Healthy Communities Consortium

Helping to build healthy communities

Exploring the Constellation Model of Governance

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Exploring the Constellation Model:

- What is it? How does it work?
- Distinguishing characteristics
- What is it best suited for?
- How is it different from other, traditional models of governance?
- Opportunities and Challenges
- Sharing of Experiences, Q & A
Constellation Model - What is it?

“A complexity-inspired governance framework for multi-organizational collaboration.”

“A way of organizing a group of interested parties to meet a need without having to create a new organization to “hold an issue”.

Tonya Surman, 2006
Assumptions and Approaches:

- Respects how energy flows in a group
- Recognizes the different needs/interests of member groups
- Model responds to the interests/energy of the group
- Action-focused; flexibility and nimbleness are valued
- Order, systems and accountability are balanced with opportunity and entrepreneurship
Components of the Model

- Magnetic Attractor (Need and/or Opportunity)
- Ecosystem
- Stewardship Group
- Shared Vision
- Partnership Agreements
- Development of Constellations
Magnetic Attractor
Need and/or opportunity

Ecosystem - Constellations exist with the broader ecosystem of activity

Shared Vision

Enabling Factors
- Collaborative Leadership
- Collaboration Catalyst - third party secretariat
- Division of content and process
- Incubation & capacity building of constellations
- Facilitated emergence
- Members get out what they put in
- Leadership moves from partner to partner

Agreements
The need and/or opportunity to work together to meet individual and shared objectives.
Ecosystem

- Sphere of activity you are operating in
- Involves stakeholders beyond partners in your collaboration
- Recognizes “loose coupling” between ecosystems
Stewardship Group

- Representatives from each of the partnering organizations
- Provides clear vision and strategic direction
- Management of projects and constellations
Shared Vision

- Clear articulation of the need
- Assumptions and guiding principles
- Clear Vision
- Partners Asset Mapping
Constellations

- “Self-organizing action teams”
- One partnership takes the lead role
- Liaise with the Stewardship group
Distinguishing Characteristics:

- Third-party catalyst and coordination
- Collaborative/shared leadership
- Action-focused work teams
- Lightweight governance structure
Third Party Catalyst & Capacity Builder

- Secretariat function comes from outside of the partners
- Supports collaboration and oversees process
Shared Leadership

- Leadership and resources come from within each of the Constellations

- Crucial need for expertise, leadership and dedicated resources (including staff) to support the work
Constellations as Action-focused Work Teams

- “The Work Leads” i.e. energy and intentionality “drive” the work
- The right partners come together to achieve their own and shared objectives
- **Crucial** to have dedicated expertise and staff assigned to lead and manage the work
- Crucial to have commitment to “heavy lifting” by partner organizations for the duration of the project or initiative
- “Creatively destroy” the constellation when the need has been met
What makes it work: Theory

- Magnetic attractors with a clear need to move the collaboration forward
- Clear division between process and content
- Generative leadership
- Preventive, conflict mediation skills
What makes it work: Experience

- Champions and Expertise, time and resources (i.e. compensated expert leaders who can dedicate time to the work)
- Heavy Lifting (within this elegant model)
- Partners who believe in the model AND the work
Key Differences from other Governance Models

- Partnership not “housed” within one organization
- Coordination provided by independent, neutral “catalyst” (group or individual)
- Leadership “shared”, and not provided solely by the sponsor organization
- “Relative” decision-making and financial autonomy of Constellation work groups
Key Differences from other Governance Models cont’d

- Not a legal entity – implications for fund-raising etc.
- Constellation work groups continually “emerge and die” as opportunities, interest, energy change.
- Engaging new partners in meaningful way requires constant vigilance (i.e. time and energy!)
Opportunities

- Action-focused work groups (constellations) can seize opportunities quickly
- Groups work on issues that they are invested in; ideas that “have energy” progress
- Rotating leadership builds capacity and sustainability
- Ability to involve new/different groups in “flexible” ways
Potential Challenges

- “Giving up” power/ responsibility for coordination and leadership roles
- Commitment to shared and supported leadership with dedicated resources
- Host agency accountability and performance management frameworks
- Keeping people connected and informed
- Creating and working toward a shared vision
Sharing of Experiences

Insights from those Using the Model
Canadian Partnership for Children’s Health and Environment

www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca

- Heavy Lifting!
- Paid Expertise to lead the work
- Dedication of significant resources beyond what is required for the project
- Strong support for the model and the work
- Funders like the model because it’s action-focused (not developing organizations/admin)
Canadian Partnership for Children’s Health and Environment
Governance

The Healthy Communities Partnership: Lanark, Leeds and Grenville has chosen a constellation model a framework for governance. 
Healthy Communities and Collaborative Governance Presentation

Additional Resources:
- Listening to the Stars: The Constellation Model of Collaborative Social Change
- Constellation Collaboration: A Model for Multi-Organizational Partnership
- Open Sourcing Social Change: Inside the Constellation Model, Tonya Surman & Mark Surman
Constellation Model

• Stewardship Group
  • Sets overall vision and strategic directions
  • Monitors overall partnership health
  • Aligns constellations with partnership purpose
  • Determines and provides support to constellations

• Three Core Governance Documents
  • Guiding Principles
  • Governance terms of reference
  • Strategic plan
Third Party Coordination

- Guides the process, manages overall progress and troubleshoots problems
- Provides logistical supports, communications links
- Usually housed in an intermediary organization
# Complexity of Accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Group</td>
<td>Primary accountability to the host organization’s board of directors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-organizational</td>
<td>Dual accountability to member’s home organizations and between collaboration members: increases with the intensity of collaboration arrangement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convener Organization</td>
<td>Triple accountability to home organizations, collaboration members, collaboration hosts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broader Community</td>
<td>Quadruple accountability to home organizations, collaboration members, collaboration hosts, and broader community.</td>
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</tbody>
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Final Thoughts about Governance

- The working relationship amongst partners is vital
- Understanding and working within the limits of accountability and structures
- There is a need to focus both on the process and the product of governance in collaboratives
- Use this opportunity to learn and have fun
Your Turn!

Questions, Reflections and Insights