



**Does Collaboration Beget Collaboration?:  
From Cooperation to Co-production in  
Township Government**

*Center for Public Management  
and Regional Affairs  
Miami University*

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# **Does Collaboration Beget Collaboration?: From Cooperation to Co-production in Township Government**

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## Executive Summary

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### Executive Summary

Township governments in Ohio have a long tradition of collaborative efforts. Dudas, Haney, Morris, and Russo ask three questions in this study.

1. What types of collaboration are going on at the township level especially in rural areas?
2. What factors led township officials to collaborate?
3. Does the experience of collaboration predispose officials towards additional collaboration?

Using data collected from a statewide survey of elected township officials, we identified townships that have entered into a least one collaborative arrangement. Townships were then categorized using a three-fold typology of “Basic Collaborators,” “Advanced Collaborators,” and “Opportunistic Collaborators.” A sample from each category was selected for a formal structured telephone survey. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure a distribution of survey respondents from all eighty-eight counties across the State. We conclude the following:

1. There are already significant levels

of collaboration taking place across townships in Ohio.

2. Collaboration is not a simple concept that should be narrowly defined in the context of informal and formal agreements.
3. Collaboration moves through a progression that may ultimately lead to co-production.

We recommend the Commission look to develop mechanisms to provide financial incentives to collaborate, to develop informational and educational programs for local officials contemplating collaboration, and to develop more statutory incentives to promote public/private partnerships.

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- Deanna J. Watts, Graduate Research Assistant
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## Center for Public Management and Regional Affairs at Miami University

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## Does Collaboration Beget Collaboration?: From Cooperation to Co-production in Township Government

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Township governments in Ohio have a long tradition of collaborative efforts; working together is neither uncommon nor unexpected, including among townships that are more rural and smaller in terms of population. These collaborative efforts (which are initiated under general or specific statutory authority) have included local and regional services such as joint fire districts, shared recreational facilities, and economic development zones. In most instances, inter-jurisdictional collaborative efforts are often embraced as a means to address resource constraints, revenue enhancement, as well as provide more effective services through co-production and delivery within rational service areas. Ohio township governments have been able to stretch limited financial resources and improve the quality and quantity of a public service such as joint fire districts through their collaborative efforts. Townships have also opted to collaborate by sharing tax revenues through joint economic development districts that benefit multiple jurisdictions and avoid costly and protracted legal disputes.

Despite these success stories there has been very little systematic study of the implications of collaborative efforts by local governments in the United States other than some targeted

case study analyses that typically assess the effectiveness of a particular collaborative effort (usually asking the question: did it work?). And research on Ohio townships has been even more lacking. In this study we move beyond single case studies and begin to look at the longer-term implications of local government collaboration. More specifically, we ask the question, “Does collaboration in one service-area encourage or advance collaboration in other areas between and among local governments?” This research question is designed to identify the *factors that are likely determinants for subsequent collaborative efforts*. Are there indicators or conditions that make subsequent collaboration more or less likely to occur? Much like public policy implementation can be viewed as a series of inter-related events with each event linked to and building off of a previous event (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973), the process of building collaboration also relies on a series of inter-related events. Since a multitude of factors may influence and affect the outcome of the collaboration, knowing these factors in advance, planning and preparing for the impacts of these factors, and avoiding any pitfalls brought about by these factors could go a long way towards encouraging subsequent local government

collaborative efforts.

Previous studies of local government collaboration have found that (perhaps contrary to some conventional wisdom) there is already a lot of collaboration going on among governmental units, including small and rural local governments. Research has identified a number of benefits for local governments of collaborating with others (see especially Lackey et al. 2002: 138-139 for an overview of these findings; see also Jansen, 1994; Korsching, Borich, & Stewart, 1992; McGuire 2009; Shaffer, 1992; Tweeten, 1992; Wells, 1990). One of the advantages is that collaboration can lead to an increase in local decision-making capacity since more expertise can be brought to bear upon problems and challenges that multiple governmental units share in common. Another theme from these studies is that collaboration can actually be a way for local governments to retain their local identity. Studies often find that officials in local government units are concerned that annexation and consolidation might wipe away the tradition and uniqueness of the local polity; collaboration can be a mechanism that local officials use in order to provide services to residents and preserve the local governing unit—even to preserve

a way of life—lest it be swallowed up from above. Studies have found that collaboration increases access to external resources. Many state level programs, for example, including in Ohio, give some preference in grant programs to proposals that emerge from collaborative efforts; so collaboration can be a way for local governments to access more resources. Related to this, previous studies have also found that collaboration is a way to increase the political influence of local governments because there is greater strength in greater numbers. Ohio's infrastructure bond financing program (administered by the Ohio Public Works Commission-OPWC) is a good example of how State incentives to local governments can facilitate collaboration and deliver maximized benefit. A snapshot of OPWC District #10 (a four county administrative district for funding distribution of State Capital Improvement Program and Local Transportation Improvement Program) serves as a promising strategy. According to data from Miami University's CPMRA, in the last eight calendar years which includes ten funding cycles for infrastructure projects within Bulter, Clermont, Clinton, and Warren Counties, local governments submitting collaborative project

proposals could earn an additional five to ten points per proposal in the competitive evaluation process. Since 2002, 90% of collaborative proposals received positive funding decisions in the process. Table #1 illustrates these data. Clearly collaborative projects (every eight of nine funded) outpace all project submissions where 67% receive positive evaluations.

