



### Collaboration – getting going!



**Successful collaborations, and research, show that time and effort spent planning, organising and building agreement in the set-up phase are essential for effective structuring and achieving goals.**

Five steps to help develop a well-structured, well-managed collaboration are outlined below.

#### 1. Clarify purpose and structure

Crafting a clear statement on the purpose of a collaboration\* is essential. What is to be achieved and how? This is more than broad scoping. Members need common understanding of what they expect to achieve and why collaboration is the best way to do so. Exploring alternatives in an informed way helps to make this clear. Consider joint-working arrangements and processes for decision making to make sure that the purpose and structures match.

#### 2. Determine membership

Who do you need (and want) to work with? Determine who should be involved and at which level. Potential collaborators need to be carefully sought out. Active champions can support and engage in projects, and are key to successful outcomes. Similarly, external stakeholders who are relevant and have clout or credibility, can enhance sustainability.<sup>1</sup> This task, identifying and attracting participants and resources (skills, knowledge and assets), is a crucial activity. It involves securing participants' buy-in and the commitment of organisations. The effort it takes should not be underestimated.

#### Tips for success.

Check that your collaboration is:

- taking time to understand issues
- composing membership strategically
- fostering dialogue and consensus-building
- nurturing positive relationships by making sure people are listened to, and heard

#### 3. Set terms of engagement and outcomes

Rules, roles and behaviours for guiding member interactions are part of the terms of engagement. Members and members' opinions deserve respect; differences can be acknowledged while still working on shared concerns.

*"We had five meetings before we understood how to speak with each other in open forums, let alone what we were trying to achieve. Then, we started to work like a team".*

FT tourism trail group leader

Once the terms of engagement are settled, and clearly communicated, discussion and negotiation can more easily and fairly encourage different interests and goals. Members can more easily hear and see different perspectives. This enables work towards solutions. Sometimes, several rounds of interactions are needed to inform members and allow them to settle on goals. Such consensus is important in operational areas. New ways of working together, driven by specific goals is key. Make sure to establish terms of engagement for your collaboration.

### 4. Build and nurture relationships

Successful interactions and effective work are assisted by bonds and connectedness between people. Relationships that will help collaborations take time to nurture. Formal rules, roles and routines can help to guide this nurturing. Building relationships can be helped by other formal measures including effective decision-making and meeting procedures, or engaging with facilitators or training programs. Even using standardised meeting minutes can help people to understand the importance of professionalism in how they interact with group members and external stakeholders. Informal measures such as social events, retreats, site visits, and shared meals can enrich perceptions and build links. When groups understand each other; their issues, limitations and perspectives; moments of shared insight can improve communications and outcomes.



### 5. Organise and manage effectively

Organisational structure needs collective rather than single authority, but with members still able to manage actions for target outcomes. Consider voting rights and multi-stakeholder structures, with power distributed on a per-member or participation volume measure. These 'rights to decide' must be clearly communicated and fairly administered.

#### Collaborative structures to use or adapt Have you considered...

- ☞ A self-governing general assembly is an approach based on teams or work groups
- ☞ A led-organisational structure has one institution nominally in charge and responsible for project management - but principles of equal partnership apply
- ☞ A core administrative structure involves a separate administrative body representing members and responsible for project directions
- ☞ Or a collaboration can have a manager working under direction from members
- ☞ Co-operatives and Incorporated Associations have a variety of power distribution arrangements to encourage participation.

#### 'Farming Together' aims to:

- generate knowledge and skills about collaboration, co-operatives and collective strategies for farm businesses
- provide support to collaborative and co-operative approaches and demonstrate the economic benefits
- facilitate knowledge and resource sharing
- form regional networks

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1. Bryson, J. (1995). Strategic Planning for public and nonprofit organizations, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; Keast, R., Brown, K., Mandell, M. and Woolcock, G. (2004). Network structures: Working differently and changing expectations, Public Administration Review 64 (3): 363-371.

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*Farming together.*



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