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**EXPLORING THE NATURE OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN
ORGANIZATIONS ASSISTING PERSONS EXPERIENCING POVERTY IN THE
REGION OF WATERLOO, ONTARIO**

By

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B.A. Honours Psychology and General Sociology, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2007

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Social Work degree
Wilfrid Laurier University
2009

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ABSTRACT

The current study was designed to examine the experiences of organizations assisting individuals who are economically vulnerable in Waterloo Region through inter-organizational collaboration. Several questions were explored in order to gain a deeper understanding of the definition of collaboration, for whom collaboration is useful, how often and with whom organizations collaborate, techniques used during collaboration, and whether collaboration should be increased and improved. Twenty Executive Directors from organizations most strongly involved in the assistance of those experiencing poverty were asked to participate in face-to-face interviews where they were asked questions based on the above mentioned questions. Qualitative analysis of the interviews demonstrated that all participants had experience with inter-organizational collaboration and overall, collaboration was believed to be an important way to resolve complex social issues like poverty. All participants offered information regarding collaboration that was placed into five main themes: definition, capacity to address social issues, quantity of collaboration, reasons and recommendations for, and challenges of aggrandized collaboration, the process, and relationship building. It was found that participants fell into one of three categories in terms of their overall feeling about collaboration: enthusiastic collaborators are those who seek, promote and use collaboration often; ambivalent collaborators are those who frequently collaborate and like collaboration, but would also be willing to address poverty without engaging in collaborative efforts; resistant collaborators are those who will use collaboration if necessary but do not actively seek to collaborate and encourage other ways to address social issues. Regardless of feelings toward collaboration, overall, it was felt to be a useful way to help address societal challenges such as poverty.

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“There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.” (International Bible Society, 1984, Deuteronomy 15:11)

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Issue Being Addressed

In 2001, Waterloo Region had a poverty rate of 11% (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2007). Poverty can be defined as “the lack of human, physical, and financial capital needed to sustain livelihoods, and inequalities in access to, and control of, and benefits from political, social or economic resources” (Canadian International Development Agency, as cited in Tamarack Community Engagement, 2007, ¶ 7). “Poverty is a significant problem in Waterloo Region” (Leviten-Reid, 2001, p. 27) and based on statistics, it is not being eliminated, or arguably, adequately addressed (Leviten-Reid, 2007). Research has suggested that inter-organizational collaboration can be used to address social problems like poverty by augmenting reduction strategies (Leviten-Reid, 2007; Rich, Giles & Stern, 2001). Poverty reduction is “the process of not only relieving, but actually reducing, the depth of people’s poverty by ensuring access to political, social or economic resources by building and engaging community. Poverty reduction attacks the root causes of poverty, not just the symptoms” (Tamarack Community Engagement, 2007, ¶ 8). As such, the topic selected for exploration is inter-organizational collaboration, specifically between the Executive Directors of organizations involved in poverty reduction or in assisting persons who are experiencing poverty within Waterloo Region.

Theories and Ideas Underlying Project

“Collaboration shows promise for solving organizational and societal problems” “and is sufficiently underdeveloped as a field of study to inspire creative conceptual contributions” (Gray & Wood, 1991, pp. 3-4). Further, “there are a number of theories that seek to explain the preconditions, processes, and outcomes of alliances and collaborations” but “there is no single theory that covers all of these issues in a comprehensive fashion” (Foster & Meinhard, 2002, p. 550) and “clearly, no single theoretical perspective can serve as the foundation for a general theory of collaboration”

(Gray & Wood, 1991, p. 19). Indeed, in a literature review conducted by D'Amour, Ferrada-Videla, Rodriguez and Beaulieu (2005) on collaboration, it was determined that numerous theoretical frameworks on collaboration exist. Because so many theoretical frameworks do exist to conceptualize the issue of collaboration, and each framework only addresses one aspect of the issue, such as relationship building or what the process looks like for example, for the purpose of this paper, no specific theoretical framework was used. Instead, the theories incorporated in the plethora of literature regarding collaboration will be used as a framework to understand the topic, which will follow.

Collaboration is being used as a way of bringing together agencies to address social issues (Bailey & Koney, 1995; Leviten-Reid, 2007; Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001; Winer & Ray, 1994). Further, collaboration is being used to design and offer programs to address these complex issues (Bailey & Koney, 1995). Collaboration has been described as “the exchange of information between individuals which has the potential for action in the interests of a common purpose” (Armitage, as cited in Farmakopoulou, 2002, p. 1051). “Inter-organizational collaboration is present when ‘a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide to act on issues related to that domain’” (Wood & Gray, as cited in Butterfield, Reed & Lemak, 2004, p.165). Collaboration is often engaged in to assist organizations in completing tasks that they would be unable to complete as individual organizations (Butterfield, et al., 2004) and “ensuring that the totality of people’s [service users’] needs are both recognized and met” (Farmakopoulou, 2002, p. 1051).

Collaboration typically refers to a “process” (Butterfield, et al., 2004, p.166): collaboration is “a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray, as cited in Rich, et al., 2001, p. 198). Furthermore, collaboration is “more than simply sharing knowledge and information (communication) and more than a relationship that helps each party achieve its own goals (cooperation and coordination). The purpose is to create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purview of any particular party”

(Chrislip & Larson, as cited in Rich, et al., 2001, p. 198) while remaining “autonomous” organizations (Wood & Gray, 1991, p. 146).

As mentioned, collaboration has been suggested to be a useful way to enhance existing strategies designed to reduce complex social problems like poverty (Leviten-Reid, 2007; Rich, et al., 2001). While there is research that discusses inter-organizational collaboration as a way to augment poverty reduction strategies (Leviten-Reid, 2007; Rich, et al., 2001), there has been little research done to investigate inter-organizational collaboration as a way to enhance poverty reduction strategies specifically within Waterloo Region.

Topic Selection

Further research on inter-organizational collaboration is necessary (Rich, et al., 2001). More specifically, little research has been done to investigate collaboration between organizations assisting those who are experiencing poverty in Waterloo Region. While previous research is important in understanding inter-organizational collaboration and much information has been gathered on this issue, it can be argued that various geographical contexts can influence the generalizability of this information and alter its applicability to specific geographical locations. In order to provide the best assistance to those in need in the Region, it was important to explore the needs of those within the local community (Torjman, 1998). The needs of those experiencing poverty differ by geographic locations: different services are and should be offered by location to provide the best support in a particular community (Torjman, 1998). Determining and addressing the needs of those experiencing poverty within one particular community could result in more needs being addressed as well as greater collaboration between organizations within that region to address the needs of their own community. Thus, inter-organizational collaboration was explored as it occurs within Waterloo Region to gather information that may be of benefit to those experiencing poverty as well as organizations assisting them and involved in poverty reduction strategies within this community. Of course, the greater goal is to witness a decrease in the number of people living in poverty in Waterloo Region as a result of effective inter-organizational collaboration.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Poverty and Poverty Reduction

As stated previously, poverty refers to “the lack of human, physical, and financial capital needed to sustain livelihoods, and inequalities in access to, and control of, and benefits from political, social or economic resources” (Canadian International Development Agency, as cited in Tamarack Community Engagement, 2007, ¶ 7). It is often measured based on Statistics Canada low income cut-offs (MacKeigan, 2004). Poverty reduction is “the process of not only relieving, but actually reducing, the depth of people’s poverty by ensuring access to political, social or economic resources by building and engaging community. Poverty reduction attacks the root causes of poverty, not just the symptoms” (Tamarack Community Engagement, 2007, ¶ 8). Poverty reduction involves meeting the basic needs of those in society because people are unable to negotiate their daily lives as effectively when they are concerned with meeting their basic needs (Torjman, 1998).

There are numerous social factors that can contribute to poverty which must be addressed in order to reduce poverty (Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2003). For example, child care, employment support, income support, recreation, transportation, food, and housing among others, can all contribute to poverty and can all be addressed in order to reduce poverty (Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2003). Poverty reduction strategies often address the individual factors, such as those mentioned above, like investing in affordable housing (Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2003), increasing recreation and leisure activities including activities for the elderly and for children (Opportunities 2000 Response, 2000; Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2003), offering transportation assistance (Torjman, 1998) or offering better food security (Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2003) to name a few.

As stated, initiatives designed to reduce poverty often focus on addressing specific and individual issues related to poverty (Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2003) such as food, housing, employment and so on. This is problematic as this individualistic approach to poverty reduction can actually lead to a decreased collaborative response and less correspondence between the various organizations designed to assist those experiencing

poverty and addressing these needs (Leviten-Reid, 2007). Moreover, individuals experiencing poverty in a variety of social aspects (i.e. food, housing, employment, etc.) can fall through the cracks in service by having to navigate many different social service agencies to receive assistance (Leviten-Reid, 2007). Collaborating about various poverty reduction strategies, initiatives or services, however, can result in shared staff, information and other resources and shows that numerous individuals should work together to reduce poverty within their community (Torjman, 1998). Further, collaborative efforts can result in greater synchronization of services within a community (Torjman, 1998). Inter-organizational collaboration then can be used as a way of augmenting poverty reduction strategies by bringing together organizations who assist those experiencing poverty (Mattessich, et al., 2001) and reducing the individualistic approach to poverty reduction (Leviten-Reid, 2007).

Collaboration and Responding to Poverty

It is necessary for society to improve its assistance and treatment of marginalized groups including those who are experiencing poverty (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). Moreover, it is crucial to include these populations in research designed to provide greater assistance to them (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). Community research, however, has very minimally involved individuals of diverse populations including those who are experiencing poverty (Bankhead & Erlich, 2005) in order to investigate different ways of providing assistance. Inter-organizational collaboration has overwhelmingly been demonstrated to be a positive way of assisting those in poverty (Mattessich, et al., 2001; Rich, et al., 2001) and in strengthening poverty reduction initiatives (Rich, et al., 2001). Combining services is helpful to providing adequate and appropriate assistance to those experiencing poverty (Leviten-Reid, 2001; Leviten-Reid, 2003). Collaboration between organizations on social issues such as poverty can improve the success of these efforts (Leviten-Reid, 2001). Collaboration can be important in reducing poverty as “all sectors are responsible for addressing these problems, preferably through a planned and coordinated approach that combines resources and expertise in new and sustainable ways” (Torjman, 1998, p. 25). Furthermore, research has proposed that successful collaboration can benefit an entire

community because “new networks and norms for civic engagement are established and the primary focus of work shifts from parochial interests to the broader concerns of the community... [because] collaboration...not only achieves results in addressing...substantive issues...it also builds ‘civic community’” (Chrislip & Larson, as cited in Rich, et al., 2001, p. 199). Collaboration as a way to bring together individualized responses to poverty is necessary in all communities (Mattessich, et al., 2001; Rich, et al., 2001).

It has been recommended that greater research is needed however, to better understand “the dynamics and determinants” of inter-organizational collaborations and factors that contribute to positive collaborations so that collaboration may be used in the most beneficial way to assist those experiencing poverty by augmenting poverty reduction strategies (Rich, et al., 2001, p. 200). Therefore, while studies have suggested that inter-organizational collaboration can be used as a way to enhance poverty reduction strategies and address social issues (Mattessich, et al., 2001; Rich, et al., 2001), more research is needed on the topic (Rich, et al., 2001) to determine whether this is indeed the case.

Definition of Collaboration

There are many ways of understanding and labeling collaboration (Frey, Lohmeirer, Lee & Tollefson, 2006; Mattessich, et al., 2001) and the literature does not use “a common language to describe collaboration” (Horwath & Morrison, 2007, p. 57). Collaboration is a “buzz word” that is often used to refer to any gathering of people whereas true collaboration involves being willing to address issues using methods different than would typically be used (Winer & Ray, 1994, p. xi). The definition of collaboration is used inconsistently and is also overused which makes using as well as evaluating it problematic (Gajda, 2004).

Collaboration has been defined as “a process by which several agencies or organizations make a formal sustained commitment to work together to accomplish a common mission” (National Assembly of National Voluntary Health and Social Welfare Organizations, as cited in Bailey and Koney, 1995, p. 25). As mentioned, collaboration

has also been understood to be “a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray, as cited in Rich, et al., 2001, p. 198). Similarly, according to Mintzberg, Jorgensen, Dougherty and Westley (1996), “collaboration is a process, not an event” (p. 70). In addition, collaboration is “a cooperative way that two or more entities work together toward a shared goal” (Frey, et al., 2006, p. 384). Similarly, a collaborative network is “a collection of loosely connected or closely knit organizations that share resources which may help member organizations achieve some strategic objectives” (Arya & Lin, 2007, p. 6698). Finally, it can be understood as occurring “when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain”, a definition developed by reviewing literature on collaboration and amalgamating common themes among them (Wood & Gray, 1991, p. 146).

One way to interpret and investigate the definition of collaboration is to understand the definitions of other words that can be used interchangeably. For example, often the words “alliance”, “partnership”, “networks”, “coalition”, “cooperation”, “coordination” or even “consortium” can be used when discussing collaboration (Winer & Ray, 1994, p. 23). It is important to recognize the distinctions of these words, particularly when reviewing existing literature on the issue of collaboration. Interchanging these words makes understanding collaboration challenging and may result in engaging in relationships that are different than expected (Winer & Ray, 1994).

An *alliance* can be thought of as a “long-term contractual and equity-based cooperative arrangement” between organizations (Bell, den Ouden & Ziggers, 2006, p. 1607). It can also generally refer to a team of people, small or large, working together to solve a social issue (Ferguson, 1999). A *partnership* involves two or more members who equally put funds or other resources into, and collect from, a project (Winer & Ray, 1994). Partnership can also refer to, very generally, people “working together” (Winer & Ray, 1994, p. 23). A *network* refers to “individuals or organizations formed in a loose-knit group” (Winer & Ray, 1994, p. 23). A *coalition* is a temporary group of organizations to meet a particular end but does not include the membership of community

members (Bailey & Koney, 1995; Winer & Ray, 1994). *Cooperation* can simply be defined as individuals “working together to produce an effect” (Winer & Ray, 1994, p. 23). A cooperation is also typically a “short term, informal” gathering where there is no specific structure to the process, information only about the issue is shared and each organization remains autonomous (Winer & Ray, 1994, p. 22). *Coordination* involves working together for a common goal but without conflict (Winer & Ray, 1994). Coordination is more formal in nature where roles are established and “some planning” occurs, but organizations still remain autonomous (Winer & Ray, 1994, p. 22). *Consortium* is described as “a partnership of organizations and individuals representing consumers, service providers, and local agencies or groups who (1) identify themselves with a particular community, neighbourhood, or locale, and (2) unite in an effort to apply collectively their resources toward the implementation of a common strategy for the achievement of a common goal within that community” (Bailey & Koney, 1995, p. 22). These words, in the literature, can be used to refer to collaborative processes. As can be seen, however, they do not have the same meanings. It is important to recognize these words vary when reviewing and interpreting literature as well as defining collaboration.

After investigating organizational cooperation, Bell, et al. (2006) suggested that the research on organizational cooperation is scattered and unorganized without clear links between studies. Previous research on cooperation, for example, has been conducted in a variety of ways with varying theories and paradigmatic lenses making it difficult to compare results and to draw logical conclusions from the literature. This, then, makes it difficult to build off of previous research as well as tie the literature together in a coherent, logical manner. Further, there has been much research conducted on cooperation between organizations but a great deal of the research has not been considered practical for those in management positions seeking knowledge. For example, research on cooperative relationships is often theoretical and typically does not incorporate issues that are of interest to managers. It was suggested that future research must be practical enough for managers to use and satisfy their questions about how to make cooperation successful (Bell, et al., 2006) which was the intent of the current study.

Purpose of Collaboration

It has been proposed that there are many purposes for collaboration (Frey, et al., 2006; Mai, Kramer & Luebbert, 2005) as well as factors that may predispose organizations to collaborate with one another (Foster & Meinhard, 2002). These factors include characteristics of the organization such as size or type of organization, insufficient funding, cost-benefit analyses of collaboration, and competition as perceived by leaders of organizations (where collaboration is viewed as more beneficial than the cost of competition) (Foster & Meinhard, 2002; Silverman, 2002). Collaboration is needed to address complex problems, such as poverty, because it brings organizations together to address the common themes underlying the issue rather than using separate organizations to resolve individual aspects of it (Mattessich, et al., 2001; Winer & Ray, 1994). Moreover, collaboration can be used to attain more results when addressing a problem or issue than in isolation (Gajda, 2004; Hardy, Phillips & Lawrence, 2003; Mattessich, et al., 2001; Winer & Ray, 1994). Increasingly, organizations are collaborating as a way to obtain long- and short-term goals that would not be feasible working in isolation (Gajda, 2004; Hardy, et al., 2003). It is also felt that collaboration is beneficial for those accessing services: that services are coordinated so that those accessing them do so easily (Mattessich, et al., 2001) and are not duplicated across organizations (Gajda, 2004). Moreover, organizations themselves can be improved through collaboration (Mai, et al., 2005; Mattessich, et al., 2001). Collaboration is believed to be vital for the sustainability of programs and program success (Frey, et al., 2006). Collaborations are often implemented because organizations wish to use resources that only agencies external to them have (Barden, 2007). Collaboration is also useful in the development of new knowledge: knowledge is created out of continuous discussions among collaborative members who contribute new and innovative ideas (Hardy, et al., 2003).

While collaboration is a way to bring organizations together to address complex social issues, it should only be used when necessary and should not be used in all situations (Mattessich, et al., 2001). Organizations should evaluate the costs and benefits of inter-organizational collaboration prior to engaging in it as well as during the process

to establish whether they should engage in it or remain in it, respectively (Schermerhorn, 1979).

The Process of Collaboration

Each collaborative process differs (Miller & Hafner, 2008) where often, they are considered an intense, long-term relationship where all members are deeply involved in planning, a leader is selected, and all members offer resources to the relationship (Winer & Ray, 1994). It has been suggested that collaboration is a very intensive process where “individual entities give up some degree of independence in an effort to realize a shared goal” (Gajda, 2004, p. 68). In many instances, however, members retain autonomy in their own organizations (Winer & Ray, 1994; Wood & Gray, 1991). Also, the contributions to the process as well as the commitment to the process can vary between members (Miller & Hafner, 2008). Collaboration involves creative thinking in terms of long-term outcomes, problem solving skills, and establishing trust (Winer & Ray, 1994). It is important also to be flexible and therefore willing to change the collaborative process as well as be able to work through changes (Mattessich, et al., 2001).

