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Collaboration among partnerships : a case study of the Cumberland Gap empowerment zone

Tracey Herrick Smith

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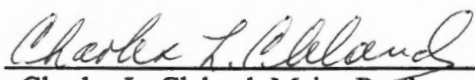
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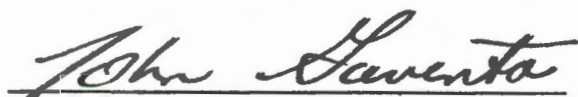
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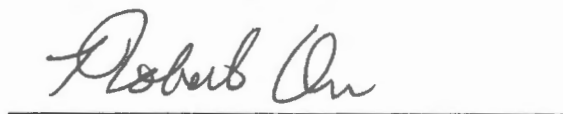
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Date January 5, 1995

**COLLABORATION AMONG PARTNERSHIPS:
A CASE STUDY OF THE CUMBERLAND GAP
EMPOWERMENT ZONE**

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Tracey Herrick Smith

May 1995

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To my father, Charles J. Herrick, Jr., for his unconditional support and belief in me.

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ABSTRACT

This study compares and contrasts the perceptions of members of a collaborative group with factors believed to contribute to the success of collaborative efforts. This study also presents members' general perceptions of the collaborative process and describes the history of Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities.

A case study approach was used to determine members' and technical assistance providers' perceptions of the factors contributing to the success of the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone's multiparty and community collaborative efforts. The mail survey method was used to contact participants. Open-ended questions were asked to determine these perceptions.

The researcher attempted to survey twenty-seven of the twenty-eight members populations which made up the core of the collaborative group. The researcher also attempted to survey the entire six-member population of technical assistance providers to the group. In all, the perceptions and observations of nineteen participants are represented in this study.

Factors commonly associated with successful collaboration efforts were found to be prevalent in the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone's efforts. Survey results revealed the primary problems to be in the areas of communication, trust, and flexibility. The existence of different levels of power and disagreements among participants' desired level of low-income participation also appeared to cause problems for collaborators.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM SITUATION

On June 30, 1994, the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone¹ committee members submitted a strategic plan proposal to the federal government for the designation of Empowerment Zone status, which entails a financial reward totaling forty million dollars to be dispersed over a ten-year time period. The proposal was developed in response to the Clinton administration's Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities² federal grant initiative being offered to economically distressed rural communities. The Zone was formed by officials from Bell County, Kentucky, Hancock County, Tennessee, and Lee County, Virginia.

President Clinton's Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Communities Act is aimed at distressed communities, rural and urban alike. This study focuses on rural communities. The goal of the EZ/EC initiative is to improve social and economic conditions in depressed areas by helping empower rural communities to determine their own futures.

The Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone is comprised of three contiguous counties across three state boundaries (See map in Appendix A). Population data by census tract is shown in Table I.

¹ Throughout the remainder of this study the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone may be referred to as the Zone or the CGEZ.

² Throughout the remainder of this study the Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities Act may be referred to as the EZ/EC Act.

Table I: Population data by census tract for the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone.

Census Geographic Area Census Tract Code/ Block Numbering Area	1990 Population	Land Area (sq. miles)	* No. of Persons in each Tract in Poverty
<u>Bell County, Kentucky</u>			
9605	2475	33.2	949
9608	3845	24.2	1265
9609	2053	41.7	824
<u>Hancock County, Tennessee</u>			
9601	944	46.9	424
9602	3166	67.6	1307
9603	947	43.4	368
<u>Lee County, Virginia</u>			
9604	1682	64.4	528
9904	2951	117	863
9905	4778	68.3	1602
9906	4403	87.4	1292
<u>Cumberland Gap</u>			
Totals	27244	594.1	9422

Source: The Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone Strategic Plan Proposal

* Note: This table has been slightly modified to include the words 'in poverty' in the heading of the fourth column. Percent below poverty figures were also omitted from this table.

The coal and zinc mining industries have dominated the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone's economy throughout the 1900s. The late 1970s, however, marked the beginning of a continuous decline in mining employment. In spite of this decline, the industry is central to the region's labor market, as it pays the highest salaries. The mines are located in Bell and Lee Counties. Hancock County has no coal mines; its only zinc mine closed in 1982.

The farming industry has also been significant to the region's economy. Beef cattle and tobacco are the primary agricultural products produced in the region. Farming is much more important to the economies of Hancock and Lee Counties than it is to Bell County. In fact, it is the largest employment sector in Lee County.

As is the case with farming, Bell County differs significantly from Hancock and Lee Counties in employment patterns. Where the manufacturing sector has developed or increased in Hancock and Lee Counties, it has declined in Bell County. Retail businesses employ the majority of the working population in Bell County, with the service sector following close behind. Mining employment levels fluctuate according to the condition of the coal market. High poverty levels and the lack of diversified employment opportunities in these three counties combine with other factors to make the Cumberland Gap, as it is defined here, a prime candidate for Empowerment Zone or Enterprise Community status.

One positive result of the formation of the Zone was the development of a tri-state collaboration process, inclusive of federal, state, and local governments, human service agencies, private and non-profit sectors, educational institutions, churches, and community members. Community collaboration is not a new concept. Multicommunity collaboration amongst rural areas, however, is a rare occurrence. A unique set of social, economic, and demographic characteristics, to be discussed later, apply to rural areas and pose a barrier to the formation of rural partnerships. One obstacle, in particular, is the absence of a perceived opportunity, a pre-condition to multicommunity collaboration among rural areas.

An opportunity for such collaborative efforts was presented by the federal government in 1993 through the EZ/EC Act. This Act, in recognition of limited size and resources characteristic of rural areas, emphasized multicommunity collaboration. The importance of an open and community-based strategic planning process was stressed in the “Rural Guidebook: Strategic Planning,” which was issued by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to aid rural communities in the application process.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

This report is a case study of the collaboration process of the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone’s strategic planning stages. Its purpose was to document and analyze multiparty and community collaboration efforts in the formation of rural partnerships by determining different parties’ perceptions of the factors influencing the success of such efforts. The development and submission of a strategic plan proposal marks the extent of collaborative success in this study.

The objectives of this study were to: 1) describe the history of Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities in general; 2) determine different parties’ perceptions of the factors contributing to the success of the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone’s multiparty and community collaborative efforts; 3) relate these perceptions to factors generally contributing to the success or failure of collaborative efforts; and 4) offer recommendations for future collaboration studies.

STUDY FORMAT

The second chapter of this study contains a literature review which consists of a discussion of collaboration. Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities are also defined and discussed in further detail in this chapter. The third chapter consists of a discussion of the procedures and methodology used to conduct this study. Chapter four focuses on the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone. The process of partnership formation and the groups involved are discussed. In chapter five, participants' perceptions of the collaborative process are discussed. Chapter six concludes this study with an examination of participants' perceptions of the collaborative process with respect to factors cited in the literature review. Problems revealed in the survey results are discussed and general recommendations for the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone are provided. Shortcomings of this study and suggestions for future research are also discussed in chapter six.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The review literature on collaboration focuses on the importance and need for collaborative efforts, factors which act as barriers to multicomunity collaboration efforts among rural areas, and factors contributing to the success of such efforts. This review consists of two parts, the first of which is allocated to the literature on collaboration. The second part focuses on literature pertaining to Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities. The history of Enterprise Communities, previous federal anti-poverty and revitalization efforts, the arguments of critics and advocates, and current EZ/EC legislation are discussed.

COLLABORATION DEFINED

The literature reviewed presented four definitions of collaboration:

- 1) Collaboration, in the words of Mattessich and Monsey (1992:7), “is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. The relationship includes a commitment to: a definition of mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards.”

- 2) Winer and Ray (1994:22) believe “a more durable and pervasive relationship marks collaboration. Participants bring separate organizations into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission. Such relationships require comprehensive planning and well-defined communication channels operating on all levels. The collaborative structure determines authority, and risk is much greater because each partner contributes its resources and reputation. Power is an issue and can be unequal. Partners pool or jointly secure the resources, and share the results and rewards.”
- 3) The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) chose not to define collaboration per se, but rather to discuss the features that define the concept. According to the UNDP, a single issue or set of issues must be present for collaboration to occur, therefore, a “concrete boundary” is created, limiting collaborative efforts in time, space, and around a particular problem. The joining of various affected parties is considered the second feature of collaboration, by the UNDP. The final feature is structure. Collaborative efforts must have a structural or formal aspect.
- 4) Finally, Ciglar, Jansen, Ryan, and Stabler (1994:6) define multicomunity collaboration as referring “both to multiple communities and to multiple sectors within the participating communities.”

Although collaboration among organizations has been around for years, it is becoming increasingly popular and more expansive in its parameters. Its increasing popular-

ity is due, in part, to declining resources at a local level combined with expanding external linkages. The majority of rural communities no longer possess the means for successful economic development efforts. Therefore, cooperative efforts among two or more communities, as a strategy to rural revitalization, most likely stand a better chance of success (Ciglar, et al., 1994).

Benefits of collaborative efforts are numerous. Mattessich and Monsey point out the reduction of individual expenses during the stages of planning, research, training, and other development activities; the avoidance of duplication of costs; the increased accessibility of services; and increased creativity in surmounting barriers to success (1992). Gray (cited in Mattessich & Monsey, 1992) points out that the quality of results is usually better due to a more comprehensive analysis of issues and opportunities. Also, the ability to accomplish tasks is diversified as a result of combined resources. In spite of all the potential benefits of collaboration, many rural communities are affected by factors which prevent effective collaboration from occurring.

BARRIERS TO MULTICOMMUNITY COLLABORATION IN RURAL AREAS

As mentioned in the introduction, multicommunity collaboration between rural areas is a rare occurrence due to the existence of a unique set of social, economic, and demographic characteristics. While social and economic decline are two primary reasons collaborative efforts emerge, Ciglar, et al. (1994) cite these same features, and others, as the cause of other problems which impede the emergence of rural partnerships. The im-

pediments cited by these authors are associated with small government and include the following:

- Low salience, on the part of public officials, toward cooperation with other municipalities.
- Lack of support for such efforts by political entrepreneurs.
- Lack of resources, political support, and public demand for partnership efforts.
- The promotion of partnerships by highly developed political coalitions is generally non-existent.
- Costs, benefits, and options of partnerships are not fully comprehended by citizens or public officials.
- Opportunities are often ignored due to the perception of public officials that such partnerships offer no political reward.
- The initiative for promoting a partnership is not taken due to the complexity of such efforts.
- The complexity and uncertainty associated with partnerships results in lost responsibility.
- The lines of communication are so complex that the result is often a lack of information. In turn, decision-making becomes more difficult.
- A community's interest in pursuing a partnership does not usually coincide with its fiscal or management capacity.
- Administrative inadequacies serve to hamper organizational efforts.

In light of these problems, Ciglar, et al. (p.45) claim that some combination of pre-conditions is necessary if rural partnerships are going to be developed and sustained. The nine pre-conditions set forth by these researchers are as follows:

- A disaster occurrence.
- Community fiscal stress or perceived stress by key local decision-makers.
- The presence of a political constituency for cooperation and/or the perception by key officials that such a constituency exists.
- Supportive programs provided by external linkages, such as State government, professional and municipal associations, and university programs.
- Early and continued support by elected local officials who set institutional agendas and who are empowered for action.
- A clear demonstration that cooperation has advantages for the participating governments.
- The emergence of a policy entrepreneur or entrepreneurs who promote partnership formations.
- An early focus on visible, effective strategies.
- An emphasis on collaborative skills-building by and for those involved in partnerships.

Several of these pre-conditions applied to the three counties defining the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone. Fiscal stress is characteristic of each community. Key officials perceived the existence of a political constituency for cooperation. Supportive pro-

grams surrounded the EZ/EC legislation. The support of local officials was continuous. The advantages for participating governments were clearly abundant, regardless of designation. The EZ/EC legislation promoted partnership formations and collaborative skills-building. The underlying notion of these pre-conditions is the presentation of opportunity. In the case of the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone, the EZ/EC legislation acted as the inducement which revealed the presence of existing opportunities.

FACTORS OF SUCCESS

Mattessich and Monsey (1992) discuss nineteen categorized factors which influence the success of collaborative efforts. The six categories are 1) Environment; 2) Membership; 3) Process/Structure; 4) Communication; 5) Purpose; and 6) Resources. According to Mattessich and Monsey (p.12), influential factors related to the Environment include:

- 1) "History of collaboration or cooperation in the community.

A history of collaboration or cooperation exists in the community and offers the potential collaborative partners an understanding of the roles and expectations required in collaboration and enables them to trust the process."

- 2) "Collaborative group seen as a leader in the community.

The collaborative group ... is perceived within the community as a leader- at least related to the goals and activities it intends to accomplish."

- 3) “Political/social climate favorable.

Political leaders, opinion-makers, persons who control resources, and the general public support ... the mission of the collaborative group.”

Factors related to Membership (p.12) include:

- 1) “Mutual respect, understanding, and trust.

Members of the collaborative group share an understanding and respect for each other and their respective organizations: how they operate, their cultural norms and values, limitations, and expectations.”

- 2) “Appropriate cross-section of members.

The collaborative group includes representatives from each segment of the community who will be affected by its activities.”

- 3) “Members see collaboration as in their self-interest.

Collaborating partners believe the benefits of collaboration will offset costs such as loss of autonomy and turf.”

- 4) “Ability to compromise.

Collaborating partners are able to compromise, since the many decisions within a collaborative effort cannot possibly fit the preferences of every member perfectly.”

Factors related to Process/Structure (p.13) include:

- 1) "Members share a stake in both process and outcome.

Members of a collaborative group feel 'ownership' of both the way the group works and the results or product of its work."

- 2) "Multiple layers of decision-making.

Every level ... within each organization in the collaborative group participates in decision-making."

- 3) "Flexibility.

The collaborative group remains open to varied ways of organizing itself and accomplishing its work."

- 4) "Development of clear roles and policy guidelines.

The collaborating partners clearly understand their roles, rights, and responsibilities; and how to carry out those responsibilities."

- 5) "Adaptability.

The collaborative group has the ability to sustain itself in the midst of major changes, even if it needs to change some major goals, members, etc., in order to deal with changing conditions."

Factors related to Communication (p.13) include:

- 1) "Open and frequent communication.

Collaborative group members interact often, update one another, discuss issues

openly, convey all necessary information to one another and to people outside the group.”

- 2) “Established informal and formal communication links.

Channels of communication exist on paper, so that information flow occurs. In addition, members establish personal connections—producing a better, more informed, and cohesive group working on a common project.”

Factors related to Purpose (p.14) include:

- 1) “Concrete, attainable goals and objectives.

Goals and objectives of the collaborative group are clear to all partners, and can realistically be attained.”

- 2) “Shared vision.

Collaborating partners have the same vision, with clearly agreed upon mission, objectives, and strategy. The shared vision may exist at the outset of collaboration; or the partners may develop a vision as they work together.”

- 3) “Unique purpose.

The mission and goals or approach of the collaborative group differ, at least in part, from the mission and goals or approach of the member organizations.”

Factors related to Resources (p.14) include:

- 1) “Sufficient funds.

The collaborative group has an adequate, consistent financial base to support its operations.”

2) “Skilled convener.

The individual who convenes the collaborative group has organizing and interpersonal skills, and carries out the role with fairness. Because of these characteristics . . . , the convener is granted respect or ‘legitimacy’ from the collaborative partners.”

Winer and Ray (1994) agree with the nineteen factors presented above. However, these authors go a bit further and say that the vision and desired results must be reviewed; an action plan must be developed; accountability standards must be created; and collaborative work habits must be built. The congruity between this conglomeration of factors and the presented definitions of collaboration is easily recognized.

Once again, collaborative efforts among organizations is not a new concept. Today, however, in the face of a shrinking resource base, human service, community, and government organizations are placing a greater emphasis on collaboration (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). The Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Communities Act is the most recent and perhaps largest attempt, at a Federal level, to promote collaborative problem-solving.

ENTERPRISE ZONES

The enterprise zone, originally introduced in Great Britain in the mid-1970s, has been a controversial strategy for economic development in the United States since the early 1980s. For Great Britain, the enterprise zone “. . . plan included removing taxes and regulatory barriers from distressed business communities” (Glover, 1993:76). Although

modified, the enterprise zone program was adopted by state government as a means of stimulating redevelopment, promoting private investment, and creating new jobs.

