

# Key Themes and Lessons Learned in Collaborations

## **Theme 1: Everyone has something to learn.**

**LESSON:** Knowledge development and learning should be explicit goals of any collaboration.

## **Theme 2: Timing is critical.**

**LESSON:** Out of crisis comes opportunity; seize the moment!

## **Theme 3: Leadership is indispensable.**

**LESSON:** Determine the availability, capacity, and readiness of leaders early in the process.

## **Theme 4: Trust makes things happen.**

**LESSON:** Keep in mind that trust is the glue that holds the process together, and actively seek opportunities to create and strengthen that trust.

## **Theme 5: Progress can occur despite power dynamics.**

**LESSON:** Take proactive steps to address any unequal distribution of power by providing safe space in which to conduct discussions, and striving for transparent communication.

## **Theme 6: Goals do not have to be highly specific and universally shared for progress to occur – as long as there is general consensus on the overall direction.**

**LESSON:** Develop purposes and goals that encourage participation and inclusion; plan and manage communication processes and messages to align with the overall intent and strategies of the project.

## **Theme 7: Structure is essential but sometimes one size does not fit all.**

**LESSON:** Collaborative projects should achieve a balance between structure and flexibility.

## **Theme 8: Planning is important but so is room for change along the way.**

**LESSON:** An organic process should be balanced with careful attention to planning and communication to avoid misplaced expectations.

## **Theme 9: Doing the deal is one thing; making the deal work is another.**

**LESSON:** Participants in any collaboration should recognize and plan for long-term engagement to make the effort successful.

## **Theme 10: The last chapter takes a long time to write.**

**LESSON:** Plan to evaluate and assess outcomes over multiple years.