Reading 1: The Partnership Continuum

Reading 1: The Partnership Continuum

Site: Infopeople Online Learning
Course: TLA50 #3 Partnerships and Collaborations
Book: Reading 1: The Partnership Continuum
Printed by: Admin Nancy Nerenberg
Date: Saturday, March 19, 2011, 02:04 PM
# Table of Contents

- Overview
- Defining the Terms
- Strategic Partnerships
- Factors in Successful Collaborations
Overview

In the previous TLA50 courses you learned about strategic facilitation and community assessment. You may be thinking about how you can apply those concepts in your library and community and how to advance the goals of this Fellowship. You may already use community partnerships to reach certain populations served by your library. If so, you recognize the value of these collaborations as tools for gathering the expertise, resources, and even space needed for effective library services.

This course will take you beyond a foundational understanding of partnerships to a deeper understanding of the strategic purposes of collaboration. We will explore how you can identify key partners and develop collaborations to increase your library's effectiveness in engaging and serving midlife adults. You may have already gotten some ideas through your intentional conversations and through planning or conducting internal and external scans that identify key stakeholders and library and community assets.

In this first week of the course, we will clarify what collaborations and partnerships are, and we will explain their strategic purposes and how they differ from cooperative and coordinated relationships. You will learn about the factors that play important roles in successful collaborations.

Based on what you have learned in the Fellowship thus far, you will have a chance to revisit the responses you gave on your fellowship application about potential partnerships. Using a Partnership Continuum, you will assess potential partnerships for your TLA50 projects.
Defining the Terms

Often used loosely, "partnerships" and "collaborations" are words that can mean different things to different people. Let's start by defining these terms.

A partnership is an arrangement in which two or more people or entities agree to cooperate in order to achieve a common goal.[1] Partnerships can be formal, legal agreements; they can be less formal, written memorandums of understanding; and they can be informal intentions to work together, sealed by a handshake.

Some researchers have defined collaboration in similar terms: "Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. The relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals, a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards."[2]

The key concepts in the above definitions are:

- Mutually beneficial
- Well-defined goals
- Shared responsibility
- Accountability for success

Too often we enter these relationships with very high expectations and come away disappointed or frustrated. To be sure, collaboration requires time and energy (do you see the word labor in the middle?), but what worthwhile relationship doesn't? Keep coming back to the key concepts identified above as you measure the promise and the results of your partnerships and collaborations.

Cooperation, Coordination, or Collaboration?

Many people think that anytime they're working together, they're collaborating. They also assume that everyone has a similar notion of what collaboration means. Actually, there are many ways to work together, with varying levels of intensity in the relationship between partners. Knowing what you want to accomplish will determine whether you need to cooperate, coordinate, or collaborate.

This table[3] illustrates the partnership continuum and may be a useful way to look at your collaborative efforts, both present and future.
Cooperation is characterized by informal relationships that exist without any commonly defined mission, structure, or planning effort. Information is shared as needed, and authority is retained by each organization so there is virtually no risk. Resources are separate, as are rewards."

"Coordination is characterized by more formal relationships and an understanding of compatible missions. Some planning and division of roles are required, and communication channels are established. Authority still rests with the individual organizations, but there is some increased risk to all participants. Resources are available to participate and rewards are mutually acknowledged."[4]

True collaboration requires a commitment to shared goals, a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility, mutual authority and accountability for success, and sharing of resources, risks, and rewards.

However you and your partners decide to work together, it's important that everyone understands and agrees to the purpose of the collaboration, the degree of commitment required, and the expectations of those involved in the effort.

