

COLLABORATING  
CONSCIOUSLY

**THE FOUR CORNERSTONES**

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# ABSTRACT

As we continue to face complex and difficult-to-solve problems such as climate change, social injustice, and a global pandemic, the need for collaboration is more pressing than ever. Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) are touted as promising mechanisms to tackle these challenges; however, despite their promise, not all partnerships are successful in their collaborative efforts. The presence or absence of individuals with the right mindset to participate in a *collaborative leadership* process is one common explanation for this.

The purpose of the research presented here is to better understand collaboration in the context of MSPs. Answering the question “*Which behaviors foster collaboration and which ones discourage collaboration?*” can help us address the question of “*How do you effectively participate in the process of collaborative leadership?*” In this research, qualitative data were collected and analyzed to reveal behaviors that influence successful collaboration.

Interpersonal behaviors emerge as most salient for effectively fostering collaboration as well as for discouraging it. Findings suggest that **compassion**, **character**, **courage**, and **commitment** are the four cornerstones to building and strengthening **collaborative connections**, and to the practice of **collaborating consciously**.

**Compassion** is reflected in behaviors perceived as *having empathy, being generous, and showing respect*. **Character** is represented through *acting ethically, demonstrating humility, and staying positive*. **Courage** is reflected in behaviors perceived as *being vocal, displaying curiosity, modeling vulnerability embracing uncertainty, staying resilient, and empowering others*. **Commitment** is shown by *advancing a shared vision, taking action, and believing in the power of collaboration*.

Frequently demonstrating these collaborative behaviors is an important part of building and strengthening healthy collaborative connections. Setting intentions around these cornerstones prior to interacting with others is one way to increase consciousness around engaging in collaborative behaviors. Collaborating consciously then becomes a practice and a pathway to developing a true **collaborative mindset**.

# PREFACE

In December 2019, a group of seven individuals (aka “Collaborating Well”) came together for a long weekend in Point Reyes Station, California. Although most of us had never met before, we shared one thing in common—an interest in collaborative leadership in the context of landscape-scale, multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs). The outcome of this retreat was a shared vision to design a curriculum for collaborative leadership development programs intended for those passionate about land conservation and stewardship. This retreat was also the impetus for me to review data I collected when studying the first four years of One Tam, a MSP committed to advancing a collective vision for Mount Tamalpais in Northern California.

In the midst of re-analyzing hundreds of pages of field notes from four years of One Tam monthly meetings and hundreds of open-ended survey responses to questions about key ingredients to effective collaboration, COVID-19 swept the globe. Several months later George Floyd’s death brought to the forefront the ongoing systemic racism that has plagued our country for far too long. This unprecedented moment in time further highlighted the need for people to come together to tackle complex, social problems—and the need to better understand what collaborative leadership looks like in practice.

The findings from my research presented here are further supported by data collected by our Collaborating Well group. I would like to recognize my Collaborating Well colleagues. They are my inspiration for analyzing the data I collected through a different lens. Thank you Lisa Brush, Sharon Farrell, Shawn Johnson, Devin Landry, Chandni Navalkha, Armando Quintero, Yakuta Poonawalla, Dylan Skybrook, and Kevin Wright.

**Individually, we are one drop.  
Together, we are an ocean.**

~Ryunosuke Satoro

# INTRODUCTION

**Collaboration**<sup>1</sup> is about the process of people working together. It is key to the success of multi-stakeholder partnerships (e.g., Gray & Purdy, 2018) and has been described as:

*a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively resolve their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible (Gray, 1989, p. 5).*

**Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)** are broadly defined as collaborative forms of governance comprised of various stakeholders who join forces to find a collective approach to a complex problem that affects all of them (Roloff, 2008; Rasche, 2012). MSPs are touted as promising mechanisms to tackle today's most complex and difficult-to-solve problems (e.g., Colquitt & George, 2011; Dentoni, Hospes, & Ross, 2012) ranging from the environment (e.g., biodiversity loss, climate change, water crises) and healthcare (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic, opioid crisis) to other societal issues (e.g., racial inequities and social justice issues, global hunger, large-scale involuntary migration). Despite the promise of these partnerships, not all are successful in their collaborative efforts. The presence or absence of individuals with the right mindset to participate in a **collaborative leadership** process is one common explanation for this.

## COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

The concept of **collaborative leadership** is not new. Frequently referred to as the “mother of modern management,” Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933) understood collaborative leadership as a vital process for fostering collaboration among people in business contexts. Chrislip and Larson (1994) have also advocated for civic leaders and citizens to approach complex public problems and shared opportunities using this process.

While there are varying definitions of collaborative leadership, there is a common understanding that it is a process involving shared power (i.e., no one person or group is in charge). Mary Follett argued that a shift in mindset—from one of coercive power (i.e., power-over) to one of coactive power (i.e., power-with, a jointly developed power)—as essential for collaborative leadership to be effective. She viewed coercive power as “the curse of the universe” and coactive power as “the enrichment and advancement of every human soul” (Follett, 1924, p. xii). If an MSP is engaging in a collaborative leadership process, all parties have joint power.

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<sup>1</sup> A glossary at the end of this article defines terms in the order that they appear.

