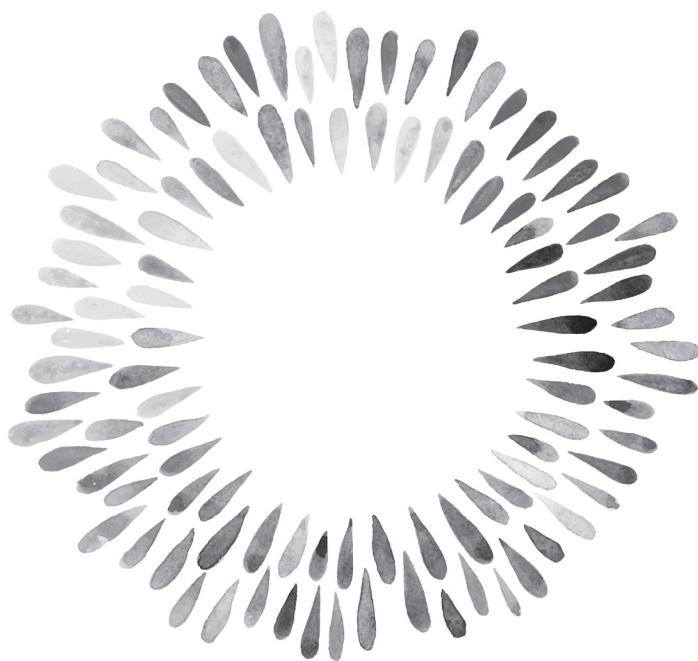


# INSPIRED COLLABORATION

IDEAS *for* DISCOVERING *and* APPLYING YOUR POTENTIAL



**DOROTHY STOLTZ**

*with* Susan M. Mitchell, Cen Campbell, Rolf Grafwallner,  
Kathleen Reif, and Stephanie Mareck Shauck



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# PREFACE

**Hey pardner, are you ready to journey into a new territory—to expand your** collaborative capabilities and capacity beyond your current thinking? The word *partner* means “joint holder” in old French. In Proto-Germanic, it was *skipam*, meaning “ship or boat.” You might say we’re all in the same boat—or raft. However, the Proto-Indo-European root for *ship* or *skei* means “to cut or split”—as in cutting through the water. You could also make a case that each “holder” or partner is responsible for cutting or shaping a collaborative effort into a vessel for smooth sailing. We don’t want to be ships that pass in the night. We *do* want to run a tight ship to create an effective partnership.

The ultimate partnership is between us (the authors) and the reader—to translate practical programs into your day-to-day library service. Only you the reader can translate our ideas, make them your own, and put them into pragmatic service for your library.

As for this book, Dorothy Stoltz, head of programming and outreach at Carroll County (MD) Public Library, delights in telling how Kathleen Reif, director of St. Mary’s County (MD) Library, and Stephanie Shauck, youth services consultant (retired) at the Maryland State Library division, mentored her in the late 1990s to become an early literacy advocate. Putting a fire under Dorothy in Carroll County—and many librarians across Maryland—Kathleen and Stephanie shaped libraries to exemplify the nationally acclaimed Zero to Three’s description of the library “as a natural community partner.” Dorothy met Susan Mitchell in 2001, when Sue began her post as Carroll County Judy Center director, the school system’s early learning prototype. Carroll County’s early childhood collaboration won three awards in recent years: Maryland Department of Education Judy Center Statewide Award for Most Improved Partnership (2008), Maryland Department of

Education Judy Center Statewide Award for Innovation (2010), and the National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award for Innovative Programming and Collaboration (2010). They all joined forces with Dr. Rolf Grafwallner, who has led the way in Maryland from his position as assistant state superintendent for a statewide early childhood education priority. Today's new and changing media, such as e-books and apps, offer unprecedented opportunities for early learning if grown-ups use the media as a tool to interact with young children. Cen Campbell, founder of LittleeLit.com, came on board to help our crew navigate the high seas of young children and new media.

Although our collective experience has focused in large part on early childhood initiatives, in this book we offer methods, strategies, and principles of collaboration that can apply to all age groups and aspects of the community.



With a tip of our Stetson to the Backyardigans, let's take a peek at a Texas adventure that can teach us something about collaboration.

Three cowpokes were enjoying a lazy day floating down a river on a raft:

"Three musical instruments are better than one!" Cowboy Joshua exclaimed. "Together we could form a country folk-jazz trio and throw in a little Piedmont blues."

