

**The Best and the Brightest:  
Fostering Innovation and Community Involvement in  
Small Colorado Communities**

**Kathryn Cheever, Ph.D.**

**Director, Center for NEW DIRECTIONS in Politics and  
Public Policy University of Colorado at Denver**

**Robert Clifton, Ph.D.**

**Center founder and Local Government Liaison, Center for  
NEW DIRECTIONS in Politics and Public Policy  
University of Colorado at Denver Aden Hogan, M.P.A.  
Town Administrator Town of Parker, Colorado**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Fostering innovation and community involvement in any community is a challenge involving collaboration, persistence, and creativity. This article examines collaboration as a tool to promote innovation and community involvement. The Best and Brightest Internship Program of the Center for NEW DIRECTIONS in Politics and Public Policy of the Political Science Department at the University of Colorado at Denver is offered as a case study of successful collaboration that enhances community involvement and innovation across the state of Colorado. Analysis of community/university involvement and program outcomes is provided. Suggestions for program enhancements, program replication, future directions and further research are provided.

### **Introduction**

Authors from Berry, Portney, and Thomson (1993) to Putnam (2003) have extolled the virtues of community involvement. And Barber (1984) reminds us that participatory democracy is rooted in “the idea of a self-governing community of citizens who are united...by civic education and who are made capable of common purpose and mutual action...” (p. 117). So, why is citizen participation in and collaboration with local government such a challenge (Stephens, 1999)?

This article looks at essential elements for successful participation/collaboration, identifies barriers to that collaboration, and offers a case study of an innovative collaborative partnership among citizens, student interns, the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, local and county jurisdictions across Colorado and the University of Colorado at Denver’s Center for NEW DIRECTIONS in Politics and Public Policy.

As Eugene Bardach (1998) reminds us, “collaboration is an unnatural action among nonconsenting adults” (p. 263.) People born and raised in the United States have been given a steady diet of competition from their earliest years. With this in mind, it should not be surprising that working together for the good of the community can be challenging, at best, and limited (or nonexistent) in many locales. Either we bowl alone (Putnam, 2000) or we bowl to win, neither of which lead to successful collaborative partnerships for the good of our communities.

### ***Characteristics for Successful Collaboration***

Alter and Hage (1993) identify four conditions that are necessary preconditions for successful collaboration: the willingness to cooperate, the need for expertise, the need for financial resources and sharing of risks, and the need for adaptive efficiency (p.39). From these conditions, networks are established that result in varying degrees of joint activity.

As networks are established, individual participants suggest key reasons for maintaining the collaboration. Citing the example of the National Rural Development Council, Radin (1996) found seven factors that contributed to ongoing collaborative success. These include: personal commitment of staff; personal commitment of members; issue appeal; production of a useful product; White House interest/support; the opportunity to create a model for use in other issue arenas; and the availability of resources (p. 158). Individuals who found working in collaboration satisfying possessed personal characteristics of flexibility, extroversion, tolerance of ambiguity, self-assurance, need for visibility, and *savoir-faire* (Dolinger, 1984). Collaborations structured with these factors and engaging appropriately suited individuals were able to minimize turf battles and smooth out organization and policy problems through a process of working at the margin of the participating agencies (Radin 1996, p. 163).

Bardach (1996) has also reviewed collaborative endeavors, identifying numerous turf-related barriers to successful engagement. Start-up costs cause much would-be collaboration to “die on the vine.” The initial investment of staff and other participant hours may be perceived as too great to warrant the effort (p. 168-192). Couple this barrier with “turf” issues (i.e., the exclusive domain of activities and resources over which an agency has the right, or prerogative, to exercise operational and/or policy responsibility [p. 177]) and one must be amazed that collaboration ever happens at all. Threats to job security, challenge to professional expertise by laymen, conflict over facilities (e.g., physical facilities, letterhead, database, accounting systems), loss of policy direction, undermining of traditional agency priorities, anxiety about accountability, requirements for building and maintaining consensus, and self-worth, all loom as barriers to the collaborative process. Specific strategies must be employed in the earliest stages of attempted collaboration to overcome these obstacles and move to more productive modes of operation.

To achieve collaboration – and overcome the above-mentioned obstacles – Gray (1989) outlines a three-phase process. In Phase One, individuals (and their respective agencies) engage in a problem setting process that involves a common definition of the problem, a commitment to collaborate, identification of the stakeholders, legitimizing of the stakeholders, and identification of resources. A convener from among the stakeholders or an outside source can play a key role in starting the collaborative process. Phase Two involves direction setting for the collaborative group, including the establishment of ground rules, agenda setting, the organization of subgroups, engagement in joint information searches, exploration of options, and the final reaching agreement and “closing the deal.” In Phase Three the interagency collaboration commences implementation of its agreed-on programs and takes on the tasks of dealing with constituencies, building external support, structuring the long-term relationship, and monitoring agreement implementation and compliance (pp. 55-94).

