Collaborate Successfully

Rarely will you be in a situation where you do not have to work with other groups or individuals to make your project come to fruition. In most cases you will have to work with people on or off campus from diverse backgrounds, education levels, value sets, and positions. Although there may be some disagreements, collaborating is really valuable, and can be the key to your project’s success or failure. So be patient, open and flexible. Below are some ideas for how you can collaborate with others effectively.

1. Create common goals and a common purpose. Make sure that everyone is on the same page and is working towards the same thing. This can prevent conflict in the future, and ensures that everyone understands why the collaborative group is coming together.

2. Be intentional about building trust. Be open and honest about your ideas, concerns, and what you want to see. Make sure if you say you are going to do something that you actually do it. If others see you doing this they will as well because you intentionally created an atmosphere where you are open and honest with each other.

3. Outline roles and responsibilities between collaborative group members. You can do this formally through a Memorandum of Understanding, which is a document everyone signs that identifies what people are giving to the collaboration, or you can informally discuss collaboration between everyone. Either way, it is important to establish this so that people are committed and understand what they are responsible for and what their purpose is in the collaborative group.

4. If you disagree on an issue try to look at the situation from their perspective, and identify potential solutions that everyone will be able to accept. It is not fair of you to ask something of someone that they would never agree to, and you would not want them to do that to you either.

5. Make sure that you have talked to all the stakeholders necessary to the project. Do not exclude anyone involved with the project from the project’s plan or development as this could risk the success of the project and your credibility as a leader. For example, if you talk with only student groups about improving water use on campus, and you have not talked to administrative units on campus your project might not move forward very well because you cannot do anything on campus when it comes to infrastructure without their help.
6. Understand the scope of your project and boundaries that might exist for the stakeholders in the group. Know what you want to change, and identify the systems your partners may be working in. For example, the University of Arizona works with large contracts to get certain services and may not be able to go against those contracts until they are renegotiated, which may limit staff’s ability to work with you on certain details immediately. So if you want to get rid of single-use disposable water bottles on campus know that the University of Arizona has a contract with Coca Cola that requires them to sell those products. Changing the contract might be a way to change the way the school operates, but be aware of these conditions on people.

7. Thank your partners!!! If you are working with other groups and people, acknowledge them, as they are big contributors to your success too. If they spend a lot of time, energy and money to help you out, and you do not recognize that then, they might not work with you in the future. Bonus: building appreciative connections with staff is a great way to create options for recommendation letters.