

ASSESSING WHETHER TO PARTICIPATE IN A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS: OVERALL QUESTIONS

Assessing Your Group's Objectives and Options

"How does collaboration compare to your other options for dealing with this issue?"

1. What are your objectives? What do you hope to accomplish *in this particular situation* (substantively on the specific issues involved; and/or strategically considering other issues, relationships, politics, etc.)? How would a collaborative approach advance these objectives?
2. What are your options? Considering your interests and objectives for the situation, what alternative ways are there to proceed? If you do not collaborate, what will you do and how will its outcome compare to a collaborative approach? What are the risks of this versus other approaches?
3. If collaboration seems like a promising or preferred approach, how might you maximize your effectiveness in it?

Assessing Your Group's Organizational Considerations

"Are you able to participate? Can you be effective?"

1. How does participating in a collaborative process on this set of issues affect your organization's ability to achieve its *overall set of goals* (including action on other priorities, visibility, strategic positioning, membership, etc)? Are there specific benefits to collaboration?
2. Can your organization commit the time, resources, and personnel necessary to participate effectively? How could you acquire additional resources? Do your personnel have the skills and knowledge to participate effectively?
3. Is your organization and the set of interests you would represent on this issue fractured? How difficult would it be to overcome this fragmentation?

Assessing the Situation

"What is the likelihood that a collaborative process will succeed?"

1. Do the issues needing attention lend themselves to a collaborative solution? Do they require a collaborative solution? Is it likely that a collaborative process will produce side benefits (better relationships, greater trust, greater sense of ownership or likelihood of compliance) that will make it preferable over the long term?
2. Do the other groups/organizations that need to participate in the process have the incentive to do so? Are they likely to commit to effective involvement and follow-up?
3. What issues will arise in designing and managing the collaborative process (including challenges related to convening, facilitation, agenda-setting, development of a credible information base, implementation)? How might you manage them effectively?
4. How can you influence the structure and management of the process to ensure that your organization's interests will be addressed in a fair manner?

ASSESSING WHETHER TO PARTICIPATE IN A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS: DETAILED EVALUATION

Considering your group's perspective ...

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"How does collaboration compare to your other options for dealing with this issue?"

Objectives

1. What are your organization's objectives related to this situation or problem? Consider objectives dealing with...
 - substantive issues (primary? secondary?)
 - psychological issues (relationships, feeling of being taken or left out)
 - procedural concerns (meaningful involvement)
 - political interests (power, relationships with patrons or influential people)
2. Considering the spectrum of benefits associated with collaborative processes (shared information or resources, relationship-building, integrative decisionmaking, etc.), how might a collaborative process advance your organization's goals? How does your organization measure success, and can collaboration produce these outcomes?
3. What specific gains and costs can you imagine from participating in the process?
4. Does fostering and promoting conflict produce benefits for your goals?
5. Are your objectives best addressed through a process that can generate binding precedents for other situations, such as a legal record of decision?

Options

1. What other options exist for pursuing these goals?
2. Does participation in the process foreclose your ability to act in other ways?
3. Does it close down options to appeal or challenge the decisions?
4. What is your best alternative to a collaborative or negotiated outcome? How strong is this alternative? Do the other parties know and understand it? Can it be improved to increase your strategic power in the collaboration?
5. Are there any foreseeable outcomes from participating in the collaboration (both tangible and intangible) that are better than what you would likely achieve through other options?
6. What happens if your group does not participate? What are the costs and benefits of not participating? Will you have more impact inside or outside the process?

Power

1. What are the sources of your power? (e.g., numbers of constituents, expertise, political influence, relationships, authority, legitimacy, information, ability to bind yourself to a course of action, willingness to take risks, ability to capture the moral highground) How will these sources of power translate to influence in the collaborative process?
2. Would giving voice, influence or information to others through such a process be advantageous or disadvantageous to your group?

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Overall Organizational Goals

1. How does participating in this process affect your organization's ability to achieve its overall set of goals? In addition to your organization's substantive mission, consider some of the following goals ...
 - creating and maintaining an organizational identity
 - building turf or enhancing control over a set of issues
 - expanding visibility
 - expanding membership or contributions
2. How will the process mesh with other issues and projects of the organization?
3. How high a priority is this issue/process in relation to other activities of the organization?
4. Is it important for your organization to present an external image as an adversary or a collaborator?

Strategic Positioning

1. What other groups are interested in the issue area that would be addressed by the collaborative effort? What resources do they have to engage in the process?
2. How are you trying to position your organization relative to others? How does participating in this process affect this process of positioning?
3. Would you be comfortable with other groups representing your organization in the process?

Fragmentation

1. What internal factions exist within your organization related to this issue? Is the fragmentation growing? Can you present a united front? Will the factions make it difficult for you to commit to decisions formed in the collaborative process?
2. Are there significant differences among the interests and perspectives of your organization's staff, members or Board that will make it difficult to participate in the process? Can these differences be dealt with in a way that will not undermine your ability to participate? How will you ensure that all constituents and groups are kept abreast of this process?
3. Are there significant differences in perspective based on national, regional or local interests which you represent? How will these differences be integrated in the process?

