Collaborative Leaders Network

Collaborative Problem Solving

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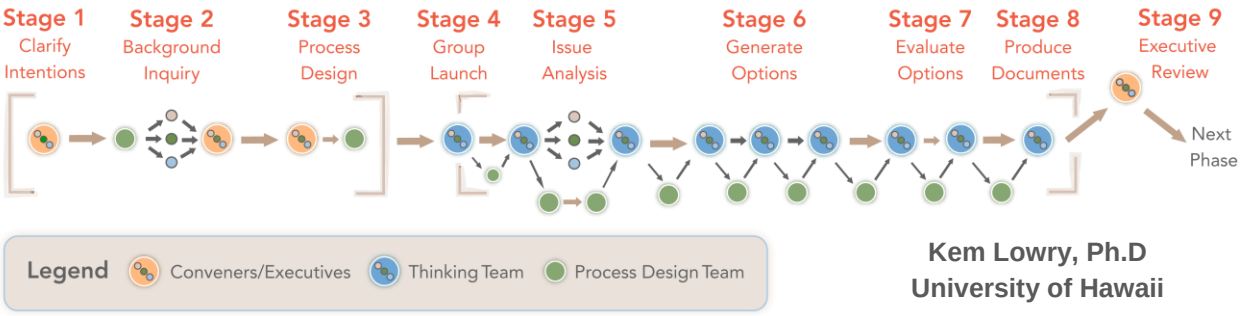


This strategy systematically builds toward consensus by having participants analyze the issue, hear from experts, generate and evaluate options, review draft documents, and revisit group agreements at every stage.

Roles

Conveners: Foundations, agencies, businesses or non-governmental organizations that conceive of and/or fund collaborative processes.
Executives: Foundations, agencies, businesses or non-governmental organizations that are primarily responsible for implementing the plan or agreement that is the product of the collaborative process.
Thinking Team: Invited participants in a collaborative process organized to address some problem or opportunity.
Process Design Team: Process leader, agency staff, and key participants who regularly meet to review group processes and make suggestions for next steps.

Overview

It is increasingly difficult to craft plans, policies, and programs that are regarded as legitimate and sustainable without the direct engagement of representatives from multiple agencies, corporations, and non-governmental organizations. Cross-sector collaborations of this type are designed to engage well-informed stakeholders in a process of sustained problem solving; the end product is often a policy document that can help to establish legislation, regulations, and standards.

This strategy requires that participants understand the logic of each stage of the process in order to build commitment toward a consensus perspective. Group members engage in clarifying the problem, analyzing potential strategies, crafting recommendations, evaluating draft documents, and delivering a report for which there is a high level of consensus and commitment.

An issue that is of sufficient importance and a convener who is of sufficient stature are among the critical success factors that will mobilize the necessary resources and participants for a cross-sector collaboration of this type.

Cross-sector collaboration provides both the forum and the strategy
for engaging the most knowledgeable stakeholders in sustained problem solving.

Collaborative Problem Solving: Critical Success Factors

- **An issue or opportunity of sufficient importance and urgency** to create the general recognition of a need for attention;
- **A convener of sufficient stature** to help mobilize the necessary resources and the participation of key stakeholders—without an expectation that the process will result in a pre-determined outcome;
- **Sufficient time and resources** to design and implement a process that allows for background inquiry, careful deliberation, and essential technical analysis;
- **Participation by necessary stakeholders** to help ensure that agreements reached about strategies will be regarded as legitimate;
- **A charter or set of principles** developed with the group to reflect agreements about what the group's mission is, how the group will function, and how decisions will be made;
- **A skilled process leader(s)** to help design a collaborative process that engenders the full understanding and support of individual participants;
- **A carefully crafted process** to encourage creativity in the design or re-design of potential strategies to address the issue or opportunity;
- **Opportunities to consult constituencies or technical experts** who are not participating in the process;
- **Credible technical analysis** to support the analysis of strategies;
- **A group decision** that is regarded by the participants as effective, wise, and durable;
- **A plan, set of recommendations, or other policy document** that summarizes the issue, process, and proposed strategy in sufficient detail to serve as both an action agenda and a reference document for others engaged with the issue.

Stage 1: Clarify Intentions

Identify the expectations of conveners to help them envision how the process might be organized, who might be participating, what time and resources will likely be required, and what the outcomes might be.

Overview

In this stage, the objective is to identify the hopes and expectations of conveners and potential group leaders, and come up with a preliminary roadmap of the process that reflects their combined intentions in a realistic way. Through interviews and focus group discussions with these individuals, a statement of purpose and a preliminary process outline can be developed.

There needs to be a sufficient level of detail—including which issues should be addressed, what outputs can be expected, who might participate, how long it might take, and what resources it might require—to ensure that conveners are clear about how the process might be organized and implemented. To some degree, the provisional statement that is drafted at the end of this stage is a useful test of commitment on behalf of the parties.

Labels like 'strategic plan,' 'collaborative planning project,' 'visioning exercise,' or 'action plan' may have different meanings for those engaged in sponsoring and conducting a process.

Stage 1: Key Tasks

Clarify what potential conveners seek in a potential collaborative process.

- Via interviews and focus groups, gather perceptions from conveners about which issues to address, how they emerged, and what outputs to expect.
- Clarify whose vision or purpose motivates the proposed process.
- Determine how the proposed collaboration relates to other problem-solving processes, if any.

Verify potential process requirements including participants, resource needs, and outputs.

- Clarify who the conveners see as potential participants.
- Assess expectations of conveners regarding available resources, time commitments, and intended outputs.

Develop a provisional statement of purpose.

- Produce a provisional process design based on interviews and focus group discussions.
- Review the provisional design with conveners to test its potential acceptability.

Stage 1: Dilemmas

Expectations are unrealistic or unclear.
Taking time, listening carefully, probing assumptions and hopes (by asking, "If this process works as intended what will the group produce?"), are investments that will help to clarify purposes at the beginning of a process.

There is insufficient time, money, and human resources.
If resources are strictly limited, conveners should consider setting more modest expectations, postponing until resources can be generated, or abandoning the project.

