CHAPTER 2
Planning For Collaboration

humanimpact.org/power-sharing-guide
Why should government agencies and community power-building organizations collaborate?

The inequitable distribution of power is a root cause of broader inequities in health and well-being. The process of building community power has the potential to transform how decisions are made, by whom, for whom, and with whom. Community power-building organizations (CPBOs) work to redistribute power and decision making by building power in communities that are most impacted by inequities. Partnerships between government and CBPOs can result in transformative improvements in the living conditions of communities through policy and programmatic changes.

Chapter 1 of this resource explains why health departments (or any government agency or department) should consider partnering with CPBOs, and offers concrete actions that they can take to bring these partnerships to life. This chapter builds on that by helping both government entities and CPBOs understand the types of collaboration that exist along a continuum of sharing power, and provides activities to lay the internal groundwork for starting collaborations.

Government entities and CPBOs can advance their work more strategically and aggressively through collaboration. Some funding sources and legislation stipulate that governments must engage community organizations in their work, though the requirements may be minimal. This is an opportunity to go beyond the minimum requirements to form deep, trusting relationships that create an expanded network of organizations inside and outside of government. These networks can coordinate on shared strategies and goals to advance health equity.

Collaboration between government agencies and CPBOs is a win-win situation: CPBOs can get improved response to their priorities and access to data and information about the policies and programs that affect their communities, and government agencies can strengthen connections to community members and other organizations. For government agencies constrained by politics, such relationships create a network of allies who can apply pressure from the outside to achieve equity and justice goals.
Spectrum of collaboration

One model for thinking about partnerships between government agencies and CPBOs is along the spectrum of collaboration above, with three related and interconnected categories:

- Inviting CPBOs to participate in existing agency processes, such as task forces and established opportunities for public participation
- Transforming the way government works, for example by collecting and providing research, data, or public testimony related to CPBO priorities or working with CPBOs to expand public engagement practices
- Sharing power, for example by co-creating projects, seeking shared funding, and formalizing collaboration with CPBOs

The table below provides a range of examples of collaboration along this spectrum. While it is written from the perspective of agencies who are developing relationships with CPBOs, these examples can also be used by CPBOs as they approach or partner with government agencies. The focus of the examples is on government agency collaboration to intentionally shift and share power with community partners.
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<th>SPECTRUM OF COLLABORATION</th>
<th>TYPE OF COLLABORATION</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Inviting In               | Build relationships  | - Meet informally for coffee with CPBO staff and/or members to learn about their priorities  
                          |                      | - Attend an event hosted by a CPBO  
                          |                      | - Arrange or host meetings between CPBOs and other staff at your agency  
                          |                      | - Co-organize informal educational events like brown-bag lunches  
                          | Invite participation | - Invite CPBO staff and/or members to participate in agency-led task forces or convenings guiding policy and program changes  
                          |                      | - Invite CPBOs to participate in your agency’s assessment and planning processes  
                          |                      | - Consult with CPBOs about how to best engage their members in your agency’s public events and programs  
                          | Subcontract          | - Hire CPBOs to:  
                          |                      |   - Provide training on their areas of expertise, such as community organizing, geographic areas they work in, or the issues they focus on  
                          |                      |   - Provide translation and/or interpretation  
<pre><code>                      |                      |   - Support community engagement and participation in programs |
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| Transforming Work         | Provide data and research | • Provide data on participation in programs or services that your agency manages  
• Disaggregate data focused on the communities the CPBO works with  
• Create public briefs or reports relevant to CPBO priorities  
• Serve as a technical advisor for coalitions |
|                           | Provide media and/or public support | • Provide media or press support for issues that CPBOs are working on by writing op-eds, sharing press quotes, or participating in press conferences  
• Submit comment letters and/or public testimony that support CPBO campaigns and priorities |
|                           | Expand community engagement | • Co-organize or provide TA for a leadership development project to build the advocacy capacity of CPBO members  
• Work together to actively include communities impacted by inequities in decision-making processes |
|                           | Leverage government power and connections | • Introduce organizers to staff in other government agencies  
• Strategize about how to leverage the agency’s institutional power and/or rule-making authority to advance CPBO priorities |
| Sharing Power             | Co-create new research, projects, resources, or policies | • Co-design and implement projects that advance shared goals  
• Co-conduct community-based research about a shared policy priority  
• Apply for shared funding to support joint work |
|                           | Formalize collaborations and power sharing | • Participate together in a government decision-making body  
• Join a community-led task force or steering committee  
• Develop an MOU or other formal agreement to establish how and why your organizations will collaborate |
Activity: Assess and Plan for Collaboration

Why:
Doing pre-work on your internal capacity and readiness to collaborate with government agencies or CPBOs will help provide you with a realistic assessment of where to begin your power-sharing journey. Deep power sharing requires intentional relationship and trust building and may also require significant culture shifts. By doing some homework beforehand, your team can set itself up for successful collaborations.

