



LEARNING TO BE BETTER NEIGHBORS

CASE STUDIES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN NATIONAL PARKS AND NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES

Based on the Conference
“Endless Summer: Managing Landscape Character in Coastal Communities”
Provincetown, Massachusetts
October 6–8, 2004

CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP PUBLICATION No. 11

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Published by the Conservation Study Institute
in cooperation with QLF/Atlantic Center for the Environment

2007

This report is the eleventh in the Conservation and Stewardship Publication Series produced by the Conservation Study Institute. This series includes a variety of publications designed to provide information on conservation history and current practice for professionals and the public. The series editor is Nora J. Mitchell, director of the Institute, National Park Service. This volume was published in cooperation with Quebec-Labrador Foundation/ Atlantic Center for the Environment.

The Conservation Study Institute was established by the National Park Service in 1998 to enhance leadership in the field of conservation. A partnership with academic, government, and nonprofit organizations, the Institute helps the National Park Service and its partners to stay in touch with the evolving field of conservation and to develop more sophisticated partnerships, new tools for community engagement, and new strategies for the twenty-first century. The Institute is based at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park within the Northeast Region of the National Park Service.

The Quebec-Labrador Foundation/Atlantic Center for the Environment (QLF) is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to support the rural communities and environment of eastern Canada and New England, and to create models for stewardship of natural resources and cultural heritage that can be applied worldwide. QLF is a founding partner of the Conservation Study Institute.

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Recommended citation: Tuxill, Stephanie L., and Jacquelyn L. Tuxill. *Learning To Be Better Neighbors: Case Studies in Civic Engagement between National Parks and Neighboring Communities*. Woodstock, VT: Conservation Study Institute, 2007.

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Publications in the Conservation and Stewardship Publication Series:

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I. Introduction

Today, as managers in the nation’s public land agencies (e.g., National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management) are reaching out to communities that neighbor public lands, it becomes important to provide models for how to engage communities and stakeholders in successful collaborative conservation initiatives. Collaborative conservation creates sustainable stewardship of national parks and other places of natural and cultural heritage through broad-based partnerships, community engagement, and cooperative leadership, to build a vision for the future. These models of collaborative conservation may also be useful to national heritage areas and other nationally designated areas that involve little public land but do require the National Park Service (NPS) or another public agency to work with local communities.

In the last several years, the National Park Service has emphasized the importance of civic engagement and cooperative conservation in carrying out its mission.¹ The Director’s Order (DO-75A) on Civic Engagement and Public Involvement, issued in 2003, describes civic engagement in part as “a discipline and practice that will...extend and expand civic responsibility by building long-term collaborative relationships with a broad range of stakeholder communities, fostering a widespread investment in stewardship of the nation’s resources.”

This handbook discusses five different models of civic engagement, and uses case studies (“success stories”) to illustrate how people worked together to create effective community–public land initiatives. Each case study includes a set of “success factors” that can help guide others interested in learning about effective community engagement.² The case studies, which come from around the country, all involve some degree of public-private collaboration. In some instances, public land managers took the lead in engaging neighboring communities; in others the initiative came from the community. These examples demonstrate how the players worked collaboratively to create trusting relationships and a common understanding and vision for the future, which can lay the foundation for lasting action of community-wide and, in some cases, regional benefit.

In addition, ten key steps for effective community engagement are described, which have been distilled from a cross-case analysis of the five case studies. They are:

- Identify the appropriate scale of effort and involvement
- Ensure broad stakeholder representation, including the NPS or other pertinent public agencies
- Use an approach that reflects local circumstances
- Craft a common vision for the future
- Build local capacity and awareness
- Provide relevant, objective background information and baseline data
- Ensure an open, transparent, collaborative process
- Employ strategic outreach by stakeholder groups
- Be prepared for a sustained effort
- Celebrate successes along the way

Overview of this Publication

Chapter II sets the context for community-level work, discussing stewardship, community engagement, and associated challenges and opportunities. Chapter III presents the five models, each with an associated case study that shows how the model was successfully adapted and implemented in a specific region. The final chapter discusses the ten key steps that can influence the success of community engagement initiatives. Taken together, these “lessons learned” can serve to guide local residents, park managers, and other practitioners in designing a cooperative, community-based conservation approach in their communities. Further resources, publications, websites, and reference materials are included in the References and Resources section.

¹ For more information on “cooperative conservation,” see <http://cooperativeconservation.gov/index.html>

² In this publication we use the terms “civic engagement” and “community engagement” interchangeably.

II. Stewardship and Community Engagement

“Partnerships that combine a landscape perspective with a growing community-based commitment to stewardship have become critical factors in the sustainability of all national park areas.”

—*Branching Out: Approaches in National Park Stewardship*

Stewardship, in its simplest definition, means people taking care of places with a sense of responsibility to future generations. While stewardship is often closely linked to individuals caring for land, it can also be applied to communities. Community-based stewardship combines a sense of place with a commitment to the community. It can encompass a community (or several communities) and the surrounding landscape, and it can incorporate the diverse interests, needs, values, and hopes for the future of the people who live there. Practicing this type of stewardship means taking a long-term view and working in an inclusive manner, welcoming participation by all interested parties. Such community-based stewardship is a growing trend in what is being called “cooperative conservation.”

Successful community engagement relies on open, transparent, and inclusive approaches to involving key stakeholders and encouraging cooperation. The potential partners and participants encompass all sectors: local, state, and federal authorities; private nonprofit organizations; businesses; and citizens. Existing public-private cooperative efforts can serve as doorways to building social capital (i.e., the sense of trust and reciprocity within a community) and broader community partnerships. Common examples of such collaboration include ecological and other resource monitoring, participatory planning, youth programs, and projects related to trails and open space. In some cases, educational initiatives that help to raise awareness are necessary as a first step. When attempting to foster community engagement, it is important for practitioners to use terminology and create approaches that are relevant and accessible to broad audiences. A variety of tools and resources are available. These include using community visioning and dialogue techniques, building capacity for leadership, broadening awareness and understanding, and sharing best practices and innovations.

Communities and adjacent public lands share more than resources that cross boundaries; they also experience common concerns and challenges that arise from their proximity. Because national parks and other public lands are attractive places to live in and visit, neighboring communities experience pressures that can affect their quality of life, the types of jobs available locally, visitors’ experiences, and ultimately the integrity of the natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources that drew people to these places to begin with. In short, the futures of the land, the landscape and the resources it contains, and the residents and communities are intertwined.

Common challenges facing these communities include:

- Maintaining community character and sense of place while at the same time ensuring economic vitality
- Meeting the needs of an intergenerational resident population and retaining the authenticity of the community while also providing services for visitors (e.g., transportation and other services that meet the needs of both residents and visitors)
- Ensuring a decent quality of life for residents, including meeting the housing needs of a diverse population, ensuring educational opportunity and jobs, and guiding development in a way that retains landscape character and scenic values

- Preserving natural and cultural resources and ecological health

At the same time, there are also opportunities to capitalize on the attributes of these areas, which include:

- A strong sense of place and identity. Whether they are long-term residents, recent transplants, or seasonal visitors, people are drawn to parks and public lands for their natural and cultural values. This connection to landscape and heritage is a point of commonality and can anchor community dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders.
- The presence of a rich mix of public and private partners (existing and potential).
- Accessibility to a range of community resources. These are in part due to the first two (place and partners), and include skills, local knowledge, funding, volunteers, and services.

There are many examples of how to engage community stakeholders in creating effective community-based partnerships that enhance management of natural and cultural resources, improve local and regional planning, and protect community character and quality of life. Taking the first step to reach out to other interests and stakeholders can seem daunting, especially if there is no history of working together in the past. But there are well-documented steps that can lead toward productive partnerships, and many resources available to help along the way. The pay-offs will be both short- and long-term, including establishment of working relationships that help address the concerns that prompted cooperative conservation in the first place, increased community capacity, and enhanced local stewardship.

