COLLABORATION | ENGAGING ACROSS SECTORS

The Case for Engaging Across Sectors

Most of us, when making a big decision, consult many people. We talk to our family. We consult friends. We engage experts. We look at internet comments and ratings. We do a lot of research and engagement. We don't limit our engagement only to those in our inner circle. We engage, often across different sectors and perspectives.

Collaborative efforts also benefit from deeper engagement. The case for engaging across different sectors is strong. It enriches the collective understanding of the issue. It builds capacity to respond effectively. It creates potential leverage to make traction on the challenge or opportunity.

What does it mean to engage across sectors? Typically, different sectors are identified as business, government, voluntary or community sectors. Others include citizens or individuals with lived and living experience of the issue.

Depending on the collaborative focus, sector definition is more nuanced and may include philanthropy, funders, faith, health, education, environment, media, small business, or immigrant-serving sectors to name a few.

The gift in cross-sector collaboration is that it is possible to use **differences as an asset**—differences in resources, experience, demographics, industry, and sector, as well as differences in perspective, such as assessments of risk, time, and scale. Cross sector leaders recognize that the most robust and sustainable solutions will come from designing with (and not just for) the communities most affected.[i]

The different perspectives generated by cross-sector partners can provide new ways of thinking, working, and acting. Collaborations intent on tackling more complex issues benefit from this 360-degree lens. Tamarack, since its inception, has encouraged collaborative tables tackling poverty to include diverse perspectives recognizing that these different partners can bring new resources, ideas, and leverage.

In addition, Tamarack recognized and advocated for the citizens impacted by the issue to be at the centre of collaborative conversations. Individuals closest to the issue or problem, bring a view of the depth of challenges, and can considered context experts. They bring an informed, lived experience of the context of the issue, challenge, or opportunity.

Look Before You Leap

Alison Gold of [Optimistic Anthropology](#) identifies four questions for collaborative efforts to consider when building their cross-sector engagement strategies. The questions are simple and yet provocative.

1. Does the problem require cross-sector collaboration?
2. Is this cross-sector collaboration set up right to achieve success?
3. Does my organization have the capacity, structures, and culture that will allow us to collaborate effectively?
4. Does our organizational representative have the necessary cross-sector leadership skills? [ii]

The first two questions are focused on the problem or opportunity focus of the collaborative. Not every collaboration requires full cross-sector engagement, but most will benefit from the inclusion of different perspectives and sectors.

The second question posed by Gold is relevant to all collaboratives. Is this collaboration set-up right to achieve success? Gold suggests that collaboration partners must have **shared and aligned interests** in order to be successful.

The second two questions designed to be considered by each of the collaborative partners. Does my organization have the capacity, structures, and culture that will allow us to collaborate effectively? This is an important question with three critical parts:

- Capacity: Considering available human, financial, and time resources
- Structures: Identifying accountability and decision-making requirements
- Culture: Committing to active participation, engagement, and aligning with the shared purpose of the collaboration

Finally, Gold raises the question about the capabilities of the cross-sector leader. Does the collaborative leader have the mindsets and skillsets required to be an effective collaborative leader? In a previous paper in this series, Tamarack described these critical attributes.

CoCreative Consulting describes cross-sector collaboration in a different way. In their resource, The Four Voices of Collaborative Innovation[iii], they describe the voices of expertise, experience, design, and intent. Each of these voices bring unique value to the collaborative process. CoCreative identifies the principles for effective engagement, methods to engage, the gifts each voice brings and the potential traps in relying only on that voice. Their approach is less focused on sector representation but rather on how the collaborative innovation might benefit from unique perspectives and innovators.

Building Readiness for Cross-Sector Collaboration

Cross-sector collaboration doesn't "just happen". It requires collaborative partners to be creative and consider the value of engaging individuals across different sectors. The Public Health Foundation in the US provides a useful readiness matrix for considering cross-sector engagement in public health. While relevant to the public health sector, the readiness matrix can be adapted for many issues being tackled by collaborative efforts.

