Process Factors

Process Factors focus on the "how to" aspect of collaboration. They deal with the specific skills and/or components necessary to build effective working relationships and contribute to the capacity of a community. Six major factors have been identified: Understanding the Community; Community Development; Leadership; Communication; Research and Evaluation; and Sustainability. Each of these factors covers a broad range of skills or tasks which impact the collaboration process (Figure 3).

Factor – *Understanding the Community*

Understanding the community, including its people, cultures, values and habits, provides the foundation for effective collaboration. It allows the practitioner to gain a sense of the vision the community has for itself and the underlying values of the citizenry. A close look at the community helps identify individuals in the community who have power and those who have gifts. Potential audiences are identified. Potential collaborators will be discovered and potential turf battle insights will be gained.

The practitioner will recognize the diversity of strengths and weaknesses that influence the success of the collaboration. A clear view of the overall strengths can be made and not focus on the weaknesses.

Factor – *Community Development*

Community development is the process of mobilizing communities to address important issues and build upon the strengths of the community. The natural communication systems and formal information channels enable one to begin the process of exploring issues, goals and objectives. The collaboration begins the process of defining its vision, mission, values, principles and outcomes within the context of the attitudes, norms, beliefs and values of the larger community. Efforts begin to build teamwork and mobilize resources (revenue, time, people) to build on the positive environment within the community, overcome potential barriers and begin to mobilize the citizenry to institute change.

While mainstream collaborative efforts begin with the process outlined, a sense of trust is critical to successful community development strategies. Citizens often see the language of collaboration in rhetoric, with actions not rooted in melding actual and long lived community development.

Factor – *Leadership*

Community collaboration requires effective leadership. While leadership is often defined as who is in power, the definition of leadership for successful collaborations is broadened to include those who impact change within their community, group and/or organization.

One of the major responsibilities of leadership is to assure that appropriate members have been brought to the collaboration. A diverse membership should encompass potentially impacted groups and individuals. Collaborative efforts should provide for youth and adult partnerships. Norms of operation must be established which include protocol, conflict resolution, political and cultural sensitivity, structure, and roles and responsibilities. Leadership should facilitate and support team building and capitalize upon diversity and individual, group and organizational strengths.

Factor – *Communication*

Standards

community conversation

Collaborative efforts are dependent upon open and clear communication. Norms of communicating must be established which assure "language usage" which is acceptable to all members. Terminology must be clarified so that shared meaning can occur. A formal process for communication between meetings must be established (i.e., weekly phone calls, mailings, faxed updates). Communication from the collaboration to the broader community must be established. This may involve the development of working relationships with the media and other formal information channels. Establishing and maintaining non–formal communication channels with local community leaders will also be essential. Marketing of the collaboration efforts must also be conducted in order to obtain community support and acquire needed resources.

Factor – *Research and Evaluation*

organization of information

Obtaining and utilizing information is essential for collaborative groups. The effect of meeting the desired outcomes is the primary objective of a collaboration evaluation. Data must be collected which establishes benchmarks for future impact and outcome analysis. Reviewing examples of other successful models of collaboration will help in adopting or customizing a collaboration model. Evaluation efforts are essential to monitor progress related to the group's goals and objectives and to make modifications where necessary. Numerous methodologies may be employed in this process including quantitative, qualitative, and participatory strategies. Strategies for communicating program impacts must be established.

Factor – *Sustainability*

In order for collaborative efforts to be sustainable, it is essential that systems be instituted to provide sustained membership, resources, and strategic program planning. This will involve membership guidelines relating to terms of office and replacement of members. Formal operational agreements may be necessary. Resource development efforts must be ongoing to assure that the appropriate level of revenue, time and people are available to conduct the group's programming efforts. Planning must be both short–term and long–term. The collaboration must be able to identify emerging trends and issues and develop strategies for needed expansion.