Collaboration Handbook

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The Collaboration Handbook provides common sense and practical advice about putting a collaborative effort together and making it work.

Collaboration is simply people working together to try to get something done.

There's no one "right" way to collaborate, but effective collaborations incorporate the following key ingredients:

- The process is open, inclusive, transparent, accessible, and tailored to local needs.

- Meetings are civil and safe. No bullies allowed.

- Deliberations are thoughtful, frank, and never rushed.

- There is an agreed-upon way to make decisions.

- Commitments that are made are honored. Trust is built on that confidence.

- It's a team effort. You win, you lose, you temporize as a team.

Does having a collaborative process guarantee success?

No.

But...

Putting your heads together will feel better than knocking them together.
You'll get to know each other as real people rather than as special interests.
You'll have a much better chance of finding agreement on possible solutions to tough issues.

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What's the difference
between "collaboration" and "partnership"?

It is unfortunate - but not unusual - to hear the words
"collaboration" and "partnership" used interchangeably, particularly by federal
land managers. When initiating a collaborative
group or process, it is important to clarify the difference for participants - particularly
if there is tension or distrust between some of the individuals or
organizations being asked to participate. Entities that would never consider partnering
with each other might still be willing to consider collaborating with them and
other concerned parties..

"Collaboration" is
a open and inclusive process through which two or more individuals or
organizations work together to address a problem/issue that concerns them all and
that no one of them is likely to be able to resolve alone. Participants retain their autonomy, however, and
are not bound by nor legally responsible for the statements or actions of other
participants. For instance, a mining company
and a non-profit organization might work collaboratively with other community
interests to find a way to address fish passage and sedimentation issues in a
stream crossed by a road heavily used by mining company trucks - the non-profit
because of its desire to improve fish habitat and the mining company to avert
possible litigation over the issue. Both
might sign on to a letter of support for a grant being sought by the county to
get money to install a new culvert under the road at the crossing. The mining company might offer the county the
use of some of its equipment to do necessary excavation work, and the non-profit
might organize volunteers to help plant new streamside vegetation. But the mining company could not speak for or
make commitments on the non-profit's behalf, and vice versa, and neither would
exercise any control over the other's activities.

A partnership, on
the other hand, is a relationship created through an expressed or implied
contract between two or more persons/organizations who join together to carry
out some business or personal activity. They
combine their assets (money, property, knowledge, and/or time) to accomplish it,
share in its profits/benefits and losses, and are both jointly and individually
liable for its obligations. They share
control of the partnership, and each may be held responsible for a commitment
made or an debt/obligation incurred by another partner on the partnership's
behalf. Any participant's entry into or
exit from the partnership generally would have to be permitted by/agreeable to the
other partner(s).

Collaborations sometimes lead to the creation of
partnerships, as when two or more collaborators form a partnership to carry out
a specific activity that the collaborative group conceived. In the foregoing example, the fisheries group
and an anglers' organization and a nursery association that also participated
in the collaboration might together establish a program and apply for grants to
totally restore a one-mile section of the stream below the bridge. They would share responsibility for the
appropriate use of the grant money received, for the completion for the
project, and for all compliance and progress reporting.

Help in dealing with specific problems is available from the staff of the Red Lodge Clearinghouse.
Consider collaboration if…
The problem is beyond the ability of a single individual or group to handleMany resource-use problems require collaboration because multiple
parties own the land in question. For example, you wouldn't need to collaborate with anyone in order to reduce the hazardous fuels on your own wooded five-acres. However, if yours is only one of many forested properties in the area, your work alone won't significantly reduce the risk of your house and barn being lost in a major wildfire. Fuels conditions in the whole neighborhood need to be addressed.

The issues are appropriate

- The identified problem is not so controversial or divisive that stakeholders cannot at least reasonably discuss it in the current circumstances Although not everyone in your neighborhood may agree that there is a serious fuels problem, they may be willing to get together and talk about the issue, attend a Firewise presentation on creating defensible space, and tour some other rural subdivisions where thinning has been done. In the process, you all will get a better understanding of wildfire risks and some of the management options for reducing your risk.

- There is general agreement that a problem exists, but there are uncertainties or differences of opinion about how it should be addressed. Even though they are aware of wildfire hazards, some neighbors still may not want to thin trees and remove brush around their own homes, because they aren't sure they'll like how it will look afterwards or are afraid the changes will drive away the deer and elk that they enjoy watching. Their concerns should stimulate your neighborhood collaborative to work with forestry professionals, the local fire department, and others to develop a treatment program that addresses neighborhood aesthetics as well as safety.

- There is general agreement both about the nature of the problem and the means of solution, but for some reason needed actions have not been taken. This tends to be the case when there has been a lack of leadership or money (or both). With the support of your collaborative group, the fire department may be able to get a grant to cost-share the hazardous fuels reduction work with homeowners.

- There is some possibility of taking constructive action, rather than just debating the problem. A local or regional collaborative can effectively address the need to reduce wildfire risks—or combat noxious weeds, preserve farm or ranch lands, restore a degraded watershed, or achieve similar goals. The same group, however, would be unlikely to make any progress in resolving the problems of global warming or world oil consumption and supply.

The time is right

- Certain events can generate a need for collaborative action. The required revision of a National Forest management plan or the impending loss of a major community employer are the kind of occurrences that can spur the formation of a collaborative

group. Sometimes these groups disband as soon as their issue is resolved. At other times they stay in business, bringing the skills and credibility acquired in dealing with that initial problem to bear on addressing other pressing area issues.

- Sometimes an issue that was too hot to handle in the past finally becomes ripe for collaborative problem solving. When the many stakeholders who have been facing off over management of National Forest lands in an area finally fight each other to a standstill, they may observe that the land and the community they all care about are suffering as a result of the impasse. At this point, even one concerned individual reaching out to some folks in one of the opposing "camps" can be the spark that finally turns conflict into collaboration.

- A new, shared threat can bring people together. Sometimes it's a catastrophic natural event (fire, disease, drought, etc.). Sometimes it's someone else's proposed action—an oil company's announced plan to begin drilling operations in an environmentally sensitive area. If it threatens the lands that people have been arguing about, it can catalyze a collaborative effort, bringing former opponents together in common purpose to deal with a mutual problem.

- Changes in government policies, turnovers in community or organizational leadership, and demographic shifts in the community may also open the doors for collaboration. The drivers of conflict are usually specific people, policies, or events. If the power of a driver is removed or weakened, the engine of conflict may falter. This can happen when a change in the electorate turns the "ins" into "outs." It can happen when a particularly vociferous leader retires or accepts a job elsewhere. Or for countless other reasons. However and whenever it occurs, the resulting power void can give collaboration a chance to take hold before a new conflict driver emerges.

Key people/organizations are willing to come to the tableAt least some of the key players from all "sides" of a problem need to be willing to attend early meetings of a collaborative group. Not all elements of the environmental community or the multiple-use community, for instance, have to take part, but some of them have to be there, and the others need to be kept fully informed about what is happening.

Getting started
First check out the available sources of help and advice.

Tapping existing local resourcesMost groups start with what's close to home. Potential local sources of advice or assistance in starting a collaborative process include:

- Existing collaborative groups (even if they don't themselves deal with natural resource issues)

- Educational institutions. Universities, colleges, community colleges, and K-12 schools sometimes have relevant classes or workshops and staff knowledgeable about collaborative processes.

- State or county Extension Service personnel

- Resource Conservation and Development Councils

- Professional associations

- State consensus councils

- Federal or state agencies. Because of the requirements for collaborative implementation of the National Fire Plan, stewardship contracting, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, and other high profile programs, the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and some state agencies are starting to provide their personnel training in collaboration. The Council on Environmental Quality released Collaboration in NEPA: A Handbook for NEPA Practitioners that outlines general principles and provides useful methods of collaboration in the NEPA context.

- Forest Service or BLM Resource Advisory Councils

- Private consultants. Business consultants (especially those experienced with total quality management) and mediation/dispute resolution consultants sometimes have skills in collaborative problem solving. Since these folks make their living by providing professional advice and services, they will expect to be paid for their work, although some may offer an initial consultation at no charge.

Getting specialized assistanceHaving the help of someone who has already successfully dealt with problems like those you are facing will save you time, reduce frustration, and increase your chances of success. The Red Lodge Clearinghouse can get you find the help you need, experienced people who are available to work with you on-the-ground, in your town.

Planning

Who?Not all concerned groups or interests need to be involved at this early stage, but diversity is important, and the presence of key stakeholders is essential. Stakeholders are people who care about and/or will be affected by particular policies or activities. They "have a stake" in the outcome. If your collaborative will be dealing with grazing on BLM land, for instance, it isn't likely to go anywhere unless it includes grazing lease holders, the BLM itself, and those parties known to be actively concerned about current or proposed leasing arrangements. A collaborative taking on issues of new oil exploration on National Forest land must include the Forest Service, stakeholders who object to the proposed activities, and those who have an interest in implementing them.

Of course, different individuals and organizations within any broad stakeholder category (such as environmentalists) are likely to have differing opinions about both the matters at issue and the potential value of collaboration in dealing with those problems. Just because one or two activists are willing to come to the table to begin a discussion doesn't mean the entire environmental community will be supportive, but it does ensure that the environmental viewpoint is represented from the beginning. If no representative from a pivotal interest is willing to participate, it may be necessary to re-think the idea of a collaborative process. The time or the issues may not yet be right.

Where are we going?With your initial planning group
in place, you need to clearly and concisely articulate what you hope
the collaborative will achieve. To that end, you should spell out—in a
few short sentences—your group's goals. This will:

- Ensure that all members themselves agree upon the desired outcome;

- Give you a target toward which an action strategy can be built,

- Help you identify other people/organizations who need to be involved, and

- Enable you to quickly and clearly explain to others what your collaborative is about.

Below are a few example mission statements.

Applegate Partnership:

The Applegate Partnership is a
community-based project involving industry, conservation groups,
natural resource agencies, and residents cooperating to encourage and
facilitate the use of natural resource principles that promote
ecosystem health and diversity. Through community involvement and
education, this partnership supports management of all land within the
watershed in a manner that sustains natural resources and that will, in
turn, contribute to economic and community stability within the
Applegate Valley.

Flathead Forestry Project:

Recognizing the need for
pro-active, community-based solutions to mutually-dependent social,
ecological, and economic concerns, the Flathead Forestry Project (FFP)
has as its foundation three unifying goals: (1) to promote community
trust and collaborative processes; (2) to ensure forest and ecosystem
health; and (3) to provide for a sustainable resource-based economy
within the region.

Henry's Fork Watershed Council:

The Henry's Fork
Watershed Council is a grassroots, community forum that uses a
nonadversarial, consensus-based approach to problem solving and
conflict resolution among citizens, scientists and agencies with varied
perspectives. The Council is taking the initiative to better appreciate
the complex watershed relationships in the Henry's Fork Basin, to
restore and enhance watershed resources where needed, and to maintain a
sustainable watershed resource base for future generations. In

addressing social, economic and environmental concerns in the basin, Council members will respectfully cooperate and coordinate with one another and abide by federal, state and local laws and regulations.

Now that you think you know where you're going, how do you get there?
As
initiator(s) of the collaborative, you will certainly have definite ideas about what needs to be done to achieve the desired results. These ideas can be used to guide the organizational effort, but none should be cast in concrete until your larger collaborative group is fully formed. All participants need to have a part in identifying and prioritizing the collaborative group's goals and objectives.

What type of collaborative group do you want?
The
membership and organizational structure of collaborative groups can take many forms. At the very beginning, however, you only need to make two decisions:

- Should the initial size of the group be limited?

- Should participants be expected to represent specific organizations or interests?

These questions have to be addressed before additional participants are recruited, because the answers will determine not only who is invited, but also what will be asked of the invitees. (The full group, when finally assembled, may need to revisit these questions to make sure everyone is still comfortable with the answers.)

Group size
Some groups feel it's essential to keep their collaborative process fully open, believing that anyone who is interested and willing to participate in a collaborative, non-adversarial process should be welcome.

Other groups put limits on participation, concerned that with an open membership some interests might "stack the deck," sending lots of attendees to make sure their interests have a stronger voice at the table than others do. Group size may also be an issue in communities where large public meetings about controversial topics have in the past become acrimonious and focused on what people don't want. The whole point of collaboration is to try to find positive solutions.

You may find that, in your group's early stages, the problem is getting people to attend-not having too many people or too many from any one stakeholder group. Even if the meetings start out large, however, the time and effort involved in participation is likely to winnow out the less motivated.

Representation
You need to ensure that the interests of all

stakeholders are represented. In deciding how to do that, consider whether asking people to participate as representatives of particular organizations could be inhibiting. Will people feel free to think "outside the box" if they are also responsible for representing a group that has already formally or informally taken a position on the issue at hand?

Some groups recruit people who are members of the various stakeholder groups (to insure broad representation), but specifically ask each person to participate as an individual, not as a representative of a particular interest. This technique can help get people to the table who would not come if they felt their organization would be expected to agree with or support every position the collaborative adopts.

Who else needs to be there?
Some questions to help you decide:

- Who are the existing players, the people who are already actively involved in the public debate on the problem(s) you plan to address? These may or may not be the folks who are quoted all the time on TV or in the newspaper. You need to recruit the direction setters and policy makers within the various stakeholder categories, not just their public relations people.

- Who has broad credibility and respect in the community and/or with key stakeholder groups? Collaboration involves the building of bridges between and among various interests. Some members should be people well regarded and trusted by multiple stakeholder groups—the sort of folks who get tapped to lead the United Way drive, judge the county spelling bee, or serve on the hospital board. They may not be actively involved in natural resource issues right now, but they are generally perceived as having the best interests of the community at heart. They will bring a broader view to the process, and can provide needed balance and a moderating influence when discussions get heated.

- Who are the people or organizations who stand to win or lose the most if current problems are not resolved? These people can make or break a collaborative effort. They have a lot personally at stake in the outcome, and are apt to fight any proposed solutions they believe will adversely affect them. Their concern may be economic (a resort owner or logging contractor fearing a loss of business). Or political (a county commissioner elected on a platform of "developing our local coal bed methane resources"). Or environmental (a non-profit group dedicated to the removal of forest roads to protect water quality or wildlife habitat). Or social (a recreational/sporting use group that wants no lessening of access for motorized recreation). Or cultural. Or aesthetic. Or religious. Or whatever.

- Who has special skills or knowledge that might be needed in crafting and carrying out good proposed solutions? Depending upon the problems being addressed, these may be scientists or technicians of various kinds, old timers who have worked on or observed the landscape

for decades, people who are politically savvy and well connected, people who have successfully confronted similar problems elsewhere, meeting facilitators, people who are good at raising money, and so forth. You definitely need some worker bees—people who have the time and energy to do more than just participate in meetings. You need people who can keep the action going between meetings.

- Who has the power to make decisions and take actions that may be needed to implement proposed solutions? When public land management is at issue, public land managers obviously wield significant power. But they aren't the only ones. Tribes and other governmental bodies may have legislative or executive authority over some proposed activities. Business, industry, and environmental leaders can encourage their constituencies to support the solutions—or resist them. No one can do it alone—and that's the whole point of collaboration.

Widening the circle

When you draw up your list of additional stakeholders to be asked to participate, you likely will have more names in some interest areas than in others, simply because you are more familiar with people in those areas. There are a number of ways to recruit a more diverse, productive group.

For the initial formation of a group and for the gradual expansion of membership:

- Use personal knowledge and connections-This is what you've done in starting your list.

- Interview community leaders and other key players—This will accomplish three purposes: introduce your proposed collaborative effort to opinion leaders; get the interviewees' recommendations about who needs to be involved to make the effort successful; and help you find out how others in the community view the area's resource problems and think they should be resolved.

- Asking those initially identified to suggest other possible participants—When you start talking to the people on your list of candidates about joining the collaborative, ask them to suggest other individuals or groups who would be valuable to have on board.

For broader, less targeted outreach:

- Talks to service organizations, Chambers of Commerce, etc.-Members who feel comfortable speaking before groups can get themselves on the agenda of meetings of the membership or boards of directors of various civic, social, and professional groups in the area. (They're always looking for interesting speakers.) As with the interviews of community leaders, these presentations and ensuing discussions can help your group identify potential new members, issues of community concern, and ideas about how resource problems could be resolved.

- Letters and other forms of direct mail—This approach can be very effective in reaching area landowners, out-of-area special interests, and other categories of stakeholders with large numbers of members not directly known to your group. Some research in the plat room at the county courthouse (or, when available, accessing property

ownership information on-line) will give you the names and addresses of property owners in your geographic areas of concern. Letters can then be sent to invite participation. Similarly, federal and state agencies can give you the names of individuals or organizations (including those from out-of-area) who have previously indicated in the past their interest in the management of local resources. Your letters to these folks should ask if they want to actively participate in the new collaborative and, if not, if they want to be kept on a mailing list to receive further information about your collaborative's activities.

- Media announcements—Press releases to radio, TV, and newspapers, paid advertisements, and participation on local talk shows are techniques to use once your collaborative has its organizational legs under it, one or more designated spokespersons, a regular meeting time and place, and an initial work program that the whole collaborative is comfortable with.

Turning prospects into participants
Now it's time to start
forming the full collaborative group, approaching the people on the lists you have been assembling, and finding out if they will participate.

Who should do it?
Ideally, one of your group's
founders who knows and has a good relationship with a candidate should make the first approach. If no one knows the person being recruited, then someone will have to "cold-call" him, explaining how you got his name, giving some basic information about the collaborative, and answering any immediate questions.

How should it be done?
Extend the invitation in person
whenever possible, and at a time and place the candidate
will be able to give the matter her full attention. Usually a telephone call is made to
arrange an appointment. Some people may want to meet in their home or office. Others
will be more comfortable having lunch or coffee at another location, so they will be less
likely to be distracted. Obviously this technique won't work with out-of-area individuals or groups. In that case, one or more telephone calls may be necessary, generally followed by a letter confirming the matters discussed.

What should the recruitment meeting or call cover?

- Introductions (if necessary)

- Background information— What problems does the collaborative propose to

- tackle? Why is a collaborative approach being used? How does a collaborative group function? What are the group's goals? (Provide a copy of your initial mission/goal statement) Why is this person being recruited (because of some particular skills, a demonstrated interest in the issues, a recommendation from another member, etc.)?

- Commitment being requested— What's the proposed meeting schedule? Will joining require a long term commitment, or is the effort expected to be of short duration? How much time will be required? What other requirements are there? Will the candidate be expected to "represent" a particular stakeholder group or organization?

- General discussion—Answer any other questions the candidate may have and solicit her ideas/opinions about the issues or the collaborative process itself.

