



Oregon Atlas of Collaboration

Notes from the Field:
A Summary of Conversations
with Regional and Statewide Leaders

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SUGGESTED CITATION

Nabatchi, T., Cochran, B., McLain, R.J., Fields, K.R., and Barthuly, B.E. (2019). Oregon Atlas of Collaboration - Notes from the Field: A Summary of Conversations with Regional and Statewide Leaders. www.atlasofcollaboration.com.

SUPPORTED BY

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Chalkboard Project, NPCC, and PARCC

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document would not have been possible without the dedication of every leader participating in Oregon's collaboratives. Thank you!

WEBSITE AVAILABILITY

All information contained in the document is available at www.atlasofcollaboration.com.

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Executive Summary

As part of the [Atlas of Collaboration](#) effort to inventory and better understand state-connected collaboratives, project team members conducted five focus groups (4 regional, 1 statewide) through the spring and summer of 2019. The four regional focus groups engaged over 25 participants and discussed five topics: (1) the strengths and weaknesses of collaboratives, (2) cross-policy collaboration, (3) factors of collaborative success, (4) state involvement in the collaboratives, and (5) moving toward the future. The statewide focus group engaged 19 participants and discussed three topics: (1) factors of collaborative success, (2) state involvement in the collaboratives, and (3) moving toward the future.

Strengths, Weaknesses, and Cross-Policy Collaboration

According to regional focus group participants, the strengths and weaknesses of collaboratives generally fall within three categories: people, purposes, and resources. Participants asserted that among the strengths of collaboratives are their ability to get diverse people to the table to build the relationships and buy-in needed to address complex issues and attract the resources to implement solutions that would not be possible for any one entity. These collaboratives are challenged by the ability to sustain partner engagement over time, create joint goals and ownership when operating under state mandates, and address organizational needs when resources are limited. The regional group participants also identified numerous examples of collaboration across policy areas. They suggested that collaboratives are talking more with one another, but that cross-policy collaboration is still emerging and can be strengthened in a variety of ways.

Factors of Collaborative Success

The regional focus group participants identified four factors of collaborative success, including: (1) getting the “right” people to the table, (2) using principled engagement, (3) fostering a sense of shared motivation, and (4) building capacity for joint action. The statewide focus group participants identified five factors of collaborative success, including: (1) conducting a site-specific assessment, (2) having a

diverse and “local critical mass” of people, (3) finding common goals and desired results, (4) being able to access flexible funding, and (5) building resilience.

State Involvement in Collaboratives

The regional focus group participants discussed the ways that mandates, resources, staff, and capacity building efforts both enable and constrain collaborative efforts. The statewide focus group participants asserted that state involvement could be improved if the state and the collaboratives worked together to develop clear expectations, address power dynamics, and communicate the value of collaboration to broad and diverse audiences.

Moving Toward the Future

Both the regional and statewide focus groups were asked to identify some potential “core pillars” for a statewide approach to collaborative governance. The regional focus group participants asserted that a statewide approach would: (1) articulate a statewide vision, but allow for localized action, (2) provide collaboratives with decision autonomy and authority, (3) supply resources for longevity, and (4) appreciate multiple forms of leadership. The statewide focus group participants asserted that such an approach would: (1) provide clarity of need, purpose, power, and accountability, (2) support “best practice,” (3) provide funding over time, and (4) recognize the evolution of collaboration.

Likewise, both groups were asked to provide ideas about how research and the Atlas of Collaboration team could support the work of the collaboratives. The regional focus group participants suggested creating a resource clearinghouse, building a learning community, conducting and disseminating research, building bridges and fostering connectivity, and acting as a communication conduit. The statewide focus group participants suggested numerous research questions centered on strengthening collaboratives and ensuring their sustainability, developing typologies and life cycle models, assessing collaborative value, and investigating the roles of collaborative platforms.

Introduction

The State of Oregon has been using collaborative approaches to address a variety of policy problems since the late 1980s. Legislative mandates established programs like Oregon Consensus (1989) that bring together multiple stakeholders with diverse perspectives to resolve complex policy issues outside of the court and Oregon Solutions (2001) to help implement projects that engage government, business, and other civic entities to solve important community based problems. The legislature and state agencies have also established platforms to deploy and support collaboratives to address a wide range of policy issues, from natural resources to education. The Atlas of Collaboration, a joint project of the National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University and the Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration at Syracuse University, seeks to inventory and investigate these state-connected collaboratives to generate knowledge and improve practice.

