

Developing A ‘Web of Action’ for Children’s Environmental Health in New Brunswick

The New Brunswick
Children’s Environmental Health (CEH) Collaborative

A Narrative Description and Analysis

FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT

Prepared for:

The Strategic Committee of the
New Brunswick Children’s Environmental Health Collaborative

By

Bonnie Hamilton Bogart, B.N., M.Ed.
Consultant in Public Health, Environmental Health and Social Development
Village of Gagetown, New Brunswick E5M 1H8
Tel: (506) 488-1888

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Developing A ‘Web of Action’ for Children’s Environmental Health in New Brunswick

Introduction

In May of 2005, a core group of New Brunswick organizations and agencies (the Planning Committee) began discussions on ways to reduce children’s exposure to environmental contaminants that may cause illness, disability, disease or death. From these early conversations, the idea emerged to create a broad network of New Brunswick agencies interested in working together on this issue. On November 21, 2006, through a participatory process, approximately 50 people from diverse agencies and sectors across the province gathered to develop a vision and mission statement. By the end of the day, the commitment was made to work toward an Action Strategy for children in New Brunswick. The “collaborative effort” was officially underway.

Today, this network is comprised of more than 300 individuals representing nearly 100 agencies – including 3 levels of government, non-government organizations, educational institutions, private sector agencies and individuals. Thus, there is in New Brunswick today a broad scope of influence somewhat akin to a ‘web of action’ around children’s environmental health. These individuals and agencies have all indicated that they would like to remain connected with the activities of the Collaborative, whether it is by receiving periodic bulletins through the listserv, attending province-wide meetings, leading an action team, participating on an action team or participating at the Strategic Committee level. Stakeholders come together in a spirit of mutual cooperation and contribute to the effort to whatever extent they can. Agencies pool resources, expertise, knowledge and experience and build upon each other’s strengths with the shared goal of making a positive impact on children’s environmental health in New Brunswick. And significantly, committed individuals in all walks of life work within their own spheres of influence to effect positive change for children’s environmental health.

In the seven years since its inception, the Collaborative has achieved some important milestones, including the development of a collaborative model, a strategy for action, an implementation plan and concrete outcomes based on the plan.

Given the rapid growth of the Collaborative, and the forward momentum it has demonstrated, the Strategic Committee overseeing the work of the Collaborative felt it timely to conduct an initial evaluation of the Collaborative. Health Canada subsequently commissioned the evaluation, which would document the narrative of the Collaborative thus far and develop an evaluation framework and tools for future use.

This paper deals only with the narrative portion of the evaluation. Its purpose is two-fold:

1. To contribute to an enhanced understanding of the activities and progress of the New Brunswick Children’s Environmental Health Collaborative to date, including lessons learned and thoughts for the future; and
2. To provide an analysis of the approach used by the Collaborative to achieve community engagement.

Methodology

The overall approach to developing this narrative uses a loose form of the ‘Constructivist Grounded Theory’ approach. It sees new knowledge as being ‘socially produced’, that is, through the dynamic interplay of the current times, social conditions and interactions. It emphasizes and embraces the inter-relationship between the researcher and participant. The researcher, rather than being a distant observer, becomes immersed in the data, while co-creating the narrative together with the respondents¹.

In this spirit, all information collected was grouped into categories or themes as they emerged from the data, then interpreted and presented collectively in a way that attempts to be faithful to the respondents’ voices.

Several means of data collection were used:

1. A brief review of historical and current documents relevant to the New Brunswick Children’s Environmental Health Collaborative
2. A standardized interview via teleconference with the Collaborative Strategic Committee and Team leaders, and
3. A standardized interview questionnaire administered to 15 key informants. They were asked to state their preference regarding how they would like to complete the questionnaire. Five informants were available for a focus group. Six preferred a telephone interview and four preferred to complete the questionnaire and submit it by email.

The story and its meanings unfold as the data from these sources is collated, analyzed and interpreted under the following themes:

1. Beginnings
2. Who makes up the Collaborative?
3. Finding Common Ground
4. Drafting the Strategy for Action
5. Building the Collaborative Model
6. Resourcing the Collaborative
7. Implementing the Strategy
8. Communicating the Message
9. Impacts, Outcomes and Stories
10. Looking to the Future: Thoughts from the participants

Limitations

The evaluation was limited by the short time-frame allocated by Health Canada, based on its available funding.

The Story

1. Beginnings: Planting the Seeds of Collaboration

Factors Favouring the Development of a Collaborative Effort

In late 2004, early 2005, several factors converged to favour the appearance of the issue of children's environmental health on the policy agenda in New Brunswick.

1. High profile provincial issues linking environment and health

Environmental health was propelled into public awareness with a number of related issues, such as health concerns of the citizens of Belledune related to emissions from the Belledune Generating Station.

2. Committed people and organizations

Committed individuals and organizations in the province independently identified this topic as one of concern, e.g., the New Brunswick Environmental Network (NBEN), the Conservation Council of New Brunswick (CCNB), New Brunswick Lung Association, Canadian Cancer Society, NB Partners in Agriculture, and some physicians, particularly those in paediatrics at the Saint John Regional Hospital. All recognized the special vulnerability of children to the effects of chemical pollutants in the air, soil, water and food. This vulnerability was supported by the scientific literature², but at that moment in time, the literature showing reason for concern for children's health had not yet become broadly recognized.

3. Action on independent fronts

Tentative first steps to gain momentum on the topic began in 2005. Between March 2005 and June 2006, the NBEN and the New Brunswick Lung had hosted, independently, three public sessions to increase awareness and build commitment for action. (See Table 1: Beginnings).

4. Policy development and action at the regional and national levels

National bodies had also begun to introduce initiatives in 2005, as identified in the NBEN Backgrounder (July, 2006). Toronto Public Health and the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and the Environment launched major public awareness and education initiatives in September of 2005. They called for research, policies and advocacy for children that would be protective of children's health, as well as education for parents, parents-to-be and everyone with responsibility for children's well-being. Health Canada, through the Safe Environments Program, set out a workplan to strengthen the evidence base and promote action to reduce risk.

5. New Brunswick experiments in collaborative models

In initiatives prior to 2005, two New Brunswick groups, the Anti-Tobacco Coalition and the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Alliance, had developed collaborative models that they were using in their respective organizations to achieve their aims.

*Table 1 (next page) describes the milestone events toward an initial first meeting of stakeholders in November 2006.

**Table 1: Beginnings: Planting the Seeds of Collaboration
March 2005 – November 2006**

| Date | Event | Description |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| March 2005 | “Our Children’s Health: Does Environmental Quality Matter?” | Hosted by NBEN. Attended by various sectors including health care professionals, policy makers, childcare workers, teachers and environmental groups. |
| May 2005 | Planning Committee of New Brunswick organizations and agencies | Discussions on developing a strategy for action to reduce children’s exposure to environmental contaminants that may affect health. |
| November 2005 | “Straight Talk on Children’s Health and the Environment” | Lunch ‘n’ Learn hosted by the Greater Saint John Community Foundation and the New Brunswick Lung Association |
| June 2006 | “The Environment and the Health of Children” | Co-hosted by the New Brunswick Lung Association and the Policy Studies Centre at the University of New Brunswick |
| July 2006 | Potential long terms goals identified by Planning Committee | Potential Long Term Goals: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement action strategy. 2. Provide a cleaner and healthier environment for children. 3. Assess incoming data on this issue and take action when necessary. 4. Lobby for increased study in this area to facilitate appropriate decision making processes and policies. 5. Develop or encourage the development of children’s environmental health indicators |
| July – November, 2006 | Communications and outreach to diverse sectors | Key members of the planning committee - intensive communications strategy, including a Backgrounder |
| November 21, 2006 | “Children’s Environmental Health: Developing a Strategy for Action” | Draft vision and mission developed; a beginning list of priorities for action; commitment to continue collaborating. # attending: 53 participants from 37 agencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health-related NGOs • Environmental NGOs • Agriculture NGOs • Education sector (parents and teachers – Anglophone and francophone) • Government sector, federal (Public Health Agency of Canada, Environment Canada, Service Canada), provincial (Health, Public Health, Environment, Social Development and Education), municipal (Doaktown) • Regional Health Authorities • Physicians • Nurses • Nutrition sector • Family Resource Centres (francophone) • First nations • Youth Council • University (francophone) |

Respondents’ Perspectives

The first public workshop on the topic, “Our Children’s Health: Does Environmental Quality Matter?”, hosted by the NBEN in March of 2005, planted the seeds of change and brought diverse sectors together, including health care professionals, policy makers, childcare workers, teachers and environmental groups. Respondents recalled that it was at this workshop that two key leaders, Mary Ann Coleman (New Brunswick Environmental Network) and Lynn Ann Duffley (Canadian Cancer Society), began a conversation on collaborating - as opposed to competing - that would lead to the formation of the New Brunswick Collaborative Effort for Children’s Environmental Health. At the workshop, Lynn Ann issued a challenge to find new ways of working with all partners, in which each had an equal voice. She offered to assist the NBEN with developing the concept of a collaborative model, and Mary Ann followed up with Lynn Anne after the conference.

