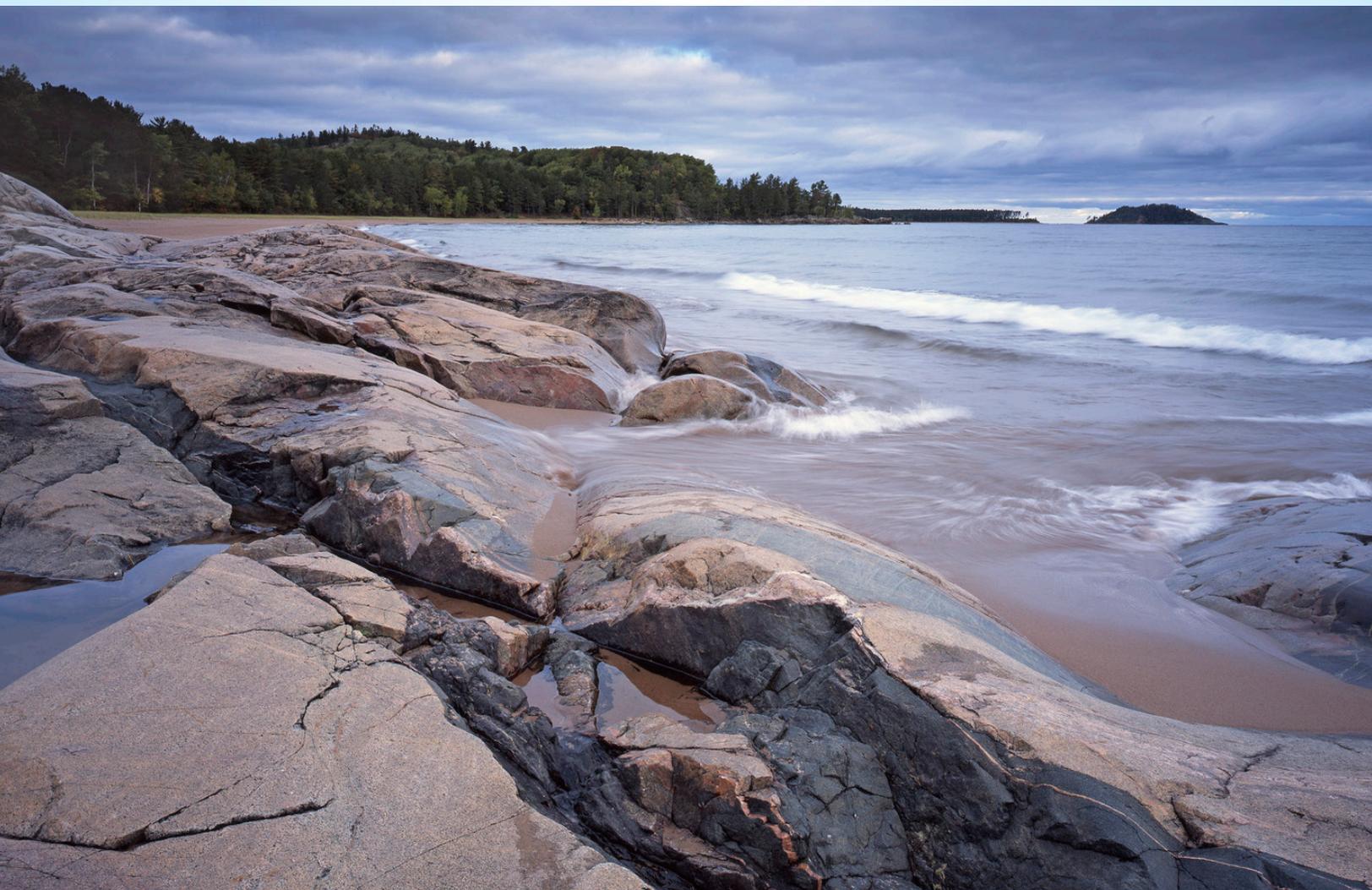


Collaborative Best Practices

A Resource Manual Produced for the Blue Accounting Program



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Great Lakes Blue Accounting
Delivering Information, Supporting Collaboration



The Nature Conservancy 

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Executive Summary



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The Great Lakes is a large basin comprised of complex and diverse ecosystems that are under intense pressure from human use. Its sheer size and ecological complexity, along with the myriad local, regional, and national actors working across eight U.S. states and two Canadian provinces, pose significant challenges to conservation practitioners and decision-makers. Across the conservation sector, at a variety of scales, organizations, agencies, and individuals are working to address these challenges to meet their selected goals or targets. While these individual efforts may be having a measurable impact on the natural and human environment, actions happening in isolation are often not as efficient or effective as they could be. Successfully addressing Great Lakes conservation challenges requires unprecedented collaboration among scientists, resource managers and administrators, business leaders, and policy makers.

This report is intended to help guide the Blue Accounting program as it initiates collaboratives to support its work in the Great Lakes region. It can also serve as a general resource for other individuals or groups who are considering forming a collaborative or are actively engaged in one, and is intended to build on and support the successful work of collaboratives currently at work in the Great Lakes. The information presented here was informed by those individuals already involved in Great Lakes regional collaboratives, as well as extensive literature and resource research. This report explains the value and stages of collaboration, explores when collaboration is most useful, and provides useful best practices for establishing and managing a collaborative group.

Collaboration is a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties to achieve common goals by sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for

achieving results. The purpose of collaboration is to create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purview of any particular party. Effective collaboratives have 1) a common agenda, 2) shared measurements, 3) mutually reinforcing activities, and 4) continuous communication and trusting relationships. When successful, collaboratives are able to more effectively and efficiently address large-scale complex problems by bringing the right skills to the table, fostering innovation, facilitating relationships across traditional boundaries, and pooling resources.

Most collaboratives go through four general stages: initial interest, emerging, established, and closing out. Collaboratives start in the **initial interest stage**, during which a few individuals (or a single person) interested in the idea of collaborating decide if collaboration is the appropriate path. If that small group decides to move forward, the next milestone is to convene a collaborative

that has a formal structure, governance, shared goals and measurement, *and* is taking action on its focal problem or issue. This period of preparing for and formally convening the collaborative for the first time is the **emerging stage**. A collaborative moves into the **established stage** when it has implemented its governance structure and is taking action to carry out its workplan. A collaborative at this stage will remain established until the collaborative decides to officially dissolve. Most collaboratives do eventually disband, either because they've achieved their goal, were always intended to be time-limited, or other circumstances have made the collaborative obsolete. Once a collaborative decides to formally end, it enters the **closing out stage** where it addresses any logistics associated with dissolving. In many cases this dissolution is a positive step forward, as it signals that the group has achieved its purpose.

Collaboration, particularly during the first two stages of a collaborative's life, is rarely intuitive or instinctual to organizations or individuals. Collaboration requires sharing responsibility and power to address problems that impact more than one institution. This means that collaboration, and collaboratives, challenge conventional individual and organizational thinking and practices in order to create solutions and take higher-impact actions. Sharing responsibility outside of one organization poses both cultural and logistical problems and requires creating a new culture that encourages collaboration.

Creating a culture of cross-jurisdictional, shared responsibility when founding and establishing a collaborative is complex and requires dedicated resources. Forming a collaborative group, however, can be a successful way to address a problem when the problem itself is complex, relevant, and timely; key stakeholders are willing to come to the table; and funding is, or will be, available. Absent these conditions, individual actions are likely sufficient

to address the problem in question and the challenges of collaboration outweigh the benefits. Crafting a successful collaborative requires ensuring that these conditions exist, then strategically developing collaborative management processes and actions. This report provides best practices for how collaborative founders, leaders, and members can develop and manage their collaboratives to create a culture that encourages collaboration and results in higher-impact actions.

This report specifically lists best practices for three general management categories and their numerous sub-areas. First, successful collaboratives must establish a **structure** and facilitate inclusive membership, clear decision-making, agreement on a shared purpose, and consensus on staffing and sponsorship needs. Effective collaboratives also need to develop a way to **effectively work together** by drafting protocols for effective meetings and internal communications. Lastly, the most productive collaboratives determine how to effectively **influence external audiences** by developing shared goals and measures of success, external communications protocols, and an information management and delivery strategy to improve the flow of information within their issue area.

Most successful collaboratives have considered and developed protocols for the various management areas listed above and detailed in this manual. This document includes the management areas that founders should consider when establishing a collaborative, along with guiding questions, useful best practices, and additional resources for addressing each area. This information is being made available specifically to inform collaboratives working with the Blue Accounting program and, more broadly, any collaborative efforts in the Great Lakes region.

Blue Accounting Overview



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The Great Lakes Commission and The Nature Conservancy have partnered to develop Blue Accounting, a groundbreaking program designed to support strategic decision-making throughout the Great Lakes water system. Blue Accounting will bring together stakeholders to set region-wide goals for key Great Lakes issues, determine how best to track progress against those goals, and deliver the right information to help leaders better set priorities and allocate resources.

The Blue Accounting program supports and serves existing and new collaborative efforts by helping them:

- Create sets of shared basin-wide goals.
- Identify strategic actions and metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of investments and programs.
- Determine the data necessary to support the metrics.
- Make investments in regional information management and delivery infrastructure to effectively and efficiently track and report progress toward goals.

The Blue Accounting program is also developing information management services that complement existing Great Lakes information platforms. These services support adaptive management programs and basin-wide efforts to protect and harness the value of the Great Lakes for economic and social development. Blue Accounting will serve collaboratives, resource managers, policy makers, and the public in the Great Lakes basin by providing up to date and relevant Great Lakes information and decision-making resources.

This resource manual is designed to assist Blue Accounting participants in developing new, and working with existing, Great Lakes issue-specific collaboratives. It can also be used as a resource by individuals or groups outside of the Blue Accounting program who are considering forming a collaborative or actively engaged in a collaborative group.

Introduction

Within and across all sectors, individuals often come together to formally create a collaborative in order to address challenges they collectively face. Through collaboratives, large-scale complex problems¹ can be more effectively and efficiently addressed than when individual entities act independently. Creating a formal collaborative is not an easy undertaking, nor is it always an appropriate way to address a problem. This document was developed to help guide the Blue Accounting program as it initiates collaboratives to support its work. It can also be used as a resource by individuals or groups outside of the Blue Accounting program that are considering forming a collaborative or actively engaged in a collaborative group. The guidance in this document is not intended to be prescriptive. Instead, it aims to include the management areas that collaborative founders should consider when establishing a group, along with guiding questions, useful best practices, and additional resources for addressing each area. This document includes seven chapters that were informed by extensive literature and resource research in addition to consultations with regional collaborative members.

[Chapter 1: Overview of Collaboratives.](#) This chapter provides a general introduction to collaboratives and collaboration. It defines collaboration, collaboratives, and describes the value and stages of collaboratives.

[Chapter 2: Criteria for Forming a Collaborative.](#) This chapter is a resource to those individuals or groups of individuals considering starting a collaborative, i.e., those in the initial interest stage, as described in [Chapter 1](#). This chapter explains the general criteria needed to form a collaborative, along with a few guiding questions to help individuals determine if their situation meets those criteria.

[Chapter 3: Collaborative Structure.](#) In conjunction with [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#), this chapter provides guidance to the individuals who are founding collaboratives and leading

them through the emerging stage (see [Stages of Collaboratives](#)). This chapter covers the various aspects and topics that must be considered when creating a governance and general structure for a collaborative.

[Chapter 4: Effectively Working Together.](#) In conjunction with [Chapters 3](#) and [5](#), this chapter provides guidance to individuals who are founding collaboratives and leading them through the emerging stage (see [Stages of Collaboratives](#)). This chapter covers the aspects and topics that should be considered when beginning to focus on working together as a collaborative to accomplish its purpose; specifically, how to manage meetings and internal communications.

[Chapter 5: Influencing External Audiences.](#) In conjunction with [Chapters 3](#) and [4](#), this chapter provides guidance to individuals who are founding collaboratives and leading them through the emerging stage (see [Stages of Collaboratives](#)). This chapter covers the aspects and topics that should be considered when completing the work of the collaborative and attempting to influence external audiences; specifically, goals and measures of success, external communications protocols, and external information management and delivery.

[Chapter 6: Challenges.](#) This chapter provides additional guidance on specific challenges collaboratives may face.

[Chapter 7: General Resources and Examples.](#) This chapter includes a list of general resources for those forming and managing collaboratives, as well as case studies on successful collaboratives.

These chapters are designed to be read in order or to be used independently as reference guides. [Appendix I](#) provides a brief summary and checklist for developing a collaborative. The manual concludes with [Appendix II](#), a list of all resources listed or referenced.

¹ Throughout this document, the area of work that the collaborative is addressing is referred to as a focal “problem” or “issue” area. These terms are used synonymously in this context.



Chapter 1

Overview of Collaboratives

Chapter 1: Overview of Collaboratives



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Definition of Collaboration and Collaboratives

Collaboration “means ‘to work together.’ It is a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties who work toward common goals by sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for achieving results. Collaboration is more than simply sharing knowledge and information (communication) and more than a relationship that helps each party achieve its own goals (cooperation and coordination). The purpose of collaboration is to create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purview of any particular party.”¹ Collaborative groups (collaboratives) are a formal way to sustain collaboration over a period of time.

This definition emphasizes that collaboration requires sharing responsibility and addressing problems that impact more than one institution. This means that collaboration, and collaboratives, challenge conventional individual and organizational thinking and practices to create solutions and take actions that can have a higher

impact.² This definition highlights the general aspects of collaboration, but the language is not prescriptive and it may align with other definitions in existence.

Value of Collaboratives

The value of successful collaborative groups is likely to exceed anything compiled into a simple list. The following, however, are a few of the benefits often reaped by collaboratives:

- Large-scale complex problems are addressed more effectively than when individual actors direct efforts.³ By coming together and sharing their diverse views, objectives, philosophies, resources, and practices, members are able to jointly understand the complexity of the problem and each other’s position in relation to the situation. Together, they can create a holistic view of the problem and the solution, which allows them to tackle it more effectively than any single entity could alone.⁴

- Additional skills are available to address the problem, which facilitates the focused application of expertise and knowledge, and helps create innovative responses and new outcomes.⁵
- Resources are pooled, which increases the efficacy, efficiency, and coordination of funding.⁶
- More dense social networks and more meaningful relationships appear.

Key Characteristics of Successful Collaboratives

Collaborative efforts can take many forms. In general, successful collaborative groups have the following characteristics:

- **Common agenda.** To achieve success, collaborative members rely on a shared purpose and goals that they use to craft a workplan and guide their actions, both those taken by the collaborative as a whole and by members individually.
- **Shared measurement.** Successful collaboratives agree on how to measure progress toward their common agenda.
- **Mutually reinforcing activities.** The power of collaborative efforts is evident when members complete the activities they excel at, in coordination with one another and under the umbrella of the common agenda and workplan.



(pixabay)

- **Continuous communication and trusting relationships.** Addressing complex problems and creating a common agenda among diverse members, each with their own priorities and expertise, requires the collaborative to create a trusting, open atmosphere in which members can build relationships with one another and continuously communicate.

Every structure or process the collaborative creates should be designed to help develop and support these key characteristics, as they will help ensure group alignment and action. In other words, form should follow function.

Stages of Collaboratives

It is helpful to think about the four general stages of collaboratives: initial interest, emerging, established, and closing out. It is important to remember though that each collaborative develops in its own way and may not exactly replicate other collaboratives. This document is geared toward those in the initial interest and the emerging stages. A few characteristics of each stage are described below and a [flowchart](#) outlining the stages is available on page 14.

Stage 1: Initial Interest

In this stage, a collaborative has not yet begun to form. This is the stage where a few individuals (or even just a single person) begin to think that a collaborative is needed. They must decide if the issue they hope to address requires the creation of a collaborative group (see [Chapter 2](#)). These people generally have significant influence in their sector or are prepared to engage a few key stakeholders who have the power and capacity to get the collaborative off the ground. If the initial group decides to form a collaborative and has a few key individuals committed to leading that process, the collaborative moves into the emerging stage.

