

# Building Bridges to Collaborative Success:

AN EVIDENCE-BASED, INTER-AGENCY PRIMER FOR HEALTH PROMOTION

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More information on the Harmonization Project and an online version of this document is available at:

<http://harmonization.ok.ubc.ca/collaboration/>

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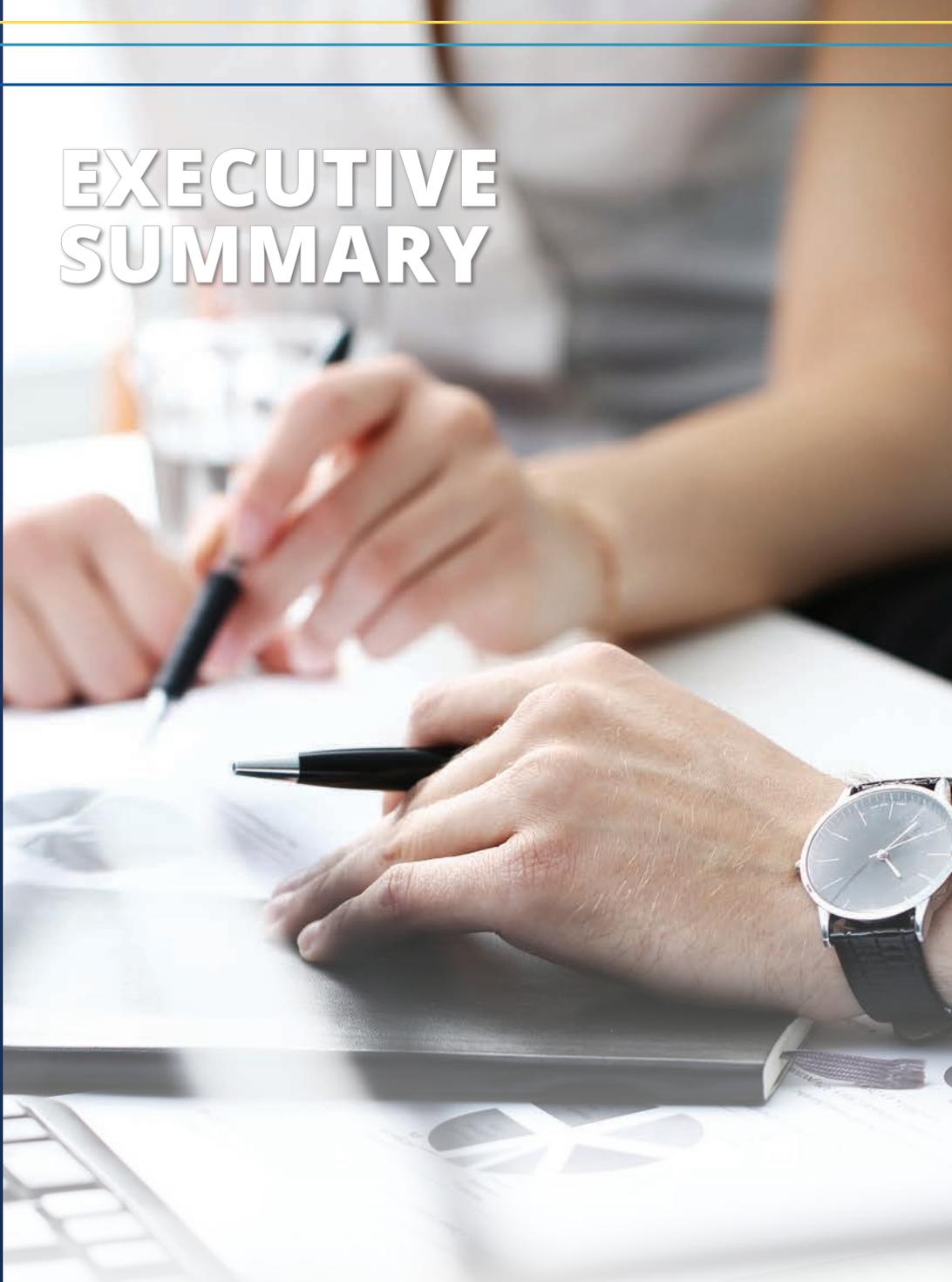
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This collaboration primer is a hands-on resource for organizations seeking concrete methods to create sustainable partnerships. This resource is based on the literature focusing on inter-agency collaboration<sup>1</sup> and the experiences of a multi-stakeholder partnership for health promotion. The suggestions provide practical guidance and useful tools for collaborators in an easily accessible format and include “living lab” sections that capture the harmonization process in a real-life context.

## about the harmonization project

The Harmonization Project was a collaborative effort initiated by the Canadian Cancer Society, Northern Health (NH) and BC Cancer Agency (BCCA) to identify ways to work together on cancer prevention initiatives. Members from these three organizations recognized that by working together and harmonizing their cancer prevention efforts, they could achieve a greater impact.

These three organizations, along with researchers at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and Athabasca University, aimed to develop new approaches to cancer prevention tailored for communities in northern British Columbia. With funding from the Canadian Cancer Society, two health promotion projects were undertaken: Stop Smoking Before Surgery (SSBS) and Men's Healthy Eating and Active Living (M-HEAL). The team combined their resources and expertise to design, deliver, and evaluate new initiatives in both of these projects.

In addition, the team engaged in developing a deeper understanding of collaborative processes. The health promotion projects provided an opportunity to study the processes of collaboration to identify strategies that support and sustain collaboration. Through a developmental evaluation, with ongoing critical reflection in the form of focus groups, individual interviews, surveys, and regularly scheduled reflective questions, the Harmonization Team sought to iteratively isolate best practices for collaborative approaches in health promotion. This primer draws on the experiences of the Harmonization Team during the implementation and evaluation of their projects.

## audience

This content is intended for a diverse audience, from grassroots non-profit organizations to provincial policy makers and funders. Groups of community partners seeking change through collaboration will find this guide helpful, as will those groups seeking to ensure the sustainability of existing collaborative projects.

This resource is well-suited to health promotion managers for community groups, health authorities, and non-profits who want to work together to build effective strategies that will enable the development of stronger, more resilient communities over the long-term. Individuals working in technology, innovation, education, environmental, and business sectors will also find this guide useful.

## objectives

The objective of this practical, evidence-based primer is to support multiple stakeholders in their work together to achieve mutual goals. Inter-agency collaboration has the potential for improved health dividends through aligning and augmenting shared resources. To date, however, there have been few guides available on HOW to collaborate. There is a need to better understand the application of real-life principles involved in collaborative processes. It is in response to this need that this primer has been developed. Informed by ongoing critical reflection, the team's experiences were distilled into key learnings and are presented here in a format to support effective, collaborative partnerships. Every phase outlined in this work links to the key lessons from the project and includes ideas that will enable others to build strong, collaborative relationships.

# INTRODUCTION



*“An often missing but critical part of achieving social change is supporting individuals who can make connections outside of a field of advocacy or practice.... To make change, philanthropy needs to invest not just within a field, but also in people and organizations that can bridge the gaps between issues and sectors.”*

**Lisa Witter & Joanna Mikulsk**  
*Stanford Social Innovation Review*  
Dec. 22, 2015

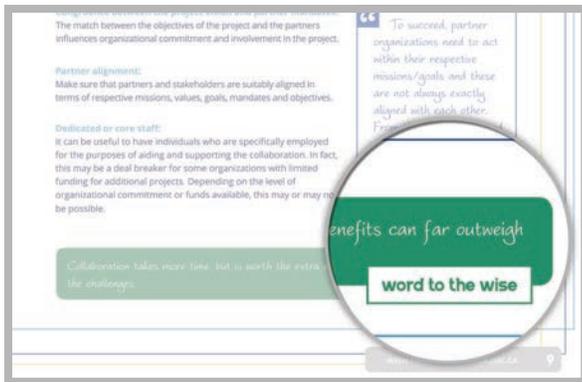
## bridging the gap

Collaboration is a complex process that is like building a bridge. Whether the divide is large or small, a detailed plan and resources (structural, human, and financial) are needed. Bridge building involves synchronized action, clear communication, and trust. A clear goal is paramount because delays and disruptions can be expected during the process. The completed bridge requires local ownership, upkeep, and maintenance as needs and use evolve.

The reward for this collaborative building effort is a sustainable enduring infrastructure that will support future collaborative projects. With strong partnerships built on knowledge gained and shared, new roads will be accessible for the next level of community change!

# collaboration primer content

The main text in each section of this primer combines details on the collaborative factors and most promising practices identified in current research and from the Harmonization Project's developmental evaluation. Also included is a Collaborative Framework that highlights the collaborative factors in diagram form. Useful tools and tips, reflective anecdotes, helpful web links, and further reading are found throughout the primer. An interactive version of the Primer can also be found on the Harmonization Project website <http://harmonization.ok.ubc.ca/collaboration>. Finally, throughout this document suggestions, tips and tools are included as follows:



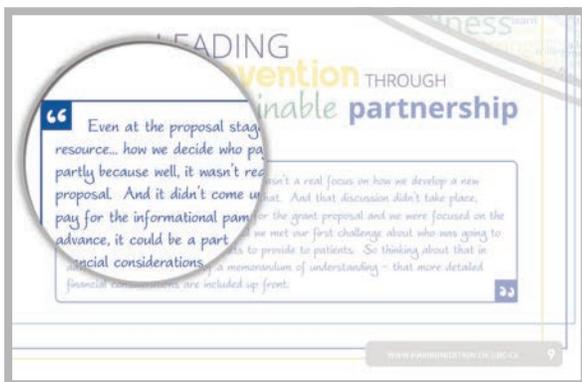
## Word to the Wise

Additional advice or information that future collaborators may find useful are offered.



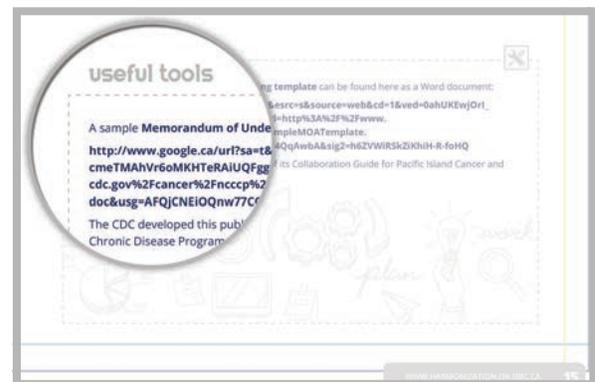
## Living Lab

Anecdotes and examples from our team's collaborative experiences are featured.



