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Processes of Cross-Sector Collaboration: A Case Study of the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program

Madeleine W. McNamara

Abstract

Organizations representing the nonprofit, public, and private sectors often collaborate to enhance capacities while addressing complex, interconnected problems. Using the framework of Bryson, Crosby, and Stone, processes used to support successful collaboration are explored empirically through a multiple sector arrangement involving 15 nonprofit, public, and private organizations. Findings are offered to augment the framework to incorporate organizational interests and leveraging resources. Implications for the study and practice of public management are discussed.

KEYWORDS: collaboration, nonprofits, public management, environmental policy

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INTRODUCTION

In today's complex settings, program implementation and collaboration are tied closely. As scarce resources and limited funding become more common, it seems likely that public, private, and nonprofit organizations will continue to work together in cross-sector partnerships to increase individual capacities (Agranoff, 2006; Chisholm, 1996; McGuire, 2006; Mandell and Steelman, 2003; Provan and Milward, 2001). Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006, p. 44) define cross-sector collaboration as "the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organizations in two or more sectors to achieve jointly an outcome that could not be achieved by organizations in one sector separately."

While the collaboration literature is quite extensive, the management of cross-sector collaborative arrangements to achieve public goals is less understood (Babiak and Thibault, 2009). Although various frameworks are presented in the literature to explain collaboration (see, for example, Bryson, Crosby, and Stone, 2006; Gray, 1985; Thomson and Perry, 2006), empirical research is still needed to evaluate existing frameworks. The purpose of this research is to begin addressing this gap through a detailed case study approach while exploring four propositions presented by Bryson, Crosby, and Stone; the framework is augmented based on data gathered. Themes of forging initial agreements, building leadership, building legitimacy, building trust, and leveraging resources are processes analyzed within a cross-sector collaboration of 15 public, private, and nonprofit organizations partnering with the Virginia Coastal Zone Management [VCZM] Program to implement coastal resource policies on the seaside of Virginia's Eastern Shore.

This research is important because conceptual ambiguity has implications for the theory and practice of public management. Different types of interactions can be used to integrate programs and services. Since collaboration will not be effective in all settings (Imperial, 2005; Keast, Brown, and Mandell, 2007; Mandell and Steelman, 2003), it is up to public managers to determine when it is needed to meet a desired goal. In order for them to do this, "a more shaded understanding" of collaboration is needed (Mandell and Steelman, 2003, p. 199). Additionally, Thomson and Perry identify a need to "look inside the black box of collaboration processes" (2006, p. 20). By understanding its attributes and conditions when it is used and seemingly successful, public managers will be better prepared to apply collaboration as a strategy for program or policy implementation in appropriate situations.

Cross-sector collaborations can be difficult to manage due to differing missions, values, and responsibilities (Babiak and Thibault, 2009; Huxham, 2003). Additional burdens are placed on public managers when the application of collaboration cannot be considered properly due to confusion surrounding optimal

use (Keast, Brown, and Mandell, 2007). It is through application of theory that characteristics of cross-sector collaboration can be better evaluated.

This paper is divided into four sections. First, an overview of collaboration and the model developed by Bryson, Crosby, and Stone is introduced. Next, the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program is described as the setting for this case study. Third, the methodology used to collect and analyze data is explained. The final section applies the framework to the data collected. Extensions of the framework are discussed along with implications for the theory and practice of public management.

COLLABORATION LITERATURE

Collaborative interactions occur when multiple organizations share responsibility for interconnected tasks and work together to pursue collectively complex goals that cannot be accomplished by a single organization (Keast, Brown, and Mandell, 2007; Mattessich, Murray-Close, and Monsey, 2001; Thomson and Perry, 2006). Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006, p. 44) define cross-sector collaboration as “partnerships involving government, business, nonprofits and philanthropies, communities, and/or the public as a whole.” Flexibility, shared power, and diverse perspectives are embraced as personnel do not have formal authority over others within the arrangement.

