



Water for Agriculture Webinar Series



Collaborative Competencies

Michael Kern

Associate Professor, Washington State University Extension
Affiliate Associate Professor, University of Washington Evans School of Public Policy & Governance
Principal, Michael Kern Consulting, LLC

The Water for Agriculture Webinar Series welcomed Michael Kern to share his insights on the University Network for Collaborative Governance's (UNCG) *Collaborative Competencies Framework*. Michael is the Principal at Michael Kern Consulting, LLC which provides strategic advice and guidance to leaders and decision-makers who are designing, conducting, and implementing collaborative public policy processes. In his 30 years of experience, he has worked with diverse groups to reach common ground on public policy issues and to provide facilitation, mediation, conflict resolution, strategic planning, and other services. He also serves on the Water for Agriculture project's Advisory Committee.

“Collaboration is not really easy or natural for many people... most people benefit from assistance to increase their capacity to initiate, participate, or lead collaborative public policy efforts.”

Michael began his presentation with a discussion of the concepts, and history of collaborative governance – and its importance and relevance across a broad range of disciplines and applications. UNCG defined collaborative governance in 2018 as “Engaging participants across the public, private and civic sectors to leverage the unique attributes and resources of each encompasses any method, model, or process that is deliberative and consensual.” Michael then highlighted the foundational role of alternative dispute resolution, or ADR, in collaborative governance processes. The roots of ADR grew out of the legal sector, international diplomacy, labor/management negotiations, and peace movements in the 1960s and ‘70s that pushed for more of a bottom-up approach to governance.

When engaging in collaborative processes, individuals will have different roles to play in that process, including leader, facilitator, and participant. Regardless of their position all individuals involved in these processes will benefit from developing their skill set – their collaborative competencies -- to make the process effective.

“All leaders are participants... all participants are leaders.”

In framing how to create successful collaborations, he used the UNCG [Guide to Collaborative Competencies \(2011\)](#) co-authored by Kirk Emerson and Steve Smutko. The five collaborative competencies outlined and described were:

- Leadership and Management Competency,
- Process Competency,
- Analytical Competency,
- Knowledge Competency, and
- Professional Accountability Competency.

Each of these competencies are comprised of multiple skills outlined and described in detail in the guidebook. Michael presented a brief summary of each.

- **Leadership and Management Competency** include the skills of strengthening collaborative leadership and of planning, organizing, and managing collaboration. Exercising collaborative leadership requires drawing on that authority when needed and sharing it when possible. In a collaborative environment, decisions can be shared, but leaders should understand at what points they are sharing their authority and when they are responsible for decisions. Depending on an initiative’s leadership this may involve a third-party mediator or external facilitator.
- **Process Competency** requires skills for communicating effectively, working in teams, facilitating groups, negotiating agreements, and managing conflict. Process Competency also means active listening, maintaining and encouraging productive dialogue, acknowledging the complexity of multi-party negotiations, expecting miscommunication to occur throughout the process, and accepting that conflict may give rise to ideas for new solutions.
- **Analytical Competency** includes evaluating and adapting processes and applying analytic skills and strategic thinking. This competency emphasizes situational assessment and recognizing that every collaborative process will be unique. This requires understanding the stakeholders, their interests, and the conditions that are most likely to create a successful collaboration.
- **Knowledge Management Competency** refers to using and integrating technology, and technical, scientific, and cultural information into the process. In collaborative processes it is important to identify information gathering methods and sources of data that all the parties can trust.
- **Professional Accountability Competency** focuses on integrity, transparency, and professionalism. In collaborative environments it is important to be transparent about purposes and objectives of the process, to be clear about the authorities, requirements, and constraints of involved parties, and to maintain professionalism and fidelity to the process and participants. Leaders need to seek candid feedback from all participants, protect confidentiality of information, and understand their own limitations, flexibilities, and adaptiveness.

Concluding his presentation, Michael encouraged participants to take the collaborative competency assessment within the guidebook, to understand their own strengths and where they can build. He advocated the wider use and understanding of the UNCG's Guide to Collaborative Competencies and discussion of the competencies with colleagues and peers.

Michael Kern

Collaborative Competencies: Self-Assessment

- ▶ **Can use Self-Assessment Tool on pp. 24-25 of Guide to identify which skill sets or particular competencies might be useful to develop for your own collaborative work.**
- ▶ **Recommend discussing with a friend or colleague.**

COLLABORATIVE COMPETENCY SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

Read the text to help identify which skill sets or particular competencies might be useful to develop further in or add yourself above your own past experience with collaborative work. Before that, think about this very generally, to see the general use of specific competencies or capacities. Recall a recent experience where your collaborative competencies were called on.

Name the experience: _____

How would you rate your performance in each skill set? (circle the appropriate number)

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT COMPETENCY

1. Strengthening Collaborative Leadership, e.g.:

Organizing leadership roles
Collaborative leadership roles and skills
Facilitating and empowerment skills

	1 Not proficient in this skill	2 Not proficient in this skill	3 Not proficient in this skill	4 Not proficient in this skill	5 Not proficient in this skill

2. Planning, Organizing and Managing for Collaboration, e.g.:

Designing and managing collaborative policies, taking and conflict resolution processes
Planning and building collaborative networks, partnerships, and cross-sector coalitions
Designing and managing a collaborative case management and public participation

	1 Not proficient in this skill	2 Not proficient in this skill	3 Not proficient in this skill	4 Not proficient in this skill	5 Not proficient in this skill

PROCESS COMPETENCY

3. Communicating Effectively, e.g.:

Listening skills
Presenting, persuading and consensus
Communicating in different media and modes to different and mixed groups
Cross-cultural communication skills

	1 Not proficient in this skill	2 Not proficient in this skill	3 Not proficient in this skill	4 Not proficient in this skill	5 Not proficient in this skill

4. Working in Teams and Facilitating Groups, e.g.:

Understanding group dynamics and building working relationships
Facilitating group collaboration and decision making
Participating in teams effectively

	1 Not proficient in this skill	2 Not proficient in this skill	3 Not proficient in this skill	4 Not proficient in this skill	5 Not proficient in this skill

5. Negotiating Agreement and Managing Conflict, e.g.:

Third party negotiation and conflict management skills
Internal third negotiation and conflict resolution in mixed party settings
Managing conflicts constructively in groups

	1 Not proficient in this skill	2 Not proficient in this skill	3 Not proficient in this skill	4 Not proficient in this skill	5 Not proficient in this skill



Created by Vectors Point from Noun Project

Principal, Michael Kern Consulting, LLC
michaelkernconsulting@gmail.com

*This webinar series brief was prepared by Erin Trouba.

*This work is supported by the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Water for Agriculture grant no. 2017-68007-26584/project accession no. 1013079 from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture