

Collaboration Framework

... Addressing Community Capacity

NATIONAL NETWORK



FOR COLLABORATION

*...building and sustaining
positive change*

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To support collaboration among universities and community-based programs, the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), USDA, created four National Networks to marshal faculty and program resources to directly respond to the economic, social, and human stresses faced by children, youth and families.

These networks, which constitute the Cooperative Extension System Children, Youth and Family (CYF) Network, are linked and accessed through CYFERNET, an Internet-based children, youth and family information system operated by the CSREES.

The CSREES currently funds the four networks for Child Care, Collaborations, Family Resiliency, and Science and marketing statement.



Collaboration Framework

... Addressing Community Capacity

Foreword

Collaborative community efforts are constructive responses to creating caring communities and expanding the safety net for children, youth and families. (National Commission on Children, 1991; Dryfoos, 1990; Meszaros, 1993). The goal of community collaboration is to bring individuals and members of communities, agencies and organizations together in an atmosphere of support to systematically solve existing and emerging problems that could not be solved by one group alone. While this is easily “said,” experience shows that it is not easily “done.” It has been likened to “teaching dinosaurs to do ballet” (Schlechty in DeBevoise, 1986, p. 12).

Understanding the complexities of collaboration and applying the key elements involved in collaboration increases the likelihood of achieving shared goals and outcomes. To assist citizens and practitioners in their collaborative efforts, the National Network for Collaboration has created a **Collaboration Framework**.

The *Collaboration Framework* is designed to help individuals and practitioners who are either starting collaborations, or need help in strengthening an existing collaboration. Specifically, the *Framework* assists people, groups and organizations to

achieve clearly defined outcomes. Drawing from a diversity of people and opinions, the *Framework* is based on a **Core Foundation** of shared vision, mission, principles and values. It clarifies the **Factors**, both **Process and Contextual**, which can either promote or inhibit the effectiveness of a collaboration which, in turn, affects its desired outcomes.

The *Framework* can be used as a tool throughout developing and sustaining collaborations. While, those involved in collaborations often describe it as being “on a journey,” the *Framework* may be used to define the shortest and safest route. For individuals starting a collaborative journey, the *Framework* can serve as a guide. Utilizing the *Process and Contextual Factors* will define routes in reaching specific *Outcomes*. Once a collaboration has been established, the *Framework* may be used as a diagnostic tool to evaluate the continued development and expansion of the group.

The *Collaboration Framework* has been developed through the collaborative efforts of eleven Land Grant Universities and the Cooperative States Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES). It utilizes knowledge and expertise of specialists who have researched collaborations and experienced sustaining collaborations within communities.



Framework Model

Technically, collaboration is a process of participation through which people, groups and organizations work together to achieve desired results. Starting or sustaining a collaborative journey is exciting, sometimes stressful, and even new for many people, groups, and organizations. The information presented here utilizes knowledge and expertise of specialists from eleven universities to provide a guide to begin, strengthen and sustain the collaborative journey.

Initiating Collaborations

When beginning the journey, it is critical that all existing and potential members share the vision and purpose. It is this commonality that brings members together to focus on achieving its mission. Several catalysts may initiate a collaboration - a problem, a shared vision, existing articulated outcomes, to name a few. Regardless what the catalyst may be, it is critical to move from problem driven to vision driven, from muddled roles and responsibilities to defined relationships, and from activity driven to outcome focused.

Often groups form as a result of an existing problem or perhaps a crisis. While problems may be the initial catalysts in forming a collaboration, defining the vision and desired outcomes begins to give shape and direction to the future collaboration. Moving from problem driven solutions to vision driven solutions offers greater potential for maximizing resources, developing sustainable outcomes and greater community ownership and commitment in the courses of action. Vision driven solutions also keep us from getting caught up in old stereotypes that often interfere with the ability to bring diverse membership together. Without this movement, there is a tendency to solve practical problems by grabbing at ready made solutions that neither address the fundamental causes of a problem, nor challenge thinking in new directions.

Building relationships is fundamental to the success of collaborations. Effective collaborations are characterized by building and sustaining "win-win-win" relationships - the kind of relationships where expectations are clear and understood by all members of the collaboration and by those who are working with the collaboration. Defining relation-

ships assists in defining tasks, roles and responsibilities, work plans and ultimately reaching the outcomes.

Defining the Relationship of Collaborators

The first steps focus on defining existing or potential relationships. A range of relationships have been defined in the "Community Linkages - Choices and Decisions" (Figure 1.) matrix. This matrix defines five levels of relationships and the purpose, structures, and processes for each level. Using "Community Linkages" in companionship with the Framework provides focus and clarity in the dialogue supporting new relationships. Recognizing and strengthening the interrelatedness contributes to the "infrastructure" of the collaboration.

