



Local Government Collaboration in Ohio: Are We Walking the Walk or Just Talking the Talk?

The Center for Public Administration and Public Policy
Kent State University (KSU)
128 Bowman Hall
Kent OH 44242

December 4, 2009

Sponsored By

**OHIO COMMISSION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REFORM AND COLLABORATION**

through

The Ohio State University

Local Government Collaboration in Ohio:

Are We Walking the Walk or Just Talking the Talk?

Prepared By:

John Hoornbeek, Ph.D.

Kerry Macomber, MPA

Melissa Phillips, Graduate Research Assistant

Sayantani Satpathi, Graduate Research Assistant

The Center for Public Administration and Public Policy

Kent State University (KSU)

128 Bowman Hall

Kent OH 44242

December 4, 2009

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge assistance from a number of individuals who provided key assistance in the conduct of this research.

First, we would like to thank Mr. Matthew Flemming, who served as a Student Research Assistant with KSU's Center for Public Administration and Public Policy from Fall 2008 through August 2009, for his contributions to the Center's capacities and understanding of local government collaboration in Ohio. Mr. Flemming's leadership, hard work, reliable performance, and enthusiasm helped pave the way for this research and other work we are doing in this area.

More recently at KSU, Dr. Thomas Pascarella, an Affiliate of the Center, provided valuable insights to this project and also assisted with the design of the survey instrument. In addition, Ms. Jessica Burke, Mr. Brian McDonald, and Dr. Richard Serpe from KSU's Survey Research Center provided valuable assistance and support in the design and implementation of the survey underlying the research presented in the pages that follow.

We also benefited from information provided by colleagues in the Urban University and Rural University Program networks. These colleagues included Dr. Jack Dustin of Wright State University, Ms. Sue Wuest from the University of Toledo, Mr. Robert Gordon of Ohio University, and Dr. Mike Carroll of Bowling Green State University.

We are also appreciative of Dr. Jennifer Evans-Cowley of The Ohio State University, and the valuable leadership she has provided

for both this project and the overall research effort supported by the Ohio Commission on Local Government Reform and Collaboration (OCLGRC).

And last, but certainly not least, we would like to thank the OCLGRC for the financial support that made this research possible.

Executive Summary

There has been a growing dialogue about local government collaboration in Ohio, but we still know little about the motivations for this dialogue and what it is achieving. This report addresses these and other gaps in our knowledge about recent efforts by Ohio local governments to collaborate with one another.

The findings presented are based on a survey of local government officials who are active in local governmental collaboration efforts. They suggest that new collaborations are becoming operational in Ohio, and these collaborations appear to be motivated by interests in economic development, public service improvement, and more efficient government. The survey findings also suggest that positive impacts are flowing from recent collaborations.

However, the findings presented here also point out that successful collaboration requires conscious efforts to overcome significant challenges. These challenges include learning what kinds of collaborations are likely to be successful, understanding how to develop successful collaborations, and identifying ways to support local government efforts to build and administer new collaborations. To address these challenges, we identify steps that can be taken to foster more productive local government collaborations in the future. These steps include:

- monitoring local government collaborations and rewarding successes;

- building knowledge on local government collaboration and disseminating it;
- developing research and educational efforts to help local governments collaborate;
- fostering productive relationships across jurisdictional boundaries, and;
- investigating potential state incentives for further collaboration.

By undertaking initiatives in these areas, Ohio can develop and enable a process of continuous improvement in which collaboration is rewarded and communities are empowered to learn from one another to the benefit of both local governments and the citizens they serve.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Page
Introduction.....	v
Research Approach and Methods.....	1
The Survey Universe	1
Survey Administration	2
Analyzing the Survey Data	3
Survey Results	3
Characterizing Intergovernmental Collaborations: Insights from Respondents	4
Factors Motivating Intergovernmental Collaborations	11
Perceived Impacts of Operational Collaborations	13
Challenges of Intergovernmental Collaboration	19
Implications.....	20
Conclusion	24
References.....	25
Appendix: The Survey Questionnaire.....	26

VISUAL ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURES

Figure Number	Title	Page
1	Characterizing Respondents: The Status of Intergovernmental Collaborations	4
2	Characterizing Operational Collaborations: Types of Collaborations	5
3	Characterizing Operational Collaborations: Populations Served	6
4	Characterizing Operational Collaborations: Legal Mechanisms	7
5	Characterizing Operational Collaborations: A Chronological Perspective	8
6	Characterizing Operational Collaborations: The Duration of Formal Agreements.	9
7	Primary Goals of Operational Collaborations	12
8	Operational Collaborations: Are They Achieving Cost Savings?	14
9	Extent of Cost Savings Achieved by Collaborations Claiming Cost Savings	15
10	Operational Collaborations: Are They Achieving Service Improvements?	15
11	Operational Collaborations: Are They Achieving Economic Development?	17

TABLES

Table Number	Title	Page
1	Types of Local Governments Engaged in Identified Operational Collaborations	9
2	Funding Sources for Operational Local Government Collaborations	10
3	Motivations for Intergovernmental Collaboration	11
4	Estimated Levels of Goal Attainment by Operational Local Government Collaborations	13
5	Types of Service Delivery Improvement Among Successful Collaborations	16
6	Economic Benefits of Operational Collaborations	18
7	Types of External Assistance that Would be Helpful to Collaborations that are Not Yet Operational	19

Introduction

Local government is big business in Ohio. The state ranks sixth among the American states in the number of local governments with 3,702, and fourth in the number of general purpose local governments with 2334 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Now, however, Ohio's economy and the local governments that support it are being challenged to provide better services at lower cost. There is also pressure on local governments to foster economic development within and around their jurisdictions to assure employment opportunities for their citizens and to help maintain tax bases sufficient to provide needed services.

Because of these challenges, we are witnessing a growing dialogue about intergovernmental collaboration in Ohio. Last year, the Ohio Department of Development implemented a Local Government Collaboration grant program, and funded intergovernmental collaboration grants for a number of proposed projects. The state legislature also created the Ohio Commission on Local Government Reform and Collaboration (OCLGRC) to study ways to re-structure, reform, and streamline local government. Earlier this year, the Fund for Our Economic Future (FFEF) in northeast Ohio initiated its Efficient Government Now (EGN) program to increase public support for intergovernmental collaboration projects in northeast Ohio and to fund three projects chosen by residents of northeast Ohio. Partially as a result of these efforts, we are now seeing growing public attention to the subject of intergovernmental collaboration.

In spite of this growing attention, however, there is little concrete information on the extent to which the growing dialogue is translating into actual collaborations. Our knowledge of the extent of intergovernmental collaboration in Ohio, the factors that motivate collaboration, and the impacts of collaboration on the efficiency and effectiveness of government services are incomplete at best. As a state, we do not appear to track intergovernmental collaboration in systematic ways, and there is limited data on what motivates collaborations and on the impacts of collaborations that have been undertaken. As a result, current intergovernmental collaborations and policy initiatives designed to foster them are operating without: (1) a clear sense of what is happening; (2) knowledge of the factors that motivate or drive change in this area, and; (3) an awareness of what impacts might be expected from the collaborative efforts that are undertaken.

This report begins to remedy this situation by reporting on the status, characteristics, motivations, and perceived impacts of local government collaborations that have been proposed and/or undertaken in recent years. It also seeks to identify key challenges and obstacles to local government collaboration. The report is based on survey data from local government leaders who have worked to promote and implement intergovernmental collaborations in Ohio in recent years. By seeking information from these local government officials, we gain a better sense of the extent to which local governments are actually translating proposals

and discussions into collaborative actions, and what factors may them help foster this transition. We also attempt to catalogue perceived cost savings, economic development advances, and service improvements associated with intergovernmental collaborations and define ways in which external assistance might enable local governments to overcome challenges and obstacles to collaboration.

Toward the end of the report, we discuss the implications of the survey results for efforts to foster productive local government collaborations. We also identify some key priorities for further research and educational assistance. Our hope is that the information reported here can be used to help guide improvements in state policies and practices and to foster more productive intergovernmental collaborations in the future.

Local Government Collaboration in Ohio: Are We Walking the Walk or Just Talking the Talk?

Research Approach and Methods

There are a variety of ways in which a study of intergovernmental collaboration in Ohio could be conducted. We chose to survey a statewide sample of local government officials in Ohio to tap their knowledge and benefit from their experiences.

Borrowing insights from literature on the diffusion of innovation (Rogers, 1983), we drew our survey universe from a group of local government officials who are likely to be relatively advanced in their recent efforts to implement innovative collaborative projects¹. Consequently, our sample is *not* intended to be representative of local governments in Ohio as a whole. Rather, the sample we have chosen should yield insights that are useful for understanding the extent to which collaborative strategies may be helpful in fostering improved and more cost-effective services in the future.

¹ It is important to recognize that while we are viewing recent efforts to foster greater collaborations among local governments in Ohio as innovations, collaborations among local governments have existed for many years both in Ohio and elsewhere. We are viewing recent collaborations as innovations, however, because they are associated with a new dialogue that appears to be founded in concerns about efficiency and economic development, rather than joint planning processes which guided many earlier attempts at collaboration which were initiated in the 1960's and 1970's.

The discussion that follows describes our survey universe, outlines the procedures used to administer the survey, and highlights ways in which we analyze the data that are collected.

The Survey Universe

Over the past year, the Center for Public Administration and Public Policy (the Center) at Kent State University (KSU) has sought to identify local government collaborations in Ohio. During the year starting in Fall 2008 and ending in Fall 2009, we identified between 200 and 300 potential collaborations among local governments in Ohio. The cases of collaboration we identified extend throughout the state of Ohio and cover a wide range of topics, including police and fire protection service integration, joint economic development districts (JEDDs), water related collaborations, shared purchasing arrangements, and a range of other kinds of collaborative endeavors. We collected *preliminary* information on contacts for each of these collaborations, the subject matters associated with them, and other pertinent information. Throughout this process, we entered the information we collected into a preliminary data set.

The data set we compiled includes potential intergovernmental collaborations from a range of sources. It includes proposals made to grant programs administered by the Ohio Department Development (ODOD) and the Fund for Our Economic Future (FFE), instances of local government collaboration that were identified through the media and the

worldwide web, and cases of proposed and/or actual collaborations that have been identified through personal knowledge or word of mouth². In all cases, the data were collected as we became aware of active efforts on the part of at least one local government to engage in formal collaborative endeavors with other local governments. This preliminary data set served as the foundation for the universe of targeted local governments for this project, and it is a data set that consists of local governments that appear to have been particularly active in their efforts to use formal collaborative endeavors in recent years.

