



Solve Problems with Community Collaboration

Continuous change and crises can bring out the best or the worst in people and organizations. Successfully navigating disruption depends on the organization's preparation, response and ability to solve problems. Although managing a crisis can become stressful, this is a unique opportunity to garner lessons to best prepare for future disruptions.

Summary

- Increased collaboration during times of crisis inspires trust, innovation and enhances the problem solving capabilities of teams and individuals.
- Before creating successful external partnerships, leaders should first eliminate silos within their own institution.
- Identify the outcomes that can be achieved by community partnerships to align individuals across various organizations to what matters most.

Collaborate When it Matters Most

It's not often people experience a world-wide crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it is common to experience disasters and disruptions that affect entire communities, such as Hurricane Katrina, the Flint, Michigan water crisis, or the fires engulfing Washington, Oregon, and California. It's essential during a crisis to increase collaboration between organizations and individuals in the community. This collaboration inspires trust and innovation and enhances problem solving. Communities have unique challenges, and their members have a mutual understanding of opportunities and threats in their communities. When organizations work together they benefit from a better use of community resources and better outcomes for those they serve.

A Model for School District and Community Collaboration

How does one county with 19 different school districts work together to accomplish a single goal? Dale Shaver, Director of Parks and Land Use, Paul Farrow, Waukesha County Executive and the School District of Menomonee Falls Superintendent Corey Golla, collaborated with 18 other Superintendents to find solutions that put safety and students first in Waukesha County. After the crisis hit, Paul had one goal: regional collaboration.

Paul and Dale began working with businesses in their community to support closing and reopening plans and policies. Through this work, they realized schools in their county would have a similar need for support. As a result, Paul, Dale and Corey collaborated to tear down silos and put students first in Waukesha County.

To provide virtual learning for the contract tracing investigation process and teach students about public health, Paul Farrow formed a partnership with Carroll University. The University provides the 19 school

districts within Waukesha County with a virtual platform to support parts of the community that have a need for additional contract tracers. In return, nurses and healthcare individuals working within K12 schools are available during the summer months to provide support as contract tracers. Their work as contract tracers is invaluable experience to the school district. Connecting with public health helps the schools quickly move to action if there's a flareup.

As a result of Paul establishing this University, K12 and government partnership, a win-win solution was generated. Community and school partnerships are now a critical component to Waukesha County's crisis response team.

5 Catalysts for Community Collaboration

The potential to unite community leaders and collaborate to inspire innovation exists all around you. Where do opportunities exist for the school district to collaborate within your community?

Eliminate Internal Silos

To create successful partnerships with external organizations leaders should eliminating silos within their own institution first. Do open communication channels exist between departments? Are all individuals and departments aligned to strategic goals of the district? Silos within the school system can hinder potential external collaboration.

Gather Input

Effective communication is critical for leaders when responding to a crisis. How to execute effective communication can vary depending on who you ask, so it's important that you do ask. Survey employees, student families and external partners. Ask about communication frequency and preferred methods of communication.

Begin gathering input as early as possible from the community to support decision making and a plan for navigating change. Ask students, families and customers to define success for your institution despite the current circumstances. Ask what adjustments can be made and what is reasonable in the eyes of those you serve.

Engage in Solutions

Collaboration is a natural enemy to siloed thinking and decision making. When people and organizations come together to overcome an obstacle, the focus should be on solutions and cooperation. Identify what outcome the partnership will achieve or what problem the partnership will solve to align individuals across organizations to what matters most.

Double Down on Culture

Put people first, at all times, not only during a crisis. Invest in and empower your teams. Build trust with colleagues and customers to develop deeper relationships which enable better problem solving and creative thinking. Devote time to focus on the wellbeing of your employees, especially during periods of intense change. Leaders should spend more time listening than talking and let people know they are heard and cared for.

Tie Decisions to Concrete Metrics

A scorecard tool engages communities in high speed collaboration. Cross-functional teams use scorecards to keep track of concrete metrics and communicate progress. During a health crisis, schools have two primary goals: safety and student learning. With these goals and metrics in mind, a scorecard helps leaders base their decisions on evidence and what is most important.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

To collaborative community partnerships with schools, you should:

Think differently.

Communities have unique challenges, and their members have a mutual understanding of opportunities and threats in their communities. By working together, organizations benefit from a better use of community resources and better outcomes for those they serve.

Plan differently.

When schools and communities collaborate, they realize greater benefits for the students they serve. Identify and build relationships with leaders of community organizations that can be reliable partners to provide additional support.

Act differently.

Collaboration is a natural enemy to siloed thinking and decision making. When organizations come together to overcome community obstacles, the focus should be on solutions and cooperation.