

Checking the Temperature of Your Coalition

I. Types of Collaboration

The following Collaboration Framework¹ compares the purpose, structure and process of different levels of collaboration.

Level of Collaboration	Purpose	Structure	Process
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue • Common Awareness • Information flow • Create support base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-hierarchical • Loose, flexible link • Roles loosely defined • Concern is primary link 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low key leadership • Low decision-making • Information Communication
Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Match needs • Provide some co-ordination • Limits duplicating services • Ensures tasks done 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central body of communicators • Semi-formal links • Roles somewhat defined • Links are advisory • Develops new resources • Joint budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitative leaders • Complex decision-making • Some conflict • Centralized communication (formal)
Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share resources • Co-ordinate activities • Address common issues • Merge resource base • Create something new 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central body of decision-makers • Roles defined • Links formalized • New resources • Joint budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomous leadership • Focus is on issue • Group decision-making by task groups • Communication frequent and clear
Coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share ideas • Willing to pull resources from existing systems • Develop commitment • Minimum three years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All members involved in decision-making • Roles and time defined • Links formal • Written agreement • New resources • Joint budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared leadership • Decision-making with all members • Communication is prioritized
Full Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accomplish shared vision • Develop benchmarks • Build inter-dependent system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus used in shared decision-making • Roles, time and evaluation formalized • Links are formal and written in work assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership high • Trust level high • Productivity high • Ideas / decisions equally shared • Highly developed communication

¹ The Duffy Group, Partners in Planning; 1997.

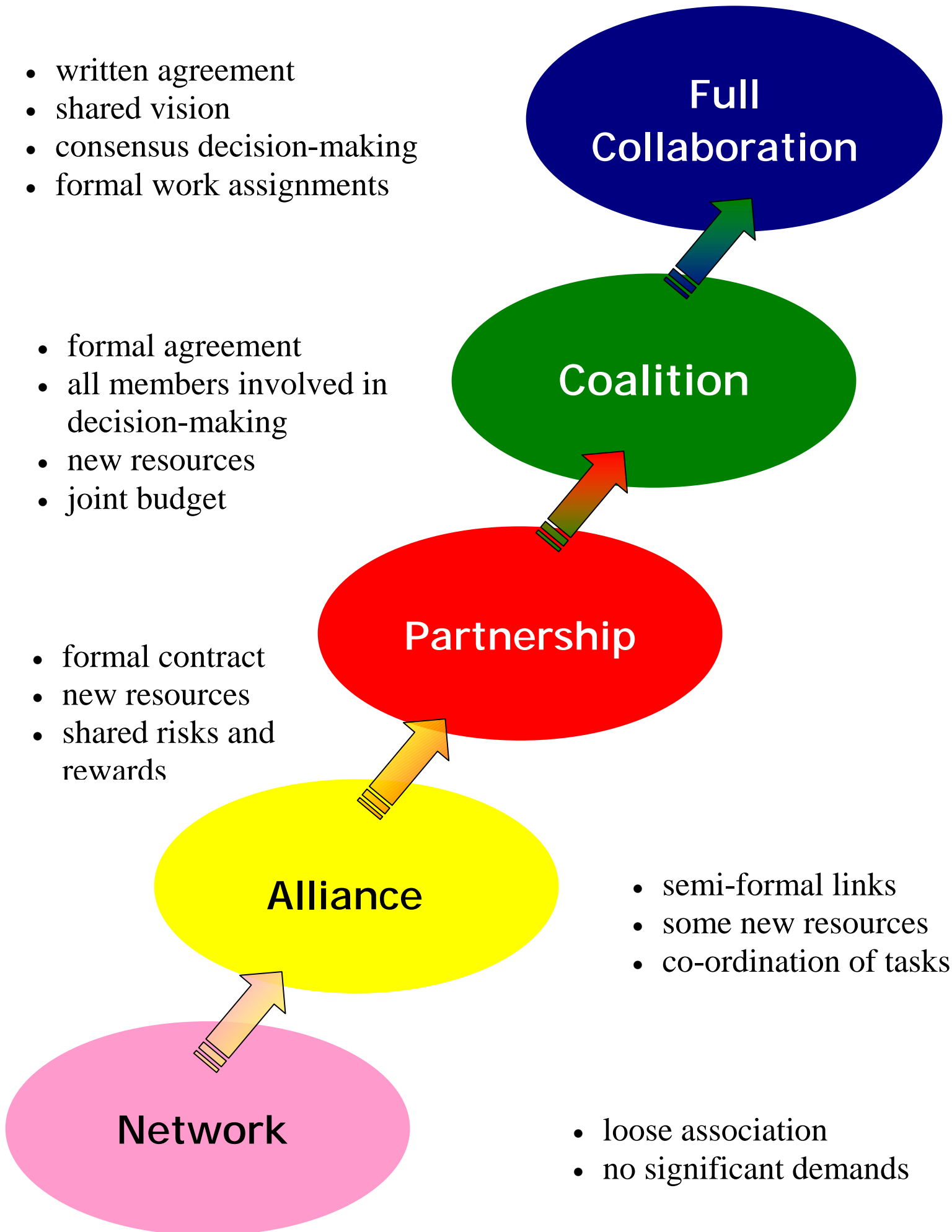
- written agreement
- shared vision
- consensus decision-making
- formal work assignments

