

The Why and How of Collaboration

Notes from a Presentation by David Cherry, Program Director, City Connect Detroit, to the Funders Face to Face Conference on July 20, 2012.

Why Collaborate?

Collaboration represents an array of strategies that can help nonprofits achieve their goals. In addition, some of the reasons that a nonprofit might want to pursue collaborative arrangements include:

- Collaboration allows your organization to specialize and still make a broad impact (when Coca Cola collaborates with movie theaters, it integrates itself into the movie-going experience without having to produce movies and theaters).
- Collaboration extends your fundraising network by allowing you to leapfrog ahead in the donor cultivation process through your partners' existing relationships.
- Collaboration, especially across-sectors, infuses new perspectives into your work and helps you and your partners avoid group think.
- Collaboration increases the real and perceived value of your organization, which can help you attract and retain resources in good times and bad.
- Funders are demanding collaboration through their grant making processes.

Tips on How to Collaborate

- Solve someone else's problems – its fine to go to the table with an agenda, but start by finding ways to help others and you will build longer lasting and more beneficial collaborations.
- Take the long view – collaboration for immediate gratification is near sighted; instead, think of collaboration as you would any other long term investment strategy – this ties in to the first tip.
- Recognize that collaboration involves more effort, and gives more pay off then lesser forms of working together, like cooperation and coordination, but that it can also be less beneficial than more intense forms of working together, like joint programs/administration and mergers.
- Find a dedicated capacity to ensure the continuity of your work, perhaps even engaging a third party convener to keep focus on the collaboration when momentum is low and/or outside distractions are high.
- Work across sectors, leveraging the strength of public, private, and nonprofit sector organizations for the most comprehensive and community-supported solutions to the challenges your organization is working to address.