"What a terrific idea!" Cowgirl Amber cheered as she plunked out a tune on her mandolin.

"Hey, it looks like trouble downstream," Cowboy Colton alerted them. They were headed right for a waterfall!

The cowpokes worked together to lasso a tree branch. Then they helped one another climb from the raft to the river bank—but there wasn't time to rescue their instruments.

"Our instruments are lost, but I'm glad you're here, pardners," said Cowboy Joshua.

"We make a laudable team, amigos," Cowboy Colton agreed. "And we can still make it to the Longhorn Saloon for tonight's dance."

At the Longhorn Saloon, the cowpokes discovered their instruments were ready for them on stage. "Our friends must have found them floating in the river and brought them here!" Cowgirl Amber exclaimed.

Joshua, Colton, and Amber picked up their instruments and began to play Nickel Creek's "Elephant in the Corn."

The lesson to be learned in this story is how this group of three cowpokes had to rely on their own skills and courage, lean on each other for help, *and depend on others outside their group*. They ended up playing their musical instruments at the

dance because of the help of friends outside their group. Collaborating with other people outside the library to do our best work is what this book is about.

Many libraries are not used to collaborating to the extent necessary to remain relevant for the next three hundred years. As you read, look for the potential within your situation—no matter your starting point—to create a practical yet extraordinary and inspiring collaboration where individuals and families become self-reliant and flourish. To thrive is a community's overarching goal. A library misses its full potential if it does not play a central role in helping a community shine.

# INTRODUCTION

## Let's Celebrate!

**For many decades, American families have supported each other. The practice** of neighbors helping neighbors is the genesis of our healthy and burgeoning communities today. The fire department, the post office, and the public library are a few examples of early voluntary associations that continue to strengthen society. These alliances among friends, colleagues, and neighbors put the maxim “Love your neighbor as well as yourself” into action. Neighborly cooperation built communities and fostered individual talents and contributions.

When a barn burned down in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, rural America neighbors showed up the next day with hammers, saws, and wood to rebuild it. “Barn-raising,” as it was known, provided required labor. This method of building or rebuilding a barn offered an added opportunity for community socializing. The 1954 movie musical *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* celebrates the collaborative spirit and depicts this combined work event with eating, courting, dancing . . . and rough-and-tumble fighting between romantic rivals. Helping a neighbor build a barn was approached with the unwritten understanding that this or a similar favor would be returned to any family in need. Or as Tara Kuipers, an educator and facilitator in Wyoming, says in her TEDx talk, “The rule of reciprocity is a fundamental principle in a barn-raising. Community collaboration is like barn-raising. A volunteer fire department is an example of a modern barn-raising. If you are part of an effort to make sure a hungry child has a backpack full of food to take home for the weekend, you are part of a barn-raising.”<sup>1</sup>

The spirit of collaboration is a natural force in humanity. This book celebrates that spirit and is designed to help you better understand the value of collaboration.



*Inspired Collaboration* is organized as follows:

**Part One: Why Collaborate?** We answer this question and give tips on cultivating an ideal yet practical perspective.

**Part Two: The Trials of Collaboration.** These include lessons learned, planting seeds, and generating patience and perseverance to help produce positive results.

**Part Three: A New Way to Plan and Implement.** The best place to begin is right here and right now by establishing a core group, starting with clear goals, knowing how to prioritize, distinguishing between good and bad plans, and implementing in practical ways.

**Part Four: Engagement—The Heart of Collaboration.** We'll explore how to best meet challenges, how to spark curiosity to benefit the library and the community, how to engage the community, and what it means to celebrate community.

An array of appendixes offers worksheets and other tools for developing strategies for excellent communication and accountability within your organization as well as among education, business, and other community allies, plus suggested reading. Throughout the text, uncited quotes from those in the field are from interviews by the author or the collaborators in person, on the phone, or by e-mail.

*Inspired Collaboration* is designed for libraries and other community organizations who want to learn to partner more effectively with each other, especially while treading the convoluted pathways of politics, bureaucratic mumbo jumbo, and naysayers. You will be asked to explore “discoveries” about cooperation and collaboration that we uncovered. Questions will be posed at the end of each chapter that are meant to expand your thinking on how to plan for the future of your library and help support individuals and families to be their best—strong and self-reliant. Like Benjamin Franklin’s Junto, a group of like-minded aspiring artisans and tradesmen who formed a club for mutual self-improvement to enhance their community, this book is a *celebration of the spirit of collaboration*.