The collaboration literature is quite extensive in areas of management, structure, and governance. Skills needed to manage collaborative arrangements are compared with those needed to manage hierarchical organizations (see, for example, Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Kettl, 2006; McGuire, 2006). Structural relationships in network settings are explored (see, for example, Isett and Provan, 2005; Keast et al., 2004; Mandell and Steelman, 2003). Collaboration is viewed as a governance strategy or a tool to enhance problem-solving (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Imperial, 2005; Rethemeyer and Hatmaker, 2007; Weber and Khademian, 2008). While important, these lines of inquiry do not address how collaboration occurs across sectors.

There are several articles that address processes within collaborative arrangements. Gray (1985) views collaboration as a three-phase process and identifies factors for effectiveness in each phase. Thomson and Perry (2006) use a systems approach to open the “black box” of collaboration. At the same time, Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) present propositions for factors of collaboration. The difference between the frameworks is that the latter is broader in scope, provides more detail to operationalize dimensions, and offers propositions pertaining to collaborative outcomes. These articles provide useful information for a starting point for practical application; to date, only one article has done so. Simo and Bies (2007) examine cross-sector collaboration following

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita using the framework of Bryson, Crosby, and Stone. A broad lens is used to address factors within all five dimensions of the framework. While this work also provides useful information, the breadth of the study does not allow for detailed analysis of each factor. This paper looks to fill this gap by focusing specifically on factors pertaining to collaborative processes and incorporates text in participants' own words to enhance information-rich detail. In their research, Simo and Bies recommend extending the Bryson, Crosby, and Stone framework to include informal collaboration between individuals and the relationship between organizational capacity and broader involvement in the arrangement. These ideas are also explored in this paper to determine their presence in a situation that does not involve emergency response.

PROPOSITIONS FOR CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION PROCESSES

In this study, cross-sector collaboration is viewed through a lens developed by Bryson, Crosby, and Stone. They offer a framework of collaboration based on five broad dimensions; the process dimension is explored in this paper through propositions pertaining to forging initial agreements, building leadership, building legitimacy, and building trust. These propositions are selected based on a recommendation in the 2007 meta-analysis of Ansell and Gash that conveys case study research being particularly valuable for similar themes.

Forging initial agreements. The form and content of collaboration's initial agreements are linked to its outcomes. Multiorganizational policies may generate a collective purpose, designate leadership and membership, specify working rules, create a governance structure, and identify the distribution of costs or benefits. Key stakeholders are involved in developing initial agreements and a lead agency may be identified to convene the group. While a contractual arrangement or statutory action may be used to bring participants together initially, informal or interpersonal relationships may also be used (Keast et al., 2004; Mandell, 1994).

Building leadership. Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when sponsors and champions provide formal and informal leadership at multiple levels. Sponsors provide authority and resources to legitimize the collaboration while champions have the expertise to sustain daily operations. A champion may serve as a mechanism to encourage interactions by identifying a complex problem and inviting relevant stakeholders to address the problem collectively (McNamara, 2008; McNamara, Leavitt, and Morris, 2010; Mandell, 1999; Wood and Gray, 1991).

Building legitimacy. Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when internal and external stakeholders perceive the collaboration to be legitimate. Legitimacy is based on the arrangement attracting resources, being

recognizable to insiders and outsiders, and building trust among partners (Byson, Crosby, and Stone, 2006). The term “program rationale” may also be used to describe the mindset toward the collective arrangement as a legitimate influence over individual behavior (Mandell, 1994).

Building trust. Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when collective action is built on trust. As an emphasis on formal organizational roles and contractual arrangements diminish, it is important for organizations within the arrangement to believe that partners are committed to one another and will act within the established rules. While trust is a critical component of collaborations, it takes time and resources to develop and sustain (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Bryson, Crosby, and Stone, 2006; Thomson and Perry, 2006).

CASE STUDY

The setting for this study involves a collaborative arrangement implementing environmental policies on the seaside of Virginia’s Eastern Shore. Virginia established a Coastal Zone Management (VCZM) Program in 1986 to protect Virginia’s coastal zone and in response to the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972. An executive order by the governor of Virginia identifies several state agencies to implement the program’s enforceable policies; Virginia’s Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is designated as the lead agency (see Kaine, 2006). Although a federal mandate is the impetus for the program, a collaborative arrangement implements the state’s resource policies because Virginia does not have centralized environmental planning across natural resource agencies. Other than the designation of Virginia’s DEQ as the lead agency, the executive order does not detail how or to what extent organizations should work together to achieve the program’s goals.

