



## Collaboration Toolkit Overview:

Inter-organizational collaboration is increasingly assumed to be both necessary and desirable as a strategy for addressing many of society's most difficult public challenges yet collaboration is hardly easy and often complex and unorganized. This toolkit contains a variety of resources that can be adapted to guide them through the collaborative process. This toolkit offers tools to guide the design and implementation of inter-organizational collaborations. This toolkit is built for all life stages of collaboration. Organizations can use this toolkit to launch new partnerships and/or strengthen and reassess existing collaborative work. The tools will be provided electronically and will help professionals assess organizational fit within any given collaborative venture, organize and systematize the work of collaborations, and evaluate collaborative work. Participants will walk away with adaptable templates and worksheets aimed to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of inter-organizational work.

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*We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.  
Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. ~Martin Luther King*



## Collaboration Toolkit

### Collaboration Continuum

**Purpose:** The Collaboration Continuum is a framework for thinking strategically about relationships between organizations. Many words are used to describe collaborative work. *Beyond the word collaboration, common terms can include partnership, network, coalition, integration, alliance, and variations therein.* Relationships between organizations vary in regard to formality and degrees integration. Inter-agency relationships exist along a continuum of inter-organizational relationships.





## Factors Influencing Successful Collaboration

(Mettessich & Monsey, 1992)

### Factors Related to the ENVIRONMENT:

- History of collaboration or cooperation in the community
- Collaborative group seen as a leader in the community
- Political/Social climate favorable

### Factors Related to MEMBERSHIP:

- Mutual Respect, understanding, and trust
- Appropriate cross-section of members (size, representation, dedication)
- Members see the collaboration as in their self-interest as well as organizational-interest
- Ability to compromise

### Factors Related to PROCESS & STRUCTURE:

- Members share a stake in both process & outcome
- Multiple layers of decision making
- Flexibility
- Development of clear roles
- Adaptability

### Factors Related to COMMUNICATION:

- Open and frequent communication
- Established informal and formal communication links
- Plans for succession if staff turns over

### Factors Related to PURPOSE:

- Concrete, attainable goals and objectives
- Shared Vision
- Unique Purpose that requires collaborative effort

### Factors Related to RESOURCES:

- Sufficient funds
- Skilled convener







## Collaboration Toolkit

### Organizational Asset Inventory

**Purpose:** Building on the assets and capabilities of all partners will strengthen the alliance and give it purpose. Nonprofits seek benefits that will further their missions, serve their customers, strengthen their organizations, and achieve desired results. To prepare for effective alliances, you must identify the assets and capabilities your nonprofit possesses that you may bring to the alliance. By identifying your assets you can also identify your deficiencies and identify what *and* how partnerships could strengthen your position.

Successful alliances require that nonprofits have effective leadership and management, high-quality programs, sound finances, and organizational practices. Although effective alliances can help strengthen these fundamental organizational capacities, nonprofits need to have a solid foundation on which to build. In light of opportunities to develop strategic alliances, your nonprofit should revisit its mission and strategic goals, consider objectives that might involve alliances, and assess its readiness to pursue them. Your nonprofit can then decide how to increase its capability in any areas and whether to proceed to develop alliances or to wait until improvements are made.

**Organization's Mission:** *[type mission here]*

**Internal Organizational Audit:** What is our agency's comparative advantage?

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1. **Organizational Strengths/Assets:** What does our organization bring to the table? (E.g. *Strong Presence/Name Recognition: a well-known name, credibility, excellent reputation. Access to community leaders or influential people*)
2. **Quality programs:** What are the programs and services that demonstrate our organization's ability to achieve results?
3. **Staff Certifications/Skills:** What certifications/training/unique skills do your staff persons possess? (E.g. *grant writing experience, strong fiscal management, program expertise, fundraising, etc.*)
4. **Strategic goals:** What aspects of our vision for the organization's future can collaborating help us realize?
5. **Effective governance:** In what ways does our board demonstrate its capacity to establish sound policy, set clear direction, make timely decisions, delegate appropriately, and appraise performance?
6. **Effective management:** In what ways do we demonstrate our ability to systematically plan, implement, and evaluate major initiatives?



