

# WHAT DOES COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY MAKE POSSIBLE?

Prevailing Perspectives  
on the Relationship between  
Collaborative Capacity and  
Landscape Stewardship Outcomes



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**The California Landscape Stewardship Network** (CLSN) was formed in 2016 to facilitate exchange and relationships; address barriers inhibiting landscape-scale work; share tools and integrate best practices; meet collective priorities; and promote innovation among landscape stewardship practitioners, funders, policymakers, and local communities. The CLSN works closely with the Network for Landscape Conservation and The Stewardship Network to stay connected to a national community in this field, including other regional peer-exchange networks.

**The Stewardship Network** (TSN) is an award-winning 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a 20-year history of caring for our natural world. TSN facilitates countless relationships across organizations and individuals, including community groups, government entities, nonprofits, and businesses. TSN supports community- and landscape-scale networks across the US and Canada and plays an active role in supporting CLSN’s success.

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Photo by Emily Harkness, provided courtesy of the High Divide Collaborative.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Collaborative conservation and stewardship offer effective approaches for addressing complex challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental justice. They also provide innovative ways to fill governance gaps and make inclusive decisions in situations for which we have no sufficient structure, processes, or abilities. However, in order to effectively allocate scarce resources, we need to better understand how to invest in the “collaborative capacity” that sustains collaborative groups, partnerships, and networks.<sup>1</sup>

This study provides an analysis of what collaborative capacity is and how it leads to improved conservation and stewardship outcomes based on expert perspectives gathered from in-depth interviews and focus groups with practitioners, leaders, and funders across the United States.

**We present a framework that illustrates the collaborative capacity elements that are necessary and fundable, as well as a list of activities they enable. We share the reasons consistent, long-term investment in these elements is needed. We emphasize the contextual factors that affect collaboration so that these investments are made in the right places, at the right times, and in the right ways to achieve their potential. We end with a set of recommendations directed toward practitioners, funders, and researchers that will help align their efforts, making them more effective, efficient, and able to achieve durable outcomes.**

This is a time of both urgency and opportunity, as complex and pressing problems are too often met with oppositional deadlock or unilateral action. Growing federal, state, and philanthropic investments in collaborative approaches are offering the chance to change that. Nevertheless, the call from practitioners is clear. Though recent funding increases have been helpful, they are not yet sufficient nor adequately allocated to achieve the social and ecological outcomes we urgently need. This study contributes to a growing body of experience and evidence that points to the need for, and value of, collaborative capacity and makes the case for the ways strategically targeted support can help us meet the challenges before us.

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<sup>1</sup> We recognize these terms have important differences; however, we use them interchangeably in this paper to speak across this field's terminological diversity and because the challenges and recommendations presented in this white paper apply to all of them.





A site visit in Gold Creek, Montana.  
Photo by Tiffany Folkes, courtesy of the National Forest Foundation.

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View of McKittrick Ridge on The McKittrick Canyon Trail, Guadalupe Mountains National Park, Texas.

# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Communities and governments across the US face an array of complex, transboundary, and intersectional social-ecological dilemmas. From climate change and land-use planning to water management and environmental justice, wicked problems cross political boundaries, scales, and sectors, posing deep challenges to ecosystems, governance structures, and mental models.

In recent years, natural-resource academics and practitioners have looked to collaborative, landscape-scale conservation and stewardship to build the relationships, knowledge, and solutions needed to make headway in meeting these challenges. Collaborative approaches have increasingly been employed to fill governance gaps, resolve conflicts, build trust, and cocreate inclusive processes that provide multi-benefit solutions.<sup>2</sup>

While landscape *conservation* draws from a lineage focusing on ecology and land protection, landscape *stewardship* explicitly recognizes human-nature interconnectivity and includes humans as potentially beneficial actors in an ongoing relationship with the land.<sup>3</sup> The field of landscape-scale *conservation and stewardship* has emerged in the 21st century as a distinct approach to managing social-ecological systems at the scale most relevant to ecological processes and the flows of resources, species, and cultures.<sup>4</sup>

There are an estimated 500 collaborative landscape-scale conservation and stewardship initiatives<sup>5</sup> currently at work across the country.<sup>6</sup> Over the last 20 years, these efforts have produced myriad successes across a variety of geographic and political scales and stakeholder demographics. The last decade has seen rapid technological transformations in communication, modeling, and mapping that have opened up new paths for more effective approaches.

<sup>2</sup> Bixler et al., 2016; Clement et al., 2020; Guerrero et al., 2015; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Koontz & Thomas, 2006 Margerum, 2008

<sup>3</sup> Enqvist et al., 2018; Heller et al., 2023; Bennett et al., 2018

<sup>4</sup> Baldwin et al., 2018; McKinney et al., 2010

<sup>5</sup> In this report, we look to a recent definition offered by Wilkins et al. (2021), which describes collaborative conservation as “a process that unites diverse stakeholders to collectively manage natural resources (e.g., ecosystems, species, and sites of conservation concern) with the goal of enabling people and spaces to thrive now and in the future.”

<sup>6</sup> Peterson & Bateson, 2018



Despite growth and successes in this field, we continue to be challenged by antiquated funding structures that are based on project implementation rather than investments in shared governance and collaborative problem-solving capabilities. There is broad agreement among funders, practitioners, state and federal agencies, and consultants that to increase the pace and scale of landscape stewardship actions, investments must focus on *collaborative capacity*.<sup>7</sup>

A recent report by the California Landscape Stewardship Network (CLSN) points out that collaborative capacity allows a partnership to “develop, support, and implement collective, inclusive, equitable, and scalable impacts, including the ability to collaborate, to influence others, and to share leadership.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, some recent grant programs are focusing on this need. California’s Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program enables effective cross-boundary fuels-reductions projects. The US Forest Service makes similar capacity investments through their Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, as do the recent federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act. America the Beautiful Challenge grants also now include language in support of “capacity building, community engagement, planning, and project design.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet, significant challenges remain in demonstrating the compounding value of collaborative stewardship and the outcomes it provides.<sup>10</sup> Practitioners face questions about how collaborative initiatives<sup>11</sup> can be sustained over time, and what kinds of resources are required to achieve their goals. Academic literature has lagged in describing the relationships between investments and outcomes, and existing frameworks contain definitional and methodological discrepancies.<sup>12</sup>

The result is a muddled portrait of the value of collaborative landscape stewardship that has inhibited policymaker and funder support, which has, in turn, hampered the field’s growth and impact.

This study responds to the need for greater clarity by undertaking a rigorous analysis of practitioner and funder perspectives about what collaborative capacity is and what it enables. We asked the following research questions:

- 1. How do practitioners and funders in the US define and describe collaborative capacity? What are the important elements for building collaborative capacity?
- 2. What does increased collaborative capacity allow practitioners to do? What are collaborative initiatives unable to accomplish without that capacity?

We begin with an overview of our methods and study participants. In Part One, we discuss themes generated from the data, including specific collaborative capacity elements<sup>13</sup> and collaborative activities<sup>14</sup> necessary for success. In Part Two, we share examples of the relationship between capacity and outcomes. We then offer a framework that includes the contextual aspects that affect the character of collaborative initiatives. We conclude with a set of recommendations and bright spots and suggest pathways forward for the field.