A common argument found in the literature is that collaboration allows governments to take advantage of economies of scale and cost-effectiveness. Bulk buying of materials and equipment, road salt, or computers for example, can save money. The issue of cost savings, or at least the perception of cost savings, stands as a key theme in the literature; the suggestion is that local governments enter into collaborative arrangements in order to save money, or to keep costs from escalating (e.g., Lackey et al. 2002; LeRoux and Carr 2007). LeRoux and Carr note that economic pressure often motivates local government collaboration for service delivery. “As fiscal pressure increases, local public

officials are prompted to consider alternative service delivery options in an effort to reduce costs or avoid cost increases” (2007: 344). But Brudney et al. (2009) find that, perceptions notwithstanding, contracting does not always lead to decreased costs or enhanced services.

There may be other reasons that governments enter into collaborative agreements, however, including an interest in higher quality service delivery (LeRoux and Carr 2007: 345). LeRoux’s and Carr’s study goes on to speculate a bit about how collaboration—even if it is initially motivated for cost savings—can beget further collaboration:

“Even though it is unclear from this analysis whether interlocal agreements result in cost savings, local governments might enjoy dividends in the form of intangible benefits by engaging in these transactions. Interlocal agreements help to build trust among local government officials. As a result, interlocal agreements may pave the way for future

**Table 1**  
**DISTRICT #10 PUBLIC WORKS INTEGRATING COMMITTEE (2002-2009)**  
 Butler, Clinton, Clermont, and Warren Counties  
 (104 jurisdictions)

Projects receiving points for collaborative submissions	90
Projects funded	81
Projects not funded	9

cooperation between jurisdictions. To the extent that local governments will need to act collectively in the future to manage transjurisdictional problems, interlocal agreements may be useful because they help to establish the foundation for cooperative norms” (LeRoux and Carr 2007: 357).

There are also a host of reasons why local governments, including Ohio townships, might choose not to collaborate. Some of these barriers to collaboration identified in the literature include that local officials might not make cooperation with other governmental units a priority; indeed, quite the opposite, some officials might make cooperation a very low priority. Furthermore, the public may not call for, or appreciate, collaborative efforts. Citizens tend to staunchly support their local government’s service delivery mechanisms and resist collaborative efforts due to the fear of loss of local control or local identity (“It won’t be my Township’s Fire Department anymore”). This might stop an effort to collaborate. But we know that many rural townships are involved in collaborative efforts, so we might also want to pay attention to how citizen attitudes change over time that may mitigate these fears for future collaborative efforts. Another challenge, especially for more rural townships, is that collaborative partners can sometimes be hard to find (see Cigler 1994; and see Lackey et al. 2002 for a full review).

Given the research that has been done on local and township government collaboration,

and the gaps in this research, in this study we aim to find out, first, what types of collaboration are going on at the township level in Ohio, especially in rural areas. Second, we tried to establish what led these officials to decide to collaborate; and finally, we attempted to determine whether the experience of collaboration predisposes officials toward further collaboration or not: does collaboration beget collaboration?

As our second question suggests, individual factors play a significant role in collaborative efforts. Local officials are the ones who decide to collaborate, or to not collaborate, after all. The research suggests that some individuals may be more open and better equipped to pursue collaboration. Personality and training have a significant impact on collaborative effort (Waugh, 2009). Prior networking can also be a precondition to collaboration (Hicklin, O’Toole, Meir, and Robinson, 2009). The question of why public managers collaborate is the central focus of a new edited book by O’Leary and Bingham (2009). They ask if managers of local governments collaborate because of resource concerns, because they are forced to, or perhaps because they think collaboration will lead to better decisions. The essays included in their study look at these questions from different applied contexts. For example, McGuire (2009) studies the extent to which the professionalization of the field of emergency management has led to increased collaboration; professional emergency managers see collaboration simply as part of what they do. In a study of post disaster response, Hicklin and her colleagues find that the emergence of

collaboration is “a product of the individual-level decisions of the (public) manager” (2009: 112). Once a public manager decides to enter into collaborative arrangements, these efforts may well also “constitute a sort of investment—a social-networking capital, as it were—that can pay dividends on collaboration in the future” (2009: 113). This is interesting because previously Cigler (1994) also found that simple partnerships are a necessary precondition for more complex collaborative arrangements; the study by Lackey et al. mirrors this, finding that an established collaborative relationship is a key factor in promoting rural local government collaboration (2002, 146). For example, the presence of a positive environment of interlocal collaboration was found to be critical in Iowa’s Olive Tree Project supported by Iowa State University and the Iowa State Department of Management, (Morse, 2005). These findings help lead us to ask whether collaboration begets collaboration among Ohio Townships, and they also lead us to want to focus on the individual level and the choices that elected officials and township officials make when deciding to enter into collaborative efforts.

One of the challenges for our study is that while many researchers have studied “collaboration,” they often mean different things when they use the term. Cigler (1999) identifies a continuum of partnerships: networking, cooperative, coordinative, and collaborative. Networking partnerships are organizations with loose linkages usually for information exchange. Cooperative partnerships are limited arrangements that do not generally have

marginal costs to participants. Coordinating partnerships require a commitment of resources beyond information sharing and have specific shared goals. Collaborative partnerships involve strong linkages, specific purposes, formal structures (usually legal) and significant resource commitments. O’Leary et al. offer a different view:

“Collaborative public management is a concept that describes the process of facilitating and operating in multi-organizational arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved or easily solved by single organizations. Collaborative means to co-labor, to achieve common goals, often working across boundaries and in multi-sector and multi-actor relationships. Collaborative public management may include participatory governance: the active involvement of citizens in government decision-making” (O’Leary, Gazley, McGuire, & Bingham, 2009, 3).