Version 1.0 of the Atlas focuses specifically on the 236 “state-connected” collaboratives in Oregon that are part of one of thirteen collaborative platforms in five policy areas (see below). Version 2.0 of the Atlas intends to include a broader sample of the rich collaborative efforts, going on across Oregon—like those supported through Oregon Consensus and Oregon Solutions, including self-initiated collaborative efforts.

As part of the initial Atlas effort, team members conducted five focus groups (4 regional, 1 statewide) through the spring and summer of 2019 to learn from leaders in these state-connected collaboratives and collaborative platforms. This report summarizes those focus group sessions. It begins with the regional focus groups, then turns to the statewide focus group.

Regional Focus Groups

The four regional focus groups, held in Baker City, Central Point, Florence, and The Dalles, engaged over 25 participants who are members of two or more state-connected collaboratives across two or more collaborative platforms. The participants in

these focus groups also represented a cross-section of the five policy areas with active collaboratives. The discussions in the four regional focus groups centered on (1) the strengths and weaknesses of collaboratives, (2) cross-policy collaboration, (3) factors of

A state-connected collaborative has a formal connection to state government and seeks to create value by addressing a public problem (e.g., through advising state policy, coordinating state service delivery and investment, or resolving policy conflict).

A collaborative platform is an organization or program with dedicated competences and resources for facilitating the creation, adaptation and success of multiple or ongoing collaborative projects or networks (Ansell and Gash 2018: 20). It is also a structured framework for promoting and assisting the individual and collective efforts of collaboratives operating in the same policy field and/or working toward the same or similar ends.

The **five policy areas** include natural resources, economic development, public safety, education, and human health.

collaborative success, (4) state involvement in the collaboratives, and (5) moving toward the future. We summarize the findings for these five topics below.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Collaboratives

Focus group participants had a lot to say about what collaborative are good at, and what they struggle with. The reported strengths and weaknesses generally fall within three broad categories: people, purposes, and resources (see table 1).

Participants in the regional focus groups identified several *strengths of collaboratives*. For example, participants asserted that collaboratives are good at getting people to the same table, including both new people and people who have a history of conflict. This helps to build relationships, which generates trust and becomes a foundation from which people can take risks and change how they do business over time.

Table 1: Strengths and Weaknesses of Collaboratives

	People	Purposes	Resources
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting diverse people to the table • Building relationships • Generating trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulating vision and goal • Informing decision spaces • Getting buy-in • Dealing with complex issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracting funding and other resources
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging new and different participants • Recruiting board members • Sustaining participation over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clear purpose, definition of issues and goals • Building shared ownership • Power dynamics • Lack of authority to make decisions and take actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Lack of funding (unfunded mandates) • Capacity (leadership, facilitation, training, technical assistance)

Participants also noted that collaboratives are good at generating a shared purpose, that is, identifying and articulating a vision and goals, which helps to inform decision spaces, get buy-in on solutions, and attract funding and other resources. Together these factors can enable collaboratives to deal with complex problems and issues that cannot be addressed by individual organizations.

The participants also identified several *weaknesses of collaboratives*. For example, it is difficult to engage people, particularly those who come from different sectors, have different missions, values, or cultural perspectives, or compete in business or for grant resources. It is also challenging to recruit new board members and sustain (voluntary) participation over time. These challenges are exacerbated by geography (e.g., distance and the urban-rural divide). Collaboratives also struggle when they lack clarity of purpose – when there is no clear definition of the issue or the goals. When goals are state-mandated, collaboratives (and the broader community) struggle with building a sense of shared ownership, which is made more difficult by power dynamics (internally at meetings and externally with local government, the community, and other stakeholders) and when

they lack the authority to make decisions take actions. Finally, collaboratives also struggle with moving from relationship building among diverse actors to building the capacity for (and taking) joint action. Often, this challenge is a function of resources: time, funding (particularly for work that comes after startup) and unfunded mandates, and capacity (leadership, facilitation, training, technical assistance).

Cross-Policy Collaboration

Focus group participants also were asked about collaboration across policy areas, that is whether and how collaboratives in one policy area work with collaboratives in other policy areas.

