

ENHANCING SMALL CENTRE COLLABORATION



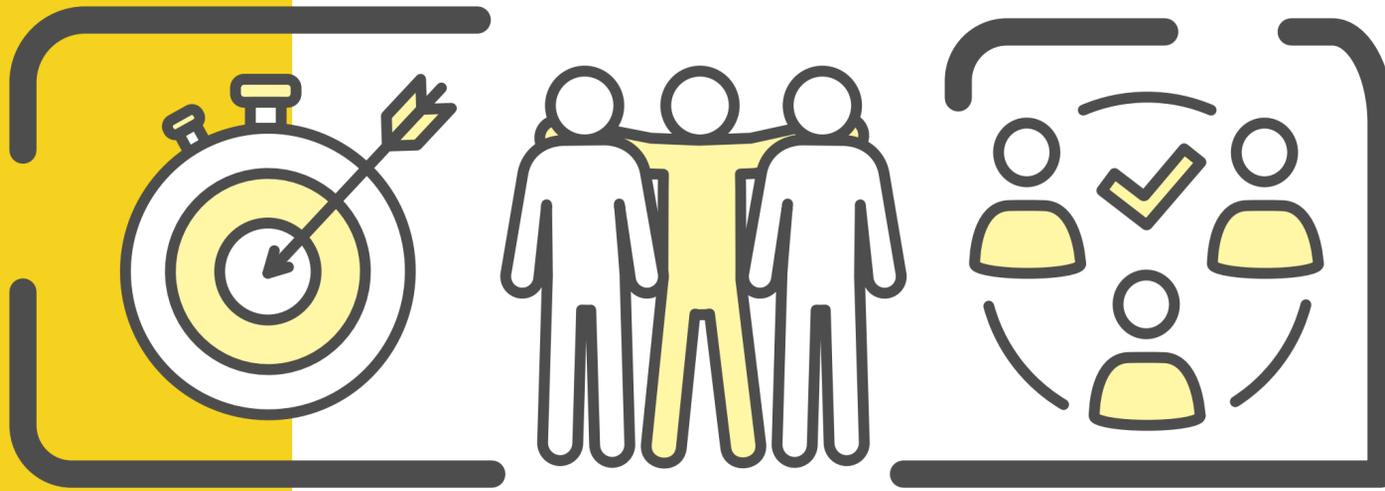
Prepared By::

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SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

For::


aaisa

METHODS & PROCESS



“The path is made by walking”

The process of gathering information for this summary document was to create meaningful opportunities for participants to gather, exchange information, and connect with one another.

The core driving question for us throughout this project was:

“What factors drive successful collaboration in Alberta’s Immigrant Settlement Sector?”

Our methods were designed to hear from participants in both written and interview formats, and create resources to support forward direction. This was achieved through a mix of surveys, one-on-one interviews, large group meetings, and facilitated working group meetings.

As a result, we have produced a model for building the conditions that encourage collaboration to thrive, and a model for different levels of collaboration. We believe these materials, along with our recommendations, will help support collaboration between IRCC funded small centre organizations in Alberta.

Total Meetings: 8 | Total Survey Responses: 12

Total One-on-One Interviews: 10

Participation Rate of Small Centre Organizations: 90%

EXPLORING ◀ ◀ ◀

▶ ▶ ▶ TENSION

Creative tension exists at the meeting point of current and future state. Experiencing it can make us feel discomfort or cognitive dissonance to the point we may not want to engage. However, tension indicates the existence of adaptive space, where transformational change is possible. When tension arises in collaborative efforts, it is important to explore them further to truly identify the source and collectively find solutions.

Through surveys and one-on-one meetings, we identified several creative tensions that exist between the current state and the desired future for small centre collaboration. The tensions, categorized below, were explored further during a facilitated meeting with participants and helped inform our resulting models and recommendations. These tensions are not easily overcome and need further efforts to find lasting solutions that were not within the scope of this project.

COMPETITION

Current funding arrangements from the primary sector funder (IRCC) create a competitive environment that does not enhance collaboration among organizations.

