

Service Partnerships

Best Practices in Service Coordination

Service Partnerships are an excellent way to offer clients the full complement of supports that they need in finding and keeping housing. By creating partnerships between agencies with different strengths and mandates, housing professionals can extend their abilities to support each other and their clients.

The City of Toronto has identified the necessity for more partnerships and collaborations between service providers, sectors and government as one of the key themes to come out of their 2013 Toronto Housing Service Consultations. The Housing Stability Service Planning Framework states that partnerships, “support effective and innovative solutions” (Toronto Shelter Support and Housing Administration, 2013, p. i). One of the strategic directions in preventing homelessness in the City’s 2014-2019 plan is to “develop partnerships with the health care, child welfare and corrections systems to coordinate transition planning strategies that prevent people from being discharged from other service systems into homelessness.” (Toronto Shelter Support and Housing Administration, 2013, p. 28), as well as strengthening partnerships between SSHA and the sector.

Service Partnerships are a growing necessity as they support organizations working with similar populations to come together and share resources to reach goals together. Partnerships build capacity for organizations, professional and clients, through mutual learning and support. Partnerships address an agencies limits of services, staff and needs, and encourage professionals to not go at it all alone!

Best Practices for Creating a Service Partnership

1. Know your organization

Before getting into the logistics of formalizing your partnership it is important to know the capacity of your own organization. Having a clear understanding of how this partnership will support your organization’s goals, processes and resources will help identify what you are capable of contributing and build a trusting and strong partnership.

2. Take the time to get to know your partner organization(s)

Get to know the goals, mission and vision statement, approval process, and resources of your potential partner organization(s). Take the time to evaluate if this organization is a good fit for the goals of this partnership and what your organization will bring to it. By learning about the organization, you will be able to minimize potential conflict, communicate more effectively, and ensure that the partnership will thrive.

Service Partnerships

3. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Talk about your partnership's overall goals. Identify the steps and tasks necessary to achieve those goals and decide together who will take on what aspects of the plan. Remember that each organization doesn't have to take on the same amount of work, instead focus on what each partner does best and what they are able to contribute. Make a plan for how to deal with conflict before it arises. Ensure there is someone identified to coordinate the overall partnership goals that all partners feel comfortable going to. If a position can be funded to coordinate communication and on-going work, it is highly recommended. If that's not possible it is important that there is an agreed upon person to coordinate the partnership and its work. This position can be rotating, but without a dedicated coordinator many partnerships have trouble keeping up with who is responsible for what.

4. Evaluate your partnership

Remember to take time to evaluate how the partnership is going, not just how the project is going. Check in with the other organization(s) to see what is working for them, what successes you all have achieved and what challenges are arising. Sometimes an organization can no longer work at the capacity they were before. Renegotiating partnership roles and responsibilities regularly helps keep everyone moving forward and happy.

5. Celebrate your successes

It is important for the partners to celebrate when you have reached milestones. Sharing successes is great for the partnership, community, sector and funders. It shows how sharing resources and the workload can make a difference in the work we all do. Celebrating with the wider community also shares examples of different kinds of partnerships. Other organizations may be inspired to join your partnership or start partnerships of their own from your model!

"So remember..."

It is important to remember the following when building a Service Partnership:

- Identify what you/your organization can bring to a partnership
- Clarify overall goals with assigned steps and tasks
- Foster communication and understanding of both organizations
- Evaluate the partnership at regular intervals
- Celebrate the successes of the partnership

Service Partnerships

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