

**Exploring Success: How Evaluators of Multisector Collaborations**

**View Collaborative Success**

Georgia Mauney

University of Washington

## Introduction

Societies have a range of complex problems that individuals and organizations seek to address. However, limitations to resources, time, and perspective prevent any singular effort from succeeding in solving complex problems. The complexity of many of these issues and the inability of any one organization to solve them necessitates a multisector approach. With combined knowledge and resources, multiple organizations which engage in coalitions or collaborations (i.e., in multisector collaboration) are better situated to effect change upon their environment and create positive outcomes in their problem area. Multisector collaboration involves “communicative processes in which individuals representing multiple organizations or stakeholders engage when working interdependently to address problems outside the spheres of individuals or organizations working in isolation” (Keyton, et al., 2008, p.381). Outcomes are the desired end result in any collaboration, and are the long-term, measurable changes in the problem domain (Heath & Isbell, 2017; Sabatier, 2005). For this paper, outcomes will use the term to outcomes to refer to, the results that come from the actions that collaborations take towards addressing a greater societal problem (Clarke & Fuller, 2010).

Determining a collaboration’s outcomes can be a difficult task. Often times, this task falls to evaluators of collaboration. Evaluators can be brought into a collaboration for many reasons and by different types of stakeholders. When a collaboration receives funding from an outside organization or individual, the funder will often require evaluation to determine whether or not their investment is making an impact (Butterfoss, 2007). However, not all evaluators brought in to assess collaborative impact and outcomes look at the collaborative process. Other times, evaluators will be brought in by members of the collaboration themselves to find areas where the collaboration itself can better attain their desired outcomes.

## Exploring Success

Even with the social value placed on collaboration, it still cannot be claimed that collaboration is indisputably effective (Sandoval, 2012). This is due in part to the long-standing struggle that evaluators have in determining which collaborative practices lead to successful outcomes and in providing evidence as to whether or not any outcomes that do occur are the result of collaborative efforts (Sandoval, 2012; Ulibari, 2015). For instance, Shumate (2017) points out that the exploration of network outcomes is still a growing field and that there are some data, particularly in early childhood education, where collaboration has led to negative impacts on the services provided.

Because it is so difficult to document that a collaboration brought about any specific outcome, evaluators often look at collaborative social capital and outputs within the collaboration to determine success. In this context, social capital refers to the nature of the relationship between collaborating stakeholders, such as levels of trust and reciprocity (Heath & Isbell, 2017, p.38). An output is an action or artifact produced by a collaboration (Heath & Isbell, 2017, p.38). Measuring success through social capital and collaborative outputs within the collaboration are process outcomes. Process outcomes show up during collaborative action and enactment of outputs, and can entail strategic budget management, collective learning, and creative solutions for implementation (Clarke & MacDonald, 2016).

Existing research suggests that particular process-level successes are correlated with positive perceived outcomes, and the process-level success leads to more effective outputs (Marek, et al., 2015). This inference points to the highly interrelated nature of social capital, outputs, and outcomes. The interrelated nature of collaborative success demonstrates how collaborations are systems, suggesting that viewing collaborative success through a systems theory lens is helpful in determining what makes a successful collaboration.

## Exploring Success

Although researchers have searched for what environmental factors, process elements, and funding considerations make a successful collaboration, the perspective of evaluators on collaborative success has been largely absent. Because evaluators are often asked to determine whether or not a collaboration is considered successful, however, their expert perspectives will add to the existing academic discussion of collaborative success. I propose an exploratory study of the views and perspectives of collaboration evaluators in order to yield new insights into how collaborative success can be conceptualized and measured. This study will explore two questions. *Q1: How do evaluators link success within a collaboration, through its processes and outputs, to outcomes in the problem area? Q2: How do evaluators approach evaluating collaborative success depending on the stage of development a collaboration is at?*

## Literature Review

### Collaborations as Systems and the Utility of Systems Theory

A holistic assessment of a collaboration's processes, outputs, and outcomes can be best understood using systems theory. Systems theory analyzes the relationships and interdependence between a system's components and the relationship an organization has with the environment (Lai & Huili Lin, 2017). The system itself is seen in the structure and patterns of the components, actions, and relationships (Lai & Huili Lin, 2017). The logic presented in this definition helps explain why collaboration occurs in the first place because stakeholders are dependent on one another as they cannot guarantee positive outcomes for themselves if they act alone (Hollingshead, 2001).

Via a systems theory lens, a collaboration such as a coalition or task force is viewed as a system. A system includes inputs, throughputs, and outputs (Lai & Huili Lin, 2017). Inputs are the received resources and information and can consist of a multitude of things, for example, the resources and funds stakeholders parent organizations possess. Throughputs refer to the process of taking an input and transforming it into an output. Within the stakeholders' resources example, the throughput would be the collaborative decision-making of how best to allocate those resources and funds. The resulting outputs are a new product that has been transformed by the system, and in the example of collaboration, outputs are the plan for the stakeholders' funds that has now been put into action. Outcomes are the impact the system has on its environment (e.g., the impact that the newly funded work has had on the problem area).

Within systems theory, the environment is of critical importance. Environmental pressures determine how a collaboration acts and reacts. One concept in systems theory, requisite

## Exploring Success

variety, concerns how the organization or collaboration adapts to the level of complexity in the environment (Lai & Huili Lin, 2017). Requisite variety can be seen as the reason why collaborations are also complex; it is necessary to match the environmental complexity a collaboration finds itself in. It also explains why evaluators focus so intently on the collaborative process. If collaboration is missing a collective identity, group norms, trust, or diversity, then it is not matching the environmental complexity of the problem it is facing and will not succeed. Weick (1979) argues that the environment that individual actors respond to is created by how they view past actions and events. This implies that a diverse group of stakeholders is critical because it allows the most complete view of the environment; the more interpretations, the better the understanding.

If a collaboration is a system, then an evaluator is an outside influence entering it, and consequently, affecting it. Evaluation influence, a concept that originates from Kirkhart (2000), is the impact the evaluator and act of evaluation have on the way the collaboration operates. Mark and Henry (2004) expand on this idea and offer that the context of the evaluation is critical to the influence an evaluator may have on a collaboration. The very presence of an evaluator will affect the outputs of the group. Whereas it is not the purpose of this study to measure evaluation influence, it is important to recognize that evaluators have an impact on the collaborations that they study. This means that the data and evidence they collect during their evaluation is, at least, partly swayed by their presence within the evaluation.

Systems theory is not something that has been applied often to multisector collaboration evaluation; however, it is useful when looking at how success in a collaboration occurs. It helps particularly when looking at early-stage collaborations. Success in collaborations that are still working towards the point of collective action must be viewed differently than collaborations

## Exploring Success

that have been working toward their goals for years. Collaborations that have no outputs or outcomes must be evaluated instead by their organization and social capital. Questions of how well a collaboration matches the complexity of its environment and protocol-based inequity are looked at much more. This could be a potential reason why most evaluations focus on measures regarding the collaborative process, such as the relationships, climate, and expectations (Greenwald & Zukowski, 2018). The rationale that is given by evaluators of collaboration could offer greater insight into this matter.

The way systems theory can be used to look at a collaboration holistically is of critical use to evaluators. It works well as a diagnostics tool: Problems with the collaborative process can be traced to issues with inputs, and subpar outputs can be traced back to issues within the collaborative process. The understanding of the environmental impact on a collaboration is also critical for an evaluator. Seeing how well a collaboration can respond and adapt to environmental influences can also help with recommendations for a collaboration. In terms of measuring outcomes, systems theory, at the minimum, can be used to explore the relationship between collaborative outputs and outcomes.