Organizations reported that funding is tied to client volume and program outcomes, which leaves little resource (time or money) to invest in collaboration.

SIZE AND SCOPE

Size and scope deals with two primary and interconnected tensions. Firstly, small organizations (of all sizes) feel at risk of being “eaten up” by larger organizations.

Secondly, organizations were split on the idea of scope. Some indicate better collaboration with organizations providing similar services, and others suggested collaboration was best served with organizations providing different services.

BALANCING CAPACITY

With limited resources for collaboration, organizations naturally focus their efforts on local collaboration that impact their clients the most.

The result is a sense among small centre providers that provincial or regional collaborations are important, but difficult to prioritize over local collaboration.

CLIENT FOCUS

Participating organizations identified that enhanced support for clients is their number one priority for collaboration.

However, collaboration is largely done through executive or managerial levels which are often a step removed from direct client services.

CONDITIONS FOR COLLABORATION



A major themes that emerged from this engagement was that collaboration for collaboration's sake - what we call contrived collaboration - is not what is needed. Organizations felt when collaboration is funder driven, it is not authentic. Alternatively, collaboration that aligns with the needs and desires of small centre organization is seen as valuable and is essential to providing effective and transformative services for newcomers to thrive.

While Immigrant Serving Agencies experience conditions that are beyond immediate control including global and political forces, there are emerging ways that encourage collaborative relationships among these organizations.



COLLABORATION =

**NEED + OPPORTUNITY +
DESIRE (CAPACITY + PERMISSION) + ACCOUNTABILITY**

NEED

Need is the catalyst for authentic collaboration; it cannot be forced and must be known, understood, and relevant to all collaborators. Needs arise and change based on shifting contexts (global, political, environmental, local) and organizational or funder goals. This creates complex challenges that require multiple perspectives to identify a response. Small centre organizations agreed that the common needs for collaboration are:

- Improving the Lives of Newcomers to Canada
- Collective Advocacy
- Sharing Best, Promising, and Emerging Practices

Need can also be understood through a strategic lens. Need can represent a desired outcome (improving the lives of Newcomers to Canada for example), a strategy (sharing best, promising, and emerging practices), or a tactic (hosting an event). The benefit can be personal to each organization as long as there is a clear outcomes and measurements.

OPPORTUNITY

On the surface, opportunity can be created in many ways. Including formal collective efforts through an organization like AAISA, or through individual agency (picking up the phone and starting a conversation). However, not all opportunities are created equally. Knowledge, understanding, and trust are all incredibly important factors in determining if a given opportunity will generate collaborative spirit.

Opportunities themselves are not difficult to create. Topical or program focused virtual conversations can be put together in a matter of minutes, but the trust and common understanding between organizations and individuals can take months to develop.

There are some systemic barriers that have to be overcome to seize opportunities when they arise. Competitive funding structures, restrictive geographical boundaries, and knowledge transfer gaps all hamper opportunities turning into collaborative initiatives.

