ip for Success

...aborative initiatives do not fail because the concept is flawed. They fail be-... of poor planning and poor execution. Foresight and good preparation ...nt failure from poor planning. Good preparation brings credibility to the ef-...and helps motivate stakeholders to participate. A well-conceived process ...a credible stakeholder group provide the foundation for future success. The ...plined work of setting up for success facilitates working together.
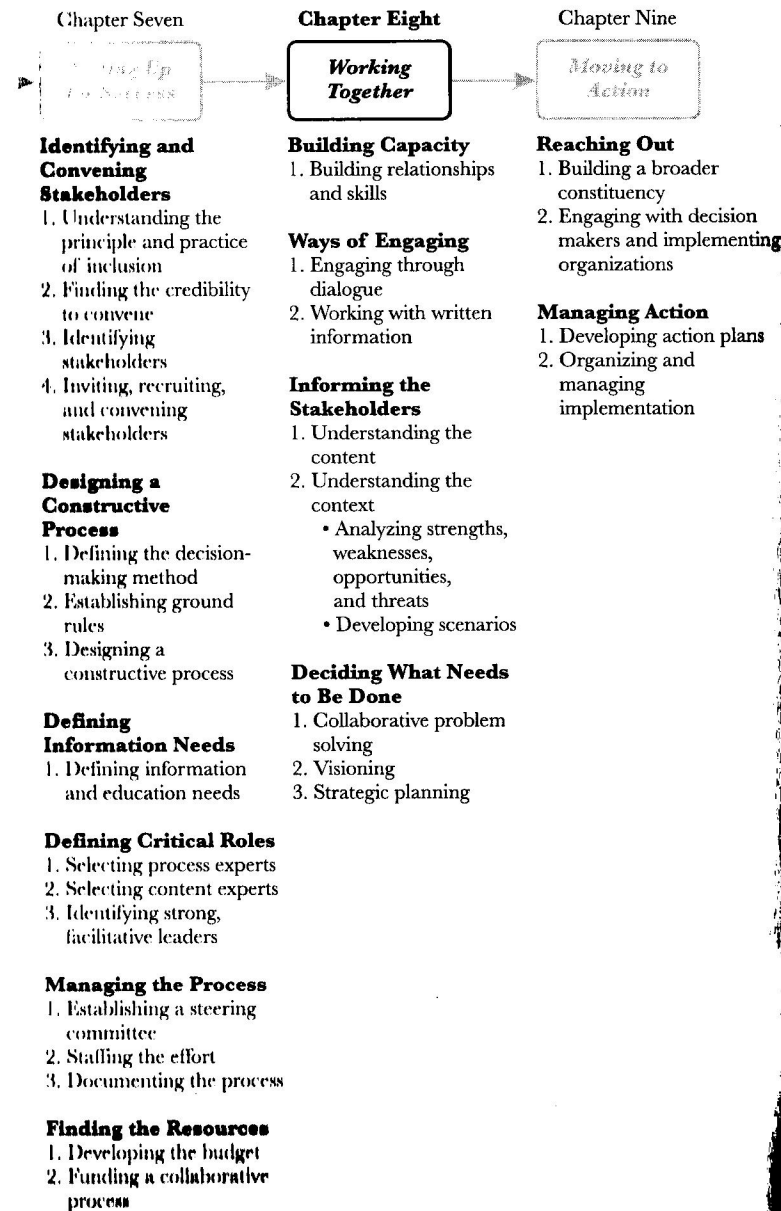
CHAPTER EIGHT

WORKING TOGETHER

Collaboration engages stakeholders in new and constructive ways. Stakeholders need relationships of trust and respect and new skills for working together. They need information that supports mutual learning and consensus-based decision making. They need specific tools and consciously designed processes to help them define problems, create visions, and decide what should be done. Addressing each of these dimensions in a synergistic way makes collaboration possible and productive. Figure 8.1 highlights the "Working Together" phase of the collaborative process.

Building Capacity

Few collaborative initiatives have the luxury of building relationships and skills prior to the engagement itself. Most stakeholders are unwilling to commit additional time to do this. They simply want to get down to work and get it over with. Successful efforts therefore build relationships and skills as part of an ongoing process. In a collaborative initiative, this work begins at the outset and continues throughout the process. Stakeholders learn to appreciate the perspectives of others while learning new skills for working together.

FIGURE 8.1. A GUIDE TO THE PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION.

Chapter Seven	Chapter Eight	Chapter Nine
. . . . . Up	*Working Together*	*Moving to Action*

Identifying and Convening Stakeholders
1. Understanding the principle and practice of inclusion
2. Finding the credibility to convene
3. Identifying stakeholders
4. Inviting, recruiting, and convening stakeholders

Designing a Constructive Process
1. Defining the decision-making method
2. Establishing ground rules
3. Designing a constructive process

Defining Information Needs
1. Defining information and education needs

Defining Critical Roles
1. Selecting process experts
2. Selecting content experts
3. Identifying strong, facilitative leaders

Managing the Process
1. Establishing a steering committee
2. Staffing the effort
3. Documenting the process

Finding the Resources
1. Developing the budget
2. Funding a collaborative process

Building Capacity
1. Building relationships and skills

Ways of Engaging
1. Engaging through dialogue
2. Working with written information

Informing the Stakeholders
1. Understanding the content
2. Understanding the context
   • Analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
   • Developing scenarios

Deciding What Needs to Be Done
1. Collaborative problem solving
2. Visioning
3. Strategic planning

Reaching Out
1. Building a broader constituency
2. Engaging with decision makers and implementing organizations

Managing Action
1. Developing action plans
2. Organizing and managing implementation

Building Relationships and Skills

Deeper relationships emerge as people begin to see others as fellow human beings rather than as strangers or opponents. The experiences and stories of participants become as valuable to the process as expert information about the content. Understanding the experiences of others fosters insight, learning, change, and agreement. Collaborative leaders legitimize the race, gender, culture, class, sector, or sexual orientation identities of stakeholders in order to ensure their engagement. Process experts design experiences that transform how stakeholders see each other. These experiences help people build trust, learn to respect and care for each other, listen to each other, and work together as peers.

Good facilitators teach new skills while facilitating the work of the group. At the beginning of each new task, the facilitator provides an outline of the process and defines and models the skills necessary to accomplish the work. Over time, the group develops a new awareness of process and the tools that make it work, and they begin to incorporate this awareness into their behaviors and actions. They learn preventions to preclude trouble and interventions to regain focus when trouble occurs. They learn to use dialogue and Socratic inquiry to build understanding of others' perspectives rather than debate different points of view. Over time, the stakeholder group's collaborative skills become the norm rather than the exception.

