

## COLLABORATION: CONCEPTS TO CONSIDER

Collaboration is a process to reach goals that cannot be achieved acting singly or, at a minimum, cannot be reached as efficiently.

“Collaboration, on the surface, is about bringing together resources, both financial and intellectual, to work toward a common purpose.

But true collaboration has an ‘inside,’ a deeper, more radical meaning. The inner life of collaboration is about states of mind and spirit that are open—open to self-examination, open to growth, open to trust, and open to mutual action.

Collaborative relationships that arise from such radical openness become vehicles of co-creation. And human collaboration that draws upon the resources of mind and money, but not on the resources of grace, will only rearrange the furniture.”

Rob Lehman

Complex issues call for complex solutions. No one entity – schools, families, childcare centers – can completely prepare children to enter kindergarten. It takes all segments of the community working together.

**Collaboration includes all of the following elements:**

- ✓ Developing and agreeing to a set of common goals and principles.
- ✓ Sharing leadership and responsibility for attaining those goals.
- ✓ Using the expertise of each group member.
- ✓ Acknowledging that working this way takes time.
- ✓ Embracing group processes like consensus building, shared decision-making and resolving conflict.

**Collaboration is a means to an end, not an end in itself.**

The formation of a community collaborative is often the beginning of a community’s desire to improve health and well-being. But it is not enough to form a collaborative – this is just one step. The collaborative must become a

vehicle to mobilize the community for improved outcomes. This means continued commitment and ongoing work.

### **Collaboration means more than communication or coordination or cooperation.**

Communication and cooperation can help people do their jobs better by providing more complete information and creating a productive environment for everyone to get their own work done, but they do not require any joint activity.

Coordination involves joint activity, but allows individuals to maintain their own sets of goals, expectations, and responsibilities. In contrast, collaboration requires a common vision to guide the collaborators' actions.

### **Why Collaborate?**

After all, isn't it easier and less time consuming to work independently? Some believe collaboration is simply a "buzz" word or an unfortunate prerequisite to receiving funding. However, collaboration is not a trend, but a return to an old way of doing business that societies around the world have relied upon for centuries. Grants are based on results and accountability. To get results, you will need help. Help comes in the form of partners because nobody can do it alone and funders know that.

Collaboration requires new ways of thinking and behaving. If collaborating is a real desire, rather than simply an exercise in meeting requirements, there can be numerous benefits.

#### **Working collaboratively can:**

- ✓ Stimulate more excitement at the local level
- ✓ Achieve greater credibility than single entities
- ✓ Accomplish objectives beyond the scope of any individual entity
- ✓ Reach more people within a community than one organization
- ✓ Help people understand their jobs in a broader context and work more effectively
- ✓ Foster cooperation among diverse sectors of a community in order to achieve mutually desirable goals
- ✓ Address community concerns by reducing duplication of effort/services
- ✓ Encourage a comprehensive approach (no fragmentation)
- ✓ Focus on prevention (instead of crisis intervention)
- ✓ Enhance communication
- ✓ Ensure all voices are heard
- ✓ Create sustained change