

# Open Government Initiative- Collaboration

## Focus Group Sessions EE008-C and EE010-C

### Q1. What does collaboration mean to you/your organization?

- Working together to achieve common goals
- Ensure staff enjoying their work, understanding of collaboration, working to together
- Sharing of resources, being able to reach a greater population
- Greater use of funds
- Buy in, taking ownership and building pride
- Engagement, mutual benefit, understanding of parameters
- More than just words, really needs to be actions (sharing actions and activities)
- Defined in a different way than in the past
- Sometimes needs to be changed
- Don't have to reinvent the wheel, one participant gave an example of another organization sharing resources and toolkits with them.
- Stronger voice
- Mutual gain - this changes with every partnership
- Exploding what you know
- Defining clear goals and expectations (understanding what is it that you have and what do you want)
- Common interest
- Having the right people at the table
- Limitation on people time, need to define clear roles
- Define and align priorities
- Establish a common goal
- Establish relationships – the first meeting with a new partner is important to do in person/ face to face so you can see body language
- Travel costs – face to face is needed at times
- Less on rhetoric and more on ...
- Need to show the importance to the group – proposal feedback
- Importance to the group/individual
- Has a big role in the health care sector because of how people's lives are affected by a wide range of things – is a need to work with others to be comprehensive in dealing with people's health
- Partnerships with other organizations
- Sharing risk
- Formal agreements (ie. MOU's)
- About co-creation and co-production
- Allows you to better deal with complex issues

- Collaboration with govt is a huge challenge as there is a major power imbalance between govt and community groups
- Having the wherewithal to commit to collaboration is very important. You have to invest the time to put into collaborations
- You need to know when to collaborate and when it is not needed
- All people involved have to be equals in the partnership
- There is a risk of partners in the collaboration poaching ideas from others – can lead to mistrust
- Working with others to achieve a common goal
- Can help in the delivery of programs by government – govt, industry groups and private sector working together
- Collaboration does not require govt \$\$
- Working with others to find common solutions to problems
- Bringing people/groups together to work together
- Creating formal MOU's sometimes works and sometimes doesn't

## Q2. What are the key challenges associated with collaborating effectively?

- Travel and meeting with people
- If Government truly believes in collaborations it has to fund them - Travel costs are the first to go/ be cut from budgets. Need to fund what you believe in.
- Hard to collaborate now that government has cut the people that many groups worked with (e.g. government employees who recently lost their jobs)
- Paid people are asking volunteers for their time – need to rely less on volunteers and provide funding.
- Government requests massive documents (for proposals etc) – it is very difficult for volunteers to have the time to write these,
- Response to a submission – timely responses to submissions/ proposals. One participant gave the example that business development requires quick decisions – a six month response time will not work.
- IBRD is amazing – preliminary steps with proposal development – they provide preliminary feedback which saves you time and energy.
- Has to be recognition of diverse community needs throughout the province and as a result, more flexibility in programs. The accountability standards/ procedures in place can make things too rigid.
- Difficulty because no regional office, meeting face to face is difficult
- Personal contact is necessary
- Turnaround time for volunteers is not the same as for government departments
- Understanding when the Premier has to be involved in making a decision. Participants gave examples of projects being prioritized and receiving funding because someone involved was brave enough to go directly to the Premier/ had a personal connection.

- Not enough voices at the lower level
- More people involved, more difficult it gets
- Costs not covered
- One participant gave an example of how their group had been given training by gov. on an initiative but their organization was then left on their own to deliver regional training sessions with no ongoing support or resources.
- No ongoing commitment
- Collaboration takes time, energy, travel, commitment and resources up front. Being provided with nothing up front creates a very stressful situation for the partner.
- Expectations too high
- Not focusing resources in the right manner (marketing vs operations)
- Acquiring funding
- Hasn't been support from the provincial government for aboriginal groups. A participant gave the example of a lack of gov. support for procurement opportunities, by requiring a first nations partnership as a criteria for companies bidding on opportunities. As a result, international businesses are bidding on and winning contracts in the community but no skills/ capacity are being left in the community, as aboriginal partnerships are not mandatory in the contracts in the province now. Need to create partnerships so that skills are left in the community and the community can become self-sufficient eventually.
- Diminishing capacity, especially in rural NL, to work on collaboration – fewer people to work on collaborative projects, fewer community development volunteers
- Danger that we will only collaborate with those that have the capacity to do it and others get left out
- Expectations of people's/organizations roles in the collaboration need to be clear upfront
- We create a plan, start executing but often stop to check and see what is working
- Differences of opinions
- Sharing resources – HR, space, ideas, etc – partners sometimes don't follow through on original commitment
- Poaching of ideas
- Collaboration is tough and very time consuming
- Everyone is resource strapped and competition for resources
- Many people/groups trying to do too many things so they don't have adequate time to put into a collaboration
- Trying to overcome the imbalance of "power" between partners at the table – some partners have more resources (\$\$, knowledge, HR, etc) which can lead to inequalities at the table

- Same volunteers at many of the same tables – burnout
- Need to know when to collaborate and when it is not needed
- Need to know that consensus is not always needed at the table
- Trust is huge for success of the collaboration
- Need good leadership
- Clarification of roles in the collaboration is needed upfront
- You need the right people at the table
- In smaller communities the capacity to be involved in collaborative projects is often lacking
- Trust
- Budget constraints
- Leadership
- Unrealistic timelines to accomplish goals can make things very stressful
- Funding program requirements (external pressure)
- Sometimes a misunderstanding within the group on the work required to accomplish what they want to do (internal pressure)
- Often a lack of respect from govt when they are involved – towards outside groups
- Often don't have a shared vision of where the group wants to go – this needs to be articulated early in the collaboration – everyone needs to believe in the vision
- People/groups struggle with the process of trying to work together
- People want to see action – yesterday. People need to see that the process will lead to a goal that they want to achieve
- Sometimes the problems that people/groups are trying to tackle large problems and is very overwhelming – need to focus on the smaller wins
- People have to see tangible benefits of what they are involved in
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### Q3. How would you describe the current state / culture of collaboration in Newfoundland and Labrador?

- One participant gave an example of how their organization collaborates with multiple partners to organize conferences with all partners involved and which make a profit
- Organizations collaborate because that is the only way to get their work done but it is hard to get government on side (cutting positions of people who you collaborate with). 'It is sad that government took away the people that we collaborate with.' The people who are left are doing more work and are not available for collaboration – 'how can we get them onboard'?
- Taking human out of HR
- Government people in positions change frequently, always have to be updating new people

- Call for proposals – 2 week notice, but getting the project completed is difficult in short timeframe.
- 'Regional collaboration is incredible'.
- People in the know – hard for new people to get involved
- In the electronic world but we are still not reaching many people
- Larger voice gets heard – 'the squeaky wheel.....' Stronger people are heard and can go through the chain of command.
- Lack of information
- First step is research but information is not available because of cutbacks – 'we are starved for information'
- Participant suggested that data/ information from the Regional Health Authorities e.g. community needs assessments should be made available through OGI – RHAs are an arm of government.
- Regional area offices are good for providing information, but when you have to go beyond that, it's difficult.
- We need to attract other people to come into the community (to sustain ourselves), however at the moment there is not enough information for them to make a safe decision to locate here.
- Outside of government, spirit of collaboration is here
- People presence has a positive affect
- Can't forget the non-profits who are servicing our communities, we are burning out our volunteers
- Collaboration has to be between economic and social – have to involve non-profits
- Business and economic development is important - when industry/ companies come into communities, they bring social support and corporate social responsibility.
- We are sometimes shortsighted – not as visionary as we need to be
- Some areas of the province have a better culture of collaboration than others (ie. South coast of Labrador)
- People need to start thinking differently to be more collaborative – sometimes don't realize the expertise they have
- Some people/groups are risk adverse
- It's the same people at many of the tables
- Trying to achieve change in thinking is often difficult
- Often depends on what you are trying to achieve
- Timeframes
- Resources
- Some communities, especially smaller ones, need to rely on others for support to make things happen

- Often in smaller/rural communities there is already a high level of engagement and willingness to do things to make things happen – also great leaders
- Is good but very fragile – because of the imbalances in resources
- Need more training and support for the volunteers in communities – those that support the volunteers (ie. Govt) get training but it needs to spill over to the volunteers to build capacity
- Need the resources to do that
- Why can't community people/community groups collaborate with govt to participate in training?
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#### Q4. How can we collectively enhance/ build a culture of collaboration in Newfoundland and Labrador?

- 'Put us all in charge – we are working with our partners and doing as much as we can.'
- More mandatory requirements for local control, participation and strong enforcement, then culture is developed (particularly in relation to aboriginal partnerships in business development).
- Initiative stops because the volunteer says no
- Consistent decision making that is not political – take the politics out of it.
- Volunteering is not what it used to be – people don't volunteer anymore and we are slowly losing the volunteer base
- Cuts to local and regional programs and services have affected the province.
- Zone boards had a huge impact on communities - these services are needed – how does government put it back.
- Culture of not supporting our own, don't want to see people succeed.  
Participant provided the example of how in Corner Brook it take longer (than in other communities) for businesses to establish as people take a while to warm up to them.
- Citizens have a responsibility to follow-up on government's commitments e.g. the Open Government Initiative.
- Collaboration among various govt depts needs to happen to better work with outside groups
- Groups often need the support of more than one dept
- Leadership is needed
- Need to Do, Check, Act and Check again to make sure we know what is working well and what needs to be improved
- Plan, act, evaluate
- Is possible to change a culture
- Need to identify what we want to achieve – a common vision
- Can't work in silos

- Share processes that we have to help others collaborate – share best practices

Q5. What should the role of the provincial government be in building a culture of collaboration in NL?

- Rebranding and renaming is not working
- Open Government hasn't been helping – take money spent on rebranding and give volunteers a portion even just to compensate for travel or give small grants
- Words mean nothing
- Government is being crippled because of the cuts
- Work of volunteers is not valued (in monetary terms) in proposal, yet government will cover the same thing when it's part of a consultant's costs.
- Will pay a consultant but not a volunteer group who has the expertise (our expertise is questioned when we apply for a project – often we are the experts and know the community, product etc.)
- Don't dictate how to do something that the group has the expertise to do it
- Don't fund the report that is paid for/supported by government after the fact
- Government has a responsibility to come back to us on this (the Open Government Initiative)
- Too political – focus on how do I get a vote, how do I get elected
- Website is good, continuing to improve information sharing
- Support people on the ground in a concrete way (e.g. support travel, minimize paperwork)
- Collaboration takes time and energy, need support
- Provide concrete answers, lip service is not enough
- It is just language, it is nothing without action – particular reference to Open Government – things don't change – we have seen this before.
- Do not change OGI to another initiative for at least 20 years – it is costing us money!
- Change takes time but frivolous spending makes people cynical
- Government officials need to make the effort to become more knowledgeable and understand the dynamics and regions that they are representing. Government officials (both federal and provincial) are not attending events – they need to do this to understand the region and its communities.
- Stronger emphasis on aboriginal partnerships for procurement, the high value that this has and how it can build expertise.
- Need to get better at determining who to talk to in the various government departments for support
- Collaboration among various government departments needs to happen to better work with outside groups
- Groups often need the support of more than one department
- Needs a policy on how to better engage community

- Not everything needs a collaboration
- Government often has ultimate decision making power – input goes in but decision made at cabinet
- People often think if you are engaging them they have decision making power
- Who has the resources to collaborate?
- Everyone needs to realize what they can have control over and when collaboration is needed
- Government needs to be sensitive of the power imbalance and the power they have
- Government needs to be open up front and clarify realities upfront
- Leadership should come from Government – lead by example (show examples of where they are collaborating)
- Assist groups in regions to work together
- Often more than one group requesting funds to do similar work
- Need to remove barriers to collaborate
- Provide opportunities for groups to collaborate
- EU – communities can apply for funding for projects but have to meet certain population requirements, therefore communities/regions are forced to work together to get \$\$
- Need to find ways to allow government employees to be involved
- Need to be very clear for what the boundaries are for the collaboration – all will be difference
- Need to come up with meaningful examples
- Need to share resources to try and create a level playing field for partners in the collaboration
- Need an acknowledgement that things need to change in government to make things more collaborative
- Often government policies and programs leads to division vs cooperation (i.e. Short term funding – need multi-year funding, competition for program \$\$ between groups)
- Government needs to have the contacts in the regions to help bring the right people to the table to work together
- Government can play facilitator role
- Extend training opportunities to groups outside of government

Q6. Do you have any other comments on collaboration which you'd like to share?

- Hydraulic fracturing internal review – not enough transparency
- Government doesn't respond adequately when organizations write letters – it acknowledges receipt but doesn't really respond.
- Internal review is not transparent

- Needs a definition of transparency, accountability, and collaboration from government – appears to different than what we have
- Youth needs to be involved and engaged as a priority (important to address demographics), but don't always feel involved.