Implementing Collaborations

Often, collaborations are formed through informal conversations and are often unplanned (Hardy, et al., 2003). Collaborations can be formed based on someone’s suggestion or based on a formal purpose, such as for funding purposes (Winer & Ray, 1994). In order to become involved in a collaborative, organizations must make decisions regarding which organizations to collaborate with (Barden, 2007); however, since informal partnerships are typically engaged in, the notion of careful partner selection often goes unused (Hardy, et al., 2003). Often, inter-organizational relationships develop because organizational leaders have had previous personal experiences. Past personal relationships can also result in increased trust within the relationships because it has been previously established. Further, previous relationships can influence how interactions within the collaboration occur (Barden, 2007).

Members can be selected based on knowledge of them in the community, previous relationships, their ability to change things in the community, common community interests, and personal relationships (i.e., liking or disliking a person may determine their involvement) (Winer & Ray, 1994). It is often the case that organizations that are large, have been in the community for a long time, or are prosperous are selected to be collaborative members, but this should not always be the case (Winer & Ray, 1994). If individuals collaborate too much with people that they are familiar with, often others are left out including small and new organizations (Mintzberg, et al., 1996). Different members can also become involved in the collaboration at different phases of the process. For example, there are members who most enjoy the free, creative thinking phase, planning and contract development stage, action stage, or the end phase where outcomes in the community are actually witnessed. All of these interests and people are important in the collaborative process (Winer & Ray, 1994).

Funding and the Use of Resources in Collaboratives

Winer and Ray (1994) suggest that resources, such as monetary resources for example, are available in the community, but often belong to individual organizations, or are hard to acquire from funders based on their selection criteria. Collaboration is important, then, as a way of sharing resources (Winer & Ray, 1994). Collaboration occurs when several parties who are equally interested in working together do so for the mutual gain of all parties involved (Miller & Hafner, 2008). In addition, collaboratives are generated to gain resources by sharing them between organizations where resources can include funding, research, personnel or expenses for example (Arya & Lin, 2007; Gajda, 2004; Mattessich, et al., 2001). Further, collaboration reduces duplication of services (Gajda, 2004).

Increasingly, organizations have been informed that inter-organizational collaboration is necessary to receive grants or funding for programs from funding agencies (Frey, et al., 2006; Mattessich, et al., 2001). Attempting to resolve complex social issues as an autonomous agency is not encouraged by funding agencies (Mattessich, et al., 2001). Also, it is the hope of funders that the collaborative

relationships developed will continue to exist after funding has ended (Frey, et al., 2006). It is inappropriate, however, for funding bodies to expect that all “collaborating” groups merge to the point of unification (Frey, et al., 2006).

Stages of Collaboration

The literature discusses four stages to the collaborative process: forming the collaboration which involves selecting members and determining the mission of the collaborative; determining the roles of members and determining the actions needed for the mission to be realized; carrying out the actions discussed and continually evaluating progress; assessing outcomes and altering the collaborative process if needed (Gajda, 2004). During the early stages of the collaboration, members are collected, trust is established, goals are determined and outcomes are identified (Winer & Ray, 1994). Afterward, member roles are established, problems are negotiated, the process and progress are evaluated and renegotiated if necessary, and all members are treated equally and fairly (Winer and Ray, 1994). Finally, at the end of the process, outcomes are realized and the collaborative is terminated (Winer & Ray, 1994).

A great deal of research has involved exploring the “levels or degrees of intensity” between collaborating members (Foster & Meinhard, 2002, p. 551). Interactions within collaborations can exist on a continuum of intensity where the least intensive interactive level involves very minimal or no collaborative process whereas the most intensive collaborative process involves “unification” of the organizations (Frey, et al., 2006, p. 384). Alternatively, collaborative processes can be defined by the purpose of the interaction (Frey, et al., 2006). For example, the purposes of collaborative relationships could be for “networking, cooperation or alliances, coordination or partnerships, coalition, and collaboration” and defined based on the respective purpose (Frey, et al., 2006, p. 385). Not only can different purposes alter the definition or intensity of the collaborative, but “tasks, organizational strategies, leadership and decision making, type and frequency of communication” can also influence it (Frey, et al., 2006, p. 385). At all stages of collaboration, “time, effort and energy” are needed so that trust between members can be established (Gajda, 2004, p. 69).

The Use of Meetings

Holding meetings during the collaborative process can be an effective way to exchange information as well as discuss the issue, planning, responsibilities, action strategies and outcomes. Indeed, it can be challenging to members when information is not shared and decisions are not made. During meetings, the objectives for the meetings should be stated and time lines for each objective established beforehand, rules should be established for how to participate and to make decisions, and progress of the meeting should be evaluated at the end. Summaries of each meeting should be developed afterward and any important information related to the meeting or the issue being addressed should be offered to members. All contributions of members should be given positive reception (Winer & Ray, 1994).

Relationship Dynamics within Collaborations

Personal relationships between members involved in the collaborative are vital to the success of the effort (Gajda, 2004). Moreover, it has been suggested that there are relational dynamics that are important for successful collaboration including “shared mission and values, personal connection and relationships, expectation of mutual benefit” (Foster & Meinhard, 2002, p. 551), and mutual trust for example (Foster & Meinhard, 2002; Silverman, 2002). For example, in a study on alliances, Saxton (1997) found that partner and relationship characteristics such as having known a partner before hand, having “strategic similarities” with partners, reputation of the partner, and “shared decision making” were important in the success of the relationship (p. 457). In addition, successful collaborative efforts between organizations result in greater resolution of community and social issues (Rich, et al., 2001) which could include reducing poverty. “Very little research has been devoted to how inter-organizational relationships are managed” (Barringer & Harrison, 2000, p.396). Further, it was recommended that future studies focus on the aspects of collaborative relationships in individual cities and the determinants of these relationships (Rich, et al., 2001).

Collaboration can only exist when several persons are in communication with one another (Frey, et al., 2006). Communication is vital at all stages of the collaborative process and between all members (Mattessich, et al., 2001; Winer & Ray, 1994). Communication should take place often and should include information sharing (Mattessich, et al., 2001). It is also important to define, at all times, what it is that is being discussed so that there is common understanding between all members (Winer & Ray, 1994). Studies have suggested that various collaborative techniques, such as using “electronic technology” to communicate or learn of other agency initiatives can be used to improve the correspondence between individuals in collaborating organizations (Shull & Berkowitz, 2005, p. 38). As mentioned earlier, however, greater research on inter-organizational methods and techniques was recommended (Rich, et al., 2001).

Members should have respect for one another as well as understanding and trust of each member (Mattessich, et al., 2001). Members in collaboratives should be open about their own self-interests and what they want to get out of the collaboration for themselves or their own organization (Mai, et al., 2005). Once self-interests have been discussed, members can determine what the interest is of the group as a whole (Mai, et al., 2005).

Further, members should feel that the collaboration will benefit them and be willing to compromise while in the collaborative to ensure that not only does it benefit them, but it benefits all involved (Mattessich, et al., 2001). Creative thinking and constantly focusing on the needs of all members is crucial (Winer & Ray, 1994). Also of importance is thanking members for their efforts and having a sense of humour (Winer & Ray, 1994).

It has been suggested that collaborative efforts should have leaders so that there is someone responsible for setting agendas and resolving conflicts (Miller & Hafner, 2008). Conflict should be expected and conflict resolution strategies should therefore be designed (Winer & Ray, 1994). Moreover, conflicts within collaboratives can actually be beneficial to those involved as it provides them the opportunity to engage in “self-reflection” to investigate their “basic assumptions” in order to correct faulty assumptions and glean greater understanding of the perceptions of others (Mai, et al., 2005, p. 108). In addition, collaborating, which includes experiencing conflict, can lead to reflection on

one's organization and ultimately, adjusting and improving how one's organization operates (Mai, et al., 2005). It has been suggested however, that more research be done to investigate problems within partnerships and the factors that lead to breakdown (Todeva & Knoke, 2006).

It can also be of interest to consider terminating the participation of members if they have contributed all that was needed of them or their participation is no longer meaningful (Winer & Ray, 1994). Members can be asked to resign from the collaboration which is not a negative action (Winer & Ray, 1994). Ending membership should not be used, however, to resolve conflicts (Winer & Ray, 1994). In contrast, adding new members may be needed to further the progress of the collaborative if they have something meaningful to offer (Winer & Ray, 1994).

Evaluating Collaborations

The collaborative process should also be continuously evaluated (Longoria, 2005; Winer & Ray, 1994). When evaluating the collaborative process, it is appropriate to determine whether the process has been effective, whether enough is being offered to the collaborative (i.e. time, resources, etc.), and whether any other pertinent knowledge (pertaining to the process itself) has been learned (Winer & Ray, 1994). From a funding perspective, it is difficult to measure not only the success of collaborative processes, but also how meaningful the collaborative relationships are to those involved in them (Frey, et al., 2006).

Challenges of Collaboration

“Collaborative work, no matter how experienced the collaborators, is a difficult and a new experience on each occasion” (Johnson & Oliver, as cited in Miller & Hafner, 2008, p. 69). When various partners decide to collaborate, it will be a complex and difficult process, particularly if the members are from fairly diverse agencies (Barringer & Harrison, 2000; Miller & Hafner, 2008). Factors that could be detrimental to the success of collaboratives include: different values or beliefs; an ineffective leader; past

conflict between members; competing, particularly to acquire funds; and being unable to contribute equally to the collaborative (Winer & Ray, 1994). Involvement in collaboratives solely to meet personal goals, such as career advancement for example, can be problematic unless the other members are made aware of these agendas (Winer & Ray, 1994).

Collaboration has typically been mandated by various funding sources as a way to have various organizations work together (Longoria, 2005). The research, however, has shown that there are a variety of ways that the concept of collaboration is defined suggesting that it may be difficult for organizations to fully understand what they are being asked to do (Longoria, 2005). In order to better work together and evaluate a collaborative, individuals involved in the process should outline what the collaborative means for them as a group (Gajda, 2004).

Merging two distinct “corporate cultures” in order to collaborate can be difficult to negotiate (Barringer & Harrison, 2000, p. 368). For example, two agencies may understand an issue completely differently from one another making it difficult to negotiate a solution (Miller & Hafner, 2008). If members are able to recognize that they likely have differing understandings of the issue and are able to develop a common understanding, they may be able to resolve the issue (Miller & Hafner, 2008). Further, when members attempt to understand and use the different knowledge that each possesses, this can build “trust and mutual respect” and can “enable differences to become strengths” (Zetlin & MacLeod, as cited in Miller & Hafner, 2008, p. 71).

Although research on the consequences of collaboration is important, it is also of importance to research ways to solve the challenges of collaboration (Horwath & Morrison, 2007). It was of interest in the current study to investigate the challenges of collaboration to further explore the aspects of inter-organizational collaboration and expand on previous findings.

Purpose and Type of Study

The purpose of the current study, then, was to explore inter-organizational collaboration in Waterloo Region as a way of assisting those who are in poverty and reducing poverty. More specifically, through exploring the experiences of those involved

in collaborative relationships, greater knowledge can be gleaned on inter-organizational collaboration with the hope that this information can be used to better assist those seeking services.

This research project employed a qualitative research method so that the topic of study could be investigated in an exploratory fashion. Qualitative research was chosen as it allowed for an exploration of a particular issue and allowed the experiences of those involved in the research to be heard and understood (Patton, 1990). Further, qualitative research seeks to answer questions that cannot be explored through numerical means (Berg, 2007). A qualitative research method was thus appropriate as it allowed for the issue of inter-organizational collaboration in Waterloo Region to be explored as a way of assisting those who are in poverty as suggested by the research (Rich, et al., 2001). Further, it provided a voice to participants (Berg, 2007) in order for their experiences with inter-organizational collaboration to be explored and therefore for knowledge on the issue to be generated. Through exploring the experiences of participants with inter-organizational collaboration using qualitative research techniques, rich data was gathered (Berg, 2007) on poverty to assist those experiencing it (Rich, et al., 2001). Based on the information gathered, a conceptual framework was generated to visually and theoretically depict pertinent findings.

In social work, it is important to address social issues and determine how to better assist those in need including those who are impoverished (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). According to the research, inter-organizational collaboration is a suitable way to assist individuals experiencing poverty with the “totality” of social issues that they may require assistance with (Farmakopoulou, 2002, p. 1051). Studies have discussed the importance of determining the issues specific to certain geographical regions to better meet the needs of a particular community (Torjman, 1998) which includes the needs of those experiencing poverty. It could be argued, then, that through communication between organizations, the needs of those experiencing poverty could be both discussed and addressed collaboratively: if greater collaboration occurs between organizations assisting those experiencing poverty and greater resources are allocated to help these individuals, then fewer of these individuals are likely to fall through the ‘gaps in service’ (Leviten-Reid, 2001).

Further, exploration of inter-organizational collaboration in Waterloo Region generated knowledge regarding collaboration that, according to previous literature was still needed (Rich, et al., 2001). Moreover, it provided information that will be useful in improving the lives of those living in poverty in Waterloo Region for the reasons previously discussed. In addition, this research may result in greater exploration of inter-organizational collaboration in other geographical locations to extend generalizability (Torjman, 1998) and to assist impoverished individuals elsewhere as suggested by the social work Code of Ethics (2005). The findings, then, could be used by collaborative members in the future to improve services as well as potentially decrease the number of people experiencing poverty within the Region. Therefore, this study was designed to explore inter-organizational collaboration to determine whether collaboration can be used to augment efforts to reduce poverty, examine the aspects of inter-organizational collaboration, the factors that can lead to collaboration, factors that can result in successful collaboration or inhibit collaboration, investigate the consequences of collaboration, determine if collaboration is beneficial and if so for whom, determine whether and how to improve collaboration, and whether and how collaboration between organizations can be increased. In other words, the study was designed to answer the question: how, in Waterloo Region, do Executive Directors from organizations assisting those in poverty experience inter-organizational collaboration?

CHAPTER THREE: EPISTEMOLOGY

Epistemology

I, as the researcher of this study, consider myself to be a middle class, white female. I was born and raised in Canada and with that, has come many privileges: I have had continuous access to food, housing, employment and been able to pursue secondary and post-secondary education, for example. While this is the case, I am also a protestant Christian who has attended the Salvation Army for all of the years of my life. This means two things to me: I believe that while there will be suffering and wrongs in the world, God has a purpose and will provide blessings to all people but also that people have a

responsibility to take action against the wrongs of society to help others. Among these wrongs, I believe, is poverty.

A document from the Salvation Army (2001) states that “the measure of any society is how well it cares for its weakest citizens. The persistence both of widespread poverty and indifference to that poverty in Canada and Bermuda is morally unacceptable. Jesus Christ motivates us to love our neighbour in practical ways. Our response to the poor is a measure of our obedience to and love for God” (¶ 1). I believe that as a society, we do not care well enough for our “weakest citizens” (The Salvation Army, 2001, ¶ 1) because if we did, in the community of Waterloo Region, there would not be a poverty rate of approximately 11 % (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2007). In the Bible, God states “I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and the needy in your land” (International Bible Society, 1984, Deuteronomy 15:11). In other words, among all other people, I have a responsibility to help those experiencing poverty. I believe that the issue of poverty is complex and therefore can be addressed at many levels. Through this study, it was my goal to investigate what is being done at the more macro level: I chose to explore inter-organizational collaboration with the hope that greater knowledge on this topic would result in a more united, collaborative approach to the administration of services to those experiencing poverty.

In order to be academically honest about research, it is appropriate to identify one’s beliefs about reality and how reality is understood and therefore identify one’s epistemological lens. The lens that I most closely identify with is the heuristic paradigmatic lens. The heuristic paradigmatic lens connects the positivist and the naturalist paradigms: the heuristic paradigm takes a realist stance by including the belief that reality is “fixed”, “knowable” and “objective” (positivist belief) and the belief that it can only be understood in part because culture and history influence our personal understanding of it (naturalist belief) (Westhues, Cadell, Karabanow, Maxwell & Sanchez, 1999, p. 140). With a background in Psychology, Sociology and now Social Work, I strongly feel that reality can be known but that all reality must be understood within its own context. The paradigm is careful in stating, however, that not all knowledge that is gathered through research can be generalized to other situations as history and “context” must be considered when reviewing this knowledge (Westhues, et

al., 1999, p. 132). This is appropriate as the experiences of Executive Directors in Waterloo Region may be far different than Executive Directors in other Regions. Furthermore, the experiences of Executive Directors who work in agencies connected with assisting those experiencing poverty may be different than those working in other sectors or “contexts” (Westhues, et al., 1999, p. 132). I also appreciate that one of the purposes of this paradigm is to understand a situation (Westhues, et al., 1999). This fit well with the current research as it was my goal to explore in order to understand the experiences of Executive Directors in Waterloo Region with inter-organizational collaboration.

Values are acknowledged to be present when researchers engage in the research process but all efforts are made to reduce these values within the heuristic paradigm (Westhues, et al., 1999). Which regard to my paradigmatic lens, I attempted in this study to minimize the effect of biases and eliminate a discussion of values. The literature suggests, however, that it is impossible to eliminate all bias from research as the nature of research is based on bias: topic selection itself is biased (Westhues, et al., 1999). It is possible, however, to conduct research that is “value aware” (Dawson, et al., 1991 as cited in Westhues, et al., 1999, p. 134) and “unbiased (as much as possible)” (Grinnell, et al, 1994 as cited in Westhues, et al. p. 134) which was the goal of the current study. I am aware that my values influenced the selection of this study in several ways. For example, my religious beliefs, I believe, resulted in an interest in the issue of poverty and previous life experiences, namely previous research I conducted on the issue of poverty with Executive Directors, resulted in the choice I made to build on that research.

The previous study was designed to investigate the issue of poverty within Waterloo Region and was conducted for The Salvation Army Community and Family Services office (Voituk, 2007). This was done by conducting face-to-face, open ended, semi-structured interviews with 16 Executive Directors from organizations who either assisted those experiencing poverty or worked to reduce poverty in the Region (Voituk, 2007). Participants were interviewed individually and interviews lasted approximately one hour. The questions explored numerous issues related to the issue of poverty. It was discovered through this research that while participants collaborated with other organizations, they felt that they did not do so enough. The current study was designed to

build on this finding by more deeply exploring the experiences of Executive Directors with inter-organizational collaboration. It is apparent, then, that my prior interest and knowledge of the issue of poverty led me to become involved in the current study. I felt, in selecting this topic that more needed to be known with regard to the connection between poverty reduction and inter-organizational collaboration: based on suggestions offered by participants in the previous study I conducted, collaboration could be useful in augmenting poverty reduction strategies but collaboration was not the focus of that study and more information was needed to fully understand this suggestion.

The heuristic paradigm suggests that the relationship between researcher and participants is “both interactive and independent” (Westhues, et al., 1999, p. 132) which fits with the research design of this study. Given my previous research experience with this population, I was aware of the time constraints of these individuals and was thus aware that developing strongly interactive or participatory relationships was not possible. The relationship between the researcher and participant was not strongly developed because, as mentioned, interviews involved brief, semi-structured interviews to acknowledge and work with the time constraints of the population.