For the purposes of this study, we define collaboration to include both formal and informal relationships. Formal relationships are those that have signed contracts and agreements. These formal collaborative agreements typically require approval by the elected governing bodies. Informal collaboration may include professional associations, participation in training and workshops, and personal relationships with peers. However, as discussed in the next section we found both much more complex and subtle sets of relationships that better describe the

reality of township collaboration.

### Methodology

Data from a number of different sources served as the basis for this study. First, we drew data from a 2008-09 Center for Public Management and Regional Affairs at Miami University statewide survey of all 5,232 elected township officials (Trustees and Fiscal Officers). With over 1,200 individual responses, this survey collected data about both the elected officials and their townships. Demographic data were collected on the elected officials including: years of service, gender, age, education level, association/organization membership, and conference/workshop attendance. Data were collected on townships including: services provided, miles of roads, number of cemeteries, number of parks, zoning, receipts, expenditures, number of employees, as well as the number and types of economic development agreements. With respect to the various services offered, respondents were asked to identify whether a particular service was provided “directly” by

the township, through a “contract” arrangement, through a “joint district”, or by the county. This database became a key starting point for our study on township collaboration. Further analysis of these survey data allowed us to identify 650 individual responses representing 374 townships that had indicated at least one collaborative relationship.

Table 2 presents data on the service delivery data for these townships. As the data indicate, Fire and emergency medical services (54.5% and 40.1%) services are most commonly provided through a contract with a neighboring local government. On the other hand, almost two-thirds of the townships (62.8%) provide police protection by relying upon the County Sheriff’s Office. Not surprisingly, Streets/Roads comprise the single most common township service department. Finally, almost one quarter (24.9%) of these townships have created a Township Parks/Recreation Department.

One of the more interesting changes that Ohio townships are experiencing is the increase in the number of full-time, part-time,

<b>Department</b>	<b>Direct</b>	<b>Contract</b>	<b>Joint</b>	<b>County</b>
Police	7.0%	6.7%	0.5%	62.8%
Fire	34.2%	54.5%	13.1%	0.8%
EMS	23.5%	40.1%	14.4%	13.9%
Streets/Roads	70.1%	4.3%	1.3%	5.1%
Parks	24.9%	0.3%	1.1%	10.4%

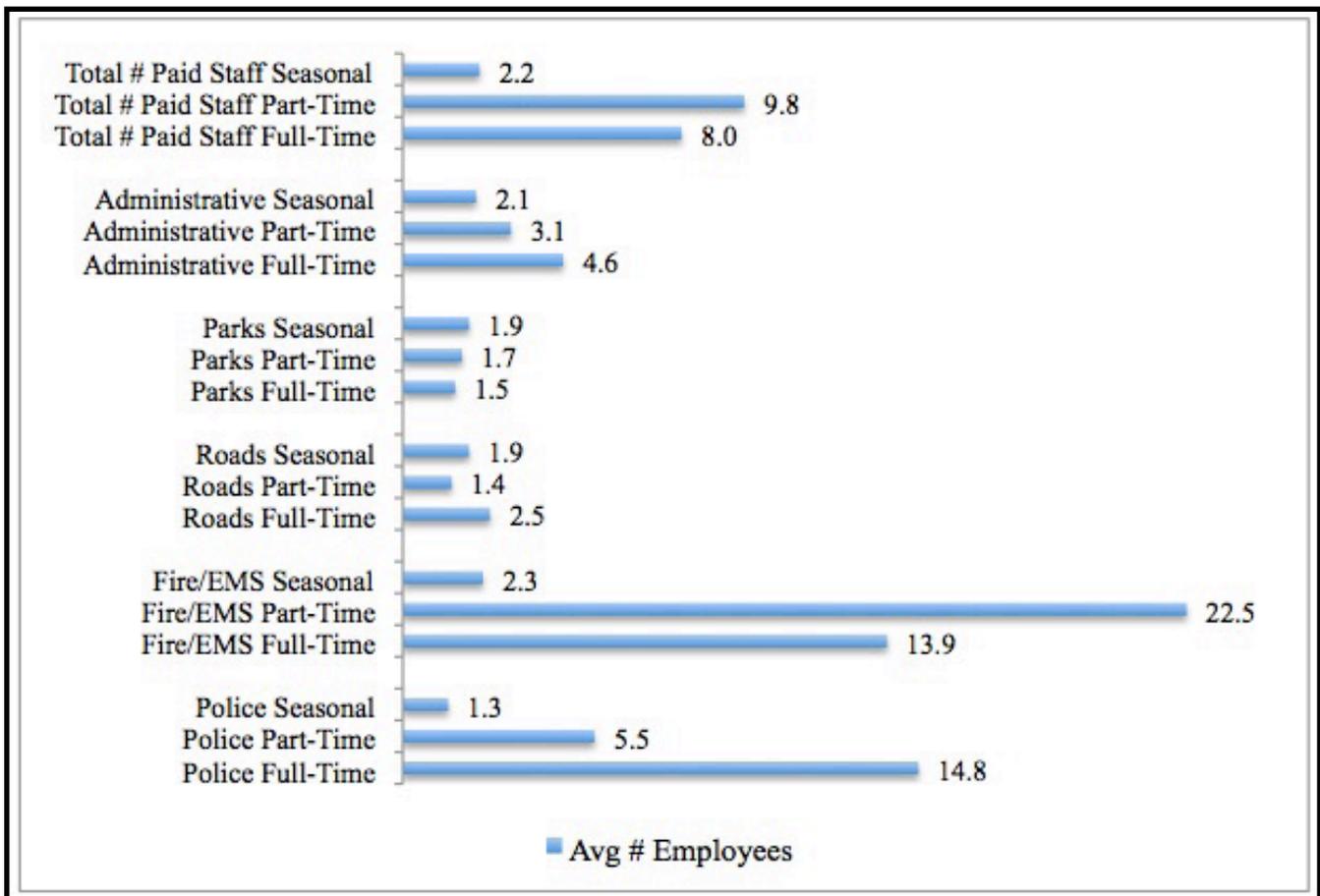
and seasonal employees among townships. As service delivery expands, logically the workforce necessary to deliver services increases. Table 3 presents information about the number and nature of township employees reported by these townships. As the data demonstrates, the average number of full-time paid employees for these townships is eight employees, and nearly ten (9.8) part-time township employees.

