

Building Capacity for Collaborative Conservation

Findings from a Practitioner Needs Assessment of Critical Skills and Tools for Collaborative Conservation in the American West

May 2017



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Red Feather Lakes, Peter Brown

The **Center for Collaborative Conservation (CCC)** helps create innovative and lasting conservation solutions for people and nature through collaboration. We believe that a collaborative approach can better address contentious conservation issues by representing the diverse voices, diverse needs, and diverse challenges involved in conservation and livelihood decisions. Leveraging the resources of Colorado State University, the CCC uses a multifaceted approach that reflects the university's land grant mission of teaching, outreach, and research. We train future conservationists through university coursework, support conservation practitioners in developing skills in collaboration, and investigate how and why collaboration succeeds or fails in achieving desired outcomes.



Why a needs assessment?

Conservation Challenges in the American West

The American West is known for its wide-open spaces, charismatic wildlife species, magnificent snow-peaked mountain ranges, vast rolling prairies, wild rushing rivers, and iconic public lands. Less recognized has been the West's rich rural traditions, local agrarian economies, quiet private working lands, and the private landowners that have cherished our natural heritage, and stewarded natural resources to produce our needed food and fiber. Virtually ignored are the conservation opportunities in the West's rapidly urbanizing landscapes as well.

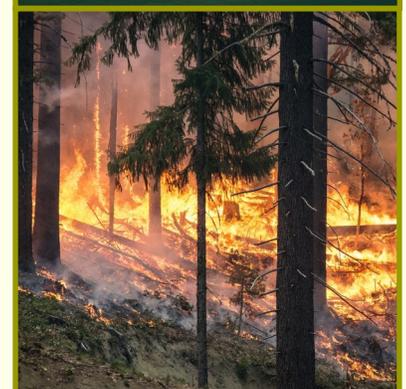
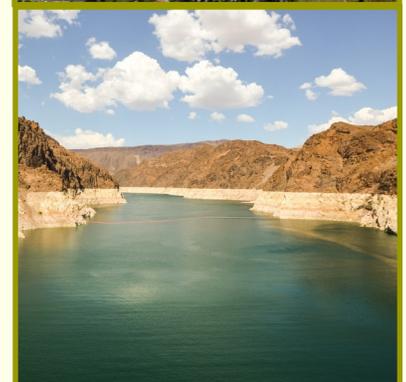
In the last two decades, the West has experienced intense change. Populations have dramatically grown, and an increasing diversity of uses and users have placed greater demands on our limited natural resources. Once rural agricultural lands and open spaces have converted to urbanized and commercial uses. Technology has enabled urban people to move into more rural landscapes and live close to where they dream to play. New service and recreational industries have displaced rural agrarian economies. Natural events occur more frequently, at larger and more intense scales, changing the natural landscape and directly impacting people's lives and livelihoods. Meanwhile, managers of public lands have lost resources and management capacity. Consequently, communities have struggled to work together to decide how to manage the West's natural resources to meet ecological, economic and social needs.

Why a collaborative approach to conservation?

In response, public and private leaders have stepped forward to catalyze and facilitate community conversations using collaborative problem solving to achieve long-lasting conservation solutions. The most successful collaborative processes are more often community-driven, occur at the scale of the conservation problem, and involve diverse stakeholders who are willing to seek common ground together, share resources and co-create solutions that provide equal benefit to people and place.

To support these conservation efforts, people have recognized the need to strengthen and invest in the sharing and development of skills and tools that increase the collaborative capacity of conservation practitioners.

Conservation practitioners today need to remain highly competent technically. They also need quality training in collaborative skills and tools to enable them to engage effectively with diverse people to solve complex conservation challenges.



Photos from top: Oil well on crop land, CCO Public Domain; Urban sprawl, CCO Public Domain; Hoover dam low water, CCO Public Domain; Forest fire, Colorado State University

“ We believe that for a conservation practice program to be effective, it should be co-designed and co-delivered by conservation practitioners .”

Heather Knight, Associate
Director of Conservation
Practice, CCC



Plowed field, CC0 Public Domain

Building support for a collaborative approach to conservation.

New organizations and programs have emerged to meet this need to build skills and tools that strengthen collaborative conservation efforts.

In 2008, the Center Collaborative Conservation (CCC) was created at Colorado State University’s Warner College of Natural Resources to strongly link university research and education to conservation practice. The CCC helps create innovative and lasting conservation solutions for people and nature through collaboration. The CCC uses collaboration to exchange resources, expertise, and experience and thereby create opportunities for achieving conservation goals at larger scales representing the needs of diverse stakeholders.

The CCC has been working with and through practitioners since 2008. We are now expanding and formalizing that work by developing a new conservation practitioner program. The purpose of this program is to work together with conservation practitioners to develop, share, and test collaborative tools and skills that will enable current and future conservation practitioners to achieve conservation outcomes.

What are collaborative skills and tools?

Collaborative skills are abilities and expertise one can learn through observation, demonstration and practice, such as leadership, mediation, listening, and facilitation.

Collaborative tools are tangible (like a participatory mapping tool or virtual meeting software to broaden participation) or intangible (like the communication techniques) mechanisms that extend a practitioner’s skill set to solve particular problems.

Why did we do a Needs Assessment?

In order to establish an effective collaborative capacity building program for conservation practitioners, the CCC recognized the need to directly engage practitioners in the process of program development and implementation.

We designed this needs assessment to ask conservation practitioners three main questions:

- ⇒ What existing collaborative skills and tools are already available for current and future conservation practitioners and who delivers them?
- ⇒ What are the gaps in collaborative skills and tools that conservation practitioners feel are needed to further support their conservation efforts?
- ⇒ What are the best methods to deliver these tools and skills?

Needs Assessment Methods

In order to establish an effective collaborative capacity building program for conservation practitioners, the CCC recognized the need to directly engage practitioners in the process of program development and implementation. Questions were then refined and finalized. See Appendix A for the final interview questions.

The CCC staff and team members used their conservation networks to create an initial list of potential conservation practitioners to be considered for interviews. To ensure representation across the conservation practitioner community, we established criteria for interview participation, including: key conservation leaders or practitioners who are well connected and or newly participating in the conservation community. These leaders and practitioners represent key place-based conservation initiatives or their member organizations that operate at a watershed or larger scale; or represent bridging/umbrella conservation organizations that operate at the state, regional or national level; or are part of supporting organizations (e.g., funding, policy, education organizations); and represent conservation efforts across different ecosystems and conservation issues in Colorado and the American West.

We obtained human subjects research approval from Colorado State University for this study. A total of five CCC staff and Team members were trained to meet the research standards. Heather Knight, the Associate Director of the CCC Practice Program, initially contacted potential interviewees and invited them to participate. Prior to an interview, interviewees were assured of confidentiality, a unique code was assigned to each interviewee, formal interview consent was obtained, and interview questions were shared. We conducted telephone interviews between August 2016, and February 2017. As part of each interview, we asked interviewees to recommend others to be included in the needs assessment, snowballing the list of potential interviewees and increasing the diversity of the participant pool.

Detailed notes were taken during each interview. After completion of each interview, notes were systematically reviewed and coded, and illustrative interview passages for each code and respondent were entered into a spreadsheet. All codes and responses were then analyzed, seeking patterns and themes across questions and respondent types. For each interview question and theme we calculated the frequency of responses for each respondent type and for the total sample of respondents. Results were then illustrated graphically in chart form.

Practitioner Group Composition We interviewed sixty-four conservation practitioners from across the United States, principally (but not exclusively) from the American West, via sixty semi-structured interviews. Practitioners were categorized as belonging to one of nine different kinds of conserva-

64 Conservation practitioners from the American West were interviewed to identify the most critical skills and tools that enable practitioners to pursue collaborative conservation.



