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Inter-organizational Networks: Challenges, Best Practices, and Relevance in Austin, TX

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Inter-organizational Networks: Challenges, Best Practices, and Relevance in Austin, TX

by

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Dedication

"Love begins by taking care of the closest ones – the ones at home." –Mother Theresa

I dedicate this report to my brothers who will forever be the motivating force in my heart and who I hope will always create their own journey in a spirit of confidence, fulfillment, and light.

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Abstract

Inter-organizational Networks: Challenges, Best Practices, and Relevance in Austin, TX

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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In the recent years, the number of nonprofit organizations in the Austin area has proliferated. At the same time, the state economic budget crisis has reduced public and private resources available to social service providers. In addition, potential clients face many barriers to accessing the services being provided. Research suggests that service coordination and collaboration between service providers may be one way to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the nonprofit sector and improve outcomes for clients. The four objectives of this report are: 1) to present an overview of issues facing the Austin social services field as a whole, 2) to conduct an exploratory scan of existing Austin networks including their goals, organizational histories, and challenges that they face in their collaborative efforts, 3) to synthesize findings from a variety of publications in a thorough discussion of the challenges and best practices for forming effective inter-organizational working groups, and 4) to identify what Austin networks can learn from

the literature and derive recommendations for enhancing coordinated efforts between social service providers in the city of Austin.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose and Methods

Challenges facing individuals, families, and communities have grown increasingly complex and interrelated, as have the organizations and systems that are created to help. As these webs become more challenging to navigate, relationships between the variety of social service providers and the relationships between providers and clients may weaken without a strategic framework for organizing the social service marketplace. Research indicates that collaboration between social service providers may be one way to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the non-profit sector, ultimately producing increased access and improved outcomes for clients served. Coordination can be instrumental in serving clients holistically, providing a full continuum of care. Plus, coordinated strategies can help to identify and eliminate gaps in service provision by creating inter-organizational networks with greater capacity to recognize unmet needs including unserved populations and geographic areas. These networks may also be effective vehicles for delegating responsibility for served and unserved groups.

In the city of Austin, Texas there are over 6,300 501(c)3 non-profit organizations which is more organizations per capita than any other city in Texas or the Southwestern United States. Of those, about half (over 3,000 organizations) work in the area of health/human services or education/research[1]. The four objectives of this report are: 1) to present an overview of issues facing the Austin social services field as a whole, 2) to

[1] Matt Kouri and Deborah Edward, Does Central Texas Have Too Many Nonprofits?, Greenlights for Non-Profit Success, 1-14, accessed April 12, 2011, http://www.greenlights.org/resources/resource-library/cat_view/ 30-resource-library/23-nonprofit-research.

conduct an exploratory scan of existing Austin networks including their goals, organizational histories, and challenges that they face in their collaborative efforts, 3) to synthesize findings from a variety of publications in a thorough discussion of the challenges and best practices for forming effective inter-organizational working groups, and 4) to identify what Austin networks can learn from the literature and derive recommendations for enhancing coordinated efforts between social service providers in the city of Austin.

A variety of methods have been employed to meet these objectives. Publications including research reports and periodicals have been reviewed. In addition, an interview with Taylor Overstreet, a Consulting Fellow at Greenlights for Non-Profit success, a non-profit consulting organization, was conducted to identify coordination issues facing the Austin social services community. Then, inter-organizational networks were identified for review including 2-1-1 of Central Texas, Community Action Network (CAN), One Voice, For The City Network, and St. John Community School Alliance. Networks were chosen with the intent of capturing a cross-section that will show the variety of types of groups in existence in Austin. A review of these organizations' websites and interviews of individuals in leadership positions within the network were conducted. The interviews were also helpful in further rounding out the discussion of current challenges facing social services organizations. The overview of needs and network scan was then used to inform the direction and scope of the interpretative metastudy. The metastudy was undertaken in order to synthesize available research to understand challenges to collaboration and derive best practices for inter-organizational work. In particular, the metastudy focused on three central issues of relevance to Austin: challenges to effectiveness posed by the proliferation of social services providers, strategies for making existing interorganizational networks more effective, and how such networks might help reduce barriers to access for clients.

The study concludes with recommendations for Austin social service networks.

"WICKED" SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND THE INCREASING ROLE OF NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Every day a multitude of professionals, including planners, social service workers, policy makers, educators, and many more, must aspire to do what some consider impossible. These professionals work to mitigate the most challenging social ills ranging from poverty to domestic violence, environmental preservation to affordable housing, and so on. Moreover, due to a strained economy, those doing this work are increasingly asked to accomplish more with far fewer resources. While it is unlikely these problems will dissipate any time soon, we can hope to improve outcomes by implementing more strategic approaches that increase the reach and depth of our efforts.

Rittel and Webber coined the term "wicked problem" in 1973 to describe social problems that are unique from other technical problems.[2] Wicked problems are "ill- and variously defined; often feature a lack of consensus regarding their causes; lack obvious solutions- or even agreement on criteria for determining when a solution has been achieved; and have numerous and often unfathomable links to other problems"[3]. Despite their complexity, however, wicked problems have been traditionally addressed by organizations and agencies working in silos with differing agendas and tools and providing only piecemeal solutions that often treat clients with fragmented solutions

[2] Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," Policy Sciences 4 (1973): 160.

[3] Michael P. Brooks, Planning Theory for Practitioners (Chicago: Planners Press, 2002), 12.

rather than holistically. This has led to problems such as inefficient service provision and increased burden on clients who must navigate a complex and confusing system which ultimately reduces desired impacts.

Many of these wicked problems, problems such as poverty, crime, and mental/physical health, have recently become of increasing public concern. For much of history, many problems were seen as matters to be dealt with individually or within the family unit.[4] Though government interventions have generally increased, levels of overall involvement have ebbed and flowed over time in response to priorities of the public. Levels of interest in specific issues have varied over time as well. The public sector is expected to serve the "public good", however, a specific focus can often be difficult to select due to the diversity of competing interests and subpopulations that make up the American fabric. Politics come into play and trade-offs are made. Accordingly, benefits of U.S. social structures, systems, and supports accrue unequally, creating winners and losers. This approach has contributed to a proliferation of social service agencies and supports. As funding and interest focus on a particular issue, government entities and non-profit organizations spring up in response. Often, within a relatively short time period, public interest shifts to a new issue, diverting funding and other resources. This has contributed to the siloed approach that is common in social service provision and has produced numerous, narrowly-focused, underfunded social service providers.

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[4] John M. Bolland and Jan V. Wilson, "Three Faces of Integrative Coordination: A model of interorganizational relations in community-based health and human services," Health Services Research 29, no. 3 (August 1994): page 342.

The number of private nonprofit organizations has increased as well in response to meeting needs where the public sector falls short in terms of capacity or interest.[5] Moreover, non-profits are also relied upon by governments to be the distributors of government funded social services due to the belief that nonprofit organizations are more effective than government. Sometimes, this devolution of public service obligations has contributed to reducing government's perceived level of responsibility in addressing social issues.[6] For now, however, government agencies and non-profits continue to work alongside each other, serving similar or the same clients.[7] However, such a proliferation of *both* public agencies and private non-profits has created a "paradox of success".[8] This paradox can be described as follows:

> "although communities are spending more money to ameliorate public health problems, each dollar has a decreasing impact. The explanation for the paradox of success seems simple: as more community organizations and agencies emerge to address local needs, they must compete more for clients and other resources, and they are less able to work harmoniously toward systemwide goals. In other words, the larger the number of distinct agencies and organizations attempting to achieve a common goal, the less likely they will be to work in a coordinated manner to achieve that goal. This leads to an extension of the paradox: as the number of agencies delivering divergent services grows, the community becomes better able to address social needs in a comprehensive manner; but the very proliferation of services constrains the service providers from functioning as a coordinated system."[9]

[5] Priscilla Wohlstetter et al., "Improving Service Delivery in Education Through Collaboration: An exploratory study of the role of cross-sectoral alliances in the development and support of charter schools," Social Science Quarterly 85, no. 5 (December 2004): 1079.

[6] Lester M. Salamon, "The Nonprofit Sector at a Crossroads: The case of America," Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations 10, no. 1 (1999): 7.

[7] Wohlstetter et al., "Improving Service Delivery in Education," 1079.

[8] Bolland, "Three Faces of Integrative Coordination," 342.

[9] Ibid.

This lack of coordination has created a system that is difficult to navigate for many multi-need clients. Research has shown that some clients have dealt with up to 21 organizations to meet all of their needs.[10] With each organization operating independently, application processes and service provision including case management can become duplicative and inefficient for the organizations as well as the clients. As inefficiencies such as these have come to light, the shortcomings of the siloed approach have been illuminated leading to a rise in collaborative efforts within and across sectors to solve social problems. This has been particularly true of the relationship between the nonprofit sector and government which has become one of "mutual dependence that is financial as well as technical,"[11] but the business sector has also looked for more creative ways to support philanthropy and partner with community enhancement projects.[12] In the present day, nonprofit organizations, for-profit businesses, and government agencies increasingly come together in a variety of ways to achieve superior results when dealing with difficult social issues.

ASSUMPTIONS

This research will be conducted based upon several assumptions about the role and need for social services. First, the arguments that social services are unnecessary in a properly functioning market are considered flawed and naïve. Rather, it is assumed that market failures do not allow all citizen equal access to markets and are therefore unable

[10] Marisa B. Ugarte, Laura Zarate, and Melissa Farley, "Prostitution and Trafficking of Women and Children from Mexico to the United States," in Prostitution, Trafficking and Traumatic Stress, by Melissa Farley (Binghampton: The Hawthorn Maltreatment & Trauma Press, 2003).
[11] Michael Lipsky and Steven Rathgeb Smith, "Nonprofit Organizations, Government, and the Welfare State," Political Science Quarterly 104, no. 4 (Winter 1989-1990): 626.
[12] James E. Austin, "Strategic Collaboration Between Nonprofits and Business," Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly 29 (2000): 70.

to achieve success or sometimes even sustenance in a market economy. Second, the detrimental effects of social ills are presumed to reach beyond the individual, negatively impacting society as a whole. Left unaddressed, these impacts will ultimately cost society and taxpayers far more than reasonable expenditures of social services. Moreover, these ills left unchecked may lead to the demise of a functioning democratic system and ultimately, deterioration of civil society generally. Thus, the value and necessity for social service provision is assumed.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Chapter 2 will discuss the social service landscape within the city of Austin as it has developed over the last 40 years. Some responses to previous problems have created new issues that are motivating increased collaboration between Austin non-profit organizations. Profiles of five Austin social service networks are described including their reasons for forming and challenges they face as they attempt to undertake collaborative work.

Chapter 3 will discuss the networks which have developed in response to the social service needs that have developed in the city of Austin. Findings gathered from website reviews and interviews with Greenlights for Non-Profit Success, Community Action Network (CAN), One Voice, For the City Network, and the St. John Community School Alliance will be discussed including challenges to collaborative efforts.

Chapter 4 will reveal what Austin networks can learn from the literature. The chapter first presents a review of literature relevant to the challenges that Austin networks face in their efforts to be more collaborative. Following this, best practices drawn from a synthesis of research study findings, program evaluations, and other relevant publications will be shared.

Chapter 5 will present final conclusions and recommendations for future efforts of inter-organizational networks in Austin.

Chapter 2: Social Service Needs in Austin, Texas

EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL SERVICE NEEDS IN AUSTIN

As mentioned previously, in Austin, there are over 6,300 non-profit organizations, and about half work in the area of social/health services or education. This is more organizations per capita than any other city in Texas or the Southwestern U.S., yet Austin continues to face numerous social problems begging the need for continued effort and improved strategies. Some recent statistics that highlight just a few of the social ills present in the city: Austin has the 4th highest number of hate crimes of all Texas cities, the 19th worst graduation rate of the nation's 50 largest districts, nearly 1 in 5 Austinites lives in poverty, and nearly 1 in 3 Austin children lives in poverty. This report seeks to establish whether inter-organizational relationships may be enhanced to improve social services being provided and ultimately improve providers' impact in mitigating these problems.

The city of Austin boasts a unique set of resources. As the state capital, Austin is home to many public offices and facilities. Legislative offices and headquarters of state agencies are all located within the city. Plus, there are five colleges including the University of Texas, one of the nation's leading research institutions. As a result, Austin is a place where research, policies and practice often converge. Plus, population growth within the city puts consistent pressure on local service providers to increase and improve services. This unique characterization of the city, defined by proximity of entities with mutual interest, would presumably make Austin an expected hub for collaboration. Historically, however, this may not have always been the case. Traditionally in Austin, both public and private service provision has been decentralized and uncoordinated, with little interaction besides referrals, though this suggestion likely varies across industries.[13] Research from the late 1960s and early 1970s, identified many urban problems burdening the city of Austin including problems related to housing, employment, education, etc.[14] Moreover, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the amount, level, and types of services being provided with many feeling supply was not sufficient to meet demand.[15] Plus, significant duplication and overlap of services characterized social service provision within the city.[16]

In the last 20 years, service providers have proliferated and coordination and collaboration have increased in the Austin area. Government human services departments have been consolidated and networks of non-profits have formed in response to the previously fragmented and disorganized social service marketplace.[17] In the past, studies of collaborative work have found that coordination and integration between government entities is more successful than efforts to collaborate with private entities, including non-profits. However, Austin's Community Action Network (CAN) has been credited with successfully promoting the integration of two major public human service agencies in the 1990s. CAN has also been credited with successfully assembling social service providers, serving as a connector and facilitator.[18]

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[13] Joy Dawn Russell, "Coordination of Social Services at the Municipal Level: Austin, Texas as a case study" (master's thesis, University of Texas, 1993), 1, 12.
[14] Barbara Sue Anderson et al., A Needs Assessment of Social Services in Austin-Travis County Texas (Austin: The University of Texas at Austin, 1974), 2.
[15] Ibid., 4.
[16] Ibid., 24.
[17] Russell, "Coordination of Social Services," 34.
[18] Ibid., 39.

However, barriers to successful collaboration were also identified at that time, most notably issues related to "turf" guarding and competition, lack of unity, and aversion to change.[19] Weak connectivity between service providers and potential clients was another problem partially created due to a lack of organizational awareness. A report co-sponsored by the Texas Health and Human Services Coordinating Council presented the following quote by a person in need of social services, "The most formidable barrier to access...is the lack of knowledge about what is available. Services that are unknown are services which are unavailable."[20] The needs in Austin that were presented in the report cited increased coordination between state information and referral providers as a necessity, locally, regionally, and statewide.

Social Service Needs in Austin Today

Based on interviews with social service leaders in Austin, current challenges related to social service provision and collaboration in Austin can be grouped under three overarching headings: 1) issues arising from the existences of a multitude of small service providing organizations, 2) increased strain resulting from the state of Texas budgetary crisis, and 3) challenges that prohibit clients in need from accessing services. Each of these problems will be discussed below.

Abundance of Small Non-Profits

The number of social service providers has exploded in the Austin area in recent years. Though the increase in organizations may be providing needed services, having such a large number of organizations increases duplication of services, intensifies sector-

[19] Russell, "Coordination of Social Services," 40, 48.
[20] Gray, Ilene, and Andersen Consulting. Information Plan and Referral in Texas: A plan to improve services. Austin: Texas Health and Human Services Coordinating Council, Texas Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities, Texas Interagency Council for Early Childhood Intervention, 1991.

wide inefficiencies and burdens funders with excessive requests and costs associated with due diligence investigations, etc.[21] Plus, many of the non-profit organizations operating in the city of Austin are disproportionately small, with ninety-three percent of the non-profit organizations reporting a budget of less than $1 million.[22] Having so many *small* non-profits may increase the responsiveness, flexibility, and relevance of the non-profit sector; however, such a large number of small organization further *worsens* inefficiencies and wastes resources, creates instability within each organization and the sector, and impairs collaboration, thus reducing strategic collective action.[23] In addition, coordinating efforts between so many different entities can be especially challenging due to lack of organizational awareness, continued turf guarding, lack of strategy, lack of structure, and competition.

Economic Stress

Also of great concern to social service providers, is the current fiscal crisis facing the state of Texas. Projected revenue shortfalls of nearly 12.3% have resulted in a $27 billion shortfall that must be balanced for the coming biennium.[24] Recent elections have increased the percentage of fiscally conservative representatives including many elected as part of the Tea Party platform. As a result, the overarching objective in the state legislature is to balance the budget without raising taxes at all and only using a portion ($3.1 billion) of the $9.4 billion available in the Rainy Day Fund.[25] Therefore, nearly all of the $27 billion deficit must be cut from current expenditures. These cuts are expected

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[21] Kouri, *Does Central Texas Have Too Many Nonprofits?*
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Brandi Grissom et al., "House Budget Shrinks Spending, Slashes Services," The Texas Tribune, April 3, 2011.
[25] Center for Public Policy Priorities, CPPP Statement on House's Proposed State Budget (n.p., 2011), 1.

to come largely at the expense of education and health and human services which have already been operating on reduced budgets following cuts made last biennium.