Participants noted that *collaboratives increasingly are talking with one another as they begin to realize they have mutual interests and can bring different resources to their work*. This is evident for example, in the ideas of “one watershed” or “summit to the sea” and in the “social determinants of health” conversations happening among Coordinated Care Organizations and collaboratives working in education and workforce development policy. Many other conversations and efforts are taking place to

link policy areas and foster cross-policy coordination. For example, a soil and water conservation district is working with local healthcare and Community Health Improvement Plan stakeholders on youth education. There are conversations linking Career and Technical Education (CTE) with economic development—building employment pathways. There are also discussions among collaboratives in health, early learning, and criminal justice.

Despite many exciting developments and innovations, participants felt that cross-policy collaboration is still emerging and not fully institutionalized or embedded in practice. They identified several barriers, including: (1) limited staff capacity (e.g., time, knowledge), (2) resource scarcity (e.g., funding competition), (3) an inability of leaders to align visions across platforms or policy areas, (4) the risk of mission creep and fear of duplicative efforts, and (5) differences among “languages” used in different policy arenas.

Participants noted that cross-platform collaboration can be cultivated through both clear-cut and more complex means. Some participants suggested simply calling on those who sit on multiple collaboratives to make connections and offer more joint events. Others suggested creating a “bank” of best practices on collaboration, innovation science, collective impact, and related issues, and providing templates and examples. Still others suggested a strategic approach centered on identifying and developing shared measures and outcomes across the platforms, which would enable cross-fertilization and more diverse contributions. At the more complex end of the spectrum, some participants suggested the need for additional coordinating bodies. For example, some suggested that Regional Solutions could act as a hub, while others suggested the creation of umbrella organizations structured to allow different parts of the community to self-organize and take action.

Factors of Collaborative Success

Participants had a lot to say about the factors of success – elements that enable fruitful and constructive collaboration over time. Overall, participants suggested that the most productive collaboratives happen when the members understand the broader political, social, and environmental

context, recognize a problem that needs to be solved, and acknowledge that collaboration has the potential to produce better results than not collaborating.

The regional focus group participants believe collaboratives are more likely to succeed if they:

- Get the “right” people to the table
- Use principled engagement
- Foster a sense of shared motivation
- Build capacity for joint action

Other elements of success pertain to the collaborative members and how they work together to cultivate principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. First, the focus group participants felt that collaboratives are more likely to succeed if they get the “right” people to the table. This means ensuring representation, and finding members who are passionate, idealistic, and enthusiastic, but also rational; willing to do the work and want to be a part of the solution; have “some skin in the game;” recognize that everyone owns a piece of the problem; and understand that collaboration on big, complex issues takes time.

Second, the focus group participants suggested that collaboratives are more likely to succeed if they use principled engagement, that is, when members work together to set ground rules, define common objectives and goals, articulate shared commitments, develop a clear sense of roles, and agree on how decisions will be made and who owns decisions. Principled engagement also means setting meeting times when people can attend and creating inclusive logistics. Sometimes, skilled leadership can generate principled engagement, but other times, it is aided by a neutral and skilled facilitator who is trusted by the members and can act as an emissary to government and to other groups and efforts.

Third, participants noted that collaboratives are more likely to succeed if they foster a sense of shared motivation among members. Specifically, focus group participants argued that collaboration is more successful when it is inspired by and emerges from the members than when it is fully defined by outside parties. Members must be willing to commit time, on

a regular basis, to doing the work of the collaborative. This helps build relationships, cultivate trust, address conflicts, and generate buy-in. Collaborative strength comes when members believe in the goals, are committed to solving the problem, and trust that they are stronger together.

Finally, the focus group participants noted that collaboratives are more likely to succeed if they build capacity for joint action – the ability to do together what cannot be done alone. This requires opportunities for sharing knowledge and fostering joint learning, which in turn is facilitated when the state is flexible and does not over-prescribe collaborative goals and actions. It also requires the sharing and leveraging of financial, technical, and other resources. It is important that there be at least some unrestricted funds to support coordination and the joint work of collaborative members, and that financial and other resources be available not only at the startup of the collaborative, but also over time and as the collaborative moves toward implementation and evaluation. The building of capacity for joint action is aided when there is a staff person to manage communications and meeting logistics.

