



**Developing Collaborations and Partnerships
A Resource Guide for Community Organizations**

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INTRODUCTION

Many community situations need everyone, or at least several groups and organizations, to be involved, to work together. The project, event, issue or opportunity may be too big or complex for one group to tackle on their own and could require the mandates, participation, resources, authorities, ideas and agreement of many. When this is the case, knowing how to proceed is important. Whether the collaboration is big or small, simple or complex, this little handbook provides some basic information and a ten-step approach for effective collaborations.

Strong viable community collaborations don't just happen:

- They need to be understood, properly developed, managed and well maintained
- Skills, knowledge and experience are required when people, groups, organizations or different communities decide that working together is more effective than working on their own
- There is an increased emphasis on and expectation that community groups will collaborate, particularly for the promotion of economic, social or cultural wellbeing
- In rural and smaller communities, it is just the way things are done

One commonly expressed concern is that working collaboratively may blend, confuse or take away from each group or organization's unique mandate. It normally doesn't, however, there is some truth in the fact that collaborating helps sort out who does what, where funds come from and how they are used. They also point out areas of overlap or duplication. Having a range of groups with separate mandates, or organizational purpose, all working together, is a way to share the load, keep the right people doing the right things and is often a source of power or strength for advocacy should it become necessary.



For Community Collaboration match the tool to your purpose and capacity

WHAT IS COLLABORATION ALL ABOUT?

Collaborations are not only necessary to get some things done, in most instances, they are also a process designed to build community support and increase community capacity. They can reinforce or maintain existing skills and they are a very good way to improve communication, enhance relationships and involve community members in an organized and shared approach to community improvement. There are many other reasons to working together.

For example:

- Finding more creative ideas and solutions to problems
- Improving diversity
- Exploring collective approaches that bring people together
- Building on what is already being done
- Making the best use of limited resources
- Increasing and improving working relationships between groups
- Building a stronger and more skilled volunteer base

WHY DO WE COLLABORATE AND WHAT ARE THE DRAWBACKS?

We collaborate because we believe we can achieve more together than by working alone, and we do this while attempting to avoid duplication and fragmentation of services or increasing any existing tensions in the community. Of course there are drawbacks to collaborations.

For example:

- There could be clashing values/interest or perceptions of unfair advantage
- Concern about too many meetings and lack of agreement about how to proceed
- Fear of change can be problematic
- Issues around power, influence and status
- Starting out strong then dissolving before it should or becoming less supported overtime

WHAT TO DO?

Each situation requires its own approach to remedy its problems. There are, however, some fundamental things that should be in place to ensure healthy relationships and a good experience while working together. There are some keys to success that are useful in any venture where groups of people or organizations pull together.

For example:

- Find a healthy balance between planning and doing
- Get the right skills and people involved at the right time so that everyone has a role to play and they understand what is expected from them
- Try not to let people get burned out or do things which they are not comfortable or capable of doing
- Have a plan, even a simple one, so you and everyone else knows what is going on
- Ensure that there is open communication, a willingness to make changes and keep expectations realistic

BEING READY, WILLING AND ABLE

Before agreeing to collaborate, it is important to determine your personal readiness to participate, the organizations' interest and ability to be good partners and the preparedness or readiness of the community in which the collaboration will take place. All have to be ready, willing and able. The assessment information that follows will help to determine the status of your situation.

Things to Keep In Mind

Experience shows us that the time spent at the beginning (to establish a firm foundation for the collaboration) will be saved in the long run and will greatly increase the probability of its success. Take time to talk things through so there is less confusion and the ability to resolve any issues. When questions are openly asked and answered there is always an increased sense of integrity, inclusion and relevancy. And through this approach, those who may feel that they are not ready or able to participate find that they can or will be able to with some help from the others. One thing heard in communities is that it doesn't have to be perfect, but if we are willing to help each other, we can all do what we need to do.

3 AREAS OF ASSESSMENT FOR COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

Assessment of need and preparedness is normally the first step to forming effective community-based collaborations. Assessment covers a wide range of possible processes, questions or areas from which information might be gathered or used. Below is a brief overview of the three most relevant areas of assessment for community-based collaborations each with questions that will help to ensure that everyone is ready, willing and able to take part.

1. Individual/Personal – Are You Ready?

If you are the person who will be the main participant in the collaboration, it is important for you to think seriously about what is required. Are you ready, willing and able to do what is needed to be a good partner and to work collaboratively with others? Some people work very well in a group process, but others prefer to work on their own. What type are you? In your organization, do you have the information and authority to make decisions and represent your group? Do you have the time and is the collaboration of enough significance that it will be in your work plan or of enough personal interest to use your volunteer time? And, is there someone to support you or back you up if your time and availability become problematic?

2. Organizational – Is Your Group Ready?

The following questions could be used from an organizational perspective before entering into a collaboration or partnership. Does your organization's mandate fit with the proposed activity? Are your values compatible with the work that will be undertaken and the way it will be done? Does the organization have the resources that might be required (e.g. time, money, people, materials, space, and equipment)? How will the collaboration benefit your organization? Who will represent the organization in a responsible way and how will you support them to do it? How much time will it take and how will that use of time affect your other activities? And, lastly, is there any reason why your organization may not wish to be involved?

3. Community – Is the Community Ready?

Assessment of community preparedness, and the needs and interests are often assumed, and sometimes forgotten, when groups, organizations or even different communities work together. Because the community sector now has paid employees who are doing a great deal of work, collaborations are often connected to their organization's mandate as well as the community's needs. Involving community members and volunteers in all aspects of a community-based collaboration is usually a good idea, including identifying needs and making decisions. Even partnerships among agencies, businesses, governments and institutions can be community-based provided that the goals and outcomes enhance something outside of their own organization. The following are some of the key questions to ask. Does our collaboration address the highest priorities within the community? When and how are we including community members? How will we encourage and support their participation? What is in it for community members or organizations to be involved? How do we ensure inclusion, relevancy, diversity and representation without asking people to take on too much on either a paid or a volunteer basis?

COLLABORATION CHECKLIST #1 – ASSESSMENT

Have we assessed our preparedness and are we ready, willing and able to proceed?

Level of Preparedness	Ready?	Willing?	Able?
Individual (Personal) Am I prepared to collaborate?			
Organizational (Group) Is our organization or group prepared to collaborate?			
Community Is the community prepared for this collaboration?			

COLLABORATION RELATIONSHIPS

More than ever before, there is an expectation that community groups should and will work together, and the reality is that they are. A great deal of time is spent at meetings, sharing information and planning - and sometime there are concerns that all this relationship building is taking time away from the real community work. Actually, relationship building is the real community work. With strong relationships, not only does more get done, it also sets a tone for inclusion, involvement and cooperation that is highly valued by most community members.

There are many types of collaborations and each has a different function or purpose. It can be confusing trying to figure them out. The following examples may help put collaborations into context and avoid confusion.

- If, various community groups or individuals get together to discuss what's going on in the community, with no commitment to action, that is simply **a conversation**, even if they do it more than once.
- When and if they decide to do something together (such as build a playground or host an event) that is called **cooperating on a project**.
- And, if they agree that they should meet on a regular basis to keep each other informed or updated about each organization's progress (with or without any collective action) this is often referred to as **a network**.
- If a number of community agencies (or community groups and individuals) develop a plan together and sign an agreement (or agree verbally) to work together on issues or goals they hold in common, that is normally called a **partnership**. They work together to do whatever it takes to get things done, usually "big picture" things that probably cannot be done by one organization alone.
- When groups and organizations, working together, plan for or address long-term needs and opportunities for their community and influence how it evolves (including the impact of projects, networks, partnerships and collaborations, that is **community development**.

All of these examples are levels of community engagement or involvement, from random or ad hoc engagement to formal agreements. They are all forms of collaboration, making the term “collaboration” a descriptor for all group or collective participation within the larger context. Regardless of what it is called, the desire is to work together on projects or activities where different interests, resources or perspectives are useful but do not blend mandates together. The level of risk and the amount of resources involved will dictate how formal or informal the collaboration needs to be. Usually though, each group remains independent, maintaining their own purpose, board, staff, volunteers and budgets, as they enter into different and often numerous collaborations to better serve their community.

Things to Keep In Mind

At this time in the history of community development, interagency partnerships, community engagement and community networks are increasing and multi-sector collaborations are becoming very common. In smaller communities, working together has always been necessary, but with various groups using the same volunteers, receiving similar grants, often with a commitment to being inclusive of community, knowing how to work together is a high priority. As well, the fact that many goals have a broad base of agency interests and a range of authorities required (e.g.: poverty reduction or community safety), the need for a structure, a solid process and some formality has become essential.

