



### Managing collaborations

**Collaborations need good management, even before the group is formalised. This means the right conditions and strong relationships. For these to develop, a group member needs to take on the role of 'network driver'<sup>1</sup>.**

The network driver helps to move towards new ways of thinking and away from traditional management. That is, away from accomplishing tasks and decision making as primary goals. The network driver shapes and develops relationships to achieve collaborative\* advantage, goals and outcomes. They guide dialogue and re-orient attitudes for collaborative activity.

#### Shaping new relationships

The network driver needs to ensure support from relevant and influential people<sup>2</sup>. Promoting the need, vision and advantages of the collaboration is a core task; it helps gain support from advocates and addresses detractor concerns.

A network driver ensures that participants' interests and issues are discussed in a balanced and informed way. Developing relationships and trust can be challenging with a diverse group; it involves helping members deal with a wide range of viewpoints and motivations. A network driver will be able to help people 'agree to disagree' respectfully. Fence-sitters or detractors may need one-on-one conversations to enable their issues to be fully considered. Time spent listening can better inform common concerns and identify ways to deactivate the "nay-sayers". This way, all members can engage as individuals as well as representatives of parent organisations.

Surprises or last minute updates can cause problems. To assist ongoing links, network drivers must keep parent organisations aware of emerging concerns.

#### Read an insider's opinion on networking (below):

*"Developing relationships across our multiple groups required a clear direction. We had to consider all stakeholders' outcomes. This process was based on trust, empathy and patient listening. You have to be sure that you are hearing what's really at stake for the players. Sometimes a slow decision, with lots of discussion works best. That way, each party can be heard and the outcomes align with the spirit and the intent of the participating groups. This is not a quick process. Going slow can help create a more solid foundation for future efforts. We found that was the best way to move our group of disparate thinkers and independent business owners forward."*

– **Andrew Ross, Bluey Merino, a Farming Together supported project.**



Andrew Ross of Bluey Merino leads a new network.

#### 10 ways to build collaborating relationships

1. Connect with relevant influencers
2. Communicate the need, benefits and vision of the collaboration
3. Build coalitions and support
4. Leverage relationships
5. Tap into participant expertise
6. Foster dialogue to explore options
7. Encourage participation as individuals not just representatives
8. Create opportunities for people to be part of the bigger picture
9. Deal with detractors to re-form perceptions by listening to them and by presenting clear, informed counter arguments
10. Keep parent organisations up to date on emerging issues.

## Developing a dialogue-environment



### A shift to dialogue

Dialogue explores options. It differs from discussion, which can tend to focus on decisions. New rules or communication procedures can assist dialogue and the chance for all participants to be heard. No single participant, regardless of formal power, should feel they are the only critical player. Developing a common set of values fosters a dialogue-environment, critical for the collaboration. The network driver oversees these vital cultural shifts. When all information and interests are put on the table and engagement and appreciation of the larger whole encouraged, innovative solutions can result.

### Changing attitudes

Forming a new cohesive whole with participants from a variety of groups and backgrounds is a challenge. Non-traditional, more interdependent interactions can help this challenge. The network driver aims to get people talking – not 'at' or 'around' each other, but to draw out different points of view. The network driver is a guide and facilitator, adjusting for participants pace and behaviours.

Participants need to develop expectations about collaborating, problem-solving and being innovative. The network driver can assist participants to adjust their approach to work, highlighting that results stem from good relationships, not by controlling outcomes. Participants may need to work at being comfortable with non-traditional procedures. They may need parent organisation support as that body relinquishes control and offers space, flexibility and authority to help the participant development, change, innovate and take risks.

### 'Farming Together' aims to:

- generate knowledge and skills about collaborative systems, co-operative structures and collective strategies, to help Australian farmers and their business networks
- examine the economic benefits of collaboration
- provide support to collaborative & co-operative approaches
- facilitate knowledge sharing
- produce and share resources
- form cross-sector networks

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1. Keast, R. (2004). Integrated Human Services: The Role of Networked Arrangements, unpublished PhD, QLD University of Technology.
  2. Innes, J.E. & Booher, D. (1999). Consensus Building as Role Playing and Bricolage: Toward a Theory of Collaborative Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 65(1):9–24.
- \* Collaboration content developed by Dr Robyn Keast. Adapted for Farming Together by Dr Cathy Byrne.

*Farming together.*