



EVIDENCE NOTE · ASPC-EN-004

Federal Practices for Cross-Institutional Collaboration

Which operating practices repeatedly appear in federal collaboration guidance?

EVIDENCE-INFORMED ASPC ANALYSIS

Supporting publication to ASPC-SF-001

August 2026 · 6-page edition

Status, question and scope

ASPC RESEARCH SYNTHESIS.

Research question

Which operating practices repeatedly appear in federal collaboration guidance?

Scope

GAO's government-wide synthesis treats collaboration as a disciplined management activity. Its practices provide a useful diagnostic for partnerships whose participants retain distinct authorities.

Evidence cutoff: August 21, 2026. Government findings, agency-reported information and ASPC analysis are distinguished throughout.

ASPC application and limitations

Proposed application

- Use a written charter that names outcomes, authority, decision rights, resources, risks, review dates, and exit conditions.
- Document how affected stakeholders influence design, rather than counting attendance as participation.
- Assign institutional and individual accountability for each commitment.

Limitations

- This note applies federal collaboration findings by analogy; it is not a GAO standard for international partnerships.

These applications are proposed by ASPC. Citation does not imply endorsement by any source institution.

Documented findings

Eight practices operate as a system

GAO's 2023 update identifies eight leading practices: define outcomes and accountability; bridge organizational cultures; identify and sustain leadership; clarify roles and responsibilities; include relevant participants; engage in open and frequent communication; leverage resources and information; and develop and update written guidance and agreements.

The report defines collaboration as joint activity intended to produce more public value than entities acting alone. Its examples show that differences in terminology can produce inconsistent reporting and weaken coordination even where participants share a broad objective.

Evidence base

GAO validated its framework through prior reports, scholarly and peer-reviewed literature, interviews with experienced federal officials and specialists, and analysis of GAO work from fiscal years 2018 through 2022. The framework supports structured diagnosis but does not establish that every practice has equal weight in every partnership.

Source finding: GAO-23-105520. ASPC has condensed the federal framework without presenting it as a government standard for nonfederal partnerships.

Implementation notes

Minimum collaboration record

- A written outcome statement with observable measures and a named owner.
- A responsibility map identifying decision, consultation, delivery and assurance roles.
- A shared glossary for terms that affect eligibility, performance or reporting.
- A meeting and escalation cadence tied to risks and decision deadlines.
- A resource register identifying staff time, data, funding and technical dependencies.

Review questions

- Are all institutions needed to achieve the outcome represented?
- Can participants explain where authority begins and ends?
- Are disagreements, corrective actions and changes preserved in the record?
- Would the arrangement remain functional after a leadership transition?

ASPC should score these conditions at authorization, during implementation and at closeout. A score is a management aid, not evidence of impact; outcome data and external review remain necessary.



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ASPC RELEVANCE

This research supports constructive American–international partnership and practical cooperation where stronger institutions can advance shared interests with the United States.

GAO-23-105520

[Official source →](#)

GAO-06-15

[Official source →](#)

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ASPC-EN-004 · Version 1.0 · August 2026