



TOOL

Lead the Organization to Successful Collaborations

What it is

There are certain leadership skills, knowledge, and attributes that enable the Board and staff leadership to select and nurture the right kinds of collaborations and be a sought-after collaboration partner. Many of these same competencies are valuable when participating at the collaboration table.

Use this checklist for personal reflection and to strengthen your leadership's capacity to make a valuable contribution to collaborations.

[Learn more: [Foster Your Organization's Culture of Collaboration: Collaboration Success Factors Checklist](#); [Build Organizational Capacity for Effective Collaboration](#)]

Three Critical Questions About your Leadership's Competencies to Collaborate

When reviewing the checklist, consider:



Which of the skills, knowledge, experience and attributes are clearly present? Are there examples of it in action?



Do we have significant gaps between the desired competencies and those of our Board and staff leadership that need to be nurtured? What are the implications of these gaps for our collaborations (*e.g. ability to attract the right partners; make the right choices of collaborations; adding value as a collaboration partner*)?



What actions can we take to better recruit for or nurture these competencies? (*e.g. revise the recruitment criteria; offer training and education; incorporate them into our organization's value statement*)?

The Checklist

The following skills, knowledge and attributes will position the organization's leaders to build and nurture the right kinds of collaborations with other organization's groups and networks and be a sought-after collaboration partner.

Focused on Purpose

Leaders navigate by a north star, while also ensuring the organization is outward facing.

A clear and compelling purpose helps ensure there's alignment between the purpose of the organization and goals of the collaboration, which makes it easier for the Board and staff at the collaboration table to share decision-making and accountability. Appreciating the organization sits in a complex ecosystem, promotes collaboration as an essential strategy to achieve meaningful impacts and helps to find common cause with partners.

- Puts the purpose of the organization first** – (*vision, mission, values, outcomes*), insisting that it guide all key decisions. Keeps the description of purpose compelling and relevant, ensuring it's well understood by all Board and staff. Has built a reputation in the community for running an organization that produces meaningful outcomes and impacts.
- Adopts an abundance, not scarcity mindset** – imagining other organizations, groups and networks as potential partners, not competitors. Recognizes that there's more talent and resources for achieving purpose outside of the organization than inside.
- Has **deep and accurate knowledge of the organization's ecosystem** – (*e.g. all those who impact or are impacted by the mission*). Astute observers of all the interconnected parts, able to see the organization as participating in a larger web of activities rather than the hub around which everyone else works. Demonstrates a commitment to the health of the whole system, recognizing actions in one sphere can deeply affect others.

[Learn more: [Map your Organization's Collaboration Ecosystem](#)]

Agile, Adaptive and Innovative

Leaders easily pivot with opportunities and challenges and cultivate creativity and learning.

This enables leaders to navigate the dynamic, complex and sometimes risky nature of collaborations. They are better equipped to share power and manage complex accountabilities.

- Demonstrates **nimbleness, shifting easily and adapting quickly** to opportunities, challenges and changing circumstances. Comfortable with change and taking measured risks. Able to let go of assumptions, norms and plans when they no longer make sense. This is because they have a proven capacity to make good strategic decisions.
- Fosters agility** – Minimizes rules and bureaucracy and mitigates silos, recognizing that an organization that collaborates well internally is more likely to be a good collaborator externally. Supports others to explore new possibilities and act autonomously so they're empowered to make collective decisions at the collaboration table. Highly resilient when recovering from setbacks, holding onto the long-game goals.
- While focussed on tangible results, they also **embrace uncertainty and complexity**. An integrative thinker who can work with multiple truths and polarities (*like being inclusive as well as efficient*). Able to juggle options and pursue directions that don't necessarily have a fixed destination if they advance the organization's purpose.
- Eager for knowledge and demonstrates inquisitiveness** – Comfortable drawing on multiple kinds of knowledge, from data to stories to collective wisdom. Welcomes open, animated exchanges of ideas and opinions, even when they are difficult. Good at asking questions that get to the nub of what matters.

Committed to Authentic Relationships

Leaders nurture an equitable and inclusive environment and engage deeply and authentically with the community.

These builds trusting relationships and enables leaders to find, select and nurture the right collaborative partners. Those participating in the collaboration bring an important lens to building it so it's more likely to succeed.

Demonstrates equity and inclusion in both words and actions – Ensures these values are embedded into the fabric of the organization. Believes that real diversity creates better decisions and solutions. Has a well-honed capacity for active listening and empathy so everyone can openly and honestly share their perspectives. Navigates tensions fairly and respectfully and has an ability to find common ground.

Cultivates extensive and diverse networks and relationships with other organizations, groups and people – Continuously scanning for opportunities to work with other organizations and people. An effective boundary spanner, reaching beyond a comfortable inner circle. Intuitive connector and communicator, brings together people who share aspirations and inspires them to produce more powerful outcomes together. Shares expertise, connections, knowledge or other resources without expecting recognition or direct benefit back to the organization.

Builds authentic relationships grounded in trust – Appreciates that trust comes through humility and fulfilling promises. Willing to step aside, when appropriate, to let others lead. Self-aware about the organization's strengths and challenges and about how their personal biases and assumptions impact decisions and choices. Believes in transparency and has a natural default to share information openly and honestly rather than use it as a source of power.



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