After several conversations, Lynn Ann, Mary Ann and women from other sectors gathered together “around the kitchen table” to think about ways they could work more effectively together using a collaborative approach.

This was the first ‘meeting of the minds’ where all expressed similar concerns and hope for the future of their children and grandchildren. The warm setting, common vision, passion and kinship stood out in the minds of the respondents as they recalled this early meeting. With the New Brunswick Environmental Network as its nucleus, this key group of “highly committed people” worked hard over the next several months - communicating its message of children’s environmental health, reaching out to diverse sectors, and putting forward the idea of collaborating to achieve shared goals. They spoke of their early efforts as “working with peoples’ hearts”, drawing on a universal ethic of society’s responsibility to care for its young.

“We worked with people’s hearts.”

Respondents described conditions that favoured the development of the Collaborative:

- 1) a greater awareness of the impact of environmental health issues (both in the community and in some areas of government)
- 2) the commitment and expertise of the core group, led by Mary Ann Coleman;
- 3) the involvement of Lynn Anne Duffley and her expertise in collaborative approaches; and committing to a collaborative model;
- 4) the subject itself – a “heart-felt subject.”
- 5) dedicated time spent on front-end planning prior to the initial call for participation (developing potential goals, thinking about the strategy, anticipating the challenges of a diverse membership and figuring out processes to address challenges.)

Challenges

Respondents described these challenges: a lack of time, having to wear a lot of hats and do collaborative work “off the sides of their desks”, getting the message out, articulating common ground and finding a critical mass. Finger-pointing had to be dealt with constructively. The ultimate challenge was to create spaces that would not be divisive but would foster understanding and cooperation.

Lessons Learned

“Working with peoples’ hearts” was effective. People responded to the message with emotion, passion and commitment.

Timing was right. The many independent initiatives, the mounting scientific evidence, the coming together of people with a common vision, whose commitment and initiative were described as “contagious” – all of this contributed to a state of readiness for action in New Brunswick.

References

¹ Mills, J, Bonner, A and Francis, K. The Development of Constructivist Grounded Theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 2006; 5 (1): 25-35. Accessed at: <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/article/view/4402/3795> (March 23, 2012).

² This scientific literature included the first textbook to focus on environmental threats to child health. *Child Health and the Environment* was written in 2003 by a Canadian physician and scientist, Donald T. Wigle, senior medical advisor in the Health Canada Safe Environments Program, Adjunct Professor in Epidemiology at the University of Ottawa, member of the National Cancer Institute of Canada’s Advisory Committee on Cancer Control.

2. The Roots of Collaboration

A broad diversity of sectors involved in a collaboration adds to the potential for creative problem-solving and opportunities to leverage resources and knowledge. It can draw additional supporters to the collaborative effort³.

Table 2: Roots of Collaboration

| Sectors | Nov 2006 | Oct 2007 | Feb 2008 | Jan 2010 | Nov 2010 | Nov 2011 |
|----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Agriculture | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 2. Day Care/Pre-school | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | 1 |
| 3. Education (District) | 2 | - | 3 | - | - | 1 |
| Education (post-secondary) | 2 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Education (parent/teacher) | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 4. Environmental NGO (NB) | 6 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 5 | 5 |
| Environmental NGO (national) | - | - | - | 1 | - | - |
| 5. Family Resource Centre | - | - | - | 4 | 5 | 1 |
| 6. First Nations | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | - | 2 |
| 7. Government-NB | 8 | 6 | 9 | 15 | 14 | 6 |
| 8. Government-federal | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 1 |
| 9. Government-municipal | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | - |
| 10. Health NGO (NB) | 4 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 8 | 2 |
| Health NGO (national) | - | - | - | 1 | - | - |
| 11. Independent Individual | - | - | - | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| 12. MD | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| 13. Nurse | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 7 | 5 |
| 14. Nutritionist | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| 15. Political Party | - | - | - | 1 | - | - |
| 16. Private Sector | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| 17. Professional Association | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| 18. Regional Health Authority | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 19. University | 3 | 3 | 3 | 9 | 7 | 3 |
| 20. Youth / Getting Kids Outside | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |

Participating Sectors

The most recent statistics provided by the New Brunswick Environmental Network indicate that over time, the Collaborative has attracted over 300 individuals from nearly 100 different agencies in the province and beyond, who are still interested in staying in touch with the Collaborative. Most of these individuals and agencies have retained their name on the listserv.

Table 2 attempts to document the people who have been drawn to this work and their sectors. It describes the number of people from each sector who have attended the six province-wide meetings. While these meetings do not define the Collaborative as a whole, they do provide a snapshot of the trends in participation by the twenty sectors over time.

From the table, we can see where participation is strong or moderate, where it has been maintained, and where it can be improved.

1. Strong participation

Strongest participation is seen from the government sectors. Provincial government participation has grown steadily over the years and peaking at 14 participants in 2010, from these departments: Health (6) Environment (3), Education (2), Wellness Culture and Sport (1), Social Development (1), Agriculture and Aquaculture (1), Ombudsman / Child and Youth Advocate (1). Federal government participation has remained steady at between 3 and 5 participants each year, except for 2011. The drop-off in numbers in 2011 can be attributed in part to date changes and short notice.

Representatives from universities have been growing in numbers, reaching a peak in January 2010 with 9 participants – from the University of New Brunswick (Fredericton and Saint John campuses), Université de Moncton, Université du Québec, Université de Montréal and the Dalhousie University School of Medicine.

2. Moderate participation

The environmental non-government organization (NGO) sector was strongly represented in the early years, with as many as 10 participants in 2007. However, participation has dropped off in recent years to five participants.

Health NGOs have been moderately represented, with numbers reaching a high of 8 at the November 2010 meeting. However, most of these participants were from two NGOs - the New Brunswick Lung Association and the Canadian Cancer Society. More recently, the Healthy Families, Healthy Communities Association have participated as well as the Healthy Eating Physical Activity Coalition of NB (HEPAC). Recently, the Canadian Cancer Society stepped down from the Strategic Committee and was not represented at the 2011 province-wide meeting.

3. Steady participation

Maintaining their participation at consistent levels over the 6 years are these sectors: Agriculture NGOs, First Nations and nurses. However, one respondent noted: “There is a need to recruit more nurses, as the environmental aspects to nursing practice are growing each year, and students need to learn.”

4. Needs improvement

Improvement is needed in participation rates of the following sectors:

- Education and Early Child Development– This government department was never fully committed to the vision and mission of the Collaborative. Since the early child development mandate was transferred to Education, there is a more pressing need for their involvement. A respondent noted that “the Department is currently doing a strategic plan for Early Childhood Education (birth to 8 years), and the Collaborative should find a way to be involved.” She also noted: “the Director on the francophone side is Nicole Gervais and the Collaborative should be working with her.”
- Social Development – This government department has had some representation around early childhood, but a stronger presence is needed. The issue of housing is fundamentally related to the health of children, and has had no representation.
- Day Care sector – There has been sporadic participation from this sector, perhaps due to their working conditions and inability to take professional development days. Creative ways need to be developed to reach this group with information and tools. A respondent noted: “The Collaborative should link with a bilingual group of early childhood educators, led by Marjolaine St. Pierre, which is networked across the province. They are doing training and are in the process of becoming accredited.”
- Family Resource Centres – This sector has been represented periodically, but it needs to be embraced as a key component of public awareness and education strategies going forward.
- Municipal governments – Doaktown was represented regularly at province-wide meetings, while Moncton, Saint John and Bathurst each attended one province-wide meeting. “Increasing representatives from the municipal sector (for example, the City of Fredericton) might be one way to improve the mix.”
- Health-related NGOs – A stronger outreach is needed to health organizations focusing on healthy living as well as chronic diseases that have been linked to early exposures to hazardous chemicals/pollution (e.g., cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, impacts on the brain [Alzheimers’ and Parkinson’s disease], cancer and respiratory disease). The Healthy Families, Healthy Communities Association and HEPAC (Healthy Eating Physical Activity Coalition of NB) have participated at one recent meeting.
- Physicians – Paediatricians in the province have remained interested, but on the Collaborative’s periphery. Creative ways of involving them need to be developed (e.g., asking them to present at a province-wide meeting.)
- Nutritionists – This represents a large, untapped resource of influence, important information, tools and access to growing families.
- Professional Associations – Nurses and physicians, as well as public health inspectors, epidemiologists, teachers and day care workers – these associations all have an important role.

- Political parties – All parties are important to building public discourse.
- Private sector – The food and petroleum industries are particularly relevant.
- Regional Health Authorities – This is where public health is lodged in New Brunswick; build support at the management level.
- Youth – this group is the most critical participant, due to the vested interest of youth in their future. One respondent urged the Collaborative to “recruit more students”. Since the Youth Council was dissolved, there has not been an ongoing youth representative. The new strategic goal of ‘getting kids outside’ requires the perspective of new participants.

Respondents’ Perspectives

The diversity of participation is regarded as a major success of the Collaborative, particularly with respect to the three government sectors. Respondents noted that government officials do not have many options for participating in grass-roots initiatives, because of the tendency for them to be “put on the hot seat”. In this model, all participants are at the table in a spirit of problem-solving, bringing their best contributions to the issue. Respondents summed it up in these words: “The confrontational piece does not exist.”

