



# Identifying best practices for collaborations

Prepared by the Organizational  
Effectiveness Research Group (OERG)  
Minnesota State University, Mankato





September 2013

Prepared for:

Center for Rural Policy and Development  
600 S. Fifth St., Suite 211  
St. Peter, MN 56082  
[www.ruralmn.org](http://www.ruralmn.org)

Prepared by:

Lisa M. Perez, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor, Psychology  
Minnesota State University, Mankato  
[Lisa.perez@mnsu.edu](mailto:Lisa.perez@mnsu.edu)

Jason Jaber, M.A.  
Associate Consultant  
[jason.n.jaber@gmail.com](mailto:jason.n.jaber@gmail.com)

The Organizational Effectiveness Research Group (OERG) is a consulting service housed within the Industrial/Organizational Psychology Graduate Program at Minnesota State University. The OERG provides contract research and HR consulting services to national and international clients. You can learn more about the OERG by visiting our web site at <http://www.mnsu.edu/oerg/>.

OERG | 332 Wiecking Center | Minnesota State University, Mankato | Mankato, MN 56001





## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	1
SECTION I: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS.....	3
SECTION II: FOCUS GROUP RESULTS.....	5
Summary of Key Themes .....	5
SECTION III: DETAILED FOCUS GROUP SESSION NOTES (BY COLLABORATIVE) .....	15
Brainerd IT Collaborative.....	15
Kandiyohi/Big Stone Dispatch Collaborative.....	22
Prime West County Based Purchasing Collaborative .....	29
Todd County & Todd County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Collaborative.....	35
APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT.....	43



## Executive Summary

The Organizational Effectiveness Research Group (OERG) at Minnesota State University, Mankato contracted with the Center for Rural Policy and Development to facilitate focus group sessions and collect information regarding the processes and important factors to consider when forming Shared Service agreements. This report summarizes information collected in these meetings. In addition, one interview was conducted with a member of a collaboration effort that was not implemented.

- CRPD staff identified and recruited focus group participants.
- The OERG conducted four focus groups at locations around Greater Minnesota. These groups were composed of key players within the development and implementation of successful shared service agreements/initiatives around the state.
- Focus group sessions allowed for the candid disclosure of information regarding a number of factors surrounding successful collaborations. In particular, participants were informed that we wished to focus on the interpersonal side of the collaboration process rather than structural and policy issues. The findings from these successful groups as well as the interview findings are summarized in the report. Topics covered within each focus group were:
  - Motivation for redesign
  - Resources available to support the initiative, in particular, leadership
  - Roadblocks to implementation
    - Cost/Benefit
    - Human Factors (Territoriality, Trust, Job Security, Power Struggles, etc.)
    - Personal Risks
  - Results of implementation
    - Goals, Measureable outcomes, Satisfaction, Public Reaction
  - Future impacts of the initiative
- OERG staff took detailed notes during the sessions. A summary of the common themes identified across collaboratives as well as detailed notes from each group are provided in this report.





## SECTION I: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Four focus groups were conducted around Minnesota. Each group consisted of individuals who played key roles in the planning and development of a successful shared services agreement in their communities. These successful collaborations were identified by CRPD staff, who then contacted key individuals to recruit focus group participants. In selecting collaboratives for the focus groups, we aimed to identify groups working in a variety of domains and in different geographical regions of the state. The four focus groups conducted were:

- **Brainerd IT Collaborative (5 participants):** A collaboration between Crow Wing County and Brainerd Public Schools to provide IT services jointly. Also involved local community and technical colleges.
- **Kandiyohi/Big Stone Dispatch Collaborative (4 participants):** A collaboration between Kandiyohi County and Big Stone County to provide 911 dispatch services. Specifically, Kandiyohi County provides dispatch services for Big Stone County under a contract agreement. Unusual in that Kandiyohi and Big Stone are not contiguous.
- **Prime West County-Based Purchasing Collaborative (9 participants):** Several counties (Beltrami, Big Stone, Clearwater, Douglas, Grant, Hubbard, McLeod, Meeker, Pipestone, Pope, Renville, Stevens, and Traverse) joined together to purchase health care coverage for individuals qualifying for public benefits.
- **Todd County & Todd County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Collaborative (6 participants):** The Todd County government planning, zoning, and GIS services merged with the Todd County SWCD.

An additional interview was conducted with an individual involved in a group of several counties exploring the possibility of a shared services agreement in human services administration. This collaboration, ultimately, was not successfully implemented.



## SECTION II: FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

### Summary of Key Themes

In this section, we summarize the key themes that were identified across focus groups. This information is organized by the questions asked during the group session. A copy of the script used during the focus group is provided in Appendix A.

#### **Motivation for redesign**

*From your perspective what was the motivation for the redesign? What were the expected benefits?*

Not surprisingly, the primary motivation for pursuing shared services agreements was to better manage scarce resources. In many cases, this meant finding cost-savings when federal grants and tax revenues are reduced. Specific issues mentioned were a need to reduce unnecessary duplication of services and to be better stewards of taxpayer dollars. However, in other cases, the issue was finding a way to provide resources to smaller communities where there is little incentive for private industry to do so (e.g., Brainerd IT collaborative) or when private industry cannot meet the needs of the citizens (Prime West purchasing) or cannot meet those needs at a reasonable cost to the citizens.

Additionally, other factors that contributed to redesign efforts were an ability to recognize and capitalize on other events such as building remodels, changes in leadership, other personnel changes, and changes in technological infrastructure.

Again, the primary benefits expected by most groups were cost-savings and providing better services to their citizens. However, other noteworthy benefits the groups gained were better communication, information sharing and stronger interpersonal relationships with their partners in the process. Finally, many groups found how important it was that they simply gain a better understanding of the work processes and needs of collaboration partners.

Every successful collaborative noted that the final successful partnership did not happen on the initial attempt or was not the initial vision of a partnership. Every group shared in common either a previous unsuccessful attempt at collaboration or a significant change to the originally envisioned collaboration. Each of these “failed” attempts was actually a significant learning opportunity that enabled the collaborative to be successful at a later time, in a different form, or with different personnel. Thus, a key component in most redesign efforts was a matter of

persistence: waiting, then moving forward at a time when the environment was more favorable for success.

A similar motivation to provide better services with cost savings emerged with the group that did not ultimately complete a shared services agreement.

## **Resources / Leadership**

*Were there key individuals who worked to get people on board, or did leaders emerge through the process? Was it one key leader who led the group to success or a combination of leaders and followers?*

Most groups felt the issue of leadership was critical, with some saying that collaboration agreements clearly required one or more key transformational leaders: champions to lead the cause, to get the ball rolling, and gain support from other key stakeholders and the community at large. However, at least one group and many individuals across groups felt that success depended more upon synergy, quality relationships between key individuals or groups, and openness throughout the process. Nevertheless, across all groups there was a critical element of trust, whether that was trust in the expertise of the project champion(s), trust built on existing relationships between key members of the collaborative, or trust built on an environment of openness and transparency.

A key theme that emerged in regard to leadership was the belief that the leaders or champions of the project needed to take on the project for the greater good of the community involved rather than out of self-interest. The impact of the collaboratives on the affected communities can be significant and long lasting, and the self-interested leader will not be able to build the necessary trust with or support of their community. One individual eloquently stated that the leader must be willing to “live in the shadows of success.”

The unsuccessful collaboration effort indicated that there was an initial synergy between a small group of leaders, but they were ultimately unable to get all of the necessary people to buy into a common vision.

## **Roadblocks**

### **Getting Started**

*What factors led to initial hesitancy to get “on board”? What/who helped to get you “on board”?*

We asked participants who were not early adopters of the vision for the collaboration to discuss their initial hesitancy with the project, as well as what factors helped to change their mind and bring them “on board.” Many participants freely acknowledged their initial concerns.

