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An Exploration of Communication Strategies for Effectively Organizing and Managing Collaborative Grant Writing Groups

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Running Head: COLLABORATIVE GRANT WRITING

An Exploration of Communication Strategies for
Effectively Organizing and Managing Collaborative Grant Writing Groups

Lisa C. Dopke

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

In

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To my children, Alison and Kyle

I hope this work will provide encouragement, for you both,
to aim high in pursuit of your dreams.

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ABSTRACT

The present research explored approaches to collaborative grant writing, as little is known about the details or range of variation in the processes that are currently deployed by professionals working within this context. Findings were used to build a typology of the roles specific to collaborative grant writing groups, provide a discussion of ideal group composition and leadership, and to identify and suggest ten *best practice* strategies for organizing and managing group dynamics and tasks during the phases of the collaborative writing process.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Required collaboration is becoming the norm for many organizations in pursuit of federal grant funding, including institutions of higher education. While this may have always been the case for research-based grants, mandatory collaboration, in which the type of partner organizations are designated by the department¹, has not traditionally been required for grants that fund educational programming, support services and/or educational outreach. However, many federal departments have perhaps begun to recognize that in order to achieve the greatest return on the public investment that grants represent, a comprehensive solution that taps into the variety of resources available within a given community must be encouraged (Baker, Homan, Schonhoff & Kreuter, 1999). This commitment to protect taxpayer interests is set forth as part of a department's strategic plan, and reflects its priorities through integration of these interests with its mission and program authorities (Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education [FIPSE], CFDA# 84.116H, 2010).

With that being the case, mandatory grant collaboration means that collaborative writing has become the expectation for those charged with drafting the application, as a critical component of obtaining grant funding is the proposal document itself. The opportunity for collaboration presents many advantages for writers such as maximum input, checks and balances, access to a depth of experience, resources, joint knowledge, error reduction/achieving a more accurate text, and potentially, a higher quality document (Appel, 2005; Noël & Robert, 2004). However, these benefits hinge upon the ability of the collaborative group as a whole to carry out their interactions and subsequent writing tasks effectively. This is often simpler in

¹Required partners may include workforce development boards, industry/business, non-profit organizations that provide education-specific services such as literary councils or k-12 schools, and community or faith-based groups.

theory than in practice, given that the turnaround time for most federal solicitations for grant applications (SGA) is now thirty days from announcement in the federal register.

When such collaborative structures are not already in place (i.e., "...an alliance among individuals linked by a common problem in order to develop a viable solution for addressing that problem") (Crawley, Dopke, Hughes & Dolan, 2007, p. 184), creating an innovative program that represents a "true collaboration" of organizational resources and ongoing reciprocity can be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve within these constraints. Moreover, even when the underlying structures for collaboration are in place, the communication required to orchestrate an often diverse team through a successful grant writing endeavor, and subsequent project implementation (if funding is received), tends to be challenging from the outset for a number of reasons. For example, group members from representative organizations may play diverse roles and/or have different levels of influence within and outside of their organization (Bacon, 1990), leading to dissention in assignment of tasks. Partnering organizations also do not necessarily share similar missions and organizational acculturation (Palmeri, 2004), which dictate how and when work is accomplished. The group's ability to mediate these, and other differences, therefore likely plays a significant role in whether or not they can achieve a successful outcome.

In addition, "because collaborative work often places unique demands on participants - requiring some unfamiliar attitudes and behaviors and a wide range of specialized skills - collaborative capacity is greatly influenced by both the existing skills, knowledge and attitudes members bring to the table and efforts taken to build, support, and access this capacity" (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz & Lounsbury, 2001, p. 243). In other words, not only is it essential to strategically select the group's members, as each individual's skills, talents and work habits must provide an added value to the whole, but the ability of the group to communicate and work

together to achieve its collective purpose also largely depends on how effectively its dynamics are organized and managed (i.e., to create conditions that promote collaboration).

Navigating collaborative grant writing ventures is of utmost importance for institutions of higher education and other organizations seeking federal grant funding. The present research therefore explored approaches to organizing and managing group dynamics and tasks during various phases of the collaborative writing process. Findings were used to identify *best practice* strategies for organizing and managing group dynamics and tasks. It is anticipated that the suggested strategies will increase the effectiveness of such groups at developing an innovative program that can then be represented through a collective proposal document.

Statement of the Problem

While the existing literature provides a broad overview of collaborative writing practices across a variety of settings, such strategies have yet to be established within the context of collaborative grant writing. This study sought to identify strategies for organizing and managing group dynamics and tasks within this context through the exploration of the following research questions:

1. What information might help professionals to position themselves and their organization for success as they prepare to embark on collaborative grant writing endeavors?
2. What strategies are being deployed by professionals who participate in collaborative grant writing activities to organize and manage group **dynamics** (i.e., managing interpersonal communications, negotiating conflict, assigning roles, establishing a communication plan, and debriefing)?
3. What strategies are being deployed by professionals who participate in collaborative grant writing activities to organize and manage group **tasks** (i.e., information collection, document management, and writing tasks)?

Purpose of the Study

Little is known about the details or range of variation in the processes currently used within the collaborative grant writing context. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to explore and identify *best practice* strategies for organizing and managing group dynamics and tasks within this context. The strategies discovered are presented within the framework of Fisher's (1970) theory of small group decision making in an effort to suggest how particular strategies, when deployed at strategic points, might help the group move through the collaborative and writing processes more efficiently. The theory provided the framework for creating a continuum, or visual representation, of the phases of the collaborative writing process. In this sense, Fisher's theoretical phases of group decision making provided a general timeframe for deploying a particular strategy in order to achieve a specific outcome. For example, the strategy of internal planning, when conducted by an organization in anticipation of collaborating (i.e., the pre-collaborative phase), sets the stage for successful group work.

Significance of the Study

While past research on collaborative writing has served to inform the development of *best practices* for a range of collaborative writing scenarios, additional research was necessary for identifying and establishing strategies that provide collaborative grant writing groups with the tools they need to work more efficaciously. The topic was deemed both timely and relevant as many federal departments now require collaborative partnerships in conducting grant activities. This necessitates the development of such strategies to ensure the success of these endeavors.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature reveals that *collaborative writing* as a subject of inquiry began in the late 1980s (Noël & Robert, 2004). Over the past decades such research has explored the topic in a variety of ways. For example, researchers have examined the writing strategies used by collaborative writing groups (Noël & Robert, 2004; Stratton, 1989), the assignment of group roles (Nelson & Smith, 1990; Stratton, 1989), the influence of gender (Lay, 1989), the use of collaborative writing assignments in business communications courses (Scheffler, 1992; Duin, 1990; Nelson & Smith, 1990), and the impact on, and use of, technology in collaborative writing endeavors (Jones, 2005; Sakellariadis, et al., 2008). The majority of these studies have been qualitative in nature, using case studies, open-ended interviews and surveys, or a combination thereof, to explore the topic and establish a basis for understanding collaborative writing processes in these various contexts. Yet, even with several aspects of this topic having been explored, many inconsistencies remain; thus, the information that we have about collaborative writing tends to be somewhat fragmentary and unfocused (Allen, Atkinson, Morgan, Moore & Snow, 1987).

One reason for inconsistencies across research may be that there has been little agreement in defining the term *collaborative writing* (Beck, 1993; Lowry, Curtis & Lowry, 2004). For instance, Duin (1990) defined collaborative writing as "...a process that requires support for more than just the exchange and maintenance of information" (p. 45), while Jones (2005) defined it "...as interaction by an author or authors with people, documents, and organizational rules in the process of creating documents" (p. 450). In addition, seemingly synonymous terms are used throughout the literature such as cooperative writing, group authoring and co-authoring (Lowry,

et al., 2004), which is indicative of the numerous iterations that exist with respect to collaborative writing endeavors. Consequently, these variations make it difficult to interpret the findings of the existing research with any degree of specificity (Allen, et al., 1987; Lowry, et al., 2004). What has been established, however, is the difficult nature of writing collaboratively, the wide range of strategies groups use for producing a collective document, roles that emerge as a group moves through stages of interaction and the writing process, and the influence and functions of interpersonal communication within collaborative writing groups.

One suggestion nearly all researchers agree upon is that collaborative writing is as difficult as it is complex, and that it involves both social and intellectual aspects. This complexity is well illustrated in the following discussion by Kraut, Galegher, Fish & Chalfonte (1992):

Socially, collaborative writing requires that group members establish shared achievement goals, that they divide tasks among themselves keeping in mind both concerns for fairness and differences in individual skills, and that they resolve questions of authority within their group. Intellectually, it requires that group members establish shared rhetorical goals and a common understanding of the facts on which the document is to be based. They must also solve high-level writing problems... To meet these social and intellectual challenges, group members must also contend with considerable procedural complexity. That is, they must adopt procedures that will enable them to get their work launched; to circulate draft versions among group members; and to refer to specific portions of their documents as pieces of text are created, revised, and incorporated into a unified whole. To launch their work, group members must be able to coordinate their conversation well enough to ensure mutual understanding of the project's requirements

and goals and, more important, of the substance of the problem they are confronting; that is, they must be able to collaborate in the construction of meaning. (p. 377)

It is evident in reviewing the challenges faced by collaborative writing groups across contexts that the difficulties they encounter typically rest upon how group communication, including the organization and management of group dynamics, is facilitated. For instance, if a problem arises with group dynamics, it is likely that the management of writing tasks will also be compromised. Instances in which group communication or the management thereof, is the primary cause of difficulty with writing tasks include diffusion of responsibility, inequitable division of labor, difficulty keeping to the timeline and managing interpersonal relationships (Noël & Robert, 2004). Research has revealed that some of these difficulties might best be managed by way of a clear delineation of group roles such as project manager, coordinator, writer, editor, data gatherer, subject matter expert, consultant, and reviewer (Lowry, et al., 2004; Noël & Robert, 2004).

While many of the existing studies touch on the idea of group communication as being central to collaborative writing issues, few fully explore this idea or provide a discussion of how “interventions” at the various identified phases of the group communication or writing processes might impact the overall success of the group in completing collaborative writing tasks. As such, the present study attempted to address this identified gap by suggesting a set of *best practice* strategies. In selecting these strategies, it was important to first consider the unique characteristics of the context in which the collaborative writing is taking place, as differing scenarios often require their own unique strategies (Stratton, 1989). These characteristics as they pertain to the context of collaborative grant writing are presented in the following section.

Defining “Collaborative Writing”

Collaboration is in essence a communicative venture, as communication is a fundamental necessity of any kind of teamwork (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2001; Germonprez & Zigurs, 2006). As such, collaborative writing was defined for the purposes of this research as it was by Lowry, et al. (2004): “An iterative and social process that involves a team focused on a common objective that negotiates, coordinates and communicates during the creation of a common document” (p. 72). This definition was selected, as it implies the necessity for group communication and shared decision-making within the overall framework of the writing process. In addition, building on past research ensured greater transferability across findings.

Overview of the Collaborative Grant Writing Process

The development of a federal grant proposal is driven by a solicitation for grant applications (SGA). This document sets forth the priorities of the funding agency and establishes the “rules” governing the submission of a proposal including document content, formatting and requirements for mandatory partners (e.g., institutions of higher education, community or faith-based groups, local non-profits such as literacy councils, workforce development boards, etc.). It is then up to the collaborating group to determine who is best positioned to be the lead applicant (i.e., fiscal agent). This decision often impacts who is assigned to the roles of the collaborative writing team, as well as who is ultimately responsible for the preparation and submission of the final proposal. In this sense, collaborative writing is “a holistic process, which involves heavy group communication and can be conducted through many different strategies and work modes” (Lowry, et al., 2004, p. 90), which the group must negotiate. The fluidity of this process might best be described as “permeable,” as its outcome is subject to multiple group member interactions. Thus, while program development is in theory separate from the writing, those

interactions greatly influence the ability of the team, particularly the writers, to adequately convey the details of the project without discrepancy.

The proposal document itself is technical in nature, requiring a detailed response to questions posed by the funding agency in the areas of need, proposed solution for addressing the need (i.e., project description, implementation and management plans), goals and objectives, budgeting and methods for evaluating outcomes. The collective proposal document must present details of the collaborative project in a clear, concise format, and be created relatively quickly in accordance with a strict deadline (i.e., typically thirty days). For the writing team, the goal is to articulately describe and/or explain the project concept which often blends the different workplace cultures and values, as well as the different missions of each partner organization.

Proposal writers must also ensure that action items (i.e., program activities) tie seamlessly to implementation costs which involves a weaving together of the need, the objectives and the outcome evaluation as they relate to the development and implementation of the program that the grant will fund. This level of detail is essential, but often when writers from different communities collaborate there is an “unspoken need to watch what one says and keep certain formality – [which] may inhibit the grant writing process by forcing writers to focus their energy on maintaining politeness instead of making sure that the proposal itself is written as a comprehensive and coherent document” (Bernhardt, 2005, p. 3). These factors make it difficult, if not impossible, to predict the success of collaborative grant writing ventures. However, adherence to *best practices* for organizing and managing such aspects of the collaborative writing process likely has the potential to increase the success of the group in this respect.

Characteristics Unique to the Collaborative Grant Writing Context

The context of collaborative grant writing is unique in that a diverse group representing differing public sectors must come together to collectively develop and propose a comprehensive program (i.e., complimentary set of services) within a very short timeframe. Other unique aspects of this context include the influence of community politics, existing relationships among organizations, individual agendas and loyalties to the group, and ideological differences in how the partner organizations approach the issue to be addressed. Such facets among the various stakeholders may be positive or be the cause of strain, which impacts the overall capacity for collaboration. Moreover, when members come together, they must negotiate hierarchies, build trust, resolve conflicts as they arise, and implement project management strategies within these constraints in order to achieve collective goals.

Processes Parallel to Proposal Writing

“Collaborative writing is a highly salient area of collaborative research and practice that has significant impact on academia, industry and government” (Lowry, et al., 2004, p. 68), especially in terms of obtaining federal grant funding. As this statement suggests, the complexity of the writing process in this context is increased not only with multiple authors, which leads to an inevitable need to coordinate multiple perspectives and work efforts, but also the parallel processes/activities involved in navigating group dynamics within the context of project development, budget negotiations and the like, which may present challenges (Lowry, et al., 2004). These processes and activities require integration of multiple perspectives, consensus-building and high-level interpersonal interactions that are not typically involved in single-author writing or a part of the day-to-day workflow (Kraut, et al., 1992). Here, few activities require participants to be as candid as group writing, especially under a deadline.

It is in this sense, that managing group dynamics plays an integral role, as without frequent and transparent communication it is unlikely that a collaborative grant writing group can be successful. Furthermore, “once multiple people are working toward one writing task, an effective collaborative writing experience will then require communicating, negotiating, coordinating, group researching, monitoring, rewarding, punishing, recording, socializing and so forth, as supported by substantial research on the importance of effective group dynamics in collaborative writing tasks” (Lowry, et al., 2004, p. 72). A breakdown in any of these areas likely will result in a rejected proposal.

For instance, Bernhardt (2005) discussed the work process of an unsuccessful collaborative grant writing team. The author noted that team members represented diverse organizations, were relatively unfamiliar with one another, worked at a distance with limited opportunity for sharing in a meaningful dialogue (i.e., no face-to-face interaction and few live phone conversations) throughout the process, and that each member produced a section of the final proposal without discussing the content with the larger group. Additionally, while the team had agreed to routinely circulate drafts as they were written, most team members fell short of making a sincere effort to do so. Inevitably, these circumstances resulted in the team’s inability to develop an effective proposal.

Collaborative writing scenarios outside of grant writing (e.g., journal articles, etc.) naturally require implementation of different communication strategies, environments, roles and modes of control (Stratton, 1989). However, virtually no research pertaining specifically to the strategies used in the context of collaborative grant writing exists. Therefore, while this brief review of the literature serves as a starting point to inform the development of *best practice*

strategies for collaborative grant writing groups, additional research is necessary for identifying and establishing the strategies that are most effective within this unique context.

Theories of Small Group Decision Making

A number of models have been developed in the study of small group interaction, and there is consensus that behavior in small groups is not random. Rather, distinct phases can be identified along a continuum in which group transactions typically take place (Nelson & Smith, 1990). A brief review of these theories is presented in Table 1.