“The confrontational piece does not exist.”

The Collaborative, as currently constructed, provides access and perspective between government and community, aiding in mutual understanding. Respondents generally concluded that the Collaborative did a good job of putting together a process that allows government to be engaged in the broader issues, while still providing a forum for participating groups to speak on specific issues.

“The mix and diversity of sectors in the Collaborative is an example to be followed. It is quite remarkable . . . I always use the Collaborative as an example of an ecosystem approach to health”. Another respondent noted, “The knowledge gained can be applied across a broad spectrum of agencies – from the home setting to entire systems.”

For researchers using the participatory research approach, the Collaborative provides fertile ground for using trans-disciplinary approaches to link health and environment. One researcher commented that the Collaborative has changed the way she does her research. Now her research is informed by the perspectives of both the academic and non- academic sectors.

“The Collaborative has changed the way I do research.”

For participants generally, the cross-sectoral diversity provided an incentive for attending meetings. Participants noted tangible rewards, such as: the opportunities for networking in their field of interest, the social aspect of meeting with people who share similar passions, the learnings that resulted from the programming of the province-wide meetings, and the tangible tools and information that was shared.

Challenges

Government officials were reluctant to come on board with the Collaborative in the early recruiting stages. However, through the persistent messaging from the New Brunswick Environmental Network that the intention of the project was to learn what was going on in the field and to work together, not to put government officials in the hot seat or “on the chopping block”. This message appeared to have the desired effect of removing barriers to their participation.

There are challenges in having such a wide range of participants – “to keep everyone satisfied and on the same page.” “With such a mix of people in a loose coalition, how is it possible to bring an initiative to the attention of the government? If you try to take it up through departments, it is usually not successful, unless it aligns with the strategic directions of their department and overall government.”

There are still gaps in the scope and reach of the initiative. In addition to the sectors listed on page 11, the Collaborative needs to:

- “Attract more men.” Look at the roots of this imbalance – “is it related to the composition of organizations sending participants? Organizational commitment? Parenthood?” “Through communication strategies, target men by showing the relationship between issues like radon exposure, diesel exhaust, etc. to the health of children.” Use the ‘fatherhood’ card – the father’s role being to “anticipate risks, protect their children from harm”.
- “Build capacity in French.” A respondent noted: “There are existing early childhood networks across the francophone population that the Collaborative could use to disseminate their messages.”
- Develop a plan for recruiting and retaining participants who are committed to delivering on the Strategic plan.

“Attract more men.”

“Build capacities in French.”

Lessons Learned

Cross-sectoral diversity is very attractive to government agencies, and has a resulting snowball effect. Persistent and ongoing recruitment of specific people from various departments and agencies is needed to ensure diversity.

Recruiting and retaining a broad range of stakeholders is critical to maintaining the momentum generated to date. Maintaining this diversity requires ongoing effort to bring in groups that have been under-represented and even stakeholders who have not yet participated. Keeping the broad scope of representation will require focused attention and monitoring over time.

References

³ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation. Towards an Environmental Justice Collaborative Model: An Evaluation of the Use of Partnerships to Address Environmental Justice Issues in Communities. Washington, DC: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, January 2003, p.47.

3. Finding Common Ground

Common ground, with its mutually agreed upon goals and shared vision, helps the collaborators to understand the scope of the collaboration, where their skill set fits best, and what sorts of benefits may be realized for their organizations⁴.

From the beginning, the Collaborative was founded on the common ground of a shared vision and passion. The values of the “small and diverse core group with expertise” (Planning Committee) were in solid alignment with the vision and mission of the emerging Collaborative.

The Planning Committee proceeded systematically with its plans to create a “coalition” of stakeholders. They took the time to find a common ground with the many stakeholders who would ultimately become drawn to the work of the Collaborative.

The list below attempts to follow their path to the common ground:

- They were willing to look at new ways of working with groups to catalyze change, and jumped at the opportunity to work with an expert on the collaborative process.
- They documented and outlined their collaborative process, creating an expectation that revisions would be added when it was presented to the larger group.
- They practiced what they preached, using the collaborative approach within the Planning Committee.
- They developed communication tools/backgrounders.
- They reached out systematically to relevant sectors.
- They listened to participants at early meetings and followed up on suggestions.
- Decisions were made according to an agreed consensus model.
- Within the larger group, they used ‘dot-mocracy’ – a democratic and visual way to identify themes and preferences within a large group.
- They developed an inventory of current initiatives being undertaken in relevant sectors, and mapped them against the goals of the strategy. This identified whether the current priorities of agencies and organizations aligned with the goals of the Collaborative.

Respondents’ Perspectives on Common Ground

Common ground is found when the individuals from diverse sectors achieve a shared understanding of the purpose and mission of the Collaborative, and when this understanding aligns well with their personal and professional goals and those of the organizations they represent. This question of shared goals and alignment was explored with the Strategic Committee, key informants and participants from these perspectives:

- the level of shared understanding perceived by the respondents
- the individual’s and the organization’s alignment with goals of Collaborative, and

- the degree of agency support for the participant’s involvement.

1. Level of shared understanding perceived by the respondents

All respondents agreed that the Collaborative did achieve a good level of shared understanding that resonated with everyone involved in the earliest meetings. That purpose was identified as the need for a “coalition of groups to develop a coordinated action strategy to protect children’s environmental health”.

The seeds of the Collaborative’s culture were sown in early meetings of the Planning Committee. The existence of a shared purpose was reflected in shared values and principles guiding action. “Openness” in developing the collaborative process, “helping each other”, “a sense of trust,” a “safe place”, “a solution-based approach”, were frequently mentioned by respondents. These still exist today in the Collaborative’s culture.

Below are some relevant comments:

- “It was wonderful to work with people with a shared purpose and passion. I felt I was exactly where I should be.”
- “Even though the people in the core group were the authors and architects of the process, they were open to others’ insights and comments, and this built trust. This established how the work would be done going forward.”
- “The core group provided “a solution-based, safe place where everyone’s contribution was valued.”
- “The idea of working in the white spaces* resonated”.
- “The idea of helping each other [in the “white spaces”] became part of the culture of the Collaborative.”
- “It may take late-comers some time to achieve the same level of shared understanding.”
- “[As a late-comer], I felt valued and welcomed by the group, never intimidated.”

“I was exactly where I should be.”

2. Individual and organizational alignment

Respondents found links between their professions and the initiative, in different ways. For example, “Healthy Baby and Me”, a program that sees and educates over 600 moms

* According to the Harvard Business School, the white space is “the range of potential activities outside of an organization’s core activities, not defined or addressed by the organization’s current business model, thus creating new opportunities. Therefore an innovative new model is needed.”
Source: *The White Space and Business Model Innovation: Finding Brilliant Opportunities Outside Your Core*, by Mark W. Johnson Harvard Business Press Chapters. Feb 22, 2010. Prod. #: 5767BC-PDF-ENG
Another working definition of white space: “areas where there are no clear guidelines.” (Lynn Ann Duffley. PowerPoint presentation, 2006).

per year, offers current information on children's environmental health. Its direct interface with mothers is a key opportunity to disseminate information.

One respondent commented that her organization's mandate is "to find solutions to problems, so professionally, this work fits perfectly". She also expressed a personal and professional interest in the model as well as the issue. The New Brunswick Environmental Network sees a direct link because its mandate is to facilitate people working together on environmental issues. The Collaborative fits well into the goals of the New Brunswick Lung Association to reduce pesticide use and improve air quality. A respondent formerly with the Canadian Cancer Society noted a strong fit between the goals of the organization and the Collaborative.

In some cases, working with the Collaborative had influenced respondents' professional goals. A researcher noted that the Collaborative often guides and inspires her research, and conversely, she has tried to bring research to the CEH Collaborative. (This is being planned, and funding has been found.)

Alignment of the Collaborative's mandate with academic research projects serves an important function. The Collaborative supports research funding proposals on the subject of Children's Environmental Health. The Collaborative also provides a link between research and the community. "It is often too time consuming to bring research on this subject to the community, but this is a place where [community research] can be done." (The community is already assembled in the Collaborative.)

A representative of the federal government noted that she had often used the example of the Collaborative as a way of supporting environmental health projects in the community. This has allowed her to have those types of discussions in the office.

It was noted that sometimes the collaborative work is a 'hard sell' at the government level, and with frequent staffing changes, proponents of the Collaborative have to sell it over and over again.

3. Agency Support

Participants and key informants who were integrating their Collaborative work with their regular day-to-day work were asked whether their agencies supported their involvement with the Collaborative. There were two levels of support indicated: 1) yes, they were supported in both tangible and intangible ways (six of fifteen respondents); and 2) yes, they were supported in a limited way, as long as it did not take away from their usual duties (eight of fifteen respondents).

a. Solid support

For the first group, all of the responses are unique and reveal a slightly different management approach. For this reason they are noted below:

- "Yes, I am supported in being part of the Collaborative and able to go to meetings"
- "My agency has always supported me in being part of the Collaborative, and thus, it supports the environmental work I do."