## Collaboration Toolkit

How do managers/leaders within the organization encourage collaboration?

What important policies, procedures, and operations have to be changed in the organization to further support collaborative activities?

7. **Sound finances:** In what ways is collaboration involvement & development integrated with our overall resource development activities? Do we have sound financial systems so that collaborations can be managed effectively?
8. **Positive organizational culture:** How have we demonstrated openness to collaborative activities, including seeking new opportunities, welcoming challenges, investing in new initiatives, undertaking reasonable risks, and learning from our experiences, whether or not they are successful?

**Areas to Strengthen:** What are our deficiencies that we could strengthen or seek in partnership?

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1. What are our organizational deficiencies that we could strengthen prior to engaging in collaboration? Or that could be strengthened by collaboration? (e.g. *staff and agency capacity: no time (money, if required) to actively, fruitfully participate in the collaborative, history of competition/adverse relationships between members on the collaboration*)
2. What, if anything, should our nonprofit undertake to strengthen its capability to develop and manage alliances (such as board, volunteer, and staff training or a resource development or strategic planning process)?
3. Has our organization made the organizational commitment to provide the leadership and management support that this collaborative work requires?
4. Given our answers to these questions, how ready is our nonprofit to develop & support strategic alliances?
5. Should we begin developing strategic alliances while we strengthen our capabilities, or should we wait for specific improvements?
6. If we begin developing strategic alliances, how should we limit, if at all, the number or scope of alliance projects given our current organizational capacity? (*don't over-commit, remember quality over quantity*)



## Collaboration Toolkit

### Determining Strategic Fit & Value

**Purpose:** Successful alliances between nonprofit organizations and businesses depend on the partners' strategic fit: **their compatibility and ability to develop mutually beneficial projects.** Starting with a collaboration assessment enables you to determine the strengths you bring to the table, the challenges you will need to divulge, and clarifying the intent of a collaboration, will provide a strong basis for deciding whether the time needed to pursue a collaboration will truly benefit your nonprofit.

1. **How might our mission and values attract and be compatible with this alliance?** Are there areas where our ethics, values, or accountabilities might conflict with those of the alliance?
2. **What benefits might this alliance provide to help our nonprofit further its mission?** Would this alliance provide services our primary customers value? Would this alliance benefit our nonprofit's operations?
3. **How might this alliance contribute to the organization's strategic goals?** Would it help generate business? Enhance the image? Reach new markets? Support human resource development? Improve social conditions in the community?
4. **What assets and capabilities might be exchanged in this alliance?** What might our nonprofit provide and expect to receive? What might the partner provide and expect to receive?
5. **How will this alliance be incorporated into our nonprofit's operating plan?** What costs might this alliance involve? How much leadership and management time would be required from each partner? What other investments of resources might be required?
6. **What risks might this alliance involve?** What risks to each other's reputation? What financial risks? (see following page for brainstorming activity regarding risk)



## Risks & Rewards of Collaboration

**Purpose:** Does collaboration provide a sufficient return on nonprofits' investments of resources to warrant their participation? The question is complex, because nonprofits may consider the risks and rewards of collaboration on financial *and* non-financial (e.g., fulfillment of social mission) bases. Below is a list of some common risks and rewards to get you started. Brainstorming & discussing the risks and rewards before entering a collaborative venture can be useful in assessing strategic fit. It is important to do an informal cost-benefit analysis to determine whether the rewards outweigh the risks.

