

Insights from Elected Officials and Local Government
Managers on Regional Collaboration

How and Why We Collaborate

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Presentation
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Background

- Dissertation/Research Study
- 20 years in local government
- Local Government Research Interest
- Fit with Certificate Program/Virginia Tech

What is Regional Collaboration?

- Two or more local governments working together to solve a public problem
- Many issues are not constrained within jurisdictional boundaries

Why do local governments
engage in regional
collaboration?



Purpose of the Study:

- Why do elected officials consider regional collaborations?
- Why do local government managers consider regional collaborations?
- What are the benefits?
- What are the barriers?
- Other interesting things to learn...

Study Area – Roanoke Region

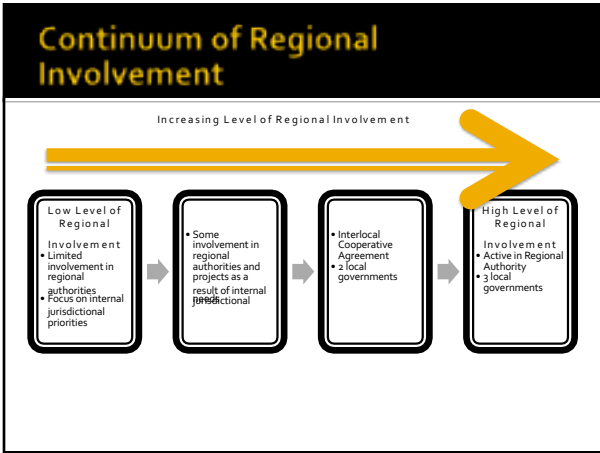


Local Governments Participating

- Roanoke County
- City of Roanoke
- City of Salem
- Alleghany County
- City of Covington
- Franklin County
- Botetourt County
- 2 Elected Officials from each locality and each local government manager

Regional Projects Identified

- Joint purchase of 100 acre site for business recruitment purposes
- Interlocal agreement for economic development purposes
- Water Authority



Interviews

- Over 50 hours of recorded interviews with the elected officials and local government managers from the respective jurisdictions.
- Interview questions were open-ended and asked about why they did or did not engage in regional projects with other jurisdictions
- Here's what they said....

What Did Elected Officials Say?

Disaster Occurrence

- "The Hercules Fiber part, there's a Film and a Fiber section, they were on the same property, two separate buildings. The Fiber side caught on fire and burned up everybody on the fiber side lost their job, basically, or that many people lost their jobs with the company. Some of them, they were transferred. That just kicked somebody else out of a job. That was like 1200-1500 jobs. With the railroad leaving from Clifton, in the early '70s, that was big hit. It's just the Westrock, or Westvaco, or the paper mill, whatever you want to call it, has kept us alive for years. With the population loss, we can't do what we used to could. You lose half of your residents, you lose a lot of income, a lot of revenue

Disaster Occurrence

- "You **lost a little over 700 jobs** from manufacturing plus the smaller outfits that service those groups. That could be well over 1,000 and all this was done **since 2008, 2007.**"

Disaster Occurrence

- "The Valley had a problem and the problem was that city was running out of water and we had a **pretty significant drought**"
- "The **drought of 2004, 2005**, at least in modern history, really **highlighted the importance of regional cooperation**"

Fiscal Stress

- "Sometimes there's something good to be said of a good down turn of the economy. It's an old business saying... **A good financial downturn makes people get along a little better**, because you have a common enemy, which is survival. That plays into it"

Fiscal Stress

- "I think also part of it, **because of the recession and the new norm**, I guess people are saying, in terms of local revenue streams, it's much harder for one locality to say ... I mean, the County could have said, "Well, you know, that's in our county, we'll buy all the land, we'll do all the infrastructure development and all the investment that's necessary to make this ready for somebody to come in," but **it's harder for one locality to do that these days**"

Fiscal Stress

- "I'm thinking it's probably, well, **you know the economy**. All of that. Just kind of changed I think everything and the way you had to look at things. When you work together you have greater buying power and I still think, and being part of the regional commission like I am too, that's given me other ideas as to how we can work together as a region and some things that we've discussed **as a regional commission have been like collectively buying things for the localities, exploring the possibility of doing that down the road**"