The Framework

The Framework has been designed as a comprehensive guide to form new collaborations, enhance existing efforts and/or evaluate the progress of developing collaborations (Figure 2). The Framework provides common elements of collaboration. The common elements include: **Grounding**, the bedrock of collaboration is the diversity with which the people, groups, organizations and communities share a desire to collaborate; **Core Foundation**, the shared purpose and destiny of the collaborative efforts; **Outcomes**, that which is achieved by implementing a collaboration; and the **Process and Contextual Factors**, those which affect the everyday activities of the collaboration.

The Framework ... Grounding

All Framework elements are grounded in valuing and respecting diversity. Valuing diversity honors the uniqueness, gifts, and talents each person, group, and organization bring to the collaboration. It opens the door to gaining an understanding of how all the elements fit together and how each is important to the whole. Diversity brings a critical balance to any level of collaboration. When a real diversity of people and opinion occurs in a group, a reverence for the shared vision often takes hold. It becomes easier to understand each member's perspective on current reality, and each other's ideas

Community Linkages - Choices and Decisions

Levels	Purpose	Structure	Process
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue and common understanding • Clearinghouse for information • Create base of support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-hierarchical • Loose/Flexible link • Roles loosely defined • Community action is primary link among members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low key leadership • Minimal decision making • Little conflict • Informal communication
Cooperation or Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Match needs and provide coordination • Limit duplication of services • Ensure tasks are done 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central body of people as communication hub • Semi-formal links • Roles somewhat defined • Links are advisory • Group leverages/raises money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitative leaders • Complex decision making • Some conflict • Formal communications within the central group
Coordination or Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share resources to address common issues • Merge resource base to create something new 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central body of people consists of decision makers • Roles defined • Links formalized • Group develops new resources and joint budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomous leadership but focus is on issue • Group decision making in central and subgroups • Communication is frequent and clear
Coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share ideas and be willing to pull resources from existing systems • Develop commitment for a minimum of three years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All members involved in decision making • Roles and time defined • Links formal with written agreement • Group develops new resources and joint budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared leadership • Decision making formal with all members • Communication is common and prioritized
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accomplish shared vision and impact benchmarks • Build interdependent system to address issues and opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus used in shared decision making • Roles, time and evaluation formalized • Links are formal and written in work assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership high, trust level high, productivity high • Ideas and decisions equally shared • Highly developed communication

Source: Community Based Collaborations - Wellness Multiplied 1994, Teresa Hogue, Oregon Center for Community Leadership

