

DD Network Collaboration: A White Paper on State-level Experiences

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Summary

Interviews were conducted to gather information regarding outcomes, strategies, lessons learned, and challenges to collaborative efforts at the state level between members of three programs authorized under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (the DD Act) and administered by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD): University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs), State Developmental Disabilities Councils (DD Councils), and State Protection and Advocacy Systems (P&As). Together, they form the State DD Network existing in every U.S. state and territory.

As outlined in the general provisions of the DD Act, the DD Councils, P&As, and UCEDDs have unique—although complementary—roles to play in achieving the Act’s purpose. As a general practice, these DD Network partners coordinate and collaborate as appropriate to the nature of the projects, initiatives, and activities they undertake to fulfill their unique mandates.

Those interviewed shared comments that were near universal while also referencing details specific to their state network. The most common outcome of collaborative efforts identified by respondents was development of materials and information. Additional activities varied by state, and a select number are profiled here.

While discussing strategies, lessons learned, and challenges regarding collaboration; multiple themes were identified; some were far more common than others. In regard to successful strategies for collaboration, communication, planning, and organizational culture outnumbered other themes, closely followed by relationships among partners. The largest numbers of lessons learned fell into the themes of guidance and oversight, planning, and communication. It is important to note that no “one size fits all” strategy or process for collaboration was identified; rather, respondents indicated that approaches needed to be tailored to the issue to be addressed.

Background

The DD Network consists of three partners in each state and territory authorized under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (the DD Act) and administered by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD): University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs), State Developmental Disabilities Councils (DD Councils), and State Protection and Advocacy Systems (P&As).

The DD Act authorizes—as well as other nationally significant initiatives and activities—DD Councils, P&As, and UCEDDs for the purpose of assuring that

individuals with developmental disabilities and their families participate in the design of and have access to needed community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life, through culturally competent programs.

As outlined in the general provisions of the DD Act, the DD Councils, P&As, and UCEDDs have unique—although complementary—roles to play in achieving this purpose. As a general practice, these DD network partners coordinate and collaborate as appropriate to the nature of the projects, initiatives, and activities they undertake to fulfill their unique mandates.

University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs)

Authorized under Part D of the DD Act, UCEDDs are public service units of universities or public or not-for-profit entities associated with universities that serve as liaisons to service delivery systems to positively affect the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families and work towards increasing their independence, productivity, and integration into communities. UCEDD conduct core activities of: Interdisciplinary training, community service (e.g., training, technical assistance, exemplary services), research, and information dissemination. Funds from ADD are used to support the operation and administration of the center and additional funds are leveraged by the UCEDD to implement the core activities. There are 68 UCEDDs with at least one in every US state and territory.

State Developmental Disabilities Councils (DD Councils)

Authorized under Part B of the DD Act, DD Councils develop and implement a statewide plan to address priority areas relevant to individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. DD Councils strive to increase the independence, productivity, inclusion and integration into the community of people with developmental disabilities, through a variety of systemic change, capacity building, and advocacy activities. There are a total of 55 state and territorial DD Councils.

State Systems for Protection and Advocacy of the Rights of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities (P&As)

Authorized under Part C of the DD Act, P&As develop and implement a system to protect and advocate for the rights of individuals with developmental disabilities. P&As provide legal representation and other advocacy services to all people with disabilities, investigate charges of abuse and neglect, and provide information and referrals. There are a total of 57 state and territorial P&As, including a Native American consortium.

Grants to these programs are administered through the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD), Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Within the DD Act (42 USC 15004, Sections 104 and 105), there are two references to collaboration and coordination among the DD network that are of particular interest to ADD in its administration of the programs:

Sec. 104, Responsibilities of the Secretary, (a) Program Accountability (3) (D) (iii), that calls for indicators of progress that shall be used to describe and measure “*the extent to which the entities described in paragraph (1) collaborate with each other to achieve the purpose of this title and the policy described in section 101(c).*”

Sec. 105, Reports of the Secretary. “*...the Secretary shall provide—(1) meaningful examples of how the councils, protection and advocacy systems, centers, and entities funded under subtitles B, C, D, and E, respectively—(a) have undertaken coordinated activities with each other;*”

ADD established a process called the Monitoring and Technical Assistance Review System (MTARS) to monitor the three grant programs identified above, address areas where grantees may benefit from technical assistance, and identify innovative practices. Prior to 2004, the MTARS process was used to monitor the DD Councils and P&As; however, since 2004, ADD has included all three programs in the process. Each year, a small number of states are identified for an MTARS. MTARS includes a review of collaborative activities between the partners by ADD.

