



## Introducing The Berkeley Collaboration Series

This is the first in a series of briefings that Berkeley is preparing on the broad topic of collaboration. Fittingly, it has been developed as a collaborative effort among our Associates.

Laren Stadelman, a Berkeley Associate, authored this overview paper. Jane Cooke-Lauder, a 'friend' of Berkeley's contributed significantly to this paper and to our thinking by sharing her preliminary doctoral research on collaboration among non-governmental organizations. We thank Jane for her ideas and insights.

In future papers, we plan to explore key themes and set out success factors for different contexts (see box) using case studies including the following.

- Collaborative governance – the case of LHINs (Ontario's Local Health Integration Networks).
- Keys to effective inter-professional collaboration.
- Negotiating a merger/alliance as a collaboration process.

We welcome your ideas and feedback.

### **Different Contexts for Collaboration**

#### **Leader-coordinated Collaboration —**

Lead organizations working with member organizations to develop common directions.

**Voluntary Collaboration —** Voluntary association of organizations working together on areas of common interest.

**Bi-lateral Negotiation —** Two organizations working on alliance, joint venture or merger for mutual benefit.

**Initiative Specific Collaboration —** Various organizations working together on a joint initiative.

**Intra-organization Professional Collaboration —** Intra-organizational work between professions or divisions to improve performance.

*Jim Mackay*



# Successful Collaboration: An Overview

By Laren Stadelman

## Why collaborate?

Health and social services organizations are facing increasing pressures to work collaboratively to improve services and increase effectiveness.

- The complexity of today's issues means that multiple perspectives must be brought together to deliver effective solutions.
- Cost pressures are driving many organizations to find efficiencies through shared services and cooperative purchasing.
- Public policy is emphasizing the need for integrated planning and coordination of services across multiple organizations at the system level.

Collaborative arrangements can take many forms — from formal partnerships and networks to ad hoc agreements. Equally varied is the nature of the collaboration — from geographically based groups to those focused on a specific target population or issue.

## The practical challenges

The benefits of collaboration are easily understood — the ability to achieve more together than could be achieved individually. While this may sound simple, the reality is more complex.

Collaborating organizations typically share a common goal; however they approach that goal with different interests, priorities and concerns. As a result, they frequently struggle to find common ground — areas where they are willing to commit resources and work together. The issue is one of competition. While the collaborating partners commit to the collaboration, their other interests and priorities can compete with the collaboration, at minimum in terms of time and resources.

Collaboration often involves organizations with limited experience of collaboration and limited experience working together. As a result, they need time to learn about one another and to build trust. To work together effectively, however, they must address the potentially contentious questions of expectations, roles, and leadership. The less the organizations know about one another, the more difficult this can be.

The practical challenges of collaboration relate to finding workable answers to questions about what the organizations involved hope to accomplish, where they will focus their energies, and how they will work with one another.

## What it takes to be successful

Studies of multi-organizational collaboration have shown that a number of factors contribute to success. These include:

- External pressure to work together.
- Alignment of interests around a shared vision.
- Careful selection of partners based on values and capability.
- Sufficient resources to get the job done.
- A bias for action and specific opportunities for joint initiatives.
- Clear roles and effective working relationships.
- Engagement of all parties and ongoing management of the collaboration.

Each of these factors is important. Because each collaboration is different, however, their relative importance may vary considerably depending on circumstances

## Stages of collaboration

Collaborations typically progress through a number of stages from start up through to maturity:

- Launching the collaboration.
- Mobilizing for action.
- Building relationships.
- Sustaining the collaboration.

This is not a strictly sequential process. More commonly, the early stages overlap and there is a high degree of iteration.



## *Launching the collaboration*

In the first stage of collaboration, the organizations involved must clearly articulate what they hope to accomplish and where they feel they will be most effective working together. A clear statement of common goals provides a valuable point of reference for subsequent planning and decision making.

They must also determine who should participate in the collaboration and who should lead it. Ideally, membership should be based on who has the potential to contribute to the stated goals. Equally important is shared values — it is not enough to get those with the right mix of skills together if they cannot work together effectively.

Leadership of the collaboration can take many forms. Some collaborations have designated leaders, either individuals or organizations; others do not. Many collaborations are led by a secretariat — and the leader of the secretariat can often become the de facto leader. Ideally, leadership is based on capability and capacity.

A key consideration at this stage is whether or not the collaboration has been externally mandated.