Initial concerns voiced about the process included not knowing what the benefits of the collaboration would be, concerns about having the resources to make the collaboration work, concerns about groups maintaining their individual identity and not being “swallowed up” by larger groups in the collaborative, and logistical issues around the geographical distance between members of the collaborative. A larger concern voiced across groups was a fear of failure. Groups were concerned that even if they created and implemented a new collaboration agreement, they might find that the re-design was a mistake and did not function as intended. There was no certainty as to what would be the next steps in that situation.

One of the most commonly cited factors that helped to convince people to work toward a collaborative agreement was the input of a committed leader they trusted. The other critical elements in overcoming these initial concerns were a combination of communication, relationship building, and trust. Regular meetings and open and transparent communications between key individuals is clearly critical. This communication helped enable relationship building and trust building. These processes also helped to ensure community support. Specific factors that helped to build relationships among groups involved in the planning as well as with the community at large were maintaining open discussion at all times, addressing concerns as they were raised rather than allowing them to fester, acknowledging mistakes when they were made and moving to correct them, and expressing commitment to work through the inevitable “bugs” in design and implementation.

Finally, a common element in overcoming concerns and building trust was seeing that other members of the collaborative were willing to make sacrifices and to take personal and professional risks. These situations served as demonstrations of commitment to the process that enabled others to follow suit. These commitments were both tangible (money, personnel, and resources) and intangible (time, effort, reputation).

It should be noted that at a more concrete level, initial concerns were overcome by simply being educated about exactly how this re-design could work. In most of these cases, there was not an existing model of success to provide guidance about how to get the more technical or structural work of the redesign done or how it would function in the end.

Interestingly, the member of the unsuccessful collaborative indicated that he was, in fact, an early adopter of the vision. He believed the economic argument was compelling, but the partners were unable to agree upon a model that worked. In fact, a smaller number of members of the initial group did subsequently form an agreement.

## **Risks**

*What were the personal, professional, and organizational risks that you needed to confront?*

As stated above, a major risk for all involved was the risk of failure, either that the redesign itself would never come to fruition or that it would be implemented unsuccessfully. If there was no collaboration agreement reached, how would community

members access the needed services? For example, how would the schools and community of Brainerd and Crow Wing County stay current with the technological demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How would the counties of the Prime West purchasing group ensure quality and affordable health services for their residents? If a collaboration agreement was implemented, what if the implementation itself failed? For example, for the Kandiyohi/Big Stone County Dispatch collaborative, an unsuccessful collaboration could literally involve life-or-death risks if 911 calls were not properly routed. Furthermore, many members were cognizant of the fact that the failure of their project could put any potential future projects in jeopardy.

In addition to obvious financial risks, a common and serious concern for participants was the risk of job loss either through elections or other means of termination. Many were not concerned about job loss but that their jobs would be changed in meaningful ways. While many were willing to take the risk and make those adjustments anyway, they were still concerned about the end result.

At a personal level, all groups had members who invested significant personal time, energy, and reputation above and beyond their normal role in order to ensure a successful end result. Also, some noted that with these larger multi-county or multi-organization collaborations, there is a risk of people losing the personal connections they are used to having as a member of a smaller community. There is a risk of more personal detachment.

In many cases, there were notable risks regardless of whether the collaboration was pursued. The collaboration was a matter of balancing the pros and cons and deciding that there were more potential benefits, more cost savings, and/or better services provided with a new approach. At least one group mentioned that the change would have been forced upon them eventually, but by doing things proactively they had the opportunity to direct and design the process themselves.

The interview with the unsuccessful collaboration indicated that there was significant political risk for him as well as others whose support he needed to seek in order to move forward.

### **Challenges**

*How did you deal with personal challenges such as boundary issues, building trust, overcoming risk aversion, power sharing, and concerns over leadership and job security?*

Most groups acknowledged that there were challenges, but once again the keys to dealing with these challenges were communication, relationships and trust. In other words: Communicate early and often. Be transparent. Keep an open mind. Be patient. If the process was open and honest, then most of these issues (e.g., power sharing) should be dealt with up front and resolved before moving forward. Participants also emphasized the importance of remembering the big picture and the long-term vision. This may make

it easier for groups to make sacrifices, financial and otherwise, in order to move the process forward. They are less likely to view this as losing something when they consider the long-term benefits of the collaboration. Notably, one group emphasized the importance of publicizing their successes, not to be self-congratulatory, but to facilitate continued buy-in to the process by the greater community.

Notably, the interview with the unsuccessful collaboration indicated that not all the counties involved shared the same vision, making it difficult to come to agreement on key issues.

### **Short-Term Costs**

Some of the short-term costs noted by groups included tangibles such as money, equipment, and increased training needs, but once again, there was more focus on the stress that resulted from the change. Groups had a healthy fear of failure, but also of success, due to the many unknowns in the process.

### **Trust-Building**

*How did you build trust during the process? Did you formally establish rules, roles, norms, etc., or did the process evolve more naturally?*

Participants universally acknowledged that building trust was critical to the success of the collaborative, but groups differed in how they achieved that end. Some groups were fortunate to have key relationships already established that they could leverage for the good of the group. Most groups, however, relied again, on a culture of open communication and allowing everyone to have input. In some cases, this process took a great deal of time (up to one year). A second key component to the trust building process is self-sacrifice. As stated before, people need to act and believe that others are acting for the good of the whole, and people need to feel that they are not being pushed forward into something they do not want and that will only benefit one party. Thus, a demonstration or recognition that others are sacrificing for the group helps with trust building. A final key component to the trust-building process was the leader. Most groups indicated that there were champions they trusted to move the process forward. In some cases, key individuals were trusted with specific roles, including keeping people informed. Finally, in some cases the fact that there was a clear need for change due to external conditions facilitated a willingness to work together.

Although many of the members of the unsuccessful collaborative had good relationships and a history of working together, ultimately, this was not shared across all parties in the collaboration. There were significant size and cultural differences across the counties that were not appropriately dealt with at the outset. As a result, misinformation and misperceptions about the motives of the various parties involved spread, ultimately preventing a sufficient level of trust from being built. The participant noted that perhaps some of this could have been overcome had there been better information out front.

Furthermore, some counties were less effective at communicating with their staff and thus did not foster the needed trust to move the process forward within their own communities, much less across counties.

### **Perceived Need**

*Did all involved in the project as well as in the community identify the project as necessary? If not, how was this overcome? How did the group convince others of the project's importance?*

In general, the groups involved felt that their communities were looking for someone to undertake these sorts of projects. They wanted more collaboration due to the perceived economic incentives and potential for better services. There is also a perception that the private sector does not have the economic incentive to serve their smaller communities, and efforts such as these can help fill those gaps. Although the public and other stakeholders may express apprehension and concerns about certain aspects of these efforts, participants indicated that education and communication about the needs of the project can allay these fears.

The participant in the unsuccessful collaborative indicated that there was some initial excitement and support around the idea, but the larger collaborative fell apart before that excitement could be communicated to the community.

### **Major Obstacles**

Groups encountered a number of obstacles during the re-design and implementation process. In fact, for many of the collaborations, there were partners who left the group prior to implementation because they could not overcome these obstacles (for example, funding or anticipated job losses). However, in the end, all four collaborations successfully overcame a number of significant obstacles. A major obstacle appeared to be time. Many collaborations took a significant period of time to come together (six years in the case of the Prime West group). Some failed in their first iteration and came back to try again. Others simply required time to build relationships and trust between key players in the redesign effort. Finally, the community needed time as well. Some found they could not move forward if the community was not ready for change.

These time-related obstacles were overcome with persistence. The key players in these collaboratives were unwilling to give up on their vision. They kept working: tweaking language in contracts, building relationships, educating the public and other stakeholders about the vision. Then, when the pieces were in place, and people were primed for change, they implemented. Interestingly, this was also true with the unsuccessful collaborative as a small subset of the original group did eventually develop an agreement.

Another major obstacle for some groups was getting partners on board. In the case of the IT collaborative they needed a partner to provide services; in the case of Prime West,



they needed providers to agree to terms. For the IT group, overcoming this obstacle was a matter of persisting until they found the right partner. For the Prime West group, overcoming this obstacle was once again open communication and taking input from the partners.