Extensive use of quotations was included in the research write-up to allow for a fuller understanding of the experiences of participants and therefore greater knowledge of the research topic. The inclusion of extensive quotations was considered an inductive approach where the data were explored to develop understanding (Ponterotto, 2005; Westhues, et al., 1999) which fits well into the heuristic paradigm as well as grounded theory methods: the heuristic paradigm allows for the use of either quantitative or qualitative methods as well as either an inductive or deductive approach because this paradigm does not adopt a method that is preferred (Westhues, et al., 1999). The methods used in this study, which will be described in greater detail, incorporated some grounded theory approaches.

As mentioned, validity was established to further ensure that the current study could be replicated. Validity was ensured using member checking which involved asking for feedback on the findings from participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Further, rich descriptions of participants’ experiences through the use of quotations were included to ensure validity, as previously stated.

I feel that the heuristic paradigm is particularly well suited to social work because it builds in the “excitement of science and the commitment and compassion of social work’s heritage” (Tyson, as cited in Westhues, et al., 1999, p. 140). I have a strong attachment to science and the scientific method because of my background in Psychology and Sociology but also appreciate the interest in social justice that Social Work demonstrates. As such, my interest in contributing to knowledge on poverty reduction and inter-organizational collaboration through research is, in my opinion, a good way to merge the values of these disciplines as well as my own.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD

Participants

As stated, the current study was designed to expand upon previous research I conducted on the issue of poverty within urban Waterloo Region which I conducted within the context of a summer job. Many of the participants involved in the previous study I conducted were invited to participate in the current study as the participant selection procedures closely match those used in the previous research. Participants were selected using non-probability sampling and specifically, a purposive sampling technique: participants were selected because they must have something in common which in this case was holding similar positions in organizations with common organizational interests. Having similarities between participants can “enable exploration of a particular aspect of behaviour relevant to the research” (Mays & Pope, 1995, ¶ 7). Participants included 20 Executive Directors, or individuals in positions with job responsibilities similar to that of an Executive Director, who worked within an organization involved in assisting those experiencing poverty or poverty reduction in the Region. Executive Directors were chosen to participate as they must, in their position within an organization, be familiar with any collaborative relationships established and information pertaining to these relationships. Further, within organizations, “leaders are expected to become facilitators of decision making, provide and share information, develop networks of relationships, share authority with and be accountable to

communities, and manage the many components associated with shared decision making” (Slater, 2008, p.55).

Participants were selected based on the mandate of their organization and connection to the issue of poverty: organizational mandates, which are publicly accessible through pamphlets or websites, were investigated. Organizations involved in addressing one of the myriad aspects of poverty such as providing food, housing, or employment among others to those experiencing poverty through programming or research were considered to have a deep involvement in the issue of poverty and were invited to participate.

Of these 20 organizations, all were situated in the cities of Kitchener, Waterloo, or Cambridge. This was done to ensure that organizations were representative of the major cities that comprise urban Waterloo Region. Due to time constraints, organizations from rural Waterloo Region were not included. It is appropriate, however, to explore rural and urban areas of Waterloo Region separately because there are differences in issues facing rural and urban areas (Reid & Katerberg, 2007). Selected participants were from not for profit organizations.

Participants included six males and fourteen females. It was assumed that as Executive Directors, they would be of working age and over the age of 18 to consent to participate, and have an exceptional knowledge of their organization and its involvement in assisting those experiencing poverty within Waterloo Region. Due to time constraints, specific demographic information was not obtained for participants, however, participant ages ranged approximately from 30 to 65.

Procedure

After potential participants had been identified, they were recruited to participate. Recruitment commenced by either emailing or mailing a letter to each participant which included an introduction to the research and the researcher as well as a research proposal outlining a brief description of the purpose, procedure and anticipated outcomes of the research (see Appendix A). This letter allowed each participant to instigate contact with the researcher or wait until the researcher contacted them, which occurred by telephone.

Following the letter or email to participants, approximately one week elapsed before contact was made by the researcher to make sure that all emails or letters had been received and read by participants. When contact was made by telephone, participants were invited to take part in a face-to-face semi-structured interview to discuss inter-organizational collaboration. All participants were given identical information about the current study over the telephone and all were provided an opportunity to ask questions (see Appendix B). All but two potential participants were recruited: contact was unable to be made between the researcher and one participant and sufficient time for the interviewing process could not be established for the second participant. Both participants were replaced with other individuals from organizations similar in mandate and purpose.

Once participants were recruited, a time and location was selected by participants for interviews to take place. Locations were chosen by participants so that their schedules would be accommodated. Before each interview began, each participant was provided a second copy of the research proposal (see Appendix A Research Proposal). Also, participants were asked to read and sign a form verifying their own name and details about their organization such as the name, address and their affiliation with the organization. This was done in order to have written, physical confirmation of this information and verify that the details regarding all participants and their organizations were accurate (see Appendix F). Each participant was provided with verbal information regarding the study and given time to ask questions if necessary (see Appendix C). Also, every participant was asked to look over and sign the Informed Consent Statement (see Appendix D). Interviews were conducted individually and lasted for approximately 60 minutes. The interviews included questions pertaining to details and experiences of inter-organizational collaboration (see Appendix E).

After the completion of the interview, participants were informed that following the generation of the findings, that they would be provided an opportunity to provide feedback on both the findings and the conceptual framework. The findings were provided in a brief, four page summary which included the conceptual framework. All participants were given this summary and provided three weeks to offer feedback to the researcher: four participants responded and only stated their interest in reading the final report.

All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim following the interview process. Any names and identifying information about participants were detached from their respective transcripts for purposes of anonymity.

Data Analysis

A grounded theory approach was used as a “guide” for data analysis (Charmaz, 2000, p. 28): the method of analysis used was a “constructivist” form of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, p. 28) where there were “flexible guidelines” for analysis rather than rigidly following grounded theory techniques (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark & Morales, 2007, p.250). All interviews were transcribed and then analyzed using N-Vivo, a software program package designed to statistically analyze qualitative data. Themes were generated by using grounded theory, and more particularly, the constant comparative method. The constant comparative method involves searching for important details (i.e. a word, a descriptor, etc.) in each response and labeling them according to that detail (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). In this study, once a detail was discovered, it was provided a “conceptual label” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 7), or ‘code’ in N-Vivo which involves a description or word to capture the information in the detail coded. These labels were determined arbitrarily by the researcher (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) but in this research, all codes incorporated specific words or concepts identical (in vivo) or similar to those stated by participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Using a transcript from one participant, and beginning with the first interview question, important details were sought and once found, the details were coded. In N-Vivo, once a word, sentence or paragraph is considered important, it can be highlighted and provided a label, or code, a process referred to as “line-by-line analysis” and “sentence or paragraph” coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 73). If many important details were included in a single sentence or paragraph, it would be coded several times using several different codes to capture the information.

The remainder of the data was analyzed using the same method and as relevant details were discovered, they were either determined to be like previous codes, and were given the same code, or were determined to be different and were given a different code

(Corbin & Strauss, 1990), a process called open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Since the codes, or labels, were being generated based on each interview question, one participant's answer would be compared to another participant's and differences and similarities were coded based on the above method. Interviews were coded one question at a time beginning with the first question, then the second question, and so on for all questions and all participants. Once all codes were generated, the codes were grouped into common themes, called categorizing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). All participant responses were coded based on commonalities in responses to a specific question, but then would be further coded into more general themes regarding the issue of collaboration and based on the study questions. These more general themes were then used to develop a conceptual framework (see Figure 1).

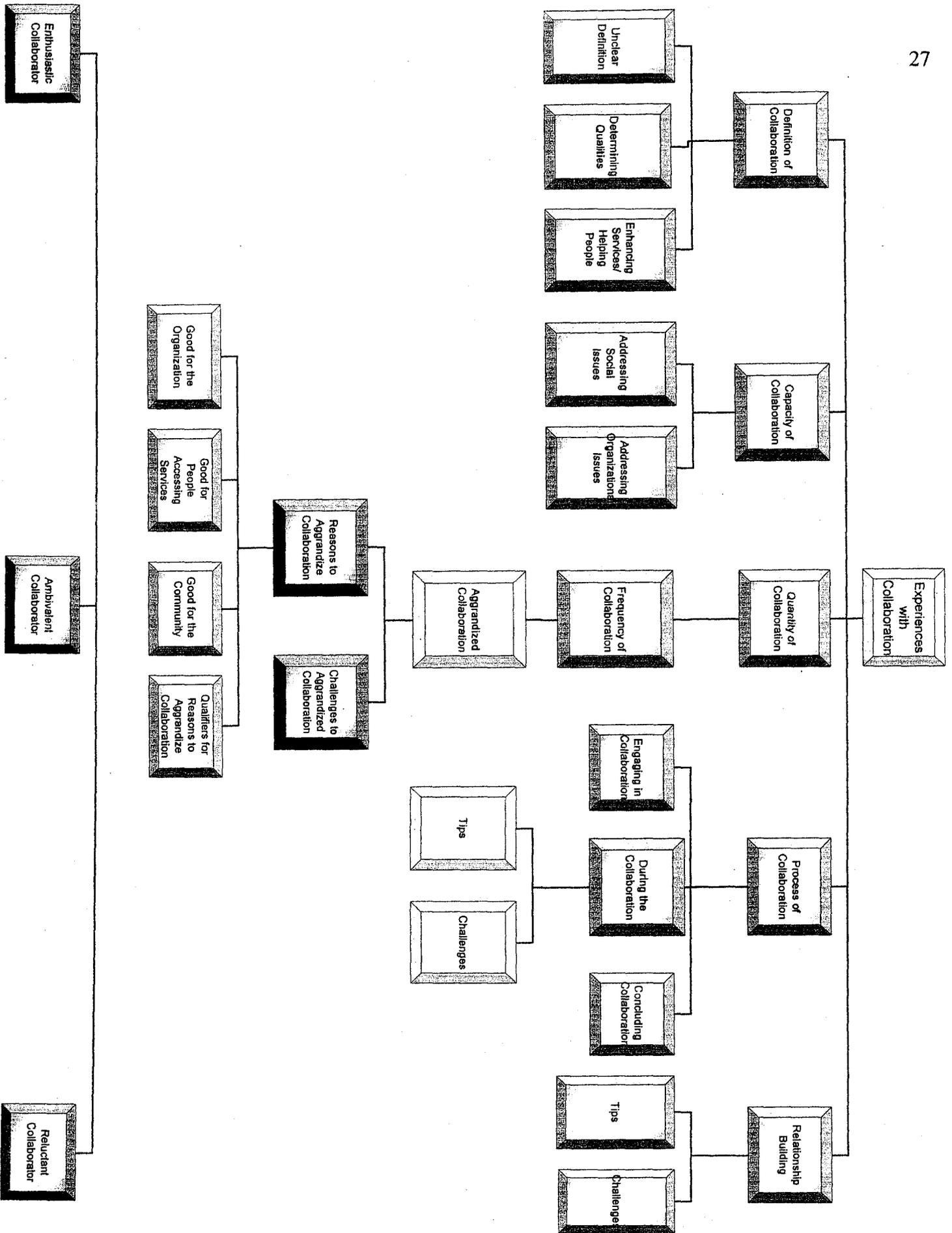


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of Exploring Collaboration between Organizations Assisting Persons Experiencing Poverty

Conceptual Framework

As aforementioned, after coding interview questions and searching for common themes among participants, a conceptual framework was devised based on these commonalities.

The framework was designed to visually depict the common themes found with regard to collaboration. As can be seen from the framework, participant experiences with inter-organizational collaboration could be categorized into five main themes: definition of collaboration, capacity of collaboration, quantity of collaboration, process of collaboration, and relationship building. Also, there were three main categories that participants fell into with regard to their overall feeling of collaboration: enthusiastic collaborators, ambivalent collaborators, and resistant collaborators. The categories visually depicted in the conceptual framework will be described in greater detail to follow.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

The current study was designed to investigate the experiences of organizations assisting economically vulnerable individuals in Waterloo Region in regards to collaboration. Qualitative analysis of the interviews suggested that the large majority of participants felt that collaboration is a crucial part of assisting those experiencing poverty despite the numerous challenges that can occur. There were many definitions of “collaboration” offered, and a variety of reasons why collaboration should be engaged in, suggestions on what the process involves, how often it should occur and how to improve the process. The results will be discussed in greater detail and as they are depicted in the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.

1. Definition of Collaboration

Participants offered numerous definitions for the idea of “collaboration”. All of the definitions of collaboration varied from one another and several participants

discussed the concept, and the process, as messy and unclear. The ideas that participants had regarding what collaboration should be, however, fell under three main themes: collaboration as having an unclear definition, collaboration as having determining qualities which are the qualities that collaboration should encompass, and collaboration as enhancing services or for helping people in general. No two participants had the same definition of collaboration.

1.1 Unclear Definition

Most participants stated that the notion of collaboration is unclear. Several discussed their belief that many people do not understand what it means to collaborate and simply become involved in the process or use the word not understanding its meaning.

Maybe because people don't understand it [collaboration] ...it's a word that is used so much...but everybody uses it different right... I believe it's not just a hot sexy word right now... I think people pick it up...and maybe they don't, they pick it up and saying they're doing it.

Further, many participants believed that the notion of collaboration is one that is vague, a word that is used often but can have many definitions, intensities, and time lines.

I don't know that there's one way that I would have defined it, we have all sorts of different collaborative relationships that are more or less involved more or less long standing, um, and I, I think they're all collaborations.

It was believed that collaborations can involve people working together in many different ways and can involve little, or informal involvement with another organization, autonomous relationships where organizations collaborate but remain individual organizations, or even integrated relationships where organizations merge together.

Several participants, in general, stated that collaborations can be problematic and messy.

1.2 Determining Qualities

All participants defined collaboration as the qualities that they felt collaboration has or should encompass. Many participants felt that collaboration should involve sharing information, responsibility, values, vision and resources.

It's [collaboration is] when, um, groups individuals or individual groups, um, work together to pool their different resources in order to, um, have an end result that's more or better than they could do individually.

The notion of having common interests and thoughts was felt important by several participants. In addition, having a common goal for each collaborative was felt to be a crucial trait of collaboration.

Ideally it's [collaboration is] a form where people are truly working together towards a common goal and they're collaborating in the best possible way, they're, um, there's no other agenda coming out, it's just, it's about achieving that goal.

Several participants felt that important traits of collaboration include displaying personal characteristics such as support, trustworthiness, cooperation, interest in partnership, contributing their skills, and thoughtfulness, particularly in terms of planning. It was also suggested that leadership should be incorporated into collaboratives such that all collaborative processes should nominate someone to lead the process.

It's hard to talk about collaboration without talking about things like leadership...in my experience with the best or successful collaborations. Somebody still takes leadership.

Further, several participants felt that open, honest, and sufficient communication is an important characteristic of collaborative processes and that numerous aspects of a successful collaboration rest on having good communication.

I think communicating is the, is the big one for us...you don't necessarily need to be working on projects together, you just need to be communicating what you're working on.

Several other participants felt that collaboration should incorporate improving relationships with individuals from other organizations, networking to meet new people, and avoiding duplicating services that already exist in the community. Moreover, participants felt that collaboration is important for enhancing the services provided within their organization.

I think it's [collaboration is] working together to better serve the people that you work for, so collaborations, we have enhance the services that are provided to the people who use our services.

Several participants also suggested that a good collaborative process should invite an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of what each member of the collaborative can offer so that all parties can work toward improving themselves, their organizations and the collaboration.

Collaboration is, is working together, identifying each other's strengths and weaknesses and supporting each other towards working better together.

It was suggested several times, however, that in order to do collaborative work, organizations must believe that more can be done by having many organizations work together rather than working as a single organization. Furthermore, organizations must be

willing to work toward bigger projects which help more people than is possible within their own organization.

It's [collaboration is] uh, the willingness to move beyond your own programs to think bigger.

1.3 Enhancing Services/Helping People

Some participants discussed how collaboration has implications in the community and for helping citizens in the community. It was suggested that collaboration is beneficial for building community and helping people in the community. Further, collaboration was believed to assist in addressing community issues.

So collaboration, for us, is the many different agencies that we work with daily...to actually solve and address community issues.

These participants felt that collaboration had a meaningful purpose in the community and in assisting those in it.

As can be seen, numerous suggestions were offered for what collaboration is or should be.

2. Capacity of Collaboration

Participants were asked to discuss the capacity with which they work in collaboration with others. Participants offered a variety of ways in which they collaborate with others and many worked in several of these ways. Among these were collaborating to address social issues in general, and to address issues within their own organizations as well as to assist in addressing the issues of other organizations.

2.1 Addressing Social Issues

Several participants discussed their involvement in collaborative processes as a result of their desire to address various social issues. Some participants stated that they are involved in many collaboratives because each addresses a different social issue. Similarly, many participants said that they were involved in collaboratives to better identify the needs of individuals in the community as well as those accessing services within their own organization.

[We] have worked in different ways to try and find ways to bring their services to our clients and our clients to our services...[and] identify the gaps and identify ways that we can close those gaps.

Many participants, then, felt that collaboration is helpful in addressing social issues.

2.2 Addressing Organizational Issues

The majority of participants spoke about the capacity of their collaborative involvement including addressing organizational issues within their own organization, in other organizations, or in both organizations simultaneously. For example, many participants discussed being involved in collaboratives to better deliver programs or services. Collaboratives are also engaged in to develop more or better policies in order to better serve those accessing services. Further, collaboration can be sought to receive greater funding.

We work in partnership with a lot of other agencies in terms of, of advocating with governments and agencies and, um, for more funding or better funding.

Participants also engage in collaborative efforts to share resources, research, responsibilities, information, case management, and referrals of those accessing services. Furthermore, collaboration is believed to contribute to organizational growth by improving information sharing, the referral process, knowledge of what other organizations are doing, knowledge of how to work better with other organizations, and planning for tasks executed by the organization such as program or policy development.

Participants also stated that the capacity of their engagement in collaboratives can range from informal to formal relationships.

If we talk collaboration, collaboration can go from very informal 'we're working together because we're really interested' onto something that's much more formal and is, and, an, an actual formal, um, uh, formal contract or agreement and we have everything in between.

Further, participants suggested that their involvement can include being the organization that leads, heads, or begins the collaborative, to being a guest or being invited to join a collaborative effort. Finally, collaboratives can include being asked to, or asking for informal assistance with some aspect of their organization, such as writing a funding proposal for example.

A few participants also discussed the need for autonomous forms of collaborative efforts where agencies remain as individualized agencies but work together, sometimes in one location, to serve a certain population or address a particular issue. This is of interest as this form of collaboration makes services accessible to those that need them, makes navigating a multitude of different agencies easy for those needing services, reduces the need for referrals outside of one location, allows those accessing services to make the choice on how many services to access and when, and promotes the growth of all organizations involved for the reasons mentioned in the above paragraph.