Convener is too wedded to a particular outcome.
Legitimacy is more likely to occur when participants in a process feel free to explore alternatives, deliberate about their strengths and weaknesses, and develop criteria for choosing among them.

A durable commitment to the process is lacking.
A group charter—detailing how the process will be run, what the behavioral expectations are, and what outputs are expected—can help to offset hesitation on the part of some participants. If the concern reflects a deeper lack of trust in group processes, it is sometimes useful to carve out a simple project that can demonstrate the group's ability to collaborate.

Stage 1: Checklists

Intentions

- How or why has this issue surfaced and who is driving the collaboration?
- What distinguishes this proposed process from related ones?
- Are conveners or key stakeholders expressing any "givens" or non-negotiables about the purpose or process?
- What reservations are being expressed publicly or privately?
- What does the community think about the subject/issue?
- Who should be consulted for background outside of those initially recommended?
- What are the known conflicts or tensions on the subject/issue?

Purpose, Goals, and Vision

- What should be accomplished (vision and purpose) through the collaborative process?
- To what extent do others accept the vision or purpose?
- Can differences about the intended purpose be resolved prior to initiating a process?

Commitment

- How realistic are the convener's and leader's conception of the time and resources that will be necessary?

- Will consulting and working with the community add real value (or is the final decision a *fait accompli*)?
- Is the process flexible enough to accommodate additional stakeholders?
- How open are the conveners and process leaders to advice from stakeholders (including those possessing detailed local knowledge)?
- Do conveners, key stakeholders, or others have any serious reservations about the purpose or process?

Stage 1: Vignettes

The launch of a process intended to engage scientists and agency officials in the design of inter-agency protocols to respond to outbreaks of coral disease, was delayed in part because of disagreements between agency staff and process consultants about the time and resources needed to accomplish the task. Process consultants were arguing for more meeting time while agency staff was concerned about requesting more time and funds. The resulting scaled-back agenda accomplished only some of the group's goals.

Stage 2: Background Inquiry

Gather first- and second-hand background information to determine which issues should figure into the tailored design of a collaborative process.

Overview

In this stage, the process team designs and implements an inquiry plan that specifies who will be interviewed, what questions will be asked, what documents will be consulted, and what other information will be sought.

Good background information—gathered from surveys, interviews, focus groups, and existing documents—can identify potential barriers to problem solving, provide realistic assessments of time and resources needed, and ultimately inform the design of an effective collaborative process.

It's important to understand the way stakeholders frame the issue, their degree of attachment to their perspectives, and their history of interaction with the topic at hand. If a valid assessment uncovers problems with the objectives and/or scope as originally conceived, the initiative should be reconsidered and revised.

From the information gathered, the process team can begin to identify which issues—substantive, relational, and procedural—will figure into the design of the collaborative process.

A less-than-adequate assessment could
actually subvert the effectiveness of the collaborative process.

Stage 2: Key Tasks

Identify stakeholder perceptions of the problem or issue, relationships with other stakeholders, and willingness to engage in a collaborative process.

- Gather information from potential stakeholder via surveys, interviews, or focus groups.
- Review reports, newspaper accounts, or other background documents on the issue.

Assess the viability of the objectives of the initiative.

- Review interviews, surveys, or other data for indicators that shared agreements are lacking and objectives have been inadequately construed.

Based on assessment, reassess objectives with conveners.

Assess the factors that might enhance or impede an effective collaborative process and ensure that the process design [Stage 3] anticipates these factors.

- Review interviews, surveys, or other data for perceived reservations, pre-conditions, old enmities, or other factors shaping conditions for an effective process.
- Identify other issues that could be important to process leaders.

Identify potential participants.

- Identify those individuals who add legitimacy to the process, who can influence the success, or who would be directly affected by the outcome.
- Assess perceptions of potential participants held by others who are likely to be included.
- Assess the degree to which subject matter experts should be included.
- Draft a list of participants and the rationale for their participation.

Assess the acceptability of the proposed project leader/facilitator.

- Identify perceptions of the proposed leader among potential participants.
- Assess any questions/issues among potential participants that reflect on the leader's potential effectiveness.

Stage 2: Dilemmas

There is no budget for assessment.
If this is a funding issue, the options range from reconfiguring the budget to reducing the scope or declining the work. It's important, though, to ascertain whether the lack of funding is actually a reflection of a tepid level of commitment to or interest in the project.

There is general resistance to engaging in a collaborative process.
Some resistance can be addressed by explaining the process and the role of the process leader. An exploration of the costs and benefits of alternative processes (or no process) can also help to address initial hesitancy.

There is perceived inequity in access to technical expertise.
Process leaders can increase access to expertise by organizing joint fact-finding, or otherwise ensuring that empirical claims can be assessed by objective analysis.

A rival or competing process is underway.
The greater the similarity of another initiative in terms of participants and process intentions, the better it usually is to wait for the alternative process to unfold.

Stage 2: Checklists

Issue Background and Context

- What are the different ways participants understand, define, or frame the problem and what are their perceptions based on?
- Is there historical "baggage" or old enmities that need to be understood?
- How content are participants with the status quo on the issue?
- What do participants believe has gone wrong in addressing this issue in the past?
- Are there portions of the subject (as opposed to the whole) where agreement or resolution is likely?

Process Design

- Are there conditions for participation in terms of format, groups or individuals involved, time, location, etc.?
- Are participants comfortable with the role of the convener and facilitator?
- Do provisional ground rules for the process need to be established before a first meeting based on who may be participating?
- Have participants been provided the opportunity to review and improve the collaborative process?
- Will a copy of the assessment report be given to (a) everyone interviewed; (b) only the conveners; or (c) anyone (or no one else) who requests it?

Participation

- Who can help lend legitimacy and influence the success of the process?
- Are there folks who will not "come to the table" but whose views and wisdom are critical to understand and incorporate?
- Who will be affected by the process outcome?
- Who is willing to participate in the process?
- What do people feel about the other participants in the process?
- Who might distract or sabotage the conversation and any potential output if they were excluded or included?
- Who are the subject matter/issue experts?

Team Leadership and Facilitation

- What assurances does the process leader or facilitator need to give regarding his or her integrity, background or affiliations, independence from the issue, and scope of work?
- What, if anything, needs to be disclosed about the relationship of the convener, funder, or participants?