### Risks:

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- Conflicting mission, goals and standards amongst members.
- Managing differing policy issues, multiple funding streams, eligibility requirements, and differences in regulations.
- Opportunity costs from the time and resources devoted to collaborative activities.
- Loss of managerial autonomy.
- Competition for funding between members.
- Data Privacy Violations
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### Rewards:

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- Collaboration helps prevent the duplication of services. When you collaborate with your peers, individuals will be directed to the agency that is in the best position to provide those services and programs that they need most. This frees up time for professionals to focus on the provision of services for which they are most skilled and qualified.
- Realize economies of scale; collaboration helps organizations to pool resources to meet a common goal.
- Many funders like to see collaborative efforts, and in some cases, are more willing to fund organizations that collaborate on specific projects.
- Achievement of institutional legitimacy in the community.
- Improve strategic position of organization within the field.
- Prolonged organizational survival.
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## Collaboration Toolkit

### Preparing to Work Together

**Purpose:** Having independently identified your organization's preparedness and fit in any given alliance you have decided to pursue a joint venture. Meet with all of the members and establish clear, mutual expectations about the *alliance's* purpose and fit. Written agreements are recommended to avoid misunderstandings and provide a basis for future appraisal, though many successful alliances rely on oral agreements, with written documents limited to legal issues.

Successful strategic alliances between nonprofits depend on effective management by both organizations. This mutual commitment to performance can be reinforced by partners working together to develop a work plan to manage the alliance.

1. How will the alliance capture sufficient attention among each member's key leaders to achieve its objectives?
2. Whom will each member appoint to serve as overall relationship manager(s) and the manager(s) of alliance projects?
3. How will the alliance be institutionalized in each member organization's plans and practices to ensure continuity despite any personnel changes?
4. How will the alliance build on-going mutual trust and commitment and resolve potential conflicts?
5. How will ongoing and effective communication about alliance projects be maintained between the members, within each member's organization, and with customers and others?
6. How often will the members meet to appraise the alliance's progress as well as each member's performance?
7. How will each member continue to learn about the other in order to strengthen the alliance, explore opportunities, and develop innovations?



# Collaboration Toolkit

## Purpose Statement

**Purpose:** Oftentimes alliances exist or were developed without a clear purpose and each member comes with varying missions, cultures, and objectives. It is useful to develop a purpose statement that both defines and guides the work of the alliance. This is the collaboration equivalent to the mission of a nonprofit. This will help focus planning, evaluation, and resources to the mission of the alliance.

### Guiding Questions:

What is the issue motivating this alliance to be formed?

What are we striving to change for our organization/customers/community?

What is the problem/need that brought this alliance together?

When I think about what children and families experiences in this ideal situation in our community, I imagine?

When I think about working relationships among agencies and organizations to support ideal quality \_\_\_\_\_ in this community, I imagine?

When I think about other factors or characteristics of the community that support ideal quality \_\_\_\_\_ in this community, I imagine?

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**Collaboratives Purpose Statement:** *[your statement here]*



# Collaboration Toolkit

## Resource Inventory

**Purpose:** What resources (in-kind services, materials, funding, talent/expertise, and connections/ access) can each partner contribute to alleviating this issue? Documentation of all member resource will aide in planning efforts and allocation of roles and responsibilities. (see pg. 5 for an exercise to identify your organization's assets)

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AGENCY NAME	RESOURCES PROVIDED
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	



### Work Plan Template

**Purpose:** To create a “script” for your improvement effort and support implementation and evaluation. Defining tasks, resources, and timelines is an ongoing process. It is useful to keep copies of the workplan handy to bring to meetings to review and update regularly. Work plans are useful as a framework for forming working groups around various goals or actions.

1. You will begin with the collaborative’s vision or purpose statement. (see pg. 10)
2. Then you will identify desired outcomes for the collaborative. There must be strong connections between the collaborative’s vision (or purpose statement) and outcomes. Strong outcomes reflect clear understanding of the needs of the community, as well as the community’s current resources and services.
3. Next you will develop the activities to realize each outcome. Activities describe how the team will achieve each outcome.
4. Then assign tasks, responsibilities, and timelines.