Colorado State University

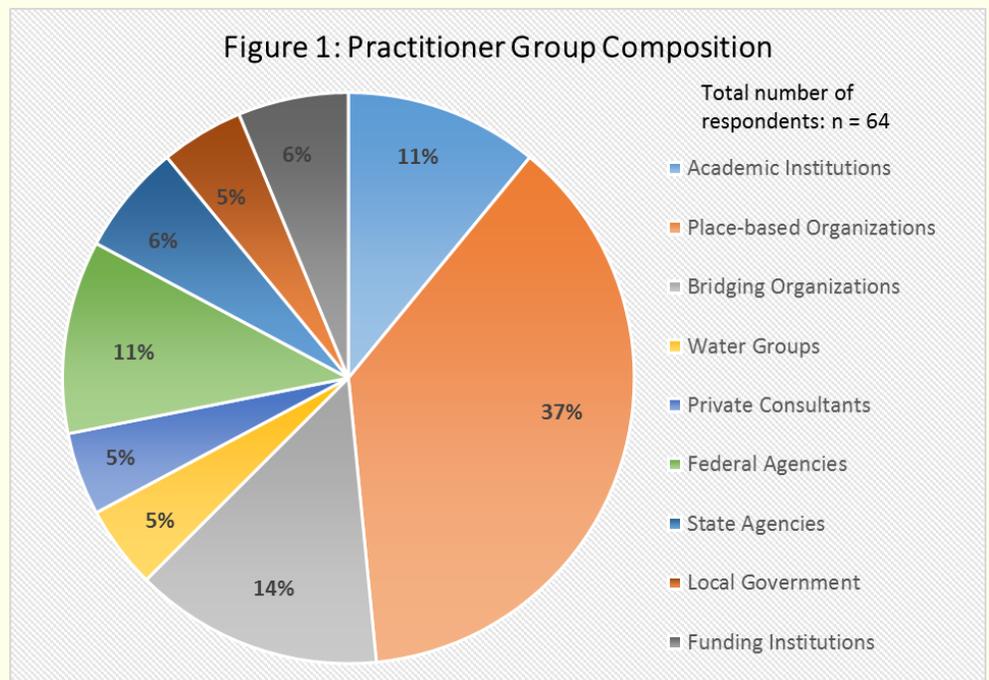
Participants interviewed represented:

- 7 academic institutions
- 24 place-based organizations
- 9 bridging organizations
- 3 water groups
- 3 private consultants
- 7 federal agencies
- 4 state agencies
- 3 local government
- 4 funding institutions

“ I am passionate about this issue of what conservation practitioners need to be better collaborators “.
Interviewee # CCCNA038

The largest group of practitioners (37%) were from **place-based conservation initiatives** and or members of organizations participating in those initiatives. These groups usually operate at the watershed or landscape scale implementing conservation actions on the ground and are comprised of a mixture of citizens, nonprofit, for profit, and governmental organizations. Representatives from conservation **bridging or umbrella organizations** comprised 14% of the interview pool. Bridging and umbrella organizations typically provide networking, training, technology, policy and resource support to one or more place-based conservation initiatives, and operate at the scale of regions, state or multi-state jurisdictions. **Academic institutions** comprised 11% of interviewees and represented both public and private universities and or other nonprofit education organizations. **Federal agency practitioners** were also represented as 11% of the participant pool. The remaining groups each represented 5% or 6% of the total interview pool; including **state agency personnel, local government programs, institutions funding conservation efforts, water groups** (personnel from water conservancy or irrigation districts), and **private consultants** who deliver education and or technical services to the conservation community.

Practitioners work across a diversity of cultural contexts, from rural to urban; geographic scales, from single watersheds to large landscapes; ecological systems and conservation issues; from forests to rangelands freshwater to marine systems; and across a mix of public, tribal and private ownerships, addressing issues ranging from wildlife habitat, energy, climate, water, and human use, at the scale of watersheds, large landscapes, bioregions and nations. A few participants also work internationally in Asia, Canada, and central and South America.



NEEDS ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Collaborative Conservation Skills & Tools Identified by Conservation Practitioners

Practitioners were asked, “What are the most important collaborative skills and tools that current and future conservation practitioners need to achieve conservation success?” Responses fell into one of two overarching categories: **People & Process Skills** and **Technical & Knowledge Tools**. Note that each respondent identified more than one skill and tool.

People & Process Skills: Respondents identified the following skills as the most important collaborative skills for practitioners (figure 2):

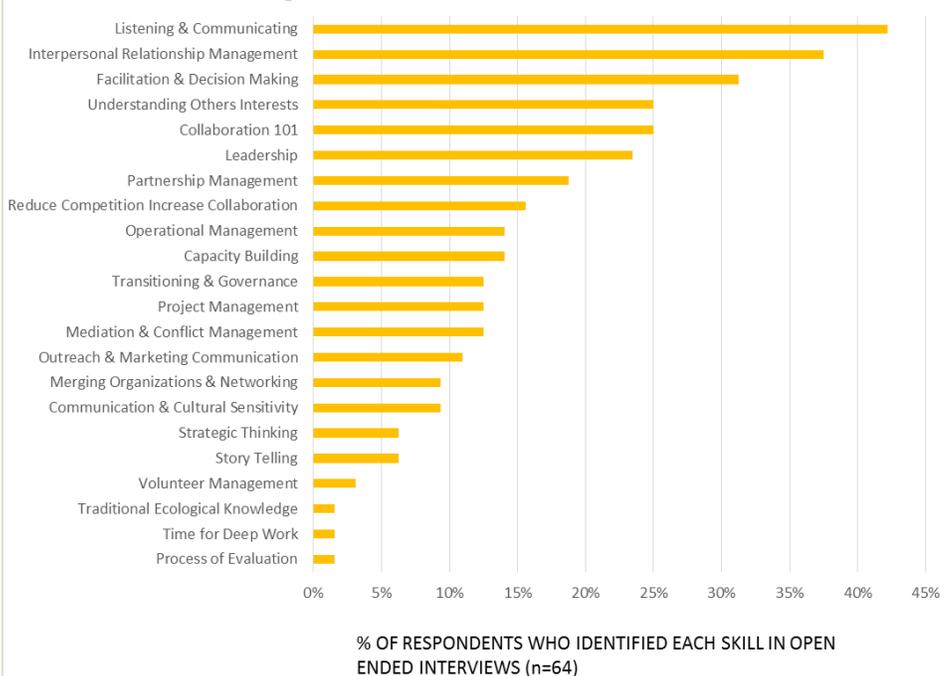
- **listening and communicating** ▪ **interpersonal relationship management** ▪ **facilitating and decision-making** ▪ **understanding others interests** ▪ **collaboration 101** ▪ **leadership**

By collaboration 101, practitioners meant the need to “understand the basics of the collaborative process” including “definitions, and how to form, manage and sustain collaborative efforts”. Many respondents noted that these skills are interrelated and “enable practitioners to understand others perceptions and values, empathize with differences, identify commonalities”, and using leadership can effectively manage and implement a “thoughtful and trusted collaborative process that engages all sectors” and “results in agreed upon solutions” to conservation challenges.