In sum, collaboration involves working together in many different capacities and all participants were involved in many collaboratives in many capacities.

3. Quantity of Collaboration

Participants were asked to discuss the amount of collaboration that they, within their organization, are involved in and whether it was enough. They were also asked to discuss whether collaboration as a process should be increased overall. All participants stated that they are involved in many collaboratives but also believed that collaboration should be increased and that other organizations should collaborate more. Participants

provided a variety of reasons why collaboration should be engaged in and therefore why it needs to be increased, but also offered challenges to collaboration and to increasing it.

3.1 Frequency of Collaboration

All participants stated that they engage in collaborative processes often. They offered numerous examples of parties that they would collaborate with to illustrate the amount of collaboration. The most common example included collaborating with many different agencies.

We collaborate with many organizations on many different levels.

Several other participants stated that collaboration often takes place internally across different departments within the agency. Collaboration also takes place on committees and numerous participants said that they were involved in many collaborative committees. Other examples included collaborating with one main agency, a few main agencies, collaborating internally with one's respective agency across various geographical locations, and collaborating across numerous different sectors.

3.2 Collaboration Increased Overall

When asked if other organizations should collaborate more, the majority of participants said yes. The majority of participants also suggested that collaboration should be increased overall both within the community in general and within their own organization.

I think there's so much more of an awareness of the benefits of working together and, and people are putting together groups where they're making sure that there's, um, there's, it's a collaboration of all the players in the community.

Many participants indicated, however, that increased collaboration within their organization, other organizations and in general would be difficult to do because enough collaboration is already happening or it needs to be at the sole discretion of other organizations to decide whether to collaborate.

In this day and age, it's essential and most organizations all organizations to some degree do it [collaborate].

A few participants suggested that collaboration need not be increased in any organization including their own because enough collaboration is being done.

3.2.a Aggrandized Collaboration

3.2.aa Reasons to Aggrandize Collaboration

Of those participants who felt that collaboration should be increased, there were numerous reasons provided for the merits of collaboration in general and for why it should be increased. There were several participants, however, who provided qualifications to collaboration: they felt that collaboration should be engaged in and provided reasons why, but also qualified this information.

In general, many participants felt that collaboration has numerous benefits for all involved including those accessing services. In addition, it was felt in some cases that engaging in a collaborative process will ultimately lead to more collaboration in the community. Further, it was suggested that when dealing with community issues, using a collaborative process makes the most sense.

It just makes, um, really good sense, you can't do, you can't work in isolation, it's not in the best interest of the community, it's not in the best interests of, um, our citizens, so it's just, it's just common sense.

Other general reasons to collaborate included a need for leaders within the community and to fill gaps in services. When discussing reasons to collaborate, participants provided reasons that fell under three main themes: collaboration is good for their organization, as well as other organizations in the community, collaboration is good for the people accessing services, and collaboration is good for the community in general.

3.2.i *Good for the Organization*

While collaboration is believed by most to be an appropriate way to address social issues, finding creative ways to address these issues and work together was encouraged. Collaboration is also believed to lead to increased creativity.

I'm hard pressed to think of any organization that is doing something so unique that they wouldn't benefit from partnerships but that it may be non traditional partnerships.

Participants also discussed how collaboration is beneficial to the growth of their organization. Collaboration can lead to improvements to various aspects of the organization such as achieving goals, improving services, providing more services and having a greater impact for clients than working alone. Further, collaboration can help raise agency profile.

[Collaboration means] getting your word out. I mean, the more people that know you and know who you are and what you do, the more volunteers, the more donors, the more everything you can attract. It raises your profile so from that point of view.

It was also suggested that collaboration is a good way to meet other people or come to be aware of other agencies. A common statement made by many participants was that no one organization has all of the answers to social issues including poverty.

I think that poverty is so complex...and that it has to be addressed from so many different, um, uh, angles that, you know, there's the absolute basic needs in terms of, of people have to have, uh, food and shelter and safety...immediately, but we also have to find ways to, um, constantly be, um, breaking the cycle of poverty... and if we knew the answer to that, we wouldn't have poverty...as much as particular, um, programs or initiatives, you know, have, have a lot of energy behind them and should, no, no one initiative is got all the answers.

Moreover, it is believed that all social issues cannot be fixed by one organization alone.

If you step back and take a look at the, um, needs of an individual, they generally will slip outside bounds of one particular agency and so it's kind of foolish to assume that you can serve all the needs of a person, and in fact, that's, I think, sometimes, how we get in trouble, um, we don't recognize that we have a specific mandate and we can do that well and then, lets reach out and touch somebody else and involve them, um, and so then we miss opportunities for, um, ensuring seamless service in the community.

I think that that's the only way that, um, we're going to do work in the future because, because one agency can't possibly be the be all and end all for, for anything, problems are just too complex the needs are just too great.

Numerous participants also commented that working in isolation from other organizations in the community is not ideal, particularly when dealing with complex social issues.

Basically if you're working in community...you can't work in isolation.

Anybody who thinks they can work in isolation is a fool and they're not doing a good job in the community so, ya, there is no choice but to work collaboratively.

Collaboration is something that should be engaged in because it is likely that individuals from other organizations will have complimentary knowledge, skills and expertise needed to deal with social issues. Further, collaboration can provide more resources and support for all organizations. Collaboration is a good idea as it allows for groups of people to come together and be more powerful as a group than in isolation.

The power of people working together is a model that could be used in many areas.

In addition, collaboration allows for organizations to capitalize on their strengths and minimize their weaknesses by working with others and bringing together organizations of many strengths.

I don't think that any one of us has or, or could pretend to have everything that's needed to, to, um, to meet a gap so we have different strengths that we bring and we have different, um, weaknesses in our organizations and, and by, by pulling together, we can capitalize on our, on our mutual strengths and, and, um, mediate our weaknesses.

Many participants stated that collaborating allows for members to share their skills as no one can have skills in all areas.

We believe that no one can be experts at, uh, at everything, we each have unique, uh, skills, uh, unique areas of expertise and in the best interest of providing, um, services, uh, that respond to the needs of, uh, individuals and families and the community, if you can bring some of those, uh, skills and areas of expertise together, you can end up with a far stronger program than, than either of you could have, uh, delivered individually.

In addition to sharing skills, collaborating allows for resources and information to be shared and for all members to glean knowledge that they may not have previously had.

We learn a little bit more about each of our services and we're better able when somebody comes to us [for help] ... you know the resources that are out there, you know the people that are out there...you know the new services that are emerging because you're at the table, you know whether funding is coming up, you're, you're proactive enough that when funding shows up, you're ready to, to put it where you think the needs are.

I think everybody benefits from collaboration, uh, I think the information you learn by being a part of a collaborative is incredibly rich, you know, the access to all kinds of resources that you don't have access to when you're just on your own and in isolation so I think that access to information is huge, I think the other piece too is, is the power of multiple minds coming together is, is great, right, I mean you, we can always accomplish more together than we can alone... and so at the end of the day, our community, our community benefits but we, as the individuals participating in the collaborative, also benefit because our knowledge is richer.

Moreover, new skills, knowledge, and resources can be acquired through collaboration because collaboration allows for the collection of multiple perspectives.

The different perspectives are really important if you want to succeed because we don't all, you know, we all come from a different set of lenses, if we don't have, uh, if we don't know the whole picture, we could fail...we won't be as successful or won't be as effective as we wish.

Collaboration also allows for greater networking to take place which would not only provide the opportunity for other organizations to learn about one's respective organization, but also for organizations to learn about other organizations and what they are doing in the community. Further, collaboration allows for greater support systems to be developed by getting to know others in the community on an organizational and

personal level. Several participants stated that the reason that they collaborate is because it has been incorporated into their mandate. Many, then, have made collaboration mandatory but by their own choice as it is felt that collaboration is important enough that it should be mandated. In addition, several participants believe that collaborating makes it easier to acquire funding and to receive increased funding when sought.

It's always easier for funders if they can see that people are working together around things than having to try and decide which organization, you know, they should fund over, over the other.

Several participants stated that collaboration is a good way to learn about issues within the community and what is already being done to address them. This is important as many participants feel it important to avoid duplicating existing services.

It, um, avoids duplication of services...in other words, if a program that our clients need to access is being offered [somewhere else], why would I go and look for funding to offer it here when our clients... could access it at that facility?

Furthermore, learning about existing services, as well as gaps in service, can contribute to developing a better product by sufficiently addressing community needs.

What we're implementing is stronger because you've got more minds around it... and you've got more resources around it and you've got more creativity running through it, uh, and so at the end of the day, you're going to have a better product which ultimately is going to benefit the client...it's going to make your work richer...and so then therefore your clients are also going to benefit.

Moreover, collaboration allows for a broader range of services because it combines the creativity of many organizations and people, better targets gaps in service, and can strengthen existing services by allowing many people to contribute to one effort.

It can, uh, you know certainly strengthen the, um, the range of, of services that we have available in our community and it can also lead to some really creative thinking that you might not be able to do, like, I, you know, once groups start to get working together around one particular thing, there can be so many different spin offs that you couldn't can't even anticipate until, you know, you develop those, uh, uh, uh, those relationships

Several participants also discussed their involvement in collaboration to help establish direction and priorities within their organization and increase job satisfaction with their employees as it was felt that working with others is fun. Collaboration is also felt by several participants to improve the quality of the services offered by their organization. Collaboration can also result in more sustainable services because more people are involved and are interested in developing a good product.

It is faster sometimes to do things alone...but it won't be sustained... that's the thing, collaboration allows for the best opportunity to sustain something.

While collaboration takes much time and resources, is a powerful way to address social issues.

The reality is that collaboration actually takes greater resources and greater time but where you yield the benefit is in the community... and so, in a number of cases, actually, it's probably easier to do the work yourself... but at the end of the day, your results isn't going to be nearly as impactful as it is when you can come together and collaborate on it.

Finally, a few participants indicated that being involved in collaboration makes them feel good about themselves and their organizations.

3.2.ii *Good for People Accessing Services*

Most participants felt that collaboration is something that is beneficial to the people accessing their services. Participants suggested that collaboration is a way of helping more people than by working as a sole organization.

As a result of collaboration, if the consumer, or client, or however the person receiving the help is, is identified, like, if the consumer isn't, you know, doing better, than I don't know, I don't think, I don't know why you would be collaborating.

Sometimes the voice of one individual organization cannot have, uh, a whole lot of influence, especially if you're looking at, at larger system change, and so we may collaborate to determine, um, what our common positions or, or views and put those views forward to all levels of government, so that, uh, it's seen as a much stronger voice, more from an advocacy perspective.

Also, collaboration is a way of helping meet more of the needs of each person than a sole organization could.

The benefit for the client is they get, they see the client as a whole person, um, you ensure that, or you provide greater opportunity for them to have, um, their needs met.

Putting them [services] together just means a bigger impact for the people that we're trying to help.

We can't do everything...and there are so many organizations who have specialties who do things really, really well, um, we can work with our clients and provide some services that we excel at serving at, at, at providing, but we can't do everything... and so we like to work with others to ensure that people coming through our doors have all their needs met.

Collaboration is felt to be particularly important when assisting those with complex needs as often, the expertise of many organizations is needed.

I think it's in the best interest of the people that we serve, you know, people's needs are complex...communities are complex no single organization has all the answers.

I think part of what we have realized is that we are one organization in a large urban setting...and we do what we do very well, we think, but you can't do everything very well, and we know, we don't intend (laughs) to do everything very well, so we keep to our niche, what we do well, and we understand that other people pick up the other pieces, so you have to collaborate if you want to tackle big issues that are complex... because no one agency can do all those kind of things so...working together on a larger picture issues...like poverty.

Because it's often the type of problems that we struggle and deal with are the kind of problems that require multiple stakeholders and a number of different organizations and perspectives so, you can't change the world all by yourself.

It was also suggested that collaboration is an important way to connect people accessing services to other resources and organizations in the community. This is important for making sure that the needs of individuals are met and that these individuals have greater support systems in place.

We also want to connect people to the resources and supports in the community that they need once they've left our [organization] ... we know that we can't provide everything, so we know that we should be, you know, um, referring to other agencies and advocating that way, and, and working, um, in collaboration with them.

A few participants, however, stated that collaboration should only be used when it is likely to be helpful to clients. If collaboration will not be beneficial or has no real purpose, it is not something that should be engaged in.

Collaboration could be increased where it is shown it is beneficial to the people we support... you don't collaborate for no good reason, it's not to be, we're not planning to be a social network, to get to have a good time, we're coming to identify the problem and resolve it, and in many cases, collaboration is the best way to do it.

Collaboration, then, was felt by most to be important for helping those in need of assistance and accessing organizational services.

3.2.iii *Good for the Community*

Participants also discussed collaboration as being a good way to address the needs of the community in general.

At the end of the day, working together is going to get us so much further in solving problems in the community.

It's so much easier if you can do things independently but it doesn't make much sense in a community context... in a community context, we have to be actually doing community modeling, community practicing, community kinds of, uh, of approaches, and, uh, in order to understand community process.

Community issues, then, should not be addressed as individual organizations and collaboration is one way to address these issues.

3.2.iv *Qualifiers for Reasons to Aggrandize Collaboration*

While most participants offered reasons why collaboration should be engaged, several mentioned qualifiers to these reasons. For example, it was suggested that more organizations should collaborate depending on how much they are already involved where those who are already engaged in numerous collaboratives need not engage in more. Further, more involvement in collaboration is needed by an organization if opportunities to better help one's respective organization or those in need of assistance are being missed. In addition, collaboration should be increased if it better assists an organization achieve its respective goals. Also, collaboration should only be involved in if it is beneficial to the organization seeking to collaborate.

Some participants felt that in order to have a successful collaboration, it must be ensured that only the most appropriate people are involved. Further, members should be gathered at the right time by finding out how and when they wish to be involved. Everyone involved must participate equally within the collaboration. Moreover, everyone involved should contribute resources to the collaboration. Those involved should also be flexible in terms of accepting the various thoughts and suggestions of others.

3.2.bb *Challenges to Aggrandized Collaboration*

When asked to discuss the benefits of collaboration, whether it should be increased in general and how often one's respective organization is engaged in collaborative processes, participants provided many positive details about why involvement in collaboration is appropriate, why it should be increased and the high frequency with which their own organization is involved in collaboratives. Participants, however, also discussed numerous challenges of collaboration which make increasing it or engaging in it seem difficult or of little interest.

In order to determine whether collaboration should be engaged in more often, it should be determined whether collaboration is the right approach to use to address the issue at hand.

Sometimes it's not collaboration but knowing when it's appropriate and not appropriate to use that type of approach.

Also, there are times when collaboration is not felt to be possible: this may be due to insufficient time, resources, or other organizational issues that need to be addressed first before organizations are able to engage in collaborations.

There will be times in organizational lifecycles where the energy you have to put into collaboration you simply don't have.

It was suggested that some issues are not best addressed in a collaborative because too much effort is spent trying to reach a common goal that cannot be negotiated. Further, it is possible that too much interest in being engaged in collaboratives could result in putting too much time, effort and resources into too many different areas and trying to manage too many different things.

Several participants also discussed a slight disinterest in collaboration due to feeling that it is being mandated. Several participants felt that collaboration is demanded by funding agencies and is seen as a way to deny funding as one's respective organization will not be granted funding unless they engage in a collaborative process.

The term collaborate and partnership I think are used...in times of, um, uh, funding challenges...as a tool to deny funding by saying that you're not collaborating or you don't have enough partnerships.

Moreover, feeling that one had been forced to collaborate in the past resulted in a slight disinterest in engaging in collaborations. Several participants felt, then, that collaboration should be increased but that organizations should not be forced to collaborate. A few participants also felt that collaboration may not be the best initial route to assisting those experiencing poverty and that tangible supports may be more necessary than collaborating around or integrating services.

I would see that there would be more integration of, of some of the programs and practices, if that comes about through cooperation, collaboration, then that's

good but...does that directly assist people living in poverty? Yes, but still ultimately does not take, take away from the fact that you're in poverty because your income is not sufficient...so yes. with a big qualification...just I wouldn't start there. you know...in saying it could be part of the strategy but not as a direct response to poverty.

Finally, only a few participants suggested that there are organizations that do not collaborate enough in the community and who therefore need to collaborate more.

4. Process of Collaboration

4.1 Engaging in Collaboration

4.1.a *Suggestions*

Participants offered many details on what should take place before engaging in the process of collaboration. For example, prior to engaging in a collaborative process, it is important to navigate the community, which can be done by attending forums or events. By engaging in the community, one can better learn of the gaps in service or social issues needing addressing. Before entering into a collaborative, however, it is important to determine first why collaboration is appropriate. It is also important to know when to collaborate and when to work in isolation.

Know when a collaborative approach is the best approach to use so, um, when would you use it when would you not.

It is also important to be open to joining or developing a collaborative, remember the importance of them, and attempt to get others interested in them.

Finding out what is already happening in the community is also appropriate so that efforts are not spent needlessly applying for and running programs that already exist.

Understanding what's happening in the community... it's a process that, that really is the fundamental beginning point of, um, it is no use for me to identify a need of our clients and for me to spend the vast amount of time to work on a funding proposal...to know that it's happening three doors down, um, I need to know what's happening in the community so that's really my starting point.

Participants find out what is happening in the community in several ways. Among them are by hearing of information through public announcements or being involved in community groups, for example. Several participants also mentioned hearing of information by sitting on committees.

We belong to many different community committees so you're always, um, meeting new people and, uh, and trying to learn more about their programs and services.

Many participants stated that they hear of information by being provided information by members of their organization such as through boards of directors or staff feedback. In addition, information can be learned through client feedback where clients suggest that collaboration may be appropriate.

Could be the client has driven us to the to the obvious conclusion that we need to work collaboratively.

Networking is also a common method used to get to know other people and agencies in the community. Many potential partnerships are determined through previous knowledge and previously working with organizations or persons in the community. In addition, many participants stated that often collaboration can begin accidentally or informally through being approached by another organization to collaborate.

In other cases, people will come to us out of that same logic, they recognize that their services are not serving the diverse community and they will come and seek our support.

If collaboration is felt appropriate, it is important to establish what organizations or persons should be involved. Several participants suggested that this could be done through selecting organizations or persons with common values or common interests as themselves and as each other. Several participants also mentioned credibility and reputation as important factors in choosing potential partners. Moreover, the majority of participants discussed the importance of trust in selecting and building partnerships. Deciding whether a person or agency could be a suitable partner can be established through researching them prior to agreeing to partner.

You have to do your homework, right, um, we get groups that come to us on a regular basis and they say that they want to partner, or they want to work with us on things, and we're, we're selective and that's not because we think that, um, that we're any different or any better than anyone, it's just doing that homework is fundamental.