Who:
Initially, do an internal assessment or inventory of your organization’s capacity to collaborate.

- For government agencies, this should happen between relevant staff members who generally have an aligned vision for collaborating with CPBOs. It is ideal for this staff to have the support and trust of leadership to forge these relationships.
- For CPBOs, participants could include staff as well as members/residents if the organization is membership-based.

What You’ll Need:
If Virtual: A shared space to take discussion notes, such as a Google Doc or Jamboard
If In Person: Butcher paper or a flipchart; markers to take notes
Time: This activity will take 3-4 hours total. We estimate one hour is needed for the existing staff meeting discussion, between one and two hours for writing the discussion into a plan, and 30 minutes for a follow-up meeting to assign next steps to engage with partners.

Instructions:
This assessment can be done as part of an existing staff meeting or gathering, or as part of a dedicated meeting or series of meetings.

1. Setting Expectations:
- Share this resource with participating staff ahead of time, and ask them to come to the meeting having read it.
- At the meeting:
  - An important first step is to define CPBOs with your staff to make sure you are all on the same page/using the same definition of a CPBO and how that differs from CBOs.
  - Name the shared value of increased collaboration between government agencies and community partners for those in the meeting.
  - Explain that the purpose of this discussion is to plan for collaboration by starting with identifying potential collaborators and key areas for collaboration.
2. **Group Discussion:** Use the prompting questions below to identify who you want to collaborate with.

**For government agencies:**
- Which CPBOs has your agency previously encountered through events or programs? Which leaders or members specifically has your agency heard speak publicly in decision-making settings?
- Does the CPBO have a history of positive or negative/contentious relations with your agency?
- Who in your agency knows the history of collaboration and could help name what happened and what could be changed or built on?
- If leadership is not a part of this group, how can you gain the support of, or anticipate and strategize around potential pushback from leadership?
- What other CPBOs are active in your community?
  - Check out this list of organizations to identify potential CPBOs in your state/area
  - If you don't find community organizations that are explicitly doing power-building, are any local unions or service providers (such as food banks) engaged in client engagement that is or could be connected to local community organizing?

**For CPBOs:**
- Which government staff have you connected with previously? What position and authority did they have?
- Were past interactions positive or negative with government staff? If negative, what happened/what could be changed? If positive, what worked?
- Which divisions or programs within the agency/department are connected to your priorities?
  - Review the agency’s website and, if available, their organizational chart. Look for departments and programs that include terms like community, equity, or engagement.

3. **Group Discussion:** Next, use the prompting questions below to discuss the key areas for potential collaboration.

**For government agencies and CPBOs:**
- What reports, planning documents, and/or social media content has the other organization released that are relevant to your goals?
- How do the issues they discuss or prioritize overlap with your work?
- Do any of their recommendations or proposed strategies to address the issue overlap with your work? Where is there synergy/alignment and where is there difference?
- What are some areas of collaboration that would amplify the existing work and goals of both organizations, and shift power towards community partners?

**For CPBOs:**
- Search the agency website. Look for a strategic plan, community health improvement plan, annual reports, or other planning or reporting document.
In which parts of the agency can you find a commitment to equity or community engagement? How could you partner with this part of the agency strategically to shift power and achieve shared goals?

4. **Write a Summary**: Create and share a summary of the discussion, including the list of collaborators, key areas for collaboration, and any decisions or next steps identified.

5. **Next steps**:
   - Schedule a follow-up meeting with the group to assign next steps, clarify roles and timelines, and begin the work towards increased collaboration.
   - Reach out to new partners and ask for a meeting. See Chapter 3 for more information on how to make these meetings most successful.

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**Additional Resources**

Get more tips on initial relationship building:

- [8 Ways to Connect with Your Public Health Department](#) in *Shelterforce*
- Building Power to Advance Health Equity by Human Impact Partners — see Recommendations beginning on page 29
- [Lead Local: Community-Driven Change and the Power of Collective Action](#)

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**About Human Impact Partners**

[Human Impact Partners](#) transforms the field of public health to center equity and builds collective power with social justice movements.

For more information about this resource, please contact [info@humanimpact.org](mailto:info@humanimpact.org).

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