TOOL

Foster Your Organization's Culture of Collaboration

What it is

An organization's culture is very powerful because it underpins strategic choices, ways of working, and reputation in the community. When a culture of collaboration permeates the organization, leaders are better able to nurture the right collaborations with other organizations, groups and networks, make a valuable contribution to them and be a sought-after collaborative partner.

The resource describes three key values that enable your organization to nurture more successful collaborations. It:

- Outlines critical questions your staff leadership should be asking about its culture.
- Provides a checklist of what the values look like in practice to help:
  - develop your organization's value statement and leadership recruitment criteria.
  - informally assess your culture of collaboration so it can be nurtured.

Organization's Culture: A Story

The organization completed a strategic planning process which identified their priorities for the next five years. The board and senior leadership discussed the complexity of serving a diverse client base and decided to embrace the values of adaptiveness and innovation to meet these needs. This led to a conversation about their current and potential collaborations. The values became a 'north star' for deciding which ones to join or exit. As a result, they made better choices about their collaborations and were able to clearly communicate what drove their decisions.

Here's another tool you'll find helpful: ***Lead the Organization to Successful Collaborations***

Key Collaborative Values

Three Critical Questions About Your Culture

When reviewing this resource, the staff leadership team can consider:

- Which of these three values are clearly present in the organization's culture and how do they show up in practice (e.g. norms, processes, structures, actions)? How are these values acknowledged and celebrated?

- Are there significant gaps between the organization's culture and the ones described in this resource? What are the implications of these gaps for your collaborations (e.g. ability to attract the right partners; make the right choices of collaboration; add value as a participant)?

- What actions can be taken to bridge the gap between the organization's current and ideal culture of collaboration (e.g. incorporate them into the organization's value statement and recruiting criteria; develop or shift existing practices so they reflect these values)?

Value: Focus On Purpose

The board and staff believe that the organization's purpose (its vision, mission, values, impacts/outcomes) should be at the centre of all key decisions. They also recognize that collaboration with other organization's, groups and networks is a critical strategy for achieving its purpose, whether it's to enhance programs, build capacity or increase mission impact.

In practice, the organization **navigates by a clear and compelling north star** and **looks outward to achieve its purpose**.

Why this value is important

When the organization insists that collaborations align with its purpose, it avoids common pitfalls like being pressured into them or finding costs exceeding the benefits.

When there is a clear and compelling north star, it reduces the need for controlling, top-down structures and rigid, complicated processes. The board and staff at the collaborative table are empowered to make collective decisions with their partners.

Leaders can more easily find common causes with others, reducing power struggles and turf conflicts, because they see the organization as a part of a larger, interconnected ecosystem. They're also prepared to look beyond their walls to solve issues and increase capacity.

A Checklist: What This Value Looks Like in Practice

Navigates by a clear and compelling north star	☑ There is a clear and compelling **description** of the organization's purpose (vision, mission, values, intended outcomes), which is highly visible in key documents including the board manual and strategic and operational plans. It fosters genuine commitment and galvanizes people to contribute their time, energy and resources. ☑ Leaders appreciate that their **primary accountability is to the organization's purpose** and as a result, focus on outcomes and impacts, not just shorter-term tactics and financial results. They know what matters and they get things done.
Looks outward to achieve purpose	☑ The board and staff consider their **larger ecosystem** (e.g. all those who are impacted by or can impact their mission) when developing strategies. They appreciate that the organization is part of a larger web of activities, not a hub around which everyone else works. They are also committed to the health of their whole ecosystem, recognizing actions in one sphere deeply affect others. ☑ The board and staff are **comfortable working outside of their organization's boundaries,** continuously scanning for opportunities to collaborate with others. They embrace an abundance, not scarcity mindset, imagining other organizations as potential partners, not competitors, and recognizing there is usually more talent and resources for achieving the purpose outside the organization than inside.

Value: Foster Agility, Adaptiveness and Innovation

The board and staff believe it's essential to adapt to changing circumstances and proactively respond to opportunities and challenges. They value agility over bureaucracy and the capacity to find new and better ways to achieve outcomes. They see these as necessary skills in a world of increased complexity.

In practice, the organization **adopts nimble ways of working** and **cultivates creativity and learning**.

