

Principles of Collaboration

This tool presents some important principles of collaboration. Understanding these principles will help you develop the relationships you need to plan, implement, evaluate, and sustain your prevention efforts, and to deepen these relationships over time.

- **Successful collaboration is intentional.** Engaging new partners, and keeping them engaged, requires deliberate and strategic planning. You will want to be clear on the purpose of the collaboration, determine how you plan to achieve that purpose, and establish clear roles and responsibilities for all involved. Over time, you will also want to check in regularly with partners to ensure that the relationship continues to meet their needs. Even those collaborative relationships that begin easily and organically need to be nourished in order to stay healthy.
- **Collaboration requires flexibility.** Partnering with new stakeholders sometimes means working in new ways. You may need to hold meetings at different times to accommodate the schedules of your new partners, communicate in new ways, or approach decision-making with an eye toward ensuring that all points of view (particularly those of your new partners) are considered. Though change may feel scary (or at least disruptive) at first, considering and accommodating the needs of new partners shows that you value your partners and their contributions.
- **For collaboration to thrive, all parties must benefit.** You may know why you want a specific stakeholder on your team, but unless they see the benefit of collaborating with you, the partnership is likely to be short-lived. Can you provide them with access to data? Specialized prevention knowledge? Increased credibility? When reaching out to new partners, be explicit about what resources you have to offer and be ready to communicate how, by working together, you can more effectively address shared prevention priorities.
- **Collaboration is not one size fits all.** Each collaboration is unique, driven by purpose, need, and the readiness of partners to engage. Moreover, collaborative relationships—like all relationships—are likely to evolve and change over time. There's no “right” way to collaborate. What's most important is that all partners understand and agree on the level of involvement expected of them and how they are expected to contribute.

- **Collaboration takes time.** Great relationships are built on trust—and trust takes time to establish. Be prepared to invest the time needed to build strong relationships. Rushing this process can lead to partner disengagement or prevention activities that miss the mark.
- **Collaboration is a journey, not a destination.** Like many journeys we take, collaboration may not be a straight road from Point A to Point B. More likely, it will contain some unexpected detours, a traffic jam or two, and a long drive that provokes the question, “Are we there yet?” Taking “shortcuts” may save on time and gas (i.e., energy), but won’t necessarily get you where you want to go. What’s important to remember is that it’s the journey itself that builds the relationship and trust between partners—so take your time and enjoy the ride!