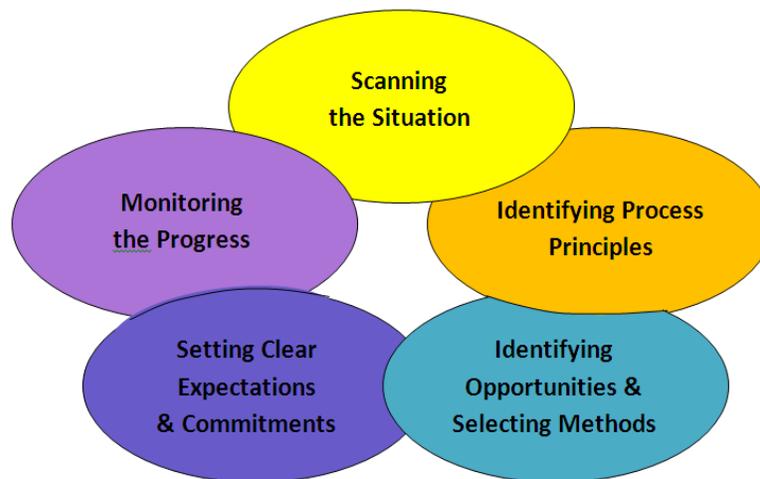


Organizing for Collaborative Action



Research and experience suggest that most successful collaborative efforts fully consider and integrate the five organizing themes displayed above. In practice, these themes are not necessarily addressed in a sequential manner, may vary in importance, and often overlap.

Five Organizing Themes

1. Scanning the Situation

It is important for stakeholders to assess their collaborative environment prior to initiating a planning effort. The community or regional situation influences the overall context for collaborative planning. Examples of factors to consider:

- Community trends
- Rate and types of social, economic, and ecological change
- Natural resource interests
- Social communication networks
- Past stewardship efforts
- Level of trust and cooperation

In addition, stakeholders need to think about and understand the skills and resources available in the community (this includes non-profit organizations; local, regional, state, and federal agencies) to support collaboration and the additional skills and resources that might be needed for a successful collaborative planning effort.

2. Identifying Process Principles

All stakeholders—in the USFS, other agencies, Tribes and the community—will hold key process principles that will guide and sustain the collaborative planning process. In other words, if the forest planning process occurs in this way – according to the agreed upon process principles – it will likely be more successful. Some examples that have been used in the past are: maintain an open and transparent process; reach out to ensure all interests are represented in the process; respect diverse perspectives; provide thorough and timely communication of key information to all affected parties; and, apply alternative ways of learning and generating knowledge to address stakeholder needs.

3. Identifying Opportunities and Selecting Methods

Collaborative methods need to be chosen based on the collective values, principles desired planning outcomes, and the capacity and/or interest in the community to participate in a collaborative effort. Some outcomes are best achieved through one or more open houses, field trips, open public meetings, or working groups that focus on specific questions or topics through a series of sessions (just to name a few).

It is far more advantageous to design the collaborative process around methods that will accomplish the planning objectives—and which are based on the local context, capacities, principles and values, and expectations of the community and the management unit—than to merely gather up so-called “public comments” that may have little value. Public comment obtained without a strategic purpose will most likely fail to contribute appropriately to building a better strategic plan or specific project, improving stewardship opportunities, or otherwise facilitating meaningful collaboration.

4. Setting Clear Expectations and Commitments

All stakeholders will have expectations about the planning process with regard to roles, time frames, key events and phases, levels of communication, intended outcomes, and similar topics. If these expectations are not clear—when resource data will be available, for example, or how often community groups will get together, or where community input fits within specific plan documents—a basic foundation for collaboration cannot be achieved. Conversely, having clear expectations keeps the ongoing work understandable, rewarding, and focused. Stakeholders are kept informed, are clear about how their contributions are being used, and can look ahead to mutually agreed upon benefits and outcomes.

