



**Moving from Collaborative Project Design to Implementation and Monitoring
Peer Learning Session Summary
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Participants

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Question: What lessons can people offer regarding the various stages of a collaborative project; planning, design, environmental analysis, contracting, or monitoring?

- *Timeline of Expectations:* While in the design stage it is productive to have an idea of what speed things will develop once design is finished and contracting and implementation start. It is counter-productive to be caught off guard if action begins before the collaborative is ready and organized to move forward. Create a timeline before the process is started and make adjustments as needed along the way.
- *Communications during the transition:* If a collaborative effort is properly structured, communications between the various parties involved should be a continuous process. To be as smooth as possible, any committees that are formed to develop or oversee a project need to be well-informed by input from the Forest Service. Organization and oversight is also important so that information about the progress of the project flows to all parties, miscommunications

are prevented and delays are avoided. Having two people involved in oversight is very helpful, because one can coordinate work in the field and the other can ensure the proper records are kept and paperwork is maintained.

- *Trust:* The longer that a collaborative effort is in operation the more the various parties will trust each other. Investing in building trust is always time well spent.
- *Moving from vision to implementation:* Having a collaborative that is broad based and representative of the various interests in the given geographic region helps to reduce conflicts. When a concern is brought up by one party, they can work within the collaborative group to find agreement with normally opposing groups. Constant communication back-and-forth between these groups within the framework of the coalition is required, and the more communication that can take place before contract negotiations proceed means less conflict during that stage of project development.
- *Applying agreements more broadly:* Some collaborative have been able to reach agreement on specific implementation policies within the collaborative, and then apply those agreements to future projects without the need to once again spend time discussing those issues.
- *Internal Documents that can help a collaborative group's efficiency:* A document that records ground-rules about how the coalition will operate is very effective with dealing with potential problems within the coalition. The **Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition** developed a document incorporating ground-rules that identify how coalition members will interact with and treat one another.
- *Interests, not positions:* Within a coalition, the members should put aside the positions their individual organizations hold and instead concentrate on interests. Positions can be too rigid to allow for cooperation to develop between normally opposed groups, but if two organizations simply focus on their interests, such as better forest stewardship practices, it allows agreement to form and actions to move forward.
- *Keep engaged at every step:* As a project goes through the various stages of development, it is important that collaborative groups stay involved, even as projects change hands within the FS. Documents that spell out **cost-sharing agreements** can be an important tool in keeping coalitions involved. The purpose of such a document is to help all those involved accomplish mutually beneficial objectives relating to natural resource management. Such documents lay out each group's responsibilities and can help projects move forward in cases where the FS may not have the funds available for a project. It is also important for a collaborative to stay engaged to ensure that the original intent of a project is implemented and the original goals are met.
- *Contracting:* The contracting stage can have a large impact upon how the actual project is accomplished on the ground. Having local community members from within the collaborative sit on the committee that makes contracting decisions allows for the collaborative's voice to be heard in an important venue. Getting a variety of local contractors involved in providing input about the contract and how it can be set up allows for more value to be added to the final contract, though it's important to be careful to avoid potential conflicts of interest. Breaking up

of a project into smaller contracts that cover different work items can also help to keep a project's implementation better defined and allow for more oversight of the details.

Question: Does a collaborative group need to pull in people with new energy and skills when at the monitoring stage?

- *Monitoring:* New people are usually needed during the monitoring stage of a project because of the increased amount of work and data created. Involvement of volunteers in the monitoring process can be effective at both engaging people that have previously not been involved and reducing the costs of monitoring. Of course, outside contractors are often used as professional monitors and can also supervise the volunteers in data collection.
- *Moving into implementation without grant funds:* Moving into the monitoring stage without extra funding to hire contractors to collect data can be very difficult. While an all-volunteer monitoring effort can take more time for data collection and compilation, high quality data can still be collected and used. Volunteer monitoring programs can be assisted by a well-formatted framework and the proper instruction on what data to collect. It is critically important that data collection methods are repeatable and objective. Consistent forms that people can easily understand and fill out can be a huge help.

Question: How can a collaborative group handle the situation of federal, state or local government, and/or private lands that are affected by the project?

- *Private landowners:* Usually private landowners are very interested in supporting a project in which the Forest Service is working on adjacent federal lands. The collaborative group can support cooperation by informing landowners about the project and its benefits.
- *Urban growth boundaries:* A very rigidly defined boundary between Forest Service and private land can create an interesting set of problems, especially when there is urban development right up to the growth boundary. A further complication is when municipal boundaries overlap with federal jurisdictions. Extra effort must be taken to ensure that permitting processes are all completed and that project work and recreational activities just outside the growth boundary on Forest Service land do not conflict.
- *Memorandum of understanding (MOU):* An MOU between various governmental bodies (and collaborative partners, if appropriate) can make the process of working in a coordinated effort easier. In the MOU, a key agreement is developed so that various responsibilities are distributed between the participating organizations. An example of this is the National Fire Planning Process which directed agencies to develop MOUs in instances of agency overlap.
- *Overlap of governmental jurisdictions:* Overlap between local, state and the federal government exists in many instances when dealing with fire control and noxious weed programs. When more detailed overlap exists, such as with specific site maintenance and facilities special use permits can complicate and delay the process of implementing a project.
- *Bringing agencies together:* Each National Forest should have a **Grants & Agreements Coordinator** within the NFS. This person can offer a variety of agreement templates to help streamline the process of bringing various agencies together on a single project.

Question: Monitoring: how is monitoring data and lessons applied to future projects?

- *Adaptive Management:* The **Northeast WA Forestry Coalition** is really all about adaptive management and of using every project as a learning experience to be used for the improvement of future projects. Incorporating a mechanism into a project during the planning stage that allows for the collected data to be used effectively is important otherwise, without a plan of how to use the data, the data can become burdensome to try and integrate later on.

Question: How can a collaborative incorporate learning and creative feedback as a regular part of group process?

- *Build into regular meetings:* It can be effective to set aside time at every meeting to discuss issues dealing with how the collaborative can improve their practices. Discussing problems in previous projects can ensure that each project going forward is completed in a more efficient and improved manner.
- *Joint meetings:* Arranging a joint meeting between the coalition and various FS staff that meets on a regular schedule in a formal setting can help the exchange of ideas and information.
- *Partners meeting:* Casting a broader net in incorporating feedback can bring in more information about how a collaborative can be more effective and efficient in reaching their goals. Bringing together the FS, state agencies, and other non profits adds more knowledge into the process. A format that incorporates open discussion with presentations by various groups is one approach.