

Policy Networks: Exploring Theory and Practice in Vermont and the Northern Forest Region

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Introduction

Governance in the United States has experienced a remarkable shift, one where public administration is increasingly managed through policy networks, partnerships, collaboration, and third party contracts (Salamon, 1995; Salamon, 2002; Cooper, 2003).¹ Goldsmith and Eggers (2004) call this “governance by network.” Many now argue that hierarchal government can no longer be effective, and that the creation and management of today’s public policies need to reflect these changes: “Government agencies, bureaus, divisions, and offices are becoming less important as direct service providers, but more important as generators of public value within the web of multiorganizational, multigovernmental, and multisectoral relationships that increasingly characterize modern government” (Goldsmith and Eggers, 2004, 8). According to Salamon (2002), this “process [of governance by network] is already well advanced. The great challenge is now is to find a way to comprehend, and to manage, the reinvented government we have produced” (8).

The overarching goal of this exploration is to articulate the strengths and challenges of the “governance by network” model. Through four illustrations of networked approaches to public policy drawn from several fields (see Tales of the Field section below), this paper explores some of the ways in which policy networks have been facilitated. But in order to review these illustrations, it is important to first understand what network governance is, how it functions, and the challenges it faces.

Governance by Network Defined: Functions and Failures

The governance by network model, while implemented by numerous practitioners for decades, is hard to succinctly define. This ambiguity is in part a result of many types of partnership (goal-specific, broad/holistic, cooperative or competitive) at different levels of government (federal, state, and local) with a plethora of actors (non-profit organizations, community-based organizations, private businesses, and various government agencies, departments and divisions). Examples of governance by network span the public-private spectrum, and the globe: from the privatization of the United States military to the Congo Forest Basin Partnership, an effort by twelve African nations and numerous NGOs and private companies to “combat illegal logging and enforce antipoaching laws” (Goldsmith and Eggers, 2004, 13).

The understanding of this governance by network model may be further confused in the context of contemporary policy management. The challenges to defining this model include (Lindlom, 1996):

- Comprehensive guidelines for network management may be impossible to achieve since policy-making is inherently political and is always limited by the partners, clients involved, and how problems are identified/defined (Stone, 2002).

¹ Each of these, policy networks, partnerships, collaboration, and third-party contracts, have different meanings. The focus of this research will be on policy networks which can be defined as more advanced forms of partnerships and, like partnerships, are instruments for collaboration.

- Resources such as money and available information may be concentrated with certain partners and non-existent for others.
- Governance by network may be utilized in conjunction with any number of market and regulatory/hierarchical tools or policies, making it hard to differentiate.
- Policymakers need to be cognizant of the public interest as well as the network's interest.
- Public policy may change incrementally, allowing a range of different partners, visions, interests, and other dynamics to influence the process.

Thus, definitions of governance by network range from specific, “constructive and voluntary collaboration among different stakeholders” (Long and Arnold, 1995, 6), to less specific, “an ongoing relationship[s]...with some degree of joint decision making and financial risk sharing” (Vining, et al., 2005), to very expansive including “almost any combination of public funding and private provision of services for public purposes” (Linder and Rosenau, 2000). The illustrations reviewed in this paper will attempt to draw from different points along this definitional spectrum. None of the illustrations selected can be characterized simply as government outsourcing or private-public contracting.²

Despite definitional ambiguity, there is general agreement that policy networks (and their associated partnerships) provide information, resources and services through a “network” or web of actors that are often vertically (within different levels/sectors of government) and horizontally (private sector businesses, non-profit organizations and other nongovernmental actors) connected (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Linder and Rosenau, 2000; Salamon, 2002): “In the twenty-first century, interdependence and the salience of information have resulted in an environment where organizational and sectoral boundaries are more conceptual than actual, and collaborative managerial responses are required to complement, and in some places even displace, bureaucratic processes” (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003, 2). Thus, traditional modes of “government” problem-solving are being replaced by “governance,” a process that often involves multiple actors and collaboration rather than “rigid hierarchies” (Salamon, 2002, 41).

The primary questions this paper addresses are: 1) in what ways can policy networks be managed/facilitated and 2) what are the skills and practices public administrators and/or network facilitators should have, or at least be aware of, to make these networks work? The following components, 1) organizational structure, 2) network facilitation, 3) governance setting, 4) process issues, 5) technology, and 6) resources, represent *both* the potential and pitfalls of the governance by network model, and are essential to understanding what networked governance is, how the illustrations below will be analyzed, and how networked governance can be facilitated.

² The cases are drawn from Vermont, Northern New England and Northern New York as a starting point for work in this field by both the NPS Conservation Study Institute and The Snelling Center for Government, research sponsors for this investigation.

Organizational Structure

There appears to be consensus in the literature that the structure of network governance must achieve a balance between flexibility and stability (Goldsmith and Eggers, 2004; Milward and Provan, 2000; Edgar and Chadler, 2004). But it remains unclear exactly what this means or how it can be achieved. Based on a review of the literature, the governance by network model should be structured to improve communication, reduce costs³, empower network partners, and achieve program/policy goals by:

- organizing around needs and values of principals and partners
- focusing on local and social interpersonal relationships
- reaching a collective understanding of goals/mission (Long and Arnold, 1995)
- creating “safe” deliberative space with the help of facilitators
- working towards solving problems (Long and Arnold, 1995)
- building bonds (strong ties) and bridging (weak ties) networks; vertical as well as horizontal linkages (see *Resources* section below)
- formalizing/legalizing institutional rules and regulations: emphasis on checks and balances and separation of powers (Bruijn and Heuvelhof, 1997)
- ensuring accountability of network partners and principal through transparent process and performance assessment (see *Process Issues* section below)

But the value of “structure” may be overstated. Among other factors, project goals, network partnership scale, network partnership stage, degree of consensus, and history of collaboration and/or actors may affect how a network partnership can be structured. It may also be extremely challenging to change the “bureaucratic,” or slowly evolving, structure of government.⁴ Thus, there may not be one “right” organizational structure, but rather a common understanding that the governance by network model should maintain stability by focusing on developing program/policy goals without minimizing the flexible nature of local social relationships (G. Eugster, unpublished notes, 2005). The key ingredients to structuring network governance seems to lie in empowering participants, devolving action/implementation to the local level, improving interpersonal relations, working towards overarching goals, and providing administrative/institutional support (Fischer, 2006; Fung and Wright, 2001).