III. Models and Success Stories

The models for community engagement profiled here can be used to target one community or multiple communities within a region. In each case, the approach should include an appropriate geographic scale in order to respond effectively to issues within the community and region. Through careful attention to collaborative processes, these models can all result in broad, meaningful stakeholder involvement.

The models outlined briefly in the chart below are organized according to increasing formality in structure and complexity. They are not mutually exclusive—that is, any of them might emerge as options from an assessment of community needs, or a more informal model could evolve over time into a more formal or complex structure as warranted by local circumstances. Each model is explained through a case study, which describes how the process unfolded according to the unique resources and characteristics of the community. For this reason, these “success stories” should be considered as general guides only.

Model	Key Attributes	Success Story (<i>Public Land</i>)
1 Conference as a catalyst for community-based dialogue and cooperation	Local steering committee; background information and research; exchange of lessons learned among regions addressing similar issues	“Endless Summer” Conference on managing landscape character (<i>Cape Cod National Seashore, Massachusetts</i>)
2 Ad hoc community forum for dialogue	Inclusive, with a focus on visioning and action planning	“Mount Desert Island Tomorrow” citizens’ forum (<i>Acadia National Park, Maine</i>)
3 Partnership between public land managers and local communities	Multiple communities, team-building approach involving diverse sectors and public land managers	Community–National Park Service partnerships in the St. Croix Valley (<i>St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, Minnesota and Wisconsin</i>)
4 Collaborative initiative to coordinate resource management and ensure broad stakeholder participation	Consensus decision-making, citizen science, specific geographic focus, informal and ongoing	Tomales Bay Watershed Council (<i>Point Reyes National Seashore, California</i>)
5 Creation of a new community-based, non-governmental organization to address a specific community issue or need	Multiple partners, desire to educate community about underlying causes and drivers affecting key issues	Middle Keys Community Land Trust (<i>Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, Florida</i>)

Model 1:

Conference as a catalyst for community-based dialogue and cooperation

Overview

An effective way to promote community collaboration is to organize a conference that engages local residents, officials, and public institutions with an array of practitioners in a structured dialogue to explore common issues, challenges, and experiences. Such a dialogue can highlight solutions and resources from outside the region that are relevant to the local context. With skilled facilitation and careful design of the dialogue process, participants can move beyond barriers and collaborate on solutions to common concerns.

Who Needs To Be Involved

The capacity for organizing a conference often exists with academic and public partners or other major organizations that can bring resources to the table, but it is also essential to engage local and regional sponsors that can provide credibility and additional support. A local steering committee can help to shape the conference around issues of local importance and provide buy-in and support from critical stakeholders. This committee links the conference organizers with communities, providing input to the conference planning and playing a key outreach role before, during, and after the event, especially in recruitment and follow-up activities.

How It Works

The primary goals of the conference are to strengthen local relationships, share common experiences, provide access to resources, and engage key stakeholders in efforts to find solutions to local challenges. Careful structuring of the dialogue can lead to stakeholder investment in the outcome and engagement in follow-up activities. For this to happen, the contextual and topical focus of the conference should be relevant to the hosting communities. Background information, in the format of a report or “white paper,” can provide a starting framework for discussion. An important role for the local steering committee is to ensure that the white paper and discussion framework are relevant to community concerns—the committee acts in essence as a “reality check.” The dialogue is enriched by bringing in people from outside the region to foster the sharing of knowledge and experience from similar initiatives that have been successful elsewhere. This sharing of comparable experiences, combined with strategic engagement of key local stakeholders in focused, facilitated discussion, may succeed where previous efforts at community dialogue have failed or stalled. Use of an outside facilitator experienced in community dialogue is essential to success. This person should be brought in during the organizing phase to help shape the conference dialogue process.

The basic multi-day conference format includes plenary sessions with invited speakers and case study presentations as well as break-out sessions organized by theme. The break-out sessions are enriched by the sharing of local experiences through field trips and other on-the-ground activities. These sessions are characterized by facilitated dialogue and collaborative problem-solving, including development of action steps and feasibility analysis. The results of the break-out sessions are compiled in a final plenary discussion.

Desired Outcomes

The conference provides new ideas and inspiration for participants and creates opportunities for networking, accessing new resources, and making connections both within and across communities. These outcomes in turn lay the groundwork for action, enabling participants and community partners to identify and move forward with feasible projects. Where finances and resources permit, the conference experiences and dialogues can be summarized and disseminated through publication of conference proceedings.

Model 1 Success Story:

“Endless Summer” Conference on Managing Landscape Character

(Cape Cod National Seashore, Massachusetts)

Cape Cod, a 60-mile-long spit of land curving out into the ocean in eastern Massachusetts, has long been valued by residents and seasonal visitors for its beaches, pine barrens, and rich shellfish and fishing grounds. Over the course of the 1900s, the region shifted increasingly from a resource-based to a service economy, and Cape Cod’s proximity to major urban centers such as Boston and New York City spurred growth in the development of tourism infrastructure and second homes.

Recognizing the need to preserve part of this rich natural and cultural landscape, Congress created the Cape Cod National Seashore in 1961. The park borders six towns and includes approximately 600 inholdings of private property, so it is not surprising that the process of land acquisition for the park



created a number of contentious situations with local towns and private landowners. Despite common challenges such as shared water resources, heavy tourism, and associated impacts on quality of life, the community–park relationships remained problematic over the decades. Additionally, despite regional planning efforts, there was minimal cooperation among towns.

With increasing growth, development, and tourism, the community–park experience is inextricably intertwined. Inside the park, managers are dealing with pressures on

limited resources and sensitive ecosystems, as well as the visual impact of new development within private inholdings, while outside the park communities are trying to meet the needs of both residents and visitors. The 1998 general management plan for Cape Cod National Seashore set the stage for addressing these connections, emphasizing the importance of collaboration with communities.

Background Context

The patterns of human activity on Cape Cod, and their relationship to the Cape Cod National Seashore, are difficult to quantify because the issues are diffuse, complex, and interrelated. This challenge led researchers at the University of Massachusetts Amherst to undertake a landscape character study of the lower Cape.¹ The Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning and the Department of History used focus groups to determine which aspects of the lower Cape’s landscape are meaningful to local communities. This data was captured in a report, *People and Places of the Outer Cape: A Landscape Character Study*, published in 2004. Over time, those connected with the study (including the national seashore) discussed how best to share and build on the results, with the idea of a conference raised as early as 2002.

The landscape character study explored issues related to development, community character, and “smart growth” on Cape Cod. Additional long-standing issues of concern for local residents, as reflected in the town plans of the six lower Cape communities adjacent to the park, included the need for affordable housing (including housing for NPS employees) and the desire to maintain a viable resource-based

¹ The terms “lower Cape” and “outer Cape” are geographically synonymous, both referring to the outermost six communities on Cape Cod.

economy, which among other things meant addressing the need to preserve public access to the sea and the viability of working town harbors.

The Method: Partners, Approaches, and Actions

Maria Burks, then superintendent of Cape Cod National Seashore, held meetings with community stakeholders in 2003 to test the idea of a conference that would encourage dialogue around issues of landscape and community character. This idea was met with interest, but local residents expressed the desire to be involved in organizing and shaping the conference, emphasizing the importance of attracting outside speakers and participants who would ensure that the dialogue moved beyond past discussions.

Burks convened the University of Massachusetts, NPS Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, and NPS Conservation Study Institute as partners to help organize the conference. To address the need for local relevance, the partners decided to set up a local steering committee, made up of 13 representatives from the towns and local and regional organizations, to advise on the content and focus of the conference. This steering committee became a touchstone for issues of local relevancy. Its members took the lead in organizing field trips around the four selected themes of working waterfronts, affordable housing, smart growth and redevelopment, and community character, as well as in recruiting key stakeholders.