We made four significant adjustments to our preliminary data set before administering the survey. First, during the early weeks of the project, we made a major effort to fill holes in our preliminary data set and update information on key contacts associated with each of the potential collaborations we had identified. Second, because we are particularly interested in the dynamics surrounding *contemporary* intergovernmental collaborations, we omitted collaborations that we knew to be more than fifteen years old from our survey list. Third, we omitted a number of applicants to the FFEF grant program from our list. We did this in part to make sure that our overall sample was not too heavily weighted toward northeast Ohio, and in part because the FFEF conducted a similar survey of these applicants just days before we conducted our survey. And finally, we omitted a handful of local governments from our survey

list because they were targeted by another survey our Center was conducting on local government use of “E-government” during the same time period in which we were conducting this survey. We did not want to overburden this handful of local officials with two surveys from the same organization simultaneously. After these adjustments were made, our universe of potential and/or active local government collaborations stood at 181.

Survey Administration

We administered the survey in cooperation with KSU’s Survey Research Center, and they used an electronic email format to deliver the survey. We also divided the survey universe into two categories. The first category consisted primarily of collaborations for which we had contacts that were unique to that collaboration. There were 146 collaborators on this list, and we sent the initial survey to these collaborators in mid-October. We sent out a second survey solicitation after the first one to a total of 20 local government officials who were listed as contacts for an additional 35 collaborative projects in our preliminary data set of Ohio local government collaborations. In the Center’s preliminary dataset, these individuals were listed as contacts for more than one collaborative project. Because these individuals would receive more than one electronic survey if we sent to the full list of 181 collaborations in our survey universe, we contacted these officials by telephone prior to sending them additional electronic surveys to request that they respond separately for each collaborative endeavor with which they were engaged. Fortunately, most these officials were receptive to our calls and expressed a willingness to assist us.

A total of four reminders were sent to those being surveyed to enhance rates of response. When we retrieved the data from the electronic surveys in early November, we had received responses from 52 collaborations, or 28.7% of the 181 collaborations that were

2 These word of mouth inquiries included a solicitation to local government assistance centers that, in the past, have been funded by the Ohio Urban University Program (UUP) and the Ohio Rural University Program (RUP). We received feedback and additions to our list of collaborative endeavors from Ohio University, Wright State University, Bowling Green University, and Youngstown State University.

surveyed.

Analyzing the Survey Data

Our analyses of the data collected are built around objectives that were established during the design of the survey. In designing the survey, we focused on four objectives:

1. Identifying cases in which the intergovernmental collaborations in our sample had actually become operational and understanding key characteristics of these collaborations;
2. Improving our understanding of the factors that encourage and/or incentivize successful local government collaborations;
3. Compiling information on the extent to which the operational collaborations appear to be realizing benefits and achieving the goals for which they were developed (cost savings and/or service improvements, etc.), and;
4. Understanding key challenges and obstacles facing local governments that are seeking to engage in new collaborations.

Responses to questions we developed to address these objectives were to be grouped by objective to enable a more complete understanding of responses relevant to each objective.

The first two questions on the survey were designed to help us verify information in our preliminary data set and to obtain information about the status of potential collaborations in our sample. The first question on the survey sought to determine if the respondent was involved in a “formal” collaboration, and asked the respondents to identify that collaboration. Respondents who said they were not involved in a formal collaboration were not asked to complete the rest of the questionnaire.

The second question in the survey sought to determine if the collaboration they were involved in had actually reached the point of becoming operational. If the respondent reported an established collaboration, they proceeded to answer fifteen additional questions relating to the objectives mentioned above. If their collaboration had not yet reached the operational stage, we collected information on its status and inquired about whether additional assistance might help them accomplish the goals of their proposed collaboration.

After receiving the completed survey data from the KSU Survey Laboratory, we downloaded it into Excel and a statistical package, SPSS, to facilitate analysis and graphical presentation of the survey results. For the most part, the analyses consisted of summations of responses and cross-tabulations. We then organized the tabulated responses around key survey objectives, and developed graphical and tabulated representations of the information that was collected. The survey results and their implications for future local and state level efforts to foster productive local government collaborations are discussed in the next two sections of this report.

Survey Results

We present the results of this study in the four following subsections. These subsections provide results of the survey with reference to its four major objectives: (1) a characterization of the collaborations highlighted by respondents to the survey; (2) the identification of factors that appear to have motivated operational intergovernmental collaborations; (3) an assessment of the perceived impacts of the collaborations that have been undertaken, and; (4) a description of the challenges and obstacles faced by local governments that seek to engage in intergovernmental collaborations.

Characterizing Intergovernmental Collaborations: Insights from Survey Respondents

As is noted above, 52 of the local governments in our sample responded to the survey. Forty-five of these respondents (87%) confirmed that they are involved in an intergovernmental collaboration. Figure 1 shows the status of collaborations reported on by these 45 survey respondents.

Thirty of the 45 formal collaborations reported on by the respondents, or two-thirds of the respondents overall, are currently operational or in the process of establishing an agreement for collaboration. By contrast, one-third of the respondents, or 15 of the 45 local governments responding, are either discussing or conducting a formal study of a proposed collaboration. This means that roughly two-thirds of the responding communities have proceeded to a point where they have decided to implement their proposed

collaboration, while one-third of them are still undertaking efforts to determine if their proposed collaboration is desirable.

All of the results that follow in this report present information on the 25 intergovernmental collaborations that are currently operational. Figure 2 provides information on the types of collaborations that are reported by these 25 respondents. The most common form of collaboration in our survey sample is a Joint Economic Development District (JEDD), as roughly half (12/25 or 48%) of the operational collaborations that were identified fall into this category³.

3 Joint Economic Development Districts (JEDDs) also appear to be well represented among the collaborations listed in the Center for Public Administration and Public Policy’s overall list of identified collaborations.

Figure 1 Characterizing Respondents: The Status of Intergovernmental Collaborations

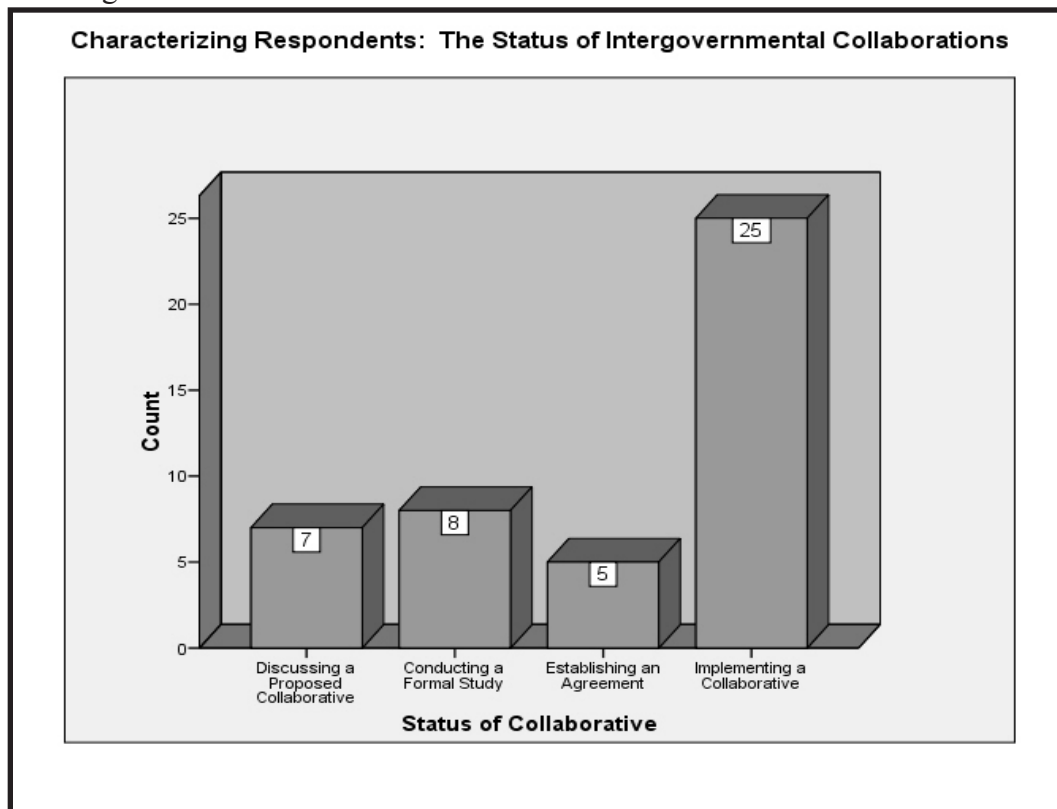
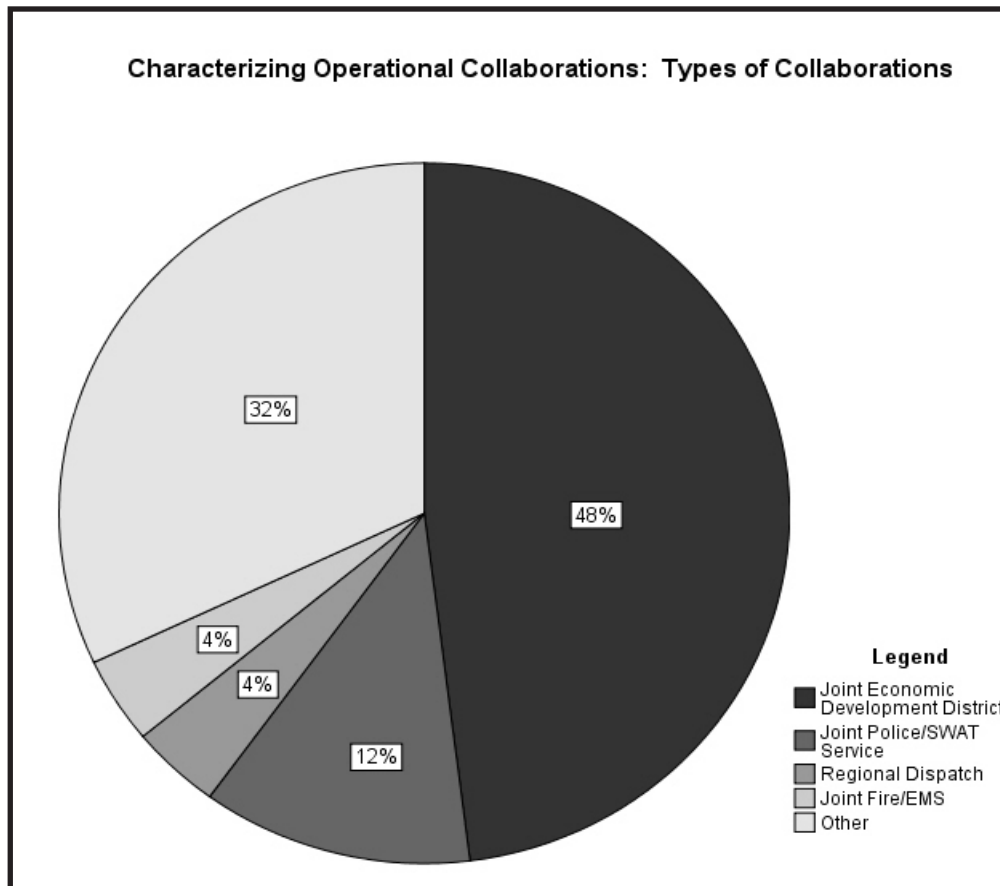