Stage 2: Emerging

After a small group, decides to create a collaborative, the next milestone is to convene a collaborative that has a formal structure, governance, shared goals and measurement, and is taking action on its focal problem or issue. This period of preparing for and beginning to formally convene the collaborative is the emerging stage. The results of steps taken during the emerging stage often determine the collaborative's future success. The order of steps may vary, but this stage generally involves:

- Drafting a governance structure (including membership roles and responsibilities, structure of the collaborative, communication processes, purpose, and decision-making process) and deciding how it will be approved.
- Expanding membership beyond the initial founding members.
- Deciding the initial leadership of the collaborative, if the governance structure requires it.
- Drafting and implementing a strategic engagement plan to expand membership.
- Deciding if staff or a sponsor is needed, and if so forming those partnerships.
- Approving governance, and drafting a charter to reflect the chosen governance structure and operational processes.
- Drafting a set of shared goals, measurements, and strategies (a common agenda).
- Setting a workplan.
- Taking one or two early actions in line with the early common agenda and workplan.

The emerging stage normally starts with the small group of founders (see [initial interest stage](#)) forming an informal "core team," and inviting any relevant additional stakeholders to help start the collaborative. "The "core team" then begins to create an initial draft of the purpose and processes for the collaborative and focuses on

expanding membership (see [Chapter 3](#) and [5](#)). This stage is considered complete when the collaborative has implemented the governance structure and is following the shared goals, measurements, and strategies. Collaboratives should not rush through the emerging stage, but they also should not unnecessarily delay taking action to address their focal issue if a few of the components of the emerging stage have not been fully completed.

Developing a collaborative can be a balancing act. The founding core team will likely need to balance creating processes and governance with taking action to address their focal issue. Ideally "governance" and "getting the work done" do not get in the way of one another. Developing governance guidelines and operations is an important step toward getting collaborative members to trust in the collaborative and in each other. However, sometimes action needs to happen before these elements are finalized or current and potential members may doubt the collaborative's ability to accomplish anything, and thus lose interest. Often the core group can say the governance structure is "good enough for now" and commit to revisiting after some actions are taken, such as recruiting new members, drafting a common agenda and shared goals, or implementing the strategies associated with those goals. On the other hand, a collaborative cannot simply begin to take action without considering governance. If operational protocols are not developed, members may feel as if the collaborative does not value the perspective of all members.

Stage 3: Established

An established collaborative refers to a collaborative entity that is, in general, following its governance structure and taking action to carry out its workplan. This stage often involves:

- Adhering to the governance structure.
- Implementing the workplan to carry out strategies and measures to achieve shared goals.
- Making recognizable progress towards achieving the collaborative's shared goals.

- Regularly reviewing and updating the shared goals, measures and strategies, workplan, and governance structure.

An established collaborative will remain established until the collaborative decides to officially dissolve.

Stage 4: Closing Out

Some collaboratives form with the intent to exist in perpetuity, while others develop specifically to address one key focal issue and then dissolve. In either of these instances, most established collaboratives will, at some point, need to reevaluate their value and whether they should continue to exist. While the final decision may be made by the collaborative's leadership, a successful evaluation process provides all collaborative members with an opportunity to provide input. The decision to close out a collaborative, moreover, can be positive. For example, if the goals of the collaborative have been reached, then the collaborative may no longer be needed because it achieved success.

Each collaborative's decision to dissolve will vary based on its specific circumstances, but a few reasons that a collaborative may choose to do so include:

- The focal problem or issue the collaborative is addressing is no longer urgent.
- The focal problem or issue the collaborative is addressing no longer exists and thus the collaborative members no longer have a shared interest or purpose.
- The collaborative's primary goal has been achieved and the collaborative members can best address any remaining problems individually.

A collaborative that decides to dissolve, for whatever reason, moves into the closing out stage. This stage often includes:

- Formally announcing the dissolution of the collaborative both internally and externally.
- Updating any online materials to explain what happened to the collaborative (e.g., if the collaborative has a website, the site explains that the collaborative no longer exists).
- Compiling all collaborative materials and deciding who should maintain them in their archives and whether they may be shared with any external groups.
- Drafting a final report on the collaborative to be shared with its members and stakeholders.

¹ David D. Chrislip, Carl E. Larson, and American Leadership Forum, *Collaborative Leadership: How Citizens and Civic Leaders Can Make a Difference* (Jossey-Bass, 1994).

² "Advancing Collaboration Practice - Fact Sheet 2 - Why Collaborate, and Why Now?" (Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY), 2013), https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/231/filename/Advancing_Collaboration_Practice_-_Fact_Sheet_2_-_Why_collaborate,_and_why_now.pdf.

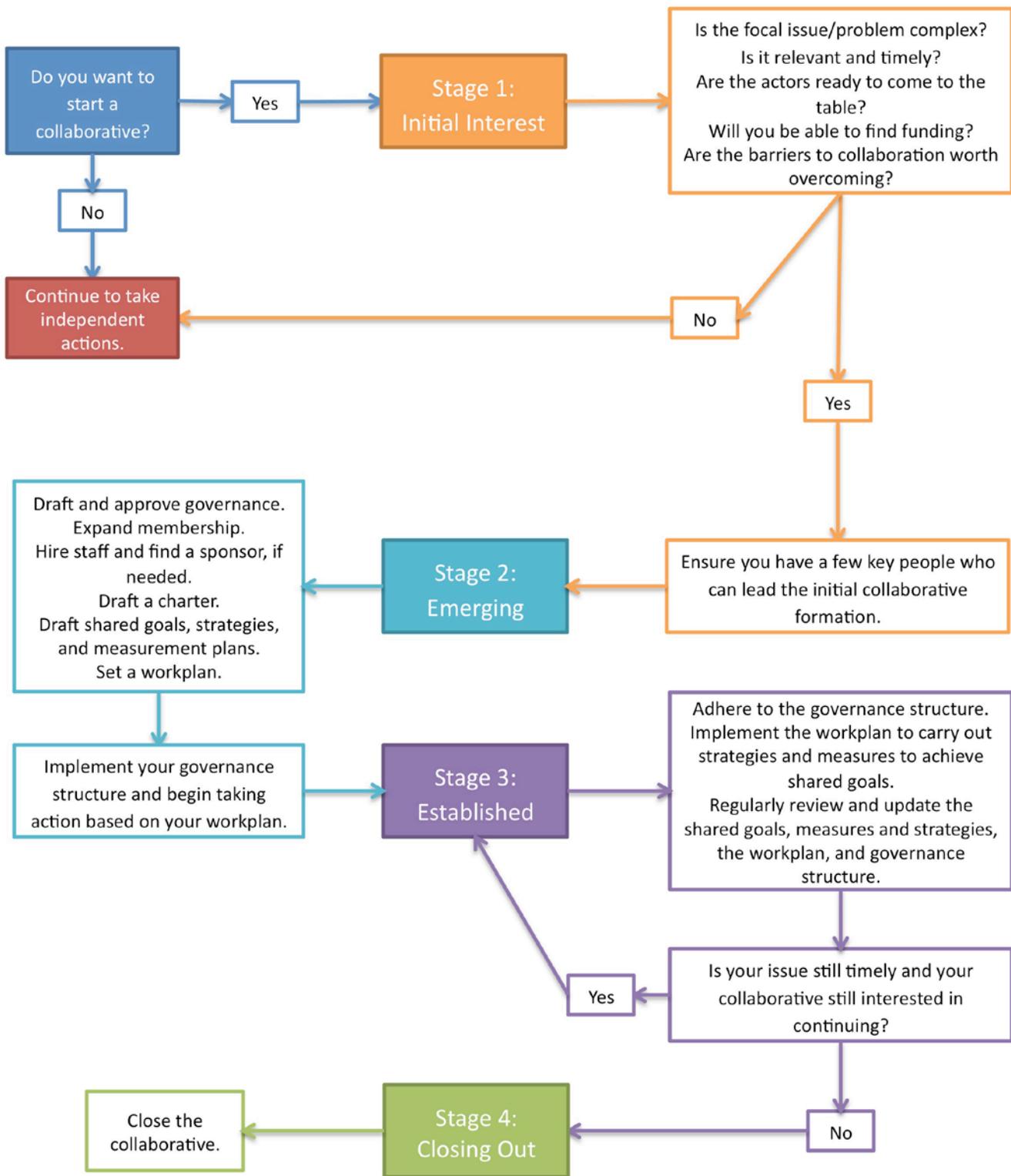
³ Dave Ewert, Interview on Great Lakes Wind Collaborative, interview by Sandy Carter, October 26, 2015; "Advancing Collaboration Practice - Fact Sheet 2 - Why Collaborate, and Why Now?"; Mark Kramer and John Kania, "Collective Impact (SSIR)," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011, http://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact.

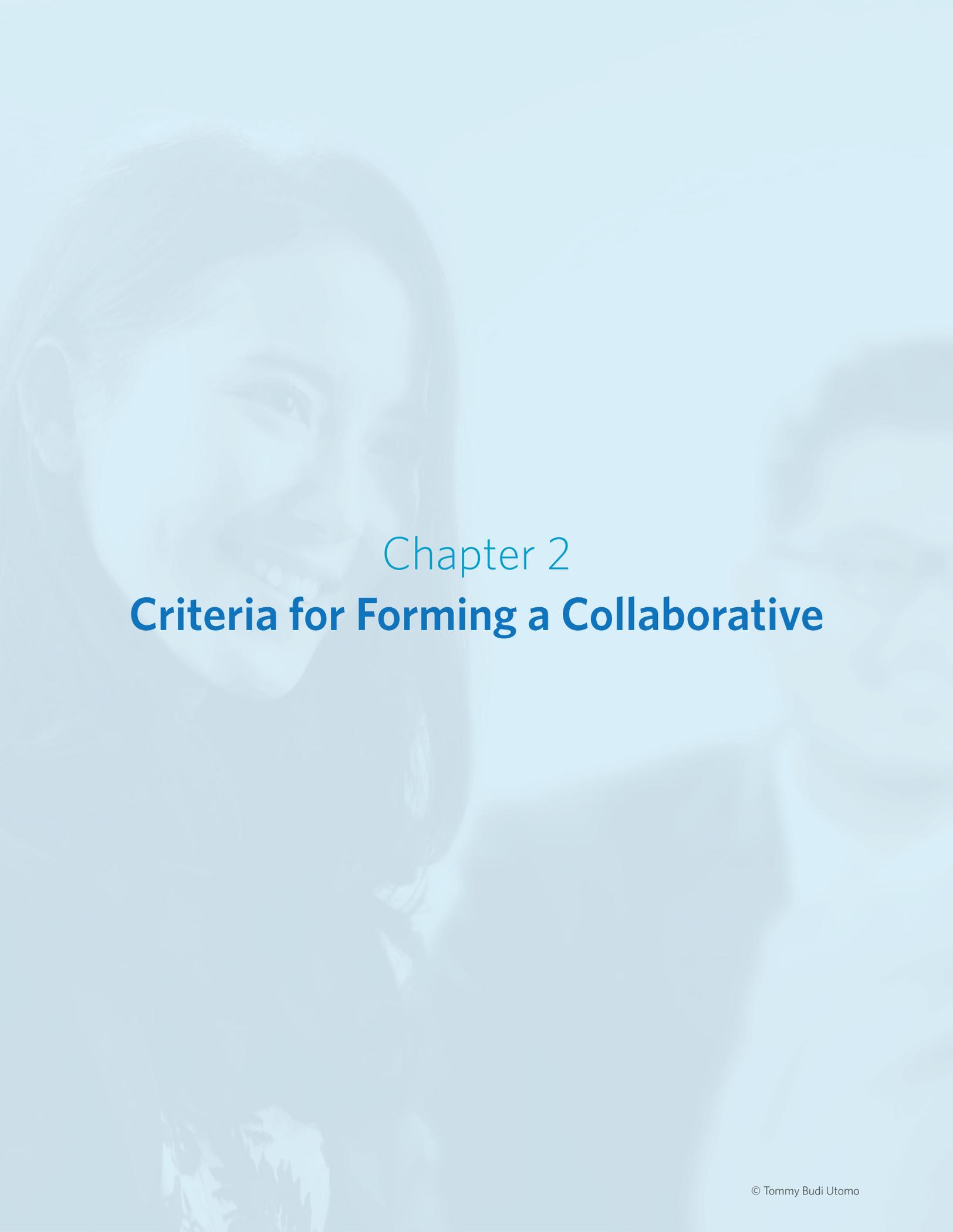
⁴ "Advancing Collaboration Practice - Fact Sheet 2 - Why Collaborate, and Why Now?"

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Stages of Collaboration Flowchart





Chapter 2

Criteria for Forming a Collaborative

Chapter 2: Criteria for Forming a Collaborative



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Before deciding to form a collaborative group, there are many things to consider. The following questions and criteria (i.e., the enabling conditions) can help guide the decision as to whether a collaborative is the most appropriate method of solving a problem. If the individual(s) interested in forming a collaborative can answer “yes” to all of the questions listed here, a collaborative will likely be an effective way to address the relevant issue. The Criteria for Collaboration section that follows provides more detailed information on the criteria that may help individual(s) decide whether to answer “yes” or “no” to each of the questions.

Criteria for Forming a Collaborative:

- **complex problem**
- **ready participants**
- **timely issue**
- **available funding**

Questions to Consider

- Is the problem complex?
- Is the issue relevant and timely?
- Are necessary actors ready to come to the table?
- Will you be able to find funding?
- What are the barriers to collaboration? Are they worth overcoming?¹

Criteria for Collaboration

Complex Problem

Complex problems are 1) hard to identify,² 2) lack clear, agreed upon solutions,³ 3) cut across numerous sectors or geographies,⁴ and/or 4) involve a wide array of stakeholders all with their own perspectives⁵. These problems are beyond the ability of a single individual or organization to address. They require a more holistic, integrated, and collaborative approach that brings together the

resources, knowledge, skills, and capabilities of multiple organizations.⁶ Together, organizations, individuals, and other entities can foster creativity and innovation, test and learn from new approaches, and adapt.⁷

Timely Issue⁸

For a collaborative group to be successful, the status of the complex problem (i.e., the issue at hand) must offer opportunities and possibilities for action, and not merely bring stakeholders together for discussion. In other words, there needs to be a sense of urgency around the problem.⁹ Sometimes key events can help trigger a need for action. A few examples illustrate this enabling condition:

- An issue may have been too politically or socially controversial to address in the past, but now has broader acceptance and is thus ready for collaborative action.
- A new, shared threat makes an issue more in need of immediate action (e.g., a new invasive species has been identified, a new land development threatens significant acres of sensitive habitat).
- The legal or political environment or community leadership and demographics have changed in such a way that encourages action on a particular issue.

In some instances, it may also be helpful to quantify and confirm the timely need for a collaborative by circulating a survey to the various entities with an interest in the issue.¹⁰

Ready Participants

For a collaborative to successfully address a problem, the key stakeholders must be ready to come to the table and take action. Specifically, this requires the relevant organizations and individuals to recognize their interdependence and be willing to adapt or change.

Interdependence: Sustained collaboration requires organizations to recognize that solving the complex problem they are facing means sharing their time, knowledge, and resources with one another¹¹ and creating shared objectives.¹² Organizations and individuals must realize the value of joining a collaborative group and understand that a better outcome can be achieved by taking a joint systematic approach rather than individual action.

