



E-PARCC

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE

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Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration

The Indiana Household Hazardous Waste Task Force

A Case Study

Introduction:

Founding the Rural Household Hazardous Waste Task Force

In 1993, when I was a solid waste director for a county solid waste management district in Indiana, I got a phone call from a colleague, “Hey, we are starting a new group to talk about household hazardous waste. We’re going to have a meeting next week. I’d appreciate it if you’d attend.” I said yes, got directions to the location, and hung up the phone. In 1990 the state legislature had given us a mandate to deal with solid waste (trash). The mandate was to divert as much of it as we could from landfills (by source reduction, recycling, and composting). At that time none of us had a good handle on the issue of what was termed “household hazardous waste.” This was the most toxic 1% of household trash. If these wastes were generated by anyone other than a household it would be treated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as hazardous waste. Since households generated it, people could simply throw it in the trash—something, under our mandate, we wanted to discourage. What I didn’t know at the time I hung up that phone was that I was about to take the first step on a journey that would turn into the most successful collaborative venture of my professional career, but we’ll get to that part in a little while . . .

This case was an honorable mention winner in our 2010-11 “Collaborative Public Management, Collaborative Governance, and Collaborative Problem Solving” teaching case and simulation competition. It was double-blind peer reviewed by a committee of academics and practitioners. It was written by Mark W. Davis and Danielle M. Varda of The School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado at Denver. This case is intended for classroom discussion and is not intended to suggest either effective or ineffective handling of the situation depicted. It is brought to you by E-PARCC, part of the Maxwell School of Syracuse University’s Collaborative Governance Initiative, a subset of the Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration (PARCC). This material may be copied as many times as needed as long as the authors are given full credit for their work.

Background

In 1990, via House Enrolled Act 1240, the State of Indiana created a new government entity. A special district termed a “solid waste management district” (SWMD). These districts could either be single county districts (a government entity within a single county yet distinct from county government—much like a school district) or multiple counties could unite into what were termed “multicounty districts”. The state officials, from the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM), and the authors of the legislation all confided that they had hoped for perhaps 15-20 multicounty districts across the entire state. Much to their consternation, initially 51 single county districts were formed and only 10 multicounty districts. Where I was located, in Southwest Indiana, there were *only* single county districts. (A map of Indiana’s solid waste management districts as of 2008 is provided in Appendix 1. As of 2008 there are now 62 single county districts and 8 multicounty districts—this occurred after a number of governmental “divorces”.)

As part of the enabling legislation the SWMDs were given a goal of reducing solid waste entering landfills by 35% by 1996 and 50% by 2001. Of this solid waste there was a particularly problematic 1%. The portion of the waste stream termed “household hazardous waste” or HHW. Although HHW is just as toxic as other hazardous wastes, it is exempted by United States federal law as a “household” item and can, per the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), be legally disposed of in regular household trash. Common examples of HHW include: paints, cleaning products, pesticides, used motor oil, some consumer electronics, and many household batteries. The concern is these hazardous wastes will create environmental problems in landfills and potentially contaminate drinking water supplies. While many SWMDs had started recycling or composting programs for common household trash in their first few years of start-up most had not yet addressed this problem waste.

1993-1994

The Rural Household Hazardous Waste Task Force / Household Battery Recycling

After that initial phone call a group of 12 solid waste directors from southwest Indiana met at a local Amish restaurant. The director who had initially called and invited me had also invited an individual from Indiana University’s Center for Urban Policy and the Environment (IU CUPE) to attend. On the topic of HHW, we as a group were what I would call “double-green”. We all wanted to do the right thing for the environment, *and* we all had no idea how to do it. At the conclusion of the first meeting we all agreed to meet on a monthly basis, marking the start of our collaborative decision making process. We decided for the next meeting to invite a guest speaker from an engineering consulting firm, the appropriate state official from IDEM, and several other directors from districts adjacent to ours. None of us at the time were using terms like “collaboration” or “networks” but instinctively we knew that is what we wanted to do. We saw strength in a collective effort. Although our local officials had formed single county districts rather than multicounty districts, this seemed an area conducive to collaboration.