Table 1		
<i>Primary Small Group Decision Making Theories</i>		
Linear Phase Models: These theories postulate that group communication moves through an identical series of stages in a linear fashion regardless of the group.		
Theorist	Year	Explanation of Suggested Phases
Lewin	1947	First empirical study examining group dynamics. His model was the Individual Change Process which included three stages: 1) Unfreezing, 2) Change, and 3) Freezing.
Tuckman	1965	Tuckman published a review of the literature, based on which he developed the Stages Model which included four stages: 1) forming, 2) storming, 3) norming, and 4) performing.
Tuckman & Jensen	1977	The model was later expanded to include a fifth stage, Adjourning, in 1977.
Fisher	1970 1978	Fisher observed interactions noticing how the situation changed as the decision was negotiated and finalized. Stages of this model included: 1) Orientation, 2) Conflict, 3) Emergence, and 4) Reinforcement.
Poole	1981 1983	Poole suggested a more complicated multi-sequence model (rather than a linear one) in which decisions are the results of multiple variables. He used Fisher's model as the basis for his own. His model included three activity tracks: 1) Task Track, 2) Relation Track, 3) Topic Track and Breakpoints. He postulated that decisions are the result of continuously evolving interactions that move through these tracks.
McGrath	1991	McGrath suggested that each team follows its own unique route to reach the same outcome. His model consists of modes of interaction to include: Mode I: Inception, Mode II: Technical Problem Solving, Mode III: Conflict Resolution, and Mode IV: Execution, with all groups beginning and ending in the same modes. He also proposed that groups adopt these modes in conjunction with three group functions: production, well-being, and member support.

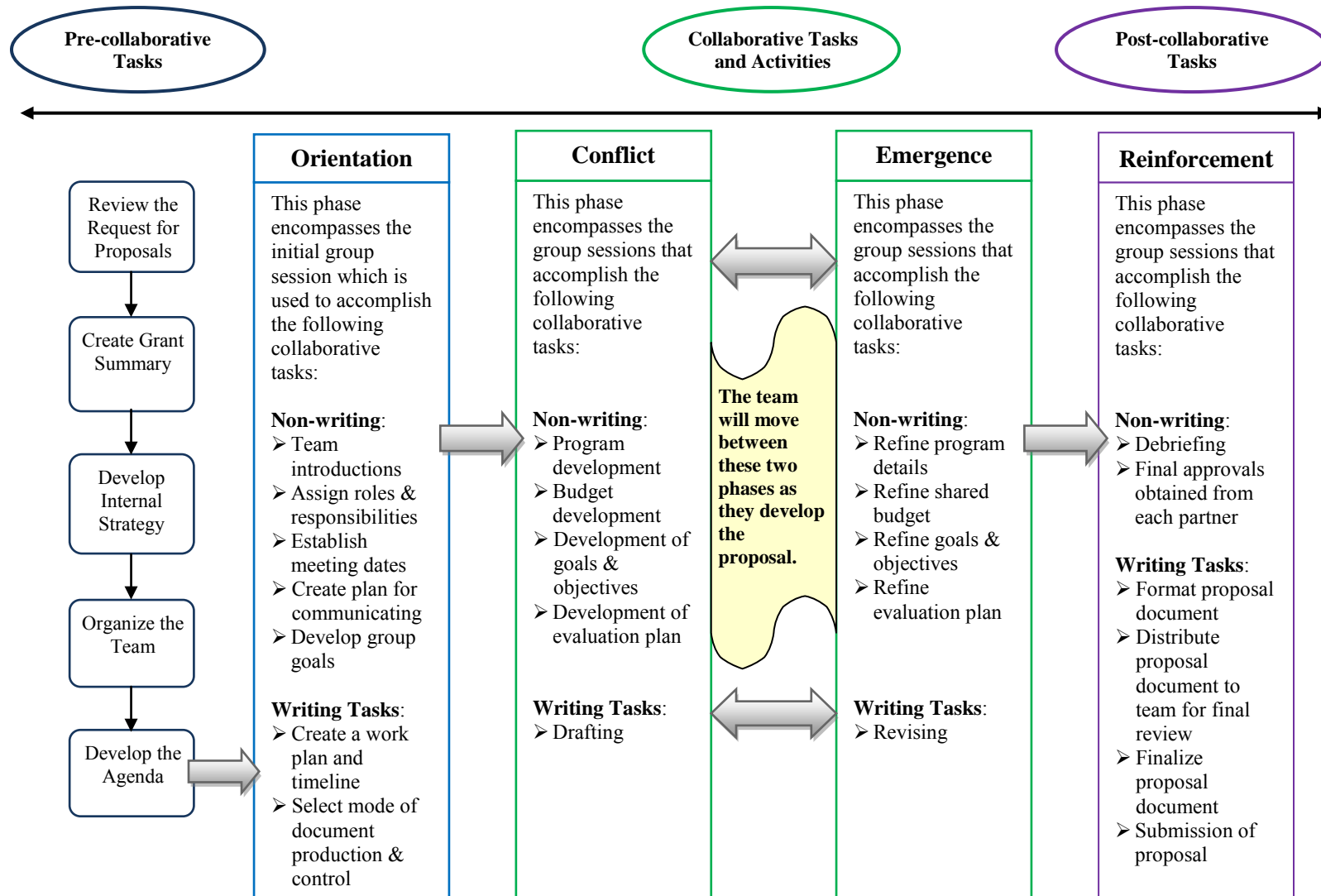
<i>Table 1 Continued...</i>		
Theorist	Year	Explanation of Suggested Phases
Tubbs	1995	Tubbs used a systematic method for examining group decisions. His model also included four stages: 1) Orientation, 2) Conflict, 3) Consensus, and 4) Closure.

As this table demonstrates, the number of phases involved in group decision making, and the terms used to explain the phases, is dependent on the particular theory and model used to examine the communication transactions; however, similar phases emerge in each case. As such, it was advantageous in the present study to identify and suggest strategy interventions within the context of these phases, as this added level of detail likely increases the potential effectiveness of the strategies suggested to influence group efficacy.

Fisher (1970) presented a simple theory of group decision emergence in which the communication transactions were divided by phase. This model was selected as the overarching framework in which the collaborative grant writing process was explored in order to demonstrate strategic points along a specific work continuum that strategy interventions might best be deployed. Moreover, deploying interventions at specific points as suggested systemizes the processes to some degree, thereby potentially helping groups move through the collaboration and writing processes more efficaciously.

According to Fisher's model, the group decision phases are orientation, conflict, emergence and reinforcement, and he postulates that groups consistently move from one phase to the next, and sometimes back again, as they make collective decisions. With respect to the context of collaborative grant writing, failure at any stage may take the form of a missed deadline, missing information, and illogical or nonfunctional organization of the proposal document (Farkas, 1991). Figure 1 provides a visual representation of this discussion. A description of interactions that typically take place during each phase follows.

Figure 1: Collaborative Writing Communication Continuum



Pre-Collaborative Tasks

Pre-collaborative tasks precede the orientation phase and are completed in preparation for collaborative work. These tasks are typically completed by the organization planning to initiate the collaboration, although this is not always the case. Within the context of collaborative grant writing, tasks at this phase likely include contacting potential partner organizations that are likely to be mandated in the SGA, organizing an agenda for initial meetings, preparing a summary of the grant opportunity and developing an internal strategy for program development that can later be negotiated within the collaborative group setting. Such tasks are completed in order to facilitate the initial meeting smoothly, as this meeting serves as the foundation for a productive endeavor (Appel, 2005; Easter & Schultz, 1998).

Phase 1: Orientation

The initial group meeting serves as the orientation phase. During orientation, group members build rapport as they become acquainted and begin to establish the communication rules and expectations for group interaction. To enhance collaborative processes, there must be some form of relationship building at this stage to serve as a way to gain commitment to the project. Therefore, formal and informal channels may be used to gain feelings of reciprocity and set the stage for the positive exchange of information (Fisher, 1970; Swarts, 2004). A sense of group identity and cohesion develops if the group is functional. These feelings lead to satisfaction with the group by individual members, as does perceived progress toward the goal (Kerr & Tindale, 2004; Nelson & Smith, 1990). Collaborative grant writing activities that might take place during this phase include:

Role Assignment

A successful collaboration provides members with a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities that facilitate collective action toward achieving a common goal. “Such clarity and formality [will] help to create a stable, predictable coalition structure and operating procedure, reduce conflicts, and promote member satisfaction and commitment” (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2001, p. 254), as the potential for conflict increases when the boundaries of responsibility are unclear (Nelson & Smith, 1990).

Research suggests that identified roles might include project manager, coordinator, writer, editor, data gatherer, subject matter expert, consultant/reviewer (Lowry, et al., 2004; Noël & Robert, 2004). The most pertinent of these roles is likely that of project manager. This individual takes on the responsibility of leading the team through the process of making key project decisions. Therefore, the selection of an appropriate manager is essential, as few, if any, projects in this context require that the team actually include a *certified* project manager. In most cases, the project manager can be a single individual or a small group of individuals who are able to work cohesively (Kent-Drury, 2000; Bacon, 1990). The role of the coordinator is to disseminate information to the group, coordinate all group communications about the development of the proposal, and track group progress. The responsibilities of the writer and editor are apparent, as are those of the data gatherer. The subject matter expert works with the writers to ensure that the technical aspects of the program are accurately represented in the proposal and the consultant reviews and advises on document formatting and content (Lowry, et al., 2004).

Creation of a Work Plan & Timeline

Once roles and responsibilities are established, the writing team may create a work plan for accomplishing the collaborative writing tasks according to an agreed upon timeline. Creating a work plan ensures that tasks are completed in a timely manner by helping the group hold its members accountable for their share of the work. Moreover, clearly stated long-range plans, when correlated with specific activities, may facilitate the perception of progress among group members (Nelson & Smith, 1998).

Selection of the Mode for Document Management

Selecting the method of document production/control during the orientation phase is critical in working toward a strict deadline. It is likely that the chosen method will ultimately facilitate or hinder the group's ability to complete necessary tasks. Some of the potential methods, as noted throughout the literature, are listed below in Table 2.

Table 2		
<i>Methods for Document Management</i>		
Method	Author/Year	Description
Single-Author Writing	Jones (2005) Lowry, et al. (2004) Noël & Robert (2004)	A single writer drafts the text, but he/she interacts with the collaborative group to get advice about, or review of, the text.
Horizontal Division	Stratton (1989) Jones (2005) Lowry, et al. (2004) Noël & Robert (2004)	Multiple writers divide the writing tasks into discrete units and then work autonomously.
Sequential	Sharples (1992) Jones (2005) Lowry, et al. (2004) Noël & Robert (2004)	Based on a clear agreement about the division of labor and roles, the document is circulated from one writer to the next; each section of text builds on what has previously been written.
Stratified	Stratton (1989) Lowry, et al. (2004)	Method of collaborating, in which individuals perform clearly defined roles based on what he/she brings to the table (i.e., what he/she is best at).
Collective	Sharples (1993) Jones (2005) Lowry, et al. (2004) Noël & Robert (2004)	Involves two or more individuals collectively writing a single document together throughout the entire writing process. This includes 'real time' writing using a computer program such as Google Docs.

Communication Plan

Collectively constructing a complex document such as a grant proposal involves considerable navigation of group communication among the principle partners (Bell, 1998). For this reason, a shared plan that entails frequent and transparent communication may be developed by the group during the orientation phase (Baker, et al., 1999). Communication at this phase achieves a range of mediating functions. In most cases, such functions are best accomplished face-to-face. For instance, prior to taking action a “group must identify itself and its motives for acting so that the opportunities for, and requirements of, coordination become apparent” (Swarts, 2004, p. 84). In this way, the group ideally creates cooperation and arrives at a coordinated effort. An effective communication plan establishes the main mode for communication such as telephone, e-mail or face-to-face meetings, and designates a responsible party to facilitate these. If effective, Fisher’s theory suggests that the group begins to build a unified vision and holds a clear understanding of the purpose of the project.

Phases 2 and 3: Conflict and Emergence

As the group works through the collaborative process toward developing a successful grant proposal, it is suggested that unpredictable activities likely will keep the group vacillating between phases two and three, conflict and emergence. During the conflict phase, group members may attempt to resolve tension surrounding the tasks of project development by exchanging and analyzing shared information. Nelson & Smith (1990) suggest that a functional group uses conflict to arrive at a consensus, while a dysfunctional group begins to break down during this phase:

Conflict in a small group situation may be productive or functional when members are encouraged to: search for new ideas or solutions, clarify issues, increase participation,

delay premature decisions, or discuss disagreements. Group decisions may be improved by new ideas generated during conflict by groups which allow time for reflection.

Conflict is functional when opportunities for discussion of disagreements are created.

However, conflict may become negative, dysfunctional, or destructive when the object of conflict progresses from issues to personalities, and when conflict consumes time, sidetracking the group from its goal. Dysfunctional conflict has the potential to cause increasing hostility. (p. 60)

The literature refers to this as substantive versus interpersonal conflict. Whereas interpersonal conflict involves negative conflict directed at individuals and their ideas, substantive conflict involves positive conflict which occurs as a functional group moves toward new shared ideas and solutions through productive discussion. Substantive conflict provides the opportunity for clarification of issues, increased participation, and productive disagreements that help move the group toward consensus (Lay, 1989; Lowry, et al., 2004). The primary benefit associated with substantive conflict is creative tension (Ewald & MacCallum, 1990). However, it is important to note that “although substantive conflicts can improve the quality of document, they can also waste inordinate amounts of time and money if they are not managed well” (Palmeri, 2004, p. 40).

The group enters the emergence phase once members arrive at a shared solution to a conflict. It is likely that this shift from conflict to emergence occurs for each aspect of project development, such as specifying goals and objectives, developing the budget and selecting methods for evaluation, for example. In the context of collaborative grant writing, the coordinator manages the tasks of the writing group during repetitive rounds of drafting and

revision/conflict and emergence (Lowry, et al., 2004). As this description implies, moving through the conflict and emergence phases is an ongoing process for the group.

Phase 4: Reinforcement

During the final phase of reinforcement, the group may complete a “debriefing” session in which members discuss the final steps in completing the collaborative proposal development process. This may include a final review of the proposal, obtaining final approvals and signatures, and submission of the collective document. Fisher’s theory suggests that this concluding phase is essential for creating group solidarity, as it provides a sense of closure and often a renewed sense of commitment to the project.

Conclusion

Examining the collaborative grant writing process within the framework of group decision making theory provides the opportunity to identify targeted strategies for increasing the efficacy of this collaborative process. Findings provide *best practices* strategies for helping groups organize and manage dynamics and tasks. It was anticipated that implementing such strategies can help groups to produce an innovative project that is well represented through a collective proposal document.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Past studies have provided a foundation for understanding the collaborative writing process, but even with several aspects of this topic having been explored, many inconsistencies remain such as how unique contexts might affect group dynamics, what project management and/or communication strategies might be deployed to organize and manage these dynamics, and how roles are assigned and tasks distributed (Allen, Atkinson, Morgan, Moore & Snow, 1987). The present study contributes to the existing body of research that examines collaborative writing by advancing knowledge of the subject as it applies to the context of grant collaborations.

Research Design

The majority of past studies have been qualitative in nature, using case studies, open-ended interviews and surveys, or a combination thereof, to explore the topic and establish a basis for understanding collaborative writing processes across contexts. The present study also deployed a naturalistic design. Using inductive reasoning, the principal investigator (PI) formulated exploratory research questions based on past observations and experiences. This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the methodology as deployed.

Institutional Review Board Procedures

Approval from the university's institutional review board (IRB) (i.e., the Human Research Review Committee [HRRC]) was granted in November 2010, prior to the initiation of data collection (IRB #199263-1). As part of the IRB protocol, each interview participant was provided with information regarding: 1) the purpose of the study, 2) the reason(s) they were selected for participation and the voluntary nature of data collection, 3) measures that would be taken to guarantee confidentiality of personal information, and 4) data collection procedures.

Thereafter, signatures for informed consent were obtained from each participant (refer to Appendix A: Consent Form).

Scope

This research was conducted during the Fall 2010 semester in Grand Rapids, the second largest city in Michigan. This largely urban area of Western Michigan is located in Kent County which has a total population of 608,315 (U.S. Census, 2009). Interview participants were comprised of professionals who had at least three years of grant experience (e.g., as a writer, program director, executive director, etc.) and who had participated as a member of a collaborative grant writing group. It was anticipated that this level of knowledge and experience would provide the individual with a good understanding of the nuances specific to the context of the research, and that such a group would provide diversity of perspective beyond what would be accessible if the research had focused only on a single case. An analysis of interview transcripts and semi-transcribed detailed field notes was conducted in an effort to discover patterns and/or themes as they related to the various theoretical decision making phases through which groups pass as they work to achieve the tasks that culminate in an end product (i.e., the grant proposal).

Sampling Methods

The first round of interview participants was located by inviting members of a local, professional grant writers group (i.e., Grant Writer's Roundtable) to participate in the research. Contact was initiated via email and a formal presentation about the study was made to the group during their November 2010 meeting. Following the presentation, the PI distributed business cards with contact information to those who came forward to express their interest in being a prospective participant. This method resulted in a prospect pool of four individuals, two of whom were later selected for inclusion in the convenience sample.

Upon initial contact, the PI gathered basic demographic information to determine if the prospective participant met the requisite criteria. Criteria were used to compile a participant group that was representative of a variety of public sectors and levels of organizational hierarchy (i.e., professional job roles) in order to produce a rich data pool from which to discover potential nuances that may have an influence on the effectiveness of the strategies suggested. Table 3 lists the information that was gathered for this purpose, as well as the minimum baseline criteria that each subject had to meet in order to be selected as an interviewee. This information was gathered by the PI during a telephone conversation with each of the potential participants. Two individuals were not selected for participation in this study, as they did not meet the criteria.