Stage 2: Vignettes

Even when carefully conducted, background inquiries don't always reveal the most significant issues likely to emerge. In a land use planning visioning exercise, background analysis revealed divisions in the stakeholder group and passionate attachments to particular substantive issues. What was not initially obvious, however, was how the personal styles of particular participants and their relationship issues—more than an attachment to particular issues—would undermine efforts to engage in group problem solving.

Stage 3: Process Design

Develop a provisional process design explaining the logic and outputs of each phase in order to garner participants' early commitment to the process and the products.

Overview

Most stakeholders will want some sort of road map of what is to come before fully committing to the process. That road map takes the shape of a provisional process design that builds on the findings of the background inquiry and formulates a clear path for the collaboration, with the caveat that it can be modified and adjusted by the stakeholders at their first meeting and along the way.

Foundational elements of the provisional process design include: the mission, key process phases, intended outputs for each stage, process issues for the group charter, as well as a tentative meeting schedule and location.

In essence, the drafting of this road map provides a framework for the subsequent group charter, which is one of the first tasks for participants when they convene. The process for developing a group document involves providing material for participants to respond to, having them review and revise, and creating a collaborative version.

It's important that conveners and participants understand the process and agree with the intended outputs of each phase. Time spent upfront, clarifying assumptions about the purpose of the collaboration and laying out the principles of how the group will deliberate and make decisions, reduces conflicts about the process later on.

A process design provides participants with a tentative roadmap for the collaborative strategy.

Stage 3: Key Tasks

Draft the process design.

- Identify mission and intended outputs.
- Identify key phases, decision points, and outputs for each phase.
- Develop a communication strategy for participants including invitation and information about meeting logistics.

Review the process design draft.

- Ensure that conveners and participants understand and agree with intended outputs of each phase of the draft process.
- Clarify tentative decision points.

Stage 3: Dilemmas

The convener has a strong commitment to a different process design.
The first option for the process leader is to engage in a full discussion of the assumptions that underlie the design and make adjustments based on deeper understanding. If no process design adjustments can be made either by the convener or by the process design team, the decision of whether to continue needs to be made.

There is a lack of balance among participants.
If the list of participants means that some critical perspectives will be missing, the convener, process design team, and others must recruit people who will ensure a more balanced process.

The background inquiry is incomplete.
Deadlines that truncate the background inquiry and rely on just a few informants increase the probability that unanticipated issues will arise during the process. If this is the case, the process leader can appeal for more time or resources, or secure an agreement that more resources may be sought from the convener later, if the need arises.

Stage 3: Checklists

Purpose

- Based on meetings or interviews with stakeholders, and prior meetings with conveners and group leaders, what is the mission and goal of the collaborative?

Participation

- Is there sufficient balance of voices and viewpoints?
- Are there entities not actively involved in the collaboration that should be kept informed along the way?
- What are expectations for participation in terms of meeting attendance, frequency, interaction, and decision making?
- Is there formal standing for invited members or are the meetings open to anyone?
- Is there room and value for other roles, including observers, advisors, and ex-officio members?

Process Design

- How are the roles of the group and its leadership defined?
- Has the convening group ratified the process design?
- What are the decision-making rules (consensus, super majority, or some combination) and what are the meeting ground rules?
- What are the rules on disclosure of information and confidentiality within and outside the group?

- Is a steering committee or other type of committee required? If so, what is the scope and composition of the committee?
- Is there value to having two distinguished co-chairs?
- What process issues are likely to shape how long the process will run?
- What milestones or process encouragements can be built into the process to move the process along?
- What will the process be called: task group, commission, study group, advisory committee, problem-solving workshop, retreat, focus group, formal mediation, or negotiation session?
- How is the process designed to help de-personalize conflict?

Resources: Time and Expenses

- How long is the process likely to run? Is there a logical deadline?
- How many meetings are needed and is it better to spread them out (and possibly lose momentum) or bunch them up and do an intensive “blitzkrieg”?
- Will there be in-between meeting work? If so, by what type of group (work groups, technical committees, etc.)?
- What support is needed and what is a reasonable budget for outside services, travel, meeting room expenses, food and supplies?
- How will the process be funded and staffed?
- Are there any special cultural, institutional, or organizational considerations that need to be built into the design?

Stage 4: Group Launch

Introduce the participants and process, and start building trust and confidence by collaborating on a group charter and amending the process plan to reflect group concerns.

Overview

The introduction of participants to one another, and an initial discussion of intentions about the process and about the needs and expectations of individuals, is done with an eye toward building trust and confidence. Having the participants review, discuss, and revise the draft process design—including each phase of the process—is part of that confidence-building process.

In this stage, participants work together on either revising or creating a group charter that serves to guide deliberations, specify intended outcomes, clarify group authority, and address other substantive and procedural issues. It's important for all members of the group to understand and agree with how the process will work before rushing into deliberations.

The opportunity to see their process concerns reflected in the set of principles that will govern the process further aligns participants with the spirit of collaboration. In this way, the group launch sets the tone and creates expectations for what follows.

Prematurely going to the next stage before participants are ready could undermine confidence in the process.

Stage 4: Key Tasks

Introduce the process, individual participants, and the preliminary design of the process.

- Participants introduce themselves. (This may follow an informal social introduction prior to the initial meeting.)
- Process leader presents and explains the draft process design.

Review, discuss, and revise the draft process, as necessary.

- Participants ask questions and raise issues about the proposed design.
- Preliminary process design is amended, as necessary, and affirmed by the group.

Develop a set of process principles or a group charter.

- Identify issues the group thinks are essential to function effectively: what the intended output of the process is; how much authority the group has; how the group will make decisions; how the group will gather research on technical issues; how

the group will communicate with the media; how issues of fact and opinion in the group will be addressed; what the group's relationship to outside task forces will be, etc.

Provide ample opportunity for thorough discussion and a chance to address questions about the intended output and process.

- Ensure that there is sufficient discussion to satisfy participants that all issues have been identified and concerns have been addressed.

Develop and affirm agreements on these issues in a charter or set of process principles.