For much of the first year our monthly task force meetings simply worked to raise our collective knowledge, serving as a forum for the exchange of information between districts. Initially we

invited outside speakers. One of my colleagues described it this way, “We’ll bring in an expert and ‘grill’ them. We have to explain to them why what they are offering will or won’t work in our communities.” Some of these early speakers were with environmental engineering firms; others were with private solid and hazardous waste collection contractors. While all these speakers provided some helpful pieces of information, they were all clearly seeking business—this was not yet something the task force was in a position to offer. The meetings, however, did both generate ideas and fostered the beginnings of future relationships. Through this time the Indiana University CUPE official was very helpful in providing an “honest broker” position. Soon, however, we found that our group was capable of creating subgroups that carried out their own research and then reported back to the group as a whole. This transition was significant: we were moving from seeking experts to help us to ourselves becoming the experts. Monthly meetings often had a theme, with exciting topics like: household paint, bleach, batteries, tires, used motor oil, used antifreeze, etc. Beyond the solid waste directors (the number of whom kept growing as word got out about our interesting little group) there were two other main “regulars” at our meetings: the researcher from Indiana University’s CUPE and a representative from IDEM’s Office of Pollution Prevention and Technical Assistance (OPPTA). The OPPTA representative was helpful as he could provide us the state’s position on matters. His office was by mandate *non-regulatory*, which empowered us to ask very frank questions.

In the spring of 1994 the IDEM OPPTA official came to a meeting with an exciting announcement. The “Household Hazardous Waste Grant Fund” we had long heard about was officially releasing a round of funds. In the next few months IDEM would be accepting grant applications for HHW programs. I remember a key insight that came from the IU CUPE representative, he said, “Let’s pick something simple—like batteries—and let’s prove that we can collaborate. If we can tackle that, we’ll be able to tackle anything.” His point was that while household batteries contained hazardous components they did not present any serious handling or transportation risks; consequently collection would be relatively easy. Thus household batteries would be an excellent project to learn from, before attempting collection programs with more difficult and/or more hazardous materials. This felt big to me; it felt important. This felt like something that was going to make a larger difference than just recycling aluminum cans, plastic bottles, and newspapers back in my home county. I volunteered to write the grant. The grant award was announced over the summer and the grant contract was ultimately signed on August 30th, 1994.

The task force’s grant application included our overall project vision, funding for a regional advertising campaign, funding for the purchase of our start-up equipment, and grant money to pay for half of the first-year of the collection, processing, and recycling costs (the other half was our local cash match for the grant). In looking back at the grant application and the program that was ultimately implemented there are two terms that come to my mind: *consistent* and *flexible*. The task force wanted a program that would be recognizable. Whether you were in cities like Evansville or Bloomington, or rural areas like Pike County or Greene County, if you saw the household battery collection program you would recognize it: *consistent*. Likewise, the group developed a set of safety and handling standards for battery collection to be utilized by all members: *consistent*.

However, we were all independent government entities. When the grant was submitted there were 17 counties representing 15 participating SWMDs. Although we were all cooperating on this project we all still had our own counties and our own elected boards to report back to, thus the program needed a second element: *flexibility*. The conventional wisdom is that when smaller communities combine efforts, cost savings ensue. This combined effort, however, comes at the cost of local autonomy. Thus the key to this regional cooperative would ultimately be a balancing act that would maximize the financial benefits of the collaboration while minimizing the loss of local autonomy. The solution was that the program was designed to be what I termed “cafeteria style.” Everyone was given a suite of options, but then everyone would simply choose the elements appropriate for their local circumstances. For collection, districts with limited resources made their district office the only collection point. For districts like my own, we included a number of locations around the county, such as the local library, grocery stores, and hardware stores. A media campaign was developed following this same *flexibility* scheme. Urban districts found television and radio ads to be effective; rural districts found newspaper ads and fliers to be effective and economical. Billboards were illegal in my county by local ordinance, so I advertised in the local papers instead: *flexibility*.

Over time the meeting “regulars” had become the represented solid waste directors, the IU CUPE official, and the IDEM official. At the time the grant was awarded, the roles for our two “regulars” who were not solid waste directors became officially formalized. Our IDEM representative was no longer just an attendee; he was now our grant administrator. As our “honest broker” the Indiana University CUPE official was selected as our ideal candidate to write the final grant report required by IDEM for the project.

There was one other critical element that made this first grant a success. We had a “champion” for the program early on. One district within our collaboration had a great deal more resources than the rest of us. They were what you might term the “deep pockets” or the “early adopters”. They had a board that had a flavor for being progressive. Even at the time the task force was established this district *already* had a HHW collection facility for their residents. This district had an existing relationship with a battery recycling firm and a facility that could accommodate the quantities of batteries our collaborative was anticipating it would collect. This “champion” district became the glue that brought the rest of the collaborative together and their contribution of the existing service delivery infrastructure cannot be underestimated. By this district serving as a “collection hub” for our materials, the task force’s first true collaborative program was off to a strong start.