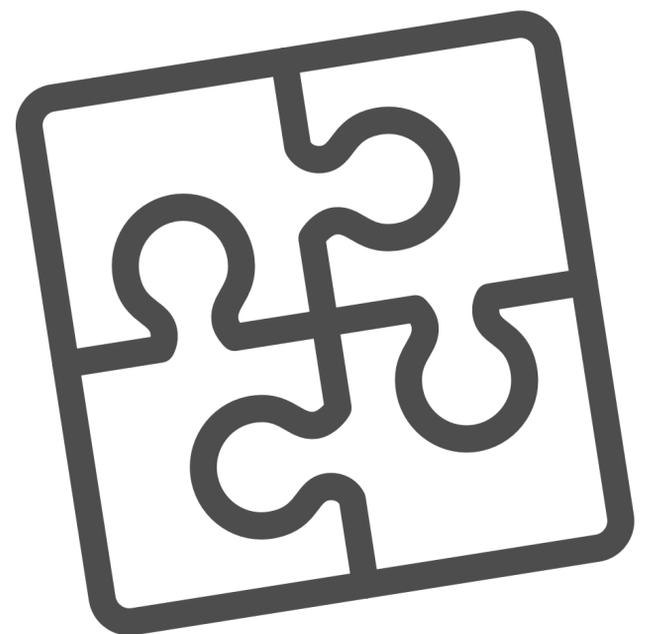
DESIRE

Desire is more than simply wishing something were so. It also requires the capacity and the permission to dedicate time and action toward collaboration. Capacity is something that most organizations indicated that they have. However, permission seemed to vary depending on who and what type of organization they were. Structural barriers within organizations and in the type of services they deliver create barriers that must be overcome to truly have the desire to collaborate. Capacity and permission both require the confidence of funders (external) and senior management (internal). There must be a common belief that pursuing collaborative relationships is allowed and encouraged in this sector.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Shared goals and outcomes are one of the things that unify all small centre organizations. Doing better for the newcomers they serve, and in a way that is mutually beneficial for the organizations providing those services is a compelling place to start. The complexity of how these goals are articulated will vary (in level of details and in the specific content) based on the type and formality of collaborative relationship that is undertaken.

Developing a common understanding of accountability from the outset of an initiative is seen as essential in creating positive collaboratives.



A MOVE FORWARD MODEL

In listening to small centre leaders, a need for defining and understanding collaboration at different levels emerged. Based upon research and informed by the needs of the sector, this model provides both a planning and diagnosis tool for collaborative leaders. Using the opposing axis of accountability & complexity and relationship & trust allows a visual representation of how we can proceed once conditions for collaboration are developed.

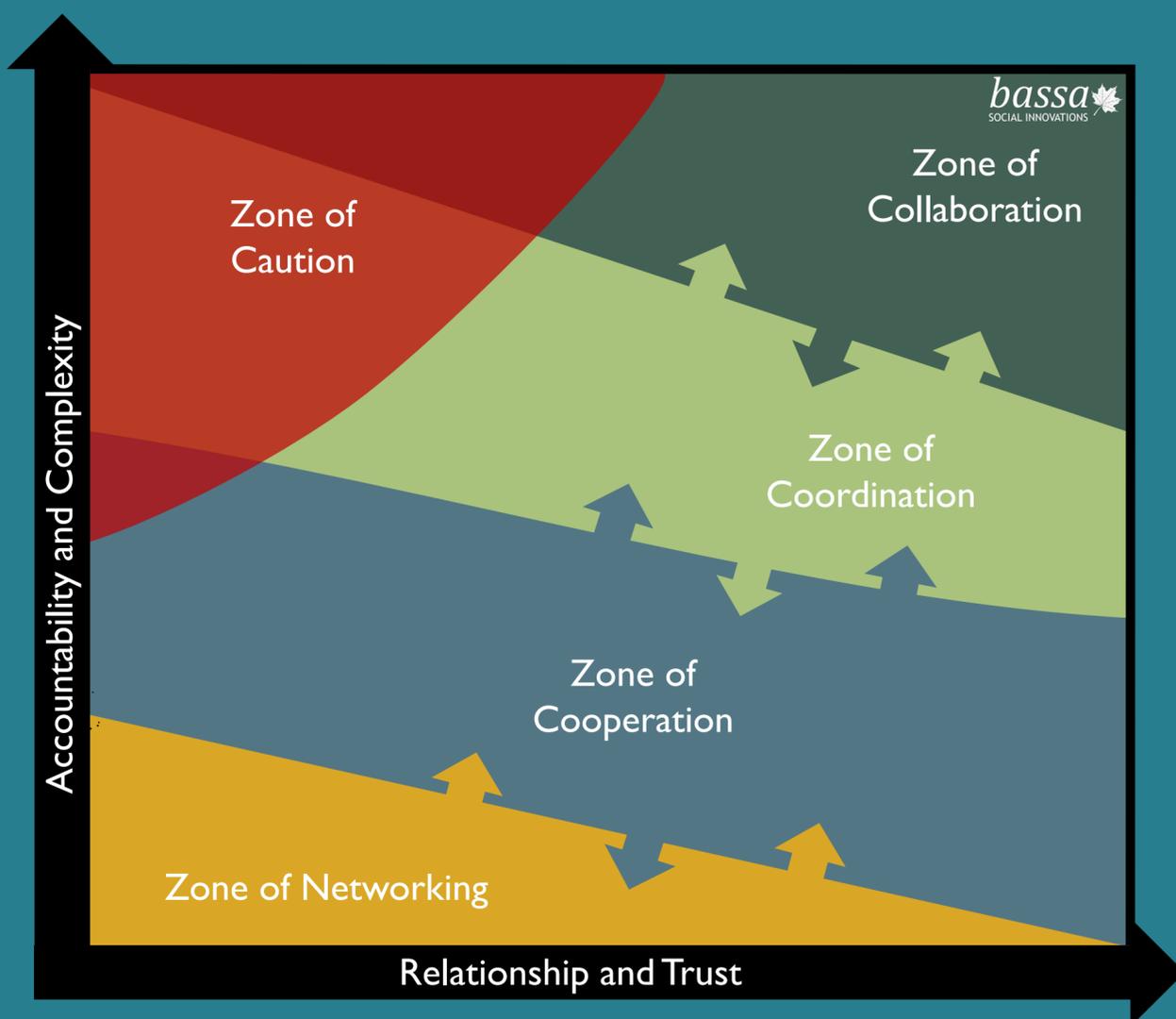
conversation at a conference. Networking builds a relational foundation upon which collaborative efforts can grow. However, it is important to maintain networking activities even at deeper levels of collaboration. In a rapidly changing environment, such as settlement, ongoing networking is imperative to onboard new leaders, organizations, and staff. However, networking is limited in its ability to address complex issues and is best suited to forming relationships.