The two-day conference, titled “Endless Summer: Managing Landscape Character in Coastal Communities,” was structured to explore the four themes in several ways: through plenary presentations, smaller discussion groups, and field trips. The plenary presentations included a summary of the landscape character study and talks by invited speakers (from Florida, California, Minnesota, and Massachusetts) who presented experiences from outside Cape Cod on each of the four workshop themes. Participants then decided which theme they wanted to focus on for the remainder of the conference, and joined a discussion group on that topic. The discussion groups centered around facilitated dialogue and group problem-solving, bringing participant experiences to bear on the local examples shared by residents through associated field trips. Dialogue was captured by note-takers, and selected representatives from each discussion group presented the results at a plenary session.

The conference was led by a skilled external facilitator who was also involved in planning the event, particularly in shaping the agenda and the dialogue process. The conference organizers identified other individuals (mostly from outside the region) to facilitate the thematic discussions. The overall conference process focused on describing challenges, sharing strategies, and identifying follow-up steps.

Outcomes

About 120 people from all sectors turned out for the conference, resulting in an interested and engaged group of participants representing a diverse cross-section of community members as well as people from outside the region. The invited speakers provided a broader context for viewing the challenges faced by communities on Cape Cod, and they shared lessons learned and specific examples of success. While the facilitated thematic discussions just scratched the surface of the issues and potential solutions, they enabled local participants to make connections, meet new people, see their challenges in a new light, identify opportunities to cooperate regionally across town boundaries, and lay the groundwork for future collaboration.

Existing coalitions have been strengthened, and new informal coalitions have formed focused on certain issues. The town planners and park planner now meet monthly to discuss common challenges and aim for more consistency across the region. The conference proceedings were compiled and published following the conference and were distributed to participants electronically via CDs.

Key Factors for Success

- As one of the main forces behind the conference, Cape Cod National Seashore demonstrated its interest in working with local communities to address joint issues as well as those manifested beyond park boundaries and influenced by the park's presence on Cape Cod. By initiating this dialogue and showing a willingness to listen, Cape Cod National Seashore took positive steps toward improving the park–community relationship.
- The local steering committee created a bridge between conference organizers and the local communities and provided an opportunity for community members and stakeholders to take ownership of the conference, provide input into the content and format, and become invested in follow-up action.
- By breaking into smaller thematic groups for discussion, the field trip, and visioning, the conference format encouraged conversations across different communities and enabled participants to better understand the common challenges. This planted the seeds for building networks and working together at a regional level.

Model 2:

Ad hoc community forum for dialogue

Overview

A community forum promotes dialogue and action planning on issues of concern for residents and other stakeholders, including public land managers. The forum can include a variety of opportunities for interaction and participation, emphasizing common elements of open communication, inclusion, and collaboration. The main goals are to describe current conditions, identify areas of common concern, and develop a shared vision for the future.

Depending upon the issues and the key stakeholders, a community forum can involve more than one town. The key is to conduct the dialogue at the geographic scale needed to deal with the issues.

Who Needs To Be Involved

The community forum process is generally led by interested residents and other stakeholders, both public and private. A steering committee and facilitator can help guide a community consensus process, identify relevant groups and resources in the community, and foster communication among participants and partners. Sponsoring organizations contribute time and resources and raise funds for specific action steps and projects. As the community forum evolves, an effort can be made to engage additional participants so that a broader set of stakeholders are represented on working groups or subcommittees. These smaller groups can then target specific issues or implement action steps.

How It Works

The community forum process usually involves one or more events, ranging from a community-wide conference to neighborhood meetings or interviews with key citizens. Other resources can be utilized, such as a series of newspaper articles exploring key issues, a survey, or an opinion poll. In some cases, the steering committee and working groups choose to continue meeting on a regular basis to address ongoing issues and concerns.

Desired Outcomes

The community forum process ideally leads to tangible projects and results, which can be either directly connected to the forum and its working groups or developed independently by key stakeholders or partners. Common results include new projects to address concerns identified by the forum and increased coordination with the formal planning processes of town governments, the National Park Service, or other local constituents. The ideas generated by the forum are captured in a report that is made available to participants and local leaders. Perhaps the most important desired outcome of the forum, however, is the intangible expansion of social capital within the community.

Vision-to-Action Forum

One basic and proven model for a community forum is the “Vision-to-Action Forum.” This 1½-day, facilitated community dialogue focuses on identifying and celebrating community assets and building on them to shape a healthy and sustainable community for the future. The agenda alternates between full-group discussions and small-group sessions, allowing participants to dig into issues in detail and hear from each other to inform further discussion. The forum ends with the launching of several citizen action initiatives.

The Vision-to-Action Forum model has been implemented in communities across the U.S. and has been adapted for use in other countries. For more information, see the References and Resources section.

Model 2 Success Story: “Mount Desert Island Tomorrow” Citizens’ Forum (Acadia National Park, Maine)

Located two-thirds of the way up the Maine coast, Mount Desert Island is home to four towns and Acadia National Park. Here local residents and organizations created a citizens’ forum called “Mount Desert Island Tomorrow” (MDI Tomorrow), which is “working to bring about vibrant, healthy, and year-round communities for Mount Desert Island and surrounding towns.” MDI Tomorrow was established in 1988 but has evolved over time; the current phase of activity began in 2000.

Although not a formal organization, MDI Tomorrow is currently led by a nine-member steering committee and supported by four organizational sponsors, including Friends of Acadia and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension. Additional stakeholders, including representatives of Acadia National Park, participate in working groups and follow through with action plans and projects on topics such as transportation, affordable housing, and land use.



Background Context

By the 1980s, the rapid growth of population and tourism on Mount Desert Island was leading to concerns about the impact of these changes on the island’s quality of life and the lack of a mechanism for managing growth across the four towns. Additionally, the towns feared continued acquisitions by Acadia National Park, which incorporates almost half of Mount Desert Island’s 73,000 acres and is intermingled with town lands. In 1986 the park’s boundary was finalized, alleviating these tensions, and the time was ripe for dialogue.

The Method: Partners, Approaches, and Actions

The impetus for creating a community forum came from the Maine Coast Heritage Trust and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, and the latter designated one of its staff to serve as a part-time facilitator. Residents agreed to serve on a working group to guide the community consensus process, identify and communicate with other island groups, and serve as a sounding board for ideas, activities, and proposals. In a parallel but unrelated effort, the local newspaper explored issues connected to growth, development, services, and community character in a series of articles, which served as a jumping-off point for discussions.

The first phase of MDI Tomorrow involved more than 200 people through interviews and neighborhood meetings. The newspaper commissioned an independent opinion poll, which showed substantial agreement on many major issues, and considerable similarity between views of seasonal and year-round residents. The data from both efforts was compiled and presented to the public in 1991 through a newspaper supplement outlining the “preferred future” favored by island residents, broken down into specific areas of concern.

For those individuals and groups involved in the MDI Tomorrow process, the next step was to implement the ideas associated with the “preferred future,” either by incorporating these ideas into local comprehensive plans or addressing the issues through smaller partnership projects. For example, several groups and businesses began exploring housing alternatives and working to manage tourism and increase off-peak visitation. Acadia National Park picked up on the transportation issue and took the lead in developing a bus system that would serve the park and local communities. Over the next five years, a series of “island network conferences” provided further opportunities to work on issues; some working groups met with success, while others faded.

