Assessing Your Collaboration: A Self Evaluation Tool

Many individuals and groups recommend working together to form strong problem-solving collaborative relationships to improve the present status and future well-being of individuals and the communities in which they live (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992, 1995; Dryfoos, 1990, 1994; Lerner & Simon, 1998). Moreover, many local, state, and federal initiatives now require collaboration among multiple sectors (Borden, 1998).

Effective collaborations are able to generate positive outcomes for the audiences they serve.

Collaboration is defined as "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).

Many scholars have suggested that there are key features involved in the collaborative process. For instance, Ash (1989) emphasizes the idea of specific factors underlying characteristics of inter-organizational relations; other scholars (Caplan, 1998; DelPizzo, 1990; Kull, 1991) focus on central features or salient themes of partnership arrangements. Still others outline strategies that can assist collaborators when facing challenges and difficulties (Gomez, 1990, Otterbourg & Timpane, 1986).

Recently, other scholars have identified common factors and characteristics influencing the collaborative process. For example, in their comprehensive review of collaborative factors, Hogue, Parkins, Clark, Bergstrum, and Slinski (1995) from the National Network for Collaboration identified specific factors, such as leadership, communication, community development and sustainability. In an empirical study, Keith et al. (1993) identified five major characteristics: leadership, unity, communication, participation by citizens and informal organizations, and successful accomplishments. Borden (1997) has identified four factors: internal communication, external communication, membership, and goal setting.

Given the importance of these factors, a self-evaluation tool was developed to assist existing and forming groups. The tool is a **self-assessment exercise allowing groups to rate their collaboration on key factors**. Key factors examined here include goals, communication, sustainability, evaluation, political climate, resources, catalysts, policies/laws/regulations, history, connectedness, leadership, community development, and understanding community.

With this tool, collaborative groups identified strong factors and challenging factors, that is, factors that need to be worked on. The identification of the challenging factors facing the group can assist in the development of strategies to address these issues, thus allowing the group to move forward and accomplish their goals. In all cases, the self-evaluation tool can be **used to strengthen the collaborative group**. The following is a description of the Collaboration Check-List.

Each of the following factors influences the collaborative process. After reading a brief description for each of the areas, place an X in the box (see Figure 1) that best reflects your opinion of how your collaboration is functioning in each of the areas using the following scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly Agree

Each of the factors are identified and defined:

1. **Goals** - the collaboration has S.M.A.R.T. goals: Specific, Measurable, Aggressive, Reachable, and Time Sensitive.

2. **Communication** - the collaboration has open and clear communication. There is an established process for communication between meetings.

3. **Sustainability** - the collaboration has a plan for sustaining membership and resources. This involves membership guidelines relating to terms of office and replacement members.

4. **Research and Evaluation** - the collaboration has conducted a needs assessment or has obtained information to establish its goals and the collaboration continues to collect data to measure goal achievement.

5. **Political Climate** - the history and environment surrounding power and decision making positive. Political climate may be within the community as a whole, systems within the community or networks of people.

6. **Resources** - the collaboration has access to needed resources. Resources refer to four types of capital: environmental, in-kind, financial, and human.

7. **Catalysts** - the collaboration was started because of existing problem(s) or the reason(s) for collaboration to exist required a comprehensive approach.

8. **Policies/Laws/Regulations** - the collaboration has changed policies, laws, and/or regulations that allow the collaboration to function effectively.

9. **History** - the community has a history of working cooperatively and solving problems.

10. **Connectedness** - members of this collaboration are connected and have established informal and formal communication networks at all levels.

11. **Leadership** - the leadership facilitates and supports team building, and capitalizes upon diversity and individual, group and organizational strengths.

12. **Community Development** -   the community was mobilized to address important issues. There is a communication system and formal information channel that permits the exploration of issues, goals and objectives.

13. **Understanding Community** - the collaboration understands the community, including its people, cultures, values and beliefs.

Figure 1
The Collaboration Checklist

A COLLABORATION PROGRESS CHECKLIST					
Factors	**Strongly Agree**	**Somewhat Agree**	**Neither Agree or Disagree**	**Somewhat Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Goals					
Communication					
Sustainability					
Research & Evaluation					
Political Climate					
Resources					
Catalysts					
Policies/Laws/Regulations					
History					
Connectedness					
Leadership					
Community Development					
Understanding Community					
Totals					
Grand Totals					

Identifying the collaboration's strengths and challenges assists the collaboration in determining the best course of action to achieve its identified goals.

For example, if the group scores from **0-30** the collaborations have many components that comprise a successful collaboration. There are goals, working members, and strong leadership.

If the collaborative group scores from **31-48** the group has some of the factors; however, there is some need too develop the inter-workings of the group. The group may need to determine new ways of working together.

However, if the group scores from **49-65** the group may wish to refocus their goals and leadership. Establishing a group's strengths and challenges can serve as a springboard to building a more effective collaborative group.

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