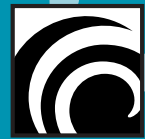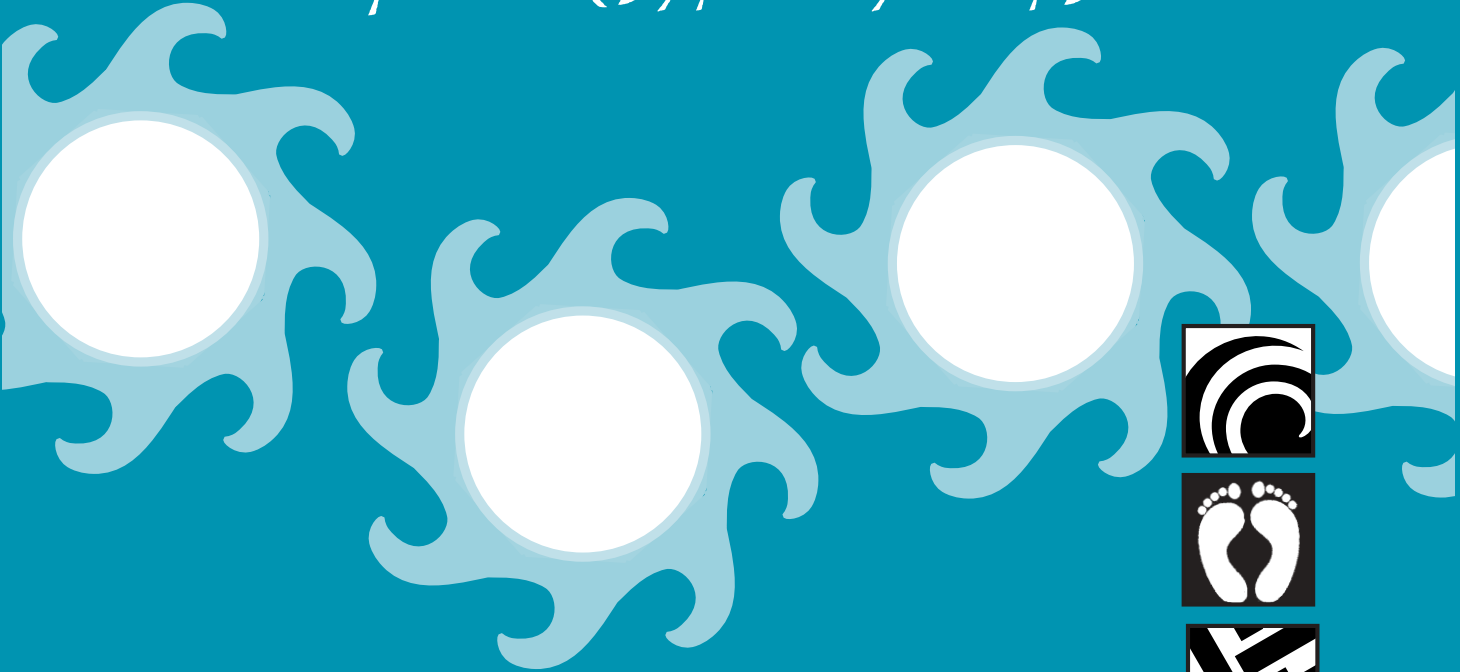# WORKING TOGETHER:

A Toolkit for Cooperative Efforts, Networks and Coalitions

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Acknowledgments

Working Together:

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List of Exercises, Charts and Illustrations

Introduction:
Why a Toolkit?

This Toolkit is for leaders and activists who are working to combine forces with multiple organizations to better accomplish environmental and social change goals. The Institute for Conservation Leadership wants to share useful ideas, models, and practices gleaned from our 16 years of consulting with, coaching and training thousands of leaders and organizations; nearly all were cooperating in some way with other groups. We hope this Toolkit helps your cooperative effort start off on the right foot so you can avoid reinventing the wheel, evade common pitfalls, and travel well.

This Toolkit will help you:

❊ Gain tools and insight into leadership in cooperative settings, as well as learn how to assist group development—the first task of leadership.

❊ Clarify your organization's reasons for joining a cooperative effort, assess risks and benefits, and find productive and focused common ground.

❊ Learn to use three essential elements for inclusive, purposeful and active cooperation, and choose exercises for launching your group.

❊ Select the most efficient and effective organizing model and structure to fit the purpose of your cooperative effort.

❊ Anticipate predictable persistent tensions as the cooperative effort evolves, and use leadership and organizational practices that support success.

This Toolkit is based on the experience of conservation and environmental leaders from across North America. We are struck by how well some of these efforts work and are encouraged by their positive impact. We also realize how much time, energy and money cooperative efforts can consume. This Toolkit combines the experience and wisdom of seasoned leaders with ICL's observations and perspectives, and adds information from the research literature to create a practical guide for cooperative success.

Overview of the Toolkit

To help you meet the challenges of cooperative work, the Toolkit includes tips, ideas and tools. We often hear people talk about "putting on different hats", and the complexity of balancing their personal interests with speaking for their organization while paying attention to other organizations' needs and sustaining the cooperative effort. Leaders must pay attention to these different levels of action and the influence each has on the other. The Toolkit provides ways to succeed at each level, and balance them!

❈ Individual: Leadership, communication, and group process skills and tools.

❈ Each organization: Tools for clarifying the reasons to participate, and how to build trust and effectively share the work and the benefits of the cooperative.

❈ Cooperative effort: Specific and pragmatic ways to form and sustain successful cooperative work.

Sequential chapters follow the typical steps necessary to develop cooperative efforts. The path of most starts with informal cooperation between individuals sharing ideas that support each other, and perhaps working in group settings. Over time, that relationship can grow into doing a project together, usually of limited scope. Moving beyond the individual relationships, a more formal agreement may be set up between the cooperating organizations to provide a supporting structure for the work. Sometimes a funding opportunity sparks a more formal initiative, and in a flurry of creative grant-writing a new coalition or project is formed. If these initiatives succeed and take on a longer-term task, maintaining and sustaining effective cooperation becomes the challenge. Change is inevitable and most cooperative efforts have a fairly short lifespan, disbanding after the task is complete or transforming into something new.

While every chapter can stand alone, each builds on the previous chapters' wisdom.

Chapter 1: Group Development — The First Job of Leadership covers typical group behaviors and ways leaders and members can enable groups to work together more effectively. It includes ways to foster inclusive multicultural settings.

Chapter 2: Start on Sound Footing — Four Steps guides you through the early stages, including three essential elements of cooperative efforts, assessment tools to determine whether your organization should participate and a risk assessment for the cooperative effort. Use field-tested group exercises and activities to facilitate success.

Chapter 3: Choose a Structure That Fits the Work — Six Models of Cooperative Efforts describes six common archetypes of cooperative efforts, including examples and a checklist to help you determine which model best fits your situation. It describes each model's typical purpose, duration, structure, membership, and the processes for decision-making, resource acquisition, staffing and communication.

Chapter 4: Cooperative Work — Full Speed Ahead addresses the dynamic tensions and offers field-tested best practices for working together over the long haul, with recommendations to get past some of the tough aspects of cooperative efforts.

❈ Together, and Working Well tells how to build member groups and trust, establish good communication within the cooperative effort, and manage disagreements and conflict.

❈ Balance Power and Benefits addresses how to use clear decision-making and be account-

able to each other, raise money together, and do joint publicity and media to get your message heard.

�֍ Accomplish Shared Goals advises you to plan for constant motion and constant learning, be set to reflect and adapt to changing needs and make the impact you want.

Chapter 5: Time for a Change — Transform, Merge, or Close It Down recommends ways to help your effort

shift and change (a common occurrence in cooperative efforts) that is best addressed openly.

Bibliography and Resources lists some excellent books, guides and websites that we hope you will add to your own library.

We invite you to read this Toolkit and contact us at the Institute with your insights, successes and questions.

Chapter 1: Group Development —
The First Job of Leadership

KEY POINTS OF THIS CHAPTER

�֍ Leadership in many cooperative efforts is shared, distributed across multiple people and groups. Leadership roles in the group often shift over time.

�֍ People and organizations will participate in groups when they:

Feel they belong, are valued, able to contribute, receive real benefits and can affect outcomes.

Work toward goals they understand, believe in and helped create.

Have clear and appropriate ways to make decisions and carry out the work.

Have adequate resources to sustain their work.

✖ Groups move through predictable phases of development. What may appear as a problem or crisis is often a developmental phase that must be completed before moving on.

✖ Good working relationships based on trust and respect provide the foundation for effective decision-making and accomplishing tasks.

As Diane discovered the hard way, the "leader" in a multi-organizational effort is seldom one or two individuals. Leadership usually is disbursed and diffused between different organizations and working groups, and roles may shift in unpredictable ways. Some find sharing the responsibility of leading a welcome relief; others see it as a confusing and frustrating way to make decisions and take action. The reality of cooperative efforts is that leadership often is not highly centralized. The more everyone in the effort understands how groups work well, the better the chances for success. When we talk about groups here, we are referring to groups of groups – or multi-organizational settings.

Cooperating with other organizations to achieve a common end can be challenging and time-consuming, but it's not rocket science. Time-tested knowl-

"I SPENT 10 YEARS LEARNING THAT YOU COULD lead in a collaborative effort, but that you also had to follow. I've had more than my share of times when I tripped trying to lead, when following would have been more effective in the long run."

DIANE JENSEN, MINNESOTA PROJECT

edge and experience about group behavior and development can help you navigate what may be uncharted waters for you or your organization. This chapter gives you the "activist's short course" on groups: their processes and predictable behaviors as well as shared leadership in a multi-organizational and multicultural setting. The bibliography at the end of this publication provides additional references.

Share the Responsibility of Leadership

Leaders in cooperative efforts often say things like:

"I had to understand how to delegate and step back, rather than step in and take charge."

"I've learned that paying close attention to the process and listening to the group's needs, not just mine, helps the group work a lot better."

"The time we spent developing honest and respectful relationships paid off in more ways than I imagined."

Some benefits of cooperative leadership are learning together, sharing power, and enjoying others with different world views, values and experiences. These advantages come from practicing leadership behaviors that build strong relationships and communication – not from acting as a solo leader or giving top-down directions and orders. Sharing leadership occurs through facilitating others' engagement, learning, problem-solving and innovation.

Some situations call for a strong leader "calling the shots" such as in coalitions with a short-term single issue, when one organization is clearly the leader and others lend their support, and in times of crisis or fast action when centralized leadership is needed. These situations are the exception, not typical of the leadership that makes most cooperative efforts successful. Leadership is more frequently a shared experience where all involved take responsibility for setting goals and doing the mutual work in multiple ways. Respectful and effective distribution of power, responsibility, resources and tasks may be tougher to do, but these are the fuel for the synergy and political clout of successful cooperative efforts.

The skills of shared leadership are practiced by many leaders some of the time – and most of us can be more conscious, informed and intentional about practicing these skills much more of the time. This includes being clear about your own role and responsibilities, and carrying them out. Shared leadership isn't about dodging your job! It is a set of attitudes and proficiencies sometimes referred to as "servant leadership" or "facilitative leadership." This chapter will help you address the particular set of leadership challenges in collaborative efforts.

Four Reasons Groups Stay Together

Every person and each organization has basic needs and conditions for participating. The extent to which these needs are met, or at least paid attention to, has a direct impact on the success of a cooperative effort. It's the leader's responsibility to recognize these needs and conditions and track how well they are being met. It is each participant's responsibility to clearly state their organization's needs.

People and/or organizations participate in groups when they:

1. Feel they belong, are valued, able to contribute, receive real benefits that match their organization's culture and needs, and can affect outcomes.

2. Work toward goals they understand, believe in and helped create.

3. Have clear and appropriate ways to make decisions and carry out the work.

4. Have adequate resources to sustain their work.

In the following section, three people tell their stories of sharing leadership in multicultural cooperative efforts, and what they have learned about how to bring and keep groups together for longer-term social change.

Practicing Inclusion and diversity

Introduction

Bringing together people of color and white people in the United States to solve community problems and environmental issues is an important role of cooperative efforts in today's democracy. We include interviews with three people who work in multicultural settings and are experienced leaders in creating successful cooperation. They share their practical observations on ways to equalize power and to create trust and common ground. They speak about the ups and downs of this work, and the exciting and rich personal, professional and social change benefits. We hope their stories will inspire you to keep on bridging the borders and finding ways to build strong multicultural cooperation.

Richard Moore, Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, (SNEEJ)

Richard Moore is a key national leader of the environmental and economic justice movement with over 30 years of experience as a community organizer. He has worked with a variety of community-based organizations on issues of welfare rights, police repression, street gang activities, drug abuse, low cost healthcare, child nutrition and the fight against racism, including the struggle for environmental and economic justice. Richard is presently the Executive Director of the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, a bi-national organization which comprises over 60 community-based grassroots organizations working in communities of color in six southwestern states and Northern Mexico. Richard's commitment to multi-racial and multi-issue community organizing — and recognition of the interconnectedness of local, regional, national and international issues — has led him to share here his seasoned experience on making multicultural alliances work.

At SNEEJ, we come to the table for particular reasons. We have partners that bring expertise, like doctors or lawyers, and our community groups bring experience in day-to-day stuff, and the impacts of the issue. What we bring is people power. It sounds simple, but it's not. There needs to be some kind of equality at the table. We are not the same and there are power imbalances of infrastructure, money, etc. We work this out, because both are needed. We like to say that each finger works to make the fist.

Finding this balance gets underestimated. A good process helps. Once we decide we want to come together, we choose one or two people from each group to help develop the agenda for the face to face meeting. We also choose co-chairs to facilitate that meeting. We have several conversations about what are the expectations and the realities. We try to develop an agenda that will facilitate the process of the partners coming in together. Everyone sees how decisions are made and participates deciding what is the agenda and the goals. In the first part of the meeting we put the goals up and review them, then at the end we go back and see if we have been able to get these moved forward.

I'm not into the process of beating up on each other, or sensitivity sessions — it's not a good experience. But we do need to go through some process and work together, to have a dialogue about how can we really work together.

Trust doesn't come easy. Trust is not a book or a meeting — it's an experience of working one on one, building trust in the context of helping the group move forward. It is real practical stuff.

There are mainstream environmental folks who can read this law, and talk all about it but in our case, we need to have some silence. We've got to bring

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out the wisdom in the room, create the space where that can happen, where people will feel OK about saying what they know. It's also about the language and the tone we use, about really getting to listen and be familiar with each other. Going through a process of building trust and confidence is so crucial for the short term and for really making the power of both come together.

As that is going forward, we recognize that there are things we won't agree on. So we look to find a place where we can be together and build on our commonalities. And build a climate where we can talk about other things that are tougher. We build the relationships. Good relationships won't make the tough conversations more comfortable, but at least we know that each other aren't the enemy! We can actually work on opening up some dialogue on things that are tough. Like with the Sierra Club who's been asking us to work together on a community organizing campaign, and they have resources, expertise on the hard core community issues we are struggling with.

Some say, "Let's get done with the process and get onto the real work!" That approach has not worked for us. We need to talk about unbalanced resources and about how we are going to make decisions. We've had bad experiences when we don't do it. We work up a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and we both sign it. The MOU addresses these things about decision making, funding, our roles and how we are really going to work together.

Funding is a real issue. Each group will bring some resources to the table and we may need some additional resources that we have to raise. We establish some principles of fundraising, including who we will and won't accept money from. We also address

competition — when you get started people say we are going to bring new resources to the table, but we have to sort it out. For example, a foundation will fund a single organization, or the whole, but they are not able to do both. Sometimes we even bring some of the more progressive funders to the table, respecting where they came from, and the knowledge they have and their expertise.

The other big one is how decisions get made. We are involved in this legislative campaign. This thing is moving fast; sometimes you don't have time to get input. So on those times, I and one other technical person were given the responsibility to make the decisions. The two of us work hand in hand — in constant communication. We get clear about who will make these decisions.

People have lived different lives — with the internalized oppression of people of color or low income, we know we give some things up. Like we don't have the skill in writing this document and we let someone else do it. But instead it would be better if we have a couple people do that, helping to transfer those skills. Like Doug Meiklejohn, the attorney who wants to do the right legal work but wants to have it linked to the organizing. So we said, "Ok Doug, you'll be the primary lobbyist and we are going to pull someone out of the community to work with you." We raised the money for the person from the community to participate and work with him. Now Doug says, "I learned more and better things from Sofia than she probably learned from me." So no one can do this work without teaming with someone from the local level. This reinforces the knowledge that people learned from their practical experiences and others maybe learned through the university. We celebrate what people have learned and built over all these experiences together.

Reginald "Flip" Hagood, The Student Conservation Association

Flip serves as the lead executive for The Student Conservation Association's strategic initiatives and business development. Prior to joining SCA he worked for the Department of Interior for 30 years, and in his last position worked for the National Park Service as the Director of Training and Education. Flip served as a consultant, advisor, and volunteer in the area of diversity and multicultural leadership and organizational development focusing on environmental and conservation organizations for the last 15 years. Most recently this effort has been with groups or organizations such as the Minority Environmental Leadership Diversity Initiative, Environmental Diversity Working Group, the National Park Service, the US Forest Service, the Land Trust Alliance, and numerous "green group" organizations. He has lectured and done presentations on the topic of race, culture, and resource at the University of Vermont, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, and the Yale University School of Forestry, and provided numerous presentations and trainings on the multicultural workplace with conservation and other nonprofit groups. Flip continues this important work in his own organization, the Student Conservation Association, as they help to build the next generation of conservation leaders and engage youth in conservation service in support of our public lands.

Building multicultural cooperation has been with me much of my work life. I'm now a trustee on the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) diversity initiative committee and we recently hired a diversity manager. It's a good example of how you have to be in it for the long haul. We can't put on a band-aid or find a quick fix. Sometimes it's two steps forward and one step back. It's like expeditionary behaviors in the wilderness: you get to base camp and get ready for the next climb.

Doing this work is not always a straight up response, there are many ups and downs in the path.

Groups need executive leadership on this issue. When you are seeking to broaden and be inclusive, your group needs strong and championing leadership. Leaders need to be talking the talk and walking the walk. People need to know there is really commitment all the way through the organization. Then we can require that this is part of the work we do — it's part of personnel performance reviews and part of the organization's infrastructure. For success we've got to have that commitment and leadership from the top.

Failure happens when there's a lack of leadership or people think they've done it and they've just gone up a stair step, which then turns out to be a superficial change, or only gives the appearance of being multicultural.

Success brings a number of benefits. I see it having an organizational benefit, beyond the moral benefit, which can be the bottom line because it is economically smart to meet the changing customer base. It's just good business. Also when groups are culturally competent and inclusive it's a higher level of organizational citizenship. When the group is broader and more inclusive, you have more ideas, get a broader approach and perspective that turns out to have a benefit for all.

You are better off to proactively act internally to do this work than to be challenged from the outside. Well-known policies, procedures and practices all are available to support this growth. All the organizational management and development industry says any business can and should implement a multicultural way of working.

We are often working from our world view of an issue and it is tough to see it from another person's world. It means taking time to be in another person's world and getting acculturated. It's worth it but it does take time. One of the things that is successful is to have ambassadors who can walk in two worlds and make a bridge. Sometimes you can't lead — you work by being a supporter and let some-

one else carry the water. Someone else can build the alliance. Working in Native American cultural settings I've found that building the trust and just being there is essential. Often in working across cultures it is about getting the respect and relationship first. Then go into the business. We can first and foremost recognize and respect the culture.

I never said this was easy work — otherwise our world would be in a different place. Most nations are culturally incompetent and not able to see the world through the eyes of the other. We still have a lot to learn among the whole world community about how to live successfully on this planet.

The opportunities to build bridges arise in what connects us — the love of the land, of the place. In the business of conservation and stewardship we have a real potential for success because we have this sensitivity to the natural world, an awareness and openness to the diversity and wonder of nature, which can make it easier to connect across differences with each other.

Bonnie Sachatello-Sawyer, Hopa Mountain and Native Science Network

Bonnie Sachatello-Sawyer, Hopa Mountain's executive director, has more than 16 years of experience working on community education projects with tribal and rural communities throughout the Northwest. In 2000, she started the Native Waters project at Montana State University to raise awareness and respect for tribal water issues in the Missouri River Basin and then launched Hopa Mountain full-time in October of 2005. Hopa Mountain is dedicated to supporting tribal and rural community leaders who are improving opportunities in education, ecological health, and economic development. Hopa Mountain facilitates the Native Science Network (NSN), a group of Native community leaders in the Rockies working on conservation education and community based environmental science projects; organizes nonprofit leadership training; and develops youth leadership programs.

I've learned a few things over the six years I've been working with our partners. The key is to have respect for your partners and for the process. I've learned to slow down and take the time to learn and work things through. We are in this for the long haul — ideally, as a community of learners.

To do collaborative work it is important to be clear about whether it is a short-term partnership for a particular, defined outcome, or a long-term partnership that works to accomplish a longer-term vision. A short-term partnership might be OK to organize top-down. That means funders, government, or organizations with a lot of resources might lead the effort to achieve specific goals. Long-term collaborations often require shared ownership among all partners, integrated decision-making, and even organizational change to empower the collective to reach longer-term goals. With Hopa Mountain, we are committed to a long-term collaborative process.

Before participating in a venture beyond your organization's doors, I've learned that it is important to

have a clear picture of why you want to participate in a collaborative effort and why it is the best approach to the issue at hand. To understand this, I work hard to step in others' shoes, and listen deeply other partners' stories, questions, and hopes, and work to find common ground.

Trust and relationships have to be established over long periods of time. Spending time getting to know people, beyond scheduled meetings and programs is important. I have learned so much by making time to attend community events. As a white woman, I strive to listen and seek to understand value systems in Native American communities. For example, when working with water in tribal communities, it is inherently understood that water is animate and has a spirit. Water can teach us things if we will listen.

Talking about cultural difference may help develop cross-cultural understanding. Sometimes there are ways to explore cultural bridges that can powerfully affect our collective understanding. For example, in working with Native Science Field Centers, it is essential to explore the intersections between traditional knowledge, ways of knowing, Western science, and language to better understand what has meaning in Native worldviews.

As a project partner, it is important to ask questions and take time to talk through initiatives in person on a regular basis. A lot can get done by phone and email but we've got to get together and talk it all through and make sure no one is making assumptions. This is especially important in cross-cultural situations.

Part of building successful cross-cultural collaboration is knowing the culture and values of each partner — so that you are doing what works for that partner for the long haul. It is also important to bring in new people. The fragile nature of partnerships is that individuals will move on and if you want to hold collaborative projects together, relationships have to be deep within individuals and organizations. It is never a static process.

Few people are overt racists, but all of us can choose to actively dismantle inequities. It's a constant education process of learning about issues of race, white privilege and environmental justice issues. I'm always learning more about how to partner well across cultural differences. I'm grateful for these opportunities because they bring such richness to my life.

Recently friends have been teaching me that we have to have a party once in a while and celebrate successes. I called some colleagues and they were out today at an opening ceremony for a school — this is a really good thing. I'm learning. I usually just get going on the next project but I'm starting to understand how celebrating successes together along the way is a vital part of an unfolding collaborative effort.

Seven Tips for Working in Groups

Most activist leaders learn about working in groups by doing it. You don't have the time or inclination to slog through long tomes about group behavior, so we've distilled seven of the most important tips we believe particularly apply to cooperative efforts — groups of groups — no matter the structure of your effort.

1. Relationships between people come first.
The combined group can accomplish the task at hand only after the individuals first create a feeling of trust, safety and awareness of who is in the room and why. People can't work in the interests of the collective group until they are clear that they will be heard and their needs and ideas addressed. Understanding and relating to each other personally is an essential part of building safety before anyone can work well across different backgrounds and perspectives or race and culture. We've seen lots of cooperative efforts launch right into defining vision, goals and a plan of action before participants feel comfortable with each other, often resulting in conflict and disagreement.

Exercises 2.4a and 2.4b on pages 30 and 31 help relationships build quickly.

"WE STRUGGLED, AT FIRST, ON BUILDING TRUST, CONSENSUS, AND GOVERNANCE. Eventually we realized trust and that's when the Coalition began building momentum and achieving success. No individual groups put their self-interest above the interests of the other groups."