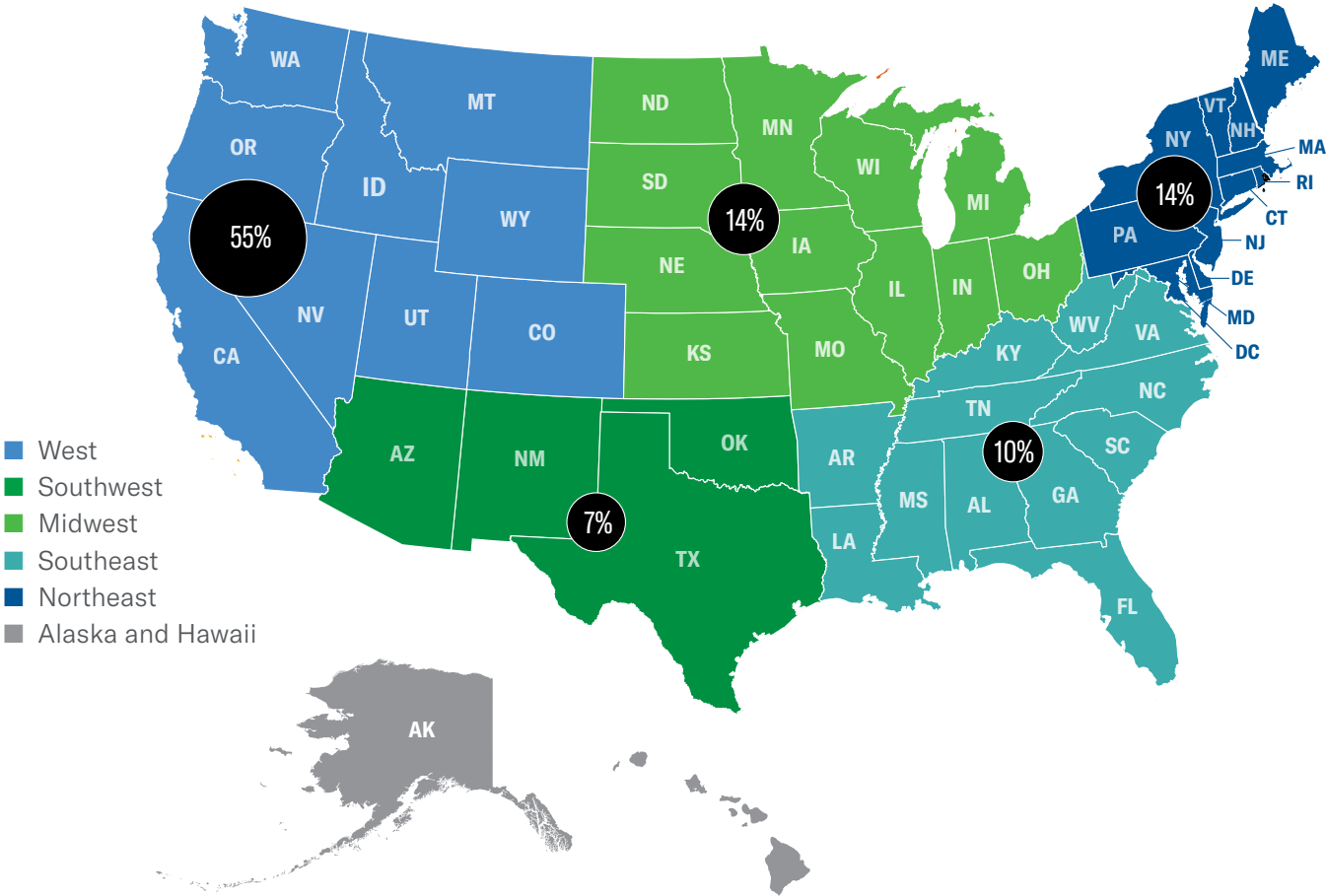
Throughout, we elevate practitioner voices from across the US and synthesize conversations we had with them to clarify what is meant by collaborative capacity. We also employ a rigorous approach that qualitatively illustrates the relationship between capacity and outcomes. Our goal is to share what we have learned with grantors, grantees, academics, government agencies, and policymakers who can support this work and to contribute to the growth of the field of collaborative landscape conservation and stewardship.

<sup>7</sup> In a research note, Dr. Amy Mickel advances some key definitions, describing collaborative capacity as “a collaborative’s ability to perform,” while describing collaborative capacity-building elements as “the more specific elements needed for an organization to function, perform, and endure” (Mickel, 2022).  
<sup>8</sup> deSilva et al., 2022  
<sup>9</sup> [California Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Grant, US Forest Service Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Partnership Program, America the Beautiful Challenge Grants.](#)  
<sup>10</sup> Koontz et al., 2020; Mattor et al., 2020; Scott, 2015  
<sup>11</sup> In this study (unless otherwise specified), for clarity and brevity, we use the term “collaborative initiatives” to include all partnerships and/or networks doing collaborative conservation and stewardship activities at a landscape scale.  
<sup>12</sup> Cheng & Sturtevant, 2012; Peterson & Bateson, 2018; Clement et al., 2020; Koontz et al., 2020; Wilkins et al., 2021

<sup>13</sup> A “collaborative capacity element” is “anything needed for an organization to function, perform, and endure” (Mickel, 2022).  
<sup>14</sup> We define “collaborative activities” as actions that individuals or collaborative partners take to achieve their goals.

# METHODS

We employed two methods of qualitative inquiry in this study: semi-structured interviews with practitioner leaders in the field and focus groups with state and federal grant-makers and private funders. Through this methodology, we established an evidence base of the different perspectives of collaborative capacity, which enabled us to describe links in the value-chain between elements, activities, and outcomes. This type of qualitative inquiry is useful for gaining in-depth insights and diverse perspectives.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of interview and focus group participants by percentage of the total interviewed.

We began our data collection process by conducting 25 semi-structured interviews with 27 participants over a three-month period. We recruited interview participants based on their expertise and roles as coordinators of specific collaborative initiatives. The recursive interviews gathered their perspectives on the elements necessary for collaborative capacity and what these elements enabled them to do. Then, we led three focus groups with a total of 16 people: one with state and federal grant-makers and two with participants from private foundations and philanthropic organizations. These focus groups were conducted to understand their perspectives on the enabling conditions and barriers to funding collaborative capacity.

Geographic representation was a consideration when recruiting interview and focus group participants. Figure 1 depicts the geographic distribution of research participants nationwide. The majority of interview and focus group participants were based in the western states (55%) while the Midwest, Northeast, Southwest, and Southeast were more evenly distributed. We were unable to recruit participants from Alaska and Hawaii.

This study is also grounded in a thorough review of academic literature on collaborative governance and landscape stewardship as well as practitioner-generated gray literature. The latter was gathered from research participants and public databases throughout the duration of the study. In total, we reviewed 51 documents, including grant program assessments and case studies (20), collaborative frameworks (5), evaluative toolkits (11), think pieces (11), and needs assessments (4). For a table of the gray literature reviewed for this study, see [Appendix A](#). Key findings and themes from these sources provided important insights that were analyzed alongside interview and focus-group data.

We concluded our research with an inductive thematic analysis of our interview and focus-group transcripts. This type of qualitative analysis made it possible for us to identify detailed themes that holistically describe the current field of collaborative landscape stewardship and the capacities required to achieve intended social-ecological outcomes. Our qualitative approach provides a basis for which future mixed methods and/or quantitative work may be conducted to further identify and quantify causal links to outcomes.