Willingness to Change:¹³ The key, relevant stakeholders must be prepared to change their own strategies. Collaboration requires member organizations to develop shared goals and a shared approach to a complex problem, which, in turn, requires changing existing systems and processes within the individual member organizations.¹⁴ In general, stakeholders should be prepared to do three things:

1. **Consider and incorporate the collaborative's recommendations.** Stakeholders must be prepared for recommended changes and be willing to contemplate them.
2. **Share power and authority.** Member organizations need to be prepared to share power and authority and change their attitudes, roles, and working processes in order to successfully address the complex problem.¹⁵ This may be perceived as a risky endeavor and organizations may need time to see that their commitment to change will lead to success. Not all organizations need to be fully committed to changing at the beginning of the collaborative process, but they need to be prepared to explore changing, and recognize that the collaborative effort will likely fail if they cannot change.
3. **Dedicate time to building relationships.** Member organizations must also be prepared to focus on building relationships and trust and creating a culture of learning. The success of collaboration hinges on the member organizations and individual participants trusting one another.¹⁶

Funding¹⁷

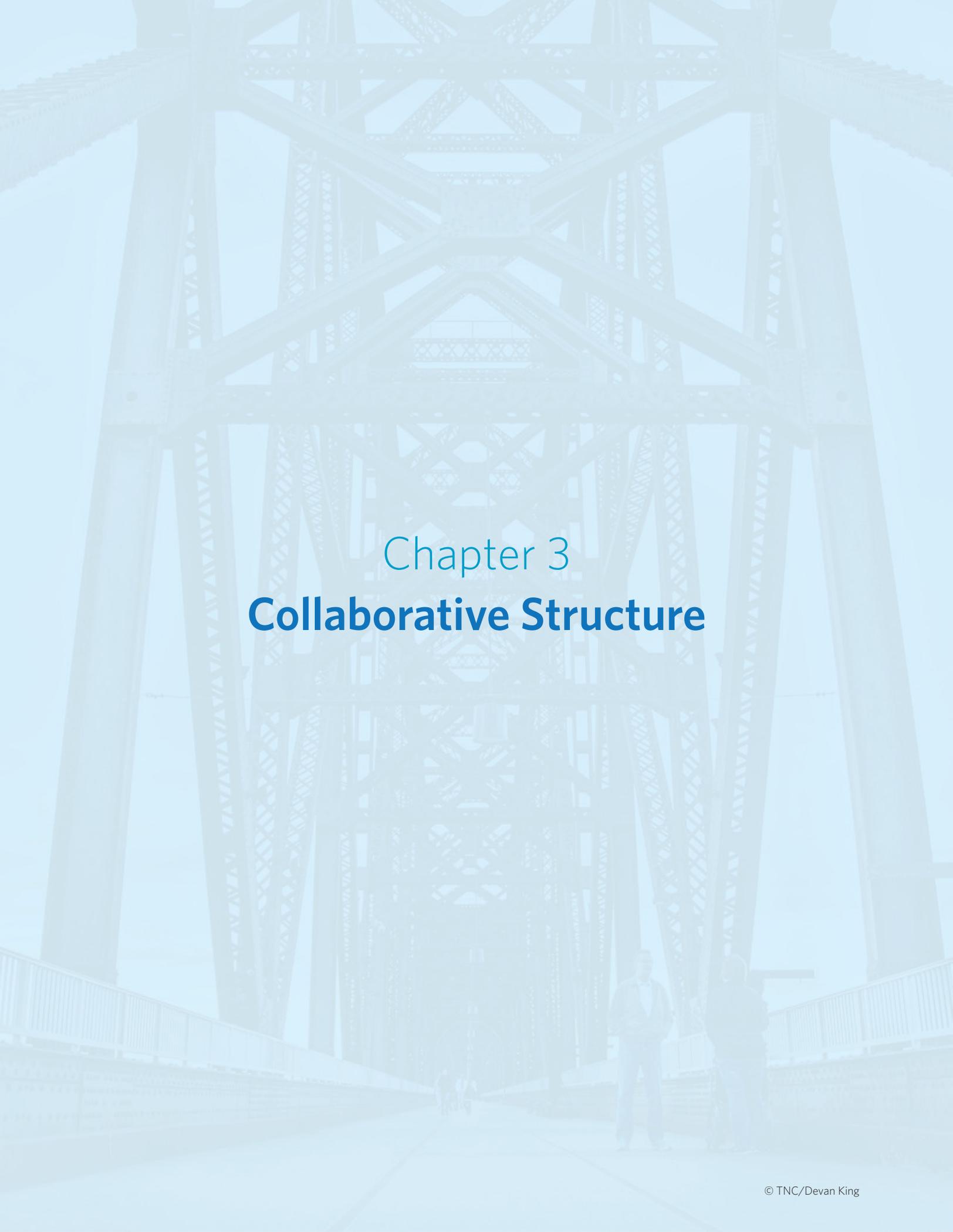
Coordinating a collaborative requires that individuals and organizations dedicate their time and, usually, their money. Eventually, dedicated support must be found to fund whatever staff the collaborative needs or whatever projects the members choose to pursue. This dedicated support may come from external funding organizations

or from individuals and organizations that are involved in the collaborative and are able to dedicate their time and resources. This funding does not necessarily need to be present when a collaborative first emerges, but the founding members should be prepared to address the need for funding as the collaborative develops.



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- ¹ Lisa Brush and Spencer Kellum, Interview on The Stewardship Network's Clusters, interview by Sandy Carter, Amber Datta, and Shawn Weis, August 24, 2015.
- ² "Collaborative Approaches: When Should I Collaborate?," Collaboration for Impact, accessed November 24, 2015, <http://www.collaborationforimpact.com/collaborative-approaches/>; "Advancing Collaboration Practice - Fact Sheet 4 - When to Collaborate?" (Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY), 2013), https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/233/filename/Advancing_Collaboration_Practice_-_Fact_Sheet_4_-_When_to_collaborate.pdf.
- ³ "Advancing Collaboration Practice - Fact Sheet 4 - When to Collaborate?"; "Collaborative Approaches: When Should I Collaborate?"; "Collaboration Handbook," Red Lodge Clearinghouse, April 6, 2010, <http://rlch.org/content/collaboration-handbook>.
- ⁴ "Advancing Collaboration Practice - Fact Sheet 4 - When to Collaborate?"; "Collaborative Approaches: When Should I Collaborate?"
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Shawn Callahan, "When Should We Collaborate?," TrinityP3, June 12, 2012, <http://www.trinityp3.com/2012/06/when-should-we-collaborate/>; Kramer and Kania, "Collective Impact (SSIR)."
- ⁸ "Collaboration Handbook."
- ⁹ Ewert, Interview on Great Lakes Wind Collaborative; William Chadderton, Interview on AIS Collaboratives, interview by Sandy Carter, October 2, 2015; Heather Braun and Erika Jensen, Interview on Great Lakes Commission Collaboratives, interview by Sandy Carter, October 22, 2015.
- ¹⁰ Braun and Jensen, Interview on Great Lakes Commission Collaboratives.
- ¹¹ "Advancing Collaboration Practice - Fact Sheet 4 - When to Collaborate?"
- ¹² Kramer and Kania, "Collective Impact (SSIR)."
- ¹³ "Advancing Collaboration Practice - Fact Sheet 4 - When to Collaborate?"; "Collaboration Handbook."
- ¹⁴ "Collaborative Approaches: When Should I Collaborate?"
- ¹⁵ "Advancing Collaboration Practice - Fact Sheet 4 - When to Collaborate?"
- ¹⁶ Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, and Mark Kramer, "Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work (SSIR)," Stanford Social Innovation Review, January 26, 2012, http://ssir.org/articles/entry/channeling_change_making_collective_impact_work.
- ¹⁷ Braun and Jensen, Interview on Great Lakes Commission Collaboratives.



Chapter 3

Collaborative Structure

Chapter 3: Collaborative Structure



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This chapter is the first of three chapters that provide guidance to individuals who are founding collaboratives and leading a collaborative through the emerging stage (see [Chapter 1](#)). This chapter contains information regarding the following management areas that should be considered when creating the governance and general structure for the collaborative:

- [Purpose](#)
- [Membership](#)
- [Sponsorship](#)
- [Staffing](#)
- [Formal Governance and Operations](#)

[Chapters 4](#) and [5](#), alternatively, contain information and guidance for how collaboratives actually can get work done. This guidance is not intended to be prescriptive. Instead, each management area section lists guiding questions, useful best practices, and relevant resources for addressing that area of management.

Purpose

In deciding to create a collaborative, a general purpose for the group was likely considered and discussed. However, as members are gathered and the collaborative begins, the shared purpose needs to be finalized and recorded. Crafting and formalizing the shared purpose is an important step in determining the structure and the functions of the collaborative (form follows function), as well as communicating to current and potential members the role of the collaborative in the relevant issue area. Ensuring the group has a shared purpose is as important as ensuring the group relies on shared goals. This purpose should also be included in any governance structure documents (see [Governance](#) section at the end of this chapter).

Questions to Consider

- Why does the collaborative need a purpose statement?

- How will the purpose be determined (i.e., what process will be used)?
- What is the purpose of the collaborative?
- How regularly should the collaborative review the purpose?

Best Practices for Establishing Purpose

Understand the Purpose of the Purpose: Collaboratives need a shared, clear purpose to understand what actions they should consider taking to address their focal issue.¹ Without a purpose to enforce some boundaries on the work, a collaborative’s actions may become unintentionally diffused.² If a collaborative’s actions become uncoordinated, they are less likely to result in great achievement.

Create a Process: Drafting a purpose statement is often one of the first formal tasks a collaborative undertakes, thus setting the tone for various working relationships. In most cases, the collaborative purpose statement is first drafted by the core founding members of the collaborative before outreach is conducted and the membership becomes inclusive. After the member list is expanded, the draft purpose statement is reviewed by the entire collaborative group. This process ensures that the core founding group has language to use when inviting other individuals and organizations to join a new collaborative. It also ensures that members are able to participate and contribute to a foundational statement. This, however, is merely one way to draft a purpose statement. Regardless of the process used, the core founding group determines who needs to be involved at what stages and how quickly a purpose statement needs to be drafted.

Remember the General Purpose of Collaboratives: In determining the specific purpose of a collaborative, it is important to remember that the general purpose of collaboration is to create value and achieve solutions that could not be reached through individual actions alone.

Membership

Members are key to the success of a collaborative effort. Ideally, members of the collaborative all share a stake in the process and outcome of the group. One of the marks of an effective collaborative member may be how little he holds his group back.³ Productive collaboratives usually contain members more committed to the success of the group and the joint agenda than to their personal agendas, with the understanding that stakeholders must be given an opportunity to express their opinions and provide input.

In creating the collaborative, protocols for membership should be defined early, including how parties may become members; what responsibilities members have; expectations for time commitments; and what, if any, levels of membership exist. The questions for consideration and the best practices listed below can help guide the development of a membership structure. Good membership structures reflect the needs of the collaborative and are formalized as part of the governance structure and documents (see [Governance](#) section at the end of this chapter). The most successful collaborative efforts also create a structure that explains member responsibilities and encourages all members to disclose their reasons for joining the collaborative.

Questions to Consider

- How will the collaborative gather and maintain members? Specifically:
 - How do individuals and organizations become members?
 - How will the collaborative find new members? Have the collaborative founders conducted a situation analysis to understand the political, social, economic, and environmental landscape of the key issue and to identify the key actors in the issue area? Have all appropriate parties been invited to join the collaborative?⁴
 - Why would people come to the table? How will members’ jobs be made easier by collaborating? How will they feel a deeper sense of individual

achievement and contribution? How will they be recognized and rewarded for their efforts? Are their opinions and ideas welcome even if they aren't considered "experts" on a topic?

- How will the collaborative ensure members are effective participants? Specifically:
 - What does membership mean? Will people represent their organizations or participate as individuals?
 - What is expected of members (e.g., attendance at meetings, alternate if cannot attend, compliance with code of conduct/group norms)?
 - Do members representing other organizations need to vet the collaborative's ideas through their constituencies?
 - Are there different levels of membership? How is power shared?
 - Can non-members ever participate or observe?
 - If workgroups are established, is consistent participation in those workgroups expected or are workgroup meetings open to anyone who would like to attend? May non-members participate or observe?

Best Practices for Gathering and Maintaining Members

Be Inclusive: In forming its membership base, successful collaboratives consider including all key, relevant stakeholders, ranging from federal and state government agencies to non-governmental organizations, from First Nations and tribal representatives to local officials, and from community organization leaders to business representatives. If the collaborative cannot bring key decision-makers to the table, it will struggle to successfully address complex problems.⁵ Securing the right mix of members will likely require the core collaborative instigators to draft a strategic engagement strategy and conduct outreach to ensure those stakeholders get involved.

Create Incentives for Participation: Stakeholders in a collaborative effort need sufficient and continuing incentives to participate and remain actively engaged. Such incentives range from creating an atmosphere that encourages participation by respecting conflicting concerns and perspectives, to creating a structure that grants some degree of power and decision-making to each member so they are able to see the real value of their involvement. (For more on how to create a positive atmosphere see the next subsection on Best Practices for Effective Members. For more information on decision-making see the [Governance](#) section at the end of this chapter.)⁶

Best Practices for Effective Members

Define Roles: Roles and responsibilities of members need to be clear and understood⁷ in order to inform a member's decision to join a group, ensure the member stays involved, and diminish the risk of conflict. For members to be sure they can commit to a joint collaborative effort, they will want to understand what would be expected of them. Defining roles and responsibilities, moreover, ensures that current collaborative members understand how they fit in to the overall collaborative structure and process, how their individual efforts are contributing to a joint effort, and what they are going to be held accountable for (see the [Goals and Measures of Success](#) section in Chapter 5 for more on accountability). When members understand their role within the collaborative and what they are being asked to contribute, certain conflicts and friction may also be prevented. While some members may take on different roles and responsibilities, success requires that general member roles and responsibilities are applied equally.

Create Openness and Honesty: While specific collaborative structures and membership needs vary, all collaboratives are affected by the level of openness and honesty expressed in the room. If, from the beginning, members are able to be open and honest about what they can bring to the table and what they need from the group, all members are more likely to have strong

working relationships.⁹ When this openness is not present, individual agendas may get in the way of the group's progress and conflict may arise.

The core leadership can take steps during early member interactions to encourage openness and honesty, such as asking all members to share why they are interested in joining the collaborative, what their priorities are, and what they think they can contribute to the effort. The core leadership may do this by taking 30 minutes or one hour during the first official in-person convening of the collaborative to allow each member to introduce himself and share his interest and personal agenda. Having the core leadership of the collaborative start such a conversation by bringing up their own uncertainties and personal agendas will show the other collaborative members that the leadership values honesty and openness as a way to encourage strong relationships and unity among the collaborative members. If the leadership starts this conversation, and if the leadership has already talked to each member during one-on-one conversations (see next section on [Membership Strategies](#)) and members know that this openness and honesty is encouraged, this conversation may help the members come together and take more strategic action. This openness and honesty will be further encouraged if this conversation is revisited regularly, both as a team and during one-on-one interactions between the core leadership of the collaborative and each individual member. It takes time to establish a culture, but having leadership that creates an expectation of openness will help ensure the collaborative's success.¹⁰

Ensure Mutual Responsibility and Benefits: A collaborative structure that allows all members to contribute and benefit equally will help foster a culture of commitment, mutual respect, and trust.¹¹ Such a structure allows all parties to share in the decision-making process and responsibility for outcomes.¹² Additionally, when each member's work fits clearly into the overarching plan, their combined efforts are more likely to achieve success.¹³

Ensure Accountable Representation: If members of a collaborative are serving as representatives of their home organizations, the group determines how to relate to those member organizations. In productive collaboratives, members are expected to be clear that they are speaking on behalf of an organization, and open and honest about what their organization has or has not empowered them to do¹⁴ and expects of them in terms of reporting. Asking each member to clearly explain their responsibilities as an organization's representative during an early collaborative meeting may help create this clarity. Some members may be hesitant to share their responsibilities because, for example, they're concerned about giving the impression that they aren't empowered to make decisions. To alleviate these concerns, the collaborative leadership might introduce this conversation by explaining that their intent is to ensure that all members are able to meet their responsibilities to their organizations, not to question those responsibilities.

If one of the responsibilities members identify is a requirement to gain approval from their organizational leadership before making decisions or committing to collaborative actions, the collaborative presents a clear understanding and outline of that process. Specifically, the collaborative articulates how much time members have to review items with their home organization, and the consequences of member organizations either not approving items or not responding. (For more on decision-making, see the [Governance](#) section at the end of this chapter.)

