# Evaluating Collaborative Environmental Programs:

## Some Thoughts on What Questions to Ask

**Presentation at the**

**2008 Environmental Evaluators Networking Forum
Washington, DC**

**June 13, 2008**

**Lou Nadeau, PhD
Eastern Research Group, Inc.
lou.nadeau@erg.com
781.674.7316**

**ERG**

# Outline

- Defining collaboration

- Ways to think about collaborations
  - Facets of collaboration

- Some evaluation questions we might want to ask about collaborative efforts

- Talk about MN Paint Demonstration Project

# Defining Collaboration

- Definition: An explicit or implicit agreement between distinct stakeholders in an issue to work together on some common activities.

- Distinct stakeholders

- Agreement
  - Some recognition by the stakeholders that they are collaborating
  - Recognition that there is a program

- Working together on common activities
  - Not conducting separate activities
  - Otherwise, it's not really a program

# Things not included in the definition

- Formal vs. informal

- Required actions vs. voluntary

- Level of integration

- Something to distinguish it from "partnerships"
  - Do we need to?
  - EPA has an accepted definition of "partnership"

# Ways to think about collaboration

- Organization

- Integration

- Stage

# Organization

- **Inclusive model**: Entities come together and form one single (united) program
  - MN Paint Demonstration Project

- **Separate and equal model**: Entities all work toward a common goal, but maintain their autonomy
  - New England Marinas Initiative

- **One leader model**: One entity takes the lead and acts as an organizer/leader for other entities
  - Hospitals for a Health Environment

ERG

# Levels of integration (strategic alliances)

- ## Cooperation:
  - Shared information and mutual support
- ## Coordination:
  - Common tasks and compatible goals
- ## Collaboration:
  - Integrated strategies and collective purpose
- ## Coadunation:
  - Unified structure and combined cultures

Source: Bailey and Koney, 2000. *Strategic Alliances Among Health and Human Services Organizations: From Affiliations to Consolidations*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

# Stages of Development

- Assemble and Form
  - Coming together
- Storm and Order
  - Defining roles, strategies
- Norm and Perform
  - Perform the initiative
- Transform and Adjourn
  - Evaluate and adjust
  - Disband if over

ERG

# Types of questions

- Process
  - Focused inward on the collaboration itself

- Outcome-oriented
  - Relationship of collaboration to results

- Big picture
  - Overall assessments of collaboration

# Process questions

- *Did it work as a true collaborative effort?*
  - Team work
  - Inclusiveness
  - Expected participation
  - Relevant questions will depend on organization, integration, and stage

- *What were the outcomes of the collaboration itself?*
  - Better relationships
  - Increased understanding of viewpoints
  - New initiatives
  - Also will depend on organization, integration, and stage

# Outcome Questions

- *Did the collaborative aspect of the program improve environmental outcomes?*

  – Compared to not collaborating

- *Can we attribute results to specific partners within the collaboration? (Should we?)*

  – Might be required on some level...OMB PART

  – Does this go against the spirit of collaboration?

ERG

# Big Picture Questions

- *Do collaborative efforts in general lead to better outcomes?*
  - No preconceived notions
  - The ultimate evaluation question

- *What are the best practices in terms of organization and integration?*
  - Lessons learned
  - Optimize results
  - Organization and integration
  - Best practices for each stage

- *Under what circumstances do collaborations lead to better outcomes?*
  - When do they work and not work?
  - When do they work best?
  - Organization, integration, and stage

# Minnesota Paint Demonstration Project

- Purpose: Develop a program to manage leftover paint in Minnesota in an environmentally responsible manner.

- From the Project's Work Plan:
  - **Objective 1.3**: Establish partnerships with other interested stakeholders to aid in the communication about, and implementation of, the Demonstration Project. These partnerships should include, but not be limited to, representatives of municipal, county, and state agencies, retailers, recyclers, producers, associations, and environmental groups.
  - **Objective 1.4**: Maintain a website for communication among PPSI stakeholders and with the public.

# MN Paint: Evaluation

- **Objective 6.1:** Evaluate the collaborative and cooperative process.
  - Critique the appropriateness, quality, and effectiveness of the Demonstration Project Work Plan...
  - *Determine the extent to which the process used to develop the Demonstration Project has been collaborative and cooperative.*
  - *Establish the degree to which stakeholders felt informed, involved, and empowered in the process.*
  - *Determine the appropriateness and quality of the website.*
  - Document lessons learned pertaining to the development and implementation of the Demonstration Project Work Plan.

# MN Paint: Questions and Methods

- Evaluation Question (general and draft)
  - To what extent has the development of the Minnesota Paint Demonstration Project been a collaborative and cooperative process and to what extent have the processes and tools used been an effective means of developing the project?

- Potential Methods
  - Review of Project documents.
  - Survey of Committee members that asks them to supply various ratings.
  - Interviews with Committee members to obtain detailed information.

**ERG**

# MN Paint: What's Missing?

- An outcome question
  - Did the collaborative process used in developing the MN Paint Demonstration Project improve outcomes?

- Need some way to link these collaborative activities to outcomes
  - "Assigned roles/activities"
    - Would the outcome-generating activity been done otherwise?
  - What about truly collaborative activities?

# Moving Forward: Evaluating Collaborative Efforts

- First (baby) steps
  - Include descriptions of collaborative aspects into evaluation reports
  - Work in the process questions
  - Begin to address outcome questions at least qualitatively

- Develop better (accepted) definitions of collaboration and its facets

- Begin to answer the bigger picture questions

- Incorporate the answers to the questions into program design

ERG