

Metro-Portland Regional Action Initiative Parenting Education Network Project

Literature Review: Strengthening Metro-Portland's Parenting Education System, Issues Related to Governance and Coordination

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Introduction

This report summarizes types, functions, values, and risks of collaborative structures by providing answers to the following questions:

- What is Collaborative Governance?
- Why Are Collaborative Structures Necessary?
- What are the Types of Collaborative Governance?
- What are the Functions of Collaborative Governance?
- What is the Strategic Value of Coordination Across Sectors?
- What are the Cautions and Risks of Coordination Across Sectors?
- What are the Leadership Issues?

This Literature Review is intended to inform the Metro-Portland Regional Action Initiative (RAI) Parenting Education Network Project.

The Metro-Portland Regional Action Initiative (MPRAI), a regional collaboration of public and private funders and other stakeholders has been exploring the best way for funders to support parenting education in the metro Portland area. As part of their exploration, these partners are looking at the current “parenting education hub” approach funded by the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative (OPEC) in 12 Oregon regions outside the Portland area. These efforts are focused on: building local capacity to coordinate parenting education programs and services; and to increase the quality of options.

Because Portland is larger and has more diverse populations and programs, the MPRAI has commissioned research (funded by The Oregon Community Foundation, the Portland Children’s Levy, and Social Venture Partners Portland) to determine which elements of the current approach happening in other Oregon communities or other approaches around the country might be beneficial in the metropolitan Portland area (Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties). The anticipated outcome of this research is a set of recommendations and options to inform one or more coordinating approaches in the Metro-Portland area as well as elements of their leadership and governance. Because the successful practice of collaboration across the country (and outside) has been researched and documented in ways that might help to frame effective approaches for regional parenting education, Dovetailing has incorporated a literature review as one way to gather useful information.

This Literature Review is part of a larger research plan, conducted by Dovetailing, which includes: (1) a parent survey 2) a survey of parenting education providers and stakeholders; (3) meetings of natural groupings of parenting education providers and stakeholders; and (4) interviews with selected key informants. Those elements will be combined with these Survey results to form the basis of recommendations for the MPRAI.

At the inception of this project, entitled the Metro-Portland RAI Parenting Education Network Project, two fundamental beliefs guiding this work were articulated:

- All parents can benefit from education programs that help them build strong family relationships and do the best job they can as their child's first and most important teachers
- Every Oregon community should have a range of parenting education and support services

The following pages provide an overview of research and current thinking in the field of collaborative governance. Some points relate to more formal structures than what is intended for the Metro-Portland RAI Parenting Education Network. These points are included to provide a fuller overview of the governance structures, their purposes, characteristics, functions, and likely results. Also note that in a few instances, this review documents conflicting views due to current lack of agreement among researchers in this emerging field.

Overview of Resources Discovered

An annotated bibliography itemizing more than 65 local, state, national, and international sources of information about the project, collaboration, governance, and cultural competence was created in April 2011. The 30+ sources related to collaboration (e.g. process, vision development, coordination, integration of services, and elements of success in collaborative undertakings and projects) and governance (e.g. effective governance, leadership structure, elements of success, and issues of authority) were examined for the purposes of this Literature Review. The sixteen most relevant sources are cited in the following pages.

A number of rich sources were found in the areas of collaborative governance and cross sector coordination, and the benefits and risks of different types of collaborative structures and processes. Additionally, a fair amount of research and writing has been done on issues related to leadership, such as elements of leadership success and various leadership considerations in collaborative structures. Far less research was available in the areas of network membership criteria and information specific to networks focused on parenting education or early learning.

What is Collaborative Governance?

Collaborative governance is the process in which multiple actors “come together, evolve, implement, and oversee rules”¹ and agreements about desired results and about the processes that guide their work together. The starting idea for collaborative governance is that multiple players agree that by working together they can create more lasting, effective solutions² than by working alone.

¹ Zadek, S. (January, 2006).

² National Policy Consensus Center. (n.d.).