- “As an instructor, I am expected to be involved in community work. I use my time with the Collaborative on my CV as evidence of my community involvement.”
- “Yes, to date. It pays my mileage and registration in return for my sharing of new knowledge.”
- “My work plan provides for up to 5% of my time on external affiliations. The CEH Collaborative is one of those affiliations.”
- “When I was working with the Ombudsman and Child and Youth Advocate, I was supported and encouraged to participate with the Collaborative. Participating was one of my responsibilities and it was a priority.”

“[My employer] pays my mileage and registration in return for my sharing of new knowledge”

b. Limited support

The respondents who reported limited support said that the children’s environmental health work was not a priority in their agencies, and that sometimes they had been asked to pull back on it to deal with other job-related priorities. But as one respondent remarked, “The fact that it [the CEH work] has not been eliminated speaks volumes.” Generally, the respondents were ‘permitted’ to be involved, attend meetings, report back to their managers, etc. Some of their managers have attended meetings as a result.

In terms of agency alignment with Collaborative goals, the Collaborative’s new strategic direction of ‘getting kids outside’ has received managers’ attention and is particularly supported. Widening the scope to include the outdoor piece aligns well with some agencies.

Lessons Learned

Finding the ‘common ground’ – the shared vision, values, and goals – initiates the development of the collaborative culture, shaping the way the work gets done in the future.

Defining the common ground brings people together who have the commitment and mutual support to persist in realizing the goal. These people, those with a strong personal interest in, and alignment with, the goals of the Collaborative, are key to continuity. They are ‘the committed’- people who are willing to sell the issue over and over again for as long as it takes.

Agency support is more likely if the Collaborative goals align with those of the agency. Agency support encourages the active involvement of individuals, particularly if the Collaborative work is highly valued by the agency. However, being an assigned delegate does not necessarily translate to a highly motivated participant, as there were some reports that people attended meetings because they were “told to”.

It will be important to future recruitment and retention to continue to pay attention to the culture of the Collaborative, to continue the practice of matching the goals of the Collaborative with those of desired agencies and to target communications to managers of those agencies.

References

⁴ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation. Towards an Environmental Justice Collaborative Model: An Evaluation of the Use of Partnerships to Address Environmental Justice Issues in Communities. Washington, DC: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, January 2003, p.51.

4. Creating the Strategy for Action

Having established the common ground, attracted over 50 people from 37 agencies (13 sectors) to the November 2006 province-wide meeting, and come to a consensus on the vision and mission of the Strategy, the Collaborative was ready to put the sectors to work in drafting the Strategy for Action.

Table 3 (next 2 pages) follows the milestone events of the Collaborative as it finalizes the Strategy for Action and develops the Collaborative model.

**Table 3: Toward a Strategy for Action and Building the Model:
October 2007 – October 2008**

| Date | Event | Description |
|-------------------|--|---|
| November 21, 2006 | "Children's Environmental Health: Developing a Strategy for Action" | <p>Draft vision and mission developed; a beginning list of priorities for action; commitment to continue collaborating from 81% of those who completed the evaluation form (32 participants)</p> <p># attending: 53 participants from 37 agencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health-related NGOs • Environmental NGOs • Agriculture NGOs • Education sector (parents and teachers – anglophone and francophone) • Government sector, federal (Public Health Agency of Canada, Environment Canada, Service Canada), provincial (Health, Public Health, Environment, Social Development), municipal (Doaktown) • Regional Health Authorities • Physicians • Nurses • Nutrition sector • Family Resource Centres (francophone) • First Nations • Youth Council • University (francophone) |
| October 16, 2007 | "Children's Environmental Health: Developing a Strategy for Action" (Part 2) | <p>Priorities were set and an initial action plan was developed. 100% of the 24 participants completing the evaluation forms agreed to return to the next province-wide meeting to continue the work.</p> <p># attending: 40 participants from 28 agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health-related NGOs • Environmental NGOs • Agriculture NGOs • Education sector (parents and teachers – anglophone and francophone) • Government sector, federal (Health Canada, Environment), provincial (Health Public Health, Environment, Social Development), municipal (Doaktown) • Regional Health Authorities • Youth club • First Nations • University (francophone and anglophone) |

Table 3 (continued): Toward a Strategy for Action and Building the Model:**October 2007 – October 2008**

| Date | Event | Description |
|-------------------|---|--|
| February 12, 2008 | “Children First: Moving to Implementation” | <p>Consensus reached among province-wide participants on the Strategy. Participants gained solid grounding in the strategy, how to move it forward in their sectors, and implement the strategy through their day-to-day work. Networking and small group work.</p> <p>Of the 17 participants completing the evaluation, all expressed an interest in attending the next meeting.</p> <p># attending: 40 participants from 28 agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health-related NGOs • Environmental NGOs • Agriculture NGOs • Education sector (parents and teachers – anglophone and francophone); School Districts 10, 18 • Government sector, federal (Health Canada, Environment), provincial (Health Public Health, Environment, Social Development), municipal (Moncton) • Regional Health Authorities • Nurses • Physician • First Nations • University (francophone and anglophone) • Day Care |
| March 2008 | “Action Today for Children’s Tomorrow: Scan of Current Resources, Programs and Services Offered in New Brunswick” | <p>Based on the initial work of the February 2008 meeting, the Planning Committee conducted a scan to identify current work by agencies and organizations that would align with the goals of the Strategy.</p> <p><i>The exercise identified common ground within the existing work of stakeholder agencies.</i></p> |
| July 08 | Designing Our Implementation Structure | Development of the Collaborative Model. |
| August 2008 | “Action Today for Children’s Tomorrow: Strategy for Action” | Finalization of the Collaborative’s first Strategy for Action, based on the work of the February 2008 province-wide meeting. |
| September 2008 | Model Implementation Principles | Development of the Collaborative Model. |
| October 2008 | Model Implementation Structure | Final document: defining the Collaborative Model |

How the Strategy was created

Table 3 demonstrates the intensive level of work over a two-year period that created the conditions for a wide spectrum of sectors to work collaboratively in the development of the Strategy for Action.

Meeting #1: November 2006 (53 participants from 37 agencies/13 sectors)

- Kathy Cooper from *Canadian Partnership for Children's Health & the Environment* presented.
- Small groups identified “good things already happening” and posted a long list of comments.
- Draft vision and mission statements (developed by the Planning Committee) were finessed/revised by all participants.

Draft Vision: To provide a cleaner and healthier environment for children.

Draft Mission: To work collaboratively to reduce children's exposure to environmental contaminants that may cause illness, disability, disease or death.

- Small groups identified and prioritized a wish-list of “best-case scenarios” to be achieved by the year 2012. These were posted.
- Large group prioritized these ideas by “dotmocracy”, resulting in a visual summary of the large group's collective thinking.
- Small groups generated a “laundry list” of concrete action items. These were posted and clustered around the following themes:
 - products;
 - awareness & education;
 - coalition;
 - advocacy;
 - air;
 - research;
 - integrative programs;
 - bill of rights; and
 - champion/leader.

At the end of the day, the group had created it's own version of the Vision and Mission statements, a prioritized list of what should be in place by 2012, and suggested concrete actions under 9 categories. Twenty-four respondents (out of 32 people who had completed evaluation forms) indicated a strong interest in continuing to collaborate.

Meeting #2: October 2007 (40 participants from 28 agencies/9 sectors)

Meeting goal: Prioritize the objectives that came out of the meeting held on November 21, 2006, and develop action plans around the top objectives.

- Small groups discussed each goal (category) and its associated objectives.
- Large group prioritized the objectives under each goal (category) that were: 1) most important and 2) could be most easily achieved, using “dotmocracy”
- Using this input, a short list of ten priority objectives was developed in the plenary.
- Participants sorted themselves into working groups; they fleshed out strategies for five of the top ten objectives, developed actions to meet the objectives and organized committees to work on the implementation of the actions.
- All of the 24 participants completing the evaluation forms agreed to return to the next province-wide meeting to continue the work.

By the end of the day, the emerging Collaborative had identified 5 top priorities, developed strategies for them, with objectives and actions, and had identified committees to work on them.

Meeting #3: February 2008 (40 participants from 28 agencies/11 sectors)

Meeting goal: to develop a better understanding of the process of implementation of the strategy, establish connections between on-going work and the implementation of the strategy and create a sense for each participant of how this could be accomplished in their sector.

- Reinforcing the common ground: briefing on strategy development to date, the ongoing work of the various committees and the strategy document.
- Motivation: Presentation by Annie Bérubé of Health Canada outlining the most current science in terms of health outcomes and an overview of activities and policies in Canada.
- Learning: Presentation by Rosemary Boyle on working collaboratively across agencies and sectors.
- Using new tools: “Speed networking” session of all participants, with the goal of familiarizing each participant with the work of each other.
- Small groups addressed questions of implementation on a sector-by-sector basis.
- Small groups identified Draft implementation principles.
- Motivation: Bernard Richard then provided participants with his insights on the issue, and how it is linked to the rights of children and his work as the provincial Child and Youth Advocate.
- Small groups/working teams developed next steps in advancing the objectives of the strategy.