Examples of Networking: Conference gatherings, informal connections, chat groups, etc.

COOPERATION

Cooperation builds upon existing relationships and generates purposeful communication. Structures may be loose and undefined, however action may begin to result. Cooperation helps deepen existing relationships as tasks and expectations have low commitment requirements (recognizing that trusting relationships are built upon commitment, capability, and consistency). Cooperation though is limited by design when tasks or expectations become complex and require structure.

Examples of Cooperation: Round table networks, community coalitions, program focus groups, etc.



ZONE OF CAUTION

Effective relationships and trust are the foundation of collaborative efforts. The Zone of Caution brings awareness to the importance of ensuring there is ample trust for the type of collaborative desired. A collective effort with high levels of complexity and accountability with little trust is likely to collapse. A collaborative existing in the zone of caution may still function, but would improve with efforts to develop relationships and trust at a deeper level.

COORDINATION

Coordination is where collective action begins to take hold and our potential for transformation grows. Coordination is where structured relationships begin to form, thus accountability and commitment become increasingly important. This stage involves collective strategy, planning, and taking coordinated action. This stage may involve some sharing of fiscal accountability in an individual approach, but is limited in the accountability and structure for pooled resources. Examples of Coordination: Community action groups, Provincial engagement initiative (PEI), Executive Directors Networks, etc.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is the peak of commitment and trust. It builds off previous relationships and leads to collective action and impact. Collaboration relies on an agreed upon structure for items such as chairing, resource sharing, decision making, and any other important items to the collaborative. Collaboration requires more investment of time and resources but holds greater potential for transformation. For organizations to collaborate at this level a deep foundation of relationship, trust, and accountability is required.

Examples of Collaboration: 7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness, Vibrant Communities Canada, etc.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

AAISA MEMBERS

Notice Needs – Needs emerge regularly through changing contexts, so they do not need to be cultivated. Provide a way to have needs shared, acknowledged, and highlighted so other organizations may identify it as a shared need.