In 2000, continued challenges and new concerns led to the revival of the MDI Tomorrow forum. The steering committee developed a second set of activities focused on community design and land use, transportation, youth issues, community health, economic prosperity, and affordable housing. New partners joined the MDI Tomorrow forum, including Acadia National Park, Friends of Acadia, College of the Atlantic, and Jackson Laboratory (the largest local employer). Forum activities included elements from the previous process (a series of meetings, conferences, summits, and a survey) as well as workshops and special sessions with certain groups. This time, however, organizers emphasized implementation, evaluation, and outreach. Leaders of working groups took the time to frame the issues, address the gaps in knowledge, and identify key indicators, and eventually drafted and tested an updated “preferred future” vision statement for the issues.

Once again, the results were shared with the larger community through a 2004 newspaper supplement called “Shaping Our Future: A Progress Report to Our Communities.” One of the goals was to develop alternative strategies for public policy and public-private partnerships. The MDI Tomorrow steering committee continues to meet regularly, send e-mail updates, and support the working groups, local planning processes, and related efforts of organizations and businesses on Mount Desert Island.

Outcomes

One of the outcomes of the MDI Tomorrow process that is most visible and appreciated by local residents is the Island Explorer bus system (funded by Acadia National Park, state and local governments, and other supporters), with routes that serve both the park and the four towns. Other tangible results include the revitalization of an inactive affordable housing initiative, reborn as the Mount Desert Island Trust, and a traveling “road show” developed by the community development and land use working group, which explores community design issues such as sprawl, zoning, and tools for smart growth.

Tracking the evolution of the MDI Tomorrow citizens’ forum reveals a maturation of understanding and a steady building of capacity and skills for the individuals, towns, and organizations involved. MDI Tomorrow has served as an umbrella for an information-sharing network and as a way to engage citizens in crafting a collaborative response to challenging issues. Through outreach, the steering committee has been able to engage the local and regional organizations whose missions align with that of MDI Tomorrow, and these organizations in turn have shared resources such as volunteers, interns, and funding. Ron Beard, an educator with University of Maine Cooperative Extension and facilitator for MDI Tomorrow, emphasized that this in-kind support played a critical role in building credibility with community members.

Over fifteen years participation by local and regional organizations has ebbed and flowed, and Marla Stellflug O’Byrne of Friends of Acadia observed that the outcomes have reflected where energy and skills exist among the community partners. One of the benefits of engaging a broad cross-section of residents is that working groups have been able to keep moving forward overall by shifting their focus to available capacity. Beard attributes much of MDI Tomorrow’s success to an open and inclusive process, mutual respect, and a “wonderful spirit” that has sustained the community forum through various challenges.

Because Acadia National Park is geographically integrated with local communities, the park’s participation in MDI Tomorrow has been critical. Building on existing park cooperation with the towns on planning issues, the citizens’ forum provided the park with an opportunity to be proactive on other initiatives—most notably the island-wide bus system, which got off the ground in large part because of the park’s support and leadership. O’Byrne notes that for the communities, MDI Tomorrow has been a positive force for working in partnership with the national park to shape their shared future. John Kelly, Acadia’s planner, says that “MDI Tomorrow [gives us points of engagement with] the community, and makes it easier for park staff to go out into the community. The initiative to work on issues already exists, and we can identify with whom to work with on particular issues.”

Key Factors for Success

- One of the major underlying contributions to MDI Tomorrow’s success is that it is grounded in a defined geographic region with a cohesive identity, strong political will, and history of citizen activism.
- MDI Tomorrow capitalized on the presence of many community-based nonprofits, local academic resources, and other respected individuals and entities in the region, enabling the forum to take advantage of existing resources and making it easier to mobilize community involvement.
- With the national park a major presence on Mount Desert Island, its participation in MDI Tomorrow discussions and working groups was key to improving park–community relations and identifying and addressing shared concerns. The park demonstrated its commitment to this process by taking the lead on developing an island-wide bus system, which was funded by multiple public and private partners and benefited both the park and areas beyond its boundary.
- The MDI Tomorrow process incorporated a variety of approaches and activities for soliciting stakeholder interests and perspectives, helped build the capacity of local organizations and community leaders, and strengthened the ability of community members to understand the complexity of local issues and experiences. In the second phase of the community forum, the steering committee recognized the importance of implementation and follow-through.



Model 3:

Partnership between public land managers and local communities

Overview

“Gateway communities” are towns and cities that border on national and state parks and forests and other public lands. A gateway community partnership forms when the community and public land managers work collaboratively to address concerns and issues arising from proximity and a shared landscape and resources. Although a partnership can form spontaneously, in the past seven years approximately 100 communities across the U.S. have participated in gateway community workshops sponsored by a partnership initiative of The Conservation Fund, the Conservation Study Institute (National Park Service, Northeast Region), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The goal of the gateway community program is to build the capacity of public land managers and adjacent communities to collaboratively identify and address shared resource- and land-related concerns through place-based partnership initiatives. Program activities include a four-day national course, a multi-day regional workshop (the focus of the case study that follows), and a shorter community partnerships forum. Participation in the national course is often the first step of a collaborative community effort.

Who Needs To Be Involved

Participants in a regional gateway community workshop attend in teams of five to seven people representing a cross-section of their community. Each team might include a town official, a businessperson, a public land manager, a representative from one or more nonprofits, and other interested individuals. These people form the nucleus for the community partnership activities that follow. A steering committee made up of key stakeholders helps guide the workshop planning and carries out recruitment.

How It Works

A typical gateway community regional workshop lasts three days and involves five or more teams from neighboring communities. They meet in a facilitated, team-based program that combines presentations, dialogue, and skill-building exercises. Presentations on safeguarding community character, ensuring sustainable tourism, conservation planning, and measuring the impacts of growth and development are interspersed with sessions on community visioning, building civic engagement, and fostering long-term partnerships. Each community team brings a map of its area; during team exercises the members map community assets and develop an action plan. Participants benefit from the networking and new contacts, including other participants and the presenters. They also receive a workshop notebook that contains articles, activities, and other resources, which is useful in future community activities.

Desired Outcomes

Each team puts together an action plan that includes short-term steps as well as a longer-term vision for collaborative action. Team members gain a greater understanding of the issues and how they can work cooperatively to address their concerns, as well as an enhanced sense of commitment and cohesiveness as a team. They also learn community engagement skills that can help in building broader partnerships within their communities. Furthermore, while the workshop is focused on building capacity at the community level, there are many opportunities for participants to discuss how their local efforts are linked at the landscape scale as well as how the teams might pursue broader regional collaborations.

Model 3 Success Story:

Community–National Park Service Partnerships in the St. Croix Valley

(St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, Minnesota and Wisconsin)



The historic St. Croix River, a northern tributary of the Mississippi River, has its headwaters near Lake Superior and forms part of the border between Minnesota and Wisconsin. The river passes through a landscape that is geologically and ecologically diverse, 150 miles of which has been designated a national scenic riverway. With the St. Croix Valley an increasingly popular destination for tourism and recreation, a convergence of factors is placing at risk the community character and natural values of this area.

In 2001 the St. Croix Scenic Coalition was founded to protect scenic and community character along the river. The coalition brings together residents, community partners, and public agencies, including the National Park Service, and focuses its work along 120 miles of the river, encompassing approximately 65 local units of government in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Beginning in 2003, coalition members began engaging valley residents in a workshop process that led to the creation of community–NPS partnerships throughout the St. Croix Valley. As a result of the workshop, residents are collaborating on projects across town and state boundaries to benefit communities on both sides of the river.

Background Context

The main issues of concern in the St. Croix Valley include managing growth and development, maintaining wildlife corridors, sustaining recreation and tourism, protecting the river valley’s scenic views, sustaining the agricultural landscape, and minimizing the impact of cell towers and power lines. One of the key challenges in addressing these issues is coordinating decision-making across multiple jurisdictions: two states, five counties, dozens of municipalities, and fifty parks and reserves, including six state parks. There also has been an acknowledged need to strengthen organizational capacity, engage citizens, build community connections, and develop a common regional identity.

