

Basic Practices for Homeland Security Regional Partnerships

by Sharon Caudle

Proven strategic and enabling practices underpin effective partnerships, but a more complete set is needed for homeland security.

Many have stressed regional partnerships in strengthening homeland security preparedness, response, and recovery. For example, Donald Kettl characterized homeland security as the coordination of multiple federal agencies, complex partnerships with state and local governments, and intricate ties between the public and nongovernmental sectors. The Homeland Security Policy Institute Task Force emphasized regional preparedness as critical in building a national response system that, among other things, would eliminate duplication of effort and integrate federal, state, and local assets into effective preparedness and response networks. The national domestic all-hazards preparedness goal—intended to establish measurable readiness priorities and targets—also stresses the use of geographic regions. Regional preparedness is strongly tied to current federal funding, and the fiscal year 2007 U.S. Department of Homeland Security funding guidance for states and localities lists regional security cooperation as one of its two paramount priorities.

However, recognizing the importance of regional partnerships does not automatically translate to actual, effective regional preparedness. Although regional approaches to confront difficult, large-scale public problems such as homeland security are not new, developing and implementing regional approaches sorely tests the management skills of those responsible for regional initiatives. Organizations involved in a

regional partnership must formulate specific homeland security objectives and related strategies, determine the capabilities and resources needed to carry out and sustain them, create regional governance structures, and continuously evaluate actual regional preparedness. With one exception—the National Capital Region (NCR), comprising the District of Columbia and surrounding counties and cities in the states of Maryland and Virginia—states and local jurisdictions must self-organize into a region for joint planning and resource allocation. Setting up working relationships and networks, dealing with competing public interests and values, removing conflicts in legal requirements, and determining the risks to be addressed challenge the regional approach.

Given these and other challenges, managers should know the management practices that can underpin a successful regional partnership. Drawing on several descriptions of regional efforts, such as work by the National Academy of Public Administration, U.S. Government Accountability Office, and others, this article describes a basic set of practices, categorized as strategic and enabling. The strategic practices value and justify the partnership, and the enabling practices support developing, implementing, and sustaining it. The article also poses questions for going beyond the basic practices for homeland security partnerships.

Strategic Practices: Partnering to Outcomes

The strategic practices are (1) implementing a formal regional partnership, (2) continuously assessing its value and content, and (3) defining and articulating a common mission and specific strategic outcomes.

Formal Partnerships

Formal regional partnerships are needed, not collaborative networks. The term “collaboration” implies a temporary, coordinative effort with fluidity of members, commitment, and resources. Instead, individual organizations must form a collective structure that shares authority, responsibility, resources, and accountability for achieving mutual goals. Partnerships may

Sharon Caudle is the Younger-Carter Distinguished Practitioner in Residence, Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University (scaudle@bushschool.tamu.edu). She formerly worked at the U.S. Government Accountability Office. This article is an update of a longer article published in Homeland Security Affairs, October 2006.

emerge from collaborative initiatives, but a formal regional partnership cements the relationship. As the relationships evolve from limited collaboration to partnerships, trust is built and policy and process boundaries between the joint actors begin to merge and tightly integrate in strategic initiatives important to the individual partners.

Value and Content

Partners must rigorously assess the value and content of a regional partnership. As many have pointed out, the purpose of a partnership is the creation of value larger than that achieved by working alone. The assessment examines who benefits and the ways they benefit, who works and the efforts made, and the time frame of the efforts. Thus, a partnership hinges on factors such as the strengths and weaknesses of the organizations involved or potentially involved. Under consideration are the organizational capabilities and capacities, such as financial resources or sources of funding, political skills and contacts, knowledge and experience, organizational structure and governance, information sources, and experience. Once the partners commit to a formal partnership, the joint and individual assessment of partnership value and balance of power within the partnership never ends. Managers of an enduring partnership must develop a process for evaluating benefits and periodically renegotiate the compact between partners.