Enhance Networking - With the rise of virtual work there are now increased opportunities to leverage technology to enhance networking opportunities. This can be done informally for front, middle, and executive level staff. Due to growth and turnover in the sector, ongoing networking is paramount to building conditions for collaboration to thrive.

Take Action - When the opportunity arises, lead the collaborative efforts from the bottom up rather than wait for a top-down approach. Collaboration is available at all levels, including within your organizations. Collaboration is best owned by the sector, so take action.

Trust and Community – Creating opportunities for trust and community to develop between small center organizations is a more difficult task. There is a large variance in physical and human geography that make up small centres, and these contextual factors must be understood to build trust and develop the community that is essential for collaboration. Trust and community are determined not by what is done, but how things are done together.

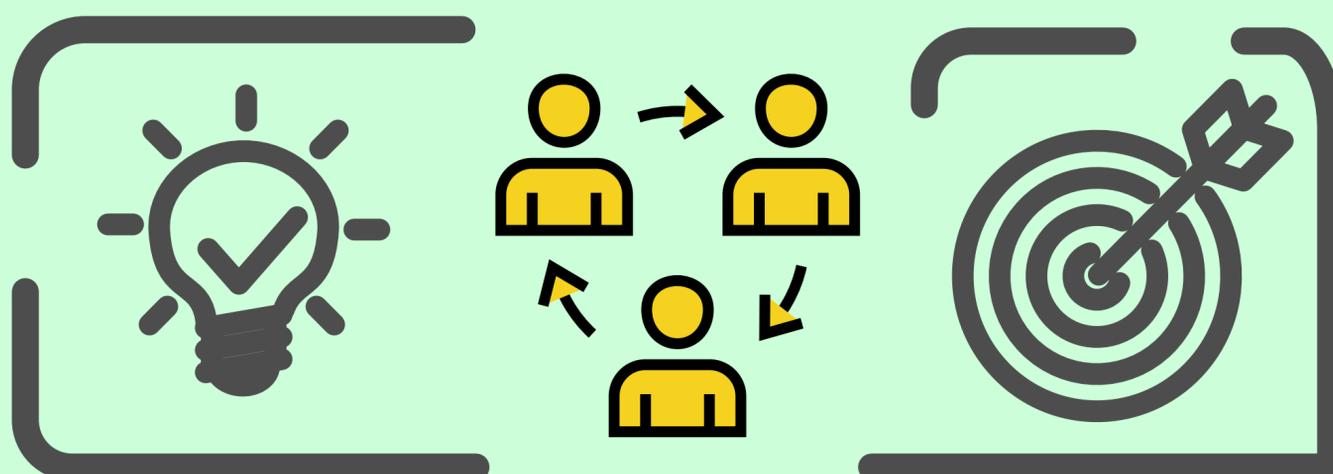
Shared Understanding - Creating understanding of the conditions and zones of collaboration is an important first step in having the sector approach one another with the same concepts and language. A common outcome and/or goal structure for collaboration can then be built on this shared understanding.

