

FOCUS GROUP BRIEF

SEPTEMBER 2011

This brief document provides a short synopsis of the results from focus groups conducted across Illinois as part of an ongoing research project on planning and conservation success in community-based natural resource management initiatives. It is intended for use by on-the-ground practitioners and community leaders to assist in improving the overall capacity of their groups and organizations to meet their own natural resource management goals.

NATALIE J. MOUNTJOY
Southern Illinois University

ERIN SEEKAMP
Southern Illinois University

MAE A. DAVENPORT
University of Minnesota

MATT R. WHILES
Southern Illinois University

MAKING CONSERVATION WORK: IDEAS FROM ON-THE-GROUND PRACTITIONERS

*Focus group results on the components of
successful, locally-based natural resource
management*



Community-based Natural Resource Management & Collaborative Capacity

Community-Based Natural Resource Management. Natural resource management sectors are trending away from adversarial, centralized management towards grass-roots, citizen-led and organized initiatives (Margerum 2007). These efforts are thought to ease tensions between governments (e.g., federal, state, and local) and private landowners (Griffin 1999), increase citizen participation (Foster-Fishman et al. 2007), and better attain sustainable ecological goals (Bradshaw 2003). Although differences exist among these initiatives, all CBNRM efforts share four key principles: 1) stakeholders acknowledge ecosystem health and services as critical to the community; 2) resource decisions are made through collaborative processes, inclusive of people affected by management decisions; 3) equity is sought in the distribution of ecosystem benefits; and 4) citizens and communities are acknowledged as fundamental components of ecosystems (Gray et al. 2001).

Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM)
An approach to foster participation from community members, resource users, and local institutions in decision-making.

Capacity. Although CBNRM has become increasingly popular in the U.S. (Craig 2007), the approach is not without limitations. As control over natural resources devolves to the local level, the question of the capacity of CBNRM initiatives to meet conservation challenges has become increasingly important (Bradshaw 2003, Margerum 2007). CBNRM groups can increase their ability to meet their goals by understanding the core components of capacity. Most models recognize five primary types of capital within the capacity framework: human capital, social capital (bonding and bridging), organizational capital, and economic capital (Table 1). Each capital type can be broken-down further into tangible assets often recognized as indicators.

Capacity
The collective ability of a group to combine various forms of capital within institutional and relational contexts to produce desired results or outcomes.

Table 1. Capacity capital types, definitions and associated indicators

Capital Type	Definition	Indicators from the Literature
Human Capital	Assets brought to the group by its members	education, skills, creativity, leadership, indigenous knowledge, core attitudes, and life experience
Bonding Social Capital	The internal relationships among various stakeholders and groups within the collaboration	trust, reciprocity, shared values, and commitment
Bridging Social Capital	Relationships between the CBNRM collaboration and other groups (e.g., local or state governments)	togetherness, cooperation, valuation of diversity
Organizational Capital	Governance structure within the CBNRM collaboration	group membership structure, meeting protocols, and procedures (e.g., decision making)
Economic Capital	Tangible group assets	physical (vehicles, office space) and financial indicators (financial resources and fundraising)

METHODS

1- COA Selection: We selected five COAs that varied in conservation priorities, identified threats, wildlife and habitat resources, the number of partners involved, financial and human resources available, and in their conservation philosophies and objectives. As many COAs are working together, some of our focus groups included individuals working in multiple COAs.

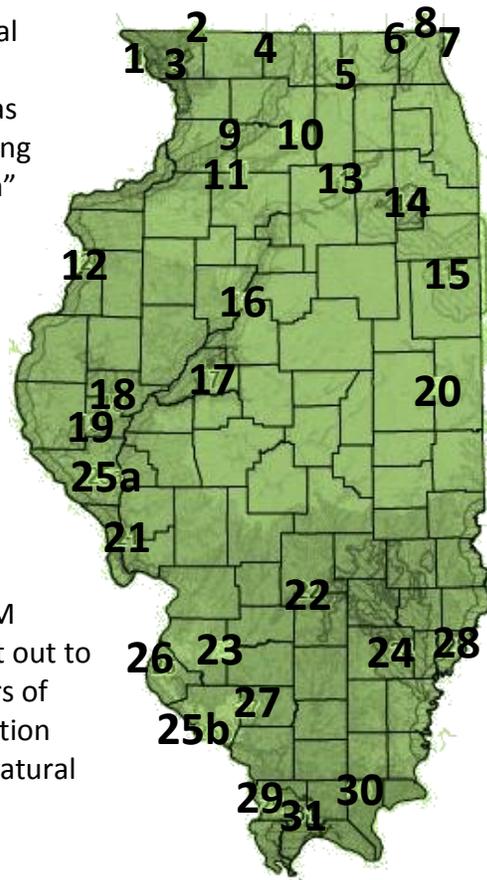
2- Participant Recruitment: We strategically selected invitees based on their affiliations and gender to achieve maximum variation in stakeholder type and experience. Individuals were solicited personally via email, indicating the purpose of the study was to discuss capacity within COAs.

