

# Collaboration Among Institutions

## Strategies for Nonprofit Management Education Programs

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### Introduction

In past decades, the corporate world and, subsequently, the nonprofit sector have witnessed changing approaches to organizations working together. Cooperation, partnership, coordination, alliance – all are approaches to cross-institutional endeavors with varying levels of commitment, investment, and intensity. In recent years, *collaboration* has been the buzzword for inter-institutional work. Encouraged by requests from funders and by a need to maximize funding dollars while serving ever-growing needs, nonprofit organizations have increasingly explored cross-institutional collaboration as a tool to meet existing and new challenges.

Ever interested in the evolution and needs of the sector, a group of leading university-based centers that study philanthropy and the nonprofit field gathered recently to explore benefits, challenges, and potential avenues of cross-institutional collaboration. Although these centers are located in either public or private institutions, it is relevant that their interests are deeply connected with those of institutions in the nonprofit sector. This unique role held by such research and education centers creates novel challenges, perspectives, and interests in regard to

collaboration. Keeping in mind their home institutions' goals, and motivated by internal challenges to increase programming, community and global outreach, and student enrollment, the group's dialogue reflected a consciousness that effective collaborations could be used as a tool to improve nonprofit management education. In their initial meeting, group members expressed a number of similar points regarding implementation and challenges to cross-institutional collaboration commonly found in literature about collaboration. Perhaps most significant to other academic centers and interested grantmakers, the group identified specific collaborative efforts needed by the nonprofit sector that would be particularly beneficial to nonprofit management education. This paper presents the major points of discussion among the centers as well as a review of research on the topic of collaboration.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The topic of this paper is specifically collaboration in the nonprofit field. Yet, the majority of collaboration handbooks, case studies, articles, and books identified in a literature search discuss business collaborations, collaboration in the arts and education fields (e.g., between secondary schools and universities), governmental and business partnerships, and for-profit/nonprofit collaborations for the sake of corporate philanthropic causes (e.g., Microsoft and youth organizations). There are a limited number of sources that specifically look at cross-institutional collaboration within the nonprofit sector.

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The group, from nonprofit academic centers and representatives of programs with an emphasis on the nonprofit sector, gathered in Indianapolis in September, 2002. The participants were from:

- Arizona State University’s Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Management
- Case Western Reserve University’s Mandel Center for Nonprofit Management
- Ferris State University’s Applied Technology Center
- George Mason University’s Integrated Nonprofit Program
- Grand Valley State University’s Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership
- Harvard University’s Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations
- Indiana University’s Center on Philanthropy
- University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee’s Helen Bader Institute for Nonprofit Management

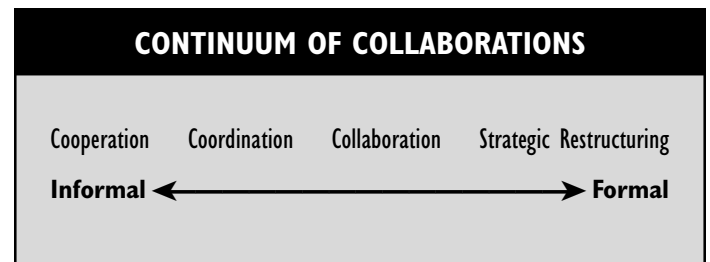
Most institutions were formerly involved in a W. K. Kellogg Foundation initiative, Building Bridges Between Practice and Knowledge in Nonprofit Management Education. Thanks to the Kellogg Foundation, and its grant administrator, CenterPoint Institute, the Indianapolis meeting and this ensuing paper became possible. The meeting allowed the group to pursue connections between their institutions and programs to carry on the work begun in the Building Bridges Initiative. (For more information on this recent initiative, see [www.centerpointinstitute.org/bridges/overview.htm](http://www.centerpointinstitute.org/bridges/overview.htm).)

## Definitions of Collaboration

- Relationship(s) that provide opportunities for mutual benefits and results beyond those any single organization or sector could realize alone (The Drucker Foundation, 2002, 47).
- 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 (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992, 7).
- Involvement of a team of people who develop and

share a common vision and then, by extension, common goals; who then work together to actualize those goals and, by extension, see their vision through to fruition (Peterson and Anderson, 2001, 21).

Though several terms are used synonymously for *collaboration* in articles and books on the subject (including *institutional cooperation*, *alliance*, and *partnership*), a number of scholars distinguish between collaboration and other types of inter-institutional work. Mattessich and Monsey distinguish *collaboration* from *cooperation* (“informal relationships...without any commonly defined mission, structure or planning effort”) and *coordination* (shares more of characteristics of collaboration, such as formal relationships and compatible missions, with some planning and role division; 1992, 39).<sup>2</sup> Myers (1998) discusses Klein’s model of the Continuum of Collaborations (below) which illustrates the differing levels of intensity in cross-institutional work, moving from the most simple on the left to the most complex on the right. Myers notes that the level of risk and reward increases as one moves further right on the scale.