Figure 1

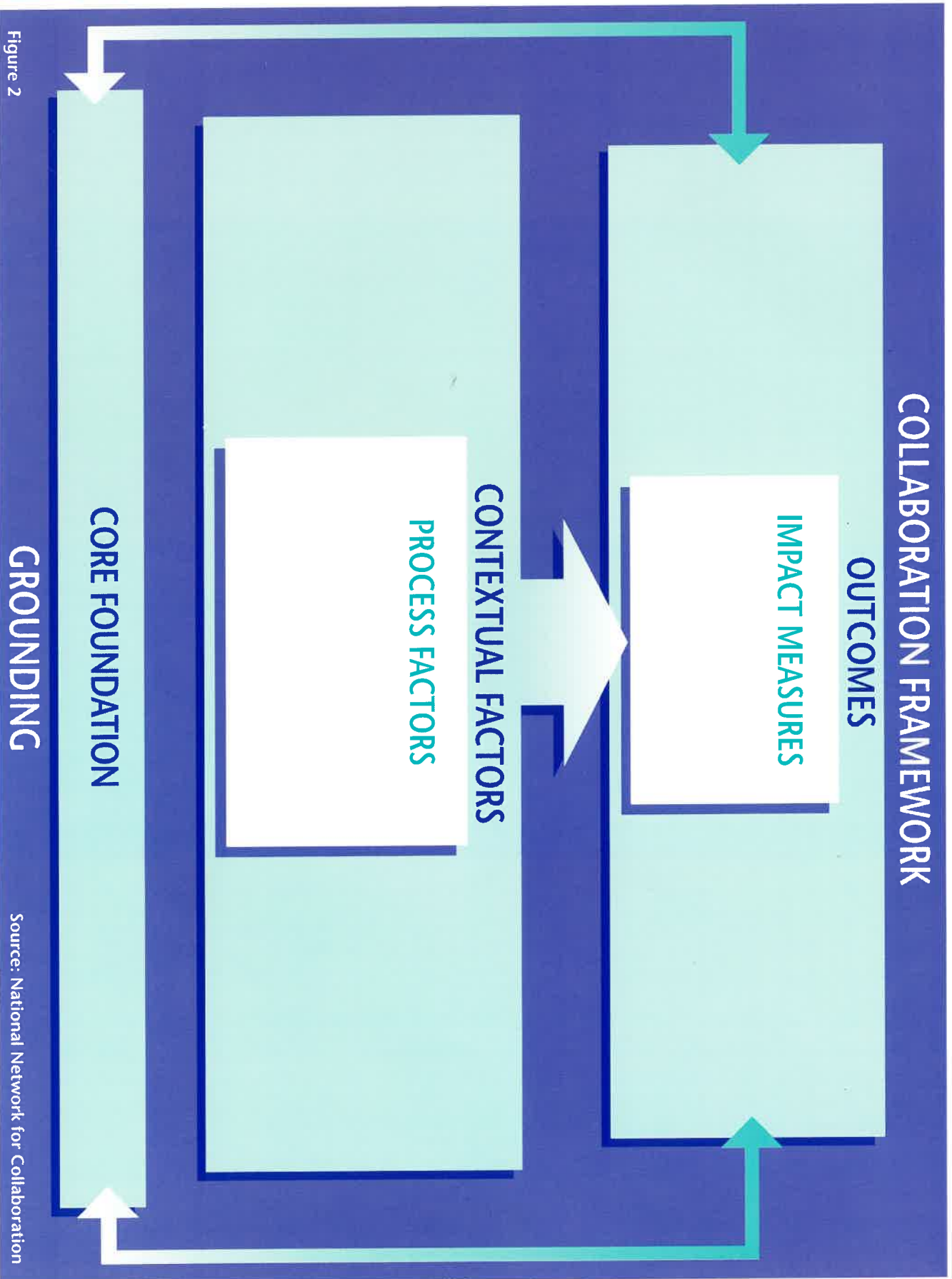


Figure 2

Source: National Network for Collaboration

other's ideas about courses of action. People whose lives are affected by decisions must be equally represented in the decision process.

The *Framework* fosters many opportunities to value the diversity of its individual members, organizations, and agencies. It provides the opportunity to recognize unique skills, capabilities and expectations within each *Process* and *Contextual Factor*. It encourages examining underlying stereotypes that affect capacity for change, promoting new awareness for collaboration members that promote shifts in attitudes and beliefs about what is possible. Through inventorying research, literature and curricula, the *Collaboration Framework* emphasizes the need to consider issues of diversity when defining strategies and content for trainings, workshops or specified assignments in committees.

The Framework ... Core Foundation

The *Core* represents the common ground of understanding. It focuses on creating a sense of common purpose that binds people together and inspires them to fulfill their deepest aspirations. Building the *Core* takes time, care and strategy. The discipline of building a *Core* is centered around a never-ending process, whereby people in the collaboration articulate their common interests - around vision, mission, values and principles. Together, the vision, mission, values, and principles describe why the collaboration matters and how it fits in the larger world. This core is essential for any successful collaboration.

Vision an image of the desired future — A Vision is a picture of the future, described in the present tense, as if it were happening now.

Mission defines the purpose of the collaboration. The Mission represents the fundamental reason for the collaboration's existence.

Values and Principles the beliefs individuals and the group hold. Values and Principles are the guides for creating working relationships and describe how the group intends to operate on a day-by-day basis.

The Framework ... Outcomes

Outcomes are the desired "conditions" for the community. They reflect success in working to reach the collaboration's vision. *Outcomes* are the results from the behavior and actions of people, groups, and organizations. *Outcomes* may range from "communities valuing and supporting life long learning" or "ensuring diversified livable wage jobs for families," or "area businesses reporting a decrease in vandalism and increased public safety." *Outcomes* do not include "increasing more services" or "building a community center." These may be strategies or actions used to attain the desired outcome.

Outcomes are often, but not exclusively, defined following the development of the shared vision. A group focusing on defining the desired *Outcomes* in the initial stage of building the collaboration is more likely to increase its effectiveness and the likelihood of engaging greater participation by a wide cross section of people and groups to create the vision.

The Framework ... Contextual and Process Factors

The *Contextual and Process Factors* represent elements that can either enhance or inhibit collaborations and ultimately the desired outcomes. *Process Factors* focus on the "how to" aspect of the collaboration and cover specific skills and components which are necessary to build effective working relationships. *Contextual Factors* are conditions that either exist or are lacking within an environment which can enhance or inhibit collaborations.

A five year collaboration which began by addressing the problem of teen mothers dropping out of high school, quickly identified underlying causes of this problem. Some of the causes included: a norm of parent and community expectations of young women to have children before 18 years of age, a norm of accepting school drop out, school policy barriers limiting student re-entry after two week absences, lack of livable wages, and lack of affordable day care.

The group initially defined three desired outcomes: 1. By 1995, school retention would be at 85% among teen parents; 2. Quality affordable day care and evening care would be available to all teen mothers and fathers enrolled in school; 3. By 1998, a minimum of 25% of all teen mothers and fathers will be enrolled in post secondary education.



