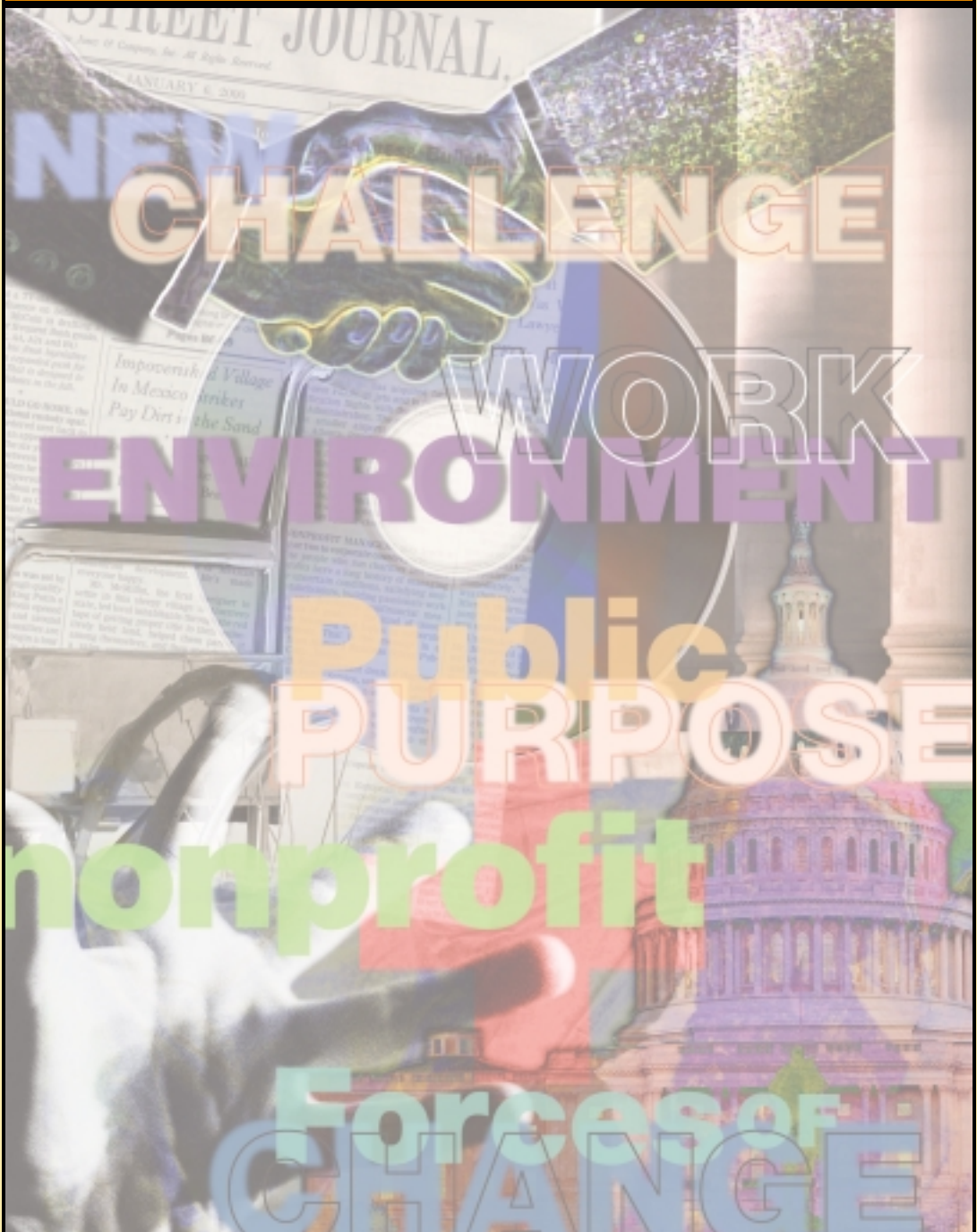


Changing Roles, Changing Relationships:

**The New Challenge for
Business, Nonprofit Organizations,
and Government**



Changing Roles, Changing Relationships:

The New Challenge for Business, Nonprofit Organizations, and Government

A THREE SECTOR
COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF:
The Conference Board
Council on Foundations
INDEPENDENT SECTOR
National Academy of Public
Administration
National Alliance of Business
National Governors' Association

FOREWORD

Institutions in all sectors are confronting powerful social, economic, technological, and philosophical changes that challenge their core missions and relationships with one another. Among these trends, the renewed interest in promoting a civil society has focused the attention of our organizations on the importance of the relationships among us. Reconsidering our roles in a society in which we share a strengthened civic responsibility provides impetus for dialogue among the sectors.