## Note

1. Tara Kuipers, “Community Collaboration Is the Barn-Raising of Our Modern Times,” TEDxCody, June 18, 2015, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VH3ZgYmPvAk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VH3ZgYmPvAk).

## PART I

# Why Collaborate?

# THE LIBRARY'S ROLE

*I celebrate myself, and sing myself.*

—WALT WHITMAN

## **What is the essence of collaboration? What is the library's role?**

What is our best work? It is the ability of library staff to listen and respond to the community. It is the skill of staff—from the circulation clerk to the branch manager to the director—to give time and attention to each person who walks through our doors, physically or virtually. Our best work can be defined as our capacity to genuinely show interest in community folk—whether they are individuals, business owners, or organization representatives—in order to shape our programs and services. How do we start? How do we keep momentum going? How do we grow and change together?

How surprising it is that the very thing that helps us grow and improve as an individual or an organization is often something that we try to avoid. When a colleague doesn't carry his weight on a group project, do you have a conversation

with him to address it, or do you avoid it? If you are a shy librarian, do you get busy working with others in order to gain social skills needed to maximize your effectiveness, or do you just accept your silence? Does your department set aside time for reflection—individually and as a group—to ponder what is working well and what is not and needs changing? Have you ever been in a meeting where everything is being discussed *except* Babar the Elephant standing in the middle of the room—whatever issue that might be? Do you create unnecessary red tape in policies and procedures, then avoid tweaking them even when patrons point out why they prevent good customer service? Even though you are aware that gossiping about others never produces positive results, can you stop yourself, or do you continue to indulge in the thrill of gossiping? How do you handle anger, anxiety, guilt, and sarcasm in yourself and others?

A mantra to help us in our collaborative work inside and outside our organizations comes from Stephen Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*: “Setbacks are inevitable, but misery is a choice.”<sup>1</sup> How can we turn stress into something positive and not something to avoid? How can we celebrate ourselves, our colleagues, and our community partners during successes *and* setbacks? How can we harness the energy of adversity and turn it into an advantage?

#### DISCOVERY #1

### CELEBRATE COLLABORATION!

Let’s look at what it means for libraries to celebrate collaboration. Celebrate means “sing praises of” and “practice often.” According to the book *Celebrating Life* by Robert Leichtman, MD, and Carl Japikse, many of us ignore celebrating. We tell ourselves that we are too busy, or it’s a frivolous activity, or we’ll appear to be conceited, or we don’t sing praises because we can’t carry a tune.

*No matter how busy we are, we should always take time out to celebrate our successes.* The less time we feel we have to spare, the more important it is to find time to praise our work. We can celebrate through song, with food, or simply by pausing to cultivate and experience the joy of our achievement.

Celebrating is *not* an act of arrogance; it is a valuable technique for building a healthy organization or partnership. A daily habit of reviewing and celebrating accomplishments rejuvenates us. Celebrating is not about ignoring issues in life; it’s a way to strengthen our ability to meet challenges, harness adversity, solve problems, and listen and respond to the community. As far as carrying a tune, remember that young children don’t care if we stay on key during a storytime song, but they intuitively know the value of developing joy in life.

By keeping the focus on the joy of working together for the greater good, a community partnership—no matter how imperfect—can grow and mature to become more effective. Much research has been done on brain development in recent decades to show high levels of activity starting at birth; the key in childhood growth is the development and expansion of thinking skills. In order to develop these skills, young children need to learn how to regulate their behavior, communicate with others, cultivate curiosity about the world, and become master thinkers. Libraries can be a key collaborator—the go-to spot—for parents to discover how to inspire the enjoyment of lifelong learning, nurture “a mind in the making,”<sup>2</sup> and help their children become self-sufficient human beings.

A simple gesture of goodwill and kindness can deeply affect other people. Library staff at all levels and areas of responsibility can attune their radar to attracting people to the library. Once in the library—again, physically or virtually—we have the opportunity to do our best work for communities: to inspire curiosity, demonstrate compassion, and encourage people to think things through in order to learn and contribute to life. We can demonstrate the essence of why a library should collaborate with individuals, families, businesses, and organizations. How can libraries serve young and old, rich and poor, and everyone in between? The answer lies in listening, responding, and celebrating our community's achievements.

Why collaborate? Why not keep it simple and work on our own? Is it worthwhile to take the extra time and effort to collaborate? Yes! Is that extra time well spent?