The group defined the initial relationship level to be a coalition. With a group desire to merge budgets and attain a higher level of commitment, by year four the relationship moved to a collaboration level. The vision for the community continues to be “ Supporting young men and women to reach their full potential in their family, school and community life.” The mission of the Teen Parent Collaboration is “ to foster the environments which support young women and men who have parenting responsibility in their family, school and community lives through education, building positive relationships, and healthy environments. Some of the group values include: realigning and utilizing all resources to maximum effectiveness; respecting and valuing all people and organizations; valuing young people, their gifts and their opinion as resources; and defining positive courses of actions through creativity, experience and research.

Outcomes

Beginning at the end.

As previously noted, a collaboration is a process of participation through which people, groups and organizations work together on the strengths of the community to achieve desired results. *Outcomes* represent the desired “conditional” changes. While a vision articulates a picture of the future that the group seeks to create, the outcomes address specific “conditions to be achieved.”

The *Collaboration Framework* centers on six of the most common *outcomes* today: Public Safety; Education; Economic Wellbeing; Family Support; Health; and the Environment. Outcomes are essential to the formation of a shared vision, though, often they are not thought about until after the shared vision has been created. This leads to inconsistencies between vision and actual desired outcomes. Thus, we have placed the outcome section before the *Process and Contextual* sections to encourage the creation of a shared vision that purposely includes well through out desired *outcomes*. (Figure 3).

The following list are actual examples of specific outcomes defined by community collaborations. Following the example outcomes, indicators are listed. **Indicators** are short term measures of achievement. *Indicators* may include data counts, change in beliefs or behaviors, or new policies.

Public Safety

Communities are safe, enriching, and participative and have access to essential services.

Indicators - lower index in crime rate and increase youth participation in out-of-school programs.

Education

Well educated and capable people along with individual, family and social wellbeing are ends in themselves.

Indicators - increase in student skill levels and literacy rates.

Economic Wellbeing

Economic diversity exists which generates desirable jobs and higher income for citizens.

Indicators - increase in personal income, employment rate increases and contained costs.

Family Support

Families are competent, self-reliant, skilled and globally knowledgeable. Families are cohesive and nurturing.

Indicators - civic and occupational participation, family participation in intergenerational support.

Health

A healthy society defined by individuals who are mentally and physically healthy. The harmony of social relations as neighborhoods and places of employment become more heterogeneous.

Indicators - live birth rates, lower alcohol and drug rates, and number of people receiving prenatal care.

Environment

Retaining and bettering quality of life characterized by natural environments, vital communities, accessible services, and responsive political and social institutions.

Indicators - air quality, land use policy, transportation services and available housing.

