

Collaboration

“Most people want to be told how to get extraordinary results with minimum risk. They want to know how to get out-of-the box results with in-the-box courage⁵. ”

Collaboration requires “dynamic relationships” between people². This relationship is driven by communication and shared vision. Collaboration meets the needs of the organizations represented, the collaborative group as a whole, and the community it’s serving. Collaboration creates solutions that one organization, on its own, could not create.

“Collaboration is composed of a group of autonomous stakeholders with varying capabilities (including resources, knowledge, and expertise) that are directed toward mutually accountable, typically innovative ends, producing long-term social change at a local level in a cooperative, relatively nonhierarchical relationship that is negotiated in an ongoing communicative and principled process³.”

What does leadership look like in collaborations?

In collaborative groups, leadership is a fluid, dynamic exchange where it can be difficult to identify who is the leader and who is the follower. It could change from one topic to the next based on member’s skills, passions, resources, knowledge, or connections. In order to make the most of this constantly shifting relationship, collaborative leaders should focus on sharing responsibility, getting the most out of the diversity of perceptions, competences and resources, reconciling the goals of overlapping collaborative initiatives, dealing with fragmentation of power, and sharing and supporting leadership⁷.

What are the benefits of collaborations?

Collaboration is imperative with the complex social issues we are facing today. No one organization is going to solve issues of poverty, substance use, crime, global warming, or economic development. The community needs to be open to sharing and leveraging resources (i.e. financial, social, and political capital) as all of the issues we face are inter-connected. Collaboration allows for diverse organizations to “constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible”¹.

Each member comes to the collaboration with varying interests such as “their desire to leverage new ideas or expertise for their organization”⁶, mandates from funders, to “foster new leaders, shape new civic cultures, or gain political influence”², a “perceived need for service provision to be coordinated”⁸, or for “efficiency, stability, legitimacy, reciprocity, and asymmetry”⁴. Because of this extensive list of reasons why people collaborate, we need to increase our collaborative competencies and emerge as transformed community leaders.



For more resources and to find out how to contact the Regional Prevention Consultant in your region, visit www.rpscolorado.org.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the challenges and realities of collaborations?

One grounding point of reality to come to terms with is that collaboration is not a short-term, trouble-free process. The research on collaboration provides a comprehensive look at the challenges to successful collaboration including: personal agendas, slow moving bureaucracy, changing leadership, complicated relationships, limited guidance on prioritizing issues, power inequalities, miscommunication, 'group think', intensive use of resources, ambiguity around roles and the inherent characteristic of collaboration being a long-term process.

The best way to tackle these issues is to face them head-on through dialogue, transparency, realistic expectations, and shared leadership as well as recognizing that the collaborative itself is a living organism that is in constant flux and will, therefore, need ongoing nurturing and re-evaluation. "The nature of collaboration is such that they can change from one shape to another frequently, rapidly, and sometimes imperceptibly"⁷.

What are some recommendations for implementing a successful and transformative collaboration?

- Helping members be good communicators
- Being transparent about the emergent reality of the collaboration by acknowledging structures, personal agendas, commitment levels, etc.
- Balancing the spirit or process of collaboration with reaching goals and objectives in a timely manner
- Understanding the past, present, and future of the organizations represented at the table
- Developing non-judgmental understanding of expectations of the self and others right from the start
- Finding ways to ensure that power and leadership are shared
- Building trust among members and organizations
- Starting with low-hanging fruit for accomplishments and then moving towards riskier ventures

If these recommendations are given attention during the early stages of the collaboration, the group will be more likely to reach their goals and objectives.

¹ Gray, B., & Wood, D. (1991). Collaborative alliances: Moving from practice to theory. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 27(1), 3-22. doi:10.1177/0021886391271001.

² Heath, R. G. (2007). Rethinking Community Collaboration Through a Dialogic Lens: Creativity, Democracy, and Diversity in Community Organizing. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 21(2), 145-171. Doi: 10.1177/0893318907306032.

³ Heath, R., & Frey, L. (2004). Ideal collaboration: A conceptual framework of community collaboration. *Communication yearbook 28* (pp. 189-231). Mahwah, NJ US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers. Retrieved from PsycINFO database.

⁴ Logsdon, J. (1991). Interests and interdependence in the formation of social problem-solving collaborations. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 27(1), 23-37. Doi:10.1177/0021886391271002.

⁵ Quinn, R. E. (2000). *Change The World: How Ordinary People Can Accomplish Extraordinary Results*. San Francisco, CA, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

⁶ Sowa, J. (2009) The Collaboration Decisions in Nonprofit Organizations: Views From the Front Line. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 38(6), 1003-1025. Doi: 10.1177/0899764008325247.

⁷ Vangen, S., & Huxham, C. (2003). Nurturing collaborative relations: Building trust in interorganizational collaboration. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 39(1), 5-31. Doi:10.1177/0021886303039001001.

⁸ Vangen, S., & Huxham, C. (2003). Enacting Leadership for Collaborative Advantage: Dilemmas of Ideology and Pragmatism in the Activities of Partnership Managers. *British Journal of Management*, 14(Special Issue), S61-S76. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8551.2003.00393.x.