- Closing—Ask for an answer. "Are you willing to participate? Do you need some time to think about it? When should we call again to get your response? We really hope you'll join. We think your participation will make a big difference."

Taking "no" for an answer—sort of
Sometimes your invitation
will be declined. The candidate may not have enough time, not be particularly interested in resource issues, or not want to get involved in anything potentially controversial. He may think collaboration is a rotten idea. Okay. No sense trying to drag the horse to water, let alone make him drink. Collaboration works best when approached with enthusiasm, realistic optimism, and a determination to give the process a good shot. But just because someone chooses not to be a full participant, doesn't mean you can't involve her otherwise, even on a passive basis. Regularly sending her copies of the group's meeting minutes, invitations to field tours, and other information will keep her in the loop, even if not at the table.

Meetings
The First Meeting
The first full group meeting is critical. If it doesn't work, your collaborative effort may fall apart then and there.

A good collaborative process
Take time
both prior to and during the first meeting to make sure that each participant understands—and is willing to work with—the key ingredients for a good collaborative process:

- The process is open, inclusive, transparent, accessible, and tailored to local needs.

- Meetings are civil and safe. No bullies allowed.

- Deliberations are thoughtful, frank, and never rushed.

- There is an agreed-upon way to make decisions.

- Commitments that are made are honored. Trust is built on that confidence.

- It's a team effort. You win, you lose, you temporize as a team.

You already will have discussed these points with
potential participants when asking them to become part of the
collaborative effort, but you need to review the process again when
everyone is together. All participants then hear the same explanation
and have a chance to ask questions (and hear other members' questions)
and provide suggestions about how to make the process work better.
Together you define your group's collaborative process and everyone's
individual and collective roles in it.

Open and inclusive
Before calling a meeting, survey your
invitees to find what meeting times and places are convenient for them.
Evenings or weekends may turn out to be better than weekdays because of
people's work schedules. If attendees will be coming from a number of
communities and outlying areas, a central meeting location will be
needed. A conference room at a public building (community center,
school, etc.) is ideal. Usually available at little or no charge, it
should be neutral territory where no one will have a "home court
advantage." Even if you have individually recruited most of your
expected attendees (to ensure that all key interest areas are
represented), your meetings should still be open to any interested
persons—either as observers or, if you have an open membership, as full
participants (as long as they're willing to play by the ground rules,
of course). There can be no hidden agendas. Information about the
process should be readily available and meeting notes taken and
distributed. (Deciding how to handle note-taking at future meetings
should be one of your agenda items.)

Civil and safe
You want frank, thoughtful dialogue among
attendees, but you don't want a free-for-all. The first meeting's
planners should prepare an initial set of ground rules. The whole group
may later decide to add to or modify them, but some sideboards need to
be in place from the beginning. For example:

- Be civil. It's okay to criticize ideas, but not the people who offer them.

- Listen actively. Think about what the current speaker is saying, not what you want to say next.

- Keep an open mind.

- Focus on finding solutions, not fixing blame.

- Keep cell phones turned off (or on vibrate).

- Enjoy.

Invitees should be given copies of the ground rules
prior to the meeting, and should know that participants who do not
follow them are likely to forfeit their right to participate.

Thoughtful and frank
If your problems were simple ones, there
would probably be no need for a collaborative process to deal with
them. As it is, however, there may have been years of strife among the

various stakeholders. Don't expect too much too soon. Though people will be anxious to produce results, you need to avoid setting unrealistic timelines and creating undue pressure for action. Patience has to be the order of the day until participants become more comfortable with each other and have developed some trust in each other's good faith. Whoever facilitates the meeting will have to be attentive to individual and group dynamics, being careful not to let some participants dominate the discussion and making sure that all viewpoints are heard.

A way to make decisions
Participants need to be assured that no one will get railroaded into a decision, and that any participant's legitimate concerns will be addressed before the group moves beyond discussion to action. Some collaborative groups require full consensus; they take no action unless all members of the group fully support it. Most, however, find general consensus (or informed consent) works best. Under that approach, some participants may not be ready to endorse without reservation a particular course of action, but they have enough confidence in the judgment and good faith of the rest of the participants to be willing to let the action be taken. Frequently this results in the creation of demonstration or trial projects to "field test" the solution being considered. Voting is generally the last resort of a collaborative group, and in that case usually a super-majority of participants (two-thirds, three-quarters, or more) must vote in favor of an action for it to be undertaken.

Commitments and trust
Trust is not something that can be planned for or demanded. It will develop, or it won't, depending upon how participants interact with each other. One thing that must be avoided at all costs is broken promises. If someone agrees to do something; he must follow through. Participants who are employees of agencies, groups, or companies must be particularly careful not to promise that their organization will do something unless they can ensure that it will happen. It is far better to say "I will try to do such-and-such," than to make a commitment and later have to back out of it.

A team effort
Participants have to share responsibility for the success of the effort, understanding that periodic disagreements and frustrations are a normal part of the collaborative problem solving process. Some groups ask that participants agree not to withdraw from the process until they have given it a fair chance to work. People are encouraged to voice any concerns they have early on, so that the group can try to resolve problems before they disrupt the collaborative.

Discretion, good faith, and confidentiality
At first, participants may hesitate to raise difficult issues, explore new ideas, or share their opinions frankly at meetings. They may worry that their comments might be attacked, deliberately misconstrued, or quoted out of context in another setting. They won't yet have a good sense of how far they can trust each other and each other's motives. Building the level of trust that inspires candor,

permits risk-taking, and begins creating bridges among stakeholder interests requires that all participants exercise discretion and good faith in discussing with non-participants what occurs at collaborative group meetings.

Because regular collaborative group meetings should be open and their minutes regularly distributed, information that has been shared in confidence should never be discussed at them. If at some point the use of confidential or proprietary information becomes critical to the achievement of your group's goals, that need will have to be accommodated. For instance, a special closed meeting could be called just to discuss the sensitive information, or a subcommittee (whose members are willing to sign appropriate non-disclosure agreements) could be set up to receive and work with the material. Limiting the number of individuals who have access to sensitive information will lessen the likelihood of a breach of confidentiality.

Time and location

For the first meeting, find a time and location that are convenient for as many as possible of the expected participants. Frequently this means an evening or weekend meeting. Wherever the meeting is, it should be on neutral ground—not in the conference room of a mining company, environmental organization, or resource management agency, for instance. Community buildings (firehalls, libraries, schools, etc.) usually offer meeting space at little or no charge.

Arrangements

The room should be set up so that participants can see each other as they talk and listen. Ideally, this means arranging tables and chairs in a large circle, square, or "U" (conference style). Avoid classroom-type seating, with people in rows facing the front of the room. Although everyone could just sit in chairs arranged in a circle, it is helpful to have table space for people's papers, maps, snacks, or whatever. A flip chart or blackboard should be available. Providing coffee, cookies, or other refreshments is always a good idea, and helps create the informal, welcoming atmosphere you are striving for.

Facilitation

Some collaboratives use a professional facilitator (or at least a moderator who is not also a stakeholder) to help them ensure their first meeting runs smoothly. A facilitator keeps the process on track-making sure the group adheres to the meeting ground rules and follows the collaborative process. It helps if the facilitator has some knowledge of the topics being discussed, although that is not essential. Her function is to move the group through the agenda, making sure the discussion stays on track, that no one monopolizes the group's time, that all participants have an opportunity to speak, and so forth. If the group hits some sort of roadblock, she can suggest ways they might procedurally and collaboratively address it. She should not participate in the group discussions or offer opinions on any substantive issue.

Having a neutral facilitator reassures potential participants that the meeting will be run even-handedly, that the facilitator will have no interest in promoting one stakeholder interest over another. Whether or not to use a facilitator should be decided based on the anticipated level of animosity or conflict at the meeting, expressed concerns about neutrality, existing facilitation skills within the group, and the

ability to pay for outside help. (Some groups have been fortunate
enough to find qualified facilitators willing to donate all or part of
their services.)

Agenda
There should be a written agenda
for the meeting, and it should be followed. Participants appreciate
meetings that start and end on time. Generally a first meeting will run
two-to-four hours, although subsequent sessions are usually shorter. It
should be mainly devoted to self-introductions, discussion of
collaboration in general and the goals of your collaborative in
particular, and decisions on some operational issues (frequency and
location of future meetings, facilitation, recording, etc.). Even if
one or more outside speakers are invited, allow plenty of time for
group discussion.

Minutes
Let everyone know that minutes
are being kept, and decide whether specific comments should be
attributed to individuals ("Joe Smith suggested that,,,,,") or be
unattributed ("It was suggested that...."). If possible, find someone
who will not be a regular participant in the collaborative to take
notes at the first meeting. That way, all participants can concentrate
on the meeting, without one of them having to worry about capturing it
on paper. You could electronically record the meeting and have someone
write the minutes up later, but that would be a daunting job. (Video or
audio taping should never occur unless everyone is comfortable with
it.) Make sure you get everyone's postal and/or email address, and find
out whether they prefer to receive their minutes electronically or in
hard copy. The minutes should be distributed shortly after the meeting,
and certainly before the next meeting.

Subsequent Meetings
A good collaborative process
Over time
your group will add to or refine these "key ingredients" of
collaboration as you craft a process suited to your unique stakeholders
and circumstances. For instance, you will start making decisions at the
first meeting (where and when to have the next meeting, whether to have
an "outside" facilitator at future meetings, etc.). Almost always these
initial procedural decisions are automatically made by "full" or
"general" consensus rather than by voting. Before the group moves on to
tougher, more potentially divisive substantive issues, however, there
will have to be considerable attention devoted to determining how the
group will make its operational and policy decisions.