Main issues addressed by the Needs Assessment:

- People & Process Skills
- Technical & Knowledge Tools
- Who Needs Collaborative Skills & Tools
- Preferred Methods for Learning Skills & Tools
- In Depth Feedback on Learning Methods
 - Challenges
 - Interest in Short Courses
 - Value of Internships
 - Importance of Mentoring

Figure 2: IMPORTANT PEOPLE & PROCESS SKILLS



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Top 6 Skills identified

- listening and communicating
- interpersonal relationship management
- facilitating and decision-making
- understanding others interests
- collaboration 101
- leadership



Zion National Park, CC0 Public Domain

Also of importance, but to a lesser extent, respondents identified skills needed to manage partnerships and projects, build and maintain collaborative organizations, and linked to that, build organizational capacity, manage governance structures and transition organizations, and mediate and manage conflict. About 15% of practitioners mentioned the concern that as collaborative conservation efforts had increased, these efforts compete for limited resources. Practitioners saw a need for “increased collaboration amongst conservation organizations” as an opportunity to leverage resources and accomplish more success.

Fewer respondents identified skills of outreach and marketing, cultural sensitivity, storytelling skills, how/when to merge or network organizations, and how to manage volunteers (the latter referring mostly to “volunteer board and staff members”).

The need to develop strategic thinking, incorporating local tradition knowledge, and finding time for deep thought were mentioned at a low frequency.

Only one practitioner identified the need to know how to evaluate the collaborative process as an important skill.

Technical & Knowledge Tools (figure 3)

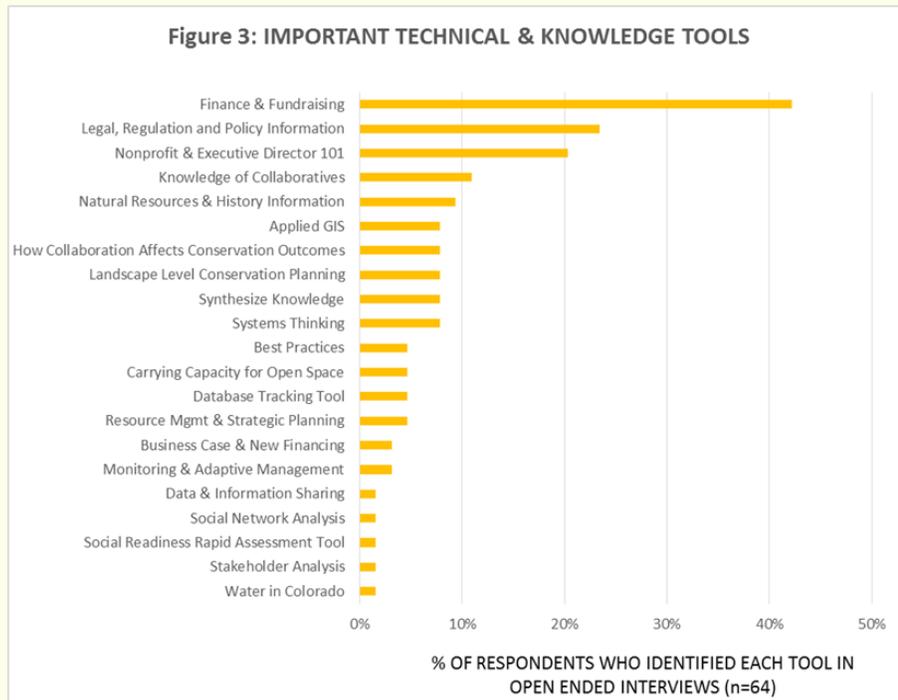
Respondents mentioned the following tools as most important for practitioners:

- *finance & fundraising*
- *legal, regulation & policy information*
- *nonprofit & executive director 101*

Forty-two percent of practitioners interviewed identified finance and fundraising as critical to “building and sustaining the capacity and management of organizations”. Finance and fund-raising includes basic activities and tasks such as “grant writing, tracking and reporting, creating, managing and reporting an annual budget”, as well as more complex activities of “long-term capacity building, financial planning and projecting”, “understanding and applying businesses models for long-term organizational sustainability”, and “public grant writing and private philanthropy”. Practitioners repeated the concern that competition rather than collaboration has increased because resources are limited and the number of collaborative efforts has increased. Funders spoke about “purposefully requiring collaboration amongst conservation groups” to “leverage their resources and create larger scale” conservation impact.

About 23% of practitioners said it was important for community members and nonprofit organizations to “understand legal regulations and policies within which public agencies and organizations must operate”.

At the same time, respondents said it was “important for agency personnel and organization staff to explain these limitations but work from an approach of how collaboration can occur within these limitations” rather than see the “limitations as reasons not to collaborate at all”.



Practitioners explained that the “majority of leaders in conservation rise out of the conservation practitioner ranks as professionally trained natural resource managers”. Few practitioners have formal training in “executive director and nonprofit and management”. Recently they see practitioners “going back to school to get degrees in business management”. Hence over 20% of respondents identified nonprofit and executive director training as important.

Respondents indicated that practitioners should have a “basic knowledge and understanding” of a number of technical tools. Mentioned as important were knowledge of other collaboratives activities, basic natural and human history of a place, the ability to synthesize scientific information and GIS data and apply that knowledge to conservation problems, how to determine open space human carrying capacity, use of common data sharing platforms, knowledge of best management practices, translating the economic value of natural systems to business, monitoring and adaptive management and how to measure the effects of collaboration on conservation outcomes, and understanding of western water. A few specific tools were noted as important but “not used widely enough”, including stakeholder analysis, social network analysis, systems thinking and landscape level conservation planning. The need to develop a new tool to rapidly assess social readiness in a community was identified.

Top 3 Tools Identified:

- finance & fundraising
- legal, regulation & policy information
- nonprofit & executive director 101



Prairie, CC0 Public Domain

Who needs collaborative skills and tools most?

- Current practitioners in mid-career and leadership were identified by 58% of interviewees.
- Next generation (graduating students) and practitioners in their first 2-5 years of career were identified by 48% of interviewees.



Prothonotary Warbler, Dave Leatherman

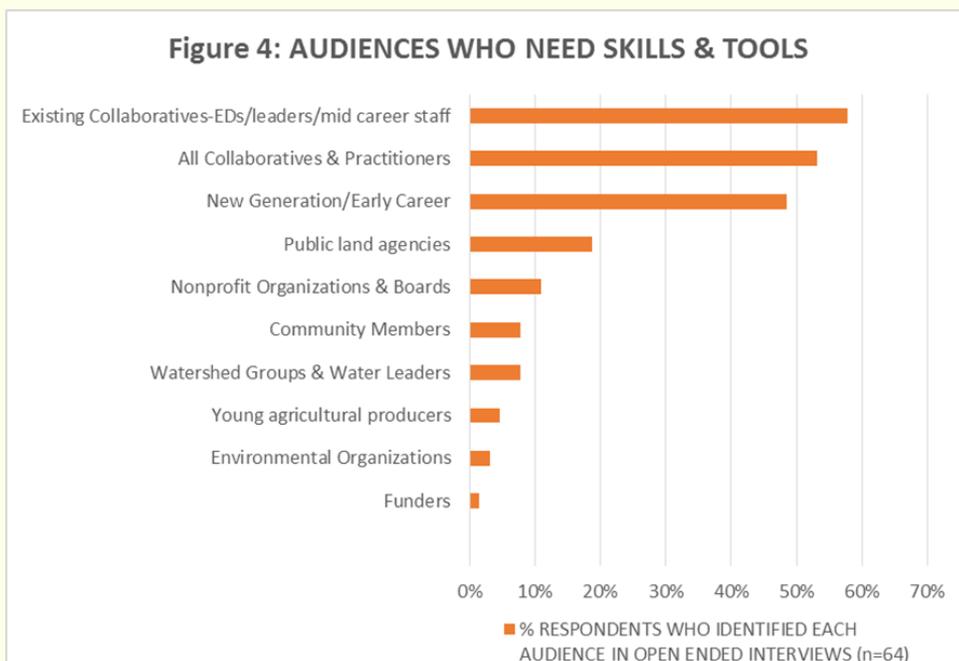
Who Needs Collaboration Skills & Tools and What are the Best Methods of Delivery

Practitioners were asked, “Who needs these collaborative skills and tools and what is the best method to deliver them?”

