

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR US TO COLLABORATE?

PURPOSES & BENEFITS

This tool helps group members and the collaborative partnership as a whole to:

- Know the relevant aspects of collaborating.
- Identify what it means for them to collaborate.

Identifying what it means to collaborate helps the collaborative group to have an intentional conversation about what it means for them to collaborate, including what the collaborative group needs from members and how the collaborative group can benefit group members.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

All group members should review this document for context on collaboration and then use the information in this document to have a group discussion on what it means for us to collaborate. Tie this discussion to the “What I Have to Contribute to & How I Benefit from This Collaborative” discussion. Record the discussion points on a flipchart and distribute to collaborative partners for future reference.

In addition, the results from this discussion will help to inform next steps in the “Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success” section of the toolkit, including:

- Defining Your Purpose(s)
 - Developing vision and mission statements
- Determining How You’ll Work Together
 - Developing guiding principles
 - Developing a collaboration charter or memorandum of understanding
 - Roles and commitments of group members



WHAT IS COLLABORATION?

Winer and Ray define collaboration as “A mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more entities to achieve results they are more likely to achieve together than alone.”

The collaborative premise: *“If you bring the appropriate people together, in constructive processes, with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of organizations and communities.”* – David Chrislip, *Collaborative Leadership*

WHY COLLABORATE?

“The civic culture in most communities is characterized by fragmentation, dissension, stagnation, gridlock, alienation, powerlessness, and burnout. We need to learn to include all people and work together to productively solve issues.” -David Chrislip

Leadership around most community issues is very difficult because:

- We don't fight the issues – we fight other people.
- We don't think we have the time to truly deal with the causes of the issue – only the symptoms.
- Shortsighted politics are driven by need to be elected.
- Hidden, different and self-serving agendas.
- Losing sight of big picture – NO VISION.
- Turfism—we are envious of others' successes or competing for resources

THE KEY ELEMENTS IN COLLABORATION

Appropriate People + Constructive Processes + Good Information = The Best Solution

So ... if these times call for collaboration and leadership can be a challenge as illustrated above, what does successful collaboration involve? Collaboration should:

- **Include multiple entities**—A successful collaboration recognizes the value of different perspectives and the importance of allowing for those differences.
- **Be a well-defined relationship**—Successful collaboration usually includes congruent expectations of all participants in terms of roles, end goals and guiding principles.
- **Be mutually beneficial**—Successful collaboration usually includes some form of a “win-win” dynamic.
- **Achieve results together that would not likely be achieved alone**—Collaboration is work in and of itself or, in other words, the process is the product. For it to be worthwhile, collaboration needs to result in greater benefits than costs. Remember, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.
- **Build trust and create a safe space for a shared vision to be developed.** About 70% of successful collaboration is comprised of this element. The other 30% depends upon relationships and follow through on identified actions.

In addition, establishing good collaborative processes (i.e., setting your collaborative group up for success) includes:



Setting Up for Success

- Being inclusive – identify and convene appropriate stakeholders.
- Being open minded and willing to reconsider your position.
- Identifying the REAL problem – search for the root causes.
- Agreeing on processes for working together.
- Gathering information needed – make sure content reflects all concerns.

Working Together

- Building relationships and the capacity to work together.
- Practicing listening and engaging others in dialogue.
- Sharing information with stakeholders.
- Understanding the information content.
- Analyzing content – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, barriers.
- Deciding what needs to be done – use collaborative problem solving, visioning, strategic thinking.

Moving to Action

- Reaching out – build a broader constituency.
- Engaging with implementing organizations.
- Facilitating action.