Table 3	
<i>Prerequisite Demographic Criteria</i>	
Question re: Prerequisite Criterion	Minimal Requirement for Participation
With respect to collaborating with external partners in a work setting, how many years of experience do you have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your current position? • In previous positions? 	Three years of experience.
How many years of grant experience do you have?	Three years of grant experience/familiarity with grant processes; experience did not need to be specific to writing, but may have may related to grant development, management, etc.
What type of organization do you work for? (categories will be provided)	The PI attempted to compile a participant group to represent several public sectors in order to discover potential nuances that may influence the research findings.
Is collaboration part of your regular job responsibilities?	The PI attempted to compile a participant group to represent different job titles/positions in order to discover potential nuances that may influence the research findings.

Chain sampling, a technique whereby existing study participants provide the name of potential future subjects from among their contacts, was used to locate additional interviewees; at the conclusion of the two initial interviews, each of the participants was asked to provide the

name of one to two additional contacts whom they believed would have similar experiences participating in collaborative grant writing activities, and who might be interested in participating in the research. This technique resulted in an additional five interview participants. A socio-gram (i.e., a graphic representation of these social connections) was developed as a visual representation of this strategy (refer to Figure 2).

Figure 2: Socio-Gram of Research Population

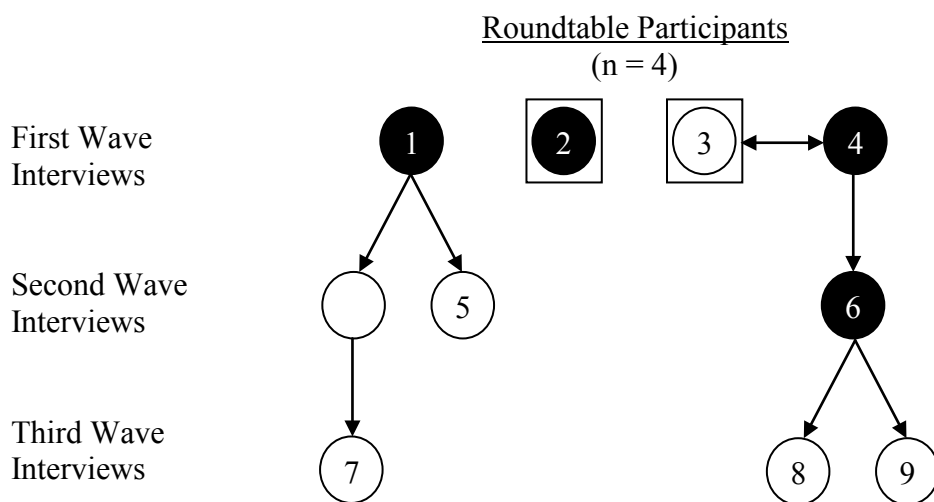


Table of Symbols		Study Sample
<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<p>10 individuals either volunteered, or were approached, to participate in the present study.</p> <p>8 individuals met the pre-requisite criteria for participation.</p> <p>7 individuals consented to provide interview information.</p>
●	Male	
○	Female	
1 - 9	Order in which participants were recruited	
No number	Individual declined to participate	
□	Individual did not meet pre-requisite criteria	
←	Individual relationship	

Data Collection

When a potential interview participant contacted, or was contacted by, the PI, it was first determined whether or not the individual met the requisite criteria. Once deemed eligible, the PI

then explained (via telephone), the procedures for data collection (i.e., face-to-face interview) and the informed consent process. If the participant agreed to be interviewed, the PI next arranged to meet with the participant individually at a time and public place convenient for both parties. The PI sent an email confirmation to each participant. This email included the date, time, and agreed upon place of the interview as well as an electronic copy of the consent form as an attachment.

Participation in this research was voluntary. At the start of each interview, the PI reviewed the consent form with the participant. This discussion highlighted the voluntary nature of the study, the ability of the participant to stop the interview at any time, and the procedure for having the participant review the transcribed interview. The PI answered any additional questions that the subjects had about the study, and explained the protocols that were in place to ensure participant confidentiality. The PI then asked for the participant's signature on the consent form (refer to Appendix A: Consent Form).

Confidentiality

The protocol for protecting confidentiality included a numerical coding system that was used to conceal participant names (i.e., participant 1, participant 2, etc.). Other identifying information and characteristics such as job title and the name of the individual's employer organization were also kept confidential; such information was grouped by general category. For instance, job titles were categorized according to the hierarchy of the role within the organization to include the categories of director, manager, coordinator, program staff, and writer. Organization categories included non-profit, corporate, institution of higher education, and government agency. Specific definitions of each category are provided in the operationalization section of this chapter (refer to page 41).

Interview Protocol

The PI took an objectivist approach in designing the qualitative methodology. That is, the PI stipulated the wording and sequence of the interview questions by dividing them into predetermined categories to create a script for conducting a structured interview (refer to Appendix B: Interview Script). The questions comprising this script were focused to correlate with the primary research questions, which were more broad and exploratory in nature. The primary research questions were:

Research Question 1: What information might help professionals to position themselves and their organization for success as they prepare to embark on collaborative grant writing endeavors?

Research Question 2: What strategies are being deployed by professionals who participate in collaborative grant writing activities to organize and manage group **dynamics** (i.e., managing interpersonal communications, negotiating conflict, assigning roles, establishing a communication plan, and debriefing)?

Research Question 3: What strategies are being deployed by professionals who participate in collaborative grant writing activities to organize and manage group **tasks** (i.e., information collection, document management, and writing tasks)?

The script facilitated the interview process and ensured consistency across interviews, while lending to the ease with which data could later be retrieved and analyzed. This objectivist approach allowed the PI to compare participant responses and identify themes in order to obtain information pertinent to “answering” the primary research questions. In keeping with qualitative practices, questions were occasionally rearranged and additional ones incorporated when the opportunity to do so arose serendipitously during the course of an interview (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The first part of the interview script (Part I) was comprised of questions for collecting demographic information. The data collected were used to provide descriptive statistics about the

research population to include gender, age range, years of professional experience, current type of position, and their type of employer organization.

The second part of the interview script (Part II) was comprised of a series of 16 main open-ended questions and 14 sub-questions, arranged into categories according to the four theoretical phases suggested by Fisher (1970), as well as two additional categories; one focused on pre-collaboration activities, and the other on participant observation/reflection pertaining to collaborative grant writing. Specifically, interview questions were arranged into the following six categories: pre-collaboration, orientation, conflict, emergence, reinforcement and reflection.

As noted, the questions in each of these categories were focused to correlate with the primary research questions so as to gather specific information that would provide insight into the subject that these broader questions were attempting to capture. For example, interview questions that corresponded to the second primary research question were focused on group communication strategies related to managing interpersonal communications, negotiating conflict, assigning roles, and establishing a communication plan. Using the suggested theoretical phases to define the question categories, allowed the PI to focus the questions on the types of activities that one might anticipate would occur during any given phase. For instance, the first category, *pre-collaboration*, included questions that asked the interviewee about the criteria that he/she has used in choosing collaborative group members, as it seems naturally intuitive that this would take place prior to the second category, *orientation*.

Categorizing the questions in this way not only assisted the PI in recognizing themes and/or patterns in the data that corresponded to the theoretical phases, but also aided in discovering whether or not the phases could be said to strictly apply within the context of collaborative grant writing. As stated, it was important to recognize that while the interview

script achieved a general framework for gathering the information necessary to fully explore the topic of collaborative grant writing, it was necessary to incorporate elements of emergent design such as re-arranging questions to follow the energy of the interview, and integrating additional questions as necessary when the opportunity to do so arose serendipitously.

Data collection took place for approximately six weeks. In preparing to carry out this research, the PI conducted an initial “test” interview to determine the approximate length of time an average interview would take, to ensure interview questions were clear and logical, and to eliminate questions that were redundant. In addition, this process allowed the PI to prepare effective interviewing techniques prior to entering the field. The results of the initial test interview were not included in the research findings.

A total of seven structured interviews lasting between sixty and ninety minutes were conducted. Interviews were digitally recorded using the Dragon Dictation® voice recognition software which creates a verbatim transcript as the interview is recorded. The transcript is then saved electronically as an unformatted text document. The PI also maintained semi-transcribed, detailed field notes. The field notes were recorded in an electronic format as soon as possible following each interview. Once the transcripts and field notes had been formatted and processed (i.e., participant responses recorded under each interview question as a heading), a member check was completed to ensure credibility of the data. This check entailed sending the transcript via email to the interview participant from whom the data had been collected. Participants were asked to verify the accuracy of the data as it had been recorded, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the data (Yin, 2010).

Qualitative interviews should continue until a point of saturation is reached. Saturation is believed to have been achieved when interview responses are similar in phrasing and content to

previously obtained responses. Consistent with the limitations noted later in this chapter, data collection concluded once a point of saturation had been reached in each of the pre-determined categories of inquiry.

All data for this project were maintained in an electronic format. Specifically, electronic data to include PDF files of interview transcripts, detailed field notes and signed consent forms were identity stripped, password protected and stored on the PI's university network drive (n:/drive). All hard copy data were destroyed (i.e., shredded by the PI) immediately after use. These protocols were approved by the university's IRB.

Data Coding Procedures

The interview transcripts and field notes were processed and coded as soon as possible following each interview. The objectivist approach to data collection resulted in a simplified coding process, as the pre-arranged categories allowed the PI to easily identify the individual themes and strategies present in the data. The aim of the research was to build a logical interrelationship among themes, and to present these in summation along with *best practice* strategies for organizing and managing group dynamics (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

First, demographic data were manually collated and categorized as previously outlined in this chapter. Because all participants were pre-screened to meet prerequisite criteria no further categorization was required. Next, the text of the transcripts and field notes were color-coded by the number corresponding to the individual's place in the order of interviews (i.e., "participant 1" was the first interview and was coded in blue, etc.). Thereafter, each of the color-coded responses was organized under the corresponding interview question (i.e., interview questions were used as headings) to create a single, master interview transcript document that contained all participant responses. Each statement was coded as a single response. For example, if a

participant paused to think before his/her next comment, the subsequent comment was counted as a second response.

Data were then read line-by-line and analyzed by the PI. Responses to each of the interview questions were grouped into emerging themes based on their wording and content. Table 4 lists the emergent themes (categorized by interview question) with their corresponding descriptions. The coding process continued until all relevant themes were identified and labeled. This protocol is in line with the notion that “qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150). Individual statements recognized as representative of the consensus among answers were highlighted for inclusion in Chapter IV. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked to review the Collaborative Writing Continuum (Figure 1, p. 14) and to discuss possible differentiations based on their experience. However, no significant differences were noted.

Table 4	
<i>Coding Tables</i>	
Note: Interview Question Categories 1 and 6, correspond to Research Question 1, while Interview Question Categories 2 through 5 corresponds to Research Questions 2 and 3.	
Category Table A: Pre-Collaboration Interview Questions	
(Q1) Based on your experiences, what steps do you take in planning for collaboration that you believe ultimately makes the endeavor successful or unsuccessful? (i.e., before initial meeting)	
(Q2) Please discuss the selection criteria have you used in choosing group members.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In terms of personal skills, who might the ideal group consist of? ➤ With respect to the hierarchy of an employee in an organization, who should be included in the group and in what role? 	
Emergent Themes	Coding Description
(Q1) Internal Planning	Responses in this category described activities and events that take place prior to initial group meetings and before the collaborative grant writing group is formally established. The majority of responses indicated that these events are conducted internally by an organization.
(Q1) Assess Internal Resources	Responses in this category described internal discussions, which happen prior to collaborating, about strategic planning and resources a group will use to negotiate. This includes the internal goals that determine how, when and what the driving factors for the organization to collaborate will be, resources they will contribute to a project, and resources needed from partners.
(Q1) Appraisal of the Political Landscape	Responses in this category described considerations of the internal group that influence the collaboration in some way. Considerations might include past experiences, a particular stakeholder's presence and influence in the community, or personal interests and goals of the internal organization (or of external partners).
(Q2) Existing Relationship	Responses in this category described the existence of a prior relationship, working or otherwise, as a reason for choosing a particular organization as a collaborative partner.
(Q2) Empowered to Make Decisions	Responses in this category described the selection of a partner organization based on past experience or knowledge as to whether or not the potential partner empowers its staff to make crucial decisions on its behalf.
(Q2) Complimentary Resources	Responses in this category described the selection of a partner organization based on the resources offered, and whether or not these resources align with those of the other partners to achieve a collective goal.
(Q2) Connecting as a Newbie	Responses in this category described strategies organizations might use to be thought of/viewed as a potentially attractive partner to other organizations.

Category Table B: Orientation Interview Questions

- (Q1)** In your experience, what has been an effective breakdown of group roles?
 ➤ What tasks are associated with these roles?
 ➤ Describe what you believe the characteristics of an effective leader are within the context of a collaborative grant writing group?
- (Q2)** In your experience, are there strategies that can be used during the initial meetings that set the tone for ongoing group interactions?
- (Q3)** How have the work plan and timeline been negotiated?
- (Q4)** How have the groups that you have worked with managed the shared document production?
- (Q5)** Did the group establish a communication plan/plan for communicating? If so, please describe?
 ➤ What are the attributes of an effective communication plan?

Emergent Themes	Coding Description
(Q1) Role Assignment	Responses in this category described the roles and the corresponding responsibilities typically assigned during collaborative grant writing endeavors.
(Q1) Leadership: Social/Emotional Intelligence	Responses in this category described the skills and abilities of individuals that are most likely to be successful in leading collaborative grant writing groups. The skills and abilities were closely aligned with Goleman's (1998) description of social and emotional intelligence, to include self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills.
(Q1) Leadership: Focused Guidance	Responses in this category described actions taken by a group's leader to guide individual group members, to facilitate project development, and to promote overall group progress.
(Q2 – Q5) Work Process: Communication Plan	Responses in this category described formal and in formal channels for communicating project information among group members and with outside stakeholders (e.g., organizational leadership, community leaders, etc.).
(Q2 – Q5) Work Process: Action Plan	Responses in this category described steps taken to formalize the assignment of writing and other types of collaborative tasks (e.g., collecting data, obtaining internal approvals, etc.).
(Q2 – Q5) Work Process: Document Control	Responses in this category described the process groups use to manage the collective proposal document.

Category Tables C and D: Conflict & Emergence Interview Questions

(Q1) In your experience, what is the primary cause of group conflict in the context of collaborative grant writing?

(Q2) Describe a situation in which a conflict was successfully resolved.

- How did the group resolve this conflict? What strategies did they use?

(Q3) Describe a situation in which a conflict was not successfully resolved.

- What was the result/outcome of the conflict not being resolved?
- Thinking about the situation you just described, what do you think inhibited the resolution of the conflict?
- How did this impact group dynamics?
- Based on hindsight, how do you think this issue could have been resolved successfully?
- Did this issue impact future collaborative endeavors with these partners? If so, how?

Emergent Themes	Coding Description
(Q1) Budget Negotiation	Responses in this category described budget-related conflicts encountered during collaborative grant writing projects. Such issues were the most commonly noted cause of conflict by those who participated in the research.
(Q1) Other Issues	Responses in this category described issues frequently encountered during collaborative grant writing projects.
(Q2) Face-to-Face Conversation (Group)	Responses in this category described face-to-face methods used to address conflict in a group setting.
(Q2) Face-to-Face Conversation (One-on-One)	Responses in this category described one-on-one methods used to address a conflict.
(Q2) Artificial Resolution	Responses in this category described ways that participants coped with conflict by not addressing the catalyst issue.
(Q3) Breakdown in Communication	Responses in this category described various reasons that collaborative groups do not resolve conflict.

Category Table E: Reinforcement Interview Questions

<p>(Q1) What activities have taken place during the conclusion of the group’s work together?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Has a debriefing session been a part of the process for the groups that you have worked with? ➤ If yes, please describe what you mean by “debriefing.” <p>(Q2) Thinking about a collaborative proposal that was funded, did the initial tone of the collaborative process carry over to implementation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Was program staff significantly involved in the development of the proposal? ➤ Was anyone from the writing team part of the implementation process? 	
Emergent Themes	Coding Description
(Q1) Standard Protocols	Responses in this category described the events that typically take place upon submission of a proposal, and events that take place upon notification that a grant has been awarded.
(Q1) Lack of Debriefing Session	Responses in this category described the participants’ indications of the lack of a formal debriefing session upon submission of a proposal.

Category Table F: Reflection Interview Questions

<p>(Q1) How do you define success in the context of collaborative grant writing?</p> <p>(Q2) What have been the greatest challenges that you have encountered while participating in collaborative grant writing activities?</p> <p>(Q3) What has been most rewarding while participating in collaborative grant writing activities?</p>	
Emergent Themes	Coding Description
(Q1 – Q3) New Opportunities	Responses in this category provided subjective considerations pertaining to participants’ collaborative grant writing experiences. The majority indicated that they consider all collaborations to be opportunities to build (or expand existing) relationships.

