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## Building Collaborative Relationships: Elements of Success

Good relationships build trust and goodwill and provide a solid foundation for partners to work together towards mutual goals and objectives. Experience shows that successful collaborative efforts often exhibit the following features.

- **Neutral Facilitator:** A neutral facilitator whose job is to set the stage for a fair, open and honest collaborative process can be invaluable. It's important to have someone who can focus on the process, enabling collaborators to freely participate and engage in the work of the group.
- **Joint Conveners:** Conveners often represent very different interests. Joint leadership can set a positive tone for open, cooperative discussion and signal to others that the group is coming together in the spirit of finding common ground.
- **Clear Objectives:** These may include specific stewardship goals for building skills, developing relationships and building capacity. The objectives should answer the question, "Why has the group come together?"
- **Agreed-upon Scope and Timeline:** Agreement on the scope of work, including its scale, extent, and intent, focuses the collaborative effort. What issue is the group working to address? What issues will be intentionally excluded from discussion? What is the timeline for completion of various milestones?
- **Mutual Benefits and Responsibility:** All parties share in the decision-making process and responsibility for outcomes. Roles and responsibilities of members are clear and understood.
- **Respect for the Process:** Even if collaborators disagree with each other's organizations or beliefs, they participate in the process in good faith, and commit themselves to work toward finding common ground.
- **Careful Process Management:** Sound process management includes clearly defined: 1) participant roles and responsibilities; 2) ground rules and protocols; and 3) informal and formal communication links among participants, as well as with those outside of the collaborative process.

- **Good Communication:** The collaborative process supports continuous communication and frequent opportunities to check progress, build relationships that provide mutual recognition, trust, and respect, and improve the capacity of participants to solve problems together.
- **Inclusion:** Collaborative planning ideally should include all interested parties. The process should treat all participants fairly and consistently, and allow participants to consult with relevant constituencies and actively inform decisions and plans.
- **Compliance with Legal Requirements:** The government agency and collaborators must comply with legal guidelines and policies that govern their status and involvement. The collaborators are knowledgeable about legal authorities and constraints that may impact their decisions.
- **Planning for Implementation and Evaluation:** Participants agree on the steps each will take to implement their collective plan, and on measurable outcomes to gauge effectiveness.
- **Incentives to Participate:** Stakeholders in a collaborative effort have sufficient and continuing incentives to participate. Conflicting concerns and perspectives are respected, and power is shared among participants.
- **Accountable Representation:** The participants who represent groups or organizations effectively speak for the interests they represent and are accountable to their constituency.
- **Equal Access:** The collaborative group ensures that all members have equal opportunities to participate, access to relevant scientific and technical information, and skill-building.
- **Transparency:** The collaborative group's decision-making and operating processes are conducted openly and with accountability to every member of the group.
- **Sufficient Resources and Information:** The collaborative effort dedicates sufficient resources to ensure success. Resources may include neutral facilitation, time, volunteers or staff, information, data, skills, money, or a combination thereof.