

The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory Interpretation Guide

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Background and Purpose

- The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (Wilder Inventory) was developed by the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation
- Consists of 20 factors gleaned from empirical studies of what influences successful collaborations formed by nonprofit organizations, government agencies and other organizations
- Designed to be a tool for collaborative groups
- Periodically and repeatedly use to help identify strengths and weaknesses with respect to the 20 factors that influence collaborative success.

How the Wilder Inventory Results can be Used

- For planning organizational development
- Monitor relationship enhancement among partners
- Identify areas to celebrate where the collaboration excels and focus on areas that could be improved
- Discuss and solicit input from each member on how to improve the collaboration
- Create solutions to improve collaboration processes and outcomes
- Recognize everyone's contributions to a common mission

Understanding Collaboration

- **Collaboration** occurs in mutually beneficial and well-defined relationships entered into by two or more individuals, and/or individuals representing organizations, to achieve common or shared goals.
 - The relationship includes a commitment to mutually beneficial goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards.
- **Cooperation** is characterized by activity that occurs due to a mutually defined mission, structure or planning effort

- *Coordination* is characterized by more formal relationships and understanding of compatible missions
- *Collaboration* denotes more durable and pervasive relationships
 - Brings previously separated partners or organizations into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission
 - Requires comprehensive planning and well-defined communication channels operating on many levels
 - Authority is determined by the collaborative structure
 - Risk is much greater because each partner contributes its own resources and reputation
 - Resources are pooled or jointly secured, and the products are shared

Measurement

- 20 factors are measured by 40 items grouped into six categories
 - Environment, Membership Characteristics, Process and Structure, Communication, Purpose, and Resources
- Responses are measured on a 5-point scale from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’
 - Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral/No Opinion, Agree, Strongly Agree

Six Categories of 20 Collaboration Success Factors Assessed by 40 Items

Category 1: Environment

1. History of collaboration or cooperation in the community: Items #1 & #2
 - Offers the potential partners an understanding of the roles and expectations required in collaboration and enables them to trust the process
2. Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community: Items #3 & #4
 - Perceived as reliable and competent, at least as related to the goals and activities it intends to accomplish
3. Favorable political and social climate: Items #5 & #6
 - Political leaders, persons who control resources, and the general public supports (or at least do not oppose) the mission of the collaborative group

Category 2: Membership characteristics

4. Mutual respect, understanding and trust: Items #7 & #8
 - Partners share an understanding and respect for each other and their respective organizations including how they operate, their cultural norms and values, their limitations, and their expectations

5. Appropriate cross section of members: Items #9 & #10
 - To the extent needed, the partners include representatives from each segment of the community who will be affected by the collaborative's activities
6. Members see collaboration as in their best interest: Item #11
 - Partners believe that they will benefit from involvement and that the benefits of membership will offset costs such as loss of autonomy and turf
7. Ability to compromise: Item #12
 - Partners can compromise, since many of the decisions within a collaborative effort cannot possibly fit the preferences of every member perfectly

Category 3: Process and Structure

8. Members share a stake in both process and outcome: Items #13, #14 & #15
 - Partners feel "ownership" of both the way the group works and the results or products of its work
9. Multiple layers of participation: Items #16 & #17
 - Upper management, middle management and operations levels within each partner have at least some representation and ongoing involvement in the collaborative initiative
10. Flexibility: Items #18 & #19
 - The collaborative group remains open to varied ways of organizing itself and accomplishing its work
11. Development of clear roles and policy guidelines: Items #20 & #21
 - Partners clearly understand their roles, rights and responsibilities, and they understand how to carry out those responsibilities
12. Adaptability: Items #22 & #23
 - The collaborative group has the ability to sustain itself in the mist of major changes, even if it needs to change some major goals, members, etc., to deal with changing conditions
13. Appropriate pace of development: Items #24 & #25
 - The structure, resources and activities of the collaborative group change over time to meet the needs of the group without overwhelming its capacity, at each point throughout the initiative

Category 4: Communication

14. Open and frequent communication: Items #26, #27 & #28
 - Partners interact often, update one another, discuss issues openly, and convey all necessary information to one another and to people outside the group
15. Establish informal relationships and communication links: Items #29 & #30
 - In addition to formal communication channels, partners establish personal connections, producing a better, more informed and cohesive group working on a common project