By the end of the day, the participants had accepted the entire Strategy.

Participants' Perspectives

Only a few of the respondents had participated in the earliest days of the Collaborative, but a few recalled the planning process used to develop the strategic plan:

“It was a democratic process. The Strategic Committee drafted the initial plan for input, and everyone had the chance to provide feedback at the province-wide meeting.”

“The planning process was about building by consensus and trying to build on common themes and ideas.”

Analysis

Between March 2005 and February 2008, approximately 20 sectors uniting in a Collaborative network had assembled over three meetings to develop and begin implementing a Strategy for Action to “work collaboratively to reduce children’s exposure to environmental contaminants that may cause illness, disability, disease or death.”

This was accomplished by a very “small core group with commitment and expertise”, the Planning Committee, who were willing and open to find new ways to develop solutions together. Given the vastness and complexity of the issue, the Committee found ways to simplify the process.

Key approaches used to achieve this result:

- Participants’ input was maximized. Each individual’s contribution was valued.
- Initial vision and mission were developed by the Planning Committee to stimulate discussion and gather input.
- Presentations by motivational speakers were strategically placed in the agenda.
- Working relationships were nurtured by means of networking activities and opportunities.
- Small groups were used to get the ideas started and posted.
- The large group of all participants then did the priority-setting.
- The Planning Committee themed the results and brought them back to the large group for validation.

These approaches had the effect of pulling together the best thinking of a highly diverse and expert group of people, on a vast and complex topic, to produce a Strategy encompassing 5 goals with their objectives in a 6-page document.

5. Building the Collaborative Model

In parallel to the development of the strategy itself, the Strategic Committee recognized the need for clarity of the model, and began the task in early 2008. The Committee reviewed other models currently in use and consulted with two organizations in particular, the New Brunswick Anti-Tobacco Coalition and the Healthy Eating Physical Activity Alliance, who were successfully engaging stakeholders using a collaborative process. Subsequently, key documents were developed:

| Table 4: Building the Model | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| June 2008 | Model: Current Implementation | An examination of the status of implementation of the work of the Children’s Environmental Health Collaborative, with pros and cons regarding the model |
| July 2008 | Designing Our Implementation Structure | Development of the Collaborative Model. |
| August 2008 | “Action Today for Children’s Tomorrow: Strategy for Action” | Finalization of the Collaborative’s first Strategy for Action, based on the work of the February 2008 province-wide meeting. |
| September 2008 | Model Implementation Principles | Development of the Collaborative Model. |
| October 2008 | Model Implementation Structure | Final document: defined the components of the Collaborative Model and their roles; draft organizational chart |
| 2008 | Graphic: Current Implementation Approach | A graphic illustrating the various components of the model. |
| | Graphic: Draft Reporting Chart | A graphic describing the reporting structure of the model. |

Intensive work on the model occurred between June and October of 2008. The Strategic Committee recognized in June of 2008 the many benefits and challenges inherent in the emerging collaborative model. “In a nutshell, the current model is very diffuse by nature, allowing for a lot to happen, for a wide number of people to be involved and for the possible projects to be limitless. By the same token, it is hard to monitor and maintain and lacks accountability.” They noted a lack of ‘ownership’ on some teams, which created extra work for the Secretariat of the Collaborative (NBEN). There was also a question around the lack of accountability – was accountability even possible in such a large collaborative effort?

The “Model Implementation Principles” encapsulated guiding principles – many of which had been in practice since the beginning of the initiative.

“The current model is very diffuse by nature, allowing for a lot to happen, for a wide number of people to be involved and for the possible projects to be limitless. . .”

“Flexible Collaborations” was the number one guiding principle. It consists of:

- a. Common vision and shared objectives
- b. Ownership, commitment to the strategy
- c. Build and maintain trust
- d. Respect contribution of each collaborator

The final “Model Implementation Structure” was completed in October of 2008, setting out clear terms, representation, roles and responsibilities for the various components of the structure. [See Appendix 1.)

These included:

- Strategic Committee
- Advisory Committee (still to be implemented)
- Secretariat
- Implementation Network
- Teams

Participants’ Perspectives

The features of the NB Children’s Environmental Health Collaborative model that consistently emerged from participants’ descriptions were:

- It focuses on shared vision, mission and goals.
- It is solution based.
- Decisions are made by consensus.
- Approaches are collaborative rather than competitive.
- The focus is on sharing resources rather than competing for resources.
- There is a commitment to evidence-based practice.
- All participants’ contributions are valued equally.
- People are open to new ideas.
- People are passionate at a personal and professional level.
- Participants are supported in their involvement by their agencies and organizations.
- It is a safe place to put forward ideas.
- Trust grows as participants help each other achieve shared goals.

NOTE: A more complete analysis of the collaborative model used by the NB Children’s Environmental Health Collaborative will follow in the section titled “Analysis of the Collaborative Model.”

6. Resourcing the Collaborative

In October 2011, Environment Canada cuts to the Canadian Environmental Network resulted in a loss of \$22,000 from the NBEN budget. This supported its core administrative funding for networking activities, which has a direct impact on activities of the Children’s Environmental Health Collaborative. Since that time, the NBEN has continued to provide services “to the best of its reduced ability.”

The resources required by the NB Children’s Environmental Health Collaborative are related to administrative and coordination support functions, and the cost of the annual province-wide meetings. The Model Implementation Structure identifies a “Secretariat function”, which the NBEN has agreed to provide. This role includes organizing the meetings of the Strategic Committee, Implementation Network and joint advisory meetings, and recording the proceedings. It also includes organizing the annual province-wide meetings, helping team leaders organize team meetings and providing meeting notes for the team meetings.

The NBEN is currently staffed by the Executive Director (full-time), a permanent employee working 4 days a week on youth work and other caucus files, a one-year contract person responsible for the data base, membership and assisting the Executive Director on the website, and a temporary replacement covering maternity leave until August, who works on the Sustainability Education file. Currently the only staff person picking up the Children’s Environmental Health Collaborative is the Executive Director. A new person had been hired to assist with the Collaborative, beginning April 2, 2012.

Participants’ perspectives on the adequacy of resources

A strong majority of respondents recognized that resources were lacking to maintain the productivity of the Collaborative. “Funding has always been our biggest challenge, and this has resulted in a reduced capacity to do all the things we could do.” “If it hadn’t been for the NBEN structure as our hub, the Collaborative would have never gotten off the ground. We need to thank Mary Ann and her gang so much for this.”

There is a “serious resource issue,” noted one respondent. “At this point, there is not a responsibility centre for all the documentation generated, etc. The Collaborative is almost a virtual network, rather than an organization, so it falls outside the usual funding guidelines.”

Several respondents noted that it was not so much a matter of funding, but a matter of sustained funding over the long term. Without this, said one respondent, “we will lose our core energy and without our core energy, the Collaborative could fail.”

“Without sustained funding, we will lose our core energy, and without our core energy, the Collaborative could fail.”

Others noted that the funding bodies themselves did not seem to recognize the significance of the children’s environmental health issue. “With so many groups involved, it should be clear to funding agencies that children’s environmental health is a priority.” “This is all being done for the health of future citizens of the province.”

“It really needs a paid position to keep the ball rolling.” “Having more staff at the NBEN” to support this work would help”.

Challenges

- Lack of clarity among participants about the funding/financial side of the Collaborative’s operations. “The email on funding raised questions – don’t know how many staff, who is getting paid, how many volunteers, etc.”
- “Core administrative funding is the most difficult to find.”
- “The Collaborative attempts projects with very limited funds”.
- “We have our limits. We have worked together over time with a good core group, but we are losing our core energy. If there is no sustained funding in the future, we will lose our energy.”
- “The nature of the Collaborative, and the model (almost a virtual network rather than a traditional organization) makes fund-raising particularly difficult. Funders are looking for tangible products from registered charities to fund”.

“The nature of the Collaborative (almost a virtual network rather than a traditional organization) makes fundraising particularly difficult.”

Lessons Learned

- NBEN as the “hub” has been the essential ingredient in creating and maintaining the Collaborative.
- Participants are looking for more information regarding the funding needs of the Collaborative. Communicating the Collaborative annual revenue and expenditures is possible, but has not as yet been implemented

Suggestions from participants

- “NBEN needs to get additional funding from provincial departments. They need to get commitment from someone at the Central government level, like the Premier’s Office. If this level felt that there was an alignment with their work, they would make it happen in all departments”.
- “For the Collaborative to be better known to government, it needs to answer many questions, e.g., Where do they get their funding? Who forms the Strategic Committee?” (Participant unclear whether they were volunteers or paid staff.)
- “The Collaborative needs to explore its funding options. Currently it doesn’t expect participating organizations to contribute funding, only in-kind participation (human resources and time). Should it look for more in-kind contributions?”

Information from the Canadian Partnership for Children’s Health and the Environment

- In a conversation with Erica Phipps of the Canadian Partnership for Children’s Health and the Environment (CPCHE), the author investigated how CPCHE funds its initiatives. Highlights are below:
- CPCHE is a small, consensus-based ‘partnership’ with eleven partners. (See: <http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/partners-list>).Two people work for the

partnership. One works out of the office of one of the partners (the Canadian Environmental Law Association - CELA), working part-time for CELA and part-time for CPCHE. She is paid by CELA.