Stage 4: Dilemmas

There is skepticism about the process.
Rather than immediately trying to "sell" the process, it is usually more productive to allow participants to take time to talk about their "greatest hopes" and "worst fears" regarding the collaboration. Participants can often educate each other about what is possible for the group to accomplish.

Initial commitment to the process is lacking.
Spending time before the meeting or during an initial session talking about other successful collaborative processes can help to educate participants. In addition, careful listening, attention to detail, and a thorough explanation of how the process is designed can help participants try to reserve judgment about how valuable the process and their participation might be.

The choice exists to present a detailed process design or work with the group to develop the design.
Some less-experienced groups value the process leader's guidance, but others want to take greater control over the design process. It's preferable for the facilitator to have clear ideas about how the process could unfold, but how to present them is contingent on the extent of the group's process experience and their previous work with each other.

The choice exists to work with the group to develop a detailed charter governing process or to rely on simple process ground rules.
In general, the more complex and contentious the issue, the more useful it is to spend time on a highly detailed set of process agreements.

Stage 4: Checklists

- What perspectives and connections do participants have regarding the issue and other participants?
- What do participants hope to produce?
- What information will be needed as the issue is engaged?
- Who else needs to be included?

- What are the areas of preliminary alignment and areas of disagreement?
- What will it take to move to a more substantive process?
- What do participants need to do their best work?
- What will create a trust-building process?

Stage 4: Vignettes

As the Hawaii Coral Reef Working Group (CRWG) discussed a draft charter for the development of a 10-year strategic plan, one of the issues raised was how the Working Group should interact with the Local Area Strategy groups (LAS), those task forces dealing with specific, reef-related issues such as fishing and land-based sources of pollution. The CRWG decided to forward their objectives and policies to specific LAS groups for review. To clarify the decision-making authority between the groups, charter language was added to reflect that the CRWG retained final decision-making authority about what was in the plan that was being developed.

Stage 5: Issue Analysis

Develop a shared understanding of the issue and identify those aspects that are most amenable to intervention.

Overview

This stage requires participants to learn all they can about the issue/problem/opportunity and, in particular, about those causes that lend themselves to intervention. Participants in a collaborative process often come with their own (sometimes conflicting) perceptions of the primary causes and the most effective interventions. Building consensus about the "real" nature of the problem requires not only careful technical analysis but also an exploration of individual views.

To arrive at a shared definition of the issue, some groups first develop a shared set of assumptions and then create an "issue map" to graphically depict possible contributing causes and identify which of those might be most amenable to intervention.

Once there is agreement among participants that the issue is well defined and key assumptions are shared, this stage is deemed complete. The significance of developing a shared understanding is the foundation it provides for the analysis that follows; it is a prerequisite to building commitment for executing whatever strategy is developed by the group.

Once stakeholders begin to understand each others' assumptions,
it is easier to reach consensus on what the problem is and
what sorts of interventions will be effective.

Stage 5: Key Tasks

Educate participants about the issue.

- Identify, review, and discuss technical analysis of the issue.
- Share individual perceptions of the issue, including ideas about causation, impact, and optimal intervention.
- Identify areas of agreement and disagreement.

Organize technical analysis as needed.

- Identify empirical questions the group has about the significance of the issues, affected populations, causation, etc.
- Organize processes for answering questions (such as a technical panel) that are perceived as credible in the eyes of participants.

Develop a shared definition of the issue.

- Come up with a shared set of assumptions about the issue.
- Co-create a shared definition of the issue that includes contributing causes.
- Identify those causal factors that are most amenable to intervention.

Stage 5: Dilemmas

The group could focus on easily identifiable problems or on deeper "root" causes.
In some processes, an immediate fix is a reasonable goal; it may bring temporary relief to deeper, more persistent causes that are not well understood. Focusing on more complex causes in order to develop more sustainable solutions may require more time, resources, technical analysis, and commitment than groups or their sponsors want to or can make.

The group could focus on current needs or future generations.
Determining whether and how to be responsible to future generations requires attention to the values of the group; technical skills—such as scenario construction and statistical analysis—are needed to assess the implications of those value choices.

The group could engage in careful analysis of problems or accept narratives from "experts."
One of the ways of reducing analytic costs is to limit the analysis of the problem being addressed. In some cases, a planning process may have to rely on expert 'stories,' old reports, and anecdotes.

Causes of problems are viewed through a limited lens.
Participants with fixed ideas about the "major" cause of a community problem may try to direct the deliberations back to their view of the most important cause … to the detriment of a broader discussion. Sometimes reframing the problem and extending deliberation can lead to a revised understanding of problem causes.

Views change regarding which problems are priorities.
Once a process has begun and stakeholders understand the process more fully, some may argue for a different problem focus or emphasis. Proposed changes are sometimes a diversion that slows the process, but until everyone has had an opportunity to explain and defend their conception of the group's work, it is unlikely that everyone will be fully committed to the process.

Stage 5: Checklists

- What is the problem, issue, or opportunity? Who says?
- What is the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal (PESTEL) history of the issue?
- Why hasn't the problem or issue been solved before now?
- How severe is the problem? Who is affected? How do we know?
- What are the symptoms/indicators?

- What are the causes? How much agreement is there about problem causes (and their effects)?
- How "tractable" is the problem? What are the "givens" of the problem that can't be addressed for legal, economic, ideological, or other reasons?
- Are the problems and solutions the group is focusing on in sync with the collaboration's purpose, mission, and scope?
- What underlying interests and needs seem to be at play, and in what ways do they converge or diverge?
- What information, data, research reports, or expert opinions are needed?
- How does each person connect to the issue personally? What one, critical piece of information does each person in the room want everyone else to know about the issue?

Stage 5: Tools

Here are some tools that can be used with groups to clarify perceptions of a problem or issue.

Stage 5 Tool:
Identifying what can/can't be changed

This activity directs a group away from the "givens" (those elements of a problem that realistically can't be changed) and instead supports participants to focus on the "policy-relevant variables" (those elements that can be manipulated and changed).

