

Exploring Success Factors of Government-Nonprofit Collaborations from the Nonprofit Perspective

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An Applied Research Project
(Political Science 5397)
Submitted to the Department of Political Science
Texas State University – San Marcos
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Public
Administration

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Purpose: Our society faces challenging and multifaceted issues that require the attention of the public and private sectors working together. Because of the significant advantages government and nonprofits stand to gain from collaborating, it is important to identify factors that contribute to successful collaboration. Nonprofit leaders play a central role in the success of government-nonprofit collaboration, and their perspectives on which aspects of collaboration lead to success, as well as which do not, are essential to improving cross-sector collaboration. Much of the literature on government-nonprofit collaboration neglects to systematically study the nonprofit perspective. This research begins to fill that gap. The purpose of this applied research project is to explore factors that contribute to the success of government-nonprofit collaboration from the perspective of nonprofit practitioners.

Methodology: Russell Linden's (2002) four stages of collaboration were used to construct four broad pillar questions: (1) Courtship, (2) Getting Serious, (3) Commitment, (4) and Leaving a Legacy. Furthermore, eight potential factors of successful government-nonprofit collaboration were identified in the scholarly literature: (1) communication and information sharing, (2) mission and goal setting, (3) trust and positive relationships, (4) leaders and authority, (5) flexibility, (6) clear guidelines and funding procedures, (7) accountability systems, and (8) honest feedback. These factors operationalized the broad pillar questions, forming the basis of sub-questions that guided the construction of an interview questionnaire. This questionnaire facilitated structured, in-depth, open-ended interviews of ten nonprofit leaders in Texas.

Findings: According to the interviewees, four of the eight factors identified in the literature were determined to be success factors for government-collaboration: (1) communication and information sharing, (2) trust and positive relationships, (3) leaders and authority, and (4) accountability systems. Whether or not the remaining four factors are important to the success of government-nonprofit collaboration remains unclear from findings of this applied research project.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thank you to Anita Stuckey, Shared Parenting Program Coordinator, at the Office of the Attorney General, Family Initiatives Department. Without her support, this research would not have been possible.

A special thank you to the nonprofit practitioners who graciously gave their time to share their thoughts about government-nonprofit collaboration.

A special thank you to Dr. Patricia Shields who provided direction, guidance, and enthusiastic support throughout the development of this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Chapter One: Introduction..... | 1 |
| Scenario..... | 1 |
| Why Collaborate..... | 1 |
| Research Purpose..... | 3 |
| Chapter Overview..... | 3 |
| | |
| Chapter Two: Government and Nonprofits Working Together..... | 5 |
| The Role of Nonprofits..... | 5 |
| Government Support of Nonprofits..... | 5 |
| Types of Government Support..... | 6 |
| Scenario (continued)..... | 7 |
| Types of Collaboration..... | 8 |
| Table 2.1 | 9 |
| Need for Collaboration..... | 10 |
| Strengths and Weaknesses | 10 |
| Table 2.2 | 11 |
| | |
| Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework..... | 15 |
| Stages of Collaboration..... | 15 |
| Introduction of Pillar Questions (Conceptual Framework)..... | 16 |
| Pillar Questions 1 | 17 |
| Scenario (Continued) | 18 |
| Pillar Questions 2 | 19 |
| Scenario (Continued) | 21 |
| Pillar Questions 3 | 21 |
| Scenario (Continued)..... | 23 |
| Pillar Questions 4 | 24 |
| Scenario (Continued)..... | 25 |
| Table 3.1: Conceptual Framework..... | 26 |
| | |
| Chapter Four: Methodology..... | 27 |
| Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework..... | 27 |
| Table 4.1: Operationalization | 28 |
| Sampling Methodology..... | 29 |
| Human Subjects Protection..... | 30 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Chapter Five: Results | 31 |
| Subjects' Background Information..... | 31 |
| Courtship Phase: Communication and Information Sharing..... | 32 |
| Courtship Phase: Mission and Goal Setting..... | 34 |
| Getting Serious Phase: Trust and Positive Relationships..... | 35 |
| Getting Serious Phase: Leaders and Authority..... | 37 |
| Commitment Phase: Flexibility..... | 39 |
| Commitment Phase: Clear Guidelines and Clear Funding Procedures..... | 41 |
| Leaving a Legacy Phase: Accountability Systems..... | 42 |
| Leaving a Legacy Phase: Honest Feedback..... | 44 |
| | |
| Chapter Six: Conclusion | 46 |
| Findings..... | 46 |
| Table 6.1: Findings and Recommendations..... | 47 |
| Table 6.2: Findings Bar Graph | 48 |
| Recommendations..... | 49 |
| Scenario (Continued) – Conclusion | 51 |
| Bibliography | 53 |
| Appendix A: Interview Responses | 57 |

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Scenario¹

In 2009 the University of Texas released results of a study that revealed a significant rise in Austin's teen pregnancy rate, causing alarm for the city's public health officials. The next day the Mayor promised concerned citizens and activist groups that his office would promptly devise a plan to deal with the issue. He immediately called a meeting with his top health policy analyst, Kim Walker, who suggested forming a stakeholder group to discuss the problem and to create a strategic plan that would lower the number of teen pregnancies in Austin. The Mayor agreed, placing Kim in charge of leading the project and adding an expectation of a comprehensive plan by the end of the year. He then moved on to his next meeting that day regarding the city's water supply.

Why Collaborate?

Communities are faced with situations like the above scenario every day. Among many other issues, the government must address complications such as teen pregnancy, homelessness, poverty, gangs, education, and domestic violence. These issues are inherently complicated and multi-faceted. As a result, solutions are often obscured by uncertainty. Addressing these problems across public/private sector boundaries increases the chances of success because organizations gain access to a broader array of resources, treating issues more holistically (Linden, 2002). Numerous potential benefits, like the ability to maximize the strengths of both sectors and reduce duplication of work, come from the collaboration

¹ This scenario was carefully constructed upon knowledge obtained from the literature, as well as time spent with both nonprofit and government leaders in government-nonprofit collaboration.

between government and nonprofit groups to address public issues (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Bryson et al., 2006; Gazley and Brudney, 2007; Linden, 2002; Wolff, 1992).

Nonprofit organizations make attractive partners because many already provide public services (Brinkerhoff, 2002). Bryson et al. define cross-sector collaboration as an effort that “achieves jointly an outcome that could not be achieved by the organizations in one sector separately” (2006, p. 44). One significant benefit of collaboration is that working together helps the two sectors maximize their strengths. Both governmental entities and nonprofit organizations bring valuable but different contributions to the partnership (Gazley and Brudney 2007, p. 399). In addition, nonprofit sector strengths correspond well with government sector weaknesses and vice versa (Cho and Gillespie 2006, p. 494), making them ideal partners. Furthermore, collaboration can streamline the efforts of both sectors and provide for more efficient public service delivery by reducing duplication of work (Wolff 1992, p. 7). Collaboration between the sectors lessens the common reality that each independently works on the same problem, providing similar public services to the same people without any coordination.

While the benefits of successful collaboration are many, potential collaborators also confront significant challenges. Many face an uphill battle trying to manage conflicting goals, different cultures, and lack of trust among prospective partners. For others, the fear of losing control and autonomy makes collaboration an unattractive option (Linden, 2002). To overcome the challenges and to take advantage of the benefits collaboration presents, public administrators can learn from the mistakes and successes of other collaborative efforts.

Because of the significant advantages government and nonprofits stand to gain from collaborating, it is important to identify factors that contribute to successful collaboration.

Nonprofit leaders play a central role in the success of government-nonprofit collaboration, and their perspective on which aspects of collaboration lead to success, including which do not, is essential in improving cross-sector collaboration. Many scholarly articles (Bryson et al., 2006; Cho and Gillespie, 2006; DeHoog, 1992; Gooden, 1998; McGuire, 2006; Thomson and Perry, 2006; Van Slyke, 2002; Van Slyke and Roch, 2004; and Young, 2000 and 2006) that address government-nonprofit collaboration neglect a systematic study of the nonprofit perspective. This research begins filling that gap.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore factors that contribute to the success of government-nonprofit collaboration taking into account the nonprofit perspective.² This chapter introduces the topic of government-nonprofit collaboration and explains the organization of this paper. The chapters that follow will explore the nonprofit sector's perspective on factors that contribute to the success of government-nonprofit collaboration.

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two provides a background on government support of nonprofit organizations and presents ideas represented in the scholarly literature regarding the types of collaboration and the potential benefits of government-nonprofit collaboration. Chapter Three explains the different stages of collaboration and identifies a set of pillar questions used to organize the

² This research focuses on nonprofit organizations that provide human services (for example, child welfare organizations and crises centers). Other nonprofit organizations like churches or professional associations were not studied.

research. Chapter Three includes the conceptual framework. The scenario presented in the introduction continues in chapters two and three to illustrate a positive example of successful collaboration. Chapter Four describes the methodology used to explore factors that contribute to the success of government-nonprofit collaboration. Chapter Five presents and analyzes the results of the research. Finally, Chapter Six concludes this applied research project and provides recommendations for improving government-nonprofit collaboration.

CHAPTER TWO: GOVERNMENT AND NONPROFITS WORKING TOGETHER

The Role of Nonprofits

Nonprofits play a prominent role in our society, providing vital public services. Nonprofit organizations serve as employers and advocates and often have significant societal, economic, and political impact. Additionally, nonprofits engage communities, foster civic participation, and frequently advocate for underrepresented groups. As Boris and Steuerle note, “Nonprofits promote and defend values and competing visions of the public good, and they harness altruism and public and private resources to serve those who need assistance” (2006, p. 2).

Government Support of Nonprofits (History)

Government support of private nonprofit groups is not a new phenomenon, as conventional wisdom suggests. Rather, it is rooted in the early history of the United States. Historical records show that the provision of state funds to privately run colleges, health institutions, and social service agencies was a regular practice in the early 1800s (Salamon 1995, p. 84).

Throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, when the government failed to provide public services to the extent necessary, nonprofit organizations frequently stepped in. Shields (1992) notes that “in some instances, nonprofit organizations actually took the lead in service provision. Orphanages, hospitals and soup kitchens run by religious organizations are examples” (p. 10). When public officials eventually recognized the increasing need for these public services, they turned to nonprofit organizations for help (Salamon, 1995). It was a

mutually beneficial relationship because the government needed to provide public services and nonprofits had the expertise to do so.

