

Glossary of Terms



ALLIANCES (ALSO, STRATEGIC ALLIANCES)

Non-profit alliances involve sharing knowledge, expertise, and innovation between organizations in the areas of services and solutions to social problems. Oriented toward common social goals, alliances involve shared/common strategic objectives (such as expanding clientele or reducing risk and costs), as well as a focus on achieving policy objectives through advocacy. In contrast to what occurs in the business sector, non-profit alliances seldom involve transfer of liquid or capital assets between organizations; however, they may develop a formalized structure depending on their function. This term is used interchangeably with partnerships and coalitions.

COALITIONS

Coalitions facilitate control over a common environment by coordinating information and actions. Minimally structured, these impermanent affiliations among organizations are mainly organized around common terms of reference or decision-making protocols. While a coalition may reflect established business or political interests, most often it is oriented toward advocacy in the public interest, especially favoured by health-promoters to achieve community-level interventions in such areas as social marketing or advocacy campaigns. In advocacy circles, a coalition forgoes a vision development process in favour of one that facilitates agreement on larger strategic objectives. This term is used interchangeably with alliances and partnerships.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is a distinct form of cooperation between autonomous, self-governing organizations who work together in order to achieve a common goal. For this purpose, the non-profit entities come together to enhance service delivery, often prioritizing ideal practices such as decentralization and egalitarianism. This type of collaboration consists of well-defined and mutually beneficial relationships, common agendas, visions and program functions.

It involves jointly developed structures and processes for sharing resources, risk, responsibility, mutual authority, accountability, and rewards, creating a trans-organizational system (TS). Collaborations are found in areas such as planning, delivery, intake and assessment, monitoring, referrals, case coordination, back office functions, etc.

COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

CCIs facilitate the engagement of diverse sectors to work collaboratively over the long term in order to tackle a wide range of interrelated issues. They encourage partnering and collaborative work, including alliances among disciplines, sectors, and community members that impact whole systems to effect neighborhood and city-wide change processes, often undertaking whole community or inter-sectoral strategic planning.

CONVENER

The role of the convener in a collaborative process is to bring all legitimate stakeholders to the table. The power to convene may be derived from the holding of a formal office, through a long standing trustworthy reputation, or from a reputation as an unbiased expert on the problem. The convener role requires both the legitimate demonstration of this authority to organize the domain and the ability to induce people to participate fully.

CONSOLIDATION

Consolidation involves the merging and amalgamation of formerly autonomous organizations to form a distinctly new entity comprised of all combined resources. Consolidation differs from partnership, alliances and collaborations in that it eliminates governance structures of previously autonomous organizations.

CONSORTIUM

A term borrowed from the business sector, consortiums allow for mutually beneficial sharing of diverse skills, capabilities, and knowledge among several independent entities (individuals, organizations, governments) that agree to undertake joint work together toward a common goal. Member organizations remain autonomous, with consortium control limited to specific joint activities, while the rights and obligations of each member are clearly delineated. A consortium may be a temporary arrangement, but is usually a more permanent collaborative arrangement.

CO-OPETITION

A type of collaboration (cooperation) between competing enterprises, who consult and coordinate with each other to maximize benefits and minimize risk in a common market. In the business sector, cartels are examples of companies working together in order to limit fair competition (e.g. Apple and Microsoft building closer ties on software development). NPOs may also cooperate in this way to specialize service delivery to a common clientele in order to minimize duplication. One example is the disability sector in Toronto coming together to create a joint recruitment campaign for workers.

INTER-ORGANIZATION

Inter-organization refers to the linkages in relationships and processes that exist between and across organizations, tying them together – as opposed to relationships and processes within an organization (intra-organization). Examples of inter-organizational ties include partnerships, coalitions and alliances.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Information Technology (IT) is a field concerned with the study, design, development, implementation, support and management of computer-based information systems – especially software applications and computer hardware. Overall, IT involves electronics, computers, and software programs to store, convert, protect, process, mine, transmit and retrieve information in secure and sustainable ways.

JOINT VENTURES

Essentially, a Joint Venture (JV) is a new entity (trans-organization system) formed between two or more parties to undertake project activity together. These parties agree to jointly contribute resources, and share revenues, expenses, and control, throughout the duration of one specific project only, or as an ongoing relationship. This is in contrast to a strategic alliance, which involves no equity stake by the participants, and is a much less rigid arrangement. JVs may also involve multiple stakeholders and types of stakeholders, and may involve international partners. They are always formalized through contractual agreements, often becoming a corporation (non-profit or for-profit), a company, or other legal structure (depending on tax and liability considerations).

