

Accountability Standards and Collaborative Governance Principles For University Centers

UNCG Conference

March 1, 2010

Accountability

- To be accountable means to take responsibility for one's actions in terms of both effectiveness (impact) and efficiency (use of resources).
- Typically the stakeholders we serve are not organized in a way that allows them to evaluate us, thus we must regulate ourselves and take responsibility for educating our constituents about what we do.

Challenges Centers Face

- Avoiding the appearance of influence or bias in our dealings with issues, stakeholders, and money
- Managing the sometimes conflicting demands of transparency and confidentiality
- Recognizing and upholding laws and policies that affect us as university centers

A Little History....

- Presentation at November 2008 Austin conference
- Discussions by UNCG Steering Committee
- Research into standards of six other organizations
- Webconference in October 2009 to discuss accountability and practice standards
- Survey of UNCG members February 2010
- Today's proposal and discussion

Initial presentation – Nov 2008

- The “agency problem” - concerns about whether centers are acting as agents for others
- Accountability standards as a tool to manage the agency problem
 - Avoiding the appearance of bias
 - Establishing trust

Six Sets of Standards & Principles

- Policy Consensus Initiative
- US Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution
- National Coalition for Dialogue and Intervention
- Association for Conflict Resolution
- Consortium on Negotiation and Conflict Resolution
- Roundtables on the Environment and Economy
(Canada)

Webconference Discussion

- Discussed meanings and implications of accountability standards
- Identified benefits of shared standards
- Considered issues of measurement and evaluation related to standards
- Identified the desire for shared principles rather than more specific network-wide standards
- A collective will to move forward with the discussion

Benefits of Shared Principles

- **Accountability:** to each other as UNCG members
- **Teaching Tool:** a guide for orienting students, associates and clients
- **Communication:** a tool for communicating mission and practice to the community
- **Advocacy:** an aid to advancing the practice of collaborative governance
- **Credibility:** increased legitimacy with funders and stakeholders
- **Unity:** greater clarity about the values we share
- **Alignment:** with principles established by related professional organizations
- **Contribution to the field:** a guide for complex or ambiguous situations



Survey of UNCG Members

- February 2010

Assumptions

- Accountability standards and collaborative governance principles are an opportunity to discuss who we are, what we do, how we do it, and what we mean by collaborative governance.
- Our purpose is not to establish policies that would guide the behavior of individual practitioners.
- Rather, we are interested in developing a shared set of principles or values that guide us and define us as a group.
- The UNCG will support its members as they carry out these principles

Four Key Principles

- Transparency
- Impartiality/Neutrality
- Confidentiality
- Appropriate Policies to Guide Practice

These Principles apply at two levels:

- To the organization as a whole
- To collaborative governance practice

Accountability Principles

Transparency/Openness

- **For the organization:** The center openly communicates its philosophy, mission, activities and funding to the public. Changes are also communicated. Input and feedback is sought. Evaluations of the center's effectiveness and efficiency are shared.
- **For collaborative governance practice:** Centers act to ensure that decision making processes take place in the public eye.

Accountability Principles

Impartiality/ Neutrality

- **For the organization:** The center strives to remain unbiased and objective in all its dealings. The center does not engage in any situation that could create a conflict of interest. Relationships with individuals and other organizations are divulged (e.g. foundation or grant funding, names of board members and sponsors). Its independence (or lack thereof) from the university is communicated.
- **For collaborative governance practice:** Centers act to ensure that processes conducted under its auspices are held in an unbiased environment and conducted in a manner that ensures fairness and balance.

Accountability Principles

Confidentiality

- **For the organization:** The center holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence and does not disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so. The center's legal obligations to make information public are communicated. Clarifies how records are managed, what information is routinely made public (e.g. clients) and how other information might be made public (e.g. when required by the discovery process in a lawsuit).
- **For collaborative governance practice:** Centers act to protect the confidentiality of private communications with any of the participants.

Accountability Principles

Appropriate Policies to Guide Practice

- **For the organization:** The center has established policies that guide its practice in vital areas such as managing finances, hiring and evaluating staff, and managing its programs. Standards for the conduct of processes, including collaborative governance should be established to guide practice within the center.
- **For collaborative governance practice:** The center has policies guiding practice, such as:
 - Equity and inclusiveness
 - Effectiveness and efficiency
 - Responsiveness
 - Consensus-Based