

# Collaboration: What Makes It Work

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# Benefits of Collaboration

Why form a partnership?

- Complexity and scale of issues makes collaboration the most effective approach
- Economic realities – increased efficiency, lower costs
- Better service to clients

# Benefits of Collaboration

- Respond to a crisis (e.g., organizations in danger of closing)
- Improve a system – unified set of services
- Reduce expenses for “back office” functions – rent, technology, support services
- Required by funders/other authorities

# What is collaboration?

**Collaboration** *is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals.*

*The relationship includes a commitment to a definition of mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards*

# Ingredients for Successful Collaboration

How did we identify them?

- Looked for all studies of collaborative initiatives & their success/failure - located several hundred – retained 40
- Synthesized findings – identified 20 factors
- Put into categories for ease of use

# Ingredients for Successful Collaboration

Factors in six categories:

Environment

Membership

Process and structure

Communications

Purpose

Resources

# Ingredients for Successful Collaboration

1. Research – based: evidence from case studies
2. Not a step-by-step “how to”
3. “Ingredients” to maximize in whatever way makes sense

# Collaboration is a Process

- Collaborative success is not the result of a formula or the product of a structure
- Collaboration is a process that requires
  - Attention
  - Commitment
  - Work

## 1. Factors related to the ENVIRONMENT

### **History of collaboration or cooperation in the community.**

A history of collaboration or cooperation exists in the community and offers the potential collaborative partners an understanding of the roles and expectations required in collaboration and enables them to trust the process.

## 1. Factors related to the ENVIRONMENT

**Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community.**

The collaborative group (and by implication, the agencies in the group) is perceived within the community as reliable and competent—at least related to the goals and activities it intends to accomplish.

## 1. Factors related to the ENVIRONMENT

### **Favorable political and social climate.**

Political leaders, opinion-makers, persons who control resources, and the general public support (or at least do not oppose) the mission of the collaborative group.

## **2. Factors related to the MEMBERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS**

### **A. Mutual respect, understanding, and trust.**

Members of the collaborative group share an understanding and respect for each other and their respective organizations: how they operate, their cultural norms and values, limitations, and expectations.

## **2. Factors related to the MEMBERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS**

### **B. Appropriate cross-section of members.**

To the extent that they are needed, the collaborative group includes representatives from each segment of the community who will be affected by its activities.

## **2. Factors related to the MEMBERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS**

### **C. Members see collaboration as in their self-interest.**

Collaborating partners believe that they will benefit from their involvement in the collaboration and that the advantages of membership will offset costs such as loss of autonomy and turf.

## **2. Factors related to the MEMBERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS**

### **D. Ability to compromise.**

Collaborating partners are able to compromise, since the many decisions within a collaborative effort cannot possibly fit the preferences of every member perfectly.

### **3. Factors related to PROCESS AND STRUCTURE**

#### **A. Members share a stake in both process and outcome.**

Members of a collaborative group feel “ownership” of both the way the group works and the results or product of its work.

### **3. Factors related to PROCESS AND STRUCTURE**

#### **B. Multiple layers of participation.**

Every level (upper management, middle management, operations) within each partner organization has at least some representation and ongoing involvement in the collaborative initiative.

### **3. Factors related to PROCESS AND STRUCTURE**

#### **C. Flexibility.**

The collaborative group remains open to varied ways of organizing itself and accomplishing its work.

### **3. Factors related to PROCESS AND STRUCTURE**

#### **D. Development of clear roles and policy guidelines.**

The collaborating partners clearly understand their roles, rights, and responsibilities, and they understand how to carry out those responsibilities.

### **3. Factors related to PROCESS AND STRUCTURE**

#### **E. Adaptability.**

The collaborative group has the ability to sustain itself in the midst of major changes, even if it needs to change some major goals, members, etc., in order to deal with changing conditions.

### **3. Factors related to PROCESS AND STRUCTURE**

#### **F. Appropriate pace of development.**

The structure, resources, and activities of the collaborative group change over time to meet the needs of the group without overwhelming its capacity, at each point throughout the initiative.

## **4. Factors related to COMMUNICATION**

### **A. Open and frequent communication.**

Collaborative group members interact often, update one another, discuss issues openly, and convey all necessary information to one another and to people outside the group.

## **4. Factors related to COMMUNICATION**

### **B. Established informal relationships and communication links.**

In addition to formal channels of communication, members establish personal connections — producing a better, more informed, and cohesive group working on a common project.

## 5. Factors related to PURPOSE

### A. Concrete, attainable goals and objectives.

Goals and objectives of the collaborative group are clear to all partners, and can realistically be attained.

## 5. Factors related to PURPOSE

### B. Shared vision.

Collaborating partners have the same vision, with clearly agreed-upon mission, objectives, and strategy. The shared vision may exist at the outset of collaboration, or the partners may develop a vision as they work together.

## 5. Factors related to PURPOSE

### C. Unique purpose.

The mission and goals or approach of the collaborative group differ, at least in part, from the mission and goals or approach of the member organizations.

## **6. Factors related to RESOURCES**

### **A. Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time.**

The collaborative group has an adequate, consistent financial base, along with the staff and materials needed to support its operations. It allows sufficient time to achieve its goals and includes time to nurture the collaboration.

## **6. Factors related to RESOURCES**

### **B. Skilled leadership.**

The individual who provides leadership for the collaborative group has organizing and interpersonal skills, and carries out the role with fairness. Because of these characteristics (and others), the leader is granted respect or “legitimacy” by the collaborative partners.

# Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory

Self assessment tool that organizations can use to see where they feel they stand on factors that influence the success of collaboration

*Concluding Questions  
& Comments*