In addition to the township profile, we also developed a profile of the township leaders represented in this database. The modal respondent is male (57%) between 50 and 65-years old (average age = 58) and has been in office for over 15 years (average years = 12). We found that 37% hold college or graduate/

professional degrees, 65% have attended additional training or professional workshops, and 66% are members of professional and/or civic associations.

We began with the assumption that not all types and forms of inter-local collaboration are equal. For example, a contract with the County Sheriff to provide police coverage in a township is fundamentally different than the creation of a joint Police District incorporating two or more local communities. Some townships provide basic police coverage through a township police department with extended coverage for additional shift hours through a contract based on hours, shifts, or number of patrols. On the other hand, the creation of a police district

**Table 3: Township Employees by Category**



generally requires a much more complicated process to set boundaries, distribute revenues, and equitably cover costs. Similarly, our data on Ohio township governments provided a picture of a number of different collaboration “types”. Indeed, while all 1,308 townships in Ohio operate under a *common* set of “statutory” prescriptions and prohibitions, we found that their collaborative service delivery initiatives were *varied and multifaceted*. We categorized townships using a three-fold typology that identified townships according to how these local governments incorporated collaboration into three different types or levels of public service production and delivery.

“Basic Township Collaborators” are townships that offer basic local services through a combination of direct provision and/or supplemental contractual arrangements. Local services such as police, fire, and emergency medical services are provided either directly by the township, directly by the county, or using a supplemental contract to extend service delivery. For example, a Basic Collaborator may rely on the County Sheriff for police protection and have a contract with another entity to provide fire and emergency medical services. Basic Collaborators have not entered into more complex institutionalized collaboration or co-production initiatives such as fire districts, economic development agreements such as joint economic development districts (JEDDs) or community improvement corporations (CICs), or multi-jurisdiction revenue cooperatives such as tax increment financing (TIFs), or Revenue Sharing Agreements.

The second category of township collaboration is a category that we labeled “Advanced Collaborators”. These townships provide all the basic services similar to “basic collaborators”, however these townships have also entered into at least one formal or institutionalized inter-local service delivery initiative. For example, “advanced collaborators” may have institutionalized joint zoning enforcement activities with a county or neighboring municipality, or entered into a special economic development collaborative arrangement such as a JEDD with an adjoining municipality.

The third category of township collaboration is comprised of a group of townships that we labeled “Opportunistic Collaborators”. Unlike Basic Collaboration and Advanced Collaboration, which may be thought of as a developmental continuum, opportunistic collaboration stems from a unique set of economic, political, and demographic conditions that characterize the service delivery environment of a special set of townships. These townships are located in counties that are less rural, more likely to have several incorporated entities, and generally have a larger population base. Given these conditions, this group of townships pursues collaborative initiatives that go beyond single ad-hoc or contracting arrangements. These townships exploit the regional political, economic, and demographic opportunities to adopt collaborative ventures that more closely reflect co-production strategies. Common among these “opportunistic townships” is collaboration in the form of merged services,

e.g. regional emergency management activities; complex and diversified formal economic development alliances, e.g. joint economic development districts or comprehensive economic development agreements; and/or formalized joint administrative support venture, e.g. regional purchasing cooperatives. Moreover, opportunistic collaborators tend to be more willing to commit to merged services that go beyond conventional single jurisdiction direct delivery, and form administrative arrangements for support services e.g. human resource management, planning, financial management, and legal cooperatives.

Using this three-fold classification scheme, we selected a sample from each of the three categories for a formal structured telephone survey. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure a distribution of survey respondents from all eighty-eight counties across the State. Approximately 80 townships were selected for interviews.

Telephone calls were placed to elected and/or administrative officials in each of the selected townships during October and November 2009 with the goal of speaking to one official in each township. We used a prepared interview schedule for each interview:

1. What types of local collaboration have you personally experienced as a township official?

- a. Can you identify any options that encouraged or incentivized you to collaborate with other local governments?

- b. Can you identify any options that discouraged you to collaborate with other local governments?

2. What changes to the local tax structure would encourage your township to collaborate more.

3. Through your collaborative efforts, have you identified any alternative service delivery models.

4. Based on your past experiences, are you more likely or less likely to seek out collaboration? Why or why not?

In addition to the telephone survey, we held a focus group with 23 township administrative officials who are members of the Ohio Township Administrators Network (OTAN). The focus was held in Columbus, Ohio, lasted approximately 2 hours, and used the same set of questions as the telephone survey.