Government support of nonprofit organizations greatly increased after Roosevelt's New Deal (Shields 1992, p. 10). In 1955 President Eisenhower enacted a formal policy that encouraged greater use of private markets. Van Slyke (2002) explains, "The policy mandate was essentially that less reliance should be placed on government solely for the production of those goods and services demanded by the citizenry and more opportunities exercised to take advantage of private sector efficiencies and economies of scale" (p. 491). This policy opened the door for more government contracting with nonprofit organizations. Then, President Johnson enacted a set of domestic programs that vastly increased government support of nonprofits in the 1970's (California Association of Nonprofits, 2012). By 1982 nonprofits were delivering a larger share of publicly funded services than the government in the fields of social services, employment/training, housing/community development, health, and arts and culture (Salamon 1995, p. 88-89). Salamon reported in 1995 that the "government has become the single largest source of support for the nonprofit sector, outdistancing the other major sources of support – fees and endowments as well as charitable contributions from corporations, foundations, and individuals" (p. 90). Though government support of nonprofits has waned somewhat after the financial crisis, many nonprofits still rely heavily on government funding.

Types of Government Support

Contracts, grants, and fees for services are the most common ways that governments provide financial support to nonprofits (Smith, 2006). A large portion of federal funds for

human services are channeled through state-administered programs. In these cases, the states manage the contracts and grants on behalf of the federal government. State and local governments also have their own funds to disperse. Thus, “some state agency representatives have said that if nonprofits were no longer willing or able to contract with governments to provide services, those services would stop or be severely disrupted” (Boris et al. 2010, p. 2-3). This statement exemplifies how mutually dependent government and nonprofits are.

The next section discusses the different types of government-nonprofit collaboration and explores details about the benefits that both sectors stand to achieve by collaborating.

Scenario (continued)

Kim Walker’s suggestion to the Mayor to form a stakeholder group was rooted in her belief in the many benefits of collaboration. She knew that the City could not effectively fight the rise in Austin’s teen pregnancy rate without getting input and help from other organizations also dealing with the issue. After meeting with the Mayor, Kim went back to her office to create a list of potential stakeholders to involve in the discussions regarding teen pregnancy in Austin. She made many phone calls over the next few days and came up with the following tentative list, acknowledging that additional individuals and organizations may need to be included as the project moved forward:

*Texas Health and Human Services Department
Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department
Austin Independent School District
The Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
Planned Parenthood, Texas Capital Region
The Wesley Center for Family and Neighborhood Development
University of Texas School of Public Health
Girls Empowerment Network of Austin*

Her primary goal in the beginning stages of the collaboration was to share information. Rather than just mailing invitations for the first stakeholder meeting, she decided to call each of the stakeholders to give some background about the city's motivations behind this project and to explain that the collaboration would be an informal forum through which the parties could share information, ideas, and goals. Kim also noted that there might be an opportunity later for more formal partnerships. After speaking with a representative from each of the groups, she called the first meeting of the stakeholder committee, scheduled for Tuesday, April 28.

Types of Collaboration

In the scenario the collaboration to deal with Austin teen pregnancy begins informally. There are many types of collaborations, but these partnerships can be classified into two main groups: formal and informal. Formal collaboration occurs when two or more groups “establish an ongoing relationship through shared, transferred, or combined services, resources, or programs” (Guo and Acar 2005, p. 343). In a formal collaboration the groups usually connect through some type of official agreement or contract. Two popular examples of formal collaboration are grants and service purchase agreements (Brown and Troutt, 2004). Service purchase agreements specify the government's service expectations and the financing that will be provided (Brown and Troutt 2004, p. 15). Grants typically give less detail about how and what services should be provided but provide the government's expected outcomes.

Formal collaboration more frequently develops between well-established organizations that have larger budgets and experience working with each other (Guo and Acar 2005, p. 340). When organizations have established relationships, the risks of collaborating with each other are mitigated (Linden, 2002). Informal collaboration is commonly the first step to working

towards formal collaboration (Bryson et al. 2006, p. 46). Informal collaboration often leads to formal collaboration because the informal partnerships allow the organizations to develop a mutual trust and a positive working relationship (Bryson et al. 2006, p. 46).

Informal collaboration, like the one described in the scenario, transpires when two or more organizations work together on a particular issue. However, they have no ongoing commitment to each other, and “decision-making power remains with the individual organizations” (Guo and Acar 2005, p. 343). Essentially, informal collaboration occurs anytime individuals from different groups discuss a problem. Forms of informal collaboration include information sharing, referral of clients, and stakeholder meetings (p. 352). The relative simplicity of informal collaboration makes it much more prevalent than formal collaborations. Informal collaborations serve as a way to let organizations test the waters or to see how a formal collaboration might work if instituted. It offers potential partners an opportunity to get to know each other and to see if a formal collaboration might prove successful. Table 2.1 defines the characteristics of formal and informal collaboration and presents examples of each.

Table 2.1: Characteristics and Examples of Formal and Informal Collaboration Between Sectors*

| | Formal Collaboration | Informal Collaboration |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Characteristics | Organizations share or combine services and resources. Official agreement or contract. | Organizations work together on an issue with no formal commitment. |
| Examples | Service Purchase Agreements Grants | Information sharing Referral of clients Stakeholder meetings |

*Table derived from Brown and Troutt, 2004; Bryson et al., 2006; Guo and Acar, 2005.

Need for Collaboration

A primary motivation for government-nonprofit collaboration is that neither sector can accomplish its goals alone. Experts refer to this common phenomenon as “sector failure” (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002, p. 5; Bryson et al. 2006, p. 44-46). Human services issues addressed by governments and nonprofits are usually complex and enduring. Issues like homelessness, poverty, gangs, education, teen pregnancy, and domestic violence - to name a few - are inherently multi-faceted. Solutions to these problems can be obscure. Addressing these issues across the sector boundaries increases the chance of success because organizations have access to more resources and can treat the issues holistically (Linden, 2002). The introduction of this chapter touched briefly on the benefits of collaboration, including maximizing strengths and minimizing duplication of work. The next section provides a more in-depth discussion of both the benefits and the pitfalls of collaboration.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Government Agencies and Nonprofit Organizations

In the collaborative process government and nonprofit organizations must maintain their organizational identities because the goal of collaboration is to tap the unique advantages each sector has to offer (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002, p. 10-13). Table 2.2 illustrates the typical strengths and weaknesses of government and nonprofits in service delivery.

Table 2.2: Typical Strengths and Weaknesses of Governments and Nonprofits in Service Delivery*

| | Government Agencies | Nonprofit Organizations |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Strengths | Funding Capacity Accountability | Service Delivery Flexibility |
| Weaknesses | Service Delivery Flexibility | Funding Capacity Accountability |

*Table derived from Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2002; Cho and Gillespie, 2006; DeHoog, 1992; Lipsky and Smith, 1990; Van Slyke and Roch, 2004.

Nonprofits commonly function under fewer bureaucratic constraints than government and, therefore, provide services with greater flexibility (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002, p. 6). Naturally, there are some exceptions to this rule. Government can and does provide many public services with great efficiency. For example, a group of Navy Seals can rapidly respond to crises. However, government's flexibility is often inhibited because of internal rules and regulations (Van Slyke and Roch 2004, p. 193). Bureaucratic red tape influences service delivery in government (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002, p. 6). For example, if a government agency wants to change marketing brochures for a program providing family counseling to low-income parents, its marketing materials must meet the guidelines of that agency. There will likely be red tape such as restrictions on the text and images. In addition, the materials must go through several levels of approval, which slows down advertising and delays the provision of services. In most nonprofits the marketing manager approves materials. The process is quick and efficient, allowing speedier delivery of service.

Nonprofits enjoy the added advantage of being able to focus on a particular service and develop expertise in administering that service (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002, p. 5). Their processes become fine-tuned. In contrast, most government agencies provide a wide variety of services to an expansive population (p. 6). By contracting with nonprofits that know the target group, the government does not have to undergo the arduous process of gathering that information (Young 2000, p. 154). Nonprofits are usually very familiar with their clientele and can respond efficiently to their needs. However, they frequently have difficulty funding their programs.

Government has become a primary funding source for many nonprofits. This is a logical partnership for several reasons. The government has a much larger funding capacity than most nonprofit organizations because its funding base comes from a universal taxing authority. Both government and nonprofits exist to serve the public in ways the private sector cannot. They often have aligned goals, and it is natural for the nonprofits to look to government agencies for financial resources (Cho and Gillespie, 2006). In addition, collaborating with nonprofits can save the government money. Nonprofits can use fewer resources by employing volunteers and part-time employees (Shields, 1992). While this research does not address this issue in depth, it is important to note that there has been significant discussion in recent scholarly literature (see Huetel, 2009; Marudas and Jacobs, 2011) regarding the “crowding out” effect of government funding on private donations. Huetel (2009) and Marudas and Jacobs (2001) discuss the possibility that private donations decrease when government funding increases, creating another potential barrier to government-nonprofit collaboration.

Since the economic crisis began in 2007, the government has made significant cutbacks. These cutbacks have negatively impacted the funding of many nonprofit programs. In order to survive, nonprofits accommodate by cutting staff, programs, and services. They have increasingly sought support from private donors and in some cases have become leery of government funding (Mosley et al., 2012).

Because most government funding comes from taxpayers, strict accountability measures are placed on government programs (Lipsky and Smith 1990, p. 626). The demand for accountability has especially increased after the economic downturn. Government agencies must align funding with legislative requirements. If the government then uses nonprofits to facilitate any of those requirements, the nonprofits also need to align with these requirements. Thus, accountability is extremely important in government-nonprofit collaboration (Lipsky and Smith 1990, p. 641), and many government entities have developed highly attuned accountability systems to meet this need. Nonprofits often find meeting government's administrative and accountability requirements challenging (DeHoog 1996, p. 3; Lipsky and Smith 1990, p. 630). However, in government-nonprofit collaboration, when nonprofits lack sufficient accountability systems, government can help to ensure outcomes are appropriately measured. Effective collaboration should reduce the challenges and facilitate accountability.

Collaboration also helps diminish the problem of duplication of effort. Duplication of effort occurs when programs with similar goals administer the same services. Collaboration assists government agencies and nonprofits in identifying ways to streamline their services so neither is providing the same services to the same population (Wolff, 1992; Gulati-Partee, 2001). Wolff (1992) offers an example of the duplication of effort by discussing how a

community might deal with the issue of teen pregnancy – the same issue addressed in our scenario. The schools might be providing sex education while local churches are addressing this issue among their congregants. There may also be a family planning agency engaged in discourse about teen pregnancy. Wolff notes that often times the different groups are unaware of the other's interest in the issue and their initiatives. Collaboration, however, helps to coordinate the different groups' work and reduces doubling of their efforts (Wolff 1992, p. 600).

