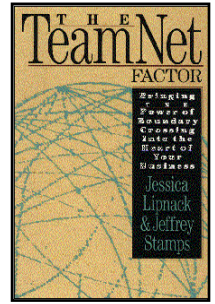*Characteristics of Successful Collaborations*

There's a greater possibility of success if the following characteristics are in place when developing a collaborative project. They don't guarantee success, but enhance your possibilities. See: *The TeamNet Factor: Bring the Power of Boundary Crossing Into the Heart of Your Business* by J. Lipnack, J. Stamps. Vt: Oliver Wright Publications (1993).
http://bit.ly/1FGi71g

1.) *Clear, Explicit Purpose*

If you don't know what it is you are trying to accomplish, you won't know when you've done it. If you're not working for the same purpose, the same goals, the collaboration dissolves.

This is simple, but also the hardest up-front thing to do. *It takes time to define clearly what it is you are really trying to accomplish together*. A clear, explicit purpose also lets you know when you're through, when you've achieved aims. This is especially challenging in human services for two reasons:

  a.)   It's not easy to come up with useful strategic outcomes, and,

  b.) We want to mobilize more of our total community capacity. In "Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)" staff animate citizens to recognize each others' gifts. In effective ABCD engagement, staff *listen* to stakeholders' motivations-to-act, help them identify opportunities and invite them to learn more. This involves structuring strong citizens roles which requires careful planning.

2.) *Members*

Members of a collaborative group have to have **reasons for being there:**

  a.) *Commitment*. Part of this is *internal -- people have to want to be there.* Are we committed to the purpose? There has to be commitment or passion for what it is you are about to do together for the voluntary collaboration to work. You have to want to be there and want to do it.

  b.) *You bring a skill, a perspective.* You are clear that there is something that you are going to bring to contribute and that other people understand this. There is a way to opt out if it's appropriate to do so (e.g., after you're appointed).

If members don't have these you have people who are just taking up space and it won't work. This often happens: You have people on committees, etc. who are asked to be there and they are wondering why they were asked. People are creative. Pretty soon if they don't have obvious work they start creating work to do. This can develop blockages and things irrelevant to the actual collaborative work.

It takes a lot of energy to make collaborations work today because it's not all smooth and simple. *You're working difficult issues or you wouldn't be together in the first place* -- you'd be out doing it by yourself. We are collaborating around topics and problems that are complex and need the input of various disciplines. So you have to want to stay with it, you have to care.

  c.) *Autonomy*. Members have to be autonomous and independent -- to be able to act. It doesn't work if they're only there as "fronts," if they don't have some range of authority and decision-making ability. This independence gets stressed a lot because it has to do with decision making, but it also has to do

with the equality of the group. Equality doesn't mean necessarily the same level organizationally, but it does mean everybody is there as an independent agent who is needed for the task. When they talk, because they are an expert in an area and bringing a perspective, there is a leveling. We're all in this together as independent players who can make this thing happen.

This is a tricky one. Often we send people to collaborate because they have the time. But they may not have the experience, information or anything else to make it work. This is not what we are talking about.

 d.) *Cross boundaries*. You need to cross boundaries. This "boundary spanning" is definitional. If we're in the same functional group and don't cross boundaries we're working internally, participatively. Collaboration crosses boundaries. This is what makes it a collaborative team or network of individuals.

3. *Multiple Leadership*

In successful collaborations research has found that leadership varies according to what stage the project is in and the topic on the table. So if you've got a complex event, maybe someone's responsible for convening the group. But at some point in time the project reaches a stage relevant to a particular competence and then another person has got the lead, etc. For us it could be the staff organizers and educators bring local citizens together, then event invitation work goes to a staff and volunteer Connector's Table, working with an event- project in a specific community, etc. The lead may shift. People recognize that is why everybody is there – they have different things to bring to the party. And at different points in time they take over in their area.

4. *Linkages-Communications* (between members and to others) *are very important*.

 a.) *Between members*. You need a lot of it and in different modalities -- verbal, written – *more than you think you need*. Pay attention to what happens between members. What happens when someone doesn't act or show up? Who fills them in? How do we handle this? Whose responsibility is it? Because we are working fast we can't afford to leave people out -- they are important -- they need to be there to extend the work.

 b.) *To others*. For example, other groups who are doing similar things and need to be kept informed; people you may be handing this work off to: your hierarchy, Board. *It is important to plan communications* -- how do we link, what linkages do we need?   (This leads to the next item.)

5. *Integrated with...*

How does a collaboration fit within the larger whole?   The more integrated the group or network, with hierarchy and other organizations, the better. Successful collaborators know many people. Through linkages and connections they keep people informed. This contrasts to a group that is more isolated, where members are off doing their own thing. *The integrated group tends to survive and to be successful.*

The isolated group tends to die. They don't get the resources. They don't keep people informed, so people don't know what they are doing. When they go for requests to others they don't have them on board. In some ways this is a political process, but it is a critical one. You have to pay attention to it. Saying to a government rep. "We have this great idea for you," they have some idea who you are and why they should trust you. You have to do your own outreach and *connecting* on projects. You can't depend solely on your organizational hierarchy or Boards, by themselves.