Two types of horizontal structures are used to establish linkages within the collaborative arrangement. The Coastal Policy Team (CPT) is one type of horizontal structure comprised of representatives from state and local governments involved in environmental protection in one of Virginia’s eight coastal areas (OCRM, 2004).¹ State agency representatives are resource administrators selected to participate by the head of their agency and are considered “midlevel managers” when looking at their relative placement within individual agencies. Participants of the CPT see themselves as the right people to be involved in the program because they can quickly disseminate information throughout the organization when needed, inform agency directors when

¹ The following state agencies are represented on the Coastal Policy Team: Environmental Quality, Conservation and Recreation, Game and Inland Fisheries, Health, Agriculture and Consumer Services, Forestry, Historic Resources, and Transportation. The setting for this study is in the Accomack Northampton coastal area.

problems arise, and direct organizational resources based on feedback from personnel in the field.

The CPT creates a forum for representatives to develop policies, allocate resources, and prioritize funding needs through consensus. Each member is an equal stakeholder with voting rights; decisions, such as prioritizing issues and funding strategies, are based on consensus. Two types of decisions are made by representatives on the CPT. First, decisions are made to guide the program's operations. More specifically, a focal area is identified for the program's funding. Second, decisions are made regarding the focus of future research. These decisions are typically guided by a desire to provide state policymakers and citizens with the information needed to make sound policy decisions regarding land-use on the Eastern Shore.

The executive steering committee is a second type of horizontal structure used within the collaborative arrangement. This group is comprised of personnel with field level expertise and responsibilities for managing projects on the Eastern Shore. Members of the executive steering committee generally have 20 to 30 years experience, and their expertise is widely acknowledged by interviewees who hold positions on the CPT. The use of the CPT and executive steering committee facilitates the involvement of two levels of personnel from each state agency – resource administrators and field project managers. Representatives on the CPT typically supervise the project managers on the executive steering committee.

In 2002, the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program became the main focal area for the VCZM Program (VCZMP, 2007). As a result, significant funding and coastal management expertise are directed toward this initiative. There are three goals for the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program: to restore coastal habitats, replenish aquatic resources, and promote sustainable economic activities such as ecotourism and aquaculture along Virginia's Eastern Shore (2007). The Eastern Shore is the peninsula that runs along the coast of Virginia and Maryland with the Chesapeake Bay to its west and the Atlantic Ocean to its east. The Virginia Seaside Heritage Program deals exclusively with the portion of peninsula tangential to the Atlantic Ocean in Virginia. Policies associated with the program are implemented by the organizations listed in table 1.

Table 1: Network of Organizations in the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program

Organizational Type	Specific Organizations in the Network
Federal Agencies	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge
State Agencies/Programs	Secretariat of Natural Resources Department of Environmental Quality Coastal Zone Management Program Marine Resources Commission Habitat Management Oyster Conservation Department of Conservation and Recreation Planning and Recreation Division Natural Heritage Division Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Watchable Wildlife Division Nongame Division
Local Government	Accomack County Planning Soil and Water Conservation District Northampton County Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission
Nongovernmental Organizations	The Nature Conservancy Eastern Shorekeeper Southeast Expeditions Cherrystone Aquafarms College of William and Mary ^a Institute of Marine Science ^a Center for Conservation Biology ^a University of Virginia ^a

^a Although these academic institutions are state sponsored, they operate autonomously as individual organizations.

The Eastern Shore is an important biosphere to protect because of the variety of ecological resources that its pristine conditions support. With a rural landscape, nonexistent government protections, and a difficult economy, aquatic resources are declining dramatically and farmers face severe pressures to sell land to developers. The collaborative arrangement focuses its efforts on purchasing land and developing sustainable industries dependent on the protection of coastal resources to prevent further habitat loss and minimize economic stress (2007).

METHODOLOGY

A single case study research design allowed for exploration of collaborative processes during implementation of the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program. Case selection was based on the following criteria: (1) public, private, and nonprofit organizations were represented within the arrangement; (2) resources and funding from multiple organizations was needed to implement the program; (3) collaborative interactions within the arrangement were frequent; and (4) no organization had formal authority to direct another organization.