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF REVITALIZATION EFFORTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Restoration of perceivably distressed areas began in the late 1940s with the Truman Administration's Urban Renewal program. The program was not enacted until 1954. The general goal of Urban Renewal was to clean up blighted areas, mainly at the level of physical appearance. The literature offers differing reasons for its failure. Glover (1993) claims insufficient funding made for difficulty in implementing program goals. From the perspective of Lemann,

the rap on it, wholly justified, was that it bulldozed neighborhoods, especially black neighborhoods (hence its name, "Negro Removal") and replaced them with highways, sterile housing developments and municipal office complexes that looked wonderful when planners presented them at Chamber of Commerce meetings but, when built, only hastened the city's decline. (1994:29)

The Johnson Administration's 1966 Model Cities program was aimed at revitalizing poor neighborhoods. According to Glover (1993), the Model Cities program was initially effective in motivating local officials to provide a broad range of services and improve government operations. However, the continuous addition of new cities coupled with no increase in funding made the program too overwhelming to be successful. One

year after Americans saw the implementation of the Model Cities program, the then New York Senator, Robert Kennedy, introduced the Urban and Rural Opportunities Development Act, which was similar to the concept of the enterprise zone program. However, the bill died in Congress.

Accompanying the 1970s was an onslaught of programs, "... which were sold as being different from the failed programs of the past while resting on the same assumptions: bottom-up planning, coordination of programs, neighborhood redevelopment" (Lemann, 1994:29). The Community Development Block Grant, instituted in 1974, was the Ford Administration's attempt at revitalizing distressed areas. Urban Development Action Grants characterized the Carter Administration. In 1979, the enterprise zone concept was introduced again by the Heritage Foundation.

In 1980, the enterprise zone strategy for economic development began its domination of the decade. Early proponents of the concept were Congressmen Jack Kemp and Robert Garcia of New York. They introduced the Urban Jobs and Enterprise Zone Act of 1980. The Act proposed job creation, tax incentives, and regulatory relief from barriers to business activity (Glover, 1993). From 1982 to 1987 several variations of enterprise zone legislation were adopted by either the House or the Senate, but not both. It was not until December 1987 that an authorization bill for housing and community development programs, inclusive of enterprise zones, was cleared by Congress. The bill was passed in February 1988 as Title VII of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1987.

The...law authorized the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to designate 100 zones in which state and local governments would reduce taxes, fees and bureaucracy while increasing public services to encourage economic development. Two-thirds of the zones were in cities; one-third were in rural areas. But the law provided no federal tax breaks and little federal money — \$1 million a year for administrative expenses. (“Congress Votes, 1993)

Nearly 300 applications for designation were accepted by HUD, but no Federal enterprise zones were designated under Title VII. Jack Kemp, one of the Congressmen who introduced the Urban Jobs and Enterprise Act of 1980, became secretary of HUD in 1989 under George Bush. He believed the law to be flawed, mainly because of the lack of federal tax incentives (Congress Votes, 1993).

It took an upheaval as great as the South Central Los Angeles riots to bring the focus back on enterprise zone legislation. A more comprehensive plan was agreed on in 1992 that might have been passed had it not been presented during the Presidential race.

The bill ... contained a few tiny technical adjustments that would increase Government revenues, like a change in the tax-accounting procedure for securities dealers. Afraid he would be accused of again breaking his “no new taxes” pledge, Bush announced he would veto the bill. (Lemann, 1994:30)

STATE ENTERPRISE ZONE PROGRAMS

Enterprise zone legislation has surfaced every year, in some form or fashion, since 1980. Nevertheless, the prolonged debate at the Federal level has not prevented individual states from testing the concept. Nearly forty states currently have enterprise zone legislation, with Louisiana being the first to adopt, in 1981. The operating zone programs are concentrated in the Northeast, South, and Southwest regions. The Northern plains or Northwestern states have either discontinued or never adopted the legislation (Reeder, 1993).

“Typical incentives include loans and loan guarantees, reduction in sales and local property taxes for businesses that locate in depressed areas, and tax credits for hiring local employees” (Katz, 1993:1881). Other forms of assistance include infrastructure, loans, and technical assistance. Streamlined local permit processes are also an incentive (Robinson & Reeder, 1991).

Eligibility requirements for an area to become a zone vary depending on the state. High unemployment, low-income, declining population, and pervasive poverty are some of the requirements. Other eligibility requirements, such as population threshold and area restriction, “...prevent many rural areas from participating in enterprise zone programs. Rural...zones, nevertheless, play an important role in some State programs. Almost half of all State enterprise zones are in nonmetro areas” (Robinson & Reeder, 1991:30).

THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION

Clinton has continued the concept of enterprise zones. His plan, which called for ten empowerment zones and one-hundred enterprise communities, was adopted, but modified by Congress. The modified version allowed for nine empowerment zones and ninety-five enterprise communities. Urban areas will constitute six of the EZ's and sixty-five of the EC's, leaving three zones and thirty communities to rural areas. HUD will designate the urban areas. The USDA will designate the rural areas. Incentives were also modified. The total plan will be allocated \$3.5 billion. Received will be "...a total of more than \$2 billion in tax incentives in addition to \$100 million in grants to each urban zone and \$40 million to each rural area" (Birnbaum, 1994:A12). Grants for each enterprise community will be as much as \$3 million.

In order to be applicable, each area must meet certain eligibility criteria related to population, poverty rate, size, and distress. A strategic plan, entailing very specific conditions, was required from each area as part of the competitive process. According to James (1994:66),

the strategic plan must describe the coordinated economic, human, community, and physical development plan and related activities proposed for the nominated area; describe how the affected community is a full partner in related activities proposed for the nominated area; and identify the amount of state, local, and private resources that will be available in the nominated area and the public/private partnerships to be used. The plan

must also identify the funding requested under any Federal program in support of the economic, human, community, and physical development and related activities and identify baselines, methods, and benchmarks for measuring the success of the plan. Finally, the plan may not include any action to assist any establishment in relocating from an area outside the nominated area to the nominated area. However, assistance for the expansion of an existing business entity through the establishment of a new branch, affiliate, or subsidiary is permitted under certain conditions.

According to Michael Savage, deputy director of HUD's office of Economic Development, the community-based approach to strategic planning is the key ingredient to making the zones more effective than previous versions (Lloyd, 1994). Others say Clinton's plan is an improvement because the population and area restrictions, which prevented many rural areas from participating, have been removed. For some areas, regardless of whether zone designation is granted, benefits have already been promised by local businesses or the city itself.

Perhaps the most popular complaint associated with Clinton's plan concerns the ninety-five enterprise communities. Many claim that the benefits to be received are too small to be worthwhile of anything but winning votes. Other criticisms concern the small number of zones and the lack of capital incentives for businesses. Stuart Butler, director of domestic policy studies at the Heritage Foundation, criticized the abundance of industrial policy and micromanagement. Butler developed the idea behind enterprise zones for

the United States. Jack Kemp “. . .called Clinton’s approach ‘a throwback to the top-down, paternalistic policies, which have dominated liberals’ thinking on poverty since the Great Society’” (Katz, 1993:1880). Regardless of the criticisms, the widespread competition Clinton’s plan has produced “. . .reminds us that every citistate region has all the resources it needs to revive its depressed neighborhoods — if it will only mobilize them” (Pierce, 1994:5). “From the start, the empowerment-zone effort was designed to compel communities to improve themselves no matter what the outcome of the enterprise-zone selection process” (Birnbaum, 1994:A12).

EFFECTIVENESS OF STATE RURAL ENTERPRISE ZONES

The literature includes several major studies that report tests of the effectiveness of enterprise zone programs. The Cambridge Systematic for the Small Business Administration performed a study in 1985. One year later, HUD performed a study. The USDA’s Economic Research Service conducted a study comparing rural to urban zones. Robinson and Reeder did the same. The results from the latter two studies will be focused on here.

The USDA’s study concluded that “. . .while urban zones created more jobs annually than rural, the typical rural zone created more jobs per resident. Rural zones were also more likely to provide a substantial employment boost relative to their populations” (Reeder, 1993:34). The rural zones that were the least populated and adjacent to metropolitan areas were found to be the most productive.

