

Intersectoral Collaboration: a mechanism to improve the quality and scale of health research and to achieve the strategic objectives of research funders

By

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In the voluntary sector, non-profit or non-governmental organizations (NGOS) are collaborating increasingly among themselves, as well as with the other sectors, to tackle broad and multi-faceted problems that require a range of skills sets and significant resources (Annan, 2000; Austin, 2000; Eizenstat, 2004; Fisher, 1997; Florini, 2000). This trend is reinforced by many funders (e.g., the James Irvine Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation) that encourage and often demand closer collaboration among their grant recipients (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2004; La Piana, 2001). In turn, they are themselves becoming more collaborative as they seek to address issues of greater magnitude that require more – or different – resources.

This trend has become increasingly apparent in the health research sector where very significant resources are required to support major studies which typically involve collaboration among a number of scientists, academic institutions or research centres. This case study focuses on research into breast cancer in Canada, an area which is currently relatively well funded and where much of the ‘low hanging fruit’, from a research standpoint, has already been accessed. However, that was not the case some fifteen years ago when, as a result of volunteer activism, government initiated a research alliance and funded it in the amount of some \$20 million over five years. The other founding partners were the National Cancer Institute of Canada and the Canadian Cancer Society. Five years later, they were joined by the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, the Avon Flame Foundation, a private sector foundation, and the Canadian Breast Cancer Network, a grass roots survivor organization. In total, \$162 million has been distributed over this period to some 500 different research projects. This paper will show the evolution of this intersectoral collaboration (public, private and voluntary sectors) with a focus on the implications for governance, i.e., control and decision making.

As the Alliance enters its fourth five year phase, the nonprofit partners have become increasingly articulate about their wish to use the research alliance as a vehicle to accomplish that which they cannot do within their own organizations. They also are seeking a flexible and efficient structure that enables the Alliance to demonstrate leadership in the sector, accountable and transparent practices and strong relationships with the research community. The theoretical underpinnings to this paper include the work of Provan and Kenis (2007) which categorizes governance forms for what they term networks (groups of three or more legally autonomous organizations that work together collectively and collaboratively to try to achieve not only their own goals, but also, the collective goal of the network as a whole p6) and then identifies four factors and three tensions that would cause a network to select a particular governance form; the definition of different forms of collaborations (Bailey and Koney, 2000; Frey, Lohmeier, Lee, Tollefson and Johannig, 2004; Gajda, 2004; Hogue,

1993; Peterson, 1991) and different collaborative models (Arsenault, J. 1998); and the joint venture literature that uses agency and stewardship theory as well as power, trust and control theory to assess the impact on joint venture performance of such variables as control, power, relationship characteristics and principals' dominant logic model (Barringer and Harrison, 2000; Geringer and Hebert, 1989; Guidice and Mero, 2007; Saxton, 1997; Yan and Gray, 1994).

Keywords: [1] intersectoral collaborations; [2] governance of collaborations; [3] collaboration among [research] funders; [4] collaborative control and decision making structures, processes and practices

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