

COLLABORATIVE WINDOWS, ENTREPRENEURS, AND SUBSYSTEMS: SETTING THE STAGE FOR PARTNERSHIP TO REBUILD LOUISIANA’S COAST

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public policy literature, this research empirically explores the importance of a collaborative window, the involvement of a collaborative entrepreneur, and the centrality of nonprofit and citizen relationships within a collaborative subsystem of 17 national and local nonprofit organizations working to restore the coastal wetlands of Louisiana. Cross-pollination of the collaboration and public policy literature allows for deeper insight into the theoretical and practical impacts regarding preconditions that support collaboration. Guidelines are offered to help nonprofit administrators assess alignment of initial conditions with collaborative viability.



ABSTRACT

Nonprofit organizations often collaborate to enhance capacities for providing public goods and services while addressing complex problems. Through a linkage with the

INTRODUCTION

In August, 2005, Hurricane Katrina caused widespread devastation throughout the Gulf Coast. While much was covered in the media regarding the human and property toll, environmental consequences were less often included in national discussions. However, flood waters from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina severely impacted the natural functionality of Louisiana’s fragile coastal ecosystem. As a result, natural flood protection barriers are compromised and

coastal communities remain vulnerable to future storms.

Complex problems, such as vast environmental destruction, require multiple organizations to work together to identify resolutions. Utilization of multiorganizational collaboration in the provision of public goods and services is a prominent theme in discussions among practitioners and scholars of public and nonprofit administration. Multiorganizational collaboration occurs when two or more organizations leverage information, resources, and expertise to achieve collective goals that a single organization is unable to achieve (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006).

In the literature, preconditions for cross-sector collaboration are offered (see, for example, Ansell & Gash, 2007; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001; Weber, 2009), but empirical research and cross-pollination with the public policy literature may allow for deeper insight into the preconditions that support collaboration. Themes including presence of a collaborative window, involvement of a collaborative entrepreneur, and utilization of nonprofit and citizen relationships within the collaborative subsystem are analyzed within a collaborative arrangement of 17 national and local nonprofit organizations working with federal and state public organizations to restore the coastal wetlands of Louisiana.

This research is important for three reasons. First, collaboration is not appropriate for use in all situations (Agranoff, 2006; Keast, Brown, & Mandell, 2007; McGuire, 2006; Thomson & Perry, 2006). It is only by linking empirical data to propositions from the literature that initial conditions for collaborative success can be better understood. Through this research, preconditions for collaboration are explored empirically to provide nonprofit and public administrators with additional tools to determine contextual viability to support this type of interaction based on an intersection of the policy and collaboration literatures. Guidelines are offered to help administrators create an environment to establish and sustain collaborative arrangements. Second, this study captures the complexity of collaborative success. While the literature frames collaboration in a context of resolving complex problems (Harmon & Mayer, 1986; Keast, Mandell, Brown & Woolcock, 2004; Rittel & Webber, 1973), practical realities may dictate more subdued expectations. This research suggests that nonprofit and public administrators may need to take on the role of collaborative entrepreneur to create an environment for change and advance the arrangement's agenda. Third, this research captures the important role nonprofit personnel play in challenging the status quo. The centrality of this role suggests that their involvement may be critical to collaborative success.

The first section of this article provides an overview of the collaboration and policy literatures. Themes pertaining to the importance of a collaborative window, the presence of a collaborative entrepreneur, and relationships in the collaborative subsystem are introduced as preconditions for cross-sector collaboration. Next, a focal area for the Mississippi River Delta Campaign is described as the setting for this case study. The third section explains the methodology used to collect and analyze data. The final section explores the data as it applies to the preconditions for cross-sector collaboration. Implications for the theory and practice of nonprofit administration are discussed.

An Intersection of the Collaboration and Policy Literatures

There is a growing interest in the nonprofit literature on the utilization of collaborative interactions to address public needs. Collaboration is an interaction between multiple organizations or individuals who share responsibility for interconnected tasks and work together to pursue collectively complex goals that cannot be otherwise accomplished (Keast, Brown, & Mandell, 2007; Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001; Thomson & Perry, 2006).

Nonprofit organizations often partner with organizations in the public or private sectors because they have a common cause, face similar obstacles, or want to develop new sources for funding (Schindler-

Raisman, 1981; Takahashi & Smutny, 2002). Since collaborative interactions are not developed easily due to the time and resources needed to develop long-standing relationships, it is important for administrators to understand how to lay a foundation for collaborative success.

The nonprofit and collaboration literatures explore preconditions for collaboration and provide a useful starting point for this research. For example, Gray (1985) views collaboration as a three-phase process and identifies factors for effectiveness in each phase. Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) offer a framework of collaboration based on five broad dimensions: preconditions, process, structure and governance, contingencies and constraints, and outcomes and accountabilities. This framework is used by Simo and Bies (2007) to examine cross-sector collaboration following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Weber (2009) also looks at antecedents to successful collaboration but emphasizes a focus on ideas, social norms, shared values, and common goals to guide a collaborative group. While much of the literature pertaining to collaborative preconditions addresses the external environment, membership characteristics, processes, and structures (see also, Ansell & Gash, 2007; Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001), the breadth of the literature does not include detailed analysis on the convergence of precondition factors to enhance collaborative viability.

