

# The Collaborative Service Delivery Matrix: A Decision Tool to Assist Local Governments

*A Product of the Enhanced Partnership of the ICMA, the Alliance for Innovation,  
and the Center for Urban Innovation at Arizona State University*



## Overview

Collaboration as an approach to the delivery of local services focuses on sharing costs and benefits by two or more organizations working together to address a need in a way that achieves efficiency and effectiveness that would not be realized by one organization operating alone. Most local government jurisdictions do “go it alone” by producing their services in-house. Certain services and certain kinds of communities may be able to develop alternative service delivery arrangements, such as a collaborative arrangement, that improves the quality of service and the satisfaction of citizens. But the key to a true collaboration, as opposed to other alternative service delivery models such as contracting or privatization, is that all the partners in the collaboration must share in the burden of the costs as well as in reaping the rewards. In other words, all partners must have a stake in the joint endeavor for the arrangement to be considered a collaboration and for the collaboration to have a reasonable likelihood of succeeding.

Collaborative service delivery of local services is not new. What is new is the attention such collaborative approaches are receiving from academics, political officials, practitioners, and consultants.

In recent years, there have been many new experiments with alternative service delivery arrangements, often accompanied claims of vast cost savings through increased efficiencies. The positive image that intergovernmental agreements and public-private partnerships have received has added more impetus for local decision makers to pursue new or expand existing collaborative arrangements based more on faith in the ideal of collaboration rather than evidence of its effectiveness.

However, there is a surprising lack of hard evidence available to support the claims that collaboration is a panacea of solutions to the array of challenges confronting contemporary local governments. There is no collection of data that simply counts the number of such service delivery collaborations, much less data measuring the success of these. Most of the reports and academic journal articles focus only on success stories. A primary reason for this is that local leaders are not as interested in sharing stories where experiments failed to achieve the expected goals. Furthermore, an ICMA survey of managers found that most collaborations and other alternative arrangements are simply not tracked or measured.

With little data available on which to base decisions about how best to deliver services to citizens, how can managers address this need?

This decision tool, developed by the Enhanced Partnership of the ICMA, Alliance for Innovation, and Arizona State University’s Center for Urban Innovation, is designed to fill this need. We chose to build this tool to assist local leaders and their staff determine whether the conditions for expanding collaborative service delivery efforts may help local governments organization achieve their goals.

The tool is in two parts. The first part helps communities determine whether or not a collaborative arrangement is a good idea for their service regarding delivery of a specific service. The second part helps those that

want to pursue a collaborative arrangement (as determined by part one) choose from among five fundamental types of collaborative arrangements by using the same information developed in part one of the tool.

The first part of the tool provides a matrix of characteristics broken down into two groups: service characteristics and community characteristics. Managers work with their staff through a discussion of the characteristics and score each one on a simple three-point scale. The scores for the two groups of characteristics are summed and compared to a chart that illustrates the likelihood of successful service delivery through a collaborative approach. We refer to this as a “soft benefit/cost analysis” as it does not rely on hard cost estimates projected benefits. Such estimates rarely prove accurate, but are resource intensive to calculate as an aid in the decision about whether a proposed collaboration is possible.

Instead, we have developed this simple matrix, which is not data intensive and does not take a long time to execute. We designed it not to provide a yes or no answer to whether an organization should pursue a collaborative arrangement, but rather to encourage participants to work through a process and be very explicit about the opportunities and challenges they will confront when undertaking a collaboration. The outcome is simply an indication of the likelihood of success as evidenced by other collaborations and scholarly literature.

Those communities that choose to pursue a collaborative service delivery arrangement are faced with the decision as to which arrangement will lead to the best outcome for their service, given their community context. This is a more challenging question to answer due to the generally limited nature of data about the success of collaborations across different types of collaborations.

However, the same characteristics from part one of the decision matrix are helpful in leading communities towards the kind of collaborative structure(s) that are most likely to lead to positive outcomes in the delivery of the service. Part two of our tool uses the information from the matrix to help communities that want to pursue a collaborative arrangement choose from among five generalized types of collaborative arrangements: horizontal public-public partnerships (e.g., two nearby municipalities partnering), vertical public-public partnerships (e.g., a municipality partnering with its overlapping county), consolidation/regionalization (e.g., merging jurisdictions into one larger new jurisdiction), public-nonprofit partnerships, and public-private partnerships.

In addition to this document which contains just part one and part two of the tool itself, we also provide additional information. A white paper is also available through ICMA's Center for Management Strategies that elaborates on the concepts used in the matrix decision tool. It also highlights the benefits local officials might expect to see in a successful collaboration, as well as what challenges to be aware of in pursuing such strategies.

## **Instructions – Part One**

### **Should the community pursue a collaborative service delivery arrangement?**

The decision tool is a matrix to help staff, council members, or even citizens, work through the various aspects of a decision situation. While the exercise generates a numeric answer, the process is really the more important aspect. The “answer” is simply a useful index that should summarize what comes out of the process. The process will force participants to be very clear going into the decision as to whether or not a collaborative service is a good strategy for a given service in their community.

Below are the steps to follow for undertaking part one of the matrix decision exercise to help communities determine whether or not a collaborative arrangement is appropriate for this service under consideration, in the community context in which they are operating. Instructions for Part Two (determining which form of collaboration is best) begins on page 10.

#### **Step 1**

Determine who will be participating in the exercise. Participants should be those familiar with the service under consideration as well as the community context.

#### **Step 2**

Set up a time and place where the participants can come together and work through the process. We recommend this be completed in one session. Previous experiences with the exercise suggest that the entire exercise will take approximately two (2) hours. We also recommend a room with a round table or where chairs can be moved into a circle to facilitate as much dialog about each characteristic as possible. Snacks are always useful for these kinds of discussion sessions too.

#### **Step 3**

Provide copies of the worksheet (see below) so each participant can have a copy of the list of characteristics, a brief definition of each, and room to score each characteristic him/herself.

#### **Step 4**

Appoint someone familiar with the matrix materials as the facilitator of the discussion. This person’s job is only to elaborate on the meaning of the characteristics and insure everyone has the opportunity to participate in the discussion.

#### **Step 5**

The first phase of the exercise focuses on the seven service characteristics. After introducing each characteristic and allowing for a brief discussion, the facilitator will instruct each participant to score that characteristic on the three-point scale (see the worksheet). Responses are shared to discuss variations in individual scores and adjustments can be made.

#### **Step 6**

After discussing the scores, the group must come to consensus on the

group's collective score for that characteristic. The facilitator may maintain the official scores or may designate someone else to maintain them. Fractional scores are permitted as well since the real purpose of the exercise is to encourage specific thinking about these elements. However, we encourage facilitators try to help the group reach a consensus on a whole number score. **WARNING:** The individual scores that each participant assigns on their own should not be averaged together in determining the collective score. This will likely lead to scores on all the measures drifting toward the middle point across all the characteristics. Rather, the facilitator should allow discussion on what the group score is so the participants can come to a consensus they may end up being quite different from the “average” of the individual scores.

### **Step 7**

Once the seven service characteristics are completed and have been scored by the group, sum the official score of each characteristic to arrive at the Total Type of Service Score. The score should range between 7 and 21.

### **Step 8**

Repeat the discussion and scoring for the seven community characteristics, and sum the official scores to arrive at the Total Community Context Score. This score should also range between 7 and 21.

### **Step 9**

Using the graph on page 9, find the intersection of the Total Type of Service Score and the Total Community Context Score. Note the “zone” in which the intersection lies. This illustrates the general likelihood that a collaborative service delivery arrangement will be a viable alternative for the service you want to deliver and in the community in which you are located. Save a copy of the final scores generated in the process (for use in Part Two).

