Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION REVIEW

Collective Impact

By John Kania & Mark Kramer

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LARGE-SCALE SOCIAL CHANGE REQUIRES BROAD CROSS-SECTOR COORDINATION, YET THE SOCIAL SECTOR REMAINS FOCUSED ON THE ISOLATED INTERVENTION OF INDIVIDUAL ORGANIZATIONS.

BY JOHN KANIA & MARK KRAMER

Illustration by Martin Jarrie

The scale and complexity of the U.S. public education system has thwarted attempted reforms for decades. Major funders, such as the Annenberg Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Pew Charitable Trusts have abandoned many of their efforts in frustration after acknowledging their lack of progress. Once the global leader—after World War II the United States had the highest high school graduation rate in the world—the country now ranks 18th among the top 24 industrialized nations, with more than 1 million secondary school students dropping out every year. The heroic efforts of countless teachers, administrators, and nonprofits, together with billions of dollars in charitable contributions, may have led to important improvements in individual schools and classrooms, yet system-wide progress has seemed virtually unobtainable.

Against these daunting odds, a remarkable exception seems to be emerging in Cincinnati. Strive, a nonprofit subsidiary of KnowledgeWorks, has brought together local leaders to tackle the student achievement crisis and improve education throughout greater Cincinnati and northern Kentucky. In the four years since the group was launched, Strive partners have improved student success in dozens of key areas across three large public school districts. Despite the recession and budget cuts, 34 of the 53 success indicators that Strive tracks have shown positive trends, including high school graduation rates, fourth-grade reading and math scores, and the number of preschool children prepared for kindergarten.

Why has Strive made progress when so many other efforts have failed? It is because a core group of community leaders decided to abandon their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach to improving student achievement. More than 300 leaders of local organizations agreed to participate, including the heads of influential private and corporate foundations, city government officials, school district representatives, the presidents of eight universities and community colleges, and the executive directors of hundreds of education-related nonprofit and advocacy groups.

These leaders realized that fixing one point on the educational continuum—such as better after-school programs—wouldn't make much difference unless all parts of the continuum improved at the same time. No single organization, however innovative or powerful, could accomplish this alone. Instead, their ambitious mission became to coordinate improvements at *every* stage of a young person's life, from "cradle to career."

Strive didn't try to create a new educational program or attempt to convince donors to spend more money. Instead, through a carefully structured process, Strive focused the entire educational community on a single set of goals, measured in the same way. Participating organizations are grouped into 15 different Student Success Networks (SSNs) by type of activity, such as early childhood education or tutoring. Each SSN has been meeting with coaches and facilitators for two hours every two weeks for the past three years, developing shared performance indicators, discussing their progress, and most important, learning from each other and aligning their efforts to support each other.

Strive, both the organization and the process it helps facilitate, is an example of *collective impact*, the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Collaboration is nothing new. The social sector is filled with examples of partnerships, networks, and other types of joint efforts. But collective impact initiatives are distinctly different. Unlike most collaborations, collective impact initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants. (See "Types of Collaborations" on page 39.)

Although rare, other successful examples of collective impact are addressing social issues that, like education, require many different players to change their behavior in order to solve a complex problem. In 1993, Marjorie Mayfield Jackson helped found the Elizabeth River Project with a mission of cleaning up the Elizabeth River in southeastern Virginia, which for decades had been a dumping ground for industrial waste. They engaged more than 100 stakeholders, including the city governments of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Virginia Beach, Va., the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Navy, and dozens of local businesses, schools, community groups, environmental organizations, and universities, in developing an 18-point plan to restore the watershed. Fifteen years later, more than 1,000 acres of watershed land have been conserved or restored, pollution has been reduced by more than 215 million pounds, concentrations of the most severe carcinogen have been cut sixfold, and water quality has significantly improved. Much remains to be done before the river is fully restored, but already 27 species of fish and oysters are thriving in the restored wetlands, and bald eagles have returned to nest on the shores.

Or consider Shape up Somerville, a citywide effort to reduce and prevent childhood obesity in elementary school children in Somerville, Mass. Led by Christina Economos, an associate professor at Tufts University's Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, and funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, and United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, the program engaged government officials, educators, businesses, nonprofits, and citizens in collectively defining wellness and weight gain prevention practices. Schools agreed to offer healthier foods, teach nutrition, and promote physical activity. Local restaurants received a certification if they served low-fat, high nutritional food. The city organized a farmers' market and provided healthy lifestyle incentives such as reduced-price gym memberships for city employees. Even sidewalks were modified and crosswalks repainted to encourage more children to walk to school. The result was a statistically significant decrease in body mass index among the community's young children between 2002 and 2005.

Even companies are beginning to explore collective impact to tackle social problems. Mars, a manufacturer of chocolate brands such as M&M's, Snickers, and Dove, is working with NGOs, local governments, and even direct competitors to improve the lives of more than 500,000 impoverished cocoa farmers in Cote d'Ivoire, where Mars sources a large portion of its cocoa. Research suggests that better farming practices and improved plant stocks could triple the yield per hectare, dramatically increasing farmer incomes and improving the sustainability of Mars's supply chain. To accomplish this, Mars must enlist the coordinated efforts of multiple organizations: the Cote d'Ivoire government needs to provide more agricultural extension workers, the World Bank needs to finance new roads, and bilateral donors need to support NGOs in improving health care, nutrition, and education in cocoa growing communities. And Mars must find ways to work with its direct competitors on pre-competitive issues to reach farmers outside its supply chain.

These varied examples all have a common theme: that large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations. Evidence of the effectiveness of this approach is still limited, but these examples suggest that substantially greater progress could be made in alleviating many of our most serious and complex social problems if nonprofits, governments, businesses, and the public were brought together around a common agenda to create collective impact. It doesn't happen often, not because it is impossible, but because it is so rarely attempted. Funders and nonprofits alike overlook the potential for collective impact because they are used to focusing on independent action as the primary vehicle for social change.

ISOLATED IMPACT

Most funders, faced with the task of choosing a few grantees from many applicants, try to ascertain which organizations make the greatest contribution toward solving a social problem. Grantees, in turn, compete to be chosen by emphasizing how their individual activities produce the greatest effect. Each organization is judged on its own potential to achieve impact, independent of the numerous other organizations that may also influence the issue. And when a grantee is asked to evaluate the impact of its work, every attempt is made to isolate that grantee's individual influence from all other variables.