## **Evaluation Tools and Their Focus on the Collaboration's Process, Outputs, and Outcomes**

The complexity of collaborations can make assessment challenging. For many of the same reasons stakeholders find multisector collaboration difficult, so do evaluators. Appleton-Dyer, et al. (2012) claim that organizational and political complexity, paired with stakeholder diversity, contributes to making evaluation challenging to approach and design for. Another difficulty is that it takes time for collaborations to develop robustly enough that they can effect

## Exploring Success

change in their environment, and then time for that change to be measurable (Appleton-Dyer et al., 2012).

Many evaluators, state agencies, and academics have tried to create tools to help evaluators address the complexity of collaboration, but there is still a lack of empirically-derived assessment tools that evaluators and collaborators can use (Marek, 2015). Greenwald and Zukowski (2018) categorize the multitude of ways that evaluators assess collaborations into two groups- evaluations that focus on a collaboration's relationship, climate, and expectation (RCE), and less frequently, assessments that are based on the extent of collaboration (EC).

Greenwald and Zukowski give several examples of both RCE and EC. As the prevalent form of evaluation, RCE evaluations focus much more on the process and social elements of collaboration and can be seen as success being measured through a collaboration's social capital. An example of RCE evaluation is the Coalition Self-Assessment Survey, which asks respondents to indicate the collaboration's representativeness of the community, members' influence, and how effective they expect the collaboration to be (Kenney & Sofaer, 2000). EC, by contrast, is much more on the concrete activity of a collaboration. This means instead of a focus on stakeholder perceptions, evaluations center on observable measurements, which can be both process measurements and outputs. An example of this is from Goldzweig, et al. (2013), who based their assessment on the strength of a coalition on how many hours members spent on shared projects to assess the strength of collaboration. Greenwald & Zukowski (2018) found that higher levels of collaboration are found with RCE measurements when compared to EC measurements.

Clearly, there are many different approaches to assessing collaboration. If an evaluation is determining collaborative success exclusively based on the measurement of RCE or EC,



## Exploring Success

however, it may ignore crucial elements of collaborative success. For example, an evaluation solely based on RCE may miss the quality of the collaborative impact and actions a collaboration is taking, and an evaluation based exclusively on EC potentially ignores how socially healthy a collaboration may be. For a collaboration to be appropriately assessed, it is better than both RCE and EC are considered.

There have been attempts to meet the need for empirically-derived evaluation tools, such as in Marek, et al. (2015), with the creation of the Collaboration Assessment Tool (CAT). CAT was developed in order to provide a link between elements of collaboration and perceived positive outcomes (Marek, et al. 2015). CAT is derived from Mattessich and Monsey's (1992) meta-analysis, which they confirmed and from which they extrapolated in 2001, of effective collaborative practices. They put such practices into six categories (Mattessich & Monsey, 2001). CAT maintains those six categories and adds one of its own, resulting in the seven factors of effective collaboration: - Context, Members, Process and Organization, Communication, Function, Resources, and Leadership (Marek et al., 2015). Whereas Greenwald and Zukowski (2018) categorize CAT as an RCE tool as it does not measure the extent of the collaboration, what is interesting about CAT is that it confirms the interrelated nature of the social health of a collaboration and perceived outcomes. It is important to emphasize that positive outcomes are measured by how they are *perceived* under CAT as it is again reflective of the point that it is difficult to prove that outcomes are caused by a collaboration indisputably.

In the absence of an evaluator, either due to lack of funds or time, tools exist for collaborations to assess their own success. These instruments include a variety of questionnaires that collaborations can use to measure factors such as trust, follow-through, and outputs and find room for improvement. The limitation of these methods is limited anonymity, which can sway

## Exploring Success

the honesty of some of these stakeholders' responses and potential blind spots to which these collaborations may not be privy. Additionally, Koonz and Thomas (2012) found that when collaborations evaluate themselves, they are prone to error in distinguishing between outputs and outcomes, and consequently, outputs get over-reported. Koonz and Thomas (2012) attribute this error to the wording of the PART program's questionnaire. So, while self-assessment does exist, it is prone to user error.

As can be seen in the case of CAT, the RCE approach, and the self-reported surveys, there exists a focus on evaluating the collaborative process for success. This makes sense as strong social outcomes are linked with collaborative longevity, which in areas of collaboration where it takes time to see results, are of critical importance (Heath & Isbell, 2017). A longer lasting and socially successful collaboration means more time for the collaboration to affect its environment. In Ulibarri (2015), high levels of collaboration, referring to the collaborative process, are associated with higher quality outputs. The perspective present in this literature of evaluation and collaboration is an assumption that a collaboration high in social capital with diverse stakeholders will produce more quality outputs that aligned with a collaboration's goals will, in turn, lead to positive outcomes (Sabatier 2005).

Outcomes are more challenging to evaluate. Whereas social capital and outputs are often easier to measure because they occur within the collaboration itself, outcomes occur externally. The problems that multisector collaborations address are complex and exist in a complex environment, so there are a multitude of factors that could have caused outcomes other than the collaboration. Ulibarri (2015) found that "collaboration is most strongly associated with those outcomes that are closer to the decision-making process, and much more weakly associated with predicted environmental and economic outcomes" (Ulibarri, 2015, p.595). Additionally,

## Exploring Success

multisector collaborations can take time to develop to the point of executing any given action plan or policy proposal, and even then, it can take time for the results of their actions to become apparent (Appleton-Dyer et al., 2012). The combination of these two factors makes linking collaborative actions to plan outcomes challenging and often impractical.

The relationship between collaborative outputs and outcomes is essential and meaningful to study, however, because creating positive outcomes is the end goal of any collaboration, and outputs are concrete actions that can be referenced when discussing what a collaboration has done. Exploring the relationship between these two measures of collaborative success can help further clarify and define what makes a collaboration successful. Furthermore, exploring how evaluators themselves look for the relationship between these two measures could help create methodology resources for both collaborations and evaluators.

## Methods

In order to answer the research questions guiding this study, I conducted interviews because, as Lindloff and Taylor (2018), cited in Merrigan & Huston (2020), state, interviews assist researchers to "understand people's experience, knowledge, and worldviews" (Merrigan & Huston, 2020, 226). The semi-structured interview format was most in line with my objectives, keeping the interview centered around my research questions with the ability to adjust which of my questions I ask depending on the experiences of the participant while remaining within the scope of my ability as a novice researcher (Rowley, 2012). In order to understand the experience and knowledge of expert evaluators, I developed a semi-structured interview agenda (Appendix A) to be used with a group of expert evaluators (Appendix B). Questions on this agenda asked about topics such as the purpose of evaluation, conceptions of collaborative success, methods of evaluation, conceptions of collaborative lifespan, the significance of collectively produced documents, approach to evaluation in regard to collaborative lifespan, and response to the evaluation.

The purpose of these interviews was not to define success in collaboration but rather to explore the perspectives of experts who deal with determining collaborative success in their work. For this reason, the questions of my agenda (Appendix A) were rooted in systems theory and sought to explore how evaluators viewed various elements of collaboration as connected to one another. I sought to find the range and commonalities of evaluators' expert and informed opinions, so I chose to explore conceptions of collaborative success and lifespan in-depth with a smaller number of participants rather than explore the broad opinions of a larger sample. My criteria for participation inclusion was that they must have evaluated at least one multisector collaboration in the US of which they were a third party. This was done to ensure that

## Exploring Success

participants had experience conducting evaluations external to any other participation they may have had working within a collaboration. Ensuring the evaluation was conducted externally to involvement within the collaboration was important as it helped control for bias. Participants also all had to reside in the US or Canada. This was done to limit the amount of external cultural factors that may have an impact on the evaluator's approach to evaluation. Finally, participants must be fluent in English. This was done because this study did not have the means to provide translation, so requiring English fluency limited potential miscommunication and helped ensure equity among participants. These selection criteria helped me ensure that all participants were experts in their field. As they are elites, my participant's span of knowledge and experience was enough to answer my research questions with an adequacy of evidence, despite having a smaller pool of participants.