## Stories and Sharing

Quotes and excerpts illustrate topics or issues in the text.



## Useful Tools

Links to websites are provided for more information and access to relevant tools.

# PRELIMINARY DECISIONS

## Why Collaborate?



### KNOWING THE BEST WAY FORWARD

The passionate people who are drawn to health promotion and disease prevention bring experiences, knowledge, and a thirst for a more just and healthier world. Like people living on one side of a raging river, they want a safe way to get across, and what they see may not be visible but it's vital. They see the need for a bridge.

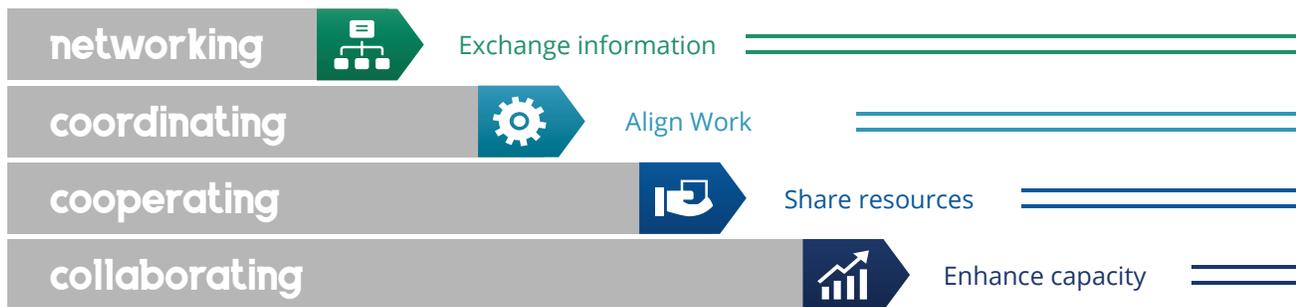
## why collaborate?

Through effective collaboration, partnerships can create a greater impact than individual organizations on their own. In fact, multifaceted social problems can only be addressed if partners work towards common solutions. When a problem is beyond the capacity of one organization alone to solve, collaboration between organizations is necessary for the achievement of complex objectives; this is known as collective impact<sup>2</sup>.

## collaboration: the right approach?

Some problems and their solutions are well defined and can be easily addressed by one organization, whereas reaching an effective solution for more complex problems requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders<sup>3</sup>. Without doubt, collaboration takes more time to guide a project from concept to completion, because partners build trust and familiarity over time. In fact, lack of time was one of the most common challenges reported in the systematic review of factors that impact the success of inter-agency health promotion collaborations<sup>1</sup>. Deciding whether a collaborative approach is appropriate or necessary is a key first step for partners. If something is urgent and needs a quick response, collaboration is not always the way to go.

It may be helpful to distinguish between different ways of working together when determining what is best suited for a particular project. The Collaboration Continuum<sup>4</sup> below is a frequently used framework for distinguishing different types of multi-organizational relationships:



NOT every relationship ← |||||  
 ||||| → needs to be collaborative

## weighing the benefits and risks

Some of the common benefits and risks of collaboration<sup>5,6</sup> are illustrated here. Weighing the benefits and risks helps guide decision making and assists in strengthening the case for collaboration. Keeping these factors in mind is essential during the phases of collaboration<sup>5,6</sup>.



“

Collaboration really highlighted the immense pool of talent available to us.

”

## the phases of collaboration

This primer outlines 7 phases of collaboration. They are illustrated in the figure below and discussed in depth in the chapters that follow. For each phase, the important and unique factors are detailed, along with strategies for promoting effective collaboration. These phases may or may not occur in a particular order, and some may occur simultaneously. Furthermore, there is no discrete ending to each phase. Communication is key to connecting with partners and collaborating throughout all the phases.



## key collaborative questions

Before beginning, have you assessed whether collaboration is the right approach for this project?



**Congratulations!** Once one project is nearing completion or has achieved sustainability, partners may want to consider undertaking another collaborative endeavor. If so, go to the "getting started" section to begin again.



# GETTING STARTED

## Vision, Leadership & Team Building



### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Like bridge engineers who make sure all the supports for the bridge are in place, developing trust in a shared vision takes time but will produce a strong foundation for moving collaborative work forward.

*Theresa Healy, Northern Health, Population Health, capturing team discussion in imagery drawn during planning meetings. Her drawings became the inspiration for the icons in the collaboration framework.*

### why this is important

The foundation of any collaborative endeavour is the **vision** that drives it, the **leadership** that moves it, and the **team** that supports it. A clear vision for the project and leadership capable of maintaining team direction are critical for success.

## what is meant by “vision”

Collaboration begins with a vision for the project. A shared vision is essential to guide project strategy<sup>7</sup>. For example, a team member on the Harmonization Project provided feedback: *“We’ve been doing cancer prevention work for so long in our different ways, all we needed was a combined project to work on together, with strong shared leadership - to really make an impact in our communities.”*

The vision may exist from the outset or it may be developed through collaboration. The essential components of a shared vision are listed below.

- ✓ It is based on the common interests of all partners.
- ✓ It is mutually agreed upon.
- ✓ It includes a meaningful goal.

Acknowledging the shared values of all partners can help define the project vision and act as a compass for the team’s actions. Note the distinction between a shared vision for a particular project (e.g., “leading cancer prevention through sustainable partnership”) and shared values that will collectively guide the collaboration itself (e.g., mutual respect, trust, honesty, privacy, inclusiveness, and transparency). It is also important to understand and respect the organizational and cultural components of each partner agency (e.g., values, beliefs, attitudes) as these will influence how members from the agencies do their work.

Once the vision is clearly articulated and agreement is achieved, partners must then decide on a suitable leadership structure.

Prior to developing a shared vision as a group, the Harmonization Team completed individual surveys to gather their unique perspectives on harmonized work. This word cloud displays the words used most frequently by team members.

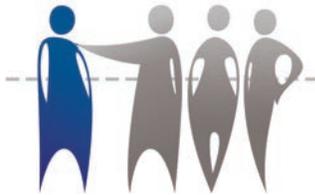


The harmonization team generated this vision statement as a group:

LEADING  
**cancer prevention** THROUGH  
sustainable **partnership**

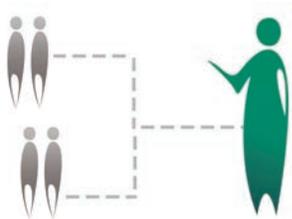
## leadership structures

Collaborative leadership offers alternative approaches to traditional structures. Successful collaborative leaders balance power sharing and control, while fostering trust and maintaining direction. Three types of leadership structures have been outlined in the literature<sup>8</sup>.



### Lead agency

One organization can provide project leadership with the agreement of the collaborative partners. When working together to create a collective impact, this is often referred to as the backbone organization<sup>2</sup>.



### Dedicated administrator

A separate administrative organization can provide oversight to the entire project. For example, an outside individual or entity can be hired to manage the collaborative.



### Shared governance

This approach shares leadership responsibilities between partner groups and can help to promote feelings of equality, but may be difficult when the collaboration involves more than 5 or 6 partners. The use of an advisory board or steering committee composed of representatives from all agencies is one example of a shared leadership structure.

Early agreement on decision-making processes in any leadership structure is essential. Depending on the group, this may be consensus-based or majority-rules.

“

Even at the proposal stage there wasn't a real focus on how we develop a new resource... how we decide who pays for that. And that discussion didn't take place, partly because well, it wasn't required for the grant proposal and we were focused on the proposal. And it didn't come up until we met our first challenge about who was going to pay for the informational pamphlets to provide to patients. So thinking about that in advance would have been helpful. In the future, financial considerations could be included in a memorandum of understanding.

”

## team building

The ability to recruit and retain partners with the desired skills and resources is key to effective collaborations and the development of mutually agreed upon principles<sup>9</sup>.

Consider involving partners that:



Have a vested interest



Can provide a different perspective

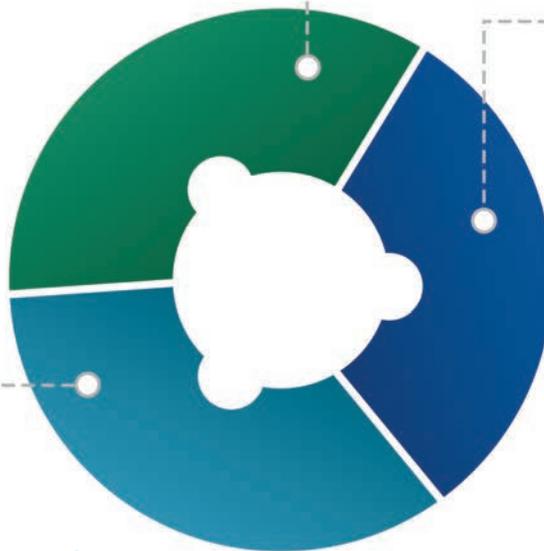


Represent an aspect of the work

The following strategies can be used to help build an effective team<sup>10</sup>.

### Be inclusive and diverse

Develop and maintain an inclusive approach to partnership. Diversity is a large part of why collaborative strategies are successful. As work progresses, remain open to seeking additional partners.



### Develop clear roles and responsibilities

It is important that all partners have collective understanding of the expected tasks and contributions of the team members and are able to commit to the partnership. Clear roles and responsibilities will also provide members with the structure needed to move the project work forward and will help to ensure accountability. Formal partnership agreements may be desired, or even required.

### Enlist multiple representatives and develop emergent leaders

Ensure that there is more than one representative from each partner organization. This can help alleviate the impact of team or staff turnover. Cultivating and developing leadership potential among partners is also important for moving forward in the event that the group experiences change in leadership.