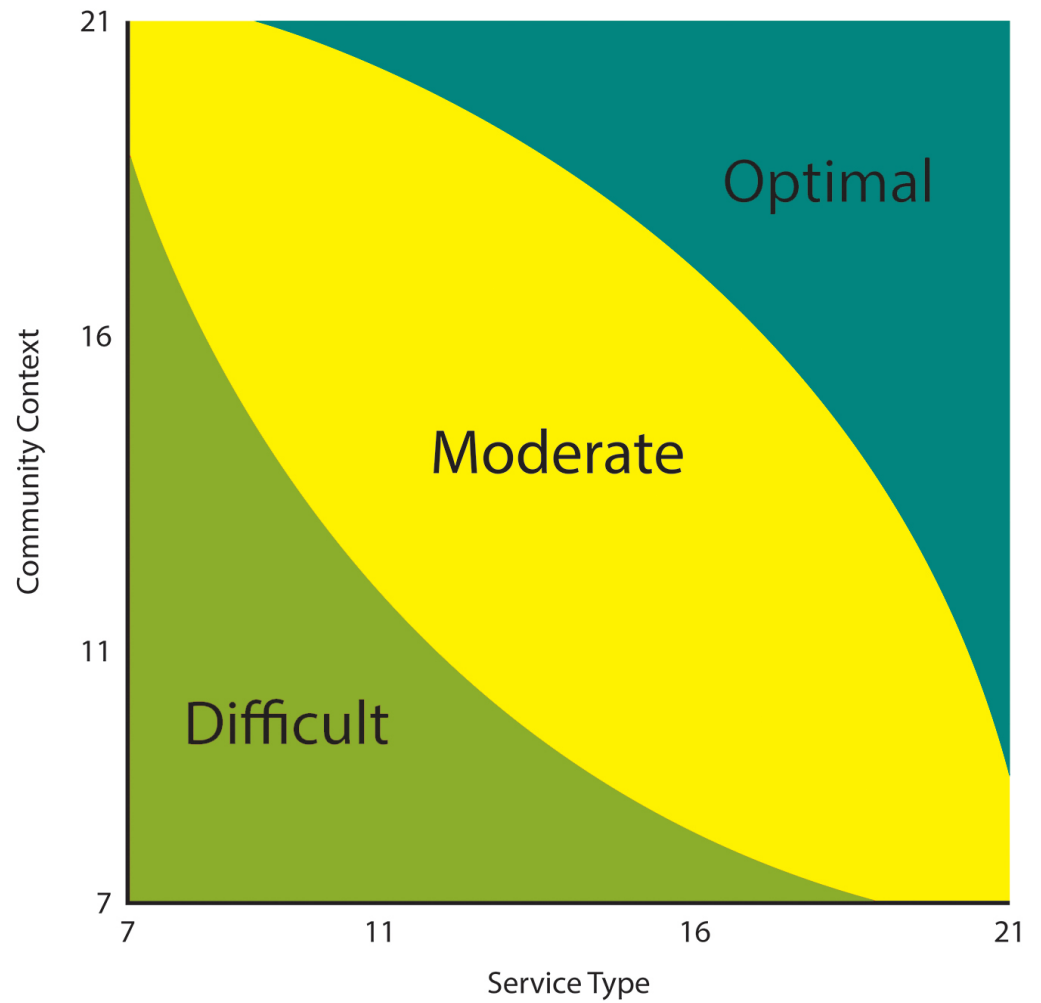
Remember that in interpreting the scores, these are not meant to be highly quantified indicators that yield a yes or no answer about whether a community should collaborate. The process is the important aspect of this decision tool. Even if the outcome suggests that it will be difficult to deliver a service through a collaborative arrangement, a community may still choose to go through with pursuing a collaboration. But the process will have helped identify those areas where challenges are most likely to arise.