Data were collected through semistructured interviews and a review of organizational documents from April through June 2008. Standardized, open-ended interview questions were used to gather information-rich detail from personnel implementing the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program. A semistructured interview technique was employed so information gathered as interviews progressed could be incorporated as necessary. Participants were identified using a snowball sampling strategy beginning with members of the CPT. Thirty-four participants representing 15 organizations were asked about the processes of forging initial agreements, building leadership, building legitimacy, building trust, and leveraging resources within the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program. Interviewees included at least one resource administrator and one field project manager from each of the state agencies represented on the CPT. A breakdown of interviewees by organizational affiliation is identified in Table 2.

Table 2: Participants Interviewed based on Organizational Sector Affiliation

Organizational Affiliation	Number of Participants Interviewed
Federal Agencies	1
Virginia State Agencies	18
Local Government	6
Nongovernmental Organizations	9
<i>Total Number of Participants</i>	34

Although the researcher took field notes throughout the interview process, audio recordings allowed the researcher to concentrate fully on interviewee responses and probe for clarification when needed. The researcher used audio recordings in post interview reviews to ensure accuracy of data and recreate exact quotations and insights. Transcriptions were emailed to interviewees to provide them with an opportunity to make revisions to the document. A review of organizational documents helped the researcher understand the contextual setting of the research and the history of interactions between participants.

A qualitative method suited this exploratory topic because it emphasized the need to describe collaborative processes. Content analysis allowed the researcher to identify meanings and summarize patterns within the data collected. A coding scheme was used to organize textual data gathered from each interview and document into the five collaborative processes that provided the focus for this research. In their 2007 meta-analytical study of critical variables for collaborative governance, Ansell and Gash supported the use of case study research to develop “greater insight into the nonlinear aspects of the collaborative process” (p. 562).

COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES IN THE VIRGINIA SEASIDE HERITAGE PROGRAM

The collaborative processes of forging initial agreement, building leadership, building legitimacy, building trust, and leveraging resources provide the organization for this section. Quoted material from participants implementing the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program is incorporated into the discussion to retain information-rich detail and provide context.

Forging Initial Agreement

Formal and informal agreements were used within this arrangement to establish roles and responsibilities. As described in the case study, designation of formal leadership is specified in the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Act with the DEQ identified as the lead agency and other natural resource agencies with related missions identified for program involvement. However, much discretion is left up to the administrators of these agencies to determine a plan for moving forward.

As a result, the two-tiered program structure described in the case is created. Many interviewees describe the CPT as providing the leadership needed to bring participants together and the structure to help them work well with one another. The collaborative arrangement benefits from horizontal connections at more than one level. Program operations appear to run smoothly because resource administrators on the CPT are linked with one another while field project

managers on the executive steering committee are also linked with one another. It is through these linkages that resource administrators and project managers become aware of the expertise within their own organizations and in other organizations. As Bryson, Crosby, and Stone suggest, there is evolution within the group as personnel assume different roles depending on the project that needs to be completed and the expertise available among participating organizations.

More than 40 percent of interviewees mention the use of grant contracts to formalize relationships between participants. This is not surprising considering that the VCZM Program awards one half of a million dollars in grant funds annually to its partners. Grant contracts are used to identify projects suitable for collective action, and roles to sustain relationships are determined largely by stipulations within the grant. For example, the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission (PDC) receives a technical assistance grant from the VCZM Program annually. This grant requires a minimum standard of interaction between the PDC and local government representatives. An administrator from the PDC conveyed that grant contracts are the conduit for the flow of information between the state, the PDC, and the localities. In addition, an organization may receive grant funding from the VCZM Program and subcontract with another organization to complete a particular project. This can be seen in the building of an observation platform in the town of Willis Wharf. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) received grant funding from the VCZM Program to design and build the observation platform. While DGIF completed the design of the platform, they subcontracted with Northampton County to construct it. In this instance, the original grant and subsequent contracts defined each organization's role and responsibilities. As Bryson, Crosby, and Stone suggest, formal agreements create a necessary accountability mechanism among participants of equal status.