Readiness Matrix for Cross-Sector Collaboration

Public Health

Other Human Services Organizations

1 Commonalities	2 Differences
• Focus on improving community health • Similar customers • Understand the need • Have the desire	• Workforce skills • Vocabulary • Funding sources • Different services
3 Barriers	4 Collaboration Areas
• Silos • Stay in your lane mentality • Staff to engage others • Workforce gaps • Sharing information • Not willing to share resources	• Align priorities • Focus on SDoH • Willingness to leverage resources • Engage in cross-sector initiatives

Figure 1

The Readiness Matrix for Cross-Sector Collaboration[iv] contains four frames including identifying the commonalities, differences, barriers, and areas for collaboration. These four areas are useful when mapping the potential contributions and challenges of different partners.

The Public Health Foundation further identifies four zones connected to each of these frames. Understanding and recruiting only partners with commonalities keeps collaboratives firmly in their **comfort zone**.

Engaging with partners who bring differences including different expertise leads collaboratives into an **understanding zone**. This is where collaborative partners begin to understand and leverage the unique abilities of each partner.

Successfully navigating barriers such as silos and turf, leads to successfully entering into a **change zone**. The change zone is described as the place where collaborative partners work together to get things done.

Finally, the collaboration areas is considered by the Public Health Foundation as the **learning zone**. This is the most intensive of the four frames and requires the collaborative table to engage deeply. To be successful, the Public Health Foundation identifies that collaborative members commit to a yes to the following questions. Any collaborative can easily adapt the questions to achieve learning zone outcomes.

- Are collaborative member organizations willing to collaborate, cooperate, and coordinate resources for the collective good of the community?
- Can the collaborative agree on a common health improvement AIM for the community?
- Can member organizations work collaboratively to achieve the community health improvement AIM?
- Are member organizations willing to pool and leverage assets?
- Are member organizations willing to consolidate programs and services to make them more efficient, effective, and available to achieve the community health improvement AIM?
- Are member organizations willing to allow community residents to serve on collaborative task forces?
- Are member organizations willing and prepared to allow community residents to shape the voice of health for their community?

Mapping Potential Cross-Sector Partners

Many of us, when seeking to recruit cross-sector partners engage in a simple identification strategy of identifying who we know in different sectors. Sometimes we bring partners together to brainstorm names.

The Partnering Initiative has a very useful Stakeholder Mapping Tool[v]. This tool not only identifies potential collaborative partners but also begins to map levels of commitment and engagement in the collaboration. There are three steps to the process. The first step includes identifying potential

collaborative partners. In this initial step, potential partners can be described as: affecting, affected, resources, and instrument. They might also fit into multiple categories.

The second step in the process is identifying where partners might fit on a four-part grid which determines their influence against their interest. In some cases, the collaboration may move one partner in one section of the grid to another section during the course of the collaboration.

The final step in the partner mapping process is identifying the role the partner will play as part of the collaborative effort. The following roles are identified in this tool, however, you might have others to add based on your collaborative work.

- Partner
- Contractor
- Influencer, Champion
- Disseminator
- Funder
- Informer/consultation participant
- Knowledge provider
- Regulator or policy maker
- Beneficiary
- Potential inhibitor
- Other

