

Partnership, Collaboration: What is the Difference?

A legal partnership is a contractual relationship involving close cooperation between two or more parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities. Each party has an equal share of the risk as well as the reward.

A collaboration involves cooperation in which parties are not necessarily bound contractually. There is a relationship, but it is usually less formal than a binding, legal contract and responsibilities may not be shared equally. A collaboration exists when several people pool their common interests, assets and professional skills to promote broader interests for the community's benefit. The most important thing to remember is: Organizations don't collaborate – *people* collaborate.

It is important to create and nurture both types of relationships to strengthen your organization and enhance the services it provides. Not only does that help your homeless clients, but it makes your program more competitive when applying for government grants and more attractive to corporate and private funding sources.

Why Collaboration is Essential

Providing shelter or housing alone will not end homelessness. Successful programs, those that help individuals and families regain economic independence, offer access to health care, substance abuse and mental health services, employment assistance, behavior and life skills counseling, financial assistance, legal aid, and follow-up case management support.

Providing access to some services will require legally binding contracts with providers – such as medical care and most substance abuse treatment programs. The contracts specify which services are available, at what cost, how they will be paid for, and limits to liabilities and other protections for the parties involved. Some organizations

depend on partnerships with local housing authorities and private development firms to provide shelter and transitional housing units for their homeless clients.

Collaborations are the most immediate, economical way to enhance the services an organization can offer homeless veterans. Gaining access to services that are already provided by community-based organizations and agencies is critical in containing costs while maximizing program benefits. Support organizations, in turn, can justify funding requests based on services they offer to homeless veterans.

Where to Find Vital Services

The following is a list of services most homeless veterans will need to regain control of their lives, and where you should look in your community to find them.

- **Employment Assistance** – The Department of Labor stations veterans representatives at state employment offices, One-Stop Career Centers, and many homeless veteran programs nationwide. Look in your local phone book blue pages under “Employment.”
- **Vocational Training** – Many homeless service providers work with local employers and industries to provide training and employment opportunities for their clients.
- **Veterans benefits counseling** – Available through Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Regional Benefits Offices, community VET Centers, Veteran Service Organizations, County Veteran Service Officers (go to www.nchv.org and click on “Resources” for contact information).
- **Life skills and behavior counseling** – Local colleges, the faith community, family crisis centers, public school system adult programs, county health departments and local businesses may offer these services, or be willing to help develop them.
- **Mental health support** – Contact your local health department, or check the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) website at www.nami.org to find services in your area.

Why Form a Partnership?

With a strong partnership, your organization may have access to more financial resources, tangible resources, people resources, licensed client services, and professional expertise. Investors, such as foundations and government grants, will be more likely to consider your program proposals because more areas of need are addressed and there is less duplication of services.

How do you find and select a partner?

- Define what your clients needs are (both current and future).
- Determine what organizations currently have resources you would like to provide to your clients.
- Look for organizations or groups that share an alignment with your mission, vision, or objectives.
- Look beyond traditional pairing, be creative in who you approach. Don't be afraid to look at nontraditional organizations such as faith based communities. You want your partnership to be diverse and reflect the community in which you serve.
- Have your board of directors use their influence and leverage to make connections for your organization.

Organizations you should contact:

- Community-based service providers
- Faith-based organizations and churches
- Civic and fraternal organizations
- Veteran Service Organizations
- Charitable organizations
- Local government service agencies

Effective Community Collaboration



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Successful Partnership Factors

Environment

- Look at the history of collaboration or cooperation within the community, what has worked in the past.
- Connect with a group that is seen as a leader in the community to assist you in the process
- Make sure that the political/social climate is favorable, i.e. is it an election year?

Membership Characteristics

- All members must maintain mutual respect, understanding and trust.
- Have an appropriate cross-section of members so that all of the community is represented equally.
- Members need to see the collaboration as a benefit to their self interest
- All must be willing to compromise.

Process and Structure of the Group

- Members share a stake in both the process and outcome.
- There is a multi-layer check in the decision making process, one group does not possess too much power.
- Flexibility to change with the community's needs.
- There is a clear understanding of roles and policy guidelines.
- The group is able to adapt and change when needed.

Communication

- Established and closely maintained formal and informal lines of communications.
- You want to make sure you create an environment in which all participants are encouraged to make contributions.

Resources

- **Continuum of Care** – “*A Place at the Table: Homeless Veterans and the Local Homeless Assistance Planning Networks*”
<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/library/coc/index.cfm>

This guide is designed to help organizations serving homeless veterans participate in homeless assistance program planning networks.

- *Building Strategic Relationships: How to Extend your Organization's Reach Through Partnerships, Alliances, and Joint Ventures* by William Bergquist (Order from Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94101, 415-433-1767, www.josseybass.com.)

- *The Collaboration Challenge: How Nonprofits and Business Succeed through Strategic Alliances* by James Austin (Order from Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94101, 415-433-1767, www.josseybass.com.)

- *Collaboration: What Makes It Work*, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation (Order from the Publishing Center, 919 Lafond Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104, 800-274-6024, www.wilder.org.)

- *Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey*, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation (Order from the Publishing Center, 919 Lafond Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104, 800-274-6024, www.wilder.org.)

- *Beyond Collaboration: Strategic Restructuring of Nonprofit Organizations* (booklet), published by the James Irvine Foundation and the National Center for Nonprofit Boards. (For copies contact the James Irvine Foundation, One Market, Stuart Tower, Suite 2500, San Francisco, CA 94105, 415-777-2244.