Ground rules
Ground rules should be
prominently posted, and participants should be reminded of them at the
beginning of each meeting—at least until their use has become second
nature to the group. (New members should always have the rules clearly
explained to them before they join.) At first, whoever is chairing the
meeting will probably have to be the one who "enforces" the ground
rules, calling people to order quickly if they start to deviate from
them. As everyone gets more comfortable with the rules and with each
other, your group should become self-monitoring, able to handle capably
any occasional outbursts of anger or frustration (and there will be
some).

Discretion, good faith, and confidentiality

Some
lapses are bound to occur. A participant might prematurely "announce" to a reporter a proposed action that the group has only begun to consider and about which there is little agreement. Someone might publicly mischaracterize a statement made by another member at a meeting. When this happens, the group needs to decide if any action is necessary. Would it be better to issue a clarification statement, or just let the hubbub (if any) blow over? Deliberate malice or a failure to act or speak in good faith cannot be overlooked. The group needs to recognize and deal with them quickly, and (depending upon their severity and potential impact on the collaborative process itself), may want to consider terminating the offender(s)' right to continue participating in the group. Breaches of confidentiality should automatically trigger expulsion, because they could compromise the entire collaborative effort.

Time and location

Groups whose
participants live in relatively close proximity usually over time find a comfortable, central meeting place (generally, but not always, on neutral ground) and convene there regularly. Groups whose members are drawn from across a large geographic area sometimes opt for a single, central location, but more frequently rotate their meetings among different communities around the area. Care should always be taken to make sure that meeting times, locations, and/or durations don't effectively exclude any important stakeholder interests from participation. People who have trouble getting time off work for week-day meetings or who will suffer lost wages if they miss work will be more likely to attend weekend or evening sessions.

Facilitation

Some groups have a
professional facilitator at all meetings. Others use one during the early stages of the collaboration and then, when participants are working well with each other, move to self-facilitation. Still others self-facilitate from Day One. Local circumstances and resources should guide your group's decision in this matter.

Agenda

All meetings should have and
follow an agenda. Generally a one- to two-hour work session is preferred. Much beyond that and people can get cranky or distracted. (Field trips are an exception.)

Minutes

Whether taken by a group
member or hired recorder, meeting minutes/notes need to be prepared and distributed in a timely fashion (at least prior to the next meeting). For people who missed a meeting, the notes let them know what happened. For people who were there, they serve as reminders of decisions or commitments made, responsibilities, assigned, etc. Distributing minutes via email is fast and saves postage, but some hard copies will be needed for people who don't have email service and for the permanent record of the group's activities.

Strategic Planning

A good strategic plan is a living document that you
add to, amend, and refine as your collaborative effort progresses. Usually it has six major (although not necessarily lengthy) sections:

- mission statement

- situation/problem description

- goals (relative to the situation/problem)

- work plan (activities you will undertake to achieve the goals)

- multiparty monitoring and evaluation plan

- adaptation/revision procedures

At first your plan will be little more than an
outline. As the collaborative progresses, you will begin to fill it in,
adding or changing specifics as you go.

Mission Statement
Your mission
statement articulates the group's collective purpose—its vision of what
it hopes to achieve. It provides a reference point to return to
periodically throughout the process to verify that the group is still
on track, still consistent in its purpose, expectations, and
activities. Because mission statements are adopted at the beginning of
the collaborative process, they frequently are of the "mom and apple
pie" variety, dedicating a group's efforts to "promoting ecosystem
health and diversity," "maintaining a sustainable watershed resource
for future generations," or something equally agreeable to all. Key
terms such as "ecosystem health," "diversity," or "sustainable" are
usually left undefined, and few or no details are given about how those
conditions will be achieved and maintained. That's okay. You've defined
your mission. The next step is to figure out how to achieve it.

Situation/Problem Description

Assessing the current situation
Whatever resources are
at issue—forests, minerals, rangeland, open space, etc.-it's important
that your group take an up-close look at them as soon as possible,
hopefully no later than the second or third meeting. Participants will
gain an increased understanding of each other's views by walking the
ground together and sharing their opinions about present ecosystem
conditions, how nature and past management have contributed to those
conditions, why current management and/or use should or shouldn't
change, and the potential impacts of proposed changes. While the
discussion will highlight participants' differences, it is bound to
reveal some (sometimes surprising) areas of agreement as well. Those
provide the starting point for the collaborative's substantive
deliberations.

Identifying concerns
In some cases, it may be
relatively easy for everyone to agree that something should be done
about a particular condition-an impaired stream, for instance—but there
may be widely varying opinions about caused the situation (and,
therefore, how to remedy it). Was the road through the area constructed
too close to the creek? Was the road poorly constructed? Is the problem

the logging trucks that use the road? Or the off-road vehicles that don't stay on the road? Or is the problem not related to the road at all?

In other cases, what one person sees as a problem may be viewed completely differently
by someone else. Is an increased incidence of bark beetles a sign of poor forest
management—or a natural result of the ongoing evolution of the ecosystem? Is a coal
bed methane development a terrific economic opportunity for the community—or a
threat to local water resources? Or both? In the beginning it isn't necessary to decide. You're just trying to get all the issues on the table.

Setting priorities
If the collaborative was formed to
deal with a single issue, this isn't a problem. If you're faced with a variety of issues, however, the group may have to make some choices about which ones to tackle first. Among the factors to consider are the relative magnitude and urgency of a problem, the level of interest that group members have in it, the time and other resources they have available to devote to the effort, and the likelihood of success. If some issues appear so contentious that they could easily fracture the group, put them aside for a while, and work on problems with more potential for collaborative solution. Later, when the group has become more cohesive and a greater level of mutual trust and confidence has been built, you can come back to those volatile issues.

Gaining knowledge
Once priority issues are selected,
everyone needs to become better informed about them. It's likely there will be varying levels of existing knowledge within the group. Some people may be intimately familiar with an issue, and even have special technical competence related to it. Others may have little or no specific knowledge, but a great sense of concern. A base of common understanding needs to be built, and that involves mutual learning.

There is no shortage of information available. The Internet
has put at our fingertips more
than we can ever read, let alone absorb. So the group needs to decide what physical and
socio-economic information is required to adequately understand the problem and figure
out how it might be resolved. Some information may be developed internally (examples
would be performing on-the-ground vegetation plot inventories or conducting opinion
surveys of neighboring landowners). Relevant information may also be available from
other local sources—the Conservation District, Chamber of Commerce, county planning
office, etc. If specific laws or regulations govern the management of the area of concern, you will need to become familiar with them and how they could affect the group's options and methods of approach

The group should talk (preferably on-site) with people who have particular knowledge of the resources at issue-specialists from government, industry, academia, or the non-profit sector. Don't overlook valuable local/indigenous knowledge—information gained by those who have long lived and/or worked on the land. If there have been relevant scientific studies done, you will want to look at their results and perhaps meet with the researchers to discuss their findings. Many collaborative groups encounter "dueling scientists"—researchers who have studied the same problems, areas, events, or conditions but produced inconsistent analyses or drawn significantly differing conclusions. The collaborative's dilemma will be further complicated if one key stakeholder group has adopted the findings of a particular study to justify its position, while an opposing group offers in rebuttal the evidence of a study that came to a much different conclusion. How to proceed?

The Red Lodge Clearinghouse can connect you to specialists who can help you sort through the scientific evidence. They can also link you with researchers or research institutions who will work with you in what is called "civic science" or "participatory science." That is a process in which communities, stakeholder groups, and/or others who need research information to help them make sound decisions work with scientists in identifying research needs, designing the study questions, helping conduct the research (through established protocols), and analyzing the results.

Defining the problems

When your group feels comfortable that it has a good understanding of the issues, it should be ready to convert its "issues of concern" into clear problem statements, identifying not just the symptoms of problems, but their root causes.

Goals

Goals are the benchmarks against which the collaborative will measure its success. Some goals relate primarily to physical or quantitative accomplishments (ex., restoring a watershed, acquiring conservation easements to ensure that prime farmland will not be converted to non-agricultural use, or creating 50 new eco-tourism jobs locally). Others may be more qualitative and less tangible—accomplishments such as reducing tension and conflict in the community or improving relationships among stakeholder interest groups.

Goals can be (and frequently are) very ambitious, but they should not be unrealistic. Thoroughly discussing and coming to mutual agreement on the group's goals will help forestall the problems and frustrations that arise if individual participants have differing expectations of what the collaborative will accomplish. This doesn't mean that the group must decide at the beginning exactly how it will achieve each goal, but simply that goals must be carefully formulated.

Work Plan

Activities

Having set goals, the group needs to figure out how to reach them. This involves the

formulation and evaluation of alternative action strategies, and the selection of the one(s) you will pursue. The Red Lodge Clearinghouse website offers a variety of resources. The "Stories" section, for instance, has both concise summaries and in-depth case studies of resource use conflicts around the West and of collaborative groups working to resolve them. Contact information is provided so that you can reach key people in areas of particular interest and get further details. The Clearinghouse staff can also put you in touch with peers around the region who have dealt with situations similar to yours.

Resources

Deciding on the specific actions to take to achieve your goals requires careful consideration of the available resources—time, money, potential allies and partners, fixed assets (land, buildings, equipment), etc.—needed to carry them out. Some your area probably already has, and others you will need to find. (The next chapter discusses ways to acquire needed funding and other implementation tools.)

