

# **Fostering Local Government Collaboration: An Empirical Analysis of Case Studies in Ohio**

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***“This is the Great Dilemma of regional approaches to governing.  
They are almost universally considered the best hope  
of solving problems facing communities.  
But they are least likely to be embraced.”***

John Parr, Joan Riehm, and Christiana McFarland

National League of Cities, 2006

## **Abstract**

Throughout the United States (US), practitioners and scholars are touting the benefits of horizontal governing arrangements. However, while there is a growing literature on collaborative governance among local governments, it is dominated by theoretical efforts to identify potential driving factors, case studies, and sector specific analyses. Broad-based empirical studies that test the strength of alternative explanations for local government collaboration across multiple policy sectors appear to be lacking.

This paper begins to fill this gap in the literature by investigating collaborative governance initiatives at the local level in the United States and the factors that drive it in eight collaborative endeavors in northeast Ohio. We find that budgetary pressures, external influences associated with mandates and grants, and past interactions which can build trust among governing units co-vary with collaborative progress among these local government collaborations. We also find that a combination of two of these variables – external influences and past interaction among the collaborators – are consistent predictors of collaborative progress among the cases in our sample. While these results should be viewed as initial findings in a longer term effort to conduct more comprehensive research, they do provide insights that can be used to help foster intergovernmental collaboration at the local level of government.

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## **Introduction**

We live in an era of change. Governments, like many other sectors of society, are facing pressures to transform themselves to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. It is in this context that horizontal relationships among governments are being viewed as increasingly important means to achieve more effective governance. The desire for stronger horizontal governance is occurring in large part because modern day problems have outgrown the jurisdictional reaches of existing governmental units. In metropolitan regions throughout the United States (U.S.), collaborations among local government entities hold promise for building economies of scale for cost-effective services, protecting critical resources, and for enabling regions to compete more effectively in a global economy.

In spite of the widespread belief that local government collaborations are desirable, broad-based data on local government collaborations and their development are not readily available. States and local governments differ in their record keeping practices and there are few, if any, ongoing programs that seek to assess and publish information on collaborative activity among local governments. As a result, scholarly efforts to understand horizontal governance have tended to focus on theoretical efforts to identify factors that contribute to the development of collaborative governing arrangements, individual case studies, and sector specific studies. Broad-based empirical work which actually tests for relationships among potential driving factors and collaborative governance arrangements is much less common. We have lots of ideas about what *may* drive collaborative government, but little empirical data on what factors actually *do* matter.

This paper begins to fill this gap in the literature by investigating collaborative governance initiatives at the local level in the United States. We summarize progress in the

building of new collaborative relationships for eight proposed collaborations in northeast Ohio. In so doing, we draw on information created by the recent establishment of a philanthropically funded local government collaboration grant program in northeast Ohio. We also use a cross-case comparative analytical framework to assess collaborative progress and understand its relationship to variables that are thought to influence the development of successful inter-governmental collaborations.

While we find little evidence of a direct relationship between expressed citizen demands<sup>1</sup> and progress with collaborative governance efforts, we do find that budgetary pressures, external influences associated with mandates and grants, and past interactions which can build trust among governing units all appear to co-vary with collaborative progress among the local governments. We also find that a combination of two of these variables – external influences and past interactions among the collaborators – are consistent predictors of collaborative progress among the cases in our sample. While these results should be viewed as initial findings in a longer term effort to conduct more comprehensive research, they do provide insights that can be used to help foster intergovernmental collaboration at the local level of government. Implicitly, they also suggest that we may be entering a period of time in which we can consciously foster collaborative governance to help transform local government to enable more efficient and effective governance.

To make our argument, we first provide background information to help the reader understand the state of current literature on local government collaboration and a recent initiative

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<sup>1</sup> However, it is worthwhile noting here that the Efficient Government Now (EGN) Program – which provided the foundation for the case studies summarized here – did engender more than 13,000 votes from citizens supporting one or more of these proposed collaborations. Thus, while citizen demands may not be the driving force behind the specific collaborations studied here, it does appear to be possible to mobilize citizen interest around collaborative local government projects.

to foster intergovernmental collaboration in northeast Ohio. We then review our methods, as we summarize the process for identifying eight cases of potential collaboration in northeast Ohio and describe the methods and criteria used to assess their progress. In this section, we also describe the cross-case comparative framework we use to analyze the influence of (combinations of) variables across these cases, and review our coding procedures. We then present our findings, with respect to both the achievement of collaborative progress in these eight cases and the extent to which variables drawn from the literature on collaboration appear to co-vary with the case outcomes we observe. And finally, we discuss our findings and their implications for initiatives to improve local governance and future research.

### **Literature Review**

“All politics are local,” former U.S. House Speaker Tip O’Neil said some years ago. Public servants at the local level of government are no strangers to challenges. Regardless of the issue at hand, local policy practitioners must navigate a complex web of fiscal, political, and technical costs and benefits when implementing programs and considering policy alternatives. Due to their proximity to their constituents, local public officials are also acutely aware of the consequences of their policy decisions (NASCIO, 2006). For many local governments, however, this pressure to generate efficient and effective policy is contrasted with significant resource constraints (Benjamin, 2007). In recent years, intergovernmental collaboration has emerged as a potential means of negotiating high citizen demand for services with resource limitations. This has resulted in the growth of a literature on intergovernmental collaboration that has been authored by both scholars and practitioners.

A variety of frameworks have been developed to understand intergovernmental collaboration. Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2006) offer a framework that envisions initial conditions which give rise to collaborations, such as a turbulent problem environment, unsuccessful efforts to address complex issues by single jurisdictions, and the presence of individuals who take responsibility for ensuring progress. Collaborations may grow from this environment, which are then mediated by processes and structures that offer contingencies and constraints that affect whether the collaborations take root and yield positive outcomes and accountabilities over time (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone, 2006). By contrast, Parr and his colleagues envision a stepwise process of discussion, problem definition, further discussion, finding the right solution, adoption of collaboration reforms, and implementation (Parr et. al., 2007). And Morris and Hebden (2007) envision collaborations progressing through a series of stages in which they mature and taken on differing characteristics over time.

