6. Cooperative Programs

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Collaboration
Collaboration is a central component of most communication programs. This chapter addresses considerations for establishing and managing partnerships with other agencies and organizations.

Consult the APPENDIX for this chapter for a number of related resources.

Introduction

Cooperation is difficult to define because it can mean different things to each entity involved. The act of cooperating also takes on unique qualities in each situation. This section describes a process that may be adopted for use by many agencies for a common purpose, in this case, wildland fire management. Some alliances may be short in duration and scope, others more long-term. Regardless of the duration, most will require planning, nurturing, and formal documenting.

Fire agencies have a history of cooperation, most often occurring on a voluntary basis to overcome a lack of fire resources. Fire education, prevention, and mitigation programs often find themselves involved in collaborative partnerships as well. Diminishing budgets and increased expectations of public services require continued efforts to build new and diverse cooperative approaches.

> "Like motherhood and apple pie, cooperation is a long-standing shared American value that is at least as strong a component in American history as competition. Concepts of cooperation evoke images of democratic government including concepts of federalism, pluralism and representation. But the simple fact that cooperation is invoked prescriptively so often in sites ranging from a school yard to the U.S. Congress suggests that achieving effective cooperation between individuals and institutions is not so simple ... cooperation and collaboration at appropriate geographic scales becomes critical. Just what cooperation is and how it is achieved are not obvious."
> *~ Regional Cooperation by Steven L. Yaffe*
> *School of Natural Resources and Environment, University of Michigan*

Benefits of Cooperation

Rapid urban expansion and the ensuing use of resources challenge land and resource managers, urban planners, governing entities, and emergency service agencies. It also has the potential to greatly affect the quality of life for people who use and choose to live in the wildland/urban interface (WUI).

For example, fires in the WUI challenge both structural and wildland firefighters, who are trained and equipped differently. Wildland firefighting agencies are now faced with an increased number of homes built in the path of wildfires, and their municipal counterparts are grappling with multiple ignitions from fast-burning vegetative fires. Everyone agrees that no single agency is adequately prepared to handle both types of firefighting. Suppression of these fires is directed by a unified command, involving structural fire departments protecting structures and wildland fire suppression agencies suppressing the wildfire.

The problem is compounded by the fact that wildfires do not acknowledge boundaries of community, land management agencies, or fire districts. Therefore, agencies responding to fires in WUI areas must develop combined, coordinated efforts to be effective.

Wildland fire management influences many aspects of the WUI, such as healthy forests and sustainable wildlife habitat, clean water, recreational access needs, insect and disease encroachment, hydrologic impacts, scenic views, wildlife, and needs for environmental education. All stakeholders involved also need to understand these "quality of life" issues as valued by the people living in local areas. This understanding will help provide opportunities for cooperation between citizens and those organizations mandated to protect their properties and adjacent resources from wildfire. Governmental agencies must understand and clearly illustrate their specific roles in managing wildland fire and ensure that the public shares the responsibility for the resolution of these problems.

Managing a wildland fire problem requires a community and interagency understanding of all resource management challenges associated with urban growth and increased use. This is best accomplished at the local level where problems are the most obvious and immediate.

Loess Hills

The Loess Hills is a 650,000-acre landscape where historically, more than 90 percent was native prairie with fires occurring every three to seven years. Land conversion and suppression have resulted in significant reductions in fire frequency.

The fire-dependent prairies and woodlands of the Loess Hills are tucked into an agricultural landscape that is almost exclusively privately owned (94 percent). Many private landowners want to see their treasured natural resources thrive, but have limited resources to conduct fire management themselves. Education, training, equipment and technical assistance are the cornerstones of this collaborative fire management effort.

- Partners involved have recently completed a regional Fire Management Plan that will comprehensively address multi-partner objectives (including private landowners), and provide the framework to enable restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems in the Loess Hills. Facilitated in large part due to participation in the U.S. Fire Learning Network (www.tncfire.org/training_usfln.htm), a collaborative project between The Nature Conservancy (TNC), DOI, and USFS.
- The Fire Learning Network strives to create a social infrastructure that catalyzes on-the-ground action through a facilitated process that moves collaborative groups to implementation including appropriate use of fire.
- Increased training from TNC and agency partners, creation of a Mobile Prescribed Fire Crew, and public-private funding for on the ground treatments made significant impacts on the scale of fire restoration efforts on public and private lands.
- The program communicates Firewise principles and the benefit of prescribed fire through the media and public education programs.