Network theory provides a structure for looking at the interrelationships of individual actors in and among government and nonprofit agencies. Both internal and external factors contribute to the success or failure of the network. Network theory is most challenged by interagency production networks because the actors are not individuals but organizations (Bardach 1998, p. 27). The motives and motivations of individual workers within the organizations may differ significantly from the motives and motivations of the agency as a whole, leading to a complexity of networking that is particularly difficult to accurately

understand. Hierarchical organizations will foster different kinds and qualities of interaction than their peer agencies with more flattened management structures. Individuals lacking any organizational attachments add a complicating dimension. Accurately illuminating the entire network can be extremely vexing.

To accurately examine and explain collaboration, Eugene Bardach (1998) suggests that researchers move beyond the traditional framework of network theory to a framework of “craftsmanship” (pp. 19-51). Employing this theoretical frame, the researcher seeking to identify and understand collaboration is directed to examine the craftsmen, materials, and purposes of the collaborative endeavor. Based on the theory of craftsmanship, the construction of a successful collaboration is a function of the skill and purposiveness of craftsmen interacting with the quality of available materials and the craftsmen’s ability to fashion protections against potentially destructive environmental forces such as personnel turnover and the erosion of political alliances (Bardach 1998, p. 49). Much as a new house is constructed, a new collaboration must have good plans, high quality materials, and skilled craftsmen to achieve the desired (i.e., successful) result.

As Bardach (1998) outlines the process of collaborative “craftsmanship,” an operating system that facilitates communication among the partners must first be established. To be optimally successful, the operating system must support flexibility, motivate lower-level staff, increase mutual intelligence and trust across community roles and boundaries, while maintaining accountability and exploiting financial exchanges that induce high quality performance (Bardach 1998, pp. 115-162).

Following the establishment of an operating system for collaboration, the collaborative must then acquire the resources necessary to succeed. Numerous factors motivate potential partners to withhold or block the contribution of resources. Bardach (1998) identifies protectionist purposes that may impede effective collaboration, such as mission-related risk aversion, competing means serving the same public interests, liabilities of the new, core mission and peripheral activity disjunctions, conflicting professional and social values, political imperatives, and size of the problem. Collaboration can be seen as: a threat to income and job security; a challenge to current career status; stressful, time-consuming and laborious work; and potentially futile raising a fear of failure.

Bureaucratic purposes may also obstruct effective collaborative action. Money, turf, autonomy, accountability, and ethnocentrism (i.e., the tribalism of bureaucratic agencies) all contribute obstacles to successful collaboration. To address these threats to collaboration, Bardach (1998) proposes value-creating purposes for the collaborative effort to counter protectionist tendencies; careerist strategies of personal renewal, security and career opportunities to offset careerist concerns that focus on threats to job and career coupled with expanded workload; and bureaucratic endeavors that enhance agency revenues, create new turf, and build on prevailing environmental demands (pp. 163-198).

Utilizing Bardach’s (1998) “craftsmanship” approach, a collaborative effort must be able to “articulate its vision, define its mission, and choose its concrete goals” (p. 199). Successful collaborations substitute management for governance, make sure that consumers/clients interests are represented, and let their form follow their function. Through these processes leadership can be legitimated. However, Bardach (1998) warns “it may be hard to find people willing to take

on the leadership role who would also do it well and would be sufficiently trusted by the partners” (p. 231). Outside, third-party mediators may be needed to facilitate the vital task of joint problem solving.

In a pragmatic vein, Bardach (1998) suggests that early successful action greatly enhances the possibilities for future collaborative efforts. Taking on small, distinct tasks and accomplishing them effectively through group effort sets the stage for continuing collaboration. This builds momentum for additional joint endeavors and makes “smart” use of “the desire on some people’s parts to do good in the world according to their own lights and to participate in the creative challenge of doing it in a nontraditional way” (p. 308).

Although there are numerous similarities, Mattessich, Murray-Close, and Monsey (2001) provide a more detailed, albeit less theoretical, approach to review of collaboration activities. They identify numerous factors for success in collaboration. Factors related to the environment include:

1. History of collaboration or cooperation in the community;
2. Legitimacy of leadership of the collaborative group; and
3. Favorable political and social climate.

Membership of the collaboration is also important and characteristics of the members contribute to success in collaborative endeavors. These factors include:

1. Mutual respect, understanding, and trust;
2. An appropriate cross section of members;
3. The ability of collaboration members to see the collaboration as in their own self-interest; and
4. An ability to compromise.

