

Nonprofit Communications Collaboration Values and Practices

FINDINGS BRIEF No.1

In the last few years, much discussion has focused on the benefits of working with others, but how much collaboration was actually happening?

This brief examines nonprofits' level of coordination and collaboration on communications efforts. The findings and implications discussed here are based on results from a summer 2008 online survey of 529 nonprofit professionals.

The survey conducted by Cause Communications and Princeton Survey Research Associates International examined how nonprofits position communications within their organizations and how they use specific communications practices. Survey respondents came from nonprofits with diverse missions (e.g., service providers, educators, advocates) and areas of focus (e.g., education, health care, the environment). The sample was representative of the sector as a whole with a significant portion being small (25 employees or less) and had been in operation for more than 10 years.

KEY FINDINGS

Organizations value collaboration

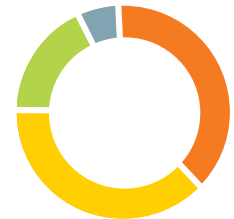
Collaboration with other organizations is a high priority for most nonprofits. Eighty-eight percent say networking or collaborating with peer organizations is important to the successful achievement of their organization's goals, including more than half (54%) that say it is very important. Looking specifically at communications, 72% of professionals report that it is important for their organization to work in partnership with other nonprofits on communications.

Smaller and newer nonprofit organizations also give greater importance to collaboration with other nonprofits. More than one-third (38%) of professionals at smaller nonprofits (those with 100

employees or less) consider collaboration with peers on communications very important, as compared with one quarter (24%) of nonprofits with more than 100 employees.

How Important to Partner With Other Nonprofits on Communications

- 35% very important
- 37% somewhat important
- 23% not too important
- 5% not at all important



Nonprofits regularly collaborate

Most nonprofits partner with their peer organizations and exchange information and lessons regularly. Three-quarters (76%) say they collaborate with other nonprofits on communications at least several times a year or do so on an ongoing basis.

Advocacy groups are more likely to collaborate than other nonprofits. Half (51%) of professionals from advocacy-driven nonprofits say partnering with other nonprofits on communications is very important, compared with just 28% of service providers and 27% of education organizations.

How Often You Collaborate or Partner



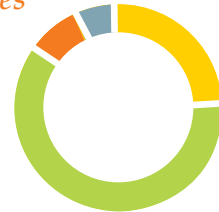


Collaboration internally is happening

A sign that there is a growing appreciation for the impact of coordinated messaging for external audiences and that communications is becoming more integrated within organizations is the level of internal coordination seen in the survey responses. Close to eighty-eight percent of communications professionals responded that they were involved with functions within their own organization such as IT and fundraising that involved reaching outside audiences.

How Involved is Communications Staff With Other Functions that Reach Outside Audiences

- 60% very involved
- 29% somewhat involved
- 6% not too involved
- 3% not at all involved



Coordination cuts through the silos

Collaboration across sectors – specifically with private corporations and government – is also practiced within some frequency throughout the field, though it is less common than collaboration among peer organizations. Half (49%) of the

professionals surveyed report that their organization has partnered with a private corporation and just less than half (46%) report working with a branch of government on a communications effort.

Has Partnered with a Private Corporation

- 50% yes
- 49% no
- 1% no answer



Has Ever Partnered with Government

- 46% yes
- 53% no
- 1% no answer



Bigger budgets collaborate more with corporate sector

Unlike collaboration within the nonprofit sector, where smaller and newer nonprofits place a higher priority, those with larger budgets are more likely to work with corporations or government on communications. Specifically, 70 percent of nonprofits with annual budgets of over \$10 million report collaborating with private corporations, and 66 percent report collaborating with government

(see Table 7). These statistics may result in part from funding relationships with corporations and government agencies, which have increased substantially in recent years.

Interestingly, when looking according to the size of organizations, it is the moderately sized organizations of 26-100 employees that are the most likely to have collaborated with the public and private sectors (see Table 8).



Table 7: Collaboration Efforts with Other Sectors by Annual Budget

	Annual Budget			
	Total	Less than \$500K	\$500K - \$10 Million	More than \$10 Million
Collaborated with a Corporation	50%	32%	52%	70%
Collaborated with Government	46%	30%	49%	66%

Table 8: Collaboration Efforts with Other Sectors by Organization Size

	Number of Employees			
	Total	1-25	26-100	More than 100
Collaborated with a Corporation	50%	43%	66%	59%
Collaborated with Government	46%	38%	67%	55%

Planning leads to more cross-sector collaboration

Having an up-to-date strategic plan that includes communications emerged as an indicator of the level of collaboration with other sectors. Nonprofits that have strategic plans that include communications partner with corporations more than organizations where communications is not part of their plan, or where there is no plan at all (55% vs. 44%). Likewise, those that have communications as a part their organization's overall plans are more likely to partner with government than others (50% vs. 41%).

Highly collaborative nonprofits share lessons and information more

Through our analysis, certain organizations were identified as highly collaborative: those that state it is very important to collaborate with other

nonprofits, and those that work with other nonprofits at least several times a year and partner with private corporations or government.

The survey reveals that these highly collaborative organizations share the lessons of their work more than others. Eighty-seven percent of those at highly collaborative organizations say they often or sometimes share information with their peers, versus 63 percent of their less networked colleagues. Further, twice as many highly collaborative nonprofits (44%) exchange information and lessons of their work often; just one in five (20%) professionals at less collaborative organizations report this frequent flow of information.



Often or Sometimes Share the Lessons



Exchange Information and Lessons of Their Work Often



Implications

Overall, the survey results confirm a longstanding assumption about nonprofit communications collaboration.

Nonprofits of all sizes and services recognize the value in learning and sharing from others to make their organizations more effective and efficient. Clearly, there is also recognition that this type of collaboration takes time and effort.

The findings also indicate there is still room for growth in collaboration with other sectors. We are exploring additional research to identify what value these types of collaborations add and when they make sense to pursue.

In this economic climate, where organizations are seeking maximum efficiency and effectiveness, Cause Communications has created tools to help nonprofits keep their communications efforts healthy as they collaborate within or across sectors.

These tools are designed to help with the planning and implementation process for the collaborations the survey described. It is our intention that they will assist collaboration efforts achieve greater results and effectiveness.



Network Health Scorecard was developed to help navigate collaboration coordination and diagnose strengths as well as areas for growth. The scorecard allows network members to track and assess progress on their network's coordination, communications, governance and adaptation. Created in partnership with Center for Network Impact.



Online Collaboration Tools Matrix is an easy-reference sheet for networks that want to harness the power of e-communications but seek guidance in selecting the most appropriate tools. Demystifying and decoding some of the "high-tech" terms, the matrix provides a high-level look at the strengths and weaknesses of the communications tools most often heard today – wikis, blogs, social media, and Web conferences. Created in partnership with Idealware.org.