

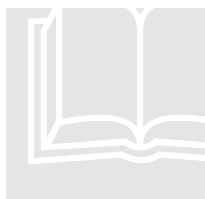


## Building Partnerships for Community Assessment

*It is going to take more than the health department to produce healthy children. It is going to take more than the school system to produce children succeeding in school. It is going to take more than the police department to produce safe communities. It will, in fact, take partnerships made up of many different players from across the community's public and private sectors.*

—*The Foundation Consortium*

Partnerships are very useful in conducting a community assessment because they allow you to take advantage of the resources that different players bring. A typical partnership consists of community residents, public agencies, and community based organizations. Each member plays a key role in bringing vital resources to the community assessment. To conduct a community assessment, you can build upon existing relationships to form a partnership or establish a new partnership. Regardless of whether it's a new or an existing partnership, behind each successful partnership is a trusting relationship among the partners.



Step 1 considers the function of partnerships and the role of partners in assessments. Sections included in Step 1 are:

- Characteristics of a Successful Partnership
- How to Build a Successful Partnership
- Determining a Partnership's Readiness to Conduct a Community Assessment

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### ICON KEY



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*Collaboration involves working together, teaming up, sharing responsibilities, or joining forces to create community intervention programs to promote health and effect behavior change or achieve goals.*

—N. Modeste, 1996

## Characteristics of a Successful Partnership

Successful partnerships are where partners:

- have equal power for decision-making and problem solving
- mutually benefit from the relationship
- are open to hearing ideas and opinions of others
- are patient and willing to work through differences
- trust each other's commitment (time, resources) to shared goals
- act on results together
- show each other respect and sensitivity
- communicate well with each other

## How to Build a Successful Partnership

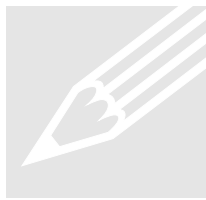
There is no cookie-cutter approach on how to build a successful partnership. However, here are some tips based on our experience:



- Rotate facilitation.
- Have ground rules that everyone can agree on.
- Think about who has more power in the situation and try to make sure that everyone has equal power.
- Pay attention to how decisions are made.
- Have a decision-making system that gives partners equal power.
- Periodically assess how the partnership is going and adjust.

## Determining a Partnership’s Readiness to Conduct a Community Assessment

Because undertaking a community assessment is a rigorous exercise, it requires community residents, organizations, and the Public Health Department to form strong partnerships. When your partnership is getting ready to conduct a community assessment, you can ask the following questions to see if your partnership is ready.



- Does the partnership offer benefits to all?
- Who has the power in the relationship? Is it equal? Who leads the group meetings?
- Is there openness from the organization partners to hear opinions and priorities from others in the community?
- Is there agreement to act together on community priorities? If not, is there agreement on how the priorities will be selected for action by the partnership?
- Do all partners believe that trust can be built between the partners?
- Are the partners respectful and sensitive to other partners?
- Can the partners work toward a shared goal?

The responses to these questions can provide the partnership with an awareness of the structure and relationships within the partnership. There may be areas that need to be changed in order to establish a successful partnership and to accomplish the assessment purpose. Time, patience, and energy are needed to achieve the structure acceptable to all members of the partnership. The most important issue is to know who controls the power and decision-making for the group and agree to change or accept it.



### Stories from the Neighborhoods

Here are some stories from the two pilot neighborhoods and some lessons learned about building partnerships.

#### How the Partnerships Were Formed

The partnerships in the two pilot neighborhoods were formed in very different ways. In South Hayward, a partnership was formed based on an existing relationship

between SoHNC and the Public Health Department. SoHNC was open to conducting a community assessment, but at first they had some concerns. South Hayward had a history of being assessed by outside agencies and SoHNC members were not convinced that another assessment would benefit the community. They suggested that the Public Health Department staff come to the SoHNC committee meetings to hear their concerns and learn more about SoHNC, and then identify what the focus of the assessment should be.

The Public Health Department staff attended the committee meetings for two months, then based on what they heard, presented a proposal for an assessment and evaluation to SoHNC members. The proposal had two components: 1) to gather information on the issues that the committees had raised; and 2) to evaluate the impact of the work of SoHNC in the community. These areas were important to both the SoHNC members and the Public Health Department. As a result, SoHNC decided to form an assessment and evaluation committee. The committee was made up of resident members of SoHNC and their organizational partners. The committee met monthly for two-and-a-half years to complete the assessment and evaluation.



