

# Sustaining collaborative ecosystem governance



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

February 2022

Judy Bush and Ariana Dickey

## Why collaborative governance for ecosystems?

Urban ecosystems provide many valuable functions and benefits, including regulating water runoff, mitigating urban heat and air pollution, habitat provision benefits for people's mental and physical health and wellbeing as well as social, community and cultural contributions.



Their governance and management is often made more complex because they span jurisdictional and functional boundaries and domains. There is usually a range of governments and organisations with oversight or responsibility for various aspects of their planning and management.

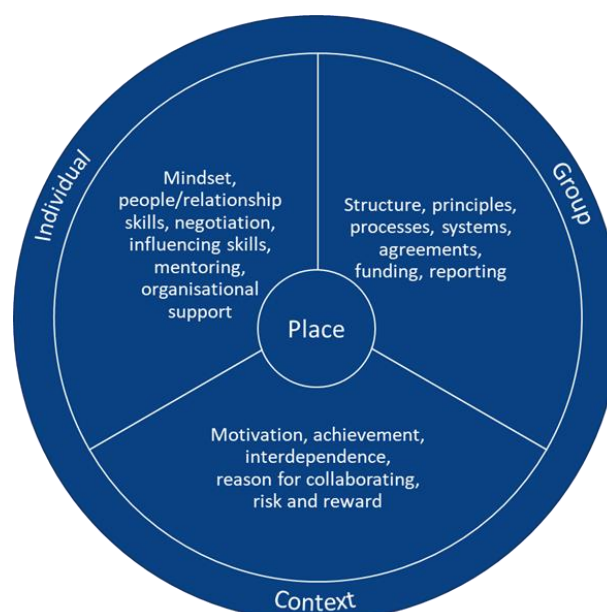
As a result, collaborative governance of urban ecosystems provides a mechanism for bringing together the range of responsible and interested stakeholders to bridge disciplinary and jurisdictional barriers, in the context of addressing complex problems and challenges.

## What is collaborative governance?

Collaborative governance, in which organisations work together to achieve what could not otherwise be achieved individually, offers benefits for tackling complex urban environmental problems. Collaborative governance involves multi-participant arrangements characterised by interdependence, creation of new collaboration-specific roles and functions, and shared power, risk, and reward.

## Sustaining collaborative governance

While there has been substantial focus on establishing collaborative governance arrangements (who should be involved? what structures and funding are required? and so on), there has been less focus on the key ingredients to *sustaining* collaborative governance over time. There are three key aspects associated with sustaining collaborative governance, and all three work together to facilitate effective ongoing collaborations.



**Sustaining collaborative governance: key ingredients**

# Sustaining collaborative governance: key ingredients

The framework for sustaining collaborative ecosystem governance identifies three dimensions or aspects that are integral to sustaining ongoing collaborations:

- Individual factors: members own skills and attitudes
- Group factors: the collaboration's agreed strategies, plans and processes
- Context factors: continuing needs and benefits from collaboration, beyond what could be achieved individually

And of course, at the centre of any collaborative governance for an ecosystem or waterway is the place itself, which provides the unique location, 'sense of place', meaning and reason for connection. Operationalising the framework involves considering how to support or develop these key ingredients. Aspects to consider are summarised below.

Dimensions	Sustaining characteristics	Applying the framework:	
		Questions to ask	Activities for strengthening collaborative governance
<b>Individual</b>	Members' own skills and attitudes ('mindset') associated with communication, negotiation, establishing and maintaining effective working relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are my key strengths and weaknesses?</li> <li>• What collaborative skills do I need to develop further?</li> <li>• How can I strengthen my organisation's support for my involvement?</li> </ul>	<p>Develop individual skills: communication and teamwork</p> <p>Be brave enough to speak up, to ask, to support, to be accountable to each other and to the principles of the collaboration</p> <p>Ensure or strengthen member organisations' continuing commitment and support for the collaboration: provide regular updates to members, demonstrating the collaboration's achievements and outcomes</p>
<b>Group</b>	Collaboration group processes, structures and systems, including policies, strategies, terms of reference, decision-making processes, funding arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are our collaborative principles embedded in our strategies and processes?</li> <li>• Are our strategies, policies and processes up to date and fit for purpose?</li> <li>• Are all collaboration members familiar with the collaboration's processes for decision-making and action?</li> </ul>	<p>Collectively reflect on how the collaboration is expanding capacity to address the issues and challenges of your waterway/ecosystem</p> <p>Review and update collaboration strategies and action plans to ensure they are addressing current and future needs</p>
<b>Context</b>	Collaborative interdependencies, continuing needs and benefits from collaboration, beyond what could be achieved individually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the key achievements of the collaboration over the past year?</li> <li>• What are the key challenges and opportunities facing the ecosystem or waterway?</li> <li>• Why is a collaborative approach required to address these challenges or opportunities?</li> </ul>	<p>Review and report collaboration achievements and outcomes</p> <p>Plan and prioritise collaborative activities and actions to ensure key challenges are being addressed, and to ensure the collaboration's efforts are targeting issues that require a collaborative (rather than individual) response</p>

Acknowledgements: This factsheet summarises research funded by a 2021 Research Development Grant, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, University of Melbourne. Thanks to expert input and guidance from the Advisory Group: Rachel Lopes (Chain of Ponds Collaboration), Geraldine Plas (Melbourne Water) and Alex English (Moreland City Council).

For more information, refer to the *Sustaining Collaborative Governance* research report here: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/22ki>

***This document has been written as a facilitation tool for collaboration groups – please provide feedback on its content and usefulness!*** Judy Bush and Ariana Dickey, Feb 2022 [judy.bush@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:judy.bush@unimelb.edu.au)