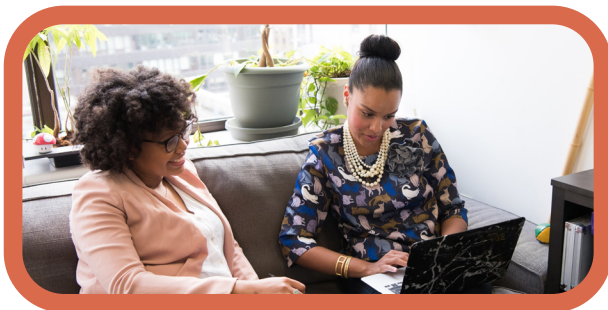


# Collaborating for Student Success

A Comprehensive, Practical Guidebook for Increasing Shared Decision-Making Through Lasting Partnerships



Presented by:



# **Collaborating for Student Success**

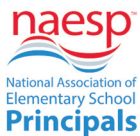
**A Comprehensive, Practical Guidebook for Increasing  
Shared Decision-Making Through Lasting Partnerships**





National  
Labor Management  
Partnership

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## Background & Acknowledgments

The National Labor-Management Partnership (NLMP) includes: AASA, The School Superintendents Association; the American Federation of Teachers; the Council of Chief State School Officers; the National Association of Elementary School Principals; the National Association of Secondary School Principals; the National Education Association; and the National School Boards Association. Jo Anderson, former Executive Director of the Catalyst for Educational Change (CEC), serves as our convener. We are joined by a representative from the US Department of Education, researcher and practitioner Dr. Saul Rubinstein from Rutgers University, and our partner practitioners from CEC and the Schlecty Center. Together, NLMP represents a full spectrum of public education

leaders: educators, administrators, school boards, and policymakers. Formed in 2011, the NLMP remains unified around the shared responsibility for all stakeholders to participate in solution-building processes in public education.



"Shared decision-making among administrators, building leaders, teachers, and staff is a critical component for building a positive culture in a school community. As we work to create future-focused and equitable solutions on behalf of our students, best collaborative practices are essential in order to allow our young learners to unleash their creativity, excel academically and socially, and reach success in later life. AASA is proud to partner on the *Collaborating for Student Success* project."

- Daniel A. Domenech, executive director, AASA, The School Superintendents Association

Sincere thanks and gratitude go to the leaders of each NLMP organization. The NLMP's 2018 *Call to Action* was a strong first step in promoting the need to work across organizational and role boundaries for the benefit of the nation's students, schools, and communities. Now, this guidebook serves as the next step in our shared journey toward collaborative solution-building in public education.

This Guidebook was developed to help improve educational outcomes in our public schools by fostering and sustaining collaboration among education stakeholders. The information and tools presented here were developed based on a thorough exploration of the theories, research, and best practices around collaboration, with a heavy emphasis on the lived experiences of those successfully working in this way.

"Labor-management collaboration is a powerful antidote to the inequities that have been present in public education for generations—one with the capacity to not just remedy, but to rebuild our entire system. More than ever before, the future is calling on us to co-create solutions that are good for public education, for every public school educator, and for each of our students."

- Becky Pringle, NEA President





"Collaboration leads to success for schools, communities, and students. We have seen it repeatedly: when teachers and school leaders sit down together, share their ideas and concerns, and really listen and find common ground, they can create solutions to the challenges that weigh so heavily on schools and communities. Public education is essential to the fabric of our democracy, and we must harness the best of what is possible by working together—union, district, and community-- for the common good of all students. This guide can be a North Star for doing all of that and doing it better."

- Randi Weingarten, AFT President



A Union of Professionals

The NEA took the lead in developing the *District & School Collaboration Framework* and the supporting information and tools presented in the first edition of this Guidebook, published by the NEA in 2019. Several foundational partners enabled us to curate ideas, practices, and resources into this comprehensive Guidebook. First, we offer our thanks to Jo Anderson, former Executive Director and founder of CEC, whose expertise on labor-management collaboration is unparalleled, for lending his time organizing us to advance collaborative practices and principles across the nation. We are also grateful to CEC for providing access to resources used in this book. Dr. Saul Rubinstein and his colleagues at Rutgers University and Cornell University have been tireless and generous in their efforts to study, showcase, and launch education partnerships at all levels by sharing their theories and research in districts around the country. Similarly, the New Jersey Public Schools Labor Management Collaborative, the New Jersey Education Association and its local affiliates, the California Labor Management Initiative, the ABC Unified School District, and the ABC Federation of Teachers provided examples of labor-management collaboration training and access to strong examples of this strategy in practice.

In this edition, we have meaningfully incorporated feedback from all of the NLMP organizations, resulting in a useful reference guide that all of our organizations stand behind. This book is a resource not just for one stakeholder or another, but for all of us who care about public education, together.

In honor of our shared commitment to collaboration, the NLMP is re-branding this Guidebook under the NLMP name.

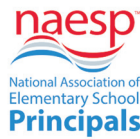
"No matter where we're coming from, we're all in this together because we care about students. For their sake, we can't let our different experiences and perspectives divide us. We must use those differences to collaborate and design solutions that provide children the future they deserve."

- Ronn Nozoe, NASSP CEO



"Collaboration among all stakeholders in the K-12 ecosystem is critical to giving students the best opportunity to succeed. As schools face daunting challenges – from implementing robust academic recovery interventions to addressing student mental health needs – district and school administrators, teachers, and parents can come together around shared goals and mutual interests to benefit all students."

- L. Earl Franks, NAESP Executive Director, Ed.D., CAE



Finally, we recognize the individual leaders in districts and education associations/unions all around the country who are working with one another and with other stakeholders to establish processes for educator voice, so that those closest to students are co-creating the solutions that enable those students to reach their fullest potential. These collaborators have taught us that this work builds bridges across chasms—those between labor and

management, and those among research, policy, and practice—because doing so results in better outcomes for students.

We continue to be inspired by the educators, administrators, school board members, and community members who are collaborating for student success. We celebrate their achievements and we appreciate their contributions to public education.

"Collaborating for Student Success is an invaluable roadmap for why—and how—everyone with a stake in student learning can work together to build trust, create buy-in for shared education goals, and build a system that supports collaboration. It is a must-have resource for school board members, administrators, teachers, parents, students, community members, and anyone else looking to increase student learning and improve outcomes for students."

- Dr. John Heim, NSBA Executive Director and CEO



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## Why Collaboration?

One thing that transcends our current polarized social and political climate is that we all want a bright future for our children. We envision their schooling filled with authentic learning experiences that prepare them to create a happy, just, and prosperous future for their generation and the ones that follow. Parents, community members, school board members, educators, and administrators all want to create these experiences for our children, and all can meaningfully contribute to this shared goal.

As key stakeholders in our public school system, AASA: The School Superintendent's Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Education Association, and the National School Boards Association agree that realizing this vision for our children's future requires new ways of working together. In joining together as the National Labor Management Partnership, our organizations committed to "fostering a culture of learning and joint problem-solving in our schools and districts...to transform our nation's public schools." As the professional associations representing teachers, education support professionals, administrators, and school boards, each of us urges our members across the nation to work together towards student-centered goals and to make collaboration "the new normal - the usual way that education decisions are made."

Collaborative education partnerships help integrate the district administration's traditional leadership role with the education association's/union's natural network, establishing collaborative relationships, processes, and structures.

**"Collaborative labor-management practices result in greater student success, increased educator engagement, and positive school cultures. Collaboration among states, districts, management, and union leaders improves public schools and advances equity."**

*- Miguel Cardona, US Secretary of Education*

There are excellent examples of labor-management collaboration (LMC), and of education collaboration more broadly, throughout the country. There is a wide body of research on teacher professional collaboration and on leadership practices in schools, and a growing body of research on the formal partnerships between educators' unions and district administrators - all showing that collaboration yields positive outcomes for both the students and the adults in the system.

Through collaboration, we seek to create state and local change and, ultimately, grow a national movement that develops lasting structures for shared decision-making in schools, districts,



and states across the nation. It's time to usher in a new era in education - one characterized by unity and collaboration dedicated to student-centered outcomes. By fostering a culture of learning and joint problem-solving in our schools and districts, the solutions to today's education challenges arise from within the system, not from outside. Together, empowered education stakeholders will transform our nation's public schools. We invite you to join us.

## What Is Collaboration?

Most simply, collaboration is the act of working with someone else. Thus, labor-management collaboration is the act of local education associations/unions and their members working *with* district and/or school administrators to co-design solutions toward shared goals. It is a long-term, ongoing strategy that is founded on an authentic partnership built on trust and respect. This partnership builds collaborative structures and uses collaborative processes that enable participants to effectively work together. The result is student-centered goals being met and stronger relationships that reinforce the partnership itself.



**“Collaboration is not just compromising by agreeing to some middle points between two positions, but expanding possibilities by adding other parties with different perspectives who can help find new and creative solutions.”**

*-Marietta, G., D'Entremont, C., and Kaur, E.M. (2017) Improving Education Together: A Guide to Labor Management Community Collaboration. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.*

### Authentic Partnership

Collaboration has *partnership* roots. In fact, the words "labor-management" are sometimes intentionally omitted and it is often framed simply as a collaborative partnership to leave space for parents and other stakeholders to be included and to encourage inclusivity.

*Collaboration does NOT mean one group relinquishing power and authority to another.*

*Collaboration means working together for student success: shared decision-making toward shared goals.*

Effective collaborative partnerships rely on mutual respect, transparency, and trust to provide the psychological safety necessary for effective shared problem-solving. Strong partnerships start with the understanding that collaboration is not a series of compromises, but the work of respecting partners' diverse opinions and ideas, and creatively forming joint solutions. These authentic relationships don't develop overnight, but partners' commitment to the shared vision allows an authentic partnership to develop over time.

## A Strategy

Collaboration is a strategy for joint problem-solving, solution building, and increasing stakeholder voice in decisions. Collaboration practitioners recognize that the best decisions occur when those closest to the situation contribute to its solution. Collaboration, as defined here, encompasses a broad range of collaborative norms, processes, and techniques. When used effectively, these norms and processes have been shown to improve teacher retention, improve student success in math and language arts, in addition to other benefits. However, collaboration is not a teacher retention program nor an academic achievement program. Rather, collaboration can be used as the design and/or implementation strategy for other programs, and can augment program results. Collaboration is also often used independently of established programs as a strategy to explore vexing issues facing a district or school and create solutions to address them.

## An Additional Space for Solution Building

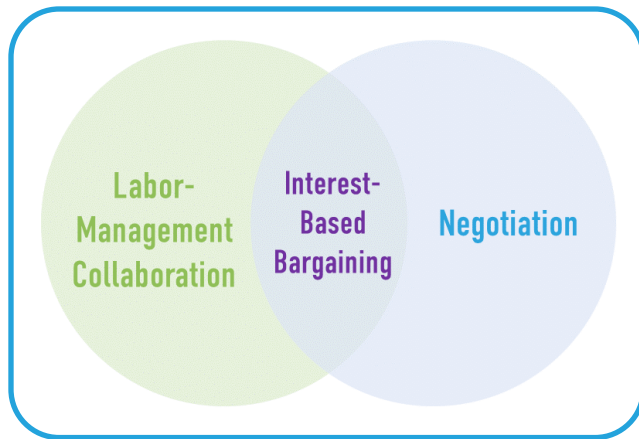
Traditionally, the relationship between the education association/union and district administration relies on negotiation, through collective bargaining or "meet and confer." Collective bargaining has *legal* roots and relies upon legally-binding processes and agreements to protect educators' rights and interests. It is cyclical, resulting in a contract or agreement, which is typically time-bound and must be periodically renegotiated. Negotiation is a necessary and important process.

Traditional collective bargaining is a give-and-take approach, where parties exchange proposals and compromise until agreements are reached. Interest-based bargaining is a collaborative approach to negotiation that frames the discussion around a shared interest, such as "what is best for student learning." When using interest-based bargaining, both sides are encouraged to seek win-win solutions where everyone has their needs and goals met.

We are sometimes asked, "Our district uses interest-based bargaining - is that the same thing as labor-management collaboration?" Although both interest-based bargaining and labor-management collaboration center on shared interests, they are not the same thing. Interest-based bargaining is a specific type of collective bargaining, where negotiations are focused on mutual, rather than competing, goals. It is a way for the bargaining parties to help each other arrive at mutually beneficial outcomes rather than becoming entrenched in their own position. Like all other forms of collective bargaining, interest-based bargaining is a time-bound cyclical activity resulting in a contract or agreement. Some topics are permissible to bargain, while others are not. Collaboration, in contrast, is an ongoing joint solution-building endeavor. Collaboration can be used to address any topic selected by the participants, the desired outcomes are not predetermined, it can involve multiple stakeholders in addition to union and management, and it is intended to grow and evolve over time.



*Negotiation is a give-and-take approach*



*Interest-based bargaining is an overlap of negotiation and collaboration that frames the negotiation around shared interests*

Interest-based bargaining can be a sign of readiness to collaborate, however. When district administrators and union leaders recognize the advantages of centering shared goals, they likely already possess the sort of collaborative mindset that allows LMC to thrive. It is important to note that collective bargaining and labor-management collaboration are *complementary* strategies. Districts can and do engage in both traditional bargaining and labor-management collaboration as ways to involve educators in decisions about the issues that affect the education professions. In fact, collective bargaining can play a substantial role in codifying collaboration structures and practices between district administrators and education associations/unions.

Although negotiating contracts is an important activity for the union and management, it occurs in a set timeframe and typically results in a single predetermined output (a ratified contract). A collaborative partnership between district administration and education associations/unions, on the other hand, is ongoing with a much broader set of possible teaching and learning outputs and outcomes. The joint solution building of collaboration often involves topics that are beyond the scope of collective bargaining. Collaboration therefore expands the opportunities for shared decision-making and educator voice.

Collective bargaining and labor-management collaboration work together beautifully as strategies to include stakeholder voice in education decisions; collaboration can occur in either bargaining or non-bargaining environments. Labor-management collaboration simply provides an additional space where teachers, education support professionals, and other educators work with administrators towards shared student-centered interests. Such a partnership requires educator involvement, shared decision-making, mutual respect, transparency, and trust.

## A System for Sustainability

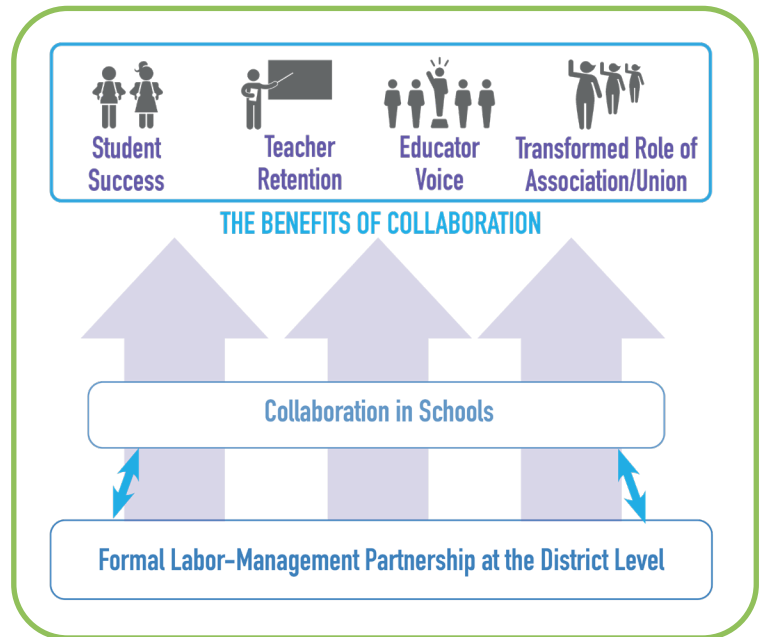
Unfortunately, partnerships between administrations and educator associations/unions too often depend on the disposition and relationship among the individuals involved, causing the partnership to falter when team members depart. The experiences of long-standing education partnerships as well as LMC research demonstrates that sustained, long-lived collaboration depends on participants committing to uphold collaborative processes, such as group norms and collaborative decision-making, and a comprehensive system of support at all levels.

**Collaborative Processes:** This guidebook presents resources, tools, and strategies to support the collaborative processes that can help teams and committees develop and foster authentic relationships, as well as managing collaborative projects. This includes:

- Processes to foster collaborative relationships, which might include developing guiding principles and behaviors, making a commitment to the partnership, evaluating decision-making norms, and addressing participants' psychological safety.
- Processes for undertaking and managing a collaborative project, including assessing system needs, identifying shared goals, developing a project plan, and communicating results.

**Collaborative Structures:** Collaboration in schools, among the principal, other administrators, building representatives, educators, and often parents, students, and/or community members leads to a host of positive outcomes (Rubinstein and McCarthy, 2017).

Research has also documented that district-level partnerships *catalyze* school-level collaboration. In other words, there is more—and more effective—school-level collaboration in districts with a strong district partnership (Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2016). And, research and experience tell us that collaboration in schools is more likely to last when it is supported by a district-level partnership. Chapter 1 provides a detailed look at Rubinstein & McCarthy's research.



Later in this Guidebook, we'll introduce the collaborative structures of leadership teams and working committees - at both the district and school levels - that provide the structure to drive higher levels of collaboration in schools, which results in more significant outcomes. This comprehensive support structure helps deeply embed collaboration into the district's culture.

And, just as school-level collaboration is catalyzed and supported by a district-level partnership, support from state-level organizations can provide an additional layer of stability in the collaborative system. Some states, such as New Jersey, Illinois, and California, have formalized a state-level partnership among the state organizations representing administration and the association/union that adds further support to the district- and school-level structures. You should investigate if your state has resources available that can help support your collaborative work.

For collaboration and its benefits to last, it must be embedded into the culture of both the district and the education association/union. This culture shift comes about by building a history of promises kept, by working successfully together over time, and by establishing structures and processes that can be reused and repeated, even without the original leaders.

## How to Sustain Collaboration: A Framework for Success

This Guidebook provides a comprehensive framework, tools, and resources intended to help build collaboration systems that transcend individual relationships and develop partnerships that can implement, sustain, and repeat collaborative processes across schools, districts, and states.

Culture shift is hard, and without a clear roadmap is often unsuccessful. The following page presents a framework that walks teams through establishing a collaborative partnership, building a productive working relationship, fostering school-level collaboration, working together on a student-centered issue, and repeating and growing these processes. The *District & School Collaboration Framework* is based on the collective experience of those engaged in this work and can provide the staying power that allows culture shift to occur.

The sequential stages of this Framework are: **Prepare**, **Act**, and **Reflect**.

In the **Prepare** stage, you'll build the foundation of your partnership, including getting to know: the collaboration movement; how various collaborative partners can contribute; the importance of partner relationships; identifying shared student-centered goals; and committing to begin working together collaboratively.



In the **Act** stage, you'll form district- and/or school-level collaborative teams and committees, and start doing the collaborative work that will impact your students. This work includes thinking about the types of support teams and committees might need, determining project goals and objectives, establishing group norms, and managing the work itself.



The **Reflect** stage helps you: evaluate both your initiative and how well you and your partners upheld your collaborative norms; identify strengths and areas needing improvement; and use lessons learned to sustain and grow your collaborative work.



## District & School Collaboration Framework

### PREPARE



### ACT



### REFLECT



**PREPARE:** Understand the benefits of collaboration and seek commitment to collaborate.

**ACT:** Build the structures and processes needed to start collaborating. Form working teams.

**REFLECT:** Catalog successes and challenges and share lessons learned with others.





## Start Somewhere: The Organic Nature of Collaboration

Collaboration often grows organically from various circumstances, relationships, and needs. Thus, education partnerships have an inherent flexibility of their start-point, attributes, and components. Because of this, there is no single model that can be applied to every partnership. There are, however, certain best practices, structures, and repeatable processes that characterize successful partnerships. A wide range of these is included in this Guidebook, but we recognize that there are few districts that currently have all of the components or processes described in the following chapters.

That's why we highlight a *Start Somewhere* approach. It's another way of saying that the steps outlined here are not necessarily sequential; in fact, the opposite is more often true. The intent is to provide information and tools to help you build a strong and sustainable partnership for student success, whatever your journey looks like. The collaborative partnership process is organic and endlessly customizable - you build it as you do it, in ways that work for you and your partners.

## Checklist: Using the Framework

The following pages provide a reference you and your partners can use as you address the various aspects of collaboration. The checklist provides an overview of the importance of each Framework step in building a strong and sustainable collaborative system, lists desired outcomes for each step, and includes a summary list of activities, tools, and resources to support the work at each step. Use the checklist to better understand each Framework step, evaluate where you are and where you should go next, and as a clearinghouse of support resources to use along the way.

Building your collaborative system may not be linear, and the components described in this Guidebook may not occur sequentially. And that's OK. It is important to remember that the goal of an education partnership is for stakeholders from different parts of the system to come together and collectively impact student success. How you go about it - including whether, how, and in what order you address the components presented in this Guidebook - is up to you to co-create with your partners. Use the checklist to help you manage that process.

## Using the Framework: Prepare

Use this checklist as a high-level guide to your collaboration journey. Evaluate what you’ve accomplished, decide where to go next, and browse the available resources that can help you get there.

Framework Step:	Why Important?	Desired Outcomes:	Checklist of Resources/Activities <sup>A</sup> :
<p><b>Learn the Case for Collaboration</b></p> <p>Step Complete? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>This knowledge is foundational to forming a collaborative education partnership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand why labor-management collaboration is an effective strategy for student, educator, and school success</li> <li>• Understand what effective collaboration entails</li> <li>• Share the case with members of your own stakeholder group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sharing the Case (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sharing the Case (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Rubinstein/McCarthy Research (R)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> LMC Infographic (R)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> LMC Pamphlet (R)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> NLMP Call to Action (R)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> LMC Case Studies (R)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Identify Partners</b></p> <p>Step Complete? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Starting out with a good first partner maximizes the partnership’s potential for success and longevity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize the characteristics of authentic partnership</li> <li>• Understand the value that various stakeholders can bring to a partnership</li> <li>• Invite others to form a partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Relational Trust (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identifying Potential Partners (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Potential Partner Brainstorm (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Relationship Continuum Self-Assessment (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Extending the Invitation (T)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Discover Shared Goals</b></p> <p>Step Complete? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Shared goals help: ensure all partners are focused in the same direction; provide a common motivation; help clarify the work; and the process of identifying shared goals supports a developing partnership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the importance of shared goals</li> <li>• Develop a strategy to identify your school system’s needs and priorities</li> <li>• Define your partnership’s broad content goals - the issues you’ll work on first</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Potential Shared Interests (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Discovering Shared Goals Planning Template (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> NEA's Opportunity Checklist (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Community Outreach Guide (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> OPSCAN (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Priority Matrix (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> NEA's Organizer's Guide to Community Conversations (R)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Campus and Community Conversations Planning Guide (R)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> State Support Network's Needs Assessment Guidebook (R)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Commit to Collaborate</b></p> <p>Step Complete? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Formalizing group norms and guiding principles and behaviors is critical to forming the relationships that are the basis of a collaborative culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand individual and group attributes that contribute to lasting partnerships</li> <li>• Understand the importance of partner commitment</li> <li>• Define the principles and behaviors that will guide your partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration Skills Evaluation (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Individual Collaboration Skills (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative Attributes List (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Guiding Principles &amp; Behaviors (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Building a Strong Partnership (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Guiding Principles, Guiding Behaviors (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Overarching Goals Template (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sample Joint Letter (T)</li> </ul>

<sup>A</sup> C&D = Consider and Discuss activity; T = Tool activity; R = Other cited resource

## Using the Framework: Act

Framework Step:	Why Important?	Desired Outcomes:	Checklist of Resources/Activities <sup>A</sup> :
<p><b>Identify Collaborative Teams &amp; Functions</b></p> <p>Step Complete? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>A structure of working committees supported by leadership teams improves outcomes and helps provide longevity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand how leadership teams catalyze, support, and sustain the work of collaborative working committees</li> <li>• Create the teams and committees who will work collaboratively on your partnership's student-centered goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative Structures (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Map Your Working Groups: District Level (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Map Your Working Groups: School Level (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative Structures Worksheet (T)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Define Content for Collaboration</b></p> <p>Step Complete? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Projects are more successful when they are based on an attainable goal and well-designed objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refine your project's scope</li> <li>• Define your project's goal and objectives</li> <li>• Develop a project plan to help you implement the work and track progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Refining Your Issue (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The Fishbone Diagram (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The Five Whys (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Driver Diagram (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Goal &amp; Objectives Template (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Project Planning (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Project Plan Template (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Opportunity Audit (R)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Improvement Science Handbook (R)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Root Cause Analysis Toolkit (R)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Establish Support Resources</b></p> <p>Step Complete? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Collaboration leads to more impactful student-centered outcomes when working committees and leadership teams have the support they need</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn about types of support that might be needed</li> <li>• Identify potential support resources</li> <li>• Establish communications plans within the partnership to enable and enhance support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support for Working Committees (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support Resources (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Role-Alike Comms Worksheet (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Communicating Within the Partnership (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Communication Plan Template (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> List of Support Resources for District Leadership Teams (R)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Define Process for Collaboration</b></p> <p>Step Complete? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Collaboration is best sustained by using effective collaborative processes that foster authentic partnership and allow your team or committee to successfully steward collaborative projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn how to foster a collaborative working climate</li> <li>• Consider how various types of decisions should be made</li> <li>• Consider conflict resolution styles and when each might be appropriate</li> <li>• Define group behavioral and procedural norms to guide your collaborative work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative Climate Check-I (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shared Decision-Making (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Decision-Making Check-In Tool (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Group Norms Activity (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Playmeo Website (R)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Consensus Decision Making Guide (R)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Beyond Conflict to Consensus (R)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 14 Conflict Resolution Skills to Use with Your Team and Your Customers (R)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Why You Need Team Conflict and How to Make It Productive (R)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Implement Collaboration</b></p> <p>Step Complete? <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Implement your plans to realize your partnership's goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership teams support working committees and maintain open two-way communications</li> <li>• Working committees implement their project plans, monitor progress, and seek support as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> External Communications Plan (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Working Committee Check-In Tool (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> List of Data Collection and Analysis Resources (R)</li> </ul>

<sup>A</sup> C&D = Consider and Discuss activity; T = Tool activity; R = Other cited resource

## Using the Framework: Reflect

Framework Step:	Why Important?	Desired Outcomes:	Checklist of Resources/Activities <sup>A</sup> :
<p><b>Evaluate Content &amp; Process Outcomes</b></p> <p>Step Complete?</p> <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Reflecting on your initiative’s results helps guide future work; reflecting on your collaborative relationships builds trust and identifies areas for improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate your project outcomes relative to your content goals, identify lessons learned, and plan next steps</li> <li>• Evaluate your team’s group norms and use of collaborative processes, and make an improvement plan as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evaluating Project Resolution (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Results Analysis Template (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Where Are You Going Next? (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identifying Repeatable Processes (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Strengthening Partnerships (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Start And Run A Guided PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) (R)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sustain &amp; Expand Collaboration!</b></p> <p>Step Complete?</p> <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Scaling successes and involving more practitioners in collaborating for student success helps deeply embed collaboration in the district and school culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for spreading best practices related to collaborative processes</li> <li>• Broadly communicate your successes</li> <li>• Plan for scaling and spreading successful projects</li> <li>• Determine the issues and challenges to address next</li> <li>• Plan for expanding the collaborative teams, committees, and other structures in your system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Scaling Initiative Success (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Scale &amp; Spread Plan Template (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reinforcing Sustainable Structures (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Collaborative Structures (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Collaborative Processes (C&amp;D)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative Framework Template (T)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Expanding the Partnership (C&amp;D)</li> </ul>

<sup>A</sup> C&D = Consider & Discuss activity; T = Tool activity; R = Other cited resource

## Who Should Use This Guidebook?

This Guidebook and the accompanying collaboration resources are designed to be used by a variety of potential audiences, as described below, and you'll likely use the resources in different ways depending on how you're coming to this work.

The Guidebook is one piece of a suite of complementary resources designed to help school- and district-level education stakeholders use collaboration to improve their schools. The resources include:

1. This Guidebook provides a roadmap for teams wishing to use collaboration, based on the experiences and best practices of education stakeholders who have successfully engaged in collaboration. Each chapter includes:
  - Background information and research
  - Examples from districts around the country
  - Links and references to additional resources
  - A set of tools and activities to help participants contextualize the information to their situation and to implement the approaches presented in the chapter
2. The *Collaborating for Student Success* online learning course, which uses this Guidebook as its textbook and also includes videos of practitioners discussing various aspects of their collaboration journey, as well as animated presentations for some of the material presented here. It is available here: [nea.org/collabcourse](https://nea.org/collabcourse).
3. *The Collaborator's Toolkit* is a standalone compilation of the reflection/discussion activities and tools presented at the end of each Guidebook chapter. You can download it here: [nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Toolkit%20v5-2\\_0.pdf](https://nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Toolkit%20v5-2_0.pdf)

### Potential Audiences

**Those New to Collaboration:** This Guidebook and the online learning are primarily geared towards those new to collaboration. We assume you have no prior knowledge of the research, resources, and strategies presented. If you're new to this work, you may want to work through the online learning and/or this Guidebook in the order presented, or quickly review either one to get an overall picture of the processes and resources, then use the appropriate Guidebook chapters to dig in more deeply to appropriate topics. You may want to seek out a facilitator or learning community who is also engaged in collaboration, to help you along the way.



**Experienced Collaboration Practitioners:** Although many of the concepts and tools presented here will be familiar to you, these resources might be helpful to you in the following ways:

- Review the *District & School Collaboration Framework* and compare it to your journey. Are there pieces missing? Are there processes or elements you could strengthen? In particular, use the Framework Checklist on pages 9 - 11 to understand the importance of each Framework step in creating a long-lasting culture of collaboration, identify which parts of the Framework you've already completed, and decide which Framework steps you might want to study further using this Guidebook and/or the online learning course.
- Use the Checklist's list of resources/activities as needed throughout your work to identify additional activities to support collaboration in your system. *The Collaborator's Toolkit* is a convenient compilation of all of the tools and activities presented here.
- Use the Consider & Discuss activities, as well as the tools in the Reflect stage (Chapters 10 and 11) to help your team develop an improvement plan and reflect on improving your collaboration, a future vision for your collaboration, topics to address next, etc.
- Use the online learning course modules to watch testimonials from other experienced collaboration practitioners and learn how they approached various aspects of building a sustained system of collaboration.

**Collaboration Facilitators:** Facilitators can use these collaboration resources to support face-to-face and/or blended learning experiences:

- Use this Guidebook as a "course textbook" for your convenings
- Use *The Collaborator's Toolkit* to select tools and activities for collaborative teams to work on together throughout their collaboration journey
- Use the online learning videos during convenings to bring practitioner voices into the room and to illustrate some of the concepts presented
- Use the online learning course for blended learning by assigning course modules and activities to be completed between convenings

## About This Guidebook

This Guidebook offers a framework and activities based on curated information and resources from successful collaborative partnerships and vetted sources, intended to help you bring about a lasting shift toward collaboration in your school system. Despite the excellent examples of education collaboration throughout the country, there are few comprehensive resources to guide stakeholder teams through establishing a collaborative partnership, building a productive working relationship, working together on a student-centered issue, and repeating and growing those processes.

Our hope is that you will be inspired by what you learn about the power of education partnerships and the benefits of collaboration, and that you can use these resources to build a system that supports collaboration in your school district.



## Chapter Sequence

This Guidebook follows the sequential stages of the *District & School Collaboration Framework*: **Prepare**, **Act**, and **Reflect**. Within each stage, you and your partners should determine how best to use the steps - or chapters - and in what order. Use the information and tools in the way that makes the most sense to you.

## Activities

We include two activity types: *Consider & Discuss* and *Tools*. *Consider & Discuss* activities include reflection/discussion prompts intended to help you and your team reflect on and internalize how the concepts presented in the Guidebook connect to your unique situation. Group discussions based on these prompts can help team members understand others' perspectives and help the team prepare to implement the learning presented in the chapter. We recommend that you record a "team" answer to each Consider & Discuss prompt to capture and summarize the group's discussion. If you're using this Guidebook as an individual, without collaborative partners or a collaborative team, you can use the Consider & Discuss activities for individual reflection. The prompts are embedded in the chapter, and there's also a template in the Activities section at the end of each chapter where you can record your thoughts.

*This Guidebook contains the supports and structures needed to develop the sort of partnership that can implement, sustain, and repeat collaborative processes across schools, districts, and states.*

*Tools* are intended to lead you through the steps of forming your partnership and undertaking your first collaborative project. As such, they are (with a few exceptions in Chapters 1 and 2) meant to be completed by partners working together and completing a "team" version of each tool.

To get the most out of the two activity types, we recommend that each participant record their individual Consider & Discuss responses and individual thoughts on the tools in their own copy of this Guidebook. Teams should also maintain a team copy of activities to record the work of the group as a whole (you may want to use *The Collaborator's Toolkit* for this purpose). It's a good idea to keep the team copy in an easily accessible loca-

tion, such as a shared drive, Microsoft Teams, or similar platform, so that all group members can access and contribute to the work.

## A Note About Terminology

The education partnerships strategy highlighted here stems from a robust body of research on the benefits of professional collaboration in education, which includes many types of relationships: collaboration among educators through professional learning communities, mentoring, and other professional relationships; labor-management collaboration between education association/unions and district administrators; community-school collaboration that offers parents and community members a path to help enhance or transform their local school systems; and more.

Much of the research and practice on education partnerships between local teachers' unions and district administrators uses the term "labor-management collaboration" (LMC), and we also often use "education partnerships" because we feel the broader term leaves space for parent and community stakeholders beyond the union ("labor") and the administration ("management"). We also recognize that to many NEA and AFT affiliates, especially those without collective bargaining rights, the terms "labor" and "union" do not resonate with their members and communities, and they are careful to brand themselves as the "association."

Collaboration can effectively benefit students and school systems, whether or not stakeholders engage in collective bargaining, and we ask stakeholders to look beyond specific terminology - we're asking you to work together toward shared goals to benefit students, regardless of what you call yourselves or how you describe the collaboration. We hope this Guidebook offers an easy-to-follow process and helpful resources to support you in that effort.

*Throughout this Guidebook, we use the term collaboration when discussing school-level collaboration, such as between educators and the principal and other administrators. We use partnership to describe district-level relationships, such as between district administration and the education association/union, led by the superintendent and local association president.*

## Desired Outcomes

We hope that this Guidebook will be a comprehensive, informative, and accessible guide for your partnership work. We want you to use this book to:

- Become familiar with the foundations of collaboration
- Understand educator empowerment and education stakeholder collaboration, and understand the impact that working collaboratively with other stakeholders can have on decision-making in your school system
- Understand the roles of various collaboration partners, be prepared to determine which partners should be included in your collaboration initiatives, and work with them to discover shared goals that will benefit your students and system
- Analyze your system's needs, decide what to work on first, and determine what group norms and decision-making processes will best support your team's collaborative work
- Understand and create the structures that support collaboration - the leadership teams and working committees that provide the "space" for collaborative decisions and learning
- Evaluate the extent to which your collaborative projects have met their goals, and make a plan to abandon, adapt, or adopt and scale the successes
- Sustain and spread collaboration in your school system to deepen the partnership itself for years to come



## Chapter 1:

# Learn the Case for Collaboration



In this chapter, you'll learn about:

- The research documenting collaboration's benefits, and the national call to use collaboration to support student success
- What comprises "collaboration," and about the collaborative structures and processes that can be developed to sustain collaborative partnerships over the long term
- How you might share the benefits of collaboration with others

This chapter is intended for anyone interested in learning more about collaborative education partnerships.

### Contents:

Introduction  
Research Supporting the Case  
A Call to Action  
Resources To Help You Share the Case  
Activities To Share the Case for Collaboration

## Introduction

This chapter covers "the case" for collaboration, by which we mean the compelling reasons why you'd want to work this way: what compels people to form and nurture collaborative education partnerships? We'll present two strong motivators for entering a collaborative education partnership: academic research that documents the positive outcomes of collaboration; and a call to collaborate from a national coalition representing educators, superintendents, principals, school board members, and chief state school officers. This chapter also includes case studies and additional resources to help you learn more and share the benefits of collaboration with others.

## Research Supporting the Case

Research has long shown that collaboration between and among educators (teachers, support professionals, and their unions) and other education stakeholders yields positive outcomes. More recent research shows that an education partnership at the district level - among district administrators, education associations/unions, and other stakeholders - can be a powerful catalyst for educator collaboration in schools.

Saul A. Rubinstein and John E. McCarthy, two chief researchers in the field, write about their research (McCarthy & Rubinstein, 2017):

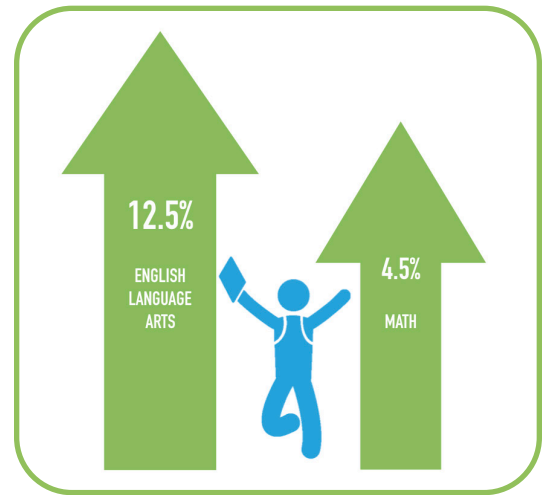


We focus on school and district decision-making and problem-solving, particularly as they apply to the relationship among administrators, teachers, and their unions. We are interested in how collaborative processes at the school level - specifically shared decision-making; goal alignment; and teacher discretion, voice, and psychological safety impact student performance, teacher turnover, and engagement, and the extent to which teachers view their principals and union leaders as educational resources. In addition, we study how union-management partnerships in school districts shape school culture.

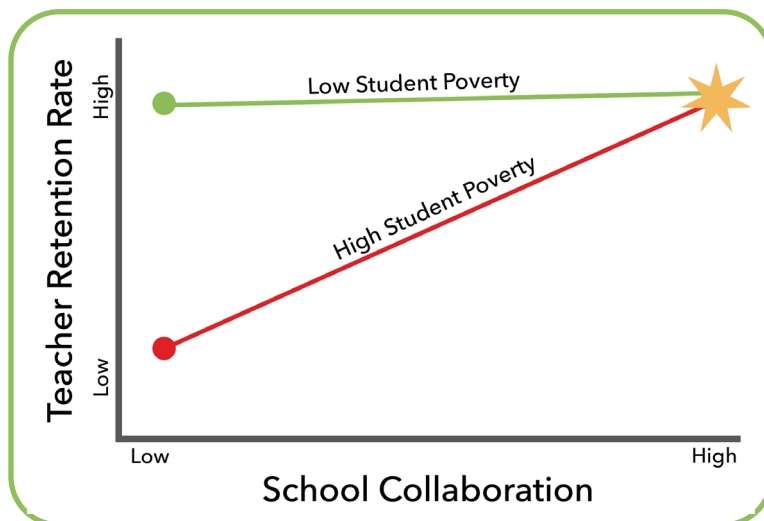
Rubinstein and McCarthy found that when district and education association/union leaders choose to establish an education partnership, commit to work together, and share in decision-making around shared student-centered goals, a culture of professional collaboration emerges, yielding positive outcomes for students, educators, administrators, and the system as a whole. These positive outcomes include increased student achievement; improved educator retention, particularly in high-poverty schools; increased educator empowerment; and a transformed role for the education association/union. These benefits are discussed in detail in the following sections.

## Increased Student Achievement

Schools and districts firmly engaged in using collaborative processes have shown significant increases in student achievement in both English language arts and math, particularly in high-needs schools. Schools with the highest levels of collaboration have, on average, 12.5% more students performing at or above standards in English language arts, and 4.5% more students performing at or above standards in math than schools with the lowest levels of collaboration, even after adjusting for poverty (Rubinstein, 2014).



## Increased Educator Retention



Educator retention increases in collaborative school environments. In high-poverty schools, teachers are less committed to remain, but collaboration mitigates this effect. When collaboration is low, teacher turnover is 3.5 times greater in high-poverty schools than it is in low-poverty schools. When collaboration is high, there is no statistical difference in teacher turnover between high-poverty and low-poverty schools (McCarthy & Rubinstein, 2017).

## Increased Educator Empowerment



Educator empowerment is a broad term that describes the ability for teachers and other school professionals to influence decisions that affect their professional lives. Greater educator empowerment in the form of increased voice in school and district decision-making is an unmet professional need and desire that has held constant over several decades (Feistritzer, 2011; Hodges, 2018). Educators, being closest to students, are best positioned to speak to their educational needs. Including educator voices in discussions about teaching and learning programs and policies leads to more informed decision-making.

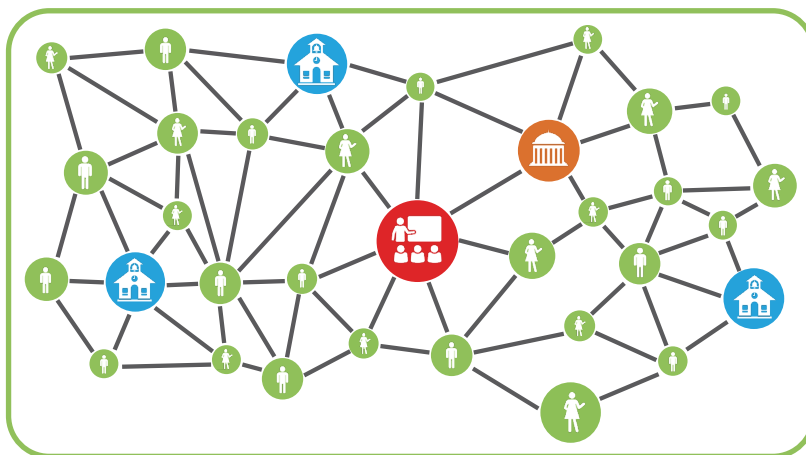
Across the country, many districts have found ways to meaningfully increase educator empowerment by establishing a collaborative education partnership with the local education association/union. When collaboration between administrators and education associations/unions is strong in schools and districts, researchers have found greater goal alignment between educators and principals, increased educator efficacy, stronger mentoring relationships between



educators, and perceptions by staff that the principal and education association/union representative are both trusted professional resources (Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2014).

## Transformed Role of the Association/Union

One interesting (and somewhat surprising) benefit of collaboration is that it transforms the role of the education association/union representative in ways that benefit everyone involved. Rubinstein and McCarthy (2016) found that in schools with strong, long-standing partnerships and high levels of collaboration, the association/union representatives take on unique roles and responsibilities that help improve teaching and student learning. In such schools, the association/union representative's role shifts from more transactional (primarily about contractual issues and grievances) to more balanced and transformational. In this new role, the association/union representative works with the principal to foster collaboration and to increase educator empowerment on issues related to school improvement and education quality.



Rubinstein and McCarthy also describe the education association/union as a “natural network” because of its structure of democratically-elected leaders in each worksite. Union members across a district are connected through their local affiliate, to educators in other districts through their state affiliate, and to educators across the country through the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. This network facilitates sharing innovative practices

across schools and districts, and sometimes even across states and the nation. The association/union representative plays a key role in this knowledge-sharing (McCarthy & Rubinstein, 2017).

These research-verified benefits are summarized in the infographic on the following page.

“My career began as a Language Arts teacher in the early 1970s at one of the nation’s first middle schools where teachers collaborated on interdisciplinary teams, leadership was distributed, and decisions were made using a collaborative process that included teachers and administrators plus, depending on the topic, students and parents. These collaborative decision-making processes resulted in support for decisions since voices were not just heard, they contributed to the decisions. That engagement also resulted in a greater commitment to the organization and its goals, greater interdisciplinary collaboration, high morale, as well as students and staff who achieved and looked forward to each school day.”

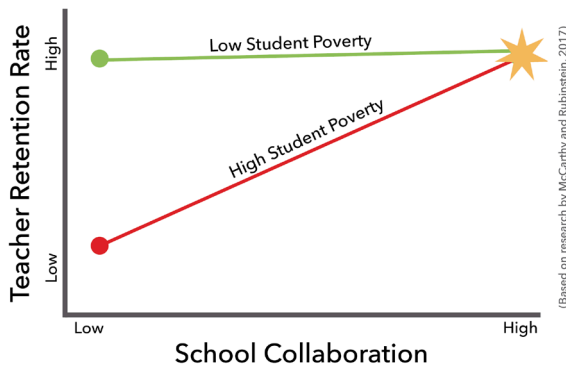
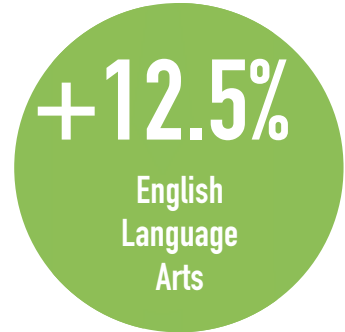
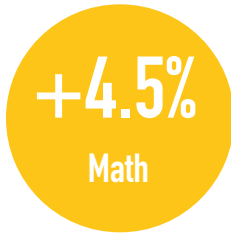
- Vincent R. De Lucia, Educator in Residence, New Jersey School Boards Association

# THE BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION: A SNAPSHOT

## COLLABORATION MITIGATES THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF POVERTY

### MORE STUDENTS ACHIEVE

When there is greater collaboration in schools, more students perform at or above grade level standards.



(Based on research by McCarthy and Rubinstein, 2017)

### MORE TEACHERS STICK AROUND

When collaboration is low, teacher retention is 3.5x lower in high-poverty schools than in low-poverty schools. But, when collaboration is high, there is no statistical difference in teacher retention between high-poverty and low-poverty schools.

## COLLABORATION INCREASES EDUCATOR EMPOWERMENT



Improved goal alignment



Increased educator confidence



Association/union rep and principal seen as professional resources

## THE ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATION/UNION IS TRANSFORMED



Building reps see their roles shift from primarily transactional, to more balanced and transformational roles.

In collaborative environments, the association/union's natural network facilitates sharing of innovative practices across schools and districts.



(Infographic based on research by McCarthy and Rubinstein, 2017)

## A Call to Action

The case for collaboration is so compelling that the national-level professional associations representing the major education stakeholders formed the National Labor Management Partnership (NLMP) to catalyze and support labor-management collaboration across states and districts. Our first major initiative was to issue a call to action, urging our members to work towards a collective focus on student success, supported by collaboration at all levels of the school system.