A collaborative governance structure often includes at least one public entity and at least one private entity partner who agree to work together to solve a social problem and coalesce around shared goals.³ Partners in the collaborative structure may, or may not be institutionally diverse and may be large or few in number.

The problem(s) that the collaborative governance structure aims to solve can be narrow with a single focus or broad by aiming to solve a broad range of problems perceived as common to the members of the collaborative.⁴ Additionally, the motivation for the creation of a collaborative structure and the framing of its position may be problem-driven (e.g. too many children go hungry) or opportunity-driven (e.g. local farmers want to help kids get better nutrition in schools).⁵ The problem statement and motivations guide development of mission and vision.

Four attributes (in addition to mission and vision) common in collaborative governance structures are:

1. **Formality.** A more permanent structure is institutionalized through formal memoranda of understanding, charters, or contracts whereas a non-permanent structure will be governed by shared understanding of informal agreement.⁶
2. **Duration.** The planned and actual life of the structure is driven by the nature of the collaboration's goals and the problems that it is working to solve. If the goals are larger, broader, and/or complex, more time and commitment will be needed from partners. If the goals are related to a specific crisis, the collaboration will likely dissolve after that crisis is handled.⁷
3. **Contribution.** Partners contribute resources (e.g. time, money, expertise) to the collaborative.⁸
4. **Shared responsibility.** Partners share decision-making and management responsibilities.⁹

Further, the Alliance for Regional Stewardship identifies *regional* collaborative governance as unique in the following ways, compared to regional problem solving:¹⁰

1. **Problem-solving.** The complex environment for problem solving and readiness of participants are taken into account, which is not typically the case when holding public hearings or conducting expert studies in non-collaborative situations.
2. **Definition of desired outcomes.** Desired outcomes are focused on economic, social, and/or environmental well being rather than institutional efficiency or problems that can be solved by a single agency working alone.

³ Grantmakers for Children, Youth, and Families. (2009).

⁴ Donahue, J. (March, 2004).

⁵ Donahue, J. (March, 2004).

⁶ Donahue, J. (March, 2004).

⁷ Donahue, J. (March, 2004).

⁸ Grantmakers for Children, Youth, and Families. (2009).

⁹ Grantmakers for Children, Youth, and Families. (2009).

¹⁰ Henton, D., Melville, J., Parr, J. with Gibbons, B. (March, 2006).

3. **Greater partner participation.** Broader and more complex problems and desired outcomes will require greater partner contributions and participation.
4. **Implementation must work for multi-parties.** Because multiple players are involved and contributing effort, implementation will require and produce innovative approaches, specific actions and agreements, and new structures that support multi-party problem solving.

Why Are The Collaborative Structures Necessary?

This section summarizes the literature about the types of issues that collaboration can productively advance. Collaboration takes time and resources, so it is important to understand when it is and is not productive. The literature suggests four technical reasons to create a collaborative structure:¹¹

1. A need to integrate policies, services and resources
2. Overlapping institutions and jurisdictions
3. A highly complex problem or complex processes needed to solve a problem

An additional reason is:

4. A desire to accelerate progress or change¹² by joining forces with multiple partners, sharing resources, and garnering shared momentum. This assumes that the time, capacity, and financial investment of players are perceived worth the anticipated greater outcome that can be achieved collectively.

What Are Some Types of Collaborative Governance Structures?

This section addresses the types of collaborative structures that work for a range of purposes and describes a host of possible leadership structures.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundations Collaborative Governance Guide for Grantmakers IBM Center for The Business of Government identifies a type of collaborative governance structure that is most relevant to the Metro-Portland parenting education network project.¹³

1. **Community Problem Solving.** This type of structure refers to place-based, multi-organizational collaboratives consisting mainly of community. Government and private groups who, over an extended period of time, work together to address problems such as reducing violence, building low-income housing or planning for parks. These collaboratives plan, coordinate and implement collective strategies and policies.

¹¹ National Policy Consensus Center. (n.d.).

¹² National Policy Consensus Center. (n.d.).

¹³ Henton, D, Melville, J, with Amsler, T and Kopell, M. pp. 10-18.