Analysis of the Data

The demographic data collected in response to Part I of the structured interviews were collated into categories in order to provide information about the research population. Categories included: organization type and size, job categories, gender, age range, professional experience in years, and the types of grants that have required them to participate in collaborative activities (i.e., private, federal, local/county, state). Selection criteria were used to compile a diverse participant pool to capture differing perspectives across multiple settings that would allow for cross-case analysis of responses. Resulting data were therefore not specific to any particular individual but rather provided insight about professionals who are involved in collaborative grant writing activities. This variety of responses allowed the PI to arrive at general conclusions about collaborative grant writing groups, rather than to make generalizations about specific cases. Findings therefore contribute to general theories regarding the phenomenon as they occur in this context.

The PI conducted a review and analysis of the data collected in response to Part II interview questions using the technique of analytic generalization, which is a “type of generalization in which the inquirer attempts to link findings from a particular case to a theory. (Here theory means something more like a set of theoretical tools, models, or concepts rather than a formalized set of propositions, laws, and generalizations comprising a systematic, unified causal explanation of social phenomenon)” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 5). The PI used this technique to study trends while compiling the data to: 1) build a role matrix/typology specific to collaborative writing groups, 2) suggest characteristics of the ideal group composition and leadership, and 3) report on strategies used organize and manage group dynamics and tasks at particular phases of the writing continuum.

This review and analysis process provided the opportunity to confirm themes and/or patterns asserted in creating the categories that comprised the Collaborative Writing Continuum and interview script. Analysis also provided the opportunity to realize deeper insights into the particular topics explored through the primary research questions and for examining social and intellectual aspects of the phenomena described by the participants. This insight made it possible to better determine how and when particular strategies might be most effective. Kraut, Galegher, Fish & Chalfonte (1992) state that:

To meet...social and intellectual challenges, group members must also contend with considerable procedural complexity. That is, they must adopt procedures that will enable them to get their work launched; to circulate draft versions among group members; and to refer to specific portions of their documents as pieces of text are created, revised, and incorporated into a unified whole. To launch their work, group members must be able to coordinate their conversation well enough to ensure mutual understanding of the project's requirements and goals and, more important, of the substance of the problem they are confronting... (p. 377)

By analyzing how participants described the social and intellectual aspects of their collaborative grant writing experiences, the PI gained insight into how group members' responses' to challenges presented within this context drive the strategies that are then deployed to address these. For instance, this analysis answered questions such as: at which point in each phase of the collaborative continuum will particular strategies be most effective, and furthermore, are there specific group dynamics that might render a strategy less effective?

Assumptions

The underlying assumption central to this research was that all groups move through phases of decision making that are both socially constructed, and specific to the particular context in which the individual members are working. Moreover, it was assumed that processes specific to each phase can be predicted to some extent, and further, that strategies can be identified and deployed to help groups move through the collaborative process more smoothly. In other words, group decision making is governed by patterns of group interaction as theorized by Fisher (1970) and *best practices* can be strategically deployed to ensure that a collaborative grant writing group achieves its objective more effectively.

Limitations

The present study sought to establish a set of *best practice* strategies for organizing and managing group dynamics and tasks that could be used by professionals working in such settings. This section reviews the potential limitations of the research methodology. These limitations should be considered when reflecting on and/or implementing the findings.

First, as with all qualitative methods, bias on the part of the PI may have presented possible limitations in the way that the data were processed and the findings reported. For instance, the PI's non-verbal communication mannerisms such as facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, way of dressing, and style of speaking may have had the potential to introduce bias, as did the PI's age, gender, student status and/or ethnicity, etc. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). While some of these variables were inevitable, attempts were made to control for others. Specifically, the PI remained as neutral as possible in terms of dress, tone of voice, and body language, and made every effort to refrain from stating personal opinions while conducting the interviews.

Additionally, the PI's experience as a grant writing professional and collaborator may have had the potential to introduce bias with respect to interpretation of data. However, while the PI's background could have been a limitation in some ways, it more likely that it enhanced accessibility to the research population, as well as provided insights not readily apparent to an outsider. For example, in delineating processes outside of Fisher's theory categories, the PI's unique position provided the understanding that a pre-collaborative category had to be included. It is therefore likely that this background allowed for deeper insight into the factors that influence grant writing groups in terms of selection of members, internal politics and strategies that inevitably set the collaboration up for success or failure. Moreover, the overt nature of the research contributed to a lesser degree of reactivity on the part of the interview participants.

Another potential source of bias was the way that the interview questions were worded and the order in which they were asked (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). For this reason, the PI kept the wording of the interview questions as neutral as possible by refraining from the use of jargon, and by using simple language that would be clear to a general audience in an effort to lessen the possible misinterpretation of the questions. In addition, the interview script was reviewed for bias by an impartial professional colleague (i.e., colleague who had no stake in the outcome of the research). This individual reviewed the questions for appropriate wording, cultural sensitivity and different interpretations of words and sentences that could have led to misconceptions.

Finally, it was important to acknowledge were issues related to transferability (i.e., the degree to which the findings of the research can be generalized to similar contexts). Here, the scope of the research was the West Michigan area. The suggested strategies could therefore differ slightly from those used in other locations, as each community has its own politics and inner workings which influence the ability of groups to form and work in collaboration

regardless of the strategies deployed. For instance, local politics likely play a role in selecting group members, and the influential nature of particular partner organizations may dictate how group dynamics are facilitated (i.e., certain organizations have more clout and therefore may direct activities in other cases with their ability to mobilize other community resources). In this sense, transferability of the findings may have been compromised. However, it is anticipated that the findings are potentially applicable to similar organizations and under similar circumstances.

Delimitations

The scope of all research is bounded by the methodological choices deployed, as it is impossible to control for every conceivable aspect of the study in the majority of research contexts. This section defines those limits with respect to the present study, as these should be taken into consideration when reflecting on, and implementing, the findings.

The research topic was selected, as the literature presented only a limited understanding of the details or range of variation in the processes used by collaborative writing groups to navigate group dynamics and manage tasks. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to explore and identify *best practice* strategies for organizing and managing group dynamics and tasks within this context. In addition to discovering *best practices*, group roles specific to collaborative writing groups were explored, as were the characteristics of an ideal group composition and leadership. It is asserted that these variables of interest influence a group's success, so developing an understanding of these would lend to greater effectiveness of such groups.

The PI attempted to compile a participant group that represented a variety of public sectors and levels of organizational hierarchy (i.e., professional job roles) in order to produce a rich data pool from which to discover potential nuances that may influence the effectiveness of

the findings. For this reason, as well as time and resource limitations, the protocol for selecting individual participants required that some self-selected participants be excluded from the research population based on the previously noted criteria.

Structured interviews were conducted to explore the topic from the perspective of seasoned professionals who have served as members of a collaborative grant writing groups. The PI stipulated the wording and sequence of the questions using an interview script. This systematic approach using prescribed questions lead to greater reliability of the data, as all participants answered the same questions. The questions comprising the script were focused to correlate with the primary research questions, which were broad and exploratory in nature. Open-ended questions contributed to richer data for comparing participant responses and for identifying themes related to the primary research questions.

Finally, a small number of participants would have limited the ability of the PI to understand the diversity and/or nuances across individuals and organizations. This would have produced simplified accounts that overstate the consistency of the findings (Maxwell, 2005). However, data collection concluded once a point of saturation had been reached in each of the pre-determined categories of inquiry. This, in turn, increased the transferability of findings in that they could be extrapolated to the context of collaborative grant writing groups in general, rather than only to the specific cases of those who were interviewed.

Operationalization of the Relevant Variables

Collaborative Writing: “An iterative and social process that involves a team focused on a common objective that negotiates, coordinates and communicates during the creation of a common document” (Lowry, et al., 2004, p. 72).

Collaborative Grant Writing Group: A group that comes together in a work setting for the sole purpose of developing, preparing and submitting a grant proposal.

Group Dynamics: Refers to how the members of a group interact together; patterns of interaction that develop within the context of grant collaboration that dictate the tone of interactions, communication strategies, division of tasks and ability to achieve the intended purpose.

Operationalization of Demographic Categories

Organization Type: Organizations were categorized as follows: non-profit, institution of higher education, or government agency. For the purposes of this research, *non-profit organizations* were those that do not distribute profits to owners or shareholders, but rather deploy surplus resources to achieve their overarching mission. *Institutions of higher education* were both public and private entities that exist for the sole purpose of educating individuals at the postsecondary level. *Government agencies* were defined as permanent agencies established by a government entity (local, state or federal) which administer, and provide the oversight of, a specific public function.

Job Role: Participant job titles were categorized as: director, grants professional or program staff. For the purposes of this research, a *director* was an individual who is in charge of a department or organization. *Grants professionals* included those individuals who perform the duties of grant writing, coordinating, and grant contract oversight. *Program staff* included individuals who are responsible for the implementation and day-to-day activities of a grant program.

Operationalization of Group Phases

Fisher's (1970) theory of small group decision emergence suggests that group decision making occurs by way of a group entering and/or passing through one of four phases. He refers

to these phases as orientation, conflict, emergence and reinforcement. The descriptions of each phase provided in this section were drawn from this theory.

Orientation: During this phase, a group convenes for the first time and members become acquainted; may be characterized by certain feelings, particular interactions such as introductions, as the group begins to form their expectations and “rules” for communicating.

Conflict: This phase is characterized by minor tension as group members share and discuss their ideas surrounding a particular decision or task. In functional groups, this phase is viewed as positive as it helps the group move toward a desired end.

Emergence: This phase evidences the group’s social structure and processes, as the group comes to a resolution regarding the task or decision at hand.

Reinforcement: During this phase, the outcome of the group decision is reinforced by group member’s use of supportive/encouraging verbal and nonverbal communication strategies.

Summary

Past studies examining collaborative writing have been qualitative in nature, and have explored the topic to establish a basis for understanding the processes used across contexts. The present study added to this knowledge by examining the topic as it pertains to collaborative grant writing. Chapter IV presents details of the data review and analysis, as well as subsequent findings.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis and Findings

This chapter details the analysis of, and subsequent findings related to, the qualitative interview data. The purpose of the study was not to generalize about the perspectives of a group of individuals but, rather, to identify and describe the strategies and social processes that have “generalizing effects.” Selection criteria were therefore used to compile a participant pool that provided differing perspectives across multiple settings, as “the reality of collaborative relations can be found only through analyzing the phenomenon perceived and described by the people who have interacted with other individual participants in the process” (Tsasis, 2009, p. 7).

This, in turn, produced a rich data set that was used to conduct a cross-case analysis of responses, allowing the PI to gain insight about individuals’ experiences and the broader social relationships within which these experiences are embedded. The PI explored the themes revealed through the data to arrive at general conclusions about collaborative grant writing groups, rather than to make generalizations about specific cases. Hence, findings are assumed to contribute to general theories regarding the phenomenon in this context, and were used to: 1) build a typology of the roles specific to collaborative writing groups, 2) provide a discussion of ideal group composition and leadership, and 3) report on *best practice* strategies for organizing and managing group dynamics and tasks at particular phases of the collaborative writing process.

Findings

The interview script consisted of two parts. The first part of the interview script (Part I) was comprised of questions for collecting demographic information. These data were used to provide descriptive statistics about the research population to include gender, age range, years of professional experience, current type of position, and their type of employer organization.

Part I: Interview Participant Demographics

Part I data were manually collated into generalized categories. Each category was not specific to any particular individual but, rather, was summarized to provide insight about those who were involved in collaborative grant writing activities.

Participant Characteristics

The criteria used to select participants ensured that the group was representative of a variety of public sectors and levels of organizational hierarchy (i.e., professional job roles). In addition, individuals chosen to participate had a plethora of experience and “...regularly moved outside the confines of their organizations to represent their own organization and to link programs with others by establishing and cultivating relationships” (Tsasi, 2009, p. 8). That is, collaboration was within the scope of their regular job responsibilities.

The gender composition of the interview group was nearly equal with a total of three males and four females participating. The group ranged in age from 30 to 48 years of age, with the majority falling between 40 and 45 years. Many had at least 10 years of professional experience or more; two had 10 years or less. Of the total participants, six held a position as either a director or grant professional, and one participant held a position as a grant-funded staff member. Table 5 provides specific information about the participants.

Table 5			
<i>Participant Demographics</i>			
Age Range		Professional Experience	
30 – 35 years:	n = 1	3 - 10 years:	n = 2
35 – 40 years:	n = 1	10 – 15 years:	n = 1
40 – 45 years:	n = 4	15 – 20 years:	n = 2
46 years or older:	n = 1	21 years or more:	n = 2
Gender		Current Position	
Male	n = 3	Director:	n = 3
Female	n = 4	Grant Professional:	n = 3
		Grant Program Staff:	n = 1

Organizational Characteristics

Participants represented a range of organizations of varying size that take part in inter-organizational collaborations to provide complimentary services via grant funding. Four participants represented a non-profit organization, two were employed by an institution of higher education, and one represented local government. Collectively, the missions of each organization included collaboration within the general scope of business activities. It was noted that these collaborations did not always involve grant projects. However, with respect to the type of grantors requiring collaboration, it was predominately government grantors (i.e., federal grants) that required collaboration (refer to Table 6).

Table 6	
<i>Organization and Grantor Demographics</i>	
Organization Type	
Institution of Higher Education:	n = 2
Small Non-Profit (50 or less staff members):	n = 3
Large Non-Profit(51 or more staff members):	n = 1
Government:	n = 1
Type of Grantors Requiring Collaboration	
Private Foundation:	n = 1
Government:	n = 6

Part II: Substantive Interview Questions

Part II of the interview script was comprised of a series of open-ended questions, arranged into categories that corresponded with the four theoretical phases of group decision emergence suggested by Fisher (1970). Two additional categories were also included; one focused on pre-collaboration activities, and the other on participant observation/reflection pertaining to collaborative grant writing. The interview questions comprising Part II were intended to garner specific, detailed information pertaining to the primary research questions, which were more broad and exploratory in nature.

Findings for each phase are presented in the successive sections of this chapter. A brief discussion about each phase is followed by tables that were generated to present the themes and strategies in summary format. Each emergent theme is supported by participant quotes. A summary of the findings, as they “answer” the primary research questions, is presented at the conclusion of this chapter.

Pre-Collaboration

Pre-collaborative work precedes the orientation phase and is carried out to set the stage for a productive endeavor (Appel, 2005; Easter & Schultz, 1998). Three positioning approaches were revealed as themes. The first of these was the need for internal planning prior to entering the collaborative process. Findings indicate that this would include strategic as well as pre-grant planning that involves positioning the organization to respond to the release of a particular solicitation for grant applications. The second theme was assessing internal resources and included such strategies as determining what the organization can and cannot offer. The third theme was appraisal of the political landscape. Findings revealed the importance of considering the political ramifications that participating (or not participating) in a collaboration can have for an organization. Table 7 provides the number of participants who responded in each theme category and the total number of responses.

Table 7		
<i>Pre-Collaboration Themes</i>		
Themes	Participants n = 7	Responses n = 20
Internal Planning	n = 7	9
Assess Internal Resources	n = 4	6
Appraisal of the Political Landscape	n = 3	5

All seven participants discussed the importance of internal strategizing in response to the question, “What steps do you take in planning for collaboration that you believe ultimately

makes the endeavor successful or unsuccessful?” Of the total responses, four individuals specifically indicated that assessing the internal resources of their own organization was an essential part of this process (6 responses), and three were concerned with appraising the political landscape (5 responses). The following were quotes, categorized by theme, provided in response to the interview question:

Internal Strategizing

“We determine the steps that need to be taken and the process for doing these. We also try to get buy-in at the top of the bureaucracy [in the case of a large organization] by having an internal champion in the organization that can talk about the project and be the point person. This individual spreads the *good idea*.”

“Start early. The most important thing to do before entering the collaborative conversation is to choose a direction in terms of what the [organization] hopes to accomplish. What is the vision for the problem that needs to be addressed? How do we, as an organization, propose to address the need? Second, you want to understand the funding environment? What is available? What is coming down the pipe?”

“For each proposal, much depends on the amount of time available for proposal writing, the “glitches” in program guidelines, the competitive odds, the talent available, hiring rules, internal politics, etc. Allowing “inside baseball” to play out in the larger arena of [organization] governance can slow the process down, or leave a bad taste when deadlines are missed because there were too many kibitzers looking over your shoulder.”

“In cases where collaboration is not mandated, it is important to determine if there really is a need for the collaboration. And in cases in which it is [mandated], the question is still the same. I mean that if the work can be done alone, and collaboration is mandated, then we will just look for other sources of funding if we can do the work alone. Sometimes a feasibility study is used to help assess this need.”