NLMP members and co-signers of the Call to Action include:

- AASA, The School Superintendents Association
- American Federation of Teachers
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Education Association
- National School Boards Association

Through our participation in the National Labor Management Partnership, we encourage our members to get started. You can read the Call to Action starting on the next page, or download it here: [nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/NLMP-2018-Call-to-Action.pdf](https://nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/NLMP-2018-Call-to-Action.pdf).





## National Labor Management Partnership: 2018 Call to Action

We, the organizations of the NLMP, believe that the moment is right for us to unite to achieve a culture shift toward a collective focus on student success, and collaboration at all levels of our system to support it. Educators, administrators, and communities are collectively rejecting the last wave of top-down education reforms that blamed educators for students' under-performance without providing the supports, resources, and authority needed to improve student outcomes. Education stakeholders are moving beyond the test-and-punish era of reforms because they see the evidence that shows there is another way – a better way – to ensure that every student is afforded the benefits of attending a great public school.

It is time to usher in a new era in education – one characterized by professional respect, unity, and collaboration toward student-centered outcomes. **By fostering a culture of learning and joint problem solving in our schools and districts, the solutions to today's education challenges will arise from within the system, not from outside it. Together, as those closest to the students and families, empowered education stakeholders will transform our nation's public schools.**

This call to action is not merely inspirational, but is based on decades of research showing the benefits of school-level collaboration on student outcomes, and on a rich and growing body of evidence showing the promise of district-level collaborative partnerships as a strategy to enhance school transformation. Specifically, when principals distribute school leadership, organizational trust among educators increases, and they are more likely to engage one another as mentors, coaches, and advisors on professional issues<sup>i</sup>. This increase in engagement and collaboration raises the social capital of those involved, which is associated with increases in student performance<sup>ii</sup>.

When collaboration is strong in schools and districts, researchers have found **greater goal alignment** between educators and administrators, **increased educator efficacy**, **stronger mentoring relationships** between educators, and perceptions by staff that **the principal and education association representative are both trusted professional resources**<sup>iii</sup>. School boards and district and school administrators have critical roles to play in fostering the forms of distributed leadership and collaboration in schools that lead to these positive outcomes<sup>iii</sup>. The identification of shared, student-centered goals and commitment to work together to achieve them serves as the first step in creating a culture of collaboration. The communication structures that are built to enable effective collaboration around these goals not only fortify the relationships that the adults in school systems have with one another, but can also be sustained beyond the initial short-term projects and used for continuous improvement efforts. The local education association also plays a particularly critical role in establishing and supporting collaborative structures within this partnership: the education association's democratic governance and web of building representatives is a "natural network" of educators that not only represents the collective wisdom of those closest to the students, but also can easily identify educators with expertise in district-level priorities and support the district in increasing shared leadership at the school level<sup>iii</sup>. Research suggests that **when decisions are shared by administrators and educators at all levels, the result-**

## National Labor Management Partnership: 2018 Call to Action (cont'd)

ing culture is so nurturing to the educator and student that, even in high-poverty schools, teacher turnover and low student achievement can be mitigated<sup>iv</sup>.

Shared decision-making does not imply one group relinquishing power and authority to another, and not all decisions in an education system are appropriate to be shared. For example, certain personnel and budgetary decisions will always reside in administration, while governance decisions will reside among the school board who is accountable to the public that elected them, and decisions about pedagogy will continue to be made by classroom educators. However, stretching the boundaries of which district and school-level decisions can be made jointly, particularly around issues such as instructional practices, mentoring, and student performance, results in positive outcomes for school climate, student achievement, and teacher retention<sup>iii</sup> – outcomes valued by all education stakeholders.

Working together is not a new concept; many district leaders throughout the nation have strong, productive relationships with their local education associations. We have seen, however, that these relationships are often built on the charisma of individual leaders, and when those leaders leave, the collaborative initiatives wither away. What is new about this Call to Action is the commitment from each partner organization to **intentionally foster and support lasting structures for collaboration at all levels**, so it becomes a part of how we all operate and is sustained at a systemic level, beyond any individual's tenure. The collaborative partnerships we seek will create structures for all stakeholders to contribute expertise toward specific shared goals, appropriate to their roles in the education system. Such partnerships offer district and school administrators a meaningful way to tap into the knowledge base and mobilized network of the education association and its members for the benefit of schools and students. In this new era, district administrators and education associations will no longer see each other as opposing sides, fighting for power over limited resources. These partnerships acknowledge the important role of each set of stakeholders in student success, and each stakeholder commits to one another's success as they work together to maximize resources and implement policy and program changes to increase the effectiveness of their public school systems.

The promise of this strategy is undeniable, and it has taken root in key places around the country, particularly in districts in California, Illinois, and New Jersey. Partnerships between NLMP organizations, universities, and/or nonprofits in these states have established consortia to support districts in using collaborative processes to strengthen programs and policies, and address students' needs. In recent years, districts participating in such consortia have successfully used collaborative partnerships to identify and implement reading and math curricula for targeted populations, to improve school schedules to allow for increased professional learning time, to explore and integrate social-emotional learning opportunities into students' school lives, and more. The ABC Unified School District in California, through one of the longest-running and most comprehensive collaborative partnerships in the country, has seen dramatic and sustained increases in student achievement over time, with formerly-troubled schools now labeled Schools of Excellence and district leaders nominated for national awards. Put simply, **this strategy works**.

## National Labor Management Partnership: 2018 Call to Action (cont'd)

We share responsibility for achieving our shared goal – strong public schools that meet the needs of the children and families they serve. **Leading together on this goal requires a system that is designed for collaboration and shared leadership. It is time to create this system.** We, as national education stakeholders, call upon educators, in their respective organizations, to engage in student-centered education partnerships. To that end, we call for three immediate changes in the ways that we as education stakeholders relate to each other:

- 1 **Start Somewhere: Begin Collaboration on Shared Goals**
- 2 **Build Sustainable Structures for Local-Level Collaboration**
- 3 **Include Parents and Community in Education Transformation**

We are asking leaders and members at all levels of each NLMP organization to commit to join with the other education stakeholders, develop the collaborative systems necessary to support and sustain this new era in education, and create structures that will support this collaborative work. We also ask our members to come together at the state level to provide technical assistance for districts or schools as needed and to facilitate opportunities for districts engaged in collaborative partnerships to learn from one another.

- 1 The first step in developing a collaborative process is simply to “start somewhere.” Stakeholder groups identify shared student-centered goals, then work collaboratively and share decision-making in the improvement processes to achieve them. For example, in the initial collaborative project, the education association might use its network to bring forward educators’ most pressing concerns for their students, and to identify members whose expertise on those issues is highly respected by their peers, while the district administrators might carve out time for a collaborative committee to be established, and offer data on performance, climate, or other issues. If helpful, external partners from universities or non-profits can aid in selecting change theories and in using best practices for collaboration around school transformation.
- 2 Simultaneously or after “starting somewhere,” collaborative partnerships will need to create a rich web of communication and collaboration structures between stakeholders at all levels of the local school system. This includes regular meetings between district department leaders and educators appointed through their association, as well as the establishment of school level leadership teams, professional learning communities, and committees to address specific issues or topics.



## National Labor Management Partnership: 2018 Call to Action (cont'd)

**3**

Schools do not operate in a vacuum; they are part and parcel of the communities they serve. As such, collaborative education partnerships will be even stronger if they include the knowledge, resources, and passion of parents and community members in efforts to transform local school systems. Parents want the best education possible for their children. And, community leaders know that the local economy is bolstered by a top-notch education system that attracts businesses to the community and that prepares a home-grown workforce. Creating opportunities for these stakeholders to join in the transformative work will benefit everyone.

The time is right for collaboration to become the new normal – for educators, administrators, and other stakeholders working together on student-centered goals to become the usual way that education decisions are made. We call upon the local-level leaders in each of our respective organizations to join with one another and with all the education stakeholders in their communities, and immediately embark upon collaborative efforts to address the district’s most pressing concerns for students and schools. Begin with one project, and use it to build lasting partnership structures that will survive the test of time and position your district to solve whatever challenges it faces. And, we call upon the state-level leaders in each of our respective organizations to join with one another and with other coalition partners to support these local-level partnerships. Just as our organizations have shown they have the mobilization strength, the unity, and the will to push up on the system and insist on improved public education funding, these same structures can be used to ensure that support is channeled down to those closest to students and families. Through shared responsibility and collective leadership, we will ensure that every student, in every district, is afforded the lifelong benefits of attending a great public school.

The National Labor Management Partnership (NLMP) is a working group comprised of the American Association of School Administrators, American Federation of Teachers, National School Boards Association, and the National Education Association, which together represent the professional voices of educators, school board leaders, and district superintendents.

The NLMP was founded in 2011 to acknowledge and promote a unified philosophy: Improving student learning and equity require strong, consistent, and sustained collaboration among parents, teachers, school boards, superintendents and administrators, business leaders, and the community. And such improvements require that we all take responsibility for the wellbeing of the students in our charge. As a national-level partnership, the NLMP supports local-level transformation, including greater shared responsibility and leadership toward the educational outcomes we seek.

### References:

- <sup>i</sup> Louis, K.S.; Leithwood, K.; Wahlstrom, K.L.; & Anderson, S.E. (2010). Investigating the links to improved student learning: Final report of research findings. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota.
- <sup>ii</sup> Leana, C.R. (2011, Fall). The missing link in school reform. Stanford Social Innovation Review.
- <sup>iii</sup> McCarthy, J.E. & Rubinstein, S.A. (2018). In progress.
- <sup>iv</sup> Rubinstein, S.A. & McCarthy, J.E. (2011). Reforming Public School Systems through Sustained Union-Management Collaboration. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

NLMP logo design by Morgan Searcy: [morgansearcy.com](http://morgansearcy.com)

## Resources To Help You Share the Case for Collaboration

Sharing the national imperatives and research-proven benefits of collaboration is often the first step in establishing an education partnership. Sharing the case with others in your system will help you recruit potential partners and help your stakeholder group, partners' stakeholder groups, and the community at large understand the work you're doing and the benefits it will bring.

This section includes a variety of labor-management collaboration case studies and other resources you can use to learn more about collaboration and its impacts on students and the education system. This knowledge and resources will help you share the case for collaboration within your own stakeholder group and with other education stakeholders in your system. You'll refer back to these resources as you work through the activities at the end of this chapter, and as you invite potential partners (Chapter 2).

As you review the resources presented here, think about what collaboration could mean in your school and district, and consider who might be a good partner. Who would share an interest? Who would help you spread the word? Are there already established groups of stakeholders who are ready to learn more and accept the *Call to Action*? How might you approach them? What resources would you like to share with them?

### Collaboration Case Studies

In addition to the research-documented benefits of collaboration, practitioners across the country have seen a wide variety of positive outcomes from using collaborative structures and processes to address their local issues. The case studies below illustrate how labor-management collaboration can look and function in different situations, and highlight the positive outcomes in each.

Browse the descriptions and keywords below to locate case studies of particular interest. For example, if you want to see examples of how labor-management collaboration has impacted AP class enrollment, you might watch the Peoria High School and Rockford Public Schools case studies.

**Corona-Norco School District:** The power of educator voice in decision-making ([youtu.be/i2VWz8KhH2c](https://youtu.be/i2VWz8KhH2c))

- **Keywords:** Educator empowerment

**Delran Township School District:** When COVID-10 hit, Delran acted quickly, with all of their players - district administration, education association leadership, principals, and educators - pulling together to address their academic and societal challenges ([nea.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Delran%20Case%20Study%20Final.pdf](https://nea.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Delran%20Case%20Study%20Final.pdf))

- **Keywords:** Collaborating in a crisis, Educator empowerment, Remote instruction

**Peoria High School:** structures like a Partnership Council, PLCs, and scheduled student "Pride" time led to improved reading and math performance, more college applications, higher AP class enrollment, and fewer suspensions and discipline referrals ([youtu.be/In6qKtbdYog](https://youtu.be/In6qKtbdYog))

- **Keywords:** AP class enrollment, College applications, Discipline referrals, Suspensions, Teaching & learning improvement

**Rockford Public Schools:** Collaborative processes and relationships led to improved community support and morale, higher AP class enrollment, fewer suspensions, and a narrowed graduation gap ([youtu.be/-35kK1Xndog](https://youtu.be/-35kK1Xndog))

- **Keywords:** AP class enrollment, Community support, Educator empowerment, Graduation gap, School culture, Suspensions

**Santa Clara Unified School District:** Impacts associated with an innovative initiative designed to enhance communication and collaboration across the district, and among administration, educators, and union leaders ([cecweb.org/project/impact-of-the-cec-labor-management-partnership/](https://cecweb.org/project/impact-of-the-cec-labor-management-partnership/))

- **Keywords:** School culture, Teaching & learning improvement

**Vets Community School:** Collaboration supports Vets' existing community school to advance their three identified goals: build enrollment; improve math and language arts scores; and improve school culture and climate ([nea.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Vets%20Family%20School%20Camden%20Case%20Study%20Final%20%281%29.pdf](https://nea.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Vets%20Family%20School%20Camden%20Case%20Study%20Final%20%281%29.pdf))

- **Keywords:** Community schools, Community support, School culture, Teaching & learning improvement

## Additional Resources To Help You Share the Case

In addition to the case studies above, we've presented a variety of resources throughout this chapter that can help you share the compelling case for collaboration with those in your system. This section provides a summary of those resources, some additional resources, and suggestions for how you might use them.



Use the NL MP Call to Action as a way to show the stakeholders in your system that this isn't just coming from you: their national counterparts also endorse this strategy and encourage them to work collaboratively.



The collaboration research infographic is an easily sharable resource that summarizes the research-backed benefits of collaboration.



The collaborative partnerships pamphlet presents a more detailed overview of the benefits of education partnerships and stakeholder collaboration. Give it to a key education stakeholder, and use it as a conversation starter. Download it here: [nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/LMC%20Pamphlet%20Jan%202022.pdf](https://nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/LMC%20Pamphlet%20Jan%202022.pdf)



The Case for Collaboration video ([youtube.com/watch?v=J-Ttm-F9q8oM&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-Ttm-F9q8oM&t=1s)) gives a concise overview of the Rubinstein and McCarthy research and an introduction to the NLMP Call to Action.



There are also several videos of Dr. Saul Rubinstein presenting the case for collaboration: a short introduction to collaboration ([vimeo.com/212780880](https://vimeo.com/212780880)), and this more comprehensive presentation discussing his research results ([youtu.be/keUP7JDubI4](https://youtu.be/keUP7JDubI4)).



### Consider & Discuss: Sharing the Case

Now that you've learned the case for collaboration and reviewed some of the shareable resources, take a few minutes to review and think about the aspects of the case for collaboration that seem most relevant to you and your stakeholder group. You can record your responses to the following questions on Activity 1A at the end of this chapter.

- Which aspects of collaboration are most compelling to you?
- What might be most compelling to your own stakeholders and to others in your system?
- How might you share the case with each of these groups?
- What supporting resources will you use?

## Chapter Summary

Research has shown that collaboration in schools leads to positive outcomes, including increased teacher retention and improved student achievement, even in high-poverty school environments. Creating an education partnership between the district and school administration, the local education association/union, and other stakeholders can be a powerful stimulant for school-based collaboration, which in turn yields the outcomes all stakeholders want.

A sustained, long-lasting collaborative partnership can be fostered by creating collaborative structures, such as teams and committees, at both the school and district level and by participants upholding group norms and other collaborative processes.



# Activities To Share the Case for Collaboration



## About These Activities

Sharing the case with others is the first step in forming a partnership, and the following activities can help you share the powerful case for collaboration. We suggest you begin with members of your own stakeholder group: association/union leaders should share the case with their members (the building representative structure and rep council meetings can be effective for this); administrators should share the case for collaboration with the other administrators in the system, including principals. Make sure your internal stakeholders understand collaboration, why it's a desirable strategy, and why you want to form a collaborative partnership.

These activities will also help you begin thinking about approaching other stakeholders in your system and asking them to join you to form a collaborative education partnership, and this will be explored more fully in Chapter 2, *Identify Partners*.

## Activities

- Use Activity 1A, **Consider & Discuss: Sharing the Case** to reflect on the aspects of the case for collaboration that are most compelling to you, and might be most compelling to your internal stakeholders and others in your system.
- Having reflected on and responded to the questions in Activity 1A, use Activity 1B, **Sharing the Case for Collaboration with Others** to help you think about how, when, and with whom you'll share the case. Brainstorm how to use collaboration information and resources to help you show others the benefits of collaboration and encourage them to get started with you. Begin with in-reach: How will you share the case for collaboration with members of your own stakeholder group, so you can present a unified request and vision when you approach the other stakeholders? Use your responses to formulate a plan of action, and get started!



# Consider & Discuss: Sharing the Case

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spent 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. If you already have some potential partners, discuss your individual responses as a group.



Which aspects of collaboration are most compelling to you?

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What might be most compelling to your own stakeholders and to others in your system?

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How might you share the case with each of these groups, and what resources will you use?

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# 1B: Sharing the Case for Collaboration With Others

## PURPOSE

This worksheet can help you create a comprehensive plan of action for sharing the case for collaboration with others. First, you'll brainstorm, then you'll create in-reach and outreach plans based on your brainstorming ideas.

## STEP 1: Brainstorm



Consider the following questions and jot down your responses. Your answers will help you formulate a plan to share the case for collaboration.



What makes me most excited about the possibilities of collaboration in my school/district?

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How and when will I tell my own stakeholder group (e.g., educators, administrators, etc.) about the case for collaboration?

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# 1B: Sharing the Case for Collaboration With Others (cont'd)

## STEP 1: Brainstorm (cont'd)



With which other stakeholders in my school/district will I share the case for collaboration?

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Which resources will I use?

Collaboration case studies

Pamphlet on collaborative partnerships

Collaboration infographic

Call to action

Others such as...

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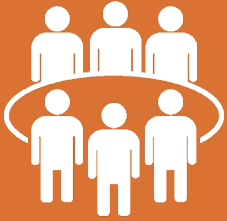
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# 1B: Sharing the Case for Collaboration With Others (cont'd)

## STEP 2: In-Reach Plan of Action



Fill in the table below to create a plan to share the case for collaboration with **members of your own stakeholder group** and ask them to join you in collaborating with other stakeholders in your education system around shared student-centered goals.

Individuals and Groups/ Caucuses Within My Stakeholder Group	What aspects of the case for collaboration will be most compelling to them?	Target Date	Method of Approach	Notes

# 1B: Sharing the Case for Collaboration With Others (cont'd)

## STEP 3: Outreach Plan of Action



Use the table below to define your plan for sharing the case for collaboration with other stakeholders in your system.

Stakeholder Group	Specific Person(s)	Issue Most Compelling to Them	Target Date	Method of Approach	Notes
Education Association/Union					
District Administration					
Principal(s)					

# 1B: Sharing the Case for Collaboration With Others (cont'd)

## STEP 3: Outreach Plan of Action (cont'd)

Stakeholder Group	Specific Person(s)	Issue Most Compelling to Them	Target Date	Method of Approach	Notes
School Board					
Parents					
Community Organizations					
Other					

## Chapter 2:

# Identify Partners



In this chapter, you'll:

- Learn about the characteristics of a strong partnership
- Discover the ways various stakeholders can contribute to a collaborative education partnership
- Use this knowledge to examine your existing relationships with potential partners
- Identify and invite some potential partners

This chapter is intended primarily for education stakeholders wishing to form a collaborative education partnership.

### Contents:

Introduction  
Authentic Partnership  
Who Might Be Involved in Collaboration?  
Who Might Be a Good First Partner?  
Activities To Help You Invite Partners



## Introduction

This chapter will help you understand the characteristics of authentic partnership, evaluate who might be good initial partners, and make the ask: approaching other education stakeholders in your system and asking them to join you in collaborating for student success.

Before inviting potential partners to join you, it's important that you understand what you're inviting them into. What are the characteristics of authentic partnership? Then, consider the potential contributions of various stakeholders. What might community members or a school board member bring to the table? You'll use those insights to evaluate who might be good initial partners. Should you start with an existing relationship? Should you approach someone who shares a common interest in school improvement? Finally, we provide tools and resources to help you make the ask - to approach other education stakeholders in your system and ask them to join you on this collaborative journey.

## Authentic Partnership

Strong partnerships start with the understanding that collaboration is not a series of compromises, but the work of respecting partners' diverse opinions and ideas, and creatively forming joint solutions. A partner's commitment to their team includes not only working to resolve the issue at hand, but also adhering to agreed-upon behavioral norms such as respect, honesty, transparency, confidentiality, and conflict resolution.

Partnership requires that each partner understand and respect the world-view of the other partners. For example, superintendents and association/union presidents understand the other's role and responsibilities. The superintendent understands that the association/union president's first responsibility is to represent their members; and the association/union president understands that the superintendent's role is to implement the school board's vision. These responsibilities don't change or disappear when the individuals work together collaboratively. Rather, participants seek ways to work together that don't impose on or threaten others' primary commitments.

At the heart of all successful partnerships is an authentic relationship, built on trust and characterized by honesty, transparency, and respect. This ideal environment may not exist at the start of a partnership, but it is the goal that new partners agree to work towards.



**In this new era, district administrators**

**and education associations will no longer see each other as the enemy, fighting for power over limited resources. These partnerships acknowledge the important role of each set of stakeholders in student success, and each stakeholder commits to one another's success as they work together to maximize resources and implement policy and program changes to improve public schools.**

*- NLMP Call to Action, 2018*

## Partner Relationships and Trust

Authentic partnerships rely on trust, but you don't need a history of trust to get started. Creating a collaborative climate and building trust can happen over time with commitment to the collaborative work.

When considering potential partners, note that even without an existing relationship, having a partner who is viewed as trustworthy increases the likelihood of a strong collaborative relationship.

Citing research from Tony Bryk and Barbara Schneider, researcher and education consultant Ken Futernick suggests that the presence of relational trust moderates the sense of uncertainty and vulnerability that individuals feel as they confront strong demands. He also notes that when trust is strong, individual engagement with change does not feel like a heroic call to action, and that relational trust is a catalyst for innovation. In other words, when trust is strong, it helps people overcome their sense of uncertainty and it spurs innovation (Futernick, 2016).

The Catalyst for Educational Change (CEC, 2018), a leader in collaborative work, offers five key components to measure trustworthiness. These are listed below, along with some ideas for how we might demonstrate each component. As you review them, consider: How can I demonstrate these attitudes to potential partners?



**“Without trust, people bail on relationships and leave organizations, cynicism reigns, progress grinds to a halt, and self-interest trumps the common good. For organizations to thrive, trust is not a nice-to-have; it’s a must-have.”**

*- Blanchard, K., Olmstead, C. & Lawrence, M. (2013). Trust Works! Four keys to building lasting relationships. New York: HarperCollins, 102.*

### Key component of trustworthiness:

### How it might be demonstrated:

**Benevolence:** Having the confidence that a partner has your best interests at heart and will protect your interests

Assume that your partner has good intentions. Start your conversations from a place of assumed goodwill.

**Reliability:** Being able to depend on a partner to act consistently, to follow through, and to maintain their commitment

Be a dependable partner on behalf of your organization. Show up, and do what you say you're going to do.

**Competence:** Believing that a partner can perform the tasks required by their position

Strive for the best contributions you can make. Bring on others when needed, to complement your skillset.

**Honesty:** Believing in a partner's ability to represent situations fairly

Speak truthfully, and represent your conversations fairly to your constituents.

**Openness:** Believing that a partner is sharing information freely with others

Share as much as you can with your partners. The best decisions come from the best information.



### Consider & Discuss: Relational Trust

Take some time to think about the existing relationships within your own stakeholder group. You can record your responses to the following questions on Activity 2A at the end of this chapter:

- Thinking about myself and my own stakeholder group, how have I or we demonstrated the five components of relational trust (benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, openness) to other education stakeholders?
- How could I or we become a partner more worthy of others' trust, especially on issues where there is disagreement?
- Who in my system has a reputation for being trustworthy?

Relational trust is the foundation for any authentic partnership and is a common goal of all partners. Not all partnerships start out with high levels trust, but as partners commit to a common vision of partnership, trust develops over time. You'll use this basic understanding to begin identifying initial potential partners for your collaborative team.

## Who Might Be Involved in Collaboration?

Research on collaboration demonstrates that when leaders in school administration and education associations/unions agree to work together to support their students, not only do students achieve more, but teachers and other educators are more likely to stay at the school, and principals and association/union representatives are more likely to be viewed as trusted resources (McCarthy & Rubinstein, 2017). In other words, collaboration begets improved results in school climate and student achievement. These results are clearly desirable to all education stakeholders, and each stakeholder brings their own perspectives and has their own roles to play.

Stakeholders can offer various contributions to collaboration, as discussed below. **However, the most important step is for them to agree to participate and put forth a good faith effort to put students first and value the views of others in decision-making.**

### District and School Administrators



District administrators are tasked with overall district operations, including implementing school board policies, hiring and overseeing school administrators and personnel, ensuring educator quality and student performance in accordance with state standards, etc. In this role, they can model collaborative behaviors to encourage collaboration throughout the district. A starting point might be regular meetings with the association/union president to discuss timely issues. They can also encourage others in their administration to meet with their association/union counterparts, such as the district's head of curriculum meeting with the association/union staff responsible for teaching and learning issues. Together, district administrators can work with the association/union to create the spaces and structures, such as committees, for collaboration to occur. This critical structure of district administrators and association/union representatives, known as a District Leadership Team (DLT), has been a successful foundation for collaboration.

District-level administrators can support collaborative processes by hiring principals who are open to distributive leadership, and by encouraging principals to include educators in the decision-making process. Where possible, district leaders can demonstrate their commitment to shared leadership by offering release time and/or stipends for educators to participate in district- and school-level leadership opportunities.

District administrators can also play a primary role in fostering collaboration in schools by actively encouraging principals to engage in collaboration and to develop positive relationships with the association/union representative(s) and other educator-leaders in their building.

School-level administrators are tasked with school operations, including employment decisions, budgeting, staff supervision, and ensuring that schools are delivering the best education possible to students. They can foster collaboration by working closely with association/union and other educator leaders towards shared decision-making. Forming a School Leadership Team (SLT) and working committees have proven to be excellent ways to engage stakeholders in collaborative decisions. According to research, principals who collaborate on school decision-making are more likely to be viewed as a valuable professional resource by the teachers in their school (McCarthy & Rubinstein, 2017).

## Education Associations/Unions



Elected local association/union leaders can play a unique and important role in collaboration because they are directly in touch with educators throughout the district, both members and nonmembers. Arguably, they are in the best position to accurately communicate educators' views and interests, and hence to be a vehicle for educator voice in district decision-making. The association/union representatives should know who the most respected content experts are at each worksite, and share that information with elected association/union leaders, so that these educators can be nominated to committees and task forces as opportunities arise.

The association/union president and other officers can be instrumental in collaborating with district administrators. Association/union leaders and district counterparts meeting regularly develops open communication and relationships, and is a very effective way to embed the collaborative approach into the district culture. At the school level, the association/union can identify representatives and other respected educator leaders who can work with the principal and other school administrative staff.



To reach its potential in the collaborative processes, the local association/union must have strong listening mechanisms, where building reps at each worksite consistently take the pulse of their peers' thoughts and feelings on education issues, and routinely administer member surveys.

The natural network provided by the local is also a massive and effective communication vehicle. The denser the communication network, the more effectively knowledge spreads across the local as stakeholders exchange experiences, knowledge, processes, and outcomes. Research also shows that the denser the network, the greater the collaborative impact on student learning:

“Union-management partnership is defined by the extent to which union leaders and district administration work together to improve teaching and learning. In a study of 30 schools in one district with strong, long-standing partnership, we found that many school-level union leaders took on responsibilities to improve teaching and student learning. Union leaders helped to foster denser, more productive school collaboration. We also found that teachers in schools with stronger collaboration are more likely to know about and implement innovations from other schools, and that union representative who have more ties to other union representatives facilitate this knowledge sharing.”  
(McCarthy & Rubinstein, 2017)

National and state association/union counterparts can provide support in many ways and this can contribute significantly to sustaining the collaborative work. They can help by spreading the word and encouraging new districts to join the movement. They can convene collaborating teams, so they can learn from each other and they can identify best practices in educator collaboration. State education associations/unions can address state-wide implementation and technical support needs and provide additional support by:

- Growing and supporting regional networks
- Incorporating education partnerships into descriptions of leadership and hiring criteria
- Having state staff and leaders participate in education partnership convenings
- Highlighting districts where stakeholders are working collaboratively, and their results in improving school performance, student achievement, etc.
- Facilitating the sharing of research and best practices on collaborative education partnerships in public schools
- Providing technical and staffing assistance to schools and districts
- Bringing together stakeholders from across regions for targeted networking and training

One of the goals of education partnerships is to increase educator participation and voice in the teaching and learning decisions, since they are the most knowledgeable about students' needs. When educators participate in district and school committees and on leadership teams, they share in the decision-making related to teaching and learning. However, increasing educators' voice and authority over their professions through education partnerships can only succeed if educators themselves take advantage of the opportunities afforded them through education partnerships. The association/union will actively encourage member participation at both the district and school levels and will also work with local leaders to ready members to play both formal and informal leadership roles within the association/union to advance this work.



## School Boards



School boards, typically comprised of elected community members, can play a vital role in a collaborative partnership by bringing the parent/community lens to the partnership's work. Through their participation, they will gain a deep understanding of what collaboration is and how it benefits the local school system.

Even if school board members do not participate directly in a district partnership, however, it is important that they understand the benefits of collaboration and why the district is working this way. As the group responsible for hiring the superintendent, the school board needs to understand the importance of hiring superintendents who will engage in this process, to help institutionalize collaboration into the culture of the school district.

School board members can set the tone for collaboration in the community, participate in district-wide collaborative efforts, encourage participation among parent and community groups, and tell the story by highlighting the collaborative work and its results. School boards can include 'willingness and intent to collaborate with the association/union and other stakeholders' as a part of their hiring criteria for superintendents.

## Parents and Community



Collaborative education partnerships are stronger if they include the knowledge, resources, and passion of parents and community members in efforts to transform local school systems. Parents and other community members can provide critically important information and involvement around the goals and needs of schools and students as well as insight into what is working and not working

For partnerships that want to include the voices of parents and community members in their collaborative work, it is important to invite them in at the outset of the partnership, so that their input can be considered as partnership goals are defined. Parents want the best education possible for their children. And, community leaders know that the local economy is bolstered by a top-notch education system that attracts residents and businesses to the community. Creating opportunities for these stakeholders to join in collaborative and transformative work benefits everyone.

One of the most important reasons to involve the community, however, is to help ensure the sustainability of the education partnerships beyond the tenure of any given stakeholder. The community, as a key and enduring stakeholder in local schools, has the influence and longevity to keep the work alive. Remember, it is the community who elects the school board and whose students benefit from strong educator voices and a collaborative school system. It is imperative that the community be an active stakeholder in the education partnership.





Finally, some communities are fortunate enough to include colleges, universities, or non-profit education organizations. These entities can serve as facilitators or supporters of collaborative partnerships. These organizations often have meeting space that can be used for convening stakeholder groups. They may also have experts in interest-based problem-solving or other inquiry-based processes who can offer impartial guidance to stakeholders as they begin to work together.

There are many ways to include parents and community. Sometimes community organizations are specifically invited to join an education partnership because of alignment between the organization or company's business model and the emerging goals of the partnership. For instance, partners who know they want to address early literacy may intentionally seek out the local librarians' association, non-profit groups that run reading-based after-school programming, or businesses that donate books.

The table on the following pages lists some of the contributions that partners can bring to the collaborative process. You may want to refer to this table as you establish the collaborative process, as it highlights suggestions that complement many phases of collaboration.

## Include a Range of Stakeholders

As your collaboration develops, it's important to evaluate and broaden who's involved to include a range of stakeholder roles, voices, and perspectives. You can refer to the stakeholder chart on the following pages to guide your considerations:

- Which stakeholder groups are represented? Are any excluded?
- Given the topic we're addressing, are there others who could contribute? Who is impacted? Who has expertise?
- When considering representation across stakeholder groups:
  - Does our partnership reflect our community in terms of race, culture, educational background, etc.?
  - What perspectives/voices are missing from our partnership?

In addition to being intentional about including those typically under-represented, it's equally important to not rely solely on those who agree with you. Diverse opinions and viewpoints bring a valuable lens to problem-solving and help foster an atmosphere of open and respectful communication where all viewpoints are considered. The best solutions come from groups with diverse viewpoints and experiences, so being inclusive plays an important role in the collaborative process.

Refer back to these considerations as your partnership develops to help you expand your working groups to include the diverse perspectives that will help produce the best solutions for your system.

## Potential Activities for Partners in the Collaborative Process

### District Administration

Include other stakeholders in decision-making

Make district- and school-level data on performance, climate, and other issues available to collaborative committees

Establish standing meetings with association/union leaders and district- or school-level committees

Work with the association/union to create the collaborative spaces and structures, such as leadership teams and committees, with expectations for shared decision-making

Model collaborative behaviors

Work with the local PTA council to invite parents to participate on district-level committees

Encourage principals to engage in collaboration and include parents on teams and committees

### Principal & School Administration

Include representatives of all school employee groups, students, and community members in decision-making

Invite students, parents, and community representatives to participate in school committees

Make school-level data on performance, climate, and other issues available to collaborative committees

Establish ongoing meetings between the principal and other school administrators and association/union representatives

Model collaborative behaviors

Work with educators to create adequate time in the schedule to allow for collaborative work

### Education Associations/Unions

Identify educators' most pressing concerns for their students and schools, and raise them as possible issues for collaboration

Use the association's/union's network to identify knowledgeable, respected educators and encourage them to be active on collaborative committees

Place and support knowledgeable and respected educators on collaborative committees

Meet regularly with district counterparts to develop and sustain collaboration

Maintain strong two-way communication structures between the workforce and the educators serving in decision-making roles

Establish strong two-way communication structures between the association/union and other stakeholder groups at district and school levels

Develop and foster relationships with parents and community partners to elevate shared goals

## Potential Activities for Partners in the Collaborative Process

### School Boards

Set the tone; establish an expectation for collaborative decision-making

Provide resources for training and ongoing support in collaborative processes, relationship building, and subject matter expertise

Provide funding and support for collaborative processes to occur as a regular part of participants' professional lives

Include "willingness and intent to collaborate" in superintendent hiring criteria

Ensure the district's collaborative partnership has the opportunity to network with other education partnerships working on similar projects or in a similar context

Ensure local community groups have a place in your collaborative partnership

Ensure there are ample listening structures for the school board to hear from constituents about the community's priorities for their school system

### Parents & Community

Help ensure collaboration's longevity beyond the tenure of any given stakeholder

Establish a liaison to the local education association/union and work together to define shared goals

Participate in collaborative decision-making to improve local schools

Respond to surveys or participate in forums to help ensure parent and community voices are included in shaping partnership goals

Offer services or expertise to collaborative decision-making teams and committees

Spread the word of the collaborative partnership's positive impacts

Support school board candidates who recognize the benefits of collaboration

Participate in collaborative decision-making when the organization's business model aligns with the partnership goals

### Universities, Non-Profits

Offer training in interest-based processes, change theory, and improvement processes

Facilitate improvement processes

Convene collaborative networks across districts and states

Offer subject matter expertise to collaborative decision-making teams and committees

## Stakeholders Throughout the System

Collaboration can occur at the school, district, and state levels, and each level can include collaborative committees working on specific initiatives that are supported by a leadership team. Accordingly, the stakeholders, and potential partners, may be different depending on where collaboration is taking place - whether at a school, across a district, or at the state level - and on the issue being addressed.



### School

Collaborative teams and committees at the school level might include the principal and other school administrators, association/union building representatives, teachers, education support professionals, as well as students, parents and community members. Association/union representatives can play a primary role in organizing educators and elevating their voices and views.



### District

At the district level, participants might include school board members, district administrators, representatives of the local education association/union, parents, and community groups. Rubinstein & McCarthy (2016) note that an education partnership between the district administration and the local association/union acts as the catalyst for the sort of school-level collaboration that leads to collaboration's positive outcomes.



### State

State and national counterparts can play a vital support role to schools and districts working collaboratively by providing joint learning opportunities for collaborative teams, encouraging districts to use collaborative partnerships to improve their district, sharing best practices and resources, and/or offering financial support. The National Labor Management Partnership's members have already pledged to provide this support. In addition to supporting district partnerships, a state-level partnership might also "advocate up," by fostering policy changes aligned with district-level work. State-level stakeholders might include representatives from state-level organizations representing superintendents, the education association/union, school boards, principals, parents, community groups, and possibly the state department of education and universities and other research partners.

## Who Might Be a Good First Partner?

Now that you have an understanding of how various individuals might contribute to a partnership based on their role, focus now on specific individuals in your system. It's always easier to build on an existing foundation, so it often makes sense to start with individuals you have an

existing relationship with, those who might share a common interest or vision, even if there's no existing relationship, and those who seem willing to work collaboratively.

First consider your existing relationships with other education stakeholders:

- With whom do you already share a level of trust or mutual respect?
- With whom have you worked effectively on past projects or committees?
- Even without an existing relationship, can you envision developing a good working relationship with particular individuals?

Partner readiness may be based on the topic at hand or student-centered issue being addressed. In other words, if a particular issue is compelling for someone, they may be more motivated to collaborate to resolve it. With this in mind, consider some potential shared interests that may entice other education stakeholders to come together. Think about a few of the broad issues you'd like to see addressed in your system and try to identify others who share these concerns. This initial issue identification is typically exploratory and very high-level, but it can be useful when trying to identify potential partners. Subsequent chapters will lead you and your partners through activities designed to focus in on more specific issues or topics.

In the best case scenario, the district administration, school board, education association/union, parents, and community stakeholders all partner together; however, you need not have everyone on board to begin. A partnership between the administration and association/union is enough to *start somewhere*.



### Consider & Discuss: Identifying Potential Partners

Consider the other education stakeholders in your system as potential partners for collaborative work. Think about and record your responses to the following questions on Activity 2B at the end of this chapter:

- Who are the other stakeholders in my system, and what roles might they play in a collaborative partnership?
- How would I characterize the existing relationships among stakeholder groups in my system?
- What school improvement issues do I care about, and who else in my system might be willing to work on them?
- Have I previously worked with a partner to address an education-related issue?
- Do I have existing relationships that I might build on?

## Chapter Summary

You have learned about how various education stakeholders can contribute to a collaborative partnership, what authentic partnership looks like, and have thought about individuals who might be willing first partners. You may identify potential partners based on your existing relationships, based on a shared goal for or concern about your system, or both. In other cases, simply being willing to collaborate might be all you need.



**Start somewhere:** Remember, you don't need to have every potential partner on board to begin: an agreement between the district administration and the education association/union is enough to get started.

Identifying and inviting partners is foundational not only to launching your collaborative partnership, but also to its growth and expansion over time. These processes can also help you identify shared interests that can become the basis for collaborative projects and initiatives.

At this point, you have a homework assignment - use the tools in the next section to extend invitations to potential partners and form your partnership!

If you aren't able to identify willing partners just yet, though, don't give up! There are resources you can turn to for help:

- The Catalyst for Educational Change offers a variety of services and events to support labor-management collaboration, and supports regional networks to strengthen district partnerships
- New Jersey and California also have strong labor-management infrastructure, and offer regular trainings and webinars
- You may also ask your state-level professional organization if they have support resources



# Activities To Help You Invite Partners



## About These Activities

Who are your potential partners and what relationship do you have with them?

The activities in this section can help you: examine your existing relationships a little more formally to identify some good potential first partners; brainstorm who might be best to approach first; and invite others to join you to collaborate for student success.

If it's been a while since you responded to this section's Consider & Discuss activities, revisit them now to help you consider who to invite. It may also be helpful to review Chapter 1, *Learn The Case for Collaboration*, and the various resources presented there to help you identify the aspects of collaboration that will be most compelling to your potential partners, and any resources you'd like to share with them.

## Activities

- Use Activities 2A and 2B, **Consider & Discuss: Relational Trust** and **Consider & Discuss: Identifying Potential Partners**, to reflect on the various individuals in your system who might be good potential partners.
- Activity 2C, **Potential Partner Brainstorm Sheet** asks you to think about your existing relationships with other stakeholders in your system and categorize them based on whether or not you have an existing relationship.
- Activity 2D, the **Relationship Continuum Self-Assessment** tool introduces a collaboration continuum that you can use to understand the level of cooperation between you and a potential partner and how you might improve it.
- Once you've identified a potential partner or two, use Activity 2E to begin **Extending the Invitation**. This tool can help you invite stakeholders to work collaboratively with you around student-centered interests and goals. Preparing an invitation for a specific stakeholder can help you feel comfortable broaching the subject of collaboration. Read sample invitations, and then create your own.





2A

# Consider & Discuss: Relational Trust

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spend 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. If you already have some potential partners, discuss your individual responses as a group.



Thinking about myself and my own stakeholder group, how have I or we demonstrated the five components of relations trust (benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, openness) to other education stakeholders?

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How could I or we become a partner more worthy of others' trust, especially on issues where there is disagreement?

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Who in my system has a reputation for being trustworthy?

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# 2B

# Consider & Discuss: Identifying Potential Partners

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spnd 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below, referring to the stakeholder chart on pages 45-46 as needed. If you already have some potential partners, discuss your individual responses as a group.



Who are the stakeholders in my system, and what roles might they play in a collaborative partnership? (You may want to refer to the chart on pgs. 44-45)

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How would I characterize the existing relationships among stakeholder groups in my system?

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What school improvement issues do I care about, and who else in my system might be willing to work on them?

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Have I previously worked with a partner to address education-related issues? What other existing relationships might I build on?

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# 2C: Potential Partner Brainstorm Template



## PURPOSE

This tool can help you identify the other stakeholders in your system and consider the strength of your relationships with them, for the purpose of selecting potential partners for collaboration.

### STEP 1

Use the list below of common stakeholder groups to start your brainstorming. Who do you know in these groups and others that may be partners in your collaborative work?

### Stakeholder Groups



Administration



Association/Union



Universities,  
Non-Profits



Student  
Groups



Parents &  
Community Groups



School  
Boards

### STEP 2

Once you've identified your potential partners, consider the strength of those relationships, and sort them accordingly. With whom do you already have strong relationships, and with whom do you need better relationships?

### Have Strong Relationships

### Need Better Relationships

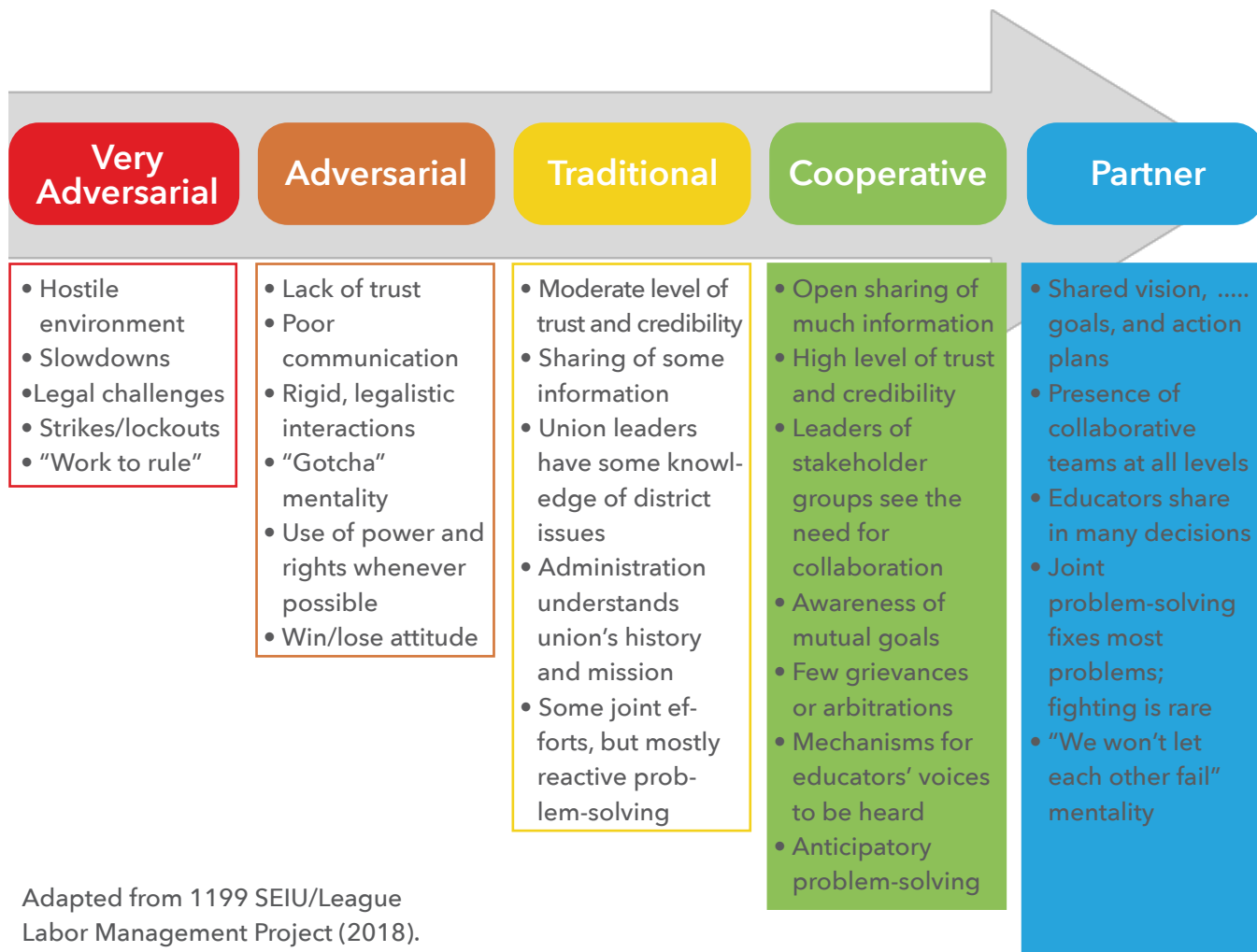
# 2D: Relationship Continuum Self-Assessment

## PURPOSE

This tool can help you consider the nature of your working relationships and understand how you might work to improve them, so that they fall into the “Cooperative” or “Partner” category.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Consider the stakeholders in your system, and assess your relationship with them using the continuum. Where do you believe the relationships fall? Place your answers in the first two columns of the table on the next page.
2. As your collaboration progresses, consider which characteristics you and your partners need to attend to in order to move towards Cooperative and Partner. Brainstorm ways that you might strengthen your relationship and put your thoughts in the last column of the table.



Adapted from 1199 SEIU/League Labor Management Project (2018).  
[labormanagementinitiatives.org/why-partner/](http://labormanagementinitiatives.org/why-partner/)

## 2D: Relationship Continuum Self-Assessment (cont'd)

Potential Partner

Current Relationship  
Continuum

How to Strengthen




# 2E: Extending the Invitation

PURPOSE

This tool can help you invite stakeholders to collaborate with you.

## STEP 1: Who to Invite

In this step, you'll think about **who** you'll invite, and **what** you're inviting them to.



For your first invitation, it makes sense to select someone with whom you already have a good working relationship, or someone you think would be open to collaboration based on their reputation or on observation of how they work and interact with others.

Initial Invitee: \_\_\_\_\_

Consider your invitee's position in the district or school, their internal stakeholders, and the groups they report to. What do they care about? What will resonate most with them? Is there a specific issue or problem taking a lot of their attention right now? Next, gather specific, relevant data or examples of an issue of importance that you can use to either grab their attention or to support your ask. Think about your invitee - are they more likely to respond to hard data, or to a story about another school or district?

Issue of importance: \_\_\_\_\_

Relevant resources:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Next, define the desired result of the conversation. In a perfect world, what would be the outcome of this conversation? What are you inviting them to do? What do you envision the next step being?

Desired outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## 2E: Extending the Invitation (cont'd)

### STEP 2: Draft Your Invitation

Choose an invitation style, review the sample invitations, and use the template to draft your invitation.



Regardless of who you're talking with or the topic, your invitation should begin with a strong opener that grabs your listener's attention and makes a connection to their interests. Your invitation should end with a specific request to take the next step towards a collaborative partnership. Base the request on your desired result from Step 1.

Use your own natural speaking style and vocabulary, and remember to keep your invitee and their interests in mind. To what information and style are they likely to respond favorably?

Invitations can take various forms, depending on your objective, your personal style, who you're talking with, and the issue at hand. The styles are not radically different, but one may feel more applicable or more natural than another.

#### Invitation Styles:

##### 1. Problem/Solution:

- Strong opener: articulate the problem or pain point
- Present a potential solution
- Request to take next step

##### 2. Join Me!

- Strong opener: statement of excitement or question
- Supporting information
- Request to take next step

##### 3. Tell a Story:

- Strong opener: our present state (what is the critical issue, what are the stakes)
- The problem (potential consequences, what happens if we take no action?)
- What we can do about it/potential solution
- Request to take next step

##### 4. Compare/Contrast:

- Strong opener: present compelling future vision
- Contrast with present situation
- Present how we might get to future vision
- Request to take next step

##### 5. Monroe's Motivated Sequence: (Various examples and templates can be found online.)

- Attention (strong opener)
- Need (state the problem or need)
- Satisfaction (outline a solution)
- Visualization (tell them how they'll benefit from your solution)
- Action (request to take next step)



## 2E: Extending the Invitation (cont'd)

### Invitation Template

Invitee:

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Issue I know this person cares about:

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Desired outcome:

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Invitation style:

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Strong opener:

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Other elements of your selected invitation style:

Element:

Your text:

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Request to take the next step:

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Also refer to the sample invitations on the next page.

## 2E: Extending the Invitation (cont'd)

### Example 1: Join Me! Style, Using Data

Have you seen the national *Call to Action* for education partnerships? The educators', principals', superintendents', and school boards' associations are jointly encouraging their members across the nation to work together on student-centered goals, like language arts proficiency. There's research that shows schools and districts robustly using these partnerships average twelve-and-half percent more students performing at or above grade level in English language arts, as well as other benefits. I'll send you a copy of the information. I think we could work together to really make a difference. Can we sit down next week to talk in more detail?

### Example 2: Compare/Contrast Style, Using a Story

Imagine being able to report a twelve-and-half percent increase in student language arts performance! We both know this has been an ongoing and stubborn problem for us. I just watched a video about a high school in Illinois that was facing some of our same problems, and they've been able to make tremendous headway by using education partnerships to overcome some of their toughest challenges. I'll send you the link. If you're interested, I think we could make some real progress by working together. Can we sit down next week to talk in more detail?



## Chapter 3:

# Discover Shared Goals



In this chapter, you'll:

- Understand the importance of identifying common ground and shared goals for the collaborative work
- If necessary, develop a strategy to identify your school system's needs and priorities to determine shared content goals

Although anyone can use this chapter to understand best practices, this chapter and the remainder of the Guidebook is designed to be used by collaborative teams.

### Contents:

Introduction

Importance of Shared Goals

Discovering Shared Content Goals

Identifying and Prioritizing Needs

Activities To Help You Discover Shared Goals

## Introduction

You have learned the compelling case for collaboration and have joined with other education stakeholders to form a collaborative partnership; now it's time to collaboratively clarify the student-centered issue(s) you want to address.

In this chapter, you'll define the content goals for your collaborative work: the shared issues you'll address collaboratively. Identifying and defining a shared goal helps your team clarify its purpose and ensure that the work moves in a focused direction to support student success in your system.



This chapter leads you through a process of discovering shared content goals, and provides a variety of tools and resources to help you gather data to identify issues and needs in your system, then prioritize the identified issues to help you select a specific focus. It is important that all partners agree on the vision and goals of their collaborative work.

## Importance of Shared Goals

Identifying shared goals is an important step when undertaking any project. Having shared goals helps ensure all partners are focused on the same outcomes, provides a common motivation, and helps clarify what work needs to be done to reach the goal. Shared goals not only help you and your partners begin defining your first project - the act of identifying and clarifying shared goals is, in itself, a process that supports a developing partnership. As such, we encourage you to define shared goals early in your collaborative journey.

The process of discussing and defining shared goals has important social aspects that can provide a good basis for a new partnership. Social capital researcher Tristan Claridge identifies the following characteristics associated with shared goals (Claridge, 2020). Shared goals:

- Are strongly associated with belonging, solidarity, and trust
- Are a force that holds people together and allows them to work together for mutual benefit
- Result in increased cooperation and collaboration
- Make individuals more likely to defer personal benefit for collective benefits
- Are a powerful motivator for collaborative efforts

Shared goals are important for both project planning and fostering an authentic partnership. The following sections provide some guidance for developing your own shared content goals.

## Discovering Shared Content Goals

Collaborative education partnerships engage in a discovery process as a way to determine what needs improving, learn about the root causes of their challenges, and then brainstorm, implement, and reflect on ideas for positive change.

As we've said, the collaboration process is organic, sometimes beginning with a known issue to be addressed, and sometimes with a coalition of partners who wish to work together. Defining shared goals is important in both cases, although your process may be different depending on whether or not your team is starting with an pre-defined issue to work on.

Often, stakeholders who are ready to collaborate rally around a known issue. Stakeholders often know broadly what the system's challenges are and where they'd like to work. Statements such as "our superintendent's vision includes equalizing graduation rates across our high schools," or "we need to do better at retaining special education teachers," or "reading assessment scores among our English learner sub-population need improvement" can indicate that the broad issue partners could address has already been identified. This issue identification can happen organically, such as a group of teachers asking their principal to form an anti-bullying committee, or it can be more formal, such as a district leader forming a task force. The broad issue is often chosen based on existing data points or on existing priorities set by stakeholders.

In many cases, a topic needs to be further refined or investigated so that partners are clear on which aspect(s) to address first. For example, if you already know that teacher attrition needs attention, a needs assessment might reveal that early-career teacher support and retention is the aspect that is most urgent or most compelling to the local collaborative team.

If your partnership is beginning with a known issue to work on, there are several questions that can help you evaluate if you have enough information to effectively move forward, or if you need to gather additional data to further refine your understanding:

### Questions To Consider When Beginning With a Known Issue

What is the scope of our problem?

Could we benefit from input from administrators, educators, school board members, parents, students, or community members?

Who is impacted by this problem, and how?

What aspects are most important to address first?

How does our stakeholder group view the problem?

Is there existing school or district data that could help clarify the problem?

Not all new partnerships come together around a known issue, however. Sometimes the desire to work together and forge a more productive relationship occurs first, without an obvious topic to address. Partners may have some vague ideas, or they may be coming to the collaboration with different viewpoints on which issue to work on.

In this case, partners need to identify and prioritize which issues to address. A good place to start is gathering any existing data, such as school or district report cards or existing survey results. A needs assessment can be used to augment existing data and can be designed to address specific issues or topics of interest.

Whether or not you're starting with a known issue, now is the time to clarify what you and your partners want to achieve. It's important that stakeholder needs are identified early in the collaborative process, since these will set the direction for your work. The remainder of this chapter offers processes, tools, and examples to help your team define a clear content goal. At this stage, the goal may be quite broad, and you may not know exactly how you'll achieve it. That's okay - content goals will be further refined in the Act stage of the *District & School Collaboration Framework*.



### Consider & Discuss: Potential Shared Interests

Use the questions below to guide a preliminary discussion with your partners about the potential shared interests you want to address collaboratively. You'll refine them later, but it may be instructive to surface potential ideas early in the process. You can record your group's responses on Activity 3A at the end of this chapter:

- What information do we already have about the topic(s) of shared interest?
- What data sources do we have for that information?
- What additional information would help clarify the problem we're trying to solve, or the needs of those we're hoping to impact?
- Which stakeholder groups is it important that we hear from on this topic?
- What methods might we use to gather the information we need?

## Identifying and Prioritizing Needs

No one-size-fits-all topic serves as the entry point for collaborative solution-building. There are a myriad of challenges facing public schools and the range of topics can be plentiful; therefore, it may be necessary to prioritize topics by evaluating existing data and collecting stakeholders' needs and wants. Which school improvement issues do the stakeholders in your district care about? Of the possible issues, which ones are best for us to address collaboratively?





As stated above, gathering existing data is often the best place to start. What information does the district already have on teacher retention or academic performance? Has your issue been investigated by education researchers or others outside of your district? How have other school districts dealt with the same or similar issues? What can you learn about the issue itself and possible approaches to improve it?

In addition to or in lieu of existing data, you can use a needs assessment to identify key issues facing the school or district and define the data to be used as a baseline for your work.

## Needs Assessments

A needs assessment is a listening mechanism that allows you to gather stakeholders' input about what they believe are the most pressing needs in your system. It lets you see how various stakeholders perceive the issues, the relative importance of different issues, and can sometimes provide a glimpse of stakeholders' readiness to work on the issues at hand.

This section introduces some considerations for selecting the type, style, and delivery method for a needs assessment, and offers a way to prioritize among the identified needs so you can better determine what to address first.



**“A thoughtful and well-planned assessment not only provides data that stakeholders need to start at the right place, it also helps deepen collaborative efforts down the road. The needs assessment does this in three ways. First, it builds buy-in early on in the process. Second, the needs assessment helps create or communicate a sense of urgency across stakeholders. Third, the process, if done correctly, establishes transparency in current and future collaborative work.”**

*- Marietta, D'Entremont and Kaur (2017): Improving Education Together: A Guide to Labor Management Community Collaboration*

**Needs Assessment Design:** Just as there is no one topic that every partnership team should start with, there is also no one-size-fits-all method for assessing the issues that are important to stakeholders. Needs assessments vary based on the amount and type of information to be collected, as well as the comfort of your target audience with the process. It can be a survey or a focus group or an interview with teachers, parents, administrators, and/or school board members. A needs assessment can be relatively informal, based on a series of conversations, or very formal, such as a written survey with results analyzed by software.

The nature of your needs assessment will vary with the scope of the issue or problem, your target audience, the amount and type of knowledge to collect, the degree of scientific process required, and the level of detail required to fully understand how the issue is playing out in your system.

Some needs assessments explore a range of potential issues and ask stakeholders to help prioritize from among them, while others begin with one broad issue and seek to identify its impact on stakeholders, and the nuanced sub-issues within it. This type of assessment allows you to identify a particular sub-issue or aspect to use as a good starting point for your work.



In addition to scope, consider who you will ask for input. You want to understand how this issue is impacting various stakeholders. Needs assessments can include a broad range of stakeholders or a small sampling of educators passionate about a niche topic. Depending on the topic, needs assessments may be confined to district and/or school personnel or can include students, parents, or the community at large. Soliciting input from parents and the community helps collaborative teams understand the

community’s priorities and ensures that the partnership’s work helps address the needs and wants of those the school system serves.

A third consideration for designing a needs assessment is the breadth of information needed to identify or refine an issue. Depending on the issue, you might be looking for broad-level data, such as state- or district-level, or data on a more intimate level, such as school- or grade-level. A well-designed needs assessment, targeted for the scope of the issue, the relevant audience, and the required information will help you better define shared content goals.

Needs assessments can vary widely depending on what you're trying to determine and who is impacted by and/or knowledgeable on the topic. This is illustrated in the following examples:

	Example 1	Example 2
<b>Key Questions Being Investigated:</b>	What aspects of school culture need improvement? Which are most important to address first?	Which professional development offerings need to be expanded or improved, and how?
<b>Scope of Needs Assessment:</b>	Evaluate current school culture indicators to assess those needing improvement and the resulting impacts on students and faculty.	Evaluate current offerings (content, availability, quality, effectiveness) to identify areas for expansion or improvement.
<b>Target Audience(s):</b>	Students, faculty & staff, parents	Educators
<b>Breadth of Information and Potential Methods/Instruments:</b>	Primarily school-based. May include looking at similar results from other schools in the district (and possibly broader) for comparison.	District-wide survey of educators, results to be evaluated according to each type of educator (classroom teacher, in-class support professional, school counselor, etc.)

To define your shared content goals, use a needs assessment that aligns with the topic you're learning more about, the ways your target audience prefers to be engaged, and the breadth of information needed.

The activities at the end of this chapter include a variety of needs assessments that you can use as-is or adapt to your situation. For those who want to dig deeper into a formal needs assessment process, we recommend the State Support Network's *Needs Assessment Guidebook* ([oese.ed.gov/files/2020/10/needsassessmentguidebook-508\\_003.pdf](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/10/needsassessmentguidebook-508_003.pdf)). It contains detailed information on the needs assessment process, designing and conducting an educational needs assessment, and interpreting the results.

Parent and community input is often gathered through surveys, open houses or forums where you can hear the community's point of view and potentially identify individuals with a particular interest and/or expertise who may be interested in participating more fully in the partnership work.

**Community Conversations:** A *community conversation* is a specific needs assessment technique used to gather parent and community input. Community conversations are facilitated forums that guide a group to build a vision for what their school could achieve and become. Community conversations bring diverse stakeholders together to discuss a broad topic of shared concern, generate a shared vision for improvement, and brainstorm strategies to achieve the shared goals. In the best cases, community conversations lead to an action plan that is jointly implemented by a coalition of education stakeholders.



In the context of education partnerships, these conversations help administrators and association/union leaders understand and connect with others who care about students. They offer ways to generate new ideas, test existing assumptions, and better understand the viewpoints and priorities of diverse stakeholder groups. Community conversations can also help identify parents and community members who have expertise and passion, and who may want to serve on committees alongside educators and administrators. An

overview of the community conversations strategy is illustrated on the following page.

If you want to hold a community conversation, NEA's website contains detailed guidance for planning and hosting a community conversation ([nea.org/resource-library/community-conversations-project](https://nea.org/resource-library/community-conversations-project)). Another good reference is Achieving the Dream's *Campus and Community Conversations Planning Guide* ([achievingthedream.org/system/files\\_force/resources/CampusAndCommunityConversationsPlanningGuide.pdf?download=1](https://achievingthedream.org/system/files_force/resources/CampusAndCommunityConversationsPlanningGuide.pdf?download=1)).

**Interpreting Needs Assessment Results:** After performing a needs assessment - whether you used surveys, focus groups, community conversations, and/or other information - the next step is to review the results with your team and come to a common understanding of implications for your system: what do the data tell you about the needs in your schools?

We suggest scheduling a meeting to help you move from data collection to project planning. This meeting can help ensure that partners are on the same page about what the needs are before deciding what to do about them. In some cases, it can be useful to hire a facilitator

# Community Conversations Overview

## STEP 1

Assemble a coalition of community stakeholders to serve as a steering committee for planning and implementing the community conversation.

## STEP 2

Plan the community conversation. Create subcommittees to address:

Select a broad topic: How can we improve \_\_\_\_\_?

Create the agenda: Choose a set of discussion questions that will help elicit a diverse set of experiences, concerns, opinions, and ideas about the topic.



Create a logistics plan: When and where will it be held? What materials are needed? (Hint: feed people!)



Select moderators and recorders. Plan to hold a moderator training session.

Create an advertising plan: Whom will you invite, and how?

## STEP 3



### Hold the community conversation

Communicate what will be done with the thoughts and ideas shared, and what participants should expect next.

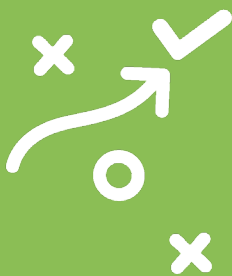
- Will you send them a summary of the event?
- Will you create committees to work on specific improvement ideas, and invite them to participate?

## STEP 4

### Plan next steps

Steering committee reviews the meeting notes and makes a plan to proceed.

Points to consider:



- Can these ideas be shared with existing teams or committees at the school or district level?
- Should new committees or working groups be formed to work on specific ideas or topics?
- Were there participants who were particularly passionate or knowledgeable? Make a plan to engage them further.
- Are additional community conversations needed?
- How will you follow up with participants for thanks and next steps?

with expertise in needs assessments to help run this meeting. Some guiding questions and considerations for this meeting include:



**Did we look at the right information? Is our needs assessment complete?**

Review the information sources together. Ensure that the data are triangulated from multiple sources, both qualitative and quantitative. Ensure that you have information about outcome(s) of interest, as well as contributing factors to those outcomes.

**Did we adequately capture the impact of these issues on all stakeholders?**

Strong needs assessments incorporate stakeholders' perceptions and experiences; however, occasionally needs are revealed by one type of data collection that must be "unpacked" or probed more deeply to understand who is most impacted and how. A thorough understanding of the problem at hand is crucial for the collaborative solution building to follow.

**What are our main findings? What do we need to work on?**

Review the data together. Everyone on the team should have access to the same information, and should arrive at a shared understanding of your system's needs.

## Prioritizing What To Work On

You'll use the results of your data collection to craft overarching shared content goals and convene working committees to address them. When considering which topics to prioritize, consider both the most important issues in your system, as well as which topics would make a good first collaborative project.

Successful collaborative partnerships around the country have recommended that new partnerships begin with topics that are relevant and important, and also low risk and with a high likelihood of success. This is because a new partnership is simultaneously building their collaborative relationships, identifying topics to address, and building collaborative structures such as teams and committees. When defining shared goals, then, set yourself up for success by selecting achievable topics of limited scope. As trust develops and as you, your partners, and working committees gain experience in joint problem-solving and shared decision-making, you'll build the capacity to successfully take on more challenging issues. For now, though, the focus is on selecting topics that can give your partnership an early win.

There are many tools and approaches that can help your team prioritize among the various issues/projects revealed by your data collection and needs assessment. A simple matrix like the one shown in the illustration on the following page (and included as Activity 3F) can help identify some good initial issues to address. For an early collaborative win, you'll want to focus on issues that fall into the *High Value* (low effort and high impact) or *Quick Win* (little to no effort and some impact) categories.



The matrix can be used to prioritize broad overarching issues as well as more specific project-related topics. See the Oakwood School District example below to see how this might be used.

### Illustration: Oakwood School District

Imagine that the fictional Oakwood School District wants to address persistent opportunity gaps for certain subpopulations of students and certain neighborhoods within the district. They conduct a needs assessment to gather staff and parent input on underlying causes of this challenge, and develop a variety of potential approaches to address it, such as: establish high school internship/apprentice partnership, revamp high school ESOL curriculum, increase teachers' use of culturally-affirming materials, etc. They use the priority matrix to help them identify a potential solution that they could address.

For each potential project, Oakwood's collaborative team discussed: *What relative level of effort might it take to address?; and How important is it, or how much impact does it have on our system?* Then, they wrote each approach in the appropriate part of the matrix. For example, "Convert Oak ES into a community school" is a high impact project, but one that also requires significant effort, so they placed it in the upper right-hand *Big Project* quadrant of the matrix.

They decided to initially focus on "Increase teachers' use of culturally-affirming materials." While they would ultimately like to work on some of the other approaches as well, they felt it wisest to start with something that would be relatively easy to accomplish and build from there.

<b>Level of Effort</b>	<b>HIGH</b>	<b>Significant Effort, Low Impact= Low Value</b>		<b>High Effort, Significant Impact= Big Projects</b>
		Develop extra supports for targeted 6th and 9th graders	Establish high school internship/apprentice partnership	Convert Oak Elem. into a community school
		Increase professional development offerings related on anti-racist pedagogy	Revamp high school ESOL curriculum	
	<b>LOW</b>	<b>Little to No Effort, Some Impact= Quick Win</b>	Get teacher input on calendar revisions	<b>Low Effort, High Impact= High Value</b>
		<b>Amount of Impact</b>		<b>HIGH</b>

In this example, Oakwood School District began with a known issue - opportunity gaps - and used a needs assessment to help surface potential solutions. A district beginning without a known issue might conduct a more general needs assessment to identify issues, then may convene a working committee to address an identified need, or gather additional data to narrow the scope before convening a working committee. Your approach will differ in different situations.

Remember that the goal of collaborative partnership is two-fold: you are improvement the student-centered topic at hand and also building sustainable structures to support an ongoing, productive collaborative relationship. To maximize your likelihood of success, select issues or topics that are not controversial and are achievable with your resources and expertise. As trust develops over time and the partners gain experience in joint problem-solving and shared decision-making, more challenging issues can be addressed.

## Chapter Summary & Next Steps

Once defined, your team's shared content goal(s) help clarify your purpose, ensure your work is focused, and give all partners a shared understanding of the work and each other's perspectives. This process of discussing your system's needs, gathering relevant feedback and information, and prioritizing how you'll move forward is vital to defining your work, and to helping newly-formed teams develop their relationships by listening to and respecting different views and input. It's good preparation for the next step of the *District & School Collaboration Framework*: deciding what attributes and behaviors you want your partnership to embody.

At this point, you may be identifying a broad area that needs to be addressed. Later on in the process, working committees will select a specific aspect to work on and develop detailed goals and objectives to address the aspect they chose. The work here is to identify some good possibilities for potential projects and think about what further information you may need to proceed.

Regardless of where your partnership is starting in terms of known issues to address, you'll likely want to gather more information to help you move forward. When choosing or designing a needs assessment, remember to consider how formal your process should be; how broad or narrow you want the data to be; and who it's important to hear from. It might be necessary to prioritize projects and identify a content goal that has a high likelihood of success.

Now, as a team:

1. If you're beginning with a known issue to work on, gather any existing relevant data. If you're initial issue isn't clear, or if you need more information on your known issue, gather relevant data and information to help define your initial content goals. You can use the tools in the next section to help, as well as the community conversations resources or the *Needs Assessment Guidebook* discussed earlier in the chapter.
2. If needed, prioritize among possible potential projects. You can use the Priority Matrix, Activity 3F, to help.
3. Select one or two broad issues to begin your collaborative work. These will be the basis for the overarching content goals you'll define at the end of *Commit to Collaborate*, Chapter 4. In the Act phase of the *District & School Collaboration Framework*, you'll form working committees to address them.

The tools in the next section offer an opportunity to learn more and to get started on this step of the Framework.





# Activities To Help You Discover Shared Goals



## About These Activities

Now it's time to gather some data, evaluate the results, and define some initial shared goals for your partnership's work. The activities in this section can help determine the issue you'll collaborate around, help narrow a broad area of interest down to specific issues for your partnership to address, and prioritize among various issues or projects.

## Activities

- Use Activity 3A, [Consider & Discuss: Potential Shared Interests](#), as a discussion guide and to record your team's initial considerations about possible shared content goals for your work.
- Activity 3B, [Discovering Shared Goals Planning Template](#), asks you to think through potential places to start. Do you know what the members of your stakeholder group care about and want to work on? If so, how will you test your assumptions? If not, how will you find out? Do you know the district's greatest needs, regardless of which stakeholder group you're in? How?
- Activities 3C through 3E [NEA's Opportunity Checklist](#), [Community Outreach Guide](#), and NEA's [OPSCAN Surveys](#), are three examples of needs assessments that you can use as-is or customize to better suit your needs.
  - The [Opportunity Checklist](#) can be used as a quick survey of educators, staff, students, and parents in your system.
  - The [Community Outreach Guide](#) helps you brainstorm how you might meaningfully include parents and community in your collaboration.
  - [OPSCAN](#) is a validated survey instrument that state and local education associations/unions can use to carry out scientifically-based surveys. OPSCAN includes a portfolio of surveys on a broad range of topics.
- Use the [Priority Matrix](#), Activity 3F, to help you and your partners prioritize among various issues that need attention in your school or district.



# Consider & Discuss: Potential Shared Interests

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spend 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



What information do we already have about the topic(s) of shared interest?

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What data sources do we have for that information?

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What additional information would help clarify the problem we're trying to solve, or the needs of those we're hoping to impact?

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Which stakeholder groups is it important that we hear from on this topic?

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What methods might we use to gather the information we need?

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# 3B: Discovering Shared Goals Planning Template

## PURPOSE


This tool helps identify areas of interest for you and your partners to address collaboratively. It is a short questionnaire for partners, staff, and/or parents to identify common interests. Use the results to help your team formulate broad shared goals.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Review the items below and answer them as a group using the table on the following pages to record your discussion.

-  Make a list of the issues that stakeholders in your system care about. Issues might be district-level or school level. (For example: literacy retention, collaborative climate, etc.)
-  What data are available to help you know how impactful these issues are in your system? For each issue, list data that may already exist to help you better understand it.

For example, if “retaining new teachers is an issue in your district, the district likely has data on the numbers of new teachers hired each year, their placement, how many receive mentoring or other professional supports, the percentage of teachers who remain in the district after several years, etc.

-  How do we decide what to address first? Rank the issues you listed, based on the considerations below (as well as other considerations you deem important for your context). You may need to revisit this initial ranking after further data collection, but for now, assign an initial ranking.
  - How important is the issue to stakeholders?
  - What impacts does the issue have on students?
  - What is the level of effort needed to complete the task?
  - Who is willing to participate in addressing the issue?
  - How much time do you have to work on the issue?

### 3B: Discovering Shared Goals Planning Template (cont'd)

Issue

Data

Where does this rank and why?




## 3C: NEA's Opportunity Checklist

### PURPOSE

This tool helps identify areas of interest for you and your partners to address collaboratively. It is a short questionnaire for staff and/or parents to collect data to identify common interests. Use the results to help your team formulate shared goals and begin the work.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Do students and educators at your school have everything they need? If not, this is your opportunity to speak up! On the lists below and on the following pages, place a check mark next to the top areas where school needs to improve.

To take advantage of the association's/union's natural network, building representatives can be responsible for distributing and collecting the checklists, and compiling data for each school. Building representatives can report the results to their principal and/or School Leadership Team, and to the education association's/union's executive board, who can then compile district-level data and share educators' most pressing concerns with district administrators and other stakeholders.

**NOTE:** Complete this form online at: [pages.email.nea.org/your-school-checklist](https://pages.email.nea.org/your-school-checklist). Completing the form online allows for follow-up from NEA with additional resources.

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#### **Community: It's important that your school is open to the community it serves.**

- A welcoming front office
- Active community involvement (parent support groups, and a community liaison, for example)
- Materials available in the languages the school serves

#### **Healthy Students in Modern Schools: Students need their essential human needs met, and to be in a healthy learning environment that is clean and in good working order.**

- Healthy meals
- School nurse
- School counselor

### 3C: NEA's Opportunity Checklist (cont'd)

- A roof that is free of leaks
- Healthy indoor air quality (free of mold, proper ventilation, and proper temperature control)
- Clean, unbroken flooring
- Ample and appropriate learning spaces (cafeterias, gyms, auditoriums, playgrounds, libraries, and computer labs with enough computers for all students)
- Class sizes that allow for one-on-one attention

#### **Well-Rounded Curriculum: All students need access to the right courses to prepare them for life after graduation.**

- Full day kindergarten
- Fine Arts (music, art, and theatre, for example)
- Advanced courses (science and math, for example)
- A pathway for advancement for every student (a path from general education courses to college prep, honors, AP and/or IB)
- Regular physical education classes (150 minutes/week in elementary school, 225 minutes/week in middle and high school)
- Foreign language courses
- Career and technical education

#### **School Climate: It's important that students feel safe and respected in their classrooms and in their school.**

- Students have a safe, reliable, and secure way to get to school
- An environment that welcomes and celebrates diversity
- A policy of restorative practices to create an environment of respect and collective responsibility (school policy with alternatives to suspension and expulsion)
- Use of early warning systems to keep students on track
- A community free from bullying and harassment

## 3C: NEA's Opportunity Checklist (cont'd)

### Quality Educators: It's important that all educators are prepared and excited to help students excel.

- Educators who have high expectations for every student in the school
- Teachers teaching in their credentialed subject
- Teachers are fully prepared to teach students in their school (teachers have completed a residency program where they were mentored by great teachers)
- Librarians
- Paraeducators and other education support professionals
- All staff trained in positive behavior supports and bullying prevention (all staff includes teachers, paraeducators, other education support professionals, and specialized instructional support personnel (SISP))
- All school staff contributing to a culturally responsive learning environment
- Staff that has time to collaborate
- Relevant, timely professional development





# 3D: Community Outreach Guide

## PURPOSE

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This tool can help you brainstorm how you might meaningfully include parents and the community in your collaboration.

- How do we already include the voices of parents and community in decision-making?
  
- How could we better include those voices? Examples:
  - Survey parents'/community priorities for district/school improvement
  - Hold a community conversation or town hall to solicit input on the district's priorities or on specific topics
  - Include parents/community members on committees or task forces
  - Reach out to community partners for collaboration



# 3E: OPSCAN Survey



## PURPOSE

The referenced surveys can help you determine stakeholders' needs and wants for their school.

## What is OPSCAN?

Optical scanning (OPSCAN) survey tools allow a large number of survey responses to be easily entered and analyzed. NEA has developed a portfolio of surveys covering a broad range of school and educator issues to help gain an accurate view of stakeholder opinions and needs. All responses are anonymous.

## How to Use This Tool

We recommend you use this tool to supplement the Opportunity Checklist. After determining stakeholders' most pressing concerns, you can use a survey to dig deeper into opinions on a subset of issues. Surveys can also provide insight into educators' relationships with other stakeholders and their perceived level of voice and influence in their schools.

While the Opportunity Checklist is intended to be informal and result in a preliminary understanding, these surveys provide more formal, scientifically valid quantitative results about both the content issues that stakeholders care about, and about the strength of the relationships among the collaboration partners and stakeholders which can help you move forward with educator-led school improvement efforts. Local associations/unions should administer these surveys with their district leadership to all employees across the district or in targeted schools.

To conduct an OPSCAN survey, a local education association/union member requests a survey through their UniServ director or state affiliate, who works with NEA to conduct the survey. NEA processes the data and provides the results within three weeks. The request must come from an NEA-affiliated individual, such as a local association/union president, and must be approved by the state association/union before being submitted to NEA.

## 3E: OPSCAN Survey (cont'd)

### OPSCAN survey topics:

- **Parent and Community Involvement in School:** Rates levels of involvement and satisfaction with various aspects of the school, and gathers information on the roles of parents, school staff, and community members in promoting student achievement and school success.
- **Professional Development Issues:** Contains items about the availability, quality, and effectiveness of PD activities, as well as on desired types of content, delivery, and scheduling.
- **School Culture:** Questions relate to: existence of shared vision, collaboration, communication, time/resources, efficacy, tolerance for ambiguity, culture of inquiry, and reflection.
- **School Restructuring:** Questions relate to: school mission and goals, curriculum, instruction, school organization, facilities and equipment, assessment, and staff development.
- **School Safety and Student Discipline:** Questions relate to: weapons, gangs, illegal drugs, theft, vandalism, and interpersonal behaviors among students and staff, as well as the root causes of student misconduct.
- **Staff Satisfaction:** Questions relate to: job accomplishments, workload and working conditions, professional development and training, compensation and benefits, relationships and communication, administrative leadership and support, and safety and environment, as well as union or professional association services.
- **Technology Issues:** Covers a broad range of technology-related areas, such as how computers are used for instructional purposes, teachers' uses of the internet, obstacles to the use of technologies, and the adequacy of various technologies. The survey is designed primarily for teachers, although others can answer to the best of their abilities.



# 3F: The Priority Matrix Tool

**PURPOSE:** This tool can help collaborative teams and committees select a shared content goal to work on by prioritizing among various alternatives.

## INSTRUCTIONS

For each identified issue, discuss its relative impact in your district or school and the level of effort that would be required to adequately address it. Then, write the issue in the appropriate section of the matrix. It is recommended that newly-formed partnerships select an issue that falls into the High Value (low effort + high impact) or Quick Win (little to no effort + some impact) categories. As your partnership develops, you'll build your capacity to address Big Projects (high-effort issues of significant impact).

<b>HIGH</b>	Significant Effort, Low Impact = <b>Low Value</b>		High Effort, Significant Impact = <b>Big Project</b>	
	Little to No Effort, Some Impact = <b>Quick Win</b>		Low Effort, High Impact = <b>High Value</b>	
<b>LOW</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>Amount of Impact</b>		<b>HIGH</b>

## Chapter 4:

# Commit to Collaborate



In this chapter, you'll learn about individual and group attributes that contribute to lasting partnerships and about partner commitments that can foster a collaborative atmosphere. You'll begin defining the principles and behaviors that will guide your collaborative partnership. Finally, you'll announce your shared commitment to form a partnership!

This chapter is intended for collaborative teams interested in formalizing their partnership.

### Contents:

- Introduction
- Fostering Collaboration at All Levels:
  - Individual Collaboration Skills
  - Relationships Among Partners
  - Collaborative Climate in the System
- Committing To Collaborate
- Key Components of an Education Partnership
- Guiding Principles and Behaviors
- Activities To Help You Commit to Collaborate

## Introduction

*Discover Shared Goals*, Chapter 3, helped you identify the topics, issues, or other content that your partnership will address. This chapter focuses on the partnership itself and the relational commitments you will make. You'll learn how individual collaboration skills, relationships among partners, and an overall collaborative climate help foster and support collaborative partnerships.

Strong partnerships start with a common understanding that effective collaboration is based on best practices and that collaboration is not a series of compromises, but the work of entertaining and respecting partners' diverse opinions and ideas and creatively forming joint solutions. A partner's commitment to their team includes not only resolving the issue at hand, but also adhering to collaborative process and norms.

Just as clear content goals increase the likelihood of a successful project, clear relational norms can help strengthen and sustain a fledgling partnership. Formalizing these relational norms is an important step in creating a long-lived collaborative partnership.

## Fostering Collaboration at All Levels

In this section, we more fully explore the characteristics of authentic partnership that we introduced in *Identify Partners* (Chapter 2), so that partners can develop a common understanding and common language to define your partnership's guiding principles. While every partnership is unique, individuals and organizations engaged in successful partnerships demonstrate predictable attributes and attitudes towards one another. Highly effective partnerships are characterized by shared decision-making, collaboration, and mutual respect among stakeholders.

Ideally, collaboration is embedded in the culture of a district or school. This deep-seated collaborative atmosphere relies on characteristics and efforts on three distinct levels:



Each individual's collaboration skills



The quality of relationships among partners



The extent of the collaborative climate systemically throughout the district or school

These characteristics aren't independent, since success at one level spurs and supports success at other levels. For example, a partnership characterized by strong positive interpersonal relationships will find it easier to implement collaborative practices at the systemic level, and these collaborative practices will naturally help develop each individual's collaboration skills.

Understanding the factors that contribute to a collaborative atmosphere helps strengthen your partnership. Examining the behaviors and attributes that characterize effective collaboration can offer a starting point for building or strengthening relationships among partners, and for establishing the psychological safety necessary for people to fully participate in such a partnership.

## Individual Collaboration Skills



In a well-functioning collaborative partnership, each individual strives to be a good partner and to contribute to the overall collaborative climate.

Effective collaborators separate relationship issues from process and content issues, take the high road when feeling slighted (rather than reacting in kind), and describe situations factually and in a neutral way (rather than characterizing). They seek out each other's perspectives, paying close attention to areas of disagreement so that they can be worked out, and maintaining the drive to gain consensus. They take responsibility for their mistakes, are constructive, and are unconditionally committed to the partnership.

In reality, we all bring different strengths and skills to the table. Some of us are more naturally collaborative than others; some have great communication skills but are less effective at productively handling conflict or shared decision-making. This natural variation in collaboration skills allows each partner to work to their strengths in the partnership. The partnership also provides a safe space for each partner to learn and develop new collaboration skills.

Reflecting on our own collaboration skills not only prepares us to be a better partner, but also provides a better understanding of the interpersonal attributes that can help grow and sustain a collaborative partnership.



### Consider & Discuss: Individual Collaboration Skills

After completing the *Collaboration Skills Evaluation*, Activity 4A, each partner should individually answer the following questions to further examine their collaboration skills. This activity can help you, as an individual, reflect on the skills you bring to the collaboration table, and identify areas for potential growth. You can record your responses to the following questions on Activity 4B at the end of this chapter.

- As an individual, which collaboration skills come easily to me, and which are more challenging?
- In this partnership, which collaboration skills would I like to strengthen?
- What can I do to strengthen my collaboration skills?

#### Suggested Team Activity

As a team-building activity, partners can discuss their insights as a group by having each partner share what they perceive to be their strongest and weakest collaboration skills and offering a few words about how they have demonstrated this in the past, or what this attribute looks like in practice. For each attribute, discuss whether you agree if that attribute is important to the partnership.



## Relationships Among Partners



When individuals are focused on bringing their best to a partnership, relationships among the partners, and hence the partnership itself, grow stronger. Although every collaborative relationship is unique, there are key skills and attributes that partners can demonstrate to build quality relationships with one another:

- Recognize the importance of each partner's role in the education system
- Treat each other with respect
- Maintain open and consistent communication
- Consult each other on issues of shared concern
- Employ shared decision-making techniques whenever possible
- Commit to not letting each other fail

These behaviors and attributes are typical of positive collaborative climates, and understanding them offers a starting point for building or strengthening relationships among partners, and for establishing the psychological safety necessary for people to fully participate in the partnership. Taking steps to improve relationships and foster a strong climate of collaboration also benefits both the individuals and the organizations engaged in this work.

The *Collaborative Attributes List* (Activity 4C) offers a selection of collaborative attributes that your team can discuss and agree to uphold. The results of these discussions and decisions will ultimately become the commitments that help define your partnership. The completed tool can be used as you develop your partnership's own set of guiding principles.



## Collaborative Climate in the System



Strong personal collaboration skills, coupled with effective relationships among partners, naturally support a culture change, where collaboration is deeply embedded in the system. This systemic culture of collaboration helps give collaboration its staying power - the power to outlast changes in leadership or team membership.

McCarthy and Rubinstein have identified five primary characteristics that indicate the extent to which a collaborative climate exists systemically at the district or school level. In other words, these characteristics describe how deeply collaboration is embedded in the district's or school's culture and indicate that collaborative work has resulted in positive cultural shifts (McCarthy & Rubinstein, 2017).

Note that the characteristics listed below are not prerequisites; we encourage stakeholders to begin using collaborative processes even if they do not yet exhibit these characteristics.

- **Peer Collaboration:** The amount and quality of collaboration among stakeholders in a system, encompassing information sharing, social support, and the extent to which stakeholders successfully work together to accomplish goals.
- **Discretion:** The amount of autonomy afforded to stakeholders. In high discretion settings, employees have the ability to make decisions independently.
- **Goal Alignment:** The extent to which stakeholders work towards common goals. High goal alignment is demonstrated by a common purpose and shared priorities.
- **Psychological Safety:** The extent to which stakeholders are comfortable voicing their concerns and sharing their opinions. Stakeholders who feel psychologically safe believe that they can voice concerns or make mistakes without being harshly judged. Psychologically safe environments allow for respectful discourse that includes and respects all viewpoints.
- **Shared Decisions:** The extent to which stakeholders collaborate on important decisions. Where shared decisions are the norm, stakeholders at all levels regularly consult with one another for input on significant items.

Partners engaged in collaboration can develop these characteristics over time, especially when they are mindful of building positive relationships while addressing student-centered issues.

*Define Process for Collaboration* (Chapter 8) includes more detail on how to foster Rubinstein & McCarthy's five characteristics of collaborative climate as well as a *Collaborative Climate Check-in* tool to assess a team's or committee's progress in fostering these characteristics. At first, these characteristics will likely be seen only among the partners, but as the collaborative work expands at the school level and across a district, it becomes a part of the culture as a whole as more and more people start to exhibit these characteristics. Periodically measuring these indicators across the system can provide a sense of how well the relational trust among partners is being infused into the culture of the system as a whole.

With effective collaboration, partners should see improvements on these climate characteristics, in addition to the student-centered outcomes of the collaborative projects. The longer you and your partners productively collaborate, the more positive your partnership's working environment will become.

## Committing To Collaborate

With a shared understanding of collaboration skills and the collaborative culture, you and your partners are ready to think through what you want your partnership to look like.

- What are the behavioral norms you'll agree to uphold?
- What principles will guide your work?
- What structures will you use to support your partnership?

Defining your partnership's key characteristics in this way helps define who you are and how you'll approach your work and each other. At some point in your partnership, it's important that partners commit to uphold these characteristics as you engage in joint problem-solving and shared decision-making.

Codifying the partnership commitments in writing serves multiple purposes:

- It is a document essential to sustainability; individuals in school systems come and go, but an agreement between organizations and groups is more likely to be sustained beyond the individuals involved
- It acts as a North Star to guide each partner's actions and contributions
- It provides criteria for partners to hold themselves and one another accountable
- It signals each partner's commitment to working collaboratively
- It provides a lens to help you and your partners share and promote your collaborative work

The next two sections, *Key Components of an Education Partnership* and *Guiding Principles and Behaviors*, can help you begin drafting your partnership's key tenets. But, the statements might not all fall into place at one time. In fact, your partnership may need to work through various situations before you decide on principles and behaviors that work for your group. Some partnerships find that codifying their relational norms at the outset helps get them off to a good start. In other cases, partners need to build trust by working together over time before they are willing to formally codify the partnership. Make the decision to finalize and formalize the commitment when it's right for your situation.

**“Every enterprise requires commitment to common goals and shared values... Unless a commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes, but no plans.”**

- Peter F. Drucker,  
*The Essential Drucker*



## Key Components of an Education Partnership



Before a commitment is made, each partner must understand the expectations of the collaborative education partnership. Education partnerships are about both content and process; that is, they are about the issue you've chosen to work on, and about the ways that you relate to one another around decision-making. In effective education partnerships, all partners agree on the desired content outcomes, as well as what they'll be building together as partners - the lasting structures and processes that will sustain success beyond the initial collaborative project.

We've studied education partnerships across the country, their supporting organizations, and their leaders, and have identified six key best practices that help sustain collaboration. The following components are considered extremely useful by successful education partnerships:



An agreement between district administration and education association/union leadership to work together with stakeholders on plans to improve schools, and a pledge to not let each other fail.



A commitment to *start somewhere*. Identify shared student-centered goals, and then work collaboratively and share decision-making in the improvement processes to achieve them.



A rich web of communication and collaboration structures among stakeholders at all levels of the local school system (e.g., regular meetings between district department leaders and educators appointed through their association/union; district- and school-level leadership teams; working committees; professional learning communities).



Planning tools and defined goals and objectives, so that everyone involved in collaboration understands expectations of the group members, the work to be done, and so that progress can be monitored and managed.



Training and ongoing support in collaborative processes, relationship building, and subject matter expertise.



Connection to other education partnerships working on similar projects or in a similar context for sharing and mentorship.

You can use *Building a Strong Partnership* (Activity 4D) as a guide for you and your partners to discuss each of these structures, what they might look like for you, and commit to building them together. Other activities throughout this Guidebook address each of these components to help you along the way.

At this point in your partnership, you should understand the importance of communication and collaboration structures; you don't necessarily need to define what each of them looks like. You'll build them over time, using tools in this Guidebook and other resources.

## Guiding Principles and Behaviors

In addition to the communication and collaboration structures are the guiding principles and behaviors that you, as partners, will agree to uphold. Think of these as the building blocks for your partnership's relational goals: What is our vision for the partnership? What are our shared beliefs and our shared responsibilities?

Discussing, defining, and committing to these principles and behaviors holds all partners to a high standard, and is an effective communication tool to help those outside the partnership understand and appreciate your work. Throughout your partnership, you'll

use these shared commitments to guide your discussions and actions, and to support collaborative processes.

Your guiding principles and behaviors are likely to develop more fully as your partnership grows, and it's helpful to purposefully revisit them from time to time to evaluate both the guiding principles and behaviors themselves, as well as how effectively the partnership is at upholding them.

## ABC Unified's Guiding Principles and Behaviors

As an example, the ABC Unified School District in California has one of the longest-standing labor-management partnerships in the country, which they call the Partnership Between Administration and Labor (PAL). At its inception, the then-president of the ABC Federation of Teachers and the then-superintendent created a list of guiding principles and behaviors that they each committed to uphold for the duration of their partnership. These are shown on the following page.

The guiding principles were developed to codify the partners' shared beliefs about their students and their shared responsibility for ensuring student success. These shared goals guide their discussions and actions and support the collaborative process. They are the underpinnings of the collaborative work and the outcomes ABC strives to achieve.

The guiding behaviors were developed to characterize the behaviors of their collaborative relationship. They reflect that the union and the district agree to foster a safe, effective, and sustainable partnership.

Although neither PAL founder is still in their role, the ABC partnership itself is still going strong. In fact, both the union and the school board have intentionally chosen leaders with a collaborative mindset, who would agree from the outset to continue the PAL. Their guiding principles, and the behaviors that exemplify them, continue to serve as the North Star for the partners.



### Consider & Discuss: Guiding Principles and Behaviors

Consider your individual responses to the questions below, then discuss each partner's responses as a group to help you begin defining your partnership's guiding principles and behaviors. Record responses on Activity 4E.

- Which of the principles and guidelines from ABC's PAL were most compelling, and why?
- Which principles do we feel strongly about adopting in our district?
- What behaviors are we willing to commit to, to foster our partnership?

# ABCFT and ABCUSD’s Partnership Between Administration and Labor (PAL)



## Guiding Principles



All students can succeed, and we will not accept any excuse that prevents that from happening. We will work together to promote student success.



All needed support will be made available to schools to ensure every student succeeds. We will work together to ensure that happens.



The top 5% of teachers in our profession should teach our students. We will work together to hire, train, and retain these professionals.



All employees contribute to student success.



All negotiations support conditions that sustain successful teaching and student learning. This is the **MAIN THING!**



**We won’t let each other fail.**

## Guiding Behaviors



We will work hard to understand the core of each other’s job.



We will respect each other.



We will be honest with each other.



We will not “sugar coat” difficult issues.



We will disagree without being disagreeable.



We will reflect on each other’s comments, suggestions, and concerns.



We will seek clarification until we understand.



We will maintain confidentiality.



We will both “own the contract.”



We solve problems rather than win arguments.



We will laugh at ourselves and with each other.



## Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the characteristics of strong partnerships, and the value of garnering partners' commitment to collaborate in order to sustain the partnership.

Highly-functioning partnerships are characterized by shared decision-making, collaboration, and mutual respect among stakeholders. Examining the behaviors and attributes that characterize positive collaborative climates can offer a starting point for building or strengthening relationships among partners, and for establishing the psychological safety necessary for people to fully participate in such a partnership. Taking steps to improve relationships and foster a strong collaborative climate benefits both the individuals and organizations engaged in this work.

This chapter also described the components of a strong education partnership, including the structures and processes that partners agree to build together. Putting these commitments in writing helps partners hold themselves and one another accountable and informs the broader education system about your partnerships.

When you have established your partnership and committed to working together for student success, communicate your intentions with other education stakeholders outside of the partnership. Let them know that the partnership exists, that a shared goal for student success has been established, a commitment has been made, and plans are emerging for pursuing the work. Not only will this inform others in your school about your collaborative work, it will help solidify your commitment.







# Activities To Help You Commit To Collaborate



## About These Activities

These activities can help you and your partners identify partnership norms, document the guiding principles and behaviors that you'll commit to upholding. They'll help you build an atmosphere conducive to collaboration, help you explore the attributes that you and your partners can demonstrate toward one another to strengthen your relationship, and present skills that you as an individual can hone or develop.

## Activities

- The **Collaboration Skills Evaluation**, Activity 4A, helps you, as an individual, consider the skills you bring to the collaboration table.
- Use Activity 4B, **Consider & Discuss: Individual Collaboration Skills**, to reflect upon the *Collaboration Skills Evaluation* and consider your strengths and how you might strengthen weaker skills.
- Use the **Collaborative Attributes List** Activity 4C, to consider the attributes that mark strong interpersonal relationships, and which ones your team wants to agree to uphold. The results will ultimately become the commitments that help define your partnership.
- Use **Building a Strong Partnership**, Activity 4D, as a discussion guide centered on the six key components of a strong education partnership.
- Use **Consider & Discuss: Guiding Principles & Behaviors**, Activity 4E, to guide initial discussions about what guiding principles and behaviors are important to your partnership.
- **Guiding Principles, Guiding Behaviors**, Activity 4F, can help you and your partners agree on the guiding principles and behaviors that will characterize your working relationship. You can use it as a basis to begin codifying your commitments to each other and to the partnership.
- **Overarching Goals Template**, Activity 4G, asks you to articulate the overarching goals your partnership will address.
- The **Sample Joint Letter**, Activity 4H, is an example of how you and your partners might announce your partnership to the district's employees and/or the community at large. Announcing your partnership is important to both inform others of your collaborative work and as a way to solidify your commitment.

# 4A: Collaboration Skills Evaluation

**PURPOSE**

Individually use this self-reflection tool to consider the interpersonal skills that support collaboration, and take inventory of your own strengths and weaknesses. Place a check mark in the bar to indicate your personal capacity in each of the collaboration skills listed below.

Needs work

Great!

Actively listening to team members

Agreeing on roles that capitalize on individual strengths

Analyzing problems without assigning blame

Building consensus

Compromising when necessary to move the group forward

Delegating tasks with open discussion

Displaying a willingness to problem solve

Encouraging reluctant group members to participate

Facilitating group discussion

Following through with commitments

Forgiving others when they come up short

Giving credit to others for their contributions

Identifying compatible partners to carry out projects

Identifying obstacles to success

Maintaining a sense of humor

Recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of others

Sharing feelings of frustration or dissatisfaction as they occur

Speaking respectfully with team members

Taking a leadership role

Taking responsibility for mistakes

Updating collaborators on project developments

Adapted from Doyle, A. (2018). *Collaboration Definitions, Skills, and Examples*. [thebalance.com/collaboration-skills-with-examples-2059686](https://thebalance.com/collaboration-skills-with-examples-2059686)



# Consider & Discuss: Individual Collaboration Skills

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spent 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on your responses to the Collaboration Skills Evaluation, Activity 4A, and record your responses to the prompts below.



As an individual, which collaboration skills come easily to me, and which are more challenging?

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In this partnership, which collaboration skills would I like to strengthen?

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What can I do to strengthen my collaboration skills?

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# 4C: Collaborative Attributes List

## PURPOSE

Collaborative groups should use this tool to discuss the collaborative attributes that are most relevant and important to the group.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Use this tool as a discussion guide for your group, to consider the collaborative climate attributes that are most important to you. What attributes would you like to see in your partnership? Hold an honest conversation about each attribute: Do you agree it would be worthwhile? How have you demonstrated the attribute in the past? If you agree it's worthwhile and you haven't demonstrated it well to date, what will you do to improve going forward?

- Awareness** - We each see ourselves and each other as necessary parts of a working system
- Motivation** - We have the drive to gain consensus when engaging in joint problem-solving
- Participation** - We are equally committed to participating in a collaborative partnership
- Shared decision-making** - Working together is the default and we collaborate on as many important decisions as possible
- Professional discretion** - We respect the professional autonomy of those within our system and create space for role-appropriate, independent decision-making at all levels
- Peer collaboration** - We support educators in working together for their students' success
- Social support** - We portray each other as valued partners to our peers

## 4C: Collaborative Attributes List (cont'd)

- Goal alignment** - We seek to align goals among stakeholders in our system by emphasizing our common purpose and shared priorities
- .....
- Authenticity** - We are honest with each other about our thoughts, feelings, and opinions
- .....
- Psychological safety** - We create an environment where all partners feel comfortable sharing thoughts and opinions, and where participants are not harshly judged for mistakes, voicing concerns, or holding unpopular viewpoints
- .....
- Mediation** - We are able to positively negotiate, compromise, and get to agreement
- .....
- Reciprocity** - We share information, and we expect sharing in return through reciprocity
- .....
- Reliability** - We are consistently reliable, and in return expect our partners to follow through
- .....
- Reflection** - We think through the possibilities, and are willing to consider alternatives
- .....
- Engagement** - We proactively engage, rather than wait and react
- .....

Enter any additional attributes here:

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Adapted from indicators of a collaborative climate in research from McCarthy and Rubinstein (2017), from information found at: [aiim.org/What-is-Collaboration](http://aiim.org/What-is-Collaboration) and [blog.risebeyond.org](http://blog.risebeyond.org)



# 4D: Building a Strong Partnership

## PURPOSE

This tool presents key components to successful partnerships - the sustainable structures that you're committing to build together. Use it to discuss *what* you'll commit to; other tools will help with *how* to do it.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Discuss each component with your partners. What do they mean to you? What are your partnership's aspirations for each component? After your discussion, partners can write their initials in the box provided.

### KEY COMPONENTS TO A STRONG EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

### INITIALS



An agreement between district and education association/union leadership to work together with local stakeholders on plans to improve schools, and a **pledge not to let each other fail**.

A commitment to **start somewhere**. Identify shared student-centered goals, and then work collaboratively and share decision-making in the improvement processes to achieve them.



**A rich web of communication and collaboration structures among stakeholders at all levels** of the local school system (e.g., regular meetings between district department leaders and educators appointed through their association/union; district- and school-level leadership teams; working committees; professional learning communities).

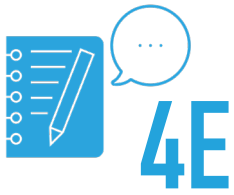
**Planning tools and defined goals and objectives**, so that everyone involved in collaboration understands expectations of the group members, the work to be done, and so that progress can be monitored and managed.



**Training and ongoing support** in collaborative processes, relationship building, and subject matter expertise.

**Connection to other education partnerships** working on similar projects, or in a similar context, for sharing and mentorship.





# Consider & Discuss: Guiding Principles & Behaviors

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spent 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



Which of the principles from ABC's PAL were most compelling, and why?

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Which principles do we feel strongly about adopting in our district?

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What behaviors are we willing to commit to, to foster our partnership?

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# 4F: Guiding Principles Guiding Behaviors: Codifying Your Commitments

## PURPOSE

This tool can guide you and your partners toward agreeing upon and codifying the guiding principles and guiding behaviors that will characterize your working relationship.

## STEP 1

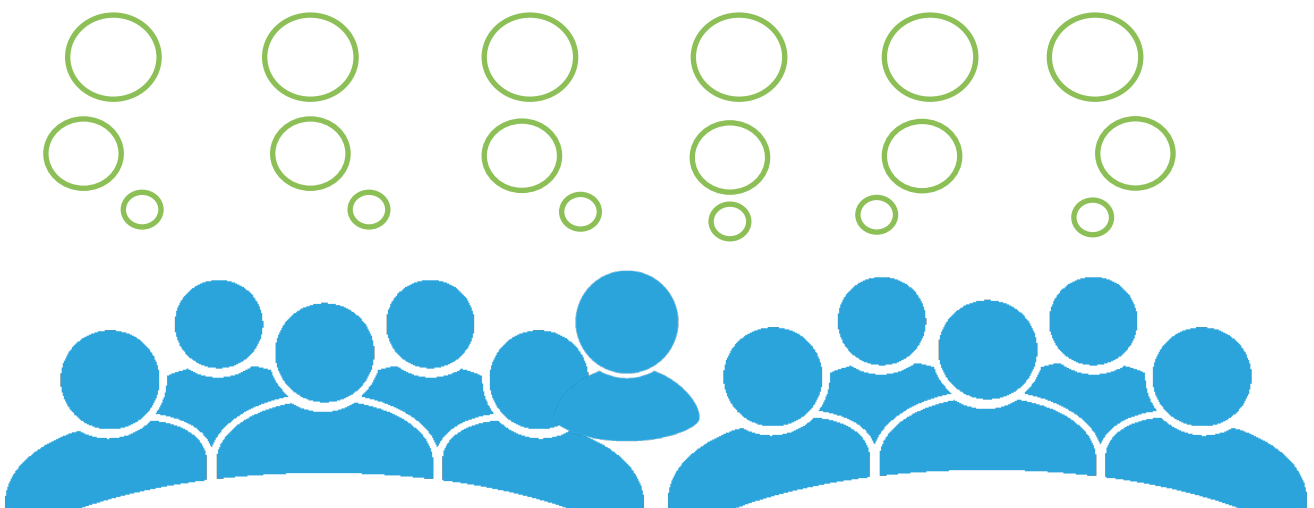
### Discussion



Gather your partners together to discuss your shared vision for the partnership. Keep the focus on the relationships, not a particular topic.

Use the following questions to guide your discussion, and then use what you discuss to serve as the foundation for your shared commitments.

- What do you both/all believe about the role of education/school in students' lives?
- What do you both/all believe about your responsibilities towards students?
- What do you both/all believe about each stakeholder's roles in student success?
- How should disagreements be handled?
- When your partner is not in the room, how will you speak to others of them and this partnership?



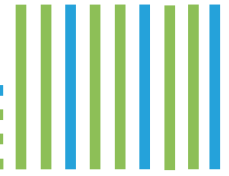
## 4F: Guiding Principles, Guiding Behaviors (cont'd)



STEP 2



### Write Your Commitments



#### Guiding Principles

**We believe...**

*[Draft your shared beliefs about your students and your shared responsibility for ensuring their success.]*

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#### Guiding Behaviors

**We will honor these principles in our relationship with one another by...**

*[Draft your commitments toward one another - the behaviors that will characterize your relationship as partners.]*

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# 4G: Overarching Goals Template

**PURPOSE**

This tool can help leadership teams clarify their overarching goals. Partnership goals often include both content-related goals (the initiatives that you'll form working committees to address collaboratively) and relational goals (what steps can we take to uphold our guiding principles and behaviors?).

## Partnership Goals

Now that your team has a clearer idea of how you'll work together and the principles and behaviors most important to you, revisit your work from *Discover Shared Goals*, Chapter 3, and articulate what issue(s) you'll address and what you hope to achieve. A content goal might read, "By the end of next year, we'll increase the percentage of fourth-graders meeting ELA standards in targeted schools." A relationship goal might read "Partners will attend joint training in collaboration at least once per year."

Write your overarching partnership goals here.

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## 4H: Sample Joint Letter

### PURPOSE

Write a formal announcement of your partnership and its desired outcomes.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Use the following example to craft your own joint letter announcing your partnership, describing your shared commitments, the topic the partnership will first address, and how you envision the work getting started.

Dear employees of **[school district]**,

Dear **[stakeholder(s)]**,

We are very excited to announce our commitment to engage in a formal collaboration process to address **[topic]** in our school system, an issue that has significant impact for our students. We will be working together to co-create solutions. We have committed to not letting each other fail in this endeavor.

Research has long shown that collaboration between and among educators in a school yields positive outcomes. **[School district]** is a school system that values the voice and professionalism of its educators. We know that educators are closest to the students and are uniquely positioned to advise on issues of teaching and learning. More recent research has shown that a formal education partnership between a district's administrators, education associations/unions, and other stakeholders can serve as a powerful antecedent to educator collaboration within schools.

Over the next couple of months, we will form district and school leadership teams to support working committees around **[issue]**. The committees will include representatives from throughout the school system who have an interest and the skills to realize our goal. All working committee members will have a shared voice in decision-making and the group process. District and school leadership teams will provide support and oversight for the project. These teams will be comprised of members from all aspects of system leadership – administrators, education association/union representatives, school board members, and parent and community members.

This partnership may require us to work together in new ways, and we hope you will join us in our excitement and follow our collaboration process so that – together – we can make a difference in the lives of our students.

Respectfully,

**[Partner 1]** and **[Partner 2]**



## Chapter 5

# Identify Collaborative Teams and Functions



This chapter introduces the leadership teams and working committees that comprise a collaborative education partnership. In particular, you'll:

- Learn the value of district and school-level leadership teams in catalyzing, supporting, and sustaining the work of collaborative working committees
- Consider who should be included in team and committee membership
- Identify and create the teams and committees needed to work collaboratively on your partnership's student-centered goals

This chapter is intended for collaborative teams at the district and school levels to help them design their leadership teams and working committees.

### Contents:

Introduction

District Leadership Team (DLT)

School Leadership Teams (SLTs)

Working Committees

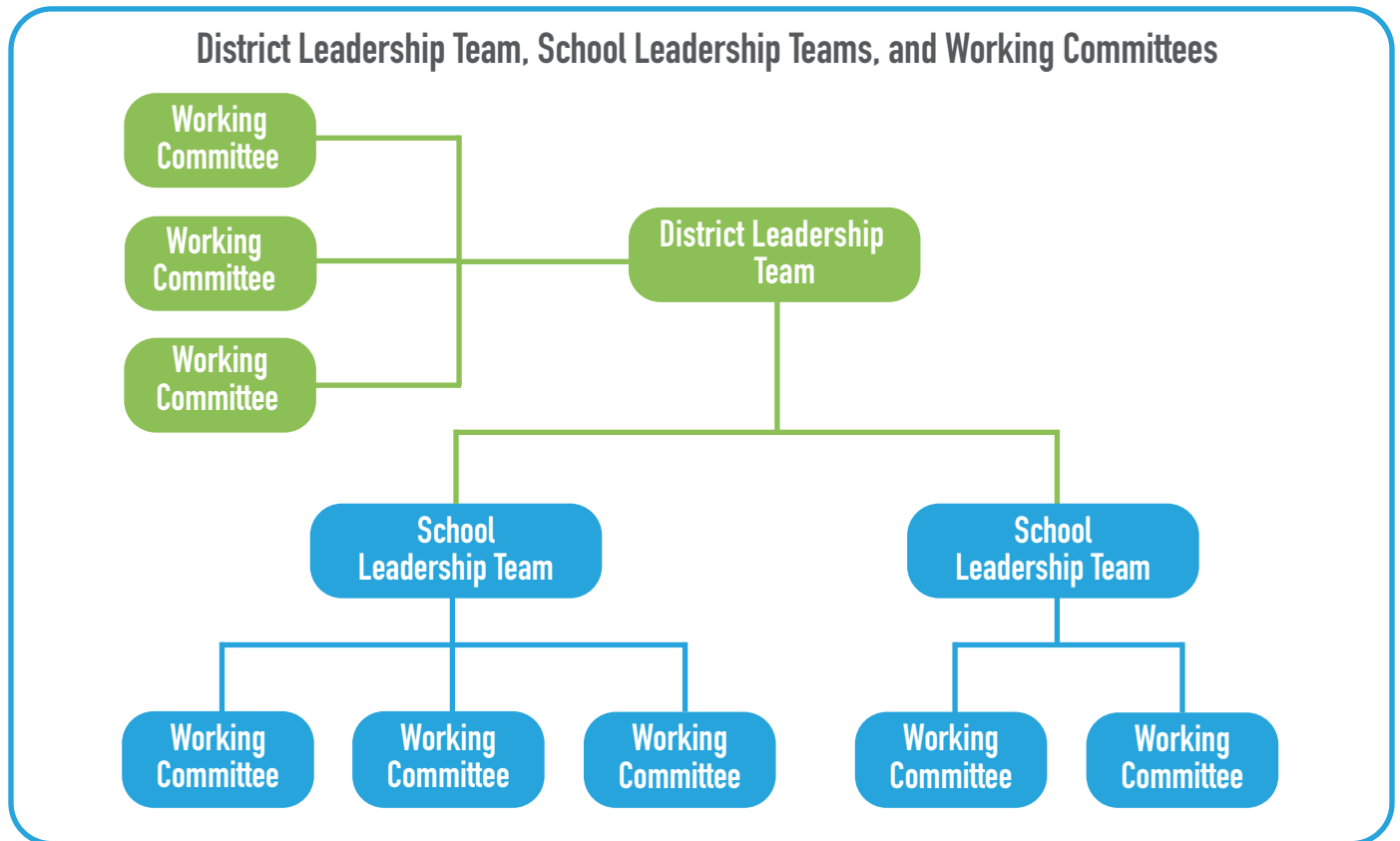
Putting It All Together

Activities To Help You Create Collaborative Structures

## Introduction

If you've completed the Prepare phase of the *District & School Collaboration Framework*, you have developed the foundation for your partnership by learning and sharing the case for collaboration, joining with partners, and developing shared goals and commitments.

This chapter begins the Act phase, where you'll implement your collaborative work, starting with creating the teams and committees that will carry out student-centered collaborative projects across your district or school. These teams and committees provide the spaces for the work to take place and form a collaborative structure that is foundational to a sustained partnership.



The fundamental collaborative structures are the working committees formed to address specific issues or topics. This is where the collaborative problem-solving takes place; where potential solutions are identified. Working committees develop specific project goals and implement those projects to realize student-centered goals. These committees can exist in schools as well as at the district level.

Working committees are supported by leadership teams (again, at both the school and district level) that outline broad overarching goals, facilitate collaborative problem-solving, coordinate working committee initiatives, offer support, and handle communications about the partnership's work.



Research has shown that a district-level partnership - such as the District Leadership Team we describe - is a strong predictor of, and a catalyst for, school-level collaboration. We further conclude that strong district-level partnerships can be the agent that helps sustain and expand collaboration in schools by spurring and supporting educators and administrators as they jointly solve problems deep within school systems. It is this joint problem-solving that results in positive outcomes for students. Building and sustaining the district-level partnership, then, can be a driving force in producing positive education outcomes. (McCarthy & Rubinstein, 2017)

The following sections provide a detailed look at leadership teams and working committees. The models presented were developed based on organizational structures that have worked well for other collaborative partnerships. It's important to note, though, that the specific collaborative structures and how they develop will naturally vary from system to system - you will customize the structures to your unique context.

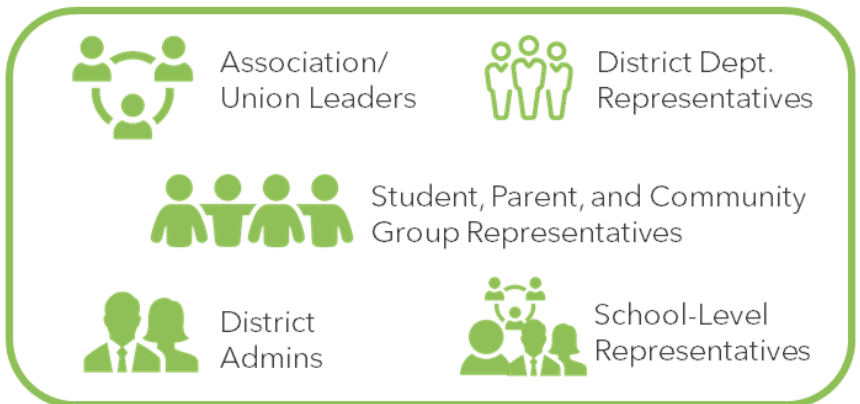


**Start Somewhere:** Note that these teams and committees are examples of organizational structures that have worked well for others using collaborative practices. Even though a newly-formed partnership is unlikely to be able to put all of them in place first, it is instructive to examine what a comprehensive system of collaboration support structures looks like. The structures can be intentionally and gradually built over time while doing the collaborative work. In some cases, you may be able to repurpose an existing group for collaborative work. For example, a professional learning committee might be used as a working committee to address a related issue. Later in this chapter, we discuss considerations for repurposing existing working groups for collaborative work.

*Note that much of the information in this chapter was adapted from materials provided by the ABC Federation of Teachers at its West Coast Institute, and from the Catalyst for Educational Change's Labor Management Collaboration Resource Guidebook. (Used with permission.)*

## District Leadership Team (DLT)

The District Leadership Team (DLT) addresses district-wide problem-solving, supports school-level collaboration, and helps integrate school-based collaboration with broader student-centered district initiatives. DLT members learn together and listen to and reflect on the school-based work in order to improve teaching effectiveness and student learning. Research has shown that



an effective DLT acts as a catalyst for school-level collaboration.

The DLT provides opportunities to model and support a culture of collaboration where all stakeholders are engaged in building a system focused on continuous improvement and student-centered outcomes.

Establishing a leadership team is often an early step in establishing a productive partnership.

Although, sometimes the opposite is true: a joint education stakeholder task force or working committee is established to address a specific problem, and their success breeds a desire to continue working together in more systemic, lasting ways, thus spawning a new leadership team to coordinate future efforts. Either way, trust is established over time between the education association/union, district administrators, and other stakeholders by building a history of promises kept. This allows the structures that support long-term, sustainable collaboration to be expanded and codified.

When collaboration begins at the district level, the initial partners form the backbone of the District Leadership Team. If this is the case for you and your partners, it is time to consider the ongoing functions of this group and to consider whether you need additional people on the leadership team.

## District Leadership Team Membership

A District Leadership Team is usually co-chaired by a district administrator and an association/union leader. Additional team members should be jointly identified by the administration and the education association/union. Consider:

- DLT members from the school district typically include administrators from major district departments such as curriculum and instruction, human resources, and/or student support services
- Association/union representatives may include the president, vice president, treasurer and/or other leaders, executive committee members, negotiations committee members, and members from other committees focused on improving professional practice
- If the partnership includes both district- and school-level leadership teams, some School Leadership Team members may serve as liaisons to the DLT to improve communication and coordination of projects across the district
- Other school-level representatives may include principals, assistant principals, educators, and union/association representatives.
- The District Leadership Team may also include representatives of student, parent, or community groups, such as the student council, PTA, local businesses, and local community, civil rights, and social justice organizations. These representatives can provide important insight into school and student needs, as well as what is working and not working in the district.



When considering who should serve on the DLT, as well as for other teams and committees, be intentional about including a broad range of affected stakeholders: those reflecting the community affected by the issue, and individuals with diverse experience and various backgrounds.

## District Leadership Team Functions

A District Leadership Team can have multiple potential functions:

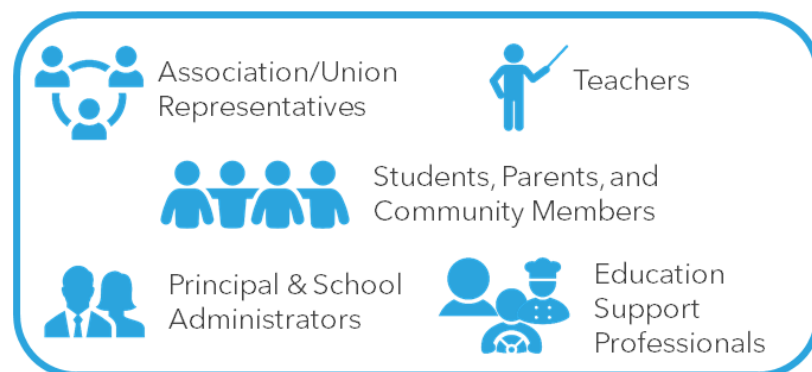
- Modeling and supporting a culture of collaboration
- Encouraging active engagement of the education association/union, district, and school communities
- Identifying district needs
- Forming project-based working committees to address district-level projects
- Commissioning School Leadership Teams and advising them on collaboration skills and project management
- Supporting School Leadership Teams and district-level working committees. For example, DLTs may provide access to subject-matter experts or facilitators, supply relevant district data, and/or arrange for training on collaborative processes.
- Tracking and monitoring district-wide progress and documenting lessons learned
- Communicating system-wide about goals, accomplishments, challenges, and best practices

By catalyzing and supporting the school-level working committees, District Leadership Teams play a vital role in a sustained, deeply embedded culture of collaboration that helps sustain and spread the student-centered outcomes.



**Start Somewhere:** You're unlikely to be able to include all stakeholders and take on all of these functions at the outset and that's OK. You can start somewhere by inviting and encouraging diverse participation, and as a group decide what your DLT's initial responsibilities will include. Your DLT can grow over time.

## School Leadership Teams (SLTs)



School Leadership Teams (SLTs) are the agent for school change. They identify school environment and student learning goals and establish and support the school-level working committees, who actively build solutions to school-related issues.

School Leadership Teams should be co-chaired by the school principal

and an education association/union representative, who jointly identify and encourage other educators and stakeholders to be part of the team. The SLT's work is supported by the DLT.

## School Leadership Team Membership

In addition to the principal and association/union representative, other SLT members might include the assistant principal or other administration representatives, grade level and content area representatives, education support professionals, students, parents, and community members.

When forming a school leadership team, be intentional about thinking beyond "the usual suspects," to include diverse populations and those who may typically be underrepresented.

## School Leadership Team Functions

School Leadership Teams may have multiple potential functions:

- Establishing and communicating a shared school vision
- Engaging broad and deep participation from stakeholder groups to solve problems, develop strategies, carry out projects, and realize goals
- Setting the direction for the school, consistent with school and district goals, and communicating progress
- Learning about collaboration's benefits, structures, and processes
- Identifying school environment and student learning goals to support student success
- Forming and supporting project-based working committees to address student-centered priorities
- Encouraging school employee participation on committees and on school improvement projects
- Advising working committees on collaboration skills and project management
- Collecting and analyzing student learning data and school climate data to support working committee projects
- Communicating and sharing progress with the DLT and within the school community



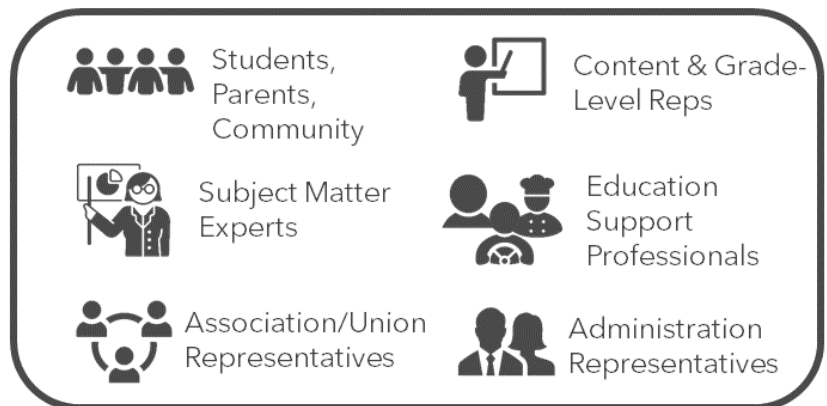
### School Leadership Team FAQs:

**Do we need an SLT at every school?** Over time, having an SLT at every school is a worthwhile goal. If your district does not already have distributed leadership structures at every school, start with one school or a few targeted schools that can support your district-level shared goals. *Map Existing Working Groups: School Level (Activity 5C)* includes some guiding questions for identifying good candidate schools to start with.

**We already have leadership teams in our schools. Can we use them as SLTs?** An existing team can be a good place to start. Consider the team's composition: to be an example of labor-management collaboration, it is important that the SLT includes an association/union representative from the building and that the principal and the association/union rep jointly agree to the process by which the other SLT members are identified and encouraged to participate. Also consider how this team currently functions. Do they exhibit collaborative behaviors? The *Putting It All Together* section, later in this chapter, includes some considerations for re-purposing existing groups as collaborative structures.

## Working Committees

Working committees are the fundamental working groups of labor-management collaboration, in that they design and implement the specific projects intended to impact student success and move the school or district closer to the partnership's goals. Working committees are formed around specific issues or initiatives, and they use shared decision-making and other collaborative processes to develop and implement their collaborative projects.



School-level working committees address school-level challenges and are supported by their SLT, while district-level working committees address district-level challenges and are supported by the DLT.

### Working Committee Membership

District-level working committee members may differ from those at the school level, and the specific topic or issue being addressed may also affect who is included.



At the district level, in addition to district administrators and education association/union leaders, working committees may include students, parents, and/or community representatives.

School-level working committees might include grade-level or subject-specific classroom teachers, instructional leaders, education support professionals and other educators, school-level administration representatives, students, parents, and/or community representatives.

At both the school and district levels, working committees should include those with a specific interest in the issue at hand, those with expertise on the issue, and those most impacted by the issue to help ensure that those who are most knowledgeable and closest to the issue are helping to craft solutions.

## Working Committee Functions

Working committees can take on several potential functions:

- Examining data to fully understand the issue and its impact
- Working together to identify and realize student-centered goals and objectives
- Communicating with their leadership team and other working committees about their work
- Creating a project plan and monitoring their work

## Potential Working Committee Topics

Working committees can be formed to address any issue or topic that supports the overarching district or school student-centered goals. Possible school-level working committee topics might include:

- Homework policies
- Social-emotional learning
- Teacher peer review and support
- Professional development
- Mentoring

District-level working committees might work on topics such as:

- School boundaries
- Curriculum selection
- Staffing
- Alternative high school programs
- Technology systems

In order to set specific and realistic goals and objectives, working committees often need to refine or limit the scope of their committee's broad goal by engaging and listening to those impacted and gathering relevant data. *Define Content for Collaboration*, Chapter 6, is designed to guide working committees through this process.



**Start Somewhere:** You'll develop your structure of working committees and leadership teams over time. It's important to start somewhere - having a full structure of DLT, SLTs, and working committees in place is not a prerequisite to begin. The next section can help you start identifying and creating the teams and committees that make the most sense for your partnership.

## Putting It All Together

A one-page overview of the considerations for the District Leadership Team, School Leadership Teams, and working committees is shown on the following page for your reference. When designing your collaborative teams and committees, think about your areas of shared interest, your overarching content goals, and any existing teams or committees that might be a good starting point for a collaborative team or committee.

Remember that education partnerships have inherent flexibility - you are building collaborative structures that reflect your context and system. As such, you may have a less rigid system of structures than that shown here. For example, leadership teams may take on their own projects, essentially functioning as both a leadership team and a working committee. Collaborative committees may form organically in response to a school-based issue, in addition to those convened by a leadership team. As always, adjust the models presented here to fit your partnership.

This section provides some considerations for repurposing existing teams and committees for collaborative work and an example of how one highly successful collaborative school district has structured their leadership teams and working committees.

### Repurposing Existing Teams and Committees

Not all collaborative teams and committees need to be created from scratch. For example, if one of your overarching content goals addresses post-secondary success, an existing academic planning committee might be a good starting point for a working committee to address the issue.

The most important consideration for repurposing an existing group is: Do we think the group is capable of authentic collaboration? Revisit the collaborative attributes in *Commit to Collaborate* (Chapter 4) and honestly evaluate if the group you're considering can function inclusively and collaboratively. If the answer is yes, consider which additional stakeholders should be added to make the group more representative of those involved, those impacted, and those with expertise and/or a special interest in the issue. If the answer is no, it might be more effective to convene a new group.



## Collaborative Structures Summary

### District Leadership Team

**Possible Members:**



Association/Union Leaders



District Dept. Representatives



School-Level Representatives



Student, Parent, and Community Group Representatives



District Administrators

**Possible Functions:**

- Model and support a collaborative culture
- Encourage active engagement of the education union or association, district, and school communities
- Identify district needs
- Form working committees to address district-level projects
- Commission School Leadership Teams
- Advise SLTs on project progress and collaboration skills
- Support SLTs and working committees by providing access to subject-matter expertise, facilitation, etc.
- Track and monitor district-wide progress, document lessons learned
- System-wide communications about goals, accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned

### School Leadership Team

**Possible Members:**



Association /Union Representatives



Students, Parents, and Community Members



Principal & School Administrators



Education Support Professionals



Teachers

**Possible Functions:**

- Establish and communicate a shared school vision
- Engage broad and deep participation from stakeholder groups to realize goals
- Set the direction for the school, consistent with school and district goals
- Learn about collaboration's benefits, structures, and processes
- Identify projects and priorities to support student success
- Form and support working committees to address student-centered priorities
- Encourage school employee participation in committees and on school improvement projects
- Advise working committees on project progress and collaboration skills
- Collect and analyze student and school climate data to support working committee projects
- Communicate and share progress with the DLT and within the school community

### Working Committee

**Possible Members:**



Administration Representatives



Students, Parents, Community



Content & Grade-Level Reps



Association/Union Representatives



Subject Matter Experts



Education Support Professionals

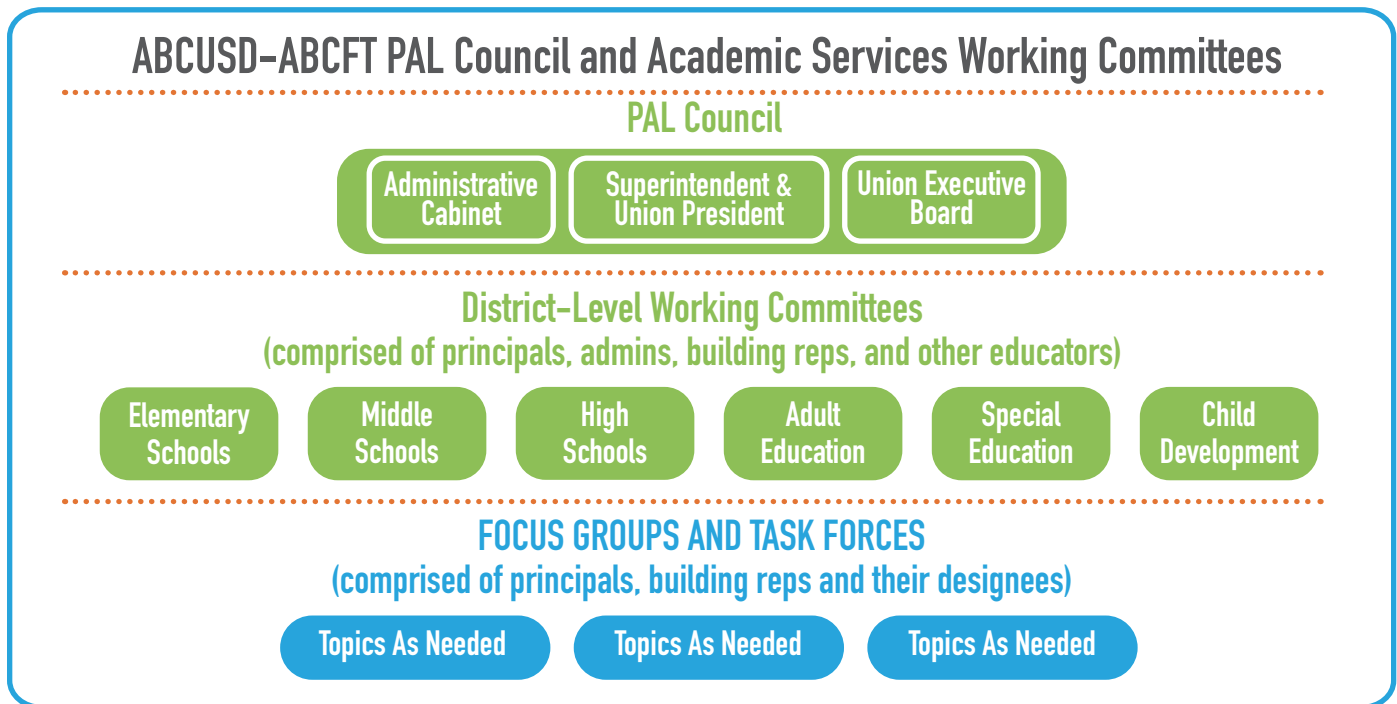
**Possible Functions:**

- Establish a shared teaching and learning vision
- Craft project goals, objectives, and project plans
- Work together to realize student-centered goals
- Communicate with the SLT, other working committees, and the DLT about the progress of their work
- Strive to meet their project deliverables within their designated timeframe

**Example: ABC Unified**

The following graphics show the structures for district-level collaboration in the ABC Unified School District, located about 25 miles southeast of Los Angeles. ABC Unified School District (ABCUSD) and its union, the ABC Federation of Teachers (ABCFT), are pioneers in sustained collaborative education partnerships and their successes have provided much research data and best practices. Their partnership has been able to withstand several superintendent and union president changes over the years because the collaboration structures are codified into lasting agreements and because the partnership fostered such a culture of working together that both the education union members and the school board intentionally seek out collaboratively-minded individuals when hiring or electing their leaders.

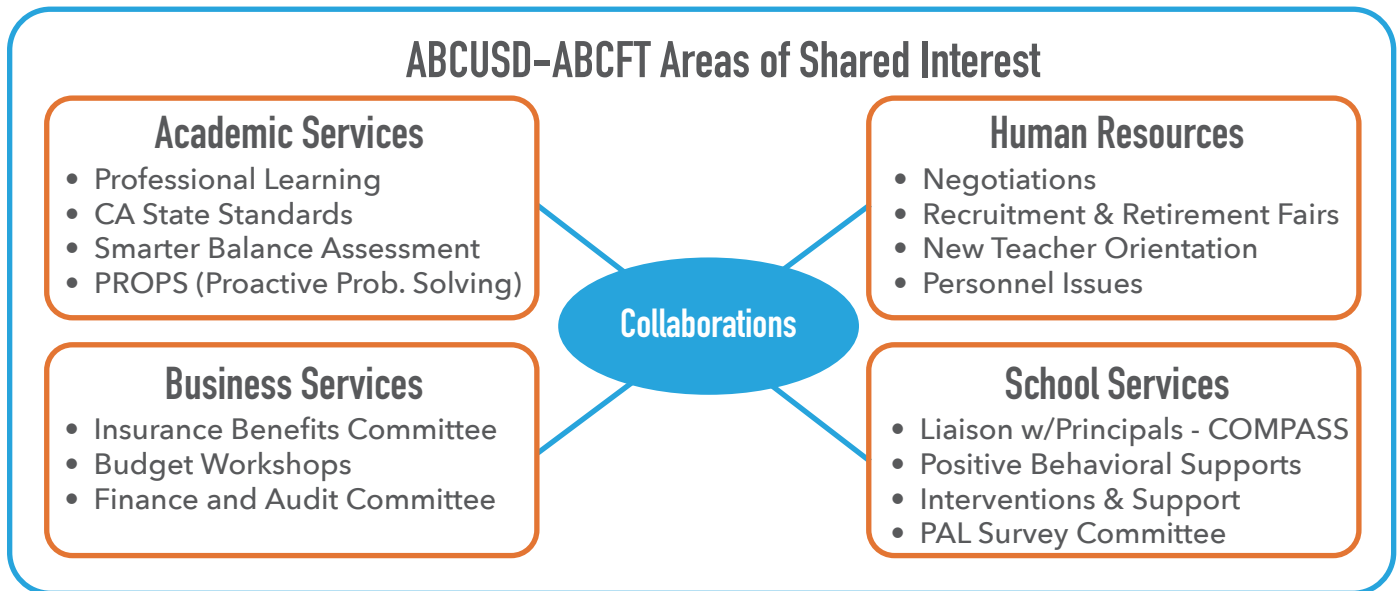
They call their District Leadership Team structure the PAL Council, where PAL stands for Partnership between Administration and Labor. It is made up of the superintendent and her administrative cabinet, and the union president and his executive board.



The partners have agreed to routinely collaborate on four broad areas of shared interest: academic services, human resources, business services, and school services, as illustrated on the following page.

Beginning with their shared interests in mind allowed ABC to create structures that made sense to support the work in each of these four interest areas. Within the Academic Services area, for example, they established district-level working committees on six key focus areas: elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, adult education, special education, and child development. Additional district-level committees are created as needed, on a variety of topics.

## ABCUSD–ABCFT Areas of Shared Interest



### Consider & Discuss: Collaborative Structures

Now that you understand the basic collaborative structures and you've seen an example, consider what these structures might look like in your context. Think about the following questions. You can record your responses on Activity 5A.

- What committees or other working groups already exist in our system, and at what levels?
- How do these existing groups align with our partnership's identified overarching content goals?
- Do these existing groups currently function collaboratively?
- What additional teams and committees should we create over time to address our shared goals?

## Chapter Summary

There are many stakeholder groups that make up a robust and comprehensive collaborative partnership. District Leadership Teams are usually comprised of the superintendent, association/union president, and other key leaders from district administration, the education association/union, and the community. School Leadership Teams are usually comprised of the principal, building representative(s), and other educators that they jointly select. These leadership teams oversee the partnership and support working committees as they design and implement their projects.

Just as setting overarching goals helps guide your partnership's work, visualizing a larger overall structure of leadership teams and committees helps keep these structures aligned as your partnership grows and develops.



# Activities To Help You Create Collaborative Structures



## About These Activities

With a basic understanding of the District Leadership Team, School Leadership Teams, and working committees, it's time to design and create your own. To help in this process, the activities in this section ask you to consider the collaborative structures you may already have in place, brainstorm what a comprehensive system of teams and committees might look like in your system, and help ensure that your partnership has included all relevant stakeholders.

## Activities

- **Consider & Discuss: Collaborative Structures**, Activity 5A, can lead you and your partners through some initial thinking about collaborative teams and committees in your district or school.
- Activity 5B, **Map Your Working Groups: District Level** asks you to think about your district-level shared goals and consider if there are existing committees or other groups that could form the basis of a collaborative team or committee. You'll want to revisit your shared goals, and keep them in mind as you think about establishing a District Leadership Team and district-level working committees.
- If your partnership has identified school-level shared goals, **Map Your Working Groups: School Level**, Activity 5C, presents a similar exercise for forming School Leadership Teams and working committees, and includes some considerations for identifying good candidate schools to start with.
- You can use the **Collaborative Structure Worksheet**, Activity 5D, to guide a more forward-looking discussion: in an ideal world, what would you want your structure of collaborative teams and committees to look like?



# Consider & Discuss: Collaborative Structures

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spent 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



What committees or other working groups already exist in our system, and at what levels?

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How do these existing groups align with our partnership's identified overarching content goals?

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Do these existing groups currently function collaboratively?

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What additional teams and committees should we create over time to address our shared goals?

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# 5B: Map Your Working Groups

## The District Level

**PURPOSE**

This tool can help you think through who should be represented on your DLT, consider the district-level working committee(s) that might be needed to address specific aspects of your overarching district content goal(s), and identify schools where you want to implement collaborative structures and processes.

### INSTRUCTIONS: Part 1- Brainstorm DLT Members

Knowing what you now know about District Leadership Teams, enter the names of any individuals you'd like to join you as part of the DLT in the spaces below. Remember that a strong leadership team composition includes leaders and representatives from administration, the education association/union, school boards, and parent and community groups, particularly those representing historically marginalized populations. Use the table below to help you consider the stakeholders who should be encouraged to participate on your DLT.

**Represented Stakeholder Group or POV**

**Potential DLT Member**




## 5B: Map Your Working Groups: The District Level (cont'd)

### INSTRUCTIONS: Part 2– Map Your Working Committees

Use this part of the tool to: revisit your shared content goals; brainstorm the working committees you'd like to see addressing each goal; consider if there are existing committees or task groups that would be good candidates to take on this collaborative work, or if a new working committee is needed. Use a separate worksheet for each shared goal or working group.

**Shared Goal/Focus Area of Working Group:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Map Out the Working Group To Tackle That Goal

Is there an existing working group that might take on this work? If so, do they currently function collaboratively? Are participants capable of authentic collaboration? If you think they are, continue with the questions below. If not, it may be advisable to convene a new team or committee.

For this existing group, who is included? Who else should be included? Beyond the group's members, should other modifications be made? (Such as to their scope, purpose, methods, meeting frequency, etc.)





## 5B: Map Your Working Groups: The District Level (cont'd)

### INSTRUCTIONS: Part 3 – Select Your Schools

Select the school(s) where you'll establish collaborative structures. Consider and discuss the following in making your selections.

Do our shared goal affect all schools, or just some?

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Do we want to implement SLTs at several schools to encourage cross-pollination of ideas and solutions, or pilot with one school first?

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Which schools already have a collaborative atmosphere that would make them good candidates for this work?

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# 5C: Map Your Working Groups

## The School Level

**PURPOSE**

This tool can help you think through who should be represented on your SLT, and consider the school-level working committee(s) that might be needed to address specific aspects of your school’s content goal(s).

**School Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

### INSTRUCTIONS: Part 1– Brainstorm SLT Members

As with the DLTs, a strong leadership team composition includes leaders and representatives from administration, the education association/union, school boards, and parent and community groups, particularly those representing historically marginalized populations. Use the table below to help you consider the stakeholders who should be encouraged to participate on your SLT.

**Represented Stakeholder Group or POV**

**Potential SLT Member**

Represented Stakeholder Group or POV	Potential SLT Member



## 5C: Map Your Working Groups: The School Level (cont'd)

### INSTRUCTIONS: Part 2- Map Your Working Committees

Use this part of the tool to: revisit your shared goals; brainstorm the working committees you'd like to see addressing each goal; consider if there are existing committees or task groups that would be good candidates to take on this collaborative work, or if a new working committee is needed. Use a separate worksheet for each shared goal or working group.

**Shared Goal/Focus Area of Working Group:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Map Out the Working Group To Tackle That Goal

Is there an existing working group that might take on this work? If so, do they currently function collaboratively? Are participants capable of authentic collaboration? If you think they are, continue with the questions below. If not, it may be advisable to convene a new team or committee.