COLLABORATION CHECKLIST #2 – COLLABORATION RELATIONSHIPS

What type of collaboration are we in?

Description	Y/N	Comments
Conversation		
Cooperating on a Project		
Network		
Partnership		
Community Development		

WORKING TOGETHER EFFECTIVELY

Depending on the approach being used and the degree of complexity of the collaboration, the basic requirements for any collaboration always include the following:

- Common goals and a shared vision
- Buy-In from all parties and agreement on leadership roles
- A commitment to community involvement
- A solid planning process and collective decision-making
- Shared risk, power, resources and accountability
- Formal agreement and a practical operating structure

BENEFITS OF WORKING TOGETHER

There are a number of benefits to working together and community-based collaborations provide many of them at one time. Some examples are:

- Increased ownership and buy –in to community issues and opportunities
- More productivity, many hands sharing the load
- A sense of accomplishment, pride and belonging
- Increased efficiency and effectiveness in the use of community resources
- Identification of common ground between or among agencies and groups
- Development of community and individual skills and capacity
- Better communication and increased coordination of activities
- A united front – acting together
- A greater sense of what the community has to offer

FACTORS THAT COULD IMPACT COLLABORATION

Many factors can make or break the collaboration. Each group should consider the following and add to the list of things that could have either a positive or negative impact on the group, the community and the projects:

- Power
- History
- Resources
- Leadership
- Values and Ideology
- Self-interest
- Perceptions
- Results
- Communication and Information Sharing

COLLABORATION CHECKLIST #3 – IMPACT

Have we discussed and addressed any issues or opportunities related to:

Item	Y/N	Comments
Power		
History		
Resources		
Leadership		
Values and Ideology		
Self-interest		
Perceptions		
Results		
Communication		
Information Sharing		
Other		

A WORD ABOUT WORDS

Most communities want to work together when and where it makes sense to do so. They want to have community members involved whenever possible, and they want to make a positive difference in how their community evolves. People use the word partnership to describe any and all collaborative efforts, but here are some things we've learned about language over the years:

- Because working together on community activities is becoming increasingly complex, it is useful to know that there are many kinds and degrees of relationships and they are called different things
- It is important that everyone know what is meant by various words or terms being used and sometimes people will not say that they don't know – or it may mean something different to them and they assume it means the same to others
- There are no set rules about language or terminology but specific words do have meaning to certain people so it's best to decide what you are calling your collaborative effort and ensure that everyone agrees to the definition
- The terms community engagement and community development are also commonly used when groups are working together and when added to the mix may be confusing
- Ultimately the language and terms you use should make sense to the people in your community

4 FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

1. Capacity

While there is never a perfect time, it is important that everyone involved be as prepared as possible and has the capacity to work together. Even if you or your organization are not totally prepared, it is ok to get started and let the others know what you need to contribute more effectively.

Key Questions: *Does your group have the capacity to enter into a collaboration or partnership with others? Do you know what you can bring to value-add to the relationship, process and the outcomes? How will your organizational or personal capabilities be used or built upon through the process of collaboration.*

2. Relationships

In small and medium sized communities, relationships are transparent, very significant and often go beyond the work environment. In some cases, these relationships make for a positive process and things get done well and quickly because there is trust and familiarity. In other instances there could be issues related to power struggles, a history of exclusion or burnout.

Key Questions: *Are community relationships well established and healthy or do they need to be further developed? If they are already in place, is there any history or past experience that could help or hinder the process? How will your collaboration build on the positive and address the negative?*

3. Process

A process is the way that things will be done. It outlines the structure as well as the steps to be taken to ensure that everyone is on the same page, and that momentum is maintained and results are achieved. There are many approaches possible, so it is useful to make sure that everyone agrees on what will be done, how, when, and by whom. It is also a good idea to determine how decisions will be made and how conflict will be resolved.

Key Questions: *Is there a plan and clear process in place for the collaboration? Is there enough leadership and skill within the group to develop and implement a plan and if not is there some external help that can be obtained? Is there agreement about who will do what, how decisions will be made and how conflict will be addressed?*

4. Outcomes

Each group, organization or community may want to see different outcomes from the same collaboration. While the activity or project may have a common vision and goal, the results may be measured or used differently depending on the group or organization's priorities, resources, authorities and mandates.