Team diversity is the backbone to successful collaboration.

word to the wise

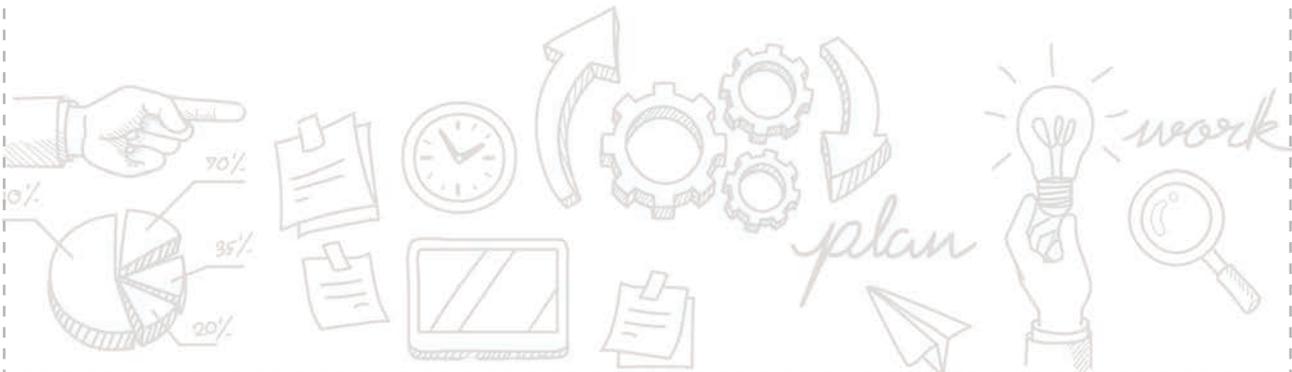


## useful tools



### Memorandum of understanding

- The CDC developed a sample **memorandum of understanding** template as part of its Collaboration Guide for Pacific Island Cancer and Chronic Disease Programs available here: <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/ncccp/pijcollaborationguide.htm>





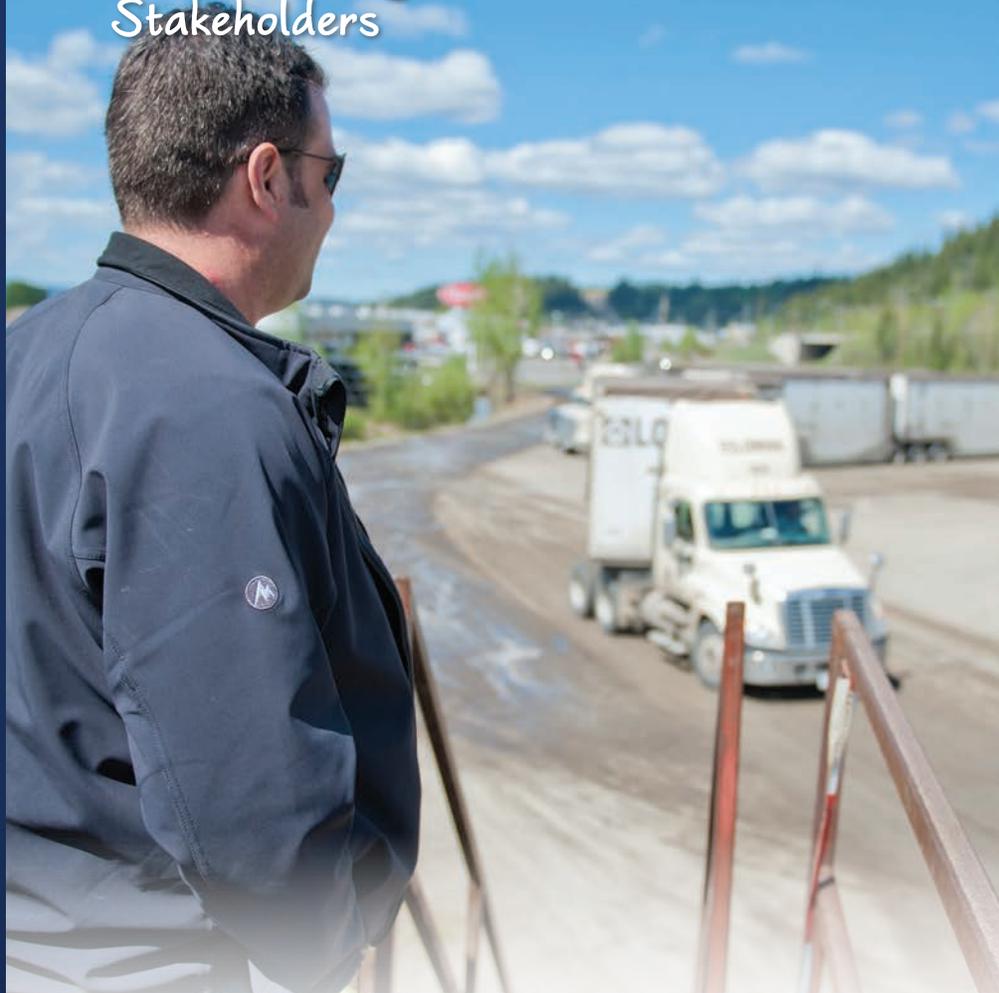
*Some of the Harmonization Project team at a face-to-face meeting.*

## Living Lab: Sharing Our Experience

“ At the beginning of our work together, our group could have been easily described as diverse, dispersed, and dedicated. We were diverse in terms of disciplinary backgrounds and professional experience. Some of us worked and lived in the north and for others the project brought them to northern BC for the first time. We were dispersed in terms of location – with people in the group working in rural and urban centres across two provinces. And, importantly, the group was dedicated and highly committed to the focus of the planned collaborative work. These characteristics were the trifecta that created the opportunity to form a unique team with a vision to work together in new ways. ”

# KNOW THE CONTEXT

*Understanding the Environment and Stakeholders*



*Photo from a collaborative project site visit.*



## CONTEXT AND RELEVANCE

A good engineer will only construct a bridge on safe ground and with proper permits. Similarly, any team will need to understand the detailed contours and landscape of the work.

## why this is important

It is essential to assess the surrounding conditions before commencing a project. This step is the foundation of project planning.

“

It's worthwhile getting your ducks in a row, working on your budget, your strategic plan, your feasibility study, whatever it is that you need to make the project tangible. But you might not have the catalyst, half million dollar funding or the agency on board to help make it happen. I've been in non-profits long enough to know that if you can hold the vision and keep lining your ducks up, when that catalyst or that convener comes, you'll be ready to launch.

”

## understanding the context

Many aspects of the environment such as physical setting, community history, cultural factors and political climate, cannot be controlled; however, these contextual factors influence the success of health promotion collaborations<sup>11</sup>. In order to maximize the potential for success, consider the following:



### Potential supporters and opposition

Have you completed an environmental scan of all potential stakeholders including business, government and non-profits?

Are there individuals or groups that have an interest in or may benefit from the success of the collaboration?

Are there individuals or groups with opposing interests?

How can opposing interests be navigated?



### Structural barriers

Are there any political, social, or cultural barriers standing in the way?

What can be done to overcome these barriers?



### Relevant legal and policy regulations

Are there legal issues to consider?

Are there any laws or policies that will impact the project?

Surveying contextual and environmental factors is a key step. Once these are defined, the development of project strategy may begin in earnest.

surveying  
contextual & environmental  
FACTORS IS A key STEP

“

We called this the Harmonization Project because of the three initial partners, but we all knew there were more partners needed than had been talked about early on. I think that for any kind of collaboration model in the future, a great exercise would be to brainstorm or mind map all the players, the stakeholders that we all know, that would have a vested interest in the project.

”

## engage and adapt to the environment

Once the relevant contextual factors are clear, consider the following strategies in order to help address environmental constraints:

### Re-evaluate the team

In order to plan and implement projects effectively, partners need to engage relevant stakeholders<sup>8</sup>. Ensure the existing team has capacity to address the environmental challenges, has legitimacy in the stated context, and is capable of negotiating the policy and political landscape. Identify new or additional partners if necessary. Strategies for addressing partner and stakeholder understanding of the context and issues could include sharing relevant background information at meetings or offering training to build member capacity.

### Leverage champions

Champions are individuals that support leadership by spearheading efforts of the group. Utilize the social and political capital of project champions. If champions are not currently in place, seek to recruit them. Champions can be instrumental in garnering local support<sup>12</sup>.

### Engage the target population

Getting the input of the program end-users can help ensure the project will meet the needs of those it is intended to serve<sup>1</sup>. One method of engaging the target population is by fostering connections with community-based stakeholders. Using a common language and understanding how the members of the target population communicate (e.g., where, when, and how they receive information) can help facilitate engagement.

### Communication

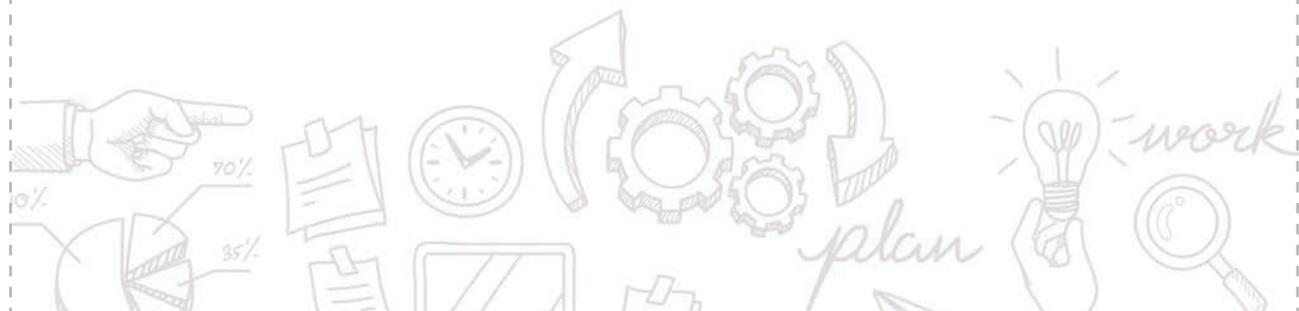
Know your partners and stakeholders and determine who needs to receive what information, in what format, and with what frequency. Agreement on a communication strategy for messages being conveyed publicly is worthy of consideration.

## useful tools



### Communication planning

- The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants has a number of communications resources, including a **strategic communication planning document** created by the Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society for the Centre for Community Organizations. This document has excellent communications guidelines, and features in its appendices “How to facilitate a creative brainstorm” and an “audience profiling” table. For a list of communications resources go to: [http://www.orgwise.ca/resources?keys=&term\\_node\\_tid\\_depth=46](http://www.orgwise.ca/resources?keys=&term_node_tid_depth=46)





## Living Lab: Sharing Our Experience

Initially the Harmonization Project team needed to engage individuals working in acute care where the Stop Smoking Before Surgery initiative could naturally be situated. One team member recalled the difficulty navigating this environment:

“Working within the hospital environment proved to be more challenging than we anticipated. There were changes and new management and they weren’t familiar with us and staff are very busy. We were navigating all these things as we went along and we wanted to work with them rather than impose our ideas. Face-to-face visits with key personnel allowed us to build connections, foster the necessary relationships, and ultimately make positive changes in the way tobacco is addressed as a standard of care.”

