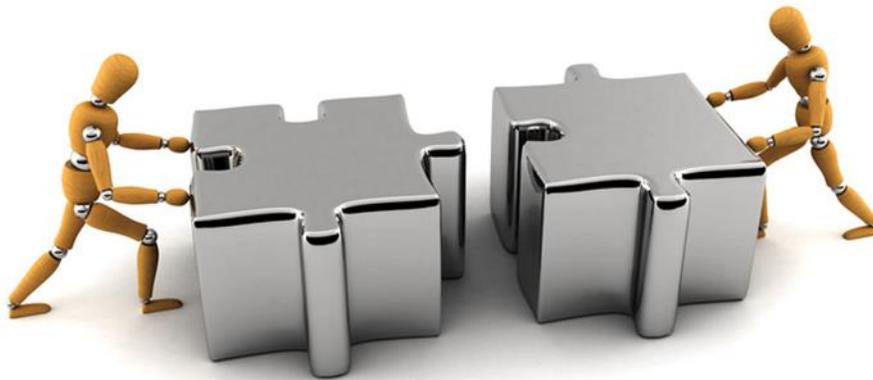




Nonprofit Collaborations: A Preliminary Conversation

Analysis | Observations | Reflections





Background

Purpose

Thank you for offering your time to participate in this preliminary conversation. Participants in this process are a random selection of people who attended the 2016 Dana annual meeting. Our goal in conducting this assessment was, first, to provide the participants with a snapshot of the opinions of their peers regarding collaboration between and among nonprofit organizations. We also wanted to illustrate how much interest there is in collaboration, testing out a list of common (though not exhaustive) ways organizations can collaborate and partner.

Questions and Answers

You provided great insight but also asked some questions. Here are our thoughts on those.

Q: *Please define collaboration.*

In retrospect, we certainly should have given the definition to this word as an introduction to the survey. We like to think of collaboration as functioning on a continuum from cooperation to collaboration to partnership to merger where the terms are defined as follows:

Cooperation: neither organization shares resources but they do refer their clients to other organizations who are capable of fulfilling needs which the referring organization cannot accomplish. Examples would be a HeadStart program referring clients to the Food Bank, or the Food Bank referring clients to a parenting class at the local community center.

Collaboration: participating organizations share some level of resources with each other. They have "skin in the game". For example, one organization uses a van during the day and collaborating organization uses the same van on weekends. Collaboration generally requires A Memorandum of Understanding to ensure common understanding of expectations.

Partnership: the organizations maintain a separate identity but share their resources for one or more programs. An agency that provides services 9 to 5 Monday through Friday shares space with a program that works evenings and weekends. The relationship is now complex enough that a contractual relationship with defined costs, liabilities, policies and procedures is required.

Merger: generally two organizations which have very similar missions form a new organization which fills both missions while realizing such advantages as economies of scale, elimination of duplication of back office functions and shared volunteer and board capacity.

O: Observation: *You might distinguish the difficulty/costs of different kinds of collaboration between nonprofits. Sharing ideas and best practices in discussion forums or written documents is easy, but coordinating shared service delivery is often difficult and time consuming.*

This point is very well taken. With very rare exceptions people, groups or organizations only change when the status quo is more painful than the process/struggle that leads to a new reality. Said another way, the benefit of the new relationship must outweigh the struggle to establish the relationship.

The methodology and technology that we have illustrated in this abbreviated process has been shown in for-profit businesses and nonprofit organizations to sufficiently lower the barrier to collaboration that



organizations are more inclined to enter serious dialogue. Such conversations have led to collaborations, partnerships and when warranted even mergers.

Q: *How can we get to know one another to work more collaboratively?*

Our vision as an organization is to enable deeper alignment within organizations and to foster meaningful collaboration and partnership between and among nonprofits. Our original intention fostering this conversation was to provoke thought, provide some insightful data, gain insights and wisdom from the community and to assess the level of interest in "collaboration". Thanks to your gracious participation, it appears we received even more than we bargained for!