Many non-profit organizations have faced cuts from private funders in recent years as well. A local coalition of philanthropic organizations that fund in the area of education, Central Texas Education Funders (CTEF), reported in their 2009 giving profile that 46% of members decreased their giving budgets from previous years as a result of the economic downtown. Many of the funders dealt with reduced budgets by reducing or eliminating multi-year commitments and by continuing to fund the same number of grantees but with smaller amounts.[26] These reductions can cause heightened economic fear and instability for non-profit organizations. Many of these nonprofits have little if any economic reserves due partially to public and private grantmaking practices that only provide break-even funding.[27, 28] In the Central Texas region, over 45% of non-profits surveyed reported having less than 3 months worth of operating reserves.[29] Only 26% of respondents reported having 6 months worth of reserves or more. Nearly 20% of respondents reported being concerned or very concerned that their organization may have to close in the coming year.[30]

Reduced funding exacerbates problems resulting from traditional grantmaking prioritization. Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), "a powerful coalition of more than 2,000 individual members representing 350 grantmaking organizations...",

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[26] Central Texas Education Funders, Giving Profile 2009, 10, accessed April 12, 2011, http://www.centraltexasedfunders.org/ Giving_Profiles_-_Public.html.
[27] Jeanne Bell, "Nonprofit Budgets Have to Balance: False!" Blue Avocado, accessed April 20, 2011, last modified May 14, 2008, http://www.blueavocado.org/ content/nonprofit-budgets-have-balance-false.
[28] "Five Questions for Thomas Polk," The Urban Institute, accessed April 20, 2011, last modified July 13, 2009, http://www.urban.org/toolkit/fivequestions/TPollak.cfm%5C.
[29] Greenlights for Non-Profit Success, 2009 Non-Profit Pulse Survey, 7, accessed April 12, 2011, http://www.greenlights.org/resources/resource-library/cat_view/30-resource-library/23-nonprofit-research.
[30] Ibid.

reports that grantmakers only give 20% of their grant dollars as operating support, preferring to fund direct services.[31] This philanthropic approach leaves non-profits unable to properly invest in infrastructure and capacity building. Another preference among philanthropists is to fund organizations that have funding coming from a variety of sources/funders. According to research by GEO and the Association of Small Foundations (ASF), expecting non-profits to manage relationships with so many funders is problematic. The application and reporting process can become overly burdensome and an inefficient use of staff time and resources as non-profits seek to communicate information to funders with varying grantmaking priorities.[32]

At the same time, many Austin social service providers have seen increases in service demands. Thus, these entities are attempting to provide more service with fewer resources. A survey of Austin service providers reported that over 65% of respondents had experienced increases in demand and over 30% had already increased service offerings.[33] Plus, over 75% reported no intention of charging for services or increasing service fees to cover budget shortfalls.[34] Strategies these organizations have used to deal with demands beyond their capacity include increased reliance on referrals (44%) and collaboration/partnership with other organizations (27%). However, as will be discussed later, many collaborations are formed ad hoc and may not be implementing strategies that will achieve maximum results.

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[31] "The Money," Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, http://www.geofunders.org/the-money.aspx.
[32] Association of Small Foundations and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, How Grantmakers Can Help Address Key Financial Challenges Facing Nonprofits, 1, accessed April 12, 2011, http://www.geofunders.org/ the-money.aspx.
[33] Greenlights, *2009 Non-Profit Pulse Survey*, 2-3.
[34] Ibid., 3.

Barriers to Access

In addition to the large number of small non-profit organizations and the negative impact of the budget crisis on social service providing organizations, service accessibility is a problem in Austin as in many other cities. Connections between providers of human services and potential clients are formed as a result of efforts on behalf of providers to push services to clients and efforts of clients to pull services from providers. If barriers arise that restrict participants on either end (supply or demand), then access may be reduced and eligible clients may not be reached or effectively served. There are many factors that can impede clients from being able to access services including lack of awareness, lack of transportation, lack of childcare, location, hours of operation, language and cultural barriers, social stigma, technology, and cost. A brief explanation of each of these barriers is given below:

Lack of Awareness

Many people don't know what services are offered in their city or community.[35, 36, 37, 38, 39] Many others may know or suspect that the services they need are offered somewhere but don't know which provider to contact or how to seek service.[40] One study of women in Philadelphia found that lack of awareness may be greater for privately

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[35] Jeffrey Manditch Prottas, "The Cost of Free Services: Organizational impediments to access to public services," Public Administration Review 41, no. 5 (September-October 1981): 530.
[36] Fary M. Cachelin and Ruth H. Striegel-Moore, "Help Seeking and Barriers to Treatment in a Community Sample of Mexican American and European American Women with Eating Disorders," International Journal of Eating Disorders 39, no. 2 (2006): 158.
[37] Janice H. Goodman, "Women's Attitudes, Preferences, and Perceived Barriers to Treatment for Perinatal Depression," Birth 36, no. 1 (March 2009): 65.
[38] Krzysztof Kaniasty and Fran H. Norris, "Help-Seeking Comfort and Receiving Social Support: The role of ethnicity and context of need," American Journal of Community Psychology 28, no. 4 (2000): 546.
[39] Rebecca Joyce Kissane, "What's Need Got to Do with It? Barriers to Use of Nonprofit Social Services," Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare XXX, no. 2 (June 2003): 133.
[40] Prottas, "The Cost of Free Services," 530.

provided services, including services provided by non-profit organizations, than for publicly provided services.[41] Another research study conducted by Yu, Huang, Schwalberg, and Kogan assessed parental awareness of health and community resources and found that between one-third and one-half of study participants were unaware of available resources.[42] For the immigrant population, lack of awareness was even greater, with nearly two-thirds of respondents reporting a lack of awareness. Young people are another population likely to be unaware of available services. In fact, since "adolescents do not usually seek services or treatment on their own,[43] their awareness is mostly dependent on the adults who refer them including parents, teachers, juvenile justice authorities, etc. These people and the organizations that youth may contact serve as gateways to other resources. Researchers have argued that better marketing campaigns may increase awareness; however, they also note that funders are often reluctant to provide resources for any efforts beyond direct service.[44]

Lack of Transportation

Transportation has been found to be a barrier for many people seeking social services.[45, 46, 47, 48, 49] Though public transportation can assist some populations, it is not a

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41 Kissane, "What's Need Got to Do with It?" 133.
42 Stella M. Yu et al., "Parental Awareness of Health and Community Resources among Immigrant Families," Maternal and Child Health Journal 9, no. 1 (March 2005): 29.
43 Arlene Rubin Stiffman et al., "Youths' Access to Mental Health Services: The role of providers' training, resource connectivity, and assessment of need," Mental Health Services Research 2, no. 3 (2000): 142.
44 Scott W. Allard, Access to Social Services: The changing urban geography of poverty and service provision, Survey Series (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004), 13.
45 Marc Schlossberg, "Coordination as a Strategy for Serving the Transportation Disadvantaged: A comparative framework of local and states roles," Public Works Management Policy 9, no. 12 (2004): 134.
46 Allard, "Access to Social Services," 13.
47 Jeanne C. Marsh, Thomas A. D'Aunno, and Brenda D. Smith, "Increasing Access and Providing Social Services to Improve Drug Abuse Treatment for Women with Children," Addiction 95, no. 8 (2000): 1237.
48 Goodman, "Women's Attitudes, Preferences, and Perceived Barriers to Treatment," 65.
49 Kissane, "What's Need Got to Do with It?" 136.

complete solution. Some populations may not be able to access public transportation even if it is available in their area and offers routes that will connect with desired destinations. For example, the elderly and the disabled may have trouble walking even short distances to city bus stops or rail stations. For other populations, public transportation may be insufficient due to limited routes and times of operation. Plus, accessing certain locations using public transportation may take exorbitant amounts of time, especially if a trip requires one or more bus transfers. Lastly, some people may not have the option of using public transportation at all if their jobs or homes are not located in a service area.

Lack of Childcare

Provision of child care assistance may be one method of increasing access to social services for those in need.[50] Studies have found that women with children are not able to access available services due to inadequate child care options.[51, 52] In a study of women in need of substance abuse services, lack of child care and transportation were found to be two significant barriers to accessing services.[53] A study conducted of Head Start in New York, found that issues related to child care and transportation accounted for 6% of non-utilization.[54]

Location

The location of social service providers is a factor in determining whether potential clients are able or willing to access and utilize needed services. Shorter

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[50]Allard, "Access to Social Services," 13.
[51] Marsh, "Increasing Access and Providing Social Services," 1237.
[52] Goodman, "Women's Attitudes, Preferences, and Perceived Barriers," 65.
[53] Marsh, "Increasing Access and Providing Social Services," 1237.
[54] Ibid.

distances are thought to facilitate access, particularly for the poor and transportation disadvantaged.[55] For this reason, social service providers have usually been established in urban centers where concentrations of the poor are high. However, in recent years, as middle-class families return to the urban core, housing policies targeted to reduce concentration of poverty and reduced racial segregation in the housing market have increased the mobility of low-income populations, and a spatial mismatch has emerged between those in need and those providing services. Researchers argue this spatial mismatch of services can result from the movement of low-income populations out of central city neighborhoods social service providers remain concentrated. Many providers are tied into lease agreements, have limited resources, and depend upon connections in the surrounding community, all of which limits their ability to re-locate in light of changing demographics. Plus, growing numbers of service providers and changes in ideology regarding social assistance have increased the significance of geography in determining accessibility as clients are increasingly required to be present for in-office service provision.[56]

Hours of Service

Hours of service may also pose a barrier for clients in need of social services. Many service providers only offer service during traditional business hours, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.[57] For unemployed populations, these service hours may be sufficient and even preferable. For those who work or have other commitments during the day, such service provision hours can cause schedule conflicts that may prohibit them

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55 Allard, “Access to Social Services,” 2.
56 Ibid.,” 13.
57 Kissane, "What's Need Got to Do with It?” 143.

from seeking and accessing service.[58] Low-income populations most in need of service are likely to be the least willing to take time off work since many low paying jobs do not offer paid leave. Furthermore, "reforms" and the shift to "work first" strategies may further deter clients from making any choice (such as the choice to miss work) that may jeopardize their job and in turn, other federally provided support. Moreover, many potential clients are aware that long waits are commonly associated with social services and may anticipate that appointments will require extended hours away from work and other obligations. Long wait times have been reported as a major deterrent to service utilization.[59]

Stigma

In American society, stigma associated with social service assistance may deter clients in need from seeking help.[60, 61, 62, 63] Aside from psychological stress that derives from participants' awareness of social stigmas, procedures for acquiring assistance may amplify insecurities and act as a further deterrent.[64] In his article, *The Cost of Free Services: Organizational Impediments to Access to Public Service,* Prottas explains how application processes that require in-person submittal, lengthy waits in dismal conditions, and impersonal and humiliating treatment reinforces clients perceptions of stigmas and anxiety. Moreover, application processes often require clients to disclose personal

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[58] Prottas, "The Cost of Free Services," 529.
[59] Jeffrey Manditch Prottas, "The Cost of Free Services: Organizational impediments to access to public services," Public Administration Review 41, no. 5 (September-October 1981): 529.
[60] Prottas, "The Cost of Free Services," 526-34.
[61] Cachelin, "Help Seeking and Barriers to Treatment," 154.
[62] Goodman, "Women's Attitudes, Preferences, and Perceived Barriers," 65.
[63] Kissane, "What's Need Got to Do with It?" 136.
[64] Prottas, "The Cost of Free Services," 528.

information which invokes feelings of shame and inadequacy.[65] Beyond clients' perceptions, stigmas may actually compel substandard treatment by social service providers in the form of "interrupt[ing] clients, ask[ing] intrusive questions, and act[ing] in a condescending manner, generally".[66] These psychological burdens resulting from stigma have been found to significantly reduce clients' utilization of available services. One research study found that stigma was cited by one-fourth of nonparticipants as a major factor compelling their nonparticipation.[67]

Language and Culture

Language and culture explain why some potential clients don't or can't access services. Though English is the predominant language in America, many people do not have the ability to speak or read English. In fact, in the United States there are 46 million people whose primary language is not English,[68] and there are "24.5 million residents over the age of five, almost nine percent of the U.S. population, with limited English proficiency".[69] A research study of the health care system found that "persons who have limited English proficiency are less likely to have a regular source of primary care, and are less likely to receive preventative care. They are also less satisfied with the care they do receive, are more likely to report overall problems with care, and may be at increased risk of experiencing medical errors."[70] Similar findings have been found in many other studies indicating that language barriers pose challenges for accessing many social

65 Prottas, "The Cost of Free Services," 528.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Jacobs, Elizabeth A., Donald S. Shepard, Jose A. Suaya, and Esta-Lee Stone. "Overcoming Language Barriers in Health Care: Costs and benefits of interpreter services." American Journal of Public Health 94, no. 5 (May 2004): 866.
69 Ted Wang, Eliminating Language Barriers for LEP Individuals: Promising practices from the public sector (n.p.: Grantmakers Concerned wth Immigrants and Refugees, 2009), 1.
70 Jacobs, "Overcoming Language Barriers in Health Care," 866.

services.[71, 72, 73] Culture, due to values conflicts and level of acculturation, may also play a role in determining whether a potential client will seek help.[74, 75] Specifically, individuals who are part of cultures that subscribe to more independent (versus dependent) and more individualist (versus collectivistic) mores may be less likely to seek help.[76] Studies of help seeking behavior of Latino battered women have discovered that 2nd and 3rd generation residents and greater degrees of acculturation are correlated with increased help seeking.[77]

Technology

In recent years, reliance on the internet to disseminate and acquire information has grown substantially. Many see the Internet as a valuable tool for linking individuals with valuable information and with other people. However, research indicates that some populations, particularly those most in need of social services, may face barriers that limit full access to internet usage and navigation.[78] A research study by Pettigrew, Durance, and Unruh assessed barriers that people face when seeking help using on-line tools. They found that help seekers faced many challenges to using the community networks and the

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71 Carolyn M. West, Glenda Kaufman Kantor, and Jana L. Jasinski, "Sociodemographic Predictors and Cultural Barriers to Help-Seeking Behavior by Latina and Anglo American Battered Women," Violence and Victims 13, no. 4 (1998): 363.

72 Alan J. Dettlaff and Ilze Earner, "The Intersection of Migration and Child Welfare: Emerging issues and implications," in Intersection of Migration and Child Welfare: Emerging issues and implications, vol. 22 of Protecting Children 2 (n.p.: American Humane, 2007), 4.

73 Tracy Vericker, Daniel Kuehn, and Randy Capps, "Latino Children of Immigrants in the Texas Child Welfare System," in Intersection of Migration and Child Welfare: Emerging issues and implications, vol. 22 of Protecting Children 2 (n.p.: American Humane, 2007), 25.

74 West, "Sociodemographic Predictors and Cultural Barriers," 361-75.

75 Kaniasty, "Help-Seeking Comfort and Receiving Social Support," 547.

76 Ibid.

77 West, "Sociodemographic Predictors and Cultural Barriers," 363.

78 Karen E. Pettigrew, Joan C. Durrance, and Kenton T. Unruh, "Facilitating Community Information Seeking Using the Internet: Findings from three public library-community network systems," Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology 53, no. 11 (2002): 894-5.

internet. In addition, those who are able to access the Internet may not be able to access on-line information due to poor retrieval (due to poor search engines), poor interface design, poor organization of the website, out-of-date and inaccurate information, authority (reliability hard to determine), missing information, dead links, language used (English only), security (distrust for sites requesting personal information), specificity, and nonanticipatory systems (information not linked to other relevant information or sites).

Cost

Social and health services, despite huge public subsidies and support from private funders, are not always provided free of charge and can be quite costly to participants. Health services can be particularly expensive, particularly for those without health insurance. Many low-income populations cannot afford preventative care or doctors' visits without insurance. Often they must wait to seek care until their condition has worsened, and they are forced to rely upon hospitals.[79] In these cases and others, clients face uncertainty about costs or perceived costs, which deters help-seeking. One study of women suffering post-partum depression found that 18% of respondents cited uncertainty of cost and affordability as a barrier to seeking help.[80] Costs are often associated with non-health related services as well, including those provided by non-profit organizations. Even seemingly minimal costs can be overwhelming for some families. In her field research of 20 poor women in Philadelphia, Kissane discovered that costs were associated with non-usage for several participants. One mother reported withdrawing her

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[79] Julian Chun-Chung Chow, Kim Jaffee, and Lonnie Snowden, "Racial/Ethnic Disparities in the Use of Mental Health Services in Poverty Areas," American Journal of Public Health 93, no. 5 (May 2003): 792.
[80] Goodman, "Women's Attitudes, Preferences, and Perceived Barriers," 65.

children from a day care offered though a non-profit, faith-based organization, when the organization began charging a $10-per-child fee.[81]

In order to further understand the social service marketplace and current responses to the above needs/problems in Austin, a scan of social service networks will be presented in the following chapter.

[81] Kissane, "What's Need Got to Do with It?" 144.

Chapter 3: Network Responses to Social Service Needs in Austin

CLASSIFYING INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Before presenting the assessments of networks in the Austin area, a brief literature review is necessary to develop a framework for defining and classifying networks. The literature shows that there are no clear definitions for inter-organizational collaboration; however, numerous frameworks have been developed that shed light on how these types of activities may be classified. Research does not indicate if certain types of collaboration are more effective than others. We do know, however, that certain types of relationships may be more prone to particular types of challenges. These overall challenges, which are also faced by Austin area networks, will be discussed in the following chapter.

A variety of theoretical frameworks have been used to explore and understand a range of inter-organizational relationships. Robert Agranoff argues that services integration (SI), a movement started in the 1960s concerned with developing "systems that are responsive to the multiple needs of persons at-risk..."[82] continues to evolve today. Though SI has been defined more broadly by some researchers as "a process by which two or more entities establish linkages for the purpose of improving outcomes for needy people,"[83] in his assessment, Robert Agranoff focuses primarily on the development of more formalized systems with a higher degree of collaboration.