THE FACTORS THAT CAN MAKE OR BREAK COLLABORATION

Building on the key collaboration elements and collaborative processes outlined above, the following factors can make or break a collaborative partnership:

Access

It is important for the collaborative group to proactively reach out to all relevant sectors of the community to make sure that if they want to be involved, they can be. Often, things like time of meetings, location of meetings, language (including jargon), availability of transportation or child care, and the culture of the meeting (Roberts Rules of Order vs. other less formal approaches) are obstacles that can keep others out. Because professionals are usually the first to become involved in a collaborative group, it can be easy to slip into making it convenient for them; but if you want others to participate, it is important to resist the temptation. *See the “Stakeholder Map” and “What I Have to Contribute to & How I Benefit from This Collaborative” tools in the Step 1A – Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success: Tools for Coming Together - section of the toolkit, as these tools help to flesh out and address issues related to access.*

Leadership

It is important to provide opportunities for and to grow new leadership. When seeking leadership, it is important to think about:

- Who has the cleanest credibility with the partners?
- Who has the necessary skills?
- Who has the passion and time?
- Who is willing to make room for others to grow in their leadership and is comfortable “sharing the success” with others?

It is not always beneficial to think of leadership in terms of position. *The “Stakeholder Map” in the Step 1A – Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success: Tools for Coming Together, and*

“Facilitative Leadership” tools in the “Universal Community Organizing Concepts” sections of the toolkit help to consider leadership using these principles.

Power

Though power is rarely completely equal among members of a collaborative group, it is important to equally value different powers and make intentional efforts to share the power. The collaborative group should be willing to share power with the group, or the situation could become disempowering for certain members. It is important to have ALL impacted parties at the table and these parties should be given the same degree of power. *The “What I Have to Contribute to & How I Benefit from This Collaborative” tools in the Step 1A – Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success: Tools for Coming Together, as well as the development of guiding principles (see “Guiding Principles” 1C – Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success: Tools for Determining How You’ll Work Together) in the toolkit can help to address issues related to power.*

History

Past failed efforts or “bad blood” between members should be acknowledged and addressed or it will become, at the least, a negative force working against the collaborative group. Just because problems exist does not mean a collaborative group should not be attempted, but it does mean the past must be dealt with intentionally.

Competition and Turf

Collaborative groups are often initiated for the wrong reasons, such as obtaining resources for “business as usual.” Many funders require collaboration, but if funding is the motivator as opposed to a “greater good” or “shared vision,” the collaborative will not work over the longer term. However, it is also ok and even sometimes important to acknowledge and encourage serving self-interests when they do not violate the self-interests of others. *The “What I Have to Contribute to & How I Benefit from This Collaborative” tools in the 1A – Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success: Tools for Coming Together can help to identify benefits of participating in the collaborative group.*

Ideology/Core Values

It is important to be very conscious of others’ values and provide space in the “Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success” step to explore relevant values of all collaborative group members. If parties are at odds on a fundamental issue and these concerns are not openly addressed, the differences can ruin the collaboration. At the very least, collaborative group partners can agree to disagree. The development of guiding principles (see “Guiding Principles” in Step 1C – Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success: Tools for Determining How You’ll Work Together) in the toolkit can help the collaborative group to identify their collective core values.

Conflict

Some believe that conflict is a precursor to failure. In fact, if there is no conflict, then parties are likely not truly bringing their unique perspective and values to the table. What is important is that collaborations have a mechanism or approach in place for dealing constructively with conflict that uses “service of the greater good” as the guidepost for resolution. *The “Conflict Resolution” tool in the Step 1C – Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success: Tools for Determining How You’ll Work Together in the toolkit can help to determine methods for resolving conflict constructively in the collaborative group.*

Resources

In this case, resources include two things:

- What each member can bring to the table in terms of time to participate in/ contribute to the effort and skills to successfully complete agreed upon tasks. It is important for all members

to really assess whether they can be meaningfully involved before joining, recognizing that “you don’t get something for nothing.”

- The total resources available to the collaboration for its efforts. Too many or too few resources can be problematic. However, there is no correlation between funding and collaborative successes. See the “Defining Resources in a New Way” and the resources section of the “From Strategies to Action Steps” worksheet in Step 4 – Agitate for Change section of the toolkit for more ideas on creatively cultivating resources and integrating them into your community organizing strategic plan.