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Resources and Skills

1. What resources do you need in order to participate effectively? What resources do you have at your disposal?
 - Can your organization commit the staff and funding needed to be involved in the meetings and follow-up activities?
 - Does your organization have access to technical expertise necessary for effective participation in the process?
2. Do you have individuals who would be effective spokespersons for the organization in the process?
 - Do your organization's representatives need particular training before participating?
 - How will you maintain communication with this representative?
3. How can your organization acquire additional resources and skills (people, information and expertise, finances)?
4. Is forming a coalition with other groups an appropriate strategy for your organization in this specific situation? What would be your role vis-à-vis other groups?
5. How can you most effectively utilize local community-based environmentalists as a resource?

Considering the problem at hand or the perspective of the collection of groups involved in the problem...

Assessing the Situation

"What is the likelihood that a collaborative process will succeed?"

The Problem or Opportunity

1. What is the situation? What issues must be explored to fully address this situation? Are these issues critically in need of a solution? Does their resolution require a collaborative solution?
2. Does the kind of situation or problem make it difficult to find a collaborative solution?
 - Is the situation framed as a zero sum problem? Can it be reframed to satisfy multiple concerns? Do your organization's policies prevent anything but a zero sum solution?
 - Is it perceived as a "winner take all" situation or does it have divisible stakes?
 - Is it likely that there are few areas of potential agreement?
 - Is it single or multiple issue? Does it present no obvious opportunities to trade across issues valued differently?
3. How are values likely to be manifested in the process?
 - Do potential solutions require compromising fundamental values?
 - Can you free the dispute from a debate over sacrosanct values?
 - Can shared values be used to guide the process (fairness, common vision, etc)?

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4. Does it require a “political” decision, that is an official decision by elected officials?
5. Are there many possible options for dealing with the underlying issues and concerns?
6. Will it take a long time to work through the intricacies of the problem and find solutions?
7. Does the problem or situation affect many different types of groups or organizations?
8. What are the potential benefits of pursuing a collaborative approach to this situation to the groups potentially involved in this situation? Consider benefits from ...
 - Sharing existing information
 - Developing a better understanding of the interests and concerns of others
 - Building a common vision of the future or a sense of shared problems
 - Building relationships with other parties
 - Conducting joint fact finding to increase information available for decision-making
 - Seeking cross-boundary or ecosystem level solutions
 - Sharing resources across parties to get more done

Getting A Process Going

1. What groups, individuals or interests would need to participate in order for collaboration to be credible and successful? These include groups, organizations or individuals who...
 - are affected by or concerned about the issues
 - have authority over or ownership of affected resources
 - have special expertise in or knowledge about these issues
 - might be a champion of the process, providing energy, focus and motivation
 - could block the actions this collaborative effort might take
 - have a strong desire to participate
2. Do they have the incentives to participate in the process? Have they expressed a willingness to participate? Do they have other, possibly better options (e.g., can they meet their interests at least as well through other channels?)
3. What happens if certain groups decline participation? How does that affect the credibility or potential of the collaboration to have an impact on the problem?
4. Are there huge power imbalances? Does one party have the ability to unilaterally impose a durable decision?
5. Can you find a legitimate spokesperson for the myriad interests and issues?
6. Are any interests unlikely to be represented? Can ways be found to adequately represent their concerns in the process?
7. Are there deadlines to take action and are they reasonable and believable?
8. Is a collaborative solution a priority for people in positions of power (such as a key elected official) or mandated by law or politics?

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9. Is there a convener who is seen as legitimate and will motivate groups to engage in the process?
10. Is there a way to access effective facilitation? Are third party neutrals available or do the parties have facilitators that will be trusted by the other participants? Will facilitators be given adequate autonomy and control over the process to make it credible?
11. Are resources (funding, access to information and expertise) available to enable the process to succeed? can they be mobilized?

Within the Process

1. Can the situation be framed as a problem/agenda that the parties will accept and work with?
2. Is there a common set of goals, values, perceived problems, or a sense of place that can be used to draw the participants toward a shared agenda?
3. How difficult will it be to develop an information base that informs the problems on the table, and is credible to participants? Are there ways to ground the analysis of alternatives in a model or analytic approach that is likely to be accepted by the participants in the process?
4. Is there a way to make resources available (e.g., travel funds, access to expertise) to participants in the process that need them to be involved effectively?
5. How might the process incorporate legal “sideboards” that bound the decision to existing law and regulation in a credible and acceptable form?
6. Will it be possible to manage the environment around the collaborative (the media, nonrepresented public, elected officials, etc)?

Implementing and Taking Action

1. Is it likely that participating organizations and agencies will be able to commit to taking action agreed upon in the collaborative process?
2. Based on the history of these groups, is it likely that they will follow through on their commitments?
3. Can new ways be instituted to bind these groups to any agreements resulting from the collaborative? Is the agreement likely to be transparent and its implementation likely to be observable?
4. Is there a legal structure that the agreements or actions will fit into that will make it more likely to be implemented and monitored? (a court-enforced settlement, an agency rule or administrative decision, a contract, etc)