Robinson and Reeder report that urban zones are more effective in job creation. However, job creation in rural zones occurred mainly through the expansion of existing

businesses; indicating no expense to other areas (Robinson & Reeder, 1991). Most of the jobs created were in traditional manufacturing industries. These analyses

suggest that nonmetro enterprise zones have been moderately successful, at least for those firms investing in the zones. The number of jobs created by participating firms has been substantial relative to zone populations, and a relatively high percentage of jobs appears to be going to disadvantaged zone residents. (Robinson & Reeder, 1991:34)

Reeder and Robinson (1992) conclude that inadequate rural participation is one of the biggest problems associated with state enterprise zone programs. Suggestions for increased participation include “relaxing...restrictions on population and area size” and the provision of “technical assistance in the application process” (p. 271). These changes were included in Clinton’s plan. “Enterprise zones can serve as a catalyst to turn around a rural economy when strong local leadership, community commitment, and an effective development strategy are present and other development tools are available” (Reeder, 1993:36).

CHAPTER THREE

PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY

POPULATION

The target population for this case study included the Steering Committee members for the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone and the technical assistance providers for the Zone. The steering committee for the Zone was made up of people from all walks of life. The members ranged from the local political elite to low-income minorities. In Bell County, initial committee members were appointed by the Middlesboro Mayor and the Bell County Judge/Executive. Later members were selected by a vote from their peers who attended the program introduction meeting. It was undetermined how committee members for Hancock and Lee Counties were selected. In addition to the general steering committee, six topical interest groups were formed. It was the task of these groups to identify issues and develop projects for the strategic plan. Approximately 68% of the steering committee members were also a part of one of the following interest groups: health, governance, infrastructure, education, environment and land use, and sustainable economic development.

Twenty-seven of the twenty-eight Steering Committee members were surveyed for this study. One member was excluded from the survey because the researcher was unable to obtain the address needed for inclusion. Fifteen of the twenty-seven questionnaires were returned, creating a fifty-five percent response rate for Steering Committee mem-

bers. A total of six technical assistance providers were also surveyed. An eighty-three percent response rate was recorded for this group.

Accompanying the self-administered questionnaire was a cover letter which provided an explanation of the study. It was made clear that participation in the study was voluntary and confidentiality would be maintained. The survey subjects were also made aware that the return of the questionnaire to the researcher constituted informed consent to participate in the study. A statement of confidentiality and informed consent is required in academic study of human subjects. An explanation of the identification number on each survey was also provided. All returned questionnaires were secured in a locked file cabinet in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. The master list of identification numbers was secured in a separate location.

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

This study utilized a case study approach to determine members' and assistance providers' perceptions of the factors contributing to the success of the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone's multiparty and community collaborative efforts. The study also ascertained Steering Committee members' perceptions of the potential for future collaborative efforts if empowerment zone or enterprise community status is not awarded.

The mail survey method was used to contact participants. A deadline for the return of the questionnaire was presented in the cover letter. At the time of the deadline,

response rate for the Steering Committee members was unsatisfactory to the researcher. A follow up letter presenting a second deadline was mailed one day later.

The questionnaire consisted of two close-ended questions followed by a series of open-ended questions. The close-ended questions pertained to participants' perceptions of the extent of involvement of different groups in the shaping of the final strategic plan proposal. However, they were both excluded from analysis due to the low response rate recorded for Lee County. The open-ended questions were formulated in accordance with the reviewed literature on collaboration. These questions mostly pertained to contributing factors to successful collaborative efforts. The questionnaire presented to the technical assistance providers was moderately adapted in order to gain knowledge of their role in the process. One person was randomly selected from each organization providing technical assistance to represent the view of that organization. Two organizations were excluded from this random selection process, but not the study, due to the fact that only one person represented each organization.

DATA ANALYSIS

Steering Committee members were initially grouped according to the county in which they served: Bell, Hancock, or Lee. Responses from Bell County tend to dominate this study for two reasons. First, Bell County had twelve (excluding the committee member whose address was unobtainable) committee members compared to seven for each of the other counties. Second, the response rate was significantly greater. Nine of the fifteen respondents were from Bell County members. Five respondents represented Hancock

County. Lee County was extremely underrepresented in this study with only one respondent.

Perceptions of both subject groups, Steering Committee members and technical assistance providers, were compared to factors commonly associated with successful collaboration efforts. Opportunities and barriers that arose as a result of this partnership effort were compared to those found in the literature review. Based on these findings, the researcher was able to reinforce or negate factors of collaborative success cited in the literature review. Statistical testing was not considered appropriate for this study for a variety of reasons. First, an entire population rather than a sample was presented with a survey. The amount of collected quantifiable data was too small to be of any statistical significance. Also, the number of people included in the study studied was small.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Interpretation of the data from the survey questionnaires was aided through participation by the researcher in a number of meetings held during the strategic planning stages of the collaboration process. Such participant observation was useful for providing a context for the relatively brief responses recorded on the questionnaire forms. Additionally, the researcher assisted in the categorization, analysis, and coding of the data collected from the many citizens who participated in the Hancock County meetings held to acquaint and involve them in the planning process. The results of these efforts were used by members of the steering committee for a variety of purposes.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CUMBERLAND GAP EMPOWERMENT ZONE

FEDERAL ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Specific eligibility requirements for zone designation were set forth in the empowerment zone and enterprise community application guide, entitled “Building Communities: Together.” The guide was provided by HUD and the USDA. The population data table presented in chapter one was an application requirement used to demonstrate eligibility. The 1990 Census was the only acceptable data source for this information. In order for the nominated area to be eligible, fifty percent of the population census tracts/block numbering areas were to have a thirty-five percent poverty rate. Ninety percent of all census tracts/block numbering areas required a twenty-five percent poverty rate. Thirty thousand was the maximum population for a nominated rural area.

ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES

Four meetings were necessary before zone boundaries were agreed upon. According to the Empowerment Zone Proposal, there were several reasons for the four meetings: the original involvement of two additional counties added to the complexity of decision-making; geographic options were restricted due to the thirty thousand population limit imposed on rural areas; community leaders were not familiar with each other; and it was not until the third meeting that the counties making up the Zone were all represented.

The USDA encouraged combining counties during the process of setting zone boundaries so a more competitive economic unit could be formed. It was clear that cooperation across county and state lines would be advantageous. However, the question of what census tracts would be included still remained. Hancock County, with less than one-third of the Zone's population, was included in its entirety. Bell County conceded to the inclusion of fewer residents in exchange for the inclusion of a census tract in which significant job creation investments had already been made. Lee County conceded to dropping the inclusion of the census tract with the highest poverty rate in exchange for the inclusion of three other tracts with more developmental potential (Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone Proposal, 1994). With these compromises on the table, the Zone boundaries were established.

COLLABORATION AMONG GROUPS

Collaboration, in terms of the participating groups, was extensive. The process of participant selection deviated from the norm of an "elite few" making decisions. The Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone Proposal refers to widely publicized intentions, the development of partnerships with agencies serving low-income residents, and the provision of basic prerequisites to widespread participation, such as child care and transportation services. It was also stated that efforts were made to ensure the participation of people not affiliated with an organization that was considered to be formally participating in the planning process. In other words, efforts were made to involve ordinary community residents.

In Bell and Lee Counties, meetings were held in a central location and were widely publicized. The forms of publicity utilized were not stated in the Proposal. Transportation and child care was provided in an attempt to increase the attendance levels of low-income residents. The objectives of the first Bell County meeting, as stated in the proposal, were to explain the process of the empowerment zone, solicit widespread participation, and establish trust with community residents. An interesting challenge from African-American community leaders arose during this first meeting. The complaint concerned the composition of the steering committee; it represented the same old power structure. The request was to add six committee members from the African-American community to ensure fair representation. The request was granted by Bell County committee members and agreed to by Hancock and Lee County committee members.

Community meetings in Hancock County were held somewhat differently. Rather than centrally located, meetings were held at separate locations throughout the county. Forms of publicity for these meetings included mailing flyers to every resident, sending home notices with all school children, and advertisement in the newspapers. Child care but not transportation was provided. There was a total attendance of over a thousand residents from a population of 6,739 (Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone Proposal).

Groups began to come together and work as a whole. According to the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone Proposal,

...a united commitment began to emerge. People who had never met suddenly found themselves working together toward a common purpose.

Educators, parents, and students discussed education problems and opportunities while healthcare professionals and patients discussed the dire health conditions found in the region. Business people worked with unemployed residents and retirees to identify workforce needs and desirable jobs.