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[82] Robert Agranoff, "Human Services Integration: Past and present challenges in public administration," Public Administrative Review 51, no. 6 (November-December 1991): 533.
[83] Ellen L. Konrad, "A Multidimensional Framework for Conceptualizing Human Services Integration Initiatives," New Directions for Evaluation 69 (Spring 1996): 6.

The SI movement began as a result of increased policy interest in reducing poverty and other complex problems with a more comprehensive approach.[84] As part of the SI movement, government sponsored initiatives in the 1970s promoted the creation of networks and combined programs as means to achieving responsive systems capable of handling multiple needs. However, according to Agranoff, the agencies learned that "restructuring alone would not integrate services"[85] or assure smoother service delivery. Nonetheless,

> "the impetus for services integration initiatives, then, is based on the assumption that existing human service delivery systems are seriously deficient and that some form of coordination or consolidation is necessary for their improvement. The benefits of SI projects are purported to include, but are not limited to, the ability to address the needs of multiproblem clients in a comprehensive manner, greater service accessibility and continuity, early intervention and prevention, reduced duplication, reduced waste and inefficiency, reduced costs, and greater accountability."[86]

Agranoff's findings inform interesting recommendations for public managers and policy makers; however, his analysis is focused largely on the work of publicly provided services and agencies with little consideration for services provided and networks created between nonprofit organizations. SI efforts dwindled in the late 1970s and 80s but reappeared in the 90s and have continued to gain momentum into the present day. In fact, researchers have found governments and non-profits have been increasing working together to coordinate services and/or collaborate to achieve desired outcomes.[87] These collaborative efforts vary significantly, however, depending on the types of entities

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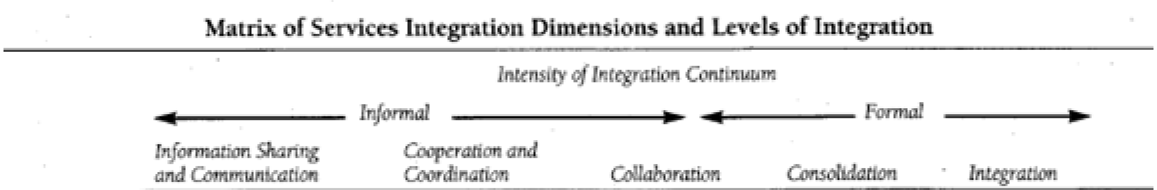
[84] Agranoff, "Human Services Integration," 534.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Konrad, "A Multidimensional Framework," 6.
[87] Wohlstetter, "Improving Service Delivery in Education," 1079.

involved, the number of entities participating, the level of formality, the type of authority structure, the level of intensity, the target population, and the activities undertaken. What differentiates inter-organization relationships from random contacts between organizations is a certain degree of consistency and regularity.[88]

Despite large variations from one initiative to the next, "the term integration is commonly used as a catch-all term and as a representation of an ideal state."[89] Many other terms are often used in the literature interchangeably as well, including networks, strategic alliances, partnerships, coordination, collaboration, etc. However, in recent years, level of collaboration is perceived as falling along a continuum where "the level of intensity is [a concept associated with] the degree of formality or informality that governs integrative activities."[90] Konrad identifies five categories that fall along the continuum: information sharing and communication, cooperation and coordination, collaboration, consolidation, and integration (See Figure 3.1) below.

Figure 3.1: Matrix of Services Integration



[88] Therese C. Reitan, "Theories of Interorganizational Relations in the Human Services," The Social Service Review 72, no. 3 (September 1998): 287.
[89] Ellen L. Konrad, "A Multidimensional Framework for Conceptualizing Human Services Integration Initiatives," New Directions for Evaluation 69 (Spring 1996): 9.
[90] Ibid., 9.

As shown in the matrix, these levels of integration are associated with differing degrees of formality and intensity. Konrad considers the first two categories informal and the last two categories formal, with collaboration exhibiting both formal and informal characteristics. She gives examples of each as follows:

Information Sharing and Communication – sharing information brochures, educational presentations, newletters, videotapes, and joint staff meetings

Cooperation and Coordination – reciprocal client referral and follow-up, joint staffing, mutual agreements to provide priority response, and joint lobbying

Collaboration – partnerships with written agreements, goals, formalized operational procedures and possibly funding, staff cross-training, and shared information systems

Consolidation – normally includes an umbrella organization with single leadership

Integration – has single authority and works as a one-stop shop with unified intake and assessment, case management, and many services provided in one location

Similar continuums are defined by numerous researchers. Gajda's evaluation framework, the Strategic Alliance Formative Assessment Rubric (SAFAR), is particularly useful for categorizing collaborative efforts (See Figure 3.2).[91] The categories are titled differently than Konrad's groupings; however, they capture similar themes and provide a parallel classification system .

[91] Rebecca Gajda, "Utilizing Collaboration Theory to Evaluate Strategic Alliances," American Journal of Evaluation 25, no. 1 (2004): 65-77.

Figure 3.2: Gajda’s Classification Matrix

Level of Integration	Purpose	Strategies and Tasks	Leadership and Decision-making	Interpersonal and Communication
Networking 1	Create a web of communication Identify and create a base of support Explore interests	Loose or no structure Flexible, roles not defined Few if any defined tasks	Non-hierarchical Flexible Minimal or no group decision making	Very little interpersonal conflict Communication between all members infrequent or absent
Cooperating 2	Work together to ensure tasks are done Leverage or raise money Identify mutual needs, but maintain separate identities	Member links are advisory Minimal structure Some strategies and tasks identified	Non-hierarchical, decisions tend to be low stakes Facilitative leaders, usually voluntary Several people form "go-to" hub	Some degree of personal commitment and investment Minimal interpersonal conflict Communication between members clear, but may be informal
Partnering 3	Share resources to address common issues Organizations remain autonomous but support something new To reach mutual goals together	Strategies and tasks are developed and maintained Central body of people Central body of people have specific tasks	Autonomous leadership Alliance members share equally in the decision-making Decision making mechanisms are in place	Some interpersonal conflict Communication system and formal information channels developed Evidence of problem solving and productivity
Merging 4	Merge resources to create or support something new Extract money from existing systems/members Commitment for a long period of time to achieve short and long-term outcomes	Formal structure to support strategies and tasks is apparent Specific and complex strategies and tasks identified Committees and sub-committees formed	Strong, visible leadership Sharing and delegation of roles and responsibilities Leadership capitalizing on diversity and organizational strengths	High degree of commitment and investment Possibility of interpersonal conflict high Communication is clear, frequent and prioritized High degree of problem solving and productivity
Unifying 5	Unification or acquisition to form a single structure Relinquishment of autonomy to support surviving organization	Highly formal, legally complex Permanent re-organization of strategies and tasks	Central, typically hierarchical leadership Leadership capitalizes on diversity and organizational strengths	Possibility of interpersonal conflict very high Communication is clear, frequent, prioritized, formal and informal

What drives groups to engage at a given level? Understanding what causes organizations to engage with one another at a given level of intensity and formality must begin with consideration of what motivates organizations to engage at all. Aside from broad overarching agendas associated with inter-organizational collaboration, what drives specific organizations to form linkages with other organizations or networks? Many theories pose answers to this question including resource dependency, transaction cost, collaboration, collective action, and network theories.

Resource dependency theory, developed in 1978, informs much of the research on inter-organizational relationships and supposes that "collaborative relationships will be formed as a managerial response to turbulent conditions in an organization's resource environment".[92] In her book, Forging Nonprofit Alliances, Jane Arsenault, identifies three scenarios that tend to motivate nonprofits to work together: 1) "Survival as an autonomous unit is in doubt, and an organization's leadership desires to ensure survival of all or part of its activities"; 2) "The organization's leadership sees an opportunity to build dominance or leadership in a particular service arena (or market)"; 3) "The organization needs additional resources to pursue an opportunity or maintain or increase a commitment to mission-driven programming."[93] In other words, during times of uncertain or strained resources, organizations may view the benefit of additional resources and security that can be derived from working with other organizations to outweigh the potential drawbacks.

[92] Chao Guo and Muhittin Acar, "Understanding Collaboration Among Nonprofit Organizations: Combining resource dependency, institutional, and network perspectives," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Quarterly* 34 (2005): 345.
[93] Jane Arsenault, *Forging Nonprofit Alliances* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 3-4.

Similar to resource dependency theory, transaction cost theory also emphasizes the organizational benefit that can be derived from inter-organizational collaboration. Transaction cost theory emphasizes the role of collaboration in developing efficiency by reducing overlap and duplication and by increasing economies of scale. In this way, psychological or economic advantages are attained by minimizing costs.[94]

Collaboration theory, network theory, and collective action theory, on the other hand, all emphasize the desire for increased progress toward achieving mutual and parallel goals by working together, or as Stoll, et all. defines collective action, "mutual interests and the possibility of benefits from coordinated action."[95] Stoll, et al. argue that these mutual interests may be found between organizations who seek to address different facets of a social problem or who serve similar populations. For example, looking at human trafficking, they argue that there may be opportunity for coordination between organizations who are working to mitigate human trafficking such as law enforcement agencies, counseling services, shelters, etc. even though the strategy and goals of these organizations differ significantly.[96] Similarly, network theory considers the social context in which organizations exist, emphasizing the networks that can enhance or impede progress toward achieving organizational goals.[97] These theories view a sense of reciprocity in reaching mutual or complementary goals as a motivational force in inter-organizational coordination.

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[94] Agnes Meinhard and Mary Foster, A Regression Model Explaining Predisposition to Collaborate, Working Paper Series 18 (n.p.: Center for Voluntary Sector Studies Ryerson University, 2001), 3.
[95] Jennifer Stoll, W. Keith Edwards, and Elizabeth D. Mynatt, "Interorganizational Coordination and Awareness in a Nonprofit Ecosystem" (Computer Supported Cooperative Work 2010, February 6-10, Savannah, Georgia).
[96] Ibid.
[97] Guo, "Understanding Collaboration among Nonprofit Organizations," 348.

Ultimately, all three theories reflect a commitment to improving outcomes for clients, as opposed to resource dependency theory which focuses on sustainability of the organization. Though organizational sustainability is a significant concern for many non-profit organizations, a greater interest in promoting the best interest of the client seems inherent to mission-based (nonprofit) organizations and public service agencies. However, *it is likely that some combination of these objectives influences decisions makers' choices regarding inter-organizational collaborations.* As will be discussed as part of the review of best practices, motives and expectations are important aspects of inter-organizational work and should be clearly laid out at the early onset of collaboration. James Austin's research on collaboration asserts that value exchange is an inherent part of collaborative work and that there are multiple sources of value which may not be the same for all participants but can still yield a fruitful relationship with benefits for all parties.[98]

Once organizations have decided to work together, what factors determine the degree of intensity and formality of the collaborative efforts in which the organizations will choose to engage? According to research by Guo et al., a more formal approach to coordination is associated with an organization that is "older, has a larger budget size, receives government funding but relies on fewer government funding streams, has more board linkages with other nonprofit organizations, and is not operating in the education, research or social service industry."[99] Konrad notes that the extent of communication, level staff deployment and reporting, extent of training, degree of geographic co-location and service configuration, level of case management, and other system characteristics

[98] Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 76.
[99] Guo, "Understanding Collaboration Among Nonprofit Organizations," 340.

will also impact the type and level of collaboration that is chosen.[100] Personal relationships also play a role in forming and sustaining collaboration. Research has shown that "the mission connect is the motivational driver, and the personal relationships are the glue that binds the organizations together".[101]

Other linkages may compel a given structure or organization simply due to its nature. For instance, relationships involving public entities often require a greater degree of formality and intensity as a result of mandates and regulatory requirements.[102] It is important to note that level of formality or intensity may not be associated with improved outcomes. It is not clear that increased formality or intensity result in improved collaborative efforts, particularly if there is little staff buy-in and implementation is not enforced. On the other hand, without increased formality and an authority structure to enforce agreements and propel efforts forward, many collaborative agendas do not actually manifest.[103] In reality, intensive collaborations are much less common than information sharing and referrals which have become quite common in recent years.[104]

These commonly formed relationships focused on information sharing have also contributed to the development of information communities[105] and can often represent, promote, or support the manifestation of collaborative efforts and partnerships. With the establishment of the Internet, technology has allowed people to connect from farther away, quicker, and easier. In essence, distance has become a less tangible concept since people often have greater contact with people who are much farther away than people

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[100] Konrad, "A Multidimensional Framework," 15.
[101] Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 83.
[102] Guo, "Understanding Collaboration Among Nonprofit Organizations," 346.
[103] Agranoff, "Human Services Integration," 540.
[104] Guo, "Understanding Collaboration Among Nonprofit Organizations," 344.
[105] Karen E. Fisher, Kenton T. Unruh, and Joan C. Durrance, "Information Communities: Characteristics gleaned from studies of three online networks" (ASIST 2003 Contributed Paper).

residing in their own neighborhoods, which are geographically "closer". This shrinking of space and time has allowed for the creation of virtual communities – communities that are derived of individuals or institutions with common interests rather than locational proximity.[106] This characteristic of on-line networks and information communities may be particularly relevant for service providing organizations that are often geographically distant from other providers (especially government providers who may operate at a state or national level). The role of information communities in facilitating coordination is increasingly being considered in Austin. Greenlights for Non-Profit Success, an organization offering training and support services to Austin nonprofits, described below, is one example of an organization interested in increasing use of technology to support connectivity in the non-profit sector.

DOES COLLABORATION ALWAYS IMPROVE OUTCOMES?

The research findings that have sought to answer this question are mixed.[107] Some researchers have argued that maintaining "parallel systems create[s] a healthy competitiveness and provide[s] backup systems for any systems that fail."[108] Others argue that coordination leads to mission confusion and unnecessary expenditures.[109] Furthermore, at least one study has found that increased coordination of service delivery actually reduces quality of service provided to clients. It is important to note, however,

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106 Fisher, "Information Communities."

107 Glisson, Charles, and Anthony Hammelgarn. "The Effects of Organizational Climate and nterorganizational Coordination on the Quality and Outcomes of Children's Service Systems." Child Abuse & Neglect 22, no. 5 (1998): 401-421.

108 Ibid., 403.

109 Schlossberg, Marc. "Coordination as a Strategy for Serving the Transportation Disadvantaged: A comparative framework of local and states roles." Public Works Management Policy 9, no. 12 (2004): 135.

that this study assessed coordinated work of children's services systems which were more formalized with predefined protocols and procedures. The authors note that this level of coordination seemed to reduce staff's discretion in serving clients and may have deflected staff's attention to effectively following the procedures of coordination rather than serving the needs of the clients. Furthermore, rather than enhancing each organization's sense of responsibility, increased collaborative work may have caused a diffusion of responsibility instead.[110]

Though it is important to consider the negative outcomes that have been associated with some forms of collaboration, plenty of research indicates that many benefits can be, and often are, derived from a collaborative approach.[111, 112, 113] As discussed, organizations may choose to engage or strengthen relationships with other entities for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. The structure, strategies, and level of conflict may all play into the effectiveness of collaborative work. Though there is no available research that connects certain types of collaboration with better/worse outcomes, there is research that puts forth best practice recommendations which will be further discussed later. One final point to note, is that even though networks may in fact be able to achieve improved outcomes, the costs associated with collaborative work should be carefully considered as part of a cost/benefit analysis. The costs of network operations vary significantly depending on the size and scope of the organization;

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110 Glisson, "The Effects of Organizational Climate," 417.

111 Schlossberg, "Coordination as a Strategy," 135.

112 Edward T. Jennings Jr. and Jo Ann G. Ewalt, "Interorganizational Coordination, Administrative Consolidation, and Policy Performance," Public Administration Review 58, no. 5 (September-October 1998): 424.

113 Keith G. Provan and H. Brinton Milward, "Do Networks Really Work? A framework for evaluating public-sector organizational networks," Public Administration Review 61, no. 4 (July-August 2001): 414-423.

however, even modest expenditures of time and funds may not produce a value significant enough to justify the cost. These types of decisions should be carefully made by member organizations and the network board, particularly during times when resources are limited.

NETWORKS IN AUSTIN, TEXAS

Networks in the Austin area are quite diverse, representing varying degrees of collaboration along the continuum and varying goals. As previously discussed, inter-organizational networks can manifest in many forms. Though there are many challenges inherent to collaborative work, some practices are likely to compel positive results. In Austin, there are numerous collaborative networks ranging in size, intensity, and formality. There are organizations, such as Southwest Key, that are moving toward a comprehensive approach in serving their community with completely integrated services ranging from a charter school, juvenile justice support, arts, economic development, etc. Other networks of numerous autonomous organizations, organized loosely with low commitment of resources, also exist. Some, such as Central Texas Education Funders (CTEF), serve specific types of organizations and support initiatives related to specific topics, while other networks serve particular geographic communities. In addition, many networks form in response to current events or crisis, engage in certain activities to address the issue, and then dissipate in a short period of time.

In the following review of Austin inter-organizational partnerships, networks have been chosen that are voluntarily formed, span a broad range of social services, and represent varying levels of coordination. In total, six organizations have been reviewed, which vary in structure, level of formality, number of members, activities undertaken, and whether they work across sectors. Five of the organizations, 2-1-1 of Central Texas, One Voice, Community Action Network (CAN), For the City Network, and the St. John Community School Alliance, are all inter-organizational networks while the sixth organization, Greenlights for Non-Profit Success, is a non-profit focusing on non-profit consulting and support. The chart below provides a snapshot of differences across organizations while the narrative that follows paints a more detailed picture of each organizations objectives and operations. Greenlights is not included in the chart because it is not an actual network; it will be discussed first to provide additional context (beyond the Austin social service needs already discussed) to the work of the other groups.