Stimulated by these trends, our organizations, representative of the business, government, and nonprofit sectors, joined together to determine how we might rise to the challenge of change. Our purpose was to help institutions in all three sectors work together more effectively to accomplish public purposes common to all of them and to society as a whole. We believed we could best serve this purpose by better understanding the forces confronting all three sectors, by providing a context for leaders to better orient themselves in relation to one another, and by promoting a dialogue that will improve the environment for collaboration and lead to practical results.

We view this discussion paper as a modest first step toward that end. It is a distillation of ideas we have developed over a year of meeting with one another. Our initial intent in meeting was to foster a broader collaboration of leaders in all three sectors. That is still our intention. But we felt it would be useful to share what we have learned in these preliminary conversations.

We hope this first step will encourage others to join the conversation. Our deliberations to date have disabused us of some of the prejudices each of us brought to the table, especially regarding how easy it will be to promote cross-sector collaborations. We are under no illusions about the difficulty of the task. By the same token, our efforts to date have reinforced our belief that such collaboration is important to the health of individual institutions in each sector and essential to the overall health of our society. So, we continue to believe this is an effort worth pursuing.

A preliminary draft of this discussion paper was shared with participants in INDEPENDENT SECTOR's national conference in Los Angeles in October 1999, and we are grateful for the constructive contributions we received at that time. We also want to acknowledge others in our respective organizations for their participation in producing this discussion paper, including David Vidal of The Conference Board; Beth Brown and Christopher Harris of the Council on Foundations; Barbara Finberg, Robert Rogers, Sandra Trice Gray and Peter Shiras of INDEPENDENT SECTOR; Nancy Tate and Benedette Stroup of the National Academy of Public Administration; Jane Couch of the National Alliance of Business; and Lynn McNair of the National Governors' Association. Thanks also to Vartan Gregorian, President of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, for his guidance in shaping our own collaboration to produce this discussion paper.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sea changes in technology, communications, the global economy, and the power and role of government are causing self-assessments within the business, nonprofit, and government sectors. The roles of the sectors are changing, and the relationships among them are also changing.

Confronting the new environment. Computer and information technology have collapsed time and distance between individuals and institutions all over the world. Disparities between groups are being reduced, although increases in real wages may flow mostly to the highly skilled and increase income gaps. Technology in turn has fueled an information-based economy. International trade is expanding and accelerating exponentially. Technological and economic forces have combined to intensify globalization. Access to global networks—for information, intergovernmental relations, and scientific research—has become instantaneous and rarely constrained by political boundaries. Regional and local concerns are drawing increased attention. Population growth and rural-to-urban migration are putting immense pressure on governments and nonprofit organizations to provide essential services.

Evolving roles and responsibilities. Businesses now have more accurate and timely consumer information and lower distribution and transaction costs. The Internet intensifies competition and forces companies to adapt quickly to market shifts. Privatization of government and nonprofit functions are forcing nonprofits into new fund-raising strategies at a time when there is more demand for their services. For government, public demands for efficiency, lower taxes, and less regulation are coupled with a gradual retrenchment from areas of historical social involvement.

Businesses have been seeking new markets in social arenas once thought the exclusive purview of government and nonprofit organizations. More global companies are turning to nonprofit networks as partners to address social questions affecting their business and to influence their reputation in the marketplace. Nonprofits have been the beneficiaries of government privatization and contracting initiatives, but they have also faced growing competition from the for-profit sector. Forward-looking government officials are more inclined to share power and to work as collaborators to develop and implement strategies.

