Insights

Building a Culture of Collaboration Within Multilevel Systems

In our line of work, positive outcomes depend on the careful synergy of multiple systems. Because children's health is influenced by a great many factors, simultaneously engaging systems at the community, city, state and government level is essential for significant change.

All too often we discover that two state agencies can be closely aligned on their goal, but working independently to reach it. When we work collaboratively instead, we're able to pool, leverage and reinforce our resources for a common aim—a major benefit when such resources are often extremely limited.

A new e-course—NICHQ's Essentials of Collaboration—provides strategies for healthy collaboration. One of the first steps is setting a clear aim, so that participants in an improvement project at all system levels know what they are working toward and understand their role in creating change. As we work to unite everyone around a common aim, team leaders should attempt to gain a complete picture of the context under which participants are currently working. Once they have a firm grasp on the specific assets and limitations of each system, leaders can provide teams with the right tools and resources to reach their goal.

Learn more about strategies to ensure successful collaboration with NICHQ's Essentials of Collaboration e-course. Take the free 30-minute course today!

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When it comes to understanding the nuances of how a system operates, [active listening](#) can be incredibly powerful. Active listening is not only helpful in fostering the robust relationships at the heart of healthy collaboration; it may also shed light on the historical context of each system (as well as the areas where various systems intersect). Active listening can also bring about a shift in perspective that allows team leaders to guide collaboration more effectively. Rather than asking how to get participants fully engaged in the improvement process, for instance, we might frame the question as: "What do team members need from us so that they can fulfill their goals?" This subtle distinction helps in adopting a collaborative mindset.

Another key aspect of cultivating healthy collaboration is tuning into each participant's unique strengths and weaknesses. Pinpointing weak spots can help you anticipate the necessary resources to support the team, while identifying and honoring a team member's strengths can boost motivation and give projects fuel for long-lasting change. By capitalizing on people's strengths, you grant them the opportunity to do what they most enjoy. And when people quickly see results from their work, they're usually inspired to stay committed and even step up their efforts.