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**Interagency Partnerships:  
A Compendium of Measurement  
Instruments**

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# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

As agencies recognize that more can be accomplished by working in cooperation with other organizations, varying levels of partnerships are being explored, developed, and implemented. During this process, questions that naturally arise include whether and how well these partnerships are working, and what the strengths and barriers are to their optimal functioning. Individuals involved in these partnerships may have an intuitive feeling about what is working well and what needs work, but how can the partnering initiative's performance be assessed in a more concrete and measurable way? This document provides an overview of several instruments and analytical techniques that have been used to assess the depth and/or quality of inter-agency partnerships, as well as the benefits and limitations of each. We begin with a brief review of key partnership concepts, including levels of interagency partnership and other variables of interest.

## What are Different Levels of Interagency Partnership?

Partnerships among agencies can occur at numerous levels, as described in recent evaluation and child welfare literature (Frey, Lohmeier, Lee, & Tollefson, 2006; James Bell Associates, 2011; Quality Improvement Center on Early Childhood, 2009). The loosest level includes **networking**, which involves communication among agencies about their respective programs. For example, networked agencies may make informal or formal referrals to other agencies. Coordination and cooperation are respectively deeper levels of interaction. At the **coordination** level, agencies align their respective services to improve service access and efficiency, while at the level of **cooperation** agencies work together toward a common goal but maintain operational independence. Although the term **collaboration** is often used to define any level of partnership, it has a more formal definition in the literature. It is an intense level of partnership in which two or more agencies work together to create a jointly owned and run program that may involve joint case management, supervisory, and administrative functions. Collaborating agencies are more interdependent than they are at the cooperative level and have more opportunities to create a program synergistically that is "greater than the sum of its parts." Other sources use terms that are similar in meaning to describe varying levels at which organizations work together, such as *partnering*, *merging*, and *unifying* (Gajda, 2004), or *coalition* (Frey et al., 2006).

An interagency partnership may also involve numerous levels of partnership within the same initiative. For example, an early childhood agency may collaborate with a substance abuse agency to create a new program that serves substance-abusing parents and their children, and within this new program

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referrals are made to additional outside agencies such as infant mental health services. Over time, the new program may develop more intensive coordination or cooperation with the infant mental health agency. Furthermore, two agencies may have a collaborative relationship involving specific aspects of a particular program, while maintaining a more independent albeit cooperative relationship within other programmatic areas.

Although **collaboration** is often considered the ideal level of partnership, it cannot nor should not always be the goal of an initiative. Collaboration is complex and time consuming to develop and implement, and it is not always necessary for achieving shared organizational goals. Partnerships generally work best when they start at less intensive levels; as sustained mutual effort increases interpersonal trust and inter-organizational understanding, higher levels of partnership can be considered.

### Why is it Important to Measure Levels of Partnership?

Assessing the depth of a partnership can be quite beneficial. People often use terms such as “collaboration” casually without considering what they really mean or if their partnering agencies truly reflect a given level of partnership. While this misunderstanding may seem like a mere issue of semantics, it can have significant consequences for the children and families that a partnership is attempting to serve. For example, an initiative that involves “collaboration” in theory between a child welfare agency and an early intervention program may in fact not go beyond simple networking or making referrals that may or may not be pursued. Deeper levels of partnership in this case could help families follow through on referrals and uncover barriers to service delivery that need to be addressed. If agencies accurately assess the level at which their partnership currently operates they can take steps to intensify and strengthen it.

### What Else Regarding Partnerships May be Important to Measure?

Sometimes it is less important to measure the level of partnership among agencies than it is to assess the quality of the interactions among the individual participants. This process can pinpoint areas that may need work, such as shared values, interpersonal communication, power differentials, information sharing, and other issues that can either enhance or impede a partnership’s progress.

## Compendium Contents

This compendium is designed to help readers select a measurement instrument or method that may best assess the functioning, strengths, and limitations of a partnership to which their agencies belong. It is divided into two sections: (1) Instruments that measure the **depth of involvement** of participating agencies and (2) instruments that measure the **quality of interactions** among partnership members. The following instruments/methods measure depth of involvement:

- The Levels of Collaboration Survey
- Strategic Alliance Formative Assessment Rubric

The following instruments/methods measure the quality of interactions among organizations:

- Collaboration Assessment Guide and Tool
- Internal Collaborative Functioning Scale
- Ohio State's Collaboration Checklist
- The Partnership Self-Assessment Tool
- SPARK Collaboration Measurement Tool
- STAR Collaborative Assessment
- The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory
- Network Analysis<sup>2</sup>

These measures are summarized in the table on the following pages, which for each measure provides its sources/citations, a brief description, sample items, and notable strengths and limitations. The assessment of each measure's strengths and limitations is based on JBA's review of the instrument and knowledge of its use in local evaluation settings. Although little information is available regarding the psychometric properties of most measures (e.g., reliability, validity, norming studies), when available it is noted in the table.

All of the measures in this compendium include a citation. Please follow appropriate citation and attribution guidelines when adopting them or discussing them in reports, articles, or other publications.