Other major obstacles were more technical and structural. One group had issues around liability that were overcome through trust and relationships but was also formalized in a Joint Powers Agreement. Another group had issues of cutting through state-level bureaucracy, which were overcome through a combination of persistence and communication. Similarly, the unsuccessful collaborative indicated that they had significant structural issues involving unions and loss of FTEs.

## Results of Redesign

### Goals

*Were goals and / or measurable outcomes established at the outset? Were these goals met?*

Most groups did not establish explicit measurable outcomes at the outset, but most did have an end goal they were striving for. Most felt that the majority of their goals, including financial goals and providing better services, were being met, though some indicated it was too soon to tell. Groups also noted some unintentional benefits, such as staff feeling more empowered due to their ability to give input into the redesign process.

### Satisfaction of Project Team

*How satisfied are you with the redesign? Would you do it again? Why?*

All groups reported satisfaction with the process and results.

### Satisfaction of General Public

*What has public reaction been? Has public reaction been measured in any way?*

A few groups indicated that a successful effort on their part would mean that they were invisible to the general public (e.g., 911 dispatch services). As one group stated, “If all is quiet, all is good.” Others felt that customers were more satisfied with the service they were receiving and planned to measure that with customer service surveys in the future.

## Future Efforts

*Will this redesign effort lead to other redesign efforts in the community? Is there trust for future projects?*

There was unanimous agreement across groups that the current collaborations have created a solid ground for future efforts. The relationships built between participants have the potential to nurture more projects. Two of the groups were able to identify ongoing collaboration efforts that followed from their efforts, indicating that a culture of change was being created. One member noted that “boundaries are being removed, both physically and metaphorically.” On a hopeful note, even the member of the unsuccessful collaborative indicated that their initial effort has increased the likelihood of future similar efforts in his community as well as other parts of the state. He did not view the effort as a failure but simply a re-direction.

## Conclusions

The participants in these focus groups believed that to continue to provide quality services to their residents, rural communities will increasingly be pursuing cost-saving ideas. One method of cost-saving is the implementation of shared-service agreements whereby groups partner with other counties, other agencies, and/or private entities to provide services jointly. This report summarizes the results of a series of focus groups designed to gain an understanding of the factors that facilitate a successful implementation of such collaborations.

Overall, a number of key themes emerged from the input of the focus group participants. First and foremost, participants constantly emphasized the critical role of communication, trust, and relationships. It is difficult to separate these three themes as they are entwined throughout this process and each is dependent on the others. Without openness, honesty, and transparency in communication, there can be no trust. The leaders must communicate openly with the partners and other members of the collaborating entities, the members of the collaborating group must communicate openly with each other, and in most cases, the groups must communicate openly with the general public. Furthermore, this communication cannot be a singular event, but an ongoing practice. It is critical to involve all stakeholders from the outset and consistently throughout the process. Finally, this communication cannot be one-way. Trust cannot be gained unless all parties feel they are allowed to openly contribute to the process.

A second key theme to emerge from the focus group participants was the importance of articulating a project vision that highlights the greater good of the community. Leaders and other members of the collaboration need to be clear that the end goal of the redesign is to provide a better service at a better cost, to make better use of tax payer dollars, and to fulfill an unmet need in the community. If participants and leaders can stay mindful of this greater good, they may be less likely to become mired in turf wars, more likely to make sacrifices, and more likely to earn the trust of others in the group. Furthermore, being reminded of this vision can be helpful in overcoming the fear of failure and fear of change that was noted consistently by participants.

A final key theme to emerge from the focus group participants was the importance of patience and persistence. Very little about the process of establishing these agreements is easy. As we

have outlined above, there are many costs, many risks, and many obstacles. Many of the groups succeeded despite the process extending over several years, despite the loss of key partners, despite previous failed attempts, and despite personal and professional risks. Furthermore, they often overcame initial community skepticism and dealt with staff members who had real concerns about their own futures. Yet, in addition to their persistence, they remained sensitive to the opposition and to the concerns of the employees. Time frames were extended in order to build support and trust. They maintained open lines of communication and involved the community or employees or partners in providing input.

**Thus, the successful implementation of a shared services agreement involves a combination of communication, trust, and relationship-building coupled with a strong shared vision of the greater good served by the collaboration and the persistence and sensitivity to make all the pieces come together.**



## SECTION III: DETAILED FOCUS GROUP SESSION NOTES (BY COLLABORATIVE)

All statements and opinions given are those of the participants  
and not necessarily those of the Center for Rural Policy & Development  
or Minnesota State University Mankato.

### Brainerd IT Collaborative

Historic Courthouse  
326 Laurel St.  
Brainerd, MN  
County Administrator's Conference Room: First floor

Crow Wing County-Brainerd and Brainerd Public Schools IT Collaboration  
The city, county and school are partnering in providing IT services jointly.  
Small: Very innovative and bold.  
Requires a lot of local talent.

#### Attendee's

- Tim Houle: Crow Wing County Administrator
- DeeAnne Newville: Crow Wing County (newcomer).
- Kevin Larson CTC: Service Provider of Fiber, DSL, dial-up.
- Jerry Walseth: former school superintendent.

Jerry:

1. Match understanding with opportunity:
  - Info from chamber of commerce
    - Communitywide review of technology and tech needs in community:
      - There's a black hole/little technology
      - Big Issue.
2. Then, soft side:
  - Relationship development...county, city, school meetings.
  - Monthly meetings: then invited county administrators (of Crow Wing County)

- Voiced concern and need of county.
- 3. School board that would go to community and request assistant
- 4. Find private company/operator that could create and implement vision
  - First attempt with large private company failed
  - Originally came together and built relationship, trust

Kevin in 1998:

- Wanted to bring communities together to bring broadband to community. Consolidated telecom and Cross Lake. Found partners, but fizzled.
- Participated in Chamber's leadership program (with Peter and Jerry). This kicked off their relationship.
- Leadership Training: Allowed opportunity to build relationships and meet each other.

Jerry:

- Get funds to lay fiber, then need maintenance funds:
- Leadership (city, county, schools):
- Jerry and Kevin had been having lunch and discussing for a while.
- Fiber maintained
- TCO (total cost of ownership)

Kevin:

- Telephone Co. Co-op: to bring in services that nobody else will bring in
- Qwest did not offer dial-up or voicemail to Baxter, Brainerd, etc.
  - Kevin would. Without expectation for profits.
    - 60 years ago this co-op was formed.
      - Investors are leaving
    - Citizens must build the fiber optics
  - Big investors want to cherry pick big boys

For Success:

Must have private along with public support and a champion

### Pros and Cons

- From your perspective, what was the motivation for the redesign?
  - Black Hole: Technology and Tech Support
  - Services to community
  - Economics

Must have business vision:

Tell me HOW it can be done. Don't tell me that it can't.

Consultant, Attorney, and Accountant

### Resources

- Were there key individuals who worked to get people on board?
  - Must have big champion to get this rolling, gain support
    - Jerry and school board.

- Get the bid
- Peter, Jerry and Kevin got ball rolling. Their previous and continuous relationship facilitated the process.
- Morrison community, Region 5...small collaborative that is beginning
- Bulldog: Carol Anderson, can move people.
  - Long-term vision
- CHAMPION
- Persistence: Lisa, a community mover and shaker; falls down many times but always gets back up.
- Often need more than one champion
- If you don't have a Carol Anderson, A CHAMPION, you cannot sell it...must keep working, concerted effort.

Relationship Issues: Kevin was willing to sell (fiber) to his board. Sell to public.