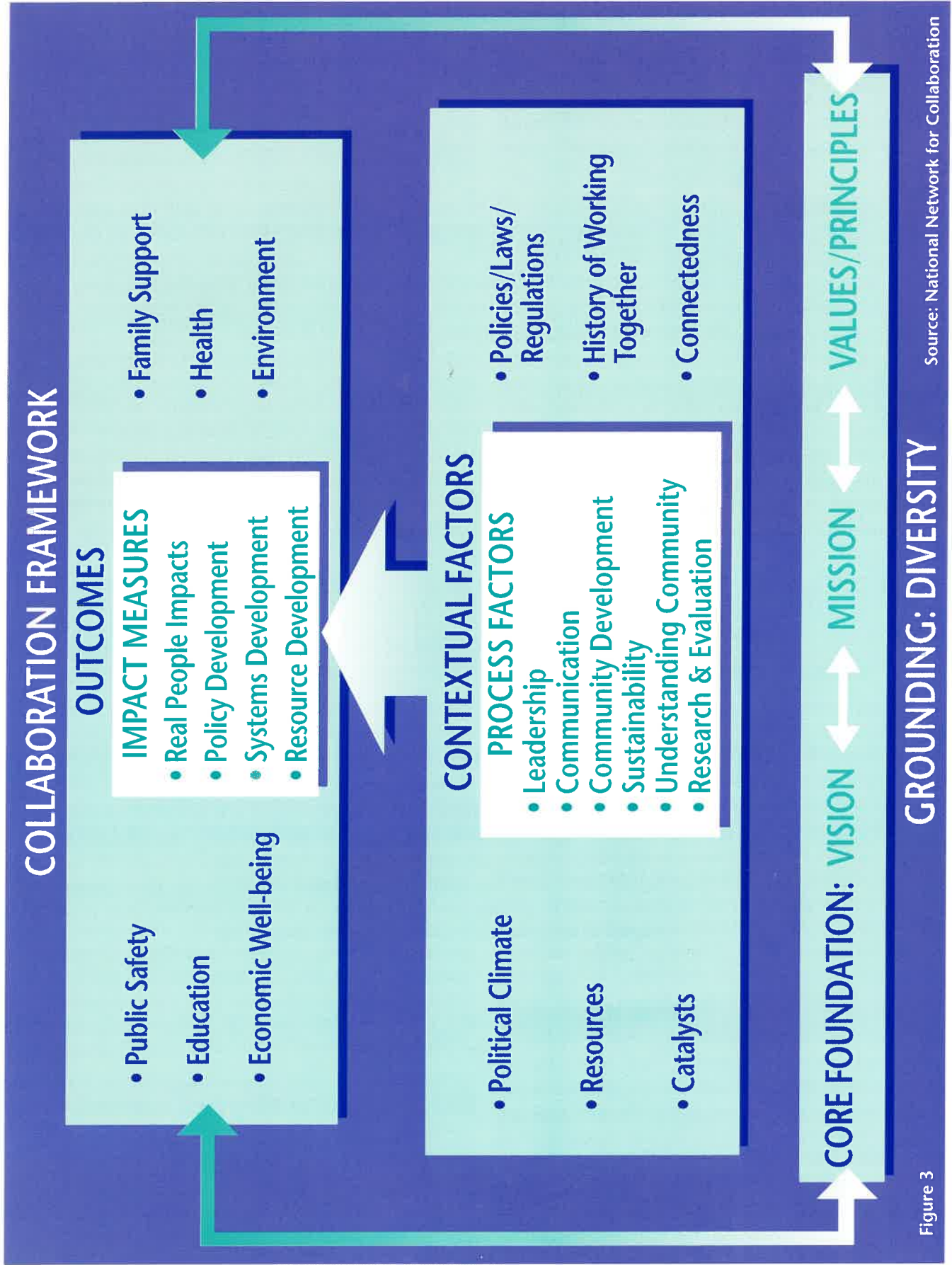


Figure 3



Impact Measures

Impact Measures are embedded within the context of Outcomes. *Impact Measures* are specific measures related to any outcome defined by a collaboration. *Impact Measures* articulate the dramatically improved results which support sustainable change and even-

tually “conditional” change. Four categories of *Impact Measures* have been identified: Real People Impacts; Policy Development; Systems Development; and Resources Development. A definition and example for each *Impact Measure* follows.

Real People Impacts

The behavior changes occurring within individuals, among groups, families, and within communities. These can include sharing of gifts, building on community capacity and strengths.

Example: As a result of a collaboration focused on providing parenting education, child care and a parenting support network, 18 two-parent families and 23 single-parent families are now practicing learned parenting skills and behaviors.

Policy Development

The evidence of policies and procedures that support and sustain ongoing efforts.

Example: A collaboration of eight agencies, and four community organizations focused on the issue of providing 24 hour child care for infants through 12 years of age. The collaboration led state- legislated policy to provide matching budget for the services. Policy was developed to provide quality care standards for private childcare providers which supported interdependent relationships with Community Childcare.

Systems Development

Organizations, agencies and groups of people who work together in a common cause.

Example: Three agencies joined together to create a new program for teen parents, including mothers and fathers, which provides education, family support, and job skills training.

Resource Development

A range of resources including skills, time, people and money realigned to focus on common issues.

Example: In a three county, community-supported effort, a new \$450,000 administration building for private non-profit social services has been built. A \$120,000 grant with a realignment of existing resources in the community valued at \$320,000 in materials, supplies, and labor was leveraged to complete the structure. The incentive for the community was to provide services with low or no administrative costs to allow more resources to be provided for the people of the community.

Process Factors

Process Factors focus on the “how to” aspect of collaboration. They deal with the specific skills and/or components necessary to build effective working relationships and contribute to the capacity of a community. Six major factors have been identified: Understanding the Community; Community Development; Leadership; Communication; Research and Evaluation; and Sustainability. Each of these fac-

tors covers a broad range of skills or tasks which impact the collaboration process. (Figure 3).

Factor – Understanding the Community

Understanding the community including its people, cultures, values and habits, provides the foundation for effective collaboration. It allows the practitioner to gain a sense of the vision the community has for itself and the underlying values of the citi-

zenry. A close look at the community helps to identify those individuals in the community who have power and those who have gifts. Potential audiences are identified. Potential collaborators will be discovered and potential turf battles insight will be gained. The practitioner will also recognize the diversity of strengths and weaknesses in the community that will influence the success of the collaboration and will develop a clear view of the overall strengths and not focus on weaknesses as it relates to serving the needs of children, youth and families.

Factor – Community Development

Community development is the process of mobilizing communities to address important issues and build upon the strengths of the community. The natural communication systems and formal information channels enable one to begin the process of exploring issues, goals and objectives. The collaboration begins the process of defining its vision, mission, values, principles and outcomes within the context of the attitudes, norms, beliefs and values of the larger community. Efforts begin to build teamwork and mobilize resources (revenue, time, people) to build on the positive environment within the community and overcome potential barriers and begin to mobilize the citizenry to institute change.