In short, the nonprofit sector most frequently operates using an approach that we call *isolated impact*. It is an approach oriented toward finding and funding a solution embodied within a single organization, combined with the hope that the most effective organizations will grow or replicate to extend their impact more widely. Funders search for more effective interventions as if there were a cure for failing schools that only needs to be discovered, in the way that medical cures are discovered in laboratories. As a result of this process, nearly 1.4 million nonprofits try to invent independent solutions to major social problems, often working at odds with each other and exponentially increasing the perceived resources required to make meaningful progress. Recent trends have only reinforced this perspective. The growing interest in venture philanthropy and social entrepreneurship, for example, has greatly benefited the social sector by identifying and accelerating the growth of many high-performing nonprofits, yet it has also accentuated an emphasis on scaling up a few select organizations as the key to social progress.

Despite the dominance of this approach, there is scant evidence that isolated initiatives are the best way to solve many social problems in today's complex and interdependent world. No single organization is responsible for any major social problem, nor can any single

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TYPES OF COLLABORATIONS

Organizations have attempted to solve social problems by collaboration for decades without producing many results. The vast majority of these efforts lack the elements of success that enable collective impact initiatives to achieve a sustained alignment of efforts.

Funder Collaboratives are groups of funders interested in supporting the same issue who pool their resources. Generally, participants do not adopt an overarching evidence-based plan of action or a shared measurement system, nor do they engage in differentiated activities beyond check writing or engage stakeholders from other sectors.

Public-Private Partnerships are partnerships formed between government and private sector organizations to deliver specific services or benefits. They are often targeted narrowly, such as developing a particular drug to fight a single disease, and usually don't engage the full set of stakeholders that affect the issue, such as the potential drug's distribution system.

Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives are voluntary activities by stakeholders from different sectors around a common theme. Typically, these initiatives lack any shared measurement of impact and the supporting infrastructure to forge any true alignment of efforts or accountability for results.

Social Sector Networks are groups of individuals or organizations fluidly connected through purposeful relationships, whether formal or informal. Collaboration is generally ad hoc, and most often the emphasis is placed on information sharing and targeted short-term actions, rather than a sustained and structured initiative.

Collective Impact Initiatives are long-term commitments by a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Their actions are supported by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication, and are staffed by an independent backbone organization.

organization cure it. In the field of education, even the most highly respected nonprofits—such as the Harlem Children's Zone, Teach for America, and the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP)—have taken decades to reach tens of thousands of children, a remarkable achievement that deserves praise, but one that is three orders of magnitude short of the tens of millions of U.S. children that need help.

The problem with relying on the isolated impact of individual organizations is further compounded by the isolation of the nonprofit sector. Social problems arise from the interplay of governmental and commercial activities, not only from the behavior of social sector organizations. As a result, complex problems can be solved only by cross-sector coalitions that engage those outside the nonprofit sector.

We don't want to imply that all social problems require collective impact. In fact, some problems are best solved by individual organizations. In "Leading Boldly," an article we wrote with Ron Heifetz for the winter 2004 issue of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, we described the difference between *technical problems* and *adaptive problems*. Some social problems are technical in that the problem is well defined, the answer is known in advance, and one or a few organizations have the ability to implement the solution. Examples include funding college scholarships, building a hospital, or installing inventory controls in a food bank. Adaptive problems, by contrast, are complex, the answer is not known, and even if it were, no single entity has the resources or authority to bring about the necessary change. Reforming public education, restoring wetland environments, and improving community health are all adaptive problems. In these cases, reaching an effective solution requires learning by the stakeholders involved in the problem, who must then change their own behavior in order to create a solution.

Shifting from isolated impact to collective impact is not merely a matter of encouraging more collaboration or public-private partnerships. It requires a systemic approach to social impact that focuses on the relationships between organizations and the progress toward shared objectives. And it requires the creation of a new set of nonprofit management organizations that have the skills and resources to assemble and coordinate the specific elements necessary for collective action to succeed.

THE FIVE CONDITIONS OF COLLECTIVE SUCCESS

Our research shows that successful collective impact initiatives typically have five conditions that together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations.

Common Agenda | Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. Take a close look at any group of funders and nonprofits that believe they are working on the same social issue, and you quickly find that it is often not the same issue at all. Each organization often has a slightly different definition of the problem and the ultimate goal. These differences are easily ignored when organizations work independently on isolated initiatives, yet these differences splinter the efforts and undermine the impact of the field as a whole. Collective impact requires that these differences be discussed and resolved. Every participant need not agree with every other participant on all dimensions of the problem. In fact, disagreements continue to divide participants in all of our examples of collective impact. All participants must agree, however, on the primary goals for the collective impact initiative as a whole. The Elizabeth River Project, for example, had to find common ground among the different objectives of corporations, governments, community groups, and local citizens in order to establish workable cross-sector initiatives.

Funders can play an important role in getting organizations to act in concert. In the case of Strive, rather than fueling hundreds of strategies and nonprofits, many funders have aligned to support Strive's central goals. The Greater Cincinnati Foundation realigned its education goals to be more compatible with Strive, adopting Strive's annual report card as the foundation's own measures for progress in education. Every time an organization applied to Duke Energy for a grant, Duke asked, "Are you part of the [Strive] network?" And when a new funder, the Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile Jr./U.S. Bank Foundation, expressed interest in education, they were encouraged by virtually every major education leader in Cincinnati to join Strive if they wanted to have an impact in local education.[1]

Shared Measurement Systems | Developing a shared measurement system is essential to collective impact. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures.

It may seem impossible to evaluate hundreds of different organizations on the same set of measures. Yet recent advances in Web-based technologies have enabled common systems for reporting performance and measuring outcomes. These systems increase efficiency and reduce cost. They can also improve the quality and credibility of the data collected, increase effectiveness by enabling grantees to learn from each other's performance, and document the progress of the field as a whole.[2]

All of the preschool programs in Strive, for example, have agreed to measure their results on the same criteria and use only evidence-based decision making. Each type of activity requires a different set of measures, but all organizations engaged in the same type of activity report on the same measures. Looking at results across multiple organizations enables the participants to spot patterns, find solutions, and implement them rapidly. The preschool programs discovered that children regress during the summer break before kindergarten. By launching an innovative "summer bridge" session, a technique more often used in middle school, and implementing it simultaneously in all preschool programs, they increased the average kindergarten readiness scores throughout the region by an average of 10 percent in a single year.[3]

Mutually Reinforcing Activities | Collective impact initiatives depend on a diverse group of stakeholders working together, not by requiring that all participants do the same thing, but by encouraging each participant to undertake the specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others.