Achieving public purposes. The contributions of the three sectors to public purposes have been changing. Businesses and nonprofit organizations are managing hospitals, prisons, and public schools. All three sectors have a keen interest in human investment that will yield productive workers and responsible citizens. This requires investing in child care, education, health care, and jobs. But who is responsible for which pieces of the human investment mosaic? And what are we going to do about the biggest gap in income in history between the haves and the have nots?

Collaboration as an option. For organizations considering collaboration as a response to an environment of rapid change, we identify several factors that, in our experience, have helped to make collaborations successful: (1) a common goal; (2) a convener; (3) a structure to organize and manage the core talents of each participant; (4) awareness of the geographical dimension: national, state, and local institutions working on global, regional, or neighborhood problems; (5) effective communication; (6) periodic assessment for establishing accountability and generating information; and (7) trust and confidence.

Next steps. This abstract and the full discussion paper were developed by The Conference Board, the Council on Foundations, INDEPENDENT SECTOR, the National Academy of Public Administration, the National Alliance of Business, and the National Governors' Association. Our goal is a forward-looking statement that describes the new environment and the opportunities for collaboration in the public interest. We would welcome your comments.



**CHANGING ROLES, CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS:
THE NEW CHALLENGE FOR BUSINESS, NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATIONS, AND GOVERNMENT**

Sea changes in technology, communications, the global economy, and the power and role of government are causing self-assessments within the business, nonprofit, and government sectors. The roles of these three sectors are changing, and, as a result, the relationships among them are also changing.

This discussion paper is a point of departure, an attempt to draw attention to the problems posed by rapid change and to explore some key issues: the changing work environment, public purposes that need attention, and new opportunities for each sector. We hope to promote a growing dialogue about how the important institutions of our society can work together better for the benefit of all. The six national organizations that generated this discussion paper, representing members in the various sectors, are interested in advancing collaboration. We believe we have a responsibility not only to foster collaborations among the sectors at the national level, but also to help our members do so at the various levels on which they function.

Most leaders are not interested in collaboration for its own sake but in how collaboration can improve the performance of their organizations. Each sector has different goals and performance measures. Collaboration

must be profitable to business, either directly or indirectly by strengthening the communities, markets, consumers, or suppliers on which business depends. Collaboration must address the needs of constituents served by nonprofits, and directly or indirectly cover the nonprofits' costs of operation. For government, collaboration must satisfy the definition of the public interest, respect democratic values, and justify the expenditure of tax money.

We do not present this discussion paper as a "how to" manual on collaboration among the three sectors. We are still in the early learning stages ourselves. While all of our organizations have engaged in various forms of collaborations and alliances involving organizations from all three sectors, we also believe that many of the old assumptions are no longer valid. Our sense is that there is a greater need for such collaborations, and greater opportunity to employ them to the benefit of all.



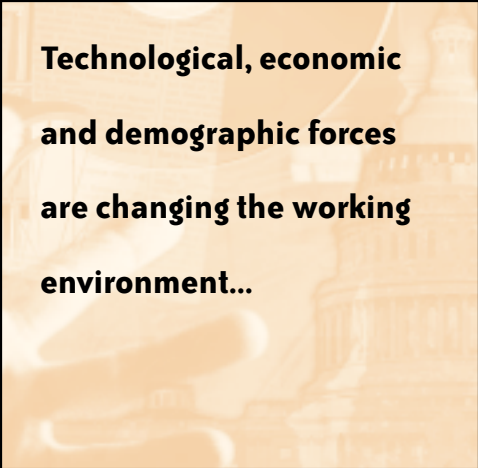
**CONFRONTING THE
NEW ENVIRONMENT**

Technological, economic, and demographic forces are changing the working environment of businesses, nonprofits, and government.

Computer and information technology have collapsed time and distance between individuals and institutions all over the world. Technology, more than ever before, is an enabler for individuals and businesses by providing access and, in most cases, reducing disparities. Gains in productivity, however, could increase income disparities. With low inflation rates, real wages could grow 1-2 percent per year, but mainly for highly skilled and highly educated workers. People without marketable skills may become worse off.

Technology in turn has fueled an *information-based economy*. Unlike the agricultural and industrial eras in which essential resources, land or factories, were held exclusively by the “owners,” today’s economy is based on information that is much more accessible to more people.