Responsibilities

Individuals in (or working closely with) the collaborative should be assigned responsibility for carrying out specific action items. Subcommittees are frequently formed, with members sharing responsibility for the work. The full collaborative should be apprised regularly of how each activity is progressing, and be involved in making any necessary major adjustments in activities or responsibilities.

Schedules

The action plan should include estimated dates by which each activity is to be completed. Some groups find it helpful to include a flowchart that shows the timing of each action item relative to the others.

Multiparty Monitoring and Evaluation (MM&E)

Why?

Regular MM&E of activities and outcomes provides the group valuable information about its progress, the effectiveness and impacts of particular strategies or actions, and early warnings of potential problems. MM&E also ensures the accountability of the group, and enhances its public credibility. Many groups also conduct MM&E of the collaborative process itself. Keeping an eye on your process helps you identify potential problems (declining attendance at meetings, non-participation by a particular stakeholder interest, difficulty in arriving at decisions, participant burnout, etc.) and take prompt remedial action.

Who?

An MM&E effort includes not only participants in the collaborative, but also persons outside it. Depending on what is being monitored, some scientific or technical skills may be required. Involving critics and skeptics makes it certain that tough questions will be asked. Similarly, having some monitors who did not participate in planning or carrying out the collaborative's work guards against a bias for success, for seeing what you want to see.

What?

The content of your MM&E effort will
necessarily be project-specific. Generally it will include three types
of monitoring—implementation, effectiveness, and validation.
Implementation monitoring verifies that what was going to be done, was
done—that the work followed the group's plan. Effectiveness monitoring
looks at results. Did the work done produce the planned quantitative or
qualitative outcomes? Finally, validation monitoring helps the group
assess whether it correctly identified the root causes of problems and
formulated the appropriate strategies to achieve them. Did the work
make a positive difference? Did it reduce or eliminate the problem?

When?
The MM&E plan should be developed
concurrently with the development of the work
program. The MM&E team itself should be recruited early in the
process, so that team
members who are not participants in the collaborative still have an
opportunity to
participate in MM&E plan development and the selection of
appropriate MM&E indicators and methodologies. The MM&E work
begins prior to the commencement of project activities, with the
establishment or verification of baseline information. Follow-on
monitoring is conducted in stages—during project implementation (so
that in-process adaptations can be made as needed), closely following
implementation (to determine immediate impacts), and at appropriate
intervals for some period thereafter (to assess long-term impacts).

How?
The process of deciding "how" to monitor
something provides a useful reality check on the "what" planned to be
monitored. If it cannot be assessed in an accurate, replicable manner,
it is probably not a suitable MM&E indicator. If the financial or
technical capacity needed to monitor an indicator is beyond the group's
current capacity, it will either have to be dropped or efforts made to
secure the needed resources. If there are so many proposed indicators
that the team would not be able to give each the attention needed, some
winnowing may be needed. The collaborative may have to differentiate
between what it needs to know, and what it would simply be nice to
know, and prioritize resources to address the former. The Red Lodge
Clearinghouse can help you with the development of your MM&E
effort. More detailed references on MM&E planning and
implementation specific to natural resource projects, as well as
representative MM&E reports from existing collaboratives are
available as well.

Gathering ResourcesThe resources a collaborative requires will vary
depending upon the stage of the group's development and the activities
it intends to carry out. The tools you employ to acquire those
resources should be appropriate to your community and action strategy,
and fundraising methods should be selected with an eye to the time and
energy they will require relative to the returns you expect them to
produce.

Contributions from participants
At start-up, your needs will
be minimal—a place to meet, refreshments (if you serve them),
photocopying and postage for the distribution of minutes, and some
telephone and computer services. Often groups just ask participants
periodically to put whatever cash they can into a "kitty," which is

used to pay the collaborative's day-to-day expenses. The kitty is usually supplemented by a variety of in-kind contributions—perhaps donated facilitation services, or the use of a photocopying machine or telephone at someone's office

If your group needs to hire a professional facilitator or has other significant regular expenses, then it may be necessary to seek outside support immediately.

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Local fund solicitations

Individuals,
businesses, and other organizations in your area with an interest in seeing your collaborative succeed are a good potential source of assistance. The amount of money you can generate locally will depend to an extent on the size of your community or service area and its economic well-being, but until you ask, you will never know what you might receive.

Asking people for donations should be approached in much the same way as you recruited participants for the collaborative. If a group member knows and has a good relationship with a potential donor, that member should make the solicitation call or visit.

The conversation should begin with a brief description of the collaborative, its participants, and its purpose. You may want to have an inexpensive brochure or other handout that includes the group's mission statement, a list of activities underway or proposed, and some information on how donated funds will be used. Explain the benefits you believe the donor or the community will receive from the collaborative's work—a restored landscape, reduced risk of wildfire in suburban areas, less conflict between motorized and non-motorized users of nearby public lands, etc.

Answer any questions the donor has, and then ask for a specific contribution -- $200,
$1,000, the use of a company's bus or van for project field trip transportation, reduced
rate or "comped" hotel rooms for specialists you will be bringing to,

or whatever else you
hope the donor will provide. Some people, particularly those asked to make substantial personal or corporate contributions, may need some time before they can give you an answer. Ask when it would be convenient to call back—and then don't fail to follow-up.

Being able to provide tax benefits to donors may help you in fund raising. If your
group has not formally organized as a non-profit itself, you may want to explore the
possibility of conducting your fundraising through an existing group which has both a
related purpose (forest conservation, wildlife or fisheries habitat improvement, open
space preservation, etc.) and state and federal government approval to receive tax
deductible contributions. If you have a local community foundation, it could be a
potential source of grant funds itself, or it might be able to set up a dedicated fund under
its umbrella to which tax-deductible contributions could be directed to support the
collaborative's work. There are specific Internal Revenue Service requirements related to the calculation of the tax-exempt portion of any donation, as well as requirements for written acknowledgement of donations of $250 or more. For further information, click here.

Special events
Putting on a special
event is another way to raise money locally. The advantage of this method is that it enables you to reach a broad spectrum of potential givers at one time. The disadvantage is that planning and producing an event is time-consuming and usually involves some up-front expenditures.

Among the more easily mounted events are awards dinners, pancake breakfasts, festivals, auctions, races, and "a-thons" (hike-a-thons, bike-a-thons, ski-a-thons, etc.). They generally produce modest (but nonetheless welcome) returns, and have the added advantage of raising your group's visibility in the community. Major events such as an air show featuring the US Navy's Blue Angels or a concert with a big-name entertainer can be a year or more in the planning and require large numbers of volunteers to carry out. They have the potential to generate big returns, but also carry an inherent degree of risk (bad weather, ticket sales insufficient to meet guarantees, etc.) that makes the purchase of appropriate insurance advisable.

"Non-events" are becoming increasingly popular. Tickets are sold to an event (a banquet, perhaps) that won't take place. The donor buys a ticket, but with the assurance that she can stay comfortably at home on the night of the non-event. Not only does the non-banquet-goer not face another dreaded "rubber chicken" dinner, but you don't have food, banquet room, or other costs to deduct from the ticket sale proceeds.

Product sales

The traditional bake sale is an elementary form of product-based fundraising. Going a step further, you can sell items such as cups, mugs, sweatshirts, cookbooks, calendars, posters, or banners with your collaborative's name and/or logo on them. Product sales are most appropriate for groups that have, or can make arrangements to share, some kind of facility (office, fair booth, gift store, museum) at which the products can be displayed and staff is available to sell them. Door-to-door sales are time consuming, and mail order catalogs can be expensive to produce and distribute (although you might want to explore having one or more of your products carried in someone else's catalog).

On-line merchandising through your group's website (if you have one) is another approach. This will necessitate becoming affiliated with one or more credit card companies, as well as meeting requirements for sales tax collections for states to which products are shipped.

A word of caution. Be careful not to overestimate the market potential for your products. You don't want to end up with large volumes of unsold merchandise, particularly dated materials (such as calendars).

Related and unrelated businesses operations

Some non-profits conduct business operations—gift shops, bookstores, restaurants, camps, eco-tourism cruises or bus tours, etc.—to generate revenue to support their operations. If your group is a non-profit and is contemplating starting a business, it is important to work closely with your financial and legal advisors in doing so. "Unrelated business" income of over $1,000 in any one year is subject to a federal Unrelated Business Income Tax.

The Internal Revenue Service considers an activity to be an "unrelated business" if it is "a trade or business," is "regularly carried on," and is "not substantially related" to the exempt purpose or function of the organization. (Simply needing the profits derived from a business activity to finance the work of your organization does not automatically remove the activity from the "unrelated business" category.) A business in which unpaid volunteers carry out substantially all the work involved is not considered an unrelated trade or business. For more information, see http://www.irs.gov/publications/p598/ch03.html.

Corporate Giving

Many corporations with regional or nationwide operations (particularly in the retail sales and restaurant sectors) give local managers considerable discretion in deciding whether to make product donations or limited cash contributions to worthy community causes. A request for a donation that exceeds the manager's approval authority usually entails completing a funding application which is decided upon by the firm's

regional or home office.