While mainstream collaborative efforts begin with the process outlined, a sense of trust is critical to successful community development strategies. Citizens often see the language of collaboration in rhetoric, with actions not rooted in melding actual and long lived community development.

Factor – Leadership

Community collaboration requires effective leadership. While leadership is often defined as who is in power, the definition of leadership for successful collaborations is broadened to include those who impact change within their community, group and/or organization.

One of the major responsibilities of leadership is to assure that appropriate members have been brought to the collaboration. A diverse membership should encompass potentially impacted groups and individuals. Collaborative efforts should provide for youth and adult partnerships. Norms of operation must be established which include proto-

col, conflict resolution, political and cultural sensitivity, structure, and roles and responsibilities. Leadership should facilitate and support team building and capitalize upon diversity, and individual, group and organizational strengths.

Factor – Communication

Collaborative efforts are dependent upon open and clear communication. Norms of communicating must be established which assure “language usage” which is acceptable to all members. Terminology must be clarified so that shared meaning can occur. A formal process for communication between meetings must be established (ie., weekly phone calls, mailings, faxed updates). Communication from the collaboration to the broader community must be established. This may involve the development of working relationships with the media and other formal information channels. Establishing and maintaining non-formal communication channels with local community leaders will also be essential. Marketing of the collaboration efforts must also be conducted in order to obtain community support and acquisition of needed resources.

Factor – Research and Evaluation

Obtaining and utilizing information is essential for collaborative groups. The effect of meeting the desired outcomes is the primary objective of a collaboration evaluation. Data must be collected which establishes benchmarks for future impact and outcome analysis. Reviewing examples of other successful models of collaboration will help in adopting or customizing a collaboration model. Evaluation efforts are essential to monitor progress related to the group’s goals and objectives and make modifications where necessary. Numerous methodologies may be employed in this process including quantitative, qualitative, and participatory strategies. Strategies for communicating program impacts must be established.

Factor – Sustainability

In order for collaborative efforts to be sustainable, it is essential that systems be instituted to provide sustained membership, resources, and strategic program planning. This will involve membership guide-



lines relating to terms of office and replacement of members. Formal operational agreements may be necessary. Resource development efforts must be ongoing to assure that the appropriate level of revenue, time and people are available to conduct the group's programming efforts. Planning must be both short-term and long-term. The collaboration must be able to identify emerging trends and issues and develop strategies for needed expansion.

Contextual Factors

As can be seen in the *Framework*, the *Process Factors* are embedded within the context of the community. The relationship between *Contextual Factors* and *Process Factors* is reciprocal and mutually influential. *Contextual Factors* are characteristics of the ecology/environment that are related to the effectiveness of a collaboration. Ecology, here, includes but is not limited to the physical and the structural settings of the community, (i.e., resources available in the community), and the social context (i.e., political atmosphere). The collaboration may be able to influence these characteristics, but the group does not have control over them.

Within the *Collaboration Framework*, six *Contextual Factors* have been identified as important to the success of a collaboration. The six *Contextual Factors* are present in the following order: Connectedness; History of Working Together; Political Climate; Policies/Laws/Regulations; Resources; and Catalysts.

In cases where minority/majority tension underlies the issues of concerns of a community, respect for diversity is a key element. Has the leadership in a given environment historically voiced the "rhetoric for change" with no real positive outcomes, or has the leadership demonstrated sincere commitment to valuing diversity - a part of the community's fabric? The capacity of diverse voices to be heard and valued influences each contextual factor, beginning with the ability of diverse citizens to form strong bonds of connection within and outside their cultural society through seeing their concerns as equally important catalysts to initiate positive change.

Factor – Connectedness

Connectedness refers to the linkages between individuals, groups, and organizations. That is, how people know each other or how they are connected

to one another. There are multiple types of connections that are not mutually exclusive. These types of connection include: individual, group, community, and networks. People are drawn together socially through organizations and groups, and by informal and/or formal rules, resources, and relationships.

An example of individual connection would be two individuals who are drawn together because of a social history that is not related to their careers or employment. Thus, on an individual level, Connectedness can be measured on whether an individual feels a linkage or bond with another individual. On a group level, people feel that they have associations or a sense of belonging to different groups and organizations. At the community level, Connectedness refers to universally understood principles and values of the community.

Finally, one can get a measure of communication by examining whether there are 'natural' networks of information exchange at each level and across the three levels. These networks may be formal and/or informal, but they provide an established pattern of communication at each of the levels—individuals, groups, communities—and across them. Collaborations that employ both the formal and informal networks of communication to support them are more likely to succeed. In sum, collaborations that are effective involve individuals, groups, organizations and communities that are well connected and have established informal and formal communication networks at all levels of Connectedness.