View of the Delaware River between Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

## PART ONE:

**How do practitioners in the US define and describe collaborative capacity? What are the important elements for building collaborative capacity?**

## DEFINING ELEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Participants affirmed the capacity elements that allow critical collaborative activities to occur. Those activities, in turn, enable landscape-scale stewardship outcomes (Figure 2). While they ascribed varying relative importance to each of the following five elements in different situations, everyone mentioned some aspect of coordination and facilitation support; decision-making structures; collaborative practice, skills, and tools; systems and infrastructure; and collective purpose and goals. These elements reflect the breadth and richness of practitioner experiences from a diversity of landscape stewardship efforts across the US. Because they were so universally cited by participants, we propose these as the key capacity elements that underly successful collaborative landscape stewardship work, though we acknowledge that this is not an exhaustive list given that our interviews did not reach all practitioners and funders. These elements are described in greater detail in [Appendix B](#).



**Figure 2.** A simplified logic model representing how collaborative capacity elements allow collaborative activities to occur, and how those then enable conservation and stewardship outcomes.

As described by our participants (Figure 2) the presence of collaborative capacity elements enables a suite of activities. Through our interviews, we concluded that these include the following: **situation assessment, public engagement, meeting and convening, relationship-building, identifying a shared purpose, landscape conservation and stewardship actions, communication across partners, resource sharing, evaluation, and training and mentoring.**



These groupings constitute the countless important individual activities that practitioners engage in every day. As our logic model shows, these activities enable collaborative stewardship outcomes that this study revealed can occur when specific collaborative capacity needs are met. For a more detailed description of each activity, see [Appendix C](#).

Many practitioners are already aware of these essential ingredients; what has remained elusive is a way to describe how they directly relate to stewardship outcomes. Although collaborative, landscape-scale practices have been recognized as achieving more durable, effective, and inclusive outcomes, the relationship between the enabling conditions and the outcomes themselves remains largely unexpressed.



Visitors in Muir Woods, California.  
Photo provided courtesy of the National Park Service.

PART TWO:

What does increased collaborative capacity allow practitioners to do? What are collaborative initiatives unable to accomplish without that capacity?

STEWARDSHIP OUTCOMES AND RELATION TO COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY

Our research revealed many compelling examples of the ways increased collaborative capacity directly supports landscape-scale social and environmental outcomes. They are presented in this section by “outcome theme,” and we share both practitioners’ and funders’ perspectives on specific collaborative elements and activities needed to achieve each. We also share what happens when collaborative capacity is lacking. The qualitative interviews validate how closely connected collaborative capacity is to successful outcomes.

*Outcome Theme: Accomplish environmental goals and holistically plan and manage across landscapes.*

Participants in this study work with collaborative initiatives that have mission and vision statements that emphasize improving ecological conditions. Importantly, we found that environmental outcomes were accomplished more often and more effectively when certain collaborative capacity elements were in place. These include protecting land from development or extraction, holistic planning and management, habitat restoration, increasing ecosystem functionality, invasive-species and fuel-loads management, and avoiding the need to list species under the Endangered Species Act. These outcomes were achieved across boundaries and at a landscape scale.

For practitioners, there were clear connections between coordination and facilitation support and their collaborative initiative meeting its environmental goals. Among them were staff or consultants (e.g., professional facilitators, partnership coordinators, development directors, communications staff, and natural resource specialists) whose time is fully (or even partially) dedicated to engaging with the collaborative. Although facilitation and coordination are mentioned in similar contexts and can be equally essential, it is important to note that there are some key differences.



“**One of the priorities for this partnership was a regionwide early detection rapid response program to understand where the emerging and incipient threats to the overall ecosystem were located. We needed to understand the collective needs to undertake action and reduce the threat to any one of those partners across that broader landscape. We hired a coordinator for that. [This work] could not have happened without coordination [and facilitation] support and clarity of understanding of how to do that work.”**

PRACTITIONER

Facilitators are professionals trained and experienced in navigating complex, multiparty collaboratives and tend to work concurrently with multiple collaborative initiatives. Coordinators, on the other hand, often provide administrative, operational, and sometimes strategic support to a specific collaborative initiative and its partners. Coordinators commonly have technical expertise in landscape conservation and stewardship activities but may not have professional facilitation training. One practitioner described how coordination and facilitation support were integral to achieving a variety of collaborative activities, including the multiagency design of a regionwide early detection rapid response program (see sidebar).

Practitioners frequently find it difficult to prioritize and accomplish collaborative stewardship goals without coordination or facilitation support. With often only project implementation funds available, they described the stress of lacking an overall unifying strategy. They also described their work as being overly narrow and focused on individual projects or programs.

Funders in this study stressed that investments in collaborative capacity often yield more durable, effective, and landscape-scale environmental outcomes. They also emphasized that the presence of collaborative skillsets and tools amongst partners, coordinating staff, and the funders themselves positively affected the outcomes of key activities. Although the mechanisms for supporting these skills were not always made clear, funders in the focus groups repeatedly pointed to the link between strong facilitation, communication, engagement, and relationship-building skills and the ability to create efficient processes that lead to successful outcomes.

***Outcome Theme: Improve interpersonal relationships and build social capital.***

Throughout our interviews, practitioners commented on how essential it was to fund training and skills-building to increase both individual and organizational collaborative mindset. This, in turn, fostered deeper relationships amongst partners, which led to more satisfaction, shared ownership, and coordinated and effective work across multiple interests.

“**[The partnership] also did some things that are more intangible and harder for people to understand sometimes. They overcame a lot of mistrust and competition in the region. It was a very contentious region that had many conflicts, but [the partnership] was able build enough trust [and social capital] that they could overcome some of that mistrust and fragmentation that was happening.”**

PRACTITIONER

One of the most notable outcomes was reduced competition for resources and increased trust amongst individuals, communities, organizations, and agencies. Further, we found that this type of purpose-driven relationship-building creates social capital that can be activated later to address additional collective needs, solve emergent problems, and create new opportunities.

Practitioners asserted that partner relationships were more resilient to staff turnover and leadership changes when they had a clear collective purpose, common goals, and a shared vision. In many cases, undertaking a shared planning effort enabled and improved relationship-building and communication among partners. These strategic planning processes were most successful when all partners consistently embraced strong decision-making structures. Without investments in the relationship-building foundations provided by a strategic plan or a shared visioning document, some found it difficult to implement collaborative activities or achieve shared outcomes.

Funders in the focus groups validated the importance of improving and increasing interpersonal relationships within collaborative settings, and many suggested that this needs to be documented, valued, and celebrated alongside the more commonly reported environmental outcomes.

***Outcome Theme: Leverage funding for collaborative initiatives and landscape-scale efforts.***

Collaborative landscape stewardship initiatives are highly effective at leveraging funding for their partner organizations. Adequate capacity investments (e.g., in a consultant, coordinator, or development director) enabled these initiatives to pursue and acquire competitive grant funding that they could not have otherwise gone after. That funding supported additional capacity-building and allowed them to better leverage other financial resources for ongoing cross-boundary mapping, monitoring, and stewardship. Simply having a dedicated staff person who could coordinate grant applications made a significant difference in whether they could successfully complete the process and receive the award.



