UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING CRITIQUES OF COLLABORATION

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Methodology

Materials Studied
- Group Governance Documents
- Applicable Statutes
- Academic Articles
- Media Articles and Blog Posts

Stakeholder Groups Interviewed
- Academics
- Facilitators
- Lawyers
- Conservationists
- Environmentalists
- Stewardship Group Representatives
- Recreation Group Representatives
- Timber Industry Representatives
- County Commissioners
- State Agency Staff
- Forest Service Officers

Interviewees
- 15
- 7
- 2

- Has Never Participated
- No Longer Participates
- Participates, Has Concerns
- Participates, Generally Approves

- 42 Interviews
- 58% Response Rate
- 8 of 9 USFS Regions
Process Flow

Simplified steps in overall process for collaborative groups
What We Heard
There is an inconsistent employment of procedural best practices in and across collaborative groups.
Some interviewees found meetings are often inefficient and unproductive

- Unclear procedures and purpose leads to less efficient use of meeting time
- Groups spend too much time discussing issues not relevant to main objectives
- Meeting agenda is not effectively designed and managed
Some interviewees perceived facilitators as biased or ineffective.

“Collaborative groups function best when the facilitator seeks out consensus like a hawk on the hunt.”

-Interviewee
#2: Group Learning

Disputes over substantive issues are a significant source of tension
Group Learning

Many groups do not have a fact finding process

“Things break down over disagreements about what science is telling people and which science is valid… Some participants believe that their values trump everything else and science or economics don’t matter.”

-Interviewee
Some stakeholders believe scientific viewpoints are presented to promote certain interests over others.

**Interviewees said:**

- Field trips make it easier to discuss actual issues in the forest.

- Would like to see more ecologists, biologists, and experts outside of the Forest Service brought to group discussions.

- Science is not always clear-cut because it is often as much about values as it is about facts.

- Science is “cherry-picked” to achieve a predetermined outcome, especially to promote timber sales.
The Forest Service does not always effectively engage with collaborative groups.
The USFS sometimes does not strike the right balance of involvement to empower group progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concerns when agency is over-involved:</th>
<th>Concerns when agency is under-involved:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FACA violations can occur</td>
<td>Group cannot provide valued input</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group becomes a “rubber stamp”</td>
<td>Group becomes disengaged</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stakeholders get left out</td>
<td>Group’s work product not considered</td>
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Agency Communication

- Form Group
- Establish Norms
- Deliberate
- Make Decisions
- Review Progress
The USFS sometimes does not effectively communicate helpful information to the group. Interviewees said many groups do not know:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How long the NEPA process can take</th>
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<tr>
<td>Where their proposal stands in the NEPA process</td>
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<tr>
<td>How to ensure that proposals comply with the law</td>
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<tr>
<td>When and how a proposal will be implemented</td>
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#4 Consensus

Groups often disagree over decision making procedures
**Consensus**

Stakeholders disagree over whether requiring consensus is positive or negative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee in favor of consensus:</th>
<th>Interviewee not in favor of consensus:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Without a consensus rule, collaboration turns into the rule of the rural majority”</td>
<td>“Seeking consensus with a wide audience does not necessarily achieve the level of specificity required to have a level of impact on forest management”</td>
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Many groups do not establish when consensus should be reached

- Most groups did not have procedures guiding which decisions require voting
- Groups did not distinguish between coming to consensus for each step and coming to consensus for the overall plan
Consensus

Some groups will change decision rules mid-way to exclude certain stakeholders

“Sometimes breakdown happens as collaboration goes on. Instead of being inclusive and building consensus, groups start getting more exclusive like “clubs” and they move to majority vote rather than consensus. Then people start feeling angry because they are left out.”

-Interviewee
#5: Stakeholder Input

The collaborative process can result in certain voices not being heard.
Some collaborative groups fail to represent a broad range of interests

**Interviewees’ concerns about representation:**

- Meetings are usually time-intensive, distant, and held on during business hours, which makes it hard for unpaid stakeholders to attend.

- Certain stakeholder groups “fall out of the process altogether,” either on purpose or by accident.

- Stakeholder groups that have more to gain attend in higher numbers, which can create imbalance or isolate stakeholders with less intense interests.
Stakeholders disagree over the balance between local interests and national interests.

Because local communities are most affected by stewardship of federal lands, they should have a stronger voice.

Because national forests are public lands, all Americans should have an equal voice in their stewardship.
There is concern that collaboration circumvents or weakens the NEPA process, or may do so in the future.

“I’m concerned that collaboration is taking on such an important role in the Forest Service and has such influence that it is keeping the Forest Service from meeting the intent of the public involvement requirements in NEPA.”

-Interviewee
Generating Options

What are options that might address concerns about meeting productivity and stakeholder inclusion?

Brainstorming Rules:

• Generate first – evaluate later!
• Be curious and ask questions
• Use active listening

Please see the webinar version of the presentation on the NFF website for HNMCP recommendations
Priority Recommendations
#1: Meeting Productivity

Collaborative groups should follow procedures that make meetings more productive and effective

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<tr>
<th>Group Procedure</th>
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<td>Agency</td>
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<td>Group Learning</td>
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Collaborative groups should follow procedures that make meetings more productive and efficient.

This may include:

- Clear Purpose
- Well-Defined Scope
- Prioritized Agenda
- Group Evaluation
Collaborative groups should follow procedures that make meetings more productive and efficient.

- **Clear Purpose**
- **Well-Defined Scope**
- **Prioritized Agenda**
- **Group Evaluation**

Being clear about the purpose of meeting and keeping that purpose at the forefront of group discussion.
Collaborative groups should follow procedures that make meetings more productive and efficient.

Ensuring that the discussion is within the bounds of:

- the technical capacity of group members
- the needs of the Forest Service
- realistic time constraints
- the group’s ability to find common ground
Meeting Productivity

Collaborative groups should follow procedures that make meetings more productive and efficient.

Group Procedure

Clear Purpose
Prioritized Agenda
Well-Defined Scope
Group Evaluation

Creating an agenda that will:
- appropriately prioritize issues
- produce the most discussion
- be enforced by a timekeeper
Collaborative groups should follow procedures that make meetings more productive and efficient.

**Meeting Productivity**

- **Clear Purpose**
- **Well-Defined Scope**
- **Prioritized Agenda**
- **Group Evaluation**

Analyzing group output and progress to ensure that:

- the group still has a purpose
- input from all stakeholders is heard
- group norms still optimize productivity
Collaborative groups should follow procedures that make meetings more productive and efficient.

Creating the container:

- Establish Norms
- Deliberate
- Make Decisions

1. Harvard Negotiation and Mediation Clinical Program.
Collaborative groups should follow procedures that make meetings more productive and efficient.
#2: Stakeholder Inclusion

Collaborative groups should seek to increase inclusiveness and efficiency in group meetings.
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- Groups should seek to have a broad range of stakeholder representation as possible, and seek to identify missing actors.
Collaborative groups should seek to increase inclusiveness and efficiency in group meetings.

- Stakeholders not serving as representatives can participate in committees and working groups, or comment on their work products.
Collaborative groups should seek to increase inclusiveness and efficiency in group meetings. This type of organization strategy:

1. enables meetings to be more productive
2. reduces the number of hours required to be active in a collaborative group
3. allows more participants to get involved
4. enhances legitimacy of group
5. mitigates against external objections

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Collaborative groups should seek to increase inclusiveness and efficiency in group meetings.