“I think that depends on the amount of time the group has. Really, the time to prepare is ahead of time. Collaborators should meet ahead of time in order to form a better response (if SGA is anticipated) because the response will be better even if not fully developed at the initial meetings. Otherwise, groups have a difficult time coalescing what the problem is and how they will solve it if not already organized. Also, when someone backs out this hurts later chances for success.”

Assess Internal Resources

“We hold internal meetings to set goals prior to the first group meeting. We agree on verbiage and set parameters for what we can and can’t do. Preparation within your own organization is important. So is choosing trustworthy partners.”

“Understanding what the mission of the organization is, how to align a project with the mission and understanding what your organization brings to the table. This understanding shapes the planning phase.”

“I have to determine what resources [the home organization] can bring to the table and what we cannot. Nobody can bring everything. Every organization has its own niche. Recognizing that is very important.”

“Developing trust-relationships happens through an understanding of what others’ strengths and weaknesses are. Part of this process is preparing to educate other organizations about what we can do, what our mission is. Developing this understanding ahead of time is critical.”

“You need to be successful in your own endeavors first. Collaboration should provide an added support because the work is hard enough. It comes down to relationships with your peers...get together once a quarter to talk. Continue the relationship building work BEFORE collaborating.”

Appraising the Political Landscape

“It is important to consider the political ramifications. What will happen if this succeeds? What if it fails? “We have pitched projects as a community effort in terms of the location of the project and how it will create synergistic services. In this case, collaboration was institutionalized to make better programs, not better grants. It also showed [the organization] as a community anchor helping more than just the [target population].”

“Determining the political landscape is important. What politics are required, what political elements are at play? This influences how we participate.”

Choosing Partners

Next, participants were asked to discuss their approach for choosing partners, as “collaborative capacity is greatly influenced by both the existing skills, knowledge and attitudes members bring to the table and efforts taken to build, support, and access this capacity” (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz & Lounsbury, 2001, p. 243). Participants were asked to, “Please discuss the

selection criteria you have used in choosing group members.” Participant responses fell into one of four themes. Table 8 provides the number of participants who responded in each theme and the total number of responses.

Table 8		
<i>Pre-Collaboration Themes Related to Choosing Partners</i>		
Themes	Participants n = 7	Responses n = 24
Existing Relationship	n = 7	8
Empowered to Make Decisions	n = 6	9
Complimentary Resources	n = 3	3
Connecting as a Newbie	n = 3	4

All seven participants discussed the importance of choosing partners with whom the organization had a prior relationship if possible. Six participants emphasized the necessity of working with organizations that would assign an individual empowered to make a decision on its behalf (9 responses). In particular, participants discussed organizations that don’t readily do this, and noted that waiting for signatures and/or having to re-explain the project to multiple individuals ultimately influences the ability of the team to meet its deadlines in a timely manner. Three participants noted that they chose partners based on complimentary resources (3 responses). For instance, they considered whether or not the program’s participants would be able to easily transition from the services of one organization to the services of the partner. Additionally, many participants noted the importance of considering if a partner’s resources add value to the whole (i.e., do services align?). Finally, three participants discussed their experiences with breaking into collaborative work as a new partner organization (4 responses). The following were quotes that represented the attitudes of the participants across themes:

Existing Relationship

“Having a prior relationship is helpful. That way, we know we are getting someone who understands their own organization’s core competencies.”

“When I choose partners, I think about someone who is trustworthy and will not publically embarrass the [organization]. I know this by having worked with them before.”

“Some partners are required even without a true commitment. But even with this degree of leeway, it is still important to rely on existing relationships.

Empowered to Make Decisions

“Personality...*maybe*. That wouldn't preclude us from working with someone. More important is that the person has the ability to make decisions on behalf of the organization. There is a person we have had to work with but she can't make decisions and it is difficult for her to get an audience in her own organization so we have had to end around when needed and try to get a decision maker there instead.”

“The most important thing is that they are empowered by the leadership to make decisions on behalf of the organization. The worst is all talk and no action.”

“It is important to have the same people assigned for the duration of the project. That way, you know who is responsible for making decisions.”

“Decisions don't always need to be made by the leadership [of the organization]. In fact, I would avoid having a committee of administrators make every decision whether to pursue a grant application. The administrators...should help set broad priorities, but they are usually either ignorant of, or misinformed about, the criteria for submission.”

Complimentary Resources

“We choose an organization that provides complimentary resources; one that can help us offer the next level of services. An example would be that we offer adult services, so an organization that offers services for children so together we can meet the needs of the entire family would be ideal.”

“Someone who is open to having frank, honest conversations. We want to work with partners that are willing to share, not just in terms of resources, but vision. Just like we need to be open to listening to what other organizations can potentially bring to the table. So...an open mind, willingness to consider all possible solutions. And a willingness to create a synergistic solution from all of the resources available.”

Connecting as a Newbie

“New organizations can become trusted partners by coming to the table. Become familiar and be transparent. This helps establish trust.”

“Money helps. So does getting to know what other organizations do. Then following through when the opportunity does arrive.”

“Sometimes it is about social currency rather than monetary resources. Diversity. For instance, someone who can bring their connections and relationships that they have earned.”

Phase 1: Orientation

Group members become acquainted and begin to establish the rules and expectations for group interaction during the orientation phase. Successful collaborations provide members with a venue for doing so, as well as a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities to facilitate achieving the common goal. In all small groups, jockeying for position is typical during the orientation phase (Yalom, 1985). Effectively managing group dynamics and assigning tasks, therefore begins with role assignment.

Role Assignment

Participants were asked, “In your experience, what has been an effective breakdown of group roles?” and “What tasks are associated with these roles?” A variety of roles and the associated duties were discussed, and responses used to build a role typology (refer to Table 9).

Table 9	
<i>Role Typology for Collaborative Grant Writing Groups</i>	
Role	Primary Responsibilities
Leader	Serves as the group facilitator. Leads the group by obtaining buy-in, sets the timeline, next steps, and serves as the final decision maker (i.e., ensures decisions are made in a timely manner). Responsible for leading the team through the process of making key project decisions. The majority of the leader’s time is spent on the interpersonal aspects of managing the group.
Coordinator	Works with the leader to keep everyone on the same page. Responsible for the technical aspects of managing the proposal. Tasks include disseminating information to the group, coordinating group communications, and ensuring follow-through.
Decision Makers	Empowered by the leadership of the organization to make decisions regarding project development; makes commitments on behalf of the organization. Representative from each organization must be included.

Role	Primary Responsibilities
Grant Writer	An individual with knowledge of the particulars of grant writing; they should make the decisions that require special expertise.
Editor	Puts the text into one style and voice. All members of the team can serve in this role. It is especially important that those who are providing final sign off for each partner participate as an editor.
Subject Experts	Program staff; works with the writers to ensure that the technical aspects of the project are accurately represented in the proposal, and the consultant will review and advise on document formatting and content.

Qualities of an Effective Leader

The importance of the role of *leader* was reflected in both participant responses and the literature. Yalom & Yalom (1998) stated that “the effective group leader...must be something of a social engineer, maintaining the structure of the group in the interest of productive work. Setting up a culture of trust, in which members feel safe to give and receive feedback, is especially difficult...with high stress levels, ambiguity and confusion. But honesty and an atmosphere of frank mutual exchange are essential components of any fruitful collaborative effort” (p. 36). The nature of the collaborative grant writing context is stressful given the social dynamics (i.e., representing your organization, need for maintaining positive work relationships, political environment, interpersonal dynamics, etc.), and the timeframe in which the development and writing of the proposal must take place. Oftentimes, individuals are not necessary used to working efficiently, and increased stress results from having to meet deadlines. Moreover, when the stress is related to meeting a collective deadline (i.e., having to rely on others), the pressure is even greater.

While it was beyond the scope of the study to conduct an in-depth exploration of leadership, the qualities of effective leaders were discussed. Participants were asked to, “Describe what you believe the characteristics of an effective leader are within the context of a collaborative grant writing group.” Participant responses represented two themes pertaining to

essential leadership qualities. The first pertained to characteristics of social/emotional intelligence such as intuitively providing guidance to keep the group on task or tactfully exerting influence at key points in the process. The second was focused guidance. This emerged from responses regarding the ability to lead group interactions and other task-oriented exchanges in a structured manner thereby facilitating overall progress of the group toward the collective goal. Table 10 shows the number of participants who responded and the total number of responses in each theme.

Table 10		
<i>Themes for Leadership Quality</i>		
Themes	Participants n = 7	Responses n = 12
Social/Emotional Intelligence	5	7
Focused Guidance	3	5

Five participants (7 responses) discussed the importance of the leader having the ability to influence others while maintaining relationships. Three participants emphasized the necessity of the leader being able to thoughtfully execute the meeting agenda and to thereafter assign tasks (5 responses). It is important to note that while these themes were evident in the present data, there are certainly a variety of other skills that an effective leader must possess but that were beyond the scope of this research to explore. Therefore, these not captured here. The following were quotes that represented the viewpoints of the participants across themes:

Social/Emotional Intelligence

“A leader should be someone who is able to achieve buy-in, has an understanding of our organization’s leverage in the partnership and the ability to influence.”

“The leader has to have the ability to negotiate and contribute in a meaningful way. They must be present with the group. Someone that maintains the relationship and knows when, and how to, influence others. It is important that they can blend community interests with personal interests, and also share credit for success and the accountability.”

“Personality-wise, a facilitator [leader] allows latitude and for people to share, but that person is comfortable enforcing when a decision needs to be made. Recognizing when that is, is important. Leaders seem to naturally emerge. The worst is someone who talks a lot and thinks that makes them the leader. It holds the group up. A leader is someone who owns the project.”

“The leader has to know how to use a level of passive communication to preserve the relationship. When the grant goes away, the relationship should be stronger.”

Focused Guidance

“I think a good leader is someone who pre-plans their steps or goals for a meeting. They can lead the team that way. People look for that one person and then just go with it when they come forward.”

“The leader has to keep the group focused on the project goal otherwise every issue becomes important. It is easier to let go of pettiness when the goal is thoughtfully used as the basis for developing the program.”

“The facilitator [leader] keeps others on task and guides the discussions. The same person has to assign the tasks and the timeline.”

“Creating a structured process with distinct phases for brainstorming and writing. Agree on the decision making process first; who will make the final decisions for the group...2-3 people. The writing should not begin until the decisions are final. It is hard for people to take a long document and have to make changes or cuts. It’s hard to let go once it is written down and hard to negotiate one in motion. A clear transition from brainstorming to writing must take place so that the group is not revisiting decisions.”

Managing the Work Process

Group activities and the writing process require integration of multiple perspectives, consensus building and high level interpersonal interactions that are not typically involved in single-author writing (Kraut, et al., 1992). Therefore, strategies must be established during the orientation phase to manage such tasks. Participants were asked a series of questions pertaining to: 1) strategies used during the initial meetings that set the tone for ongoing group interactions, 2) plans for ensuring adequate communication of group activities, 3) strategies for negotiating the work plan and timeline and 4) strategies used to manage the collective proposal document.

Table 11 provides the number of participants who responded in each topic category and the total responses for each topic. It was not appropriate to calculate the percentage of responses, as each interview question for this section focused on a particular topic rather than emergent themes (i.e., strategies specific to document control, strategies specific to creating a plan for communicating).

Table 11		
<i>Orientation Task Strategies by Topic</i>		
Topics	Participants n = 7	Responses n = 21
Communication Plan	7	10
Action Plan	4	5
Document Control	5	6

Communication Plan

Communication was revealed as an element of every aspect of the collaborative process, as well as each of the strategies suggested herein. Communication during the orientation phase and throughout the process serves a range of mediating functions. Therefore, a collectively created communication plan for specifically managing the work process can be extremely useful, as it can provide a source of accountability and can ensure that all members are “on the same page.” A plan also will ideally create cooperation and help the group arrive at a coordinated effort.

However, while all of the participants agree that such a plan is important, few, if any, reported having used a formalized process. In response to the interview questions, “Did the group establish a communication plan/plan for communicating?” and “What are the attributes of an effective communication plan?” the majority of participants indicated that the groups with which they had worked, typically did not formalize a communication plan, but rather improvised as they went along. This may indicate a lack of project management expertise, as formal project management training and experience are not necessarily a requirement for the majority of the job

categories of those interviewed. All seven of the participants responded to the questions that pertained to communication plans (10 responses total). The following were quotes that represented participant responses:

“I don’t recall a definite plan for communicating, but having a [communication] process for decision making in place prevented relationships from deteriorating. The group made choices together about how to treat all partners equally and there was the added value of more points of view. Building a process also led to easier implementation once we got the money.”

“Group communication has been ad hoc in my experience. Sometimes there has been an overuse of meetings in which case it is hard to hold people’s attention for extended periods. What I do think needs to be communicated are clear performance expectations so that there are no surprises at implementation time. Of course though, there are always surprises. Implementation is always easier in hindsight.”

“A combination of e-mail and personal conversations are the ideal. Attributes of an ideal plan would be keeping everyone in the loop and keeping the group moving forward...not letting them continue re-hashing the same thing over and over. It [a plan] should facilitate an agreement on the details...you know...writing plans, timelines, etc. I have never worked with a group that had an official communication plan. We exchange e-mails usually and the deadlines are communicated in a timeline...formatting plan and dividing the proposal by sections.”

Action Plans

Once roles and responsibilities are established, writing teams typically begin to create action plans for accomplishing the collaborative writing tasks according to an agreed upon timeline. Even while participants indicated their groups had not used a formal communication plan, it seems likely that action plans might have been more effective if facilitated using an established communication plan for negotiating responsibility for tasks. In other words, the functions of communicating and creating action/work plans cannot be separated. Rather, negotiating an action plan was difficult if group communications were not clear. Four participants provided a direct response to the question, “How have the work plan and timeline

been negotiated?” (5 responses total). The following were quotes that portrayed participant responses:

“Clear communication of agendas and the timeline are important. Discussions should lead to an agreement on these details – writing plans, timelines, etc. The group also has to decide who is doing what and when. If you don’t, then things don’t happen or worse, they fall apart. You know...the work doesn’t get done. Nobody wants that so it has to be discussed and delegated.”

“An agreed upon template is important. The groups that I have worked with have assigned sections of the proposal using the template. At the end of the first planning session, the writers sit down with the template and decide who will write what. Then the coordinator takes the template, assigns everyone a highlight color and sends it out by e-mail. The e-mail also states the deadline. I think the writers do this because they are most likely to respect timelines and deadlines.”

“The group makes choices about how to treat all partners equally in terms of who has to do what. We have also coordinated scheduling, which I negotiate verbally or by email as we begin the project.”

Document Management

Selecting the method of document production during the orientation phase is critical for working toward a strict deadline. All participants reported using some form of technology to manage the shared proposal document. The majority circulated the draft proposal via e-mail, while others used a “real time” web-based platform such as Google Docs or Basecamp. Five participants responded to the question, “How have the groups that you have worked with managed the shared document production?” (6 responses total). The following were quotes that characterize participant responses:

“The document production mode varies depending on the size of the group and the amount of content that needs to be written. How much work needs to be done and how specific the information needs to be. Sometimes it is easier just to write it myself than to communicate how to do it to someone else because I have written about it so many times.”

“Document production has been handled through e-mail. The person assigned to a writing role is usually the person delegated by the organization to write on their behalf.”

“I strongly encourage collaboration while writing the grant. We use an Internet utility called “Basecamp” to isolate the group working on a particular grant. Basecamp stores all documents and drafts in one location, and allows you to communicate progress via emails. Nothing is hidden; everyone is accountable, and you can divide up the workload to ensure that grants are ready to review before the deadline. You can archive all grant efforts including final drafts in one location, and return when you need to prepare reports or worst-case scenario make a second attempt.”

“We agreed upon a template for the project and then passed around each draft using email. One person kept the main proposal and everyone wrote their sections and sent them off to her. This worked well. She put them into one organized document and made sure everything flowed since so many people were working on it at the same time.”

Phases 2 & 3: Conflict and Emergence

Groups attempt to resolve tension surrounding project development (i.e., specifying goals and objectives, developing the budget, etc.) and group tasks by entering the conflict phase, during which information is exchanged and analyzed. Strategies for interacting should have been established during the previous orientation phase. Again, the quality of the communication process either facilitates or hinders the effectiveness of the group at moving through conflict and into emergence. The group enters the emergence phase once they have arrived at a shared solution to the conflict. This shift from conflict to emergence occurs several times over the course of project development.

First, participants were asked, “In your experience, what is the primary cause of group conflict in the context of collaborative grant writing?” Nearly all participants (6 participants) indicated negotiating budget line items caused conflict, while three participants indicated another cause. Because possible sources of conflict are endless depending on the circumstances that the group is working in, saturation was achieved only in the budget negotiation theme. Moreover, it was beyond the scope of the study to provide a complete list.

Next, participants were asked to, “Describe a situation in which a conflict was successfully resolved” and “What strategies did they use [to resolve the conflict]?” Three separate strategies were discussed. Five participants (7 responses) discussed using face-to-face group meetings to resolve conflict. Four participants indicated they had used face-to-face conversations, but in a one-on-one setting (5 responses). Four participants noted that there had been no real resolution of the conflict. Rather, the group made it through the process but never emerged with a solution that all members readily agreed upon (6 responses).