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<sup>2</sup> This assessment method also briefly examines the depth of involvement of organizations in a partnership.

## Instruments Measuring Depth of Involvement

Instrument	Source/Citation	Description	Sample Item(s)	Strengths	Limitations
<b>The Levels of Collaboration Survey</b>	Frey, B., Lohmeier, J., Lee, S., & Tollefson, N. (2006). Measuring collaboration among grant partners. <i>American Journal of Evaluation, 27</i> , 383.	Measures level of collaboration among agencies using a scale with the following levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>No Interaction</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Networking</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Cooperation</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Coordination</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Coalition</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Collaboration</i></li> </ul>	Agencies are rated using the scale described in the previous column (e.g., <i>No Interaction, Networking</i> ).	Concise and easy to understand.  Journal article explains the theory and approach to using the instrument.  Test-retest reliability of instrument has been established.	Does not include a measure or standard of what an “ideal” level of partnership looks like.  Must be adapted for use by each agency in the partnership.
<b>Strategic Alliance Formative Assessment Rubric</b>	Gadja, R. (2004). Utilizing collaboration theory to evaluate strategic alliances. <i>American Journal of Evaluation, 25</i> , 65.	Involves a group interview process to determine the level at which a partnership is functioning and what the ideal level of partnership should be.  Actual and ideal levels are identified using the following categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Networking</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Cooperating</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Partnering</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Merging</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Unifying</i></li> </ul>	Organizations are ranked as to their ideal and current levels of partnership using the categories described in the previous column (e.g., <i>Networking, Cooperating</i> ).	Measures both current and intended levels of partnership.	Requires a more involved and time-consuming process than a simple survey.

## Instruments Measuring the Quality of Interactions among Organizations

Instrument	Source/Citation	Description	Sample Item(s)	Strengths	Limitations
<b>Collaboration Assessment Guide and Tool</b>	Kellerman, M. (2007). <i>Collaboration Assessment Guide and Tool</i> . Ottawa, Ontario: United Way of Canada. Retrieved from <a href="http://www2.unitedway.ca/uwcanada/content.aspx?id=105&amp;langtype=1033">http://www2.unitedway.ca/uwcanada/content.aspx?id=105&amp;langtype=1033</a> .	Includes 78 indicators of collaboration in 13 categories, with each item ranked on a 4-point Likert scale. A brief version of the instrument that includes the 20 most important items within each category is also available. The tool can be administered in interview or survey form.	"The collaboration was established to address important, complex issues in our community that require a comprehensive approach."	<p>Comprehensive and detailed.</p> <p>Flexible administration both in terms of format and length (long and short versions are available).</p> <p>Is most useful as a tool to facilitate partnership development (e.g., what should our collaboration focus on?).</p>	<p>The long version requires considerable time to complete.</p> <p>Some items include compound statements that make it more difficult to identify the specific construct or aspect of collaboration that is being measured.</p>
<b>Internal Collaborative Functioning Scale</b>	Taylor-Powell, E., Rossing, B., & Geran, J. (1998). <i>Evaluating Collaboratives: Reaching the Potential</i> . Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension.	Includes 12 items (e.g., Shared Vision, Plans, Evaluation) that use a 7-point scale with 2 anchor points depicting the lowest and highest extremes (see page 89 of the report for a copy of the instrument). The report serves as a "how-to" guide to evaluate community collaboratives.	<p>The item "Plans" has the following anchors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We do not follow work plans (lowest)</li> <li>▪ Plans are well developed and followed (highest)</li> </ul>	<p>Short and simple.</p> <p>The scale allows users to give an item a numerical rating instead of forcing them to choose a discrete category that may not fit.</p>	<p>The definition of the five points between the two anchor points is sometimes vague; for example, what is the difference in level/intensity between 2 and 3 on the scale?</p> <p>Scale lacks a separate "don't know" category.</p>