³ The issue of costs is complex. For example, Bardach (1994) suggests that network-based approaches may have higher transaction costs (compared to other approaches). Thus, in order for network-based approaches to be more cost effective, the benefits derived through the network must exceed these increases in transaction costs.

⁴ To complicate matters further, there appears to be at least two forms of structure, an internal structure that characterizes the inner workings of policy networks and their individual actors (i.e.: partner needs, relationship building, etc.) and a broader definition of structure, one where over-arching and network-wide themes and elements are addressed. Despite these differences both structural variables are likely to be highly context specific.

Network Facilitation

Practitioners and policy-makers have been managing partnerships and various forms of “collaboration” for decades. What can be learned from them and, more specifically, what kinds of governance strategies should be employed? The answer (as well as further questions) appears to be rooted in collective action (Salamon, 2002). Rather than setting out goals, designing the organization, and overseeing implementation, administrators need to manage “the interaction processes within networks or the changing of the structural and cultural characteristics of the network” (Kickert, et al., 1997, 9). But how do you steer non-linear interactions, address complex problems and manipulate network conditions without co-opting the process? According to the literature, leaders of collective action will be well served by cultivating a combination of attributes and skills⁵ such as:

- negotiation; mediation; conflict resolution
- ability to facilitate toward shared goals/visions
- bargaining and motivating
- trust building
- creativity and innovation
- empathy and respect
- interpersonal communication: building informal and formal networks with network actors; strengthening strong and weak ties (strengthening bond within network and building bridges to other networks and/or peripheral actors), creating new ties (Granovetter, 1982)
- coalition and team building, particularly among diverse sets of people
- organization and information-flow management (Yoshino and Rangan, 1995)
- confidence and the ability to give credit (ego-less)
- story telling (Sorenson, 2006)
- facilitation and strategic support (Sorenson, 2006)
- evaluation and assessment
- capacity to build on strengths (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003)
- articulating a vision (Salamon, 2002)
- risk assessment and risk analysis (Goldsmith and Eggers, 2004)

One of the most important aspects of managing networks is empathy. Each actor and principal needs to gain from the process as a whole (Balloch and Taylor, 2001), and the role of leadership (or network facilitator) is critical for ensuring that the values, perceptions, and roles associated with each actor are understood. This will also help facilitate negotiation, mediation, conflict resolution, trust building, team building, and interpersonal communication. Creativity is also an important factor. Kickert, et al. (1997), list a plethora of both innovative as well as traditional strategies that can be used for managing policy networks, including covenanting, bargaining, preventing/introducing

⁵ These skills do not necessarily align with the more traditional approaches in management of public administration.

ideas, organizing confrontation, reframing policy alternatives, constitutional reform, changing incentives, changing internal structure, and managing by chaos (170).

But does this mean “anything goes” when it comes to network facilitation? The short answer is no. While the focus of the first section of this paper, *Organizational Structure*, was on goal attainment and problem solving, the direction of a policy network, particularly the conceptualization of “goals” and problems,” should be facilitated through an open and deliberative process. Network facilitators are not making decisions, but working to incorporate the views and values of participants; essentially, they need to facilitate the networking of people and ideas (Kickert, et al., 1997) through a process of design and discovery (Durney, et al., 2005).

Furthermore, network facilitators are expected to utilize a suite of tools, as the above list suggests, which can include regulatory/direct (hierarchical) and financial (market) mechanisms/policies as well as communicative strategies (Bruijn and Heuvelhof, 1997). Salamon (2002) calls for a shift from “management” to “enablement” skills: “the skills required to engage partners arrayed horizontally in networks, to bring multiple stakeholders together for a common end in a situation of interdependence” (16). He splits the skills into three parts corresponding to three distinct partnership phases: activation and mobilization; orchestration; and modulation through incentives and penalties (Salamon, 2002, 17). All of these tools are useful in thinking about how policy networks can be facilitated, but the institutional/contextual limitations need to be considered as well.

Governance Setting

Each partnership and/or example of governance by network embodies the history, culture, and dynamics of its partners and policy context. Any given partner may be constrained by institutional structure, goals/objectives, legal authority, resources, and past experiences. The network as a whole may also be confined. For example, a governance by network model may need to adapt in the face of political movements, changing legislation, economic trends, or any other macro-level development that the network as a whole, as well as individual partners, are unable to control. The context (i.e.: legal, economic, political, timeframe) of a specific policy (public health, community development, land conservation, etc.) may impede or facilitate the governance by network model. It would be impossible to summarize all of the variables that constitute the networked governance setting. By analyzing four illustrations that range in specific policy and partnership make-up, this brief will attempt to illustrate how policy networks that are contextually disparate can be facilitated.

Process Issues

One critical aspect of the governance by network model is that structure and facilitation are informed by an ongoing and evolving collaborative process. Though this section is inextricably linked to the previous three sections, there are four other facets of the policy

network process that still need to be discussed: transparency and accountability, representation, partnership stages, and conflict, power relations and authority.

1. **Transparency and Accountability:** Policy networks need to demonstrate that they are not simply another form of interest group politics. “The involvement of democratically chosen bodies in network interaction processes...is an additional check on the promotion of the interests of under- and unrepresented parties in the networks” (Kickert, et al., 1997, 174). Public agencies are most likely to play this role. They are able to position themselves as an *accountable* entity, one that offers a window on the workings and failures of the governance by network model. But what happens when government actors, what Agranoff and McGuire (2003) call vertical partners, play minimal roles? Are there ways to ensure accountability in “bottom-up” and flexible processes? There are no definitive answers, but there seems to be general agreement that broad-based engagement, particularly during the inception of partnerships, needs to be in place to account for the “public” interest and partners’ interests (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000, 9). It is also generally agreed that a processes of evaluation and assessment should be in place to help ensure and independently document that the partnership is achieving its goals. Thus, accountability and transparency is closely linked to goal setting and performance measurement (results-oriented accountability), a reflection of the flexible and creative nature of partnerships (Page, 2003).
2. **Representation:** Networks need to be as open and diverse as possible within the context of whatever universe the network seeks to encompass. Agranoff and McGuire (2003) indicate that public-private partnerships need to include both *vertical* and *horizontal* relationships and activities. This thinking can also be applied to networks more generally. Vertical relationships are primarily governmental; activities consist of both information gathering and “adjustment seeking” activities (i.e.: regulatory and statutory flexibility). Horizontal relationships include those with public, semi-public and private organizations. Horizontal activities are comprised of policy or strategy-making, resource exchange and project implementation (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003, 69). It is also important to include, involve, and at the very least adequately represent, the “public” interest. This process can start with defining who the “public” is and determining what the barriers are to public participation (Roberts, 2004; Ventriss, 1987).
3. **Partnership Stages:** Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) and Long and Arnold (1995) argue that partnerships have stages. Long and Arnold (1995) state that “practitioners ... need an understanding of how partnerships actually work” (10). Their solution is the “Partnership Life Cycle” (PLC) model, a means to effectively managing, analyzing and evaluating policy networks. The authors operationalize partnerships into four distinct phases: seed, initiation, execution and closure/renewal. The conceptual groundwork of the partnership is established during the seed phase; opportunities, participants and agendas are solidified during the initiation phase; strategies and alternative solutions are

