



THE COLLABORATION SPECTRUM REVISITED

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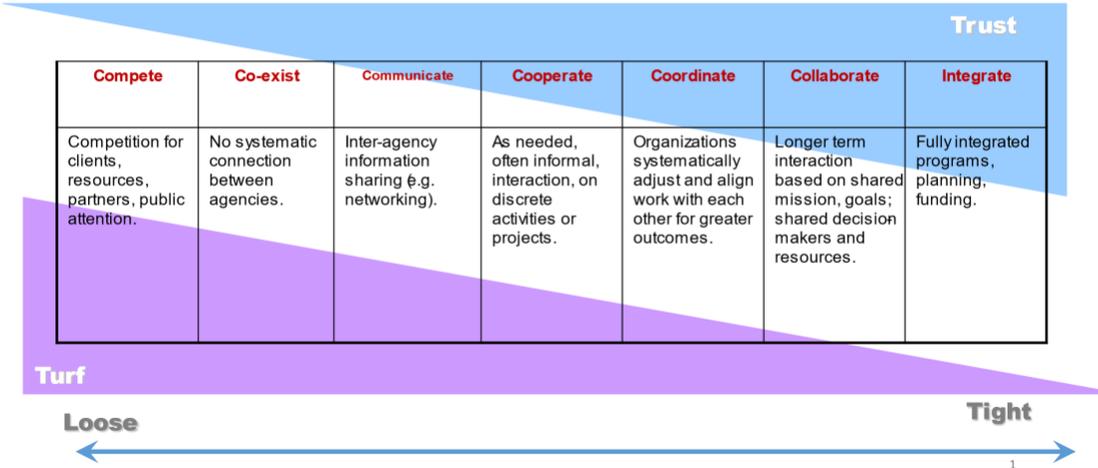
This resource revisits the Collaboration Spectrum and provides clarity to collaborative conveners, leaders and partners about engaging in the work of collaboration. Its intent is to support collaborative efforts to be more purposeful, intentional, and engaging. Too often, we join collaborative tables because we are inspired by the convening organization, the purpose of the collaboration, or because we think it will change our community for the better only to be frustrated with the lack of focus, opportunity, or leadership potential.

All points in the collaborative spectrum require intentionality of purpose. In employment interviews, there is a saying that you only have the first 10 minutes to make a strong impression. This is also true for successful collaborative efforts. You want to start strong and with purpose. This will engage partners from the beginning and will maintain momentum through the rough patches that all collaboratives face. Design your collaborative with purpose, engage with intentionality and work toward shared results and impact.

COLLABORATION IS NOT JUST ONE ACTION, IT'S A SPECTRUM

The collaboration spectrum guides Tamarack’s thinking about the practice of collaboration. For the last 10 years, the Tamarack team has been using the collaboration spectrum to illustrate that collaboration is not a single action, but that it can mean different actions or activities to different partners engaged in collaborative efforts. The collaboration spectrum has several elements. Collaborative efforts are more clearly defined. The spectrum ranges from compete to integrate with several different modalities for collaboration in which can be found along the spectrum. Getting clarity about the nature of the collaborative effort is important.

The Collaboration Spectrum



When collaborative partners are competing or co-existing, the partners are more loosely coupled together and there is more turf between the partners. When collaborative efforts are intentionally coordinating, collaborating, and integrating services, programs or organizations, these partners should focus on building trust and connection.

The collaboration spectrum is a useful tool for getting partners on the same page. In 2017, the Tamarack Institute designed a [collaboration spectrum tool](#) which assists partners to assess the current context of their collective work. The tool also helps the partners to plan forward by collectively identifying where they hope to see their collaborative in 3 to 5 years. The [collaboration spectrum tool](#) is an opportunity to generate dialogue about the current and future context for collaborative efforts.

CLARITY OF PURPOSE

In facilitating the [collaboration spectrum tool](#), we often see members of the same collaborative identify different expectations about where the work is currently and what the future holds. This difference in expectations can create tensions or conflicts amongst collaborative partners. If a few partners think that their involvement is to communicate and share information and other partners think the work is about coordinating efforts, tensions can arise. Gaining clarity of purpose is essential for effective partnerships and collaboration.

Clarity of purpose is a trust building activity. Collaborative partners will engage more deeply when they understand the core purpose of the collaborative work and what this means for each of the partners. Whether the collaboration is about shared service delivery or systems impact, clarity of purpose is essential.

