

BUILDING YOUR PARTNERSHIP'S CAPACITY FOR CHANGE

Every community has a unique way of bringing people together to work on health issues, ranging from informal groups of leaders to voluntary coalitions to formal alliances. For the purpose of this guidance, we will refer to any such group as a “partnership.”

The County Health Rankings illustrate that where we live, learn, work, and play matters to our health, and that by working together, we can improve the health of our communities. Moreover, the Rankings illustrate that all of us—from public health leaders and health care providers, nonprofit and government representatives, to diverse community leaders and business owners—play a role in improving the health and vitality of our communities.

Community health improvement is a long-term process, requiring the commitment of many people with diverse perspectives working together collaboratively to bring about change. Change takes time, patience, and resources. Partnerships that are leveraging existing assets, strengths, and expertise in their communities—using these resources in sometimes new and innovative ways—tend to be better able to sustain that effort over time. The purpose of this guide is to provide tools and ideas that build your capacity to identify, develop, and leverage existing resources. If you are interested in understanding how to best apply for outside funds for your initiative, see [Funding Guide: Securing Additional Resources for Community Health Improvement](#).

This guide has two sections:-

- I. **Capacity Assessment** – This section helps you consider your partnership’s strengths and capacity needs. Once you’ve done this, you’ll be in a good position to know what resources need to be developed and what can be better leveraged.
- II. **Developing and Leveraging Your Relationships, Networks, and Partnerships** – This section helps you explore how to further maximize your existing network and build connections with those who believe in your mission and want to invest in your community.

As you use this guide and identify additional ways to build sustainable community health improvement efforts, please share your ideas by emailing us at info@countyhealthrankings.org.

Section I: Capacity Assessment

As you work on building a sustainable initiative, consider your partnership's capacity for addressing your community's challenges and opportunities. Successful initiatives are the result of strong partnerships: good people, good planning, and good systems. Assess your partnership's existing expertise and resources so that you can take stock of how to better leverage these and be sure additional resources will have the greatest strategic impact.

[Evaluate Your Partnership and Make Changes](#) in the Evaluate Actions step provides guidance and tools to help ensure that what you are doing is working the way you intended and that your partnership is as effective as possible. Step eight of [Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide](#) (pp. 24-25) provides more detail about evaluating your partnership's efforts.

Taking action—whether it's adopting a policy or systems change or implementing a program—requires resources: time, people, materials, meeting space, and money among other things. Are there ways to reallocate existing resources, including people, in-kind support, and money?

- For example, if you are working in the areas of affordable housing, providing services to the most vulnerable in your communities, and/or job creation, check with your partners to see if they have access to [Community Development Block Grants](#) (CDBG).
- As another example, if you and your partners are working on improving the health system in your community, [Stewarding Regional Health Transformation: A Guide for Changemakers](#) from [ReThink Health](#) can help you think through how to guide resources into smarter more sustained investments.

Suggested tools:

- [Coalition Core Competencies Checklist](#) (from Missouri Foundation for Health's Social Innovation for Missouri Project) helps your team identify where your strengths lie in the improvement process and where additional skills, knowledge, and/or resources may be needed.
- [Nine Habits of Effective Coalitions Assessment](#) (from StrategicHealthConcepts.com) is a 21-question survey that helps members rate their coalition or partnership.
- [Coalition Member Survey](#) (from CoalitionsWork) is a 45-item survey for members to rate the coalition on aspects related to planning, implementation, leadership, local and statewide involvement, communication, participation, progress and outcomes.

Section II: Developing and Leveraging Your Relationships, Networks, and Partnerships

Now that you have a good idea of your current capacity as a partnership, you're in a good position to work on strengthening relationships among partners, expanding leadership roles and skills, and connecting with other networks and partnerships in order to have more sustainable impact in your community.

Developing and leveraging your relationships, networks, and partnerships involves working together to build a diverse multi-sector partnership with an aligned vision and a system-wide strategy that harnesses the collective power of the community to create meaningful and sustainable change.

The [Work Together](#) step includes a number of helpful tools and resources for strengthening partnerships.

[Develop Leadership Capacity](#) in the Work Together step provides guidance and tools for cultivating existing and new leadership among partnership members. Tom Wolf's article on [Coalition Leadership](#) provides an overview of the critical skills and talents needed in a coalition or partnership. [Reinforce Healthy Partnership Practices](#) provides guidance and tools for ensuring all members feel their time is being valued and are involved in leadership roles they are most interested in and suited for.

Developing and leveraging your partnership is a continuous process of involving new community members. The guidance and tools in [Recruit Diverse Stakeholders From Multiple Sectors](#) can help you keep recruitment front and center throughout your work. It offers ideas about who to reach out to and how to meaningfully engage with partners from multiple sectors and people most affected by health issues. [A Practitioner's Guide for Advancing Health Equity](#) (from CDC), provides examples of meaningful community engagement and partner development practices (pp. 20-26). As you involve new members and partners, use the guidance and tools in [Develop the Group's Vision, Values, and Mission Statement](#) to review, revise, and refresh your partnership's shared agenda for change.

Suggested tools:

- [6 Strategies for Creating Shared Vision](#) (from *Smart Learning Systems*) describes six ways to develop shared vision, including Blue Sky Scenarios, Forecasting Scenarios, Mapping, Time Warp, Role Play, and Pictograms.
- [Team Blueprint](#) (from Center for Creative Leadership) clarifies your partnership's goals, project scope, meeting processes, and how you will work together; it also identifies roles and responsibilities.
- [Effective Recruitment of Coalition Members](#) (from M + R) helps you analyze "what's in it for them?" when recruiting a new organization.

Using the County Health Rankings to Engage Partners

You can use the County Health Rankings to bring new partners to the table to invest in improving health. Partners can:

- See how your county measures against the Top U.S. Performers and against other counties in your state.
- Engage in conversations with you about the many factors that contribute to health and how they might play a role in improving one or more factors.
- Help spur community engagement in improving health.

Below are some resources that can help you build and strengthen your partnerships, networks, and relationships.

- [Building Nonprofit-Business Partnerships for the 21st Century](#) (from Candid, a service of the Foundation Center formerly known as GrantSpace) is a free webinar that highlights the world of nonprofit and business partnerships and offers insight into the trends driving these collaborations.

- [Build Healthy Places Network](#) works to improve low-income communities and the lives of people living in them through connecting leaders, practitioners, investors, and policymakers across sectors.

Making the most of available resources is key to building long-term, sustainable change that will result in improved health outcomes for every member of your community. By building on and leveraging your assets, you'll be in a strong position to attract additional resources while ensuring that the community continues to lead the change process.