Why this value is important

Collaborations are inherently risky because they often address complex issues and juggle partner's diverse interests. They require patience, and a long-term commitment to an evolving roadmap. Organizations which are comfortable with agility, adaptiveness and innovation are **better equipped to navigate the dynamic and complex nature of collaborative work.**

The board and staff who are participating in the collaborations can **add real value** because they are:

- Comfortable working across teams and appreciate the importance of open exchanges of ideas, constructive debate and outside-the-box thinking
- Equipped to help design versatile processes and create the right conditions to solve complex problems
- Able to lead without being controlling and are used to taking shared ownership for results

A Checklist: What This Value Looks Like in Practice

Adopts nimble ways of working	☑ The organization easily pivots, adapting quickly to opportunities, challenges and changed circumstances. Siloes are mitigated across programs and functions and between the board and staff. As a result, staff feel empowered to make decisions and take greater ownership of them. ☑ The organization doesn't have cumbersome processes and rigid structures. They are only as formal and centralized as necessary to manage risk and monitor strategic progress. For example, there are more time-specific task groups and minimalist processes rather than standing committees and complicated procedures.
Cultivates creativity and learning	☑ Everyone in the organization is prepared to try new things, not just continuously perfect what's been done. They feel comfortable experimenting because it's okay to make mistakes and take measured risk, learning from these experiences and applying it to the next choices. As a result, board and staff members make bolder, more courageous decisions. ☑ There's a safe space for difficult, but necessary conversations, constructive debate and open and animated exchange of ideas. Board and staff are highly inquisitive, and comfortable drawing on multiple kinds of knowledge, from data and stories to collective wisdom. As part of this curiosity, they ask good questions, getting to the root of what matters. ☑ The board and staff leadership focus on results while embracing uncertainty and complexity. They appreciate that there aren't quick fixes to complex issues. Leaders can see the multidimensional picture, juggle options and manage polarities, like being inclusive and efficient. They can also let go of assumptions and traditions when they no longer make sense.

Value: Commit to Authentic Relationships

The board and staff leadership approach relationship building with deep intentionality because they believe that equitable, positive and trusting relationships with all those impacted by the organization are key to its success.

In practice, these organizations **nurture equitable and inclusive environments** and **engage deeply with their community**.

Why this value is important

Deep and accurate knowledge of its community and authentic relationships helps the organization select the right collaborations and partners, ensuring quality over quantity. The organization is also more likely to be invited to collaborate if it's seen as a credible partner (e.g. reliable and trustworthy), with a proven track record of authentic engagement and strong partnerships.

The board and staff who are participating in the collaborations can add real value because they:

- bring an equity and inclusion lens to the collaboration table (e.g. can navigate diversity; appreciate power dynamics and their own biases; create a safe and welcoming environment), which is crucial when sharing decision-making and accountability with partners.
- offer an expansive and accurate understanding of the landscape and issues, and know how to harness diverse talents, passions and capacities in a mutually beneficial way.

A Checklist: What These Values Look Like in Practice

Nurture equitable and inclusive environments	☑ Organizational leaders create a space that is psychologically and emotionally safe and welcoming. People feel listened to, and conflicts are navigated fairly and respectfully. A true diversity of perspectives and life experiences are seen to produce better decisions and solutions. ☑ Leaders are committed to equity and inclusion in both their words and actions. They are self-aware about their biases (e.g. assumptions, world views), and privileges, and openly acknowledge how they influence their decisions. They can navigate a diversity of perspectives, with empathy and have the humility to know they don't have all the answers. They believe in transparency and their natural default is to share information openly, not contain it as a source of power. ☑ Equity and inclusion are embedded. It is highlighted in board and staff orientations, built into human resource policies, and reflected in how people are engaged, and who participates in decision-making.
Engage deeply with the community	☑ Leaders see nurturing trust, and mutually beneficial relationships with all those who are impacted by it as an important investment which requires a substantive commitment to do it well. ☑ The organization understands the difference between true engagement and just gathering input. When engaging with the community the organization: • Creates opportunities for real dialogue and co-created solutions, not just one-way communication • Sets clear expectations and delivers on them • Openly shares honest, comprehensive and timely information. • Organizational leaders are good boundary spanners. They: ○ reach beyond a comfortable inner circle to engage a wider diversity of organizations and people

	○ welcome opportunities to learn from alternative approaches ○ are great connectors because they're good communicators ○ can see alignments in diversity and can energize others toward a collective vision ○ share knowledge and other resources without expecting a direct return.