“One of our grantees alluded to the spirit and culture that we aspire to build within the peer learning context. It deepened connection and joy and meaning and purpose in their work.... So, in addition to the more direct conservation outcomes, there is that [connection and joy] component. I think we should celebrate that too.”

FUNDER

Additionally, individual organizations within these collaborative initiatives reported becoming more competitive for grant funding after demonstrating strong partner relationships.

In focus group conversations, funders also highlighted that investing a relatively small amount in collaboratively focused and regionally scaled efforts can have compounding effects. Developing a strategic plan or hiring a grant coordinator enables collaborative initiatives to move their work forward and may even encourage participating organizations to invest more of their own funding and staff time. As one shared, “[Investments in capacity building] fundamentally changed the mindset of some of the funding community around how a \$20,000 capacity-building grant can have impact far beyond what they have ever imagined.”

Our research also found that in the absence of systems and infrastructure to facilitate joint applications, fund transfers, or resource matching, partner organizations tended to work in siloes, focused on their individual land parcels and priorities. According to practitioners, this resulted in a wasteful competition that hampered landscape-scale outcomes.

**Outcome Theme: Achieve individual organizational goals.**

Collaborative approaches are, in part, designed to enable people to do more together than they could do alone. But participants still need to serve their own discrete organizational mission, vision, goals, and objectives. Historically, this has created tensions between traditional governance and collaborative processes. While practitioners recognize this tension, they provided examples of how their individual organizations successfully achieved their goals because of—not in spite of—their collaborative partnership work. For example, they described benefiting from sharing best practices, data, communications, and information from collaborative activities, and the ways this helped meet their individual management needs.

One practitioner offered a specific example of a massive effort to design a complex, interactive countywide vegetation map and GIS database of critical ecosystem information.

“For the countywide vegetation map [project], we needed coordination capacity to bring all the agency partners in the space together, understand collective needs, and then coordinate an approach to fundraise over \$1 million. That coordination yielded a regionwide result, which each partner could use individually, too.”

PRACTITIONER

“We need new ways of thinking, new ways of behaving, new capacities ... because everything is changing so quickly. We’re standing on the edge of this really important moment of history. We’ve got to be thinking about capacity building around change.”

PRACTITIONER

“I think one of the challenges and breakthroughs for collaboratives is being able to foster that network mindset at an individual level and build to a group level. That feels like a really key piece for people to explore.”

FUNDER

Through investment in capacity elements (e.g., systems and infrastructure, coordination and facilitation, and development of a collective purpose), they were able to create the map and database and support regional and individual agency and nonprofit organizational needs. Partners have used the new tools directly in service of their own goals, thereby achieving outcomes for which they would otherwise have lacked funding.

**Outcome Theme: Connect to the field of practice, influence policy, and advocate for more support.**

Working across boundaries, sectors, and scales is becoming more commonplace in the US, but practitioners are still seeking resources, tools, and financial resources to lead such network-based efforts. Peer exchange, training, and mentoring opportunities help fill this need and also support the evolution of the collaborative stewardship field as it adapts to changing social, ecological, and political dynamics.

According to practitioners, peer exchange opportunities strengthen their ability to resolve partnership conflicts; seek new funding for specific projects and capacity-building efforts; and acquire new systems, infrastructure, and tools for advancing their work. This was especially true amongst groups from different regions or that operate at various geographic scales (e.g., national or state). The Network for Landscape Conservation, Southwest Collaboratives Support Network, The Stewardship Network, and Western Collaborative Conservation Network were cited as important resources for creating peer learning and connection opportunities, developing and influencing policy, and advocating for more support.

Yet, some practitioners felt they lacked opportunities to connect either within or across neighboring collaboratives and reported frustration in the absence of a comprehensive database for collaborative initiatives in their region, state, or nationwide. Without resources to know and be known by the broader community, let alone their neighbors, they described feeling like they were reinventing the wheel and missing opportunities to effectively leverage the full impact of their work.



**Outcome Theme: Intentional or unintentional dissolution of collaborative partnerships**

Collaborative initiatives must be intentional in achieving their anticipated social-ecological outcomes. While in some cases they may seek to exist indefinitely, many of our participants noted that the evolving and adaptive nature of partnerships leaves the door open for dissolution, both intentional and unintentional.

In interviews, practitioners provided examples of collaborative initiatives that intentionally ended when all their goals had been achieved. In these cases, a clear collective purpose at the start enabled them to proceed along the path toward its realization. Importantly, even if fulfilling this primary goal meant that the initiative dissolved, participants noted lasting community benefits from the increase in collaborative capacity, and a greater likelihood of future partnerships around another collective purpose.

Collaborative initiatives can also unintentionally dissolve, which practitioners commonly attributed to a lack of certain key capacity elements. Many of our participants experienced this kind of dissolution—or the threat of it—when coordination or facilitation capacity was not consistently funded, or when barriers for implementing certain systems and infrastructure were too big to overcome. They also described cases of partnerships “fizzling” in the context of a loosely defined governance structure, lack of clear partner roles, or failure to plan for succession in their membership.

Dissolution does not necessarily equate to failure. Collaborative initiatives are inherently complex, and their success depends on their context and the presence and quality of capacity elements, which we expand on in the next section. Given this complexity, we suggest that case studies of dissolution can offer an important way to understand signals sent by unmet capacity needs. They might even illuminate the relative importance of particular elements and their relationships to partnership success or failure.

“I can’t overemphasize the importance of having a functioning governance structure. If that goes haywire, or if it’s loosely defined, that’s when we’ve seen a lot of these collaboratives run into trouble, or even dissolve in some cases.”

PRACTITIONER

**VALIDATING A PRACTITIONER FRAMEWORK AND ADDING CONTEXT**

In their 2022 paper, *Increasing Collaborative Capacity and Infrastructure for Landscape Stewardship*, the CLSN provided a framework adapted from one traditionally used for nonprofits (Figure 3). The framework was originally crafted to help illustrate how capacity-building elements work together, especially for audiences who may be operating under a more traditional, project-based funding model. The authors used two element categories: *structural capacity-building* and *binding capacity-building*. Structural elements, which are fundable, provide the scaffolding needed for a collaborative initiative to function effectively. Binding elements, which emerge from the presence of structural elements, act as enabling conditions that influence and optimize the performance of the other elements. After defining and organizing the emergent themes derived from our research data, we returned to this CLSN framework and tested it against what we found. We were able to use our systematic and geographically representative data to validate it to reflect a broad constituency.



Figure 3. CLSN collaborative capaacity framework (2022).



