

### 4.3 How-to Q & A: Pursuing an ESOL / Health Care Health Literacy Partnership

*Note: For suggestions on how to find a health care guest speaker for your class, see [3.4, Teachers' Concerns about Teaching Health](#).*

Currently, ESOL / health care partnerships are scattered around the U.S. with no central collection point for information and data on how to start the partnerships and keep them afloat. While there are no hard and fast rules for forming these partnerships, the following Q and A provides advice on how to go about partnering based on information gathered from ESOL educators and health care providers who have participated in such collaborations. This Q and A assumes that funding (and associated goals / directives) for a partnership has not already been identified.

**Q: What things does our ESOL program need to do before contacting a potential community partner for a health literacy partnership?**

**A:**

- **Make sure there is administrative buy-in in your program for an ESOL health literacy partnership. This is very important!**
- **Designate a staff member or particularly savvy volunteer to be the lead on the project.** This person will be the key contact person for the health care partner to interact with and will be the one who keeps everyone organized and up to date on the ESOL program side.
- **Identify your goals.** What do you want learners to gain from being involved in the project? Health knowledge? Health screenings? A new health curriculum? Health care? An opportunity to practice communicating with health care providers? A tour of a health care facility? An opportunity to share their views and experiences to sensitize health care providers to needs of people with limited English proficiency in U.S. health care?

If no clear goals readily stand out (but you know that learners would benefit from some kind of health literacy partnership), consider doing some kind of needs assessment (survey, focus group, etc.) with learners to identify what their priorities and biggest concerns are around health information and using health care.



- **Identify potential community partners who can help you work toward your identified goals.** Consider local public health departments, non-profit organizations focused on health care, low-cost clinics, hospitals, private medical practices, church- and school-based nursing programs, medical schools, nursing schools, medical and nursing professional organizations, and alternative care providers.
- **Are there any health literacy consortia already in place in your area?** If yes, ask to attend one of their meetings where you can meet other members and assess their interest in a possible partnership.
- **Identify what your program can offer the potential partner.** See [4.2, What ESOL Offers to Health Literacy Partner Organizations](#), for ideas.
- **Consider writing up a simple, one-page description** of your program's work, goals for a partnership, and offerings to a partnership so that you can have it ready to send to or leave with a potential partner once you have made contact. Be sure to mention potential health care cost savings of raising learners' health literacy and improving their understanding of health care.
- **See if there are any existing models** or past models of health literacy partnerships that you can draw on that would be effective for the kinds of goals you have identified. Share information on those models with potential partners. Some models are described in this toolkit. Others are described in the [health and literacy partnerships issue of Focus on Basics](#) (September 2008) and in the past conference proceedings of the [Wisconsin Health Literacy Summit](#).
- **Give some thought to the kinds of data collection and project evaluation** a clinical partner might want to conduct. A good resource for this is the [Clinical-Community Relationships Measures \(CCRM\) Atlas](#) (March 2013) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

**Q: How do we go about contacting a partner?**

**A:**

- **Making contact can be tricky**, as health care providers are so busy and their work settings can be so complex and fast-paced. You will probably need to call a general number to ask who would be the right person to speak with about a partnership.



You may need to persist with multiple emails and phone calls until you get the right person *and* the right timing. Be as prepared as possible, with information on your goals and what your program offers the partnership at the ready. Remember to be brief and succinct so you can sell the idea before someone's pager goes off!

- **Be enthusiastic about partnering and confident in your professional skills and your field's value to a health literacy partnership.** Many of us suffer from a touch of "White Coat Syndrome" from time to time and may feel a little intimidated in talking with health care providers. Be confident that your time, skills, and field are as valuable as a health care provider's (just not compensated the same way) and that your program indeed has much to offer in the way of knowledge, insight into cross-cultural communication, and access to vulnerable populations that is currently urgently needed by health care.
- **It is sometimes easiest to make contact with health care through personal connections.** Do you know anyone who works for the possible partnering organization? Do any learners work for the organization? Do any of your program volunteers work for the organization or know someone who does? An awful lot of people work in health care these days, so chances are good you know someone who knows someone who does.
- **Some current hospital terms** for departments/positions that might be interested in setting up a partnership include patient relations offices, patient experience representatives, community relations departments, community outreach, health equity offices, and health science libraries.
- **Invite representatives of the potential partnering organization to visit your program.** They will possibly see learners very differently — more multidimensionally — than they would see them in a health care setting. This can help partners see the benefits of a partnership more clearly.

**Q: Once we have found an interested partner, how should we proceed?**

**A:**

- **Set up meetings to learn about each other's work, identify mutual goals and individual partner expertise, and start planning.** A successful partnership depends on both partnering organizations feeling heard and feeling that their expertise is valued.



Give each partner an opportunity to identify what they bring to the collaboration and what they would like to get from it. Acknowledge from the get-go that you are two very different fields with different perspectives and ways of doing things but that you can learn a lot from each other in the process of partnering. Decide who would be best to fulfill which roles.

- **Outline what the partnership will accomplish** and who will do what.
- **Build in ESOL class visitation** if partners have not done this yet. Make sure health care providers have seen your learners outside of health care situations and get more of a sense of them as whole people. This can be especially valuable for student doctors and nurses.

**Q: What should we be mindful of while the partnership is in progress?**

**A:**

- **Be flexible.** Schedule regular meetings or phone calls to re-evaluate how things are going and make changes as needed.
- **Be patient with the process.** Balancing the needs and schedules of learners, educators, and health care providers may initially be a lot of work. However, many who have participated in such partnerships speak very highly of their experiences. They report that all parties involved gained a lot from the efforts and that the work created lasting interprofessional relationships and improved understanding.
- **Collect data!** Discuss, with your partner, what kinds of outcome data are reasonable and valuable to collect to assess the effectiveness of the partnership's work. Decide together how and when to collect it. Aim to get quantitative as well as qualitative data. Data collection is vital to demonstrate the value of addressing health literacy in ESOL programs, continuing partnerships, and securing future funding and other support.
- **Get learner feedback!** Elicit, record, and act upon learner feedback in addition to educator and health care feedback on how the project is going and what individuals are getting out of it.
- **See what health literacy training opportunities can be created for ESOL teachers (and health care providers!) in the course of the partnership.**



- **Publicize what you are doing so your efforts can gain external support and others can learn from what you are doing.** Use listservs, e-newsletters, LinkedIn, conferences, etc.

