

Collaborative State Projects: Process Overview

Introduction

The Collaborative State Project (CSPs) process is designed specifically to allow state SHIP programs identify and implement an innovative project over a 12-month period, building on the commitment and resources of key stakeholders and partners. While this project model was designed by HAP to help build the capacity of SHIP programs, it can be used by SHIPs to implement a project with a new or existing partner, or to make a significant change within their own program. The CSPs are designed and implemented using an approach that allows all stakeholders to participate in the design, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of project activities. The process is divided into the following phases:

- Request for Application, Selection, and Award of Projects;
- Partnership Agreement;
- Needs Assessment;
- Outcomes Planning;
- Implementation of Project Activities;
- Monitoring and Evaluation; and
- Project Closeout.

Although each project incorporates the same phases or elements, the strategies utilized for each individual project may differ, reflecting differences in the project objectives, goals and, environment. Additionally, all projects are guided by the following key principles:

- Stakeholder participation in the definition of project goals, objectives and proposed activities.
- Complementary project elements that build off one another to ensure a coherent project.
- Incorporation of evaluation findings and best practices from previous projects in the design and implementation of new projects to maximize opportunities and minimize challenges, thereby ensuring the best possible outcomes.

I. Request for Application, Review, Selection and Award

The CSP process begins with the announcement of a Request for Application (RFA). The RFA is an online survey that includes questions about a SHIP's organizational background, resources, needs, and expected project activities and outcomes. The RFA

announcement is promoted in several ways, including personalized email alerts, monthly newsletters, and special conference calls for interested parties.

Completed applications are reviewed using a set of criteria, such as the background of the SHIP program, the extent of their need, and the state of their volunteer and training programs. Follow-up calls are made to select applicants to further probe critical areas that may affect the implementation of projects. These factors include the interest level of local programs, as well as the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities as identified by the SHIP Director. After all the information is analyzed, HAP selects four SHIPs to participate in CSP projects, and notifies all applicants of the decisions.

II. The Partnership Agreement

Each SHIP that is selected to participate in a CSP is expected to sign a non-contractual partnership agreement. The partnership agreement initiates the CSP process and helps ensure commitment to the project. It includes information about the CSP objectives, process, and the resources required from the SHIP and HAP.

III. Needs Assessment

The purpose of the needs assessment is to discuss and analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the SHIP program (also known as a SWOT analysis). The process brings together stakeholders from the state SHIP office and selected local programs to brainstorm in a participatory environment. During the needs assessment, participants discuss the challenges of the SHIP, prioritize needs, and identify the critical factors that may affect the successful implementation of the project. The outcome of the needs assessment phase is a brief report that is shared with the state and local SHIP programs. Over the years, the needs assessment phase of the CSP process has provided a strong foundation for the development and direction of each project.

IV. Outcomes Planning

The outcomes planning phase of the CSP process involves using the needs assessment findings and completed RFAs, to develop project objectives, implementation strategies, and proposed activities to address the needs of the SHIP. The outcome of this process is an operational work plan which clearly shows the project goals, objectives, implementation strategies, proposed activities, timeline, responsibilities and feedback mechanisms. The operational plans developed for each project also serve as a basis for the monitoring and evaluation of project activities.

V. Implementation of Project Activities

Following the work plan as a guide, project activities are generally implemented at the local level with strong support and hands-on technical assistance from state SHIP staff

(and HAP), including the project leader(s). Implementation of the project activities identified in the work plan generally begins in month three of the 12-month project.

VI. Monitoring and Evaluation

The success of each CSP depends on the feedback mechanisms that are built into the design of the project process. Monthly conference calls and periodic project site visits are important tools to monitor project activities. These activities are used to review project assumptions, progress, and assess planned activities against actual activities implemented. The feedback received from all these mediums are used to strengthen project implementation and, in some cases, modify the direction of the projects and the overall implementation strategy.

Additionally, an external organization conducts an evaluation of the CSP process. The evaluation is undertaken in two stages: a mid-term evaluation and a final evaluation. The mid-term evaluation is aimed at establishing preliminary information against which to measure change and to identify the impact that the project has made to local SHIP programs. Lessons learned from the mid-term evaluation are incorporated into the remainder of the project.

The final evaluation assesses what the project has been able to achieve and the lessons learned. Over the years, these lessons and findings have been used to improve the design and development of future projects.

VII. Project Closeout

The CSP process ends after a 12 month period of intensive project implementation. However, before the end of the project, HAP works with participating programs to develop sustainability plans. These plans help SHIP programs sustain project outcomes, and create a framework for the successful integration of all project deliverables.

For additional information on the CSP process, please see our [Practical Guide to Implementation](#).