Factor – History of Working Together/ Customs

History, here, has to do with a community's past with regard to working cooperatively or competitively. Collaboration is more likely to succeed in communities that have a history of working together cooperatively (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). Usually, in communities where there is a long history of cooperation, there exists a corresponding history of solving problems. These communities work on difficult issues by employing the available resources and developing creative, community-wide solutions based on the desired outcomes. Moreover, in communities where a history of cooperation exists, the collaboration members trust each other and the

collaboration process. A diversity of members is welcomed as a resource and this diversity enhances creative solutions.

Finally, the power structure of the community also demonstrates the history of working together for the shared values of the community. In communities where a competitive history exists, it might be useful to implement education programs for potential collaborators regarding the benefits, costs, and processes of collaboration. Collaborations succeed in an environment that is oriented toward cooperation and away from competition.

Factor – Political Climate

Political Climate is the history and environment surrounding power and decision making. Political Climate may be within the community as a whole, systems within the community or networks of people. A healthy collaboration insures that political climates affecting or potentially affecting the collaboration have been identified and utilized in the positive development of the collaboration.

Recognizing and welcoming the political climate as a resource sets the stage for engaging a diversity of support for the shared vision of the collaboration. A wide cross section of people, groups and organizations within the identified political climate will better insure a mutually inclusive membership within the collaboration.

Widespread political support is important in developing and sustaining collaborations, particularly for policy making and implementation of policy. In collaborative political climates, there is a demonstrated willingness to dialogue, accept and negotiate new ideas, to navigate through conflict, and to be open toward emerging trends. Moreover, it is important that a collaboration has members who know which decision makers need to be influenced and how to influence those decision makers.

Collaborations which have support and endorsement of key people, groups and organizations in power are more likely to be effective in reaching the agreed upon outcomes. Effective collaborations have the potential of fostering new and emerging leaders. Together with existing people in power, new and emerging leaders find an opportunity to align themselves with an agreed upon shared focus and a wide range of people within the community who are committed to reaching positive outcomes.

Factor – Policies/Laws/Regulations

Solving problems collaboratively means transforming and changing policies, laws and regulations. Indeed, policies, laws and regulations represent all the concepts and activities that are used to resolve problems. Collaborations are more likely to succeed when supportive policies, laws, and regulations are in place. This is especially true with regard to the policies and regulations within the collaborating members' groups and/or organizations, contributors, and the people using the service.

Policies, laws, and regulations contribute to the political climate, but also directly affect the environment. Thus, whether systems and their structures, norms, and decision-making processes are open and supportive of collaboration depends in part on existing policies, laws, and regulations. Sustainability of collaborations is often dependent on policies and practices in place.

Factor – Resources

Within a collaboration, resources refer to four types of capital: Environmental, in-kind, financial, and human. Much of what has already been presented has to do with environmental capital. The ecology can promote collaborations or it can discourage them. An environment where there is connectedness at all levels, a history of working together, a supportive political climate, and policies, laws, and regulations that encourage cooperativeness, increases the probability of a successful collaboration.

In-kind capital has to do with what each of the collaboration members and their organizations contribute to the collaboration, such as meeting rooms, supplies, and computers. Financial capital involves monetary resources, which are often assumed to be most important. Note, however, that collaborations that cooperate only to seek funding are more likely to fail than collaborations that form as comprehensive community-wide responses to a problem. That emphasis shifts into a vision.

Human capital is the most important asset in a collaboration. The investment of people's time, expertise and energy into a collaboration is an essential contribution to achieving the collaboration's shared vision. Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of people can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has."



Each collaboration member and organization demonstrates commitment to the collaboration by contributing and/or realigning resources to the collaboration. The contribution can be in one or all four of the types of capital mentioned previously. However, the contribution of human capital to a collaboration is a crucial investment for Sustainability.

Factor – Catalysts

Catalysts get the collaboration started. The existing problem(s) or the reason(s) for the collaboration to exist must be viewed by the community and potential collaboration members as a situation that requires a comprehensive response. In this way, the problem(s) or reason(s) are the catalyst. For example, before the prevention of youth violence can be an issue to collaborate around, the community must view youth as having skills and gifts that can enhance the quality of life in the community.

In addition to a community-wide issue, the second type of catalyst needed is a convener. This is the person who calls the initial meeting of a collaboration and draws everyone into a dialogue about possible solutions to the situation. If the collaboration is going to move forward and establish a shared vision, the person who convenes the collaborative group must be respected and viewed as a “legitimate” player. Conveners must have organizational and interpersonal skills, and must carry out the role with passion and fairness.

Summary

Practical Application

This *Framework* is for people who want to learn to sustain community building through collaboration. It is for people who want to make collaborations more effective, while realizing specific outcomes. And it is for people who are invested in addressing an array of complex problems which resist “simple solution” fixes.