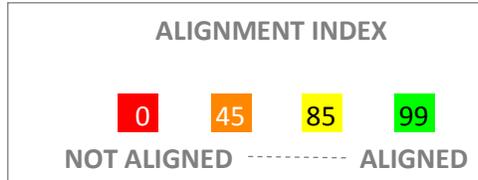
Therefore, in light of what we perceive to be some genuine interest in further conversation, we would be delighted to conduct a webinar with all participants to walk through the data. You will be able to see the analytics at a deeper level when the software is live as opposed to in PDF form. If that conversation results in ongoing communication by two or more organizations that would simply be a great bonus.

Please anticipate a Doodle Poll through which we will be able to determine a time convenient for all to participate in the webinar. In addition, should anyone have any particular questions they would like answered please feel free to contact us via email or at 302 – 584 – 2218.

Brief introduction to Alignment Theory

How to read the data

This report is generated by our software and provides insight into how a group thinks. When discussing a topic we all realize many objections, insights and opinions are left unsaid, particularly by those in the minority and/or by those who are less assertive. Because this information is unknown, it cannot inform the discussion. In addition, these unspoken and unaddressed concerns (often at odds with the eventual direction you choose to move in) will undermine the effective implementation of any plan.



While the existence of unspoken concerns is not a revelation, what is new is we can now *measure* the degree of support. Instead of an up/down, yes/no vote, we can now see the groups thinking on a continuum. We speak of this support or lack of support as Alignment, illustrated in an Alignment Index.

Watch the jargon

We strive to stay away from “consultant speak”. It is inevitable, however, that you need to become familiar with some technical terms. The first we will introduce is **Non-Alignment**. In assessing a set of responses in the survey, **Non-Alignment** is where some respondents agreed with a statement, while others disagreed.

This does *not* mean right or wrong. It simply identifies statement(s) that warrant further discussion. **Alignment** also is not about “for” or “against”. Full alignment means rather that, when asked if you agree or disagree, *everyone* answered one or the other. So you could be *aligned in disagreeing* that you should paint your office orange. You could be *aligned in agreeing* that the office should have new furniture.

Two examples from your survey

Organizations that collaborate are more attractive to funders. 91 

- The 91 means high alignment among the people who participated
- The colors represent the six options for response:
 - Dark Brown: Strongly Agree
 - Brown: Agree
 - Light Brown: Slightly agree
 - Light Blue: Slightly Disagree
 - No one “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed”
 - Grey: People who skipped the question

Collaboration in my organization requires board approval. 41 

- The 41 means very low alignment – this would be very important if you have staff discussing collaboration but no one realizes the decision making process is not aligned. Often we presume our norms are the same for everyone
- We see the other two colors:
 - Blue: Disagree
 - Dark Blue: Strongly Disagree