Much of the emphasis on collaboration in the nonprofit literature is placed on structure and governance. For example, Guo and Acar (2005) and Gazley and Brudney (2007) emphasize transaction and resource dependency theories to focus on the formality of nonprofit collaboration. In addition, Foster and Meinhard (2002) use regression analysis to explain nonprofit's predisposition to collaborate. Throughout the literature, exploration of preconditions is lacking in addition to acknowledgment of convergence among preconditions. In their 2007 meta-analysis, Ansell and Gash convey the value of case study research to address collaborative themes.

This research looks to fill this gap by incorporating elements from the public policy literature to expand the discussion surrounding initial conditions for collaboration to include a collaborative window, collaborative entrepreneur, and relationships from the collaborative subsystem. Two previous articles (Lober, 1997; Takahashi & Smutny, 2002) also focus on themes of collaborative entrepreneurs and collaborative windows. However, both articles apply these themes to collaborative governance structures while this research links these themes to setting a stage for collaborative success.

Presence of a Collaborative Window. A policy window is created when three streams – problem, policy, and politics – come together to create an opportunity for agenda setting action (Kingdon, 1992).

The convergence of these three streams is based on the identification of a public problem in need of a solution, the availability of a solution through the policy development process, and openness within the political environment for change (Takahashi & Smutny, 2002). The opening of a policy window, which only lasts a short time, creates opportunities for issues to be placed on the policy agenda. It can be difficult to open a policy window because the three streams operate on independent paths until they intersect at particular points. A policy window may be created based on a compelling problem, a focusing event, presence of a policy entrepreneur, or the appropriations cycle (2002).

A collaborative window is described by Takahashi and Smutny (2002) as a convergence of a problematic situation, a resolution to the situation, decision making with consideration for environmental impacts, and public recognition of the problem. Much like the policy window, opportunities for collaboration are created when there is an intersection of conditions. Partners share agreement on a problem, establish shared rules, develop a collective purpose, and decide on a course of action (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Imperial, 2000; Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001). Decisions regarding the arrangement's direction and operations are made through consensus and compromise to bridge differences among participants (Agranoff, 2006; Mandell, 1999; Mandell & Steelman, 2003; Mattessich, Murray-

Close, & Monsey, 2001; Reilly, 2001; Thomson & Perry, 2006). Since group membership is comprised of many different organizations with different views (Mandell & Steelman, 2003), partners must be aligned on identifying the problem that needs to be resolved and the roles each participant will play to resolve it.

Obstacles to collaboration exist as issues such as turf, communication, organizational autonomy, and distrust surface (Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Takahashi & Smutny, 2002).

Involvement of a Collaborative Entrepreneur. A policy entrepreneur is an advocate that uses personal resources to couple a problem with a viable solution based on political feasibility and windows of opportunity (Kingdon, 2002). It is often up to the entrepreneur to recognize and act on an opportunity. Characteristics of an entrepreneur include perceived legitimacy to advocate for problem resolution, strong political connections or negotiating skills, and persistence to push ideas onto the policy agenda (2002). It is up to the entrepreneur to garner attention from relevant stakeholders while coupling problems and solutions with political forces.

The idea of a “collaborative entrepreneur” is described by Takahashi and Smutny (2002, p. 165) as a coupling mechanism for interaction by identifying a complex problem and inviting relevant stakeholders

to address the problem collectively based on the resources and expertise needed to identify a resolution. Much like a policy entrepreneur, a collaborative entrepreneur plays a significant role in establishing, focusing, and sustaining the group of stakeholders through their expertise and credibility (Agranoff, 2006; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Mandell, 1999; Mandell & Steelman, 2003). A

collaborative entrepreneur must be able to persuade stakeholders to participate in the group, establish collaborative processes, and organize the arrangement in the absence of formal authority (Gray, 1989; Keast et al., 2004; Wood & Gray, 1991). It is essential that all members of the collaboration perceive the convener to hold legitimate authority to organize the arrangement (Gray, 1985).

Relationships in a Collaborative Subsystem. In a policy subsystem, various government and nongovernmental actors participate in the agenda setting process and interact where common interests are identified (Howlett, 1955). Actors outside government such as interest groups and the public usually influence the agenda setting process by bringing problems to the attention of actors inside government (1955). Various indicators, focusing events, and feedback give certain problems prominence and influence how actors react to the placement of those problems on the agenda. It is possible for a particular subsystem of actors to monopolize

interpretation of the problem to ensure it is conceived and discussed in ways that further the subsystem's interests (Kingdon, 2002). In order for the problem, policy, and political streams to converge, major actors must agree on the problem and the viability of potential solutions.

