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Rocky Mountain  
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## *Fuels Planning: Science Synthesis and Integration*

Social Issues Fact Sheet: 12

# Keys to Successful Collaboration



Rocky Mountain  
Research Station



Pacific Northwest  
Research Station



North Central  
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Research Station*

## *Synthesizing Scientific Information for Fire and Fuels Project Managers*

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### **Lessons Learned**

Collaborating on fire and fuels management with a host of public and private partners may seem like an impossible undertaking. Certainly it presents many challenges, and it may not even be appropriate for some situations. But the barriers are not insurmountable. Lessons learned from successful collaborations can help pave the way. Following are tips for what to focus on as you embark on a collaborative fuels management project.

### **Community Context**

Understand that community context matters. Contentious, unresolved past conflict in a community will hinder success. Collective past achievements will better position a community to address a common threat such as wildland fire.

### **Resource Stewardship**

A focus on resource stewardship creates strong common bonds among participants, evoking emotions that can motivate landowners and other interested parties to take an active role in a partnership. The key is to connect those emotions to facts and data that participants can agree on. Field trips help link people to the land and to each other, and move them past ideology to common attachment to place.

### **Appropriate Scale**

It is essential to work at a scale appropriate to the community, a scale that evokes shared values, collective action, and sense of place. Local, small projects are often a good place to start. When considering scale, both geographic scale and temporal scale are important. It can take years to achieve major milestones such as implementing restoration, education, or monitoring projects.

### **Building Relationships and Trust**

Being inclusive and valuing diversity are cornerstones of building trust and credibility – two essential ingredients to successful collaboration. Participants may not trust each other at the beginning of a project, which is why talking about shared goals early on is so important.

### **Strong Leadership**

Strong leadership is key. Success is more likely if participants, including agencies, are seen as leaders in the community. New leaders will emerge during the process as well.

### **Structure and Process**

Stakeholders should have the opportunity to create a structure they believe is fair and inclusive. This, rather than the lead agency determining the structure, can help overcome any fears of bias. Good facilitation and process design also help. Regardless of the framework the group forms, flexibility is a must.

## Communication

For collaborative fire projects, communication with local residents is essential. Newsletters, multiagency educational workshops, and involvement in the community are important forms of outreach, especially if they include a clear message that the project is a joint effort. Communication is useful not only for informing the public, but also for gathering information and bringing interested parties on board.

## Resources

Adequate time and consistent funding are critical to supporting collaborative projects. Government agencies can be key players because they have access to different sources of funding, can provide critical personnel, and share resources such as meeting space and equipment. Nonprofit organizations also provide an important source of funding, facilitation, and leadership.

## Linkages

Collaboration needs both internal support from local agencies and communities, and external support and linkages. This means



The Bureau of Land Management has supported the Applegate Fire Plan, in southern Oregon, by providing its Slashbuster for projects on Federal, county, and private land.

everything from ensuring that agency partners are effectively connecting with each other, to networking with other community-based groups to gain from their expertise.

## Adaptive Management

Reflecting on management decisions and actions is essential to learning from and building on the collaborative process. Participants should monitor and evaluate the extent to which decisions and actions accomplish goals, then adjust management activities as necessary.

## Successes

Celebrating successes—even small ones—maintains group motivation, involvement, and focus. Early on, successful collaborations find tangible outcomes to rally behind and present to others as potential models. Some groups remind themselves of the intangible outcomes, such as new relationships and the satisfaction of having their neighborhoods prepared for an emergency.

## Source

Sturtevant, Victoria; Moote, Margaret Ann; Jakes, Pamela; Cheng, Antony S. 2005. Social science to improve fuels management: a synthesis of research on collaboration. Gen. Tech. Rep. NC-257. St. Paul, MN: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, North Central Research Station. 84 p. Available online at <http://ncrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/viewpub.asp?key=3123> [2006, August 25]. For a hard copy, contact Pamela Jakes at [pjakes@fs.fed.us](mailto:pjakes@fs.fed.us).

## Additional Collaboration Fact Sheets

*Keys to Successful Collaboration* is one of a series of four fact sheets on the topic of collaboration and fuels management. See also *Benefits of Collaboration*, Social Issues Fact Sheet 9 (RMRS RN-21-9-WWW); *Stages of Collaboration*, Social Issues Fact Sheet 10 (RMRS RN-21-10-WWW); and *Challenges to Collaboration*, Social Issues Fact Sheet 11 (RMRS RN-21-11-WWW).

## Social Science Team Fact Sheets

Look for fact sheet topics from the Social Science Team including information on developing personal responsibility for fuels reduction, communicating fire hazard, topics for community fire plans, guidelines for community education, and the “golden rule” for communicating fire hazard to people.

Fuels Planning: Science Synthesis and Integration is an inter-agency research/management partnership to support the Ten-Year Fire Plan, led by Russell T. Graham, RMRS, and Sarah M. McCaffrey, NCRS.

## Fuels Planning: Synthesis and Integration

This fact sheet is one in a series being produced as part of a larger project supported by the USDA Forest Service to synthesize new knowledge and information relevant to fire and fuels management. Fact sheets address topics related to stand structure, environmental impacts, economics, and human responses to these factors. Information in the fact sheets is targeted for the dry forests of the Inland West, but is often applicable across broad regions of the country. For more information, please visit our Web site at: [www.fs.fed.us/fire/tech\\_transfer/synthesis/synthesis\\_index](http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/tech_transfer/synthesis/synthesis_index)