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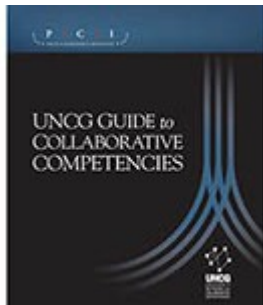
## Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Collaborative Competencies

By Rick Morse

Article: <https://ced.sog.unc.edu/collaborative-competencies/>

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Collaborative governance in its many forms, from intergovernmental and public-private partnerships to stakeholder consensus building processes, is becoming more and more common across the U.S. and will continue to be so due to the highly interconnected nature of public problems. The realm of community economic development in particular exemplifies the need for and value of partnerships across traditional boundaries, as the example of the Wayne County Development Alliance demonstrates. But collaboration is inherently difficult, and it “requires people to develop and put to use collaborative behaviors, skills, and tools in order for it to be most effective.” Thus it is critically important for public and nonprofit development agencies to develop and nurture *collaborative competencies*. The University Network for Collaborative Governance (UNCG), in partnership with the Policy Consensus Initiative, recently published a *Guide to Collaborative Competencies*. The rest of this post will summarize and review this important new resource and offer suggestions on how it might be utilized in community and economic development (as well as other public service) organizations.

The *Guide to Collaborative Competencies* is a 28 page monograph that pulls together identified collaborative competencies from a variety of sources, including U.S. OPM, ICMA, and Cooperative Extension. The term competency is used here to imply mastery of various skill sets (knowledge, tools, and techniques). A working group of the UNCG reviewed the variety of sources and synthesized them into five broad competency groupings that encompass ten specific skill sets. They also refined their work based on feedback from over 60 local, state, and federal government professionals. The competencies and skill sets discussed in the monograph are:

1. Collaborative Leadership and Management
  - Collaborative leadership skills, including leadership style, political acumen, and entrepreneurial skills.
  - Planning, organizing, and managing collaboration.
2. Process
  - Effective communication.
  - Working in teams and facilitating groups.
  - Negotiating agreement and managing conflict.
3. Analysis
  - Applying analytic skills and strategic thinking (including assessing situations and understanding political, legal, and regulatory context for collaboration).
  - Evaluating and adapting processes.
4. Knowledge Management



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- Integrating technical and scientific information.
  - Using information and communication technology.
5. Professional Accountability
- Maintaining personal integrity and professional ethics.

Clearly within each of the skill-sets is a host of specific skills that can be learned and improved upon. For example, effective communication includes listening skills and presentation skills as well as cultural competency. The authors of the monograph suggest that the competencies can (and should) be utilized by individuals and organizations interested in improving collaborative capacity and also for educators developing curriculum. A simple self-assessment tool is included at the end so that professionals, after reading the competency descriptions, can rate themselves as proficient or lacking confidence in the various skill sets. The self-assessment can help individuals identify gaps in their collaborative competencies so they can know where they need development (through training, self-study, mentoring, etc.).

As stated, I believe this is a very valuable resource for public and nonprofit development professionals (and, indeed, for all those working in the public service). It is well-researched and concise, written in accessible (mostly jargon-free) language, and includes illustrative examples throughout. It is an excellent starting point for individuals and organizations seriously interested in increasing their collaborative acumen.

The strength is also somewhat of a weakness in that each of the skill sets discussed could be expanded on greatly. It is not hard to see how the monograph could be expanded into a book, and perhaps the authors will consider such an expansion. A guidebook with exercises and case studies to go along with the competency and skill set descriptions would be a most valuable tool for training and personal development. But as a brief introduction and synthesis of the various extent resources on collaborative competencies, this monograph is highly recommended. Community economic development professionals in particular need to be effective collaborative leaders in order to be successful. This guide offers an excellent starting point for understanding collaborative competencies and assessing one's strengths and weaknesses in relation to them.