Methodology

ADD provided excerpts from MTARS reports describing collaborative efforts of State DD Networks from 17 states that were reviewed between 2004 and 2007: Oklahoma, Minnesota, Nebraska, Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin, Delaware, New Hampshire, New Mexico, South Dakota, California, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Arizona. The brief descriptions were reviewed, and the directors of the UCEDDs, DD Councils, and P&As in those 17 states were emailed a request to participate in an interview regarding collaborative activities in their state.

The email to the directors explained the nature of the project, requested approximately one-half hour of time for a telephone interview, and provided the four questions that would be asked during the interview:

1. What are some positive outcomes experienced by individuals, families, communities and/or systems in your state that have resulted from collaboration among DD Network partner?
2. What strategies lead to successful collaboration among the DD network partners in your state?
3. What are some “lessons learned” from collaborative efforts in your state?
4. What are some challenges to your collaborative efforts?

Subsequent emails were sent to the directors to reiterate the invitation and schedule the interviews. Ultimately, a total of 22 directors of DD network programs in 9 states participated in interviews: directors of 9 UCEDDs (including 2 UCEDDs from each of 2 states that have multiple UCEDDs), 7 P&As, and 6 DD Councils representing 9 states. Interview participants are noted in Table 1.

Table 1: DD Network Members Participating in Interviews

State	UCEDD #1	UCEDD #2	P&A	DD Council
Arizona	X			
Arkansas	X		X	
California	X	X	X	X
Delaware	X		X	X
Georgia	X	X		X
Pennsylvania			X	X
South Dakota	X		X	X
Virginia	X		X	X
Wisconsin			X	

In several states, DD network members took it upon themselves to coordinate joint interviews. Such coordination was not requested by the interviewer; instead, it was initiated by the DD network partners. In one state, the UCEDD director participated in the phone interview only after discussing the interview questions with other partners in the state and including their feedback in the phone interview. In other states, two or more of the network partners coordinated their schedules to participate in the interview through a conference call together.

Following completion of all scheduled interviews, the responses were analyzed to identify themes in outcomes, strategies, lessons learned, and challenges related to collaboration among the DD Act programs.

Results

Outcomes

Similar collaborative activities (conferences, newsletters, etc.) among partners were detailed by many states that were responsive to the needs of their communities. The outcomes—that is, benefits to the state’s disability community and stakeholders, related to knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, condition, or status—of those activities were identified.

Most Common Theme

The most common outcome of collaborative efforts identified by respondents overall was development of materials and information. In several states, DD network members plan, host, and fund state-wide conferences on disability issues (Arkansas, Georgia, Delaware, and Arizona). In addition, joint outreach materials have been developed, such as flyers, brochures and newsletters describing the state DD network as a whole and services and activities of each partner in a number of states (Georgia, Arizona, South Dakota, and Arkansas). Other notable efforts include joint publications for community members on topics such as a

- special education guide for parents (Arkansas),
- guide to healthcare and transition for parents and IEP team members (Wisconsin),
- guide for people with disabilities to become homeowners (South Dakota),
- criminal justice handbook informing emergency responders on disability issues (South Dakota),
- regularly updated series of handbooks on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, autism, and developmental disabilities (South Dakota), and a
- white paper addressing abuse and neglect of adults with developmental disabilities (California).

Finally, in many states the DD Network members work together on policy issues, coordinating the provision of information to legislators and other policy makers (Virginia, Delaware, Georgia, Wisconsin, and South Dakota), and providing training to community members, Partners in Policymaking, and other groups (Arkansas, Virginia, and South Dakota).

In addition to this near-universal outcome, numerous state-specific *anticipated* outcomes were identified; some of which have been achieved to date, others have not. Note that examples of anticipated outcomes that were not achieved should not be viewed as failure; instead, they should be viewed as examples of how well-laid plans may not turn out as planned due to unanticipated systemic barriers. Five examples of joint efforts are presented here that were selected to illustrate various levels of achievement of anticipated outcomes, as well as unanticipated barriers.

