



Basic Collaboration Principles

The principles that are valid for all group processes require particular consideration in shaping collaboration among stakeholders in the field of health:

- Building trust and workable structures takes time.
- The success of any collaboration cannot be left to chance, but requires continuous leadership.

Abraham Wandersman and colleagues (1997; see also Stevenson et. al. 1996) summarise, based on the experiences of several organisations, the most important prerequisites for the success of collaborative work:

A suitable combination of stakeholders: Collaboration is usually planned and coordinated by a core group of people – perhaps even a working party or steering committee. All groups supposed to take part in implementing and evaluating the activity are invited to participate, particularly funders, the project team and the target group. This, however, does not mean haphazardly recruiting representatives of a group or organisation, but to directly approach people who can publicly represent their respective group's interests and become active in the initiative. Just as important as a multiplicity of interests is a multiplicity of individual competencies. It is therefore necessary to consider which strengths potential individual representatives possess.

Structures for active leadership: Clear structures, agreed-upon procedures and delegated authority as well as processes for conflict resolution are indispensable for productive and satisfactory collaboration. In the case of larger working parties or steering committees, leadership should, according to Wandersman and colleagues, be in the hands of a small number of people who fulfil the following criteria:

- Experience with group processes and leadership functions
- Experience with (local) political structures and processes
- The ability to organise and facilitate meetings
- The ability to build relationships of mutual trust with various stakeholders
- Flexibility
- Access to decision makers and media at the local level

Formalising ways of working and employing methods of conflict resolution enable working parties and steering committees to manage a variety of interests.

Balancing the maintenance of working relationships with goal-oriented activities: those stakeholders who equally strive for contributors' satisfaction and for reaching agreed objectives succeed in achieving successful, long-term collaborations. Ensuring harmonious interaction alone can lead to a high degree of trust and team spirit without necessarily achieving marked progress in improving the health of the target group. On the other hand, an exclusive focus on goal-oriented activities leads to the neglect of internal conflicts among participants and eventually to a loss of motivation.

Goal Orientation: Setting clear goals to be achieved within an agreed time frame clarifies the reason for and purpose of the collaboration and motivates participants to commit to the process for the long term. All goals and objectives should be negotiated among stakeholders using agreed decision-making processes.



Participatory Quality Development in HIV Prevention

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Further Reading and Links:

- [Collaboration: Further Reading and Links](#)

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