Figure 2 Characterizing Operational Collaborations:
Types of Collaborations

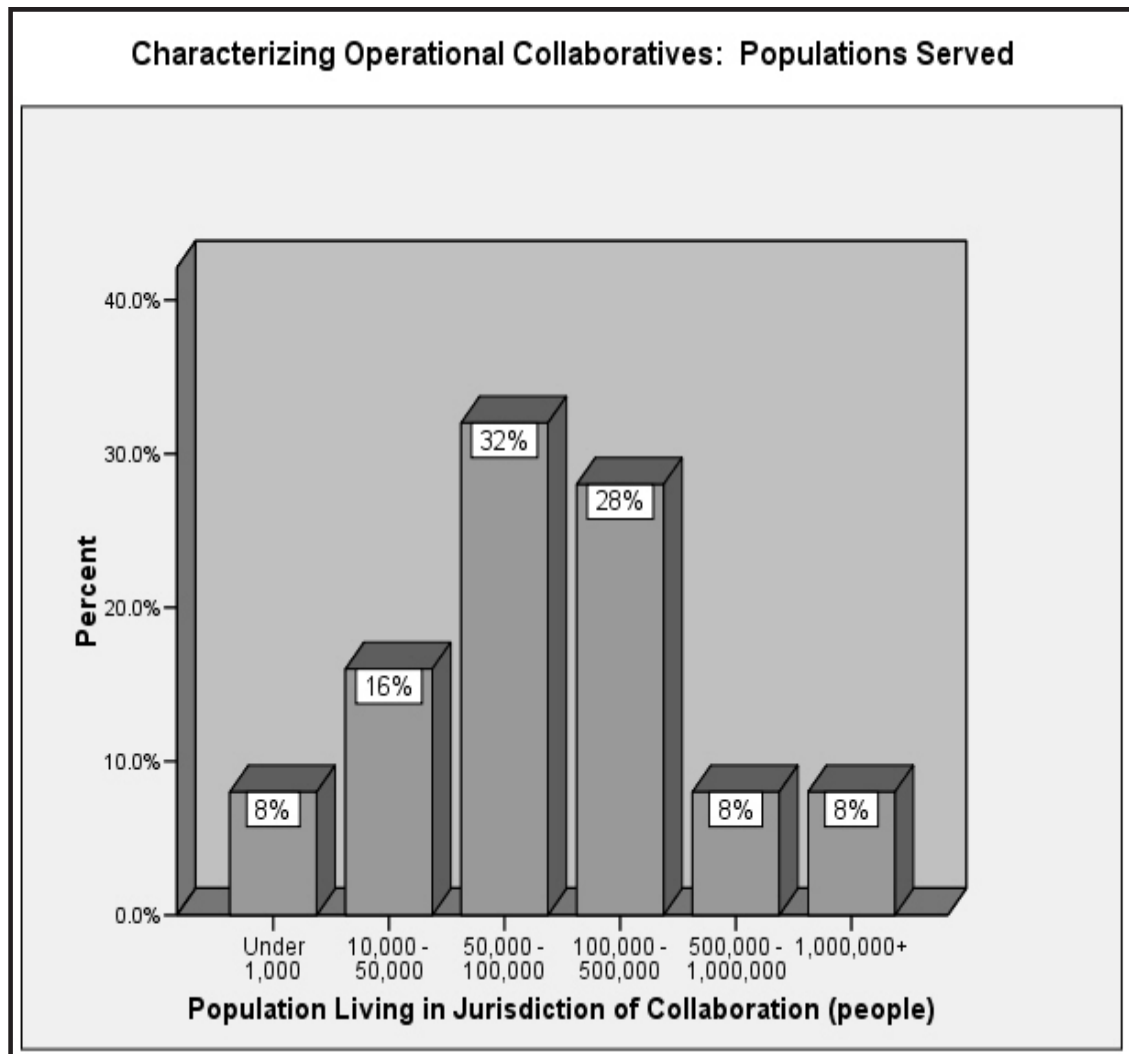


The remaining thirteen respondents were involved in a range of different kinds of inter-governmental collaborations. Three of these operational collaborations (12%) are joint Police or SWAT teams. The remaining collaborations include a regional dispatch center and a joint Fire/Emergency Management System. The “other” category is made up of a range of eight different types of collaborations. Four of the eight respondents who sited categories other than those listed in the survey questionnaire said that their communities were involved in multiple collaborations, and one of these included an additional JEDD. The four remaining “other” intergovernmental collaborations included “transit sharing,” “Building/Capital project,” “advocacy,” and a “national center for medical

readiness.” These results clearly suggest a strong interest in intergovernmental collaborations relating to JEDDs and economic development, as well as interests in a wide range of other kinds of inter-governmental collaborations.

The results also suggest that current intergovernmental collaborations serve populations of a range of different sizes. Figure 3 displays information on the populations served by the intergovernmental collaborations in our sample. The results suggest that a majority of the operational collaborations identified serve between 50,000 and 500,000 people (32% + 28% = 60%), although collaborations serving very small and very large populations are also identified.

Among the operational local government

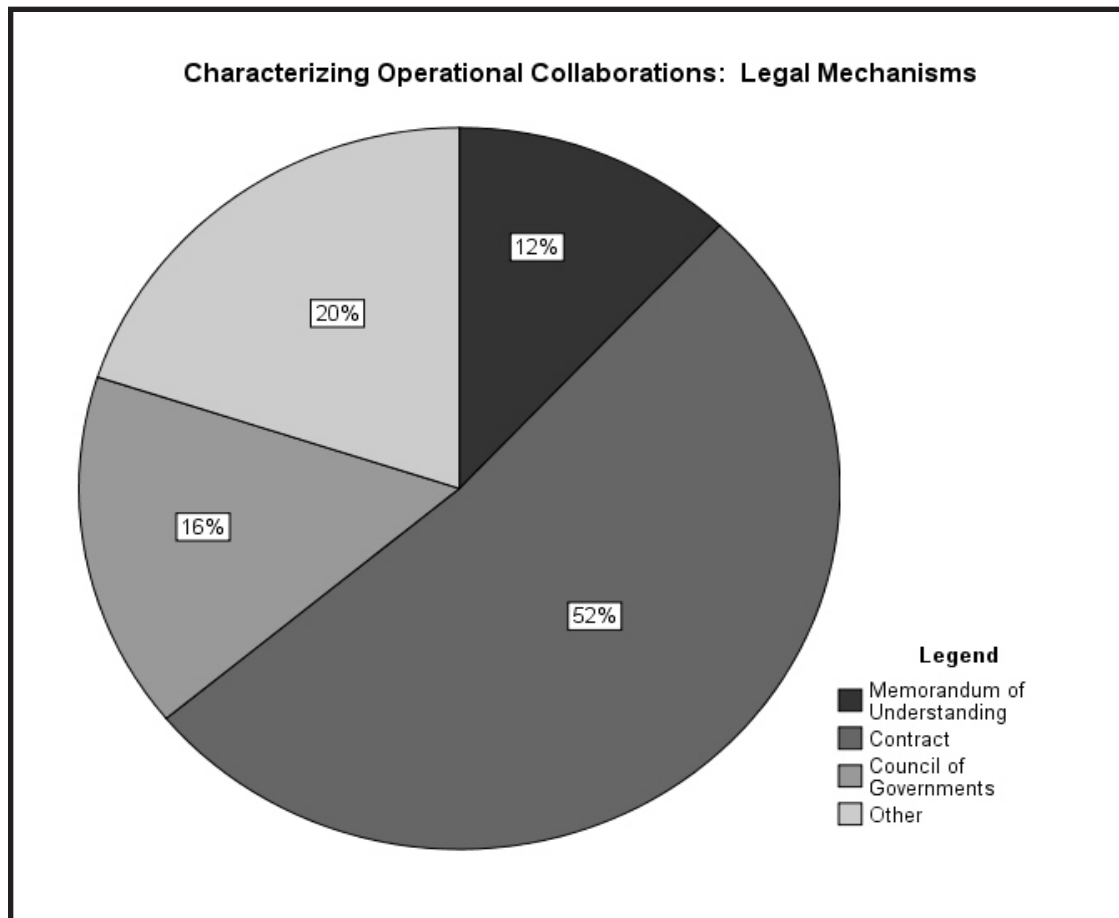
Figure 3: Characterizing Operational Collaboratives: Populations Served

collaborations in our sample, more than one-half (13/25 or 52%) use a contract as the legal mechanism underlying their intergovernmental collaboration. Figure 4 provides a more complete breakout of the legal mechanisms cited by the collaborators in our sample. As Figure 4 suggests, some of the collaborations in the sample (4/25, or 16%) use a Council of Government (COG) to implement their local government collaboration and several use a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Four of the five intergovernmental collaborations that checked “other,” indicated that they use multiple legal mechanisms from among those shown in Figure 4, and one respondent said that his/her collaboration relied on “legislative

authorizations for cooperative agreements.”⁴

Many of the respondents in our sample of intergovernmental collaborations have initiated their collaborations rather recently. Figure displays information on the year that the collaborations in the sample became operational. As Figure 5 shows, 40% (10/25) of the operational collaborations in our sample began in 2009, and well over one-half (17/25) of

⁴ Because of limited time, we did not have an opportunity to investigate exactly what this phrasing means in terms of statutory authorizations provided by Ohio law.

