

BACKGROUND GUIDES

BACKGROUND GUIDE 4:

PROACTIVE COLLABORATION WITH OTHER COMMUNITY PROVIDERS

Conducting outreach in any community can be challenging. It often requires providing a multitude of services to a diverse population over a large geographic area and each of those conditions carries its own set of often hard-to-meet demands.

One strategy for addressing the challenges is to join forces with other agencies that have goals in common with yours or that serve clients with similar needs. Collaborations and partnerships can be especially effective when you are serving clients who have multiple diagnoses or are contending with other difficult issues such as HIV, homelessness, mental illness, substance abuse, or involvement with the criminal justice system.

Community partners can assist each other in many ways. For example, partners might provide space in which to deliver services, facilitate outreach to particular individuals or groups, give access to helpful databases, offer technical assistance, or furnish incentives and enablers to help patients adhere to LTBI treatment. In return, you can supply similar services to them.

WHAT BENEFITS DO YOU GAIN WHEN YOU COLLABORATE WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS?

The specific advantages of collaboration will depend on the type of organization selected as a partner and the capacities and requirements that each partner brings to the table. These can include:

Cost-effectiveness. By sharing resources, each partner may be able to leverage their resources more effectively and lower individual program costs.

Credibility. You will gain credibility with your prospective clients when you are allied with organizations they already trust.

Increased referrals to your program. Through their programs, partners may have access to high-risk clients who need testing or have been identified as having LTBI and may increase their ability to influence them to participate in TB testing or treatment.

Expert assistance in reaching your target clients and providing them services. You will be able to tap the knowledge and experience of your partner's staff in working with clients. For example:

- Identifying, locating, and providing outreach to members of your target groups
- Addressing issues affecting your clients, such as substance abuse or lack of housing
- Providing culturally acceptable services to individuals who have particular ethnic or cultural backgrounds or who belong to other kinds of groups with shared attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors

Increased community awareness of TB issues. Collaborations open up opportunities to educate the staff and clients of other programs about TB and the importance of treatment.

Seamless services for clients. Seamless services are services offered to an individual client by multiple agencies in an integrated way and often in one location. Frequently the client perceives no distinction among the agencies providing the services. The more convenient it is to obtain services, the more willing clients are to accept them. The result is fewer gaps in services and fewer clients lost to follow-up.

WHO ARE POTENTIAL PARTNERS FOR COLLABORATION?

To identify likely partners, consider who else in your community serves the target population. Possibilities may include:

- Methadone programs
- Homeless shelters
- Social service providers or service centers
- Community clinics
- Substance abuse treatment centers (inpatient and outpatient)
- Needle exchange programs
- Food pantries or meal programs
- Correctional facilities
- HIV/AIDS service providers

After you have listed the possibilities, assess the potential benefits and drawbacks of each. What will each program gain? What will be the advantages to your clients and theirs? What will be the costs, financial or otherwise? How do your needs and strengths mesh with those of your candidate organization? A good collaboration has synergy—one partner's needs are complemented by what the other can provide and the combined endeavor is larger than the sum of its parts. Determining which agency to work with can be a complex task and you may need to re-evaluate your choices as the process evolves.

Once you have identified a prospective partner, approach the organization to explain the LTBI program, propose the collaboration, and begin preliminary discussions of the possibilities.

WHAT ARE THE KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION?

A successful collaboration provides something of value to all of the participating partners. It allows each of them to expand their reach and accomplish goals that would be difficult to achieve alone.

A clear understanding of your own needs and expectations. It pays to take time at the outset to assess what your reasons are for participating in a collaboration, what you hope to gain, and what your organization has to offer that can benefit potential partners. If you are fully aware of what you bring to the partnership and what you would like to get from it, your chances for satisfaction and success increase dramatically.

Trust and credibility among the collaborating agencies. These qualities are the cornerstone of a successful relationship. Achieving trust can be a lengthy process but is a worthwhile investment of time. Be upfront and straightforward about your issues and concerns and encourage your partner to do likewise.

Agreement on goals, roles, and responsibilities. For a collaboration to work well, the participants must work together to carefully define their mutual goals for the joint effort and agree upon the roles and responsibilities of each party. Refer to the last pages of this background guide, Table A, for a list of objectives to consider when building relationships with community partners.

A sound evaluation process. With your partners, decide what criteria you will use to declare the collaboration a success or failure and determine how the results of the evaluation can be incorporated into improvements in the program. You might wish to consider establishing a trial period for the collaboration. When the trial period is concluded, you can evaluate the arrangement and either terminate or continue the partnership.

Written documentation of all the terms and conditions to which the partners have agreed. Outline all the decisions made in setting up the collaboration, including the goals,

roles, and responsibilities of each partner, in an interagency agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU). An easily modifiable template, MOU: Infectious Disease Screening, is included in the Tools section. This ensures that all partners are clear from the outset about their mutual expectations, reduces the chance of future misunderstandings, and provides the foundation for a harmonious and productive relationship.

TABLE A: BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

<p>Goals and desired outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does each partner bring to the collaboration? • What does each partner hope to gain from working together? • What are the potential costs and benefits to the programs and the clients? • What are the specific program objectives to be attained?
<p>Program parameters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the scope of services that will be offered? • How, when, and where will the services be delivered? • Which clients will receive services? Are all clients eligible or are there criteria that must be met?
<p>Roles and responsibilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will be responsible for each component? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Scheduling – Staffing – Assessing client eligibility – Coordination and monitoring – Intake – Documentation – Provision of services – Evaluation • How will funding and financial responsibilities be handled? Which partner will be responsible for which costs? • How will communication be handled between agencies? Who will be the day-to-day contacts? • Who will have decision-making powers? How will changes be made to protocols or agreements? • What are the consequences if responsibilities are not met? • How will overlapping program boundaries or “turf issues” be resolved?
<p>Evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will there be a trial period? If so, for how long? • What criteria will be used to declare the collaboration a success or failure? • How will evaluation results be incorporated into the program?