

DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTHENTIC COLLABORATION

Collaborations can serve many different purposes and take diverse forms. However, there are a set of unique characteristics that distinguish authentic collaborations and set them apart from other structures and initiatives. The following definition and checklist¹ can be used to build a shared understanding about what collaboration means, and to 'test' potential or existing collaborations to ensure they are authentic. If a collaboration doesn't satisfy the majority of characteristics it invites partners to ask themselves if the entity is in fact a significant relationship rather than a collaboration, and provides an opportunity to choose to make different choices moving forward.

Authentic collaboration is defined as:

A well-defined relationship entered into by two or more different partners (e.g. individuals, organizations, networks) coming together from various sectors, groups and/or communities to achieve common goals. They are characterized by a commitment to building, nurturing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships; joint responsibility and accountability for success; and the sharing of resources and rewards.

In an authentic collaboration, partners:

1. NURTURE RELATIONSHIPS BASED ON MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT

- Each have a voice in the collaboration so there is joint decision-making and power differentials are acknowledged and negotiated
- Are comfortable with conflict and stress because they recognize they are products of active engagement and are a part of the dynamic and complex nature of collaborations
- Are all prepared to be open, transparent and honest about their organization's expectations, issues that emerge in the collaborative or among partners, and any personal concerns or conflicts of interest

2. NEGOTIATE COLLECTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS, BENEFITS AND STRENGTHS

- Are empowered by their organizations to come to consensus so that decisions and solutions are focused on the best interests of the collective
- Must all have something significant to contribute to the collaboration, including time, knowledge, expertise and funds, although partners may bring different resources to the table
- Each stands to gain in a significant way from the collaboration, both in terms of their own organization as well as the collective
- Recognize each other's strengths and assets but also openly acknowledge and work to strengthen areas requiring improvement

3. AGREE ON SHARED OUTCOMES, RISKS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND SUCCESSES

- Have agreed upon a shared mission, values, goals and measurable outcomes
- Are prepared to share in the risks, liabilities and responsibilities associated with the collaboration itself and its work in a way that encourages mutual accountability
- Share credit for outcomes and successes based on parameters that are determined by partners together
- Recognize that its structure and processes will continue to adapt to address new circumstances