THE COLLABORATION SPECTRUM AS A GOVERNANCE TOOL

More recently, Tamarack has revisited the collaboration spectrum and adapted it from a governance lens. The table below provides a high-level view of each of the approaches to collaboration found on the collaboration spectrum. The table provides details about the following collaboration or governance elements:

COLLABORATIVE SPECTRUM DEFINITIONS

This row describes each of the ways organizations and community change efforts collaborate. Some types of collaboration require very little commitment such as compete and coexist. In fact, many collaborative efforts might also include members who are there to compete or coexist. In the middle of the collaboration spectrum are collaboratives whose chief outcome is to share communications and information or initiate early-stage cooperation.

Those collaborative efforts are more intentional about achieving shared outcomes usually fit into the coordinate, collaborate, and integrate part of the collaboration spectrum. The partners around these collaborative tables are often committing time, resources and their creative intelligence toward a shared goal or outcome. They are working in concert with one another and generally have a shared focus or approach.

	Compete	Coexist	Communicate	Cooperate	Coordinate	Collaborate	Integrate
Definition	Competition for clients, resources, partners, public attention	No systematic connection between organizations	Inter-organization information sharing	As needed, often informal interaction, on discrete activities or projects	Organizations systematically adjust and align work with each other for greater outcomes	Longer-term interaction based on a shared mission, goals, shared decision-making, and resources	Fully integrated programs, planning, and funding

TYPES OR FORMS OF THE COLLABORATION

There are many different types or forms of collaboration. In March 2020, [Collaborate CIC](#) published a resource called [Forms and Features of Collaboration](#). In this publication, they described several different types of collaborative approaches including networked collaboration; decentralized collaboration; collective impact; system connectors; catalyst collaborators; coalitions and mission-oriented collaborations. While you might use different words to describe your collaborative effort, this resource can be helpful because it deepens our understanding about the form and nature of collaborative work.

Most of the collaborations describe in the [Forms and Features of Collaboration](#) resource tend to align with the coordinate, collaborate and integrate part of the collaboration spectrum. What is useful however, is that each example features the value of that collaborative approach, a description about the purpose, and the focus of the collaborative. There is also information about the mechanics distinct to that specific collaborative effort and the make up or membership, decision making, and diversity.

The table below describes additional forms of collaboration. How would you describe your collaborative effort? What makes it distinct and where would it sit on the collaboration spectrum?

	Compete	Coexist	Communicate	Cooperate	Coordinate	Collaborate	Integrate
Type or Form of Collaboration			Communities of Practice, Networks	Networks, Decentralized Collaboration Shared Project Teams	Coalition, Decentralized Collaboration, Mission-Driven Collaboration	Collective Impact, Mission Driven Collaboration, Public-Private Partnerships	Collective Impact, Mergers

CONVENING LEADERSHIP FOR THE COLLABORATIVE WORK

A distinctive factor for collaborative efforts is the convening leadership. Convening leadership is described as the individual and/organization that initiates the conversation about collaboration and brings partners together to address and issue, solve a problem, or advance an opportunity. Sometimes, the collaboration is single sector, meaning that all the partners are drawn from the same sector. Other times, depending on the nature of the collaborative, the convening leader might recruit individuals representing multiple sectors for a multi-meeting process to address a more complex issue.

A convener is an individual or group responsible for bringing people together to address an issue, problem, or opportunity. In the context of collaborative leadership, it usually involves convening representatives from multiple sectors for a multi-meeting process, typically on complex issues. A convener, or group of conveners working together, might invite public officials, business professionals, or leaders of community or non-profit organizations to participate. Conveners use their influence and authority to call people together to collaborate. Often, conveners help fund the process.

Source: <https://collaborativeleadersnetwork.org/leaders/the-role-of-the-convenor/>

There are specific functions in convening leaders in collaborative work. This includes identifying the issue or opportunity facing the group. Determining who might initially be invited to the collaborative table.

- Identifying the issue or opportunity facing the group
- Clarifying the purpose of the collaborative effort
- Determining who might initially be invited to the collaborative table
- Seeking input from the partners about their engagement, role, and potential contributions
- Seeking buy in from collaborative partners and working toward a shared approach.

Those convening collaborative efforts should identify the core reasons for bringing partners into collective efforts and design approaches which are both engaging and purpose driven.

