

The ABC's of Collaboration

Collaboration can take many forms at different levels: councils can meet to set goals or plan collaborative action; service providers can contact one another for information, referrals, or support; community representatives or families can collaborate with administrators or service providers to express needs or make suggestions. The result of any effective collaboration is that participants will develop an interagency decision-making style (Ayers, 1984). Once this decision-making style is established, collaborators work together to implement integrated services, create new policies, or address community concerns. Whatever the form of the collaboration or key players involved, some guiding principles for effective collaboration can be applied. (21)

Address All Needs

Checklist:

- Involve representatives of all groups affected by collaborative effort to identify needs.
 - Establish a collaborative council and effective communication procedures with stakeholders.
 - Conduct a formal needs assessment.
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Build Relationships

Checklist:

- Get to know one another as people.
 - Get to know one another's agency.
 - Develop trust.
 - Respect professional priorities.
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Deal With and Defuse Conflict

Checklist:

- Be prepared for turf-related conflicts:
 - need for autonomy
 - redistribution of responsibilities
 - fear of job loss
 - Keep focused on overall goals.
 - Review accomplishments.
 - Do not "hide" from conflict.
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Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Checklist:

- Practice good listening skills.
 - Avoid jargon.
 - Define terms.
 - Develop a communication protocol.
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Establish Clear Leadership

Checklist:

- Take the initiative.
 - Seek political support.
 - Withstand resistance.
 - Give time and authority to other collaborators.
 - Share leadership tasks.
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