ADAM SNYDER, ALABAMA RIVERS ALLIANCE

2. To go fast, it helps to go slow.
Take time to ensure that individuals understand each other and each organization. Slow down and listen deeply to each person speaking about their work, values and perspective on the issues. How does each member see the issue, understand the problem? Develop a rich and complex picture of the opportunity and/or problem at hand so that the confluent differences within the group become a resource. Articulating differences is essential at this juncture, plus identifying where you will need to disagree. With a common understanding, the group can move to planning goals and action that has true group ownership and can be implemented flexibly.

Do Exercises 2.5 and 2.8 on pages 33 and 36 to get familiar with the other groups and build understanding.

"THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES OF LEADING START WITH SILENCE, then with listening and then with intention – in that order. I can feel myself falling into a different way of being – into a quieter place, quieting my mind and listening to them at their pace. If I can be in that place then it all just happens, I don't even have to work at it. The intention is to listen and understand their concerns, not think I know their questions and concerns or ideas. Lead with the intention to help them and to serve our common goals."

LAURA ZIEMER, WESTERN WATER PROJECT, TROUT UNLIMITED

3. Pay attention to the tension between what the full group may need and what individual participants want.
Wants and needs of the participating groups and individuals may differ. Honestly and clearly stating your organization's needs and wants and identifying where these do and don't coincide with what the cooperative effort needs is very helpful. This can be difficult since at times these are also areas of competition, so going slow and creating safety helps.

Organizations usually then recognize and agree on what they must give up — full credit, media presence, control over strategy, etc. — to create something greater.

(⚇) **Complete Exercises 2.2 and 2.3 on pages 28 and 29 for insight into balancing individual and full-group needs and wants.**

"OUR BIGGEST OBSTACLE WAS FEAR — THAT WE WOULD CREATE OUR OWN COMPETITION, or that some group would win or lose. We dealt with that by naming the fears — people disclosed. 'We're afraid that someone will take the money or resources or we won't get the credit.' Those are real fears. It's why you have to work in your self-interest. We ran straight into the face of the fears, and figured it out."

Diane Jensen, Minnesota Project

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4. Power dynamics are always present.
People and organizations will often vie for power and recognition, and the nonprofit world is no different. In coalition settings or multicultural cooperative efforts, unrecognized differences can undermine the group's cohesion. We recommend that the combined groups identify the different sources of power, knowledge and influence of each, and recog-

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"I THINK WE DON'T DO AS GOOD A JOB OF LISTENING. Some of our leadership can be more forceful – they set a position and stick to it. When one does that, the emphasis is not on finding a course that works for everyone but on having everyone agree with your vision. The truth is that when people are more willing to trust, to give in, and to not be the authority on everything, we develop much better solutions as a coalition. Also, once people are willing to let others step up as leaders, then you're building capacity and leadership."

Adam Snyder, Alabama Rivers Alliance

nize the impact of social, racial and economic differences. An example is the power differences between local, state and national groups — each has resources that are vital to the joint effort, but often local groups feel overrun by the national groups' access to money, press and congressional staff. Or individual groups have different styles of leadership and must figure out how to work in a coalition. Good facilitators or diversity consultants can help a multicultural group develop inclusive ways to work across differences. Balancing power needs to be openly discussed, guidelines agreed to, and a cooperative agreement signed.

(⚇) **Exercise 2.10 on page 39 supplies a way to help a group name and claim its diverse sources of power, and Exercise 3.4 on page 62 provides a template for a cooperative agreement.** ⇢ **Read Chapter 4 for ways to balance the Give/Get ratio, dynamic tensions and power.**

5. Develop a culture (together!).
Be intentional about the culture you would like to create and model behaviors and establish norms that reinforce that culture from the start. For example, if you truly want a democratic, participatory process, make certain that everyone is given a time at the first meeting to express their views on several key issues. Take the time to create ground rules or operating principles that can be encouraged and monitored by all participants.

(⚇) **Exercises 2.6 and 2.7 on pages 34 and 35 offer processes to build a group culture.**

6. All groups progress through predictable and unavoidable phases.
Different individual behaviors become apparent in each phase of development, and specific work must be completed in order to move to the next phase. If the work in a specific phase is not completed, the group will either return to it at a later time or their work together may be interrupted by conflict or stunted by avoiding unresolved issues.

⇢ **See Chart 1A Taming the Pack: A Field Guide to Group Development on page 13.**

7. Group reflection is necessary for learning and improvement.

Most of us love to do things. We are in the business of fixing things, working to make the world a better place. But there is power in taking time to reflect, to just be together. Celebrating can build solidarity and coherence, benefiting the overall strategy and camaraderie. Reflect on your group's efforts, discuss what worked well and what didn't, and why.

Then, with a deeper, shared understanding, your group can plan for future work equipped with tested experience and new insights.

Do Exercise 2.1 and 2.12 on pages 26 and 41 to evaluate how your cooperative effort is doing and discuss areas for improvement.

Also read Constant Motion, Constant Learning on page 84 in Chapter 4.

PHASES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Working well with a group of individuals is no easy task. The complexity increases exponentially when you expand to working with several organizations. First and foremost, keep in mind that groups have predictable developmental phases. You cannot avoid or skip a phase.

Once you, as a leader, have some idea what to expect at different phases of group development you can observe the group, identify the reason for their struggle and help to facilitate the work necessary to move to the next level of development. We've found that leaders are often reassured when they become aware that their group circumstance is not unique or particularly dysfunctional, but a predictable stage or phase that must be addressed before it can be passed through.

Susan Herman, of Dovetail Consulting, developed a chart which we have adapted as a field guide to group behavior in cooperative efforts. It's based on R. B. Lacoursiere's "The Life Cycle of Groups" (see bibliography) and identifies five basic stages: Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing and Transforming. The chart shows what must happen at each phase and the behaviors to watch for. Use this chart as a lens to observe the actions and behaviors of the group and its members, help assess the phase of development on a particular decision or action, and select an appropriate leadership intervention that can help to move the group to the next phase of development.

CHART 1A
TAMING THE PACK: A FIELD GUIDE TO GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Phase	What Happens in the Group	Questions of Group Members	Some Observable Behaviors	Leadership Tasks and Responsibilities
Form	Get to know each other. Make contact and bond. Determine current level of trust. Communicate needs (personal and organizational). Identify similarities and expectations. Agree on common purpose. Identify resources and skills.	Do I/we want to be a part of this group? How do I/we fit in? Will I/we be accepted?	Members are eager and enthusiastic. Questions arise regarding why we are here, what is to be gained. Some members express urgency about getting on with the job. Concerns may be expressed about how leaders will behave and how each member will fit in.	Provide time for people to get to know each other. Provide time for questions. Clarify goals. Model expected behaviors. Identify the group membership, its tools and resources. Be directive.
Storm	Express differences of opinions, feelings and ideas. Challenge leadership. Struggle for control. Identify roles and leadership styles. Identify resource needs. Wrestle with communication issues. Explore decision-making process.	How am I/we different from others? How much power do I have? Who will befriend whom? How will that impact relationships? What is the conflict here? How will we figure this out?	Members express anger and frustration directed at leaders and/or the task at hand. Members point to their own expectations that are not being fulfilled. Focus on the task at hand gives way to focus on the process used to get here.	Encourage different perspectives be aired. Acknowledge conflict as a condition for change. Help group clarify tasks and roles Model desired behaviors. Request and accept feedback. Recognize group progress and wins. Build trust by honoring commitments.
Norm	Collaborate on decision-making, reconcile differences. Agree on direction and results. Establish each member's role in achieving goal. Develop process for distributing information and resources. Develop team/group identity.	Will group and member goals be consistent? How can I/we help make this group work effectively toward its goals?	Clear roles for group members are named and acted upon. Members are open to learning and trying new things in the interest of group success. Members and leaders give each other encouragement and recognize successful completion of tasks. Interpersonal relationships flourish.	Encourage problem solving. Keep focus on goals and context. Teach and enforce group consensus. Reinforce and model positive listening. Share rewards for successes. Share responsibility and leadership.

TAMING THE PACK: A FIELD GUIDE TO GROUP DEVELOPMENT *continued*

Phase	What Happens in the Group	Questions of Group Members	Some Observable Behaviors	Leadership Tasks and Responsibilities
Perform	Work cooperatively. Work for the benefit of the whole group effort. Experiment; develop new ways to meet team goals. Feedback and evaluation. Respond to change. Achieve effective and satisfying results.	What will I/we be responsible for? How can I/we best do this work? How will we improve our effectiveness? How will we continue our work?	Members are more positive about the group and its work. Tasks are planned and completed efficiently. A unique group culture and even language develops.	Provide feedback on group effectiveness. Reinforce task and process. Assist in gaining meaning from meetings. Focus on communication and coordination
Transform	Reduced productivity. Anger directed at other members and/or group leaders. Withdrawal. Denial that change has occurred. Increased conflict. Review the experience. Develop action plans for new work. Express feelings.	Will I/we keep in contact with others? Is the job really complete? What are the next steps? What did we learn?	Anxiety about leaving the group. Sadness and feelings of loss, sometimes denied by joking and escape-like behaviors. Focus on task decreases, although spurts of activity may be used to over-come the sense of loss of meeting the final deadline.	Acknowledge that the group is really ending or changing. Encourage (and structure) ritual and reflection. Encourage expression of feelings. Welcome the appearance of new activity, new forms.

ADAPTED FROM LACOURSIERE, THE LIFE CYCLE OF GROUPS (1980) AND SUSAN HERMAN, DOVETAIL CONSULTING (2002)

EXERCISE 1.1
What Do You See?

Take a few minutes to think about the last meeting of your cooperative effort and to identify what phase/s in Chart 1A you observed and experienced. Jot down your thoughts to the following questions.

1.   What behaviors did you observe in this group?

2.   What do your observations tell you about the phase/s the group experienced?

3.   Did the group complete any phase/s? If so, what did you observe?

4.   What behaviors or actions helped the group complete the phase successfully and move to a new phase?

5.   Did you observe any backtracking? (The group moved on to a new phase too quickly and found they needed to return to the previous one.)

6.   What phase is this cooperative effort working to complete right now?

- Is this where you want to be?

- If not, what can you do as a leader to complete this phase successfully and move the group to the next phase?

- How personally comfortable are you in this phase of group development?

- Who could provide assistance?

Chapter 2: Start on Sound Footing—Four Steps

── KEY POINTS OF THIS CHAPTER ──

�֎ Begin by getting clear on your personal and organizational intentions, needs, and limits. Be certain this cooperative effort is important to your mission and that the benefits are worth the effort.

✖ All members of the cooperative effort decide the elements of the collaborative effort, in this order: membership, decision-making structures and processes, and purpose and goals.

✖ Leaders must pay attention to and employ the group development models and tips discussed in Chapter 1 in order to get through the start-up issues.

✖ Engage in reflection as a group – take stock of your progress at key points in your development. Early in your work together create the time and space to give and receive feedback and think critically about the group's abilities to work cooperatively.

✖ An outside facilitator can be especially helpful if the cooperative effort is stalled on a crucial decision, is diverse and having difficulty working together, or if all participants at the meeting want to fully engage in the conversation and decision-making.

✖ Make use of the exercises provided in this chapter to help launch your cooperative effort.

We can't over-emphasize the importance of a good beginning. Starting your cooperative effort on sound footing will save both resources and relationships and avoid a good deal of backtracking. The first part of this chapter discusses four steps that are important to the initial development of your cooperative effort: assessing your participation, exploring options, initiating cooperation, and checking your footing.

The rest of this chapter provides exercises and processes that facilitate group work on each of the steps. The exercises offer examples you can tailor to a particular situation. Furthermore, these exercises were developed for a facilitator or leader to conduct. The facilitator could be a member of the collaborative effort or an outside professional. An outside facilitator can be especially valuable if the cooperative effort is stalled on a crucial decision, has diverse members who are having difficulty understanding each other and working together, or all participants at the meeting want to fully engage in the conversation and decision-making.

Get Started in Four Steps

Step 1. Assess Your Organization's Readiness: Is the Cooperative Effort Right for Us?

Organizations join forces for a variety of reasons. Leaders we work with most often state the following reasons they work cooperatively with other organizations:

❋ **Complex problems and/or issues**. "The issue has a number of different angles to it and we need more capacity to deal with its complexity, including legal, administrative, scientific, and community and public policy involvement."

❋ **More clout and power**. "Our joint effort brings together different constituencies to make a winning team."

❋ **Old problems need new solutions**. "Times have changed, new opportunities have opened to us and we can now deal with this issue in new ways and with new partners."

❋ **Diversity defines the whole picture**. "We can't understand what is really going on without everyone who is affected by this problem in the room. With everyone here we are finding new options and think we can find a better solution."

❋ **Funder mandate or incentives.** "A foundation approached our four organizations and offered funding to help us collaborate on a big new program. How could we say no to that kind of cash?"

❋ **Limited resources**. "Land stewardship is a big-picture, long-term commitment. It just made sense for the land trusts in our region to jointly figure out key areas to protect, with strategies for new funding."

❋ **New ideas and relationships**. "It's energizing to learn what others are doing and meet people who are working on similar issues, but in different contexts and communities."

❋ **Public relations and presence**. "Working together on messages and media makes us more sophisticated and effective in reaching key audiences to build public awareness."

Who Should Participate?

The purpose for cooperating and the best mix of participants are intertwined. When considering who should participate in a cooperative effort, consider its purpose. If your purpose is to advocate for an issue, bringing like-minded groups together may be the best mix. Selecting similar groups also might be helpful if you want to learn from and support each other in a common field of work. If, however, your intention is to demonstrate that this issue has widely-supported common ground, then your group must include diverse constituencies who may bring in multicultural and class differences. Place-based coalitions or multi-stakeholder groups who want to find solutions to community problems generally include a cross-section of the community or representative constituencies. Those who want to forge new solutions to complex problems often are more effective if they invite groups with different viewpoints and knowledge.

Diversity can really help a cooperative effort succeed. Building multicultural cooperation across racial and class differences can be critical in affecting many of the complex issues facing our society. Although this work can be difficult, working to first create safety and trust is worth it. When the purpose of getting together has meaning and value for all, working through differences can build deeper understanding and more broadly viable action. It does take commitment on a personal and organizational level, and often an outside facilitator is needed to help lead a constructive process.

For your cooperative effort, establish criteria about what kinds of groups make sense. Select criteria such as the following. "We need organizations that…"

❊ Advocate similar issues.

❊ Hold diverse perspectives to foster dialogue.

❊ Represent a cross-section of the community.

❊ Serve people affected by the issue.

❊ Are influential and have special skills on the issue.

❊ …What else?

Spend the time up front to work through who needs to participate. Bringing in the right members from the beginning will make a big difference in your success. 🚶 **With your general criteria in hand, complete Exercise 2.9 on page 38 for a way to think about the right mix of specific organizations.**

Should Your Group Join?

Groups enter into cooperative efforts because they perceive a benefit. Are you and other leaders in the organization clear on why your group would participate? Before you commit to a joint effort, clarify your personal and organizational intentions, needs, and limits. We've seen groups jump in because they "care about the issue," or they "don't want to be left out of potential funding opportunities" – without having explored fully whether it was the right place to put their energy and resources.

Your organization's mission and goals must guide your decisions about where and how to invest in

cooperative ventures. For cooperative efforts that involve significant investments of time and money or involve a new set of constituencies, get the advice and approval of your board of directors.

To make the decision to participate your group must address three essential elements of developing cooperative efforts:

Step 1. Membership and Participation – why join and who should participate

Decide why we would join and consider who else should participate.

Choose who will represent us and how.

Step 1. Structures and Processes – how to work together

Clarify our desired role and responsibilities.

Consider what we can contribute and need from participating.

Step 1. Purpose and Goals – what we do

Ensure that this cooperative effort fits our mission and is essential to accomplishing our goals.

🚶 **Exercises 2.2 and 2.3 on pages 28 and 29 offer processes that enable organizations and individuals to decide whether to participate.** We suggest that each organization and leader complete and discuss these assessments prior to the first organizing meeting. Each individual organization's responses to these questions can be topics of discussion at the first few organizing meetings.

The Three Elements of Participation

The diagram on page 20 describes the sequence of the essential elements in developing cooperation. Effective group work begins in the "Membership" arena and moves clockwise through "Structures and Processes," completing a cycle in "Purpose and Goals." All groups address all of the elements in this cycle, and you will spiral through this diagram many times as a cooperative effort develops, each time going to a new level of development.

🚶 **Exercise 2.1 on page 26 includes a process for assessing your cooperative effort and a comprehensive set of questions for each element.** Over time groups address these questions as they progress through the spiral and continue to develop cooperation. Because cooperative efforts are dynamic systems, you will deal repeatedly with who is involved and why, how we are working together and what are our goals.

ILLUSTRATION: THE THREE ELEMENTS OF PARTICIPATION

Membership: develops trust and the who and why of participation.

Begin here, follow clockwise

Purpose and Goals: provides direction for the group and keeps the project on course.

Structures and Processes: distributes power and provides opportunities to act and influence what is important.

Assess Your Organization's Readiness

Explore Options for Cooperation

Initiate the Cooperative Effort

Assess Your Start: Are You on Sound Footing?

STEP 2. EXPLORE OPTIONS FOR COOPERATION

"I'VE LEARNED THAT IT'S IMPORTANT NOT TO JUMP TOO FAST. It's important to bite my tongue and wait to make sure that everyone in the room is in the same place. The responsibility of leadership is to anticipate differences in the level of knowledge and experience. Leaders need to provide the background and context to bring everyone up to the same place to make sure everyone has the same level of understanding about what's going on."

JIM ABERNATHY, ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORT CENTER

Your organization and several others have decided to attend the first meeting. You all have done your individual homework, but where and how do you begin to engage as a group? Often the first meeting agenda is about getting down to the "real business" at hand – and the discussion starts with what needs to be done and who will do it. Unless groups have a history of working well together, however, starting with this content usually causes confusion and can lead to power struggles and disagreement. Instead, dedicate the first meeting to exploring the question, "Why should we work together?" Think about your combined group: what do they need to learn, hear and say to each other to bring them together and

build common understanding? Make this work the primary agenda of your first meeting or two.

New cooperative efforts need to step back from the action and take a good look at why each group is there. A sense of inclusion, safety and common identity emerges only after discussing desires and purposes for cooperating. This discussion also helps participants understand the individual leaders and build relationships among them. Then the group can talk about how to better work together and share an understanding of the problems and possible solutions. After this essential groundwork is laid, setting goals and deciding what needs to be done will be more realistic and more likely to be accomplished.

Your process may not be as smooth as the orderly diagram of the Three Elements of Participation may suggest. You may find that the group has to backtrack because you haven't truly completed the previous set of tasks. That is no cause for alarm. As a leader, observe what the group is doing, what's causing the confusion or conflict, and help facilitate the appropriate move. No doubt the group will also progress through predictable phases (see pages 13-14) as they complete tasks and activities in each of the three areas diagrammed in these charts. Use the same set of facilitative skills to help all of you move forward.

Getting started on your cooperative effort has distinct and definable objectives. We recommend that you meet in person for at least the first couple of meetings if you are considering structures other than a network. It's extremely difficult to build relationships and group cohesiveness over the phone or by email.

The first time the full group works through the circle of the Three Elements they should achieve the outcomes outlined below. Unless you are a collection of groups who have worked well together before, on this or a similar issue, don't expect to complete this round in your first meeting. It may take two or even

three sessions, depending on their length. For a new and diverse group, consider it a colossal success to get through just the membership tasks in the first meeting.

These exercises and processes are designed to help you accomplish the outcomes of step 2, exploring options for cooperation.

Step 2. Membership and Participation

Participants generally know who is in the room and why they are there.

Participants are comfortable that they belong in this effort.

Participants feel respected and trust each other.

A spirit of cooperation is growing.

If you are weak in membership, use Exercises 2.4a or 2.4b and 2.5 on pages 30, 31 and 33 to help participants feel more comfortable and included as they learn about the organizations in the room.

Step 2. Structures and Processes

The group begins to see the potential of working cooperatively and starts setting norms and ground rules.

Agreement on how members will participate and make decisions is beginning to emerge.

Exercise 2.6 on page 34 establishes ground rules or norms for how members of the group will behave and treat each other. See Chapter 4, page 73 for ways to make decisions.

Step 2. Purpose and Goals

The group creates a rich, shared picture of the issue or problem to be worked on cooperatively.

The group explores what success looks like and clarifies its vision and purpose for working together.

Exercise 2.7 on page 35 helps you begin creating a shared vision for success. Exercise 2.11 on page 40 leads your group in a discussion of strategies to accomplish goals.

Step 3. Initiate the Cooperative Effort

"MOTIVATIONS AND INTERNAL CLARITY ARE IMPORTANT, even if public clarity isn't possible to express openly. Clarity and candidness are not the same thing. Successful coalitions are not built on bluntness, they are grown on subtleness and nuance. Assumptions are both public and privately held and that's okay. Many environmentalists don't understand that. Politics is in part saving face and honoring others' need to do certain things. Groups have to build the culture and rituals to handle this."

MIKE CLARK, TROUT UNLIMITED

Although you are still in the early stages of a cooperative effort, you have completed one cycle of the Three Elements of Participation in Step 2 and now are able to operate on a slightly higher plane. In your first round, you decided to participate. In the second round, you established who is in the room and why each organization is there, began setting up how you want to work together, explored the issue or problem from diverse perspectives, and envisioned what you might achieve together. This critical groundwork makes initiating the cooperative effort possible.

You'll encounter new challenges the third time you go around the Three Elements diagram. At this stage, the cooperative effort asks its members for commitment and resources. Move forward with care and tact because the nature of the cooperation is still fragile. You may experience hesitancy from group members at this juncture or the inability of participants to make commitments for their organizations. Don't panic or throw in the towel. Encourage participating groups to be clear and public about their organizations' self-interests and their decision-making structure and process. It helps to understand the power and limitations of each representative who makes decisions and commitments on behalf of their organization.

It is important to take stock of the capacity and resources that each partner organization has at its disposal and is willing to bring to the effort. Capacity represents much more than dollars, although financial resources are necessary. It could also include:

❈ People power (board, staff and volunteers).

❈ Information and knowledge, or special expertise.

❈ Track record and a history of working on the issue.

❈ Relationships and connections to decision-makers, media or other stakeholders.

❈ Access to potential donors.

❈ Local credibility and the ability to be directly involved.

It is critical to make a full assessment of the individual and collective group's capacity and who or what else is needed before you can determine your effort's ability to achieve success. Group members may hold back when you are talking money and resources. Resources represent different kinds of power and are unequally distributed in a group. These issues can bring up fear and competition — groups may worry that they will lose funding to the cooperative effort or to one another. Finding ways to explore these issues openly and safely may seem difficult but it is very important at this juncture. ❧ **Chapter 4, page 78 provides ideas for working cooperatively to fundraise.**

At this stage it is also useful to consider what your individual groups could gain from participating. We've seen cooperative projects and campaigns designed so each member group could participate more effectively and grow into a stronger organization in these ways:

❈ Involve more volunteers and increase membership. Every issue has many opportunities for involving people.

❈ Be part of larger fundraising plans, either with a pass-through grant or in a clear role as

fundraiser for part of the collective work. This also can provide access to new funding and funding relationships.

❋ Get credit in the media for your part of the work.

❋ Be acknowledged for all the resources that the group brings (people, knowledge, expertise, connections to different constituencies), in grant proposals and other formal documents.

❋ Build the capacity of the organization through upgrading systems such as computers or phones, getting access to training or addressing other administrative or program needs.

❋ Develop "mentoring" relationships among the coalition groups. Larger groups can open doors for smaller groups, provide informal coaching for less-experienced leaders, provide technical assistance and information resources on issues, and in many ways support the development of more leaders and stronger groups.

The third time around, discussions begin to describe with greater specificity and commitment the resources the cooperative effort needs, what each member can bring and what benefits each member group hopes to get from the cooperative effort. The group also starts to frame the decision-making, goals and strategies.

A cooperative effort's third cycle around the Essential Elements diagram should bring the following outcomes. Use the exercises and processes in this chapter to help accomplish the work.

Step 3. Membership and Participation

The organizational participants talk honestly about their needs, limits and the priority of this effort to their organization's mission.

