

# INTRODUCTION

## The Present Problem with Governing

If you think governing is more challenging than it used to be, you're not alone. There is a growing recognition that it takes more than government, or any other one sector acting alone, to address many of today's public policy issues—intractable issues such as health care, homeland security, immigration, poverty, and crime. Consider the following real-world examples:

- **A state needs to develop plans and strategies for managing and communicating in emergencies. Such management and communication must take place across different levels of government and must include businesses, schools, hospitals, and many other groups.**
- **A city struggles to deal with growing traffic congestion and air emissions in the face of ongoing development and lack of funding for transportation infrastructure.**
- **A region seeks to muster the resources to address issues of community development, access to jobs, affordable housing, and health care in distressed neighborhoods and rural areas.**

In addition to these types of complex societal problems, demands on public and private resources are increasing, political polarization and gridlock are worsening, our population is growing more diverse, and citizens increasingly expect to have a say in public issues.

At the same time, governmental jurisdictions and traditional decision-making processes established over the past 200 years have remained essentially static. Public leaders and managers often don't have the power or authority they need to address issues or resolve crucial problems. And many have discovered that top-down, unilateral decision making simply does not result in comprehensive, lasting solutions.

As Ron Heifetz describes in *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (1998), today's problems call for leaders to play their roles differently. Heifetz, who is a physician, co-founded the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He suggests that public leaders face three kinds of problems, which are analogous to three kinds of problems doctors face. He also explains how leaders need to think about their roles in involving the public to address these problems.

A Type I problem is like a patient with a broken leg, Heifetz says. It has a clear definition and a clear solution. In these cases, the doctor takes the primary responsibility for diagnosing and solving the problem. In the policy world, a leader can address or resolve a straightforward Type I issue alone, based on his or her knowledge and authority.

A Type II problem—for example, a patient with heart disease—Heifetz says, has a clear definition, but responsibility for the solution needs to be shared between the doctor and the patient. The doctor can prescribe, but the patient has to exercise, change his or her diet, and reduce stress. With a Type II public problem, a public leader or manager must engage those involved in the problem in a process of solving the problem together.

A Type III problem, such as a patient with chronic fatigue syndrome, requires the doctor and patient to work together, Heifetz says, both to define the problem and to test various solutions until they find what works. The cause or causes of the illness are not easily identified, and no specific diagnostic tests are available. In fact, managing the symptoms will require lifestyle changes that are more the responsibility of the patient than the doctor. Given a public issue of this nature—say, a community that is losing its economic base—a leader will need to involve members of the community to address the problem.

More and more of today's public issues—including, for example, reforming education or health care—are Type II and III problems. Heifetz calls these *adaptive problems*. Adaptive problems are not well defined, the answers are not known, and many different stakeholders are affected, each with their own perspectives. Even when a solution to an adaptive problem is discovered, rarely does anyone have the authority to impose it on everyone else. Clearly, adaptive problems pose particular challenges for public leaders, and require nontraditional responses.

These kinds of problems and issues call for leaders to serve in a new role – as conveners, bringing people together from various interests and perspectives, to work together, bringing their knowledge and resources to the table to address the issues. Conveners do not impose the solutions, rather they get people involved in finding effective solutions together. This role provides leaders

with the opportunity to “take action without taking sides.” You’ll learn more about how leaders can play this role most effectively in Chapter 6.

## The Solution: Collaboration and Collaborative Governance

In the public realm, adaptive problems call for a kind of adaptive, collaborative governance that enables people to combine their knowledge and resources and reach integrative solutions. Such collaboration enables individuals to come together across governmental, sectoral, and organizational boundaries—i.e., from multiple branches and levels of government, the private sector, and the nonprofit sector, along with private citizens. Addressing adaptive problems in this requires new forums in which these diverse parties can work together. Often it is necessary to create a neutral forum, a space where participants feel assured that the process will be conducted in a fair and unbiased fashion. Chapter 5 elaborates on how leaders can address this important consideration.

New governance structures and mechanisms to support cross-sector collaboration are especially important when traditional forums cannot or will not undertake to do so. In order to collaborate in problem solving, decision making, and implementation, new governance structures and tools are needed that enable agencies and organizations to overcome the barriers to cross-sector collaboration.

This *Guide* addresses all the various aspects of collaboration, including the development of new collaborative governance structures. But first, some definitions are in order.

*Collaboration* is a catch-all term used to describe various processes that bring people together across sectors through various forms of public engagement to address policy issues. Such processes may also be known as *consensus building*, *conflict resolution*, *policy dialogue*, and *joint problem solving*, among many other terms.

Most recently, the term *collaborative governance* has gained traction. Collaborative governance includes a variety of processes in which all sectors—public, private, and civic—are convened to work together to achieve solutions to public problems that go beyond what any sector could achieve on its own.