State Examples

Arizona

Institute for Human Development at Northern Arizona University
Sonoran UCEDD at the University of Arizona
Arizona Center for Disability Law
Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities

In Arizona, the DD network members jointly created a diversity outreach group that meets regularly to plan activities to encourage the participation of under-served and un-served populations in the developmental disability service system and to include recipients and providers of disability and general community services. Members of the outreach group share information related to requests for information/ complaints received from individuals, families, providers, and others across the state. Respondents indicated that this information sharing is critical in identifying needs throughout the state. The result is geographically targeted information dissemination, training, and technical assistance from all network partners.

Virginia

Virginia Office of Protection and Advocacy
Virginia Board for People with Disabilities
Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University

In Virginia, the DD network members jointly developed a high quality Positive Behavior Support training that they intended to offer to disability service providers throughout the state. When attendance was lower than anticipated, they determined that their training was not approved for Medicaid reimbursement, so service providers were unwilling to register their staff. The 3 organizations worked together to take the steps necessary for the state Medicaid office to determine that both Positive Behavioral Supports and Applied Behavior Analysis could be covered services under its home and community based services waiver. Respondents indicated that, after the training became a covered service, more providers were able to take advantage of the high quality training the network members provided.

Georgia

Institute on Human Development and Disability at the University of Georgia
Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities
Georgia Advocacy Office
Center on Leadership in Disability at Georgia State University (the newest UCEDD)

The Children's Freedom Initiative (CFI) was formed in Georgia by the DD network members as well as People First of Georgia and the Statewide Independent Living Council. As the CFI, DD network members jointly

- sponsored a summit in 2005, which highlighted models of family support systems for children with disabilities and
- developed proposed legislation (which subsequently passed) urging Georgia's Department of Human Resources, Department of Community Health, Department of Education, Department of Labor, and Department of Juvenile Justice to coordinate the development a plan to provide home and community based services to children with developmental disabilities under age 22.

To assist in implementing the plan to provide home and community based services, the legislation also created an Oversight Committee that required representation from the 3 original partners in the DD Network. The CFI's Steering Committee, meets monthly with the State DD Director to support the planning process. Additional activities of the CFI include a media campaign consisting of print publications and video to further the reach of individual and family stories. Future steps will work toward transitioning the children currently living in private nursing homes, then children and youth living in private residential facilities, into the community.

Arkansas

Partners for Inclusive Communities at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
Arkansas Disability Rights Center
Arkansas Governor's Developmental Disabilities Council

In Arkansas, the DD Network members in Arkansas held a strategic planning session with the state DD agency to prioritize systemic needs in the state's developmental disability services system and worked with the agency to prioritize quality assurance of services. The three partners each committed funding for an employee to be dedicated to this project, crafted a job description, and determined the administrative home of the employee; however, when the state agency's leadership changed, the new administration identified different priorities and the quality assurance initiative did not come to fruition. Although the anticipated outcome was not achieved, network partners reported that the strategy and process in developing this coordinated effort was excellent experience for additional joint projects.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council
Institute on Disabilities at Temple University
Pennsylvania Protection & Advocacy, Inc.

In Pennsylvania, the DD Network members—in addition with others in the state—jointly developed a cross-systems coalition to address and support the needs of people with disabilities who are victims of assault. Additional partners in this initiative include local shelters, public housing entities, and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape and Victim Services. Each DD network member holds a seat on the coalition’s guiding council; additionally, the UCEDD completed research on rape and assault across the state, the DD Council funded a curriculum development program to train self-advocates, families and providers on issues surrounding assault and staying safe, and the P&A provided legal support. As a result of these coordinated efforts, Pennsylvania now has a system in place where all reported assaults in the state are reviewed daily, and determinations are made about whether or not each person got access to legal services, victim services, and evidence collection. Measures are in place to ensure access to these services is provided where needed. In addition, in cases where the perpetrator also has developmental disabilities, a smaller group has begun to look at the history and perspective of the assailant to address the needs of that individual.

