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### Evaluating Change in Representation and Coordination in Collaborative Governance Over Time: A Study of Environmental Justice Councils

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## Evaluating Change in Representation and Coordination in Collaborative Governance Over Time: A Study of Environmental Justice Councils (Saba Siddiki and Graham Ambrose)

### Brief Author: Davor Mandom

This article uses two state-level environmental justice (EJ) councils — referred to as Midwest and Mid-Atlantic — to study stakeholder representation in collaborative governance arrangements. EJ councils bring together government and non-government actors to formulate and implement environmental policies that impact low-income and minority communities. The authors are particularly interested in the difference between descriptive and substantive representation on EJ councils, tracing the life cycle of EJ councils, and changes in representation and collaboration activities over the course of their lives.

### Descriptive vs. Substantive Representation

Descriptive representation refers to the membership makeup of a collaborative governance arrangement (such as an EJ council), while substantive representation describes those members who are actively engaged in the collaborative governance process. The authors use mandating documents from both councils to identify descriptive representation and meeting minutes and annual reports to capture substantive representation. While descriptive representation changed little over the study period, substantive representation fluctuated. Both the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic councils saw substantive representation decline across their respective study periods, though the Midwest's was more significant, especially among members of the public. Observing disparities between descriptive and substantive representation is vital for understanding how collaborative governance arrangements function in practice and whose interests are heard.

### Collaborative Life Cycle Stages

The authors map the meetings data onto the life cycle stages for collaborative governance developed by Imperial et. al. (2016): (i) activation; (ii) collectivity; (iii) institutionalization; and (iv) re-creation. The authors find that life cycle stage activities overlap over the course of the study period. Indeed, in any given year, activation, collectivity, and institutionalization activities might all be occurring, but life cycle stages become 'dominant' as their activity markedly increases compared to the stage's average observed activity. This underscores that collaboration activities do not unfold in a tidy linear fashion, and that certain activities may be required throughout the existence of a collaborative governance arrangement. The authors also observe fluctuations in coordination activities as well as substantive representation depending on the relative dominance (or lack thereof) of life cycle stages in a given year. This offers insight into how the work of collaborative governance arrangements — along with participation therein — evolves over time and can aid in developing more effective and inclusive arrangements.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Collaborative governance arrangements often exhibit a disparity between who is mandated to be 'at the table' and who actually participates 'at the table'.
- The case of environmental justice (EJ) councils illustrates the nonlinearity of collaborative governance life cycles.

For more information, please see Siddiki, S., & Ambrose, G. (2023). Evaluating Change in Representation and Coordination in Collaborative Governance Over Time: A Study of Environmental Justice Councils. *Environmental Management*, 71, 620-640. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00267-022-01688-7>



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