

# Collaboration Toolkit 2012

What does it take to truly collaborate? How do you take your collaboration to the next level? Read on to learn how to determine whether collaboration is right for your organization and to find tools for effective collaboration.

*“By mobilizing resources outside their immediate control, networked nonprofits achieve their missions far more efficiently, effectively, and sustainably than they could have by working alone.”*

*Jane Wei-Skillern & Sonia Marciano, The Networked Nonprofit*

## **Getting Started:**

Collaboration is a well-worn word, but what does it really mean for a community? What are the benefits and challenges? What are the different ways organizations can collaborate to achieve community change? Read below to find out more.

### **What is collaboration?**

There are many definitions of collaboration as it can take many forms, both formal and informal.

In *Collaboration Handbook*, Michael Winer and Karen Ray define formal collaboration as “a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve results they are more likely to achieve together than alone.”

Collaboration is a process by which organizations work together on a task, event or goal, both short and long-term. All the parties involved have something to gain by working with one another. Working together helps the organizations better serve the community and reach its own mission-focused goals.

In order to have a successful collaboration, each organization must define what stake they have in the relationship and what they hope to achieve.

### **Why collaborate?**

Nonprofit organizations collaborate because it makes them more successful in achieving their varied missions.

It is unrealistic to believe a single nonprofit organization can solve all of the problems it faces in a local community even if it focuses on one specific issue. More and more the problems we face are multi-layered and complex. Single nonprofits do not always have the resources, manpower or even the skill set to tackle such challenges alone. Collaborating with another nonprofit, and the public and private sectors, can bring a fresh perspective to an old challenge along with adding more manpower and resources to effectively tackle a community issue.

Collaboration, when effectively carried out, can help organizations be more efficient and effective in their work by reducing duplication and overlap, and can make the work of nonprofits more attractive to funders.

## Types of collaboration

Collaboration can stretch across the public, nonprofit and private sectors. There can be public-private, public-nonprofit, private-nonprofit, nonprofit-nonprofit collaboration and many more variations.

Additionally, there are many ways in which organizations can work together. We have compiled examples of types of collaborations that an organization might consider as defined by Michael Winer and Karen Ray in *The Collaboration Handbook*:

- **Cooperation:** Informal arrangements and relationships with no change in organizational structure of participating entities.
  - Example: Endorsement of services or affiliation
- **Coordination:** More formal arrangements and relationships that focus on specific programs or projects and are accompanied by plans and a shared mission.
  - Example: Co-sponsorship by jointly providing a program or service
- **Collaboration:** Longer-term, formal arrangements and relationships where separate organizations are brought into a new structure with a shared mission.
  - Example: Forming a coalition by sharing a broader end goal, or forming a consortium whereby the organizations identify themselves with a specific community or domain
- **Strategic Alliance:** A contractual agreement between organizations to connect their interest to one another to provide services
  - Example: Share (co-locate) or better utilize space, combine marketing efforts, share development (fundraising) activities, share staffing, share staff training
- **Merger:** A formal arrangement in which two organizations become a new entity.
  - Example: Acquisition whereby one organization acquires a program or service previously administered by another organization, or a divestiture in which one organization “spins off” a program or service to another organization”

## Sources

[Winer, Michael and Karen Ray. \*Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining and Enjoying the Journey\*. Saint Paul, MN: Fieldstone Alliance, 2008. Print.](#)

[Richardson, Adam. “Collaboration is a Team Sport, and You Need to Warm Up.” \*Harvard Business Review: HBR Blog Network\*. Web. 30 Aug 2011.](#)

[“Douglas, Anne. “Collaboration: Every nonprofit should be doing it.” \*Fort Meyers Florida Weekly\*. Wed. 30 Aug 2011.](#)

[Yankey, John A. \*Strategic Alliance Definitions\*. Center for Nonprofit Excellence.](#)

[Nonprofit Partnership Continuum. Strategic Alliance Fund.](#)

[Nonprofit Collaboration Database. The Foundation Center. Web. 30 Aug 2011.](#)

[Knowledge Base. Grant Space. And Winer, Michael and Karen](#)

## Getting it Right:

In the long run collaboration may make your organization's tasks easier and more efficient; however building a successful collaboration requires commitment, planning and foresight. Following is a checklist for successful long-term collaboration.

### Checklist for successful collaboration

- Are the right people/organizations at the table?
- Do the organizations around the table have a shared interest, purpose or challenge that they can't address on their own?
- Do the organizations involved have similar values?
- Are the organizations around the table willing or prepared to take action towards a collective solution now?
- Are there favorable political, funding and social climates that will support the collaboration?
- Do the potential partners have a shared history, mutual respect, understanding and trust?
- Are partners willing to put their own self-interest/desires aside to achieve the mission of the group?
- Are partners invested in the process and outcome of the collaboration?
- Is the collaboration process open, credible, and flexible enough to meet the needs of the group?
- Are there clear outcomes, roles, responsibilities, and resource allocations established for partners?
- Are there established and effective channels of communication?
- Are tasks assigned within the group executed in a timely way?
- Are there concrete and attainable goals and action steps for the group?
- Does the collaboration have adequate resources in terms of skilled leadership, funds, staff, materials and time?