The next chapter provides a detailed description of the stages that occur during government-nonprofit collaboration. There is a variety of terminology in the scholarly literature used to describe the stages of collaboration. Linden (2002) developed an innovative and easy to remember model which is used to organize the discussion about stages below.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Stages of Collaboration

Russell Linden (2002, p. 170-174) uses metaphorical terms to describe the stages of collaboration. Linden believes relationships are the centerpiece of government-nonprofit partnerships (p. 92), cleverly applying the easy-to-remember stages of a romantic relationship to the stages of collaboration. Scholarly literature also supports the idea that relationships are a core factor in the success of government-nonprofit collaboration (Bryson, 2006; McGuire, 2006; Provan and Milward, 2001; and Shaw, 2003). This applied research project utilizes four stages as the basis for a conceptual framework to examine nonprofit collaboration. These stages include *Courtship*, *Getting Serious*, *Commitment*, and *Leaving a Legacy*. Each stage defines a pillar question in the conceptual framework. Together they shed light on the issues of government-nonprofit collaboration by informing the interview questionnaire and, hence, the focus and direction of the data collection method.

The *Courtship Phase* affords potential collaborators time to get to know each other and to determine whether they have compatible goals. During this stage, communication and information sharing begin in abundance. If shared goals emerge and a sense of momentum builds, collaborators are ready to move to the next phase (Linden 2002, p. 170-171).

The *Getting Serious Phase* entails designing a plan for action. Relationships grow stronger as a result of consistent communication and information sharing, occurring during the *Courtship Phase*, and a sense of trust evolves. Partners are ready to create governance structures and to designate leaders and assign authority within the collaboration. When they

come to a mutual agreement on how to take action, they may wish to make a more formal commitment (Linden 2002, p. 171-173).

During the *Commitment Phase*, co-collaborators institutionalize their relationship. They build formal structures and develop constituencies to support the collaboration. Guidelines and procedures are established as well as measures of success. The *Leaving a Legacy Phase* follows the *Commitment Phase* (Linden 2002, p. 173-174).

The *Leaving a Legacy Phase* is the final stage of collaboration. *Leaving a Legacy* involves evaluating the successes and failures of the collaboration. Collaborators determine whether to continue their work or whether to dissolve because the mission has been accomplished (Linden 2002, p. 173-174).

Introduction of Pillar Questions (Conceptual Framework)

While there is substantial literature on the subject of government-nonprofit collaboration, systematic studies of the nonprofit perspective on government-nonprofit collaboration are much less prevalent. Through the pillar questions that follow, this research develops a framework to uncover the nonprofit perspective. This approach is appropriate because of the preliminary, exploratory nature of this research project. The conceptual framework employs pillar questions³ in order to determine the relevant focus of future research (Shields and Heichelbech, forthcoming). Linden's four stages in combination with a

³ For more information on the ways that Texas State University students develop a conceptual framework, see Shields (1998) and Shields and Tajalli (2006). For examples of Texas State University Applied Research Projects that use pillar questions, see Whetsell (2011) and Evers (2011).

review of literature regarding government-nonprofit collaboration led to the development of four pillar questions. A detailed description of the pillar questions follows.

The Courtship Phase (Pillar Question 1)

According to Linden (2002), the *Courtship Phase* of collaboration allows time for potential collaborators to get to know each other and to determine if the relationship is worth pursuing further. Similar to a romantic relationship, government and nonprofit leaders want to weigh the benefits of working together so as not to waste time chasing a relationship that may not be mutually beneficial. This question seeks to determine what factors nonprofit leaders believe lead to the success of a collaborative relationship during the early phase of the partnership.

PQ1: From the nonprofit perspective, what factors contribute to the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration during the Courtship Phase?

The following two sub-questions include ideas presented in the literature regarding potential factors of success during the *Courtship Phase*.

Communication and Information Sharing (Pillar Question 1a)

Nonprofit organizations studied by Brown and Troutt⁴ reported that collaborations were successful because they were included in the initial meetings and felt that the government listened to their input (2004, p. 7). Also crucial is input of all stakeholders (p. 18). Balser and McClusky cited communication as an integral tool in collaboration (2005, p. 297). Mary Shaw

⁴ Brown and Troutt (2004) is an exception of the scholarly literature that did study the nonprofit perspective on government-nonprofit collaboration.

identifies eight characteristics present in successful collaborations, including communication and understanding (2003, p. 110). She also noted that sharing information relevant to the project is key (p. 111). This literature consistently expresses the importance of communication and information sharing, therefore this study asks nonprofit leaders what role these factors play in their organization's collaborative relationships with the government.

PQ 1a: What role do communication and information sharing play in the Courtship Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

Mission and Goal Setting (Pillar Question 1b)

A mission statement defines the purpose, or the end goal, of the collaboration. Brown and Troutt say that a common mission is vital to the success of a collaboration (2004, p. 16). Gazley and Brudney list a compatible mission in their requirements for a collaboration (2007, p. 411). McGuire advocates for strategic planning by participants (2006, p. 37). It follows that one would suspect that leaders of nonprofit organizations will believe mission and goal setting play a significant role in the *Courtship Phase* of a government-nonprofit collaboration.

PQ1b: What role do mission and goal setting play in the Courtship Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

Scenario (continued) – The Courtship Phase

About a month after UT released the results of their study, the first meeting of the City of Austin's stakeholder committee on teen pregnancy convened. Kim Walker began the meeting by having everyone around the table spend a few minutes introducing themselves and the mission of their agency or organization. Recognizing the importance of communication and information sharing, Kim gave an introduction to the city's primary goal to lower Austin's teen pregnancy

rate and asked each person in the group to discuss how their goals align with the City's goals. The meeting continued with the participants sharing information and suggestions on how to approach the teen pregnancy issue. They decided to meet bi-weekly over the next six months with a goal of presenting a comprehensive plan to the Mayor by the end of the year.

The Getting Serious Phase (Pillar Question 2)

The *Getting Serious Phase* occurs after the partners have decided the relationship is worth pursuing, and they are ready to design a plan to move forward (Linden, 2002). The purpose of this pillar question is to determine what aspects nonprofit leaders believe are important in order to define a successful plan of action for their collaboration with the government.

PQ2: From the nonprofit perspective, what factors contribute to the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration during the Getting Serious Phase?

The following two sub-questions include ideas presented in the literature regarding potential factors of success during the *Getting Serious Phase*.

Trust and Positive Relationships (Pillar Question 2a)

Trust begins to develop during the *Courtship Phase* of collaboration when partners communicate and share information consistently. Positive relationships grow as the collaborators begin to see their efforts come to fruition (McGuire 2006, p. 38) during the *Getting Serious Phase*. Partners need to trust each other to act in the best interest of the collaborative project so they can focus on their shared mission (Shaw 2003, p. 110, 118). Shaw writes that having positive relationships increases trust and allows the partners to be more

flexible when working together (2003, p. 111). Provan and Millward state that when organizations grow relationships and build trust, they can later draw upon that relationship for the “smooth and successful implementation” of the collaborative project (2001, p. 417). McGuire adds that trust takes time to develop and it grows as the collaborative project begins experiencing positive results (2006, p. 38). Bryson et al. suggest building trust by sharing information and “demonstrating competency, good intentions, and follow-through” (2006, p. 48). Because the topic of trust and relationship-building is prevalently discussed in the above literature, this study asks nonprofit leaders what role trust and positive relationships have played in the second phase of their collaborations with the government.

PQ2a: What role do trust and positive relationships play in the Getting Serious Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

Leaders and Authority (Pillar Question 2b)

Leaders and authority present special challenges to the public and nonprofit sectors during collaboration. Bryson et al. describe the issue well, stating that “the leadership challenge in cross-sector collaboration may be viewed as a challenge of aligning initial conditions, processes, structures, governance, contingencies and constraints, outcomes, and accountabilities such that good things happen in a sustained way over time” (2006, p. 52). Collaborations between government and nonprofit need to have committed leaders who have the authority to make decisions (Shaw 2003, p. 111; McGuire 2006, p. 37). Leaders need authority, vision, long-term commitment, integrity, and relational and political skills (Bryson et al. 2006, p. 47). Brown and Troutt warn the government against micromanaging nonprofit organizations because micromanagement inhibits success. According to them, the details

should be left to the nonprofit organizations (2004, p. 22). This study asks nonprofit leaders what role leaders and authority has played during the *Getting Serious Phase* of their collaborative relationships with the government.

PQ 2b: What role do leaders and authority play in the Getting Serious Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

Scenario (continued) – The Getting Serious Phase

Over the next couple of months, the stakeholders worked together tirelessly. They had disagreements about how to approach the teen pregnancy issue. For example, some of the religious groups wanted to promote abstinence while other groups favored education about birth control options. While all the groups were passionate about their beliefs, with the help of regular meetings and communication along with the shared mission of the project, they had developed a sense of trust and respect among each other. They were able to establish a system for overcoming their differences and outline an approach to address Austin’s teen pregnancy rate that they could all support.

The Commitment Phase (Pillar Question 3)

After romantic partners have courted and determined a plan of action for their relationship, often times they are ready for a formal commitment. According to Linden (2002), a similar process happens between government and nonprofit partners. In order to explore the nonprofit leaders’ perspective on this *Commitment Phase*, we ask nonprofit leaders to identify success factors of government-nonprofit collaboration during the third phase of collaboration.

PQ3: From the nonprofit perspective, what factors contribute to the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration during the Commitment Phase?

The following two sub-questions include ideas presented in the literature regarding potential factors of success during the *Courtship Phase*.

Flexibility (Pillar Question 3a)

According to Alexander (2000), Brown and Troutt (2004), Cho and Gillespie (2006), and Shaw (2003), flexibility is important to the success of government-nonprofit collaboration. Guidelines are established during the *Commitment Phase*, and partners should retain the ability to change them as the need arises (Brown and Troutt 2004, p. 9; Cho and Gillespie 2006, p. 505). When discussing service plans, Alexander notes that they should not be set in stone, nor should they extend beyond three years (2000, p.297). The expiration date allows collaborators to review and make changes, if necessary. Shaw adds that partners should be flexible in their dealings with each other (2003, p. 110). Flexibility nurtures the positive relationships that have been established (Shaw 2003, p. 111; Brown and Troutt 2004, p. 9). In order to explore the nonprofit perspective on flexibility, this study asks nonprofit leaders what role flexibility plays in their collaborative relationships with the government.