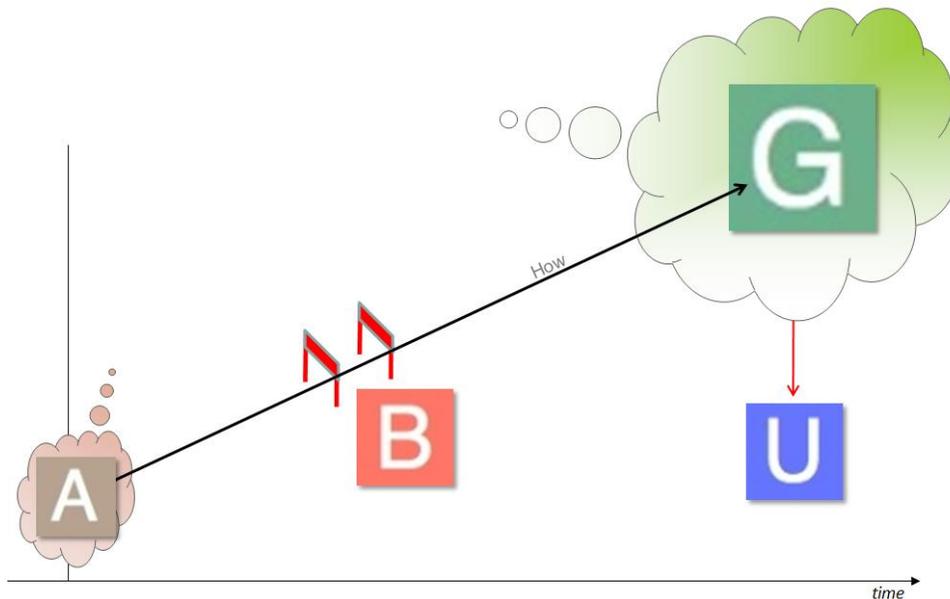
Report Frameworks

GUBA Framework

To effectively determine when a group should act or not act, we use the GUBA framework, which represents the four types of thinking that drive action and inaction in individuals.

G	Goals Benefits and desired outcomes needed to provide the stakeholders.
U	Unintended Consequences Respondent's concerns of possible negative side-effects that could be triggered.
B	Barriers Constraints respondents feel they would face.
A	Assumptions Business and personal factors which respondents currently experience that drive their opinion.

The GUBA framework is an integral part of the report and is visually reinforced with following graphic. To achieve a major goal, a team must be in alignment around the assumptions, barriers and unintended consequences of such an activity.



You will see below that each statement fits into one of these four categories



Executive Summary

The goal is to understand how a random selection of leaders in Delaware view *collaboration*.
Some tentative conclusions are:

1. *There is strong alignment around collaborating on advocacy, delivery of services and events.*
 - a. *Collaboration around advocacy would provide groups a stronger voice relative to the legislature. DANA does this for nonprofits in general, but what about specific topics?*
 - b. *Further conversation about the nature of events sharing could be very productive as planning such events is not unique from agency to agency (for example, site selection, marketing, set up, knockdown etc.) . Further, there is great benefit to multiservice events as each participant draws their stakeholders, increasing the likelihood of critical mass in providing exposure of each stakeholder to other programs.*
2. *There is great misalignment regarding sharing staff and sharing buildings/equipment.*
 - a. *When we find misalignment the software provides us with tremendous amounts of insights from the participants. (Our thanks to each of you who took the time to do the 2nd half of the activity where you gave narrative responses) this information often will expose data which pushes the group to a unified conclusion (for example, the availability of new funds or the elimination of previously available funds) or we find a word or phrase was defined differently by the disagreeing parties (how does each person to find "sharing staff"?).*
 - b. *These 2 examples of misalignment appear to require more resources, effort and programmatic overlap than those places where there is more alignment.*
3. *The participants are aligned around two key factors related to collaboration: collaboration is attractive to funders and it results in greater impact.*
 - a. *Our research supports these conclusions*
 - b. *while everybody agrees this is a great benefit, there is strong misalignment on the following statement from the survey:*

The effort required to create an effective collaboration outweighs the eventual benefits. 51 

This may be the most significant insight from this process. A fair interpretation of the above is that cooperation, which most organizations often share, is easier to do but has less powerful positive impact. Collaboration, as we have defined it above, can have significantly greater impact but is much more difficult to accomplish. This has consistently been our experience in working with nonprofits. We look forward to hearing your experience.

Analytics

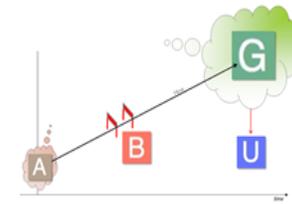
The software takes the data you will see below and analyses it from many different angles, increasing your insight into the alignment of the participants, sub-groups and overall team. We can review such analytics in the webinar – to do more than the little we did above would simply be confusing.

