

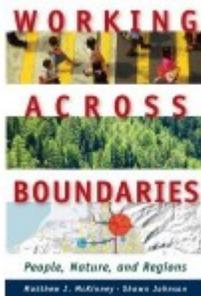


Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Recommended Book: Working Across Boundaries

By Rick Morse

Article: <https://ced.sog.unc.edu/recommended-book-working-across-boundaries/>

This entry was posted on February 08, 2011 and is filed under Community Development, Economic Development, Natural Assets, Regional & Collaborative Approaches, Social & Civic Assets, Sustainable Development



Rick Morse is a School of Government faculty member. His work focuses on collaborative governance and public leadership.

Community economic development is a classic example of a “transboundary” issue. There is no single authority that, acting alone, can effectively address community and economic development issues. These issues transcend the boundaries we’ve created—jurisdictional, functional, and sectoral boundaries. Community leaders looking to make a difference in terms of community and economic development, therefore, must learn to work across boundaries. With that in mind, I would like to recommend an excellent book that is somewhat of a primer and even a user’s guide to leading regional, transboundary efforts.

McKinney and Johnson’s *Working Across Boundaries* is aimed at practitioners, presenting “an array of practical and tested strategies and techniques” for regional collaboration. The book begins by identifying “a gap in governance” created by the mismatch between jurisdictional and institutional boundaries and the “territory” of the economic, social, and environmental issues we face (2). The authors focus primarily on land use and environmental issues, since that is where most of their experience is. However, the principles discussed in the book apply to essentially all kinds of regional initiatives. The authors outline the strengths and weaknesses of a continuum of regional arrangements, from informal networks, to more formal partnerships, to regional institutions (11-22).

After establishing the case for regional collaboration and outlining the various institutional forms it can take, the remainder of the book is a how-to, organized around “principles of effective regional collaboration” organized within a four stage model of diagnose, design, take action, and evaluate (28). The diagnostic stage is about determining the need for cross-boundary collaboration. Here leaders “identify the compelling issue or catalyst” and “determine if there is a constituency for change” (35-41). Next, a process is designed to fit the needs of the situation. The design phase involves determining “who should convene and lead the effort,” mobilizing “the right people,” mutually defining the region “to match the place, problem, and people,” and developing an organizational strategy (47-74).

The third phase of a regional collaboration initiative involves formulating and implementing actions. The three principles that guide this phase are facilitating “scientific and joint learning” (which incorporates joint issue framing and deliberation), developing action plans, and “translating vision into action” (75-101). A particularly useful take-away from the discussion of taking action is the authors’ “seven habits for effective implementation” (102-105), a list of important insights culled from experience that separate successful collaborative efforts from the many more failed ones.

The final phase of regional collaborative governance is to “evaluate, learn, and adapt.” The principle here is to “learn



together as you go forward and adapt as needed” (107). McKinney and Johnson present a very useful discussion on how to evaluate regional collaborations in terms of both process and outcomes. A “participant satisfaction scorecard” is also included as an appendix.

Working Across Boundaries concludes with discussion (including examples) of four different models of regional governance for land use or natural resource issues, and advice to “move both the theory and practice of regional collaboration forward” (145). The book is very readable and includes many vivid, illustrative case examples. I highly recommend it to anyone working on regional issues such as community economic development, land use, and natural resources management. Also recommended is a fantastic companion website, created by the authors, hosted by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy (the publisher of the book). Working effectively across boundaries—across jurisdictions and across sectors—is critical for communities to succeed in today’s globalized world. This book is an excellent resource for those involved in these efforts.