Potential participants were recruited using purposive sampling from a group of twenty-one evaluators known by my thesis adviser. To ensure that participants were expert evaluators, they were asked to fill out an online screening questionnaire (Appendix B) to determine if they qualified for the study. The questionnaire also included questions regarding the scope of the participants' involvement in collaboration as well as which tools they used. The responses to this questionnaire also helped me select which questions regarding a collaboration's lifespan were relevant to the experience of the participant in order to utilize the time of the interview most effectively. The questionnaire was brief and designed to be completed in under ten minutes. A total of thirty people completed the questionnaire, of which twenty-four were eligible for the study. Of those twenty-four, twenty were available to be interviewed within the three-week period spanning February 2022, during which all interviews were conducted.

## Exploring Success

The twenty interviews were conducted and recorded over Zoom to enable the participation of evaluators from all across the United States and Canada. A potential limitation of interviewing over video call is that the potential "rapport and richness of the interaction may be lost" (Rowley, 2012, p.265). Interviews were scheduled for forty-five minutes and ranged from thirty-five to sixty minutes depending on the availability and information offered by the evaluator. All participants were assigned pseudonyms in the transcripts as they were promised confidentiality and that their comments would be anonymized when reported.

After data was collected, I conducted an inductive thematic analysis, meaning I worked to "surface and link key themes that emerge from the research into a coherent narrative" (Rowley, 2012, p.268). Because the interviews were conducted and recorded over Zoom, I used the transcripts provided by Zoom, which I then edited for precision and accuracy. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, I went into interviews without pre-decided coding categories other than the topics of the questions in the interview agenda. After the interviews were concluded, I read and reread my transcripts to look for consistent concepts in the type of responses participants gave to determine thematic coding categories. From there, I coded the transcripts using the software ATLAS.ti. After coding was completed, I determined common themes that the interviews centered around and then looked at the variety of the expert opinion that was present in these responses. The findings section below outlines the range of perspectives that was present in these themes.

## Results

Twenty evaluators of multisector collaborations, with experience ranging from one evaluation conducted to over seventy, were interviewed for this study. Issues the evaluated collaborations were designed to address include poverty reduction, human trafficking, mental health, youth health, international development, nutrition, climate-related hazards, and others. Within this large swath of subject matter and experience, several themes emerged across interviews related to one or both of the overarching research questions guiding this study. Common themes emphasized by many interviewees included a collaboration's sustainability, the importance of trust among stakeholders, the collaboration as a system, common challenges of evaluation, the importance of an evaluation's utility, and conceptions of the collaboration's lifespan. These interviews help create a richer understanding of the nature of success and lifespan in relation to multisector collaborations. In this section, a summary of findings pertinent to RQ1 is followed by a summary of findings pertinent to RQ2.

### **Findings on Q1: How do evaluators link success within a collaboration, through its processes and outputs, to outcomes in the problem area?**

As presented above, the first overarching RQ was: Question one asked, how do evaluators link success within a collaboration, through its processes and outputs, to outcomes in the problem area? The results indicate that participants view all three—, processes, outputs, and outcomes— as highly connected to one another. Success within a collaboration was seen as related to collaboration's ability to sustain itself and, moreover, as a topic for evaluation that would be useful to the collaborations.

## Exploring Success

To link success within a collaboration to outcomes in the problem area, participants used a variety of methods and tools, many of which were developed by the participants themselves. The results pertaining to question one are far more focused on participants' conceptions and viewpoints of collaboration as a whole rather than specific methodology. Participants viewed success within a collaboration as an indicator of positive outcomes in the problem area. A strong collaborative process, specifically trust among stakeholders, was seen as an indicator of a collaboration's ability to continue to sustain itself and continue to produce outputs into the future. One reason evaluators gave for focusing on the collaborative process was the difficulty of connecting the efforts of a collaboration to its external outcomes. In the face of this challenge, many evaluators stressed the importance of creating an evaluation that will be useful to the collaborative, often meaning an evaluation that looks at some aspect of the collaborative process.

### ***The collaboration as a system:***

While interviewees did not agree upon a specific way to link the collaborative process and outputs to external outcomes, each interviewee saw them as linked to one another in some way. The general consensus was that the collaborative process is what generates outputs, which in turn affect the problem that collaborative was brought together to address. So there was an underlying belief among all participants that generally, a cohesive and high-quality collaborative process will lead to more effective outputs. What participants disagreed upon was which elements of the collaborative process led to strong outputs.

The collaborative process and its quality were linked to different areas of collaborative success. The collaborative process has many elements to it, such as leadership, social capital, diversity, power, conflict, and communication. The presence, absence, and quality of these



## Exploring Success

aspects were linked to various areas of success. First, participants indicated that the quality of the collaborative process was linked to success in how stakeholders engage with their responsibilities. The quality of the collaborative process was also linked to the quality of the outputs. When asked why a collaboration may be struggling to produce outputs, all evaluators linked the struggle to some aspects of the collaborative process, such as leadership problems, lack of diverse voices, conflict, uneven power dynamics, and lack of structure. Julius said about his approach when a collaboration is struggling to produce outputs, “I often want to go back to something around the nature of the engagement. What is it that is preventing people from interacting in such a way that it would result in something that could be agreed upon on paper?” Julius links the collaborative process to outputs with this statement, implying that if outputs are not materializing, then he would look at the collaborative process to diagnose a problem. While the production of outputs is the goal of many collaborations, mere production does not necessarily indicate a successful process. Mallory explained the dangers of this, “premature commitment or composition of documents would not necessarily be a signal of a successful collaboration and, in fact, it could be a signal of a collaboration that has not gleaned understanding or information they don’t know their stakeholders very well... so I’d be careful about like how those become a benchmark as success.” So outputs in and of themselves are not a sufficient indicator of process-level success. Issues with the collaborative process may not result in a lack of outputs but also poor outputs as well. Finally, the collaborative process was linked to a collaboration’s success in a collaboration’s ability to sustain itself. Many different elements of the collaborative process were linked to sustainability; the primary element was trust, but others, such as leadership, were also outlined. On leadership’s effect on sustainability, Sydney said, “when you start to see when you start to see other people within the collaboration take on leadership roles and subcommittees,

## Exploring Success

and those start to work in a healthy, effective, consistent way... tends to begin to look like they're... going to be able to have that sustainability." The collaborative process being linked to sustainability represents how its health is important if the collaboration plans to continue achieve success, making aspects such as trust and leadership important for evaluators to look at when assessing longevity.

Collaborative outputs were discussed as impacting both the collaborative process and external outcomes. Documentation outputs such as meeting agendas and other shared documents were indicated to be helpful to the collaborative process. Outputs were also discussed in terms of evaluation as a useful tool for understanding a collaboratives history. Ambrose described it as "action plans MOU's.... those types of things, are super super helpful in helping to understand... monitor and study you know evolution of thinking and projects over time." While many evaluators saw outputs as a valuable measure of success, some evaluators did express concern with what is not measured or quantifiable as an output being left out of a definition of success. Virginia spoke about a human trafficking task force, saying that law enforcement "get[s] incentives for meeting the quotas, they get incentives for busting more bad guys they get press conferences for busting bad guys. What they don't get is a quota of people protected. They don't get a quota about like prevention efforts." In this example, the output is the quota of arrests, but as Virginia explains, it does not show the full picture of preventative efforts the collaboration makes. So while collaborative outputs may show some of the history of a collaboration's efforts, they may not always be the best indicator of positive external outcomes.