Beginning the Process of Relationship and Skill Building

1. *Introduce participants to each other.* Stakeholders can introduce themselves or another stakeholder. When stakeholders introduce themselves, ask them to define their role in the community rather than identifying themselves with a particular organization or position in a hierarchy. To build understanding of other perspectives, have them describe the concerns that motivated them to participate rather than their position on the issue. When stakeholders introduce others, ask them to interview others whom they do not know or do not know well and create a headline that captures something interesting about the person.
2. *Use small groups to build relationships and skills.* Working in small groups such as dyads or triads made up of people with different or unfamiliar perspectives speeds the relationship-building process and helps participants learn new skills. Groups should include people with different perspectives and experiences. Change the makeup of small groups regularly. Allow people enough time for introductions, and provide a well-defined process to guide their work. Describing and demonstrating relevant skills and designating facilitators for the small groups help ensure productive interaction and full participation. Early successes in small groups set a powerful and positive tone for subsequent work.

- See facilitators' guides like *How to Make Meetings Work* (Doyle and Straus, 1976) and *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making* (Kaner, 1996) for ideas for relationship and skill building for the process expert.

Ways of Engaging

Collaboration develops deeper agreements through shared understanding and mutual learning. The engagement requires critical faculties for listening, inquiring, and advocating. Two approaches for changing the norms of engagement can help: engaging others in dialogue as a means of creating shared meaning and understanding and working with written information to develop understanding of content and the critical assumptions that support different perspectives.

Engaging Through Dialogue

The process of dialogue changes the norms of public engagement. Rather than producing controversy through debate and argument, productive dialogue creates shared meaning and mutual learning. It builds the stakeholder group's capacity to do adaptive work through active listening and constructive inquiry and advocacy. The process legitimizes and clarifies the diverse perspectives of stakeholders. When dialogue works, learning occurs, new possibilities emerge, and relationships and skills—social capital—improve. Figure 8.2 contrasts the working premises of dialogue with those of debate.

Dialogue, like collaboration, has opening, narrowing, and closing phases. The opening phase provides a sense of safety, allowing people to suspend judgment so that new insights emerge. Participants learn from each other through inquiry-exposing reasoning and underlying assumptions supporting differing perspectives and concerns. New insights appear in the narrowing phase as participants advocate new possibilities in ways that educate and inform. New understanding and agreement develop in the closing phase. At its best, dialogue is an organic process, with each phase unfolding naturally from previous ones.

Stakeholder facility for dialogue depends on the capacity for active listening and constructive advocacy and inquiry. Groups learn these skills through structured group exercises. With regular use, these skills quickly become the norm, allowing dialogue to take place with a less structured process.

In addition to these basic skills, several other factors nurture and support a group's capacity for dialogue. A facilitator can help the group honor its guidelines for working together, raise awareness of group dynamics not apparent to those participating, and help the group work through difficult emotions, misunder-

FIGURE 8.2. DEBATE AND DIALOGUE.

Debate	Dialogue
• Assuming that there is a right answer and that you have it	• Assuming many people have part of the answer
• Combative: participants attempt to prove the other side wrong	• Collaborative: participants work together toward common understanding
• About winning	• About exploring common ground
• Listening to find flaws and make counterarguments	• Listening to understand, create shared meaning, and find agreement
• Defending our own assumptions as truth	• Revealing assumptions for evaluation
• Seeing two sides of an issue	• Seeing all sides of an issue
• Defending one's own views against those of others	• Admitting that others' thinking can improve one's own
• Searching for flaws and weaknesses in others' positions	• Searching for strengths and value in others' positions
• Discouraging further conversation by creating winners and losers	• Keeping the topic open even after discussion ends
• Seeking a conclusion or vote that ratifies your position	• Discovering new options, not seeking closure

Source: Created by Mark Gerzon for the Bipartisan Congressional Retreat. Adapted from work by the Public Conversations Project, National Study Circles Resources, Educators for Social Responsibility.

standings, and conflict when they arise. Sufficient time—two hours or more when possible—allows the process to work. More than one session may be necessary in order to reach closure on a particular topic or issue. Because dialogue creates shared meaning and understanding, participants speak more to the topic than to each other. A circle of chairs where everyone can see each other works best.

Learning the Skills of Dialogue

1. *Choose a topic or issue.* A dialogue generally focuses on a particular topic or issue.
2. *Surface personal perspectives on the topic.* Allow stakeholders to reflect on and outline their own perspective about the topic or issue. Have them identify the reasons or rationale for their perspective. Have each person verbally describe his or her perspective and the rationale behind it. This process provides practice in making thought processes visible to others. Other participants listen carefully without interrupting.
3. *Build shared understanding.* Allow listeners to ask clarifying questions that check for understanding. They are not to comment on or rebut what others say. This

provides practice in inquiring to understand others' perspective without attacking them.

4. *Refine personal perspectives.* As stakeholders begin to understand the perspectives of others, ask them to refine their personal perspective based on what they have learned from others.

5. *Focus on new insights and perspectives.* Repeat the process as necessary in dyads, triads, small groups, or the large group. When using dyads or triads, do several rounds, changing partners with each round. Observe how individual and group thinking evolves. New insights and perspectives emerge as learning takes place, and an organic consensus tends to develop as thinking converges.

- See Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* (1994) for further information about the use of dialogue and for very useful protocols for advocacy and inquiry.
- See *The Study Circle Handbook* (Study Circles, 1993), for further information about the use of dialogue for exploring public concerns.

orking with Written Information

Participants in most public engagements take information apart and debate it rather than try to understand it. Instead of using information to educate, they use it to buttress positions. The medium—the manner of presentation—often becomes more important than the message. Collaboration seeks to change these norms. Working with written information in a manner similar to dialogue fosters the skills of reading, listening, and analytical thinking.

Stakeholders begin by understanding the issues and ideas in a written document regardless of who the author is, the author's biases, or the manner of writing. This Socratic method relies on questioning to probe the meaning of a text. Socrates had a specific lesson in mind that he sought to elicit through leading questions; Socratic inquiry, however, has no particular destination in mind (see Figure 8.3). A process of inquiry using open-ended questions leads to shared understanding of the text. Using this method helps participants

- Gain knowledge and perspective through deeper understanding of written information
- Understand how others think about ideas, values, and information
- Gain new insights and learning from other participants
- Create shared meaning from the text
- Build relationships of trust and respect
- Develop skills for listening, inquiry and advocacy

FIGURE 8.3. SOCRATIC INQUIRY.

Socratic Inquiry Is	Socratic Inquiry Is Not
• Understanding issues, ideas, and values in the text	• Debate
• About the text	• Finding the "right" answer
• Acquiring new insights and perspectives from the text and from other participants	• About your opinion or position
• Making meaning from the text through exploration	• Acquiring organized knowledge

The technique of Socratic inquiry has been used with all types of audiences, especially in educational settings from kindergarten to higher education. St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, uses the technique as its central teaching method. Some programs use Socratic inquiry with inner-city and low-income groups to develop skills and knowledge for full participation in civic and political life. This wide application demonstrates that anyone, regardless of age or ability, can access text, contribute worthwhile ideas to a conversation, derive meaning from the insights of others, have their ideas valued by others who might be different from themselves, and create shared understanding and meaning by engaging with others.