*Note: While developing these elements, ensure **Feasibility!** Can have short, medium, and long term strategies: keep the work plan achievable, thus limited in scope.*



# Collaboration Toolkit

<b>Purpose Statement:</b> (see pg. 10)				
<b>Outcome 1:</b> (What are our long-term desired results? What are our short-term desired results?)			<b>Measure(s) of Effectiveness:</b> (How will you know that you are making progress?)	
<b>Activities</b> What Will Be Done?	<b>Responsibilities</b> Who Will Do It?	<b>Timeline</b> By When? (Day/Month)	<b>Resources</b> A. Resources Available B. Resources Needed (financial, human, political & other)	<b>Communication</b> What methods? How often? Evaluation? Reporting?
Action 1:			A. B.	
Action 2:			A. B.	
Action3:			A. B.	
Action 4:			A. B.	
Action 5:			A. B.	



### Appraisal and Renewal

**Purpose:** It is important to appraise and renew each alliance separately and review all your alliances together as a portfolio. These processes allow your nonprofit to maximize the benefits of alliances, update its operating plan, and incorporate alliances into long-range organizational planning. During this process, the decision will be made whether to maintain, expand, narrow, or abandon the alliance(s).

Successful strategic alliances usually grow more successful when both partners commit themselves to appraising the alliance, exploring opportunities, developing innovations, and renewing the partnership periodically. Appraisal provides the opportunity to mark progress, review the purpose statement, the work plan, the milestones, reflect on what each partner is learning about developing an effective alliance, and make further plans. Appraisal is part of the alliance work plan and takes place at intervals appropriate to each alliance.

1. How are our expectations being/not being met, changed, and/or exceeded?
2. How do we think our partner's expectations being met, changed, and/or exceeded?
3. Is this alliance significantly benefiting our customers and furthering our mission? If so, how?
4. Is this alliance producing unexpected benefits for either or both partners? If so, what are they?
5. Do the alliance's benefits for our customers and our nonprofit justify its costs? In what ways?
6. What are we learning about developing more effective alliances?



## Collaboration Toolkit

### Developing a Written Agreement

**Purpose:** A written agreement is a document that formalizes a group's commitment to collaborate. A strong written agreement describes the team's shared vision and goals, as well as how the team will act to achieve them. (Note: developing work groups is an effective way to develop parts of the written agreement)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is simply a written agreement to identify the working relationships and guidelines between collaborating entities. An MOU spells out the common understandings. It clarifies what kind of support will be provided and creates more meaningful ways for communication or participation. It defines the roles and responsibilities of each involved entity. Here are some typical components of an MOU, with sample language:

#### Purpose and Agreement(s)

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The memorandum should state the purpose *and* outcome (goals) of the collaboration or partnership between the collaborating entities. The specific agreements should be detailed into separate paragraphs or listings along the lines of "What [X Agency] Will Do" and "What [Y Group] Will Do."

#### Duration or Term of Memorandum and Termination Process

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- The memorandum should identify the beginning and ending dates of the agreement or its anticipated duration.  
**Example:** *This memorandum shall commence on [date] and shall continue for period of [ending date/number of years].*
- The memorandum should also identify how the MOU can be terminated.  
**Example:** *This memorandum may be terminated by either party giving the other party [three months'] notice in writing.*

#### Meetings and Reporting

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An MOU describes the interaction between the organizations. It provides a structure, such as a specific meeting time, or the "as needed" informal expectations of all parties involved. It is also a way for parties to specify their reporting needs and timeframes.

**Example:** *To accomplish the purpose and objective set forth in the MOU, partners will meet at least [twice] a year.*

#### Resource Considerations

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The monetary and non-monetary resource requirements should be explained. If applicable, someone may need to take responsibility for financial record keeping and reporting. Specify who will review and approve expenditures and financial decisions on behalf of the collaboration.

#### Signatures with Dates

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Once the MOU is prepared and agreed upon by parties involved, it should be signed and dated by the authorized individuals representing each partner or organization. Copies should be kept in an easily accessible location by both entities.