### Sources

[Linden, Russell, "Leading Across Boundaries"](#)

[Mattessich, Paul, Murray-Close, Marta, Monsey, Barbara "Collaboration: What Makes It Work".](#)

[Applegate, Tiffany. "7 Tips for Successful Nonprofit Collaboration".](#)

# Tools for Collaboration:

Here are some useful tools you can use to put theory into practice on collaboration. Tools are provided for each of the following collaboration steps:

## **Evaluating internal opportunities for collaboration and potential partners**

Organizations can often be proactive in seeking partnerships that are in line with their strategic priorities. [Use this tool](#) to help you understand your current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and how to evaluate external collaboration opportunities that you can leverage.

## **Establishing a collaboration and determining your collective mission, values and vision**

Having a common vision and values and a clear mission are essential building blocks for successful collaboration. The process of defining these can help unify organizations around a shared goal and guide collaborative effort to success.

- [Source 1](#) – Building a mission and vision statement
- [Source 2](#) – Tool for defining shared values

## **Sample agreements/memorandum of understandings**

These sample agreements and memorandums of understanding are helpful not only to provide you a framework for a collaboration effort but also as because forms of this kind are frequently used when applying for joint funding.

- [Sample 1](#) – also includes project work plan and budget template
- [Sample 2](#)
- [Sample 3](#)

## **Seeking joint funding**

Many organizations who wish to collaborate may find themselves applying for and navigating joint funding. There are numerous benefits to joint funding, but also inherent challenges. Take a look at the resources below, including two fundraising agreements, for things to think about when seeking joint funding.

- [Source 1](#) – Provides suggested actions and a fundraising plan
- [Source 2](#) – Sample fundraising agreement

## **Establishing a joint plan of work**

Action plans set the path for effective collaboration by laying out the steps, responsibilities and budget to help you realize your goals.

[Download the template](#) to help you with map out your action plan.

## **Evaluating collaboration**

Are you on track? Use the tools below to evaluate how collaboration is going so far and what can be improved. It's always good to get a quick check-up along the way.

[Fundamentals of Evaluating Partnerships](#) – an evaluation guide by the National Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program that offers guidance and aid in skill building. Although geared toward educating Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention programs, the framework is a useful tool for many organizations.

[Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory](#) – a tool to assess your current collaboration's performance.

### **More Resources**

For more tools to fuel your collaboration, stop by CNE and visit our [Resource Library](#). We have several collaboration books in our collection, but two in particular, [Forming Alliances](#) and [Collaboration Handbook](#), could be helpful as they include worksheets on decision making structures, writing a vision statement, and much more.

## **Building Collaborative Relationships:**

Working together, whether within an organization or across organizations or sectors, requires relationship-building that takes time, social skill and a good deal of patience. In this section we will explore the key components of successful collaborative relationships, as well as challenges you may face in creating them.

### **Keys to successful relationships**

In *Forming Alliances* Emil Angelica and Linda Hoskins describe the six components of an effective collaboration:

- **Shared purpose:** Make sure each organization has shared goals and the same understanding of what needs to be achieved.
- **Shared power:** Each organization has something different to bring to the table, be it financial support or a large network. Realizing each of these components are valuable and equal will help lead to shared power.
- **Shared view of interdependence:** This entails realizing the shared purpose cannot be met without the work of each organization.
- **Mutual respect and trust:** These two features need to be held not only in the beginning of collaboration but throughout the process. Part of this is making sure each organization did what they said they would do.
- **Shared control:** The previous steps help build up to shared control. This means making sure resources are shared in an efficient manner to accomplish the goal of the relationship.

- **Shared indicators of progress:** Having a conversation with the organizations about whether or not the purpose is being achieved is crucial. Checking up on progress and finding out what works and doesn't work will help better realize the overall goal.

### **Challenges to an effective collaboration & suggested strategies for getting your collaboration back on track**

- **Lack of common vision:** This results from not having an agreed understanding of the core vision of the collaborative effort up front. Defining [mission, vision, and values](#) is critical and all parties must be in agreement before entering into collaboration.
- **Costs not identified upfront:** Time must be taken in the beginning to identify costs and the collaborative partners should agree in the early stages a process for monitoring and approving unaccounted for cost. [Check out these sample fundraising agreements](#) for examples of how to structure these arrangements.
- **Lack of buy-in:** All levels of staff, who are involved in the collaboration, must be invested in the effort. Furthermore, leaders of the effort must be willing to forego their egos in an effort to achieve collective goals. Find out how to develop and sustain [staff buy-in](#) and how you can proactively [help people get to know each other](#).
- **Conflict among leaders:** Leaders must be able to work effectively together for collaboration to be successful. Early trust-building exercises and maintaining trust throughout the process is crucial. For more information on building and maintaining trust see - Fieldstone Alliance - [Tips for Managing Conflict in Collaborations](#) and [Collaboration: Building and Sustaining Trust](#).
- **Leadership lacking the right skills:** Specific leadership skills such as being able to build relationships and consensus, negotiate change, and inspire are essential to the success of collaboration. [Check out chapter 5 of this resource](#) for a guide to the role of leadership in collaborations.