PQ3a: What role does flexibility play in the Commitment Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

Clear Guidelines and Funding Procedures (Pillar Question 3b)

Expectations about how a collaborative project will work are set through clearly written guidelines (Brown and Troutt 2004, p 19). In order for planning to be successful, funding streams must be stable and predictable (Brown and Troutt 2004, p. 18). The ultimate goal

during the *Commitment Phase* is for the government and nonprofit organizations to work together to create guidelines that protect the integrity of the nonprofit, but allow the government appropriate accountability over its programs (Cho and Gillespie 2005, p. 505). This study asks nonprofit leaders what role they believe clear guidelines and funding procedures play in government-nonprofit collaborations.

PQ3b: What role do clear guidelines and funding procedures play in the Commitment Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

Scenario (continued) – The Commitment Phase

The stakeholder committee convened to present their strategic plan for lowering teen pregnancy in Austin to the Mayor and the City Council. The plan, which included grant money for further collaboration, was approved unanimously. The committee agreed to meet again in one year to discuss progress on the plan.

The City of Austin, with Kim Walker at the helm, began the process of soliciting grant applications and administering the grant program. The objectives developed by the stakeholder committee were clearly explained in the request for applications. The City received many applications. After having a group of evaluators score the applications, the City elected to give three nonprofit organizations money to work on the teen pregnancy issue. Once selected, the nonprofits discussed the guidelines and the funding procedures with the City. They worked together to create a grant contract that provides clear guidelines and funding procedures, but remains flexible so that it can be altered if the need arises.

The Leaving a Legacy Phase (Pillar Question 4)

The *Leaving a Legacy Phase* offers a time for evaluation and reflection (Linden, 2002).

This broad pillar question seeks to determine what aspects of government-nonprofit collaboration may make the *Leaving a Legacy Phase* successful.

PQ4: From the nonprofit perspective, what factors contribute to the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration during the Leaving a Legacy Phase?

The following two sub-questions include ideas presented in the literature regarding potential factors of success during the *Leaving a Legacy Phase*.

Accountability Systems (Pillar Question 4a)

Many collaboration experts (Bryson et al. 2006; Brown and Troutt, 2004; Balser and McClusky, 2005) believe that accountability systems play an important role in a collaboration's success or failure. Collaborations need accountability systems that track achievements (Bryson et al., 2006, p. 52). The government has a responsibility to evaluate equity and accountability while nonprofits need to be responsive and flexible (Brown and Troutt 2004, p. 9). However, the level of accountability has to be cost-effective for both partners (Balser and McClusky 2005, p. 305). This study investigates the nonprofit perspective of the role accountability systems play in the *Leaving a Legacy Phase* of government-nonprofit collaboration.

PQ4a: What role do accountability systems play in the Leaving a Legacy Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

Honest Feedback (Pillar Question 4b)

Services should be evaluated by recipients, and the collaborative efforts should be evaluated by co-collaborators (Wolff 1992, p. 11). Cho and Gillespie note that it is imperative to

“understand how relationships evolve over time because it can take several years to observe the unanticipated consequences resulting from government funding for service delivery” (2006, p. 498). Because of the attention paid to honest feedback in the scholarly literature, this study asks nonprofit leaders what role it plays in the *Leaving a Legacy Phase* of their government-nonprofit collaborations.

PQ 4b: What role does honest feedback play in the Leaving a Legacy Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

Scenario (continued) – The Leaving a Legacy Phase

As agreed, the stakeholder committee met one year after their strategic plan to lower teen pregnancy in Austin was approved. They evaluated accountability measures they had set and invited the nonprofit grant recipients to the meeting to give feedback about the grant process. While it was too soon to do any serious evaluation of the nonprofits’ work, the stakeholders agreed that they had made solid progress on their goals since the beginning of the project. They set their next meeting for six months later.

Table 3.1 lists the pillar questions and links them to the supporting literature.

Table 3.1: Conceptual Framework Linking Exploratory Pillar Questions to Literature

| Pillar Questions | Literature |
|---|---|
| PQ1: From the nonprofit perspective, what factors contribute to the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration during the Courtship Phase? | Linden (2002); McKinney and Johnson (2009) |
| PQ1a: What role do communication and information sharing play in the Courtship Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | Balsler and McClusky (2005); Brown and Troutt (2004); Cho and Gillespie (2006); Linden (2002); Shaw (2003) |
| PQ1b: What role do mission and goal setting play in the Courtship Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | Brown and Troutt (2004); Gazley and Brudney (2007); Linden (2002); McGuire (2006); Shaw (2003) |
| PQ2: From the nonprofit perspective, what factors contribute to the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration during the Getting Serious Phase? | Linden (2002); McKinney and Johnson (2009) |
| PQ2a: What role do trust and positive relationships play in the Getting Serious Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | Alexander (2000); Brinkerhoff (2002); Bryson et al (2006); McGuire (2006); Provan and Milward (2001); Shaw (2003) |
| PQ2b: What role do leaders and authority play in the Getting Serious Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | Brown and Troutt (2004); Bryson et al (2006); Linden (2002); McGuire (2006); Shaw (2003) |
| PQ3: From the nonprofit perspective, what factors contribute to the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration during the Commitment Phase? | Linden (2002); McKinney and Johnson (2009) |
| PQ3a: What role does flexibility play in the Commitment Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | Alexander (2000); Brown and Troutt (2004); Cho and Gillespie (2006); DeHoog (1996); Shaw (2003) |
| PQ3b: What role do clear guidelines and funding procedures play in the Commitment Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | Alexander (2000); Brown and Troutt (2004); Cho and Gillespie (2006) |
| PQ4: From the nonprofit perspective, what factors contribute to the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration during the Leaving a Legacy Phase? | Linden (2002); McKinney and Johnson (2009) |
| PQ4a: What role do accountability systems play in the Leaving a Legacy Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | Balsler and McClusky (2005); Brown and Troutt (2004); Bryson, et al. (2006) |
| PQ4b: What role does honest feedback play in the Leaving a Legacy Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | Cho and Gillespie (2006); Wolff (1992) |

The next chapter presents the methodology to illustrate the methods used for data collection.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

This study used structured interviews to investigate the pillar questions listed above. Structured interviews work well for the purpose of this study to explore from the nonprofit perspective factors that contribute to the success of government-nonprofit collaboration because they allow for flexibility in the data collection. The exploratory nature of this study calls for adaptability. Structured interview questions permit the researcher to “establish a general direction for the conversation and pursue specific topics raised by the respondent” (Babbie 2007, p. 306). An additional benefit of conducting structured interviews includes the interviewer’s ability to record both her empirical observations and her interpretations of them (p. 310). This increases the validity of the research. However, validity and reliability are major weaknesses of the structured interviews. An interviewer’s interpretations are subjective and, therefore, can be biased. Even with the same interviewer and interviewee, responses may vary day-to-day.

In an attempt to overcome the interviewer’s subjectivity, all interviewees’ responses were recorded in writing. Responses are included in the appendices, but have been edited to remove identifying information. The interviewer added her observations only after the interviewee’s responses were recorded.

Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework

Table 4.1 outlines the operationalization of the pillar questions. The first column lists the sub-questions, derived from pillar questions. The second column explicates the interview questions, based on these sub-questions. Thus, the operationalization table links the interview

question, through sub-questions, back to the pillar questions and the literature. For example, according to scholarly literature, communication and information sharing play an important role in the success of government-nonprofit collaboration (Balser and McClusky, 2005; Brown and Troutt, 2004; Cho and Gillespie, 2006; Linden, 2002; and Shaw, 2003). In order to explore the nonprofit perspective of this factor, Pillar Question 1a asks the interviewee what role communication and information sharing play in the *Courtship Phase* of a government-nonprofit collaboration. The interview questions are designed to determine the role nonprofit leaders believe the factors pulled from the scholarly literature play in the success of government-nonprofit collaboration.

TABLE 4.1: Operationalization – Aligning Pillar Questions with Structured Interview Questions

| Pillar Questions | Interview Questions |
|--|--|
| PQ1a: What role do communication and information sharing play in the Courtship Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | IQ1a: What role do communication and information sharing play in the Courtship Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? |
| PQ1b: What role do mission and goal setting play in the Courtship Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | IQ1b: What role do mission and goal setting play in the Courtship Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? |
| PQ2a: What role do trust and positive relationships play in the Getting Serious Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | IQ2a: What role do trust and positive relationships play in the Getting Serious Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? |
| PQ2b: What role do leaders and authority play in the Getting Serious Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | IQ2b: What role do leaders and authority play in the Getting Serious Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? |
| PQ3a: What role does flexibility play in the Commitment Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | IQ3a: What role does flexibility play in the Commitment Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? |
| PQ3b: What role do clear guidelines and clear funding procedures play in the Commitment Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | IQ3b: What role do clear guidelines and clear funding procedures play in the Commitment Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? |
| PQ4a: What role do accountability systems play in the Leaving a Legacy Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | IQ4a: What role do accountability systems play in the Leaving a Legacy Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? |
| PQ4b: What role does honest feedback play in the Leaving a Legacy Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | IQ4b: What role does honest feedback play in the Leaving a Legacy Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? |

Sampling Methodology

This applied research project used a nonprobability, snowball sampling method, meaning that the sample is not representative of the entire population. This technique does not provide generalizable conclusions about the beliefs of nonprofit leaders overall. The data collected, however, is sufficient to satisfy the exploratory purpose of this study, as this method permits a preliminary exploration into the dominant themes of nonprofit-government collaboration. This research method focuses on the qualitative insight that nonprofit leaders may provide, rather than the aggregate of numerical preferences along predetermined scales.

Interviewees were selected based on a number of criteria, including individuals who (1) hold a leadership position in a nonprofit organization located in Texas that collaborates with the government, (2) have knowledge of how the organization's collaborative relationship with the government works, and (3) availability for an in-person or by-phone interview. The researcher interviewed ten subjects.

All of the ten subjects who were interviewed have extensive experience with government-nonprofit collaboration and were able to provide information relevant to this study. Most interviewees have over ten years of experience working in partnership with various government entities, and they shared experiences from a range of different collaborative relationships. Anita Stuckey, who facilitates an access and visitation grant for the Office of the Attorney General of Texas, referred potential interviewees. Limited snowball sampling was employed as well. The researcher also used personal connections to approach potential respondents. Nine of the ten interviewees work for nonprofit organizations that provide human services. The remaining respondent leads an organization that specializes in helping other

nonprofit organizations and, hence, has a unique and in-depth understanding of the nonprofit perspective on government-nonprofit collaboration. Most interviewees were Executive Directors or Program Directors with over ten years of nonprofit experience. The majority of respondents' experiences with government-nonprofit collaboration occurred in a grantor/grantee relationship in which the government was the grantor and the nonprofit was the grantee. However, a few of the interviewees also had experience serving on stakeholder committees. Interview length ranged from 15 minutes to 1.5 hours. Only one interview was 15 minutes long because of a time constraint for the interviewee. The remaining nine interviews ranged between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours.