Once it has been determined that a collaborative should be developed and the most suitable partner organizations have been established, it is appropriate to approach those parties to collaborate.

We identify for ourselves that we need to work with agency A, then we'll reach out to agency A and say 'I think we need to work with you can we sit down and chat'.

Often, members of collaboratives are selected by simply building on existing relationships or having previous knowledge of potential partners.

I think it, it, it, depends on, do you know the person...obviously, that's the first...if you know the person, you like, you like the person, or you, you, you find a good

communication with the person, it's almost like you seek out areas for collaboration... if you don't know anyone, um, or worse, if you know someone, but really don't like them, you're not going, well, no, it's human nature.

It is important to recognize, however, that there are always new people entering the workplace with new ideas that should be included in collaborative efforts.

There's always new ideas and new people in the community... with new ideas.

It was also suggested that if possible, multisector viewpoints can be important so that numerous people with various expertise are engaged in the collaborative process.

If you're talking about multisector engagement ...the different views are vital, I mean, you need business... you need action, you need to get things moving, and they can get things going, and happening, and non profits, well, you need them, obviously, you know, for the social end of things, and governments, you need all sectors, and you need, you need, um, because they all play a part in making something happen... government can change, you can get change happening...with different sectors together, you just can't do it with one sector alone.

When approaching other organizations or people, establish who has the power in the community to address issues needing resolution and determine an appropriate way to engage them. In some instances, a program or collaborative already exists, in which case it may be appropriate to seek involvement. In other instances, funding is made available only to those who partner and partners, therefore, are sought to receive funding. Moreover, collaboratives can be arranged out of financial necessity or needing the resources of other organizations in conjunction to one's own.

Sometimes it comes out of financial necessity, there are services we want to provide but we don't have all the resources, but if we partner with someone, or three or five agencies, we can collectively have the resources to make it happen.

In order to engage in collaboratives, however, one's respective organization must be willing to devote resources to the process.

Inviting people to engage in a collaborative effort is often done through a personal exchange such as a telephone call or email.

Could be as easy as, as simple as a phone call email.

Sometimes we'll have an idea and we'll make a call or send out some emails.

It also typically occurs through face-to-face conversations or arranging meetings with potential partners.

You can be... at meetings, you can be at events and have conversations with people and go 'my goodness, you should be involved in this project, we hadn't even thought of your participation'.

Lastly, participants stated that broadly, the process of engagement depends on the collaborative and can change from collaborative to collaborative. In sum, before entering into a collaborative process, there are steps that can be taken to determine who should be partnered with and when, and how and why to become involved in a collaborative process.

4.1.b Challenges

While all participants offered suggestions for how to engage in the process of collaboration, several offered challenges to this process. For example, one challenge mentioned involves having few people interested in the ideas put forward and thus having

to address issues or explore ideas in isolation. Similarly, one participant discussed working in isolation being in the history of their organization and the difficulty in instilling the notion of collaboration.

As stated, numerous participants stated that collaboration can often begin informally or accidentally by being approached by another organization to collaborate. This was a common response of larger organizations as these organizations often do greater networking, have been engaged in more collaboratives, and therefore know more potential partners. Further, networking is much easier for larger, more established organizations who know many other organizations and who have established credibility and often have greater resources so that they have the ability to do greater networking. Engaging in a collaborative may be more challenging, then, for smaller or newer agencies. In addition, working with the same partners all the time does not allow for the creative ideas of new members to be included in the process.

One major challenge to engaging in collaboratives is moving past the competition involved when seeking funding. It is often the case that a potential partner in a collaborative can be competition when applying for funding for a different aspect of one's respective organization. Also mentioned was having perpetual staff turnover which makes engagement in collaboration difficult. Several participants also mentioned that they do not always hear about the programs and organizations that exist in the community which makes engaging in collaboration difficult.

Sometimes we don't [hear] and that's still a problem.

Moreover, there are not enough report cards, information packages or enough online information discussing what is happening in the community that organizations need to collaborate and engage the process.

As can be seen, there are several challenges to engaging the process, particularly for smaller or newer agencies.

4.2 During the Collaboration

All participants discussed suggestions for making collaboratives successful and what makes them seem easier once they have engaged in them. Participants offered information that can be divided into suggestions for the beginning, middle and end of the collaborative process.

4.2.a *Suggestions for the Beginning of the Process*

Several participants discussed the importance of having leaders and establishing leaders at the outset of the process. It was stated, however, that it is not important who the leader is, simply that there is one selected.

It may also be important to ensure that everyone has a similar understanding of what collaboration means.

I would only encourage people just to really understand it and make sure it's a good fit right it...is that collaboration, if it isn't, don't say it is.

Finding common perspectives of the issue to be addressed is necessary at the beginning of the process. Members should also clearly establish the purpose of the collaborative at the beginning of the process. Similarly, at the beginning of the process, it is important to establish the goals of the collaborative.

I would start with talking about what your goals are trying to get everybody on the same page...so that you're all talking about the same kind of thing, where, what do you want this group to be able to do.

Also at the beginning of a collaborative, clear expectations and limitations of the process and members should be established.

I think the most important thing is to be very, very clear and complete right out front about what the limitations are on the relationship, what the expectations are on the relationship, so that, um, so that people don't end up frustrated or

disappointed or, or feeling that, um, that you know, that anything was going to help.

It is also vital to clearly establish what each member is to contribute to the collaborative and what roles they will engage in.

Things don't happen unless you assign... responsibility for lead roles.

Moreover, every member should have a clear idea of what each other member will be doing while in the collaborative. It was also suggested that each member be conscious of their own organizational mandate and ensure that they do not overstep their own. If this may be the case, delegating responsibility to those more appropriate based on mandate was discussed.

During the collaborative process, it should be ensured that all members of the collaborative are having their respective needs met by the process and by all members.

You can always benefit from taking a step back and making sure they're meeting the needs of the folks around the table.

Also of importance to a successful collaborative is to clearly outline the process including what will happen and approximately when it should occur.

The more that you can put in place to say 'this is how we do our work'...and you're really clear about your process...I think that's very beneficial...and that makes it easier.

Furthermore, it was also suggested that in order to clearly outline a collaborative process, information could be used from research on collaborative models, or past or existing successful collaboratives for ideas.

It can also be a good idea to establish potential time lines and be willing to plan in advance for when and why the collaborative will be terminated.

There are other times in which it makes sense for a collaborative to come together, complete their purpose and then dissolve... that generally happens when you have a really clear specific mandate.

Many participants stated that the development of logic models can be important for a successful collaborative.

I am a great proponent of logic models so I would probably have already done a logic model of what this might look like. So I would have already identified what my resources needed are, what the outcomes I hope to achieve, and how I want to evaluate that (pause) and we would have a conversation about that and, you know, what kind of dollars we're talking, what funders we might think we could get that from.

We'll come up with, sort of a project proposal, how do we address it, uh, what are the resource implications, what's going to be the cost, what's the outcome, what's the goal.

Furthermore, developing agreements, contracts, and written protocols for the collaborative process were strongly encouraged by many participants, and even, by some participants, encouraged for informal collaboratives as well.

Then let's draft some kind of agreement between the two agencies, or however many agencies, to say, 'okay, and here's who is responsible for what, this person will provide staff over here, this will, maybe, provide some admin work over here, whatever'...whatever it's going to look like, get that on paper, rather than being... reactive, you've been proactive...all of that stuff needs to be all done upfront... that you can't be sort of creating it on the run, so, figure out what you need in the beginning and it will flow much smoother.

Many people want to have more informal feeling relationships but ultimately formal contracts were suggested by many.

Planning in advance for potential problems that could arise and discussing how to solve them can make the collaborative process easier for all members.

If we run into a problem, here's how we're going to deal with conflict (pause), if we run into another problem, here's a process for that, I really think you need to do that stuff up front.

Similarly, several participants suggested that rules for how to participate are needed as well as a common set of values that everyone adheres to.

I think having sort of a set of guiding principles or some values that you adhere to as you work together, um, can really provide for a deeper collaboration.

Participants offered many suggestions for the beginning of the process, but many felt that the more that is in place at the beginning, the easier the remainder of the process is.

4.2.b *Suggestions for the Middle and End of the Process*

Once the necessary suggestions have been used to begin the process, there are suggestions that can be used to engage the remainder of the collaboration. For example, it is suggested that throughout the collaborative, members should be free to suggest creative ideas, explore the various perspectives of members, ask questions, challenge existing ideas, beliefs and suggestions, and clarify the collaborative if appropriate. At all times, it is important to remind oneself and group members of the needs of those being served by the collaborative.

Constant conversation with members of the collaborative is also important because improvements can only be made through having conversations. Furthermore, any new information, new knowledge and new resources that may be helpful to the collaborative should be offered.

While many participants discussed the importance of having rules and guidelines, such as logic models or contracts, in place for collaboratives, some cautioned that collaboratives should not feel too structured. A useful technique to use during the process that several participants discussed, that also contributes to reducing the structured feel of a structured process, includes brainstorming or free thinking and having someone capture the key information.

A lot of free flowing sort of thinking and conversation I think is really important... to get the ideas flowing, um, but then making sure that there's always one person at the meeting who can take all of that those free flowing thoughts and ideas and capture it, so they either capture it in minutes... or they capture it in, my big one, of my favourite things is action oriented minutes, and so you've captured the highlights of the discussion, but then you've also identified what the action items are, and what the next steps are moving forward...so we can sit and be blabbing, you know, just having a very casual what feels like a very casual, open conversation, and a week later... boom, boom, boom, here's our next steps, here's what everybody's responsibilities are....so it's having that person who can really sort of pull it all together.

Similarly, several participants suggested that the use of facilitators, mediators or neutral parties can be beneficial to the process to capture and direct information as it is discussed.

A lot of guided discussions, um, I think that's, I mean, I think, often, we've brought in facilitators... it helps to have a neutral party...so having a neutral body convene...or facilitate...is often quite helpful.

Several participants encouraged having meetings on a regular basis to touch base and determine the progress being made. Evaluation was mentioned by many participants as an important way to establish the progress being made and the collaborative process itself.

Always, always be evaluating your, your collaborative, is it working, are the, the mechanisms working, is the process that you are using working, so not just your end result, not just your product, but also, what is the, the process that you're using... or the, the ways in which you interact, and are they effective, and are they as effective as they could be, and then modifying those based on what you're learning over time...is very, very important.

More specifically, it was suggested that evaluating the outcome of the collaborative is important but so is the evaluation of the process and determining whether the process is working. Furthermore, having continuous feedback from all members is important to enhancing the process and making changes when necessary. Moreover, several participants suggested that adjusting the process is important in itself.

I think in terms of poverty, this community is changing how, how people work, and live is, is changing and shifting, and so it's, your collaborations need to be shifting and changing as a result of that to be able to address whatever new need pops up...and that's really important.

Many participants felt that there is constant learning that takes place during collaborative processes and that they learn many new things during the process.

You learn every time you're at a table you learn something...you have to be open to, um, the experience, learning from it, and you get some real good value from it, and you can get some things that you would decide to do differently the next time... there's always a learning you, don't never learn something.

It is important, then, to constantly attempt to develop better ways to share information learned and gathered with other members of the collaborative.

Important to the success of collaborative efforts is devoting time and resources. Several participants stated that they make every effort to devote staff time for collaboratives, use staff time and resources to support collaboratives, and even create

staff positions specifically for collaborative purposes. It is also important to transition new staff within one's respective agency or to the collaborative into the process and provide them full details about it.

Many participants discussed the importance of finding time and being willing to invest time into collaborative efforts.

You only have so many hours in this day, but if you just let that stuff go without any, um, I mean, let's just, it's a relationship really...so if you don't put time and energy into a relationship, you're not going to have a relationship.

Similarly, many participants also discussed the importance of contributing resources and funding to the collaborative and being willing to do so. Organizations should also attempt to be accommodating and flexible to issues that need to be addressed, with requests made, or with meeting the needs of the collaborative process and members.

It was suggested that collaboratives can be useful in learning new information about one's self. Similarly, it is important during the process to do your own part well and be prepared to take risks. Several participants also discussed developing the ability to ask hard questions of one's self in order to grow as an individual and an organization. Moreover, one must be willing to change aspects of their organization if, in asking questions of their organization, they find something that could be improved. In addition, one must be able to admit that other organizations or persons may be more suitable to address a particular issue than they are. At an organizational level, respective organizations should be willing to determine how they can better improve and strengthen their own agency and the collaborative process.

I also think as an organization, um, we can improve... so that, um, within operating divisions as well as between operating divisions, we don't get so siloed...in our thinking ...create some really neat opportunities...I think it's just because you get so focused on what we do in each of our you know teams or sites.

Several participants have altered their own agency as a result of collaborative efforts by building collaboration into their organizational mandate and insisting that collaboration should be engaged in.

It's [collaboration] got to be a part of everything you do as an organization is that that collaborative message needs to be built in.

As much as staff in different organizations might think it's a good idea to collaborate... it won't really have any depth unless, um, at the most senior levels, it's part of their strategic plan... so at the most senior level, you need to have, um, commitment to collaboration so with your boards of directors and... whatever the governing body is as well as your most senior administrators.

Further, it was suggested that collaboratives should be outlined clearly enough that it could be sustained if members changed.

Collaboration, unless it's institutionalized between organizations, will be, um, critically contingent upon the relationships between the individuals in those organizations... you create that collaboration, but, if you don't institutionalize it, um, the minute there's a change that... linkage is broken.

Several participants discussed the importance of improving collaboratives and the process of collaboration in general. It was felt that to fail to attempt to improve the process would be a mistake.

It would be it would be a fatal flaw if we just simply rested on where we're at.

Improvements in the collaborative process could, for example, reduce frustration of the members, improve the services and the efforts being developed, and result in increased areas of expertise for members and in general. Moreover, the more people who are

involved in collaborative efforts, the less burden there is on members of the community to resolve social issues.

It [collaboration] eases the, the burden because now you've got more folks involved and, and working together again on the same cause in a coordinated way.

In addition, it is important to remember that collaborative efforts are engaged in to assist members of the community needing help.

Once the collaborative has been in progress for a while, it is important to discuss the results. In addition, members of collaboratives need to be patient when waiting for results.

For a lot of organizations, you're not going to see benefits tomorrow... you couldn't sort of start some sort of collaborative partnership today you might not see the benefits for 5 or 10 years down the road.

I've learned that I think I've learned to be patient and, and I've learned to see the benefits, so you have to stick around long enough to see the benefits and when you do, like, you're a believer.

Several participants discussed the importance of spending time on difficult collaboratives. It was felt that often, the collaboratives that are felt to be the most difficult can result in the most learning.

Well, maybe everyone spending a bit more time on the more difficult ones... I think people putting the energy into some of the ones that are more difficult ultimately effect more meaningful change.

Collaborations can also end up in a far different place than was first anticipated and this should be encouraged if it is something that will benefit the process and goal. Similarly,

many organizations often feel that there are so many issues that need addressing and new collaboratives that should be developed, that it is easy to be disinterested in completing current collaborative efforts. Participants stated, however, that if these efforts are still meaningful, they should be completed. If collaboratives are no longer felt to be beneficial or needed, or a collaborative is more difficult, time consuming or resource intensive than beneficial, it should be reevaluated, altered or terminated.

But if it's taking more time to establish and nurture and sustain those relationships than is benefiting your organization, you are not doing your job ... any collaboration that I do [should] substantively move that agenda forward.

Several participants cautioned against having large collaborative efforts either in the number of members engaging in it, or in the complexity of the issue being addressed. It was advised that the merit be seen in having fewer members. In addition, collaboratives with a smaller goal can be beneficial as well.

Small things can happen too, it doesn't have to be large... it can just be small... which is sometimes it happens faster.

Several participants suggested that greater information on collaboration and the process of collaboration needs to be generated and better understood in general. Further, collaborative, cooperative processes need to be built in and encouraged in the community, society, and the education system so that collaborating with others is not seen as a challenge. In addition, different, more creative ways to collaborate should be investigated such as increasing integration of various agencies or increasing co-location where agencies remain autonomous.

It is also important to remember that taking risks and attempting to tackle large issues or projects can have a great impact.

What we've learned, you know, is, um, going big ...it takes some courage to do it, but I think going big is, um, got just like powerful impact.

Moreover, collaboration can be a powerful aid in resolving large or complex issues.

As can be seen, there are many suggestions to use during the process of collaboration that can result in a successful, meaningful outcome.

4.2.c Challenges

All participants offered suggestions to use during a collaboration to make it successful and for how to make it as easy as possible. All participants also discussed challenges that can occur during the collaboration which can make them more difficult. For example, as previously mentioned, collaborations can be difficult and feel messy. Similarly, collaborations can be very frustrating for those involved. Some of the aspects of the collaborative process that can lead to frustration are a lack of consensus, unclear expectations, a lack of commitment from any members, or not having a process established for solving problems. Since a lot of collaborations are either informal in nature or are engaged in in an informal manner, these can often have informal rules for the collaborative process. Several participants also discussed losing sight of the goal as being challenging.

One of the things, or one of the grey areas where we see, sometimes collaboration gets mixed up, is when we, when all of us collectively lose sight, is what we're trying to accomplish...what is the focus of the group?

In addition, several participants find it challenging to be in collaboratives where there seems to be more planning than action. In contrast, several other participants mentioned that more action than planning can be problematic.

I think instinct is just to move to action, move to action, 'oh, I don't know, let's pilot something' right, like that's the great thing 'let's just, let's just do a pilot, we'll figure it out as we go'...ok, no, let's talk

During the collaborative process, a lack of information sharing amongst members can be challenging. These types of collaboratives can also result in members feeling that their time is being wasted.

The biggest challenge that most participants mentioned many times is not having enough time to devote to collaborative efforts.

Sometimes, because you're so busy with the day to day stuff, you don't have the energy or the time to put in to.

Sometimes that kind of work takes time because... it takes a little time but at the end, you get a really good thing whatever it is right.

It also takes time to develop and maintain relationships with those involved in the collaborative which can also be challenging. Further, collaboratives can be resource intensive which is found challenging by most, particularly smaller agencies who have limited resources to devote.

Several participants mentioned that on occasion, collaboratives can seem slow to progress and that the outcomes take many years to be seen.

The merits are, you know, often are not measurable until five or ten years later... we can work like crazy on a collaborative piece, you know, and it's going to take two to five years to see that impact... one could suggest that we live in a world of immediacy where people expect to see change... right away.

In some instances, not all members of a collaborative feel that they are benefiting and it is difficult to feel that other organizations are while one's respective organization is not. Similarly, when members of the collaborative have personal agendas and reasons for belonging to the collaborative that are in contrast to other members or to its purpose, it can make working with them difficult. In addition, it can be a challenge when members are not contributing equally to the process. Another challenge is when members are fearful of sharing resources with other members or the collaborative.

