

Partnering for Performance NH

Tools for Collaboration

1. Dedicated project leadership

Having one agency as the dedicated project leader helps to make the day-to-day efforts of the project run smoothly. The project lead handles all of the administrative work, organizes the group, assigns and manages tasks, sets deadlines, and reduces the overall work for the other agencies.

2. Assessments

Self-assessment is crucial to identifying strengths and weaknesses in any process, and collaborative efforts are not an exception. In collaborative efforts, it is important to know how each participant perceives the group. This information can be used to develop strategies to improve on weaknesses.

The PlanWorks Partner Assessment was used for this project¹. These assessments address 10 topic areas: process steps, data and information, tools and technology, decision-making authority, organizational support, role clarity, participant stability, shared goals, sense of ownership, and practitioner communication. After taking the assessment, it is important to address weaknesses. If your project scores particularly low in practitioner communication, it may be worthwhile to consider project management software. If participants do not feel as though they have buy-in from their organization, seek ways to increase buy-in at the management level. The ability to target weaknesses with strategies helps to increase the efficacy of the group.

3. Action Plan

An Action Plan helps to keep everyone on track. For this project, our Action Plan was dedicated solely to improving collaboration and was based off the PlanWorks Assessment. Each time the assessment was taken, we revisited the Action Plan to decide if what we were doing had helped, and what needed to be done to improve it.

Strategy	How it helped
Set up a data subgroup consisting of participants with more data experience	The data subgroup helped to write the methodologies for calculating measures, as well as checking the work of other MPOs to ensure that the methodology was clear, easy to replicate, and produced accurate numbers.
Universal portal to access project information	We used an online project management software to serve as a project portal. All project communications were through this application. We also purchased cloud storage that integrated with the application and used this to store all project files. This kept all of our files, conversations, and tasks in one place and helped us to stay on track.
Documentation of decision-making process including end results	All decisions that were made by the group throughout the project were documented and shared via the project management software.
Documentation of meetings	Meeting notes from each meeting were posted in the project management software and available for anyone on the project to view and comment on.
Agency commitment via value in process as well as ownership in the process	We saw great buy-in from each of the MPOs as well as our advisory partners. Representatives from the four MPOs were at every meeting.

¹ While primarily Transportation focused, PlanWorks can be applied to a variety of projects that are not necessarily transportation focused.

4. Project management software

Project management software can be a life-saver in collaborative projects. It serves as a project portal that contains all information one needs to be successful in the project. All file sharing and communication can be done through the software, which makes it easier to find documents and past conversations. Additionally, all of these conversations are open and visible to the entire team. Anyone can go back and reference it. Most project management software have the ability to assign tasks to team members and create Gantt charts that show tasks on a timeline. This makes staying on track easier.

5. Ground Rules

Another useful tool that helps to keep everyone on track is to spend time setting and agreeing upon ground rules. Some that were particularly useful in this project were:

- a. Seek common ground and understanding (not problems and conflict)
- b. Be brief and meaningful when voicing your opinion
- c. Stay out of the weeds and the swamps (when not necessary)
- d. Be back from breaks on time
- e. ELMO (“Enough, Let’s Move On”)