Human Subjects Protection

Texas State University's Institutional Review Board reviewed a prospectus for this project, prior to research being conducted, to ensure that federal guidelines and accepted ethical principles were followed. The IRB exempted this project from review. The exemption is attached as Appendix A.

The next chapter presents the results of this research.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings generated through the interviews. As a recap, this applied research project explores factors that contribute to the success of government-nonprofit collaboration from the nonprofit perspective. The information gathered through interviews of nonprofit leaders indicates that implementation of certain aspects may improve the success of government-nonprofit collaboration, while others may be less important. The interviews also revealed some unexpected elements that may affect the success of government-nonprofit collaboration that were not discussed in the scholarly literature.

Subjects' Background Information

Nine of the ten interviewees' typical collaborations with the government occur through formal collaboration in the form of grants. In the *Courtship Phase* of collaboration, the government issues a request for applications in which the grant purpose is explained. If the nonprofit organization decides to apply, and the government selects it as a recipient, they move on to the following phases of collaboration. All interviewees had led a nonprofit to completion of a grant cycle. Three of the ten interviewees also had experience with more informal collaboration in which they served on stakeholder committees. The interview questions revealed the following results.

The Courtship Phase (Pillar Question 1)

The first broad pillar question deals with the factors nonprofit leaders attribute to success in *Courtship Phase* of government-nonprofit collaboration. Specifically, the

interviewees were asked what role communication, information sharing, and mission and goal setting play in the success of government-nonprofit collaboration. The details of the findings under pillar question 1 are as follows.

Communication and Information Sharing (Pillar Question 1a)

A majority of the interviewees noted that very little communication and information sharing took place during the *Courtship Phase* of their collaborations with the government. The interviewees who had participated in collaborations in which communication and information sharing took place during the *Courtship Phase* expressed that this factor was integral in the success of the project.

One interviewee discussed a large grant her organization sought and obtained. She said that there was no real communication with the government entity during the grant application process (the *Courtship Phase*). In fact, she explained that the grant administrator for their project had virtually no time to communicate with them throughout the administration of the grant. While the project was successful in meeting its expected outcomes, this interviewee felt that more communication and information sharing during the *Courtship Phase* would have produced even better results. She added that the grant administrator did set up a conference for all the grant recipients to attend, and the grant recipients found the communication and information sharing that occurred between the grant recipients tremendously helpful.

Another interviewee had a similar grant experience during which the government agency organized a conference for grant recipients. She said this opportunity is one of her

favorite aspects about this particular grant. The ability of the grant recipients to refer to one another and share information is invaluable.

Another interviewee explained that she serves on a committee to address issues affecting her organization's work. The communication and information sharing that takes place on the committee allows her to participate in creating outcome measures for some of the grant money they receive. She found that sharing of information is a great opportunity to improve the administration of the grant and the programs funded by the grant.

One interviewee spoke about her best collaborative experience through a grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The partnership was specifically designed for community-based organizations. The Department of Education provided resources and helped her organization throughout the application process, and other phases of the collaboration. The communication that went on between her organization and the Department of Education allowed them to develop a positive relationship because she felt their needs were being addressed to the betterment of the project.

One of the interviewees worked on a project to draft a city ordinance. During the *Courtship Phase* of this project, the interviewee's organization and the city council worked together to draft language that would be beneficial to all stakeholders. The interviewee noted that there was a lot of back and forth during the *Courtship Phase*, and an ordinance that all stakeholders could support resulted from intense communication and information sharing.

Another interviewee discussed a positive experience with a large government agency involving a tremendous amount of communication and information sharing, which occurred during the *Courtship Phase*. The agency approached this organization to partner with them on a

grant. They had weekly conference calls during which the agency listened to their input, and both partners developed an application for services. This interviewee felt that his organization had a voice in the project and that the project was better because of the open communication the partners shared.

In sum, most of the interviewees were dismayed by the lack of communication and information sharing between government and nonprofit organizations in the collaborative process. Six of the ten interviewees had experienced successful collaborations in which they felt communication and information sharing played an integral role. All of the nonprofit leaders interviewed felt that collaborations would benefit from increased communication and information sharing between the government and nonprofits during the *Courtship Phase*.

Mission and Goal Setting (Pillar Question 1b)

When asked about the role that mission and goal setting play in the *Courtship Phase* of collaboration between government and nonprofit organizations, nonprofit leaders who were interviewed had consistent responses. While most stated that staying true to their organization's mission is important, they noted a lack of discussion about mission with their collaborative partners. The nonprofits generally use their organization's mission as a guideline to evaluate whether to seek a partnership in the first place. If the purpose of the grant does not fit well with the organization's mission, they do not apply for the grant. None of those interviewed had examples of formal collaboration in which they had the opportunity to discuss the mission of the partnership with the government agency partner. One interviewee thought it would be incredibly helpful if the government were to invest time and effort in collaboratively

defining need, then collaboratively designing a program, and finally coming up with agreed-upon outcomes during the *Courtship Phase*. On rare occasions, this happens.

Those interviewees who had participated on stakeholder committees had an opportunity to discuss issues with their government partner in a broad manner and then help to define the mission of a future project. In some cases, they worked collaboratively to set broad goals. In fact, the scenario discussed in Chapters 1-4 employed this method.

There appears to be a lack of communication about mission and goals in the *Courtship Phase* of collaboration. In many cases, government entities are not seeking input from nonprofit organizations until later in the collaborative process, if at all.

The Getting Serious Phase (Pillar Question 2)

The second pillar question deals with the factors nonprofit leaders attribute to success in the *Getting Serious Phase* of government-nonprofit collaboration. Specifically, the interviewees were asked what role trust and positive relationships and leaders and authority play in the success of government-nonprofit collaboration. Detail of the findings follows.

Trust and Positive Relationships (Pillar Question 2a)

According to interviewees, a positive relationship with the government grant administrator is paramount to the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration. One interviewee noted, "Positive relationships are vital. It really comes down to the contract manager. The contract manager should educate potential recipients and recipients about the grant." Five interviewees talked about collaborative projects in which they experienced positive

relationships with their government partners and stated that those relationships lead to the success of the collaboration.

One respondent explained that her organization had worked with a government entity for a long time, and they developed a respect for one another. She trusted this agency, and they trusted her. If there was a problem with a report, the grant administrator would simply call her to clarify. This interviewee believed that an important factor of their positive relationship was that it was built over a long period of time.

The second interviewee who discussed his positive relationships with government partners believed the relationships worked well because of their shared mission. Everyone involved had aligned goals, so they were able to talk out their differences. Their individual needs were superseded by what would help them accomplish their mutual goals.

Another interviewee talked about how the relationships that his organization developed during the *Courtship Phases* of two collaborations had given them credibility in their field. Now other larger government agencies and organizations listen to what they have to say because of these two partnerships.

A different respondent noted that she and one of her government partners developed trust and positive relationships during the *Courtship Phase* because they went through the learning process together, both bringing different skills and resources to the table. Because of these positive relationships, the organization felt empowered throughout the collaboration.

Other interviewees also expressed strong feelings about the role the relationship with the grant administrator plays in the *Getting Serious Phase* of the collaboration. One suffered through a grant cycle, working with a program manager who was too busy and overburdened

to communicate with her at all, other than to collect the required reports. Ultimately, the program was successful, but she felt a positive relationship with the grant administrator would have led to better results. They could have shared ideas about how to maximize the grant money.

Ideally, the communication and information sharing that occurs during the *Courtship Phase* of collaboration should build trust and lead to positive relationships in the *Getting Serious Phase*. However, according to the nonprofit leaders interviewed, there seems to be little communication and information sharing during the *Courtship Phase*. This could explain the poor relationships and low-levels of trust some of the nonprofit leaders are experiencing with government employees in the *Getting Serious Phase*. According to the nonprofit leaders interviewed, cultivating these relationships and building trust between the government employees and the nonprofit employees would lead to better results for the collaborative projects.

Leaders and Authority (Pillar Question 2b)

When interviewees were asked about what role leaders and authority plays in government-nonprofit collaboration in the *Getting Serious Phase*, most continued to discuss the importance of the grant administrator. This individual apparently plays a significant role in the success of collaboration. Three interviewees focused on the overall tone set by the agency with which they are partnering.

In the typical grant-funding situation, the government has authority over important decisions about the program. There is not a democratic system for deciding who makes

decisions, much like informal collaborations. The government has the money, thus the government makes the decisions. Consequently, the employee who represents the government - usually a grant administrator or program manager - has the authority. According to one interviewee, if the grant administrator is committed to the mission, the process works better. Another explained that the attitude with which the program manager approaches the mission is important. The manager doesn't necessarily need expertise in the issues, but they need to have an in-depth understanding of the funding guidelines. One interviewee said that the program manager should be a seasoned nonprofit professional who could help a nonprofit grantee with the process. Another noted that being flexible and thinking outside the box are important characteristics.

Three interviewees talked about leaders and authority in a big-picture way. One described the government-nonprofit relationship as an "us vs. them" mentality. He said, "there is an attitude of disdain for the nonprofits among government contract managers. This needs to change." There is an imbalance of power that sometimes inhibits program advancement. Another interviewee put it in these terms, "the person responsible for administering these grants needs to be motivated by impact and progress, not power and authority." Another nonprofit leader explained that the positive tone of one partnership was set by an agency leader who prioritized community partnerships. This priority was continually reinforced, so employees were motivated to make the relationships work. Another interviewee also felt a positive attitude among the leaders of a collaboration is vital. She added that these collaborative projects need support from people with authority. She also suggested that

government leaders should look at the collaborative project as a learning opportunity. Both organizations can learn from each other as they go through the process.

It is unclear from the interviews whether the leaders and authority factor of the *Getting Serious Phase* is a systemic problem or an issue with individual employees. Responses seem to indicate that the person in the grant administrator role matters a great deal, and several interviewees had suggestions for recruiting the right type of person for the job. However, one interviewee suggested trying to change the process from the contracted services method to a block grant with desired outcomes system. Perhaps less direct administration would change the important role that the grant administrator plays. Alternatively, two interviewees believed that the culture instilled in the government agency has a great deal to do with government-nonprofit success. One interviewee said agencies that work to instill a culture more supportive of community partnerships are more successful. Flexibility is addressed in the next section.

