



Engaging Others

Competencies

"This Deep Dive draws from one of the Areas of Competence in the [Career Development Manager/Leader Competency Framework](#). Through reflection, analysis of real situations, and practical activities, you'll explore how this part of the framework shapes your leadership practice."

The Challenge Ahead

In human services, collaboration and communication aren't "soft skills." They are the foundation of resilience and success. Your ability to build trust, share knowledge, and spark dialogue, whether aligning departments, engaging funders, or supporting frontline teams, shapes every outcome.

Challenges are real: missed messages, siloed teams, and disengaged stakeholders can erode alignment, morale, and impact. But there's a smarter way forward.

This module is your chance to elevate collaboration as your most powerful leadership asset. It's about creating space for every voice, forging bridges across roles and organizations, and communicating with clarity that inspires action. When leaders master this, they unlock collective intelligence, strengthen trust, and move everyone toward truly shared goals.

The Leader's Role in Collaboration and Communication

You are the dynamic role model for openness, clarity, and connection. This powerful commitment means:

- Building relationships across levels and sectors
- Facilitating timely, transparent information flow
- Listening deeply and validating others' perspectives
- Tailoring communication to audience and context
- Creating space for disagreement, creativity, and consensus

Collaboration is far more than just being pleasant, it's about being profoundly strategic and intentional! It means actively designing powerful processes that include, truly inform, and brilliantly empower every person. And above all, it's about using communication not merely to transmit data, but to forge deep trust and unstoppable momentum.

In this resource, you'll find three useful exercises you can use to help you engage with others.

- Collaboration and Communication Framework
- Expand To Your Collaboration Landscape
- Building Meaningful Conversations



Exercise 1: Collaboration and Communication Framework



Purpose

This exercise helps leaders and teams reflect on how they communicate and collaborate across roles, departments, and perspectives. It supports the development of intentional practices that foster clarity, inclusion, and trust—especially in environments where coordination and shared understanding are essential.



Preparation

Start with the Team

- Set aside 45 to 60 minutes for this session.
- Let participants know in advance that the focus will be on how they work together and communicate—not just what they say, but how they listen, respond, and build shared meaning.
- Provide printed or digital copies of the reflection prompts. You may also want to bring a whiteboard or shared document to capture themes that emerge.



How to Use It

Step-by-Step

1. Begin by framing the conversation. Explain that collaboration and communication are not just operational tools—they're cultural signals. How we engage with others sends a message about what we value, how we lead, and how we build trust. This exercise is about making those signals intentional and aligned.
2. Invite participants to reflect individually first. Ask them to consider questions such as:
 - How do I communicate expectations and decisions?
 - How do I invite input and feedback from others?
 - How do I navigate disagreement or tension?
 - How do I ensure that people feel heard and respected?
 - How do I coordinate across roles or departments to avoid confusion or duplication?
3. After 10 to 15 minutes of individual reflection, invite small group or full group discussion. Encourage participants to share insights, patterns, or moments of growth. Use open-ended questions like:
 - What helps collaboration feel smooth and respectful?
 - What communication habits support clarity and trust?





- Where do we see gaps or friction—and what might help?
- 4. As themes emerge, capture them visually or verbally. Highlight practices that support psychological safety, such as active listening, shared language, and timely follow-up. Reinforce that collaboration is not just about working together—it's about aligning purpose, respecting differences, and building shared ownership.
- 5. Close the session by inviting each participant to name one communication or collaboration habit they want to strengthen. Encourage the team to revisit this framework regularly and to use it as a touchstone during times of change, stress, or growth.



Pro Tips

- Create a tone of openness and curiosity.
- Normalize the idea that collaboration is a skill that evolves over time.
- Encourage storytelling and real examples. Reinforce that communication is not just about clarity—it's about connection





Exercise 2: Expand to Your Collaboration Landscape



Purpose

This exercise helps leaders and teams identify key Interest holders, understand their roles and interests, and assess the quality of collaboration across relationships. It supports strategic engagement, trust-building, and alignment—especially in complex human service environments where coordination is essential.



Preparation

- Set aside 60 to 75 minutes for this session.
- Let participants know that the goal is to map out who they collaborate with, how those relationships function, and where there may be gaps or opportunities for stronger engagement.
- Provide printed or digital copies of the Collaboration Map worksheet. You may also want to bring markers, sticky notes, or a shared digital canvas for visual mapping.