determined during the execution phase; and actions/policies are implemented and decisions made regarding continuation/termination during the closure/renewal phase. Throughout this process, the agenda may be amended, network partners may change and new partnerships may be formed, making network management and Private Life Cycle analysis/evaluation that much more challenging (Long and Arnold, 1995).

According to Lowndes and Skelcher (1998), collaborative efforts often involve the following modes of governance: market (contractual), hierarchy (employer/employee) and network (relational). In their life cycle theory of partnerships, policy networks may encounter both cooperation and competition. Partnerships may begin and end with networking, but are often formalized through hierarchy. Furthermore, the delivery of policies and programs are more often associated with “market mechanisms of tendering and contractual agreements” (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998, 321). Ultimately, the fear is that “certain well-resourced organizations [will] take advantage of the fragility of network relationships in order to shape ‘common purpose’ to suit their own priorities,” the subject of our next point (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998, 323).

4. **Conflict, Power Relations and Authority:** Much of the literature on partnerships and collaboration agree that people make partnerships work (Chrislip and Larson, 1994; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Long and Arnold, 1995). Partners and partnership facilitators can be chosen for a plethora of reasons (expertise, experience, access to resources, etc.) and, according to the literature, they should represent a range of different sectors and interests (see the second *Process Issue*, Representation, above). What also seems apparent is that different partners will have different agendas and differing access to power/influence. For example, in a study of six public-private partnerships throughout North America, Vining et al. (2005) found that private sector businesses are better able to use public-private partnerships to their advantage and that they are more capable and more likely to avoid risk and uncertainty.⁶ While power and authority can be expressed through responsibility and risk, or lack thereof, it can also be demonstrated through more micro-level and often subtler means of power, including facilitation, expertise, language, and identity.

The governance by network model often “assumes overarching common interests between different players...” (Balloch and Taylor, 2001, 2), but this may not be true to reality. In the words of Agranoff and McGuire (2003), “the term ‘collaboration’ should not be confused with ‘cooperation’” (4). Working together should not be equated with consensus, agreement or, least of all, selflessness. There must be an “added value” for each participant, and the presence of conflict and power struggles between participants should be recognized, even expected. With this in mind, how can policy networks be governed in a way that accentuates a uniform distribution of power and influence while minimizing “personal

⁶ It should be noted that the public sector can be opportunistic as well, particularly in the context of “high-profile political issues” (Vining et al. 2005, 215).

agendas and individual egos” (Huxham and Vangen, 2005, 11). One of the keys to managing these dynamics is rooted in how well administrators understand sources of power. It may be possible to spur conflict in order to build trust, mutual understanding and consensus (if needed), but this may be detrimental to the process if conflict, power relations and authority between and among partners is poorly evaluated. Thus, the questions of whose interests and whose agenda need to be constantly asked and assessed, and “points of power,” ranging from financial-backing to publicity, need to be continuously evaluated (Huxham and Vangen, 2005).

All of these process issues should be evaluated throughout the development of policy networks. Yet they may be most important to the initial partnership phases. If misunderstood or underestimated, collaborative efforts may be doomed from the start.

Technology

Technological innovation has minimized the cost of communication and collaboration. According to Goldsmith and Eggers (2004), technology has been a major factor in making it “more cost efficient for organizations to partner than to do certain tasks themselves” (18). Furthermore, since governance by networks is dependent on interpersonal relations and knowledge sharing, rapid communication via technical infrastructure (electronic rooms, extranets, web-based seminars, interactive media) is essential. Today’s technology allows for an unprecedented ability to gather and disseminate information: “Modern technologies allow [networked] organizations to share data and integrate their business processes with partners outside the four walls of the organization, enabling them to share information in real time about supply and demand and customers’ preferences” (Goldsmith and Eggers, 2004, 17). Durney, et al. (2005), echo this sentiment, particularly in terms of the Internet’s affect on customer-partner relations: “...the speed, power, reach and adaptability of the Internet require faster, more informed responses to stakeholder demands and force organisations in all sectors – public, private and non-profit – to become more customer-oriented to meet clients’ growing expectations” (101).

Yet there are a number of distinct technological problems that networks need to consider. First, the organizational network and its managers/leaders need to ensure technological compatibility. If one partner is using an outdated system and is unable to communicate, the collaborative effort will suffer, perhaps even fail. Second, managers/facilitators need to have the capacity to repair breakdowns in the technical infrastructure. Third, they need to retain both communicative transparency and the confidentiality/privacy of its partners and clients. Finally, the entire network needs to be aware of and able to evolve with the rapid changes of technology. This may be a particularly difficult problem for government bodies if their organizational structure, management strategies, and resources do not allow for constant upgrades of their IT system.⁷

⁷ Despite these concerns, technological innovation continues in ways that may further support policy network goals. For example, research companies like MAYA Design are working on innovative solutions such as the Information Commons, a database management system that enables individuals, non-profits,

Resources

This section describes the many different kinds of resources policy networks require, ranging from money and expertise to information and personal contacts. Klijn (1997) describes the importance of resources, particularly the dependency and exchange of resources, in the context of interorganizational theory: “Interorganizational analysis involves analyzing the dependency and resource exchange relations between organizations and the conditions which influence these processes” (21). Though this theory has evolved and expanded beyond Klijn’s (1997) definition, it is still useful to think about what kind of organizational “resources” may be exchanged, transferred or depended upon. The following describes resources in terms of capital:

- human capital: expertise, knowledge, experience, labor
- built capital: material goods
- political capital and political will
- financial capital: money
- social capital: mobilization of social networks

While each of these has a role to play in the activation and implementation of policy networks, social capital is perhaps the least recognized and hardest to comprehend. Social capital is the mobilization of social networks for specific “purposive” actions (Lin, 2001, 12), such as the governance by network model. While networks rely on social interaction and/or human communication for mobilization, networks can be more than personal contacts (who you know). They can include networks of information, ideas, support, and concerns (Coleman, 1988). Thus, the more status, power and influence an individual has, the more networks and social capital they have at their disposal.