Figure 3.3 - Austin Networks					
	2-1-1	**CAN**	**One Voice**	**For the City**	**St. John**
Year Established	2003	1995	1983	2010	2006 formalized - 2011
Reason Created	To help connect clients in need of services with service providers	Developed in response to a recognized need for greater communication, information sharing, and collaboartion between large public and private social service providers.	Created in order to communicate social services needs more cohesively and impactfully to policy makers.	To increase the role of the church in promoting and supporting well-being within the community by residing in the community and actively encouraging collaboration and collective action of residents and organizations.	Many community groups were meeting on a regular basis to address youth issues in St. John. The alliance formalizes these information sharing activities
Member Type	Non-Profit Public	Non-Profit Public For-Profit	Non-Profit Public For-Profit (2011) Individuals (2011)	Non-Profit (with an emphasis on faith-based)	Non-Profit Public Community Groups Individuals
# of Members	1,700 agencies 500 programs	17 partners (and 13 coalitions)	45	0 currently 42+ potential	30
Objectives	1) Provide referrals to human/health services 2) Gateway for enrollment in State services (i.e. TANF, Medicaid, etc.) 3) Community needs tracking and reporting	Facilitate collaboration between large health/human service orgs	1) Advocacy 2) Promoting Standards of Excellence 3) Networking	1) Facilitate collaboration between non-profits 2) Provide a space (For the City Center) for community activies and convening 3) Provide volunteer opportunities for members of the Austin Stone church *Currently focused on serving St. Joh neighborhood	Focused on providing youth support in the St. John neighborhood and in supporting the efforts of Reagan High School, Webb Middle School, and Pickle Elementary School.
Paid Staff	3 - operations 22 - call specialists	3	0	4	0
Interviewee	Amy Price	Alan Miller & Chantel Bottoms	Suki Steinhauser	Chris Allman	Allen Weeks
Title of Interviewee	Community Information Manager	Vice Chair & Program Associate	Director	Director	Director
Identified Challenges	Org awareness, Personal relationships, Technology	No challenges impeding collaboration	Transaction costs	Reputational risks	Competition, Org cultural clashes

Greenlights for Non-Profits Success

The mission of Greenlights is to provide “a catalyst for extraordinary nonprofit performance.”[114] The organization was created in 2001 by local funders, nonprofits directors, and community volunteers to provide managerial and governance consulting to non-profit organizations. Specifically, Greenlights offers support to nonprofits in five key areas: Financial Management, Resource Development, Board Excellence, Leadership Advancement, and Strategy & Planning.[115] Taylor Overstreet, Greenlight’s Consulting Fellow, was interviewed about the work being undertaken at Greenlights. Staff provides customized consulting services as well as broader education services through member and community events. Currently, Greenlights supports over 800 organizations and 2,500 individuals each year with customized consulting services. In addition, Greenlights has 375 members who have access to additional benefits such as monthly learning workshops, financial services, free use of meeting space, invitation to the member only board recruitment event, and more. They also host several networking events throughout the year to help increase connectivity between non-profit organizations.[116] Through this work, Greenlights is able to keep its finger on the pulse of the non-profit community in Austin. They frequently survey members and clients to keep up with changes and trends.

Though Greenlights is not currently operating as a collaborative clearinghouse, leadership within the organization is looking for ways that Greenlights may increase their role in this area, supporting the development of a network between members. They have recognized that the abundant number of organizations makes it difficult for organizations to know about each other and keep tabs on changes or opportunities for resource

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[114] Greenlights for Non-Profit Success, accessed April 12, 2011, http://www.greenlights.org/.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Taylor Overstreet, Greenlights Consulting Fellow, telephone interview by author, April 4, 2011.

exchange or collaboration. In the past, Greenlights has hosted resource exchange events where organizations bring something to the event to exchange with another organization for something they need (for example, one organization may have extra space in a building while the other may have technological resources). These events have been well attended and productive as evidenced by attendee feedback; however, Greenlights hopes to develop a strategy for connecting non-profits in a more consistent and engaging fashion. One idea being developed is that of an on-line information community and webspace made available on Greenlights' website for members. Though this idea is still being formed, Greenlights' goal is to increase communication and collaboration within the Austin non-profit sector in hopes of increasing efficiencies and sharing information to improve outcomes.

Through their experience supporting countless non-profit start-ups (and attempted start-ups), Greenlights has come to understand the need for more efficiency and consolidation in the Austin non-profit sector. Aside from difficulties finding out about each other in order to collaborate, Greenlights has found that many organizations (or individuals within organizations) fear a loss of autonomy. When approached by individuals or groups hoping to launch a new non-profit organization, Greenlights consultants strongly encourage a thorough competitive analysis and suggest to these clients that it is highly likely the services they intend to provide are already being provided by another organization. The consultants suggest that these new start-ups seek an organization to work with rather than creating yet another non-profit. According to Overstreet, many clients are not receptive when collaboration is suggested and often respond by saying, "No! This is my idea!" She reports that many individuals running non-profits wish to have a very personal relationship with their work and want to operate independently with little outside involvement.[117]

Aside from these indirect efforts to increase efficiencies in the non-profit sector in Austin, Greenlights also supports non-profit collaboration more directly by offering support services for organizations seeking to collaborate to the fullest extent in the form of a formal merger. Greenlights' helps each partner conduct due diligence information gathering, draft a collaboration plan, and develop contracts that will protect the interests of all parties.

2-1-1 of Central Texas

2-1-1 of Central Texas, is an established public/private partnership between the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and the United Way. The 2-1-1 call center operates to support clients in connecting with the network of social and health service providers. 2-1-1 Central Texas was implemented in 2003 and is one of 25 interwoven 2-1-1 call centers operating in the state of Texas. 2-1-1 Central Texas is housed and operated at the United Way and funded by HHSC. 2-1-1 seeks to accomplish three overarching objectives. First, it provides referrals to all social service providers in the region. Second, 2-1-1 serves as the gateway for enrollment into state services including TANF, Medicaid, and food stamps. Finally, 2-1-1 tracks and reports community needs to inform priorities of policy makers and service providers.

The mission of 2-1-1 of Central Texas is "to help Texas citizens connect with the services they need. Whether by phone or internet, our goal is to present accurate, well-organized and easy-to-find information from over 60,000 state and local health and

[117] Overstreet, Taylor. Telephone interview by author, April 4, 2011.

human services programs."[118] Essentially, the service provides an access point for clients overwhelmed by an independent search for needed services. In addition, 2-1-1 supports specialized projects such as the Texas Military Family Access Project which provides financial assistance in addition to customized advocacy and support services. Moreover, the 2-1-1 service also serves as the state's disaster relief hotline, providing referrals and information during times of crisis following natural disasters.

To understand more about 2-1-1, an interview with Amy Price, the Community Information Manager, was conducted.[119] 2-1-1 maintains an extensive database and operates a call center that provides a central place for clients to access a network of social service providers by calling in and speaking with a call specialist who can access the database of services and programs in the city and statewide. The call specialist is able to make referrals to privately or publicly provided social services and is trained to provide individualized support, including assistance with problem solving and prioritizing for multiple-needs clients.

The 2-1-1 database includes listings for community organizations and non-profits, government agencies, and faith-based organizations. For-profit entities are not included even if they provide socially relevant services. Currently, the database includes approximately 1700 agencies and 500 programs. The call center is served by 22 call specialists and 2-1-1 has 3 operations staff. The staff is responsible for updating database entries annually and work year round to add new information and organizations. In addition, the staff hosts trainings to teach local service providers how to use the database which is also made available on-line. Though individuals are also able to access the

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[118] United Way of the Capital Area. 2-1-1 Texas. Accessed April 12, 2011. http://www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org/_help_2-1-1/.
[119] Amy Price, Community Information Manager, interview by author, United Way, December 7, 2011.

database on-line, the interface can be difficult to navigate, and according to 2-1-1 staff is best suited for use by other service providers rather than individuals seeking service.[120]

2-1-1 is free and confidential, available 24 hours per day 7 days per week, accessible by TTY/TTD, is multilingual, and accessible from cell phones and on-line. 2-1-1 sees itself as "enhancing the community's capacity through...support for the social service system infrastructure [and] community needs tracking and reporting." By recording the services being requested, including requests for services that go unmet (either due to lack of provision or geographic proximity), 2-1-1 is able to track trends in community needs as well as identify gaps in services. Currently, 2-1-1 of Central Texas receives approximately 25,000 calls per month. The call line received a total of 267,355 calls in 2009, up 478% from 55,845 eight years earlier, in 2001. The network is largely accessed by individual clients seeking assistance, but about 10% of calls are received from other social service professionals. In addition, nearly one-fifth of all calls are received from Spanish-speaking clients.

Though 2-1-1 of Central Texas reports that they are currently operating at a 98% client satisfaction, the staff claims that their biggest challenges are keeping information current and complete and spreading the word to potential users. Even with updates made annually, many program changes, such as eligibility criteria, contact information and location, or availability, occur periodically during the year. Plus, many organizations have seasonal or temporary offerings. While several organizations take the initiative to contact 2-1-1 with such changes, many organizations do not know about 2-1-1 or do not think to call in with changes. Plus, 2-1-1 may form a relationship with one person at an organization but when that person leaves the organization, the connection is lost. In that

[120] Price, Amy. Interview by author, United Way, December 7, 2011.

case, updates are not made until 2-1-1 conducts verifications each year. Many service providers may under-engage in the 2-1-1 network because 2-1-1 operates more as a resource center than a network and doesn't emphasize connectivity with providers in operations. Perhaps, greater outreach and training of service providers regarding the importance of proactively updating information would be useful, allowing information to flow into the 2-1-1 as freely as it flows outward. Moreover, by teaching service providers how to access their own information in the database and encouraging organizations to take ownership of their page, perhaps leadership would be more attentive to supporting the accuracy and currency of the information available. In regards to awareness of potential users, 2-1-1 markets their services with posters and print ads as well as radio promotions; however, they are always looking for new ways to expand their reach.

Community Action Network (CAN)

The mission of the Community Action Network (CAN) is to "achieve sustainable social, health, educational and economic outcomes through engaging the community in a planning and implementation process that coordinates and optimizes public, private and individual actions and resources."[121] Essentially, CAN works as a clearinghouse, facilitating collaboration between large health and human services organizations or funders and/or relevant issue-focused collations (Basic Needs Coalition, for example). CAN operates solely in Austin and Travis County though the organization has considered expanding to a regional focus once the Austin area is fully served. Currently, CAN has 17 partner organizations including the City of Austin, Greater Austin Chamber of

[121] Community Action Network. Accessed April 13, 2011. Last modified April 13, 2011. http://www.caction.org/.

Commerce, United Way, Austin Community College, and Seton Family of Hospitals to name a few. In order to become a partner, each organization must apply and be board approved. The board is comprised of the partners already approved. Partners must also make a contribution to the operations and sustainability of CAN. Contributions vary from one partner to the next ranging from office space to financial donations.

CAN also works with 13 issue-wide coalitions that are considered issue experts. Each coalition represents a network of organizations working in a particular social service field such as education, poverty, housing, etc. Coalitions interested in becoming one of CAN's issue area groups must also apply and be board approved. The board seeks groups that are active and hold regular meetings and that represent an issue not already represented within the CAN network. Once an issue group is accepted, the group is expected to communicate with CAN about pressing issues and news related to the field. CAN relies on many of these groups for data collection to inform CAN's "Community Dashboard" which "provides an overview of the social health and well-being of Austin and Travis County. By tracking the 16 key social indicators in this report, the Community Action Network identifies areas where collaborative action is needed."[122] In return, CAN offers the coalitions website support as well as opportunities to increase their organizations' profile with the board members and the broader community.

CAN also seeks input from its Community Council, a body comprised of community members who attend community discussions or gatherings in order to communicate with CAN regarding issues or interests at the community level. Council

[122] Community Action Network. Accessed April 13, 2011. Last modified April 13, 2011. http://www.caction.org/.

members also help to build awareness about the work of CAN and its partners within the community.

CAN only employs three full-time staff members who help facilitate collaboration, host convenings, and support the initiatives selected by the board. All activities undertaken by CAN are board directed. Each year, CAN hosts a strategic planning retreat for CAN staff, all board members/partners, issue area groups, and Community Council members. Through this retreat, information regarding relevant and pressing social problems in the Austin area is collected that will inform the board's decisions in compiling the annual work plan. Through the work plan, the board identifies the project goals for the year and the activities and collaborations that will be organized to meet the goals. CAN does not provide direct services to clients, but rather works at a larger scale to facilitate the collaboration necessary to make large scale change and impact in the community. CAN uses the community dashboard as one way to evaluate its accomplishments, hoping to see community-wide change and impact rather than client level outputs and outcomes.

To learn more about CAN including its achievements and needs for improvement, Chantel Bottoms, a CAN Program Associate, and Alan Miller, the Vice Chair on CAN's board, were interviewed.[123, 124] Through facilitating collaboration, CAN hopes to support area service providers (government, non-profit, and for-profit) in providing better service for clients in need of social services. By better serving clients, it is hoped that the overall well-being of the community will be improved. As discussed previously, the partners CAN works with are subject to an application process. Once approved, contracts are

[123] Bottoms, Chantel. Telephone interview by author, March 21, 2011.
[124] Miller, Alan. Interview by author, Workforce Solutions, April 18, 2011.

drafted to reflect the agreements made between the partner and CAN, including the partner's expected contributions. However, this is a very new process, prior to which there was no formal contract. The Community Action Network is in the process of forming more formalized expectations to include in future contracts though the current informality does not seem to be negatively impacting collaboration or increasing conflict, according to CAN staff.[125] The biggest challenge reported by the CAN staff is that relationships between partners are so collaborative that discussions are very lengthy and sometimes impede decision-making and action.[126] The structure that guides decision making is rather flexible. However, staff reports that delays may be partially because of the number of member organizations and also because of the complexity of the issues being tackled.[127] According to Alan Miller, CAN is "an evolving entity" and is becoming more sophisticated over time as goals become more defined and resources become available.[128] Miller posits that there is still room for improvement including a longer-term vision, "We've got mileposts, but we don't know the destination."[129] Through the increased focus on the Community Dashboard, CAN is shifting toward a more data-driven approach. However, fine-tuning of the network structure and operating procedures is still underway.

CAN operates on a large scale working with the health and human service giants in the Austin area. CAN does not work with small organizations or individuals independently though they do support small organizations by supporting the work of the coalitions to which they belong. They view the coalitions they work with as the true

[125] Bottoms, Chantel. Telephone interview by author, March 21, 2011.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Miller, Alan. Interview by author, Workforce Solutions, April 18, 2011.
[129] Ibid.

experts in the field and rely on them as well as the board partners to share data and best practices. Essentially, CAN serves as a connector and convener between the major operators in the community which seems to increase efficiency, innovation, and sharing of effective practices. Plus, according to Miller, being collaborative can assure that gaps in service provision are identified and addressed.[130] However, the needs of smaller organizations or even the on-the-ground needs of the frontline workers employed by CAN's partners may not be fully captured.

One Voice

One Voice Central Texas, formerly the Austin Area Human Service Association, has been operating since 1983. The coalition operates as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization serving the Central Texas region, though most of the members are from the city of Austin proper. The mission of One Voice is to "convey the human service needs of the Austin area community to policy makers and the public and to support member organizations in meeting these needs."[131] One Voice engages in three main activities in pursuit of the organizational mission: advocacy, promoting standards of excellence, and networking. One Voice currently has 49 dues paying Full Members, which are primarily social and human service oriented non-profits.[132] According to Suki Steinhauser, the Executive Committee Chair, beginning this year, One Voice plans to offer Individual Memberships for individuals and Affiliate Memberships, for other groups including for-profit business, foundations, or public entities.[133]

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[130] Miller, Alan. Interview by author, Workforce Solutions, April 18, 2011.
[131] One Voice Central Texas. Accessed April 12, 2011. http://www.onevoicecentraltx.org/.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Steinhauser, Suki. Interview by author, Communities in School Central Office, April 1, 2011.

One Voice operates with a high degree of formality and structure. There is elected leadership, delegated responsibility, and formal bylaws. The board chair is mainly responsible for setting the direction of the organization's work; however, many of the member organizations actively make suggestions and calls to action. There are three committees, one for each of the activity areas, as well as ad hoc committees that are formed intermittently to address specific issues. In addition, individuals are assigned to represent the network at community/public meetings/hearings (for example, all Health and Human Services convenings, CAN meetings, City Council meetings when necessary, etc.). One Voice hosts monthly meeting that are usually attended by the Executive Directors, or other top leadership, of member organizations. According to Suki Steinhauser, the Director of the Executive Committee, the monthly meetings are well attended mainly as a result of the perceived value of the convening.[134]

The organization technically has no paid staff; however, One Voice contracts with Knox Wollard Consulting for part-time administrative support. Knox Wollard handles all communications and administrative work needed to support One Voice including maintaining the website, preparing materials and agendas for convenings, scheduling of events, updating list serves and emailing members, etc. The fees for these services are paid by grants received from the United Way Capital Area and with dues collected from members. The membership dues are set on a sliding scale with smaller organizations paying as little as $50. The organizations with multi-million dollar organizational budgets pay the greatest amount in dues, around $500. Organizations also may choose to become a Contributing Member by paying $1,000 or a Sustaining Member by paying $2,000. New members are actively recruited by the Membership Committee, mainly

[134] Steinhauser, Suki. Interview by author, Communities in School Central Office, April 1, 2011.

through word of mouth; however, formal outreach efforts to potential members or to client populations served by membership organizations are not undertaken.