Endnotes
[4] Ibid.
Strategic Partnerships

In my experience, everyone I encounter is a possible partner (or let me say I "try" to see everyone this way!). Everyone I meet, especially those with shared goals and interests, might have a resource or asset that would benefit me and the projects I care about. John McKnight's *Asset-Based Community Development* model provides a useful approach to organizing around community assets, not just community needs.[5]

But such an "open" orientation is not enough; it is equally important to identify the strategic ways in which other individuals or organizations might support your organization or project. After scanning the many possible partners, it is important to prioritize those who bring the specific assets you need to make your project successful. These might be called "strategic" partners in that they can contribute valued assets such as ideas and expertise, financial and non-financial resources, access to (larger) target populations, and the capacity and energy to share the workload. Forming and sustaining strategic partnerships is a worthwhile goal, and most of you can probably identify ones that you already have in place.

Where do you start with partnerships and collaborations as you think about "transforming life after 50" in your community?
Collaboration happens both internally and externally. Sometimes the most frequently forgotten collaborators or partners are those that exist within our own organizations. Often it is those internal collaborators whose buy-in is needed to support an idea or launch an implementation. Sometimes those internal partners have expertise or resources you need. Don't forget to look internally: internal partners represent the low-hanging fruit that we sometimes miss!

We will come back to these ideas about internal and external collaborations in Week 3, when we explore how to target strategic collaborators and partners to increase your library's effectiveness in serving and engaging midlife adults.

Endnotes
[5] For more information about this asset-based community development approach, see www.abcdinstitute.org.
Factors in Successful Collaborations

The most adaptive and effective organizations are those that engage in partnerships and collaborations that are well-defined with respect to roles, resources, outcomes, and impact. Collaborations are not always appropriate and often collaborations may not be effective. However, collaboration can be a valuable and strategic tool that helps an organization address mission-critical needs.

While it is not essential for successful partnerships and collaborations to embody all of these factors, researchers have found that these factors all play an important part in successful collaborations. In their absence there lies a greater likelihood that the collaboration will fail or not achieve its fullest potential.

Twenty Factors Influencing Collaboration Success

Here are 20 factors that research has identified as influencing collaboration success.[6]

The factors are grouped into six categories:

1. Environment
   - History of collaboration or cooperation in the community
   - Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community
   - Favorable political and social climate

2. Factors Related to MEMBERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS
   - Mutual respect, understanding, and trust
   - Appropriate cross section of members
   - Members see collaboration as in their self-interest

To ensure the effectiveness of your collaborative effort, pay attention to all the factors listed.
• Ability to compromise

3. Factors Related to PROCESS and STRUCTURE

• Members share a stake in both process and outcome
• Multiple layers of participation
• Flexibility
• Development of clear roles and policy guidelines
• Adaptability
• Appropriate pace of development

4. Factors Related to COMMUNICATION

• Open and frequent communication
• Established informal relationships and communication links

5. Factors Related to PURPOSE

• Concrete, attainable goals and objectives
• Shared vision
• Unique purpose

6. Factors Related to RESOURCES

• Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time
• Skilled leadership

We will return to these factors in Week 2 of this course, when we identify the types of partners and collaborators that will support success for your TLA50 initiatives.

The handout provided for this week is a Partnerships Continuum. It is used in one of the assignments and may be found in the Week 1 section of the Supplementary Material page.

There are three assignment options for this week. Option 1 is required, but please do as many as you are able.

**Option 1 (required):** Using the Partnerships Continuum, brainstorm a list of potential partners for your TLA50 initiatives, and assess whether the potential partners fit the definitions of cooperative, coordinated, or collaborative.

After you have completed Option 1, please do one or both of the assignment options for this week:

**Option 2:** Review and rewrite the response you wrote to a question about readiness for
collaborations and partnerships in your Fellowship application.

**Option 3:** Read the two articles in the [Supplementary Material](http://elearn.infopeople.org/mod/book/print.php?id=3353) for Week 1, *Four Keys to Collaboration Success* and *The Engaged Library: Chicago Stories of Community Building*. In the discussion forum, tell us about your own library's success at collaboration and your experiences in building community.

**What to Do Next:** Go to the [Week 1 Assignment Options](http://elearn.infopeople.org/mod/book/print.php?id=3353).

---

**Endnotes**