

LEADING & COMMUNICATING

A GUIDE FOR WATERSHED PARTNERSHIPS



RECYCLED PAPER



UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP.

Successful partnerships don't just happen. They depend on the leaders who emerge from the groups. Yet, leaders of successful watershed partnerships differ from leaders of many organizations. Watershed partnership leaders do not assume the same amount of control or responsibility as do leaders of formal organizations.

WHAT DO WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP LEADERS DO?

Effective leaders generally coordinate activities and keep the partnership moving forward. They handle or delegate administrative details such as calling and conducting meetings and preparing reports.

LEADERSHIP TRAITS

- ◆ Interested in group's concerns while sensitive to individual needs
- ◆ Aware of current social and political situations
- ◆ Good communication and group interaction skills
- ◆ Respected as knowledgeable and fair
- ◆ Able to share responsibility and credit with others
- ◆ Promotes consensus, compromise and trade-offs
- ◆ Integrates a variety of different perspectives
- ◆ Patient, creative and flexible

In fact, some successful partnerships have more than one leader. Shared leadership is possible when two or more people rotate responsibilities.

TECHNICAL ADVISORS.

Technical advisors are also important to partnerships. These advisors work closely with the leader to determine tasks. They can focus on the technical validity of a plan and project. Someone from a natural resource agency or consulting group should be involved since they can help address the technical issues.

In fact, a "team" of technical advisors will likely emerge. This team should reflect the concerns and issues being addressed by the partnership. This team may be a part of the local watershed partnership or it may be separate. In either case, the *Building Local Partnerships* guide will help with building the team.

WHO MAKES AN EFFECTIVE LEADER?

An effective leader can have a wide range of backgrounds. You can be a farmer or rancher, banker, pastor, housewife, shoe salesperson, teacher, nearly anyone with an interest and commitment.

In fact, some successful partnerships

EFFECTIVE COORDINATION.

Leaders get the partnership started and keep it moving. Effective leaders serve as neutral catalysts for the groups' decisions and actions. They also accept some responsibility for helping the partnership focus on a common task. They do *not* make decisions for the group.

A skillful leader will:

Keep the purpose, goals, and approach relevant and meaningful — Help partners determine, clarify, and commit to the group's goals. Leaders can inspire appropriate actions, but should not try to move the partnership in any particular direction.

Build commitment and confidence — Understand and try to balance the needs and interests of both individuals and the overall partnership. Positive and constructive feedback helps make the partnership more successful.

Strengthen the mix, level of skills — Recognize and build on the strengths and skills of individual members of the partnership. Effective partnerships depend on having an appropriate balance of technical, interpersonal and other skills. The leader ensures that all the necessary skills are available for the partnership.

Manage relationships with outsiders, including removing obstacles — Ensure that external relationships are developed and maintained. This responsibility may be shared with other members of the partnership.

Create opportunities for others — Leaders should not try to do everything themselves. They must provide opportunities for individuals or the partnership to grow and work effectively. This involves delegation of authority and responsibility.

Do real work — Leaders are members of the partnership and are, therefore, responsible for doing their fair share of the work.

COMMUNICATION: THE KEY TO LEADERSHIP.

Successful partnerships are built on open and ongoing communication. Only this way can partners come to a shared understanding.

Communication is a two-way process. Listening is as important as speaking. Communication is never perfect. Some information is always lost or jumbled in the process.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Look for common ground — Find shared values. Consider shared personal experiences. Pay attention to and give feedback. Be yourself and expect the same of others. Be willing to accept differences in perceptions and opinions.

Find out about others — Learn about others' interests and needs. Consider their perspectives and needs. Appeal to the highest motives. Let others express themselves freely.

Attack problems, not people — Don't waste time on personal hostility. Make other people feel good. Avoid criticism and put-downs.

Give and get respect — Show respect for others' opinions. Be considerate and friendly. Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Be responsive to emotions. Speak with confidence, but remain tactful.

Proceed slowly — Present one idea at a time. Check for understanding and acceptance of each idea before moving on to the next. Speak in an organized and logical sequence.

Be explicit and clear — Share your ideas and feelings. Pay attention to nonverbal communication. Speak clearly and look at your partners. Select words that have meaning for your listeners.

Remember the five "C's" of communication — Clarity, Completeness, Conciseness, Concreteness and Correctness.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS.

LISTENING.

Listening helps us learn and shows others that we respect their views. There are three major steps to listening. First, focus your mind on the person speaking. Second, use body language to signal attention and interest. Third, verbally reflect and respond to what the speaker feels and says. Here are more tips:

Stop talking — You can't listen when you are talking. Concentrate on what others are saying. Don't interrupt or change the subject.

