Stop! Collaborate, and Listen

By Nadeen Hachem

Devel.openmedia.org.

We often hear that there is power in numbers, but how often do people practice this philosophy? Every community around the world has its own way of doing things. This means that any community ranging from a group of University of Michigan School of Social Work students getting together outside of class to a country that reels in its troops during a time of battle has its own forms of communication and processes to be most efficient. Something that I have recognized as I have entered the nonprofit world is that some communities are better than others at working together and collaborating to maximize resources and reach sufficient outcomes.

I have been working with nonprofits in the Metro Detroit area for almost two years and see an astounding amount of amazing work being done by many nonprofit organizations across the region. Dearborn and Detroit are very different from one another but both communities practice collaborating internally to further strengthen collaboration beyond city boundaries.

As members of the nonprofit sector, we need to maximize our resources to create sustainable impact in our communities. However, more than once I have witnessed groups of people heavily focus on creating their own nonprofit to work on objectives that existing organizations already address. This practice only hurts our mission and steers focus away from building capacity within existing structures.

My current field placement, Public Allies Metro Detroit (PAMD), is an AmeriCorps program that serves as a central hub to build capacity in the city. PAMD branches out of the Office of Metropolitan Impact at The University of Michigan-Dearborn and aims to support and cultivate homegrown leaders to serve their own neighborhoods across Metro Detroit. Roughly 30 Public Allies are placed at Partner Organizations across the city to serve a minimum of 1,700 hours and engage in additional projects, volunteer opportunities, and leadership training.

I am currently working on a project that aims to increase collaboration across Detroit and enhance PAMD's outreach efforts into communities that we have yet to reach. We want to ensure that we are offering our Public Allies opportunities to serve directly in the neighborhoods in which they live and at organizations they connect with. Public Allies Metro Detroit is increasing efforts of collaboration across the city to maximize capacity within organizations and support emerging community leaders.

Further collaboration has occurred amongst Detroit's 65 Head Start programs. It is typical to see national programs such as Head Start to have a national curriculum that expects site administration to create what programming will look like exactly. Collaborative efforts between The Work Department, the Southeast Michigan Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, and individual nonprofit providers of Head Start led to the creation of a comprehensive communication plan and campaign strategy. Evaluation measures and participatory human design strategies helped establish a Head Start brand and shared identity.

The practice of collaborating amongst organizations working towards similar initiatives increases internal capacity, while creating a greater network that will accomplish greater goals. We need to better recognize the systems that already exist instead of trying to reinvent the wheel and claim ownership of a single nonprofit. Our commitment is to social justice and social impact – let us not divide our efforts; rather come together to address the injustices of today's world.

Sources:
http://www.publicallies.org/site/c.liKUL3PNLvF/b.8746115/k.8D22/Detroit_Metro.htm

http://www.theworkdept.com/about

http://www.wkkf.org/what-we-do/featured-work/
southeast-michigan-early-childhood-funders-
collaborative-invests-early-to-help-boost-detroits-future

http://www.theworkdept.com/news/cultivating-
collaboration-ensure-detroit-head-start%E2%80%99s-
successful-expansion