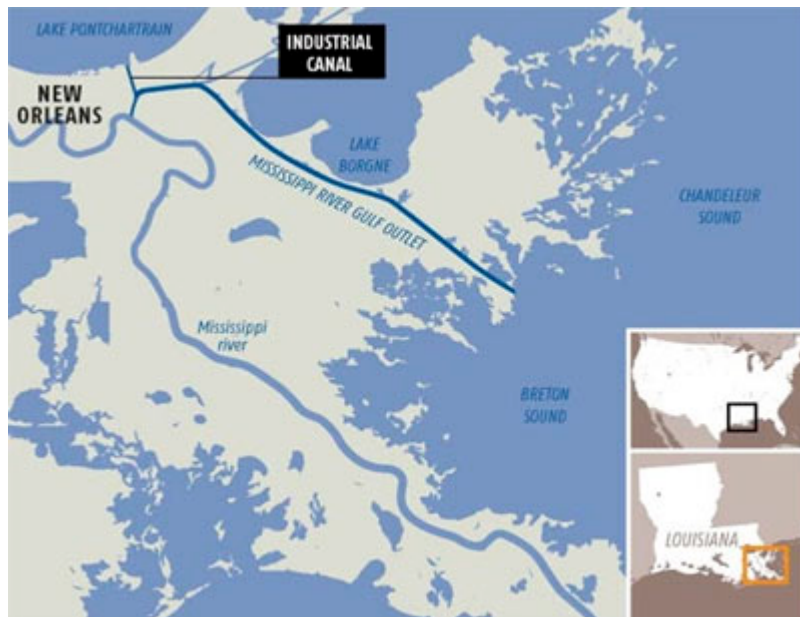
A collaborative subsystem can also be viewed as an interdependent system in which participants with varied backgrounds and expertise work together where overlapping interests are identified.¹ Representatives for relevant organizations are considered an essential element of the larger system (Mandell, 1994). A collaborative entrepreneur legitimizes the arrangement by identifying an important problem and bringing relevant stakeholders together to address a particular purpose (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Wood & Gray, 1991). Key stakeholders must establish shared rules, develop a collective purpose, and decide jointly on a course of action (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Imperial, 2000; Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001). As in a policy subsystem, power among collaborative participants is not necessarily equal. In order for a collaborative to be successful, participants must move beyond these power differences to decide collectively on a path

forward.

CASE STUDY

The setting for this study involves a collaborative arrangement of national and local nonprofit organizations working with federal and state public organizations to restore the coastal wetlands of Louisiana. In the 1950s and 1960s respectively, Congress authorized and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) constructed a 76-mile artificial channel between the Gulf of Mexico and the inner harbor of New Orleans called the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) – see Figure 1. Natural water patterns changed fundamentally as the construction of the MRGO, which cut through a natural ridge, now allows salt water and storm-driven tides to flow inland from the Gulf of Mexico. As a result, 20,000 square miles of wetlands were converted to open water destroying over 600,000 acres of freshwater marshes and cypress forests – a natural hurricane buffer to Louisiana's coast (Lopez, Moore, & Constible, 2010).

¹ Although some similarities between policy and collaborative networks are highlighted, the author is not suggesting that policy networks are synonymous with collaborative networks. While collaborative interactions may be present within policy networks, many other types of interactions may also be utilized.



As a result of its connection with the Gulf of Mexico and a lack of wetlands or cypress forest protection, wave regeneration in the MRGO during Hurricane Katrina significantly contributed to flood wall and levee failures which resulted in catastrophic flooding in the Lower Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish in August 2005 (Day, Ford, Kemp, & Lopez, 2006; Lopez, Moore, & Constible, 2010)². In addition to increasing storm surge height and speed, destruction of cypress forests allowed previously protected levees to become vulnerable. As a result, communities were devastated, lives were lost, and fragile ecosystems were damaged significantly. In 2007, Congress ordered the USACE to close the MRGO and directed priority for environmental restoration in its closure plan (Day et al., 2006). The channel was closed to deep-

² The state of Louisiana is unique in that it is divided into “parishes” in the same way that most states are divided into counties. For example, the city of New Orleans is located within Orleans Parish.

draft navigation in 2009 but much remains to be done in terms of recreating a natural storm buffer and revitalizing the estuary system surrounding the MRGO.

In 2006, the MRGO Must Go Coalition formed to ensure wetland restoration in areas impacted by the channel. Today, 17 local and national environmental, social justice, and community nonprofit organizations are involved in the Coalition.³ Through educational forums, social networking, media tours, and rallies, the

³ Membership includes the following organizations: American Rivers, Citizens Against Widening the Industrial Canal, Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, Environmental Defense Fund, Global Green, Gulf Restoration Network, Holy Cross Neighborhood Association, Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, Levees.org, Louisiana Environmental Action Network, Louisiana Wildlife Federation, Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper, Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development, MQVN Community Development Corporation, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, and Sierra Club – Delta Chapter.

Coalition conducts outreach and serves as a liaison between the community and the

USACE. It also makes policy and scientific recommendations concerning ecosystem restoration (Lopez, Moore, & Constible, 2010).

The MRGO Must Go Coalition is a focal area of the Mississippi River Delta Restoration Campaign. Five nonprofit organizations are partners in the campaign: Environmental Defense Fund, National Wildlife Federation, and National Audubon Society represent the involvement of national nonprofit organizations, and the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana and the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation represent the involvement of local nonprofit organizations. The primary objective of the campaign is to restore the Mississippi River Delta to its natural functionality by connecting the river to the wetlands while preserving communities and culture.