In the spring of 1995 our group was standing on a stage at the Indiana Recycling Coalition Conference. We were being presented a Governor’s Award for Excellence in Recycling. The household battery collection program was being hailed as a success. We were indeed successfully diverting household batteries from area landfills, having these batteries recycled, and we were doing it via a *regional* and *flexible* collection program. The program was cited as a model for other districts wishing to enter into collaborative working agreements. Within ten years this program became the largest household battery-recycling program in the nation, exceeding quantities collected by recycling “powerhouses” like Seattle, Washington and San Francisco, California.

1995-1998

**The Regional Household Hazardous Waste Task Force
Motor Oil, Oil Filters, and Antifreeze Recycling**

IDEM's HHW grants became an annual occurrence. As the author of the battery-recycling grant I had been given the role of "chairman" of our task force. It wasn't like we had an election one day, it just happened organically. At this point, however, I knew this group was capable of some great things. I was willing to take on this "leadership" role. Yet, in reality, I actually viewed the role more as one of "facilitator." I remember coming to a meeting three months out from when the next round of grant applications were due. I issued a simple question to the group, "What next?" It was our single agenda item for the day.

In the spirit of brainstorming the group produced a list of potential projects. In "round one" of this iterative process there were no bad ideas. Once the list had reached a point of exhaustion we moved into discussion. We weighed merits against problems with each of the options. By the end of the day we had decided on a suite of three items. They were all automotive related, all common problems in the trash and the environment, and all things "do-it-yourself" mechanics had to deal with. The task force decided its "next" program would be motor oil, oil filters, and antifreeze.

Why did we pick the motor oil, oil filter, and antifreeze trio? The answer to this question was two-fold. First, the materials posed clear and significant environmental threats. Second, we could see the roadmap toward a recycling solution for this trio of materials. While other materials were arguably of equal or even more environmental risk, the roadmap to a solution was much less obvious. Pesticides would be a good example of a material that fell within this category. We knew of a network of private companies providing collection for our three materials at manageable costs and we had definite ideas for how we wanted to handle the collection of these materials.

In 1995 our collaborative was rechristened as the *Regional Household Hazardous Waste Task Force* (acknowledging that as we had grown we were no longer all *rural* counties). This renaming occurred via the grant application. The organization, in fact, had no legal standing beyond a name. This new grant included 17 member districts, representing 25 counties, in Southern Indiana. Our "champion" district had been the "in name" recipient of the first grant and was now again our sponsor for our second application. Much as our friend from Indiana University CUPE had predicted, the success of our first program catapulted us headlong into our second (and much more environmentally significant) program. The framework of the grant was the same as the first: *consistent yet flexible*. The state grant money would be used to purchase collection containers, fund an education and advertising campaign, and fund a portion of the collection, processing, and recycling costs (with the remainder of these costs again being local match). There was, however, one major change for this second grant. Because of the types of materials being collected, our "champion" district could not serve as our "collection hub" for this new program—this time we would need a private contractor.

In the summer of 1995 we were informed that the motor oil, oil filter, and antifreeze recycling grant had been funded. The project and grant itself also received a renaming, and become

forever after known as the “MOOFA” grant. This was a slightly whimsical acronym for motor oil, oil filters, and antifreeze. The grant was ultimately signed and initiated on July 31, 1995.

The first key step after funding was that we had to hire two contractors: a media campaign coordinator and a collection program coordinator. Requests for Proposals (RFPs) were developed for both efforts. These RFPs were sent to appropriate contractors, reviewed by a task force committee, final interviews were conducted at a task force meeting, and in the end both an advertising contractor and a collection contractor were selected.

In this early implementation process for MOOFA there were two interesting aspects of the collaboration worth noting: (1) The very structure of this program’s implementation was forged in the informational network phase of the task force, and (2) The “ties” forged with contractors several years ago made these contractors very willing and interested in bidding on our contracts.