Slow down your thoughts — Realize that you can listen much faster than a person can talk. Pay attention and summarize what a person is saying. Don't be too quick to judge the other person.

Understand the other person — Review and summarize what they are saying. Get their meaning, not just the words. Paraphrase what you just heard. Listen for what is not said.

Control your own emotions — Don't argue mentally with the person. Avoid jumping to conclusions or going on the defensive. Avoid arguments or criticism.

Ask questions — Ask for clarification. Invite the other person to provide more detail or present new ideas.

Control your body language — Remember that actions often speak louder than words. Look at the other person. Keep eye contact. Respond as appropriate.

DISCUSSION.

Much of the work done in partnerships involves face-to-face discussions. Leaders have the responsibility for keeping discussion moving.

Ask questions — If you are not sure what a person means or why they are taking a particular position, ask for clarification. Ask people to repeat their statements in a different way. Open-ended questions (why or how) generate more discussion.

Seek information and opinions from all parties — Some people are naturally quiet or have trouble talking in groups. Provide these people with a chance to state their opinions. Listen actively and carefully to what people say.

Summarize as you go — After discussion winds down, ask for or give a brief summary of what was discussed and decided.

Stay on track — Do not let people go too far off the subject. Avoid examples that aren't relevant or last too long. Reach agreement and move on.

Manage time efficiently — If your discussion seems to get off-track or bogged down, point out the other items on your agenda. Remind them that there is a need to finish on time.

Recognize when to end discussion — Learn when there is nothing to be gained from further discussion. Help the group close discussion and make a decision.

Test for consensus — State any decisions that seem to have been made. Check if everyone agrees with the summary and can live with the decision.

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Even if you use strategies (see page 3) and are a skilled communicator, problems can still arise. When communication breaks down, partnerships get stuck. People lose energy and enthusiasm. It may help to remember these barriers.

People are different — They vary in knowledge levels, communication skills and cultural perspectives. They also have different backgrounds and frames of reference.

People are impatient — They jump to conclusions. People think faster than they listen, which often means they assume they know what another person will say next.

People are selective — They tend to only hear what they want to hear. People are also more likely to accept something that supports what they already believe.

People can be negative — They can be bossy or sarcastic. They may take things personally and get angry. People can also tend to show cynicism or mistrust.

BRAINSTORMING.*

One reason for discussion is to generate new ideas. Brainstorming is an essential way to bring out the creativity in your group. The result is often a variety of good ideas that will lead to new solutions. Below are guides for brainstorming.

Set the stage — Define your purpose in terms of what you want the group to accomplish. Provide a relaxed and informal atmosphere. Have all the necessary supplies (such as markers and flip charts) on hand.

Go for quantity — People often have different ideas. The key is to get these ideas out quickly without concern for the quality of the ideas. Evaluation comes later.

Record ideas — Ideas need to be recorded on a flip chart by a recorder. Another way to get ideas down is to allow people to silently record their ideas on post-it notes or other cards. These notes and cards are placed on a flip chart so others can see them.

Limit time — Set a time limit for generating ideas so people are motivated to get ideas out quickly. This also allows enough time for discussion and evaluation of ideas later.

Encourage free wheeling — Let people share ideas no matter how unrealistic they may be. Ask people to build off others' ideas. Don't evaluate or criticize ideas at this point.

Use humor — This will allow your group to break out of existing patterns and habits to relax and be more creative.

Follow-up — After ideas are generated, the group should identify the most promising ideas. They can then work to come up with ways to expand or improve on these. Set a time for the group to further evaluate ideas and make decisions as a group.

CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK.

Another important skill is giving and receiving constructive feedback. Good feedback skills are needed to have productive meetings and to promote cooperation among partners.

Everyone should agree that giving and receiving feedback is an important and acceptable part of how you will work together. No one should be surprised by open and honest feedback.

Be sure to provide both positive and negative feedback. We often take good work for granted and only give feedback when problems arise. It is just as important to point out something you like.

Think carefully about what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Make sure the time and place are right.

HOW TO GIVE & RECEIVE FEEDBACK

Giving...

Be descriptive. Use specific information.

Don't use labels. Be clear and objective.

Don't exaggerate.

Be exact and avoid absolutes like "always" or "never."

Don't be judgmental.

Don't compare the person you're talking to with others.

Speak for yourself.

Don't refer to what "others" say.

Talk first about yourself.

Start statements with "I" not "you."

Stick to what you know. Don't present opinions as facts.

Receiving...

Take a deep breath. Relax before responding.

Listen carefully. Don't interrupt.

Ask questions for clarity. Ask for specific examples.

