

SIX STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION BUILDING:

What is the issue to be tackled:

Too often Collaborations come together because some funding stream has appeared. However, the healthier approach is for there to be some community consensus that a given issue has for too long been either ignored or ineffectively addressed. Many local United Ways are great at highlighting several of those critical community issues. Without the proper community energy focused on the issue to be tackled there is little hope that the problem will be genuinely addressed.

Starting Collaboration: who is invited:

Ah, the \$64,000 question. There are two fields of thought: (1) invite only the non-profit agencies who have a stake in the given issue, or (2) invite those agencies as well as non-traditional stakeholders who have a connection to the issue. Let's take Child Neglect and Abuse. Sure, there are a number of child welfare and governmental agencies with a stake in this issue. But, don't school districts, police departments, the faith community and even neighborhood associations also have a connection to this issue? While option #1 above will more likely ensure that whatever dollars are raised to tackle the issue will be divided among fewer providers, option #2 offers the most hope for creative, innovative, and sustainable solutions to the problem.

Building a Strategic Plan:

This is the most important phase of Collaboration building. The partners have to agree upon a core mission and clear outcomes that will be achieved through very specific goals and objectives. Even more key is that the goals and objectives must have achievable timelines and clear delegation of which partner is to be responsible for which goals and objectives.

Who is in charge:

Effective Collaboration leader(s) should be seen by all members as being open to the ideas brought to the table. While a given agency can lead, sometimes very effectively, it is generally better to reach out to the non-agency world for leadership. Corporate leaders with a passion for the issue can often be great at leading Collaborations, with one caveat: typically they need a collaboration manager/consultant to work with them to provide the necessary structure to the process. This model is practiced quite effectively by United Way when working with their volunteers.

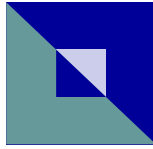
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**Holding each other accountable:**

Once the Strategic Plan for the Collaborative effort is determined, there will be a variety of organizations that will have duties and responsibilities to ensure that the overall goals are achieved. Someone/some organization needs to be the overall Collaboration Manager. Everyone in the Collaboration is dependent on some other organization to fulfill their duties. If not, the whole process tends to break down. And it is this issue, the ability for a range of organizations to effectively work together, that will determine success or failure.

Collaboration Life-Cycles:

Healthy Collaborations generally last no more than 2-4 years. First of all, it takes tremendous energy to get Collaboration started. Sure, everyone is excited at first, particularly if there are funding streams awaiting the Collaboration to generate a plan. But, once the Collaboration moves from visioning/thinking/planning to the action phase, the energy begins to wane. To sustain the Collaboration until its conclusion will take real stamina from the Collaboration leadership. After 3-4 years, the goals set in the beginning are either being achieved or not. If they are, the work is becoming part of regular community programs. If not, no-one wants to be part of the Collaboration anyway. The worst mistake community members can make is to attempt to keep a Collaboration alive when it is time for it to end.

John Ross Collaboration Development & Management experience:

- 1999-2006: The Partnership For Children: a Tarrant County, Texas early childhood collaboration. Partners included 20+ agencies with a focus on early childhood issues. Founder and Collaboration Chair.
- 2004-2007: Building Connections – Building Community: a federally funded community alternative response program for neglected and abused children. Partners included city government, (particularly the Police Department), Child Protective Services, school district, faith community and citizen groups. Developed project framework, facilitated the implementation of the effort.
- 2004-2007: Arlington Child Care Council: community-wide effort to improve the quality of child care in Arlington, Texas. Partners included city government, school district, child care providers, faith community, business leaders. Developed project framework, facilitated the implementation of the effort.
- 1995-1997: The Safety Network: a county-wide client management systems collaboration. Partners included 15 agencies with case management responsibilities for families connected to the welfare system. Provided leadership.

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