- New to roles. But not new to what they do. Must have experience in their field.
- Newness to collaborative relationships. Must be optimistic.
  - Must have a belief system.
  - Are we better together or separate?
  - Do people see benefit?
  - Core value came, too. New executives. (CTC, Baxter, reluctant but looking for good deal in Brainerd)
  - Serve kids better.
  - Probably not going to be successful if the leader is narcissistic => leader must be willing to live in shadow of success.
    - Must be intrinsic. Impact greater than self.
    - Co-ops bring services to community that no one else will provide.
    - Willing to go in without huge profit motive

❖ Spread the Vision. **Transformational leader, key theme.**

### Roadblocks

- If you were not “on board” right away (early adopter), what got you there?
  - What made you initially hesitant?
    - DeeAnn: got slammed into it. Working on wireless. Virtual Desktop: Will be running.  
Need the fiber from CTC. There is technology that each could not own on their own. But collectively, they could afford the services.
    - Collaborative business model for IT support. Perhaps create a help desk at college for real life experience.
  - What got you on board?
    - Low cost model. Collaborative with the high school.
    - Trust.

- A player/champion steps back from own self-interest. And take on other's initiative.
- What were the risks (personal/professional/organizational) that you had to confront?
  - Fear of Failure
  - Failures:
    - Lots for CTC
    - Lots of competition
      - TDS, Charter, etc.
      - Need to be tenacious
    - Plenty of times things felt like they were falling apart at the negotiations.
    - Kevin went to Jerry and voiced concern.
    - But schools needed CTC to do well.
  - Hurdle: Kevin: Not owning every inch of the fiber (came from monopoly world)
  - Don't own facilities but need to maintain them.
    - Construction consultant taught them: when they build, they know EVERYTHING. What bolts, etc., but Jerry doesn't need to know that stuff. They know how to build.
  - Culture shock: 25-year agreement. Who is going to write the service agreement? I'm not going to be here.
  - How do we protect ourselves? We are connecting to a fiber that we don't own.
  - Financial
    - \$25K...must convince that that is a deal.
  - ROI is longer term
  - 2003: Startup... people are just getting into home Internet services
    - Why do I need 1Mb to my house?
    - Hesitant

**Jerry:**

- With schools
  - No real risks...but could not support kids at home or broader community.
- When you use a public resource (only for schools) is it possible to have the greater good benefit. Kids are served, but how do you take care of the broader community?
- Need this to make the community grow. Brainerd did not have broadband, but all surrounding communities did.
- TDS: went back to traditional model. Told schools that they bury the cables.
  - Financial Risks.
    - Must be willing to lose a lot in order to get that one win.
    - Must sustain effort, and that is discouraging when you must lose 10 times before you get a win.
  - How did you deal with issues like: regionalism (boundary issues, not territoriality), trust, risk aversion, leadership, power sharing, job security
    - \*Change territorial boundaries, not remove them.



- When people begin to understand the bigger picture, the bigger view, when they don't put limits on their view, then this can work
  - Community vs. city, county, school district
    - Community: Chamber of commerce, hospital, school, said there is a need. What about community members? In general, the community doesn't know it happened. They have no clue as to how it came about.
    - They are doing such a good job, nobody's issue. If they are doing good: not talk at coffee shops.
    - People don't know because they don't make it known. Not bragging.
- Short term costs: How did you get people around it?
  - Fear of Failure
  - **Hesitation**: Some are hesitant about 911/Public services going through tower. There is an understanding that general community use will be cut off so bandwidth is not being used for Internet surfing if there is a tornado coming in.
- How did you build trust during the process? Rules? Norms?
  - Was it a purposeful process or did it evolve?
    - Build trust with the superintendent of schools. Never once any voice of reluctance. Total trust from board. No roadblocks.
    - Take care of other's needs (board's needs).
    - Having a new administrator come in. No territorial issues. Willing to make big changes/initiatives.
    - Greater the ownership an entity can have, the higher the probability it will succeed.
    - Must bring in value.
      - Brainerd Public Utilities
    - Baxter had connectivity issues: BAM **value**.
    - Must step back from self-interest and see what's in it for other players and address those issues.
- Did people identify the project as necessary/critical?
  - If not, how did you get them to do so
    - Collaborative cannot occur without the county and GIS system and its costs.  
Message from general public: You guys ought to work together more.
      - "You can provide better service at better cost."
    - Create value/incentive: It's economics, people want to see some incentive.
  - Failure of private market = rural community development
  - Co-op: Focus on survival and community focus/support, not profit.
- Were there "critical stoppers"?
  - Brainerd School board: Did not get funding (from stimulus), so Staples initiative fizzled.

- Where are you on the wagon? On the back draggin' heels? Just sitting, or pulling?
    - If there are enough people dragging their heels = failure.
- Failed ventures: A partner dropped out right away.
  - TDS: No local ownership with TDS. Does not understand community paradigm/model.
    - No concept that things could work differently.
    - Not willing to invest beyond their mission.
  - TDS: Took contract ownership and gave it to a VP in Madison, WI.
    - Fell to pieces soon after that.
    - TDS: Failed b/c they needed to own everything.
      - CDC: Hired the individual.
      - Cannot build trust long distance, if you cannot step in and change anything.
  - Need economies of scale: Communities get cable and private companies cherry pick for biggest return
    - If private companies are left to their own devices, rural will suffer.

## Results

- Huge success in regard to tech support. They can be competitive with any tech question/service.
- Technology is bad. How to measure successes?
  - Did you establish measurable outcomes? Did you set goal in the beginning? (SMART) Or “Did you meet your expected outcomes?”
    - Connectivity/high-speed access. Online learning.
    - Short term: did not really set goals.
    - Continued progress.
      - Chamber continues to measure progress.
  - No longer concerned about speed.
    - Reduced customer concerns about connectivity.
      - Streaming video (Netflix).
  - Issue: Fiber is on left side of road and house is on right...but you haven't come to my house yet.  
Did not know what the goals at outset.
  - Traffic over fiber. Not satisfactory for measuring success (synergy of having infrastructure in place).
  - Many ways to measure success of infrastructure.
  - People buying homes are asking, is there fiber?
    - People want to come here and live, but they need to be connected.
      - ROI: not noticed yet. WFH, distance learning. Results-only work environment.
      - Perhaps have only seen 5% of the investment yet.
  - Not all outcomes are Measurable. Synergies, etc.
  - Need a network that will be there for the next 50 years. (It has lasted 35 already.)

- Are you satisfied? What is your perception/reaction? Would you do it again? Why?
  - ISD 181: Underprivileged, etc.
    - They have an iPad to take home, but no Internet at home.
      - Built tower in Crosby.
      - Assigned ownership over.
        - Continue to find ways to do business. CDC and county own half the tower. Because there is trust.

### Looking forward

- Will this redesign lead to other redesign efforts in your community?
  - Can be replicated but must broaden one's understanding of the world.
  - Then they will understand the limits and possibilities.
- Succession: Current players are building relationships, and it is built into the culture.
  - Perpetual return. Self-perpetuating.

## Kandiyohi/Big Stone Dispatch Collaborative

May 7, 2012

Sheriff Dan Hartog: Kandiyohi Co.

Sheriff John Haukos: Big Stone Co.

Heather B: Network Admin. Kandiyohi

Larry Kleindl: County Administrator, Kandiyohi

Big Picture: Shared dispatch

- Kandiyohi County dispatches for Big Stone County under contract.
- 2007: Too many silos
  - Infrastructure cost is same regardless of the size of county
  - Lots of upcoming costs: NG911, retirements in dispatch system, 800 system
    - Perfect storm
  - Wanted more efficient service
  - Cost effectiveness of sharing certain services. Cannot share sheriffs, but you can share dispatch unit.
  - Started talking with Swift Co.
  - Kandiyohi was willing to take on something they did not need. Big Stone was willing to give.
  - Swift: looking for backup

### Pros and Cons

- Huge cost savings.
  - All calls go through Kandiyohi.
- From your perspective, what was the motivation for the redesign?
  - Timing?
    - Next Generation 911, retirements, perfect timing.
      - Now they can bring counties in one at a time, start with one or two, then bring others in.
  - Outside influence?
    - Kandiyohi is a hub site for the state, so they are perfect for regional development.
      - More fiber optics, more technological infrastructure.
    - Combination of right attitudes. Someone willing to give up something and someone willing to take something on.
      - Able, willing and wanting.
    - Sheriffs took responsibility. (Sheriffs are the experts.) County board stayed out of it unless there were monetary needs.
      - Politics stayed out of it.
  - Expected benefits?
    - Reduced Costs

- Sharing information.
  - Same records management.
- Reduced training. Big Stone has different expertise.
  - Big Stone: on cutting edge of technology and equipment.
- Spend a dime to make a dollar.
- Big Stone has armor.
- Pushed technology ahead because of cost savings on other funds.
- Kandiyohi has access to Big Stone data.
  - Information part is biggest pro.
- Kandiyohi obtained an extra dispatcher because of money from Big Stone.
- Learning about process.
  - Rewarding experiences.
- They chose to do it, and they were able to design it themselves. Create it on own terms.
  - If they waited, perhaps it would have been made mandatory by state.
- Better relationships.
- More aware of other counties and their processes.

