



# Building Intentional Partnerships

Fruitful partnerships are built through continued interactions between partners. In these interactions, partners have the opportunity to learn about one another, build trust and respect, and identify each other's skill sets. Through these continued connections, you can build a collaborative, agile partnership that can serve your institutions for a long time to come. Below are some steps that can help you in building and sustaining intentional, collaborative partnerships. You can read more about partnerships in CICMH's [Campus/Community Partnerships toolkit](#).

## Determine the need and readiness

A key part of partnership building is reflecting on your department/institution and determining if there is a need for partnership and if you have the ability to undertake that endeavour

- You may want to consider are what kinds of supports you have (staff, financial, etc.), and whether you might be recreating the wheel.



## Recruit the right people and organizations

Who would be ideal or helpful collaborators in this partnership?

- The people you call on may differ depending on whether your project has a broad or narrow reach.



## Assess resources needed

What tools do you need to get this partnership off the ground?

- Do you need to allot time, human resources, a budget, institutional support, etc. to this partnership?



## Determine the structure of the collaborative partnership

Partnership may not mean the same thing at every organization. It's important to ensure that everyone is working from the same definition and understanding.



## Develop a communication strategy

Decide what type(s) of information needs to be shared between partners and how it will be shared.

- Having everyone on the same page with regards to communication ensures that important information isn't lost or misconstrued as you progress with your work.



## Agree on and develop an action plan

An action plan will help your partnership to easily track and meet your goals by laying out your objectives and detailing how you plan to achieve them.



## Identify risk factors for the collaboration

When you proactively identify risks, you can then create strategies to mitigate them so that you are ready in the event that those risks materialize.



## Create an open environment

Take the time throughout your partnership to continuously build a foundation of trust with your partners. This helps to ensure that the partnership runs smoothly and that any issues that arise can be dealt with from a place of openness and respect.



## Celebrate successes

Every achievement, milestone and goal met along the winding road that is partnership deserves to be recognized. Every lesson learned also deserves its moment in the sun as well.



# The Importance of Intentional Student Engagement

Students are at the centre of why we create programs and services for. Campus mental health services are there to support them through their post-secondary experience. The programs and services we offer should strive to reflect the needs that students express. One of the best ways to ensure this reflection of needs is through intentional partnership with students and student groups.

Over the last several years, there has been a movement in the realm of student engagement towards the concept “nothing about us without us”. This concept, originated by the disability rights movements, highlights the fact that students don’t just want their opinions to be heard, they want them to be considered, valued, and taken into account in the decision-making process. There are several ways that you can engage students in intentional partnership, one of which is co-creation or co-production.

Co-creation or co-production is when we engage with students on equal footing in order to collaborate and create new things. In this process, students have an equal share of decision-making power. This method makes space for students to participate in all stages of the rollout of a program or service, from brainstorming, to planning, to implementation, and even evaluation. Co-creation or co-production is great learning opportunity for both students and staff and faculty. Students gain valuable **experience** while also contributing to significant change on their campus. Staff and faculty have the chance to be more reflexive about the ways they work with students after collaborating with them and hearing first-hand how best to build and maintain productive partnerships. The result of co-creation or co-production is not only programming or services ideally suited to meeting students’ needs, but increased trust and an improved relationship between students and staff and faculty on campus.

Another helpful model for intentional partnership with students is “The Ladder of Citizen Participation” created by Sherry R. Arnstein in 1969. This model highlights several way of engaging with students and student communities that may be useful depending on the type of project you are engaged in. Three of the means of engagement that can support you in partnering with students are partnership, delegation and, citizen control.

- **Partnership** - in Arnstein’s model of partnership; students, staff, and faculty equal power. They have the power and ability to negotiate and make tradeoffs with the staff or faculty they’re working with. In this method, all parties are on equal footing and working side by side to get the project off the ground.
- **Delegated power** - in this method, those being supported by the program or service being created (in this case, students) have the majority of the decision-making power. Students are driving the project forward with support and guidance from staff and faculty.
- **Citizen control** - With this method, students are in full control of the creation of the program r service. They are the ones who make the decisions. Staff and faculty may be involved in the implementation, but their main role here is as a support.

When we work to intentionally engage students in partnerships, we are then better positioned to be able to base our program and policy decisions on the real experiences and needs of students. Once we’ve homed in on these needs, we can partner with students and other stakeholders to collaboratively craft solutions that address the issues and barriers impacting student mental health on campus.