3- Focus Groups: We conducted audio recorded focus groups with individuals working in CBNRM groups across various COAs. The focus groups lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were structured to allow for maximum exploration of the capacity capitals, with a focus on the necessary indicators of successful CBNRM. Participants were encouraged to share examples of successful CBNRM initiatives in their COAs.

Context & Rationale

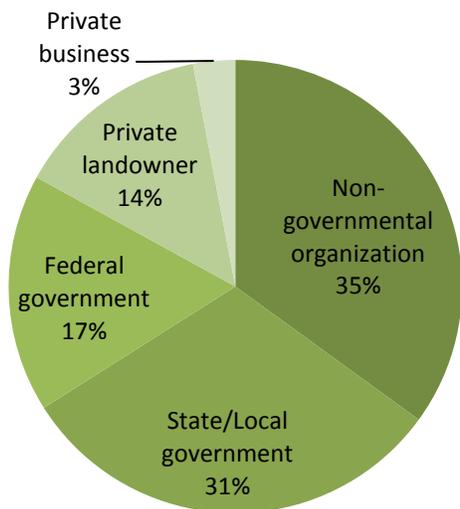
In 2005, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) established thirty-two Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) as locations of high importance for conserving “species in greatest need of conservation” across the state (e.g., species with low and declining populations, IDNR 2005). CBNRM groups are organizing in the COAs, and a recent online survey revealed they vary in their ability to meet their goals, with some groups reporting more success in their collaborative efforts than other groups (Mountjoy et al. 2009).

Using the context provided by the CBNRM groups organizing in Illinois’ COAs, we set out to identify the ten most important indicators of CBNRM group capacity to meet conservation goals under the current contexts facing natural resource management.



Who Participated in the Focus Groups?

Figure 1. Affiliations of focus group participants



Twenty-seven individuals participated in our focus groups (Figure 1). Our focus group size (2-7 participants per session; $\mu=5$) constitutes what are known as mini-focus groups. This type of small focus group is increasing in popularity, and although mini-focus groups may limit the total range of experiences, they allow for more in-depth insights and are preferred when participants have “a great deal to share about the topic or have intense lengthy experiences with the topic of discussion” (Krueger and Casey 2009, p.74).

METHODS

4- Selecting Indicators: Five large sheets of paper were hung, one representing each capital type (Table 1). For each indicator proposed in the focus group, discussion continued until placement within capital type and specific verbiage were agreed upon.

5- Voting: Lastly, participants were asked to individually place a sticker on the two most important indicators, in their opinion, written under each of the five capital types (Table 2). The voting process of sticker placement was not carried out in one focus group due to time constraints. Therefore, the agreement rankings represent five focus groups (n=27) and the importance rankings represent four focus groups (n=19).

6- Combining Results: We developed a series of guidelines to keep grouping, consolidation, and placement consistent as we combined data from the five focus group sessions. The indicators under each capital type were ordered by agreement (e.g., how many groups mentioned each) and by importance (e.g., the total number of stickers on each indicator). The final top ten were selected based on their rankings in each category.

The Focus Group Results

Table 2. List of important indicators of CBNRM group capacity

Capital Type	Rank Ordered by Agreement (n=27) [†]	Rank Ordered by Importance (n=19) [‡]
Human Capital	Motivation (5) [§] Leadership (5) [§] Staff/volunteers (5) Member/stakeholder diversity (4) Knowledge/skills (3) Success/productivity (2)	Motivation (16) [§] Leadership (15) [§] Knowledge/ skills (10) Member/stakeholder diversity (4) Staff/volunteers (3)
Bonding Social Capital	Respect/trust (3) [§] Mutual interests/shared values (3) [§] Continuing education (2) No ego involved (2) Encourage participation (2)	Respect/trust (8) [§] Mutual interests/shared values (2) [§] Continuing education (2) Shared outcomes/goals (2) Continuing education (2) Recognize good contributions (1)
Bridging Social Capital	Outreach/education (4) [§] Marketing (4) [§] Reputation (3) Conflict management (3) Include diverse groups (2) Partnerships (2)	Outreach/education (11) [§] Reputation (6) Include diverse groups (6) Partnerships (5) Marketing (3) [§]
Organizational Capital	Plan (5) [§] Communication (4) [§] Clear roles (3) Political capacity (3) Funding requests (3) Regular meetings (2) Organization/ coordination (2)	Plan (11) [§] Communication (9) [§] Clear Roles (4) Political capacity (2) Funding requests (2)
Economic/ Built Capital	Funding (5) [§] Equipment/supplies (2) [§]	Funding (21) [§]