---

An early childhood educator is interviewed by library staff at an early literacy network retreat. San Francisco Public Library. *Photo by Brian Castagne.*



Yes! As Sakya Pandita, a Buddhist scholar who lived from 1182 to 1251, said, “When many work toward a goal, great things may be accomplished.” The collaboration of two or more people or organizations can turn a good service into a great service. If you can handle your mistakes and those of others by tolerating or forgiving them in order to learn and benefit from them, then you have discovered a key to continuous improvement and celebration. What are some practical results of collaborating? Boosting circulation, reaching nonusers, and increasing avenues of financial support are all excellent outcomes of pursuing and celebrating community partnerships.

## **Leading the Way to Cooperate and Celebrate**

Libraries should excel at cooperation, collaboration, and celebration in order to fulfill our purpose. *The underlying purpose of a library is the enlightenment of humanity in practical ways.* What does this mean? When a father borrows the delightful book *Moo, Baa, La La La!* by Sandra Boynton and reads it to his baby, father and son are strengthening their bond, enjoying the playful and uplifting aspect of life, and learning vocabulary words, such as *snort*, *snuff*, and *ruff, ruff, ruff*. When a middle school student joins a library teen-advisory board, she is learning teamwork, expressing creative ideas, and helping shape library programs and services. When a wealthy entrepreneur meets with colleagues at the library to discuss projects, he may develop a philanthropic relationship with the library on the one hand; on the other hand, he is bringing the energy of innovation into the community to help solve problems. The library’s role is to provide resources and information to engage people to think thoroughly and completely, to enjoy life, and to improve their lives. Libraries can translate this purpose into policies, plans, and the capacity to serve the community.

In the spirit of collaboration with parents and the community, Maryland, as an example, designed an early literacy public library model in 1998 based on the following principles:

- » Parents are their child’s first and continuing teacher.
- » Libraries are powerful resources for families.
- » Libraries do their best work for children in collaboration with parents, agencies, and public officials.
- » Information given to parents is based on valid, reliable research.

With a nod to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, let’s count the ways to cooperate and celebrate:

I celebrate the depth and breadth and height  
 My soul can reach, when gaining new insight  
 Into my neighbor's strengths and ideal grace.  
 I celebrate the level of every day's  
 Most quiet need, through joy and sunlight.  
 I celebrate freely, as we strive for right;  
 The spirit of unity, I do praise.  
 I celebrate compassion put to use  
 In ways that set my thought of beauty ablaze.

At a breakfast gathering in Carroll County, Maryland—to celebrate a boost in school readiness scores—a previously homeless mother spoke in front of seventy-five community members, including elected officials, business people, and parents. She said, “I’m grateful for everyone who has helped me get on my feet again. I’m trying to help a friend of mine in the same way. We support each other so we can be there for our children.”<sup>3</sup>

In order to collaborate, a library must first think through the value of doing so. It needs to celebrate the idea of working together. Take a few minutes to ponder the following points and questions.

1. To collaborate means to work and act together for a common purpose or benefit.
2. Why am I a library worker? What purpose do I serve?
3. “People who have good jobs in supportive workplaces are more committed. They’re more loyal, they’re more likely to stay with their own jobs, they’re more likely to give their all to their jobs, to care about their company succeeding,” says Galinsky, author of *Mind in the Making*.<sup>4</sup> How do I enrich my library? How do I make the library an uplifting place to work?
4. Why is my position necessary to the service of the library?
5. A colleague wants to attend a meeting of the XYZ community organization to ask what the library can do to support its mission, but she needs me to cover the desk. How do I respond?
6. By keeping the focus on the joy of working together for the greater good, a community partnership—no matter how imperfect—can grow and mature to become more effective. Do I take time to celebrate my individual and partnership’s successes, small and large?
7. How can I maintain a sense of celebratory spirit day in and day out, during successes and setbacks, as I collaborate with individuals and groups inside and outside my library organization?

## Notes

1. Stephen Covey, foreword to *The Adversity Advantage* by Paul G. Stoltz and Eric Weihenmayer (New York: Fireside, 2006), xvii.
2. Ellen Galinsky, *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs* (New York: William Morrow, 2010).
3. Carroll County Early Childhood Consortium's Celebration Breakfast, April 30, 2013, Westminster, MD.
4. Quoted in Katharine Barrett, "Americans Working Longer," *CNN Money*, April 15, 1998, [http://money.cnn.com/1998/04/15/life/working\\_pkg/index.htm](http://money.cnn.com/1998/04/15/life/working_pkg/index.htm).



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