While all of these conceptions of collaboration suggest a dynamic process in which collaborations take on differing forms over time, researchers have not yet sought to compile data in ways that take account of the dynamic nature of collaborative phenomena. Rather, most of the research conducted to date has focused on developing frameworks for understanding collaboration and developing studies of individual cases of collaboration or collaborations in particular policy sectors (Leach et al., 2002 and Feiock, et al., 2009). A number of studies also identify key variables that are believed to affect intergovernmental collaboration.

Identifying variables that affect collaboration success is vital to understanding both the development of collaborative enterprises and ways in which their success may be encouraged. First, however, collaborative success must be clearly defined. Observers have differed on this

definition, however. Two general interpretations of collaborative success have emerged: operationalization of collaborations and the achievement of goals.

Supporters of the achievement of goals as a measure of success generally argue that the goals highlighted in proposals for collaboration must be accomplished before a collaborative can be deemed successful (Bentrup, 2001). There is certainly a strong rationale for this position as collaborations do have goals that they try to achieve and it is therefore appropriate to assess their progress in this regard. However, goal-oriented success measures can take on a somewhat narrow view of success because this interpretation can result in the premature dichotomization of relatively new projects as either successes or failures (Leach, 2002).

Proponents of the operationalization interpretation argue, on the other hand, that success cannot be measured by the simple achievement of the goals outlined in a collaboration proposal; these goals, after all, represent an endpoint in a process which takes considerable time. Instead, supporters of the operationalization definition of success point out that early achievements, even small ones, represent progress which should be accounted for (Billette, 2007). By utilizing a more incremental approach, collaborations which are still in the process of completing their stated goals can be credited for their progress.

Factors which theoretically influence the success of collaborative projects are relatively diverse, though they generally fall into five categories: problem characteristics, external influences, sector failure, direct antecedents, and trust. When exploring the factors which impact the development and success of a collaborative endeavor, it is important to consider the problem(s) that led to its creation. Problem characteristics include factors which relate directly to the issues that helped to frame the argument for collaboration.

Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006), for example, suggest that collaborations are more likely to develop in turbulent environments than in stable ones. In this context, citizen demand emerges as one potential factor that may influence the development of a collaborative. As citizen expectations grow, the demand for better government service at a lower cost increases (NASCIO, 2006). These demands may produce additional pressure to resolve issues in cost-efficient ways, thus increasing the appeal of collaborative solutions.

Resource limitations are another problem characteristic that may influence the development of collaborative projects. Researchers theorize that collaboration occurs when one party has unique resources that another party needs, and vice versa; in much of the literature, significant emphasis is placed on the value of financial resource contributions by partner organizations (Thomson, 2006). Contributions of revenues from multiple sources can reduce resource burdens on individual collaborating governments.

External influences describe obligations and opportunities outside of the collaborative partners which may drive them to consider collaborative approaches and implement them; both incentives and mandates are generally included. Incentives, which often come in the form of grants or the provision of other resources, serve as positive reinforcement of collaborative action. Observers note that state government provision of financial incentives for collaborative programs could increase the likelihood of local governments taking part in collaborative projects (CRC, 2008). Mandates, on the other hand, yield pressure to accomplish program goals or collaborate. This pressure is typically achieved through direct requirements or the threat of funding restrictions. Observers have proposed that more statutory programs promoting partnerships would increase the number of collaborative relationships (Dudas et al., 2009).

Sector failure describes the influence of failings in either efficiency or effectiveness on the choice to collaborate. This issue has been noted repeatedly, and many theorize that collaborations emerge in large part to resolve efficiency and effectiveness issues that have not been solved by single jurisdictions in the past (Andrew, 1998).

Direct antecedents deal with factors that influence the continuing progress of a collaborative project, and they typically focus on leadership. Researchers have theorized that leadership for collaboration must come from those who have legitimacy within the collaborating communities (Benjamin, 2007). This legitimacy may have a strong influence on whether the collaboration continues, as leaders who possess such recognition and respect across communities are better positioned to push projects forward.

Trust has been recognized, time and again, as one of the critical underpinnings of collaborative success (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone, 2006). Past interactions are cited as a key part of the establishment of trust. These past relationships with collaborative partners are thought to have significant influence on the success of collaborations (Billette, 2007).

In spite of the surge in collaboration-related research and the theoretical development of variables which may influence collaborative success, there remains a paucity of empirical research on the factors driving successful collaboration. Of the handful of studies which attempt to isolate variables that influence collaboration, few move beyond the traditional case study structure. Those that do tend to analyze collaboration in particular policy sectors (see for example Leach et al., 2002 and Feiock, et al., 2009).

Projects such as Gary Bentrup's 2001 exploration of the factors which influence collaborative success in watershed planning and management hinge on a relatively small sample size (3 cases), comparing relationships between single independent variables and successful

outcomes (Bentrup, 2001). It thus offers only a preliminary test of variables which emerge from theoretical discussions.

A few larger, scientifically rigorous studies also exist within the literature. Several examples emerge. First, consider Ramiro Berardo's empirical test of multi-organizational watershed management projects. By utilizing data collected from 92 projects, Berardo examined the impact of partner resources on whether or not a collaborative project received funding, concluding that the addition of partners was valuable as long as redundancy of resources was avoided (Berardo, 2009).

Second, consider the work Leach et al. (2002) in evaluating the relationship between stakeholder involvement and collaborative success. This study was considerable in its scope, including case studies of 44 watershed partnerships in Washington and California, 157 interviews and 770 surveys. The project found that time was a critical factor, and presented a well-articulated argument for the use of incremental measures of success, rather than an oversimplified "success-or-failure" determination (Leach, 2002).