The collective effort identifies and engages other organizations needed to achieve the success articulated in Round 1.

"IT HELPS TO HAVE A COMMON ORIENTATION AMONG THE GROUPS about the problem, the political lay of the land, as well as the strategies and assumptions each group has about how change can be made and how to be effective. There can be radically different assumptions about how to make things work. If these assumptions are made explicit we have a chance to figure out how we are going to work together anyway. Otherwise the whole thing can get bogged down in misunderstanding."

BARB CESTERO, GREATER YELLOWSTONE COALITION

🏃 **Exercise 2.8 on page 36 defines a process for discussing individual members' needs, limits and priorities. Exercise 2.9 on page 38 provides a process for the group to identify and consider other key players.**

Step 3. Structures and Processes

The group has a beginning conversation about the kind of structure that will most effectively help them accomplish their shared vision and goals. ↕❯ **See also Chapter 3, which describes the different models and structures for cooperative efforts.**

The collective group understands the decision-making processes of each participating organization and the authority of each representative to commit and decide.

The collective effort discloses the currencies its member groups have to allocate and share. (Who brings what to the table?) 🏃 **Exercise 2.10 on page 39 helps the group identify capacities and resources that members bring to the collaborative effort.**

Step 3. Purpose and Goals

The collaborative group:

> Drafts its goals and desired outcomes.
> ✤ **See final steps in Exercise 2.7 on page 35.**

> Identifies key strategies for reaching its goals and outcomes. ✤ **See Exercise 2.11 on page 40.**

Decides what's on the agenda and what's not. Where do the groups agree to disagree?

Begins to identify next steps that lead to developing a specific workplan and timetable.
⬌ **See Chapter 4, Be Accountable to Each Other, page 72**.

STEP 4. ASSESS YOUR START: ARE YOU ON SOUND FOOTING?

By the second or third meeting you likely are ready to determine what needs more discussion, and to check with everyone to feel confident that all are on board and ready to move forward together.

✤ **Use the assessment tool in Exercise 2.12 on page 41 to help the group determine if it has completed its grounding work. Each leader may want to do this assessment individually and later discuss it together.**

Exercises and Processes

We offer a number of exercises and processes we have employed or modified to help cooperative efforts embark on a strong footing. Use all of these processes, or bits and pieces. Feel free to adapt any of them.

Most of these exercises are designed for developing groups and are best used in face-to-face meetings. With some modification a few could be conducted in a conference call. The sequencing of these exercises is important, and consistent with the illustration, Three Elements of Participation. Depending on the length of each meeting, the sequencing of exercises is as follows:

- Before the first meeting of your cooperative effort: Exercises 2.2 and 2.3.

- During the first meeting: Exercises 2.4 through 2.7.

- The second meeting: Exercises 2.8 and 2.9.

- The third meeting: Exercises 2.10, 2.11 and 2.12.

- If the first meeting is a full day, you could also include Exercise 2.8. If so, the second full day meeting would complete Exercises 2.9, 2.10, 2.11 and 2.12.

Exercises for:

- Overall assessment and strengthening: 2.1 and 2.12

- Membership: 2.2, 2.3, 2.4a, 2.4b, 2.5, 2.9

- Structures and Processes: 2.6, 2.8, 2.10

- Purpose and Goals: 2.7, 2.11

EXERCISE 2.1
Developing Cooperation: Three Essential Elements

PURPOSE:

To provide a comprehensive way to better understand and strengthen your cooperative agenda through inquiry and discussion.

HOW TO USE:

This tool can be used at any stage of your cooperative effort's development, and can be answered and discussed by small groups or the whole leadership core.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR LEADER OF THE EXERCISE:

1. Ask people to work on this individually first and then share their answers in small groups of 3-4 people that mix up the different participants in your group.

   For each section (Membership; Structures and Processes; Purpose and Goals) answer the questions. Identify where things are going well, and which of these questions raise significant problems that need improvement.

2. Share you answers in your small group and consider which of the three areas you think the whole group is doing pretty well. Which is the flattest side where improvement would make the biggest positive impact on effective participation?

3. Each group shares their observations with the whole group. A simple approach is to just ask each small group to share their observations about which area is weakest and strongest and why.
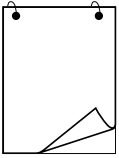
   A more complete assessment can be done by posting three flip charts, one for each element. List the questions under each element with two columns — one for strengths, one for areas that need improvement. Ask each small group or person to mark their assessments on the flip chart.

4. Then the full group can work on ideas for improvement.

   Once you identify your weak and strong areas, start with your weaknesses in Membership, then tackle Structures, and complete your triage with Purpose and Goals.

THE THREE ELEMENTS OF PARTICIPATION

Membership:
develops trust and the who and why of participation.

Begin here, follow clockwise

❋ Are the right people here?

❋ Do people listen and engage?

❋ Do you feel like you belong? Is everyone included by the culture of the group?

❋ Is the give/get ratio in balance?

❋ How strong and positive are the relationships, the level of trust?

❋ Is internal communication done well?

❋ Does this group handle conflict and turf issues effectively?

Purpose and Goals:
provides direction for the group and keeps the project on course.

❋ Is it clear why this group came together?

❋ Do you share understanding of the context and problem?

❋ Are the goals clear and worthwhile?

❋ Is the planning process mutually agreed upon?

❋ Does the group have focused goals and agree on strategy?

❋ Does the group learn from its work, evaluate and adapt its plans?

Structures and Processes:
distributes power and provides opportunities to act and influence what is important.

❋ Is decision-making clear and effective?

❋ Is the power distributed appropriately?

❋ Do you have a clear role, a chance to add value and make a difference?

❋ Does the group use workplans and hold each other accountable?

❋ Do you have authority to carry out your responsibilities?

❋ Is the distribution of resources clear and equitable?

❋ Are there agreements on money and fundraising?

❋ Are there agreements on public presence, media and credit?

EXERCISE 2.2
Clarify Your Organization's Reasons for Cooperating

PURPOSE:

To help organizations examine the reasons, benefits and costs of joining a cooperative effort, in order to make sound decisions. The questions are particularly helpful at the start of an effort, but some may be worth asking at critical decision points along the way.

HOW TO USE:

All or some of these questions could be:

- Discussed at a board or staff meeting of an organization thinking about joining a cooperative effort, and/or
- Reviewed by an individual leader or several leaders to prepare for an organizing meeting of a cooperative effort.

1. How important is this cooperative effort in helping to achieve our mission? Why is it important now?

2. What are the three most important results that we hope to accomplish? By when?

3. What assets, resources, and time are we able and willing to bring to the cooperative effort?

4. What are the risks in doing it? What are the risks in not doing it?

5. What are the main reasons for NOT joining forces now?

6. Will our organization's major stakeholders and members support this effort?

7. What would partnering organizations need to know and understand about our group? (e.g., How do we make decisions? What are our other key commitments and where do they fall in our list of priorities? What are our resource limitations?)

8. What are the breakpoints – what do we need partnering organizations NOT to do? (What could other groups do that would break our trust and ability to work together?)

9. What does our organization need to get out of this cooperative effort? (i.e., What is our bottom line?) Should we do it?

10. How else might we support this effort without participating directly?

EXERCISE 2.3
Identify Your Personal Role and Motivations

PURPOSE:

To help leaders of a cooperative effort become more aware of their personal motivations and the roles and relationships they must track and maintain.

HOW TO USE:

These questions should be answered by any leader considering being the liaison for their organization.

They can also be usefully answered and discussed by several people preparing for an organizing meeting (or an especially challenging meeting) of a cooperative effort; or

Discussed openly with other leaders in your organization.

1. What are my personal reasons for participating? (What do I hope to gain or learn?)

2. What personal concerns do I have entering this cooperative effort?

3. What is my existing relationship with the players at the table?

4. What is my role in representing my organization in this cooperative effort?

5. With whom must I communicate and how can I involve others in my group as I participate in this cooperative effort?

6. What leadership responsibility am I willing (or is my organization allowing me) to assume? What level of decisions can I make without my organization's approval?

7. What leadership strengths and skills do I bring to this effort?

8. Your personal reasons and roles may change over time. Continue to identify what is working well for you by considering: Where am I able to be effective? How might I clarify areas that are confusing or problematic? Who can assist me to do this?

EXERCISE 2.4
Introductory Exercises for Membership

As the group moves toward deciding who it is and what it hopes to accomplish, the following collection of suggested activities can help reveal important participant information and feelings. These exercises are meant to stimulate your creativity and are not prescriptive. Use whatever exercises are helpful or create your own, keeping in mind the basic tenets of group development (♦ **see Chapter 1**) and the cycle for developing a cooperative project discussed above.

Begin with a fun and lively way to introduce each person in the room. Adding some physical activity helps to dissipate anxiety. In addition to each person's name and organization, pose a question that allows participants to share something about themselves. At each subsequent meeting and as trust develops, you can ask more revealing questions.

Exercise 2.4a The Name Game

PURPOSE:

To learn everyone's name in a way that adds a bit of lightheartedness to a serious meeting. This also begins to establish norms and cooperation as participants help each other with the task of remembering names.

HOW TO USE:

The game works only when the majority of participants don't know each other.

The game is best for groups with 12 to 20 people. (If the group is larger, the game gets tiresome; if smaller, it loses its fun challenge.)

The game will take 15 to 25 minutes, depending on the number of people.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR LEADER OF THE EXERCISE

1. Ask the group to stand in a circle.

2. Explain to the group that by the end of the exercise, you will all know each other's name. Some of you may be familiar with "Going to the Market," a game you may have played as a child. This game is similar, but uses people's names.

3. Give the group the following instructions:
   Each person gives a one-word alliterative descriptor in front of their own name, "Something that you like about yourself, like Persistent Pam or Jumping Jerry."

   Along with the two words (your descriptor and first name) make a gesture that fits. So Jumping Jerry jumps as he says his name, then everyone including Jerry laughs.

   Choose your name carefully, because it may stick with you.

   Now, here's the remembering part – before you introduce yourself, you must repeat everyone's name and descriptor, in order around the circle up to you.

   If someone is having difficulty remembering the names, the group can assist. A good way to assist is by doing the gesture that goes with the name.

   The last person will say all the names of the group.

EXAMPLE OF HOW THE EXERCISE GOES

1st person: "My name is Sally Jones, I live in Austin, Texas, and I'm the Executive Director of Citizens for a Better World. I'm 'Sassy Sally' (with hands on hips, looking impudent)."

2nd person: "My name is David Wise, I'm from Two Dot, Montana, and I'm a Board Member of Earthscape. There's 'Sassy Sally' and I'm 'Daring David' (with a "daring" gesture)."

3rd person: Gives their own brief introduction, followed by "There's Sassy Sally, Daring David, and I'm [name with gesture]."

Usually the person who gives the directions does the full round of names at the end just to share the joyful noise!

If the name game is just too "out there" for your first meeting, choose from a number of other warm-up questions. Always design the introductory exercise to fit the number of people present. If the number of individuals in attendance is over 15, think about doing introductions in small groups of two to four people and having them report one short piece of their conversation to the full group. Exercise 2.4b gives examples.

Exercise 2.4b Additional Introductory Questions for Individuals

PURPOSE:

Begin the process of learning about group members that will start to establish group culture, tradition and trust. Introductory questions allow everyone to speak at the very beginning of the meeting – getting their voice in the room. We suggest that you begin each meeting with an introductory exercise.

HOW TO USE:

There are a number of ways to do this, depending on the size of the group and the time allotted to the meeting.

Option 1: Go around the group (starting with a volunteer) and ask each person to give: (1) their name, (2) their organization, (3) their hometown, and (4) answers to one or two of the suggested questions listed below. The leader should decide in advance the question(s) that all will answer. The leader or facilitator is responsible to model the desired length of the response by going first. (Estimate that this exercise will take about 50 seconds per person, including giving instructions.)

Option 2: For a larger group you may want to divide into pairs or threesomes to do the introduction described in Option 1. This is especially helpful if you pose a question that lends itself to a deeper, more complex answer. Give the small groups about five minutes to talk, depending on the nature of the question. Then do a two-minute report-out from each group where each person gives their name, organization and hometown, and asks for the most interesting or agreed-upon response to the question. (Estimate 15 to 20 minutes, depending on the group's size.)

POSSIBLE INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

1. Why did you come to this meeting?

2. What excites you most about these groups working together?

3. What one thing do you hope to gain from this meeting?

4. What do you most like about working with other organizations?

5. Tell one thing about yourself that this group would be surprised to learn. (This one works best when the group has met for a while.)

6. If you were a dog, what breed describes you best? Why?

7. Tell us the brief story of your first name. What does it mean and/or how did it get attached to you?

EXERCISE 2.5
Get Familiar with the Organizations in the Room

PURPOSE:

To learn about the organizations working on a joint effort.

HOW TO USE:

Do this at the first meeting, especially if the groups are new to each other. If the groups are very familiar, you might ask them to draw or diagram a particular aspect of their organization that would be important to the cooperative effort, i.e., how decisions are made or who are their allies.

Materials needed: flipchart paper, lots of colorful markers and tape.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR LEADER OF THE EXERCISE

1. Ask participants to get in their organizational groups if more than one person from each organization is attending.

2. Instruct them to quick draw (using at least three colors) on a flipchart: (10 minutes)

   In the center of the flipchart draw a picture that represents what your organization is currently doing on the issue you are here to discuss.

   In the space surrounding the center picture, draw or write any important information about your organization that this larger group needs to see and understand.

3. Post the drawings around the room and walk the full group to each post.
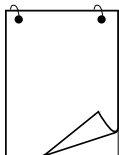
   Each group gets two minutes to tell the full group about their drawing.

   The full group has one minute to ask for clarifications.

4. Full group de-brief: What are the common themes or patterns you see in these drawings? What do we now know is common to all of these groups? What are some of the major differences between groups? What might we need to take into consideration in our plan now that we have this information? (10 minutes)

EXERCISE 2.6
Create Operating Principles for the Meeting

PURPOSE:

To begin establishing desired group behaviors and a legitimate way to monitor and encourage them.

HOW TO USE:

Create these after personal introductions and review of the agenda, and certainly before any decisions are made or substantive content is discussed. This exercise should take about 15 minutes at the beginning and five at the end.

Consider using these again, and refining them over time.

This process can be adapted to develop organizational values and principles of operation. Start with the questions: Why did you join your organization, and what keeps you involved in this cooperative effort? List these reasons, one from each person until all ideas are up. Then these can be summarized into values and principles and discussed for agreement.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LEADER OF THE EXERCISE

1. Ask group members to think about an excellent meeting they have attended. What made it productive and enjoyable? How did people behave? What were the norms? What is transferable to this meeting/effort?

2. List these principles on a flip chart, taking only one idea at a time from each person.

3. Once the group has listed all of its principles, review the full list.

4. Ask the group if they can agree to these principles for today's work. (Usually all agree, but if not, you may need to discuss an item or two.) If the list is long, you could ask the group to prioritize the top four or five.

5. Close the exercise by setting the expectation that it's the job of everyone present to ensure that these principles are adhered to. If a group member is violating or supporting a principle, the facilitator or a group member could bring it to the attention of the full group.

6. At the end of the meeting assess how well these worked and if changes could be made. Ask if these are sound principles to carry to the next meeting. Review these at the start of the next meeting.

EXERCISE 2.7
Define Success and Vision

PURPOSE:

To begin to create a shared vision of success. Member organizations explore whether they hold similar expectations about outcomes.

HOW TO USE:

This exercise might happen during the afternoon of a day-long first meeting of organizations exploring a cooperative effort or at the second meeting.

This exercise also could be used when there is a major shift in the internal or external environment that impacts or changes the course of the collaborative effort.

A skilled facilitator might prove helpful. There is a good deal of moving people around and summarizing results.

Allow at least 45 to 60 minutes for this exercise.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LEADER OF THIS EXERCISE

1. Ask participants to pair with someone outside their organization, preferably someone they don't know well.

2. Ask them to pretend they are in an elevator five years from now, overhearing someone talk about this effort. Tell them to keep in mind that they are only going up five floors together.

3. Discuss together: What are they saying? What did you do? What's been accomplished? How have things changed? (Jot these thoughts on sticky notes)

4. On a blank wall, cluster sticky notes with similar ideas.

5. Review clusters and try to paraphrase each cluster.

6. Check for full group agreement about this vision for success. Is everyone in general agreement at this point? What are the areas where we may have disagreement?

    If there is agreement, you might want to ask a small group to draft these ideas into a purpose statement and a set of goals for full-group discussion at a later time. Or you may need to further focus the area of common ground to have a specific focus for the work together. Often cooperative efforts do best with a specific focus for their work together rather than a broad and general goal.

    Identify areas of disagreement because you will need to resolve them before you can move on. Disagreements may be on the sources of the problems you are hoping to address, or on strategies to solve them. Disagreements on these issues may mean this is not a good time or situation on which to form a partnership, so explore them fully.

    All participants in a cooperative effort must be in agreement on big-picture success and vision in order to work together well.

EXERCISE 2.8
Clarify Each Organization's Needs, Desires and Limits

PURPOSE:

To publicly share each organization's needs, wants and limitations so that the cooperative effort will have realistic expectations of each member and can plan accordingly. This exercise also may reveal the critical conversations this cooperative effort needs to have.

HOW TO USE:

Plan to do this exercise in the second or third meeting of the group.

The discussion flows much better if groups and individuals have already completed Exercises 2.2 and 2.3.

A skilled facilitator would prove helpful. This is a rather complex and potentially charged exercise.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LEADER OF THE EXERCISE

1. Put the questions to be explored on a flipchart and review them with the group by checking for understanding and asking for questions of clarification.

2. Explore each question below. Note the "subset questions" required for each.

Questions to Explore in this Exercise

A. How important or central is this cooperative effort to your mission?

B. What does your organization need to get out of this cooperative effort (bottom line)?

C. What are the risks for your organization in joining this effort?

D. What are the three most important results your own organization hopes to accomplish through this joint effort?

E. What are the breakpoints – what do you need partnering organizations NOT to do? (I.e., what could other groups do that would break your trust and ability to work together?)

For Question A: (Allow 15 to 20 minutes depending on size of the group.)

1. Create a human continuum where one end of the line is low priority and the other end is critical.

2. Ask a representative from each organization to line up somewhere between the two poles.

3. Hand each representative a large card with their group's name on it. (Organizations may need to huddle to determine their spot on the line.)

4. Once folks are lined up ask each group to take one minute and explain why they are at this spot.

5. Take a photo, making sure the organizational name cards are visible.

For Question D: (Allow 20 to 25 minutes depending on the size of the group.)

1. Individual organizations huddle and quickly agree on the top three.

2. Each group gets one minute to state their three.

3. Record these on a flipchart and make certain they are tagged by group.

4. Ask the full group to identify common results and major differences. List them on a flipchart.

5. Identify any differences that may need further discussion and when and how the discussion should take place.

For Questions B, C & E: (Allow at least 45 minutes.)

1. Individual organizations may need to huddle first to agree on their responses to all three questions and designate a spokesperson.

2. Taking the questions one at a time, ask each organization to give their honest response. Record all responses on a flipchart with the name of the group.

3. After everyone has responded to each question, review the list and ask: "What should the full group pay attention to on this list, and why?" Record notes on a flipchart.

4. Explore the next question in the same manner.

5. After all three questions have been explored, identify any key conversations that the group needs to have before it proceeds. Decide how and when to have those conversations.

EXERCISE 2.9
Map The Players

"People need to think hard about all of the possible actors and think beyond the usual suspects. The convener(s) better not be viewed as intentionally excluding people whom others would consider essential to the effort. Wait. Think. It's better to invite everyone who needs to be there and talk with them about their interest if they can't be there."

JIM ABERNATHY, ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORT CENTER

PURPOSE:

For the initial leaders to think strategically about who else needs to be part of this effort in order to achieve the desired success.

HOW TO USE:

As your cooperative effort is developing or after it has a core of committed organizations with a clear vision for what you want to accomplish and an assessment of your resources, it may be time to reconsider the membership issue. Are there other important stakeholders who could significantly add to this effort? (Keep in mind that adding others requires you to revisit some of the group development exercises.)

You'll need flip charts, tape, many markers and large sticky notes.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LEADER OF THE EXERCISE

Identify decision-makers, supporters and critics.

1. Tape two flip charts together in one large sheet. Write the goal or vision of your cooperative effort at the top center of the flip chart. Write down the key people whose decisions will determine your success just below your goal. Draw a line down the center. On the left side write: Allies + supporters; on the right side write: Opposition + critics.

2. Identify organizations, stakeholders or constituencies who might care about your issue or goal. Discuss the general categories of groups that might be involved, especially if you are considering a community-based initiative or other broad or multi-stakeholder effort.
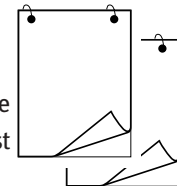
    Then ask each person to think of specific groups and write down one organization's name per sticky note. Use a marker, so it can be read from a distance.

    After about 5 minutes, ask them to place their sticky notes on the chart. Group those that have similar interests; draw lines showing the influence of groups on decision makers.

Looking at this network of groups, facilitate a discussion that explores the following questions:

1. Who can help us reach our goals or influence key decision makers?
2. Do we have the necessary connections and diversity to accomplish our purpose?
3. What criteria will we use to select groups?
4. Which groups might be good partners in our cooperative effort?
5. What will we need to do to welcome and integrate new members into this group?

Based on this discussion you can decide whether to ask others to join. Remember that too broad a membership may include differences of values and interests that are hard to manage, and that too narrow may be too exclusive and miss the benefits of sufficient diversity to really address the problems you hope to solve. Decide which individual to invite to represent their organization.

EXERCISE 2.10
Explore Members' Roles and Resources

PURPOSE:

To assess the collective resources and capacities of the cooperative effort and to explore roles each member organization might play along with what resources they are willing to commit. If there is a shortfall of resources, think together about how and where to acquire them.

HOW TO USE:

This exercise could be a significant agenda item for your second or third meeting, once the group has jelled a bit and has a vision of outcomes.

Allow at least an hour for this exercise. If you anticipate conflict, allow 90 minutes.

If you believe the exercise will raise issues around power and inequity, you may want to use a skilled facilitator.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LEADER OF THE EXERCISE

1. Conduct a quick brainstorm session that lists capacity/currency/resources needed for this cooperative effort. Rules of a brainstorm: all ideas are recorded on the flipchart, with no comments or discussion of any items. The purpose is to get as many ideas as possible.

2. Ask each member group to take about 10 minutes to put their capacities into three categories.
   Category 1: What are the resources and capacities of our organization? What roles might we play in this cooperative effort?
   Category 2: What we are we prepared to offer today to help support and do the work of the cooperative effort?
   Category 3: What do we think we can offer, but only after checking further with our organization?

3. Come back into the full-group circle. Each member group should share as much resource/capacity information as they wish. Record the resources and the category listed by organization. (Note: Some organizations may need to check back with their office to determine whether they can offer certain resources. Set a time and/or contact person to report back.)

4. The full group compares the list of resources generated with the desired success discussed in Exercise 2.8. How close is the match? What are the gaps and in what areas?

5. If there are gaps, the facilitator prompts the group to think about ways to generate additional resources.

6. Ask the group if and how it wants to formalize these resource offerings. Would it be helpful to create written contracts or memoranda of understanding that list the resources each group is committing?

7. Conduct a quick evaluation: Ask each participant how this discussion felt, what it brought up for them personally, and/or what other conversations this collective effort may need to have in the future.

EXERCISE 2.11
Understand the Issue, Share Paths to Success

PURPOSE:

To explore with respect and openness different perspectives on the issue, increase understanding of the situation, and consider strategies for addressing the problems and opportunities together.

HOW TO USE:

This exercise may flow better if it is done after 2.7 which explores a vision of success.

This exercise could be a significant agenda item for your second or third meeting, once the group has jelled a bit and has a vision of outcomes.

Allow at least 1.5 hours for this exercise.

If you believe the exercise will raise issues around power and inequity, you may want to use a skilled facilitator.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LEADER OF THE EXERCISE

A. Each organization prepares answers to these questions before coming. They will each be able to make a short presentation to the full group.

