Tool: FACA Committee or Community-based Collaborative?

Summary
When people come together to form a collaborative group, they must choose how the group will be governed and determine the nature of its relationship with the Forest Service or other agency. Community-based collaborations operate very differently than FACA-chartered committees.

Keys to Success
Thoroughly discuss the purpose and role of the group early in its formation, so the structure is a

“We ultimately decided that a community-based collaboration would give us more ‘street cred’ than a formal, FACA committee.”
— Bruce Farling, Montana Trout Unlimited and Beaverhead-Deerlodge Collaborative organizing committee member

Some Choices in Structuring Your Collaborative
A collaborative effort on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest was considering how to structure their group, and thought hard about whether to form a committee that’s chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act or a community-led collaborative. The discussions resulted in a comparison of the features of each kind of structure.

FACA-chartered committees:
• Are directed by the Forest Service, who sets the agendas.
• Require that the agency provide staff support (capacity and funding can be an issue here) and name a Designated Federal Officer.
• Are highly structured and formalized.
• Have a set number of members and specific categories of interests to be represented. Membership is approved by the Secretary of Agriculture, which can take a long time.
• Are “institutionalized” in that they will live beyond any particular Forest Supervisor or other Forest Service staff’s tenure in the agency.
• Operate using votes. Consensus is specifically not allowed.
• Must give official public notice for all meetings.
• Usually are narrowly focused, and a change in scope requires approval from the Secretary of Agriculture.

Community-based collaborations:
• Are member driven and led.
• Can range from informal to highly-structured.
• Can make decisions however they choose, including consensus.
• Must structure themselves in a way that doesn’t violate FACA.
• Set their own agendas and the group’s purpose can change according to the desires of the members.
• Can involve the Forest Service as members or can develop formal or informal relationships with the agency.

Links
• Partnership Guide Chapter on FACA
• Forest Service thoughts on Collaborative and FACA
• FACA - Key Principles and Practical Advice
• National Forest Foundation Peer Learning Session Notes