

Resistance to Collaboration: A Proposal to the Hewlett Foundation

Contact Information and Summary Information

Proposal Submitter:

Sanford M. Jaffe, Director
Center for Negotiation and Conflict Resolution
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy
33 Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901

732-932-2487

732-932-2493 (fax)

cncr@rci.rutgers.edu

www.policy.rutgers.edu/cncr

Head of organization's name, title, address and phone: same as above

Project leader/grant contact person:

Sanford M. Jaffe (see above)

Mark Aakhus, Associate Professor
Department of Communication
School of Information Sciences and Library Studies
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
16 Huntington Street
New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901
aakhus@scils.rutgers.edu

Project: Resistance to Collaboration

Project Overview

We propose to investigate the following question: Why do policy-makers and planners resist the use of collaborative, problem-solving approaches, and, specifically, mediation and facilitation, as means to manage, if not solve, public disputes?

This project is intended to address one of the knowledge gaps identified by Robert A. Baruch Bush which is briefly described in the “Tiers of Interest” list regarding understanding and responding to resistance to collaborative processes. (The project also intersects with and has the potential to contribute to several other topics on that list including “framing” and “knowledge-building and synthesis.” The proposal submitted by Barbara Gray and colleagues, “Framing and Dispute Resolution,” is particularly relevant to research on resistance, and, accordingly, CNCR is participating in that proposed project.)

This proposal will be undertaken by the Center for Negotiation and Conflict Resolution in collaboration with Associate Professor Mark Aakhus. In addition, colleagues in three schools and representing several disciplines and units at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, will form a Steering Committee both to advise the project generally and provide assistance on design, implementation and dissemination. They include the following:

Claire McInerney (Information Sciences)
Michael Greenberg (Urban Planning/Public Health)
Sandy Jaffe (Negotiation and Conflict Resolution/Public Policy)
Linda Stamato (Negotiation and Conflict Resolution/Public Policy)
John Weingart (Eagleton Institute of Politics)
Clint Andrews (Urban Planning)
Caron Chess (Human Ecology).

Some members of our group have been working on understanding how controversies emerge in public policy decision-making and on developing practical strategies for dealing with them and others have been particularly interested in how communication, information, and media might be more effectively used to advance collaboration. These complementary efforts have generated a common interest in the sources of resistance to collaboration.

While there have been a number of approaches used over the last decade to educate both planners and policymakers as to the value of collaborative processes (e.g. case studies in journals; reports in newsletters; orientation and training sessions), it is clear that such efforts have had limited utility. Despite advocacy, and some experience, public officials generally have not taken up collaborative processes. We need to understand why there appears to be so little acceptance of mediation and facilitation when creative, coordinated, collective action is critical in solving shared problems.

Project Plan

This project will review relevant literature on resistance to collaboration, devise and implement interview/survey instruments, conduct field research, and report findings on resistance to collaboration along with recommendations for dealing with them. The ultimate goal is to develop (a) an adequate explanation for resistance and (b) a set of practical principles for dealing with resistance. Within the scope of the anticipated support for this project we will take the following steps:

1. Literature review to codify and evaluate existing data, analysis, and theory relevant to resistance to collaboration. These findings would be used to refine and focus our basic research question.
2. Semi-structured interviews with mediators and facilitators from major institutions involved in dispute resolution and policy matters. These interviews would gather stories and opinions about why there is resistance in some situations and not in others. We would also interview leaders of organizations that work to bring community groups together with public officials on a variety of planning and policy matters. The design of the interviews and the analysis of the interviews would follow principles of grounded practical theory (see Craig & Tracy, 1995).
3. Semi-structured, in depth interviews with policy-makers at the local level to gather accounts of their experiences with collaborative processes. The design of the interviews and the analysis of the interviews would follow principles of grounded practical theory (see Craig & Tracy, 1995).
4. Convene one or more focus groups of policy-makers to discuss resistance to collaboration. The focus group meeting will be designed using materials drawn from the interviews with mediators, facilitators, and policy-makers. The focus group design and analysis is based on an extension of grounded practical theory (see Aakhus, 2001).

