

Actioning Complex Collaboration

Practical Tool



Part of the Complex Collaboration Toolkit.

Introduction

About the Tools and Toolkits

These tools and toolkits are hosted by **Healthy Campus Alberta**, a provincial community of practice committed to cultivating caring campus communities in Alberta. Originally developed by **Alberta Campus Mental Health Innovation** (an initiative carried out by the **Alberta Students Executive Council**), the tools and toolkits are learning-focused, living documents that serve to support our community of practice.

About the Complex Collaboration Toolkit

Complex collaborations are essential to promote mentally healthy campuses across Alberta. Originally developed to support Regional Hubs, collaborative groups that originated amidst the launch of the Alberta Post-Secondary Mental Health and Addictions Framework, this toolkit is adaptable to any collaboration: interdepartmental, regional, provincial, national, or international. The toolkit frames complex collaboration as a point of connection among individuals, teams or organizations with complementary skills and resources willing to collaborate on a common objective. However, creating a shared approach for mutual gain is not an easy task. The complex collaboration model has been developed to provide some insights and approaches that weave together a variety of processes and theories to enhance the effectiveness of these complex collaborations.

About Actioning Complex Collaboration

The **Actioning Complex Collaboration** tool is the first step in the Complex Collaboration Model.

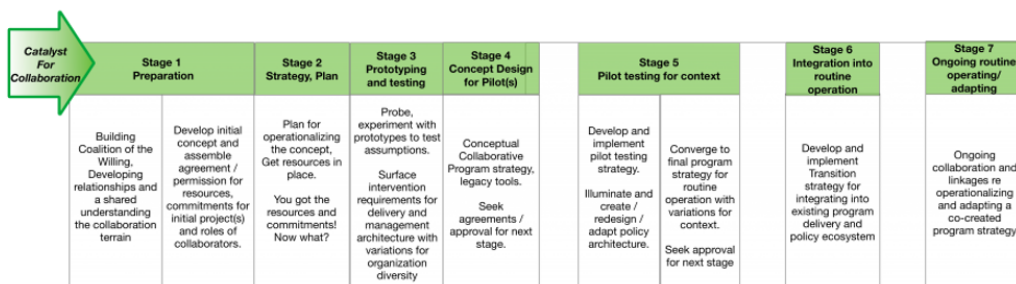
Who could use this tool?

- Coordinators of collaborations among post-secondary institutions;
- Program planners in post-secondary student services or administration;
- Mental health professionals who work with post-secondary students.

What purposes could this tool serve?

- Providing a framework to guide every step of a collaboration;
- Providing support for specific aspects of a collaboration;
- Initiating conversations about complex collaboration among organizations;
- Revisiting ongoing collaborations to make them more effective.

Actioning Complex Collaboration



The Complex Collaboration visual shows the collaboration catalyst and the various stages of action across the top of the diagram, as the actions contributing to the desired outcomes.



Download a [high-definition PDF](#) of the Complex Collaboration Model.

Catalyst for Collaboration

Actioning a collaborative project starts with its catalyst.. A collaboration can be catalyzed in different ways. Perhaps most often, one or more organizations are engaged in ongoing conversations, which bring attention to shared frustrations about gaps or vexing problems in their shared system, or potential opportunities. In these cases, the early conversations accomplish some of the early preparation tasks.

In other cases, a collaboration is guided by policy, such as the case of Regional Hubs. The policy has made clear that new collaborations are not necessary if there are existing groups doing the same type of work, but they would not likely have the same range of desired outcomes, so the preparation stage would help to clarify what is the same and different about this work.

Case Study



Campus A and Campus B have both been working on their own individual peer listening programs. At a conference, they notice the similarities between their programs and start to think about a possible collaboration.

Steps for Actioning

The Seven Stages

In a multi-organizational collaboration all steps must be operationalized in all organizations. The stages involve iterative diverging and converging discussions, to make sure the collaborators are exploring the widest possible range of opportunities while at the same time making timely progress.

In a complex collaboration it is especially important for representatives on the Coordinating Committee to be clear about their relative roles. Clarifying the rules of consensus decision-making, growing levels of trust, and mutually believing that the collaboration is beneficial will help with acting these roles in harmony.

1. **Prepare**
2. **Strategize and Plan**
3. **Prototype and Test**
4. **Concept Design**
5. **Pilot Test**
6. **Integration**
7. **Operate and Adapt**



Collaborative Learning Sessions

The *Collaborative Learning Sessions Practical Tool* can be used after each stage to facilitate learning and adapting through the process.

Steps for Actioning

Stage One: Prepare

The catalyst for collaboration will influence stage one. Mandated collaborations may find this stages more critical to identify shared ideas, passions, potential conflicting processes and each others' constituencies. During the preparation stages, participants will need to spend time building relationships, and have more conversations about potential initiatives, considering the chain of work and recommendations involved.



