Collaboration In Action

Overview

During the transition from alternative dispute resolution to today's standard of collaboration and stakeholder engagement, many federal agencies developed their own implementing policies, guidance, procedures, methods, and tools for collaborative decision-making. While there is no "one size fits all" solution, there are common themes, activities and actions that run through most every successful collaboration effort.

A source that best explains successful collaboration is a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) presentation - "Seven Principles of Successful Collaboration," jointly prepared by BLM and the Sonoran Institute. Its principles are as follows:

- ✓ Build Lasting Relationships
- ✓ Use Sideboards and Guidelines
- ✓ Encourage Diverse Viewpoints
- ✓ Work at an Appropriate Scale
- ✓ Empower the Group
- ✓ Share Resources and Rewards
- ✓ Build Internal Support

Another resource is the Environmental Collaboration and Conflict Resolution (ECCR) report from 2018. It explains the benefits of collaboration and lists strategies for communities, military installations, and local and state governments to implement when faced with compatibility and resiliency issues requiring mutually beneficial solutions.

Both the BLM presentation and the ECCR Report are in the Resources tab.

Benefits of Collaboration

Collaboration can be more beneficial than conflict resolution or litigation. Below are some of the major advantages of such an approach identified in the 2018 ECCR report:

Collaboration is less costly and less time-consuming:

- When compared to a conventional decision-making process, in a study of 123 ECCR participants, 75% of waste management negotiations that were done collaboratively saved time and in 81% of those cases it saved money.
- Compared to litigation, the EPA found that ECCR cases required 45% less time to reach a decision, 30% fewer staff members, and 79% fewer hours by lead attorneys.

Collaboration improves government and stakeholder relationships and creates long-term partnerships:

- More than 700 people were asked about their participation in collaborative land use planning and 82% agreed that such a process improved existing relationships and created new ones.

- A study of land use disputes suggests that ECCR can aid progress even when a complete settlement has not been reached. Most respondents (64%) involved in cases that did not reach settlement still thought they made significant progress and improved relationships.
- Most respondents in a study of federal and state ECCR cases reported that their working relationships improved, including their ability to work together to solve issues and their level of trust.

Collaboration creates better solutions and meet the needs of more stakeholders:

- Collaboration achieves high settlement rates, ranging from 66% to 93%, in a variety of situations.
- Participants in a group of land-use dispute mediations agreed that their settlement was creative (88%), and that it satisfied their interests (92%), as well as those of the other parties (86%).
- Two large studies found that skilled mediators and other good ECCR practices enhanced outcomes, including reaching agreements and their durability, resolving issues, addressing all interests, and improving understanding.
- ECCR cases analyzed by DOI, EPA, and the State of Oregon showed comparative improvements in natural resource management practices, environmental results, and economic benefits.

Establishing a Collaboration Group to Address Military-Community Compatibility Issues

An online search for terms such as collaboration, stakeholder engagement, outreach, and collaborative work environments will yield hundreds of results with guidance and recommendations about creating effective and collaborative teams, how to engage stakeholders and, how to overcome stakeholder obstacles. While there is no universally agreed upon method to effectively establish a collaborative group to assess and solve any one given compatibility issue, broad guidance is common across collaborative approaches. Using the guidance provided below, and based on specific situations and needs, communities will have to fill in the details, either by hiring a consultant or mediator, doing additional research on the topics that need addressing, or exploring different options through trial and error. Some common steps identified as necessary to initiate and implement a proactive group collaboration include:

1) Identify the stakeholders and parties that should be involved
2) Identify the overall purpose of the group – what are the goals, objectives, and desired outcomes?
3) Conduct a situational assessment and while you may not know all the answers at the beginning, some questions to ask include
   a. What does the local community want out of the process?
   b. What does the military want out of the process?
   c. What are the controversial issues?
   d. Are there areas of mutual agreement and mutual benefit?
   e. Is there enough data and information about an issue or is more needed? If so, how will it be obtained?
   f. Who has resources available to support the effort are they volunteers, paid, or sponsored?
   g. How much time do you have to solve the problem or provide input to a proposed action?

       h.   Who are the other stakeholders you think need to be involved?

       i.   What roles and responsibilities are necessary and how can they be assigned based on the group strengths and perspectives?

       j.   Should the group be facilitated or run by a chairperson?

4) Establish meeting frequency, location, and length, as well as how meeting discussions and decisions will be recorded

5) Develop meeting guidelines and decide whether discussions can be disclosed outside the group

6) Send invitations to potential members and provide the materials in Steps 2-5 to help them decide whether to participate.

7) Establish group membership, but if an original invitee has declined, find someone else with a similar perspective or familiarity with the issues

8) Begin the process by first reviewing and updating the details in Steps 2-5 and gain group agreement by consensus or majority vote

9) Develop multiple courses of action and the pros/cons that include factors like total cost, time to implement, and any impacts and benefits

10) Develop criteria for the group to use to evaluate success of the chosen course of action

11) Choose the course of action

12) Implement the course of action

13) Evaluate the success of the action based on the criteria established in Step 10

14) Conduct a lesson learned activity with the group to capture desired improvements to implement should another collaboration group need to be formed in the future

The above are not all inclusive, nor comprehensive and for each one additional activities and decisions may be necessary. The goal of this list is to provide a broad overview of the steps and actions to establish a collaborative group dynamic and to trigger questions when reviewing the resources listed below in Best Practices. The Maryland Department of Planning recommends that communities and military installations avail themselves of these resources and consider hiring an experienced consultant who specializes in this field of practice.