## Why Collaborate? Motivations and Benefits

Collaboration is a strategy used by public, private, and nonprofit institutions to achieve both small-scale, short-term and long-term, organization-altering goals. Whether cross-sector or intra-sector, the encouragement for nonprofit organizations to collaborate has increased dramatically in recent years. Often, the encouragement comes in the form of a request from a funder or because funds are available specifically for collaborative efforts. At other times, an ever-present need to maximize resources provides the impetus. James Austin asserts that

<sup>2</sup> A table on page 40 of Mattessich and Monsey’s book shows essential elements distinguishing an effort as *collaboration*, *cooperation* or *coordination*.

political, economic, and social forces are causing societal changes that make collaboration imperative (2000). The Drucker Foundations' focus on leadership for the new millennium points strongly to internal and external collaboration as the key to high-performing organizations' succeeding in an evolving, highly competitive and global world (Hesselbein et al., 1999). Myers (1998) provides a simple motivator – the real reason for collaboration is to “better achieve your organization’s goals.” Whatever the initial catalyst, organizations must honestly identify why they wish to collaborate and what benefits they envision before undertaking this time- and labor-intensive strategy.

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Benefits identified by scholars and documented through case studies are profound – from improvements in programming to public relations to fiscal resourcefulness.<sup>3</sup> As the number of people and needs served by nonprofits have grown, collaboration helps “integrate programs and services that better serve complex needs” (Myers, 1998). Additionally, collaborations have the potential to attract more public attention than the similar work of a single institution. For some organizations, collaboration

has allowed development of a more in-depth understanding of an issue. After the initial investment in staff time for beginning a collaborative effort, often a reduction is seen in the institution’s expenses for new initiatives. Particularly, planning, research, and training costs are lessened as two or more organizations pool resources to accomplish a shared goal. Indeed, Austin points foremost to the fiscal effects of collaboration – cost savings, economies of scale and scope, synergies, and revenue enhancement (2000).<sup>4</sup>

In frank discussion about their motivations for exploring new collaborations, the Building Bridges partners identified a number of needs for their own institutions

and education programs. A few broad ideas arose as universal interests. First, and foremost, is the core belief that the focus on civil society, addressing the issues of a needy world, is at the heart of each institution’s work. Second is a need to increase the pool of students and the services offered to students in nonprofit management education programs. Third is a concern that trust and legitimacy issues have arisen in the nonprofit sector and that university centers serve a unique role in raising debate about and for the sector. Finally, particular areas of strength for each partner paired with common areas of interest can lead to potentially productive cross-institutional collaborations to further their institutions’ goals.

## Challenges and Barriers to Collaboration

Interestingly, the collaboration literature spends a good deal of time on challenges, barriers, and simple areas of frustration for participants. The most common challenges can be categorized as 1) institutional readiness, 2) ownership challenges, 3) implementation challenges, and 4) funding issues.

### Institutional Readiness Challenges

- Partner institutions do not have a clear vision or mission statement.
- CEO, board, or other key stakeholders do not support the collaboration.
- Institutional representative is unwilling or unable to participate as a team member, to work, to share ideas, to work through conflict, and to take on responsibility.
- The institutional culture is resistant to new ideas, change of practices, and partnering.

### Ownership Challenges

- Equal buy-in and commitment from different partners (and their institutions).
- Branding – who disseminates the product and how credit is given.
- Copyright issues – who owns rights and how credit is given.

### Implementation Challenges

- Developing an organizational structure with clear responsibilities for each participating organization.
- Agreeing on project objectives.
- Identifying a project leader capable of championing the cause and managing the diverse and complex

<sup>3</sup> Though there is a substantial body of literature on collaboration, benefits are a small portion of it, with most works concentrating on how-to, what it looks like, and the large number of challenges to collaboration.

<sup>4</sup> Synergies refers to “organizations with complementary capabilities . . . able to accomplish more together than separately” (Austin, 2000, 10).

challenges of implementing collaboration between a number of institutions.

- Program management.
- Designated decision-making process by which decisions will be made within the group (e.g., by dialogue, vote, or consensus).
- Perceived or real differences in power.
- Differences between the type of institution involved and resulting tensions.<sup>5</sup>
- Communication and relationship management.
- Creating an environment to facilitate free exchange of ideas and open doors of communication between institutions.
- Moving toward collaborative goals in meetings while allowing members time to make personal connections with one another and report on relevant issues.
- Measuring collaboration's success when changes within the individual partner institutions cannot be assumed as a result of the collaboration.

### Funding Challenges

- Initial investment of staff time and, possibly, significant resources.
- Securing funding, and a lingering concern over this issue.
- Timely receipt of funds by partnering institutions (if funding is delayed through one partner or through a funding source).

When the university centers gathered to discuss potential collaboration, their dialogue echoed some of these concerns found in a review of the literature. Several participants mentioned budget issues as being restrictive, with multiple levels of administration involved in the approval process and an eye to transactional costs. Yet, a key factor important to the group in backing a collaborative effort was that it must be something compelling, big and meaningful, to do within the institution to warrant the “hoop-jumping” of the institutional approval process.