　　1. From your perspective, what is the problem or opportunity?   Please do this in one concise statement.

　　2. What evidence best describes the problem or opportunity?

　　3. What is the cause of the problem or opportunity?

　　4. What has your organization done to address this situation?

　　5. From your point of view, what would be the best resolution?

　　6. How could that be accomplished? What strategies should be pursued?

B. Each organization has 5 minutes to answer questions 1-3 while everyone else listens. Once everyone has spoken, facilitate a full group discussion on the following questions, one at a time:

　　What common themes did you hear?

　　What new understanding or insights did you have?

　　What questions did listening to these presentations raise for you?

　　What does this suggest we should do or learn more about?

C. Then break into small groups of four or five people and share your answers to questions #4-6. Take 20 minutes.

　　Prepare a report back to the full group on the preferred solutions and possible strategies – where there is common ground and synergy, what the differences are. Only take questions of clarification, no discussion.

D. After hearing from all the groups, discuss as a full group:

　　What do these reports suggest about us moving forward together?

　　How can we best focus our common effort?

　　What could we agree not to address or do together?

EXERCISE 2.12
Assess Your Foundation

PURPOSE:

To check in with everyone on how your cooperative effort's initial start up development is going.

HOW TO USE:

This can be used in a meeting, or each group can be asked to do this before hand. It should take about 20-30 minutes to do, longer if you devote time to solutions. See the notes at the end on tallying and sharing the results. Have a copy of this chart for each person. Circle the number that best states your rating on each question. Put that number in the right column. Add this column for a total score. See page 42 for assessment.

Score

1. We have found common ground on understanding the problem and solutions.

1	2	3	4	5
Little common ground		Some common ground		All agree

2. Now is a good time to tackle this issue at a larger scale of involvement, and a cooperative effort is the best strategy.

1	2	3	4	5
Little common picture		Some agreement		All agree

3. What's your collaboration's history of working together?

1	2	3	4	5
Negative history		No history		Positive history

4. To date, how successfully has the cooperative effort worked across the differences in the group?

1	2	3	4	5
Big divergence, conflict brewing		Some success		Good progress

5. Is there agreement on the core strategies the cooperative effort will use to effect change?

1	2	3	4	5
Strategies conflict		Possible to coordinate		Compatible strategies

6. Do leaders share trust, understanding, and mutual respect?

1	2	3	4	5
Underlying distrust or lack of respect		Some trust built		High level of trust and inclusion

7. What are the collaborative skills and intentions of leaders in this effort?

1	2	3	4	5
Own agendas, competitive, defend turf		Good negotiators		Welcome difference as a resource

8. What level of resources (time and money) can partners contribute to the effort?

1	2	3	4	5
Minimal		Adequate		More than enough

Total Score

Score	Assessment
8-16	The risks are pretty high and it appears this cooperative effort is facing some significant hurdles. Figuring out how to address the areas with low scores might launch the group with a higher chance of success. You should also consider other ways to coordinate work that would require less intensive cooperation – perhaps a network to exchange information would be sufficient.
17-28	Some risks are present. What can be done to improve the situation? Or is now not the right time for a cooperative effort?
29-40	Your cooperative effort has a good opportunity to get going fairly easily.

Consider for yourself, or in the full group:

Why did the answers come out this way?

What factors contributed, especially for the questions with low scores?

How can these underlying issues be addressed?
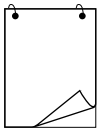
The full group may find it helpful to create a wall chart tally to see the full spectrum of scores. This can foster good discussion about the results and what to do about them. It's better to get the issues out in the open before the group proceeds further, to support open conversation about tough issues. Use a flip chart – everyone can come up and put an "X" for each of their scores.

TALLY

Question		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Common ground					
2.	Good timing					
3.	History of collaboration					
4.	Success with differences					
5.	Agreement on strategy					
6.	Shared trust, respect					
7.	Leaders' skills					
8.	Resources for cooperative effort					
Total Score						

Chapter 3:
Choose a Structure That Fits the Work –
Six Models of Cooperative Efforts

KEY POINTS OF THIS CHAPTER

✳ Form follows function. Get really clear on the purpose of your cooperative effort, then choose your structure.

✳ Keep it simple. Choose a structure that is as simple and efficient as possible for your purpose.

✳ Be intentional about terms you use to define your cooperative structure. Use the archetypal models in this publication as a starting point in your discussions.

✳ Trust is the essential glue that holds it all together. Invest, on the front end, in building relationships, trust and respect.

✳ Cooperative efforts can change to fit new situations. Notice when your effort needs a change in structure and fully explore the ramifications before acting.

✳ Write a Cooperative Agreement and sign a Memorandum of Understanding to clarify your commitments and structure.

"ESPECIALLY WHEN WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS, IT'S IMPORTANT TO CREATE just enough structure that people can see what needs to be done and can feel empowered to go and do it. I can't do it all. So being able to create the structure and not get bogged down in reinventing the wheel or always revisiting decisions is essential."

BARB CESTERO, GREATER YELLOWSTONE COALITION

Explore Cooperative Structures

The Language of Cooperation

We have noticed that the language of cooperation is often full of miscommunication and confusion. "Coalition" is probably the most widely misused term, applied freely to a wide range of ways groups actually work together. Leaders creating a cooperative effort often attribute different meanings and expectations while using the same term and/or don't realize the variety of formal and informal options they can choose from. In our workshops, we've heard a number of remarks and insights:

"You mean all activist multi-group efforts are not coalitions?"

"There are big differences between a network and an alliance. I always thought they were different words for the same thing and it didn't matter which we called ourselves."

"It's good to know that a partnership is an actual structure, not just a feel-good process of working together."

In this publication, we use the term "cooperative effort" as an umbrella to include a variety of approaches and structures for multi-organizational work. This chapter will help you see the differences between structures and define the language to use as your groups consider joining forces.

As a starting point, consider these differences as a continuum between three commonly used terms that actually refer to three very different forms of structuring cooperative efforts:

Terms:	Network	Project Partners	Coalition
Purpose	Education and information	Joint work, projects, short-term	Mobilize partners on common goals, long-term
Structure	Simple	Connected	Complex, multi-layered
Processes	Informal, loose	Coordination of work	Formal agreements, strong systems

What Is the Purpose of Your Cooperative Effort?

Before you continue reading this chapter, write down:
The most important central purpose of a cooperative effort you are involved in.

Are there a few other purposes? Probably. Note these too.

What's your hunch about which of the above terms best describes your effort?

Keep in mind why you are working together and use the rest of this chapter to see which organizational structures might assist or impede your effectiveness.

A word of caution

In some circles, people frequently think that a coalition is needed to do complex coordinated work. If you have been cooperating and sharing information with several other groups on an issue and the issue heats up, it's too easy to say, "Let's form a coalition!" But there are down sides to a formal agreement to share decision-making, resources and publicity. We have seen perfectly fine networks try to form a coalition, only to realize, too late, that their different perspectives on the political landscape and effective strategy have tied them up in endless debates. An example might be a coalition formed of both "purists" and "pragmatists." Look before you leap, and talk through the options thoroughly. Sometimes it's better NOT to form a coalition. Instead you might communicate and coordinate informally about how you are implementing your different strategies, and discuss their combined effect on the issues.

Six Models of Cooperative Efforts

Once your effort has a clear idea what it wants to accomplish, then it's time to shop around for the most effective structure to support your cooperative work. The six models presented below are archetypes of possible structures. These six models range from simple to complex multi-organizational structures. As with all models or archetypes, they are general and idealized. It's up to you to determine the structure that best fits your purpose.

Keep in mind that these forms are not static. "Once a network always a network" is not true. Cooperative efforts change over time, as the situation warrants, and often are much more fluid than the organizations that make them up. The stage of development of your effort may affect which structure is appropriate. For example, you may be involved in a Coordinated Project now as a stepping stone to an Ongoing Partnership. Or, a Coalition may step back to a Network after completing a campaign.

Changes in structure reflect a change in purpose, and usually have significant implications for who will be a member, how things will be done, and the vision and goals. The key is to recognize that your structure may need to change and, if so, all participating organizations must understand and agree to the roles and responsibilities of your new relationship. If the purpose or structure of your cooperative

effort changes, consider it a new group and begin the journey anew. Use the group development chart () **Chapter 1, pages 13-14**) and the processes outlined in that chapter. The time it takes will likely be compressed because of the trust and respect you have developed over time.

The six models are presented in a diagram so you can more visually detect their structural differences. Then each structure is taken separately, described in narrative detail that fleshes out the assumptions and purpose behind each one, and demonstrated in real life examples.

KEY TO THE SIX MODEL DIAGRAMS

These structural diagrams represent the relationships among members of the cooperative effort.

An organization is represented by an "O."

The lines connecting the organizations represent the strength of the relationships:

- - weak

---- strong

= very strong

The boundary circle lines indicate the circles of involvement in the cooperative effort: the center is the most involved. A square designates when the cooperative effort may form a legal nonprofit organization as its center.

SIX MODELS OF COOPERATIVE EFFORTS AMONG ORGANIZATIONS

Network
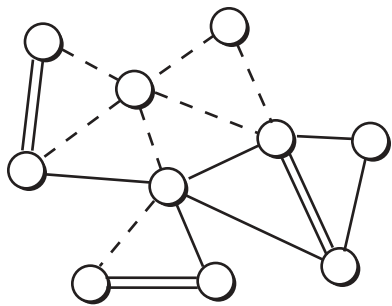
Association of Organizations
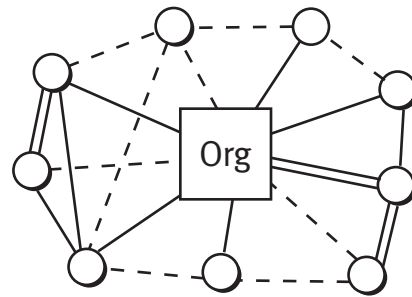
Coordinated Project
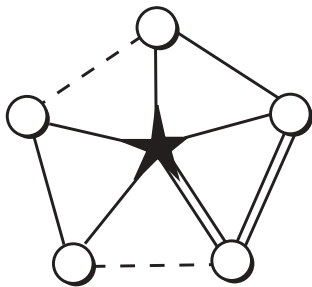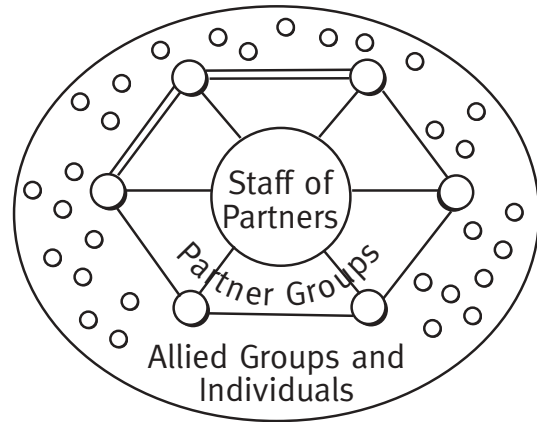
Campaign Coalition

Staff of Partners

Partner Groups

Allied Groups and Individuals

Ongoing Partnership/Strategic Alliance

Staff and Working Groups

Partners

Allied Groups and Individuals

Multi-Stakeholder Process

Org

Members
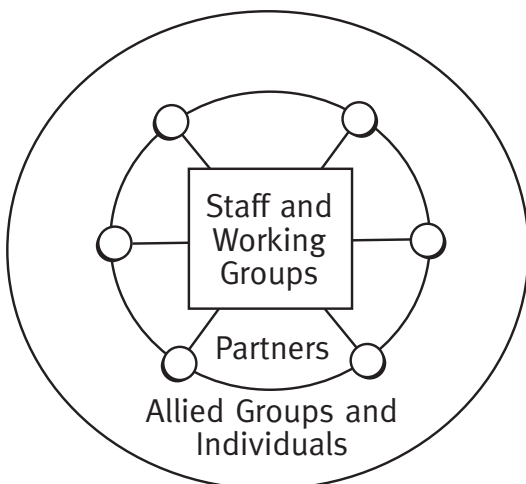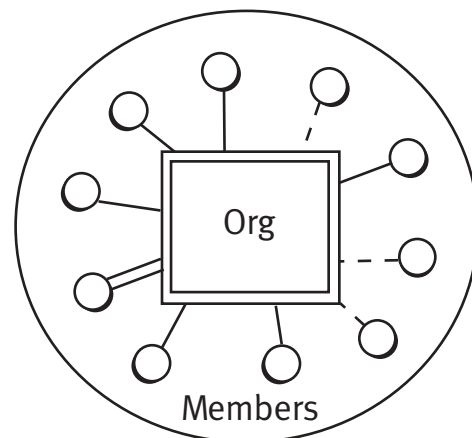
The Network Model
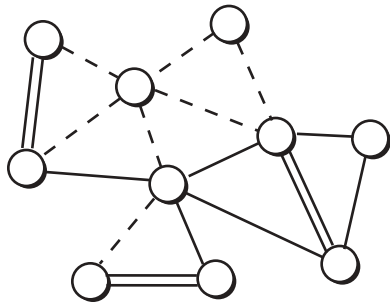
Purpose

A network of organizations is formed to share information and learning on topics of common interest.

Networks help participating organizations build relationships, gain knowledge of each others' work, and ensure that the "right people" get timely and useful information to make sound decisions and to take informed action on the issues they share. Networks can be short-term or long-term; loosely organized or specifically structured to share particular types of information. A network might hold regular face-to-face meetings of its member organizations or communicate exclusively through an electronic listserv. Sometimes information networks evolve into more action-oriented structures such as campaign coalitions that work together for a common legislative initiative or other purpose.

Examples of Information Networks

FoodRoutes Network Learning Community connected 10 buy-local food campaigns around the USA. Each campaign was a little different, tailored to its geographic region, market/s and producers. Representatives from the ten campaigns met four times over two years to share their stories and lessons, intending to improve their individual campaigns and create new collective knowledge. Between meetings, participants employed email and the telephone to ask questions and get information from each other. As one participant put it, "The non-competitive environment and willingness to share freely in this Learning Community is unique and special. We don't have to reinvent the wheel."

The Campus Climate Challenge is a project of more than 30 leading youth organizations throughout the U.S. and Canada. The Challenge leverages the power of young people to organize on college campuses and high schools across Canada and the U.S. to win 100% Clean Energy policies at their schools. They provide networking support and resources through a website with tools and policies for campus organizing, case studies of successes, a calendar of events and conferences, discussion boards, skill training conference calls and more. This network is part of the Energy Action Coalition, founded in spring of 2004 in Washington, DC by student and youth representatives of 16 organizations from across US and Canada. Together they decided to work together and build a movement to stop global warming.

Membership, Leadership and Process

Information networks generally accept any group that shares their goals and has interest and energy for the issue. Networks are usually democratic, non-hierarchical and volunteer-based. Leadership and communication typically come from those organizations most invested in their topic and which benefit most from the exchange of information. Communication is provided through regular meetings, listservs and/or conference calls. Sometimes different network members act as the "hub" by taking on a coordinating role, but it's not essential for effective operation. Most information networks don't have (or need) a formal process for admitting new participants. Since their goal is to share information, they tend to reach out to include everyone active on their topic.

Resources

Network participants who derive value from the information shared usually cover their own costs.

Association of Organizations

The Association Model
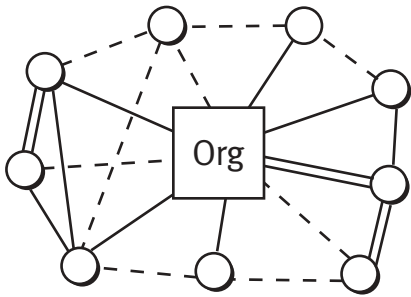
Purpose

An association is a formal umbrella nonprofit that brings together organizations and/or individuals with common needs.

(This publication focuses only on associations of organizations.) Associations often provide their organizational members with specific services that could include: legislative, policy and/or research support; administrative capacity such as bookkeeping and purchasing; information services; organizing an annual meeting or conference; and cost savings for needed services. Associations generally exist for many years and many continue to add benefits and services over time.

Examples of Associations

The Land Trust Alliance is a political lobby, certification and educational services organization for land trusts across the United States. Member organizations pay a fee to belong and receive a newsletter, online information and technical assistance. In some areas of the country, regional staff offer technical and organizational assistance. The Land Trust Alliance hosts a national conference that is widely attended and considered an important source for building technical and organizational capacity.

CAST (Council for Agricultural Science and Technology) brings together 37 agricultural scientific societies to inform federal policy by providing sound scientific research. Each member society has a representative on the CAST Board of Directors. CAST's major function is publishing research and information, but the organization also occasionally provides its member organizations leadership training and other special benefits.

Membership, Leadership and Process

Associations usually are open to like-minded groups, often membership-based organizations that share similar needs. The association acts as a hub or umbrella and provides agreed-upon centralized services to each of its members over a long period of time. Levels of engagement vary, but often are moderate. Communication emanates from the association to its member groups, and communication between individual member organizations is relatively loose and often around issues of common concern. Associations usually are nonprofit and their boards are composed of representatives from the member organizations. Many associations hire a staff manager to handle dues, ongoing communication and coordination, and the annual meeting or conference.

Resources

Typically organizations pay a membership fee. These fees-for-service provide the association's core funding. Often associations raise additional funds from government, foundations or corporations for special projects that may benefit a constituency beyond its members.

COORDINATED PROJECT

The Coordinated Project Model
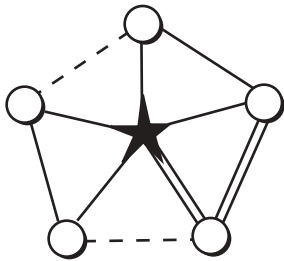
Purpose

A coordinated project model frequently is used by two or more distinct organizations to coordinate work and share resources on a specific issue or program they have in common.
Each organization brings different and complementary skills, strategies and/or geographic territory to the effort. A coordinated project takes advantage of the available strength and synergy of organizations working together, without creating a formal non-profit. Many cooperative efforts between activist groups can be accomplished with this structure.

Examples of Coordinated Projects

National monument designation. Many western states experienced a backlash when President Clinton designated new national monuments. Four conservation organizations countered the wave of resentment at federal interference with local land designations by creating a coordinated project to develop local support for a particularly contentious monument designation. The organizations remained low profile as each staff coordinated meetings and engaged local landowners and business people to speak out in favor of the monument. Over the course of two years, the project successfully built public support and the areas remained protected.

A coordinated project between the **Blackfoot Challenge** and **The Montana Nature Conservancy** involved the purchase and resale of up to 88,000 acres of Plum Creek Timber Company lands with the intent of implementing a local community-created plan to conserve its values, landscape and lifestyle.

The Blackfoot Challenge approached The Montana Nature Conservancy and asked them to help broker the purchase and resale of Plum Creek lands. The two organizations entered into a Memorandum of Understanding that spelled out the process and desired results. Although the two organizations had different cultures, organizational management styles, and slightly different objectives, the leadership of both organizations worked hard to identify and focus on their common objectives and establish trust. They agree to share credit for the project and its success.

Membership, Leadership and Process

A coordinated project might involve two groups or many, although typically four to five core groups carry the majority of the load. No new or formal organization is created. A coordinated project between several organizations requires that it be approved at the higher executive levels of each. Once authorized, however, coordinated projects frequently are executed by program staff, steering committees, work groups or task forces, with occasional coaching or guidance from above. Coordinated projects can be very short in duration – for example, getting out lots of volunteers from different parts of the community for a trail clean-up day – or may endure a long time depending on the nature of the work.

Often formal agreements (written contracts, Memoranda of Understanding and workplans) structure the relationships and responsibilities between organizations. This is especially true in long-term or high-risk/high-gain situations where significant resources will be expended in the project.

Resources

Funding is typically provided by the individual organizations as part of their annual budget because the work is generally a high priority and supported by staff. Fundraising also may be done as a cooperative venture, depending on the project's duration and the desires of any outside funders.

Campaign Coalition

The Campaign Coalition Model
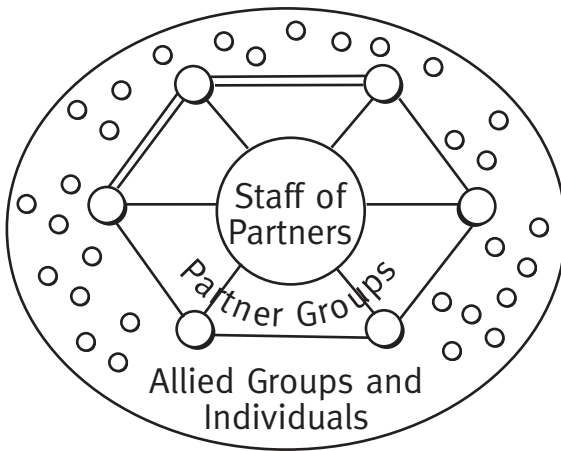
Purpose

A campaign coalition brings together organizations committed to pursuing a single common issue in a jointly staffed campaign.
Groups form campaign coalitions to gain power, wield wider influence, mobilize more resources and represent a larger constituency base than one organization could do alone. Frequently campaign coalitions are organized around a legislative or policy issue, either to stop something bad or to pass something good. Typically the coalitions are temporary structures that disband or shift form or focus following completion of the effort.

Examples of Campaign Coalitions

Several conservation and agricultural organizations, along with the **Smart Growth Coalition**, formed a campaign coalition to pass a bill in the state legislature on an urban growth and subdivision permitting revision. After proposing similar legislation in the past two sessions they had learned a few things, had done their homework in several key legislators' districts and had a good chance of passage in this session. Staff and a few board members met in the early summer to draft a plan with key allies from community associations, downtown business leaders and transportation

groups. As the summer progressed they met with key leaders in the districts and, building on prior relationships, moved forward with their intention to have a wide range of local people speak out in favor of the bill. As the bill was introduced and moved through committee, they worked with a media consultant to get coverage of local spokespersons. At critical steps before votes and hearings, all the coalition groups sent their members requests for support. The rapid action in the legislature led to many quick decisions among the leaders, some bruised feelings and mishaps, and a victory with a 12-vote margin.

Environmental leaders in Alabama began a series of conversations focused on reforming the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM). The ADEM Reform Coalition (ARC) was organized as a more comprehensive approach to replace the piecemeal and unsuccessful activities of individual groups in the past. ARC developed priorities, principles, goals, and a blueprint of 22 recommendations for reform of ADEM. Currently there are 40 organizations in ARC who agree to support ARC's blueprint and work for its implementation. ARC marked the first time in Alabama that environmental justice (EJ) and environmental groups were brought together. EJ involvement brought diverse culture, experience, and strategic thinking. ARC's governance structure did not allow for staffed environmental organizations to be the sole drivers of the coalition. A number of structures put in place ensured that power and decision-making were distributed more equally between the grassroots all-volunteer groups and the better-heeled staffed organizations. For example, the first co-chair position was open to any member of ARC, but the second co-chair had to be from a volunteer, grassroots, non-staffed organization. Not only is ARC achieving its goals, but ARC's member organizations, especially its non-staffed grassroots members, are getting stronger and gaining confidence.

Membership, Leadership and Process

A campaign coalition usually develops a centralized, shared decision-making authority that represents the key coalition member organizations. This leadership group frames overall campaign strategy and tactics, makes explicit choices on how decisions will be made, defines (often in writing) organizational roles and responsibilities for carrying out the campaign, determines where resources will come from and how they will be managed, and decides how timely communication will be handled internally and with the media. The governing body often delegates implementation to a small group or staff for whom this issue is one of their most important activities. Staff is hired jointly and/or allocated from member groups to work for the coalition and is accountable to its decision-making body, particularly during crunch times. Often a coalition is housed within one of the core member organizations, but a separate nonprofit can be created for long-term efforts.

Organizations involved typically have long-term relationships, and often share many similar values and goals. However, single-issue campaigns also can engage different constituencies that may agree only on this one issue. Although several core groups usually provide most of the strategic decision-making and staff power, a wider circle of groups may be involved in the issue and play roles that support and communicate the campaign's message. Good relationships and communication between the core partners and the wider circle of supporting groups are important to the success of the campaign. Sometimes groups in the wider circle can play a more radical role, enabling the coalition to appear more "moderate" and/or "reasonable" to the general public.