Strategies

Respondents provided strategies they felt led to successful collaboration among the DD Network members in their state; these strategies are shared below. In total, respondents identified 44 distinct strategies, nearly half of which (21) were identified by more than one interviewee. These 44 strategies fall into the seven themes: communication, organizational culture, relationships, planning, resource utilization, network partner roles, and funding.

Communication

Interviewees identified nine distinct strategies related to communication; some combinations of these strategies were identified 37 times by the 22 respondents. Note that some of these strategies are in opposition to each other:

1. Maintain frequent communication through unscheduled phone calls;
2. Share membership on each others’ boards, councils, advisory, and other committees;
3. Maintain leadership roles in each others’ boards, councils, and advisory and other committees;
4. Participate in other committees and meetings across the state, creating natural opportunities for communication on relevant areas of joint work;
5. Keep each other informed of initiatives, opportunities, and community complaints
6. Hold periodic meetings with directors and senior staff of all network partners;
7. Hold scheduled conference calls to keep updated on each partner’s activities and areas of collaboration;
8. Do not hold regularly scheduled meetings to address areas of collaboration; rather, allow such meeting and discussion to occur naturally in the context of the issues being addressed; and
9. Always ask, “How does this apply to people with other disabilities?”

Planning

Respondents identified 12 distinct strategies related to planning; some combinations of these strategies were identified 20 times:

1. Complete a joint statewide needs assessment to inform planning for all network partners;

2. Hold joint community meetings to hear feedback on local disability issues (this portrays the network as a whole to the community, and has the added benefit of reducing the number of times community members are asked to participate in such meetings);
3. Hold joint strategic planning sessions, with or without a facilitator, to inform long term planning for the network partners;
4. Identify an issue of shared passion among network partners, and undertake focused brainstorming and problem-solving efforts to develop and implement a plan to address the issue;
5. Hire a skilled facilitator to assist network partners to remain focused on a collaborative project of significant impact and detail;
6. The DD Network is viewed as its own organic entity, with its own strategic plan;
7. Partners just collaborate by necessity to get things done;
8. Uncovering additional projects or barriers to address together may be an outcome of collaboration on another project;
9. Focusing on statewide rather than local issues makes it easier to collaborate;
10. All DD Network members prioritizing the same things can be ineffective; rather, diversifying priorities can decrease competitiveness for funds and increase the number of issues that can be addressed in the state;
11. Identify legislative requirements that are shared by each partner, and collaborate in those areas; and
12. Identify an issue that is important enough for all network partners to work on, and complex enough for each partner to have a role.

Organizational Culture

Respondents identified 10 distinct strategies related to organizational culture; some combinations of these strategies were identified 20 times:

1. Maintain a “can-do” attitude;
2. Celebrate small successes;
3. Maintain a united front to internal and external staff, partners, legislators, and other stakeholders;
4. Maintain a sense of urgency and use deadlines to help move things along;
5. Make a commitment to continue working on an issue even when barriers appear insurmountable;
6. Identify shared values and language;
7. Make a commitment to take any new issue back to the network partners to figure out how to deepen and strengthen the approach to addressing it, rather than using knowledge for the individual advantage of having advance notice of an issue;
8. Come together as partners, with others in the disability community, to prioritize issues and an agenda prior to going to state legislators;
9. Encourage and expect collaboration at all levels of staff within all partners, making a top-down and bottom-up approach to collaboration; and
10. Encourage open communication between all leadership and staff among all partners (i.e., making it acceptable for the CEO of one partner to contact staff of another partner to obtain an update or request assistance on a joint project without going through the chain of command).

Relationships

Interviewees identified 3 distinct strategies related to relationships among people in leadership roles; some combinations of these strategies were identified 17 times:

1. Take the time to build trust and respect;
2. Take the time to get to know each other personally and professionally; and
3. Get along with each other and learn to like each other.

Resource Utilization

Interviewees identified four distinct strategies related to resource utilization; combinations of these strategies were identified 10 times:

1. Share and capitalize on each other's expertise;
2. Share satellite offices when possible, sharing reception and conference areas;
3. When any partner is visiting a remote area of a state, take along outreach and other information representing all partners; and
4. Share a booth during events in local communities.