The power of collective action comes not from the sheer number of participants or the uniformity of their efforts, but from the coordination of their differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action. Each stakeholder's efforts must fit into an overarching plan if their combined efforts are to succeed. The multiple causes of social problems, and the components of their solutions, are interdependent. They cannot be addressed by uncoordinated actions among isolated organizations.

All participants in the Elizabeth River Project, for example, agreed on the 18-point watershed restoration plan, but each is playing a different role based on its particular capabilities. One group of organizations works on creating grassroots support and engagement among citizens, a second provides peer review and recruitment for industrial participants who voluntarily reduce pollution, and a third coordinates and reviews scientific research.

The 15 SSNs in Strive each undertake different types of activities at different stages of the educational continuum. Strive does not prescribe what practices each of the 300 participating organizations should pursue. Each organization and network is free to chart its own course consistent with the common agenda, and informed by the shared measurement of results.

Continuous Communication | Developing trust among nonprofits, corporations, and government agencies is a monumental challenge. Participants need several years of regular meetings to build up enough experience with each other to recognize and appreciate the common motivation behind their different efforts. They need time to see that their own interests will be treated fairly, and that decisions will be made on the basis of objective evidence and the best possible solution to the problem, not to favor the priorities of one organization over another.

Even the process of creating a common vocabulary takes time, and it is an essential prerequisite to developing shared measurement systems. All the collective impact initiatives we have studied held monthly or even biweekly in-person meetings among the organizations' CEO-level leaders. Skipping meetings or sending lower-level delegates was not acceptable. Most of the meetings were supported by external facilitators and followed a structured agenda.

The Strive networks, for example, have been meeting regularly for more than three years. Communication happens between meetings too: Strive uses Web-based tools, such as Google Groups, to keep communication flowing among and within the networks. At first, many of the leaders showed up because they hoped that their participation would bring their organizations additional funding, but they soon learned that was not the meetings' purpose. What they discovered instead were the rewards of learning and solving problems together with others who shared their same deep knowledge and passion about the issue.

Backbone Support Organizations | Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. Coordination takes time, and none of the participating organizations has any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.

The backbone organization requires a dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly. Strive has simplified the initial staffing requirements for a backbone organization to three roles: project manager, data manager, and facilitator.

Collective impact also requires a highly structured process that leads to effective decision making. In the case of Strive, staff worked with General Electric (GE) to adapt for the social sector the Six Sigma process that GE uses for its own continuous quality improvement. The Strive Six Sigma process includes training, tools, and resources that each SSN uses to define its common agenda, shared measures, and plan of action, supported by Strive facilitators to guide the process.

In the best of circumstances, these backbone organizations embody the principles of adaptive leadership: the ability to focus people's attention and create a sense of urgency, the skill to apply pressure to stakeholders without overwhelming them, the competence to frame issues in a way that presents opportunities as well as difficulties, and the strength to mediate conflict among stakeholders.

FUNDING COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Creating a successful collective impact initiative requires a significant financial investment: the time participating organizations must dedicate to the work, the development and monitoring of shared measurement systems, and the staff of the backbone organization needed to lead and support the initiative's ongoing work.

As successful as Strive has been, it has struggled to raise money, confronting funders' reluctance to pay for infrastructure and preference for short-term solutions. Collective impact requires instead that funders support a long-term process of social change without identifying any particular solution in advance. They must be willing to let grantees steer the work and have the patience to stay with an initiative for years, recognizing that social change can come from the gradual improvement of an entire system over time, not just from a single breakthrough by an individual organization.

This requires a fundamental change in how funders see their role, from funding organizations to leading a long-term process of social change. It is no longer enough to fund an innovative solution created by a single nonprofit or to build that organization's capacity. Instead, funders must help create and sustain the collective processes, measurement reporting systems, and community leadership that enable cross-sector coalitions to arise and thrive.

This is a shift that we foreshadowed in both "Leading Boldly" and our more recent article, "Catalytic Philanthropy," in the fall 2009 issue of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review.* In the former, we suggested that the most powerful role for funders to play in addressing adaptive problems is to focus attention on the issue and help to create a process that mobilizes the organizations involved to find a solution themselves. In "Catalytic Philanthropy," we wrote: "Mobilizing and coordinating stakeholders is far messier and slower work than funding a compelling grant request from a single organization. Systemic change, however, ultimately depends on a sustained campaign to increase the capacity and coordination of an entire field." We recommended that funders who want to create large-scale change follow four practices: take responsibility for assembling the elements of a solution; create a movement for change; include solutions from outside the nonprofit sector; and use actionable knowledge to influence behavior and improve performance.

These same four principles are embodied in collective impact initiatives. The organizers of Strive abandoned the conventional approach of funding specific programs at education nonprofits and took responsibility for advancing education reform themselves. They built a movement, engaging hundreds of organizations in a drive toward shared goals. They used tools outside the nonprofit sector, adapting GE's Six Sigma planning process for the social sector. And through the community report card and the biweekly meetings of the SSNs they created actionable knowledge that motivated the community and improved performance among the participants.

Funding collective impact initiatives costs money, but it can be a highly leveraged investment. A backbone organization with a modest annual budget can support a collective impact initiative of several hundred organizations, magnifying the impact of millions or even billions of dollars in existing funding. Strive, for example, has a $1.5 million annual budget but is coordinating the efforts and increasing the effectiveness of organizations with combined budgets of $7 billion. The social sector, however, has not yet changed its funding practices to enable the shift to collective impact. Until funders are willing to embrace this new approach and invest sufficient resources in the necessary facilitation, coordination, and measurement that enable organizations to work in concert, the requisite infrastructure will not evolve.

FUTURE SHOCK

What might social change look like if funders, nonprofits, government officials, civic leaders, and business executives embraced collective impact? Recent events at Strive provide an exciting indication of what might be possible.

Strive has begun to codify what it has learned so that other communities can achieve collective impact more rapidly. The organization is working with nine other communities to establish similar cradle to career initiatives.[4] Importantly, although Strive is broadening its impact to a national level, the organization is not scaling up its own operations by opening branches in other cities. Instead, Strive is promulgating a flexible process for change, offering each community a set of tools for collective impact, drawn from Strive's experience but adaptable to the community's own needs and resources. As a result, the new communities take true ownership of their own collective impact initiatives, but they don't need to start the process from scratch. Activities such as developing a collective educational reform mission and vision or creating specific community-level educational indicators are expedited through the use of Strive materials and assistance from Strive staff. Processes that took Strive several years to develop are being adapted and modified by other communities in significantly less time.