Resources

Fundraising often is carried out in a dispersed manner as each participating group finds funds for their part of the campaign. In some cases a particular funder may help initiate forming a campaign coalition and provide support for the collective work.

ONGOING PARTNERSHIP/STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

The Ongoing Partnership Model
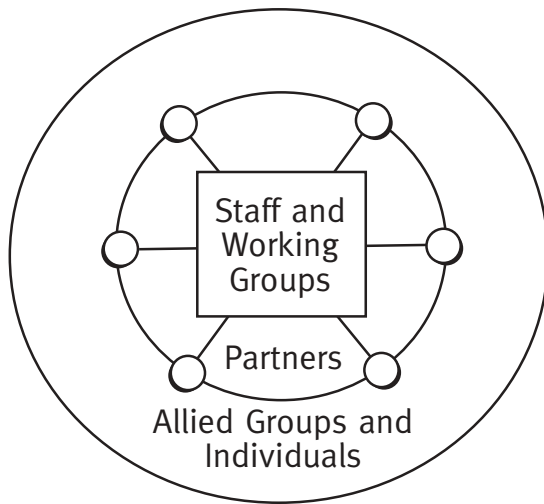
Purpose

An ongoing partnership or strategic alliance between organizations is a long-term, formal relationship that provides mutual advantage.
The partnership or alliance creates a joint entity that assumes a high level of integration and shares many aspects of program planning, fundraising and implementation. An ongoing partnership or strategic alliance can tackle several issues or employ multiple strategies such as education, lobbying, research, and education. A strategic alliance typically involves only two or three organizations, while an ongoing partnership may have many groups, and frequently refers to itself as a "coalition."

Examples of Ongoing Partnerships/Strategic Alliances

The Northern Forest Alliance was created in 1990 to protect the forests of northern New England and northern New York from clear-cutting, subdivision, and liquidation, as paper companies sought ways to generate new revenue in an increasingly global market. The core group spent two years hammering out three central goals: promote protection of wild lands, advocate for sustainable forestry, and promote sustainable communities and economies.

Having chosen a unified message, the leaders of the coalition galvanized public opinion in a series of hearings around the region's watersheds, creating a new awareness of the Northern Forest as an ecological entity, of the threats to it, and of the values it represented to a way of life. The Alliance developed bylaws, a campaign plan, and a large fundraising effort, though continuing to rely on a member organization as its fiscal agent. It channeled 80% of its monies to its grassroots members for their organizing, advocacy, and communications, retaining only about 20% for central staff and operations. Over time, it managed to create the public image of the Northern Forest, a concept that now enjoys bipartisan support among regional leaders.

Food Alliance's offices in Oregon, California and Minnesota promote and certify sustainably produced agricultural products, primarily in the Northwest and Midwest. To deal with the increasing number of requests for certification coming from other regions of the USA, Food Alliance formed a partnership with a like-minded organization, International Certification Services (ICS). Partnering with ICS gives Food Alliance access to a nationwide network of professional inspectors who can certify farms, ranches and food processors.

Membership, Leadership and Process

Ongoing partnerships and strategic alliances are created through formal and legal agreements between organizations. These agreements construct the joint entity and the terms of partnership. Partner organizations have specific rights and responsibilities, usually including a representative slot on the board of directors as described in the bylaws of the jointly formed organization. Ongoing partnerships or strategic alliances often employ their own executive and staff to carry out the work of the joint venture. A strategic alliance may differ slightly from an ongoing partnership in that it more explicitly blends the capacities of the member groups that are dis-

tinctly different, thereby providing a strategic capacity that otherwise would not be available with the same level of assurance and expertise. Typically, the alliance is founded on a set of deliverable products or services that partners will provide to each other, and the agreement spells out certain principles and criteria that the partners must deliver.

Resources

Fundraising is carried out by the joint entity, and often funds are passed along to the partner groups to support the work of the partnership or alliance.

Multi-Stakeholder Process

The Multi-Stakeholder Model
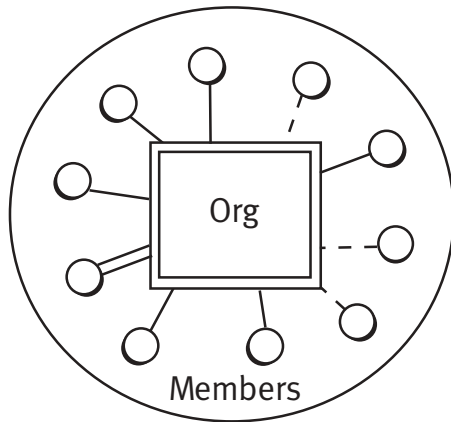
Purpose

A multi-stakeholder process brings together organizations with diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives on an issue. The goal is to discover common ground and in some instances work together on project planning and implementation.

Examples of Multi-Stakeholder Processes

The Rocky Mountain Front Weed Roundtable is an example of a multi-stakeholder discussion process that has led to new action. The Roundtable addresses weed management in over one million acres on Montana's Rocky Mountain Front, and involves nine watersheds. Participating stakeholder organizations include the Montana Nature Conservancy, three county weed districts, two national forests, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and conservation districts, each with a role in providing technical support and resources to landowners interested in alternative and effective weed management. By meeting with interested landowners and talking about ways to cooperate, they leveraged financial and agency resources to initiate a new, more effective and far-reaching weed management effort.

Minnesota Conservation Security Program Roundtable involves diverse stakeholders – organic, sustainable and conventional farmer organizations, environmental and conservation groups, government agencies, etc. – invested in sound implementation of the federal Conservation Security Program

(CSP) in Minnesota. The CSP, administered by Natural Resources Conservation Services, promotes and helps to fund whole-farm conservation practices. These stakeholders are critically concerned with how technical and financial resources get to those who are farming and managing the land. The Minnesota Roundtable, organized by the Minnesota Project, provides a more informal, less politically charged forum to explore policy and implementation issues and to advise and assist Natural Resources Conservation Services in its implementation duties.

Membership, Leadership and Process

Multi-stakeholder processes involve diverse voices that represent conflicting perspectives on an issue. These diverse voices often are brought together by a managing organization or government agency. The common reason for multi-stakeholder processes is to recognize and reveal different perspectives on a common problem, and to find new approaches to solutions that invite broad ownership. They may be created around a specific geography, a constituency's needs, or a public policy concern. Multi-stakeholder processes can have a variety of purposes, from an informal listening or dialogue circle to a formally mandated representative process for the purpose of settling a controversial issue, such as settlement of a timber management plan by the U.S. Forest Service.

Groups are often selected to participate in a multi-stakeholder process because their voice is expected to be a legitimate voice for their constituency. Multi-stakeholder processes often begin with a formal agreement or ground rules for engagement. Good facilitation is essential to establishing a climate of openness and the possibility for trust in this potentially contentious situation. The group itself will make decisions but their power as decision-makers varies. Some may be solely advisory in nature, while others are actually required to develop a solution.

Resources

Often initial funding is put up by one of the stakeholder groups or by an outside interested party, such as a government agency. Resources usually are not shared between groups.

Find the Form to Fit Your Function

Match the Model to Your Needs

Each of the boundaries between structures represents a subsystem of membership within the cooperative effort. Each has a different type of involvement and benefits. As you design your own structure, think about the different subsystems in your cooperative efforts. How are they distinguished from each other? How do they connect? These boundaries usually are defined by how members relate through:

✳ Decision-making.

✳ Contribution and sharing of resources.

✳ Amount and type of work they do for the cooperative effort.

✳ Types of communication.

✳ Benefits of belonging.

Ⓩ **Complete Exercise 3.1 on page 57** to determine which structure or combination of structures might best fit the purpose of your cooperative effort.

Put It On Paper

Now that you have some information about possible structures for your cooperative effort, you may want to create a more elegant hybrid that works for your particular situation.

Use the following tips and Ⓩ **Exercises 3.2 and 3.3 on pages 60 and 61 to create your own model.**

Keep in mind:

✳ Form follows function – be clear and consistent in matching form to your purpose.

✳ Membership may have different levels of responsibility and participation.

✳ Trust is the essential glue that holds it all together.

✳ Keep it as simple as possible.

Write a Cooperative Agreement

At this point you know the purpose, the levels of responsibility and participation by members, and what the structure looks like. Based on the work your group has done in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, you have the basis for a cooperative agreement. It's a good idea to write it down, either as a Membership Agreement or a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that can be signed by partners. A network may not need a formal agreement between members. Most other cooperative efforts will benefit from the clarity and commitment of a signed document.

This cooperative agreement typically is a general agreement about the purpose and motivations for working together and how you will carry out the work. This can be a relatively simple document of one or two pages. Some may need to be longer, depending on your situation. You are making an agreement to cooperate – usually for a specific time frame or project activity. The purpose of this agreement is to establish the intentions and guidelines of your work together and to remind you of these agreements during times of change and difficulty.

Start off on the right foot with an overall MOU for your cooperative effort. This cooperative agreement sets the stage for other legal or contractual agreements you may want to develop over time. If you are forming a new organization, you will need to develop the standard agreements of nonprofit business: articles of incorporation and bylaws. Over time you may develop other specific agreements on areas such as fundraising, or contracts for specific workplans and pass-through grant funds.

Ⓩ **Exercise 3.4 on page 62** guides you through the process in an orderly way.

EXERCISES AND PROCESSES

EXERCISE 3.1
Determine Your Best and Simplest Structure

On the following pages, on each horizontal row, select one of six boxes that best describes your cooperative venture. At the bottom of the matrix total the number of boxes selected from each column. The "scores" should be seen as a rough indicator to help you identify the components of a structure and consider how well they align with your intended purposes.

	Network	Association	Coordinated Project	Campaign Coalition	Ongoing Partnership	Multi-Stakeholder
Purpose	❏ Exchange information on topics of common interest, to coordinate calendars and scheduling, or improve practices.	❏ Provide specific services to organizational members at a cost savings (e.g., legislative support, administrative service, research).	❏ Coordinate work and share resources on a specific issue or program that two or more groups share in common.	❏ Coordinate and mobilize the energies and resources of multiple groups on a single issue (often policy related) in order to wield larger influence and achieve common goals.	❏ Coordinate, mobilize or create something together that no one partner could do alone through a long-term, formal entity. Can house multiple issues and strategies.	❏ Discover common ground and sometimes make decisions by convening organizations and individuals with diverse perspectives.
Duration	❏ No set time limit.	❏ Many years. Over time, often adds benefits for members.	❏ Short-term or long-term, depending on the complexity and vision of the project.	❏ A specific timetable will be set based on when the issue is over – win or lose.	❏ More permanent, given the long-term nature of creating or building process.	❏ Defined process and timetable.
Structure	❏ Looseknit, but enough structure to coordinate periodic or even regular interaction.	❏ Likely to evolve into a distinct nonprofit organization.	❏ Steering committees, work groups or task forces representative of the participating organizations often are created to implement the project. No new or formal organization is created.	❏ Multiple levels of engagement with key decision-makers and players from coalition members.	❏ Distinct organization with formal written legal agreements that construct terms of partnership. Partners are clear on what they contribute and how it adds up.	❏ Formal agreements and ground rules for engagement in process. Structure initially based around a series of conversations.
Authority and Decision-making	❏ No formal structure. Authority may be given to those organizing the next meeting to set the agenda.	❏ Board of directors elected by members.	❏ Once higher-ups for the shared work approve the concept and resource allocation, decisions rest with program staff.	❏ Centralized, shared decisionmaking authority representative of the key coalition member organizations. Can react quickly to timesensitive decisions.	❏ Formal board of directors or steering committee representative of key member groups.	❏ Varies with intent of outcome. Participating organizations may only have an advisory function or may be based loosely with the leader or group who initiated the exploration.

	Network	Association	Coordinated Project	Campaign Coalition	Ongoing Partnership	Multi-Stakeholder
Members and Leadership	❑ All are welcome who share interest and energy. No formal process for entry.	❑ Open to likeminded groups with a similar structure, needs and/or focus. Usually membership based.	❑ Member groups make a formal decision to work together and create written documents or contracts to describe role, responsibilities and process.	❑ Multiple levels: (1) core member groups with more responsibility and decision-making, and (2) other diverse groups with common interests limited to one issue.	❑ Small number of core members with high buy-in and decision-making, and other more numerous, less engaged member groups and individuals.	❑ Participating organizations represent the diverse constitu-encies necessary for issue resolution. Consistent partici-pation of individuals from groups helpful to the process.
Resources	❑ Cost is relatively low and is shared by those who benefit.	❑ Organizational members pay annual fee that provides core funding.	❑ Fundraising is done by the individual organizations or together as a cooperative group, often depending on the project's duration.	❑ Fundraising is done by the individual organizations or as a mix of cooperative fundraising where every group adds to the "kitty" via dollars or time.	❑ Fundraising is carried out by the joint entity, and often funds are passed along to the core partner groups.	❑ Often initial funding is put up by one of the stakeholder groups or an outside interested party, such as a government agency. Resources usually not shared between groups.
Staffing	❑ Usually volunteer, often rotates.	❑ Often hired staff or consultants who manage specific services or clusters of benefits.	❑ Shared program staff of cooperating organizations, based on expertise and tasks.	❑ Hired or allocated from member groups; accountable to the decision-making body.	❑ Executive and staff employed to carry out the work of the joint venture.	❑ Facilitator often hired to help with the process. A representa-tive subgroup may advise the facilitator.
Communi-cation	❑ Flows in all directions between participants.	❑ Flows predominant-ly from staff or consultants of the association to its member groups. In best cases, member groups are regularly asked what they want.	❑ Most active at program staff level. Regular face to face and telephone conver-sations support the coordination.	❑ Frequent communi-cation between key decision-makers, especially during crunch times; ability to communicate quickly and efficiently when strategy requires it.	❑ Assumes a high level of integration and communication of many aspects of program planning, fundraising and implementation.	❑ Primarily in the formal process, outlined when the group begins; mostly diffuse except at gatherings/ meetings.
Total Scores						

EXERCISE 3.2
Find Clarity: Purpose and Participation

Write down in a couple of sentences the purpose of your cooperative effort, who participates, and how.

Purpose:

Who participates:

How they participate:

EXERCISE 3.3
Draw Your Structure

In the space below, draw and experiment with a new structure for your cooperative effort that supports your purpose.

EXERCISE 3.4
Produce a Cooperative Agreement

We recommend that most cooperative efforts write down purposes and organizational elements of your structure in a Cooperative Agreement.

This outline for a Cooperative Agreement includes the main issues you already addressed when determining your structure. Your agreement may not need to include all the topics listed here, or your agreement might have more topics or greater detail. Make it fit your needs.

One approach is to ask several people representing the partners to write a draft that captures your discussions and negotiations on the main issues of your cooperation and its structure. Then the leadership reviews and revises it. Once a working draft is agreed on, the Cooperative Agreement will go to each of the member groups to be reviewed and signed by the executive and in some situations, by the board. Each member group should keep a copy of this document that is signed by all members.

An Outline of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Cooperative Agreement

A. Purpose

Describe the intention and reasons for joining together in the cooperative effort.

List the partnering organizations.

You may include your mission and vision statement, if you have them.

B. Principles of operation

A statement of the values and intentions for how you will work together.

Include general agreements on decision-making and conflict management or arbitration.

C. Membership

Rights and responsibilities of organizational members. Possibilities include voting privileges, representation on board, providing staff for program or administrative work, and others.

May include ways that members can expect to benefit from their participation.

How members join, and how members leave.

D. Financial Agreements

If a lead organization will handle the fiscal management, describe its role and responsibilities.

Specify member contributions and expectations for fundraising.

E. Duration and Revision of Agreement

The time frame for when and under what terms this agreement will end.

When and how it will be reviewed and revised. An annual review is a good idea.

F. Signatures

Lines for the signatures of the executive directors and sometimes the board chairs, with the date of signing.

Chapter 4: Cooperative Work — Full Speed Ahead

─────── *Key Points of this Chapter* ───────

✻ Dynamic tensions, disagreements and conflicts are a fact of life in cooperative efforts. Learn to recognize and deal openly with them — it's a major responsibility of leadership!

✻ Organizations need a positive balance in the Give/Get ratio: the amount of hard work it takes to participate and the benefits received.

✻ Cooperative efforts thrive on the flow of good communication among members to build relationships, help people know they are respected and included, generate new ideas, foster smart decisions and implement plans effectively.

✻ Balance power by being accountable to each other and having clear agreements about raising money and getting credit and publicity.

✻ Regularly practice learning and renewal to be more adaptive and responsive. Plan for impact and to keep focused on achieving meaningful results.

Your cooperative effort is up and running: you are working together on focused goals, the structure you chose fits and supports your work, and the roles and responsibilities of members are stated in an agreement. Cooperative efforts with a history of positive informal shared work can build on their trust and understanding as they move into this operational phase. But often groups get to this point and find it's a lot more complicated than initially anticipated. This chapter is for cooperative efforts that have made an inter-organizational agreement to work together over time — and are in the thick of it! If you are looking for ways to be effective, responsive, get results and enjoy working together, this chapter is for you.

The Three Elements of Participation (↕ **see page 20**) continue to guide cooperative efforts in this stage of full operation. The key practices for mem-

bership and sustaining trust, for governing well and balancing power, and for accomplishing common goals are addressed as they pertain to the long-term cooperative effort. In this chapter we address these three with sections on:

✻ **Together, and Working Well:** Ways to manage the give/get balance that organizations need to participate well, developing consistent and transparent internal communication, and working with differences and conflict.

✻ **Balance Power and Benefits:** Practices and tools for being accountable to each other, raising money together and sharing credit in public for the cooperative work.

✻ **Accomplish Common Goals:** Tips and practices for staying focused on results and incorporating learning and change in your ongoing operations.

In long-term cooperative work we have noticed that leadership and managing dynamic tensions matter a great deal to the success of the effort. Throughout this chapter, look for these two frames and our suggestions for using leadership and tension in a creative way that will benefit your cooperative work.

When we ask leaders why their cooperative effort is succeeding, most say it's because they have a core group who like each other and are willing to work things out. Then they add that there is someone or several people (usually the coordinator or the executive of the lead group) who works hard to keep people engaged, resolve conflicts and roadblocks, and generally makes sure things run well. If your cooperative effort has gotten this far, chances are your group has this kind of shared leadership and a facilitative coordinator or two somewhere in the ranks.

As an active participant, it's important to proactively help your cooperative effort be enriching, positive and successful. In most multi-organization cooperative efforts, leadership is ambiguous and diffused among people who are in different organizations. Good communication and coordination is the glue that holds it all together. Everyone, then, has an obligation as a leader within their sphere of work to help the whole group be more effective.

Your personal behavior has a direct impact on the group. You can model the behaviors that foster good relationships and support other people's positive actions (⬍⟩ **see Chapter 1 for examples**). You can use effective management practices for working together. In the sections that follow, you will find both personal leadership practices and group management suggestions for dealing with the typical tensions of inter-organizational life.

Let's face it: leadership and organizational tensions are a fact of life in cooperative efforts. Each partner organization has its own needs and demands, and the cooperative effort is the place where competition between the partner groups will or will not be worked out to common positive ends. Working with differences also provides creative space for something new to emerge. Identifying the dynamic tensions can help leaders understand the sources of conflict, open up discussions to solve problems before they get out of balance, or bring them back into balance. These dynamic tensions often are the source of greater understanding and synergy, so it is worthwhile to develop a culture that recognizes and explores them constructively and safely. This chapter provides field-tested ways to successfully manage the inevitable tensions of cooperative efforts.

Together and Working Well

Sustaining a cooperative effort requires attention to relationships between the individual leaders and among member groups. These relationships outside of your home organization can be challenging and fun and open new possibilities. However, all may not be rosy.

❋ Groups can feel like they are just getting stretched too thin and not getting enough back for their efforts. If that's your situation, check out the **Give/Get Ratio** below.

❋ If people feel left out, are surprised by a decision or new development, or feel their ideas are not being heard, the **Communications Flow** section can help.

❋ In the hustle to get things done, relationships can get bruised and disagreements escalate. When conflicts flare (or to prevent them) ❩ **see the section Manage Disagreements and Conflicts on page 67.**

The Give/Get Ratio for Member Groups

Too often, leaders in cooperative efforts feel like the hard work it takes to participate is out of whack for the benefits gained. We call it the Give/Get Ratio. For cooperative work to thrive, participating groups give time, money, expertise, staff and volunteer hours, and much more to the effort. Participating groups get the benefits of new relationships, learning, wider expertise, and clout. The balance is never an exact tally; the nuances and sustaining benefits are different for each group.

Each group gives in a unique way. There may be standard methods, such as an annual financial contribution or participation on the governing group, but typically the "give" part of the balance is based on the values and resources of each group. For more specifics, ❩ **see Accountable to Each Other, Raise Money Together, and Share the Limelight later in this chapter**. Also, remember that the sense of "give" and "get" will be impacted by differences of race and culture. Acknowledging a wide spectrum of what is given and received will be critical for maintaining the balance over time in cooperative efforts that work across racial and cultural groups.

Frequently we jump into a coalition or alliance because it's the right thing to do, and only later do we realize that it takes more effort than we can sustain. Sometimes we hesitate to express what our own group needs because we're afraid of raising competitive tensions with other groups. But if we don't ask, our participation will begin to fall away because we are not getting back what we need to sustain our involvement.

As leaders of a cooperative effort, it's really our responsibility to ensure that all the involved organizations emerge stronger. If the effort is successful, chances are good that there will be new opportunities that require even stronger cooperation. Addressing this early in a structured way makes it much easier to manage.

By paying attention to the Give/Get Ratio, the cooperative effort can encourage each group to also plan to build their individual organization. For example, encourage each participating organization to define its self-interest for:

❋ Gaining members.

❋ Earning publicity.

❋ Encouraging new leaders.

❋ Adding new donors or resources.

❋ Developing new organizational capacity, such as new/expanded expertise, a new computer or additional staff.

❩ **For more ideas on defining the Give/Get Ratio, see Chapter 2, Step 3. Initiate the Cooperative Effort.**

When each organization puts its self interests on the table, all the partners can take those needs into account and talk about whether and how they can be met. In one campaign, for instance, a regional organization that relied heavily on publicity requested that all news releases in its area carry its name. One of the other groups needed the coalition to do some specific research on property taxation and its impacts on rural sprawl and infrastructure cost to local government. They couldn't fund it alone, but that research could help them make big strides forward in habitat protection, their main goal.

In another cooperative effort, a national legal advocacy organization wanted opportunities to get grassroots groups to prepare for litigation by establishing standing in the issues. In exchange, the grassroots groups asked for (and got) a chance to present their perspective to the national organization's board. Several local leaders went to New York with the national leaders and met with key foundation program officers. This cooperation led to funding for the grassroots organizations to hire additional organizing staff and bring in new members and volunteers.

Are you clear about what needs and self-interests are being met for your own and each of the other participating organizations in your cooperative effort? When was the last time you checked to see if their needs were being met? Maybe it's time to revisit ⊗ **Exercises 2.2 and 2.8 on pages 28 and 36.**

Follow these steps to build member groups:

1. Plan the project or campaign together, defining the level of activities and an overall workplan. Include in your planning document a space for individual groups' requests.

2. Each group must consider what they can offer and what they will need to make this plan work. Include how each hopes to grow (e.g. members, capacities, publicity) and share this information with the other groups.

3. Rethink the project with this detailed information about available resources and what each group needs. Find agreement about which requests you can meet and how you'll do that.

4. Develop workplans with specific goals and roles. Define responsibilities for fundraising, implementing projects, communications, and so on.

5. Ask each group to "contract" for their work. Include this in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that can be approved by the board of each group. The MOU should describe what each group will do to carry out the cooperative project and build its own capacity.

6. Set up times, either annually or at specific points in the project life, to revisit these workplans and see how things are going. Monitor how each group is giving its agreed-on share and getting back their benefits. Make adjustments as needed and help each other really strive to do the things that will build your groups.

MANAGE DISAGREEMENTS AND CONFLICTS

Unlikely partners can bring real value to a cooperative effort. Leaders tell us that the best part is getting to work with new and different people, especially those from different backgrounds and perspectives. To get the full benefit from diverse opinions, backgrounds and cultures, we encourage you to think about it as a resource — and expect some disagreements.