Yet social networks, like policy networks, are far from generalizable. Some players in the social web wield more power and influence than others, and “social relationships are not always symmetrical, not always voluntarily chosen, and sometimes not even reciprocal” (Stokowski, 1994, 57). Add to this the different types of networks – horizontal and hierarchal relationships (Flora and Flora, 1993), structural holes and structural sanctions (Burt, 1992), obligations and expectations (Coleman, 1990), informal and formal networks (England and Albrecht, 1984; Coleman, 1990), strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1982), bonding and bridging (Putnam, 2000) – and the term becomes dizzying. At the policy level, networks are complicated further by organizational values and norms, a plurality of actors and principals, evolving objectives, in-groups and out-groups, and conflict. My hope is that in better understanding the composition of networks at both the micro (social/individual networks) and macro (policy/issue networks) level, practitioners and policy-makers will be better prepared to address the

private organizations, and government agencies to network, to share information/resources, and to improve service delivery, public access and cooperation. For additional information see <http://www.maya.com/infocommons>.

management of these complex, and often autonomous and self-organizing, networks (Rhodes, 1997).

Summary of Challenges

The governance by network model underscores some of the major societal changes that challenge policy makers, including a complexity and diversity of problems, a decrease in direct government, calls for broader political inclusion and influence, and the institutionalization of networked approaches in a broad spectrum of public, private and non-profit arenas (O'Toole, 1997). But this permeability may serve to undermine our understanding of policy networks and raises legitimate challenges. The review process will attempt to address two sets of interrelated challenges. For purposes of clarity, they appear in the form of questions. The first set is broader and draws from many of the *Process Issues* described above:

- In what ways can transparency and accountability be achieved?
- How can a diverse set of actors and an open/deliberative process be ensured?
- How can an adequate representation of the “public interest” be ensured?
- In what ways can a balance between collaboration and competition be achieved?
- What role do different partnership stages play in the overall “success” of a partnership?
- Whose values, interests and agendas are incorporated? How is this complicated by the evolving roles, responsibilities, and influence of actors (G. Eugster, unpublished notes, 2005)?
- How is power and authority equitably distributed among actors?

The second set of questions is more focused on how the governance by network model can be facilitated/implemented. To a certain extent, these targeted questions should also help answer the broader questions listed above:

- Can managers be taught how to facilitate/utilize this model? If so, how?
- How does the partnership transform/adapt in the face of new information, changing agendas, different partners, etc.? Are there certain strategies that might help with such changes?
- Do managers have specific strategies to get partners to work together?
- Are there times when team work/collaboration does not work? If so, what strategies do the partnership and/or the manager employ?
- How is partnership conflict dealt with? If needed, how do you facilitate consensus?
- Are there certain structures, formalities that need to be in place in order for a partnership to succeed?

Drawing on these specific questions, the following illustrations explore some of the challenges the governance by network model faces and, helps to identify tools and strategies for developing and facilitating policy networks.

Review Process

According to the literature, the governance by network model does not simply dwell on third party contracts or outsourcing, but concentrates on the resolution of “wicked problems” through public-private partnerships. The central question is *what makes and breaks policy networks?* And more specifically, where does the balance lie between stability and flexibility, and design and discovery?

The remainder of this paper focuses on linking theory with practice. What can practitioners and policy-makers add to this discussion? What do they think makes and/or breaks policy networks? In other words, what are some of the organizational “realities” of the governance by network model and how do these realities parallel or contradict some of the current academic literature and theories? To explore these questions I have chosen four different examples of governance by network in Vermont and the Northern Forest Region: the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative; Vermont’s Clean and Clear Action Plan; the Vermont Association of Regional Partnerships; and, the Northern Forest Center.⁸ Each represents well-established, complex policy networks with some of the following disparate characteristics:

- tightly v. loosely coupled networks
- centralized v. diffuse government influence
- preventative v. reactive contexts
- different management strategies
- access to different kinds of resources
- in different stages of partnership life-cycles

Methods

The methods drawn upon to assess each policy network reflects the governance by network model: a weave of different theories and fields to create an ethnographic, critical and reflective whole. By focusing on what Van Maanen (1988) calls “tales of the field,” the methods employed here reflect both pragmatism and critical reflection. It is the intent of this study to portray the organizational culture of networked governance through informal conversations with key members of each policy network, as well as secondary sources (legislation, bylaws, websites, public meetings, etc.). In the end, I hope to:

1. describe each partnership’s context/setting, goals/mission, primary actors, technological capacity, and resource availability
2. evaluate the tools used for managing each complex partnership; and,
3. summarize each network’s effectiveness, particularly in overcoming the following process issues: transparency, representation, cooperation/competition balance, partnership evolution/change, conflict, and authority.

⁸ The selection of these policy networks represents a purposeful sampling of diverse networks that meet the research interests of both the NPS Conservation Study Institute and The Snelling Center for Government, research sponsors for this investigation.

These “tales” are neither comprehensive nor highly detailed, but should give the reader a glimpse of the practitioner perspective, and ultimately, help the reader understand some of the links between policy network theory and practice. The examples discussed below are more about exploring important questions related to the facilitation of the governance by network model rather than finding conclusive answers.

Tales of the Field

This section is intended to provide the history and context of four policy networks in Northern New England and Northern New York, and focuses on the challenges summarized above: transparency, representation, cooperation/competition balance, partnership evolution/change, conflict, and authority. The stories are shaped by the people I’ve talked to, the secondary sources they have supplied or I have found, and the stated goals/objectives of each policy network.