State Involvement in Collaboratives

Participants discussed several ways that state involvement helps and hinders collaborative efforts. These links are important to explore given the focus on state-connected collaboratives.

State involvement can either help or hinder collaborative efforts. Specifically, the state can enable or constrain collaborative through:

- Mandates
- Allocation of resources
- Provision of agency staff
- Building collaborative capacity

First, focus group participants reported that the state can enable or constrain collaboratives through mandates (e.g., orders that define goals, process structures, or who must participate). A mandate is useful for getting reluctant stakeholders to the table and can bolster greater and deeper collaboration

among parties. However, a mandate that specifies inflexible structures for how groups come together and work will undermine collaboration. Similarly, participants suggested that a state mandate should be clear, but cannot be a rigid edict. Problems are statewide, but also localized, thus a cookie cutter process and structure will not work. Instead, the state should understand the local context and read the situation well but leave enough flexibility for the collaboratives to design their own process, articulate their desired outcomes and solutions, and adjust to their particular situation and needs. This was the case, for example, with the Rural Economic Development Initiative and the Southern Oregon regional problem solving on land use.

Second, participants suggested that as the collaborative develops, the state can enable or constrain collaboratives through the allocation of resources, particularly funding. In terms of funding, the state is good at providing money for planning, but less good at providing money for implementation. The state can be helpful by offering flexible funding, assisting collaboratives to navigate different pots of money, and encouraging agencies to proactively offer in-kind support. Such efforts must be made throughout the life of a collaborative, not just at its beginning. Participants noted that unstable funding is particularly harmful because it leads to coordinator turnover, undermines implementation, and otherwise disrupts progress.

Third, participants said the state can enable or constrain collaboratives through the provision of agency staff, the “right” agency staff can serve as conveners and buffers, and have the authority to make decisions, the time to engage, an understanding of the community, and the appropriate temperament (e.g., flexible, cooperative, innovative). It is unhelpful when staff say, “That’ll never work” or “We can’t do that.” Instead, staff need to say, “How can I help? Let me go find out.” This requires changing the current paradigm in which state agencies do things to the collaboratives, not with and for the collaboratives. Finally, one participant remarked, “There’s no 10-point play in basketball, but that’s what we’re asking of our collaboratives.” The state can enable or constrain collaboratives by actively building collaborative capacity. To the extent that the state does

not, it is harming collaboration and the possibilities for success.

The state can build collaborative capacity by:

1. Helping collaboratives identify sources of technical assistance.
2. Recognizing the cyclical and temporal nature of collaboratives and not force a timeline – “it will take as long as it takes.”
3. Assisting communities to navigate cultural divides and conflict.
4. Providing oversight, regular communication, and goal alignment (e.g., integrating collaborative goals into state plans; bridging agency silos).
5. Helping collaboratives connect, find new ideas, share information, and create joint analyses.
6. Empowering collaboratives with clear decision-making authority.
7. Supporting ongoing evaluation.

among the legislature, agencies, and other parts of state government. On the other hand, this requires efforts to ensure that the local level is able to execute the state and/or local vision. It requires the state to (a) define terms, expectations, and outcomes clearly; (b) provide localities the authority and flexibility to manage processes and make decisions; (c) foster and strengthen local representation and leadership; and (d) otherwise help build local capacity.

2. **Decision Autonomy and Authority.** Although participants recognized the need for cooperation with the state, they argued a statewide approach should provide collaboratives with decision autonomy and authority, particularly in terms of how to achieve desired outcomes. At the very least, participants want greater clarity on who owns which decisions. They want the state to provide reasonable flexibility and/or exemptions from statewide rules that interfere with implementing the preferences of collaboratives. They also asserted the need to have decisions that are informed by science and data, which requires information sharing provisions so that different collaboratives, and different parties within collaboratives, have access to the data needed to make integrated decisions.

Moving Toward the Future

As part of the concluding discussions in the focus groups, participants were asked to think about two issues: (1) what might be some “core pillars” for a statewide approach to collaborative governance, and (2) how might research and the Atlas project support the work of the collaboratives.

The question about “core pillars” was intended to elicit ideas on how to improve the design and use of collaborative policy and collaborative platforms in the state of Oregon. The participants’ ideas for those core pillars fall into four overarching themes.

