



Advancing Collaboration with YMCA of the USA

Approach to Collaboration

As nonprofit organizations around the country are trying to cope with the COVID-19 crisis, we realized that we wouldn't sustain these nonprofits through increased program revenue or fundraising. We saw groups come together and coalesce to be a part of the federal government conversations around stimulus funds. We set aside our individual missions and priorities, and aligned behind three priorities we all shared to secure additional funding.

By ensuring we look at some of the provisions in the bills that support the survival of nonprofit organizations, we can begin the process of recovery.

Through teleconferencing, we set up times to discuss our priorities and divide the work according to expertise. We created a large coalition by connecting several smaller workgroups and had a week to shape provisions within the CARES Act. Overall we are generally pleased in the sense that two new funding streams now were available to nonprofits – the Small Business Administration (PPP) and the Main Street loans – however, we still have work to do to shape these in a way that will benefit more nonprofits. We benefited greatly from our pre-existing relationships – we knew each other and could trust each other, which facilitated the process of diving into a conversation as partners.

Application of the 9 Considerations for Collaboration

Build Trust

We are transparent in all our partnerships and share our priorities. Recently, we were able to achieve so much in such a short amount of time because we have been taking the time to build relationships with members of Congress over the last several years. We've been inviting elected leaders from all levels of governments to see our work, lay hands on our projects, and understand our mission. Now, when we're approaching these elected officials, they already know the programs we're talking about as soon as we call them. We build a diverse range of relationships; in the most recent case, our friends on Capitol Hill have been vital for ensuring sustainability.

Have a Vision

Communities have been coming together more than we've seen before. When given opportunities for a shared mission, goals, or aspirations, if we come together and share our resources, strength, and partnerships, we all succeed.

Seek to Assure the Success of Your Collaborators

A mentor to Neal Denton, our Senior VP of Government Relations, once said, "You can get absolutely anything done in this town if you're prepared to work with others and share the credit;" time after time, we've found this to be true. During this time, as people in our sector are facing unprecedented furloughs and layoffs, we need to ensure we can distribute the work and make space for everyone to bring what they can to the table.

Take Stock

Dividing up the work guarantees collaboration. It's been a marvel to watch everyone come together, set their egos aside, and collectively pull the rope in the same direction for the good of the whole sector.

Start Small

The collaboration we're working on is still growing now. There are over 250 different national nonprofits working on this, and everyone has their own separate

missions and priorities. We convened and identified three things that affect us all as 501(c)(3) nonprofits, and determined several solutions collectively. Our circle is still growing with every passing day, but we started small.

Fail Fast, and Build Rigorous Feedback Loops

Recently, we talked to several congressional staffers who didn't grasp the message we were sharing with them, which brought up the notion of recalibrating every day. We have several feedback loops to include internal and public policy decision-makers, who point out successful and compelling messages, as well as those that aren't resonating.

Take a Portfolio Approach

Often, as several groups convene to address the different areas we're dealing with daily, other topics may arise. Organizations that have similar mission responsibilities will set up separate calls to discuss those issues. The Y is the largest nonprofit provider of childcare in the nation, so in addition to the larger nonprofit coalition, we work closely with the out-of-school time community to advance priorities that affect that sector.

Consider Non-traditional Partners

During this time of crisis, nonprofit organizations around the country are collaborating by looking into their hometowns to identify what families need. For the Y, we focus on childcare. We've been a part of #Relief4Charities efforts, which include partnerships that various nonprofits are doing together. We've partnered with local restaurants, high schools and colleges to provide food to communities. Also, we've joined forces with the American Red Cross by hosting blood drives across the country.

Keep Your Donors Apprised of Your Collaborations

We keep our donors in the loop at all times and share our expertise. Our funders encourage collaborations; we believe partnerships add value to the work that we do.

Future Collaborations

Now that we have the contact information of other organizations within this newfound coalition, post-COVID, we'd like to continue these partnerships. We hope the nonprofit sector will be able to take from this experience and put it towards shaping public policy as we emerge into our new normal.

Great opportunities can arise from working together to accomplish something sizable, even without the circumstances of a crisis.



Neal Denton,
Senior V.P./ Chief Government Affairs Officer
The YMCA

About the Organization

The YMCA (Y) is the leading nonprofit committed to strengthening the community by connecting all people to their potential, purpose, and each other. Working locally, we focus on empowering young people, improving health and well-being, and inspiring action in and across communities.

Disclaimer: All participants were interviewed about past collaborations through the framework of the 9 Considerations for Collaboration. Naturally in some organizations, not every one of the considerations are applicable to their circumstances.