The Commitment Phase (Pillar Question 3)

The third pillar question deals with the factors nonprofit leaders attribute to success in the *Commitment Phase* of government-nonprofit collaboration. Specifically, the interviewees were asked what role flexibility, clear guidelines, and clear funding procedures play in the success of government-nonprofit collaboration. Details of the findings follow.

Flexibility (Pillar Question 3a)

Six of the ten interviewees discussed flexibility in depth. Of those who discussed flexibility, all maintained that it plays a role in success of a government-nonprofit collaboration

during the *Commitment Phase*. One nonprofit leader talked about an agency that had recently empowered its program managers with more flexibility. She said this flexibility was passed along to the nonprofits during the *Commitment Phase* and made use of their funds more creatively. Like the interviewee mentioned in the previous section, this nonprofit leader also believes that block grants are better because they allow more flexibility. The nonprofits can then determine the most effective way to use the funds. One respondent agreed that more flexibility in spending funds would be helpful and noted that she needs money for equipment in order to properly facilitate the grant program. However, she is not allowed to use grant funds to pay for the necessary equipment.

A different respondent discussed an experience in which the grant administrator changed their entire research design based on feedback from the grant recipients. The project wasn't moving along as quickly as the administrator thought it would. The feedback from the grant recipients uncovered additional issues that would require more time to establish the program. Based on input from their partners in the field, the grant administrator remained flexible to making changes to the program. The respondent felt this flexibility greatly contributed to the success of the collaboration.

Another interviewee, whose organization participates in different types of informal and formal collaboration with the government, said that flexibility was a key factor in their collaborations' success. The ability to go back and forth with their partner agencies when making a formal commitment was immensely helpful.

The third interviewee who discussed flexibility explained that her organization stopped seeking government funding altogether. The time and expense they spend administering the

government-funding programs is inhibitive. She explained how corporate grants are much more effective because of the flexibility. The business gives the nonprofit a goal, which is usually discussed between them in advance, as well as funding, and then gets out of their way. The programs have better outcomes because they don't have to use so many resources meeting strict guidelines and reporting requirements. Another interviewee noted that she needs additional money to buy necessary equipment, but the grant she receives will not provide funds for equipment. She agreed that flexibility in spending would be helpful.

Because the government must maintain a certain level of accountability over taxpayer money, flexibility may seem like a pipe dream to most nonprofit leaders. However, according to at least six of the nonprofit leaders interviewed, more flexibility is possible and would be helpful during the *Commitment Phase* of collaboration.

Clear Guidelines and Clear Funding Procedures (Pillar Question 3b)

According to three of the interviewees, clear guidelines and funding procedures do play a role in the *Commitment Phase* of government-nonprofit collaboration. One interviewee explained that most of her government partners require monthly reimbursement reports. She likes them because they keep her accountable. A different interviewee suggested that the government should develop standardized guidelines for the grant process and the reporting process. He said, "Having a transparent process with clear, standardized guidelines for the grant and reporting process would take away a lot of administrative costs nonprofits have to spend." They currently use too many resources preparing grants and meeting reporting requirements.

There was not very much discussion from the interviewees about the importance of clear guidelines and clear funding procedures. This might be because they focus on the main challenges they see with the system. For example, clear guidelines and funding procedures are important, but they feel the clarity provided now is sufficient. Alternatively, there may have been limited discussion because these factors do not play an important role in government-nonprofit collaboration during the *Commitment Phase*.

The Leaving a Legacy Phase (Pillar Question 4)

The fourth pillar question deals with the factors nonprofit leaders attribute to success in the *Leaving a Legacy Phase* of government-nonprofit collaboration. Specifically, the interviewees were asked what role accountability systems and honest feedback play in the success of government-nonprofit collaboration. Detail of the findings follows.

Accountability Systems (Pillar Question 4a)

Nine of the ten interviewees believe that accountability systems play a major role in the success of government-nonprofit collaborations in the *Leaving a Legacy Phase*. One of the interviewees who served on a stakeholder committee had the opportunity to help develop outcome measurements during the committee meetings. She stated that the monitoring of those outcome measurements help with maintaining quality of care. Three additional interviewees agreed that outcome measurements are helpful. The monthly reporting requirements help keep them accountable and on track.

A different interviewee talked about how organization builds evaluation into their program budgets. He explained that being able to demonstrate results in the *Leaving a Legacy Phase* of a collaboration is extremely important. He said, “If we can’t afford to evaluate the program, it’s not worth doing.” Although, he did acknowledge that they use a massive amount of resources to keep up with the government’s reporting requirements. He believes a systemized reporting process would be helpful. Along those same lines, another interviewee mentioned that one of her particularly successful grants had evaluation measures incorporated into recipients’ budgets. She thought this aspect was tremendously helpful in their success.

Other interviewees had less favorable opinions about accountability systems. One noted that accountability requirements have increased tremendously over the past few years. She said, “In general, the strict accountability and bureaucratic red tape often makes working with the government agencies a challenge.” She explained that the government agencies want quantitative reports for everything, but she feels it is difficult to show the full impact of the organization’s service quantitatively. Another agreed, adding that they have trouble tracking the outcome measures because the services are given by their program anonymously. Additionally, one interviewee talked about how administrative costs and tracking accountability can cause a tremendous strain on a nonprofit’s infrastructure.

The reporting requirements can be especially taxing for small and/or rural nonprofits. One rural nonprofit leader explained that they are expected to conduct sophisticated data collection and analysis, but the government doesn’t provide resources to help them do that. She said it would be helpful if the government would help with program evaluation.

Another interviewee complained that outcome measures the government creates are not always representative of success. According to the interviewees, when nonprofit leaders have a hand in creating the outcome measures, they tend to be more successful. A different interviewee said, “Only on rare and wonderful occasions, I have had the opportunity to be involved in the development of outcome measures.” One interviewee suggested that the government should to be more transparent and accountable for oversight of the collaborations. She suspected that the government wastes a lot of money on administration costs.

While the nonprofit leaders interviewed had different opinions of their experiences with government accountability systems, the majority of them agreed that they play a very important role in the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration during the *Leaving a Legacy Phase*.

Honest Feedback (Pillar Question 4b)

Four of the ten interviewees discussed the role honest feedback plays in the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration in the *Leaving a Legacy Phase*. Three interviewees explained that in most of their experiences there is no mechanism for providing honest feedback about the collaborative project. Only one interviewee had an experience where the government had set-up a system for collecting feedback from grantees. She felt comfortable providing the feedback honestly without negative repercussions on future funding and stated that such feedback would improve future programs. Another respondent praised one of her grantees stating that she feels completely comfortable giving them honest feedback and that this is an important aspect of their program’s success.

Another interviewee said, “I have never had an opportunity where I felt comfortable providing honest feedback to the government about a grant program without fearing negative repercussions. The ability to do that would be invaluable.” She added that the imbalance of power between the government and the nonprofits doesn’t weigh in favor of honesty on the part of the nonprofit. Nonprofits fear repercussion.

It is difficult to determine from the interviewees’ responses whether honest feedback is important to the success of government-nonprofit collaboration during the *Leaving a Legacy Phase*. Those who responded felt it would improve future programs, but most had never had the opportunity to provide honest feedback about their collaborative projects with the government.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Government-nonprofit collaboration is extremely challenging, but the results can be extraordinary. The issues that many governments and nonprofits address are complicated and cannot be solved by one sector acting independently. These multi-faceted problems require the efforts of many people working across boundaries (Linden, 2002). Potential partners should look to prior successful collaborations for inspiration and guidance in processes to employ in their own collaborative efforts. According to the literature, government-nonprofit collaborations would benefit from considering the factors listed below.

- 1) Courtship Phase - Communication and Information Sharing
- 2) Courtship Phase - Mission and Goal Setting
- 3) Getting Serious Phase - Trust and Positive Relationships
- 4) Getting Serious Phase - Leaders and Authority
- 5) Commitment Phase - Flexibility
- 6) Commitment Phase - Clear Guidelines and Funding Procedures
- 7) Leaving a Legacy Phase - Accountability Systems
- 8) Leaving a Legacy Phase - Honest Feedback

Findings

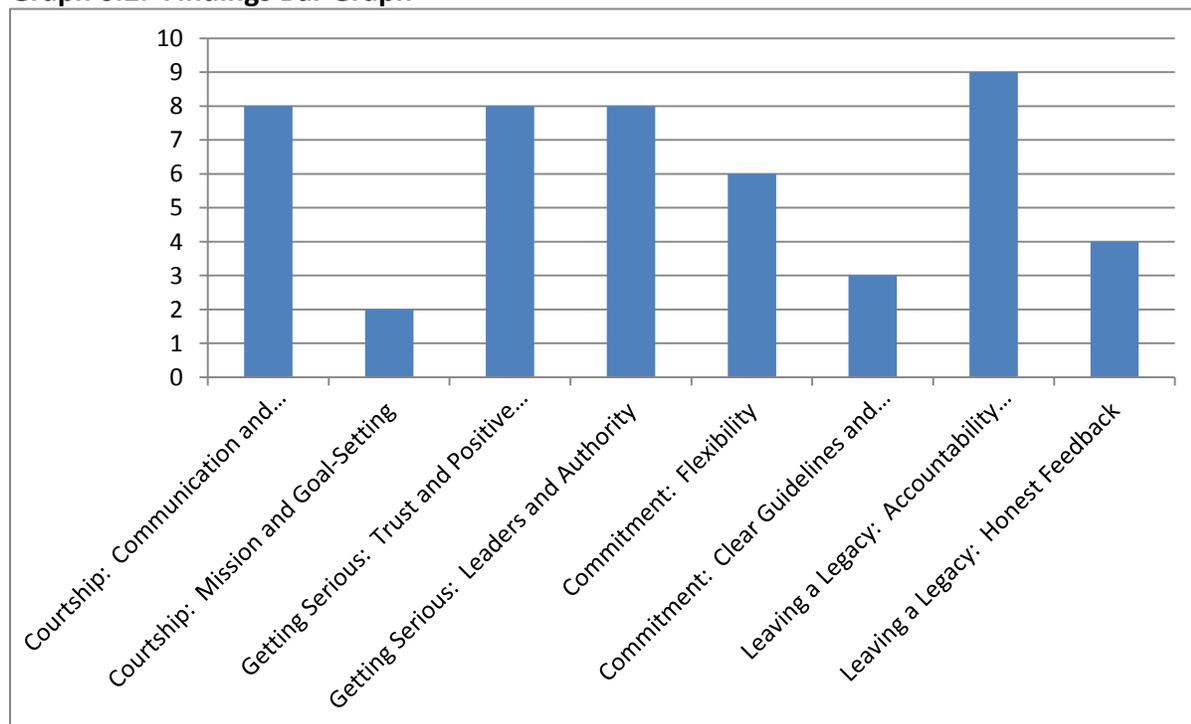
Table 6.1 summarizes the findings of this research and includes recommendations for that may increase the success of government-nonprofit collaboration. The information collected during the interviews indicates that the following factors play an important role in the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration: (PQ1a) communication and information sharing, (PQ2a) trust and positive relationships, (PQ2b) leaders and authority, and (PQ4a) accountability systems. The research also indicated that flexibility might be important. While the other factors may be helpful in leading to the success of government-nonprofit collaboration, their degree of importance is less clear.