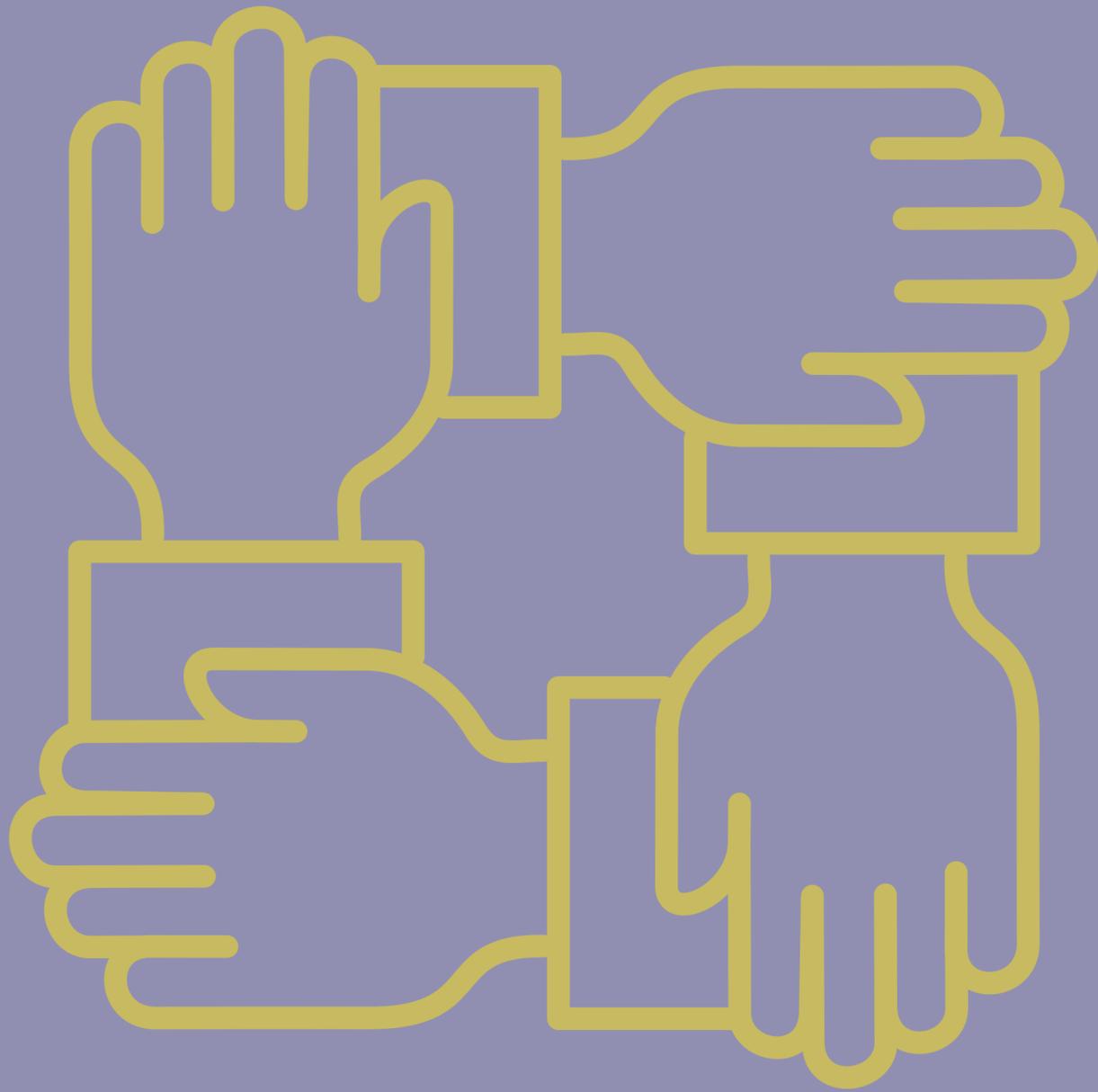
AAISA

Dialogue – Connecting people on particular topics and program types is essential to create increased opportunity. Involving staff at all levels is easy to facilitate through available technology, existing structures, or contracted resources and holds potential for transformation. Generating true dialogue across these spectrums is a key action that can be taken toward opportunity creations.

Collective Advocacy – A unified voice on matters that affect all organizations in small centres is vital to easing the tensions that currently shape and inhibit the collaborative environment across the province. Identifying and leveraging existing advocates within the sector can become simpler as relationships and conditions improve across all levels.

SPO's Know! - SPO's know how to collaborate when the barriers are removed from their path. AAISA plays an important role in addressing funding and other barriers to IRCC and the Alberta Government.



