

Joined-Up Management: A Next Step in Cross-Agency Collaboration

by Dan Chenok

Most government activities are managed through programs in agencies. The pace of technology and business change is causing leading organizations that have always collaborated to move to a new model of managing activities from a cross-program view, leveraging resources to more effectively serve a citizen or business.

For most of the last century, when the government determined a need for an activity in a certain area, the response has come in the form of a program that sits within an agency. Funding is requested by administrations within accounts dedicated to that program. Congress then authorizes funds under committees focused on the program. Managers run their programs as a line operation, with staff (and often contractors) working within program authorities in a hierarchical structure. Oversight processes from OMB to Congress to outside interest groups are aligned to influence the program. Results are generally measured by how much money is spent, how many people are served, and in some cases by outcomes tied to particular program missions.

Over the past two decades, coinciding with the growth of the Internet as an information resource without boundaries, a growing number of initiatives have sought to collaborate across programs to better align government resources to those being served: citizens, business, schools, states, or cities. These initiatives have evolved over time. For example:

- The Clinton administration’s National Performance Review (NPR) opened the floodgates for cross-program ideas. NPR leaders first explored the idea of reformulating government services around life events like births, college attendance, starting a business, and retiring. Innovators came together under the auspices of NPR to define the art of the possible.
- The Bush administration’s e-government initiatives used technology to integrate resources through front doors that the public could enter to access common services and information, without regard to which agency hosted a given service. To make these front doors work effectively, OMB brought together agency officials who wanted to



make change happen, creating committees and boards that oversaw coordinated delivery of services.

- The Obama administration’s “High-Priority Goals” focus on improving the performance of over a dozen activities with programs in multiple agencies. These goals include doubling exports, which involves more than eight contributing agencies and over 40 programs within them, and improving cybersecurity, which involves virtually every agency in the government. The goals address significant mission challenges in government and have a common set of performance measures, so that the collaboration centers on government programs that have a direct effect for citizens or businesses.

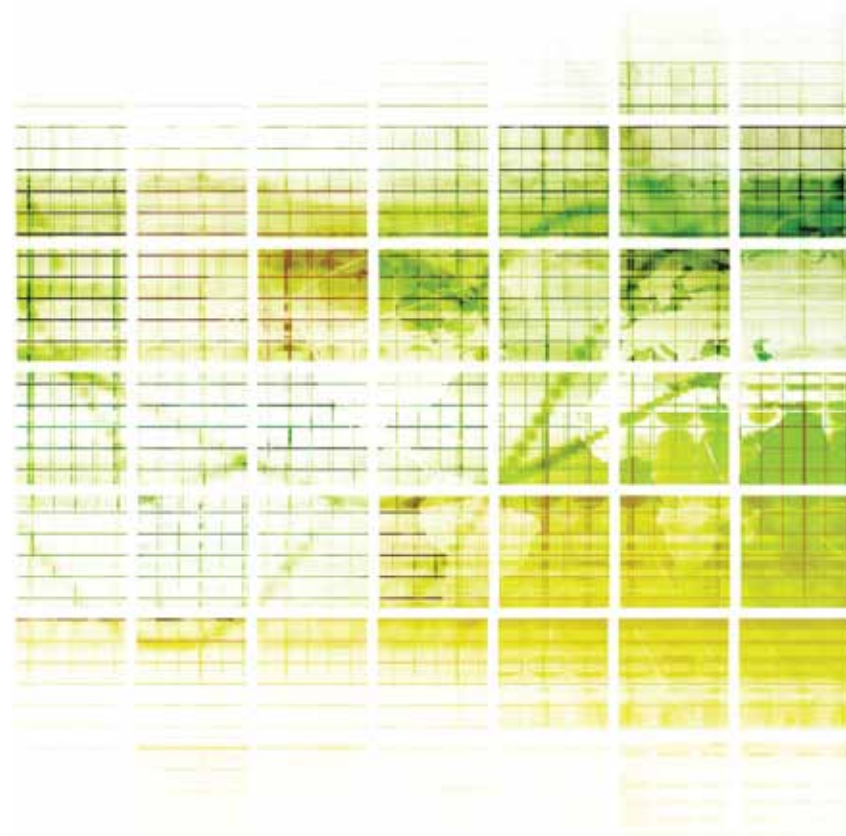
While technology can both identify consistencies and expose differences in how agencies provide services in areas ranging from education to environment to public safety, transparency and interagency coordination are only first steps. A second is collaborating to develop consistency in how services are delivered in such areas, so that managers do not perpetuate

different ways of doing business to achieve the same goal. To understand how important this is, just ask states that receive federal funding from numerous agencies how much time and money they spend following different compliance and reporting paths.

Significantly, last month the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report addressing a variety of mechanisms for collaborating effectively. It can be found at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/650/648934.pdf>. The report catalogues a dozen specific mechanisms the government currently uses to collaborate across boundaries. GAO also offers a self-assessment checklist of seven key design features that collaborative network leaders need to consider when using these approaches. These features include:

- **Outcomes and accountability:** Have short-term and long-term outcomes been clearly defined? Is there a way to track and monitor their progress?
- **Bridging organizational cultures:** What are the missions and organizational cultures of the participating agencies? Have agencies agreed on common terminology and definitions?
- **Leadership:** How will leadership be sustained over the long term? If leadership is shared, have roles and responsibilities been clearly identified and agreed upon?
- **Clarity of roles and responsibilities:** Have participating agencies clarified roles and responsibilities?
- **Participants:** Have all relevant participants been included? Do they have the ability to commit resources for their agency?
- **Resources:** How will the collaborative mechanism be funded and staffed? Have online collaboration tools been developed?
- **Written guidance and agreements:** If appropriate, have participating agencies documented their agreements regarding how they will be collaborating? Have they developed ways to continually update and monitor these agreements?

Ultimately, lasting and real change will involve the ability to manage in ways that capitalize on the multiple paths to reach beneficiaries of common services. The simplest approach to this would seemingly be to reorganize around these common services. But as has been demonstrated time and again, government reorganizations are complex and fraught with legal, institutional, and budgetary challenges. As an alternative path, successful leaders in government can follow the enterprise model of the private sector, using



technology and information to manage jointly across agencies—building from collaborative networks to share operations, overcome programmatic silos, and improve services.

There are many examples of interagency committees to coordinate programs across common areas; however, most of those entities come together quickly, agree on a strategy forward, and then go back to their agencies to implement that strategy. What if leaders took the opportunity to build on some successful models of actually managing programs in a coordinated way? For example, a recent interagency cybersecurity committee (see description at <http://www.gsnmagazine.com/node/27304>) not only established goals across civilian and national security agencies, but also set up joint review processes to ensure that standards across agencies built off one another.

Success factors in such a joint management model have some commonalities with the GAO study list, and include:

- Leaders should establish and communicate a clear vision and mission.
- Roles and responsibilities should be transparent to all stakeholders.

- Funding streams should be identified up front and be clear throughout.
- Participation in joint activities should come from committed staff, who form teams with similar performance incentives for the group effort.
- Success should be based on clear measures that tie back to individual agency metrics (as opposed to agency measures that differ from those of the group).
- As the agency best positioned to incentivize collaboration, OMB should establish accountability structures that reward cross-agency management.
- Communications with key congressional staff should occur early and often.

The ability to move from collaboration to joint management by leveraging multiple agency resources will only grow over the next four years, as leveraged technology and management models (including the cloud and “big data”) point out opportunities to gain greater performance by combining efforts across organizations and processes in key mission areas. In the longer term, successful management integration without organizational change might also make it easier for key players to support such change in the future. ■



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