1. **Statewide Vision, Localized Action.** Participants asserted that a statewide approach would articulate state objectives for collaboration, while also allowing flexibility for locally-driven efforts. On the one hand, this requires an integrated vision that communicates the broader strategy and explains how local actions tie into that strategy and add value. It also requires state guidance and support, as well as better alignment

3. **Resources for Longevity.** Participants argued that a statewide approach should recognize that collaboratives are stronger when resources support durability, endurance, and inclusive, constructive engagement. Funding is critical, particularly as the collaborative moves toward action, and can be provided directly, through competitive grants tied to performance expectations and other criteria, or in other forms. However, while funding is important, other resources also matter. For example, convenings, trainings, and technical assistance can help collaboratives (including both staff and members) learn skills, build collective impact models, develop shared measures, and exchange knowledge. Likewise, access to facilitators can help collaboratives build group charters with goals/mission, outcomes, decision rules, and communication norms or deal with difficult or high-conflict situations. For all resources, it is important to pay attention to what

is needed given the developmental stage of the collaborative.

4. **Appreciation of Leadership (in Multiple Forms).** Participants asserted that *a statewide approach should recognize and support the value of many different kinds of collaborative leadership.* Successful collaboration requires multiple neutral and effective leaders who are transparent about their interests, including conveners, facilitators, mediators, analysts, and others who can support and enhance various aspects of the process and other work. Participants encouraged the state to think about how to provide a collaborative “mentor” – someone who can be a coach or a catalyst that helps collaborative leaders and members connect the dots, learn new concepts, or recruit new members.

engage and connect. Hold more informal events such as a regional collaborative “speed dating” or “coffee and conflict” chat to meet others doing collaborative work in different sectors, and in the same region.

4. **Act as a Communication Conduit.** Help collaboratives tell their stories. Raise awareness about the collaboratives and their state-wide efforts. Communicate this work to broad audiences in digestible ways.

The participants’ ideas about how research and the Atlas of Collaboration team could help their work fell into five categories.

1. **Create a Resource Clearinghouse.** Provide access to templates that can speed collaborative start up, information on funding sources, rosters of facilitators and conveners, metrics for evaluation and success, and other useful resources.
2. **Build a Learning Community.** Offer trainings and a “train the trainer” program for collaborative conveners and members. Create opportunities for technical assistance, including data analysis, grant writing, and communications, among other issues. Support work to teach and learn collaborative design, innovation, integration, legitimacy and trust building, and other functions. **Conduct and Disseminate Research.** Widely share the focus group summaries and other research, not just among the collaboratives, but also among state actors, foundations, and other potential funders. Conduct new research, for example on the differences between urban and rural collaboration, or the resource endowments of all collaboratives.
3. **Build Bridges and Foster Connectivity.** Host regional and/or statewide convenings with speakers and with opportunities for people to

Statewide Focus Group

The statewide focus group, held in Salem, engaged 19 participants, including state agency staff and others who manage collaborative platforms. The focus group took place in two parts and involved three overarching themes. Specifically, part one asked questions about (1) factors for collaborative success and (2) state involvement in the collaboratives, while part two centered on (3) moving toward the future. The findings for these three topics are summarized below.

Factors of Collaborative Success

The statewide focus group participants spent less time talking about the specific strengths and weaknesses of collaboratives, and more time discussing factors for collaborative success, that is, the enabling conditions that let collaboration succeed.

The statewide focus group participants believe collaboratives are more likely to succeed if they:

- Conduct a site-specific assessment
- Have a diverse and “local critical mass” of people
- Find common goals and desired results
- Can access flexible funding over their life course
- Build resilience

First, participants asserted that not all places and situations are conducive to collaboration and that collaboratives are more likely to succeed if they conduct a site-specific assessment before the state or others decide whether and how to start or support a collaborative.

Second, the participants asserted that collaboratives are more likely to succeed if they have a diverse and “local critical mass” of people (i.e., collaborative members, leaders, staff, and conveners). Generating this critical mass can be made easier with resources such as stipends, interpreters, and childcare. Others pointed to the importance of trust and relationships, which require time and cannot be

generated “via a transactional lens.” Still others asserted the importance of leadership, and especially the presence of “respected, influential leaders” at the local level, including for example, elected officials, well-networked individuals, and those with socially powerful reputations. These and other local leaders can advocate for and speak to the value of collaboration with the state legislature, executive leadership, agency staff, and other external stakeholders and audiences.