Proposed timeline

Jan 2005 – Mar 2005	Literature Review
Feb 2005 – June 2005	Interviews with mediators/facilitators
Mar 2005 – Dec 2005	Interviews with local policy makers
Oct 2005 – Dec 2005	Focus Group/Workshop
Jan 2006 – Apr 2006	Data Processing/Analysis and Write-up

Project Budget

\$ 7,000	Meetings (e.g., interviews, focus groups, workshop)
5,000	Research Assistance (e.g., transcription, coding, data processing)
4,000	Equipment & Supplies (e.g., recording equipment, recording media)
3,000	Travel/Transportation
500	Mailing/Shipping
500	Copying/Duplication
\$20,000	Total

All faculty involved in this project will provide significant in-kind contributions in terms of their time so that interviews, focus groups, and ongoing planning can be effectively carried out. All administrative costs are being contributed as well.

Project Outcomes and Impact

Once we gather and evaluate the data that we anticipate the project will produce, we hope to identify potential ways to deal with resistance of public officials to collaborative processes. We have been in contact with the Policy Consensus Institute and the National Policy Consensus Center (specifically Chris Carlson and Greg Wolfe) both about the nature of the proposal and have received their willingness to provide advice and assistance and to suggest “venues” for the use of its product. Both have expressed enthusiasm for it; they believe it will be useful in supporting their “state solutions” and “community solutions” projects. The use of this project’s results will also be assured given the fact that the Center for Negotiation and Conflict Resolution will be one of several “charter members” of PCI’s planned national network of university-based centers that work on implementing collaborative approaches to managing policy conflicts.

We would make the results of the project available, moreover, to the network of centers in order to assist their efforts to increase the use and effectiveness of collaboration in public contexts and particularly their efforts to advance “community solutions” initiatives. We would expect to present the findings to the group of center directors and engage with them to devise approaches to policy makers that would reflect those findings and advance the prospects for increased use of collaboration.

We would anticipate producing a “briefing paper” that would summarize the results and the policy and practice implications; the paper would be distributed in a number of venues, including meetings in conjunction with PCI and NPCC. We would also plan on offering panels at regularly scheduled meetings of such organizations as the National Governors Association and the National Conference of State Legislatures, the League of Cities, and at regional meetings of governors of states and their agency directors; and in sessions organized by those relating broadly to planning (e.g. AICP), for example, and to transportation and the environment. With respect to transportation, for example, the National Transit Institute and the Voorhees Transportation Research Institute are located at Rutgers; the former is funded by Congress to further “best practices” in the transportation field and the other to disseminate research results to improve planning; we’ve worked extensively with both of them and also with APTA, the national organization of transportation professionals and NCHRP, the council that conducts and disseminates research relating to road and highway development. We would use these important contacts to disseminate the results of our research and ask to make presentations at national and regional meetings.

With respect to the area of environmental policy and practice, we would work, we anticipate, with a number of key planners in several states and, we anticipate, with INFORM, in New York, and RESOLVE, in D.C., as well as with organizations and institutes located here at Rutgers, including the Sustainability Institute and the National Center for Energy and Environmental Protection.

In an extension of what CNCR already does, we would anticipate using the data the project produces to enhance the quality of the technical assistance we provide, on request, to elected and appointed officials in states both directly and through our colleagues at PCI and elsewhere,

We anticipate scholarly contributions as well. We would expect to present our findings at meetings of the International Association of Conflict Management (an organization that has a number of scholars working in complementary areas, including Barbara Gray and Roy Lewicki et al on “framing”) and the International Communication Association Conference with the intention of generating more interest in resistance to collaboration in public contexts.

Evaluation:

In order for research and practice in the field of negotiation and conflict resolution to contribute meaningfully to improve decision-making, particularly in public domains, it must find a home in the area of public policy. While court-related and commercial dispute resolution programs are notable areas of practice, the public policy domain is fairly barren. We would look to this project to encourage the use of collaborative processes at all levels of government.

As a result of this work, policy makers (and, particularly, leaders in their professional organizations) will understand the characteristics and potential benefits of collaboration and gain information on understanding the sources of resistance to it. Thus, they may develop the tools, we anticipate, to convince their colleagues, and others in government and private and not for profit sectors, when and why to use collaborative processes. Moreover, since resistance is central to work on collaborative processes and public policy, we would anticipate that the data we generate may well find its way into other research and applied contexts.

References:

- Aakhus, M. (2001). Technocratic and design stances toward communication expertise: How GDSS facilitators understand their work. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 29(4), 341-371.
- Craig, R. & Tracy, K. (1995). Grounded practical theory: A case of intellectual discussion. *Communication Theory*, 5(3), 248-272.