Factors of process and structure also influence a collaboration’s chances for success. Successful collaborations need:

1. Members who share a stake in both the process and the outcome;
2. Multiple layers of participation;
3. Flexibility;
4. Development of clear roles and policy guidelines;
5. Adaptability; and
6. An appropriate pace of development.

Although it may seem a truism, communication is central to all successful collaborative efforts. Such communication must be: open and frequent; and employed through both formal and informal relationships and communication links.

Purpose and resources for the collaboration will also influence success or failure of efforts. Concrete, attainable goals and objectives, shared vision, and unique purpose enhance opportunities for success. Sufficient funds, staff, materials, time, and leadership skill are also key (Mattessich et al, 2001: 8-10).

Winer and Ray (1994) remind us that the term “collaboration” means different things to different people and identify a continuum of increasing intensity for building relationships and doing work. Groups may come together in cooperation, i.e., shorter-term informal relations that exist without any clearly defined mission, structure, or planning effort. Cooperative partners share information only about the subject at hand. Each organization retains authority and keeps resources separate, greatly minimizing risk. Groups that choose to coordinate efforts establish more formal relationships and understanding of missions. The people involved in coordinated efforts focus their longer-term interaction around a specific effort or program. Coordination requires some planning and division of roles and opens communication channels between the participating organizations. While authority still rests with the individual organizations, everyone’s risk increases. Power can be an issue. Resources are made available to participants and rewards are shared. In “true” collaboration, more durable and pervasive relationships are established. Participants bring separate organizations into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission. Such relationships require comprehensive planning and well-defined communication channels operating on all levels. The collaborative structure determines authority, and risk is much greater because each partner contributes its resources and reputation. Power is an issue and can be unequal. Partners pool or jointly secure the resources, and share the results and rewards (Winer and Ray 1994: 22). Based on this series of definitions, few of the so-called interagency collaborations may actually ever achieve full-blown collaboration, reinforcing the Bardach assertion about “unnatural acts.” Joint efforts are commonplace; full-scale collaboration is not.

While the development of totally new collaborative structures is relatively rare, Winer and Ray (1994) identify a series of four stages for any collaborative endeavor. In Stage 1, results are envisioned by working individual-to-individual. A policy entrepreneur or group of like-minded entrepreneurs begins the process of developing a shared vision of a problem or problems and possible solutions that could benefit from coordinated joint action. In Stage 2, individual-to-individual work expands to individual-to-organization. The original individuals seek to bring along the rest of the members of their organizations, identifying roles, resolving conflicts, and organizing the proposed joint effort. Stage 3 encompasses the organization-to-organization work of the collaboration. Joint systems are established, results are evaluated, and renewal activities are undertaken. In Stage 4, the interagency collaboration takes on the tasks of assuring continuity of efforts through working collaboration-to-community. Traditional and nontraditional public relations activities that create visibility are engaged, system changes are embraced, and an end to the original collaboration may be embraced to allow for the involvement of new individuals and organizations to address changing problems and opportunities (Winer and Ray 1994: 40-41).

Whether pragmatic observation and reflection or abstract theory building is used to describe collaboration, several themes repeat across the literature. Adequate resources are needed and, in fact, may play a key role in bringing collaborative partners together (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2001). Leadership that is boundary spanning and characterized by flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, self-assurance, out-going, and capable of articulating the collaborative vision, is needed to develop the successful collaboration (Radin 1996). All the stakeholders must be identified, but strategic decisions may be made about when they should be included in the collaborative process. Drawing on the skills of leadership, obstructionist stakeholders may be

brought in early in the process with the intent of co-optation or kept out of the process until key structures and preliminary successes have been achieved (thereby diluting the effectiveness of such obstruction) [Bardach 1998]. A collaborative structure that fosters effective formal and informal communication must be established (Mattessich *et al* 2001; Winer and Ray, 1994). Social capital is a key ingredient for getting individuals (and subsequently, their organizations) to work together (Bardach 1998; Radin 1996). Throughout the collaborative process trust must be built and sustained. At a minimum, collaborative participants must know what their partners will do in specified circumstances (Mattessich *et al* 2001). At times a mediator or convener, i.e., a neutral third party who can bring the stakeholders together, can play an important role in assuring collaborative success (Bardach 1998).

### **The Best and Brightest Internship Program: A Case Study in Community Involvement and Collaboration**

In the early 1990s, CU/Denver's Political Science Department pioneered an all-weekend B.A. program in Public Policy and Administration tailored to the needs of working professionals. Students took the political science major core courses and electives on weekends while completing their general education requirements in the more traditional weekday model.

