



DEFINING COLLABORATION AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

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Fundamental Paradox

People want to have a voice in public decisions that affect their lives but how can that voice be meaningful if the terms, concepts and technical trade-offs are new or distrusted by them?



What is Collaboration?

A process in which interdependent parties work together to affect the future of an issue of shared interests. Five features are critical:

1. Stakeholders are interdependent.
2. Stakeholders are diverse, with different values, and desire different outcomes. It means working with “the other”.
3. 2. Solutions emerge by dealing constructively with differences that otherwise would not.
4. 3. Joint ownership of decisions is involved.
5. 4. Stakeholders assume collective responsibility for the future direction of the situation.
6. 5. Collaboration is an emergent property.

What Collaboration is not:

- Quick.
- Cooperation: colleagues working together, or agencies who are expected to work together.
- Always cheap.
- The same every time.
- Simple.

The Basic Collaborative Process

- Situation Assessment -> Design Process. Phases in Process include:
- Define the Problem: e.g. Situation Mapping
- Discover Interests
- Generate Objectives
- Invent Options
- Create Criteria to evaluate Options/Objectives
- Decide with the group which Objectives meet Criteria

Why Collaboration and Collaborative Learning?

- USFS: Healthy Forest Restoration Act, Collaborative Federal Lands Act, CWPP, National Fire Plan, etc.
- Public participation tool for complex, conflict situations.
- Creates continuous, sustainable “table of trust” to return to over time, builds relationships, creates networks for future learning and decision-making.
- Maximizes opportunities for solutions
- Starting with a collaborative approach, means less chance of litigation, confusion, disappointment or no decision later.

What is Collaborative Learning? (CL)

- Collaboration is an iterative process and Collaborative Learning is the mechanism that can facilitate each iteration.
- A collaborative orientation toward multiparty **learning** first to create progress. Collaborative decision-making may emerge.
- It means designing and implementing events (meetings, field trips, etc.) to promote creative thought, constructive debate and weighing of options, and possibly finding solutions.
- Appropriate when there are multiple stakeholders who are interdependent (affected by same situation) and independent because they have different values and views.
- Suitable for NRM situations that are **wicked** . Characteristics:
 - a. conflict
 - b. complexity

Note: When Collaboration or CL may not work

Sometimes Collaboration or CL are not the right approaches if:

- It's a low conflict situation.
- There is low collaborative capacity within the convener organization/agency.
- Lack of decision space.
- Outcome will be trumped by decisions in other venues (BATNA's).



Three Dimensions of The Progress Triangle



Substance (Issue)



Procedure
(Process)

Relationship
(Stakeholders)

Tools

- Food and Beverages
- A facilitator who is experienced in CL.
- Interactive Workshops.
- Field trips.
- Documentation
- Social Science that describes “silent majority”
- Participatory monitoring and/or research.
- Concept/Situation Mapping and Group Exercises
- GIS as a learning tool using multiple layers.
- Web-based tools.

Considerations related to CL



- Takes time, staff and costs in the short run.
- Takes active, meaningful support throughout convening organization and other stakeholders
- Requires open mindedness and active listening skills.
- Take preconceptions and agency/community culture into consideration.
- Also takes time and travel for participants.
- All less of an issue if there is progress.

Keys to Success (Schuett et al. 2001)

Study of participants in 30 CL efforts around the country – categories of themes emerged of keys to success:

1. Development: identify goal, purpose and stakeholders, develop ground rules, agendas, time for homework.
2. Information Exchange: e.g. available research, informed stakeholders, progress updates.
3. Organizational Support: well-organized meetings, funding, staff, coffee.
4. Personal Communication: Communication skills - Listening, understanding, Discussion. Environment conducive to free exchange of opinions, “safe”.
5. Relationships/Team Building: Results of Communication -Trust, respect and honesty.
6. Accomplishments (Monitoring/Habitat Management/Prescribed Fire/Restoration Plan)

See also Burns and Cheng Report (2005) – “The Utilization of Collaborative Processes in Forest Planning”.

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Questions?

