

**The Four Rules for Successful Collaboration**

***1. The scope of the collaborative project is clearly defined.***

What exactly do you want to accomplish together? For example, you may start with wanting to improve outreach efforts to family caregivers in a particular neighborhood. What activities will be undertaken? And how will you know if outreach efforts have improved? As specifically as possible, describe the activities and the standards by which you will measure both activities and outcomes.

***2. Each partner knows how the collaboration will advance the interests of its organization and clients.***

Beyond the common goals, what does each party want? Community organizers know that to make a coalition work, self-interest plays a critical role. One director may be worried about her organization's financial health, another director may want access to new services, and another may see working together as a way to gain power in the political process. Whatever the personal goals are of individual leaders or specific interests of individual organizations, it helps to be honest about them so that no important agendas remain "hidden." In addition to discussing what each party wants, it may also be important to address each party's fears and concerns.

***3. Role and responsibilities have been defined; mechanisms for communication and joint accountability are in place.***

What can each party give? Even among "small" agencies, each with the same or similar missions and clientele, there will be differences in financial stability, management capacity, facilities, board leadership, and access to political power. What resources is each party able to give, and what is each willing to give to support the joint effort? (Collectively these resources must match the requirements of the project scope discussed in Rule 1. If they don't, either the scope it too broad, or you have the wrong mix of organizations at the table.) Beyond "who will do what by when?" how will you hold yourselves accountable? Regular meetings, financial incentives/penalties related to performance, other?

***4. The relationship works: there is enough trust and respect among the key players to support the level of risk and interdependence involved in the project.***

The most difficult aspect of collaborations, and the least concrete, is the relationship between the partners. A low intensity project such as sharing information on service schedules does not involve "high stakes" and therefore requires less trust and the respect between partners. However, in a joint service contract the level of trust and the respect between partners is the intangible element that will either make or break the project: no contract can spell out every possible eventuality. Are we able to communicate effectively? Are the right people involved? Can the relationship among the participants support the kind of honest talk and genuine listening required to work together successfully?