In its mission statement, the Center for NEW DIRECTIONS notes, "the mission of the Center for NEW DIRECTIONS is to develop academic programs and courses focused in the areas of politics and public policy with the purpose of developing the leadership capacities necessary to address changing public priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century within neighborhoods, communities, governmental jurisdictions, and nonprofit entities." The tragic events of what we now mark in time as "9-11" have heightened our awareness of how quickly the public's priorities can change. It has also challenged us more than ever to examine the meaning of leadership in our individual and collective efforts to determine the legitimacy of competing agendas for realizing the public good. The threats and challenges of the past have not gone away. We must continue to plan and implement good local government to be prepared to meet them. The dynamic new threats will further test us in the areas of professional competency and leadership. The NEW DIRECTIONS program is focused on preparing its participants for that challenge. The following paragraphs briefly outline the historical development of the program and the unique characteristics of the Center for NEW DIRECTIONS in meeting its own challenge of *redefining leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*...a leadership model that increasingly entails development of collaborative partnerships for student and local government benefit and heightened community involvement.

#### ***Rural Collaboration***

In 1997, in response to the request for graduate educational opportunities in the Western Slope-Durango area, an exploratory off-campus master's program was initiated through the CU/Denver Political Science Department with an area of emphasis in politics and public policy. The first cohort consisted of 31 participants. The Center still provides courses at its Durango site.

In 1999, the Durango-based program received the ICMA (International City/County Management Association) award as "*The best academic program in the nation helping to meet the needs of local governments.*" With the success of the Durango-based M.A. program, the

decision was made to bring it to the Denver area, to complement the earlier B.A. initiative, under the more comprehensive designation as a Center. In September of 2001, the Center began offering an M.A., along with an Academic Certificate Program in Leadership in the metro Denver area, all with a special emphasis in Politics and Public Policy.

### ***Urban Partnerships***

Equally important, this expanded role also provided an opportunity to develop a wider range of collaborative programs and other activities supporting the leadership needs of participating local metropolitan Denver government consortium members. The Center's success to date in implementing its mission can be attributed largely to the early achievement of one of its major goals: to establish working partnership agreements with participating local government jurisdictions. In formalizing the partnership agreement, each participating entity makes a one-time contribution to the Center of \$2500 as evidence of the jurisdiction's commitment to the mission and goals of the Center. In turn, the Center provides training sessions and special programs for the staff and/or citizens of any participating local government jurisdiction. Perhaps most essential is the Center's ongoing commitment to help meet the leadership competency needs of the participating jurisdictions. The Center currently has partnership agreements with the following local government jurisdictions: Denver; Aurora; Arapahoe County; Douglas County; Parker; Englewood; Arvada; Westminster; Greenwood Village; Commerce City; Brighton; Thornton; Northglenn; and the South Metro Fire District. This partnership is unique in two dimensions. First, it brings together a wide spectrum of local governments with a focus on learning and professional development. Secondly, this partnership continues to flourish despite the myriad of conflicting issues that so often arise between local governments.

### ***The Best and Brightest Internship Program***

The Best and Brightest Internship Program of the Center for NEW DIRECTIONS in Politics and Public Policy provides a unique model for enhancing student awareness and ability to respond to community needs across the State of Colorado. Currently 19 Master of Arts in Political Science students in the NEW DIRECTIONS program are placed in government agencies in municipalities as diverse as Durango (near Mesa Verde National Park, world class ski slopes, and a long history of mining and agriculture) in the far southwest corner of the state, Brighton (international home of the sugar beet, and extensive farming interests) just outside of Denver, and Sterling (a national center of feed lots and beef production) on the high plains on northeast side of the state.

This program is the outgrowth a successful collaboration among the University of Colorado at Denver's Center for NEW DIRECTIONS in Politics and Public Policy, the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) and participating small rural local government jurisdictions. Through this collaborative partnership DOLA provides financial support (matched by the local jurisdiction) for a two-year administrative internship program that places master's degree students in small and/or rural communities across Colorado. NEW DIRECTIONS students take a prerequisite course in Politics, Public Policy, and Leadership prior to formal admission to the program. All M.A. candidates in Political Science are eligible to compete for one of twenty two-year internships with an annual stipend of \$26,000 including full benefits that place them with small and rural governments while completing their two-year academic program



in politics and public policy. NEW DIRECTIONS students receive their academic course work through a series of weekend classes: three weekends within a two-month period for each class. The goal is to enhance skills and awareness valuable for community, nonprofit and public leadership, and activism. Specific learning outcomes focus on fostering of creativity and innovation; resolution of conflicts; deductive and inductive reasoning; strategic planning and decision making; individual, organizational, and cultural communication; ethical and legal accountability; changing public priorities; political and social diversity; social and/or natural ecology; and the applied use of appropriate technology to develop committed people with open minds.