These nine communities plus Cincinnati have formed a community of practice in which representatives from each effort connect regularly to share what they are learning. Because of the number and diversity of the communities, Strive and its partners can quickly determine what processes are universal and which require adaptation to a local context. As learning accumulates, Strive staff will incorporate new findings into an Internet-based knowledge portal that will be available to any community wishing to create a collective impact initiative based on Strive's model.

This exciting evolution of the Strive collective impact initiative is far removed from the isolated impact approach that now dominates the social sector and that inhibits any major effort at comprehensive, large-scale change. If successful, it presages the spread of a new approach that will enable us to solve today's most serious social problems with the resources we already have at our disposal. It would be a shock to the system. But it's a form of shock therapy that's badly needed. ■

Notes

1 Interview with Kathy Merchant, CEO of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, April 10, 2010.

2 See Mark Kramer, Marcie Parkhurst, and Lalitha Vaidyanathan, *Breakthroughs in Shared Measurement and Social Impact*, FSG Social Impact Advisors, 2009.

3 "Successful Starts," United Way of Greater Cincinnati, second edition, fall 2009.

4 Indianapolis, Houston, Richmond, Va., and Hayward, Calif., are the first four communities to implement Strive's process for educational reform. Portland, Ore., Fresno, Calif., Mesa, Ariz., Albuquerque, and Memphis are just beginning their efforts.

Directions for completing this form: Place the title of your workshop in the space indicated, followed by the name and contact information for each of the presenters. Provide a brief description of your workshop by placing the cursor on the line below "Brief Description" and commence typing. To complete the "Topical Outline", place cursor next to each Roman numeral and begin typing. Then place the cursor next to the "a." to begin listing sub-topics. To list more than one sub-topic, push "Enter" and "b." should appear on the next line, and so on. Place the cursor on the line under "Notes" to begin providing your notes. To list bibliographic information, place the cursor next to "1." and start typing. Push "Enter" to move on to "2." and etc.

ABA / NLADA 2009 Equal Justice Conference

"Fostering Information Sharing and Collaboration to Maximize Successful Team/Partnership Efforts" (WSR_114)

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Brief Description: This is a nuts and bolts workshop on what it takes to start and sustain a collaborative effort. Topics discussed include the continuum of going from cooperation to collaboration; the benefits of collaboration; challenges and barriers to collaboration; where to start; how to overcome barriers and challenges to collaboration; and essential elements to strengthen your collaboration. Examples of successful collaborative efforts will also be discussed.

Topical Outline:

I. Defining Cooperation, Coordination, and Collaboration

a. The difference between cooperation, coordination, and collaboration
b. The continuum of going from cooperative/team projects to collaborations and partnerships

II. When and Why to Partner or Collaborate

a. A desire to work together, to solve a specific problem
b. A common purpose, shared vision
c. A desire to improve efficiency and effectiveness (i.e. eliminate duplication of efforts, more efficient use of time, talents, and services, use of integration techniques)
d. To better meet customer/client needs
e. Strong desire to share and exchange information that benefit all involved
f. The nature of the work necessitates collaborative efforts
g. To be innovative or try something new
h. To obtain funding or support

III. Challenges and Barriers to Collaboration

a. Lack of resources (internal or external)
b. Limited experiences with collaborating
c. Lack of role clarity (internal or external)
d. Unsure of who to partner or collaborate with or the benefits of the potential collaborative effort

e. Power differences between partners
f. Fear of compromising mission of organization
g. Lack of leadership support for collaborative effort(s)
h. Lack of trust and confidence between potential partners
i. Lack of information sharing and/or poor or strained communication between potential partners
j. Geographic, confidentiality and security issues
k. Different levels of commitment between partners
l. The structure and culture of the organization

V. **Developing a Strategy and Setting the Stage to Collaborate**

m. Ongoing planning with research and idea exploration
n. Setting up the infrastructure
o. Identify specific barriers to the collaboration

VI. **Developing a Plan of Action to Overcoming Challenges and Barriers**

a. Understanding roles and responsibilities of each partner
b. Building trust and sustaining relationships
c. Increasing information sharing
d. Gaining leadership support, creating the right climate

VII. **Essential Elements to Strengthen Your Collaboration/Team Efforts**

a. A succinct and flexible purpose
b. Roles and responsibilities defined
c. Frequent and open communication
d. Strong and sustainable relationships
e. Training and development
f. Ongoing feedback and evaluation

VIII. **Examples of Successful Collaborative Efforts**

a. The Virginia Partnership (GEAP grant)
b. Capitol Region Grant Collaboration Network
c. LawHelp, Pro Bono Net, Bench/Bar Collaborations
d. Other successful collaborations

IX. Scenario Exercises

Notes: Handouts below will provide additional information to participants attending this workshop.

Handouts:

1. "Starting and Sustaining Collaborations and Partnerships: Tools, Resources, and References."
2. "Fostering Information Sharing: Tips on Communicating Effectively."
3. "Tips to Overcome Barriers to Collaboration."
4. "The Virginia GEAP Partnership."

Overcoming Barriers to Partnering and Collaborating

Don Reinhart and Madelynn Herman[1]

Collaborations and partnerships can be a challenge with many barriers to overcome. We can't change each and every obstacle overnight, but we can maneuver through the barriers placed in our path. The following information provides a sampling of barriers and a few tips on how to overcome them.

Lack of resources (internal or external). Assuming that you are funded for a partnering, collaborative project; make sure that you have the capacity to implement the project both in human resources and technology.

Limited experiences with collaboration projects. By 'educating' as many functions as possible within your organization as to the value of collaborating and partnering as a team, the more you will be able to share information and therefore are able to maximize your team's effectiveness.

Lack of role clarity (internal or external). Once you are appointed to participate or to lead in a collaborative outside project representing your organization, make sure that you understand the magnitude of your project and that you are supported by your superior before you accept the responsibility.

Unsure of who to partner or collaborate with, or the benefits of the potential collaborative effort. Get to know your 'in-house' neighbors. Reach out to understand their particular role or responsibility in the organization so that you might be able to partner and collaborate with them in the near and far term.