Disagreements are the juice of cooperative work. Problems can provide tension that sparks the group to reach new levels of understanding and creativity. Of course, the potential for a destructive outcome is always there. Establish guiding principles that recognize this and include tolerance and honoring diversity, as well as creating safety and respect for voicing different perspectives.

Your group can handle problems constructively by consistently using a problem-solving approach. At first, you will need a specific and facilitated process for the group to solve challenging situations. With practice, posing problems and solving them will become part of the culture of the group, and help create a climate of open resolution of difficulties. **See Exercise 4.3 on page 91 for a straight forward process for group problem solving.**

All cooperative efforts must balance persistent tensions – which occur naturally because of the differences between groups and the dynamic nature of cooperative efforts. Some familiar examples include:

❋ Making decisions in a timely manner while being inclusive and democratic.

❋ Building strong positive relationships among leaders while having many dominant personalities in the group who often disagree and compete.

❋ Raising funds for the common effort while NOT competing with member groups' funding sources.

Good ideas and problem solving can occur after proactively acknowledging this reality. Sometimes an individual leader or small group of leaders paying attention to the nature of dynamic tensions can see ways to begin resolving them to mutual benefit. **Exercise 4.2 on page 89 will help you clarify persistent dynamic tensions in your cooperative effort and generate ideas for turning a problem into a positive, effective way to work together.**

Conflicts happen — they are harder to handle than disagreements because in a conflict people feel hurt, excluded, ignored or devalued. In a conflict, sides are drawn and people take up positions — the ability to hear each other is diminished. Conflicts will happen, so prepare for them!

❋ Develop agreement among members on how to handle conflict. For example, agree to bring it up honestly and as soon as possible, and decide who will help resolve it.

❊ Provide training on conflict management for the core leadership.

❊ Get individual training on conflict management. It's often available free or inexpensively from a nonprofit near you, such as a peer mediation center or a nonviolence training program.

❊ See web resources such as www.peacemakers. ca/education/educationlinks.html.

✇ **Do Exercise 4.4 on page 92 for a proven way to negotiate through conflict.**

Communications Flow

"Keep communication open, make it a priority to communicate with individual members, not just on the conference calls as a team. Individual relations are crucial. Be mature, take leadership in addressing issues of inter-personal relationships."

Patricia Dowd, Greater Yellowstone Coalition

Cooperative efforts thrive on the flow of good communication among members. It builds relationships, helps people know they are respected and included, generates new ideas and fosters smart decisions. Poor communication can result in frustration and resentment about decisions and the process of decision-making. We've seen situations where a few partners demanded to be better informed about decisions, so more emails and reports were written when the cause was the fragmented and hurried quality of personal interactions. Talking about how communication takes place, and working to improve it, can make a huge difference in everything the group does. Good communication is the outgrowth of many different things — it's not just information transfer! In this section we deal with building the respect, understanding and trust of good relationships, and developing effective communication channels and practices.

Leadership Tips

In today's fast-paced world, simply keeping partners up to speed is tough. It's even harder to develop real understanding. In cross-cultural and multi-constituency efforts, learning to listen, ask questions, and get beyond our own jargon or local language takes time — time spent with each other in person.

❊ Get to know your fellow partners and leaders individually. A visit to someone else's office is a sign of respect and a way to learn about their organization and work. It's even better if you can visit them at conferences or in their community.

❊ Don't let a misunderstanding simmer — if you think there is some misunderstanding or disagreement, check to see what others are thinking and feeling.

❊ Ask for feedback and advice from your colleagues about how you could better handle interpersonal or group leadership situations.

❊ Make sure your meetings include time to enjoy each other's company. Facilitate work time to enable good listening and deepen understanding.

❊ For more information, see bibliography for references on facilitative or servant leadership.

Communication Channels

Establish a structure that links different parts of the system and supports responsive communication. For larger and more complex cooperative efforts it is essential to have clearly marked pathways of communication between membership, staff and core leadership or board. A frequently used successful approach creates work groups and committees that organize and work with the membership and are responsible for raising issues with the core leadership group. Then the leadership sets priorities and tasks for the committee work, and the committees work with the membership to implement the pro-

grams or services. A staff and a core leader on each committee are co-chairs and are responsible to each other to support this two-way communication flow.

By intentionally linking the different parts of the organization, this approach creates a web through which information can flow.

CHART 4A TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

This chart is an example of the structure of communications within a complex cooperative effort with staff. It shows how ideas and needs are communicated to the organization, and how resources and action opportunities are returned through communication channels between the council, committees, partners and members.

Level of member involvement in cooperative effort:	Partner groups, allies, individual members	Committees, ad hoc task forces, working groups	Council and/or executive committee
Members communicate to the council:	New ideas, needs, information come from members through: member meetings, work with groups, surveys, staff organizing	Research problems; develop opportunities, innovations and issue options; evaluate programs; make recommendations for action to Council	Consider member input and recommendations, requests; make decisions at council meetings, planning and evaluation sessions
Council communicates to the members:	Opportunities to learn and take action, resources, information, services, etc.	Guide program and project implementation; staff, develop and manage programs; start projects and new initiatives with members	Identify available resources, goals for programs, plan for partner and member involvement

This structure works best when the board gives careful thought to the role that membership plays and manages this process to achieve those ideals with:

❋ Policies that set up a clear charter and role for the council or board, the committees and working groups, and the partners and allies.

❋ Committee assignments for staff and council members. Clear responsibilities to ensure good two-way communication and organizational accountability to the members.

❋ Organizational planning, budgeting, fundraising and evaluation that includes the members and their ideas.

Medium and Message

The following diagram illustrates some common ways of communicating. What would your organization's pattern of communication look like on this grid? Think about the pattern of confusion that occurs among people in your group. Why does this happen? For example, are people trying to use email to solve disagreements? Match up the type of communication and the method used to avoid problems.

CHART 4B IT'S THE MEDIUM *AND* THE MESSAGE

	Face-to-face ◄──────────► Distance	
	In person or by phone	**Electronic**
Important or difficult issues	Major decisions Conflict resolution Allocation of roles and responsibilities Task assignments Strategy and planning sessions Workshops Celebrations	Writing documents together Joint calendar Requesting assistance File-sharing
Information sharing; casual communications	Personal updates Networking Conferences Parties	Agendas General updates Meeting minutes Check-in with friends Action alerts Researching and finding contacts/info

"IN COALITIONS THERE IS SO MUCH COMMUNICATION BY EMAIL. For efficiency's sake, much of it is rapid-fire and abbreviated. But we have to take care with the interpersonal tone. We need to reflect on our progress, appreciate and thank coalition members for their specific contributions. We also need to tie developments back to agreed-upon strategy. Is the strategy working, or does it need refinement based on new events? Colorless and feeling-less emails can make us look at our campaign work over time as thankless drudgery. Reporting new developments without sufficient context can unwittingly move campaigns off onto non-strategic tangents before partners come together in person again."

JON CATTON, COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT

It's not just the medium we use that can be out of alignment with our intention, it often is the language and tone of how we say things. Email is an especially difficult medium to use well. Be cautious and thoughtful about saying things clearly, and give your message a personal touch. Short snappy replies are often misinterpreted as orders, an angry response, or a dismissal. Communications research says that up to 80% of what we understand comes from facial and body language and the tone of voice. Do your part to say things in email well, and if you are confused about the intent of someone else's email to you, don't assume the worst. Simply call them up to get a better understanding.

Cooperative efforts are increasingly using a wide range of electronic technology. Nonprofit technology-assistance organizations like ONE/Northwest and Green Media Toolshed can help you develop tools to communicate and work together more effectively. To improve internal communications, research how these tools might help you:

❋ Password-protected websites for file sharing, document and project development, and campaign planning and management.

❋ Joint databases for combining information and tracking issue development. For example, a legislative bill-tracking database.

❋ Streamline information and discussions through improved listserv management and targeted electronic discussion groups.

Hold Good Meetings — by conference call or in person

Meetings are precious — and we spend a lot of time in them, either in conference calls or in person. The best gift for a beleaguered leader is attending a meeting or call that is necessary, well-facilitated, and efficient, with a tight agenda and clear decisions to be made. It's even better if there is time for some good conversations and fun. If your group has trouble holding effective meetings, several books provide great suggestions (see the bibliography). To get a conversation going at your next meeting, ➷ **evaluate your meetings and conference calls with the questionnaire in Exercise 4.1 on page 88.** Plan 15–30 minutes for everyone to fill it in and then discuss what can be improved.

Four Leadership Tips to Manage Airtime

It takes real facilitation skills to create safe, equal participation. Either develop these skills among the leaders or use outside expertise to facilitate meetings and planning sessions. Nearly everyone has a story to tell about the person who speaks first, last and many times in between, or always has a quick comeback defending their turf.

We want to especially note that expectations for the amount of "airtime" participants want or need is often influenced by our backgrounds and who we are. In your cooperative efforts, it may help to pay special attention to the differences in airtime taken by: men and women, by white people in the group and people of color in the group, by those with different positions within an organization, by people from low-income, moderate income or high income backgrounds, and/or by geographic locations. Rather than pretend that these conversational patterns and different expectations don't exist, we find it more helpful to pay attention to and monitor the impacts of the these differences in the group dynamic.

Here are some of our favorite tips to help reduce any person or set of people from dominating the discussion, and to create more equal participation and airtime.

Develop and use a good set of groundrules.

❊ Create these up front, with input and buy-in from all members. Encourage full participation as well as not speaking until others have finished. Add other ways that you know will invite inclusiveness.

❊ Ask the group to ensure that everyone follows these groundrules.

❊ Have a timekeeper.

Use processes that involve everyone.

❊ Brainstorming or using an all-on-the-wall sticky note process can encourage open flow of ideas.

❊ Use small groups to generate options on tasks that need creative solutions.

❊ Before starting a full group discussion, ask people to first think quietly or write down their thoughts about the task.

❊ Use "buzz groups" of two people who talk for 2–5 minutes on a topic and get ideas of their own before moving into a full group session. Start it with: "Turn to your neighbor for 5 minutes and share ideas about..."

❊ Use a round robin or talking stick — go around the room to hear each person's opinions, ideas or recommendations on what the group should do next. Allow people to pass if they choose, but then come back to them at the end.

Control how airtime is used.

❊ Ask people not to speak again until at least three other people have spoken.

❊ Ask quiet people to share what they are thinking.

❊ Ask others to help deal with dominating personalities.

❊ Tell frequent speakers you are looking for other voices that haven't been heard as often.

❊ Talk to people up front about their involvement. During breaks or between meetings, encourage participation from quieter members to offset the more vocal or domineering members. Talk to the more vocal participants about allowing space to include and involve the more reflective members.

Share Power and Benefits

Three aspects of sharing both the power and benefits of cooperative efforts can cause problems:

✻ Accountability in deciding and doing the work. If your group is confused about how decisions are made and who really is going to do the work, if you've had little honest conversation about what happens when the workplan slips, get help in ❖❯ **Be Accountable to Each Other.**

✻ Raising money. What cooperative effort doesn't have problems over fundraising? Some tough

love and open conversation can go a long way ❖❯see **Raise Money Together**.

✻ Sharing credit. Your group's name in the newspaper is a real prize — or maybe not, if the common goals of the cooperative effort are more important. If your cooperative effort is looking for ways to sort out who gets credit for what, ❖❯see sharing the Limelight.

Be Accountable to Each Other

""A FEW PEOPLE HAD A HARD TIME WORKING TOGETHER. Finally we figured out a way to handle it so it wouldn't be a problem in the future. When it's clear we are making a decision, we go around on the call or meeting and hear from everyone whether they agree or not. Our rule is, silence cannot be assumed to be consent, especially on the telephone. It was an effective lesson and helped diffuse problems. We realized we had to be clear about the process.

"Since this is a statewide coalition, communication is crucial. We have to communicate and make decisions fast, and we make a lot of decisions by email. We had to come up with decision rules about how we communicate by email and whether we can make a decision by email. As a backstop, anyone can call for a conference call before a decision is made by email."

BETH STEWART, CAHABA RIVER SOCIETY

As the quote above points out, we can take decision-making for granted. Once problems start, it's

easy to find fault. Yet sometimes it's the process that is flawed, not the person. To deal with this reality, most groups end up with very explicit decision-making practices. As a cooperative effort grows and new people come into leadership, these agreements will need to be revisited and renewed. Discussing the process by which decisions get made, and who will be part of making which decisions, can increase inclusion and balance power, and help deliver good, timely decisions.

Do you have decision-making rules in your cooperative effort? Are they formal and has everyone agreed to them, or are they informal? If you frequently run into conflicts or revisit a decision, or if a few people are running the show and others are left in the dark, consider the following frameworks for ways to clarify and strengthen your ability to make decisions well.

Clarify Roles and Responsibilities.

It is tough to have good communications and decision-making without a shared, clear understanding of who is responsible for what. Use the following chart to help clarify who is responsible for what, and who talks to whom when making a decision.

✸ **See Exercise 4.5 on page 93 for a way to use this chart – and a blank one you can fill in.**

Consider:

❈ Responsibility: Who will carry out the work? Give them as much responsibility as possible to decide as many things as possible.

❈ Authority: Who has the power to approve, fund or veto a decision? They must be included in the decision loop.

❈ Consultation: Who will be affected by the decision? Who needs to add ideas, expertise or sage advice? Get them in the loop before decisions are made.

❈ Information: Who needs to be informed, when and why? Make sure these people are communicated with in a timely way to get the information they need.

CHART 4C RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY MATRIX

TASK or FUNCTION	Responsible person or committee:	Gets approval from:	Consults with:	Informs which people:
Example 1. *Tasks in a Cooperative Project:* Comments on Forest Service Travel Plan	Lands Committee — Karen (staff lead from a partner group)	John (communications staff from a partner group) — on all media ideas; Steering committee for overall strategy	Science advisory group, partner organizations as needed	Core leadership group (monthly short reports)
Example 2. *Organizational functions in a Coalition with staff:* Fundraising	Executive Director — overall plan and implementation with staff and development committee help and support	Executive Committee on annual development plan — approves monthly progress reports	Staff on funding needs and ideas, board on funding sources and personal connections	Full board— quarterly reports; Staff — monthly reports

Clarify Who Makes Which Decisions

1. Be clear on which decisions will be made at each level: board, executive committee, committees, and membership. On the staff: executive, management team, program or administrative staff.

2. Disperse decision-making to those close to the topic who carry out the work. ⬍❯ **See the diagram in Communications Flow for a way to do this that keeps the communication and accountability with the board.** Typically, in larger cooperative efforts the board or core

leadership will make policy-level decisions and set direction and goals, but committees and volunteers or staff have a fair amount of latitude to design and implement the work. This relies on the staff or committee volunteers maintaining good communication and intelligence with the core leadership or board on key decisions, so they can make informed and accountable decisions. A good way to accomplish this is to set up a leadership pair (staff/volunteer and board liaison) for each committee. The pair is responsible for handling the two-way communication.

3. Be explicit about what must be decided by the core leadership or the board, as well as what must be determined by the whole membership.

4. Clarify the decision-making responsibilities of the member groups:

    *   What decisions can the member group representative make? Which need to be discussed or decided by the member group before the representative can act?

    *   Each representative needs to build understanding and buy-in through all levels of their home organization. To help this move forward, set times when all representatives will share and discuss what they are doing in order to engage their home organization.

    *   Agree on how the decision processes of the cooperative effort will coordinate with partner groups to provide timely information for mutual decision-making.

Use Consistent Methods to Make Decisions

It is easier to be consistent and open when the roles and responsibilities for decision-making are clear.

Does everyone in your group understand the method for making decisions and practice it consistently? You'll get far greater buy-in and follow-through if you make decisions through processes that involve the people who will be affected by them. Consistently using agreed-on decision-making methods builds trust and a feeling of reliability.

Because groups have different cultures and ways of deciding things, it's important to understand how each group works. Only then can you design a decision process that respects each group. Plan to take extra time to understand and develop a good working decision-making process when working across different ethnic and social cultures. Most cooperative efforts opt for a consensus decision-making method at the core leadership or board level, because consensus ensures that everyone has considered the issue and either agrees with it or agrees to abide by the decision.

Good resources listed in the bibliography include *Robert's Rules of Order* and *The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making*.

CHART 4D COOPERATIVE DECISION-MAKING METHODS

Methods for Deciding at the Board and Committee Levels	Best Practices
Minority Rule: One or a few people can make this decision	This is used when someone has both authority and responsibility for an action. Typically the decision-maker consults with other people before deciding. In a cooperative effort, this approach is seldom used by the core leadership or board on big issues. Once direction is set, however, the board may delegate decisions about implementation to a small group or one person, such as the executive director.
Majority Rule: A vote is taken. Usually 51% of the votes wins; sometimes a 2/3 majority is needed	While efficient, this approach in a cooperative effort can split the group. For this reason voting is seldom used in effective cooperative efforts.

continued...

Informal Consensus: A quick way to test for agreement on issues that are not contentious or complex	This is a common general operating method for cooperative efforts. During a discussion, the facilitator sees agreement forming and tests for consensus. Example: An issue is raised, followed by discussions and brainstorming of solutions. The facilitator sees an emerging agreement and asks for a proposal or motion. She tests by asking the group to show "thumbs up" for agreement, "thumbs across" for some concerns but the proposal is fine, or "thumbs down" because of concerns that block their agreement. The group explores concerns to see if they can be resolved. The facilitator again tests for consensus. If the issues still are unresolved, the decision is deferred and someone is asked to bring back a better choice.
Formal Consensus: A process by which complex issues or policies can be developed through finding common ground	This is a more complex method for dealing with significant decisions in cooperative efforts. Example: An issue is identified by the leadership, and a proposal developed in committee is brought back to the core leadership group. The proposal is described, followed by questions to clarify ambiguities. Then the issue is discussed, first to identify common ground, and next to identify concerns. Each element of the proposal is tested for consensus (as above). Concerns are discussed and improvements suggested. The proposal is then revised by the committee and resubmitted to the leadership for further consensus work at a later time.

Leadership Tips for Clear Decisions

1. **In casual group settings, always check for agreement**

   - Don't get sloppy, such as saying, "What do people think?" and then going ahead as if a decision has been reached because nobody raised any concerns.

   - Either re-state the proposed decision and ask, "Are there any objections?" or get a clear decision by vote or consensus.

2. **Special-case decision-making rules. Be explicit about when and how exceptions will be made to established decision-making processes.**

   - What decisions can be made by email, under what conditions, and using what rules? Example: Only time-sensitive decisions will use email — all else will be held until the bimonthly board meetings. Everyone must immediately acknowledge receipt of decision notice, and reply with their vote within 2 days. If we do not hear back from you within 3 days, we will assume that you are abstaining.

   - When does a conference call need to be held? Who can call for it if the email process is not effective?

3. **Agree on decisions that can be made by a designated small group or one person, such as media coverage, legislative lobbying, and other time-pressured situations or decisions that require special expertise.**

EVERYONE GOT A SAY IN THE ADS AND ALL HAD SOME INVESTMENT IN THE PRODUCT. But beyond that, someone was trusted to make executive decisions. And we had some nitty-gritty negotiations on what was presented to the larger audience. Early on we could see this coming and negotiated and defined a backstop on decisions, and what decisions were whose to make. There is a fine line between buy-in and everyone driving."

BEN LONG, RESOURCE MEDIA

Five Steps to a Great Workplan — And Accountable Follow-Through

Building and maintaining trust, as well as getting the work done, is crucial in implementing your plans. A workplan of who will do what by when is a simple device that clarifies how things will be done.

It's essential for effective and complex cooperative groups and coalitions. Here's a process for creating good workplans that have effective delegation and follow-through, with good communication that supports accomplishment.

1. **Decide who will be the coordinator**. Some groups also create a leadership team to guide the coordinator and drive the implementation and follow-through. A coordinator can:

   • Remind people of upcoming deadlines so they stay on time.

   • Help people problem-solve when the timeline is slipping.

   • Develop contracts with partner groups for work deliverables.

   • Set up accountability conversations and negotiations when needed.

2. **Make a timeline that has realistic due dates.** At the big-picture level, all partners make and commit to meeting the goals and timeline of major tasks and deadlines. At the operational level, staff or working groups can make a timeline for their own part.

3. **Determine who will do what tasks.** Create a workplan chart that can be filled in during a meeting and sent out to remind people what they agreed to do. see **Exercise 4.6 on page 93 for a sample chart**.

   • List the goals, and the actions or tasks that will accomplish them.

   • Assign leaders and supporters for each task.

   • Set due-by-when dates for each time period. For example, an annual workplan will have tasks that have steps to be done in each quarter of the year.

4. **Agree on a respectful accountability process**. The intention is to help people stay on track, provide early warning and make other arrangements if necessary. The danger of discussing accountability is that most of us feel threatened, sure we will be judged and found guilty. There may be many reasons why someone

does not get work done on time — we all are familiar with this! None of us is perfect. Most of us slip on our timelines at some point so develop a non-judgmental attitude.

In a cooperative effort, nonperformance can damage trust— the fundamental glue that holds the group together. To avoid this damage seek ways to talk safely about performance. One option – while planning activities, discuss openly the consequences of not following through. Also discuss how to check in without threatening. This is especially important if you are working across organizations that have different levels of power and racial or cultural difference within the cooperative effort.

Discuss the questions below and decide how your group will handle these situations and others that might be unique to your cooperative effort:

• If someone cannot get the work done that they agreed to do — when do they need to inform others? Whom do they need to tell?

• Who has the permission and the responsibility to ask each group how their work is going?

• How will the group deal with the impact of that work not being completed at the agreed-on time?

• If someone repeatedly does not do the work they agreed to, or does not engage honestly about their ability to get the work done on time — what will be the consequences? Who will talk to the leader (or the board) of the non-performing group? At what point will the task be reassigned? Does this mean that the member status of the non-performing group is threatened or that they are asked to leave the group? Who will make these decisions?

5. **Sign contracts or a Memorandum of Understanding** stating the responsibilities and the consequences for each partner organization. A contract is particularly important if the cooperative effort is providing funding for this

work. Ask each organization's top leadership to sign this contract. ⮀ **See the Cooperative Agreement Framework in Exercise 3.4 on page 62.**

Leadership Tips for Encouraging Accountable Action

✳ When deliverables and agreements slip, talk about it. Find out what's happening. Resist making assumptions and judgments.

✳ Nurture a positive culture of group accomplishment. Low levels of accountability lead to more low-quality action, so set high expectations for yourselves, and support people to do it. Celebrate your successes, even the small ones. Frequently thank people for doing good work.

✳ Invest time to check in informally with people in your group. Knowing that your partners will follow up on how things are going, support each other and follow through builds trust.

✳ Create a leadership group in a more complex cooperative effort, to integrate and drive the implementation. For example:

- Form a key leaders' group of executives of partner groups to hash out conflicts and priorities.

- Hold each other accountable at the highest staff and board levels for organizations doing what they promised.

✳ Agree on several times during the year when working groups or committees will report to each other and to the full group, and discuss what's going well and suggest improvements or adjustments.

RAISE MONEY TOGETHER

"OPEN COMMUNICATION, OPEN FUNDING. WE share all the detail of our own budgets and have an open budgeting and reporting process for our cooperative work. You can put up with a lot of nonsense in the short term but not in the long term. In this cross-cultural work, we are in it for the long haul. We find it builds trust and works well to be open about money and all be responsible to each other."

BONNIE SACHETELLO-SAWYER, HOPA MOUNTAIN

"IT'S IMPORTANT TO MANAGE TRUST AND TERRITORIALISM. Conflict can arise around competition for funding. It's a challenge when large groups, attracted by funding for a project or a region, enter an area without respecting the grassroots organizations that have a history in a community and will remain in that service area after a project is completed. It's important for larger groups to be attentive to what's happening on the local level and to the impact of their chasing a grant without working in concert with local groups."

DULCIE FLAHARTY, MONTGOMERY COUNTY LANDS TRUST

Any time the word "money" is spoken it brings up all sorts of issues around worth, power and equity for leaders and groups in a cooperative effort. Frankly, this is one persistent tension that does not go away and must be managed with understanding and tact.

Two main paths lead to funding in cooperative efforts:

Path 1. The organizations gradually begin working together and build up a positive experience base.