There is fear about sharing resources, there's fear about having, you know, 'I'll have less to do the things I want to do if I... send some of it over that way'.

Participants also felt that if there were differences between themselves and other members that could not be negotiated in any way, collaboratives can be particularly challenging.

Competition was discussed by most participants as a challenge because competition is the antithesis of collaboration but in many social situations, competition is required for funding or jobs, for example, and is often more acceptable than collaboration.

You get yourself out of a competitive headspace into one of collaboration, um, but it can take people a long time to get there, um, depending upon, uh, the experiences that you've had around collaboration, whether you've been involved in some, uh, you know, ones that haven't worked well, or depending upon a sector that you might come from, um, or a community collaboration doesn't come natural... some people are very much in, you know, 'we have to, you know, protect what we, we have' and, um, and I mean, while we're all concerned with, uh, viability of our organizations, um, it's just some people don't think as easily around collaboration.

It was also stated that the notion of collaboration cannot fully be understood or improved as a technique until society reevaluates the need for and privilege of competition.

Collaboration is also a fairly new technique being used to address social issues which requires a greater understanding and knowledge base. Having little knowledge on collaboration can be difficult for the process.

We're learning lot more, uh, about collaboration now... so we're starting to learn more about it in school...and but it's still a fairly new body... of research from my understanding...so I think that there's value, not just to what we are doing right now...but there's value to that body of knowledge around how do we collaborate,

what are the models of collaboration, and so if we can continually be improving our collaborative efforts, we can also be building that body of knowledge on how to collaborate.

Because collaboration is considered a newer area of practice and research, many participants felt that more suggestions and information are needed for how to improve the process. Several cautioned, however, that collaboration may not necessarily need to be increased within their own organization or in general, but should be improved.

Several participants also mentioned the challenge of being able to maintain one's organizational identity during a collaborative process as well as fully engage the process. Similarly, it was stated that it can be difficult to have the willingness to give up aspects of your own organization and change. Collaboration can also be risky for organizations, particularly smaller ones who can gain many things, such as resources, reputation or better help for those accessing their services, but stand to lose a lot from an unsuccessful collaborative.

Another challenge mentioned by most participants is around funding. Many participants find funding motives to be a challenge as often funding bodies will only provide funding if collaboratives are developed. Several participants stated, however, that funding bodies need to recognize the difficulty of collaborative efforts.

The intensity of the work that needs to go into, um, collaboration isn't always recognized at the funding level... there's just the assumptions that sometimes, um, that things come together and not the recognition of all of the work that has to happen, um, you know, and some of the processes that were involved just to maintain the level of collaboration is phenomenal but it doesn't get it doesn't necessarily get recognized.

Similarly, it was suggested that there should be improvement at the funding level with regard to recognizing that competing for funds and collaborating with other organizations do not work in conjunction with one another and can actually hinder collaborative relationships.

I think it could be improved by having fewer pressures competitive pressures...on local organizations that they're having to, to work darn hard just to stay afloat and the way the funding environment has pet organization against each other, it requires an approach to collaboration that does not, uh, allow for the integrity of the, of the relationships.

Several participants stated that a great deal of funding and resources given to their organization are often stretched in many ways making the process of collaboration hard.

I think sometimes, um, especially for funders...I don't think they understand the, the, the financial cost or they, they don't put money towards the human resource cost...[sometimes] we don't ever think there's a cost to, but, what we're just, we're just absorbing it too, or we're just adding it our job...we can have all these folk, all these great collaboratives, and all these partnerships, and, and things, but we haven't done it on a forty hour week.

Also discussed was the idea that measuring the success of collaboratives can be challenging because a lot of success can also lie in building and maintaining relationships with members before actual outcomes are seen in achieving the goals of the effort. In addition, in some instances, members of the collaborative simply do not have the resources to improve the aspects of the collaborative that need to be improved.

Finally, several participants stated that some collaboratives can just simply be hard and often the process can be unpredictable.

In sum, it is important to be aware of the aspects of the collaborative process that can be challenging and use the suggestions made by participants for the process in the above section to make it easier and more successful.

4.3 Concluding the Collaboration

4.3.a Suggestions

Primarily, participants discussed ideas surrounding how to improve the process of collaboration as well as offered some ideas on how to engage a collaborative process. Participants did, however, mention that there should be a process for terminating in place, and ideally determined through conversing with members of the collaborative at the outset. Further, it was suggested that establishing and knowing that some collaboratives are temporary makes terminating them easier.

4.3.b *Challenges*

Several participants mentioned that they find collaboratives difficult to end. The main challenge for disengaging from collaboratives is in suggesting to others that it is no longer efficient in some regard and should be terminated. As mentioned in the previous section, then, it is important to outline at the outset details surrounding the termination of a collaborative.

5. Relationship Building

5.1 Suggestions

Relationship building is an important part of building successful collaborative efforts. All participants offered suggestions for developing and maintaining more successful relationships and therefore more successful collaboratives. For example, establishing clear boundaries for oneself and organization was suggested by several participants. Establishing responsibility and delegating tasks was also felt important. Similarly, being clear at the outset of what one's respective organization is able to contribute and what is needed from a collaborative effort can be helpful to developing positive relationships. Several participants suggested that having previous knowledge of partners can be helpful to making a successful relationship. Being committed to the collaborative effort and demonstrating that commitment is also important for the process. This can be accomplished through engaging in regular communication with collaborative members, for example.

We do a lot of, um, regular, uh, regular communication either in person or, or email, we also have, um, we also host some, uh, group emails through our organization, and send out, um, regular, uh, updates to larger committees, or, you know, groups that we would partner with, um, on a regular basis.

In addition, having personal check-ins, such as emails or phone calls with members on a regular basis is important to determining how they are feeling about the collaborative process. In order to have regular communication and check-ins however, one must be easily accessible to all members. When talking to others, it was suggested to be direct and clear as well as to talk in simple, uncomplicated language.

Several participants suggested the importance of maintaining a good sense of humour and not taking the process so seriously that it is no longer enjoyable.

You have to have a good sense of humour...that could be the biggest insight that I've, that, you know, you really can't take it too seriously at the end of the day.

You've got to keep a sense of humour because as soon as it stops being enjoyable...then you've got to wonder why you're doing them.

Several other key aspects of successful relationships included establishing trust, being respectful, being hospitable, and having open and honest communication. Similarly, it is important to roll with conflict and have patience with others and the process.

Positively affirming the work that collaborative members are doing is also valuable to improving the relationship.

Lots and lots and lots of praise, you know, for the people that we're partners with... when people work with us, we really profile them and we make them feel, um, really valued...what they're doing and, um, you just can't give people too much affirmation...that kind of affirmation, I think, really feeds the partnerships as well.

Learning about and being more understanding of others is also important in having successful relationships. Moreover, remembering always that it takes time to develop and maintain relationships and that the process cannot be rushed.

I think we underestimate the time that it takes to nurture those, and to develop those bridges, and to build the trust, and to, you know, get everybody at the table where they're speaking openly and honestly and they're not, and, and, and not easily offended, and those types of things, um, you know, that's a tremendous learning curve when you go through this process.

Also, in addition to learning about others, one must be willing to learn about themselves.

As mentioned, developing and maintaining relationships take time and all members must be willing to dedicate the time to do so.

You don't have time, or maybe this and that report need to get done, and accredited out to people, well, pick up the damn phone and say 'hey...this is what's going on here, I'm really crazy busy, um, but I think we need to touch base, these are the times that are good for me, what's good for you, let's do' and stick to it... do not push it off it and it's a relationship...it's like any friendship, romantic relationship, familial relationships, why should a business relationship be any different?

In addition to time, resources and energy must also be devoted to relationships. If possible, each relationship should be managed as fairly and equally as possible.

It is important to evaluate relationships, determine how successful they are and if anything should be improved. Repair any damaged relationships as immediately as possible. In addition, be flexible in all aspects of the relationship. Moreover, be willing to assist others become more successful in their own agencies. There are many suggestions, then, that can be used to improve relationships with those who are involved in the collaborative process.

5.2 Challenges

While all participants offered suggestions for developing and maintaining successful relationships with collaborative members, they also all offered challenges for relationships. Furthermore, the challenges for relationships outnumber the suggestions offered for ensuring their success. One example is having little or no trust in relationships.

There's a real trust factor that's required in, in deep collaboration, so to be able to, to put the baggage on the table, or to put some of the more uncomfortable pieces together ...you need an incredible amount of trust... to work with an organization which you typically see at competition or, or worse.

When that trust isn't there, the collaboratives move very, very slowly.

Other challenges mentioned were having to work through relationships where one or more members have strong egos, different objectives for the group or collaborative, few or no protocols for solving problems, being inflexible to change, or personal agendas for why they have entered, remain in, or plan for the collaborative.

There's certain personal agendas that you need to be aware of too, I guess that's some, something that I've learned is that they're not all (laughs) all at the same one as you have...they're there for the same reasons, but they're not, not always a part of, of the, of the issue so there's, there's that to deal with.

A lack of shared purpose for the group can also be hard on relationships. Moreover, a lack of shared values and a lack of direction were also suggested to be hard on relationships. Also, not having clear expectations for each member or the collaborative itself or a clear understanding of what each party is responsible for can make relationships harder.

If you build a good relationship where everybody knows where they stand, what they are doing... If you've been sloppy somewhere along the line then it can be hell... Then you're spending all your time trying to fix it.

Consensus building can also be hard on relationships as it can be a long, frustrating and difficult process.

It's very, very difficult, um, because then there's also there's so much consensus building... and consensus building is difficult and it takes a long time.

If all members are not contributing equally or there are power imbalances evident between members, successful relationships may not be developed. Further, relationships can be troublesome if understanding from all members for one another and the collaborative process is not demonstrated.

Members who do not have a genuine interest in the collaborative can be difficult to build relationships with but it was suggested that persons not interested in the collaborative will leave anyway. Similarly, some members may be interested in maintaining their sense of organizational autonomy which can be a challenge for developing a collaborative relationship.

Unequal levels of commitment can be problematic for relationships as well. There can also be organizational or personal challenges such as tensions that exist between different agencies or sectors or agency biases which make working together in a collaborative manner difficult.

You sort of have to set aside your own individual agency biases, because we all have them whether we think we do or not, you know. We operate a certain way here. Someone over here who is providing the same type of service operates a little differently so we have to be able to put whatever biases we've got about that

aside and say we can work together here and still achieve something...you have to be very open to that.

Personal characteristics of the members of the collaborative can also be a challenge for relationships if people do not like one another.

Most participants mentioned time as a challenge for relationships. Most feel that it is challenging to develop or maintain relationships when there is little time for all parties to do so.

For the ones that are involved, they're all really busy anyway...there's also some others that need a little more nurturance and attention ...I don't always get to do that... it's not that it's difficult so much as a time thing.

Similarly, energy, effort and work must be put into relationships which can be a challenge.

Most relationships are fairly difficult to maintain on an ongoing basis, uh, and that has a lot do to with just the energy and that has to go into it, um, the relationship need to be monitored, it needs to be invested, and you have to take the time to make that, you can't simply set it up and just ignore it, because it will break down so, uh, like most human interactions at a social level, it's a lot of ongoing work and relationship building right?

Often the workload and schedules of members can make it difficult to contribute time and energy into relationships. Getting people together can also be difficult due to time or funding restraints but a lack of communication can be problematic.

Many participants also mentioned funding as a challenge for relationships because more often, competition rather than collaboration is encouraged. When collaboration is encouraged, organizations are sometimes forced to join together to collaborate. Either of these situations make entering or maintaining authentic, successful relationships difficult.

It's a more aggressive world right now in terms of getting funding... it used to be everybody wants, you know, funders...even donors, you know, they, they want proof that, you know, that their dollar is being spent the best way possible so you have to be able to show them that giving money to [you] ...is better than giving money to all of our partner agencies (laughs) or we won't have any money to, to partner.

Likewise, competition is an issue for relationships as it is challenging to develop relationships if one is attempting to compete and collaborate with another person or organization.

Even though two organizations might be partnerships partners around one area, they may also might be competing against us.

Staff turnover and staffing changes can be hard on developing and maintaining relationships as the connections made are often severed.

Well turnover, uh, we live in a world where there's lots of people leaving jobs or taking on new jobs and if, uh, organizations people are in front of collaborations, really collaborations between organizations are often between people...so when those people leave, then there there's massive turnover that's a, a challenge ...it's incredibly hard to keep the thing, uh, moving.

As can be seen, there can be numerous challenges for developing and maintaining relationships with collaborative partners but recognizing the challenges can be vital to establishing successful relationships.

As is evidenced by the results, all participants had a great deal of experience with collaboration. A wealth of knowledge was gathered through discussing the topic with participants and several main themes emerged from exploring these experiences.

6. Types of Collaborators

All participants had experience with inter-organizational collaboration and overall, collaboration was believed to be an important way to resolve complex social issues. It appeared, however, through the type of information given and the manner in which inter-organizational collaboration was discussed, that participants did not all feel the same about collaboration. After looking in greater detail at the information offered by participants as well as how information was offered, it was found that participants fell into one of three categories in terms of their overall feeling about inter-organizational collaboration: enthusiastic collaborators, ambivalent collaborators, and resistant collaborators, each of which will be discussed.

Numerous participants expressed strong interest and a desire to collaborate, collaborate often with other organizations, would encourage others to collaborate, and discussed collaboration eagerly. Further, while this type of collaborator discussed challenges to the process, many more examples of positive characteristics of collaboration were discussed and suggestions for improving the process offered. These types of collaborators would be considered enthusiastic collaborators.

Interviewer: "Do you collaborate with other organizations?"

Participant: "We sure do... it's hard to imagine anything we would do here that wouldn't be in some kind of relationship with others."

Interviewer: "Do you believe that collaboration should be increased?"

Participant: "Yup, yup, I think with what we've learned...of the power of people working together is a model that could be used in many areas... around different issues."

Other participants demonstrated contrasting thoughts about collaboration where they frequently engage in collaborative endeavors and like the idea of collaboration, but would also be willing to use other ways to augment poverty reduction strategies, or ways of conversing with others if more appropriate. In conversation, these participants would discuss collaboration eagerly in some instances but with displeasure in others. These

types of collaborators could be thought of as ambivalent toward collaboration. This type of collaborator discussed the challenges as well as the positive aspects of collaboration.

“Collaboration isn't the only way to do it it's a model and a method...better for some things than others.”

Several participants demonstrated resistance to collaboration. Resistant collaborators are those who will use collaboration if necessary but do not actively seek to collaborate and encourage other ways to address social issues. These participants spoke more to the challenges of collaboration than the benefits and spoke mostly about the topic with displeasure.

Interviewer: “Do you believe that other organizations should develop collaborative relationships?”

Participant: “It depends, if it helps them get an outcome, uh, better than, better, faster and more efficiently than doing it on their own, so I don't believe in collaboration, so collaboration if necessary but not necessarily collaboration.”

Throughout the conversations with participants, it became evident how strongly each promoted the idea of collaboration and felt it to be an effective way to address complex issues. This can be seen in the above examples but was evident also through the number of references made to the positive aspects of collaboration versus the challenges of it. Several participants readily discussed the challenges of collaboration and offered more examples of challenges than positive aspects or suggestions on how to improve the process. These individuals, for example, would be considered resistant collaborators whereas those who more readily discussed the positive characteristics of collaboration would be considered enthusiastic collaborators.

Regardless, however, of the type of collaborator participants presented as, all participants felt that collaboration is an important tool to address social issues as well as assist those experiencing poverty. Further, all provided suggestions for and challenges to the process.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of the research was to explore the experience of twenty Executive Directors with regard to inter-organizational collaboration in helping those in poverty to answer the following research question: how, in Waterloo Region, do Executive Directors from organizations assisting those in poverty experience inter-organizational collaboration? It was found through an in depth qualitative analysis that participants had both positive and negative experiences with inter-organizational collaboration and as such, had varying attitudes toward the notion and process of collaboration, defined collaboration in many different ways, and offered many suggestions to improve the process as well as challenges to it.

Participants differed with regard to how positive their experiences with inter-organizational collaboration have been and therefore how eager they are to engage in collaborative endeavours. For example, several participants discussed having many positive experiences with inter-organizational collaboration and as such, were eager to become involved in new collaboratives as well as encourage others to do the same. Moreover, these participants offered more suggestions for how to improve the process than challenges to it. In contrast, participants who were more ambivalent or resistant to inter-organizational collaboration had fewer positive experiences with it, discussed the challenges more readily and were not as eager to engage in collaboratives themselves or encourage others to do so. Ambivalent collaborators, however, were more eager to enter future collaboratives and encourage others to do the same than resistant collaborators. These findings are important as they give insight into how collaboration is experienced in practice and demonstrate that collaboration is experienced differently for various people. Further, it shows that having many negative experiences with inter-organizational collaboration can hinder one's interest in it. It is also possible that those engaged in collaborative efforts but more strongly believe that challenges are likely to occur and do not fully wish to be engaged in the first place may make the collaborative effort more problematic for others involved. This makes the suggestions offered by participants for

how to improve collaborative efforts important because improved collaborative processes could result in fewer challenges and therefore greater interest in engaging in inter-organizational collaboration.

Collaboration was also understood and practiced differently between participants. This was likely due to the fact that the definition of collaboration differed among participants: while there were some commonalities between participants in their definition, no two definitions were the same. This finding contributes to previous research which suggested that there is no consistent understanding and use of the term “collaboration” throughout the literature, but in this study, it is important to recognize that there is also no consistent use of the term in actual practice. This could also explain why participants experienced collaboration differently from one another and why some more strongly appreciate collaboration than others: it is possible that certain definitions of collaboration can influence how it is practiced and therefore how positively or negatively it is experienced by those in the collaborative effort. Prior research suggests that members could enter the collaborative processes with preconceived notions of what collaboration means (Winer & Ray, 1994) and these notions could differ because the definition of collaboration in general differs within the literature (Gajda, 2004). Establishing a common understanding of the term “collaboration” as well as the process among collaborative members once the collaboration has been formed, a suggestion made by several participants, may be very important: clearing up ambiguities of the definition and process of collaboration may result in more positive experiences of the process because members do not expect the process to match their personal definition and become disappointed when it differs. Further, the notion that numerous participants felt the process and definition of collaboration to be messy and unclear would explain why they are often unclear about what it actually means to collaborate or use the word without genuinely understanding its meaning. Further, it could explain why collaborating is felt to be challenging and messy a great deal of the time. It could also account for an individual’s experiences with collaboration.