Partner Roles

Interviewees identified 6 distinct strategies related to partner roles; some combinations of these strategies were identified 6 times. Again, note that some of these strategies are in opposition to each other:

1. Maintain the legislated roles of each partner during collaboration;
2. Be flexible with the roles of each partner according to staff skill sets;
3. Be honest about what each partner can and cannot do;
4. Collaborate in as many areas as possible. In each effort, one partner gets more benefit than another. Over time and projects, a symbiotic relationship is developed, balancing benefits and efforts for all partners;
5. Identify one partner to take the lead role in a collaborative project; and
6. Respect the different roles of each partner, and the unique nature of each partner's role as legislated. Value these differences.

Funding

Interviewees identified 3 distinct strategies related to funding; these strategies were identified by three:

1. Share financial contribution to a joint project rather than expecting one partner to finance the contribution of another (this creates joint ownership in which all partners have an equal voice at the table and have a financial investment in the success of an initiative);
2. Rather than compete for funding, approach different sources for funding; and
3. File joint applications for funding, or be sub-contractors to each other.

Lessons Learned

Respondents provided examples of lessons they learned about collaborating with DD Network members in their state (for example, strategies that proved unhelpful or helpful hints); these lessons are shared below. In total, respondents identified 34 distinct lessons learned, with approximately a third (10) of the lessons identified by more than one interviewee. These 34

lessons fall into the seven themes: guidance and oversight, relationships, communication, partnerships, and funding.

Guidance and Oversight

Interviewees identified 8 distinct lessons learned related to guidance and oversight; some combination of these lessons were identified 12 times:

1. All DD Network partners cannot collaborate on all activities, as previously recommended by ADD;
2. The MTARS process assisted network partners in becoming more intentional about collaboration;
3. A clear definition of “collaboration” is lacking;
4. It can be difficult to determine how much of an outcome is attributable to DD Network collaboration;
5. Collaboration techniques cannot be legislated;
6. Collaboration cannot be forced – it works best when not contrived but instead when partners finding themselves talking about where systems need to go;
7. Collaborative efforts should be well documented;
8. The administrative home of the UCEDD may have an influence on its strengths and collaborative efforts;

Relationships

Interviewees identified 7 distinct lessons learned related to relationships; some combination of these lessons were identified 13 times by interviewees:

1. Focus on how to contribute to each others projects;
2. Willingness to share and accept ideas for improving on each others programs is important;
3. Collaboration really is about the people, their personalities, and their willingness to work together;
4. All partners need to have loyalty to the mission and to the partnership;
5. It is nurturing to have other people to work with on a common challenge;
6. Partners need to take the time to learn how to work together; and
7. Don't let personality differences get in the way – there is just too much to do.

Communication

Interviewees identified 6 distinct lessons learned related to communication; some combination of these were identified 10 times:

1. Be honest about the hard topics;
2. Talk about the money (i.e., who has it and who doesn't among the partners);
3. It is critical to take time to talk about what is important and what is going on, to proactively and affirmatively keep each other in the loop and value the collaboration;
4. Coordination of efforts and open communication creates the equivalent to a single point of contact for community members, as they then get the same information regardless of which partner they call;
5. Having partners spread out across the state has advantages and disadvantages: partners get to hear different perspectives from different regions and share these perspectives with each other, but it is also harder to connect with partners;

6. Sitting down with an agenda of things to do for collaboration was stifling and got in the way of natural progression.

Partnerships

Interviewees identified 5 distinct lessons learned related to partnerships; some combination of these were identified 7 times:

1. It is important not to keep partner roles in silos, but to instead make use of the expertise of both each partner as a whole, as well as that of individual staff;
2. The impact of the network partner collaboration will be limited if the state DD agency is not involved;
3. Partners have access to more resources through collaboration and through the strengths of multiple partners;
4. Legislators work closely with the DD network partners, so any tension among the partners is easily identified by the legislators and gets in the way of getting work done; and
5. Collaboration needs to be among multiple partners in the state, not just the DD Network partners.

Funding

Interviewees identified 3 distinct lessons related to funding; each was identified once by three respondents:

1. It is a lot of work to find grants that match identified initiatives;
2. DD Councils may need to be cautious about funding network partners, to ensure one partner is not perceived as getting preferential treatment;
3. Care needs to be taken about locating funding over and above what ADD provides, as other grantees may move the mission further away from people served in the community.