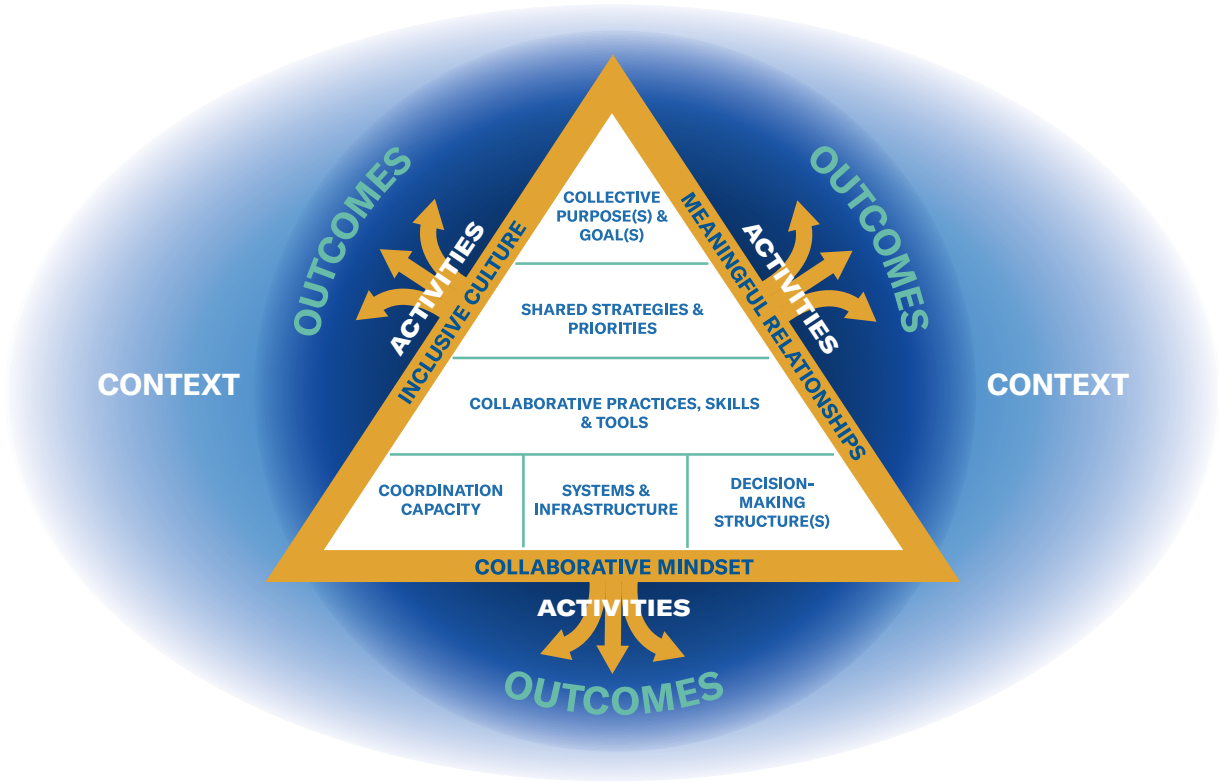
“ I consider it a success when funding opportunities defer to what a collaborative is saying. This is what we should fund.”  
FUNDER

The authors of this framework explain that each capacity element can be targeted through investment and funding, and this was reflected in our study, given that the need for funding was the most frequently discussed theme across our interviews. Our data affirms that each structural element is an area appropriate for investment, but our findings also emphasize that each of these elements is fundable and measurable in unique ways. Additionally, we found that to fund these elements effectively, practitioners and funders must recognize the variety of contextual factors that we present in the next section. Specific funding opportunities are also highlighted in the [Recommendations section](#).



CONTEXT

Context underlies and affects each capacity element and activity differently. Participants repeatedly affirmed the importance of understanding the context in which a collaborative process exists, nearly always asserting that a wider contextual view is needed to identify necessary capacity elements. Given this, we chose to recognize context as foundational to our adapted framework’s structural and binding elements, collaborative activities, and outcomes (Figure 4). Participants specifically identified five contextual aspects: **geography, collaborative phase, policy environment, history, and power dynamics**.



**Figure 4.** Adapted capacity elements, collaborative activities, and landscape stewardship outcomes framework presented by this report.



## GEOGRAPHY

While our framework connects common themes nationwide, it is equally important to recognize the vast diversity across regions. For all participants, **geography** was an integral driver of collaborative initiatives, and it also shapes the character of ecological systems and communities that they encompass. Some highlighted how collaboration is more common and necessary in regions like the population-dense East, while the public-land-rich West tends to get more federal funding. Others described how geographic factors such as topography and distance bear heavily on partnerships’ ability to engage in collaborative activities (e.g., meeting and convening, communication, and restoration projects). Physical scale and a shared sense of place also influence the qualities of capacity elements such as collective purpose and coordination. As one participant put it, “Informing from local place is really critical to the success of conservation and stewardship-type projects.” Participatory, community-driven mapping, fact-finding, and science can provide invaluable data and facilitate more successful collaborative processes, determine shared visions and goals, and more equitably distribute resources.

## COLLABORATIVE PHASE

Interviewees affirmed that understanding which collaborative phase an initiative is in—start up, building, or maintaining—is key to determining its most relevant activity or element. Although many acknowledged the nonlinear nature of collaborative work, there were some common findings. In the early stages, funding for coordination and/or facilitation and reaching consensus around a collective purpose were important to lay the groundwork for effective stakeholder assessments and public engagement. Collaborative evaluation, training, and mentoring were seen as more relevant in later stages. Fortunately, a variety of frameworks and toolkits exist to address questions of readiness and timing.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Huayhuaca et al., 2023

## POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Some of the participants we interviewed described processes that were entirely driven by a specific **policy environment**, such as the Endangered Species Act or Executive Orders. However, a range of policy contexts shape how collaborative initiatives across the country function. For example, federal policies such as the Administrative Procedures Act and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) impact communication among partners and how they approach landscape stewardship actions. In some cases, collaborative partnerships have formed between federal agencies and local land managers or nonprofit organizations after a successful NEPA process (e.g., North Yuba Forest Partnership). In others, partners may have legislation and mandates that affect how they communicate and develop common visions or goals. Many participants noted increasing opportunities for federal funding supported by recent policy changes, but highlighted ongoing difficulties posed by the constraints of project-focused grants.

## HISTORY

Participants highlighted the importance of the particular **history** underlying the ecosystems, communities, and governance regimes in which they work. As one interview participant shared, “Collaborative partnerships are influenced by the nuanced context of land-use history, the history of relationships, and the policy and programmatic history of government programs and policies and how they intersect with those land users and resource users.” Whether from the work of academic environmental historians or the insights of community storytellers, there is clearly a growing recognition of the ways society and ecology are inextricably linked. Recognition of Indigenous peoples’ stewardship nationwide was repeatedly noted by our participants. As one observed, “Indigenous peoples have had a huge influence on the landscape historically, and these landscapes are suffering because we’re not allowing for that process to take place.” This was affirmed by others, who also said that collaborative approaches offer important, though often challenging, opportunities to mend historical injustices.



## POWER DYNAMICS

Similarly, **power dynamics** can shape and influence the collaborative process. Race, class, gender, and institutionalized biases pose enormous challenges to individuals and organizations, and partnerships are no different. Collaborative governance is an explicit attempt to reconfigure traditional power dynamics but is often still subject to their influences.<sup>16</sup> Participants named many cases in which the legacies of particular historical and systemic power dynamics have significant bearing on collaborative initiative formation and function.

Each situation bears careful attention, but the unique features of collaborative processes also create different opportunities for transformative change. For example, one participant shared that “nobody does conservation on an empty stomach,” which provided the rationale to expand the scope of their mission to community issues not traditionally included. For others, collaboratives can more directly address power inequity through capacity elements like decision-making structures and the presence of neutral facilitation and coordination. Another participant noted that increased partner communication can reduce competition for grants that have traditionally excluded marginalized groups. Additionally, investments in collaborative leadership and skills often results in deeper awareness of how to manage power dynamics. The presence of these capacity elements can enable activities like public engagement and assessment, well-facilitated meeting and convening processes, and inclusive training and mentoring. It was also noted that power dynamics should be explicitly addressed in evaluation programs.