International trade is expanding and accelerating exponentially, and nations are becoming more closely connected through trade. One consequence is that simmering issues, such as working conditions in developing countries and environmental protection, have come to a boil. Indeed, they boiled over on the streets of Seattle outside the World Trade Organization conference.



**Technological, economic
and demographic forces
are changing the working
environment...**

Technological and economic forces have combined to intensify *globalization*. Access to global networks—for information, intergovernmental relations, and scientific research—has become instantaneous and rarely constrained by political boundaries. Indeed, the blurring of national boundaries challenges the very foundations of the nation-state and the concept of national sovereignty. Large corporations are merging across national boundaries. People and groups from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds are interacting and demanding a voice and a vote on issues that affect them. Power is consequently more diffuse.

These global technological economic forces are also permitting—and in some cases requiring—increased attention to *regional and local concerns*. For example, individuals and businesses in some isolated, rural, and deprived areas are competing in the global marketplace by selling products over the Internet, enabling residents in these areas to improve their lives.

Metropolitan areas in the United States and abroad are more conscious of their common roots and interests as single, regional communities and economies.

Finally, population growth and rural-to-urban migration are putting immense pressure on governments and nonprofit organizations to provide essential services.






**EVOLVING ROLES
AND RELATIONSHIPS**

As a result of these forces organizations have changed the way they do business. Roles and responsibilities of the three sectors have begun to overlap, increasing competition and the opportunities for collaboration.

Businesses have more accurate and timely consumer information and lower distribution and transaction costs. The Internet is an efficient and inexpensive distribution channel, reducing the importance of some traditional distribution networks. Thus, the Internet intensifies competition and forces companies to adapt quickly to market shifts.

With consumer power in the hands of virtually anyone with a laptop, business is becoming increasingly sensitized to societal interests and needs that go beyond the basic commercial product and reach into the relationship of business with the customer and with society. As a result, more global companies are turning to nonprofit networks as partners to address social questions affecting their business and to enhance their reputation in the marketplace.

Thinking and practice regarding the engagement of business with the other sectors have evolved over several decades. In the 1960s, many corporations focused on corporate social responsibility, with an emphasis on volunteer and philanthropic activities. In the 1970s, some corporations began to view a more aggressive corporate public involvement as integral to their business interests. This in turn led to growing interest in public-private partnerships in the 1980s—principally between business and government—to pursue projects that combined private profit



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...Government, one of several institutions involved in the governance process.

with public interest. In the 1990s businesses have been seeking new markets in social arenas once thought the exclusive purview of government and nonprofit organizations. Such pursuits often require a high degree of business innovation and collaboration among a wider array of actors in government and the nonprofit sector.

The nonprofit sector must meet rising public expectations of commitment to social needs and advocacy for people, causes and the common good. Privatization of government and nonprofit functions are forcing nonprofits into new fund raising strategies at a time when there is more demand for services. Nonprofits are engaging in for-profit initiatives, with

increasing entrepreneurship and attention to branding, and they are more inclined to seek strategic alliances with other nonprofits, as well as with business and government.

Nonprofits have been the beneficiaries of government privatization and contracting initiatives. But they have also faced growing competition from the business sector as business experiments with ways to provide traditionally nonprofit services at a profit. As a result nonprofits are paying closer attention to how they structure and manage their international operations and how they position themselves strategically within the broader social environment and economic marketplace.

Increasingly nonprofits are joining together at the international level to press their agenda, whether it be on environmental standards, workplace practices, the international campaign to ban land mines, or human rights issues. International nonprofit advocacy is targeted both to government and to business at the national and the international levels, while at the same time it is an important force at state and local levels within the United States.

Nonprofits, as well as government, provide businesses with license to operate. Through a variety of mechanisms, including voluntary codes of conduct and the court of public opinion, the nonprofit sector creates either a favorable or an inhospitable climate for business operations.

For both the business and the nonprofit sectors, these are the best of times in terms of public expectation and acceptance. Whether these also become the worst of times may depend on the ability of each to design an appropriate role suited to this environment of rapid change.