Making sure the end-users, whether they are patients, community groups, or schools, are on board from the beginning will go a long way to ensuring success of a program. This will be easier if teams have a strong understanding of the context and end-users, they go through the right channels, and program benefits to end-users are clearly communicated.

# DECIDING TO PROCEED

*Evaluating Resources and Assessing Readiness*



## STOP OR GO?

With solid foundations and firm understanding in place it is time to assess commitment and feasibility. Successful project managers for construction of a bridge always double-check that everything they need is in order and ready: the design, the labour, the funding, etc.

A collaborative must reach a full understanding of what each partner can – and cannot – bring and whether the team is ready to proceed or not.

## why this is important

Partners need to consider whether they have the right resources and organizational structures to support and facilitate cooperation and commitment.

# COLLABORATION needs a time & resources commitment of both



## evaluating and mapping resources

Collaborative efforts require a commitment of both time and resources. Funding, along with technical and administrative support and appropriate training have an impact on health promotion collaborations<sup>1</sup>. Resource requirements vary from project to project. A resource-mapping tool can assist with this determination.

Once there is a clear understanding of project resources, there will need to be a transparent understanding about decision making regarding resource allocation.

## organizational considerations

Organizational structures and processes employed in a collaborative effort impact the effectiveness of the project<sup>1</sup>. Considerations worthy of discussion include:

### Congruence between the project vision and partner mandates

The match between the objectives of the project and the partners influences organizational commitment and involvement in the project.

### Partner alignment

Partners and stakeholders should be suitably aligned in terms of respective missions, values, goals, mandates, and objectives.

### Dedicated or core staff

It can be useful to have individuals who are specifically employed for the purposes of aiding and supporting the collaboration. In fact, this may be a deal breaker for some organizations with limited funding for additional projects. Depending on the level of organizational commitment or funds available, dedicated staff may or may not be possible.

“ To succeed, partner organizations need to act within their respective missions/goals and these are not always exactly aligned with each other.

From this project I learned that commitment to working together is a critical piece to enable the collaborative work.

”

*Collaboration takes more time, but it is worth the extra effort. The benefits can far outweigh the challenges.*

**word to the wise**

## relationship considerations

Consider social or cultural factors which can influence positive collaborative interactions, align vision, and mitigate conflict. Cultivating mutual trust, respect, and cultural sensitivity among collaborative partners goes a long way in facilitating discussion and overcoming conflict. This is particularly meaningful if collaboration has the potential to extend beyond the life of a project. Some important considerations to keep in mind:



### Determining equity in relationships

Sometimes individual partners may feel they are contributing more than others. Discuss workload distributions to find equitable solutions, improve efficiency, and enhance satisfaction with levels of contribution. Partnership agreements can be integral to minimize perceptions of workload inequity.



### Managing power differentials

Real or perceived power disparities can increase feelings of inequality in a partnership. Find mutually agreeable ways for all partners to have a role in guiding the collaboration.



### Ensuring meaningful participation

Providing opportunities for all team members to contribute in meaningful ways helps foster commitment and ownership. Find ways to acknowledge group successes and partner contributions.



### Conflict Management

Establishing how conflicts will be resolved before they occur will help keep project work moving forward in the event of conflict. Mechanisms to help manage conflict include returning to the shared vision, clarifying assumptions of all partners, and adjusting timelines if needed<sup>13</sup>.

## final readiness assessment

At this point, the collaborative team should have agreement on goals and strategy. Before committing time and resources to a long-term project, it is important to assess partner capacity and readiness to proceed.



“

Stop Smoking Before Surgery was an ideal project to work on together, as it allowed for avoiding some previous duplication and was in alignment with the goals of all three partners. As we developed the project we realized each partner had different strengths and roles to play.

”

## useful tools

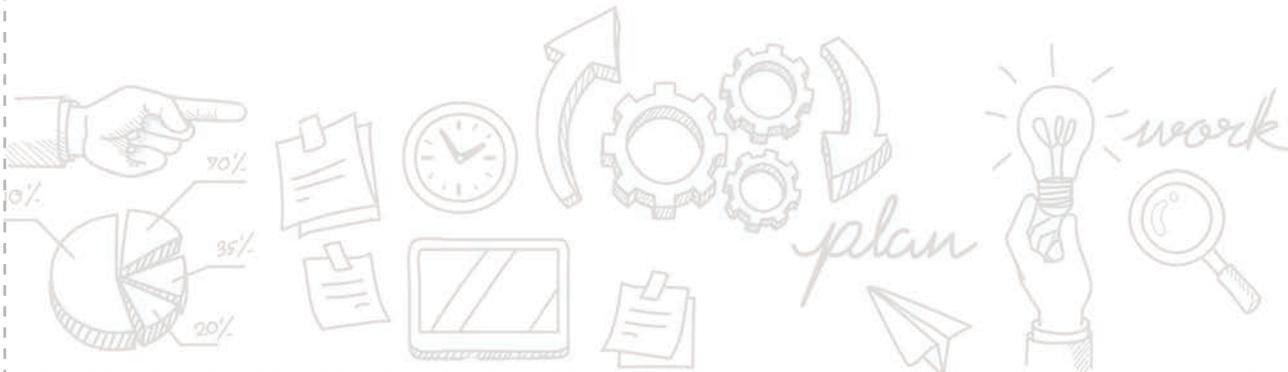


### Resource mapping

- The **USAID Collaboration Mapping Tool** is an interactive tool for visually mapping relationships between stakeholders. To access this tool and the guide, go to:  
**<https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/collaboration-mapping>**
- The Assessing Community Needs and Resources section of the University of Kansas Community Toolbox offers guidance for conducting an assessment of community resources. Access this **Community Toolbox** here:  
**<http://www.ctb.ku.edu/en/assessing-community-needs-and-resources>**

### Readiness assessment

- The **Partnerships Analysis Tool and Checklist** is an online resource available from the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. The interactive checklist allows users to generate aggregate scores on 7 subscales (e.g., determining the need for the partnership) by responding to a series of questions. Access the tool online here:  
**<https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/the-partnerships-analysis-tool>**
- **The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory** is a free online tool that includes 42 questions. Responses to these questions are used to calculate scores on 20 factors (such as leadership) that research has indicated are important for collaborative success. Access the online inventory here:  
**<https://www.wilder.org/Wilder-Research/Research-Services/Pages/Wilder-Collaboration-Factors-Inventory.aspx>**





*Kerensa Medhurst, BC Cancer Agency, and others at a meeting where harmonization was initially conceptualized.*

## Living Lab: Sharing Our Experience

Getting a collaborative project off the ground can be challenging, especially in the context of resource limitations or environmental constraints. One of our partners reflected about the history leading up to the decision to proceed with the Harmonization Project:

“ We had an interest in collaborating for many years prior to the start of the Harmonization Project. In fact, a working group comprised of members from each of the organizations was initially established approximately a year before the Harmonization Project planning started. This group was tasked with reviewing possibilities for collaborative prevention projects, and developed terms of reference and a strategic action plan for a potential collaborative tobacco reduction project. Following member turnover, the collaboration lost traction with no projects being approved or implemented. When the grant for multi-sectoral partnerships was identified, it provided the perfect partnership. ”

# PLANNING

Setting Goals, Designing, & Tailoring Projects



## SHAPING THE WORK

Successful bridge construction comes from detailed blueprints that bring together the accumulated knowledge and skills of many different professionals and sectors. A collaborative works in the same way, enabling different sectors and varying expertise to coalesce effectively. Planning requires forethought, experience and significantly heightens chances for successful outcomes. Imagine building a bridge without a blueprint!

*Dr. Joan Bottorff, UBC Okanagan Campus, and Cathy Adair, Canadian Cancer Society, BC and Yukon Division, at a planning meeting.*

## why this is important

Project planning provides clear goals, deliverables, and key midpoints along the journey. It provides a step by step framework to guide decision making and action.

## setting goals and defining success

Now is the time to identify concrete goals and criteria that will guide the project. Following are some strategies that can be employed to aid partners in determining project goals.

### Define project scope

Define realistic and attainable project requirements which represent the goals of the partners and take into account the external environment and resource limitations. Consideration should be given so that any products (e.g., research publications, health brochures) that will result from the project benefit all team members.

### Develop a mutually agreeable project timeline or agenda

Develop a project timeline with long and short-term goals. This facilitates priority setting and allows all partners to prepare for future resource needs.

### Define success and success indicators

Seek agreement on what project success looks like. This will help determine group deliverables within the project scope and will enable project evaluation.

### Set specific objectives

Once the team has defined success, set a final goal; be concrete and realistic. A realistically achievable goal promotes optimism and focus.

*Beware of “scope creep”, work that begins to expand beyond the project’s original vision and boundaries. Clear goals can help keep the shared vision in alignment.*

**word to the wise**

“

Ideally, teams would set their own timelines for implementing a project – one that works for them. However, as this was also a research project there were pre and post program surveys to consider and the research project did dictate timelines for partner organizations. We had to manage this potential conflict of interest to the benefit of both the research evaluation and achieving the goals of the project. Open communication between all our stakeholders resulted in a project that really worked.

”

## A **HALLMARK** OF **successful projects** IS AN **effective** **PLANNING** PROCESS

### the project planning process

A hallmark of successful projects is an effective planning process. Here are some strategies to facilitate planning.



#### Ensure mutual development

Mutual development of the project promotes ownership and opportunities to share knowledge and skills. This in turn supports capacity building for future collaboration. Shared contributions create shared results!



#### Examine similar projects or programs

Examining other evidence-based models can assist with determining effective approaches, allocating project resources, and overcoming project challenges.



#### Involve stakeholders

Involving stakeholders in the planning and implementation of programming can help boost legitimacy, contribute to program tailoring, and reduce environmental barriers to implementation.