Results

It is important to balance planning with action. Some people are doers and need to feel they are “doing” in order to stay invested and energized. Planning should include measurable outcomes to demonstrate results. Once planning is completed, ongoing check-ins should celebrate enthusiasm and effort, as well as provide opportunities to course-correct. The “From Strategies to Action Steps” worksheet in Step 4 – Agitate for Change, as well as the additional tool in the Step 5 – Demonstrate and Celebrate Your Successes sections of the toolkit for how to develop and measure outcomes that demonstrate results.

STEPS TO A PERFORMING COMMUNITY

Building further on the collaborative processes outlined above, as well as the framework for “Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success” section of the toolkit, the following framework outlines the steps that a collaborative group goes through in order to perform optimally. Below are the steps to a performing community, with the major tasks of each step included.

Gathering – “Why am I here and what do I have to contribute?”

The first step in a performing community is gathering. The primary tasks of the gathering step are about gaining a collective understanding of why those gathered are there and what they have to contribute. The act of gathering includes using a stakeholder map to identify and invite the right stakeholders to the table, setting the right meeting environment, and identifying the individual strengths of and benefits for the stakeholders gathered.

Chaos – “What is our purpose?”

Before a group can effectively work together, it often experiences chaos. During the chaos step, a group experiences barriers to successful collaboration such as poor communication, lack of leadership, absence of vision and mission, and an inability to use conflict positively and constructively. Though individuals may understand the reason for the group and what it hopes to achieve, the means by which to reach those goals, as well as individual roles, may not be well-defined. Combined with limited resources, these barriers can make the chaos step frustrating. The task of bringing a group out of chaos is to define the group’s purpose.

Unity – “How Will We Do It?”

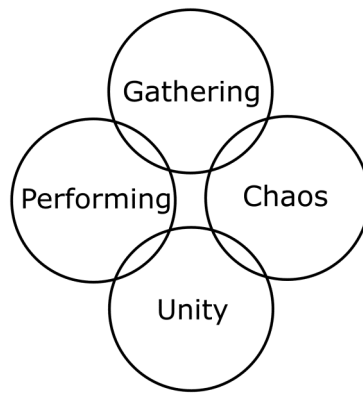
After a group overcomes the roadblocks to success that occur during chaos, it can then experience unity. Unity usually involves members working together to overcome the barriers they encountered during the chaos step. Specifically, the primary task of the unity step centers on defining how to accomplish the work and usually involves members developing guiding principles and a collaboration charter or memorandum of understanding, using the consensus

decision process and group diagnostic tools, addressing and resolving conflict, determining internal communication mechanisms and roles and commitments.

Performing – “Do It ... What’s Next?”

After uniting as a group, a collaborative is then in a position to perform by doing the community organizing work and taking the next steps. Of particular importance is to maintain the group’s momentum and make progress without overwhelming group members. Performing involves assessing the needs and resources in the community, developing and implementing a strategic plan, and demonstrating and celebrating successes from plan implementation.

Although outlined here in a linear format, this framework and process is really an iterative one in that the steps are interconnected, as illustrated in the concentric circles diagram below. It is common for a collaborative group to frequently find themselves in more than one step at the same time or touching back on previously addressed steps as issues arise and forward progress is made. Be assured that this is a normal part of a collaborative group’s performance!



WHAT THE COLLABORATIVE NEEDS FROM GROUP MEMBERS

Every successful collaborative depends upon contributions from its group members. Some general examples of what a collaborative group's needs might include are as follows:

- **Commitment** – reading materials, following through, working
- **Participation** – come to meetings, providing feedback or ideas
- **Support** – recruiting, attending events, advocating with decision makers on our issues, talking up issues
- **Honesty** – speaking up if you have an issue
- **Remaining solution-focused** when identifying or discussing problems
- **Commitment to do the work** – making clear the expectations up front
- **Attending to the relationships within the group**

We almost never write this stuff down or tell people this when we are recruiting, but it's important to have this intentional conversation, as it will help to inform the collaborative group's next steps in setting the group up for success in order to do community organizing work.

As a group, discuss and record answers to the following question:
“What does collaborating mean for us?”

Be sure to integrate answers from the “What the Collaborative Needs from Group Members” discussion in the “What I Have to Contribute to & How I Benefit from This Collaborative” discussion here also.