

The Partnership Continuum

This job aid—a companion to the [Engaging Community Partners job aid](#)—helps sexual and reproductive health care agencies advance along a continuum of strengthening community partnerships.

By advancing along the Partnership Continuum, agencies can maximize limited resources, strengthen the system of care, and tailor patient-centered, culturally responsive sexual and reproductive health services to the populations they serve.

THE PARTNERSHIP CONTINUUM

Partnerships among organizations with common interests allow for the pooling of everyday knowledge, special expertise, and resources. Joining efforts enables a more comprehensive understanding of community issues and needs, and the development of innovative, relevant strategies to address them.



THE FOUR LEVELS OF PARTNERSHIP

There are several levels of partnership—from simple information sharing, to long-term collaborations guided by a common vision.



The following **Four Levels of Partnership Table** provides an overview of the Partnership Continuum and examples of various roles partners can play at each level.

FOUR LEVELS OF PARTNERSHIP: THE PARTNERSHIP CONTINUUM¹

	COMMUNICATION	COOPERATION	COORDINATION	COLLABORATION
Definition	Partners share information and talk with each other for their mutual benefit	Partners support each other's health and support services and community activities, but have no formal agreement in place	Partners are engaged in mutual projects and initiatives, modifying their own activities to strengthen the whole	With a formal agreement in place, partners work toward enhanced capacity to achieve a shared vision
Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loosely defined/flexible relationships Informal communication Minimal decision-making No time commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Somewhat defined roles Informal and supportive relationships More frequent communication Limited decision-making Low time commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defined roles Formalized links, but each group retains autonomy Regular communication Shared decision-making around joint work Low to moderate risk Some shared resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formalized roles Formalized links, which are written in an agreement Frequent communication Equal sharing of ideas and decision-making High risk, but also high trust Pooled resources
Examples of how it looks	<p>Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share at interorganizational meetings what each is doing to address common community issues Discuss existing programs, activities, or services with other organizations 	<p>Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publicize each other's programs and services Write letters of support for each other's grant applications Co-sponsor training or professional development Exchange resources, such as technology expertise or meeting space Attend each other's meetings and events 	<p>Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serve together on event planning committees and community boards Implement programs and services together 	<p>Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sign a memorandum of understanding Develop common data collection systems Participate in joint fund-raising efforts (including pursuing grant funding) Create common workforce training systems
Benefits	Increases awareness of services offered, resources available, and mission/goals of community partners	Helps to leverage limited resources	Enhances the capacity of each organization through shared activities and expertise	Strengthens the system of care, and addresses gaps in services

OTHER RHNTC RESOURCES

- [Community Participation, Education, and Project Promotion \(CPEP\) Plan Template](#)
- [Establishing and Providing Effective Referrals for Clients: A Toolkit for Family Planning Providers](#)

¹ Frey, B. B., Lohmeier, J. H., Lee, S. W., & Tollefson, N. (2006). Measuring Collaboration Among Grant Partners. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(3), 383-392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214006290356>