Table 6.1: Findings and Recommendations

| Pillar Questions | Findings | Recommendations |
|--|--|--|
| Pillar Question 1 | | |
| PQ1a: What role do communication and information sharing play in the Courtship Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | 8/10 interviewees discussed the importance of communication and information sharing during the Courtship Phase of government-nonprofit collaboration. | Increase communication and information sharing during the Courtship Phase of collaboration by creating stakeholder groups, holding regular meetings, and connecting similar providers and/or potential grant recipients. |
| PQ1b: What role do mission and goal setting play in the Courtship Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | 2/10 interviewees discussed the importance of mission and goal setting during the Courtship Phase of government-nonprofit collaboration. | |
| Pillar Question 2 | | |
| PQ2a: What role do trust and positive relationships play in the Getting Serious Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | 8/10 interviewees discussed the importance of trust and positive relationships during the Getting Serious Phase of government-nonprofit collaboration. | Cultivate trust and positive relationships during the Commitment Phase through increased communication and information sharing during the Courtship Phase. |
| PQ2b: What role do leaders and authority play in the Getting Serious Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | 8/10 interviewees discussed the importance of leaders and authority during the Getting Serious Phase of government-nonprofit collaboration. | Program administrator should have a commitment to the program's mission, as well as an in-depth understanding of the guidelines and regulations of the project. Government agency leaders should prioritize collaboration and cultivate an environment that reinforces the importance of community partnerships. |
| Pillar Question 3 | | |
| PQ3a: What role does flexibility play in the Commitment Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration? | 6/10 interviewees discussed the importance of flexibility during the Commitment Phase of government-nonprofit collaboration. | Government agency leaders should empower program administrators and nonprofits to modify program details when appropriate and in ways that will not negatively impact accountability. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>PQ3b: What role do clear guidelines and funding procedures play in the Commitment Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?</p> | <p>3/10 interviewees discussed the importance of clear guidelines and funding procedures during the Commitment Phase of government-nonprofit collaboration.</p> | <p style="background-color: black; color: black;">[Redacted]</p> |
| <p>Pillar Question 4</p> | | |
| <p>PQ4a: What role do accountability systems play in the Leaving a Legacy Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?</p> | <p>9/10 interviewees discussed the importance of accountability systems during the Leaving a Legacy Phase of government-nonprofit collaboration.</p> | <p>Government leaders should involve nonprofits in creating reporting requirements and outcome measures. Evaluation mechanisms should be included in program budget. Governments should use their expertise to help nonprofits create effective accountability systems.</p> |
| <p>PQ4b: What role does honest feedback play in the Leaving a Legacy Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?</p> | <p>4/10 interviewees discussed the importance of honest feedback during the Leaving a Legacy Phase of government-nonprofit collaboration.</p> | <p style="background-color: black; color: black;">[Redacted]</p> |

Graph 6.2: Findings Bar Graph



Recommendations

Communication and Information Sharing

In order to increase successful outcomes from government-nonprofit collaboration, the government should institute more communication and information sharing during the *Courtship Phase*. Involving nonprofit organizations as stakeholders in the early stages of a project increases the chance for success because they often have expertise in a certain policy area from which the collaborative project could benefit. In addition, the nonprofits feel listened to. They have background knowledge and have participated in the creation of the project. Thus, when the nonprofits move through the other phases, they have a deeper commitment. Governments should also connect similar providers and/or potential grant-recipients. These organizations benefit from problem-solving and sharing ideas with one another.

Trust and Positive Relationships

Trust and positive relationships are built through the communication and information sharing that occurs during the *Courtship Phase*. These characteristics are strengthened as nonprofits and their government partners enter the *Getting Serious Phase*. Government agencies looking to collaborate with nonprofits need to institute relationship-building opportunities during both the *Courtship* and *Getting Serious Phases* of collaboration. The more opportunities each entity has for interaction with one another, the better. In addition, a change in perspective among government agencies to look at grantees more as collaborative partners, and less as contractors providing a service, would help foster better relationships.

Leaders and Authority

The person who is the leader of the collaboration and has authority once the *Commitment Phase* has begun plays a central role in the success of a government-nonprofit collaboration. In most cases, according to the respondents of this study, this is the grant administrator. The government should go to great lengths to ensure the person in charge of the project is committed to the mission and should do the same to seek effective collaboration with nonprofit partners. The program administrator should have an in-depth understanding of the guidelines and regulations of the project. Agency leaders should prioritize collaboration and cultivate an environment that reinforces the importance of community partnerships.

Flexibility

Flexibility during the *Commitment Phase* may improve the success of government-nonprofit collaboration. Some nonprofit leaders who were interviewed believe that when government agencies empower their program administrators to modify the details of a collaborative project, the programs are more successful. Others advocate for less restrictions on funding. Flexibility should only be instituted to the extent that it does not negatively impact program accountability.

Accountability Systems

Government entities also need to look at how they develop and use accountability systems. Involving nonprofits in the development of accountability measures during the *Courtship Phase* would improve outcome measurements and ensure their accurate

representation of success. The government excels at accountability. Helping nonprofits with the evaluation process during the *Leaving a Legacy Phase* would be extremely beneficial to the collaborative process. At the very least, governments should include funds for evaluation in the program budget. Creating more standardized reporting methods might also be helpful.

Recommendations for Future Research

As government increasingly looks to the nonprofit sector to provide public services, added attention should be paid to the nonprofit perspective of government-nonprofit collaboration. Nonprofits play an essential part in providing human services. This research was preliminary and, therefore, further research needs to be conducted to determine methods that will better utilize nonprofit resources and improve the overall collaborative process. Another topic that is worth further study is whether fear of losing funding or other negative repercussions mutes nonprofit advocacy. Are nonprofit leaders afraid to discuss issues because they worry losing future funding?

Scenario (continued) – Conclusion

The collaboration created to address Austin's rising teen pregnancy rate was extremely successful. Five years after the creation of the committee, the city experienced a dramatic decline in teen pregnancies. What did the City do right? First, Kim Walker encouraged communication and information sharing at the start of the partnership, which continued throughout their collaboration. Because of the open communication, partners were able to develop trust and positive relationships. In addition, the Mayor heavily prioritized community

partnerships and selected a skilled public administrator, Kim Walker, to lead the cause. Under Kim Walker's capable leadership, all partners had input in developing effective evaluation measures. Because the City recognized the importance of these four factors of successful collaboration (communication and information sharing, trust and positive relationships, leaders and authority, and accountability systems), City officials were able to create a tremendously effective government-nonprofit collaboration.

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APPENDIX A

-----Original Message-----

From: AVPR IRB

Sent: Friday, February 17, 2012 4:58 PM

To: lh1267@txstate.edu

Subject: Confirmation of Approval: IRB Application 2012P2034. DO NOT REPLY to this message. This email message is generated by the IRB online application program. Do not reply. The reviewers have determined that your IRB Application Number 2012P2034 is exempt from IRB review. The project is approved. If you have questions, please submit an IRB Inquiry form at: http://www.txstate.edu/research/irb/irb_inquiry.html

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APPENDIX B

Exploring Success Factors of Government-Nonprofit Collaborations from the Nonprofit Perspective

By: Lori Donley

Interviews Responses⁵

1. Please give a brief explanation of your role with this organization and describe any experience you have with government-nonprofit collaboration.

Responses were removed because of identifying information.

2. Please explain the nature of collaborations your organization typically has with government entities.

My organization gets about 60% of funding from the state and 40% through private donations. We often work with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Texas Health and Human Services Commission, and state licensing. The contracts we receive are renewed annually and sometimes there are changes in the compliance mandates.

I have been responsible for leading my organization through several large grant projects. In two projects, we received grants approximating nearly \$2,000,000.

We receive standard funding from the Department of Justice for prevention services.

We get a mixture of federal and state funding. Most of our funding comes from the government. We don't receive a lot of private donations. Sources of funding include Texas Health and Human Services Commission. They provide \$200,000 to run our main program.

My organization chooses not to take many, if any at all, government funds. Typically, the requirements are too burdensome. We do, however, work with many nonprofit organizations that collaborate with the government and I can share my perspective of their experiences.

⁵ Responses have been edited to remove identifying information.

We work with the City and various state agencies through grants and informal projects.

When I became Executive Director, we were receiving two very large federally-funding grants.

We receive a large grant from a state agency. It's about a \$200k grant/year. It has been a mutually beneficial relationship. In general, I've never thought about it being a collaborative relationship, but rather a grantee/grantor relationship.

We've received various grants. The main one I will discuss today, which was very successful, was federally-funded, but we partnered with a state agency to pursue the grant.

We recently worked on a \$90,000 grant with a state agency. It was tremendously successful. We also receive another grant from a different state agency that works well.

3. What role do **communication and information-sharing** play in the Courtship Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

In our successful collaborations, there is a lot of back and forth about processes and guidelines. We communicate frequently with our partner organizations to get our goals accomplished. We spend a lot of time educating government entities about our mission and programs.

We did not have any real communication during the Courtship Phase with our grantor, other than submitting the grant application. Essentially, the process is to apply for the grant, and then you find out if you receive it. There really isn't any participation from us, the nonprofit, other than submitting the application, before the grant is awarded. Time was a critical factor. It seemed like people managing grant didn't have time to communicate with us. More communication and information-sharing would have been helpful to the process. We did, however, have an opportunity to communicate and share information with other grant recipients. Our grantor set-up a conference and grant recipients attended and discussed their programs. Many of us had similar goals, so it was a great opportunity to determine what was working and what wasn't working.

