

Reflecting on processes of engagement and collaboration in outdoor recreation

There is a general assumption that ‘working together’ produces better results, no matter what area you are working in. While there is a fair degree of truth in this assumption, there is also a need to understand some basic principles that underpin successful engagement and collaboration.

‘Collaborations’ generally focus on longer term relationships which involve multiple stakeholders working together on issues of common interest. Such relationships usually involve contributing time, people and resources to support the relationship, above and beyond the needs of specific projects. They can deliver deeper understanding, greater certainty and better outcomes for all parties.

Working together ‘collaborating’ is process orientated – how you do something is seen as important as what you do – this relies on genuine relationships among diverse kinds of people and across diverse kinds of organisations, and brings into play considerations of respect, trust, shared goals, and mutually beneficial outcomes - these **principles** underpin collaborative practice.

Collaboration doesn’t just happen – you need to build the capacity of a stakeholder group to collaborate effectively (*e.g.* from Surowiecki’s *Wisdom of Crowds* ‘a group of people working together in a well facilitated participatory process will always come out with better solutions than one person working alone’).

In terms of collaboration in outdoor recreation I see 3 discrete but overlapping levels of collaboration:

- practice - program participants/customers
- organisational - your group
- sectoral - local/state government agencies, landholders, participants, schools, private enterprises, community groups

If you know what you want to get out of your collaboration, then you can design structures, systems and processes to achieve this.

Potential outcomes:

- Promotes broad ownership of decisions and actions
- Strengthens sense of identity and community within your organisation and sector – working together for common goals
- Greater transparency and accountability (key government interest)
- Better solutions to problems (wisdom of crowds by James Surowiecki)
- Enhancing individual health and community well being – “The social, community, health, spiritual and educational benefits of outdoor recreation are major contributors to the liveability and outdoors lifestyle of SEQ”.
- Facilitates organisational learning (better business outcomes for you, more effective and efficient use of limited resources, risk management, enhances service quality)
- Builds support for and profile of your organisation/sector (lobbying power) – analogy with environmental movement over past 20 years.
- Overall, effective collaboration leads towards agreed sectoral goals, actions and outcomes