(p. 15)

Group involvement was extended beyond local traditional, (elected officials) and new, (grassroots organizations) leadership, the business community, human service organizations, and community people. Outside technical assistance providers were also involved in the process. Census data analysis, technical assistance, and referral of possible Zone partners was provided by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Information, meeting facilitation, and data analyses were provided by the Virginia Polytechnic Institute Economic Development Assistance Center and the University of Virginia Center for Public Service (Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone Proposal, 1994). The Cumberland Valley Area Development District, the First Tennessee Development District, and the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission also provided technical and planning assistance as well as facilitation to their respective counties and the Zone planning effort.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO THE FORMATION OF RURAL PARTNERSHIPS

As stated in the "Rural Guidebook: Strategic Planning" (1994:5), "partnerships should be formed, both within the community among diverse social groups and with the Federal and state governments, other local communities, private businesses, and nonprofit

organizations to focus resources through lasting alliances.” The empowerment zone and enterprise community initiative provided the jolt needed by communities to overcome some of the barriers to the formation of rural partnerships, cited by Ciglar, et al. (1994), simply by making the formation of partnerships a key objective. Public officials recognized the advantages of cooperating with other municipalities. As the political support for a partnership effort grew, public demand for such an effort began to emerge. Partnerships were promoted by Federal and state governments. Through the initial meetings between community leaders and the subsequent community meetings, the costs, benefits, and options of a partnership effort became clearer to public officials and citizens. For public officials, this partnership opportunity offered the potential to reap numerous political rewards. Essentially, there was nothing to lose by taking part in the process. If empowerment zone or enterprise community status was not granted, participating communities, at the very least, were left with a developed strategic plan for economic improvement and newly developed alliances. The empowerment zone and enterprise community initiative provided an opportunity that was too good for these rural communities to let slip away.

FACTORS OF SUCCESS

Mattessich and Monsey’s (1992) discussion of nineteen categorized factors that influence the success of collaboration efforts was presented in chapter two. At this point in the study, a discussion of several of these factors, as they apply to the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone, is warranted. Other factors will be discussed in following chapters.

Relevant to environment is a prior history of collaboration or cooperation in the community. In the case of the CGEZ, a history of collaboration or cooperation between communities was more relevant. Prior linkages were limited to tourism promotion, trade, and highway improvements. For the most part, communication and collaboration efforts between the participating communities were slight prior to the strategic planning effort. Also related to the environment is a favorable political and social climate. Support for the mission of the collaborative group was widespread throughout the community.

Relevant to membership is an appropriate cross-section of members. Political leaders, opinion-makers, persons who control resources, and the general public were all brought into the process in one way or another. Therefore, each segment of the community was represented in the process. Members seeing collaboration as in their self-interest is also a factor Mattessich and Monsey related to membership. The collaborating partners obviously believed the benefits of collaboration would offset the costs. As mentioned previously, there was nothing to lose by taking part in the initiative. The ability to compromise is another factor related to membership. This ability was shown by collaborating partners in the beginning with the establishment of Zone boundaries and the extension of the Bell County steering committee.

Mattessich and Monsey related members sharing a stake in both process and outcome to the category of process/structure. All segments of the Zone community were represented in the process. If empowerment zone or enterprise community status was

granted, all segments of the community would reap the benefits, provided the strategic plan was implemented as proposed.

Concrete, attainable goals and objectives, related to purpose by Mattessich and Monsey, was what the strategic planning process was all about. Developmental goals and objectives had to be attainable for the strategic plan proposal to be competitive. One factor that helped keep goals and objectives concrete was a shared vision. A shared vision is another factor related to purpose and was a required element of the strategic plan proposal. The vision statement for the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone described their future as a Zone in the areas of education, quality of life, health and safety, infrastructure, economy, governance, and leadership. In terms of education, the Zone envisions itself as a world leader in rural public education. In terms of quality of life, the Zone envisions itself as one of the world's most desirable places to live, work, and visit. This would be accomplished by balancing economic opportunity and environmental responsibility. In terms of health and safety, the Zone envisions itself as being among the safest and healthiest places to work and live. This would be the result of public-private partnerships as well as an emphasis on wellness programs. The Zone's envisioned infrastructure links the region and the world through telecommunications. The envisioned economy is diverse, sustainable, and globally competitive. In terms of governance, with local and state governments acting as partners, the future is beneficial to all residents. These governments promote ongoing citizen participation. In terms of leadership, processes are developed which promote widespread participation (Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone Proposal, 1994).

A unique purpose is also a factor influencing the success of collaborative efforts that is related to purpose. A unique purpose is described by Mattessich and Monsey (1992:14) as “the mission and goals or approach of the collaborative group differ, at least in part, from the mission and goals or approach of the member organizations.” While an individual agenda applies to each county in the Zone, the overall mission is defined in the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone Proposal (1994:29) as follows: “The mission of Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone, Inc. is to assist people, families, and communities, through cooperative partnerships, as they strive to achieve economic self-sufficiency and reduce dependency.”

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The strategic plan proposal submitted to the Federal government for consideration for empowerment zone designation paints a rather all-inclusive (i.e., all sectors of the community) picture of the strategic planning process. Relatively few conflicts—three, to be exact—were presented in the proposal. Essentially, the proposal represented an overall view of the strategic planning process. Revealed through the self-administered questionnaires were the participants' perceptions of the multiparty and community collaborative process. Results from the questionnaires, while often confirming the overall view presented in the proposal, sometimes provided a very different view of the process. Presented in this chapter are participants' perceptions of the involvement of low-income residents and other groups, power imbalances between groups, and the opportunities and difficulties that arose during the process. Several questions were designed to confirm or negate the presence of some of the nineteen factors to successful collaboration formulated by Mattessich and Monsey (1992). Results of these questions are also discussed.

INVOLVEMENT OF LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS

The strategic plan proposal discusses widespread participation on the part of low-income residents during the initial meetings. The great lengths to which each county went to ensure the participation of this group of residents were discussed in the proposal and

presented in chapter four of this study. None of the questionnaires negate the initial participation of low-income residents. However, when asked what processes were created or sustained that would ensure the involvement of low-income residents throughout the entire process, the overall view presented, while positive, had some negative overtones.

Several respondents indicated that the expansion of the Bell County steering committee to include six representatives from the African-American community was intended as a means of sustaining the participation of low-income residents. While this measure may have helped to ensure sustained participation of low-income African-Americans in Bell County, did it help to sustain the participation of low-income members of all races? This question was not addressed by respondents.

Another process considered to ensure sustained participation of low-income residents was the selection of projects that would, if implemented, involve this group. Also indicated was the involvement of this group in the project planning meetings. The application of open door policies and newspaper advertisements of the meetings were cited as processes that would ensure sustained low-income participation. However, transportation and child care services were not said to have been available for meetings held following the introduction of the grant program.

Two respondents remarked negatively on processes that were created or sustained to ensure the involvement of low-income residents. In fact, one respondent indicated that no processes were sustained. Another stated that, while present initially, low-income residents were gradually excluded through the “scheduling of meetings during the work day

and inadequate notification [of meetings].” Since the submission of the proposal in June 1994, “none of the counties have substantially involved low-income people.”

Survey subjects were asked what fears they had, at various stages in the process, about involving community people and whether or not those fears turned out to be valid. A few respondents indicated that they personally felt no fears. However, plenty of fears were experienced by other respondents. The most common was the fear that involvement would not occur or, at most, be minimal; “especially during drafting [of the plan] when real decisions were made.” Another respondent stated a fear of “whether they [community residents] would actually attend and then if they could be an asset or of value to the process.” Initially, they were very productive and helpful. Some rather disturbing comments were made:

Though Hancock Co. (and to [a] lessor [sic] degree Bell Co.) did involve community people initially, Lee did not, really. ...fears were valid since there was virtually no involvement of community people during real decision making, and proposals arising out of community meetings were often discouraged or omitted by T.A. [technical assistance] providers, who dominated [the] process.

To confirm parts of this comment, another respondent stated, “we were afraid of our lack of being able to shape the plan. This was pretty well realized.” A third respondent confirmed others’ responses as well by stating the fear that “their input would not be heard in the final product [strategic plan]. We need to do more with structuring a process

to keep our people involved.” Two additional respondents feared existing differences would split the community because no one would be able to “give anything up in the process. The fears were not valid.”