The concept of using collaborative processes to resolve intractable public problems has been around since the 1970s. Over the past 30 years, collaboration has proven effective in resolving difficult adaptive problems. It has evolved and been refined during that time, yet unfortunately is still not used as widely as it should be. Too many leaders resort automatically to traditional modes of decision making and are daunted by the concept of collaboration.

*When it comes to working together with the other side, I think, as I've said earlier, that I have learned my lessons in 2005, and I have learned it the hard way, because we had some great initiatives, and we went out and went about it the wrong way.*

*It was not an inclusive approach. It was kind of like setting a deadline, saying, “If you don't work with us in two months from now, we're going to go directly to the people.” And it became kind of us versus them. And that's the wrong approach.*

*The approach that we always have to take is to be inclusive and to bring all the stakeholders in, which we are doing, for instance, this year with health care. We bring all the stakeholders in. And this is why there have been no fights. There have been no attacks. I mean, no name calling or anything like this. So I think that I've learned from that, and I'm a quick learner.*

**Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger**  
News Hour PBS, June 22, 2007

We at the Policy Consensus Initiative believe collaborative governance practices need to be employed more widely if today's leaders are to effectively address the challenges faced by society. We have uncovered some important insights and lessons about what it takes to collaborate effectively to get to solutions. We have identified and studied how innovative leaders can convene people from across diverse sectors to work together. And we have looked at what it takes to create the kinds of mechanisms necessary to overcome the barriers to collaboration presented by traditional structures and procedures.

The objective of this *guide* is to use these lessons to equip more leaders—present and future, in the public, private, and civic sectors—with the information and tools they need to bring about better governance through the use of collaborative practices.

## Roles Leaders Play in Collaborative Processes

Leaders who initiate collaborative approaches to governance must decide what role or roles they want to play in such a process. They may serve as sponsors, conveners, facilitators, and/or participants. Sometimes leaders can

double up on these roles, and sometimes that is not advisable. A leader's role is usually determined by the nature of the issue, the situation, and the relationships among the parties.

The *sponsor* is an individual who initiates a collaborative process and provides or secures support for it, financial and otherwise. The sponsor is often a leader within an agency, civic organization, public-private coalition, or foundation.

The sponsor needs to be able to work hand in hand with other participants to reach a successful outcome. When also playing the role of participant, the sponsor serves as liaison between his or her organization's leadership, the process, and other participants. To be successful, the sponsor-participant must lead by example, by being open-minded, flexible, and willing to listen and learn during the process.

While a sponsor may successfully take part as a stakeholder-participant, the dual roles of sponsor-convenor and sponsor-facilitator may be more problematic.

The *convenor* is a person who, by virtue of their office, leadership skills, and reputation for trust and credibility, can get all of the differing, or even competing, interests to come to the table and work together. A former elected official or civic leader who is known as fair-minded and good at listening and communicating effectively with people from all sides of an issue is likely to be a successful convenor. Generally, when an elected or respected leader convenes a meeting, people from across the board are willing to come. The convenor can't advocate for a particular outcome, however, or favor one side or another, and keep people with diverse interests working toward a solution. This role can conflict with the role of the sponsor if the sponsor seeks to promote a particular solution.

The *facilitator* is a neutral third party who helps assess, plan, organize, and manage the collaboration process, and who runs the meetings. He or she needs to be able to maintain impartiality and accountability with all participants to effectively and credibly assist groups in working together to achieve their objectives. The facilitator plays an important role in establishing and maintaining a safe environment for participants and a positive tone for the meetings.

If a sponsor has an obligation to advocate for a particular view or outcome, it may be difficult for him or her to also credibly serve as the facilitator. At the same time, the complexity of the issue, the number of parties, and the parties' past history may make it desirable for a skilled, impartial facilitator to manage the process. Skilled

assistance is available from university centers, extension services, institutes of government and other institutions and organizations who subscribe to professional standards of impartiality and best practice and who offer leaders help with processes to address difficult public issues.

## How this Guide Is Organized

Several of the chapters in this *Guide* focus on these roles and what is entailed in carrying them out. Other chapters provide straightforward how-tos on the key steps and stages of collaborative processes. Each chapter is preceded by a case study that illustrates the points elaborated upon in that chapter.

### The chapter topics are as follows:

1. Understanding the spectrum of collaborative processes
2. Identifying when collaborative processes will work and when they won't
3. Sponsoring a collaborative process
4. Conducting an assessment
5. Choosing and using a neutral forum and facilitator
6. Identifying and working with a convenor
7. Ensuring legitimacy for the process through inclusive participation
8. Planning and organizing the process
9. Developing ground rules to guide the process
10. Conducting problem solving discussions and reaching consensus agreements
11. Creating mechanisms for implementation and on-going collaboration

Note that this *Guide* covers only the basics of collaborative governance. Many other publications discuss one or more of the above topics in greater detail; see the resource list at the back of the *Guide* for suggestions. My hope is that readers will find this *Guide* a good place to start.