

COLLABORATION FOR A CHANGE: DEFINITIONS, MODELS, AND ROLES,
WITH A USER-FRIENDLY GUIDE TO COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES *

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(3) COOPERATING is defined as exchanging information, altering activities, and sharing resources for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose.

Cooperating requires greater organizational commitments than networking or coordinating and, in some cases, may involve written or even legal agreements. Shared resources can encompass a variety of human, financial, and technical contributions, including knowledge, staffing, physical property, access to people, money, and others. Cooperating can require a substantial amount of time, high levels of trust, and significant access to each other's turf.

Example: A hospital and community clinic exchange information about prenatal services, decide to alter service schedules, and agree to share physical space and funding for pre-natal services so that the hospital and community clinic can better meet the needs of common clients.

(4) COLLABORATING is defined as exchanging information, altering activities, sharing resources, and enhancing the capacity of another for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose.

The qualitative difference between collaborating and cooperating in this definition is the willingness of organizations (or individuals) to enhance each other's capacity for mutual benefit and a common purpose. In this definition, collaborating is a relationship in which each organization wants to help its partners become better at what they do. This definition also assumes that when organizations collaborate they share risks, responsibilities, and rewards, each of which contributes to enhancing each other's capacity to achieve a common purpose. Collaborating is usually characterized by substantial time commitments, very high levels of trust, and extensive areas of common turf. A summary definition of organizational collaboration is a process in which organizations exchange information, alter activities, share resources, and enhance each other's capacity for mutual benefit and a common purpose by sharing risks, responsibilities, and rewards.

Example: A hospital and community clinic exchange information about prenatal services, decide to alter service schedules, share physical space and funding for pre-natal services, and provide professional development training for each other's staff in areas of their special expertise so that they can better meet the needs of common clients.

COLLABORATION IN PRACTICE: Decision-making, Control, and Ownership

Both research and informal insights from experience suggest that the power to make decisions and the ownership of any social change process are among its most important characteristics. There are few more fundamental indicators of whether community initiatives

- * Although advice from the community is considered, the decision to terminate the collaborative is made by the institutions that initiated it.

Collaborative Empowerment: Definition and Key Principles

In this paper, empowerment is defined as "the capacity to set priorities and control resources that are essential for increasing community self-determination." Collaborative empowerment begins within the community and is brought to public, private, or nonprofit institutions. An empowerment strategy includes two basic activities: (1) organizing a community in support of a collaborative purpose determined by the community; and (2) facilitating a process for integrating outside institutions in support of this community purpose. The empowerment approach can produce policy changes and improvements in program delivery and services. It is also more likely to produce long-term ownership of the collaborative's purpose, processes, and products in communities and to enhance communities' capacity for self-determination.

Collaborative Empowerment: Key Principles

- * The process is initiated by community-based organizations and is assisted by community organizing; early discussions include dialogues about beliefs, motivations and what people want to accomplish as the basis for a community change vision.
- * Challenges to be addressed by the community are identified by including both data-based trend analysis and narrative examples from community residents. The latter is given equal credibility in considering options for setting priorities.
- * Community priorities are focused in the mission statement of the collaborative. Community-based organizations select representatives who strategically invite partners public, private, and nonprofit institutions outside the community based on the community's mission statement.
- * Negotiations with outside agencies and institutions produce agreements to proceed on a collaborative basis based on the mission established by the community, and within a governance and administrative process in which power is equally shared by the community and outside organizations.
- * The governance and administrative structure supports a policy council that can serve as the policy advocacy focus, an executive committee to help maintain operational processes, action groups for implementing action plans, and staff agreeable and accountable to the community to assist the collaborative.
- * Substantial attention is given to balancing administration/management continuity with an openness to easily accessible community participation. Emphasis is placed on the recruitment and capacity-building of members; ongoing community organizing is a central characteristic.

COLLABORATIVE ROLES: A Variety of Options

The following collaborative roles are not mutually exclusive; one role often leads to or is integrated into another. Most can be played to some extent by any organization, although several of them are more often associated with government and philanthropic organizations.

Convener

Organizations often play the role of community convener on significant issues that may, or may not, result in further community action. The convening role usually includes a highly visible public discussion of community issues. These discussions are often related to data gathering or studies which provide information intended to highlight a common understanding of the issues at hand. Such discussions are important prerequisites for collaborative community problem-solving.

Catalyst

Organizations may use the convening role to stimulate discussion with a longer-term strategy in mind. When an organization is catalytic, it makes an early and clear commitment to participate in longer-term community problem-solving that begins with an initial discussions of issues. In this way, it uses its influence and resource base to make the collaborative initiative "real" in the minds of various other potential partners who may be waiting for leadership before making commitments to an action agenda.

Conduit

Organizations may serve as conduits for funding that is essential for collaborative action. For example, many federal grants require a particular organization to be the "lead agency" in providing grants for local collaborative initiatives. A similar situation occurs when foundations make grants with the condition that an agency be a lead partner. This stipulation can be very problematic, however, if the conduit role appears to be, or is in fact, a way for an organization to dominate a collaborative process because of its fiscal role. This can result in conflicts related to power on the surface and to trust as a deeper undercurrent.