Challenges specific to this type of university-based organization were identified by Peterson and Anderson in a case study of a large inter-university collaboration called the Civic Engagement Cluster (2001). The authors explain that when higher education institutions are involved, transformation through collaboration becomes difficult because of a deeply rooted academic culture,

<sup>5</sup> See Lessons Learned section regarding discussion of *productive tensions*, which can be one of the healthy factors to move a group along toward new and creative approaches in collaboration.

actions not representing the espoused mission of the institution, the level of institutional readiness for change, and success being reliant on the willingness of key institution members to reconceptualize current practices.

## Successful Collaboration Models

Naturally, many successful cross-institutional collaborations exist, with documented lessons on their processes, challenges, and results. The following three are of particular interest to this initiative because they are long-standing, well-recognized, and involve collaboration among universities or stakeholders interested in education. The collaborations intend to benefit students — in particular, allowing reciprocation of course work. For contact information, see Appendix A.

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### Consortium of Universities of the Washington, DC, Metropolitan Area

This collaboration began over twenty years ago and has grown in the number of participating institutions, the budget, the number of students enrolled, and the programs offered. This growth is reflected in the existence of a freestanding Washington, DC, office (as well as contacts at each university) and a program to support enrichment opportunities in local K-12 schools. Participating institutions are: American University, The Catholic University of America, Gallaudet University, Georgetown University, George Mason University, The George Washington University, Howard University, Marymount University, Southeastern University, Trinity College, University of the District of Columbia, and University of Maryland College Park.

### Consortium Priorities

The Consortium ([www.consortium.org](http://www.consortium.org)) is a nonprofit association of private and public higher education institutions in the metropolitan Washington, DC, area that offer baccalaureate and graduate degree programs. Its priorities are to:

- 1) develop and enhance cooperative opportunities for students;
- 2) represent the interests and concerns of the member institutions with local and regional governmental entities;

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- 3) provide a forum for campus representatives to develop and refine intercampus initiatives;
  - 4) expand and promote intercampus faculty collaboration; and
  - 5) promote the Washington metropolitan area as a center for higher education.

General consortium and individual institutional policies exist. A typical individual example is that George Mason University undergraduates may take one transferable course a year, and graduate students may take only two in their graduate career.

### Benefits to Consortium Students

- **Greater choices in coursework:** If a student's home institution does not offer a course, he or she may enroll at another consortium university for the course.
- **Ease of payment:** The student pays home institution standard tuition for a course. Any additional cost due to discrepancies between university charges (e.g., public vs. private costs) is paid by the home institution.
- **Ease of records:** No transcript is needed for a student to receive credit. Each university has a consortium coordinator responsible for keeping a record of the transferred coursework. One group transcript is sent from one institution to another, listing grades of all visiting students belonging to that home institution.
- **Weight of coursework:** Unlike the typical course credit transfers, the grade of a visiting consortium student is treated as a resident credit by the home university and factors into the student's grade-point average.

### Committee on Institutional Cooperation

*"Voluntary cooperation, within the framework of flexible agreements, has been the strength of CIC." (Herman B Wells, 1967).*

The Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) was established in 1958 as an association of the Big Ten midwestern teaching and research universities and the University of Chicago ([www.cic.uiuc.edu](http://www.cic.uiuc.edu)). All aspects of university activities (except athletics) are involved in cross-institutional programs and activities. Current participants are: Indiana University, Michigan State University, Northwestern University, Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State University, Purdue University, University of Chicago, University of Illinois,

University of Iowa, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, and University of Wisconsin-Madison. This collaboration boasts the participation of a large number of faculty and staff at each university, from presidents to deans to student records administrators. Such a high level of support is possible because the collaboration is seen as a way for each university to develop its areas of specialty and to avoid course duplication. Policies are consistent across universities. The CIC's Traveling Scholar Program has specific conditions of enrollment (e.g., courses taken at a visiting institution can not exceed two semesters).

### Benefits to Students in the Traveling Scholar Program

- **Greater choices in coursework and unique opportunities:** If a student's home institution does not offer a course, he or she may enroll at a member university for the course. Likewise, if a special opportunity exists at another university, such as studying with a world-renowned scholar or having access to a unique library collection, a student is allowed to take courses at the other institution. Graduate students may study for an entire semester at any member university without extra fees.
- **Ease of payment:** Students pay fees at their home institution and the host institution absorbs the cost of the class offered to the visiting student (if the host cost is higher than that of the student's home university). CIC deans agree to absorb the additional expenses of the program. There is *no exchange of fees between universities* in this program.
- **Ease of records:** An administrative contact person at each institution keeps track of students in visiting programs and assures transfer of credit between institutions. Contact between the student's advisor and a faculty member at the host institution is required to assure equivalency of a course.