Sequence/Steps:

- Explain the distinction between problem "givens" and "policy-relevant variables."
- Provide an example.
- Ask each person in the group to identify "givens" and "policy-relevant variables" on a card—working alone or with a partner.
- Put two sheets of newsprint in front of the group, one of which is titled "Givens" and the other, "Policy-Relevant Variables."
- Have the stakeholders record their responses on the relevant sheets.
- Facilitator notes areas of apparent agreement and disagreement.
- Participants discuss implications for designing possible "solutions."

Where there is disagreement on the "givens," the facilitator keeps the conversation going about what is meant by "givens" and why certain aspects of the problem are considered "givens" by some. If that doesn't lead to agreement about "givens," the facilitator will try to generate strategies using multiple conceptions of "givens" regarding a particular issue or problem.

In Practice

This example illustrates how a group might distinguish between “givens” and “policy-relevant variables.”

Issue: Possible sea level rise in Hawaii

Possible perceived givens

- Global patterns of continued greenhouse gas emissions [GGE] cannot be sufficiently reduced to alter long term patterns of climate change, OR GGE is but one of many factors—and not the most important one—in global climate change.
- Continued sea level rise will contribute to long-term beach retreat, loss of beaches, threats to coastal housing, hotels, and infrastructure such as highways, sewage treatment plants, etc., OR long-term threats of sea level rise are overstated.

Possible policy-relevant variables

- Reduction of GGE to reduce or alter global climate change
- Designation of key beaches/coastal areas for protection
- Protection of selected coastal areas by coastal structures such as dikes
- Regulatory protection of threatened coastal areas via designation of new setbacks and ‘no-build’ hazard areas
- Relocation over time of threatened public infrastructure
- Relocation/abandonment of some coastal housing, hotels, and infrastructure
- Education and behavioral modification of potential coastal property purchasers

Stage 5 Tool:
Interviewing stakeholders

Stakeholders have their own perceptions of problem significance, problem causes, symptoms, and impacts. Careful interviews outside the group process can elicit key areas of divergence/convergence.

Sequence/Steps:

- Identify key stakeholders based on their agency responsibilities, other professional roles, engagement with the issue, previous involvement or interest, etc.
- Interview them about their perceptions of problem significance, symptoms, causes, and impacts.
- Prepare charts, matrices, or reports comparing perceptions.
- Deliver feedback to the group.

Stage 5 Tool:
Refocusing discussion on outcomes

Some individuals/groups are inclined to focus on problem causes. Because a focus on causes can become a discussion of "villains," re-focusing the discussion on impacts clarifies the emphasis.

Sequence/Steps:

- Ask stakeholders who or what is impacted by the problem.
- Ask stakeholders how the problem is manifest and what the symptoms or indicators are.
- Repeat until there is agreement on impacts rather than on causes.
- Once there is agreement about impacts, work with groups to identify single or multiple causes and, if possible, assess the relative influence of each causal factor.

In Practice

A community forum focusing on coastal problems generated thoughts such as "too many tourists." When pressed about what it was about too many tourists that resulted in adverse impacts, respondents said they couldn't find parking at their favorite swimming/fishing sites. Subsequent discussion led the group to re-focus on "inadequate coastal access in some coastal areas, including parking."

Stage 5 Tool:
Diagramming a problem

Diagramming the multiple causes of the problem—social, economic, environmental—can help to clarify their relative importance.

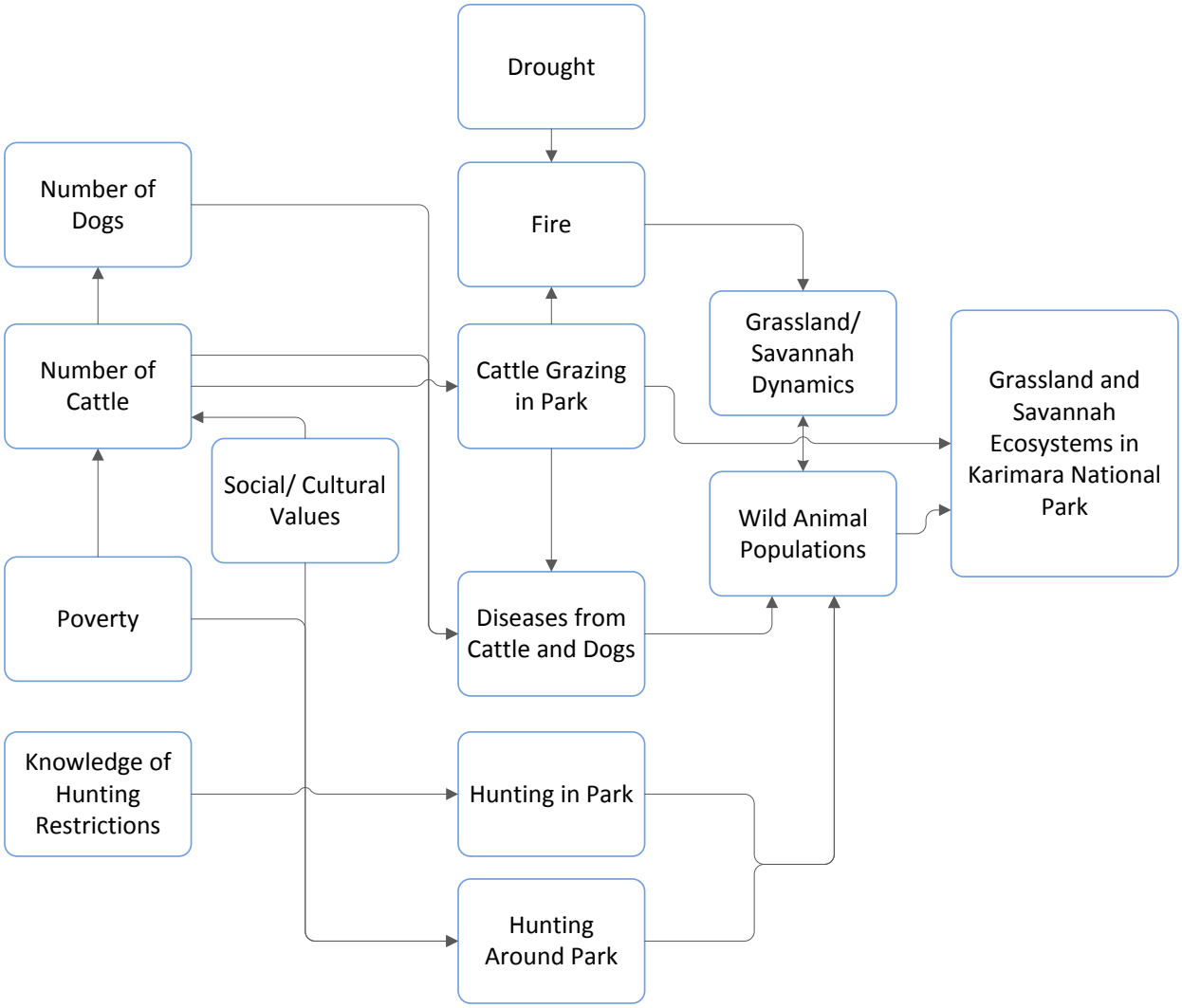
Sequence/Steps:

- Start by identifying the adverse social, environmental, economic, or organizational impact that the group hopes to change. Put it on the right side of a large piece of newsprint.
- To the left of the "impact" ask the group to list the direct "threats" or causes contributing to the problem/impact; draw arrows to the "impact."
- Identify and list "indirect" threats or activities that influence the direct threats.
- Identify and diagram other contributing factors.
- Discuss the arrangement of direct, indirect, and contributing factors until the resulting diagram reflects the consensus view of the group.

In Practice

Problem Diagram: Factors contributing to a natural resource problem.

Margoulis, Richard and Nick Salavsky, 1998. "Measures of Success." Washington, D.C., Island Press.



Stage 5 Tool:
Discussing the impact on individuals

Sometimes, groups discuss problems that touch them personally, as when there are changes in their workplaces. Discussions of individual impacts can clarify perceptions, develop shared understandings, and improve assessments of perceived impacts.

Sequence/Steps:

- Name the problem to be discussed.
- Ask members of the group if they agree with the problem.
- Ask group participants to take turns indicating how they think the problem affects them.

- Give people an opportunity to ask clarifying questions.
- Ask people if their perception of the problem has changed based on the discussion and, if so, how.

Stage 6: Generate Options

Identify and analyze a range of alternative strategies for addressing a problem or taking advantage of an opportunity.

Overview

The goal of this stage is to generate a range of alternative strategies that can be analyzed with available resources and which leave no viable strategies unexamined. The practical challenge is to encourage participants to suppress their immediate reactions to proposed strategies so that creative ideas can flow freely. The bigger challenge is to determine how comprehensive to make the list, as there are almost never enough resources to examine all of the strategies that might be suggested.

Credible analysis of how each strategy might impact the problem or opportunity is what ultimately allows each stakeholder to make an informed evaluation. Outside experts or specialists are called upon when proposed strategies require detailed technical analysis.

At the end of this stage, participants should feel that the most relevant strategies have been identified and the analysis of impacts of individual strategies is credible. The process requires a high level of thoroughness in order for members of the group to regard both the proposed list of strategies and the technical analysis as legitimate and complete.

Separate idea generation from idea evaluation.

Stage 6: Key Tasks

Identify strategies for addressing the primary causes of the problem identified in the previous stage.

- Examine reports, testimony of technical experts, strategies used for similar problems elsewhere, and other resources that help identify possible strategies.
- Design a process in which group participants can identify and list possible strategies.

Analyze the primary impacts of each strategy on the problem.

- Identify critical impacts to be analyzed.
- Organize technical analysis in ways that ensure credibility to group participants.

Stage 6: Dilemmas

There is uncertainty about the definition of the problem.
As participants start to generate strategies, one or more individuals may begin to express reservations about the task, even asking if the group is working on the wrong causal factor. One

response is to pause, review how the group arrived at the current stage of the work, and discuss process options until there is consensus about whether to continue or alter the process.

The list of strategies is too comprehensive.
It is sometimes possible to reduce the number of strategies by combining similar ones or subsuming specific strategies under more general categories. It is also possible to carefully sort the strategies—using criteria such as cost, ease of implementation, or timeliness—to ensure that no potentially useful strategies are eliminated from the list.

Strategies are at multiple levels of generality.
Sometimes strategies expressed at different levels of generality can be grouped together without loss of meaning. At other times, a specific strategy can be expressed as one of a suite of activities under a more general heading that, taken together, would effectively address the problem.

Premature closure may occur.
Premature closure may occur because some participants are in a hurry to complete the task. The process leader can encourage the group to continue, "Just to make sure that there are no more creative ideas." If that fails, beginning a more detailed analysis of the impact of the proposed strategy on the problem may be a way of testing the strategy and the group's commitment to it.

Conflict arises over the credibility of the list of strategies.
Conflict over the results of the analysis can be reduced by careful structuring of the analytic process prior to the commissioning of any studies. First, participants should reach agreement about what questions they expect the analyst to answer. Second, they should agree on the types of data and analysis they would regard as credible. If, after efforts have been made, the results are still not regarded as credible, it may sometimes be possible for the group to rely on an expert or panel of experts to agree on a strategy for re-analysis—provided the conflict is really about the quality of the analysis and not simply an ideological issue.

Stage 6: Tools

Stage 6: Tool
Generating options

When the group includes participants who hold different, even competing views of an "ideal" strategy, this practice encourages participants to engage the views of others.

Sequence/Steps:

- Determine whether group is ready to develop strategies to address the problem as defined.
- Before inviting strategies, encourage participants to avoid evaluation of options suggested by others. Suggest separating idea generation from idea evaluation.
- Invite participants to take turns identifying options.
- Record options as they are identified.
- Continue to encourage options until no more are suggested (or allotted time has expired).
- If possible, combine like strategies to create a more manageable list.

Stage 6: Tool
Comparing options using different constraints.

Constraining choice by focusing on particular management tools or by imposing dollar limits for other constraints may result in a smaller, but more realistic set of options. This is a useful approach when there are known constraints in terms of funds, time, or personnel.