David Chislip, author of the Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook describes the convening process as follows:

If you bring the appropriate people together as peers in constructive ways with good content and context information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organizations and the community.

Source: David Chrislip, The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook;
<http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g3s5l.html>

Following Chrislip’s advice as the convening leaders of collaborative work, will set the collective effort on a purposeful path forward.

	Compete	Coexist	Communicate	Cooperate	Coordinate	Collaborate	Integrate
Convening Leadership	No or limited relationship between organizations	Often convened and driven by a single organization	Often convened and driven by a single organization	Often convened and driven by a single organization	Often convened by a single organization but partners agree to collaborate actions	Often convened by a single organization but partners agree to collaborate. Could include a Leadership table and staff support	Partners agree to integrate programs and services – equity of participation and engagement

AUTHORITY AND DECISION-MAKING APPROACHES

Different forms of collaboration may also include different levels of authority and decision-making processes. Understanding authority, who is ultimately accountable for the decisions made by the collaborative, is important for all members of the collaborative. Too often, this conversation is missed, and assumptions are made about accountability. Collaborative tables do this at their peril. It is difficult to move partners from engagement to buy in to ownership when accountability is not known or defined.

The golden egg of accountability is when all members to the collaborative are accountable for the collective agenda and outcomes but that may not always be the case. Clarity about accountability and reporting practices can be incredibly helpful to building collaborative efforts.

	Compete	Coexist	Communicate	Cooperate	Coordinate	Collaborate	Integrate
Authority	Individual organizations	Individual organizations	Convener of collaborative group	Convener of collaborative group	Convener of collaborative group	Shared across the Leadership Table	Shared across the partners

SHARED OWNERSHIP

One of the biggest challenges facing collective efforts is getting the individuals and organizations around the table to proactively commit to sharing resources, knowledge, and expertise to get to shared ownership. Shared ownership is when the partners understand the shared purpose of the collaboration and contribute to shared leadership and shared outcomes. Shared ownership is moving beyond just showing up for the meetings. It is about deliberately considering how the mission and goals of your home organization aligns with and potentially can contribute to the shared outcomes of the collaborative effort.

To understand the nature of shared ownership, Tamarack often facilitates a [Liberating Structures](#) exercise called [15% Solutions](#). The intent of this exercise is to invite each of the partners to consider what work they already doing and how this current work might be revised slightly to contribute to the shared or collective effort. This facilitated exercise provides many lightbulb moments for collaborative partners. It also creates an opportunity to create clarity about shared purpose, role, and shared ownership of the collaborative outcomes.

	Compete	Co-Exist	Communicate	Cooperate	Coordinate	Collaborate	Integrate
Shard Ownership	Individual organizations loosely connected	Individual organizations loosely connected but aware of each other	Individual organizations connecting individually or collectively to share information and knowledge	Individual organization connect to work collectively on a shared service or program	Individual or collective of organizations intentionally plan and work together	Collective of organizations intentionally plan, share resources, and work together	Collective of organizations work toward shared and integrated services, programs or organizations

KEY GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS

Each form of collaboration benefits from a key set of organizing documents. These documents are designed to keep the collaborative effort on track to achieve its desired outcomes. [Solving the Puzzle of Collaborative Governance](#) describes the core documents in more detail.

The following documents are foundational to collaboration and useful to collaborative partners. Some collaborative efforts might not require governance documents while others might benefit from a more defined and co-developed approach to describing its work.

1. [Governance Structure](#) – A visual document which details the overall governance structure, roles of the different parts of the structure and accountabilities. The governance structure document might also include terms of reference or memorandums of understanding if these documents are required.
2. [Principles for Working Together](#) – Every collaboration should develop a core set of principles for how the partners would like to work together. This, when done at the initiation of the collaborative, should be revisited regularly and can be a guide when the collaborative goes off track.
3. [Decision Making Strategy](#) – This can be included in the governance structure document and in the Key Milestone document, but it is important that the collaborative agree to a decision-making strategy to guide their work.
4. [Plan on a Page](#) – This document is a synthesis of the core aspiration / common vision of the collaborative and provides high level details about the approach.
5. [Key Milestone Report](#) – During the course of a collaboration lifespan, the group makes choices or undertakes strategies. The key milestone report is a living document that reflects the purpose and key decisions which have informed the progress of the collaborative.
6. [Regular or Annual Progress Update](#) – Nothing builds momentum more than a group making progress and impact. An annual progress report is a time for reflection, sense-making and learning together. It also helps the collaborative reflect on what worked well and where the collaborative might focus next. An outcomes diary can be a helpful tool in tracking progress and reporting on results.