It should be noted that this Partnering Initiative calls this tool "Stakeholder Mapping". The word "stakeholder" has a negative colonialist context. We have adjusted the language in our example to "partner".
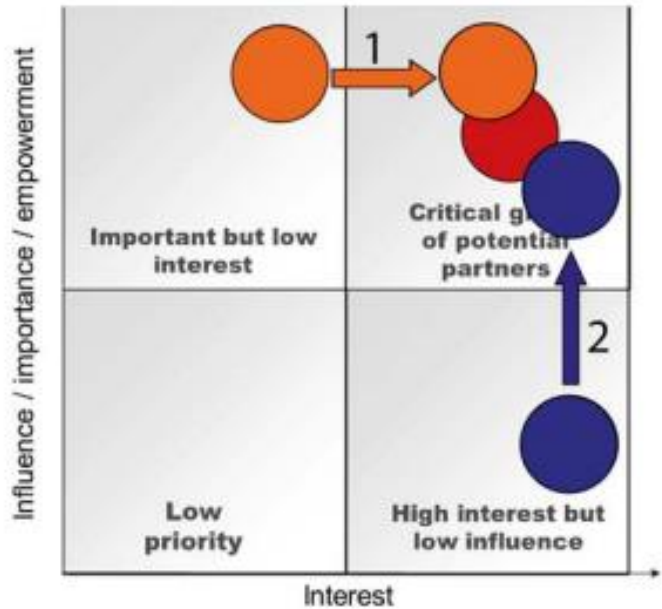
Assessing Cross-Sector Engagement

Living Cities has developed an online Cross-Sector Partnership Assessment.[vi] The 10 minute survey helps collaborative leaders and tables think through the development and process of their cross-sector partnership. It helps collaborative efforts consider how to best work with partners to achieve increased impact. Collaborative leaders and partners are provided with tailored feedback, tools, and resources.

The assessment is designed for community-based efforts employing a collective impact approach and is based on Living Cities experience supporting more than 70 collective impact initiatives.

Final Reflections about Cross-Sector Engagement

Collaboration is based on the premise that success and impact can only be achieved through individuals working together toward a **shared goal**. Some collaborative efforts might only need to recruit from one or two sectors. Others might identify the need to engage a wide variety of partners representing different sectors.

In every case, collaborations benefit from partners bringing different perspectives, views, and interests to the table. Engaging across sectors can leverage new resources, build a deeper perspective about the opportunity, and deepen commitment to change. CoCreative also asks us to consider the unique voices that are required to achieve collaboration innovation.

Engaging cross-sector partners requires a thoughtful process and intention. Understanding the interests and relationship that potential partners might have to an issue is an important step. Being thoughtful about the overall approach can net better results.

Tools for Engaging Across Sectors

Public Health Foundation:
Cross-Sector Collaboration for Improving the Health of Communities

CoCreative Consulting:
The 4 Voices of Collaboration Innovation

The Partnering Initiative:
Stakeholder Mapping

Living Cities:
Cross-Sector Partnership Assessment

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The Collaborative Governance and Leadership Series

This is a paper in a series about Collaborative Leadership and Governance. The papers will be released throughout mid 2022 and early 2023. We invite your comments and feedback. If you are a member of a collaborative table, we would love to hear from you. Please email Liz Weaver – Liz@tamarackcommunity.ca

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[i] Stanford Social Innovation Review. The Need for Cross Sector Collaboration. Jeanine Becker and David B. Smith. Winter 2018. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_need_for_cross_sector_collaboration

[ii] Optimistic Anthropology. 4 Questions to Ask and Answer when engaging in Cross-Sector Collaboration. Alison Gold. https://www.optimisticanthro.com/blog/2018/4/16/4-questions-to-ask-before-engaging-in-cross-sector-collaboration

[iii] CoCreative Consulting. The Four Voices of Collaborative Innovation. https://www.wearecocreative.com/_files/ugd/421acf_669b2a710c1d4b3fafb0fe0e031a1ed5.pdf

[iv] Public Health Foundation. Cross-Sector Collaboration for Improving the Health of Communities: You Can't Do It Alone. http://www.phf.org/phfpulse/Pages/Cross_Sector_Collaboration_for_Improving_the_Health_of_Communities_You_Cant_Do_It_Alone.aspx

[v] The Partnering Initiative. Stakeholder Mapping. https://www.thepartneringinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Stakeholder-mapping.pdf.

[vi] Living Cities. Cross-Sector Partnership Assessment. https://livingcities.org/resources/cross-sector-partnership-assessment/

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