#### Agree on clear roles and responsibilities

Be open and clear on what is expected from teams and individuals. Make timelines and other planning documents accessible to all. Developing a detailed breakdown of partner member roles, ensures shared responsibility for the project<sup>1</sup>.

## things to keep in mind

Communication	Virtual environment	Project management	Meeting facilitation
<p>A communication strategy helps ensure information is shared and reinforces accountability. Open communication channels give team members the opportunity to share challenges, limitations, new ideas, and feedback. Regularly sharing updates about the project with members of the partner organizations not on the project team (especially senior leadership, funders, and communications personnel) can also help to ensure ongoing support for project activities.</p>	<p>For some projects it can be difficult to get all team members in one place. Taking advantage of virtual technologies such as teleconference or web meeting software can enhance project communication.</p>	<p>Select software and technology and allocate administrative resources to the creation and maintenance of a project plan. Consider each organization's policies when choosing project management tools (e.g., where do they need to store their data). Allow access to team members where applicable.</p>	<p>Productive meetings that are inclusive of all members' input are necessary to keep members engaged over time<sup>14</sup>. Effective agendas, action-item focused meeting notes, and a leader or chair with solid facilitation skills all contribute to productive meetings.</p>

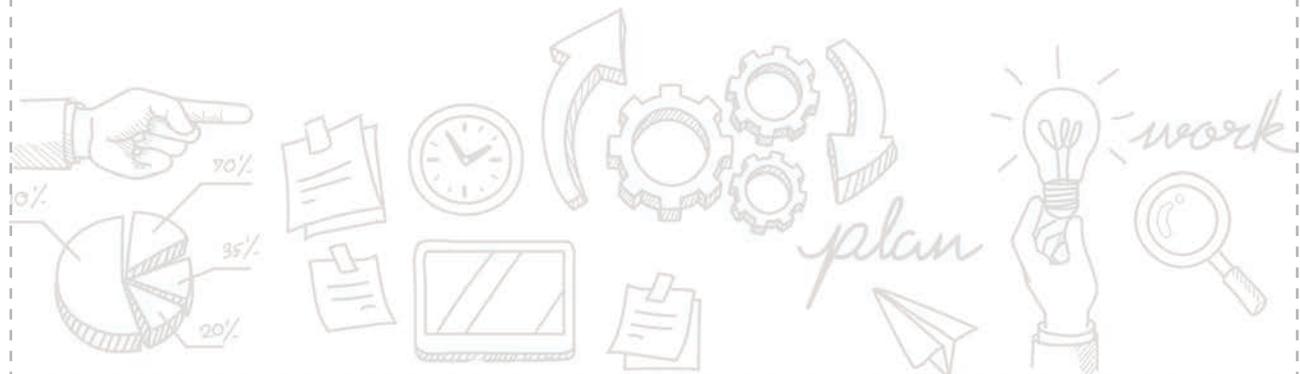
## useful tools



### Community engagement

- A webinar with a wealth of information about maximizing community engagement, including strategies for involving stakeholders in project planning is available here:

<http://www.mchnavigator.org/trainings/detail.php?id=1333>





## Living Lab: Sharing Our Experience

Collaboration can happen in many different contexts. The Harmonization Project focused on northern and rural/remote regions and included team members from many different locations. As a result, planning and organization of meetings between partners, meeting minutes, administration, and sharing of resources were necessary considerations.

“A really unique part of our project was the vast area that we’re working within. British Columbia is nearly four times the size of Britain and bigger than every US state except Alaska. As a full team, we could only meet in person once or twice a year. We had to maximize the use of technology in order to have a shared document filing system, co-ordinate teleconferences, share notes and ideas, and we all had to have internet and online capabilities, no matter how remote our team members were.”

# IMPLEMENTATION

*Moving from Paper to Practice*



## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Taking action moves an idea from paper into the real world of opportunities and challenges. Adjustments are often needed during bridge construction to take advantage of ideal conditions or skillfully maneuver around obstacles. As such, collaborative teams need to remain agile and flexible in planning their work.

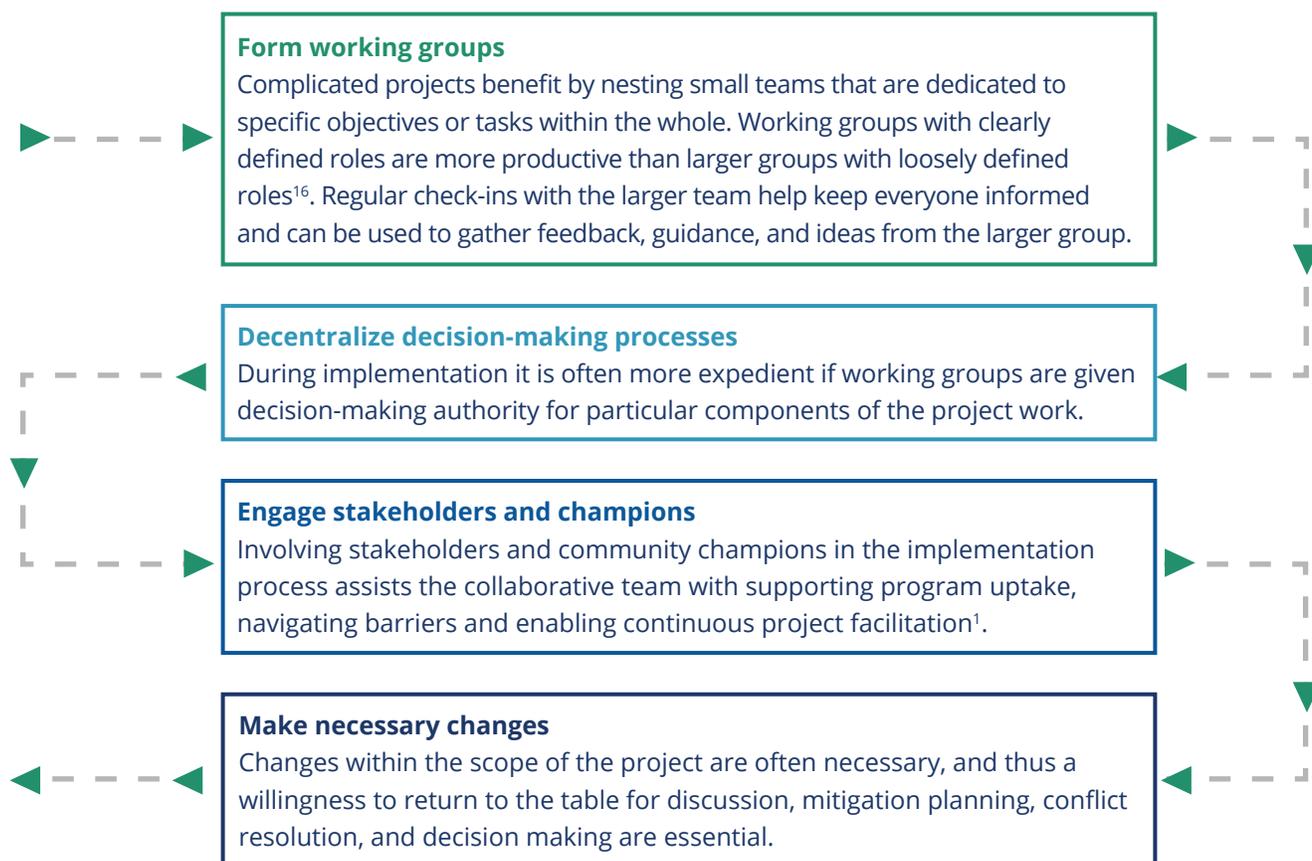
## why this is important

As project teams move forward with their work, they encounter both unexpected opportunities and challenges. Translating planning into reality requires constant checks and balances.

# ADOPTING *flexible* STRUCTURES will help ensure *successful* implementation

## moving from paper to practice

Regular monitoring and adopting flexible structures will help ensure successful implementation<sup>15</sup>. Following are some strategies to support evolving conditions.



“

We had a small implementation group but all were equally committed to developing and implementing the Stop Smoking Before Surgery program. I think the group worked well because each member was able to put in considerable time to this work – and all of them had extensive knowledge and experience related to smoking cessation that we drew on. Generally when members said they would do something – by our next meeting it was done. So the level of commitment was high.

”



Paul Sharp (Research Assistant), and Cherisse Seaton (Research Coordinator) at a workplace health screening event to launch POWERPLAY, a program for men working in northern and rural settings.

## coping with pressure and change

Implementation can accelerate the need for rapid decision making and can create unforeseen challenges that may increase pressure on team members. Yet, a high level of community engagement, trust, and clear communication can be essential to overcoming the barriers to project implementation.

“

During one of our project launch events, I became aware we were short staff for one of the sites. Fortunately, we have strong networks in the community and I was able to put out a last minute call. Somebody, who had nothing to do with this particular project, was able to send qualified staff. This commitment to community health and wanting to help turned a challenging situation into a successful one.

”

Be realistic about expectations under different decision-making conditions. Decision-making within large organizations can take more time than anticipated.

**word to the wise**

## things to keep in mind

The following are some useful strategies for dealing with implementation challenges.

### Balance workloads

Burnout is a potential threat to collaborative projects, especially if there are limited human resources and the project is time constrained. Assess work requirements, delegate appropriately, and encourage sharing the workload among partners. Securing strong organizational commitment can provide more dedicated time for staff to devote to the collaborative project<sup>1</sup>.

### Conflict management

Even the most closely aligned collaborative partners can have disagreements; however, if managed carefully, conflict can lead to new ideas. A collaborative style of conflict resolution, in which issues are openly discussed and solutions are identified by members, can promote successful implementation<sup>15</sup>. Partners that anticipate potential conflicts and work to resolve them also achieve greater progress<sup>17</sup>. Still, conflicts may occur, so identifying resources that can be called on if needed is one strategy to ensure conflict does not halt implementation mid-project.