Acknowledge the feedback. Repeat the message in your own words to make sure you understand.

Acknowledge valid points. Agree with what is true and what is possible.

Take time to think about what you heard. Check with others if you are not sure.

***Brainstorming:** The process of generating lots of ideas. Generates and captures innovative or creative thoughts.

CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS.

Much of the work in a partnership gets planned or done in meetings. Unfortunately, we all have spent time in meetings that turned out to be a waste of time.

These tips will help make your meetings more productive and even enjoyable.

ABOUT THE GROUP'S FIRST MEETINGS...

The first meetings are very important for establishing trust and communication. During these you'll want to:

- ◆ Learn each other's background, skills, perceptions, and interests.
- ◆ Begin to work as a partnership by recognizing each other's strengths and interests.
- ◆ Set ground rules and determine organizational structure.
- ◆ Begin to develop a purpose statement. See the *Building Local Partnerships* guide for more on this topic.

PRIOR TO THE MEETING

Select a convenient time and location. Evening meetings are usually best for people who work during the day. Lunch meetings are also possible. Ask people what they prefer.

Select a "neutral" site. Many civic clubs and restaurants provide meeting rooms. Schools and churches can also be neutral meeting sights. Avoid government offices or the offices of a partner if possible.

Develop an agenda. People like to know what to expect. These should be sent out before the meeting.

Arrange tables and chairs so that everyone can be part of the discussion. Circular tables work well as do large rectangular ones. Keep the temperature comfortable. Provide water, coffee and other refreshments.

hold meetings as often as necessary to carry out your work.

Use the agenda. Ask for suggestions on the agenda at the beginning of the meeting. Refer to the agenda to keep the meeting focused and on time.

Take minutes. These serve as reminders of what people have agreed to do. Be sure to record the group's decisions and/or concerns.

Establish specific procedures and objectives. Clearly define your own role as a leader. Get agreement on the meeting objectives and processes for conducting the meeting. Maintain the focus and direction of the group.

Promote shared decision making. Give as few directions as possible. Check for consensus at appropriate times. Ask questions and encourage sharing of ideas.

Monitor and improve group processes. Make sure the group is moving along and not getting stuck. Be patient and don't interrupt, especially during discussions or reflection. Make sure all members have an opportunity to speak and be heard.

Foster good relationships and a positive climate. Allow for creative conflicts and disagreements over issues. Discourage interpersonal confrontation or personal attacks. Avoid being defensive if you are challenged by a group member.

DURING THE MEETING

To keep the meeting focused and moving, many successful groups establish and enforce ground rules. Other techniques include:

Respect your partners' time. Never allow meetings to start or end late. Only

Before the meeting ends, try to get a sense of how it went. Ask people what they feel the meeting accomplished. Determine what unfinished business is left for next time. Set the time, place, and tentative agenda for the next meeting.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

To start down the road toward an effective local watershed partnership, you may want to read some of these other guides from the Conservation Technology Information Center by calling 765-494-9555. A \$2.00 fee is charged to cover postage and handling.

Getting to Know Your Watershed

Building Local Partnerships

Managing Conflict

Putting Together a Watershed Plan

Reflecting on Lakes

Groundwater & Surface Water: Understanding the Interaction

Guide to Information and Resources

Nonpoint Source Water Quality Contacts

The author acknowledges the following sources of information that were used in developing this guide. You may also find these publications helpful. Most of these can be found through your local bookstore.

Creating the High Performance Team.

Steve Buchholz and Thomas Roth, 1987, New York, NY: Wiley.

Executive Communication Power: Basic Skills for Management Success.

Frederick Williams, 1983, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Leadership Skills: Developing Volunteers for Organizational Success.

Emily Kittle Morrison, 1994, Tucson, AZ: Fisher Books

Solving Community Problems by Consensus.

Susan Carpenter, 1990, Washington, DC: Program for Community Problem Solving.

The Team Handbook: How to Use Teams to Improve Quality.

Scholtes, Peter R. and Associates, 1988, Madison, WI: Joiner Associates, Inc.

The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization.

Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, 1993, New York, NY: HarperCollins.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE...

This guide is one of a series for people who want to organize a local partnership to protect their watershed. This series will not solve all your problems. They were designed to provide guidance for going through the process of building a voluntary partnership, developing a watershed management plan and implementing that plan. Because the characteristics of each watershed are unique; you may wish to select and use the portions of this guide that are applicable to your particular situation.

Although the series is written for watershed-based planning areas, the ideas and process can be used for developing other types of plans (such as wildlife areas) to match the concerns of the partnership. Regardless of the area, remember a long-term, integrated perspective — based on a systematic, scientific assessment — can be used to address more than one concern at a time.

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