How to Use It

Step-by-Step

1. Begin by framing the conversation. Explain that collaboration with interest holders is not just about coordination—it's about shared purpose, mutual respect, and clear communication. Mapping these relationships helps leaders see the full landscape of influence, responsibility, and connection.
2. Invite participants to begin by listing all relevant interest holders. These may include internal groups such as staff teams, supervisors, or leadership, and external groups such as funders, referral partners, community organizations, or clients. Encourage them to think broadly and inclusively.
3. Guide the team through a reflection on the quality of each relationship. Use prompts such as:
 - How strong is our communication with this interest holder?
 - Do we understand their needs, priorities, and constraints?
 - Do they feel heard, respected, and included in decisions that affect them?
 - What do we rely on them for—and what do they rely on us for?





- Where do we see tension, confusion, or missed opportunities?
- 4. Encourage the team to highlight relationships that need attention, strengthening, or clarification. Then, invite them to choose one or two priority relationships and brainstorm specific actions to improve collaboration. These might include initiating a conversation, clarifying expectations, co-creating a shared goal, or adjusting communication methods.
- 5. Close the session by inviting each participant to name one relationship they will invest in more intentionally over the next month. Encourage them to revisit the map periodically and use it as a living tool for strategic engagement.



**Pro Tips
for Success**

- Create a tone of curiosity and openness.
- Normalize the idea that collaboration is dynamic and requires ongoing attention.
- Encourage the team to look beyond formal roles and consider the human dimensions of partnership—trust, empathy, and shared purpose.





Worksheet 1:
Collaboration Map

Purpose

Identify key relationships, gaps, and opportunities for connection.

Best ways to connect				
In what way does this relationship need strengthening?				
Influence				
Interests, concerns				
Internal / external interest holders				





Worksheet 1: Interest Holder Collaboration Map (Sample)

Internal / external interest holders	Interests, concerns	Influence	In what way does this relationship need strengthening?	Best ways to connect
Program staff	Need clarity	High	Staff turnover has resulted in asymmetrical connection with leadership	Team meeting and staff events
Funders	Want measurable impact	High	Need to be included in early planning	Quarterly reporting
Peer agencies	Want to share best practices	Low	Limited inter-agency discussion	Nothing now, may need to create an open house event
Municipal leaders	Want to address inclusion issues in the city	Medium	Recent election and new council, some relationships are new	Could invite municipal leaders to open house





Exercise 3: Building Meaningful Conversations



Purpose

This exercise helps leaders apply Kinlaw's four pillars of commitment—clarity of purpose, competence, influence, and appreciation ([described in Deep Dive - Defining Effective Service](#))—to strengthen communication and engagement with interest holders. It supports trust-building, shared understanding, and collaborative problem-solving across internal teams and external partners.



Preparation

- Set aside 60 to 75 minutes for this session.
- Let participants know that the focus will be on how they engage interest holders—both inside and outside the organization—in ways that foster commitment, clarity, and mutual respect.
- Provide printed or digital copies of the reflection prompts or conversation planning worksheet.
- You may also want to bring a whiteboard or shared document to capture themes and strategies.



How to Use It

Step-by-Step

1. Begin by introducing Kinlaw's four pillars of engagement: clarity of purpose, competence, influence, and appreciation. Explain that these pillars offer a practical lens for designing conversations that build trust and commitment. Emphasize that interest holders—whether staff, clients, funders, or community partners—are more likely to engage meaningfully when these needs are acknowledged and addressed.
2. Invite participants to choose one internal interest holder group (such as frontline staff, supervisors, or cross-departmental teams) and one external interest holder group (such as funders, referral partners, or community collaborators). Ask them to reflect on the following questions for each group:
 - What is the purpose of our relationship with this group? What shared goals or values connect us?
 - How do we support their competence—do they have the information, tools, and confidence they need to engage effectively?





- How do we invite their influence—do they have a voice in decisions, and do we listen actively?
 - How do we show appreciation—do we recognize their contributions and communicate respect?
3. After 15 to 20 minutes of individual reflection, invite small group or full group discussion. Encourage participants to share insights, challenges, and examples of meaningful engagement. Use open-ended questions like:
 - What's one conversation we've had with this group that built trust or clarity? –
 - Where might we be falling short in one of Kinlaw's pillars—and what could help?
 - What's one shift we could make to strengthen engagement with this Interest holder?
 4. As themes emerge, capture them visually or verbally. Highlight practices that support psychological safety, mutual accountability, and values-based leadership. Reinforce that meaningful engagement is not just about communication—it's about relationship, responsiveness, and shared purpose.
 5. Close the session by inviting each participant to choose one Interest holder group and commit to a specific conversation they will initiate or revisit using Kinlaw's model. Encourage them to use the four pillars as a guide for planning and reflection.

**Pro Tips**

- Create a tone of openness and curiosity.
- Normalize the idea that engagement is a skill that evolves through practice.