Power differences between partners. Understand the hierarchy of community and state-federal agencies versus your own organization, but also understand that in the outside partnering project, each agency including yours is considered equal in the decision-making process.

Fear of compromising the mission of your organization. Know and understand your organization's mission and objectives versus those of the external team players as well.

Lack of leadership support for collaborative effort(s). Make sure that your peers and immediate supervision are always brought up-to-speed as to developing national & local trends affecting the collaborative project you have undertaken.

Always be aware that by undertaking a collaborative project, the first order of business should be to develop a sense of rapport with each and every member of the team. This personal effort over time should help to establish an aura of trust and reliability among the team members.

Lack of information sharing and/or poor or strained communication between potential partners. One of the most difficult challenges in overcoming barriers to collaboration is to convince individuals on the external team as well as those within your organization to share information. The Silo mentality is one that refuses to share information for the better good of the

[1] All views expressed are of the authors alone.

organization or project. As leader, you must devise ways to 'bring' individuals to believe in the team concept.

Geographic, confidentiality and security issues. Always remember "what goes on in Vegas, stays in Vegas'. Although this term is humorous, it makes good sense to abide by its inference. Always know that the outside team's activity has a specific purpose for its existence; respect its privacy issues, and confidentiality of sensitive information if requested.

Different levels of commitment between partners. Each partner involved in your collaborative project will come to the table with various levels of commitment. As a collaborative team member or leader, respecting these variances will eventually result in a very dedicated member.

The structure and culture of the organization. From an internal perspective, to enforce the concept of Collaborative Teams or Partnering within your organization, impress your HR director to consider using the following terminology in all job descriptions: a) Collaborates with peers as to team projects both internal and external; and b) Participates in information sharing activities such as Communities of Practice or Cross Functional Teams.

Understand that if you are in the middle of a 'silo' situation, change does not take place overnight. We should work thru or around the 'Silo.'

Don't play Small Ball! Be strong and convincing that to succeed in a highly competitive world, the 'team concept' is better able to partner and to lead in all sorts of collaborative goals of the organization.

2009 Equal Justice Conference, WSR_114
"Fostering Information Sharing and Collaboration to Maximize Successful Team/Partnership Efforts."

Starting and Sustaining Collaborations & Partnerships: Tools, Resources, and References

Best Practices: 12 Lessons from Successful State Access to Justice Efforts. American Bar Association, Access to Justice Support Project. See: http://www.atjsupport.org/DMS/Documents/1018712627.59/12%20Lessons.pdf

Tips and Ideas for Criminal Justice Partnerships. The Center for Effective Public Policy. These WebPages provide tips on team success and problem solving, facilitation and leadership, and effective meetings for justice collaborations. See: http://www.collaborativejustice.org/tipsideas.htm

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Chapter 1
Building Collaborative Partnerships

How do collaborative efforts get started?

How does a collaborative partnership plan for action?

The axiom that two heads are better than one really is true when it comes to strengthening children and families in a holistic way. By thinking, planning, and working together, the individuals and groups that make a community can accomplish goals that neither could achieve alone.

Diverse stakeholders shape their holistic efforts through **collaborative partnerships**. These partnerships give communities a structure for organizing, planning, and implementing their ideas. Collaborative partnerships are the mechanism for designing **comprehensive strategies** that strengthen children and families.

The process of building a collaborative partnership is multidimensional. It involves:

- recognizing opportunities for change;
- mobilizing people and resources to create changes;
- developing a vision of long-term change;
- seeking support and involvement from diverse and non-traditional partners;
- choosing an effective group structure;
- building trust among collaborators; and
- developing learning opportunities for partners.

Although the effort takes time and requires careful attention, it's essential to creating strong, viable partnerships that produce lasting change. This chapter addresses the work that collaborative partnerships typically engage in as they begin and as they move toward action.

How Do Collaborative Efforts Get Started?

Comprehensive partnerships begin because individuals reach out to like-minded people and groups to address issues that affect children and families.

There are many catalysts for comprehensive partnerships. Some form when school leaders or local policymakers initiate collaboration. Others begin when a community becomes aware of an urgent need for change, or when funding becomes available to respond to conditions in the community. For example, a school superintendent, notified of new public or private funds for comprehensive services, may work with teachers, parents, and community agencies to develop school-linked strategies for health care, adult education, child care, job preparation, and violence prevention programs. Or, school staff may initiate collaboration with the community to respond to a recognized need:

> In rural Kentucky, school staff learned of a developmentally delayed preschool child whose parents had been unaware of the community services available to them but were willing to work with school, health, and human service providers to enroll the child in a preschool program. Agency staff formed a team to support the parents' efforts to work with their child at home. They also helped the father enroll in a job training program. Encouraged by the success of this collaboration, the team decided to formalize its partnership in order to tackle similar issues.

Sometimes, parents initiate collaboration:

> In Salinas, California, a small group of Spanish-speaking families with seriously ill children formed a support group for children and families. Partners included the American Cancer Society; a Spanish-speaking outreach liaison from the school district; and Healthy Start, a state initiative that links families with multiple community agencies and providers. The families meet weekly at the Healthy Start center to learn about local services and to support each other as they confront their children's problems. The partnership has been so successful in empowering parents that some participants have begun to provide leadership to other Healthy Start projects.

Once an individual or small group of planners lights the spark of collaboration, school leaders join with families, community leaders and representatives, and health and human service providers to forge individual programs into comprehensive strategies. This core group evolves into a collaborative effort by (1) understanding the context for collaboration, (2) expanding to include parents and other community partners, (3) forming a partnership, and (4) establishing an effective governance structure.

Understanding the Context for Collaboration

Before you can determine how to develop comprehensive strategies in your community, you will want to know what local conditions will support or inhibit a collaborative effort. You can learn about the school's readiness for collaboration by talking with school administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff; parents and parent-teacher organization leaders; and teacher union leaders. At the school district level, Title I coordinators, volunteer coordinators, and other program administrators can explain the district's policies, practices, and perspectives. In the community, religious leaders, city or county council members, and representatives of neighborhood and youth-serving organizations can provide useful insights into the potential for a comprehensive partnership.

Be sure to involve community members, parents, and other partners in developing an understanding of the context for collaboration. You may want to consider the following questions:

> **Which stakeholders have an interest in the partnership you are planning?**
>
> **Who might be willing to join your collaboration?** Will the attitudes and culture of the school, the

school district, and the community support the partnership?

