Assessing Your Collaboration: A Self Evaluation Tool

Abstract
Many scholars have studied the collaborative process and have suggested that there are several key factors that promote or inhibit the collaborative process. Given the importance of these factors, a self-evaluation tool was developed to assist existing and forming groups. This self-evaluation tool examines thirteen, factors that can influence the collaborative process. The information gained from this tool can provide group members with an understanding of the strengths and challenges they face as they work to reach their goals.

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Presently, Extension professionals and community groups are working collaboratively to develop innovative solutions to promote positive development in children, youth and families. Effective collaborations are able to generate positive outcomes for the audiences they serve. Collaboration is defined as "a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem [or issue] can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible" (Gray, 1989, p. 5).

Many scholars have suggested that there are key features involved in the collaborative process. For instance, Ash (1989) emphasize the idea of specific factors underlying characteristics of inter-organizational relations; other scholars (Caplan, 1988; DelPizzo, 1990; Kull, 1991) focus on central features or salient themes of partnership arrangements. Still others outline strategies that can assist collaborators when facing challenges and difficulties.
Recently, other scholars have identified common factors and characteristics influencing the collaborative process. For example in their comprehensive review of collaborative factors, Hogue, Parkins, Clark, Bergstrum, and Slinski (1995) from the National Network for Collaboration identified specific factors, such as leadership, communication, community development, and sustainability. In an empirical study, Keith et al. (1993) identified five major characteristics: leadership, unity, communication, participation by citizens, and informal organizations, and successful accomplishments. Borden (1997) has identified four factors: internal communication, external communication, membership, and goal setting.

Given the importance of these factors, a self-evaluation tool was developed to assist existing and forming groups. The tool is a self-assessment exercise allowing groups to rate their collaboration on key factors. Key factors examined here include goals, communication, sustainability, evaluation, political climate, resources, catalysts, policies/laws/regulations, history, connectedness, leadership, community development, and understanding community.

With this tool, collaborative groups identified strong factors and challenging factors, that is, factors that need to be worked on. The identification of the challenge factors facing the group can assist in the development of strategies to address these issues, thus allowing the group to move forward and accomplish their goals. In all cases, the self-evaluation tool can be used to strengthen the collaborative group. The following is a description of the Collaboration Check-list.

**A Collaboration Checklist**

Each of the following factors influences the collaborative process. After reading a brief description for each of the areas place an X in the box (see Figure 1) that best reflects your opinion of how your collaboration is functioning in each of the areas using the following scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

Each of the factors are identified and defined:

1. Communication - the collaboration has open and clear communication. There is an established process for communication between meetings;
2. Sustainability - the collaboration has a plan for sustaining membership and resources. This involves membership guidelines relating to terms of office and replacement of members;
3. Research and Evaluation - the collaboration has conducted a needs assessment or has obtained information to establish its goals and the collaboration continues to collect data to measure goal achievement;
4. Political Climate - the history and environment surrounding power and decision making is positive. Political climate may be within the community as a whole, systems within the community or networks of people;
5. Resources - the collaboration has access to needed resources. Resources refer to four types of capital: environmental, in-kind, financial, and human;
6. Catalysts - the collaboration was started because of existing problem(s) or the reason(s) for collaboration to exist required a comprehensive approach;
7. Policies/Laws/Regulations - the collaboration has changed policies, laws, and/or regulations that allow the collaboration to function effectively;
8. History - the community has a history of working cooperatively and solving problems;
9. Connectedness - members of this collaboration are connected and have established informal and formal communication networks at all levels;
10. Leadership - the leadership facilitates and supports team building, and capitalizes upon diversity and individual, group and organizational strengths;
11. Community Development - this community was mobilized to address important issues. There is a communication system and formal information channels that permit the exploration of issues, goals and objectives; and,
12. Understanding Community - the collaboration understands the community, including its people, cultures, values and habits.

**Figure 1**
The Collaboration Checklist

**A COLLABORATION PROGRESS CHECKLIST**

Neither
Identifying the collaboration's strengths and challenges assists the collaboration in determining the best course of action to achieve its identified goals. For example, if the group scores from 0-30 the collaborations has many components that comprise a successful collaboration. There are goals, working members, and strong leadership. If the collaborative group scores between 31-48 the group has some of the factors; however, there is some need to develop the inter-workings of the group. The group may need to determine new ways of working together. However, if the group scores between 49-65 the group may wish to refocus their goals and leadership. Establishing a group's strengths and challenges can serve as a springboard to building a more effective collaborative group.

References