- Each of the 11 partners signs a formal partnership agreement with CPCHE.
- Representatives in the various partner organizations are supported by their organizations to attend meetings and participate in CPCHE as part of their regular work.
- All of the work is project-based. Ideas for funding proposals are vetted with the 11 partners in advance. Usually a proposal is submitted by one of the partners, and that partner receives and administers the funding. This avoids bureaucracy, in that CPCHE uses the machinery of the partners, e.g., accounting services.
- Although the proposal is submitted by one of the partners, it is always recognized as a CPCHE proposal with a CPCHE perspective.
- Being “the lead” on a project might mean different things – from hosting, to providing staff time, to providing financial management.
- There are volunteers who work with CPCHE. They gain benefits from their involvement, e.g., they can use the video they helped create.
- A suggestion from CPCHE to the NB Collaborative: Try to find a topic that has a critical mass of support and get a few organizations to come together around it.

Suggestions to strengthen the Collaborative’s resources and infrastructure

- Present a summary of the revenue and expenditures for the Collaborative at the province-wide meetings.
- Strengthen the representation from relevant government and non-government organizations within the Collaborative’s Strategic Committee, e.g., Ombudsman’s Office, Public Health Agency of Canada, Diabetes Association, Canadian Cancer Society, Learning Disabilities Association, Youth groups, etc.
- Develop a more formalized arrangement for partners who wish to participate on the Strategic Committee.
- Develop a process for submitting funding proposals around specific projects of the Collaborative.
- Ensure that participating organizations can see benefits to their organization from their participation.

7. Implementing the Strategy

The Strategy for Action, “Action Today for Children’s Tomorrow!” has been guiding the work of the action teams since it was first developed. Teams are responsible to implement the goals and objectives as outlined in the Strategy.

Team leaders are responsible for ensuring that teams meet as needed and are on track. They are also invited to Leadership consultations annually, when they meet with the Strategic Committee to provide updates, brainstorm ideas and gather advice for going forward.

There are no formal monitoring mechanisms in place to track the progress of the teams toward their goals. However, the minutes of meetings, which are created by the Secretariat and distributed to the Team, do capture progress. A team report at the annual leadership consultation and the province-wide meeting serve to monitor progress as well.

Participants’ Perspectives

Many participants were unclear on this topic and there was a general lack of understanding about who monitors progress, and even the pace of progress was often unclear. Another commented that the goals and objectives were “clear in the beginning, but not so clear now”.

While goals and objectives were clearly defined in the Strategy, respondents noted that milestones and timelines were not. One respondent said, “We have a tendency not to set deadlines on the work, due to the nature of the Collaborative, where participants are “working off the corners of their desks.”

“We have a tendency not to set deadlines on our work.”

One respondent suggested that “the Collaborative needs to do a better job of monitoring progress: 1) performance monitoring – “Are we reaching toward those targets and deliverables?” and 2) evaluation of targets – “Is where we are headed where we really need to go?”

Only two responses (of 15) were very positive – “Pleased with the rate of progress. The group has been driven. A very active group with good ideas.” “The Strategic Committee has the role to set deliverables and milestones and to monitor progress, but it has struggled with this. It has not been a consistent agenda item”.

“The pace of progress has been good, and there are quite a lot of people who are really involved and finding the work satisfying.” Regarding the pace of progress, comments have varied from being “pleased with the progress” to “progress was slow”. The majority of responses reflected the latter. One respondent indicated that slow progress may have been related to “a lack of time and a lack of communication”. Another responded, “When the pace has been slow, that is a normal part of the process. Other priorities come up for people. Presents an opportunity to come back with renewed energy”. And finally, “I think that we have been working away, and if we have been slow, it is because everyone is not doing this work full-time, and we need governments and industry on board.”

Suggestions from Participants for ways to improve the implementation process

- The Collaborative should invite ordinary citizens and parents to its province-wide meetings. This would help in spreading the word among parents.
- The Collaborative should recruit or identify people within the collaborative who could do some of the planning work (planning process – impacts and outcomes, etc.)
- The Collaborative and its teams should clearly set out what they want to accomplish within the next year.
- “Perhaps have a pre-defined schedule [of activities] for the Implementation Network meetings and the province-wide meetings.”
- “Initiatives need to go to the Executive Council or the Premier’s Office to see if there is interest. If not, the effort will not succeed. Try to get a representative from this level on the Collaborative, or have a link. The Collaborative should concentrate on showing how their initiatives could reduce government spending. The most favourable opportunity would be through the Department of Health, as there has already been some success there.”
- “Continue face-to-face meetings and Team Leaders’ meetings.”
- “Use minutes to track progress. This is a real strength of the Collaborative in that the minutes come out right away! Amazing! Suggest that you try a template with three columns – Goal – Decisions – Follow-up.”

“Use minutes to track progress – this is a real strength of the Collaborative.”

8. Communicating the Message

In the Model Implementation Structure document (October 2008), it is stated that the Strategic Committee is “responsible for the communications strategy, including the production of an annual progress report” and acts as “the public face of the collaborative effort.”

Decisions were made to develop several communications vehicles for internal communications: a listserv, website, emails, direct contact by telephone when warranted, teleconferences and face-to-face meetings. The practice of sending minutes on the same day as the Team meeting is a very effective communications strategy internally, and is highly valued by participants.

Recently, the Strategic Committee has pulled together a Communications Team, which is currently setting out a communications strategy for internal and external communications.

Participants’ Perspectives: Internal communications

A large majority of the respondents felt that they had been kept adequately or well-informed by the Collaborative via the above-noted means. This was a two-way endorsement, as they also felt that they had an excellent opportunity to provide their feedback to their team or the Collaborative Secretariat. The listserv was particularly appreciated. Many people noted that they “loved” the articles that were sent along. One respondent commented that the meetings of the Team Leaders with the Strategic Committee were very important to the lines of communication. “When I took issues to that meeting, I felt that the work was getting to the right people to make good decisions.”

Participants’ Perspectives: External communications

While there were successes, in general, communications to the public were felt to be “an area where we need to do better work”.

“The establishment of the Communications Team recognizes that we do need to better inform the public.”

Communications to the public - “an area where we need to do better work”.

Among the positive responses, participants appreciated the BPA publicity (Fact Sheet and public interviews) that originated with some of the members of the Collaborative. As well, they appreciated the website (“very good”) and annual workshop.

Challenges

The greatest challenge to external communication was identified as “the nature and structure of the Collaborative”. A broad-based collaborative makes its decisions based on consensus. Therefore, it cannot speak with one voice representing all the 100 agencies that are a part of it. It was not intended to be an advocacy body.

One respondent felt the Collaborative was lacking in concrete results to report on publicly.

Lessons Learned/Suggestions for Improvement

- The issue seems to be “What communications are in the public interest, and what communications would be considered advocacy?” A suggestion was to develop some key messages that are in the public interest that could not be construed as advocacy. These could raise the profile of the Collaborative and perhaps even some key issues.
- Use public media more often – newspapers, radio, television, Twitter, FaceBook.
- “Continue to try to expand their presence in the public domain, e.g., hold activities for the public and publish them on the City of Fredericton Calendar page”.
- Do articles in the paper on a regular basis.
- Use the website to ‘hook’ young families – place a banner or tab on the front page of the NBEN website leading to the Children’s Environmental Health Collaborative page.
- Use ‘Fredkid’ and other similar locally based, child-focused websites.
- Work through the Family Resource Centres to bring information to parents.
- Hold activities for children relating to the environment and health.

“Use public media more often.”

Analysis

The Strategic Committee and its new Communications Team are currently on the path of improving their communications both internally and externally. From the active discussion that occurred on this topic among participants and key informants, we can conclude that this is a topic of concern to them.

As they proceed with their work, the Communications Team needs to work with the Strategic Committee to determine who will be “the face of the Collaborative”, what sorts of communication vehicles will be used and whether there is a need for more public transparency and accountability (e.g., an annual report). This joint work, together with the many good suggestions, can serve to inform the directions to be set out in the new communications strategy.

9. Results: Impacts of the Collaborative on Agencies and Participants

A significant impact within agencies has been the creation of change agents in the area of children's environmental health. Participants promoted and initiated changes in their workplaces and their homes, contributing to cleaner, healthier environments for children and adults alike.

Participants increased their own capacities to address children's environmental health issues, and subsequently, built capacities within their agencies – both at the staff level and the management level.

By providing networking and collaboration opportunities, the Collaborative has helped to remove barriers and build bridges between and among government and non-government agencies.

Importantly, the Collaborative's work has directly and indirectly supported the work of the many agencies within its sphere of influence.

Agents of Change

- “I am more mindful and aware of workplace practices”, e.g., cartridges in the printer, requesting that floors not be waxed
- Became instrumental in setting up a working group at the School District Health Advisory Committee on children's environmental health
- Made more environmentally friendly choices in the workplace, e.g., at an outdoor play area, instead of using pesticides to get rid of spiders, suggested that a broom be used.
- Made more environmentally informed decisions outside work as well, e.g., with child's school, where a decision was recently made to eliminate outdoor recess – brought the perspective of Nature Deficit to the attention of the principal.