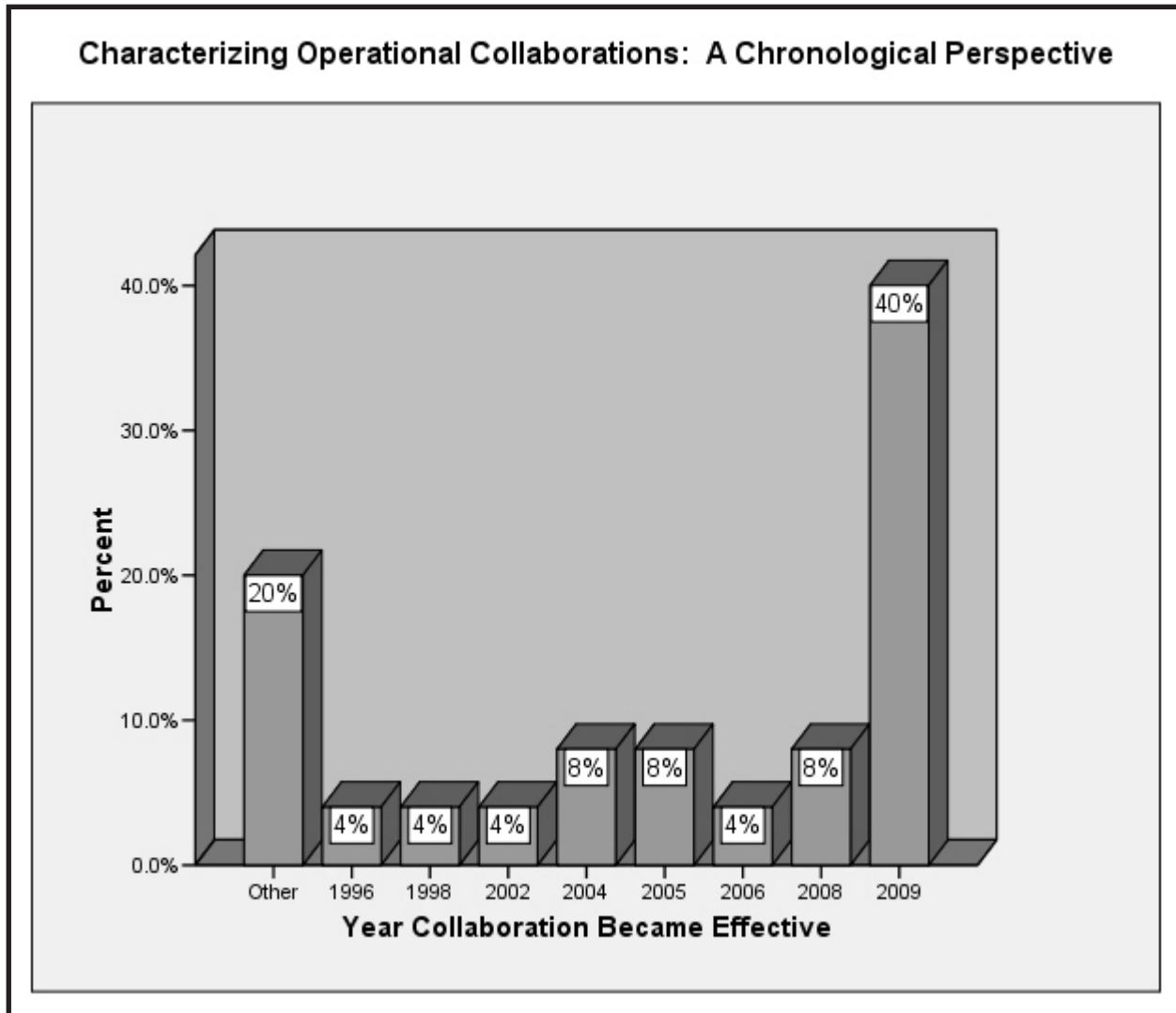
Figure 4 Characterizing Operational Collaborations: Legal Mechanisms

the respondents had initiated their collaborations in the last five years, since 2004. Four of the five respondents who provided “other” responses said that they initiated their inter-governmental collaborations prior to 1995 – the first year for which a closed-end response category was provided on the survey questionnaire. While our sample is biased toward more recent collaborations, the data compiled do make it clear that a good number of local governments in Ohio are now actively engaging in formal intergovernmental collaborations.

Most of the local government collaborators who responded to the survey

indicated that they were engaged in long term collaborative agreements. Figure 6 displays information on the durations of the agreements that were reached by the collaborators who responded to the survey. As Figure 6 shows, the most frequently cited duration of time for a collaborative agreement in the sample was 51 or more years, and more than half of the respondents (17/25 or 68%) had agreements of 16 years or more in place. None of the agreements cited was for a period of one year or less.

A range of different types of

Figure 5 Characterizing operational Collaborations: A Chronological Perspective

local governments appear to be engaging intergovernmental collaborations, although cities appear to be the most frequent participants in our sample. Table 1 displays information on the prevalence of different kinds of local governments among participants in the operational collaborations that are identified through the survey.

As Table 1 shows, cities were participants in 88% of the operational collaborations that were identified, and both townships and counties were participants in more than half of the identified collaborations. Villages and

other kinds of local government jurisdictions were also represented among the collaborating governments cited by the survey respondents.

The communities involved appear to be major contributors of funding for the operating collaborations that were identified, although their contributions are supplemented by funding from other sources. Table 2 presents information on the funding sources cited by the survey respondents.

Not surprisingly, given their widespread participation in the collaborations identified, cities provided funding for many

Figure 6: Characterizing Operational Collaborations:
The Duration of Formal Agreements

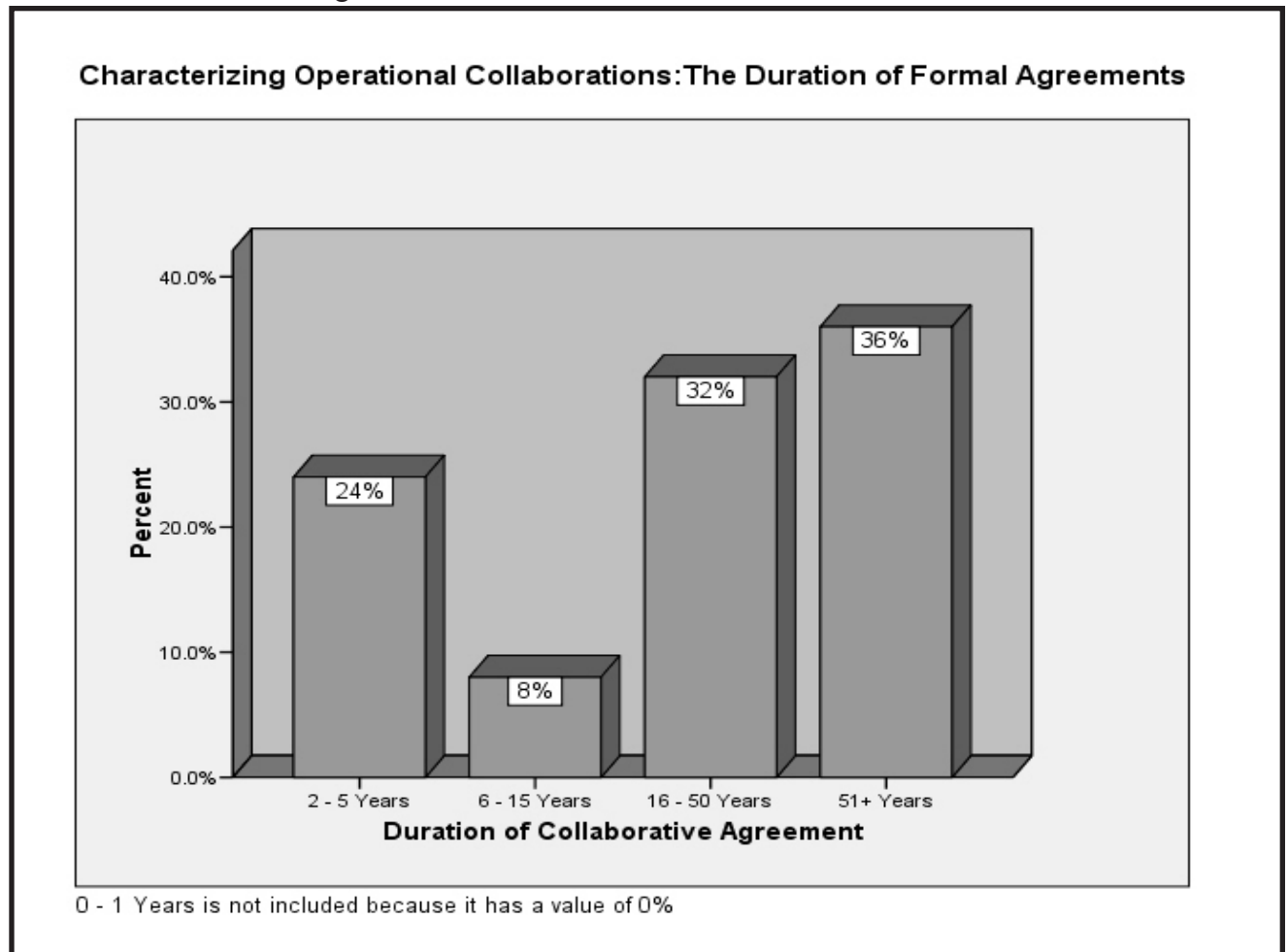


Table 1: Types of Local Governments Engaged in Identified Operational Collaborations

Types of Local Governments Engaged in Identified Operational Collaborations	
Type of Local Government	Percent of Identified Collaborations
Cities	88%
Townships	56%
Counties	52%
Other Local Government Jurisdictions	28%
Villages	16%

of the collaborations identified by the survey respondents. A large number of the respondents also cited “other” funding sources, but many of these respondents identified income taxes (presumably local ones in most cases) as a source of revenue supporting their collaborations.⁵ Other local governments, federal grants, state grants, and private sector donations also appear to have funded intergovernmental collaborations

in the sample.

Factors Motivating Intergovernmental Collaborations

To investigate the motivation of participants in operational local government collaborations, we included questions asking participants to identify the motivation for their collaboration and the primary goal(s) they were trying to achieve. The responses received for each of these questions were consistent with one another and re-enforced the importance of desires for economic development, service improvement, and cost savings as motivators

⁵ Based on the language of the responses, some of these “other” respondents appear to have come from JEDDs.