Corporate giving can take other forms as well. Some companies "loan" employees for a period of time for a particular activity—such as running a United Way drive. Others sponsor specific programs. Crystal Geyser Spring Water, for instance, has a label on each of its bottles explaining that the company "is a proud sponsor of American Forests' tree-planting for environmental restoration." A local business in your community might be willing to donate to your group a percentage of a day's sales or a set amount per item. ("For each cup of coffee served this week, the Blue Goose Café will donate 5¢ to the Howell Creek restoration project.") A well-publicized linked-giving program may be attractive to a business that can benefit from increased public visibility and good will. You, of course, will want to be careful not to link your collaborative's name with an organization whose policies or practices are not compatible your group's goals.

Foundation and government grants
Once
your group moves to the implementation stage of its work and needs more money, you are likely to find yourself entering the world of grantsmanship.

The business of successfully applying for grants is part science, part art, and part politics (with a small "p"). Each granting organization has its own funding priorities, policies, and procedures. To help you find those grantmakers whose interests match your needs, the Red Lodge Clearinghouse has assembled an ever-growing, easily-searchable data base of foundations and government programs of particular relevance to collaboratives addressing natural resource issues in the West.

The Foundation Center has a comprehensive list of private foundations and an excellent on-line short course to help you learn how to prepare effective letters of intent and applications.

The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (www.cfda.gov) has an exhaustive listing of federal government grant and technical assistance sources, as well as "Developing and Writing Grant Proposals," a good guide to completing the frequently complex components of a government grant application.

Although their application and approval procedures may be very different, most government and foundation grantors:

- Require you to have clear goals and a realistic strategy for achieving them

- Encourage you to be innovative

- Like projects that could be replicated; that is, that could be used by other groups as a successful model

- Expect you to think long-term (although they usually fund short-term)

- Want specific, measurable accomplishments delivered in a relatively short time frame (1-3 years)

- Don't want to be your only funding source

- Encourage, and sometimes require, you to use their grant funds to leverage other funds

- Want you to have a feasible plan for sustaining your program after the grant period ends

Capital campaigns

Capital campaigns are usually undertaken to finance "big ticket" items—the acquisition of land, the construction of buildings, and so forth—although they may also be used to raise the money to capitalize an endowment fund (see below). These campaigns require a good deal of upfront planning and work (frequently a year or more), but are conducted intensively for only a limited period of time. Some groups find it helpful to use professional fundraising consultants, although their services can be expensive.

Having outside assistance won't significantly reduce the amount of work you have to do. The professionals can tell you what to do and how to do it efficiently and effectively, but it is still up to you to get it done. The upfront work can involve cost, market, and operational feasibility studies; architectural designs/plans (if a facility of some kind is being built or renovated); long term planning for operation and maintenance of the facility or property; the preparation of a campaign strategy; identification and analysis of possible donors and their potential contributions; development of campaign materials (brochures, videos); events planning; assembly of a campaign staff; training of volunteers; and so forth.

Capital campaigns normally have two phases. During the "silent" phase, potential major individual and corporate donors are solicited for contributions. Only when a significant portion (50% or more) of the campaign's financial goal has been reached does the campaign enter its high profile, public phase to drum up support from the rest of the community.

Endowments

If your group is embarking on a long-term effort—perhaps the acquisition and stewardship of large and environmentally significant tracts of forest or rangeland—it may be desirable to establish an endowment fund to support future management needs. Establishing a fund requires a sizeable initial capitalization, frequently sought from a single or a few large donors. The fund (which

subsequently may be added to by other donors) is then invested, usually through professional fund managers. If the investments are sound, the fund grows. The income from the fund, primarily interest, is used to provide continuing financial support for your group's work.

Donations of land, buildings, or equipment

In lieu of cash contributions, some individuals or companies give real or personal property to non-profit organizations, with the donated property to either be used directly in the group's work or sold to generate cash.

If you plan to seek or accept such donations, you should make sure that your articles of incorporation or other chartering documents include appropriate sections that provide that the group may acquire, use, pledge, and/or dispose of property. (Again, this is something about which you should consult your lawyer and accountant.) For further information about valuing and acknowledging such gifts, click here.

Volunteers

Volunteers are absolutely essential to a collaborative effort. Whether it's giving their skills and energy to fundraising, conducting field tours, planning and implementing on-the-ground work, or serving on a multiparty monitoring and evaluation team—volunteers make things happen.

Because volunteers are such an important resource, you need to be thoughtful in recruiting and using them. If your activities call for a large number of volunteers, a volunteer coordinator may be needed. Training should be offered to prepare volunteers for unfamiliar tasks, and adequate supervision needs to be provided. Their hard work has to be recognized and rewarded. Frequent "thank you's," occasional pizza parties, pins or certificates awarded upon the completion of so many hours of service, special caps or shirts with the group's logo, an annual Volunteer Appreciation Day, and similar gestures help show how highly your value your volunteers.

Volunteers don't just provide hands-on assistance to your collaborative. They become knowledgeable about your mission and committed to its accomplishment. When they share that enthusiasm in conversations with friends, neighbors, and employers, they enhance the collaborative's credibility and support throughout the community, and increase its likelihood of success.

Organizational Structure

Changing organizational needs

Most collaborative groups are volunteer-driven and can function quite well during their first months or years without having to take on a formal legal existence, raise a great deal of money, or hire or contract for staff services. Moving into action plan implementation, however, almost always requires more financial and administrative support than was needed earlier. If your group plans to seek grants, loans, or other assistance, you will want

to revisit the issue of structure.

Organizational and structural options
Let others implement the collaborative's recommendations and either disband or shift to a monitoring and evaluation focus

This
alternative may be appropriate if yours is a "single issue" group—formed to seek a solution to a problem of limited scope or duration. For example, the Beaver Lake Collaborative was created in northwest Montana specifically to develop a proposed plan for the management of an area of the Stillwater State Forest about which there was intense, sometimes divisive, public concern. The state Department of Natural Resources and Conservation provided the needed financial support for the group's work. The group met for six months, prepared detailed recommendations to DNRC and then dissolved, its mission accomplished.

In other instances, "single issue" collaboratives may stay active throughout the implementation phase, monitoring and evaluating the progress and outcomes of their group's proposed solution. No changes in the collaborative's organizational structure or financing are necessary, since another party is handling the actual implementation work.

A benefit of not being directly involved in implementation is that it may enable the collaborative to be more objective in its monitoring role.

Let others implement the collaborative's recommendations, and continue to collaborate on other issues

Having
developed into an effective, respected, and solution-oriented working group, an initially "single issue" group may decide to use its energy and credibility to tackle other natural resource-related problems in the community. As long as it continues not to take on implementation responsibilities, it should be able to do this (in addition to monitoring any activities it has already set in motion), without having to change its organizational structure, adopt more formal operational procedures, or expend a lot more money. This also may be a desirable option if the group wants to engage actively in the political process. Not being a tax-exempt non-profit gives the collaborative more leeway than many other groups have to participate aggressively in advocacy work and the support of particular legislation or candidates.

Conduct implementation activities through a fiscal and administrative agent

Perhaps
your collaborative wants to be involved in implementing its proposals,

but participants don't want to formalize the group's structure, take on management of a new organization, or assume any legal or financial obligations. In that case, you need to seek another entity (usually an existing non-profit organization) to be your fiscal and administrative agent. That entity will then raise and/or receive and administer the necessary funds in its name, on behalf of the collaborative. There is often a fee for this service, usually 5-10% of the total amount being administered.

Under this option, the collaborative retains great flexibility in matters of lobbying and advocacy. On the flip side, however, the media, policy makers, funders, and the general public may have trouble differentiating your group from the organization serving as your fiscal/administrative agent. Both entities will have to frequently, clearly, and consistently explain the purpose and limits of their relationship. Otherwise, each is likely to be held responsible for all the activities and statements of the other, even ones that have no relationship to the collaborative's project.

Care must be taken in recruiting and selecting an agent. Your collaborative and its agent need to have compatible goals and interests and a great deal of confidence in each other's capacity, reliability, and good faith. A clear statement of each party's role and responsibilities should be agreed upon—who chooses project staff, makes spending and operational decisions, prepares reports, represents the project in dealing with the media, funders, and the public, and so forth. There should be appropriate provisions for modifying or terminating the relationship should it encounter problems.

Conduct implementation activities directly

Many
collaboratives decide to take a hands-on approach to problem solving, not only
developing solutions, but also putting them into practice on the land. These groups need
to adopt a formal organizational structure so they can obtain an Employer Identification
Number, open a bank account, directly apply for grants or loans, hire staff, enter into
contracts, secure liability insurance, and perform other administrative functions. Not
many collaboratives have the desire or the income-producing potential to become for-profit businesses, so most set up as non-profits.

Organizing as a Non-Profit
The primary types of non-profit organizations are:

- Corporations,

- Trusts, and

- Unincorporated associations.

While many states will grant non-profit status to unincorporated associations, most collaborative groups incorporate. A primary consideration is that the members of an unincorporated association can be held personally liable for the acts of the association, while the directors of a corporation have limited liability protection from lawsuits against the corporation.

Trusts, according to the Internal Revenue Service, are "a form of ownership which completely separates responsibility and control of assets from all the benefits of ownership." Land trusts, whose primary activity is acquiring and managing lands or conservation easements on lands, frequently partner with collaborative groups in preservation or restoration efforts involving private properties.

The type of organizational structure your collaborative adopts needs to be appropriate to the purpose of your group and its planned activities. Your lawyer and accountant can explain the legal and financial pros and cons of each option. Every state has its own laws, regulations, fees, forms and procedures for incorporating non-profit entities. Copies of any required forms and the instructions for completing them are usually available on line, usually from the Secretary of State's office.