Government must respond to public demands for more efficiency, lower taxes, less regulation of business, and gradual retrenchment from areas of historical social involvement. The privatization of public services—which is spreading throughout the world—has shifted accountability from government toward the business and nonprofit sectors. But this shift has taken place politically first, without a parallel shift in resources and institutional capacities. The gap between responsibilities and resources is one reason the sectors are rethinking their roles.

National government has also been devolving responsibility to the state and local levels. And governments at all levels have been seeking ways, in addition to privatizing, to “reinvent” the way they carry out basic functions. Government’s convening role is becoming more common and more important. State and local governments, in particular, are paying increasing attention to their leadership role in bringing people together, listening to their concerns, being open and sharing information, searching for common ground, helping the community to establish a vision and develop a strategy, and enabling non-governmental groups to make their special contribution toward the implementation of that strategy. Forward-looking government officials are more inclined to share power and to work as collaborators to develop and, where appropriate, implement commonly developed strategies. They think first of their role in *governance*—by which the community determines its goals and means to achieve them—and secondly of their role as *government*, one of several institutions involved in the governance process.

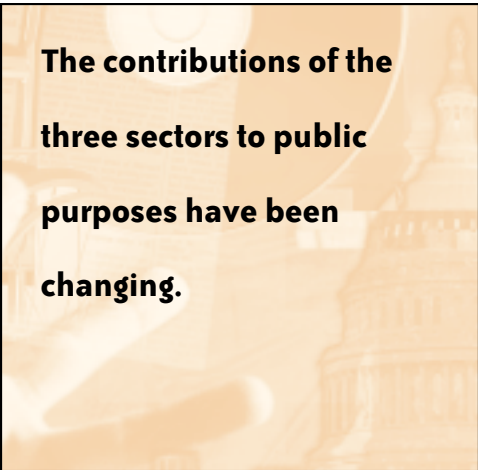


**ACHIEVING
PUBLIC PURPOSES**

“Public purposes,” as opposed to private interests, include a prosperous economy and a safe and healthy environment. The contributions of the three sectors to public purposes have been changing. Businesses and nonprofit organizations are managing hospitals, prisons, and public schools. Businesses have moved into areas once served principally by nonprofits in health, education, and social services. New organizations have arisen to deal with these shifts, including various forms of for-profit, nonprofit, and hybrid organizations. Our interest is in learning how important public purposes are being addressed or neglected by institutional innovations.

Taken together, these changes have underscored the interdependence of economic, social, health, and education systems. For the past two centuries, modern society has reaped growing benefits from increasing specialization and the division of labor. However, the fragmentation resulting from this specialization has, in many areas, reached a point of diminishing returns. One of the key challenges we now confront is to integrate the many interdependent activities that cross traditional political, economic, and social boundaries.

Social problems and the institutions that have evolved to deal with them are increasingly complex. A shift or change in one system can immediately force changes in other systems. In fact, institutions in society are in a constant state of change. This can be positive because it is forcing interdependence among the three sectors. But it also poses a risk and a challenge: the failure



The contributions of the three sectors to public purposes have been changing.

of any one sector to adjust carries costs ranging from lost opportunity to serious societal disruptions.

In Lowell, Massachusetts, for example, juvenile crime increased in the mid-1990s when the federal government slashed allocations for summer youth programs. In response, fourteen groups, including the city of Lowell, nonprofit community organizations such as the Streetworker Anti-Gang Program and the YWCA,

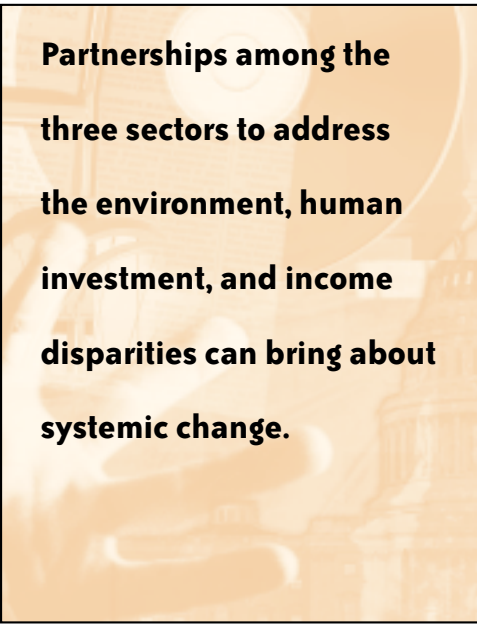
and private businesses planned and implemented summer camp and educational programs for children ages 3-17 and created 1,800 new summer jobs.