The Campaign relies on a two-pronged organizational structure. An executive committee is representative of each nonprofit organization and creates a forum for representatives to develop policies, allocate resources, and prioritize funding needs through consensus. Each member has voting rights; decisions such as prioritizing issues and funding strategies are based on consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, which has never occurred, the Campaign will abstain from taking a position. A memorandum of understanding guides organizational roles and responsibilities; the committee meets weekly via conference call to discuss planning strategies and develop goals. Face to face meetings occur frequently as

personnel are involved in overlapping projects and organizations.

A subcommittee structure creates a second type of horizontal structure used within the collaborative arrangement. This group is comprised of personnel with field level expertise in legal, policy, science, communications, or advocacy areas. The subcommittees report to the executive committee. Each representative on the executive committee has a subordinate who represents that organization on each subcommittee to intertwine the organizations with one another. The two-pronged structure helps to reduce conflict. As one interviewee explained, "If there is a conflict within a subcommittee, my subordinate will talk to me before I meet with the executive committee so I already know what the questions will be. It is very collaborative." The group embraces a three-pronged approach to restoration based on science, policy, and community. Scientific research helps legitimize community initiatives and is used to influence policy.

The Walton Family Foundation provides a substantial and stable funding stream for the Coalition through a focus on freshwater conservation.⁴ In 2012, the Foundation contributed over 7.5 million dollars to the three national nonprofits that play a significant role in the Mississippi River Delta Restoration Campaign -- National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, and Environmental Defense Fund.

⁴ The Walton Family Foundation carries out a philanthropic vision developed by Sam and Helen Walton, the founders of Walmart. Their philanthropic work focuses on three areas: education reform, freshwater and marine conservation, and community and economic development (WFF, 2012).

The National Wildlife Federation also passes money to the Louisiana Wildlife Federation and The Nature Conservancy as part of the Campaign. This money is earmarked for Mississippi River fresh water conservation initiatives to restore and sustain the delta ecosystem and its surrounding communities (WFF, 2012). These funds support restoration projects in the Mississippi River Delta and 30 full-time positions designated for the Campaign. Staff members consist of a campaign director, field director, communications personnel, and campaign coordinators. The Walton Family Foundation acts as a sponsor by providing funding to legitimize the arrangement.

Funding generates support for collaboration as the presence of a stable funding stream helps lure participants to the table (Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001). The allocation of the Walton Family Foundation funding draws attention and attracts tremendous support for the program. Like many nonprofit organizations, those involved with the MRGO Must Go Coalition have fewer resources to face increasingly complex problems. The money that the Walton Family Foundation brings to the table legitimizes the collaborative arrangement as it enables the Coalition to make their projects a reality. The impacts of this funding are described by an interviewee: “We are very lucky that we have a very deep pocket with our grantor. Money is distributed through the Mississippi River Delta Campaign as one grant divided up among organizations. There is no matching requirement, but money is pooled among the organizations to pay for the Campaign.”

Grant money is prioritized through a process of consensus decision-making in the executive committee and approval by the grantor. Since the grantor allocates a designated amount of money to each organization on the executive committee, representatives for each organization have much say in how they will spend their “piece of the pie.” Discretionary funds are set aside and allocated based on the discretion of the executive committee for unexpected costs throughout the year.

In 2006, the MRGO Must Go Coalition formed to advocate for the closure of the MRGO and restore the ecosystem impacted by its development. The National Wildlife Federation with funds provided by the Walton Family Foundation employs a middle level manager who is the program coordinator for the Coalition. Once the MRGO Must Go Coalition was established, the closure of the MRGO garnered much attention— yard signs were distributed, a logo and slogan were developed, and media events were scheduled to continue to raise awareness and place pressure on the USACE to close the channel. Coalition members found opportunities to organize rallies and hold public workshops to enhance community involvement.

METHODOLOGY

A single case study research design allowed for exploration of initial collaborative conditions within the MRGO Must Go Coalition. Data was collected through semi structured interviews and a review of organizational documents from January through March 2013. Standardized, open-ended interview

questions were used to gather information-rich detail; participants were identified using a snowball sampling strategy beginning with members of the National Wildlife Federation – the organization that employs the program coordinator for the

MRGO Must Go Coalition. Participants were asked about preconditions focusing on the importance of a collaborative window, the involvement of a collaborative entrepreneur, and the centrality of nonprofit and citizen relationships within the collaborative subsystem.⁵

Although the researcher took field notes throughout the interview process, audio recordings allowed the researcher to concentrate fully on interviewee responses and probe for clarification when needed. The length of time allocated for each interview was approximately one hour. The researcher used audio recordings in post interview reviews to ensure accuracy of data and recreate exact quotations and insights.

