Working for the Win-Win Speaking Discussion Topics

Contents

1. Data and asset management as the foundation for collaboration

Introduction:
Local governments are tasked with making the best decisions they can with the information that they have available. They are not tasked with making the "right" decision. The effectiveness of any decision may not be known until years later. However, what can improve the likelihood of making better decisions is the consistency, clarity, and accuracy of the information used to help inform decision-making processes and how municipalities can establish a shared understanding of the current reality as part of any collaborative conversation.

Questions
(These questions are for inspiration. They don't need to be done in order and one, two or all can be skipped, as needed.)

- Collecting data can be a never-ending exercise and often leads to unfulfilling outcomes. The question should not be how much data do we need, rather what is the right data we need to best inform the decision we need to make?

- How could a shared understanding of the current reality facing an individual municipality support shared accountability for sustainable service delivery?

- How can we move toward a shared mindset that erases the boundaries on the map and reinforces that strong community outcomes can benefit all municipal partners?

- Many municipalities look to build new, better, and bigger and often focus on projects that people can both see and directly understand the value they get from their "taxes" (i.e., arenas, community centers, etc.). How could we better factor in the opportunity cost of investment in core infrastructure (i.e., water, wastewater, stormwater, transportation) when making decisions on these types of investments?

- Municipalities often look at growth as a necessity. However, what data are we using to inform whether growth will improve our social, environmental, and economic conditions? New growth undoubtedly generates new revenue. But how do we know if it is enough revenue?

2. How do you set up negotiations for a win-win?

Introduction:
Most successful collaborations do not just come together spontaneously. They typically require a thoughtful and coordinated process that allows all parties to be clear about what they want to achieve together, information needed to assess the best options, and their commitment to follow through. This topic is about how best to set up negotiations to achieve the expected outcomes.

Questions
(These questions are for inspiration. They don't need to be done in order and one, two or all can be skipped, as needed.)

- How important is establishing a strategic approach together before engaging in negotiations, i.e., being clear on the expected outcomes, process, and timelines?

- If you proactively worked with your partner organization on negotiation planning, did you have any positive surprises that helped set things up effectively?

- What preparations would you recommend before collaborating with other organizations (i.e., internal assessments, input from all departments, education, training, legislation knowledge, getting to know each other)?

- What information was critical to decision-making that you need to account for in the future? How long did it take to get that information?

- How useful was having external support (i.e., data collection, facilitation, legal advice, conflict resolution, etc.) and would you recommend doing that again? What did you have to consider when bringing on external support?

- How does political / administrative time and availability impact negotiations? How do you navigate limited capacity?

- What lessons were learned in doing ICFs the first time that you will apply in renegotiations? What will you do again and what will you differently?

3. Public engagement

Introduction:
Research as part of our Future of Municipal Government project has identified that one of the potential disadvantages that ICFs and other forms of intermunicipal collaboration, such as regional service commissions, is that such agreements and structures can be inaccessible to the public and may lack strong accountability.

Questions
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- How can the potential shortcomings of intermunicipal collaboration be overcome (i.e., inaccessible to the public and lack of accountability)?

- Have you seen examples where the public has been effectively engaged?

- If you were to plan for public engagement in a future collaboration, what would that look like?

  o When would it occur in the process?

  o What agreements would you need to have in place for it to be effective?

- How would including public engagement affect the timelines and approach you take in planning for a negotiation process?

- There is a potential disconnect when individual councillors are appointed to represent the entire council on a regional committee, commission, or corporation, and they may also lack the capacity to be an effective conduit of the information back to the entire council, so everyone feels they have the ability to meaningfully contribute to decisions. Do you have ideas on how to overcome this challenge?

4. Relationships

Introduction:
Collaborations and negotiations are highly dependent on our relationships whether that's in business or politics. A change of council or CAO can be a major factor in improving intermunicipal relationships or tearing them apart.

Questions
(These questions are for inspiration. They don't need to be done in order and one, two or all can be skipped, as needed.)

- What tips do you have for municipalities to maintain positive intermunicipal relations following a change in personnel?

- How can a change in leadership be used as an opportunity to improve intermunicipal relationships?

- What do you do to build relationships with other municipalities or community organizations?

- When negotiations are stalled because of an interpersonal conflict or the erosion of trust, what have you seen work best to address these issues?

- Are there examples of times when including a critical perspective in negotiations has resulted in better outcomes?

- Do you have examples of situations where individuals didn't have a positive shift in perspective related to each other, but still effectively negotiated to the benefit of both organizations?

5. Legislation, policy, and capacity needs

Introduction:

An old adage is that: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together".
Collaborations are often about finding ways provide infrastructure and services more
efficiently, but they take time and resources to negotiate, coordinate and maintain.

Questions

(These questions are for inspiration. They don't need to be done in order and
one, two or all can be skipped, as needed.)

- What supports do municipalities need most to effectively negotiate new
  collaborations?

- What supports are needed now to maintain existing collaborations?

- What capacity building tools are most needed and why (i.e., education, training,
  funding, conflict resolution services)?

- Support for ICFs was largely funded through Alberta Community Partnership (ACP)
  grants. Are grants of this type needed now? What will happen without grant funding?

- When municipalities are in conflict, where can they go for extra help for
  mediation/arbitration? Did you benefit from the mediation/arbitration services
  available?

- What policy and/or legislative changes would be beneficial to create a better
  environment for collaboration?

- What support is necessary to think about collaboration on a broader scale so that
  municipalities are focused on what is best for the regional community, not just
  meeting legislative requirements?