Citizen Support for Cooperation

- "...have had **three or four consolidation referendums**. The idea is always less government, joint services, one school system, and those were the drivers... The joint services is something that what can we do together that we're doing separate now... **Once we didn't have a consolidated government, one of the things we started working on, he and I both, when we got elected, was more joint services and more regional cooperation.**"

State Influence

- Regulatory
 - Water Permit
 - "...because we're pulling water out of the river and what with our permit, there's no scenario that **the state would have forced us** to provide water if City's out of water"
 - Interlocal Agreement
 - "we had to ask permission from Big Brother"

State Influence

- Incentive-based
 - Grant Funding from DHCD
 - *"We are doing a comprehensive plan with the city of, which will be compiled as separate lands, but one steering committee directing both jurisdictions...That goes hand in hand with our economic development that we have a **joint partnership** with and is complete"*

State Influence

- Statutory Authority
 - Virginia Water and Waste Authority Act
 - Virginia Regional Industrial Facilities Act
 - State Code Section 15.2-1301, Voluntary Economic Growth Sharing Agreements

Outside Agency Influence

- Roanoke Regional Partnership
 - Economic development organization for all 7 localities
 - "...one of the things we were told by the regional partnership is that we had a lack of inventory of 100 acre sites for development, for business, **so that was one of the reasons why we pursued** the property over there"

Outside Agency Influence

- Roanoke Regional Partnership
 - "...our regional partnership, economic development partnership, had **done a very good job**, I think, of documenting the need for large parcels"

Outside Agency Influence

- Non-profit Foundation
 - "...wants to do things in the community above and beyond the normal function of government or to assist government in things where we can make it better...they helped us build a **joint YMCA, a joint animal shelter**, new air packs for volunteer fire and rescue...if it's not for everybody, they're not going to pick...we can kinda regionalize some of these projects. **I think they'll step up and help us.**"

Summary

- Elected officials stated that a disaster occurrence, fiscal stress, citizen pressure, state influence or outside agency influence were key factors in their decision to work with other local governments.

Benefits As Viewed By The Elected Officials

Shared Expenses	"We will share in the costs" "might be a little bit easier than trying to have one jurisdiction swallow the whole thing".....10
Shared Revenue	"We will share in the revenue" "A system of revenue sharing and it was fair and it was agreed on by both boards".....10
Save Money/Cost Avoidance/Economies of Scale	"We've saved quite a bit of money".....9
Shared Resources	"We've got all the land" "Not having a whole lot of developable land, you know it really does limit you and ... a way to reap some of the benefits" "We've got the land in the county".....4
Shared Return on Investment	"We will benefit from the tax revenue that comes back to us, so this is not an expense of taxpayer's money, this is an investment that promises a return".....4
Efficiency and Effectiveness	"...it's exactly what governments should be doing to be more efficient for its citizens" "we have to be more efficient" "more efficiently and effectively than they can solve it by themselves".....5

Barriers As Viewed By The Elected Officials

Risks of partners pulling out of project	"they were supposed to be sharing this and they backed out at the last minute".....2
Unequal relationship	"We're willing to meet them but we expect a relationship with both sides being equal. Or you know, expect it to be somewhat equal.".....1
Lack of Communication Among Partners	"That's part of the process anywhere. You've got (to) communicate.".....6
No Jurisdictional Benefit	"Is it in the best interest of the City?".....10
Competition among jurisdictions	"A lot of the competition between localities has gone away..." "they were really competing against each other".....9

Interesting Findings From Elected Officials

- Shared Values and Norms
- Manager as the Initiator of these projects
- Jurisdictional/Self-Interest
- Relationships with other Elected Officials

Shared Values and Norms

- "it's the right thing to do"
- "rising tides raise all ships"

Shared Values and Norms

- "It's realizing that if we don't do partnership and don't consolidate in our efforts, we don't have to consolidate the schools or whatever, but our efforts to make this a great area, it won't survive... The jurisdictions, you have a structure here. I'm not complaining about them, but it was old school. Business has changed. You have to have partnerships"

Expectations of Manager

- "He (the new manager) understands, immediately, how important it is to reach out and to find partners and to see where you can reach the commonality and then move forward. Yes, **that was a big part of our decision to hire** (the new manager)"

Expectations of Manager

- "You know I wanted first and foremost whoever we hired to be **a leader** and to be able to come into this organization and be respected and just be someone who could lead. I think that was my number one thing. And then the thought had occurred to me can he work well with others because I think impressions are everything, and when you've got somebody that's leading your city and **they are expected to work with other local leaders and managers**, I think you wanna have somebody **that plays nice with others**, I guess, for lack of a better way to term it. And that's respected by others..."