Linked with expectations are commitments, which represent the level of resources, capacity, and ongoing responsibilities that are obligated in a variety of ways by participants to the process. Stakeholders need to define tasks, roles, responsibilities, commitments, and timeframes so everyone has a clear understanding of what they are committing to in the collaborative planning process. The strength of these combined commitments will strongly benefit the collaborative process, making it far more likely that desired expectations will be met.

5. Monitoring Progress

The adaptive and emergent nature of most collaborative processes suggests that it needs to be monitored for success and challenges throughout the process. Collaborative planning efforts evolve over time as the process is implemented because the efforts are cumulative in the sense that problem solving resources will be increased, working agreements will enhance capacities, and relationships will be expanded.

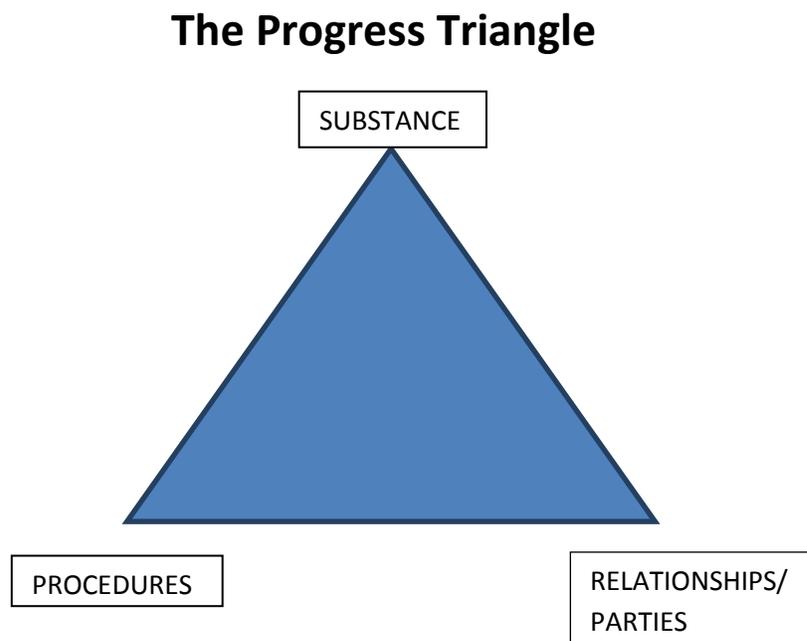
Monitoring focuses on the very factors that have been assessed in designing the overall collaborative process: linkages to the situation or context, including relationships and collaborative capacities; adherence and commitment to selected values and principles; the relative accomplishment of mutually agreed upon expectations; the effectiveness of particular methods in constructing identified collaborative planning outcomes, products, and solutions; and strengthening long-term collaborative capacities within organizations and the community.

**Segment Four:
Organizing for Collaborative Action**

Creating Progress through Collaboration

Every collaborative project must ask “What are we trying to accomplish?” but that is not a simple question to answer. Some people think about collaboration in terms of success versus failure, and in some cases that can be useful. But when the issues involved are very durable—like the management direction for the El Yunque National Forest—it is often more useful to think about *progress* rather than *success*.

The Progress Triangle is a simple graphic that helps us think about three different kinds of progress that need to occur in order to have an effective collaborative project: relationship progress, procedural progress, and substantive progress.



Daniels and Walker, 2001

Relationship progress deals with who are involved, what the history among the stakeholders has been, how much they trust one another, the communication linkages among them, etc. Sometimes collaborations occur in places where the relationships among the key parties are quite negative, or the

potential participants have organized into competing sides with a long competitive history between them. Other times the relationships among the key stakeholders have not yet built and the collaborative project will need to do networking in order to make much progress. A key issue is who has not been involved in the past, but needs to be, if the project is going to achieve its potential.