Best Practices for Membership Strategies

Encourage Positive Relationships: Member relationships define a collaborative and have the power to either facilitate or inhibit a collaborative's success.¹⁵ Building a relationship with a new member goes beyond inviting them to join and attend a meeting. Success requires that members be given regular opportunities to build relationships with one another and the collaborative creates an atmosphere that facilitates mutual respect.¹⁶



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Facilitating effective, respectful meetings is key to this (see [Meetings](#) section in Chapter 4), but creating an open, honest atmosphere takes additional dedicated effort. This can be accomplished when, for example, individuals leading the collaborative through its emerging stage engage directly one-on-one with new and existing members and then ask them to do the same with each other:

One-on-One's. One-on-one's are intentional and purposeful conversations between two individuals to learn about their individual concerns, interest levels, and resources.¹⁷ Most importantly, they are a key opportunity to get commitments to actions.¹⁸ Through one-on-one's, individuals are able to build relationships, gain each other's trust, and better understand and harness their self-interest.

One-on-one's are similar to regular individual conversations in that they are often over coffee or lunch

or simply in someone's office and allow two people to get to know each other better. Unlike a simple chat, however, one-on-one's are intended to result in commitments to some specific action (e.g., attend a meeting, speak at a meeting, join a collaborative, ask someone else to join a collaborative, bring snacks, etc.) and, thus, require preparation. Whoever is organizing the one-on-one is responsible for preparing for the meeting by setting a prearranged time and having a clear goal and specific questions in mind, and maintaining a professional tone.¹⁹ In the early days of a collaborative, most one-on-one's will likely be set up by a member of the collaborative core/founding team with a potential member to learn more about an individual, why he or she may be interested in the collaborative, what his or her personal agenda(s) may be, what resources he or she might bring to the collaborative, and, if appropriate, ask him or her to join the collaborative. After a member joins, however,

effective collaboratives ask other general members to meet with that new individual to build a relationship and ask him or her to take on specific tasks, join work groups, share his or her concerns about the group, meet again to discuss something related to the group, invite someone else to join the collaborative, etc.

When these one-on-one's regularly happen, members are more likely to trust one another, use their resources and skills in the best ways, and be engaged and committed to the collaborative. See the resources section below for additional guidance on how to set up and organize one-on-one's.

Successful collaboratives likely have a membership coordinator who, in partnership with other collaborative members, sets a strategy for increasing or improving membership, trains other collaborative members on organizing and running one-on-one's, delegates one-on-one's to other members, and holds members responsible for completing their assigned tasks. When the entire collaborative is involved in building successful relationships with potential members and with each other, the collaborative is more likely to succeed.

Be Innovative and Adapt: Membership structures will vary across groups. Collaboratives codify their selected structure in the group's governance documents (see the [Governance](#) section at the end of this chapter).

Resources

- Community Tool Box's [Section 8. Identifying and Analyzing Stakeholders and Their Interests](#). In-depth guidance on how to identify key stakeholders and determine whether they should be included in the collaborative.
- Coalitions Work's [Potential Members Grid](#). A table that may be useful in crafting an outreach plan to engage new members and in tracking members' interest in the collaborative.

- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's [Stakeholder Identification Table](#). A table that may be useful in identifying what stakeholders to invite to join a collaborative and who should ask them to join.
- Coalitions Work's [Member Gap Analysis](#). A useful exercise to determine what additional groups or individuals should be included in the group.
- [Introduction to Community Organizing: One-to-One 101](#). An introduction to one-on-one's and key steps on how to organize a one-on-one.
- Americorps*VISTA's [Training: Community Organizing Part 2: One to Ones](#). A good training on how to conduct one-on-one's.
- Coalitions Work's [Buddy Program for Member Recruitment](#). Step-by-step instructions for expanding a collaborative by having current members recruit new members.

Sponsorship

Most collaboratives are initiated by existing formal organizations or individuals within existing organizations. Yet, existing informally as part of another group or as an ad hoc group may not work in perpetuity, as a collaborative belongs to all of its members, not merely one group. At some point in the collaborative process, the group will need to formally decide if it should be under the umbrella of a larger sponsor organization, or if it should operate as an independent organization with no sponsor.



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Depending on how the collaborative was initiated, this may happen as the collaborative emerges or after it is more established. Regardless of the timing, this decision involves a discussion of the value and benefits of operating under the umbrella of a larger organization. If a collaborative decides to have a sponsor, as most often occurs, the collaborative and sponsor work together to clearly articulate the role of the sponsor to prevent confusion and conflict. The questions for consideration and best practices listed below can help a collaborative decide if it needs a sponsor and, if needed, define the role of the sponsor.

Questions to Consider

- Does the collaborative need a sponsor? Specifically:
 - What are the collaborative's financial and administrative needs?
 - Would having a sponsor increase or decrease the collaborative's credibility and access to resources?
 - Will the collaborative ever need to become a formal, independent 501(c)3?
- If the collaborative needs a sponsor, what is the role of the sponsor?

Best Practices for Sponsorship

Decide if a Sponsor is Needed: A collaborative belongs to its members, not to any one member organization. However, most collaborative groups often require supporting infrastructure and thus will eventually need to be housed somewhere. Many collaboratives start under the unofficial umbrella of a member organization. That member organization may provide space for meetings and limited administrative support. As a successful collaborative becomes established, it will *officially* decide if it requires an umbrella organization as a sponsor. Discussing the need, or lack thereof, for backbone support can help ensure the long-term success of the collaborative.²⁰

In determining their need for backbone support, successful collaboratives consider whether they need administrative, financial, legal, or communications support,

and/or increased credibility within their focus issue area (i.e., does the collaborative need a sponsor to ensure it is respected within the sector it's trying to work). In general, collaboratives have two options: 1) find a fiscal and administrative sponsor, or 2) become a separate institution, such as a 501(c)3. In general, if a collaborative is not prepared to become a formal institution, it will likely benefit from finding a sponsor to manage some of its legal, administrative, and financial work.²¹

Pick a Sponsor: If the collaborative has decided it needs an umbrella organization, it then finds a sponsor. Collaboratives that were already tacitly under the umbrella of a member organization should still go through this process to determine if they want to formalize their relationship with their current umbrella organization or initiate a partnership with another organization. A few recommended steps for picking a sponsor are as follows:

1. **Review list of needs.** When deciding if a sponsor is needed, the collaborative likely developed a general list of support needs and included items such as administrative or financial support. Now the collaborative will revisit that list and add any additional detail (e.g., administrative support in the form of coordinating meetings or running the website).
2. **Conduct a situation analysis.** To gain an initial understanding of its options, a collaborative gathers information and conducts research on potential sponsors. Before approaching potential sponsors, the collaborative will document what each may have to offer in terms of support; what issues each sponsor is concerned with and why that sponsor might like to support the collaborative; and what, if any, concerns the collaborative may have.
3. **Identify a list of preferred sponsors.** Using the information gathered during the situation analysis, the collaborative can compare that information to their list of needs to identify its top choices. While the chosen sponsor will need to be able to provide the necessary services, it is also important to pick a sponsor that wants to support the collaborative. In

ideal circumstances, the sponsor and collaborative have compatible goals and interests and respect one another.²²

4. **Initiate relationships.** After the list of sponsors has been narrowed down to the collaborative's top two to five choices, the collaborative leadership will decide how and when to approach each potential sponsor to ensure a positive outcome.

Define the Role of the Sponsor: If the collaborative has found a sponsor interested in partnering, it then works with the sponsor to clearly articulate the respective roles of the sponsor and the collaborative.

The role of the sponsor will vary among collaboratives, depending on the sponsor's capacity and commitment to the relationship; the collaborative's needs; and the political, social, and financial landscape of the focal issue/problem. Moreover, the reputation of the sponsor and its skill at maintaining a neutral position that allows all collaborative members to contribute and "own" the collaborative will determine the specific role the sponsor

Example Sponsor Roles:

- Choose staff
- Make financial decisions
- Represent the collaborative externally²³
- Collect and manage data
- Generate reports
- Provide overall strategic direction
- Coordinate outreach
- Create communications materials²⁴
- Provide administrative support (coordinate meetings and logistics)
- Serve as an advisor

plays.²⁵ In formalizing roles, the collaborative and its sponsor will also benefit from creating a provision for modifying or terminating the relationship as needed.²⁶

Resources

- The Nature Conservancy's [Stakeholder Influence Mapping Tool](#). A tool that can help facilitate conducting a situation analysis, which may be of use when attempting to identify a sponsor.
- The Nature Conservancy's [Conservation Partnership Center](#). A website that provides information on scoping meetings and negotiations, along with other relevant collaborative resources.

Staffing

Creating a collaborative requires dedication and commitment, as well as individuals who have the capacity to give their time and resources. While all members should have responsibilities to the collaborative, the group may need additional capacity to coordinate logistics and facilitate progress. Each collaborative must analyze its needs and determine whether to 1) meet these needs with current members (with or without giving them collaborative funds), or 2) hire dedicated staff (with collaborative funds or funding from specific member organizations). If a collaborative does decide it needs additional capacity, it often looks for one or two people, either internal or external to the collaborative, who can provide administrative and facilitation support.

Questions to Consider

- What are the collaborative's staffing needs? Specifically:
 - Does the collaborative need dedicated, new staff to coordinate the collaborative?
 - Are any current members able to dedicate the time and resources to facilitate the collaborative process? Would those persons be trusted by the collaborative members?

- Would neutral staff increase the likelihood that the collaborative will reach its goals?
- From where would funding for staff come?
- If the collaborative needs dedicated staff, what will that staff be responsible for and how will they be managed?

Best Practices for Deciding if New External Staff is Needed

Assess Collaborative Need: To determine if additional capacity is needed, a successful collaborative examines its current status and what additional support is needed, either internally or externally. In general, collaboratives need dedicated staff to coordinate and facilitate meetings, manage communications, facilitate decision-making, and keep the collaborative on-task and on-track. Staff is often hired not to take leadership and make decisions, but to facilitate the collaborative process.

Consider the Value of Staff: If additional capacity is needed, the collaborative decides if that support should come from existing collaborative members or external staff. In making that decision, collaboratives will consider two of the key values of hiring external staff:

1. **Neutrality.**²⁷ One of the key benefits of hiring individuals that are not currently members of the collaborative is their neutrality, particularly if the collaborative needs help facilitating decision-making and agenda-setting. Dedicated staff are able to separate the needs of the collaborative from the needs of any one member organization in order to advance the shared agenda of the collaborative.²⁸ Neutral staff can help facilitate meetings, alleviate conflict, and serve as an impartial arbitrator. Their neutrality may also make them ideal representatives of the collaborative in external communications.²⁹ This can be particularly important during the early stages of the collaborative, when the various members have yet to build trusting, working relationships with one another. As highlighted throughout this manual (see [Membership](#) section in



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this chapter and [Chapter 6: Challenges](#)), personal agents have the potential to derail collaboratives. Having a neutral facilitator whose dedicated job is to build relationships with the various members, understand their agendas, and facilitate the creation of a shared agenda can create a culture of respect and help the collaborative make decisions.³⁰

2. **Administrative support.** As discussed in the [Sponsorship](#) section, coordinating a collaborative requires administrative support. This generally includes taking minutes at meetings, circulating minutes and notes, maintaining contact lists, and coordinating meeting logistics.³¹ Most general members do not have the time or capacity to dedicate to the administrative side of the collaborative. Yet this coordination role cannot be overlooked. Without someone dedicated to managing the administrative details, meetings may not be held and information may not be circulated.³² This coordination role may be filled by finding new, external staff or asking an existing member if they have extra capacity. Some members may come from organizations that are willing to allow them to dedicate time to the collaborative for administrative purposes.

Assess Resources and Determine Staff Location: If the collaborative determines that additional capacity is needed, an analysis of available resources occurs. An effective collaborative considers the cost of funding new staff and the value of staff, and decides whether it wants to 1) hire and fund new external staff, 2) fund a current member, or 3) ask a current member to donate their time. In making this decision, the collaborative also considers the pros and cons of whether the staff is internal or external.

Weigh Benefits Against Challenges: After assessing the value of added staff and the resources available, a collaborative is likely able to determine whether adding staff would be helpful. The collaborative may also need to consider the challenges posed by staff, both if that staff is coming from an external or internal location. Staff can exert a great influence on the way a collaborative works, which, as noted, can be beneficial. However, it can also risk replacing active engagement by member organizations.³³ This risk of member disengagement can be mitigated by setting clear roles and boundaries for staff from the beginning, as noted in the next section.

Best Practices for Having Collaborative Staff

Set Roles: Clarifying the role of collaborative staff is as important as defining the role of members. Successful collaboratives have a clear understanding of what they expect their staff to do and how those actions will support the collaborative.

Determine Where Staff is Housed: When deciding to hire external staff or select staff from within the collaborative, the collaborative considers which official member organization will “house” that staff member. Most collaboratives operate under the umbrella of a larger sponsor and cannot legally hire their own staff, so they may want to ask their sponsor to house new staff. Alternatively, new external staff could potentially be housed within another member organization. In making this decision, a successful collaborative considers the credibility of the potential organization as well as that organization’s

commitment to the collaborative and their capacity to help manage the staff (See [Sponsorship](#) section above for more information on umbrella organizations).

Formal Governance and Operations

In the context of collaboratives, governance refers to how the collaborative is structured and how decisions are made. Collaborative governance is often a challenge to create and formally draft. There is no one simple governance model or structure that works in every situation. Each collaborative must create the governance system that works best for its circumstances.³⁴ Some collaboratives may decide to have a steering committee, an advisory board, and permanent workgroups. Others may only need a core team and advisory committee. For some, decisions may be made by an advisory board, while for others decisions may be made by the entire membership. Some collaboratives may allow non-members to participate or observe at various stages, while others may not allow non-members to contribute. This section does not prescribe one governance system, but lists questions to consider, best practices to remember, and resources to review when crafting a structure.

Regardless of what structure is designed, the structure must be written down in either a formal (i.e., a charter) or informal format. That document should include the structure, as well as all the policies determined for the collaborative, such as member roles and decision-making processes. In crafting the structure, collaboratives have the perfect opportunity to formalize all guidance for the other management areas listed in this chapter.

Questions to Consider

- What kind of formalized structure do the member organizations require in order to support the collaborative? Are memorandums of understanding (MOU’s) or agreements with any particular agencies involved in the collaborative needed to meet necessary organizational rules or allay individual concerns?

- How will the collaborative make decisions?
- How will the collaborative ensure it is meeting all legal requirements?
- How will the collaborative ensure that it is regularly assessing itself and its projects? How will the collaborative ensure it is adapting based on that assessment?
- Does the collaborative need a written code of conduct, as determined in membership and meeting rules (e.g., respect and comply with facilitator’s behavioral directions, treat others with respect, good-faith effort to resolve differences, speak with candor, come prepared, participate actively, support the outcomes, act in a way that fosters trust, don’t treat the collaborative as a “soapbox”)?