## Who is a collaborative leader?

Since participants jointly share power in a collaborative leadership process, anyone actively involved with an effort purporting collaborative leadership is theoretically a **collaborative leader**. Becoming an effective collaborative leader (i.e., participant) is a process involving conscious awareness and commitment to transforming on a deeper level. Mary Follett (and Joseph Smith) argue that collaborative leadership is “not a skill set per se; rather, the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) associated with collaborative leadership are inextricably intertwined with the heart and the soul” (Mendenhall & Marsh, 2010, p. 301).

## What are collaborative stewards, mediators, and catalysts?

Although all participants are leaders with shared joint power, there is frequently a need for individuals to take on certain roles to promote and facilitate this type of shared leadership in partnerships, coalitions, and initiatives. Ansell and Gash (2012) identify **steward**, **mediator**, and **catalyst** as three **collaborative process roles**.<sup>2</sup>

The role of a **steward** involves facilitation and guidance throughout the collaborative leadership process, in addition to safeguarding process integrity. The role of a **mediator** is to help manage conflicts and negotiate exchanges among stakeholders. The role of a **catalyst** is to help identify and realize value-creating opportunities. Individuals may informally assume these roles or be formally appointed to them (e.g., partnership facilitator). A person can also assume one or more of these roles.

It is important to remember that stewards, mediators, and catalysts are not in control—they help lead the process, not the people. These roles are intended to establish, maintain, and safeguard a collaborative process that allows everyone to fully participate in the work. Individuals who are effective in these roles earn the respect and trust of those involved in the collaborative leadership process.

**Leadership is not defined by the exercise of power  
but by the capacity to increase the sense of power among those led.  
The most essential work of the leader is to create more leaders.**

**-Mary Parker Follett**

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<sup>2</sup> In situations where parties are collaborating, but not practicing the process of collaborative leadership, the term *collaborative leader* is sometimes used interchangeably among those in collaborative process roles (i.e., stewards, mediators, and/or catalysts).

## What are obstacles to collaborative leadership?

Adequately preparing participants for collaborative leadership is perhaps one of the biggest obstacles. Mendenhall and Marsh (2010) suggest several reasons for this: (1) the critical heart-and-soul aspect of collaborative leadership may be omitted in trainings due to fears of appearing too emotional, spiritual, nonscientific, or soft; (2) the message is not being successfully conveyed that collaboration is a very different way of interacting with others (unlike the contractual mode in which they are likely psychologically grounded); and (3) traditional training approaches are being used [instead of action learning pedagogies see Raelin (2006)].

Another potential obstacle is that participants may not be ready to embark on an endeavor that has been described by Follett (and Smith) as one of personal transformation. This involves shifting into a **collaborative mindset**. A collaborative mindset requires people to: (a) deeply believe in the power of collaboration, (b) want to become a certain kind of person, (c) commit to the current and future wellbeing of the group, and (d) be open to sharing differences and changing perspectives.

*For Follett and Smith, to truly participate in collaborative leadership one must first be—or be actively trying to become—the type of person who can pull it off. When individuals engage in collaborative leadership, they must be consciously aware that they are doing something special— something that is far removed from the mundane (Mendenhall & Marsh, 2010, p. 297).*

The absence of collaborative stewards, mediators, or catalysts is another possible obstacle to the collaborative leadership process. Since participating in collaborative leadership is a unique and different experience, it is useful to have people help coordinate and guide the collaborative leadership process.

A fourth obstacle to collaborative leadership occurs when sincere power sharing is not embraced or internalized by everyone participating, or people think they are practicing collaborative leadership when they are not. Collaborative leadership is most effective when all participants approach the work with a collaborative mindset and take the process seriously.

**Essentially, an effective collaborator must move beyond the traditional mindset of functioning within a hierarchy or order, to functioning as an equal, outside of normal standards of work (like a 9-5 job), to achieve a vision.**

-Study Participant

## THIS RESEARCH

Embracing a collaborative leadership style makes sense for MSPs invested in advancing shared opportunities and tackling today's complex problems. Integrative solutions to complex problems have been outcomes of collaborative leadership efforts (e.g., Chrislip & Larson, 1994). Moreover, MSPs typically have flat, horizontal (vs. hierarchical) organizational structures where stakeholders and their representatives are equals. Despite collaborative leadership being a natural fit for MSPs, questions around how to engage in the process of collaborative leadership remain.

The purpose of this research is to better understand collaboration in the context of MSPs. Answering the question "*Which behaviors foster collaboration and which ones discourage collaboration?*" can help us address the question of "*How do you effectively participate in the process of collaborative leadership?*"

As mentioned in the preface, I (along with Leigh Goldberg) studied an emerging landscape-scale, MSP in its first four years (2014-2018) with an emphasis on examining its impact.<sup>3</sup> Based in the San Francisco Bay Area, One Tam is committed to managing, stewarding, and conserving lands on and adjacent to Mount Tamalpais. Data collected over a four-year period include hundreds of pages of field notes detailing my observations while attending One Tam's monthly steering committee meetings and over 300 surveys with open-ended questions around effective collaboration. In that study, connectivity and trust emerged as essential building blocks for a highly functioning partnership (Mickel & Goldberg, 2018).

For the research presented here, I re-analyzed these data through the lens of collaboration and collaborative leadership and collected additional data from those involved with a broader range of MSPs focused on landscape stewardship, conservation, and/or management. An online survey with open-ended questions was sent out to individuals actively involved in MSPs across the United States and Europe. Potential survey respondents were recruited using a snowball sampling method (e.g., Noy, 2008) which resulted in 30 participants who were involved in collaborative efforts throughout the United States (i.e., New England, Southeast, Great Lakes, Rocky Mountains, Southwest, and West Coast) and Europe.