Additionally, the IBM Center for The Business of Government identifies four types of collaborative public management networks by purpose and task.¹⁴ They are:

2. **Service implementation network.** This type of network delivers services to clients.
3. **Information diffusion network.** This type of network is designed to share information across government sectors.
4. **Problem solving network.** This type of network focuses on solving a specific problem and relies on past cooperative relationships. That the IBM Center and the foundation publication referenced above use the same name for structures with different purposes is a sign of the rapid evolution of the field.
5. **Community capacity building network.** This type of network aims to build social and community capital so that a community is better equipped, more resilient, and more responsive to future community problems.

Purposes, tasks, leadership and the contribution of members are essential ingredients of effective networks and alliances as these types of networks are sometimes referred to. In an article about modes of network governance, Keith Provan and Patrick Kenis use the following classifications based on leadership structures:¹⁵

1. **Participant-governed networks.** This type of network can be formal or informal, highly centralized or decentralized in management, but depends solely on the involvement and commitment of all participants to manage the internal and external network issues and duties.
2. **Lead organization-governed networks.** This type of network has a lead agency that has sufficient resources and legitimacy. Decision-making is centralized and the lead agency facilitates and coordinates network-level key decisions and activities. Member organizations must have goals closely aligned with the lead agency.
3. **Network administrative organization (NAO).** The NAO is an entity set-up specifically to govern the network and its activities. What makes this structure different than the lead organization-governed network is that the NAO is not another service provider (like the lead agency in the lead organization-governed network), but rather a separate administrative entity set-up by mandate or the members themselves for the exclusive purpose of managing the network.

Going a step further in connections among service providers, examples of shared child care service models, specific to early childhood education (ECE) providers, provided by Louise Stoney in the September/October 2009 *Exchange* magazine are:¹⁶

1. **Program Alliance.** Independent ECE businesses contract with a common administrative agency to handle program and fiscal management. (Note: Elsewhere in the literature the term “alliance” is used almost interchangeably with the networks described above.)
2. **Consortium.** Existing ECE businesses join to form a single non-profit.
3. **Provider trust.** ECE providers form single legal trust which contracts with a third party to provide fiscal and administrative management.

¹⁴ Britton Milward, H., Provan, K. (2006).

¹⁵ Kenis, P., Provan, K. (2007).

¹⁶ Stoney, L. (September/October, 2009).

4. **Cooperative.** ECE providers form a jointly-owned entity that is responsible for administration of multiple, independent sites.

What Are the Functions of Collaborative Governance?

This section describes the functions, or tasks of an effective collaborative governance structure. The Fieldstone Alliance notes that one of the most important functions of a network, or in their terms an alliance or network, is the initial clarification of the purpose and goals.¹⁷ They underscore the importance of setting goals and outcomes and revisiting them regularly for the purpose of maintaining appropriate focus, making necessary adjustments, celebrating progress and demonstrating the value of the collaborative effort.

The IBM Center for The Business of Government indicates there are five tasks that lead to effective collaborative network management¹⁸ where a collaborative network is defined as an entity that reaches across agencies and programs to solve complex problems. The tasks listed below are internal tasks that pertain to management of the network itself.

1. **Management of accountability.** This task involves deciding who is responsible for what as well as how to deal with non-contributors and/or bad actors. Collaborative governance does not have a rigid chain of command, but rather depends on member willingness to participate based upon indirect incentives (such as those outlined in the “What is the Strategic Value of Coordination Across Sectors?” section below).
2. **Management of legitimacy.** When membership of the network crosses private, non-profit and public sectors, the network must continually negotiate its legitimacy as its purposes are not mandated but rather based on cooperative effort. Additionally, individual member organizations may find themselves continually explaining to their stakeholders why their participation in a larger network is a value-add to their individual organization.
3. **Management of conflict.** Conflict can stem from differing goals and divergent views of network members. Because individual members do not “report” to each other in the way that a traditional organizational hierarchy might, these conflicts cannot be solved by commands from above. Instead, conflict resolution mechanisms need to be in place, with support from “network managers,” to handle conflicts among network members / individual organization leaders. Other literature suggests such mechanisms need to be convened by a neutral party in a neutral venue.
4. **Management of design / governance structure.** Larger numbers of network members and/or unfamiliarity among network members may require a more formal structure beyond management by goodwill and consensus. Literature suggests that a key to successful management of design is the regular assessment of current structure and operation, making modifications along the way.
5. **Management of commitment.** Individuals who participate in a collaborative network represent and are paid by their individual organizations. Thus, there is more loyalty to their