Best Practices for Creating a Governance Structure and Operations Processes

Create a Structure: Successful collaboratives have determined the appropriate structure they want to use. Some collaboratives have a formalized governance structure with a hierarchy of bodies, while others operate with simpler structure. To create a structure, collaboratives consider various models and discuss them with their members. Successful collaboratives craft a structure that ensures all stakeholder groups that need to provide input have a clear way of doing so, and that creativity and innovation is encouraged.³⁵

Create a Decision-Making Protocol: When creating the governance structure, an effective collaborative also determines how decisions will be made going forward. The group drafts a protocol for making decisions; selects those within the structure who will make the various types of decisions, including who will approve the final governance structure and decision-making protocols; and defines the level of consensus needed for decisions to be considered final or approved. In creating a decision-making process, many collaboratives consider the following suggested steps and principles:

- **Identify decision-makers.** In crafting the governance structure and decision-making protocol, the collaborative decides who will make what decisions. For example, if the collaborative has a core steering committee of ten people and an advisory board of twenty that represents everyone involved, the steering committee may set the workplan, but the advisory board may decide who sits on the steering committee.
- **Select level of approval/consensus.** Each collaborative decides if it would like all decisions to be reached by consensus or by a majority vote. In making this decision, it is important to remember what “consensus” means in practice. Consensus does not give each member a veto, or require that every member fully agree. Consensus means that each relevant member can influence the decision and the final decision reflects the group feeling or thinking together. This is important because when people have veto power, individuals are less likely to work together to reach a shared decision.³⁶ In the end, a successful collaborative decision-making process encourages individuals to propose, not merely oppose, ideas.³⁷
- **Identify the final decision-maker.**³⁸ Regardless of what model of decision-making is used (consensus, majority vote, etc.), a successful collaborative also determines at the beginning what will happen when that level of approval cannot be reached but a decision must still be made. For example, if the steering committee cannot reach a consensus on whether to take one of three actions, but they must take one of the actions, the decision may be referred to a sub-work group.
- **Create respect for the process.**³⁹ Regardless of what decisions are made, the important thing is that members have respect for the process. This means having a process that is transparent,⁴⁰ encourages accountability, and is supported by the members from the beginning. All members should

understand the process and those making decisions should be accountable to the group. Creating this transparency and ensuring that members are included in, and committed to, the process helps ensure decisions are accepted and conflict is minimized.⁴¹

- **Don't rush, but don't delay.**⁴² Regardless of what decision-making process is selected, a successful process does not encourage rushing. A good process moves at a pace that gives all relevant members the opportunity to contribute to the process. If the group is forced to make a decision before it is ready, that decision will likely not be implemented. Rushing is discouraged, but so is excessive delay. In crafting an effective process, the collaborative leadership balances the need to include all collaborative members with the need to make decisions and get the work done. In the end, the leadership uses their discretion to decide when enough time has been given to discussion before reaching a decision.

Comply with Legal Requirements:⁴³ Some collaboratives may need to analyze the legal landscape to ensure that their governance structure and various processes are in line with any relevant legal requirements and to understand any constraints that may impact their decisions. For example, federal or state agencies may need a collaborative to meet certain requirements before they can legally participate.

Plan to Assess and Adapt:⁴⁴ The success of the collaborative depends on a regular analysis of its value and progress. These assessments can help answer questions such as the following:

- Is the decision-making process transparent?
- Are members held accountable for meeting their responsibilities?
- Are the roles and relationships clearly stated in a formalized, useful way?

Assessments should take place on a regular schedule, and as needed (e.g., when specific milestones for major projects are reached), and the schedule is included in the governance documents. The results of the assessment, moreover, may help the collaborative focus its efforts, restructure the way members work together, or, if needed, bring the collaborative to a close. Breaking apart a collaborative, however, is likely the best option only if the goals of the collaborative have been reached and the main problem it sought to address no longer requires a collaborative solution (See [Stage 4: Closing Out](#) in Chapter 1).

Draft a Charter or Compile an Operations Manual: Effective collaboratives compile all governance materials into one document or a compendium of documents. These documents help ensure transparency and allow the group to identify and document any non-compliance with governance and operations. For groups that require members to formally sign on to the group, compiling the governance information into a charter with a list of supporting individual and organization members provides them with a clear way to agree to support the collaborative.

Common Collaborative Charter Sections

Most collaborative charters will include the following sections:

- Purpose (or Mission Statement)
- Structure of the Collaborative (including responsibilities of any sub-groups)
- Membership Roles and Responsibilities
- Communication Protocols
- Decision-Making Protocols
- Staffing and Sponsorship Guidelines
- Meeting Guidelines

Once they have been established, shared goals should also be included in the formal charter.

Resources

- National Forest Foundation's [Governance Documents for Collaboratives](#). Example guiding documents for collaboratives that detail a group's purpose, scope of work, the mechanics of how it conducts business and makes decisions, and personal behavior expectations. These may be structured to include bylaws and ground rules or a charter and a code of conduct, etc.
- National Forest Foundation's [Multi-Agency MOU Coordinates Landscape Restoration](#). A sample MOU establishing a collaborative, which may be helpful to a collaborative that needs to establish an MOU between all members.
- Collaborative Leaders Network's [Sample Charter](#) and [Sample Operating Principles](#). An example charter, with sample operating principles in a separate document.
- The Nature Conservancy's [Organizational Guidelines: East Maui Watershed Partnership](#). An example of organizational and operating guidelines developed for a partnership.
- [The Big Sur Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy: Partnership Owners' Manual](#). An example of management principles for a partnership.

¹ Braun and Jensen, Interview on Great Lakes Commission Collaboratives.

² Mickey Connolly and Julie Naster, "Ten Laws of Collaboration," *American Management Association*, May 1, 2004, http://conversant.com/wp-content/uploads/10laws_article.pdf.

³ Chadderton, Interview on AIS Collaboratives.

⁴ Brush and Kellum, Interview on The Stewardship Network's Clusters.

⁵ Ewert, Interview on Great Lakes Wind Collaborative; Lynda Gratton and Tamara J. Erickson, "Eight Ways to Build Collaborative Teams," *Harvard Business Review*, November 2007, <https://hbr.org/2007/11/eight-ways-to-build-collaborative-teams>.

⁶ "Building Collaborative Relationships: Elements of Success" (National Forest Foundation, November 24, 2015), <https://www.nationalforests.org/assets/pdfs/Best-Practice-Building-Collaborative-Relationships.pdf>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Gratton and Erickson, "Eight Ways to Build Collaborative Teams."

⁹ Brush and Kellum, Interview on The Stewardship Network's Clusters.

¹⁰ Chadderton, Interview on AIS Collaboratives.

¹¹ Chris May, Interview on Phragmites Collaborative, interview by Sandy Carter, October 5, 2015.

¹² "Building Collaborative Relationships: Elements of Success."

¹³ Kramer and Kania, "Collective Impact (SSIR)."

¹⁴ "Building Collaborative Relationships: Elements of Success."

¹⁵ Penny Walker, "A Practical Guide to Cross-Sector Collaboration," *The Guardian*, July 17, 2013, sec. Guardian Sustainable Business, <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/practical-guide-cross-sector-collaboration>.

¹⁶ Chadderton, Interview on AIS Collaboratives.

¹⁷ "Americorps VISTA Training: Community Organizing Part 2: One to Ones" (Campus Connect Americorps VISTA, n.d.), <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rc=t&j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKewjTweFmmcDJAhVK7yYKHd0VA-QQFggcMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.compact.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2010%2F05%2FFormatted-One-on-Ones.doc&usg=AFQjCNHzwoXJGRZ5nvT5YLcl3D4NDgf5fg&bvmm=bv.108538919,d.eWE>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Angela Buttler, "Introduction to Community Organizing: One-to-One 101," Joint Religious Legislative Coalition Blog, January 17, 2013, <http://www.jrlc.org/blog/569-introduction-to-community-organizing-one-to-ones-101>.

²⁰ Chadderton, Interview on AIS Collaboratives.

²¹ "Collaboration Handbook."

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

- ²⁴ Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, "Channeling Change"; Braun and Jensen, Interview on Great Lakes Commission Collaboratives.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ "Collaboration Handbook."
- ²⁷ Braun and Jensen, Interview on Great Lakes Commission Collaboratives.
- ²⁸ "Will There Be a Dedicated Coalition Staff Team?," Global Coalitions, accessed November 24, 2015, <http://www.globalcoalitions.org/chapter-3/will-there-be-a-dedicated-coalition-staff-team>.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ewert, Interview on Great Lakes Wind Collaborative; Braun and Jensen, Interview on Great Lakes Commission Collaboratives.
- ³¹ "Will There Be a Dedicated Coalition Staff Team?"
- ³² Brush and Kellum, Interview on The Stewardship Network's Clusters.
- ³³ "Will There Be a Dedicated Coalition Staff Team?"
- ³⁴ Brush and Kellum, Interview on The Stewardship Network's Clusters.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Connolly and Naster, "Ten Laws of Collaboration."
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ "Building Collaborative Relationships: Elements of Success."
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Braun and Jensen, Interview on Great Lakes Commission Collaboratives.
- ⁴² Connolly and Naster, "Ten Laws of Collaboration."
- ⁴³ "Building Collaborative Relationships: Elements of Success."
- ⁴⁴ "Conservation Partnership Center: Step Five," Conservation Gateway, The Nature Conservancy, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPlanning/partnering/cpc/Pages/step5.aspx>.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.

The background of the slide features a collection of smooth, light-colored stones, possibly river stones, scattered across the frame. On the right side, there is a white, feathery plant, likely a type of grass or reed, with long, thin blades. The overall color palette is light and natural, with a soft, slightly desaturated blue-green tint.

Chapter 4

Effectively Working Together

Chapter 4: Effectively Working Together



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This chapter is the second of three chapters that provide guidance to individuals who are founding a collaborative and leading it through the emerging stage (see [Chapter 1](#)). There are several management areas that must be considered when determining the processes needed for the collaborative to work together to accomplish its purpose. This chapter provides questions and general best practices to consider regarding the following management areas:

- [Meetings](#)
- [Internal Communications](#)

[Chapter 3](#), alternatively, contains information and guidance on how successful collaboratives are structured and governed. [Chapter 5](#) provides additional information on how collaboratives can complete their work and influence key external audiences. This guidance, however, is

not intended to be prescriptive. Instead each section lists guiding questions and useful best practices for addressing a particular area of management.

Meetings

Collaboration requires bringing organizations and individuals together to meet in-person, via phone calls, and/or online. When meetings are effective they can lead to efficient decision-making and the relationship-building that is key to collaboration. When meetings are ineffective, they leave people feeling frustrated and disinclined to return. Creating effective, inclusive meetings takes practice and preparation. The following are questions to consider, best practices, and resources for collaborative meeting protocols. For most groups, it is important to formalize meeting protocols in their charters (see [Governance](#) section in Chapter 3).

Questions to Consider

- How will meetings be planned? Specifically:
 - How will meetings be coordinated?
 - Who will plan meetings?
 - How often will the collaborative meet?
 - How will minutes be distributed?
- How will meetings be facilitated? Specifically:
 - Who will facilitate meetings?
 - Can meetings be set up to support joint learning, group decision-making, and people connecting with each other?
 - Who will take notes?
- What will be expected of meeting attendees? Specifically:
 - Will in-person attendance be required, or can people join remotely?
 - Who is allowed to speak at meetings?
 - How will the collaborative prevent absences from distracting the work? What is the responsibility of members who miss meetings? What happens if decisions are made in a member's absence? What is the responsibility of a member to his or her alternate, and of alternates to the primary group member, and to the group?

Best Practices for Planning Meetings

Assign Coordination Roles: Efficient and effective collaboratives decide in advance who will be responsible for coordinating meetings.¹ In general, the coordination of meetings includes the following roles, which may be filled by the same or different people:

- **Overall coordinator.** The overall meeting coordinator facilitates setting meeting dates and selecting the meeting location, and ensuring the other coordinators complete their tasks. This coordinator may not personally pick the date or location, but is, at minimum, responsible for helping the collaborative make these decisions.
- **Host.** The meeting host manages all of the logistics for the selected location (virtual or in-person).

- **Facilitator.** Facilitation can determine the success of a meeting. In effective meetings, a designated facilitator is present and focused on the process, which can help ensure meeting objectives are reached, and allows members to freely and honestly participate.² The meeting facilitator's primary concern is facilitating the meeting, not voicing his or her opinions or agendas. The next section, [Best Practices for Facilitating Meetings](#), may be of use to the facilitator.
- **Agenda setter(s).** Effective meetings have an agenda and effective collaboratives determine who will set that agenda before each meeting. See next page for details on how to set an agenda.

Select a Location (in-person or virtual): In-person meetings have significant value, particularly at the beginning of a collaborative's development. Bringing members into the same room can lead to better-facilitated meetings and conversations, and foster stronger relationships between collaborative members. Successful collaboratives meet in-person as much as possible to build collaborative cohesion.

However, virtual meetings are an important option to consider when working with dispersed collaborative members. Virtual meetings can allow participation when in-person meetings are not an option due to distance, financial limitations, or other constraints. Virtual meetings may have drawbacks such as diminished attention span among participants who multi-task while in the meeting or struggle to pay attention virtually; limited ability for members to socially bond or build relationships; and, particularly for meetings without video, lack of social cues to inform the facilitator or speaker on whether the group is puzzled, lost, or enthusiastic.³

Be Transparent: Productive collaboratives are clear with the entire group about when and where meetings are being held.⁴ The process for sharing this may be decided when setting meeting protocols or when setting communication protocols (see the [Internal Communications](#) section in this chapter).

Set a Specific and Detailed Agenda: An effective meeting has a specific, detailed agenda listing both meeting objectives and discussion items. If this level of detail isn't prepared by the agenda setter(s), the meeting may become an unguided discussion without clear results or next steps.⁵ Including the following key elements in each agenda helps ensure the success of the meeting:

- **Objectives/Outcomes.** The objectives the collaborative is hoping to achieve at the meeting, and how they will move the group toward its larger goal, are clearly articulated at the top of the agenda and reviewed at the beginning of effective meetings. If collaborative members do not understand the value of the meeting and how it will further their goals, they are less likely to attend or participate.⁶
- **Introductions.** This agenda item is often overlooked during large meetings or meetings among very formal organizations. Meetings are intended to further the collaborative's work, but they also present an opportunity for members to get to know one another and build relationships. Giving five to 10 minutes at the beginning of each meeting for each person to introduce themselves, their organization, and—especially during early meetings—their reason for attending helps create a trusting, open environment.
- **Item, person, and time.** Each item needed to reach the meeting objectives is listed on the agenda for an effective meeting, as should the item's speaker and time allotment. Assigning time limits may be difficult, but it is critical to respect attendees' time by keeping the meeting within its promised running time. Each item's speaker lets the agenda setter know how much time he or she expects to need and, if necessary, works with the agenda setter to adjust his or her time allotment. The agenda setter may feel pressure to shorten a discussion in order to fit in additional agenda items. However, conversations that are rushed or cut short during the meeting can delay decisions and create conflict. It is better to design a realistic agenda and, if needed, schedule

additional meetings than to have one meeting with an overly full, unrealistic agenda.

Prepare a Structured Close:⁷ When a good meeting ends on a positive, clear note, participants are more likely to leave feeling inspired and encouraged. To facilitate this, end meetings with a "structured close." The purpose of this close is to clarify action items, give all members time to air final concerns and feelings, and suggest agenda items for the next meeting. For regular, large meetings, it may be sufficient for the facilitator to review action items and decisions made, and highlight one positive decision or milestone recently reached, or likely to be reached in the near future, that will remind the attendees of the collaborative's value and success.

For a formal meeting that happens infrequently and for which there is more time on the agenda, a longer structured close may make sense. An example structured close for the last 10 minutes of a formal meeting involves asking the group the following questions and requiring each attendee to answer:

- In one sentence, what was your single biggest takeaway from this meeting?
- In one sentence, what are the tensions (positive or negative) you felt at this meeting?
- What is one word or phrase that describes how you feel about this meeting?
- What actions will you take before the next meeting?
- In one sentence, what is one topic that should be discussed in our next meeting?

Set Ground Rules: Simple ground rules for meeting interactions improve the effectiveness of meetings. These ground rules or "norms" can help everyone in the room understand the expectations and how they should participate. These ground rules will likely be enforced by the meeting facilitator, so it may also be helpful to clearly articulate as a ground rule the facilitator's role as an enforcer.

Example Ground Rules:

- Listen actively
- Listen to understand
- Don't interrupt
- Deal with facts not rumors⁸
- Be present (i.e., when in the meeting, pay attention to the meeting)
- Respect the facilitator's role in moving the meeting forward
- Communicate authentically
- Leave personal agendas at the door
- Ask questions instead of making assumptions
- Keep personal computers closed
- Step up/step back (talk and listen in equal measure)
- Assign action items
- Start on time
- Be respectful when the facilitator enforces the ground rules

Some collaboratives may have an official set of ground rules, while others may set ground rules during each meeting. Either approach can result in effective meetings.