For this existing group, who is included? Who else should be included? Beyond the group's members, should other modifications be made? (Such as to their scope, purpose, methods, meeting frequency, etc.)



# 5D: Collaborative Structures Worksheet

## PURPOSE

Previous tools asked you to examine your existing structures - how you might get started by using some of your in-place committees for collaborative work. This tool can help you brainstorm what a more complete collaborative structure might look like in your system, and get you started creating new teams and working committees.

## PART 1 INSTRUCTIONS:

Use the sample chart of collaborative structures below as a guide to draw your existing structures, then consider what additional teams or committees you might want to establish. Draw your chart on the next page.

### District Leadership Team

**Working Committee**  
Focus Area:  
Elem & Middle Schools  
(existing)

**Working Committee**  
Focus Area:  
High Schools  
(existing)

**Working Committee**  
Focus Area:  
Child Development  
(existing)

**Working Committee**  
Focus Area:  
Adult Education  
(new)

**Working Committee**  
Focus Area:  
ELA Proficiency  
(new)

### Oakwood MS Leadership Team

**Working Committee**  
Focus Area:  
Professional Development  
(existing)

**Working Committee**  
Focus Area:  
ELA  
(existing)

**Working Committee**  
Focus Area:  
School Climate  
(new)

*What do our current structures look like?*

*What's missing?*



## 5D: Collaborative Structures Worksheet (cont'd)

Now draw your own!



## 5D: Collaborative Structures Worksheet (cont'd)

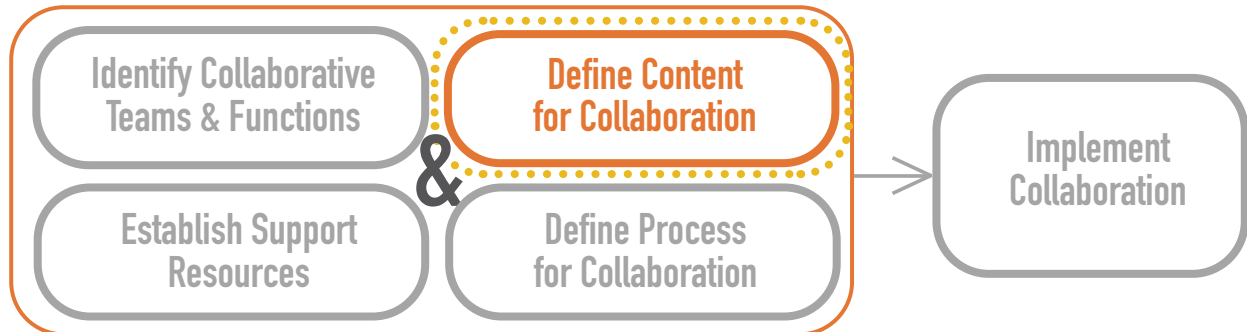
### PART 2 INSTRUCTIONS:

For any new leadership teams or working committees that you identified in Part 1, use the table below to consider who should be represented on each team or committee. Consider those impacted by the issue, as well as those with expertise and/or interest in the issue.

New Structure Name	Who Should Be Included?

## Chapter 6:

# Define Content for Collaboration



This chapter helps working committees define the scope of their project, set an attainable and measurable goal and objectives for their collaborative project, and develop a project plan to help implement the work and track progress.

[This chapter is intended for district-level and school-level working committees.](#)

### Contents:

Introduction

Deciding What To Work On, Exactly:

- Using Data To Refine Your Project
- Root Cause Analysis

Project Design:

- Defining a Goal & Objectives
- Creating a Project Plan

Next Steps

Activities To Help You Define Content for Collaboration



## Introduction

As a collaborative working committee, you are the fundamental working group of your system's collaborative partnership. You'll design and carry out projects to address a specific challenge, and your work will support overarching student-centered goals in your school or district.

As you begin, you may need to narrow the scope of your committee's overarching goal using data and analysis to identify areas of greatest need, and define the underlying causes you want to address. You'll use that insight to design a relevant project with a defined goal and objectives, then create a project plan to help you carry out the work. This clear game plan helps you achieve your goal by defining exactly what needs to be done and ensuring that everyone is moving in the same direction to complete the work.

To help make that happen, this chapter introduces processes and tools to help your committee refine the scope of your project, define a goal and specific, achievable project objectives, and develop a project plan to help you implement and track the work. By the end of this chapter, you'll be well on your way to beginning your first collaborative project!



## Deciding What To Work on, Exactly

Whether your working committee has come together to address a known issue in your school or a broader district-level issue, you will likely need to hone in on a particular aspect of the issue that is meaningful and attainable. For example, a school-level working committee formed to address early elementary reading proficiency may decide to focus on the reading curriculum or on instructional time. This section provides guidance on defining the scope of your work, using data to further refine your project, and using root cause analysis to better understand the issue and help you start to hone in on a specific aspect to address in your collaborative project.

Whatever your topic, you should set yourself up for success by selecting a project with a high likelihood of success. This is especially important if this is your first time using collaborative processes (those are covered in more detail in *Define Process for Collaboration*, Chapter 8). Successes built from smaller projects can be scaled up, and more challenging problems can be addressed as your collaboration matures.



**Start Somewhere:** A first-time working committee should not try to solve all the woes of the system, but rather tackle an issue that affects students, is aligned with the committee's broad goal, and ideally is not controversial. Begin with a project that is within your reach and capacity. The starting point can be any project that supports your overarching goal and is under your committee's control.

## Using Data To Refine Your Project

It's essential at this point to analyze your committee's purpose to understand how your school or district is impacted and to identify what's causing the issue at hand. You'll use this evaluation to decide which specific aspect of the issue to focus on first.



A good first step is to gather data to help you better understand the underlying situation. This data may already exist in your system, or you may need to conduct some sort of needs assessment to gather it.

**Existing Data:** Depending on your issue, your district or school may already have information that could help inform your committee's work. Existing data might include: school and district report cards; student proficiency data in various subjects; an existing school climate survey; teacher retention rates by grade, subject, and years of experience; suspension/discipline rates by grade and subgroup; or AP/Honors course enrollment by subgroup.

subject, and years of experience; suspension/discipline rates by grade and subgroup; or AP/Honors course enrollment by subgroup.

In addition, if your leadership team gathered data to help define their overarching goals, make sure your committee has access to it. This information can be used with other data to assess and identify needs.

**Needs Assessments:** In addition to existing data, a needs assessment can be used to gather new or additional information. A needs assessment is a listening mechanism that allows you to gather stakeholders' input about what they believe are the most pressing needs in your system. It allows stakeholders such as educators, students, and the community to offer input about your school system's needs. *Discover Shared Goals*, Chapter 3, contains detailed information on various types of needs assessments, as well as guidance and a tool to help you prioritize which needs to address first.

Often, an initial needs assessment helps identify an issue or problem, but additional information is needed to better understand the issue and refine it into a specific initiative or project. A needs assessment tool not previously covered in Chapter 3 is the NEA Opportunity Audit. The audit is a deep dive into a school's opportunities for students, rooted in NEA's seven Great Public Schools criteria. Use it to help your committee evaluate policies and programs. The NEA Opportunity Audit is available online at [nea.org/resource-library/opportunity-audit](http://nea.org/resource-library/opportunity-audit).



**"We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them."**

**- Albert Einstein**

**What Data Do We Need?** Your committee's purpose or issue is the primary determinant of whether you'll use existing data, conduct a needs assessment, or some combination of the two. For example:

- A school-level working committee formed to improve math proficiency might want to review math data by grade. This analysis may indicate that math proficiency falls off in ninth grade, so they may decide to focus there first.
- A committee whose purpose is improving school climate may want to survey or hold focus groups with students, educators, administrators, and parents to identify areas of common concern. These surveys may identify one or more specific needs, such as positive discipline procedures, increased emphasis on student safety, or more collaborative lesson planning time for teachers.



### Consider & Discuss: Refining Your Issue

To help your committee refine your issue, consider the following questions individually, then discuss each participant's reactions as a group. You can record your responses on Activity 6A at the end of this chapter.

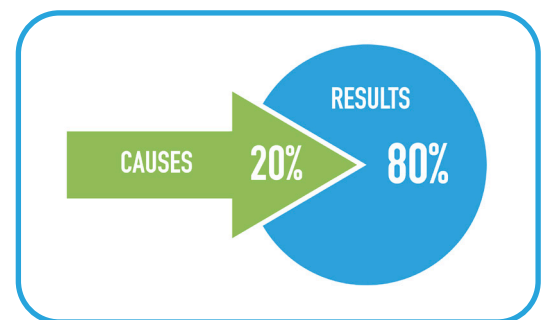
- What aspects of our committee's purpose or issue are most compelling to us?
- What aspects do we have the ability to influence?
- What information or data might we need to help us decide what to work on first?
- What are the best ways to gather that data?

When you're finished with the activity, your committee should gather any data or information you identified as being relevant to refining your issue. Remember to use the resources in *Discover Shared Goals*, Chapter 3, to help you gather data and prioritize your results.

### Root Cause Analysis

Depending on the specific problem, challenge, or issue you identified, your committee may need to dig a little deeper to help identify the best way to address it. The Pareto principle states that for many occurrences, 80% of results come from 20% of the causes. By concentrating on the root of your most significant cause, therefore, you'll maximize your project's impact.

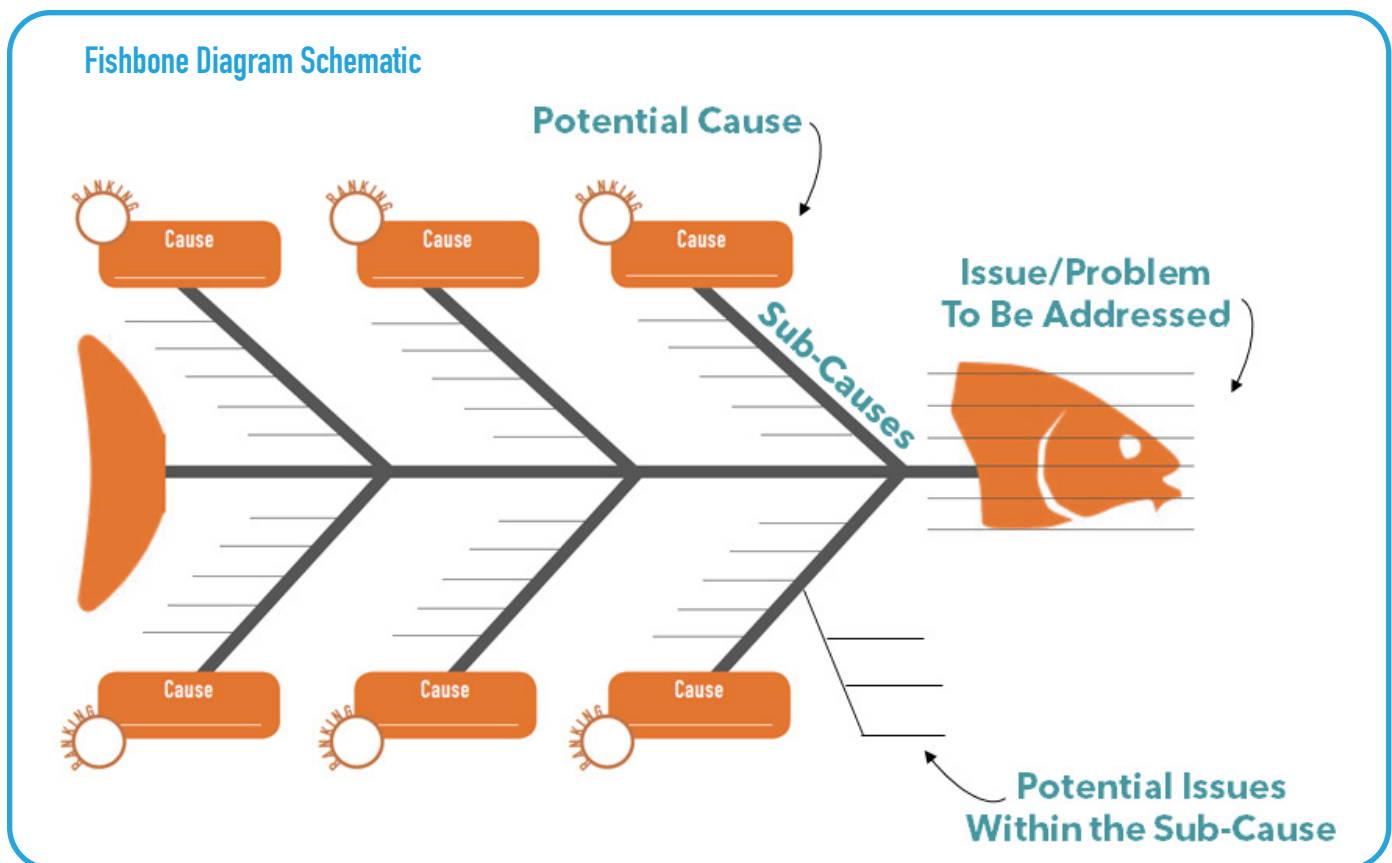
A root cause analysis or other diagnostic exercise can be useful to help your committee think through the underlying causes of your issue, determine which causes are most significantly contributing to your issue, and select one underlying cause to address first. In other words, exploring *why* you think a problem exists allows you to identify *what* you want to focus your work on.



The fishbone or Ishikawa diagram is a visual root cause analysis tool that can help your committee brainstorm and understand what’s causing the identified problem in your system, and focus on the most significant causes. Addressing the underlying causes means you’re more likely to successfully solve the problem. This is a collaborative problem-solving technique that identifies the causes of known problems or issues and works to solve them, instead of simply treating the symptoms.

A fishbone analysis can allow committee members to create a shared understanding of what's causing a particular issue, and help identify more targeted causes to focus on to resolve it. It works best when the team can base its root cause discussion on current data and accurate information on the topic. This approach keeps attention on the issues themselves and removes any kind of guessing, blaming, or faulting others, in a way that leads to meaningful, actionable goals and objectives.

To conduct a fishbone analysis, begin by writing the problem at the head of the fish, then defining broad categories that might be contributing to the problem. These categories will likely vary with the problem being addressed, and might include things like instructional materials, pedagogy, staffing, or scheduling. Within each category, participants brainstorm underlying sub-causes that might be contributing factors, and in some cases, those sub-causes can be broken down further to identify potential issues within a sub-cause. Committee members can use the results to better understand the problem as a whole and perhaps select a sub-cause to address. A fishbone analysis tool is included as Activity 6B at the end of this chapter.

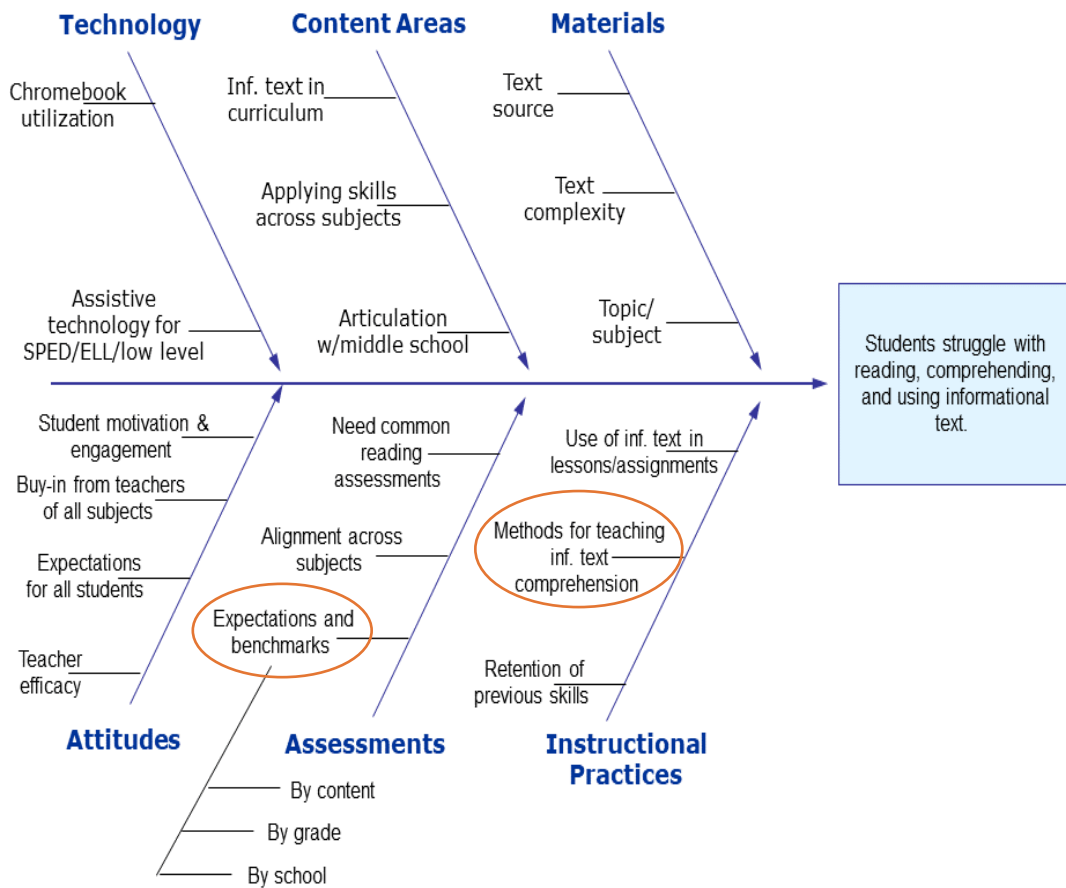


### Illustration: Maisie School District

Imagine that the fictional Maisie School District wants to address student performance on writing assessments. They used teacher-collected data and an analysis of their state learning assessments to identify that their high school students were struggling to read, comprehend, and interpret informational text in history, language arts, and science. The District Leadership Team convened a working committee to explore the issue and develop potential solutions to address it.

The working committee used a fishbone analysis to brainstorm possible underlying reasons and discuss how impactful the various root causes might be. They identified six broad areas that might be impacting their students' proficiency with informational text: technology, content areas, materials, attitudes, assessments, and instructional practices. Then, they brainstormed underlying sub-causes in each area. See their completed fishbone below.

They ultimately decided to focus on teaching methods and a lack of consistent benchmarks for evaluating proficiency as two areas that can impact the issue and are within the committee's purview to address.



## Project Design

Now that you have explored your issue's underlying causes, it's time to determine what you want to achieve by defining your project goal and objectives. Having well-defined goals and objectives increases the likelihood of success by focusing all team members in the same direction, providing a common motivation, and clarifying what work needs to be done to achieve the goal. Goals and objectives are the roadmap for a successful collaborative team journey.

### Defining a Goal and Objectives

Your goal states what your committee wants to achieve. It describes what will be accomplished or produced by the end of the project. All committee members should agree that the goal is important and be committed to working towards it. Your committee's goal should align with visions your school, administration, and/or district have to support student success.

A goal is stated in terms of the desired outcome within a designated timeframe. For example, a working committee convened to address teacher turnover might look at data showing that the highest teacher turnover is among third and fourth-year teachers and decide to focus on increasing support for this group. Their goal might read, "By the end of the year, at least 80% of third and fourth grade teachers will have been offered extended mentoring opportunities."

To define your goal, start with your work earlier in this chapter, where you used data and analysis to gain a better understanding of your issue and the aspects you want to address. Then, articulate exactly what you hope to accomplish and set a timeframe to complete the project. There are several tools at the end of this chapter that can help you with this process.

If goals tell you what you want to achieve, objectives tell you exactly how to get there. Well-written objectives increase the likelihood of achieving your goal by dividing the goal into smaller more manageable steps, and defining exactly what work needs to take place. Depending on your goal, you may or may not need to dig deeper before you can define specific objectives to help you reach your goal.



A **goal** describes what you want to accomplish, what results you want to achieve, or what outcomes you want to see at the end of the project.



Well-written **objectives** define how your committee plans to reach each goal. Objectives describe what steps will be taken, when they'll be completed, and the criteria for measuring that completion.



Each objective should reflect a step needed to achieve the goal, the timeframe for completing each step, and the criteria for measuring success. Well-designed objectives should be:

- **Specific** - clearly identify what will be done, and what you want to accomplish. Specific objectives make it easier to define tasks and what success looks like.
- **Pertinent** - ensure the objective is based on the stated goal. Pertinent objectives, when achieved, bring you closer to achieving your overall goal.
- **Realistic** - ensure the results can realistically be achieved given available resources and capabilities. Realistic objectives improve the likelihood of success.
- **Data-Informed** - ensure that results can be evaluated in terms of quantity, quality, frequency, etc. Data-informed objectives allow you to define and track progress towards success.
- **Time-Bound** - specify when the objective will be met. Time-bound objectives provide an incentive to complete the task and a way to evaluate progress.

Note that one common criticism of the criteria outlined above is that it stifles out-of-the-box thinking and results in narrow, limited goals and objectives. Some people prefer BHAGs instead: Big Hairy Audacious Goals (Collins & Porras, 1997). Still others advocate for HARD goals: Heartfelt, Animated, Required, and Difficult (Murphy, 2010). We maintain that both ways of thinking and planning have value. It is, indeed, worthwhile to set lofty goals and have high expectations for ourselves. Our students depend on it. At the same time, the educators and administrators on your working committee are likely already very busy and thus the committee's objectives need to be realistic about limited time and resources. Smaller successes breed larger successes.

In this Guidebook, we balance the tension between aspiration and attainability by applying these criteria at the objective level, rather than the goal level. That way, the goals can be lofty, but the objectives still result in an attainable sequence of strategies to get across the finish line.

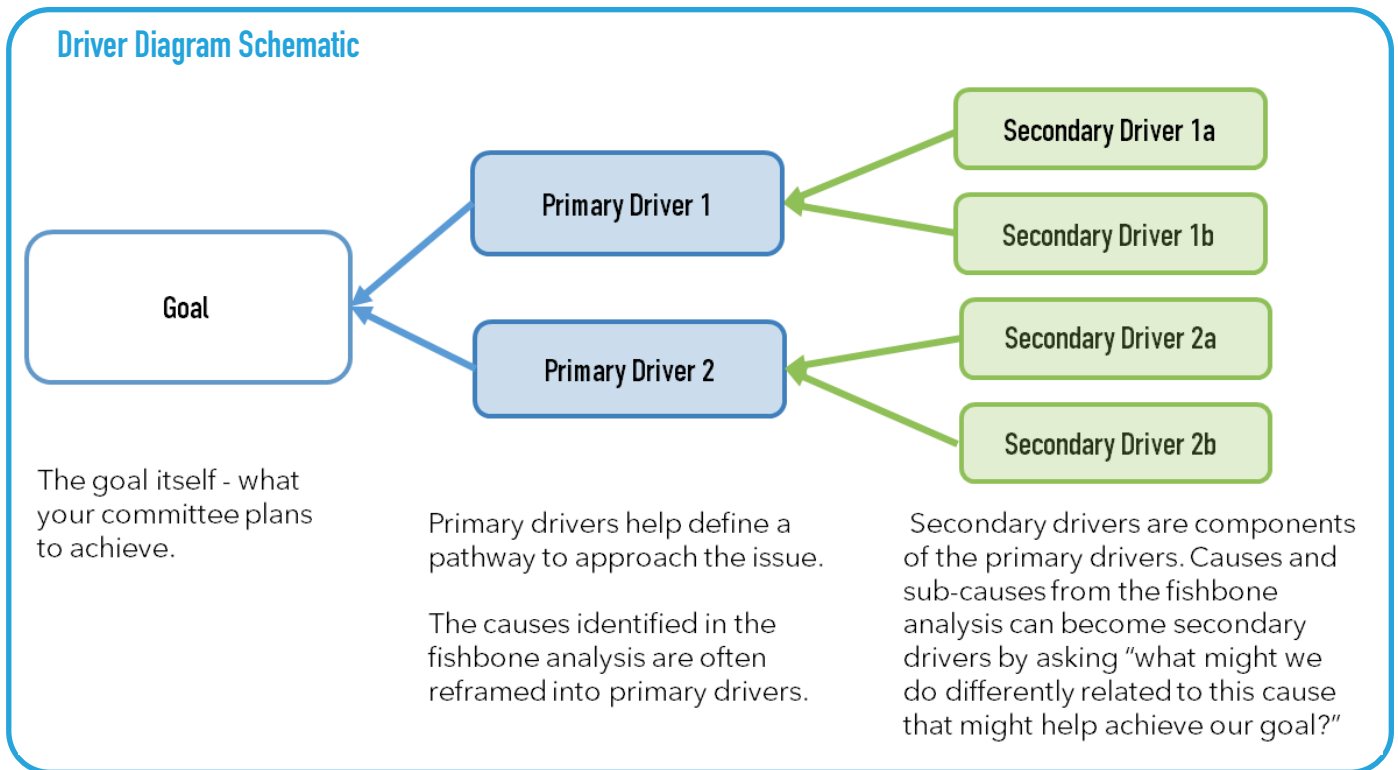
**Using a Driver Diagram to Define Objectives:** Sometimes, a working committee goal is relatively straightforward, such as selecting a new curriculum. In this case, committee members may feel confident defining good objectives without the need for further analysis.

Not all project goals lend themselves to clear-cut objectives, however. As your committee takes on more complex issues, you may want to perform additional analyses to help you create well-defined objectives. One way to help define objectives is to develop a driver diagram for your issue. Whereas a fishbone analysis helps explore underlying causes or factors contributing to the issue at hand, a driver diagram helps turn that causal understanding into specific, actionable solutions.

A "driver" is a hypothesis - an educated guess about where the issue's solution might lie. It becomes the main idea of the collaborative project. A driver diagram typically has three types of components, as illustrated on the following page.

Consider the Maisie School District example introduced earlier in this chapter. They used a fishbone analysis to decide to focus on teaching methods and consistent benchmarks for evaluating proficiency as avenues to impact their overall goal around high school student





informational text proficiency. The illustration on the following page shows how they might use a driver diagram to help craft objectives in each of these areas.

More detailed information on using tools such as the fishbone and driver diagrams can be found in:

- *Improvement Science Handbook*, NYC Department of Education, [weteachnyc.org/resources/resource/nycdoe-improvement-science-handbook/](http://weteachnyc.org/resources/resource/nycdoe-improvement-science-handbook/)
- *Root Cause Analysis Toolkit*, California Department of Education, [cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/documents/contimprct.doc](http://cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/documents/contimprct.doc)

### Creating a Project Plan

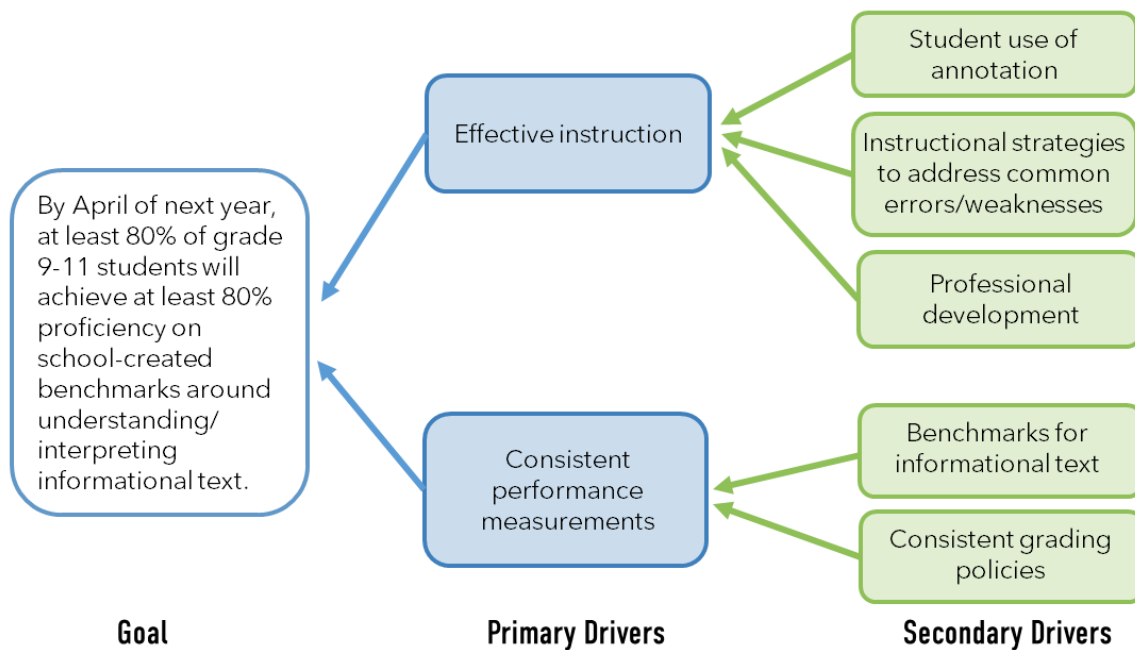
With a clear goal and solid objectives in place, it's time to plan how you'll achieve each objective. A project plan can help your committee identify the activities, tasks, resources, milestones, and timeframes needed to accomplish each objective. Your project plan helps you monitor progress and determine when certain buckets of work have been completed.

The project plan starts with your committee's goal and objectives. For each objective, you'll outline the activities and tasks needed to meet the objective. Then, think through the resources needed to complete each task, who will be responsible, when it should be completed, and any output or metrics associated with the task.

When defining tasks, keep in mind that completing the tasks should ultimately realize the objective, just as the completed objectives achieve the goal. So, think carefully through what is needed to reach each objective.

### Illustration: Maisie School District

Consider the Maisie School District working committee that we introduced earlier. This working committee was formed to address students' ability to read, comprehend, and interpret informational text, and their fishbone analysis led them to focus on instructional practices and consistent evaluation. From this work, they defined a working committee goal of: "By April of next year, at least 80% of grade 9-11 students will achieve at least 80% proficiency on school-created benchmarks around understanding/interpreting informational text." The diagram below shows how this committee's driver diagram might look.



The secondary drivers can be reworded to become the project objectives:

- By January of this year, prepare guides for various annotation types and distribute to each grade-level team.
- By May of this year, teachers will have access to instructional professional development on reading varied texts.
- By May of this year, each school will design grade- and subject-specific benchmark assessments on the use of informational text.
- By May of this year, PLCs will determine consistent point values for multiple-choice questions and open-ended responses.
- By October next year, schools will administer the first benchmark assessment requiring students to annotate a document.
- At least once per academic quarter next year, teachers of each grade will check for consistency in how they grade open-ended responses.
- At least once per academic quarter next year, teachers of each grade will discuss common errors and develop instructional strategies to address them.

It is essential to plan how you will collect any required data and to schedule data collection in the rhythm of your education system. For example, data on teacher retention are readily available from human resources departments and usually coincide with a district’s hiring calendar, which ramps up each year around April or May, and ends at the start of the following school year. This lends itself to a natural data collection period: once yearly, in September.

**Note!** Few projects are completed exactly according to the original plan. And, at times, the process of designing a project plan causes a committee to edit or add to their objectives.

During the project, your committee will periodically review your actual progress relative to the project plan and evaluate if adjustments are needed. If you hit a roadblock or need additional expertise or other support, reach out to your leadership team. One of their responsibilities is to support working committees. *Implement Collaboration*, Chapter 9, provides more detail on using your project plan as a project management tool while your project is under way.

**Illustration: Maisie School District**

The example below shows what part of a project plan might look like for the Maisie School District example introduced above.

Goal: By April of next year, at least 80% of grade 9-11 students will achieve at least 80% proficiency on school-created benchmarks around understanding/interpreting informational text.				
Objective 1: By January of this year, prepare guides for various annotation types and distribute among each grade-level team.				
Tasks & Subtasks:	Lead:	Due Date:	Percent Completed:	Product/Output/Metrics:
Task 1: Convene annotation task force	JP	9/1		Kick-off meeting
Task 2: Define types of annotation guides to be prepared	AM/LL	9/15		List of annotation guides to be prepared
Task 3: Define criteria for annotation guides	AM/LL	10/1		Evaluation rubric
Subtask 1: Scan for existing guides	MK	10/1		
Task 4: Evaluate annotation guides using the criteria defined in Task 3	AM	11/1		Completed rubric/scoring
Task 5: Curate/select annotation guides	LL	11/15		Guides identified
Task 6: Edit/revise guides as needed	AM	1/10		Guides finalized
Task 7: Finalize annotation guides	AM	1/15		Guides distributed to grade-level teams



## Consider & Discuss: Project Planning

Use the discussion prompts below to help your committee think through the project plan. You can record responses on Activity 6F at the end of this chapter.

- What steps might be needed to reach each objective?
- Is our current committee membership broad enough to accomplish this work, or are there others we should invite to join us?
- Will we need outside support, such as a subject matter expert, specific school or district data, etc.?

## Chapter Summary & Next Steps

Working committees should determine exactly where within a broad topic they would like to begin their work, and establish a goal and objectives around it. Maximize your chances of success by selecting a project that is of limited scope, low-risk, and achievable. Successes built from small projects can be scaled up, and more challenging problems can be addressed as the your committee matures.

At this point, if you haven't already done so you should communicate with your leadership team and let them know of your progress and your defined goal and objectives. During the course of this chapter's work, you may have identified some areas where your committee needs support, resources, or more information. Communicate these to your leadership team as well so that they can help get you the support you need.

*Establish Support Resources*, Chapter 7, is intended for leadership teams to help them consider the various types of support that may be needed by collaborative teams and working committees. Working committees should advance to Chapter 8, *Define Process for Collaboration*.



# Activities To Help You Define Content



## About These Activities

Use these activities to focus in on the exact areas within a broader topic you want to address, to define a related goal and objectives, and to develop your project plan.

In addition to the activities included here, NEA's Opportunity Audit is available online at [nea.org/resource-library/opportunity-audit](https://nea.org/resource-library/opportunity-audit), and can help you evaluate both the accessibility and effectiveness of policies, programs, and budgeting. The audit is aligned to NEA's Opportunity Checklist (Activity 3C) provided in Chapter 3, but is much more detailed, allowing your committee to focus on more specific priorities and to plan projects aligned to those priorities.

## Activities

- Use Activity 6A, **Consider & Discuss: Refining Your Issue**, to guide an initial discussion about your committee's project scope.
- The **Fishbone Diagram**, Activity 6B, is a root cause analysis tool that can help working committees brainstorm and understand an issue's most significant causes.
- The **Five Whys** technique, Activity 6C, can be used to dig into each potential cause and get to the root of the issue.
- A **Driver Diagram**, Activity 6D, can help your committee map out a project plan to reach your goal by brainstorming ideas about where solutions might be found and then identifying actionable steps that could lead to those solutions. These action steps become your project's objectives.
- Activity 6E, **Goal and Objectives Template** can help your working committee craft and document your project goal and the objectives that will help you attain it. The tool provides guidance for defining your goal and the individual objectives that will outline the work and allow you to track your progress.
- Use Activity 6F, **Consider & Discuss: Project Planning**, as a discussion guide for initial project planning considerations.
- The **Project Plan Template**, Activity 6G, provides a format for defining objectives, the change ideas toward those objectives, and the tasks involved.



# Consider & Discuss: Refining Your Issue

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spent 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



What aspects of our committee's purpose or issue are most compelling to us?

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What aspects do we have the ability to influence?

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What information or data might we need to help us decide what to work on first?

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What are the best ways to gather that data?

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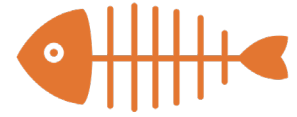
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## 6B: Root Cause Analysis: The Fishbone Diagram



### PURPOSE

This tool can help a collaborative group define an initiative for their work by better understanding the underlying causes for or contributing factors to the issue at hand, and helping prioritize which cause(s) to address. Fully understanding contributing factors and their significance helps groups hone in specific issue(s) to work on.

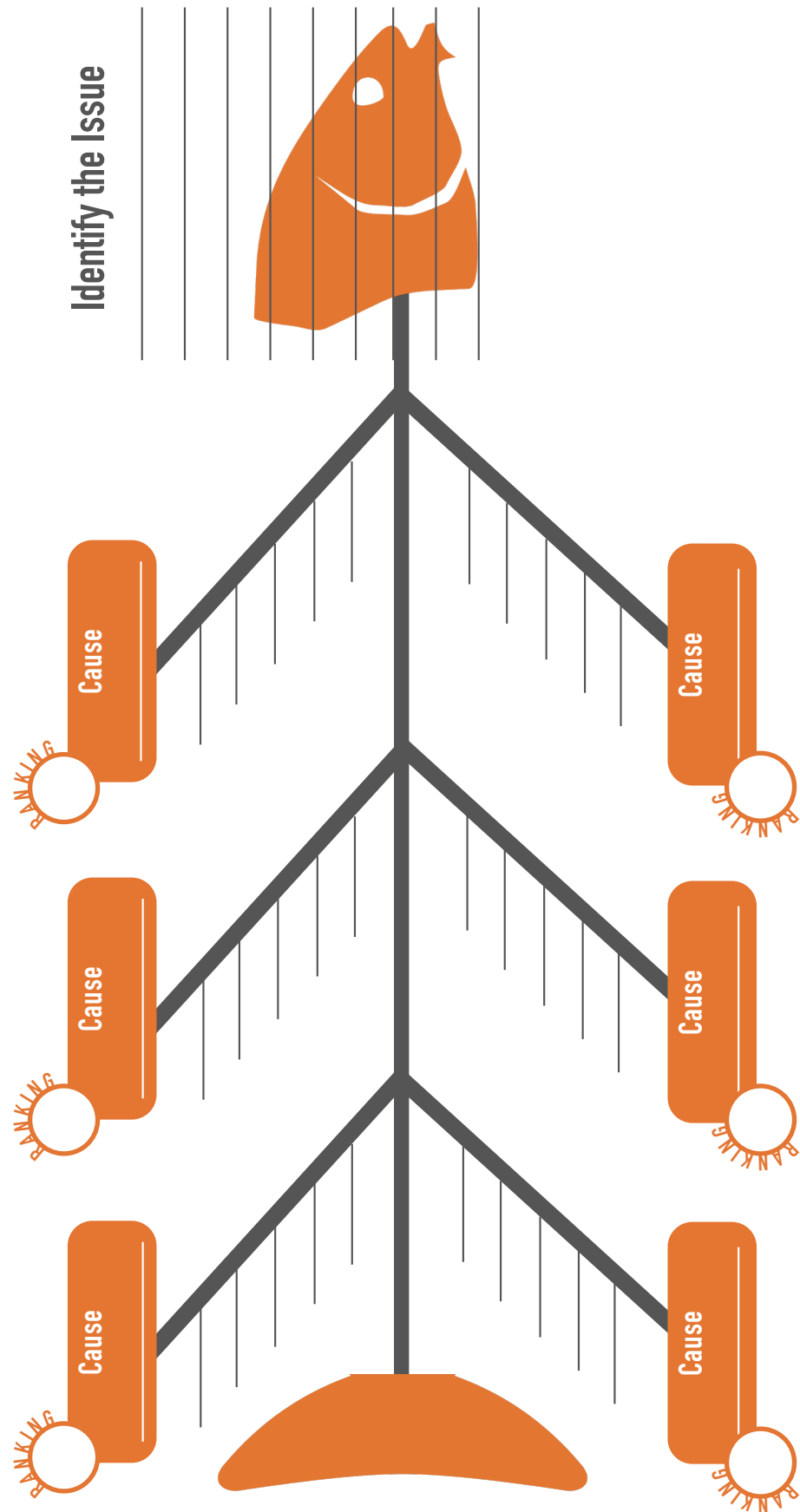
### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Write the problem or the issue you want to investigate at the head of the fish.
2. Brainstorm the contributing causes and write a cause at the end of each "fishbone."
3. For each cause identified, drill further down into the root causes. Ask yourselves "what are the sub-causes?" Write the answers on the spines of the fishbone below the related cause. Asking why you believe a cause is occurring can help identify sub-causes.
4. Sometimes a sub-cause has its own sub-causes. In those cases, draw additional spines on the fishbone as needed.
5. After identifying sub-causes, return to your causes and evaluate them by asking "if we fixed THIS, how many other things would fall into place?" Then rank each cause, with 1 being the most significant, 2 being the next most significant, etc. Write the ranking in the associated circle.

**Note:** Depending on your issue and number of potential causes and sub-causes, it may be preferable to do this exercise on a wall or whiteboard with sticky notes.



## 6B: Root Cause Analysis: The Fishbone Diagram (cont'd)





# 6C: Root Cause Analysis: The Five Whys



## PURPOSE

The 5 *Whys* is a technique pioneered in the automotive industry by Toyota. It helps a group better understand the root causes of an issue, which makes it easier to decide how to approach solutions. Use this tool to gain further insight into the highest-priority sub-causes identified.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Write the original cause. As a group, discuss "why did this occur?" and write down the answer. Continue to ask why each answer occurred until you've answered "why?" five times. Repeat this process for each potential cause of the issue your team has identified.

## Example

- Issue:** Too many unexcused absences.
- Cause:** Notification policies aren't being followed.
- Why?** Parents don't know how to report absences.
- Why?** They can't find the information on the website.
- Why?** The website is poorly organized and labeled.
- Why?** Overall website design was not well thought out.
- Why?** Funding wasn't available for a professional design.

## Template

**Issue:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cause:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why?** \_\_\_\_\_



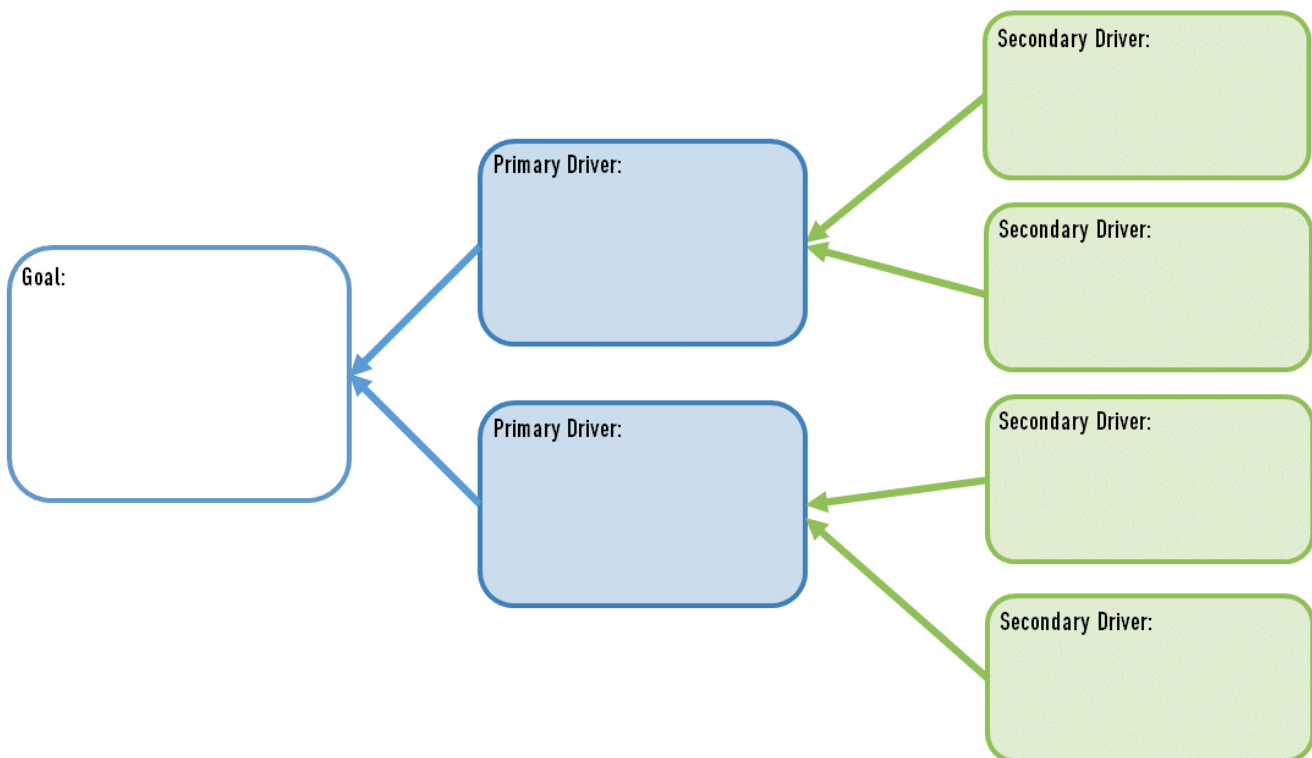
# 6D: Driver Diagram

**PURPOSE:** Use a driver diagram to identify possible solutions that will inform your committee's project objectives.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**Note:** Use the template below as a guide. There is no set number of drivers on a driver diagram; edit the diagram to suit the topic you're working with. You may also find it easier to complete this activity on a whiteboard or using sticky notes.

1. Write the project goal on the left-most box.
2. Brainstorm some ideas about where the issue's solution might lie. These are the primary drivers. The causes identified in the fishbone analysis are often reframed into primary drivers. Enter primary drivers in the appropriate boxes of the driver diagram.
3. Next, brainstorm the possible components of the primary drivers. These are typically discrete, actionable ideas that, once identified, can help clarify how to accomplish the goal. These are the secondary drivers - enter them in the Secondary Driver boxes. Causes and sub-causes from the fishbone analysis can become secondary drivers by asking "what might we do differently related to this cause that would be likely to help achieve our goal?" Secondary drivers become the project objectives.



# 6E: Goal and Objectives Template

## PURPOSE

This tool can help collaborative groups define a project goal and identify objectives toward that goal.

### Initiative Goal

State your goal in terms of your desired result and time frame. For example, a goal related to language arts achievement might read, "By the end of this year, we will select a new language arts curriculum and it will be implemented next year in targeted schools."

Write your initiative's goal here:

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### Initiative Objectives

Objectives outline the steps you'll take to achieve your goal. Use the guiding questions below to help you write your objectives, then record them on the following page.

**As you write your objectives, make sure that they are:**

-  **Specific:** What do we want to achieve in this step towards our goal?
-  **Pertinent:** Does completing this objective bring us closer to achieving our goal?
-  **Realistic:** Do we have the resources and capabilities to complete this objective? If not, do we have a way to access additional resources?
-  **Data-informed:** What determines success? What information or metrics will we use to measure progress?
-  **Time-bound:** Do our objective deadlines align with the overall goal time frame? Do some objectives have to be met before others can begin?

## 6E: Goal and Objectives Template (cont'd)

### Initiative Objectives

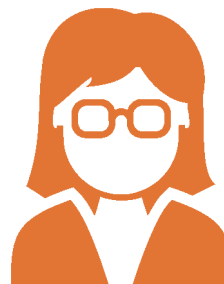
Objective 1:

Objective 2:

Objective 3:

Objective 4:

Objective 5:



When you set and achieve objectives, you will have reached your goal!



