PARTNERSHIP PLAYBOOK

A GUIDE FOR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS

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IPHA
Indiana Public Health Association

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Introduction & Acknowledgements

This playbook is intended to help Indiana's local health departments build and sustain partnerships, as well as understand options for fund distribution, particularly as it relates to Health First Indiana and the delivery of core public health services.

This document was created by the Indiana Public Health Association, with input from the Indiana Department of Health and local health department staff.

Partnership

Partnerships allow us to combine expertise, resources, power, and purpose toward a collective goal. What an individual or organization might do alone can be multiplied and strengthened through intentional and strategic partnerships. This section will discuss the basics of identifying partners, establishing partnerships, communicating with partners, and sustaining partnerships.

Identifying Partners

Before identifying potential partners, it’s critical that your organization has set a clear goal for the work, as well as a clear purpose for involving a partner in it. Below are a few reasons why you may consider engaging another organization in your efforts:

- Your agency has limited staff capacity.
- Your agency does not have the specialized skills or expertise needed to deliver certain services.
- Another organization is already delivering certain services, and your agency would like to be involved.
- The work would benefit from diverse perspectives beyond your agency.
- Your agency wants to reach a broader audience by involving external partners in the work.
- The work is too big for your agency to do alone.

Additionally, you should be prepared to explain to a potential partner why they would benefit from being involved and what you will expect of them as a partner.

From there, you can begin exploring potential partners. This can be accomplished informally, through conversations, introductions by others, or web searches. Alternatively, you might seek out partners through a more formal process that involves funding, which will be discussed later in this playbook.

As you begin the process of partner identification, the below template may be helpful for organizing your plans:

Project	Project Goal(s)	Partnership Need	Partner Role	Potential Partners
EXAMPLE: Maternal & Child Health Safe Sleep Program	*Educate key populations about safe sleep practices*	*Support with education dissemination*	*1) Distribute safe sleep flyers to patients/clients* *2) Promote LHD safe sleep events*	*Local Obstetrics Center*

Establishing a Partnership

Once you've identified a potential partner, it's time to reach out, determine if the partnership is a good fit, and if so, establish expectations, norms, processes, and roles.

First, you'll want to connect with your potential partner, request a meeting, and note the meeting purpose. See the sample introductory email below:

Subject line: Scheduling Time to Connect

Good morning, [name],

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is [first and last name], and I am the [role/title] at the [organization]. If your availability allows, I'd like to schedule time for us to connect regarding potential partnership around [core service area]. Please let me know which of the following options would work best for you:

[insert meeting time suggestions]

I look forward to connecting with you soon. Thank you!

[sign-off]

After successfully scheduling a meeting, be sure to prepare and share an agenda in advance to guide the conversation. This agenda can be brief but will help ensure that the discussion stays focused and includes all relevant information. See a sample list of agenda items for an introductory meeting below:

- *Introductions*
- *Overview of [your organization]*
- *Overview of [potential partner organization]*
- *Potential areas of alignment and/or partnership*
- *Next steps/action items*

If you and your potential partner identify areas of alignment and ways to collaborate, you may consider setting another (or recurring) meeting time to further discuss and clarify expectations, norms, processes, and roles.

In some cases, the partnership may remain informal, meaning that neither partner is bound to an agreement. In other circumstances, however, particularly if funding is involved, the partnership should be formalized through an agreement such as a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or contract. Formal agreements will be covered later in this playbook.

For any partnership, it will be critical for all parties to agree upon the following items (BUILD Health Challenge Workbook):

- *Why are we partnering? What are we trying to achieve through this partnership?*
- *What individuals and organizations make up this partnership? Are there others that should be invited in?*
- *How will partners communicate with one another? How often should partners meet?*
- *How will partners make decisions?*
- *How will partners hold one another accountable?*
- *How will partners share responsibility? What roles will exist within the partnership?*
- *What skills/power/leverage do partners have that can be utilized to optimize the partnership and work?*

Through consideration of the above questions with your partner(s), you may want to establish a set of group agreements/norms which will enable the group to work together effectively, respectfully, and intentionally. Group agreements help to define the values and practices that partners should adhere to in their interactions. See a few sample group agreements below:

- **Accountability**: Deliver on responsibilities and meet deadlines.
- **Collaboration**: Make decisions and act together.
- **Openness**: Be receptive to new ideas and differing opinions.
- **Communication**: Be clear, honest, and direct.
- **Purpose**: Remain focused on a shared vision to improve the health of our communities.