Third, participants felt that collaboratives are more likely to succeed if they [especially the public and private sectors] can find common goals and desired results, and that goal achievement depends on all parties working together to accomplish more than they could in isolation. One participant referred to this as “enlightened self-interest.” Yet, some participants noted that there may not be a clear, shared outcome and that collaboration can simply be an alternative path to conflict/litigation. Collaboratives that successfully moved from conflict to collaboration were able to develop trust, find shared values and common ground, and use small wins to build momentum to tackle larger issues.

Fourth, focus group participants engaged in a nuanced conversation around funding for collaboratives. They asserted that collaboratives are more likely to succeed if they can access flexible funding over their life course. Participants also noted that collaboratives may be stronger when they have a diverse funding base and are not reliant on one funding source (e.g., a single state program). From their perspective, diverse revenue streams generate resilience, which in turn might produce more significant collaborative impacts. Yet, participants also argued that fundraising diverts the energy and attention of collaborative leaders.

Finally, the participants noted that collaboratives are more likely to succeed if they can build important aspects of resilience beyond funding. For example, they noted that access to data from the state and other sources enables collaboratives to ask the right questions, consider potential solution scenarios, and manage proactively. Similarly, they asserted that challenges (e.g., turnover of key personnel, departure of a key leader, litigation, loss of funding) can bring

people together or cause a collaborative to struggle. These challenges are “do or die” opportunities to “double down” on collaboration.

State Involvement in Collaboratives

Participants had a rich discussion about state involvement in collaboratives and identified three broad areas of challenge, opportunity, and need.

State involvement in collaboratives can be improved if the state and the collaboratives:

- Develop clear expectations
- Address power dynamics
- Articulate and communicate the value of collaboration

First, participants emphasized that *the state and collaboratives must develop “clear expectations” that are understood by all*. They asserted that expectations should not be defined top-down, but rather should emerge from a co-creative process between collaboratives and the state. When expectations are unclear or are established without input, barriers can emerge at both the state and local levels. For example, the state is held accountable to a particular set of measures for its investments in collaboration, but without clarity and input, these metrics may not align with the way communities and collaboratives define successful outcomes.

Second, participants asserted that *the state and collaboratives must address directly to the power dynamics between them*. Participants felt this was not an issue about who has more power, but rather about who holds what power to make which decisions. Similarly, participants pointed to the strength of self-initiated collaboratives. They asked questions like: What would it look like if community were at the center of decision-making instead of the state agency? Rather than the state deciding to initiate collaboratives, what if there were a system to support collaboratives when they pop up? Can we develop some flexible, adaptive, and place-based criteria for investments in collaboration?

Finally, participants had a rich discussion about

how *the state and collaboratives must work together to articulate and communicate the value of collaboration to broad and diverse audiences*, including elected officials at the local and state level. They identified metrics and evaluation measures as being key to such an endeavor, but recognized that demonstrating impact is difficult because often there is no clear baseline, and many outcomes and impacts are difficult to measure and compare. Still, one participant said, “Maybe we have trouble articulating success because we haven’t defined it.” This led to discussion about how proxy measures for collaborative success (e.g., agreement on and articulation of goals, staying together when funding goes away) could be useful, and about how the focus should not be on whether collaboration is better, but rather on the value that collaborative creates.

Moving Toward the Future

As with the regional focus groups, concluding discussions in the statewide focus group centered on: (1) what might be some “core pillars” for a statewide approach to collaborative governance, and (2) how might research and the Atlas project support the work of the collaboratives.

Again, the question about “core pillars” was intended to elicit ideas on how to improve the design and use of collaborative policy and collaborative platforms in the state of Oregon. Key elements of that collaborative governance framework can be summarized in four main points.

1. **Clarity of Need, Purpose, Power, and Accountability.** Participants asserted that *a statewide approach would recognize that collaboration will not work everywhere*. There must be a problem whose solution requires the engagement of diverse entities that are willing to do the work. Expectations for collaboratives must be clear, not only in terms of scope, but also in terms of power and accountability. Specifically, there must be legitimate power-sharing relationships between the state and federal government and the collaboratives, and there needs to be accountability for implementing what the community has decided is necessary.