As in dialogue, a circle of chairs for participants is essential. Each person should have a copy of the text in order to refer to it. People who have not read the text sit outside the circle and serve as process observers and offer comments after the session. Seminars work well with groups up to thirty people or so. For larger numbers of participants, break the group down into smaller, more manageable groups, conduct a separate inquiry with each, and then integrate learnings later. Most seminars take forty-five minutes to an hour and a half to run their course. The facilitator starts the conversation, keeps it focused on the text and the issues raised by the text, keeps it moving, and ends it at an appropriate or strategic time.

Learning the Skills of Socratic Inquiry

1. *Select and distribute a relevant text.* The best texts for Socratic inquiry are rich in issues, ideas, and values. Since ambiguity about issues, ideas, and values characterizes most public concerns, texts that uncover ambiguities serve better than those that are narrow or one-sided.

2. *Read the text.* Ask participants to read the text several times before the seminar and to note important points or questions raised by the text. Some seminar leaders

encourage participants to read the text like a love letter, examining every word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph for different meanings or interpretations.

3. *Begin the conversation.* When the group is gathered, ask an opening question to begin the conversation. Opening questions should be open-ended, lead participants deeper into the text, and reflect something about which the facilitator has genuine curiosity. If this fails to start the conversation, drop the question and try another.

4. *Keep the conversation moving.* Once the conversation is moving, intervene only to keep it focused on the text and moving but not to promote your own agenda. Ask participants to indicate and read specific paragraphs and pages within the text that support their points. Encourage them to say more if necessary. Ask what others think or how a point one person raises relates to that of another. Remember that the first objective is to understand what the author says, not to disagree with or critique the author.

5. *End the conversation.* Stop the conversation as energy decreases and before conclusions are drawn. Socratic inquiry is not a decision-making process; rather, it creates shared meaning and understanding that informs future decisions.

6. *Reflect on the experience.* Debrief the experience by quickly eliciting a word or two from each participant about his or her experience in the process. If the seminar is part of an education phase of a collaborative process, capture content points to remember from the text itself.

- See Michael Strong's *The Habit of Thought: From Socratic Seminars to Socratic Practice* (1997) and *How to Conduct Effective Socratic Seminars* (1999), a videotape, for further information about Socratic inquiry.

orming the Stakeholders

Stakeholders need two types of knowledge in a collaborative process: content information about the concerns or issues and information about the current and future context in which action will take place. Gathering and analyzing content information uses the skills of dialogue and Socratic inquiry to create a shared understanding of the issues. Analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and developing scenarios describing alternative futures helps groups understand the context for action.

erstanding the Content

Gathering and analyzing information about content helps stakeholders make good decisions in a collaborative process. In the early stages, participants build a common base of understanding about the presenting issue. In later stages, they learn about and evaluate alternative courses of action.

A history of conflict about facts and differing interpretations of implications makes finding credible sources of information challenging. Unfortunately, dueling experts and adversarial science commonly do more harm than good in informing stakeholders. More intent on telling stakeholders what to do and impressing them with what they know, content experts too often divide, confuse, and obfuscate rather than enlighten.

Stakeholders have more confidence when they determine their own information needs as well as how they will gather it, analyze it, and use it. This shared understanding becomes a central reference point for the remainder of the process. Gathering and analyzing information in credible and constructive ways serves several purposes. Because most public issues require adaptive work, new insights and perspectives arise from a deeper understanding of the content. Relationships and skills develop through interaction with written information, content experts, and other stakeholders. With more understanding of and confidence in relevant information, stakeholders make better decisions.

Defining Information Needs

1. *Determine areas of concern.* Ask stakeholders, "When you think about the future of [the issue], what concerns you the most?" Give them time for personal reflection, and then have them share their ideas with others in dyads or triads. Have them use dialogue for clarifying other participants' views without argument. Use two or three rounds to build understanding. Ask all stakeholder to refine their concerns at the end of each round, building on what they hear from others. Once the rounds are complete, ask each person to narrow his or her list to the two or three most important concerns. In the large group, ask each person to share one of those concerns. Write each one on a sticky note and stick it on the wall. Continue until all concerns are out (the number will not be too large because many ideas will be duplicated). Ask the stakeholders to group similar concerns. Once they are satisfied with the groupings, have them name the groups. This becomes the initial list of shared concerns.

2. *Identify the information needed to address the concerns.* Ask the stakeholders to consider the question, "What do we need to know in order to make good decisions?" Use a brainstorming process to develop an initial list. Combine and group ideas as necessary. Have the list checked by an outside source to be sure that nothing significant has been overlooked.

3. *Determine the best sequence for working with the information.*

4. *Determine the process for gathering information.* There are several options: task groups within the larger stakeholder group, individual experts, panels of experts, surveys, or outside assessments by academic or consulting groups. Develop criteria to help determine which approach to use. Stakeholders must agree on how

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to gather the information and how to select resources as a key step in building confidence in the information.

5. *Agree on roles and responsibilities for gathering information.* Sometimes task groups within the stakeholder group can be assigned to gather information. Task groups should be given specific instructions about their role and tasks by the larger stakeholder group and should have diverse membership so that narrow interests or perspectives do not bias the findings.

6. *Decide how to use the information.* Stakeholders must decide how the information will be presented, organized, analyzed, and considered.

7. *Record the information for future use.* Record the learnings or things to remember as preparation for moving to the next stage. Check that all necessary information has been gathered and considered. Prepare for problem-defining or visioning activities by asking stakeholders to list what is known and not known about the issue. This helps frame activities in subsequent stages.

- See John R. Ehrmann and Barbara L. Stinson, "Joint Fact-Finding and the Use of Technical Experts" (1999), for further information.

nderstanding the Context

Public problems and opportunities do not happen in a vacuum; they take place within a particular context—a bigger picture or a wider regional, national, or even global perspective—and a varied history of efforts to address them. Understanding this larger context grounds the work of stakeholders and helps them make more responsive decisions. New visions and strategies should connect current reality with a desired future state. Stakeholders must respond to both current and future needs. Unfortunately, most interventions on public issues, collaborative or otherwise, pay little heed to understanding the context for action. Decisions are disconnected from both current reality and the vagaries of an uncertain future.

Two powerful tools can help stakeholders understand the current and future context. First, analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis) surfaces the contextual challenges in the near term. Second, developing scenarios exposes the deep uncertainties inherent in any future context and highlights alternate possibilities for how the future might unfold.

Analyzing Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT). Businesses have used SWOT analysis as a tool for strategic planning for decades. Now communities and regions use it in the public arena. Strengths and weaknesses describe features of the community or region that help or hinder its capacity to deal with the presenting issues. Opportunities and threats define features of the cur-

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Working Together

in positive or negative ways. Understanding the implications of these features helps inform other aspects of collaborative work, such as developing scenarios, collaborative problem solving, visioning, and strategic planning.

