



center for BEST  
PRACTICES



## BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Childhood hunger is a complex issue and ending it will require the commitment and hard work of multiple stakeholders. Working across sectors expands the capacity of entities focused on a common cause by aligning resources and energies to collectively achieve success and strengthen the political influence of all involved. And yet, even when we work across sectors where symmetry already exists, there is still a need to create a common language, as well as to align agendas and goals. The more we work together, the more we know and learn together. The more we discover what we don't know, the more we can overcome those barriers that impact hunger which may not have previously even been a consideration. By bringing different perspectives together, we uncover new ideas and opportunities, strengthen results and increase the speed and efficiency at which success can be achieved through shared efforts.

### KEY ELEMENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

Although collaborations can take many forms, there are several key elements and fundamental activities required for any collaboration to be successful:

#### Invest the time, attention and enthusiasm to launch a strong collaboration

- Assess the data on childhood hunger in your community.
- Identify other stakeholders engaged in solving the problem and bring them together.
- Establish trust over a series of initial meetings.
- Identify a lead partner responsible for communication and administration of the collaboration.

#### Establish an effective structure and plan

- Take time to learn about the programs and resources of the other partners at the table.
- Develop shared goals, responsibilities and values within the collaboration.
- Clarify and agree upon a decision-making process.

- Develop a work plan with specific measures and targets. Consider a local celebrity and/or champion who will rally the partners and inspire action.
- Agree to a conflict resolution process.

### **Monitor progress against goals to recognize success and tell the story**

- Continue to coordinate efforts and track data.
- Set achievable milestones and celebrate early wins, both big and small.
- Raise awareness about the issue, the initiative, and how stakeholders can engage.

### **Evaluate and adjust the strategy over time**

- Regularly review progress to date, understand what is and is not working.
- Continuously adjust the strategy and revise the work plan as the environment changes.
- Maintain a diverse and inclusive collaboration, appreciating the unique perspective that each partner offers.
- Invite new stakeholders to participate as the collaboration evolves.

## **NO KID HUNGRY AND COLLABORATION**

Collaboration with local organizations, government agencies, and public officials is a critical element of success to achieve no kid hungry. Because every jurisdiction has its own unique challenges and politics, as well as a myriad of different entities working to prevent and/or end hunger, there is no one “right” model or “one-size-fits-all” approach to ending childhood hunger. Some No Kid Hungry collaborations build off of many years of activity by multiple stakeholders while others represent new efforts to end childhood hunger in a community.

### **Inviting the Right Stakeholders to Your No Kid Hungry Collaboration**

It is important to have a broad and diverse group of people with a mix of knowledge, resources and connections participating in your collaboration. These partners will add meaningful perspectives representative of the complexity of the community and the issue.

No two No Kid Hungry collaborations are alike. Factors that influence which stakeholders participate in a collaboration include local politics, the geographic area being served (i.e., state versus city) and the capacity of the various partners. When initially thinking about whom to invite, consider:

- Who knows what is happening with kids and families in the community?
- Who has resources (i.e., time, energy and/or finances) to put toward this work in the community?
- Who can make critical decisions about program strategy, implementation and policy?
- Who needs to be involved for the community to see this plan as legitimate?
- Who can open new doors or jumpstart stalled conversations that have not gained any recent traction?

Here are some likely partners to consider including in your collaboration:

Stakeholder	What they bring to the table	How to Reach them
Elected Official	Elected officials can help elevate the issue of child hunger, hold government agencies accountable for program success and support legislation to improve access to healthy meals.	<p><a href="#">Click here to find out how to contact your state governor</a></p> <p><a href="#">Click here to find out how to contact your mayor</a></p>
Nonprofit	Nonprofits can bring much to the table: close connection to the community, experience running the child nutrition programs, skill in advocacy, relationships with state agencies, and additional resources.	<p>Check out these national partners to identify local affiliates in your area:</p> <p><a href="#">2-1-1</a></p> <p><a href="#">Action for Healthy Kids</a></p> <p><a href="#">Out of School Time Network</a></p> <p><a href="#">Feeding America Food Banks</a></p> <p><a href="#">Local Food Pantries</a></p> <p><a href="#">Dairy Association</a></p> <p><a href="#">Anti-Hunger Organizations</a></p> <p><a href="#">YMCA</a></p> <p><a href="#">Boys and Girls Club</a></p> <p><a href="#">Catholic Charities</a></p> <p><a href="#">United Way</a></p> <p><a href="#">Communities in Schools</a></p>
State Agency	State agency leaders can set a vision for increasing access to child nutrition programs and share data that informs decision-making. They are crucial to resolving administrative challenges and improving program integrity. State agency staff who oversee the child nutrition programs have in-depth knowledge of the rules and are critical to developing program expansion plans.	<a href="#">Click here to find out which state agency administers the child nutrition programs in your state</a>
School	Schools have experience operating most of the child nutrition programs and are trusted institutions that touch the lives of most children in our country. Superintendents and principals can champion effective nutrition programs and elevate the importance of feeding children in schools. School nutrition directors have the knowledge and skills to run programs and can identify opportunities and challenges to program expansion.	<a href="#">Contact your state Department of Education to get information on schools in your community</a>
Philanthropic Organization	Local philanthropic organizations offer insight into local efforts to address issues of hunger or child well-being, and can provide financial resources to support program implementation.	Check with the <a href="#">Council on Foundations</a> and the <a href="#">Foundation Center</a> to find funders in your area.
Municipal Government	Local government agencies that oversee public facilities, like libraries and parks, are ideal sponsors for afterschool and summer meals programs. They can also help connect other government services to support ending child hunger.	Check with your local jurisdiction

Faith-Based Leadership	Many faith-based organizations have a long history of addressing the needs of low-income families and are trusted resources for communities. They can operate summer and afterschool meals programs, promote programs in the community and help secure necessary resources, like transportation, to address access challenges.	Check with your local jurisdiction
Academia	Local colleges and universities can provide research and evaluation support and are a good source of volunteers.	<a href="#">Click here to search for colleges or universities in your state</a>
Community Health Clinic & Hospital	Community health clinics and hospitals can provide detailed data on child health disparities and raise awareness about why it's important to address childhood hunger. They also operate food skills education programs and summer meals programs, and help to connect families to local food and health programs.	<a href="#">Start here to find health centers in your community</a>
National Organization or Association	National organizations and associations with regional or state affiliates, like the School Nutrition Association or the Dairy Council, have connections across a state or community to promote the child nutrition programs to a wide audience. They can also provide support for state policy initiatives or additional financial resources to expand the reach of a program.	Check out these national partners to identify local chapters in your area: <a href="#">School Nutrition Association</a> <a href="#">National Education Association</a>
Business Leader	Businesses leaders, and chambers of commerce, can offer financial resources, volunteer support, and access to the community to raise awareness for local efforts to end childhood hunger.	<a href="#">Click here to search for your local chamber of commerce</a>
Law Enforcement	Local law enforcement have direct connections with families and communities to share information about available child nutrition programs and to provide safe passage for kids to meal sites.	Check with your local jurisdiction
Culinary Community	Chefs know food and can serve as great spokespersons and advocates for a local No Kid Hungry campaign.	<a href="#">See what chefs in your area support No Kid Hungry</a>
Federal Agency	Regional offices of federal agencies, like the USDA, bring in-depth knowledge of the policies and regulations governing the child nutrition programs, connections to other federal resources, and technical assistance.	<a href="#">Find your regional USDA FNS office here</a> and <a href="#">search for other regional USDA offices here</a>

### Your Role as a Lead Partner

The role of the lead partner in the No Kid Hungry collaboration cannot be minimized. A [study conducted by FSG](#) in 2012 found that lead partners in a collaboration help coordinate programs, ensure that the larger community has an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, and raise awareness of the issues with the greater public through a targeted, consistent communications strategy.

The role of the lead partner can range from initiating and coordinating meetings to guiding the vision and strategy to supporting aligned activities. As the lead partner for the collaboration your role will include:

- Offering communications support and technical assistance to other partners within the collaboration.
- Tracking, measuring and reporting on progress toward shared benchmarks and goals.
- Serving as point of contact for the collaboration.
- Coordinating broader externally focused, community-level activities

To effectively coordinate the activities of the collaboration, consider dedicating a staff person who has the capacity and expertise to serve as campaign manager.

### No Kid Hungry Collaboration Structures

No Kid Hungry campaigns typically represent a partnership between a high-level public official, such as a Governor, and a lead nonprofit partner. The specific structure of the collaborations vary, depending on the scope of the work. The structure and partners will likely change over time as your strategy evolves. The table below provides some common ways to structure your collaboration.