Key Questions: *Is it clear what each partner wants to achieve through the collaboration? If there are different agendas, will the collaboration be able to respect and address all of them? Does each partner know how they will measure outcomes collectively or separately, and will the process allow for the results everyone hopes for? Is it clear to all how the outcomes and data or information will be used by each group?*

10 SKILLS AND ABILITIES FOR EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Collaboration involves skills, knowledge and experience and often these are available within various members of the group. No one person is expected to have all the skills and experience required and even having experience does not ensure that the right skills or knowledge have been obtained. Collaboration really means sharing what you know, being open to new ideas and approaches and learning as you go. The following are ten of the most common skills required for effective collaborations and should exist somewhere in the group:

1. **Negotiation skills:** the ability to create a situation in which all members are satisfied with the direction or decision. Partners who perceive that they have been forced to concede generally do not serve the collaboration well.
2. **Group facilitation and team building:** being able to read a room and manage a process is a skill that comes with experience and is essential to build healthy relationships. Team building is inclusive and makes people feel comfortable with a sense of belonging.
3. **Planning:** the ability to organize and move the group from an idea or intent to action and assist in managing and directing change. Remember that planning is a tool to move things forward and should not prevent action or change.
4. **Evaluation:** evaluation determines what success should look like and what information is required to measure progress and results. It includes skills to collect and analyze the information and how to present it in a useful manner.
5. **Problem solving and conflict resolution:** understanding techniques that identify problems and safely resolve them including conflict that typically arises from personality issues, power struggles, bullying, and loss of focus. Lack of leadership or low trust.
6. **Time and project management:** involves balancing different schedules and levels of involvement toward a project plan with resources and timeframes that frequently change. Partners don't want to feel that their time or resources are being wasted.
7. **Financial management:** skills that demonstrate responsibility to set a budget, live within it and be able to show that resources are being used both effectively and efficiently.
8. **Managing outside/specialized help:** knowledge and experience in contracting and overseeing assistance for services that you may not totally understand.
9. **Working with volunteers:** skills that encourage people to get and stay involved and to appreciate and make the best use of people's skills, time, and willingness to learn.
10. **Stress management:** ability to recognize the potential for stress and handle difficult or stressful situations in a realistic and honest way so that everyone benefits.

10 WAYS TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN EFFECTIVE COLLABORATIONS

The following ten steps are the process used to develop, maintain, manage and monitor collaborations. Each one should be considered and addressed to whatever degree is necessary:

1. Vision: A common or shared picture for the future

Agreeing to a common vision is a good way to start a collaboration or partnership. Often when community groups, individuals or organizations get together to address a common interest or concern there is a tendency to focus on the issue or problem. Visioning encourages those involved to image the idea scenario. Prospective partners can move more easily into action when they have a better idea of what the future potentially could hold and, with a vision they are better able to see their interests or mandates connecting beyond just one project or activity.

If the collaboration is just for one project or activity, a vision may not be necessary. It could be that just discussing the ideal future for the community or sector might help place the work to be done into the context of a future vision.

Some partnership groups like to capture their vision in a one or two line vision statement. This statement is used to explain the one main theme of the work being done and must be supported by all members of the collaboration.

Tips and Advice

- Involve as many people as possible in imagining the ideal future based on the collaboration's purpose or intent.
- Combine the ideas and thoughts into a clear picture. Find a simple way of describing it in one or two lines. This is called a vision statement.
- Remember that a vision is a picture. Just describe the ideal; the planning process will figure out how to make it happen.
- Sometimes the vision is developed after all the rest of the planning takes place (it doesn't always happen first)

2. Goals: What we are aiming for - the desired outcomes

Goals are clear, easy to understand statements of what we are aiming for, actions and outcomes that help to make the vision a reality. Basically they answer the question: What are we hoping for or what are we doing? Goals should be measurable accomplishments that can be broken down into tasks that are doable within the scope of capacity and resources and they should be able to be evaluated.

There is sometimes confusion about language around goals and objectives. Basically, as long as everyone agrees, it doesn't matter which term you use, however, goals are normally the bigger items and objectives are the steps or actions needed to reach them.

