



E-PARCC

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE

Syracuse University

Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs

Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration

A Collaborative Strategy for Organizational Survival

Teaching Note

Organizations across all sectors continuously emerge, evolve, and cease to exist. Entrepreneurs propose new ideas, members join and leave, products and services ebb and flow, and resources accumulate and are spent. However, much of what is known about these processes stems from systematic study of private, market-focused corporations and captures organizational birth in resource-rich competitive environments. Subsequent boundary formation and internal organizational clarity occurs under stakeholder demands, resource availability, and institutional norms.¹ While many of these processes apply to organizations of all types, leaders involved with the start-up of new public organizations face a unique set of challenges. Stakeholders include elected officials, service clients, and the general public; performance measures extend beyond the financial bottom line; authority mechanisms trend towards hierarchal and political; expectations of accountability include the public interest; and, a wide range of public laws place legal constraints on personnel management and other agency actions.² Taking into account these differences, new public organizations do not seek survival in a competitive market environment as much as they seek to “institutionalize” themselves within government structures.³ As a result, a primary concern of leaders of new public

¹ Aldrich, Howard. 2001. *Organizations Evolving*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

² Rainey, H. G., & Bozeman, B. 2000. Comparing public and private organizations: Empirical research and the power of a priori. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 10(2): 447.

³ Boin, A., & Christensen, S. 2006. *The Development of Public Institutions: Reconsidering the Role of Leadership*. Paper presented at the Why Public Organizations Become Institutions: An Interdisciplinary Discussion of Research Questions, Theoretical Frameworks and Initial Findings, Leiden, The Netherlands. 10-12 June, 2004.

This case was an honorable mention winner in our 2007 “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 Rob Alexander of the Maxwell School of Syracuse University and edited by Laurel Saiz. It is based on research with the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution conducted between 1998 and 2007 with Rosemary O’Leary. This simulation 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 author is given full credit for his work.

organizations is the rapid gain of legitimacy in the eyes of key stakeholders unique to the public sector. By making strategic decisions that lead to increased validity, these leaders increase the probability that the organization obtains the political and financial resources it requires to continue operations.

Part A of this case describes the challenges faced by Kirk Emerson, newly appointed director of the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (USIECR). Students are put in her shoes and asked how they would “grow” a new federal organization with a mandate to collaborate. At the end of Part A, students are asked to take fifteen minutes to write down their initial plans for addressing the USIECR’s strategic management challenges and to share them with the class.

Part B describes what Kirk Emerson and the USICER leadership team actually did. At the end of Part B, students are asked to discuss the following questions:

- 1) What role did the authorization statute play in limiting or enabling collaborative behaviors by members of the USIECR leadership team?
- 2) Which challenges faced by the USIECR leadership team did collaborative strategies most effectively address? Which challenges were not addressed as effectively?
- 3) Who were the key stakeholders from whom the USIECR had to gain legitimacy? Which set of stakeholders seemed to be easiest to engage collaboratively? Which set of stakeholders seemed to be most difficult to engage collaboratively? Why?
- 4) Organizational self-interest and collaborative strategy often conflict, especially in the start up of new public organizations. How did the USIECR leadership team moderate this tension? How have you seen these tensions manifest in public organizations of your experience?
- 5) What do you think were the primary drivers of collaborative management strategies for the USIECR leadership team?
- 6) How might the experience of the USIECR apply to the establishment of a much larger public organization, such as the Department of Homeland Security? What might be some limitations?