



GREATER GOOD
CONSULTING

COLLABORATION: why you should do it and how to do it well

Jodi DeLibertis & Lydia Watts

Youth at Risk Conference
June 13, 2007



GREATER GOOD
CONSULTING

What is Collaboration?

Collaboration refers abstractly to all processes wherein people work together —applying both to the work of individuals as well as larger collectives and societies. (Wikipedia)

Is a means through which individuals or organizations work together in a concerted effort to achieve mutual goals. (“Real Collaboration” by David La Piana, pg. 4)



Collaboration Defined

“A process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem [or issue] can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible.”
(Gray, 1989, p.5)

This definition declares some of the benefits.



Why is Collaboration Important?

- Funders since the 1970s - and increasingly through today - are demanding collaboration
- Collaboration can lead to greater results than efforts undertaken alone or in isolation
- The nonprofit sector has increasingly seen collaboration as a “solution”
- The “extreme” form of collaboration is mergers, a trend increasingly seen or demanded within the nonprofit sector



Benefits of Collaboration

- Less duplication, less overlap of services, better outcomes for communities
- Could share administrative or overhead costs/duties
- Less or better coordinated competition for funds
- Ability to show significant and measurable outcomes of projects
- Trust built between community members
- Better communication and cooperation
- "Multi-determined problems, such as poverty, environmental degradation, poor educational achievement, and the weakness of civic and cultural institutions require multi-disciplinary approaches for workable solutions" (La Piana, page 2)



Tales from the real world

- Six international NGOs brought together by funder to build their capacity to advance the field
- Ten local NPOs working together with a team of marketing professionals to communicate the value of the City's nonprofit community



Elements of a Successful Collaboration

- Committed leadership
- Shared vision from the start ... even if it is vague
- Taking the time to build relationships
- Unambiguous goals
- Clearly defined roles
- Commitment at multiple levels of the organization
- Dedicated staff time
- Not wasting time, running meetings efficiently and effectively
- Sustainability in the midst of change



Successful Collaboration Simplified

The **Partnership PACT™** technique used by the Boston Coaching Company Coaches helps participants visualize the techniques needed to work collaboratively for maximum results.

Positive answers = positive momentum.

- Are you both aligned about how you will know you have reached your goal?
- Do you have confidence in partner's ability?
- Do you feel this person has confidence in your ability to accomplish your goal?
- Is candid freedom of expression possible?





Challenges of Collaboration

- Autonomy issues and territoriality
- Conflicting organizational cultures
- Need for trust-building between organizations
- Lack of support or commitment from leadership
- Lack of common understanding or solid relationships
- Limited resources, geographic distances, etc.



Stages of Collaboration

- Inspiration – perceived potential synergies, creative, experimental
- Formalization – seen as critical to the organizations' missions, MOU signed, staff time devoted
- Operation – implementing activities agreed upon during formalization, has the potential to last for years



Checklist for Effective Collaboration

- Communication – an open and clear with an established process for communication between meetings
- Sustainability – plan for sustaining membership and resources
- Research and evaluation
- Resources – financial and human
- Catalysts – the reason you are coming together
- Connectedness between members
- Leadership
- Understanding the community



Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

- Assume leadership role or inspire another to do so
- Engage in trust-building efforts – formal and informal (example of sharing meetings)
- Invest in capacity-building efforts to aid collaboration (outside facilitator, strategic planning, communication processes)
- Learn meeting facilitation skills and then use them
- Identify a unifying rallying call or event
- Engage funders in discussion – they may fund efforts to improve collaboration
- Own your mistakes
- Remain quiet and allow others to step forward
- Remember that it takes TIME



Resources

- Collaboration Handbook, Amherst Wilder Foundation (1994)
- Collaborating, Barbara Gray (1989)
- "Real Collaboration: A Guide for Grantmakers," David La Piana, January 2001
- Emerging Partnerships, The Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management (1997)
- "Nonprofit Collaboration & Mergers: Finding the Right Fit – a Resource Guide for Nonprofits," United Way of Greater Milwaukee
- "Assessing Your Collaboration: A Self Evaluation Tool," *Journal of Extension*, April 1999
- "Snapshots: Research Highlights from the Nonprofit Sector Research Fund," The Aspen Institute, February 2001
- "The Seven Secrets of Effective Collaborative Leaders," Hank Rubin, *Aspire Now*.