



Collaboration Glossary of Terms:

Collaborative activities can take many forms; they can be local, regional, statewide, or span the nation. They can be called a coalition, an alliance, or a partnership. They can include like-organizations or organizations from different sectors. They can include public, private, or philanthropic organizations. Regardless of the structure, collaborative activities often bring individuals together with different experiences, so terminology may not be consistent. Use this glossary to help you cut through industry terms and jargon, clarify roles and responsibilities, and agree on definitions to help set expectations for your collaborative activities.

Collaboration is an umbrella term.
It is the action that groups take together.

Subtypes of collaboration include:

- **Networks**—Like your professional networks, these ties may be informal and can last indefinitely or for a finite amount of time. Networks are defined by the relationships one has with individuals and organizations. Networks may be informal, and have few or no expectations of members. Some networks are deliberately established to enhance communication, encourage development of new models or services, and provide opportunities for strategic partnerships. Deliberately established networks may still require coordination and management to engage members and to encourage communication.
- **Coalitions**—Coalitions are formal relationships among organizations and individuals defined by a common cause, issue, or mission. Coalitions often form in times of crisis or political pressure. Coalition members come together for a particular purpose and then may disband. They may, however, remain a coalition beyond their original purpose and evolve into an alliance or partnership. Coalitions require administration, staffing, and financial resources to coordinate their work. There are explicit expectations around the role of coalition members.

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Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC (ACS) developed this glossary based on our experience with collaborations across many sectors and spanning several issue areas, including early childhood, K-12 education, post-secondary education, workforce development, boys and young men of color, and citywide master planning. ACS uses these terms as a baseline to help groups move toward clarity and unity.

Check with your group about preferred terminology. As group structures change or evolve, the terminology may not change with it. That is OK as long as everyone in your group is in agreement about the terminology used.

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Subtypes of collaboration include: *(continued)*

- **Alliances**—Alliances are formal relationships among organizations and individuals working together for a longer time period than a coalition. They are often formed to influence policy. There are explicit expectations around roles of members and their contributions. Alliances require administration, staffing, and financial resources to coordinate their work.
- **Partnerships**—Partnerships are formal relationships defined through a written agreement or contract. Partner organizations share in the risk and rewards, and partner organizations share resources and responsibilities to achieve a common objective.

Participants in collaborative activities are defined below:

- **Members**—Members are affiliated with collaborative activities. They may be dues paying and stay aware of and participate in collaborative activities when asked, but often do not have a formal role in the decision making process.
- **Stakeholders or interested parties**—This includes anyone with a “stake” in the issue. A stakeholder may or may not be a formal partner, but the issue directly affects them. Stakeholders attend meetings and take action when asked. Stakeholders or interested parties may also be ideal messengers and/or the target of communication to influence outcomes of the collaboration. They are chosen by the partners or leadership to be engaged. Examples of stakeholders include legislators, parents, teachers, universities, business owners, or any interested community member. Stakeholders may also be entities that represent others, such as chambers of commerce, advocacy coalitions, committees, teachers unions, parent-teacher organizations, and associations representing superintendents, principals, school boards, or teachers in specific academic disciplines.
- **Partners**—Partners have specified roles that support the collaborative activities. Partner roles may include participation in the decision making process or on the core leadership group, financing, administration, or research. There may or may not be a formal agreement to bring partners together.
- **Leadership or core leadership**—This is typically a small number of individuals (fewer than five) who make strategic decision about the direction of a collaborative and its activities. There may or may not be a formal agreement to increase accountability among the leadership.

ACS developed this collaboration glossary to answer questions received from the field across various sectors. Check out other ACS tools to help ensure the success of your collaborative activities, including tools on [Network Building](#) and [Assessing your Collaboration](#). You can find these tools and more on the ACS website: www.advocacyandcommunication.org.