2. **Support of “Best Practice.”** Participants emphasized that *a statewide approach would help collaboratives succeed by following best practice as defined through both experience and research*. This requires nurturing enabling conditions, fostering skill development, and otherwise supporting collaborative capacity building efforts. Specifically, best practices can be cultivated through training collaborative members, supporting leadership at both the collaborative and platform levels, providing access to facilitators and increasing facilitation capacity, and assisting with evaluation. It also requires developing cross-collaborative and cross-platform learning opportunities. Such opportunities could be improved if collaborative members had “common language” or a “glossary” that aided with sharing information, measuring performance, and articulating progress and value creation.
3. **Funding over Time.** Participants asserted that *a statewide approach would provide sustainable funding that is available through the ebbs and flow of collaborative cycles*, that is, as collaboratives form, work together, and implement and evaluate solutions. This means helping the funding community (government, foundations, and otherwise) understand what it takes to sustain durable collaboration over time. They warned against conditioning funding on participation in a state-run platform, as this might limit self-initiated collaboratives.
4. **Recognizing the Evolution of Collaboration.** Participants noted that *a statewide approach would recognize the developmental dynamics of collaboratives*, that is, how collaboratives form and how their needs evolve over time. Participants noted that collaboratives are in a constant state of flux, shifting between forming, implementation, and reforming. They felt the need for a broader understanding about this evolution and how different stages could be expedited to maximize benefits (e.g., startup times could be compressed, assistance could help people more quickly understand context and what already exists so efforts are not duplicated). In addition, they wanted more information about collaboration at multiple scale and across different roles (e.g.,

policy advice, resource allocation, advancing community interests), and felt that this could be generated through sharing of lessons and challenges.

As the conversation shifted to research, the participants noted that the initial information gathered by the Atlas team was impressive, but incomplete. They identified a robust list of questions they wanted to have answered through research on collaboration and collaboratives across the state. These questions can be grouped into four overarching themes.

1. **Strengthening Collaboratives and Ensuring their Sustainability.** What are the ingredients (the “secret sauce”) that make a collaborative successful? Which ingredients can be grown and how? How do we cultivate the knowledge, skills, and abilities in our workforces needed for collaboration? How does leadership (and leadership turnover) affect collaboration? Is the next generation of collaborative leaders going to operate at the same scale, with the same approaches, or same values? What should be in place to help collaboratives work together? How do collaboratives relate to each other, and how does working together (e.g., in a platform) affect efficiency?
2. **Developing Collaborative Typologies and Life Cycles Models.** What are some archetypal models of collaboration, formative types, and collaborative life cycles? Is there a “stages of maturity” model for collaboratives as they evolve, and something like a “hierarchy of needs” to support each stage of maturity? What are a collaborative’s capacity needs over time (e.g., leadership, facilitation, roles for different kinds of organizations)? Is there a link between the number and diversity of participants and the age of a collaborative?
3. **Assessing Collaborative Value.** How do we best assess the work of collaboratives? What can be done through collaboratives that cannot be done otherwise? How can we make a compelling, unequivocal case about the return on investment? Does (and how does) the value of a collaborative

depend or vary based on its purposes? Do collaboratives work better when they emerge in response to conflict or in response to incentives (e.g., funding)?

4. **Investigating the Roles of Collaborative Platforms.** How do we define a statewide collaborative platform, including what it is, and how it can help or hinder collaborative efforts? What are best practices with regard to designing collaborative platforms, including knowing when (and when not) to create a new platform, and when the right number of collaboratives are in place and working well? How do collaborative platforms evolve? Can collaborative platforms compress some of the start-up pains for collaboratives? What are the relationship dynamics between the platform administrator and the collaboratives, and how could they be different or improved? What are the best practices for funding collaboratives? Can a collaborative platform provide tools for “self-service” so collaboratives can self-initiate without state financial support?

Conclusion

With over 230 state-connected collaborative operating across thirteen collaborative platforms in five policy areas, there is a marvelous richness to Oregon’s experience with using collaboration to address complex public problems. The collaborative leaders who participated in the regional and statewide focus groups not only shared their wisdom about collaboration, but also demonstrated their dedication to helping communities thrive and supporting sustainable, high quality collaboration.

