

State Collaboration:

SUPPORT, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY



The WIC and Head Start Better Together Collaboration project seeks to create a formal partnership between WIC and Head Start on both the State and local levels. Support, Accountability and Sustainability are key aspects needed to nurture the WIC and Head Start Better Together Collaboration.

STRUCTURE SUPPORT FOR THE COLLABORATION

Consider using a “Project Liaison” to provide support to the local sites engaging in collaboration. Based on resources, a liaison can be brought on specifically for the project or these responsibilities can be given to an existing State (or local) staff person. A sample job description can be found in the WIC and Head Start Better Together Toolkit.

In whichever approach you take, have clear expectations for both the liaison and local agency staff to ensure that the collaboration remains a priority for both agencies and stays focused.

In general, your liaison should do the following:

- Plan and facilitate activities during the project's kick-off meeting
- Schedule the initial collaboration meeting between local WIC & Head Start sites
- Facilitate monthly local collaboration meetings
- Plan and lead quarterly meetings with all sites working on collaboration



ADMINISTER A QUARTERLY SURVEY

A survey is a great way to keep local staff on track and evaluate the progress of your local collaboration. A survey can also help with staff accountability. The liaison or key state program contacts can use survey feedback to provide support, identify local best practices and detect common challenges that can be shared or addressed with staff at monthly visits and/or quarterly meetings. Examples of surveys can be found in the final report and in Better Together Toolkit.

SKILLS TO LOOK FOR IN A LIAISON

- ORGANIZED
- GOOD FACILITATOR
- ABILITY TO REMAIN NEUTRAL

“I think the liaison is critical to the success of this collaboration because, being two entities, having that bridge is important. I think without that – with the challenges of staffing and time – the collaboration might have faded away.”

HEAD START STAFF

FIVE LEVELS OF COLLABORATION AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

0 NO INTERACTION AT ALL	1 NETWORKING <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Aware of organization- Loosely defined roles- Little communication- All decisions are made independently	2 COOPERATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Provide information to each other- Somewhat defined roles- Formal communication- All decisions are made independently	3 COORDINATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Share information and resources- Defined roles- Frequent communication- Some shared decision making	4 COALITION <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Share ideas- Share resources- Frequent and prioritized communication- All members have a vote in decision making	5 COLLABORATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Members belong to one system- Frequent communication is characterized by mutual trust- Consensus is reached on all decisions
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Adapted from the Frey et al., 2006

SCHEDULE FREQUENT CHECK-INS

Providing opportunities for all local sites or programs involved in the collaboration to meet regularly allows for challenges to be addressed and solutions to be shared.

Meetings can vary between in-person and conference calls to accommodate travel needs and clinic or classroom schedules. Aim to make the quarterly meetings interactive and allow ample time for local staff to celebrate their accomplishments and work on collaboration goals.

A basic agenda for quarterly meetings is provided in the Better Together Toolkit.

Building time for reflection is important. Consider asking staff to complete a self-assessment of their progress on the Levels of Collaboration Scale found in the Better Together Toolkit. This activity can help to build momentum or evaluate barriers that need to be overcome.

THINK ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY FOR YOUR COLLABORATION

Once processes are developed and systematized collaboration between programs becomes part of standard operations. Consider the following when developing a sustainability plan:

- Existing State and local resources to support local staff
- Available WIC and Head Start funds that can be leveraged
- Ability to include collaboration activities into existing reporting requirements or processes in place to monitor progress i.e. for WIC, the Local Agency Nutrition Plan
- Best option for implementing WIC & Head Start collaboration (statewide rollout or in phases)
- Develop a plan for ongoing training in case of staff turnover. Use the resources in the WIC & Head Start Better Together Toolkit for self-directed training or as part of orientation for new staff

More details about how Connecticut plans to sustain its Better Together Project are available in the Final Report.

Examples of State level resources for tracking collaboration in the local agency plan can be found at WICHeadStartBetterTogether.org



For more information and resources visit the Better Together Toolkit at www.WICHeadStartBetterTogether.org