**That is always our problem, not how to get control of people, but how all together we can get control of a situation.**

**-Mary Parker Follett**

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<sup>3</sup> Mickel, A. E., & Goldberg, L. (2018). *Generating, Scaling Up, and Sustaining Partnership Impact: One Tam's First Four Years*. See [onetam.org/PIM](http://onetam.org/PIM)



The focus of this survey was on behaviors to help address the question of “*How do you effectively participate in the process of collaborative leadership?*” By knowing what behaviors foster collaboration, individuals can be trained to engage in those behaviors and therefore become more effective collaborators and better prepared to engage in the process of collaborative leadership.

Study participants were asked to reflect on their personal experiences and describe the behaviors of individuals they deemed as effective in fostering collaboration and ones that discouraged collaboration within the context of MSPs. Specifically, respondents were asked four sets of questions.

*1) In general, think about those people who successfully foster collaboration in your partnership work. What do they do to encourage people to effectively work together?*

*2) Think of a specific example that exemplifies collaboration in your partnership work. Describe the example in detail. What actions/behaviors did key people take to foster collaboration in this example?*

*3) In general, think about those people who (unknowingly) discourage collaboration in your partnership work. What do they do to discourage people to effectively work together?*

*4) Think of a specific example that illustrates a lack of collaboration in your partnership work. Describe the example in detail. What actions/behaviors did key people take to discourage collaboration in this example?*

Well-established methods were used to analyze this collection of qualitative data—hundreds of pages of field notes, over 300 surveys with open-ended questions around effective collaboration, and 30 surveys focused on specific behaviors. More specifically, the data were segmented into thematic thought units.<sup>4</sup> These thought units are the main ideas contained in a phrase, sentence, or paragraph and are the basic unit of analysis in this study. I generated and applied a coding scheme based on my holistic reading of all data.

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<sup>4</sup> The selection of the *thought unit* as the qualitative unit of analysis (rather than individual words or phrases) is consistent with those who argue that qualitative analysis is about *finding your story* (Patton, 2001, p. 432), which requires a focus on a larger unit of analysis to make sense of participants’ narratives.

The following four themes emerged in the analysis.

- ✓ Healthy *collaborative connections*<sup>5</sup> (i.e., relationships) are the key ingredient for successful collaboration in MSPs.
- ✓ Those assuming roles of steward, mediator, and/or catalyst must be able to establish and maintain connections to effectively guide and safeguard the collaborative leadership process.
- ✓ MSPs are most effective in generating, scaling up, and sustaining partnership impact when all parties embrace and practice the concept of shared-joint power.
- ✓ Interpersonal behaviors related to building and strengthening healthy collaborative connections (i.e., relationships) emerge as most salient in fostering collaboration in the context of MSPs.<sup>6</sup>

This fourth finding will be described in more detail in the following sections.

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<sup>5</sup> *Collaborative connections* are intentionally-formed relationships between and among individuals and groups for the purpose of working together on efforts and initiatives.

<sup>6</sup> The analysis also reveals other types of behaviors as important for collaboration such as one's related to demonstrating knowledge of issues, systems thinking, or building organizational structure, processes, and procedures. But, the overwhelming majority of data can be categorized into themes surrounding commonalities that are more interpersonal in nature.



# CORNERSTONES

Four main commonalities—*compassion, character, courage, and commitment*—emerged when analyzing participants’ descriptions of those who foster collaboration; similarly, those identified as discouraging collaboration were described as lacking these four attributes.

These findings suggest that compassion, character, courage, and commitment are the four *cornerstones for effective collaboration* in general as well as for participating in a collaborative leadership process. Representative quotes from study participants’ responses to open-ended survey questions about collaborative behaviors are presented in Tables 1-4. The collective set of behaviors is referred to as *collaborative behaviors*.

Anyone involved in collaborative efforts (whether or not they are participating in a MSP) should consider these collaborative behaviors as vital to establishing and maintaining healthy collaborative connections.

Collaboration has no hierarchy.

The Sun collaborates with soil to bring flowers on the earth.

- Amit Ray\*

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\* Amit Ray, a revered spiritual master and author, granted permission for use of his quotes.

# COMPASSION

**Compassion** emerged as the first cornerstone in fostering collaboration and maintaining collaborative connections. Compassion is reflected in behaviors perceived as *having empathy, being generous, and showing respect.*

<b>Having Empathy</b>	
<b>A person who is <u>empathetic</u> actively listens, shows concern, and strives to see issues from others' perspectives.</b>	
<i>"They lead with the heart, compassion, empathy, solidarity, and allyship."</i>	<i>"They are prepared to listen a lot and are kind."</i>
<i>"They create safe spaces where people are comfortable sharing their opinions."</i>	<i>"They listen well. They stand in others' shoes and have the capacity to see from other perspectives and empathize."</i>
<i>"They offer a sincere welcome to those participating and an invitation to co-create."</i>	<i>"They strive to see the issue from the other's perspective and show empathy."</i>
<b>A person <u>lacking empathy</u> doesn't listen, doesn't show concern for others, and sees issues only from their own perspective.</b>	
<i>"They don't listen to others."</i>	<i>"They only see issues from their own perspective."</i>
<i>"They lack empathy for a partner's needs or concerns if they are opposite of their own."</i>	<i>"They act disparagingly toward others and stir up conflict."</i>