## Collaboration Decision Worksheet

| Type of Service to be Delivered  | Score |
|--|-------|
| <p><b>Asset Specificity</b> – This represents the degree to which the service requires investment in special infrastructure (e.g., water pipes, treatment plants, ditch diggers) or technical expertise (e.g., legal, environmental), which may mean a lack of competitiveness in supplier markets and the level of the community’s internal expertise or technical capacity. High asset specificity means that the investments cannot be easily adapted to produce another service. (High=1, Medium=2, Low=3)</p>                         |       |
| <p><b>Contract Specification and Monitoring</b> – Services that are relatively harder to specify in a contract or that are harder to monitor, or that require a higher level of performance management expertise on the part of government. (Hard=1, Medium=2, Easy=3)</p>   |       |
| <p><b>Labor Intensity</b> – Some services are more labor intensive than others. Labor intensive services may also be capital intensive (see below). Generally, services that are more labor intensive in their delivery are better candidates for collaborative alternatives arrangements. (Low=1, Medium=2, High=3)</p>   |       |
| <p><b>Capital Intensity</b> – Some services are more capital intensive than others. Capital intensive services may also be labor intensive (see previous). How diffused the benefits are from the capital investment determines the effect on the likelihood of successful collaborations. Generally, services that are more capital intensive with diffuse benefits are more amenable to collaborative approaches to their delivery. (Low=1, Medium=2, High with focused benefits=2, High with diffuse benefits=3)</p>                    |       |
| <p><b>Costs</b> – Overall project costs influence the likelihood of successful collaboration in terms of both driving the need for collaboration as well as limiting the pool of potential partner organizations that might be able to participate in the delivery of more expensive services. (High=1, Medium=2, Low =3)</p>  |       |
| <p><b>Management Competencies</b> – Communities must be sensitive to the expertise they have available on staff for managing the various stages of a collaborative arrangement from planning, structuring and executing a competitive bidding process, to negotiating and bargaining with vendors and employees, to measuring vendor performance or partner evaluation. The greater the managerial expertise on staff related to a service, the more likely a collaborative arrangement can achieve success. (Low=1, Medium=2, High=3)</p> |       |
| <p><b>Stability in Administrative Team</b> – Communities should be aware of the degree of turnover in the administration and the likelihood of additional turnover in the short and long term future, as best as possible. Communities facing turnover in the higher level positions will have more difficulty establishing and maintaining the institutional knowledge and oversight necessary for successful collaborations. (High turnover=1, Medium=2, Low=3)</p>  |       |
| <p><b>Total Type of Service Score<br/>(sum of seven characteristic scores)</b></p>   |       |

| Community Context   | Score |
|---|-------|
| <p><b>Possible Public Partners</b> – Communities may have other public jurisdictions with whom they can work in terms of nearby municipalities, townships, special districts, or county government. (Few=1, Some=2, Several=3)</p>  |       |
| <p><b>Possible Private Partners</b> – The opportunity for partnering for delivery with private sector firms is limited to the extent that the community or region is home to enough such competent firms to support a competitive marketplace. (Few=1, Some=2, Several=3)</p>   |       |
| <p><b>Possible Nonprofit Partners</b> – As with private partners, the size of the local supply of nonprofits will also be driven by the type of service under consideration as well as the competence of such organizations to serve as potential collaborators in service delivery. (Few=1, Some=2, Several=3).</p>  |       |
| <p><b>Council Orientation/Political Environment</b> – Different kinds of services may meet different levels of support among local politicians which can raise the costs of pursuing and/or executing a collaborative arrangement. (Highly sensitive=1, Moderately sensitive=2, Non-sensitive=3)</p>  |       |
| <p><b>Fiscal/Economic Health</b> – The community's fiscal condition may be a motivating factor in wanting to pursue alternative service delivery arrangements as a means to curbing costs. Those in better health are more likely to be successful in collaborative arrangements. But those that are in a weak fiscal position may find it more difficult to locate partners with whom to collaborate. (Poor=1, Moderate=2, Good=3)</p> |       |
| <p><b>Unions</b> – In many communities, there may be resistance to any collaborative alternatives that could affect public sector employment levels. (Strong=1, Moderate=2, Weak=3)</p>   |       |
| <p><b>Public Interest</b> – Some services are more likely to attract the attention of citizens than others. Changes to those services that receive closer scrutiny by citizens are more likely to meet resistance to changes in how the community delivers the services. (High visibility=1, Moderate=2, Low=3)</p>   |       |
| <p><b>Total Type of Service Score<br/>(sum of seven characteristic scores)</b></p>  |       |

## Interpreting the Scores





## Instructions – Part Two

### Which kind of collaborative arrangement is best?

If the participants complete the exercise and determine that the community should not pursue a collaborative approach to delivering that particular service, then the exercise is complete. However, if the community decides to move forward on a collaborative service delivery arrangement, then the discussion shifts to determining which alternative structure will maximize the likelihood of success.

Utilizing the information from the group discussion that worked through the worksheet in Part One, organization leaders will already have much of the information needed to identify the structure(s) that are most amenable to the kind of service under consideration for delivery in the type of community context in which the community is situated. Below are the steps for using the information from Part One to help generate a recommended form of collaborative arrangement that has the greatest likelihood of success. The array of combinations of these characteristics and the collaborative structures that are a best fit are explained in more detail in the Collaborative Service Delivery white paper available on the ICMA Center for Management Strategies web site.