The majority of the work of One Voice is focused around public policy. The group works to keep abreast of current and relevant policy issues and to form a cohesive message to communicate with policy makers. One Voice develops policy alerts and holds legislative breakfasts, among other efforts, to mobilize public policy efforts. One Voice also advocates for the populations they serve at the local level, engaging Capital Metro and Austin Energy in meaningful dialogue about pricing options for very low-income Austinites, as one example. Secondary to policy work, One Voice works to promote standards of excellence among social service providers. All members are required to take an anonymous assessment, derived as part of a validity tested tool for measuring "excellence", about how well the organization is operating in different areas. These assessments are used to determine what organizational support/training is most needed by member organizations. This helps One Voice to develop agendas and programming that will help members build capacity and improve their work.

The largest reported challenge to the work of One Voice is the limited availability of members as far as time and resources. As mentioned previously, engagement is high among members and leadership. According to the Chair of the Executive Committee, competition between members and distrust is not a problem within One Voice. Yes, the Executive Directors of member organizations have many responsibilities and only have limited time to engage in collaborative work. Specifically, the Chair of One Voice has found that members are often reluctant to take on leadership positions within One Voice due to the perceived time burdens that would accompany such roles.[135] This could create

[135] Steinhauser, Suki. Interview by author, Communities in School Central Office, April 1, 2011.

sustainability issues in the long-term though the current levels of growth are maintaining the momentum. Aside from limited time, limited and inconsistent funding is also a challenge.[136] The administrative support provided by Knox Wollard Consulting is critical for the successful operation of One Voice. Though revenues from dues and grants are available currently, the dependability of these funds into the future is questionable, particularly given the financial instability currently faced by many non-profit organizations. The current level of staffing and support provided by Knox Wollard is modest, and any cuts to the funding that makes these supports available would have negative impacts on the work of the One Voice.

Overall, One Voice Central Texas is more inclusive than other networks included in this study, particularly with the intent to open membership to individuals, for-profit businesses, and public entities in the coming year. Furthermore, the networking opportunities hosted by the coalition promote increase organizational awareness and connect organizations that are often serving similar or the same populations. However, limited availability of paid staff could jeopardize the long-term success and growth of the network. One Voice exists to support the work of social service providing organizations in capacity building and advocacy efforts. The inter-organizational awareness that develops from the efforts does help to tighten the fabric of the social service marketplace though it is unclear to what extent this trickles down to clients in need of service, particularly since front-line workers are not represented in One Voice currently. Moreover, One Voice articulates its goal of serving organizations through the network at the network level and chooses not to engage with one another or collaborate in regards to clients at the operation level. Though One Voice would be in a unique position to

[136] Steinhauser, Suki. Interview by author, Communities in School Central Office, April 1, 2011.

successful engage in outreach to clients who may be in need of services, this is not part of the mission of One Voice.

For the City Network

Another organization that fosters collaboration in the Austin area is the For the City Network. For the City works as a clearinghouse to support collaboration between existing non-profit organizations, connecting like-minded organizations interested in increasing collaborative work. Moreover, For the City seeks to support the work of its partners by recruiting and training volunteers. The stated mission is to "maximize efforts to renew Austin by creating a funnel for volunteer engagement and a platform for organizational collaboration."[137] For the City targets their work to enhance outcomes in four areas: education, family & community, healthcare, and housing.

The For the City Network began as an initiative within a local church, the Austin Stone Church. Chris Allman, a Director at For The City Network, was interviewed to learn more about why For The City formed and its driving strategies and goals.[138] According to Allman, the Austin Stone Church expresses a commitment to community engagement, encouraging volunteerism, charitable giving, and leadership training. Moreover, the church truly aspires to be a church "for the city". Justin Lopez, an Austin Stone Church parishioner, came up with the idea of For the City in early 2009 built upon a belief that the church should play a greater role in enhancing the well being of communities within the city.[139] They seek to empower communities by living within the neighborhood they seek to transform and by helping to build opportunities that the communities themselves implement and maintain thus creating a sustainable and lasting

[137] For the City Network. Accessed April 12, 2011. http://www.forthecity.org/.
[138] Chris Allman, interview by author, For the City Center, March 16, 2011.
[139] Ibid.

impact. Justin and For the City are implementing this approach for the first time in the St. John neighborhood in Northeast Austin.

By early 2010, For the City was operating as a 501(c)3 organization, and by September 2010, the For the City Center was opened. The center, located in the St. John neighborhood, is owned by the Austin Stone Church and is designed to accommodate church activities. There is an auditorium where religious services are held, a wing dedicated to activities for children, class rooms, For the City offices, and space available for lease. The center currently houses four other non-profit organizations: Austin Life Care, the Capital Area Food Bank, Communities in Schools, and the Caring Family Network. These organizations were invited to locate in the For the City Center due to their interest in working collaboratively and their embodiment of values similar to For the City and the Austin Stone Church. Co-location allows the organization to work together more efficiently, sharing knowledge and experience and referring clients.

For the City Center has just finished developing a partnership agreement contract and intends to begin recruiting "partners" soon. So far, staff has identified between 42 and 45 potential partners though any organization may apply for partnership. Several criteria determine whether For the City will decide accept an organization as a partner including a proven track record of success and Christian values. While partnership organizations do not have to be Christian, they can't be anti-Christian (as defined by the Austin Stone Church). For the City is committed to honoring the tenants of their faith as a New Testament church and do not wish to promote or create an image of supporting organizations that contradict their beliefs (the example they give is that For the City would not invite an organization providing abortion services to be a member).[140]

[140] Allman, Chris. Interview by author, For the City Center, March 16, 2011.

Moreover, For the City particularly reaches out to organizations that also value an empowerment rather than relief approach. Non-profits that For the City connects and non-profit "partners" maintain full autonomy with no oversight imposed by For the City. Currently, For the City is only working with other non-profit and faith-based organizations, not with for-profit or public entities.

In addition to working as a connector between existing non-profits, For the City also helps to connect existing non-profits with willing volunteers. For the City recruits most volunteers from the congregation by making announcements at weekly services. Plus, For the City does work with other faith-based organizations, providing volunteer opportunities for churches with less opportunities and resources; however, this coordination is carefully orchestrated so as not to disrespect or disregard the work of other existing churches. Currently, volunteer recruitment is offered only to interested persons referred from a church.

For the City receives most of its organizational support from the Austin Stone Church. Approximately 75% of the budget is covered by a general fund created by the church with the remaining 25% of funds provided by additional donations and grants.[141] For the City has three paid staff members and seven volunteer interns working full or part time. Interns are provided by Austin Stone Church as well as through the Austin Stone Institute, a church-based leadership training program. The church supports the For the City Network as well as other church-run initiatives and projects dedicated to making impact for social good. Though currently focusing on the St. John neighborhood, For the City truly sees itself becoming an organization for the city – serving the Austin area. Currently, outreach efforts are largely through personal contact and word of mouth.

141 Allman, Chris. Interview by author, For the City Center, March 16, 2011.

Though For the City relies on the internet for communication with some volunteers, they have recognized that technological barriers prohibit over-reliance on Internet communications.[142] As support grows, the organization also has hopes of expanding to other cities.

So far, For the City says there have been few challenges to the work they are undertaking. Most of the partner organizations are hand-picked for their compatibility so as not to contradict core beliefs or reputation, so conflict has remained at a minimum. This may also be due to the fact that the organization is still in its infancy, with only one year of operations. For the City has experienced some challenges in engaging community members to be involved with the For the City Center, the church, and/or partners. Some clients in the St. John neighborhood have been reluctant to engage due to trust issues. Some have lived in the neighborhood for many years and have had poor experiences with other well-intentioned groups, and some past initiatives that have had limited success lost momentum or fizzled out, diminishing the community's trust in social service organizations' longevity and reliability.

St. John Community School Alliance

The St. John Community School Alliance was originally formed in October, 2006 to serve the St. John Community in Northeast Austin. According to Alan Weeks, the group's founder and director, the group just recently applied for non-profit status and is awaiting approval any day.[143] The mission is "to bring together community partners in support of three schools in St. John: Pickle Elementary, Webb Middle School and Reagan High School".[144] To date, there are over 55 partner organizations, approximately 25 of

[142] Allman, Chris. Interview by author, For the City Center, March 16, 2011.
[143] Allen Weeks, Director, interview by author, Capitol Grill, March 25, 2011.
[144] St. John Community School Alliance, accessed April 12, 2011, http://www.sjcsa.org/.

which are active (e.g. regularly attends meetings).[145] Non-profit organizations, churches, businesses, schools, community groups, and staff from government agencies attend the meetings each month to “plan ways to coordinate youth support in the St. John area.”[146] According to Allen Weeks, the current board director and one of the founders, the group was formed fortuitously – as the original members found themselves in meetings with one another on a regular basis anyway. Forming a network with regularly scheduled meetings seemed like an efficient way to share information so that all members could receive updates at one time, leaving no one out and eliminating risk of information distortion as word spread through the communication chain.

Attendance at a given monthly meeting, held at the local public school, is approximately 30.[147] At these meeting members talk about issues affecting the St. John neighborhood and the broader Austin community. Though the alliance is mostly concerned with youth, due to the inter-relatedness of many social issues, many topics are often discussed. Aside from sharing information and referring clients, the group does undertake some activities collectively. For example, the alliance hosts community fairs and events to address community problems and connect families in the community to available resources. These efforts have produced several successful community events already.

St. Johns Community Alliance does not actively reach out to new members. Anyone can attend Alliance meetings, and St. Johns Community Alliance leaves it up to interested parties to pursue membership. The network is not advertised, but rather, depends on word of mouth to build awareness of the Alliance and its work. Membership

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145 Allen Weeks, Director, interview by author, Capitol Grill, March 25, 2011.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.

is free and does not require a time commitment nor is there any sort of reward structure for participation; however, the Alliance is governed by a set of by-laws that members are expected to abide by. Members are accepted from all sectors and may engage with the network at differing levels.

One of the challenges to collaboration that the St. John Community Alliance has faced is the issue of self-interest/competition as some members fear losing autonomy. Allen Weeks, the Founder and Executive Director, expressed that many of these fears dissipate over time as members build trust within the group. Still, many of the participating agencies and businesses operate in the business world and bring a competitive outlook to the group. For this reason, the group, as written in the Alliance bylaws, engages in very little collective grantwriting. This helps to support the autonomy of the organizations and doesn't tempt unethical behavior.

Some challenges are the result of organizational cultural clashes. According to Allen Weeks, forging effective relationships between non-profit members and the schools which are highly bureaucratic was difficult initially. However, over time, these relationships have become highly functional.[148] Mr. Weeks has noticed in recent years, as the number of for-profit members has increased, there have been similar cultural clashes between members from the non-profit and public sectors and members from the for-profit sector.[149] Though a competitive air and culture conflicts may pose some challenges, Weeks suggests that the group works well together overall and has built an effective presence in the community. Mr. Weeks maintains that having a geographic

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148 Allen Weeks, Director, interview by author, Capitol Grill, March 25, 2011.
149 Ibid.

focus and proximity between members helps to strengthen the bond between participants and helps to solidify the work.[150]

DISCUSSION

Though there are numerous inter-organizational networks operating in the Austin area, none of the networks seem to implement a comprehensive strategy of collaboration. Many of the networks formed in an ad hoc fashion and select annual initiatives in a similar fashion, without a clearly defined objective or long-term goals. Though each network has achieved notable successes in their own right, many admit that they face challenges to their work. Fear of losing autonomy, lack of inter-organizational awareness, over-reliance on relationships with a single person to maintain a connection, technology, transaction costs, competition, and organizational culture clashes are all challenges Austin area networks face as they attempt to engage their members in collaborative work. Findings from research relevant to the challenges facing these networks will be discussed in the following chapter followed by a discussion of best practices for inter-organizational work.

[150] Allen Weeks, Director, interview by author, Capitol Grill, March 25, 2011.

Chapter 4: Challenges to Collaboration and Best Practices

CHALLENGES

Several challenges to collaboration were identified during interviews with Austin area inter-organizational networks. These challenges include lack of inter-organizational awareness, over-reliance on relationship with a single person or leader, technological barriers, transaction costs, competition, and organizational culture clashes. In addition, Greenlights identified the fear of loss of autonomy as another key challenge. This section reviews the character of these challenges, based on existing research findings reported in the literature.

Fear of Losing Autonomy

One concern that can keep organizations from working together effectively is a fear of loss of autonomy.[151, 152] Linden argues that the ethos of individualism recognized to be a central feature of American culture works against collaboration. Drawing upon the nineteenth century observations of Alexis de Tocqueville, a French nobleman and political scientist, Linden states, "these two forces, individualism and collectivism, have formed a duality in America since the dawn of the republic. The problem, from a collaboration standpoint, is that individualism often trumps our collective instinct."[153] While a desire to defend organizational autonomy may limit collaborative work, maintaining autonomy between organizations may not be entirely ill-informed. In fact,

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151 Eugene Litwak and Lydia F. Hylton, "Interorganizational Analysis: A hypothesis on co-ordinating agencies," Administrative Science Quarterly 6, no. 4 (March 1962): 395-420.
152 Russell M. Linden, Working Across Boundaries: Making collaboration work in government and non-profit organizations (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 40.
153 Ibid., 49.

other research calls into question whether coordination is beneficial at all. Glisson assesses the benefits of inter-organizational coordination and finds some evidence of benefits to “having uncoordinated but parallel systems provide services to the same population...such parallel systems create a healthy competitiveness and provide back-up systems for any systems that fail.”[154] Though this finding may not be relevant to more informal and less integrated forms of coordination, the implications are worth noting. Within inter-organizational relationships, preservation of a division of authority may slow the processes of change and operations but may be the most stable form of governance.[155]

Autonomy may also play an important role in assuring that clients are best served. In fact, many organizations have formed to serve a need unmet by other existing providers. Independence between these organizations may be most important when the goals of each create a value conflict between two desirable values.[156] In such a situation, having a single unit providing service would not be likely to produce the best outcomes since the organization would have to suppress one goal in lieu of the other. The example given in Litwak and Hylton’s assessment that illustrates conflicting goals is that of the police force and the press. While each of these institutions provides essential services, if they were provided by a single organization, sometimes the objectives of one would be suppressed by the objectives of the other. Moreover, Litwak and Hylton argue that even if values align, resource allocation between differing goals could inadvertently prioritize

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[154] Charles Glisson and Anthony Hammelgarn, "The Effects of Organizational Climate and Interorganizational Coordination on the Quality and Outcomes of Children's Service Systems," Child Abuse & Neglect 22, no. 5 (1998): 403.
[155] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 53.
[156] Litwak, "Interorganizational Analysis,” 396.

one goal over another.[157] "A key challenge for an individual organization in choosing among different forms of collaboration therefore, is to keep the dynamic balance between managing resource dependence and sustain[ing] organizational autonomy".[158] Though in the past, many forms of cooperation required members to surrender some level of autonomy, in recent years, this is no longer the case.[159] In fact, most research and best practices call for a balance between the two.

Inter-organizational Awareness

Organizations in the social service marketplace are often unaware of the work of other organizations which can weaken the fabric of the social service field and can limit an organization's ability to recognize available opportunities to initiate collaborative work.[160] [161] Due to lack of available staff time and limited tools, finding this information is not an easy task. According to Austin, "potential partners do not have good information sources about one another or established mechanisms for seeking each other out."[162] Austin points out two specific limitations to forming inter-organization linkages: "There is not a common, widely used communication vehicle to enable organizations to find partners" and "there is no collaboration clearinghouse for matching interested parties."[163]

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157 Litwak, "Interorganizational Analysis," 396.
158 Guo, "Understanding Collaboration Among Nonprofit Organizations," 346.
159 Catherine Alter, "An Exploratory Study of Conflict and Coordination in Interorganizational Service Delivery Systems," *The Academy of Management Journal* 33, no. 3 (September 1990): 478.
160 Stoll, "Interorganizational Coordination and Awareness."
161 Robert J. Rossi, Kevin J. Gilmartin, and Charles W. Dayton, *Agencies Working Together: A guide to coordination and planning*, Sage Human Services Guide 28 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982), 27.
162 Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 88.
163 Ibid.

According to research by Stoll, Edwards, and Mynatt, this limited knowledge and infrastructure creates "pockets of existence awareness" in the social service marketplace in which organizations are well aware of organizations that they work with regularly but have no way to expand and strengthen their knowledge and connectivity of the organizational network beyond this limited number of linkages. Stoll, et al. found this problem was most clearly illuminated when an organization's contact at a partner organization was lost either due to closure of the organization or staff turnover. In response to such losses organizations reported increasing efforts to become aware of other resources to fill the need; however, these efforts were often difficult to sustain and information acquired quickly became outdated and inaccurate. Lack of awareness of potential partners undermines formation of cooperative efforts between organizations.[164]

Breadth of Personal Relationships

Though much of the research and theory that seeks to explain inter-organizational collaboration focuses on organizational motives and goals, many researchers argue that personal relationships between staff are equally, if not more so, responsible for the formation of inter-organizational linkages and coordinated professional efforts.[165] The significance of trust in forming alliances is mentioned frequently in the literature about collaboration and organizational partnerships.[166, 167, 168] Moreover, connections between individuals are often seen as the drivers of the formation of this trust.[169] Findings by Stoll, et al. suggest that trusting relationships between organizations' staff are even more

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164 Stoll, "Interorganizational Coordination and Awareness."
165 Gajda, "Utilizing Collaboration Theory," 69.
166 Ibid.
167 Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 69-97.
168 Stoll, "Interorganizational Coordination and Awareness."
169 Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 83.

significant when organizations are serving particularly sensitive and vulnerable populations.[170] Developing a sufficient degree of trust for these networks to function well often requires a proven track record spanning several years.