“I am more mindful and aware of workplace practices.”

Increased Awareness and Capacity-building

- Informed senior management about the Collaborative and its activities. In some cases, the managers attended the province-wide meetings as a result.
- “I am a more confident researcher”, having access to the broad spectrum of expertise in the Collaborative.
- Increased agencies' awareness of children's environmental health issues. “I've been able to raise significant awareness on the issue of children's environmental health within my agency”.
- Built capacities among staff and managers at their agencies; increased knowledge transfer to their agencies. Professionals from many different disciplines reported that they have shared resources (with nursing students, educators, public health nurses, parents) that had been disseminated through the Collaborative.

“I am a more confident researcher.”

- Provided reports to staff and managers following province-wide meetings; conducted many information sessions such as ‘lunch and learns’ with staff, and information sessions for day care workers, public health nurses, teachers, parents.
- Tried to make senior management and peers more aware of what the Collaborative was doing, but the [Education] department was never fully engaged in supporting it. Even at the meeting of the Strategic Committee with senior government officials – “senior management didn’t know much about it and still did not become engaged”.

Bridge-building

- Increased the active networking among agencies, knowing the right person to contact in the right agency at the right time; face-to-face contact through the Collaborative increased the networking activity.
- Increased collaborations/synergies with other agencies, e.g., the collaboration between Social Development and Public Health to improve healthy environments in day care facilities

Supporting agencies in their work

- Provided support and inspiration to continue to work on the issues.
- Provided many benefits such as increased access to information, resource people, networking opportunities, collaboration opportunities
- Has strengthened the community practice of nursing students in their work with prenatal families.
- Gave agencies a means and contributed to the rationale to initiate changes in organizational practices to improve children’s environmental health, e.g.:
 - introduction of a Healthy Environments Unit within the Provincial Department of Health, with a mandate to address children’s environmental health;
 - use of cleaning agents in health care settings;
 - the type of toys, play equipment and other products used in day care settings;
 - initiatives around ‘getting kids outside’;
 - a checklist for improving healthy environments in day care centres (used by public health);
 - information on sun exposure in child care settings.
- “My participation in the Collaborative . . . has changed the way I do research. It presents the opportunity to do research using a trans-disciplinary approach with many different sectors.”
- Has provided a “community” of government and non-government agencies that can be incorporated into collaborative research, in partnership with universities.

“My participation in the Collaborative . . . has changed the way I do research.”

Analysis

Respondents reported significant impacts of their involvement with the Collaborative, whether they had extensive active involvement (e.g., as a team member or leader) or a more passive involvement (as an attendee at province-wide meetings or simply receiving bulletins on the listserv). There emerged a distinct ripple effect that moved steadily from the source (the Collaborative) to many areas within the respondents' spheres of influence. Only one government department remained unresponsive to these efforts, the Department of Education. Further outreach efforts are needed with this department to engage not only the staff under the new Early Childhood Care and Education unit, but educators within the school system.

10. Looking to the Future: Thoughts from the Participants

The primary theme emerging from this line of inquiry was that “this work should continue”. Agencies offered ideas regarding the kinds of initiatives that would be important to their agencies in the future, such as:

- continuing and enhancing links, developing relationships and partnering with communities
- developing the Collaborative’s capacity in French
- expanding the reach to include many more francophone and aboriginal communities, municipalities, networks and schools
- continuing to nurture partnerships, keep the information flowing to professionals and the general public
- involving the children
- “collaborating with policy-makers on a Bill of Rights for Children’s environmental health”
- creating more outcomes that deal with the development of policy, standards and laws.
- holding public information sessions where parents can gain knowledge on the issue
- producing studies that impact the classroom
- giving consideration to, and respecting children’s health when considering funding, legislative and policy decisions
- increasing awareness and education in children’s environmental health through health promotion initiatives

Analysis

Now that the groundwork has been laid, the networks and collaborations activated and capacity-building begun, participants have articulated a readiness for continuing to build the network and producing concrete, trans-disciplinary, multi-sectoral and multi-cultural advancements on children’s environmental health.

Analysis of the Collaborative Model

The collaborative model, as it unfolded, has had an impact on the success of the Collaborative in achieving its goals. It has produced significant outcomes in terms of the creation of change agents, increased awareness, networking, capacity-building and importantly, supporting agencies in their work.

This can be attributed to the foresight and intensive work of the Strategic Committee, as it shaped the development of the Collaborative in its early years. Strategic decisions were made early on which created a firm foundation and fertile ground for the successful growth of the Collaborative. Decisions regarding guiding principles, a clear statement of vision and goal (province-wide action plan), developing strong networks, and determining effective communication strategies – all of these contributed to the success of the collaborative effort.

Earlier schematics of the model and reporting structure are available as reference, but with the evolution of the Collaborative, more current charts and graphics need to be developed.

Components of the Model

One of the early decisions that contributed to the strength of the Collaborative was to create an “Implementation Structure” that reflected the principles and goals of the Collaborative. It serves as a Terms of Reference for the Collaborative’s operation.

The current model, based on that described in the 2008 NBEN document “Implementation Structure” is comprised of these components:

1. Strategic Committee, with representatives from:
 - government agencies: NB Department of Environment, NB Department of Health, Health Canada
 - non-government agencies: Partners in Agriculture, New Brunswick Conservation Council, New Brunswick Environmental Network
 - health agency: Victorian Order of Nurses
2. Advisory Committee (to be implemented)
3. Secretariat – services provided by the NBEN
4. Implementation Network, with representatives from:
 - Strategic Committee (2)
 - Team leaders (active teams)
5. Teams, active and inactive:
 - Team 2A – educational tools
 - Team 2B – education of parents and professionals
 - Team Nurses
 - Team Consumer Products

- Team Research
- Team Policy
- Team Pesticides

Two aspects not currently included in the Implementation Structure, but which are operating very effectively, are the extended group of participants who are part of the listserv distribution list and those who are on the contact lists for notification of the annual province-wide meetings. This extended contact group serves as “the community of collaborators” – the community of agencies and individuals that the Collaborative has engaged. Tracking this wider group could serve as a baseline or proxy measure of the success of the Collaborative in terms of the diversity of agencies and sectors involved.

The other aspect not included is the statement of principles that was developed in 2008. These principles contribute significantly to not only the operation of the Collaborative, but the entire culture that came to define the Collaborative.

Successes of the Model

Successes converged around these themes which emerged from respondents’ comments:

- Strong networks and working relationships have been initiated and maintained among government and non-government organizations.
- There exists an improved understanding of organizational cultures and how to work with them.
- Collaborative relationships have resulted in shared responsibility and shared results.
- Collaborative steps have been taken to solve challenging and complex issues in children’s environmental health.
- The resources of many sectors have been mobilized.
- Capacities have been built within participants, agencies and communities.
- There exists a culture of acceptance and openness to new ideas within the Collaborative – “a safe place” to explore solutions to complex issues.

Key Factors Contributing to Collaborative Progress and Success

In an evaluation by the US federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice, *Toward an Environmental Justice Collaborative Model*¹ (January 2003), fifteen national demonstration projects were examined. They were all community-based, and used multi-stakeholder collaborative problem-solving as a tool to address environmental justice issues. Several key factors emerged as contributing to the success of these “community partnerships” or collaborations. These factors were applied to the Children’s Environmental Health Collaborative narrative, as described below.

Common Ground

Participants found common ground in the Overarching Vision and Mission as well as the agreed upon Principles, Goals and Activities of the Collaborative. That common ground was enhanced by the passion and personal commitment that participants brought to the issues.

Diversity of Collaborators

The Collaborative has actively recruited and tracked participants and their agencies over time. This indicates a wide diversity of approximately 20 sectors that consistently remain in contact with the Collaborative. Those sectors are:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Agriculture | Health NGO (NB) | Health NGO (national) |
| Day Care/Pre-school | Independent Individuals | |
| Education (District) | Education (post-secondary) | MDs |
| Education (parent/teacher) | Nurses | |
| Environmental NGO (provincial) | Nutritionists | |
| Environmental NGO (national) | Political Parties | |
| Family Resource Centres | Private Sector | |
| First Nations | Professional Associations | |
| Government-NB | Regional Health Authorities | |
| Government-federal | Universities | |
| Government-municipal | Youth / Getting Kids Outside | |

Strength of Leadership

The leadership for the formation of this Collaborative was provided by the core group of committed and expert individuals who came together as the original Planning Committee. The Executive Director of the New Brunswick Environmental Network demonstrated strong leadership at the times when it was most needed – especially during the formative stages. While the leadership appears to be strongly embedded within one individual (the Executive Director), there has been an effort to use a shared leadership approach to avoid the potential for a leadership vacuum if one of the leaders must leave the Collaborative unexpectedly.

Government Involvement

Involvement of the three levels of government was critical to the success of the Collaborative. It expands on the potential for collective solutions and sharing of resources. It also sends a clear signal to the top levels of government that the initiative has value.

Sharing of Resources

Participating agencies supported the work of the Collaborative in substantial, as well as more limited ways. Contributions were primarily in-kind, but there was limited funding support as well.