*The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative*⁹

The Northeast Kingdom¹⁰ Collaborative (the “Collaborative”) is a collection of individuals and organizations associated with economic development agencies, businesses, educational institutions, conservation organizations, health care providers, and social service agencies that are “dedicated to improving economic and community well being in the Northeast Kingdom” (*Northeast Kingdom Enterprise Collaboration*). The Collaborative was formed in 1996 emerging from a set of informal and formal conversations, according to Jan Eastman, who at the time was the President of The Snelling Center for Government and was active in helping initiate those conversations. The conversations led to the recognition that the region as a whole needed an “independent facilitator type organization,” one that minimized competition and in-fighting between organizations with essentially the same economic development goals. According to Eastman, the overall mission was to work towards “commonality and regional collectivity” on issues of social and economic development.

In 1996 The Snelling Center for Government coordinated an exchange with twenty different people involved in community development issues with the hope of “broadening the base” to include a range of different organizations interested in the various facets of economic development. According to Eastman, the Collaborative became more established when organizational representatives began discussing mission statements and stopped “showing up to protect turf.” Early funding from the Ford Foundation provided facilitation services and general support to organizing efforts. Partners were interested in where the Collaborative was going, what role they were going to play and how they were going to benefit rather than how they might compete against their organizational neighbor.

⁹ <http://www.nekcollaborative.org>.

¹⁰ The Northeast Kingdom is comprised of three counties (Caledonia, Essex and Orleans) in the northeastern corner of Vermont. The region is one of the least populated and poorest in the state.

Three years after the Collaborative was formed, it secured funding and a Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) designation through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Eastman claims that USDA funding and involvement would not have occurred without the trust and facilitation capacity developed in the first two years. The Collaborative was in a unique position of being able to “run interference” between rural residents (and their organizations) and “distrusted” government agencies. It was also able to reduce administrative overhead as well as add a level of legitimacy and credibility that may not have existed in the context of individual organizations. The REAP designation and USDA funding helped to provide a more formal governance structure.

There are at least two sides to the Collaborative’s transformation. On the one hand, the structure required by the REAP designation and USDA grant worked to increase transparency, designate “indicators of success,” establish common goals/mission, incorporate a definition of the public interest, and provide formal funding and staffing. In 1999 a “comprehensive, long term economic and community development plan” was drafted (*REAP Strategic Plan*, 2000, 4). This strategic plan, finalized in May 2000, featured a visioning process and public input (three public forums, a mail-in survey to low income residents, and numerous focus forums) as a means to evaluate the assets, priorities, challenges and strategies of the Northeast Kingdom. It also laid out “indicators of success” to measure the impact this money and these services might have on the “lives of the individuals and families who live and work in the Northeast Kingdom” (*REAP Strategic Plan*, 2000, 6). Between 2001 and 2005, \$4,451,995 was invested in the region in the form of grants and loans for small businesses, telecommunications programs, outdoor recreation services, education initiatives, and rural housing as well as a part-time coordinator position. Funding and REAP designation is expected to last until 2010. The Collaborative has also been mandated to produce a work plan every two years, laying out specific targets and “measures of effectiveness” for the region’s economic and community development (*Work Plan*, 2006).

On the other hand, the Collaborative’s changing structure may encourage stability over and above flexibility, creativity, and even trust. Unlike when it began, the Collaborative may be seen as driven more by money than the desire to collaborate. It is no longer just a series of conversations or a deliberative forum. Furthermore, the formalization and professionalization of the organization may, according to Eastman, transform it into “yet another non-profit for other organizations to compete with,” this one a funded goliath in comparison with most. Since money is distributed through the Collaborative (nearly \$4.5 million between 2001 and 2005) it is by definition a power source. Is it really a “network-centric,” facilitation-based organization now, or simply a pass-through organization? And, more importantly, is this the way of “successful” networks, to go from informal to highly structured and professionalized? Regardless of how the Collaborative is currently perceived, it appears that 1) there is value in an initial period of conversation and deliberation – the way in which the Collaborative began – and 2) that the Collaborative has given up some flexibility and neutral ground after helping to establish the Northeast Kingdom as a REAP zone and distributing USDA funds.

In speaking with the Collaborative's coordinator, one of the most pertinent challenges facing the organization today is communication. Orchestrating meetings via email and phone can take days, and getting board members to take time out of their busy schedules can be difficult. But once a meeting is planned and partners show up, the "interest" is usually there. The second challenge, according to the coordinator, is shifting the Collaborative from "discussion" to "action." Gaining input, forming focus groups and agreeing on "problems" is possible, but implementing the "end product" is sometimes hard, particularly when the problem or issue isn't pressing. In my discussion with the coordinator, it occurred to me that a third concern may also be present. The Collaborative's by-laws empower board members with the "business and affairs of the corporation" (*NEK Collaborative By-Laws*). This in and of itself may not be a problem, but when board members are closely linked to each other and outside community development organizations/representatives, as the coordinator believes they are, a closed network may be created at the expense of inclusion, diverse representation, and possibly even the public interest. It is not clear to what extent this is a problem, since the Collaborative's by-laws state that the twelve appointed board members "shall be limited to three consecutive terms" of two years and that they "shall appoint up to three other directors to insure there is representation on the board from the low income community of Orleans, Essex and Caledonia Counties" (*NEK Collaborative By-Laws*). But this closed network could be problematic for reasons of transparency, accountability, and representation.

*Vermont's Clean and Clear Action Plan*¹¹

The purpose of Vermont's Clean and Clear Action Plan (Clean and Clear) is to stop non-point source pollution from entering Lake Champlain and other Vermont waterways. According to the Clean and Clear website (*Vermont Clean and Clear Action Plan*), the primary goal is to reduce phosphorus by stabilizing stream banks, managing stormwater, reducing soil erosion, regulating agricultural waste, monitoring water quality, and forming watershed planning councils. The partners involved include the Lake Champlain Basin Program, the Lake Champlain Committee, the ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain, SMART Water Ways Chittenden County, the Quebec Citizens Advisory Committee, New York Citizens Advisory Committee, and the Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee in addition to the following Vermont state agencies: The Agency of Agriculture, the Agency of Natural Resources and the Agency of Transportation. Most of these partners represent another layer of formal and informal networks. There are also more than 150 watershed groups around Vermont with which the program partners on an ad hoc basis, most often through grants or other contracts.