The fact that participants had varying definitions and understandings of collaboration also builds on the notion that each collaborative effort is different (Miller & Hafner, 2008). Participants suggested that some collaboratives are more intense than

others (Gajda, 2004): more intense collaboratives require more time and energy put into them and often are longer term. If participants have a preconceived notion of how intense a collaborative should be, they may have a more negative experience when it requires more time and effort than expected. Both the literature and participants, however, stated that members should be flexible to how a collaborative progresses and be willing to accept changes in the process (Mattessich, et al., 2001). The participants who suggested that collaborative members should accommodate changes in the collaborative effort were mostly those who had more positive experiences collaborating.

Collaboration was also defined and understood based on the qualities that it possesses. Many of the qualities suggested were related to traits that the individuals *in* the collaboration should possess, such as trustworthiness, responsibility, cooperation or interest in partnership, for example. This builds upon the ideas presented previously where characteristics of the organization, including size or type of organization (Winer & Ray, 1994) for example, were felt important to the collaborative process. It is important to note that the qualities that collaborative members should possess were highlighted more than the purpose of collaboration when participants defined the term. Participants also had different notions of what qualities are important to collaboration which could mean that each member looks for different qualities in a collaborative effort. If particular qualities of collaboration are either missing, or are present but believed to be unnecessary, it is possible that the quality of the collaboration could be viewed negatively. In contrast, if members outlined at the beginning of the collaborative effort the qualities they believe a collaborative and its members should possess, which was suggested by several participants, members could attempt to meet the needs and expectations of all those involved and thus, make the experience more positive.

Collaboration can also be defined by its level of contribution to society and to the lives of those in need. For example, bigger, more complex collaborative efforts were believed to be helpful to more people. Indeed, collaboration must be beneficial for building community and assisting those in it by addressing community issues. Numerous participants did not feel that less intense collaborative efforts that did not attempt to contribute to societal issues could be considered collaborations. This would make it very important to establish the purpose of the collaborative at the outset as well as the

expected duration so that the definition and common understanding of the collaborative can be made clear.

Social issues can be addressed through collaboration because collaboration helps individuals better access organizational services and assists in identifying the needs of those in society. Moreover, collaboration can be used to combat larger social issues such as poverty, for example, which corroborates existing literature (Mattessich, et al.; Winer & Ray, 1994). Collaboration should be used to bring together various agencies to address the same issue, such as poverty, and combine efforts. Further, working together can result in greater outcomes than working in isolation. Working together can also help individuals needing assistance better navigate the available services while minimizing duplication of the services available.

Collaboration can also be used to resolve issues within one's respective organization, partner organizations, or both. For example, collaboration can improve how programs or services are delivered to users, for example. In addition, more or better policies can be designed by collaborating which can be used to better serve individuals accessing agencies. Greater knowledge of other organizations, programs and services can also be gathered through collaborating so that services are not duplicated. These suggestions show that collaboration can be used as a way of better assisting those in the community and those in need of services through improving organizations: the better an organization operates, the more efficiently and effectively they can help those accessing services. In addition, collaboration can be used to discover organizational aspects that need to be addressed. Some of the qualities that should comprise collaboration such as open and honest communication, a willingness to address organizational and personal strengths and weaknesses as well as a willingness to improve one's organization would be necessary to improve one's organization in the ways described.

All participants were involved in collaborative processes to some degree where collaboration takes place within their own agency, across agencies and across different sectors. Moreover, most, even those who were ambivalent about or resistant to collaboration, felt that collaboration overall should be used by more people and more agencies and numerous participants felt that it should be used more within their own agency. Collaboration should be increased because it simply makes sense to work

together in a community to address community issues. Further, by engaging in collaborative efforts, it is demonstrated to others that collaboration is needed within the community in general. Collaboration is a useful way to become aware of other organizations in the community, learn about existing services and learn about gaps in service in order to find new and creative ways to develop high quality, sustainable services. Collaboration can allow individuals to share knowledge, skills and expertise on various social issues, like poverty. No one organization can address social issues like poverty in isolation and working to address them collaboratively can be a more powerful way to do so. Further, having connections between agencies can help those accessing services receive support by better connecting them to the various resources within the community. The advantage of working in collaboration to address complex needs is that many more people can be assisted and that those in need have greater support systems available to them, confirming and expanding on the previous literature (Mattessich, et al., 2001) including my own prior research on poverty. As mentioned, participants in the previous study that I conducted felt that they needed, in their own organization, to collaborate more. This was also found in the current research suggesting that increased collaboration is indeed of interest to this population regardless of the challenges and prior negative experiences. Moreover, the findings in the current study make evident why increased collaboration is desirable which also builds on the findings in my previous research. Most participants feel that collaboration should be increased overall because it is helpful in addressing social issues (Bailey & Koney, 1995; Leviten-Reid, 2007; Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001; Winer & Ray, 1994) like poverty.

In the current study, participants suggested that improvements in collaboration could improve their organization, a suggestion also made in the literature (Mattessich, et al., 2001), the services being offered, increase interest in the process and ultimately provide greater assistance to individuals in the community such as those experiencing poverty. Because there are so many social issues to be addressed, however, it is sometimes the case that collaborative efforts are not completed as new efforts are engaged in, something not mentioned in previous research. Participants suggested that these efforts be completed and stated that sometimes establishing smaller collaborative groups or tackling smaller issues may be more beneficial, a suggestion not found in the

previous literature. In addition, participants suggested that collaboration is beneficial to organizational growth, creativity, increasing their profile, and improving various aspects of their organization such as making services better or increasing the number of services, which corroborated what was stated in the literature (Mattessich, et al., 2001; Winer & Ray, 1994). With increased service, participants believed that more individuals can be assisted and with improved service, individuals accessing them can receive better quality services. In addition, participants, in conjunction with previous research (Mattessich, et al., 2001), stated that collaboration allows for increased knowledge regarding the services already in existence within the community avoiding duplication and helping those using them better navigate these services. Further, participants stated that collaboration can meet more of the needs of individuals accessing services, something not previously mentioned in the literature.

Several individuals suggested that collaboration should only be increased if organizations are not already in enough collaborative efforts, if opportunities to better assist those in need are being missed or it benefits the organization in some way. While the benefits of collaboration are numerous, as mentioned, the definition and process of collaboration can be complex which may lead some to be hesitant of collaborating. Moreover, several challenges to increased collaboration were discussed such as simply not having the time or resources to do so. Indeed, attempting to manage too much can cause disinterest in increasing collaborative efforts. Being mandated to collaborate or being denied funds unless collaboration is employed can also be challenges for increased collaboration. It is also important to determine whether collaboration is appropriate to solve issues before proceeding which was also suggested by Mattessich, Murray-Close and Monsey (2001). Many of the participants who discussed challenges to increased collaboration, however, were from smaller organizations or were resistant to collaboration in general. These challenges, as well as the above mentioned reasons to collaborate and increase collaboration provide insight into why organizations choose to collaborate or not and why they find collaboration more rewarding or challenging. For example, a small organization with few staff and resources may have very little time to devote to collaboration and therefore may not feel that increased collaboration is appropriate whereas a larger organization may find the opposite. In fact, this was the case

as participants from small organizations were more hesitant than those from larger organizations to increase collaboration for the reasons suggested.

The previous research stated that often in collaborative processes, there are stages that members work through to achieve the goal of the collaborative (Gajda, 2004; Mattessich, et al., 2001; Winer & Ray, 1994) but that more information is needed on the collaborative process as well as how to improve the process (Rich, et al., 2001). Further, during each stage of the collaborative process, certain actions are engaged in (Gajda, 2004; Mattessich, et al., 2001; Winer & Ray, 1994). Participants in the current study suggested that collaborative processes do indeed have various stages which verifies the existing literature. Moreover, this study builds on the research as numerous suggestions were offered for how to improve the various stages of the collaborative process demonstrating that the process needs improvement. The literature mentioned that the beginning of the collaborative processes is where members are collected, trust is developed, and the purpose of the collaborative is established (Winer & Ray, 1994). Participants in the current research went further to suggest certain actions that can be taken prior to beginning the process, early on in the process, and offered recommendations for how to make the beginning of the process successful and challenges that may occur. For example, when engaging in collaborative efforts, it is important first to navigate the community and determine the gaps in service or which social issues need to be addressed. If collaboration is determined to be the appropriate way to resolve an issue, it is necessary to establish who should be invited to collaborate. Members are most commonly selected based on common values or interests, credibility, reputation, their viewpoints, particularly if they are from another sector and can offer a different viewpoint, trust, and their level of power in influencing change. Much of this information can be gathered through researching potential partners before inviting them to collaborate. Participants did state that the process of engagement into a collaborative is different each time.

One challenge to engaging in collaboration includes having difficulty networking and meeting potential partners. Often collaborative processes are started based on informal conversations, something which was also suggested in the literature (Hardy, et al., 2003). This can be a challenge particularly for smaller organizations who do not have

the ability to network with large numbers of individuals. Further, networking is also easier for more established organizations who have greater funding, more staff and greater credibility. Both small and large organizations, however, do not always hear about what resources, programs or organizations are already in existence. In general, not enough information is available in the community regarding the services available. Staff turnover can also be a challenge in engaging in collaboratives but this is a challenge again, for small and large organizations.

At the beginning of a collaborative process, leaders, goals, expectations, limitations and the meaning of the collaboration should be established. Members should discuss what they will contribute, the roles they will have, and their organizational mandate to ensure that their contributions remain within their respective mandates. An approximate timeline for the process, and when the collaboration will be terminated should also be negotiated. Using logic models, written agreements, contracts or protocols can aid in outlining the various plans and rules of the collaboration. Members should also plan for problems and how to resolve them. Determining how the collaboration will operate at the outset, including rules about communication or problem solving for example, can make the collaboration more successful later in the process. Having few or inadequate plans in place at the beginning could cause the remainder of the collaborative process to be problematic and messy which could be why a number of participants described their experiences with collaboration as such. Similarly, participants discussed their experiences of collaboration at the middle and end of the process which included ideas discussed in the literature (Mattessich, et al., 2001; Winer and Ray, 1994) but again, built on these ideas by offering suggestions to increase success and potential challenges during these stages. These findings build on the literature as it was posited that more information is needed on the collaborative process and how to improve the process (Rich, et al., 2001).

During the middle and end of the process, constant knowledge, information and resource sharing is important as well as frequent communication and meetings. Using brainstorming to engage in creative thinking, using facilitators or mediators to capture ideas, avoiding too structured a process, accommodating issues that need to be addressed, and being willing to alter one's self and one's agency if improvements are necessary

could also be helpful. In addition, evaluation of the process as well as the outcome was strongly encouraged. The process should be altered as necessary to remain efficient and members should often be reminded of the purpose for the collaboration. Planning for the cessation of collaborative efforts was also encouraged. Further, the process should be clear enough that if members change, the collaboration will not. Many of these suggestions were also discussed in previous literature (Mattessich, et al., 2001). Also mentioned was the suggestion that collaboration should be built into society where collaboration, not competition should be encouraged and creative ways to collaborate should be explored, an idea not previously discussed in the research. Any improvements to the collaborative process were felt to be beneficial and that failing to search for ways to make the process better would be a mistake. Even collaboratives that are messy and frustrating can be positive as they result in learning for those involved. If, however, it is determined that collaboratives are no longer beneficial, are too time or resource intensive, terminating them may be appropriate regarding the process of collaboration. While the current findings contribute to the existing knowledge, more research should be done so that the process can be more greatly understood, particularly with regard to improving it.

Challenges during the middle and end of the process can include lack of consensus, unclear expectations, not enough commitment from members, not having a protocol in place to resolve problems, informal rather than formal rules, losing sight of the goal, not enough information sharing, and simply not having enough time to devote to the process. Some participants felt that too much planning and too little action can be a challenge while others felt the opposite. Many, however, said that collaboratives that are slow to progress or take too long to show results can feel challenging. Members attempting to fulfill personal agendas, not contributing or being afraid to share resources can also make the process difficult. Competition, particularly with regard to funding is believed to be in absolute contrast to the notion of collaboration which is why it is felt to create difficulties during the process. Many participants felt that collaboration cannot fully be understood or practiced until it is appreciated more than competition in society. These challenges could result in negative experiences of collaboration as well as the messiness that it is often felt to have.

Concluding and terminating collaboratives should be planned for at the beginning of the process and there should be plans in place to end them. Preparing all members for termination can be challenging which is why having plans in place at the outset can be helpful.

Participants were also asked to discuss techniques used during the collaborative process. While participants had some difficulty establishing what techniques they use when collaborating, they did offer suggestions on how to better communicate, network, resolve conflicts, and engage each step of the collaborative process using a variety of methods such as having face to face interactions as well as using technology to do so. For example, e-mail was suggested as a way to increase communication between members but also address the issue of time constraints that face to face communication is connected with. This information addresses a gap in the literature regarding collaborative techniques but greater research on collaborative techniques would be recommended.

Building positive relationships with individuals prior to engaging in and during a collaborative effort was linked to the success of the collaboration and to previous research (Gajda, 2004). For example, regular communication, check-ins, learning about others, affirming the work of others, evaluating all relationships, and promptly fixing misunderstandings were a few of the relationship building techniques discussed which confirms existing literature (Mattessich, et al., 2001). Further, demonstrating a good sense of humour, not taking conflict too seriously and having patience are also important. In addition, learning about self, being committed to the process, being hospitable and respectful were suggested. It is important to build and continuously improve relationships as they can be crucial to how the collaborative process is experienced. Collaborative processes that included several strong relationships were remembered to be positive and participants discussed a greater likelihood of engaging in future collaboratives with individuals who they had a strong relationship with previously. It could be argued then, that if strong efforts were put into relationship building and more collaboratives were felt to be positive, collaboration may be engaged in more frequently.

In order to create positive collaborative processes, reduce challenges and build positive relationships at all stages of the collaboration, regular meetings should be held according to participants. Meetings allow members to come together and evaluate the

collaborative process itself, determine whether the expected outcomes are being achieved and determine future actions. Further, meetings provide time for members to communicate and establish as well as build personal relationships with one another. These findings build on the existing literature which discusses the purpose of regular meetings and the agendas that they should follow (Winer & Ray, 1994). While meetings were felt to be beneficial, participants stated that it can be difficult to find the time to attend them. Also, too many meetings or meetings that are not felt to advance the collaborative in terms of its purpose can be challenging and contributed to a negative experience with collaboration in general for some. In order to develop more positive experience then, regular meetings with a clear purpose can be beneficial.

To expand on the literature, some of the challenges to relationship building can be having little trust in members, different objectives for the collaborative, and a lack of shared purpose, direction or values during the process. Individuals with strong egos, personal agendas, little interest in actually being in the collaborative, and a strong interest in maintaining their agency's autonomy rather than working somewhat collectively can be challenging to developing relationships. In addition, when members do not contribute equally to the collaborative, there are evident power imbalances between members, there is tension between agencies or there is agency bias, relationships cannot be successfully established. Having no protocols in place to resolve problems, being unable to reach consensus or being unable to come to an understanding of one another's perspectives can be problematic for relationship building. Energy, effort and work are needed to develop positive relationships but workload, schedules and simply time can make achieving these things difficult. Furthermore, getting people together to address some of the challenges and improve relationships can be very difficult. Organizational issues such as staff turnover can impede relationship building as well because often relationships are broken when members of the collaborative change due to turnover. Funding challenges can also make building relationships hard because the same people who are involved in collaboratives and in relationship building can be simultaneously competing for funds. Many participants discussed the challenges to relationship building and there were more challenges discussed than suggestions for how to build relationships. What this suggests is that relationship building is a very difficult task with many factors impeding success.

Participants did, however, discuss the importance of relationship building and stated that if successful relationships can be built, they often drive the desire to collaborate again in the future. It is likely then, that stronger and better relationships could result in increased, more successful collaboration. Not enough research has been done to investigate how relationships within collaboratives “are managed” (Barringer & Harrison, 2000, p.396), how collaborative relationships are experienced in individual cities, and the determinants of relationships (Rich, et al., 2001). The current study addressed these gaps through investigating the experiences of individuals from a particular Region and determined which factors determined what makes relationships successful and challenging.

Previous literature has suggested that not enough has been done to practically research collaboration so that the information can be used by managers (Bell, et al., 2006). This study attempted to outline, through the experiences of Executive Directors, how the notion of collaboration can be understood, its purpose, whether that is to address organizational or societal issues, and suggestions and challenges for the collaborative process as well as relationship building. Further, discussing how different individuals reacted to the thought of past and future collaborative processes could allow those considering collaborating to be more aware of the attitudes to possibly expect from other members toward the process. These experiences then, and the knowledge offered by Executive Directors who had been involved in collaboratives could be used by other managers interested in collaboration and in making their collaboratives more successful.

According to Gray and Wood (1991) “collaboration shows promise for solving organizational and societal problems” (pp. 3-4). Participants stated that the purpose of collaboration is to solve social problems. Indeed, many stated that one of the main purposes of collaboration was to address complex social issues like poverty and assist those in need. Further, participants stated that if that purpose was not being accomplished in the collaborative, then the purpose, goal or process would need to be re-evaluated or the collaborative terminated. Also, there can be so many challenges to the process, such as time, funding or other resources for example, that if collaborating did not help address social issues, participants would not collaborate. It is possible to address complex social issues like poverty through collaboration because in collaboratives, according to participants, numerous people work together using their skills, knowledge and resources

to develop new, creative and powerful ways of addressing these issues. In addition, collaboration allows for numerous organizations to develop innovative programs and services based on the needs of clients regarding issues considered complex (Bailey & Koney, 1995) which was also corroborated. Moreover, collaboration can result in better quality, more sustainable programming (Frey, et al., 2006).

Poverty reduction involves “building and engaging community” (Tamarack Community Engagement, 2007, ¶ 8). This is precisely what participants stated is the purpose of collaboration. This is done, as mentioned, by determining the needs of the community, determining what services are already being offered, joining collaboratives that already exist or beginning new ones to address gaps in services to build and strengthen the community. Since poverty is a complex issue with many underlying factors such as child care, employment, income, and recreation for example (Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2003), it cannot be rectified by addressing these individual factors. Indeed, participants stated that it is not ideal, particularly when addressing community issues, to work as isolated organizations: working in isolation does not allow for the underlying issues of a complex problem to be resolved, rather organizations must work collaboratively to attain results (Gajda, 2004; Hardy, et al., 2003; Mattessich, et al., 2001; Winer & Ray, 1994). Moreover, participants believe that collaboration between agencies can result in more coordinated services so that those using them can navigate various services and agencies more easily (Mattesich, et al., 2001). Also, participants stated that collaboration can enhance existing services, including those designed to address poverty (Leviten-Reid, 2007; Rich, et al., 2001) because if something is already being done, others seek to be involved and help.

