

Questions to Consider in Developing Collaborative Relationships

The active involvement of the hearts, minds and spirits of the community members relies on individuals feeling included in an empowering process. Community partnerships are built on equitable sharing, valuing of all members, reducing barriers and finding a sense of purpose in that partnership.

Many new comers to community development make a common mistake in their work. They spend more time concerned with the outcomes of a particular event than paying close attention to the process of the event. This can be a major stumbling block for those who have yet to understand that community development is all about process!

We all work hard to get the right people to the table however what do we do once we have them there? How do we engage them in a process that is empowering and meaningful? It is not as simple as trusting that a group will all work from the same values or with the same guiding principles. Regretfully, we do not all work equitable to share power or reduce barriers.

The development of collaborative relationships requires that we ask questions and dialogue the responses around key issues. Inclusion requires that we recognize and dismantle barriers to the full participation by those most affected by the issues. The valuing of diversity requires that we recognize ways other than our own and work to dismantling hierarchies and ensure that power is used responsibly.

The following questions have been developed to assist community groups in exploring the key aspects of power sharing, collaboration and meaningful participation. These questions are not definitive however they are meant to provoke discussion of the values and principles that your community holds in order for authentic community development to take place.

How will we establish shared vision, goals, values and beliefs in the equitable sharing of power?

Do all members feel that their contributions matter?

How will we ensure open communication wherein we share information readily, use language that is accessible to all and work to ensure everyone is listened to and understood?

Is there a forum for community members to recognize problems and actively participate in making changes to those problems?

How will we discuss, all along the way, the participation of all members?

How will we establish flexibility and adaptability to accommodate changes as new information becomes available or circumstances change?

How will we establish recognition and rewards for success, efforts and commitment, which are key to maintaining our goals?

How will we share decision-making and authority and how will we ensure a willingness to agree on how to share decision-making and authority?

Have you considered the power that some have over others that prevents their involvement?

How will we establish an agreement to trust, respect and openly discuss our concerns and quandaries?

What are the barriers to everyone participating and are they being addressed?