Clean and Clear began in the fall of 2003 in response to concerns over Vermont's water quality. It formed as a more immediate substitute for an EPA promised clean-up that was slated for completion by 2016. The plan calls for phosphorus-reducing action by 2009 instead of 2016, and costs are estimated to take 103 million dollars of state, federal and other funds. Specific initiatives and programs appear to correlate with the rational, or science-based methods of planning: an assessment phase (research and monitoring),

¹¹ <http://www.anr.state.vt.us/cleanandclear/>

followed by a project development phase (design and work with landowners), followed by an implementation phase. Clean and Clear has developed pollution-reduction programs through the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, the Agency of Natural Resources and the Agency of Transportation. Grants related to Clean and Clear goals but not directly affiliated with the action plan are intended to involve municipalities, other governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, schools, universities and colleges in helping reduce non-point source pollution. The grants are available through the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation and the Lake Champlain Basin Program.

Clean and Clear relies on six watershed coordinators from at least nine different watershed basins. It is a state wide program although there is an emphasis on watersheds draining into Lake Champlain. The coordinators' role is to “work with public groups to gain support for and facilitate a combination of practices as well as with technical personnel to assist in the implementation of watershed restoration projects” (*Vermont Clean and Clear, Basin Planning*). These “clerks of the works” are intended to be the point people for the planning, strategizing, assessing, outreach and education, program development and design, as well as implementation of Clean and Clear initiatives. They even act as funding coordinators and public participation facilitators. If the organization was translated into a flow chart, the coordinators would be central to the entire operation – they seem to be highly connected in terms of information, resources, and decision-making power. This partnership is no doubt complex: it needs to incorporate multiple stakeholders, ranging from transportation officials to farmers to municipalities. But through these coordinators the planning, design and decision-making process is streamlined and very structured; it might even be considered hierarchical.

The primary challenge, according to state officials, is trying to reduce phosphorus from non-point sources precisely because they are non-point or non-specific; there are multiple sources of phosphorus ranging from farms, construction sites, stormwater, wastewater, and eroding stream banks, to roads, lawns, and pet waste. A more specific challenge is balancing action with both transparency and research. While farmers may understand the problem, they often are more interested in solving one obvious problem than they are in considering contradictory studies, navigating the permit process, accepting government oversight or addressing all of the environmental issues on their property. A third challenge is getting various dimensions of the “public” interested in and/or educated about the “problem.” The problem is pre-defined, phosphorus in Vermont’s waterways, and the watershed coordinators and other government agency officials are charged with engaging the public through outreach and education activities.

According to one state official, Clean and Clear coordinators may know what water quality issues need to be addressed and they may even have the science to back it up, but they do not always know how to frame the issue for the community to understand. For example, scientists at the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources define river pollution as sediment. Coordinators, however, learned that community members are able to identify better with the problem if it is defined as erosion. According to this same official, Clean

and Clear coordinators need to learn how to speak the community's language, to appeal to community interests and to discover "who the spark plugs are."

Based on my informal conversations with Clean and Clear coordinators, there appears to be three indicators of success in regard to program process: 1) the number of people you have talked to; 2) completed projects; and 3) completed watershed basin plans. Coordinators may contact hundreds of people a year, yet most work hard to play a minimal role in program or project development. This is left up to the community, particularly the leaders or "spark plugs" in the community. One coordinator I spoke to described it "as throwing resources [the community's] way and then following up with them." Coordinators are responsible for providing funding, direction, partners, and energy, but shy away from micro-managing the actual project/program. This same coordinator went so far as to say that these leaders should have the freedom to co-opt the process as long as the group is addressing non-source pollution. It should be worth noting however, that ANR management says the bottom line in this approach must be that projects work toward compliance with Vermont Water Quality Standards. Thus, coordinators may be left wondering if the various partnerships they are "managing" work in the context of an "anything goes" philosophy. This hands-off approach, while not necessarily the case in all watershed basins, appears to be especially evident in places where problems of non-point source pollution are severe and immediate.

*Vermont Association of Regional Partnerships*¹²

According to the website at the Vermont Agency of Human Services "Regional Partnerships are collaborative groups in each of the twelve geographical regions of the state that were created in Vermont statute to improve the well-being of children, families and individuals and to make their communities healthier places to live." Partnership "membership includes individuals and families served by human services and education programs; other community citizens; non-profit and state providers of health, education and human services; economic development representatives, and business leaders," and they are led by a state-wide association, the Vermont Association of Regional Partnerships (VARP), and its staff of part-time regional coordinators (*Regional Community Partnerships – Agency of Human Services*).

According to the Central VT Community Partnership website (*Central Vermont Community Partnership*), there are ten statewide program goals:

1. Families, youth and individuals are engaged in their community's decisions and activities;
2. Pregnant women and young children thrive;
3. Children are ready for school;
4. Children succeed in school;
5. Children live in stable, supported families;
6. Youth choose healthy behaviors;
7. Youth successfully transition to adulthood;
8. Adults live healthy and productive lives;

¹² <http://humanservices.vermont.gov/resources/regional-community-partnerships/>

9. Elders and people with disabilities live with dignity and independence in settings they prefer;
10. Communities provide safety and support to families and individuals.

According to a former coordinator, the partnerships were to be cultivated in the early 1990s. It began as a series of conversations about shared goals and concerns across state departments and disciplines. Eventually community-wide problems were discussed and in 1998 The Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) became interested in developing broad based strategies for solving these problems. The process was far from linear but there was consensus that different state organizations and stakeholders needed to work together and that they needed to work at the level of individual communities. Foundation funding spurred the partnership process along and resulted in regional report cards that evaluated 1) what the current conditions are 2) who the partners are 3) what needed to change, 4) how these changes can be measured, 5) what the strategies are, and 6) how specific results can be demonstrated. Today, VARP has an overall leadership team, with three members, to “support regional activities,” “coordinate community report cards,” provide informational and training support, and act as a liaison between the twelve Regional Partnerships and statewide stakeholders such as AHS.

VARP calls itself a “keeper of the outcomes” using “results-based accountability.” In addition to developing regional report cards, regional partnerships host “public education forums” (education/learning), it creates “task/work groups” that move desired outcomes “from talk to action,” and it helps facilitate “the community voice” particularly in decision-making processes. Examples of “strategies that are producing results” include restorative panels and mediation to reduce the drop out rate in schools, transportation for migrant workers, and coalitions that focus on homelessness and workforce housing needs. As discussed in Page’s article on managing interagency collaboration, where he examines Georgia and Vermont’s efforts to “improve services for children and families” (Page 2003, 311), the Regional Partnerships are striving to combine clear overarching missions and goals with specific, locally-based, indicators of program effectiveness.

