

## Insights

# Don't Let These Common Collaboration Challenges Derail Your Change Effort



You've already identified and recruited your core partners, aligned your goals and assessed your team's strengths and skills. You've committed to a collaborative approach to improving population outcomes, which means you are on track to drive lasting change.

But collaboration can get complicated quickly; partners are often in separate locations and balancing individual priorities, which can make it difficult to share ideas and resources, manage deadlines and remain focused on a shared goal. Proactively acknowledging common challenges can help ensure your collaboration effort stays on course. To help, we've compiled strategies for managing frequent pitfalls so that you can not only initiate, but maintain effective collaboration:

**Minimize competition:** Partnering with an organization with a common mission might mean partnering with an organization that competes with you for clients and recognition. When this happens, team members can feel tempted to prove their organization's value, building internal tension that takes away from a productive collective energy. Team members need to be reminded that their fates are intertwined: the initiative's success or failure will reflect on all contributing organizations, making collaboration essential. When the teams collaborate around a shared aim and vision, they achieve better outcomes and support the clients of all participating

partners.

**Free E-Course:** Interested in avoiding additional pitfalls and learning more about effective collaboration? Our free 30-minute online course, Essentials of Collaboration, uses a Boston-based case study to illuminate the impact of successful collaboration and provides evaluation techniques to make sure your collaboration effort succeeds from start to finish. [Take the course and continue your learning.](#)

**Manage Mistrust:** there are many sources that can inhibit trust: limited experience working together, competition and initial misperceptions, to name a few. Yet effective collaboration depends on team members trusting each other so they can work together productively. Encourage a safe, judgment-free environment by establishing internal meeting ground rules that facilitate productive discussion. Consider training staff and leadership in conflict management so that there are check points within all teams.

**Maximize Limited Resources:** Limited time is often the most common challenge teams face. High staff and team member turnover rates, resulting in frequent reorientation of new team members, as well as external competing priorities all result in staff being pulled in too many directions at once. Taking the time to document all processes, meeting notes and materials can lead to more efficient onboarding processes, as well as build understanding and accountability for individual roles.

**Avoid Indecisive Decision-Makers:** Multiple stakeholders means more resources and ideas, but it also means catering to more expectations and interests. When stakeholders are pulled in multiple directions, it can be difficult for them to focus on a common aim. Address this by avoiding unclear expectations, both about stakeholder roles as well as processes, such as deadlines and reviews. Help keep stakeholders focused on the shared goal by always offering relevant options, rather than have them start from a blank slate.

**Address Digital Miscommunication:** With stakeholders often working in separate locations, leveraging digital communication methods is essential for success. However, with multiple files and emails circulating, information can easily be misunderstood or misplaced. Understandable human errors, such as forgetting to hit “reply all” or attaching a draft that had already been updated, can lead to inefficient collaboration. Capitalizing on technology platforms can help you easily track and share files, manage data and receive feedback.

### **Facilitate Process Syncing Rather than Process Sinking**

Organizations and individuals often have different processes and workflows; finding a happy integration between the two can be difficult. For example, someone expecting weekly progress meetings may find daily progress report emails frustrating. Similarly, an organization familiar with one email platform’s calendar function may run into scheduling difficulties when working with another platform. Before you hit these roadblocks, collaboratively identify a process that everyone respects, and find collaboration tools that integrate with all partners’ existing platforms.