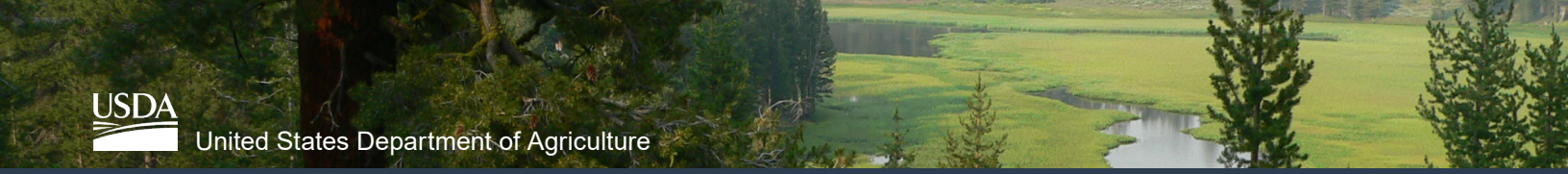


USDA United States Department of Agriculture

# BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

## The 4-P Foundation: Purposes, People, Process, and Products

Forest Service FS-1127 July 2019 (Slightly revised)

***An expert builder wisely knows that the time and care spent constructing the foundation is directly commensurate to the strength and stability of the entire building. The same is true of collaborative efforts. Whether it's building, evaluating, or rebuilding a collaborative effort, all require thoughtful consideration to what people will accomplish and how they will do it.***

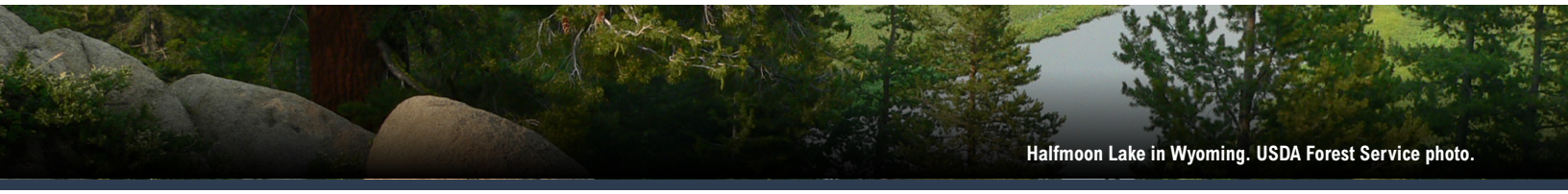
The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service National Collaboration Cadre (Collaboration Cadre)[1] has been invited to work with newly emerging collaborative groups, groups that seem to be losing their effectiveness, and groups that are brought together through a sense of urgency from either natural events or a human-induced timeframe. Some of the natural occurrences include wildfires, drought, and insect and disease outbreaks. The human-induced sense of urgency may include legislative or regulatory deadlines for competitive project applications such as the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) or the Farm Bill. Each effort is unique yet similar because a proper foundation needs to be built and maintained over time.

Gary Severson, community representative on the Collaboration Cadre, has observed this situation numerous times. "In their enthusiasm to 'get things done on the ground,' collaborative groups often overlook the foundational essentials of diverse people working together:

- What is our purpose?
- Who needs to be involved?
- How will we make decisions and resolve disagreements among us?
- Where will we focus our efforts and what will we produce?

When we examine faltering collaborative groups, we often find that a solid foundation was never built in the first place, or situations changed and what used to work is no longer working for them and their foundation needs to be revisited."

Montana Forest Restoration Working Group, Lolo National Forest in Montana. Photo courtesy of the National Forest Foundation



Halfmoon Lake in Wyoming. USDA Forest Service photo.

[1]The USDA Forest Service National Collaboration Cadre works with national forests, communities, collaborative groups, and interested stakeholders to help them engage in effective collaboration. For more information regarding this Forest Service resource, please contact Sharon Timko at sharon.timko@usda.gov.

