“What Science and Common Sense Say About Collaboration and Sustainability”

Valley Care Community Consortium Breakfast - 10/23/07

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< Key Elements of Successful Collaborations

1 - Systematic planning, leading to objectives and activities that collaboration members can support.

2 - Addressing psychological challenges, such as power differences or resistances based on previous bad experiences with other collaborations

3 - Clearly identifying the strong core idea at the heart of the collaboration

4 - Finding the needed financial and human resources for the collaboration to be successful

5 - Incorporating learnings from other collaborations, both successes and mistakes made

6 - Encouraging the collaboration to evolve, responding to the changing community environment

7 - Looking at costs and benefits of collaborating over the long haul, including evaluation when appropriate

8 - Planning for sustainability at the outset, including creation of a revenue model to provide financial support beyond initial funding

< Cautions About Collaborations

1 - Not all collaborations work, and the science about effectiveness of collaborations is still limited

2 - Not all problems can be solved by collaborations - sometimes the right decision is not to collaborate

3 - People come to any new collaboration burdened by any negative experiences they’ve had with them in the past

4 - People are tired of putting resources into collaborations that often have limited success (like endless meetings without any noticeable results). This can increase “collaboration fatigue” - people complain about spending half their lives in collaboration meetings

5 - Collaborations can sometimes be a tactic for delaying action or obscuring responsibility so that change doesn’t happen - but no one individual or organization can be blamed for this outcome

Operated collaboratively by California State University Northridge, Human Interaction Research Institute, MEND and Volunteer Center of Los Angeles
Strategies for Promoting Sustainability of Projects

1 - *Early planning for sustainability*  Long-surviving successful projects plan early for the long run, including plans for leadership transition and for long-term funding support.

2 - *Technical assistance*  Help both with maintaining and improving the project and with creating a strategy for sustainability, can come from outside, and is often peer-based.

3 - *Integration*  Interventions that are well-integrated into their host organizations are more likely to survive, as are those having high congruence with staff or community values.

4 - *Early and continued involvement by key community leaders*  Community leaders need to have voice in implementing a project, and active engagement in these activities, ideally as part of a comprehensive plan that was embraced by those who live and work in the community.

5 - *Re-invention or adaptation*  A project may face changes in the environment where it is operating that require flexibility so it can adapt itself to the changes occurring, while maintaining “fidelity.”

6 - *Continued funding support*  The single most common cause of a project’s failure to survive (assuming it is worthwhile and doesn’t end due to poor quality) is simple...the money runs out.

Resources on Collaboration and Sustainability


Nonprofit Finance Fund Website: nonprofitfinancefund.org


The Finance Project Website: financeproject.org

*Note*: The VNR website will be operational in late December 2007. Current telephone contacts are for offices of the Human Interaction Research Institute.