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New England Resource Center *for* Higher Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify techniques for designing and maintaining effective multi-institutional collaborative projects that will also encourage the success of each individual institution. It contains recommendations regarding the formation and management of the networks. First, it reviews project goals and desired outcomes, with consideration of whether collaboration should be a means or an end. Next, the paper turns to strategies for forming and managing networks, with particular attention to the selection and role of a "project leader." It then considers the role and responsibility of institutional participants, reviewing criteria for network participation and arguing in favor of a highly selective admissions process.

About the Author

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About the New England Resource Center for Higher Education

The New England Resource center for Higher Education (NERCHE), founded in 1988, is dedicated to improving colleges and universities as workplaces, communities, and organizations, NERCHE addresses this issue through think tanks, research, consulting, professional development, and publications.

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Introduction

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) has launched an initiative designed to support colleges and universities interested in significant institutional transformation. WKKF developed an ambitious set of goals for this initiative, primarily designed to support institutions engaged in institutional transformation in ways that are responsive to the needs of students and communities, but that also create capacity for change across sectors of higher education. The initiative involves the creation of networks that will be engaged in a range of inter-institutional collaborative projects linked by common themes and goals. Before establishing these networks, however, WKKF wanted to learn more about the design, goals, outcomes, and advantages and disadvantages of multi-institutional collaborative projects; stated another way, WKKF wanted to understand better "what works."

The context: a look at networks and the culture of higher education:

The relationships among higher education institutions are growing more complex. At one level, colleges and universities vigorously compete: for able and diverse students, for talented faculty, for visionary leaders, for scarce financial resources, for grant support from the government and foundations, for recognition and prestige, for placement of students in graduate programs or good jobs, for high rankings in publications such as *U.S. News and World Report*, and, of course, on athletic fields. As a result, higher education in the United States consists of some 3500 highly autonomous institutions -- even within state systems -- each striving to achieve and maintain security and distinction.

At many levels, however, colleges and universities work together. Some examples include:

- Supporting faculty or administrator memberships in associations and resource organizations, allowing people with shared duties or interests to meet, share strategies, gain insight, and develop professionally.

- Forming or joining consortia, usually regional, to enhance cooperative academic programs, faculty development programs, technological development, administrative costs, and special projects.

- Organizing student or faculty exchange programs; academic associations.

- Supporting and participating in efforts surrounding specific public policy issues (e.g., diversity initiatives or service learning) funded through foundations or associations that include a requirement of collaboration or cooperation.

- Serving as research sites with other institutions.

- Forming partnerships with institutions to enhance student learning opportunities (e.g., a three-plus-three-year undergraduate-graduate program at neighboring institutions).

- Established institutions serving as mentors and consultants to institutions interested in enhancing specific practices (e.g., Yale University offering replication services for its unique program for training police officers and psychologists to work with victims of crimes).

These examples illustrate the complexity of the relationships among higher education institutions. They also demonstrate how ad hoc the interconnectedness is historically. For the most part, no formal mechanisms manage the various relationships at the many levels institutionally. Institutions tend to be so decentralized that formalizing relationships through a single point of contact or an actual agreement have been historically uncommon. One exception is the formation of consortia, such as Five Colleges, Inc. (a cooperative venture among five institutions -- Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts Amherst -- that includes faculty and student exchanges, cross-registration opportunities, library borrowing, meal exchange, special events, and partnerships with local communities), that serve as "clearinghouses" for a variety of collaborative activities among the involved institutions.

The purpose of this paper:

Understanding, then, that colleges and universities have a culture of autonomy and generally a history of ad hoc approaches to working together, WKKF asked: with respect to multi-institutional efforts, what works and what does not work? This paper seeks to address those questions. Its purpose is to identify techniques for designing and maintaining effective multi-institutional collaborative projects that will also encourage the success of each individual institution. It contains recommendations regarding the formation and management of the networks. First, it reviews project goals and desired outcomes, with consideration of whether collaboration should be a means or an end. Next, the paper turns to strategies for forming and managing networks, with particular attention to the selection and role of a "project leader." It then considers the role and responsibility of institutional participants, reviewing criteria for network participation and arguing in favor of a highly selective admissions process.

In the last two sections, the paper includes recommendations for managing the networks once established and tools to increase the likelihood of success. It concludes with comments on assessing outcomes and institutional change.

Methods

To discover these techniques, I interviewed 17 people (referred to as "interviewees") from colleges and universities, centers, foundations, consulting organizations, and higher education programs who had been actively engaged in multi-institutional alliances (see Appendix A for a list of interviewees). Thirteen of the interviewees had responsibility for leading or managing such projects; five of the interviewees had served as a representative of a participating institution (some interviewees fell into both categories). The interviews were conducted over the telephone. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours, with most in the one to two hour range. I followed an interview guide. Summaries of the interviews were then transcribed and coded using a software program called "Ethnograph, V.4." Many interviewees sent written materials or references.

Note that any quotes (below) attributable to interviewees are paraphrased. The interviews were not taped.

Collaboration as a means or an end?

Although colleges and universities are independent and essentially self interested, carefully designed and managed cooperation can have profound effects. As one interviewee for this paper said, "Institutions are doing things on their own, but they could be doing them bigger and better through collaboration." Another agreed that the results of collaborative projects "will almost *always* be better results." Another person interviewed focused on administrative efficiency and the notion of pooling resources. He asked, "Why are colleges and universities still mowing their own lawns?" "The advantage," one interviewee commented, "is that collaboration is stimulating and energizing."

Nonetheless, *collaboration should never be an end itself.* The goals of the project influence (1) whether it should be multi-institutional and (2) how it should be structured and managed. Accordingly, identifying project goals is paramount.

One interviewee pointed out:

> It may well be better to do something alone. The test should be, "What do you want to accomplish that you could do better through working with others?" Another way to analyze potential collaborative

> projects might be, “Is the task or challenge greater than one institution can handle?”

Another interviewee lamented, “The driving force behind collaboration, currently, is that it is required by the funders and foundations as a prerequisite for getting money. This is not enough of an incentive.”

One interviewee urged that collaborative projects be formed around “stretch goals,” goals that are *significantly* more ambitious than minor improvements here and there. “These projects should involve more than merely ‘doing something better.’ They need to involve *big* transformation."

One interviewee stressed, and others agreed, that:

> Multi-institutional projects are the best way -- perhaps the only way -- to achieve an industry-wide focus on a desired change. They should be used when the underlying task involves a movement, a passion, or a significant shift in the culture of higher education.

Participants identified learning communities and environments, general education, diversity, and civic engagement as examples of areas where significant commitment is needed.

Several interviewees indicated that a desired goal should be permanent relationships, including mergers, associations, partnerships, and consortia. This is consistent with the literature on collaboration and cooperation. In his book, *The Evolution of Cooperation,* Robert Axelrod stresses that to maximize the effectiveness of cooperation, parties need to be together frequently and nearly “threatened” by the probability of a prolonged relationship. Axelrod suggests a variety of methods to promote collaboration, such as:

> making the interactions between the players more durable and frequent, teaching the participants to care about each other, and teaching them to understand the value of reciprocity (Axelrod, 1984, p. 23).

In other words, the understanding that interaction will continue indefinitely is critical.

A final thought on why multi-institutional collaborative projects can work effectively -- perhaps more so in higher education than in the business or political worlds. It is the influence and unique needs of faculty that make multi-institutional collaborative projects appropriate. As one interviewee noted:

> Whenever we talk about institutional transformation, we have to think

> about faculty. There can be *no* meaningful institutional transformation without faculty involvement. We need to have a vehicle for "retraining" faculty, and yet faculty cannot stand the notion of being "trained." (This is why we call it "development.") So when you put together faculty development projects, which is what this ultimately has to be, you should model it after the best multi-institutional faculty development programs . . . .

One interviewee maintained a *good* collaborative process has special value for faculty participating in multi-institutional projects. The collaboration itself is a very much desired add-on in their lives:

> I believe the faculty who participate in collaborative projects value good collaboration, even as an end in itself, and good collaboration is, for them, "enough," even when they recognize that other goals are important too. . . The memories of "good collaboration," in fact, may be the only glue that holds a project together over time and is one of the most crucial motivators. . . I am suspecting that, understandably, administrative leaders will put more emphasis upon extra-collaborative goals and are much more willing to conclude that "collaboration should never be an end in itself" than are faculty when they are describing what is more important to them in a cross-institutional project.

Understanding, however, that collaboration is not the appropriate tool in all cases, when should a project involve more than one institution? Collaboration should govern the structure of a project when *one or more* of the following exist:

1. When the underlying task is more than a professional association: it is a *movement*.

2. When the task is extremely complicated and ambitious.

3. When the task involves significant intellectual inquiry; when it involves an ambitious learning experience for faculty or institutional leaders.

4. When the task or desired result is beyond the reach of an entity acting alone.

5. When it is a way to share resources and do more for less.

6. When it is likely to result in a permanent affiliation, partnership, merger, association, network, or consortium.

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Project goals and outcomes: a mix of the individual and collective

The top priority in any multi-institutional project should be the individual participating institutions. But attention also needs to be paid to the collective and to informing the field of higher education in general.

The primary project goal: institutional capacity building

A common model for multi-institutional projects involves representatives meeting several times a year, hiring experts and facilitators to run workshops and retreats, sharing information and data, and then putting on a conference where materials are distributed. Most interviewees agreed that this model simply is not enough to justify the time and money needed to support a multi-institutional collaborative project.

Every collaborative project should be designed to improve the participating institutions. Participating institutions need to possess something one interviewee called "mutual self interest." So, for example, it is not enough that a goal be identifying new ways of thinking about a subject (e.g., liberal learning, diversity, civic engagement). Several interviewees lamented that their multi-institutional projects generated good information or publications, but that they became "simply data sharing exercises." One commented, "We naively thought that the participants would act on the information and data we provided. I believe that the study had little or no impact on the institutions that participated." Thus, an explicit goal of any multi-institutional project should be institutional capacity building, described by one interviewee as "life beyond the duration of the project or limits of the seed money." Stated another way, an explicit goal of participating institutions should be *institutional reform***.** The project needs to include a mechanism to look at its impact beyond the life of the project. Several interviewees suggested that an assessment be performed five or ten years later.

What would institutional reform look like? It might vary from institution to institution, but it could include:

- Calling attention to "stretch goals" or extremely ambitious institutional agendas
- Developing new means to further those agendas
- Implementing mechanisms or restructuring organizations to empower institutional leaders to sustain efforts consistent with those agendas

Most interviewees agreed that an exciting advantage to a multi-year collaborative project is that outcomes and goals can be somewhat fluid. One said, “What is best about these kinds of projects -- and Kellogg is in the position to allow this -- is the freedom to change direction, to take advantage of few opportunities that arise.” While it is important to establish and strive for predetermined goals, it is equally important to allow the project to inform outcomes and to allow goals and outcomes to emerge as a project progresses.

Secondary goals: publications, information, conferences, models of good practice

What would “success” look like? Some of the suggested “end products” include:

- “Greater clarity” in how matters (e.g., general education, diversity, civic engagement, etc.) are viewed. This is difficult to measure, however. Interviewees suggested that it be measured by the participating institutions through self-evaluation techniques.

- Significant idea development and sharing among participants: one interviewee urged funders to support retreats and “weeks away” that are “beyond the flip chart stage.” One interviewee opined that representatives from participating institutions should be afforded the opportunity to “talk, share, write, reflect, talk, edit, and rewrite. There is an art to idea development, and it should be followed.”

- Resources and working tools: some possible products include workbooks, inventories of practice, case studies, texts, survey instruments, publications, and other “yardsticks against which other institutions can measure their own practices” based on “lessons learned” from the project. One interviewee said, “Pulling out ideas that can be shared broadly is also important, a little like dissemination but not exactly. Ideas need to be one level above ‘what we did and what worked for us,’ but not as abstract as we find in academic journals. Projects should create concepts and identify elements of the process, but not get overly theoretical.” To use an overused term of the 90s, dissemination of lessons learned needs to be “user friendly.”

- “Ya’ll come” conferences: Conferences presented by participants and open to others interested in the project are fairly typical. Some suggested that the conferences include non-participants who might have something valuable to contribute to the information pool. Publishing outlines or papers in connection with a conference is standard. Several interviewees suggested that more than one conference be held. One in the middle of the project open to others interested in the project, can shape or enhance a project.

- Finally, as indicated above, an appropriate goal and outcome includes identifying places where collaboration can work permanently.

Strategies for the formation and management of collaborative networks

Interviewees warned that collaborations can fail if they are not properly designed or maintained. Generally, careful consideration of the selection and role of the many players is important. Those players include the individual or group of people overseeing the project (“project leader”) (note: this role can carry many titles such as “lead consultant,” “project director,” “resource institution,” “resource group,” or “network coordinator”), representatives from the institutional participants, and the funding entity (“funder”). Most interviewees felt that the networks should consist of several (three to five) institutions.

Project leaders: “visiting nuns”

Every multi-institutional collaborative project requires a person or persons to control the rudder. These project leaders can take several forms:

- One person or a team of people with some special expertise hired by the funder.

- An advisory or executive committee or board (consisting of representatives either from each participating institution or from experienced “mentor” institutions) and a representative from the funder. This committee then hires some to serve as lead consultants.

- A resource group or center (e.g., NERCHE, the Council for Independent Colleges) that brings to the project a staff.

Project leaders should be chosen for their collaborative skills, their leadership skills, and their expertise.

One interviewee warned,

> It is more of a balancing act than a mandate to be either the project's inspiration or its primary expert. The balancing act for a collaborative

> leader is between being personally assertive on the one hand and being interpersonally inclusive on the other. Almost every collaborative leader I have known -- and they mostly have been within multi-institutional settings -- falls off on one side or the other. Or people perceive them to fall off on one side or he other.

Some terms interviewees used to describe the project leader include:

- strategic thinker
- broker
- liaison (between the institutions in the network and between the institutions and the funder)
- midwife
- coach
- facilitator
- moderator
- good thinker ("Good thinking can emerge at any level, but it is imperative that the project leaders be good thinkers.")
- neutral thinker
- formulator of "big ideas"
- good interviewer

One person described the project leader as "the visiting nun, whose role is to inspire them and forgive them at the same time." Another said,

> The project leader needs to be someone who knows the subject, knows higher education, has relevant expertise, knows "the territory," knows who to consult and hire, etc. It is also important that the project leader possess facilitation and management skills.

Others agreed, stating that the project leaders must possess "political savvy." One interviewee stressed that a project leader needs to have experience with collaboration and partnerships, an understanding of organizational psychology, research experience (both primary and secondary), an ability to conduct interviews, analytic skills, facilitation skills, and an ability to "take care of people."

The project leader should be responsible for the *collective goals of the project.* These include providing institutional support (e.g., technical assistance) for all of the institutions, idea sharing, making certain the project is equitably managed and participants share equally in responsibilities, and that outcomes regarding informing the literature or disseminating data are met.

The *tasks* of the project leader include:

- understanding the literature and art of collaboration and cooperation

- collecting and distributing information
- identifying experts who can serve as consultants
- sharing research findings
- providing technical assistance
- conducting research to assess the project as it is going on (or hiring someone to do that)
- organizing and running workshops, meetings, retreats, conferences, summer clinics, etc.
- making site visits
- reporting to and working with the funder
- keeping information flowing among participants
- checking the quality of communication among participants
- assuring that discussion go beneath the surface
- building consensus or making decisions based on a collaborative process that falls short of reaching a consensus

Selection of project leaders: a "chicken or egg" problem

Should the funders select the project leaders who then select the network participants? Or should the funder place an advertisement (or receive a solicitation) for networks who then band together and choose a project leader? If the project leaders are selected first, should they have a part in the selection of the network participants? This problem relates to the question discussed below: whether it is best to set up a multi-institutional collaborative project by funding first and then seeking affiliations, or affiliating first and then seeking funding.

The answer might simply lie in whether the movement is grass-roots or top-down. If the network participants (who might have a history of working together or whose representatives get together to discuss a good idea) approach a potential funder, then the project leader should probably be selected after the network is formed. If, on the other hand, the project is the result of leadership at a foundation or a resource center, then the key players are already in place and the next step is to form the networks. Either way, the project leaders should be "good thinkers about big ideas" who are committed to the mission of the project.

Support for the project leaders

Collaborative projects require a separate administrative structure, most likely around the project leaders. Project leaders need a budget that will enable them to support the participating institutions. They should have control and autonomy, as one interviewee said, "whatever it takes to create good work conditions, conditions for success." This should include money to cover secretarial services, travel, telephone expenses, transcription services (where appropriate), research, photocopying and dissemination of data and information, etc.

Forming Networks

There are basically two ways to establish multi-institutional collaborative projects: (1) Where the funder generates an idea or project and then seeks clusters of institutions interested in participating and (2) Where the institutions form alliances based on mutual self-interest and then seek funding. *There is no "best way" to form institutional clusters*. One interviewee said:

> [My funding organization] used both methods, and they worked in some ways and did not work in some ways. The key is to know when to use the first method and when to use the second method. The mistake funders make is in not having a good process for disseminating the money. My organization put the clusters together, and then gave each institution seed money. It did not put the money into a project leader or resource institution. That was a mistake.

Some funders follow an "open admissions" policy or practice where they receive applications (sometimes thousands) each year and then choose among them. Sometimes the applications come from established consortia or newly formed alliances. Other times, single applications share common themes (e.g., an urban mission), and the funders find some way to link them.

What probably matters most is where the idea for the project started. (One interviewee distinguished between "a bottom-up approach, somewhat like grounded research, versus a top-down approach.") This might seem simple, but in reality, most ideas are probably the result of a confluence of people and factors that include ideas by "big thinkers" and funders and demonstrated commitment by identifiable institutions. Projects formed around obvious institutions run the risk of being limited to the "already converted" who are the "usual suspects" and do less to expand a movement or commitment to an important policy issue.

Several interviewees suggested that the clusters be tiered. The tiers would include mentor institutions (that have a history of commitment to the project and are further along in terms of development regarding an issue) and two or three less experienced institutions that can learn from the mentor institutions.[1] The funder

[1]The mentor institutions would not serve in place of a project leader. Collaborative projects still need that structure in place. Representatives from the mentor institutions could, however, serve as an advisory board to the project leader or resource group.

would then support tiers of activity that would include a tier for mentor institutions to get together and share their accomplishments and learn from each other. The institutions in a learning position could get together as well. What would be "in it" for the mentor institutions? Recognition, an opportunity to teach, an opportunity to learn, to stimulate and sustain both collaboration and the underlying activity, and, of course, financial support.

Criteria for network participation

When forming clusters, those putting together the networks should consider *(in order of importance*) each potential network participant's:

- **Commitment to the common purpose**: Institutions need to be able to demonstrate a *serious* commitment to a project or theme. One interviewee said, "the institutions need to *clearly* explain why they want to play, what they want out of it, and what they will put into it." One interviewee suggested that clusters be made up of institutions that can prove that they are the "hungriest" or those institutions that would benefit from a "huge win in transformation." Others felt that the institution needed to demonstrate that the task is a "a passion" or "cause." One interviewee advised, "Where was the institution when it heard about the grant possibility? Did it pull things together simply to get the grant?"

- **Commitment of institutional human resources**: Institutions need to commit a significant administrative team that includes representatives from many levels. One interviewee told of an institution that committed only a few faculty members to a project who were supported only by a letter from their dean. The faculty members, though passionate about the project, lacked the administrative support (release time, secretarial support, institutional recognition and rewards) necessary to sustain a commitment to the collaborative project. "The result," the interviewee believes, "will be *no change* on that campus."

  Involvement from the top, the president, was identified by many interviewees as an essential element. But one interviewee disagreed and argued that while presidents need to bless a project and agree to commit resources, actual participation is unnecessary. Depending on the project, chief academic affairs officers and student affairs officers should be involved. One interviewee suggested that the public relations officers be involved. Another suggested that trustees be included. Trustees and public relations officers would be particularly important in the case where the underlying task involves a "movement."

Most important, collaborative projects must involve key faculty members. Without their involvement, no meaningful transformation will result. The institution needs to give them release time from a heavy teaching or research load, and their involvement needs to be reflected in their job description, the reward structure, and as a basis for promotion. Approval of a project from the faculty governing body was also suggested.

- **A commitment of financial resources:** One interviewee said, “buy-in is very important.” Many suggested that institutions be required to commit anything from matching funds to secretarial support for a project.

- **A culture of cooperation**: “Colleges and universities are notorious for their long history of autonomy. It is not in the culture generally.” Limit clusters to institutions that can show that collaboration is already a part of the institutional culture. Institutions should be able to demonstrate a history of collaboration both *internally and externally.*

- **An internal mechanism to facilitate change**: Does the institution have an office of institutional research? Does the data from that office actually drive change on campus? If so, it is more likely that the institution is serious in its commitment to institutional change.

- **Institutional type and mission** (e.g., urban, rural, public, independent, etc.): Many interviewees suggested that institutions be clustered by “type.” One interviewee noted, “Urban institutions, for example, have different ‘pressure points’ than community colleges and rural publics. Also, their representatives are already working together or seeing each other at conferences, so this provides a practical way to allow them to collaborate. They attend the same conferences, and can get together before or after for a workshop.” One interviewee pointed out that the more homogeneous the cluster, the less need for clarity in purpose; the more heterogeneous the group, the more need for clarity.

- **Geography:** Do the institutions compete because of their geography? Close proximity makes the logistics of collaboration easier, but two institutions that compete for students or state and local resources might not be good collaborators. Under Axelrod’s theories, however, (that the more frequent and constructive the interaction between collaborators, the more durable and effective the outcomes), close proximity and logistical ease should be a high priority.

- **Stage of development**: The notions of “emerging institutions” and “mentoring institutions” (plus the average institution in the middle) should be considered. One interviewee warned, "there has to be equality among partners, a balance." Another added that "you do not want 'beginners' but you do not want those institutions that have already established sophisticated programs. They are probably in it for the wrong reasons: for publicity, money, and tooting their own horns." It is hard to measure where institutions actually are with respect to a purpose. Yet, the institutions need to be able to learn from each other, so if the playing field is not level, then some institutions might feel shortchanged and less committed.

- **Institutional status**: One interviewee said, and others agreed, that, "Social status, regrettably, is going to matter. Strong institutions are not going to want to be networked with failing institutions. The groups need to be true 'peer groups.'"

Selection process

Assuming that the project basically involves a top-down initiative, the selection process should involve three stages:

- Soliciting applications through a vigorous written process
- Conducting site visits
- Getting references

These should be done by the project leader or resource group and/or an advisory board (if established) and/or the funder.

Among the selection criteria noted above, a high level of commitment to the common purpose and to collaborating are most important. To weed out the serious institutions from the institutions that merely pay lip service to an issue, *the application process needs to be extremely rigorous.*

Announcements or calls for network participants need to include "mandates," a clear list of the expectations of each level of administration for each institution (e.g., presidents will attend one meeting a year; faculty members will meet monthly). One interviewee said:

> Funders need to provide clear expectations of the participating institutions. They should expect to work hard. They should be aware that collaboration is an add-on. It is hard in terms of time commitments, products, and emotional connections. You need to tell institutions all these things so that they are seriously committed.

All interviewees agreed that *site visits are important*. One suggested that the selection process should take “up to a year” because of the need for careful site visits.[2] Another said:

> Even when you have a great applicant, it is important to do a site visit. It is important to be physically on campus, get a tour, talk to leaders. Send someone with horse sense who can size up what is really going on on campus.

Several interviewees suggested that funders and project leaders *solicit opinions from people “in the know*” on who is where on the continuum on a particular topic. This should be used in conjunction with the first two approaches (soliciting applications and conducting site visits) so that clusters will not consist of “the usual suspects.”

Successful Collaboration: What it takes

For multi-institutional projects to succeed, a number of things are recommended. Underlying each is the notion and importance of establishing mutual *trust.* Institutions need to trust each other in order to succeed collaboratively. With that as a goal, recommendations include:

1. Spend considerable time educating institutional representatives on how cooperation and collaboration work and what it takes to work together effectively. One interviewee suggested that the first year of a multi-institutional project should be devoted simply to the study of collaboration. He said:

> In the first phase of a project, study collaboration models. Look at for-profit, nonprofit, community development, and higher education literature. Create reading files on each. Study mergers, acquisitions, degrees of collaboration, theory and practice. Bring in experts who can teach the group about cooperation and collaboration theory and practice. Use case studies from the Harvard Business School. Hire facilitators and experts who can run workshops and retreats on the art of cooperation.

[2] One interviewee identified a formula used by a foundation in funding projects in support of diversity initiatives. He said that, based primarily on site visits and application materials, the funder considers five factors: recruitment and retention rates of minority students and faculty members, campus climate, curriculum, faculty development, and a category labeled “liability.” The formula is discussed in Diversity Digest, which can be viewed at www.inform.umd.edu/diversity.

It is particularly important that all participating institutions understand how their individual involvement affects the experiences of others in the network. If one party fails to "carry its weight," it should know in advance how that will affect all of the others.

2. Using the same techniques (experts, workshops, case studies, reading files and literature dissemination, etc.), study institutional change. This could be accomplished during the first year as well.

3. Structure collaborative projects so that there is always the "threat**"** of more interaction, site visits, meetings, an exchange of materials, etc. Tasks should include frequent and repeated site visits and exchanges. Get together frequently and regularly.

4. Include on-going updates from each institution. During the first six months, have the project leaders gather information (even public relations materials) on each network participant. Run "poster sessions" about each participant. It is important for the project leaders to "know their audience," but it is equally important that participants get to know each other well.

5. Strive for continuity among representatives from each institution. If a group of four or five faculty members work well together, their work can be severely disrupted should one leave the project. If possible, institutions should assign more than one contact person and should send more than one person to the meetings and workshops. A system for mentoring replacements should be included in any long-term collaboration plan. This will minimize the disruption to the task should a key player relocate.

6. Structure the decision-making process in a way that participating institutions have equal say. Strive for governance through consensus, with the understanding that the previously established common goals will remain as guideposts. Establish a board or advisory committee with representatives from each institution who can work with the project leaders.

7. Include in each project a significant fund for faculty professional development projects. Remember that the initial goal is institutional capacity building (change) and that no meaningful change is possible without the involvement of and commitment from faculty members.

8. Strive for continuity in project leaders. Require long term, binding contracts. Consider retaining a team rather than an individual to assure the likelihood of continuity should a project leader relocate, retire, or become unavailable.

9. Allow for sufficient time for real transformation, but make the project of finite duration. One interviewee suggested that a project of five years is too short: seven to ten would be more appropriate and realistic for meaningful transformation to occur. One interviewee said, "Change resulting from a grant or individual award from a foundation takes about five years. Change resulting from collaborative projects takes more time." Another agreed, stating "You can't study outcomes without a seven or eight year commitment."

10. Build into the project design time for reflection. How is the project going? Has the level of commitment shifted? In what direction? Acknowledge and confront problems directly (Tushnet, 1993; Kaganoff, 1998). Include in the plan a mechanism for resolving problems and making decisions.

11. Include in the plan provisions not only for admission, but also for withdrawal or removal. What happens if one institution fails to perform?

12. If one of the desired end products is any form of written publication, *start writing early*. Build into the design one or more retreats where participants can talk, share, debate, write, review, edit, and then reflect on a draft. Consider a working paper on "lessons learned so far." It can be for the eyes of the participants only, but can serve as a yardstick a year or two later.

13. Include an appropriate tool to evaluate the effectiveness of the project, the project leaders, and the participating institutions (see below).

The findings of this survey confirm a relevant study by Baker (1993) on educational partnerships at the K-12 level. Baker offers these keys to successful collaboration: shared vision, clearly defined goals, institutionalized decision making structure, local decision making, continuity among partnership personnel, allowing sufficient time for change to occur, and provision of professional development training to teachers. She also suggests carefully choosing people and sites, stating in writing clear roles and expectations, cultivating collaborative skills, and meeting regularly and often (Kaganoff, 1998).

Evaluation

For most multi-institutional projects, the intention behind them is that institutions will learn from the collaboration, use the information, and change. Absent some mechanism to determine whether meaningful change resulted from a project, there is almost no way of knowing whether a project was a success worthy of duplication. Nearly all interviewees felt that a project should have an evaluation component, although opinions on how to do this varied.

Because the primary goal of any project is institutional capacity building, assessment should be performed at the individual institutional level. It can be done by internal institutional researchers or by external consultants funded as part of the original grant. Many interviewees felt that outcomes should be measured through qualitative, reflective measures. They cautioned, however, that when the ultimate goal for an institution is change, there will be little consensus on the campus as to the perceptions of the problem, change, or outcomes. One interviewee warned, “Assessing a project can really tie an institution in knots, and that is not good.”

Other suggestions included retaining a third party researcher to work with the project leaders as the project is designed, networks are selected, and progress is made.[3] Another suggestion was a longitudinal study.[4] A third suggested that in evaluating a project, assessors should “look for extremes rather than the middle, where it is going extremely well and where it is going terribly badly.”

Many interviewees felt that it was counterproductive to get “too hung up” on assessment. “Expect these projects to end up two steps forward and a half step back,” said one interviewee. Another added, “It is very difficult to measure incremental change in people’s experiences. There is really no way to measure success here.” Another advised, “the benefit to collaborative projects is that they are energizing. Energy begets energy.” And that is difficult to measure.

Assessment of a multi-institutional collaborative project is difficult to design. At a minimum, it should involve on-going reflection by participant and internal evaluations at each network institution.

Conclusion

Even when carefully planned and implemented, multi-institutional collaborations are not easy to do. They require extensive financial and human resources. Participants must be prepared to take on a sometimes untidy and inconvenient process that rarely furnishes immediate results. They require extensive commitment from each institution, not mere lip-service from the president or a dean. And that commitment needs to be at many levels. To assure that a project continues despite attrition from individual representatives, intra-institutional team work is required as well. They require significant training. All of these tax

[3] One interviewee suggested using the Center for Learning through Evaluation, Adaptation, and Dissemination at the University of Wisconsin. Researchers there receive a percentage of the original grant using applied research techniques.

[4] Some good studies along these lines are being produced at Alverno College.

institutional financial resources.

Collaboration is risky and does not always result in meaningful change at the participating institutions. As one interviewee noted, (and this would need to be confirmed by research), “More divorces result from collaboration than marriages. It is not always the most successful model to pursue.” Similarly, any group of people working together feel the tension between open-mindedness, independent thinking, and a “group think” mentality. Sometimes, going along with the group will expedite the process, but it might not create the best results.

But the advantages of mindful institutional collaborations are compelling. Representatives from institutions can learn from each other, share information and strategies, and measure their own practices against others similarly situated. The adage, “There is strength in numbers” applies. They can generate the impression externally and internally that a task or goal is worth considerable investment in time and resources. Faculty members who are fully supported value the process of collaboration and find it to be invigorating and creative.

Multi-institutional collaborative projects provide a unique forum for professional development and research opportunities, and offer colleagues ways to form new professional contacts. Done well, collaborative projects enable and encourage reflective thinking, all too often a luxury in the embattled lives of university administrators or faculty members.

They allow institutions to share resources including financial, technical, and expert. In some cases, they can help institutions avoid duplication of services and administrative costs across campuses. They enable institutions to offer academic and co-curricular programs that it might otherwise be unable to afford.

One interviewee summarized by saying:

> Collaboration is valuable because it helps institutions see the forest rather than the trees. It helps them see the implications of what they are doing, and how it would have or could have a broader impact on higher education, on students, and on society.

This paper urges individuals and institutions (including project participants, project leaders, and funders) participating in collaborative, multi-institutional projects to consider key elements of success: a common purpose; a rigorous selection process; a commitment to educating participants on the arts of collaboration and institutional change; commitments of human and financial resources to support the project; a supportive infrastructure/project leader; equal commitment from all participants, and frequent and repeated contact among participants.

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When designed and managed well, multi-institutional collaborative projects will yield potent results. Collaboration is the appropriate tool when a project concerns significant transformation, serious intellectual inquiry and energy, and is complicated and ambitious; stated another way, where the strategic thinkers are trying to start a movement or culture shift in higher education. Since we know that no meaningful change is possible without faculty understanding and support, collaborative projects necessarily require a large faculty development component. This is extremely effective through inter-institutional networks. It is also appropriate when a desired outcome is permanent alliances or associations.

One final point: in spite of the emphasis on establishing networks, in truth, effective networks are easier to start than to maintain. The emphasis in this paper has been on the careful *formation and management* of networks. It is axiomatic that even the best designs will fail without the involvement of the right individuals: *strategic thinkers who are passionate about an issue, dedicated to the collaborative process, and supported by their institutions.*

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APPENDIX A: Interviewees

Edgar Beckham, Ford Foundation
Russell Bredholt, Bredholt & Co., Winter Springs, Fla. (an expert in industry collaborations)
Arthur Chickering, Vermont College
Renee Fall, Five Colleges, Inc.
Jerry Gaff, American Association of Colleges & Universities
Zelda Gamson, New England Resource Center for Higher Education
Russell Garth, Council for Independent Colleges
James Hall, Chancellor, Antioch University
Elizabeth Hollander and staff, Campus Compact
Morris Keeton, Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
Richard Kimball, Teagle Foundation
James Laymon, National Center on Adult Learning
Jean MacGregor, Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education
Ted Marchese, American Association for Higher Education
W. Dwight Oberholtzer, Emeritus Professor of Sociology; Former Director, Center for Teaching and Learning, Pacific Lutheran University
Paula Peinovich, Vice President, Academic Affairs, Regents College