TIPS: HOW TO BUILD TRUST ACROSS SYSTEMS AND ORGANIZATIONS

The essence of collective leadership is crossing boundaries. Significant boundaries that many KLCC II sites encountered were those that exist between organizations. Different types of organizations have different goals, ways of working, cultures, and values. These differences mean that working together can bring tension, suspicion, and misunderstanding along with the power of shared interests.

Here are some tips to keep in mind as you begin, or continue, to strengthen your cross-organizational working relationships:

■ Organizations have different calendars and timelines. Be aware of these differences (e.g., different busy and slow seasons or standard working hours) and ask about them up front so that you can involve everyone more effectively. Different calendars, however, can also bring new opportunities. For example, an organization that does home visits in a certain season may have the time in its off-season to tag along on some outreach efforts for your social-change group.

■ Organizations have different decision-making patterns and requirements. Some may need an executive to sign off on even small matters; others will be able to move quickly and less bureaucratically.

■ The history of previous working relationships between organizations can teach you a lot. When you are trying to build or strengthen your own relationships with other organizations, ask about the history of their relationships and what went poorly or well.

■ Organizations have different cultures (i.e., patterns or values that influence all aspects of their operations, from communications to celebrations). Sometimes organizations are not conscious of their culture, so you'll need to observe closely and ask thoughtful questions of your partners to understand how they do things or perceive events.

■ Stereotypes exist about organizations as well as groups of people. Often these stereotypes are true, but they can also often be misleading (i.e., "All businesses care about is money," or "non-profits don't care about the bottom line."). Take the time to understand what motivates individuals in an organization and what they truly care about in their community.