Check out this article by Motion to learn more about setting group norms.

Communicating with Partners

When developing a partnership, it is important to consider what communication channels you'll use and how frequently you'll communicate to ensure that tasks are being met to accomplish the goals of your collaboration.

Communication Channels: Consider what methods and modes of communication you will use when collaborating with your partner. Choose the options that work best for the goals of your collaboration. Ensure that everyone who will be working on the project has access to the communication platform(s) you select.

- Email
- File sharing platforms
    - Google Drive
    - Box
    - OneDrive
    - SharePoint
- Task management platforms
    - Trello
    - Asana
    - Monday
    - Microsoft Planner
- Virtual or in-person meetings
- **Frequency of Communication:** Determine the frequency of meetings, email, and other forms of communication needed for your collaboration (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly). Communication frequency may change as needed based upon project objectives, deadlines, etc.

Meeting Management: Meetings are a critical component of partner communications, and it's important to determine a standard structure and process to optimize your meetings.

- ***Creating a Meeting Agenda***
    - What standing items will you include in the agenda? What items require discussion to achieve the goals of your partnership?
    - Will input from partners be allowed when creating the agenda? If so, how will you solicit input?
    - When will the agenda be sent to ensure that there is ample time for participants to review ahead of the meeting?
        - If possible, send an agenda a week ahead of the meeting.
- ***Capturing Meeting Notes***
    - Who will be responsible for taking notes during meetings?
    - What level of detail is needed in note taking?
    - Where will you store meeting notes for future review and sharing purposes? How will you ensure that all parties can access meeting notes?
- ***Action Items/Follow-Up***
    - Who will be responsible for sharing meeting notes and communicating any action items or follow-up needed after a meeting?
    - When will the meeting follow-up communications be sent?
        - If possible, send within a few days of the meeting.
- ***Virtual Meeting Considerations***
    - What platform will you use?
    - Who will be responsible for sending meeting invitations?
- ***In-Person Meeting Considerations***
    - Is the meeting location a reasonable distance from all participants, and are folks able/willing to travel to the location?
    - Does the meeting location meet the accommodation needs of all participants?
    - Does the meeting location have all necessary AV equipment (e.g., projector, screen)?
    - Will you meet at the same location every time, or will you alternate locations?

Sustaining a Partnership

Once you have established a partnership, it's important to consider how that partnership will be sustained long-term. To begin, it's important to document the following items for a partnership:

- How/why the partnership was formed
- The purpose, objectives, and terms of the partnership
- The roles and responsibilities that each partner plays

These basic items are important to document in instances of staff turnover or onboarding new staff or partners.

Additionally, you may consider revisiting group norms and processes on a regular basis (e.g., annually) to ensure that the partnership is still operating well for all parties.

If the partnership was formed through grant funding, it's important to revisit the purpose of the partnership and, if applicable, consider how to continue the partnership once funding ends. This may include exploring new or alternative funding sources.

Coalition Building

If a community issue is too big or complex for a single agency to tackle alone, it may be beneficial to convene various partners and build a coalition.

According to Community Tool Box, a coalition is "a group of individuals and/or organizations with a common interest who agree to work together toward a common goal". A coalition's goal may be related to securing funding, addressing a pressing health concern, or advocating for public policy. Starting a coalition "can concentrate the community's focus on a particular problem, create alliances among those who might not normally work together, and keep the community's approach to issues consistent" (Community Tool Box).

While establishing a partnership with one other organization can function to implement programming, coalition building can go further to pool the collective resources, power, connections, and thinking of diverse individuals and organizations to address broader or multiple community challenges.

The Community Tool Box outlines when to start a coalition, what barriers may be present, who should be part of a coalition, and more. This resource also discusses best practices to maintain a coalition once it's been formed. This guide from the Prevention Institute also digs into the steps necessary to develop an effective coalition.

Funding Partners

As noted previously, in some cases, you may consider establishing a formal partnership and providing funding to a partner. This section of the playbook will outline how to determine grantees and the differences between types of formal partner agreements.

Selecting Who to Fund

In some circumstances, you may make an informal decision to fund a partner, meaning there is no formal identification or selection process involved.