Relationships with Other Elected Officials

- "The mayor and I, **we have gotten together a couple of times** this year for breakfast, talking about different types of things and you talk about something that doesn't work or might not work and we're gonna look at it anyways"

Relationships with Other Elected Officials

- "You do it by going to the functions that are sponsored by the regional partnership, the regional chamber, the regional commission. If you see them in a restaurant, you go over to their table and you talk to them, you go to dinner with them. It is more than meeting every other Monday in city council chambers and talking about regionalism. It's developing a personal relationship. **When I'm in Salem, I go by the jewelry store** just to pop in and say hello. We're friends"

Relationships with Other Elected Officials

- "...we're not friends where we socialize but we had breakfast together yesterday morning. Just to talk about issues that are in common ... that are common to all of the various jurisdictions. I don't know everybody. I need to meet and become a little more familiar with the two newest members of the Board of Supervisors. ... **I go by his ice cream store**"

Jurisdictional Benefit/Self Interest

- "because we all want to work together, we all want to be fair but we're not gonna just advantageous. **We're not gonna do something disadvantageous to our citizens just to be nice**"
- "Then you make the call that you think is in the best interest of the majority of the city... **I'm going to do what I think is in the best interest of the city overall.**"

Jurisdictional Benefit/Self-Interest

- “but then as time went on and we learned more and examined it more, **it became clear that the City was going to be better off joining the authority**”

Summary: Why do elected officials consider regional collaborations?

- Preconditions
- Benefits and Barriers
- Interesting Findings
 - Manager as the Initiator
 - Jurisdictional/Self-Interest
 - Elected Officials Relationships
 - Norms...just what we do

So what did the Managers say?

Disaster Occurrence

- “The fighting that went on between the jurisdictions over access and availability to water, the consequence of not having sufficient water on economic development. One jurisdiction trying to constrain another's growth by controlling access to water... Then **ultimately a crisis occurs where it's so bad for everybody that they just had to work together.**”

Fiscal Stress

- “For me, why do we do the collaboration is really because **almost everything we do, either requires resources that are beyond the capability of any individual entity,** and/or the impact or the benefit is beyond just the boundaries of any one of those parties”

Fiscal Stress

- “and **particularly the recession**, and maybe it's not a coincidence that things began to change just as the recession was coming in. Because I'm telling you that about 10 years ago is when I began to notice the change. That was a change in leadership on the management side, but it was also a change in financial situations for everybody, as well, too. Where (the locality), **in the past, could absolutely afford to be completely independent**, 10 years ago that began to change. Our ability to pay for whatever we want, not worry about bills. (The Locality) was financial, very, very secure prior to real estate values essentially stopping and growing”

Early and Continued Support from Elected Officials

- "because if they're not on board with something and approving something out in the end, **there's no need for us to work on it**"

Early and Continued Support from Elected Officials

- "Well I think you'll find in the **strategic plan** any number of examples where whether it's expressly stated or not, **there's a very big emphasis on regional cooperation** ...The board sets the policy direction and policy direction, for a lot of our policy direction, revolves around the need to grow from an economic perspective. I think it's appropriate and prudent for them to not necessarily say exactly how that'd be done. If they were going to tell us exactly what to do they probably wouldn't need me"

Early and Continued Support From Elected Officials

- "The other would be the political side of it, and typically here, what I would end up doing is just **talking with the council members and the mayor, kind of one-on-one**, just to gauge the sense of, "If we went down this path, here are things I see as benefits, and potential limitations of it," and kind of feel them out about where they are politically on it. I have the advantage that right now, I have council that is very open to those kind of partnerships, and don't bring any baggage to it"

Early and Continued Support From Elected Officials

- " So, we had three new members of council, from the time I was hired up until the Wood Haven decision. And that was a fairly significant change. (An elected official being on there, who was a big proponent of regionalism, and not being so insular, isolated, as the (locality). **Much more open to working together regionally...** but willing and wanting to work, **seeing the advantage of working regionally**. We had that change"

State Influence

- Authority Acts
 - "we work at regional level on many different fronts, **resource authority, solid waste authority, regional industrial facilities authority**"
- Interlocal Agreement Process
 - "Initially I kind of said this a bureaucratic thing...but I was kind of glad to see Richmond...and it built some good will with them"

Outside Agency Influence

- Roanoke Regional Partnership
 - "I mean they're key here, because the way we positioned ourselves, and this was just how the groups just have worked it out, is in most instances, they're our lead provider, so they're the ones that bring prospects to the community... Again, to me, that's the strength of the partnership here and the Partnership is not just waiting for instructions from the partners, **actually leading the conversation in a lot of ways**, which has been a good thing."

