

Climate Change and Collaborative Governance

In 2007 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that global warming is “unequivocal” and primarily due to human activities with significant and potentially catastrophic global and regional impacts. More recently, scientists have observed that the models used to predict the rate of climate change have been underestimating the accelerating emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG). Global carbon dioxide emissions, for example, are now increasing 3.3 percent per year, compared with 1.3 percent in the 1990s.

The impacts of climate change are no longer abstract or hypothetical. They are already affecting us. In North America, we are experiencing declines in forest health and catastrophic fires; changes in planting zones and crop ranges; shifts in routes and timing of migratory species; expanding ranges of pest and vector born disease species; drought, increased flooding, and severe weather events. This changing environmental landscape is beginning to change where we live and how we plan.

Climate change poses challenges too big for just one country or one state or one community to solve. And yet “think global, act local” has never rung more true. Only by working together, individuals and communities, corporate citizens, and all levels of government, can we deal with the complexity of global warming. We don’t have all the answers yet; there are many different ways to reduce global warming and adapt to changing climate conditions. What we do know is that time is of the essence and we need to work on many fronts simultaneously, learning and adapting as we go. International agreements, national policy, state and local action will all be necessary in order to transform the way we produce, consume and conserve energy, how we farm, how we manage our forest covers, and how we structure our economic and market policies. And we will likely need the full array of policy tools to get us there, including mandates, standards, market incentives, monitoring, and voluntary action.

Good government and collaborative governance. The climate change challenge will require people pulling together to make tough decisions and lasting commitments to change across public, private and civic sectors. That means not just returning to traditional principles of good government but advancing to include principles of collaborative governance as well – accessibility, transparency, accountability, inclusion, shared purposed and joint problem solving. Collaborative governance opens up the work of public decision making and service to engage citizens, stakeholders and interest groups, experts and laypeople, corporate and government managers to optimize wise decision making and effective policy development in the face of these challenging circumstances.

Collaborative governance is already at work on climate change generating:

- **Collaborative Climate Action Plans** by bringing communities together to set targets and strategies to reduce their collective carbon footprint. For example, the Arlington Initiative to Control Emissions (AIRE) in Arlington County, VA is implementing its climate change action program through collaborative planning and action;
- **Climate Change Forums** through national, regional or community town halls to find ways to reduce GHG emissions, generate clean energy and conserve energy and water. For example, stepitup2007 organized the first open source, web-based day of action dedicated to stopping climate change by connecting more than 1,400 communities. Another forum, Focus the Nation: Clean Energy Education and Engagement , brought over 1900 colleges, universities, high schools, middle schools, faith and civic groups, and businesses together to educate a million people on climate change solutions on January 31, 2008; and

- **Sustainability Action** through community engagement and collaborative action. Oregon Solutions sponsors collaborative governance approaches to environment and energy projects and has fostered over 37 local projects with the assistance of the National Policy Consensus Center.

Collaborative governance builds cooperation across political boundaries, public and private sectors, and diverse interests that might otherwise divide us. Cooperation generates trust and willingness to share ideas, expertise, and resources. Jointly owned climate solutions are more likely to bear fruit and reduce our carbon footprints, year after year after year.

Collaborative governance does not happen without strong leadership. In fact, it helps leaders make smart decisions gleaned from the wisdom of people they serve and represent. Flexible approaches, innovative ideas, and workable solutions are generated by people when they can engage and collaborate on shared challenges. After all, they will be the ones, in their households and work places, who will be making the changes we need to make.

How does collaborative governance work? Its key features foster effective engagement and deliberation by:

- providing balanced, equitable and voluntary representation;
- creating the conditions and capacity for people to engage constructively;
- making available information accessible to all; and
- securing committed leadership and direct links to public decision making and implementation.

Often agencies or non-governmental sponsors initiate the call for collaborative governance. Independent assessments then test the feasibility for collaborative problem solving and identify public leaders who can convene the process. Once engaged, participants frame the issues, agree to shared objectives, and jointly design their procedures and ground rules. Often a facilitator is retained to guide the process and help people share their different perspectives, incorporate technical and scientific data, identify and evaluate options, and negotiate agreements. Large civic engagement processes can require teams of facilitators and reporters, while web-based interfaces synthesize thousands of iterative exchanges and comments. Most project-specific efforts lead to written reports or agreements that establish recommendations, responsibilities and accountability measures.

The Climate Change and Collaborative Governance Alliance. Recently, the University Network for Collaborative Governance, initiated by the National Policy Consensus Center, has started a new initiative to connect those working on the special synergy between climate change and collaborative governance. It envisions an informal alliance among researchers, practitioners, and managers linking with business leaders, environmental organizations, community groups, and government agencies share experience, research, tools and resources. An inventory of collaborative governance models for climate change initiatives is already underway. Research demonstrating the effectiveness of collaborative governance approaches in mitigating and adapting to climate change is being contemplated.

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