Instrument	Source/Citation	Description	Sample Item(s)	Strengths	Limitations
<b>The Partnership Self-Assessment Tool</b>	Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health (2006). <i>Partnership self-assessment tool: Questionnaire</i> . New York, NY: New York Academy of Medicine. Retrieved from <a href="http://cacsh.org/pdf/psatquestionnaire.pdf">http://cacsh.org/pdf/psatquestionnaire.pdf</a>	This survey includes a total of 50 Likert-style items and 16 “Yes/No” items that measure a partnership's level of synergy, and assesses factors such as leadership, efficiency, administration, management, and sufficiency of resources. It also measures partners' perspectives about the decision-making process, the benefits and drawbacks of partnering, and their satisfaction with the partnership.	“By working together, how well are these partners able to carry out comprehensive activities that connect multiple services, programs, or systems?”	Very thorough; assesses a wide variety of variables.  Easy to score.  Good for helping partnerships continuously improve their interagency functioning.	Not intended for use by external evaluators.  Not meant for partnerships at all stages of development or partnerships of all sizes. Specifically, the partnership being assessed must have (1) been in existence at least six months, (2) begun to take action to implement its plans, and (2) have at least five active partners.  Length of survey may create barriers to timely completion.
<b>Ohio State’s Collaboration Checklist</b>	Ohio State University Extension. Retrieved from <a href="http://hostedweb.cfaes.ohio-state.edu/bdg/pdf_docs/b/B02.pdf">http://hostedweb.cfaes.ohio-state.edu/bdg/pdf_docs/b/B02.pdf</a> .	Adapted from Borden & Perkins’ (1999) collaboration self-assessment tool, the checklist rates the presence in a partnership of 13 concepts using a 5-point Likert scale. Each concept is accompanied by a paragraph-long definition.	Examples of measured concepts include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Political climate</li> <li>▪ Sustainability</li> <li>▪ Leadership</li> </ul>	Concise and succinct.  Easy to administer and score.	The concepts measured by the instrument are very broad and may be difficult to assess accurately.
<b>SPARK Collaboration Measurement Tool</b>	The Childcare Partnership Project (1998). <i>How Are We Doing? A Self-Assessment Tool for Partnerships</i> . Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services.	Pre-post test with 58 Likert-scale items that measure expectations for the partnership (pre-test) and actual performance (post-test).  Pre-test items are also rated on a scale from “Not Important” to “Most Important.”	“Our partnership will collaboratively identify desired results.”  “Our partnership will consider and acquire any technical assistance necessary to design and implement a methodologically sound process for measuring partnership results.”	Useful for clarifying expectations among partnership members.	Length of survey may create barriers to timely completion.  Some items contain complex statements that may be difficult to understand.  Participants may be tempted to rate all items as “most important,” thus limiting the instrument’s discriminatory power.

Instrument	Source/Citation	Description	Sample Item(s)	Strengths	Limitations
<b>STAR Collaborative Assessment Instrument</b>	Eoyang, G. H. (2006). <i>Be a STAR: A tool to assess and maintain effective collaborations</i> . Circle Pines, MN: Human Systems Dynamics Institute. Available for online purchase at <a href="http://www.hsdinstitute.org/books-resources/online-learning-and-products/tools.html">www.hsdinstitute.org/books-resources/online-learning-and-products/tools.html</a> .	Contains 50 short, 4-pt Likert-scale items within 4 categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Similarities and Differences</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Talking and Listening</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Authentic Work</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Reasons for Coming Together</i></li> </ul>	"I know why I participate in this group."  "We use our financial resources wisely."	Concise and succinct.  Easy to understand, administer, and score.	Focuses primarily on interpersonal interactions rather than on the concrete activities and accomplishments of partnering organizations.
<b>The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory</b>	Mattessich, P., Murray-Close, M., & Monsey, B. (2001). <i>Collaboration: What Makes It Work</i> (2nd ed.). St. Paul, MN: Fieldstone Alliance.	Measures the quality of organizational interactions and collaboration success using 40 items organized within 20 factors. Items are rated using a 5-point Likert scale.  More information about the survey, including an on-line version and information on registering collaborative agencies to take the survey, is available at: <a href="http://wilderresearch.org/tools/cfi/index.php">http://wilderresearch.org/tools/cfi/index.php</a> .	"People in our collaboration always trust one another."  "My organization will benefit from being involved in this organization."	Encourages deeper thought into what organizational processes should look like.  Includes questions regarding both interpersonal and interagency relationships.  Instrument has been tested for statistical reliability -- see the relevant RAND Corporation study at: <a href="http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/2004/RAND_TR177.pdf">www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/2004/RAND_TR177.pdf</a> .	Conflation of item responses of "no opinion" and "neutral" (two separate concepts) may make accurate scoring of some items more difficult.



Instrument	Source/Citation	Description	Sample Item(s)	Strengths	Limitations
<b>Network Analysis</b>	Provan, K., Veazie, M., Staten, L., & Teufel-Shone, N., (2005). The use of network analysis to strengthen community partnerships. <i>Public Administration Review</i> , 65, 603-613.	<p>Written survey in which respondents:</p> <p>1) Indicate whether certain types of interactions occurred (“Y” or “N”) between organizations (e.g., sharing of information or resources, referrals made or received).</p> <p>2) Assess the quality of the relationships between organizations using a Likert-type scale.</p> <p>3) Indicate whether particular benefits or drawbacks resulted from the partnership using the following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Already Occurred</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Expected to Occur</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Not Expected to Occur</i></li> </ul>	<p>Examples under the Benefits/Drawbacks Section include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Ability to serve my clients better.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Takes too much time and resources.</i></li> </ul> <p>These items are rated using the scale in the previous column. (<i>Already Occurred, Expected to Occur, etc.</i>).</p>	Explicitly examines interactions and relationships between specific partners.	<p>Depth/level of partnerships is minimally addressed (limited to networking activities).</p> <p>Assessment of the quality of relationships among partners is limited (just one global question for each partner).</p> <p>Some respondents may have difficulty understanding the scoring process and will need to be “walked” through it.</p>

## References

Frey, B., Lohmeier, J., Lee, S., & Tollefson, N. (2006). Measuring collaboration among grant partners. *American Journal of Evaluation, 27*, 383.

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