The literature has suggested using inter-organizational collaboration as a way of strengthening poverty reduction initiatives (Rich, et al., 2001) by combining services (Leviten-Reid, 2001; Leviten-Reid, 2003) and reducing individualized responses to poverty (Mattessich, et al., 2001; Rich, et al., 2001). Participants stated that collaboration can indeed bring organizations together and coordinate services so that those in need are assisted in a holistic manner and do not ‘fall through the cracks in service’. Collaboration then, can be used as a way of augmenting poverty reduction initiatives by including more members of the community, namely various organizations, in coordinated services so that

more people, including those experiencing poverty are assisted and in a more positive, successful, sustainable way.

Limitations

While the current study does provide an in depth analysis of the experiences of collaboration for several people, there are several limitations to the research. Firstly, it should be recognized that the experiences of collaboration discussed in the current research were from individuals employed within urban Waterloo Region. The findings, then, may not be generalizable to other geographical locations or even to rural Waterloo Region.

Further, the current study was designed to examine the experiences of Executive Directors in organizations who in some way, assist individuals experiencing poverty. The findings may not, then, be generalizable to individuals in positions other than this or to individuals accessing services who are themselves experiencing poverty in some way. Moreover, since only those organizations who assist individuals experiencing poverty were selected to participate, it is possible that organizations with different organizational purposes, mandates or from other sectors could have different experiences with inter-organizational collaboration. It is possible that the findings, then, may be limited to this particular sector or to organizations involved in assisting those experiencing poverty. Moreover, only not for profit organizations were included in the current research making it possible that the experiences with inter-organizational collaboration could be limited to those within this particular type of organization.

Demographic details such as age, ethnicity, economic status and level of education were not collected in the current research to determine whether any of these influenced experiences of inter-organizational collaboration. It is possible that any or all of these demographic details could influence how inter-organizational collaboration is understood and experienced. In the current study, the experience of inter-organizational collaboration in general was explored without specifically investigating whether demographic details influenced the nature of collaboration.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should investigate various sectors to compare responses and gather greater knowledge about the idea and process of collaboration: it is possible that other social service agencies with a different mandate or other agencies in general, may not understand collaboration in the same way. It is important to distinguish between various sectors in order to better understand how different sectors interpret and practice collaboration. In the current study for example, participants stated that their experiences differed when collaborations included individuals from their own sector than individuals from other sectors. This was because individuals from various sectors approach social issues and their resolution differently from each other. Investigating sectoral differences would be important for gleaning more knowledge on how to better collaborate with individuals from multiple sectors.

As mentioned, the experiences of Executive Directors from only not for profit organizations were included in the current research. It may be of interest, however, to determine whether the experiences of for profit and not for profit agencies in various sectors differ in terms of inter-organizational collaboration. It is possible, for example, that for profit agencies have access to greater resources and are therefore able to collaborate with more agencies than not for profit agencies which would result in different collaborative experiences. Further, each agency brings strengths and challenges to the collaborative process and it would be of interest to see if the strengths and challenges of for profit and not for profit agencies differ.

Previous research has encouraged studies distinguishing between urban and rural locations (Reid & Katerberg, 2007) and future research should investigate the experiences of Executive Directors from rural Waterloo Region as well as other geographic locations. Moreover, future research could explore the experiences of Executive Directors from other regions inside and outside of Ontario. Individual need, particularly with regard to poverty, is influenced by geographical location and communities (Torjman, 1998). It is possible that the resources, or simply geographic location, could contribute to the amount of collaboration engaged in, understanding of the process, challenges or suggestions for improvement.

Research should also be done to investigate how collaboration is understood and practiced by individuals other than Executive Directors. It is likely that the definition and process of collaboration is different for a front-line worker or individual accessing services than an Executive Director. Moreover, the experiences of front-line workers and individuals accessing services will vary depending on geographic location and sector which should also be explored. It would be of interest to determine whether individuals accessing assistance feel that they receive services differently from agencies more or less strongly engaged in inter-collaboration. In addition, research could examine the experiences of front-line workers employed in agencies who are more or less involved in inter-organizational collaboration, particularly in terms of providing services to individuals needing assistance. Examining the experiences of the various individuals involved in agencies would allow for greater knowledge on collaboration from all parties involved. In addition, better understanding how all individuals view and practice collaboration could contribute to a more succinct, appropriate use of collaboration as a tool to work together or help others.

Future research could also investigate how various demographic details such as gender, age, ethnicity, economic status and level of education influence perceptions and experiences of collaboration. This research could be done with a variety of populations including Executive Directors but also front-line workers as well as those accessing services. For example, it is possible that those from different ethnic groups experience collaboration as more or less meaningful based on whether they are from individualist or collectivist societies. As such, collaboration may be more fruitful if it involved more people who met fairly regularly for those from collectivist societies while the opposite may be true of those from individualistic societies. Determining if and how demographic details influence experiences with collaboration could be helpful in making the practice of collaboration more meaningful to collaborative members by addressing the various demographic needs within the collaborative.

A last recommendation would be to design and execute a study involving greater participant action. Due to the time constraints of participants in the current research, they were unable to be strongly involved in the research process. Future research could involve a more active approach which would seek to gather as well as put into actual

practice suggestions offered by participants about inter-organizational collaboration. For example, a future study could examine the experiences of front-line workers involved in agencies engaged in inter-organizational collaboration and involve them in the research process and then also use any suggestions offered to improve the process for themselves as well as other front-line workers. This type of research would not only investigate the issue, but also apply the knowledge gathered.

Conclusion

The social work discipline discusses the importance of attending to social issues and specifically, to better assist those in need including those experiencing poverty (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). According to the literature, one way to better assist those experiencing poverty is through inter-organizational collaboration (Mattessich, et al., 2001; Rich, et al., 2001). Research examining community issues, however, has very minimally involved and explored different ways for those experiencing poverty to be assisted (Bankhead & Erlich, 2005; Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). Further, greater knowledge was needed on inter-organizational collaboration such as the characteristics, determinants and factors that result in a positive outcome for the process community to better assist those in need (Rich, et al., 2001).

The purpose of the current study, then, was to build on the gaps in existing research including my own and determine whether inter-organizational collaboration, in part, is useful in addressing complex social issues such as poverty. It was discovered that this is indeed the case; the majority of participants stated that collaboration is crucial in addressing social issues regardless of the challenges the process encompasses. As can be seen then, the current study advanced social work knowledge with regard to better understanding how to assist individuals experiencing poverty: it has been shown through this research that inter-organizational collaboration can be used to better assist this population. A variety of reasons were offered for why collaboration should be used, suggestions for how to increase and improve the process as well as potential challenges that could occur. The suggestions offered by participants in this study can be used by individuals in various other organizations to increase and improve collaboration but also

to anticipate and overcome potential challenges. Moreover, since relationship building was felt to be a crucial part of the collaborative process, several suggestions as well as anticipated challenges were discussed.

It can be argued that through improved collaborative processes and greater relationship building, fewer individuals accessing services will fall through the 'gaps in service' (Leviten-Reid, 2001). This study provides suggestions for and potential challenges of the collaborative process and relationship building so that organizations can improve inter-organizational collaboration and therefore better serve those in need. Moreover, this study provides a foundation upon which other studies can build so that inter-organizational collaboration in other regions can be explored to address the needs of individuals in regions outside of Waterloo Region, something encouraged by the social work Code of Ethics (2005). The findings in this study also show that inter-organizational collaboration can be a suitable way to assist those in need within Waterloo Region and an appropriate way to assist poverty reduction initiatives.

The current study was also successful in addressing the gaps in the literature with regard to inter-organizational collaboration: previous literature discussed the need for greater research on inter-organizational collaboration (Rich, et al., 2001) and more specifically, to explore experiences of collaboration in various communities (Torjman, 1998). This research was innovative in that it addressed both of these gaps in the literature and therefore expanded the knowledge of inter-organizational collaboration in general and in Waterloo Region specifically. Overall, this research was important for expanding current social work knowledge particularly with regard to inter-organizational collaboration. Since inter-organizational collaboration was felt to be beneficial for all involved including those in need of assistance, it is certainly a topic deserving of further exploration.

Appendix A

Recruitment Script (Email and/or Mail)

Wilfrid Laurier University
75 University Avenue West
Ontario, Canada
N2L 3C5

Date

Dear [Name of Organization CEO or equivalent],

Hello, my name is Morgan Voituk. I am a Master of Social Work (MSW) student at Wilfrid Laurier University developing a paper on the issue of poverty in the Region of Waterloo, specifically on inter-organizational collaboration. I would like to study collaboration between organizations to gather information on this issue and learn its importance relative to the serious problem of poverty. The purpose of this letter is to introduce myself to you as well as to invite you to participate in this research project. Your input and opinions would be much appreciated and valued.

I will be contacting your office within the next few days to hopefully set up an appointment for an interview. At that point, I will gladly give you more information on the interview process.

If you have any questions and would like to speak to me about this please do not hesitate to email me at voit8350@wlu.ca.

Thank you in advance for allowing me to work together with you to defeat poverty in our community.

Sincerely,

Morgan Voituk
MSW (Candidate)

Proposal

Purpose

The purpose of the current study is to investigate collaboration techniques used by organizations who deal with persons in poverty within Waterloo Region. This information is of importance to determine what collaboration techniques are currently being used, and discover ways to improve and increase collaboration between organizations to better assist those in poverty using organizational resources. Further, it is of importance to determine whether and how organizational collaboration can contribute to poverty reduction.

Methodology

Using exploratory, qualitative statistical techniques, organizations within Waterloo Region designed to assist individuals considered impoverished will be analyzed to determine collaboration techniques used to correspond with other organizations dealing with poverty within Waterloo Region. Twenty organizations most directly involved in assisting individuals considered impoverished within Waterloo Region will be selected to participate in the current study. The selected organizations will be representative of the various ways in which poverty reduction can be undertaken. Of these twenty organizations, all will be from the cities of Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge. This will be done to ensure that organizations are representative of the major cities that compose Waterloo Region.

Participants will be the executive directors of each organization selected who will be asked to take part in a face-to-face semi-structured interview to discuss collaboration: how they initiate contact with other organizations, techniques used when they currently collaborate, how *frequently* they collaborate, and listen to their thoughts on inter-organizational collaboration. Participants will include executive directors as they must, in their organizational position, have exceptional knowledge regarding their organization and its involvement in poverty reduction in Waterloo Region. Participants will be selected purposefully based on their organizational mandate and connection to poverty.

Interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. Transcribed interviews will be statistically analyzed using a qualitative statistical software package called N-Vivo to search for commonalities in responses using the constant comparative method. Findings and a conceptual framework will be provided to participants once generated and participants will be provided the opportunity to provide feedback on findings. A detailed report will be generated based on findings and participant feedback.

Expected Results and Implications

It is expected that participants will provide information pertaining to collaboration that will be useful in determining more specific, successful ways to reduce poverty within Waterloo Region.

Appendix B

Recruitment Script (Phone)

Researcher: "Hi there. My name is Morgan Voituk and I am a Master of Social Work student at Wilfrid Laurier University. I was wondering if I may speak with you regarding some research that I am currently conducting."

Participant Answer:

No:

Researcher: "If you decide that you would like to hear more about the project, I can be reached by email at voit8350@wlu.ca. Thank you for your time."

Yes:

Researcher: "I am currently interested in finding out about collaboration between organizations assisting those who are in poverty within Waterloo Region. I have been informed that your organization is involved in working with those who are in need of assistance and was hoping that I could arrange to ask you some questions specifically about collaboration between your organization and other organizations."

Participant Answer:

No:

Researcher: "If you decide that you would like to hear more about the project, I can be reached by email at voit8350@wlu.ca. Thank you for your time."

Yes:

Researcher: "Great! I simply need about sixty minutes of your time. I will discuss more details regarding the project and your involvement in it at that time. Could we schedule a time now that would be convenient for you?"

Participant:

Provide details for meeting arrangements.

Researcher:

“Do you have any other questions?”

Participant answer:

Yes:

Researcher: *Answers any questions.*

“Thank you again for your help and I look forward to meeting with you.”

No:

Researcher:

“Thank you again for your help and I look forward to meeting with you.”

Upon meeting with the participant, the Informed Consent form would be discussed to ensure that participants understand the nature of the study and what is expected of them as participants.

Recruitment Script – Phone Message

Researcher: “Hi there. My name is Morgan Voituk and I am a Master of Social Work student at Wilfrid Laurier University. I am following up an email sent a few weeks ago regarding a research project that I am conducting. I am interested in finding out about collaboration between organizations assisting those in poverty in Waterloo Region. I would love the opportunity to speak with you in relation to this issue and hope to set up an appointment to meet. I can be reached at ...or by email at voit8350@wlu.ca. Thank you so much for your time and I look forward to speaking with you.

Appendix C
Researcher's Script

Upon arrival at the organization where the interview will take place, the researcher will greet the participant employed within that organization.

Participants will have agreed to participate based on being informed that they will be asked questions regarding their knowledge of their organization's involvement in assisting impoverished individuals within Waterloo Region. This will not be reiterated during the study unless the researcher is asked specifically about it.

Researcher: "I have an Informed Consent form that you can look over that I will need you to sign before we begin. The Informed Consent statement goes over everything that will take place now and in the future."

The participant will have a moment to look over the informed consent and sign it.

Researcher: "We are going to start by asking you some questions. As stated in the Informed Consent, these questions will be tape-recorded. I wanted to reiterate before we begin that this study was in no way designed to evaluate yourself or your organization but to gather information on poverty. Do you have any questions?"

Participant Answer:

Yes:

Researcher: *Answers any questions.*

"Ok, let's begin."

No:

Researcher:

"Ok, let's begin."

The researcher will turn on the tape-recorder and ask interview questions as written in Appendix E.

After all interview questions have been answered, the researcher will thank subjects for participating and provide them with the contact information of the researcher and a copy of the Informed Consent form.

Appendix D

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Exploring collaboration between organizations assisting persons experiencing poverty

Researcher:
 Morgan Voituk
 B.A. Psychology
 B.A. Sociology
 M.S.W. Candidate
 voit8350@wlu.ca
 SSHRC Award Holder

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore inter-organizational collaboration between organizations in Waterloo Region to generate knowledge regarding collaboration and to better assist those in need. This study is conducted by Morgan Voituk, a Master of Social Work student at Wilfrid Laurier University and holder of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) award.

INFORMATION

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by a Master of Social Work student at Wilfrid Laurier University. You were selected as a possible research participant because of your knowledge of the organization by which you are employed and its relation to the assistance of those who are considered impoverished. Your participation is completely voluntary.

This study aims to gain a greater understanding of inter-organizational collaboration in response to poverty within Waterloo Region. You will be asked to answer several questions pertaining to the organization by which you are employed and more specifically, collaboration between your own organization and others within the Region to generate knowledge on inter-organizational collaboration as a response to poverty. More details about the research will be provided at the end of the study. It is expected that the interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. Approximately 20 organizational representatives will be interviewed: all are Executive Directors from the cities of Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge. Organizations were selected based on their involvement in various areas of poverty reduction. Interviews will be tape recorded so that they may be transcribed by the researcher, Morgan Voituk. Interviews will be recorded so that quotations may be included in the written report to maintain the accuracy of statements made by those interviewed. Participants will be given access to the tape of their personal interview but only if they specifically ask for it. They will not, however, be permitted to listen to the interviews of other participants. The researcher, Morgan Voituk, as well as four individuals and the advisor, Dr. Ginette Lafrenière will have access to tapes and transcriptions. Others will be assisting the researcher, Morgan Voituk in transcribing the interviews.

Participant's Initial _____

RISKS

You should experience no harm or discomfort by participating in this research project. However, should you feel uncomfortable with any questions asked during the interview, or the feelings raised by those questions, you may refuse to answer them, and may terminate the interview at any time.

BENEFITS

While you will receive no compensation for your participation in this study, the research will assist the researcher to disseminate valuable information regarding poverty within Waterloo Region in order to better assist those in need.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained within this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential to maintain your anonymity. A pseudonym or code name will be used in place of your real name in any notes that are taken. If the interview is quoted, no information will be included that would reveal your identity in the written report. All notes and written transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet or a password-protected computer. The researcher, Morgan Voituk, will have access to this information as well as the three individuals assisting the researcher, Morgan Voituk with transcribing the interviews. Finally, the researcher's advisor, Dr. Ginette Lafrenière will also have access to this information. Three years after the study is complete and the results published, all notes, tape recordings and written transcripts will be destroyed.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the researcher, Morgan Voituk, at voit8350@wlu.ca. You may also contact the researcher's advisor, Dr. Ginette Lafrenière by phone at (519) 884-1970 ext. 5237 or by email at glafreniere@wlu.ca. This project has been reviewed by the Ethics Review Board at Wilfrid Laurier University. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. William Marr, Chair of the Research Ethics Board at (519) 884-0710 ext. 2468.

Participant's Initial _____

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

You will be provided with a two page summary of the findings, once they are completed, which will include a conceptual framework for you to review. You will be given three weeks to respond to the researcher with feedback on the findings. Your feedback will be incorporated into the final report generated by the researcher. Results from the study will then be published as a copy of a Master's thesis and will be made accessible to individuals affiliated with Wilfrid Laurier University. The twenty organizations whose executive directors participated in the research will receive a copy of the final report. If you would like an additional copy of the final report, you may contact Morgan Voituk at voit8350@wlu.ca.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

I agree with being quoted in the final report if no identifying information is present

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix E

Interview Questions

- 1) Can you tell me a bit about your organization?
- 2) How would you define collaboration?
- 3) Do you collaborate with other organizations?

If so, how come?

If not, how come?

Go on to Question 7 (skip questions 4, 5 and 6)

- 4) With whom do you collaborate?

Probe:

In what capacity?

- 5) How did you (or do you) initiate collaboration with other organizations?
- 6) How do you maintain/sustain collaborative relationships?

Probes:

Is it easy or difficult to do so? How come?

What are some of the challenges?

- 7) Who benefits from this type of collaboration?

Probes:

Do you think that this type of collaboration is meaningful for both the organization and/or the clients?

If so, how?

8) What characterizes the nature and depth of your collaboration with other organizations?

9) What types of techniques do you use when you collaborate?

Probe:

For instance, what secret formulas do you have to maintain collaboration with other organizations?

Is there a secret formula (or a way) to engage the process?

10) Do you believe that other organizations should develop collaborative partnerships?

Probe:

What are the merits and challenges of collaborative work?

Do you believe that collaboration should be increased?

11) What insights or perspectives have you developed/learned on collaboration?

12) Do you feel that collaboration should be improved?

Probe:

Do you feel that there would be benefits of improvement in collaboration?

13) Is there anything else you would like to say that you have not had a chance to say?

Appendix F

Participant Employment Information

Name:

Name and Address of Organization Employed With:

Position within Organization:

Participant Signature:

Date:

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