In 2002, the St. Croix Scenic Coalition received a Challenge Cost-Share Program grant from the NPS to organize a series of “Last Chance Landscape” workshops along the designated riverway. Several months later, during the planning for these workshops, the coalition sent a six-person team to the four-day national course, “Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities,” offered annually by The Conservation Fund, the Conservation Study Institute, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These three partners provide practical tools and effective strategies to help communities and their public land neighbors protect natural resources, preserve local character, and support economic growth through collaboration and partnerships.

The Method: Partners, Approaches, and Actions

The St. Croix team that attended the national course included representatives from the coalition’s member organizations and the NPS. During the course, the team developed an action plan for the valley that focused on the Last Chance Landscape workshops planned for winter 2003. At these workshops, which attracted 260 people, the coalition initiated dialogue on citizen engagement and many other issues of concern.

At the same time, the coalition approached the gateway community program about bringing a regional workshop to the St. Croix Valley that would be similar to the national course but focused more closely on

regional issues and concerns, with an aim to engage communities and foster a regional identity. The coalition was again successful in receiving an NPS Challenge Cost-Share Program grant, and planning began for a three-day workshop in winter 2004. An expanded network of partners formed a workshop steering team, which included representatives from the coalition; NPS staff; the University of Wisconsin (both Madison and River Falls branches); the University of Wisconsin Extension Service; Watchable Wildlife, Inc.; the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program of the NPS; and The Conservation Fund, which represented the gateway program partners.

To build interest within the valley in participating in the three-day workshop, the steering team held several evening visioning sessions (with potluck suppers) in the fall of 2003. At these gatherings, participants reviewed and discussed the issues and priority assets identified at the Last Chance workshops, mapped the assets, and learned more about the regional workshop to be held in winter 2004. Participants were enthusiastic and began building community teams for the regional workshop.



In organizing the regional workshop, the local steering team took the lead on marketing and logistics, and hired a staff person from the coalition to conduct targeted outreach and recruit participant teams. (A key partnership-building aspect of the gateway workshops is that interested participants apply not as individuals but as community teams.) Meanwhile, The Conservation Fund worked with the local steering team to assemble an agenda that was relevant to local concerns. The steering team considered whether to engage participants primarily around issues of regional significance or to maintain a community-based focus, deciding it was important to focus first at the community level and

build on the connections there, then work on regional linkages. The question of region vs. community came up again in discussing participant team formation. In the end, six teams were selected, with some representing communities and some the region. At the workshop, which was a mixture of presentations, skill-building activities, and team sessions, maps became a central focus. Each team brought maps to use in its sessions, identifying community assets and resources that would be critical to post-workshop action strategies.

However, a large regional wall map of the riverway, produced by the NPS for the workshop, became the gathering spot for frequent conversations among the teams and between Minnesota residents and Wisconsin residents. By the end of the workshop, it too was marked with assets and resources and numerous potential collaborative projects.

The enthusiasm and energy that surfaced at the workshop continued afterward as the teams developed their action plans. At a well-attended follow-up meeting four months afterward, all teams were represented and provided updates on their projects. They discussed the partnership challenges and opportunities and decided to use the remaining small amount of grant money to meet twice a year as a regional council.

Outcomes

The regional workshop started the process of building the capacity of local community partners in the St. Croix Valley. Workshop organizers observed that the community teams moved forward at different rates in implementing their action plans, based on challenges in defining the respective roles of team members and differences in skills such as meeting facilitation. The team process resulted in valuable relationship

building at multiple levels and led to a stronger, shared understanding of the “lay of the land”—the issues, stakeholders, and commonalities within each community and along the riverway.

The workshop helped place local action plans in a regional context and helped participants understand the opportunities for regional collaboration. The map of the riverway enabled communities to see how resources and opportunities are integrated at the regional level. Understanding how everything fits on the ground was an important first step before communities could begin working together. For the first time, partners from Minnesota and Wisconsin discussed collaboration across the river on joint projects. In this way, the regional workshop laid important groundwork for future community and regional collaboration focused on the riverway.

Key Factors for Success

- By hiring a staff person to focus on outreach and recruitment prior to the regional workshop, the workshop organizers helped build communities’ capacity to organize themselves as local public-private partnerships. This positioned the teams to take better advantage of the information and resources provided through the workshops. It also helped to ensure that the teams were composed of appropriate (and key) stakeholders and that there was a good geographic mix attending the workshop.
- The participation and support of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, especially leadership by a key individual, were critical to the success of the workshops, from funding to the provision of resources such as the large wall map that inspired conversations and regional thinking.
- The mix of local, state, and federal representatives on the steering team encouraged the integration of diverse perspectives into all aspects of workshop planning. Also critical to the success of the regional workshop was the steering team’s foresight in holding pre-workshop visioning meetings. These sessions engaged community leaders in dialogue about regional and community assets and provided tips on team-building.

Model 4:**Collaborative initiative to coordinate resource management and ensure broad stakeholder participation**

Overview

A collaborative initiative can serve as an effective way to address resource management issues at a specific landscape scale. Composed of public and private stakeholders and typically relying on a consensus-based process, a collaborative initiative is non-regulatory, voluntary, and designed to play an ongoing role in coordinating resource management activities. A watershed council focused on protecting and restoring water quality and watershed health is one example of this model.

Who Needs To Be Involved

Participants in a collaborative initiative can include local residents and representatives from community groups, public agencies managing lands and resources, and agricultural, forestry, environmental, recreational, and other interests. Any organization, agency, or institution that is important to addressing the particular concern should have a seat at the table. The initiative can be supported by grants, in-kind contributions from collaborating organizations or agencies, and volunteers. In some cases, the group may have a paid coordinator or other staff.

How It Works

A collaborative initiative often meets monthly or every other month for meetings, with detailed work and planning carried out through subcommittees. The group may work with a neutral facilitator to build trust and effective communication, especially in the early stages of formation and operation.

Examples of activities commonly carried out by collaborative organizations include citizen science (using volunteers to collect and analyze data and produce and implement reports or plans that help address the shared concern); public outreach (e.g., community workshops, consultations with private landowners, and education, media, and work projects); and cooperation across different jurisdictions and public entities to inform decision-making at local, state, and federal levels.

Desired Outcomes

The tangible outputs of collaborative initiatives often include enhanced civic engagement, various reports and plans, and activities related to land and resource management on both public and private lands, such as watershed restoration and water quality monitoring. The less tangible outcomes of ongoing collaboration include improved community understanding and trust and increased coordination of resource management among municipalities, organizations, and agencies within the geographic focal region.

Model 4 Success Story:

Tomales Bay Watershed Council

(Point Reyes National Seashore, California)



Faced with water quality and land use concerns in the watershed and estuary of Tomales Bay in northern California, state and federal agencies and other community and regional stakeholders came together in 2000 to establish a consensus-based approach to resource stewardship. The result was the Tomales Bay Watershed Council, an ongoing collaboration which has strengthened existing public-private relationships and provided a forum for sharing resources, knowledge, and different perspectives on land and resource management. A key partner in this effort is

the National Park Service, as the scenic and agricultural lands of Point Reyes National Seashore make up a large portion of the watershed's 220 square miles.

Background Context

The Tomales Bay watershed lies in Marin County, north of San Francisco. The rolling landscape is dominated by ranches and dairy farms across the coastal grasslands, as well as conifer forests and a spectacular coastline of cliffs and beaches. In the bay itself, oyster aquaculture and recreational fishing are popular. During the 1950s, local concerns about development plans and the desire to protect both landscape character and public access led to the establishment of Tomales Bay State Park and Point Reyes National Seashore. Subsequent efforts in the 1970s and 1980s alleviated further development pressures through rezoning and creation of the Marin Agricultural Land Trust, the country's first land trust devoted solely to conservation of agricultural lands. Today, the watershed is home to 11,000 year-round residents and receives between two and three million visitors annually.

