



What is collaboration?

How does your farm business work? Do you collaborate, co-ordinate or co-operate? What is the difference? And why should you know?

Collaboration* is about individuals and groups working together to address complex problems and get results that are not easily achieved alone.

Collaboration is not 'business as usual'.

It demands new ways of dealing with each other. When individuals and groups combine effort and expertise, they produce greater benefits. This is the 'collaborative advantage'. Understanding different types of working relationships can help groups decide if, and when, collaboration could be used. Different relationships produce different outcomes.

Carnarvon's Sweeter Banana Co-op developed a regional brand and loyal customers. When Cyclone Olwyn flattened the WA region's crop in 2015, the 20 growers, their families and staff worked against the elements, and the clock, to rescue the harvest. They used grade-2 bananas for banana bread, sourced local additional ingredients and reduced crop waste from 60% to 4%.



Collaboration can help if your aim is to:

- reduce duplication and overlap
- access limited resources
- expand opportunities
- increase efficiency and effectiveness
- improve organisational legitimacy
- resolve complex social problems
- complete complex projects.

Collaborative relationships:

- are intense and involved
- have regular communication flows
- share power between participants
- last usually three or more years
- share risks and rewards.

What kind of working relationship do you need?

Co-operation

- Loose connections, low trust
- Implied information sharing
- Ad hoc communication flows
- Independent goals
- Adapting to/accommodating others' actions and goals
- Power and resources remain with parent organisations
- Commitment/accountability is to own organisation
- Short relationship timeframe
- Low-risk/low-reward

Co-ordination

- Medium connections, work-based trust
- Structured communication flows, formal project information sharing
- Joint policies, programs and aligned resources
- Semi-interdependent goals
- Power remains with parent organisations
- Commitment/accountability to own organisation and project
- Medium relationship time, based on prior projects
- Medium-risk/reward

Collaboration

- Dense, interdependent connections, high-trust
- Frequent communication
- Tactical information sharing
- System changes
- Pooled, collective resources
- Negotiated shared goals
- Power is shared between organisations
- Commitment/accountability to network first, then to community or parent organisation
- Relationships of three years+
- High-risk/high-reward

Characteristics of group working relationships

Relationships of co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration show distinct characteristics and purposes.¹ Knowing about these differences can help groups to understand when collaboration should, and should not, be used.²



Co-operative endeavours share information and expertise. Participants are loosely connected and independent, with low demands to contribute and minor changes to how they work. The advantage is in learning from others. This approach, of low-risk and limited rewards, targets specific actions – not holistic operational change.

Co-ordination needs some interdependence. The parties realise the need to work together to align efforts and resources. Each organisation retains control over its operations. Co-ordination requires a higher level of commitment and good relationships, often based on prior exchanges.

Collaboration involves highly interdependent, strong relationships. Participants must radically alter the way they think, behave and operate. This is not about making adjustments at the edges; it is about changing systems. Collaboration is a high-risk, high-stakes environment that can produce unexpected results and directions. This uncertainty requires high levels of trust and extensive dialogue, and can be rewarding.

Each of these relationships has merit. The challenge is to match working style with project purpose. If the goal is sharing information or expertise, **co-operation** may be sufficient. If alignment of resources and activities is needed, then **co-ordination** is appropriate. Co-operation and co-ordination means operating normally, but more efficiently. If the project requires major innovation, **collaboration** can help individuals and organisations work together more effectively.

The 'Farming Together' Program aims to:

- generate knowledge and skills about collaborative systems, co-operative structures and collective strategies to help Australian farmers and their business networks
- provide support to collaborative and co-operative approaches
- facilitate knowledge sharing and produce re-usable resources
- form regional and cross-jurisdictional networks

For more information, visit: farmingtogether.com.au
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1. Himmelman, A.T. 2002. Collaboration for a Change, Himmelman, Minneapolis; Konrad, E. 1996. A Multidimensional framework for human service integration, in J. Marquart & E. Konrad (eds). Evaluating Initiatives to Integrate Human Services: American Evaluation Assoc. No. 69, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
 2. Keast, R. Brown, K. and Mandell, M. 2007. Getting the right mix: Unpacking integration..., International Public Management Journal 10(1): 9–33.
- * Collaboration content originally developed by Dr Robyn Keast.