Participants saw outcomes to be both internal and external. Many evaluators looked at both for their evaluations. Karina explained how when she evaluates, she looks at "what is the system that you're trying to shift producing, and then we always look at like what's happening

## Exploring Success

within.” When Karina uses the term system, she is referring to external outcomes in the problem area the collaboration is approaching, but she also looks at the internal outcomes happening within. External outcomes refer to the changes in the problem area a collaboration was designed to address. Outcomes were seen to be internal as well; when collaboration works towards its goals, the relationships and collaborative, dynamic shift and change for the better or for the worse. Ambrose described the internal outcomes he looks at as “the relationships that collaboration is developed within and... between the sort of the organization and people in there, I mean that’s sort of the lubricant that’s going to drive... successful collaborations but also their work going forward.” He extended the importance of relationships and positive internal outcomes to external outcomes as well “outcomes are the product of relationships and technique.” What many evaluators saw to be the importance of these internal outcomes is that they determine future successes. Sydney said of this, “I think a lot of that is how entities work together, how relationships and trust are built, that is likely to lead to better outcomes and success in lots of different kinds of you know campaigns or projects that... they work on.” The implication of this statement is that the positive internal outcomes, in this case, positive relationships and trust among stakeholders, are associated with future success. What this ability for a collaborative to continue to enact change upon its environment is, is collaborative sustainability.

### ***Collaborative Sustainability:***

In almost all interviews, sustainability was brought up as an aspect of importance by the interviewee, but there was not a unanimous view on the usefulness of collaborative sustainability. The predominant view was that sustainability is an indicator of a successful

## Exploring Success

collaboration. However, others viewed collaborative sustainability as undesirable in the long term and something that should be avoided.

The majority of participants who discussed sustainability viewed it as a measure of success and even a precursor to positive outcomes. One evaluator, Gail, claimed that collaborative sustainability was the only way to see a change in anything other than the short term. As she put it, “why would you believe that if the collaboration ends and three years to now four years from now, you’re going to be able to sustain the effects that you’ve had without sustaining the collaboration itself.” What Gail is referencing is that by their nature, collaborations are formed around complex issues that may never go away in their entirety, so for a collaboration to make a lasting change, it also needs to last. However, a common obstacle to a collaboration’s sustainability was the withdrawal of funding. As Lucille phrased it, “I doubt they’re being much beyond the end of the purse strings, honestly.” Many evaluators discussed that collaborations dependent on grants struggle to last because if funding is the only thing keeping people together, the collaboration will not continue unless the grant is renewed. This led some to believe that sustainability was only a precursor for success if a collaboration was able to sustain itself without a grant. What was pointed to as a sustaining factor instead of funding was moral drive. Vera, an evaluator in the human trafficking sector, put it, “for me, the long-term goal is that people will do this work without a grant because it is the law and because it is a human rights issue as well.” What Vera is referring to is an intrinsic motivation to continue to work on a collaboration in the face of any funding issues because of a belief that the collaboration is the right thing to do.

While a substantial majority saw collaborative sustainability as an indicator of success or even a form of success, there was also an opposing viewpoint that collaborative sustainability is

## Exploring Success

undesirable and should be avoided. August claimed that “collaborations are best served when they see themselves as... ephemeral organizations. as organizations that come together and break apart.” August’s rationale for this was that “collaborations just like organizations have a burnout moment. And when you spend too much time together trying to work on something, you start to burn out, and you don’t have an ability to accomplish the tasks and missions.” However, August also claimed in conjunction with his view that sustainability is undesirable because the issues that collaborations are designed to address are so long-lasting that it is desirable for the stakeholders of one dissolved collaboration to form new collaborations in the future. While this view does not support a single collaboration sustaining for the foreseeable future, it does value a continued effort towards the problem by a collaboration’s stakeholders for the foreseeable future.

### ***The importance of trust among stakeholders:***

For a sustained effort to occur, regardless of the form it takes, evaluators highlighted the importance of stakeholder relationships. Stakeholder relationships relate primarily to the collaborative process. Amelia said of this, “people are not going to be willing to stay with it unless they also feel connected and valued in the process and feel the process is valuable to them.” That is to say, that a collaboration will be unable to sustain itself if stakeholders do not feel valued within the collaborative process. Many various elements of the collaborative process were seen by participants as crucial to sustaining a collaboration, but the theme that emerged was the importance of trust in generating positive internal outcomes.

Trust was explicitly looked at by many evaluators as part of their evaluation. Karina would look at trust because if the stakeholders “trust that people in the room are sort of all here

## Exploring Success

for the right reasons, that sort of thing generally is a pretty good indicator that people are willing to put in the time.” Trusting that people are collaborating for the right reasons was referred to by Tammy as “trust in intention.” Trust in intention was brought up by many evaluators as a necessity for collaboration. As another evaluator, Cameron, said of trust, “if you’re a criminal, I’m not going to trust you with the keys to my house because... you’re going to rob the block.” Trust is seen to be essential by many participants for collaboration to function properly. One method of trust-building that was brought up by multiple evaluators was socialization beyond the scope of the collaboration. Tammy said of this, “You know, someone a little more personally you, how do you trust someone’s intent unless you know them? And if all I ever see you in is the meeting... it’s hard for me to understand how we overlap” The absence of trust was indicated to be detrimental and could lead to a stunted collaborative process or even collaborative dissolution.

### ***The difficulty of connecting external outcomes:***

Consistently, evaluators expressed that definitively linking the efforts of a collaboration to environmental outcomes was challenging to say definitively. As one evaluator, Gail put it, “I’m not convinced. I don’t think it’s possible to say a collaboration alone is going to achieve that kind of impact if that’s how we’re defining it. You’re going to need the collaboration, along with whatever the service array is whatever you know the other components of the programming is.” What Gail is articulating is a belief that a collaboration on its own cannot cause much of the impact it hopes to achieve; rather, collaboration is more of an effort to add to other environmental factors on the problem area rather than be the sole input into solving the problem. This viewpoint underlines the issue the fundamental issue of attributing outcomes to a

## Exploring Success

collaboration; the collaboration is never the only thing affecting the problem area. Mallory gave an example of this issue in the instance of a writing center, “do we know... that students writing better because they came to the Center, or because the teacher intervened, or, because over time if they just had their aha moment and it clicked, so that’s this is the area you’re in that I think is so interesting and also a little dangerous because it’s like you’re trying to measure something and attribute it to processes that we, we can only kind of make an educated kind of case for. but it’s still there’s not a cause and effect kind of relationship, as I see it, and I don’t see it as.” In this case, an increase in student writing performance could be due to the writing center, or it could be due to a teacher in the classroom, it is impossible to definitively say.

One barrier to evaluators when attempting to link collaborative actions to external outcomes was the element of time. For one, many evaluators saw the time it takes for change to occur as longer than the time in which their evaluation occurs. More specifically, for many of the large-scale changes collaborations wanted to see, the time in which the evaluation was taking place was not sufficient to measure those. As Sydney put it, “they want to make big change right? You want to reduce population health issues, and some of those things take years and take time to really see, and so there might be small outcomes we’re looking for an evaluation, but then they really want to make these larger impacts.” The large-scale outcomes the collaboration is aiming to achieve may not be apparent at the time of evaluation, so it would be impossible for evaluators like Sydney to attribute them to collaboration. This issue compounds with another issue evaluators brought up, the withdrawal of funding before outcomes can be seen. Nicole spoke of this problem by asking, “if we keep creating these little collaborations and then evaluating them and then disbanding them, is that ever really going to link to the outcomes?” That is to say, if funding is constantly cut from collaborations before larger outcomes become

## Exploring Success

apparent, no impact may be made at all. If this withdrawal of funding happens prematurely and repeatedly, then many collaborative efforts may just be a waste of time and money for funders.