Partnerships among the three sectors to address the environment, human investment, and income disparities can bring about systemic change.

Innovations are under way to find better ways for the three sectors to protect the environment. Governments are experimenting with market mechanisms such as the trading of pollution rights among private organizations. “Cause related” marketing relationships have also become fashionable. For example, as a travel promotion American Express is working with nonprofits to save world monuments. Similar experimentation is occurring in other areas, such as education, support of families and children, health care, transportation, and public safety.

Some public purposes intersect the interests of organizations in all three sectors. For example, all have a keen interest in *human investment* that will yield productive workers and responsible citizens. This requires investing in child care, education, access to health care, and job creation. But who is responsible for which pieces of the human investment mosaic?

In Green Bay, Wisconsin, and Wichita, Kansas, sectors have collaborated to increase human investment. In Green Bay in the late 1980s a business leader publicly attacked the quality of education to draw attention to the slipping quality of the work force. The result was the Partners in Education project, which



Partnerships among the three sectors to address the environment, human investment, and income disparities can bring about systemic change.

involved ten school districts and over 100 businesses and nonprofit organizations and which helps 40,000 students each year to learn about business skills and plan their careers. In Wichita in 1998, Boeing teamed with city and county government to provide mentoring and improve reading skills among elementary school students. Wichita was the only urban school district in the nation whose students improved academic achievement despite an increasing percentage of the population falling below the poverty level.

As might be expected, the shift in responsibilities has not occurred without problems. Welfare reform, for example, has produced shifts across sectors and within them, with resulting frictions. One result has been exacerbation of inequities based on the difference from state to state. The new approach to welfare leaves a wide latitude to the fifty states and thousands of American communities

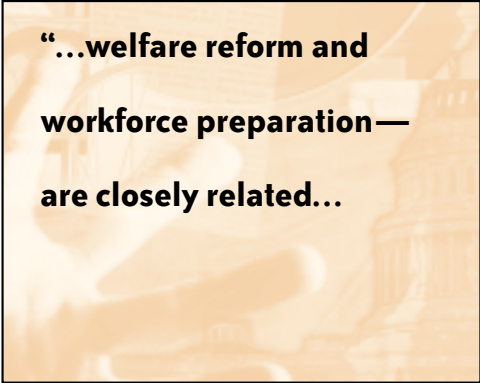
to experiment. Lockheed Martin is processing paperwork but not servicing welfare clients, and is looking to the expertise of nonprofits (or employees hired from nonprofits) to do this work.

State and local officials have complained about the numerous conflicts, overlaps, and redundancies among the federal agencies and their various data requirements. Welfare reform now involves the federal departments of Labor, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, and Agriculture, as well as Health and Human Services. The efforts of these agencies to reconcile conflicts and redundancies often confused rather than simplified requirements, not just for state and local governments but for businesses and nonprofit organizations providing welfare-related services.

There has been similar friction in the area of **workforce preparation**, particularly in the implementation of the Workforce Investment Act. This could be significant since this law provides the legal framework for virtually all government workforce investment spending.

These two elements of human investment—welfare reform and workforce preparation—are closely related, since the former aims to get people off welfare roles and into jobs. The U.S. Secretary of Labor recognized this interaction and the problems it is creating among the sectors and the various levels of governments when she called for more dialogue among the parties involved in both efforts.

When coordination problems and redundancies led to uneven distribution of services in metropolitan Tallahassee, Florida, the city collaborated with



**“...welfare reform and
workforce preparation—
are closely related...”**

United Way and Leon County government—and invited recommendations from local businesses and universities—to set up a more systematic approach to the distribution of grants. The resulting Community Human Service Partnership (CHSP) distributes funding from the United Way, the city, the county, and the state and Community Development Block Grants in a process requiring only one application and one presentation. The CHSP won HUD’s 1998 award for the best practice in community development.