# Case-in-Point

## A 4-Year-Old, Highly Functioning CFLRP Collaborative Group

They had successfully completed the environmental impact statements for two projects, were working on a third, and planning the fourth. However, participation in the collaborative group was dwindling, and their breadth of diversity was narrowing. The forest supervisor contacted the Collaboration Cadre asking for assistance in identifying the problems and recommending ways to get the collaborative back on track.

The Collaboration Cadre members identified several key issues leading to reduced participation:

- The focus of the group was narrow and didn't address the interests of some participants.
- The monthly meetings were always held in the same location, making some of the participants drive long distances every month, even in winter.
- The leadership of the group and many of the participants were suffering from what the Collaboration Cadre termed "collaboration fatigue"—they were tired of the constant grind of the 10-year CFLRP process. When one project ended, there was always another one waiting to take its place.
- The collaborative group's decision-making process was perceived as being unfair to those in the minority, causing some participants to attend meetings out of a sense of self-defense.
- There was a sense by some individuals that the Forest Service placated them when they suggested ideas, knowing that the Forest Service could not or would not ever implement them.

All the identified reasons the collaborative was losing participation, and hence their effectiveness, could be traced to the foundational elements of the group.

What are the essential foundational elements of people who have decided to work together?

They can be summed up in four building blocks: PURPOSES, PEOPLE, PROCESS, and PRODUCTS—the 4-Ps.

Read on to learn about the 4-Ps.

Halfmoon Lake in Wyoming. USDA Forest Service photo.



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# The 4–P Foundation: PURPOSES, PEOPLE, PROCESS, and PRODUCTS

**PURPOSES** — When people come together in a community organization, a recreational activity, a neighborhood association, a special interest group, or any of a wide variety of interests, there is a purpose or purposes that beckon people to gather together. The clarity of the purpose is the calling card for the group as it attracts more people. People are aware that investing time and energy in a group with others that share a range of interests, concerns, and values can lead to accomplishments they could never achieve on their own. The former mayor of Leadville, CO, was once asked why he participated in a collaborative effort with the Forest Service to address a bark beetle outbreak in the State's high-elevation lodgepole pine forests. He responded, "Because it makes us all bigger." The purpose is the vision, glue, and touchstone for the group and its efforts. All things of the group begin and end with the purposes.

**PEOPLE** — If the purpose provides the vision for a collaborative effort, it is the people who come together that give it life. Not all people are interested in the same things. This individuality is what provides the richness of diversity in our communities and world. When people come together to share a vision provided by a specific purpose, the dynamics of human interaction unleash great amounts of creativity and energy in striving to make the vision a reality. However, just because people may share the same vision doesn't make them monolithic. All people are uniquely different, and it is the differences of individuals working together towards a shared vision that makes collaboration so potentially powerful.

Referencing the example of the CFLRP collaborative stated earlier, an elected member of the State legislature was asked what some ideas were for reengaging a group of people into the process. The response was, "Why should we attempt to reengage them when we know that we are going to disagree with them." This is the very reason why they should be reengaged. The diversity of ideas, opinions, talents, and skills of people working together in a collaborative effort toward the same purpose provides vitality and health for the effort.

**PROCESS** — Effective collaborative groups have developed a system of governance regarding how they will work together. Governance elements include everything from the nuts and bolts of meeting logistics to how decisions will be made, and behavioral principles and guidance are all part of the process. The process agreements reached by those who are participating in a collaborative effort become the "rules of the road" that will serve the group of people as they work together.

**PRODUCTS** — Collaborative groups that meet simply to share information do not last long. People have lives to lead with many demands on their time. If the collaborative effort is not producing actual outcomes, other demands for a person's time and energy will begin to take higher priority. When a collaborative group shares a purpose or purposes, the group needs to know how to measure their progress in achieving that purpose.