Tips and Advice

- Refer to the vision and decide what has to happen or change to make the vision possible.
- Discuss the gap that exists between the current reality or situation and the desired outcome. Identify the broad-based areas of action that will close the gap. These are the goals.
- Be sure that the goals can be achieved within a reasonable period of time. They must be easy to understand and be realistic given available time and resources.
- Determine how you will know when the goals have been reached. This discussion will help with progress reports and will form the foundation for progress monitoring and evaluation.

3. Membership: Deciding who will be involved

Collaborations, regardless of the size or duration of the activity, should select members carefully based on their “stake” or interest in the purpose, goals or outcomes of the collaboration. Motivation to join a collective group or collaboration depends on the benefits to each partner or organization and how closely the vision and goals link to their personal interests or organization’s mandate. There should be a good mix of skills, resources and expertise and a very clear understanding of what is, or could be, expected from each partner.

A group with diversity in age, experience, ethnicity, and gender makes for a much more interesting and dynamic collaboration, however, diversity for its own sake should not be the driving force behind including people. The real connection is based on what they can give to and get from the collaboration. When recruiting potential partners it is important to explain why they are being asked to participate and what will be expected from them. The collaboration should involve people whose skills, commitments, connections and credibility can ensure that it achieves its goals. Membership may change over time, making it is important to plan for succession and to maintain a core group who know the history of the collaboration. Keep in mind that it is not unreasonable to include people who are there to learn, gain experience and make connections or even those who may bring opposing thoughts to the group.

Tips and Advice

- Invite people who have a real interest or mandate as well as expertise or skills that would be useful to collaboration. Start with a small group of very keen people and grow it from there.
- Discuss the challenges of working together as a group and determine how concerns will be addressed before they happen. Sometimes a code of conduct agreement, on how people will behave or communicate with each other, is useful.
- Not all members are equal and there should be discussion about what differences exist or how involvement or commitment will work if not all contributors are active partners or available to take part all the time.
- Each member should understand the collaboration could mean sharing resources, risk, power and benefit. If these are not to be shared equally it should made clear at the beginning of the collaboration and agreement reached on who takes what risks and who gets which benefits.

4. Commitment: An agreement to work together

Obtaining agreement or commitment is an important step and involves affirming that all partners agree to work together and move ahead with the goals or project as outlined. Obtaining agreement might be as simple as a show of hands or may be as formal as a signed memorandum of understanding or collaboration agreement. The greater the risk or the more resources involved, the more important understanding, agreement and commitment become.

Formalizing the involvement of all the participants affirms that everyone is committed to proceed with a good understanding of the conditions in which the collaboration is taking place. At the community level ensure that the people involved are the ones who can speak for their family, organization or agency and can enter into a more formal agreement if one is required. In some cases they may need to obtain permission or approval from their boards or from a more senior person.

Tips and Advice

- Clarify what is expected from each person or organization and then affirm his or her interest, commitment and contribution.
- Identify possible barriers or challenges that may make a sustained commitment difficult. Discuss ways of overcoming these obstacles.
- Consider succession planning and maintaining continuity and good communication if certain individuals in the collaboration change. Keep notes so that the history is easy to follow.
- Make sure that everyone understands what they are agreeing to and why it is important.

5. Action Plan: What we will do to reach the goals

An action plan is an outline of the various steps that must be taken to reach the goals and desired outcomes of the collaboration. The steps should include what is to be done, by whom, how and when. The action plan should also identify any resources required and where these resources will come from. When developing an action plan, it is best to remain flexible, as it might be the process that sorts out the real goals and priorities. We learn a great deal as we do the work so sometimes changes are needed.

Action planning should include a discussion about what progress, results and success will look like so that evaluation requirements can be identified up front. Although the action plan need not be complicated, it should be written down and reviewed to make sure that it is do-able in the time allotted, that it stays on track and that it is using the resources in a reasonable way. It is worth noting that more than one action plan may be required if the collaboration is complex or if there are many goals to reach. There are often plans within plans.

Tips and Advice

- Look at the goals all together and discuss the steps or actions needed to reach each one. Occasionally some of the goals can be collapsed together or organized differently.
- Action plans break down the goals into manageable pieces. Prepare a plan by identifying actions that must be taken immediately and those that can wait.
- Place the priority actions in a logical order and decide if what you have identified is do-able.
- Action plans should be detailed and then summarized so that it is easy to read and review. An action plan summary is a good tool to explain what is going on, who is doing what, and when it will be happening.