Reducing income disparities is another public purpose. The widening income gap, in part from productivity changes noted above, is supported by census data. The Census Bureau recently reported that even as the expansion of the national economy continued, the number of people considered very poor grew in the mid-1990s. Households in the top fifth of the income scale had a record high 49 percent of all earnings in 1996, while the share going to the lowest fifth remained flat. The gap between the haves and the have nots in the United States, now the biggest in history, continues to grow. Education

and training for low-income individuals are the only ways to mitigate the effects of the widening income gap. With downsizing, devolution, and states and localities trying to keep tax rates down, who has the responsibility to see that people do not fall through the cracks? With businesses dependent on profits, what do we do about services that are not profitable but that people need?

Growing competition is also causing businesses to examine more carefully the returns they receive from different kinds of customers, and how those returns change with new technological opportunities to alter modes of services. For example, the financial sector is more systematically identifying unprofitable or “loss-making” services and customers. Denied access to what are becoming mainstream financial services, such people could get left behind.





**COLLABORATION
AS AN OPTION**

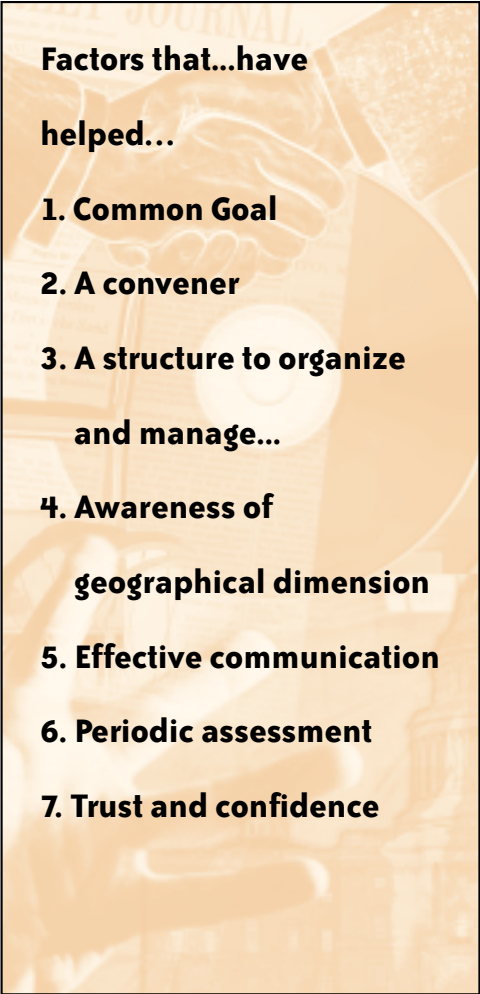
Confronted with the new and rapidly changing environment, organizations in the three sectors are grappling to meet their own needs and those of society. Some may enter into intersectoral collaborations to reach their goals. Others may go it alone or pursue different sorts of relationships.

For organizations considering collaboration, we present several factors that, in our experience, have helped to make collaborations successful:

A common goal. Collaboration entails negotiation of mutually compatible goals and a strategy for carrying them out. True collaboration works toward a “win-win” arrangement where all parties gain more than they give up. It also entails articulating a common vision that accounts for the individual and mutual goals of each participant within the context of the broader community interest.

A convener. Successful convening suggests an openness in sharing information. As we have noted, government has a natural convening role, but if it is perceived as dominating or heavy handed, that role may be better played by business or nonprofit groups.

A structure to organize and manage the core talents of each participant. The structure might be formal—a joint organization, a binding contract, use of an intermediary organization—or informal—a memorandum of understanding, oral agreements, or personal relationships. For example,



Factors that...have helped...

- 1. Common Goal**
- 2. A convener**
- 3. A structure to organize and manage...**
- 4. Awareness of geographical dimension**
- 5. Effective communication**
- 6. Periodic assessment**
- 7. Trust and confidence**

will costs once assumed by nonprofits be charged to customers of businesses now providing these services? How will new arrangements affect services and costs to service recipients? The key is that responsibilities need to be clearly understood so that participants can be held accountable for carrying them out.

