

## Tools: Collaboration



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Collaboration may be viewed as a continuum of inter-organizational relationships among organizations working together to solve problems:



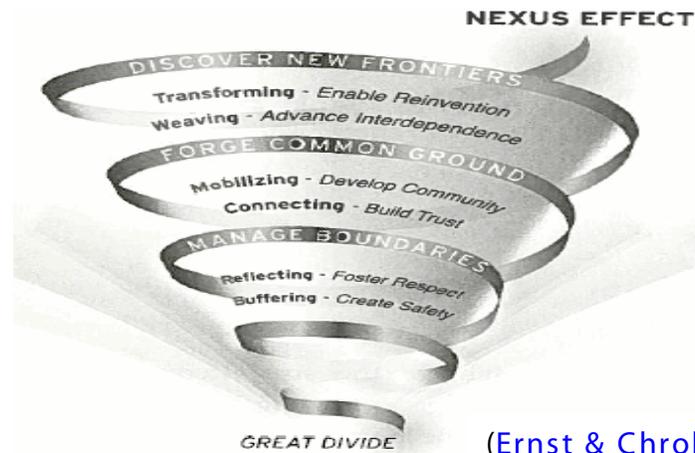
The simplest form of working together is cooperation. Two organizations discuss ways they could work together to make it easier for either or both organizations to improve their efficiency and effectiveness. Cooperation is usually informal. An example of this is a county and a city sharing data on a transportation issue.

Coordination, the next step on the continuum, requires deeper cooperation. One or both organizations make changes to help the other or both organizations. Again, it is likely an informal relationship. An example of this is a city and a school working out a schedule where a park is used for after-school athletics.



Collaboration is same-sector or multi-sector organizations working together to solve a problem. It has become a very popular approach to innovation and redesign. Some collaborations are surprisingly informal, while others require formality to make them work. An example is the [Health Careers Partnership](#) of Project for Pride in Living, Hennepin County, City of Minneapolis, Minneapolis schools, Minneapolis Community and Technical College, and Children's, Abbott Northwestern, and Hennepin County hospitals all working together to train low-income people from the Phillips neighborhood for jobs in the healthcare field.

The following schematic shows the steps for going from the great divide---think of usual relations between a school district and the city or cities in the district---to the nexus effect of creating a collaboration.



([Ernst & Chrobot-Mason](#), 2011)

Partnership is a formalized collaboration. Various organizations come together to solve a problem that they could not solve separately, and it requires more than just collaboration. An example of this is the [South Metropolitan Public Safety Training Center](#)—a joint-powers arrangement among a number of suburban cities and the Metropolitan Airports Commission.

Consolidation is the ultimate collaboration. Organizations decide to merge together to solve a problem more efficiently and effectively. A significant example is the merger of the Minneapolis Library System and the Hennepin County Library System. The surviving organization was the Hennepin County Library System, even though the city system had originally created and served as the county system.



Creating cooperation that leads all the way to consolidation is very difficult work and often fails. [Bryson, Crosby and Stone](#) (2006) developed a framework for understanding cross-sector collaborations and the conditions necessary for success:

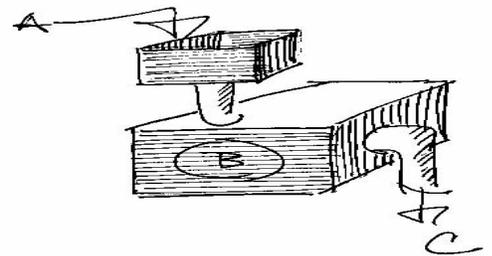
- **Initial conditions:** What are the likely requirements of all the actors?
- **Process:** What process is going to be used to develop a consensus among the actors?
- **Structure and governance:** With a consensus in hand, how will the collaboration be structured and governed?
- **Contingencies and constraints:** How will the collaboration be unwound if it doesn't work?
- **Outcomes and accountabilities:** What are the outcomes that will be used to determine if the effort was a success?

The [Minnesota Commission on Service Innovation](#) has recommended that the state establish a Shared Services/Consolidation program for state and local government entities.

To illustrate the *problem to redesign* methodology for this section, an example of the development of low-income housing follows:

**Step 1. Clearly define the problem**

The quality and affordability of housing for low-income people is inadequate.



**Step 2. State the desired measurable outcome**

Increase the satisfaction of low-income people with their housing choices.

**Step 3. Investigate why traditional approaches aren't working**

Government builds public housing units in large buildings. This leads to a concentration of poor people in a small area. Nationwide, these projects have proved problematic.

**Step 4. Identify alternative theories or assumptions that address the problem**

A collaboration of government, nonprofits and banks can bring more dynamic solutions to problem.



## Step 5. Innovate and redesign

A collaboration of government, nonprofits, academic and private-sector institutions combines efforts to create successful new housing for low-income people.