Procedural progress deals with how the collaborative project is organized and how it functions. There is no one right way for a collaborative group to be organized. Some are based upon consensus decisions; some have strong steering committees; some have extensive charters/by-laws; some are closely linked to agency decision processes and funding opportunities. Key features of procedural progress are that a group should decide for itself how it wants to work (given the constraints in the situation), must constantly be evaluating its operating environment to make sure that its procedures become outdated, and be open to new participants and opportunities.

Substantive progress deals with the various issues that the collaborative project is working on. This can include a wide range of topics, from uses (recreation, grazing, water production, etc.) to physical/ecological conditions (critical species decline, invasive species, ecosystem processes, etc.) to social values associated with the project area (subsistence uses, cultural sites and patterns, adjoining landowners' needs, etc.).

Virtually everyone who becomes involved in natural resource collaboration is motivated by the substantive issues—we all want to get something done. The shape of the Progress Triangle reminds us that substantive accomplishments depend on a foundation of progress in relationships and procedures. If there is a strong foundation of skilled people with a strong organization, then substantive progress may come quickly. If those things are not in place, then time must be spent building them. There are many cases in which collaborative projects “tipped over” because they were trying to reach too high without having an adequate base of relationships and procedures.

El Yunque National Forest Workshop

Segment Four: **Organizing for Collaborative Action**

Purpose of the Segment

- The objective of this segment is to provide a broad overview of five organizing themes that are deemed to be essential for organizing a successful collaborative effort and to point out how and when in the workshop the themes will be applied and/or practiced.
- A second objective is to present a model by which participants can measure the progress of the collaborative process in three key dimensions: substance, relationships and process

Key Points:

- Research and experience suggest that most successful collaborative efforts fully consider and integrate five organizing themes.
- These themes are not necessarily addressed in a sequential manner, may vary in importance and often overlap.
- The themes are interconnected and therefore influence each other. They are parts of a system, not linear steps.
- It is important to measure the progress of the collaborative process in the areas of building relationships, quality of the process and substance or products of the process

Organizing Themes

Scanning the Situation

- Scanning the situation provides an opportunity to assess the local community or regional situation – getting the “big picture” of what is happening in the region and on the Forest.
- In addition to information that can be gathered before or after the workshop to develop the “big picture” view, there will be an exercise in which participants will have the opportunity to look back 20 years and look ahead 20 years and record on a wall chart the significant events that have shaped or could shape the region or the Forest in the future.

Process Principles

- All stakeholders in the Forest Service, other agencies and community will hold key process principles that will guide and sustain the collaborative planning process.
- Examples of process principles are: maintain an open and transparent process, focus on what matters most; be open to new ideas
- Process principles become indicators against which progress in the collaborative process can be measured

- Group Exercise: Ask participants to write down on a “sticky note” at least one process principle that in their opinion would keep the process on track and produce successful collaborative outcomes. After a few minutes have the participants post the “sticky note” on the wall and explain that they will refer back to these principles as they work in their “working group” setting.

Identifying Opportunities and Selecting Methods

- The purpose of this theme is to identify opportunities for engaging the public and to select methods that will accomplish the planning objectives. This theme was applied earlier when participants prioritized their level of interest among the various opportunities identified for public engagement

Setting Clear Expectations and Making Commitments

- Everyone – the Forest and community stakeholders - come to the table with a set of expectations
- Identify and establish clear expectations up front in the process
- Assess these expectations in light of both the Forest’s and the community’s resources and capacities
- Commitments represent the level of resources, capacity and ongoing responsibilities that are obligated in a variety of ways by participants in the process
- Table exercise: Segment 4: Expectation/Commitment Worksheet

Monitoring the Progress

- The objectives of monitoring are threefold:
 - to determine the desired outcomes of the collaborative process that need to be monitored
 - to determine what approaches might be available and suitable for monitoring progress during the Forest Plan Revision process
 - to decide whether a monitoring design or process team is desired
- Tomorrow, there will be an opportunity in your “working group” setting to talk about how and what your group would like to monitor, what indicators you might use to measure progress and how you will monitor the progress.