Using the *Framework*, people can experiment with redesigning or changing the direction of an existing collaboration or address the beginnings of a new collaboration. In the process, users will recognize increased skills in communication, decision making, and applying research. The *Framework* will guide collaboration members in dealing with daily

problems and opportunities. It will help groups of people focus on investing in their capacity to develop new solutions while maximizing a range of resources to their fullest potential.

Respect for diversity lays the groundwork for a dynamic collaboration. The *Framework* foundation provides a purpose for collaborators to gather around. In sum, the *Contextual Factors* influence and are influenced by the *Process Factors*. The dynamic interaction among these factors determines the possibility of having a successful collaboration. In order to prepare for possible obstacles and pitfalls, the *Contextual Factors* (Connectedness, History of Working Together, Political Climate, Policies/Laws/Regulations, Resources, and Catalysts) can be evaluated before forming/developing a collaboration. Additionally, these factors can be used in ongoing evaluation of a collaboration.

The *Framework* itself can be used as a tool for communication, setting direction and focus, defining results, leveraging new resources or diagnosing problems. Although a few examples of applying the *Framework* follow, those using the *Framework* are encouraged to expand these examples and share with the Collaboration Network membership.

Opening Dialogue

Whether one is working with an existing collaboration or developing a new one, communication within the collaboration and with those affected by the collaboration is critical. Using the factors as a focus of discussion may reduce fragmentation within the group and move group conversation from polite discussion to skillful dialogue, sound decision making, and action. Open and honest dialogue within the group contributes to the distribution of power in the group while increasing self-discipline and commitment. It also assists with viewing issues and problems in a holistic approach.

Setting Direction and Focus

Having a clear direction and focus for a collaboration defines the purpose of the collaboration as what its members seek to create. Setting the direction and focus begins with establishing the vision, mission, values, and principles. Defining the outcome(s) further establishes identity and fundamental purpose.

Applying the range of factors to the processes and contexts of the collaboration results in a greater shared understanding of what the collaboration stands for, where it's going, the community environment, and how it intends to make its outcomes a reality.

A five-year-old Drug Education Collaboration originally organized around a specific grant, recently used the Collaboration Framework to set a new direction and focus for its work. While the initial grant sought to provide drug awareness education after school hours, other organizations have become interested in joining with the schools, Extension Service, and community organizations to provide a continuum of drug education for all school age youth and families. The Framework has been used to guide the expansion and development of a broader vision, broader outcomes, and implementation of a range of new leveraged resources.

A Victims Support collaboration has identified four Process Factors and five Contextual Factors having potential direct impact on the success of the organization. They have a list of "indicators" of success for each factor. During meetings, the group discusses strategies to increase the success thereby keeping a focus on the important issues impacting the collaboration.

Leverage New Resources

The *Framework* may be used to explore new resources and enhance existing resources. Many collaborations look for "new money" to support the actions of the collaborations, when in fact the most valuable resources available exist within the community.

The *Framework* may be used to examine the membership of the collaboration. By reviewing the *Process Factors* a group may decide to add a member who agrees to facilitate the meetings or provide evaluation expertise. Key people in the community may be added who are viewed as "catalysts" in making something happen. The *Framework* has the capacity to redeploy people more effectively.

The *Framework* assists collaborations in designing fundamental mechanisms that increase the stability and value of the membership. For example,

using existing communication systems such as newsletters, telephones, and electronic mail is far more effective than creating new systems.

A newly formed collaboration used the Framework to insure inclusivity in its membership. The collaboration's purpose is to develop community capacity to support the juvenile justice system. With the Framework, membership now includes people and organizations with a wide range of backgrounds. The Extension Service has been added for its expertise in community development and communication. A local non-profit research agency with expertise in evaluation, and outreach workers with a social service agency have been added to assist in designing community-based outreach.

As a result of the added membership, new office space, equipment and a base budget have been added to the collaboration. Awareness of the collaboration among a wider cross section of the community has increased.

Diagnosing Problems

The *Framework* may be used to diagnose problems within a collaboration. Viewing the *Framework* as a "template" and placing it over an existing collaboration will help dissect the workings of the group. Often one or more elements may be causing underlying problems with group.

A four-year-old Affordable Housing collaboration used the Framework as a diagnostic tool when they began to experience problems with low attendance, lack of commitment, few resources and lack of accomplishment. The membership along with an outside facilitator, examined each element of the Framework and how it applied to their collaboration. Through consensus, it was decided that the mission was muddled, communication systems were fragmented, leadership needed to be shared, and there was a lack of protocol on how the group worked together. Strategies for each factor were defined and within eight months new progress from the group had been documented.

In summary the Framework can assist you in your collaboration. The National Network for Collaboration members invite you to join our evolving dialogue.



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