The regional focus group participants identified several strengths and weaknesses of collaboratives, most having to do with people, purposes, and resources. They asserted that collaboratives are more likely to succeed when they get the “right” people to the table, use principled engagement, foster a sense of shared motivation, and build capacity for joint action. They also identified numerous examples of collaboration across policy areas, but also noted that cross-policy collaboration is still new and emerging.

Participants in both the regional and the statewide focus groups identified several factors of collaborative success (see table 2). Some factors were unique to one set of participants. For example, only the statewide participants mentioned the need to conduct a site-specific assessment. Other factors were mentioned by both sets of participants, though framed in different ways. For example, the regional focus groups mentioned getting the “right” people to the table, while the statewide group discussed the need for a diverse “local crucial mass” of people. The remaining factors identified by the two sets of participants are different, yet united by a common undergirding: setting conditions that enable durable, constructive engagement.

There were also similarities and differences in how the two sets of participants discussed state involvement in the collaboratives. Specifically, the regional focus group participants discussed how the presence (or absence) and form of mandates, resources, staff, and capacity building efforts could either enable or constrain collaboration, while the statewide focus group participants asserted that state involvement could be improved if the state and the collaboratives worked together to develop clear expectations, address power dynamics, and communicate the value of collaboration to broad and

Table 2: Factors of Collaborative Success

Regional Focus Groups	Statewide Focus Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting the “right” people to the table Using principled engagement Fostering a sense of shared motivation Building capacity for joint action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducting a site-specific assessment Having a diverse “local critical mass” Finding common goals and desired results Being able to access flexible funding Building resilience

Table 3: Potential “Pillars” of a Statewide Approach to Collaborative Success

Regional Focus Groups	Statewide Focus Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate a statewide vision, but allow for localized action • Provide collaboratives with decision autonomy and authority • Supply resources for longevity • Appreciate multiple forms of leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clarity of need, purpose, power, and accountability • Support “best practice” • Provide funding over time • Recognize the evolution of collaboration

diverse audiences. Again, the responses of both sets of participants seem to focus on creating conditions that enable durable, constructive engagement.

In terms of moving forward, the participants articulated many overlapping ideas for potential “core pillars” of a statewide approach to collaborative governance (see table 3). For example, participants in both groups wanted greater clarity about collaboration in terms of objectives and responsibilities. Participants in the regional focus groups wanted autonomy to determine participation and authority to implement their agreements. Statewide leaders agreed with the need for local autonomy, but framed it more in terms of clarity about who owns decision making authority when and for what. Moreover, both local and statewide leaders recognized the need for predictable, long-term funding to support collaboration. Each set of participants also had some unique ideas. For example, the regional focus group participants wanted greater appreciation of different kinds of leadership, while the statewide focus group wanted more attention to best practice and the evolution of collaboration. Finally, the Atlas of Collaboration team is eager to support Oregon’s collaboratives and collaborative platforms as they evolve, wrestle with challenges, and cultivate successes. These initial regional and statewide conversations revealed many ways that the

Atlas project and research could help. The regional focus group participants suggested concrete tools and actions, such as creating a resource clearinghouse, building a learning community, conducting and disseminating research, building bridges and fostering connectivity, and acting as a communication conduit. In contrast, the statewide focus group participants suggested research numerous questions centered on strengthening collaboratives and ensuring their sustainability, developing typologies and life cycle models, assessing collaborative value, and investigating the roles of collaborative platforms.

These focus group discussions with Oregon’s leaders of collaboratives and collaborative platforms shed light on many important issues, including the strengths and weaknesses of collaboratives, cross-policy collaboration, factors of collaborative success, state involvement in the collaboratives, and moving toward the future. As the Atlas of Collaboration project continues to develop, the team is committed to analyzing information, generating knowledge, and providing tools and resources that advance both practice and scholarship.

Table 4: How the Atlas Project and Research Can Help

Regional Focus Groups	Statewide Focus Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a resource clearinghouse • Build a learning community • Conduct and disseminate research • Build bridges and foster connectivity • Act as a communication conduit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen collaboratives and ensure their sustainability • Develop typologies and life cycle models • Assess collaborative value • Investigate the roles of collaborative platforms