Opinion Survey Statements

The following shows the actual statements to which you responded. When warranted, the second Questionnaire brought in your comments (in green), under each relevant statement, if we were doing a full alignment cycle, each of these statements would be processed by the group to determine common assumptions, barriers that need to be mitigated and prioritized strategies. We would then develop actions to implement those strategies.

DRIVERS TO ACTION OR INACTION: GUBA

The statements you all responded to were, as we said, broken into four categories. That is how they are listed below, but starting with "A", the present state or what we assume to be true today. They are each evaluated by the software and placed in one of three categories: 1. Convergent (aligned) 2. Moderately convergent (slightly aligned) 3. Divergent (not aligned)



A Underlying Assumptions/Current State

The Opinion Survey gathered participant responses of agreement or disagreement with statements around Assumptions: what we believe to be currently true. It is necessary to first confirm the group's agreement about where there is an opportunity or there is a problem to be addressed. Without strong alignment around the reasons for action, gaining agreement on the future state and how to attain it will be inefficient and lead to a flawed implementation of the group's objectives.

Convergent

Organizations that collaborate are more attractive to funders. 91 

People were invited to give reasoning on this area but none chose to.

Collaboration enables organizations to have a greater impact. 89 

People were invited to give reasoning on this area but none chose to.

A benefit of collaboration is saving costs. 78 

- This depends on who is collaborating. A big corporation is likely to be asked to fund more of a community-based program than a tiny non-profit. For example, diabetes outreach--the deep pockets should be paying more but it is a better program when organizations work together. Saving cost depends on where you sit and what cost you incurred before the collaboration.
- Collaboration, while valuable, costs a lot of time and money, and therefore leads to higher quality but not necessarily cost savings.
- Where there are goal or value differences, collaboration can take more time than doing something alone. Time = money.



Divergent

Collaboration in my organization requires board approval. 41

- Everything in my org seems to require approval. Perhaps not "board approval" but approval from a higher authority. It's a major bureaucracy.
- It depends upon the level of collaboration, but if the collaboration involves sharing of resources, our board needs to approve.
- The Board of Directors has fiduciary and staffing responsibilities that would require their approval of collaborations. Further, the Board is responsible for strategic direction, so approvals of collaborations in light of strategies is necessary.
- Because this is how we currently operate and it works
- We have an advisory board that we must run decisions through because we are state organization

G Goals/Objectives/Indicators of Success

Convergent

The following responses highlight the most likely areas to seek collaboration.

My organization should collaborate on advocacy. 93

- Not sure how that would benefit us or the other groups

My organization should collaborate on delivering its services. 90

My organization should collaborate on events. 89

Divergent

My organization should share buildings and equipment with other organizations.

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- Libraries are already providing space and equipment for our partners to conduct workshops etc for the public. And the partners have access to all the services provided too.
- We already share a building with three other nonprofits and this has worked out well for all four organizations.
- I work in an educational institution and would like students to be able to engage in cross-departmental projects. Shared sites would facilitate this.
- By sharing space, various organizations can better collaborate and it allows multiple organizations to learn from each other.
- Our facilities are underutilized by our organization, if they were shared with other organizations, the cost of ownership is shared. Again - efficiencies.
- Perhaps this is even easier than sharing staff as there are probably great efficiencies to leverage costly overhead.
- I thinking sharing space is an excellent choice for some organizations, or at least aspects of their organizations. For example, we use space in the United Way of Delaware as a classroom for our ITWorks program here in Delaware. We also use space at Peirce College in Philadelphia for our program there. Financially, it does not make sense at this point in time for us to purchase a building and make our own classroom. These spaces already exist, and have proven to be valuable for us. That being said, I think there needs



to be clear agreements that both parties need to follow. Additionally, the sharing of equipment seems less of a good idea than sharing buildings.