### ***Focus on Politics***

Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the Center's academic programs is its emphasis on politics, political awareness, and collaboration. The emphasis on politics has little to do with traditional partisan politics as generally associated with political parties or ideologies. *The Center's focus on politics and the policy-making process relates to the ability of leaders to mobilize resources and achieve constituent goals consistent with the public interest.* In this context, politics becomes a synonym for communication and effective politics translates into effective communication, key to successful collaboration.

In short, this emphasis on political awareness seeks to help participants utilize the political process as the "art of making what appears to be impossible, possible" (Scheibner)...making "unnatural acts" (Bardach, 1998) a more natural part of community involvement. For local government to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an in-depth understanding of the "political" elements of administration and public policy are critical. The Center's focus on these elements helps create the new paradigms that will be necessary in Colorado local government in the coming decades.

### ***"Best and Brightest" Interns***

In 1998, a prototype internship program was begun through the Durango-based program in collaboration with six small, rural western slope jurisdictions located in Colorado's sparsely populated Four Corners area and the Colorado Department of Local Affairs. The program was so successful that in January of 2001 it was expanded to include 20 placements consisting of 13 jurisdictions scattered along the eastern plains and the Front Range, as well as 7 jurisdictions on the western slope. A third cohort of 20 placements started in January of 2004. A fourth is scheduled to begin in January 2006.

The broad scope of problems the internship program was designed to address can best be identified in the following objectives of the Program:

- To provide a cost effective way to help support the increasing administrative, policy development and implementation needs of small and/or rural jurisdictions in Colorado.
- To provide a way for the Colorado Department of Local Affairs to meet part of its mission to help address the administrative support needs of small and/or rural jurisdictions in the most cost effective way possible.

- To provide graduate education opportunities for Colorado students graduating from small, western Colorado colleges along with graduate education opportunities for residents living in remote, rural areas of the state.
- To provide a rare opportunity for students to complete a graduate degree while, at the same time, gaining invaluable applied learning experiences in the challenges and opportunities of effective administration so uniquely found only at the small rural local governmental level.

Through the Program, participating towns and counties are provided with a full-time general resource person for two years at a relatively inexpensive cost to the jurisdiction. Students submit personal portfolios to those jurisdictions for which they would like to be considered for an interview. The jurisdiction then makes a determination on those applicants they wish to invite to participate in the interview process.

Best and Brightest Internship Applicant jurisdictions must submit a general description of the jurisdiction, as well as a tentative two-year work plan for the intern. It is expected that the interns will attend commission or council meetings as well as other designated meetings as part of their regular performance description, and be encouraged to attend workshops and conferences that will enhance their ability to better serve the jurisdiction. Students participating in any of the NEW DIRECTIONS academic programs consistently identify the Center's focus on developing leadership competencies as one of the major reasons for their enrollment (LaCourse-Blum, September 2004).

Participants in the NEW DIRECTIONS academic programs represent a wide range of demographic, occupational, and personal backgrounds. They include public and non-profit administrators, elected officials, private-sector employees, community activists, and a variety of others who might be simply called "concerned citizens." All classes are offered in an integrative fashion of instructor presentation complemented with active participant feedback and involvement. Students frequently comment on how much they value the diversity of individuals in the program and how much they learn from each other in the feedback process. DOLA Field Representatives identify the development of these social networks as "value-added" for Colorado communities as these students graduate and advance through their public careers in Colorado county and municipal government (Charles, September 2004).

### **Toward Innovation through Collaboration**

As many authors have noted (Gray, 1989; Bardach, 1998; Kettl and Milward, 1994; Mandell, 2001, and others), coordinating simple collaboration is often extremely challenging. Lack of trust, turf issues, and threats to professionalism are just a few of the barriers to any collaboration that produces results greater than the sum of its parts. In spite of these dire predictions, the NEW DIRECTIONS Best and Brightest Internship Program has managed to clear many of the hurdles to collaboration and community involvement. Large bureaucracies (the Colorado Department of Local Affairs and the University of Colorado at Denver) have managed to forge vital collaborative partnerships with small towns and counties across the state. In turn, the interns have forged collaborative partnerships and facilitated community involvement across the state.