Two technical assistance providers indicated they had no fears about involving community people and that a good cross-section of participating parties existed. Another technical assistance provider revealed the “fear that they wouldn’t participate in adequate numbers and wouldn’t work well across state lines. Both fears proved not to be true.” On a negative note, there was a fear of “too many totally unworkable and unrealistic ideas—yes, those fears were valid.”

POWER IMBALANCES

In this type of collaborative effort, significant differences in power exist among participating groups. Participants were asked how imbalances in power were handled and whether or not any one group acted as mediator between power holders and the relatively powerless. Only two Steering Committee respondents chose not to answer the question. Five claimed they did not personally observe any problems related to differences in levels of power. On a more informative note, one respondent indicated that “the imbalances were not handled well do [sic] to lack of understanding that they exist on the part of traditional holders of power. This resulted in some polarization of the [steering] committee.” Some respondents chose to describe the process used during meetings. “One person was picked by the main body to oversee the group. There was a different person picked at each meeting.” “We tried to keep equal representation on all groups. The majority rule

was accepted by everyone.” Another respondent indicated that few differences surfaced and those that did were handled by leadership from the three counties. Other respondents were slightly more informative about where the differences in power existed. One respondent indicated feeling that the committee on health was the most powerful but that no complications or exercise of power over other committees occurred. Another respondent stated that while “no significant power struggles developed, one group seemed to take the lead in establishing procedures, time-lines, community involvement strategies, etc.” Another respondent’s comments were more elaborative:

Individual steering committee members attempted to regain power over [the] drafting process from VPI [Virginia Polytechnic Institute], but had only very limited success. Steering committees as groups did not deal with this effectively due to leadership styles. Planning Districts were most helpful in mediating between steering committee and T.A. [technical assistance] providers; nonprofits helped a little to try (unsuccessfully) to mediate with community people as a whole.

Technical assistance providers were asked whether their institution/organization became involved in any power struggles and, if so, what role they played. One respondent chose not to answer the question. Another respondent claimed no involvement in any power struggles, stating, “our role was clear from the beginning and we stuck to it.” Other respondents, however, claimed that all technical assistance providers became in-

volved in power struggles and that roles varied depending on the struggle. The role of mediator was played numerous times.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Steering Committee members were asked to what extent each participating group would be involved in the implementation of projects discussed in the strategic plan if empowerment zone designation was awarded. While many indicated they were working on a method of implementation, others were more elaborative on the advancements that have already been made in this area. Five committee members, according to the survey results, have already been appointed to “be in charge of all policy making and disbursement of funds.” One respondent indicated that presently identified leadership is expected to be involved directly and “the process which is identified will allow community leaders to serve on topical area boards and advisory groups.” Another respondent stated that “a broad based representation of the communities will be on the board of directors.” One respondent voiced concern over whether local control could be maintained or state or federal agencies would become controlling. Another response indicated that while “county leadership elite” would likely be involved, “grassroots people” would probably not be unless some major changes were made. The noticeable differences in these responses imply that communication between participants has dwindled since the process began and may or may not be recognized as such by participants.

DIFFICULTIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Survey subjects were asked what difficulties and opportunities arose, other than those discussed in the strategic plan proposal, during the process of deciding the Zone boundaries. Only three Steering Committee respondents indicated that no additional difficulties or opportunities surfaced. Others simply expanded on the difficulties mentioned in the plan. The plan stated that community leaders' unfamiliarity with each other presented difficulty in establishing Zone boundaries. One respondent elaborated on this point by claiming the difficulty was in "creating a trusting relationship among leaders." The difficulty presented by the initial involvement of two additional counties was also stated in the plan. Respondents confirmed the difficulty presented by Claiborne County, Tennessee, in particular; revealing representatives of the county were taking part in the meetings in a "relatively uninformed and disorganized" manner. Another respondent revealed that difficulty was presented in the fact that the extent of advantages to Zone-wide cooperation was not fully recognized. The responses did not indicate that any specific opportunities arose during the process of deciding Zone boundaries.

All survey subjects were asked what difficulties and opportunities arose as a result of the partnership effort in general. Difficulties mentioned by Steering Committee members were few. From one member's perspective, "the difficulties relate to each [county] being under a different state government and, if funded, to those of maintaining cooperation." Another member indicated that difficulties related to "maintaining trust between county delegations and between counties and T.A. [technical assistance] providers."

“Serious mistrust persists.” The most commonly cited opportunity among members was the development of a working unit. “With or without the grant, the future seems to hold a working unit which has been formed from this effort.” Respondents indicate that many of the projects will be implemented even if zone designation is not granted. One respondent indicated that cooperation on various ongoing projects had already begun while another indicated “possible future collaborative partnerships may result in business, education, etc.” The opportunity to get to know people from different areas and the chance to see “what other communities have been able to do to improve [conditions]” were also commonly cited by respondents. One respondent indicated that the partnership effort gave rise to the opportunity to discuss problems from the perspective of low-income residents. However, “these [problems] were not addressed effectively.”

Achieving trust was considered a difficulty by technical assistance providers as well. The perceived dominance of the Virginia Tech Economic Development Assistance Center was thought to have caused grave difficulty by one technical assistance provider. “... the dominance of Va. Tech created hard feelings that won’t heal easily.” On the other hand, “the opportunities that have resulted from the formation of dozens of alliances and partnerships offer great prospects for the future.” In addition to the formation of alliances and partnerships, the effort “brought together an incredibly diverse group.”

FACTORS OF SUCCESS

Mattessich and Monsey (1992) claimed group flexibility was a factor influencing the success of collaborative efforts. Survey subjects were asked whether or not the group remained flexible to varied ways of organizing itself and accomplishing its work. Responses overwhelmingly indicated that the group did remain flexible. However, a couple of respondents offered exceptions to the majority opinion. One indicated that Virginia Polytechnic Institute was unwilling to share the drafting work of the strategic plan. Another claimed “the structure was pretty well dictated by decisions made prior to low-income members involvement.”

Open and frequent communication is another factor considered by Mattessich and Monsey to be related to the success of collaborative efforts. Participants were asked if communication among collaborative group members was open and frequent. All participants were in agreement that communication was open and frequent. “Meetings within counties were conducted weekly; between counties every two weeks; daily telephone communication; plans and actions were shared freely.” Others stated that while communication was not open and frequent initially, it evolved during the process. A couple of respondents, while claiming communication was open and frequent, expressed problems. “Too many meetings over too short a period resulted in individuals missing meetings. No real mechanism to catch people up existed.” Communication was “shaped in most part by UVA, VA. Tech, and local governments.” For technical assistance providers, communication between collaborative group members and their organizations was open and fre-

quent but improvements could have been made had more time been allowed for the project.

When asked in what ways communication could have been improved, the most frequent response was more meetings that included an economically diverse group. Other responses include: all members being informed rather than just a “select few;” a central television or radio station; and a “better understanding of the process”. The general mistrust among participants in the process, the noticeable differences in the knowledge of which groups will be involved in the implementation of the plan, and the suggestions for improvement just mentioned all imply that communication was not equal among participants and that it has dwindled since the process began.

FUTURE COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Survey subjects were asked whether or not they felt the collaborative partnerships would continue in the future if empowerment zone designation was not awarded. The majority of respondents believed the collaborative partnerships established during the strategic planning process would continue into the future even without the advantages of being an empowerment zone. “A door that no one knew existed” has been opened. In fact, “plans are already in place to continue.” For example “the health committee has begun to identify various grant programs that have Zone-wide application.” Another respondent stated, “I feel the leaders in this effort formed a mutual respect and trust for each other. Knowing they can work successfully together will encourage future collaboration and partnerships as opportunities unfold.” Other respondents were not as positive about

the future of the established collaborative partnerships. One person believed that, while some groups would continue to collaborate on efforts for improvement, most will not due to the existence of a “strong mistrust” among collaborative group members. Another respondent stated, “the partnerships and cooperation should continue. They won’t, however, unless there is a reason to do so. Will there be other ‘carrots’ to go after?”

