

Building Collaborative Relationships

Save to myBoK

by Donna M. Fletcher, MPA, RRA

Is work "falling through the cracks" between your department and another? Are you not getting information from peers that you need for your job? Is there "friction" between you and your peers? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, the process of building collaborative relationships may be of help to you. Building collaborative relationships may be second nature to some, and simply identifying the peer with whom to collaborate may be enough. But when problems arise or continue such as those indicated above, planning and preparation is needed for successful encounters with your peers.

In building collaborative relationships you and your peers must see yourselves as colleagues. We talk to and interact with each other differently when we think of ourselves as colleagues or friends. Therefore, the first action in building collaborative relationships is initiating contact with your peers. The mere act of talking or engaging in dialogue with peers results in feelings of friendship.

Preparation

To prepare for this encounter, first determine with whom you have priority peer relationships. (See [Table 1.](#)) Next, in preparation for the encounter, answer the following planning questions:

- What is the issue that requires you to collaborate with this peer?
- How does it benefit this peer to collaborate with you?
- What factors are working to help you and this peer to collaborate? How can you build on these factors?
- What factors are working against collaboration between you and this peer? How will you deal with these factors?
- What is the best time and place for you to meet with this peer?

In addition, to the above, determine your personal shortcomings.

- From your experience, what potential pitfalls will you need to overcome in order to achieve success in building a collaborative relationship with your peers?
- How will you overcome these pitfalls?

relationship	priority
peer who has been vaccinated against measles	high
peer who has been vaccinated against pertussis	medium
peer who has been vaccinated against rubella	low
peer who has been vaccinated against tetanus	low
peer who has been vaccinated against diphtheria	low
peer who has been vaccinated against polio	low
peer who has been vaccinated against hepatitis A	low
peer who has been vaccinated against hepatitis B	low
peer who has been vaccinated against varicella	low
peer who has been vaccinated against mumps	low
peer who has been vaccinated against meningitis	low
peer who has been vaccinated against influenza	low
peer who has been vaccinated against pneumococcus	low
peer who has been vaccinated against typhoid	low
peer who has been vaccinated against cholera	low
peer who has been vaccinated against yellow fever	low
peer who has been vaccinated against rabies	low
peer who has been vaccinated against HIV	low
peer who has been vaccinated against AIDS	low
peer who has been vaccinated against malaria	low
peer who has been vaccinated against tuberculosis	low
peer who has been vaccinated against leishmaniasis	low
peer who has been vaccinated against schistosomiasis	low
peer who has been vaccinated against hookworm	low
peer who has been vaccinated against ascariasis	low
peer who has been vaccinated against trachoma	low
peer who has been vaccinated against yaws	low
peer who has been vaccinated against syphilis	low
peer who has been vaccinated against gonorrhea	low
peer who has been vaccinated against chlamydia	low
peer who has been vaccinated against herpes	low
peer who has been vaccinated against HPV	low
peer who has been vaccinated against hepatitis C	low
peer who has been vaccinated against hepatitis E	low
peer who has been vaccinated against dengue	low
peer who has been vaccinated against Zika	low
peer who has been vaccinated against Ebola	low
peer who has been vaccinated against Marburg	low
peer who has been vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2	low
peer who has been vaccinated against COVID-19	low

1	2	3	4	5
☆	Categories of Information, Materials, or Services Provided	☆	Rating	Peers

Instructions

1. In column 2, list categories of information, materials, or services that your department or area provide to the organization.
2. In column 5, list peers you need to successfully collaborate with to provide the items listed. (Include peers both within and outside your department.)
3. Of the information or services you provide, which represents the most important or the most visible outcomes of your work? Indicate by placing a star in column 1.
4. Of the peers listed beside the most important or most visible information services, whose collaboration do you truly need or whose lack of collaboration makes your work more difficult? Indicate by placing a star in column 3. These are your priority peer relationships.
5. Analyze the quality of your priority peer relationships. Rate them from on a scale of 1, the most positive (trusted ally), to 5, least positive (impossible to work with) and place their rating in column 4.
6. Based on this analysis, take action to build or improve collaborative relationships with your peers.

Meet with Your Peer

Now you are ready to schedule the meeting with your peer. According to the Zenger-Miller, Inc. Frontline Leadership training series,¹ the meeting agenda or what you hope to accomplish is as follows:

- Seek out your peers and explore common interests
- Determine ways to support each other's operations
- Agree on what you will do for each other
- Develop and maintain an ongoing follow-up plan

Relationship Maintenance²

Now that this relationship improvement effort has started, take action to continue progressing.

Share relevant information—Information is power. Don't use information like a security blanket; share it with your peers.

Share credit—No department or area is an island. Those who provide input to processes and utilize outputs from a process should be given credit for the work.

Reward and recognize honesty and openness—Create an environment in which there is no penalty for honesty and openness.

Promote and reward partnering—As part of the process to improve your peer relationships and to subsequently change the organizational culture, promote and reward partnering particularly across functions and departments.

These actions will encourage your peers to do the same and provide opportunities for continued success.

Notes

1. "Building a Collaborative Relationship with Your Peers," Frontline Leadership. Cupertino, CA: Zender-Miller, Inc., 1986.
2. Senge, Peter M. The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization. New York: Doubleday, 1990.

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Article Citation:

Fletcher, Donna M. "Building Collaborative Relationships." *Journal of AHIMA* 70, no. 10 (1999): 58-59.

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