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Fact Sheet: Administrative Support in Collaborative Forest Restoration

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Administrative Support in Collaborative Forest Restoration

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INTRODUCTION

The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) has helped the U.S. Forest Service and collaborative groups overcome some of the financial barriers to national forest restoration by providing additional funding for restoration projects. Yet CFLRP funds cannot be used to support the collaborative group process or administration, and group members find that increasing collaboration and restoration planning requires a significant investment of coordination and organizational effort. It is generally recognized that administrative support is crucial to the efficient functioning of a collaborative group. Without consistent sources of funding or specific guidance on how to manage administrative support, CFLRP groups have had to develop their own approach to meeting these administrative needs.



Collaborative groups responding to the survey all reported that administrative support was considered an important function of their collaborative. Photo of Dinky Collaborative participants, by Dorian Fougères.

OVERVIEW

The Ecological Restoration Institute conducted a survey in 2015 to better understand how the various CFLR projects are procuring their administrative support and what lessons have been learned for maintaining capacity for administrative functions.

METHOD

A 16-question survey was sent to 60 CFLRP contacts, often those in co-chair or other leadership positions, at all 23 CFLR projects. Survey questions focused on how participants fulfill, fund, and perceive administrative support. We received 39 responses from collaborative participants at 22 projects, with between 1 and 4 responses per site.

FINDINGS

CFRLP groups see administrative support as essential, and think it is best to have a dedicated position to fill that role. Groups are successfully meeting administrative needs in a multitude of ways; there is no single best approach. When funding is an issue, sharing administrative tasks among collaborative members can get the job done, however reliable funding for administrative support can reduce demand on group members and make support more consistent.

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Collaborative groups value administrative support

All responding groups had administrative tasks they considered important to the function of their collaborative. Some thought field trip organization was more important than website administration, or meeting note-taking was more important than field trip organization, but nearly every respondent had at least one administrative function they thought “essential.”

Administrative functions include meeting organization, field trip organization, recording and distributing meeting notes, and website administration. In addition to these tasks, groups reported that their administrative duties include:

- Document and presentation drafting and editing
- Sharing information within the group (like reporting monitoring data)
- Fundraising and grant administration
- Budget management
- Communications
- Outreach
- Coordinating group work and tasks
- Coordinating with USFS personnel
- Task specific duties, like organizing/assisting with annual reporting
- Facilitation

In many groups, administrative duties are shared among collaborative group members and USFS staff.

Funding is the primary challenge

Fluctuations in funding influenced how much support groups were able to maintain. When funding decreased, group members often found it necessary to donate their time for administrative support instead of having a dedicated person complete important tasks. Group members also covered administrative support “overtime” or needs that exceeded the support that was available. Most groups also found that their need for administrative support fluctuated over time, either growing to support increased meetings and activity, or shrinking during quieter times.

CFLRP groups are using a combination of in-kind donations of time and monetary funding to support administrative work. Direct funding comes from private, local, state, and federal grants; from participating organizations; from the USFS through Resource Advisory Committees or Memorandums of Understanding. In kind donations of time come from a single or multiple participants or participating organizations, and from the USFS.

Insights from collaborative group participants

- “Develop and budget enough time and funds for a person to conduct administrative activities. The collaborative process will suffer without consistent and thorough administrative work.”
- “Having a dedicated administrator has been essential to keeping us moving forward, but sometimes, I think we have not taken enough responsibility ourselves for doing the necessary work between meetings. I also think we have not taken enough responsibility for setting and meeting goals. It has simply been enough to let the administrator schedule meetings, we show up, and we call it progress. I would encourage new groups to use an administrator to goose them along but not to defer all responsibility for making progress to the administrator.”
- “Having paid coordination and facilitation help is essential to the success of our collaborative.”
- “The focus of a person dedicated to the administrative duties is like glue ... it keeps all the pieces together and functioning. Not a “nice to have” — a definite “need to have.”
- “Administrative support, particularly facilitation, is critically important to a successful collaborative effort. It takes far more time than most people realize, and is often undervalued, including by members and the Forest Service.”
- “Administration is essential. Secure one person to take this on and pay him/her to do this. Be careful not to overwork that person, as there is a great deal to do. Cultivate a culture in the collaborative of appreciating that it is work to set up and run effective meetings and help out with set-up and clean-up to improve morale.”

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