

How and Why to Build Collaborations

Adapted from: Linden, Russell M. 2002. *Working Across Boundaries: Making collaboration work in government and nonprofit organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Introduction: There is a national trend moving organizations from a ‘within’ focus to a ‘between’ focus. This new networked world is characterized by new partnerships, for example the US Postal Service and FedEx and government agencies integrating natural resource management. Why is this happening? “Working across boundaries delivers better service, value, and outcomes for customers, stakeholders, and communities.” The idea of collaboration is often first driven by budget constraints, but also by a “service first” interest.

What is Collaboration? It is both joint effort and joint ownership

Why Collaborate?

- Better use of scarce resources, cost savings
- Ability to create something you can’t have on your own
- Higher quality, more integrated product or service for the end user
- Potential for organizational and individual learning
- Better ability to achieve important outcomes

Why Now?

- Complexity of challenges, multiple goals, lack of agreement for achieving ends, and growing number of stakeholders
- Blurring of boundaries, particularly between public and private sectors
- Move to horizontal/networked structures; new economy based on speed, agility and responsiveness – “customers want control and choices customized to their preferences”
- Advances in information technology
- A public unwilling to accept and fund poor performance; need for accountability for outcomes

Assumptions

- Collaboration can lead to extraordinary results but isn’t for everyone
- Needs careful attention to process, but bias for action
- Will use best judgement
- Requires learning to think more collaboratively

Hurdles

- Problems with communication and value differences at interpersonal level
 - Issues of power, self-serving bias, fear of losing control/autonomy, lack of trust, turf concerns
- Distrust at organizational level
 - Immediate costs and remote benefits; differing goals and measurements; low credit or reward; individually oriented appraisal systems; line item budget systems; WIIFM; and different rules, cultures, and values

- Systemic problems such as fragmentation of responsibility
 - Ethos of individualism, bias for competition, fragmentation, diffused authority, narrow categorical funding programs

Framework for Collaboration

- Basics are in place
 - Shared purpose or goal can't be achieved on own
 - Willing parties
 - Right people at table
 - Parties have open, credible process
 - Joint ownership, agreed norms or ground-rules, knowledge of each other, transparency, skillful convening
 - Initiative have champion(s) with clout
 - Articulates purpose and benefits, makes sure basics are attended to, keeps leaders informed, helps parties engage in joint problem-solving, provides confidence, hope, and resilience
 - Partnering workshops
 - Assessment: Are the basics in place?

Forming Relationships

- Begin meetings with simple way to reconnect people
- Model open, candid communication
- Build trust by giving parties a chance to be accountable
- Do some informal exploring and careful listening
- Share accurate information, both requested and unrequested
- Make conscious use of stories
- Set aside time to work explicitly on relationships and trust
- Find ways to create a sense of an “entity”

Developing High Stakes

- What creates high stakes? Working on an activity that is very important to them, their leaders, their customers, and other stakeholders; activity is visible to others; consequences of doing the activity well or poorly are large; doing the activity will feel the consequences directly in the near term
- How to create high stakes? Help others develop a line of sight, develop a sense of urgency, make current performance visible and accountability real, identify a higher purpose

Creating a Constituency for Collaboration

- Create visible signs of success and share credit widely
- Set clear, simple goals that resonate with the public; invite outside groups to help and monitor progress
- Use symbols to reinforce the partnership's power
- Invoke stakeholders at every step
- Educate stakeholders to see connection between collaboration and their self-interest
- Think politically, without becoming political

Building Collaborative Leadership

- Use collaboration as a vehicle for joint planning, policy development, and resource allocation
- Recognize interdependence of each agency's mission, and respect each one's autonomy, diversity, and cultural values
- Initiate programs that are outcome-based, comprehensive, preventive
- Diminish or eliminate categorical, narrowly defined programs
- Support replication of programs and strategies that demonstrate measurable positive outcomes
- Use collaborative resource allocation strategies, including pooling of funds and development of joint budgets
- Use accountability measures and benchmarks to track client well-being
- Foster creativity, mutual trust, and respect among all partners and the community
- Use inclusive techniques which are more "pull" than "push"

