What is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)?

- A written agreement (not a contract) between two or more parties meant to support the collaborative.
- Offers a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the collaborative partners’ roles and expectations to assure fairness and mutually satisfactory outcomes.
- Not legally binding unless explicitly stated in the MOU.
- If not stated as contractually binding, carries a degree of seriousness and signals mutual respect that is tantamount to a gentlemen’s agreement.
- When compensation is involved, a MOU usually leads to a subcontract (a legally binding document).

Why is it important to have an MOU?

- To ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities as a foundation toward building capacity, often as a first step in the development of more formal agreements that outline equal representation and mutual benefit for community-academic partnerships.
- Each partner needs to take time to know what their needs and mission-driven goals are to assure the contents of the MOU will honor fidelity to such mission and goals. This is particularly important for service focused community agencies.
- The MOU outlines specific roles and responsibilities between two or more parties so that all parties have a clear understanding of their purpose in the partnership. It helps to fill in the gaps between a verbal agreement or a handshake and the formal contract.

What are elements of a MOU Document?

- Identification of Partners
- Each Partner's Responsibilities
- Purpose of Work
- Start and End Date
- Decision-Making Process
- Compensation/Terms
- Provisions for Conflict Resolution (see below)
- Authorized Signatures for All Partners
- Date Signed by Each Partner Representative

Include options below, as may apply to your collaborative:
- History of Relationships between partners
- Service area/populations to be served
- Identify representatives for the planning and development teams
- Describe how teams will work together
- How will partners work to achieve project goals and to sustain the project once grant funds are no longer available
- Amend MOU when new partners are added and when partners discontinue their affiliation

Conflict Resolution

- How will disputes be handled?
- What happens to the continuity of work during resolution process?
- Is there a 3rd party mediation entity in place? Can one be established?
- Are there Guiding Principles of Engagement for this partnership?