In other cases, however, you may want to establish a formal request for proposal (RFP), a request for application (RFA), or another similar process to identify partners and solicit project proposals. According to Investopedia, "A **request for proposal (RFP)** is a business document that announces a project, describes it, and solicits bids from qualified contractors to complete it." In contrast, "A **request for application (RFA)** is a type of solicitation notice in which an organization announces that grant funding is available. A grant is a financial award awarded by the federal, state, or local government for the benefit of a project or research." (Investopedia). While many external resources exist on this topic, **you should always consult with your local attorney on this matter.**

There are several items to consider if you choose to establish a formal granting/contracting process:

- **Project Focus**
    - What types of projects do you want to fund? Are there specific core services areas that you would like partners to support?
        - You may establish a granting process for a multitude of core service areas, or you might decide to seek grantees for one area. This decision may be influenced by the support your LHD needs in service delivery, as well as your LHD's capacity to manage a large vs small granting program.
        - Your RFA/RFP should clearly indicate what core service areas, types of projects, and activities you will fund.

- **Funding**
    - How much funding is available for partners?
    - How many partners are you seeking to fund?
    - How will funding be divided among partners?
    - When will funding be distributed?
- **Application**
    - How will partners apply for funding? Is there an online form, or will applications be emailed to a specific staff member?
        - The application process should be standardized so that all partners apply in the same way and provide the same information to the LHD.
    - What is the application period, and when will decisions be communicated?
- **Review Process**
    - Who will make funding decisions?
    - Will you establish a proposal review committee?
    - Will a rubric be used to guide decision making?

There are several Indiana local health departments who have developed formal processes to provide funding to partners. Check out information on a few of these programs below:

- Elkhart County Health First Grants
- Health First Allen County
    - Program Overview and Request for Grant Proposals
    - Application Scoring Guide
    - Summary of 2024 Grant Awards
- Health First Hamilton County
    - Sub-Granting Program Information
- Health First St. Joseph County
- Hendricks County Health First Indiana

Memoranda of Understanding and Contracts

When partnering with other agencies or individuals, you will need to determine how that agreement is documented and defined. This is where it becomes critical to understand memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and contracts.

The key difference between a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and a contract is that a contract is a legally binding document that is enforceable in court, while an MOU is not legally binding nor enforceable in court (Community Tool Box).

This ChangeLab Solutions resource further describes the difference between a memorandum of understanding and a contract:

"A **contract** is a legally enforceable agreement between two or more parties that creates an obligation to do (or not do) a particular thing… The terms of the contract (i.e., the who, what, where, when, and how of the agreement) define the promises that each party has made to the other… Another key characteristic of a contract is that a court will enforce its terms if one of the parties breaches the contract (i.e., a party fails to carry out a promise)."

"A **memorandum of understanding** is an agreement between two or more parties. Unlike a contract, however, an MOU need not contain legally enforceable promises."

This Community Tool Box resource also defines a memorandum of understanding as follows: "In health and community work, memoranda of agreement are usually used to clarify and/or specify the terms of a cooperative or collaborative arrangement involving two or more organizations. They may have to do, for example, with sharing space, with working together toward common goals, with each organization contributing something toward a common effort, or with agreements to serve on one another's boards. The purpose of a memorandum of agreement might be to indicate goodwill on the part of both parties, or to help them keep track of what they've agreed on. The agreement may help to clarify the relationship between two organizations, and to make clear which services in the community each is responsible for."

The Community Tool Box also notes instances when you might use each of these types of agreements.

If you need help creating a contract or MOU, consider reviewing these templates provided by the Indiana Department of Administration.

While many external resources exist on this topic, **you should always consult with your local attorney regarding contracts and MOUs.**

SEA 4 Considerations

It is critical to note that Senate Enrolled Act 4 states, "Before a local health department may hire or contract for the provision or administration of core public health services, the local health department shall post the position or contract to the public for at least thirty (30) days."

The Indiana Department of Health hosts a contracts portal to provide an option for local health departments to share opportunities in alignment with SEA 4. If LHDs prefer to post opportunities in another format, they are not required to utilize the IDOH contracts portal. You can view the public-facing portal here and post opportunities here.

Consult with your local attorney if you have questions about this requirement as it relates to funding partners.

Evaluation and Reporting

It is important to establish reporting and evaluation processes for each program your department is conducting or funding.