Finally, participants were asked to, “Describe a situation in which a conflict was not successfully resolved” and “What do you think inhibited the resolution of the conflict?” The single theme that emerged was a breakdown in communication (8 responses). It was important however, to interpret this finding with caution, as *communication* is a multi-faceted term, and it is likely that there were other issues which prevented the groups from fully resolving the conflict. Table 12 provides the number of participants who responded in each theme and the total number of responses. Quotes provided in response to the interview question, categorized by theme, follow the table.

Table 12		
<i>Conflict and Emergence Themes</i>		
Categories & Themes	Participants	Responses
Causes of Conflict	n = 7	n = 14
Budget Negotiation	6	11
Other Issues	3	3
Resolving Conflict	n = 7	n = 18
Face-to-Face Conversation (Group)	5	7
Face-to-Face Conversation (One-on-One)	4	5
Artificial Resolution	4	6
Unresolved Conflict	n = 7	n = 8
Breakdown in Communication	7	8

Causes of Conflict

Budget Negotiation

“Money is always the biggest issue when a project is no longer theoretical. It’s business, and you need to cover your costs. Credit and who gets it can also become an issue.”

“Budgets are without a doubt the greatest source of conflict. It takes a lot of conversation to pare down a budget that everyone is happy with. This is where knowing what you [your organization] can’t do without comes into play. As long as cool heads prevail, you’re okay.”

Other Issues

“Deadlines cause conflict. The resolution is always that the work has to get done and the group most responsible is the fiscal agent. So if someone doesn’t meet a deadline then the organization acting as the fiscal agent ends up writing everything when they were expecting help. Budget negotiation also causes conflict.”

“Feeling like the other partners don’t fully understand what our [organizational] mission is, has caused conflict. If they don’t understand what it is we do, then how can we collaborate?”

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Face-to-Face Conversation (Group)

“It was resolved with continued conversation and by keeping an open mind. We [the organization] also had to ultimately determine who needed to know what, so politics came to mind. How will this decision look to the community? The conflict resulted in an increased capacity because it created a new third party entity.”

Face-to-Face Conversation (One-on-One)

“Using a communication plan but you should begin with an internal plan. It is really important that you don’t bring internal issues to the table. I have even met with all partners individually before meeting collectively. Once the larger group has met then I have coordinated communication among core members of the group. The same people need to be committed for the duration of the writing process; otherwise it is difficult to make progress as a group. The content of the communication itself might consist of what was discussed [at a meeting], what the decisions that have been made are and actions. Be inclusive.”

“I have approached conflict by meeting with the problem partner individually. When that hasn’t worked, I bring in our own leadership to initiate conversations with the other

organization's leadership, always keeping in mind that difficult conversations require a friendly approach. This is most pertinent to required partners. They require careful or restricted communication instead of open communication."

"I think they should of set the budget and collaboration parameters before going into the meeting. For instance, based on the amount available, negotiate the money each organization is eligible for so that there is not so much variation in budget amounts."

Artificial Resolution

"Time constraints required that artificial connections be made with the union partner. Steps have since been taken to formalize the relationship but action was not taken by the group to forge a real relationship in time. In choosing the group members for next time, we need to choose those with the appropriate connections. Group had to move forward because of deadline."

"Negotiating and re-negotiating the budget was a problem. So at the end of the day, the deadline was set and cuts were made. Time was not allowed for continued negotiations but at the same time, decisions just needed to be made."

Unresolved Conflict

Breakdown in Communication

"Well, conflict is not always resolved. This happens when expectations are not clear or the partners do not fully agree. When this happens the leader should say it is not working in writing. In my situation, that didn't happen."

"We couldn't resolve it because the expectations and the individual's role were not clearly established at the outset of the project so there were divided loyalties. The individual was not accountable to the group. It would have helped to have a clear memorandum of understanding."

"Going back to the healthcare consortium, no one took the lead so trust never developed. It's not they didn't assign themselves as the lead; there just was no common agenda so trust never developed. Then we turned in content and the proposal was never submitted. We would never work with that group again."

Phase 4: Reinforcement

In the context of collaborative grant writing, the reinforcement phase is comprised of the final review of the proposal, obtaining final signatures/commitments and submission of the

proposal document. Celebrating the proposal submission was a part of this phase as suggested by participant responses. These actions support group solidarity, which often provides a renewed sense of commitment to the project (Fisher, 1970).

Specifically, participants were asked, “What activities have taken place during the conclusion of the group’s work together?” and “Has a debriefing session been a part of the process?” As noted, the majority of participants (5 participants) discussed obtaining signatures (i.e., “final sign off”) following the final review of the proposal as part of their organization’s formal process. No participants noted using a debriefing session which might have included strategies such as discussing what went right or wrong during the process. Two participants mentioned that the group would meet after submission, but prior to implementation, if the grant was awarded. It was not appropriate to calculate a percentage of responses, as each of the interview questions for this section focused on a particular strategy (i.e., strategies used to debrief) and not emergent themes. Table 13 lists the number of participants who responded in each topic category and the total number of responses. Quotes provided in response to the interview question follow the table.

Table 13		
<i>Reinforcement Task Strategies</i>		
Strategies	Participants n = 7	Responses n = 17
Standard Protocols	5	7
Lack of Debriefing Session	7	7

Standard Protocols

“You need signatures from everyone involved before submitting the grant. This can be done on a signature cover page that you can hand-circulate if you are close to the deadline. Your [organization’s] budget officer will want time to review, and possibly discuss or revise, the budget details before the packet goes to the [organizational leadership] for a signature. Even though grants are submitted electronically, probably through your office, you should have all final signatures in hand BEFORE pushing the

submit button, in order to avoid negative feedback about going behind people's backs. The signature form can be simple, but all funding agencies expect the [leadership] to be on board before a grant is submitted. Be safe, or be sorry."

Lack of Debriefing

"A debriefing session did not take place until the grant was funded but it was probably needed to reinforce the group decisions. No one thought we would get the grant so when we did people had to be reminded of what they had committed to. Implementation is not the right time to debrief. It would have been ideal to have an implementation plan (or some structure in place for one) such as plans for hiring process or next steps to move forward. The group is otherwise still talking about the process such as budget negotiation."

"If we get a grant it is generally the program people that meet to go over what we said we would do. The only thing that I, as a writer, do at these meetings is to make sure they collect the data I need for the report. That they commit to gathering the data."

"In my experience, there is a flurry of e-mail where people are congratulating one another for a job well done once the application gets submitted. Even if the process went poorly, this still happens, and it might be part of just...you know...networking or saving face with colleagues. Not to say that it isn't genuine. Most times it is."

Participant Reflection

In order to discern additional information that would ensure appropriate interpretation of responses, participants were asked, "How do you define success in the context of collaborative grant writing?" All participants (7 participants) discussed some aspect of finding new opportunities by way of their participation in the collaboration. The following were quotes that represented the attitudes of the participants across themes:

Defining Success: New Opportunities

"Collaboration without change is not difficult. Success for me is the enhanced ability to work together. To see things differently which can make a dramatic change in the way things are done. Real collaboration can help you change the system of doing things. It increases the level of risk tolerance. A group can take a greater risk with trying something new than a single organization can. Even if a project is a failure, everyone has a new perspective. Without transformational risk, you can't have big success. Taking advantage of the creative process to be able to make a difference, this will help you better serve the

community. Balancing individual interests with those of the group to achieve greater outcomes.”

“A real success is the opportunity to develop relationships. Proposals [even when not funded] can lead to the development of plans that bring a needed project to life.”

“It is not always just getting the grant. Like when we got the [title removed] grant; it evolved into so much more, a better relationship. Those we served were better served because of the collaboration. We also learned a ton and used this to expand to other opportunities.”

“I think success is winning the grant and successful relationship building and gaining a new understanding about the other organizations. True collaboration can only work if all players win.”

Summary of Findings

Data analysis facilitated a foundational understanding of the interactions that take place in the context under study. Findings were comprised of overlapping themes and strategies which were organized according to the pre-determined phases of the Collaborative Writing Continuum (refer to Figure 1, pg. 14). Additionally, it is worth noting that communication was an underlying element of nearly all of the themes and strategies revealed. This section provides a summary of significant findings in “answer” to each of the primary research questions.

Research Question 1: What information might help professionals to position themselves and their organization for success as they prepare to embark on collaborative grant writing endeavors?

Findings: In preparing to engage in collaborative grant writing endeavors, findings indicate that *best practices* center on internal planning strategies. Responses suggested that internal planning might include formal strategic planning, during which the organization sets priorities and objectives for accomplishing its mission over the course of one or more years. Perhaps more often, however, internal planning in this context involves deploying pre-grant planning as an essential “first step” in the collaborative grant writing process.

This strategy entails bringing together an internal team comprised of the grant writer(s), program staff, subject experts, and organizational leadership to develop a collective agreement as to how the organization will respond to the anticipated solicitation for grant proposals. The internal team might participate in informal activities such as brainstorming, or more formal agenda-driven discussions during which the team plans specific activities for tackling the issues to be addressed through the grant proposal. In either case, such planning equips those tasked with the responsibility of participating in the collaborative activities with the knowledge to proceed with deliberate action on the project. Moreover, participants noted that funded grant projects are more easily implemented when accurate insights about resources (e.g., monetary and otherwise - staff time, etc.) are part of the original planning negotiations.

Best Practice Strategy #1: Conduct Internal Planning

This strategy will accomplish the following:

- Establishes an internal team.
- Secures leadership buy-in.
- Ensures alignment of project approach with the strategic objectives of the organization.
- Provides venue for internal networking to help staff maintain awareness of local politics.
- Provide internal staff with a venue for discussing who to consider as potential partners.

As part of the internal planning process, the team may choose to plan, or at least discuss, various approaches for addressing issues that members believe may arise in the group setting. For instance, the team may decide on one or more strategies for addressing conflict over budget negotiations, or how to engage problem group members while maintaining political currency. While such strategies may not be deployed until a collaborative group enters the phases of conflict and emergence (or not at all in some cases), anticipating and preparing for potential conflicts may help to individuals in the leadership role to better manage likely conflicts.

Best Practice Strategy #2: Anticipate Potential Conflicts

This strategy will accomplish the following:

- Allows the internal team to strategize potential approaches outside of the group setting.
- Helps the group to avoid conflicts in some cases.
- Affords the suggestion multiple well-thought out strategies to the group.

Research Question 2: What strategies are being deployed by professionals who participate in collaborative grant writing activities to organize and manage group **dynamics** (i.e., managing interpersonal communications, negotiating conflict, assigning roles, establishing a communication plan, and debriefing)?

Findings: The initial group meeting serves as the orientation phase. During this phase group members become acquainted and begin to establish the communication rules and expectations for interacting. To enhance collaborative processes there must be some form of relationship building at this stage to serve as a way to gain commitment to the project. Therefore, formal and informal channels should be used to gain feelings of reciprocity and to set the stage for the positive exchange of information (Swarts, 2004). This can be accomplished through a combination of strategies.

First, findings suggest that the organization initiating the collaboration should prepare for the initial team meeting by creating a detailed, yet flexible, agenda to guide the group through introductions, presentation of the “need” to be addressed, grant requirements, and discussion about next steps. Providing this type of structure for initial interactions sets the tone for future exchanges and can unite the group in forming common goals.

Best Practice Strategy #3: Structure the Initial Meeting

This strategy will accomplish the following:

- Agendas outline the purpose of the meeting and ensure quality/productive time. They provide a compass for the meeting, and help the group to stay on task.
- Agendas bring the group together, and provide a foundation for the group to move right into the project development and other phases.
- Sets the stage for the collaborative group to take successive steps toward completing the project. Formalizes “next steps.”

Next, while largely a responsibility of the leader as he/she facilitates the program development process, conversations about ground rules help to set expectations, and contribute to the overall productivity of the group. Participants noted that discussions about expectations and “rules” helped to create a certain camaraderie and trust between group members, which added to the group’s ability to resolve conflicts. It was asserted that establishing ground rules likely contributed to feelings of accountability to the project.

Best Practice Strategy #4: Establish “Ground Rules”

This strategy will accomplish the following:

- Puts individual members at ease to disagree; contributes to productive, rather than contentious, conflict resolution.
- Sets expectations for how group will accomplish its collective tasks.
- Creates accountability to the group.

A successful collaboration will provide members with a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities that facilitate collective action toward achieving a common goal. “Such clarity and formality [will] help to create a stable, predictable coalition structure and operating procedure, reduce conflicts and, promote member satisfaction and commitment” (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2001, p. 254), as the potential for conflict increases when the boundaries of responsibility are unclear (Nelson & Smith, 1990). Participants were next asked to discuss the roles and associated tasks generally assigned within their collaborative grant writing groups. These included the role of leader, coordinator, decision maker(s), writer, editor, and subject matter expert(s) (refer to Table 9 on pgs. 51-52). By assigning roles, the group may be able to avoid such difficulties as diffusion of responsibility, inequitable division of labor, and/or difficulty keeping to the timeline, among other things.

Best Practice Strategy #5: Assign Roles and Responsibilities

This strategy will accomplish the following:

- Establish a clear understanding of who is responsible for what tasks.
- Provides a system for maintaining accountability to the group.
- Facilitates the accomplishment of writing and other tasks.

With regard to participant discussions about assigning roles, it was evident that choosing an effective leader is critical to a group's success. Participants were asked to discuss the qualities of a good leader. Responses represented two essential leadership qualities or "categories:" 1) social/emotional intelligence, and 2) skills to tactfully provide focused guidance. These skills closely align with the research of Goleman (1998) who lists essential leadership traits as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Similarly, Thompson (2010), stated that a good leader will "direct projects effectively and efficiently by incorporating active listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and community building" (p. 112).

Best Practice Strategy #6: Choose Effective Leadership

This strategy will accomplish the following:

- Facilitates the group's progress toward successful completion.
- Maintains motivation and morale among group members.
- Provides foresight regarding potential conflicts.

Finally, once roles and responsibilities are assigned, the group will move into project development and into the phases of conflict and emergence. Collectively constructing a grant proposal involves considerable navigation of group communication among the primary partners. For this reason, the opportunity for frequent and transparent communication in the form of meetings is critical in keeping the group "on the same page." Meetings provide a way for the team to "check in," which will ideally create cooperation and help the group to arrive at a coordinated effort. Participants noted that in most cases, program development is best

accomplished during face-to-face meetings. However, most agreed that conference calls can serve this purpose when such circumstances are not a possibility.

Best Practice Strategy #7: Hold Regular Meetings

This strategy will accomplish the following:

- Helps to maintain group cohesion.
- Achieves true group consensus.
- Maintains group member engagement.

Research Question 3: What strategies are being deployed by professionals who participate in collaborative grant writing activities to organize and manage group **tasks** (i.e., information collection, document management, and writing tasks)?

Findings: Findings pertaining to the management of group tasks indicated that the writing team should create a formal work plan for accomplishing the collaborative writing tasks according to an agreed upon timeline. Doing so ensures that tasks are completed in a timely manner, as a written work plan helps the coordinator hold group members accountable for their share of the work. Moreover, participants noted that clearly stated long-range plans and activities facilitate the perception of progress among group members (Nelson & Smith, 1998).

Best Practice Strategy #8: Create a Written Work Plan

This strategy will accomplish the following:

- Documents the assignment of tasks, responsible parties, deadlines and methods for reporting progress to the team.
- Provides a means for holding group members accountable.
- Keeps group members on the same page.

With respect to establishing a communication plan, the majority of participants indicated that the groups with whom they had worked, typically had not used a formal plan, but rather improvised as they went along. The literature, however, suggests that, like written work plans, documenting plans for communication has many advantages, as it prevents the “ball from being dropped” at a crucial stage of the project. Further, McNellis (2009) states that an effective

communication plan will consist of five elements: 1) who needs to know, 2) what they need to know, 3) how they will be told (i.e., e-mail, in person, etc.), 4) who will tell them, and 5) the deadline for telling them.

Best Practice Strategy #9: Formalize the Communication Plan

This strategy will accomplish the following:

- Creates high level of accountability to the group.
- Contributes to the development of trust among group members.
- Ensures is accurate information is shared with the appropriate individuals in a timely manner.

When incorporated into the work plan, a debriefing session can provide a way for groups to maintain relationships and provide closure, reinforce camaraderie, etc. Participants noted that debriefing typically included conducting the final review of the proposal, obtaining final signatures and/or commitments and submission of the proposal document. Celebrating the proposal submission was also mentioned as part of this process. A more formal debriefing session however, would allow the group to determine what went well, lessons learned, and ways to facilitate future endeavors more smoothly (McNellis, 2009).

Best Practice Strategy #10: Hold a Debriefing Session

This strategy will accomplish the following:

- Allows team to discuss what went well and lessons learned.
- Helps the team decide how to improve the collaboration process for the next time.
- Provides the venue for internal teams to develop an implementation plan.