Excited students report of securing hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants for their internship communities during the two-year program (Balter, Carrington, Wilborn, and others July 2004). These dollars pave roads, build recreation centers, provide restrooms for county fairgrounds, and enable a wide range of community resident participation activities. Citizen input to plan major parks and trail improvements is occurring in Berthoud, Colorado (population 4,849 – U.S. Census 2000). Community business leaders are working closely with the NEW DIRECTIONS intern and the Brighton Economic Development director to bring new resources to the high plains town of Brighton (population 20,905 – U.S. Census 2000).

As mentioned earlier, Alter and Hage (1993, p. 39) identify four conditions that are necessary preconditions for successful interagency collaboration: the willingness to cooperate; the need for expertise; the need for financial resources and sharing of risks; and the need for adaptive efficiency. The “Best and Brightest” internship program provides all four. The Colorado Department of Local Affairs is mandated to help local jurisdictions and the jurisdictions desire the assistance, whether that assistance comes in the form of dollars to build new roads or technical aids to write more effective federal grant proposals. Expertise to research everything from highway history (Black, September 2004) to smart growth options (Schivavone, August 2004) is needed by most Colorado towns and counties. In a cash-strapped state such as Colorado [Colorado experienced a multi-million dollar budgetary shortfall in 2003 (Denver Post, 2004)], every governmental jurisdiction welcomes human resources as the “extra hands” needed to get things done. Town and county chief administrative officers (CAO’s) report that the interns take on all the special projects that had previously been placed on the “back burner” for lack of human resources to accomplish the tasks (Jensen and others, July 2004). Not only do the interns accept the challenges, they complete the projects in record time. [One intern was reported to have been given a set of 90 tasks to complete during his internship that began in February of 2004. At the end of March (2004), the intern asked what he should do next...all 90 tasks had been successfully completed (Wilborn and Hollenback, July 2004).] With the help of the DOLA field representatives and the University faculty, communities across Colorado are achieving adaptive efficiency.

As outlined previously, the NEW DIRECTIONS collaborative efforts have followed Gray’s (1989) three-phase collaborative process. In Phase One, individuals (students and interns) and their respective agencies engage in a problem setting process that involves a common definition of the problem, a commitment to collaborate, identification of the stakeholders, legitimizing of the stakeholders, and the identification of resources. A convener from among the stakeholders (in this case, DOLA and the NEW DIRECTIONS leadership) can play a key role in starting the collaborative process. DOLA requests that each potential intern-receiving jurisdiction develop both a work plan and a mentoring plan to assure future collaborative success. The NEW DIRECTIONS program aids students in their preparation for the interview process through the prerequisite course, Politics, Public Policy, and Leadership (P SC 5324).

In Phase Two (Gray 1989) direction setting for the collaborative group occurs. Ground rules are established as DOLA works with the jurisdictions to hone their work and mentoring plans. Agenda setting is a key component of the successful work plans. Subgroups are organized around DOLA’s eight field regions across the state. As interns move into their new

jobs, they join with city and county government officials in a wide range of joint information searches [park and recreation needs, affordable housing options, road closure histories, smart growth/land use planning options, to name a few (interns, July 2004)]. Numerous options are explored for collaborative work within the local jurisdictions and among the interns in their far-flung work placements. Interns negotiate for choice project options and “close the deal” through defining their final master’s project that must blend political science theory and local jurisdiction practicality.

As the current cohort of interns moves into the second year of their internship placement, all are actively engaged in the implementation of the agreed-on programs of the interagency/often intergovernmental collaboration [Phase Three (Gray 1989, p. 55-94)]. Interns take on tasks of dealing with constituencies. The intern in Telluride/San Miguel County, Colorado, has facilitated community dialogue and decision-making about new tennis courts (Balter, September 2004). The Town of Gypsum, Colorado, intern coordinated an annual family fun fair (Esbenshade, October 2004). The circus came to town in Berthoud, Colorado with accompanying thrills and animal-rights protests, coordinated by the local intern (LaCourse-Blum, August 2004). All 19 interns report that grant writing is a part of their daily work, building external support for the communities they serve. Long-term relationships are being developed among government agencies and between government and local residents, all aided greatly by the presence of “best and brightest” interns.

In refreshing contradiction to Bardach’s (1998) predictions of “turf” issues (i.e., the exclusive domain of activities and resources over which an agency has the right, or prerogative, to exercise operational and/or policy responsibility), these challenges are notably absent from the work among the collaborative partners of DOLA, local jurisdictions, interns, and the University of Colorado at Denver’s NEW DIRECTIONS program. Bardach (1998, pp. 168-192) identified start-up costs as a cause for would be collaborations to “die on the vine.” The financial support of DOLA and the local jurisdictions has overcome this hurdle. The dedication of founder, Robert Clifton, and Mike Cummings (chair of the UCD Political Science Department when the program began) provided the needed energy to launch the NEW DIRECTIONS in Politics and Public Policy Center.