Community Engagement

The ‘community of collaborators’ that was spawned by the Collaborative effort is evidence of the success of the initiative.

Communication strategies

From the beginning, strategic decisions were made to optimize connections among agencies and create a vibrant network of collaborators. This was accomplished through the listserv, website, province-wide meetings and quick circulation of minutes, among others.

Development and Use of an Evaluation Framework

Strategic decisions are a hallmark of this Collaborative, and the decision to develop a narrative and evaluation framework demonstrates its strong commitment to continuous improvement.

Suggested Areas to be Strengthened

In brief, some areas that could be strengthened are described as follows:

Participants’ Understanding of the Model and Strategic Plan

- Update the Implementation Structure and the strategic plan to better reflect current status.
- Clarify goals, milestones, current structure, roles and responsibilities.
- Flesh out the responsibilities of team members.
- Develop strategies that each participant is aware of how he or she fits into the structure of the Collaborative, and their role within the Collaborative.

Clarification of Responsibilities

- Clarify responsibilities relating to monitoring team progress within the teams and committees.

Leadership

- Enhance participants’ understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the various levels of leadership.
- Consider whether there is the potential of a leadership vacuum if one of the core leaders has to leave the Collaborative unexpectedly.
- Attract and mentor new leaders.

Government Involvement

- Continue to communicate with, and develop networks among government agencies.
- Enter more formal partnerships with government agencies with respect to sustained core funding and project funding.

Conclusions/Recommendations

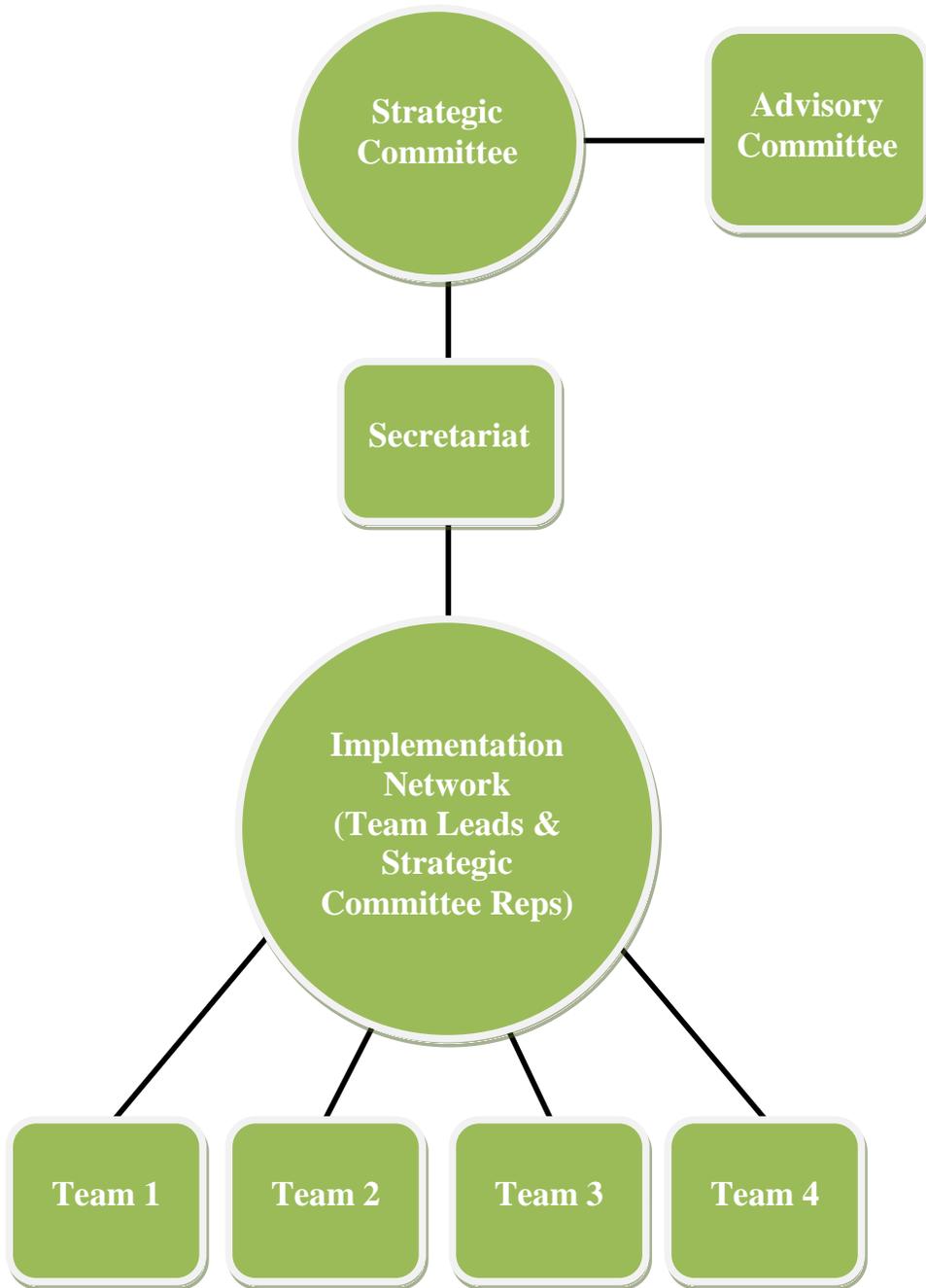
In spite of the expected challenges of using a collaborative approach, the New Brunswick Children's Environmental Health Collaborative has made significant gains for the issue in terms of public and professional awareness, representation from a broad spectrum of sectors, actions to reduce exposures on many fronts, and building a level of "readiness for change" within government and non-government spheres of influence.

Recommendations centre around three themes:

- 1) Explore options to achieve stable funding to sustain the Collaborative.
 - 2) Develop a plan for updating and strengthening the infrastructure of the Collaborative.
 - 3) Set a course for the future, giving priority to:
 - strengthening capacities within the Collaborative
 - increasing understanding of roles and responsibilities
 - monitoring progress
 - mentoring leaders
 - communicating results and
 - expanding the ripple effect and the 'web of action'.
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Model Implementation Structure (2008)



Appendix 2: Stories

Research

- As a woman in a field of research that is primarily male, I am more confident now in asking questions relevant to communities. Still, I am perceived as the “odd person out”, but am confident in my approach because I know I have the support of the Community of Practice for Ecosystem Approaches to Health (CoPEH) and the Collaborative. The result is that even though I have a different approach, I get respect in my profession because of my inner confidence. Now my approach to research is much more integrated and grounded in both academic evidence and the more practical evidence found in communities.
- The Collaborative helps me to share and have contact with the public and agencies in order to discuss my research program and increase our visibility. They help to make the link to basic research-“utilisateur des connaissances”.

Daily Living

- I am trying to ‘be the change’ – to be that person who educates others. Day-to-day life is where I most actively focus on reducing exposures. It’s through doing little everyday things that we can make change.
- My involvement with the Collaborative affected me so much personally, that I brought the issue of children’s environmental health everywhere I went. For example, I questioned the custodians at school on what kind of cleaning chemicals they use in the schools.

Working with Youngsters

- I have always been concerned about the environment, as we were brought up that way. By being a part of the Collaborative, we are supported in our beliefs and are challenged to do more. I have met so many amazing people in the Collaborative and have developed new contacts and friendships. I try to walk the talk everyday and try hard to support local, and reduce my own carbon footprint in my home and work life. I educate/suggest and inform when I can, but mainly try to lead by example.

My funniest anecdote was after my colleague and I did a presentation/information session with elementary students, we received two thank you cards. We had shown them a few videos from “The Animals Save the Planet” and the children were laughing so hard with the cow that was passing gas. (Learning about green house gases). In the thank you card, the child wrote: “I loved the videos that you shod. I mostly loved the cow wen the cow fartid and the shep brpt.” This was priceless!

A Non-government Organization Story

- When the Collaborative produced the BPA paper [in response to a federal announcement regarding BPA], I had wanted to send something out from my work but couldn't because a) I didn't have time to write something and b) I would not be able to write anything because it would be seen as advocating. It was wonderful that one of the members of the Collaborative sent something that I could disseminate. It is a great example of how I used the information from the Collaborative.

A Government Story

- When I was writing a curriculum for early learning and childcare at UNB, I was heavily influenced by the work of the Collaborative. I had in my mind that the curriculum should be as environmentally friendly as possible and that a focus on outdoor play and all the things we have spoken about over the years be integrated. Now, the UNB early learning and childcare program at UNB has a curriculum that encourages environmental awareness and encourages early learning and childcare staff to get the kids outdoors as much as possible.

Throughout this process I also worked with health inspectors to help them understand how some of their rules and standards could be changed to reflect bringing some of the things from the outdoors into the indoors. I have affected how “our” early learning and childhood centers equip themselves, plan for their day, make their purchases (for example, instead of purchasing plastic, purchasing wood, etc.) In sum, I brought the ideas that the Collaborative has talked about over the years, at meetings and during conference calls, to people within my sphere of influence who were already in those sorts of thoughts. “Like-minded thinking created this beautiful curriculum”.