The data collected from both the telephone survey and the focus group were analyzed, compiled, and summarized. The findings are presented below.

**Table 4: Township Sample Population Demographics by Classification**

	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>Opportunistic</b>
Number of Townships	35	37	12
Average Population	1,888	4,119	16,455
Avg Pop % Rural County	46%	44%	24%
Number of Officials	61	64	18
Average Years in Office	13	15	12
Average Age	59	59	59
Male	57%	61%	56%
Female	43%	39%	44%
College/Graduate Degree	34%	53%	56%
Association Member	57%	70%	89%

#### **OTAN Focus Group**

The Ohio Township Administrators Network (OTAN) is a professional organization of appointed township administrative officials (mostly administrators and assistant administrators) sponsored by the Ohio Township Association. An update on the Commission's progress was provided to the attendees and the remaining portion of this topical session was utilized as an opportunity to hold a focus group to discuss issues relating to collaboration. A total of twenty-three township administrative officials participated in the focus group, representing twenty-two different townships from ten counties. The average population of the townships these officials managed was 15,276. These twenty-three township administrative officials had on average served in their current position for seven years, and had on average twenty years of government administrative experience.

Dr. Patrick J. Haney served as the moderator for the focus group and led the discussion. The

definition of collaboration that was used for this research project was provided. The first question asked the participants "Using these definitions (of collaboration), what types of collaboration have you personally experienced?" The majority of participants shared with the group some form of collaboration that their township had been involved in. The majority of townships shared examples of collaboration in the service area of public safety. The most often cited examples included multi-jurisdictional dispatch centers (for fire protection, emergency medical services (EMS), and police protection) and co-location of safety service buildings to house personnel and equipment. Other collaborative efforts that were mentioned included belonging to joint fire districts, contracting with the County Sheriff for additional police patrols, and participating in a multi-jurisdictional conversion to communications equipment operating on a common radio frequency. Additionally, some of the focus group participants identified collaborative efforts in the area of emergency

preparedness and disaster response. Regardless of the type of disaster, several participants spoke of mutual aid agreements, providing assistance to other jurisdictions in service areas affected by the disaster (e.g. road maintenance, snow removal, fire protection, police protection, emergency medical services), and providing manpower to enable affected jurisdictions to provide work relief for their own employees.

Another service area where collaboration is currently occurring is that of road maintenance. Entering into contracts for maintaining roadways with other jurisdictions is another example of collaboration. Several local governments have entered into a joint agreement for engineering services. And finally, one focus group participant discussed collaborative efforts among multiple jurisdictions in the course of applying for competitive infrastructure financing grants through the Ohio Public Works Commission (OPWC). These collaborative efforts were designed to strengthen their grant applications in the hopes of increasing their chances of securing funding during the grant application process.

Economic development is yet another service area where local government collaboration is already occurring. Formal economic development agreements (such as Joint Economic Development Districts or JEDDs) are in place in several jurisdictions participating in the focus group. A relatively unique collaboration effort was identified as two local governments were part of a joint Main Street program. The center-line of Main Street serves as the border separating a township and

a village; despite the border distinction, both local governments have a formal agreement in place to focus on revitalization efforts along Main Street. Other collaboration efforts in economic development included joint programs and efforts as part of a regional Chamber of Commerce.

Additionally, collaboration efforts were identified in other service areas, including land-use planning, trash hauling, and parks and recreation. Focus group participants cited the development of a comprehensive land-use plan or master plan that would encompass multiple jurisdictions. Several focus group participants indicated that they were part of larger trash hauling districts and had contracts in place for this effort. Also, belonging to multi-jurisdiction park districts were cited as examples of collaboration.

Finally, some of the most unique collaborative efforts focused on cooperative group efforts that were generally designed to produce cost-savings. Group purchasing efforts to reduce the cost of commonly used supplies and materials were identified as well as group purchasing efforts for reduced health insurance premiums. Also mentioned were collaborative efforts on assorted grant applications. The type and amount of collaboration varied depending on the grant application and grant requirements.

As a follow-up question, the participants were then asked, "Can you identify any options that encouraged or incentivized you to collaborate with other local governments?" The majority of respondents to this question indicated that cost-savings were a primary

determinant in the decision to pursue collaboration. Another significant determinant was the ability to provide higher quality services to residents through collaboration. Ideally, collaborative efforts that would do both were the best options—reduce costs while improving service delivery, but respondents also indicated that as long as service delivery levels did not deteriorate after collaboration, that would also be acceptable. Additionally some respondents indicated that collaboration was a unique opportunity for one jurisdiction to be able to tap into an existing expertise in a particular service area. Service areas identified based on this expertise factor included zoning enforcement/building inspection, storm water management, and recreation programs and facilities.

Finally, one township official indicated that their township had embraced collaboration strategies years ago as a means of survival. The perspective was that the township would not be able to survive as an independent entity without collaborative efforts. Collaboration became a strategy for the township to preserve local character and a sense of community. Currently, there is a monthly meeting held in their area which is attended by township officials, village officials, and school district officials to discuss current events and on-going efforts affecting all of these entities. As needed, additional individuals and entities (such as local developers and officials from other jurisdictions) are invited to attend these meetings. In this township, collaborative efforts have evolved into a routinized activity.

