3 What Successful Health-Related Community Partnerships Have in Common

Findings from comprehensive studies of health-related community partnerships confirm that partnerships play a significant role in improving public health.[1] Although every partnership is unique, research reveals that high-performance health-related community partnerships appear to have specific strategies and practices in common, while low-performance partnerships are deficient in one or more of these same strategies and practices.[2] These findings are applicable to TB partnerships.

Nine Practices Common in High-Performance Partnerships
• Use a mutual selection process when recruiting partners
• Encourage size and value diversity
• Recruit partners who are leaders within stakeholder communities
• Understand and address partner motivations
• Establish ground rules (codes of conduct)
• Embrace a common vision
• Develop commitment through leadership
• Create decisionmaking protocols
• Anticipate and manage conflict

Use a Mutual Selection Process when Recruiting Partners

Early on, high-performance partnerships employ practices designed to ensure they get the right people on board. This initial investment of time and resources can be characterized as a mutual selection process.[3] The process begins when respected and influential community leaders and organizations from key <u>stakeholder</u> groups have been identified. Partnership recruiters then contact these individuals and organizations.

The success of the process is founded on establishing trust with potential partners through an open and honest exchange of information. The partnership recruiter communicates an interest in, and respect for, the health priorities and concerns of the potential partner. In addition, the partnership recruiter clearly describes the

- Purpose of the partnership
- Resources available to the partnership to carry out its work
- Rights and obligations of partners

Through this process, potential partners understand that the partnership is a working group where partners are expected to make a commitment of time, financial, or physical

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[1]Shortell SM, Zukoski AP, Alexander A, et al. 2002. Evaluating partnerships for community health improvement: Tracking the footprints. Journal of Health Politics, Policy, and Law 1: 49–91.
[2]Ibid.
[3]Weiner BJ, Alexander JA. 1998. The challenge of governing public-private community health partnerships. Health Care Management Review 23, no. 2:39–55.

resources. Through dialogue and information sharing, recruiters and potential partners openly and honestly explore whether the partnership is a good fit. According to those who use the mutual selection process, the end result is a partnership with committed team players that "free riders" and those not willing to "check their turf issues at the door" choose not to join.[4]

Additional information on recruiting is provided in Chapter 5: *Determining Your Purpose and Choosing Partners.*

Encourage Size and Value Diversity

High-performance health-related partnership members represent a wide range of partners, and such partnerships tend to have multiple participants from key stakeholder groups, including target and consumer populations. They seek out and obtain political support at state and local levels, and use a variety of methods to ensure both input and accountability. Thus, the partnership is seen as both credible and relevant.[5]

High-performance partnerships value diversity.[6] <u>Cultural competence</u> is a precursor to working effectively with partners from diverse <u>cultures</u>. Partnership cultural competence can be defined as a set of consistent behaviors, <u>attitudes</u>, and policies that enable diverse members to work effectively in multicultural settings. For health programs to achieve cultural competence, they must ensure that consumer populations play an active role in the partnership's assessment of the population's needs, as well as in program development, implementation, and evaluation. In addition, culturally competent agencies and staff facilitate ongoing co-learning among care providers and community members.[7]

Additional information addressing partnership size and diversity is provided in the following chapters:

Chapter 4. *How Well Do You Know Your Environment?*
Chapter 5. *Determining Your Purpose and Choosing Partners*
Chapter 6. *Creating a Sense of Ownership*
Chapter 7. *Making Progress and Making Decisions: Structure and Decisionmaking Issues*

Recruit Partners Who Are Leaders within Stakeholder Populations

High-performance partnership recruiters understand the difference between being a key community leader and being the representative of a respected community-based or

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[4]Ibid.
[5]Shortell et al.
[6]Ibid.
[7]Health Resources Services Administration. 2001. *Cultural competence works.*

sector-based service organization. High-performance partnerships addressing community health have both key community leaders as partners and supporters, as well as representatives of community-based service organizations as partners.

The key leaders recruited by high-performance partnerships are respected by their communities or population sectors, have credibility and visibility, are well integrated into their communities, and have substantial influence in them.[8] Research suggests that partnerships are more productive when they recruit respected leaders who understand the different perspectives that exist within their community or population sector, and who use this understanding to ensure the partnership acts in ways that minimize, rather than exacerbate, these differences.[9]

High-performance partnerships use recruiting sessions to learn from and gain the support of respected and influential community leaders. In these sessions, recruiters:

- Elicit and value the health priorities and perspectives of community leaders
- Provide epidemiological data and anecdotes that show the leaders why their participation is vital to the success of the partnership
- Discuss how the partnership will benefit the leaders' communities

Additional information on leadership issues is provided in Chapter 4: *How Well Do You Know Your Environment?* and Chapter 5: *Determining Your Purpose and Choosing Partners.*

Understand and Address the Motivational Issues of Potential Partners

Leaders of high-performance partnerships recognize that dual attention must be given to building, nurturing, and maintaining the partnership, and to engaging in task-oriented behaviors that realize the partnership's goals and <u>objectives</u>.[10] Leaders employ a variety of ongoing strategies to build trust, while motivating partners to increase their commitment to and alignment with partnership interests over time. They recognize that partners, whether viewed as organizations or as individuals, have a variety of motivations, and they effectively address these motivations.[11] Motivations can be categorized into three broad areas:

- A desire to help others (altruism)

- A desire to be instrumental in increasing the individual's or organization's ability to achieve their goals

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[8]Israel, BA, Schultz AJ, Parker EA, et al. 1998. Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual Review of Public Health* 19:176-202, 187
[9]Weiner and Alexander, 17.
[10]Shortell et al., 6.
[11]Ibid.