**The true miracle lies in our eagerness to allow, appreciate, and honor the uniqueness and freedom of each sentient being to sing the song of their heart.**

-Amit Ray

## Being Generous

**A generous person spends time thinking about others and their problems, offers help, and shows appreciation through frequent acts of recognition.**

*“They reach out and redefine the problem from ‘your problem’ and ‘what do you plan to do about it’ to ‘our problem’ and ‘here’s how we can offer to help.’”*

*“They contribute time and resources to thinking about other people’s projects, problems, and possibilities.”*

*“They reach across boundaries to offer help and resources.”*

*“They show appreciation.”*

**An ungenerous person focuses on their own agenda and does not offer help to others.**

*“They run their own agendas; hold information and resources close; seek to amass their own power, influence, and position at the expense of others.”*

*“Only go to partners when they have an idea they want help working on versus trying to understand partner needs and co-develop solutions that provide value to everyone involved.”*

## Showing Respect

**Showing respect involves learning about others and their differences, honoring and valuing those differences, and treating everyone with respect.**

*“They approach each person as if they have something unique and valuable to offer the group. They make space for each person to contribute.”*

*“They build trust, listen and respect each other. We are a Native American land trust, they respect our culture and spirituality.”*

*“They withhold judgment of others, even if their orientation to the issue is totally opposite theirs.”*

*“They work to make people feel comfortable, included, and important during gatherings that are often predicated on conflict.”*

*“They value multiple points of view. See that different kinds of partners can offer different kinds of skills or expertise.”*

*“They show respect for others in the group and for the positions/organizations they represent.”*

**Being disrespectful means being dismissive and closed to differing viewpoints and opinions.**

*“They act despairingly towards others in the room (put down others for their beliefs and viewpoints).”*

*“They bully and show signs of prejudice/sexism/racism or lack of consideration for differences.”*

*“They do not respect or are not open to other points of view.”*

*“They dismiss or disparage others’ perspectives.”*

# CHARACTER

**Character** emerged as the second cornerstone. Character is represented through *acting ethically, demonstrating humility, and staying positive.*

<b>Acting Ethically</b>	
<b>Acting ethically involves being transparent and consistent, considering all perspectives equally, and promoting equity and inclusion.</b>	
<i>"They are consistent and provide same information to all participants."</i>	<i>"They lead with an open heart and open mind to build strength together. This allows for a space to understand each other's backgrounds, cultures and histories, and helps identify the needs of each partner."</i>
<i>"They consider all perspectives equally and foster a transparent environment."</i>	<i>"They are open to suggestions from every member of the group."</i>
<i>"They treat everyone respectfully and fairly."</i>	
<b>An <u>un</u>ethical person lacks transparency and consistency, favors certain people and groups, and is non-inclusive.</b>	
<i>"They lack transparency and communicate different things to different people."</i>	<i>"They fail to be inclusive of important stakeholders."</i>
<i>"They say one thing and do another."</i>	<i>"They give one person or group special favors—inconsistent in how they treat others."</i>

**Be like a lotus. Let the beauty of your heart speak. Be grateful for the mud, water, air and the light.**

-Amit Ray

## Demonstrating Humility

**Demonstrating humility** involves sharing credit and success willingly and openly, knowing and acknowledging personal limitations (in addition to strengths), and being grateful for interactions and experiences.

*“They share lots of credit and praise—confident yet humble.”*

*“They are not concerned with getting the lion’s share of credit for ‘solving’ a problem.”*

*“They are invested in the work, not their ego.”*

*“They are humble enough to apologize when [they] make mistakes and not castigate others for mistakes they made.”*

*“They are not all about themselves, and are, in a way, a servant of the group vision and personal missions of others.”*

**Not being humble** is characterized by being concerned about getting credit and discrediting others.

*“They are concerned with getting credit for things, or not being able to share space around a common goal because they want authorship over some new initiative.”*

*“They can be personally and professionally condescending.”*

*“They insist their point of view is correct.”*

## Staying Positive

Someone who is **positive** views challenges as opportunities, stays positive and inspires others to do the same, says “yes,” has fun, and celebrates joyfully.

*“They start from a ‘yes’ and ‘opportunity’ perspective rather than a ‘no,’ ‘scarcity,’ or ‘limitation’ perspective.”*

*“They help people see opportunities in challenges.”*

*“They lead with vision—not constraints or deficits.”*

*“They have a positive, can-do attitude.”*

*“They have fun!”*

Someone who is **not positive** is pessimistic and a naysayer who focuses on constraints and limitations.

*“They are focused on deficit, process, rules, constraints rather than where we want to go and how to get there.”*

*“They express pessimism or doubt that the idea can work.”*

*“They say no first to everything.”*

# COURAGE

**Courage** is the third cornerstone. Courage is reflected in behaviors perceived as *being vocal, displaying curiosity, modeling vulnerability, embracing uncertainty, staying resilient, and empowering others.*

