



## QUESTIONS TO UNDERSTAND A CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

Cross-sector collaboration can be complex and sometimes opaque, bringing together multiple stakeholders with differing institutional logics, motivations, and practices, who are often navigating ambiguous decision-making processes with varying formality. These questions are intended to help those interested or involved in a particular cross-sector collaboration better understand the complexities and nuances of the program or initiative. Because there are many approaches to partnership, not every question here will be useful for every cross-sector collaboration.

Considering the answers to these questions can be helpful for a range of users, including:

- ❖ Individuals or organizations who are developing a case study about a specific cross-sector collaboration
- ❖ Individuals or organizations considering becoming involved in a cross-sector collaboration who want to know more about the health of the initiative (e.g., potential funders or partners)
- ❖ Individuals or organizations involved in a cross-sector collaboration who are tasked with communicating key information about the collaboration's work to external stakeholders (e.g., members of the press)

*These questions reflect our thinking at the time of publication — They are occasionally updated based on conversations with practitioners, scholars, and other supporters of cross-sector collaboration.*



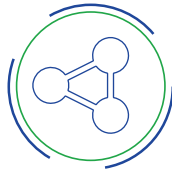
## Who's Involved?

- ⚡ **What offices, agencies, organizations, and companies are partnering in this collaboration?** What individual(s) will represent each of them within the partnership?
- ⚡ **Have the partners enlisted the assistance of a facilitator, negotiator, manager, or other third party to assist with the design, implementation, or evaluation of the collaboration?** If so, who is this individual or organization, how was the individual or organization chosen, and what is their track record of success in previous cross-sector collaborations? Who is providing funding for this assistance?
- ⚡ **Have the organizations and individuals involved worked together previously?** If so, were those relationships successful (e.g., were they characterized by trust and goodwill and did they produce desired outcomes)?
- ⚡ **Have the organizations and individuals involved participated in previous cross-sector collaborations, whether with these same partners or with others?** If so, were they successful or not?
- ⚡ **How is partners' current collaborative work similar to or different from their previous work?** (e.g., What differences or similarities are there in goals, governance, resources?)
- ⚡ **What process was used to determine whom to include in the partnership?**
- ⚡ **Have any critical partners been left out?** If so, who are they, why were they left out, and what are the potential downsides of their not being included?
- ⚡ **Has the public been consulted on this partnership's work in a meaningful way?** If so, how (e.g., through public meetings or hearings, formal surveys, public comment periods, ballot measures)? If not, are partners considering a public consultation process of some kind? Was/Is the public consultation process required or voluntary? Has/Will this process focus on engaging members of the public who are most likely to be affected by the collaboration's work?
- ⚡ **What is the collaboration's process for acting upon the feedback received through the public consultation process?**
- ⚡ **What signs of public support or opposition are observable, if any?** What is the reason for this public support or opposition? Does the opposition pose a risk to the work and outcomes of the collaboration? If so, how will the collaboration mitigate that risk?



## Why Was a Cross-sector Approach Chosen?

- ⚡ **What is the partnership's "genesis story"?** When did it begin to take shape? What individual(s) or organization(s) initiated the partnership, and what initial problem, issue, or event led them to do so? When and why did each partner get involved in the partnership?
- ⚡ **What other approaches were considered or attempted before choosing a cross-sector approach?** Did an individual or organization consider or attempt addressing this problem on their own before pursuing a cross-sector solution? If so, why wasn't that effort successful? If not, why wasn't that attempted before involving cross-sector partners?
- ⚡ **Why was a cross-sector approach ultimately chosen over other potential approaches?** What evidence, if any, was used to make that decision? If the public sector is involved, was a formal analysis used to determine why a cross-sector approach was pursued?
- ⚡ **What problem or issue is the collaboration aiming to address?**
- ⚡ **In what terms is the problem being defined?** For example, is the problem being defined financially (e.g., cost issues), in terms of values (e.g., accessibility issues, equity issues), operationally (e.g., ineffective program), or otherwise?
- ⚡ **Do all partners agree with how the problem is defined?** If not, where are there differences? Do partners anticipate that those differences will create problems for the collaboration? Do partners have sector- or organization-related biases related to how the problem is defined?
- ⚡ **What information and data are partners reviewing to understand the problem or issue?**
- ⚡ **What program or initiative is the collaboration proposing to address the problem or issue?**