6. Roles/Responsibilities: Who will do what

The identification of who is doing what is a natural outcome of action planning. It is fine to have lots of good ideas, but without knowing who is in charge, who is doing the work, who reports to whom (and about what) and who has authority or responsibility in the end, the best plans in the world can go wonky. Not only is it important to know who is doing what – it is also important to know that they can and will do what they have agreed to do.

This step also may include a discussion about what practices are acceptable within the collaboration and what are not, but mostly it focuses on what need to be done by whom. Sometimes a more formal structure or assigned roles are required: determining leadership at meetings or on site at projects, note taking, specialized tasks, and a way to keep communication going. A good balance is required between conceptual thinking and doing the work - ensuring that there is leadership as well as worker bees.

When there are gaps between what needs to be done and who can do it, there may be a need to get specialized or outside help. These people are often referred to as resource people with special skills or contracted service providers and are not normally part of the partnership group.

Tips and Advice

- Having clear roles and responsibilities helps the collaboration to be organized. Not everyone needs to be involved in everything and not everyone needs to have a specific role. Involvement can vary.
- Share decision-making, responsibilities and resources. Too often it is the same people taking on lead roles and assuming a great deal of responsibility. If possible try to build community skills and capacity by sharing the load or training others as you go along.
- Form subgroups, committees or task teams where required. Keep in mind that not everyone likes to organize or administer a process – some like to be more conceptual and others like to just get the work done. Keep these preferences and styles in mind when establishing the collaboration structure and action plan.
- Make good use of existing skills and experience but seek outside or expert assistance if necessary.

7. Communication: How information will be shared

Communication is one of the most important aspects of any collaboration regardless of the size, purpose or duration. It is so important that usually needs a plan all its own. The three levels of communication to keep in mind are:

- Communication within the group.
- Two-way communication between the group and the community at large.
- Communication from the various group members and their own organizations and back to the collaboration group.

All communication should be clear, concise, timely and relevant. Most groups like to have an overview of who needs to know what, when and how they will be informed and who is able to be the contact for the group. Providing information in an organized way constitutes the beginning of a communication strategy. This strategy or plan should include:

- The day-to-day information within the partnership
- Information for the public or the broader community
- Specific information as required for media or funders
- Highly focused information and data for support and advocacy purposes

Tips and Advice

- Develop a communication plan by identifying who needs what kind of information and how they should receive it. Remember the role of social media but do not rely on it.
- At the heart of all communication is trust. If this is an issue, get some outside assistance to help establish it and ensure that things stay on track.
- Make sure there is a contact person for the collaboration or partnership group.
- Sort out what is open to the public to know, and when they are to know it, and ensure that there is understanding about what is to be kept confidential or internal and why it needs to be that way.

8. Resources: What is needed and where it will come from

Resources take on a different meaning with each collaboration or activity, although typically they involve human, financial and infrastructure considerations. Infrastructure can be materials and supplies, tools, equipment or buildings. Having the resources you need, or knowing where or how to get them, is fundamental to success in any collaboration and is again another area that may require its own plan, particularly when the work to be done is expensive, long-term or complex.

The first step is to identify the resource that are critical to the success of the collaboration and discuss who can contribute what. Many community groups are used to working together and sharing resources but a resource plan should assess the physical, financial and human requirements and allow for agreement to be reached on where these things will come from. Volunteer and in-kind donations are a big asset to community projects but they require planned support and recognition as well as good management.

Tips and Advice

- Resources include people, money, space, equipment, refreshments, and other items need to operate the collaboration. Don't assume that every partner will or can bring money or resources into the mix.
- Be sure to incorporate training plans and funding strategies as well as other plans to acquire space and material that might be needed.
- If the collaboration needs ongoing revenue, a fundraising strategy might be required to support the work now and in the future.
- Respect all the assets and resources that each partner brings and ensure that recognition takes place on an ongoing basis when time or resources are donated.

9. Evaluation: Assessing progress and results

Evaluation allows a collaboration to assess or monitor progress and provides a means to measure results and success. Although the development of an evaluation plan usually appears in one of the final steps in the process, it should be considered and build in right from the beginning.

Being able to clearly define progress and success is important not only for the collaboration partners, but also for others interested in the work being done, including funders and community authorities. When outside funding is involved, such as donations, grants or government programs, other levels and ways of providing evaluation information may need to satisfy those requirements. Try to determine in advance the expectations, systems for data gathering and measures of success that are required and important for all the stakeholders. Keep in mind that there is always a need for good examples of community collaborations that work, even if they are not perfect.