An example of wildland fire cooperation on a national level is the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG). The purpose of the NWCG is to design and coordinate programs of the participating agencies to avoid wasteful duplication and to provide a means of constructively working together.

Numerous coordinating groups of smaller scope (regional, state, and local) can be found across the country. Other examples of cooperation can be found in the efforts of private associations, citizen groups, and governmental organizations. Examples of cooperators include The Nature Conservancy, State Wildlife Agencies, State Natural Heritage Programs, as well as state forestry agencies, tribal governments and federal land management agencies.

According to the NWCG, fire prevention and education includes all of “the actions taken to limit the adverse environmental, societal, political, and economical effects of wildland fire.” Community groups and non-fire organizations are now being integrated better into wildland fire management and may also be signatory to new cooperative agreements. If not signatory, their views, interests and participation must be incorporated into your education, prevention and mitigation efforts. Building cooperation can be challenging. Preparation for cooperation includes identifying the factors that facilitate cooperation and recognizing the obstacles that detract.

Factors that facilitate cooperation

1. Shared problems; sense of threat or crisis
2. Shared goals
3. Sense of place
4. Prior relationships between individuals
5. Public pressure or interest
6. Use of a collaborative, proactive process
7. Effective process management
8. Interpersonal skills
9. Dedicated, open-minded individuals
10. Opportunities for interaction; a sense of control
11. Resources, capabilities and support
12. Technology, especially telecommunications

Obstacles to effective cooperation

1. Limited resources, time and energy
2. Limited skills of staff members in outreach, human relations
3. Government policies or budgeting
4. Attitudinal factors
5. Intergroup attitudes, as between social groups, organizations
6. Organizational norms and turf
7. Lack of agency support for interagency efforts
8. Public opposition
9. Inadequate opportunities for interaction
10. Conflicting or ineffective incentives to cooperation
11. Ineffective process management
12. Local parochial concerns
13. Inappropriate political influence

Wildfire Protection Cooperatives

Utilizing the six-step process outlined below will help establish partnerships in a cooperative approach to wildfire prevention. These general collaboration techniques can be applied directly to the establishment of various partnerships within fire management including cooperative fire education or mitigation programs.

In the six-step process you will:

1. Identify Partners and Get Commitment
2. Define the Current Situation
3. Define Roles and Responsibilities
4. Set Goals and Objectives
5. Document and Implement the Plan
6. Evaluate and Revise the Plan

1. Identify Partners and Get Commitment

It's important to realize that cooperation takes place between people, not organizations. So the first step is to identify partners. A partnership is not itself a goal but rather a means of achieving a goal. Partnerships are voluntary, mutually beneficial, desired arrangements between groups. They are established to accomplish mutual objectives that are consistent with the mission of each group.

Work with fellow agencies in your area to determine who should take the lead role in cooperating with rural and urban fire departments for wildland fire protection. In some cases it may be state forestry agencies due to their existing relationships with other state agencies and their responsibility to protect rural lands. In other cases it may be federal agencies due to federal fire assistance programs.

It is important that the interests of each agency, organization, or group be carefully acknowledged in the process. A partnership should include:

- Appropriate legal authority
- Consistency with agency plans, policies, and priorities
- Evident public benefit
- Mutual interest in and benefits from a common objective
- Realistic time frames
- Voluntary participation
- Written agreement(s) between parties

Consider enlisting interagency fire prevention and education teams to share resources and funding. Information on the National Fire Prevention Education Teams is available online through the NWCG Wildland Fire Education Working Team page. www.nwcg.gov/teams/wfewt/wfewt.htm, or create your own local team with neighboring agencies.

Establish a dialogue among the agencies and organizations that can increase the level of fire protection. Concentrate on those agencies you know that may be asking the same questions, and seeking similar solutions.

