

Healthy Air for Northeast Denver (HAND) Partnership

CARE Facilitation Case Study



Facilitation Used to Convene and Redirect Partnership

This case illustrates many of the functions that third party facilitators can perform. Third party facilitators, at different points in the process, assessed project feasibility, facilitated the formation of the Healthy Air for Northeast Denver Partnership (HAND), provided early leadership, and helped reorient the group via a formal process and charter. This case also speaks to the need for clear group processes and seasoned facilitation in the face of extremely disruptive behaviors, and raises the importance of closely monitoring the group's development and gauging its 'ripeness' for a formal group process.

Background

For several years, local stakeholders expressed concerns about air quality in Northeast Denver communities. EPA's Toxic Release Inventory reported that Northeast Denver residents are exposed to ten times as many hazardous air pollutants as other residents of greater Denver County. Industrial activities and the I-70 East EIS project were identified as sources of air toxics and detractors from the quality of life. Although EPA and the State of Colorado were making efforts to address a Superfund cleanup and affected media in the vicinity, the regulatory agencies were unable to address air quality concerns. In an attempt to address stakeholder concerns, EPA initiated the Northeast Denver Environmental Initiative in August 1998 to ensure that EPA was fulfilling its regulatory responsibility in the area.

The Initiative focused state, federal, and local inspection resources in the area; however, EPA continued to hear concerns from the community regarding air quality. Cognizant that even 100% compliance with regulations may still leave significant impacts unaddressed, EPA began to lay the groundwork for a voluntary approach in the Spring of 2004. EPA Region 8 staff hired a third-party facilitation organization (convener) to assess the feasibility of convening a Working Group to address air quality concerns in the area based on the model of the Cleveland Air Toxics Pilot project¹. Based on that assessment, the HAND Working Group was convened in August 2004. HAND's goals are to:

- Reduce emissions of and/or exposure to air toxics in a relatively short time;
- Build capacity in the community to sustain and expand reduction and;
- Continue to develop a model for action that can be replicated in other communities.

¹ HAND is modeled after a successful program in Cleveland where diverse stakeholders formed a Working Group to identify, prioritize, gather resources for, and implement air toxics reductions programs.



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The group established ground rules and determined the areas on which the group would focus. HAND formed subcommittees on indoor air and education, emissions from stationary and diesel sources, and land use.

EPA Region 8 identified CARE as a possible funding source for HAND, believing that the funding would help the Working Group take the next step in its development. Throughout the grant application process, the Working Group kept in mind that HAND needed to be more than the CARE grant, and that it needed to shape the CARE activities to fit HAND's mission, not the other way around. EPA awarded a Level II Cooperative Agreement to Groundwork Denver, Inc. (the grantee) on behalf of HAND in September 2005.

Initial Third Party Assistance

EPA's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center (CPRC) provided funds to hire the convener to conduct a situation assessment in the spring of 2004. The purpose of the situation assessment was to identify stakeholder interest in participating in the project, issues the project would address, and composition of the group. Based on the situation assessment, the convener determined that it was feasible to form a project Working Group to address air quality concerns. All stakeholders interviewed during the situation assessment were invited to participate in the Working Group.

As part of the situation assessment, the convener recommended development of a formal Working Group process, including group mission and protocols. Although the Working Group did establish ground rules, it did not establish protocols for making decisions if and when there was dissent. It also did not determine what constituted membership and how membership from various stakeholder categories would be balanced. The Working Group elected not to establish these protocols because the group members were more interested in figuring out which projects to focus on during the early stages. Nevertheless, project stakeholders and EPA recognized that a third party facilitator would provide structure and organization to the initial Working Group meetings.

At this point in the process, the convener's role shifted to facilitator, and he teamed with another local independent facilitator to convene the first meeting in August 2004. EPA and the convener believed it would be useful to team with the second facilitator because he had a more robust working knowledge of the community. This facilitation team primarily provided organizational and meeting management assistance to the Working Group meetings for 15 months. During this time, additional members of the HAND group were recruited to serve on a Steering Committee, which assisted in the design of meeting agendas, thus ensuring that a representative subgroup (rather than EPA or the facilitation team) provided the general direction for the group. The facilitation team also participated in strategy development, and occasionally stepped out of the facilitator role in terms of providing advice and suggestions to the Steering Committee.

Significant Challenge to the Group's Progress



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A significant challenge emerged early in the history of the HAND project in the form of disruptive and intimidating behaviors from one participant. The facilitation team, with support from EPA and other members of the Steering Committee, went to great lengths to manage this individual's behaviors into more constructive activities. Initially, the facilitation team's response was appropriate to the individual's behavior, but due to a lack of appropriate guidance from the Steering Committee and group support, the balance of the group came to view the facilitation team as ineffective in dealing with the disruptive behaviors, and the facilitation team eventually lost credibility with the group.

This loss of credibility was compounded by the disruptive participant's conflict of interest claims about a facilitation team member. The conflict of interest allegation became yet another contentious issue that siphoned the Working Group's time and energy. The Working Group decided to look elsewhere for facilitation support.

Reorienting the Group Process

Concurrent with the departure of the first facilitation team, the Working Group used CARE funding to hire a project manager who was also able to serve as meeting facilitator. Nevertheless, the Working Group realized that it needed a more formal structure, with defined membership, decision-making protocols, and re-affirmed ground rules, to make meetings more effective. EPA Region 8 made use of a standing national contract with the Office of Air and Radiation to bring in another facilitator to provide process design and facilitation support to HAND. This facilitator helped HAND develop a formal process and group charter to guide its work into the future and facilitated the Working Group's June 2006 meeting, at which the charter was formally adopted.

Value of Facilitation

The role of third party facilitators provided several benefits to HAND:

- It confirmed the feasibility of convening these stakeholders and forming a Working Group based on the Cleveland Air Toxics model; it allowed the group to coalesce without having to appoint a leader in the beginning of the group process. This obviated the need for a leader to emerge during the Working Group's formative stages;
- It eased the burden on the Working Group by having the facilitation team plan for meetings and prepare meeting summaries that documented the history of the Working Group;



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- It enabled EPA to participate without having the responsibility of leading the meetings, allowing the process to be locally-driven; and
- It provided a clear process regarding who could make decisions and how for the group, thereby enabling the group to reconvene and function effectively.

The HAND Working Group fully recognizes the benefits of third party facilitation in the group formation and meeting processes. However, the challenges experienced by the Working Group raise questions about the optimal time to institute a formal group process. Development of a group process can be a significant decision; the appropriate time for that discussion to emerge should be carefully considered and revisited as necessary. While it takes time and energy to develop an agreed-upon group process, it does establish common expectations for everyone about commitment to the goals of the process, participant roles and responsibilities, how decisions will be made, expectations regarding the behavior of group members, and fundamentally, who is a member. The time invested in establishing the process often results in greater group effectiveness and efficiency as the group works together. Often, a crisis will force the issue, as illustrated in this study and it will force a group to reexamine previous working assumptions and readjust as appropriate.

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For more information on whether facilitation may be helpful for your project, please contact EPA's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center at 202-564-2922, or visit the CPRC Web site at: <http://www.epa.gov/adr>