<b>Being Vocal</b>	
<b>Being vocal includes openly sharing knowledge, clearly communicating concerns and fears, providing feedback, and speaking up when something doesn't seem right or just.</b>	
<i>"They share the knowledge and experience they have openly."</i>	<i>"They speak up if there is a problem, instead of "clamping up" and allowing for failure."</i>
<i>"They willingly communicate honestly about barriers."</i>	<i>"They set rules of behavior by calling out egregiously selfish or short-sighted actions."</i>
<i>"They provide feedback and ideas for course correction, if needed."</i>	
<b><u>Not</u> being vocal includes being silent and unresponsive, withholding information, and ignoring issues that are difficult to talk about.</b>	
<i>"They sit quietly and allow project failure instead of contributing ideas that could bring success."</i>	<i>"They ignore power structures, dynamics and inequities that exist within our systems."</i>
<i>"They are unresponsive to requests."</i>	<i>"They remain silent when commitments or joint decisions are needed."</i>
<i>"They do not communicate what they are doing effectively."</i>	

**If you are guided by courage, awareness and equanimity, nature will serve you. If you are driven by fear, anger or pride, nature will force you to compete.**

-Amit Ray



## Displaying Curiosity

**Displaying curiosity** involves asking questions, listening before providing input, being open to new ideas and ways of thinking, and maintaining a learning and growth mindset.

*"They ask questions first, then listen, and withhold their input until others have had their say."*

*"They facilitate dialogue and listen to people, demonstrate that their input is heard and makes a difference."*

*"They have an open heart and open mind...allowing for a space to understand each other's backgrounds, cultures, histories."*

*"They focus on learning and being open to new information and new ideas."*

**An uncurious person** lacks interest in others and their perspectives.

*"They are not open to diverse perspectives and voices."*

*"They lack interest in hearing other perspectives."*

*"They are not interested in adjusting their ways and views."*

*"They talk more than listen."*

## Modeling Vulnerability

**Modeling vulnerability** involves sharing one's authentic self, accepting critique, admitting mistakes, taking time for self-reflection, and asking for help.

*"They let their barriers come down."*

*"They self-reflect and encourage others to do the same."*

*"They allow space for vulnerability and authentic dialogue."*

*"They are open to being wrong and changing one's mind."*

**Not being vulnerable** involves being inauthentic and putting up a façade.

*"They are always angling for power or advantage."*

*"They shape shift pretending to be collaborative when they are actually self-seeking to gain power and influence over others or for themselves."*

*"They are critical of others and inauthentic."*

## Embracing Uncertainty

**A person who embraces uncertainty takes risks, experiments with different approaches, promotes outside-the-box thinking, and has tolerance for ambiguity.**

*“They are creative and feel comfortable thinking outside-the-box and voicing possible solutions that are outside the status quo.”*

*“They are innovative leaders in the content, while also being ready to celebrate innovative thinking and leadership in others.”*

*“They take risks and have some disregard for bureaucracy.”*

*“They are patient and have a tolerance for uncertainty.”*

**A person who avoids uncertainty prefers the status quo and stifles others’ creativity and innovative thinking.**

*“They refuse to think differently or creatively about the work that they do— they just want to do things the way they've always been done.”*

*“These people stifle the creativity and innovation that can really push a collaborative into a new phase of success.”*

*“They ignore or downplay the innovation of others.”*

*“They actively prefer to stay within their status quo.”*

## Remaining Resilient

**Remaining resilient involves adapting to changing situations, persevering in the face of challenges, and finding lessons learned when confronted with failure.**

*“They can pivot when an agenda or activity isn't working as hoped.”*

*“They have dedication, persistence, perseverance, and patience.”*

*“They adapt when needed and modify expectations.”*

*“They do not give up, despite serious challenges.”*

**A person who is not resilient is inflexible, focuses on failures, and gives up when confronted with failures.**

*“They deliberately sabotage program work in order to say ‘See... I told you it wouldn't work.’”*

*“They are not open to other ways of doing things (inflexible).”*

*“They give up easily.”*

## Empowering Others

A person who **empowers others** learns about them and their passions, fosters opportunities where others can develop and shine, trusts and enables them to make decisions and work independently, is open to answering questions, and provides encouragement.

*"They trust people will work independently and do not micromanage."*

*"They encourage the group to complete the work according to their own best judgement."*

*"They empower staff to make decisions and move the work forward since they were most often the real experts."*

*"They introduce people who might have similar/compatible interests and might not otherwise find each other."*

A person who **disempowers others** speaks negatively about them and the partnership, micromanages, and thinks that their way is the only way.

*"They engage in autocratic leadership practices and create unneeded hierarchies."*

*"'Badmouth' the project and leaders when they believe they will not be held accountable for their actions."*

*"They speak negatively about the partnership outside of the room."*

*"They are not enablers but gate-keepers to institutional work."*

*"They think their way of doing things is the only way."*

*"They micromanage and pick apart others' work."*

# COMMITMENT

**Commitment** is the fourth and final cornerstone. Commitment is shown by *advancing a shared vision, taking action, and believing in the power of collaboration.*

<b>Advancing a Shared Vision</b>	
<b>A person <u>advances</u> a shared vision by helping identify and create consensus, staying connected to a shared vision and encouraging others to do the same, finding opportunities for collaboration, and celebrating progress toward shared goals.</b>	
<i>“They identify shared goals and opportunities to add value to each partner’s work and the shared vision.”</i>	<i>“They look for consensus on issues and highlight those areas of agreement to push the effort forward and boost morale.”</i>
<i>“They stay connected to the big picture and help others stay connected to the big picture.”</i>	<i>“They point to early positive results as proof that partnership is worth the time and effort.”</i>
<b>A person <u>hinders</u> advancement of a shared vision by focusing only on their own goals, interests, and agendas.</b>	
<i>“They think of personal/organizational interest rather than shared branding.”</i>	<i>“They make unilateral decisions that are destructive to partnerships or the project.”</i>
<i>“They have a ‘me,’ ‘my,’ ‘I’ attitude that focuses on individual / personal gains.”</i>	<i>“They only look at their own (or very narrow) interests, without seeing the big picture.”</i>

## Taking Action

**Taking action** means showing up and being present mentally and physically, being prepared to dig in and contribute, following through on commitments, and following up with others.

