

# THE SKILL SETS OF SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATORS

BoardSource, in partnership with several other leading nonprofits, recently launched a campaign encouraging nonprofit leaders to think about going beyond organizational boundaries to do together what they may not be able to do alone. **The Power of Possibility: Exploring Greater Impact through Strategic Partnerships** encourages collaboration and provides real-world examples of successful nonprofit partnerships as well as discussion guides to use with the board at those pivotal moments when it makes sense to consider a strategic partnership.

While organizations collaborate, it is individuals who make it happen. Who sit around the table — and the skill sets they bring with them — is key to the success of a collaboration or partnership. So what, one might ask, is the skill set of a successful collaborator?

We found the answer in a research paper, “The Skill Sets of the Successful Collaborator,” published in the *Public Administration Review* in 2012 and based on data derived from a 2010-2011 survey of U.S. Senior Executive Service

(SES) members. SES members are federal government executives who link presidential appointees and the rest of the federal workforce and serve in important roles in national policy-making and government activities. Their qualifications, according to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), include “the ability to build coalitions internally and with other federal agencies, state and local governments, nonprofit and private sector organizations, foreign governments, or international organizations to achieve common goals.”

When asked what they perceive as the skill set of a successful collaborator, SES members most frequently mentioned individual attributes and interpersonal skills as essential, followed by group process skills, strategic leadership skills, and substantive/technical expertise.

Here is the skill set of a successful collaborator. Do particular members of your board and executive team have them? If so, they are the ones who should sit at the table when it comes time to discuss a partnership and collaboration.

## 1. INDIVIDUAL ATTRIBUTES

- Open Minded
- Patient
- Self-Confident and Risk Oriented
- Flexible
- Unselfish
- Persistent and Diligent
- Diplomatic
- Honest
- Empathetic
- Trustworthy
- Respectful
- Goal Oriented
- Self-Aware
- Decisive
- Friendly
- Sense of Humor

## 2. INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- Good Communicator
- Excellent Listener
- Works well with people

## 3. GROUP PROCESS SKILLS

- Facilitation
- Negotiation
- Collaborative problem solving
- Skill in group dynamics, culture, personalities
- Compromise
- Consensus building
- Mediation

## 4. SUBSTANTIVE/TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE

- Technical knowledge of subject area
- Project management and organizational skills
- Time management

Adapted with permission from “**The Skill Set of the Successful Collaborator**” by Rosemary O’Leary, Syracuse University; Yujin Choi, Florida International University; and Catherine M. Gerard, Syracuse University. *Public Administration Review*, ©2012 by The American Society for Public Administration.