Additional data were gathered through the review of program documents. This review included memoranda of understanding

⁵ Representatives from each of the 17 nonprofit organizations were contacted multiple times to introduce the research and request an interview. Due to the time that lapsed since Hurricane Katrina, some players were no longer available. 11 participants representing the 17 nonprofit organizations were involved in the study. Since some personnel are not represented, I understand that the conclusions will be somewhat limited. Interview participants were asked about relationships with other organizations not represented in the study to gather information indirectly about their involvement in the Coalition.

between organizations, meeting minutes, memos, and newspaper articles. Review of these documents helped the researcher understand the contextual setting of the research and the history of interactions among participants.

A qualitative method suited this exploratory topic because it emphasized the need to describe collaborative preconditions. Content analysis allowed the researcher to identify meanings and summarize patterns within the data collected. A coding scheme was used to organize textual data gathered from each interview and document into the preconditions that provide the focus for this research. In their 2007 meta-analytical study of critical variables for collaborative governance, Ansell and Gash supported the use of case study research to develop “greater insight into the nonlinear aspects of the collaborative process” (p. 562).

Preconditions for Collaboration in the MRGO Must Go Coalition

Data is organized and analyzed through three themes: the importance of a collaborative window, the involvement of a collaborative entrepreneur, and the centrality of nonprofit and citizen relationships within the collaborative subsystem. Quoted material from participants is incorporated into the discussion to retain information-rich detail and provide context.

Presence of a Collaborative Window

In this case, Hurricane Katrina and subsequent flooding created a window for collaboration through an intersection of conditions. Interviewees suggest that there is universal agreement among citizens and politicians on the problem at hand. “We

look around at environmental issues in the U.S., and there is hardly a bigger one in terms of its impact. You have a system that is losing 16 square miles a year. It isn’t rocket science. It is going from A to B and B is not good. And unlike a lot of these horrible environmental catastrophes, this one actually has a fix,” said one interviewee. Each organization is involved with the MRGO Must Go Coalition based on a broad goal to shut down the MRGO and restore the wetlands in impacted areas. A participant describes this alignment noting, “Everyone agrees that the wetlands needed to be restored. So there is no need to build common values because they are already there.” Interviewees view the collaborative arrangement as a way to best address ecosystem-wide destruction in coastal Louisiana. “It is tremendous to have all these tentacles. If we tried to do it individually, it would take a ton of money and resources.”

While the collaboration literature acknowledges the importance of shared agreement on the problem (see Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2007), it does not recognize the important role a focusing

event plays in generating social and political agreement on the problem. In many ways, the impact of Hurricane Katrina created a window for collective action as the resulting mass destruction forced politicians, community members, scientists, and advocates into an aligned position that something needed to be done with the MRGO. For example, Congress ordered the closure of the MRGO following

the hurricane and provided funding for the USACE to develop a restoration plan. In this sense, the opening of the window created an opportunity on the policy agenda to close the waterway. In addition, a participant explained that work within the Coalition really picked up following Hurricane Katrina because the group was able to politically advance its agenda. The MRGO’s role in the destruction is described by interviewees as a “lightning rod” for action and a “rallying cry” for citizens and environmental groups.

While significant events such as the Space Shuttle Columbia Disaster, Hurricanes Rita and Katrina, and the attacks of 9/11 are often used as the backdrop for case studies in the collaboration literature (see Donahue, 2006; Kapucu, 2006; Kiefer & Montjoy, 2006), the impacts these types of events have to focus collaborative efforts are less often discussed. An interviewee offers some insights that may help us better understand why focusing events are so important: “You cannot present people with unsolvable problems because they will

deny it exists. You have to present them with solutions that seem possible.” By their very definition, collaborative relationships are used to address complex issues with temporary resolutions versus solutions (Harmon & Mayer, 1986). A focusing event makes a problem tangible for policy makers, scientists, citizens, and advocates while highlighting possible resolutions for the problem. In this case, a collaborative window opened when the hurricane magnified an existing problem.

The National Wildlife Federation found funding to hire a coordinator for the Coalition, and Congress provided funding to the USACE to close the MRGO and develop a restoration plan.

Involvement of a Collaborative Entrepreneur

A viable resolution to a complex problem can be identified when a collaborative entrepreneur brings relevant stakeholders together based on political forces and a window of opportunity. On the coast of Louisiana, the collaborative entrepreneur for the MRGO Must Go Coalition plays an important role in identifying relevant participants and bringing them into the collaborative arrangement. Much like a policy entrepreneur couples a problem with a viable solution, the collaborative entrepreneur identifies participants with expertise needed to contribute to and benefit from the coalition’s agenda. While the collaboration literature acknowledges

the role of a champion and a sponsor (see, for example, Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2007), the literature does not link a collaborative entrepreneur to the identification of funding and the occurrence of a collaborative window for change. In this case study, the presence of a focusing event and the efforts of a collaborative entrepreneur to further communicate the problem resulted in the availability of funding.