Something happens, usually an external event, that pushes them to work together more closely. This work is first funded from their own budgets; gradually they partner to raise new funds from individuals and foundations, usually direct expenses for the cooperative work, such as legal fees, consultants, or new travel expenses. At the next level, the program work becomes well-enough integrated between the partnering organizations that they jointly write grant proposals and approach donors.

Path 2. A government agency or charitable funder offers support to initiate new cooperation and coordination. Sometimes this is a doorway to new and more effective efforts, which is what most foundations and grantees hope for. For existing grantees, this can pose challenges about how to viably initiate this new cooperative effort, and whether it will compete with existing program funding. Grant seekers often see new funding opportunities earmarked for cooperative efforts as a way to bundle the current work of several groups. But finding common ground and true collaboration under a grant deadline can be difficult. When in doubt, ask for a planning grant. If you are starting down this path, ❥ **go back and look thoughtfully at Chapter 2, and use the exercises to help build common understanding and the commitment to work together**.

In either scenario, partners need to explore and seek clarity about:

❊ Each organization's financial motivations and intentions for the collaboration.

❊ What work will be supported by individually raised sources, where this money comes from, and if it's from common sources how to handle the potential competition.

❊ What funding will be raised together.

❊ Who will manage jointly raised funds.

❊ Can donors be convinced to provide funding for the cooperative effort while continuing their

current contributions to individual groups — or will the joint fundraising compete with member groups' existing support?

⊛ **Do not begin fundraising without first completing the processes outlined in Exercises 2.8, 2.10 and 2.11 on pages 36, 39 and 40.**

When You Ask For Money

Create a solid plan to ensure that your group has deep agreement on why they want to work together, what you will accomplish and how. When in doubt, ask for a planning grant first. This will be the basis for your fundraising plan. Tips for successfully creating a fundraising plan include the following six steps.

Share information on currently funded work. Be open about your current commitments and financial support for the cooperative work. While this may seem risky, an open discussion of your currently funded work related to the cooperative effort can reduce underlying tensions and build trust, and open up new ways of working cooperatively and jointly fundraising. Consider asking each partner to describe their current work, its value and the sources that support it, similar to the following sample chart. Each organization's executive would come to a meeting prepared to share their work and funding sources.

"AS CHAIR, I HAD A RULE ABOUT RESOURCES — THE 80/20 RULE. We sought to direct 80% of the funds we raised to the groups doing the work on the ground and 20% to central coordination. Over time, this truly built local capacity to work on the bigger picture. At the height of the campaign, that 20% grew to around $500,000/year, with four times as much going to the member organizations. In return, those who were most active on behalf of the coalition worked on behalf of the whole."

STEVE BLACKMER, FORMER CHAIR, NORTHERN FOREST ALLIANCE

Create a budget. Your plan should include a budget for the common work that is explicit about what will be done, by whom and the cost. **Be clear that you need to fund the process of collaborating as well as the actual activities**. Make sure that the costs of supporting collaboration (consultants, facilitation, special meetings) are clearly written into the budget. We frequently see groups realizing too late that the work requires significant process support, but they have not budgeted for it and already are in the middle of things. Avoid this problem by thinking through all the coordination and meetings you will need to schedule, and budget for it.

CHART 4E SHARE PROGRAM AND FUNDING SOURCES

Example: Energy Policy Initiative—Sources of Support for Transportation Alternatives

Current Work on Cooperative Effort Issues	Who and How Much, For How Long	What Sources Support This Work?
Documenting impact of current transportation system in our state on greenhouse gas production	1 staff person __ time since last January: total personnel cost $35,000; Report due in June: $8,000 for publication and distribution	Sunny Grove Foundation; Membership contributions for general support
Light Rail System public education and lobbying	1 staff 25% time; 1 intern full time, July through legislative session in April, Personnel cost: $28,500	Mega Bucks Fund

BASED ON AND ADAPTED FROM KAREN RAY, *THE NIMBLE COLLABORATION* (2002)

"*ANY TIME WE HAVE SKIPPED DOING AN MOU, even with friends and allies, things come up later that we didn't think about and we've regretted it. Sitting down to hash out an MOU and a budget for the work is a process. People say, 'Let's not waste time on process, let's get down to the work,' but the process is the work.*"

RICHARD MOORE, SOUTHWEST NETWORK FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Discuss fundraising options openly. Unless there is a clear funding source in sight, map out potential ways to raise money, such as events, appeals, major donors, and foundations. See the chart below for an example. Discuss each organization's ability to raise funds by source, and define what they are willing to do. This will raise potential conflicts — you may want to have this process facilitated so possible struggles can be sorted out. Most important, this discussion can open up cooperative develop-

ment of funding sources and identify where the differences in access can create new and more diversified support for the common work. Generate a funding plan based on these discussions. Review and revise it at least annually, because the possibilities will shift as the program develops. **Exercise 4.7 on page 95 provides a process and a blank chart to create your own Strategy Options.**

Communicate with donors about your strategy and priorities for cooperation. This will help reduce concerns about competition and build momentum for funding the cooperative work. We suggest these actions:

❋ Send a joint letter to donors.

❋ Hold a joint information meeting for several donors.

❋ Have a donor host a meeting with other potential donors who know your area or issue.

❋ Be explicit and seek commitment that donors not reduce funding to individual organizations.

CHART 4F FUNDRAISING STRATEGY OPTIONS

Example: Regional Land Stewardship Education and Defense Program

Current Sources of Funding — *Potential new sources in italics*	Local Land Trust	Statewide Land-Use Group	National Conservation Group	Regional Wildlife Protection Group
Events	Annual easement tour			
Appeals		*Special appeal*		*Special appeal*
Major Donors	Local family foundation	?	2 who may be interested	*Maybe —*
Foundations	Community Foundation	Community Foundation, Mega Bucks Fund	Mega Bucks *Conservation Corridors Fund*	Windfall Fund Habitat Forever
Government			*Wildlife Protection Program,* LWCF	
Businesses	*Sporting goods store*	*Sporting goods store*	*Sporting goods store*	

Establish fundraising leadership. To better coordinate and drive the development work forward, appoint a committee and a lead person. If possible, allocate staff time to support it.

❅ Appoint a leader or point person to coordinate the fundraising.

❅ Establish how to communicate progress on funding between partner groups and the entire cooperative effort. Set up a task force or committee with representatives from lead groups who keep the information flowing both ways.

❅ Set clear expectations for how much effort each group will spend on fundraising.

Manage coalition grants professionally and formally. Decide who will actually be the fiscal sponsor that manages the funds for a cooperative effort. If it will be one of the member groups, this lead organization will need sound financial management. If the cooperative effort's budget is small, the fiscal sponsorship likely will be easy to set up. If it will be a significant amount of money over time, then you may need to find a large, outside organization suited to fiscal sponsorship, perhaps a community foundation or the Tides Foundation. Or form a separate nonprofit.

❅ Establish which organization(s) will manage joint grants. They should have a good relationship with the funding source and the administrative capacity to manage it well. It can be a significant burden (and often thankless) to handle this administrative task, though the fiscal agent typically gets 7-10% for the administrative costs. Being the lead organization requires balancing your role as an equal partner with the very real responsibility for managing the money and reporting to the funders that the group did indeed deliver on the promises made in the grant request.

"I PERSONALLY KNEW THE GROUPS AND CALLED a meeting of those I felt had the staff, skills, organizing capacity and political savvy to challenge an immediate threat to state environmental policy. Although the four original partner groups knew each other, they had never before worked together collaboratively, but they knew the value of leveraging. If the groups do not understand politics and the value of leveraging their resources through different constituencies, then it probably won't work as well. They quickly created a coalition and solicited a diverse statewide membership. Although some were skeptical, by using a consensus process, 80-plus original members developed a Participation Statement, a short list of priorities, and a strategic plan."

PHYLLIS BOWEN, THE SAPELO FOUNDATION

❅ Be explicit about budgeting and reporting processes. Share all the reports on income and expenses monthly. Set up clear accounting processes for the partner groups who are contracted to do work for the cooperative effort. They will need to account for the work done and any expenditures of funds.

❅ Use written agreements such as contracts and MOU to govern how funds, budgeting and accounting will be handled between partner groups. These contracts should establish accountability for tasks as well as resources, carrying one's weight, doing what each committed to do. The "sticking" place is always around how much money you should get based on your performance. It is worth the time and effort to sort it out at the beginning when writing a contract.

Share the Limelight

"IF YOU WORRY ABOUT CREDIT YOU'LL GET LESS DONE. Raise it early on as an issue, and work it through up front. Identify what people need to get credit for and from whom; then taking credit and blame is part of the strategy. This is teamwork, not a time to be the most valuable player."

BEN LONG, RESOURCE MEDIA

Most participants in a cooperative effort want ways to share the limelight and expand each group's reach to new audiences. There is real value in being able to use a wider array of media contacts and express a consistent message across many organizations. It's a real benefit for everyone if different voices speak up. It strengthens the public understanding of the issue and makes the widespread support more visible. Participating groups directly benefit from wider recognition, pooling resources to do more professional media work, and combining forces to organize grassroots support.

Figure out who among your partners has the skills and interest to lead the work of developing your common message and communications plan. Often larger organizations can play the role of communications coordinator because they have these skills in-house. The coordinator helps the group think proactively about publicizing your message as part of the overall strategy for the project, who needs to hear the message and how it will get covered in the media. Because things can happen quickly in media work, this coordinator can also keep the message clear, sharing the limelight as you agreed.

Set up a media or outreach and communications task force to help strategize and implement the communications plan, and help people stay on message. This group can develop additional communications tools to inform the public or specific audiences. Some examples of electronic tools that cooperative efforts currently are using include:

❊ **Electronic newsletters,** targeted lists and chat rooms to reach and involve the membership, allies and interested supporters. Recently, Green Media Toolshed asked its supporters to volunteer to research media contacts in their town. They entered the data on a combined media contact database that otherwise would have taken a huge investment to update.

❊ **Linked or joint websites** to present a unified face and message to the public. For example, Coastal States Organization (CSO) brought together the 35 states with coastlines to work on sound management policies. By speaking with "one voice" through CSO, states are more influential than by acting individually. See their website at www.coastalstates.org. For a good example of youth networking on environmental issues, see www.climatechallenge.org.

❊ **Combined alerts** to simultaneously reach members in many different organizations on an issue, such as that used by the cooperative campaign, Priorities for a Healthy Washington. After years of losing a defensive battle in the legislature, Priorities pooled the resources of most of the state's major environmental organizations to successfully promote a pro-environment agenda for the past four legislative sessions. See their website at www.environmentalpriorities.org.

"THERE'S OFTEN A TENSION IN OUR COALITION work between the agreed-upon long-term strategy, which tends to involve everyone, and acting quickly to embrace opportunities or address threats, which can't efficiently include everyone. Striking this balance requires clear subgroups (for example a media group) and within these subgroups an individual or two who are empowered to move quickly to achieve consensus. These individuals need to be given trust and confidence by the larger group to keep everyone on track. If this structure isn't put in place, threats or opportunities needing quick action receive delayed response, which can cripple campaigns."

JON CATTON, COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT

CHART 4G COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

We recommend six steps to develop your plan:

1. Create a pro-active role and strategy for communications	Discuss how your communications will be a positive force in forming public opinion and influencing decision-makers. Integrate the communications work into the rest of the program in an annual plan.
2. Develop a message and a communications plan	Enlist help from a professional to figure out core messages, target audiences and ways to reach them. Create a workplan (a timeline that specifies who will do what kind of communications work by when).
3. Agree on a messenger strategy	Who will be the best messengers for your target audiences? Sometimes it's better if it comes from community leaders or other respected people in the project or campaign rather than from staff. Match the spokesperson to the audience. Let the local people talk most of the time. They can credibly bring out the values in your position. Avoid people perceived as elitist, such as environmental talking heads or policy wonks. Have the organizations' experts speak about policy issues.
4. Develop media contacts	Define who has relationships and personal contacts to get the media leverage you need. Stay goal-focused.
5. Get and share credit	Find many ways to share the credit all around — photos, writing, behind-the-scenes work, and frontline communications. Make sure this is on the checklist when you create your plans. Also coordinate your messages to funders about the ways you are working together.
6. Set media ground rules	Make sure everyone can agree to follow the protocols. Some examples: • Who are the designated spokespeople? • How will we handle press calls? • How will we give credit to groups in the public media? • How will decisions be made if time is tight? • How will we deal with problems?

Accomplish Common Goals

Cooperative efforts are constantly in motion. They need to be, often just to take advantage of opportunities or to react to the latest crisis. Sometimes a fear of getting out there and doing the work stops us, and we spend too much time focused on getting the strategy right. Part of excellence is learning and improving your strategy *while* doing the work. In this last section we offer proven ways for your group to take a pause in the action to identify the lessons learned thus far, and apply them to future work to get results.

Constant Motion, Constant Learning

For most, the school of hard knocks provides the real lessons. In a cooperative effort, learning and growing with a group of trusted colleagues can pay off in smarter strategy, better execution and better results.

The process of learning from experience goes something like this:

You are engaged in doing the work, thinking and figuring it out. Things are happening. At some point you pause—maybe talking with a friend, maybe on a walk around the block, or because your plans hit a snag. In that pause, you reflect on what's been happening, tallying results and seeing patterns—drawing a picture in your mind that tells the story of what's been going on. Then you wonder why it worked out like this, what caused it, what something means, and what you should do now. Options and choices pop up, and sometimes one of them quickly seems like the right move. And then you are back in the action.

Learning together in a combined group follows this same process, but slows it, taking it by steps so everyone can create the picture and story and add their part. The group then reflects on what it means,

and why it happened. Following that rich discussion, people can suggest options from a wide base of group knowledge and make a decision on what to do now.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Do → *Share Observations and Reflect* → *Consider Why and Future Options* → *Plan and Decide*
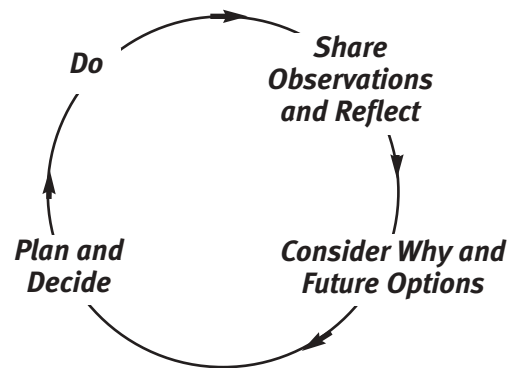
Groups that want to build shared wisdom, intelligence and knowledge must intentionally create ways to learn together. This is difficult because we are so busy that reflecting seems like a waste of time. Also, we cover up our trial-and-error ways, afraid of being judged for mistakes. It is important to find safe ways to reflect if you want to benefit from the combined knowledge in cooperative efforts.

Typically these learning and reflection conversations take place during formal strategic planning and evaluation. These are good, and important useful tools. These practices can be thoughtfully used to build inclusion and engage leaders from diverse perspectives in sharing their knowledge and experience. Because there is a great deal of information and experience available on these practices, we do not address them at length here. Some good resources are listed in the bibliography.

Beyond these formal group efforts, we encourage you to find ways to reflect while you are in the flow of your work together. This helps keep you passionate about plans and goals and connected to the reality of the work.

First — Do the Work as an Experiment

Usually we set up cooperative efforts to do something we have never done before, often with groups that we have seldom worked with so closely. We have some assumptions about what will happen; some hopes and plans. Most of the time, something different actually happens. When we expect change we can be forgiving, more interested in learning about why and how to be more successful. Instill an open and experimental attitude about doing the work among your group.

1. Accept that problems and mistakes are great ways to learn about what works or not. Share your own mistakes enthusiastically, and ask people to help you understand why this happened. See things that happened as experiences to be explored.

2. Name your assumptions about why you think a certain action will achieve a certain outcome. This will help everyone be more thoughtful about why a course of action is chosen and more adaptable if it needs to shift.

3. Identify milestones and indicators that mark the path toward success. Discuss whether you are achieving these indicators, and speculate why or why not.

Second — Share Observations and Reflections

Increase and improve your informal strategic thinking by regularly encouraging the group to share observations and learn from experiences. Some simple processes help you create a common picture of the circumstances and your work to change it. Scan back over what has happened to find patterns and trends. Look around the changing environment for clues about what will come next. **Use Exercise 4.8 on page 96 for several informal and informative ways to engage a group in shared observation on important parts of the work.**

Third — Consider Options and Paths Toward Success

At this step you integrate what happened in the past with what it might mean for the future – it's all about seeing options and consequences. Don't skip **Exercise 4.9 on page 97** for four simple and flexible ways to build group intelligence and creative ways to approach the future.

Fourth — Plan for Impact

Planning helps your cooperative effort focus on making the difference you want in the world. While a written document is important to remind you of decisions, a planning process really benefits your groups because you can move forward with coordinated action after thinking together.

Here are three commonly used ways to plan:

❖ **Big-picture thinking and strategic planning** helps partners identify common ground. This level of planning helps define and focus the purpose, vision, values and niche of the coop-

erative effort in relationship to other activities going on in the field, and identify the jointly held goals and objectives or milestones.

❧ **See the Bibliography for strategic planning resources for nonprofit organizations.**

❊ **Campaign and program planning** focuses on how to do the work on specific issues or goals, seeks agreement on the strategies to be used, and identifies the synergy between them.

❊ **Implementation planning** determines who will lead which pieces of work and what will be done by when. The level of detail will vary from looser on a strategic plan to more specific on an annual workplan to a detailed plan for an event next month.

Planning is about deciding what you will do. All the prior steps of constant motion and learning provide much of the information you need to make a decision. If your group is using learning tools during the work, you are more likely to make quick and smart decisions. You'll have shared lessons learned from the work, assessments of the current and changing environment, and options to consider. But what criteria will you use to choose? Sift each option through the following criteria to see if it:

❊ Will result in a real change that has broad support in your group.

❊ Is a true core problem or issue, not just a symptom.

❊ Has committed and strong leaders to move it forward, and many others are excited.

❊ Empowers individuals in your organizations and in civic involvement.

❊ Has attainable and clear goals.

❊ Moves the biggest obstacle out of the road toward your goals.

❊ Is understandable by the public and decision-makers — and you can move it with a good message.

❊ Has clear decision-makers and a deadline for a crucial decision.

❊ Strengthens the cooperative effort (does not splinter it) and builds capacity for future work together.

❊ Can be done within your group's capability.

❊ Has resources already available or that can be raised.

❊ Add your other criteria:

Program or campaign strategy plans. Developing sound program and campaign plans can be difficult for cooperative efforts. In part, this is because each group often has its own agenda and approach. It also takes time for everyone to understand what each of the different possible strategies might accomplish and how they will fit together. By filling in a strategy chart as a full-group activity the cooperative effort can become much clearer in a half day or so of discussion. **We make it easy —** ⊛ **work through Exercise 4.10 on page 99.**

You can develop a complex strategy with multiple players who have different approaches and skills. For example, a coalition working on regional habitat protection for the grizzly bear, an endangered species, can use legal strategies to stop degradation of habitat, public outreach to raise awareness of the bear's precarious situation, scientific research to support the agencies, and education about landowner stewardship practices for bear-friendly farms and ranches. These strategies and their activities can be mapped out over several years to see the points of synergy and leverage between the different strategies, which can help inform the need for resources and action.

Tips to Keep the Learning Alive

Use, review and revise your plans regularly.

❅ Connect your committee and program reports to your plan. What got done this month or quarter on our main goals and objectives?

❅ Review the past year's work annually, as part of developing next year's workplan and budget.

❅ Review your strategic plan about every three years to see if it needs a full update.

Communicate, share, publish and celebrate your successes!
By writing down what you have accomplished, your understanding will be deeper, and others want to learn about it from you.

Create an annual calendar of conversations that link to your annual cycle of work. For example,

❅ Big picture review—Spring: Think about the larger trends and changes in your environment, and your cooperative effort. What might you need to change to better adapt and meet new challenges?

"IT'S WORTH IT TO REVISIT YOUR VISION AND MISSION regularly, rather than getting caught up in the campaigns. The legislative bill is a tactic; the goal is to accrue power."

DIANE JENSEN, MINNESOTA PROJECT

❅ Evaluation of last year – Late summer, early fall: Consider what got accomplished, what didn't, why? What are the lessons learned?

❅ Annual planning and budget — Fall: Develop annual plan and budget.

❅ Monitor – Winter: A mid-point check-in with others. Goals check-in and activity review.

Use the Three Elements of Participation annually, to reflect on how your cooperative effort is doing. It's never too early or too late to look at it again!

See Exercise 2.1 page 26.

EXERCISE 4.1
Assess Your Meetings

PURPOSE:	HOW TO USE:
To help a group think about how to improve their meetings	Use this assessment in a meeting or in preparation for it. The entire task will take about 30–45 minutes.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LEADER OF THE EXERCISE

o   Ask all members of the group to fill in the following assessment and choose their top three improvements.

o   Next, each person says what they think is going well, and what needs to improve.

o   Make agreements on what changes can be made. Fine-tune your meetings accordingly.

o   Repeat this process in a few months to check in.

Assess Your Meetings

Planning and Preparation

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Is it clear *why* you're meeting?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Have the right folks been invited?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Is there opportunity for everyone to provide input on the agenda?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Is the agenda sent ahead of time, clearly indicating the purpose of the meeting, what decisions will be made, and what actions taken?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Are the logistics figured out well in advance?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Is the meeting space adequate and pleasant, and can individuals see and hear one another clearly?

The Meeting Itself

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Does your meeting start and end on time?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Does someone facilitate and see that the meeting runs well?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Is the agenda, purpose and time to end reviewed and agreed on?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Is there time to build relationships and have fun?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Do you review assignments from the last meeting and check their status?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Is there a clear process for making decisions? And is this process understood by those attending the meeting?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Do all participants share their ideas and concerns freely?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Are decisions made in an amicable manner, respecting minority opinions, and do all participants support the decisions afterward?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Before the meeting ends, are decisions reviewed and next steps set, with deadlines and responsibilities for each?

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Are meetings evaluated, and ideas shared for the next meeting?

Follow-up

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Do people accomplish their tasks and is someone checking in to encourage them?
(It's true — organizing *is* 90% reminder calls.)

_ yes _ maybe _ no   Are the meeting notes or minutes distributed and filed?

EXERCISE 4.2
Identify and Manage Dynamic Tensions

PURPOSE:

To identify the sources of tension and prioritize them for problem-solving or negotiation. To select top priority areas discussed in this chapter that can assist your cooperative effort.

HOW TO USE:

This must be used in conjunction with the Balancing Dynamic Tensions Chart on the following page.

This activity can be done with a group of leaders as a specific agenda item intended to open up conversation on improving communication and cooperation. It also can lead an individual through a useful process of reflecting on where you may want to devote your energy to improving the cooperative effort. As a group activity, allow an hour.

Before starting, discuss the purpose and establish groundrules — the purpose is to identify concerns and develop options and a plan for moving forward. In an hour you probably will not have time to go to solutions.

Use a skilled facilitator if you believe this discussion will raise difficult issues that have emotional charge.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LEADER OF THE EXERCISE

Hand out a copy of the chart Balancing Dynamic Tensions. Ask each individual to take a few minutes to answer the following questions:

1. Which of the tensions do you feel are present in your cooperative effort now? What else would you add?

   Which of these tensions has your group managed effectively so far? What has helped you do this well?

   Which one or two most need attention now? How could they be better addressed?

2. Share your priorities and why you selected them. From this discussion, the group chooses one or more where it is important to improve coordination.

3. Discuss options for strengthening this area and develop some next steps for moving forward. If you are working in a large group, you may find that breaking into small groups will generate better participation and ideas

4. If you are doing this individually, read through the portions of this chapter that most pertain to those priorities. What might you do differently as a result?

Create common visions and goals	and	Respect differing agendas and roles of diverse partner groups
Develop agreements on effective strategy	and	Resolve conflicting experiences and approaches between organizations about how to make a difference (for example, when is it okay to run hard-hitting ads against legislators if we need their support on other issues?)
Build strong positive relationships among leaders	and	Have many dominant personalities in the group, often disagreeing with each other, and in competition
Make decisions in a timely manner	and	Be inclusive and democratic
Raise funds for the common effort	and	*Don't* compete with member groups' funding sources
Use common public media and messages consistently	and	Credit each group in the media for their work
Do the work in a timely and effective manner	and	Dispersed staff and volunteers are in different locations and doing lots of other work in their home organization
Other tensions in your organization:		
Other tensions in your organization:		
Other tensions in your organization:		

EXERCISE 4.3
Seven Steps to Problem Solving

PURPOSE:

To use a consistent effective way for the group to raise and solve problems.

