10 Drivers of Successful Collaboration

1. **Shared Agenda, Vision & SMART Goals**
   Successful collaboratives develop and clarify their UP (or Unified Purpose) at the onset. Asking “what can we do together that we could not accomplish alone?” and “what results do we expect to achieve?” help to set the agenda and vision for the group’s efforts. SMART goals should be used to specify the desired outcomes and measure progress.

2. **Management & Membership**
   Collaboration to improve health requires both charismatic leadership and effective governance. Although each coalition is managed differently, leadership should be a group process and partnering should be endorsed as a strategic priority. Successful coalitions leverage strong leaders to bring awareness to the issues, garner supporters, and cultivate champions across the community.

3. **Formalized Structure**
   Documenting and solidifying the relationships between and roles among partners is valuable and helps set clear expectations. Establishing policies and procedures, operational processes, contracts, and other documents (such as bylaws) that define the roles and responsibilities of partners provides structure for the collaboration process.

4. **Dedicated Capacity**
   Partnership engagement often depends on helpful and available staff, such as a coalition coordinator or facilitator. A ‘backbone’ organization, responsible for managing daily operations and communications, helps to keep the group focused and moving forward. Successful collaboratives dedicate resources to support the ‘behind-the-scenes’ work.

5. **Culture of Reciprocity**
   Collaboration requires give-and-take between individuals and organizations. Members should understand this expectation and hold one another accountable for their contributions. A willingness to say yes, sign up, and follow through with commitments is the norm among successful groups.
Intentional Inclusion
Although it may be comfortable to work with familiar people and organizations, successful collaboratives avoid the ‘silo effect’ by recruiting, engaging, and building diverse partnerships across sectors and disciplines. In addition, the ‘target population’, or those intended to benefit from the work of the collaborative, should be included at all levels and stages of the effort.

Evidence-Based Decision Making
The foundation of a coalition’s work begins by reviewing data to define the problem, assessing community needs and resources, analyzing root causes, and identifying potential solutions. Strong collaboratives make decisions based on evidence; they test projects, programs, and policies to gain a better understanding of the problem and measure outcomes to determine what works.

Investment for Sustainability
Human capital (people) are the heart of collaboration. However, financial resources must also be prioritized and may include in-kind donations, membership dues, service fees, sponsorship, grants, and redirected or realigned funding. Although the costs and efforts for collaboration are rarely accounted for in budgets, strong collaboratives recognize the resources needed and make investments for long-term sustainability.

Ability to Adapt & Evolve
As coalitions evaluate progress and develop better understanding of community problems, it may be necessary to alter membership, direction, expectations, and goals. Some members may not be the right fit any longer, while new partnerships may be necessary for success. Programs may be eliminated and new action plans developed. Change is inevitable; strong coalitions are flexible and can adapt quickly to change and evolve to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

Relationship Dynamics (Trust)
Trusted partners follow through, share a common mission with the group, and are willing to engage in difficult, yet honest, discussions. Strong collaboratives do not discourage disagreement; rather, there is an expectation that when conflicts arise, members can speak frankly, will listen to differing perspectives, and put the mission first to come to consensus and move forward. Like any solid relationship, trust is a core value.