Second, informal agreements are also used to develop roles and responsibilities, maintain dialogue, and share information as relationships move beyond contract stipulations. Personnel implementing the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program often communicate through channels such as email, ad hoc working groups, or by seeing each other in the field. Interviewees suggest that they know who to pull together to work on a project based on long-standing relationships. A project manager from the DGIF explained communication among partners in the following manner, "We are always talking to each other and bringing each other in on different projects. . . . We come to the table on a regular basis. So it keeps that partnership and the relationships going." Other interviewees suggested that geographic proximity among participants lends itself to interactions that cultivate informal agreement. Almost 50 percent of the participants implementing the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program live and work on the Eastern Shore. A nonprofit administrator suggested that visibility between

field workers is important for communication. “There is a physical opportunity for people that live on Virginia’s Eastern Shore. There are only two counties and there is really only one highway. And that helps. There are only 50,000 people on the Virginia portion of the Eastern Shore. So you see people at church and the grocery store.”

Much like the research conducted by Simo and Bies (2007), individuals assisted one another on an informal basis. However, these individuals were already active in the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program. The difference between this research and that of Simo and Bies has to do with the order in which relationships occurred. Rather than a situation where informal relationships were institutionalized, informal relationships in this study grew from a formalized arrangement.

While the use of a two-tiered governance structure, decision-making through consensus and compromise, distribution of grant funding, and development of personal relationships support the proposition that initial agreements affect outcomes of the collaboration’s work, an additional proposition should be considered to link the development of the initial agreement to organizational interests. Based on data collected, the following proposition is offered:

Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when initial agreements take into account an intersection of interests between participants’ commitments to their individual organizations and the collective arrangement.

Participants are asked to join the efforts of the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program because their mission areas are tangentially related to environmental protection and there is an identified need for a particular expertise. The culmination of specialized expertise among the collective group generates the capacity needed to address varied environmental resource issues on the Eastern Shore. An overwhelming majority of interviewees indicated that they perceive their own organizational goals to be furthered by establishing partnerships with other organizations on the Eastern Shore. Collaboration occurs between partners implementing the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program because they can resolve complex environmental problems without diminishing commitments to individual organizations.

Multiple participants explained how individuals benefit by working together. For example, a project manager for the Department of Conservation and Recreation [DCR] said, “Beyond the funding opportunities, it gives us the opportunity to do work that we otherwise would not be able to do and achieve a part of our mission that would otherwise not be possible. It is an opportunity to be successful in a way that would be impossible otherwise.” Resource

administrators and operational personnel alike indicated that they look to find ways to tie their organizations and research together because they are able to accomplish more by doing so. In addition to these findings, a desire to serve individual organizational interests while also meeting collective interests is supported by the literature (see, for example, Keast, Brown, and Mandell, 2007; Thomson and Perry, 2006) and should be captured in the process dimension of the framework.

Building Leadership

A sponsor and champion are involved in the implementation of the VCZM Program. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) acts as a sponsor by funding the VCZM Program. These funds legitimize the arrangement by helping to maintain ongoing initiatives, support long-term programs, or help smaller projects get started. The CPT selects the program's primary focal area every three years (OCRM, 2004), and grant contracts are used to distribute money for projects aligned with this focal area. The VCZM Program Manager, a midlevel administrator with the DEQ, serves as a champion while providing a significant source of leadership to the CPT and executive steering committee. While many interviewees mentioned the interest in funding opportunities, every interviewee recognized the efforts of the VCZM Program Manager and her contributions to the arrangement's success.

With differing missions and so many organizations involved, the VCZM Program Manager helps organizations recognize when they have complementary interests that can be better served by working together. The importance of identifying a mechanism to bring organizations together was acknowledged by a project manager at the DEQ, "The key is having something to bring these organizations together. Otherwise they will work together where it benefits them." Other participants stressed that money brings people to the table, but strong leadership has everyone working together. Due to her expertise in facilitating relationships, the VCZM Program Manager has high levels of credibility with participants.