For more information on collaboration challenges, check out the article: [When Collaborations Go Bad](#).

#### **Sources:**

Hoskins, Linda and Emil Angelica. The Fieldstone's Nonprofit Guide to Forming Alliances: Working Together to Achieve Mutual Goals. Saint Paul, MN: Field Stone Alliance, 2005. p60-67

"Nonprofit Collaboration." Deloitte.

<http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-UnitedStates/Local%20Assets/Documents/Nonprofit%20Collaboration%20Presentation.pdf>

# Donors' Guide to Facilitating Collaboration:

Donors can be both catalysts and support for collaboration within the nonprofit sector and across the community.

## Why facilitate collaboration?

By and large, donors facilitate collaboration because they seek to increase the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of their philanthropic giving.

Nonprofit organizations may provide a valuable program or service, but lack the human and financial capacity to leverage the program or service through collaboration which can lead to disjointed and small-scale accomplishments rather than large-scale community change. Or, organizations may have a program or service that works, but need investment to effectively collaborate to bring the model to scale. Donors have the opportunity to form strategic alliances with such nonprofits to leverage their philanthropic dollars while having real benefit to the community.

It is important to note, though, that good collaboration takes leadership, resources and time and may require a long-term investment.

## Facilitating collaboration

To start, donors interested in facilitating long-term collaboration, either between nonprofits or across sectors, can strengthen their own philanthropy by researching the issue they seek to address and identifying, where possible, scalable solutions and key organizations with which to work.

Developing this bird's eye view will better allow you to see the strengths, weaknesses and the areas for improvement in existing collaboration.

Armed with this background, you can choose to engage in different types of philanthropy to achieve your goals. Visit Sean Stannard Stockton's [The Three Core Approaches to Effective Philanthropy](#) for these categories.

While each of these approaches can help facilitate collaboration strategic philanthropy, requiring a significant investment from a donor, can be a powerful driving force in assembling key players to effectively put the pieces of the puzzle together to create change. [Learn more about mounting this campaign.](#)

Browse through [The SeaChange-Lodestar Fund for Nonprofit Collaboration](#), [Strategic Alliance Partnership](#), [Community Catalyst Program](#), [Nonprofit Finance Fund](#), and [Lodestar Foundation's Collaboration Prize](#) for examples of funders initiating collaboration.

And for corporate philanthropists, check out the resource guide, [The Business of Change](#) , for research and resources on how corporate funders can facilitate collaboration.

## More Resources for Funders

Stanford Social Innovation Review - [The Reality Underneath the Buzz of Partnerships](#)  
The Boston Foundation - [The Catalyst Funds for Nonprofits](#)  
The Chronicle of Philanthropy - [Finding Incentives for Nonprofit Collaboration](#)  
Stanford Social Innovation Review - [Leading Boldly](#)  
La Piana Consulting - [Merging Wisely](#)  
La Piana Consulting - [In Search of Strategic Solutions](#)

### Sources

"Finding Incentive for Nonprofit Collaboration." The Chronicle of Philanthropy  
<http://philanthropy.com/blogs/money-and-mission/finding-incentives-for-nonprofit-collaboration/27236>

Kramer, Mark. "Catalytic Philanthropy." Stanford Social Innovation Review  
[http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/catalytic\\_philanthropy/](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/catalytic_philanthropy/)

There is no one blueprint for effective collaboration. However, the case studies below illustrate the tools and skills required to collaborate and offer examples of how other organizations have built successful collaboration.

## Case Studies:

### Great Resources for Case Studies

[Nonprofit Collaboration Database](#) - models and best practices of exceptional nonprofit collaboration efforts drawn from projects presented for consideration for the 2009 Collaboration Prize.

[The Foundation Center](#) - provides a helpful map, in conjunction with the Collaboration Database, to provide easy access to collaborations in your area

[Mandel Center for Nonprofit Organizations](#) - a list of case studies exemplifying the role of trust.

[The National Academy of Public Administration](#) - case studies of "High Performance Partnerships".

Stanford Social Innovation Review's "[The Missed Merger Opportunity](#)" explores a case study of how collaboration could have saved a nonprofit from closing.

Fieldstone Alliance's "[A Nonprofit Merger Case Study](#)" examines the merger between Family Service of Greater Saint Paul and East Communities Family Center.

The Bridgespan Group offers [12 Community Collaborative Case Studies](#) from around the country on collaborations that are truly making a difference. Read the background behind this initiative in [Needle-Moving Community Collaboratives](#).

## Further Reading:

Looking for some more ideas or need some more help? Below are databases, articles and more that further explore collaborations that work.

### **Online Resources**

- [GrantSpace Resource Page](#) - A series of webinars, podcasts and resources on best practices in collaboration.
- [Foundation Center Collaboration Resource Page](#) - A wealth of information about the ways that nonprofits can collaborate to achieve their missions.
- [Collective Impact Resource Page](#)- The original article by Mark Kramer and John Kania as well as other resources on the topic.
- [National Council of Nonprofits](#) - A number of helpful resources on collaboration, mergers, and partnering.