

DEFINING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES**

Collaborative communities are continuing forums where public and private sector members proactively work together to achieve common objectives and outcomes, to solve shared challenges and to leverage collective opportunities in an environment of trust, respect, empathy and openness.

1. *Purpose*

Collaborative communities are equipped to perform activities such as developing best practices and robust strategies for addressing challenges; generating and evaluating evidence that supports novel approaches; and disseminating and implementing solutions. The communities may also work to clarify ill-defined challenges or generate consensus on the definition and scope of the challenge, which will aid in tailoring appropriate strategies to tackle those challenges. By leveraging the wide variety of resources, power and expertise of the community members, collaborative communities can help address challenges and opportunities related to (respite).

2. *Members*

Collaborative communities include diverse, relevant organizations and individuals impacted by the topic which may include but are not limited to the following: care providers, care recipients, care-partners, academicians, healthcare professionals, healthcare systems, payers, federal and state agencies, international regulatory bodies, and industry.

To foster trust, it is often suggested that the initial contact with members be made in person to facilitate the development of interpersonal relationships among the members. This step not only helps to generate trust but also to establish behavioral norms. In addition, clearly defining explicit and implicit roles, and eliciting the expectations of the members during the early stages of forming the collaboration may mitigate downstream relationship challenges.

Starting and Maintaining a Collaborative Community

The establishment process of a collaborative community may not be linear from birth to maturity but rather cyclical, going through phases of exploration, development, and creative destruction or transformation on its way to maturity. Remaining flexible and open through the planning process is key, and members may opt to revisit the collaborative community's goals and objectives over time. Reassessment of the status of the community is not viewed as an indicator of failure, but instead a marker of the members' willingness to evaluate and strengthen the community and help ensure its success.

Vision-setting Generated Collectively

The collaborative community is focused on tackling complex challenges that impact multiple stakeholders with potentially different perspectives about the causes and solutions. Therefore, one important initial step may be the creation of a shared vision and the plan to sustain that vision for the collaborative community. To come to a common vision, it is helpful if all members actively participate in shaping the vision of the community. These visionary meetings can clearly delineate group and individual goals, aid in fleshing out the needed stakeholders and facilitate commitment to accomplishing the goals.

Casting the Membership Net Broadly and Strategically

At the start of the collaborative community, it is important to identify the perspectives, knowledge, and skills of potential members needed to address and implement the collaborative effort. Ideally, members of the collaborative community

- Care about the issue being addressed;
- Are impacted by the issue; and/or
- Have knowledge and skills to help address the issue.

Integral to any collaborative effort is identifying the relevant members who are invested in solving the community's challenges and providing diverse perspectives.

It is important that the size of the collaborative community's membership roster be adequate to elicit diverse perspectives and generate thoughtful discussions; but not too large that it impedes efficient and effective group functioning. Although suggestions of membership size ranging from 6 – 20 members have been made by other collaborative groups, the ideal number for the community may be related to the forum through which the community meets (e.g., in-person, online), the scope of the topic to be addressed by the community, and the need for adequate representation and buy-in of key stakeholder communities.

Clear Roles and Responsibilities

An important characteristic of a high performing collaborative community is a results-driven structure. This characteristic reflects the need of every group to organize itself in a way that enables it to be productive and, ultimately, to achieve what it has set out to do. Clear roles and responsibilities are considered by many to be a necessary feature of such a structure. To effectively accomplish the collaborative community's objectives, each member would typically have a clear understanding of her or his function and the tasks and activities for which each member is responsible. At the outset of a community's work and as new members are invited to participate, members' roles and responsibilities are discussed and clarified.

Working together is the hallmark of a successful collaborative community. Communities are most successful when all members actively contribute by sharing their ideas and concerns, creating solutions and back up plans, pursuing needed resources, and contributing their perspective, experience, and skills to help accomplish collective goals. Questions are encouraged and can facilitate a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities at hand. Communication among members is essential with ongoing communication set as an expectation to further foster trust and maintain engagement.

Distributed Leadership

Many models of leadership have been suggested for collaborative efforts. One potential leadership model for the collaborative community is a distributed model instead of a hierarchical one, with all members sharing the responsibility of ensuring the work leadership is having a chair that changes every 6 months to 1 year, thereby, giving everyone ownership of advancing the community's objectives. In addition, a facilitator model may help build trust and ensure that all members are equal partners in the effort. Using a skilled facilitator who may not be an expert in the topic area might help to maintain a neutral position during discussions, ensure all members have an opportunity to contribute, and help resolve conflicts should they arise. The meeting facilitator position could potentially rotate as well depending on the work stream.

Effective Communication

Respect, trust, and empathy are integral to successful collaborations. Creating an environment where members feel safe and respected enhances sharing ideas, discussing challenges, and developing solutions, which can lead to sustained collaborative communities.

Decision-making Approach Clearly Defined and Consistently Applied

Regardless of the decision-making framework for a collaborative community, clearly defining how decisions will be made within the collaboration and consistently applying the approach may help sustain the collaboration. While the decision-making could involve a group consensus, the collaborative community is encouraged to determine the process by which consensus may be reached.

Evaluating Effectiveness, Outcomes/Impact, and Value of Collaborative Communities

Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are members actively engaged? • Do members help make joint decisions? • Do members trust in each other and in the process? • Are all aspects of the collaborative community transparent? • Is the process democratic and inclusive? • Is the process reciprocal (is there give and take)?
Outcomes/Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do members work collectively to identify and solve problems that directly impact the identified focus area? (lifespan respite system) • Have you identified ways to measure progress, outcomes and impact?
Value of Your Collaborative Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do individual members believe their membership directly contributes to effectively accomplishing the collaborative community's vision, mission and commitments?

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<https://www.fda.gov/media/116467/download>

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