Fire prevention should be a shared responsibility among those who live and work in the same area. Identifying many potential partners and seeking their ideas and suggestions will increase the level of cooperation as they, at least, agree to agree. The responsibility for fire management centers on fire agencies, but the overall responsibility for fire prevention resides in a network of private and public organizations, businesses, and, of course, the residents themselves.

2. **Define the Current Situation**
   Gather information, research and analyze the current fire prevention situation in the targeted areas. Define the fire management situation in more detailed terms of hazards, current and potential risks, and values to be protected. Fire protection mapping, for example, identifies the values at greatest risk and the location of available interagency resources needed to protect those values in the event of wildfire. These maps can also identify areas where fuel treatment projects can reduce potential fire intensity and spread, and lower property and resource loss in the event of a wildfire. Once the fire management situation can be described in these terms, partners can identify specific areas of improvement that can be gained through cooperation.

3. **Define Roles and Responsibilities**
   Missions and practices vary between fire protection agencies and organizations. It is important to distinguish between them in this process. Highlight strengths and weaknesses of current programs and focus on areas where interagency efforts can be most beneficial.

   The interests of each agency, organization, or group must be carefully acknowledged in this process. No one group's mission is more important than another. Each partner must operate within legal boundaries, and this step will identify barriers, conflicting regulations, and laws that may need alteration for overall public benefit.

   Organizational ethics, accountability, and credibility are an integral part of roles and responsibilities and must be upheld by each partner. The appearance or actual establishment of "conflict of interest" must be avoided. Endorsement of commercial products, services, or entities should be avoided unless authorized. Legal requirements relating to procurement, personnel, labor, printing, and publishing must be honored.

Western Kern Fire

In the summer of 2003, the NPS and USFS initiated on-the-ground operational cooperation for cross-boundary fire use projects. The lightning-caused West Kern Fire began in Sequoia National Park near the park boundary. In the past, boundary fires were routinely suppressed to prevent spread onto neighboring U.S. Forest Service lands. But this year, with the institution of a fire use program, the Sequoia and Inyo National Forests were pleased to manage this natural fire cooperatively with the parks.

As a result, the West Kern Fire burned across a line on a map that had previously been a huge barrier. This positive partnership prevented a costly fire suppression effort and improved the health of local forests. The West Kern Fire totaled 7,968 acres (3,510 acres were in the park). This photo shows the West Kern Fire. All three units (Sequoia National Park, Sequoia National Forest, and Inyo National Forest) are in the photo.

4. **Set Goals and Objectives**

Establish goals and objectives for cooperative opportunities. Likely, they will be designed to solve the most pressing problems first — the ones that cannot be ignored. Among the types of cooperative opportunities to consider are awareness and education, training, prevention, communications and dispatch, weather services and equipment, and suppression resources (e.g., equipment, stations, and personnel).

Often goals and objectives involve formal protection assistance agreements. There are generally four types of protection assistance methods that can be employed between fire agencies. Agencies may choose to use one or all four or a combination. These four methods enable protection assistance between signing agencies and organizations. Each agency may also have additional legal requirements that need to be considered.

- Reciprocal – Establishes the exchange of fire protection services on a non-reimbursable basis, when one of the organizations is in a position to furnish resources to another. This exchange is roughly an equal exchange of resources and usually limited to a 24-hour time period. Reciprocal exchange is probably the most often used type of fire protection assistance.
- Offset – Arranged by an equal exchange of services, typically determined by workload and not acres. There is generally no exchange of funds in offset protection assistance. Experience has shown that local offset arrangements work best because partners are in the position to define what is equitable and make alterations when needed. Once instituted, offset exchanges may be difficult to modify at a later date. This should be considered before entering into offset protection services.
- Reimbursable – Provides payment for personnel and equipment at an agreed rate by the requesting agency. It is called reimbursable protection assistance. Generally, the reimbursement rates are agreed upon and documented annually.
- Fee basis or contracted – Provides protection on fee basis. That is, the fire protection for one agency is assumed by another, and payment is provided for the contracted services.

