

Overcoming Barriers to Partnering and Collaborating

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Collaborations and partnerships can be a challenge with many barriers to overcome. We can't change each and every obstacle overnight, but we can maneuver through the barriers placed in our path. The following information provides a sampling of barriers and a few tips on how to overcome them.

Lack of resources (internal or external). Assuming that you are funded for a partnering, collaborative project; make sure that you have the capacity to implement the project both in human resources and technology.

Limited experiences with collaboration projects. By 'educating' as many functions as possible within your organization as to the value of collaborating and partnering as a team, the more you will be able to share information and therefore are able to maximize your team's effectiveness.

Lack of role clarity (internal or external). Once you are appointed to participate or to lead in a collaborative outside project representing your organization, make sure that you understand the magnitude of your project and that you are supported by your superior before you accept the responsibility.

Unsure of who to partner or collaborate with, or the benefits of the potential collaborative effort. Get to know your 'in-house' neighbors. Reach out to understand their particular role or responsibility in the organization so that you might be able to partner and collaborate with them in the near and far term.

Power differences between partners. Understand the hierarchy of community and state-federal agencies versus your own organization, but also understand that in the outside partnering project, each agency including yours is considered equal in the decision-making process.

Fear of compromising the mission of your organization. Know and understand your organization's mission and objectives versus those of the external team players as well.

Lack of leadership support for collaborative effort(s). Make sure that your peers and immediate supervision are always brought up-to-speed as to developing national & local trends affecting the collaborative project you have undertaken.

Always be aware that by undertaking a collaborative project, the first order of business should be to develop a sense of rapport with each and every member of the team. This personal effort over time should help to establish an aura of trust and reliability among the team members.

Lack of information sharing and/or poor or strained communication between potential partners. One of the most difficult challenges in overcoming barriers to collaboration is to convince individuals on the external team as well as those within your organization to share information. The Silo mentality is one that refuses to share information for the better good of the

¹ All views expressed are of the authors alone.

organization or project. As leader, you must devise ways to ‘bring’ individuals to believe in the team concept.

Geographic, confidentiality and security issues. Always remember “what goes on in Vegas, stays in Vegas’. Although this term is humorous, it makes good sense to abide by its inference. Always know that the outside team’s activity has a specific purpose for its existence; respect its privacy issues, and confidentiality of sensitive information if requested.

Different levels of commitment between partners. Each partner involved in your collaborative project will come to the table with various levels of commitment. As a collaborative team member or leader, respecting these variances will eventually result in a very dedicated member.

The structure and culture of the organization. From an internal perspective, to enforce the concept of Collaborative Teams or Partnering within your organization, impress your HR director to consider using the following terminology in all job descriptions: a) Collaborates with peers as to team projects both internal and external; and b) Participates in information sharing activities such as Communities of Practice or Cross Functional Teams.

Understand that if you are in the middle of a ‘silo’ situation, change does not take place overnight. We should work thru or around the ‘Silo.’

Don’t play Small Ball! Be strong and convincing that to succeed in a highly competitive world, the ‘team concept’ is better able to partner and to lead in all sorts of collaborative goals of the organization.

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