And finally, Richard Feiock and his colleagues (2009) investigate a number of variables relating to transaction costs that may affect city membership in joint economic development ventures with other governments. Drawing data from a nationwide survey, they find that variables related to transaction costs are strong predictors of collaborative activism. Notably, however, the dependent variable, a survey question "asking whether the respondent's local government "has engaged in joint ventures with other cities to encourage development" is not a specific measure of collaborative progress.

It is significant that most empirical assessments of the factors which influence collaboration success have focused on the development of collaborations in specific policy areas.

The policy area in question has an influence on the type of data available, the goals of particular collaborative initiatives, and potentially the specific barriers facing collaborative development. It is therefore important to test the variables put forward in theoretical collaboration literature across policy areas. In addition, the studies undertaken thus far have not always differentiated well among cases of collaboration based on their stage of development. This means that we are not always aware of whether our conclusions relate to a large range of potential collaborations or cases of collaboration that are well conceptualized and ripe for implementation.

### **Ohio's Efficient Government Grant Program: A New Source of Data on Collaboration**

The concept of local government collaboration is broad and extends to different sectors of policy activity. However, states and local governments differ in their record keeping practices and there are few, if any, ongoing programs that seek to assess collaborative activity among governments in a wide range of areas. Finding broad samples of local government collaborations to study can therefore be a cumbersome and time consuming exercise. Largely as a result, existing research on collaboration often tends to focus on single policy sectors. This lack of existing data and incentive to compile information across policy sectors is perhaps the major reason why broad based empirical work assessing driving factors associated with local government collaboration is lacking.

We address these problems by drawing on a unique philanthropic initiative in Ohio. In the early years of the Twenty-first century, a group of philanthropic organizations in northeast Ohio combined forces to create the Fund for Our Economic Future (FFEf), a consortium of funding organizations and individuals that develop strategies and provide funding to help re-invigorate the northeast Ohio economy. They subsequently embarked on a public engagement

process that yielded four major areas of strategic focus, one of which was to increase government collaboration and efficiency.

The choice of this area of focus is not surprising. Northeast Ohio, along with the State of Ohio as a whole, is rich in local government. The State of Ohio ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in the country in the number of local government jurisdictions contained within its borders. Northeast Ohio alone has more than 600 local governments. This proliferation of local governments can inhibit coordinated planning and service delivery, lead to duplicative local government services, and many persons believe it places the northeast Ohio metropolitan region at a competitive disadvantage in comparison to other metropolitan regions. In addition, the costs of local government in northeast Ohio have been increasing at rates that exceed inflation, and – according to one recent study -- local government in northeast Ohio now accounts for more than 10% of the region’s economy (Zettek, 2008).

In 2009, the FFEF announced an initiative to help foster local government collaboration in the sixteen counties that comprise northeast Ohio<sup>2</sup>. The FFEF’s interest in doing this stems from their desire to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public services and to foster long term sustainable economic growth in northeast Ohio. The initiative includes a grant program to encourage collaboration among local governments in these sixteen counties, and efforts to engage community leaders and the public at large in discussions about progress on local government collaboration in the northeast Ohio region. As a result, the FFEF’s program is now providing a foundation for ongoing efforts to collect and compile information on inter-governmental collaboration efforts in northeast Ohio. The Center for Public Administration and Public Policy at Kent State University (the KSU Center) is collecting and compiling these data,

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<sup>2</sup> Ashland, Ashtabula, Carroll, Columbiana, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Richland, Stark, Summit, Trumbull, and Wayne counties.

and this is enabling the creation of a body of information that can be used to assess the influence of a range of factors that are thought to influence the establishment and success of intergovernmental collaborations.

Under the FFEF's Efficient Government Now (EGN) program announced in 2009, local governments in northeast Ohio were invited to submit proposals to fund and support intergovernmental collaborations. The program also enabled citizens to vote on which projects should be awarded grant funding. In the first round of the program in 2009, a total of three grant awards were to be provided, and the total amount of funding was not to exceed \$300,000 across all three grant awards. To help ensure that the public could vote on quality proposals that could be implemented within two years, the FFEF convened a committee to evaluate the proposals and determine which ones should be selected as finalists. A total of nine finalist proposals were selected. Voters in northeast Ohio were then to choose three winning proposals from among these nine finalists. The idea behind the program was not only to fund a limited number of collaborative proposals, but also to call attention to innovative local governments and ideas that could be replicated and yield positive impacts in the future.

The 2009 EGN program was well received. During the first half of 2009, the FFEF received 65 abstracts and 45 of them were found to meet the program's baseline requirements<sup>3</sup>. The 45 organizations submitting those abstracts were invited to submit full proposals. Eventually, 39 full proposals were received involving numerous governments in northeast Ohio. The nine finalists were selected from this group of 39 proposals in June of 2009. In July of 2009, citizens in northeast Ohio were invited to vote on the proposals and more than 13,000 of them selected three proposals to receive EGN funding. The proposals that were selected sought

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<sup>3</sup> These requirements included having two or more government partners, proposing a project that can be implemented in two years, and identifying cost savings and/or economic development opportunities.

to: (1) create a joint web-based economic development marketing effort for the Mahoning Valley region; (2) implement an information technology consortium, and; (3) produce more collaborative regional fire services in Lorain County west of Cleveland, respectively.

The KSU Center sought to develop case studies for the nine finalist proposals to learn about their collaborative efforts and the factors that drive them. Drafts of these case studies have now been completed (although, we anticipate continuing to refine them to take account of new information prior to final publication). These case studies provide the foundation for the analyses that are presented in the pages that follow. Table 1 below provides baseline information on the topics the case studies address and the types and numbers of governments that have been involved in each of the collaborations. The three winning proposals are highlighted in italics.