## What Resources Are Involved?

- ⚡ **What resources does each partner bring to the partnership, whether financial or non-financial (e.g., convening power, legal expertise, access to information, authority)?** Do partners require approval from internal stakeholders to appropriate these resources to the partnership? Are the individuals who have decision-making authority over these resources “at the table”?
- ⚡ **Is one or more partners exchanging ownership or stewardship of resources with other partners during the course of the collaboration?**
- ⚡ **How are resources within the partnership governed (e.g., jointly or by one partner alone)?**
- ⚡ **Does the partnership have the financial and non-financial resources to achieve its goals?** If not, what steps will the collaboration take to obtain the resources to achieve its goals? What process was used to determine the resources necessary for the collaboration to achieve its goals?
- ⚡ **Who is providing the funding necessary to accomplish the collaboration’s aims, whether members of the collaboration or external parties?** If each partnering organization has not provided financial resources to the partnership, why not?
- ⚡ **What process was used to determine the partnership’s funding structure?**
- ⚡ **If there is a contract or memorandum of understanding (MOU) involved, who is negotiating on behalf of the public sector?** Does that individual have previous experience negotiating contracts or MOUs between government and private-sector partners? If so, what is their track record of success on those previous initiatives? If not, what steps will this individual take to ensure a “fair deal” for the public sector?
- ⚡ **What taxpayer resources are allocated to this project?** How much does the partnership’s work depend on these resources? Is there a potential for the amount of taxpayer resources devoted to this initiative to increase?



## What Risks and Rewards Is Each Partner Taking On?

- ⚡ **What does each partner have to gain by joining the collaboration, whether financial or non-financial benefits (e.g., access to technical expertise, increased political influence, improved brand reputation or standing within the community, access to data)?** Do these potential gains present conflicts of interest for any partners?
- ⚡ **Which partner has the most to gain if the partnership achieves its goals?** Is that partner’s contribution to the collaboration appropriate considering this potential gain?
- ⚡ **What risks is each partner taking on by joining the collaboration, whether financial, reputational, political, or otherwise?**
- ⚡ **Which partner has the most to lose if the partnership does not achieve its goals?** Is that partner’s level of involvement and authority in the collaboration appropriate considering this potential loss?
- ⚡ **How will the partnership’s work affect the public, in both the short and long term, either positively or negatively, both if it achieves its goals and if it does not?**



## How Are Partners Working Together?

- ⚡ **How are decisions made within the collaboration?** (For example, do all partners make every decision together? Does a select group of partners or representatives from partnering organizations make decisions? Does the collaboration require absolute consensus among partners or some form of majority rule? Do certain partners have authority to make certain decisions without consulting others?) How and why did the partnership decide on this particular decision-making process? What are its benefits and drawbacks?
- ⚡ **What formal or informal authority or influence does each partner have over the collaboration's governance and project management structure?** How was each partner's authority or influence over these key design choices determined? Was there any conflict in determining each partner's level of authority? If so, how was the conflict resolved?
- ⚡ **What responsibilities is each partner taking on through the partnership?** How were these responsibilities decided and agreed upon? Do these respective responsibilities draw on the assets and strengths of each partner?
- ⚡ **How are partners (both organizations and individuals representing them), accountable to one another,** whether through formal mechanisms like contracts, MOUs, or partnership agreements, or informal mechanisms like the desire to protect organizational reputation or maintain key strategic relationships? What are the consequences if a partner is not following through on its commitments, both for the partner and the collaboration?
- ⚡ **What disputes have arisen during the partnership — whether about the partnership's processes, goals, or otherwise?** How have they been resolved?
- ⚡ **What examples is the partnership learning from — whether successes or failures, partnerships or single-sector initiatives, addressing similar or different issues?** How are these examples informing the collaboration's work?



## What Are the Potential or Actual Outcomes?

- ⚡ **How does the collaboration define success?** How do partners differ in their definitions of success, if at all? How are those differences being managed by the partnership?
- ⚡ **How is the collaboration measuring success?** What data, whether quantitative or qualitative, are being used, and how are the data being collected?
- ⚡ **When will the partnership be able to assess whether it has been successful or is showing signs of success?** Will it share interim signs of success or failure with the public or other stakeholders? How will the collaboration course correct if interim assessments suggest it will not meet its goals?
- ⚡ **What will the partnership do if it does not achieve its goals in the decided timeframe?**
- ⚡ **How will the partnership be held accountable for its outcomes, whether by the public, funders, or other external and internal stakeholders?**
- ⚡ **What would be the implications for failure for each partner?**
- ⚡ **What would be the implications of failure for the public?**
- ⚡ **What would be the implications of failure for the issue the collaboration is seeking to address?** (e.g., Could resources committed to the collaboration have been used in a different, successful way?)
- ⚡ **How are partners managing the risk of failure?**
- ⚡ **Which partner will own what at the end of the partnership** (e.g., assets such as physical infrastructure, data, or intellectual property)? How did the collaboration decide who would own what at the end of the partnership?