HOW TO USE:

This process can be used for problems big and small. Use it regularly and it will become an accepted way the group raises and deals with challenging situations and differences of opinion and problems.

1. **Identify the situation and context of the problem or challenge.**
   Discuss the situation that's posing difficulties. Make sure everyone who is concerned with this situation speaks and is heard so that a full picture is shared.

2. **Choose a problem to solve.**
   Summarize the causes of the problem and state the problem to be solved simply and clearly. Make sure everyone understands the problem or challenge.

3. **Consider alternative solutions.**
   Explore options and alternative ways of approaching the problem or challenge. Hold off on jumping to a decision, give the group time to be inventive and think beyond the usual solutions.

4. **Evaluate possible results.**
   Consider the most likely options – what are the pros and cons – what are the consequences of choosing each of the most likely options? How will you implement them?

5. **Choose a course of action.**
   Choose the most promising option and develop an action plan for it. ⭳ **See Exercise 4.6 Chart a Workplan on page 94** for examples of ways to determine who will do what, when, where, and how?

6. **Implement the solution.**
   Carry out your tasks and keep in touch with each other. Monitor how things are going and adapt as needed.

7. **Evaluate results and move on.**
   Once the plan of action has been completed, spend time together to discuss how well this worked, what could be improved for next time, and why? What still needs to be done, what is the next step? Recognize and celebrate each other for work well done.

EXERCISE 4.4
Negotiate Past Conflict

PURPOSE:

To open communication and understanding in order to find a solution that works for both parties.

HOW TO USE:

Use this process when two or three parties have a conflict that they wish to resolve. It will be essential to find a neutral member of the cooperative effort or an external skilled facilitator to help this process by creating a safe space, and maintaining the purpose and timing of the conversations. Practice this process on "easy" conflicts to gain skills. Always start with setting groundrules. **↔ See Exercise 2.6 on page 34.**

A. Describe the situation.

1. Each party in the conflict takes 10 minutes to write a description of what they saw happening. Describe the main events in the order they occurred. Include how you felt, using "I" statements. For example: "When I heard that you were lobbying other leaders against my organization's stand on the roadless issue, I felt angry and betrayed." The facilitator should check in to see how this is going with each party and note when both are ready. In difficult conflicts each party may have a facilitator who works with them.

2. Each party gets an equal amount of uninterrupted time to describe their perspective on the situation. The facilitator may encourage the speaker to stay on their main points and makes sure that everyone uses "I" statements and does not make assumptions about other motives or intentions. Usually 10–15 minutes each is sufficient.

   While the first party is speaking the other party writes down what they are hearing, so they can recall it. Then the second party describes their situation, while the other takes notes.

3. Each party has five minutes to paraphrase what they heard from the other. Then the facilitator opens up the conversation for questions and further clarification and explanation. This step of more fully understanding each other's position can often lead to some resolution. Identify the issues that need resolution; these issues will be explored in the next step.

B. Identify Wants and willingness.

1. If further work is warranted, each side then takes few minutes to think through what they want from this situation and the other person, and what they are willing to do to resolve it. Do this for each issue.

2. For each issue, each party in turn offers their wants and what they are willing to do. Five minutes each is usually enough. Then the conversation can be opened up for further discussion of the options. Often a resolution emerges at this stage.

C. Come to an agreement.

1. Each party summarizes where they see the emerging common ground and agreement. If there are areas not yet resolved, frequently they can be settled now. But sometimes this must be left for another session. Occasionally the parties and the cooperative effort agree to live with an unresolved conflict.

2. Agreements on what will be done by when are summarized by each party. If the conflict is still unresolved, greater understanding and respect for each other's position will have been gained and can be stated.

EXERCISE 4.5
Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

PURPOSE:	HOW TO USE:
To identify who is responsible for which task or function in your group, and what the decision path should be.	Define what area of decision-making you need to clarify (for example, strategic planning). Then start with the level of the organization that is most responsible and identify their role and responsibilities. Next, identify who will make the final decisions, when, what decisions approval is needed for, who will have input and when, and who must know about the decisions.

Consider:

❋ Responsibility: Who will carry out the work? Give them as much responsibility as possible, to decide as many things as possible. The board or core leadership group generally is responsible in matters of policy, fiscal accountability and strategic priorities.

❋ Authority: Who has the power to approve, fund or veto a decision? They must be included in the decision process and give final okay.

❋ Consultation: Who will be affected by the decision? Who needs to add ideas, expertise or sage advice? Get them in the loop before decisions are made.

❋ Information: Who needs to be informed, and when and why? Make sure these people get the information they need in a timely way.

Example chart:

TASK or FUNCTION	Responsible person or committee:	Gets approval from:	Consults with:	Informs which people:

EXERCISE 4.6
Chart a Workplan

PURPOSE:

To have a common, visible process that all can use to create agreements on who will do what, with whom, by when.

HOW TO USE:

This chart is generally used first as a flip chart in a meeting — the focal point for discussing action plans on goals and objectives. Then it can be transcribed to an electronic spreadsheet and adapted as needed.

Annual Goals

What	Who leads	Who supports	When: Jan-Mar	Apr — June	July — Sept	Oct — Dec
Goal 1.						
Task A.						
Task B.						
Goal 2.						
Task A.						
Task B.						

EXERCISE 4.7
Fundraising Options

PURPOSE:

To map out the potential sources of funding, discuss each organization's ability to raise funds by source, and determine what they are willing to do.

HOW TO USE:

Each organization fills in this chart with their current and potential funding sources for the work they do as part of the cooperative effort. Then in a meeting this information is shared, new fundraising ideas are generated and potential conflicts are discussed. Consider having this process facilitated so that possible conflicts can be sorted out. Generate a funding plan based on these discussions. Review and revise it at least annually.

CHART: FUNDRAISING STRATEGY OPTIONS

Current Sources of funding. *Star Potential New Sources*	Organization A	Organization B	Organization C	Organization D
Events				
Appeals				
Major Donors				
Foundations				
Government				
Other				

EXERCISE 4.8
Sharing Observations

PURPOSE:

To increase and improve your group's strategic thinking by regularly sharing observations and learning from your experiences.

HOW TO USE:

Use these processes when a milestone is accomplished or your work hits a snag. Or at regular monthly meetings. These processes are flexible and meant to be used in meetings or group gatherings. Put them into agendas or set up short meetings explicitly to do these exercises.

Headlines:

When starting a meeting, use an open question like the ones below to quickly assess what is happening that's important to pay attention to. An open question elicits sharing. A closed question can be answered yes or no. Select one of the following questions, or draft your own. Ask everyone to give a one to three–minute answer.

❉   What is one thing that happened recently that made you think about our work together in a new way?

❉   Have you heard news in the last month that may be important for our group to pay attention to in the future?

❉   Is there something one of your partners did that you are glad about? Thank them!

❉   What's a recent accomplishment, no matter how small, in the work your group is doing for the cooperative effort?

❉   Looking back over the last year, name one event that illustrates the direction our work is taking.

❉   Others?

Jam Session:

Set up a time over lunch or for a short 45-minute section of a meeting to focus the group's thinking and learning (no decisions!) on some aspect of the work. Holding a jam session requires advance preparation. A week or two in advance, ask three people who are respected and observant in a field to each prepare a five-minute presentation on what they are learning about a common topic. Some examples are: working with editorial boards, conservation organizing in agricultural communities, and working with volunteers on stream restoration and monitoring. Keep each to the five-minute limit at the meeting, then open the floor to questions and discussion.

Jam Session II:

Another approach for a jam session is to ask someone to summarize in less than 10 minutes what has been going on in a particular initiative or strategy your group is working on: what has been successful and what questions the group is dealing with now. Then open it up for observations and questions.

EXERCISE 4.9
Many Paths to Success

PURPOSE:

Build group intelligence and flexibility, develop options and creative ways to approach the future.

HOW TO USE:

The activities can be part of regular evaluation sessions, planning meetings — or whenever your group needs to refresh its outlook and way of working together.

Focus on Results:

Adjust this work based on available time and the complexity of the situation. It might take 30 minutes or three hours, depending on what the cooperative effort needs. Ask the following questions one at a time:

❈ Looking at our goals, what did we accomplish?

❈ What didn't happen?

❈ Why?

❈ What were the unanticipated outcomes?

❈ What does this suggest about what we do next? What questions does this raise?

❈ Do we need to change our goals?

❈ What lessons can we draw from this experience to guide our future work?

Synergy and Friction:

This is a good time to find out how the groups are working together. Ask these questions:

❈ When did we do our best work together? Tell these stories with some detail.

❈ What can we learn from those experiences so we can work at our best more often?

❈ Where did we get stuck or have conflicts?

❈ What did we learn about working out problems and improving how we work?

❈ How can we strengthen our capacity to work together more effectively, have more fun?

❈ Imagine this cooperative effort being more synergistic — what would it look like?

❈ What resources would we need to do that?

Goals and Consequences:

Thinking through future options is the next step. This is not about deciding — this is the step before deciding. This can be done in different ways, and the key is to think creatively. Generate options by brainstorming, small group discussions, and/or individual quiet time to think and write.

❉ Brainstorm possible approaches to _____.

❉ Ask: What are our options for _____?

❉ Imagine what might happen in 2 years, 5 years. How should we prepare?

A powerful and fun activity is to imagine different paths your work might take, either in response to an anticipated decision or event (such as a court decision, election or a natural disaster), or as a consequence of different strategic options your group is considering. This will build understanding and resilience into your cooperative effort, and is a great way to help new people understand more about what you all are doing together.

Trail Crossings:

Build this activity around a specific choice or anticipated event. The question is: If our anticipated event happened and we did _____, the consequences would be_____. The intention is to openly consider different possible choices of action on your part and potential outcomes and consequences for each. Break into small groups of three or four people; each small group explores one possible course of action much more fully, suggesting ways it might be carried out, critical choices that would be made and identifying the possible variety of consequences. Consider questions like:

❉ Who would support and oppose your actions?

❉ What might they do?

❉ What assumptions are we making about the situation and other actors? Can we check out our assumptions to see if they are likely correct or not?

This activity lends itself to drawing. Each small group can make a drawing that depicts the choices and alternate consequences; or a flow chart of the decision path, its choices, and possible outcomes. Then these flip charts can be shown and described to the full group, and used to firm up plans for action.

EXERCISE 4.10
Strategy Chart

PURPOSE:

To help coordinate the long-term strategies of a program or campaign and build common understanding of how they are interrelated.

HOW TO USE:

Post a flip chart on a wall, or multiple charts for a large map. In the top boxes, list the overall campaign goals for each year. For the first round, people meet in strategy groups based on their expertise and type of work. Each group figures out the major activities and milestones for their strategy. Write each activity and each milestone on a half sheet of paper. Tape them with masking tape into the chart timeline. Once everyone fills in their strategy with milestones and activities, step back and consider the interactions and the consequences. As the following questions are discussed, move or add pages:

❋ What are the key turning points – what must get done before another action can start? What dates might shift and what consequences would that have?

❋ Where are the critical points in this timeline? How can we prepare and respond?

❋ Where are the opportunities for more synergy and cross-strategy support?

❋ What additional resources does this suggest we need?

Strategy	Who Leads and Who Is Involved: Partners, Staff, Allies, …	Year 1 Goals 1. 2. 3.	Year 2 Goals 1. 2. 3.	Year 3 Goals 1. 2. 3.
Legal				
Outreach and Education				

Strategy	Who Leads and Who Is Involved: Partners, Staff, Allies, …	Year 1 Goals 1. 2. 3.	Year 2 Goals 1. 2. 3.	Year 3 Goals 1. 2. 3.
Legislative				
Research				
Other…				
Other…				
Other…				

Chapter 5: Time for a Change — Transform, Merge or Close it Down

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KEY POINTS OF THIS CHAPTER

✻ Cooperative efforts shift and change their purpose, membership and structure to meet new opportunities and changing situations. Plan on it!

✻ If your group is undergoing changes, think ahead and be intentional about guiding this process effectively, be it a friendly or a tough change.

✻ Mergers are a special case — more than cooperation. They warrant a unique, very carefully structured process.

✻ When closing down a cooperative effort, be clear about what you are doing. Reflect and evaluate, and tell your story to others. That's the best way to learn and to celebrate.

In the middle of the action, it's hard to imagine what will happen when your work is done. Why would you even think about preparing for it? Most of us don't. But there can be real consequences as well as real value in being thoughtful and strategic about making changes in your cooperative effort's purpose and structure.

It is the nature of cooperative efforts to shift and change, sometimes to a different form, sometimes to a new strategic direction. In this chapter we give you some pointers on what to look for and how to carry out three common ways that cooperative efforts change and morph, through transforming, merging, or closing down.

Transform Your Cooperative Effort

Anticipate Change

As the cooperative effort grows, you can count on repeatedly revisiting the issues of membership and trust, decision-making, and goal-setting. There are five main reasons cooperative efforts transform their basic purpose and/or way of operating:

❋ New people take on the core leadership roles.

❋ The membership changes: New types of constituency groups are added, or participating groups leave.

❋ You win! Or lose... The issue requires different strategy and action because the external environment changes.

❋ Resources grow or shrink considerably.

❋ Member groups change their work or agendas, causing them to have different expectations of the cooperative work.

Big transformations happen when the reasons to cooperate have changed — which can happen frequently. For example, a coordinated project is completed, and the groups go back to being a loose network. A network takes on a campaign and runs both for a while. And then several of the campaign members form an ongoing coalition. It's a swirling dance of partners as groups work cooperatively in different ways to meet the altered circumstances.

When you need to change it helps to be intentional and proactive. Recognize what is needed now, and do the work of shifting. Recognize that you are now back at the beginning of a new venture. Maybe it's not entirely new, but some fundamental things have shifted and that will send ripples (or tidal waves) of change throughout the organizational system. This Toolkit has several resources to help you out.

⟲ **Check out the Phases of Group Development (page 12).** The fifth stage is Transforming and that's where you are now. Review the leadership skills and think about who can play those roles. Read over the common behaviors and pay attention to personal and organizational needs as you all let go of what you have done and the fun and frustrations of working together.

⟲ **Read over Start on Sound Footing (page 17).** This is the time to think again about membership — who really needs to be in and who might want to be out. If membership and purposes change, the governance and decision-making processes also will need to realign. Vision, goals, strategies and activities can be redirected. Think about whether it could be beneficial to put different people and organizations in leadership roles. It might be helpful to adapt and use some of the exercises in Start on Sound Footing to help the group make the transition thoughtfully and well.

Which model really will work best? Refer to the structural models (page 46) to test and clarify your thinking. Which makes the best sense? How simple can you make it, now that your group has a history of working together?

Cooperative Work offers an overview of how to get the most out of the transition in the section ⟲ **Constant Motion, Constant Learning (page 84).** Start by reflecting on what you have done together. There is much that you can discover through a structured reflection on the benefits of having done this work together, the failures and successes and lessons. Take time to do this review, to integrate what you have learned and take it forward as leaders and as social change practitioners.

Two additions to the above suggestions: Celebrate!!! The activists, partner organizations and community of supporters deserve a good thanks and some fun to honor the work accomplished and to recognize the value of each other's efforts.

Put together a communication strategy on the changes. Don't leave it to the rumor mill to tell your story of what's going to happen next. Your supporters and constituencies need to hear it straight from you to ensure that the right message is conveyed so you can maintain their trust and respect.

Mergers — A Special Case

This Toolkit is not about mergers, but sometimes cooperative ventures lead groups to consider a merger. Mergers are a special case and require a significantly different level of work on the part of the participating groups. Groups in a merger are not just working together, but literally become one organization. This short overview merely introduces a very complex topic.

In the last few years, an increasing number of mergers have occurred among small to mid-size environmental and conservation organizations. For example, in one region a merger occurred between two alternative energy groups, in another between three rivers groups, and in a third case between seven land trusts. Perhaps it's a reaction to the years of financial austerity or a greater willingness to work cooperatively. In some cases groups may be encouraged by funders or national organizations like the Land Trust Alliance, which promotes mergers as one way of ensuring that land trusts have enough resources for long-term stability.

Benefits of Mergers

As Jason notes in his quote at top right, mergers have a number of benefits worth considering. Done well, mergers can provide:

❊ Better market positioning.

❊ More program resources.

❊ Greater reach in fundraising.

❊ Economies of scale so services are provided more efficiently.

We've seen a number of small organizations use mergers to grow past that precarious stage when they have only one to three staff — the period when so much depends upon the person of the executive director. After they merge, the larger combined organization may be able to afford more staff and more developed systems, which makes it less

"FROM A PROGRAM OFFICER'S POINT OF VIEW, we want to leverage our funds with every grant. When we get proposals for the same work from multiple groups, we start to ask logical questions of economy of scale. For small local grassroots groups with a defined service area, this discussion of mergers probably does not apply. But for larger statewide or regional organizations, it certainly does."

Jason Halbert, Oak Hill Fund

dependent on any one person and therefore more stable. But the transition is always a huge investment of time and money. It is a risk.

Down Sides of Mergers

Bad mergers hurt — witness RJR Nabisco or other corporations who tried to merge their way into financial health. Joining another organization can seem an enticing way to cover one's own weaknesses. Experienced participants of mergers warn against underestimating the work and difficulties involved while overestimating the benefits. None of the leaders we interviewed had seen mergers reduce costs or bring in new foundation support. Even a smooth merger requires a great deal of work. A difficult one is almost impossible to navigate if you're also experiencing internal challenges, and it can sap energy that needs to be spent elsewhere.

If You Are Considering a Merger

Use a structured process. A merger is as complex an organizational procedure as you'll ever go through. Most of the leaders we talked with had relied on facilitators and consultants. This process is laid out well in a few publications, chief among them David LaPiana's *Nonprofit Merger Handbook,* which outlines a merger process and provides a wealth of handouts.

"DO SOME DEEP AND LENGTHY INTERNAL INTROSPECTION. Not alone, but with your senior leaders. Write it down and look at it regularly."

BRUCE JOHNSON, MINNESOTA WATERS

Do the advance work. You want to enter a merger only when you're clear about everyone's motivations — and especially your own. The executive directors particularly recommended LaPiana's sec-tion "How to know your own motivation and keep your mission forefront."

Involve the whole board regularly. The board has the legal and moral responsibility to ensure the merger is right for the organization. Although the staff will have a central role in the process, the board must take the lead. It's helpful to have a smaller committee to oversee the process or work out details, but the full board should be involved in all the key deliberations and decisions. It's not enough for a smaller group to develop a merger pro-posal and bring it back for discussion and approval.

Close It Down — Plan and Carry It Out Well

Nonprofit groups seldom close down. Perhaps that is because the issues remain even when the crisis passes. Or it may be because people are passionate about their cause and see little reason to formally close down the shell that hosted good and important work. But collaborative efforts are a bit different — they often have a specific timeliness and eventually complete the work they had assembled to address. Unfortunately sometimes they have an untimely demise due to internal infighting or loss of resources. Some of the scenarios we see include:

Sinking ship. Member groups leave, one at a time, and finally a single member, usually the one with the most responsibility, is left holding the baggage.

Abandonment. The key lead group pulls out and no one else wants to or is able to take on the core responsibilities.

Implosion. Internal weaknesses in management cause the structure and relationships to collapse, and the members struggle to save face, save the work, and save relations with the funders.

Swan song. The need is great but the resources just aren't there, and with frustration and great sadness, the leaders part ways.

Fade-away. Slowly, incrementally, the members spend less time and energy on the collective interest, and finally the core group has a party at a sushi bar with the last of the funds.

Friends and foes forever. The leaders duke it out and the effort splinters in a blast of public recrimination gleefully covered by reporters.

Phoenix. You thought it was over, but it just keeps coming back. Yet another issue emerges from the ashes and draws you all back together.

Sound familiar? If your group is facing any of these or other variations, here are a couple of thoughts and some resources to help make it easier.

Prevention Is the Best Cure

In the beginning, start thinking about the end. Be clear about why you are all together and for what goals. This is essential to recognizing when the work is complete. Envision and discuss the reasons for closing down, declaring victory, defeat, or obsolescence. This is actually fun.

Many leaders recommend having explicit processes for how groups leave the cooperative effort. This helps alert everyone to changes and to how agreements are or are not kept. Some groups use a pre-cooperation agreement or annual contract about each group's responsibilities, including the consequences of failing to complete them.

When Closure Approaches

If things are ending badly or there are financial problems, generally it's best to close it down. Figure out the options and set a timeline. Sometimes it's fine to just lay it all down peaceably; the shell of the agreements can remain behind in case they are needed again in the future. For a more detailed guide to anticipating and planning this process see *Managing in Hard Times*, a joint publication by the Institute for Conservation Leadership and the Environmental Support Center, available on ICL's website www.icl.org.

Closure is Different Depending on the Structural Model

Informal cooperative efforts (networks, coordinated projects, or multi-stakeholder processes) generally can close relatively easily. The main steps to a sweet demise can be summarized as: reflect, learn

from your efforts, let go, let appropriate others know, and move on.

Formal cooperative efforts (associations, alliances, or ongoing coalitions) have more work to do. If the group has its own 501(c) 3 or other legal status, that makes it even more complicated. Some key considerations include:

> **Decision-making**. The board must be informed and involved; ultimately they decide what must be done.

> **Financial accountability.** Tracking the money, good budget projections, and dealing honestly with funding sources are crucial to successful closure.

> **Obligations to accomplish work.** Know what the group is committed to finishing, and figure out how to do it or how to be relieved of the need to do it.

> **Legal considerations.** Find out how to lay off staff correctly, dispose of all assets, formally dissolve the legal status, and reach closure with the IRS.

Scott Denman's article, *Closing an Environmental Nonprofit Well: The Case History of the Safe Energy Communication Council*, is an excellent and complete case study with important guidelines for everyone. Read an electronic version at: www.icl.org/resources/articles.

Final Steps to End the Cooperative Effort

Alert and tell others. Think about what communications strategy is appropriate, how and what you tell the world, and who needs to know, when. Sooner is usually better for supporters.

Be good to your partners. Express thanks and help people deal with the closing process. This simple courtesy can make a huge difference in how these leaders participate in future ventures. Partners may include your allies, direct participants in the cooperative effort, and foundations or major donors who supported the work.

Reflect and evaluate. Schedule a reflective conversation that can assist individual leaders and the whole group in learning from this experience. What were our successes and progress? How could we have done things better (20/20 hindsight)? What new capacity have we built? If another group were going to do a similar thing, what's our best advice? What's next?

Share the story. Lessons learned by the Alaska Coalition, for example, have influenced many of the most successful coalitions in the lower 48 states. Many audiences may be interested in hearing about the cooperative effort's successes and challenges, structures, and group process through written articles, blogs, or conference presentations.

Celebrate and say good-bye!

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Website Resources

Dismantling Racism Works Website
http://www.dismantlingracism.org
Resources and consulting services designed to help proactively understand and address racism.

Green Media Toolshed Website
http://www.greenmediatoolshed.org
Information and tools for successful communications campaigns for the environmental movement.

Guide to Participatory Evaluation Website
http://People.cornell.edu/pages/alr26/parEval.html
Provides a thorough and practical approach to using participatory evaluation.

Interaction Associates Website
http://www.interactionassociates.com
Training and resources for facilitation and leadership with an emphasis in collaborative leadership.

Free Management Library Website
http://www.managementhelp.org
Integrated library of 72 management topics with tips, practices and tools for nonprofits and for-profits.
ONE/Northwest Website
http:// www.onenw.org

Information, services and technology for collaboration and online networking for the environment.

Peacemakers Trust Website
http:// www.peacemakers.ca
Charitable organization dedicated to research and education on conflict transformation and peace-building.

Resource Media Website
http://www.resource-media.org
Media strategy and services to nonprofits, foundations and other partners who are working on the front lines of environmental protection.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Website
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http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf

Visions, Inc. Website
http://www.visions-inc.org
Offers training and consulting in multiculturalism.

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