### Stay focused on vision

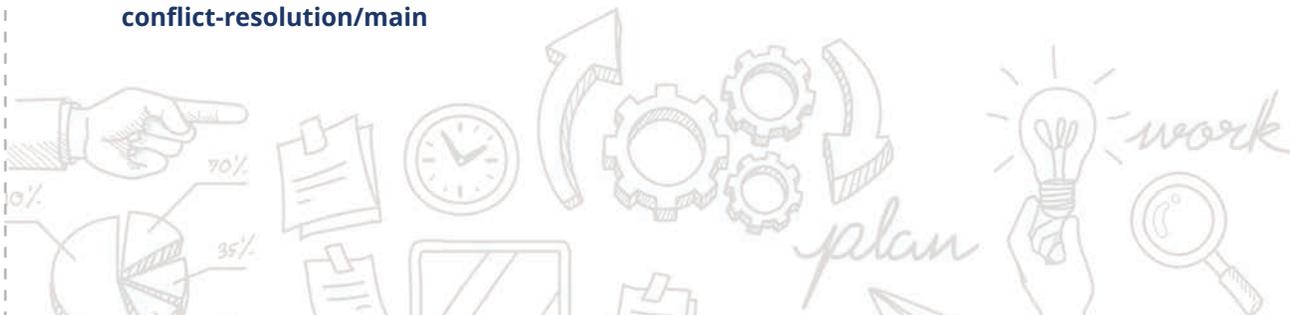
Re-visiting the collective vision and project goals during the implementation stages can help keep things on track. Identifying milestones and celebrating successes can keep team members motivated<sup>18</sup>.

## useful tools



### Conflict resolution

- The University of Kansas **Community Toolbox**, has many strategies for conflict resolution. See: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/provide-information-enhance-skills/conflict-resolution/main>





*Teaming up with northern employers to implement POWERPLAY, a program for men working in northern and rural settings.*

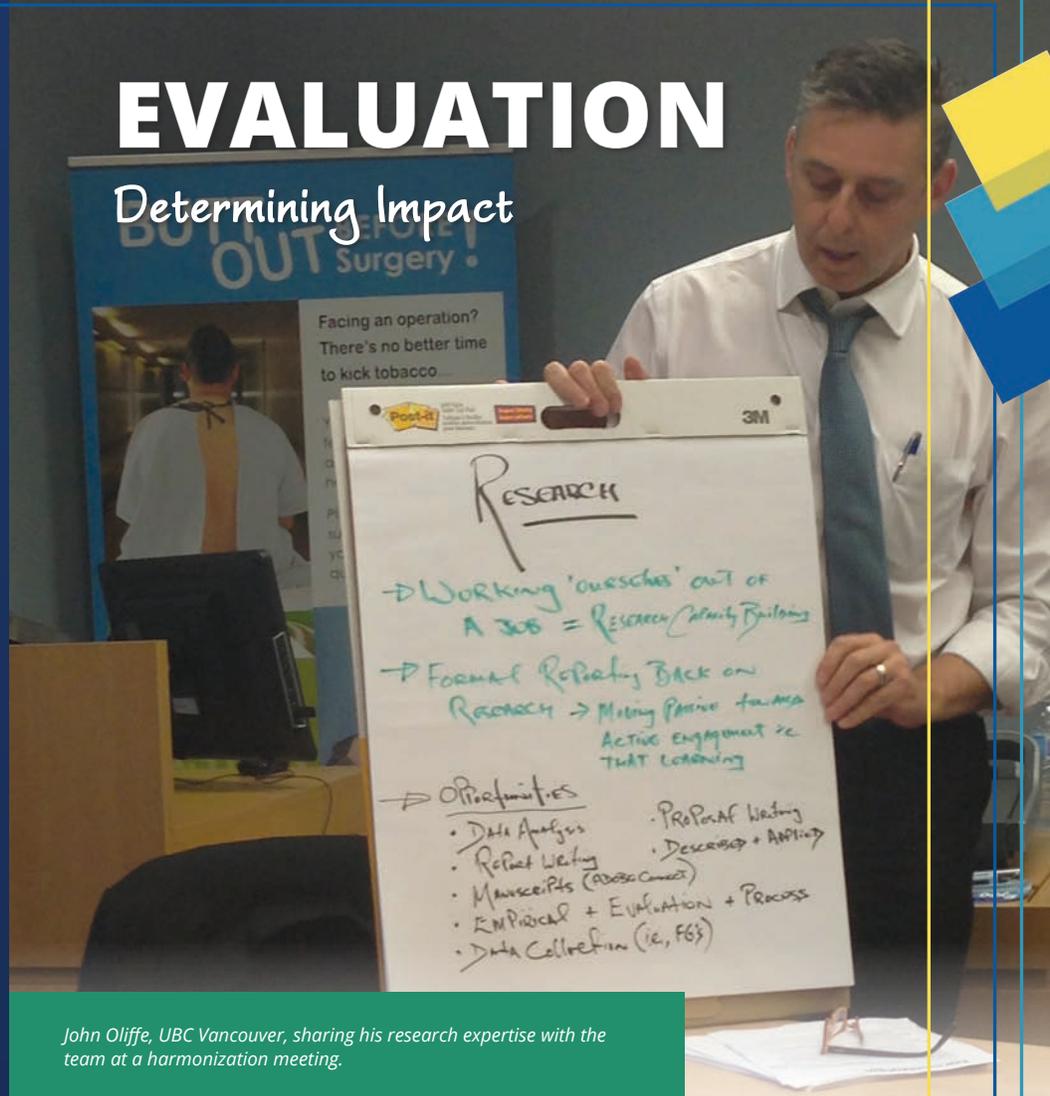
## Living Lab: Sharing Our Experience

In the Men's Healthy Eating Active Living project the team was committed to using a health promotion approach that was specifically geared to the target audience, working men in northern, rural British Columbia. It would have been easier to implement an "off-the-shelf" product. However, the decision to develop the POWERPLAY program as a new approach from scratch meant new timelines, budget needs, and human resource requirements, and the need to be adaptable at almost every step of the implementation.

“ We learned about tailoring health promotion programs to men who are often challenging to engage through our work with POWERPLAY. Even though one partner already had a great workplace wellness tool (Wellness Fits) that was available to us, it did not have a masculine look and feel. ”

# EVALUATION

## Determining Impact



John Oliffe, UBC Vancouver, sharing his research expertise with the team at a harmonization meeting.



### WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Evaluating the worth of a bridge may be relatively straightforward; for example, counting the number of people using the bridge.

Collaborative work is more difficult to measure but successful project outcomes and the number of people positively impacted would be starting points for review and evaluation.

### why this is important

Evaluations of collaborative projects that focus on the outcomes of project activities demonstrate accountability. The results can also be used to garner support for program sustainability and funding, and demonstrate the effectiveness of the collaboration. Evaluations provide important information that enables stakeholders, partners, and others to learn from the successes and challenges of working together. Collective agreement on how collaborative success or effectiveness will be measured ensures that partners remain aligned in their shared vision and are held accountable for project outcomes<sup>2</sup>.

# BEGIN **evaluation** BY identifying **key, agreed upon** **OUTCOMES**

## Identify an evaluation process

The evaluation process begins with the identification of key, mutually agreed upon outcomes. Evaluation can occur at the completion of a project or at set times during implementation. The approach the Project team used, referred to as developmental evaluation<sup>19,20</sup>, provided team members with an opportunity to respond and adapt as project needs evolved.

Developmental evaluation is an evaluation strategy that supports ongoing innovation and growth by providing real-time feedback in dynamic environments<sup>19</sup>. In developmental evaluation, the goal is to actively shape the course of development by providing key insights to facilitate learning and inform decision making. Patton (2006)<sup>21</sup> provides a helpful comparison of traditional and developmental evaluation, shown below.

Traditional evaluations	Complexity-based, developmental evaluations
Render definitive judgments of success or failure.	Provide feedback, generate learnings, support direction or affirm changes in direction.
Measure success against predetermined goals.	Develop new measures and monitoring mechanisms as goals emerge and evolve.
Position the evaluator outside to assure independence and objectivity.	Position the evaluator as an internal, team function integrated into action and ongoing interpretive processes.

*\*\*To read the rest of this table please see Patton (2006)<sup>21</sup>.*

For more information about developmental evaluation and to take a self-assessment, see:

<http://innoweave.ca/en/modules/developmental-evaluation>



*Holly Christian, Northern Health (left), and Megan Klitch, Canadian Cancer Society, BC and Yukon Division (right), sharing the results of the POWERPLAY program evaluation at the Inaugural Physical Activity Summit in Prince George.*

## evaluation questions

Evaluation questions should be discussed early in the planning phase of the project and should commence prior to project completion. Project evaluations may require data from multiple time points.

Indicators of successful or effective health promotion collaboration have been identified in reviews of the current research<sup>22</sup>.



**Population health or project outcomes:** Assessment of project end goals and



**Collaborative capacity:** Assessment of how well the partners are working together, and functioning as a team.

Examples of evaluation questions that can be used to assess each of these outcomes are included below.



“

*The evaluation component tested our ability to be flexible in the face of change. At times we struggled, such as when team leadership shifted. Fortunately, we had enough expertise in the group to continue with the evaluation. And that's what made the difference. In addition, having a small, diverse, consistent, and dedicated working group was essential.*

”



## strategies for supporting evaluation

A number of strategies can be used to make the evaluation process as smooth as possible.

### Foster a culture of evaluation

Reinforce the importance of creating opportunities for the team to provide input into evaluation strategies and plans. Ensure team members who join mid-project are aware of the project evaluation plan and how it relates back to the success of the whole.

### Seek expertise

Identify evaluation experts during the team building phase.

### Designate an evaluation team

Form an evaluation team with a diverse subgroup of project members.

### Clarify the purpose

Clearly convey to all project team members that evaluation is an essential component of project accountability.

### Collect Data

For evaluation, consider using a variety of tools such as questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Collect data at regular, pre-determined intervals.

### Keep records

Diligent recordkeeping and note taking will help when reflecting on decision making and other collaborative processes. Ensure all data is stored securely and kept confidential. It is advisable to remove identifiers when sharing data related to collaborative processes with team members.

### Dissemination of results

Prior to dissemination, evaluation results should be reviewed by the project team, and vetted by the communication departments of partner organizations. At the beginning of the project, a clear understanding and agreement related to sharing the results of evaluations can be helpful.



## why sharing results matters

There are a number of reasons why it is important to conduct an evaluation and to communicate results.

### Demonstrate accountability

Funders, stakeholders, and executives from partner organizations will all want to know whether their contributions were worthwhile. Communicating results is a key component of accountability.

### Continue to engage the target population

Feedback for the community and other groups that were part of the project may be needed in order to foster ongoing engagement. Participants often want to know the final results of a project. Results can be communicated within a community through newspapers, local news, community forums, or social media.