Useful Tools

Assessing Complexity Worksheet, in the Framing Complex Collaboration Tool.

Student Journey Map, in the Student-Led Initiatives Toolkit.

Student Mental Healthy Journey Scenarios, in the Tools for Holistic Mental Health Approaches toolkit.

Student Transitions Tool, in the Tools for Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit.

Student Profiles Tool, in the Tools for Holistic Mental Health Approaches toolkit.



View the [Student Led Initiatives Toolkit](#).



View the [Holistic Mental Health Strategies Toolkit](#).

Tasks

- Ask who needs to be involved, and in what ways;
- Build relationships grounded in trust;
- Assess complexity;
- Develop group processes;
- Explore possibilities for projects;
- Establish priorities;
- Revisit conversations as the collaboration evolves.



Case Study

Campus A and Campus B identify that could collaborate on a program that would create a cross-campus network of peer listeners.

Steps for Actioning

Stage Two: Strategize and Plan

The collaborating participants work through a process to develop a longer term plan (for example, three to five years in duration). This plan includes identifying key directions, priorities and anticipated outcomes as well as defining the operational elements (structures, processes, management systems and budgets) that will be put in place to allow the plan to be implemented.

Tasks

- Plan for operationalizing the concept;
- Put resources into place;
- Practice group decision making.



Case Study

Campus A and B create a working group and draft a timeline and project proposal that is approved by senior leadership on both campuses.

Stage Three: Prototype and Test

The innovation and human-centred design approaches bring the value of quickly getting something 'on the ground' to test assumptions. This is especially important for a collaboration, where you want to take advantage of the members' different perspectives from the beginning, to help 'see' multiple aspects of a service or product and thus make it much better, help achieve better outcomes. A prototype is a way to test out assumptions associated with your idea. In the beginning, it is possible to share perspectives and test assumptions with processes such as story-boarding, desk-top prototyping, and role playing.



Case Study

The working group designs a role-play peer listening activity that they test with a focus group of students from both Campus A and Campus B.

Steps for Actioning

Stage Four: Concept Design

It is important to identify the assumptions about aspects of the design that will need to be tested in different contexts or for different types of students. Contexts will need to include remote, rural, urban and metropolitan environments. Different types of students will need to include short and long-term programs and apprenticeships, undergraduate and graduate students, residence or community housing, students with disabilities, international students, or distance learning students. At this stage, time is required to get the approval of the organizations for the investment required for the following stage.

Tasks

- Develop the design for the collaborative project
- Detail the intervention and logic of actions to achieving outcomes;
- Outline assumptions or theories that support the evolution to the desired outcomes (see stage one);
- Detail the functions and processes for the delivery and management architecture;
- Detail the policy architecture needed for the pilot, and suggest policy innovations to be explored and prototyped;
- Practice group decision making processes.



Case Study

The working group creates a timeline for the first year of the program, identifies roles that Campus A and Campus B will take, and identifies which outcomes will be met and how they will be evaluated as the program starts.

Stage Five: Pilot

The prototyping will be complete when there is enough detail to properly design a pilot with enough fidelity for sufficiently mature delivery and management architecture. This is also the stage where decent conclusions about outcomes and impact can be made. The new practices, services or environments that have survived the rigour of the piloting process can then be integrated into routine operation, while retiring the services or environments that have been improved through the process.



Case Study

The first year of the program runs as a pilot with a small cohort of peer listeners, evaluation and learning takes place, Campus A and B prepare a report for their senior leadership with recommendations for the future of the project.

Steps for Actioning

Stage Six: Integration

The focus of Stage Six is to develop and implement strategy for integrating into existing program delivery and policy ecosystems in multiple campuses, student associations and community agencies. Innovation is a process of exploration, experimentation and learning. Operations emphasize consistency and routine delivery of services. The emphasis is on efficiency and effectiveness. Organizational routines and systems tend to support existing operations. Introducing new initiatives requires effort, attention and focus.



Case Study

The pilot was a success! The working group plans a next stage to see how the peer listening program can integrate with other supports on Campus A and B. They think about steps to ensure the sustainability of the program.

Stage Seven: Operate and Adapt

Stage Seven involves operational activities associated with routine operations. It is still important to maintain a routine of periodic learning sessions and sharing learnings from routine operations in multiple PSIs, student associations, healthcare organizations and community groups. If possible, key learnings could be shared in a space such as the HCA website.



Case Study

Campus A and B continue to run the program and hold learning sessions. They share their learnings and connect with three other campuses interesting in joining the collaboration. They return to stage one of the complex collaboration model.

Resources



View the rest of the [Complex Collaboration Toolkit](#)

Questions for Consideration

- In your collaborations, how have you designed and prototyped the collaboration?
- How would the seven stages be useful for catalysing a new collaboration, or improving a current one?
- Are there additional stages that you have noticed?