Provided the collaborative partnerships continue, technical assistance providers plan to continue their support of the Zone. Only one technical assistance provider was specific about anticipated long-term roles. These roles, as stated by the respondent, will be to: provide specific expertise upon request; provide leadership training for community groups; conduct studies that require academic credibility; and conduct studies or projects that require technical expertise that the group does not have.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Based on the perceptions of Steering Committee members and technical assistance providers, this investigation determined that many of the factors commonly associated with successful collaboration efforts were prevalent in the collaboration process of the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone. While participants' perceptions of the process often proved consistent with many of the influential factors cited by Mattessich and Monsey, the collaborative group experienced many difficulties with these factors. It is these factors, mentioned previously in this work, that will serve as the basis for reviewing and summarizing participants' perceptions of the process.

INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

A brief synopsis of the nineteen influential factors to the success of collaboration efforts cited by Mattessich and Monsey and the role they played for the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone is warranted.

■ **History of collaboration or cooperation in the community.**

A history of collaboration or cooperation in the community enables participants to trust the process. While each county had a great deal of experience in within county cooperation, there was almost none between them. The Zone counties did not have this advantage. Due to community leaders' unfamiliarity with

each other, the issue of trust between them and trust of the process was the first difficulty encountered. Had a significant history of collaborative efforts between the counties existed, many of the initial as well as subsequent difficulties would most likely have proven avoidable.

■ **Collaborative group seen as a leader in the community.**

Expectations for this project were high among community people. The collaborative group was seen as a leader in the community, at least in terms of the goals and activities of the project.

■ **Political/social climate favorable.**

In this case, the political and social climates go hand-in-hand. America's growing interest in politics and sharp demands for economic change encompassed the Clinton administration and perhaps helped pave the way for the passage of the Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Communities Act. Political support stretched from the Federal to the local level. It was time for a change. Every participant discussed the widespread enthusiasm and support for the project that was felt throughout the Zone.

■ **Mutual respect, understanding, and trust.**

For the most part, mutual respect existed among participants. However, there was some difficulty in this area, most of which surfaced between steering committee members and the Virginia Polytechnic Institute Economic Development Assistance Center, which took the lead in developing the strategic plan proposal.

According to participants, committee members and technical assistance providers alike, this organization's occasional dominance over the drafting of the plan created for many problematic situations.

■ **Appropriate cross-section of members.**

Every segment of the Zone community would be affected in some way if empowerment zone or enterprise community status were granted. Every segment of the community was represented in the process, whether serving as a committee member or attending community meetings. Although low-income participation was said to have tapered off during the later stages of the process for a variety of reasons, this segment of the community was represented at some point in the process.

■ **Members see collaboration as in their self-interest.**

It was obvious to participants that the benefits of collaboration would offset the costs. As mentioned previously, members, especially local politicians, had nothing to lose by taking part in this initiative. At the very least, participating communities would be left with a developed strategic plan for economic and social improvement as well as newly created alliances.

■ **Ability to compromise.**

The ability of participating members to compromise was proven early on in the process when Zone boundaries were being established. The extension of the Bell County steering committee was another way in which compromises were

made. Also, if development projects were to be beneficial to all three counties, plenty of compromises had to be made for the good of the Zone as a whole.

■ **Members share a stake in both process and outcome.**

All segments of the community were included in the process. If empowerment zone or enterprise community status should be granted, all segments of the community would reap the benefits, provided the strategic plan is implemented as proposed.

■ **Multiple layers of decision-making.**

This study did not determine whether decision-making was stretched across all levels within participating organizations. However, diverse socio-economic groups did serve on various topical committees. Therefore, decision-making was stretched across different segments of the community.

■ **Flexibility.**

The majority of participants perceived the collaborative group as remaining very flexible to varied ways of organizing itself and accomplishing its work. However, the flexibility of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute Economic Development Assistance Center was indirectly questioned by participants when it came to control over the drafting of the strategic plan proposal. While the role of this organization may have been clearly defined in the beginning, some participants expressed the need to redefine that role later in the process. However, attempts to do so were unsuccessful.

■ **Development of clear roles and policy guidelines.**

According to the surveys, participants clearly understood their own roles and responsibilities in the process and knew how to carry out those responsibilities. However, there were some discrepancies in responses which indicated that while individuals may have understood what they were supposed to do, they did not necessarily believe others understood their roles.

■ **Adaptability.**

The adaptability of the collaborative group was not directly determined by this study. Questions pertaining to changes in major goals, members, etc. were not asked in the survey, partly because the time frame involved was so brief.

■ **Open and frequent communication.**

Most participants perceived communication to have been open and frequent during the process. In fact, one participant perceived it as being too frequent to reach the large number of people involved in the process. Meetings were held within counties on a weekly basis and between counties on a bi-weekly basis.

■ **Established informal and formal communication links.**

Channels of communication existed on paper and many personal connections were established in an attempt to produce a more informed and cohesive working unit.

■ **Concrete, attainable goals and objectives.**

In the case of this study, the ultimate goal of the collaborative group as a whole, the development of a workable strategic plan for community improvement, was the extent of success. This overall goal was clear to all participants. Whether or not goals and objectives which evolved during the process were clear to all partners was not questioned and is a shortcoming of this study.

■ **Shared vision.**

A vision statement describing the envisioned future of the Zone was formulated by collaborative group members. A mission statement and a series of values statements were developed to guide the planning process and the strategic plan.

■ **Unique purpose.**

While a more specific agenda may apply to each county and, most likely, to each participant in the Zone, the overall mission of the group is the same—economic self-sufficiency.

■ **Sufficient funds.**

With the help of technical assistance providers, the core group was able to finance its efforts through the strategic planning process. If collaboration continues in the future without the financial base provided by the empowerment zone status, funding sources will have to be identified.

■ **Skilled convener.**

County leadership and technical assistance providers were said to have convened the meetings and done an excellent job. Many participants indicated their surprise at the fairness exercised by conveners.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For the most part, factors commonly associated with successful collaboration efforts were present in the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone's efforts. As long as these factors continue in the process, at least to some degree, positive results will most likely still be produced.

Communication, trust, and flexibility were not persistent issues. Although many goals could still be reached even with minimal amounts of these factors, the collaborators could have achieved more had the factors been present in greater degrees. Communication was not shown to have been as widespread and open as it should have been. Survey results indicated that many problems could have been lessened, if not avoided, had communication been stronger. The results also indicated that collaborators need to achieve greater levels of trust in each other. One organization really had a problem with flexibility. These problems need to be worked out for trust and understanding of the organization to be increased. Issues of unequal levels of power were often indirectly indicated as causing problems. For the most part, participants were either unwilling to discuss the issue or un-

aware of its presence. Perhaps the existence of different levels of power needs to be openly addressed among collaborators.

A great deal of money accompanies empowerment zone status. If the CGEZ is awarded this status, many problems will arise if communication, trust, and flexibility between collaborators is not strengthened. Many participants indicated that plans have already begun to continue collaboration efforts into the future even if zone status is not awarded. Problems with these factors as well as the issues of power differences and the desired amount of low-income participation must be addressed and settled if activities are going to continue as a community-wide effort. The Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone collaborators must “keep in mind...that many factors are inter-related—building one may strengthen another” (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992:36).

SHORTCOMINGS OF THIS STUDY

The mail survey approach to data collection was utilized in this case study because the time period between the completion of the strategic plan and the Federal government’s designation of the zones was so short. However, many of the shortcomings of this study were a result of this approach to data collection. Although open-ended questions were asked, it is difficult to overcome the superficial appearance of surveys that is inherent in this type of research. While the mail surveys did reveal respondents feelings and opinions on the collaborative effort during the strategic planning process, another approach to collecting data, such as face-to-face interviews, may have been more appropriate for this

study. Self-administered questionnaires do not allow the researcher to develop a feel for the total situation in the way that the participant observer method would allow.

Another shortcoming of this study pertains to the nineteen success factors outlined by Mattessich and Monsey. Many of the factors were not addressed directly in the surveys. However, information was gathered on these factors through responses to various survey questions. Other success factors, such as adaptability and concrete, attainable goals and objectives that may have occurred during the process, were not addressed either directly or indirectly. All factors should have been addressed in one way or another.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has left many unanswered questions about collaborative efforts. Quantifiable measures of the success factors Mattessich and Monsey have outlined need to be developed for their importance to be determined. With such measures, researchers would be better equipped to determine whether all nineteen factors are needed for collaborative efforts to be successful or if a certain combination would also work. The role these factors play in different types of collaborative efforts needs to be examined in future studies. Does the need for the presence of some factors outweigh the need for others when the effort is mandatory rather than voluntary? This leads to the question of what factors influence groups to build collaborative partnerships. Does the incentive have to be as enticing as the rewards offered in the Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Communities Act?