Applying for 501(c)(3) Status

Although not essential, having tax-exempt organization status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code gives collaborative groups several important benefits:

- Most government agencies, private foundations, and other funders do not provide grants to individuals or for-profit groups, and many require that non-profit groups have 501(c)(3) status.

- Individuals and corporations have an added incentive to contribute to a 501(c)(3) collaborative group because their donations will be federal tax exempt.

- The group itself will be exempt from federal income tax and, in some cases, Federal Unemployment Tax (FUTA).

- It may also be exempt from some state income, sales, and property taxes. (A state will generally require that additional documentation be submitted to document the group's qualifications for tax-exemption)

- Some organizations may be able to get reduced U.S. Postal Service mailing rates.

On the down side, preparing a successful application
for 501c)(3) status is very time consuming and can be expensive. A new
organization that anticipates gross receipts averaging not more than
$10,000 during its first four years has to pay a $150 user fee to the
IRS. Organizations anticipating gross receipts exceeding $10,000
annually must pay $500. If an attorney and/or accountant prepare or
review the application, they may also charge the group an hourly or
flat fee. (Sometimes these services can be obtained as an in-kind
donation.)

Moreover, submitting the application may just be the beginning
of the process, because the IRS frequently responds with requests for
more material-copies of newsletters and other publications you have
produced, explanations of corporate operating procedures; further
details on proposed activities; copies of any leases or agreements the
group has signed; and other matters. Six months to a year may elapse
before the group receives an initial determination of exemption.

Finally, 501(c)(3) status brings restrictions as well as
benefits. Books and records detailing all activities, both financial
and non-financial, must be kept. Reports and financial statements must
be provided annually to the IRS, and the group will be required to
provide copies of that information to anyone else who requests it.
There are also limitations on the amount and type of lobbying that may
be conducted by the group, a definite concern if a substantial part of
the collaborative's work is in advocacy.

IRS Publication 4220. Applying for 501(c)(3) Tax-Exempt
Status, is a good starting place. Found on-line at
http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p4220.pdf, this brochure gives a plain
language overview of what it takes to become a 501(c)(3) organization
and what is required to maintain that status. It also has useful links
to other relevant publications and forms.

Dealing with Problems

Your collaborative is bringing together people from
diverse, sometimes antagonistic, interests and perspectives to try to
resolve complex and controversial natural resource related issues. It
would be surprising indeed if you didn't have occasional difficulties.
The most common problems arise from two sources—the process and the
people who are trying to make it work.

Process Problems

Without question, the collaborative process
is demanding. It's not always easy to be open, inclusive, transparent,
frank, civil, and patient. Some elements of the process are
particularly challenging:

Time

Collaboration takes time—lots of it.

When you're dealing with critical issues, however, you're anxious to get to solutions. The time it takes to build trust among the participants, do your research, and develop your action strategy can seem endless. Frustration levels almost inevitably rise. Bear in mind, however, that the community divisions you're now facing didn't develop overnight, and your solutions are unlikely to either. Serious problems need serious time. (An exception may be if you're dealing with an intractable deadline—a fast-approaching date by which, if you take no action, an irreversible negative impact will occur. In that case, you will have to streamline and adapt the process to fit the circumstance. The Red Lodge Clearinghouse staff can give you suggestions on how to do that.)

The entry of new participants into an on-going collaborative or the irregular participation of some current members can create other "time" problems. It takes time to bring people up to speed on what happened before they joined or at meetings they missed. With new folks, it's time well spent, although you may want to schedule a special catch-up briefing session for them, rather than doing the re-cap at a full group meeting. Irregular attendees, on the other hand, need to be held responsible for getting their own updates, usually through reading the minutes of missed meetings or talking individually with other participants.

A third "time" problem occurs when your collaborative is moving along well, but some "outside" party—perhaps a government agency, landowner, or financial institution whose cooperation or authorization must have—is slow to respond. You can usually forestall such problems by making sure the other party knows well in advance what you will be needing and when you will need it. Sometimes, however, your need will not be the other person's top priority. He'll get to it, but only after he's dealt with other people and issues he feels are more urgent. You can try exerting pressure—calls to your Congressional representative if the delay is with a federal agency or to a financial institution's chairman if the problem is with a lower-level official there, for instance. That approach can backfire, however, if your action alienates the person whose help you need to make your project succeed. A less risky and more diplomatic strategy is to go to him and say, "We're sure you're doing everything you can, but we're stalled out until you act. Would it help if we went to your department director and asked her to let you give our project immediate attention?" He may welcome the intervention. If not, the prospect of such action may prove as motivating as the action itself would be.

Facilitation

If discussions at your meetings frequently wander off track, get acrimonious, seem to lead nowhere, or are dominated by a few individuals, you have a facilitation problem. If you're using a paid facilitator you should demand and expect improvements—or change facilitators.

If, as is more likely, you have a non-professional facilitator or your group is self facilitating, you may need to sharpen up your process. Are you making an agenda for each meeting? The facilitator should use that to guide the discussion and eliminate non-fruitful

side-trips. Other participants can help him by pointing out when the agenda starts to slip. Setting a reasonable time limit on comments, requiring that others who are waiting to speak must be heard before a commenter can take the floor again, or occasionally calling on reticent participants to make sure their ideas get heard—all can help. If those things aren't working, you may want to bring in a professional facilitator, at least for a while. Alternatively you could get training in group facilitation for one or more of your members. Check the "Training" section under the "Resources" tab on the Red Lodge Clearinghouse website. Another good source of information is the Forest Services Partnership Resource Center.

Information

How much information is enough? A collaborative could work forever and never amass all the information that might relate to the natural resource issue the group's working on. At a certain point, some participants may feel overwhelmed by all the data, scientific studies, and advice they have received, while others may still want more. You need to be well informed and remain open to new input, but at some point you have to move ahead using the information you have at the time. The group needs to bring its collective intelligence to bear on what you've learned. Together you have to decide which information is most relevant, which advice the most sound, which actions most likely to produce desirable results, which risks are acceptable and which are not. Having a well-designed monitoring and evaluation process and/or starting out on a limited scale—doing a 20-acre project rather than a 500-acre one, perhaps—can help alleviate any lingering concerns. When the first work is done, take a hard look at the results. Factor in any relevant new information, and adjust your plan or prescription as necessary. Having turned your information into knowledge, you should feel more confident taking the next, bigger step.

Decision making

One of the key
ingredients of collaboration is "There is an agreed upon way to make decisions," and your group should have settled on its methodology early in the process. However, regardless of whether you chose full consensus, general consensus, an affirmative vote, or some other decision mechanism, problems can still arise.

If your group does not have a closed membership (that is, it is open to all interested participants), you may need to set guidelines for how long someone has to have participated in order to be eligible to have a voice in decision making. Otherwise, if you make decisions by full or general consensus, one or a few new participants could block the group from implementing a strategy that it has carefully developed over the previous months or years.

Problems can also arise when members who were not present at a meeting at which a decision was made want the group to re-visit that decision. Providing advance notice of when important decisions will be made can help forestall this. If someone can't be present, he can still be expected to make his concerns/objections known in a timely manner via mail or a phone call.

If, even after concentrated good-faith effort, your group is unable to reach a decision on a particular project, you may need to put it aside for a while and pursue another (perhaps less controversial or unconventional) activity. Later, when participants have developed a higher level of confidence in each other and in the group's capacity, you may be able to successfully re-visit the originally proposed project.

Unrealistic or unfulfilled expectations

One of the most frustrating experiences for a collaborative group is to find its ability to implement its proposed solutions constrained or blocked by another individual's or organization's actions. For instance, many groups working on issues related to federal or state natural resources have unrealistic expectations about the speed with which required environmental analyses are completed. In some cases the analyses take years, while the collaborative waits in a kind of operational limbo and participants start to drift away. Early discussions with knowledgeable agency personnel will enable you to build a realistic timeline for the group and schedule other productive activities for it during the analysis period.

Participants in some collaboratives dealing with public land management issues unrealistically expect their efforts to lead to the elimination of project appeals or litigation. When a subsequent appeal or lawsuit necessitates delays or changes in their implementation plans, they are inevitably frustrated, angry, and/or discouraged.

Not all "unrealistic" expectations are to be avoided, however. Collaboratively-developed solutions are frequently innovative and occasionally bring about major shifts in long-established (but no longer adequate) laws, policies, or procedures. In spite of having been told "you can't do that," some groups have proven remarkably successful in finding ways to do exactly that.

Once in a while a public agency or other decision making body will make an unexpected, late-stage decision not to support and/or authorize a collaborative group's proposed solution. Budget constraints, political opposition, unfavorable findings from an environmental analysis, or threatened litigation are some of the factors that may cause a turnabout. Even if collaborative participants know going into the process that the ultimate decision authority rests outside the group, a rejection can still be devastating. The collaborative and the decision maker(s) need to stay in close communication from Day One—ideally having representatives of the decision making body regularly participate in group meetings. Potential problems should be laid on the table as soon as they surface. Unfavorable decisions occurring with no advance warning can irreparably damage critical relationships and the collaborative effort itself.

People Problems

The more open your collaborative process is,
the more likely you are to experience some occasional people problems.
That's not a reason to restrict participation, however. Broad, active
stakeholder involvement in your work is highly desirable. You just need
to devote a little more attention to group dynamics and individual
personalities.