Are the school, district, and other potential partners willing to share their resources and capacities?

How do the interests of each potential partner fit into the broader collaboration? How can administrators of specific programs (e.g., Title I, special education, school volunteers) join with other partners in a unified effort?

Expanding the Involvement of Families and the Community
It isn't enough to simply round up the "usual suspects"--the core group of teachers, parents, and business leaders who already participate in collaborations between schools, families, and communities. If your comprehensive partnership is going to have a complete picture of community strengths, conditions, and resources, you'll want to enlist families and community leaders who may be disenfranchised from traditional groups but still have their finger on the pulse of important segments of the community.

Don't wait for these stakeholders to walk through the schoolhouse door; send representatives from your planning group to neighborhood association meetings, the city planning office, and cultural and community centers to invite these players to join your partnership. Try to enlist people who truly understand and are committed to the goals of your partnership--not those who are simply assigned by their supervisors to collaborate. You can also increase the investment of potential partners by asking them to help collect information about the local context for collaboration.

Forming a Partnership
As your partnership begins to take shape, you will want to make sure you are attracting appropriate participants to the collaborating table--and that they can work effectively once they get there. Experienced partnerships offer the following advice:

- **Ensure a broad-based, inclusive partnership** by seeking partners who represent a cross-section of the community: parents, principals, teachers, counselors and other school staff, cultural and religious leaders, health care and human service providers, business and political leaders, staff and administrators from community organizations, and representatives from local universities and student groups. Make sure your partners reflect diverse perspectives, experiences, cultures, and levels of authority.

- **Don't wait for all partners to get on board before moving forward** with your plans. Most partnerships expand gradually over time. For example, in one community a partnership that focused on school-linked strategies eventually joined forces with a partnership concerned with community policing. The joint effort, dubbed "Peace Builders," built capacity for conflict resolution and supported community policing strategies. As the entire community gradually embraced the idea, the size and impact of the new partnership grew.

- **Secure a commitment to collaboration**. You may want to ask partner organizations to designate representatives' names and responsibilities in writing; this makes it more likely the same people will be at the table every time the group meets. It also helps move decisions along quickly if organization representatives are authorized to make commitments for their employers.

Once your partners are in place, you are ready to establish a governing structure for the partnership. Take some planning time to consider the following questions:

Will responsibility be shared equally, or will one partner take the lead?

How will decisions be made among partners?

The answers to these questions will be shaped by the extent to which partners share goals, responsibility, and authority; the comprehensiveness of the partnership and its strategies; and the level of resources and policy support for the collaboration.

Establishing an Effective Governance Structure
There is no prescription for the ideal size or design of a leadership group. However, in many communities a two-tiered approach to governance helps partners balance the need for broad oversight with practical considerations. A small management group (10-15 members) that can respond quickly to immediate concerns has responsibility for day-to-day management, while a larger oversight group (30-50 members) meets periodically to consider long-term issues and ensure diverse representation.

Partnerships often use one of the following strategies to create a governance structure that encourages collaboration:

- **Select a lead agency**. One organization--often the school--may be selected to manage the school-linked partnership. "Linkages to Learning," a partnership for school-linked comprehensive services in Montgomery County, Maryland, is led by the county health and human services department's division of children, youth, and family services. This agency coordinated the community assessment, contacted potential partners, organized initial meetings, and developed a memorandum of understanding among other partner agencies. It continues to facilitate planning retreats for program staff, provide a coordinator who organizes partnership meetings, and contribute the majority of staff members. To ensure that the lead agency does not assume undue influence or bear an unfair burden, partners must devise ways to involve all agencies and organizations in decisionmaking--for example, by rotating the responsibility for conducting meetings among partners.

- **Create a new nonprofit agency**. Privately funded ventures, such as the Cities in Schools partnerships, often formally set up a new agency to manage comprehensive school-linked strategies. This approach frees collaborators from the constraints of existing institutions and opens the possibility for change. However, partnerships that choose this strategy need ample time and support to allow schools, agencies, and other organizations to coordinate their efforts with the new entity.

- **Build a consortium of agencies**. In contrast to a new agency, a consortium is an informal organization established and run jointly by the partners. It ensures shared leadership and collaboration and requires that partners be involved in multiple aspects of the collaboration on an ongoing basis. For example, the Local Investment Commission (LINC) in Kansas City, Missouri is guided by a 36-member consortium whose members range from chief executive officers of local corporations to low-income parents. A "professional cabinet" of service experts advises the consortium in its focus on professional development and comprehensive neighborhood services for 16 communities. In addition, three permanent committees address such critical implementation issues as financial management and operations, data and evaluation, and communication and advocacy. This governance structure allows each individual and group to contribute specific expertise to the consortium, and streamlines the decisionmaking process of the larger consortium by having smaller working groups attend to the details of issues such as financial planning.

Creative Approaches Can Increase a Governance Group's Effectiveness

A large governing group can form subgroups to build communication and trust, and prepare members to address specific topics. For example, the oversight committee of one partnership has 50 members who break into subgroups with each subgroup including parents, school staff, agency representatives, and community members. Representatives from all of the stakeholder groups also participate in a 12-member governance group to provide ongoing policy direction. Small groups provide opportunities for parents and other partners to get to know each other personally, before they work together in larger settings.

Providing a variety of options for participation enables many types of partners to contribute to your efforts. Some people work best in small groups, while others prefer large committees. Some partners make powerful presentations, while others contribute best by writing down their concerns and impressions.

The use of jargon-free language and bilingual translators is essential to help all partners understand the issues and feel that their contributions are valued. When everyone has the opportunity to discuss ideas together, partners arrive at a common understanding.

How Does a Collaborative Partnership Plan for Action?

Evolving collaborative partnerships often struggle between the desire to take immediate action and the need to plan for a sustained effort. There is no specific formula for how much time and energy to initially allocate for building relationships or for planning strategies, but experienced partnerships agree that both activities are essential to long-term success.

Planning for action involves **(1)** establishing guidelines for partner relationships, **(2)** defining a target community, **(3)** creating trust and a shared vision among partners, and **(4)** building cultural awareness. These steps take time, but they lay a firm foundation for future action.

Establishing Guidelines for Partner Relationships
The challenge of putting collaboration into action raises many practical issues:

Where will the partners meet to conduct business? Will one agency's facilities be used, or will meetings rotate among several facilities?