***Just as mile markers on a highway inform drivers of the progress they are making toward their destination, milestones of accomplishment inform the collaborative participants of their progress in striving toward their vision or purpose. The identification of product milestones is important to allow collaborative partners to know the progress they have made, celebrate accomplishments, and inform them how much further they must go to achieve their vision and purpose.***

# Collaborative Group Resources

The following are the web links to several collaborative groups working with the Forest Service and their foundational documents*

## Colorado Bark Beetle Cooperative, Colorado

http://www.nwccog.org/programs/rural-resort-region/cbbc

## Custer-Gallatin Working Group, Montana

http://www.cgwg.org/?page_id=14

## Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions, California

http://www.yosemitestanislaussolutions.com/meetings-events/collaborative-documents

## Payette Forest Coalition, Idaho

http://www.payetteforestcoalition.org/main_page.html

## Front Range Roundtable, Colorado

http://www.frontrangeroundtable.org

## Panhandle Forest Collaborative, Idaho

https://sites.google.com/site/panhandleforestcollaborative/home

*The above-mentioned forest collaborative groups' foundational documents are for generating discussion and ideas with your collaborative partners. The primary value of these documents is the collaborative process the group went through to develop them. Please do not simply adopt another group's governance documents as your own.

# Collaborative Group Worksheets

Consider using the worksheets on pages 5–10 to generate discussion among your own collaborative partners.

Halfmoon Lake in Wyoming. USDA Forest Service photo.

# PURPOSES

What should this collaborative effort do?

**5 minutes.** Working individually, jot down your response to the following question: Should you decide to become involved with this collaborative effort, what are some of your expectations for what this effort should do?

**15 minutes.** As a group, share your expectations with one another. The purpose of the discussion is not to challenge or affirm each other's expectations but to understand them.

**20 minutes.** As a group, list the PURPOSE(S) that you think this newly forming or existing collaborative effort should work together to achieve. Please write them on a flip chart for others to see.

1.

2.

3.

**20 minutes.** The small groups present their agreed-upon PURPOSE(S) with the large group.

# PEOPLE

**30 minutes.** Working as a group, refer to your agreed-upon PURPOSE(S) for the newly formed or existing collaborative effort and identify the specific individuals, organizations, and/or interests that you think would be beneficial to involve achieving the PURPOSE(S).

Write the names of the individuals and groups horizontally in the spaces provided at the top of the matrix. Vertically, down the left side of the matrix in the spaces provided, list the skills/experiences that you think are needed to achieve the PURPOSE(S).

Now, return to the names of the individual and groups written horizontally at the top of the matrix and check the appropriate cells that reveal their skills/experiences.

**10 minutes.** Share the names of individuals/groups with the other groups. Please prepare a master list for your group that will be handed in to the facilitators.

**Individuals / Groups**

**Skills / Experience**

| PEOPLE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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# PROCESS

How do PEOPLE work together for a common PURPOSE?

All groups have some type of process that guides their sharing of time together to address a common purpose. The process can be formal with a charter or by-laws operating under “Robert’s Rules of Order;” or the process can be informal, guided by shared understanding, habit, or tradition. The point is that all groups have some type of process that provides organization and order as the people work together for a common purpose. You already have experience and knowledge about group processes.

Think of a group to which you belong. It can be formal or informal. It can be a business or professional organization, or it can be a civic, church, or recreational group; it could even be a group that gets together for coffee. Thinking of the group you chose, respond to the following questions:

1. What is the formal name or informal nickname of the group? How do you refer to yourselves?
2. What is the purpose(s) of the group?
3. Who belongs to the group?
4. How do people get to be members of the group?
5. How often does the group get together?
6. Is there a set time for when the group meets?
7. Is there an order or a routine that guides the group when it is together?
8. Is there an elected or appointed presiding official or respected informal leaders who guide the group?
9. How does the group decide what it is going to do and how to do it? (These could be formal tasks to accomplish identified objectives or simply to organize a holiday party.)
10. How does the group formally or informally measure its progress towards the purpose of the group?