### Southern Regional Education Board

*"Last year I attended Virginia Tech as part of your Academic Common Market program. I would like to thank you, because without that program I couldn't have gone to college." (Bryant Hutchinson)*

The Southern Regional Education Board is the country's oldest educational collaboration. Begun in 1948, SREB has attempted "to improve every aspect of education from early childhood education to doctoral degrees and beyond" ([www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org)). The Board's main aim is to help "government and education leaders work

cooperatively to advance education and, in doing so, improve the social and economic life of the region.” This collaborative provides a voice for many key issues affecting education, publishes a large number of annual reports on the state of education, and maintains databases for K-12 and higher education for the region. The sixteen member states are: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. Each state’s board members include the governor and his four appointees, at least one of whom is a state legislator and one an educator.

For twenty-five years, SREB’s Academic Common Market program has allowed students to pursue studies in selected programs in other SREB states and pay in-state tuition rates. The number of Market students participating totaled 2,200 in 1999. During the 2002-2003 school year, the Market’s Electronic Campus initiative begins a pilot project allowing students to apply for a waiver of out-of-state tuition for distance learning degree programs offered in areas unavailable at their own state’s institutions (for instance, a Masters in Public Administration is one available program). SREB is the country’s largest online academic coursework consortium. Similar to the CIC philosophy, the Academic Common Market’s purpose is to eliminate the cost and pressure for each institution to develop and maintain degree programs in every field while allowing students to benefit from a diverse choice of programs.

#### Benefits Offered to Students

- **Greater choices in coursework:** If the public institutions in a student’s home state do not offer a program of study, he or she may enroll in another state’s undergraduate or graduate program.
- **Affordable cost of education:** Through the Academic Common Market, students pay in-state tuition for out-of-state education. Likewise, the pilot project, Electronic Campus, makes available distance learning degree programs at in-state tuition rates. Indeed, the SREB board advocates one electronic tuition rate (one e-rate).

## Guidelines for Nonprofit Collaborations

A number of guidelines exist to provide an organization with principles of how to approach collaborations, what characteristics to strive for, how to interact, and what

to bring to the table. These vary from preparatory questions to lists of actions to characteristics to stage-based progressions toward collaboration (a life cycle of collaboration by Winer and Ray, 1994). Regardless of the source, only one set of guidelines in a broadly disseminated resource was developed specifically for nonprofit organizations (Patrick J. Waide, 1998).

### GUIDELINES FOR A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION’S INVOLVEMENT IN A COLLABORATION

- 1) Preserve the organization’s core values.
- 2) Maintain absolute integrity in the internal and external operations of your organization.
- 3) Enter partnerships only with organizations that have comparable credibility.
- 4) Enter partnerships only with organizations whose values and mission are similar to yours.
- 5) Understand that people relationships are crucial for the effectiveness of collaborative endeavors.
- 6) Avoid alliances in which the social sector contribution is not a critical value for a partner.
- 7) Collaborate only with social sector organizations with staff, volunteer, or board relationships comparable to yours.
- 8) Understand clearly what makes the critical difference for each partner’s mission and organizational effectiveness.
- 9) Commit adequate time to plan for and build the collaborative effort.
- 10) Fix responsibility and financial accountability.
- 11) Understand that networking, both internally and externally, is an important leadership function in new collaborations.
- 12) Determine what the new partnership has to offer that meets funders’ needs.
- 13) Engage in contingency planning to ensure that the alliance is structured in a way that will continue to serve partners’ interests.

Waide’s guidelines touch on a number of points discussed in other works. Taken together, the various guiding principles can be organized into seven categories: Collaboration and Your Organization, Partnering Relationships, Leadership, Planning and Implementation, Communication, Funding and Resources, and Results and Continuity.

#### Collaboration and Your Organization

At the outset, cross-institutional collaboration should be seen as a means to an end. To determine if it will benefit your organization to partake in such an effort, a

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number of questions must be asked and a set of guidelines followed as the collaboration takes shape. Waide provides four pieces of advice specific to organizations: preserve the organization's core values; maintain absolute integrity in the internal and external operations of your organization; avoid alliances in which the social sector contribution is not a critical value for a partner; and collaborate only with social sector organizations with staff, volunteer, or board relationships comparable to yours (1999). In *The Collaboration Challenge*, James Austin identifies a set of strategic questions for an organization to answer as it considers collaboration: Why, with whom, when and how should we collaborate; what type of collaboration should we undertake? (2000, 15-16). As the first steps in the development process, Austin includes: Have an understanding of strategic collaboration and ensure strategic fit. Remembering the institution's self-interest, how and if it is beneficial to collaborate, is identified as important by several resources. Naturally, certain characteristics of the institution and the members representing it in the collaboration are important. The often-cited "19 Factors That Influence the Success of Collaborations" by Mattessich and Monsey (1992), identifies specific "membership characteristics," such as the ability to compromise (see Appendix B for the complete list of factors).