MANAGEMENT SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Management Service Organizations (MSOs) are private and non-profit organizations that provide operational support to non-profit organizations. Sometimes the service is funded by a funder or a foundation, and provides management and/or consulting services to their clientele. In the area of membership associations, MSOs handle the administrative tasks necessary for the functioning of a membership association, including the provision of office space, staffing, financial and information-management services.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PROCESSES

Multi-stakeholder processes refer to the nature of a collaborative process rather than a type of collaboration. For instance, a multi-stakeholder process can be considered an alliance, coalition, consortium, joint venture, network, or partnership, consisting of many parties who share similar interests and objectives, and work together to create a mutually beneficial alignment of system components. Also, members usually share equal decision-making power, except when applied by a government for policy consultation purposes that involve input and recommendations only. This process is often used with public interest issues such as health or environment (e.g. public consultations about Medicare).

NETWORK (SEE ALSO SOCIAL NETWORK)

This concept usually refers to the structure created by processes such as social networking and technological networking (which often work together). A network may be considered an emerging form of collaborative organization. A good illustration of the network concept might be the image of a spider web. In broad terms, a social network involves relationships between individuals and organizations with compatible interests, who maintain ongoing connections for practical, ideological or sentimental purposes (e.g. professional opportunities, political aims, or friendship).

PARTNERSHIP

In the business sector, collaborative members often avoid this term because of its legalistic connotations (especially related to liability). Currently, the term is favoured by government policy-makers who most often equate it with private/public partnerships (sometimes it serves as a code term for outsourcing and contracting out government services to the for-profit sector, often controlled by contractual agreement). The value of partnership often assumes inclusive and equal decision-making and is often expressed as “working in partnership with.” The term is used interchangeably with alliances and coalitions in the non-profit sector.

SOCIAL NETWORK (ALSO NETWORK)

A social network is an evolving social structure made up of nodes (generally individuals or organizations) that are linked by one or more specific types of relationships (e.g. financial exchange, friendship, enmity, trade, communication links, transport routes, etc.).

STRATEGIC ALLIANCES (ALSO, ALLIANCES; STRATEGIC PARTNERING)

This is the most frequently used term to describe a cooperative arrangement between two or more organizations designed to achieve a shared strategic goal and gain competitive advantage in the private sector. In the business private sector, alliances may be equity-based (e.g. stock investments, joint capital ventures, majority investment).

STRATEGIC FIT (ALSO, STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT)

Strategic Fit denotes the degree of compatibility, the extent to which activities of organizations working in partnership complement each other in beneficial ways. The strategic fit of one organization with another is often a factor in decisions about whether to collaborate; thus, success of a strategic alliance or collaboration will be affected by the degree of strategic fit. Advantages of good strategic fit include cost reduction, and transfer of knowledge and skills.

TRANS-ORGANIZATION SYSTEM

Trans-organizations systems (TS) is a technical term to describe supra-systems that consist of separate autonomous organizations that span organizational boundaries. A TS functions as more than the sum of its separate constituents by enabling decision-making and task-performance on behalf of member groups, who retain autonomous identities and goals. Examples include alliances, coalitions, partnerships, and joint ventures.

COLLABORATION REFERENCE GROUP MEMBERS:

The following members were invited to contribute their knowledge of the community non-profit sector in Toronto – in particular with respect to the Wellesley Institute's three priority social determinants of health and their knowledge of the sector's involvement in collaborative initiatives. In addition, they made suggestions regarding key people to invite to participate in the research activities.

MANY THANKS TO:

Mini Alakkatusery, Senior Program Officer
Toronto Community Foundation

Chris Brillinger, Director, Social Development Division, City of Toronto
Community Resource Unit, City of Toronto

Rob Howarth, Coordinator
Toronto Neighbourhood Centres

Amanuel Melles, Director of Organizational Capacity Building, United Way
United Way of Greater Toronto

Collette Murphy, Community Program Director
George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation

Tonya Surman, Executive Director
Centre for Social Innovation

Winston Tinglin, Director of Community Engagement
Community Social Planning Council of Toronto

Charlotte Young, Director of Practice
ENVision...synergy