In this section, we emphasized the tangible effects that context has on collaborative capacities, processes, and outcomes. Although Figure 4’s updated framework shows that context underlies collaborative stewardship outcomes, participants expressed that outcomes influence context as well. Neither is static, and often, a collaborative initiative’s stated goal involves changing the context it is operating in and the ways that context influences outcomes. This feedback loop deserves deeper investigation in future studies.

<sup>16</sup> Bryson et al., 2015; Purdy, 2012

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND BRIGHT SPOTS

Participants made clear their need for increased collaborative capacity and shared an assortment of insights and recommendations that they felt would enable more durable outcomes, increase efficiencies, and expand their capabilities. Because practitioners, funders, and researchers maintain unique roles and operate different levers of change, we offer a series of recommendations specifically for each group. Each is accompanied by a bright-spot example drawn from current work.

### PRACTITIONERS

Practitioners are the keystones of collaborative initiatives and their outcomes. In our interviews, it was clear that their keen observations, lived experiences, and proven results inspire decision-makers, funders, and the communities in which they work. Practitioners also seek ways to evaluate their efforts and help advance the field of collaborative landscape stewardship.

**RECOMMENDATION: Tell the story of the relationship between landscape stewardship outcomes and collaborative capacity to demonstrate its impact and value.**

Those working to coordinate, facilitate, and sustain collaborative initiatives are intimately aware of what drives successful outcomes. We recommend that practitioners use and continue to refine shared terminology and tools to communicate the role, impact, and value of collaborative capacity in everyday conversations, grant applications, and reporting.





**BRIGHT SPOTS:** Nationwide, regional collaborative initiatives are particularly well-situated to assert the value of collaborative capacity and its direct relationship with increasing outcomes across boundaries. For years, groups such as the CLSN, Western Collaborative Conservation Network, and New England's Regional Conservation Partnerships Network have successfully brought leaders together to discuss capacity needs and opportunities, facilitate trainings and webinars, organize policy recommendations, and coordinate funding prospects. These participants are dedicated to demonstrating the benefits of collaborative stewardship, increasing the pace and scale of this work, and achieving greater results.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Use the updated framework in Figure 4 to conduct internal evaluations and determine best practices, and then share lessons learned.

Practitioners across the country continue to develop innovative tools and evaluation processes to understand and improve their practices. We suggest that the updated collaborative capacity framework can be used as a tool to support these internal assessments and annual reports. Practitioners are advised to consider how investments in one element may affect their collaborative initiative, and to plan accordingly. We recommend working with fellow practitioners, funders, and researchers to develop and test a collaborative capacity measurement tool that can help determine where to make investments and how to monitor their impact. We also suggest that practitioners continue to build shared knowledge and language about collaborative capacity among their various communities and networks, including funders and policymakers.

## FUNDERS

Throughout this study, it became clear that federal, state, and private funders each provide unique resources that practitioners need to be successful. Many funders highlighted the importance of clarifying the character, value, and logic of collaborative capacity, as well as the need for more effective communication between funders and practitioners. Most importantly, there is consensus amongst practitioners and funders that there is not enough long-term, flexible support for essential capacity needs. Too often existing funding supports on-the-ground activities but not partnership coordination.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Provide long-term funding to support essential collaborative capacity elements.

Collaborative initiatives require different capacity elements depending on what phase they are in (i.e., start-up, building, or maintaining). Although philanthropic dollars are most commonly used to catalyze the start-up stage, the scale of funding rarely meets the need. We encourage public funders to also consider making greater investments in collaboratives in their start-up phases.



**BRIGHT SPOTS:** California's Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program provides multiyear block grant funding to build and sustain collaborative initiatives. These initiatives come together across boundaries to develop, prioritize, and implement projects that serve multiple benefits, including building social-ecological resilience in communities, improving ecosystem health, and increasing fire adaptivity and community wildfire preparedness.





**We’ve seen an efflorescence of collaborative conservation, especially at the landscape scale. It has become more and more apparent that those endeavors really require underpinnings and support beyond the individual project investments.”**

FUNDER

**RECOMMENDATION: Integrate collaborative-capacity funding and project implementation to ensure more durable, efficient, and effective outcomes.**

Study participants clearly articulated that traditional funding models are biased toward technical solutions and discrete projects, and that this severely limits both the diversity of funding recipients and the scale of collaborative initiatives’ successes over time and space. To address this, we recommend that grant programs include collaborative-capacity funding alongside that for project implementation. Collaborative capacity and project-implementation funding needs are interwoven and should be recognized as such. Our research reaffirms the need to amplify the unprecedented movement toward supporting collaborative capacity seen in recent grant program innovations and provides language and tools for doing so through the updated framework.

**RECOMMENDATION: Fund peer learning and exchange opportunities through regional and national networks to help practitioners build collaborative capacity.**

Nationwide, practitioner communities have established a variety of formal and informal networks for sharing resources and knowledge, but these groups would benefit from more direct funder support. Additional coordination and facilitation capacity would allow comprehensive network assessments and the design and distribution of training tools and financial resources. Peer learning and exchange programs, especially for those early in their collaborative conservation careers, provide opportunities to receive valuable guidance and support. Practitioner feedback regarding the application, relevancy, and usefulness of collaborative capacity frameworks, such as those offered in this report, is critical to the continued development of funding programs and evaluative tools. This type of feedback is often harnessed in peer learning and exchange programs.



**BRIGHT SPOTS:** The Network for Landscape Conservation’s Catalyst Fund Program (Catalyst Fund) is a unique combination of financial support for collaborative capacity elements with in-depth peer learning and capacity-building experiences. Since 2019, it has provided more than \$1.6 million in strategic collaborative capacity-building investments, with a specific portion of annual funding dedicated to Indigenous-led partnerships. Currently, the Catalyst Fund uses the CLSN’s collaborative capacity framework (2022) in their request-for-proposals and peer-learning programs.

**RECOMMENDATION: Increase collaboration in grant-making and simplify grant application and reporting outcomes to increase consistency, transparency, and accessibility.**

Given profound capacity inequities across historically marginalized groups, it is crucial to reduce technical barriers. As described here and by others, solving social and ecological issues at landscape scale requires adaptivity. We recommend that grant-makers remain flexible on objectives and performance measures.<sup>17</sup> Funders in this study expressed how much can be learned in one grant cycle and emphasized the importance of grantees communicating about emerging issues and lessons learned throughout the process. Practitioners and funding-program managers each face unique challenges when activating collaborative capacity funding, but our study shows that they are, in fact, largely aligned around the value of capacity. Nevertheless, opportunities exist for both groups to work more strategically with one another, such as coproducing requests-for-proposals, providing open calls for proposals, and consulting with practitioner-based advisory teams for grant-making.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> California Resilience Partnership (n.d.)

<sup>18</sup> Sanderson et al. (2022) similarly argue that by having closer relationships, practitioners can respond more promptly to funders’ requests to understand how their investments in collaborative capacity elements directly support a collaborative’s outcomes.





**BRIGHT SPOTS:** Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) promotes equitable and effective philanthropy in Native communities. Community networks, which are foundational to NAP’s grant-making efforts, are made up of Native professionals, elected Tribal leaders, and Native youth leaders. These networks directly influence NAP’s funding priorities and ensure accountability to Native-led organizations, grassroots movements, and Tribal Nations.

