Examining Your Collaboration

This module is designed to support the process of developing and sustaining a joint initiative among partnering agencies to improve access to services for sexual violence victims with disabilities. It encourages representatives from these agencies to do the following: (1) learn more about collaboration in general; (2) examine their current collaboration, identifying strengths and areas where changes are needed; and (3) begin to develop a plan to strengthen the collaboration.[1]

Key Points

- "Collaboration goes beyond informal cooperation or the occasional coordination of efforts. It is a long-term, well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. It involves the genuine sharing of authority, accountability, resources and rewards. There is [always either] a need, a crisis or an opportunity. Partners come together to accomplish something that they cannot do alone."[2]

- Communities use different approaches to facilitate collaboration—their approaches often build upon related efforts already underway.

- When agencies successfully collaborate to improve access to local services for sexual violence victims with disabilities, it can benefit victims (e.g., better and more accessible services), partnering agencies (e.g., more networking and coordination to meet the needs of victims) and the community (e.g., increased knowledge of services and more confidence in service providers).

- To begin to develop a clearer sense of factors that influence partnering agencies' efforts to collaborate, this module encourages agencies to think about and jointly discuss questions and considerations related to the following:

  o Which agencies are/should be involved in this effort;

  o The history of collaboration among the partnering agencies;

  o Relationships among the partnering agencies;

  o The collaborative's vision and a work plan to incrementally implement the vision;

  o Whether the collaboration is guided by the self-identified needs of victims;

  o The level of support for the collaboration from agency administrators, the community and community leaders;

  o Resources available to facilitate the collaboration;

  o Leadership and staffing for the collaborative;

  o Operating procedures of the collaborative; and

  o Methods used to evaluate the effort.

A2. Examining Your Collaboration

Purpose

Collaboration 101. Forming a Collaboration Among Service Providers: An Initial Meeting Activity, suggested activities for an initial meeting to begin a dialogue among the partnering agencies on improving local services for sexual violence victims with disabilities. The next step, as discussed in this module, is for staff at these agencies to learn more about collaboration and examine their current collaboration. Examining their collaboration involves identifying strengths in their joint efforts to serve sexual violence victims with disabilities, as well as areas where changes are needed. Such an exploration can help build relationships and increase communication among the partnering agencies—outcomes which not only benefit these agencies, but also the clients they serve.

Objectives

This module seeks to:

• Facilitate a dialogue on how agencies can collaborate to improve access to services for sexual violence victims with disabilities;

• Develop a basis for understanding how each participating agency perceives the collaboration in general;

• Identify potential barriers to effective collaboration; and

• Develop a prioritized plan for strengthening the collaboration.

Also note that other modules in this toolkit focus more on assessing the agency-specific and community-wide accessibility issues related to serving sexual violence victims with disabilities (as opposed to general collaboration issues).

PART 1: CORE KNOWLEDGE

What is collaboration?

The definition of collaboration was discussed briefly in *Collaboration 101. Forming a Collaboration Among Service Providers: An Initial Meeting Activity.* In review:

"*Collaboration goes beyond informal cooperation or the occasional coordination of efforts. It is a **long-term, well-defined relationship** entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. It involves the genuine **sharing of authority, accountability, resources and rewards.** There is [always either] a need, a crisis or an opportunity. **Partners come together to accomplish something that they cannot do alone.**"*[3]

For partnering agencies that seek to increase the accessibility of local services for sexual violence victims with disabilities, collaboration is a tool they can use to facilitate this common goal. While each agency can strive to make internal improvements, it is only by working together that they can offer a streamlined and coordinated response to victims with disabilities.

Are there different approaches to facilitate collaboration?

Communities use different approaches to facilitate collaboration—their approaches often build

upon related efforts already underway. For example, there may be a local council on violence against women that includes representation from agencies that serve sexual violence victims and persons with disabilities. A subcommittee could be formed to address the issue of increasing access to services for sexual violence victims with disabilities. An existing coordinating team, such as a sexual assault response team (SART), might be willing to explore how to better respond to victims with disabilities. Agencies may already engage in informal partnering on this or other areas that could pave the way for more formal efforts to strengthen accessibility to services for sexual violence victims with disabilities. For instance, they may form a task force with subcommittees or a less formal working group to accomplish the tasks of the collaboration. Agencies may collectively seek funding to support their collaboration.

What are the benefits of collaboration?