Best Practices for Meeting Facilitators

Review (or set) Ground Rules: If the collaborative has official ground rules for meetings, an effective facilitator reviews them at the beginning of the meeting. For meetings that occur on a daily or weekly basis, the facilitator may be able to review them less frequently. For effective meetings that occur monthly, quarterly, or yearly, the ground rules are reviewed at the beginning of each meeting.

If the collaborative does not have a set of official ground rules for meetings, the facilitator and meeting participants spend five minutes at the beginning of the meeting setting ground rules to ensure success. This can quickly be done by putting a piece of paper up on the wall (or a blank word document via shared screens if the meeting is virtual) and asking the meeting participants to suggest ground rules. A good facilitator introduces this brainstorm by explaining the value of ground rules to keeping the meeting on track and ensuring that participants have an equal opportunity to participate. The facilitator also highlights that he or she (the facilitator) is responsible for enforcing the rules. If preferred, another meeting participant chosen prior to the meeting may facilitate the five-minute discussion and development of ground rules.

Gain Agenda Approval: After reviewing the ground rules, the facilitator walks through the agenda to gain approval or incorporate any reasonable suggestions.⁹ As the agenda was likely set by only a handful of people, this is an important step to be sure members understand the value of the meeting and can highlight any needs or changes the agenda setters may not have been aware of.

Adhere to the Agenda: During an effective meeting, the facilitator adheres to the agenda prepared before the meeting and reviewed at the beginning of the meeting. Changes, however, may be made if the group decides as a whole to table certain conversations or extend other discussions.

Be Neutral: A facilitator's role is to manage the conversation and flow of discussion. A neutral facilitator sets the stage for a fair, open, and honest process.¹⁰ While he or she is, of course, welcome to offer his or her own opinion if needed, the facilitator focuses on being a neutral party and not a content leader. This neutrality will help each member to trust the facilitator to manage the meeting fairly. For collaboratives that rely on an external party or external staff to facilitate, this neutrality is likely already an aspect of the facilitator's role.



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If the collaborative has existing members facilitate meetings, the collaborative will likely establish as a ground rule that the facilitator is acting as a neutral entity and has been instructed to prioritize facilitating the meeting over sharing his or her own opinion. To help encourage neutrality, collaboratives asking their own members to facilitate may rotate the facilitation responsibility. If a member only has to serve as a facilitator once every few months and can participate as a general member the majority of the time, he or she is more likely to be able to be neutral during the few times he or she facilitates. Additionally, if all members facilitate at one time or another, each member is more likely to encourage and actively respect all facilitators as he or she will prefer to be respected when his or her facilitation turn comes.¹¹ This rotation process is most effective, when members are trained on how to facilitate and understand the best practices included in this section. To that end, it is helpful to either train the entire group on effective meetings and facilitation, or for the previous meeting's facilitator to briefly and informally train the next facilitator.

Consider the Time. Time is an aspect of meetings that often gets overlooked, resulting in meetings that start and run late, and don't achieve their stated objectives. When these delays happen, members may begin to feel as if their time isn't respected and they may stop

attending or participating. These challenges can be managed through two key facilitation practices:

1. **Start on time.** Starting on time is one of the hardest rules for meetings. People regularly trickle in late and the group often wants to wait until everyone is present. However, waiting discourages the people who show up on time. If the facilitator starts the meeting on time, every time, an expectation is set for members to arrive on time.
2. **Assign a time keeper.** At the beginning of each meeting the facilitator should ask another participant to monitor the time and give one minute warnings before the end of an agenda item. If the speaker merely needs to wrap it up, this is a good warning. If, on the other hand, the group would like to extend a discussion, this warning gives the facilitator a chance to ask the group formally if they would like to close, table, or extend the current discussion, and thus possibly the meeting. It is recommended the facilitator assign this time-keeping role to someone else, as his primary focus is on facilitating the agenda and conversation.

Best Practices for Meeting Attendees

Adhere to the Ground Rules: In successful collaboratives that have set ground rules (see [Best Practices for Planning Meetings](#) section earlier in this chapter), all meeting

attendees adhere to those ground rules and respect the “ground rule enforcer” (likely the meeting facilitator).

Respect the Facilitator: If the group does not set ground rules, or if it is not part of the ground rules, productive meetings still require that all attendees remember to respect the facilitator. The facilitator is there to ensure the meeting runs smoothly and on time, with an open atmosphere. If the facilitator asks someone to wait and allow others to speak or tells a speaker to wrap it up, effective attendees respect those requests.

Be Authentic: The primary responsibility of a meeting attendee is to participate authentically.¹² Each attendee may have a specific role during the meeting, but their responsibility at every meeting is always to communicate openly and honestly with the intent to share and understand insights, opportunities, and motives. When members speak from a place of authenticity, they are able to share their motives and perspectives and hear those of others in order to find intersections that create new insights and opportunities. One of the biggest dangers during conversations is talking past one another and listening to respond, not to learn or understand. When this happens, conflict may ensue, decisions may not get made, or agreements may be reached that are not fully understood by all parties.

Challenge: Ineffective Meetings

Almost everyone has attended a bad, ineffective meeting, from which they walked away feeling discouraged, disrespected, and/or disillusioned. These feelings often drive people to stop attending those meetings. No successful collaborative can succeed with ineffective meetings. For information on how to create an effective meeting that facilitates decision-making and encourages member participation, refer to the best practices above or review the resources listed in the next section. If the collaborative’s meetings are already in line with these guidelines, but attendance is low or declining, the collaborative leadership and/or meeting facilitators may benefit from asking members why they are disinclined

to attend and if there are specific changes they would like to see. The collaborative leadership or meeting facilitators can then use that information to recommend and implement changes. Such changes may include moving the meeting location or time or increasing opportunities for social interaction at the meeting. For more information on challenges collaboratives often face, see [Chapter 6: Challenges](#).

Resources

- [10 Rules to Make Any Meeting Better](#). A few rules to improve meetings, listed in a fun, graphic format.
- National Forest Foundation’s [Best Practices: Running an Effective Collaborative Meeting](#). Detailed instructions on how to prepare for and run effective meetings.

Internal Communications

To achieve its goals, collaboration relies on active and open communication between members and between the collaborative and any member organizations.¹³ Quality communication can help create good working relationships between members, prevent conflict, and facilitate decision-making. Specifically, communication should help members to be:

- Engaged and committed.
- Genuinely interested in each other’s views, experiences, and priorities.
- Prepared to take their share of responsibility and be held accountable.
- Open to new ideas or to new ways of approaching tasks.
- Committed to making progress, while respecting the needs of the group (i.e., keen to “get on with it” while maintaining a commitment to consensus and consultation).¹⁴

The following questions and best practices may help collaboratives develop formal and informal processes for internal communications within the collaborative and between collaborative members and their home organizations.

Questions to Consider

- How will collaborative members communicate with one another? Specifically:
 - How can the collaborative improve the communication culture?
 - How can the collaborative help members trust and communicate openly and honestly with one another?
 - What sort of communication tools are members accustomed to using (e.g., e-mail, social media or instant messaging, memos, video conferencing, etc.)?
- How will collaborative members communicate with their home organizations? Specifically:
 - What sort of communication tools are member organizations accustomed to using (e.g., e-mail, social media or instant messaging, memos, video conferencing)?
- What systems or policies need to be in place to ensure appropriate internal communication occurs?

Best Practices for Communication within the Collaborative

Well-designed internal communication increases the likelihood of collaborative success by creating a culture that encourages member involvement. The following best practices may help create a successful internal communications protocol:

Set Norms: As a successful collaborative develops, it forms internal communication norms and principles. These facilitate conversation and encourage members to trust one another. Here are a few example effective norms and principles that the collaborative leadership can use to facilitate positive communication and relationships:¹⁵

- **Be timely in communication.** Some matters require instant action, whereas other issues need time for reflection and adjustment.
- **Be consultative, not dictatorial.** Invite contributions and communication from others, rather than only informing them of what you think they need to know.
- **Be flexible.** Keep communication as fluid as possible, and don't make anything too final too soon.
- **Be meticulous.** Date everything and agree with members to revisit, adjust, and adapt as the situation changes.

A few example principles that all effective collaborative members often follow to facilitate communication and relationships:¹⁶

- **Listen to learn.** Listen to learn, not to respond. This helps ensure members hear what is said, not what they expect or want to hear.
- **Be authentic.** The quality of conversation determines the value of the result of that conversation. Remember to speak honestly and with purpose and consideration.
- **Judge lightly.** Judgements are generally based on perception, not on reality. Remember to hold those judgements lightly and be prepared to reassess as members make new statements.

Develop Internal Communications Strategies: After general principles are determined, successful collaboratives develop internal communications strategies and protocols. Once the collaborative sets its strategies, roles and tasks are distributed between the different members.¹⁷

Continuously Communicate:¹⁸ Developing trust between the collaborative, member organizations, and various members is a serious challenge and may take a significant length of time. Members may need several months or years to build up enough experience to see their

common motivations. They need time to trust the collaborative and to trust one another. Successful collaboratives spend significant time on creating an open, communicative environment and are also able to communicate, as needed, to allay fears about the collaborative.

Best Practices for Communication from Members to Their Organizations

For collaboratives with members representing organizations instead of speaking as individuals, there are three key practices for communication between those members and their home organizations:

Ensure Buy-In from the Start: From the beginning, an effective member representative actively communicates with his or her organization to gain support for the collaborative.¹⁹ Some organizations may struggle to commit to forming interdependent relationships with other organizations. An effective member from a reluctant organization is aware of how his or her organization sees

the collaborative and is prepared to explain to both the collaborative and to the home organization why that organization should be involved in the collaborative.

Focus on Continuous Engagement: Effective collaborative members that represent specific organizations continuously and actively engage with and seek engagement from colleagues within their organizations. If the member does not share with his or her home organization, that organization may be less likely to support or take direction from the collaborative.²⁰

Use Existing Mechanisms: Successful member representatives use existing internal communication tools to share information about the collaborative with their home organization. If additional avenues of communication are needed, a member representative may also set up specific conversations with colleagues to explain why they should buy into or continuously support the collaborative.

¹ "Conservation Partnership Center: Step Four," Conservation Gateway, The Nature Conservancy, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPlanning/partnering/cpc/Pages/step4.aspx>.

² "Building Collaborative Relationships: Elements of Success."

³ Nick Morgan, "5 Fatal Flaws with Virtual Meetings," *Forbes*, October 2, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmorgan/2012/10/02/5-fatal-flaws-with-virtual-meetings/>.

⁴ "Building Collaborative Relationships: Elements of Success."

⁵ Kevin Daum, "3 Ways to Keep Meetings Short (Every Time)," *Inc.com*, September 14, 2012, <http://www.inc.com/kevin-daum/3-ways-to-keep-meetings-short-every-time.html>.

⁶ "Building Collaborative Relationships: Elements of Success."

⁷ Daum, "3 Ways to Keep Meetings Short (Every Time)."

⁸ "Conservation Partnership Center: Step Four."

⁹ Daum, "3 Ways to Keep Meetings Short (Every Time)."

¹⁰ "Building Collaborative Relationships: Elements of Success."

¹¹ "Facilitator Tool Kit: A Guide for Helping Groups Get Results" (University of Wisconsin Office of Quality Improvement, September 2007), <http://oqi.wisc.edu/resourcelibrary/uploads/resources/Facilitator%20Tool%20Kit.pdf>.

¹² Connolly and Naster, "Ten Laws of Collaboration."

¹³ Sue McManus and Ros Tennyson, "Talking the Walk: A Communication Manual for Partnership Practitioners" (The Partnering Initiative, 2008), <http://thepartneringinitiative.org/publications/toolbook-series/talking-the-walk/>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

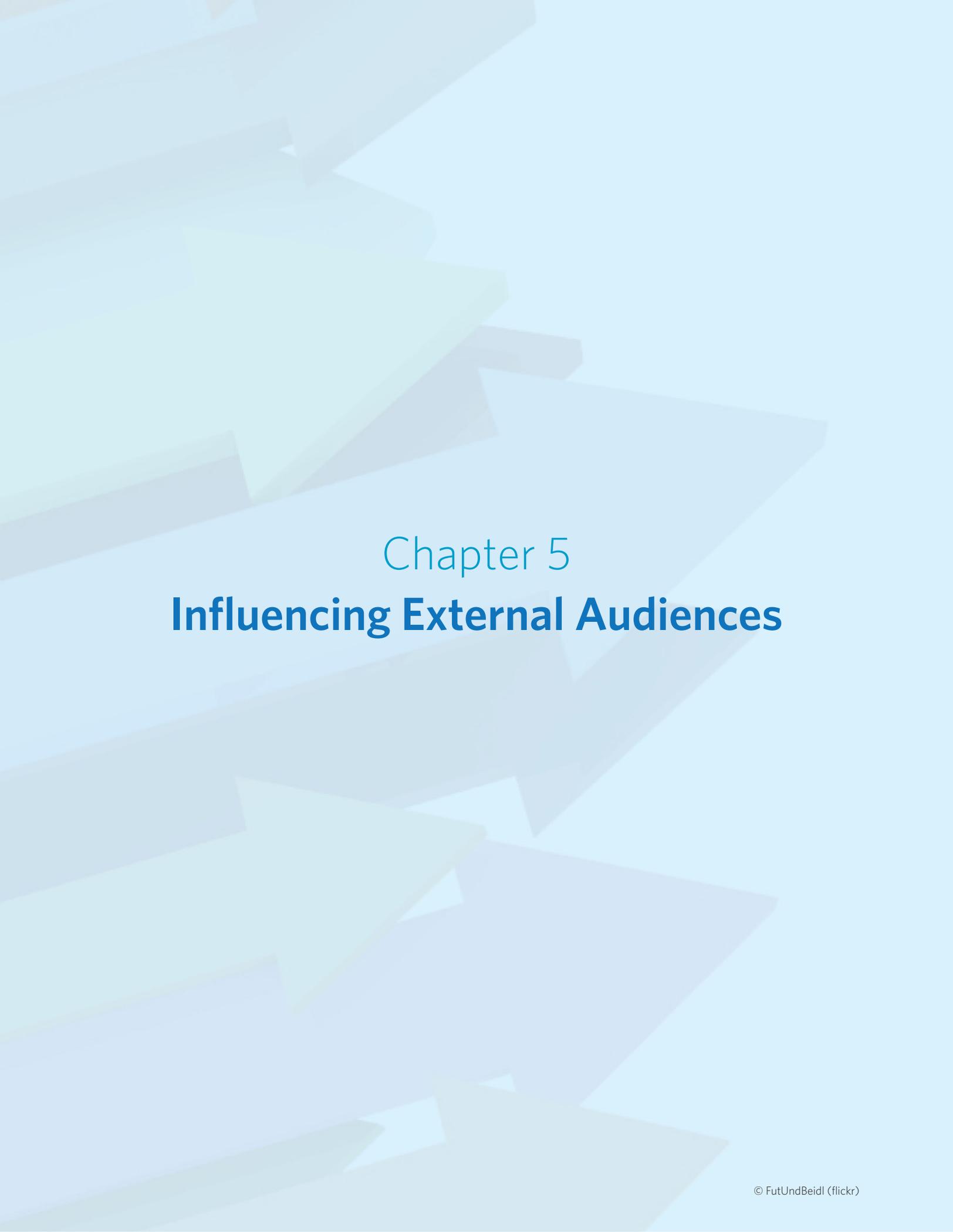
¹⁶ Connolly and Naster, "Ten Laws of Collaboration."

¹⁷ McManus and Tennyson, "Talking the Walk: A Communication Manual for Partnership Practitioners."

¹⁸ Kramer and Kania, "Collective Impact (SSIR)."

¹⁹ McManus and Tennyson, "Talking the Walk: A Communication Manual for Partnership Practitioners."