### Contribute to greater knowledge

Evaluations of projects have the potential to contribute to the greater pool of knowledge on a given subject. When made public, contributions can assist and inform others.

### Capitalize on results

Projects that demonstrate the success or benefit of collaboration can use results to advocate for continued investment or further collaboration on future projects. Alternatively, negative results can illustrate the need for a change in direction.

## useful tools



### Evaluation

- The **Collaborative Assessment Tool** is one example of a short activity that can be completed by members of a collaborative and discussed as a group. It is intended to help identify (as a baseline) areas that can be strengthened as well as provide a gauge of progress. This tool is available online:  
<http://www.preventioninstitute.org/component/jlibrary/article/id-193/127.html>
- The **Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory** is another free online tool that includes 42 questions. Responses to these questions are used to calculate scores on 20 factors (such as leadership) that research has indicated are important for collaborative success. This inventory can be used periodically to assess how these collaborative factors are changing over time.  
<https://www.wilder.org/Wilder-Research/Research-Services/Pages/Wilder-Collaboration-Factors-Inventory.aspx>
- The **Evaluation Plan Builder** at Innovation Network can be used to guide the creation of flexible questions to fit real-life evaluation needs. Free online registration is required.  
[http://www.innonet.org/index.php?section\\_id=64&content\\_id=185](http://www.innonet.org/index.php?section_id=64&content_id=185)





## Living Lab: Sharing Our Experience

One of the ways we made sure evaluation was included in our work was to weave activities and tools into the everyday activities of the project. Including evaluation questions in team meetings established a recorded and mutually shared set of data in the minutes.

“ We agreed to have a reflection question on every meeting agenda. That didn’t work too well at first because it was always last and often overtaken by more pressing matters on the agenda. However, we were soon able to work in evaluation as the primary topic for many key meetings, which provided us with valuable information. ”

Knowing that sensitive issues or critical incidents may not always be discussed during our meetings, we also provided other ways for our team members to share their experiences related to the collaboration.

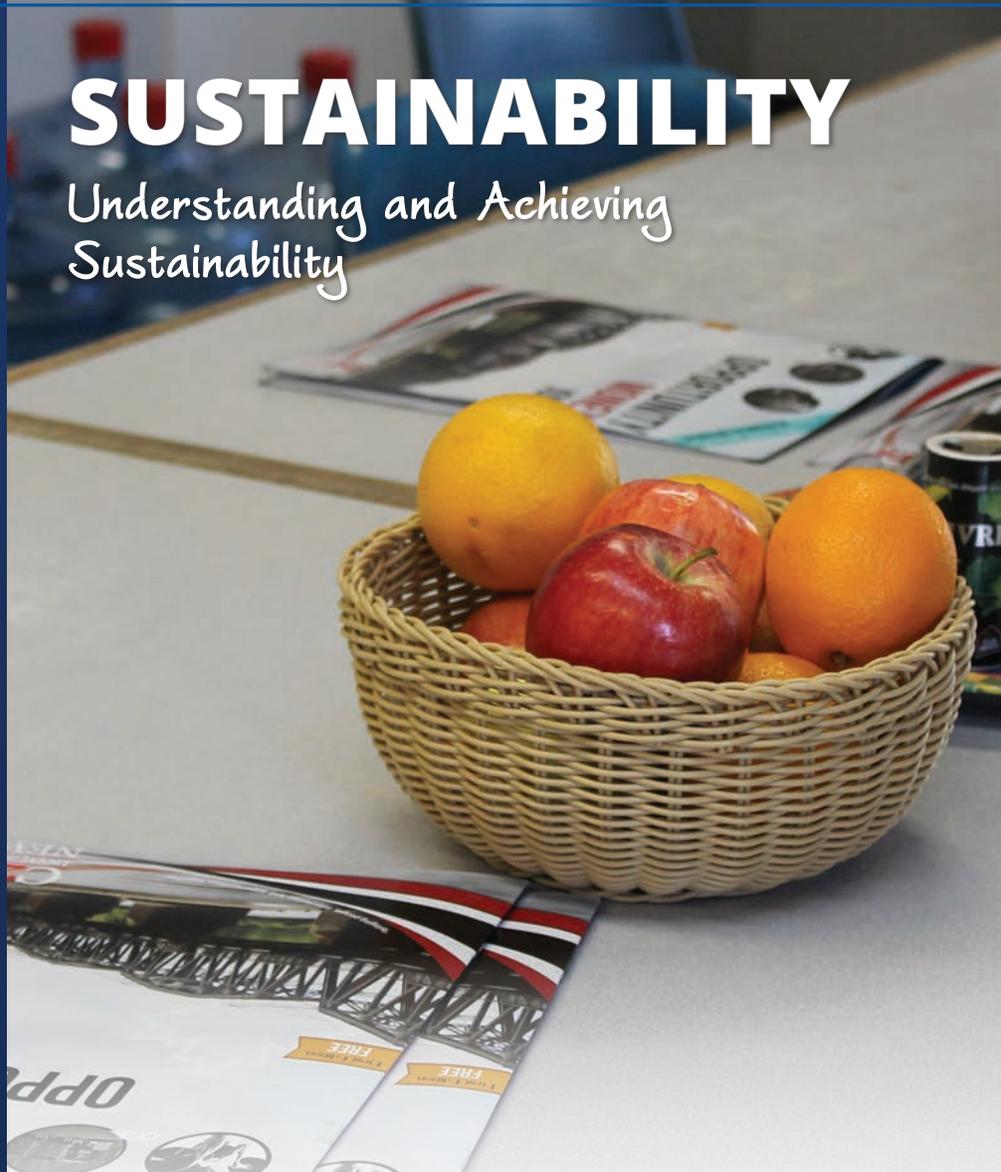
# SUSTAINABILITY

## Understanding and Achieving Sustainability



### WHAT LIVES ON?

A completed bridge leaves a legacy that is visible and useful to the people in the region. Similarly, collaborative partnerships leave a legacy in relation to population health or project outcomes, and collaborative capacity. Sustainability will also be determined by how the partners choose to cross new bridges together in the future to achieve shared goals.



*Workplaces that partnered with the Men's Healthy Eating and Active Living team to offer the POWERPLAY program continued to make fruit available to their employees.*

### why this is important

Sustainability can mean different things to different people, and the interpretation can shift over time. Collaborative projects may be focused on a singular objective or goals that create long term partnerships. Project goals and partner expectations will determine the potential for sustainability.

“

I've learned that senior management support of a project is critical to sustainability. They need to not only be in-line with the vision and aims, but also approve the financial and human resources involved. Reflecting back, ideally a project should fall directly within an organizational mandate or policy for optimum sustainability.

”

## defining sustainability

Collaborative sustainability can be categorized in three ways<sup>23</sup>.

### Sustaining the ongoing benefits for communities and individuals

This applies to collaborations focused on specific, one-time goals where the project value is immediate and non-cumulative. An example might be a change to local bylaws so that smoking is no longer permitted in public places.

Some programs may require ongoing staffing and financial support in order to maintain value and impact into the future. Examples include: implementing a healthy eating program in local schools, or creating an urban needle exchange program.

**Collaborative Sustainability**

**Sustaining programs following project completion**

### Sustaining working relationships and the capacity for future collaborative program delivery beyond project completion

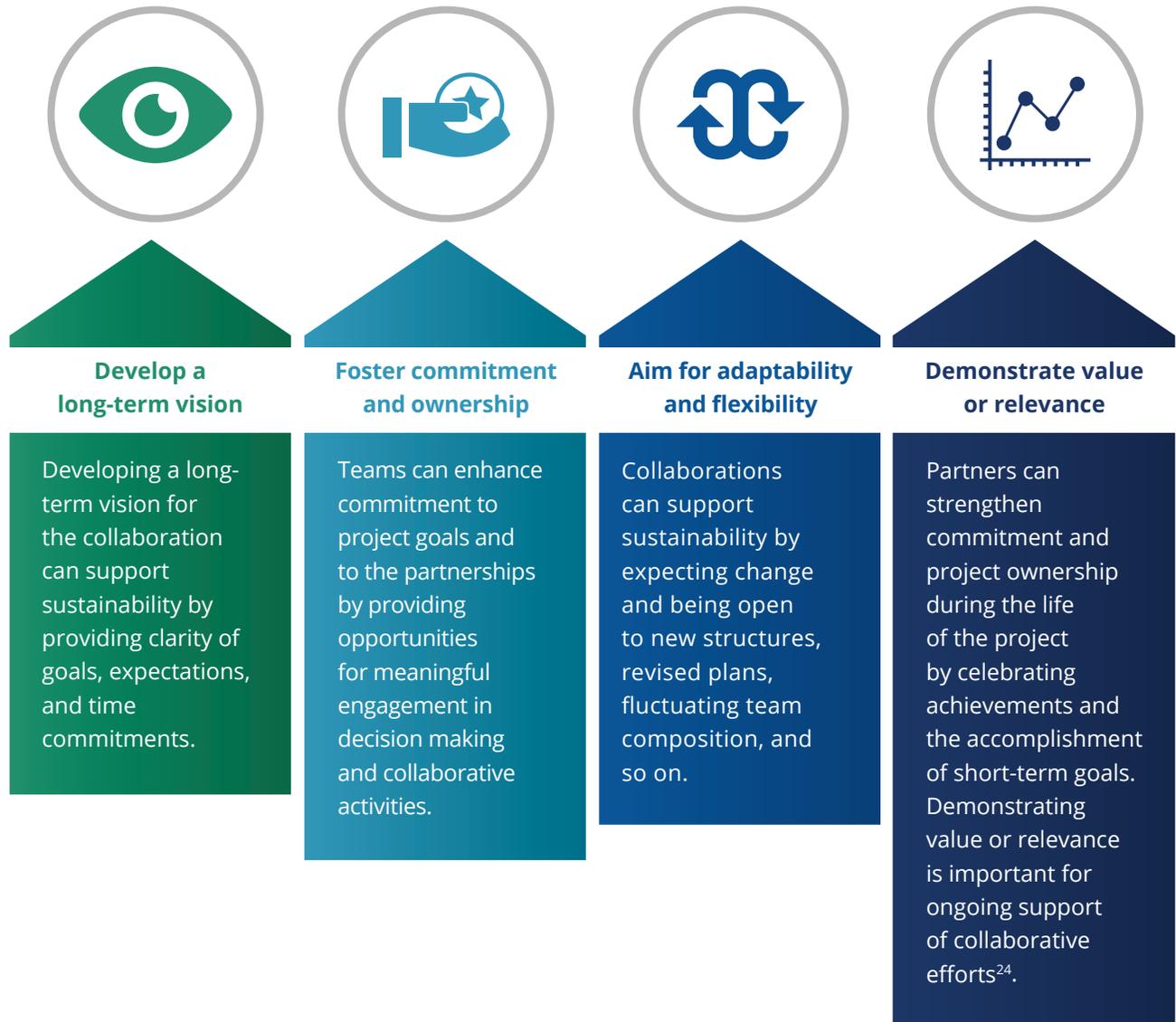
Sustainability in this sense is about building the infrastructure for collaboration and enabling the partners to work together more readily to address new and emergent issues.