In Livermore, the partnership developed through a different process. The Livermore Police Department was already working with some residents to address the high crime rates in the neighborhood. At the same time, the Public Health Department was looking for a partner to conduct a community assessment. Several public health nurses working in the area were aware of the community policing efforts in Livermore and acted as a link between the Public Health Department and the community policing efforts. The Public Health Department staff contacted the Police Department, and together with community residents, formed the Livermore Neighborhood Coalition. The residents and the police department welcomed the new partner. The new partnership developed a vision of what they wanted their neighborhood to be like in five years. After this process, the residents wondered if their vision was shared by the larger neighborhood. The Public Health Department offered resources to gather this information and the group decided to conduct a community survey. The plan was to collect the information and act on the results to improve the community's health.

### Clear Roles of Partners

In order for a partnership to work smoothly, it is helpful to have clear roles for each member of the partnership. The role of the Public Health Department was initially unclear to residents in Livermore. Initially, Livermore residents thought that the role of Public Health Department staff was to provide health services. Later however, they recognized that by working together on issues of violence and gangs, the Public Health Department was also working to improve the public's health in general.

### Good Communication Between Partners

The ability to communicate well is a key component of a strong partnership. One example of the need for communication was when SoHNC was involved in a strategic planning process, which resulted in a three-year plan. Since the strategic planning work group included some of the assessment committee members, several members who were on both committees became concerned that they would use assessment results for more planning, rather than for action. A second concern was that the groups might duplicate each other's work. The partnership discussed these concerns openly, and therefore, was able to avoid the tensions that these concerns might have created. Steps were taken to avoid duplicating any work and to ensure that the assessment results were considered in the strategic plan. This showed the group was able to prevent problems through good communication and demonstrated the strength of the partnership.

### Shared Deadlines

Members of any partnership have outside commitments and deadlines. Deadlines that directly affect the group need to be shared as early as possible so the group takes the responsibility for meeting them. This was a lesson learned through experience in the partnership in South Hayward. Although a deadline for grant funding that supported the assessment affected the SoHNC work group, the Public Health Department who had received the grant, initially did not share the deadlines with the work group. The Public Health Department staff initially thought that since the work group's timeline was in line with the funding deadline, there was no need to communicate the grant deadline and burden the group. However, data collection was delayed and the funding deadline became an issue towards the end of the assessment. At that time, the Public Health Department staff raised the grant deadline issue to the work group. This created frustration among work group members because they felt that it should have been shared from the start. Since the group made decisions about how to spend the funds, they also needed to know about grant requirements. Fortunately, the group was able to ask the foundation for an extension which was approved.

### Importance of Informal Relationship Building

Relationship building is an important part of forming a partnership. It can occur during meetings, but also in other informal ways. In Livermore, changing the meeting site from a school to people's homes helped to build better relationships within the group. The Livermore Neighborhood Coalition meetings were initially held at the middle school in the neighborhood. As a small core group emerged, the school site

did not seem necessary for the monthly meetings. At one point, a school holiday prevented the use of the school for a core group meeting. A decision was made to move the meeting to a member's home. From this time forward, it became routine to have core group meetings at the members' homes. Other residents opened their homes to host meetings as well. This promoted an increased closeness within the group, sharing food, celebrating birthdays, hearing vacation news, and showing family photos.

### Building a Sense of Community

Planning for neighborhood events and celebrations offers opportunities to work together on activities that are fun, give immediate results, build a sense of community, and strengthen a partnership. The Livermore Neighborhood Coalition decided to hold a street barbecue and clean-up day in October 1999. This was the first event that was held after the Coalition was formally organized. The members wanted to introduce themselves and recruit additional neighbors to join the Coalition. The Coalition members went door to door in the neighborhood, letting neighbors know about the event. The day of the event there was a major storm. However, the group decided to get an awning for the barbecue and go forward. Despite the rain, families came out for hot dogs, the dumpster was filled with trash, and teens helped pick up old mattresses and tree branches in the neighborhood. Over 50 residents came out in the rain for the event. The Coalition and partners shared the success of bringing the neighborhood together.

## References

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