6-1-2014

A Framework for Integrating and Managing Expectations of Multiple Stakeholder Groups in a Collaborative Partnership

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Recommended Citation

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Abstract

The success of collaborative partnerships depends on the integration and management of multiple stakeholder expectations to develop mutually agreeable solutions that lead to desired environmental conditions and social well-being. The North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Partnership (NCSLP) provides an example of a coalition representing Extension, military, conservation, natural resources, and economic interests to address conservation of forest and farm lands. This article presents a framework for determining the diverse expectations of large collaborative programs and integrating them into an outcome-based decision making model.

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Introduction

Government agencies, communities, and private groups are forming partnerships to manage common problems and develop strategies for regional protection and development (Layman, Doll, & Peter, 2013; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). A strategy for framing collaborative projects from the views of multiple stakeholders allows for decisions to be made based on the project's total picture.

Gaining a holistic view of these multi-facet collaborative programs becomes complicated as various stakeholders with diverse expectations become involved (Layman et al., 2013). "Successful collaborative processes must be able to integrate and manage multiple stakeholder interests and knowledge, build trust and foster social learning, develop mutually-agreeable solutions, and lead to desired environmental conditions and social well-being" (Muñoz-Erickson, Aguilar-González, Loeser, & Sisk, 2010, p. 132).

This article's purpose is to share a framework for determining and integrating the expectations of multiple stakeholders in collaborative programs. This framework was used with the North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Partnership (NCSLP), which provides a unique example of a coalition of public and private groups formed to address land use issues. NCSLP developed a strategy focused on gaining a holistic view of the program by determining and incorporating the expectations of multiple stakeholders. These expectations are tied to program outcomes, ensuring an effective process for building sustainable partnerships with multiple stakeholders (Guion, 2010; Kelsey & Mariger, 2003; Lachapelle, Austin, & Clark, 2010; Layman et al., 2013; Prokopy et al., 2009).

How to Determine and Integrate the Expectations of Diverse Stakeholders

NCSLP used the following five-step framework for determining and integrating stakeholder expectations into an adaptive decision-making model for collaborative partnerships. The outlined framework can be applied during any phase of collaborative programs with multiple stakeholders and may be adapted based on program context.

1. Determining Various Elements of the Multi-Facet Program

The process begins by determining the various elements of the program. NCSLP is a regional program comprised of four primary elements (Table 1).

Table 1.

NC Sentinel Landscapes Program Elements

Element 1	Enhancing the Network and Linkages between Conservation, Military, and Community Goals.
Element 2	Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation (ADFP) in Support of Marine Core Installations East (MCIEAST) Training.
Element 3	Food and Fuel for the Forces
Element 4	Web-Based Data and Payment Management (DPM) System to Support Conservation of Working Lands.

The partnership is a funded set of efforts by the U.S. military with a goal of not only identifying and protecting working lands, but also creating a reproducible model that can work successfully elsewhere without military funding. Focusing on element activities and participation builds an understanding of the overall functionality of the multi-facet program (Lachapelle et al., 2010).

The statement of work serves as a great starting point to understand internal context. The statement of work outlines the overall structure of the program as well as the components that comprise each element. For example, Element 2 was subcontracted to the North Carolina Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation (NCFSWC). The foundation holds landowner workshops to inform and promote

engagement of relevant stakeholders in Market-Based Conservation. This process allows you to gain a holistic understanding of the program and provides a foundation for stakeholder analysis (Lachapelle et al., 2010).

2. Determining All the Stakeholder Groups

Connecting the program to the context of management allows you to determine all relevant stakeholders (Lachapelle et al., 2010). The Element 2 landowner workshops provide a venue for multiple stakeholders to become engaged with the program. Using direct observation of participation across all elements builds awareness of the stakeholders participating and affected. Initial identification of stakeholders should be evaluated in reference to already existing programs, for example NCSLP looked at the North Carolina Governor's Land-Use Compatibility Task Force.

3. Identification of Key Stakeholders

NCSLP categorized stakeholders as rural landowners, agricultural groups, conservation districts, land trusts, private conservation organizations, local governments, and the military. Next, leaders of the target audience, otherwise known as "key stakeholders," must be identified. Key stakeholder identification is needed to determine the needs of the target groups while securing their commitment and support to the program (Lachapelle et al., 2010; Layman et al., 2013).

The process began by identifying key decision-makers who contributed to program planning, design, and implementation on behalf of their groups. Traditionally, these decision-makers are identified from relevant organizations across each stakeholder group during program planning. Influential leaders frequently establish a positive reputation among the target audience highlighting the benefit of the reputational approach. The reputational approach allows the aforementioned decision-makers to suggest additional key stakeholders that will accurately represent the stakeholder group and increase program buy-in.

4. Conducting a Short Survey to Determine Key Stakeholder Expectations

Next, conduct a survey to determine stakeholder expectations for involvement and program success (Kelsey & Mariger, 2003). Collected survey responses should be organized by stakeholder group for the identification of short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals for success based on stakeholder expectations. These goals and expectations serve as the initial input for a program logic model (Kelsey & Mariger, 2003).

5. Development of an Over-Arching Logic Model

Developing an over-arching logic model requires an advisory committee approach to maintain stakeholder engagement and buy-in while not bogging down the process (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). The survey participants should serve as the initial list for committee selection, with primary consideration given to the ability to remain engaged in the process.

Mediated committee discussion promotes a participant-driven model that builds program commitment (Fratanduono, Steelman, & Petersen, 2013; Lachapelle et al., 2010; Layman et al., 2013). The larger group, through reoccurring engagement, must agree upon the over-arching logic model. NCSLP uses steering committee and quarterly meetings to address such decisions. The finalized model provides each NCSLP element lead with a holistic view of the program and allows them to identify the most effective and efficient communication processes.

Challenges, Alternatives, and Lessons Learned

The main challenge is maintaining key stakeholder engagement. This is a common issue with collaboration, which requires increasing the opportunities for engagement (Prokopy et al., 2012). Key stakeholders explained that an increased workload and time limitations were the main reasons for waning participation. To address this issue, program assimilation into already existing social networks provides a means for maintaining key stakeholder involvement (Layman et al., 2013). Schedule compatibility of large groups creates obstacles for attending program specific engagements. Attending key stakeholder workshops, meetings, and other events brings the program to target audience. This approach maintains engagement with key stakeholders while raising awareness within their stakeholder group (Fratanduono et al., 2013; Layman et al., 2013).

Framework and Implications

A partnership's ability to integrate and manage multiple stakeholder objectives and expectations by linking directly to the target publics contributes to program success (Fratanduono et al., 2013; Guion, 2010; Kelsey & Mariger, 2003; Lachapelle et al., 2010; Layman et al., 2013; Munoz-Erickson et al., 2010; Prokopy et al., 2009; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). As partnership networks continue to grow, determining program functionality and expectations of each stakeholder becomes more complex. Using a practical strategy for determining stakeholder expectations is extremely important for gaining a holistic view of the program.

Focusing on an inclusive strategy built upon collaborative stakeholder involvement provides a framework for effective program accountability and monitoring that is important to manage the large information demand collaborative programs require (Prokopy et al., 2009). North Carolina Cooperative Extension developed this framework to increase program commitment and credibility while providing a replicable model for program institutionalization.

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