After Hurricane Katrina shined a spotlight on the environmental issues around the MRGO and through the efforts of the National Wildlife Federation, the Walton Family conveyed interest in moving the freshwater conservation work they do in the Mississippi Valley to the New Orleans area. When it became clear that the Walton Family Foundation would move their work to Louisiana, the National Wildlife Federation developed a state director position and located it in New Orleans. When the National Wildlife Federation hired a coordinator for the MRGO Must Go Coalition four years ago, she played a significant role in bringing together organizations with a presence in the area. For example, an attorney for the Environmental Defense Fund was in the area addressing legal issues surrounding the Clean Water Act; the National Audubon Society owned a refuge in Louisiana with a number of local chapters interested in restoration work; the Sierra Club was established in local neighborhoods to assist with social justice issues; and the Gulf

Restoration Network was already advocating for local environmental issues. By taking advantage of a collaborative window that opened as a result of a focusing event and funding from the Walton Family Fund, the collaborative entrepreneur identified opportunities to make the goals of the group a reality.

Another role of a collaborative entrepreneur involves identifying niche organizational strengths needed to develop viable resolutions while generating political feasibility for those resolutions in the policy arena. In this research, each partnering organization has a niche within the science, policy, or community dimensions of the group's approach to restoration. The National Audubon Society and the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation focus on science. The Coalition to Restore Louisiana does policy work and is well versed in Louisiana legislation. The Sierra Club has strong lobbying efforts in Washington D.C. and focuses on environmental justice issues to promote community initiatives. The National Wildlife Federation helps make local connections and builds a base of community support through a ground campaign. An interviewee explains the role of the collaborative entrepreneur in aligning organizational specializations, noting, "The convener is able to bring together the science, policy, and community aspects of the situation. Science adds legitimacy to community initiatives and concerns, education and

outreach are needed to move public policy forward." The importance of identifying a mechanism to bring organizations together is acknowledged during an interview. "It is critical to have coordination from the convener who pulls all the strings together. It is so complicated that it takes someone looking at it all the time," says one participant.

Many interviewees acknowledge that the Coalition involves a wide variety of organizations with different strengths and organizing strategies. With the help of a collaborative entrepreneur, they have balance and are well rounded in the science, policy, and advocacy aspects of their projects. Another interviewee describes the role in the following way: "It takes a lot of people to stay on top of what is going on. The convener helped us move things along. She is aware of what is going on in Washington D.C. and helps us respond to public comment opportunities." Therefore, the collaborative entrepreneur not only invites participants to attend various public meetings and ensures receipt of regular communications on developments within the program but also helps citizens engage in the public policy process through deliberation and consensus building.

The role of a collaborative entrepreneur also includes the involvement of citizen stakeholders. With the convener leading the way, the Coalition recognized the importance of utilizing existing

relationships within the coastal community at the outset of the project. The convener is described as “helping to build and expand community involvement on a day-to-day basis.” Another participant commented, “Through the awareness of the convener, the community could respond and move forward with their initiatives. The convener helped influence policy because government employees realized that they needed some kind of popular support for their restoration plan.”

A collaborative entrepreneur must also generate the political forces needed to open a collaborative window. In this case, political support came through communications with constituents. An interviewee explaining the importance of building a national constituency for the area’s environmental issues, commented, “In order to build a national constituency for our issues, you have to have some kind of hook to give people a reason to care about what happens in the [Mississippi] Delta.” Birds and ducks are identified as two “hooks” to involve national constituents. For example, as nine million ducks winter in Louisiana, duck hunters from other parts of the country become interested in the Gulf region. And many members of the National Audubon Society have an interest in birds who build habitats in the Gulf region. It is important to involve constituents that support both groups because they tend to represent different socio-economic and political profiles. An interviewee explains that

energizing both groups bring different interests into the equation for communications with Congressional offices, “There are a lot of very conservative Republicans from states that wouldn’t open their door to the Environmental Defense Fund or the National Wildlife Federation or the National Audubon Society. But they listen when a duck decoy manufacturer from their home state or district comes and says you need to do something about this problem. So we have a highly structured, organized campaign called ‘Vanishing Paradise’ that reaches out to constituents.”

In addition, the research suggests that a collaborative entrepreneur should consider the benefits a stable funding stream has to open a collaborative window. “It is an exciting time. We have money coming in, we have a plan, we have political consensus. It doesn’t mean that it will all be done, but it does mean that we are heading downhill and we were going uphill the past 30 years,” explains one interviewee on the Campaign’s impact. The benefits associated with a source of funding should not be underestimated, as the use of grant funding seems to be particularly important in today’s economic environment. The need for a stable funding stream suggests that collaborative entrepreneurs should consider ways in which collaborative arrangements can access funding streams despite the regularity of unfunded mandates.

Relationships in a Collaborative Subsystem

Partners with diverse expertise and resources work together to address complex problems in a collaborative arrangement. While the collaboration literature recognizes the need for niche expertise and resources to be represented in the group to best address the problem (see, for example, McNamara, Leavitt, & Morris, 2010), the central involvement of nonprofit and citizen participation in the collaborative subsystem is less noticed. In this research, benefits based on the involvement of the nonprofit sector are threefold.

First, nonprofit administrators are better able to move around bureaucracy while acting as a catalyst for change. In this arrangement, nonprofit organizations play a critical role in pushing for the closure of the MRGO and advocating for community involvement in restoration plans. “Nonprofit organizations are engines of change. They help governments deliver better public goods and services,” offers one interviewee. For example, the USACE operates within the formal public comment process. By having the National Wildlife Federation set up meetings and invite the USACE, they organize workgroups with targeted citizens. “While government agencies are reactive, nonprofit organizations propose new ideas and understand different players,” affirms one participant.