Analyzing Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

1. *Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.* Ask participants to make a list of each of these aspects from their own perspective. Use the tools of dialogue in dyads, triads, or other small groups to build shared understanding and develop a broader perspective. Have participants refine and prioritize their lists. Transfer the top three or four points from each list to large sticky notes. Group them by category: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Further grouping within categories helps emphasize particularly significant features.

2. *Analyze the information.* Strengths describe assets or features of the community or region that support future action. Weaknesses define challenges or barriers that must be compensated for in order to make progress. Opportunities identify features of the contextual environment that can be used to advantage. Potential threats may undermine efforts to move ahead. After identifying these features, ask the group to consider their implications for future action.

Developing Scenarios. The few trenchant questions in a SWOT analysis help stakeholders understand the current and near-term features of the contextual environment. Understanding a future fraught with uncertainty is more challenging. The key variables or driving forces affecting the future of a community or region—population growth, changing business environments, shifting tax bases, growing social problems, economic globalization, developments in new technology, increasing interdependence with other communities and regions, and others—are generally unpredictable or out of its control. Beyond a few years out, forecasting becomes inaccurate or impossible. Most groups find it easier to assume that the future will be very much like today rather than consciously considering its unpredictability. This limited understanding of the future context can lead to unresponsive and ungrounded decisions with potentially harmful consequences.

When forecasting is unreliable, other tools must be used to consider the inherent unpredictability of the future. Anticipating the future in a rapidly changing environment calls for more than systematic analysis; it demands creativity, insight, and intuition. Developing scenarios or stories about possible futures combine these elements into a foundation for improving community and regional visions and strategies. Understanding the contextual environment helps shape proposed strategies and actions.

Distinguishing three types of uncertainties helps define the purpose and focus of scenarios. First, statistical forecasting techniques can predict some factors affecting the future when sufficient history and data exist. For example, insurance companies use actuarial data about accidents and mortality to identify the probability of future events in order to set premiums.

Second, some factors affecting the future cannot be accurately predicted, though different plausible assertions can be made about what may happen to these "structural" uncertainties. The ongoing debate between the bulls and the bears reflects the inherent structural uncertainty of the stock market. Both sides rely on the same information about the performance of the economy. They discern common patterns while drawing different conclusions. Each side tells a very different yet plausible story about how the future might unfold—one optimistic, one pessimistic. Neither predicts the future with any level of confidence. When structural uncertainties pervade, a scenarios process identifies a range of plausible assertions or assumptions about them and creates stories about what the future might be like. The majority of the most important factors affecting the future of a community or region fall in the category of structural uncertainties.

Third, some uncertainties are virtually unknowable. What are referred to as "acts of God" might include such things as terrorist attacks, catastrophic floods or other weather-related events, collisions with meteors, and surprise acts of war. A community or region can prepare for these events by putting in place structures, protocols, and organizations to deal with potential emergencies. Neither forecasting nor scenarios can help cope with these unpredictable events.

A scenarios process begins by identifying the structural uncertainties—the driving forces—affecting the future of the community or region. Internally consistent stories based on different assumptions about these forces describe possible future contexts. Each story describes a larger world in which a community or region may have to live. A community or region will have little control over this external environment.

Unlike traditional forecasting or research approaches, scenarios present alternative images instead of extrapolating current trends. They embrace qualitative perspectives and the potential for sharp discontinuities that more quantitative models exclude. Creating scenarios requires decision makers and stakeholders to question their broadest assumptions about the way the world works so they can foresee decisions that might be missed or denied. Within a community or region, scenarios provide a common vocabulary and an effective basis for communicating complex, and sometimes paradoxical, conditions and options. By providing a deep understanding of the future context, scenarios allow communities and regions to create realistic, responsive, and grounded visions and strategies.

The use of scenarios as a way of enhancing visioning and strategic planning efforts has expanded in recent years from the corporate world to government

and, now, to communities, regions, and countries. Royal Dutch Shell developed the methodology to help make better decisions about volatile oil prices. The Global Business Network, a California consulting group, refined the process in the private sector through its work with large corporations. In the public arena, scenarios have been used to guide South Africa's transition from apartheid to a multiracial democracy, cope with the challenges of economic and population growth in Missoula, Montana, and Charlotte, North Carolina, and restructure the nonprofit sector in the Boston metropolitan region.

Scenarios serve several purposes. They can help a community or region identify an emerging public agenda and build agreement on concerns that need to be addressed. The stories offer a starting point or artifact to react to and build on. They inform the visioning process by helping stakeholders identify qualities or aspects of the future they would like to create or avoid. Stakeholders test strategies by evaluating which options work best in different future environments.

Within communities and regions, the scenarios process helps build trust and skills for collaboration among disparate stakeholders. The process provides a safe environment to explore difficult issues and improve communication. Citizens, not experts, create scenarios. Different and varied perspectives among stakeholders challenge current assumptions about the future. The stakeholder group or a smaller task group can develop the scenarios.

The tools of facilitation, dialogue, and Socratic inquiry support the work of developing scenarios. Some of the subtle aspects of developing scenarios such as identification of driving forces and the development of scenario themes require skillful and experienced facilitators to get good results. Process experts new to scenarios should work with more experienced people when possible.

Developing Scenarios

1. *Set up the scenarios development process.* Identify the scenario development group participants, and design the scenario development process.
2. *Conduct individual interviews.* Interviews with a cross-section of the stakeholder group help focus the scenario work. They identify pertinent strategic questions and ensure the relevance of the scenario work. These interviews generally follow the format and protocol described in Chapter Six.
3. *Educate the stakeholders or the scenario working group.* Stakeholders need to understand the purpose of scenarios and how they will be developed and used. Background information from individual interviews or other studies provides a shared understanding that ensures the relevance of scenarios to presenting concerns. New perspectives from experts and "remarkable people," that is, unconventional

thinkers with particular insight, inform the work and challenge stakeholders to consider hidden or unspoken dimensions of possible futures (Schwarz, 1994).

4. *Identify the driving forces.* The scenario working group identifies the driving forces: the most important and uncertain factors affecting the future of the community or region. Use dyads, triads, or other small groups to brainstorm possible driving forces. Use sticky notes to rank driving forces first by importance and then by degree of uncertainty. The five to ten most important and uncertain factors become the driving forces for the scenarios.

5. *Develop scenario themes or story plots.* Participants create scenario themes or story plots by making different plausible assumptions about the driving forces. Out of a range of possibilities, the group chooses two to four themes or plots. Good themes or plots are relevant, plausible, provocative, and divergent.

6. *Create the scenarios.* The scenarios working group expands the themes or plots into stories about how the future might unfold. Each story has an internally consistent logic that considers what happens to each of the driving forces, catalytic events that might occur, how the story progresses over time, possible newspaper headlines, early indicators, and a symbolic name that vividly captures the essence of the story and quickly distinguishes it from the others.