The partnership needs to be prepared to terminate a partner if that organization no longer adds to the synergy of the partnership. Partners in a homeland security region will find this a particularly tricky issue. The reverse concern is when a well-resourced partner decides it no longer wishes to support a regional homeland security partnership. In addition, reassessing the partnership may involve the network of partnerships of each partner. Partners rarely are aligned with just one partnership, and relationships with other partnerships have implications for other collaborations. The partnership value analysis should include surveillance on developments in other partnerships and their possible impact on the partnership. For homeland security, this is likely to involve alliances with non-governmental organizations and the private sector, as well as mutual aid agreements with jurisdictions outside the region.

Mission and Outcomes

Defining and articulating a common mission and deciding on specific, high-level regional partnership

strategic outcomes set the course for the partnership. For example, part of the initial NCR homeland security mission was to “build and sustain an integrated effort to prepare for, prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from ‘all-hazards’ threats or events.” Washington State’s Region 6 (geographic King County) 2005 mission statement was to protect the citizens, property, environment, culture, and economy of Region 6 from acts of terrorism and natural disasters and to minimize the effects of these emergencies.

A strong common mission statement is necessary to help overcome differences in individual partner organizational missions, cultures, and established ways of doing business while still satisfying respective operating needs. Partners, working with customers and stakeholders, should develop a specific and precise definition of high-level outcomes on the basis of the partnership mission statement. For example, Washington State’s Region 6 plan includes priorities such as (1) coordinating and strengthening regional emergency preparedness, prevention, mitigation, response, and recovery and (2) developing region-wide interagency and interoperable communications capabilities and strategies. The outcomes must convince those involved that their return on investment warrants the time and resources devoted to the regional partnership and the costs of sustaining it. The costs include money, management and staff time, sharing data and reports, and designing and implementing joint incentive and evaluation systems.

Enabling Practices: Leadership to Performance Systems

The second set of practices defines the enablers for implementing a high-performance regional partnership. Enabling practices include

- ◆ having a champion lead and secure commitment to the partnership and its high performance;
- ◆ crafting the partnership’s organizational infrastructure and norms to perform effectively;
- ◆ setting joint regional strategic goals, objectives, and measures across regional jurisdictions to accomplish the strategic outcomes;
- ◆ providing resources from both joint and individual regional partners to initiate and sustain the regional goals, objectives, and related strategies; and
- ◆ setting a partnership performance management system for outcomes and individual performance management systems to reinforce partnerships.

Champion

A champion leads and secures commitment to a regional partnership and its high performance. Experts point out that partnerships appear to thrive when individual champions, representing senior leadership in their own organizations, commit to the partnership and tackle the challenges, working across organizational boundaries. These champions invest their personal reputation, resources, and time until the understandings that serve as the partnership’s foundations are reached and a process established to define goals and the ways to achieve them.

However, although champions give the partnership initial direction and support, sustainable partnerships require sharing authority, ownership, and joint accountability for results. Managers of the joining partners must support and then supplant the initiating champion. The champion and these managers should see the partnerships as a means of extending their own organizations’ resources, not as remedies for past failures. Top managers from the jurisdictions should be involved in all aspects of regional performance-based management, from developing a performance monitoring and evaluation system to identifying and assessing key measures.

Infrastructure and Norms

Crafting the regional partnership’s organizational infrastructure and norms—including a decision-making structure—enables the partnership to perform effectively. They are the processes and capabilities that govern partnership decisions, allocation of resources to implement the decisions, and resolution of the unavoidable conflicting priorities and concerns within the partnership. The NCR Senior Policy Group, for example, plays a central role in interaction across the NCR jurisdictions, continuously setting policy for and making executive decisions on the region’s homeland security issues. Its mandate is to determine priority actions for increasing regional preparedness and response capabilities and reducing vulnerability to terrorist attacks. The group is the final adjudicator for decisions, relying on extensive input and advice from local government’s chief administrative officers committee. Political traditions and authorities should be harmonized to promote partnerships that cross organizational or jurisdictional boundaries. Partnering organizations also need to address the compatibility of standards, policies, procedures, processes, and data systems to be used in the partnership.