### Resources

- Were there key individuals who worked to get people on board?
  - Emerging leaders?
    - Big Stone sheriff.
    - Kandiyohi sheriff.
    - IT people (communication people).
    - State of MN (OET) people.
    - Consultant to help when things get overwhelming (deal with the state and legislature issues).
    - Radio-shop vendors.
      - Committed to success.
      - Got Cisco involved because nobody has done what they were doing with technology.
    - Commissioner of Public Safety
      - Provided support
        - Funding
      - Talked to the right people to keep things moving.

### Roadblocks

- Initially hesitant.
  - Especially after Swift Co dropped out.
- If you were not “on board” right away (early adopter), what got you there?
  - County administrator
    - What made you initially hesitant?
      - Being an hour and a half away.
        - Blind trust

- If we get started down the road, can we stop?
  - Do we have the resources?
  - Trust in two sheriffs.
  - What got you on board?
    - Trust of the sheriffs.
      - Previously built the trust.
    - Seeing the commitment.
- What were the risks (personal/professional/organizational) that you had to confront?
  - Political
    - Re-education
    - Could have been the end.
      - Trying to sell citizens, EMS, fire dept.
      - Can we overcome the concern that the call is not being answered locally? (China call center thinking.)
  - Risk of not being re-elected over it.
  - Liability
  - Consequences of failure
    - Future trust for projects
  - Personal risks: took project home because husband and wife were key players.
  - Personal time: Big Stone sheriff listened to radio at home to make sure everything transitioned smoothly.
  - What is the back-up plan?
  - Risk of going to wrong location because of familiarity.
  - Personal involvement vs. detachment.
    - Can remain professionally detached when answering call from other county. Distance self vs. knowing the caller.
    - This system can take away that personal connection.
- How did you deal with issues like: regionalism (not territoriality) boundary issues, trust, risk aversion, leadership, power sharing, job security?
  - Lots of meetings.
  - Lots of patience.
    - Learning experience.
    - Deal with mistakes.
  - Willingness to give stuff up/willing to take things on.
  - The two groups work well together.
  - People's attitudes.
    - Needs to be open and understanding.
  - Never an issue of losing something.
  - Not being so nit-picky about who is paying for what (e.g. consultant).
    - Kandiyohi paid for some of Big Stone's stuff.
      - But it was not an issue here.
  - Risk aversion: Gain trust of community members.
    - **Get the word out early.**

- Talked with dispatchers early.
  - As project got closer, invite all employees for a meet and greet (with a grill-out)
    - IT, Dispatch
  - Dispatchers went out with deputy to see layout of land.
    - Gain comfort with the land.
      - All have a map, too.
  - Before project started, dispatchers listened to other county's dispatchers.
  - There are very few 911 calls in Big Stone but lots of administrative calls/routine.
  - Be open with fire chiefs and all employees (IT Dept.)
    - Have clear expectations.
      - No more, turn left at the red silo. Accurate descriptions. Held responsible now. Accountability.
  - Need to explain and spell out reasoning.
    - Then people are supportive.
  - Nobody has been let go or fired. Only process is through attrition (retirement, etc.).
    - Will continue to this.
    - As people leave, Big Stone will delegate tasks accordingly without hiring new individuals.
    - People can gain job opportunities from Kandiyohi, too.
- Community vs. city, county, school district.
  - Keep community informed.
    - Communication
  - Gain trust.
  - Be trustful (the dept.)
  - Explain reasoning.
  - Accept failures and say this went wrong
  - Citizen had concern and voiced it to the sheriff.
    - Issue was addressed.
  - Be responsive and welcoming of citizens' concerns.
  - Good things went well right away, and there was news about it.
  - Gain "buy-in" from city administrators and fire chiefs. They relay info to citizens.
  - Show successes.
    - Newspaper stories
    - Statewide recognition
    - Identification with the community
    - Creates buy-in.
      - Now people love this new system.
- Short-term costs? How did you get people around it?
  - Loss of sleep (stress).

- Equipment implementation
    - State was supportive of financing things.
  - Some costs that get swept under the rug (paid for by other county).
  - Buy-in from citizens.
    - See above.
  - Insecurity of success or failure.
  - Fear of Change.
- How did you build trust during the process? Rules? Norms?
  - Was it a purposeful process or did it evolve?
    - Trust already existed.
    - Be straightforward.
      - There will be dark moments.
    - Economic/fiscal crisis facilitated trust and support.
      - People understood things needed to change.
    - People were happy nobody was going to get fired.
      - Retirements
      - Small community and contagion.
    - No personal agenda.
      - Genuine trust to try new things.
      - No pressure from outsiders.
      - A project everyone felt was necessary.
    - No political spin.
      - “Matter of fact.”
        - This is what might happen.
    - Communication, Communication, Communication.
- Did people identify the project as necessary/critical?
  - If not, how did you get them to do so?
    - Yes.
    - The unions were not a problem right away.
    - Many people were indifferent but some were apprehensive.
    - EDUCATION.
      - Keep everyone in the loop.
- Were there “critical stoppers”?
  - Swift county dropped out.
    - Unique attribute of the county (yes/no thinking).
    - They see themselves as an employment firm and keeping jobs in the community.
      - Job loss issue could not be overcome.
        - Did not want to lose jobs in their dispatch unit.
      - They want to use Kandiyohi, technology (server), but not give up dispatch unit.
    - Swift could have saved lots of money, especially with the technology piece.
      - Big Stone saved \$150,000.
    - Artificial borders.



- Some had attitudes that Kandiyohi is trying to take over west central MN.
    - Some don't even want to hear "consolidation."
      - Because some do not want to give anything up.
- Issue of Liability.
  - Joint powers agreement.
    - Both counties will get sued.
      - But sheriff is responsible.
    - Kandiyohi took on liability they did not have to take.
    - TRUST
    - Big Stone just seems like another community to Dan Hartog, b/c he already dispatches for the whole county.
      - Recordings are very helpful. The citizen is usually the person who made mistake.
    - People tend to take ownership.
- Keep the politicians out of it.
- City Administrator: People of Big Stone were concerned about how many people will you kill before you get it right?
  - But they did great.

## Results

- Did you establish measurable outcomes? Did you set goal in the beginning? (SMART) Or "did you meet your expected outcomes?"
  - 911 staff is always trained in area
    - All fire and EMS service employees
      - Familiar with 911 system
  - Citizens know how to accurately report/call in address.
  - Made system redundant (with paging).
    - Radio
  - Everyone understanding map system.
  - Record management system. Shared data.
  - Other things have spun off, jail and court relations.
    - People can be seen in court in "other" county.
- Are you satisfied? What is your perception/reaction?
  - Would you do it again? Why?
- What has public reaction been? Has it been measured?
  - If all is quiet, all is good.
  - Lots of people (in Kandiyohi) don't even realize this is being done. More apparent in Big Stone.
  - Once you explain things (getting paid, create jobs, efficiencies, etc.), people don't say much.
  - Cost savings, negotiations.