- Why not maximize resources?
- We are not a program that needs extensive/expansive space; so, we could benefit from sharing a building and the financial responsibilities.
- Because this is how we currently operate and it works
- Assets are often underused. There's efficiency in sharing resources when possible.
- It is cost effective for small or start up organizations to share things like office space. I've even had conversations about sharing an executive assistant. It is harder to get quality help with a part time position that doesn't provide benefits, so sharing that person in a support role would increase the pool of applicants and work within our budget constraints.

My organization should share staff with other organizations.

49  7

- Sharing staff can be mutual so it is fair. It can also be two agencies both needing a part time worker. They can get as more skilled and engaged worker. To me it is about putting skin into the collaboration
- Each organization should do what they do best, simply do so collaboratively
- We already have staff who also work at other organizations. Unless there is a reason that would prohibit it, we allow it.
- Share staff may not be the best choice of words. Perhaps better stated that my organization would like to subcontract my staff to others in the collaborative group
- When there is alignment in needs with other organizations and when the staff position would be less than full time at either organization, sharing staff gains efficiencies for both organizations. It also provides a more just employment.
- To be more nimble and agile, sharing staff with other organizations could provide opportunities to uniquely leverage strengths, information, best practices, and even capabilities of the other organizations. The only word that perhaps I would change is "should". Instead I would use the word "could".
- I think this works if there is a shared "mutual ministry" and goals are complementary. Can also
- With seasoned employees, the opportunity to expand skills when provided with an opportunity to work with another organization.
- Because this is how we currently operate and it works
- Duffys Hope does not have paid staff. But we could consider encouraging our participants and volunteers to support other organizations for support from peer organizations.
- In office spaces where there are administrative people, it can be a good use of resources to share the staff. For volunteer work, making employees available as a resource to a non-profit is a powerful message about supporting the community, and helps to imprint a volunteer mentality in the workforce.
- In close collaborations, it sometimes is more cost-effective to share specific resources. EG There is no need to have two project administrators, one from each organization, if one would be adequate.
- Because I work for a state agency, it is difficult to share staff with other organizations. We collaborate often and share resources, but state staff are paid through public funds and cannot.



U Potential Unintended Consequences

Moderately Convergent

Organizations that collaborate will lose their unique identity. 83

B Issues and Barriers

Moderately Convergent

The effort required to create an effective collaboration outweighs the eventual benefits. 51

A Ungrouped

What other thoughts would you like to contribute to this dialogue?

- None
- We love collaboration! It's been very beneficial to us and to Delawareans
- Collaboration requires that people not be afraid -- sometimes fear is leftover from previous administration's actions and is difficult to let go of.
- Would like to see specific collaboration examples between orgs that have worked. What were challenges and how did the respective organizations overcome them. How do you market this type of collaboration to a BOD for approval?
- You might distinguish the difficulty/costs of different kinds of collaboration between nonprofits. Sharing ideas and best practices in discussion forums or written documents is easy, but coordinating shared service delivery is often difficult and time consuming.
- Does this collaboration discussion relate to non-profits OR; is broader discussion with non-profit and for-profit organizations? I'm particularly interested in collaboration to lower sales cost and sales cycles. As well as delivery.
- Interesting ideas!
- How can we get to know one another to work more collaboratively?
- Collaboration and mutual support are essential
- The key word in these items is "effective." There's plenty of collaboration that might seem interesting, but hasn't been thought through well enough to be effective.
- I represent an all-volunteer organization with no equipment, buildings, paid staff, etc. My answers reflect this.
- There are many grey areas here. Collaboration can work when done correctly but many of the above questions highlight potential problems with collaboration.
- Collaboration is too broad a term for deep understanding on this topic. It can mean anything from jointly writing an article to proposing and delivering long term work together. In my experience only one brand is promoted at a time, so successful collaboration requires a solution for mutual promotion. This may reduce differentiation in the market.
- Collaboration is key to ensure buy-in from a cross-section of different industries. It promotes success and provides for future alignment of goals.
- Collaboration and competition are sometimes counteracting. Balancing the two along different interests is key.
- We already collaborate, so this isn't anything new to us. What else do we have to learn?