

Effective Collaboration

What does it mean to collaborate?

Collaboration is defined as the effort, “to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor”.¹ Collaboration among organizations, campus staff, administration, and cross departmentally is an essential practice. Successful partnerships allow us to move towards our mission of fostering student success at the University of Iowa.

Inter-Organizational Collaboration²

Research has outlined positive effects for the successful integration of inter-organizational collaboration including the cultivation of new knowledge and ideas, the attainment of resources, and sharing of available tools, as well as increased impact and efficiency towards organizational commitments. Collaborative efforts promote sustainability of resources as groups are able to utilize and better understand existing resources available to them. Conclusively, a collaborative organizational culture creates a unifying aspect among all individuals working towards the same goals.

The Harvard Business Review³ outlines four types of internal collaboration models: Innovation Mall, Innovation Community, Elite Circle, and Consortium. These models differ in the level of participation among individuals as well as the organizational governance model. Examples of each are included in the table below, adapted from The Harvard Business Review to apply to division efforts:

	Open Participation	Closed Participation
Hierarchical Governance Models	<i>Innovation Mall</i> The VPSL poses a problem of which anyone can propose solutions to. The VPSL determines which solution is preferred.	<i>Elite Circle</i> A committee of Division staff selected by the VPSL to work on a given problem and develop solutions. Ultimately the VPSL will select the preferred solution.
Flat Governance Models	<i>Innovation Community</i> Anyone within the Division can propose problems, offer solutions, and decide which to use.	<i>Consortium</i> A work group made up of individuals selected by the VPSL that is tasked with defining the problem(s), coordinating progress and determining a solution.

¹ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Collaborate. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collaborate>

² Hardy, C., Phillips, N. and Lawrence, T.B. (2003). Resources, Knowledge and Influence: The Organizational Effects of Interorganizational Collaboration*. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(321-347). [Retrieved link](#)

³ Pisano, G. P., & Verganti, R. (2008). Which kind of collaboration is right for you. *Harvard business review*, 86(12), 78-86. [Retrieved link](#).

External Partnerships⁴⁵

Partnering between organizations provides for mutual benefit as well. Among the many forms of external collaboration that occur, three core commonalities are found across the board. These include individual autonomy, pooling of resources, and contracting. External partnership provides the opportunity for organizations to work toward a similar goal while continuing to operate independently of one another.

Characteristics of Collaborative Partnerships

Whether among organizations, business partners, or between practitioners within the Division of Student Life, effective collaborative partnerships operate with the same principles. Incorporating the following seven tips for success in collaborative efforts is a helpful guide for achieving maximum potential amid team initiatives.

Tips for Success⁶

1. Establish clear definitions and agreements on the roles of partners in the collaborative process.
2. Keep communication open within teams, never withholding information necessary to carry out tasks.
3. Reach consensus about goals and methods for completing projects or tasks.
4. Offer recognition of, and respect for, the contributions of all collaborators.
5. Carefully identify obstacles and address problems cooperatively as they occur.
6. Place group goals above personal satisfaction and/or recognition.
7. Be willing to apologize for missteps and forgive others for mistakes.

Organizational partnerships also provide a greater community of resources to pull from to tackle a project, whether they be materialistic or fiscal. Finally, contractual relationships provide a set of guidelines to ensure both parties understand their role in the partnership and intended outcomes.

Integrating Collaborative Techniques

A hypothetical situation calling for successful collaboration on a large and small scale could look like the following scenario:

An idea is presented in a Division of Student Life brainstorming session to integrate a tutoring center within Iowa Memorial Union. The center would provide a reserved room in the IMU for students to meet their tutors in a quiet, campus space to help facilitate their meetings. In order to pursue this idea, collaboration would be essential. This collaborative effort would merge efforts of the Division of Student Life with that of University College. The primary departmental partnerships would be between the IMU, to provide the space, and the office of Academic Support and Retention, who would coordinate tutors to fill the space. Each of the involved parties should be represented on a task-force assigned to further cultivate the idea. If this cannot be

⁴ Caglio, A. & Ditollo, A. (2008). Controlling collaboration between firms how to build and maintain successful relationships with external partners. Oxford; Burlington, MA: CIMA.

⁵ Parisi, P. (2017). The power of partnerships: Why businesses are better together. *The Globe and Mail*. [Retrieved link](#)

⁶ Doyle, A. (2020, January 18). Collaboration Skills for Workplace Success. [Retrieved link](#)

achieved, regular communication would need to be facilitated among all groups involved from the very early stages of vetting the idea of a tutoring center to the implementation and promotion of the center.

Collaborative ventures should be goal driven through an agreed process. All parties involved in a collaborative venture should provide equal contributions throughout the process, from the beginning stages of idea generation to project completion. The team should come to a consensus of the unifying goals and intended outcomes of the project together in the beginning, as well as the means or method of achieving them. The outcomes and goals should be reflected upon regularly to guide progress and drive the project's process.

The foundation of successful collaboration involves effective communication among stakeholders. Stakeholders should be defined as all parties involved in a collaborative project. Communication should be held to the standard of transparency of decision making and process among staff, the department, the university, and inter-organizationally. Communication should also be facilitated regularly among these stakeholders.

Each collaborative effort is unique, so it is important to incorporate goals, strategies, tips for success and a process as is appropriate for the endeavor and group at hand.