## Looking forward

- Will this redesign lead to other redesign efforts in your community?

- Show that IT CAN BE DONE.  
This success has built HOPE.
- Is there trust for future projects?
  - Definitely.

State Website: Committee for Dispatch Collaboration

## Prime West County Based Purchasing Collaborative

Prime West County Based Purchasing: Beltrami, Big Stone, Clearwater, Douglas, Grant, Hubbard, McLeod, Meeker, Pipestone, Pope, Renville, Stevens, and Traverse Counties

**Marvin Tinklenberg:** Pipestone County Commissioner, Family Services. Saw potential for implementing shared services. Delegate of Prime West Group. Getting started.

**Kathy Hungness:** Original employee of Prime West. Administrative Assistant. Moved office to Alexandria in 1999 and moved here, too. Now Director of Administrative Purposes. Here since beginning.

**Bob Stevenson:** Stevens County. Commissioner (40 yrs retired). PMAP will be joining. Eric Schneider, got ball rolling (great organizer). Kept going. Every county stuck it out, even during rough times and when one was going to take money from the other. More local control. DHS put roadblock and still do put them in front of them.

**Amy Wilde:** Stevens County took initial steps. Key. Counties kept their own populations and did not contract out to other health companies. Only state other than CA that does this. Prime West representative (“Founding Mother”). Not just local control, but also economic development issue. Desire to have all local providers included in network. Meeker County Commissioner. Big HMOs not willing to contract with local providers, which would have killed small doctor offices and pharmacists. Economic development issue.

**Richard Kastner:** Grant County Commissioner. Goal to protect local providers. County hospital. Itasca had pilot program and they looked into that. County of 6,000. Only one on board that was interested in collaboration. Too much risk. Uphill battle the whole way. Stubborn and eventually very successful.

**Jerry Brustuen:** Renville Co. Human Services Director. Board is interested in effects of managed care. Largest employer decided to get meds from mail. Local control is being lost. They will not do PMA. Got local providers on board right away. Lots of support. Split from hospital to create community health system of Renville Co., county-based purchasing. Eventually Pipestone joined (surrounding county). Board had faith and provided funds. Immediate buy-in from providers (doctors, etc.).

**Gordy Hagen:** Director of Bemidji Prime West. County-based purchasing. Three northern counties that eventually joined. Beltrami. Clearwater. Protect providers from large

pharmaceutical and insurance companies. Have unique populations (Native Americans). After 10 yrs they failed and could not make it on their own. Requested support from Jim.

**Beverly Wangerin:** McLeod County Commissioner. Stevens Co. had the guts to go with it. Now others want to replicate PrimeWest's county-based purchasing. Do not have local hospital. Everything PrimeWest does is very transparent vs. large [health care] company.

**Bob Ryan:** Promoted the initiative. Mover and shaker of group. Bulldog.

**PrimeWest clients:** Medical Assistance and some MNCare members

## Focus Group

### Pros and Cons

From your perspective, what was the motivation for the redesign?

- State forcing things they didn't want.
- Outside (large) companies have no interest in small counties.
- Protect providers.
- Economic development
- Human Services and Public Health directors had concern over services people receive. Good services. Large insurance company started limiting visits.
- Goal of collaboration
  - Do not duplicate services.
- Expected benefits?
  - No additional costs.
  - Cost savings.
  - Access to services.
  - Better Care: **Local and personal.**
    - Chose to provide those with hip replacements both a walker and a cane. More costly, but better recovery.
    - Human Services and Public Health provide better services.
      - PrimeWest deals with the doctors and the patient.
      - (Large insurance co. only deal with the doctors.)
- Opportunity arose?
  - Managed care vs. county-based purchasing.
    - Nothing to lose.
    - Risky to do nothing.

### Resources

- Were there key individuals who worked to get people on board?
  - Emerging leaders?
    - Eric S.: Executive Director/Organizer
    - All counties decided they would do county-based purchasing.
      - Commissioners talked and brought Eric in.
      - Eric suggested bringing in other counties that were already doing this.

- Eric: Public relations/administration, ability to draw groups together. Expertise, resource.
  - One leader or combination of leaders/followers/etc.
    - All in attendance: Champions.
      - Had concern/fear over quality and affordable health care access.
        - Personal reasons: Knew how in danger they were of losing local providers.
          - Without better reimbursements, the network would fall apart.
- Monthly meetings to answer questions/address concerns.
- Federal grants are very important.
  - Each county kicked in a certain amount of money for seed money.
  - They were loans to PrimeWest. They all got paid back.
  - PrimeWest ended up getting a big grant (a few different ones).
- Strength in numbers. All counties had to work together to make it a success, especially counties that were not regional centers, smaller or fragmented areas that have clients dispersed.
- 1998: 10 counties signed on.
  - Joint Powers Act: Must have **meetings to gain support** before this was signed.
    - Educate. Invite all providers.
- Itasca: Had lots of risk.
- Commissioners were diligent. They did not give up.

### Roadblocks

- Chicken and egg analogy
  - Needed provider buy-in to get DHS, but providers wanted to know it was approved before signing contract.
- If you were not “on board” right away (early adopter), what got you there?
  - What made you initially hesitant?
    - Is it workable? Skeptical: Will providers get what they used to?
      - County went forward and proved that it is workable.
      - Ended up paying providers more.
    - People were hesitant because of ignorance. They didn’t know what county-based purchasing was, and they didn’t want to take the time to learn.
  - What got you on board?
    - Showed providers it could work and paid them more.
    - Education
    - Public meetings for providers: Let them have a say in how things should be done.
    - Small gains
    - As soon as they make money, we will provide enhanced services.
      - All money will go back to Health Services/Medical Assistance.

- 7% reimbursement (got lots of providers to buy in after that).
    - Pay better medical assistance than any other providers.
  - Built trust/support from the local control piece.
  - Providers: Local. No managed care.
- What were the risks (personal/professional/organizational) that you had to confront?
  - People didn't understand what they were trying to do.
    - Two new concepts:
      - Managed care (in general)
      - Managed care run by county board
        - How can county commissioners run a health plan?
        - County had to hire expert.
    - People were concerned about the risk county board had to take on.
    - Fear: The group would fall apart and cost would fall back on county.
      - Large insurance companies were already putting cost on county, so there was really no choice but to implement county-based purchasing.
      - Counties bear risk whether they joined or not.
    - Government is running things. What if I don't reelect those commissioners?
      - County board is not stable.
    - Political risks: Re-election.
    - Risky to do nothing.
      - Managed care was scary.
        - Feared what it would do to county.
        - What it would do to health care in the county.
  - How did you deal with issues like: regionalism (not territoriality), boundary issues, trust, risk aversion, leadership, power sharing, job security?
    - Community vs. city, county, school district.
      - Turf issues.
      - Got another installment of a grant b/c 10 counties stayed together despite roadblocks/barriers.
    - NO managed care.
      - Go local: Selling point for PrimeWest
  - How did you build trust during the process? Rules? Norms?
    - Was it a purposeful process or did it evolve?
      - TRUST.... that's what it is all about.
      - Trusted Bev to go to meetings and provide updates to board.
        - Also got support from board.
      - Amy was the go-to person, went to meetings, provided updates.
        - Needed one champion commissioner to do legwork.
        - George Rice provided support b/c he liked idea of local control (especially with conservative commissioners).
  - Did people identify the project as necessary/critical?
    - If not, how did you get them to do so?
      - Providers did not want managed care.

- Seen as government takeover by some.
- Who took ownership?
  - Critical for success.
    - Each county needed 1 or 2 commissioners to be a champion for it.
- Were there “critical stoppers”?
  - Hurdles:
    - The language in the contract (Dept. of Health contract).
      - People were getting picky and changed their mind on signing the contract, even though they previously signed off.
        - “Well, that was just an initial contract.” “We changed our mind.”
        - Had to rewrite and resend the contract.
          - Set back months b/c Dept. of Health changed their mind on a few things on the language.
      - Want State of MN in there.
      - Pay promise.
        - As soon as we make money we will give you enhanced reimbursement.
          - Reinvestment.
        - More timely.
      - DHS approval: Continuous concerns.
        - Bureaucracy from DHS.
    - Took 6 years to go live.
      - Many hurdles.
        - Must be persistent.
          - “Well, we’ve gone this far, keep on keeping on.” It’s just one more hurdle.
    - Lack of support from Association of Counties.
      - Backed out when things were taking so long.
    - Richard: His board did not support this initiative.
    - Ignorance and lack of motivation to learn.