In some collaborations, an external organization (for example, funding agencies or government) has identified organizations to work together to achieve certain goals. With goals, membership, and leadership already determined, the focus is initially on role clarity and then on how to accomplish what is expected within the parameters that have been set.

## *Mobilizing for action*

Once goals have been articulated, the next stage involves developing an action plan for how the goals will be achieved.

Planning must consider a number of perspectives. Over the long term, the plan must lead to improved results. In the short term, it must emphasize the practical first steps and early successes that will move the collaboration forward.

Finally, planning must lead to action. Resources must be mobilized to take action on both long term and short term initiatives. Typically this involves discussion of how costs and benefits will be allocated.

Key considerations at this stage are the degree of alignment of interest among the participating organizations, and the degree to which they share power.

Collaborations with specific goals and a high degree of alignment around those goals tend to follow a logical process that looks much like traditional planning. They establish criteria, evaluate alternatives, and develop a course of action.

Collaborations with more broadly defined goals and potentially diverging interests follow a different process. Agreement on direction is generally achieved through consultation and consensus building across collaborating partners. Contentious issues are avoided, at least in the early stages of collaboration, and time and effort is focused on achieving some early wins.

## *Building relationships*

To move forward successfully, collaborating organizations must forge effective working relationships. The first task is to clarify roles and accountabilities so that all parties understand what is expected of them.

The second key task is establishing effective processes for working together. Areas to address include information sharing, decision making and conflict resolution.

A key consideration at this stage is how well the participating organizations know and trust one another.

For organizations with little prior experience with one another, establishing effective working relationships can be difficult. Such situations generally pose a higher risk that the collaboration may be derailed. Typically, organizations respond to these risks by requiring more controls to be put in place and by moving forward more slowly.

For all organizations, consensus building must be an explicit and ongoing process emphasizing common goals while respecting individual differences.

## *Sustaining the collaboration*

In the early stages of collaboration, many activities and processes are established in an ad hoc manner to deal with specific situations. As the collaboration matures, those that are seen to have ongoing value begin to be formalized, and those that are missing are put in place.

At this stage in the process, it is very important to ensure that effective monitoring mechanisms are in place to ensure that the collaboration is delivering the results it was established to achieve.

It is not uncommon in more mature collaborations for there to be changes in membership, changes in the circumstances leading to the collaborations or both. Ongoing assessment of the goals/priorities is required and it is likely that the collaboration will morph and evolve.

## **Three levels of activity**

Based on our experience with a variety of organizations, we believe that successful collaboration involves three levels of activity.

1. At the collective level, the organizations involved manage competing interests and must stay focused on the common goals. Ultimately, for the collaboration to be sustainable, they need to demonstrate improved results in these areas.
2. At the operational level, they must develop and implement a game plan that, over time, ensures that the key components required for collaboration are in place.
3. At the organizational level, they must establish mechanisms that foster effective working relationships and build trust and commitment.



## About the Author

*Laren Stadelman, MBA, CMC*

Laren is an independent associate of the Berkeley Consulting Group with over 20 years experience in management and management consulting. She leads her own firm, Stadelman Consulting Inc., that specializes in helping senior leaders plan, design and introduce significant organizational change. She has extensive experience in the area of mergers and organizational design. As an active volunteer, Laren is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Bloorview Kids Rehab, and a Council Member of the Institute of Certified Management Consultants of Ontario.

## About the Berkeley Consulting Group

The Berkeley Consulting Group, established in 1985, is an independent Canadian firm providing management consulting services. We primarily support clients lead their organizations effectively through strategic and organizational transitions.

Berkeley is a 'network' firm with a core of four permanent staff and a collective of 20 consulting associates. While our associates are primarily in the GTA, we have associates across Canada and in the U.K. Berkeley is affiliated with Square Peg International, a firm based in London, U.K. with a global consulting network.

Each associate brings specialized experience and knowledge of a sector or function. Berkeley forms teams with this tight group of associates to fit each project opportunity. This is why our theme is **Collective Wisdom...Fresh Ideas.**

### Supporting Your Collaborative Efforts

Berkeley can help your collaborative efforts be successful. Our consultants and broad network of associates can provide support in the following ways.

- **Process design advice** – we can help design the process for launching the collaboration and putting in place the initial plan and working relationships.
- **Planning advice & facilitation** – as a neutral third party, we can help facilitate key meetings and workshops to ensure the dialogue is constructive, and conflicts in the process are managed and addressed. We can also help foster the link between planning and action.
- **Organizational advice** – we can help outline roles and accountabilities, develop the ongoing communication, decision making, and conflict resolution process that will promote good working relationships.



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