5 building blocks

for effective partnerships between **providers** and **community-based organizations**

Social drivers of health (SDOH) can have a huge impact on health outcomes. So, to improve SDOH, healthcare providers are collaborating with health plans, local governments, public utilities, and others to expand community health offerings and improve patient access, outcomes, and operational efficiency.

In particular, community-based organizations (CBOs) play a vital role by bringing trusted relationships, local knowledge, and deep expertise to addressing community needs. That said, strong partnerships with CBOs require intentionality and thought. Consider these five building blocks to working well with CBOs – and the pitfalls they help you avoid.

1 Choose the right partners

A partnership can succeed only if those in it are compatible. Look for a partner organization with:

- Established credibility in the community
- Expertise that complements your organization and aligns with community needs
- Shared goals and desired outcomes
- Existing or buildable capacity and capability

Pitfall you're avoiding:
Overlooking smaller organizations

Choosing partners based only on name recognition or size may mean missing out on relevant, tailored offerings from smaller organizations.

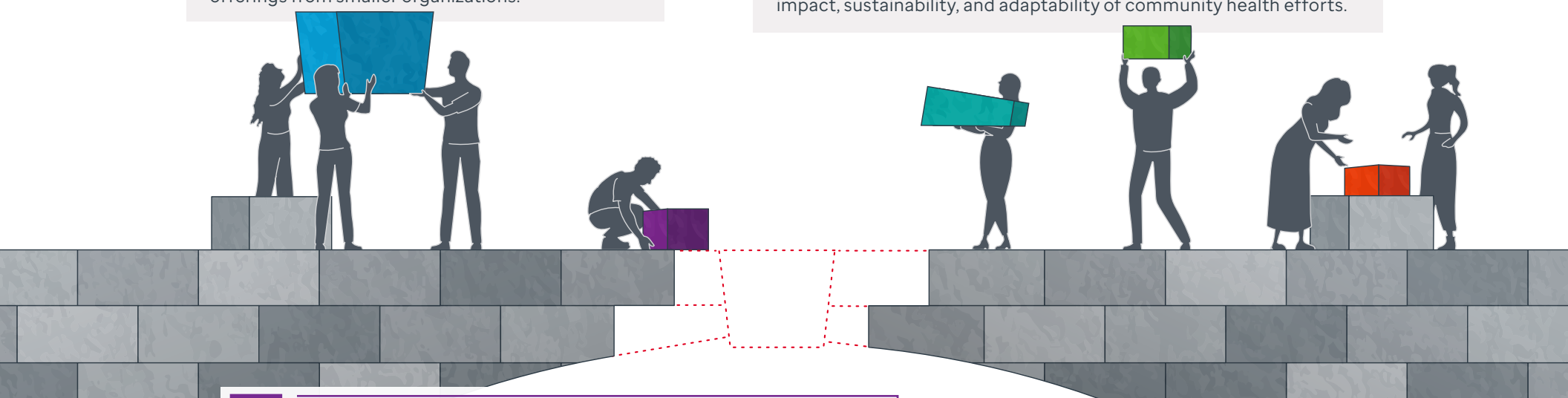
2 Focus on building relationships

Build genuine relationships, rather than treating project partners like vendors fulfilling a role, will improve execution and keep the work sustainable as organizational and community needs evolve:

- Moving at the speed of trust and taking time to get to know one another
- Creating a sense of fellowship by bringing food to events, taking time to socialize, and celebrating big and small wins
- Devoting staff and effort to maintaining relationships

Pitfall you're avoiding: Neglecting relationships

While partnerships are often centered around a project with a discrete timeline, failing to maintain relationships with partners limits the impact, sustainability, and adaptability of community health efforts.



3 Take time to align roles and goals

Solid parameters set the stage for a successful partnership. To ensure that everyone is on the same page, establish a charter that documents:

- The problem to be addressed, community context, and desired outcomes
- Roles, responsibilities, and resources contributed by each organization
- Timelines for program design and execution with milestones that will indicate progress
- Mechanisms for measuring and documenting success, such as desired outcomes, metrics, and a plan for data sharing and ownership

Pitfall you're avoiding: Rushing to implement projects

Completing a project quickly can feel rewarding but can leave gaps in program design and partner accountability that impact whether you can effectively execute and measure success.

4 Practice humility

Respect the value your partner brings to the table. Invite CBOs to lead in their areas of expertise by:

- Scheduling regular checkpoints where all partner organizations have an equal voice
- Using outside facilitators, rather than representatives from your organization, to run meetings
- Acting on CBO suggestions

Pitfall you're avoiding:
Undervaluing partner expertise

When healthcare delivery organizations become the default leaders or are always the dominant voices, CBOs have a harder time bringing their expertise to the table.

5 Demonstrate your commitment in person

Show your support for partner organizations by attending community health meetings and events. Share resources that complement CBO expertise by helping with:

- Communication and information dissemination
- Data collection and evaluation
- Grant and proposal writing
- Direct contracting
- Value-based arrangements

Pitfall you're avoiding:
Failing to prioritize population health projects

While healthcare organizations have many competing priorities, being an active participant in CBO partnerships can strengthen the relationships and meaningfully improve health outcomes.

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