The Tomales Bay region has a history of active citizen and interest groups as well as cooperation among various public agencies through forums such as the Tomales Bay Advisory Committee (TBAC), which was established in the late 1980s to share information among local, state, and federal agencies. However, in 1998, a public health crisis linked to poor water quality demonstrated that more coordinated regional resource management was needed. After talking with watershed stakeholders, Harry Seraydarian, an experienced engineer and facilitator with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, recommended using the watershed council model to convene both public agencies and private groups to develop a watershed stewardship plan.

The Method: Partners, Approaches, and Actions

TBAC took the lead in setting up the Tomales Bay Watershed Council, drawing up a list of about 30 organizations, agencies (federal, state, and county), and at-large community members who would represent a broad cross-section of interests within the watershed (including agriculture, aquaculture, environment, business, recreation, and local planning groups). Michael Mery, a local resident who was trusted and respected by different interest groups, was asked to chair the council.

The mission of the Tomales Bay Watershed Council is "to provide a continuing, collaborative forum that will improve local capacity to comprehensively manage and protect the watershed." The emphasis is on voluntary approaches, engaging citizens in the science of watershed management and developing a

responsibility for watershed stewardship. Although government agencies are participating on the council, the nonregulatory emphasis enables their representatives to act side by side with the private stakeholders to address the linked issues of land use, growth and development, ecological restoration, and preservation of viable agricultural enterprises.

The Tomales Bay Watershed Council uses a consensus-based decision-making process that follows established ground rules (e.g., someone who opposes an idea must propose an alternative). The focus on positive, constructive dialogue is enhanced by the fact that many of the council members are neighbors. Mery, now emeritus chair, notes that “approximately two-thirds of the council members are local residents; most of us know each other apart from council participation.” While initial meetings were “prickly,” the group benefited from the presence of Seraydarian, who served as a facilitator during the first year of council meetings. Conflicts still arise, but members are committed to working through differences as part of the process. In 2001, the council hired a watershed coordinator who now runs the meetings, which are held six times per year and are open to the public.

The Tomales Bay Watershed Council has decided to remain an ad hoc organization rather than to formally incorporate as a nongovernmental organization (NGO). This informality allows the continued participation of federal government representatives as council members. However, one drawback to being an informal group is that the council cannot apply for grants directly; it must work through fiscal agents such as the Marin Resource Conservation District. The group’s work is funded through a variety of public and private grants as well as cost-sharing arrangements and in-kind donations. Recently, the council has discussed forming an associated NGO that could serve as fiscal agent.

The National Park Service is a key partner of the Tomales Bay Watershed Council, and both entities play integral roles in coordinating resource management in the region. Don Neubacher, superintendent of Point Reyes National Seashore, is a council member, and the park provides office space for the council. The NPS Pacific Coast Science and Learning Center provides technical assistance to the Tomales Bay Watershed Council, coordinating research and serving as a data clearinghouse. Together with the Point Reyes National Seashore Association, these three organizations are also involved in the Tomales Bay Biodiversity Partnership, a research and management collaboration that includes landowners, agencies, advocacy groups, and educational institutions.

Outcomes

In the five years since its formation, the Tomales Bay Watershed Council has completed several important projects. These include the original objective—a comprehensive stewardship plan focused on restoring and protecting the Tomales Bay watershed—as well as a water quality database and an inventory of species and habitats, the latter two carried out through the Tomales Bay Biodiversity Partnership. Currently, the council is working with the appropriate agencies and communities to implement the recommendations of the watershed stewardship plan.

The various local and regional partnerships fostered by the watershed council emphasize another important outcome: increased communication, awareness, and trust. As a non-regulatory entity, the watershed council has softened the lines of responsibility between public and private, resulting in a sense of shared responsibility. For Point Reyes National Seashore, the watershed council has become another important vehicle for engaging the community on common issues. Because the park was carved out of private land, it has a long history of conducting public meetings and working closely with local residents, ranchers, and businesses. According to Neubacher, “you can never have too much communication,” but it requires time, trust building, and commitment to working through the occasional setbacks along the way.

“Through the process of watershed characterization—describing those realities on the ground we share and mutually value—we can create the basis for sufficient trust and acceptance of the others’ legitimate

interests,” notes Mery. He goes on to explain that the entire effort rests on three things: a common sense of place, recognition of shared responsibility, and commitment to watershed enhancement through sustained, collective action.

Key Factors for Success

- A rich history of partnerships, cooperation, and public involvement laid the groundwork for council activities in the Tomales Bay watershed. Since its inception, Point Reyes National Seashore has worked closely with the local agricultural community on management of agricultural lands within and adjacent to the park boundaries, and in more recent years has worked closely with business and recreational interests to promote park activities. The Marin Agricultural Land Trust also played an early role in bridging agricultural and conservation interests in the region.
- Focusing on a common sense of place, the Tomales Bay Watershed Council used a consensus-based decision-making process to strengthen trust among its members and emphasize a shared responsibility for watershed stewardship. This voluntary approach has benefited public agencies in the watershed, as it enables them to participate in discussions and problem-solving with private stakeholders in a non-regulatory capacity.
- The watershed council has developed close partnership arrangements with the National Park Service through the involvement of the superintendent of Point Reyes National Seashore as a council member and the technical and financial support of the Pacific Coast Science and Learning Center. These resources have been key in collecting and consolidating data on the watershed’s ecological resources.

Model 5:**Creation of a new community-based nongovernmental organization to address a specific community issue or need²**

Overview

As residents, community partners, and other stakeholders come together to engage in dialogue on common concerns and action steps, in some instances they conclude that a specific issue or need is not being addressed by any existing organization or institution in their community. In these cases, the creation of a new nongovernmental organization provides a formal means to build community capacity within the region, broaden the engagement of stakeholders, and lay the groundwork for future partnerships and cooperation.

For example, a community where property values are rising rapidly can consider the model of a community housing trust, an NGO that aims to make land and housing more widely available to community residents. The focus on “affordable” housing applies not just to low-income residents, but more broadly to the portion of a community’s workforce that provide essential community services (e.g., policemen and women, firefighters, teachers, and nurses). In communities neighboring national parks, it may also be difficult for National Park Service staff to find housing.

Who Needs To Be Involved

The basic NGO model is a formal nonprofit organization with a board of directors, staff, and volunteers. For an effective community-based NGO, it is essential to engage the appropriate local stakeholders from the beginning and to have the formal or informal support of local governments. A community housing trust usually has the involvement and support of local officials, residents, community service providers, local employers, and other local or regional interest groups.

How It Works

A community-based NGO often uses education and community engagement as the means to build public support for addressing and resolving complex issues. The group emphasizes participation and cooperation (usually across public and private sectors) in order to achieve its goals.

A housing trust operates by acquiring land and housing and making it available to residents who meet certain qualifications that it has established. Funding usually comes from public grants, private foundations, and local memberships or donations, and the trust works with residents to help them secure property. The land itself is held permanently by the trust in order to keep it in community ownership. Some trusts have a broader mission and also provide land for community gardens, parks and open space, and other community services.

Desired Outcomes

A community-based NGO has the potential to strengthen local and regional partnerships and build community awareness while also providing unique services that fill a gap in the community.

The housing trust model is flexible and adaptable, and has been recognized as a valuable tool in resolving affordable housing issues in a variety of contexts. Housing trusts have been established in numerous communities around the U.S., from city neighborhoods to rural areas.

² Since there are many different kinds of nongovernmental organizations, in the model discussion on this page we have used a community housing trust, the subject of the success story, as the example.

