



# Strengthening Coalitions in American Indian/Alaska Native Communities

## Introduction

Collaboration and coordination of efforts is central to the Native Connections (NC) grant. Grantees are charged with implementing an array of activities, including involving American Indian/Alaska Native community members in all grant activities, working with schools, and leading efforts to improve coordination. To meet these goals, grantees will need to form and strengthen coalitions. More importantly, by mobilizing the entire community—parents, teachers, youth, police, health care providers, faith communities, business and civic leaders and others—communities can transform themselves.

## Goal of Community Collaboration

The goal of building collaborations is to bring individuals, agencies, organizations, and community members together in an atmosphere of support to systematically solve problems that could not easily be solved by one group alone. Collaborations should focus on increasing capacity, communication, and efficiency while improving outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

## What to Look for in a Coalition Leader

A coalition leader or group of leaders must be able to do the following:

- Foster team building
- Inspire commitment and action
- Take responsibility
- Speak clearly and persuasively
- Convey vision and strong sense of purpose
- Maintain focus on goals and process for achieving those goals
- Capitalize on stakeholders' strengths

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Collaboration Framework...Addressing Community Capacity, National Network for Collaboration, retrieved from <http://www.humanserviceresearch.com/framework.pdf>, 1/26/2017



## Benefits and Barriers to Effective Coalitions

To form and maintain effective coalitions, NC grantees must collaborate with other agencies and organizations in the community.

**Benefits** of collaboration may be immediate or long term, direct or indirect. Throughout the country, community coalitions make a significant difference. Benefits include:

- Improved delivery of programming
- Increased community readiness scores
- Efficient use of limited resources
- Increased use of programs and resources available in the community
- Elimination of duplication of efforts
- Improved communication
- Opportunities for shared professional development
- Improved public image
- Increased sustainability of services

**Barriers** to collaboration include:

- Turf issues and turf mentality
- Lack of staff or time to participate in the collaboration
- Conflicts with organizational focus and priorities between the collaboration and its members
- Mistrust of other organizations
- Lack of planning and follow through
- Limited resources or lack of willingness to share existing resources
- Withdrawal of support because of outside pressures from individuals or groups
- Decreased levels of cooperation among collaborators during a crisis

### Addressing Barriers

Turf issues and mentality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk to other organizations about shared vision, mission, and goals.</li> <li>• Demonstrate willingness to help meet other organization’s deliverables.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Find out “why” people take the positions they do by asking them to share the interests that underlie their positions.<sup>2</sup></li></ul>
Lack of staff or time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaboration is a key part of the NC grant. Job descriptions for staff should include meetings and other forms of communication with community stakeholders and agencies.</li><li>• Prioritize which organizations are most closely aligned with the NC goals and focus your efforts on those organizations.</li></ul>
Mistrust of other organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All staff practice transparency and clear communication.</li><li>• Document communication via meeting minutes, emails, etc. In meetings, document on flip charts so all can see, then transcribe to minutes.</li><li>• Make sure all voices are heard; don’t let a few dominate.</li><li>• Respect different communication styles.</li><li>• Be patient with the process; trust is built by consistency over time.</li></ul>
Slowed decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create work groups and delegate tasks across agencies.</li><li>• List action items and ensure action item followup is tracked in meeting agendas and notes.</li><li>• Set realistic timeframes but hold groups responsible to keep those timeframes.</li></ul>
Limited resources or lack of willingness to share existing resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brainstorm ways to collaborate in fundraising efforts.</li><li>• Promote the benefits of sharing limited resources.</li></ul>
Withdrawal of support because of outside pressures from individuals or groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Apply Community Readiness Model (CRM)-appropriate strategies to outside groups.</li><li>• If possible, contribute to helping resolve issues raised by outside pressures.</li></ul>
Decreased levels of cooperation among collaborators during a crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Revise or develop crisis response and postvention plans.</li><li>• Communicate with stakeholders about crisis response and postvention plans.</li></ul>

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<sup>2</sup> Davis, S., Recognizing and Resolving Barriers to Collaboration. Retrieved from <http://facilitatoru.com/meetings/recognizing-barriers-to-collaboration/>, 1/26/2017



## Some Things to Consider

1. Your Community System Assessment (CRA) is a valuable resource to use as you plan your strategies for collaboration.
2. Your CRA scores apply to organizations and agencies as well as individuals. Refer to the CRM for actions and activities that are appropriate to your community's readiness level.
3. It is important to value the diversity that coalitions bring to addressing problems. When we value the uniqueness, gifts, and talents of each person and organization, it helps to bring a balance of understanding and abilities to the group.<sup>3</sup>

## Resources

1. National Community Anti-Drug Coalition Institute: Handbook for Community Anti-Drug Coalitions: <http://www.cadca.org/sites/default/files/files/coalitionhandbook102013.pdf>. This brief handbook provides an overview of resources for and about community anti-drug coalitions. It also includes funding links.
2. HUD's Homeless Assistance Programs: Building Effective Coalitions: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/BuildingEffectiveCoalitions.pdf>. This is an extensive resource covering many aspects of coalition building.
3. Collaboration Framework: <http://www.humanserviceresearch.com/framework.pdf>. This document discusses the "how to" of collaborating as well as the contextual factors, which talks about the conditions that enhance or inhibit collaboration.
4. Building Collaborative Communities by Scott London: <http://www.scottlondon.com/articles/oncollaboration.html>. This essay discusses the prerequisites of collaboration, the dynamics of collaboration, and collaborative leadership.
5. School – Community Collaboration: <http://www.seenmagazine.us/Articles/Article-Detail/articleid/1298/-school-8212-community-collaboration>. This a very short article but it provides a nice summary of the steps needed to start a school – community collaboration.
6. The Collaboration Cloverleaf: Four Stages of Development: [https://www.nationalforests.org/assets/pdfs/Tool-Collaboration-Cloverleaf-Four-Stages-of-Development\\_NFF.pdf](https://www.nationalforests.org/assets/pdfs/Tool-Collaboration-Cloverleaf-Four-Stages-of-Development_NFF.pdf). This article provides a short overview of the four stages of collaboration detailed in the book by Michael Winer and Karen Ray, Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 2003.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Collaboration Framework...Addressing Community Capacity, National Network for Collaboration, downloaded from <http://www.humanserviceresearch.com/framework.pdf>, 1/26/2017