The existing methods for assessing collaborative impact were also seen to be a limiting factor when linking external outcomes to a collaboration. Many common evaluation tools the evaluators in this study indicated that they used, such as the Program to Analyze, Record, and Track Networks to Enhance Relationships (PARTNER) tool and the Collaboration Assessment Tool (CAT), measure participant perceptions of collaborative success. One of the issues with this method is that the stakeholders present at a collaboration may not accurately perceive how successful their efforts are. Jean discussed how stakeholders in leadership positions viewed their collaboration as more successful than on-the-ground service providers. She went on to say that it could be attributed to a “dissonance between leaders and how they might perceive the goal of a project and.. for providers and on the ground folks, that there was a kind of mismatch between how the leaders saw the program going and the support that they actually received.” This difference in view when it comes to external outcomes raises questions to whom is correct about the impact a collaboration is having. Those in leadership may have more access to data that could help color their view, but service providers will be able to better see how the collaboration’s efforts are being implemented. This difference for an evaluator may be hard to parse when determining impact.

Participants also indicated that the scope of an evaluation was a limiting factor when attempting to link to external outcomes. Even in circumstances where the evaluation takes place from the beginning until the end of a collaboration, there is a multitude of factors that make some evaluation methods more difficult than others. Amelia pointed out that even when an evaluation is able to conduct pre and post surveys, change in participants means that there are different



## Exploring Success

people being surveyed at the beginning of a collaboration versus its end. The culmination of these factors makes it incredibly difficult for evaluators to produce outcomes reports that are the desired level of certainty for both collaborations and their funders.

### *The importance of evaluations' utility*

Connecting collaborations to their external outcomes is very difficult, and a problem that comes with this difficulty is that evaluating for that link is very desired. When explaining how funders view success, Karina said, “with funders and their boards, what they think of a success is almost always the are we getting the changes in the population-level outcomes, and if we’re not that, we’re not successful.” The sentiment behind Karina’s statement is that funders’ view of success is often limited to demonstrable external outcomes. Louise echoed this thought when discussing funders’ interests in evaluation “they’re not interested, whether the collaborative trust each other, whether people have high-quality relationships, whether people are connected, whether those organizations aren’t undermining one another. They look at the outcomes report.” Again, this demonstrates a viewpoint other evaluators shared regarding Funder’s preference toward outcomes. Some evaluators were not asked to assess anything other than external outcomes, like Lucille, who said, “I’m not often asked to evaluate whether collaboration is happening.” However, the difficulties of connecting collaborations to external outcomes make it difficult for evaluators to deliver the reports the funders and many collaborations are after. Multiple participants expressed the sentiments that oftentimes, evaluation reports go untouched and unused by both collaborations and the funding organizations that ordered them. Alternatively, as Cameron put it, reports are often “thick and covered with dust on someone’s top shelf, because no one ever read it.” Creating useless reports was seen as a negative by all

## Exploring Success

participants, and many participants sought to highlight the importance of designing an evaluation and presenting its findings in a way that is useful to a collaboration.

One way evaluators tried to ensure that their evaluations would be helpful was by getting input from the collaborations themselves when designing their evaluations. While most of the evaluators interviewed were brought in to evaluate due to grant requirements, many also asked the collaboratives what they would like from their evaluation and used it as a chance to give their professional input. Velma described this as, “there’s always that kind of right after a contract is awarded when you can actually engage with the client when you can look at the background documents, where you can start to tell them actually it might be better if we took this approach or that approach.” By involving collaborations in the evaluation’s design, evaluators are better able to tailor their evaluation to become useful to the collaboration. Some evaluators discussed the probability of their evaluations centering around the collaborative process. Ambrose phrased this as, “and that’s just sort of like the reality, the reality of a lot of these collaborative with these collaborative works you’re going to have to rely a lot on like process measures, or at least I have to rely a lot on process measures to help tell the story of what’s happening.”

The evaluators in this study also emphasized the importance of the presentation of their evaluations. One common consideration for this was the feelings of the stakeholders, so one method of mitigating this was presenting findings as a collaborative history. By doing this, evaluators were able to add a discussion of successes which is an important inclusion for results to be accepted by collaborations. As August put it, “you won’t have a very long life as a consultant if you don’t at least acknowledge the successes for them and tell them how to continue and how well that you’ve helped them reach those particular successes they’re looking

## Exploring Success

for.” This shows that presenting results in a way that will be positively received can also be a necessity to continue to receive work as an evaluator as well.

What these findings demonstrate is that evaluators view the collaborative process as critical in understanding and situating external outcomes. For a collaboration to continue to achieve its goals of external outcomes in the future, the quality collaborative process is something that must be analyzed to determine whether a collaboration will be able to sustain itself. Additionally, due to the difficulty of connecting a collaboration to its external outcomes, many evaluators elect to evaluate the collaborative process to provide an evaluative report that will be useful to the collaboration. With this in mind, what was considered to be useful or necessary in a collaborative report differed based on when an evaluation took place in a collaboration’s lifespan.

### **Findings on Q2: How do evaluators approach evaluating collaborative success depending on the stage of development a collaboration is at?**

The second overarching RQ was: how do evaluators approach evaluating collaborative success depending on the stage of development a collaboration is at? Participants held several conceptions of collaborative lifespan, timebound, ongoing, and as a series of beginnings. The foci of eEvaluations’s focus also differed depending on whether an evaluation took place at a collaboration’s beginning, middle, or end.

#### ***Conceptions of the collaborative lifespan:***

When conceptualizing the collaborative lifespan, nearly all participants differentiated between timebound and ongoing collaborations. Those who did not view all collaborations as having an eventual end still differentiated between those with a set dissolution date and those

## Exploring Success

that plan to be active for the foreseeable future. A timebound collaboration refers to when a collaboration is set to dissolve either at a specific date or upon the production of a specific output. Ongoing collaborations plan to be active for the foreseeable future. Both timebound collaborations and sustaining collaborations were seen as having a beginning and a middle, but only timebound collaborations were seen as having an end. Ends could be either voluntary or involuntary. The most common involuntary end was a collaboration's loss of funding. Nicole contributed involuntary ends to "neoliberal capitalism" due to the collaborations she was referencing not being given enough time to produce demonstratable outcomes, and with the cut of funding, many collaborations are unable to sustain. Some considered the final stage of sustaining collaboration to be working to be financially self-sufficient. Herschel discussed that many sustaining collaborations should get to the point that "you're not getting as much funding and you have to work harder to develop outside sources like business support donations drives... however you get your money... can you sustain that beyond just wanting to have it, are you able to financially sustain." If a collaboration is able to get to the point of being financially independent, then it is truly able to sustain itself, as the collaborative's function being bound to funding may lead to an involuntary dissolution if the collaboration loses funding.