When collaboration is successful, it can benefit victims with disabilities, the partnering agencies and the community. For victims, for example, collaboration can increase their options for protection, healing and justice; facilitate prompt referrals and connections to services; and lead to services that accommodate their needs. For partnering agencies, collaboration can increase the effectiveness of their staff in assisting clients in addressing their full range of needs and heighten the awareness of their staff of community resources. For the community, collaboration among partnering agencies can lead to a greater public knowledge of services available to sexual violence victims with disabilities and increased confidence in those agencies' abilities to collectively provide assistance. Collaborations should publicize the potential benefits so everyone who is involved or affected understands how their self-interests are served by supporting the collective efforts.

What factors might impact the success of your collaboration?

Many factors could impact the success of collaboration among partnering agencies to improve access to services for sexual violence victims with disabilities. For example, in *Collaboration 101. Forming a Collaboration Among Service Providers: An Initial Meeting Activity,* we discussed how understanding each other's agency-specific roles in working with victims with disabilities is a first step for providers to be able to assist one another in connecting victims with the comprehensive services they need. We also began to explore the gaps and challenges for victims with disabilities in accessing the services of the partnering agencies. This knowledge can help service providers to determine what is needed to improve accessibility.

To begin to develop a clear sense of the factors that influence your collaboration, think about the questions and considerations below.[4] These questions and considerations are the focus of *Part 2: Discussion* of this module. Exploring these questions and considerations, first on your own or in conjunction with other staff from your agency and then with representatives from partnering agencies, can help promote a common understanding of how individual partners perceive the collaboration, areas of agreement/disagreement, and what issues need to be addressed to strengthen it.

FYI—Answers to these questions will likely be different if partnering agencies are just beginning to collaborate to improve access to local services for sexual violence victims with disabilities versus if they already have some history of collaborating on this issue. If the collaboration is just starting, these questions can be reference points for guiding the

development of the collaboration.

Directions: Each themed section below begins with a "rated" question, meant to encourage respondent objectivity and subsequently facilitate equal input and participation across agencies during discussions. Use the following rating scale for those questions:

1=Strongly Disagree **2**=Disagree **3**=Not Sure/Need More Information **4**=Agree **5**=Strongly Agree

The remaining questions in each themed section ask respondents to further describe how the collaborative addresses the theme.

1. Participating Agencies

Rate the following statement on the above scale of 1 to 5 and explain your rating:

All relevant agencies (that interact with sexual violence victims with disabilities in the community) are participating in this collaboration. Score: _____

a. What agencies should be part of the collaborative, but are not yet involved?

b. What current barriers might prevent a particular agency from being active in this collaborative (e.g., agency X has lost significant funding and lacks the resources to participate)?

c. Describe whether each partnering agency (1) has a representative who participates in the collaborative who has the authority to make decisions for her/his agency when needed; and (2) has representatives who participate who provide services as well as develop and implement policies.

2. History of Collaboration

Rate the following statement on the above scale of 1 to 5 and explain your rating:

Partnering agencies already work together on other initiatives. Score:_____

a. Describe how they have worked together in the past.

b. What factors have contributed to the success/failure of these initiatives?

c. What would you have changed to enhance these collaborative efforts?

3. Relationship Among Agencies

Rate the following statement on the above scale of 1 to 5 and explain your rating:

There is respect and trust among partnering agencies. Score:_____

a. What are the existing strengths that support mutual respect and trust, as well as barriers that detract from mutual respect and trust?

 (One key to mutual respect and trust is building awareness among those involved in the collaborative of each agency's general mission, services and role in serving victims with disabilities. See *Collaboration 101. Forming a Collaboration among Service Providers: An*

Initial Meeting Activity.)

4. Vision of the Collaborative

Rate the following statement on the above scale of 1 to 5 and explain your rating:

Partnering agencies have a shared vision of what they wish to accomplish through this collaborative. Score:_____

a. What is that shared vision? (See *Collaboration 101. Forming a Collaboration Among Service Providers: An Initial Meeting Activity.*)

b. Are agencies equally invested in achieving that vision? Why or why not?