Long-term change in the communities is the accepted outcome of the work of the Partnerships. While specific outcomes are important, accountability and transparency is directed at the process toward those changes in the future. Partnerships achieve their credibility with the community through building a common understanding around the direction and process of change.

The most important aspect of the partnership is its community members. The partners need to be in positions of authority and they need to be representative of the community as a whole. A problem can arise if partners in positions of authority overwhelm the needed diversity and self-directed nature of the full partnership. One solution is an “open door policy” in the form of public meetings and/or other public events. Leadership and community-wide input needs to be encouraged simultaneously. The more public and open a process, the more likely a partnership will build relationships based on trust to allow for greater risk taking and collaboration.

Based on conversations with various state officials involved in the Regional Partnerships, several other factors need to be present in order for the partnerships to work:

- **Funding:** One state official said consistent funding was necessary though rarely can it be equated with better solutions or better services or products. According to the VARP point person, the Regional Partnerships receive minimal funding and that this actually helps keep the partnerships “honest.”
- **Collective ownership:** A community needs to be engaged and passionate about the issues and problems facing the Regional Partnerships, and they need to agree with how the partnership has defined over-arching problems. This requires that the community “voice” be recognized and incorporated from the start.
- **Partners willing to do the “dirty” work:** Someone in the partnership (preferably multiple partners) needs to research, record meeting minutes, write press releases, and engage in other logistical and organizational details.
- **Research/data:** Partnerships need to continually ask what the “data say and what the research says.” It is important to achieve a balance between what the community wants, what the research shows as best practice and common sense.
- **Strive for consensus:** The partnership needs to get to a place where partners can reach a decision that everyone can live with, one that includes key stakeholders from the beginning.
- **Continual assessment of where the partnership is at and where it is going.**
- **Coping with a constant state of chaos:** Partnership stability is often in short supply and members need to work with change not against it.
- **Informed partners:** Even if they aren’t physically present, partners need to be included. This means considering the different perspectives and issues that attract partners. As one state official said, “you never know what issue will bring people back...and you always have to think about those who aren’t sitting at the table with you.”

In summary, Regional Partnerships act as facilitators for change. According to a coordinator, they act as the “tipping points that lead to change.” They “create many different opportunities in many different ways” by fostering shared leadership and responsibility in an environment where no one person, group or entity can create sustained cultural change, and where no one individual can take the credit.

*Northern Forest Center*¹³

The Northern Forest Center (the “Center”) is a non-profit organization dedicated to mobilizing people and organizations to build healthy communities, economies, and ecosystems across the Northern Forest region, northern New York and northern New England, through research, public forums, programs and projects (*Northern Forest Center*). The Northern Forest Center was founded in the late 1990s to build on the early work of the Northern Forest Alliance, a coalition effort that started in the late 1980s and

¹³ <http://www.northernforest.org/>

focused primarily on land conservation. Large timber/paper companies throughout the Northern Forest region were selling off large tracts of land and organizations like the Northern Forest Alliance were concerned with conserving the scenic and recreational values of the forested land without sacrificing the economic needs of the region. The Center began as a focused effort to extend this policy development into the socio-economic realms of the Northern Forest Region according to Steve Blackmer, the Center's current President. Starting in the late 1990s the concepts of sustainability were extended to include other components of community (cultural, civic, social, economic and environmental) at multiple scales (local, regional, national).

Blackmer states that there are at least two phases to the partnership process. The first phase is defined by thinking and strategizing; it is the building of a shared understanding and language. The Center recruits from a wide range of backgrounds to help frame the issues, they facilitated regional gatherings and leadership exchanges, and they formalized the partnership into four sector teams: forestry products; tourism and recreation; sustainable energy; and, the knowledge economy. Each of these is its own complex partnership, with a core group for each sector and an overarching steering committee for all four sectors. But it has taken six years of “talking” and “figuring out how to work together” to reach this point. According to Blackmer, this phase requires conceptual thinkers rather than “doers.” The second phase, implementation (or action), is impossible without the first. Only when both phases are operationalized, states Blackmer, do policy networks become reality.

Since the implementation phase has only just begun, and because the first phase lays the foundation for collaboration, the remainder of this “tale” will focus on what Blackmer calls the “collaborative skills” of the “talking” phase. According to Blackmer, the Center’s partnerships need at least one facilitator (or leader), and a partnership of twelve to twenty (what Blackmer calls the optimal size) can have up to five. According to Blackmer, the facilitators need to:

- “see the big picture”
- work well with others
- inspire passion without losing sight of a common mission
- do “the simple, but necessary stuff”, such as convening meetings, writing notes, and keeping the flow of communication going
- raise money and provide informational services (research, etc.), or know someone who can
- give the perception that all partners are equal
- recognize that they are involved in a time consuming process that demands selflessness and the ability to cope with uncertainty

This initial phase, according to Blackmer, is not for everyone. The private sector, for example, may have less tolerance for this “touchy-feely” process because of its evolving and uncertain nature. The bottom line, at least according to Blackmer, is that partnerships “need to spend time on defining vision, values, and principles” in order for the implementation stage to work effectively.

Blackmer also outlined two additional partnership requirements, consensus and accountability. Each partnership decision should be decided by “functional consensus” where, by and large, everyone is satisfied (or at least not unhappy) with the decision. According to Blackmer, “a split vote means something isn’t working well.” Conflict resolution and consensus-building skills are more valuable in more complex partnerships. The other requirement, accountability, can be split into three parts: 1) knowing goals up front; 2) knowing what work gets done; and, 3) knowing what money is available. Of these the first may be the most crucial. For if a partnership knows its goals up front, trust can be built, and when the foundation of trust is laid the partnership is prepared for the inevitability of evolution and change.