*“Quite simply, they show up, lead by example, and follow through.”*

*“They are ready to dig in.”*

*“They meet and exceed their commitments.”*

*“They come prepared with information on a situation that is often complex and requires them to do extensive research in areas that may be highly technical/scientific. Simply put, they do their homework before meeting.”*

**Avoiding action** means not being mentally or physically present, being unprepared, and not following through on work.

*“They miss meetings regularly, are not caught up when they do attend, and often sit through meetings with no thoughts.”*

*“They fail to ‘show up’ and fail to follow through on critical assignments.”*

*“They are often missing at key meetings to go over progress or lack thereof. They find ways to not do what they originally agreed to do. They disappear.”*

*“They do not complete work they promised to do.”*

## Believing in the Power of Collaboration

**Believing in the power of collaboration** is demonstrated by affirming the value of collaboration through actions and words, reaching out to others (especially underrepresented groups), modeling how to compromise for the collective good, and approaching interactions with compassion, courage, and character.

*“They reinforce and affirm the value of collaboration throughout the process.”*

*“They come to the table with a collaborative spirit.”*

*“They make community engagement a top priority—they don’t just tell people about the work but invite them to join in and contribute.”*

*“They invite collaboration in everything they do.”*

*“They demonstrate an understanding of complex reciprocity, and are not simply advocating for their own interests.”*

*“They show a willingness to ‘give ground,’ to compromise, and to ‘move towards the middle’ to find common ground where agreements could be reached.”*

**Not believing in the power of collaboration** is demonstrated by finding ways to avoid collaborative work and compromise.

*“They find whatever rationale(s) that are most convenient to resist collaborative activity while never extending themselves to work together with partners.”*

*“They are unable to compromise and display siloed thinking and actions.”*

*“They create or enforce bureaucratic processes rather than looking for ways to remove or simplify those processes to allow for collaboration.”*

*“They perceive partnership as additional work rather than inherent to the work.”*

**Collaboration is the essence of life. The wind, bees, and flowers work together to spread the pollen. Mindfulness gives us the opportunity to work with cosmic collaboration.**

-Amit Ray

# COLLABORATING CONSCIOUSLY

The four cornerstones to building and strengthening collaborative connections are compassion, character, courage, and commitment. ***Collaborating consciously*** is the process of activating self- and group-awareness around ways to demonstrate a collaborative mindset(s) in interactions such as *showing compassion, having character, being courageous, and committing to the process of collaboration.*

Every participant in a collaborative leadership process (i.e., involved in a partnership committed to advancing shared opportunities and addressing complex problems through collaboration), and especially those assuming collaborative process roles (i.e., steward, mediator, and/or catalyst), should strive to approach every interaction with these in mind. It does not matter whether the interaction is face-to-face or virtual, if you are interacting with one person or a group. Nor does the purpose or type of interaction matter (e.g., to meet someone for the first time over coffee, to accomplish work through an organized meeting or event, to celebrate or protest at a gathering, etc.). Be mindful, set intentions, and practice collaborative behaviors.

## SETTING INTENTIONS

Establishing rituals to increase consciousness around sharing power such as setting intentions before interacting with others is highly encouraged. An example of setting intentions might include saying the following: *“Show compassion” “Have character” “Be courageous” “Commit to collaborating.”*

Setting intentions can be done quietly alone or aloud as a group. This process helps trigger a person to be conscious of their actions and words. If performed in a group, generating social cohesion is an added benefit. Enhanced consciousness paves the way for healthy collaborative connections.

*The key to collaborating consciously is to set intentions around each of these cornerstones in advance to interacting with anyone.*

## PRACTICE COLLABORATIVE BEHAVIORS

In addition to setting intentions, it is important to be mindful and conscious of behaviors when building and strengthening collaborative connections. The collaborative behaviors described here should be practiced frequently as an important part of shifting to a collaborative mindset and for building and strengthening healthy collaborative connections.

# COMPASSION

*Have empathy, be generous, and show respect*

## **Have Empathy**

- ✓ Create safe spaces where people are comfortable sharing
- ✓ Listen intently and show concern
- ✓ Be considerate, caring, and welcoming
- ✓ Demonstrate empathy and strive to see issues from others' perspectives

## **Be Generous**

- ✓ Spend time thinking about others and their problems
- ✓ Offer help (time and resources) to assist others with issues
- ✓ Redefine your problem to our problem (if appropriate)
- ✓ Show appreciation through frequent acts of recognition and compliments

## **Show Respect**

- ✓ Spend time learning about others' backgrounds, cultures, and histories
- ✓ Honor and value differing opinions, perspectives, needs, and expertise
- ✓ Treat everyone with respect through listening, affirmation, and kindness



# CHARACTER

*Act ethically, demonstrate humility, and stay positive*

## **Act Ethically**

- ✓ Foster a transparent environment
- ✓ Consider all perspectives equally
- ✓ Provide consistent and honest information to everyone
- ✓ Promote social justice, equity, and inclusion