Finally, findings pertaining to how individuals and groups define success within this context indicated that success is often determined by whether or not the grant is awarded, and perhaps more importantly, the new opportunities that participation in the collaboration afforded. This perception was shaped by the individual's job. Whereas program directors were more likely to be relationship driven, grant writers tended to be process driven (i.e., had the process gone

well enough to obtain the grant?). A more detailed discussion of the findings as they apply to the context of collaborative grant writing is provided in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore and identify *best practices* for organizing and managing group dynamics and tasks within the context of collaborative grant writing groups.

The questions comprising the qualitative interview script were organized within the framework of Fisher's (1970) theory of small group decision making in an effort to suggest how particular strategies might be deployed at strategic points to help the group move through the collaborative and writing processes more efficiently.

Significance of the Study

While prior research on collaborative writing has served to inform the development of best practices for a range of collaborative writing scenarios, additional research was necessary for identifying and establishing strategies that provide collaborative grant writing groups with the tools they need to work more efficaciously. The topic was deemed both timely and relevant as many federal departments now require collaborative partnerships in conducting grant activities. This has required the development of strategies to ensure the success of such endeavors.

Review of Methods

This study deployed a qualitative design from an objectivist approach. That is, interviews were conducted using scripted but open-ended questions that were pre-organized according to the phases of group decision making as theorized by Fisher. The interviews were conducted during the late fall of 2010 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Interview participants were professionals who had at least three years of grant experience and who had participated as a member of a collaborative grant writing group. Initial participants were drawn from a local, professional grant

writers group (i.e., Grant Writer's Roundtable). Additional interviewees were located using a chain sampling protocol. A total of seven structured interviews lasting between sixty and ninety minutes each were conducted. Interviews were recorded, as were semi-transcribed detailed field notes. A review and analysis of participant responses were used to detect themes and strategies which were then used to formulate general conclusions about the subject.

Limitations

This section reviews the potential limitations that should be considered when implementing the findings. First, as with all qualitative methods, the principle investigator's bias presented a potential limitation. Specifically, the PI's experience as a grant writing professional and collaborator may have introduced bias with respect to interpretation of the data. However, it was assumed that this background more likely enhanced accessibility to the research population, as well as provided insights not readily apparent to an outsider. For example, in delineating processes outside of Fisher's theory categories, the PI's unique position provided the understanding that a pre-collaborative category had to be included. It is thus more likely that this background provided deeper insight into the processes that influence groups in terms of selection of members, internal politics and strategies that inevitably set a group up for success or failure.

Another potential source of bias was the way that the interview questions were worded. To reduce such bias, the wording of the interview questions was kept as neutral as possible. Specifically, simple language that would be clear to a general audience was used as well as no jargon. This lessened the possibility of misinterpretation of the questions. Moreover, the interview script was reviewed for bias by an impartial professional colleague (i.e., colleague who had no stake in the outcome of the research). This individual reviewed the questions for

appropriate wording, cultural sensitivity and different interpretations of words and sentences that could have lead to misconceptions.

The final possible limitation was issues related to transferability. Here, the scope of the research was the West Michigan area. The suggested strategies may differ slightly from those used in other locations. In other words, each community has its own politics and inner workings which can influence the ability of groups to form and work in collaboration regardless of the strategies deployed. For instance, local politics likely play a role in selecting group members, and the influential nature of particular partner organizations may dictate how group dynamics are facilitated (i.e., certain organizations have more clout and therefore may direct activities in other cases with their ability to mobilize other community resources. In this sense, transferability of the findings may have been compromised. However, it is anticipated that the findings are potentially applicable to similar organizations and under similar circumstances.

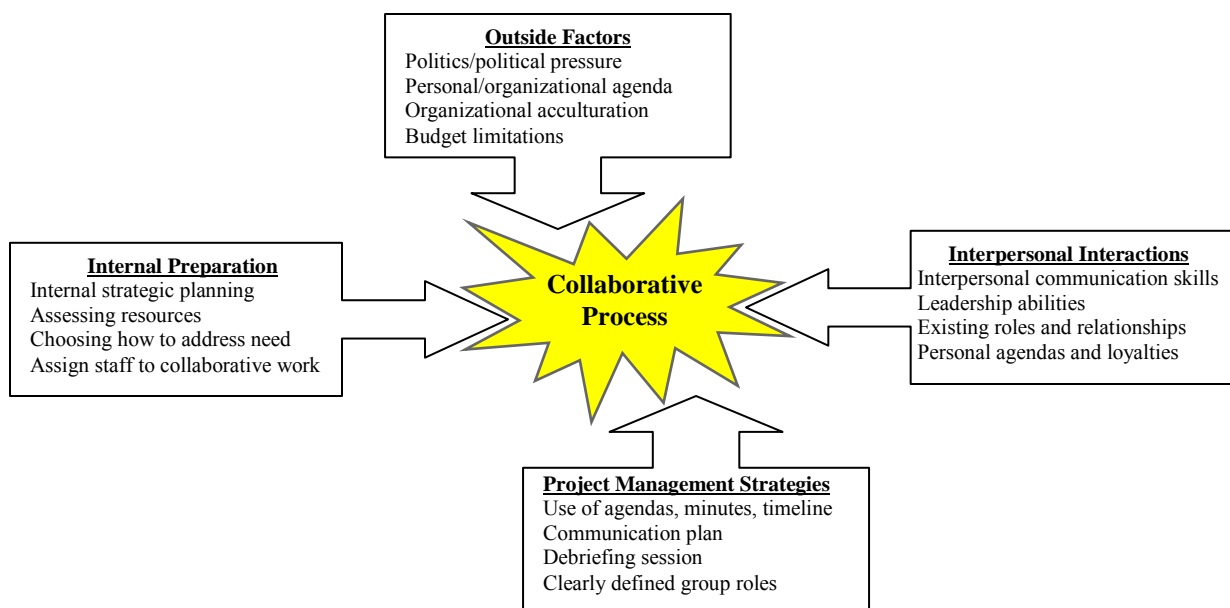
Overview of Findings

Analysis of the data explored the unique aspects of the collaborative grant writing process through the lens of the Collaborative Writing Continuum (Figure 1, pg. 14). This continuum was based on Fisher's model of small group decision emergence. Themes and strategies pertaining to each of the phases, as they apply within this context, were revealed. Findings were used to facilitate a foundational understanding about the interactions that take place in this context. The following discussion presents these strategies and describes how further examination of the themes might provide insight as to additional and/or underlying strategies that can be used to effectively organize and manage group dynamics and tasks.

Discussion of Findings

The context of collaborative grant writing is unique in that a diverse group representing various public sectors must come together to collectively develop and propose a comprehensive program (i.e., complimentary set of services) within a very short timeframe. This context tends to be particularly challenging, as there are a number of dynamics simultaneously at play which influence the formation and interactions of the collaborative group. As shown in Figure 3 below, such dynamics generally fall into one of four categories: 1) outside factors, 2) internal preparation, 3) interpersonal issues, and 4) project management strategies. The group's ability to work through such dynamics to establish productive patterns of interaction within the given timeframe plays a significant role in whether or not a successful outcome can be achieved.

Figure 3: Dynamics Influencing the Collaborative Writing Process



Outside Factors

Outside factors encompass aspects of the collaborative process that are outside of the group's control but which significantly influence the formation of the group, and at times, group

member behavior. Participants noted for instance, the importance of considering the political ramifications that participating (or not participating) can have for an organization prior to entering a collaborative relationship. For instance, the way that a collaborative relationship may shape the community's perception of an organization is a consideration (i.e., publicity management). Likewise, it may be necessary to select a partner organization based on the position it holds within the community; in terms of their status as a key stakeholder or their influence with particular community groups and/or the target population.

Other outside factor may be the roles, routines and loyalties that individual group members bring from their home organization. For example, group members may play diverse roles and/or have differing levels of influence within and outside of their "home" organization (Bacon, 1990), or the organizations involved may not share similar organizational cultures dictating how and when work is accomplished (Palmeri, 2004). These factors may affect the assignment of tasks and the associated writing processes. Personal or organizational agendas also present a challenge for groups because as the collaborative process progresses, it may become difficult for the individual to align a competing agenda with the common goal(s) of the group.

Lastly, every grant opportunity has an award ceiling that limits the funding available to each partner organization. This influences the collaborative process when there is political pressure to participate even while funds are limited. Here, each organization has a bottom line associated with the services it offers, and because budget negotiations are typically contentious to begin with, this may present an added layer of tension that impacts the group in some way.

Internal Preparation

The dynamic of internal planning is especially important given the short timeframe of the collaborative grant writing process. Typically conducted prior to a collaborative opportunity,

such planning prepares the staff tasked as the organization's point person(s) to carry forth the strategic action plans of the organization. Planning provides a clear sense of direction and buy-in from organizational leadership, understanding of resources, and empowerment of staff, all of which informs the direction of the project and how it is developed. Completing this planning as a first step in the collaborative process will assist the staff in positioning the organization for upcoming opportunities and forging initial discussions with potential partners before a solicitation for grant applications is issued. Again, this is critical given the tight turnaround time most grant proposals require. As such, it was revealed as one of the *best practices* strategies cited by the present study.

Project Management Strategies

While not necessarily a dynamic per se, project management strategies certainly influence collaborative grant writing groups. Strategies may be technical and/or interpersonal in nature, and are deployed to facilitate the tasks that the group must accomplish in order to complete the proposal. For example, practical strategies such as using organized agendas and timelines can make a big difference but only if communicated appropriately. A more in-depth discussion about project management strategies is provided in the next section.

Interpersonal Interactions

Collaborative groups are greatly influenced by interpersonal dynamics before, during and after the collaborative process. Such dynamics play a role in creating the tone and circumstances of each aspect of the process. Moreover, given the limited amount of time collaborative groups have to progress through the stages of group formation (i.e., develop trust, establish cohesion, etc.), these dynamics have considerable influence on the ability of the group to plan for and achieve a common goal.

Best Practice Strategies for Managing Collaborative Projects

Communication was revealed an underlying element in nearly all of the themes and strategies discussed. This was not surprising, as prior research has established that collaboration is in essence a communicative venture, and further, that communication is a fundamental necessity of any kind of teamwork (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2001; Germonprez & Zigurs, 2006). The *best practices* suggested herein are therefore intended to facilitate a combination of both technical and interpersonal aspects of collaborative work, which in combination, further a group's progress. Table 14 lists examples of the two aspects of collaborative work.

Table 14	
<i>Aspects of Collaborative Work</i>	
Technical	Interpersonal
Coordination of project logistics: Use of agendas, timelines, etc. Project management: Use of work plan, formal communication plan, and debriefing session	Maintaining group cohesion Handling a problem member Achieving group consensus Ensuring member engagement Maintaining motivation and morale

Whether or not a group is effective largely depends on the extent to which group leadership is able to deploy the appropriate types of strategies synergistically. That is, strategies must correspond to be truly effective. Group consensus (*interpersonal*) for example, must be achieved before work plans can be delegated (*technical*). The best practices developed in review of the findings presented in Chapter IV are based on this understanding. These are again presented here, but organized by the pre-determined phases of the Collaborative Writing Continuum (refer to Figure 1, pg. 14).

Pre-Collaboration Strategies

The first best practice strategy was: *Conduct Internal Planning*. The activities an organization undertakes in preparation for collaborative work were found to be more noteworthy than anticipated. Specifically, findings revealed that individuals charged with representing their

organization in a collaborative effort must be prepared to strategically position the organization for partnership. They must fully understand the organizational mission, and what resources can or cannot be brought to the table. This insight is developed through internal planning, networking with colleagues, and understanding the nuances of the funding environment; all of which enables staff members to articulate how services and resources offered by the organization will compliment those offered by the partner. **The second best practice strategy, *Anticipate Potential Conflicts***, is also part of this planning process but is discussed later in this section as it better corresponds with the conflict phase.

Internal Preparation

As discussed, including internal planning as a routine step in the collaborative process is essential given the short timeframe for writing a grant. While not intended as an all-inclusive list, specific planning strategies may include: 1) formal strategic planning based on initiatives that will be driven by budget allocations within the organization, 2) internal discussions among key staff to determine the “fit” of a potential grant opportunity prior to engaging with potential partners, and/or 3) internal discussions to plan the organization’s approach in applying for the grant which will guide potential negotiations with partners. Undertaking any of these tactics will assist staff in strategically positioning the organization for partnership.

Choosing Partners

Another facet of internal planning is determining which external organizations should be invited to partner on the grant. While it is often the case that specific types of entities are mandated by the funding agency, organizations have some leeway in choosing the specific organization with whom they collaborate (e.g., there may be a number of non-profit organizations offering similar services). With respect to how partners are selected, three primary

strategies were described by participants. The first strategy was to select organizations based on whether or not the potential partner is able to offer complimentary services. This provides a primary advantage for all partners, as offering a full scope of services is often necessary for meeting the needs of the population served by the grant-funded program. Additionally, this strategy increases the likelihood of meeting the required grant outcomes by increasing the scope of the intervention.

The second strategy was to choose partners with whom the organization has an existing relationship. This can be especially important given the limited timeframe for developing and writing the grant proposal. The general consensus among participants was that when the underlying structures for partnership are already in place, such as trust and an established work process, the group is more likely to advance through the collaborative processes and writing tasks more efficiently, and with greater success. Additionally, when organizations have previously collaborated, staff members typically understand how the others work and what services can or cannot be combined seamlessly. Here, a coordinated work process usually exists if the same staff is working on the project.

Finally, the most noted strategy for selecting partners was choosing organizations in which the leadership is willing to empower key staff to make decisions on behalf of the organization. It is critical that partner organizations are willing to appoint a single decision maker for the duration of the collaborative process due to the limited timeframe for developing the project and submitting the grant proposal. Grant projects typically cannot move forward without firm commitments from each of the partners; thus, projects that lack a firm commitment end up stalling out and wasting the valuable organizational resources that have been devoted to applying for the grant.

Orientation Strategies

During orientation, group members begin to establish the communication rules and expectations for group interactions. Initial group meetings serve as the orientation phase in this context, as they typically provide the venue for relationship building and for gaining commitment to the project. Because the orientation phase should set the stage for the collaborative process by assisting the group in establishing a framework for overall project management, **the third best practice strategy was: *Structure the Initial Meeting***. Using a formal agenda, this structure should include introductions, establishing a common goal (i.e., identifying as a group through the acknowledgment of the problem to be addressed), and clarification of purpose (i.e., motives for acting).

The fourth best practice strategy was: *Establish Ground Rules*. Here, formal and informal channels should be used to build feelings of reciprocity and to set the stage for the positive exchange of information (Fisher, 1970; Swarts, 2004). McNellis (2009) suggests that ground rules might include: suspending judgment, no lectures, and/or actively listening to each other. Participants reported that informal socializing between group members, initial verbal commitment to pursuing a collaborative approach, and discussion concerning “next steps” typically takes place. A sense of group identity should develop if the group is functional, and later interactions will be “...characterized by an openness to considering others’ perspectives, dedication, and leadership among those vested, in an effort to reach mutual goals for addressing such issues” (Crawley, Dopke, Hughes & Dolan, 2007, p. 180). Settling these fundamental concerns advances the group to their next task of assigning roles, which typically takes place at the conclusion of the initial meeting.

Assigning Roles

The fifth best practice strategy was: *Assign Roles and Responsibilities*; the sixth best practice strategy was: *Choose Effective Leadership*. A successful collaboration provides members with a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities that facilitate collective action toward achieving a common goal. “Such clarity and formality help to create a stable, predictable coalition structure and operating procedure, reduce conflicts and, promote member satisfaction and commitment” (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2001, p. 254), as the potential for conflict increases when the boundaries of responsibility are unclear (Nelson & Smith, 1990). Roles provide a niche for each member, and each role typically has a set of associated duties that help establish accountability to the group (Yalom, 1985). Furthermore, because certain tasks are typically associated with each role, determining the method for accomplishing “next steps” logically flows from role assignments.

Findings revealed that the most common roles include leader, coordinator, decision maker, writer/editor, and subject expert; all of which have been discussed in the literature as they also apply in similar contexts (Lowry, et al., 2004; Noël & Robert, 2004). A description of each role was provided in the typology presented in Chapter IV (p. 51). Table 15 offers a snapshot of how the different roles interrelate throughout the collaborative grant writing process.

Table 15		
<i>Interrelationship of Group Roles</i>		
Role	Value-Add to Group	Relation to Other Members
Leader	Keeps the collaborative process moving forward; facilitates buy-in, determines “next steps,” and serves as the final decision maker.	Interacts with all group members in one way or another, especially the Coordinator.
Coordinator	Manages the technical aspects of drafting the proposal; coordinates group communication, set the timelines, ensures follow-through.	Communicates with all group members to ensure the project stays on track.
Decision Makers	Makes timely decisions/commitments on behalf of their organization.	Works with Leader to make final decisions.

