

Making MOUs Meaningful

(<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/makingmou.pdf>)

Efforts to address barriers to student learning (including mental health and psychosocial concerns) require the combined resources of schools and communities working together. This reality is reflected in a range of current initiatives across the country. Many of these are focused on fostering collaboration between schools and various community agencies. One result of all this activity has been the widespread use of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs).

MOUs have become a staple of grant submissions because of the emphasis on integrated school-linked services and school-community “partnerships.” Too often, such MOUs are no more than a piece of paper indicating that the signatories have agreed to work together. The details generally are not delineated adequately. The intent is mainly to satisfy the requirements of the granting agency. Indeed, the need to meet a submission date often precludes much discussion and negotiation and forces the parties to generate a superficial document.

In some cases, the parties go on to work out satisfying relationships (although rarely true partnerships). In other cases, the follow-through is more in form than substance, and the results are not highly productive. In almost all cases, the matter of sustainability beyond the grant period is not well-addressed, and it is common for the relationship to erode when the funding ends.

Progress in developing effective collaborations can be enhanced by investing greater time and effort in negotiating MOUs.

Initially Negotiating an MOU

Given a tight grant deadline, it is probable that schools and community agencies will find a way to develop and “sign off” on an MOU. Initial discussions tend to cover:

- statements of vision and shared mission
- the benefits and costs for each participant
- mutual responsibilities, roles, and functions for the initiative and for the additional activity required to implement it
- infrastructure mechanisms (e.g., for communication, problem solving, etc.)
- evaluation and accountability requirements

Limited time for discussion and negotiation usually results in commitments that are phrased in general terms (e.g., ways in which resources will be shared are not detailed). Such a document usually meets the minimal demands of the funding agency. However, it should be understood by the signatories that this initial MOU is a starting point for ongoing negotiations that are meant to delineate details and develop substantive and lasting partnerships.

Ongoing Working Out of Agreements

Many of the problems experienced by collaboratives can be attributed to failure to carry out the type of work required for developing detailed agreements. Under ideal circumstances, most of the fundamental matters would be dealt with in the initial MOU. (See the outline on the following page which was designed for agreements related to establishing an Enabling or Learning Support Component.)

Among the matters that will need to be worked on are how the following functions will be addressed on an ongoing basis:

- building capacity (including reframing job roles and functions; infrastructure and stakeholder development related to new functions; orienting and bringing newcomers up to speed)
- mapping, analyzing, and (re)deploying existing resources (school and community)
- establishing priorities for enhancing existing activity and filling gaps
- developing standards, quality indicators, and benchmarks, and the processes for using them
- determining desirable policy modifications and systemic changes

Whatever the status of an initial MOU, all parties need to understand that ensuring sustainability of valued functions requires institutionalized systemic change. And, for many key facets of initial agreements to become formalized, they must be transformed into contractual arrangements.

I want the program carried out with fidelity.



Don't you realize that any system which depends on human reliability is unreliable!



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Memorandum of Understanding for Establishing an Enabling (Learning Support) Component

This is an agreement among the following parties:

Purpose: This MOU is to delineate the process by which the above parties will collaborate in establishing and maintaining an Enabling (learning support) Component to address barriers to student learning and promote healthy development. (Attach a document delineating the nature and scope of such a component.)

Agreements: It is agreed that the following steps will be taken:

- (1) Establishment of an onsite and an external ***change agent***.

The designated onsite person is _____.
(Attach the job description for that individual.)

The external person is _____.
(Attach the job description for that individual.)

- (2) Establishment of a ***policy*** adopting and supporting an Enabling Component.

The policy will state that the above parties will develop and institutionalize an Enabling Component as part of the improvement plan for participating schools. It will also state that this Component will be treated as primary and essential in policy and daily practice.

- (3) The ***immediate functions*** in establishing the Component will be to initiate and build capacity of the school-based infrastructure for daily operation and ongoing development of the Component – in ways that ensure it is fully linked to the instructional and management/governance facets at a school. This will include:

- establishing a Component Steering Group
- establishing administrative and staff leads for the Component
- establishing a resource-oriented team and related work groups to build Component capacity
- mapping, analyzing, and (re)deploying school and community resources for the Component
- establishing priorities for Component enhancement and development (including filling gaps)
- developing Component standards, quality indicators and benchmarks for its development

- (4) ***Financial/Resource agreements:*** (Specify dollar amounts and other resources to be provided by each party; delineate any arrangements for braiding or blending resources; clarify steps to be taken to establish long-term funding as part of the ongoing budget of the collaborating parties)

- (5) ***Time Frame:*** The terms of this MOU shall commence on _____ and shall extend through _____ and is renewable thereafter as agreed upon by the parties.