The second exercise is very straightforward. If you do not already have a copy, get the final scores the group generated in response to the service and community characteristics in Part One on the Collaboration Decision Worksheet. Transfer the final scores assigned by the group to each service to the Form of Collaboration Worksheet (see page 11). For instance, if the group scored their Asset Specificity score as a 2, then simply find the Asset Specificity line in the Form of Collaboration Worksheet, circle the “2” row with its arrow pointing to Public-Public (Horizontal). This would mean that for the service under consideration, the group believed that it had a “medium” level of asset specificity. In such situations, the form of collaboration associated with the highest likelihood of success is a public-public partnership between two jurisdictions at the same level of government (e.g., two municipalities). Transfer the remaining scores. Once all 14 scores have been transferred, go to the bottom table and record the sum of each type of collaboration suggested by each service or community score. Check the box with the most recommendations and that represents the form of collaboration with the highest likelihood of success for that service in a community with those characteristics.

While this part of the decision exercise can be conducted by a single person, we recommend that this be done with the same group that participated in part one in order to have as much feedback on the outcome as possible.

## Form of Collaboration Worksheet

**Directions:** Transfer the final scores assigned by the group to each service from the Collaboration Decision Worksheet by circling the score from there in the Score column below. Also circle the associated form of collaboration that number points to.

| Service Characteristic                | Score               | Preferred Structure  |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--|
|                                       | (circle your score) | (circle the corresponding structure)   |
| Asset Specificity                     | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | Consolidation/Regionalism<br>Public-Public (Horizontal)<br>Public-Private Partnership    |
| Contract Specification and Monitoring | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | None<br>Public-Public (Horizontal)<br>Consolidation/Regionalism                          |
| Labor Intensity                       | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | Public-Public (Horizontal)<br>Public-Private Partnership<br>Public-Nonprofit Partnership |
| Capital Intensity                     | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | Consolidation/Regionalism<br>Public-Public (Vertical)<br>Public-Private Partnership      |
| Costs                                 | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | Consolidation/Regionalism<br>Public-Public (Vertical)<br>Public-Nonprofit Partnership    |
| Management Competencies               | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | None<br>Public-Public (Horizontal)<br>Public-Private Partnership                         |
| Stability in Administrative Team      | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | None<br>Public-Private (Vertical)<br>Public-Private Partnership                          |

| Community Characteristics                     | Score               | Preferred Structure  |
|---|---------------------|--|
|   | (circle your score) | (circle the corresponding structure)   |
| Possible Public Partners                      | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | Consolidation/Regionalism<br>Public-Public (Vertical)<br>Public-Public (Horizontal)    |
| Possible Private Partners                     | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | Public-Public (Vertical)<br>Public-Public (Horizontal)<br>Public-Private Partnership   |
| Possible Nonprofit Partners                   | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | Public-Public (Vertical)<br>Public-Private Partnership<br>Public-Nonprofit Partnership |
| Council Orientation/<br>Political Environment | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | None<br>Public-Public (Vertical)<br>Public-Private Partnership                         |
| Fiscal/Economic Health                        | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | None<br>Public-Public (Horizontal)<br>Public-Nonprofit Partnership                     |
| Unions  | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | Public-Public (Vertical)<br>Public-Public (Horizontal)<br>Public-Private Partnership   |
| Public Interest                               | 1 →<br>2 →<br>3 →   | Public-Private Partnership<br>Public-Nonprofit Partnership<br>Public-Public (Vertical) |

Transfer the results above to the table below by counting up the number of each collaboration form recommended. Once completed, check the box to the right to determine the form of collaboration associated with the highest probability of success.

| <b>Delivery Options</b>      | <b>Count</b>       | <b>Preferred Structure</b> |
|------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
|                              | (how many circled) | (check highest score)      |
| Public-Public (Horizontal)   |                    | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| Public-Public (Vertical)     |                    | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| Consolidation/Regionalism    |                    | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| Public-Nonprofit Partnership |                    | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| Public-Private Partnership   |                    | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| None                         |                    | <input type="checkbox"/>   |