

Practicing Shared Accountability

Developing Meaningful Partnerships between Government and Community Organizations

Community organizations and government offices often share common goals, but may have different means of accomplishing them. How do you develop meaningful partnerships among individuals who sit in different offices, in different organizations, and with different ways of working? Government and community organizations can move their conversation from “Are you aware of this?” to “What can we do to get to this outcome?” A shared concern can bring about collaborative action if partners can find the balance between competing and complementary accountabilities.

1 Discover a common purpose

Partnerships are based on a common vision, value or purpose. Identify the common goal on which your partnership can focus its activity.

2 Know your partner

Share information with your partner about your organization/department. Identify challenges to open communication.

Question any information that is not clearly understood about:

- Mission and purpose of organization/department
- Primary responsibilities of each partner
- History of partnership initiatives
- Communication practices and communication challenges

3 Identify competing and complementary layers of accountability

Who is each partner accountable to? What is each partner accountable for?

Stretch yourself to name accountabilities of each partner:

- Personal and professional ethics
- Primary clients who benefit from your work
- Internal and external stakeholders
- The financial and program plans which define your work

4 Define each partner's contributions

A partnership requires the defined contribution of resources from each partner.

Identify:

- All resources (people, money, operational) needed to successfully complete the project
- The resources each organization can contribute
- Additional resources that are beyond the scope of the partnership and where they will come from. This may require bringing more stakeholders to the table.

5 Begin to act like partners

Each partner must commit to act as part of a larger whole while maintaining their individual identity.

A strong partnership works through:

- Clear intent
- Valuing the contribution of each partner
- Maintaining organizational integrity/identity
- Respect
- Trust
- Open consultation

6 Continue to practice shared accountability

Acting in partnership requires purposeful intent, a strong level of commitment and time. Take the time to build on what you have started.