Try to think about what your work will look like a year after project completion. Are there continuing or new areas for partnership work? Will there still be a need for funding? Will partners still be meeting regularly? These are the kinds of questions partners need to think about when determining sustainability.

**word to the wise**

## planning for sustainability

Discussing sustainability throughout a collaborative project will provide team members an opportunity to plan for the future and consider implications for roles and responsibilities. Deciding whether sustainability of a project or partnership is **appropriate** or **necessary** is a key to clarifying future organizational commitments and allocation of resources. It is important for all team members to be as open as possible about future plans in order to maintain amicable relationships should the partnership end. Attention should be paid to the following strategies that support sustainability.



“

Through this project we've been able to create a certain level of trust. I think that will be of huge value going forward and is certainly something that will nurture future relationships.

”

“

Collaborating on the Harmonization Project has been meaningful, both from an individual learning perspective and from an organizational achievement perspective. Together we've been able to do what was beyond each of us alone.

”



Nursing students Jamie Armes and Cassie Dussault at the SSBS display table at the University Hospital of Northern BC

## other strategies for sustainability

The following are evidence-based strategies<sup>23</sup> that have been successfully used by other groups to sustain collaborative efforts:

### Policy or organizational changes

Project work can be sustained through policy changes that support ongoing efforts, or through the institutionalization of a practice or activities within an organization.

### Developing permanent advisory committees

Committees can be formed to monitor the ongoing impact of a program and to inform decision makers about the best courses of action to maintain program benefits.

### Securing sustainable funding

The sustainability of collaborative projects are often dependent on continued funding and resources. Consequently, needs for ongoing financial support and in-kind contributions (e.g., staff time) for the project must be determined. Evaluation results may be critical for future funding applications and obtaining organizational commitments.

### Partnership expansion

The sustainability of a collaborative project can be enhanced by building linkages with other organizations and stakeholder groups that support ongoing goals. This will extend the reach and visibility of the work.

# Collaborative experiences PROVIDE valuable insight FOR future endeavours



## the future

After a bridge is built, it connects communities on both sides for years to come. Similarly, developing a collaborative project will forge connections and relationships between individuals and organizations laying the groundwork for future collaborations. Yet just as a bridge requires ongoing maintenance, so too does collaboration.

Project successes that demonstrate the value of partnerships can also enhance collaborative capacity across organizations. Whether this is accomplished through formal partnership agreements or through adopting collaborative principles into organizational mandates, building cultural commitment to collaboration will ensure support for future joint projects.

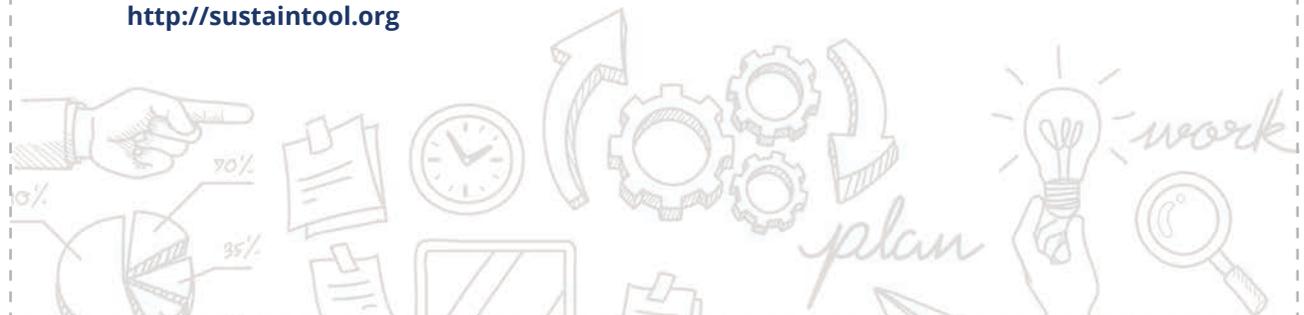
Many complex social problems, such as addiction, obesity and mental health issues, can only be addressed if groups work together. Collective action can create collective impact - combining the skills and expertise of diverse partners reduces duplication, leverages shared resources, and optimizes performance<sup>2</sup>.

## useful tools



### Sustainability

- **Tools for Sustainability** is a document that reviews several approaches for reaching sustainability and includes tools to help readers discern how they might sustain their efforts. This document, along with the appended worksheets and tools, is available here: <http://www.gjcpp.org/pdfs/2009-0017-Final%20Version-011410.pdf>
- The sustainability section of the University of Kansas **Community Toolbox** includes many additional questions and resources to assist in the development of a sustainability plan, including how to create a business plan, and how to write an annual budget. Access the sustainability section of this toolbox here: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/sustaining-work-or-initiative>
- The **Program Sustainability Assessment Tool** can be used to take baseline and follow-up 'snapshot assessments' of a collaborative program's sustainability. These can be used to help inform sustainability planning discussions. This tool is available at: <http://sustaintool.org>





## Living Lab: Sharing Our Experience

The Harmonization Project team was committed to reducing cancer rates, but often working independently on prevention efforts.

Deciding what sustainability would mean to our team took time, communication, and an understanding of organizational limitations. In this process, three different options were discussed:

1. Will the organizations continue working together to *deliver* the original programs?
2. Will the organizations continue working together to *expand* the original programs?
3. Will the organizations continue working together on *future* projects?

Ultimately, the team decided that the project programs could be sustained through policy and organizational changes with minimal ongoing support from the partners. However, the collaborative experience of the Harmonization Project has led to a long-lasting commitment amongst partners to continue to work together on other projects for collective community impact. The bridges have been built....

# suggested tools included in the primer

## Community engagement

- A webinar with a wealth of information about maximizing community engagement, including strategies for involving stakeholders in project planning is available here:

<http://www.mchnavigator.org/trainings/detail.php?id=1333>

## Communications planning

- The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants has a number of communications resources, including a **strategic communication planning document** created by the Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society for the Centre for Community Organizations. This document has excellent communications guidelines, and features in its appendices “How to facilitate a creative brainstorm” and an “audience profiling” table. For a list of communications resources go to:

[http://www.orgwise.ca/resources?keys=&term\\_node\\_tid\\_depth=46](http://www.orgwise.ca/resources?keys=&term_node_tid_depth=46)

## Conflict resolution

- The University of Kansas **Community Toolbox**, has many strategies for conflict resolution. See: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/provide-information-enhance-skills/conflict-resolution/main>

## Evaluation

- The **Collaborative Assessment Tool** is one example of a short activity that can be completed by members of a collaborative and discussed as a group. It is intended to help identify (as a baseline) areas that can be strengthened as well as provide a gauge of progress. This tool is freely available online here: <http://www.preventioninstitute.org/component/jlibrary/article/id-193/127.html>
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## Memorandum of understanding

- The CDC developed a sample **Memorandum of Understanding template** as part of its Collaboration Guide for Pacific Island Cancer and Chronic Disease Programs available here:

<http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/ncccp/pijcollaborationguide.htm>

## Readiness assessment

- The **Partnerships Analysis Tool and Checklist** is an online resource available from the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. The interactive checklist allows users to generate aggregate scores on 7 subscales (e.g., determining the need for the partnership) by responding to a series of questions. Access the tool online here: <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/the-partnerships-analysis-tool>

- The **Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory** is a free online tool that includes 42 questions. Responses to these questions are used to calculate scores on 20 factors (such as leadership) that research has indicated are important for collaborative success. Access the online inventory here: <https://www.wilder.org/Wilder-Research/Research-Services/Pages/Wilder-Collaboration-Factors-Inventory.aspx>

### Resource mapping

- The **USAID Collaboration Mapping Tool** is an interactive tool for visually mapping relationships between stakeholders. To access this tool and the guide, go to: <https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/collaboration-mapping>
- The Assessing Community Needs and Resources section of the University of Kansas **Community Toolbox** offers guidance for conducting an assessment of community resources. Access this Community Toolbox here: <http://www.ctb.ku.edu/en/assessing-community-needs-and-resources>

### Sustainability

- **Tools for Sustainability** is a document that reviews several approaches for reaching sustainability and includes tools to help readers discern how they might sustain their efforts. This document, along with the appended worksheets and tools, is available here: <http://www.gjcpp.org/pdfs/2009-0017-Final%20Version-011410.pdf>
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- The **Program Sustainability Assessment Tool** can be used to take baseline and follow-up 'snapshot assessments' of a collaborative program's sustainability. These can be used to help inform sustainability planning discussions. This tool is available at: <http://sustaintool.org>

## additional tools:

### Collaboration assessment

- The **Collaboration Multiplier** is an interactive tool for strengthening collaborative efforts on complex social challenges. The tool is designed to be used in a variety of different stages of collaboration and is available here: <http://www.preventioninstitute.org/component/jlibrary/article/id-44/127.html>

### Policy development

- The **BC Healthy Communities Stakeholder guide** supports collaboratives in drafting and developing public policy and is available here: <http://bchealthycommunities.ca/res/download.php?id=417>

### Sustainability

- The **Sustaining Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Key Elements for Success** is a sustainability analysis tool to support long term sustainability planning for community initiatives. It identifies eight critical elements for success that constitute a sustainability framework and examines each of these elements in detail. See: [http://www.ccitoolsforfeds.org/doc/Sustaining\\_CCI\\_key\\_Elements\\_to\\_Success.pdf](http://www.ccitoolsforfeds.org/doc/Sustaining_CCI_key_Elements_to_Success.pdf)

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