Partners often agree to more than one form of protection assistance. Moreover, assistance can be employed back-to-back, such as reciprocal assistance followed by reimbursable assistance. Depending on the particular needs of a community or agency, the various protection assistance methods offer a variety of approaches to securing needed resources and providing coordinated responses. Besides direct protection and suppression, there are many other ways that fire agencies and organizations can cooperate. Regardless of type, developing cooperative fire agreements requires a systematic approach to planning. Coordinated efforts will result in improved fire protection capability and reduced losses.

5. **Document and Implement the Plan**

Document and implement a formal agreement each partner signs. Most agencies have specific guidelines and processes for signing and developing cooperative relationships, sometimes including a formal legal review. Staff specialists can assist in writing and reviewing the documents. Generally, draft versions are shared with partners prior to the final edition.

Written cooperative fire prevention agreements exist between most federal agencies and most federal and state forestry organizations. They can be found in Mobilization Guides and in individual agency manual directives. Higher level written cooperative agreements are the enabling documents for lower level agreements for the same participating agencies. Written agreements may also document plans, requirements, and/or decisions for specific projects or purposes (e.g., interagency prescribed burn projects, arson task forces, use of state National Guard resources in wildfire emergencies).

It is important to ensure that each cooperator understands the role and responsibility before them. Individual agency missions and capabilities must be honored and incorporated in the documentation. Whether your agency and the other partners have planned for reciprocal, offset, reimbursable, or a fee-based protection service, each should be fully prepared to follow through with agreed upon methods.

There are two sub-agreements that are connected to so-called “master” cooperative fire protection agreements. They are annual operating plans and supplemental cost-share agreements. They add both time- and situation-sensitive details to cooperative fire protection agreements which tend to be multi-year documents.

Interrelated types of fire protection agreements include:

A. Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement
B. Annual Operating Plan
C. Supplemental or Cost-Share Agreements
D. Compact Agreements

Annual Operating Plans

Many protection agreements require the development of annual operating plans. These are important because they provide procedural details to implement the agreement in time of need.

Annual operating plans outline specific procedures between parties at each local geographic area implementing a master cooperative fire protection agreement. They often include how information will be transferred and processed, specific billing procedures, dispatch coordination, reciprocal and/or offset exchange zones (if used), fire resource directories, and other important logistical information.

6. **Evaluate and Revise the Plan**

Cooperative fire protection agreements and operating plans should be reviewed annually. The purpose of the review is to evaluate the currency of the document and the level of commitment in terms of resources and procedures that were agreed upon. Annual reviews and subsequent revisions help to ensure that the plan will meet your needs in the next fire season. Amendments may be made at any time during the life of an agreement. Once an agreement has expired, a new agreement must be executed.

Every annual operating plan will need some adjustment, particularly in its early stages. Often, joint training sessions and exercises help to test the plan before fire season. In this way, procedural problems can be worked out prior to an emergency.

When fire season arrives, efforts will be realized. The meetings, the discussions, the training — all will result in more effective and efficient operations, working together rather than separately. Following each project in the plan that was activated, hold debriefings with the other partners to make adjustments before the next activity.

Like other tools, working cooperatively with others can also improve the effectiveness and efficiency of interagency fire prevention.

Corporate or Foundation Partnerships For Communicating Fire Messages

Businesses and others in the private sector can be an excellent partner for your fire communication program. It's important to be aware of how the potential partner's needs fit into your program. All agencies have guidelines for working with partners. Before formalizing an agreement, be certain to ask the following questions:

- **Budget –** What, if any, will be the necessary expenditures from the agency? What event, activity, or materials can the partner offer to underwrite?
- **Legal Guidelines –** How will the partnership stay within the guidelines of the agency's directives about partners? How do we keep both the partner and the agency on a sound footing?
- **Audience –** Who will receive the educational program? Where do they live? How old are they? Does this program target a priority fire prevention focus in our area?
- **Influence –** What are we trying to influence our audience to do?
- **Appeal –** How can our prevention program appeal to our audience to convince them to take the steps suggested to prevent damaging fires and promote healthy landscapes?
- **Benefit –** Does the partnership benefit both the agency and the partner?
- **Sustainability –** Is the program sustainable? Can we follow through with our plans in a timely way? Are we promising things we can't deliver? Are we being as helpful to our partner as possible? Can we solve the problems that may occur?
- **Evaluation –** How can we best monitor and evaluate our partnership? If some aspect isn't working, how can we redesign our plans?
- **Recognition –** How can we best acknowledge our partners contributions?