The KSU Center's work is now yielding information that is enabling an improved understanding of local government collaboration in northeast Ohio. And, while the EGN program is unique to Ohio and may make the region more conducive to future collaborations among local governments, there is – at this point – no clear and obvious reason to believe that the program fundamentally alters the processes of change that are necessary to achieve progress in local government collaboration. Furthermore, while the EGN finalists discussed in this paper may be more advanced than other collaborations in the northeast Ohio region, it is likely that there are similarly advanced collaborative projects in other regions of the country. As a result, there is a good chance that the potential causal factors identified here also apply to other groups of local governments that are well along in crafting and conceptualizing their collaborative efforts.

<b>Table 1: EGN Finalists in Northeast Ohio</b>				
Case Code And Title	Topic	Description of Collaboration	Types of Partners	# of Partners
A. <i>“Rollin on the River”</i>	<i>Joint Marketing for Economic Development</i>	<i>Develop a promotional website to enhance business development for a shared river corridor</i>	<i>Cities Villages</i>	9
B. <i>“Mahoning Youngstown Regional Information System” (MYRIS)</i>	<i>Information Technology</i>	<i>Develop a shared IT platform to enhance service and save money</i>	<i>Cities Townships County</i>	5
C <i>“Westshore Regional Fire District Project”</i>	<i>Fire Services</i>	<i>Collaborate and potentially consolidate local fire departments to improve fire service and save money</i>	<i>Cities</i>	7
D. <i>“Sustain a Greener Ohio”</i>	<i>Storm-water Management</i>	<i>Develop a multi-jurisdictional map to meet EPA mandates for storm-water management, save money, and enhance services.</i>	<i>County Cities Townships</i>	11
E <i>“Creating Efficiencies and Cost-Savings through Consolidation of Public Health Services in Summit County”</i>	<i>Public Health</i>	<i>Collaborate among health departments to save money and improve services</i>	<i>County City</i>	2
F <i>“Master Plan for the Western Reserve Joint Economic Development Zone of the Cities of Cuyahoga Falls, Hudson and Stow”</i>	<i>Economic Development District</i>	<i>Create a Joint Economic District &amp; adopt a coordinated land use plan to foster economic development &amp; save money.</i>	<i>Cities</i>	3
G. <i>“City/Township/School District Fleet Management Collaboration Project”</i>	<i>Joint Fleet Maintenance Services</i>	<i>Share auto fleet maintenance services between a city and a school district to save money &amp; improve service.</i>	<i>City School District Township</i>	3
H <i>“Combined Dispatch to Use New Technology to Save Lives and Money”</i>	<i>Emergency Dispatch Services</i>	<i>Integrate and expand dispatch services to meet upcoming requirements, improve services, and save money.</i>	<i>City Village</i>	3
I <i>“Rittman and Orrville Schools Administrative Compact”</i>	<i>School District Administration</i>	<i>Buy shared equipment &amp; integrate their management</i>	<i>School Districts</i>	2

Note: *EGN grant awardees shown in italics.*

There is also reason to believe that findings from Ohio might be applied productively to other states. Ohio is often thought to be a bell-weather state that is indicative of trends and conditions in the U.S. as a whole. Northeast Ohio, in particular, also possesses a wide range of local governments (counties, cities, villages, townships, school districts, special districts, etc.), urban and rural governing bodies, and a relatively diverse population – all of which mean that it shares traits with a wide range of geographic areas around the country. For all of these reasons,

there is reason to believe that research findings presented here are likely to be useful in understanding inter-governmental collaborations in other areas as well.

### **Methods: A Cross-Case Comparative Analysis**

Given the scarcity of large data sets on local government collaboration noted above, case analysis becomes a readily accessible method for assessing local government collaboration efforts at this point in time<sup>4</sup>. However, while scholars and observers have developed case studies focusing on inter-governmental collaboration, there has been little effort – if any – to accumulate information from these cases in systematic fashion. And, where there have been such efforts (see Dustin et al., 2009 and Benjamin, 2007, for example), they have been focused primarily on identifying lessons to be learned rather than on testing the influence of theoretically derived variables that are thought to influence intergovernmental collaboration.

The analytical approach taken here is to accumulate information from multiple cases in ways that enable tests of the influence of key variables identified in the literature on intergovernmental collaboration. Multiple case comparisons have been used in the past as a basis for empirical testing (Ragin, 1987, for example) and can be used as a way to conduct variable-based research with empirical testing for relatively modest numbers of cases (Peters, 1998). While there are inherent limitations when one tests the influence of key variables in small numbers of cases, comparative analyses of this kind can yield both empirical evidence and improved direction for longer term research efforts.

Peters (1998) explicates a “Boolean Algebra” approach to compile information from multiple cases in systematic fashion. This approach envisions not only comparisons of the

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<sup>4</sup> Over the long term, the KSU center envisions building larger data sets which enable the use of statistical techniques, as well as cross-case comparative methodologies.

relationships between conditions that are thought to facilitate collaborative progress and findings regarding progress in particular cases, but also the construction of “truth tables” that highlight combinations of key conditions that may affect collaborative progress. By using this approach we improve our ability to identify patterns of relationships not only between individual variables and collaborative progress, but also between combinations of variables and collaborative progress. We use Peters’ (1998) methodological approach to develop the framework and analyses used in this study.

To develop the case studies, we sought to collect information on the progress of the nine finalists, and collect information that identifies whether key variables identified in the literature are operating in each case. To accomplish these objectives, we contacted the nine finalists in the fall of 2009 to ascertain their willingness to participate in the development of the case studies. Only one of our nine finalists declined to participate, so our subsequent contacts were made with the eight remaining finalists.

Between the fall of 2009 and the summer of 2010 we held a series of meetings and telephone interviews with the eight finalists to determine if they were proceeding with their collaborations and to ascertain the extent of their progress. We also developed measures of collaborative progress and established criteria for determining whether conditions which are thought to facilitate collaborative progress were in effect in each case. We then asked questions and sought written information which could be used to characterize both whether progress had occurred and whether key conditions likely to influence collaborative progress were in place.