# Collaboration Toolkit

## Organize the Effort

**Purpose:** This section presents ideas about how to organize information and use time effectively both AT and INBETWEEN meetings. When meetings are organized and well-run, participants feel that their time is used well and respected. Everyone shares a common understanding of what the team has accomplished and where it is going. Information is clear and regularly distributed between meetings to ensure that everyone has access – not just a select few.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>[Name of group here]</i>  <b>Meeting Agenda</b>            [Date]            [Time]            [Location]</p>			
<b>Purpose Statement:</b> <i>(insert collaborations purpose statement here, this statement should drive the work)</i>		<b>Duration &amp; Discussion Lead</b>	<b>Action</b> <i>(brainstorming, decision making, information sharing, problem solving)</i>
<b>Agenda Items</b>			
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
<b>Next Meeting:</b> [Date, Time, Location]			

**Debriefing** offers an opportunity to capture lessons learned from the meeting, problem solve about issues that surface and plan activities for future meetings that will strengthen the team and its work. It allows the group to reflect on and summarize the outcomes of the meeting, assess the teams' progress toward its goals, share observations about group dynamics, consider politics and administrative concerns that influence the team, and set goals and the agenda for the next meeting.

### Debriefing questions:

- Would anyone like to share any thoughts, feelings, or ideas that they have as a result of today's meeting?
- What satisfied you most about today's meeting?
- What would you like the team to handle differently in the future?
- What would you like to see covered at the next meeting?
- How can you help prepare for the next meeting





# Collaboration Toolkit

<b>Agenda item:</b>		<b>Presenter:</b>	
Discussion:			
Conclusions:			
<b>Action items</b>		<b>Person responsible</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
<b>Agenda item:</b>		<b>Presenter:</b>	
Discussion:			
Conclusions:			
<b>Action items</b>		<b>Person responsible</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
<b>Agenda item:</b>		<b>Presenter:</b>	
Discussion:			
Conclusions:			
<b>Action items</b>		<b>Person responsible</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
<b>Other Information</b>			
Next Meeting:			
Carry Over Items:			
Special notes:			



# Collaboration Toolkit

## Benchmarking Tool

**Purpose:** This is a practical tool for assessing how your collaboration is doing. Groups that are considering collaboration can use it to see if they have what they need to succeed. They can then act quickly to shore up weaknesses and capitalize on strengths—before formalizing the collaboration, or in its early stages. Established collaborations can use the inventory to troubleshoot problems, demonstrate successes to funders, and uncover differences in how participating organizations perceive the collaboration.

Indicator	No	Somewhat (In Progress)	Thriving
<i>The alliance has a charter (such as a Memorandum of Understanding or letter of agreement) that states the purpose of the partnership and identifies roles and responsibilities for the partnering organizations.</i>			
<i>There is a written workplan with desired outcomes, goals, strategies, and evaluation system with a timeline to achieve stated goals.</i>			
<i>Alliance has developed an issue statement.</i>			
<i>The team has a plan that it uses to share information</i>			
<i>Agenda outlining corresponding activities is present at each meeting</i>			
<i>Vision is central in planning the collaborative effort</i>			
<i>Each alliance meeting is structured and task-oriented.</i>			
<i>The alliance stays focused on the issue statement.</i>			
<i>The alliance evaluates its progress and outcomes and adjusts the workplan as needed.</i>			
<i>The team regularly reviews its progress against benchmarks.</i>			
<i>Meetings are held regularly</i>			
<i>There is a mechanism(s) for on-going communication.</i>			
<i>Trusting relationships exist between members</i>			
<i>Each partner is held accountable to assigned tasks and roles.</i>			
<i>Participating organizations each have a role that is mutually beneficial where each partner both brings and receives value to the working relationship.</i>			
<i>Each member of the team contributes resources (both in-kind &amp; direct) to support the team's operations.</i>			
<i>Team represents the diversity and resources of the community and/or issue being addressed by the collaborative.</i>			

For an online resource to assess how your collaboration is doing on 20 research-tested success factors, go to <http://wilderresearch.org/tools/cfi/index.php>. (Mattessich et al., 2001)



### Resource List

This resource list includes books, publications, and articles that been cited and have helped shape the development of this toolkit.

Mattessich et al. (2001). *Collaboration: What Makes it Work 2nd Edition*. Fieldstone Alliance.

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