Phases in Collaborative Journey

- **Phase I. Courtship** –
 - focus on basics
 - make effort to create an open environment including what's in it for each party, concerns and risks, benefits; model openness
 - identify boundaries (what's on table and what isn't)
 - develop general game plan for next year
 - try one or a few small projects
- **Phase II. Getting Serious** –
 - gain deeper knowledge of core group members
 - develop a more detailed road map for the initiative
 - start several short-term collaborative projects
 - publicize the results of the early projects, start to involve others
 - identify stakeholder groups of each agency and meet with them
 - design and create governance structure for group
 - deal with any emerging issues or threats
 - set some initial performance metrics to determine progress
- **Phase III. Commitment** –
 - Make changes in key human resources policies to support collaboration
 - Assign some people part- or full-time to the initiative
 - Integrate information systems among the agencies where possible
 - Base promotions, in part, on collaborative behavior
 - Develop flexible budgeting systems so resources can be reallocated as needed
 - Measure, track, and publicize the initiative and its results
 - Take active steps to grow an external and internal constituency
 - Create a brand, an identify for the collaboration and its products & services
- **Leaving a Legacy** –
 - Internal learning, growth, and change at the individual and agency levels increase the chances for success and for increased benefits to clients

- **More Keys to Successful Collaboration** – continuity of leadership, play to each parties strengths, keep collaborative efforts voluntary, acquire flexible resources, measure and post results, balance need to plan with requirements for results.

Adapted from: Austin, James E. 2000. *The Collaboration Challenge: How nonprofits and businesses succeed through strategic alliances*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Example of strategic alliance for website development: MCI Worldcom with the National Geographic Society created Marco Polo Geography that can be integrated into K-12 curriculum. This has led to other similar projects with NEH, AAAS and other partners.

Forces for Collaboration

- Macro: political shifts of responsibility from federal government to private organizations; economic downsizing; social complexities
- Nonprofit benefits: cost savings, economies of scale and scope, ‘can’t do it alone’, revenue enhancement
- Corporate benefits: strategy enrichment for social visibility, higher morale, business generation, culture building

Collaboration Continuum

- Philanthropic stage – grants given with little interaction
- Transactional stage – events sponsorship connects with business operations
- Interactive stage – joint ventures are central to both organizational strategies

Making the Connection

- Systematic search for an alliance
- Market makers
- Getting acquainted
- Engaging top leadership
- Creating personal connections and relationships

Ensuring Strategic Fit

- Clarifying purpose and fit
- Matching needs and overlapping values
- Growing together through small beginnings and bolder ventures
- Collaboration breeds more collaboration
- Shared visioning
- New leadership and new strategies

Generating Value

- Quantifying benefits that are useful and convincing to stakeholders; recognizing cost/benefits
- Creating value – core competencies, joint ventures, social benefits
- Balancing value – needs to flow both ways equally
- Renewing value – continual innovation

Managing the Relationship

- Focused attention

- Institutionalism
- Building trust
- Communicating effectively between partners, within organization, and with outsiders
- Pursuing learning
- Collaboration portfolio

Collaboration Drivers and Enablers

- Matching up and starting off
- Progressive engagement and resource exchange
- Scaling up and organizational integration
- Alliance drivers – mission, strategy, and values alignment; personal connections and relationships; value creation
- Alliance enablers – clear purpose and focused attention, mutual expectations, communication processes
- Alliance challenges – communication and relationship management, brand dissemination, value creation

Guidelines for Collaborating Successfully

- Connection with purpose and people
- Clarity of purpose
- Congruity of mission, strategy, and values
- Creation of value
- Communication between partners

Compiled by Barbara Hutchinson