Partnership norms—a common set of values, language, and glossary of terms—guide joint activities and build mutual trust. Data sharing is enhanced by establishing common data definitions and information systems. Standard data definitions help ensure that data used for common purposes are consistently defined, collected, calculated, and interpreted. Partners can also identify information systems in each partner organization to serve common interests and information that is already shared across partner organizations. To strengthen norms and relationships, the partnership should hold regular (bimonthly, quarterly, or annual) meetings or forums to discuss issues and continue valuable face-to-face contacts. An effective partnership encourages consistent member attendance and participation to build trust and form relationships. Members should consistently involve the same representatives, rather than rotating them.

Goals, Objectives, and Measures

Partnerships need to set specific joint regional and individual partner strategic goals, objectives, and measures across regional jurisdictions for the strategic outcomes discussed earlier. Regional managers and staff members should extensively participate in the development of goals, targets, and measures, securing agreement on joint and individual partner implementation plans and program management. The planning should provide a clear rationale or logic of the way specific objectives and strategies and their related inputs for individual programs deliver regional homeland security outputs that can be connected to intermediate and final regional homeland security outcomes. Performance measures and strategies should be consistent with the rationale.

These implementation plans serve as a form of partnering agreement. They should ensure each partner's goals are carefully integrated with those of the other partners. In sum, the plans direct partners' strategies and activities toward achieving the principal regional strategic goals and help avoid contradictory goals or the supplanting of planned goals across the partnership and within individual partner organizations.

The implementation plans should define roles and responsibilities and resource commitments for achieving the regional goals and objectives. For example, Washington State's Region 6 strategic plan specifies a "coordinating lead" for each objective to develop an

action plan, mapping out the immediate steps necessary to accomplish the objective. The implementation plans also can be mapped to plans of other jurisdictions to validate the content of the goals and their importance. For example, the Region 6 plan crosswalks its goals to national preparedness priorities and capabilities, Washington State priorities, and urban area strategies.

Resource Commitment

Resources from joint and individual regional partner sources initiate and sustain the implementation. Resources include tangibles—such as financial resources, staff, assets, technology, and information—and intangibles—such as knowledge, access, relationships, political support, and in-kind contributions. The partners should align their individual budgets with regional homeland security program activities, which, in turn, should be tied to agreed-upon goals, targets, and measures. Each partner should allocate or redirect existing funding and other assets to meet the partnership's purposes. A regional partnership will fail if members do not obligate the resources intended for the partnership or believe they are free to change partnership commitments unilaterally. Each partner needs to understand the contributions expected of its organization and the return.

To better leverage partnership resources, a business plan and related formal agreements for resource allocation can be prepared at the outset. Although the partnership needs to scale the mission and goals to available resources, it should have a plan for growing resources if necessary. For example, other partners can be recruited if current partners cannot fill resource gaps.

Performance Management Systems

Setting a regional partnership performance management system for outcomes and individual performance management systems reinforces partnerships. Using performance measures, the regional governance structure should rigorously track and evaluate action items designed to implement plans. Variances between actual performance and expected performance targets should be promptly identified and acted upon. A partnership performance management system enforces partnership agreements and surfaces destructive partnership behaviors such as shirking agreed-upon responsibilities. Properly constructed, performance management systems institutionalize results-based management

and identify areas for policy and operational improvement or changes.

Individual performance management systems should also reinforce individual accountability for regional partnership efforts. Individual performance plans or performance agreements should identify partnership-oriented individual goals. For example, these plans or agreements can include required competencies in working across organizational boundaries, such as breaking down barriers between organizations. Specific individual performance responsibilities and accountabilities for operating in a partnership can (1) increase the visibility and importance of partnership performance management results and (2) encourage managers and staff members to pay attention to partnership performance information and outcomes.