According to my conversation with Jackie Tuxill, Northern Forest Center board member and former chair of the board, the Center recently passed a resolution asserting that it is a “networked organization.” Though it doesn’t change anything, it reaffirms the practice of governance through partnership. Yet Tuxill wasn’t sure anyone on the board, including herself, knows exactly what the formalization of a networked organization means; she expressed this lack of clarity by saying “a road map” laying out “what to do” and “what to expect” does not exist. Like Blackmer, Tuxill also offered suggestions regarding network leadership and facilitation, including the following skills and practices:

- reliance on intuition and relationships
- “big picture” and “long term” vision
- the ability to live with uncertainty
- the ability to share credit and control
- the ability to communicate, build capacity and bring partners along as the network evolves
- the ability to utilize partner strengths
- the capacity to share work loads
- the ability to continually assess and evaluate

Tuxill claims that there is a set of operating principles that can lead to success, and that unlike traditional top-down, hierarchical approaches, governance by network requires learning by doing, intuition and constant evaluation. Blackmer commented that sometimes this might look like the Center does not know where it is headed, but in fact the process of developing an action plan through a network requires that the Center itself does not simply decide on desired outcomes and actions, but that "we facilitate and guide a network-based process to make those decisions. The bigger the set of issues and participants, the more complex (and cumbersome) that decision-making process is."

Concluding Thoughts

The intent of this exploration has been to shed some light on the “layers” of realities that fashion policy networks and to provide some initial direction for public administrators and practitioners to be “good stewards” of the governance by network model. By reviewing the relevant literature and presenting four examples, or tales of the field, this brief has attempted to address how policy networks can be managed or facilitated, and what the skills and practices are that public administrators and network facilitators should have, or at least be aware of, to make these networks work. It should be stressed that this exploration was not meant to be a “how-to” manual or an exhaustive study on governance by network, but rather an introductory brief that critically examines some of the issues and questions surrounding policy networks.

In the review of literature, I found there to be at least six components or layers of the governance by network model:

- 1) organizational structure,
- 2) network facilitation,
- 3) governance setting,
- 4) process issues, such as transparency/accountability, representation, partnership stages, and conflict/power relations,
- 5) technology, and
- 6) resources, including funding, human capital, built capital, political capital, and social capital.

I also explored specific challenges, most of them a combination of process issues and network facilitation concerns (see *Summary of Challenges* above). Based on my review of literature, it became apparent that 1) governance by network is a balancing act between stability/structure and flexibility/creativity, and 2) that there are specific tools and strategies for facilitating policy networks. To explore some of these questions and challenges, I turned to the four tales of the field illustrated above. Table 1 summarizes some of the lessons learned from each of the policy networks. Further research is necessary to determine how general the application of the “lessons learned” will be.

Table 1: Lessons Learned

Illustration	Lessons Learned
Northeast Kingdom Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure does matter; too much can suppress creativity and flexibility • Potential problems when money becomes the unifying force • Value in discussion, deliberation; it has the potential to lead to trust
Clean and Clear Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinators need to speak the community’s language and learn who the local community leaders are • Coordinators are responsible for providing funding, direction, partners, and energy, but not for managing or leading the actual effort
AHS Regional Community Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In coordinating regional report cards, hosting “public education forums,” and creating “task groups,” the “community voice” can be facilitated and “results-based accountability” can be implemented • Partnerships need to maintain an “open door policy” • Continual assessment and questioning
Northern Forest Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are at least two phases to the partnership process: the “thinking” phase and the “doing” phase • Partnership facilitators need to “see the big picture,” they need to work well with others, they need to be able to inspire passion without losing sight of a common mission, and they need to give the perception, at least, that there is a level playing field

Overall, it appears that the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative and Northern Forest Center are less structured and more emergent (this is especially true for the Northern Forest Center) than the Vermont’s Clean and Clear Action Plan and the Vermont AHS Regional Community Partnerships, which are state driven and more formalized. This does not mean that one “type” is better than the other or that each policy network is a static, unchangeable construct. The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative, for example, became increasingly formal after receiving USDA and Ford Foundation funding as well as REAP designation.

This distinction has led me to draw the following conclusions regarding the four illustrations:

- 1) The more formal or structured policy networks appear to struggle more with flexibility than the less structured, more informal networks;
- 2) Stability and structure tends to increase rather than decrease over time in networks, and
- 3) The more formalized and state-driven policy networks (Vermont's Clean and Clear Action Plan and the Vermont AHS Regional Community Partnerships) seem more consumed with action, results, and solving "problems" than complex partnerships under the umbrella of the Northern Forest Center, which is more concerned with deliberation, trust building and defining problems.

Despite these differences, there does appear to be a number of overarching commonalities and themes:

- Not all partnership stages/phases are for everyone, but policy networks are complex enough, diverse enough, that nearly everyone may eventually have a role to play; the key for facilitators is staying in touch with past, current and future partners
- Uncertainty is the norm
- Consensus should be the norm, though it is more difficult in more complex partnerships
- Coordinating bodies have an important role to play, particularly when it comes to informing and networking (building social capital) and distributing resources
- Community members and/or localized interests need to be included early and often
- The more immediate or apparent a problem is, the easier it is to include community members
- Someone, preferably multiple members, need to do the "dirty" work: research, record meeting minutes, convene meetings, constantly and consistently communicate, write press releases, and engage in other logistical details
- The community "voice" needs to be incorporated and recognized from the start; initial, start-up phase is arguably the most important
- Leadership requires selflessness; willingness to give rather than take credit
- Funding is important but should not drive partnership
- Partnership members need to establish goals upfront – this often takes time and a lot of talk; action is contingent on talk and trust building, and without this partnerships may fail

These themes start to get at the heart of network governance and the facilitation of the governance by network model, but they also reveal how hard it is to generalize about policy networks. There are many more variables than constants, as the review of literature makes clear, and complex partnerships can be difficult to facilitate. But this difficulty should not be translated as impossibility or unmanageability. There are certain resources, skills and practices that facilitators may find useful, as well as pertinent challenges that need to be considered. This brief has introduced some of the theories and practices of policy networks, and in doing so has focused on raising important questions

about the governance by network model. It is my hope that this exploration has set the stage for future research, particularly research regarding the following:

- balancing research with community input and action
- building shared leadership and responsibility
- increasing transparency and inclusiveness without increasing complexity, a reliance on “outside” expertise and/or the alienation of the “public” or “community” that the network intends to represent
- enhancing stability and structure to reduce uncertainty without diminishing flexibility, innovation and creativity?
- engaging community members in the deliberation/thinking/defining phase as well as the action/implementation/doing phase?

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