Structure	Definition	No Kid Hungry example
Steering Committee	Generally formed to lead a collaboration at its inception. The committee may be responsible for developing the collaboration's vision and mission statements, as well as the action plan and/or organizational structure.	In Arkansas, leaders from the Governor's office, Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance and Share Our Strength started planning the campaign and recruited more participants.
Coordinating Council/Leadership Team	The Leadership Team directs and modifies objectives and strategies collectively defined by the collaboration and oversees implementation.	Connecticut No Kid Hungry started engaging leaders from key organizations that participated in the collaboration to meet between meetings to discuss progress and plan for future meetings.
Advisory Committee	The Advisory Committee is comprised of a diverse group of leaders with in-depth knowledge of and/or experience with issues in the community and offers guidance as subject matter expertise.	The Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Maryland seeks guidance from an advisory committee consisting of elected officials, faith-based and community leaders, and key allies across the state.
Action Committees, Task Force or Work Groups	Formed to do the bulk of work, task forces bring about changes in program operations in the field. They have direct contact with program participants (kids and families), sites and sponsors, and help to solicit input for the collaboration or communicate information from the collaboration.	No Kid Hungry in Washington state organizes work groups to focus on addressing barriers and coordinating efforts with the summer meals and afterschool meals programs.

### Initiating a No Kid Hungry Collaboration

The first meeting of the collaboration is an important opportunity to clarify goals, solidify commitments of partners, and set the tone for future work together. These initial meetings create a space for partners to converse with each other about their perspectives on childhood hunger and help define their contributions to the solution. This exchange will help organizations and agencies to better understand their environment and opportunities to work more effectively together.

The first meeting should be co-hosted by the campaign lead and the Governor's office or other key partners involved. It is also a great opportunity to engage other high-level stakeholders, such as cabinet secretaries, who won't be involved in the day-to-day work of the collaboration but want to show support and encourage membership.

### Sustain the Enthusiasm of Your No Kid Hungry Collaboration

Once you launch the collaboration, it's critical to continue to sustain the energy and enthusiasm that the partners have brought thus far. Ending childhood hunger is not something that can be achieved overnight. It takes patience, discipline, adaptability, and a long-term commitment.

Here are some ideas to sustain the energy of your collaboration over time:

- **Agree from the start to share credit widely.** Say "thank you" to your partners often and recognize them for their successes that might be indirectly aligned with the No Kid Hungry campaign (i.e., sponsor distributed 5,000 books through summer meals sites)
- **Maintain consistent communication.** Always distribute meeting minutes and follow-up action items consistently and immediately after any meeting to keep the campaign on the forefront of your partners' "to do" lists.
- **Balance discipline and adaptability.** Figure out what works, figure out why it worked and build upon it. Or, if something is not working, understand why, and stop doing it.
- **Set milestones – even small ones – and celebrate successes as a group.** More often than not, it's easy to get distracted by the next item on the "to do" list. However, letting your partners know how much you appreciate their work will go a long way toward building trust and sustaining their long-term commitment and energy.

### Avoid Common Collaboration Challenges

Working with partners is not always easy, even if you're working towards a common goal and have followed the processes outlined in this playbook. There will be hurdles to overcome, and almost all collaborations experience one or more of the common challenges outlined below. Be persistent and don't give up. Together, we will achieve **No Kid Hungry**.

Challenge	Solution
Ending childhood hunger is hard and it takes time. Commitment and enthusiasm can wane.	Celebrate all successes, regardless of how small. Find ways to build relationships outside of meetings (i.e., host a lunch at the Governor's mansion).
There will be disagreements.	Use the process established during the planning phase to address conflict immediately. Clarify the issue. Allow voices to be heard. Consider giving people multiple options to express concern.
There will be discomfort. Collaboration requires organizations to be vulnerable, to divulge more than they might be ready to reveal, and to answer hard questions.	Accept that it will be uncomfortable. Set the example: Be honest about your organization's capacity so that others will be transparent, too. Use the "collaboration expectations" agreement to highlight respect for organizational limitations and confidentiality.
Ensure that partners are participating for the right reasons. Their objectives for participating in the collaboration should align or further the work and/or mission of the collaboration.	Don't collaborate just because it might lead to funding. Collaboration does not always equate to additional financial resources and support.