In developing measures of collaborative progress, we were cognizant of the fact that collaboration may take years to yield positive results (Leach, 2002) and that all of the projects in our sample were in early stages of development. While the long-term success of an

intergovernmental collaboration relates to whether the collaboration achieves its goals, collaborations must first become operational and move forward with concrete actions if they are to hold any hope of achieving their goals. For this reason, we chose to measure whether or not collaborative progress had occurred, rather than whether the collaborative projects in our sample had fully achieved their goals at this point in time<sup>5</sup>.

We also developed a coding procedure to identify collaborative progress consistently across the cases. To ascertain whether there was progress, we sought to determine whether each group of collaborators had taken clear steps to continue their collaborations and were actually moving forward with implementation of their collaborative efforts. To obtain this information, we relied on our interviews with project leads and other project personnel, as well as written corroboration wherever possible.

We also asked a series of questions of our collaborative contacts to assess the presence or absence various factors that we had identified in the literature on collaborative policymaking to be potential drivers of collaborative progress and/or success (independent variables). In total, we collected information on six potential drivers of collaborative progress from existing literature (see literature review for discussion of these variables). They include the following:

1. Citizen demand expressed for collaboration and/or collaborative solutions;
2. Potential budget savings associated with financial challenges;
3. External incentives engendered by grants of funds and/or external mandates;
4. Sector failure in the past, making collaboration an attractive solution to a known problem;
5. Strong leadership on the part of an individual convener or entrepreneur, and;
6. Trust among the parties, as evidenced through previous collaborative projects involving two or more its members.

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<sup>5</sup> Over time, we anticipate assessing not only collaborative progress, but goal achievement as well.

For each of these independent variables, we articulated hypotheses and developed coding procedures to ascertain their presence or absence. We then coded each case for each of these variables. These variables, hypotheses, and coding procedures are described in the Table 2.

Once we completed coding the data from the cases, we analyzed it in two major ways. First, we assessed progress in each of the cases and reported whether the eight participating EGN finalists are continuing to progress in their collaboration. Here we present information on whether or not the collaboration was proceeding based on a mutually agreed decision and we also describe key elements of the progress achieved.

Second, based on the comparative case analysis approach discussed above, we create two tables that allow comparisons across cases regarding collaborative progress and the presence or absence of potential driving factors. The first of these tables is a simple cross-case comparison table which shows whether each of the six variables being investigated is present or absent in each of the eight cases being investigated. This table also includes information on whether or not collaborative progress is occurring. It allows one to determine which potential driving factor(s) are present or absent in each case. It also allows one to learn which explanatory variables co-vary with the dependent variable – in this case, the existence of collaborative progress.

The second table we construct is the more traditional “truth table” that is used in Boolean analysis to elucidate relationships between the dependent variable and independent variables. It lists possible combinations of the values of independent variables in one table, and allows cases with and without demonstrated collaborative progress to be aligned with specific combinations of values on the independent variables. This table allows one to ascertain whether there are specific combinations of values associated with the independent variables that co-vary with

collaborative progress. It also allows one to more easily identify relationships based on both the total numbers of driving factors present and on specific combinations of driving factors.

<b>Table 2: Case Coding for Explanatory Variables and Hypotheses</b>			
Variable	Definition	Hypothesis	Measure
Problem Environment: Citizen Demand	Expressed public desire for the specific services to be achieved through the collaboration.	Citizen demand increases the likelihood of collaborative progress.	Project lead perception of specific citizen interest in and influence on the collaboration, backed by documentation of citizen engagement if asserted.
Problem Environment: Budget Savings	Insufficient resources to meet perceived needs of community and its citizens.	Potential budget savings increase the likelihood of collaborative progress.	Is there a documented budgetary savings in the EGN proposal?
External Incentives	External influence in the form of grants and/or mandates from external entities.	External incentives increase the likelihood of collaborative progress.	Did the project receive an external grant or is it responding to an external mandate?
Sector Failure	Failure of existing or previous effort to address an underlying problem by (a) single jurisdictions.	Sector failure increases the likelihood of collaborative progress.	Project lead or proposal says there were previous efforts to address this problem that did not succeed.
Individual Leadership	One key “entrepreneur”, “convenor” or “sparkplug” ensures continued progress.	The existence of a key leader increases the likelihood of collaborative progress.	A two part criterion is used: (1) Does there appear to be one person driving progress? (2) Is this person identified as the key leader by at least one other person involved in the collaboration?
Trust/past interaction	Past interactions which are successful yield trust which enables all actors to act in good faith with one another in pursuing collaborative goals.	If there is recent past interaction on (a) collaborative project, the likelihood of collaborative progress increases.	Project lead or proposal provides a specific description of past collaborative interactions among at least two project partners within the last 5 years.

## **Findings**

The core findings of this study relate to the extent of progress achieved by the collaborations in our sample after a one-year period and the factors that drive the progress that is occurring. We assess progress for the eight EGN finalists and compare their progress with information on the presence and absence of key factors that are thought to drive collaboration.

Overall, we find that the existence of budgetary savings, external incentives (grants and/or mandates), and patterns of past interactions which build trust among the participants all co-vary with the existence of collaborative progress to a significant degree. Perhaps more importantly, while we find no single necessary or sufficient condition for collaborative progress for the cases in our sample, we do find that external incentives and trust built through patterns of past interaction -- in combination with one another -- are sufficient conditions for collaborative progress in the case studies in our sample.

Table 3 below presents information we collected through interviews and written documents on each case. It identifies whether or not the proposed collaborations were actually established and making progress between the summer of 2009 and the summer of 2010. It also presents information on evidence we were able to collect that demonstrates collaborative progress and briefly describes the progress that has been achieved.