5. Work Plan for Collaboration

Rate the following statement on the above scale of 1 to 5 and explain your rating:

Our collaborative's vision is achievable in increments over a defined time period. Score:_____

a. Has/will a written work plan been developed and agreed upon by the partnering agencies to implement this vision?

b. Is the work plan to be reviewed periodically to evaluate whether circumstances or goals have changed, and if so, then revised? (See *Tools to Increase Access. Developing a Transition Plan.*)

6. Collaboration Guided by Self-Identified Needs of Victims

Rate the following statement on the above scale of 1 to 5 and explain your rating:

Partnering agencies collectively make a sufficient effort to ensure that the voices of sexual violence victims and persons with disabilities guide the collaboration. Score:_____

a. What strategies are/will be used to ensure that the self-identified needs of sexual violence victims and persons with disabilities guide the collaboration? What additional strategies may be useful?

7. Support for Collaboration

Rate the following statement on the above scale of 1 to 5 and explain your rating:

The current level of support from agency administrators and the community for this collaborative initiative is sufficient. Score:_____

a. Describe if and how leadership of each agency supports the collaboration.

b. Describe if and how the community/community leaders support the collaboration.

c. Describe strategies that are being/will be used to gain additional support.

8. Resources to Facilitate Collaboration

Rate the following statement on the above scale of 1 to 5 and explain your rating:

There are sufficient resources available across partnering agencies to support the work of this collaborative. Score:_____

a. Describe the resources that partnering agencies are willing to share/make available to support this effort—personnel time, expertise, training, money, meeting space, etc. (See *Collaboration 101. Creating a Community Resource List.*)

9. Leadership

Rate the following statement on the above scale of 1 to 5 and explain your rating:

There is an individual(s) designated as responsible for leading and/or coordinating our collaborative effort. Score:_____

a. Is this person(s) a paid administrator hired for this purpose or employed by one of the partnering agencies, with this role incorporated into her/his existing work?

b. Do you think the collaboration would continue without that person(s)? Why or why not? If not, is there a way to structure the collaboration to ensure sustainability?

10. Staffing

Rate the following statement on the above scale of 1 to 5 and explain your rating:

The work of the collaboration is shared appropriately across agencies. Score:_____

a. What are the roles of each of the partnering agencies in carrying out the work of the collaboration?

b. Describe if there are different ways/levels that agencies can be involved or contribute to the collaborative.

11. Operating Procedures

Rate the following statement on the above scale of 1 to 5 and explain your rating:

Partnering agencies have agreed upon the operating procedures that aid them in carrying out the collaborative's vision. Score:_____

a. Describe if your collaborative has formal or informal operating procedures. Have there been purposeful discussions to develop operating procedures or did they just evolve over time? How would someone new to the collaborative learn about its operating procedures? (See *Collaboration 101. Forming a Collaboration Among Service Providers: An Initial Meeting Activity.*)

1. Do participating agencies *meet regularly* to discuss expectations, plan for activities and problem-solve? Are collaborative meetings held often enough, not enough or too often? Are meetings sufficiently productive given the time invested? Why or why not?

2. How are *decisions* facilitated and *consensus* reached among agencies?

3. How does your collaborative *deal with conflicts* that arise among agencies?

4. How do agencies *communicate* with one another regarding the collaborative, outside of

regular meetings?

5. What strategies are used, if any, during meetings and other communications to (1) facilitate an *environment of mutual respect and trust*; and (2) support all collaborative members in *feeling comfortable* to express their opinions and feelings on the various topics?

6. Describe the expectations for *confidentiality* related to information shared during meetings and in other communications. Describe if and how consensus about these expectations was reached.

12. Evaluation of Efforts

Rate the following statement on the above scale of 1 to 5 and explain your rating:

Our collaborative has an effective plan to evaluate our incremental successes in achieving our shared vision. Score:_____

a. How does/will your collaborative evaluate the effectiveness of its efforts?

b. How often does the evaluation occur?

c. What is done with the evaluation findings?

Test Your Knowledge

Refer to the pages in this module as indicated to find the answer to each question.

1. Define collaboration. *See page A2.2.*

2. What are some examples of how communities might use different approaches to facilitate collaboration to improve access to services for sexual violence victims with disabilities? *See pages A2.2–A2.3.*

3. What are examples of potential benefits of effective collaboration for victims, partnering agencies and communities? *See page A2.3.*

4. What factors might influence and impact the effectiveness of partnering agencies' efforts to collaborate to improve access to services for sexual violence victims with disabilities? *See pages A2.3–A2.7.*

Part 2: DISCUSSION

Projected Time for Discussion
Up to 2.75 hours

Planning

• Ensure that the meeting is held at an accessible location. Ask participants prior to the meeting if they need any accommodations—if so, work with them to secure accommodations.