## **Demonstrate Humility**

- ✓ Share credit and success willingly and openly
- ✓ Know and acknowledge your limitations (in addition to strengths)
- ✓ Be grateful for all interactions and experiences

## **Stay Positive**

- ✓ Embrace optimism and view challenges as opportunities
- ✓ Stay positive and inspire others to do the same
- ✓ Maintain a can-do attitude and say *YES*
- ✓ Have fun, be joyful, and celebrate

# COURAGE

*Be vocal, display curiosity, model vulnerability, embrace uncertainty, remain resilient, and empower others*

## **Be Vocal**

- ✓ Openly share your knowledge, experiences, and expertise
- ✓ Clearly communicate concerns and fears
- ✓ Provide feedback, including constructive criticism when needed
- ✓ Speak up when something doesn't seem right or just

## **Display Curiosity**

- ✓ Facilitate dialogue by asking questions and listening (prior to providing input)
- ✓ Be open to new ideas and different ways of thinking
- ✓ Maintain a learning and growth mindset

## **Model Vulnerability**

- ✓ Allow others to experience your authentic self
- ✓ Accept critique, admit mistakes, and apologize (when appropriate)
- ✓ Take time for self-reflection
- ✓ Ask for help when needed

## **Embrace Uncertainty**

- ✓ Dare to take risks and experiment with different approaches
- ✓ Be creative and promote outside-the-box thinking
- ✓ Have patience and tolerance for ambiguity/unknown

## **Remain Resilient**

- ✓ Adapt to changing situations and consider alternative paths
- ✓ Persevere in the face of challenges
- ✓ Find lessons learned when confronted with failure

## **Empower Others**

- ✓ Learn about others' passions, strengths, personal goals, and desires
- ✓ Look for and foster opportunities where others can learn, develop, and shine
- ✓ Trust and enable them to make decisions and work independently
- ✓ Be open to answer questions and provide words of encouragement

# COMMITMENT

*Advance a shared vision, take action, and  
believe in the power of collaboration*

## **Advance Shared Vision**

- ✓ Help identify and create consensus around a shared vision and goals
- ✓ Stay connected to a shared vision and encourage others to do the same
- ✓ Find opportunities for collaboration to advance shared goals
- ✓ Celebrate accomplishments toward shared goals

## **Take Action**

- ✓ Show up by being present (mentally and physically)
- ✓ Be ready to dig in and contribute (time, sweat, ideas, action, plans)
- ✓ Follow through on commitments and follow up with others

## **Believe in the Power of Collaboration**

- ✓ Affirm the value of collaboration through actions and words
- ✓ Reach out and invite others (especially underrepresented groups) to collaborate
- ✓ Model how to compromise for the collective good
- ✓ Commit to approaching interactions with compassion, character, and courage