In the end the MOOFA program used a collection program that we referred to as a “milk run”. This idea came out of the reality that we were a large number of geographically dispersed entities. A hazardous waste collection contract to any one of us would be very costly. Thus the contract pooled the collection into a series of collection points, which we referred to as a collection “milk run”. This allowed the contractor to look at the big picture: how much waste would be collected at the end of the day, rather than each individual collection site’s quantity of material. As one of my colleagues described it, “Our group buying power has given us a great deal of clout!” At the time we knew of no one else using this approach for hazardous waste collection. None of us had read of this idea in a magazine or heard a presentation on it at a conference. The idea itself was generated within our group during our collaborative learning.

The other fascinating outcome was that, from a network analysis perspective, the “ties” forged in the early years of the task force came back into play during the RFP process. Many of the contractors we had “grilled” earlier, now had a working knowledge of our organization. Thus even though we were implementing completely new forms of waste collection these contractors had a rudimentary knowledge of what we were doing. This empowered them to better trust us as true experts. When the bids came in this trust was truly reflected in the cost projections, which were well below our estimates prior to the RFP process.

In the spring of 1997 something of a *déjà vu* occurred. The group was again on stage at the Indiana Recycling Coalition Conference. We were again being presented a Governor’s Award for Excellence in Recycling. This time the “MOOFA” program was being hailed as a success. We were effectively diverting motor oil, oil filters, and antifreeze from area landfills *and* preventing the same from being dumped on the ground—a once common disposal “technique”. Once again the program was via a *regional* and *flexible* collection program and this time around it was also a successful *public-private partnership*.

1998-2010

The Indiana Household Hazardous Waste Task Force / Mercury Awareness Program

In 1998 a fundamental shift occurred. Instead of the task force going to the State of Indiana for funding, the State of Indiana came to the task force for help. The Indiana Department of Environmental Management wanted to initiate a statewide “Mercury Awareness Program” (MAP). IDEM felt the task force was the best entity in the state to handle the task and asked us to apply for a household hazardous waste grant to fund the program.

At this point certain features of the program were old hand: a *consistent yet flexible* program, a *statewide-collaborative yet locally-managed* program, and a *public-private partnership* between local government entities and private-sector hazardous waste contractors. The new twist for this grant: the State wanted the task force to act as the state agent and to do so the task force would need to hire a coordinator. For the first time in the history of the task force, the HHWTF itself would actually have “staff”. The grant allowed the task force to hire a full time coordinator of the MAP program for the grant term of two years.

Because the mercury program would be statewide and the task force was acting as the State’s agent, the network relations were by far the most complex for this project. The coordinator role helped to re-simplify a complex network web. The position of coordinator created a nexus for the program. The private waste contractor, the State, and the participating districts all knew the starting point if any questions arose: the MAP Coordinator. Fortunately for all of us she was both competent and energetic; she helped to make the program another success. The initial grant allowed the task force to hire the full time coordinator for two years; this was later extended an additional two years by a supplementary grant. After four years the MAP program was up and running, individual districts could handle the day-to-day efforts of the program. The MAP coordinator position was retired, yet the program itself continued.

Through a series of six consecutive grants lasting a total of twelve years (and another Governor’s Award for Excellence in Recycling, awarded in 1999), the State of Indiana and the *again* rechristened *Indiana* Household Hazardous Waste Task Force worked in partnership to inform Hoosiers of the risks of mercury in their homes, provide a collection infrastructure to remove mercury containing materials from their homes, and prevent these materials from ending up in a landfill. Although, as of 2010, the State of Indiana ceased their portion of the funding, the MAP program continues.

Through this multi-year project the task force further transitioned from an “in name alone” organization to a true legal entity in its own right. In 2004, the Indiana Household Hazardous Waste Task Force formally incorporated as a not-for-profit 501c3 corporation. Today any Solid Waste Management District in the State of Indiana may become a member of the organization, the task force’s waste collection contracts are highly sought after by private contractors, and the suite of services under the task force’s banner provide high quality and cost effective service to the residents living within the task force’s member-districts.

Today, the mission statement for the Indiana Household Hazardous Waste Task Force Task Force reads: “The mission of the Indiana Household Hazardous Waste Task Force, Inc. is to seek and develop opportunities to protect Indiana’s environment and human health through environmentally and economically sound management of universal and EPA exempt hazardous wastes. We promote cooperative efforts among public and private entities emphasizing a regional approach to education, and the proper handling and disposal of environmentally harmful products”. More information can be found at the Indiana Household Hazardous Waste Task Force website: www.indianahhw.org or you can “like” the “Indiana HHW Task Force, Inc.” on Facebook.



Appendix 1: Map of Indiana Solid Waste Management Districts in 2008