Tips and Advice

- Evaluation methods and criteria should be considered right from the start of the collaboration and put directly into the discussion about goals.
- Evaluation is ongoing, so continue to monitor, measure and modify as you proceed.
- Do not confuse evaluation with assessments. Normally assessments look at the current situation while evaluation measures progress or results obtained from a specific activity or actions.
- Use evaluation results for planning, adjusting, and promoting the projects and activities as well as the collaboration itself.

10. Revision/Closure: Adjusting, ending or move on

Reaching the goals of the collaboration is cause for celebration and it is also the time to determine whether the collaboration group should continue or disband. Revision can involve terminating the collaboration or deciding to move to new goals. The latter decision would require a new agreement and process in order to keep all members up to date and clear about what they are doing together and what they may need to do within their own group or organization if they were to continue.

Endings are as important as beginnings. Care should be taken to acknowledge the results of the collaboration, the various individuals or organizations that made a difference and the effort that the group itself has made. The following are some suggestions about formalizing and recognizing closure and endings to collaborations.

Tips and Advice

- Ask the members to consider the following:
 - What have been the major successes of the collaboration?
 - What can be done to acknowledge all the hard work and contributions?
 - Who needs to be recognized within and outside the collaboration group?
 - How will we capture the history of the group and the project?
- Celebrate and let the community know what was accomplished. They want to be informed and it is not considered bragging if there have been real results, lessons learned and credit to be given.
- Do not maintain the collaboration beyond its useful purpose. If the group continues in a different format, determine if it is a network to share information, a collective action to be taken or a formal partnership.
- Remember that there is a distinction that needs to remain between what the collective group does together and what they do or are mandated to do on their own.

COLLABORATION CHECKLIST #4 – ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN COLLABORATIONS

Do we have or do we know the following:

Process Step	Y/N	Comments
Vision A common or shared picture for the future		
Goals What we are aiming for - the desired outcomes		
Membership Who will be involved		
Commitment An agreement to work together		
Action Plan What we will do to reach the goals		
Roles/Responsibilities Who will do what		
Communication How information will be shared		
Resources What is needed and where it will come from		
Evaluation How to Assess progress and results		
Revision/Closure When and how to adjust, end or move on		

PARTNERING BEYOND THE COMMUNITY AND BETWEEN SECTORS

Most often community collaborations focus on a particular activity or project and all those with a stake in either the process or the results take part. Recently there have been more inter-agency partnerships established to build a sector response to helping communities stay economically, socially or culturally more viable or to build facilities or services in a more collaborative manner.

Although all the steps in this handbook are applicable to any type of collaborations, those between business/industry and community organizations are unique. Value differences exist between the sectors that may cause barriers to the collaboration. The three sectors (public, private and community) operate in different ways with different languages and styles and different objective and mandates. It is important to clarify what you want to do together, how you will go about it, and how any real or perceived conflicts in values or relationship can be addressed.

Things to Keep In Mind

The not-for-profit or community sector traditionally focuses on principles and inclusive processes to meet community needs while the private sector is often concerned with products, profit and corporate image. Private sector partners have discovered a number of benefits available to them from participating in community collaborations. Community perception and social responsibility as well as increased visibility in the community and marketplace are but a few. The public sector (government and its agencies) is there to serve the public good in an equitable way. Each department has a political leader, policies and a mandated authority or function. Many have funding and programs that serve the needs of communities within that department or agencies mandate. Community collaborations are often an ideal vehicle to deliver their mandate and sometimes they prefer that community group's work together. The benefits to the community organizations can be numerous too, but should be identified and balanced with those of other sectors or be somewhat equal. Ensure that there is mutual benefit and no real or perceived conflict of values or styles in these collaborations, funding agreements and partnerships.

Other funders such as foundations or trusts also refer to themselves as partners or collaborators. This may or may not be a correct interpretation of the relationship. There is a difference between being a financial contributor and being an “at the table” member of a collaboration. In each instance, it is import to sort out (throughout the process) the level of engagement, the commitment, the benefits, the need for information or communication, the amount of shared risk, decision-making and responsibilities, and the requirement for and type of evaluation or advocacy data that will be generated. Each collaboration is unique and each will need to look at the partners involved to ensure that it is a good fit and that the collaboration is the best way to approach the community's needs, plans and dreams.