Action people and process people
Some
people are quite comfortable working within a collaborative process.
Others have trouble adjusting to it, particularly people who in their
day-to-day work are accustomed to making solo decisions and having them
carried out. Action people are often anxious to "cut to the chase," and
may be frustrated by the time taken to build understanding and trust
within the group. A clear explanation of the collaborative process
should be part of all participant recruitment/briefing sessions.
Understanding its parallels with the Total Quality Management systems
used so effectively in the business world may enhance its acceptability
or appeal to some members. Action people and process people alike need
to see that their involvement is producing concrete results. Even while
a long-term strategy is being built, the group will want to undertake
some hands-on work—demonstration projects, fundraising, public outreach
efforts, etc.

Tunnel vision
Some people join a
collaborative because they are deeply concerned about the issue being
addressed, but then are unwilling to give credence to any proposed
solution except their own—even if it proves to be impractical or
unacceptable to the rest of the group. As soon as it becomes clear that
her solution will not be adopted in toto, a tunnel vision person may go
away mad. If she stays, the other participants are likely to find their
patience and good humor occasionally strained by the tunneler's
single-mindedness. If they acknowledge and address her general concerns
(as opposed to her specific prescriptions), however, they may over time
enable her to become a productive member of the group.

Preconceptions and attitudes
Coming
into a collaborative, participants bring with themselves views and
opinions shaped by the culture (professional, ethnic, social, etc.) in
which they function day-today. To some, a professor is immediately
perceived as wise and his opinions to be highly regarded. To others, he
is an ivory tower resident, out of touch with the "real" world. Some
agency personnel or scientists initially view other participants as
"amateurs" dabbling in natural resource issues or government policies
about which they have little knowledge or experience. An
environmentalist may regard a logger as a despoiler of the forest,
while the logger sees her as an obstructionist preventing sound forest
management from taking place. An old man who has lived in the area for
80 years may be viewed by some as a tiresome chronicler of times past,
while others see him as a valuable source of indigenous knowledge of
the ecosystem. Following ground rules for active listening, and dealing
with fellow participants as individuals rather than as the embodiments
of one's preconceptions about that "type" of person, goes a long way
toward solving these problems. The longer members work together, the
more preconceptions and stereotypes are put aside.

Changes in players
One of the biggest
challenges to a collaborative process is the departure of a key
participant. While all participants are important to the success of the
group, some (such as Forest Service or BLM employees) provide important
linkages to other organizations whose cooperation and support are
needed. An energetic and committed agency employee working with the
collaborative can do wonders in helping the group understand and
navigate agency regulations and processes. When that person leaves, her
successor (assuming there is one) does not always slide easily into her
seat at the table. New relationship-building has to occur. People who
were comfortable with and willing to trust the departing person may not
have the same immediate confidence in her replacement. And he has to
learn the goals, the plans, the process, and the personalities of the
group. This will take time, and activities may slow down as a result.

The worst case scenario is when a key player is replaced by
someone who doesn't want to be there, who does not believe in the
collaborative approach but has been given the assignment of working
with the group. Sometimes attitude changes occur, and things work out.
If they don't, that is a situation in which it may be appropriate to go
to the participant's supervisor and request a change.

Not only agency members change. Business people get
transferred. Parents need to spend more time at home. Retirees decide
to go to Florida for the winter. Hard workers get burned out. A wise
group plans ahead, actively recruiting new members. (See "The Maturing
Collaborative," below.)

Challenges from the outside
Some
outside challenges come through the "normal" channels—appeals and
litigation of projects the group is advocating, for instance. Some of
these will be from people you know, people you have invited to
participate in the collaborative, but who have refused. They don't
agree with your approach and/or your solutions. To the extent that you
are aware of their concerns, you may be able to address those points in
your deliberations, even if the dissenters aren't there to advocate for
them. In some cases, the fact that a collaborative gave dissenting
individuals or organizations the opportunity to participate (even
though it was declined) has weighed in the group's favor when the
matter moved to higher decision levels.

Some groups have faced challenges to the collaborative process
itself. Meetings have been "packed" by anti's aiming to seize control
and change the group's direction. Depending upon your collaborative's
structure—open or closed, formal or informal organization, membership
based or not—you may have some resources for resisting a similar
assault. Limitations on participation (requiring a balanced
representation of stakeholder interests, allowing participation in
decision making only after so many months' attendance, etc.) are some
of the organizational tools you may want to have in place to safeguard
your group's functional integrity.

The Maturing CollaborativeAs natural resource-related collaborative groups mature, they will find themselves confronting some or all of the following:

Participant Burnout
In addition to attending regular
meetings, participants usually become involved in subcommittee work, field tours, data gathering, monitoring and evaluation, community education programs, contractor workshops, management agency meetings, discussions with researchers, media interviews, and more. The toll can be particularly hard on those who have other demanding jobs (ex., loggers or ranchers whose work days last 12 hours or more), those who must take unpaid leave from their regular employment to attend, and those who have to travel long distances to participate. Initial optimism and enthusiasm will carry them through the early stages of the group's work, but if the results they see occurring are not commensurate with the effort being expended to achieve them, attendance may flag. That can leave the group less diverse or balanced, composed mainly of agency or organizational staff members whose participation is part of their job.

Organizational Burnout
This occurs most frequently when a
collaborative has worked hard for a long time and experienced little or no progress toward accomplishment of its goals. Unless there is some realistic expectation that conditions will improve, the group may decide to call it quits.

Stagnation or calcification
Regardless of how well motivated
or apparently successful a collaborative group is, it can encounter problems if it does not maintain a vital and diverse membership and a continued receptiveness to new and better ways of getting its job done. Public, legislative, and scientific views on natural resource management are continually evolving, and need to be incorporated into the collaborative process. Continued membership growth and diversification not only involve more people in the group's work; they also ensure that the group does not become too organizationally comfortable or self-satisfied, doing things "because that's the way we've always done it."

Persistent gaps in stakeholder participation
Two key
stakeholder groups continue to be difficult for most collaboratives to involve: young people (under age 25) and the more confrontational and litigious "watchdog" organizations. Students have many other claims on their time, and can find the pace of collaborative work less than exciting. They are often interested in hands-on projects, however, and some groups have involved them very productively in monitoring, research, and community education activities.

Trying to attract the "watchdogs" to the table is harder.
Their conventional approach is to
try to stop what they view as bad things from happening on the land, rather than trying to
make good things happen. Entering into a collaborative process requires them to
approach problems from the opposite direction, and collaboration may appear to be a less

effective and efficient way to achieve their goals. There may be some issues and activities, however, on which watchdogs and collaborators find they can work together.

Change in mission, focus, or activities

When a group makes a major shift in its work, some adjustments will be needed. Members who were terrific fundraisers when critical lands were being acquired may be less interested in dealing with long-term management of those lands. Key players in the group's successful effort to restore bull trout habitat may feel they have little to contribute when the collaborative's focus turns to hazardous fuels reduction. Significant changes call for thoughtful discussion, careful planning, and identification and recruitment of additional stakeholders who need to be involved—almost the same process the group went through when it was initially formed.

Long-term funding challenges

The longer a group functions and the more complex its work becomes, the more its operational and administrative costs are likely to increase. Groups which are heavily dependent on grant funding often find foundations and government agencies interested in supporting new projects, but not willing to fund general operating expenses or the continuation of existing projects. Trying to meet financial needs by creating more and more new programs can prove self defeating.

Groups whose major focus is public lands issues will find many private individuals, foundations, and corporations reluctant to fund activities conducted on federal or state lands. The funders argue, with some justification, that using private sector money to fund public sector projects is counterproductive. It enables, perhaps even encourages, Congress and state legislatures to further reduce already inadequate funding of natural resource programs and agencies.

Power sharing and the future role of collaboration in natural resource policy making and management

Requirements for collaborative planning, implementation, and monitoring are increasingly being incorporated into federal resource management initiatives such as the National Fire Plan, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, and the Stewardship End Result Contracting Program. In response, many communities that have not had collaborative groups will be trying to form them. Existing groups will have to consider whether to take on roles additional to the ones they were created to fill. If collaboration is indeed the "new way of doing business," as federal agency leaders have said, then the collaborative's place in the decision making process may need to be re-examined.

Up to now, collaboration has been largely an outside-the-system, frequently reactive means of helping multiple stakeholders find a way to resolve problems created by present or past management decisions. Lately, however, lawmakers seem to be viewing the collaborative process as a proactive, almost-part-of-the-system procedure through which stakeholders' views on various management

issues are to be gathered, debated, refined, reconciled if possible, and then used to inform the decision making process. The collaboratives themselves still have no part in the actual decision making, and their proposals can be accepted, modified, or rejected as decision makers see fit.

What is not known is how satisfied the collaboratives will remain with that arrangement. As the experiences of some of the stewardship contracting pilots revealed, collaborative participants become frustrated and discouraged when after months or years of volunteer effort, the plans and recommendations that they developed are not adopted. Their discouragement can lead to disengagement, an unwillingness to collaborate further.

A stronger move toward redefining the collaborative/decision maker relationship occurred in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act recently enacted by Congress. HFRA calls for collaborative community involvement in developing local Community Wildfire Protection Plans, and (in addition to giving communities the flexibility to define their own wildland-urban interfaces, including both public and private lands) the Act requires that federal agencies give priority to the projects and treatment areas identified in a community's plan. Federal agency participation in the collaboration is specifically exempted from FACA requirements.

Other Collaboration ResourcesCollaboration in NEPA: A Handbook for NEPA Practitioners - The Council on Environmental Quality put together a handbook outlining general principles, useful steps, and methods of collaboration.