Category 5: Purpose

16. Concrete, attainable goals and objectives: Items #31, #32 & #33
 - Goals and objectives of the collaborative group are clear to all partners, and can realistically be attained
17. Shared vision: Items #34, & #35
 - Partners have the same vision, with a clearly agreed-upon mission, objectives and strategy.
 - The shared vision may exist at the outset of collaboration, or the partners may develop a vision as they work together
18. Unique purpose: Items #36 & #37
 - The mission and goals, or approach, of the collaborative group differ, at least in part, from the mission and goals or approach, of the member organizations or partners

Category 6: Resources

19. Sufficient funds, staff, materials and time: Items #38 & #39
 - The collaborative group has an adequate, consistent financial base, along with the staff and materials needed to support its operations
 - It allows sufficient time to achieve its goals and includes time to nurture the collaboration
20. Skilled leadership: Item #40
 - The individual who provides leadership for the collaborative group has organizing and interpersonal skills, and carries out the role with fairness
 - Because of these characteristics (and others), the leader is granted respect or “legitimacy” by the partners.

Scoring

- The Wilder Inventory does not have normative standards that allow definitive interpretations of numerical scores.
- Instead, scores can be used as a basis for constructive discussion and planning for your collaborative.
- When reviewing the average score for each factor, generally:
 - **4.0 or higher**
 - ✓ Indicates a strength and probably does not need special attention at this time
 - ✓ Note: Just because you have high scores now doesn't mean you will have high scores later. Ongoing effort is required to maintain collaboration.
 - **3.0 to 3.9**
 - ✓ This factor's quality is borderline and may require attention
 - ✓ Should be discussed by the group to see if these factors deserve attention

- **2.9 or lower**
 - ✓ Indicates a concern and should be addressed
 - ✓ Develop a plan to remedy any concerns that exist
- **General advice**
 - If most scores are 4.0 or above and a few are between 3.0 and 3.9, you can probably be confident that your collaboration has no major shortcomings that warrant the group's immediate attention.
 - If most of your group's scores fall in the middle (3.0 to 3.9), you may need to take steps now to improve your standing on several factors.
 - Scores falling below 3.0 should be discussed by the group as soon as possible. Develop a plan to remedy whatever concern(s) exist if you wish to proceed with collaboration.
 - However, do not be lulled into complacency by good scores. The collaboration factors require ongoing maintenance.
 - ❖ For example, good communication at the outset of an initiative does not mean that it will continue unless the collaborating partners make efforts to keep up such communications.
 - The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory is periodically re-administered as a vital component of continuous quality and outcome improvement monitoring.

Considerations When Reviewing Your Results

- 1) **What factor strengths and weaknesses of the collaborative group influence collaborative success?**
 - Scores can serve as a relative indicator of your readiness to collaborate.
 - Your three or four highest-rated factors for your organization, and for the collaborative partner group as a whole, likely represent strengths that your group can draw on to sustain collaboration, even in the face of major challenges.
 - Similarly, three or four lowest-rated factors may represent problem areas that your organization and collaborative group should take steps to address.
- 2) **Do representatives from all organizations in the collaborative group tend to rate the factors the same way? If not, what are the implications?**
 - Determine if there are variations in the factor scores rated by each partner organization. If there are variations, why do these variations exist?
 - Sometimes, an organization that sees things differently can provide valuable insight to the rest of the group. The representatives from that organization can lead the group to a very helpful new understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.
 - For example, an organization that gives ratings much higher or lower than other organizations on "Skilled leadership" may have an important perspective on the group's leader that other organizations ought to understand, for example, her ability to manage projects, her fairness or honesty, her experience in similar situations, etc.

- Other times, an organization that sees the factors very differently from its partners may be having trouble participating or may be “out of the loop” for important communications and does not understand what is going on.
 - If this is the case, the group may use this discovery as an opportunity to take corrective action before serious problems develop.

3) For low-rated factors, are particular items problematic?

- For example, your group may have a low-average score for “Sufficient funds, staff, materials and time” because the group does not appear to have adequate funds (low score for item 38), in spite of having enough personnel (good score for item 39).
- When individual items are problematic, it is more efficient and effective to remedy the specific deficiencies than to attempt to improve your standing on the general factor.

4) How strong are your scores overall?

- Your Wilder scores are *not* an absolute reflection of your group’s ability to collaborate effectively. We cannot tell you how high your scores must be on each factor to ensure success, nor can we tell you that scores below a certain level inevitably lead to failure.
- However, your scores can be used as a basis for commonsense judgments about how to proceed with your collaboration.
- Do not be lulled into complacency by good scores. The collaboration factors require ongoing maintenance.
 - ❖ For example, good communication at the outset of an initiative does not mean that it will continue unless the collaborating partners make efforts to keep up such communications.
- The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory is periodically re-administered as a vital component of continuous quality and outcome improvement monitoring.