The VCZM Program Manager gives much thought to identifying organizations whose specialized interests can be furthered through a collective effort; collaboration between organizations occurs in a specialized way as the program manager ensures a proper mixture of specialties is achieved. The VCZM Program Manager described her role in aligning organizational specializations in the following way, "It's like being a conductor of a symphony. You have your different instruments and you know what their specialties are. So you figure out the right time to bring them in and hopefully it comes together in one nice piece of music." In this sense, collaborative interactions are purposive to the extent that

the champion invites organizations to work together based on the specializations needed to carry out the program's objectives.

For example, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and the Virginia Marine Resources Commission are primarily involved in oyster restoration. The Nature Conservancy and the Center for Conservation Biology are primarily involved in avian research. On the other hand, the Department of Conservation and Recreation is focused on invasive species control and ecotourism. While these only represent a few examples of organizational specializations within the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program, a broader look reveals that each organization has a niche within the larger group. Utilizing a champion to bring organizations together in a specialized way helps minimize conflict among partners as the allocation of grant funding and determination of project involvement is based on the need for a particular expertise. Opportunities for grant funding through NOAA and the culmination of specialized expertise through the efforts of the VCZM Program Manager provide support for the proposition that committed sponsors and effective champions are linked with successful collaboration.

Building Legitimacy

Legitimacy for the VCZM Program is based on its abilities to attract funding, receive recognition, and develop trust among partners. First, the allocation of NOAA's funding through grant contracts attracts tremendous support for the program. Like many public organizations, those involved with the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program have fewer resources to face increasingly complex problems. According to an administrator with the DEQ, "Virginia spends less than one percent of its budget on natural resources. The environment is the underdog in the state budget and in the national budget when it comes down to it." Therefore, organizations focused on environmental resources and sustainability have vested interests in working together. The money that the VCZM Program brings to the table legitimizes the collaborative arrangement as it enables personnel to make their projects a reality without having to spend time "chasing funding." The benefits of this funding were described by an administrator for The Nature Conservancy, "The job that needs to be done is bigger than any one agency. And things like the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program give you a vehicle for everyone to work together . . . to get in the same car and to get to the same place with somebody else providing the fuel." A stable funding stream helps sustain partnerships throughout the program's implementation.

Second, interviewees recognize the collaborative arrangement as a way to manage diverse resources on the Eastern Shore through an ecosystem approach. Discussion during an interview with a resource administrator for the DCR revealed why a collective effort is needed to implement the Virginia Seaside

Heritage Program, “There is so much to do that you need a lot of different hands and you need a lot of different expertise because of the fact that no one organization has sufficient capabilities and expertise in all the different disciplines to address the broad range of resource issues that present themselves on a place like the Eastern Shore.” Multiple interviewees convey that each organization addresses one piece of the Eastern Shore’s larger ecosystem, and each piece impacts the larger system. It was evident during interviews that participants feel connected personally to the work they do and care deeply about the Eastern Shore. The Virginia Seaside Heritage Program creates opportunities for participants to identify ways to protect the Eastern Shore using a holistic approach. Working together to implement the program forces participants to think about other ways in which they can work together.

Third, there is a long history of the VCZM Program being involved in projects on Virginia’s Eastern Shore that facilitates a building of trust among participants. Many of the players involved in implementing the program started working together almost 20 years ago to protect the midatlantic migration corridor -- a piece of property on the southern tip of the Eastern Shore which is an important stopover for migratory songbirds traveling from South and Central America to Canada. Two decades later, the organizations and people representing these organizations still interact in significant and overlapping ways. The director of a research program affiliated with The College of William and Mary described partners’ continued involvement as “building upon or a reinvestment on past investments.” The ways in which the VCZM Program creates trust among participants and attracts funding and resources to address holistically diverse ecological needs on the Eastern Shore support the proposition that legitimacy of the collaboration is linked to its success.

Building Trust

High levels of trust are evident within this collaborative arrangement as it plays an important role in creating and sustaining relationships in two ways. First, interviewees indicated that they feel comfortable with other members of the group because they know their partners will help them achieve the project’s deliverables. The Director of the Eastern Shore Wildlife Center explained a level of comfort in the following way, “Trust is built through successful accomplishment of various projects that we work on and positive reinforcement. We build because we are at a point where we know the person will be there and they will follow through.” High levels of trust among participants helps them rely on one another regardless of organizational affiliation. Interviewees indicated that they believe their partners are committed to the collective arrangement and will work in good faith with personnel representing other organizations.