Given the significance of personal relationships in forming trust and propelling collaborative efforts, it is no surprise that poor relations between individuals could create a barrier to collaboration and have been blamed for destroying collaborative efforts.[171] One research study of 130 companies found that 64% of respondents cited poor working relationships among parties as the cause of failures in collaboration.[172] Negativity of key leaders including top executives can be even more problematic in developing working relationships.[173]

On the other hand, even good relations can pose a liability if the connection is dependent entirely upon one staff contact as mentioned by Central Texas 2-1-1. Given the high turnover rate and dependence on volunteers in the social services field, organizational knowledge and history can be lost with the departure of one person causing significant delays or setbacks in inter-organizational work.[174] Moreover, "interpersonal conflict needs to be recognized as normal and even expected as the level of integration and personal involvement increases."[175]

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[170] Stoll, "Interorganizational Coordination and Awareness."
[171] Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 83.
[172] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 94.
[173] Agranoff, "Human Services Integration," 540.
[174] Stoll, "Interorganizational Coordination and Awareness."
[175] Gajda, "Utilizing Collaboration Theory," 69.

Disparate Access and Knowledge of Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Technology availability and access varies from one organization to another, particularly in the non-profit sector. Nonprofit organizations are often at the mercy of their funders, who often look askance at expenditures not related to direct service. Developing information and communications systems often takes a back seat for this reason. Stoll, et al. found that some organizations are quite sophisticated technologically, while other nonprofit organizations are completely reliant on mobile phones.[176] These asymmetries "whether because of differences in funding restraints or because of differences in local expertise in deploying and managing ICTs, can increase the overhead required in maintaining intra- and inter- organizational communications."[177]

Moreover, even if information systems are developed for cooperative use, Kumar & van Dissel describe a variety of conflicts that can come about through use of a coordinated information system. These conflicts include "overgrazing, fouling or contaminating, poaching, and stealing."[178] To clarify, overgrazing occurs when one of the participants overuses the information system to the extent that it lessens the quality or long-term sustainability for other users. Fouling and contaminating can also occur, either due to careless behavior or simply by accident. Specifically, incorrect information can be spread, corrupt files shared, or viruses spread through Internet contacts. Poaching can occur when one participant is utilizing a shared information system to gain information to be used for private gain at the expense of other participants. Participants may even attempt to "steal" other organizations' clients, funders, or other resources.[179] Many of

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[176] Stoll, "Interorganizational Coordination and Awareness."
[177] Ibid.
[178] Kuldeep Kumar and Han G. van Dissel, "Sustainable Collaboration: Managing conflict and cooperation in interorganizational systems," MIS Quarterly 20, no. 3 (September 1996): 290.
[179] Ibid.

these challenges can be overcome or prevented through appropriate control measures; however, they are important concerns to consider when developing technologies and communications strategies within inter-organizational networks. Furthermore, other types of interpersonal conflicts may be exacerbated since research has found that individuals are more likely to communicate frankly through IT-mediated communication and that such communications are prone to misinterpretation.[180]

Transaction Costs

Though cooperative work is presumably undertaken to achieve greater social service outcomes more efficiently, there are usually some costs associated with collaborative work. Moreover, the benefits derived from these additional costs may take a long time to become apparent.[181] These costs should be justified by organizations' achieving collective outcomes above what could have been achieved independently. Costs may be associated with supporting collective action and projects or can also be incurred as participants seek to minimize conflict ensuing as a result of working with other organizations. These transaction costs are management related expenses that are necessary to minimize conflict so that collaboration can occur.[182] Such costs can include those associated with set-up, contracts, monitoring and regulation, etc.[183]

Conflict may arise if there are barriers to resource and cost sharing. Public agencies may not be able to easily authorize transfers of funds or resources. Non-profits' funds may be restricted to use for direct service. Plus, it is likely that members of inter-organizational networks will have different levels of resources and will be able to

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[180] Kumar, "Sustainable Collaboration," 294.
[181] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 45.
[182] Kumar, "Sustainable Collaboration," 291.
[183] Ibid., 292

contribute to the collaborative work at different levels. Standardizing expected contributions may not be necessary or preferable; however, some research has found that participants who have and contribute greater resources may try to wield greater control over the group and goals.[184]

Moreover, research has discovered a general “unwillingness among organizations to devote resources specifically to organizational or technological infrastructure intended to support coordination and inter-organizational awareness. Such efforts were seen as ‘strategic’ rather than oriented toward the more ‘tactical’ mission’...and as one participant stated, ‘nobody wants to pay for doing the strategic!’”[185] For nonprofit organizations who must satisfy donors, these limitations are common. Even if nonprofit organizations desired to contribute resources toward strategic efforts that would ultimately have positive impacts on clientele, often times the donors restrict the uses for which nonprofits may allocate funds, disallowing spending on activities beyond specific mission-related programming and causing a general underfunding of these efforts.[186]

On the other hand, coordination has sometimes been found to be overfunded and costly, diverting funds and attention from the overall mission. “Coordination often leads to mission confusion, that coordination tends to drain resources from organizational participants, and that there are organizational disincentives to coordinate.”[187] Additionally, costs associated with “transaction risk,” risk of being exploited,[188] and

[184] Cynthia Hardy, "Swimming with Sharks: Creating strategic change through multi-sector collaboration," Internation Journal of Strategic Change Management 1, no. 1/2 (2006): 107.
[185] Stoll, “Interorganizational Coordination and Awareness.”
[186] Ibid.
[187] Schlossberg, "Coordination as a Strategy,” 135.
[188] Kumar, "Sustainable Collaboration," 292.

opportunity costs, particularly those related to unfruitful use of management and staff time,[189] must be taken into account.

Reputational Risks

Forming partnerships with other organizations from any sector can be accompanied by reputational risk.[190] If organizations coming to the table are of unequal reputation and esteem, forming publicly known collaborations will expose all involved to risks since parties may be held responsible for actions taken by partner groups. In addition, partners will face perceptions that they are shifting resources away from their core mission and clients. Organizations do not wish to be perceived as expending valuable resources on initiatives not linked to direct service.[191]

Opportunistic Behavior and Competition

Opportunistic behavior and competition can often manifest in forms of turf guarding that pose a barrier to effective collaboration.[192, 193, 194, 195] In fact, Hagebak has argued that opportunistic behavior has been a driving factor in the creation of a siloed approach to social service provision in the first place. "Barriers that block service integration are those of organization, personal attitude, and vision which are outgrowths of...self-interest."[196] He asserts that it is self-interest that has pushed varying causes to the "forefront of national consciousness" each year causing the public to focus on one

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189 Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 78.
190 Ibid.
191 Stoll, "Interorganizational Coordination and Awareness."
192 Kumar, "Sustainable Collaboration," 280.
193 Beaumont R. Hagebak, "Local Human Service Delivery: The integration imperative ," Public Administration Review 39, no. 6 (November-December 1979): 575-582.
194 Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 41.
195 Bolland, "Three Faces of Integrative Coordination," 355.
196 Hagebak, "Local Human Service Delivery," 576.

problem then the next, creating piecemeal solutions as time passes. This incremental and disconnected approach has created policies, funding practices, and organizational structures that are designed to promote self-interested behavior, supporting an organization's mission, perhaps to the detriment of addressing the range of clients' needs. This self-interest can carry forward to the personal approach of individual staff workers as well, where preserving the program becomes the single-most important priority. Hagebak posits, "The social worker, though often painfully aware of the need for integrated services as a result of daily confrontation with the multiple needs of individual clients, finds both sense of purpose and job security tied directly to providing the specialized categorical service."[197] These sentiments may cause further challenges since service providers "feel a greater sense of belonging to the profession than to the community in which they work."[198]

These issues are likely to be most pronounced when resources are scare and there is a greater sense of competition for funding and volunteers between organizations.[199] Furthermore, competitive relationships are intensified when goals are not aligned such that benefits to one participant do not benefit or actually harm others. As discussed previously, differing goals and modes of operating can cause conflicts of interest and or actually harm others.

Cultural Clashes

Cultural clashes between organizations can create challenges when working together whether participants are of the same or different sectors.[200, 201] though the

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[197] Hagebak, "Local Human Service Delivery," 576.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Stoll, "Interorganizational Coordination and Awareness."
[200] Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 93.

clashes are often more pronounced within cross-sectoral partnerships. Researchers have found that practitioners report "that cross-sectoral partnering was quite different from same-sector collaboration in various ways. The distinctions include different performance measures, competitive dynamics, organizational cultures, decision-making styles, personnel competencies, professional languages, incentive and motivational structures, and emotional content."[202]

Despite differences "each of the three economic sectors – nonprofit, for-profit, and public – possess distinct advantages and strengths, making partnering beneficial."[203] Examples given by Osborne & Gaebler included nonprofit organizations' success at meeting client needs, exhibiting compassion, and focusing on moral codes, for-profits' adeptness at adapting to change, securing financial resources, and developing managerial effectiveness and efficiencies, and the public sector's ability at providing services consistently, serving the public good, and managing relevant public policy issues.[204] Nonetheless, cultural complexities can create challenges. For example, the desired pace of action may differ. Governments are often bigger with a more complex bureaucracy.[205] Plus, government organizations must take into account the opinions of a broader group of stakeholders including many citizens. Non-profit organizations are often much smaller with much simpler governance structures. [206] Government entities then, may take longer

[201] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 48.
[202] Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 93.
[203] David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, *Reinventing Government: How the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public sector* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1992).
[204] Osborne, Reinventing Government.
[205] Lydian Altman-Sauer, Margaret Henderson, and Gordon Whitaker, "Strengthening Relationships between Local Governments and Nonprofits," Popular Government (Winter 2001): 34.
[206] Ibid.

to develop and implement action plans than nonprofit organizations are used to, causing nonprofit organizations to feel impatient and government entities to feel rushed.[207]

In fact, Atlman-Sauer, et al. have identified several potential challenges resulting from organizational cultural differences between government entities and nonprofit organizations including "different perceptions about the same situations, a lack of understanding of each other's work, the effects of the economic and cultural base of a community on the style of communication, information sharing, and decisions making, and an imbalance of power in relationships".[208] Their research found that participants in these relationships with more control were often more satisfied and more confident in the effectiveness of the relationship than other parties whose needs may be unmet but who have less power.

CONFLICT AND COOPERATION

"Researchers have often presented conflict and coordination as the extremes of a single inter-organizational dimension...viewing conflict and coordination in this manner is not the most helpful possible conceptualization because it casts them as opposites."[209] In fact, this strategy may be inherently flawed. Many argue that not all conflict is negative; rather, the ability to disagree openly has been shown to be a necessary part of collaborative work that will ebb and flow through the life of the cooperative relationship and may, in fact, enhance members' ability to work together. In essence, some research has found that both conflict and cooperation are necessary to produce effective operations within a collaborative group[210] and best outcomes for clients, then, overall.[211]

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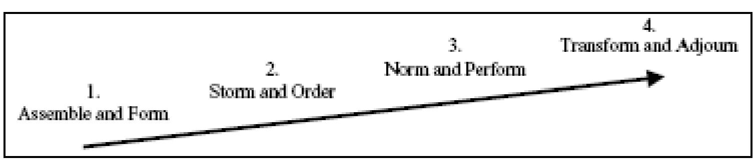
[207] Atlman-Sauer, "Strengthening Relationships," 34.
[208] Ibid., 35.
[209] Alter, "An Exploratory Study of Conflict and Coordination," 462.
[210] Ibid., 479.

In fact, some research suggests that the cooperative framework should incorporate mechanisms for preserving conflict and autonomy. Cooperation and group formation can bring about homogeneity of members through increased pressure and focus upon the group goals. This sort of groupthink can lead to loss of autonomy, mission drift, and a shrinking of social service diversity and offerings. Preserving conflict, according to Litwak and Hylton, will help to mitigate this tendency.[212] On the other hand, excessive conflict can impede progress toward collective goals. According to one research study, some conflict is likely, but excessive conflict most often occurs when there is a "mismatch between the need for coordination and the actual amount of coordination occurring".[213] These findings may suggest the importance of monitoring conflict within collaborative structures to assure that levels are healthy and productive.

Another theory that offers a framework for viewing conflict in collaborative work can be found in literature that discusses the normal processes of group work. Such analyses view cooperation as a phenomena that develops in a consistent process such that groups "form, storm, norm, and perform" as a normal part of formation and functioning.[214] This continuum is shown in the figure on the following page.

Figure 4.1: Stages of Collaboration



[211] Litwak, "Interorganizational Analysis," 413.
[212] Ibid., 414.
[213] Alter, "An Exploratory Study of Conflict and Coordination," 479.
[214] Rebecca Gajda, "Utilizing Collaboration Theory to Evaluate Strategic Alliances," American Journal of Evaluation 25, no. 1 (2004): 69.

This process, therefore, includes conflict as part of the development process. The second stage, storming, occurs as members determine roles, set norms, and identify strategies for engaging in collective work. This stage is defined by some level of conflict as members seek to maximize relevance for their individual/agency objectives while also appreciating the benefits derived from cooperation with others. Balancing the goals of the group with the goals for individual members will likely result in conflict but is also important for assuring group and member goals are simultaneously maximized.[215]

BEST PRACTICES THAT MAY ENHANCE COLLABORATIVE WORK

Though some level of conflict and disagreement is assumed to be a normal and healthy part of collaboration, excessive conflict will likely jeopardize the longevity of the work and diminish outcomes. There are many strategies for compelling effective collaboration. These strategies will assure that conflict is kept to a reasonable level and also addresses many of the aforementioned challenges to collaboration that are being faced by Austin networks. Many researchers and practitioners have discussed the benefits of inter-organizational coordination including improved staff effectiveness, improved public image, improved accessibility for clients, reduced fragmentation of services, and greater efficiency – to name a few.[216] Plus, symbiotic relationships can form that provide improved outcomes for all members and actually reduce competition overall.[217]

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215 Rebecca Gajda, "Utilizing Collaboration Theory to Evaluate Strategic Alliances," American Journal of Evaluation 25, no. 1 (2004): 70.

216 Robert J. Rossi, Kevin J. Gilmartin, and Charles W. Dayton, Agencies Working Together: A guide to coordination and planning, Sage Human Services Guide 28 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982), 12-13.

217 Alter, "An Exploratory Study of Conflict and Coordination," 479.

In this section, best practices for forming and maintaining cooperative inter-agency relationships will be presented that apply broadly to inter-organizational work. Unfortunately, studies of networks at the network level, rather than at the organizational level, have been identified as a gap in the available literature particularly in terms of empirical studies.[218] Plus, suggested practices will vary significantly depending on the level of intensity, goals, and scope of the collaboration desired. In his book Working Across Boundaries, Linden quotes Buz Cox, director of a city social service agency, "this is an art, not a science."[219] Nonetheless, Linden and many others argue that there are some guiding principles that will facilitate success and a thorough literature review has been conducted to synthesize available research that will inform the best practice recommendations presented here. These recommendations can be grouped into three categories: operations, engagement, and outlays.

Operations

Alignment of Strategies, Mission, and Values

First and foremost, participants in any collaborative effort should have shared objectives that cannot be achieved independently (or cannot be achieved as well independently).[220] Some argue that these objectives should be "concrete, even measureable;"[221] however, in practice, the shared purpose may not be obvious initially.[222] The goals and objectives may have to develop and evolve over time as members learn more about one another and the potential overlap between each others' work. Still, as

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[218] Keith G. Provan, Amy Fish, and Joerg Sydow, "Interorganizational Networks at the Network Level: A review of the empirical literature on whole networks," Journal of Management 33 (June 2007): 480.
[219] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries,* 59.
[220] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 60.
[221] Ibid., 75.
[222] Ibid., 76.

goals become more tangible, research suggests that some level of **goal formalization** is beneficial, and formalization of a "goal setting process" is useful as well.[223] Research suggests that the independent goals of each party are important to consider as well. Participants whose strategies, missions, and values align will be able to engage in collaborations of heightened intensity and integration. However, some degree of alignment is important for any level of collaborative work.[224] One research study surveyed community-based organizations and government entities engaged in collaborative work. Respondents emphasized the importance of including a shared visioning activity as part of initiating collaborative work. A strategic planning process was described as essential for reducing barriers to collaboration.[225]

Mutual Expectations and Reliability

After defining shared objectives and goals, parties must be willing to contribute to the achievement of the mutually agreed upon stated goals, and these contributions should be understood among all participants.[226] Some research indicates that some level of formality increases coordination and collaboration which could be due to the clarity of roles and expectations.[227] Austin's collaboration value construct (CVC) suggests that collaborative work initiatives progress through a process in which value is created for participants. A successful process begins with value definition followed by value

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[223] T.K. Das and Bing-Sheng Teng, "Between Trust and Control: Developing confidence in partner cooperation in alliances," The Academy of Management Review 23, no. 3 (July 1998): 506.
[224] Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 90.
[225] Micahel J. Rich, Micheal W. Giles, and Emily Stern, "Collaborating to Reduce Poverty: Views from city halls and community-based organizations," Urban Affairs Review 37 (2001): 199.
[226] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 60.
[227] Richard H. Hall et al., "Patterns of Interorganizational Relationships," Administrative Science Quarterly 22, no. 3 (September 1977): 467.

creation, value balance, value renewal, value generation and shared visioning, and continual learning.[228] This approach stresses the significance of value exchange within inter-organizational initiatives. Austin states:

> “...the fundamental viability of an alliance depends on its ability to generate value for each of its partners. High performance collaborations are about much more than giving and receiving money; they are about mobilizing and combining multiple resources and distinctive capabilities to generate benefits for each partner and social value for society.”[229]

Evaluation may be important for illustrating value that has been created. In any case, partners should be responsible for communicating achievement,[230] and accountability should be maintained within the partnership. Structures should be in place to encourage compliance, deter opportunistic behavior, and punish unethical or negligent non-compliance.[231] In fact, Kumar states that a formal and consistent structure is important on many levels for maintaining effective collaborative work.[232] In addition to delegating duties and financial responsibilities, management responsibilities should be clearly assigned as well,[233] and the “right people,” who can represent the organization’s interests and stakeholders, should be “at the table”.[234]

Organizational System, and Process, and Structure

> “Alliances are not necessarily forever. The longevity time frame is a function of purpose and performance...Terminating an alliance can be a recognition of successfully completing a joint mission.”[235]

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228 Austin, "Strategic Collaboration,” 76-85.
229 Ibid., 84.
230 Ibid., 88.
231 Das, "Between Trust and Control,” 507.
232 Kumar, "Sustainable Collaboration" 284.
233 Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 87.
234 Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 60.
235 Austin, "Strategic Collaboration,” 92-93.