The process of forming a corporate partnership is similar to a cooperative fire protection agreement, with some modification.

1. **Identify your objectives.**
   Objectives can include the messages to communicate, the audiences to reach, and the end results to achieve. Having identified clear and specific objectives, it will be much easier to determine which companies to approach and what activities to implement. Measurable objectives can help evaluate the success of a cooperative program at the end of the year.

2. **Identify target companies.**
   Develop a list of 10 to 20 companies in the area to contact. These companies may include local supermarkets, real estate offices, accounting firms, utility companies, banks — virtually anyone, because wildfires can have an impact on the employees or customers of all companies. Some of the companies that are contacted may be a division or branch of a larger national company. This should not be a barrier because most branches have monies set aside for local public service. Do use some caution when choosing partner companies. Any company that promotes the message will — in the eyes of the homeowners — be a reflection of the agency. In other words, make sure that the company has the right image for the agency. And remember, it's important to make sure there is a "fit" between the message communicated and the company chosen. For instance, if the objective is to reach vacationers with fire safe tips, contact camping supply stores for their support.

   If there is difficulty in identifying a list of companies, the local chamber of commerce may have insight into the most active and concerned corporate citizens. Please be sure to contact them. They are an excellent resource to have.

3. **Identify specific program ideas for each company.**
Once the list of companies has been selected, develop an accompanying list of program ideas for each. Try to be as specific as possible to help the company visualize what is needed. It may also help to make a drawing of the proposed artwork or design to help bring the idea to life; a company will never commit funds to a cause without knowing exactly how the monies will be used. Keep in mind that most companies work with a six-month to one-year lead time. If seeking financial assistance, it is imperative that contact is made with companies early (at least six to eighth months in advance of your anticipated start date) before monies are committed elsewhere. It is important to develop ideas that are appropriate to a given company.

For example:
- A supermarket may be willing to tell its grocery bag manufacturer to print a supply of bags with fire prevention, education, and mitigation messages.
- A real estate office might be interested in distributing a WUI homeowner tip sheet to all new home buyers.
- Utility companies may be able to create educational inserts for billing statements.
- Fast food restaurants could develop fire education placemats.
- Camping stores could distribute campfire safety information to all customers.

Other general program ideas include:
- Sponsoring fire prevention billboards.
- Producing radio/television commercials and PSAs.
- Education/prevention/mitigation messages on products (such as milk cartons).
- Underwriting the cost of brochures to be delivered to every doorstep in the community.
- Local shopping mall exhibit.
- Newspaper advertisements.
- In-store fire prevention and education displays (commonly called “point-of-purchase” displays) that can include: shelf containers for brochures; banners that can be hung from ceilings to call attention to the availability of fire materials in the store, bank, etc.; large cardboard displays that can accommodate a company's product (e.g., soft drink cans) and brochures.
- Elementary school programs meeting state standards for learning.
- Placing articles in company newsletters/newspapers/Web sites.
- Civic meetings and town halls.

4. **Identify approximate costs for each program**.
Before pitching a specific idea to a company, try to get an accurate estimate of the cost for such an endeavor. Some programs can be quite expensive (such as in store displays), while others can cost almost nothing (such an article on the employee Web site). Always check to see if printing or other production discounts are available to a not-for-profit organization.

When working with outside vendors (such as designers or advertisers) to get price estimates, make sure the vendors provide the total price of completing a project. Often, items such as tax, shipping, and overrun costs (for printed materials) are not included in budget estimates. These “hidden” costs can amount to hundreds or thousands of dollars and result in a project running over budget. It is always a good practice to increase budget estimates to take into account any such hidden costs or price increases (paper costs, for example, increase several times annually) that might arise. If a company agrees to pay $5,000, and the program ends up at $5,500, the agency may have to make up the difference. On the other hand, if under budget, money can be returned, to the delight of the sponsor.