Second, nonprofit administrators are

comfortable working with others. According to an interviewee, “Our efforts always aim to work together – it’s in our name and part of our DNA.” Increased levels of comfort could also be a result of multiple connections among nonprofit participants. For example, the collaborative entrepreneur employed by the National Wildlife Federation used to work for the Sierra Club. The executive director for the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation serves as a board member for the Gulf Restoration Network. The Director of the Tulane Law Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy used to work for the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana and the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation. This supports suggestions in the nonprofit literature that nonprofit organizations with greater board overlap are more likely to enter collaborative relationships (Guo & Acar, 2005; Simo & Bies, 2007). In addition, this research suggests that there may be a linkage between employee overlap and increased levels of trust. The Coalition benefitted from building on relationships within a preexisting network of people that worked together for varied reasons. For example, the National Wildlife Federation and Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation partnered to increase media coverage of the Louisiana coast, which involved aerial tours for newspaper reporters. The Sierra Club, Holy Cross Neighborhood Association, and the Center for Sustainable Economic Development have long worked together to focus on sustainable living initiatives in the

Lower Ninth Ward. The Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation and the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana are described as “sister organizations” often working on grant projects beyond restoration in areas impacted by the MRGO. “There is a strong level of trust. The MRGO was a major focus for local government and environmental organizations for decades so it has a built-in constituency,” explains one participant on the enhanced level of comfort among participants.

Third, nonprofit participants included representation from an important mixture of national and local organizations, which further diversifies available expertise and resources. Representatives of national nonprofit organizations bring a level of financial independence to the group as established relationships with large foundations open doors for funding. When the Environmental Defense Fund, National Wildlife Foundation, and National Audubon Society secure funding, they often share it with the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana and the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation. Representatives of national nonprofit organizations also help affect political change through lobbying efforts to facilitate the opening of a collaborative window. Representatives of local nonprofit organizations, with deep roots in the community, champion local positions based on their geographic knowledge and relationships with local personnel. A

community member on the importance of this diversification conveys, “We do not have many local political allies, but we have national connections and the support of local environmental groups to help us challenge what is being done.” Through these relationships, community members mobilize, which translates to a large community presence at city council meetings. As a result, public officials see significant support for closing the MRGO and subsequent restoration initiatives. The research suggests and previous research supports (see McNamara & Morris, 2012; Simo & Bies, 2007) that the involvement of nonprofit organizations within the arrangement may be essential in developing and sustaining collaborative interactions.

In this research, citizen engagement also plays a major role in helping the group achieve one of its goals – the closure of the MRGO. Interviewees describe community participants as passionate and eager to be part of the discussion. The benefit of community involvement is explained in an interview: “We learn about the community by talking to landowners. You just have to listen to them. It is a very organic approach but very effective because we still have those relationships.” Another participant described community members as “the most effective observers.” An interviewee suggests that civic engagement is most needed when addressing public works projects: “While it is possible for change in public works infrastructure, it is tough to do because every project has a custodian and

constituency. So it has to be someone else's job to undo it, which is where community advocacy becomes important to challenge the status quo."

To enhance citizen engagement, the Coalition took several approaches. As part of the Coalition's education campaign, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, Gulf Restoration Network, and Community for Sustaining Economic Development worked together to provide boat trips to community members from the Lower Ninth Ward so they could see healthy cypress forests. In seeing how the habitat should look, the Coalition hoped it would help community members advocate for their own interests. In addition, the Coalition identified funding to help local residents attend national meetings so they could hear about issues and meet other people working on projects throughout the entire Mississippi River Basin.

As a result of the Coalition's efforts to engage citizens, they found some success in achieving set goals. As a result of the Coalition's efforts, the USACE received 75,000 comments during the public comment period pertaining to their draft restoration plan for areas impacted by the MRGO. According to a federal government employee, this number of comments was a result of the outreach of nonprofit organizations. Furthermore, there were over one million hits on the USACE MRGO website that reflect the efforts of nonprofit organizations to assemble and

disseminate information. The Coalition worked with the USACE to ensure citizens had opportunities to convey feedback. Recreational elements of the plan were based on input from public workshops. A website was created to post meeting materials, an interactive GIS map, and an email link to ask questions of the USACE. A participant summarized, "This project involves a complex ecosystem, a complex political system, and many interests. It is about building relationships among community, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. The nonprofit community has taken highly technical problems and broken them down to educate folks so they understand how to make public comments and develop viable alternatives." This research supports a linkage between collaborative success and preexisting relationships with citizens and community groups. While Simo and Bies (2007) identify volunteer involvement as an important initial condition in their case study of Hurricane Katrina, this linkage is worthy of additional consideration.