Successful collaborations have a defined, open and credible organizational system with a pre-determined process, keeping in mind that it is a “means to end; it is most certainly not the goal”.[236] In his book, Working Across Boundaries, Linden argues that some of the features of an open and credible process include joint ownership, agreed-upon norms and ground rules, knowledge of each other, transparency, and skill convening.[237] These processes should be recorded as part of organizational protocols to keep authority and power dynamics from dominating collaborative work. Sharing of information, rather than non-communication or secretive behavior, will help facilitate a culture of openness and will also motivate participants to engage. According to Linden, “holding information creates dependency, while sharing information creates initiative.”[238]

It is also important to keep in mind that there are many different forms of collaboration, operating at differing levels of intensity and duration; however, all partners should consider which type of collaboration will best serve their needs and should agree on which type of coordinated effort will be implemented. By effectively implementing goal setting and accountability strategies, all participants will understand the structure of the partnership including the type of work being undertaken and the process for collaboration. As mentioned previously, some level of conflict may be a healthy part of the collaborative development and may in fact be a stage in the evolution of the collaboration. In addition, the organization system and structure should support a leadership component though many researchers characterize effective leaders differently.[239] Though some collaborations are compelled by regulation or though top-

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[236] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 81.
[237] Ibid., 84.
[238] Ibid., 99.
[239] Ibid., 152.

down authority structures, there is some evidence that voluntary rather than mandatory collaborative efforts are more successful.[240, 241]

Lastly, as alluded to in the beginning of the section, an important part of the organizational process may be deciding when to end collaborative efforts. While some partnerships may exist indefinitely, other collaborative work may reach a culmination, particularly groups that have formed in response to a current event or crisis. Once the issue is resolved or is no longer a relevant concern, the collaborative work may no longer be necessary. Therefore, the structure of the group should address termination including criteria for determining when termination is necessary and how it should be undertaken.

Continual Learning

Inter-organizational networks are most effective if the parties involved and the group as a whole is committed to facilitating continual learning.[242] By continually reassessing the usefulness of the partnerships and looking for new ways to generate value, opportunities can be maximized. Plus, if issues arise, adjustments can be made before conflict or disappointment grow to a level that deteriorates the partnerships overall.[243] Developing a formal evaluation process to assess the accomplishments of cooperative efforts is important to provide necessary information for strategic planning and accountability.[244] Effective evaluation can communicate changes in collaboration over time, allowing for interim adjustments and maximum productivity over time.[245] Though evaluation is one strategy for supporting continual learning, there is some

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240 Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 192.
241 Agranoff, "Human Services Integration," 533-542.
242 Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 85.
243 Ibid.
244 Gajda, "Utilizing Collaboration Theory," 66.
245 Ibid., 67.

evidence that over-emphasis on quantifying measures too early on can be detrimental. Moreover, some outcomes may not be quantifiable or measureable at all. Nonetheless, important information can be gained by engaging in some form of evaluation, using quantitative or qualitative data, to assess an initiative's progress and potential for improvement.[246]

Engagement

Breadth of Personal Connection and Relationships

> "The sustainability of an alliance requires that the relationship connections extend beyond the top leadership and that the alignment be sufficiently strong to transcend the person-specific ties if key individuals should leave."[247]

As discussed previously, personal relationships play a role in motivating and maintaining inter-organizational relationships. However, one of the challenges mentioned includes the instability that can result from over-dependence on individual relationships. Research suggests that the most sustainable cooperative efforts develop connectivity between organizations that extend beyond top leadership or one individual. Some researchers argue that inter-organizational initiatives must have "champions" to reach maximum success.[248] These champions are necessary to build energy and momentum around the initiative by communicating the importance of the goals and engaging member and partners. However, over-dependence on a few people including champions is not a sustainable strategy. By increasing connectivity between partner organizations in general, including all staff, rather than just key champions or leaders, the

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[246] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 195.
[247] Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 83.
[248] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 71.

strength of the inter-organizational relationship will be enhanced. Effective leadership remains important, however. Though connections between organizations should span beyond key leaders, continuity of leadership should still be encouraged to compel successful outcomes.[249]

Focused Attention and Communication

To generate a successful partnership, attention should be paid to the relationship, making it a priority among members. Though differing levels of collaborative intensity may require a greater amount of consideration on the part of members, all alliances should be comprised of engaged participants.[250] In addition, maintaining a successful inter-organizational network requires communication that is effective, efficient, and frequent.[251] Such communication should occur between organizations and within organizations among staff and should allow for direct disclosure and openness in order to maintain trust within the relationships. Plus, communication should be open and should include self-disclosure. Creating a safe space where all parties can share their thoughts and opinions will help avoid groupthink.[252] In addition, active listening is equally important in facilitating effective communication.[253] Lastly, the personal connection is important in facilitating communication as well so effective networks should allow time for members to engage with one another personally, not just professionally.[254] It is also important to note, that over-reliance on the Internet may impede effective communication which will be discussed in further detail later.

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[249] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 188.
[250] Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 85.
[251] Ibid., 86.
[252] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 97.
[253] Ibid., 98.
[254] Gajda, "Utilizing Collaboration Theory," 69.

Create a Constituency for Collaboration

"A constituency for collaboration is a group (or several groups) of people who strongly believe that a collaborative effort is in their interest, who want to support it, and who have influence over the parties involved".[255] The constituency is important for propelling the collaboration forward, particularly if the network is loosely formed with no authority structure. Creating a constituency will help assure that there is sufficient interest, buy-in, and energy among participant organizations so that the inter-organizational efforts do not fizzle out and will be sustained for long-term success. According to Linden, creating a constituency can be done by employing the following strategies:

- Create visible signs of success and share credit widely
- Set, clear simple goals that resonate with the public; invite outside groups to help monitor progress
- Use symbols to reinforce the partnership's power
- Involve stakeholders at every step
- Educate stakeholders to see the connection between collaboration and their self-interest
- Think politically, without become political

Once constituencies have been created, potential conflicts between contradictory objectives of differing constituencies should be discussed. Each participant in the inter-organizational network may have obligations to differing constituencies which could limit the success of collaboration if these issues are not addressed up front,[256] allowing participants to disclose and discuss their obligations within the network and to their own

[255] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 131.
[256] Hardy, "Swimming with Sharks," 102.

organizations/constituents. Losing sight of the desires of stakeholders and constituents will not produce the best outcomes for the organization or for the collaborative effort. Successful inter-organizational networks will develop when members are able to balance the needs of the collaborative process with individual partners' needs. "There are, therefore, joint outputs that may be quite different from the initial preferred outputs of the participating agencies."[257]

Context of Trust and Openness

All of the suggested practices for developing collaboration should be undertaken in a context of trust and openness. Many researchers and evaluators argue that trust and openness are the glue for inter-agency relationships.[258] These relationships can be solidified by creating a sense of unity that can be committed to and preserved and that spans the overarching needs and intentions of the members individually.[259] In their assessment of strategic partnerships, Das and Teng identify confidence as an important element in successful inter-organizational relationships. They define confidence as "a firm's perceived level of certainty that its partner firm will pursue mutually compatible interests in the alliance, rather than act opportunistically".[260] They argue that confidence is created through control and trust. In this context, control is defined as "a regulatory process by which the elements of a system are made more predictable,"[261] and trust is defined as "positive expectations about another's motives with respect to oneself in

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[257] Alter, "An Exploratory Study of Conflict and Coordination," 480.
[258] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries,* 60.
[259] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 102.
[260] Das, "Between Trust and Control," 491.
[261] Richard Leifer and Peter K. Mills, "An Information Processing Approach for Deciding Upon Control Strategies and Reducing Control Loss in Emerging Organizations," Journal of Management 22, no. 1 (February 1996): 117.

situations entailing risk".[262] Confidence is developed within inter-organizational relationships by wielding some level of authority over members and demanding a sufficient level of accountability. In this way, members are deterred from taking advantage of the others, and over time, members know what to expect from one another. Trust, built on the belief the others will engage ethically, is equally important as control since there is no realistic way to control every aspect of the relationship. The authors point out that trust and control will promote confidence. They also note the difference between trust and confidence, arguing that trust is belief in another party's motives whereas confidence is belief in another party's behavior.[263] In this framework, confidence can still be high when trust is low as long as sufficient control mechanisms are in place.[264]

Das and Teng offer several approaches for developing trust and control. They argue that trust can be created in inter-organizational relationships iteratively and over time as members take risks. Taking risks can include allocation of time or resources, for example. As some members engage in risk taking, others will be inclined to follow suit to exhibit reciprocity. If all participants behave appropriately, members will incrementally take larger risks over time which will gradually increase trust within the relationship.[265] Another strategy for building trust is maintaining a commitment to equity preservation. In other words, those who contribute more receive more benefits. These benefits may include positive media attention and publicity which may be of value to

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[262] S. D. Boon and J. G. Holmes, "The Dynamics of Interpersonal Trust: Resolving uncertainty in the face of risk," in Cooperation and Prosocial Behavior, ed. R. A. Hinde and J. Groebel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 194.
[263] Das, "Between Trust and Control," 494.
[264] Ibid., 495.
[265] Das, "Between Trust and Control," 503-4.

social service organizations which depend on their reputation to solicit grant funding, donations, or government support. Assuring credit is paid where it is due can also be one important factor contributing to help maintain trust though Das and Teng argue that a relationship with high trust may be able to withstand inequities more easily for a short period of time.[266] Communication-- including information sharing and willingness to adapt for the sake of the partnership-- are two other factors that may also contribute to the development of trust.[267]

Das and Teng also present effective mechanisms for control in inter-organizational relationships including goal setting, structural specifications, and cultural blending. These strategies have been discusses previously as part of best practices for structuring and advancing inter-organizational work. Goal setting lays the groundwork for imposing outcome-level control whereas structural specifications, including evaluation and accountability, impose process-level control. Research has shown that social control can be equally effective at compelling compliant behavior. Social control can be created in inter-organzational collaboration by blending organizational cultures and allowing for an informal socialization process.[268]

Outlays

Allocated Resources

Though many forms of collaboration may be largely free of costs, there will likely be the need for some funding,[269, 270] along with other resources including staff time, etc.

[266] Das, "Between Trust and Control," 504.
[267] Ibid., 505.
[268] Ibid., 507.
[269] Bolland, "Three Faces of Integrative Coordination," 356.
[270] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 193.

in order to organize gatherings or provide drinks and snacks, for instance. Moreover, as the collaboration becomes more intense, managing the partnership will become more complex, more time consuming, and will likely require more resources. At the same time, the value created can increase significantly.[271] However, many initiatives that have grown over time have come to need a full or part-time staff person hired solely for the purpose of operating the collaboration.[272] A research study by Marc Schlossberg, examined the effectiveness of policy in compelling coordination between organizations to provide service for the transportation disadvantaged. The results indicate that the policies that were most effective at improving coordination and service for clients were policies that were targeted and provided funding to support the mandate. Financing for the initiatives allowed full-time coordinators to be hired which the study found to be crucial for successful collaboration.[273]

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING COLLABORATION

As presented above, there are several research-based elements to forming effective collaborations. Structure and pre-established expectations seem to be significant in a variety of ways though increased formality and intensity of collaboration may not be necessary to achieve best outcomes. Increasing buy-in and level of engagement may assure the sustainability of the network and the ability to meet collaborative goals, and this is most effectively achieved by providing a structure that clearly defines goals, activities, and responsibilities. While not all successful models will embody all suggested practices above, we can assume that many of the best practices

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[271] Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 72.
[272] Linden, *Working Across Boundaries*, 193.
[273] Schlossberg, "Coordination as a Strategy," 142.

discussed will be reflected in effective initiatives. To recap, best practices for inter-organizational collaboration are as follows:

Operations

- Identify shared values and goals. Goals should be captured with some level of formality as soon as possible though some inter-organizational relationships/networks may need time for members to become acquainted and familiar with each other so that areas for collaboration can be identified.
- Once goals are identified, parties should determine expectations for the group and individual members, particularly in regard to expected contribution and responsibilities and how these contributions will be measured and shared. Plus, ramifications of unethical or self-interested behavior should be disclosed. The management duties and authority structure should also be spelled out (even if the network is loosely formed).
- The network/relationship structure should be determined as well. The organizational system should be open and credible, sharing information and encouraging transparency.
- The inter-organization network should devise a plan for evaluation to assure accountability and continual learning. Though not all desired impact may be measureable, evaluation can still be used to refine network strategies.

Engagement

- Connecting individuals from participant organizations is important to assure long-term sustainability of the collaboration. Champions of the initiative should be identified, and key leadership should be engaged; however, connectivity between organizations should be incorporated into the organizational structure and work and should extend beyond a few key individuals.

- Communication that is effective, efficient, and frequent should be encouraged. Participant members should be encouraged to be engaged in the relationships at the determined level of intensity (though level of intensity may vary). Effective relationships will require engaged and connected membership.
- Particularly in cases of informal network with little or no formal authority structure, key organizations should work to create a constituency for collaboration in support of the collaborative as a whole or in support of member organizations' involvement. These constituencies will increase interest and motivation among organizations. Potential for competing interests between constituent groups exists and these contradictory objectives should be discussed up front. Network participants should seek to reach a balance between serving constituent interests and focusing on collaborative goals.
- Though trust may take time to develop, networks can create an environment that fosters trust by maintaining open operations, developing some sort of control mechanism to compel ethical behavior, and by working to maintaining equitable distribution of costs and benefits to members.

Outlays

- As inter-organizational networks grow in size and scope, resources will likely become necessary to support the collaboration. Providing funding and dedicated staff to help with the management of members and organization of network events and meetings will help assure smooth operations and progress toward network goals.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations for Austin Networks

The problems facing individuals are increasingly seen as multi-faceted and complex and elude a single, silver bullet solution. Given the "wicked" nature of many social ills and with so many non-profit organizations operating from a siloed perspective, the need for coordination between service providers becomes apparent. The value of inter-organizational linkages in increasing efficiencies and improving outcomes has become more widely acknowledged in the public, private non-profit, and private for-profit realms.[274, 275] Moreover, relationships are increasingly being developed across sectors. Public agencies recognize that coordinating efforts and working together can increase the agencies' capacities.[276]

In the Austin area specifically, there are a variety of inter-organizational social service networks in operation, ranging in size, scope, mission, level of formality, and intensity. Some networks are focused on serving clients directly while other are focused on the needs of service providers. From this preliminary inventory, few of the networks are operating at a large scale or are engaging in thorough strategic planning efforts. Moreover, few are specifically focused on mitigating access barriers for clients. The potential for strengthening (expanding) these networks and their membership to increase functioning of the social service market in the Austin area becomes clear. The problems and challenges faced in addressing them are summarized in Figure 5.1.

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[274] Guo, "Understanding Collaboration Among Nonprofit Organizations," 340-361.
[275] Wohlstetter, "Improving Service Delivery in Education,": 1078-1096.
[276] Joseph W. Grubbs, "Can Agencies Work Together? Collaborationin Public and Nonprofit Organizations," Public Administrative Review 60, no. 3 (May-June 2000): 275-280.

Figure 5.1: Summary of Problems and Challenges in Austin

SUMMARY OF PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN AUSTIN
THREE OVER-ARCHING PROBLEMS IN AUSTIN 1) Proliferation of social service organizations 2) Strain from state budget crisis 3) Barriers restricting client access
CHALLENGES Fear of losing autonomy Inter-organizational awareness Breadth of personal relationships Disparate access to technology Transaction costs Reputational risks Opportunistic behavior Cultural clashes

In this chapter, best practices derived from the literature will be used to assess the strengths, weaknesses, and potential improvements that might strengthen the networks reviewed for this study (see Figure 5.2). Then, these findings will be considered in a broader context by considering how these issues and potential enhancements may be relevant to the three overarching challenges facing social service providers in Austin.