In contrast, the participants were also

asked, “Can you identify any options that discouraged you to collaborate with other local governments?” Most of the responses to this question identified individual elected officials as barriers to collaboration. Some of the problems expressed were that elected officials were concerned about ‘turf wars’ with other jurisdictions as well as a loss of local control that would result from collaboration. Another issue raised is that elected officials sometimes express concern that collaboration with another jurisdiction could be taken as a sign of weakness or that there is a sense of inadequacy on the part of the local government’s ability to provide necessary services to its citizens.

The remaining responses to this question were based on individual experiences in which collaboration was considered or attempted, but never came to fruition due to a problem or barrier that could not be overcome. One such example was the inability of a township to enter into an agreement that would have resulted in the creation of a new taxing authority that is prohibited by the Ohio Revised Code. Legal restrictions stymied collaboration in this instance. Another specific example was that townships are only permitted to spend money for the maintenance and upkeep of township roads and do not have the authority to allocate resources to maintain roads that are within the township, but are the responsibility of the County Engineer. Once again, provisions of the Ohio Revised Code stymied collaborative efforts.

The next question posed to the focus group dealt with potential changes to the local

tax structure. Specifically, the participants were asked, “What changes to the local tax structure would encourage you to collaborate more?” The major issue identified in response to this question related to the county level of government. With the structure of county governments having a significant number of elected officials overseeing specific functions of county government, some participants described the county government as a series of individual ‘fiefdoms’ that make it difficult for collaborative efforts in general, but also make it impossible to discuss issues related to fiscal matters.

It should be noted that under the Ohio Revised Code, only incorporated entities (cities and villages) have access to tax the income of residents and/or employees working within the incorporated limits of the city or village. Townships are not permitted to tax income. This was mentioned and echoed by most of the focus group participants as a tax structure limitation affecting townships. Finally, one participant mentioned the inability of townships to provide direct fiscal support to a local historical society. Some potential collaborative efforts with the local historical society have been hampered by this provision of the Ohio Revised Code.

The third question asked of the focus group was, “Through your collaborative efforts, have you identified any alternative service delivery models?” The majority of responses to this question revolved around opportunities for collaboration through formal economic development agreements with other local governments. Nearly half of the focus group

participants indicated that they already had a formal economic development agreement in place or were in the process of negotiating an agreement. Several participants indicated that their township was already involved in multiple formal economic development agreements. A Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) was the most commonly cited form of economic development collaboration. Other collaborative efforts in economic development included a Cooperative Economic Development Agreement (CEDA) as well as Community Reinvestment Areas (CRA). Most of the focus group participants agreed that collaboration on economic development was necessary for a couple of reasons. First, it increased the capacity to develop or re-develop certain areas of their jurisdiction that might not have been possible without the collaborative effort. Secondly, collaboration on economic development was seen as a means of township survival to stave off annexation attempts. This is a unique factor affecting townships and one of the only tools that townships have in their fight against annexation attempts.

The final question posed to the focus group participants asked, “Based on your experiences, are you more likely or less likely to seek out collaboration? Why or why not?” It was fairly evident based on the discussion leading up to this question that the focus group participants were already collaborating in a variety of areas. Most of the participants indicated that their individual township was involved in multiple collaboration efforts across a variety of services. The focus group participants

generally agreed that they were all more likely to collaborate in the future based upon their past experiences. The ability to achieve cost-savings along with static or improved service delivery levels were the over-riding factors influencing future collaboration. Another underlying factor was that once a certain synergy of collaboration could be demonstrated, future collaboration would be more likely to occur. Essentially, some of the aforementioned barriers or hurdles that discouraged collaboration could be dealt with or eliminated which would make future collaborative efforts easier to achieve. Finally, the process of collaboration seems to help build better relationships and communication mechanisms between and among local governments. Improved communication was also cited as a reason for more collaboration in the future on the part of local governments.

Overall, the majority of township officials participating in the focus group expressed a very positive experience with collaborative efforts and will collaborate more in the future. Many of these townships have a greater opportunity for collaboration due to their budget size, population, their geographic location, and the number of services provided to residents. Indeed, the administrative officials that comprised the focus group are best described as exemplary of the Opportunistic Collaborators that one finds among larger, less rural, and less fiscally stressed townships. This gives these townships ample opportunities to seek out collaboration. Summary points:

- Overall positive experience with collaboration;

- Plan to continue to collaborate in the future;
- Opportunities exist for increased collaboration in the future;
- Primary Benefits: cost savings and improved service delivery.

### **Basic Collaborators**

Telephone interviews were conducted with elected officials from the sample of townships that were identified as Basic Collaborators. To qualify as a Basic Collaborator, the local government had to be collaborating only on service delivery in basic areas (such as police, fire, and emergency medical services). A total of eighteen elected township officials responded to the telephone interview. The questions mirrored those used in the focus group.

Since we had already collected data on the types of collaborative efforts that individual townships were involved with, the initial question asked officials to focus on the “options that encouraged or incentivized you to collaborate with other local governments.” The most often cited reason for collaboration was the presence of good relationships with officials from other jurisdictions. Officials who get along well with one another seemed to be a driving force behind collaborative efforts. The next most often cited reason for collaboration was the ability to achieve cost savings. Finally, several officials indicated that collaboration led to improved service delivery.

Conversely, when asked about the “options that discouraged you to collaborate with other local governments,” several respondents

indicated that it was because elected officials were reluctant to collaborate with one another. Similarly, collaboration was also discouraged because one of the potential collaborative partners was too self-interested to willingly collaborate. A couple of officials also cited red tape and County-imposed regulations as impediments to collaboration. Finally, some officials cited concerns about annexation as a factor that discouraged collaboration.