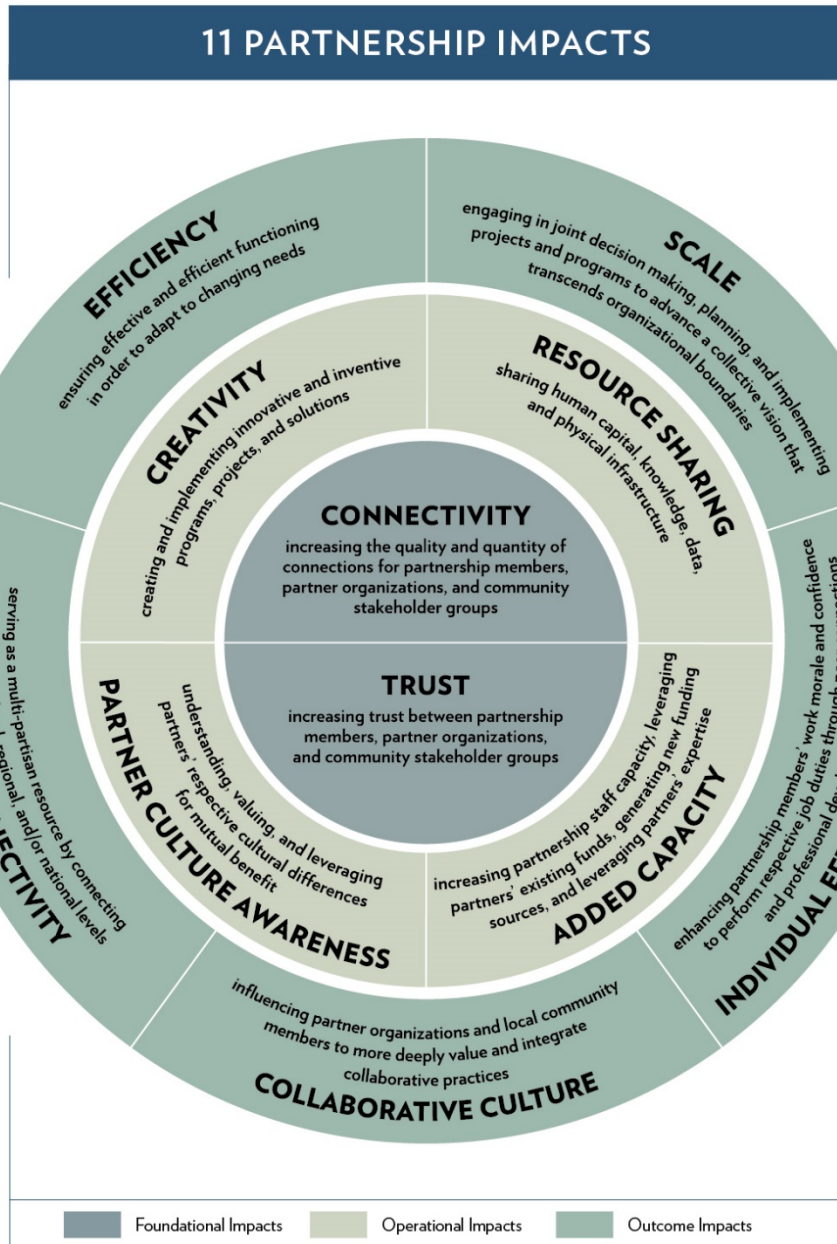
# COLLABORATING FOR IMPACT

Since healthy relationships are the key ingredient for successful collaboration, it is important to be conscious of how to demonstrate *compassion, character, courage* and *commitment* in interactions throughout all phases of a partnership lifecycle—start-up, building, and maintaining and sustaining—while working toward impacts such as the *11 Partnership Impacts* highlighted in the ***Partnership Impact Model*** (Mickel & Goldberg, 2018).

More specifically, one way to collaborate consciously is to actively think about how these cornerstones can be demonstrated when interacting with those in a partnership and with community members to build the *foundational impacts* of trust and connectivity. These cornerstones should also be applied when working with funders and partner organizations toward *organizational impacts*—increased creativity, resource sharing, added capacity, and partner culture awareness. They should also be applied to all stakeholders when working toward *outcome impacts*—increased efficiency, scale, expanded connectivity, collaborative culture, and individual effectiveness and resiliency.

Opportunities designed to develop a collaborative mindset should embrace an action-oriented approach with a focus on a wide range of common scenarios that a person may encounter in their collaborative work. A scenario-based approach that integrates role-play is one effective way to practice behaviors that generate and strengthen collaborative connections.

In conclusion, anyone participating in the process of collaborative leadership should strive to demonstrate compassion, character, courage, and commitment during each and every interaction. Collaborating consciously is a practice and a pathway to developing a true collaborative mindset.



The **Partnership Impact Model™** was created by Amy Mickel, Ph.D. and Leigh Goldberg based on findings from their Four-Year Partnership Study investigating the work and impact of the One Tam collaborative. The project was funded by the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, commissioned by the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, guided by One Tam Director Sharon Farrell, and supported by One Tam agency partners. This model was first published in the study's final report, *Generating, Scaling Up, and Sustaining Partnership Impact: One Tam's First Four Years* (Mickel & Goldberg, 2018).

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# Glossary of Terms

These are listed in the order that they are referenced in this article.

**Collaboration** refers to the process of parties working together to resolve differences and find solutions to complex problems.

**Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)** are collaborative forms of governance comprised of various stakeholders who join forces to find a collective approach to a complex problem that affects all of them.

**Collaborative leadership** is a process in which power is jointly shared among those involved in a collaborative effort(s) such as those in MSPs; no one person or group is in charge.

**Collaborative leader** is theoretically anyone actively involved with an effort purporting collaborative leadership. In situations where parties are collaborating, but not practicing the process of collaborative leadership, the term *collaborative leader* is sometimes used interchangeably with those engaging in *collaborative process roles*.

**Collaborative process roles** include *steward*, *mediator*, and *catalyst* (Ansell & Gash, 2012).

**Stewards** facilitate and guide the collaborative leadership process and safeguard the integrity of this process.

**Mediators** help manage conflicts and negotiate exchanges among stakeholders.

**Catalysts** assist with identifying and realizing value-creating opportunities.

**Collaborative mindset** requires people to: (a) deeply believe in the power of collaboration, (b) want to become a certain kind of person, (c) commit to the current and future wellbeing of the group, and (d) be open to sharing differences and changing perspectives.

**Collaborative connections** are intentionally-formed relationships between and among individuals and groups for the purpose of working together on efforts and initiatives.

**Cornerstones for effective collaboration** are *compassion, character, courage, and commitment*.

**Collaborative behaviors** include the collection of behaviors which represent the *cornerstones for effective collaboration (i.e., compassion, character, courage, and commitment)*.

**Compassion** is reflected in behaviors perceived as *having empathy, being generous, and showing respect*.

**Character** is reflected in behaviors perceived as *acting ethically, demonstrating humility, and staying positive*.

**Courage** is reflected in behaviors perceived as *being vocal, displaying curiosity, modeling vulnerability, embracing uncertainty, staying resilient, and empowering others*.

**Commitment** is reflected in behaviors perceived as *advancing a shared vision, taking action, and believing in the power of collaboration*.

**Collaborating consciously** is the process of activating self- and group-awareness around ways to demonstrate a collaborative mindset(s) in interactions such as *showing compassion, having character, being courageous, and committing to the process of collaboration*.

**Partnership Impact Model™** (Mickel & Goldberg, 2018) is based on a system of 11 interdependent, scalable impacts that are grouped into three classifications: *foundational, operational, and outcome* impacts. Foundational impacts are relationship-building impacts that are essential building blocks for a highly functioning partnership. Operational impacts are those that benefit the partnering organizations and the partnership itself. Outcome impacts are those that partnerships generate through their collaborative work.

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Despair shows us the limit of our imagination.  
Imagination shared creates collaboration, and  
collaboration creates community, and  
community inspires social change.

- Terry Tempest Williams