Second, trust plays an important role in creating and sustaining collaborative interactions because people become involved on a personal level. As people learn about one another, organizational partnerships evolve into personal relationships. High levels of trust exist because participants have worked together for long periods of time and they know who to call when they need help. The VCZM Program Manager described the collaboration's history in the following manner, "The secret of success is the continuity of the personnel over time. And that is not something that you can really control, that is just luck. And I think the fact that we have known each other for about 20 years now and we know what we are each about." A sense of sustainability was also expressed by an administrator of the DEQ, "When September rolls around, the funding for this focal area will end, but the need for partnership does not. The need to manage the resources in a collaborative way will not end."

Regular meetings among individuals involved in program implementation and routine communication among personnel working projects in the field also facilitates trust. The benefits of communication were described by a DCR project manager, "I've been in Virginia doing this now for just over 10 years and this certainly enables me to learn who many of the other players are in the coastal area working in natural resources. I learn a lot about who they are, how they operate, who I can count on, and who not to count on." It is through regular meetings of the CPT that partners openly communicate with one another as they discuss the program's direction, identify what their organization can provide to the collective group, and learn more about the other organizations involved in the program. Many interviewees acknowledged a high level of understanding among organizations and willingness to share information. A supervisor of a private business, Southeast Expeditions, suggested that this willingness to share information with one another "helps create a real scientific community rather than a group of scientists." As participants focus on projects that address one piece of the larger ecosystem, a willingness to help others becomes apparent. Reliance among participants and longstanding, personal relationships within this arrangement provide support for the proposition that trust is linked with successful collaboration.

Leveraging Resources

Data supports the creation of a proposition that links leveraging resources with successful collaboration.

Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when participants understand the benefits of leveraging organizational resources and do so to support the collective effort.

The power of this collaborative arrangement is enhanced by leveraging resources in three ways. First, the structure of the grant process generates opportunities for organizations to pool resources around a funding stream. These additional funds contribute directly to the scope of work they are able to accomplish. The grant money distributed through the VCZM Program requires organizations to have a one-to-one match with nonfederal monies and lends itself nicely to pooling resources. It is through the matching requirement that participants identify opportunities to leverage resources as they must bring money or resources to the table.

Second, resources are leveraged when participants have access to resources or funds that other program participants do not have access to. As these funds are identified, participants often apply them to projects that align with the broader initiatives of the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program. Several project managers described this process as “piggybacking.” It was also mentioned by a resource administrator for the DCR that the cost of purchasing property on the Eastern Shore requires organizations to pool various funding sources. “The most recent acquisition project involves a piece of land contiguous to the Fish and Wildlife refuge at the Southern Tip. We came together as a group to figure out what pots of money might be available to buy that piece of land. . . . The money is coming from all different pots because no one source has enough cash to pay for it all.” In addition to leveraging funding, resources are also pooled in the sense that one group may be able to push an initiative forward in a way that another organization may not be able to do. In this situation, The Nature Conservancy spearheads land acquisition because it is able to allocate funding in a timely manner. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are working together to repurchase the land from The Nature Conservancy and manage it in perpetuity.

Third, nonfinancial resources are pooled in specialized ways. Interviewees frequently mention that organizations combine specialized areas of expertise in order for the collective group to achieve the goals of the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program. For example, The Nature Conservancy has access to volunteers and experience with land acquisition; The College of William and Mary has expertise in bird habitat management; The Eastern Shorekeeper monitors environmentally restored areas; The University of Virginia negotiates environmental management priorities among partners; and the VCZM Program Manager champions the arrangement and manages grant funding. These represent a few examples of the ways nonfinancial resources are pooled. As with the research of Simo and Bies (2007), this data supports a linkage between organizational capacity and involvement in cross-sector collaboration. Access to unique resources or expertise determines how an organization is involved in the arrangement.