Table 2: Funding Sources for Operational Local Government Collaborations

Funding Sources for Operational Local Government Collaborations	
Funding Sources	Percentage of Collaborations Using This Source
City Funds	60%
Other	48%
State Grants	32%
Federal Grants	32%
County Funds	24%
Township Funds	20%
Village Funds	16%
Private Funds	16%

for local government collaborations.

Table 3 presents information regarding the motivations for intergovernmental collaborations cited by respondents to the survey. Many of the respondents cited more than one motivation for their collaborative work, but economic development, service improvement and budget shortfalls were the most frequently mentioned motivations cited. However, there were also a number of other motivations cited by the respondents, and this suggests that the dynamics of fostering intergovernmental collaborations may often depend on more than one form of motivation.

Because we recognized that motivations for inter-governmental collaborations may

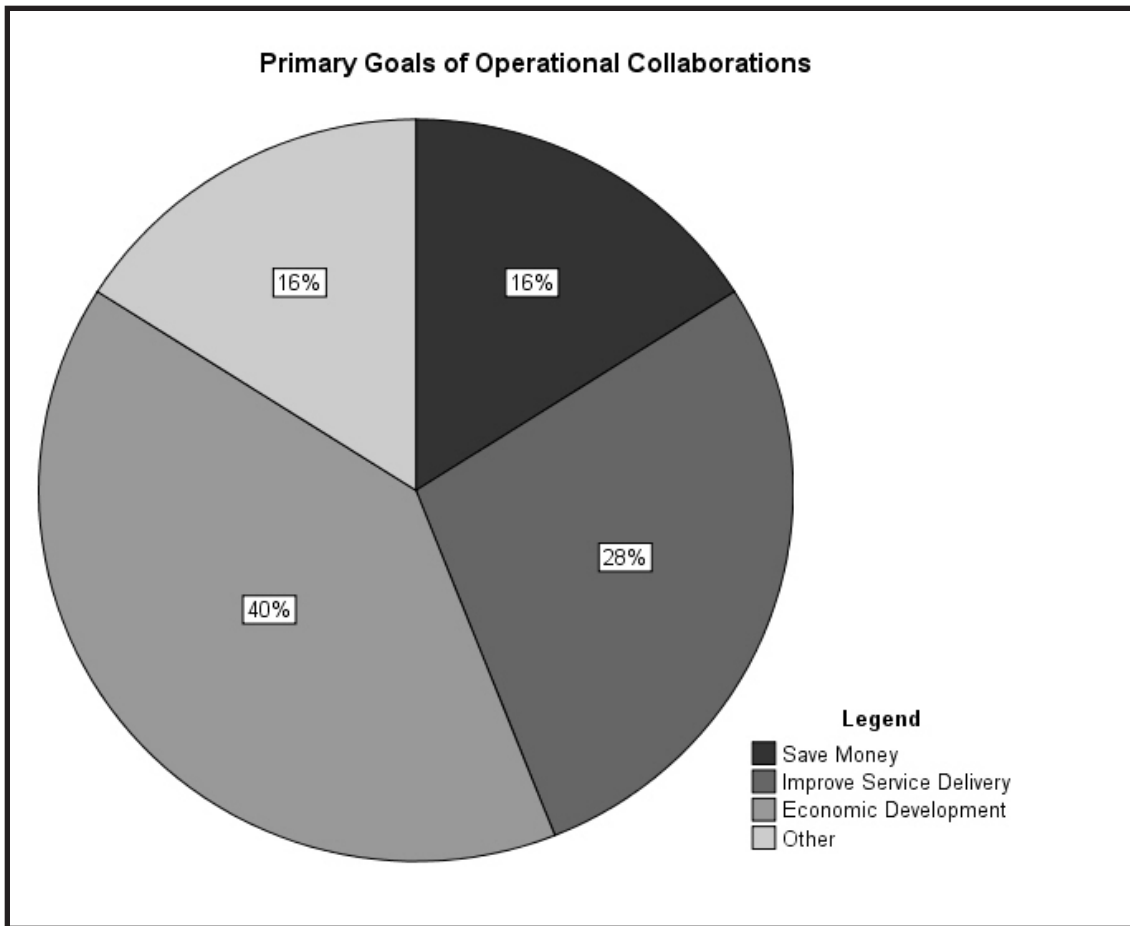
spring from multiple sources, we also asked respondents to identify the primary goal of their collaborations. Their responses are summarized in the Figure 7.

As Figure 7 indicates, the responses here largely mirrored the responses to the question about motivation discussed above. Economic development, service improvement, and saving money were all cited as primary goals of collaborative endeavors by respondents involved in the 25 operational collaborations identified through this survey. The four “other” responses suggested primary goals relating to demolition and land acquisition, traffic congestion relief, USA readiness, and sustainability – all of which could also be viewed as forms of service

Table 3: Motivations for Intergovernmental Collaboration

Motivations for Intergovernmental Collaboration	
Factors Motivating Collaborations	Percentage of Respondents
Economic Development	60%
Improve Service (or reduce service disparities)	40%
Budget Shortfall	32%
Reduce Future Risks to Community	24%
Avoid Annexation	12%
Persistent Leader or Convener	8%
Requested by the Public	8%
Other, please specify	4%
Federal/State Mandate	0%

Figure 7: Primary Goals of Operational Collaborations



improvement.

Perceived Impacts of Operational Collaborations

Local governments that are contemplating engagements in formal collaborations are concerned not only about their motivations and goals, but also about whether they are likely to achieve their goals. For this reason, we also included several questions in the survey which sought to gauge

whether local government officials involved in operational collaborations believed that their intergovernmental collaborations were achieving the goals that they had intended.

Table 4 presents information from the respondents on the extent to which they believe that their intergovernmental collaborations are achieving their primary goals.

The data presented in Table 4 are encouraging. The respondents uniformly indicated that they were experiencing at least

Table 4: Estimated Levels of Goal Attainment by Operational Local Government Collaborations

Estimated Levels of Goal Attainment by Operational Local Government Collaborations										
% - Responses	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	8%	8%	48%	16%	16%
# - Responses	0/25	0/25	0/25	0/25	1/25	2/25	2/25	12/25	4/25	4/25
Goal Attainment Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Goal Attainment Continuum	VERY LOW-----VERY HIGH									

some level of goal achievement. The lowest level of goal attainment indicated was at the midpoint of the scale provided (5, on a 1 to 10 scale). And, the vast majority of responses - 80% - indicated perceived levels of goal attainment in the 8 through 10 range, thus suggesting levels of perceived goal attainment that are rather high.

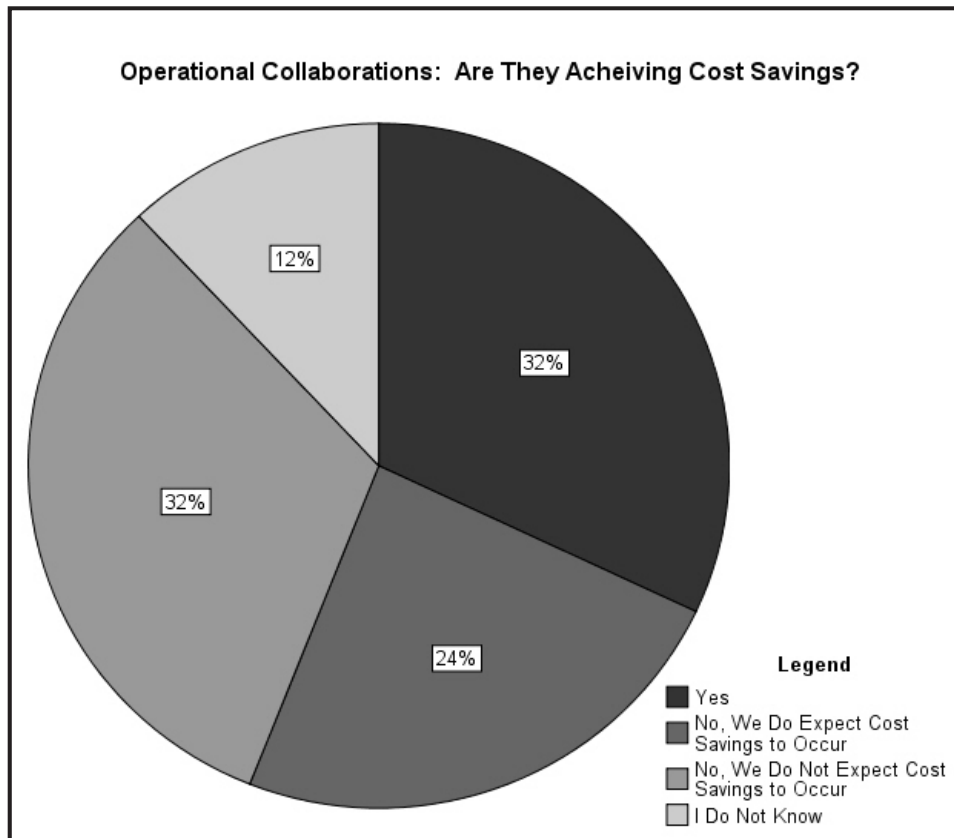
We also asked about the perceived achievement of *particular* goals sought by operational local government collaborations. Figure 8 provides information regarding whether or not respondents perceived that their collaborations were achieving cost savings. As is evident from the chart, 32% (8/25) of the respondents indicated that their intergovernmental collaboration was already achieving cost savings. Another 24% (6/25) of the respondents suggested that while cost savings had not yet been achieved, they were still expecting cost savings to accrue in the future. This means that 56% (14/25) of the officials

from operational collaborations believed that their collaboration was or would achieve cost savings.

Notably, among collaborators who indicated that cost savings was their primary goal, the percentage of respondents perceiving that cost savings had been achieved was even higher. Three of the four collaborators who cited cost savings as their primary goal had already achieved cost savings according to the respondents surveyed. In addition, the official surveyed from the fourth collaboration who cited cost savings as the primary goal indicated that cost savings were still expected to result from his/her collaboration in the future. This means that cost savings were achieved or are still expected to be achieved in 100% of the cases where cost savings was cited as the primary goal.

Figure 9 provides an indication of the levels of cost savings achieved by those respondents who perceived cost savings resulting

Figure 8: Operational Collaborations: Are They Achieving Cost Savings?



from their collaborations. As is evident from Figure 9, several of the respondents who cited cost savings (37.5 %, or 3 of 8) did not know how much cost savings had been achieved. The remaining five respondents (62.5%, or 5 of 8), however, estimated annual cost savings in the range of \$10,000 to \$500,000.