Mosaic is a national grant-making initiative that provides collaborative capacity funding for the environmental movement. Using the term “movement infrastructure” to describe their collaborative capacity investments, Mosaic offers an open call for proposals that generate new ideas; promote greater understanding of practitioner needs; and create more opportunities for locally led, frontline communities to acquire funding.

## RESEARCHERS

Contemporary research on collaborative landscape governance continues to struggle to correlate collaborative capacity and social-ecological outcomes. This study was not designed to statistically correlate these things once and for all, but we believe it provides a foundation for further investigation. We look to the research community to build on this foundation and continue this critical line of inquiry through several opportunities described here.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Coproduce a research agenda with practitioners and funders that explores the relationships between collaborative capacity elements and desired outcomes.

Participants emphasized that this field faces knowledge gaps that require deeper study than they can manage while working to balance their partnerships’ more urgent practical needs. Additionally, practitioners noted that when academics do produce analyses of collaborative governance, they rarely result in useful or pragmatic products, nor integrated relationships with the practitioners. As a result, many frameworks remain largely untested. This gap between research and practice exists in many sectors, but some fields have embraced community-engaged methods to support cocreation and greater trust-building. Those approaches could benefit the field of collaborative landscape stewardship and could be used to gather more robust case studies and ground test the framework. In the latter, such research should investigate the influence of context on the dynamics of collaborative capacities and activities.

We also recommend that researchers enrich our array of outcomes by more precisely defining the terms “capacity” and “outcomes,” so that they may be measured in future studies. Each outcome provides myriad opportunities to clarify the link to collaborative capacity through research and testing using social science methods and statistical analysis.

The suite of collaborative skillsets that participants shared provides fertile ground for study through social science. For example, some study participants suggested that effective leadership is a key driver of collaborative success, and we recommend exploring outcomes associated with the presence and absence of leadership at multiple levels. Understanding the human characteristics that enable or restrict collaborative possibilities can inform existing educational programming and skill-building efforts.





**BRIGHT SPOTS:** Some researchers have delved deeply into collaborative governance, capacity, and outcomes. One, Eaton et al. (2022), used a researcher-practitioner collaborative process to create a set of themes and questions to foster dialogue and encourage coproduction of knowledge so that the field can grow in a just and equitable way. Practitioners have further risen to this challenge by offering frameworks for assessing collaborative initiatives and the elements that sustain them.<sup>19</sup>



Wetlands in southern Louisiana.

<sup>19</sup> Eaton et al., 2022; Beeton et al., 2022

## THE PATH FORWARD

The field of collaborative stewardship has seen many successes in addressing a suite of complex problems, but the need for greater investment in solutions to pressing landscape-scale issues is escalating. Researchers, practitioners, and funders represented in this study called attention to the variety and durability of beneficial landscape stewardship outcomes that occur when adequate collaborative capacity resources are made available. A recent influx of federal and state funding for collaborative landscape-scale projects adds urgency to the need to demonstrate the value and impact of collaborative capacity in achieving desired outcomes for these types of projects. Without investments in collaborative capacity, they may fail to realize their true potential.

Across our dataset, it is clear that the relationships between collaborative capacity and stewardship outcomes are dynamic and occur within specific contexts. Our findings advance the body of research that shows the importance of understanding the influence of context on achieving collaborative goals.<sup>20</sup> Much like the dynamic approach of many collaborative initiatives themselves, this study was designed to look across siloes and coordinate research efforts toward broader, more inclusive, and more ambitious cross-boundary and sector goals. The scope of problems that our ecosystems and communities face has created both an urgency to do things at a collective scale and an opportunity to make transformative change. We hope that landscape stewardship initiatives, including the people who rely on and support them, benefit from our work.

<sup>20</sup> Researchers specifically emphasize the context of individual and social-relational factors as key influences for enabling successful collaboration (Clement et al., 2020; Cockburn et al., 2019).



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Photo by J.R. Logan, provided courtesy of the Taos Valley Watershed Coalition.



APPENDICES

A: GRAY LITERATURE INDEX

YEAR	AUTHOR(S)	TITLE
2001	Mattessich, P., Murray-Close, M., & Monsey B. (Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, shared by Institute for Conservation Leadership)	Success Factors for Collaboration
2006	Alliance for Regional Stewardship	Regional Stewardship and Collaborative Governance
2006	Institute for Conservation Leadership	Six Models of Cooperative Efforts
2008–2012	California Department of Conservation	Watershed Coordinators Final Report
2011	International Union for Conservation of Nature	Guide to Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology
2011	Labich, W., Hamin, E., & Record, S. (Journal of Forestry)	Regional Conservation Partnerships in New England
2012	US Agency for International Development	Advancing Partners and Communities: Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool
2014	Collective Impact Forum	Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact
2014	Center for Evaluation Innovation	The State of Network Evaluation
2014	Shasta Valley Resource Conservation District	Watershed Coordinator Grant
2014	National Forest Foundation	Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program: OR and WA Impact Report 2011–2014
2016	Ruckelshaus Center	Revisiting Many Waters: Evaluation of the Walla Walla Water Management Initiative
2017	Institute for Sustainable Solutions	Exploring the Relationship between Collaborative Partnerships and Outcomes
2017	AmeriCorps	Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool
2017	Texas Hill Country Conservation Network	Network Models and Lessons
2018	Network for Landscape Conservation	Pathways Forward
2018	Goldberg, Leigh	Capacity Building for Collaboration
2018	Urban Institute	Institutionalizing Urban Resilience
2018	National Forest Foundation	Assessing the Effect of the NFF’s Investments in Developing Collaborative Capacity for National Forest Stewardship
2018	Texas Hill Country Conservation Network	Strategic Plan for 2018–2022
2019	Miller, L., Bourg, K., Kusel, J., & Borchers, J. (Sierra Institute and California Department of Conservation)	Wading through the Watershed Program
2019	Institute for Sustainable Communities	Regional Collaboratives for Climate Change
2019	Barrett, B., & Peterson, J.	Pennsylvania Conservation Landscapes: Models of Successful Collaboration
2019	Lee, L., & O’Hara, M. (Beacon Consulting)	Texas Hill Country Conservation Network Governance Structure Report
2020	Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative	Framework for Resilience
2020	Manley, P., Wilson, K., & Povak, N. (Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative)	Framework for Socio-ecological Resilience for TCSI