7. *Prepare the scenarios for use.* Scenarios are tools for developing visions and strategies, not an end product. The scenarios working group develops a means of presenting the scenarios for use by stakeholders and others. This might include written stories, multimedia presentations, or improvisational theater.

- See Chapter Fifteen, "Scenarios: Catalysts for Civic Change," for examples of the use of scenarios in the public arena.
- See Peter Schwartz's book, *The Art of the Long View* (1991), for a good introduction to scenarios. Kees van der Heijden's book, *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation* (1996), although directed more to the private sector, provides the most help on the subtleties of scenario development and describes specific processes for various steps. *Learning from the Future* (1998), edited by Liam Fahey and Robert M. Randall, offers valuable ideas about scenario themes, story plots and the use of scenarios for developing testing visions and strategies.

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ciding What Needs to Be Done

New relationships, skills, and understanding prepare stakeholders for the real work of collaboration: deciding what needs to be done. Inquiry and learning shift to building agreements. The open-narrow-close framework provides guidance. Up to this point, the process has been one of opening. Now the work turns to nar-

rowing as stakeholders define problems or create visions and identify alternative solutions or strategies. Finally, closing occurs, with clear and firm agreements about what should be done. This work must be carefully designed, skillfully facilitated, and powerfully led. Most collaborative initiatives use some combination of collaborative problem solving, visioning, and strategic planning to help stakeholders decide what needs to be done.

- See Chapter Seven, "Setting Up for Success," for more information on choosing an approach or combination of approaches.

Collaborative Problem Solving

Collaborative problem solving relies on a particular set of tools and strategies to help stakeholders define problems and solutions. More specifically, it defines a way of organizing the work of deciding what needs to be done. Public concerns require adaptive work and a heuristic and iterative process for getting results. Though this may sound chaotic, an underlying logic helps make it work. First, a group cannot agree on solutions unless it agrees on the underlying problem or problems. Collaborative problem solving defines problems before defining solutions. Second, each step in collaborative problem solving has its opening or generative phase, its narrowing or evaluating phase, and its closing or reaching agreement phase. Third, a series of specific steps guide the process. For collaborative problem solving to work, groups must engage on the same task at the same time.

Six Steps for Collaborative Problem Solving

Michael Doyle and David Straus (1976) outlined six steps, each designed to answer a specific question, for organizing the work of collaborative problem solving.

Defining Problems

1. *How do stakeholders perceive the problem?* The problem definition phase begins with the perception of the problem. This first step surfaces and legitimizes different perceptions of the problem and helps define its dimensions.
2. *What is the real problem?* This step specifically defines the problem.
3. *Why is it a problem?* The group analyzes the problem, building an understanding of its causes and consequences. This deeper understanding provides the basis for developing solutions.

Defining Solutions

4. *What are possible solutions to the problem?* The solution phase begins by generating alternative ideas for solving the problem. Creativity rather than practicality shapes this dynamic stage of the process.
5. *How should these alternatives be evaluated?* Alternatives must be evaluated in order to narrow the range of possible solutions. This analytic stage considers the desirability and practicality of alternative solutions.
6. *What is the solution?* What will the group's decision be? This step requires agreement on both how the final decision will be made—the process—and what the decision will be—the content.

- See Michael Doyle's and David Straus's *How to Make Meetings Work* (1976) and Sam Kaner's *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making* (1996) for further information on the concepts and tools used in collaborative problem solving.

Visioning

Over the past three decades, the concept of vision has dominated thinking about setting direction. Heroic, charismatic leaders show the way by providing an inspiring vision. The leader persuades followers to align themselves in support of the leader's vision and motivates them to achieve it. Some circumstances—a crisis, for example—may require this style of leadership. The complexity of public concerns and the diversity of people affected by them demand a different style.

In the public arena, citizens are more likely to respond to a vision they helped create than to the vision of a single leader. A shared vision leads to mutual understanding and commitment. This does not mean, as some think, a diminished need for leadership. Rather than a solitary, visionary leader painting a picture of what needs to be done (the content), a few credible leaders provide inspiration and a means (the process) for creating a shared vision. Collaborative leaders help stakeholders set direction and inspire them to move in that direction.

Several recurring themes characterize the notion of a vision. A vision describes a desirable future to be realized over a period of time. An effective vision invigorates and inspires people to achieve it. A compelling vision aligns people in pursuit of it. A vision answers the questions of what will be done, why it should be done, and how it will be done. It is not abstract. When in place, a vision provides a context and rationale for decision making and criteria—values—to guide action. Achieving a vision requires creativity, risk taking, and experimentation. A shared vision creates expectations when people can feel what it would mean to achieve it. A palpable tension pulls energy toward the vision. Specific strategies

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link current circumstances to a desirable future state, grounding the vision in the realities of the current and future context.

When old ways of thinking and acting fail to match changing circumstances, a shared vision can provide a revolutionary reconception of future possibilities. By providing a broader context for action, a shared vision allows people to break out of historic mind-sets. It shifts emphasis from the present to the future by redirecting energy toward positive, desirable outcomes rather than avoidance of negative, undesirable consequences.

Creating a Shared Vision

The best visioning processes integrate personal vision into shared vision by finding common ground. The process is organic and emergent rather than logical and rational. It taps both the heart and the mind of participants. As in other collaborative processes, a visioning process moves from a generative phase—opening—to an evaluative phase—narrowing—to an alignment or agreement phase—closing. A successful process generates alignment with the vision.

1. *Define shared vision and its importance.* Participants understand the definition of a vision, its importance, and the process for creating a shared vision.
2. *Identify personal visions.* Have participants take a few minutes to define their personal vision. Ask them to create a compelling image of a desirable future relevant to presenting issues and concerns that is personally meaningful and fulfilling and serves the needs of society. Have them describe it in terms of what it would look like and feel like, and how they would experience it. Ask them to define the values that inform and support their vision. Have them identify any personal concerns or aspirations. Ask them to see their vision in the present as if it had been achieved and to capture particular images of success. When they are finished, ask them to circle key themes and images.
3. *Expand and refine personal visions.* Ask participants to share their personal visions in dyads or triads. Have listeners look for aspects in common and for ideas that support or enhance their own vision. Listeners can ask clarifying questions but should not critique another's vision. Have participants do two or three rounds of sharing their personal vision and incorporating ideas from others at the end of each round. On completion, have each participant identify three to five key themes or images that are especially important to them.
4. *Record elements of personal visions.* Record essential elements of personal visions on sticky notes. Be sure other participants understand the meaning of each element. Put the sticky notes on a wall where all are visible.
5. *Create a shared vision.* Have the group put common themes or images together with other similar themes or images. Ask group members to describe the rationale

for why particular themes and images go together. Have participants move the sticky notes until all are satisfied with groupings. Ask the group to name the groupings. This label identifies the characteristics, dimensions, and values implicit in the vision. Contradictions within groupings or between groupings should be reconciled if necessary at this point. Check for missing elements that would help make the vision clear and complete. Have participants draft a vision statement incorporating these various aspects and check for alignment.

- See Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990) and *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1994), along with Carl Moore, Gianni Longo, and Patsy Palmer, "Visioning" (1999), for further information on and other approaches to visioning.

ategic Planning

Strategic planning incorporates both collaborative problem solving and visioning into a more comprehensive approach. It establishes a disciplined process for responding to a dynamically changing context. The process provides a means for creating a plan while concurrently building support for it. It defines strategic goals and objectives, as well as specific actions necessary to achieve them. The plan itself becomes a means of communication and a structure for management and control. The use of scenarios complements the work of strategic planning under conditions of great uncertainty. A strategic plan provides a rationale for future actions, sets priorities, and describes how work will be done.

Once a discipline reserved for experts, the practice of strategic planning has evolved into a collective endeavor. In the past, policy analysts would study an issue and use their intelligence and education to develop optimal strategies or policies. The increasing complexity of public issues and diversity of political perspectives, coupled with growing distrust of government, undermined confidence in the work of the "best and the brightest." In an age of uncertainty, optimal strategies no longer exist. Sound strategy requires a skillful strategy process capable of accomplishing adaptive work, not a cadre of experts. Sound strategies mobilize the assets of a community or region and lead to synergistic combinations of programs and services that produce results and enhance the health and sustainability of the area. Figure 8.4 contrasts traditional and evolving approaches to strategic planning.

A skillful strategy process builds sound strategy by improving the match between the evolving needs of a community or region and the capacity to respond to these needs. It informs and facilitates a strategic conversation among stakeholders that leads to alignment and commitment. It uses a wide range of techniques and tools to help stakeholders define the concerns or issues that need to be addressed,

FIGURE 8.4. APPROACHES TO STRATEGIC PLANNING.

Traditional Strategic Planning	Evolving Strategic Planning
• Expert driven • Looking for "correct" answer or "optimal" strategy • Objective, rational, and analytic • Predictive	• Stakeholder driven • Looking for most skillful strategy process • Open, flexible, and adaptive • No one right answer—"best" answer is what stakeholders determine it to be

identify the challenges or barriers to action, analyze the contextual environment, describe current reality, envision a desirable future, and develop strategies for achieving this future. Figure 8.5 describes this framework.

Facilitating a Skillful Strategy Process

1. *Define the strategic questions to be addressed.* A skillful strategy process responds to particular needs. Identifying these needs and defining the questions that need to be answered about these concerns determines the focus of strategic planning. Open-ended questions like those described in "Understanding How Citizens Think About Public Issues" in Chapter Six can help inform this work.

2. *Describe the current and future context.* Understanding the context helps ground strategy development. This includes understanding the challenges and barriers to dealing with presenting issues, identifying the relevant structural uncertainties affecting the future of the community or region, and analyzing the current and possible future contexts in which the community or region will have to exist. The tools and techniques described in "Analyzing the Context for Collaboration" in Chapter Six, along with SWOT analysis and scenarios, can help inform this work.

3. *Describe current reality: where we are.* Skillful strategies help communities and regions move from where they are to where they want to be. A description of current reality includes an assessment of the current capacity of the community or region to meet critical needs and an analysis of its capacity for change. SWOT analysis can be particularly helpful in describing current reality.

4. *Envision the desired future: where we want to be.* A vision of a desired future defines the target for strategy development. A skillful strategy process ensures that the vision is robust, that is, it will be viable in a range of plausible future environments. The visioning technique defined in this chapter can be used to develop the vision. SWOT analysis and scenarios can be used to test the viability of the vision.

5. *Define strategies: how we get there.* Strategies define what a community or region should do in order to achieve the desired future state. Strategy development

may include understanding what is known about how this can be accomplished and defining the assets of the community or region relevant to the vision. Sound strategies describe a synergistic combination of policies, programs, and services that can achieve this future. They define the capacities the community or region needs in order to implement these strategies, as well as the actions necessary to build these capacities. SWOT analysis and scenarios can be used to test the viability of proposed strategies.

- See Kees van der Heijden's *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation* (1996) for further information on evolving approaches to strategic planning.
- See John Kretzmann and John McKnight's *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (1993) for further information on identifying and mobilizing community assets.

rom Recommendations to Action

While a collaborative process builds agreement among participating stakeholders, its larger purpose is to build agreement in the community or region. The makeup of the stakeholder group and the quality of its work provide the credibility to move recommendations to action. By working together in skillful ways, communities and regions build the capacity for moving to action.