# Consider & Discuss: Project Planning

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spent 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



What steps might be needed to reach each objective?

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Is our current committee membership broad enough to accomplish this work, or are there others we should invite to join us?

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Will we need outside support, such as a subject matter expert, specific school or district data, etc.?

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# 6G: Project Plan Template



## PURPOSE

This tool helps your team plan, track initiative progress, re-evaluate tasks, subtasks and due dates, and ultimately demonstrate success.

Because a project plan is meant to be a working, evolving document, we suggest you use an editable Excel or Word version and use the template below as a guide. You should customize the template to fit your project, such as adding columns for notes or other project information.

1. Enter the goal and objectives recorded in Tool 6E, Goal and Objectives Template, in the appropriate rows.
2. For each objective, enter the necessary tasks and subtasks.
3. For each task and subtask, enter the initials of the person responsible for overseeing the work, the expected date the task will be completed, and any deliverables or other output of the effort.
4. Save your plan where all team members have access (such as a shared drive or Microsoft Teams) so each member can review and update the plan.
5. During the project, each lead should use the % Complete column to let other committee members know of their progress.

**Goal:**

**Objective 1:**

	Lead	Due Date	% Complete	Product/Output/Metrics
Task 1:				
Subtask 1a:				
Subtask 1b:				
Task 2:				
Task 3:				



## Chapter 7

# Establish Support Resources



Collaboration leads to more impactful outcomes when practitioners have effective support. This chapter helps leadership teams think through the types of support that might be needed, and how to put that in place. In this chapter, you'll:

- Learn how a District Leadership Team can support School Leadership Teams and district-level working committees
- Learn how School Leadership Teams can support working committees in their schools
- Understand the role of communication within the partnership to enable and enhance support
- Recognize the resources available to support District Leadership Teams in their work

This chapter is intended primarily for District and School Leadership Teams.

### Contents:

Support Provided by Leadership Teams  
Communications Structures To Support the Partnership  
Support for the District Leadership Team  
Next Steps  
Activities To Help You Establish Support Resources

## Introduction

At this point, your leadership team has defined some content goals around the issues or projects the partnership will address, as well as relational goals around guiding principles and behavioral norms. Collaborative working committees will also be creating and implementing student-centered solutions at the same time they're developing collaborative working relationships and learning to use shared decision-making.



### Training and ongoing support

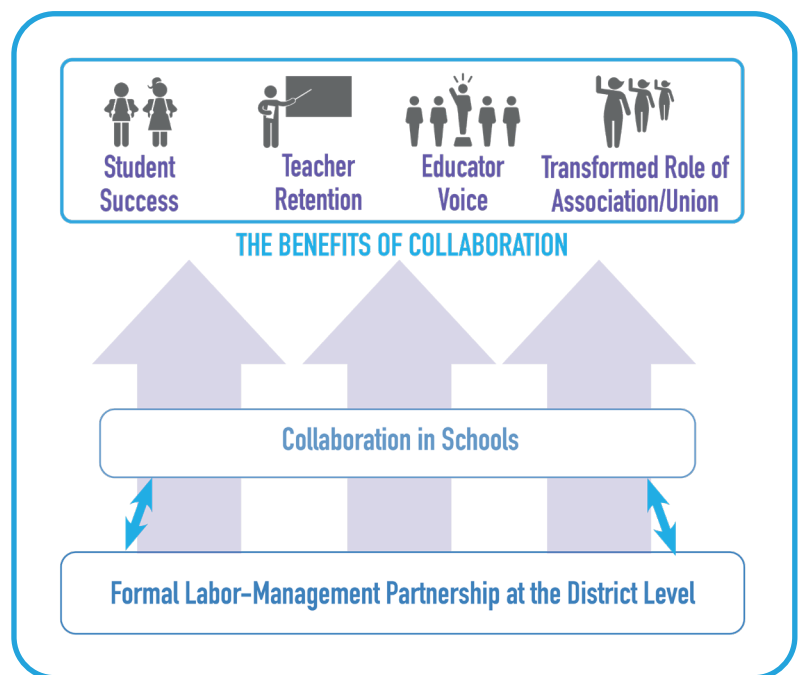
In *Commit to Collaborate* (Chapter 4), we identified training and ongoing support as being foundational to a strong partnership, and a key component that

helps sustain long-term collaboration. It's natural, and should be expected, that working committees, School Leadership Teams, and even the District Leadership Team will periodically need help and support as they use collaborative processes to address issue in their system.

Support may be needed to address the relational aspects of collaboration, such as shared decision-making and collaborative processes, and groups may also need support in addressing project-specific content, which may take the form of subject matter expertise or a needs assessment.

In this chapter, we introduce a comprehensive system of support - that is, support for each level of collaborative structure: District Leadership Teams supported at a state or regional level; School Leadership Teams and district-level working committees supported by District Leadership Teams; and school-level working committees supported by School Leadership Teams.

When stakeholders at all levels of the system are working together collaboratively, and each level's efforts support the other, their collaboration is transformative and leads to positive outcomes across the system. In other words, collaboration leads to more impactful student-centered outcomes when working committees and leadership teams are effectively supported.



This chapter can help leadership teams anticipate and plan for the types of help and support that might be needed. It can help District Leadership Team members understand how to support School Leadership Teams and district-level working committees, and help School Leadership Teams support school-level working committees.



**Start Somewhere:** A comprehensive support system is unlikely to exist at the beginning of a new partnership and so, as always, we encourage you to ‘start somewhere’ by planning for immediate support needs, as well as considering how a more comprehensive support system, developed over time, might look.

## Support Provided by Leadership Teams

A key role of leadership teams is to support working committees as they develop and implement their collaborative projects, and working committees typically need two primary types of support: relational support and content-specific support. For both relational and content-specific support, the leadership team may be providing direct support or may be providing access to support resources.

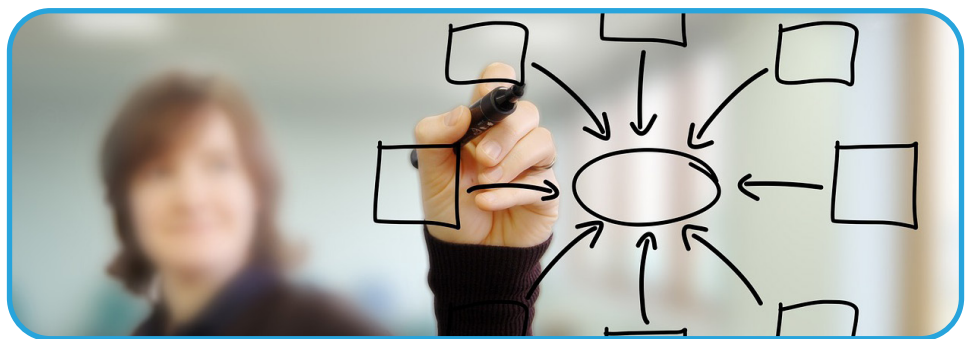
Leadership team support is central to sustaining and expanding the working committees, increasing the number of individuals involved in collaboration, and ultimately deeply embedding collaboration into the school and/or district culture.

The following sections describe what this support might look like for:

- District and School Leadership Teams supporting district- and school-level working committees, respectively, and
- A District Leadership Team supporting School Leadership Teams

### Leadership Team Support of Working Committees

Working committees, at the district and/or school level, are the fundamental working groups of labor-management collaboration: they design and implement specific projects to address student-centered issues. It is their work that leads to system-wide improvements and student success outcomes.



As such, it is vital that working committees are supported as they launch their work, and as needed throughout their project to help them continue making progress. Leadership teams provide this support either directly (such as by partnering the working committee with a mentor, or conducting a training session) or indirectly (such as directing a working committee to a subject matter expert or grant opportunity).

Leadership teams should be prepared to support working committees in addressing both relational issues and content-specific issues, as described below.

**Relational Support:** Relational support fosters the development of collaborative relationships and processes. Relational support topics might include shared decision-making, collaborative norms, psychological safety, team building, or help with conflict resolution.

As a leadership team, you should provide new working committees with an introduction to shared decision-making, the key components of strong education partnerships, and collaborative attributes and skills. A kick-off meeting covering some of these foundational principles is often a good first activity for new working committees and teams.

After launching a new working committee, and throughout a working committee's project, leadership teams can provide access to workshops, outside facilitators, or other refreshers to help working committees overcome hurdles and build relationships. Connecting working committees within your system or to collaborative groups elsewhere is also a useful support strategy.

Resources for providing relational support include:

- For initial learning about collaboration, you can use content and resources from *Learn the Case for Collaboration* (Chapter 1), *Commit to Collaborate* (Chapter 4), and *Define Process for Collaboration* (Chapter 8)
- Consider pairing newer committees with more experienced collaborative groups in a mentoring capacity
- The Teachers Union Reform Network (TURN) hosts conferences, produces a podcast, and provides other helpful resources on their website ([turnweb.org](http://turnweb.org))
- Several state-level initiatives work to support collaboration, and their websites hold useful resources for collaborative teams and committees: the California Labor Management Initiative ([cdefoundation.org/cde\\_programs/clmi/](http://cdefoundation.org/cde_programs/clmi/)), the New Jersey Public Schools Labor-Management Collaborative ([smlr.rutgers.edu](http://smlr.rutgers.edu)), and the Massachusetts Education Partnership ([renniecenter.org](http://renniecenter.org)). These organizations may also be helpful in locating a skilled collaboration facilitator.

**Content-Related Support:** Content-related support is specific to the working committee's issue, to help them better understand the topic at hand so that the best solutions can be designed and implemented. Leadership teams might provide content support by connecting working committees to resources that can help them: narrow an overarching topic to a specific project goal, gather relevant data, perform needs assessments, interpret data, or prioritize among possible projects. For example, you might want to provide topic-specific support that draws



**"I'm starting to think this world is just a place for us to learn that we need each other more than we want to admit."**

*- Richelle E. Goodrich, Smile Anyway*

from a research base or best practices related to their chosen topic, or access to subject matter experts, data analysts, curricular materials, or other resources. It is crucial that working committee members feel they have enough expertise to contribute to solution building on the topic at hand. If they do not initially have this knowledge base, content-related support may be required.

Potential content support resources include:

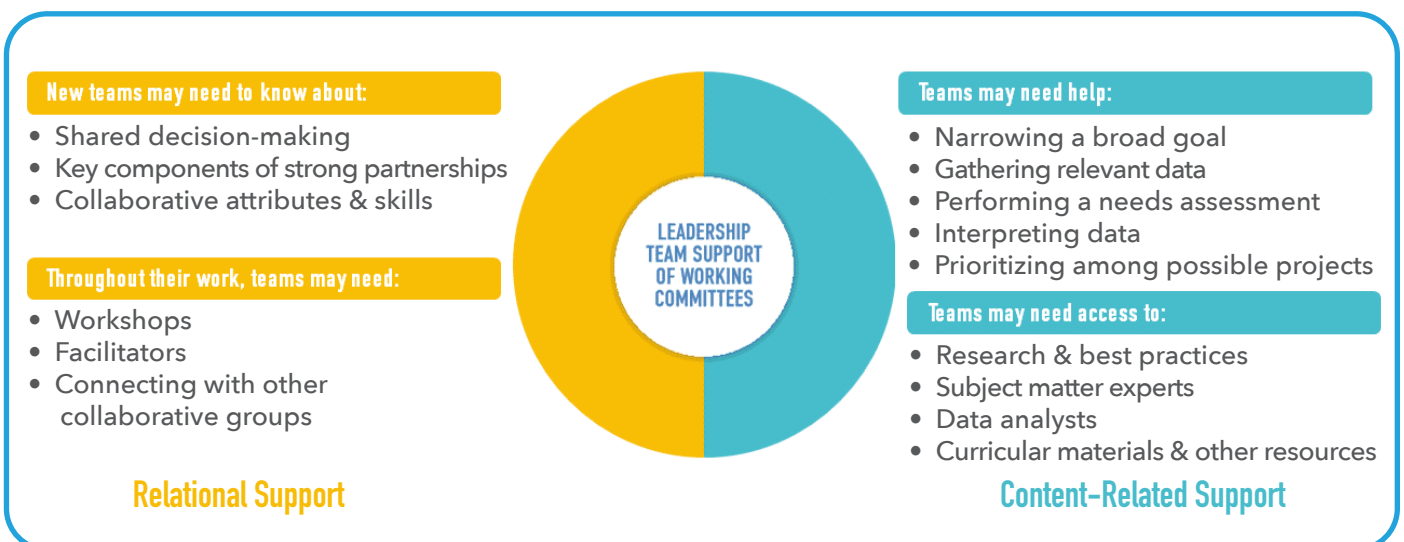
- Professional associations or local/state organizations related to the topic, such as a state literacy or STEM foundation
- Help gathering existing data or conducting a needs assessments
- Networking with other schools or districts that have successfully addressed the topic
- College/university departments related to the topic
- Online resources such as recorded webinars
- Your state department of education may also maintain lists of resources, websites, and/or professional organizations related to various education topics



### Consider & Discuss: Support for Working Committees

Use Activity 7A to journal individually, then discuss your thoughts as a team. Use the questions below to start trying to anticipate both the relational and content-specific support working committees might need.

- What relational support might the working committees need as they begin their work? Throughout their projects? How might we provide that?
- What content areas are working committees addressing? What types of content-related support might they need?
- Will we need to budget and arrange logistics for outside support, such as trained facilitators or subject matter experts?





## DLT Support of School Leadership Teams



A rich web of communication and collaboration structures among stakeholders at all levels

In addition to supporting district-level working committees, District Leadership Teams also support School Leadership Teams. This support tends to be more relational than content

related, and the same general types of resources and convenings discussed above for working committees are also appropriate for SLTs. Use the graphic below to revisit the support types.

## Communications Structures To Support the Partnership

A rich communication web has been identified as a key component to a strong education partnership. Robust communications within the partnership help collaborative projects proceed more smoothly, and at the same time they support the collaborative partnership as a whole. Regular communications among collaboration practitioners keeps everyone informed, and is an early sensing mechanism for emerging issues or problems. It also surfaces opportunities for aligning similar efforts and sharing lessons learned. This web of communications also helps keep focus on the overarching student-centered goals that are the heart of this work.

A communications plan helps leadership teams and committees determine when, why, and how to communicate with other stakeholders. It provides participants and stakeholders with a schedule and format to receive and distribute information. The goal of a communications plan is to share and publicize the work so that both those involved and those outside of your collaborative are informed of and inspired by your collaboration.

As you plan your communications, be thoughtful about anticipating who might need to be informed of and engaged in your partnership's activities. Teams and committees should be sharing their work with each other, communicating about needs and available resources, building relationships, and learning together. In addition, team and committee members can maximize their effectiveness by actively listening to their internal stakeholders and bringing stakeholder needs, wants, and aspirations to the collaborative work. Regularly scheduled meetings are very useful in nurturing relationships, helping avoid conflicts, and preventing problems from escalating.

Communication from collaborative teams to the broader community about the partnership and its work is also important and is covered in *Implement Collaboration*, Chapter 9. In this section, we discuss:

- Communications between role-alike individuals from administration and the education association/union
- Communications between practitioners on working committees/leadership teams and their internal stakeholders
- Intra-partnership communications between working committees and leadership teams

## Role-Alike Communications

Regular communication between role-alike individuals from the education association/union and management provides an open channel that allows partners to understand their counterpart's perspectives and challenges, facilitates on-the-ground problem-solving, and helps surface issues that need attention and that can be addressed collaboratively. It allows issues or problems to be addressed in the early stages, before they become bigger problems. In fact, these role-alike communications are a good structure to have in place regardless of the level of partnership in the district. A series of standing meetings between role-alike individuals from the administration and the education association/union is a good way to facilitate this information sharing and joint problem-solving.

As an example, imagine that the district's chief financial officer and the association's chief negotiator meet once a month. Regularly scheduled meetings give them the opportunity to discuss resource-related issues, build their professional relationship, generate ideas about solutions, and problem solve. These meetings can provide insights about available district resources as well as clarity about the needs of educators and students.



They can serve as a scanning mechanism to identify and surface emerging issues related to budgets and resource allocation. Any issues that can't be addressed directly by the chief financial officer and chief negotiator can be assigned to a working committee for resolution. Within schools, these meetings might take place between the principal and an association/union representative (and often department chairs).

One way to develop a structure of standing meetings is for the local association/union to organize its executive board roles to match those of the district superintendent's cabinet, to make it clear who the union counterpart is for each key district administrator. As a first step, identify the current association/union board positions that align with the district's structure. Then, better align or create new positions to ensure that each district position has a corresponding association/union representative. The *Role-Alike Comms Worksheet* (Activity 7C) can help in this process.

These regular role-alike communications are an important part of the partnership, independent of any specific collaborative project or initiative. This structure provides multiple benefits:

- Complements the work of the DLT and SLTs, because the individuals involved can surface issues that might be best addressed by a collaborative committee
- Builds and maintains relationship and trust across a broad spectrum of administration and association/union representatives
- Helps participants understand each group's stakeholder views
- Helps build an environment that supports collaboration as a viable means of problem-solving

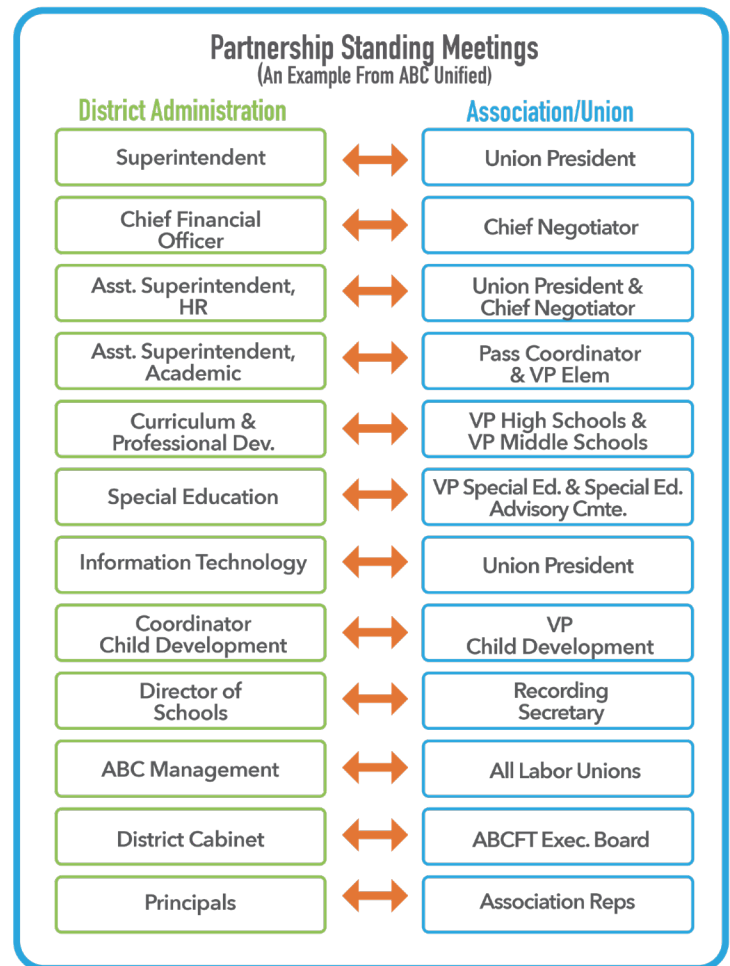


- Can be instrumental in solving problems as they emerge and in quickly getting support where it is needed
- Establishes consistent two-way communication
- Fosters both the culture of and processes for collaboration
- Can be important to collaboration's sustainability within a district

**The Association/Union Role:** A primary partnership role for the association/union is to ensure that educators’ voices are included in solution building. Between the standing meetings, building representatives are listening to their members in the schools and identifying problems or issues. This educator input is communicated to association/union leaders through their monthly building rep meetings. Association/union leaders, in turn, bring this knowledge to their meetings with administration for discussion. For example, educator concerns around adequate before-school support for children with disabilities might be expressed by the building rep to the association's/union's vice president of special education instruction, who would then raise the topic at their regular meeting with the administration's assistant superintendent of special education. There, the two might discuss possible solutions, or refer the issue to a working committee for resolution. Collaborative teams using these structures have found that this helps avoid grievances and other labor actions.

**Example: ABC PAL:** As an example, ABC’s PAL includes a set of standing meetings between role-alike individuals across labor and management. The ABC Federation of Teachers aligned its existing executive board roles with corresponding district superintendent cabinet positions, then revised the scope of and/or created new board roles until there was a corresponding union board role for each administration cabinet position. The result is shown in the chart to the right.

The superintendent and union president meet weekly, and the other paired individuals also meet regularly. Between their meetings, the union leaders gather input from building representatives and other educator-leaders, so they are knowledgeable about the opinions and experiences of the workforce and can have productive, timely conversations.



## Practitioner/Stakeholder Communications

Working committee and leadership team members play an important role in representing their own stakeholder group to the other partners, and in keeping their stakeholders informed of the collaborative work.

Successful collaborative partners agree that strong internal communications are a key to success.

Administrators need to communicate with the other administrators in the system. In particular, district leaders need to keep principals informed of the partnership's district-level work and provide for cross-school sharing among principals about school-level work. Similarly, association/union leaders need to listen to and communicate with members. The building representative structure can be a useful way to share information, and representative council meetings can be used to share progress across school sites.

Between collaboration practitioners and their stakeholders, consider both incoming and outgoing communications:

- Actively listening to and soliciting input from your stakeholders allows you to faithfully represent them and bring stakeholder needs and wants to the leadership team and working committees. This is an early sensing mechanism for potential concerns, issues, or problems.
- Communicating clearly, transparently, and regularly with your internal stakeholders educates them on the value of your role in the partnership and reinforces the benefits of working collaboratively.

There are many different communication types and channels, but your core communication should be on a regular, predictable schedule such as a weekly email or a "check in" during district and/or school staff meetings. These efforts help build a foundation of common knowledge and common understanding, and provide opportunities to engage your stakeholders and to reinforce the value of collaboration.

## Intra-Partnership Communications

Equally important is communication among the various working committees and leadership teams in the collaborative partnership. Regular communication allows those involved in the collaborative work to share successes and lessons learned, get support resources when needed, exchange ideas, and build the relationships that sustain collaboration and optimize its benefits. This chapter's activities can help you define communication norms among leadership teams, working committees, as well as with internal stakeholders as discussed above.



As working committees define and implement their projects, regular two-way communication helps the leadership team offer timely and relevant support. In addition, a District Leadership Team in communication with multiple working committees across the district is in a great position to share information among working committees addressing similar topics. DLTs can provide a hub for communication and for sharing ideas, successes, and lessons learned. SLTs can integrate the work of committees in the school and facilitate communications among them.

A communications plan helps collaborative teams and committees determine when, why, and how to communicate with other stakeholders. It also helps teams and committees be intentional about seeking input, listening, asking for help, and celebrating success. Depending on the audience and goal of the specific communication, the venue might be an informal weekly email, standing meetings among participants, or even a shared project plan or other document. Whatever methods your partnership uses, communication should be open, should include both listening and reporting out, and should occur on a regular basis.



### Consider & Discuss: Communicating Within the Partnership

Now, consider the questions below to help your team start to mapping out the communications you'll use. You can record responses on Activity 7D at the end of this chapter.

- How will your team keep informed about working committee projects, and how can working committees communicate with you about support needs and project status? What types of communication structures might best support that? Consider meetings or other check-ins, scheduled emails, an online collaboration space such as Slack or Microsoft Teams, shared project files, etc.
- What existing venues do you use to communicate with your own stakeholders? How will you use those venues to communicate with them about the partnership and collaborative projects? Or, will you use new/additional venues for this work? Remember to consider two-way communication: communication from members and staff to partners, and from partners to members/staff.

## Support for the District Leadership Team

What if your District Leadership Team itself needs support? Remember that you are not alone - you're part of a movement and there are others on this journey whose experiences and insights can be instructive and helpful. There are resources available to help strengthen your partnership and support the working committees and other collaborative teams in your system. This section provides some strategies and resources to help you seek out the support you may need.

DLT's should strive to develop their "self-support" muscles by learning to address training or relational issues themselves, whenever possible. This capacity makes you a better resource for the other collaborative teams and committees in your system, and it strengthens the DLT partnership. The process of jointly working through issues and creating solutions is a good team-building opportunity, and lets the DLT practice and model collaborative behaviors.

A good strategy is to revisit the relationship-building activities from *Commit to Collaborate*, Chapter 4. Use them as templates to discuss as a group: what areas need to be improved and how might we address them? An outside facilitator can often be helpful in guiding your team through a challenge, and in the process building the team's capacity to self-manage future challenges.



Early in the partnership, however, it might not be realistic for the DLT to guide itself. The trust required for truly shared decision-making should not be underestimated, and if trust is not present at the start, then the team might benefit from a neutral, independent facilitator for guidance. As trust is built and collaborative skills are developed over time, the facilitator can step back. These facilitators are typically consultants with expertise in collaborative processes.

Engaging an external facilitator has several advantages:

- External facilitators typically create an atmosphere of neutral or unbiased facilitation
- They bring fresh perspectives and new questions to the discussion
- They are willing to ask difficult questions and confront assumptions
- They can move the group forward when dealing with difficult or controversial issues

(Source: [extension.umn.edu/public-engagement-strategiespros-and-cons-using-internal-and-external-facilitators](https://extension.umn.edu/public-engagement-strategiespros-and-cons-using-internal-and-external-facilitators))

While education challenges, approaches, and solutions vary across state and local contexts, it is valuable to build connections with other education partnerships for sharing and mentorship. It is easy to get so wrapped up in our own projects that we fail to look at the changing landscape around us. Good ideas abound, and our learning multiplies when we intentionally seek out sharing opportunities with others doing similar work. Opportunities for district teams to come together for cross-district learning and sharing help increase the quality of collaboration and help spread innovative ideas across district boundaries.

There are national and regional organizations that you can contact to help support your work, some of which are listed below. Many of them are the same as those you might connect working committees to when they need help, although in this case, you'd be using these resources to support your own DLT processes or relationships.

- *Define Process for Collaboration*, Chapter 8, provides a variety of tools to support team building and psychological safety, collaborative decision-making, conflict resolution, and other collaborative group processes
- Universities and education non-profit organizations may offer facilitation, advice, and/or resources to help address specific problems
- *Support Resources*, Activity 7B, can be used to develop a clearinghouse of potential sup-

port resources for working committees and it may suggest good resources for your DLT to use, depending on the issue you're facing

- The state-level associations of DLT members (state education association/union, state superintendents association, etc.) or state department of education may provide collaboration support or may be able to connect you with other districts doing this work
- The Teachers Union Reform Network (TURN) hosts regional and national conferences that provide networking, training, and support opportunities for districts engaged in collaborative processes. They also publish a newsletter and other helpful resources on their website ([turnweb.org](http://turnweb.org))
- The New Jersey Public Schools Labor Management Collaborative helps districts with collaborative processes by offering training, mentoring, networking, and online resources ([smlr.rutgers.edu](http://smlr.rutgers.edu))
- The California Labor-Management Initiative holds trainings and webinars on collaborative processes for collaborative teams. Their website includes recorded webinars and other helpful information ([cdefoundation.org/cde\\_programs/clmi](http://cdefoundation.org/cde_programs/clmi))
- The Catalyst for Educational Change, an Illinois-based nonprofit, offers consulting, training, and support in collaborative practices, as well as case studies, recorded webinars and other resources on their website ([cecweb.org](http://cecweb.org))

## Next Steps

- This chapter asked you to brainstorm and anticipate the types of support working committees might need as they create and implement their projects. As you check in with working committees and needs are identified, use your list of potential support resources and update it as needed. You may want to eventually develop topic-specific lists of support resources for future reference on similar projects.
- Put your communications plans into action to help support and advance your partnership's work.
- The *Role-Alike Comms Worksheet* (Activity 7C) asks you to consider the alignment between the administration's and association's/union's leadership structures with an eye towards creating regularly-scheduled communications between the aligned individuals. Now is the time to bring those individuals up to speed, introduce them, if necessary, and ask them to schedule their check-ins to regularly update each other on the district's and association's/union's priority work in their area of the system. Part of their work is to report back to the District Leadership Team, identifying any major topics or issues discussed. Feel free to share the information from this chapter, so they understand the importance of these regular communications within the broader goals of the partnership.



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## Chapter Summary

All collaborative committees and teams need access to meaningful supports to ensure sustained success. This comprehensive support system catalyzes collaboration in schools and helps provide the partnership's staying power over the long term. Leadership teams provide both relational and content-related support to working committees, and the DLT also supports the SLTs.

A rich web of communication structures is also considered a key component of a strong education partnership, and this encompasses two-way communication: between role-alike individuals from administration and the education association/union; among those active on working committees/leadership teams and their internal stakeholders; and between working committees and leadership teams.



# Activities To Help You Establish Support Resources



## About These Activities

This chapter's activities can help District and School Leadership Teams plan the supports they offer to district- and school-level working committees, respectively. There are also tools to help you plan role-alike communications, communications between each partner and their internal stakeholders, and intra-partnership communications.

## Activities

- **Consider & Discuss: Support for Working Committees**, Activity 7A, can guide your leadership team through initial considerations for how you'll provide both relational and content-related support to working committees.
- The **Support Resources** worksheet, Activity 7B, helps you document potential sources of support. The completed tool is a clearinghouse of potential support resources that you can refer back to as working committees identify their support needs. Refer to this tool throughout your work, adding new resources as you become aware of them.
- The **Role-Alike Comms Worksheet**, Activity 7C, can help district administrators and association/union leaders explore possibilities for aligning leadership structures to better support regular communications between key individuals throughout the system to create deeper connections between administration and the association/union.
- Use Activity 7D, **Consider & Discuss: Communicating Within the Partnership**, to guide a group discussion about how best to plan for open two-way communications among leadership teams, working committees, and internal stakeholders.
- The use Activity 7E, the **Communication Plan Template**, to document the communications norms in your partnerships, ensuring that stakeholders are informed of your progress. This tool is for leadership teams to detail how, when, and where information will be distributed.





# 7A

# Consider & Discuss: Support for Working Committees

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spent 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



What relational support might the working committees need as they begin their work? Throughout their projects? How might we provide that?

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What content areas are working committees addressing? What types of content-related support might they need?

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Will we need to budget and arrange logistics for outside support, such as trained facilitators or subject matter experts?

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# 7B: Support Resources



## PURPOSE

This tool can help you identify sources of support for the collaborative teams and committees in your partnership. The completed tool is a clearinghouse of potential support resources that you can refer to and add to throughout your partnership's work.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Brainstorm available content-specific and relational support resources, and use the chart below to document who might be able help, and the types of support they can provide.

### Relational Support Resources

Organization/Contact:

Support Available/Area of Expertise:

Organization/Contact:

Support Available/Area of Expertise:

Organization/Contact:

Support Available/Area of Expertise:

### Content-Related Support Resources

Organization/Contact:

Support Available/Area of Expertise:

Organization/Contact:

Support Available/Area of Expertise:

Organization/Contact:

Support Available/Area of Expertise:



# 7C: Role-Alike Comms Worksheet

## PURPOSE

This tool can help district administrators and education association/union leaders align their leadership structures to establish regularly scheduled communications between key individuals.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Enter existing district administration positions under District Administration on the left.
2. Where there's an association/union position that corresponds well, enter the association/union position across from the corresponding administrator.
3. Where there's not alignment, are there association/union positions that can be repurposed or created to better align with administration? Make a plan to address them. Refer to the ABC Unified example, if desired.
4. Help establish standing meetings by introducing the individuals, explaining the purpose and importance of this ongoing communication, and making a recommendation for how often they might meet.

## How Might You Align Leadership Structures?

### District Administration




### Association/Union




# Consider & Discuss:

## 7D Communicating Within the Partnership

### INSTRUCTIONS

Spnd 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



How will your team keep informed about working committee projects, and how can working committees communicate with you about support needs and project status? What types of communication structures might best support that? Consider meetings or other check-ins, scheduled emails, an online collaboration space such as Slack or Microsoft Teams, shared project files, etc.

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What existing venues do you use to communicate with your own stakeholders? How will you use those venues to communicate with them about the partnership and collaborative projects? Or, will you use new/additional venues for this work? Remember to consider two-way communication: communication from members and staff to partners, and from partners to members/staff.

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# 7E: Communication Plan Template

## PURPOSE

This tool can help leadership teams define their communication plans, both individually with their internal stakeholders and within the partnership.

## PART 1: Practitioner/Stakeholder Communications

Each leadership team member should use the template below to define how and how often you'll communicate with your internal stakeholders. Remember to consider both reporting to your stakeholders on progress and successes, and gathering stakeholder input to bring back to the leadership team.

Stakeholder Group	Objective/Content	Method & Frequency	Responsible Party
Association members	Report on committee projects; listen for emerging issues	Monthly 10-minute meeting + newsletter	Building reps

## 7E: Communication Plan Template (cont'd)

### PART 2: Intra-Partnership Communications

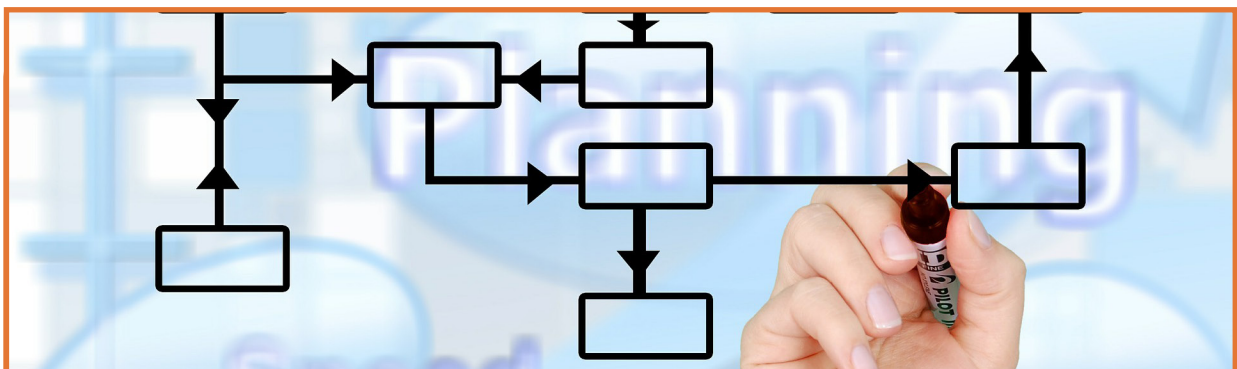
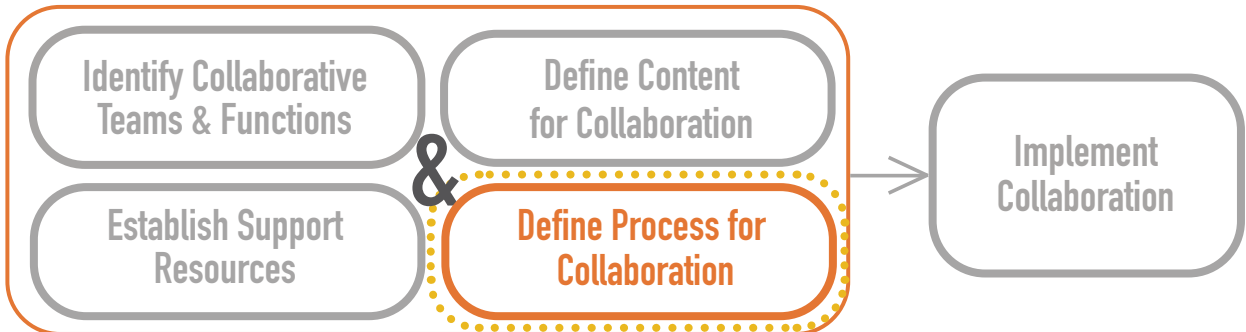
Use the template below to define how often your leadership team will check in with each of your teams and committees, and the types of information to be shared.

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Team or Committee	Objective/Content	Method & Frequency	Responsible Party
Oakwood working committee on ELA	Progress; support needed?	Google Workspace and/or monthly check-in	Working comm

## Chapter 8

# Define Process for Collaboration



Collaborative processes are the norms that partners agree to uphold in order to foster and support collaborative relationships. In this chapter, you'll:

- Learn how to foster a collaborative working climate
- Consider how various types of decisions should be made
- Build your shared decision-making skills
- Learn about the different types of conflict and strategies to address each
- Consider conflict resolution styles and when each might be appropriate
- Define group norms to guide your collaborative work

*This chapter is intended for collaborative leadership teams and working committees at both district and school levels.*

### **Contents:**

Introduction  
Developing a Collaborative Climate  
Collaborative Decision-Making  
Conflict Resolution  
Group Norms  
Activities To Help You Define Collaborative Processes



## Introduction

Collaborative processes are the norms and procedures that partners agree to uphold in order to foster and support a collaborative work. Strong and effective relationships help deeply embedded collaboration in the system and support a culture change. This systemic culture of collaboration helps give collaboration the power to outlast changes in leadership or team membership, and the power to continue to implement the initiatives that support student success.

In this chapter, you'll develop group norms to support:

- **A collaborative climate:** behaviors and attitudes that foster open communication and psychological safety for all involved
- **Collaborative decision-making:** the practice of selecting the right decision-making process for the decision at hand and being transparent about it
- **Conflict resolution:** strategies to productively handle conflict

You'll use this learning to define your team's or committee's group norms - the guiding behaviors and procedures that provide consistency and order for group activities. Groups who define and uphold such norms improve their clarity and efficiency, develop a shared understanding, and strengthen their collaborative relationships. Ultimately, these collaborative processes help keep your group aligned and focused on your primary goal: collaborating for student success.

## Developing a Collaborative Climate

In *Commit to Collaborate*, we introduced McCarthy and Rubinstein's five primary indicators of a collaborative climate. Here, we expand on these indicators to include advice and resources for providing for or improving upon each.

Remember that these indicators are not prerequisites for beginning to collaborate. Teams and committees develop these characteristics over time, when participants are mindful of building positive relationships and are committed to collaborative behaviors. With effective collaboration, partners should see improvements in these climate characteristics, in addition to the student-centered outcomes of the collaborative projects.

1 Peer Collaboration

2 Discretion

3 Goal Alignment

4 Psychological Safety

5 Shared Decision-Making

These characteristics should also be used to assess the extent to which individuals in a school system feel each of these things, thereby indicating the extent to which a collaborative climate exists systemically throughout the district or school. In other words, these characteristics describe how deeply collaboration is embedded in the district's or school's culture and indicate that collaborative work has resulted in positive cultural shifts. Consider periodically assessing these indicators in school climate surveys so that you can assess cultural shifts in your system.

## 1 Peer Collaboration

*The amount and quality of collaboration among stakeholders in a system, including information sharing, social support, and the extent to which stakeholders successfully work together to accomplish goals.*

Although every collaborative relationship is unique, there are key skills and attributes that partners can demonstrate to build quality relationships with one another:

- Recognize the importance of each participant's role in the education system
- Treat each other with respect
- Maintain open and consistent communication
- Consult each other on issues of shared concern
- Employ shared decision-making techniques whenever possible
- Commit to not letting each other fail

To take a closer look at collaborative skills and attributes, revisit Commit to Collaborate, Chapter 4.

## 2 Discretion

*The amount of autonomy afforded to stakeholders. In high discretion settings, employees have the ability to make decisions independently.*

In this context, discretion refers to a level of autonomy throughout the school or district, which fosters engagement and creative problem-solving. Autonomy has been defined as "Allowing employees to shape their work environment so they can perform to the best of their ability. Autonomy is not working in isolation, doing what you want whenever you want, or lack of guidance. An autonomous workplace is based on trust, respect, dependability and integrity." (Adapted from Beth Osborne for RallyBright, [rallybright.com/autonomy-in-the-workplace](http://rallybright.com/autonomy-in-the-workplace))

Best practices to foster discretion and autonomy include:

- **Flexibility Over Rigidity:** Where possible, give stakeholders the freedom to work on tasks or projects when and where they want. Being able to choose how they work shows that you trust them, and demonstrates your commitment to autonomy in the workplace.
- **An Accountable Culture, Not Based on Fear:** Accept that mistakes happen and don't react with anger or blame. Fear paralyzes stakeholders and shuts down innovation. Try to approach mistakes as learning opportunities.
- **Stakeholder Ownership:** Give stakeholders some ownership of the project, so they're motivated to bring their best to the work. Allow them to participate in decision-making and communicate that you value their input.
- **Ask for Input, Listen to the Answers:** It's important that stakeholders know that their opinions and input are valuable and have been heard. Make sure you follow up on any input or feedback, telling stakeholders what was implemented or why no action was taken on

their suggestions. The listening and feedback based on their opinions tells them their input is valuable, and increases their engagement.

- **Provide Stakeholders With the Tools They Need:** Autonomy has as much to do with access as it does with trust. Ensure stakeholders are positioned to succeed by giving them access to the tools they need, such as technology, training, or data.

### 3 Goal Alignment

*The extent to which stakeholders work towards common goals. High goal alignment is demonstrated by a common purpose and shared priorities.*

Identifying shared goals helps ensure all partners are focused in the same direction, provides a common motivation, and helps clarify what work needs to be done in order to reach the goal. Shared goals not only help stakeholders begin defining their first project, the act of identifying and clarifying shared goals is, in itself, a process that supports collaboration.

For more on goal alignment, refer to *Discover Shared Goals* and *Commit to Collaborate*, Chapters 2 and 3, which provide specific guidance for developing shared content and relational goals.

### 4 Psychological Safety

*The extent to which stakeholders are comfortable voicing concerns and sharing opinions. Psychological safety occurs when each team member believes they are respected and accepted by the group and the group provides a safe environment for risk taking. Psychologically safe environments allow for respectful discourse that includes and respects all viewpoints.*

When team members feel safe in a group, they tend to be more engaged, innovative, and successful. In contrast, research shows that individuals who do not feel psychologically safe often refrain from speaking up and sharing ideas in a group because they fear being judged harshly. In fact, in a large-scale internal study, Google recently found that psychological safety was the most important distinguishing factor of its most successful teams. (Source: Business Insider, [businessinsider.com/google-explains-top-traits-of-its-best-teams-2015-11](https://www.businessinsider.com/google-explains-top-traits-of-its-best-teams-2015-11))

The construct of psychological safety was introduced by Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmonson in 1999. Edmonson's 2014 TEDx talk outlined three important pieces of advice to increase psychological safety for members of work teams that include both managers and workers:

1. Frame your work as learning problems, as opposed to execution problems
2. Acknowledge your own fallibility
3. Model curiosity by asking a lot of questions

Read more from Edmonson here: [web.mit.edu/curhan/www/docs/Articles/15341\\_Readings/Group\\_Performance/Edmondson%20Psychological%20safety.pdf](https://web.mit.edu/curhan/www/docs/Articles/15341_Readings/Group_Performance/Edmondson%20Psychological%20safety.pdf)

Part of providing psychological safety is being intentional about creating space for all voices to be heard, providing safety for expressing opinions, and valuing different perspectives. The following articles offer some advice for being intentional about including diverse voices.

- *How to Intentionally Create a More Inclusive Culture*, Workbar blog: [workbar.com/how-to-intentionally-create-a-more-inclusive-culture/](https://workbar.com/how-to-intentionally-create-a-more-inclusive-culture/)
- *4 Actions to Integrate Diverse Perspectives*, SHRM blog: [blog.shrm.org/blog/4-actions-to-integrate-diverse-perspectives](https://blog.shrm.org/blog/4-actions-to-integrate-diverse-perspectives)

The Impraise blog cites research that shows “creating an environment in which people feel comfortable to take risks is key to fostering innovative workplaces. Have you ever been in a meeting where no one voiced their opinions, there was no discussion and people simply went along with what their manager said? A truly great team is able to bounce ideas off each other, strengthen action plans, help solve issues and provide support.” Impraise also suggests the following four steps to foster psychological safety:



### Lead by Example

- Ask for upward feedback
- Acknowledge your mistakes
- Make an effort to take on board opinions that differ from your own
- Be approachable and encourage others to ask questions



### Encourage Active Listening

- Leave phones at the door during meetings
- Show understanding by repeating what was said
- Encourage people to share more by responding and asking questions
- Actively ask those who rarely speak to share their opinion



### Create a Safe Environment

- Don't allow people to interrupt each other
- All ideas should be accepted equally and never be judged
- Never place blame
- Encourage out of the box and off-the-wall suggestions, as they often lead to innovation



### Develop an Open Mindset

- Help your team become comfortable receiving feedback from each other
- Teach them how to first listen, then respond to input from others
- Rather than a criticism, encourage your team to see feedback as a way to strengthen their ideas

Based on: [impraise.com/blog/what-is-psychological-safety-and-why-is-it-the-key-to-great-teamwork](https://impraise.com/blog/what-is-psychological-safety-and-why-is-it-the-key-to-great-teamwork)

## 5 Shared Decision-Making

*The extent to which stakeholders collaborate on important decisions. Where shared decisions are the norm, stakeholders at all levels regularly consult with one another for input on significant items.*

When decisions are shared, they are made by the team, on behalf of the team, and are “owned” by the team - once made, all team members support them and take accountability for them.

However, not all decisions are appropriate to be shared. Some decisions land squarely within the responsibility of one stakeholder or another. There’s no right or wrong to the choice of how decisions are made; only that we owe it to one another to be transparent about which decisions will be made in which manner.

This topic is covered in more detail in the following section.

### Improving Collaborative Climate

In addition to the general advice provided above, practitioners have used a variety of strategies to help them create and foster a collaborative climate. Some of these strategies are listed below. You should also brainstorm with your team: What effective team building or ice-breaking activities have you used in other settings?

1. Share a meal together.
2. Go on a retreat together: Get off campus if you can. A neutral convening space can be useful.
- 3.. Learn about collaboration together: Attend a TURN meeting or other convening where collaborative teams come together for learning and sharing. Or, invite an LMC facilitator or representatives from another collaborative team to address your group.
4. Explore an issue together: Invite a subject matter expert or attend a training/event on your group's collaboration topic. Have a content-specific conversation together as a starting point (based on understanding the problem, not solving it).
5. Build in time for ice-breakers and getting-to-know-you activities, such as:
  - Campfire storytelling: Use a grab bag of prompts such as “funniest classroom moment,” “hobbies or side hustles,” “worst group project,” etc. and ask individuals to share stories
  - Memory museum: Individuals draw or bring in artifacts representing positive memories to share with the group that get displayed around the room
  - Spectrum mapping: A facilitator lists a spectrum, such as “broccoli: delicious to disgusting” or “morning person to night owl” and people move around the room to show where they are on the spectrum

Other ideas can be found on the Playmeo website: [playmeo.com/activities/?subscription=free](https://playmeo.com/activities/?subscription=free).