The results are encouraging for observers who are supportive of expanded inter-governmental collaboration efforts. While only three of the collaborations actually received grants from the EGN program (cases A, B, and C in Table 1), seven of the eight program finalists in our sample successfully continued their collaborations. In these seven cases, we identified evidence of an agreement among parties to continue the collaboration. We also found evidence demonstrating the collaborators' continuing engagement with one another in pursuit of goals that are specified in their collaborative EGN proposals.

**Table 3:  
Progress Status Among Northeast Ohio Collaborative Projects – Summer 2010**

Case Code And Title	Topic	Description of Collaboration	Collaborative Progress?	Evidence of Progress Includes	Description of Progress
A. <i>“Rollin on the River”</i>	Joint Marketing for Economic Development	Develop a promotional website to enhance development for a shared river corridor	Yes	Agreement between communities and an area University.  Grant report	GIS mapping complete and website is designed. Website expected to be operational in Fall 2010.
B. <i>“Mahoning Youngstown Regional Information System” (MYRIS)</i>	Information Technology	Develop a shared IT platform to enhance service and save money	Yes	Collaborative engagement expressed at December 2009 meeting between County & a large township.	Jail booking website completed and disaster recovery software purchased.  Request for grant extension to continue building the collaboration.
C <i>“Westshore Regional Fire District Project”</i>	Fire Services	Collaborate or consolidate fire departments to improve fire service and save money	Yes	Draft Report on feasible alternatives.	Draft Study of regional Fire/EMS feasibility is completed. Partners and study team are working on recommendations.
D. <i>“Sustain a Greener Ohio”</i>	Storm-water Management	Develop a multi-jurisdictional map to meet EPA mandates for storm-water management, save money, and enhance services.	Yes	Signed Agreement among the collaborators.	Mapping is well underway and on schedule. Initial cost savings have been achieved on equipment that has been purchased.
E <i>“Creating Efficiencies and Cost-Savings through Consolidation of Public Health Services in Summit County”</i>	Public Health	Collaborate among health departments to save money and improve preventive health services.	Yes	MOU  Notification of Combined District on Website	Project has moved beyond proposed information sharing to a full merger of City and County Health Departments.
F <i>“Master Plan for the Western Reserve Joint Economic Development Zone of the Cities of Cuyahoga Falls, Hudson and Stow”</i>	Economic Development District	Create a Joint Economic District & adopt a coordinated land use plan to foster economic development & save money.	Yes	News article on draft JEDZ contract.	Intersection Completed and parties are negotiating Joint Economic Development Zone (JEDZ) Agreement.
G <i>“City/Township/School District Fleet Management Collaboration Project”</i>	Joint Fleet Maintenance Services	Share auto fleet maintenance services to save money & improve service.	No	N/A	Partners did not move forward with project.
H <i>“Combined Dispatch to Use New Technology to Save Lives and Money”</i>	Emergency Dispatch Services	Integrate & expand dispatch services to meet requirements, improve services, and save money.	Yes	Agreement for Emergency Dispatch Services & News Article saying partners are moving forward	Partners are negotiating with Voice Over Internet Protocol Providers to purchase needed services & equipment for long term communications upgrade.

While none of the collaborations has yet fully accomplished its goals, it is perhaps too early to expect this level of progress given that it often takes several years to develop a fully effective collaboration (Leach et al., 2002). In fact, the extent of progress among the cases does vary. In some cases, the progress is extensive. After just one year, the joint economic development marketing website being developed by multiple local governments for properties along the Mahoning River Corridor is well underway and is still on schedule to be available for use in the Fall of 2010. The Stark County storm-water mapping project is also progressing rapidly, as partnership documents have been signed and a substantial portion of the mapping has already been completed. And finally, the proposed collaboration among Health Departments in Summit County has been transformed into a full scale consolidation of two Health Departments, and it has been voted on and approved by relevant authorities in both the City of Akron and Summit County. This consolidation represents a more aggressive approach to achieving public health service improvements and cost savings than was the information sharing efforts that were envisioned in the original EGN proposal.

Progress has also been documented in four of the other cases. The Westshore Fire Department Collaborators in Lorain County have joined forces to hire a consultant, and they have completed an extensive (approximately 500 pages) draft report on ways to implement options for fire service collaboration and consolidation. The report is now being finalized prior to full consideration by the governing bodies involved. The governing bodies involved in the joint Ashland Dispatch Center project have joined forces and are taking a more incremental approach to unifying their services to meet forthcoming regulatory standards for dispatch centers, in part because their bid for funding from the EGN program was not successful. Both

the MYRIS and the Hudson-Stow-Cuyahoga Falls planned economic development project have encountered obstacles, but they have been able to make progress nonetheless. In the former case, relevant software has been purchased and a jail booking website has been completed, in spite of the fact that project leadership has been moved from the County Auditor (an elected official) to an IT professional at the county level who is working to develop cost sharing agreements with the other local governments involved. The cities of Hudson, Stow, and Cuyahoga Falls have negotiated a Joint Economic District Zone agreement which is being considered by their respective legislative bodies, even though their proposed land use plan for this zone has not yet been developed because funding is not available.

Among the eight projects for which we have developed case studies, only the Oberlin fleet management project has folded altogether. Without funding from the EGN program, the City and the School District were not able to build a needed storage facility or build the skills of the City of Oberlin mechanics to service a wider range of vehicles. As a result, the School District has renewed a contract with an external vendor for servicing of its buses and other vehicles. The chances of further collaboration on this project therefore seem limited.

The case comparison matrix in Table 4 below highlights information on the presence or absence of conditions that are thought to influence collaborative success. A review of this table yields at least two key observations. First, strong and demonstrated citizen demand for collaboration does not appear to have driven progress in any of the eight cases, including the seven cases where collaborative progress was in evidence. Citizen demand, it appears, is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for collaborative progress – at least among these particular projects.

