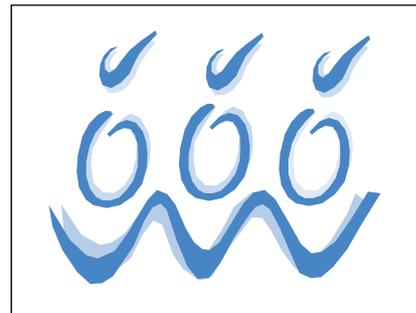


Reality Check

Issue Two, January 2010

The challenges facing our economy have forced a new way of business for nonprofit and public organizations and the programs that fund their work. Funders, contract managers, and leaders face a higher level of scrutiny to ensure that funds are managed according to program regulations and to demonstrate maximum success in achieving desired outcomes; return on investment has become paramount. This monthly e-bulletin is dedicated to programs, organizations, and their leadership; promoting authentic partnerships and leaders with capacity, intuition, and collaborative skills that can transform systems, change lives, and maximize resources.



 **Axis
Group I, LLC**

(423) 768-0476 www.axisgroup1.net



The Partnership Factor

Building Partnerships between Systems, Programs and the People

According to Webster's dictionary, the word partner implies "a joint interest, a companion, a person who shares, or a player on the same team." The human services arena has applied the term "partnership" for decades as a goal, behavior, or approach that includes families, consumers, providers, and programs collaborating at various levels of service planning, delivery, and implementation. Systems development, service planning and delivery, and policy change all proclaim to be built upon or aim for partnerships between *all* stakeholders. We have seen programs where families or consumers govern the development, implementation, and evaluation of their services. The country is host to thousands of models where systems, providers, and target populations gather and work collaboratively toward common goals.

The benefits of partnership have been well documented; more coordinated systems, fewer gaps, better outcomes, maximization of resources, response to the real needs of the system and the people it serves, cross stakeholder ownerships for outcomes, program transparency, and cultural competence that is driven by common goals. The benefits of NOT partnering (*Please, let's be honest*)

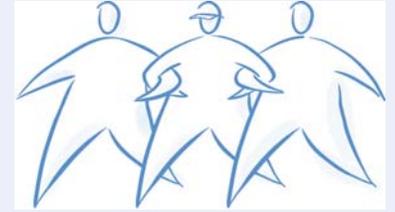
might include decreased overall costs, faster service delivery, the ability to do things within one's comfort zone, and program ability to maintain its policies and procedures without adaptation or change. Likely, we can all conclude that the benefits of partnering at all levels of service delivery planning, development, and implementation far outweigh the benefits of not partnering at all.

Sound easy? Sound like a done deal? You *know* better!

Effective partnerships do not "just happen." They take time, energy, effort, and patience to build skills to communicate clearly and collaborate effectively; contributing to the development of successful partnerships between and among all stakeholders. As described by the Pacer Center in **Working Together**, 2006, the art of partnership is built upon an intentional effort that capitalizes on the potential for positive outcomes. The Partnership Factor becomes "*intent*"; the intent to make it work; the intent to do what is necessary to make it work; and, the intent to sacrifice comfort for better outcomes that are family or consumer driven, culturally competent, and built upon authentic participation and leadership within all stakeholder populations.

Intentional Partnerships

We can assume that the intent of partners is a major factor to its success. The key elements, discussed below, are easily influenced and impacted by partner intent.



Goals or Outcomes: The success of a partnership will require that the members or the “partnership team” all share and anticipate a common goal or outcome. This must be clear and built upon consensus and should be considered the “intended” outcome by all partners.

Motive: Partners have a variety of motives when they come to the table. Partnerships do not require a common motive since these may be different for each partner. Some motives may be personal and others professionally driven. Motives is the spark that ignites the passion and energy of partners. A motive may be to secure a service, while the desired outcome is improved functioning. Motives should not alter or interfere with the overall goals or anticipated outcomes.

Knowledge: The partners do NOT all have an equal knowledge base. This is a partnership myth. Some have a degree, others have an expertise that evolved from years of work in the field, and the family or consumer has personal knowledge that cannot be replaced by education. The key is a willingness to share this knowledge, contributing to the knowledge base of the partnership itself.

Role: The role of different partners should be definable. Specific roles might include providing information regarding program resources, serving as the point person of information on the needs of the individual or family, assisting the team in understanding policy and procedure, making necessary changes within the system to accommodate and respond to needs, or paying for the services deemed necessary to meet the desired goals or outcomes. While planning and decision-making can be an activity, it is a team role and not explicit to one partner or another.

Access: Intentional partnership is dependent upon equal access to the information that is necessary to meet the goals and outcomes. Different members will have information that can contribute to the final outcome and hoarding this information as a source of power or to manipulate the outcome makes them a non-partner. It immediately negates their partner status and puts them on the outside of the team. Partnerships will require shared access to all relevant information. The team of partners should decide what is relevant and what is not. Not all information is relevant.

Capacity: Partners will emerge with differing levels of capacity and abilities that dictate what they can and cannot contribute to the partnership. The beauty of a partnership is that capacity is defined by the total partnership, not the individuals making up the partnership. Their skills and abilities complement one another and collectively they emerge with the capacity to meet the anticipated goals and outcomes.

Partnership is not about equality. It is about utilizing the contributions of all stakeholders in a manner that respects, trusts, values, and coordinates their expertise toward common goals and outcomes. The goal may be focused upon individualized service planning, education plans, systems change, developing or changing policy, or ensuring that programs are accountable and responsive to the needs of consumers, families, and communities. This requires intentional efforts to create goals and outcomes that are based upon consensus, motives that are in balance with the anticipated outcomes, a common knowledge base, defined roles, and agreed upon information that is available to the entire partnership.

For more information on this topic and others:

Axis Group I, LLC, Phone: (423) 768-0476 Fax: www.axisgroup1.net
cjwells@axisgroup1.net