The Greater La Pine Basin Cohesive Strategy Project is a local collaborative effort to address the threat of wildland fire across jurisdictional boundaries. USDA Forest Service photo.

# PROCESS

How will you work together? Some Considerations

## Authorities, Opportunities, Limitations, Accountability

1. What are the authorities of this group?
2. What are the opportunities for this group? / What are the things this group can do best?
3. What are the limitations/sideboards for this group? / What are the things this group can't do or should not do?
4. To whom or what is this group accountable?

## Resources

1. What resources are needed?
2. What financial resources are available to the group?
3. Who will be accountable for handling the financial resources of the group?
4. What nonfinancial material resources are available to the group?
5. What human resources are available to the group?

## Logistics

1. How often will your group meet?
2. When will you meet?
3. Where will you meet?
4. How will you communicate between meetings?
5. For how long should this group exist?

## Governance

1. How will the group be organized?
2. How will meetings be called?
3. Are meetings open to the public?
4. How will meeting agendas be established?
5. Who will preside at meetings?
6. Who and what will guide the conduct of the meetings?
7. How will the meeting proceedings be recorded and distributed?

## Communication

1. How will the group communicate internally between meetings?
2. How will the group communicate externally?
3. Who will coordinate internal and external communications?

## Decision Making

1. What procedures will guide decision making?
2. How will the group know when decisions have been made?
3. How will dissent be handled?
4. What commitments do group members have to decisions made by the group?

## Conduct

1. What behaviors among group participants are essential?
2. What principles/ground rules will guide the conduct of participants at meetings?



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# PRODUCT(S)

What will the PRODUCTS of the group actually be?

Once groups have agreed on a shared Purpose and have gathered People who want to work together to address that Purpose, and once there is an accepted Process to guide how the group will work together, it is time to decide what to do, how to do it, and by when to accomplish it. What will the Products of the group actually be?

## Identification of Possible Projects

The best place to begin deciding what the group is going to do is to identify those things where there is a demonstrated or an expressed need for action. The list of possible projects needs to be prioritized and ranked by the group, and the highest ranked projects should be assessed. The following questions may be useful to identify possible projects:

1. Is the project on Federal lands or lands of other jurisdictions and ownerships?
2. If the project is located on Federal lands, it is subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
    a. Is the project currently in the NEPA process?
    b. Does NEPA need to be initiated?
    c. Has the NEPA process been completed, but the project has not been implemented?
    d. Has the project been implemented under NEPA but still needs to be monitored and evaluated?
3. If the project is located on non-Federal lands, what statutes, ordinances, and permissions need consideration?
4. What are some of the challenges to implementing the project?
5. What are some of the opportunities for implementing the project?

## Identification of the Products (Needed Accomplishments) Regarding the Selected Projects

Most projects have challenges and opportunities associated with them before implementation occurs. Some of the Products that citizens' collaborative groups often find they must accomplish include:

1. Agreement on recommended actions. Speaking with one voice among a wide diversity of interests carries weight.
2. Removal or relief of administrative barriers (regulations, policies, and protocols) that block or hinder implementation.
3. Legislative action to make something possible that is currently difficult or impossible.
4. Advocacy for recommended or implemented actions.
5. Obtaining necessary financial, material, and human resources that enable implementation.
6. Public acceptance of recommended or implemented actions through information, education, and civic engagement.

# PRODUCT(S)

What will you strive to accomplish?

## Project Description

1. What is the demonstrated or expressed need?

2. What is the geographic location and jurisdiction(s) pertinent to the project?

3. What is the desired outcome?

4. What are some of the challenges to implementation?

5. What are some of the opportunities for implementation?

## Identification of Products

1. What are some actions that need to occur for the project to be implemented?

2. What are some specific actions that the collaborative group can take?



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