<i>Table 15 continued...</i>		
Role	Value-Add to Group	Relation to Other Members
Grant Writer	Possesses knowledge about the “ins and outs” of grant writing. Attends group meetings to obtain specific information about the project. Crafts the proposal document.	Works with all group members to draft the proposal, especially the Coordinator.
Editor	Ensures that the details in the final proposal document are accurate and clearly written.	Works with the Writer(s) and Coordinator to put the text into one style and voice.
Subject Experts	Provides insight from his/her specialized knowledge and experience with the target population, aspects of the program, etc.	Works with the Leader and other group members to develop the program.

The seventh best practice strategy was: *Hold Regular Meetings*. Once roles and responsibilities are assigned, the group moves into project development and through the phases of conflict and emergence. The proposal is concurrently drafted during these phases. Collectively designing a grant project involves considerable navigation of group communication among the primary partners. For this reason, the opportunity for frequent and transparent communication in the form of meetings is critical in keeping group members from different organizations “on the same page.” Meetings provide a way for the group to check in, which ideally creates cooperation and helps the group to arrive at a coordinated effort. Participants noted that in most cases, project development is best accomplished during face-to-face meetings. However, most agreed that conference calls can also serve this purpose when circumstances prevent in-person exchanges.

Work Plans

The eighth best practice strategy was: *Create a Written Work Plan*. Once roles and responsibilities are established, collaborative groups should create detailed work plans for accomplishing the writing tasks according to an agreed upon timeline. Work plans should specify the task, who is responsible, the deadline, the agreed upon method of measuring the progress or results (e.g., data will be gathered, need section will be drafted, etc.) and method for reporting on progress (e.g., next draft will be emailed to the group) (McNellis, 2009).

Participants noted that work plans are often developed during face-to-face meetings, and distributed to the group in writing via email. Once the plans are written, they make useful social contracts, providing members with clear deadlines, a sense of direction, and a sense of accountability to the larger group. Moreover, clearly stated plans and activities facilitate the perception of progress among group members (Nelson & Smith, 1998).

Document Management

Selecting the strategy for managing the collective proposal document during the orientation phase is critical when working as a group toward a strict deadline. The chosen method ultimately facilitates or hinders the group's ability to complete the collective document on time. All participants reported using some form of technology to manage the shared proposal document. The majority reported having used single-author writing (i.e., sections of the proposal assigned to single authors, with sections later compiled into one document) and circulating the draft proposal via email. Others reported having used a real time platform such as Google Docs, Basecamp or Backpack which enabled them to use the "real time" writing method.

Communication Plan

The ninth best practice strategy was: *Formalize the Communication Plan.*

Collectively constructing a complex document such as a grant proposal requires groups to rely heavily on interpersonal communication. Therefore, establishing a shared communication plan during the orientation phase achieves a range of mediating functions. McNellis (2009) suggests that each face-to-face meeting conclude with the group developing a prescriptive plan for how they will communicate about group tasks and activities between meetings, and how the group will share its progress with organizational leadership. He suggests that effective communication plans must be distributed in writing, and consist of five elements: 1) who needs to know, 2) what

they need to know, 3) how they will be told (i.e., email, in person, etc.), 4) who will tell them, and 5) the deadline for telling them.

Like work plans, the strategy of using a clear, concise communication plan provides group members with deadlines, a sense of progress, and it establishes accountability. This is an important consideration as findings indicated two things with respect to unresolved conflict: 1) that communication had broken down in some way, and 2) some aspect of the planned process (e.g., task assignments) were not clear; thus, resulting in frustration, lack of accountability, and/or lack of commitment to the common goal. While this strategy seems relatively simple, findings suggest that many groups fall short of devising a specific plan for communicating, and instead opt for an ad hoc arrangement.

Phases 2 and 3: Conflict and Emergence

Group members attempt to resolve tension during project development (e.g., specifying goals and objectives, developing the budget, etc.) by entering the conflict phase. During the conflict phase, group members attempt to resolve issues by exchanging and analyzing shared information in order to arrive at an acceptable solution for all members. Ideally, the group's leadership will deploy the strategies during this phase. Specifically, an effective leader will encourage the group to search for new ideas or solutions, clarify issues, delay premature decisions, or discuss disagreements (Lowry, et al., 2004; Nelson & Smith, 1990). The group enters the emergence phase once they have arrived at a shared solution to the conflict. This shift from conflict to emergence occurs several times over the course of project development.

As previously noted, the second best practice strategy was: *Anticipate Potential Conflicts*. Participants were asked to discuss their experiences with respect to causes of conflict during grant collaborations. The majority noted that budgets negotiations were the greatest

source of conflict in this context. This being the case, group leadership may choose to plan strategic approaches for addressing such issues prior to their arising in the group setting. For instance, suggested approaches included allowing each organization the opportunity to make a case for their share of the resources, basing budget allocation on the percent of services provided to the project, or leveraging non-monetary resources as part of budget negotiations.

It was also revealed that other sources of conflict were prevalent such as when a partner feels their organizational mission is misunderstood, or when group members don't feel engaged or that their time is being wasted. Findings indicated that a lack of communication may be the underlying cause in each of these cases, as most participants stated that a breakdown in communication was the primary cause for a conflict not being resolved. A strategy for addressing these issues might be the implementation of a formal communication plan, as previously suggested.

Participants noted three overarching strategies for dealing with conflict. The first was to address issues of conflict during face-to-face group meetings with all group members present. This strategy would facilitate transparency and trust among members, as each member has the opportunity to weigh in on potential resolutions. The second strategy, face-to-face conversations between the group leader and the problem partner in a one-on-one setting, may be deployed when a lack of accountability is the issue, or when a single partner is holding up the progress of the group in some other way (e.g., failing to obtain a commitment from leadership). This strategy would prevent embarrassment and allow the partner to openly discuss issues they may be reluctant to discuss in the presence of the whole group.

Finally, while choosing not to resolve a conflict is not necessarily a strategy, it may be the best course of action in some situations. For instance, due to time constraints the leader may

decide it is better to finalize a decision before achieving buy-in from the whole group. Likewise, the political ramifications of confronting an issue may not be worth the “social costs” of forcing a resolution.

It is important to note that these strategies for dealing with conflict are just the tip of the iceberg. Possible sources of conflict and strategies for addressing it are endless depending on the circumstances that the group is working in. In addition, to a great extent, a group’s ability to resolve conflict and emerge in full consensus is dependent on the capacity of the group’s leadership for managing collaborative activities. Additional research is therefore needed to fully address this aspect of the context.

Phase 4: Reinforcement

The tenth best practice strategy was: *Hold a Debriefing Session.* During the final phase of reinforcement, findings indicated that, while recommended in the leadership literature, collaborative groups typically do not hold a formal debriefing session. Rather, the collaborative process concludes once each organization agrees to the final draft of the proposal, provides final signatures of authority, and the proposal is submitted. This may be the case for several reasons. First, there often is not a direct need for the proposal writing team to work together again per se. That is, each individual resumes his/her daily job activities, as the goal for working together has been accomplished. In addition, the majority of the staff members that work as part of a collaborative grant writing team are not the same ones who are responsible for implementation (i.e., if the grant is received).

Participants did indicate that internal debriefing occasionally does take place, especially if they had been the lead organization (i.e., fiscal agent). This debriefing session may or may not be a formal meeting, and it usually consists of a review of the collaborative writing process,

development of a project implementation plan, and a discussion about what could have gone better. It was evident that this process is more important for an internal team, especially a fiscal agent, as they are ultimately responsible for the project should the grant be awarded. However, it may be a good practice for all organizations if they intend to be involved in future collaborations, as it can help the team move toward more effective processes.

Professional Development Implications

In preparing the findings of this research for presentation, it was realized that leadership competencies likely have a much greater influence on the outcome of a collaborative project than originally assumed. Consequently, even when *best practice* strategies are deployed, the quality of the leadership may ultimately drive the level of success achieved by the group. This presents several implications for organizations, in terms of who is assigned to collaborative work, the leadership skills an individual possesses, and the ongoing professional development opportunities necessary for tapping into an individual's highest capacity.

The skills and behaviors of individuals in positions that require them to represent their organization to external partners greatly inform stakeholder perceptions about the organization. The most critical step is therefore to appoint individuals who have the capacity to carry out the strategic direction of the organization in a way that preserves the organization's reputation. According to Goleman (1998), the base skills needed to perform truly effectively in a leadership role include self awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. The sum of these skills readily translates to an individual's level of emotional intelligence and his/her ability to provide focused guidance, as noted by participants. Moreover, these skills result in the ability to motivate others, to make good decisions under pressure, and to be relatively comfortable with ambiguity (Thompson, 2010). With this in mind, it seems advantageous for organizations to

appoint leaders based on current skill level, and to provide professional development opportunities that will continuously improve the individual's leadership competencies.

“Project success requires that project managers [leaders] not only manage projects, but lead people” (Anderson, 2010, p. 60). A leader must therefore have the wisdom, skills, tools, and experiences to manage both the technical and the interpersonal sides of the endeavor.

Professional learning offers a positive approach for an organization to ensure the continued development of its leadership. Such opportunities help with retaining talent (i.e., return on investment), maximizing productivity, improving both individual and team performance, and promoting innovative problem solving (Anderson, 2010).

Organizations have many options when it comes to leadership development. External opportunities abound and are offered year-round in a variety of venues. Organizations also have the option of providing such opportunities in-house which is perhaps most common in a college or university setting. Leadership training should ideally provide the individual with the opportunity to recognize shortcomings and begin to work toward self improvement as a leader.

Future Research Agenda

This study explored and identified *best practice* strategies for organizing and managing group dynamics and tasks within the context of collaborative grant writing groups. Strategies were presented within the framework of Fisher's decision emergence model, which is comprised of the phases that groups consistently move through as they make collective decisions.

Investigating potential strategies in this way provided a basis for determining which would be most effective, and at which point along the continuum. The topic was both timely and relevant as many federal departments require collaborative partnerships in conducting grant activities.

This has required the development of strategies to ensure the success of such endeavors.

Findings revealed that the context of collaborative grant writing tends to be particularly challenging as there are a number of dynamics simultaneously at play which influence the formation and interactions of the collaborative group. Such dynamics generally fall into one of four categories: 1) outside factors, 2) internal preparation, 3) interpersonal issues, and 4) project management strategies. The group's ability to work through such dynamics to establish positive patterns of interaction within the given timeframe plays a significant role in whether or not they can achieve a successful outcome.

It was also discovered that communication was an underlying element in nearly all of the themes and strategies discussed, and that leadership competencies likely play a more significant role in the process than originally assumed. This implies that even when the best strategies are deployed it may be likely that the quality of the leadership remains a significant factor related to the outcome of the project. However, future research is needed to explore this connection more thoroughly.

The ten suggested *best practice* strategies are comprised of a combination of both technical and interpersonal exchanges that work in combination to further a collaborative group's progress. Specific strategies were suggested for each phase of the continuum. However, while many useful strategies were revealed, it is evident that these are just the "tip of the iceberg." In other words, focusing on a single phase or facet of the process likely could have provided deeper insight into the specific aspect examined. Particularly, many of the themes can likely be disaggregated to reveal additional targeted strategies. Future research will therefore be necessary to expand on the findings presented. Such endeavors might include an examination of the following topics:

- 1) Standardizing the grant project development process.

- 2) An examination of how the initial collaborative process carries over to grant project implementation.
- 3) A focus on the interpersonal strategies that group leaders might use.
- 4) A more in-depth exploration of the sources of conflict in this context, and ways that these can be addressed.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Consent Form

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Appendix A: Interview Consent Form

EXPLORING THE GROUP PROCESSES WITHIN A COLLABORATIVE GRANT WRITING SETTING

You are invited to participate in an interview, which will take approximately 1 hour of your time. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

This interview is part of a graduate student thesis used to collect information about the experiences and observations of professionals who have been involved in collaborative grant writing activities. Information collected from this interview may be published or presented at scientific meetings, but there will be no way of identifying you. In other words, once all information has been collected, your identity will be stripped from the data so as not to directly connect you to any research information.

We are asking you to be a part of this study because you have participated in collaborative grant writing activities within the context of a work setting. As a participant in this study you will be asked questions regarding 1) your experiences with collaborative grant writing, 2) your observations of specific strategies used while participating as a member of a collaborative grant writing group, 3) your observations regarding the dynamics of the collaborative group and how these dynamics were managed, 4) your observations of group roles and task assignments, and 5) your observations regarding the decision making strategies deployed by the collaborative grant writing group. It will take approximately 1 hour to complete the interview. You may be contacted by the principle investigator via e-mail or telephone to follow-up on information provided via the interview if the need for clarification of information should arise.

There are no risks to you if you participate in this study. There will be NO way of identifying you or connecting the interview to you after it has been processed. Names will be changed to a number and identifying characteristics will be removed from the data as it is processed.

There are no direct benefits to you as a result of your participation; however, your participation will contribute to our knowledge about the practices and strategies used by professionals for organizing and managing group dynamics and tasks within a collaborative grant writing context.

You do not have to take part in this study. If you do decide to participate, you are free to stop the interview at any time. Your decision not to take part in this study or to stop the interview cannot and will not be used against you in any way. Should you choose to participate, any information obtained during this research that could identify you will be kept strictly confidential.

PARTICIPANT: YOU ARE VOLUNTARILY MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY.

PRINT YOUR NAME HERE: _____

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

DATE

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study or the way the survey was conducted, please contact the Principle Investigator at 616-234-3340 or the Chair of the Human Research Review Committee at 616-331-3197 or hrrc@gvsu.edu.

Appendix B: Interview Script

Part I: Demographic Variables of Interest

1. What is your job title/degree of responsibility/leadership in your present position?
2. Years of professional experience? (In current position? Including previous experience?)
3. Is collaboration part of the mission of the organization? Part of your regular job duties?
4. What is the approximate size of the organization?
5. What type(s) of grants (private, federal, local/county, state) have required collaboration?
6. Gender
7. Age Range

Part II: Substantive Questions

Research Question 1: What information might help professionals to position themselves and their organization for success as they prepare to embark on collaborative grant writing endeavors?

Category 1: Pre-Collaboration

Interview Questions:

1. Based on your experiences, what steps do you take in planning for collaboration that you believe ultimately makes the endeavor successful or unsuccessful? (i.e., before initial meeting)
2. Please discuss the selection criteria have you used in choosing group members.
 - In terms of personal skills, who might the ideal group consist of?
 - With respect to the hierarchy of an employee in an organization, who should be included in the group and in what role?

Research Question 2: What strategies are currently being deployed by professionals who participate in collaborative grant writing activities to organize and manage group **dynamics** (i.e., managing interpersonal communications, negotiating conflict, assigning roles, establishing a communication plan, and debriefing)?

Research Question 3: What strategies are currently being deployed by professionals who participate in collaborative grant writing activities to organize and manage group **tasks** (i.e., information collection, document production, and writing tasks)?

Category 2: Orientation ~ Phase 1

Interview Questions:

2. In your experience, what has been an effective breakdown of group roles?
 - What tasks are associated with these roles?
 - Describe what you believe the characteristics of an effective leader are within the context of a collaborative grant writing group?
3. In your experience, are there strategies that can be used during the initial meetings that set the tone for ongoing group interactions?
4. How have the work plan and timeline been negotiated?
5. How have the groups that you have worked with managed the shared document production?

6. Did the group establish a communication plan/plan for communicating? If so, please describe?
 - What are the attributes of an effective communication plan?

Category 3 & 4: Conflict ~ Phase 2 and Emergence ~ Phase 3

Interview Questions:

1. In your experience, what is the primary cause of group conflict in the context of collaborative grant writing?
2. Describe a situation in which a conflict was successfully resolved.
 - How did the group resolve this conflict? What strategies did they use?
3. Describe a situation in which a conflict was not successfully resolved.
 - What was the result/outcome of the conflict not being resolved?
 - Thinking about the situation you just described, what do you think inhibited the resolution of the conflict?
 - How did this impact group dynamics?
 - Based on hindsight, how do you think this issue could have been resolved successfully?
4. Did this issue impact future collaborative endeavors with these partners? If so, how?

Category 5: Reinforcement ~ Phase 4

Interview Questions:

2. What activities have taken place during the conclusion of the group's work together?
 - Has a debriefing session been a part of the process for the groups that you have worked with?
 - If yes, please describe what you mean by "debriefing."
3. Thinking about a collaborative proposal that was funded, did the initial tone of the collaborative process carry over to implementation?
 - Was program staff significantly involved in the development of the proposal?
 - Was anyone from the writing team part of the implementation process?

Research Question 1: What information might help professionals to position themselves and their organization for success as they prepare to embark on collaborative grant writing endeavors?

Category 6: Reflection Questions

Interview Questions:

1. How do you define success in the context of collaborative grant writing?
2. What have been the greatest challenges that you have encountered while participating in collaborative grant writing activities?
3. What has been most rewarding while participating in collaborative grant writing activities?