¹⁷ Hoskins, L, Angelica, E (2005)

¹⁸ Briton Milward, H., Provan, K. (2006).

individual organization than the network. Issues of perceived inequitable rewards or incentives can arise from participation in the network, and should be carefully addressed by network managers. Training and joint problem-solving methods are suggested as strategies to deal with this commitment dilemma, which is a constant force in collaboration.

Other external functions, or actions that the network takes to make progress towards achieving its desired outcomes in terms of solving a problem are¹⁹.

1. **Network promotion.** Efforts that are trying to change public perception or substantially raise visibility may have considerable focus on branding, raising public awareness, and/or recruiting new network participants to increase the understanding of the network to the public, client base, policymakers, and/or potential new network partners.
2. **Broadening network participation.** Efforts that require broad agreement or drastic changes of approach among specific partner groups dedicate attention to identification of strategic partners that are missing, cultivation of interest and incentivization of participation and commitment. If focus of work shifts due to political, regional, and/or service changes, identifying valuable, new participants is important.
3. **Communication.** Communication across a variety of channels can increase internal understanding and support among network members as well as externally among non-network stakeholders. Communication should be steady in flow, in a variety of formats (e.g. in-person, electronic, website, emails), and be treated as a priority. Additionally, if there is a need to gain public support and/or participation for the network and network's efforts, then network information should be transparent.²⁰
4. **Decision-making processes.** In order to accomplish the functions noted above, networks must establish processes for making, documenting, implementing and changing decisions. Important among many considerations is clarity about the instances in which a lead agency, executive committee or network manager is authorized to act on behalf of the network. These processes must be clear to participants, regularly used and protected (e.g. constraining a member absent from a previous meeting from undoing a recent decision without new information or outside of the decision-making process).

What Is the Strategic Value of Coordination?

Research and literature confirms that successful alliances, networks, and public-private partnerships take considerable time, commitment, and dedication of resources. Types of strategic value of such coordinated, collaborative undertakings across sectors are noted below.

Grantmakers for Children, Youth, and Families has identified the following positive benefits from private foundation involvement in public-private partnerships:²¹

1. **Alignment of efforts** among non-profit, business, philanthropic, and public sectors.
2. **Increased efficiency**, allowing each player to focus on what they do best.

¹⁹ Agranoff, R. (March, 2003).

²⁰ Henton, D. et al. (April, 2001).

²¹ Grantmakers for Children, Youth, and Families. (2009).

3. **Knowledge sharing** that leads to more comprehensive understanding of the problem and best practices to remedy the problem.
4. **Cost savings** for both government and foundations by streamlining processes.
5. **Leveraging of resources** because public and private funds are dedicated to a shared cause. Private funds can help states draw federal match dollars.
6. **Broadened areas of foundation funding.** Investing in a public-private partnership allows foundations to invest in projects tangential to their “initiatives” while deriving benefits of interconnected efforts (i.e. increased use of evidence-based approaches in parenting education are supported by foundation investments in higher education)

The literature suggests that additional benefits specific to the private sector include:

1. **Credibility.** Involvement of non-governmental/private sector involvement in an era of low confidence in government helps to advance chosen goals.²²
2. **Overcoming institutional rigidities.**²³ Since private entities are not as bound to public policy limitations, they can help to deploy solutions where flexibility and nimbleness are beneficial.