First, consider what information the funder requires you to report. For example, many state and federal funders require data on the type and number of services provided, how many individuals were served, and their specific demographic information.

If you are funding partners, consider the following items to create your own reporting requirements and processes for those grantees:

- **What is the overall goal of the program?**
    - The goal will help you determine which indicator you would like to improve; this will help with which data point(s) to start tracking.
- **What information is required for my local health department to report back to the funder?**
    - Many funders require the type and number of services provided, number of individuals served; some want to see demographic information (county, race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.)
- **How often should grantees report back information?**
    - You may require grantees to report information to you on a monthly, quarterly, or semi-annually basis, depending on your needs and your own reporting requirements.

- **In what format should grantees share information?**
  - Provide grantees with a template through which they should report information. For example, you may ask for data in an Excel spreadsheet, online submission form, or another format.

Once you determine a reporting mechanism for grantees, it's important to think about how you are going to evaluate the program. The two main reasons to consider evaluation are for program improvement and program effectiveness. Once you receive the grantee's reports, it's important to spend time reviewing the report and tracking the data. By tracking key data points and indicators, you can determine the effectiveness of the program and make any changes along the way that will contribute to program improvement.

Appendix

Partnership Resources

The following resources may be helpful at various stages of the partnership building process.

Bridging Partnerships & Strategies

Source: Human Impact Partners

Description: Advancing equity requires work inside and outside government to transform our institutions and promote democratic, community-driven decision-making about the conditions impacting our lives and well-being. Launched in 2022, the Bridging Strategies and Partnerships Program seeks to build deep and trusting relationships between health departments and community organizers to support building community power and advance policy and systems change on the social determinants of health (e.g., housing, economic security, community safety, climate change). Funded by The Kresge Foundation and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, HIP provides a series of offerings and programs to advance inside/outside strategies, and to 'bridge' the governmental public health and community organizing sectors.

Partnership Evaluation Guide: Building Productive Relationships Through Evaluation

Source: National Association of County and City Health Officials

Description: This guide aims to provide local health departments with tools for evaluating their partnerships.

Contracts and MOUs: Understanding Key Terms

Source: ChangeLab Solutions

Description: This document outlines the differences and similarities between contracts and MOUs.

Understanding and Writing Contracts and Memoranda of Agreement

Source: Community Tool Box

Description: As you collaborate with other groups, employ consultants, or hire organizations to provide services to you or your target population, you will often find it useful to "get it in writing". This section will help you to read, understand, and draft contracts and memoranda of agreement, the two kinds of documents that most organizations require in their relationships with others.

Community Health Workbook

Source: The BUILD Health Challenge

Description: The BUILD Health Challenge (BUILD) is not only a funding collaborative and national awards program — it's a model of change. BUILD is a model for communities looking to employ cross-sector and community-driven approaches that ensure everyone can reach their optimal level of health. It's a network of practitioners, local advocates, and expert organizations who swap stories and solutions — and publicly share honest accounts of hard-earned lessons — all in the spirit of continual learning and innovation to advance health equity.

Recommendations For Strengthening Partnerships Between Health Departments and Community-based Organizations

Source: CDC Foundation

Description: In this report, the CDC Foundation offers a set of transformative and inclusive recommendations to strengthen partnerships between health departments and CBOs, framed within The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership, a framework to increase community ownership of public decisions.

Community Health Partnerships Tools and Information for Development and Support

Source: Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO); National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO); National Business Coalition on Health (NBCH) Community Coalitions Health Institute (CCHI); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Alliance to Make U.S. Healthiest

Description: To help promote the development and sustainability of Community Health Partnerships that include leadership from both business and business led health coalitions and public health officials, this information is intended to help at all stages of the evolution of a collaboration.

Coalition Building I: Starting a Coalition

Source: Community Tool Box

Description: This resource discusses what a community coalition or partnership is, why and when it can be a good strategy, who should be included, and how to implement it.

Coalition Building II: Maintaining a Coalition

Source: Community Tool Box

Description: This resource discusses how to maintain and sustain a coalition and its mission over time.

Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide

Source: Prevention Institute

Description: The Eight Steps to Effective Coalition Building is a framework for engaging individuals, organizations and governmental partners in addressing community concerns. The complete document offers concrete steps towards building effective partnerships, and provides tips for making collaborations and partnerships work.