Funder

Some organizations may wish to encourage a variety of collaborative activities by being a funder, either alone or with other funding sources. This is an increasingly common practice but, again, one with complexities. Many recipients of such funding find that funders - public and private - fail to understand that a collaborative is more than a proposal to which many organizations attach letters of endorsement. What must be made clear is that it takes time for organizations to create a well designed, mutually respectful and trusting collaborative; unfortunately, funders often do not fully appreciate the time required for these characteristics to emerge, as a result, expect substantial results before the collaborative has fully formed.

As has been noted, empowering partners share risks, responsibilities, resources, and rewards in collaborative efforts. They establish mutually respectful, trusting relationships, take the time to understand each other's motivations and hopes for accomplishments, and state problems in a manner that provides opportunities for others to share in their solutions.

Advocate

Some partners view their primary role as advocacy, either for individuals or groups that are the primary focus of the collaborative's activities and/or for policy and systems change proposals that emerge from the collaborative. Partners that play this role may be viewed as problematic by other partners in a collaborative and, therefore, it is helpful to develop frameworks and internal processes within which advocacy efforts can emerge with support from as many partners as possible. In general, it can be argued that all collaboratives seeking systems change would have to have commitments from its partners to play an advocacy role. Without such advocacy, collaboratives would be limited to data gathering, public education, and program/service innovation change strategies.

Community Organizer

Partners may include community organizing among their contributions to collaboratives. In this role, partners have a primary interest in paying attention to who is at the decision-making table and, in particular, how those who are traditionally excluded from decision-making are included as full partners. A community organizing role often includes the ongoing recruitment, welcoming, and sustaining of participation by community-based, neighborhood-based, and constituency-based organizations and individuals.

Facilitator

In this role, an organization attempts to help make collaborative community problem-solving efforts among nonprofit, government, business, labor, religious, academic, and other organizations possible and effective. This can be difficult when an organization is a key partner because the facilitator role may be perceived as another way of adding greater decision-making authority to the organization's partner role. When it works well, however, facilitation is valued as a source of fairness, encouragement, and as a resource to all those who might need it in the collaborative process.

Evaluator

The importance of evaluation in collaborative efforts is often down-played, except in response to funding requirements. It is very helpful if some partners are willing to play a role in evaluation by providing the collaborative with ongoing information about how well it is meeting stated goals and objectives over time. This can be done through the formation of an evaluation committee that assesses both product and process results. Partners that play this role can also work well with "outside" or paid staff evaluators as a part of team.

Design Step 5:

A mission statement can be defined as a simple, clear statement of purpose that is also a call to action. What is the mission statement of your collaborative?

Design Step 6:

(6a) What are the goals and objectives of your collaborative? (6b) If you have not formulated them, please discuss possible goals and objectives and write them below (a goal is a long-term guide to and measure of progress on achieving a mission; an objective is a short-term (often annual) activity to implement a goal and from which progress toward achieving a goal can be measured.

Design Step 7:

(7a) Who will get the work done? (7b) How can you link specific individuals and organizations to the specific objectives you have identified above to ensure that the objectives will be carried out in a timely manner?

Design Step 8:

(8a) What do you know about other collaborative efforts that have worked on a similar mission and goals? (8b) What are some key lessons your collaborative can learn from these efforts?

Design Step 9:

What can each partner contribute to the collaborative? In making this inventory, please remember that it can include a wide variety of financial and non-financial contributions. For example, a partner who brings credibility with and access to community residents adds something as valuable as any financial contribution.

Design Step 10:

(10a) How does the collaborative identify and encourage new members to participate? (10b) How well are new members informed about the roles, responsibilities, and rewards of participation? (10c) How well do new members reflect the diversity of the communities that the collaborative serves?

Design Step 11:

(11a) What are some incentives that can be used to recognize and sustain (11b) partners' contributions to the collaborative and (11c) changes they make in their own organization's policies and practices that are consistent with the collaborative's vision, mission, and goals?

Design Step 19:

(19a) How much money do you need and how will you secure it in a timely manner? (19b) What kinds of funding sources will be necessary if you are to be successful? (19c) Is there a written financial plan and a clear strategy with identified responsibilities for implementing it? (19d) Has the collaborative made certain that the organization through which funding flows does not have greater decision-making authority in the collaborative simply because of this fiscal management role?

Design Step 20:

(20a) How will you monitor progress and evaluate the overall success of your collaborative? (20b) How can you monitor and evaluate both the products/results and the processes of your collaborative? (20c) How can your evaluations be used by the collaborative to make changes in the collaborative's processes based on the findings of such evaluations?

Closing Comment

This paper is offered with the hope that those who choose to work together with others, either on an organizational or personal level, will find it helpful in selecting and employing change strategies, roles, and models that best reflect particular circumstances. Circumstances in which change efforts take place always include a range of conditions and variables and are often compounded by The Three Ts that limit working together strategies: time, turf, and trust. In practice, the paper suggests, a good basis for resolving the challenges of The Three Ts is to engage in The Four Rs of collaboration: shared risks, resources, responsibilities, and rewards.