### Partnering Relationships

Personal dynamics and understanding in partner relationships are of core importance to healthy collaboration. A small number of guiding principles recommend close attention to the area, from the creation phase to implementation. Austin calls for taking time to "make the connection" during the beginning and care in "managing the relationship" as it develops (2000). Mutual respect, understanding, and trust are keys to successful and effective collaboration (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992). Crucial for effectiveness are the "people relationships" that serve as the basis for the collaboration (Waide, 1999). A certain parity of purpose is recommended by some scholars – some pointing to similar institutional missions, goals or scope. Mattessich and Monsey's factors include a shared vision. Waide's "Guidelines for a Nonprofit Organization's Involvement in a Collaboration" is most cautious in this way – enter partnerships only with organizations that have comparable credibility and whose values and mission are similar to yours. Likewise, Austin recommends a congruency of mission, strategy, and values in cross-sector collaborations (2000). Internal and external to

the institutions, a political and social climate favorable to the collaboration makes its success viable and its impact relevant (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992).

### Leadership

If the sheer number of books devoted to the subject are an indication of importance, not enough can be said about an institution's success being linked to an effective, dynamic leader. Not surprisingly, successful collaborations call for a talented, driven, intuitive individual to lead and support the work of the group. Leaders must understand their important role in networking for the new collaboration, both internally and externally (Waide, 1999). Warren Bennis and Patricia Ward Biederman discuss the pivotal role of leadership in their study of seven collaborations ("great groups") that achieved world culture-altering success (1997). In their list of fifteen lessons from these groups, four deal specifically with the leaders: 1) great groups and great leaders create each other, 2) every great group has a strong leader, 3) the leaders of great groups love talent and know where to find it, and 4) leaders of great groups give them what they need and free them from the rest.

**Successful collaborations call for a talented, driven, intuitive individual to lead and support the work of the group.**

### Planning and Implementation

Perhaps the most difficult and complicated of the principles to carry out, the planning and implementation of the collaboration is where all other factors intersect. In the planning phase, purpose is a key issue. Austin (2000) recommends having a clear purpose and connecting it with the people involved. He also points to a need to generate the value of collaboration as fuel for the institutions' involvement. A unique purpose with concrete, attainable goals and desired results provides a strong foundation (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992; Winer and Ray, 1994). Throughout the difficulties and frustrations of implementation, James Austin reminds collaborators, the need to be committed to the partnership is critical. Contingency planning is a way to ensure the continued value of the alliance to partners. Having a plan for conflict resolution will be essential to continued engagement (Winer and Ray, 1994).

With regard to logistics, crucial elements for success

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include a commitment of adequate time to plan for and build the collaboration, continual learning and rethinking throughout the process, and clear responsibilities and policy guidelines for partners. Mattessich and Monsey (1992) recommend that the group have a flexible and adaptable process and structure, with multiple layers of decision making. A few scholars of collaboration are passionate about involvement of the end user of the collaboration's product. Others ignore the issue. Will the consumer value what you produce? Customers will want to provide their input and share experiences so that they receive better service (Ulrich, 1999). Ulrich asserts that the end user should be involved in the entire collaborative process, from development to evaluation. When the collaboration reviews the vision and desired results, it is an ideal time to begin to include the recipients of the collaboration's products (Winer and Ray, 1994).

### **Communication**

Crucial to any collaborative effort's success is open and frequent communication between participants, from and with leadership, and carried to and from the partnering institutions (Austin, 2000; Mattessich and Monsey, 1992). Informal and formal communication links should be established. In addition, communication with the outside community can be useful in gaining support for the effort and for partnering institutions; particularly influential to the group's success is being viewed as a "leader in the community" (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992).

### **Funding and Resources**

Collaborative initiatives, like many others in nonprofits, are closely linked to having sufficient funds. Often, funding is secured by an institution as a result of promising to form a collaboration. A number of factors will make partners more effective and satisfied with funding. To find funds for a new effort, Waide (1999) suggests determining what the partnership offers that meets funders' needs. He also recommends putting in place financial accountability measures.

Beyond funds, the key resource to successful collaborations is the people involved. Bennis and Biederman champion talented people capable of working together as the basis for great collaborative groups (1997). As discussed, the superb leader is a driving force needed by all. In addition, a skilled convener is capable of making the group's meetings personal and productive.

### **Results and Continuity**

An end product or result and continuity are final concerns in the collaborative process. When the group is ready, evaluate the results (Winer and Ray, 1994). If success is reached, share the results of the collaboration by creating visibility in the community. Continuance of the collaborative effort, not the group itself, is the goal.

## **Lessons Learned from the Field**

Guidelines are one way organizations map out their approach to new initiatives; they serve as principles to follow or for reorientation when the group goes astray. Yet, often when uncharted territory lies ahead, a leader or a group looks to lessons from those who have experienced the undertaking before them. The body of writings about collaboration, as well as the stories of individuals involved in them, provide observations and suggestions worth heeding. Again, these lessons can be separated into the seven categories found in the previous section: Collaboration and Your Organization, Partnering Relationships, Leadership, Planning and Implementation, Communication, Funding and Resources, and Results and Continuity.