## Results

- Did you establish measurable outcomes? Did you set goal in the beginning? (SMART) Or “did you meet your expected outcomes?”
  - Unmet goal
    - Getting PrimeWest to cover county and municipal employees
- What has public reaction been? Has it been measured?
  - People are unaware of PrimeWest.
  - Consumer had no real say.
    - Just want to see good services.
  - No interest until there is a need.
  - Hard to get member representation on committee.
    - Busy, poor transportation.

**Looking forward**

- Will this redesign lead to other redesign efforts in your community?
- Is there trust for future projects?
  - There are a number of different collaborative initiatives that can still be done to save money and use state funds more effectively.
    - Children’s mental health services
    - Nurse/family partnership
  - Lots more collaborative b/c commissioners see success of PrimeWest.

**Future Directions**

Would like to see PrimeWest take on county board members.



## Todd County & Todd County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Collaborative

### Present:

- Randy Neumann, Todd County Commissioner
- Gerald Ruda, Todd County Commissioner
- Nathan Burkett, (former) County Administrator
- Timothy Stieber, SWCDD Director
- Lee Buchholz, SWCDD Supervisor
- Norman Krause

### Not present:

- Sandy Rohr
  - Marie Katterhagen
- Two separate districts with board and budget (subsidized by county) and planning, zoning, GIS on county side (part of county government).
    - 1.5 yrs ago Todd County SWCD and County merged into one entity.
    - Lots of communication (began with staff).
      - Inform policy makers and board of directors.
      - December [2012], signed agreement between two entities.
      - Staff from SWCD moved into county building.
        - 3 months in, no complaints.
  - Differences between two entities: education first (SWCD) vs. policy/enforcement first (county).
    - Merging philosophies and cultures is “a work in progress.”
    - Ensure longevity.
      - County seen as “bad guys.”
      - SWCD seen as “good guys.”
  - Began by noticing overlap in work.
  - Want education first, Soil and Water Group.
    - This philosophy appears to be spreading.
  - Need commitment first.
  - SWCD: Asking “how can we strengthen our position.”

### **Pros and Cons**

From your perspective, what was the motivation for the redesign?

- Outside influence?
  - Grants from the state are drying up, not guaranteed.
  - SWCD needed technologies, GIS, etc.

- Do not need to duplicate it.
- Expected benefits?
  - People come in with intent to talk to one group, but someone from other side offers help/resources.
    - Better service provided. Planning and Zoning, lots of behind-the-scenes people.
    - Lower cost to customer.
- Opportunity arose?
  - Gerry:
    - 3 things came together.
      - 3-5 years ago: Staff of soil and water were getting to age of retirement.
      - SWCD developed a plan to change leadership structure.
        - Todd County Administrator moved to strategy-aligned management.
      - Courthouse renovation made a “one-stop” shop more “doable.”
  - Randy:
    - Planning, zoning, and water district groups have always worked together.
      - Makes it easy to collaborate
    - Cross training was a win-win.
- *Main Driving Force*: Funding, planning, financing for the future, must maximize value of tax dollars.

Benefits: More resources, better service, envelope of service.

## Resources

Were there key individuals who worked to get people on board?

Emerging leaders?

- Sandy: previous manager/director of SWCD.
  - Developed good working relationship with Nate (County Administrator).
- Good relationship between the two boards facilitated the collaboration process.
- Cannot look to one person, must be open and organic.
- Sandy: we are bringing up the right issues.
  - During the initiation process:
    - Must be open, transparent, and answer all questions.
    - Do not move too fast. Must address all issues.
      - Once a decision is made, need to take as long as needed to get people “on board” and informed.
      - Even if it results in a move backwards.
        - a. Have a timeline, but be flexible.
- *Trust* between past director and SWCD directors.

- Motivation must be for the people they serve and make it clear to the staff.
  - Trust that director will do what is right for ppl and ppl of county
  - Empower employees to take that trust and accept decisions (Sandy was trusted) to move forward
- Mutual Interest
  - Agreement lives beyond current members
  - Set Base.
- One leader or combination of leaders/followers/etc.
  - Synergy
    - Sandy (Supervisor) was a key player. Trusting

### Roadblocks

If you were not “on board” right away (early adopter), what got you there?

What made you initially hesitant?

- Will SWCD employees become county employees?
  - Benefits?
- Gerry: everyone was open to discussion. Not 100% sold from day 1, but there was willingness.
  - Supervisors had a bigger leap than County Board.
  - Now all supervisors and board are on.
- Randy:
  - Not on right away, he got lots of calls about turmoil between departments.
    - Lack of stability.
- Real concern that SWCD maintain their identity.
  - This issue was discussed and reiterated, that they were not going to be swallowed up.
- What got you on board?
  - Sandy’s and supervisor’s commitment and assurance that we can work through the “bugs.”
  - Unspoken agreement that at any time someone could raise a flag and not move on until issue was resolved.
    - When it came time to implement, everyone was on board because at that time all issues were raised and solved.
  - SWCD supervisor: Requested that staff be empowered to voice concerns. Empowered to be part of decision making. Asked employees how they wanted/perceived their job to be. Employees took a major role in redesigning their job.
    - The board listened.
    - Questions about pay, benefits, etc., and all were addressed.
  - Never felt forced into this. No pressure financially.
    - Positive reinforcement. Focus on benefits and efficiencies of scale.
  - They have outcomes and goals.

- Director has resigned. New director is Tim.
- What were the risks (personal/professional/organizational) that you had to confront?
  - Loss of identity of programs.
  - Gerry: Concern from both departments: My job is going to change. What is it going to be like? There are some long timers (30+-year employees).
    - They have been willing to make adjustments. Still some concerns, yet willing.
    - Young employees were eager to make changes.
- How did you deal with issues like: regionalism (not territoriality), boundary issues, trust, risk aversion, leadership, power sharing, job security?
  - No real issues with boundaries.
    - People are sharing very well.
  - Simple thing about losing image on side of car to let customers know who they are.
    - SWCD-D: added a D.
  - Education over policy (County wants to adopt the SWCD philosophy) – they do not want to give citations (this should be last resort).
    - Educate first and enforce second (citizens voice).
    - Education is cheaper than enforcement.
    - Provide citizens with the WHY of the rule.
      - This usually addressed a lot of issues.
  - Power sharing: no issue, it was all laid out in the beginning.
    - County: enforcement
    - SWCD: educate
    - People still do what they used to do.
    - People know their role as outlined by the purview.
      - Especially related to grants, etc.
    - Two full boards meet 3-4 times a year
      - Very little power struggle
      - Soil and Water: always policy-setting board.
        - County board: beginning to be more policy setting board.
  - There is no universal outline.
    - Due to different personalities.
    - What works in Todd County may not work elsewhere.
  - Community vs. city, county, school district.
- Short-term costs? How did you get people around it?
  - Nothing to lose if it didn't work out. Just go back to old ways of doing things.
  - They want to be more efficient.
  - This is the second time.
    - Learning experience and seed was planted.
      - Second time, it evolved over the years.
      - Built trust over time.