Who will attend the meetings? What time(s) of the day or week are most convenient for them?

How will child care be provided?

How often will the group meet? Will it meet for the same purpose every time? How long will meetings last?

Who will determine the agenda for each meeting? How and when will partners submit agenda items?

Will the position of chairperson rotate or remain stable?

Who will distribute briefing materials to participants? Who will record and distribute meeting minutes?

Will tasks be delegated to subcommittees? If so, which ones? Who will staff subcommittees, and how will topics and members be selected?

How can the meeting format best accommodate communication styles and preferences within the community? (For example, are informal meetings with refreshments best?)

Clear guidelines and procedures that address these issues can help ensure effective communication, minimize misunderstandings, and enhance collaboration among partners and agencies. Guidelines are an important part of team building and collaboration; the process of deciding how to work together can actually bring diverse stakeholders together.

The guidelines your partnership chooses should be based on the unique context of your community. However, two general strategies can help most partnerships work effectively:

- **Share the spotlight; seek input from all partners**. In a truly collaborative effort, partners relate to each other on a non-hierarchical basis, regardless of the organizational structure (Jehl & Kirst, 1992). No single agency, organization, or individual should dominate or control the decisionmaking process. You can promote this balance by setting goals for your comprehensive partnership that are broader than the goals of any participating agency or individual and cannot be reached through the efforts of any single group.
- **Include families in decisionmaking**. Parents bring unique perspectives and skills to partnerships and are knowledgeable about the community's cultures and languages. Parents remind school professionals that their issues require more complex solutions than simply creating a new categorical program, and parents can educate other partners by describing what they and their children experience in the community outside the school or agency. By involving families in decisionmaking, emerging partnerships may find strategies that eluded professional staff and also demonstrate that families are respected as full partners. However, the schedules of working parents may make it hard for them to participate unless the partnership schedules meetings on evenings or weekends--and provides child care.

Tips for Taking Action: Guidelines and Procedures for Shared Decisionmaking

Partners often use the following approaches:

Group consensus. Decisions made by consensus require input from each member and agreement that he or she understands, supports, and is willing to implement the group's decision. This method is ideal for partnerships because the process requires thorough discussion of alternatives, allows all voices to be heard, and fosters commitment. Consensus decisionmaking can be time consuming. To reach a decision in the time allotted, groups sometimes have to resort to another method such as majority rule.

Committee decisionmaking. Sometimes a few members are appointed to a committee to decide an issue on behalf of the full membership. This process expedites work; however, not all members of the larger group may support the committee's decision. If the larger group frequently overrides decisions, committees may begin to question their investment of time and effort.

Majority Rule. With this approach, the greatest number of votes carries the decision. Because it is a winner-take-all method, it may erode participants' commitment to collaboration and is probably most useful for deciding minor issues.

Defining a Target Community

Defining a community involves (1) identifying a group or groups of people with whom the comprehensive partnership should focus its efforts, and (2) choosing a location or locations for partnership activities. Both steps require collaboration and inclusiveness.

The multiple stakeholders who form a partnership often work with different communities, based on geographical location, service boundaries, funding constraints, and other factors. As schools, agencies, and community organizations build collaborative efforts, they cannot assume that all children or families interact with the same agencies and organizations. (If they did, comprehensive strategies might not be necessary.) So, a collaborative partnership must determine which community or communities it will work with and eliminate any barriers that prevent children and families in the community from benefiting from the comprehensive strategies.

To define your target community, consider the following factors:

Are there specific issues such as the concerns of individuals with disabilities, needs of different age groups, or other conditions that can and should be addressed through the partnership?

What physical or geographical boundaries may affect the community, and how?

Are there political, social, or cultural factors to consider? For example, will policies for busing complicate the participation of any populations? Will gang rivalry or a reluctance to cross neighborhood boundaries prevent some residents from participating?

Will non-English-speaking families or families new to this country be afraid to participate in activities located at a school or other official institution?

Does affordable, accessible transportation exist to link your chosen community with the operating sites you have chosen?

Community members are the best source of information about many of these factors, and their input is vital.

Creating Trust and a Shared Vision

In many communities, the partners who join a collaborative group may not have worked together before; they may not even know each other, or they may come from organizations with long histories of conflict and competition. And although diversity among partners gives multiple stakeholders a voice in the comprehensive partnership, it can also mean differences of opinion about issues involving children, youth, and families and the best strategies for addressing them. In order to shape a group of diverse individuals into a focused, trusting, effective partnership, you will need to find common ground and develop a unified vision for success.

Find common ground. Take time to help partners familiarize themselves with each other and with the participating agencies. As discussion develops around general issues affecting children and families, encourage your partners to exchange specific ideas, perceptions, and concerns. Discussion topics may include:

- how local schools, agencies, and organizations operate;
- what activities each partner conducts, and with whom;
- families' perceptions about education, health care, and human service providers;
- how organizations are funded, how funds are allocated for activities, and how much is spent on each activity; and
- the effect of state and federal policies on agencies' ability to work with children, youth, and families.

Develop a shared vision. For example, a comprehensive partnership in El Paso County, Texas, developed a vision statement focusing on families, schools, and communities. The vision for each of the three groups began with a broad objective--such as, "Schools actively involve families and communities in their operation"--followed by specific goals such as:

- Campuses are open to the community, not just young children and students, for a wide array of child care, educational, health, and social services.
- Service providers, parents, teachers, and administrators . . . share responsibility for education goals as well as the services offered at the school.
- Higher education institutions . . . reach out to rural communities so that student teachers, especially those from the community, can teach in rural community schools and be supervised by university staff.

As you explore perspectives within the group and find common ground, you can begin to shape a vision that will guide your partnership. This process will evolve from discussions to consensus to a final written vision statement that reflects the conditions, interests, and issues of the community's many groups and organizations. The vision statement expresses your partnership's dreams, aspirations, and concerns for children, families, and the community. The vision may include concrete goals, but it also encompasses broader purposes.

Because a shared vision sets the tone and direction for school-linked comprehensive strategies, it's worth investing time in formulating and reviewing your vision. This is an opportunity for you and your partners to think creatively about traditional strategies and to imagine innovative changes.

The process of developing a shared vision is open-ended and exploratory (Kagan, 1994). It requires partners to set aside individual and agency-specific views in favor of a broader, community-wide perspective. The vision statement should reflect the fact that fulfilling the vision will require collaboration among all partners, so they are prepared for the collaborative nature of the path they have chosen.