As suggested previously, cooperation to consolidation has limitations. [Salamon](#) (2006) described these as needs:

- Management challenge, so the right people are at the table.
- Accountability challenge so everyone knows exactly who is responsible.
- Legitimacy challenge so citizens know who is accountable for success or failure.
- Tool knowledge so participants understand what a collaboration entails in reality.
- Design knowledge so participants can use a guide to assist them.
- Operating knowledge so collaboration can be sustained.

Real examples of collaboration choice include:

- [Merger of New Market and Elko](#): In 2005, the cities of Elko and New Market began exploring the implications of consolidating their two towns, and in 2006, voters approved. The cities will save an estimated \$2.9 million.
- [Minnesota School Food Buying Group](#) (MSFBG): Started by a charter group of 15 school districts representing 24 percent of MN student population, secured pricing direct from the food manufacturers lowering costs of food for school lunches.
- [Consolidation of Minneapolis and Hennepin County Libraries](#): In 2007, the Minneapolis Public Library Board, the City of Minneapolis, the Hennepin County Library Board and Hennepin County came together to merge overlapping library functions. By adopting a set of guiding principles, the two library systems consolidated; employees are now all a part of Hennepin County [Full Case Study available].
- [Smart Kids](#): Promotes the academic and social development of children by helping educators, parents and human service providers operate from a simple belief: all children can learn at high levels if the process of education is effectively organized in Rochester, MN.
- [Growing Up Healthy](#) in Rice County: An active coalition of



14 non-profit and government entities helping marginalized families with children 0-5 years in age.

- [Currie Ave. Housing Partnership](#): The Downtown Congregations to End Homelessness, the Downtown Business Council, local nonprofit agencies and Hennepin County provides permanent housing and support to people with disabilities who are long-term homeless.
- [MN Chamber of Commerce](#) Local Collaboration Grants: The MN Chamber of Commerce is funding four efforts to improve local government services.
- [JumpStart Duluth](#): A partnership of Community Action Duluth (CAD), Lutheran Social Service of MN (LSS), West Central Wisconsin Community Action, Inc, (West CAP) the Northern Communities Credit Union (NCCU) and the Twin Ports NAPA Auto Care Centers to meet the transportation needs of at-risk, low-income people.
- [NE Middle Mile Fiber Project](#): Northeast Service Cooperative (comprised of St. Louis, Lake, Cook, Koochiching, Carlton, Pine, Itasca and Aitkin counties, a number of state and municipal agencies, the Arrowhead Library System, SISU Medical System, Minnesota Association of Mental Health Programs and 28 public school districts) is developing dark-fiber, wavelength services available to public and private sector technology service providers in un-served and underserved rural areas of Northeast Minnesota.
- [Shared Fire and Emergency Services](#): A task force appointed by Governor Pawlenty has developed models for the merger of these services locally and released its report October 2010.
- [East Metro Mental Crisis Mobile Team](#): Improves access to crisis services and meets mental health needs at the appropriate level of care across Ramsey, Washington and Dakota counties, including four health plans, three health systems, State Operated Services and DHS Adult Mental Health Division.
- [Lakeville Ice Arena](#): The City of Lakeville, ISD 194, the Lakeville Housing and Redevelopment Authority and others have a long history of collaborating to finance, maintain, and manage Lakeville's ice areas.
- [Kandiyohi and Big Stone Counties Shared 911 Service](#): The result of two years of planning and infrastructure development efforts between Kandiyohi County, Big Stone County, and State of Minnesota officials.
- [NW Minnesota School Districts](#) and their technology



- Consortiums, in cooperation with MNSCU, are offering an ['OnLine College in the Schools'](#) program to provide AP level college credit courses online to students in very small school districts where such courses can't be provided on a local level.
- Values Health: A public-private partnership has extended healthcare coverage to people who cannot afford insurance but are not eligible for publicly funded healthcare programs. It includes 13 county governments, nine hospitals and 32 local employers.
- [Southwest Transit](#): Created in 1986 under a joint powers agreement among Chanhassen, Chaska and Eden Prairie to provide the three cities with public transit service.
- [Virginia-Eveleth Economic Development Authority](#): Formed in 1994 by a Joint Powers Agreement and serves to facilitate economic development in both cities.
- [St. Paul City, Parks, and Schools](#): These organizations are beginning a new effort to share facilities. For example, Dayton's Bluff Elementary shares facilities with St. Paul Parks and Recreation's Dayton's Bluff Recreation Center. This is happening across St. Paul.
- Horizon [Community Health Board](#): Effective January 2011, the rural counties of Douglas, Pope, Grant, Stevens and Traverse will administer public health programs together.
- [Annandale-Maple Lake-Howard Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant](#) Despite facing hurdles from state agencies and others, the Cities of Annandale, Maple Lake and Howard Lake collaborated to construct a joint wastewater treatment facility.
- [The Doorway](#): A collaborative effort of the St. Paul Public Library, the City of St. Paul, St Paul Parks and Recreation, MN College Access Network, MN Office of Higher Education, MN Private College Council and funders from the private sector to increase the number of St. Paul youth who pursue higher education.



Further readings and examples of Collaboration are available at The Humphrey School of Public Affairs [Local Government Innovations Website](#).