Outside Agency Influence

- Non-profit Foundation
 - "The other partner that we have is a local foundation, **The Foundation**. It was created for the sale of a hospital. That's just across the interstate here now, but it was ... It was ... I think if the city and the county ... If they see us working together, and the city and the county are investing jointly in a project, **we'll then be able to leverage some of their money**"

Summary

- Disaster Occurrence, Fiscal Stress, Early and Continued Support from Elected Officials, State and Outside Agency Influence

Benefits As Viewed By The Manager

- Sharing of resources and reward
- Shared Risks
 - **"We share whatever we agreed on in the agreement.** Theoretically 50/50. And then when we land the project and something happens there, we share 50/50 on the revenue"
 - "Of course, then the **shared expenditures with the shared revenues** makes it so that everybody's equally contributing and equally benefiting from..."

Barriers As Viewed By The Manager

**THE
ELECTED
OFFICIALS**

Barriers As Viewed By The Manager

"without the support of the elected officials on either the city or county boards, there is literally no chance for a successful cooperation between the local governments."

- *Lackey, et. al(2002)*

Interesting Findings from the Managers

- Jurisdictional Benefit/Self-Interest
- Manager Initiation of Projects
- Manager Relationships
- Tenure

Jurisdictional Benefit/Self Interest

- "It's much more **what's right for my jurisdiction** kind of discussion"
- **"How will it help us**, as a government, accomplish our objectives, or our goals, that kind of thing, that's going to be one calculus that I'll do"
- "First of all, **we just don't do that out of the goodness of our hearts**. If you're going to do something like this there has to be a presumed return on investment to your citizens"

Jurisdictional Benefit/Self-Interest

- "Well one of the things was that we ended up having our plates full with the projects that we already had going. It wasn't like that we had been sitting over here and that there was no activity... **it's not that were anti (regional) but we're being blessed so much that we've got to take care of our stuff at home**"

Manager Initiation of Projects

- "it's not typical though for elected officials to get together and tell us do something." **"it's really the administrators that do that"**
- **"so it wasn't the Board**, I took the concept back to my Board"
- **"but the truth is in every community it's the County Administrator, the City Manager that is facilitating those pieces"**

Manager Initiation of Projects

- "We put the project together and the proposal and then we **carry it to the board** and say in furtherance of the economic development agenda of our respective regions we think this makes logical sense and **there's a significant return on investment for us**. Then we present them the details of that and they make a decision as to whether or not it's something the jurisdictions will engage in together, right and whether will each individual jurisdiction support it."

Manager Relationships and "Windshield Time"

- **"we just really worked well, we all knew each other, we respected each other, and all of a sudden we all trusted each other and could work well... a good group of managers in the area**, who are all trying to work together"
- **"the manager and I drive back and forth...just driving back and forth to meetings... Two dudes riding down to go to a meeting had a conversation, so ... The City Manager and I just driving back and forth to meetings together"**
- **"We were riding the Amtrak together...and we were talking about transportation...and what can be done about that"**

Tenure

- Every elected official interviewed was on the governing body when the current manager was hired
- 6 of the 7 managers had a tenure in the current locality of less than 4 years
- Most managers had tenure of two years or less in the current locality

So what?

- Never underestimate the influence of elected officials in regional collaboration
- Recognize that the manager initiates these projects as a result of direction from the governing body
- There is always a jurisdictional benefit

Think about this?

- How do elected officials recognize the norms of cooperation? How are they different from your professional norms?

Policy Implications

- Interlocal Agreement process – study of the process, potential statutory changes, use of these agreements between towns, cities and counties. Especially in Southwest Virginia.

Questions?

- Thank you!
- Thank you to the Managers and Elected Officials of the respective cities and counties in the study