

KEY FACTORS SUPPORTING SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES

A consensus-based, agreement-seeking process is more likely to succeed if it has certain characteristics or certain factors are present at the beginning and throughout the process. Below is a list of many such characteristics or factors. This brief checklist cannot capture every factor or circumstance that might affect a collaborative effort. It may, nevertheless, provide a helpful roadmap for assessing the potential for success in a collaborative effort.

One way to organize ideas about the key factors supporting collaborative processes is to think about these factors as they relate to (1) *issues*, (2) *interests and participants*, and (3) *external factors*.

Factors Related to the Issues

- Clear Objectives.
 - Can the parties agree on *overall objectives* for a collaborative process?
 - Possible objectives might include:
 - agreement on specific actions or alternatives
 - agreement on recommendations to another decision-making authority
 - joint fact finding (i.e., seeking agreement on a set of scientific facts or a study)
 - improved communication/understanding among the parties (a relationship-building rather than agreement-seeking objective)
 - another clearly articulated objective.
- Manageable and Negotiable Issues.
 - Can the parties can agree on a *manageable number* of interdependent or related issues, **and**
 - Are the issues of a nature that is *amenable to collaborative negotiation* (e.g., not arising from fundamental value differences).
 - Strictly quantitative/distributive conflicts (zero sum games) may be problematic.
- Sufficient Data/Information.
 - Is there *sufficiently well developed information or data* to support a meaningful discussion?
 - If not, can needed information can be obtained/developed as part of the process?

Factors Related to the Interests and Participants

- Identifiable Representative Interests.
 - Are the relevant interests readily *identifiable*,
 - Are the relevant interests *capable of identifying* from among themselves, appropriate participants that can adequately represent their affected interests, and
 - Are the relevant interests *few enough in number* to allow for a manageable process?
 - Will *essential* parties/interests come to the table?
 - I.e., all those who could block the outcomes or who are needed for implementation.
 - Issues relevant only to society at large may be problematic.

- Identifiable Representative Participants.
 - Are the likely participants able to definitively *represent* the interests of their constituencies?
 - E.g., is the participant adequately connected with his/her constituency's leadership
- Good Faith Participation.
 - Can the parties can come to the table with a *genuine interest* in participating in good faith?
 - I.e., do they feel themselves as likely, if not more likely, to achieve their overall goals using a collaborative approach as they would through whatever alternatives are available to them?
 - I.e., do they have a “better alternative to a negotiated agreement” (BATNA)?
 - A desire to be collaborative (or not to appear un-collaborative), even if sincere, may be insufficient absent a real interest in negotiation.
 - Are the parties motivated to negotiate?
 - Are the issues sufficiently important and the outcomes sufficiently uncertain to motivate meaningful participation?
- Relationships and Trust.
 - Is there a historical relationship between the parties that either supports or undermines mutual trust and their ability to negotiate?

Factors Related to Other Parameters

- Adequate Resources and Time.
 - Can all the parties obtain *adequate resources* to participate, including technical support?
 - Is there *adequate time* to conduct a meaningful and well-designed process?
- Action-Forcing Deadline.
 - Is there some *action-forcing mechanism* that promotes a decision within the foreseeable future?
 - E.g., a legislative, administrative or judicial deadline or a time-restricted opportunity.
 - Avoid emergencies or circumstances that allow insufficient time.
- No Delay.
 - Can a collaborative effort be completed without causing *unreasonable delay*.
- Acceptable Political/Legal Context.
 - Are there *legal or political constraints* that would prevent consideration of meaningful alternatives or otherwise unreasonably constrain the outcome?
- Implementation Mechanism.
 - Is there is an available *mechanism to implement* a consensus agreement, if one is reached.

The ideas presented herein represent a synthesis of information and material prepared by many different individuals and entities involved in the facilitation of complex multi-party public policy collaborative processes. Thanks go out to the Center for Collaborative Policy, the National Policy Consensus Center, Oregon Consensus, the Policy Consensus Initiative, RESOLVE, and others.