6. Read and discuss a book together:

- ABC Unified began their collaborative work together by reading the book *Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott and discussing how they might use and apply the recommended communication strategies.
- *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, Peter Block
- *HBR's 10 Must-Reads on Collaboration*, Harvard Business Review
- *Building Brand Communities, How Organizations Succeed by Creating Belonging*, Carrie Melissa Jones and Charles H. Vogl

## Collaborative Decision-Making

**Collaborative decision-making** is the practice of selecting the right decision-making approach for the decision at hand, and making sure everyone knows what that is. Collaborative decision-making is a key practice of collaborative teams and committees, but it's important to recognize that collaborative decision-making may look different in different contexts.

**Shared decision-making** refers to all team members contributing to the decision, and is a new skill for many of us. Making decisions independently is a very different thing from committing to being open to other perspectives or information that conflicts with our ideas. Collaborative groups commit to sharing as many decisions as possible.

### The Decision-Making Continuum

Dr. W. Patrick Dolan from the Catalyst for Educational Change studied how decisions are made and developed a seven-step scale (shown below) to depict the extent to which a decision made between two individuals or two stakeholder groups is shared. The scale can also be extrapolated to include more than two parties, which can be useful in setting decision-making expectations in a group.

The outer edges of the scale (1 and 7) represent decisions made solely by one party. As you





move towards the center of the continuum, each step moves a degree closer towards the true shared decision-making represented by step four. Being clear from the outset about where a decision lies on the continuum helps avoid conflict and build trust among team members.

One goal of partnership and collaboration is to make decisions closer to the center of the continuum - shared decision-making - whenever possible. The more decisions that can be made at step four, the stronger the collaborative relationship becomes. As one superintendent noted, choosing to move a decision from a one to a three on the continuum is worthwhile because “even if the decision is solely mine to make, I will make a better one if I have input from others on my team.”



Recognize, though, that not all decisions *should* be shared. Sometimes, a decision's risks, impact, and importance affect how collaboratively it can be made. Sometimes the skills, influence, and experience of decision makers factor into the decision-making equation. And, some decisions will always remain in the purview of one party or the other, such as the daily pedagogical decisions that classroom teachers make to help their students learn, or the governance decisions a school board makes as required by its policies.

The important thing is that the group understands which decisions will be made in which manner, and why. When participants expect a decision to be made collaboratively, only to find that one party sees themselves as the decider, trust erodes. For example, consider a District Leadership Team coming to a decision point that includes confidential information to which only the superintendent is privy. The superintendent might decide to listen to and consider the group's ideas and opinions, but ultimately make the final decision (step three). In this scenario, the superintendent needs to discuss the decision-making process with the group and set the expectation that the superintendent will be making the final decision after considering input from others.

Being clear from the outset about where a decision lies on the continuum helps avoid conflict. One collaborative team places the appropriate continuum number on their meeting agendas next to each decision to be made, to provide transparency and ensure that everyone at the table recognizes their role in the decision.

Learn more by listening to Dr. Dolan describing his continuum here: [turnweb.org/videos/patrick-dolan-learning-to-live-together-building-a-culture-of-collaboration-focused-on-improving-teaching-and-learning/](https://turnweb.org/videos/patrick-dolan-learning-to-live-together-building-a-culture-of-collaboration-focused-on-improving-teaching-and-learning/).



## Decision-Making Processes

In addition to considering who owns a decision and who might be able to inform a decision, consider the process used to reach a decision, which may vary with the issue's complexity, its importance, and the available time. Many sources present six decision-making options:

1. **Shared Decision-Making/Consensus:** This approach corresponds to the middle of the decision-making continuum, and is best used when the decision impacts everyone in the group, when the issue is important, and when it's important that all group members buy into the decision. This process builds collaboration and commitment to the outcome, but can be time consuming.
2. **Majority Voting:** A ballot or show of hands can be useful to select from a limited number of defined options, when a decision must be reached quickly, when a consensus is not required, and for less important decisions.
3. **Multi-Voting:** Multi-voting involves participants casting more than one vote, and can involve multiple rounds of voting. It can be a quick way to prioritize among a long list of options, and can be used to identify one top option or to narrow the possibilities to a smaller list of the top priorities. Multivoting allows an item that is favored by all, but not the top choice of any, to rise to the top. You can find detailed instructions here: [accendoreliability.com/multi-voting-one-vote-better/](http://accendoreliability.com/multi-voting-one-vote-better/)
4. **Compromise:** Compromise uses negotiation to reach a decision, and is used when there are opposing options that polarize the group. Everyone wins, but also gives something up in return.
5. **One Person Decides:** This corresponds to the ends of the decision-making continuum, and can be appropriate if one person has authority for the decision, if there's a clear expert on the topic, or if the issue is trivial.
6. **Unanimous:** When issues are either trivial or not complex, a group will often reach a quick unanimous decision.

Again, there's no right or wrong process, but team members owe it to one another to be transparent about which decisions will be made in which manner.

## Strengthening Shared Decision-Making Skills

One reason we recommended beginning your collaborative work with an easily achievable goal or issue is because your team will likely need to develop shared decision-making skills over time. Beginning with relatively low-stakes issues will help you practice working as a team and build the capacity to take on more complex or contentious issues.

Seeds for Change, a community advocacy group in the UK, offers a short guide on shared decision-making, which includes a process, guidance on a shared vocabulary around agreement and disagreement, conditions for consensus, facilitation, group structure, and key skills for shared decision-making. Their top tips are:

- Remember that consensus is about cooperation among equals. The exact process that groups use may vary, but putting these techniques into practice will always be the key to making consensus work.
- Explore your differences. People often shy away from conflict or get into arguments to prove they're right. However, the key to finding win-win solutions is to understand all of the different needs and perspectives before forming a proposal.

- Be very clear when you make a decision so everyone goes away with a shared understanding of what has been agreed to. Before finalizing a decision, test to check that there really is agreement.

Download Seeds for Change's full *Consensus Decision Making* guide here: [seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus](https://seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus).



### Consider & Discuss: Shared Decision-Making

Consider the following questions individually, then discuss each participant's responses as a group. You can record your responses on Activity 8B at the end of this chapter.

- What types of decisions can truly be shared by our team or committee?
- What types of decisions fall towards the outside of the continuum?
- How will we ensure all participants understand where each decision falls and why?
- Are there meeting logistics or other group norms that might facilitate shared decision-making?

## Conflict Resolution

No matter how solid your relationship or how long-standing your partnership, conflict is inevitable. Acknowledge that and discuss as a group how you might handle it. Thinking through how your team wants these processes to look - before disputes arise - strengthens your relationships and helps you weather storms. Regardless of what approach or processes you use to resolve conflict, everyone needs to remain committed to the larger goal - student success in your system.

Although many of us try to avoid it, conflict can be a positive force in a partnership or team. When handled well, conflict can help strengthen a relationship by allowing for open communication and understanding what each team member values. And, working through conflict can lead to more creative and innovative solutions.

Understanding the sources of conflict and strategies for handling conflict makes us better equipped to deal with it. This section discusses common sources of conflict and strategies to address them, and five conflict resolution styles and when each might be appropriate.

Like decision-making, there's no one "best" way to handle all disputes. The best strategy depends on the source of conflict and on the relative importance of the outcome versus the the relationship.

## Sources of Conflict

Leadership coach Donna Schilder discusses four primary sources of conflict as well as strategies to address each, shown below. Understanding the source of a particular conflict can help a team or committee address the issue proactively and positively.

### Sources of Conflict and Resolution Strategies

#### Methods Conflict

- **Based on** disagreement over how something will be done: the techniques, approaches, or tools used. In a methods conflict, all parties should try to understand that the end result is more important than how the task is accomplished. This understanding can de-escalate the emotion stakeholders have in "their" method, making it easier to collaborate.
- **Resolution strategies:** Methods conflicts can be resolved by: agreeing to follow established processes, learning about various methods, testing each method to see what works best, combining two methods, or agreeing to simply selecting one method over the other.

#### Goals Conflict

- **Based on** incompatible or conflicting goals.
- **Resolution strategies:** To resolve a goals conflict, revisit your overarching goals and let them guide the decision. Or, you can prioritize the goals in light of the overarching goal. Open discussion and finding common ground are key to resolving goals conflicts.

#### Facts Conflict

- **Based on** conflicting sets of information, viewing the same facts differently, or disagreeing on the validity of the facts. Conflicting facts don't necessarily mean that one set of facts is correct and one is incorrect, each may be correct within its own context, such as data on elementary schools versus data that includes all K12 schools.
- **Resolution strategies:** Once you understand you are in conflict over facts, your job is to better understand the facts presented so that all parties can agree on one set of facts. A facts conflict can be resolved by sharing data and information, verifying facts, and/or gathering additional data.

#### Values Conflict

- **Based on** differences in basic principles or beliefs, this is the most difficult type of conflict to resolve. In fact, a values conflict may never be completely resolved, but all parties should take the time to understand how values differ and find ways to work together. Try to understand the differences rather than try to change someone's values.
- **Resolution strategies:** Values conflicts can be addressed by seeking to understand the others' values, clarifying your values, seeking compromise, or knowing when to 'agree to disagree.'

Adapted from *Understanding the Sources of Conflict*, Donna Schilder Coaching, [donnaschilder.com/blog/leadership-blog/understanding-the-sources-of-conflict/](https://donnaschilder.com/blog/leadership-blog/understanding-the-sources-of-conflict/)

## Conflict Resolution Styles

Alexander Haim defined five styles most commonly used to resolve conflict: Collaborate, Compete, Compromise, Avoid, and Accommodate, described in the table below. The most constructive way to handle a particular dispute depends on the source of conflict, as discussed above, the importance of the outcome, and the importance of maintaining the relationship.

Conflict Resolution Style	Characteristics	Appropriate When:	Inappropriate When:
<b>Collaborate</b>	Integrative, problem-solving, even handed	Time is available to complete the process and parties are committed to and skilled in using it	Time, skills, knowledge, and/or commitment are limited and/or the issue is not important enough to warrant the effort
<b>Compete</b>	Confrontational, hard-nosed	Power comes from a legitimate source and parties agree to use the method	Power is not seen as legitimate or balanced and the losing party has no way to express needs or concerns
<b>Compromise</b>	Splitting the difference, both sides win/both sides lose	Both parties have enough leeway to give, resources and time are limited, or a win/lose outcome is undesirable	The original position is unrealistic, the solution is watered down to be ineffective, and commitment of the parties is doubtful
<b>Avoid</b>	Leaving/losing, withdrawing	The issue is unimportant, the timing is wrong, or a cooling off period is needed; short-term use	The issue is important and will not disappear, but instead will build
<b>Accommodate</b>	Yielding/losing, friendly, helping	Preserving the relationship is more important than the issue at hand	Reluctance to deal with conflict leads to evading important issues especially when others are ready and willing to deal with the issue

Used with permission from the Catalyst for Educational Change.

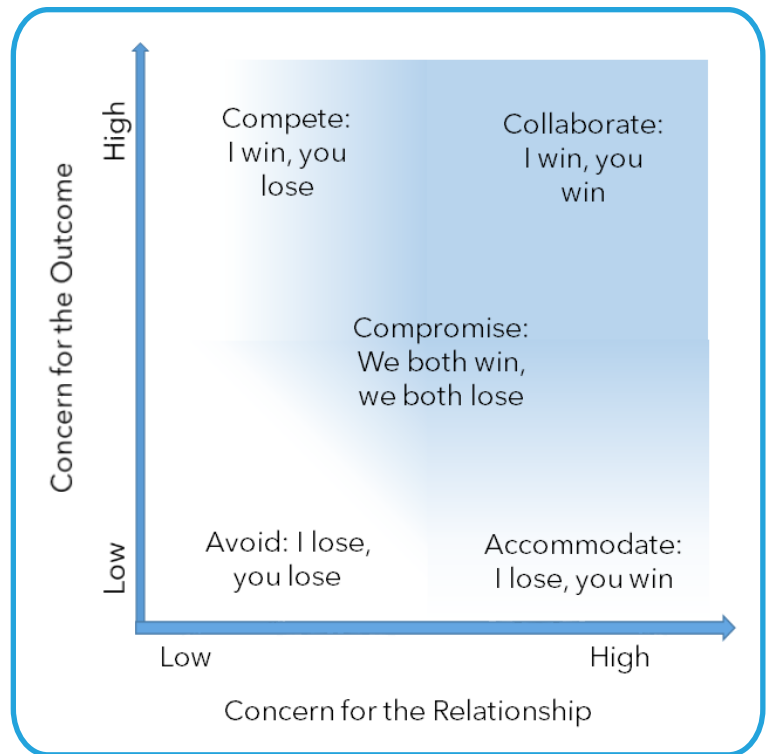
Haim's research also showed that each of us has default styles that we tend to use first when conflict arises, and understanding these tendencies can help us manage our own conflict behavior and help guide a team or committee when they're in conflict. Activity 8D at the end of this chapter can help you better understand your natural tendencies for addressing conflict - to see which style you rely on most heavily and which style you use least. Your style or approach might be different in a different context, so you may want to complete the activity a second time with a different context in mind to better understand how your style is affected by the context. The activity does not label or categorize you; it merely indicates your more dominant and less dominant styles within a particular context. Understanding your styles can help you be better prepared to constructively handle different types of conflicts.

There is no one right way to resolve every dispute. Think about the challenge you're facing: How important is the relationship? How important is the outcome? How much time is available to resolve the issue? Use the answers to agree on an approach to resolve the issue at hand.

### Conflict Resolution Resources

For particularly difficult situations, bringing in a neutral facilitator or mediator can help your team work through the dispute. A variety of strategies and helpful approaches can also be found in the following resources, which you may want to note for future reference or select one to discuss as a team:

- *Beyond Conflict to Consensus*, Bob Chadwick, [managingwholes.com/chadwick.htm/](http://managingwholes.com/chadwick.htm/)
- *14 Conflict Resolution Skills to Use with Your Team and Your Customers*, Swetha Amare-san, [blog.hubspot.com/service/conflict-resolution-skills](http://blog.hubspot.com/service/conflict-resolution-skills)
- *Why You Need Team Conflict and How to Make It Productive*, Rallybright blog, [rallybright.com/why-your-team-needs-conflict-and-how-to-make-it-productive](http://rallybright.com/why-your-team-needs-conflict-and-how-to-make-it-productive)



## Group Norms

Now that your group has considered how you'll approach developing a collaborative climate, decision-making processes, and conflict resolution, it's time to use that understanding to define the norms that will guide you throughout your collaborative work. Group norms are behavioral and procedural guidelines that participants agree to, that provide order and consistency for group activities. Your team or committee should establish group norms as a foundational part of successful collaborative work.

Group norms are typically either behavioral or procedural:

- **Behavioral norms** are those that foster collaborative climate attributes: psychological safety, decision-making, discretion, peer collaboration, and goal alignment. Examples include: ensuring all participants have an equal voice, promoting active listening, respecting all opinions, confidentiality of discussions, agreeing not to blame, keeping an open mind, and transparent decision-making. See the Collaborative Attributes List (Activity 4C) for additional examples.

- **Procedural norms** help keep meetings on track, work organized, and communications open. Examples include: meeting logistics, a communications plan, and how group roles (such as meeting chair, recording secretary, etc.) are assigned and rotated.

Groups who define and uphold such norms build their collaborative climate and reduce ambiguity that can lead to misunderstandings and inefficiency. Ideally, group norms should be established by group members collectively, and all group members should agree to abide by them.

Consider establishing group norms on the following topics:

**Meeting Logistics:** Document expectations around meeting times, tardiness, absences, meeting cancellations, meeting location, meeting length, requirements for a quorum

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**Record Keeping:** Determine how agendas will be developed, what will be recorded, how notes will be recorded and distributed, processes if members disagree with what's recorded in the notes

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**Confidentiality:** Decide if meetings will be open to others, what meeting topics/information will be considered confidential, whether or not the group wants to jointly develop "talking points" that can be shared outside of the meeting

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**Open Participation:** Set norms to encourage all members to participate, respect all voices, promote active listening, discourage interruptions, and favor inquiry over judgment

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**Decision-Making:** Define a method for making group decisions and communicating who is making the decision, allow for inclusive decision-making, determine if decisions can be reopened/reconsidered, decide how you will address conflicts

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**Member Expectations:** Set ground rules around meeting attendance, participation, use of cell phones/technology during meetings

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## Chapter Summary

Collaboration is best sustained by both a comprehensive *structure* of leadership teams and working committees addressing student-centered goals, and on the collaborative *processes* that foster an authentic collaborative climate and allow your team or committee to work successfully together. This chapter: described the importance of a collaborative climate, collaborative decision-making, constructive conflict resolution, and group norms; and provided resources, strategies, and tools for developing and strengthening these processes. Understanding and implementing collaborative processes leads to a sustained culture of collaboration and more impactful outcomes.



# Activities To Help You Define Collaborative Processes



## About These Activities

The activities in this section can help leadership teams and working committees establish the collaborative norms that support a collaborative culture within their system.

## Activities

- Use the **Collaborative Climate Check-In**, Activity 8A, to assess your team's or committee's progress in fostering Rubinstein & McCarthy's five indicators of collaborative climate. You may want to periodically revisit this tool to assess your progress.
- Activity 8B, **Consider & Discuss: Shared Decision-Making**, can be used to guide a discussion about the types of decisions that can be authentically shared and how to ensure transparency about decision-making.
- As you're faced with decisions throughout your work, you can use Activity 8C, the **Decision-Making Check-In Tool**, to help determine where a particular decision falls on the continuum and discuss why, so that all team or committee members understand the decision-making process. Refer to this tool frequently as your team makes decisions.
- Each individual can use the **Conflict Resolution Style Inventory**, Activity 8D, to assess their natural tendencies for addressing conflict - to see which styles they rely on most heavily and which styles they use least. Your style or approach might be different in a different context, so you may want to complete the inventory a second time with a different context in mind to better understand how your style is affected by the context. Inventory scores do not label or categorize you; they merely indicate your more dominant and less dominant styles within a particular context.
- Use the **Group Norms Activity**, Activity 8E, to apply what you've learned and develop the behavioral and procedural norms that will guide your work and help foster a collaborative climate. Consider periodically reviewing your group norms, perhaps by discussing one per month: How are we doing upholding this norm? What is helping or hindering? Are there additional group norms we should consider?





# 8A: Collaborative Climate Check-In Tool

## PURPOSE

This tool can help collaborative teams and committees foster a collaborative climate by assessing their group's current capacity in each of the five characteristics of a collaborative climate.

## INSTRUCTIONS

As a group, reflect on and discuss your group's capacity in each area, and place a check mark along the scale to indicate where your group falls at this point. Consider: What does this characteristic mean to us? How do we demonstrate it when we work together? How do we demonstrate it with our internal stakeholders? Make an improvement plan for any areas you feel need to be improved.

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

How consistently do we demonstrate each characteristic?

Never      Sometimes      Always



**Peer collaboration** - The amount and quality of collaboration among stakeholders in a system, encompassing information sharing, social support, and the extent to which stakeholders successfully work together to accomplish goals.



**Discretion** - The amount of autonomy afforded to stakeholders.



**Goal alignment** - The extent to which stakeholders work towards common goals.



**Psychological safety** - The extent to which stakeholders are comfortable voicing their concerns and sharing their opinions.



**Shared decisions** - The extent to which stakeholders collaborate on important decisions.



# Consider & Discuss: Shared Decision-Making

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spent 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



What types of decisions can truly be shared by our team or committee?

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What types of decisions fall towards the outside of the continuum?

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How will we ensure all participants understand where each decision falls and why?

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Are there meeting logistics or other group norms that might facilitate shared decision-making?

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## 8C: Decision-Making Check-In Tool



**PURPOSE:** This tool helps collaborative team members clarify which decision-making process will be used for a given decision.

All collaborative group members need clarity about where a given decision falls on the continuum. When one person believes the decision is theirs to make and another believes that decision-making is shared, it leads to disappointment, frustration, and mistrust.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Use this tool to assign a number to each decision before the decision-making process starts. Make sure that all group members know what sort of decision-making process is being used for each decision.

### The 7-Point Decision-Making Continuum (from W. Patrick Dolan)





## 8D: Conflict Resolution Style Inventory



### PURPOSE

This tool can help individuals identify their more and less dominant conflict resolution styles within a particular context.

Consider sharing and discussing individual results as a team to better understand your team's dynamics.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Think about a recent or recurring type of conflict you've faced. Then, read each statement below and enter the score that reflects how often the statement accurately describes your approach to that conflict.

Transfer the scores to the scoring box at the end of the activity and total the scores by column to see your dominant and less dominant conflict resolution styles within the chosen context.

Complete the inventory again with a different context in mind to determine how your style is affected by different contexts.

### SCORES:

**1 = Never    2 = Seldom    3 = Sometimes    4 = Often    5 = Always**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I avoid getting in the middle; I keep any disagreement to myself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I use my position to influence others to accept my suggestions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I believe in meeting each other halfway.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I usually allow concessions to others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I try out various ideas to see if there is a way to satisfy all sides.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I usually avoid discussing my differences of opinion with others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am able to use my authority to get decisions in line with what I want.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will find a middle road to avoid an impasse.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I try to accommodate the other side's wishes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I try to work my plan into the other side's plan for a mutually acceptable approach.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I try to stay out of disagreements with others.

12. \_\_\_\_\_ I use my expertise to get a result that works for me.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ I propose a middle ground to try to break the deadlock.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ I tend to go along with others' suggestions to satisfy their needs.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ I try to work with others to find solutions that satisfy all expectations.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ I try to keep my disagreement to myself to avoid hard feelings.
17. \_\_\_\_\_ I generally pursue my side of an issue.
18. \_\_\_\_\_ I negotiate with others to reach a compromise.
19. \_\_\_\_\_ I am often persuaded to support other people's suggestions.
20. \_\_\_\_\_ I share information in order to solve the problem together.
21. \_\_\_\_\_ I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with others whenever possible.
22. \_\_\_\_\_ I sometimes use my power to gain the upper hand.
23. \_\_\_\_\_ I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be reached.
24. \_\_\_\_\_ I usually try to satisfy the other person's expectations.
25. \_\_\_\_\_ I try to bring all concerns out in the open to resolve the issue.

### Score Your Responses:

For each question, enter your numerical response in the corresponding box below, then total the scores by column then check your results using the scoring guidance below.

1:	2:	3:	4:	5:
6:	7:	8:	9:	10:
11:	12:	13:	14:	15:
16:	17:	18:	19:	20:
21:	22:	23:	24:	25:
Total =	Total =	Total =	Total =	Total =
<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Compete</b>	<b>Compromise</b>	<b>Accommodate</b>	<b>Collaborate</b>

### Scoring:

- 21 - 25 points: this is a very dominant tendency
- 15 - 20 points: this is a slightly dominant tendency
- 11 - 14 points: this is an average tendency is neither dominant nor minor
- 6 - 10 points: this is a less dominant tendency
- 0 - 5 points: this is a minor tendency

Used with permission from the Catalyst for Education Change. Adapted from Rahman, M.A. & Manger, N.R. (1995, February). Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict: First-Order Factor Model and Its Invariants Across Groups. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 80(1): 122-132. [pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/7706190/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/7706190/)



# 8E: Group Norms Activity



## PURPOSE

Use this tool to guide the development of group norms to build trust and ensure participants' psychological safety throughout the collaborative process.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Distribute color-coded sticky notes for the six categories below, and project on a screen or distribute the category descriptions below. Ask all participants to brainstorm words and phrases they want to include in the group norms, ensuring everyone has at least one idea for each category. It may also be helpful to think in terms of "What would make our time together meaningful and enjoyable?" Use the responses to complete the template on the next page.

### Meeting Logistics

- *When and where do we meet?*
- *How often? For how long?*
- *Will we require a quorum?*
- *How will cancellations or rescheduling be handled?*

### Recordkeeping

- *How will agendas be developed?*
- *What will be recorded?*
- *How will notes be recorded and distributed?*
- *How will we handle disputes over what was recorded?*

### Confidentiality

- *Will meetings be open to others?*
- *What meeting topics/information will be considered confidential?*
- *Will we jointly develop "talking points" that can be shared outside of the meeting?*

### Open Participation

- *How will we encourage all members to participate?*
- *What can we do to promote active listening and discourage interruptions?*
- *What can we do to help us favor inquiry over judgment? To help us respect all voices?*

### Decision-Making

- *How will we make group decisions and make sure everyone understands the process for a particular decision?*
- *How will we encourage inclusive decision-making?*
- *What process will we use to reconsider previous decisions?*
- *How will we address conflicts?*

### Member Expectations

- *What are our expectations for meeting attendance and participation?*
- *What attitudes will we use when talking about our partnership with others?*
- *Do we want to establish norms regarding cell phone use and other distractions during our meetings?*

## 8E: Group Norms Activity (cont'd)

Meeting logistics:

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Recordkeeping:

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Confidentiality:

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Open Participation:

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Decision-Making:

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Member Expectations:

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## Chapter 9

# Implement Collaboration



This chapter will help you put your plans for positive change into action by using your collaborative processes to work through your plans and initiatives. Leadership teams will support working committees by maintaining open two-way communications and will develop a communications plan to spread the partnership's successes out to the community at large. Working committees will implement their project plans, monitor progress, adjust project plans, seek support as needed, and maintain open two-way communications with leadership teams.

[This chapter is intended for all leadership teams and working committees.](#)

### **Contents:**

Introduction

Use Collaborative Processes

Advice for Those New to Collaboration

Leadership Teams Implement:

Communications & Progress Monitoring

Support Working Committees

Monitor Ongoing System Needs

Activities To Help You Implement Your Initiatives

Working Committees Implement:

Project Monitoring

## Introduction

Your team's initiatives are intended to improve your educational system. The outcomes you're seeking - whether academic, social/emotional, school culture, teacher retention, etc. - will depend on the issue you've chosen to tackle and on your team's ideas to address it. As you implement your plans, you'll evaluate progress and results to ensure your work is on track.

This chapter can help you understand how the project planning, collaborative structures, and relationship building you've worked on thus far have prepared you to implement your team's ideas.

You'll use your collaborative processes - group norms, collaborative decision-making, and conflict resolution skills - as you work through your plans and initiatives.

You'll see how your extensive planning, collaborative structure building, and relationship building have prepared you to implement your group's ideas. You've completed the preliminary work and laid the foundation, and now it's time to start the work that will directly impact your students!



**“Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work.”**

**- Peter F. Drucker,  
*The Essential Drucker***

## Use Collaborative Processes

Throughout your journey, your team or committee has discussed and decided on how you'll work collaboratively - the procedural and behavioral norms that will guide you. Now, use those processes as you implement collaboration. Throughout your work, refer back to the tools you previously developed, such as the *Collaborative Climate Check-In* (Activity 8A), *Group Norms Activity* (Activity 8E), and, for leadership teams, *Guiding Principles, Guiding Behaviors* (Activity 4F).

Each group member should be very familiar with the content of these tools. Make sure each participant understands what the norms mean and agrees to uphold them. Once a month, or on another regular schedule, you might want to select a collaborative climate indicator or a group norm and discuss: What does this indicator mean to us? How are we demonstrating it as we work together? How else might we demonstrate it?

Some collaborative teams include their group norms at the top of each agenda and set of minutes. How else might your team or committee keep your collaborative norms front-and-center to guide your work together?

When there's a decision to be made, you'll also want to refer to the *Decision-Making Check-In Tool* (Activity 8C). For each decision, make sure everyone involved understands at the outset who owns the decision. On their meeting agendas, the School Leadership Team from

**8C: Decision-Making Check-In Tool**

**PURPOSE:** This tool helps collaborative team members clarify which decision-making process will be used for a given decision.

All collaborative group members need clarity about where a given decision falls on the continuum. When one person believes the decision is theirs to make and another believes that decision-making is shared, it leads to disappointment, frustration, and mistrust.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Use this tool to assign a number to each decision before the decision-making process starts. Make sure that all group members know what sort of decision-making process is being used for each decision.

The 7-Point Decision-Making Continuum (from W. Patrick Delany)

Montgomery Upper Middle School in Montgomery Township, New Jersey, prints the appropriate continuum number next to each decision to be made. How will your team or committee ensure there's clarity and transparency about who owns each decision?

You'll also at times have need of the conflict resolution resources from *Define Process for Collaboration*, Chapter 8, and perhaps outside facilitation on conflict resolution as well. Remember that when handled well, conflict can strengthen a relationship by allowing for open communi-

cation and an understanding of what each team member values. The important thing is to remain committed to the shared student-centered goals that brought you to collaborate in the first place.

### Advice for Those New to Collaboration

Your collaborative journey to date has prepared you and your partners to identify shared goals, define the norms and collaborative processes you'll use to work together, gather any necessary data or information to inform your initiative and develop detailed plans for providing support, communications, and/or implementing a specific project. It might seem like putting these plans into action should happen on autopilot because on paper, everything is ready to go.

Realize, however, that this is where upholding your group norms and collaborative decision-making can get messy and difficult. Each team member brings a unique perspective as well as their "full time" role as superintendent, building rep, parent, principal, or educator, and those roles and responsibilities don't disappear at the collaboration table. Individual styles differ and personalities may clash. Remember to stay focused on your shared goal and commit to sticking with the collaborative process.

Implementing collaboration looks different for leadership teams than it does for working committees, and the remainder of this chapter reflects those differences.



**"You need to be committed for the long haul. Collaboration is like biking a changing roadway. Sometimes you're on smooth asphalt, sometimes you're on a sandy patch, sometimes you're hitting a few potholes. You can get through if you slow down your pedaling a little bit, steer a little to the left, steer a little to the right. It's hard to see fruit from the labor immediately and I wouldn't assess that the low-hanging fruit built our culture as much as some of those sandy patches or potholes. So I think what I would say is: don't get off the bike . . . keep pedaling!"**

*- Kathy McHugh, Recording Secretary, Delran Education Association, Delran, NJ*

Leadership teams will use their collaborative processes, communications plans, and support tracking tools to help them manage, coordinate, and support multiple working committees. In addition, leadership teams may take on their own projects, essentially functioning as a working committee and a leadership team simultaneously. If this is the case for your leadership team, be sure to work through both the leadership team and working committee sections of this chapter, beginning below and on page 198, respectively.

Working committees will use their collaborative processes to implement the project plan developed in *Define Content for Collaboration*, Chapter 6. They'll monitor their progress, adjust their project plan as needed, and identify and request any required support.

**Working committees should proceed to page 198.**

## Leadership Teams Implement Collaboration

During the *Implement Collaboration* stage, leadership teams have three primary responsibilities, discussed in the following sections:

- Maintain open two-way communications among all collaboration participants and communicate out about the partnership and outcomes
- Support working committees as needed
- Monitor the district or school environment and establish new working committees to address emerging needs

### Communications & Progress Monitoring

*Establish Support Resources*, Chapter 7, discussed the importance of robust internal communications to help collaborative projects proceed more smoothly and to support the collaborative partnership itself. This intra-partnership communication helps keep the focus on the overarching student-centered goals that are the heart of this work.

Regular communications with working committees help ensure that leadership teams are aware of support needs, can help you gauge how effective various support resources are, and can help in coordinating similar initiatives.

In addition to these internal communications, external communications - from your partnership to the broader community - allow you to highlight student-centered results and the collaborative processes used to achieve them. These external communications are good public relations for your school system and partnership and help generate an understanding of and appreciation for the work you're doing.

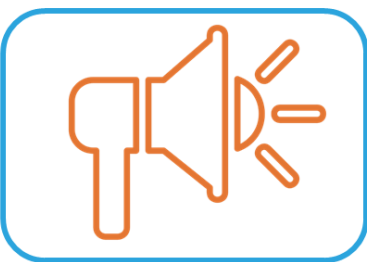
**Internal Communications:** Use your *Communication Plan Template* (Activity 7E) to help you establish a web of internal communications among the various collaboration practitioners. You'll want to ensure you have open two-way communication among the District Leadership Team, School Leadership Teams, working committees, and each participant's internal stakeholders. And, you want to ensure these communications occur frequently and on a predictable schedule.

Leadership teams should check in regularly with working committees, coordinating similar efforts, and either helping directly or providing access to support as needed. Similarly, the DLTs should be in regular contact with SLTs for the same purposes. The leadership team's progress monitoring role is ongoing. While the frequency and cadence of progress monitoring depends on the committees involved and on the milestones and timeline of specific projects, it is vitally important that these check-ins occur to keep the committees moving forward and to maintain a culture of collaboration throughout the system.



As you put these communications channels into practice, take note of how they're working. Do some groups benefit from more or less frequent check-ins? Are there practitioners or stakeholders that you overlooked in your original plan? Adjust your communications plans as needed along the way so that they're working effectively for your partnership.

**External Communications:** As your partnership strengthens and working committees make progress on their initiatives, you'll want to make sure your community knows about your collaboration, why you're working this way, and most importantly, about the outcomes that are benefiting your students.



Your audience for these communications is the community at large. Whether involved in the school system or not, parents or not, all community members have a vested interest in student success and the health of the school system - whether from a sense of civic pride in living in a community that prioritizes student success or simply an appreciation for the impact on real estate values. These communications can help rally the community behind your efforts, generate positive public relations for your school system, and may surface new partners or support resources from the community itself.

As with your internal communications plan, these external communications should be on a regular schedule. Topics might include:

- Milestones achieved
- Highlights of a particular working committee's goal, project, and progress
- Shout-outs to community partners
- Information on collaboration itself: the case for collaboration, the processes and structures being used



- Information on your partnership: who is involved, your overarching relational and content goals, your guiding principles and norms

In addition, the work of school-level working committees and School Leadership Team should be broadcast to the school community, perhaps through the school newsletter and website.



At the district level, communications should include both district- and school-level news and successes. You might consider submitting items to your city or county website, a community news website such as Patch, local newspapers, local radio news outlets, and/or presenting at school board and other community meetings.

Although this section discusses communication to your community

and parents, hearing input *from* parents and community is equally important. This typically occurs by including parents and community members directly on leadership teams and working committees, and/or by intentionally gathering feedback through Community Conversations, surveys, opportunity audits, and other needs assessment strategies. Find information about these aspects in:

- *Identify Partners/Who Might be Involved in Collaboration?* (Chapter 2)
- *Discover Shared Goals/Identifying and Prioritizing Needs* (Chapter 3)
- *Define Content for Collaboration/Using Data To Refine Your Project* (Chapter 6)

Use the *External Communications Plan*, Activity 9A at the end of this chapter, to help you plan these external communications.

## Support Working Committees


A crucial role for leadership teams is to support working committees. This support is central to sustaining the working committees, improving the success of working committee's collaborative projects, and ultimately deeply embedding collaboration into the school and/or district culture.

Use the *Working Committee Check-In Tool*, Activity 9B, to keep track of each working committee's progress, notes on your check-ins, any support needed, and other action items. Consistently using the tool produces a running history of your work with each committee. Use it to:


- Track team/committee needs and support resources allocated
- Identify similar or overlapping needs that might be coordinated across several working committees

- Track the status of working committee projects, including successes and milestones that should be reported out

As working committees request relational and/or content-specific support, refer to Activity 7B, *Support Resources*, to identify potential resources to help them. As you identify new subject matter experts, facilitators, or other resources, add them to this list so that it remains a current clearinghouse of potential support that you can refer back to. As your catalog of potential support resources becomes larger, you may want to put it into a format where it can easily be searched or sorted by topic.



## 7B: Support Resources



**PURPOSE** This tool can help you identify sources of support for the collaborative teams and committees in your partnership. The completed tool is a clearinghouse of potential support resources that you can refer to and add to throughout your partnership's work.

**INSTRUCTIONS**  
Brainstorm available content-specific and relational support resources, and use the chart below to document who might be able help, and the types of support they can provide.

Relational Support  
Resources

Content-Related  
Support Resources

## Monitor Ongoing System Needs



Regularly-scheduled communication between role-alike individuals from labor and management is an important sensing mechanism for surfacing district needs. These communications provide an open channel that facilitates a partner's understanding of their counterpart's perspectives and challenges, provides an opportunity for on-the-ground problem-solving, and helps surface issues that need attention and that can be addressed collaboratively. When an issue identified in these meetings can't be solved directly by the individuals involved, they should bring it to their District Leadership Team. The DLT can assign the issue to an existing working committee or form a new working committee to address it.

Read more about role-alike communications in *Establish Support Resources*, Chapter 7.

If your team has already established role-alike communications, now is the time to periodically check in with the individuals involved. Are standing meetings taking place? Are the individuals receiving information from their stakeholders, and are the meetings helpful in surfacing and addressing any issues raised? Make sure the outcomes of these meetings are being communicated to your team so you can stay current on your district's needs.

In addition to role-alike communications, *Discover Shared Goals*, Chapter 3 presents information on using existing data and/or needs assessments to identify system needs, includes several tools for conducting needs assessments, and provides a method to prioritize among identified needs. Revisit that information now to help you consider the best ways for your leadership team to stay up-to-date on your system's needs.

From your district-wide scans, you may identify collaborative committees or groups that have formed organically in response to a school-based issue. Reach out to them to offer support in collaborative processes and practices as well as content-based support. If there is a working committee in another school working on a similar issue, you may offer to connect the two so they can learn from each other.



When issues or needs are identified, revisit your tools from *Identify Collaborative Teams and Functions*, Chapter 5, and determine if an existing working committee can take on the issue or if a new committee should be formed. Update your *Collaborative Structures Worksheet* (Activity 5D) to reflect any identified changes to your committee structure, and revisit your support tools (as discussed in the *Support Working Committees* section above) to plan how you'll support any new committees.

## Summary and Next Steps for Leadership Teams

At this point, collaborative projects should be moving forward according to working committees' plans, and there's no set timeline for how long that should take. Individual projects will vary based on issue complexity and how a committee plans to address it. Some working committees may move through the *Implement* stage fairly quickly, while others might be in this stage for a long while. As a leadership team, you might want to use this time to explore other challenges in your system.

During this phase, use this chapter and the tools previously developed throughout your collaboration to help you support working committees and maintain strong internal and external communications to support your partnership and its work. Feel free to add to, expand on, or edit the tools to better align with your goals and how you and your partners are working.

In particular:

- Ensure you're using role-alike communications and other sensing mechanisms to stay current on your system's needs. Assign new and emerging needs to an existing working committee or form a new committee to address the needs you decide to work on collaboratively.
- Ensure that the working committees in your system are getting the support they need as they complete their student-centered project. Use your *Working Committee Check-In* and *Support Resources* tools (Activities 9B and 7B) to help in these efforts.
- Maintain open two-way communication with working committees, so that you're aware of support needs and milestones achieved.
- Communicate to the public to ensure the entire community understands the outcomes and importance of this work.

## Working Committees Implement Collaboration

Your working committee has defined its goal and developed a detailed project plan to carry out the work, and now it's time to get started! This section provides guidance to help your committee manage your project: monitoring and evaluating progress, adjusting your project plan and objectives as needed, and communicating with your leadership team.

Throughout your project, you'll rely on the *Project Plan Template* (Activity 6G) that your committee developed in *Define Content for Collaboration*. As you evaluate your progress,

you may need to adjust this plan to keep the work on track. The following sections provide some guidelines and processes for doing that.

## Working Committee Project Monitoring

Monitoring is a way to keep track of whether the tasks in your project plan are being implemented as planned and to shed light on any unforeseen challenges or opportunities so you can seek support or adjust your plan. Effective monitoring helps keep your project on schedule and resolve issues or problems to help ensure your project is successful. Project plan monitoring should be open, transparent, and routine.



**"I ain't Martin Luther King. I don't need a dream. I have a plan."**

**- Spike Lee**

**Clarify Roles:** If you didn't assign a lead for each task in your project plan, you should do so now. This person is not necessarily responsible for performing the task, but is responsible for keeping the task on track. This may entail: keeping in touch with those performing the task; identifying any roadblocks; identifying any intermediate milestones or deliverables; gathering any applicable metrics that can help indicate if the task is on track and; making recommendations to the committee about any plan changes that might be needed. Discuss missed deadlines, roadblocks, or other challenges with the committee as a whole if they're not easily resolvable.

Your committee should also designate someone to facilitate each meeting. This may be one or two individuals who function as the committee chair or co-chairs, or it can rotate among the committee members. This person is responsible for setting the meeting agenda and keeping the meeting itself on track.

It's also a good idea to identify someone to keep meeting minutes and records, and again, this can be one individual or a rotating assignment among the committee members.

**Set a Monitoring Schedule:** As a committee, you should decide on a monitoring interval to periodically review your project plan and progress. These check-ins typically include status reports from task leads whose tasks are actively underway and discussion of any obstacles, support needed, or necessary adjustments to the project plan.

Weekly monitoring works well for many projects, although the ideal monitoring schedule depends on what's going on with your project. Projects with fewer active tasks or longer-range tasks may work best with bi-weekly or monthly check-ins. Others may need more frequent check-ins if there's a short turn-around time, multiple active tasks, or quickly-moving tasks. You can set an initial monitoring schedule and then adjust it as needed throughout your work.

**Evaluate Progress:** Some projects have obvious data points or milestones that indicate if an objective or task is complete, such as "Convene a Language Arts task force" or "Make professional development on early elementary reading strategies available." Many times,

however, the project goal doesn't lend itself to a series of discrete milestones. When this is the case, you'll need to collect and evaluate intermediate data to assess progress and determine if course adjustments are needed.

As an example, let's revisit the Maisie School District example from *Define Content for Collaboration*, Chapter 6. That fictional working committee's goal was "By April of next year, at least 80% of grade 9-11 students will achieve at least 80% proficiency on school-created benchmarks around understanding/interpreting informational text."

One approach would be to follow the project plan, measure the student proficiency in April, and hope that the desired increase was realized. A better way, however, is to measure intermittently in order to understand if your project objectives are bringing you closer to the larger goal. If the intermediate measured proficiency improvements aren't on track to meet your goal, it's time to either evaluate what needs to change to accelerate improvement, or to decide that the initial timeline was overly optimistic and adjust it as necessary.



For this approach, decide what data to collect, how to collect it, how to evaluate it, and how to apply what you've learned to your project plan. There are a variety of documented approaches to accomplishing this data collection and analysis, and we can recommend the following:

- *Improvement Science Handbook*, New York City Department of Education, [www.we-teachnyc.org/resources/resource/nycdoe-improvement-science-handbook/](http://www.we-teachnyc.org/resources/resource/nycdoe-improvement-science-handbook/)
- *Plan-Do-Study-Act Toolkit (PDSA)*, Vermont Agency of Education, [education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/PDSAToolkit.pdf](http://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/PDSAToolkit.pdf)
- *The Baldrige Program: Self-Assessment For Continuous Improvement*, National Institute of Standards and Technology, [www.nist.gov/baldrige/baldrige-program-self-assessment-continuous-improvement](http://www.nist.gov/baldrige/baldrige-program-self-assessment-continuous-improvement)
- *Using Data to Guide School Improvement*, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), [files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED518630.pdf](http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED518630.pdf)
- *3 Tips To Use Data Effectively*, Edutopia article by J. Mullikin (discusses considerations on amount and type of data), [www.edutopia.org/article/3-tips-use-data-effectively](http://www.edutopia.org/article/3-tips-use-data-effectively)
- *Managing for Results*, Council for Great City Schools (Key Performance Indicators for school districts' improvement efforts, both academic and operational), [www.cgcs.org/domain/86](http://www.cgcs.org/domain/86)

**Communicate:** In addition to your regularly-scheduled project monitoring meetings, you should have regular check-ins with your leadership team. Remember that your leadership team is available to offer access to support, which may take the form of district data, subject matter

experts, data analysts, lessons learned from other working committees, meeting facilitation, conflict resolution, support in collaborative processes, etc. Part of their role is also to tout your progress to the school, district, or community at large, so make sure that's a regular part of your check-ins as well.

### Are You Ready To Start?

Below are practices and norms you should have in place as you implement your project. Have you:

- Assigned a lead for each task in your project plan?
- Designated someone to facilitate each meeting?
- Identified someone to keep meeting minutes and records?
- Determined a project monitoring schedule?
- Determined what data you need to collect, how it will be collected and evaluated, and at what intervals in order to assess progress?
- Scheduled regular check-ins with your leadership team?

If so - great - you're ready to move on and implement your plan!

### Summary and Next Steps for Working Committees

Remember that there's no set timeline for how long you'll be working in the *Implement* stage. Individual project timelines will vary based on issue complexity and how your committee plans to address it. Some working committees will move through the *Implement* stage fairly quickly, while others might be in this stage for a long while.

Use this chapter and your project plan throughout your project to help you track progress, evaluate interim results, and adjust your work as needed. Feel free to add to, expand on, or edit the tools to better align with your goals and how you and your partners are working.

In particular:

- Put your project plan into action. Initiate the first step(s) and work towards your goal!
- Monitor your project, using your project plan as a management tool.
- Evaluate your progress relative to your plan and adjust as needed.
- Stay in touch with your leadership team and reach out to them for any support you may need for content-specific needs, or challenges adhering to collaborative processes.
- When your project is complete, use *Evaluate Content & Process Outcomes*, Chapter 10, to help you assess what worked well or could be improved, and determine what to work on next.



# Activities To Help You Implement Your Initiatives

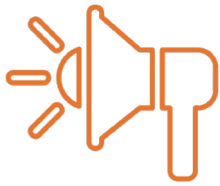


## About These Activities

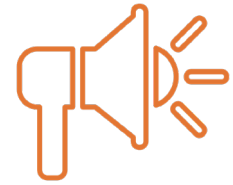
Both leadership teams and working committees will rely primarily on previously-developed tools as they implement collaboration. The two additional tools presented here are intended primarily for leadership teams to help them manage multiple working committees and external communications.

## Activities

- *Activity 9A, **External Communications Plan***, can help you make a plan for keeping your community, school district, and schools up to date on successes and outcomes that are benefiting your students, your partnership, and why you're working this way.
- Use the **Working Committee Check-In Tool**, Activity 9B, to keep track of each working committee's progress, keep notes on your check-ins, track any support needed, help coordinate across multiple working committees, and help identify successes and milestones that should be reported out.



# 9A: External Communications Plan



## PURPOSE

This tool can help leadership teams plan how they'll communicate about the partnership and resulting positive impacts to the community at large.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Use the template below to brainstorm who it's important to communicate with, and how and how often you'll communicate.

Venue	Objective/Content	Method & Frequency	Responsible Party
Community website	Recognize individuals; milestones, outcomes	Monthly	RDG



# 9B: Working Committee Check-In Tool

## PURPOSE

Leadership teams can use this as a template to record the content and outcomes of their check-ins with each working committee to maintain a record of topics discussed and action items.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Use one copy of this tool for each working committee.
- At your initial check-in, discuss the working committee's anticipated project milestones (from their project plan), and any support needs they anticipate at this point, and enter the information in the Schedule of *Anticipated Milestones* section. This can help the leadership team anticipate support needs.
- Update the Schedule of *Anticipated Milestones* as needed throughout the working committee's project.
- Use the *Check-In Notes* section to record an overview of each check-in, including any resulting action items.