The second question asked respondents “What changes to the local tax structure would encourage your township to collaborate more?” The overwhelming majority of respondents either didn’t have an answer to this question or indicated that they would not make any changes to the local tax structure. The next most common answer to this question was that officials favored any changes to the local tax structure that would result in more money for their township.

The third question of the telephone survey asked, “Through your collaborative efforts, have you identified any alternative service delivery models?” Most officials cited that they had not adopted any alternative service delivery models due to collaboration. Those that identified alternative service delivery models spoke of sharing fire substations/buildings as well as agreements to share in the purchase and maintenance of expensive capital equipment.

The fourth and final question of the telephone survey asked “Based on your past experiences, are you more or less likely to seek out collaboration? Why or why not?” The overwhelming majority of respondents stated that they were more likely to seek out

collaboration in the future. The most commonly cited reasons for future collaboration included: improved service delivery, cost savings, and the ability to exert some control and benefit from growth and development occurring in the region. One respondent indicated that they were likely to maintain the status quo in regards to collaboration, while another respondent was unsure whether their township would be more or less likely to pursue collaboration. Only one respondent indicated a disinclination to collaborate in the future due to a perceived problem with County government. Overall, the overwhelming majority of township officials expressed an overall positive experience with collaborative efforts and look to collaborate more in the future. That being said, the current collaborative efforts that these townships are involved in are fairly basic and relatively non-complex. While these officials are open to future collaboration, they may have limited options for collaboration due to their population, their geographic location, and the fact that they provide a limited number of services to residents. Summary points:

- Overall positive experience with collaboration;
- Plan to continue to collaborate in the future;
- Options and opportunities to collaborate may be limited.

### **Advanced Collaborators**

Telephone interviews were conducted with elected officials from the sample of townships that were identified as Advanced Collaborators.

To qualify as an Advanced Collaborator, the local government had to be collaborating on service delivery in basic areas (such as police, fire, and emergency medical services) while also collaborating in other areas such as being part of a collaborative economic development agreement. A total of nineteen elected township officials responded to the four-question telephone survey. The questions mirrored those used in the focus group.

Since we had already collected data on the types of collaborative efforts that individual townships were involved with, the initial question asked officials to focus on the “options that encouraged or incentivized you to collaborate with other local governments.” The majority of the responses to this question revolved around three main reasons to pursue collaboration: cost-savings, to help citizens, and to improve service delivery. Additionally, the fear of the loss of township land due to annexation was also mentioned as a reason to pursue collaboration.

When asked about the “options that discouraged you to collaborate with other local governments,” the majority of respondents could not provide a direct answer to the question because all of the townships in the Advanced Collaborator category are already involved in multiple collaborative efforts and haven’t experienced any significant setbacks to collaboration. That being said, however, many of the respondents did speak about concerns that were raised during the various debates and discussions about collaborative efforts. Generally, concerns were expressed about the

loss of local control over service delivery, the potential for township consolidation in the future, and that increased regionalism could lead to a loss of autonomy for townships. One respondent indicated skepticism about contractual arrangements for collaboration due to the fear of hidden clauses and stipulations that could be damaging to the township in the long term.

The second question asked respondents “What changes to the local tax structure would encourage your township to collaborate more?” The overwhelming majority of respondents either didn’t have an answer to this question or indicated that they would not make any changes to the local tax structure.

The third question of the telephone survey asked, “Through your collaborative efforts, have you identified any alternative service delivery models?” Most officials cited the basic collaborative efforts that their township was involved in currently such as joint fire districts, joint police services, joint emergency medical services, as well as agreements to share in the purchase and maintenance of expensive capital equipment. Another common response to this question involved collaborative economic development efforts such as JEDDs. One township indicated that they were involved in a public/private partnership for recreational activities. The township was unable to afford constructing their own recreational facility for their citizens, but instead was able to collaborate with four local recreational facilities to offer discounted memberships for township residents. This was the most unique alternative

service delivery model that was identified.

The fourth and final question of the telephone survey asked “Based on your past experiences, are you more or less likely to seek out collaboration? Why or why not?” The overwhelming majority of respondents stated that they were more likely to seek out collaboration in the future. Commonly cited reasons for future collaboration included: the reduction of duplication of services, cost savings, working together benefits all citizens in a region, and collaboration creates more opportunities in general. Some respondents indicated that they were less likely to collaborate in the future due to a fear of regionalism, consolidation, and loss of township control over service delivery, particularly to larger municipalities.

Overall, the majority of township officials expressed an overall positive experience with collaborative efforts and look to collaborate more in the future. It seems that these townships have a greater opportunity for collaboration due to their size, their geographic location, and the fact that they are providing a significant number of services to residents. Threats of annexation make some townships skeptical of collaboration efforts, while others see collaboration as a strategy to stave off annexation. The key to successful collaboration, according to most officials, is that the process is open and above-board, all jurisdictions are included in the process, and no single jurisdiction places an undue burden or tries to unilaterally impose their will on another jurisdiction. Summary points:

- Overall positive experience with

collaboration;

- Plan to continue to collaborate in the future;
- Opportunities exist for increased collaboration in the future;
- Annexation threats make some skeptical about collaboration; while others see collaboration as a mechanism to prevent annexation;
- Successful collaboration comes from good communication, openness, and equality in the process.