Now, the NEW DIRECTIONS program is able to build and expand on this history of collaboration and cooperation in the community (Mattesich, Murray-Close, and Monsey, 2001). The Center has established its legitimacy as leader of this collaborative group (Mattesich, *et al*, 2001). The Colorado Department of Local Affairs, with its close ties to Colorado Governor Bill Owens, has helped to provide a favorable political and social climate for these collaborative endeavors (Mattesich, *et al*, 2001).

As the Wilder Foundation (Mattesich, *et al*, 2001) has noted, membership in successful collaboration is centered around mutual respect, understanding, and trust; an appropriate cross section of members (more the 40 jurisdictions have participated since the program began); the ability of collaboration members to see the collaboration as in their own self-interest; and an ability to compromise. The NEW DIRECTIONS Center and its “Best and Brightest” internship program embody all these needed characteristics.

In keeping with the Mattesich *et al* model (2001), NEW DIRECTIONS collaborative partners share a stake in both the process and the outcome; partners find multiple layers of participation (county commissioner to county commissioner, town manager to town manager, intern to intern); all parties involved have demonstrated exemplary flexibility; each cohort of interns has benefited from development of increased role clarity and policy guidelines; all partners have shown their ability to adapt to changing situations in the community, in state government, at the university, and the nation. Although the program founders wanted everything to happen immediately and to be executed perfectly the first time, the NEW DIRECTIONS program has benefited from an appropriate pace of development and has recently accepted the award for best collaborative efforts in support of local jurisdictions with populations of less than 50,000 awarded to the program and its collaborative partners at the ICMA annual conference in San Diego in October 2004 (*Public Management Magazine*, October 2004).

Collaborations succeed when there are adequate resources (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2001). DOLA, the local jurisdictions, and the University of Colorado at Denver have facilitated the NEW DIRECTIONS collaborative success in this manner. Leadership that is boundary spanning and characterized by flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, self-assurance, and capability in articulating collaborative vision (Radin, 1996, and others) has been the hallmark of NEW DIRECTIONS. Key stakeholders have been identified and engaged in the process (Bardach, 1998, and others). A collaborative structure that fosters effective formal and informal communication is now well established (Mattesich, *et al*, 2001. Winer and Ray, 1994. and others). The established network of DOLA, NEW DIRECTIONS, local jurisdictions, faculty and interns, consists of many interlocking and redundant ties that facilitate development of the trust and cooperation needed for successful collaboration (Granovetter, 1998; Coleman, 1988; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). Truly, Huxham's (1996) collaborative advantage has been achieved.

What now follows is a brief description of the measurable outcomes of this collaboration success story. Then we conclude with lessons learned and suggestions for further study and collaborative growth.

### **Measuring Outcomes**

The measurable outcomes/results are defined in the following ways:

*Increasing Interest by Jurisdictions Requesting Interns* – Beginning with the initial pilot program of six jurisdictions in January of 2000, a total of 45 jurisdictions have now participated in the program.

*Cost Effectiveness for Small Jurisdictions* – All but five of the participating jurisdictions have populations of less than 10,000. The other five jurisdictions have populations of less than 20,000. In general, all jurisdictions meet the broad requirement of not having available the resources needed to hire administrative support staff with the high qualities demonstrated by the intern candidates. (Note: The \$13,000 annual cost to the jurisdiction including benefits amounts to approximately \$6.25 per hour on an annual basis – still not an insignificant amount but generally manageable for small, financially struggling jurisdictions.)

*Increases the Number of Jurisdictions Supported by DOLA* – The Colorado Department of Local Affairs can provide administrative support assistance for two years to 10 small rural jurisdictions for approximately the same amount (\$260,000) it normally provides on average for a capital expenditure request from only one small rural jurisdiction.

*Insuring Quality Candidates from Increasingly Larger Pool of Applicants* – For the most recent internship cohort more than 500 applicants made inquiry about the Program. Of that number, 50 individuals eventually completed the required prerequisite course *Politics, Public Policy and Leadership* and became the candidate pool for the 19 funded placement opportunities currently active.

*Integration into Regular Staff Positions by the Jurisdictions* – Of the first 25 interns, all of whom completed the two-year academic program, over half were integrated into regular staff positions with their internship jurisdictions. Most of the others were offered positions but declined and have taken on other employment opportunities.

*Continuation of the Program in Spite of Severe State Budget Constraints* – In spite of draconian budget cuts required for all state departments in the last session of the legislature, the field representatives for DOLA along with the director of the department advocated that the internship program was too cost effective to be cut or even reduced. As a result, state funding for another round of 20 two-year placements was provided in spite of mandated department budget cuts.