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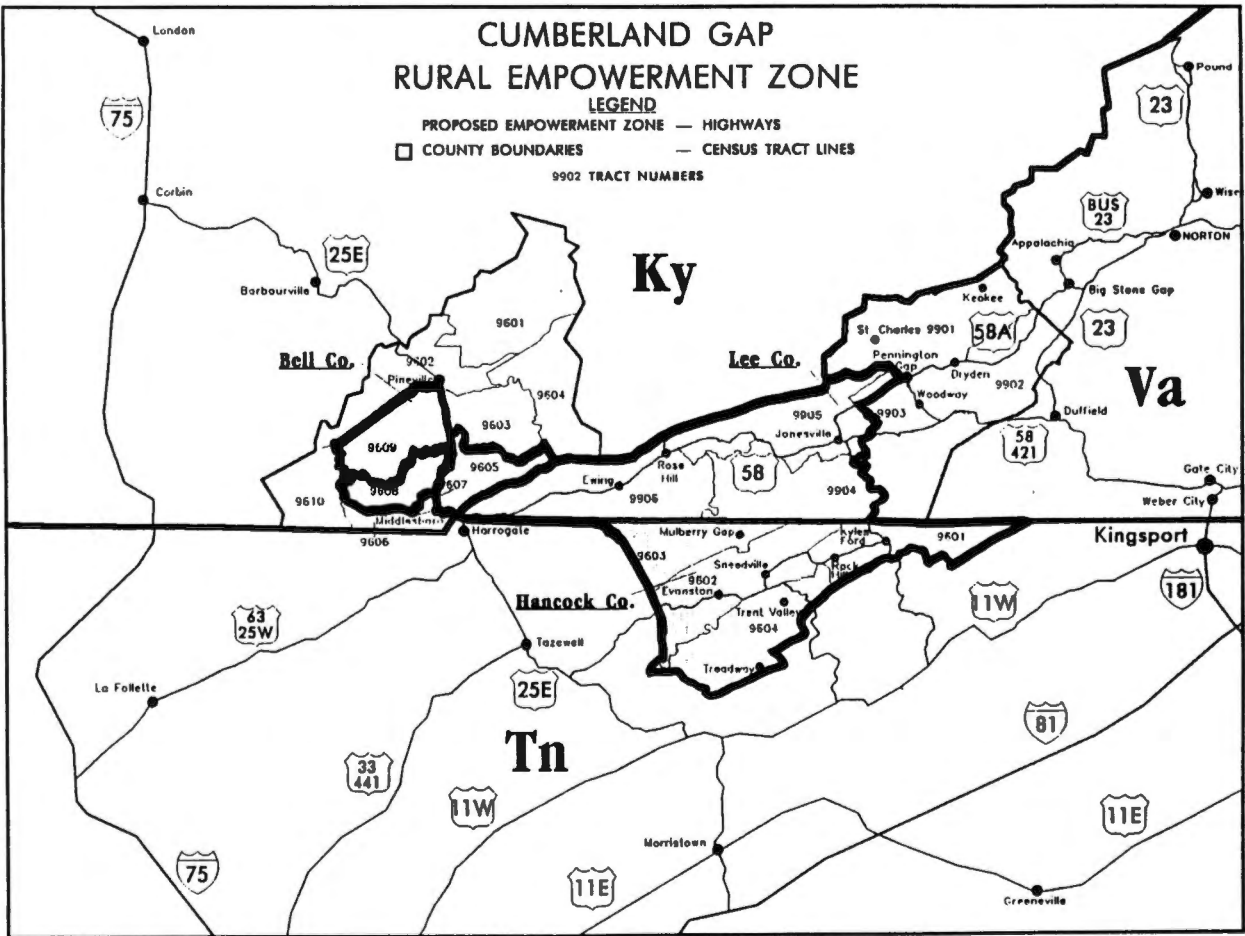
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CUMBERLAND GAP RURAL EMPOWERMENT ZONE

LEGEND
 PROPOSED EMPOWERMENT ZONE — HIGHWAYS
 □ COUNTY BOUNDARIES — CENSUS TRACT LINES
 9902 TRACT NUMBERS



APPENDIX B

Collaboration Among Partnerships: A Case Study of the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone

Survey for Steering Committee Members

Please rate the following questions on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, in accordance with your experience and knowledge.

1. To what extent do you feel the following groups involved in shaping the final strategic plan:

Technical Assistance Providers:

Tennessee Valley Authority

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Virginia Polytechnic Institute

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

University of Virginia

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Others: _____

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Community:

Community Groups

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Non-Profit Organizations

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Community People

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Others: _____

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Government:

Local Government Officials

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

State Government Officials

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Others: _____

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Please indicate your opinion on the extent of involvement of these groups in the shaping of the final strategic plan:

Technical Assistance Providers:

Tennessee Valley Authority		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
Virginia Polytechnic Institute		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
University of Virginia		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
Others: _____		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much

Community:

Community Groups		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
Non-Profit Organizations		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
Community People		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
Others: _____		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much

Government:

Local Government Officials		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
State Government Officials		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
Others: _____		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much

Additional Comments: _____

3. What other groups, if any, would you have liked to have seen involved in the shaping of the final strategic plan? Why?

4. Briefly describe the history of relations among the counties involved in the Zone. Were there any linkages involving the communities in the past?

5. What difficulties and opportunities, other than those discussed in the strategic plan, surfaced during the process of deciding the Zone boundaries and how were they handled?

6. Was communication among collaborative group members open and frequent? Please explain.

7. In what ways could improvements in communication have been made?

8. Did the group remain flexible to varied ways of organizing itself and accomplishing work? If not, where did the problems exist?

9. Building broadly based community partnerships was encouraged throughout the process. What processes were created and sustained that would ensure the involvement of low-income people throughout the entire process?

10. What fears did you and others have, at various stages in the process, about involving community people? Did those fears turn out to be valid?

11. Do you feel there was enthusiasm from the community for the Empowerment Zone Project? What type of impact did this have on you and other collaborative members?

12. In this type of collaborative effort significant differences in power exist among participating groups. How were imbalances in power handled? Did any one group rise as mediator between power holders and the relatively powerless?

13. What opportunities and difficulties arose as a result of this partnership effort?

14. If the Cumberland Gap is awarded an Empowerment Zone or Enterprise Community designation, to what extent will each group be involved in the implementation of the strategic plan?

15. If the Cumberland Gap is not awarded designation will the collaboration and partnerships continue in the future? What opportunities and difficulties are anticipated for future collaborative efforts among the Zone counties?

Collaboration Among Partnerships: A Case Study of the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone

Survey for Technical Assistance Providers

Please rate the following questions on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, in accordance with your experience and knowledge.

1. To what extent do you feel the following groups involved in shaping the final strategic plan:

Technical Assistance Providers:

Tennessee Valley Authority

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Virginia Polytechnic Institute

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

University of Virginia

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Others: _____

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Community:

Community Groups

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Non-Profit Organizations

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Community People

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Others: _____

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Government:

Local Government Officials

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

State Government Officials

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Others: _____

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Please indicate your opinion on the extent of involvement of these groups in the shaping of the final strategic plan:

Technical Assistance Providers:

Tennessee Valley Authority		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
Virginia Polytechnic Institute		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
University of Virginia		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
Others: _____		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much

Community:

Community Groups		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
Non-Profit Organizations		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
Community People		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
Others: _____		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much

Government:

Local Government Officials		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
State Government Officials		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
Others: _____		
Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much

Additional Comments: _____

3. What other groups, if any, would you have liked to have seen involved in the shaping of the final strategic plan? Why?

4. What specific services did you provide to the Cumberland Gap Empowerment Zone?

5. Was communication between collaborative group members and technical assistance providers open and frequent? Please explain.

6. In what ways could improvements in communication have been made?

7. What fears did you and others have, at various stages in the process, about involving community people? Did those fears turn out to be valid?

8. In this type of collaborative effort significant differences in power exist among participating groups. As a technical assistance provider, did your institution/organization become involved in any power struggles? If so, what role was played?

9. What opportunities and difficulties arose as a result of this partnership effort?

10. What do you anticipate the long term role of the technical assistance providers to be?

VITA

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