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- A desire to increase the individual or organization's legitimacy or credibility[12]

Understanding and nurturing motivations associated with altruism and legitimacy are essential to sustaining a long-term commitment from partners.[13]

Establish Ground Rules (Codes of Conduct)

High-performance partnerships operate in ways that promote understanding while demonstrating sensitivity and competence in working with diverse cultures. The partnerships consistently operate in ways that promote listening, openness, caring, inclusiveness, agreement to disagree, an opportunity for all to participate, and mutual respect.[14] The process for establishing these ground rules, including how the partnership makes decisions, must be consistent with the rules themselves. These ground rules or codes of conduct are most effective when developed by the members. The extent to which these rules are formal or informal arrangements is best decided by each individual partnership. The level of formality by which these rules are established does not influence partnership productivity.[15]

Additional information on establishing ground rules is available in Chapter 6: *Creating a Sense of Ownership.*

Embrace a Common Vision

An initial investment of time and resources by prospective partners is usually required to establish the trust that leads to a common vision and shared commitment to that vision.[16] Extensive sharing of information aimed at creating a common and comprehensive understanding of the external and internal environment helps to build trust and is a precursor to forming a common vision and creating strong group commitment to it.[17] Early in their development, high-performance, multisector, health-related partnerships successfully work together to create a shared vision that incorporates all four of the following guiding principles:

- A focus on community health, not just the health or treatment of individual patients;

- Implementation mechanisms that facilitate and coordinate service delivery to the most appropriate recipients, at the most appropriate times, and in the most appropriate settings;

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[12]Shortell et al., 6.
[13]Ibid., 7.
[14]Israel et al., 185.
[15]Jack M, Phillips R. 1993. Public-private partnerships in health care: Cooperative strategies and models. *Hospitals and Health Services Administration* 38, no. 3:186.
[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid., 7.

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- Effective use of limited resources by providing the most efficient services possible; and

- Active involvement of multiple and diverse stakeholders in the identification, prioritization, and implementation of partnership goals, objectives, and activities.[18]

Minimizing the importance of any one of these four guiding principles significantly diminishes partnership performance.[19] Partnerships without a shared vision find it very difficult to manage member input or effectively focus members toward collective actions.[20] Additional information about creating a common vision is provided in Chapter 6: *Creating a Sense of Ownership.*

Once a common vision is established, high-performance partnership leaders incorporate the partnership's vision and values into the mutual selection recruiting processes. Potential partners and new recruits are provided information and orientation sessions that help them to understand how the vision and values have shaped the partnership's history, culture, activities, composition, and structure, including communication and decisionmaking channels and practices.[21]

Develop Commitment through Leadership

Three aspects of leadership differentiate the multisector health-related partnerships making the most progress from those making the least: committed core leadership, an organizational driver, and leadership delegation.[22]

Committed Core Leadership

High-performance partnerships tend to have a dedicated and respected long-term leader who fulfills the role of executive director. In addition, these partnerships tend to develop a committed core leadership that helps to create and consistently reinforce the group's vision, guiding principles, and operating norms, as well as meaningful objectives, tasks, projects, and programs.

Core leaders help to create an accurate and shared sense of where the partnership is, as well as the skills, abilities, resources, and commitments that are needed to realize the group's vision and goals.[23] Effective core leadership ensures the partnership uses ongoing reflective processes to monitor significant environmental changes and trends, and that it expands or repositions assets, competencies, and resources to effectively

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[18]Shortell et al., 3.; Israel et al., 186.
[19]Ibid.
[20]Ibid., 14.
[21]Weiner and Alexander, 6.
[22]Shortell et al., 15.
[23]Israel et al., 163; Shortell et al., 16, 21–22.

address these changes. Core leaders do so without losing commitment and focus on the partnership's vision and purpose. They successfully lead the partnership in the acquisition of new funds, the blending of existing resources to better meet partnership priorities, the improving of initiatives through corrective or adaptive actions, and the effective use of resources.[24]

Organizational Driver

High-performance partnerships tend to have a respected lead or facilitating organization, called an organizational driver. The organizational driver enhances partnership stability over time by providing staff support and by covering operational expenses. The organizational driver provides this support while maintaining a low profile, which allows the partnership to establish and develop a sense of collective identity and influence.[25]

Leadership Delegation

High-performance partnerships are adept at recognizing when and where different members need to take the lead on different issues, and when new leaders and members need to be recruited to supplement the skills and abilities of the existing partners. These partnerships delegate to those members closest to a given problem the authority and resources to deal with the problem.[26] High-performance partnerships also serve as "incubators" for ideas, which are then spun off to specific members for implementation. [27]