Sequence/Steps:

- Determine whether the group is ready to engage in problem solving.
- Determine the group's appetite/inclination to work with decision-making constraints.
- Work with group to identify (and delimit) different constraints under which options are being generated. For example, participants may be asked to generate options for regulatory solutions, public outreach solutions, research options, etc. Groups might be asked to think of options under specific financial constraints such "no option should cost more than $100,000 to implement."
- Before inviting options for each constraint, encourage participants to avoid evaluation of options suggested by others. Suggest separating idea generation from idea evaluation.
- Once the group understands the constraints, invite participants to take turns identifying options.
- Record options as they are identified.
- Continue to encourage options until no more are suggested (or allotted time has expired).
- Ask people to compare the type of options identified using different constraints

In Practice

In a coastal management workshop, participants were encouraged to generate management options consistent with an emphasis on principles of *ahupua`a* management.

Stage 7: Evaluate Options

Evaluate strategies and choose between them using criteria the group selects.

Overview

Once the technical analysis of the strategies has been completed and the potential impact of each has been assessed, the group must evaluate and choose which will most effectively address the issue on which the group is focused. To be regarded as credible, the process of choosing must be based on criteria that the group itself selects.

The selection of criteria—measures such as effectiveness, cost, ease of implementation, community acceptability, staff availability, and partnership potential—is a critical group choice. Once criteria are fully developed, refined, and combined, they can be assigned different weights by the group's participants to show their relative significance.

The process for applying the criteria to the list of possible strategies has to be done in ways that reveal real differences between approaches. The group is likely to spend some time deliberating which criteria and which review process will be most credible in selecting a strategy that will be regarded as effective and sustainable.

The selection and application of criteria for choosing between strategies is an exercise in articulating the group's values.

Stage 7: Key Tasks

Identify criteria for assessing strategies.

- What criteria does the group regard as most important?
- Is cost a primary consideration?
- How effective is each strategy in mitigating the problem?
- To what extent is a strategy politically acceptable?
- What criteria—and whose—should be paramount in choosing between strategies?

Identify data needed to apply criteria to strategies.

- Are the value preferences of participants sufficient to allow the group to choose between strategies?
- Will detailed information be required in order for the evaluation process to be considered valid by participants and the public at large?
- How will data be gathered and at what cost?

Apply the criteria to the strategies.

- Determine whether some criteria should be weighted more heavily than others and, if so, what weights should be applied.
- Apply 'sensitivity analysis' to determine whether slight changes in weightings would change the outcome of the evaluation (i.e., modify the weights attached to particular criteria to see whether the outcome of the analysis changes).

Stage 7: Dilemmas

Conflict arises over what criteria should be used.
The credibility of which strategy is chosen depends in large part on the perceived validity of the process used to assess alternatives. The deliberation about criteria needs sufficient time: First, to discuss why a certain criterion might be more important than another. Second, because criteria can sometimes be combined by creating a new criterion. Third, it may be useful to repeat the analysis several times by using different criteria to illustrate to the group the difference it makes.

There is subjectivity in group ratings.
Some assessment processes—such as rating on a 1-5 or 1-10 scale for each criterion—risk being highly subjective. When using rating systems of this sort, it's helpful to assign an operational definition to a numerical rating so that the group clearly understands what a rating means. Sometimes the group has agreed in advance that both the highest and lowest individual rating will be dropped from the analysis. It can be useful to have two rounds of rating; the first, followed by discussion and deliberation, and the second, a "final" rating.

There is insufficient time and resources for analysis of strategies.
Limiting the analysis to 8-10 strategies is possible, but the basis for choosing the "top ten" must be founded on a principle or set of criteria with which there is strong agreement in the group (e.g., probable costs, ease of implementation, most likely to have immediate impact, etc.)

The fallacy of misplaced precision exists.
In including or omitting particular strategies in some kind of group voting procedure, it is possible to assume that small differences in the results have more practical significance than they really do. Generally, if it is difficult to draw a line between what's included and what isn't, the analysis is not likely to be credible. The analysis can sometimes be made more credible by re-examining and adjusting the weights of evaluative criteria, by further discussion of the criteria or the strategies, or by changing the voting procedure.

Stage 7: Tools

Stage 7: Tool
SWOT analysis

Preliminary group assessment of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats [SWOT] associated with each strategy is a useful tool to start the evaluative discussion of strategies.

Sequence/Steps:

- Put each strategy on a separate piece of newsprint.
- Ask participants to identify the strengths of each strategy in turn and list them.
- Ask participants to identify weaknesses and list them under each strategy.
- Continue by asking participants to identify opportunities and then threats associated with each strategy–and record them on the newsprint.

Once the listing is complete, give the group time to comment on the participants' assessment, areas of agreement, etc.

Stage 7: Tool
Option/ criteria analysis

When the group recognizes that some criteria are more relevant than others, the group works to come up with a list of weighted evaluative criteria.

Sequence/steps:

- Brainstorm criteria.
- Discuss and revise criteria.
- Discuss relative relevance/importance of each criterion.

After discussion, seek consensus on the relative significance of weighting each criterion.

Consider this example. A community wants to create some new active and passive parks. They have identified several new sites and have evaluated the sites based on criteria such as cost, accessibility to nearby county or state roads, benefits to community, and likelihood for success. They have decided on three sites they want to acquire. Where do they start?

Option 1: Large site for an active park--owner unwilling to sell; site will require condemnation; new road will be required.

Option 2: Small site for a passive park--location next to a county road in a populated area; owner willing to sell at a reasonable cost within the next six months.

Option 3: Medium size site for an active park--location on a major road; seller asking more than the appraised value and wants to complete transaction in three years.

For each option, give a score for each criterion from 1 to 5, with 1 being the highest score. Add the total of the scores. The strategies with the lowest scores are the optimal choice. The optimal choice in this example is Option 2.

Option	Cost	Accessibility	Benefits to Community	Likelihood for Success	Total Score
Option 1	5	5	1	4	15
Option 2	1	1	3	1	6
Option 3	4	1	2	3	10

Each criterion can also be weighted to reflect its relative importance. For example, if cost is most important, a weight can be attached to calculate its relative importance.

Stage 7: Tool
Paired comparison of options.

This tool attempts to compare two options at a time to see which is best until one "best" option emerges.