[†] Ordered by the number of focus groups in which the indicator was mentioned (recorded in parentheses). The indicator was listed if it was mentioned in more than one focus group. If the same number of focus groups listed various indicators (i.e., equal agreement), they were ordered in the list secondarily by importance. Agreement rankings are from five focus groups (n=26).

[‡] Ordered by the number of stickers each indicator received (in parentheses). The indicator was listed if it received 2 or more stickers and was listed by at least two focus groups. If equal numbers of stickers were on various indicators (i.e., equal importance), they were ordered secondarily by agreement. Importance rankings were not conducted in one focus group due to time constraints, therefore, the importance rankings are from four focus groups (n=19).

Top 10 Indicators of CBNRM Group Capacity: Key Terms & Quotes from the Focus Groups & Recommendations

HUMAN CAPITAL

1- Motivation: Shining lights, focus/willing to work together, enthusiasm, catalyst, energetic

"[You need] key individuals to champion efforts...who can rally the troops and get everyone involved"

Motivation is inextricably linked with leadership, as evidenced by the comments from our focus groups. Our results indicate strong, committed leadership that serve as champions for the cause can increase energy and create a contagious atmosphere of enthusiasm. These characteristics in combination with an enhanced ability to work together will be most successful.

2- Leadership: Commitment and dedication, succession, core leadership group

"If you've got a good leader and dedicated people then you can get an awful lot of stuff done"

Leadership has been described as the most important attribute in the toolbox of conservation science, and Gruber (2010) found that leadership is imperative for successful CBNRM. Given CBNRM collaboration within the COAs is relatively new, motivation and leadership are particularly important as novel groups attempt to organize and rally around a cause.

BONDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

3- Respect: Mutual respect, listening, trust

"A mutual respect...professionalism. Listening on both sides. Hopefully they... can trust each other"

Respect is viewed as a necessary, yet rarely reported requirement for communities to work together to meet common objectives (Mendis-Millard and Reed, 2007). Our participants discussed "listening" and "mutual respect" as fundamental. As CBNRM groups organize, they should participate in efforts to increase respect and trust among new members, thus building their bonding social capital.

4- Mutual Interest/Shared Values: Shared outcomes, common ground, same page, like-minded

"Some kind of shared interest in end results...I also like the things you're trying to accomplish"

Our participants focused on having a "shared interest in end results." CBNRM groups that are unable to foster shared values or work from the interests of those involved are often plagued with disinterest and apathy (Davenport et al. 2010). On the contrary, according to our results, facilitating shared values and interest can lead to the development of agreed upon outcomes and may increase capacity.

BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL

5- Outreach/Education: Support from community and resource users, outreach to diverse groups

"The group needs to ...effectively outreach to the community, seek out collaboration and cooperation"

Participants saw outreach in building external relationships as vital, emphasizing "collaboration" and "cooperation" within the community and with diverse groups, and "not preaching to the choir." Building public trust and legitimacy is critical for CBNRM initiatives (Gruber 2010); a lack of transparency and information sharing on behalf of the collaborative can degrade public support.

Top 10 Indicators of CBNRM Group Capacity: Key Terms, Quotes from the Focus Groups & Recommendations

BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL CONTINUED

6- Marketing: Selling your product to the community, brand/logo, social events, public relations & the press

"[If you can't] get [your message] out to the other groups ... it's not going to work."

Regarding both indicators of bridging capital, participants emphasized interacting with groups or stakeholders that may not share the objectives of the CBNRM group. CBNRM groups that identify these segments within the community at large and engage them in successful outreach and marketing strategies will increase their capacity, expand their networks and increase public support.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPITAL

7- Plan: Adaptive plan, long-term vision, stated goals and objectives, clear plan, long-term goals

"You need a defined plan with goals and objectives [for] people to allocate funds to you"

Gruber (2010) argues that establishing "a shared holistic vision/plan that anticipates probable environmental, social, and economic outcomes" is imperative for CBNRM groups to achieve their goals (p. 57). As a first step, developing CBNRM initiatives should create plans that articulate strategies and responsibilities for accomplishing goals and monitoring progress (Foster-Fishman et al. 2007).