YEAR	AUTHOR(S)	TITLE
2020	Watershed Research and Training Center	Capacity Needs Assessment
2020	Wright, K. (CLSN and Marin County Parks)	Advancing Collaboration in California
2020	McCleod-Grant, H., Wilkinson, K., & Butts, M. (Open Impact and SeaChange)	Building Capacity for Sustained Collaboration
2020	Garfield Foundation	Systems Principles for Collaborative Networks
2020	Center for Collaborative Conservation	10-year Review of Conservation Fellows Program
2020	Alaska Center for Climate Policy	Assessing Sustainable Southeast Partnership as a Model for Climate Resilience Networks in Alaska
2021	Watershed Research and Training Center	Regional Forest and Fire Capacity
2021	Mickel, A.	Collaborating Well
2021	National Center for Environmental Resolution, Udall Center	Review of Models for Sagebrush Biome Partnership Conflict Governance
2021	Sentinel Landscapes	Accomplishments Report
2022	Deaton, C.	Better Results: What Does It Take to Build Capacity in Rural and Native Nations Communities?
2022	Community Strategies Group	Rural Capacity Building Tips for Funders
2022	California Strategic Growth Council	Regional Climate Collaboratives Program
2022	US Forest Service Region 1	Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership Collaborative Capacity Funding
2022	California Resilience Partnership	Climate Crossroads: California Readiness to Act on Climate Resilience
2022	Sierra Nevada Conservancy	Needs Assessment by California Association of Resource Conservation Districts
2022	California Integrated Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Program	ICARP Engagement Summary
2022	Aspen Institute	Measuring Community Capacity Building
2023	PEER Associates	Summary of Evaluation of Parks for Every Classroom
2023	UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration	Global Capacity Needs Assessment
No date	Watershed Solutions Network	Watershed Framework
No date	California Landscape Stewardship Network	Qualitative Metrics
No date	Reid, R., Scharf, V., Huayhuaca, C., Lynn, S., Loyd, K., & Jandreau, C.	Collaborative Conservation in Practice: Current State and Future Directions
No date	Institute for Conservation Leadership	Benchmarks for Networks, Coalitions, and Other Cooperative Efforts

APPENDICES

B: ELEMENTS

Collaborative practice, skills, tools

The qualities that individuals and organizations use to engage in collaborative efforts may be primarily abstract and intangible behaviors (e.g., care, commitment, leadership, or trust); however, these skills can be measured (e.g., using social science evaluation) and increased (e.g., through trainings and mentorship).

“Coordinators and facilitators need to have a lot of human training or just an innate understanding of the humaneness of it all. They must have incredible communication skills. They must have a really deep understanding of their different partners and human motivations. They must be incredibly aware of their own emotional capacity.”

Collective purpose and goals

The mission and vision statements that bind the members of a collaborative together under a common purpose may be based on either affirmative aspirations or on negative drivers that a collaborative intends to avoid.

“Having a narrative of what you’re doing with the partnership and what the partnership can be is really important. It’s the glue that enables all these pieces to actually to add up to something.”

Coordination and facilitation support

Staff or consultants (e.g., professional facilitators, partnership coordinators, development directors, communications staff, and natural resource specialists) may be fully or in part dedicated to engaging with the collaborative.

“I think the biggest aspect is having a paid, full-time coordinator or manager ... having someone like me who was waking up in the morning and thinking about this.”

Decision-making structures

Protocols and agreements give shape to a collaborative’s governance (e.g., steering committees or working groups).

“I think that collaborative conservation, it’s a movement. It really needs to take shape in different ways that get to the heart of what collaborative conservation is ... and so for me, that means that the structures can vary widely.”

Systems and infrastructure

Physical objects such as hardware and software, meeting spaces, and supplies are needed for a collaborative to perform.

“Every collaborative needs to have a website, social media, and a newsletter. It’s simple, but it’s not easy.”  
“Sometimes having the ability and platforms to be able to work across organizations is the largest

APPENDICES

C: ACTIVITES

Communicating across partners

Exchanging information through joint fact-finding and group learning supports the development of a cohesive group identity. Elements required for this activity include, but are not limited to, collaborative practice, skills, and tools and coordination and facilitation support.

“The other piece that we needed in our building phase was how to communicate and share across federal, state, regional, nonprofits. For example, all of our GIS files and our databases were placed in one shared system. This sharing and access took a lot of time and energy. It was critical for our work to have a shared implementation strategy, shared protocol, shared data repository, and a shared way of reporting.”

Evaluating the collaborative

Assessments through surveys, interviews, or other evaluative tools can be used to review a collaborative initiative’s efficacy and value. Elements required for this activity include, but are not limited to, collaborative practice, skills, and tools; collective purpose and goals; and systems and infrastructure.

“We also need to look for opportunities to eliminate redundancy in the field. There are a lot of collaboratives out there and a lot of them are doing similar things. Some are even right next to each other. So, is there a way to improve resource allocation and efficiency by combining forces?”

Identifying a shared purpose

Clear, overarching goals and objectives bring together the various partners or stakeholders within a collaborative initiative. This shared purpose serves as a unifying vision that guides their efforts. Required elements for this activity include, but are not limited to, collective purpose and goals, coordination and facilitation support, systems and infrastructure, and decision-making structures.

“Funding was key, I mean, federal funding and investment, but that all came from that initial shared purpose and vision.”

Landscape conservation actions

implementing restoration and landscape projects and mapping, monitoring, planning, and permitting. Elements required for this activity include, but are not limited to, collective purpose and goals, systems and infrastructure, and decision-making structures.

“There was already an existing watershed group that was doing great work, but they didn’t have a person that was working at that landscape scale on this really urgent need. And now, because of this partnership and other funding, they have been accomplishing so much related to various threats and really getting those tangible, on-the-ground outcomes.”

Meeting and convening

Meeting and convening facilitation in service to the collaborative initiative and its mission and goals includes notetaking, reporting, decision-making, and event planning. Elements required for this activity include, but are not limited to, coordination and facilitation support and decision-making structures.

“Successful collaboratives meet on a regular basis to be effective. Convening meetings, reporting, and having one-on-one conversations are just critical to moving our collective work forward.”

Public engagement and situation assessment

Public engagement can happen through myriad outreach and communication activities such as newsletters, events, and educational materials. It also includes assessments of relevant and potentially interested parties to connect to the collaborative initiative and its goals. Elements required for this activity include, but are not limited to, systems and infrastructure and coordination and facilitation support.

“Who has the audience that we need? Who has the resources that we need? Who needs us? We’re at a point where we have to be very specific about who we’re welcoming into our network. Because we are not as effective as we can be.”

Relationship building

Building new and/or deepening ongoing interpersonal relationships requires developing bonds of trust and reliability amongst collaborative initiative partners. Elements required for this activity include, but are not limited to, collaborative practice, skills, and tools and coordination and facilitation support.

“We have to try to find ways to be able to build our collaborative capacity through people. Because we can do more if we can have more people involved and then they can do more within their communities. So, it has to be that fanning out of responsibility through that network of people.”

Resource sharing

Pooling and distributing resources—such as funding, staff, and equipment—among the various partners within a collaborative initiative is key. The intention for sharing is determined by their collective purpose and goals. Other required elements for this activity include, but are not limited to, systems and infrastructure and decision-making structure.

“Connective tissue, shared resources, and shared tools can empower a broad and sprawling ecosystem of actors to work effectively at scale together.”

Training and mentoring

Current and prospective collaborative initiative members can benefit from internships, fellowships, and peer-learning opportunities. Required elements for this activity include, but are not limited to, collaborative practice, skills, and tools and coordination and facilitation support.

“We actively support capacity building through a network of grantees. We held workshops and in-person gatherings to build the overall capacity of the field.”



**Jaimie Baxter** has worked with landscape stewardship and partnerships for over a decade, starting with the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. Most recently, Jaimie was a Research Fellow with the California Landscape Stewardship Network where she co-led this research study. She is now the Collaborative Capacity Program Manager with the National Forest Foundation.

**Seamus Land** grew up on the Central Coast of California, where he gained a love for the landscape through ecological restoration and play. After completing his MS in Environmental Studies at the University of Montana he has worked on a variety of collaborative restoration efforts around Western Montana. In addition to this research fellowship, Seamus teaches Ethics of Restoration as an adjunct professor at UM.