Figure 10 provides information on the extent to which respondents perceived that service improvements were resulting from their collaborations. As is evident from Figure 10, 36% (9/25) of the operational collaborations identified through the survey indicated service improvements. Officials representing an additional 28% (7/25) of these collaborations suggested that they were still expecting service improvements in the future. This means that a total of 64% of the surveyed officials from operational collaborations identified believed

that they had achieved service improvements or were still expecting to achieve them in the future.

Once again, however, among those collaborations where service improvement was the primary goal, the percentage of officials perceiving that service improvements had been achieved was even higher. Five of the seven collaborators who cited service improvement as the primary goal of their collaboration indicated that they had already achieved service improvements. And once again, the remaining two officials from collaborations where service improvements are the primary goal suggested that they still expected service improvements in the future. This means that service improvements were perceived to have been achieved or are still expected to be achieved in 100% of the cases where service improvements are cited as

Figure 9: Extent of Cost Savings Achieved by Collaboration Claiming Cost Savings

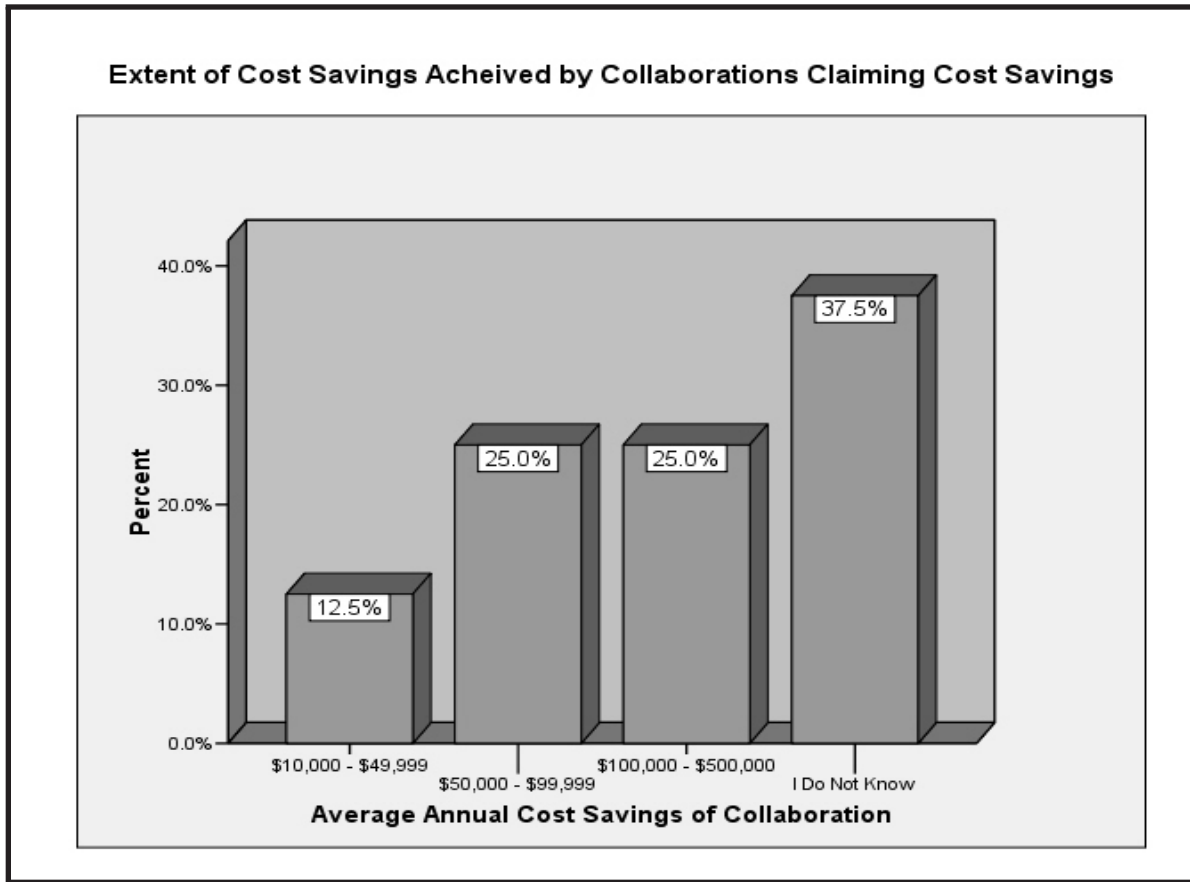
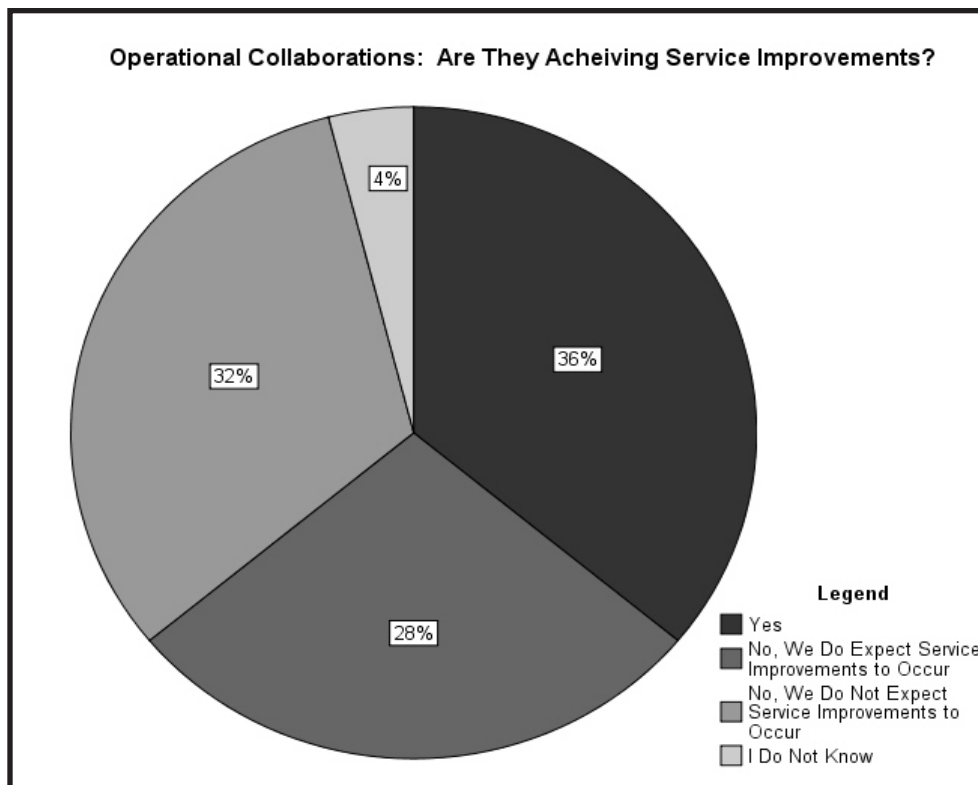


Figure 10: Operational Collaborations: Are They Achieving Service Improvements?



the primary goal of the collaboration.

Table 5 provides information on the types of service improvements that responding officials perceived were occurring as result of their collaborative project.

Two of the nine collaborators who participated in successful collaborations focusing on service improvements indicated that their services were now reaching more people, while another two collaborators said that their services had improved in quality and become more cost-effective, respectively. However, as is evident from the data in Table 5, more than half of the respondents cited other kinds of service improvements. Two of these “other” responses suggested that additional funds were being raised for services as a result of the collaborations, while the remaining three “other” responses cited training services and information sharing on best practices,

reduced emergency and fire response times, and advocacy and work progress. Clearly, service improvements appear to come in a wide range of forms.

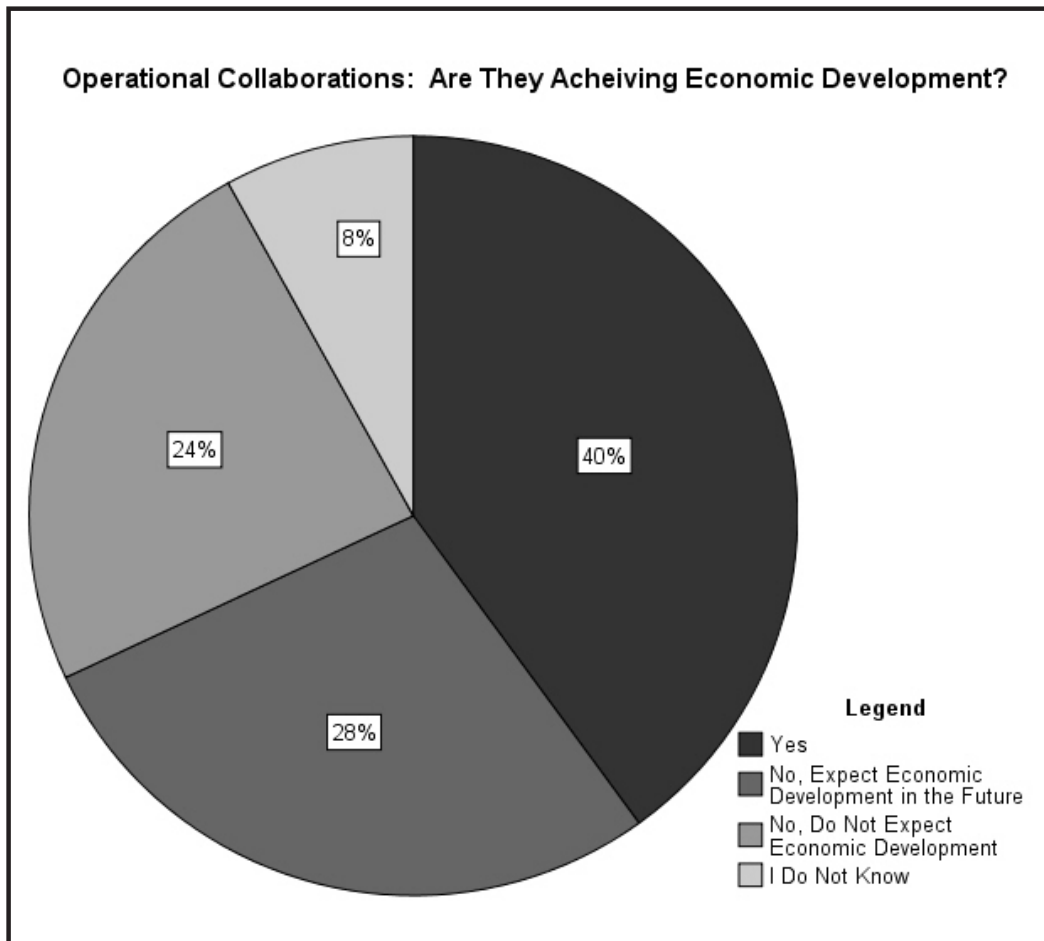
Figure 11 provides information on the extent to which the respondents perceived that their collaborations were achieving economic development improvements.