Community-wide value benefits:

1. **Effective or increased efficiency in service delivery to clients.**²⁴
2. **Increased access to influence and resources.** Increased trusting relationships among engaged partners allow players to serve as relationship brokers and conduits for other collaborative partners.
3. **Strengthened abilities of other players.** Knowledge sharing, access to new technology and skills, and cost savings may strengthen individual and joint capacity, filling gaps in the system.
4. **Centralized, clear, and efficient decision-making and network direction** when there is a lead agency.²⁵
5. **Increased ability to reach new markets or population segments and refer to partners’ services**
6. **Creating system change**²⁶

What are the Cautions and Risks of Coordination across Sectors?

As noted above, collaboration takes time and resources. It is instructive to understand the cautions and pitfalls at the outset so that consideration can be given to how to navigating risks.

1. **Inclusivity means more struggles in community and regional problem solving.** An environment of conflict can be expected when asking individual players to find

²² Donahue, J. (March, 2004).

²³ Zadek, S. (January, 2006).

²⁴ Graddy, E. (September 1, 2008).

²⁵ Briton Milward, H., Provan, K. (2006).

²⁶ Hoskins, L, Angelica, E (2005)

a new way of doing things and agreeing on “compatible interests, defining a common purpose, mapping out complimentary roles, and driving collaborative action.”

Struggles for partners include:²⁷

- **Personal** (e.g. wrestling with stereotypes of other players, lack of common language, fear of losing market share)
- **Structural** (e.g. organizing complexity, establishing boundaries)
- **Political** (e.g. fear of giving up individual political capital, unpredictability of local/regional/state political environment,²⁸ undoing legacy of political predecessor)
- **Cultural/racial** (e.g. working through different assumptions, perspectives, and solutions about a perceived problem or goal; establishing new understanding about race, past injustices, and current challenges).

2. **Joint decision-making is often a perception, not a reality.**²⁹ A case study of 12 collaborative, cross sector networks located in the Midwest, found that there are five reasons why brokering decisions and results is so challenging.

- First, network partners often participate in the network to exchange information and then use that information to make adjustments to their own organizations.
- Second, there may be a mismatch between the network participants’ ability to make decisions for their organization and the decision-making expectations of the network. The level and type of participants can change over time, so this much be watched carefully.
- Third, due to the cross sector nature of collaborative networks, the risk of different perspectives clashing is high. This must be managed and it can make consensus-building and decision-making difficult. Also, as noted in I. above under the cultural/racial bullet point, diverse players may need to first do the work of understanding each other’s different perspectives before collectively building a new understanding and identifying shared solutions.
- Fourth, decisions in networks often come from the shared learning of network participants. This suggests the importance of discussion and an honest sharing of views prior to decision-making.
- Fifth, decisions that create perceived winners and losers discourage both contribution and participation. Literature and experience tells us that there is frequently a delicate balance of incentives and values to participating in a network and the time commitment it requires to participate. Thus, the types of decisions network members are asked to make are important to be thoughtful about.

3. **Divergent views of partners lead to network volatility.**³⁰ A collaborative structure is more vulnerable when players do not agree. In this case, more energy will need

²⁷ Parr, J. (November, 2003).

²⁸ Alliance for Regional Stewardship. (April, 2001).

²⁹ Agranoff, R. (March, 2003).

³⁰ Donahue, J. (March, 2004).

to be invested in managing the structure. Greater stability comes from players sharing and agreeing on the *need for shared governance*, *what* shared governance should accomplish, and *how* it should accomplish shared goals.

4. **Responsiveness to fast-paced economic change³¹ and changes in leadership.** Durable collaborative structures are skilled in navigating the sometimes rapid-pace of economic changes in the market place as well as changes in partner agency and political leadership.
5. **Buy-in of partners must take place before accountability.** More formal, written agreements to participate in the collaborative structure can lead to more accountability of the players and greater certainty of who is really in for the long-run.³²
6. **Lead agencies can be perceived as dominant** thus leading to lack of commitment from other partners and players.³³

What Are Some Leadership Issues?

The items listed below are a combination of considerations and elements of success based upon what has been learned from national literature and the state, national, and international experience of the consulting team.

1. **Initiative.** According to a Harvard University article on collaborative governance, (1) the dominant share of the initiative in starting and maintaining a collaborative structure must rest with the player that holds a plausible claim to represent broad public interest and has credibility with involved partners/members, and (2) every partner/member must have some role in setting the goals of the collaborative so that the dominant player does not dictate the mission, vision, and purposes of the collaborative.³⁴
2. **Leadership**
 - **Clear key leader(s).** Whether the structure has a centralized leader, or more decentralized leadership, literature states that the collaborative structure's leadership should have credibility, power, and authority to bring necessary, diverse partners to the table and keep them there.³⁵ A central leader does not necessarily have to provide all the capacity needed to manage the network; in fact it may be preferable to avoid this scenario to diminish perceptions of dominance. But a central or hub leader does need to be supported by network participants through dedicated capacity.³⁶

³¹ Alliance for Regional Stewardship. (April, 2001).

³² National Policy Consensus Center. (n.d.).

³³ Briton Milward, H., Provan, K. (2006).

³⁴ Donahue, J. (March, 2004).

³⁵ National Policy Consensus Center. (n.d.).

³⁶ Agranoff, R. (March, 2003).

- **Single leader or co-leaders.** Collaborative networks by nature are not hierarchical. If a lead agency structure is used, the key leader must be clearly identifiable. However, if a less centralized structure is selected, clear leadership or co-leadership can help provide order and structure. Additionally, the IBM Center for The Business of Government indicates that a leader should: (a) initiate the collaborative structure; (b) provide the dedicated support to maintain the collaborative structure; and (c) be seen as a neutral convener.³⁷
 - **Collection of leaders.**³⁸ Leadership can be provided by a collection of very dedicated champions. These champions can rotate leadership responsibility by serving terms as a board or committee Chair. These champions should be surrounded by network promoters and network-to-network and/or member organization-to-member organization conduits to provide overall cohesion and to maintain a sense of stability in a decentralized structure. One pitfall is that such structures often rely on the goodwill of many players, which is not easy to sustain through staff transitions or times of economic hardship.
3. **Tolerance for risk.** In identifying potential leaders, the potential leader's tolerance for risk should be considered. Risks include making or implementing decisions that are unpopular to some players; being perceived as dominant if tasked with the job of managing conflict at various levels in the network; and general jealousy from competitors. One way to mitigate risk is to determine what functions can be delegated to other tiers of leadership within the network.
 4. **Joint undertaking, in combination with a visual, influential key champion, safeguards against political resistance.** Case studies of North Carolina's Smart Start system indicate that a strong local-to-state connection broadens and deepens public will and support for ECE investments. A necessary complement was Governor Jim Hunt's tremendous championship at the executive level. Additionally, national opinion research of numerous state system leaders on the sustainability of ECE structures suggests that a gubernatorial champion was most effective in bringing about accelerated system changes, but strong state-local connections were critical in sustaining that change over time.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in an effort to answer the many research questions of this project suggests that collaboration in its many forms can lead to increased efficiency, increased effectiveness and reach and lasting system change. Productive, durable collaborations focus on results, hence initial framing and goal setting are key to short and long-term success. Successful collaborations also recognize that collaboration takes time, commitment and contribution, so do not enter into collaborative structures lightly.

³⁷ Agranoff, R. (March, 2003).

³⁸ Agranoff, R. (March, 2003).

Research also shows that collaborative leadership can have several forms, can take place at different levels, and can be effective in a wide array of areas. Careful consideration of the situation from which a collaborative solution is emerging should guide decisions about the how, who and why of leadership roles.

There is wide agreement that connecting planful action (starting with the end in mind) with thoughtful leadership roles can inform the structures that best fit the challenge and available resources of any grand endeavor.

References

These references provide an excellent description of collaborative governance structures, their internal and external functions, the strategic value and risks of proceeding and the leadership required. The field and the literature are evolving; so new studies and additions to the literature are available every month. Readers who are wrestling with specific issues will find further research on the Internet and in university libraries to be fruitful.

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