Tips for Taking Action: First Steps in Formulating a Vision

Visit existing school-linked comprehensive strategies. Arrange for administrators, agency representatives, school staff, parents, and other partners to visit nearby school-linked programs. Seeing other efforts first-hand brings the concept home and starts creative ideas flowing.

Build shared ownership. Solicit ideas from all participants during the visioning process to promote inclusion. Write down ideas as they emerge to validate the contributions of all participants.

Use a variety of approaches to capture ideas. Remember that some people express themselves better in nonverbal ways. Use pictures, charts, diagrams, and color-coded lists to relay participants' ideas.

Develop resources to support the local effort. Even a contribution of $150 from a local service club provides something tangible to move the effort forward--for example, postage and printing for flyers or child care for a community meeting.

Building Cultural Awareness
Collaborative groups function most effectively when participants recognize, understand, and value cultural diversity. As you establish guidelines, define a target community, and develop your collective vision, try to learn about the cultures of individuals and groups in the community.

Ethnic groups, organizations, and communities each possess a distinct culture. A group's culture includes the informal rules, beliefs, and practices that guide interaction but are invisible to those outside the culture (Boyd, 1992). Encourage your partners to consider the following questions:

How is each organization's culture reflected in its policies, procedures, and practices and in the beliefs, values, and behavior of its staff?

How might cultural factors affect the way a partner or family participates in comprehensive strategies?

Does each partner organization support collaboration and a focus on children and families, or are these concepts likely to be met with resistance and lack of understanding?

How might the partnerships's goals and vision be affected by cultural factors?

Parents and other community members help the partnership bridge cultural differences and support the home cultures.

Parents and community leaders are valuable sources of information about cultural diversity. They can provide insights into the match (or mismatch) of cultural beliefs, values, and practices between families and institutions. For example, staff involved in a comprehensive partnership may unwittingly contribute to cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding by making direct eye contact (a sign of disrespect in some cultures) or by scheduling appointments on families' religious holidays. Parents can bring these concerns to the attention of other collaborators and suggest solutions that bridge cultural differences.

Learning Opportunities

The process of creating comprehensive strategies offers opportunities for learning at every stage. As collaborators join forces and begin to work together, they need to learn about:

- each other and the community groups, organizations, and agencies that they represent;

- the community and its cultures, assets, and traditions;
- the conditions and strengths of children and families in the community; and
- strategies that have been successful in similar communities and settings.

Collaborative partnerships often bring together individuals with very different knowledge bases, attitudes, and assumptions. Each partner possesses unique knowledge and skills that can benefit the others. As partners organize, plan strategies, and move forward, they create learning opportunities for themselves and each other.

It is tempting for new efforts like comprehensive school-linked strategies to "just do it"--to assess, plan, and organize for action as quickly as possible in order to begin program implementation, leaving "staff development" for a later time. But the time it takes to build knowledge and support is essential if you want partners to reflect on the effort as they develop it and develop a shared understanding of the work they are doing. This is the real work of a partnership: to build a community of learners by allowing different stakeholders to come to consensus and common understanding.

Because developing a partnership is essentially a learning process, it is artificial to separate "professional development," "parent education," and "community involvement" from the rest of the work. This guidebook is organized to promote opportunities for learning in every phase of building the partnership, organizing for action, and maintaining momentum; each of the following chapters will provide suggestions for reflective learning and engagement.

Learning Among Partners
As collaborators initially come together, they need to spend a considerable amount of time learning about each other and the community. For example, school superintendents and heads of other public agencies often do not know each other, despite years of working in the same community. "Horizontal" relationships (among people at the top levels of partner organizations) need to be built, as do relationships that span roles in the community--for example, between parents and agency staff. The goal is to develop a sense of collegiality and common purpose throughout the partnership.

Successful partnerships suggest the following approaches to create learning opportunities for partners:

- **Conduct "cross-learning" exercises** in which each partner tells the others who he or she is and what he or she does.
- **Remember that people learn in different ways**--adults as well as children. Honor different learning styles within the partnership by providing material in many forms, verbal as well as written, and paying attention to the length of meetings so that action-oriented people don't feel frustrated.
- **Use small-group activities to stimulate discussion** between partners and to help parents and other partners develop personal relationships as well as professional interactions. One partnership holds "pre-meetings" before every partnership session, where parents and community members can learn about meeting protocols and staff can encourage parents to raise the issues that concern them. These meetings give parents a comfortable place to develop leadership skills.
- **Create opportunities for partners to learn about the community**. Many partnerships rotate their meetings among different locations in the community so members can learn about their partners'

organizations and clients.

- **Build awareness about collaboration**. Educate partners and the community about the benefits of working together by reaching out to agency administrators, community-based and advocacy organizations, businesses, and religious leaders to explain how comprehensive school-linked strategies work.

- **Make information and ideas accessible to all partners**. Participants frequently leave with varying meanings of what occurred; but partners cannot learn from each other if they do not understand what their collaborators are saying. Effective partnerships teach school and agency partners to avoid technical language and acronyms that may intimidate or confuse other participants. One partnership provides language interpreters at group meetings; the interpreters work with small groups of partners to review and translate documents, so that all participants share the same knowledge base. You may also want to review or "debrief" after meetings. A session to talk about what just happened can help parents and other partners make sure they understand interactions between agency heads or others whose communication styles are different.

- **Build capacity for shared decisionmaking**. Partners may want to adopt a model for group decisionmaking or devise their own approach; either way, all partners must understand and feel comfortable with the process.

A Neutral Meeting Site Can Facilitate Collaboration

An interagency group in Florida initially alternated its monthly meetings between a school and community agency. However, staff from the host agency were interrupted frequently by phone calls and questions. Finally, the group decided to meet at a neutral site: a local community college. This allowed uninterrupted meetings, enabled the group to draw support from the community college, and created the sense of a level playing field among the group members.

Summary

The impetus for forming a collaborative partnership often comes from an individual or a small group of community members seeking answers for a particular problem, or from funding that is available for broad-based change. A core group of planners evolves into a partnership after assessing the context for change and expanding to include additional partners and parents. The governance structure for a collaborative partnership can come from a lead agency, a nonprofit agency created to lead the partnership, or a consortium of agencies.

Partnerships begin planning for action by establishing guidelines for partner relationships, defining a target community, creating trust and shared vision among partners, and building cultural awareness.

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