Working Committee Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Issue or Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

### Schedule of Anticipated Milestones:

Milestone Description:	Anticipated Completion Date:	Anticipated Support Needs:	Other Notes:



## 9B: Working Committee Check-In Tool (cont'd)

### Check-In Notes:

Check-In Date:	Attendees:	Topics Discussed:	Action Items & Responsible Party:	Other Notes:
12/1/21	AB, FL, RO, CC, RD	Committee is struggling to unpack high school students' lack of informational text comprehension	<input type="checkbox"/> CC to provide district assessment data by 1/15 <input type="checkbox"/> PL to contact SME for possible consulting by 12/15	



## Chapter 10

# Evaluate Content & Process Outcomes

Evaluate Content  
& Process Outcomes

Sustain & Expand  
Collaboration!



This chapter can help leadership teams and working committees determine how well your initiatives have gone, and evaluate the health of your collaborative relationships. You'll:

- Evaluate your project outcomes relative to your content goals, identify lessons learned, and plan next steps
- Evaluate your group's group norms and use of collaborative processes, and make a plan for improvement where needed
- District Leadership Teams will evaluate how they upheld their guiding principles and behaviors, their progress relative to the *Key Components of a Strong Education Partnership*, and make a plan to strengthen their partnership

[This chapter is intended for all leadership teams and working committees](#)

### Contents:

Introduction

Evaluate Content Outcomes

Evaluate Collaborative Processes

Evaluate the Partnership

Activities To Help You Evaluate Outcomes

## Introduction

Your team or committee has prepared for and implemented collaborative work, and now you're ready to reflect on your work to date to evaluate what went well and which aspects were more challenging. Throughout your work, you've used tools and resources to help make your collaborative project and processes more efficient, accessible, and successful. The resources in this chapter can help you reflect on your project and on your collaborative processes with an eye towards adopting best practices, adapting any practices or processes that need improvement, and abandoning those that did not work for your group.



**"Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action."**

*- Peter Drucker*

Earlier in your work, your group defined content goals for your collaborative project and also established relational goals. You'll use the project goal and objectives that you defined to evaluate and measure your initiative's success. Similarly, you'll use your group norms as the criteria to evaluate how well you lived up to your relational goals. This chapter can help you with these evaluations by exploring: What did we accomplish? How well did we collaborate? What processes are repeatable? Where is there room to improve? What changes might we make moving forward?

You'll learn from your initiative's results in order to guide future work and continue to build healthy collaborative relationships.

## Evaluate Content Outcomes

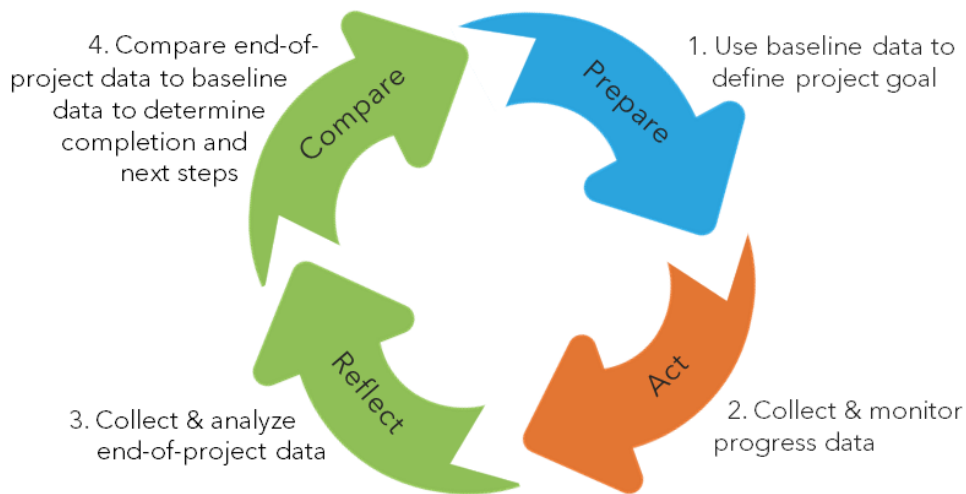
This section can help you evaluate the success of your project and consider your team's or committee's next steps.

### Evaluate Project Resolution

You began your collaborative project with one or more content goals, ideally written in a format that makes it easy to measure your progress. Now it's time to evaluate: Did we meet our goal? How well did we fulfill our original intent?

Each step of your project plan was intended to meet one or more project objectives, and each objective was intended to get your team closer to achieving the project goal. Now, evaluate relevant data to help your group determine how well the project worked and the impacts of your initiative. Did your work result in positive changes or not, and in what ways? After accomplishing each task, were you closer to the related objective? Examine evidence to help you answer these questions and determine if you're making progress.

### Data Use Throughout the Collaboration Framework



Some goals are relatively easy to evaluate. For example, consider the goal "By the start of the next school year, our voluntary teacher retention rate in high-poverty schools will increase to 90%." This goal lends itself to clear data needs: your team needs to know the number of teachers in the targeted schools who remained in their teaching placement from one year to the next.

Once you have end-of-project data in hand, compare it to your starting place and the benchmark defined in your goal. For this example, let's say that HR's data at the start of your project indicated that the voluntary teacher retention rate in your targeted schools was 73%. Data from the start of this school year show that the retention rate was 82%. You haven't yet met the 90% goal, but you've made significant progress. What factors led most directly to that progress? Should you use other strategies or approaches moving forward? You may need additional information to answer these questions. Focus groups or interviews with the targeted populations in your project might provide your team with a view into how and why your interventions worked or didn't, so that you can make plans to continue or discontinue various aspects.

In this example, the working committee likely conducted an initial needs assessment to understand the factors leading to teacher turnover. A follow-on needs assessment at the end of the project can be used to see if the responses have changed and if different factors are more significant now. This insight can inform either continuing this project or implementing a new project to improve teacher retention in high-poverty schools.

When conducting a follow-on needs assessment, include the same questions as the original so that you can assess changing attitudes or perceptions, and consider if you also want to collect additional information, and if there are other stakeholders whose viewpoints should be included.

For information on data collection and needs assessments, refer to *Discover Shared Goals* and *Define Content for Collaboration*, Chapters 3 and 6, respectively.



## Consider & Discuss: Evaluating Project Resolution

Now, think about the success of your collaborative project, then discuss responses to the questions below as a group. You can record responses on Activity 10A at the end of this chapter.

- Did we meet our project goal? How do we know? (project plan, survey results, district data, etc.)
- What results did we see? If results were not what we hoped for, what are the likely causes?
- Do we need to collect impact data to determine the extent to which we've met our goal? What might be the best approach?
- Did our project plan address all relevant aspects of our topic? Were all stakeholders' priorities represented?
- Were we able to monitor progress throughout implementation? Why or why not?
- Should we conduct a needs assessment to shed light on current conditions and possible next steps?

## Deciding What's Next

Data collection and analysis results in a choice: What are you going to do about what you've learned? One approach is to use the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's improvement science methodology choices: adopt, adapt, or abandon.

**Adopt – It Worked!** If an approach or process effectively led to your objective, it is likely a strategy worth keeping. In this case, determine how to repeat it or make it a permanent part of how your district/school handles similar issues, perhaps by changing an official policy or procedure. In the next chapter, *Sustain and Expand Collaboration*, you'll consider how to spread these lessons learned, scaling them across the system.

**Adapt – It Almost Worked!** If a process effectively resulted in some positive change, but not enough to get you to your objective or goal, it makes sense to adapt your strategy and try again. What tweaks can you make that might result in a better outcome? The beauty of trying something and coming up short is that this is where the most learning occurs. It enables your team to take a close look at the conditions that either enable or hinder the success of new ideas. At its heart, evaluation is a learning and inquiry cycle; challenges are an accepted part of the process.

**Abandon – It Didn't Work!** Finally, if implementing a task did not get you closer to your objective and/or resulted in negative unintended consequences, it might make the most sense to simply abandon that idea entirely and move on to other ideas.

You can read more from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching here: [carnegienetworks.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/230497548-Start-and-Run-a-Guided-PDSA-Plan-Do-Study-Act-](https://carnegienetworks.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/230497548-Start-and-Run-a-Guided-PDSA-Plan-Do-Study-Act-)

## Evaluate Collaborative Processes

Developing guiding principles and behaviors

Making a commitment to the partnership

Evaluating decision-making norms

Addressing psychological safety

In addition to progress on your collaborative project, your team's or committee's success is also based on how well you used collaborative processes. You have been implementing processes to develop authentic relationships, such as group norms around topics such as collaborative climate, collaborative decision-making, and productively handling conflict. Commitment to these processes is an important part of sustaining collaboration through changes in individual participants.

Whether you are serving on a District or School Leadership Team or on your district's first or tenth working committee, you ushered in student-centered change by working proactively with others in your system. This section can help you evaluate how your group encouraged honest participation, ensured all members were respected and heard, and otherwise fostered a collaborative climate.

Take some time now to review your team's or committee's collaborative commitments, assess how successful you were at upholding them, and make a plan to continue improving your collaboration skills. As you work through these evaluations, it may be helpful to refer to the *District & School Collaboration Framework* and consider: What were the keys to our success at each step of the Framework? Note the norms and practices that worked well at each step (so you can sustain them) and the ones that did not (so you can take a different approach moving forward).

Revisit the *Collaborative Climate Check-In Tool* (Activity 8A) and reflect on and discuss your group's capacity in each area. Consider: What does this characteristic mean to us? How do we demonstrate it when we work together? How do we demonstrate it with our internal stakeholders? Compare your responses to your first evaluation. What has improved? What led to the improvement? Has anything gotten worse? Make an improvement plan for any areas you identified that need to be improved. Refer to *Define Process for Collaboration*, Chapter 8, for suggested ways to improve your collaborative climate.



### 8A: Collaborative Climate Check-In Tool

PURPOSE

This tool can help collaborative teams and committees foster a collaborative climate by assessing their group's current capacity in each of the five characteristics of a collaborative climate.



### 8E: Group Norms Activity



PURPOSE

Use this tool to guide the development of group norms to build trust and ensure participants' psychological safety throughout the collaborative process.

Similarly, revisit your team's or committee's group norms, documented in the *Group Norms Activity* (Activity 8E), and consider: How well did we uphold each of our group norms? What facilitated or inhibited our progress? Are there other group norms we should consider adding?



Add to your group norms as the team sees fit, and make an improvement plan for norms that were more difficult to uphold.

You can also use *Identifying Repeatable Processes* (Activity 10D) to help you reflect on the collaborative processes you used at different stages of your work, how helpful they were, and what you might want to change, if anything, for the future.

## Evaluate the Partnership

This section is primarily intended for leadership teams, to help you evaluate team members' commitments to one another as partners, the overall health of the partnership, and what might be improved.

Earlier in your collaborative journey, you learned about the attributes and skills that experience has shown support sustained collaboration, and the importance of co-creating partner commitments and documenting the guiding principles and guiding behaviors that serve as your partnership's foundation. You also learned about the six *Key Components to a Strong Education Partnership* - the essential elements of a sustained partnership.

There are several activities that can help you reflect upon your guiding principles and behaviors and the six *Key Components*, and how successful you were in upholding them. Similar to the group norms reflection in the previous section, leadership teams should revisit their guiding principles and behaviors (Activity 4F) and consider: How well did we uphold each of our guiding principles and behaviors? What facilitated or inhibited our progress? How can we improve? Are there other commitments we should make? In light of your discussions, update your guiding principles and behaviors as you see fit.

The *Strengthening Partnerships* reflection exercise (Activity 10E) can help your team reflect on the six key components of strong education partnerships, consider how you've exhibited those components, and make a plan to improve where needed.

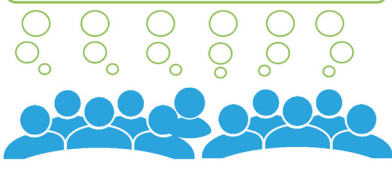
**4F: Guiding Principles Guiding Behaviors:  
Codifying Your Commitments**

**PURPOSE** This tool can guide you and your partners toward agreeing upon and codifying the guiding principles and guiding behaviors that will characterize your working relationship.

**STEP 1 Discussion** Gather your partners together to discuss your shared vision for the partnership. Keep the focus on the relationships, not a particular topic.

Use the following questions to guide your discussion, and then use what you discuss to serve as the foundation for your shared commitments.

- What do you both/all believe about the role of education/school in students' lives?
- What do you both/all believe about your responsibilities towards students?
- What do you both/all believe about each stakeholder's roles in student success?
- How should disagreements be handled?
- When your partner is not in the room, how will you speak to others of them and this partnership?



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## Chapter Summary

In the *Act* stage of the *District & School Collaboration Framework*, your team implemented a collaborative initiative to meet your shared goal(s). This chapter provided resources and tools to help you:

- Evaluate project outcomes relative to your content goals, identify lessons learned, and plan next steps
- Evaluate your team's group norms and use of collaborative processes, and plan for improvement where needed
- Evaluate how District Leadership Teams upheld your guiding principles and behaviors, progress relative to the *Key Components of a Strong Education Partnership*, and plan to strengthen your partnership



# Activities To Help You Evaluate Outcomes



## About These Activities

The activities in this section can help a collaborative group evaluate their successes, both toward the shared student-centered goal(s) and toward building healthy collaborative relationships.

## Activities

### Content Outcomes:

- Use Activity 10A, **Consider & Discuss: Evaluating Project Resolution**, to individually think about the success of your collaborative project, and then discuss responses as a group.
- The **Results Analysis Template**, Activity 10B, can help you keep track of the work you undertook to meet your objectives and the corresponding results. You'll use this information to help determine next steps.
- Building on the *Results Analysis Template*, use **Where Are You Going Next?**, Activity 10C, to brainstorm and document next steps.

### Collaborative Processes:

- Use **Identifying Repeatable Processes**, Activity 10D, to help you reflect on the collaborative processes you used at different stages of your work, how helpful they were, and what you might want to change, if anything, for the future.

### Partnership:

- **Strengthening Partnerships**, Activity 10E, asks you to reflect upon the commitments you made to build each of the key components of a strong education partnership, how you've exhibited those components, and to make a plan to improve where needed.



# Consider & Discuss: Evaluating Project Resolution

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spent 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



Did we meet our project goal? How do we know? (project plan, survey results, district data, etc.)

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What results did we see? If results were not what we hoped for, what are the likely causes?

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Do we need to collect impact data to determine the extent to which we've met our goal? What might be the best approach?

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## Activity 10A, Consider & Discuss: Evaluating Project Resolution (cont'd)



Did our project plan address all relevant aspects of our topic? Were all stakeholders' priorities represented?

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Were we able to monitor progress throughout implementation? Why or why not?

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Should we conduct a needs assessment to shed light on current conditions and possible next steps?

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# 10B: Results Analysis Template

**PURPOSE**

This tool will help your team analyze the success of your work, and allow you to consider whether to continue the activities, modify them going forward, or stop doing them altogether.

As a team, complete a copy of this form for each major task, strategy, or process your team used to achieve your goal.

**Task/Strategy/Process Employed:**

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**How Effective Was It? In What Ways? (Hint: Use Data!)**

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**Based on Your Results, Decide How To Proceed:**

**ADOPT**

It worked! Standardize this idea by putting it into official policies or processes.

**ADAPT**

It almost worked! Make tweaks to what we did and try again to get even better results!

**ABANDON**

It didn't work! Ditch this idea and move on to a better one!

**For Strategies We'll Adapt: What Should We Change, and How?**

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# 10C: Where Are You Going Next?



**PURPOSE:** This tool can help you and members of your collaborative group to reflect on your collaborative project and plan for your next initiative.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Reflect upon your collaborative project. Consider your results and lessons learned, and use this tool to brainstorm your group's next steps. You may decide keep the same goal if your goal was not met, set a higher goal around the same issue, address another aspect of the original issue, or address a new issue.

Then, define your next steps. Consider the strategies you decided to adopt or adapt, the need for data collection/needs analysis, engaging subject matter experts, including new team members, etc.

**How close did we get to our goal?**

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**What should our next goal be?**

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**What are our next steps?**

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# 10D: Identifying Repeatable Processes



**PURPOSE:** This tool can help you reflect on your collaborative processes, how helpful they were, how well you did applying them, and what you might want to change, if anything, going forward.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Think through the collaborative processes you used, such as your group norms, decision-making and conflict resolution processes, communication channels, and project plan implementation. What worked well, and what might be improved? Are there other strategies or approaches that might work better? What can you change to improve them for future use? Carnegie's Adopt/Adapt/Abandon framework can be helpful for this reflection.

Process	How helpful?	What will we change or adapt going forward?



# 10E: Strengthening Partnerships

## PURPOSE

This tool can help leadership teams reflect on the strength of your partnerships by reviewing the key components below and considering how to continue strengthening those components.

## Key Components to a Strong Education Partnership



An agreement between administration and association/union leadership to work together with local stakeholders on plans to improve schools, and **a pledge not to let each other fail.**

A commitment to **start somewhere.** Identify shared student-centered goals, and then work collaboratively and share decision-making in the improvement processes to achieve them.



A **rich web of communication and collaboration structures among stakeholders at all levels** of the local school system (e.g., regular meetings between district department leaders and educators appointed through their association/union; district- and school-level leadership teams; working committees; and professional learning communities).

**Planning tools and defined goals and objectives**, so that everyone involved in collaboration understands expectations of the group members, the work to be done, and so that progress can be monitored and managed.



**Training and ongoing support** in collaborative processes, relationship building, and subject matter expertise.

**Connection to other education partnerships** working on similar projects, or in a similar context, for sharing and mentorship.



## 10E: Strengthening Partnerships (cont'd)

### Reflect: How Did We Do?

An agreement between administration and association/union leadership to work together with local stakeholders on plans to improve schools, and a pledge not to let each other fail.

Strong

Adequate

Needs Work

We can strengthen this component by.....



A commitment to start somewhere: identify shared student-centered goals, and then work collaboratively and share decision-making in the improvement processes to achieve them.

Strong

Adequate

Needs Work

We can strengthen this component by.....



## 10E: Strengthening Partnerships (cont'd)

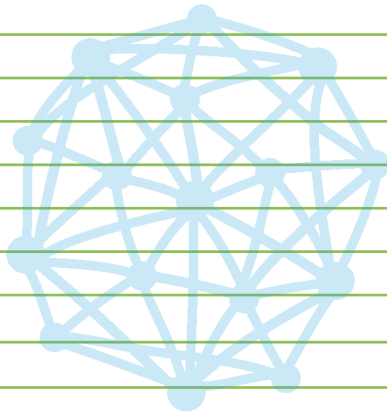
A rich web of communication and collaboration structures among stakeholders at all levels of the local school system (e.g., regular meetings between district department leaders and educators appointed through their association/union; district- and school-level leadership teams; working committees; professional learning communities).

Strong

Adequate

Needs Work

We can strengthen this component by.....



Planning tools and defined goals and objectives, so that everyone involved in collaboration understands the work to be done and so that progress can be monitored and managed.

Strong

Adequate

Needs Work

We can strengthen this component by.....



## 10E: Strengthening Partnerships (cont'd)

Training and ongoing support in collaborative processes, relationship building, and subject matter expertise.

Strong

Adequate

Needs Work

We can strengthen this component by.....



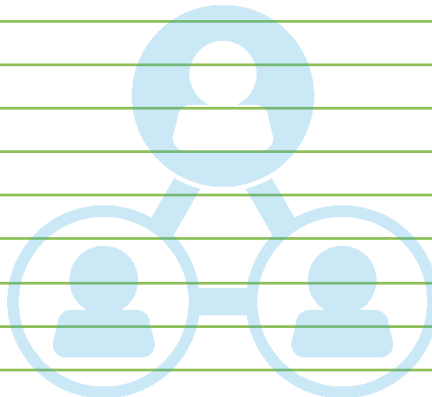
Connection to other education partnerships working on similar projects, or in a similar context, for sharing and mentorship.

Strong

Adequate

Needs Work

We can strengthen this component by.....





## Chapter 11

# Sustain & Expand Collaboration!



This chapter can help you consider the best ways to ensure that collaboration is sustained over the long term, and expand collaboration in your system by: broadly communicating your successes to garner wider support for and understanding of collaboration and its outcomes; considering how best to scale and spread your partnership's initiative successes; making a plan to expand the collaborative teams, committees, and other structures in your system; deciding how best to share and spread best practices related to collaborative processes; and expanding the partnership itself.

[This chapter is intended primarily for District and School Leadership Teams](#)

**Contents:**

- Introduction
- Celebrate & Share
- Scale Initiative Success
- Sustain & Expand the Collaborative Partnership
- Join the Collaboration Movement
- Activities To Help You Sustain & Expand



## Introduction

The previous chapter, *Evaluate Content & Process Outcomes*, asked you to reflect on content- and relationship-based lessons learned as you worked through the *District & School Collaboration Framework*. This section asks you to look forward: how do we build on our successes to scale our student-focused successes and involve more practitioners in collaborating for student success? Your team will also reinforce the collaborative structures you've built to support the processes moving forward. Doing so will fortify the partnership that got you to the collaboration table in the first place.

You'll consider scaling both your initiative successes and scaling the partnership itself.



For scaling initiative success, consider:

- Can success at one site be expanded to additional sites?
- What should we work on next?
- How can we keep current on our system's needs?



For scaling the partnership itself, consider:

- How can we increase the number of people involved and the variety of perspectives?
- Are there other sites that should be using collaboration?
- Do we need more working committees?
- How can we expand the support we offer to leadership teams and working committees?

To help embed collaboration in your system's culture, be intentional about planning for sustainability through creating and sharing repeatable processes, reinforcing sustainable collaborative structures such as leadership teams and working committees, and strengthening the collaborative partnership. It is our hope that your work will foster even more opportunities for collaboration and expand and improve on the positive outcomes that support our students.

## Celebrate & Share



Before you make plans to scale and spread collaboration in your system, take the time to celebrate and to broadly communicate your successes!

The work from *Evaluate Content & Process Outcomes*, Chapter 10, helped your partnership identify impacts and outcomes, best practices, and lessons learned. Now, share that information broadly, within your school/district/community as well as across schools, districts, and communities. Make sure that both

internal and external stakeholders know of your impacts and achievements. These communications give well-deserved recognition to the working committees who crafted student-centered initiatives. They also build awareness and understanding throughout the system, both about what was accomplished and about how well the education stakeholders are working together for the benefit of your students, schools, and community.

Ultimately, these communications can help spread collaboration by surfacing potential new partners and education stakeholders who want to be part of the movement. They help sustain collaboration by educating parents and community members about the positive impacts of shared decision-making on their children. And once parents recognize that value, they'll want it to continue. These parent voices can help sustain collaboration beyond the tenure of an individual superintendent, principal, or association/union leader.

As you communicate your outcomes, consider getting the word out to:

- The community at large: use multiple venues, such as press releases, videos and storytelling, a feature for an education website, and presentations at school board meetings and education conferences
- All of your working committees: praise their dedicated problem-solving and contributions to organizational learning, and widely share their successes so that they know their efforts are appreciated and so that other committees can learn and be inspired by each other's good work
- Partners' internal stakeholders: each partner should be sure to share achievements and lessons learned with their peers, and encourage broader use of collaborative processes
- Within your partnership: take some time to jointly celebrate and congratulate each other
- Revisit your *External Comms Plan*, Activity 9A, to consider if your partnership should be sharing your story with other groups or through other communication channels, and update your communications plan accordingly.



**“Remember to celebrate milestones as you prepare for the road ahead.”**

*- Nelson Mandela*



## 9A: External Communications Plan



### PURPOSE

This tool can help leadership teams plan how they'll communicate about the partnership and resulting positive impacts to the community at large.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Use the template below to brainstorm who it's important to communicate with, and

## Scale Initiative Success

In *Evaluate Content & Process Outcomes*, Chapter 10, you analyzed implementation and impact data to determine progress toward your initiative's goals, and identified the lessons you learned along the way. You also considered which approaches and strategies were worth adopting or adapting for future use. Now, revisit your initiative's topic/issue and the strategies you decided to adopt or adapt, and consider how best to scale and spread the ideas and strategies that worked well.



### Consider & Discuss: Scaling Initiative Success

Use the questions below to guide a group discussion around how you might most effectively scale your collaborative initiatives. You can record responses on Activity 11A at the end of this chapter.

- Do we need to test whether what worked in one context will work in another?
- Do we want to implement similar interventions across a broader population of staff or schools?
- Do we want to continue to work on the same topic and either set a more ambitious goal or address another aspect of the topic?
- Or, is this issue fully resolved within our system, indicating that it's time to move to other needs? If this is the case, it might be time for a needs assessment to re-evaluate the most pressing issues in your system. For detailed information on conducting a needs assessment and prioritizing issues to address, see the *Identifying and Prioritizing Needs* section in Chapter 3.
- How will we stay informed of current system needs and issues? What data will we collect? How often?

### Create a Scale & Spread Plan

Based on your discussions, develop a plan for how you'll scale and spread your initiative's successes. In the same way that a project plan supports a project's success, a 'Scale & Spread' plan can help ensure that your partnership's good work and outcomes are effectively extended throughout your system. Activity 11B at the end of this chapter can help you develop this plan.

Because a Scale & Spread plan is a specific type of project plan, now might be a good time to revisit the information on defining a goal and objectives and developing a project plan that was presented in the *Project Design* section of Chapter 6, *Define Content for Collaboration*. In addition to the more generic information presented in Chapter 6, such as assigning a project lead, consider the following elements as you develop your Scale & Spread plan.

**Goal:** Clearly define the exact changes are you spreading across your system. Are you setting a loftier goal on the same aspect of your issue? Will you take on a different aspect of the same issue? Will you apply a successful strategy in additional sites?

**Scope/Target Audience(s):** Clearly define where the changes will be implemented and who will be involved in adopting those changes. Additional considerations include:

- Will adopting the changes be optional or mandatory? If optional, what criteria should leaders use to determine whether to adopt the initiative?
- What schools/groups will be asked to adopt the new program/policy? If a program or policy is complex enough to need group, grade, or school-level customization, you may want to roll out the program gradually, leveraging existing groupings (regions, levels, etc.) and starting with those most likely to be successful.
- Do we need to consider context-specific needs? Different groups and sites may have more or less capacity and different infrastructures to support the program. How will we identify these needs and support them?
- Who are the point people for each implementation site/group? Because the overall context of this work is labor-management collaboration, ideally those implementing the initiative, program, or policy will do so jointly with key stakeholders.

**Communications:** How will you inform affected stakeholders about changes and implementation plans? Make sure those new to the work understand the success you've seen in your pilot program and how adopting the new program or process will benefit them. One advantage of consistently communicating collaboration's benefits is that new participants will already understand why this is an effective strategy to support student success.

Larger and more complex changes have a greater need for personal interaction to explain the changes and answer any questions or concerns. A relatively minor policy change might be communicated in an email, whereas communicating a new discipline strategy will require more planning, time, and consideration. For larger/more complex changes, be sure to leverage personal and peer connections in explaining the initiative. For example, principals and association reps at the pilot sites can be encouraged to share their experiences with their counterparts at target sites.

**Timeline:** Incorporate planned implementation milestones for each site/group.

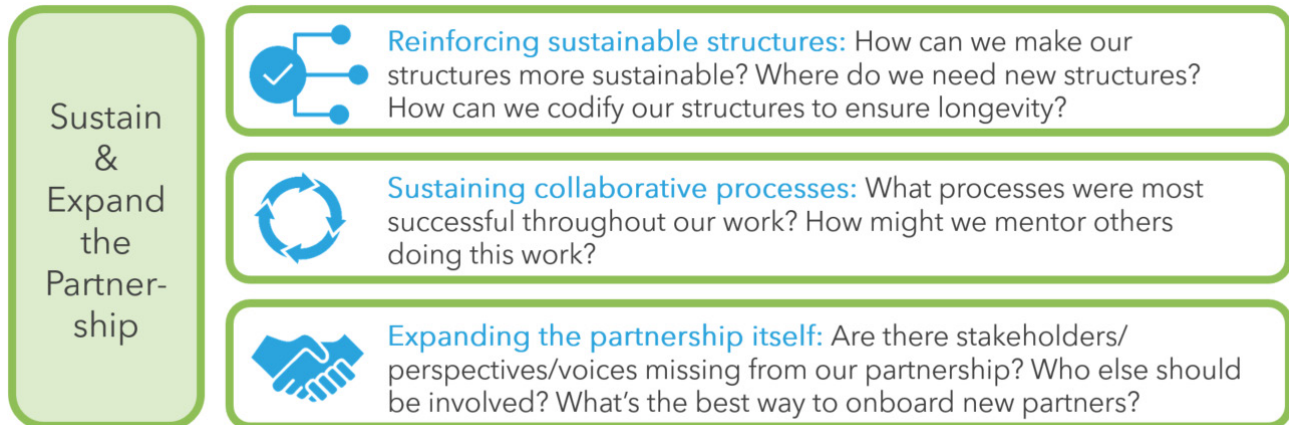
**Feedback Loops:** Establish periodic check-ins with each site/group to see how implementation is progressing, identify any support needs, and gather best practices and lessons learned that can be shared with other sites/groups. You can use the *Working Committee Check-In Tool*, Activity 9B, as a template to manage these check-ins.

**Resources & Support:** Assign both dollars and personnel to the plan. How will you ensure each group/site has what they need to successfully implement the program or policy? You may want to ask those involved in the pilot program to mentor those new to the initiative. Also consider knowledge transfer opportunities so that those implementing the initiative can learn from each other's successes and challenges.

## Sustain & Expand the Collaborative Partnership

As a leadership team, you have invested a great deal of time and effort in establishing collaboration as a viable problem-solving strategy to support student success. So now you may be wondering: How do we keep this up? Where do we go next? Who else should be involved? These considerations will help you plan for your future, as you embed collaboration deeper into the fabric of your school or district.

This section addresses three aspects of sustaining and expanding the partnership, as illustrated below:



### Reinforcing Sustainable Structures



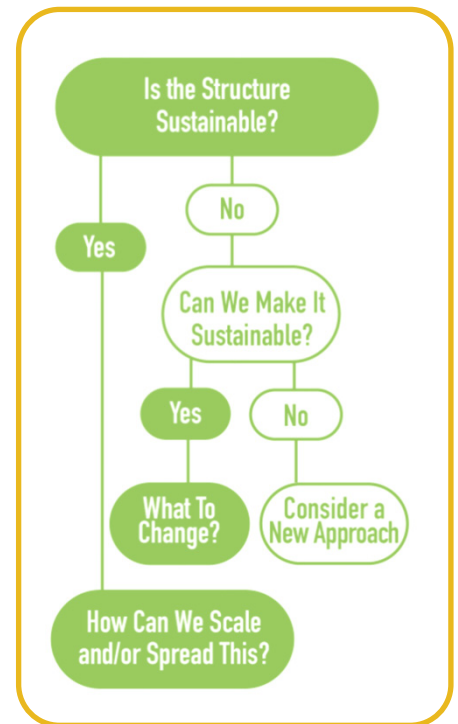
Your partnership's structures are the “spaces” you built for collaboration to take place: the elements you have formally created to encourage collaboration. Examples include leadership teams, working committees, standing meetings between administration and the association/union, communications structures, and norms for orienting and onboarding new participants. Take some time to reflect with your partners about the structures you've created, consider their long-term sustainability, then make plans for reinforcing and possibly expanding them.

Examine the various roles in your collaboration, and consider how roles might stay the same or change in order to sustain and expand your partnership. For example, many partnerships begin with a group that acts as both a leadership team and a working committee. If that's the case for your partnership, now is the time to consider establishing working committees to execute projects and moving your team into a more dedicated support role.

Expand joint decision-making structures wherever possible, to include School Leadership Teams and district-level committees on a variety of issues. If you have not already, establish role-alike communications between administrators and educator-leaders at district and school levels, with each pair of leaders co-chairing working committees on the topic that matches their area of expertise (as discussed in the *Communications Structures To Support the Partnership* section of Chapter 7).

Another consideration for sustainability is maintaining the collaborative culture as individuals in the system come and go. How can you help ensure that newly hired staff have the experience and/or desire to work collaboratively? Can you include collaboration in interview protocols and job descriptions? Once hired or identified, what learning and support will you provide to bring new participants up to speed? The information you've documented about your partnership - guiding principles and behaviors, group norms, etc. - is an important part of helping ensure that those new to your system understand the way you work and the expectation that they will also uphold these norms. You can also revisit Chapter 1 for some introductory information on collaboration.

Whenever possible, **codify your collaborative structures** to help ensure they will last beyond the current partners. Revisit *Commit to Collaborate*, Chapter 4, and write or revise your partnership's charter. You might also document your collaborative structures in district/school handbooks, MOUs, or collective bargaining agreements. Consider establishing policies to provide resources (release time, substitutes, continuing education credits, training, funding, etc.) for those who serve on collaborative leadership teams and working committees.



### Consider & Discuss: Reinforcing Sustainable Structures

Use the questions below to reflect on your collaborative structures (teams, committees, standing meetings, etc.) and discuss individual responses as a group. You can record your discussion on Activity 11C at the end of this chapter.

- What factors give a collaborative structure staying power/sustainability? Can we codify our structures, and in what ways?
- Did our teams and committees work well? Why or why not?
- What should we change in our overall plan for collaborative teams and committees? Revisit your team's *Collaborative Structures Worksheet* (Activity 5D) and update it as needed.
- Successful labor-management collaboration partnerships rely on robust and open communications among participants as well as those impacted by the work. With this in mind, consider: How might our internal and external communications plans be expanded or improved? Revisit your *Communication Plan Template* (Activity 7E) and update it accordingly.
- Did we establish role-alike communications between administration and the association/union (as discussed in the *Communications Structures To Support the Partnership* section of Chapter 7)? Were they effective? Should we adjust or expand these structures?
- Do we have effective and consistent procedures to orient and onboard those new to collaboration?
- What additional structures might help us as we expand collaboration in our system?



## Sustaining Collaborative Processes



As you expand collaboration in your system, you'll periodically review how you implemented projects and reflect on what worked and what didn't to refine your collaborative structures. As you do, re-use the collaborative processes and tools that worked for you as you refine and document what you've learned.

You may have used this Guidebook as the basis of a collaboration toolkit in your school or district to create an education partnership. Or, you may have used ad-hoc tools from this Guidebook, and relied more heavily on another collaborative framework or discovery process that worked better in your context. Regardless of how closely you followed the framework offered here, it is important to document your processes, share your learnings, and update your documentation as you become more experienced in collaborative processes. When your processes are committed to paper, they are easier to repeat, improve, and share.



### Consider & Discuss: Sustaining Collaborative Processes

Use the questions below to reflect on the *District & School Collaboration Framework* itself - how you used it and how well it aligned with your processes.

You may want to refer back to your responses to *Identifying Repeatable Processes* (Activity 10D) as you consider the questions below. You can record your discussion on Activity 11D. For each stage of your work, consider how it aligned with the framework presented in this course:

- Did we use each step within this stage? Why or why not?
- What processes were most successful in each stage?
- Did we modify our activities within one or more steps in this stage? How so?
- Were there additional steps we performed or processes we used that were helpful?

## Expanding the Partnership Itself



As your collaboration develops, it's important to evaluate and broaden who's involved to include a range of stakeholders, voices, and perspectives. Revisit *Identify Partners*, Chapter 2, for more detailed information on who might be involved and what roles they might play. Broadening awareness of collaboration in general and your work in particular, as discussed in the *Celebrate & Share* section above can also help broaden participation.

Consider reaching out to school board members, parent/community groups, and others in your system who can bring their unique perspective to your work.





### Consider & Discuss: Expanding the Partnership

Use the questions below as a discussion guide for your team to consider what you want your partnership to look like moving forward. You can record your discussion on Activity 11F at the end of this chapter.

- Is now a good time to expand our partnership? Why or why not? Is our partnership stable enough to include additional partners?
- What perspectives/voices are missing from our partnership?
- Does our partnership reflect our community in terms of race, culture, educational background, etc.?
- How will we onboard new partners?

## Join the Collaboration Movement

By this point, your partnership has come a long way. Perhaps you began with a single working committee, in which case the processes and tools that worked well for this committee are learnings that can be used to set additional collaborative teams up for success. Perhaps you started with a single School Leadership Team, and you're ready to establish similar structures at other schools. Or perhaps you started with a District Leadership Team, and you are looking to foster the same structure and collaborative processes at the school level.

Your team now has a role to play in expanding knowledge about and the use of collaborative processes. You've learned a great deal about how to meaningfully engage within an education partnership, and now is the time to share your knowledge and mentor others in your district or state who are embarking on the collaboration journey. You received support and guidance as you progressed through your journey; consider how you might be able to support others as they begin their quest. Partnerships become self-sustaining as they facilitate new partnership development and growth within the system (McCarthy & Rubinstein, 2017):

Our experience has been that this is a self-sustaining model: As facilitators from within the system are trained to support other schools and districts, they return to their own schools and districts with renewed energy and effort to collaborate.

Take a moment to think about how you can spread the word and recruit others to embark on this journey. Discuss collaboration often in faculty meetings, at parent-teacher conferences, grade-level meetings, local, state, and national association/union meetings, school board meetings, and other community/city/county meetings.

Consider additional ways you might scale your work so that greater numbers of practitioners can start using partnerships and collaboration to support student success. You might consider creating a website for your materials so that others can access them. Or you could automate and share some of your tools so they are accessible to stakeholders just starting out. You might

share your positive outcomes at education conferences, or jointly submit an article to your state education association's/union's and state administrators association's monthly publications. You and your partners might consider electing a collaboration ambassador to act as a spokesperson for the movement, help spread the word, and garner influence in your district, state, and beyond.

It is our hope that creating a lasting education partnership has afforded everyone in your system the benefits of collaboration, and that these benefits continue to serve your students and community for years to come.

## Chapter Summary

At this point, you have come full circle in the collaborative cycle - having implemented and reflected upon progress toward your student-centered goals AND having laid the foundation for a strong partnership using collaborative processes that support joint problem-solving. This chapter's content can help you:

- Broadly communicate your successes to garner wider support for and understanding of collaboration and its outcomes
- Determine how best to scale and spread your partnership's initiative successes
- Determine how to expand the collaborative teams, committees, and other structures in your system
- Decide how to share and spread best practices related to collaborative processes

Now, put those plans into action as you continue your collaboration journey!



# Activities To Help You Sustain & Expand



## About These Activities

These activities can help collaborative teams plan your next steps. They can help prepare your team to scale and spread both the positive results from your student-centered initiative(s), as well as the collaborative structures you built and the effective shared decision-making processes used.

## Activities

- **Consider & Discuss: Scaling Initiative Success**, Activity 11A, can help you and your partners consider your next steps for expanding your collaborative projects.
- The **Scale & Spread Plan Template** (Activity 11B) can help your team define and document your intentions to scale and spread your identified project, process, or policy. Use it as you would a project plan, to periodically review your progress and evaluate if adjustments are needed. The *Working Committee Project Monitoring* section of Chapter 9 provides more detail on using your plan as a project management tool.
- **Consider & Discuss: Reinforcing Sustainable Structures**, Activity 11C, can help you gain clarity on how you might improve or expand your collaborative structures.
- Use Activity 11D, **Consider & Discuss: Sustaining Collaborative Processes** to reflect on the *District & School Collaboration Framework* itself: how you used it and how well it aligned with your process.
- Activity 11E, the **Collaborative Framework Template** asks you to use your discussion from Activity 11D to customize the *District & School Collaboration Framework* to make it your own and better reflect your partnership's unique processes and context.
- Activity 11F, **Consider & Discuss: Expanding the Partnership**, contains some guiding questions to help you consider inviting in additional partners.



# Consider & Discuss: Scaling Initiative Success

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spend 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



Do we need to test whether what worked in one context will work in another?

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Do we want to implement similar interventions across a broader population of staff or schools?

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Do we want to continue to work on the same topic and either set a more ambitious goal or address another aspect of the topic?

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## Activity 11A, Consider & Discuss: Scaling Initiative Success (cont'd)



Or, is this issue fully resolved within our system, indicating that it's time to move to other needs? If this is the case, it might be time for a needs assessment to re-evaluate the most pressing issues in your system. For detailed information on conducting a needs assessment and prioritizing issues to address, see the *Identifying and Prioritizing Needs* section in Chapter 3.

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How will we stay informed of current system needs and issues? What data will we collect? How often?

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# 11B: Scale & Spread Plan Template

**PURPOSE**

This tool can help your team develop a detailed plan to help you scale and spread your program/policy/strategy throughout your system.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Customize this template as needed to fit your plan and the items you want to track. Revise your plan as needed along the way to incorporate lessons learned and to keep it current.

Complete the *For Each Site/Group* section in concert with each participating site/group to give them ownership of the project and to help ensure consistent expectations. When completing the implementation plan, refer to the information in the *Project Design* section of Chapter 6.

**For the Project as a Whole:**

Strategy to be scaled/spread: \_\_\_\_\_

Project lead: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Sites/groups to adopt the change: \_\_\_\_\_

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Overall budget: \_\_\_\_\_

What resources might the new sites/groups need to be ready to adopt the strategy? (preparation, training, funding, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

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## 11B: Scale & Spread Plan Template (cont'd)

### For Each Site/Group:

For the site/group - point person(s) & contact information: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Point person on leadership team, if different from project lead:

\_\_\_\_\_

### Implementation Plan:

Because your plan is meant to be a working, evolving document, we suggest you use an editable Excel or Word version and use the template below as a guide, customizing it as needed to fit your project.

Objective 1:						
Tasks:	Point(s) of Contact:	Completion Date:	Status:	Resources/Data Needed:	Product/Output /Metrics:	Notes:
Objective 2:						
Objective 3:						





# Consider & Discuss: 11C Reinforcing Sustainable Structures

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spend 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



What factors give a collaborative structure staying power/sustainability? Can we codify our structures, and in what ways?

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Did our teams and committees work well? Why or why not?

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What should we change in our overall plan for collaborative teams and committees? Revisit your team's *Collaborative Structures Worksheet* (Activity 5D) and update as needed.

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## Activity 11C, Consider & Discuss: Reinforcing Sustainable Structures (cont'd)



How might our internal and external communications plans be expanded or improved? Revisit your *Communication Plan Template* (Activity 7E) and update it accordingly.

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Did we establish role-alike communications between administration and the association/union (as discussed in *Establish Support Resources* (Chapter 7)? Were they effective? Should we adjust or expand these structures?

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Do we have effective and consistent procedures to orient and onboard those new to collaboration?

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What additional structures might help us as we expand collaboration in our system?

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# Consider & Discuss: 11D Sustaining Collaborative Processes

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spnd 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



Did we use each step within this stage? Why or why not?

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What processes were most successful in each stage?

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Did we modify our activities within one or more steps in this stage?  
How so?

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Were there additional steps we performed or processes we used that were helpful?

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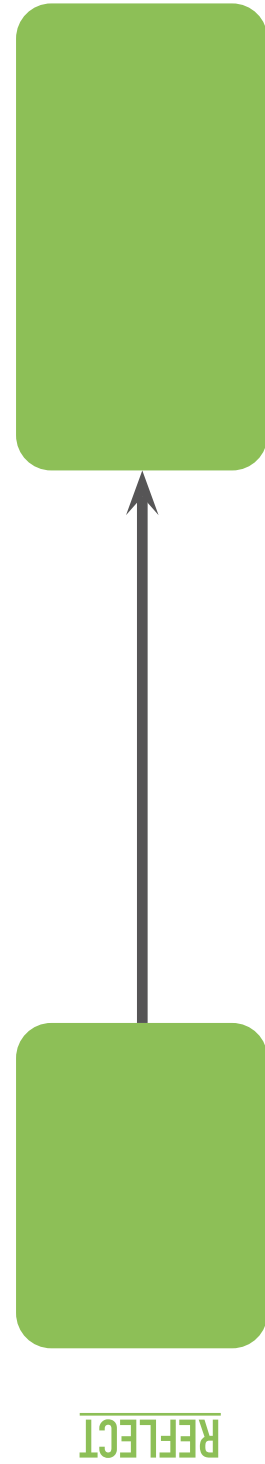
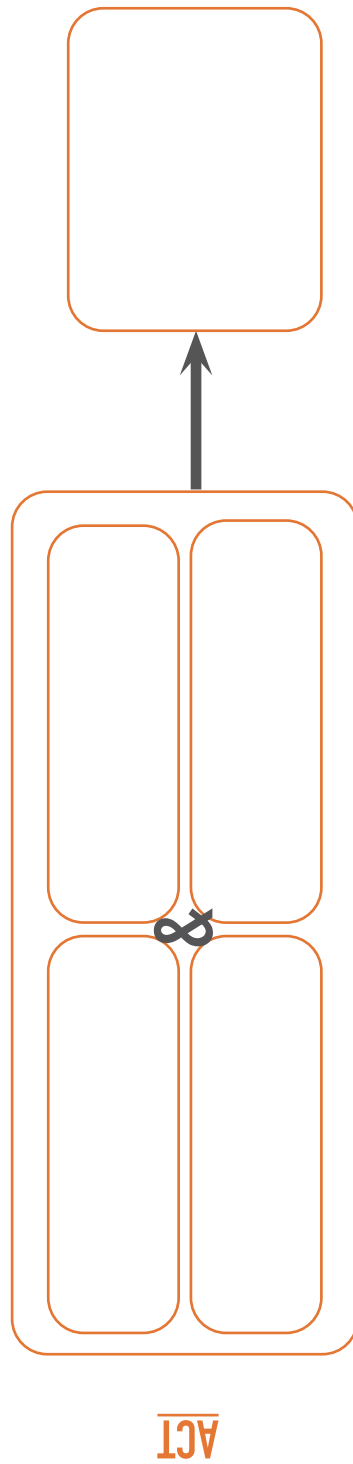
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# 11E: Collaborative Framework Template



**PURPOSE:** Use this template to customize the *District & School Collaboration Framework* to better reflect your partnership's unique processes and context.





# Consider & Discuss: Expanding the Partnership

## INSTRUCTIONS

Spend 10 to 15 minutes reflecting on and responding to the questions below. We recommend that each partner respond to the questions individually, then discuss your individual responses as a group.



Is now a good time to expand our partnership? Why or why not? Is our partnership stable enough to include additional partners?

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What perspectives/voices are missing from our partnership?

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Does our partnership reflect our community in terms of race, culture, educational background, etc.?

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How will we onboard new partners?

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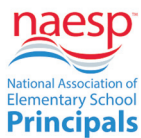
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