Who Needs Collaboration Skills & Tools (figure 4)

About 53% of participants said that everyone, meaning all practitioners, need these collaborative skills and tools. 58% of respondents specifically identified current practitioners in their mid-careers and the leadership of conservation groups including executive directors as needing these skills and tools. While 48% of respondents targeted the “next generation and new people coming into the profession and in the first 2-5 years of their career” (figure 4).

Other groups were also identified at lower frequencies; including public land agency personnel (19%), nonprofit organizations and their board members, community members, watershed groups and their leadership, young agricultural producers, environmental organizations and funders.



Preferred Methods to Deliver Collaborative Skills & Tools to Practitioners (figure 5)

Many respondents commented that learning and then adopting new “soft skills” or “people skills” requires a “safe personal environment”, “skilled and credible trainers,” and a combination of “clearly delivered theory,” followed by “examples of successful application” and “time to practice these skills and tools,” and the support of “coaching and feedback over time.” Not surprisingly, 70% of practitioners emphasized the importance of learning from their peers, and using interactive methods that preferably “got them out on the ground, learning skills and tools with peers” while

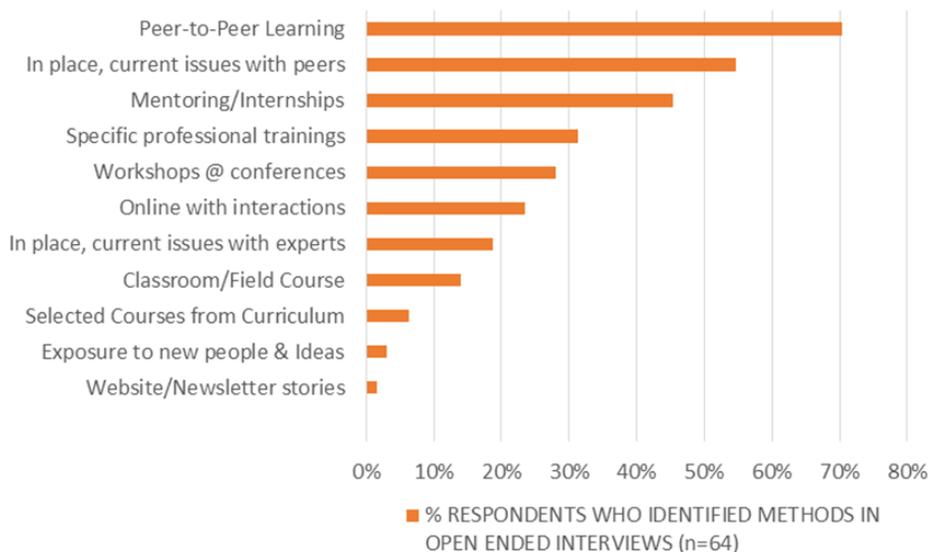
also “addressing conservation issues” (55%). This method creates an added benefit of “building networks between practitioners and across landscapes and conservation issues” and provides “informal mentoring and internship opportunities” (45%) (figure 5).

Given practitioners have limited capacity, the idea of offering targeted trainings taught by practitioners (31%) at existing conferences in workshop interactive styles, was also suggested. Online learning opportunities, “while attractive because of lower cost and easier accessibility”, were less attractive unless taught by “peers and included meaningful learning interactions”. A smaller number of practitioners suggested some basic tools “presented in case study style” might lend themselves to this mode of learning. Experts delivering these trainings in places of conservation action instead of peer trainers were less important, and classroom courses with a field component were seen as less desirable (14%) than other methods of delivery. Six percent of respondents suggested a “curriculum that allowed practitioners to select courses” might be attractive because it recognized “practitioners have different levels of skill and need.” Websites, newsletters and social media were seen mostly as means for “announcing and exposing ideas and opportunities” rather than learning activities.



Laramie Foothills Advisory Group, Heather Knight

Figure 5: BEST METHODS FOR DELIVERING SKILLS & TOOLS



“Classes or short courses would have some value. But people are at different levels. If you could choose streams and do them at different places that would be more attractive.”

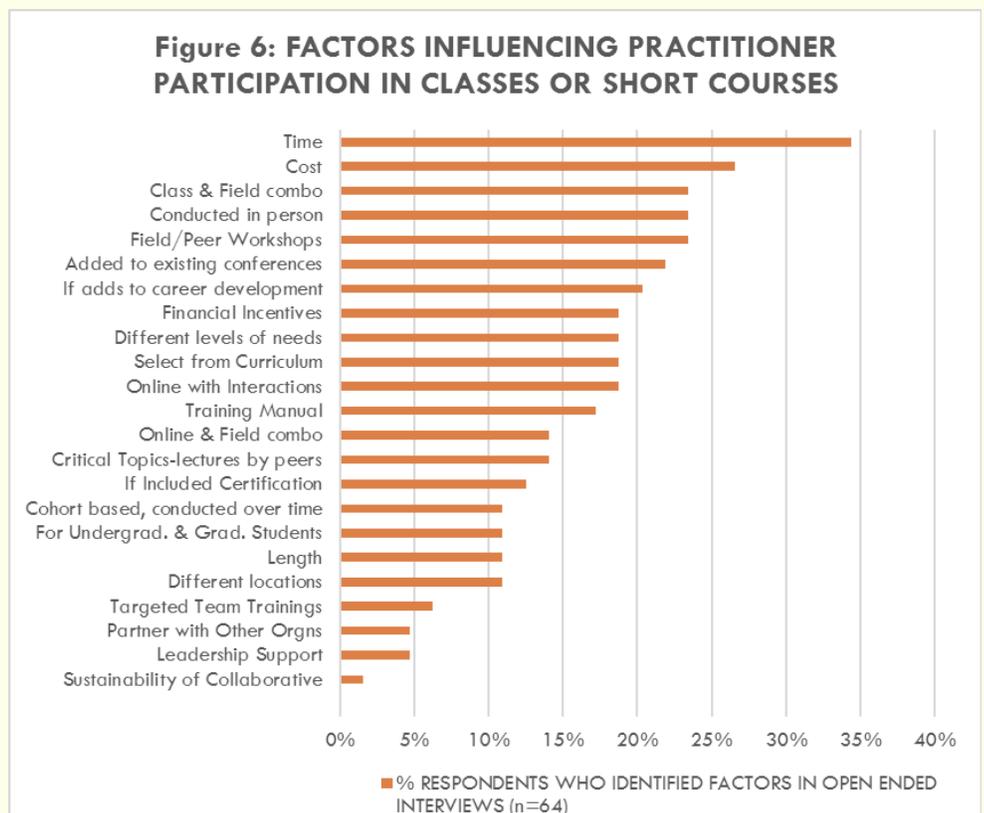
Interviewee #
CCCNACE007



Montana, CC0 Public Domain

Willingness of Practitioners to Participate in Classes or Short Courses (figure 6)

Most practitioners (70%) indicated their willingness to participate in classes or short courses. Respondents however identified 23 factors that influence their decision to participate (figure 6). The most critical being time and cost. The “availability of financial incentives”, such as “scholarships, can reduce this limitation”. Second most important were factors relating to the method of delivery; classes with an “interactive field component” and “conducted in person by peers” are more attractive. Other important factors mentioned by respondents included, if classes advanced professional development, or if the curriculum was designed so practitioners with differing skill levels and needs, could “select from a menu of choices and take classes over time”, and or earn a certification. Some organizations preferred targeted trainings for cohorts of practitioners as an alternative approach. Length of time and location were influencing factors, as was support of leadership. A small number of respondents mentioned that participation might be influenced by whether the organization “had legs, and was likely to be around for a while or not”.