5. **Determine the appropriate contact at each company.**
Call the company, briefly explain the idea and who the appropriate contact is. Although one's first inclination is to send the letter to the president of the company, in all likelihood, the president will pass the letter on to the director of marketing, public affairs, or another department. If the letter is sent to the wrong person, there is always the chance that it will be thrown out or lost. Also, if a personal contact at the company is a supporter of the agency, it may be more effective to start your outreach with him or her. Often a personal contact can "go to bat" for you. A person from within a company who can accurately represent agency interests will definitely help the cause.

6. **Submit a proposal.**
The proposal is the first opportunity to present the cause, the idea, and the agency. As such, it is very important to make a strong first impression. Effective letters begin with an emotional appeal and include impactful information about the fire hazard and what can be done about it. Remember to keep the letter brief—one page, if possible; no more than one and one-half pages. Try to include the following information:
   - Emotional appeal, referencing recent activity if relevant
     E.g., "We are emerging from one of the worst fire seasons in history. During the past five months, more than 12,000 wildfires burned out of control, destroying more than 114 homes. The danger is not over, but with help from organizations like yours, we can do something about it.
   - Reference success stories.
   - Demonstrate that the company can help make an impact by informing the community about crucial fire safety and mitigation information.
   - Explain what needs to be done, and how that company can help. Include a cost estimate if appropriate.
   - Reference the number of consumers expected to be reached by such a program and how beneficial it will be for the company to be seen as a dedicated and caring corporate citizen. Indicate the publicity avenues available to them, and let the company know that the agency will work to get them as much visibility as possible for their efforts.
   - Be prepared to work with them to develop a co-op program that will meet their needs.
   - If appropriate, tell the company that the program is being offered exclusively to them. Many times, a company will be looking for a cause it can "call its own."
   - Include with the proposal letter any useful background information about the agency, the campaign, local areas, and fire statistics for the area. This type of information can help "sell" the department to the potential co-op sponsor.

7. **Schedule a meeting/presentation**.
In some instances, the agency may be asked to make a presentation to the company before a decision can be made. This presentation will be the chance to show the company who you are, what the agency role is, how severe the wildfire problem is, what can be done about this problem, and how the company can help. It's always helpful to accompany remarks with visual aids.

Flexibility is a key when talking to a company. Some of the proposal will result in an interest in the campaign, but not necessarily in the suggested program. Be willing to work with the company to tailor a program especially for them. Make sure the company understands that *any* assistance they can offer will help to make the area fire safe. Remember, too, that rarely will the agency get something for nothing in a co-op effort. The sponsor may want to redesign artwork, have its logo prominently displayed, etc. Again, be flexible — the most important thing is that the message gets out. Also, don't assume that just because a company is unable to help out this year, it will not be able to help out the next. Business

environments, budgets, and personnel are always changing. It may just be a matter of time before a company has the budget, or inclination to help you.

8. **Work with the company throughout the program**.
   Be easily accessible to a cooperative sponsor and provide any assistance they may need. If the company needs camera-ready artwork to print a poster or a news release to print an internal newsletter, provide it to them promptly. The more precise in executing responsibilities, the more likely it will be that the sponsor will do the same.

   Be sure to review any copy or artwork before it goes to print. Changes may have been made to your originals that result in faulty, incomplete, or misleading information being communicated. While complete control over the artwork that is selected may not be available, control over the message that is conveyed must be maintained. Make sure that it says what needs to be said.

9. **Express your appreciation.**
   The final step is to say “Thank You.” Any time a company (or individual) donates time, money, or resources, be sure to express appreciation. None of these companies is obligated to support the agency, but without their assistance, it would be impossible to communicate fire safe messages to all of the residents and vacationers in the area.

   Consider recognizing cooperative sponsors with a special award that expresses appreciation for their involvement. Engraved plaques or framed certificates are thoughtful gifts that will tell the sponsor how significant and appreciated their support is. Depending on the depth of a sponsor's commitment (money, time, service, etc.), host a news conference, or at least distribute a local news release, to unveil the cooperative program to the media. Public recognition such as this can go a long way toward encouraging repeat participation in the cooperative effort. The more aware sponsors are of gratitude and need for them, the more likely they will be to renew their pledge to help in the future.

   In the event that the company cannot sponsor the project at this time, sending a thank you letter to acknowledge their time is also appropriate and may result in the company sponsoring a future project.