

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS: BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES ¹

PURPOSE

There are two kinds of accountability in collaborations. One is the accountability for fulfilling legal, regulatory, funder and policy requirements. Another is accountability for delivering on the planned work and promised outcomes. When the second kind of accountability is working well, all individual partners and their respective organizations are taking responsibility for achieving results. When that's not happening there are 'free riders', things fall between the cracks, and partners play the 'blame-game'.

HOW TO USE THE TOOL

- Review the key principles that need to be present to ensure that collaboration partners take responsibilities for their commitments.
- Have an open and constructive conversation about whether these are present in your collaboration and then use the list of strategies to build better practices.
- To determine whether there are issues with partner commitment and accountability, see the Tool: Clues to Detecting Low Commitment by Partners

CONSIDER THESE BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES:

Accountability Principle: Can't hold a partner accountable for something they don't own and isn't clear

Accountability between partners is a two-way commitment. You can't hold people accountable for results they didn't help to formulate and commit to achieve. People are more likely to be held accountable, individually and by their organization, when they have a vested interest in the outcomes.

If partners aren't willing to fulfil their commitments it's often because they're not clear or specific enough; they aren't aligned with their organization's unique capacities, needs and priorities; or the partner doesn't have the available resources and skills to effectively contribute.

Strategies for Building Accountability:

- Develop clear, measurable and realistic outcomes and goals with all partners.
- Confirm that all partners, and their respective organizations, understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Truly engage partners in the development of those responsibilities and expectations they've been assigned.
- Make sure partners perceive the distribution of roles and responsibilities as reasonable and equitable both to the partner responsible as well as to other partners.
- Create a space for partners to jointly monitor and discuss progress and challenges.
- Continuously review and, when necessary, revise goals and partner expectations as circumstances change so they continue to be seen as relevant.

Accountability Principle: People need meaningful incentives to succeed and clear consequences for not fulfilling commitments

In some collaborations, partners find it hard to hold people accountable for delivering on their commitments. In many cases it's because they're afraid of 'rocking the boat' or they feel it's easier to just do the work themselves. They may also be hesitant because there is no clear course of action to address it. But if individuals who don't deliver on their commitments aren't taken to task, then partners are reinforcing the poor behavior and missing an opportunity to acknowledge those who are contributing.

At the same time, partners may not be succeeding in fulfilling their commitments for legitimate reasons. They may not feel confident in the value of their contributions; their organizations may not be appropriately supporting them or their circumstances have changed; or they may think they are performing because no one has made clear that they aren't.

Strategies for Building Accountability:

- Clearly identify ways the collaboration will acknowledge partner performance with different kinds of acknowledgements; clearly distinguish between exceptional, versus ordinary, performance.
- Create an environment in which partners feel safe taking measured risks and trying new ways of working.
- Establish clear and fair mechanisms for resolving conflict.
- Develop mechanisms for uncovering why a partner is not fulfilling the commitment, making sure it's a dialogue, not an interrogation; then try to address them (e.g. by better aligning expectations with capacities; providing appropriate support to achieve the commitment; offering training or mentoring; developing better two way communication).
- Together with partners, negotiate fair and reasonable consequences for not achieving expectations.
- Follow through on the consequences if partners continue to fail to fulfil their commitments (e.g. ask /encourage them to leave the collaboration; alter the benefits they receive from participation).
- Build into the collaboration agreement that partners will commit to supporting the collaboration mission and goals; participate in achieving the agreed-upon roles; and support and abide by decisions.

¹ A Culture of Accountability; Linda Mollenhauer and Ruth Armstrong; 2006; Redefining Accountability: An Essential Structural Change Requirement for Health care; Ted Ball; Quantum Transformation Technologies



Project Consultants

Heather Graham, H. Graham Consulting, heather@hgrahamconsulting.com

Cathy Lang, C. Lang Consulting, cathy@clangconsulting.com

Linda Mollenhauer, Ignite NPS, mollenhauerl@rogers.com