

Factors Influencing the Success of 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. Nineteen factors that influence the success of collaborations have been identified. The factors are grouped into six categories:

I. Factors Related to the ENVIRONMENT

- a. History of collaboration or cooperation in the community.
 - i. 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.
- b. Collaboration group seen as a leader in the community.
 - i. The collaboration group (and by implication, the agencies in the group) is perceived within the community as a leader – at least related to the goals and activities it intends to accomplish.
- c. Political/social climate favorable.
 - i. 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.

II. Factors Related to MEMBERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

- a. Mutual respect, understanding, and trust.
 - i. 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.
- b. Appropriate cross-section of members.
 - i. The collaborative group includes representatives from each segment of the community who will be affected by its activities.
- c. Members see collaboration as in their self-interest.
 - i. Collaborative partners believe the benefits of collaboration will offset cost such as loss of autonomy and “turf.”
- d. Ability to compromise.
 - i. Collaborating partners are able to compromise, since the many decisions within a collaborative effort cannot possibly fit the preferences of every member perfectly.

III. Factors Related to PROCESS/STRUCTURE

- a. Members share a stake in both process and outcome.
 - i. Members of a collaborative group feel “ownership” of both the way the group works and the results or products of its work.
- b. Multiple layers of decision-making.
 - i. Every level (upper management, middle management, operations) within each organization in the collaborative group participates in decision-making.
- c. Flexibility.
 - i. The collaborative group remains open to varied ways of organizing itself and accomplishing its work.
- d. Development of clear roles and policy guidelines.
 - i. The collaborating partners clearly understand their roles, rights, and responsibilities; and how to carry out those responsibilities.
- e. Adaptability.
 - i. 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.

IV. Factors Related to COMMUNICATION

- a. Open and frequent communication.
 - i. 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.
- b. Established informal and formal communication links.
 - i. Channels of communication exist on paper, so that information flow occurs. In addition, members establish personal connections – producing a better, more informed, and cohesive group working on a common project.

V. Factors Related to PURPOSE

- a. Concrete, attainable goals and objectives.
 - i. Goals and objectives of the collaborative group are clear to all partners, and can realistically be attained.
- b. Shared vision.
 - i. 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.
- c. Unique purpose.
 - i. 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.

VI. Factors Related to RESOURCES

- a. Sufficient funds.
 - i. The collaborative group has an adequate, consistent financial base to support its operations.
- b. Skilled convener.
 - i. The individual who convenes the collaborative group has organizing and interpersonal skills, and carries out the role with fairness. Because of these characteristics (and others), the convener is granted respect or “legitimacy” from the collaborative partners.