DEFINITIONS

The definitions below are based on standards currently accepted within the community sector. They show the difference between a community conversation or information sharing meeting and establishing a formal partnership, often with terms and conditions, and everything in between. Use language and terms that are relevant in your own context, remembering that all of it, and how we communicate about it, is based on relationships, activities and in the end, the outcomes.

The following definitions may be useful in determining the type and degree of relationship needed and some options about terminology:

- **Collaboration** involves individuals, groups, organizations or communities working together. We collaborate because we believe that we can achieve more together than acting on our own.
- **Conversations** bring people together to share information and opinions on matters of concern or interest to them. Sometimes these are simply updates about activities from various organizations.
- **Networking** is a process used to build and sustain relationships. It is an inter-connected system of two or more people or organizations that see mutual value or benefit in staying connected.
- **Cooperation** is a process where individuals, groups or communities strive for collaboration and are willing to work together to achieve common goals.
- **Partnership** is a relationship where two or more parties, with compatible goals, form an agreement to share the work, risks, rewards, results and/or proceeds. Often this is a formal written agreement.
- **Community Engagement** is the active participation of community members in something that is of interest to them or may impact on their quality of life. The process may be formal or informal, but it always implies a commitment to hear or involve community members and/or stakeholders.
- **Community Development** is an intentional process whereby community members take collective action and generate actions/solutions to common problems or to take advantage of opportunities. It is the planned and unplanned evolution of any/all aspects of a community.

WHY THIS HANDBOOK WAS WRITTEN

This handbook has been written for small to medium size communities where everyone needs to work together. In most cases they probably always have, however, sometimes a more organized approach is required, because:

1. Community priorities and projects are bigger than one organization or group can handle
2. Doing one or two projects together is not the same as using a collaborative approach most of the time or forming longer-term partnerships
3. Amazing things are taking place in our communities and often they are happening in rapidly changing conditions
4. Community groups are receiving grants and need to avoid overlap or duplication and make the best use of all resources involved
5. Volunteers need to know who is doing what and where they can be of the best use

This handbook has also been written because many people have said that while things do get done in their communities, they are not always as organized as they could be and occasionally there is confusion about: who should do what; how decisions are made; or a lack of clarity about what the end result should be. And, they say that there are sometimes undercurrents of resentment, power struggles, role and mandate confusion or other conflicts that have never been addressed or resolved properly.

This handbook is for ordinary community workers, clubs, councils, groups and volunteers who want or need to do things together that will benefit their communities. It provides some insights, processes and tools for collaboration that will help obtain better collective results, address issues before they become problems and make the best use of your community's talent and resources.

Things to Keep in Mind

The ability to work together successfully requires skill as well as the willingness to do it. When done well it can build confidence and unity in communities and a sense of pride and belonging. Volunteers feel appreciated and are willing to do more. Successful collaborations usually build on and benefit from a wide range of community people's experience, skills and interests and they maximize both the paid and the volunteer experience, generally achieving more than might be accomplished if it were only one group working on their own.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Collaboration can be of great use and benefit to all, and most obstacles can be addressed providing they are brought out into the open, as they as they occur or when they are understood to be serious. This handbook simply provides the basics of what collaborations are, how to go about them and tips for success. No doubt your community has a wealth of additional information to use and build upon. Ask around and see who knows has skills related to group leadership, the process being used, building and maintaining momentum, communication or how to encourage people to get and stay involved. Keep in mind that it is not just the result or the project that you are hoping to undertake – it is the relationship and goodwill that can be generated through the process. But, even after reading this handbook, and talking to people in your community, should you require additional information about collaborations, call or email the contact at the front of the book or google: partnerships, collaboration, community development or community engagement. Keep up the good work and good luck with all your collaborations.

CONTACT

Looking for information about sport, culture and recreation program, services, funding and resources? We can help!

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The South West District for Culture, Recreation, and Sport (SWDCRS) works with community leaders, volunteers and youth to help develop sustainable sport, culture and recreation programs and services.

Our programs and services include training, workshops, networking gatherings, community development and funding support. Specific topics are tailored to match the needs of our communities.

For information, please contact us at:



www.gosouthwest.ca



Facebook/South West District for Culture, Recreation and Sport



@SWDCRS