The key in execution often lies in tapping the real core talents of each participant. For example, too often business participants are tapped for their financial resources—and may indeed believe that they can “write a check” for their part of the bargain—when in fact their real core talent may lie in their business organization and management expertise. Similarly, the real talent of government leaders, especially elected officials, may lie more in their political savvy and credibility than in tangible resources. Nonprofit leaders can bring a commitment to social goals that establishes credibility for the collaborative in the eyes of community groups.

Awareness of the geographical dimension. Most principal social institutions are organized on a national, state, and local basis, while many of the principal problems and opportunities are manifested at the global, regional, and neighborhood levels. Consequently, collaborative projects need to take place on several different geographical planes, or levels of organizational interaction. Much of the significant experimentation with cross-boundary collaboration has occurred at the regional and community levels. Local governments within regions, as well as regional organizations of local governments, have worked with businesses and nonprofit groups at the regional and community levels to address a wide range of common problems that affect their region. (The term “subsidiarity”

means moving responsibility for initiatives to the level closest to the action; local communities are perceived to “make things happen on the ground.”)

Regional alliances require an additional dose of collaborative flair since governments are rarely organized regionally, and hence their convening, planning, and decision-making capacities are less likely to be available without strenuous efforts to work with other governments in the region. This is one of the reasons why businesses, which are more likely to cross political boundaries to engage regional labor, advertising, and consumer markets, are so important to regional collaboration. Likewise, many nonprofit organizations function on a regional or neighborhood level, and thus are key to collaborations on those levels. As noted above, nonprofits work at the international level on environmental issues, arms control, and worker and human rights.

National associations and intermediaries typically have state, regional, and local affiliates. For example, the National Governors’ Association’s role is catalytic, taking useful experience from states and interstate regions and disseminating it to other states and regions. National councils of nonprofits typically work on several levels of collaboration. INDEPENDENT SECTOR comprises nonprofit organizations that work at all levels; the National Civic League’s Alliance for National Renewal comprises national associations that also have state, regional, local, and

community affiliates; CIVICUS is a global organization comprising national and subnational partners.

Effective communication. Each sector uses different concepts, vocabulary, and means of communication. Even the concept of “collaboration” among organizations in the three sectors is variously characterized as public-private partnerships, strategic alliances, networks, governance processes, civic infrastructure, and social capital development, among other terms. It would be useful to develop a common language that is recognized and understood by the various sectors.

Periodic assessment. There must be a process for establishing accountability of the participants individually and the initiative as a whole. This is important not only to establish incentives, but also to generate information and answer important questions: Which collaborative approaches are working, and which are not working? Which are promising? Which may be working now but are not likely to work in the future? What modifications of current models or new models may have promise for the future?

Trust and confidence. Trust depends on such “soft” factors as culture and expectations, as well as such “hard” factors as power, money, and law. Ultimately, however, trust results from the experience of people and organizations working together and seeing that they can have confidence in their partners and that their joint efforts produce results that matter.

The *manner* in which collaborative initiatives develop can be an important determinant in building trust. Thus, participants in collaboratives are sensitive to whether the conveners and other participants really are inclusive, listen, seek to understand their interests and culture, share information and power, negotiate win-win solutions, and refrain from imposing themselves as a dominating force. These are the kinds of factors that build trust, confidence, and ultimately the legitimacy of cross-sector collaborations.





NEXT STEPS

This discussion paper was developed by The Conference Board, the Council on Foundations, INDEPENDENT SECTOR, the National Academy of Public Administration, the National Alliance of Business, and the National Governors' Association. Our goal is a forward-looking statement that describes the new challenging environment and the opportunities it offers for collaboration in the public interest. We would welcome your comments, criticisms, and suggestions.



COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS

The Conference Board's mission is to create and disseminate knowledge about management and the market place to help businesses strengthen their performance and better serve society.

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The National Governors' Association is the instrument through which the nation's Governors collectively influence the development and implementation of national policy and apply creative leadership to state issues.

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CHALLENGE

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