Model 5 Success Story:
Middle Keys Community Land Trust
(Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, Florida)



The Florida Keys are a chain of islands stretching southwestward 220 miles from the southern tip of Florida, connected linearly to one another and to the mainland by bridges and an overseas highway. The islands host several national wildlife refuges and state parks, and the offshore waters comprise the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The Keys are a popular resort destination for millions of tourists, contributing to rising property values and the conversion of year-round residences to seasonal vacation homes. Other challenges that have also contributed to the housing crisis for local residents

include the finite land base, the high cost of living, limits to growth and development, and strict building codes (the result of flood and hurricane regulations).

A variety of community partners and local officials in the Keys recognized that to respond effectively to this crisis there was a need for a new entity with a dual mission. It would need to spearhead affordable housing projects and work with residents and community partners to raise awareness and address the issue from multiple perspectives. In 2000, the various partners incorporated a new NGO, the Middle Keys Community Land Trust (MKCLT), which operates between the city of Marathon and Key West.

Background Context

The housing shortfall is particularly felt by the community workforce that provides essential services through local government, hospitals, law enforcement, and schools and by seasonal workers, most of whom hold low-paying jobs in the hospitality sector. One contributing factor is that it has become common for older, more affordable rental and residential properties to be converted to lower-density, more expensive vacation properties. In addition, many older houses and high-density developments in the Keys, such as mobile home parks, are vulnerable to condemnation due to stricter zoning regulations and building codes.

The early efforts of public agencies, local governments, and community activists to address the housing issue were often isolated and ineffective. This changed in 1997, when the state of Florida formed a statewide affordable housing oversight committee. In 1999, this committee sponsored several countywide affordable housing summits in the Keys in order to bring together all the stakeholders. These summits brought attention to housing concerns and helped set the stage for the formation of MKCLT.

The Method: Partners, Approaches, and Actions

The Middle Keys Community Land Trust has taken a holistic, regional approach to addressing the affordable housing crisis. In addition to increasing the availability of affordable housing, the organization has made efforts to identify and resolve regulatory barriers and to work on planning and policy aspects, such as coordinating with the city of Marathon on its master plan. Recognizing connections between housing issues, community character, and historic preservation, the trust has helped to integrate these concerns into the planning process. The MKCLT relies on in-kind support and donation of time from many community partners and seeks to foster partnerships among the public and private sectors.

Community outreach and education are essential to MKCLT’s approach because diverse interests are involved and there are misconceptions associated with the housing issue. The trust initiated a public education campaign that explores the reality of the affordable housing crisis in the Keys and puts a “human face” on who is affected—firemen, teachers, and retired fishermen, for example, as well as seasonal workers. The trust works across communities and encourages civic engagement and working with local authorities. “Although it is very difficult to build consensus in this environment, it is essential, because it allows for meaningful and lasting change to occur,” notes planner Debbie Love, a founder of MKCLT. The trust also works with the media to publicize positive outcomes, which “promotes the affordable housing cause and reinvigorates those who are working so hard to provide new opportunities.”

Outcomes

The MKCLT has successfully implemented several housing projects, including both new housing developments and the conversion of motels to rental units. Additionally, the group has helped hospitals, the sheriff’s office, and local businesses to develop workforce housing on their lands. Building on its cross-community educational initiatives, the trust has promoted problem-solving across communities as well. One outcome is the pooling of resources between local governments, so that one community contributes funding for affordable housing on land owned by an adjacent community.

With its broad approach and focus on addressing the roots of the problem, the Middle Keys Community Land Trust has gained a reputation as a “think tank” on affordable housing issues. The group has targeted regulatory barriers as well as issues related to community character, economic development, and city planning. Perhaps one of MKCLT’s most important roles has been engaging the public and influencing how people view the housing crisis in the Middle Keys.

Key Factors for Success

- Stakeholders in the Florida Keys recognized that a new NGO could fill a necessary niche and serve to bring together community partners across the public and private sectors to effectively address the complex factors influencing the housing crisis in their region.
- From the outset, the Middle Keys Community Land Trust employed a holistic approach to the housing issue. A key strategy has been to allocate resources toward public education, community outreach, and consensus building in order to increase community understanding of the housing issue.
- The Middle Keys Community Land Trust has sought out opportunities for strategic creative partnerships and community-based problem-solving in order to make inroads into the housing crisis.



IV. Key Steps for Effective Community Engagement

The success stories presented in this handbook demonstrate the importance of working at the public-private interface to engage a broad spectrum of community stakeholders, develop partnerships, and discuss issues of concern. Collaborating across common areas of concern allows the discovery of shared values and integrated solutions to complex issues. Ongoing partnerships enable partners to move forward, navigate obstacles and areas of difference, and create lasting results that work for everyone.

Various models of community engagement are possible; they are determined in part by different local contexts and issues which in turn are influenced by parks, communities, and landscapes. The success stories, as well as research on other collaborative initiatives, highlight some of the key steps underlying successful partnerships and cooperation that are applicable to different situations and models. The processes of collaboration and community engagement are rarely easy or simple, but insights and lessons gleaned from other experiences can help lead to greater success.



Key Steps for Effective Community Engagement

- *Identify the appropriate scale of effort and involvement.* The scale of the collaborative initiative should be appropriate to address the problems and issues at hand and involve a logical, defined geographic area. The initial scope and goals of the initiative should take into consideration the existing capacity of community and organizational partners, so that the initiative is not too ambitious at the outset.
- *Ensure broad stakeholder representation, including the NPS and other pertinent public agencies.* By involving all the key stakeholders (and who is “key” depends in part on the scale and on local issues) there is a greater chance of achieving broad, workable solutions. People support initiatives they have helped to develop, and the process of working together builds a sense of common purpose and an investment in the outcome. There will always be a few stakeholder groups that are more challenging to reach and involve in a collaborative process. The best approach may be to examine barriers to their participation and interest, then overcome these by making an effort to better understand their priorities and seek key individuals who can serve as bridges to these groups. Reframing the issue and avoiding “hot button” topics can help, as can creating informal opportunities to interact socially, such as potluck suppers.

The credibility of the NPS and other public agencies can lend a lot to the community process, particularly when NPS staffers participate as members of the community. These public partners can often provide important in-kind support to a community-based initiative, which helps to demonstrate agency commitment. Wearing a uniform may emphasize separateness, however, and is not always necessary to convey the integrity and credibility of agency involvement. When staff transitions occur in public agencies, it is important to consider the impact on community partnerships and prepare a plan for building new relationships and passing along appropriate knowledge and responsibilities to replacement staff and other agency staff.

- *Use an approach that reflects local circumstances.* While these suggestions serve as a framework, many of the specific details need to be rooted in and sensitive to the local context. For example, seek local inspiration and creativity, make use of local knowledge, and recognize unique barriers and opportunities. Be conscious of local values and needs, and use accessible, familiar language and terminology. Some situations may require working at a policy level to coordinate with planning efforts or eliminate regulatory obstacles. If the aim is to work regionally, it may be necessary to start with individual communities and build outward from there.

- *Craft a common vision for the future.* Taking the time to develop a common vision for the future helps to create solid, effective partnerships. This process involves partners moving beyond organizational positions to discovering the community-based values they share: what is important to them about their community, their region, or their landscape. It also involves talking about good stewardship and what people want for the future. Initially, it may only be possible to come to agreement on a vision for the short-term future. Working together successfully toward short-term goals and visions, however, can develop greater trust and open up the potential for broader, more long-term cooperation and agreement.