- Easy to set up, but hard to dissolve.
    - Must have it in writing, how would we dissolve?
    - Built “divorce” possibility into agreement.
  - Must look at lack of funding.
  - Always a sense of urgency but no strong sense of urgency.
    - Financial security: always aware that things must change to remain competitive.
    - Must be proactive.
      - SWCD wants best technology and a great way to do it is to work with county.
  - SWCD must make trade-offs. But even with technology they can be diverse.
  - Citizens question actions.
    - Board gets defensive.
    - Loss of identity.
    - Change: to have to do things differently (i.e. landowners).
      - Come over to building and deal with zoning, property taxes, AND your soil and water program.
        - Ask for a new normal.
          - Some do not want to accept change even if it is more efficient.
      - Now the combined offices have a brochure of people and their expertise.
        - Also, have “need to know” sheets.
        - Cross training so everyone can help customers and they do not need to wait for a particular individual to come into the office.
          - Have the info sheet in the field, too, i.e. a guy is checking septic system but landowner has question about windbreak. Employee may have answer or info for contacting expert.
    - If people are told they cannot do something, i.e., build 50 feet from shore, from a conservation standpoint, the worst thing to say is because rules say so.
      - Must educate everyone.
    - Usually customers are split. Some focus on following rules, others focus on doing what they want to do.
  - From operations perspective, had to slow down a little. The merging took longer than expected.
    - Grants are a little behind, but things are getting done (especially those that need to get done).
- How did you build trust during the process? Rules? Norms?
    - Trust was important but not crucial.
    - Matching vision between boards was important.
    - Do not micro-manage.

- The “meeting-after-the-meeting” never occurred. All things were put on the table right away.
  - Policy of openness.
- Lee: “Things will only work if we genuinely share our feelings. Respect and transparency.”
- Vision: Customer Bill of Rights. Passed as a policy by both boards jointly. All about customer satisfaction.
  - Also passed a complaints bill of rights.
  - All accept and or contribute to the language and it was worked out.
- Common people on the street need to see this as important, too.
- Nobody felt pushed. If they do, people tend to perceive there is an underlying motive. Need trust.
- Openness, communication, transparency, respect.
- Lots of concern over terms like merger, acquisition.
  - If we merge, do I lose my identity? If I lose identity, do we work together?
  - Important factor was that there would be no loss of identity.

Did people identify the project as necessary/critical?

- Constituents gave positive feedback about people at county, very helpful and knowledgeable.

Were there “critical stoppers?”

- Previous attempt that stopped.
  - Just needed to percolate, seed was planted:
    - Time. The seeds were planted and it just needed to work its way through the system
  - Nate: Lack of trust from supervisor (Sandy).
    - After a year, trust was built when Nate followed through with what he had promised.
    - Now, very trusting.
    - Sandy didn’t know Nate’s motives.
  - Lack of faith and trust in leadership.
    - Needed to sort itself out.
    - Concerns about specific individuals’ roles in process.
  - A newbie working with a 30+ employee: possible conflicting interests.
    - Must be transparent.
  - City members/public were worried
    - Brought it out publicly and newspaper wrote negative editorials. Moving too fast.
      - Revealed some issues that must be addressed.
      - Paved way, primed community for change.
  - Soil and water employees were fearful of what things might look like.
    - Just not the right time.

## Results

Did you establish measurable outcomes? Did you set goals in the beginning? (SMART) “Did you meet your expected outcomes?”

- If things don’t work, there is a dissolution agreement in place (divorce).
- Does this work financially?
  - Yes.
- Sandy responsible for making sure these happen:
  - Info sheets, educate staff on why rules exist, answer phone the same, standardized methodologies, moving offices.
- Measurable outcomes:
  - Hours of education provided.
  - # of violations they are writing.
  - Grant dollars.
- Too early for concrete answer.
  - Customer service surveys: will be sent out in July (citizens reactions).
- Tim: influence in a positive way.
- Staff reactions
  - Most are doing well once they got past initial shock.
    - They all get along well.
    - Pleased that something is happening and that they were involved in the process.
  - Empowerment to get the job done:
    - Sense of ownership.
      - They are going to make it work.

Are you satisfied? What is your perception/reaction?

Nothing but good things so far. Balanced so far.

Would you do it again? Why?

- Yes all around
  - But there is work to be done.
  - Set policy, outcomes, to see results. Do not micromanage.

What has public reaction been? Has it been measured?

- Too early to tell. In July there will be customer satisfaction surveys to evaluate.
- Customers are already becoming more satisfied. Improved customer attitudes because of better service.

## Looking forward

Will this redesign lead to other redesign efforts in your community?

Yes, already a culture of change in Todd County.

Two months away from public health dept. and social services collaborative (new building).

- Co-locating employees to better serve customers and be more efficient.
  - Cross training

- Land records (Assessor, Auditor, Treasurer) sharing one workspace.
- Take walls down, physically and metaphorically.
  - Remove boundaries.

How we are affected by broadband and other technology?

There is agriculture here that needs faster broadband.



## APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

### Script for CRPD Shared Services Focus Groups

#### (OERG) Introductions of OERG members and CRPD members, if present

- Name, Organization, Position
- OERG
- Grad students here will be taking notes for us
- Thanks for coming
- Appreciate your time
- Here to listen to you.

We want to get feedback from you about your experiences in creating shared services agreements. In particular, we are interested in best practices for the implementation of these agreements. Not all of these types of collaborations are successful. Some never get off the ground. This one did and was successful. We want to know why you chose to move forward and why you were successful.

- Will be talking to several groups who have successfully managed this process. We hope to identify common threads to share with others who are starting this process or considering this process.
- We want to focus this discussion on the “softer” side of things. We want to minimize discussion of technical details like policy, budget, or structural roadblocks. We want to emphasize the personal side of the decision making process. We know those technical issues are vital, but other resources exist to help people deal with those.
- Our goal is to develop resources about dealing with personal resistances, trust building, etc.
- We know sometimes these can be sensitive issues. Our goal is not to criticize, nor to focus on the difficulties themselves, but to understand how the difficulties were overcome.

#### (Group) Introductions:

- Name, Organization, Position
- Briefly explain (in one or two sentences), your role in the design of the shared services agreement.
- Are you currently working in same role in some other way working in a setting that is still affected by this shared services agreement?

## (OERG) Focus Group Process

### Ground Rules

- My job is to make sure that the conversation keeps moving so I may have to interrupt you to keep things moving or to clarify a point. I apologize in advance if I cut you off, but we want to hear from as many people as we can on a variety of topics in the short time that we have today.
- If you have specific concerns or if you think of something after the meeting that you feel is important for the final product, you have my business card and can contact me at a later date.

Does anybody have any questions before we start?

Re-emphasize a focus away from technical issues.

### Pros and Cons

- From your perspective, what was the motivation for the redesign?
  - Timing?
  - Outside influence?
  - Expected benefits?
  - Opportunity arose?

### Resources

- Were there key individuals who worked to get people on board?
  - Emergent Leaders?
  - One leader or combination of leaders/followers/etc.
    - Synergy

### Roadblocks (Expand this section)= Focus of “Focus Group”

- If you were not “on board” right away (early adopter). What got you there?
  - What made you initially hesitant?
  - What got you on board?
- What were the risks (personal/professional/organizational) that you had to confront?
- How did you deal with issues like: regionalism (not territoriality) boundary issues, trust, risk aversion, leadership, power sharing, job security
  - Community vs. city, county, school district
  - Dig into the personality issue
- Short term costs? How did you get people around it?
- How did you build trust during the process? Rules? Norms?
  - Was it a purposeful process or did it evolve?
- Did people involved as well as in the community identify the project as necessary/critical?
  - If not, how did you get them to do so
- Who took ownership from the working group or community?
- Were there “critical stoppers”?

**Results (Sacrifice this section for roadblocks)**

- Did you establish measurable outcomes? Did you set goal in the beginning? (SMART) Or “Did you meet your expected outcomes?”
- Are you satisfied? What is your perception/reaction?
  - Would you do it again? Why?
- What has public reaction been? Has it been measured?

**Looking forward (Sacrifice this section for roadblocks)**

- Will this redesign lead to others redesign efforts in your community?
- Is there trust for future projects?

**End of session**

- We’re out of time. Thanks again for your time. We’ve gotten a lot of really good information that I’m sure will help with the development of guidelines for future implementations.