²⁰ *Ibid.*



Chapter 5

Influencing External Audiences

Chapter 5: Influencing External Audiences



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This chapter is the last of three chapters that provide guidance to individuals who are founding a collaborative and leading it through the emerging stage (see [Chapter 1](#)). [Chapter 3](#) focuses on how successful collaboratives are structured and governed, and [Chapter 4](#) provides additional information on how collaborative members can work together internally to accomplish their purpose. To succeed at addressing their focal problem, collaboratives also need to create mechanisms and guidelines for communicating externally and for taking actions that directly impact their issue. There are several management areas that must be considered when determining the processes needed for the collaborative to 1) complete its work, 2) influence key stakeholders, and 3) take various actions within its focus issue area. This chapter provides questions and general best practices to consider regarding the following management areas:

- [Goals and Measures of Success](#)
- [External Communications Protocol](#)
- [External Information Management and Delivery](#)

This guidance is not intended to be prescriptive. Instead each management area section lists guiding questions and useful best practices for addressing that area of management.

Goals and Measures of Success

Collaboration, more than anything, depends on having measurable, shared goals.¹ Shared goals reflect a common agenda among all collaborative members and should be accompanied by shared responsibility. Setting goals, however, is only the first part of this process. To be successful, collaboratives develop strategies to meet those goals, as well as measures and monitoring protocols to track progress.

Questions to Consider

- What are the collaborative's goals? Specifically:
 - How should the collaborative set goals?
 - What brought each member to the table?
 - What does each member want to see happen?
Where is the overlap between members?
Where is there potential for conflict?
 - How regularly will the collaborative re-examine its goals?
- How will the collaborative measure progress?
Specifically:
 - Will the collaborative use measures that are quantitative, qualitative, or a mixture of both?
 - Where will the data used to measure success come from? How will it be collected and managed?
 - How regularly will the collaborative evaluate progress?

Best Practices for Developing Goals

Develop Goals: Collaboration depends on shared, or at least complementary, goals.² Without shared goals, a shared vision for change, and a common understanding of the problem and strategies, collaborative members are not able to act jointly and achieve the benefits of collaboration.³ Most successful collaboratives will set goals both for the problem they are addressing *and* for the collaborative's success. For example, a collaborative addressing wetlands restoration may set a goal of increasing wetland acreage by 25 percent, within a designated geography, within three years, while also having a goal of increasing the membership of the collaborative by 50 people, or expanding its range to a new region. The following principles may help guide goal setting:

- **Bring people together.** Each collaborative takes a different approach to drafting their shared goals. Regardless of the specific process, successful collaboratives select a point person (or persons) to develop the goals and ensure all members are able to provide feedback and be invested in the shared goals.
- **Align with purpose.** Effective goals are not only agreed upon by each of the collaborative members, but are also tied to the purpose of the group. Together, the list of goals points to why the group came together.⁴
- **Be clear.** Well-designed goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-limited to the overall purpose and vision of the collaborative.
- **Set issue goals.** Successfully addressing a problem requires setting goals for the issue. For example, a collaborative formed to improve the health of coastal ecosystems may set the general goals of increasing the acreage of wetlands, protecting areas from increased development, and increasing coastal species populations. Next, each of these goals would need to be expanded to be specific, measurable, achievable, and time-limited.
- **Set collaborative goals.** In addition to setting goals for the issue or problem, successful collaboratives also benefit from setting goals to ensure the health of the collaborative. Collaborative goals will vary, but may include items such as developing a membership structure aligned with the guidelines in this document within three months, or expanding the collaborative's range to a neighboring geography within two years. Collaborative goals are related to all areas of management listed in this manual, but they are highlighted here to clarify that successful collaboratives set specific goals for their own structure, management, and influence.
- **Set short- and long-term goals.** In setting goals, effective collaboratives set both short- and long-term goals. Short-term goals allow the collaborative to gain momentum and have tangible successes to point to early.⁵ Most complex problems, however, also require long-term goals in order to achieve significant change.

Develop Strategies and Achieve Goals: Once goals have been developed, successful collaboratives draft strategies to achieve those goals and a plan for implementing those strategies:

- **Develop a strategic framework.** The strategic framework is not an extensive plan of action but outlines how the collaborative intends to achieve each goal. Successful frameworks generally include a description of the problem, informed by solid research; a clear goal for the desired change; and a portfolio of key strategies to achieve the change needed.⁶
- **Develop a strategic action plan.** A strategic action plan lists the detailed tasks that the collaborative intends to take to implement each strategy and achieve each goal.

Set Milestones and Timelines: After setting goals (short- and long-term) and creating strategic action plans, successful collaboratives set specific milestones and timelines for each goal. Good goals—especially long-term goals—are broken down into shorter milestones so the collaborative can keep track of progress and hold itself accountable. The timelines for each collaborative will depend on its capacity. In general, emerging collaboratives benefit from setting one to four concrete goals for the first year.⁷

Best Practices for Measuring Success

Measure Progress: A successful collaborative agrees not just on goals, but also on how to measure its progress. Collecting data and measurements enables collaborative members to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures.⁸ It also allows the collaborative to understand the impact it is having and make adjustments. While drafting goals and strategic plans, effective collaboratives also draft a plan for measuring their progress toward those goals. The collaborative can likely refer to the expertise of their members on best practices for monitoring and measuring. Monitoring plans also list a timeline for the collaborative to regularly measure and report progress.

Evaluate Progress: After each progress measurement is made, a successful collaborative evaluates that progress and adapt its goals, strategies, and workplan as needed. Two key principles may guide progress evaluation:

- **Don't fear failure.** If progress reports show the collaborative is not on track, placing blame is unproductive.⁹ Instead, successful collaboratives focus on how to adjust and adapt and recognize that each failure is a learning opportunity.
- **Plan for and celebrate early "wins."**¹⁰ As early measures and milestones are reached, successful collaboratives celebrate. Short-term goals and milestones should have been included in the strategic plan and list of goals. These short-term wins can help build positive relationships among collaborative members.

Resources

- National Forest Foundation's [Developing an Outcome-Based Monitoring Plan with Measurable Indicators and Targets](#). A sample form to help determine outcomes, indicators, and targets.
- National Forest Foundation's [Tool to Develop an Outcome-Based Monitoring Plan](#). A blank form for sorting through ecological, social, economic, and organizational goals. This may be helpful in determining shared goals (comparable to outcomes in these forms) and in determining how to measure progress.
- National Forest Foundation's [Forest Resiliency Indicator Checklist for Collaborative Groups](#). An example process for developing a shared ecological vision for an area, which may be helpful in determining how to develop shared goals.
- National Forest Foundation's [Factors Influencing Successful Collaboration](#). A performance review template for determining the success of a collaborative.

External Communications Protocol

While collaboration hinges on the relationships between members, the perception of the collaborative by its target audiences is also important. Each collaborative will, at some point, need to communicate with external entities to gain support for its goals, share its success, find funding, etc. The following questions and best practices may help collaboratives develop formal and informal processes for external communications.

Questions to Consider¹¹

- What is the collaborative looking to communicate?
- How urgent is it that the collaborative communicate with its audience?
- What are members' different needs and expectations regarding external communication?
- What communications resources does each member bring?
- How many people is the collaborative trying to reach?
- How open to communication is the audience?
- What drawbacks might come from communicating externally?
- What's the right medium for the collaborative's communications? How does the target audience already communicate?
- Is there a budget? Are there timing constraints?
- What can the collaborative gain from receiving input from external people or organizations?
- Does the collaborative want to make the communication two-way and open a dialogue with external entities? If so, how will it do this?
- Who should communicate on behalf of the collaborative?

Best Practices for Establishing External Communication Guidelines

Discuss Early: Agreeing what type of information should be made public, and when and how to communicate about the collaborative externally, is a key challenge for any collaborative.¹² For example, some members may want to begin publicizing the collaborative as soon as it begins to emerge, while others may want to wait until measurable progress has been made. Successful collaboratives decide what information will be made available to external audiences, when it should be made available, and who is allowed to communicate externally. Each collaborative will address this issue at a different time, but it is helpful to start at the beginning by discussing any urgency to communicate externally and deciding when to create an external communications strategy. It may also be helpful to formally agree not to discuss the collaborative externally until a meeting on communications has occurred.

Determine Why to Communicate:¹³ In general, external communication is intended to share information about the collaborative with individuals and groups who might be impacted or influenced by it, or who might impact or influence it. Before creating an external communications plan and deciding what to share, effective collaboratives determine the exact purpose of the communication activity, or activities.

Decide When to Communicate: Different topics will have different levels of urgency and priority levels. In making an external communications plan, the collaborative will need to consider when it is most appropriate to communicate its message. This may require examining the political situation or any communications other key stakeholders are making.

Determine What to Communicate: Once the collaborative decides why and when to communicate, it decides what to share and with whom. The collaborative also decides what logos or names should go on the communication. Here are some common ideas about what to share.¹⁴

- For emerging collaboratives:
 - General ideas and an invitation to a wider group to a workshop or brainstorm
 - Announcement of the launch of the collaboration
- For sustained collaboratives:
 - Lessons from works in progress
 - Unfolding stories
 - Quantitative and qualitative information about the collaborative's impacts
 - Personal stories of change and achievement
 - Influence of the collaborative's activities on a range of audiences
 - Lessons or case studies highlighting the collaborative process—to help other practitioners in their activities
 - Articles in the media drawing out issues likely to be of interest to a wider public

Decide Who: Successful collaboratives establish who makes the communication decisions and who actually communicates on behalf of the collaborative. Refer to the [Governance](#) section in Chapter 3 for more information on how to decide who should make communications decisions. The person(s) making communications decisions will also likely decide who should present the various external materials to target audiences. When deciding who should communicate externally, it's important to consider who the target audience likes to hear from (policy experts, scientists, citizens, etc.) and what collaborative member or partner can tell the most compelling story. Sometimes it may be appropriate to ask a collaborative leader to speak. At other times, it may be more appropriate to ask a collaborative member, who is an expert on the topic or who is directly involved in a project, to communicate externally. For example, if the collaborative is publicizing a new report about the effect of an on-the-ground project the collaborative supported, the collaborative member who led the project may be a more appropriate speaker than a collaborative leader.

A Few Tips to Remember:¹⁵

- When possible, successful collaboratives seek assistance from members or member organizations with communications expertise.
- In general, effective content is accessible, responsive, engaging, fresh, focused, and purposeful.¹⁶
- Effective content and delivery methods provide ways for individuals to provide feedback and get more involved.

Resources

- The Nature Conservancy's [Partnership Center: Example Communication Agreement](#). An example communications agreement between partners. This is more formal than many collaboratives need, but it may be useful in determining how the collaborative will communicate externally.
- The Partnering Initiative's [Talking the Walk](#). A report on communications and partnerships.

External Information Management and Delivery

In addition to communicating externally about the collaborative, many collaboratives are also concerned with the management and delivery of information within their issue area. Information is defined here as data that can be used by those with the relevant knowledge to



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evaluate progress towards a goal. Data refers to basic facts and statistics, while knowledge refers to the theoretical or practical understanding that is needed to interpret the data. Successful management of the data and knowledge related to a collaborative's goals can lead to highly informed and strategic decisions.

The effective and efficient sharing and managing of information can significantly increase the likelihood that equally efficient and effective actions will be taken to address a focal issue or problem. Information curation, management, and delivery can facilitate relationship building and improve communication and understanding between policy and science¹⁷ and between knowledge and action.¹⁸ This success, however, is dependent on the information being considered "good," or salient, credible, and legitimate, by its various audiences.¹⁹

Successful collaboratives examine and analyze the state of information management and delivery in their focal area and decide what the collaborative can and should do to get the right information, to the right people, in the right format, at the right time. The following questions and best practices may help collaboratives conduct this analysis and reach a decision.

Questions to Consider

- What is the state of information management and delivery in the focal area? Specifically:ⁱⁱ
 - How do collaborative members share and manage information?
 - Do collaborative members, or other key stakeholders, struggle to share and access information and resources?
 - Is there information that key stakeholders need but does not exist?
 - Are the shared goals (developed by the collaborative) highly visible to collaborators and other interested individuals?

- Is there a coordinated way to track and display progress against those shared goals?
- Does data align with goals? Is data being used within the context of a goal?
- Is data quality controlled (QA/QC)?
- Is information easy to find and access?
- Are the relationships or connections among information resources being communicated explicitly?
- Are existing information management and delivery systems sufficient to support the collaborative's overall goals and strategies?
- What can, or should, the collaborative do to improve information management and delivery?
 - Does the collaborative have an information management and delivery strategy as part of its overall goals and measures of success?
 - What information management and delivery infrastructure is needed to support the issue area as a whole and to support the collaborative's efforts (i.e., their issue-specific goals and strategies)?

Best Practices for Conducting an Information Management and Delivery Gap Analysis

Conducting an information management and delivery gap analysis allows collaboratives to understand the state of information management and delivery in their focal area, which can then help them determine whether to take action to improve the flow of information. This analysis may take many forms, but a few useful steps include:

Talk to Collaborative Members: Individuals that work as experts within the focal area are best equipped to provide perspective on the state of information management, delivery, and sharing within their sector. If a collaborative has a robust and diverse membership

ⁱⁱ This list is intended to provide a few high-level questions for collaboratives to consider when conducting an information management and delivery analysis. There may be additional questions that collaboratives develop and consider as they craft their information management and delivery strategies.

base, its collaborative members will likely be able to provide significant information on the current state of information flow. Before conducting external outreach or research, successful collaboratives survey their members on how they share and access information and what, if any, gaps they have already identified.

Analyze Existing Data Aggregation Efforts, Online Portals, Catalogs, and Inventories: After conducting an internal survey, a collaborative interested in information management and delivery will analyze the existing information infrastructure, including those systems identified by the collaborative members. This analysis likely includes online research and external outreach to identify and evaluate the information management and delivery infrastructure currently in place.

This infrastructure may include data aggregation efforts, online portals, information or data catalogs, and various inventories. In this context, catalogs and inventories are compiled lists of items, usually of data or databases. Data aggregation is a process by which data, including the kinds listed in a catalog, is gathered and summarized. An online portal is a website that brings together knowledge, data, and information in a uniform way and presents it to a target audience. Each of these pieces of information management and delivery infrastructure serves a different purpose, allowing them to complement each other. By understanding what pieces of infrastructure exist and which ones are considered useful by various audiences, a collaborative can begin to determine its role in the information management and delivery realm.

Talk to Information Management and Delivery Experts and Other Stakeholders: Each collaborative will likely identify significant information management and delivery gaps. However, successful collaboratives will also, if possible, survey key individuals or organizations not involved in the collaborative on how they share and access information and what, if any, gaps they see. This final survey can help a collaborative better identify robust

information systems and determine whether the collaborative has a complete picture of the current state of the information flow in their focal area.

Targets of an external survey may include individuals who develop and manage information or information infrastructure or are considered experts on information management. These individuals likely work on some kind of information infrastructure or are already leading efforts to consolidate information management and delivery in the collaborative's focal area, or on a related issue. Some collaboratives may have members that already have information management and delivery expertise or are connected to experts.

Best Practices for Crafting an Information Management and Delivery Strategy

If the information management and delivery gap analysis reveals significant flaws in the flow of information, a collaborative may decide to take action to improve information management and delivery in their issue area. This generally involves setting information management and delivery strategies (see [Goals and Measures of Success](#) at the beginning of this chapter for more information on goals and strategies). A few key best practices to consider when crafting an information management and delivery strategy include:

Consider and Prioritize Specific Needs: In many instances, a collaborative will identify several information management and delivery gaps and needs. However, it may be inefficient and ineffective to attempt to address all of them. Successful collaboratives determine what information management and delivery gaps are significant barriers to implementing the collaborative's strategies or achieving its goals. They then prioritize that list and decide what gaps to address based on the collaborative's current resources.

Talk to Information Management and Delivery Experts (Again): After prioritizing the gaps, a collaborative may want to follow up with information management and

delivery experts previously interviewed, as additional expertise may help the collaborative determine how best to improve the information flow. (Some collaboratives may have members that already have information management and delivery expertise and thus may be

able to fill this role.) Experts may suggest strategies such as developing new online infrastructure or bringing individuals and organizations together in-person or virtually to facilitate information sharing.