- formal agreement
- all members involved in decision-making
- new resources
- joint budget

- formal contract
- new resources
- shared risks and rewards

- semi-formal links
- some new resources
- co-ordination of tasks

- loose association
- no significant demands



II. Types of Coalitions

Feighery and Rogers² describe three main types of coalitions, based on membership:

Grassroots Coalition

- Form in times of crisis to pressure political decision-makers to act
- Organized by volunteers
- Political, controversial and short-lived

Professional Coalitions

- May form in time of crisis or as part of a long-term strategy to increase their power and influence
- Lead organization established that contributes significant staff and financial resources
- Often plagued by “turf” control issues

Community-Based Coalitions

- Broad-based coalitions involving both professionals and volunteers/grassroots leaders
- Focused on positive action to improve conditions in community, worksites, schools or other local institutions
- Often one agency takes lead and seeks funding to support the coalition and its activities
- Usually have their own funds and staff (may be seconded from a participating agency)

Coalitions can also be categorized by features such as:

- how the coalition was formed
- functions of the coalition
- structure of the coalition
- duration

² Feighy, M.S. and Todd Rogers. (January 1990) Building and maintaining effective coalitions. Palo Alto, CA: Health Promotion Resource Centre, Stanford University School of Medicine.

III. Functions of A Coalition

Feighery and Rogers outline three major functions of a coalition:

1. *Communication*

- honest and clear communication among its members will help the group stay focused on its common purpose.
- members have opportunities to share information not only relating to their common purpose, but about their individual organizations' goals, programs, activities and resources
- communication strategies facilitate the development of trusting relationships among members, while acknowledging differences of opinion
- members are encouraged to speak out about their concerns and difficulties.

2. *Co-ordination*

- the work of each member organization relating to the purpose of the coalition needs to be complementary and not in conflict
- collective response to gaps in programs/services
- co-ordination should not result in a loss of autonomy or identity for individual organizations.

3. *Collaboration*

- coalitions do more than share information. They work together on coalition objectives and activities that are carried out in the name of the coalition, rather than of individual member organizations.

IV. Collaborative Roles

There are many different roles that groups can play in terms of their relationship with each other, such as:

- **Convenor:** initiates a public discussion of a community issue
- **Catalyst:** provides initial leadership and credibility but is committed to a longer-term strategy
- **Conduit:** acts as the “lead” organization in that it manages the necessary contractual and financial obligations that come with receiving grants. It is important that the conduit not be allowed to dominate the initiatives as a result of taking on this role.
- **Funder:** provides financial resources, and may also be actively involved in the design and evaluation of the project. A clear understanding of the scope and limit of their authority is required.
- **Technical Assistance Provider:** provides data, technical information, professional opinions or particular skills.
- **Capacity-BUILDER:** provides resources and skills training to community members to increase their ability to effect change. Capacity-builders aim to increase community power and ownership.
- **Partner:** shares in risks, responsibility, investment and rewards.
- **Advocate:** focuses on changing policy or systems
- **Community Organizer:** interested in who is “at the table”; i.e. who is involved and who has decision-making power. The community organizer works to maximize community participation and to ensure that those who are traditionally excluded from decision-making are included as full partners in the process.
- **Facilitator:** assists in community problem-solving process by liaising among various players and being a source of fairness, encouragement
- **Evaluator:** provides information about how well the collaborative is performing and whether its objectives are being met.³