Challenges to Practitioner Participation

Practitioners voiced concern regarding the ability of practitioners to participate in collaborative skill and tool trainings. A “lack of leadership and support from the old guard”, referring particularly to situations within agencies, were identified as factors that can “limit field staff participation”.

In addition, and equally important, limited capacity, in terms of time and budget, “restrict practitioner engagement”. The “pressure to focus and achieve conservation outcomes”, often means trainings focused on “technical content directly related to conservation issues are chosen over other opportunities” that build skills and tools to support increased conservation success. A few participants noted staff sometimes chose to “participate on their own personal time and dollars” because of these factors.

The “lack of inclusion of marginalized groups” was mentioned by participants as a concern. Participants meant that most often “participation is dominated by individuals in paid positions, because it counts towards their job and they have a budget.” Too frequently, “smaller conservation groups with very limited budgets, and citizens with non-related job commitments” cannot afford the time or resources to participate; and “so are left out of the equation” or “marginalized.”

Challenges of Delivering Skills and Tools to Practitioners

Practitioners identified again the challenge of overcoming limited time and financial capacity and including marginalized groups. Practitioners also repeated the concern of getting more than the “self-motivated segment” of the conservation community engaged; that is “getting beyond the choir” of those bought into the collaborative approach.

Value of Internship Programs for Building Collaborative Skills and Tools (figure 7)

Practitioners were asked if internships were important in building collaborative skills and tools.

Respondents agreed (98%) that internships are important ways for the next generation of practitioners to “acquire hands-on experience during or after their undergraduate career”. Practitioners discussed components and factors that make internships more effective at building collaborative skills and tools (figure 7). Internships enable current practitioners to “train and identify the next cohort” of professionals, thereby creating a “pipeline of next generation professionals” to support “organizational sustainability and knowledge transferability”.

More effective programs have a formalized structure that “sets goals and expectations for the intern and organization” and often includes opportunities for “feedback, reflection and training”. “Matching the intern



Blackfoot River Corridor, John Salisbury

“ Internships can be very powerful for the right person, and can be career changing.”

Interviewee #
CCCNANS022

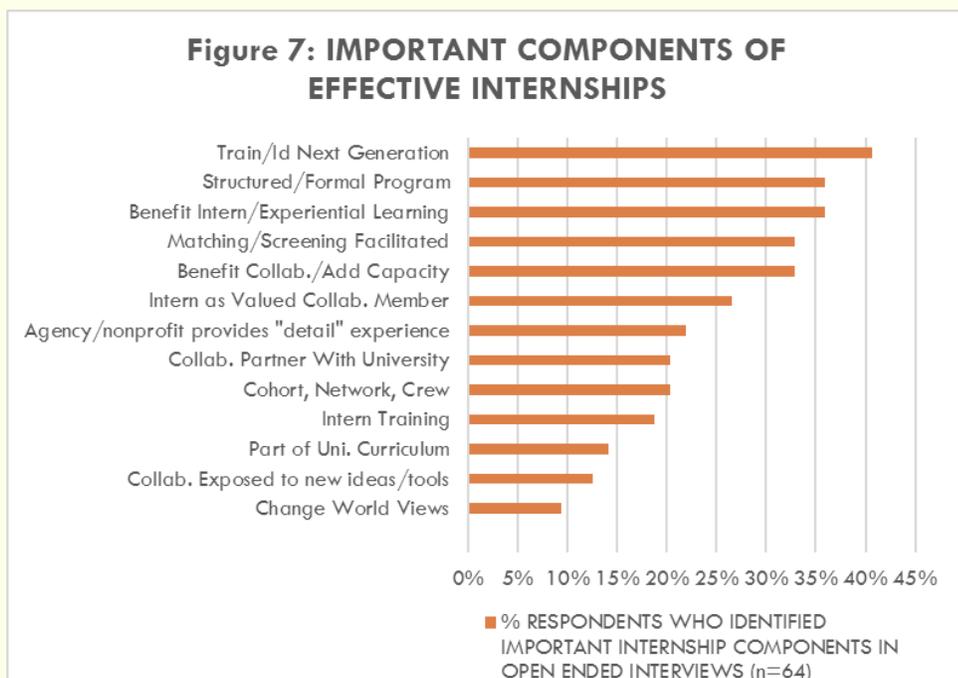
“ We need steps to bring someone from fresh out of school to being prepared to be in a professional role. It is very competitive. Internships or fellowships provide a ladder to take steps to build a career. “

Interviewee #
CCCNAAH006



Roberts Ranch, John Fielder

and the collaborative conservation group is critical” to assuring a “real learning benefit for the intern”, providing “needed capacity for the host organization”, and establishing an environment where the “intern and organization perceive mutual value” and accordingly the intern “becomes part of the organization itself”. Some respondents said their organizations see “more value in having a cohort approach” to internships, where a “small group of students learn and work together during their internship” while “sharing experiences and providing group support”. Other practitioners described an advantage to “establishing internships through long-term partnerships with academic institutions where the internship is part of the curriculum”. Respondents said internships are not without challenges. These programs require an “investment of time, a certain level of organizational capacity on the part of the host” and funding which “can be significant”. This must be weighed against the opportunity “to hire better trained people into positions afterwards”. The pros and cons of paid versus unpaid internships were identified as important considerations, as are the “increasing number and complexity of legal roadblocks”. Respondents said internships can “expose collaboratives to new ideas and tools” and “change the world views” of interns. Internships offer the opportunity to “experience different cultures and different places”.



Who Needs Mentoring Programs (figure 8)

Practitioners were asked, “Are mentoring (or coaching) programs useful for building collaborative capacity in the conservation practitioner community?”

Practitioners identified current mid-career practitioners (47%) and new/next generation practitioners (38%). Other groups of practitioners were

also identified, but less often, and included nonprofit groups, women starting their careers, newly formed collaboratives, public agency personnel, and conservation situations involving high levels of conflict. Community members and conservation organization leadership were identified at the lowest frequencies.

Out of these less frequently mentioned groups, of particular interest may be “women starting their careers”, “community members” and “conservation organization leadership”. Some participants remarked, that in many natural resource education programs the “proportion of women comprising classes has significantly increased over the last 10-20 years” with women being an “increasing majority in many classes and degree programs”. At the same time however, respondents noted that many organizations are challenged to retain women as they start their professional careers, and suggested that a focus on “mentoring women as they enter the workforce may therefore be important in the coming years”. Community members were identified by practitioners as often being “marginalized”; meaning because they are not in paid natural resources or conservation positions and therefore “do not have career or financial support to participate in training opportunities” they are often “left out or do not have access to programs such as mentoring”. Community members also may be important for targeting mentoring opportunities. Few respondents identified the need for the leadership of conservation groups to be mentored. Practitioners had previously identified a “lack of support from leadership” for staff to participate in collaborative trainings. This raises a concern about leadership that should be explored further.

“ Mentoring is really important; especially for young woman in a mostly older male dominated field; I have been mentored by both by young and older men and women. It is important for passing on of institutional knowledge and relationships others have built. Coaching is also good for leadership development for mid-career practitioners.”

