



The Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations gratefully recognizes the contributions of individuals in Edmonton's nonprofit community who participated in discussions about

Accelerating Impact

ECVO has compiled highlights from these discussions into a series of five resources.

Continuous Communications

Continuous communication provides the platform for trust to be developed, concerns to be addressed, and ideas to be discussed.

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Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations

Moving to Action



Introduction

This resource is the summary of a community conversation about the fourth condition of Collective Impact, Continuous Communications. Members of the Edmonton nonprofit community participated in this conversation in June 2014.

One final discussion is scheduled to discuss the final condition of Collective Impact:

- Backbone Organizations.

Each conversation explores a local Edmonton case study followed discussion questions. The responses to these questions are summarized in a resource similar to this document. If you are interested in collecting the series of resources, please visit the ECVO website and look under Our Work / Moving to Action.



“What communications processes, strategies or protocols has your group utilized?”

It was agreed that communication is a critical success factor in partnerships, collaborations and strategic alliances. Participants identified the following four needs for developing communications protocols within collaborations:

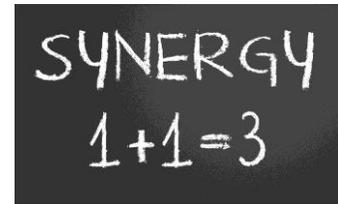
1. Discuss communication plans up front.
2. Use a narrative to understand common values.
3. Build relationships.
4. Cultivate champions within the group.

Further Reading

[Continuous Communication, Collaboration for Impact.](#)

[Me versus We: Communicating in Collaborations](#), Lewis, L.K., Isbell, M.B. and Koschmann, M.A.

[Communications Strategies to Build Collaboration](#), Buysse, V. and Wesley, P.W.



“What communication processes have worked well?”

- ✓ Having networking opportunities.
- ✓ Quick wins to establish momentum.
- ✓ Face-to-face opportunities help to build stronger interpersonal connections.
- ✓ Being clear at the outset as to what level of decision making is possible at the table.
- ✓ Being aware that there are different decision making styles in the room. Some may need more time than others.
- ✓ Telling stories is huge for nonprofits to communicate their impact.
- ✓ Building awareness and buzz about what you are doing.
- ✓ Connect your brand at the community level.

Further Reading

[Norms and Communication Structures, Partnerships: Frameworks for Working Together.](#)

[The Networked Nonprofit, Jane Weiskillern and Sonia Marciano.](#)

“What communication challenges have you faced?”

- The capacity of members to continue to meet and invest the time needed to grow and deepen relationships. Pay attention!
- Communications have to be framed in an empowering way focused on improvement.
- Politics and culture can get in the way of good communication both internally and between organizations.
- Fear of failure can get in the way of adjusting course when it needs to happen. There is “intelligent failure”.
- Money – and the power attached to it can create communication issues.

Further Reading

[The Power of Storytelling to JumpStart Collaboration.](#) Seth Kahan.

“How can you successfully confront the challenges?”

Frame the common agenda as a story

- Start with the story – what do we do and what do we want to do.
- Articulate the issues in the story.
- Translate changes as they occur – a new partner, a shift in outcomes – whatever the change, make it clear and transparent.
- Amplify voices. Make it easy for all members of the collaboration to be heard and to tell the story. Record key messages and agree on what needs to be communicated.

Once is not enough

- The common agenda of the group needs to stay in the forefront. It needs to be embedded in all activities and messages. Saying it once is not enough.
- If the common agenda is lost, the rest will start to fall apart.



Relationships are key

- Bringing multiple perspectives to the table is important. With diversity and varying perspectives there is more opportunity for creativity in telling the story.

Further Reading

[Sustainability Through Partnerships: Capitalizing on Collaboration](#). Barbara Gray and Jenna P. Stites.

[Strategic Questioning and the Art of Network Leadership](#). Beth Tener.

“Continuous communication within a collective impact context is identified as a means of building trust. How can communication issues diminish trust amongst partners?”

Investing in the time and effort upfront to develop relationships and build trust is critical. While this might seem to slow down the process, it in fact means that the group’s ability to find common interests, address conflict and adapt to change is made easier as the collaboration grows.

Trust can be impacted when partners do not feel they are being kept adequately informed or when they do not feel their input is heard. This reinforces the need for accurate and inclusive meeting notes or minutes. Partners want and need to know that everyone’s input carries equal weight.

Relationships within a collaborative will thrive or die in response to the degree of trust that exists amongst the partners. If trust is broken, it will not naturally rebuild – it will require intentional and sustained work and leadership.

Collaborations that are transparent in their practices, processes and protocols will have a high level of trust between partners. Effective communication tools showcase transparency. When communication between partners is inconsistent, irrelevant and untimely, trust can be damaged.



Further Reading

[Collaboration: Building and Managing Trust](#). Allcollaboration.com. Lokesh Datta.

[Facilitating Trust: What team leaders need to know](#). Jay Gordon Cone.

[Engagement Strategies: Making the Most of Working Together](#). Sand Jacobsen and Stephanie Jacobs.

“What internal communication constraints or influences might partners within collaborations face and how does this impact their ability to participate within a collaborative? How do these constraints impact the collaborative?”

The group identified “self-interest” as a major motivator and challenge for a collaborative. Individuals (or organizations) will be motivated to be at the table because the agenda of the collaborative aligns with their own interest(s). This is a strong motivator for both the individual and the collaborative.

The challenge is to bring together a group of individuals who have a shared agenda and are each willing to park their personal agenda at the door for the shared outcomes of the collaborative.

Collaboratives require partners to invest time and resources into the development and evolution of the collaboration. It is important to have a shared understanding of the investments required and that those expectations are communicated amongst the members and their respective organizations.

The turnover of collaborative members needs to be actively managed. New members need to be brought on-board effectively. Failure to do so can lead to disengagement, demotivation and setbacks for the whole group.

Further Reading

[Permission, performance and play: shifting culture, changing systems.](#) Martin Stewart Week.

[Who blocks innovation?](#) Jeffrey Phillips.

[Making strategies stick – tackling anti-stories.](#) Mark Schenk and Kevin Bishop.



“Are there supports or resources you would recommend to groups trying to develop effective group communication strategies/protocols?”

- ✓ *Power and Love* – Adam Kahane
- ✓ Visual mapping and tools
- ✓ Mapping of roles and responsibility
- ✓ Visual graphic facilitation
- ✓ Mind mapping
- ✓ Stories and visual facilitation to communicate
- ✓ Honesty and transparency – telling a powerful story.
- ✓ Video and story to get your message across
- ✓ The story does not need to be told only from the outcomes sense. History matters and communicates more depth.

Further Reading

[Berrett-Koehler Publishers Book Review.](#)
Power and Love. Adam Kahane.

[Story Telling Tool Kit.](#) Labour Management Partnership.

[Telling Your Story.](#) 350.org.

[7 Collaborative Storytelling Websites to Weave Your Own Digital Stories.](#)

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