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POLICY CONSENSUS INITIATIVE

Public Solutions

The best public solutions come when people work together on issues.

The Public Solutions collaborative governance system is one where leaders convene all sectors—public, private, and civic—to develop effective, lasting solutions to public problems that go beyond what any sector could achieve on its own.

PRINCIPLES	NETWORK
The System is based on these principles:	The System relies on a:
Transparency and Accountability	**Sponsor:** an agency, foundation, civic organization, public-private coalition, etc. to initiate support
Equity and Inclusiveness	**Convener/leader:** A governor, legislator, local official, respected civic leader, etc. with power to bring diverse people together to work on common problems
Effectiveness and Efficiency	
Responsiveness	**Neutral Forum:** An impartial organization or venue, etc. to provide and ensure skilled process management
Forum Neutrality	
Consensus-Based Decision making	**Participants**: All sectors (public, private, civic, etc.) are involved to ensure representation of all interests and points of view

Leaders engaging with all sectors—public, private, non-profit, citizens, and others—to develop effective, lasting solutions to public problems that go beyond what any sector could achieve on its own.

What results does it produce?

The best public solutions come from people working together on issues. Collaborative governance takes as its starting point the idea that working together creates more lasting, effective solutions.

- Lasting—Solutions developed through collaborative governance won't simply be undone in the next year or legislative session.

- Effective—The collaborative governance approach ensures that the realities of the situation are considered and discussed; decisions are not made in a vacuum.

- More buy-in—From the outset, all with a stake are involved in authentic ways; all have a role in the final agreement.

Why is it needed?

- Accelerating change

- Overlapping institutions and jurisdictions

- Increasing complexity

- A need to integrate policies and resources

How is this different from "government?"

"Governance" is the process by which public ends and means are identified, agreed upon, and pursued. This is different than "government," which relates to the specific jurisdiction in which authority is exercised. "Governance" is a broader term and encompasses both formal and informal systems of relationships and networks for decision making and problem solving.

What does it take?

Collaborative governance requires three elements:

1. Sponsor- an agency, foundation, civic organization, public-private coalition, etc. to initiate and provide support

2. Convener/Leader- a governor, legislator, local official, respected civic leader, etc. with power to bring diverse people together to work on common problems

3. Neutral Forum- an impartial organization or venue, etc. to provide and ensure skilled process managament

How does it work?

The System integrates the principles and network to assure an effective collaborative governance process:

- **Sponsors identify** and raise an issue

- **Assessment** is made on the feasibility for collaboration and who needs to be involved

- **Leader(s) convene** all needed participants

- **Participants adopt** this framework for addressing the issue

- **Conveners and participants** frame (or reframe) the issue for deliberation

- **Neutral forum/facilitator designs** and **conducts** a process to negotiate interests and integrate resources

- **Written agreement** establishes accountability

- **Sponsors** identify and raise an issue or opportunity that calls for a collaborative response

This collaborative governance system can work anywhere as long as several key principles are adhered to: transparency; equity and inclusiveness; effectiveness and efficiency; responsiveness; accountability; forum neutrality; and consensus-based decision making.

The same kind of logic that powers our computers can power solutions to community problems!

Communities that have successfully resolved thorny problems —such as siting a new landfill, improving local health care, or cleaning up brownfields —underscore several important lessons about how to take on challenges:

- One or two leaders from government or the community stepped up and convened their neighbors to solve the problem;

- The leaders made sure to engage all those in the community with a stake in the issue;

- Leaders found or created neutral territory where people could work together on the problem without feeling intimidated.

A closer examination of these problem-solving experiences reveals other characteristics that should work in almost any community. Taken together, these characteristics amount to an "operating system."

In computer terminology, an operating system is the logical process that allows for the sharing of resources (hardware, software, memory) so that tasks can be performed smoothly and stably. In public problem solving, this operating system allows for the sharing of leadership, time, ideas, and other resources (infrastructure, policies and practices, institutions) to address public issues.

Governments' traditional operating systems have relied on hierarchy and control in order to make, implement, and enforce policy to solve problems. Today, accelerating change, entrenched and overlapping political jurisdictions, and far more complex problems require a better operating system to meet our public challenges. This is not a matter of government reform, but of better "governance" — the combined efforts of public and private institutions and individual citizens to solve community problems with innovation, fairness, and integrity.

Once communities embrace a better operating system, the resulting network of people and institutions can be called on to tackle other problems.

Operating System Components

The operating system involves the following six steps with continuous feedback among them. While they work in sequence, they also work together. Without one component, system logic is lost. The components are:

1. Sponsors identify and raise an issue or opportunity that calls for a collaborative response.

2. Assessment is made on the feasibility for collaboration and who needs to be involved.

3. Leader(s) convene all needed participants.

4. Participants adopt this framework for addressing the issue.

5. Conveners and participants frame (or reframe) the issue for deliberation.

6. Neutral forum/facilitator designs and conducts a process to negotiate interests and integrate resources.

7. Written agreement establishes accountability.

Notable aspects of this system include:

- Engagement of all sectors of the community in problem solving

- Emphasis on the role of convener for leaders

- The need for credible, neutral forums such as universities, civic centers, or other places

This is an open source system. Those using the system can adapt it to respond to issues and challenges, as well as to take into account context and conditions, so long as the principles are adhered to.

Public Solutions System Principles

Transparency and Accountability

Decisions take place in the public eye.

Equity and Inclusiveness

All interests who are needed and willing contribute to solution.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

Solutions are tested to make sure they make practical sense.

Responsiveness

Public concerns are authentically addressed.

Forum Neutrality

Different perspectives are welcome; the process itself has no bias.

Consensus-Based

Decisions are made through consensus rather than majority rule.

Sponsors / initiators:

- Identify and raise an issue or an opportunity that should be addressed through collaborative governance

- Assess (with help from a neutral forum) whether conditions are present for successful collaboration

Leaders who lend their authority:

- Convene all the participants to address the issue

- Engage participants in framing (reframing) the issue to open the way for deliberation

- Produce a written agreement that establishes accountability for how individual and collective actions will contribute to a solution

Neutral forums with capacity:

- Provide and ensure use of a collaborative process for negotiating interests and integrating resources to solve the problem, using the best tools, science, and methods