Figure 5.2: Best Practices for Effective Collaboration

BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION
Operations Alignment of strategies, mission, and values Mutual expectations and reliability Organizational system, process, and structure Continual learning
Engagement Breadth of personal relationships Focused attention and communication Create a constituency for collaboration Context of trust and openness
Outlays Allocated resources

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AUSTIN NETWORKS

Network Operations

The operating procedures guiding the work of the five Austin networks vary significantly. All of the groups have established a stated mission, providing over-arching direction; however, many of the groups have not set network goals and strategies overall, and only a few have set short or intermediate term working goals. Moreover, few have formalized methods for deriving new goals or strategies. The process for achieving goals is also weakly defined within most of the networks as is the decision-making process. Most of the groups do clearly define contributions expected from members, including fees, in the bylaws or member rules. The structures of the networks vary in intensity and level of collaboration, with most of the groups operating in a fashion perceived by members to best meet the network mission. However, little attention seems to be placed on defining and communicating the chosen network structure or determining how the structure will function most effectively. While the research does not seem to indicate that any particular structure will yield greater outcomes, clearly defining and communicating the structure and strategy of the network so that all members know what to expect has been found to improve functioning of the group. Lastly, very little emphasis is placed on accountability within these networks, neither among members nor as a collective. Though many of the groups do not face issues regarding lack of trust so individual members' accountability may not be as significant, performance management for the sake of continual learning is recommended in the literature. The costs of a formal evaluation would certainly outweigh any potential benefit, but there are undoubtedly measurement strategies that may be implemented at a small scale and would require very little allocation of resources (for example, even confirming that short-term goals were met or tracking attendance).

One Voice has the most formalized and structured operations. Stated goals drive the work of the organization and are reflected in the working committees and bylaws. Expected contributions including membership fees are also stated in the bylaws and committees are used to delegate responsibility. One of the challenges One Voice faces is in recruiting executive leadership which may be addressed in small measure by communicating an expected level of leadership within these operating procedures. One Voice does consider the *process goals* of the network in addition to the *outcome goals*; however, neither process goals nor outcome goals are tracked or measured. Though leadership has expressed an interest and a need for refining their work, One Voice does think more strategically about the role and functioning of the network entity and how they will pursue and achieve their objectives than many of the other groups.

CAN also has a clearly defined mission and overarching vision for its work. In addition, overall working goals and objectives are formalized within the Community Dashboard. Furthermore, CAN's method for deriving short-term goals/strategies at the annual planning meeting is more consistent and strategic than the other groups which usually take on new agenda items ad hoc at the suggestion of one or two members. Moreover, CAN has the most developed and sophisticated performance management strategy of all the networks assessed in this study. With the development of the Community Dashboard, CAN has set community level goals and identified the indicators that will be used to track progress toward said goals. While these indicators are still being refined, the commitment to achieving results and validating the outlay of valuable resources, including time and funds, is commendable. CAN's operations may be further enhanced by more clearly defining network processes, especially decision-making processes, and expected contributions. CAN is currently working toward becoming more systematic and consistent in defining what contributions will be required of members and in its general operating procedures.

2-1-1 Central Texas does not operate like a collaborative network. The member organizations (including in the database) do not seem to be viewed as true partners and are not involved in any operational processes or decision making. However, the context in which 2-1-1 exists is different since 2-1-1 supports publicly provided services and is obligated to the requirements of government contracts that accompany public grants. The potential improvement in services, however, may be significant if members were more engaged in the 2-1-1 network and understood the goals and benefits that could be derived from increased participation. The structure in place that guides the operations at the 2-1-1 call center is very organized and formal. Staff at 2-1-1 undergo extensive training and frequent assessment to ensure high-quality service for clients. The procedures that inform how the database will function and be maintained are also consistent and clearly communicated. 2-1-1 is also continuously working to improve its work by tracking client satisfaction and service needs and engaging in more formalized evaluations.

The St. John Community School Alliance and For the City Network are both very new and are still developing their network structure and objectives. SJCSA has increased formality in recent years with the development of bylaws and other guiding regulations as well as through its filing for 501(c)3 status. The group, however, has developed as a grassroots initiative and intends to remain responsive to community needs and flexible in its approach to forming solutions. However, a more structured value-sharing, goal-setting activity may be useful in building more consensus and unity within group, particularly in light of the increasing membership of individuals and entities from a variety of backgrounds. In order to reduce conflict and improve trust with the network, SJCSA has made some provision in its bylaws to assert control and accountability over members (including forbidding the joint pursuit of grants or other issues related to competition for scarce resources). With so few clearly defined long-term goals, SJCSA does not focus on tracking performance or network accountability. The group has been awarded the “100 Best Communities in America” award for the last 4 years which indicates the success of their work; however, a more systematic performance management approach may be useful in the future. Even something as inexpensive and easy as a survey of members might yield findings that could be useful for promoting continual learning and building upon current success.

For the City Network, as mentioned, is still too new to assess in terms of network operations. Staff has recently prepared a member contract and is currently in the process of defining criteria for selecting and approving members. Because there are no members yet and very few programs, the operating structure remains to be fully developed.

Network Engagement

By and large, the Austin networks reviewed are already functioning in a manner that is consistent with best practices relevant to network engagement. Most of the networks report that their members engage consistently and are able to communicate effectively and openly. Trust does not seem to be a problem generally which is expected of voluntary networks at low levels of integration. All of the interviewees expressed a positive view of the interpersonal relationships between members.

All of the networks have made efforts to connect with constituencies within the community though the weight given to constituency input is not clear. These groups remain engaged which may be indicative of perceived value; however, Austin networks may not be sufficiently or clearly assessing the needs of the constituencies, the conflicts that may exist between constituencies, or the conflicts that may exist between constituency values and the broader network goals.

All of the groups have effectively engaged leadership from member organizations which is important for yielding consistency in the long-term and member buy-in. Nonetheless, all of the networks might be strengthened by increasing connectivity with member organization beyond executive leadership. Most of the groups report that network meetings and events are well attended by high-level executives of the participant organizations but few front-line workers, who may actually be able to contribute valuable insight to the work of these groups, attend. Plus, given the possibility and probability for staff turnover within social service organizations, engaging more than one person at each member organization may increase stability of the network in the long-run.

The only critique to be noted in regards to network engagement, is the relatively small emphasis all of the groups place on inter-organizational awareness between members. Though members are acquainted, very little time and effort is allocated to keeping abreast of what member organizations are doing independently. Obviously, with limited time, being fully aware of every members day-to-day happenings would not be feasible or useful; however, increasing broad awareness of who is doing what within the sector may support further efficiency and effectiveness, particularly in terms of client outcomes.

Network Resources

Funding and dedicated staff, as well as other resources, become critical for network success as a network grows in size and scope. Of the five networks interviewed, three have dedicated staff – CAN, 2-1-1, and One Voice (Knox Wollard). Of these, resources can be considered the most reliable for 2-1-1 since 2-1-1 is funded through government grants. Even in the case of a fiscal crisis, 2-1-1 reports that funding will not likely be in jeopardy since 2-1-1 is contracted to assist with legislatively required services including disaster relief. CAN and One Voice, on the other hand, rely largely on the contribution of members and foundation grants. Not only are resources often insufficient to support all of the activities each group would like to take on, but they must also worry about fluctuations, great or small, that can result from economic instability in the sector generally.

While all networks recognize the increased work that could be achieved with greater resources, none are thinking strategically about how such resources might be developed. Increasingly non-profit groups are able to incorporate earned income strategies into their work. While these approaches must be implemented cautiously so as not to detract from the overall mission, these efforts can sometimes provide some degree of financial stability. There may be some way for these networks to include an earned income stream into their work. For example, CAN only authorizes large organizations as members but perhaps could begin accepting individual "affiliates" who would pay a minimal fee to access all of the research and data that CAN produces. Each network would have to consider the products that they create and whether there is a potential market, however small, that may benefit from marketing the product.

RELEVANCE TO AUSTIN AREA SOCIAL SERVICES

In Chapter 1, three overarching problems that effect social service provision in Austin were discussed:

1) Proliferation of social service organizations
2) Strain from state budget crisis
3) Barriers restricting client access

We reflect here on the role social service networks currently play in addressing the issues as well as the effect improved functioning and support of these networks may have in further mitigating these problems.

Proliferation of Social Service Organizations

Per Greenlights, there is evidence that the large number of social services providers is causing inefficiencies and diminished functioning of the social services market in the Austin area. Though inter-organizational networks have been created (directly or indirectly) in response to these inefficiencies, many of these networks' operations may not be maximizing the possible success of these initiatives. The research has shown that goal setting, consistency, structure, and communication about expectations are all important for assuring healthy functioning of inter-organizational relationships. While forcing participation and imposing a rigid authority structure has not been shown to effectively compel participation or achieve goals, some method of imposing accountability standards that are clearly recorded and communicated will help build stronger relationships and minimize conflict.

Another interesting thing to note is that in Austin, many fragmented and disconnected networks seem to be in operation. While this research did not specifically addressed connectivity between networks, the general impression is that these networks are only moderately aware of one another. Even within the networks assessed, relatively little emphasis is placed upon building awareness of existing services including awareness between service providers or among potential clients. Aside from deriving lessons learned from the literature regarding how to improve operations, networks in Austin (particularly those serving non-profits) may benefit by starting a conversation about how to improve overall connectivity and awareness within the non-profit sector as a whole (rather than just within particular issue areas) so that opportunities for coordinated work may be more readily recognized, even outside of network agendas. One way networks might facilitate this idea would be to host monthly or quarterly meetings with the purpose of showcasing local non-profits and their work and services to build awareness.

Strain from the State Budget Crisis

In any case, the benefits that can result from inter-organizational networks are becoming more apparent to many service providers, particularly in light of the huge budget cuts that many face. The necessity for increased efficiency and mutual support between organizations in the sector is at an all time high which begs the need for increased support for inter-organizations groups. The need for funding and other technical support have been themes through this study which indicates a need for educating funders and decision makers about the value that can be derived from collaboration if supported with sufficient resources. Greenlights is working on developing a new strategy for providing a forum to support collaborative work and technical assistance for its members. However, the need for creative thinking including innovate fundraising strategies will likely increase into the future.

Barriers Restricting Client Access

In regard to client access, existing research does not indicate whether inter-organizational networks have been proven to reduce access barriers. However, preliminary consideration of the activities that networks undertake and how these activities may relate to access suggests that networks may play a role in increasing access of potential clients. Organizational awareness, lack of transportation and childcare, location, hours of operation, and inefficient processes, social stigma, language and cultural barriers, technology, and costs all reduce potential clients' ability and may be mitigated by coordinating services. Networks with a stated goal of coordinating service then play a role in increasing access.

One point for consideration, however, is that mitigating barriers to social service access may not be a goal of some service providers. Some service providers may not wish to address barriers to access because increased accessibility would increase service usage and strain resources, particularly during times of resource conservation. Administrators can address lack of resources by reducing demand or by adjusting expectations.[277] Demand may be reduced by inflating barriers, at worst, or by refusing to address them, at best.[278] In light of increased accountability standards, similar tactics may be used as a "creaming" strategy where only clients likely to success are served in order to keep success rates high and maintain satisfaction of funders and policy makers.

Assuming that service providers do wish to serve all clients in need of service, inter-organizational networks may be one way to mitigate barriers, particularly lack of organizational awareness. "Better inter-organizational relationships between primary community organizations and service providers can improve accessibility by ensuring that individuals in need receive information about available services and proper referrals."[279] Even the most loosely organized and informal networks may have a role to

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[277] Prottas, "The Cost of Free Services," 531.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Allard, "Access to Social Services," 15.

play in this capacity. For example, networks may increase members' front-line workers' awareness of other service providers, allowing for increased referrals, and increasing the connectivity between clients and available services, particularly for multi-need clients. Moreover, the potential for significantly reducing marketing costs through coordinated promotion strategies seems apparent.

Increased levels of coordination may also help mitigate other barriers. For example, coordinated transportation and child care assistance may significantly ease burdens for clients in need of service. Other efforts might also be of assistance. For instance, if organizations were able to share office space on a rotating basis, perhaps having a panel of service providers all working out of one organization's space, one night per week, might decrease the impact of locational barriers and issues related to traditional service hours. Also, as Allard notes, "the development of information systems capable of tracking clients, referrals, and services received across a host of governmental and non-governmental providers can also enhance service accessibility. Information systems will not only improve the quality and efficiency of service delivery, but can also serve as a tool for tracking and strategic planning to ensure adequate access to services."[280]

Of the Austin networks included in this study, only 2-1-1 of Central Texas focuses specifically on directly improving client access to social services. Since 2-1-1 already has the most extensive network of service providing organizations, 2-1-1 might be able to effectively broaden their scope and effectively focus on outreach and awareness among social service providers. Already 10% of calls that 2-1-1 receives is from other social service professionals. Though additional staff and resources would be required, 2-1-1 is well-equipped and well-connected such that they could play a larger

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[280] Allard, "Access to Social Services," 15.

role in facilitating inter-agency collaboration, referrals, and awareness. For instance, 2-1-1 could host sessions periodically that trains service providers to use the 2-1-1 database and allows providers to share their mission, programs, and scope with one another. Also, creating more engagement with members may help ease some of the burdens 2-1-1 faces including difficulties maintaining current and complete information and forging organizational connections that penetrate beyond one contact person within member organizations.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The networks assessed through this study are making progress toward noteworthy goals. 2-1-1 is helping to connect service providers with clients. One Voice is effectively organizing social service providers to advocate for clients and the non-profit sector in the realm of public policy. The Community Action Network is committed to providing a bird's eye view on the community including needs, trends, and key players. The St. John Community School Alliance works to maintain deep roots within the community it serves, working at a smaller geographic scale to build the capacity of the St. John neighborhood youth supports. Finally, the For the City Network intends to serve as a proactive collaboration clearinghouse: reaching out to potential collaborative partners, making a connection, and sometimes then removing itself from the relationship. This model is innovative and its functioning and effectively will be an interesting item for study as it develops. Each group is unique yet all are seeking to improve outcomes for the community by working together.

CAN may be able to enhance their collaborative efforts by drawing upon best practice recommendations. Though CAN does engage in annual strategic planning meetings, the overarching goals of the network are very loosely defined. Though a membership contract has been developed this year, increased emphasis on developing the structure of the network and the long-term objectives will add clarity and focus to the group's mission.

One Voice boasts the most strategic approach of all the networks considered, appreciating the importance of defining the network equally to defining the mission. The goals, operations, and limitations are clearly defined and communicated with members. Responsibilities are clearly delineated and authority is dispersed between leadership and members. Formal bylaws are helpful in maintaining consistency and standardization. Suki Steinhauser, the head of the executive committee, claims, "we do well, but we can always do better." As she noted, more resources would facilitate enhanced functioning and increased activities of the group. The current dependence on an outside consultant for managerial and technical expertise is sufficient at the current level of operations but may not sufficiently support the work as the network grows. Perhaps, a greater emphasis on bringing in resources would allow the group to build the foundation for a more sustainable network infrastructure (dedicated staff, etc.)

The St. John Community School Alliance formed more spontaneously and organically, beginning as a grassroots initiative. The ad hoc formation and loose agenda setting may increase conflict between members. On the other hand, the alliance prides itself on its responsiveness and bottom-up leadership. The commitment to the St. John neighborhood is unique and may ultimately prove to facilitate exceptionally strong unity. The group has recently began formalizing its efforts with the establishment of a 501(c)3 status. The Alliance already operated under the guidance of thorough bylaws and operating guidelines. The potential of a network like this seems particularly noteworthy given the geographic focus. Coordination of co-location, operating hours, transportation and childcare assistance, etc. might be easily implemented through the Alliance framework.

Lastly, the For the City Network is the newest of all the networks assessed. Their proactive approach to facilitating collaboration is innovative and intriguing. This approach implies a potential role as an effective clearinghouse for inter-organizational partnerships. The breadth of this potential is slightly limited by the network's limited interest in organizations with differing beliefs. Though reputation risks can be minimized by conducting adequate due diligence and developing rules and authority structures, For the City does not wish to compromise its allegiance to Christian values, nonetheless.

The efforts of Greenlights are particularly important. Their commitment to the excellence of the non-profit sector within Central Texas is commendable and of great value to the plethora of non-profit organizations operating in the region. Their recent interest in supporting a greater organization of the alliance marketplace is notewothy. Though there are many socially inclined organizations from all sectors that could benefit from collaborative work and are interested in engaging in such initiatives, connecting to each other is difficult with no clearinghouse available to match interested parties.[281] Greenlights brainstorming and preliminary problem solving in this area will hopefully yield solutions that help organize the social service marketplace locally and provide a model for scaling in other areas.

Overall, more research is needed to assess the variety of forms of inter-organizational networks and which forms are associated with particular outcomes. A general lack of empirical research on network functioning as a whole leaves a gap in terms of understanding which forms of networks and which activities will lead to

[281] Austin, "Strategic Collaboration," 82.

successful collaboration. However, many researchers have reported improved outcomes and successful collaboration within networks and have cited inter-organizational collaboration as a means of improving organizational success and in turn, client outcomes. More research needs to be done to further understand the impact that collaboration can make on improving access to social services and to understand the parameters that facilitate successful partnerships. For example, none of the research found directly addressed size of networks and implications. Though size has been found to be associated with increased complexity and cost, the benefits associated with increased size are unknown

While the ultimate goal is to have strategies and policies in place that systematically address wicked problems, the complex and interwoven nature of these problems has thus far been impossible to disentangle so that a clear path to identifying the root problem and subsequent solutions can be observed. Absent such knowledge, we can nonetheless seek to make efficient and effective use of the expertise and resources that are available. "In the world of...wicked problems...the aim is not to find the truth, but to improve some characteristic of the world where people live..."[282] As shown by the research presented, this may be accomplished in Austin by improving organizational awareness and strengthening inter-organizational networks.

[282] Rittel, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," 167.

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