Table 4 Case Comparison Matrix								
		Explanatory Variables						Independent Variable
	Case Code And Title	Citizen Demand	Budget Savings	External Influence	Sector Failure	Individual Leadership	Past Interaction (Trust)	Collaborative Progress?
A	<i>“Rollin on the River”</i>	No	No	Yes*	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
B	<i>“Mahoning Youngstown Regional Information System” (MYRIS)</i>	No	Yes	Yes*	Yes	No	No	Yes
C	<i>“Westshore Regional Fire District Project”</i>	No	Yes	Yes*	No	No	Yes	Yes
D	<i>“Sustain a Greener Ohio”</i>	No	Yes	Yes**	No	No	Yes	Yes
E	<i>“Creating Efficiencies and Cost-Savings through Consolidation of Public Health Services in Summit County”</i>	No	Yes	Yes*	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
F	<i>“Master Plan for the Western Reserve Joint Economic Development Zone of the Cities of Cuyahoga Falls, Hudson and Stow”</i>	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
G	<i>“City/Township/School District Fleet Management Collaboration Project”</i>	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
H	<i>“Combined Dispatch to Use New Technology to Save Lives and Money”</i>	No	Yes	Yes**	No	No	Yes	Yes

\*grant; \*\*mandate.

Second, three variables do appear to co-vary with collaborative progress, although not perfectly. Demonstrated budget savings appear in 7 of the eight cases, and 6 of the 7 cases where collaborative progress is evidenced. However, potential budget savings were evident in the Oberlin Vehicle Fleet management case, and this collaboration folded. Both external incentives and past interactions which may yield the development of trusting relationships are present in 6 of the eight cases overall. Both of these conditions is also present in six of the seven cases of collaborative progress, and neither of them is in evidence in the Oberlin Fleet Management case, in spite of expected long term budget savings. This information provides

evidence that all three of these variables may contribute to collaborative progress, although none of them – on their own – appears to be a necessary or sufficient condition for collaborative progress. For each of these variables individually, Table 4 makes it clear that there are exceptions to patterns of co-variation between individual conditions and collaborative progress.

The Boolean “truth table” displayed in Table 5 addresses the influence of multiple combinations of conditions on collaborative progress across the eight case studies being investigated. It shows the possible combinations of the independent variables being investigated, thus enabling us to align those combinations with the conditions in each case study. It also aligns these combinations of conditions with information on whether collaborative progress was achieved for each of the eight projects being investigated. In so doing, the truth table yields several additional insights regarding potential driving factors for collaborative progress.

First, the data presented suggest that projects with more potential driving factors present are more likely to have experienced progress than projects with few potential driving factors. The one collaborative project which had only one variable present, the prospect of budgetary savings for the Oberlin Fleet management project, did not experience collaborative progress. By contrast, all of the cases with at least two variables present experienced some sort collaborative progress. This suggests that the presence of multiple facilitating conditions is likely to foster collaborative progress, all else being equal.

Second, while progress was evident in cases with more than one potential driving condition present, no single variable was in place in all of these cases. While there are certain variables (budget savings, external incentive, and past interaction) that appear to co-vary regularly with collaborative progress (as was noted above), no single variable is so perfectly correlated with progress that it can or should be viewed as a necessary condition for

collaborative progress – even in this small sample of eight cases. This suggests that multiple facilitating conditions may be required for the successful collaborative endeavors.

Third, there are combinations of variables that appear to be quite powerful in predicting collaborative progress. There are three cases where collaborative progress has occurred that share precisely the same combination of potential driving conditions. In these cases, potential budgetary savings, external incentives, and past interactions indicating the potential for developing trust are all present. Furthermore, in every case where both external incentives and past interactions indicating the potential for developing trust are present, collaborative progress has occurred. This finding suggests that these two variables – when present in combination with one another – may in fact operate as a *sufficient* condition for collaborative progress, at least for this sample of collaborative projects.

This finding is strengthened further if we look more specifically at the cases that are characterized by both external incentives and past interactions, in comparison to those cases in which only one of these variables is present. While our Boolean methodology measures progress in dichotomous terms, we do have information suggesting that some projects have made more progress than others at this point in time. Outside of the Oberlin Fleet management project which has folded, the discussion above suggests that the two cases where progress appears to be slowest at this point in time are the planned joint economic development zone and the information technology integration project. Both of these two projects have only one of the two variables mentioned in place<sup>6</sup>. By contrast, the five other projects which have exhibited more extensive progress thus far are characterized by both of these two conditions.

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<sup>6</sup> The joint economic district zone project is characterized by past interactions among the participants but there is no external incentive present. By contrast, the MYRIS project is characterized by an external incentive associated with its EGN grant, but there does not appear to be evidence of past interaction.

**Table 5:  
Boolean “Truth Table” Assessing Co-variation of Potential Explanatory Variables with Collaborative Progress**

# of Driving Factors Present	Explanatory Variables						DV: Collaborative Progress?	
	Citizen Demand	Budgetary Savings	External Incentives	Sector Failure	Individual Leadership	Past Interaction (Trust)	# Yes (cases)	# No (cases)
0	N	N	N	N	N	N		
1	Y	N	N	N	N	N		
	N	Y	N	N	N	N		1 (G)
	N	N	Y	N	N	N		
	N	N	N	Y	N	N		
	N	N	N	N	Y	N		
2	Y	Y	N	N	N	N		
	Y	N	Y	N	N	N		
	Y	N	N	Y	N	N		
	Y	N	N	N	Y	N		
	Y	N	N	N	N	Y		
	N	Y	Y	N	N	N		
	N	Y	N	Y	N	N		
	N	Y	N	N	Y	N		
	N	Y	N	N	N	Y		1 (F)
	N	N	Y	Y	N	N		
	N	N	Y	N	Y	N		
	N	N	Y	N	Y	N		
	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y		
	N	N	N	Y	N	Y		
3	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N		
	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N		
	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N		
	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y		
	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N		
	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N		3 (C,D,H)
	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N		1 (B)
	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N		
	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y		1(A)
	N	N	Y	N	Y	N		
	N	N	Y	N	N	Y		
	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y		
	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N		
4	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N		
	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N		
	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y		
	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y		
	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N		
	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y		
	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N		
	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N		
	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y		
	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y		
	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y		
	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y		1(E)
	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N		
5	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y		
	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y		
	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y		
	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y		
6	Y58	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		

## **Discussion and Implications**

The findings above have potential implications for both collaborative practices and further research. We now address these implications in turn.