One conception of a collaborative life span is having a series of beginnings. This conception was applied to both timebound and sustaining collaborations. Julius referred to the collaborative lifespan as a "cycle of seasons" and claimed that collaborations are always going through cycles, whether it be because of new leadership due to turnover or grant deadlines. Virginia said of a sustaining collaboration, "it seemed to be always in a state of development. It had lots of turnover, so there was always this reorientation going on and sort of starting from the start again and again and again and again and again." Herschel said that a collaboration's ability

## Exploring Success

to reorient itself repeatedly is a success, “you have an idea you work together to framework it, you start implementing it, you take the time to do feedback and improve, as well as you go and then you have to be able... to pay it forward... so the new people come... that’s truly success.”

This idea resembles positive internal outcomes. For a collaboration to bring on new stakeholders, it must be able to continuously adapt to be effective.

### *Evaluation’s relationship with lifespan*

While every evaluator has a unique approach to conducting evaluations, there are some areas of a collaboration that evaluators tend to look at more or prioritize more when evaluating a collaboration at different points in its lifespan. Evaluators who interacted with collaborations at the beginning of their lifespan often did so because they were conducting a formative evaluation; that is, they were helping a collaboration structure itself as it formed. During this time, many evaluators paid special attention to certain elements of the collaborative process, such as stakeholder diversity and shared collaborative goals. Amelia said of her work with collaborations at the beginning of their lifespan, “there’s a lot of pre collaborative work that happens, you know, identifying who’s going to be part of the collaboration, who should be part of the collaboration. Getting some early collaborative members and then saying, who else should be at the table.” This is in reference to the importance of stakeholder diversity to the proper functioning of the collaborative process, again, an emphasis on the collaborative process on assessing for success at the beginning of a collaboration. Otto discussed the importance of defining the collaboration’s lifespan early and setting goals “first off, I think what’s important is to start off with is getting everybody on board to understand what the goals are, and is there a definitive lifespan for what we’re doing” All of these aspects of the collaborative process help set a collaboration up for future success both internally and externally.

## Exploring Success

Evaluators that looked at the middle of collaboration often looked at both process elements and collaborative outputs. Most of the experience participants of this study had was evaluating the middle of the collaborative lifespan. So many of their insights into which elements of the collaborative process or output production indicate success for an established collaboration applies here as well. Lucille explained that because she does not evaluate at the beginning of a collaboration, outputs are important because “they serve as the actual proof that collaboration was happening over time, even if people didn’t really feel it or call it that.” As stated earlier in the findings section, for sustaining collaborations, trust and stakeholder relationships were looked to directly at to determine the collaboration’s capacity for enacting future change.

Evaluators who came to assess at the end of the collaborative often focused primarily on external outcomes. Mallory described how short-term collaborations have different objectives and measures of success, “If this is a short term collaboration that really isn’t, that relationships don’t even factor into what might be leftover in the community afterward... and you know that they what counts as accomplishment I think is going to be different than if part of what that collaboration needs to accomplish is in the social capital area of building.” Mallory went on to say that questions of success then become more focused around collaborative outputs and outcomes. The examples she gave were, “did we come up with a report, did we do a government Task Force report on substance abuse, yes, we got a report done, we came together short term it’s done, it’s out there, people like to report.” Julius had a similar thought; he claimed, “I think some more objective measure about what the final deliverable may be in relation to the self-defined objectives of the group.”

So, in summary, the beginning and middle of collaboration are evaluated more with the collaborative process and outputs in mind, and the end is evaluated more by its outputs and

## Exploring Success

external outcomes. This makes sense as the beginning and middle of a collaboration represent the potential for future environmental outcomes, and the end report often aims to assess what a collaboration has done.

## Discussion

What these results demonstrate is that from the perspective of evaluators, the collaborative process is essential for determining a collaboration's potential for success. Evaluators discussed it as a necessary precursor for both quality outputs and positive external outcomes, as well as an indicator of a collaboration's sustainability. To many evaluators, the quality of the collaborative process is a measure of success. This finding supports much of the literature surrounding evaluation. Greenwald & Zukowski (2018) discussed how the most popular evaluative tools focus on relationship, climate, and expectation (RCE). Many evaluators used RCE based tools, and several evaluators found discrepancies among stakeholders' perceptions of collaboration where collaborative leaders saw more success. My results uphold what Ulibari (2015) said about the difficulties evaluators experience when attributing external outcomes to elements of the collaborative process and collaborative outputs. Evaluators in this study also agreed with Appleton-Dyer et al. (2012), that it often takes time for the external outcomes of a collaboration to become apparent. My results indicate that the difficulties indicated in both Ulibari (2015), and Appleton-Dyer (2012) are both reasons why evaluators often focus on the collaborative process, as it allows them to still give collaborations constructive feedback when it is difficult to measure external outcomes.

The findings from this study demonstrate that many evaluators place great value on the collaborative process within their evaluations. However, these findings also evidence that—according to evaluators—funders of multisector collaborations do not always share this view, and that funding is crucial to many collaborations. Often collaborations that are just starting out require grant assistance to bring stakeholders to the table and effect change in their environment.



## Exploring Success

Funding organizations or individuals are also very often the ones who bring in or mandate evaluation in the first place. It follows then that how the funder views success is crucial to how collaboration operates and whether or not it is able to continue into the future. What my results show is that evaluators' view funders as valuing a demonstration of external outcomes but that external outcomes are challenging to demonstrate.

What also seems to be underestimated by funders is the value of a collaboration's longevity. The reason collaboration occurs in the first place is because there are problems that exist in a society that are too complex for any one organization or institution to solve, so collective effort then becomes necessary to make a change. This can be understood under the concept of requisite variety, which, again, is the necessity of an organization to match the complexity of its environment (Lai & Huili Lin, 2017). The environment in which collaborations exist is complex, so collaborations themselves must be complex. For one, the time it takes for a collaboration to affect change or for that change to be detected is often longer than when the evaluation takes place. Many of the issues that collaborations aim to address, whether it be poverty, homelessness, human trafficking, or environmental degradation, are not going away. They are issues that will require constant effort to mitigate. Even the view against sustainability that was articulated by some of the participants in this study held that it was crucial for there to be consistent efforts by stakeholders to work towards these intractable problems, just that they break apart and begin new collaborations.

If the collaboration's ability to sustain itself is so crucial to its ability to accomplish long-term change in the problem it is trying to address, then any factors that contribute to collaborative sustainability should be considered when looking at collaborative success. Trust was what was most associated with sustainability within the results of this study. Many

## Exploring Success

evaluators already evaluate levels of trust within a collaboration, and many evaluative tools contain trust measures. Trust in collaboration is already viewed by evaluators as an important marker of collaborative success, but it is not enough for only the evaluator to value trust; collaborative stakeholders and funders must also value trust.

I do not mean to say that every collaboration's goal should be to sustain itself and that evaluation should only look at process-level measures. Collaborations are incredibly diverse in their goals, their stakeholders, and their needs. If the purpose of a collaboration is a particular outcome, such as a legislation change, then sustaining past that point may not be necessary. Additionally, a collaboration has a highly trusting collaborative process with strong stakeholder relationships, but they also need to produce efforts toward its goals to get to the external outcomes it hopes to achieve. In this sense, collaborative outputs and measures of external outcomes that do exist are also crucial in assessing collaborative success. My results indicate they alone are not sufficient to determine whether a collaboration is successful or will be successful. Because by themselves, outputs and environmental outcomes do not indicate a collaboration will continue to be successful in impacting its environment. If a funding organization decides not to renew a grant due to delayed external outcomes, it may miss more impactful future outcomes. Additionally, if a collaboration neglects trust and collaborative relationships, then it may sabotage its future efforts.

## Conclusion

Regarding RQ1, evaluators saw a link between the collaborative process to outputs to external outcomes. Success in the collaborative process, such as trust, was seen to be needed for a collaboration to continue to produce outputs and work toward long-term change. Evaluators also affirmed the difficulty of connecting external outcomes to a collaboration, and to compensate for this difficulty, many evaluators aim to create evaluations that will be used.. Regarding RQ2, evaluators adapt their evaluation to look at either collaborative potential, the history of the collaborative's work, or both depending on a collaboration's lifespan. This study contributes to scholarship on the evaluation of success in collaborations by demonstrating how many evaluators view collaboration's outputs as a representation of its history. This creates a link from the collaborative process to its outputs and demonstrates that outputs can be used to discern past collaborative successes and failures. It also contributes to scholarship on evaluating collaboration by illuminating how evaluators view collaborative success in regard to the developmental stage of collaboration.

This study was limited to evaluators in the United States and Canada. Additionally, the number of participants evaluators who had conducted an international evaluation was low. Almost all collaborations discussed by evaluators within the interviews were collaborations within the United States. Because of this, it may be that any conclusions drawn from my results may not apply to evaluations of collaborations in other countries due to cultural and circumstantial differences. The small number of evaluators who worked with international collaborations included in this study did indicate that their evaluations centered primarily around collaborative outputs and external outcomes. However, this was not a large enough sample to make claims about international evaluation.

## Exploring Success

Because of the geographic limitation of this study, it would be helpful to ascertain the perspectives of success of evaluators who focus on collaborations outside the United States. It would be valuable to determine if evaluation internationally depends more on different elements of success than in the United States and Canada, as well as if other aspects of collaboration are considered to be more successful internationally. Future studies of international collaborative success may help to yield insight into this.

As stated many times throughout this thesis, collaboration is difficult. The issues that collaboration deals with are complex and often unsolvable, so it can be challenging for collaborations to make an impact. Even when a collaboration does make an impact, it is also complicated for evaluators to attribute that impact to the efforts of the collaboration. This is why it is crucial that collaborative success be considered beyond external outcomes. Evaluators have indicated that elements of the collaborative process, such as trust, are indicators of a collaboration's ability to continue to affect its environment for the foreseeable future. For issues that are likely to persist in society, collaborative sustainability and stakeholder relationships are critical to making a difference in these intractable problems.

## References

- Appleton-Dyer, S., Clinton, J., Carswell, P., & McNeill, R. (2012). Understanding evaluation influence within public sector partnerships: A conceptual model. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 33, 532–546. doi:10.1177/ 10982/40/2447672
- Butterfoss, F. D. (2007). *Coalitions and partnerships in community health* (1st ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Clarke, A., & Fuller, M. (2010). Collaborative strategic management: Strategy formulation and implementation by multi-organizational cross-sector social partnerships. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 94(Suppl 1), 85-101.
- Clarke, A., & MacDonald, A. (2019). Outcomes to partners in multi-stakeholder cross-sector partnerships: A resource-based view. *Business & Society*, 58(2), 298-332.
- Downes, E., & McMillan, S. (2000). Defining interactivity. *New Media & Society*, 2(2), 157-179.
- Greenwald, H., & Zukoski, A. (2018). Assessing collaboration: Alternative measures and issues for evaluation. *The American Journal of Evaluation*, 39(3), 322-335.
- Goldzweig, I. A., Schlundt, D. G., & Moore, W. E. (2013). An academic, business, and community alliance to promote evidence-based public health policy: The case of primary seat belt legislation. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 24, 1364–1377.
- Heath, R. G., & Isbell, M. G. (2017). Ethical contexts. In *Interorganizational collaboration: Interorganizational collaboration* (pp. 17-42). Waveland Press.
- Heath, R. G., & Isbell, M. G. (2017). *In Interorganizational collaboration: Interorganizational collaboration*. Waveland Press.

- Hollingshead, A. (2001). Cognitive interdependence and convergent expectations in transactive memory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81*(6), 1080-1089.
- Kenney, E., & Sofaer, S. (2000). Allies against asthma coalition self-assessment survey. School of Public Affairs, Baruch College, City University of New York. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/#q=Allies+Against+Asthma+Coalition+self-assessment+survey>.
- Keyton, J., Ford, D. J., & Smith, F. I. (2008). A mesolevel communicative model of collaboration. *Communication Theory, 18* (3), 376–406.
- Koontz, T., & Thomas, C. (2012). Measuring the performance of public-private partnerships. *Public Performance & Management Review, 35*(4), 769-786.
- Kirkhart, K. E. (2000). Reconceptualizing evaluation use: An integrated theory of influence. *New Directions for Evaluation, 2000*(88), 5–23.
- Lai, C.-H., & Huili Lin, S. (2017). Systems theory. In C.R. Scott, J.R. Barker, T. Kuhn, J. Keyton, P.K. Turner, & L.K. Lewis (Eds.). *The International Encyclopedia of Organizational Communication*.
- Marek, L. I., Brock, D. P., & Salva, J. (2015). Evaluating collaboration for effectiveness: Conceptualization and measurement. *American Journal of Evaluation, 36*, 67–85.
- Mark, M. M., & Henry, G. T. (2004). The mechanisms and outcomes of evaluation influence. *American Journal of Evaluation, 10*, 35–48.
- Mattessich, P., Monsey, Barbara R, Wilder Research Center, & Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. (1992). *Collaboration--what makes it work: A review of research literature on factors influencing successful collaboration*. Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.

## Exploring Success

- Mattessich, P. W., Murray-Close, M., & Monsey, B. R. (2001). *Collaboration: What makes it work?* (2nd ed.). Fieldstone Alliance.
- Merrigan, G., & Huston, Carole Logan. (2020). *Communication research methods* (Fourth ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Rowley, J. (2012). Conducting research interviews. *Management Research Review*, 35(3/4), 260-271.
- Sabatier, P. (2005). *Swimming upstream: Collaborative approaches to watershed management* (American and comparative environmental policy). MIT Press.
- Sandoval, J. A., Lucero, J., Oetzel, J., Avila, M., Belone, L., Mau, M., Wallerstein, N. (2012). Process and outcome constructs for evaluating community-based participatory research projects: A matrix of existing measures. *Health Education Research*, 27, 680–690.
- Shumate, M., Atouba, Y., Cooper, K. R., & Pilny, A. (2017). Interorganizational communication. In C. R. Scott & L. K. Lewis (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of organizational communication*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118955567.wbieoc117>
- Ulibarri, N. (2015). Collaboration in federal hydropower licensing: Impacts on process, outputs, and outcomes. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 38(4), 578-606.
- Weick, K. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing* (2d ed). Addison-Wesley Pub.

## Appendix A

### Interview Agenda

- 1) Are there particular ways you tend to think about success in regard to collaboration?
  - a) Are there any particular concepts or measures you typically use to assess a collaboration's success?
  - b) You mentioned [just now and/or in the screening questionnaire] that you have used [xyz tool(s)]. How does that tool help you assess success in relation to the concepts or measures you described?
- 2) Has there ever been a time when your view of success differed from the views of those you were evaluating, or the funders of the collaboration?
  - a) In what ways?
  - b) Are there other measures of success that you have not been able to pursue but would like to? What has prevented you from examining those aspects of collaborative success?
- 3) In your view, what elements of the collaboration process indicate that a collaboration is likely to produce beneficial outcomes?
  - a) Why do you think that [those elements of the collaborative process] are likely to generate beneficial outcomes?
- 4) I'm going to ask you now to reflect on the joint documents, resources (such as action plans, policy recommendations, guidelines), and other things that often are collectively produced through in the course of collaboration. What roles do they have in successful outcomes?
  - a) Why do you think that is?
  - b) If a collaboration was struggling to produce these kinds of collective resources, how would you recommend they make progress?