The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory

Name of Collaboration Project

Date

Statements about Your Collaborative Group:

Factor	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral, No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
History of collaboration or cooperation in the community	1. Agencies in our community have a history of working together	1	2	3	4	5
	2. Trying to solve problems through collaboration has been common in this community. It's been done a lot before.	1	2	3	4	5
Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community	3. Leaders in this community who are not part of our collaborative group seem hopeful about what we can accomplish.	1	2	3	4	5
	4. Others (in this community) who are not a part of this collaboration would generally agree that the organizations involved in this collaborative project are the "right" organizations to make this work.	1	2	3	4	5
Favorable political and social climate	5. The political and social climate seems to be "right" for starting a collaborative project like this one.	1	2	3	4	5
	6. The time is right for this collaborative project.	1	2	3	4	5
Mutual respect, understanding, and trust	7. People involved in our collaboration always trust one another.	1	2	3	4	5
	8. I have a lot of respect for the other people involved in this collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
Appropriate cross section of members	9. The people involved in our collaboration represent a cross section of those who have a stake in what we are trying to accomplish.	1	2	3	4	5
	10. All the organizations that we need to be members of this collaborative group have become members of the group.	1	2	3	4	5
Members see collaboration as in their self-interest	11. My organization will benefit from being involved in this collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to compromise	12. People involved in our collaboration are willing to compromise on important aspects of our project.	1	2	3	4	5
Members share a stake in both process and outcome	13. The organizations that belong to our collaborative group invest the right amount of time in our collaborative efforts.	1	2	3	4	5

Factor	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral, No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
	14. Everyone who is a member of our collaborative group wants this project to succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
	15. The level of commitment among the collaboration participants is high.	1	2	3	4	5
Multiple layers of participation	16. When the collaborative group makes major decisions, there is always enough time for members to take information back to their organizations to confer with colleagues about what the decision should be.	1	2	3	4	5
	17. Each of the people who participate in decisions in this collaborative group can speak for the entire organization they represent, not just a part.	1	2	3	4	5
Flexibility	18. There is a lot of flexibility when decisions are made; people are open to discussing different options.	1	2	3	4	5
	19. People in this collaborative group are open to different approaches to how we can do our work. They are willing to consider different ways of working.	1	2	3	4	5
Development of clear roles and policy guidelines	20. People in this collaborative group have a clear sense of their roles and responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
	21. There is a clear process for making decisions among the partners in this collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
Adaptability	22. This collaboration is able to adapt to changing conditions, such as fewer funds than expected, changing political climate, or change in leadership.	1	2	3	4	5
	23. This group has the ability to survive even if it had to make major changes in its plans or add some new members in order to reach its goals.	1	2	3	4	5
Appropriate pace of development	24. This collaborative group has tried to take on the right amount of work at the right pace.	1	2	3	4	5
	25. We are currently able to keep up with the work necessary to coordinate all the people, organizations, and activities related to this collaborative project.	1	2	3	4	5
Open and frequent communication	26. People in this collaboration communicate openly with one another.	1	2	3	4	5

Factor	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral, No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
	27. I am informed as often as I should be about what goes on in the collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
	28. The people who lead this collaborative group communicate well with the members.	1	2	3	4	5
Established informal relationships and communication links	29. Communication among the people in this collaborative group happens both at formal meetings and in informal ways.	1	2	3	4	5
	30. I personally have informal conversations about the project with others who are involved in this collaborative group.	1	2	3	4	5
Concrete, attainable goals and objectives	31. I have a clear understanding of what our collaboration is trying to accomplish.	1	2	3	4	5
	32. People in our collaborative group know and understand our goals.	1	2	3	4	5
	33. People in our collaborative group have established reasonable goals.	1	2	3	4	5
Shared vision	34. The people in this collaborative group are dedicated to the idea that we can make this project work.	1	2	3	4	5
	35. My ideas about what we want to accomplish with this collaboration seem to be the same as the ideas of others.	1	2	3	4	5
Unique purpose	36. What we are trying to accomplish with our collaborative project would be difficult for any single organization to accomplish by itself.	1	2	3	4	5
	37. No other organization in the community is trying to do exactly what we are trying to do.	1	2	3	4	5
Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time	38. Our collaborative group had adequate funds to do what it wants to accomplish.	1	2	3	4	5
	39. Our collaborative group has adequate "people power" to do what it wants to accomplish.	1	2	3	4	5
Skilled leadership	40. The people in leadership positions for this collaboration have good skills for working with other people and organizations.	1	2	3	4	5