¹ Connolly and Naster, "Ten Laws of Collaboration"; Walker, "A Practical Guide to Cross-Sector Collaboration."

² Walker, "A Practical Guide to Cross-Sector Collaboration."

³ Kramer and Kania, "Collective Impact (SSIR)."

⁴ "Building Collaborative Relationships: Elements of Success."

⁵ Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, "Channeling Change."

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Brush and Kellum, Interview on The Stewardship Network's Clusters.

⁸ Kramer and Kania, "Collective Impact (SSIR)."

⁹ Connolly and Naster, "Ten Laws of Collaboration."

¹⁰ "Conservation Partnership Center: Step Four."

¹¹ McManus and Tennyson, "Talking the Walk: A Communication Manual for Partnership Practitioners."

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ David Cash et al., "Salience, Credibility, Legitimacy and Boundaries: Linking Research, Assessment and Decision Making," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, November 1, 2002), <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=372280>.

¹⁸ Richard B. Rood and Paul N. Edwards, "Climate Informatics: Human Experts and the End-to-End System," *Earthzine*, May 22, 2014, <http://earthzine.org/2014/05/22/climate-informatics-human-experts-and-the-end-to-end-system/>.

¹⁹ Cash et al., "Salience, Credibility, Legitimacy and Boundaries."

The background of the slide is a light blue, semi-transparent overlay of various leaf patterns. The leaves are detailed with visible veins and are arranged in a natural, overlapping manner. The overall color palette is a soft, monochromatic blue.

Chapter 6

Challenges

Chapter 6: Challenges



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Collaboration offers numerous benefits when it is done well, but it also poses significant challenges; many such efforts fail. A few common challenges, and activities that help address them, are listed below.

Conflict

In most collaboratives, conflict will occur. Conflict can be a positive occurrence, as it is often part of the natural evolution of people working through issues to reach consensus. Too much conflict, however, can damage collaborative member's working relationships. Successful collaboratives take steps to give collaborative members an opportunity to address points of contention in positive ways, and do not avoid conflict when it may help clear the air. Conflict can be limited by implementing a transparent process, sharing information between members, asking people to share and set aside their personal agendas from the beginning, establishing a shared purpose and goals, asking members to listen actively, and establishing mutual accountability among all members

(see [Chapters 3](#), [4](#), and [5](#) for preventative measures). When these preventative steps do not help the collaborative fully address contentious issues, conflict may occur. Two practices may help the collaborative leadership prepare for this conflict:

1. **Don't be afraid of conflict.** As mentioned above, it is better to address the conflict than to let it silently brew. Conflict may not be ideal, but it is preferable to having members not voice their opinions or concerns. When conflicts arise, addressing them head on can help the group clear the air and work through the issues that need to be discussed.
2. **Plan for conflict.**¹ Successful collaboratives expect disputes to happen—even if measures are taken to prevent them—and create a process for resolving issues. This often involves having a third-party (likely the collaborative facilitator if he or she is considered a neutral entity) facilitate a conversation about the point of conflict.

Personal Agendas²

One of the biggest challenges collaboratives face is members who only push their personal agenda or “aim to win at any cost.”³ These individuals are not willing to be team players, and, as a result, create conflict and may prevent the group from taking action and making decisions. Effective collaboration (as described in [Chapter 2](#)) depends on people putting aside their personal agendas and finding a shared agenda that can achieve greater results. Successful groups address this from the very beginning and explain that forcing personal agendas onto the group is not productive.

When forming a collaborative and increasing membership, effective collaboratives search for individuals and organizations that are aware that the problem requires collaborative action, and are willing to support a team agenda. Moreover, as individuals are first invited to join the collaborative, successful collaboratives ask them to share their interests and what they are able to compromise on, and then ask them to agree that the group’s collaboratively developed shared agenda should take precedence over any individual agendas (see [Membership](#) section in Chapter 3). If an individual does not agree to this from the very beginning, he or she is likely not a good candidate for the collaborative.

If the preventative steps are not effective and individuals who cannot let go of their personal agendas become members, a successful collaborative may decide to ask those members to leave the group. This is not an ideal scenario, but it is better than having the entire collaborative effort fail. In the end, the worst response to an individual, or handful of individuals, who push their agenda onto the collaborative is to do nothing.

Power Imbalance

Power imbalances, real or perceived, will cause collaboratives to struggle.⁴ When some members are believed to possess (or actually do possess) more control than other members, or more control than the entire group approved, conflict can ensue. This conflict may be



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prevented from the beginning if member roles are clearly articulated and the process for decision-making is transparent.

Lack of Transparency⁵

As with many groups, if collaborative members feel decisions and actions are happening in secret, resentment and distrust can appear. This conflict can be prevented if the collaborative actively shares information about its processes. This may involve taking actions such as distributing governance documents, listing who participates in various discussions, and regularly asking the group if they understand what has happened (see [Internal Communications](#) section in Chapter 4 for more information).

Time Delays

Collaboratives often run into challenges that delay their overall project. While delays are in and of themselves disruptive, they can also significantly diminish member commitment and positivity. Time delays are more likely to occur when projects have large time-scales with only vague milestones. If however, projects are broken into shorter timelines, the overall project is less likely to be impacted by a delay and members are more likely to see the concrete actions and solutions they are taking.⁶

Lifecycles

Collaboratives often struggle to maintain the interest and commitment of their members over time. Members may be very enthusiastic when a collaborative first emerges but lose interest as time passes. If a problem is no longer urgent, perhaps the collaborative should formally break apart (see [Stage 4: Closing Out](#) in Chapter 1 for more information).⁷ However, if the collaborative is still needed, two actions may help manage waning interest:

1. **Set short milestones.** As mentioned throughout this guidance, when members can see the impact of and celebrate their actions they are likely to remain enthusiastic.
2. **Set a re-visioning cycle.**⁸ Once a collaborative has been established it may be useful to periodically review what has happened, re-examine where it wants to go, decide if the membership should shift or expand, and set action steps. Members may be rejuvenated by bringing people together in-person to conduct this re-visioning.

However, successful collaboratives are prepared to lose a certain percentage of members and recognize that this is not always a bad thing. The success of the collaborative is diminished when members are not enthusiastic, or try to derail the collaborative's shared agenda. Effective collaboratives are also prepared to adjust to member organizations replacing their representative, as staff may change within member organizations.⁹

¹ "Conservation Partnership Center: Step Four."

² Chadderton, Interview on AIS Collaboratives.

³ Kristen Sherwood, "How to Build Partnerships That Thrive" (Powerpoint, Webinar, The Nature Conservancy, 2013).

⁴ Ibid.

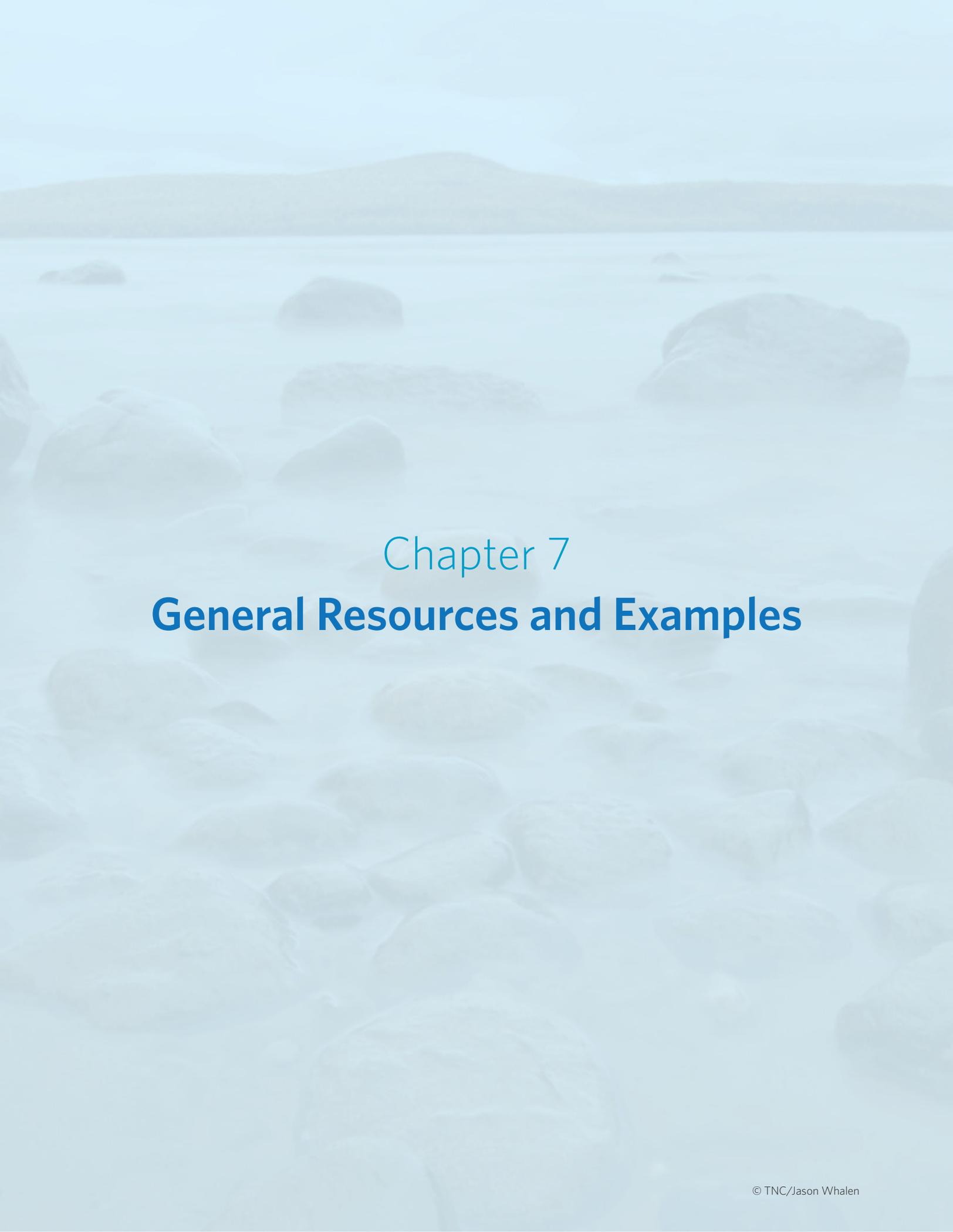
⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Brush and Kellum, Interview on The Stewardship Network's Clusters.

⁷ Braun and Jensen, Interview on Great Lakes Commission Collaboratives.

⁸ Brush and Kellum, Interview on The Stewardship Network's Clusters.

⁹ Ewert, Interview on Great Lakes Wind Collaborative.



Chapter 7

General Resources and Examples

Chapter 7: General Resources and Examples

General Resources

This guidance is only one resource that can inform collaborative efforts and it does not cover all aspects of collaboration. The following general resources may offer additional value:

- Collaboration for Impact’s [Guide to Creating a Common Agenda and Shared Measures](#). A how-to guide for creating a common agenda, including goals, a workplan, and measures of success.
- [Collaborative Approaches to Decision-Making](#). A list of example ways to make decisions. This is designed to inform partnerships, but applicable to collaboratives.
- [Collective Impact](#). A good description of collective impact, which is similar to the collaborative efforts outlined in this report.
- The Nature Conservancy’s [Conservation Partnership Center](#). A Conservation Gateway site that lists best practices and steps for developing partnerships. The [10 Steps to Improve Partnerships](#) may be of particular use.
- National Forest Foundation’s [Tools: Building Collaborative Relationships: Elements of Success](#). A two page quick guide reviewing the key pieces of collaboration.
- National Forest Foundation’s [The Collaboration Cloverleaf: Four Stages of Development](#). A breakdown on how to establish a collaborative. [Stages of Collaborative Development](#) walks through these four stages and explains the documents that should come out of each stage.
- Red Lodge Clearinghouse’s [Collaboration Handbook](#). A general reference guide for tips/solutions to particular collaborative structures or problems.
- Red Lodge Clearinghouse’s [Lessons Learned List](#). A list of lessons learned from various collaborative projects.
- Red Lodge Clearinghouse’s [Training Opportunities](#). A list of both in-person and online trainings covering a variety of collaborative topics.
- The Nature Conservancy, California Chapter’s [Place-Based Partnership Manual](#). A general reference guide to partnerships, much of which applies to collaboratives.
- Wilder Foundation’s [Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory](#). A free tool to assess the success of collaboration.

Examples of Collaboration

- [Upper Joseph Creek Landscape Scale Assessment](#). In Wallowa County, Oregon, a coalition came together, determined stewardship principles, and conducted an assessment of the landscape in order to set project priorities. They split into workgroups based on their scientific focus areas, while also holding a joint conference to review known and unknown information about species and habitat. The assessment was completed and project priorities are now being set by the U.S. Forest Service. Useful points are in the “What Worked” and “Challenges” sections.
- [New Mexico Biomass Evaluation Task Force](#). Following a proposal to build a biomass power plant, the U.S. Forest Service brought a group together to develop the 18-point “[New Mexico Forest Restoration Principles](#).”

Appendices

Appendix I. Summary and Checklist

This is a high-level summary of *Collaborative Best Practices: A Resource Manual Produced for the Blue Accounting Program*. See the manual for additional details.

What is Collaboration?

Collaboration “is a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties who work toward common goals by sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for achieving results.”ⁱ Collaborative groups (collaboratives) are a formal way to sustain collaboration over a period of time.

What is the Value of Collaboration?

- Large-scale complex problems are addressed more effectively
- Additional skills are available to address the problem
- Resources are pooled
- Dense social networks and meaningful relationships appear

What are Key Characteristics of Successful Collaboratives?

- Common agenda
- Shared measurement
- Mutually reinforcing activities
- Continuous communication and trusting relationships

Should You Start a Collaborative?

If you can check yes to all of the following questions, starting a collaborative may be the best pathway to address your focal problem or issue:

- Is the problem or issue complexⁱⁱ?
- Is the problem or issue relevant and timely?
- Are the necessary actors ready to come to the table?
- Will you be able to find funding?
- Are the barriers to collaboration worth overcoming?

What Stage of Collaboration are You At?

See [page eleven](#) of the *Collaborative Best Practices* manual for definitions of each stage.

- 1. Initial Interest
- 2. Emerging
- 3. Established
- 4. Closing Out

Has Your Collaborative Considered All Management Areas?

The following management areas should be considered when creating a collaborative’s governance and general structure. Check off the areas your collaborative has considered and/or developed protocols for.

- Purpose:** Does your collaborative have a shared, clear purpose?
- Membership:** Do you have a membership structure? Have you clearly defined member roles? Do you have a plan for gathering and maintaining members?
- Sponsorship:** Have you decided if you need a sponsor (i.e., umbrella) organization? If so, do you know what role that sponsor will play?

- Staffing:** Have you decided if you need dedicated staff? If so, do you know where funding for that staff will come from? Have you decided what their role will be?
- Formal governance and operations:** Have you crafted a clear governance structure and decision-making processes and formalized them in a charter or other document?
- Meetings:** Have you decided how meetings will be planned and facilitated, as well as what will be expected of meeting attendees?
- Internal communications:** Do you know how members will communicate with one another? Do you know how members will communicate with their home organizations?
- Goals and measures of success:** Have you set measurable, shared goals? Do you have strategies to meet those goals and measures and monitoring protocols to track progress?
- External communications:** Do you have a protocol for external communications?
- Information management and delivery:** Have you conducted an analysis of the state of information management and delivery for your issue? Do you have a strategy for addressing information management and delivery?

For more information on challenges collaboratives commonly face, review the *Collaborative Best Practices* manual, [Chapter 6: Challenges](#).

ⁱ David D. Chrislip, Carl E. Larson, and American Leadership Forum, *Collaborative Leadership: How Citizens and Civic Leaders Can Make a Difference* (Jossey-Bass, 1994).

ⁱⁱ Problems that are 1) hard to identify; 2) lack clear, agreed upon solutions; 3) cut across numerous sectors or geographies; and/or 4) involve a wide array of stakeholders all with their own perspective.

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