



### Evaluating collaborations



**Flexibility, time and resources are needed to evaluate collaborations. Any new business initiative needs to be carefully monitored – to assess the value of changes and investments. New capacities, relationships and styles of work can be given measures at start-up and compared to similar measures once the project is fully operational. Collaboration\* evaluation is often longer term than traditional assessment which targets short-term accountability.**

Evaluation looks at how collaboration is assisting outcomes<sup>1</sup>. Input from all members is needed, not only key players. Collaborative evaluation, since it gathers data from different groups, is broad ranging and can shift expectations and approaches. Evaluation methods for a new project requires collective acceptance and a variety of tools to measure success<sup>2</sup>. Methods can focus on assessing participation, contributions, networking, and performance impacts.

#### Evaluating participation using self-reflection

Participants can be asked to reflect on their efforts:

- How connected are you to others in the project?
- Have you been able to work collaboratively and creatively?
- Is there shared understanding of the collaborative activity and the environment?
- How far do ideas, debate, documents and resources flow within the collaboration? Do they drive, guide, influence and impact key matters?

Reflecting on actions, behaviours, phases and events can indicate where advantages might be found.

#### Assess your collaboration

##### Relationships and processes

- Are there good relationships, committed members, clear processes for building bonds, and mechanisms for sharing ideas and resolving conflict?
- Is communication frequent, does it occur openly, in a context of trust?
- Is there a culture of learning, information and power sharing?
- Is time spent on relationship building, such as members getting to know each other's strengths and limitations?

##### Participation and structure

- Do all members participate in decision making and resource provision?
- Is there a process for member engagement? Could there be barriers?
- Is the structure too tight, too loose or ... just right?
- Does the group structure encourage action as well as consensus decision-making? Does it suit the aims?
- Are decisions made democratically?
- Is external support (parent organisations; stakeholders; relevant community members) monitored? Are the feedback loops effective?

# Evaluating contributions and networks

## EVALUATING CONTRIBUTIONS

Who is contributing?

(members, organisations, stakeholders)

What is contributed?

(skills, knowledge, staff-time, finance, parent body support or other material items)

Members can indicate their participation, volunteer time, funding contributions (actual and potential).

Are these resources suitable and sufficient?  
Are they shared to best effect? And acknowledged?

Has the facilitator been able to move, allocate and share resources within the collaboration? What resources could be further leveraged to add value and advantage?

Has the group been able to adapt and evolve?



## Evaluating networks through regular checks

The strength, frequency and quality of member links give insights into a collaboration's structure, strengths and weaknesses. Collaborative efforts can indicate an opportunity for refining processes. Connection patterns can be tracked across time through an observational method called 'Social Network Analysis'. This can use a diagnostic tool<sup>3</sup> to create a visual map where a web of dots and lines represents members, linkages and actual (not aspirational) interactions. It is possible to highlight where attention is needed and further development possible by asking...



- Where are member links? Which organisations link together? Are there bottlenecks?
- Are key parties involved? Are there central or peripheral parties? Is this suitable?
- Are there tenuous links? If so, are these between core members or core organisations? Why?
- Which relationships strengthened over time?
- Is there a resource flow between parties?
- Who has links with critical information and resources?
- Where are the weak link risks?

### '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. Mandel, M. & Keast, R. (2007). Evaluating Network Arrangements: Toward Revised Performance Measures, *Public Performance & Management Review* 30(4): 574-597.
2. Church, M. et al. (2003). *Participation, Relationships and Dynamic Change: New Thinking on Evaluating the Work of International Networks*. UCL-DFID.
3. Provan, K. et al. (2005). The use of Network Analysis to Strengthen Community Partnerships, *Public Administration Review* 65(5): 603-614.

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*Farming together.*



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