### **Collaboration and Your Organization**

- Give authority to your institution's representative (Winer and Ray, 1994, 74-75).
- Provide a letter of commitment from the board or senior officer (Winer and Ray).<sup>6</sup>
- Encourage broad participation to protect against personnel change (Peterson and Anderson, 2001, 20).
- Consult county district or state attorneys to determine whether data privacy is an issue in your community.
- Realize that release of information forms may need to be signed to allow certain institutional information to be shared between partners.

### **Partnering Relationships**

- To build relationships, have individuals meet one another before large group meetings. Everyone needs to feel that his or her input is valuable.
- Build trust. This is a key to the collaborative process that needs an intentional focus in the beginning.
- Avoid in-group/out-group: If a small group is formed within the larger collaborative, there must

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<sup>6</sup> All universities and colleges involved in the Civic Engagement Cluster had presidentially authorized institutional commitment (Peterson and Anderson, 2001).

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be an openness to deal with any exclusivity or privacy problems if they occur; all group members must feel valued.

- Avoid letting differences in power within the group silence some members.
- Seek partnering institutions of diverse backgrounds to create a true exchange of ideas. Yet, bear in mind that some commonalities need to exist across institutions.
- Involve partnering institutions that have demonstrated a commitment to the field or focus of the collaboration.

## Leadership

- Identify and appoint a champion: a project leader must have the drive, initiative and ability to “facilitate institutional participation and learning” (Peterson and Anderson, 2001, 19).

## Planning and Implementation

- Choose a skilled convener for meetings.
- Incorporate rituals in meetings so members can interact and become comfortable (Winer and Ray, 1994).
- Initially, spend time establishing a clear vision, mission and set of objectives. Later, this agreement will result in more efficient and worthwhile meetings.
- As ambiguity and complexity are inherent elements in the collaborative process, expect not to find “an easy fix” to issues and anticipate that the steps in the process will be complex – from building trust to producing end results.
- Use video and audio conferencing for some meetings.<sup>7</sup>
- Hold focused and well-planned meetings.
- Establish a decision-making protocol, “a written record of . . . agreements on who [in the group] can make decisions and what type of decisions can be made” (Winer and Ray, 1994, 88).<sup>8</sup>
- “Successful collaboration needs to involve minority, grassroots, and end-user groups” (Winer and Ray, 49).
- It is easier to incorporate end users when the collaboration is near to taking specific actions.

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<sup>7</sup> The long-standing and large Committee on Institutional Cooperation finds this useful.

<sup>8</sup> There are five styles of decision-making: autonomous, consultative, consensus, democratic, and delegated. See *Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey*, pp. 88-89 for an explanation.

- Advisory board members need to be valuable to the development of the collaboration’s goals, not just political or financial assets.
- Make decisions on the ongoing management and coordination of the effort.
- A lack of organizational structure will adversely affect the collaborative.

## Communication

- Rethink differences: Differences can cause progress, not just conflict, if *dialogue* is used to make them *productive tensions*. The most significant learning experienced by one school/university collaboration “[emerged] out of dialogic efforts to surface and explore the tensions related to our differences... Differences kept in tension in a dialogue nurture critique and learning” (Johnston, 1997, 9).
- Expect conflict and create a conflict-resolution process. Clarifying the conflict often resolves disagreements (Winer and Ray, 1994, 79).
- Use collaborative, partner-reinforcing language rather than exclusive language: Use “we” and “our” and “us” rather than “you” and “I” in meetings.
- Develop common language and common ground. Avoid jargon and institutional-specific terminology; these result in roadblocks.
- Develop a strategy for “transferring learnings” from collaboration meetings to the home institution beyond relying on team members to conduct meetings upon their return (Peterson and Anderson, 2001, 15).

## Funding and Resources

- Generate political and fiscal support; support from varied sources is a key.
- Make sure every partner understands the funding arrangement!
- Part of renewing the effort will entail retiring existing members and adding new members.

## Results and Continuity

- Great collaborative groups produce the desired result and dissolve after achieving their aim (Bennis and Biederman, 1997).
- Success results when the community carries on or incorporates the enterprise and it lives on without the structure of the group.

## What Should We Undertake?

The goals of the academic centers meeting in Indianapolis were simple: 1) identify institutional barriers and challenges to collaboration, 2) identify common collaborative efforts needed by the sector, and 3) reach consensus on areas on which to collaborate. The dialogue was an open brainstorming session. The group identified the following ways in which nonprofit management education centers and education programs can collaborate to benefit the field.

1. Online courses
2. A research consortium
3. Joint seminars/conferences
4. Joint publications
5. Curriculum development – focus on specific courses; ask key executives to give input on effectiveness of what is being taught; perhaps utilize existing conference structures as a meeting opportunity, such as ARNOVA or NASPA<sup>9</sup>
6. Faculty meetings (focus on special topics)
7. Faculty exchange (e.g., special summer seminars)
8. Validation by practitioners
9. Development of issue papers
10. Student exchange experiences (e.g., summer and/or semester-long)
11. Student summer experiences and internships
12. Intra-institutional work
13. Sector legitimacy – form a “Bulldog Alliance” to respond to recent legitimacy issues (see “Key Approaches” in the next column.)