There is very little communication and information sharing during the Courtship Phase. However, one of my best grant experiences was with the federal Department of

Education because it was designed specifically for community-based organizations. They provided resources and helped us through the process. There was a list-serve of all the people receiving the grant so we could communicate and share information and resources. This piece was integral to the success of our collaboration.

I serve on a residential childcare committee on which we discuss and develop outcome measures, so I have the opportunity to communicate my organization's perspective during the Courtship Phase.

We have an established relationship with the state entities from which we receive funding. However, the person responsible for managing the relationship on the government level occasionally changes. When this happens, the Courtship process somewhat takes effect, during which we engage in much communication and information-sharing.

We have had this grant for 10 years now, so there has been a great deal of communication and information-sharing throughout the years. One of my favorite aspects of this grant is the meeting of grant recipients. The conference gives us all a bigger perspective. The ability to refer to one another and share information is invaluable.

The state agency reached out to us to partner with them on the grant, so the process was very collaborative from the beginning. We worked together, sharing information and communicating throughout the collaborative project.

During the Courtship Phase, we were given the opportunity to provide input on the application process. The partners had weekly and monthly conference calls during which we felt our voice was heard.

4. What role do **mission and goal-setting** play in the Courtship Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

There really is no discussion of mission and goal-setting done between my organization and the government, with the exception of the stakeholder committee on which I serve.

We evaluate the grants to see which fit our mission, but we don't have an opportunity to participate in any discussion of the mission or goal-setting of the grant program.

If you're a good leader of a NPO, you're going to stay true to your organization's mission. We don't seek funding that doesn't align with our mission.

Staying true to the NPO's mission is vital. Ultimately, the BOD approves my decision to seek certain funds. They will not allow "fund chasing".

Governments should invest time and effort in collaboratively defining need, and then collaboratively designing program, and then coming up with agreed-upon outcomes in the beginning. This would be huge!

A shared mission is very important. Our mission produces environmental benefits, health benefits, and economic benefits, so most government entities they work with share their mission.

5. What role do **trust and positive relationships** play in the Getting Serious Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

The relationships we developed with our partners in this grant played a huge role in the success of the project. We were able to share information openly and learn from one another. We went through the learning process together, having different things to bring to the table. We felt empowered through the process.

The positive relationship we have with the state agency grantor is integral to our success. We have developed this relationship through communication and information-sharing over the past 10 years.

The relationship with the overseeing grant manager is very important. We really had a non-existent relationship with one of our big grant managers. Our program had great results, but the manager wasn't really interested in anything except the documentation she was required to get. The grant manager was so busy and over-burdened that she didn't have time to focus on our program grant.

With the one of our major grants, the people who facilitated it really got it. We didn't have too much interaction with the program manager, but we did get a lot of help from the people at the conference. Having trust and a positive relationship with the grant administrators is paramount to success. If the grant manager is committed to the mission, process works better.

Positive relationships are vital. It really comes down to the contract manager. The contract manager should educate potential recipients and recipients about the grant. We need to work on changing the culture of governments from being about contract service to a more block grant with desired outcomes.

We generally have positive relationships with the entities they work with because of our shared goals.

The personal relationships we developed through their collaborative projects with government agencies has given us credibility in our field of service provision. Other, larger government agencies and organizations listen to what we have to say because of our current partnerships.

We have a superb relationship with the licensing people. We've worked with them for a long time and have a mutual trust. The length of our relationship, especially with the case workers, matters a great deal. Unfortunately, there is high turnover.

6. What role do **leaders and authority** play in the Getting Serious Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

In most cases, our government partners have authority over decisions. The more often the administrators visit, the better.

The important work that's being done overseeing the grants we receive is not being done by the right people. The leadership role here is very important. People who are responsible for administering these grants need to be motivated by impact and progress, not power and authority.

I think the origination of funding is important. We prefer working with the federal government over state government because many times the state is just passing through federal dollars and it's just another level of bureaucracy. The contract manager role is integral. If the grant manager is committed to the mission, process works better. Political will is vital, too!

The contract manager should be knowledgeable about provisions of contract funding. This person interprets contract provisions and eligible funding. The attitude with which they approach the program makes a huge difference.

There is a distinct "us vs. them" culture and an attitude of disdain for the nonprofits among government contract managers. Change that! Governments should hire seasoned nonprofit professionals to administer these grant programs. They understand how NPO's work.

I think the program manager who administrates the grant plays a huge part in how successful the collaboration is. If the program manager has been at the agency for a long time (a lifer), they tend to be very hard to work with. Need someone who can think outside the box and be committed to the mission.

The positive tone of our partnership arose from the agency's culture. A former leader had prioritized the importance of community partnerships, so that filtered down through the ranks.

A positive attitude among the leaders of a collaboration is vital. Leaders should be open to dialogue and have a positive mind-set about working with community partners. There needs to be some level of humility among leaders. They should recognize that each project is a learning opportunity and a chance to improve things.

7. What role does **flexibility** play in the Commitment Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

There needs to be more flexibility, especially in accountability measures. The Texas Department of Health and Human Services empowered their contract managers with more flexibility. They allowed recipients to get creative in managing their programs and funds. Block grants are good, and allow more flexibility. This type of funding gives NPO's the freedom to use dollars effectively. Provide solutions that are flexible.

Being able to communicate and go back and forth with the different government entities they work with has been hugely helpful in their success. The flexibility they have with their programs is integral.

We have stopped seeking government funding because it's too much work and not much ROI. With corporate grants, we have much more flexibility. The business gives us a goal to accomplish and then we use the money however we think best to produce the desired results.

More flexibility in grants would be helpful. We need more money for equipment, but can't get it with the grant. Block grants are nice, the more flexibility the better.

The administrator of the grant changed the entire research design in order to meet the needs of grantees. While there was a program design and outcome measures set, our grantor was willing to make changes.

I felt that our partnership was truly collaborative. They allowed us to grow with the project.

8. What role do **clear guidelines and clear funding procedures** play in the Commitment Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

Clarity is important.

Clear funding procedures are vital. Most grants require monthly reimbursement reports. I like this because it keeps us accountable.

Having a transparent process with clear, standardized guidelines for the grant process and reporting process would take away a lot of the wasted administrative costs nonprofits have to spend. Now, they have to use lots of resources to prepare grants and meet the reporting requirements.

9. What role do **accountability systems** play in the Leaving a Legacy Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

The contacts we receive have outcome measures that monitor certain outcome measures. I have some say in these outcome measures because of my participation on a stakeholder committee that develops them.

On rare and wonderful occasions, I have had the opportunity to be involved in the development of outcome measures. For the most part, everything is quantitative, and it's difficult to show the full impact of our services quantitatively.

Accountability has increased tremendously over the past few years. We struggle with meeting these requirements. Success is very difficult to measure. Lots of our successes are anecdotal and cannot be quantified. Occasionally we have a say in the outcome measures, but it's rare. Outcome measures are not always representative of success.

Helping NPO's with program evaluation would be extremely helpful. Governments expect NPO's to conduct sophisticated data collection and analysis, but they don't provide the resources to help them accomplish that. Push the government to pay for the robust program evaluation.

Being able to demonstrate results is extremely important. We build evaluation into their budget, and if they can't afford to evaluate their program, it's not worth doing. That's how much we prioritize the accountability portion. However, we use a lot of

resources to keep up with the reporting requirements. A systemized process would be helpful for reporting.

I think the government should have to be more transparent with their funding. Figure how much is spent on overhead and how much is actually spent on programming.

Outcome measures are difficult for us because the services we provide are anonymous. We've done follow-up surveys, but tracking success of the services we provide is generally a thorn in our side. However, I think they are helpful and important.

Working with government agencies has helped us improve financial accountability. There are many more hoops to jump through, however.

Program evaluation was factored into our initial budget. We had an independent evaluator who spoke with us at least monthly, and was a huge resource. In general, the strict accountability and bureaucratic red tape often makes working with government agencies a challenge. Administrative stuff can cause a tremendous strain on their infrastructure. Governments don't give enough money to administer the programs.

10. What role does the ability to give **honest feedback** play in the Leaving a Legacy Phase of a government-nonprofit collaboration?

Imbalance of power doesn't weigh in favor of honesty. There were no mechanisms for providing honest feedback without the fear of repercussions.

I have never had an opportunity where I felt comfortable providing honest feedback to the government about a grant program without fearing negative repercussions. The ability to do that would be invaluable.

Only one grant program gives us the opportunity to provide feedback and I feel comfortable that the feedback won't hurt us. Coalitions are helpful to advocate on behalf of small rural organizations, especially.

I feel completely comfortable providing honest feedback and this is an important aspect of our program's success.

11. Any final thoughts?

Everything is dictated on ideals without the financial resources to support them. Government workers are often under-trained and unfamiliar with the programs they are administering. The whole process is cumbersome and bureaucratic.

I would like to see more of willingness on the government's part to understand the local culture of the organization they are working with.

The biggest issue that we face is probably a congressional one. Limitations put on funding. For example, limits on salary. Often, our greatest asset is their staff, and we can't get good staff if they can't pay a competitive salary. Also, matching requirements are especially difficult for small rural organizations to meet. So is the minimum amount. We often can't administer a huge grant. We need smaller grants so we can meet all the requirements and administer the services to our community.

Having support from the community, and other organizations has helped them be especially successful. The government entities want to work with us because of our reputation, and because the community advocates for our mission. The bureaucracy we have to deal with when working with government entities is an ongoing challenge.

If the government could get in a more collaborative partnership mindset – using terms like grant instead of contract. The bureaucracy, red tape, and duplicative paperwork is prohibitive. I believe governments should invest in NPO capacity building – helping us uncover best practices. Governments need to change their views of their roles in collaborating with nonprofits. They tend to view the relationship as a contractual one instead of a partnership.

The relationships we formed from working with the government has given us a voice with policy-makers. We now have more opportunities to inform policy-makers about the ramifications of their decisions. Collaboration allows government to take advantage of community organizations ability to be innovative and creative in a way that agencies can't be.

We would prefer to be treated as partners, and not just contractors paid for a service. However, either way, we will work to make their partners look good, and to get good results.

The process is extremely cumbersome and bureaucratic. There is too much paperwork and the nonprofits have to jump through so many hoops, it takes away from time they

could be using to treat the children. Often government employees are unfamiliar with the services, programs, and are untrained. Makes things difficult.

So much money is spent on administration, rather than programming. More money should go to the organization, and less should be spent on administering at the government level.