It is important to note that this study suggests that the pooling of resources occurs in a specialized way in which each organization retains control of the resources they provide to the collective group. More specifically, resources are pooled in ways that align with the mandated responsibilities in each organization's legal authorities or missions. A resource administrator for the DGIF explained the applicability of pooled resources to the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program, "They are pooled to the extent that everybody contributes. They are not pooled to the extent that you donate a certain amount of time and somebody else decides how that time is spent." This control generates an accountability mechanism to ensure resources are used in ways that align with the goals of individual organizations. The same administrator explained, "If I am going to commit my time or my staff's time to [a project], it is more a matter of here is a specific task that is within our mission and my responsibility"

CONCLUSION

As budgets shrink and resources remain scarce, the use of cross-sector collaboration is bound to become more prevalent. There is much to explore in terms of the processes used to establish and sustain operations. Bryson, Crosby, and Stone derive propositions of cross-sector collaboration from the literature, and this research links empirical data to their framework. Based on the data that emerges from this study, two modifications to the framework are suggested. First, the framework should link the process of forging initial agreements to an intersection of interests between participants' commitments to their individual organizations and the collective arrangement. Participation is motivated by a perception that individual organizational interests are best met by working together. This suggests that it is important for public managers to take the time to educate participants on the benefits of working together. In order to convey this, managers must understand how each organization fits into the bigger picture.

Second, the framework should account for leveraging resources. The use of a matching requirement to pool resources around grant funding, "piggybacking" on resources available to one organization within the arrangement, and combining nonfinancial resources in specialized ways increases the power of cross-sector collaboration. The criticality of a stable funding stream in this study suggests that administrators should consider ways in which cross-sector collaborations can access funding despite the regularity of unfunded mandates in today's political environment.

Linking empirical data to propositions derived previously from the literature is significant from a theoretical perspective because it may help researchers better understand how collaboration occurs. In addition, the importance of cross-sector collaboration is evident in this study as representatives

of public, private, and nonprofit organizations play critical roles in implementing the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program. Since social, environmental, and economic problems are bound to get more complex with time, continued exploration of this topic is necessary.

This study also has implications for the practice of public management. First, exploring factors that characterize collaboration may help practitioners narrow the context in which it is appropriate to use. On the other hand, this knowledge may also help public managers facilitate collaboration by strengthening the presence of these characteristics within an arrangement. In understanding that a series of factors characterize collaboration, managers may make changes proactively to adjust relationships so processes needed to develop and sustain the interaction align with the context where integration is expected.

Second, collaborative success was seemingly predetermined based on the resources or expertise of each organization invited to participate in the arrangement. If this is the case, bringing participants together that represent organizations with particular resources or expertise is critical. Therefore, planning for cross-sector collaboration is necessary to ensure representatives from appropriate organizations are invited to the table. In addition, successful collaboration may rely on diverse representation to ensure needed resources and expertise are available. Nonprofit organizations may be essential in developing and sustaining collaborative interactions because they operate in ways that public organizations are unable to achieve.

Finally, findings from this study reiterate that certain circumstances are more conducive to collaboration. Although findings from this research are based on one arrangement, the complexity of this problem and a lack of funding are common to public landscapes. Data suggests that the convening organization plays a pivotal role in bringing organizations together and creating multiorganizational structure. Although this role is acknowledged in the literature, specific guidance for convening organizations is lacking. Therefore, the following guidelines are offered for convening cross-sector collaborations:

- Identify a sponsor who has financial resources that can be used to incent participation in the program through a stable funding stream.
- Find a champion to motivate participants by helping them recognize complementary interests can be better served by working together.
- Invite participants to the table with diverse resources/expertise needed to address the problem.
- Think outside the box to leverage resources/expertise in creative ways to achieve collective goals.
- Establish linkages through a two-tiered governance structure to promote awareness of expertise within and between organizations.

- Encourage participants to learn about one another to foster longer-standing relationships, trust, and communication.

Continued exploration of cross-sector collaboration is important and the following recommendations are offered for future research. The criticality of a stable funding stream in this study suggests that researchers should consider ways in which implementation networks can access funding streams despite the regularity of unfunded mandates. Second, informal relationships play a significant role in developing and sustaining relationships between organizations, and theoretical understanding of collaboration may be improved by exploring ways in which this interaction is initiated. Third, information in this paper provides a starting point for further research on collaborative conveners.

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