

# Partnerships and Collaboration

West Downtown LIP

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# Methodology

- Literature Review on Nonprofit Partnerships
  - Case studies
  - Manuals and guides
  - Nonprofit resource websites
  - Articles and books
- Key Informant Interviews
  - 6 key interviews with people who have experience developing and working with nonprofit partnerships
  - Test and augment findings of literature review

# Literature Review

## Key Learnings:

- Why organizations choose to partner
- Common causes of partnership breakdown
- Key elements of successful partnerships
- Range of partnership types

# Why Organizations Choose to Partner

- Common goals
- Maximize resources
- Enhance credibility of organizations
- Find solutions to complex problems
- Add value to services, programs or activities
- Eliminate duplication of services
- Compelling reasons make better partnerships

# Causes of Partnership Breakdown

- Lack of communication
- Lack of clarity around roles
- Lack of resources
- Lack of motivation
- Conflict

# Key Elements of Successful Partnerships

## **Shared vision and principles**

- Should be identified to guide work

## **Clear communication and transparency**

- Decision making and management process

## **Clarity around roles, responsibilities and power**

- Identify objectives, activities, roles, responsibilities and available resources

# Key Elements of Successful Partnerships *continued*

## **Appropriate participation and inclusiveness**

- Establish structures

## **Committed leadership**

- Develop and share leadership roles

## **Building trust**

- Should grow as partnership progresses

# Key Elements of Successful Partnerships *continued*

## **Dedicated resources**

- Resources needed to manage the partnership, achieve project objectives and sustain the partnership

## **Evaluation and assessment**

- Need an agreed-upon method and timetable, measure progress and consider wrap up

## **History and celebration**

- Helps build trust and achieve goals



# Stages of Partnership Development

1. Envisioning Results
2. Empowering Ourselves
3. Ensuring Success
4. Endowing Continuity

*Fieldstone Alliance's Collaboration Handbook*

# Range of Partnership Types

- Types of organizations
- Functions of partnership
- Level of formality
- Level of decision-making
- Resource commitments
- Duration of the partnership

*Clarity of these matters is critical.*

*Most literature suggests that developing written agreements adds clarity and facilitates discussion.*

# Key Informant Interviews

Interviewees had experience in:

- Communication and information-sharing partnerships
- Service collaboration partnerships
- Service cooperation partnerships
- Service integration

# Key Informant Interviews

## Key Learnings

- Challenges often emerge in partnerships between organizations of different sizes.
  - Power dynamics
  - Different values and approaches
  - Fear of losing autonomy
- Important to be flexible and have the capacity to address and work through issues as they occur.

# Deciding When to Partner or Not

- A lot of time and energy needed to sustain partnerships
- Key questions to ask when deciding:
  1. Does the organization have a clear understanding of the purpose of the partnership?
  2. Will this partnership help the organization meet its goals, will it enhance services to clients?

# Key Elements of Success

- Informants agreed with the literature.
- Stressed time should be spent up-front in early stages of partnership to clarify expectations and establish how each element is achieved.
- Need to understand how partnering organizations operate.
- Important also to pay attention to processes throughout the partnership and ensure that engagement is sustained.

# Key Elements of Success

- Specifically time should be spent up-front on:
  - Shared vision and principles
  - Clear mechanisms for communication and transparency
  - Clarity around:
    - roles (who does what),
    - responsibility (what needs to get done)
    - and power (who makes decisions and how)

# Challenges

## **Lack of Communication**

- Can occur at all stages of partnerships.
- In partnerships with organizations of different sizes, sometimes smaller organizations feel their voices aren't being heard.
- Important to design processes that include everyone.
- Turns small problems into big problems.



# Challenges

## **Conflict**

- Can be a sign that the partnership is functioning.
- Critical to settling real disagreements and clarifying choices.
- Open dialogue.
- Respect is critical.
- Establish conflict resolution process.

# Challenges

## **Lack of Clarity Around Roles**

- Clarify roles, responsibilities and accountabilities up-front.
- People representing organizations at partnerships can change over time - revisit documents and agreements throughout the course of the partnership.
- Name misunderstandings early.

# Challenges

## **Lack of Resources**

- Can be especially difficult for smaller organizations.
- Important to be clear about remuneration, resource obligations up-front.
- Important that resources match needs --- proceeding on inadequate resources makes it hard to meet obligations, fulfill agreements.

# Challenges

## **Lack of Motivation**

- Important to engage the individuals involved in the partnership.
- Partners must be at least motivated enough to carry out their agreed on roles.

# Partnership Governance and Agreements

- Partnerships need to be deliberate and clear around governance.
- Formal contracts not always necessary, as long as the arrangements are clear and there are ways to confirm them.
- Important to be flexible too.

# Assessing Partnerships

- How do the partners feel about their involvement?
- Has the partnership met the original goals and objectives?

# Ending Partnerships

- Important to periodically review partnerships to ensure relevance and effectiveness.

# Tools

- Partnership types and definitions
- Partnership agreement templates and forms
- Decision-making tools