Source: [Solving the Puzzle of Collaborative Governance](#), 2021

	Compete	Coexist	Communicate	Cooperate	Coordinate	Collaborate	Integrate
Key Governance Documents	Very light weight or no governance documents	Very light weight or no governance documents	Light weight terms of reference including focus on sharing and	Terms of reference including focus of the collaboration,	Defined Governance structure	Defined Governance structure Partnership agreement	Defined Governance structure Partnership agreement

	Compete	Coexist	Communicate	Cooperate	Coordinate	Collaborate	Integrate
			communications, expectations, and frequency of meeting	expectations, and frequency of meeting Shared action plan or plan on a page Success measures	Decision making strategy Shared action plan or plan on a page Success measures	with accountability defined Decision making defined Shared action plan or Plan on a Page Evaluation and success measures	with accountability defined Decision making defined Shared action plan or Plan on a Page Evaluation and success measures

A DESCRIPTION OF POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

Most collaboratives are working toward some sort of program, services, or community change outcome. Again, clarity around the purpose and outcomes is helpful. In the Collective Impact context, this is found in the conditions of a common agenda and shared measurement.

All along the collaboration spectrum, groups are seeking to collaborate for a reason. Outcomes may range from sharing information and learning more about each other to leveraging the collective capacity of partners to influence and drive systems change.

	Compete	Coexist	Communicate	Cooperate	Coordinate	Collaborate	Integrate
Outcome	Opportunity focused	Awareness of others	Shared information and learning	Shared program or service	Shared program or service focus	Shared program or systems focus	Integrated outcomes – program or systems focused

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT COLLABORATION

This resource dives deeper into the collaboration spectrum and its elements. It provides a useful framework for collaborative leaders and collective action. There are likely other elements that have been missed and I welcome your observations and contributions. The Collaboration Spectrum will continue to evolve, as collaborative efforts and community contexts also change and evolve.

In the dynamic nature of community change, collaborators are facing increasing challenges. Ensuring equity and engagement around collaborative tables. Learning to navigate complex problems or social challenges. Establishing a good enough balance between the process of governance and the shared outcome the collaborative effort is seeking to achieve. Developing strategies which build trust, address power dynamics, navigate shifting accountabilities and effectively manage the ups and downs of everyday life.

Collaboration is not for the faint of heart. It is purposeful action, where partners are seeking to accomplish together than they would be able to accomplish on their own. Many collaborative efforts are seeking to improve the conditions in the community and for stakeholders. As we noted earlier,

clarity is a foundation key to successful collaboration. If this article has helped your collaborative achieve greater clarity, then it has fulfilled its purpose. Now go out there and collaborate.

REVISITING THE COLLABORATION SPECTRUM – AT A GLANCE

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Authority	Individual organizations	Individual organizations	Convener of collaborative group	Convener of collaborative group	Convener of collaborative group	Shared across the Leadership Table	Shared across the partners
Shard Ownership	Individual organizations loosely connected	Individual organizations loosely connected but aware of each other	Individual organizations connecting individually or collectively to share information and knowledge	Individual organization connect to work collectively on a shared service or program	Individual or collective of organizations intentionally plan and work together	Collective of organizations intentionally plan, share resources, and work together	Collective of organizations work toward shared and integrated services, programs or organizations
Key Governance Documents	Very light weight or no governance documents	Very light weight or no governance documents	Light weight terms of reference including focus on sharing and communications, expectations,	Terms of reference including focus of the collaboration, expectations, and frequency of meeting	Defined Governance structure Decision making strategy	Defined Governance structure Partnership agreement with accountability defined	Defined Governance structure Partnership agreement with accountability defined

	Compete	Co-Exist	Communicate	Cooperate	Coordinate	Collaborate	Integrate
			and frequency of meeting	Shared action plan or plan on a page Success measures	Shared action plan or plan on a page Success measures	Decision making defined Shared action plan or Plan on a Page Evaluation and success measures	Decision making defined Shared action plan or Plan on a Page Evaluation and success measures
Outcome	Opportunity focused	Awareness of others	Shared information and learning	Shared program or service	Shared program or service focus	Shared program or systems focus	Integrated outcomes – program or systems focused

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