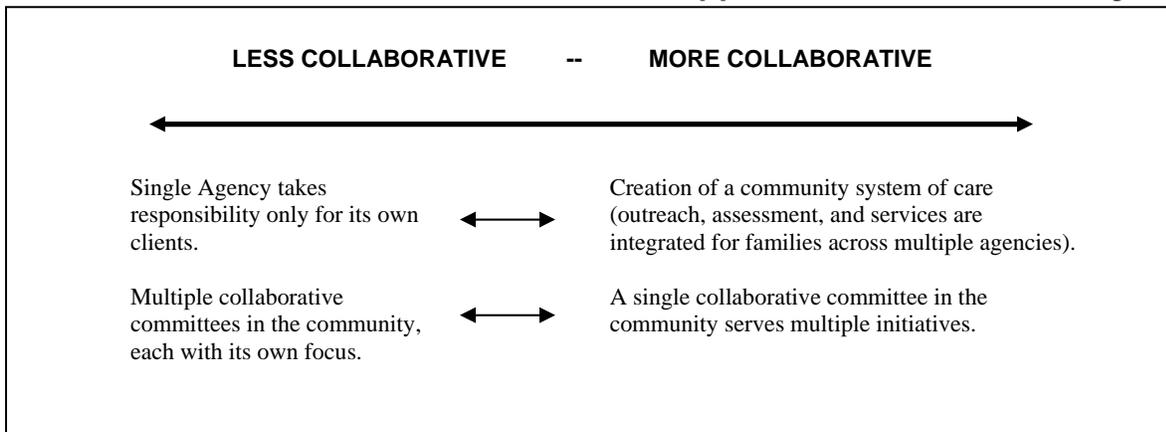


Collaboration Defined

Federal and state agencies and foundations have increasingly required collaboration in the specifications for agencies applying for grants, generally without the recognition that collaborating is a complex process that develops over time. Community agencies working together function on four levels that represent different types of activities and require increasingly more complex relationships. While each of these sets of strategies may sometimes be referred to as "collaboration," only those whose relationships change the partners themselves meet the test of our definitions.

Continuum of collaborative approaches in a community



NETWORKING

The Networking level of working together is evidenced in such activities as:

- Signing off on each other's grant proposals.
- Sharing information about services.
- Becoming acquainted with each other.
- Sending and receiving referrals.

COORDINATING

The Coordinating level of working together adds:

- Sharing information about clients and services provided to them (with consent).
- Agreeing upon a plan of services for a mutual client.

With the exception of the first item under Networking, these activities involve informal relationships between front-line service providers.

Adapted from: 2003. Statewide Evaluation of The ASAP-PIE Program, Report 2. Institute for Children, Youth, and Families, and University Outreach Michigan State University.

COOPERATING

The Cooperating level of working together reflects a more planned interface of activities. It involves executive decision making in the context of an agreed upon focus. Cooperation is operationalized through such activities as:

- Sharing of resources with or without reimbursement (e.g., space, vehicles, etc.).
- Provision of services to the clients of another Agency in their setting (as in services delivered in a school).
- Co-location of staff of two or more agencies.
- Cross Agency training directed at information.

Agency executives recognize that they have responsibilities for a common population and engage in decision making to plan and deliver services, but services remain discrete and essentially unchanged. Decisions to provide and maintain services essentially remain within each Agency.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is substantively different from the other three levels. InterAgency action at this level requires executives to make major change in their own organization, operation, and service delivery. Collaboration substantially changes the service system. Collaboration involves some or all of the following:

- A shared vision that incorporates responsibility for a shared population.
- Agreed upon outcomes.
- Commitment to shared initiatives.
- Development of community plans.
- Shared decision making with respect to InterAgency development of services and grant applications.
- Pooled resources: cash, staff, as well as space, supplies, materials, etc.
- Assigned responsibility for joint ventures.
- Shared decision making with respect to InterAgency oversight of shared initiatives.
- Cross-Agency training directed at changing service delivery.
- Reconfiguration of service delivery.
- Cross-Agency teams.
- Common forms.
- Common evaluation/information system.

In order to be sustained over time, a collaborative enterprise needs written agreements between:

- The collaborative body and the Agency assigned primary responsibility concerning their respective roles.
- The Agency assigned primary responsibility and agencies receiving or providing resources.

Written changes in the policies and procedures of participating agencies also institutionalize the collaborative approach to service delivery.