The eight university-based centers agreed on five key approaches (as listed in the right-hand column) to better support collaborations among centers of their kind.

## Five Areas of Collaborative Interest

Of the many needs discussed, the partners chose five areas of common interest for their own institutions' collaboration consideration: 1) general concerns about nonprofits, 2) diverse cultures, 3) grantmaker/donor education, 4) curriculum development standards, and 5) distance education. In each area, they distinguished challenges and next steps.

<sup>9</sup> ARNOVA is the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action. NASPA is the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

### KEY APPROACHES TO SUPPORT COLLABORATION

**PR for IR** – External public relations and external funding help gain internal relations and recognition for collaborative efforts.

**Bulldog alliances** – Passionate advocates need to take leadership for their cause in sector collaborations.

**Low barrier efforts** – Explore collaborative efforts that require little institutional approval to implement.

**Grow the pool of students** – Identify a pipeline for graduate education coming from undergraduates and nonprofit middle management professionals. Explore ways to partner to increase the number of applicants to graduate programs. Programs can and should collaborate rather than compete in admissions and recruitment.

**Nonprofit literacy for students** – Develop a core curriculum with essential knowledge needed by all nonprofit sector employees.

## General Concerns in Nonprofits

In the light of the negative press received by the nonprofit sector recently, how can academic centers help to bring a balanced, realistic view of the sector to the public? For public relations purposes, there seems to be an overarching theme needed by the sector that is simple and understandable. Yet, the role of the university is not that of cheerleader, nor simply of watchdog. What is the appropriate role? These academic centers hold the unique responsibility of engaging debate about issues surrounding the nonprofit sector and providing information for others to participate in that debate.

So, how can this group of universities collaborate to ensure that the nonprofit sector achieves its greatest potential and that there are standards for professional conduct? They must articulate these standards of integrity to the public and train graduate students, in turn, to do so. They can provide information on nonprofit sector issues and educate the public about problems facing the sector. This allows others to join the debate. They need to provide a balanced voice to help discover the overriding issues and what is being done to alleviate the problems. The role of their institutions is to voice the aspirations for civil society and engage that society in discussion.

## Diverse Cultures

This group to their surprise found that diverse cultures

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in philanthropy is a common interest to all partners in very different ways. They use *diversity* to refer to various racial, gender, religious, and international groups. Research on diversity and the nonprofit sector is one area of interest to most partners, though the specific topics vary greatly. Harvard University has a substantial focus on global philanthropy. Arizona State University is greatly interested in nonprofit sector involvement by the booming Hispanic community in its state. A number of partners voiced concern over how demographic change in the general population is not reflected in their institutions' student and faculty makeup; recruitment and retention of minority males is a particular concern. Also a topic of debate and interest is whether the overwhelming number of female nonprofit management students will end up in middle management while males are hired through law or business schools for top positions, thus perpetuating the glass ceiling.

To address these issues, several next steps were agreed upon:

- Bring together student services staff from universities and academic centers to discuss common recruitment issues (i.e., the number, quality and diversity of students).
- Hold a discussion with American Humanics about options available to its graduating students; the Humanics program could be an asset to increase recruitment of minorities and the sheer number of students recruited for graduate programs.
- Provide training for current nonprofit organization employees and educate them about graduate school opportunities.
- Examine the student job placement process.
- When conducting research or recruiting students, remember the cultures outside the U.S. and the variety of religious traditions across the U.S. and world.

### **Grantmaker/Donor Education**

Training for grantmakers (foundation staff) and donor education are two different, though related, areas needing attention. As Grand Valley State University began a grantmaking education initiative, a particular challenge became apparent. For grantmakers, there is a small window of opportunity in which to engage them

– after their hiring but before they are expected to be highly knowledgeable. The first year after hire is opportune to help grantmaking staff attain an acceptable level of knowledge; for best results, the group agreed to approach existing infrastructures for training (such as the Regional Association of Grantmakers).

The group agreed that donor education involves a unique set of obstacles. Issues of trust are pervasive among donors since very few people are “of their world” and understand their realities. For those who have given donor workshops, the sessions often end up being part education and part therapy as issues arise that continually face those of wealth. Traditional education methods and forums may not work, so vary the pedagogy. Explore a consortium rather than a single institution offering training.

The next steps developed by the university center representatives focused on creative ways to approach donors via their interests or associations and people to whom they were accustomed. First, establish a partnership with an organization such as the National Center for Family Philanthropy. Additionally, identify and partner with complementary programs that donors already belong to as a result of their special interests (e.g., affinity donor groups). Form a coalition of organizations that advise donors, and charge it with the task of identifying ways to further donor education. Convene interest-centered groups to explore a particular issue. Talk to major gift officers about how to establish trust. Segment the markets for donor education purposes (e.g., education for donors who are self-made is different than that needed by those who are heirs). Explore the use of an existing academic journal as a medium for donor education.