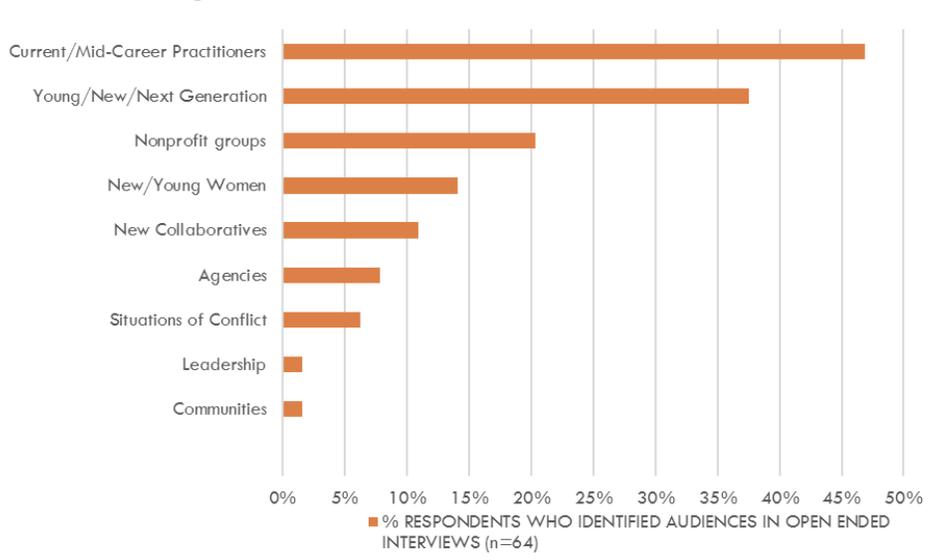
Interviewee

CCCNAHD048



White Sands, CCO Public Domain

Figure 8: WHO NEEDS MENTORING PROGRAMS



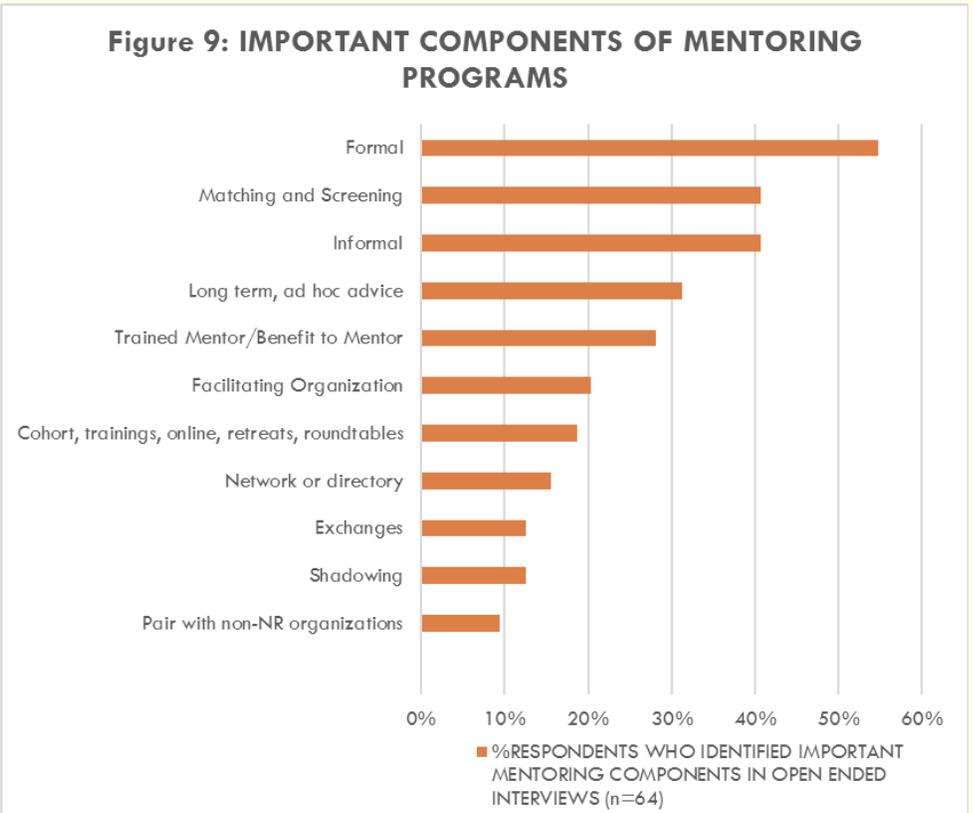


Phantom Canyon Preserve, Carly Voigt

Value of Mentoring / Coaching Programs for Building Collaborative Skills & Tools (figure 9)

Respondents often used “coaching” as an alternate term for mentoring. The majority of practitioners interviewed highly valued mentoring or coaching programs as a tool to provide opportunities for building collaborative skills and tools, and particularly for passing on knowledge and relationships from one generation of practitioners to the next.

Practitioners discussed both formal (55%) and informal structures (41%) for mentoring programs (figure 9). Formal programs “set expectations and goals for both the mentor and mentee” and included “planned time for feedback and reflection”, and often included opportunities for “complementary training”. Respondents said some of the best programs included an initial period (“often the first year”) where mentors and mentees frequently interacted, “building a foundational relationship and learning in the field together”, followed by a period of more ad hoc advising on an “as-needed basis with less frequent scheduled interactions”. Often these formal programs evolve over time into long-term “informal mentoring relationships”. More practitioners suggested formalized programs were “more important for new professionals as they begin a career”. Informal programs usually were favored (41%) more often by mid-to late-career practitioners. Practitioners may be initially “encouraged by leadership” or may “voluntarily” and individually decide to “pursue a mentorship” opportunity. These are usually ad hoc, with “interactions occurring on an as-needed basis”, initiated most often by the mentee, have



a “problem-solving/advisory” focus, “develop over time”, and for some are sustained over an “entire career”. The mentor sometimes may be a peer rather than an elder, may or may not be in conservation, and the relationship often is never formally acknowledged by name.

Irrespective of formal versus informal programs, some practitioners (20%) suggested a facilitating organization adds value to these programs by importantly matching (41%) mentors and mentees, and screening to ensure mentor capability and capacity (28%).

Respondents noted that mentoring programs also have challenges. Seventeen percent of practitioners acknowledged that sustaining successful mentoring programs requires capacity (time, sufficient and skilled/willing mentors and funding). Organizations often struggle to “maintain such a level of resources while the pressure is to reach conservation outcomes”. Over 9% of practitioners mentioned that no one has measured the return on investment for mentoring programs and 11% of practitioners questioned if programs reach the people who really need the support. These concerns and factors often lead organizations to experiment and implement alternative models; such as hosting cohort-based learning roundtables, discussion/learning series, or targeted retreats, and exchanges or shadowing opportunities. Practitioners raised as before, that “support from leadership affects participation” in mentoring programs.

Existing Organizations & Individuals Currently Delivering Collaborative Skills & Tools to Conservation Practitioners

Practitioners identified a large and diverse number of existing organizations and individuals whom they recommended as currently delivering collaborative skills and tools that conservation practitioners might find helpful. These included 31 academic and educational institutions, 24 consultants or training organizations, 12 funding institutions, 14 networks, 7 nonprofit support and training organizations, 7 policy organizations, 9 public agency programs and 32 conservation organizations and initiatives (see Appendix B).