- *Build local capacity and awareness.* A collaborative process is enhanced when it draws on a cohesive local or regional identity, active citizens, supportive local officials, strong political will, and local resources, skills, and leadership. Partners and facilitators should not be discouraged if these attributes are not present in the beginning, but instead should focus on building capacity and awareness—a process that can prove empowering for all. Examples include identifying and supporting emerging leaders, seeking ways to encourage strategic thinking, and helping to elicit shared values and a common sense of place and community.
- *Provide objective, relevant background information and baseline data.* Presenting new data or information can be a means for opening community dialogue or providing a catalyst for action, but it must be presented objectively and not reflect a particular stakeholder perspective. Involving citizens in collection of the data is a useful engagement tool resulting in learning and stewardship.
- *Ensure an open, transparent collaborative process.* Building relationships takes time, and the initial focus should be on this process, not on particular outcomes. An open process (often utilizing consensus decision-making) promotes dialogue and creates an environment where trust can grow. Social gatherings can help build ties. Where barriers to collaboration exist, a skilled, neutral facilitator can help to move participants through and beyond these obstacles. Once dialogue is initiated, an effective process follows through to the next steps of action planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- *Employ strategic outreach by stakeholder groups.* Involving diverse partners makes it easier to engage and educate a broad set of community members. Partner groups can take responsibility for reaching out to their constituencies to broaden support. This may require considering in advance how the different stakeholder groups can benefit from participation or a changed situation. Thinking ahead in this way will allow for a more focused, strategic discussion.

- *Be prepared for a sustained effort.* Building partnerships is an ongoing process that takes time. It may begin with a specific initiative, but will need continued nurturing to achieve long-term benefits. This investment can lead to benefits that go far beyond the initial collaboration and provide a strong foundation for stewardship.
- *Celebrate successes along the way.* Recognition of positive outcomes through newspaper articles and other means can underscore the importance of community and help participants stay energized and focused on long-term goals. Social gatherings can further cement partnerships and reaffirm the investment of time, energy, and funding.

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Websites and Online Resources

Cooperative Conservation
<http://cooperativeconservation.gov>

Institute for Community Economics, Community Land Trusts
<http://www.iceclt.org/clt/index.html>

National Park Service Civic Engagement Initiative
<http://www.nps.gov/civic/>

National Park Service Community Tool Box for Public Participation
<http://www.nps.gov/phso/rtcatoolbox/>

National Park Service Conservation Study Institute
<http://www.nps.gov/csi>

National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program
<http://www.nps.gov/phso/rtca/>

Pew Partnership for Civic Change, Resources
<http://www.pew-partnership.org/resources/>

Sonoran Institute
<http://www.sonoran.org>

The Conservation Fund
<http://www.conservationfund.org>

The George Wright Forum
<http://www.georgewright.org>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Green Communities Program
<http://www.epa.gov/greenkit/>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center
<http://www.epa.gov/adr/>

Watershed Support and Capacity Building
<http://www.4sos.org/>

B. Source Materials for Success Stories

“Endless Summer” Conference on Managing Landscape Character

Cape Cod National Seashore
<http://www.nps.gov/caco>

“Endless Summer: Managing Landscape Character in Coastal Communities”
http://www.umass.edu/larp/endless_summer

University of Massachusetts Amherst and National Park Service. *Endless Summer: Managing Character in Coastal Communities, Conference Proceedings, October 6–8, 2004, Provincetown, Massachusetts*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Amherst, September 2005.
http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/caco/endless_summer.pdf.

University of Massachusetts Amherst and National Park Service. *People and Places on the Outer Cape: A Landscape Character Study*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Amherst, June 2004.
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“Mount Desert Island Tomorrow” Citizen’s Forum

Acadia National Park
<http://www.nps.gov/acad/home.htm>

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<http://www.friendsofacadia.org>

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<http://www.mditomorrow.org/Final Report MDI Insert/Final Report.pdf>

Mount Desert Island Tomorrow
<http://www.mditomorrow.org>

Sonoran Institute. *Acadia National Park, Maine: Balancing Park Protection and Community Needs through Partnerships*. Partnerships beyond Public Land. Unpublished paper.

Community–National Park Service Partnerships in the St. Croix Valley

National Park Service Partnerships, St. Croix Scenic Coalition case study
http://www.nps.gov/partnerships/st_croix_scenic_coalition.htm

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St. Croix National Scenic Riverway
<http://www.nps.gov/sacn/index.html>

Tomales Bay Watershed Council

Mery, Michael. "Tomales Bay Watershed Council: A Model for Consensus-Based Community Engagement." In *Endless Summer: Managing Character in Coastal Communities, Conference Proceedings, October 6–8, 2004, Provincetown, Massachusetts*, University of Massachusetts Amherst and National Park Service, 79–86. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Amherst, September 2005.

Pacific Coast Science and Learning Center
http://www.nps.gov/pore/educate_pclc.htm

Point Reyes National Seashore
<http://www.nps.gov/pore/home.htm>

Tomales Bay Biodiversity Partnership
<http://www.tomalesbaylife.org>

Tomales Bay Watershed Council
<http://www.tomalesbaywatershed.org>

Middle Keys Community Land Trust

Florida Department of Community Affairs, Division of Community Planning, Affordable Housing
<http://www.dca.state.fl.us/fdcp/dcp/affordablehousing/index.cfm>

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary
<http://www.fknms.nos.noaa.gov/>

Love, Debbie. "Providing Affordable Housing in Resort Communities: A Holistic, Area-wide Approach." In *Endless Summer: Managing Character in Coastal Communities, Conference Proceedings, October 6–8, 2004, Provincetown, Massachusetts*, University of Massachusetts Amherst and National Park Service, 41–50. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Amherst, September 2005.

Middle Keys Community Land Trust
<http://www.mkclt.org>

Acknowledgments

This publication was guided and prepared by a project team that included Stephanie Tuxill, Jacquelyn Tuxill, Jessica Brown, and Leslie Hudson from QLF/Atlantic Center for the Environment and Nora Mitchell and Leslie Shahi from the NPS Conservation Study Institute. The idea for compiling these case studies originated during the planning for a conference, “Endless Summer: Managing Landscape Character in Coastal Communities,” held October 6–8, 2004, in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

The project team acknowledge the conference organizers Cape Cod National Seashore, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, and Conservation Study Institute; the local steering committee; and the many cosponsors for creating an environment and the context conducive to dialogue and meaningful civic engagement. Special thanks go to Jack Ahern, Margie Coffin Brown, Maria Burks, Ethan Carr, Delia Clark, Lauren McKean, Mike Murray, and Mary Lee York. We are grateful to the conference guest speakers—Debbie Love, Michael Mery, and Bill Neumann—who contributed to the case studies profiled in this publication. We would also like to extend our appreciation to conference participant Marla Stellflug O’Byrne, who brought to our attention the Mount Desert Island Tomorrow citizens’ forum, which became another case study.

Numerous people have contributed directly to this publication. Special thanks go to those who gave their time for interviews: Ron Beard, University of Maine Cooperative Extension; John Kelly, Acadia National Park; Debbie Love, Middle Keys Community Land Trust; Michael Mery, Tomales Bay Watershed Council; Mike Murray, Cape Hatteras National Seashore (formerly at Cape Cod National Seashore); Don Neubacher, Point Reyes National Seashore; Marla Stellflug O’Byrne, Friends of Acadia; and Kristin Peppel, The Conservation Fund. Many thanks also to Eileen Woodford, Shaun Eyring, Delia Clark, Kristin Peppel, and Brent Mitchell for reviewing the draft of this document. We are most appreciative of the Northeast Region of the National Park Service, which provided the Civic Engagement grant that supported this collaborative project.

The Conservation Study Institute thanks the following for the photographic contributions to this report:

Delia Clark: 16, 25, 26

Middle Keys Community Land Trust: 24

National Aeronautics and Space Administration Earth Observatory: 23

National Park Service: 7, 11, 15

Jacquelyn L Tuxill: 19

U.S. Department of Transportation: 13