Challenges

Respondents described challenges related to collaborating with DD Network members in their state; these challenges are shared below. In total, respondents identified 25 distinct challenges, nearly half of which (12) were identified by more than one interviewee. These 25 challenges fall into the five themes: resources, planning, regulation and oversight, funding, and relationships.

Resources

Interviewees identified 5 distinct challenges related to resources; some combinations of these challenges were identified 22 times:

1. There is no dedicated funding for DD Network coordinated activities;
2. There is a lack of resources (personnel, money);
3. Significant geographic distance between partners in a state is a hindrance, as well as the significant numbers of communities and languages to support within a large and/or diverse state;
4. Community members' and network partners' access to, and knowledge of technology is limited; and
5. There is not enough time to do everything that needs to be done.

Planning

Interviewees identified 6 distinct challenges related to planning; some combinations of these challenges were identified 10 times:

1. Lack of coordination with the state DD agency is a hindrance;
2. The differences in mission, goals, and approaches of each partner can be difficult to navigate;
3. Identifying initiatives that all network partners can be involved in is sometimes hard;
4. Competing priorities are challenging to manage;
5. There are occasional disagreements of opinion on priorities; and
6. Focusing on local rather than statewide issues creates difficulty in network collaboration.

Guidance and Oversight

Interviewees identified 6 distinct challenges related to guidance and oversight; some combinations of these challenges were identified 7 times:

1. The expectation that all partners must be involved in all collaborative activities, or that collaboration is defined by a specific number of face-to-face meetings or phone calls, hinders the development of natural collaborative strategies by professionals;
2. The role of the state agency administering the DD Council may inhibit the DD Council;
3. Guidance that discourages partners from taking leadership roles in other partners' boards or councils limits the involvement, influence, and effectiveness of partnerships within the DD Network;
4. The DD Council can be in a difficult position when receiving information from within the state governor's or administering agency's office, as well as conflicting information from community members and their DD Network partners;
5. University policy may prevent UCEDDs from participating in legislative efforts, limiting their collaboration in this area; and
6. Each of the network partners manages multiple requirements of various funding entities; it is challenging when ADD suggests collaboration on all activities, even those funded by other sources.

Funding

Interviewees identified 5 distinct challenges related to funding; some combinations of these challenges were identified 7 times:

1. Grant funding for each partner may not support shared activities due to restrictions on use of funds;
2. Disparate amounts of funding among partners creates difficulty in funds available to use for collaborative efforts;
3. Tension can occur when one partner is not selected for a funding request from another partner;
4. Economic challenges make it difficult to plan next year's budget and activities; and
5. An under-resourced state that does not prioritize human services in its annual budget is a hindrance to progress by the DD Network partners.

Relationships

Interviewees identified 3 distinct challenges related to relationships; combinations of these challenges were identified 4 times:

1. Turnover in leadership or staff at any of the DD Network members creates hesitation in the flow of progress on activities, as time is needed to get to know the new partners;
2. After sharing satellite offices among all DD network partners, it was difficult when one partner had to move out; and
3. As a cross-disability agency, a P&A must be aware of the effects of publicizing collaborative efforts for the DD community, to prevent the alienation of other communities it supports.

Discussion

Respondents spoke frankly and provided thoughtful comments in response to interview questions. Those interviewed shared comments that were near universal while also referencing state-specific issues. The most common outcome of collaborative efforts identified by respondents was development of materials and information. Some suggested strategies for collaboration were in opposition to others, suggesting that it may be important for networks to develop their own individualized strategies for collaboration. Throughout the interviews, the importance of communication was emphasized by respondents.

While multiple themes were identified; some were far more common than others. In regard to successful strategies for collaboration, communication, planning, and organizational culture outnumbered other themes, closely followed by relationships among partners. The largest numbers of lessons learned fell into the themes of guidance and oversight, planning, and communication. Interestingly, communication and organizational culture did not emerge as challenges at all. It is important to note that no “one size fits all” strategy or process for collaboration was identified; rather, respondents indicated that approaches were tailored to the issue to be addressed, and by the people addressing them.

Funding was repeatedly mentioned in the context of strategies, lessons learned, and challenges. As significant differences in funding sources and amounts exist between DD Network partners, this is a critical area to be addressed by partners.

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