### **Opportunistic Collaborators**

The Opportunistic Collaborators are those that directly provide most, if not all, services and have entered into a variety of economic development and collaborative agreements with other localities. It is the direct provision of services that sets these townships apart from the other two categories. These townships also tend to have larger populations; 16,455 is the average population for these Townships—well above the other classifications and even above the average population of the participants in the OTAN Focus Group. We placed 12 townships in this classification. We should note that there were no duplicates between the Townships represented in the Focus Group and the Townships that were included in the phone survey.

When asked what types of collaboration these officials had personally experienced, we heard a variety of responses including: mutual aid agreements, joint purchasing agreements, joint community events (e.g., fireworks), and collaborative planning/development efforts

(e.g., JEDDs). Two unique collaborative efforts involved the donation of fire equipment from one township to another; and a county using township facilities to store equipment.

When asked to identify incentives, three themes emerged. First was the potential for cost savings. All believed the current economic conditions would further incentivize collaborative agreements that resulted in cost savings for the parties involved. A second theme was the need for relationships prior to establishing collaborative efforts. Positive personal relationships built on trust were seen as pre-conditions to collaboration. Finally, an openness to regionalism and “being in this together” provided a significant incentive to collaborate. One respondent indicated that their community was becoming increasingly receptive to “shared response” and not as concerned with what name was on the responding vehicle.

When asked to identify disincentives to collaboration, the relationship theme again played a key role. Without an already developed “comfort level,” collaboration was unlikely to occur. A second disincentive occurs when all parties do not see specific benefits for themselves. Collaboration is unlikely without identifiable cost savings or improved service quality for everyone. One respondent noted that professional staff work (a luxury that these Townships tend to have, relative to others) can often eliminate these disincentives.

The tax structure question yielded little in the way of specific suggestions. Respondents mentioned the level of property taxes as problematic when looking to encourage

development. The impact of state-level reductions (e.g., Local Government Fund) is of concern with the burden falling to local governments. Several respondents indicated these reductions might force them into additional types and amounts of collaboration. One respondent shared their use of language in their TIFs to guarantee payback from owners/developers. When asked about alternative delivery models, respondents referred to various joint partnerships across a range of issues, including emergency management, public health, libraries, and even support of the arts. One respondent noted novel programs for public awareness that have been constructed by the Township working in concert with other levels of government including neighboring townships, county government, and state agencies, as well as with private agencies.

Finally, when asked if they were now more or less likely to collaborate, every respondent indicated more likely. When asked why, every respondent indicated money was the driving force. The economic outlook, potential savings, and benefits of scale were all referenced with respect to money. The notion of collaboration being a win-win was also seen as a motivating factor, and the idea that there are natural synergies among governmental units and private groups in order to address problems that communities share in common. Summary Points:

- Overall positive experience with collaboration;
- Will continue to collaborate in the future;
- See regional approaches to collaboration;

- See public-private partnerships as valuable;
- Primary Benefits: cost savings and improved service delivery.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

We began this study with a fairly simple question, “Does collaboration beget collaboration?” Our working hypothesis, supported by previous research in the field, was that successful collaborative efforts in the past would encourage and ultimately lead to additional collaborative efforts in the future. What we found surprised us and painted a much more complex picture than we might have expected. We offer three key conclusions:

1. Townships in Ohio have in the past and continue to work in a multitude of collaborative arrangements with other levels of government. Not only are there significant levels of collaboration already taking place, there is a strong desire and a willingness to seek even more collaboration in the future. The notion that collaboration does not currently occur, even among rural Townships, is simply a myth that should be put to rest. Collaboration is not a simple concept that should be narrowly defined in the context of informal and formal agreements. Collaboration can range from simple one to one contracts to elaborate agreements covering multiple jurisdictions and complex revenue sharing. This complexity speaks to the resourcefulness of townships and other

local governments and their willingness to find solutions that best serve the citizens of Ohio.

2. Once begun, we found that collaboration moves through a progression that leads not only to additional collaboration but also can potentially move beyond our traditional conceptions of collaboration. The collaborative progression we identified moves from informal to formal agreements; from ad-hoc arrangements to institutionalization; from two jurisdictions to multi-jurisdictions; and from collaboration to co-production/integration.

As the commission continues its work, our research provides some insight into possible recommendations that might facilitate increased inter-jurisdictional collaboration among local governments in Ohio.

- *Continue developing mechanisms that provide financial incentives to local governments to collaborate. Clearly, the ability to achieve economies of scale and efficiency make collaboration much more attractive. However, “front end incentives” seem also to stimulate cooperative efforts. The bonus point rewards for joint grant proposals, e.g. OPWC State Capital Improvement Program and Local Transportation Improvement Program, are exemplary of front end rewards and incentives,*

- *Clearly, educational outreach directed toward elected officials and citizens concerning the positive benefits of interlocal collaboration leads to more collaboration. Consequently, the Commission should contemplate developing informational and educational programs for local officials and citizens that provide relevant and useable knowledge for local officials contemplating collaboration. For example, the Ohio Township Association Leadership Academy has a regular component in its workshop curriculum that focuses on intergovernmental strategies to improve Ohio township governance.*
- *Develop more statutory incentives to promote public/private partnerships. Clearly, “opportunistic collaborators” look for unique conditions to adopt innovative and non-traditional collaborations. For example, quasi-public and quasi-private partnerships such as Community Improvement Corporations and Port Authorities can and do bring non-governmental entities into cooperative ventures that create entrepreneurial market strategies that promote regional approaches to regional problems. At the end of day, local governments feel less compelled to “compete interjurisdictionally” and pursue cooperation across local boundaries under these conditions.*

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