As is evident from the data in Figure 11, 40% (10/25) of the responding officials believe that they have already experienced economic development successes as a result of their collaborative endeavors. In addition, another 28% (7/25) of the surveyed officials indicated that while they may not yet have experienced economic development benefits, they still expect to achieve these kinds of benefits in the future. This means that 68% (17/25) of the surveyed officials from operational collaborations appear to be experiencing economic benefits already or

Table 5: Types of Service Delivery Improvement Among Successful Collaborations

Types of Service Delivery Improvement Among Successful Collaborations	
Type of Service Delivery Improvement	% Citing this Type of Service Improvement
The services reach more people	22%
The services are of higher quality	11%
The services are delivered more cost-effectively	11%
Other, please specify	56%
I do not know	0%

Figure 11: Operational Collaborations: Are They Achieving Economic Development?



still believe that they will do so in the future.

Once again, it makes sense to ascertain the extent to which collaborative endeavors that cite economic development as their primary goal are actually achieving this objective. Of the ten collaborative projects for which economic development is cited as the primary goal, seven appear to have already started reaping the benefits of success according to the officials surveyed. And, once again, the other three officials surveyed suggest that their collaborative project is still expected to achieve economic development benefits as a result of their collaborations. This means that

100% of the collaborators who have economic development as their primary goal appear to be achieving economic development benefits already or are still expecting to do so.

The ten collaborators who were successful in achieving their economic development goals cited a range of benefits associated with their collaborative endeavors. Table 6 provides data on the types of benefits that these collaborators cited in their survey responses.

As the data in Table 6 suggests, the economic benefits of operational collaborations include attracting both new businesses and new

jobs for a good number of the collaborators. They also include retaining businesses that would have left in several cases. The three collaborators citing “other” economic benefits all referred to economic benefits associated with enhanced tax revenues.

One cannot absorb the information presented above in this subsection without concluding that most of the operational collaborations in our sample appear to be achieving desirable benefits to at least some degree. This finding is important because it suggests that collaborative endeavors are worth undertaking, even though additional objective evidence of their effectiveness would be desirable (we return to this point later in this report). In the meantime, however, it is important to recognize that those participating in operational collaborations believe overwhelmingly that their collaborations are achieving important

benefits, including the goals originally set forth for them.

Challenges of Intergovernmental Collaboration

While the results presented in the previous subsection suggest that local governments engaging in collaborations appear to benefit from their efforts, it is also clear that local government collaborations face significant challenges. A good number of those responding also indicated that they could benefit from external assistance, a finding that echoes results from another recent study (Pascarella et al., 2009).

Of the 45 respondents to our survey who are involved in formal collaborative arrangements, 20 of them have not yet been able to make their collaborations operational. Ten of these 20 respondents indicated that assistance

Table 6: Economic Benefits of Operational Collaborations

Economic Benefits of Operational Collaborations	
Type of Economic Benefit	% of Successful Collaborators Citing Benefit
Attracted New Business to the Area	90%
Attracted More Jobs to the Area	80%
Retained Businesses that Would have left	30%
Other, please specify	30%
Does Not Know	0%

from professionals outside of their collaborative group would help them achieve the goals of their collaborations. Table 7 provides information on the kinds of assistance that these respondents indicated would help them move forward in achieving their collaborative goals.

As the table suggests, it appears that a good number of proposed collaborative endeavors might benefit from different kinds of assistance, including case studies, models of successful collaborations, model ordinances and resolutions, technical and legal assistance, training, and potentially other forms of external assistance as well.

Operational collaborations also experience challenges, as officials representing more than two-thirds of the operational collaborations in the survey pool indicated that they had faced obstacles in implementing and/

or administering their collaborations. These respondents cited a wide range of challenges and obstacles, including budget shortfalls, a lack of appropriate authorities, political resistance, a lack of adequate coordination in their collaborative efforts, and a lack of sufficient public support. Successful collaborations, it appears, do not occur spontaneously. They require work, resources, and often assistance to overcome a range of challenges and obstacles.

Implications

The results presented above have implications for citizens and communities in Ohio, local governments, and state policymakers. The findings also have implications for further research. While we know more about current efforts to engage local governments in collaborations in Ohio now than we did

Table 7: Types of External Assistance that Would be Helpful to Collaborations that are Not Yet Operational

Types of Assistance that Would be Helpful to Collaborations that are Not Yet Operational	
Type of Assistance Desired	Percent of Non-Operational Collaborations Indicating that this Assistance would help them Achieve their Goals
Case studies on successful collaborations	80%
Access to successful models and resource contacts for successful collaborations	70%
Model ordinances, resolutions, & contracts	50%
Technical or legal assistance	50%
Training on “how to” of collaboration	40%
Help in changing state laws, where necessary	20%
Other, please specify	20%

six months ago, our findings also clarify how much we have yet to learn. This latter insight is important not only because it can guide future research, but also because improving our knowledge base is important for facilitating productive local government collaborations.

For citizens and communities, the results presented above suggest that local government collaboration holds the potential to foster economic development, improved services, and more cost-effective government. While many of the collaborations we identified focus on economic development, local government collaborations are nevertheless wide ranging with regard to the subject matters they address. Active citizens and communities can thus draw from an array of new local government collaborations to help them identify ideas for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of local government services. To do so, however, they will need to find ways to access useful information from these efforts and this will require both the development of a useful knowledge base on local government collaborations and the creation of user-friendly means to access it.

For local governments, it is important to recognize that the results presented above make it clear that local government collaboration is not *just* talk. The results suggest that discussions about intergovernmental collaboration in Ohio are actually leading to operational collaborations. And, based on the views of local government officials in our survey sample, it appears that these operational collaborations are yielding benefits for the communities that are involved in them. The results also suggest that these benefits are multi-dimensional, and include not only cost savings but service improvements and economic development advances as well. Indeed, it is worth noting that the data presented here suggest that desires for economic development and public service improvement are at least as likely to yield successful collaborations as desires for cost savings.

At the same time, however, the results above also make it clear that local government collaboration does not happen automatically or without challenges. Local government collaborations face many challenges and they include:

- a need to build relationships across political jurisdictions;
- a need to develop good ideas and plans for their implementation;
- a need to overcome political resistance (at least in some cases);
- a need to find sources of funding to support collaborative efforts;
- a need to gain external assistance in facilitating appropriate decision-making processes within and between communities, and;
- a need to become educated about the options for collaborations and ways in which communities can make good decisions about how to proceed in collaborating with one another.

In short, the results of this study suggest that intergovernmental collaborations can be beneficial, but they also suggest that successful intergovernmental collaboration often requires initiative and incentives, a knowledge base to guide decision-making, external assistance, and hard work.

State government is in a position to assist citizens, communities, and local governments in making greater use of collaborative strategies to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of local government services. This assistance could come in at least two major forms. First, state government could build a capacity to monitor innovations in local government service provision, reward innovations that are particularly valuable, and publicize the benefits of those innovations that do occur. This kind of effort could provide incentives for local government collaborations, as well as a means to help educate citizens, communities, and local

governments about ways in which they might be able to foster economic development, improve services, and/or save money. While this kind of effort would require an investment in capacities to monitor local government collaborations and recognize them appropriately, the results above suggest that it might very well prove to be a worthwhile investment.

Second, state government could use its relationships with local governments to provide incentives for collaborations that yield more effective and efficient public services. The State of Ohio possesses a long tradition of home rule and efforts to respect the autonomy of local government decision-making processes.⁶ It also provides assistance to local governments in a range of ways, including funding local government services, providing financial audit assistance, and licensing and/or certifying local government professionals, to name just a few. These and/or other assistance mechanisms provide potential avenues through which state government might develop incentives for collaborations that yield more efficient and effective local government services. These state-local government connections could be explored more thoroughly to ascertain whether they might be used to incentivize improvements in local government collaboration, while also respecting the value and importance of autonomous local decision-making processes and prerogatives.

If the state were to pursue one or more of the approaches discussed above, it might also want to consider engaging in an effort to expand the base of readily available knowledge concerning existing local government collaborations and ways in which they might

be improved, expanded, and/or transferred to other jurisdictions. While local government collaboration sounds as desirable as “apple pie,” it is not at all clear that local government collaboration makes sense in *all* cases. It may be that some forms of collaboration are quite desirable in a wide range of situations, while other forms of collaboration are effective and desirable only in certain kinds of cases. Still other forms of collaboration may not be a good idea at all. While the OCLGRC’s efforts to expand our knowledge base on local government collaboration in recent months have been helpful, our knowledge base in these areas remains under-developed. Given the promising results presented above, state investment in research and education relating to local government collaboration would be appropriate to expand upon the base of knowledge that could be used to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local government services.

If this kind of research and education effort were to be undertaken, several kinds of projects might be considered. First, to establish a baseline for understanding the full range local government practices regarding collaboration, it might be useful to conduct a large scale statewide survey of local governments regarding current practices relevant to local government collaboration. This survey could target a wide range of different kinds of local governments without regard to their past engagement in local government collaborations. Such an effort would provide a broader base for understanding the full range of current practices relevant to local government collaboration. It might also be used to establish a baseline measure of current practices that could aid researchers and practitioners in understanding whether changes in collaborative practices are actually occurring, and whether they are yielding actual improvements in local government service provision over time. While assessments of the practices of innovative local governments are useful for identifying potentialities and lessons

6 It is important to acknowledge, however, that this tradition has been challenged in recent years by legislative and judicial decisions that compromise home rule powers (see Mayors Think Tank, 2008).

for transfer to others, they are not appropriate for establishing a statewide baseline for measuring progress in local government collaboration over time.

Second, an effort to assess the actual results of different kinds of collaborations under differing kinds of circumstances might also be helpful. While the positive views of innovating local government officials reported above are promising, they are based on the perceptions of individuals involved in the process of developing and administering local government collaborations. In the end, if state government is to help foster useful changes in local government practices, the changes it advocates should probably be supported – to the extent possible – by objective criteria and data, as well as the perceptions of individual leaders who are involved in the development and implementation of new practices.

Third, it might also be useful to develop a more empirically based understanding of the factors that actually drive local government collaboration. Existing literature in public administration suggests that a range of factors may drive collaborations among public sector entities (see Berman, 1996 and Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006, for example). These factors include:

- the existence of complex problems requiring multiple perspectives for resolution;
- significant reductions in resources;
- legal, regulatory, or institutional requirements;
- failures to address important problems on the part of particular policy sectors, and;
- the presence of compelling leadership and/or a convener to foster collaborative progress.

Empirically based studies to assess the impact of these (and potentially other) factors on the success (and/or existence) of local government collaborations would enable more conscious

and rational choices about when and where to place priority on implementing new local government collaborations. More conscious and rational choices on when and where to foster collaborations, in turn, are likely to yield more productive collaborations and greater benefits to the communities involved.

And finally, as was mentioned above, any effort to improve our knowledge of collaborative local government service provision in Ohio (and to develop means to improve its efficiency and effectiveness) should be accompanied by some robust means to disseminate the knowledge base that it creates. At the present time, there does not appear to be any major and long term effort of this kind being undertaken. However, the results reported here suggest that leading local government collaboration innovators believe that this kind of assistance could be helpful in enabling local governments to achieve their collaborative goals. Case studies, successful models, technical assistance, and training were all mentioned as potentially useful endeavors by respondents to the survey above, and these same forms of assistance were endorsed by large numbers of respondents to the FFEF's September 2009 survey of local government collaborators (Pascarella, et al., 2009).

If the State of Ohio is to play a role in helping local governments to collaborate more effectively with one another, it should consider further exploration of the kinds of activities and efforts described above. In so doing, it should also consider developing some form of ongoing capacity to provide research and educational assistance to inform and connect local governments that are seeking to improve their services through local government collaboration.

Conclusion

Even a cursory review of local newspapers in Ohio makes it clear that citizens, communities, and local governments are facing significant challenges. Local governments throughout the state are facing revenue shortfalls, and these shortfalls are affecting services and tax burdens that impact citizens and communities. Intergovernmental collaboration is being cited as a means to address these financial problems.¹ At the same time, citizens, communities, local governments, and the state as a whole are facing major public service challenges in areas that require inter-jurisdictional coordination -- economic development, urban sprawl, watershed protection, and public safety and security represent just a handful of these challenges. It is in these contexts that the importance of local government collaboration should become obvious and evident to all.

The survey results presented above make it clear that a number of local governments in Ohio are attempting to “walk the walk” of local government collaboration. They also suggest that a number of these attempts are becoming operational and are achieving positive results. While these results are encouraging, they

do not reveal a scale of collaborative effort that is sufficient to address the financial and service provision problems that the citizens and communities of Ohio are facing. In a state with more than 3500 local governments, the results presented above verify the existence of effective local government collaborations in a relatively small number of cases. At the same time, however, multiple challenges and obstacles to greater use of collaborative strategies by local governments suggest that a significant expansion of current efforts is necessary to address the kinds of issues that Ohio is facing.

One of the major issues facing the State of Ohio in the early years of the 21st Century is whether and how to aid local governments in transforming themselves to address a new era of financial and public service challenges. The discussion above presents some ideas on steps that local and state officials may take to address at least some of these challenges through local government collaborations. Our hope is that this report and the survey results presented in it provide policymakers with a sense of what might be possible in the future, as well as some ideas regarding steps that they can take to help realize these possibilities.

¹ For example, a recent Cleveland Plain Dealer article highlighted Cleveland’s estimated \$30 to \$50 million revenue shortfall for next year and the potential role of shared services and service consolidations to help the city address these shortfalls (Gomez and McCarty, 2009).

References

Berman, E. M. (1996). Local Government and Community-Based Strategies: Evidence from a National Survey of a Social Problem. *American Review of Public Administration*, 26(1), 71-91.

Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B., & Stone, M. (2006). The Design and Implementation of Cross Sector Collaborations: Propositions from the Literature. *Public Administration Review*, 66(1): 44-55.

Gomez, H. J., & McCarty, J. F. (2009 November, 11). "No Layoffs, but City Report Recommends Consolidations" *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, pp.B-1, Metro Section. Retrieved from <http://mobile.plaind.com/story.php?id=8257610>.

The Northeast Ohio Mayors' Think Tank (2008). *Exploring the Balance of Power between Local and State Government*. Kent, Ohio: The Center for Public Administration and Public Policy, Kent State University.

Pascarella, T., Hoornbeek, J.A. & Macomber, K. (2009). *Survey Results Analysis: Fund for Our Economic Future's EfficientGovNow (EGN) Grant Program*, Unpublished Manuscript, Center for Public Administration and Public Policy, Kent State University, Kent, OH.

Rogers, E. (1983). *Diffusion of Innovations*. New York: Free Press.

US Census Bureau (2007) *Local Governments and Public School Systems by Type and State: 2007*. Washington, D.C.: US Census Bureau, Governments Division. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/govs/cog/GovOrgTab03ss.html>

Appendix

The Survey Questionnaire

This survey is part of an effort by the Center for Public Administration and Public Policy at KSU to improve local government collaborations in order to enhance public services, save money, and foster economic development in Ohio. Again, the survey should only take about 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have questions about KSU's rules for research, please call Dr. John West, Vice President for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies at 330-672-3012.

1. Is your community involved in a formal collaborative effort of any kind with other public sector entities?

Yes
No

2. Can you please provide the title of the most recent collaborative effort that your community is now implementing?

- 2.1. Which of the following statements best reflects the current status of this collaborative effort (please check only one).

We are discussing a proposed collaboration, but have not yet proceeded with it
We are conducting a formal study of a specified collaboration
We are now establishing an agreement to collaborate
We have an established agreement to collaborate, and we are administering it

- 2.2. Would assistance from professionals outside of your collaboration group help you achieve the goals of the collaboration?

Yes
No

3. Which of the following topics best describes this collaboration?
(please check only one)

Utilities Management
Merging Services
Joint Economic Development District
Joint Police/SWAT Service
Joint School District
Solid Waste District
Storm-water Management District
Regional Dispatch
Joint Fire/EMS
Material/ Equipment Sharing
Other, please specify

- 3.1 If you selected Utilities Management, which of the following applies?
(check all that apply)

Water/Wastewater
Electricity
Gas
Other, please specify

- 3.2 If you selected Merging Services, which of the following applies?
(Check all that apply)

Bulk Purchasing
Joint Public Health District
Consolidated Building Department
Public Safety Agreement w/Sheriff
Other, please specify

4. What is the population that lives within the collaboration's jurisdiction?

Under 1,000
1,000-5,000
5,000-10,000
10,000-50,000
50,000-100,000
100,000-500,000
500,000-1,000,000
1,000,000+

5. What were the main motivators for collaboration? (Check all that apply)

Requested by the Public
Improve Service (or reduce service disparities)
Budget Shortfall
A desire to reduce future risks to our community
Federal/State Mandate
Avoid Annexation
Economic Development
A persistent leader/convenor
Other, please specify

6. What is the primary goal of the collaboration? (check only one)

Save Money
Improve Service Delivery
Economic Development
No Clear Goals
Other, please specify

7. On a scale of 1 to 10, to what degree are you achieving the primary goal you set forward for your collaboration? (check only one)

- 7.1 To the extent you are achieving your goal(s), what factors do you believe are important to your success? (Check all that apply)

A good idea that is achievable
Strong prior relationships with our partners
Resources from external sources
A well researched plan of action
Support from external experts and/or organizations
Other, please specify

8. Have you encountered any obstacles in implementing and/or administering this collaboration?

Yes
No

8.1 What were the main obstacles you encountered? (Check any that apply)

- Lack of Public Support
- Lack of Authority
- Unfunded State Mandates
- Budget Shortfall
- Other, please specify

9. What legal mechanism has been used to formalize the agreement to collaborate?

- Memorandum of Understanding
- Contract
- Council of Governments
- Other, please specify

10. What year was your original collaboration agreement put into effect?

11. What is the duration of your collaborative agreement?

- 0-1 years
- 2-5 years
- 6-15 years
- 16-50 years
- 51+ years

12. What is the lead agency or lead community for administration of the agreement? (By lead, we mean the agency/community that plays the most extensive role in administering the collaboration.)

Agency:

Community:

13. How many separate entities are signatories on the agreement?
 (By entities, we are asking for governments and any departments within their jurisdiction, e.g. police from the city of Cleveland would be one city; Cuyahoga County Sheriffs would be county, etc.)

Counties # =

Names:

Cities # =

Names:

Villages # =

Names:

Townships # =

Names:

Other Government Jurisdiction # =

Names:

14. How is each collaboration funded?

Community Funds – Counties	_____	%
Community Funds – Cities	_____	%
Community Funds – Villages	_____	%
Community Funds – Townships	_____	%
State Grants	_____	%
Federal Grants	_____	%
Private Funds	_____	%
I don't know		
Other		

15. Has the collaboration resulted in cost savings to your community?

Yes
 No, and we do not expect cost savings to occur
 No, but we expect cost savings to occur in the future
 I do not know

- 15.1. What has been the average annual cost savings to your community since the year that your collaboration was formalized? (Please check only one box)

\$0-9,999
 \$10,000-49,999
 \$50,000-99,999
 \$100,000-500,000
 \$1,000,000 - 5,000,000
 More than \$5,000,000
 I do not know

16. Has the collaboration resulted in improved service delivery to its residents in your community?

Yes
 No, and we do not expect service improvements to occur as a result of this collaboration
 No, but we do expect service improvements to occur in the future
 I do not know

- 16.1. What service delivery improvements have been realized since the collaboration's inception?

The services reach more people.
 The services are of higher quality
 The services are delivered more cost-effectively
 Other, please specify
 I do not know

17. Has the collaboration resulted in economic development for your community?

Yes
 No, and we do not expect economic development to occur as a result of this collaboration
 No, but we do expect economic developments to occur
 I do not know

- 17.1. Please identify the kinds of economic benefits that have been achieved as a result of the collaboration. (please check all that apply)

We have attracted new businesses to our area
 We have attracted more jobs to our area
 We have retained businesses that otherwise would have left our area
 Other, please specify
 I do not know

18. What is your preferred method of contact (please check box)?

Your Name:

Title:

Address:

Telephone:

Email:

This completes the survey!!! Thank you for your time.
Click NEXT to end the survey.