Programs in **academic institutions** were largely located in colleges or schools of environmental studies or natural resources. Programs included research and undergraduate or graduate teaching. Research is mostly focused on applied conservation issues identified by practitioners and collaboratives. There is increasing interest in research on monitoring and evaluation methods and measures of conservation outcomes. Some specifically focus on teaching and evaluating collaboration in conservation as well. Many teaching programs are delivered by centers or initiatives within these universities as concentrations or certificates in leadership, facilitation, mediation or conflict resolution, coupled with traditional environmental studies or natural resources degrees. Some programs included internships or practica where undergraduate students are placed in conservation organizations



Hayden Valley, Wyoming, CCO Public Domain

Interviewees recommended groups currently delivering skills & tools:

- 31 academic & education institutions
- 26 consultants & training organizations
- 12 funding organizations
- 14 networks
- 7 nonprofit support organizations
- 7 policy groups
- 9 public agency programs
- 32 conservation initiatives



Idaho, CC0 Public Domain

for a defined period, usually during the summer break, and receive school credit and or financial support.

At some universities, some of the best leadership and nonprofit training are offered through schools of business and law, and increasingly through extension. A proportion of the identified academic institutes or education organizations engage more directly in on-the-ground conservation efforts. They directly engage with collaboratives through the provision of facilitation, mediation, convening services and nonprofit trainings, or indirectly by creating and sharing information at conservation conferences and workshops (best practices, case studies, policy papers) and technology resources (GIS, database tracking tools), and or enabling public engagement in conservation issues through public forums.

Consultants and training organizations include private individuals and teams, running for profit or nonprofit organizations that deliver skills and tools training and or provide consulting services. Some organizations tailor their programs specifically for the conservation and natural resources community, others do not. The best of these come out of the business world and are often expensive in terms of time and cost and therefore not accessible. Smaller conservation organizations can only access these services if they receive financial support and or if they are offered to larger audiences in association with annual conferences.

Funding organizations recommended by practitioners were mostly private foundations or state programs. Ironically, practitioners noted that with the increase in collaborative conservation efforts has come an increase in competition for financial resources. Some funding organizations were specifically mentioned because of their support for their collaborative approach and often longer term commitment to conservation.

Networks were recommended because they provide either a database or directory of resources to support conservation practitioners or because they offer a learning framework for collaborative conservation efforts.

Nationally and by state, there are a large number of **support and training opportunities for nonprofit organizations**. Practitioners recommended some that deliver high quality programs. While not tailored to conservation organizations, they do serve the diverse members of the nonprofit community and provide services often at more affordable costs and more accessible locations than the private sector. For practitioners who have moved up through the ranks as natural resource professionals, these trainings build executive and leadership capacity. Mentoring and coaching programs are included in some of these programs.

Policy organizations play a critical leadership and support role for conservation practitioners. Raising the understanding for the collaborative approach can bring needed resources and leadership support to the

conservation community. Several of these policy organizations often pool resources to provide high quality and cost effective collaboration training to practitioners.

Practitioners identified **programs provided by state and federal governmental agencies**. Recommended state agency programs usually offer resources through a competitive application process. Some states within their conservation community offer the opportunity for conservation groups to join a state-level umbrella organization that provides affordable resources. This is common across the US for the land trust community, but not yet for the conservation practitioner community.

A large number of place-based and landscape-scale **conservation organizations and initiatives** were recommended because of the programs they offer in collaboration training to practitioners. These take various forms, including annual conferences, targeted workshops, networking tools, mentoring programs, internships, peer-to-peer site visits and learning, exchanges, and resource libraries.

Conclusions & Next Steps

The conservation community has recognized the need to formally build collaborative skills and tools to compliment the technical knowledge of future and current conservation practitioners. Practitioners can readily identify the most important people and process skills, and technical and knowledge tools, and how best to deliver them to practitioners. Attaining both of these skill sets at a high level of competency prepares and enables conservation practitioners to be more successful at achieving conservation and livelihood outcomes in complex and diverse human and natural community settings.

Opportunities for developing and learning these collaborative skills and tools has been increasing across the American West. Some regions, like the Pacific Northwest, appear to be better resourced and networked than others. A gap in opportunity for conservation practitioners to develop collaborative skills and tools. Part of the gap is likely the lack of awareness and access to existing collaborative learning opportunities. The remaining gap offers an opportunity for the conservation practitioner community to form partnerships to develop additional collaborative learning.

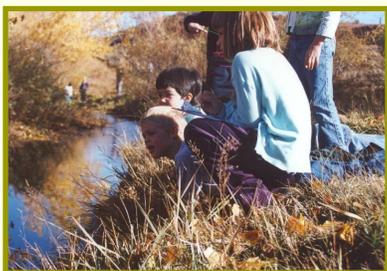
Practitioners were able to identify existing organizations and individuals they recommend who currently deliver certain collaborative skills and tools to the conservation community. Conservation success can be increased by first building on and strengthening existing collaborative learning opportunities. These opportunities need to be promoted amongst the conservation practitioner community and also made more available and accessible to more members of the conservation practitioner community. A thoughtful process is needed to accomplish this. Conservation practitioners and



Rafting, CCO Public Domain

“ Together we need to invest in our future by building collaborative capacity of current and future conservation practitioners. “

Heather Knight,
Associate Director, CCC



Heather Knight

partners from across the American West, representing each bioregion, could be convened and to review results of this and other needs assessments. Facilitators could then enable practitioners to map and document all current collaborative learning opportunities and resources. A summary of the collaborative conservation workshop could then be shared across the conservation community. This approach would a) recognize the existing efforts and available resources for development of collaborative skills and tools in the conservation practitioner community, and b) create an opportunity to identify opportunities to strengthen existing resources and discuss how to expand opportunities to increase conservation practitioner access and participation.

Practitioners also identified collaborative skills and tools that are important for conservation practitioners to reach conservation success. Gaps in collaborative skills and tools trainings exist and need to be filled using effective methods that assure practitioners are likely to adopt and implement new skills and tools. As described above, conservation practitioners once convened to lay out existing resources, could then identify gaps in collaborative skills and tools learning opportunities and potential partners to work together to fill gaps. Practitioners identified various methods for delivering collaborative skills and tools. This is an opportunity for the conservation practitioner community to design and implement a variety of methods for delivering collaborative skills and tools using an evaluation methodology to assess their effectiveness. Once methods are tested and evaluated collaborative skills and tools trainings can be scaled up and out to conservation practitioners. This approach will identify gaps in collaborative skill and tools training and will evaluate different methods of delivery.

The provision of financial support to incentivize and expand participation “beyond the choir” and to reach “marginalized groups” should be carefully planned into future collaborative capacity building. Leadership support and participation will also be critical to encourage participation. Mentoring programs should be further assessed to determine how effective they are in building collaborative capacity.

Meanwhile, academic institutions can continue to partner with the conservation community and play a critical role in preparing future generations of conservation practitioners with strong collaborative skills and tools to match their high competency in technical knowledge. At Colorado State University, and possibly at other institutions, there appears to be an opportunity to use the results of this needs assessment to review existing undergraduate and graduate programs and identify gaps in classroom and experiential learning. This may lead to the design of new courses in collaborative conservation skills and tools that can be run in parallel to

current natural resource learning. In addition, the inclusion of hands-on, real-time, practical learning opportunities, where students are imbedded for extended periods with conservation collaboratives, can prepare the next generation to be more effective more quickly as they start their careers.

Conservation practitioners, today and in the future, will be more effective at achieving conservation outcomes if they are highly competent in both the sphere of technical knowledge and collaborative skills and tools.

Acknowledgements:

This needs assessment was only possible because of the willingness of conservation practitioners across the American West to willingly participate in interviews. The Center for Collaborative Conservation is thankful for their eager participation and sharing of their knowledge and experience.