³ adapted from Himmelman, Arthur: “Collaboration as a Bridge from Social Service to Social Justice”, paper presented at the Healthier Communities Summit in San Diego, April 1995).

VI. Benefits of Collaboration

In almost any kind of community initiative, finding other groups and organizations with similar interests, that are willing to work with your group is strategically advantageous for a number of reasons:

Synergy: The synergy created from working collaboratively will result in greater accomplishments than each group working on its own could ever hope to achieve. If you work separately, it will fragment the efforts and the resources, possibly leading to less accomplishment.

Community Awareness: Increased participation leads to increased community awareness.

Share resources: The sharing of resources and expertise can make daunting tasks more manageable.

Overcome Obstacles: Obstacles faced by one group may be overcome by another group.

Effective Representation: A partnership, coalition or network has more strength than a single organization when presenting a case because a broader section of the community is represented.

Avoid Duplication: Working together can help ensure efforts and services aren't being duplicated, and that there is an appropriate distribution of resources.

VII. Overcoming the Challenges

While the vision of a collaborative may be very compelling, every day realities may pose considerable challenges and tensions; e.g.:

- Despite common concerns, each organization may have “its own take” on the problem, with its own set of assumptions and preferred solutions
- We may accomplish a greater impact by working together but it takes longer and can be more complex
- While partners benefit from each other's strengths, they also add to their risks and responsibilities
- It can be difficult to find the time and energy to nurture partnerships in times of rapid change
- Conflict is probably inevitable due to different organizational values, cultures, levels of experience and degree of expertise among organizations that make it difficult to work in harmony.

VIII. Tips on Forming Effective Collaboratives:

People: Organizations do not work together, people do – thus individual characteristics will be a factor in whether the collaborative is successful or not. Check out the “chemistry” between people and their level of commitment to the collaborative.

Vision: Create a shared vision and common goals that incorporate all of the members’ perspectives and interests, and identifies mutual needs that cannot be met by one organization alone.

Trust: Take some time to explore your common ground. *“Trust is built through mutual respect for each person’s experience, knowledge and contribution.”*⁴

Time: Do not give in to the pressure for speed and action. Getting to know each other in order to developing a solid partnership takes time, as does planning and implementation.

Planning: Working together effectively requires a great deal of planning. All aspects of the collaborative, including purpose, function, decision-making process, the risks and benefits to each member and anticipated results needs to be considered, agreed upon and committed to (usually by signing a written agreement). Subsequently, every meeting, every workplan, every approach to a prospective member or funder, has to be planned.

Communication: There needs to be a transparent flow of information among members, and mechanisms for ensuring that all members are kept up-to-date on matters relating to the collaborative and have clear means of voicing concerns and suggestions.

Learning Together: Partnerships involve learning about each other, about the issues or needs that are being addressed, and about how to work together effectively.

Decision-Making: It is crucial that how decisions are made is agreed upon right at the start of the partnership and adhered to throughout its duration. Partners should also agree on a problem resolution process. Agreements regarding the investment of people, time and resources need to be negotiated and clearly understood by all partners.

Leadership: There are many options for leadership; e.g. elect a Chair or Co-Chairs, or establish different roles for different members. It may be formal or informal. Shared leadership can renew energy and increase commitment.

Technology: Electronic communication can enhance and support the work of the partnership by facilitating connections and opportunities for innovation. An assessment of current systems and technical capacities of each of the members is required before an effective information and communications system can be established.

Flexibility: As circumstances change, one or more members may not be able to contribute to the extent originally intended, or may not be able to remain involved at all. The remaining members will have to make adjustments accordingly.

⁴ Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse (OPC). Dynamic Partnerships. 1997; pg.3