Additional information addressing leadership issues is provided in the following chapters:

Chapter 4. *How Well Do You Know Your Environment?*
Chapter 5. *Determining Your Purpose and Choosing Partners*
Chapter 6. *Creating a Sense of Ownership*
Chapter 7. *Making Progress and Making Decisions: Structure and Decisionmaking Issues*
Chapter 8. *Sustaining Longer-Term Partnerships*

Create Decisionmaking Protocols

High-performance partnerships recognize there is no one best way to make decisions. They realize that each partnership is unique and must develop the decisionmaking practices that best meet its needs. These practices are likely to include formal, informal, consensual, and majority vote processes. In addition, high-performance partnerships

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[24]Shortell et al., 23.
[25]Ibid., 15.
[26]Ibid., 15-18.
[27]Ibid., 23.

evaluate and take into consideration possible unintended consequences of their actions when making decisions. The key to successful decisionmaking is to create and use processes that are perceived by all as fair and open.[28] Additional information on how to create effective structure protocols is provided in Chapter 7: *Making Decisions and Making Progress: Structure and Decisionmaking Issues.*

Multisector health-related partnerships tend to be voluntary. As such, they lack formal authority and administrative power over members. High-performance partnerships consistently use four strategies to exert influence.[29]

Social Control

In high-performance partnerships, partners believe that failure to fulfill partnership agreements will result in a loss of reputation and social status.[30] Through extensive community involvement, high-performance partnerships are able to develop a shared sense of responsibility for partnership outcomes among stakeholders, as well as accountability to the communities they seek to serve. Influence is achieved through an "outside-in" approach to planning and decisionmaking that incorporates community input on needs, problems, and priorities.[31]

Project Selection

High-performance partnerships initially develop trust and cooperation among members by intentionally identifying and choosing projects in which all partners have an interest, but that none has as a core service.[32] These projects often include issues associated with service gaps that all members are experiencing. Buy-in to these choices depends on the extent to which members participate in priority setting and resource allocation decisions associated with them.[33] High-performance partnerships use these initial projects to build a working context within which members build the trusting and respectful relationships that will allow them to address and successfully manage issues in which there is less initial agreement.[34]

Credible Commitment

High-performance partnerships require members to make commitments of time, in-kind, or financial resources that result in mutually beneficial relationships that lead to interdependencies among partners.[35]

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[28]Weiner et al., 21.
[29]Weiner et al., 6.
[30]Ibid., 7.
[31]Ibid., 11.
[32]Ibid., 6.
[33]Ibid., 11.
[34]Ibid., 18–20.
[35]Ibid., 7.

Building Ownership

High-performance partnerships employ three interrelated strategies that contribute to increased commitment by members and stakeholders to partnership goals and objectives.[36] These strategies are

- Working in and through existing stakeholder structures, both formal and informal, in the populations and sectors the partnership seeks to impact.

- Creating multiple opportunities for stakeholders and partners to exchange information. These opportunities may be formal or informal.

- Creating a sense of community ownership by having members share responsibility for planning and facilitating meetings.

Additional information on strategies and practices that help to increase partners' commitment and productivity are provided in the following chapters:

Chapter 4. *How Well Do You Know Your Environment?*
Chapter 5. *Determining Your Purpose and Choosing Partners*
Chapter 6. *Creating a Sense of Ownership*
Chapter 7. *Making Progress and Making Decisions: Structure and Decisionmaking Issues*
Chapter 8. *Sustaining Longer-Term Partnerships*

Anticipate and Manage Conflict

High-performance partnerships recognize that conflict is a natural part of partnering with diverse groups, and are able to anticipate and use conflict constructively.[37] They recognize that relying heavily on conflict-avoidance behaviors is not effective. High-performance partnerships employ the following strategies to minimize the negative aspects of conflict: [38]

- Create a sense of interdependency among partnership members.

- Create a sense among partners of being well informed by regularly providing updated information to them.

- Work continuously to maintain a high degree of trust among partners.[39]

- Create a process of decisionmaking that is perceived by all as fair and open.

When interpersonal trust is lacking among members, research reveals that partnerships tend to rely on accommodation to resolve conflict, a conflict-resolution style that is likely to attain short-term harmony at the expense of longer-term goals and objectives.[40]

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[36]Ibid., 15-16.
[37]Shortell et al., 20.
[38]Ibid.
[39]Ibid.
[40]Ibid.

Additional information on managing differences is provided in Chapter 6: *Creating a Sense of Ownership* and Chapter 7: *Making Progress and Making Decisions: Structure and Decisionmaking Issues.*

Conclusion

High-performance, multisector, health-related partnerships value the relationships that members have with each other and that the partnership and its members have with the stakeholders and communities they seek to serve. These partnerships employ strategies that allow them to recruit and retain diverse, talented, and influential members who are willing to create a shared vision of improved health and to undertake the tasks required to make that vision a reality.