Sequence/steps:

- Develop a list of strategies.
- Ask the group to compare each strategy to every other strategy in terms of all criteria simultaneously.
- Continue to do this until each strategy has been compared against every other strategy. This will produce a rank ordered list.

Be sure to allow sufficient time in advance for discussion of every strategy before votes are taken. Invite people to speak for or against strategies, or encourage everyone to discuss the pros and cons or advantages and disadvantages of each item.

Stage 7: Vignettes

To identify the high priority reefs, the Hawaii Coral Reef Working Group (CRWG) used three primary criteria: biological value; degree of threat; and conservation viability. At a meeting of reef specialists, agency staff, and conservation groups, participants used the three criteria to rank 43 sites that The Nature Conservancy had identified as being biologically significant. Priority sites were first voted on by island groups, and then voted on again in a plenary group, where nine sites across the state were identified as top priority. At a subsequent meeting of the

Coral Reef Working Group, the nine sites were again ranked in terms of four different criteria: readiness; urgency; cross-LAS potential; and potential for effective management.

Stage 8: Produce Documents

Develop a plan, set of recommendations, or policy document that describes the strategy the group has developed, the rationale for the strategy, and the process by which it was developed.

Overview

The final group task is to design and write a plan, set of recommendations, or policy document that is tangible evidence of the quality of the deliberations. The document should include an overview of the issue, details of the strategy, and a description of the rationale behind its development. Enumerating the step-by-step logic and the assumptions on which it is based will help to guide those who are charged with implementation.

The product itself can be written by group members, by staff, or by a consultant to the group. Key constituents who are not part of the group—including technical experts and those responsible for implementation—are often consulted and given opportunities to comment. Because participants in the group are responsible for the final document, there should be multiple opportunities for them to review and approve the content.

In addition to high quality plans, policies, or recommendations, a well-designed, well-executed collaborative strategy strengthens the habits of collaboration among participants.

Stage 8: Key Tasks

Prepare and approve plan/policy document outline.

- Sub-committee, staff, or consultant prepares an annotated outline.
- Group members review, revise, and approve.

Prepare a draft plan/policy document.

- Group, technical specialists, and significant constituents review draft[s].
- Group/drafting team revises as many times as required to meet stakeholder standards and expectations.
- Final draft is circulated to select constituents.

Stage 8: Dilemmas

Keeping the group focused on this final stage is a challenge.
Once the choice of strategy has been made, some participants may feel their work is done. Helping the group stay focused—and ensuring they are making necessary connections to constituents in gathering comments and suggestions—is part of the process challenge of this stage.

There are last minute disagreements about language.
As the document is prepared and circulated to participants and to constituencies outside the group, there are often requests to modify findings or language. Sometimes, those who object would prefer vague or less direct language. These are issues that can consume a substantial amount of the group's time at a moment in the process when most participants think that their work is complete.

Production problems crop up.
Lack of assistance for graphics and layout, overloaded editors, and similar practicalities can slow production and result in the circulation of multiple "unofficial" final versions. When electronic versions are circulating, the use of "track changes" features can result in multiple "final" drafts.

There are signals of weak support from executives or other sponsors.
The group may receive or hear of weak support from the executive or other significant outsiders. Sometimes, the executive appears to be backing away from the proposed strategy or indicating a preference for some strategy other than the one developed by the group. To the extent that the group has worked well together to produce a product in which they take some pride, this can be particularly difficult. At the center of this dilemma are questions about who the group is responsible to and what the nature of that responsibility is.

No master editor protocols exist.
As the group begins to produce a report, editing of electronic versions by individual group members can result in multiple versions of the document. Groups are wise to develop protocols governing the sequencing, labeling, dating, and transmission of edited versions.

Draft reports are prematurely circulated.
Groups should develop protocols governing the circulation of draft copies to constituents outside the group because premature release of incomplete documents can create a negative climate for the final version.

Stage 8: Vignettes

The Hawaii Coral Reef Working Group's (CRWG) document incorporated policy priorities for addressing land-based sources of pollution, reef protection, and related initiatives, along with details of the priority-setting process. A first draft was submitted to the CRWG, to the Local Action Strategy groups, and to the staff of the Papahanaumokuakea Monument. After a first round of revisions incorporated some of the recommended edits, the document was re-submitted to members of the Coral Reef Working Group, as well as to selected experts and the national NOAA staff. The final draft incorporated further edits and was disseminated to all who had participated.

Stage 9: Executive Review

Present and explain the report to the executive or convener in a way that it is understood, accepted, and supported.

Overview

In presenting the plan, policy, strategy, or recommendations to the legislative chair, agency director, or other executive for whom the strategy was developed, it may be necessary to clarify the logic, assumptions, key tasks, and processes that underlie the choice of strategy. In most collaborative processes, the strategy selected by the group and the logic on which it was based will not be a surprise to the executive or convener.

The executive authority determines whether to accept the strategy submitted by the collaborative. He or she may also defer acceptance and ask for more information, analysis, broader stakeholder review, or other inputs. In the case of deferred acceptance of the strategy by the convener, the process team decides what further work or process would be an appropriate response.

Depending on what agreements regarding confidentiality were made, outside constituency groups may receive a version of the group's output, although it may not be the full report submitted to the executive.

Setting the stage for implementation is a key consideration.

Stage 9: Key Tasks

Submit plan to executive, if appropriate.

- A formal or informal presentation to the executive is made by the group.

Develop and implement a dissemination plan at the discretion of the executive.

- Group members hold meetings/workshops to explain logic of the strategy and answer questions about the plan development process.
- Group members provide testimony to legislative bodies and others, as necessary.

Stage 9: Dilemmas

There is no decision by the executive.
When the executive neither formally accepts nor rejects the group's work, participants can request a meeting with the executive as an "action-forcing" initiative or embark on their own dissemination strategy, provided it does not violate previous agreements with the convener.

There is no action by the executive.
When the executive accepts the plan or report in principle but takes no steps to execute it, the group can seek meetings with the executive and offer to assist in promoting the work or building support.

The executive wants a particular focus in order to "sell" the plan to constituents.
Participants may have to negotiate with the executive or conveners about how best to organize, synthesize, and frame the report in ways that make it accessible without sacrificing the integrity of the analysis.