



Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) is a critical document in establishing coordinated efforts in a Linking Systems of Care project. An MOU is a multilateral agreement among multiple parties intended to express a common vision and line of action. MOUs in Linking Systems of Care projects represent a collective commitment among service providers, state agencies, victim serving organizations, grassroots services, courts, and other relevant agencies to adhere to specific principles and shared responsibilities for the collaborative engagement. When developing a comprehensive MOU, stakeholders must specifically define the roles and responsibilities of each involved party, as well as clearly identify areas of shared responsibility. MOUs should be developed with the understanding that it is a living document, subject to changes in goals and dynamics as needed to adapt and sustain an effective collaborative.

Memoranda of understanding are vital to the Linking Systems of Care for Children and Youth Demonstration project in two key areas:

1. With the stakeholders participating in the planning and implementation of the project; and
2. With the organizations, service providers, agencies, and others who are a part of the linked systems. Both types of memoranda share common characteristics, but there are some key differences in the memoranda for organizations participating on a service level.

Common Characteristics

A good MOU provides all parties with a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities within the project. Although an MOU is not a contract or a binding legal document, it is a way to avoid misunderstandings by clearly delineating expectations. Key elements of an MOU include the following:

Shared Mission and Vision

In this section of the MOU, provide a brief overview of the project and the shared mission and vision.

Key Partners

This section describes the key partners participating in the MOU. For the Linking Systems of Care project, the project should be led by one or two primary organizations or agencies. MOUs will generally be between these organizations or agencies and all other stakeholders.

History of Involvement

This section can be included if agencies or organizations have worked together in the past on projects.

Roles and Responsibilities

This is one of the most important parts of an MOU. It should be detailed and specific about the roles and responsibilities of each party.

Commitment to Partnership

This section describes each party's commitment to the partnership and may include allocation of funding, space, time, and other resources to support the collaborative.

Time Period

MOUs should be designed for a specific period of time and reviewed and renewed periodically for ongoing projects.

Financial Requirements

If any party to the MOU is receiving or providing funding, this section should detail the funding and reimbursement plan.

Review and Monitoring

Depending on the nature of the collaboration and coordination between agencies or organizations participating in the project, it may be necessary to conduct a review of deliverables. This is particularly necessary for any subcontractors.

Signatures

While MOUs are not binding legal documents, it is important to have signatures from the heads of the principles involved in the MOU.

Special Considerations for Service Providers

In addition to the above elements of an MOU, an MOU for and between service providers should incorporate several additional elements.

Protocols

If service providers will be working with the same tools or populations, it may be useful to include notations regarding shared protocols within the MOU. For example, if all providers will be using the same screening instrument, this is the section to describe that.

Information Sharing

This section of the MOU will describe the type of information shared and the mechanisms for sharing. It is important to note that depending on the agency or organizational policies the information sharing portion of the MOU and the project may vary widely depending on the party. In addition, depending on the level of information sharing, Linking Systems of Care stakeholder groups may need to consider implementing separate information sharing agreements.

Disclaimers

If for some reason you need disclaimers when working with service providers, this section should be included. For example, if a service provider agrees to be part of a directory, a disclaimer may be included indicating that participation in the directory does not guarantee client referral.

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