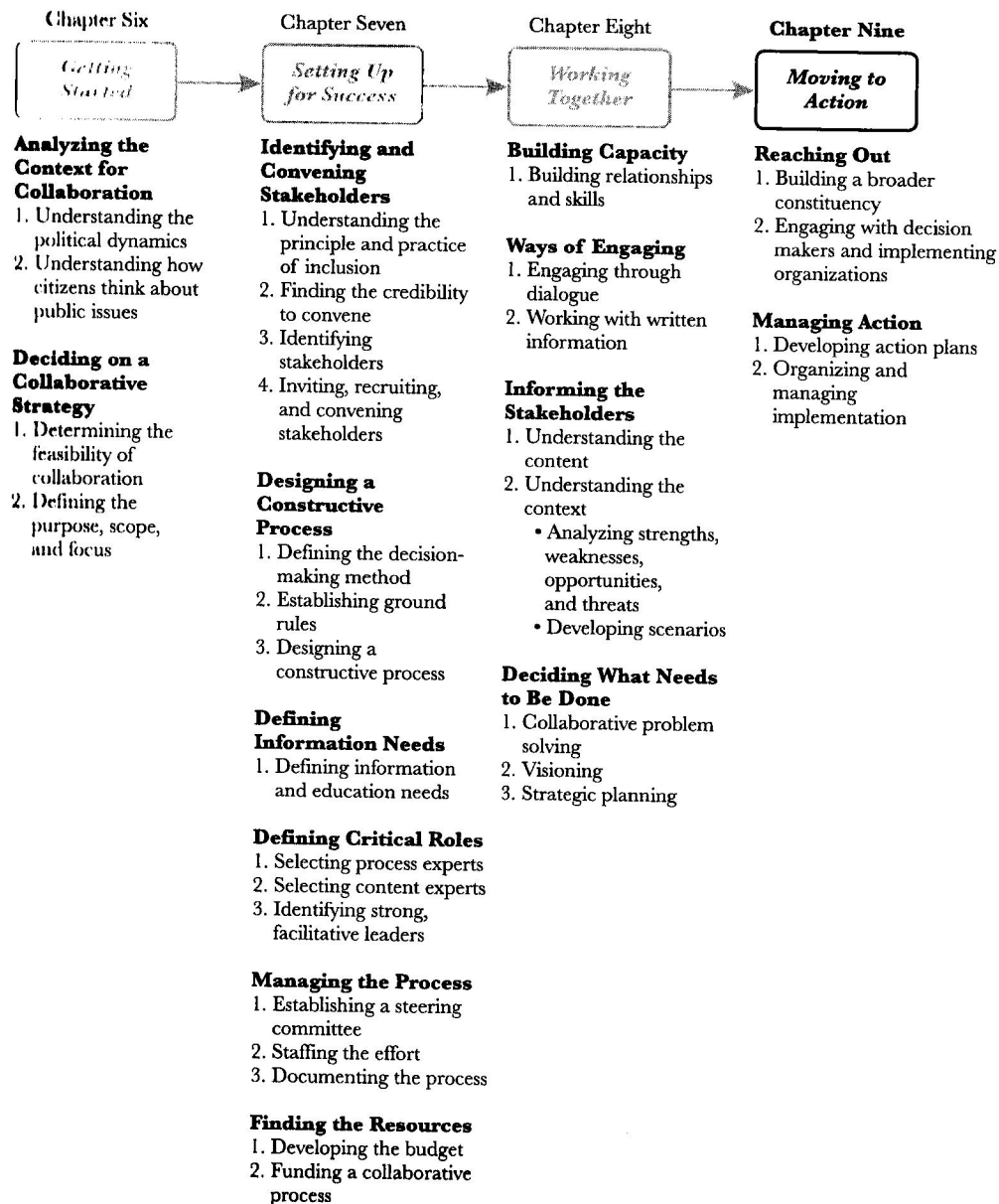### FIGURE 8.5. STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORK.
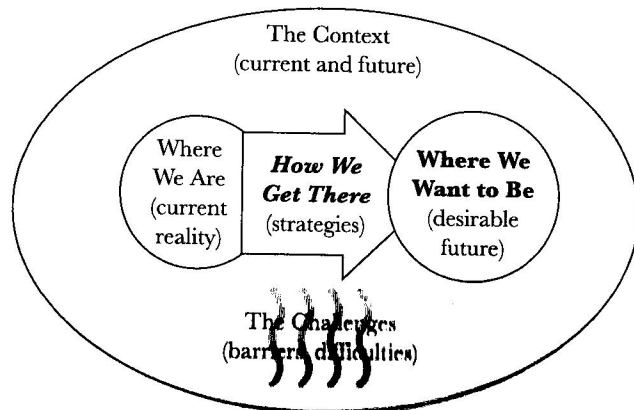
CHAPTER NINE

MOVING TO ACTION

Citizens must ultimately judge civic leadership strategies by the results they produce. In leadership theorist James MacGregor Burns's words, "Power and leadership are measured by the degree of production of intended effects" (Burns, 1978, p. 22). Successful civic leaders choose strategies most likely to lead to results. If old ways fail, they invent new means for achieving results. Collaboration itself emerged as a leadership strategy in the public arena when more traditional strategies could no longer produce intended results.

Similarly, the success of a collaborative effort depends on the capacity of stakeholders to convert their agreements into meaningful results in the community. Stakeholders must cope with a number of challenges in order to move recommendations to action. Their conclusions will inevitably be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Agreements reached through trust, constructive engagement, and mutual learning may not translate into hierarchical organizations managed by command and control. Parochial politics may undermine collaborative action.

The process of collaboration itself creates the assets for overcoming these challenges. Well-conceived and well-executed initiatives create a constituency for change with carefully considered recommendations and well-informed rationale. Reaching out to the community builds a broader constituency, thus extending and strengthening this work. This expanded influence helps hold formal decision-making bodies, public agencies, and implementing organizations accountable for moving to action. Figure 9.1 highlights the "Moving to Action" phase of the collaborative process.

FIGURE 9.1. A GUIDE TO THE PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION.

Chapter Six	Chapter Seven	Chapter Eight	Chapter Nine
Getting Started	*Setting Up for Success*	*Working Together*	**Moving to Action**

Analyzing the Context for Collaboration
1. Understanding the political dynamics
2. Understanding how citizens think about public issues

Deciding on a Collaborative Strategy
1. Determining the feasibility of collaboration
2. Defining the purpose, scope, and focus

Identifying and Convening Stakeholders
1. Understanding the principle and practice of inclusion
2. Finding the credibility to convene
3. Identifying stakeholders
4. Inviting, recruiting, and convening stakeholders

Designing a Constructive Process
1. Defining the decision-making method
2. Establishing ground rules
3. Designing a constructive process

Defining Information Needs
1. Defining information and education needs

Defining Critical Roles
1. Selecting process experts
2. Selecting content experts
3. Identifying strong, facilitative leaders

Managing the Process
1. Establishing a steering committee
2. Staffing the effort
3. Documenting the process

Finding the Resources
1. Developing the budget
2. Funding a collaborative process

Building Capacity
1. Building relationships and skills

Ways of Engaging
1. Engaging through dialogue
2. Working with written information

Informing the Stakeholders
1. Understanding the content
2. Understanding the context
 • Analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
 • Developing scenarios

Deciding What Needs to Be Done
1. Collaborative problem solving
2. Visioning
3. Strategic planning

Reaching Out
1. Building a broader constituency
2. Engaging with decision makers and implementing organizations

Managing Action
1. Developing action plans
2. Organizing and managing implementation

The recommendations of stakeholders must be legitimized and accepted by the community, decision makers, and implementing groups before the actual work of implementation begins. Once this occurs, stakeholders and implementing groups can develop action plans that clearly define roles and responsibilities and establish appropriate structures to manage the work.

Reaching Out

Consciously planned efforts to build a broader constituency and engage with decision makers and implementing organizations help stakeholders move recommendations to action. Stakeholders help mitigate divisions in the community or region by educating and engaging others while expanding their own influence. Informing decision makers and implementing organizations about the progress of collaborative work prevents future surprises. The success of future negotiations with these bodies depends on the efforts to keep them informed.

Building a Broader Constituency

The broader community needs to understand the work of the stakeholder group, its thinking process, and the rationale for its conclusions. Reaching out to the community or region begins early and recurs regularly. It uses a variety of media to inform, educate, and work with others in order to gain their support. Consistent with the idea of collaboration, engagements with the broader community use similar processes for working together. Stakeholders reach out to diverse interests to communicate the importance of collaboration. Public forums do more than share information or gauge public support. Citizens have real opportunities to help shape stakeholder recommendations.

The various stages of a collaborative effort provide logical points for reaching out. At the start, letting others know about the process, its purpose, who participates, and how the effort fits with other public decision-making processes helps alleviate suspicion. This clarifies the role citizens can play and informs them about future opportunities to participate. Early efforts to reach out provide an opportunity to expand the stakeholder group if others want to participate. As a collaborative effort progresses, stakeholders can provide citizens with summaries of work in progress and a rationale for their work and engage others in improving it.