*The Value to the Jurisdiction of the Tailored Master's Projects* – For the final four to five months of the student's internship, they are required to devote a significant amount of their time completing a master's project that becomes the capstone requirement of their degree. The master's project has all of the research criteria of a graduate thesis and more. It goes beyond the typical thesis requirement in that it must be "real world" focused. Each project must be directed toward addressing a major concern, need, or issue defined by the intern's jurisdiction. The document must ultimately be defended by a committee of tenured faculty and acknowledged experts in the subject area. The eventual quality of these documents is such that it would likely cost the jurisdiction anywhere from \$8,000 to \$10,000 dollars if a consultant were hired to offer the same depth of research and critical analysis.

## **Lessons Learned**

Perhaps the most amazing lesson learned through the planning, implementation, and analysis of the Best and Brightest Internship Program is that a wide range of entities, systems, and individuals can, in fact, develop a synergism in which the sum of the total is very much greater than its parts. Indeed, it may go beyond amazing to think that a major department within the state government, an urban branch of the state university, the political science department of that university, an experimental program within that department, and 46 separate towns and counties could develop and approve the necessary intergovernmental agreement needed to make this effort such an overwhelming success.

The formula for that success consists of the following rather simple guidelines:

- Analyze the respective missions, goals, and needs of all entities involved including, for this specific program, the academic, experiential, and professional needs of those students applying for the internships.
- Determine the points at which those respective missions, goals, and needs overlap with each other and build the program utilizing those common denominators.
- Keep all aspects of the model as simple as possible.
- Apply common sense in addressing any problems that may arise and help prevent such problems from occurring in the first place by keeping all participants informed of concerns or issues.
- Be totally unselfish regarding what entity or individual gets credit for the overall success of this effort.

The success of the “Best and Brightest” Internship program for all of its collaborative partners has come about in large part due to the tenacious work of its founder, Dr. Robert Clifton, a true social entrepreneur. Through Clifton’s leadership the program has had significant transformative impacts. Clifton had an idea about how to address the problems faced by small Colorado jurisdictions – he knew “the territory,” having served as town and county manager in diverse Colorado communities. He has been relentless in his pursuit of a vision of what “can be” (Bornstein, 2004, p. 1).

Interagency, multi-jurisdictional collaboration is never easy. Keeping communication lines open requires constant attention. The Center for NEW DIRECTIONS in Politics and Public Policy has committed to building on current successes. Local jurisdictions are calling for assistance in succession planning for local term-limited elected officials. A book, showcasing master’s projects on land use planning and smart growth in the southwest, is under preparation. Research opportunities to expand collaboration and aid local jurisdictions in their informed policy decision-making abound. The future is rich indeed.

Bill Drayton, founder of *Ashoka: Innovators for the Public*, reminds us that “every change begins with a vision and a decision to take action” (Bornstein, 2004, p. 11). The

The Center for NEW DIRECTIONS in Politics and Public Policy, through its staff, interns, and collaborative partnerships across the state of Colorado, is working to develop “better recipes, not just more cooking” (Bornstein, 2004, p. 5). Citizen participation through community involvement is increasing through collaborative innovation. The best is yet to come.

### **About the Authors:**

***Kathryn Cheever***, Ph.D. – A Graduate of UCD’s Graduate School of Public Affairs and former faculty member at the University of Memphis in Tennessee, Kathryn is Executive Director of the Center for NEW DIRECTIONS. Her practitioner background includes service as executive director and program director of numerous nonprofit organizations in the metropolitan Denver area with a focus on fair housing, affordable housing, youth violence prevention, and community involvement. In the local government arena, Kathryn served two five-year terms on the Denver Board of Adjustment for Zoning Appeals. Kathryn teaches the Research Methods course,

preparing students for the completion of their master's project, and she is developing a course on interagency collaboration, her current research focus.

**Robert Clifton**, MPA, EdD – Primarily responsible for the conceptual vision and initial development of the Center for NEW DIRECTIONS, Dr. Clifton is a former small town administrator and the chief administrative officer of a large urban county. His principal publication, *Grassroots Administration*, is a widely used resource book for directors and staff of small, community-based, nonprofit agencies. He also teaches the prerequisite course, "Politics, Public Policy and Leadership," required for all of the Center's academic programs.

**Aden Hogan**, MPA – Aden is the highly respected Town Administrator for the Town of Parker. As the former assistant city manager in Oklahoma City, he served as one of the City's liaisons during the response and recovery following the Oklahoma City bombing tragedy.

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