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APPENDIX A: NEEDS ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. a) What are the most important collaborative skills and tools that current and future conservation practitioners need to achieve conservation outcomes?
b) And, what is the best method to fill these needs in collaborative skills and tools?
c) Would you be interested in taking a series of classes or a short course at CSU on any of these topics? If so, what kind of course delivery would you prefer; in classroom, field course, online, or combination, other?
d) And, who needs these collaborative skills and tools?
2. a) What organizations or people do you know who already deliver good quality trainings or workshops on collaborative skills and tools for conservation practitioners?
b) Can you connect me to them?
3. a) Are mentoring (or coaching) or internship programs useful for building collaborative capacity in the conservation practitioner community?
b) Who needs these programs most?
c) Do you know of any recommended programs?
4. a) Do you know of any needs assessments/reports/surveys that have been done on collaborative conservation skills and tools?
b) Who did them?
c) Can you connect me?
5. a) Who else should I talk to?
b) Might you be willing to connect me?
6. Any other things that you need that we have not talked about today ?

APPENDIX B: EXISTING ORGANIZATIONS & INDIVIDUALS RECOMMENDED & CURRENTLY DELIVERING COLLABORATIVE SKILLS & TOOLS TO CONSERVATION PRACTITIONERS

31 ACADEMIC & EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS	
Center for the American West	National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS)
Center for Natural Resource and Environmental Policy	Oregon Consensus
Center for Public Deliberation	Public Interest Internship Experience (PIIE)
Center for Science and Technology Policy Research	Poudre Runs Through It
Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI)	Presidents Leadership Class
Colorado Water Institute	Private Lands Initiative (PLI)
Conflict Resolution/Collaboration Center	Program in Environmental Design and Environmental Studies
Denver Community Leadership Forum (DCLF)	Red Lodge Clearinghouse
Ecosystem Workforce Program	Ruckleshaus Institute
Environmental Dispute Resolution Program	Teton Science School
US Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution	Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy
Institute for Participatory Management and Planning (IPMP)	University Network for Collaborative Governance (UNCG)
Institute for Renewable Natural Resources	Wallace Stegner Center's Environmental Dispute Resolution (EDR)
Institute for Sustainable Solutions (ISS)	Western Environmental Law Center
LBJ School of Public Affairs - research center	Western Rangelands Partnership
Lead 21	

24 CONSULTANTS or TRAINING ORGANIZATIONS

Accord Resource Solutions	Lynda Company
Beh Management Consulting Highly Effective Teams	Marsha Porter-Norton
Center for Creative Leadership (CCL)	Meridan Institute
Center for Strategic Facilitation (CSF)	Morf Consulting
Colorado Foundation for Water Education	Partnership & Community Collaboration Academy
Consensus Building Institute (CBI)	Peak Facilitation Group
Dovetail Consulting Group	Presidio Institute
Dynamica Coaching and Capacity Building	Shiple Group
Emerging Wildlife Conservation Leaders (EWCL)	Southwest Decision Resources
Global Cognition	Student Conservation Association (SCA)
IDEO	Training Resources for the Environmental Community (TREC)
La Mano del Mono	The Watershed Research and Training Center (WRTC)

12 FUNDING ORGANIZATIONS

Colorado Water Conservation Board	Lincoln Institute of Land Policy
El Pomar Foundation	National Forest Foundation
Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA)	Mission Capital
Gates Family Foundation	Philanthropy Northwest
Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO)	Walton Family Foundation
Intermountain West Funders Network	Wilburforce Foundation

14 NETWORKS

Blue Planet Network	Montana Forest Collaboration Network
Carpediem West	Practitioners' Network for Large Landscape Conservation
Collaborative Learning Networks	Private Landowner Network
Cross Watershed Network (XWN)	Resources First Foundation (RFF)
Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network	River Network
Fire Learning Network	Southern Rockies Fire Science Network (SRFSN)
Locally Managed Marine Areas Network (LMMA Network)	Southwest Fire Science Consortium

7 NONPROFIT SUPPORT & TRAINING ORGANIZATIONS

Center for Nonprofit Excellence-VA	Community Resource Center
Colorado Dept. of Local Affairs (DOLA)	Mountain States Employers Council
Colorado Non-Profit Association	National Association of Community Development and Extension Professionals (NACPEP)
Community Foundation of Northern Colorado	

7 POLICY ORGANIZATIONS

Center for Science and Democracy	Union of Concerned Scientists
Colorado Water Congress	Western Landowners Alliance
Model Forest Policy Program	Western Resource Advocates
Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition	

9 PUBLIC AGENCY PROGRAMS

America's Youth in the Great Outdoors Initiative	NOAA Habitat Restoration Training Center
DOI and Coalition Wild	National Partnership Office
Colorado Open Space Alliance (COSA)	National Training Center
National Collaboration Cadre (Cadre)	Office of Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution (CADR)
National Conservation Training Center	

32 CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS & INITIATIVES

Arizona Watershed Partnerships	Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership
Blackfoot Challenge	Land Trust Alliance
Center for Whole Communities	Middle Colorado Watershed Council
Coalitions and Collaboratives, Inc.	Mountain Studies Institute
Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts	NatureVest
Colorado Watershed Assembly	Partners for Conservation
Columbia River Basin Water Transaction Program	Partners for Western Conservation
Dolores River Restoration Partnership	Quivira Coalition
Environmental Defense Fund-Cuba Oceans Program	Salmon Valley Stewardship
Future Earth	San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership
Future West	Sierra Institute for Economy and Environment
Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative	Sonoran Institute
Heart of The Rockies Initiative	Sustainable Northwest
Hill Country Alliance	Tamarisk Coalition
High Divide Collaborative	Wallowa Resources
Houston Wilderness	Wimberley Valley Watershed Association

Join us in building capacity for collaborative conservation!

The mission of the Center for Collaborative Conservation is to help create innovative and lasting conservation solutions for people and nature through collaboration. In order to effectively address increasingly complex conservation challenges, we must change the status quo. We must collaborate!

The findings from this needs assessment serve as the foundation for designing an action plan to build collaborative capacity in current and future conservation practitioners. This plan of action will be designed and supported by the conservation practitioner community, and is an inherently partner driven collaborative initiative. The next steps to action are:

- ⇒ **Practitioner Workshop in winter 2018.** Building on the results of the needs assessment, practitioners from across the American West will gather to create an action plan to fill the collaborative capacity gap. This will involve strategies to expand access to existing collaborative trainings and develop new opportunities for practitioners to learn additional collaboration skills. A timeline, structure and process for co-designing and co-delivering future trainings will be established to guide this effort for the conservation practitioner community.
- ⇒ **CCC Fellows Program.** Using the findings from the needs assessment, we will revise and strengthen our existing program which offers opportunities to students, faculty, and practitioners to gain practical, hands on experiences in collaborative conservation and build stronger networks with conservation practitioners.
- ⇒ **Practitioner Trainings spring 2018.** Following the Practitioner Workshop, trainings will be designed and delivered to conservation practitioners to strengthen and build their collaboration skills. Trainings will use different methods of delivery and will be evaluated for their effectiveness in building collaboration capacity. Successful trainings can then be scaled up and out across the conservation community.

Online

<http://www.collaborativeconservation.org/support-us>

Mail donations to:

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CSU Foundation
1401 Campus Delivery
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523

We need your support to continue moving forward with this plan of action! We would love to hear from you.

For further information regarding the needs assessment, getting involved in the action plan, or general information about the Center for Collaborative Conservation, please contact:
Heather Knight, heather.knight@colostate.edu, 970-631-7645.

To access an electronic version of this report, please visit:

<http://www.collaborativeconservation.org/practitionerneedsassessment>

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