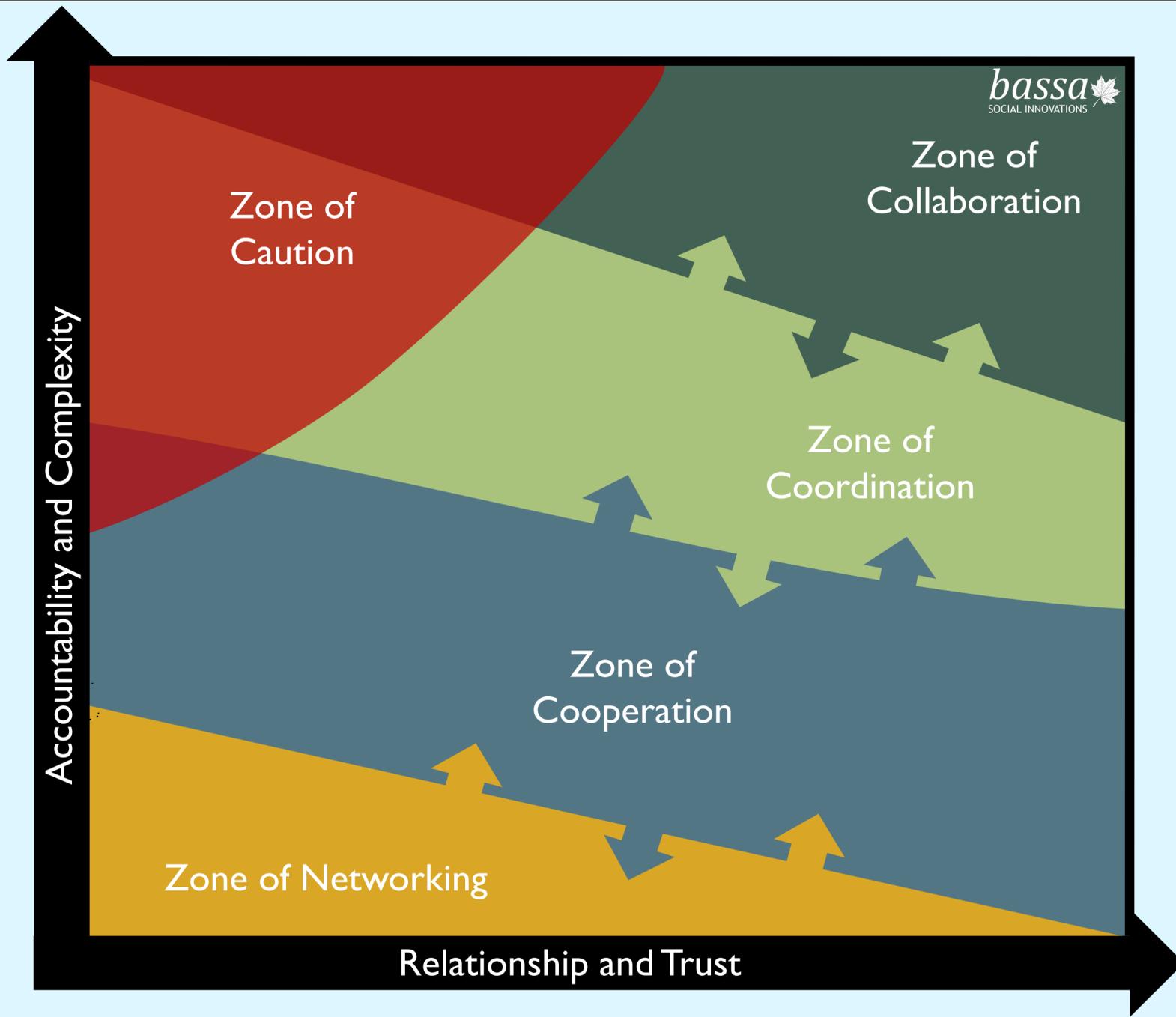


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SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

COLLABORATION REFERENCE SHEET



COLLABORATION =
NEED + OPPORTUNITY + DESIRE (CAPACITY + PERMISSION)
+ ACCOUNTABILITY



NETWORKING

Informal information sharing and gathering.

COOPERATION

Informal gathering and sharing with a purpose.

COORDINATION

Structured sharing and coordinated actions.

COLLABORATION

Structured leadership with shared resourcing; leading to collective action and impact.

ZONE OF CAUTION

Increased risk of breakdown due to low relationship and trust.