### **Curriculum Development Standards**

Of common concern to the group are the broad forces that create policies affecting what nonprofit professionals should know. There is a debate over whether a generic nonprofit curriculum is needed or specific course work for the subsector. A major obstacle to creating one set of standards: nonprofit management and philanthropy are taught throughout many programs within universities; this results in a diverse set of academic and institutional homes for student course work. Also, the shifting research interests of faculty who teach in many areas of the university make standardization infinitely more difficult than if there were a core faculty.

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After discussion of the difficult realities, the group agreed that it is possible to identify a core set of knowledge that professionals in the nonprofit field should have, a *nonprofit literacy* for students. A singular action was chosen for progress in this area: to seek funding for a common curriculum across nonprofit subfields for exchange of information and the development of a curriculum. In carrying out this action, it is recommended that the group explore working with the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC) and, potentially, NASPA as well.

### **Distance Education**

Finally, the most debated issue of collaboration was distance education. Some center partners were disinterested in and perhaps opposed to the use of online education. Yet, two institutions (Indiana University and Ferris State University) had just begun an online course collaboration. Common areas of concern to all were 1) faculty training and adequate compensation, 2) tuition issues (how much does a student pay), and 3) the acceptance of distance education as an academically credible program. A number of institutional obstacles were identified, with faculty issues at the heart of the discussion. Faculty training is a substantial undertaking, particularly the challenge of adapting a course's materials and pedagogy to online communication. Also, when a faculty member is asked to teach a distance learning course, teaching levels are often not adjusted, resulting in extra teaching for the professor. The majority of faculty members are staunchly committed to the physical classroom interaction with students, which they do not receive from distance education. Not surprisingly, evaluation of faculty teaching methods and student academic performance become larger issues in the new medium of instruction. There can be greater suspicion over student honesty when an instructor may never

actually look into their eyes. Finally, when a professor's syllabi, readings, and other curricula become widely accessible via the Internet, the ownership of the product becomes threatened.

Keeping in mind the substantial obstacles, the group decided to proceed in this area. A first step to take is to initiate discussions among experts in the field. Second is the identification of desired outcomes for the student and his or her institution. Regarding ownership and cross-institutional availability, there is a need to conceptualize the process for exchange of the product between institutions, possibly making a given curriculum (and the expertise it offers) widely available. As a part of the curriculum and training, a language or vocabulary needs to be defined for use in the medium.

### **Collaboration Beginnings**

Where will this dialogue lead? Like any effort in the nonprofit sector, the future awaits funding. Like any cross-institutional collaboration, the ideas await institutional commitment. This handful of representatives from leading university-based centers and programs feel that effective collaborations in the areas they have identified will serve the nonprofit sector immensely. They believe that these big, compelling needs can be addressed through various smaller collaborations among their centers and others. A few of their next steps have begun, and others are being discussed among home institutions. Yet, a great deal of work needing passionate involvement and resources is found in their dialogue. This paper serves as a call to other institutions to join or create their own collaboration beginnings, for them to ready the next generation of nonprofit sector professionals and leaders and to help make the sector stronger.

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# Appendix A

## Contact Information for Three Successful Cross-Institutional Collaboration Models

### **Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area**

One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 200

Washington, DC 20036-1131

Phone: 202-331-8080

E-mail: [info@consortium.org](mailto:info@consortium.org)

Web address: [www.consortium.org](http://www.consortium.org)

John Childers, President & CEO

### **Committee on Institutional Cooperation**

302 E. John Street, Suite 1705

Champaign, IL 61820-5698

Phone: 217-333-8475

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Web address: [www.cic.uiuc.edu](http://www.cic.uiuc.edu)

Barbara McFadden Allen, Director

### **Southern Regional Education Board**

592 10th Street NW

Atlanta, GA 30318

Phone: 404-875-9211

E-mail: [info@sreb.org](mailto:info@sreb.org)

Web address: [www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org)

Mark Musick, President

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# Appendix B

## 19 Factors That Influence the Success of Collaborations

### Environmental

- 1) History of collaboration or cooperation in the community
- 2) Collaborative group seen as a leader in the community
- 3) Political/social climate favorable

### Membership Characteristics

- 4) Mutual respect, understanding, and trust
- 5) Appropriate cross-section of members
- 6) Members see collaboration as in their self-interest
- 7) Ability to compromise

### Process/Structure

- 8) Members share a stake in both process and outcome
- 9) Multiple layers of decision making
- 10) Flexibility
- 11) Development of clear roles and policy guidelines
- 12) Adaptability

### Communication

- 13) Open and frequent communication
- 14) Established informal and formal communication links

### Purpose

- 15) Concrete, attainable goals and objectives
- 16) Shared vision
- 17) Unique purpose

### Resources

- 18) Sufficient funds
- 19) Skilled convener

From Paul W. Mattessich, Ph.D. and Barbara R. Monsey, M.P.H. (1992). *Collaboration: What Makes It Work/A Review of Research Literature on Factors Influencing Successful Collaboration*. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.

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