• Select a facilitator. It would be useful for the facilitator to have expertise and/or experience in

building community partnerships, particularly for the specific purpose of serving sexual violence victims with disabilities. Also, consider looking outside of your circle of collaborating agencies for a facilitator. Use of a neutral facilitator may help promote more open dialogue among participants.

• Select a note taker to record potential steps to strengthen the collaboration. A flip chart(s) and markers will also be needed.

• Participants and the facilitator should review *Part 1: Core Knowledge* of this module before the discussion.

• Bring the following supplies and materials to the meeting: flipcharts and colored markers, sufficient copies of participant materials, office supplies (tape, pens, paper, etc.) and a clock/watch to monitor time. Optional items include name badges or table tents.

Suggested Activities and Questions

1. **Invite participants to identify the discussion ground rules to promote open communication.** Utilize the following principles: *(5 minutes)*

   • An environment of mutual respect and trust is optimal. Everyone should feel comfortable to express their opinions and feelings on the various topics. There are no right or wrong answers, only different perspectives.

   • Avoid personalized comments that are negative as they can lead to defensiveness and confrontation among the participants and ultimately may shut down dialogue.

   • Be clear about what information discussed during this meeting is confidential and the expectations for confidentiality in the context of this partnership.

2. **Ask participants to work either individually or with other staff from their agencies to review/discuss the questions/considerations posed in *Part 1: Core Knowledge* of this module and to write down their answers/comments for each themed section**. Encourage them to answer the questions honestly and be prepared to discuss the reasoning for their responses. *(Allow up to 45 minutes. Note that some or all of this activity could be completed prior to this discussion.)*

3. **Ask participants to share with the large group the highlights of the individual and agency-specific answers/comments as discussed above**. Record the highlights on flipcharts. *(Up to 60 minutes)*

4. **Facilitate a large group conversation about common themes**, based on the questions below. Record themes on flipcharts. *(20 minutes)*

   a. Did the discussion of the questions identify common or obvious areas of strength and/or weakness that exist within the collaboration?

   b. In what areas, if any, did partners agree?

   c. In what areas, if any, was there disagreement or incongruence?

5. Based on the conversation above, **develop a written list in priority order of potential**

steps to strengthen the collaboration. Record the list on flipcharts. Ask for participant feedback on the following: *(20 minutes)*

a. What specific steps should be taken for each identified area of need?

b. What resources, information and/or training are needed to implement these steps?

c. What existing community resources are available to help address each area of need?

d. Are there areas where we will need to seek out additional resources or technical assistance?

6. **Closing.** Ask each participant to write down how the information gained from this discussion will promote change in their agency's policies, practices or training programs. Then facilitate a large group discussion on this topic. *(15 minutes)*

[1]Partnering agencies refer to the persons they serve as "clients," "consumers" and "victims." For convenience, "victims" and "clients" are primarily used in this module. Also note that the terms "sexual violence" and "sexual assault" are generally used in this module to encompass sexual assault, sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence.

[2]Excerpted from P. Mattessich, Can this collaboration be saved? 20 factors that can make or break any group effort, Shelterforce Online, #129, May/June 2003, National Housing Institute, at http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/129/savecollab.html. Note that all online documents referenced in this module were available at the links provided at the time the module was written. It is suggested you check the sites for any updates or changes. If you experience difficulty accessing the documents via the links, another option for locating documents is doing a web search using titles.

[3]Excerpted from Mattessich.

[4]The questions build upon the authors' experiences doing collaborative work, as well as concepts from P. Mattessich, M. Murray-Close & B. Monsey, *Collaboration: What Makes It Work*, as cited in C. Lucas & R. Andrews, *Four Keys to Collaborative Success,* http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/articles/Article-4_Key–Collab–Success.cfm; and M. Carter with M. Griffin & K. Littel, *The Collaborative Approach to Sex Offender Management, Center for Sex Offender Management,* 2000, through http://www.csom.org. If agencies wish to delve more into assessing their capacity and planning for collaborative community work, two online resources include the publications of the Fieldstone Alliance (in particular, see link for free tools), through http://www.fieldstonealliance,org/index.cfm; and the University of Kansas, *The Community Tool Box: Do the Work* (2010), through http://ctb.ku.edu.