

# FACTS ABOUT COLLABORATION

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The following facts dispel some widely held beliefs and assumptions about collaboration by presenting key findings from a recent collaborative research study by The Ontario Trillium Foundation that gathered and synthesized experiences and insights from local collaborative practitioners and stakeholders<sup>1</sup>.

▶ **The 'one size fits all' approach doesn't work.**

Collaborations form organically and therefore different supports and measurements are required at different stages in their development. To be successful and to innovate, collaborations need to be able to build authentic relationships, take risks with new strategies, and shape and reshape as they evolve.

▶ **Collaborations should be enabled versus mandated.**

Research on collaborations confirms that the most successful collaborations are the ones that happen because individuals, groups and not-for-profit organizations identify a shared need, not because a funder requires it. Collaborative partners may perceive that collaboration is being mandated even when the intent of the funder is simply to avoid duplication or to encourage the achievement of more significant impacts.

▶ **Trust is at the core of successful collaborations.**

In order for collaborations to build trust, respondents emphasized that they need the time, resources and space for individuals to build authentic working relationships; to identify and revisit the outcomes and expectations; and to find the right balance between the need for a formal relationship and the need to remain nimble, responsive and innovative.

▶ **Achieving significant impacts takes risk, time and resources.**

Successful collaborations, particularly those that address complex problems/issues and work toward broader social impacts, require a certain level of risk. Being innovative means allowing for surprises and unintended consequences, being comfortable with the unknown, and learning from mistakes.

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<sup>1</sup> Drawn from Strengthening Collaboration in Ontario's Not-for-profit Sector; Ontario Trillium Foundation, 2011.