## Exploring Success

- 5) How have you gone about assessing whether or not a collaboration has had impacts on the issue it is trying to address, and the specific types and/or levels of impact it has had?
  - a) If your approach to assessing impact has changed over time, what are some ways it has changed and why? Is there a circumstance in which you would use a different approach?
  - b) How reliable would you say your approach is, or in other words, how confident are you in your approach to assessing impacts?
  
- 6) [Ask only if the answer to Q12 in questionnaire was YES] You indicated in our online screening questionnaire that you have focused on interactions, communication, self-other perceptions, or relationships between participants in at least one of the evaluations you have conducted, and we would like to hear more about that. Thinking about interactions, communication, self-other perceptions, and relationships, which of those have you focused on, and how have you done so?
  - a) In your view, how do [whatever the interviewee has focused on among interactions, communication, self-other perceptions, and/or relationships between participants] affect the success of a collaboration?
  - b) It can be hard to evaluate [whatever the interviewee has focused on among interactions, communication, self-other perceptions, and/or relationships between participants] systematically. What do you think are good ways to assess how [whatever the interviewee has focused on among interactions, communication, self-other perceptions, and/or relationships between participants] affect the success of a collaboration?
  
- 7) How do you conceptualize a collaboration's lifespan?
  - a) Do you use any particular model?

## Exploring Success

- b) What are some indicators that help you determine where a collaboration is at in its development?
- 8) X.[Ask only if the interviewee's response to Q10? from WebQ is yes] When you were evaluating a collaboration that was time-bound and will dissolve after a specific output had been produced, did you ever establish any baselines at the beginning, evaluate it in the middle of its lifespan, and/or evaluate it at the end?
- a) [If you did any baselining] What did you look at, and kind of baseline assessments you made?
  - b) [If in the middle] What did you look at to assess the success-to-date of that collaboration in the middle of its lifespan and develop recommendations for improvement?
  - c) Did you [also] do an end-of-collaboration evaluation? If so, what did you look at to assess the success of the collaboration at the end of its lifespan?
  - d) If you only did an evaluation at the end of a time-bound collaboration, what did you look at to assess the success of the collaboration at the end of its lifespan?
- 9) 7. Y [Ask only if the interviewee's response to Q11 is yes from WebQ is yes but the response to Q10 is no then ask:] If you were evaluating a collaboration that is ongoing and plans to be active for the foreseeable future, did you ever establish any baselines at the beginning, and/or evaluate it in the middle of its lifespan?
- a) [If you did any baselining] What did you look at, and kind of baseline assessments you made?
  - b) [If in the middle] What did you look at to assess the success-to-date of that collaboration in the middle of its lifespan and develop recommendations for improvement?

- 10) 7. Z. [If the interviewee's response to Q#10 from WebQ is yes AND response to Q#11 is also yes then ask:] In your responses in the online questionnaire, you said you have evaluated both time-bound and ongoing collaborations... When you were evaluating a collaboration that was time-bound and would dissolve after a specific output had been produced or after a certain time period had elapsed, did you ever establish any baselines at the beginning, evaluate it in the middle of its lifespan, and/or evaluate it at the end?
- a) [If you did any baselining] What did you look at, and kind of baseline assessments you made?
  - b) [If in the middle] What did you look at to assess the success-to-date of that collaboration in the middle of its lifespan and develop recommendations for improvement?
  - c) Did you [also] do an end-of-collaboration evaluation? If so, what did you look at to assess the success of the collaboration at the end of its lifespan?
  - d) If you only did an evaluation at the end of a time-bound collaboration, what did you look at to assess the success of the collaboration at the end of its lifespan?
  - e) Now think about evaluations you have done of ongoing collaborations... is there anything you looked at or tracked differently because they were ongoing for the foreseeable future?
- 11) Thinking now about the stages of a collaboration's collective life and the variety of ways people respond to being evaluated, that is, how open or forthcoming they are about what's going on, have you perceived that the stage a collaboration is in affects how its leaders and/or members respond to being evaluated?
- a) Sometimes collaboration leaders and/or interact with and respond to the findings of an evaluation together with their evaluator, and sometimes not. Have you had any

## Exploring Success

experience with collaboration participants responding to your findings? If so, in how have responses varied depending on the stage a collaboration is at?

12) Do you have anything that you would like to add or elaborate on?

13) Do you have any additional questions for me?

14) If when we're doing analysis we need clarification on any of the things you've said today, do you mind if we email you for more info?

## Appendix B

### Screening Questionnaire Questions

#### Question 1

What is your first and last name (this information will not be used or accessed by anyone outside the research team)?

#### Question 2

Have you ever conducted an evaluation of a multisector collaborative task force, network, or coalition, comprised of multiple organizations (hereafter referred to as a "collaboration")?

Yes

No

*No response*

#### *Logic destinations*

➡ Don't skip (default)

➡ End of Survey

➡ End of Survey

#### Question 3

Are you fluent in the English language?

Yes

No

*No response*

#### *Logic destinations*

➡ Don't skip (default)

➡ End of Survey

➡ End of Survey

#### Question 4

Do you currently reside within the United States or Canada?

Yes

No

*No response*

#### *Logic destinations*

➡ Don't skip (default)

➡ End of Survey

➡ End of Survey

#### Question 5

Have you evaluated at least one collaboration as an external or embedded third party, (e.g. as an expert evaluator who was not a member of the collaboration)?

Yes

No

*No response*

#### *Logic destinations*

➡ Don't skip (default)

➡ End of Survey

➡ End of Survey

## Exploring Success

## Question 6

Have you evaluated collaborations as part of your responsibilities within an organization, business, or institution for which you work?

- Yes  
 No

## Question 7

Have you evaluated collaborations as an individual academic or independent consultant?

- Yes  
 No

## Question 8

Which of these methods have you employed in evaluating any collaboration? (Select all you have used, and if you have used additional methods, please select "Other" and list them.)

- Observation of meetings among collaboration members  
 Individual interviews with collaboration members  
 Group interviews with collaboration members  
 Surveys of collaboration members  
 Analysis of documents or data generated by the collaboration  
 Analysis of documents or data generated outside of the collaboration that are relevant to the work of the collaboration  
 Individual interviews with people external to the collaboration about the collaboration  
 Any kind of network analysis  
 Any kind of geographical mapping  
 Any kind of gap analysis  
 Other:

## Question 9

If you have used any specific evaluation tools while evaluating a collaboration, which tools have you used? (Select any you have used. If you have used any other tools not named in this list, please select Other and enter the name(s) of the tool(s)).

- Collaboration Assessment Tool (CAT)  
 The Community Care Network (CCN) evaluation  
 The Levels of Collaboration Scale  
 RE-AIM Framework  
 The Coalition Self-Assessment Survey  
 The Partnership Self-Assessment Tool

## Exploring Success

- The Wilder Collaborative Inventory
- The Program to Analyze, Record, and Track Networks to Enhance Relationships (PARTNER) Tool
- A tool I developed myself
- Other:

### Question 10

Have you evaluated a collaboration that was time-bound and would dissolve after a specific output had been produced?

- Yes
- No

### Question 11

Have you evaluated a collaboration that was ongoing and planned to be active for the foreseeable future?

- Yes
- No

### Question 12

Have you sought to assess interactions, communication, self-other perceptions, or relationships between participants in any of the evaluations of collaborations you have conducted?

- Yes
- No

### Question 13

Are you willing to participate in this study by taking part in a 45-minute interview?

- Yes
- No

### Question 14

Please provide the email you would like us to use when contacting you to schedule the interview.