CONCLUSION

A focus on preconditions that set the stage for successful collaboration is particularly important in today's fiscal environment. In a subsystem of 17 national and local nonprofit organizations working to restore the coastal wetlands of Louisiana, the presence of a collaborative window, involvement of a collaborative entrepreneur, and utilization of nonprofit

and citizen relationships assisted in the closure of the MRGO. The impacts of Hurricane Katrina created a focusing event and opportunities for collaboration. When the window opened, a collaborative entrepreneur pushed the group's ideas forward in order to politically advance the group's agenda and create an environment conducive to change.

The inclusion of the nonprofit sector and the involvement of citizens were critically important as these personnel acted in ways that public sector personnel could not or would not act. For example, developing marketing strategies to garner public support and finding creative ways to educate and involve citizens directly contributed to the 75,000 comments that the USACE received for their draft restoration plan. Advocacy for community concerns, abilities to affect change, and proposals of new ideas are strengths of the nonprofit sector that should be harnessed in other collaborative arrangements. Although accountability is complex, the early involvement of citizens may increase responsibility and responsiveness in these arrangements. It is through an equal sense of responsibility among participants that areas impacted by the MRGO will benefit from the best possible restoration plan and efforts.

This research has implications for research and practice. There is much discussion in the literature concerning success in collaborative arrangements (Bardach &

Lesser, 1996; Mandell, 1994; O'Toole, 1997, Page, 2004). Often times, it seems that we look at collaboration through rose-colored glasses. Thoughts concerning the definition of collaborative success range from the mere existence of a collaborative process (see Feldman & Khademian, 2001) to proven improvements in outcomes (see, for example, Koontz 2006; O'Leary, Choi, & Gerard, 2012). This study captures the complexity of collaborative success as the Coalition faces difficulties due to circumstances outside of their control. In other words, even with the presence of identified preconditions, collaborative success can be limited by outside dynamics – namely funding in this case. The structural projects associated with closing the MRGO, such as building a rock closure across the channel and a surge barrier in New Orleans, were 100 percent federally funded. In this phase of the project, the group saw success in the closure of the MRGO. However, a lack of clarity regarding government funding for the restoration phase of the project impacts implementation. With a three billion dollar price tag, the USACE's master restoration plan for areas impacted by the MRGO has yet to be funded by Congress. Further complicating the matter is a disagreement regarding cost shares between the USACE and the State of Louisiana. As a result, comprehensive, ecosystem-wide restoration has yet to begin. Despite the cases we often read about in the literature, it seems that this challenge may be representative of many collaboratives that have trouble

getting representatives of government organizations involved in the process or identifying funding to solve complex problems with huge price tags.

What do challenges, such as these, mean for the collaborative process? While a definitive answer will require additional research and reflection, it seems important to point out that some collaborative success can be achieved despite challenges. In practical application, collaborative partners may be more limited in what they can accomplish but that does not mean their efforts are inconsequential. While the lack of restoration progress is frustrating to Coalition members, this frustration has more to do with how they view success. Frustration from a neighbor in the Lower Ninth Ward is palpable as he conveys a view of success encompassing complete restoration to the impacted ecosystem. “It has been almost eight years since Katrina. The wound is still very much there. Until it is restored it keeps getting degraded. We lose hundreds of acres a year.” Frustration due to a lack of tangible outcomes in collaborative arrangements is understandable. But as Mandell (1994) points out, the process of collaborating can be viewed as a tangible outcome in itself. “It has taken a multi-decade battle – a 50 year process—to get where we are today. It is going to take time to build all elements of such a large plan,” explained one interviewee. A third interviewee recognizes that the ecosystem would never be exactly as it was but saw value in the

group focusing on creating a functioning Louisiana coast within the bounds of the current budget environment. So even though the literature theoretically applies collaborative relationships within the context of solving unsolvable problems, practical realities may dictate more subtle definitions of success. A focus on the attainment of short and long-term goals may lay a foundation for continued success (Cheever, 2006).

Furthermore, this study reiterates that certain preconditions support the formation of collaborative arrangements. Since collaboration is not appropriate in all situations, it seems likely that the presence of certain conditions enhance collaborative viability. Despite their important role, specific guidance for collaborative conveners is lacking (McNamara, 2011). Therefore, the following guidelines are offered to help conveners assess the alignment of initial conditions with collaborative viability:

- Be an entrepreneur to create an environment for change. Seize focusing events to create windows for collective action through a softening in the environment that may create opportunities to politically advance the arrangement’s agenda.
- Canvas existing relationships to ensure

necessary resources and expertise are represented in the collaborative subsystem.

- Locate a stable funding stream that can be used to support the arrangement and leverage resources amongst participants.
- Ensure all members of the arrangement agree on the problem at hand and a plan to address it.
- Cultivate relationships with personnel representing the nonprofit sector.
- Identify creative ways to educate and involve citizens.

It is through continued research that the role of a collaborative entrepreneur and the involvement of the nonprofit sector will be better understood. Since the literature emphasizes the enormous effort needed to develop and sustain collaborative arrangements from a theoretical standpoint, it is important for us to have discussions about the conditions that contribute to collaborative success and practical limitations. It is through these discussions that administrators will be truly prepared to make a determination of collaborative viability in a specific context.

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