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Collaboration Assessment for Community Coalitions

Background

Developing an effective coalition involves two major steps. First, a coalition needs to recruit representation from every sector of the community that is affected by the issue of concern. Second, coalition members should work toward collaboration on major coalition functions.

Collaboration is the process of two or more individuals or organizations working together toward common goals and objectives while retaining individual identities. Collaboration can be defined as the end point of a continuum of levels of working together in a coalition¹.

Levels of Collaboration

Coexistence is defined as two or more organizations addressing the same target population or problem or issue without being aware of each other. In other words, they are working in a vacuum.

Communication is defined as two or more organizations being aware of each other's existence and sharing information, e.g. attending each other's annual meeting.

Cooperation is defined as two or more organizations working together on projects that exist separately in each organization. Examples include referring "clients" to each other, sharing data and/or information.

Coordination is defined as two or more organizations jointly planning and implementing programs or activities. For example, one program's information might be distributed in an event

¹ EVALUATING COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS: A RESEARCH SYNTHESIS CHAPTER 4. Prepared for: Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Department of Health and Human Services. Contract Number: 100-99-0008. Task Order 2. Prepared by: The Lewin Group : Michael Fishman, Mary Farrell, Vincena Allen and Elizabeth Eiseman.
www.lewin.com/Lewin_Publications/Human_Services.

sponsored by another. One organization's services might complement another or events and activities are scheduled to avoid conflicting dates.

Collaboration is defined by two or more organizations developing and implementing all or most functional areas of a program in a single effort. Each organization retains its identity and might have some distinct roles but the collaboration program has an identity of its own.

Functional Areas for Collaboration

A coalition has several functional areas on which members and partners might collaborate. These include:

Strategic Planning is the process of quantifying a problem and identifying strategies to reduce that problem. Steps in strategic planning include: 1. Needs Assessment; 2. Resource Assessment; 3. Gaps Analysis; 4. Priority Setting and; 5. Strategy Identification/Selection.

Resource Acquisition includes meeting immediate resource needs and long term sustainability through one or more approaches such as grants, fundraising, and income generation.

Policy & Program Direction includes: 1. Establishing an organization mission; 2. Developing a structure e.g. bylaws; 3. Establishing policies and; 4. Defining program operations, e.g. location, staff.

Staff Training includes: 1. Basic training on organizational functions; 2. Training on skills common to collaborative and; 3. Training for shared programs and functions

Program Operations include all direct services provided by one or more coalition member or partner in order to provide the program services and complete activities.

Information Dissemination includes informing target populations, other organizations, funders and the community at large about operations and services and project impact. Integrated policies and programs need more integrated information dissemination. Sometimes it makes sense for an agency to report on its operations including, in some cases, on its collaborative efforts, from the framework of its more traditional practices to meet funders' expectations.

Community Representation includes organizations gathering input and information from parties outside of their organization including input from their service community representatives and from other organizations. Collaboration in this area would include combining some of these practices. Organizations that have just begun to collaborate might solicit input from the community or other organizations regarding how to go about building collaboration or how they might benefit from working together. Established collaboratives solicit input as to the effectiveness of its combined efforts.

Community Leadership involves reaching out into the community to build support for agency efforts and raise awareness of available services. Levels of collaboration range from sharing

observations from separate outreach efforts to sending representatives from multiple organizations on specific outreach efforts to creating permanent community leadership cooperatives whose mission is to build support for collaborative goals and increase awareness of the collaboration.

Program Evaluation includes quantifying the process of organization functioning and determining the effectiveness of programs and strategies. Organizations that are coordinating or collaborating may decide to continue to evaluate their efforts separately, perhaps extending these self-evaluations to include new agreed upon practices. Goals, strategies, and procedures that are part of the collaborative effort benefit from combining evaluation. Collaboration on evaluation includes: sharing data collection and evaluation results; reviewing evaluation procedures and developing shared evaluation guidelines and; conducting formal joint evaluations.

Measuring Collaboration

The process of assessing levels of collaboration involves periodic self-assessment by each coalition member or partner. Using the attached matrix form, each member is asked to check one cell (box) on each row to signify their perception of their level of collaboration on each functional area.

Prior to the first assessment, members should read the attached background piece and/or have a brief overview at a coalition meeting. The overview should be provided by the Evaluator to minimize bias by project staff. Members should be reassured that the assessment is not an assessment of the performance of the coalition organization or staff. However, to ensure the most honest response, the completed assessments should be collected, retained and analyzed by the Evaluator with aggregate results provide to the project staff and coalition members. Collaboration assessments should be repeated periodically. Every six months is generally adequate.

There are also some options for supplementing the process. Items can be added to ascertain perceptions and satisfaction with coalition functioning. For example, members could be asked about their perceptions of the coalition's mission, structure, functioning, resources, communications etc.

The initial assessment will provide baseline for measuring progress in coalition development. It also will identify the functional areas in greatest need of development. Once two or more assessments have been conducted aggregate change scores are calculated to measure progress. In order to track individual progress it is ideal to have members' names on the assessments. However, if members prefer not to identify themselves aggregate results can be used.

The Collaboration progression model is depicted in figure 1. A simple collaboration assessment involves each coalition member/partner simply checking the box on each row (functional area) that corresponds to the level of collaboration they have reached.

Figure 1. Collaboration Model Matrix

Level of Collaboration	Coexistence	Communication	Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration
Functional Area:					
Strategic Planning					
Resource Acquisition					
Policy & Program Direction					
Staff Training					
Program Operations					
Disseminate Information					
Community Representation					
Community Leadership					
Program Evaluation					