Overall, the findings here suggest that well conceptualized collaborative projects (presumably like the EGN finalists) with multiple potential driving conditions present hold the potential for achieving collaborative progress. The issue for practitioners in this context is to determine how to enable well conceptualized projects to be developed, and then how to encourage key driving factors to influence the collaboration's development.

Both state and local policymakers could take steps to foster the development of well conceptualized collaborative projects. At the state level, policymakers could sponsor regular gatherings of local government officials that are focused on sharing information about productive collaborations and the results they can achieve for local communities. They might also provide seed funding for groups of communities that share problems and commonalities to design ongoing collaborative efforts. Local officials, on the other hand, can facilitate progress in this area by participating in these kinds of events or by generating these kinds of activities themselves if state assistance is not forthcoming.

State and local officials may also benefit from building and implementing their collaborative efforts in ways that take advantage of the strong predictors of collaborative progress that are identified above. At the state level, policymakers could foster collaborative progress by developing grant programs that support the development and implementation of collaborative efforts. They might also impose mandates or institute cross-cutting requirements that provide incentives for multi-jurisdictional collaboration in cases where mandates are being imposed.

Local officials, on the other hand, can benefit by taking account of the influence of strong predictor variables highlighted above as they implement programs and services in their communities. When communities face budget challenges, they may look to collaborative services as a means for saving money and continuing needed services. When they do undertake collaborations, they would also benefit by understanding the value of long term, continued interactions, which build trust. They might also benefit by seeking to respond to external mandates collaboratively. The Stark County joint mapping project provides one example of how communities can benefit when they combine efforts to respond to mandates imposed from external sources.

While states and communities are likely to benefit if they undertake the kinds of actions outlined above, it is important to recognize that additional research is necessary before we are fully confident of the validity of our conclusions and these recommendations. We would therefore suggest that additional research be conducted in several areas.

First, our suggestions are based on a small sample of cases. Further research on a wide range of additional collaborations that are known to be well conceived and implementable would certainly be advisable. We anticipate following up on this report with analyses of a new set of collaborative case studies over the coming year. The FFEF has just recently conducted a second round of its EGN program, and we plan to conduct case studies of the finalists for this round of the program if the finalists themselves are willing. In the longer term, it is our hope to build a database of collaborations and information on their progress that is sufficient to enable not only cross-case comparative analyses like those offered here, but also large n statistical analyses that can yield more definitive results over time.

Second, it would be useful to conduct this kind of research on non-EGN cases that are viewed to be well conceptualized and implementable. While the EGN program has enabled the development of a universe of screened collaborative projects that can be used as the basis for study, its unique characteristics may very well affect the collaborations we are studying. The publicity surrounding the EGN program in northeast Ohio, as well as our effort to develop case studies of the finalists, may very well provide additional incentive for communities to move forward with their collaborations. By studying cases of collaboration that are thought to be well developed and not subject to the publicity surrounding participation in the EGN program, we could verify that the progress we have identified and the factors that appear to facilitate it are typical, and are not merely the function of the FFEF's efforts to make collaboration more salient in northeast Ohio.<sup>7</sup>

Third, while there is a common belief that local government collaboration is beneficial, and surveys of collaborators appear to suggest that this is the case in Ohio (see Hoornbeek et al., 2009 and Dudas et al., 2009), there is a need for concrete data that measures the success of collaboration in terms of goal attainment rather than collaborative progress or the operationalization of collaborative projects. Further research in this area is therefore both important and advisable. It is our hope to follow up on at least some of the cases reported on here to conduct additional analyses to assess goal attainment as well as collaborative progress.

And finally, this analysis is based entirely on local government collaboration in Ohio. It would be useful to extend this kind of research to other states and collaborative efforts in the U.S. Indeed, because the issue of horizontal collaboration exists not only at the local level of government, but at state and national levels as well, one might even envision future efforts to

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<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, if we found that these cases were substantially less likely to achieve progress, it would suggest rather clearly that EGN-like programs might be useful to develop in other areas of the country.

apply this kind of cumulative case study approach to collaborations among both state governments in the U.S. and national governments in the realm of international collaboration.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides encouraging information for advocates of local government collaboration and regional solutions to metropolitan problems. Drawing on data generated through a unique program in northeast Ohio, we demonstrate high rates of progress among eight proposed collaborations that were found to be well conceptualized and implementable by an external panel. We also find that several variables – budget savings, external pressures and influences, and patterns of past interaction – co-vary with the collaborative progress that is uncovered. And the presence of two of these variables simultaneously – external incentives and patterns of past interaction – appears to be a particularly strong predictor of collaborative progress in these eight cases. These findings, in and of themselves, suggest some initial guideposts for policymakers seeking to foster local government collaborations in Ohio.

While these findings are interesting and useful, they should be viewed as first steps in a longer process of building a knowledge base to fully support transformations of local governance in the modern day world. We need to expand broad variable-based research to larger numbers of samples. We also need to ascertain whether the cases here are unique outgrowths of one attempt to foster collaboration in northeast Ohio or whether they are typical of a subset of collaborations that has moved beyond the point of initial discussion to implementable proposals. Efforts should also be made to test and verify the conclusions here in other settings, and against more demanding criteria of success that relate not only to progress but also goal achievement. With these kinds of follow up research efforts, we can begin to help foster longer term efforts to enable local,

regional, and metropolitan governance efforts that are better equipped to handle the challenges of the modern world.

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