8- Communication: Between leadership and others, within and between organizations

"You [need] clear communication from top to bottom, and then in reverse, from the bottom up"

Statements emphasized "communication from top to bottom" and from and between "nested groups," which demonstrates the importance of within group and across group communication. CBNRM groups can build their communication network by distributing information in various ways and by teaching communication and listening strategies to organizational members.

ECONOMIC CAPITAL

9- Funding: What's available, political support monies, government funds and tax dollars, adaptive funding

"There are significant funding gaps that are literally changing the environment for us"

The importance of funding to any CBNRM group cannot be overstated; it is an optimal pre-condition for success (Gruber 2010). Most CBNRM groups rely on public grants from federal and state agencies or NGOs for financial support, and the ability of CBNRM groups to create and take advantage of such economic opportunities will be vital to success.

10- Equipment & Supplies: Equipment, website, office supplies

Equipment, maps, [and] all the references and technical stuff you really need to have.

Equipment and supplies are a recognized physical component of built capital (Mendis-Millard and Reed 2007). Facilitating network development via bridging capital within the COAs could greatly increase access to both funding and equipment (Foster-Fishman et al. 2001 and references therein).

References

- Bradshaw, B. 2003. Questioning the credibility and capacity of community-based resource management. *The Canadian Geographer* 47(2):137-150.
- Chaskin, R. 1999. *Defining community capacity: a framework and implications from a comprehensive community initiative*. Chapin Hall Center for Children, Chicago, Illinois, USA.
- Craig, G. 2007. Community capacity-building: something old, something new. *Critical Social Policy Ltd* 27(3):335-359.
- Davenport, M., C. Bridges, J. Mangun, A. Carver, K. Williard, and E. Jones. 2010. Building local community commitment to wetlands restoration: a case study of the Cache River wetlands in southern Illinois, USA. *Environmental Management* 45(4):711-722.
- Foster-Fishman, P.G., S. L. Berkowitz, S. J. Lounsbury, and N. A. Allen. 2001. Building collaborative capacity in community coalitions: a review and integrative framework. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 29(2):241-261.
- Foster-Fishman, P., D. Cantillon, S. Pierce, and L. VanEgeren. 2007. Building an active citizenry: the role of neighborhood problems, readiness, and capacity for change. *American Journal of Community* 39:91-106.
- Gray, G. J., L. Fisher, and L. Jungwirth. 2001. An introduction to community-based ecosystem management. *Journal of Sustainable Forestry* 12(3):25-34.
- Griffin, C. B. 1999. Watershed councils: an emerging form of public participation in natural resource management. *Journal of the American Water Resources Association* 35(3):505-518.
- Gruber, J. S. 2010. Key principles of community-based natural resource management: a synthesis and interpretation of identified effective approaches for managing the commons. *Environmental Management* 45:52-66.
- Margerum, R. D. 2007. Overcoming locally based collaboration constraints. *Society and Natural Resources* 20(2):135-152.
- Mendis-Millard, S., and M. G. Reed. 2007. Understanding community capacity using adaptive and reflexive research practices: lessons from two Canadian biosphere reserves. *Society and Natural Resources* 20(6):543-559.
- Mountjoy, N. J., M. A. Davenport, D. J. Myers, and M. R. Whiles. 2009. An assessment of Illinois Conservation Opportunity Areas: stakeholders' perspectives on conservation planning, implementation, and threats. Technical report for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Questions? Contact:

Natalie J. Mountjoy at
mountjoy@siu.edu, or
natalie_179@hotmail.com

How Can Your CBNRM Group Use This Report?

Our results have practical applications for CBNRM groups and individuals interested in building or assessing the capacity of such organizations. It is our hope that local CBNRM groups can use these results in various ways along the continuum from initial group formation, to rebuilding or revitalizing, and on through maturation and continued monitoring (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Potential ways CBNRM groups could use this report



Summary

The aim of our study was to develop a top ten list of indicators of CBNRM group capacity, reflective of current, on-the-ground conditions. We found a high level of congruence between the levels of agreement and importance among nine of the top ten indicators (motivation, leadership, respect, mutual interest/shared values, outreach/education, communication, planning, funding, and equipment/supplies). The remaining indicator, marketing, was supported by high level of agreement. Additionally, all forty indicators identified undoubtedly influence the capacity of CBNRM groups. It is our hope that these results can assist CBNRM groups in increasing their capacity to meet their own natural resource management goals.