The steering committee and the stakeholders manage outreach to the community as a specific track of a collaborative process. They carefully design each effort to achieve specific objectives. Several considerations guide this design work:

- What are the desired results or outcomes?
- What do people need to know at the current stage of the effort?
- How will this information be communicated?
- Who will communicate this information?
- What processes will be used to engage others in useful ways?

As in stakeholder meetings, skillful facilitation helps make these events effective. If public meetings do not work, citizens will not support the effort. Process experts can facilitate the engagement, but stakeholders must provide leadership and speak for their work. Citizens get a firsthand account of the experience of collaboration and learn about the results from the people who did the work.

Public forums offer one way of reaching out. Other media complement face-to-face meetings and reach a broader audience. Stakeholders have used radio call-in shows, live television presentations, extended newspaper coverage, special inserts in newspapers, and messages included in utility bills to communicate their work.

Facilitating a Public Forum

One example of a public forum looks like this:

1. *Review the history and purpose of the collaborative effort.* Citizens need to know the purpose of the initiative, why a collaborative strategy is needed, and how the effort fits with other public decision-making processes.
2. *Review the concept of collaboration.* Citizens need to understand the premise and principles of successful collaboration.
3. *Review and clarify roles and responsibilities.* A clear description of the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, decision makers, and implementing organizations helps citizens understand how they can engage in the effort.
4. *Identify participating stakeholders.* Citizens need to see the stakeholder group as a microcosm of the community, not as a narrow interest group. The credibility of the stakeholder group enhances the credibility of the effort.
5. *Review the status of the stakeholder process.* Let participants know what work has been accomplished and what remains to be done.
6. *Present an overview of work accomplished and clarify for understanding.* This may include educational information, problem definitions, visions, solutions, or strategies. Describe the considerations supporting this work and the rationale for any conclusions.
7. *Engage citizens.* Ask participants to assess the work in progress. Have them identify strong points, and elicit ideas from them for improving or enhancing the work.
8. *Review next steps.* Identify future opportunities for engagement.

Engaging with Decision Makers and Implementing Organizations

By building a broader constituency, stakeholders demonstrate broad-based support for their work. This augments the capacity of the stakeholder group to influence decision makers and implementing organizations to act on its recommendations.

When recommendations require legislative action, stakeholders work closely with elected officials and public agencies. The nature of this engagement ranges from acquiescence to working partnerships to challenging negotiations. In any circumstance, stakeholders need to recognize that their collective influence can be formidable and compelling even without formal authority. Power does not reside solely in the hands of decision makers. Although the active support of elected leaders enhances the possibilities of collaboration, stakeholders do not need the permission of elected leaders to do their work.

Effective links between citizen-driven efforts and elected leaders help ensure the success of these initiatives and can take different forms. Sometimes elected leaders participate directly as stakeholders. At other times, they help identify and select the stakeholders. Some examples of collaboration move forward without the support of elected leaders. Citizens provide leadership when elected leaders either cannot or will not take the initiative.

Collaborative processes can provide the conceptual framework for coherent public policy. This helps elected leaders understand what needs to be done in a deeper way and provides a comprehensive basis for action. Sometimes elected leaders use the credibility of collaborative stakeholder groups to provide the cover they need to take politically risky actions. At other times, stakeholders use their collective influence to hold elected leaders and formal organizations accountable for action on their recommendations. Stakeholders become, in John Gardner's words, "a constituency for the whole" (Gardner, 1990, p. 109) that can speak credibly for the larger community, not just another interest group.

In many cases, civic action does not depend on legislative approval. Instead, working together leads to new partnerships between existing organizations or the creation of new entities to move recommendations to action. As with relationships with elected leaders, the links between stakeholders and potential implementing organizations take different forms. Where possible, members of these organizations participate as stakeholders in the collaborative process. They provide a communication link to their organizations but are not solely responsible for gaining its support. The stakeholder group as a collective body provides the most important link with implementing organizations.

Just as in reaching out to the community or region, communicating with decision makers and implementing organizations begins early and recurs regularly. Information about the status of the effort, including what the stakeholder group

In thinking and why, where it is in the process, what kinds of information it is considering, and who is participating, helps prevent future surprises and enhances the credibility of the initiative. Feedback from these groups helps stakeholders understand potential legislative or organizational constraints, allowing them to formulate better recommendations. The steering committee manages these efforts using stakeholders to convey the value and credibility of the work to other influential parties.

Managing Action

Successful collaboration produces tangible results that leads to real progress on public issues while changing the way communities do business. Careful and conscious effort turns recommendations into agreements and agreements into action plans, structures, and organizing frameworks to facilitate the transition from vision to action. Most agreements reached through collaboration require coordination of cross-boundary activities, sharing of management responsibilities, finding and mobilizing resources, and mutual accountability. Sometimes complex agreements lead to subsequent smaller-scale collaborative initiatives to refine action plans. Stakeholders need to define action steps, clarify roles and responsibilities, and put structures in place to oversee and evaluate implementation.

Developing Action Plans

Action plans specify what work needs to be done, who will do it, and when it will be done. A stakeholder group will often designate a special task group to do this planning work. The stakeholder group oversees the work in order to maintain the integrity of their work and ensure that all parties understand its intent. The task group may need to include new people from implementing organizations that were not part of the stakeholder group.

An effective action plan consists of several elements. First, specific action steps relate directly to achieving the desired results. The steps themselves are clear and unambiguous, and each party understands their intent and meaning. Second, action steps define the roles and responsibilities of each participant or organization. Everyone knows what each party is expected to do. Sometimes a type of "job description" formalizes these arrangements. Third, a schedule or time line describes the sequence of events. Fourth, resource needs are specified and budgets or other control mechanisms established. Securing resources becomes part of the action plan. Fifth, accountability standards facilitate managing and evaluating the work of implementation. Finally, action plans need to be communicated to the

stakeholder group and to all parties responsible for implementation for review and approval.

Organizing and Managing Implementation

With action plans defined, many collaborative initiatives establish a separate structure to manage and provide oversight for implementation. Sometimes a new coordinating group or interagency committee performs this function. Some of the original stakeholders provide continuity and guidance working closely with members of implementing organizations. In other circumstances, stakeholders designate a lead agency or organization to coordinate activities or establish a new entity to do the work.

This managing structure helps turn action plans into real work. Its tasks include helping implementing organizations change internal systems to meet new demands, building new partnerships among existing organizations, establishing new organizations to meet new or unmet needs, or organizing further collaborative efforts to define what remains to be done. Analyzing existing arrangements and mapping the relationships between its parts help specify these needs.

Realizing the Promise of Collaboration

Collaboration helps communities and regions negotiate real differences in values and priorities. Moving to action converts these agreements into real change. Civic leaders choose to collaborate because it produces tangible results and teaches a more productive way of addressing public concerns. By working together, citizens develop a different kind of civic culture that builds social capital and enhances the civic community.