Beyond Basic Practices

The practices in large part apply to any partnership arrangement, not just homeland security regional initiatives. However, these practices are a base set on which to begin assessing regional homeland security approaches, not the complete set. Additional research is being done on regional preparedness, including standards, such as the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) pilot testing, which applies preparedness stan-

dards to the NCR. Certainly, a more complete set of practices is needed to better inform the complexity and nuances of homeland security partnerships and answer several thorny questions (see box). ❖

References

- Doz, Yves, and Gary Hamel. *Alliance Advantage: The Art of Creating Value through Partnering* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1998).
- Government Accountability Office. *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies* (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, October 2005).
- Homeland Security Policy Institute Task Force. *Empowering America: A Proposal for Enhancing Regional Preparedness*, Heritage Special Report SR-6 (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, April 7, 2006).
- Imperial, Mark. *Collaboration and Performance Management in Network Settings: Lessons from Three Watershed Governance Efforts* (Washington, DC: IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2004).
- Kettl, Donald. *System under Stress: Homeland Security and American Politics* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2004).
- Klitgaard, Robert, and Gregory Treverton. *Assessing Partnerships: New Forms of Collaboration* (Washington, DC: IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2003).
- National Academy of Public Administration. *Powering the Future: High-Performance Partnerships* (Washington, DC: National Academy of Public Administration, 2003).
- Linden, Russell. *Working Across Boundaries* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002).

What criteria can be used to form a geographic region and the “right” set of partners?

The makeup of a region is a central question for homeland security regional partnerships. A region could include, as suggested by the EMAP, metropolitan areas with local jurisdictions in more than one state, intrastate metropolitan regions with multiple local jurisdictions, regions that closely overlap a single local jurisdiction, such as a single county, and nonmetropolitan regions that do not overlap a single local jurisdiction. However, another option is to consider flexible regional partnerships that depend on risk management assessments. For example, an entity could consider membership in a regional arrangement for terrorism prevention that involves sharing information and coordinating efforts and a different partnership arrangement for natural hazards preparedness, response, and recovery. Homeland security managers need to consider whether formal partnerships should cross international borders. This certainly makes sense for jurisdictions bordering Canada or Mexico. However, such an arrangement raises a multitude of questions regarding international laws and treaties, the roles of federal governments, and cost-sharing.

What can be done about “free rider” partners in a regional homeland security partnership that reduce their partnership contributions, but still want the partnership benefits?

A range of possibilities pertain to the commitment and control of the regional partners. For homeland security, the partnership is as good as its weakest link, which could be a partner that initially commits to the partnership, but then reduces or threatens to reduce its commitment with the press of non-homeland security priorities. The other partners may find it difficult to fill the resulting gap, creating vulnerabilities for all. But when disaster strikes, the weak link will be certain to want full benefits of the partnership.

In addition, some jurisdictions in an apparent natural region for homeland security may not want to partner, even with the incentives of federal homeland security grant program funding. If they or the weak partners request aid, the other partners will find it difficult to refuse it in the face of public scrutiny and media attention where the nuances of partnership are minimally mentioned, if at all. At the other end is the strongest link, where a partner with the most population and resources begins to direct homeland security partnership arrangements to its own benefit. Weaker partners will find it hard to withstand this partner and its demands, anticipating that being a weak part of a homeland security partnership is better than not being a partner at all.

What negative consequences do homeland security regional partnerships have?

Most of the literature touts the benefits of multijurisdictional efforts, but little is written about their possible negative consequences. For example, an entity with mutual aid agreements outside of a regional partnership may find it hard to respond to a mutual aid request if the partnership either has or anticipates a need for its resources. Regions likely will compete with other regions for national resources and attention, possibly leading to a mismatch between risks and needed capabilities. A regional focus also may dilute a national approach unless accountability and oversight are clear about regional preparations addressing national homeland security goals.

The answers to these questions can help us better understand, craft, and leverage regional homeland security partnerships. Stronger partnerships should overcome weaknesses in regional planning and coordination structures and capabilities, which are revealed in major catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina.