

SUPPORTING HIGH PERFORMANCE GOVERNMENT

Leading Large Scale Change

March 28th, 2006

Working Together: A Close in Look at Interagency Collaboration

Panelists:

John Doherty Commissioner, Department of Sanitation

Kate Ascher Executive Vice President Economic Development Corporation

Susan Kath Environmental Law Chief, Law Department

Haeda Mihaltses Director, Mayor's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs

Maryanne Schretzman Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Planning Department of Homeless Services

Peter Cantillo Assistant Deputy General Manager of Operations for Support Services, New York City Housing Authority

Harold Shultz Special Counsel, Department of Housing Preservation and Development

Patricia M. Smith First Deputy Commissioner, Human Resources Administration/ Department of Social Services

Moderator:

Gordon Campbell Chief Executive Officer of Safe Horizon

Prepared by

Richard Cho, Doctoral Student, NYU/Wagner



Supporting High Performance Government: Leading Large Scale Change
“Working Together: A Closer Look at Interagency Collaboration”
March 28, 2006

Executive Summary

Introduction

Accenture and the Research Center for Leadership in Action of the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University are co-hosting an Executive Briefing series for public sector managers to discuss the multiple managerial and leadership challenges of implementing large scale change. The series seeks to:

- Encourage the exchange of ideas between senior managers of complex change programs and those emerging leaders charged with undertaking similar efforts.
- Support a cadre of new leaders interested in undertaking such challenges, providing them with the insights, learning and the collegial support that will help sustain their work over time, and
- Promote further learning about how successful complex change initiatives are designed and managed, and capture this information in written reports.

Each session is organized around a central strategic and managerial question of particular relevance to large-scale change. The session held on March 28, 2006, entitled “Working Together: A Closer Look at Interagency Collaboration ” focused on the challenges and strategies for pursuing an effective interagency collaboration.

Background and Context

Large-scale change initiatives often require effective inter-agency collaboration. The Executive Briefing held on March 28, 2006 focused on the major leadership challenges of inter-agency collaboration. The briefing examined three primary questions:

- With multiple agendas represented, how does a multi-agency coordinating group reach an agreement about its desired results?
- Agencies have specific and unique public mandates that do not always align. How do collaborations with multiple agencies address the differences in their purpose and approach?
- Decisions of coordinating groups affect program as well as policy. Which mechanisms help insure that agency management is kept abreast of coordinating group commitments and that both policy and program decisions are implemented at the individual agency level?

Two sets of panelists, representing two case studies of interagency collaboration, were invited to share their perspectives on these three questions. The two panels were members of two ongoing interagency collaborative efforts: the Homeless Housing Working Group and the Solid Waste Management Program Working Group. Both are comprised of a range of agencies all of which have come together in intense collaboration with an approach and focus on holistic problem solving.

The briefing was moderated by Gordon Campbell, Chief Executive Officer of Safe Horizon, former Commissioner of the New York City Department of Homeless Services, and former Chief of Staff to the First Deputy Mayor.

The Solid Waste Management Working Group included:

- John Doherty, Commissioner, Department of Sanitation
- Kate Ascher, Executive Vice President, Economic Development Corporation
- Susan Kath, Environmental Law, Chief, Law Department
- Haeda Mihaltses, Director, Mayor's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs

The Homeless Housing Working Group included:

- Maryanne Schretzman, Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Planning, Department of Homeless Services
- Peter Cantillo, Assistant Deputy General Manager of Operations for Support Services, New York City Housing Authority
- Harold Shultz, Special Counsel, Department of Housing Preservation and Development
- Patricia M. Smith, First Deputy Commissioner, Human Resources Administration/
Department of Social Services

Key Challenge: Knowing when and why to collaborate

Leaders in city government often acknowledge that the work of running agencies or making policy is rarely “a solo act.” Nearly every effort, task, or initiative necessarily involves and affects other agencies and stakeholders within city government. While this is true, leaders in city government seldom seem to engage other agencies and stakeholders, let alone enter into formal interagency collaborations. Everyday workloads are demanding, building a meaningful collaboration takes time and entails lots and lots of meetings, and the last thing city government workers want is yet another set of meetings. And few Mayors or City Managers ever give direct orders to their agency executives to collaborate with one another.

The culture of leadership within city governments may also discourage leaders from asking for help from other agencies. Leaders may view the desire for collaboration as a sign of ineffectiveness or inability to lead. Or they may be wary of seeking for help from other officials, thinking, “Everyone is dealing with huge challenges and demands. Why should anyone stop what they are doing to help me?” or even, “Why should I help anyone else when I have my own job to do?”

At times, the tendency within city governments to go about “business as usual” and not pursue interagency collaboration is unfortunate when one considers the tremendous accomplishments that can arise from successful interagency collaboration. Interagency collaborations have led to improved functioning of agencies, solutions to once intractable problems, and even greater efficiencies in governance resulting in public savings. Given the potential benefit of interagency collaboration, it would seem that leaders would pursue such interagency collaboration more often.

To do so, they must first recognize when the need and opportunity for interagency collaboration arise. Thus, a key challenge to leadership is simply knowing when to pursue interagency collaboration.

The briefing panelists offer some insights for how the need for collaboration arose and how leaders in city government recognized the need for collaboration. For the Solid Waste Management Program working group, the need for collaboration arose as a result of a specific event and change in policy: the closing of the Fresh Kills landfill in 2001. Department of Sanitation Commissioner John Doherty recollects, “It was an amazing changeover at that point. We went overnight from having Fresh Kills to not having Fresh Kills.” The closing of the 2,200-acre landfill represented a tremendous shift in city waste management policy. Fresh Kills had been the primary dumping site for the City’s commercial and residential waste. For Commissioner Doherty, the closure meant that he would rapidly need to find alternative ways to dispose of the City’s solid waste: “We all realized in City government that we had to find a better approach.”

This new approach meant finding a means to transport 50,000 tons of solid waste to other states and localities, and initially, the City attempted to use small infrastructure transfer (transport by road). However, it became quickly apparent that truck transport alone was not adequate, and that a rail transport system would be needed. This, in turn, meant that the Department of Sanitation would need to site four rail transfer stations where solid waste could be loaded and transported out of the city. And, in the understated words of Commissioner Doherty, “The politics of sitting is difficult.” Thus, although directly charged by the Mayor to come up with a transfer plan, Commissioner Doherty recognized that he could not tackle the daunting task of sitting four waste transfer stations in New York City alone, and therefore, went to City Hall to ask for help. Haeda Mihaltses, Director of the Mayor’s Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, remarks, “The Mayor empowered the Sanitation Commissioner to come up with a plan, so John went to City Hall and asked for help.”

For the Homeless Housing Working Group, the need for collaboration arose out of a change in leadership at the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). DHS Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Planning Maryanne Schretzman recalls, “[Commissioner Linda Gibbs and I] had just come over from child welfare. We felt that there we had spearheaded a great transformation in the child welfare system, scaling it down from 43,000 to 23,000 children. Some critics said that the decrease was not real because those clients simply relocated to Homeless Services, but that was inaccurate. The year was 2002, and we were in an economic recession. Many families were experiencing housing instability and coming into the [shelter] system, due to a myriad of situations. The system was set up such that the only response we could offer was to provide shelter; there were no mechanisms in place for prevention or rental assistance, etc..” Believing that they could replicate their successful approach to downsizing a system at DHS, Commissioner Gibbs and Deputy Commissioner Schretzman soon found that they faced a different kind of problem as the shelter census continued to rise with no limit in sight. The multitude of court proceedings the plaintiffs repeatedly brought, forced a focus on compliance with court orders. This impeded the executives from restructuring the system, let alone actually designing creative solutions to assist families.

Another part of the problem, it turned out, was the slow rate at which families moved out of shelters. This was in part due to the lack of readily accessible, affordable permanent housing for homeless families. The dearth of innovative strategies in prevention, reducing length of stay and housing placements was the legacy of prior administration’s focus on court mandates, and responding primarily to finding capacity to meet the emergency shelter needs. . Deputy

Commissioner Schretzman knew that reducing length of stay in shelters would mean rapidly out-placing homeless families into permanent affordable housing. Having no means of offering such housing on their own, DHS knew they had to re-engage those City agencies charged with housing issues: the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). In addition, given the context of ongoing litigation, the Office of Management and Budget and the Law Department had to be included in any collaborative efforts. As Deputy Commissioner Schretzman puts it, “It was a crisis situation and we knew we needed all of these other partners.”

Interestingly, neither of these collaborations arose out of a mandate from the Mayor or from any other top-down directive. Instead, for both Sanitation and Homeless Services, the impetus for interagency collaboration arose out of a new large-scale change effort and leadership challenge. In the case of the Department of Sanitation, this new leadership challenge resulted from a policy shift—the closure of the City’s primary landfill—which necessitated a search for an entirely new and alternative system for waste disposal. Similarly, in the case of the Department of Homeless Services, a change in leadership led a shift in policy focus—from shelter management to reducing the shelter census—which led to a need for resources held by other agencies. And in both cases, it was ultimately the agency’s leaders who recognized the need and called for collaboration.

Key Leadership Challenge: Taking the first steps toward collaboration

Upon recognizing the need for interagency collaboration, leaders in city government are faced with several questions. Who needs to be at the table? How can they be convinced to participate? What will the roles of the partners be? The briefing panelists provided their own experiences regarding how they went about answering these initial questions and how they took the first steps towards collaboration.

Who needs to be at the table?

In the case of Sanitation, the decision about who to invite to the collaboration was driven by obvious gaps in expertise. The siting of waste transfer stations demands both technical (environmental and transportation) expertise as well as skills with political and community relations. Although knowledgeable about sanitation and waste management, Commissioner Doherty needed assistance with tackling the technical and political aspects of the plan. Thus, upon his request for assistance from City Hall, Haeda Mihaltses performed a quick calculus about where this expertise could be found: “[Sanitation] needed to get counsel [around environmental issues]. EDC got involved because it had expertise on transportation.” Accordingly, Mihaltses invited Kate Ascher from the Economic Development Corporation, who had expertise in transportation issues, and Susan Kath, Chief of the Environmental Law Division at the Law Department.

For DHS, the decision about who to include in the collaboration was not a function of gaps in expertise, but by considerations about who possessed critical resources. The New York City Housing Authority possessed the bulk of the City’s Section 8 vouchers and therefore was a logical partner to include. However, DHS also realized that Section 8 vouchers, which cover the difference between market rents and the tenant contribution (30% of the tenant’s gross monthly income), would only be useful to homeless families if the families had income to pay the tenant portion of the rents. For homeless families, this tenant contribution would most likely come from public assistance. Hence, the next logical partner was the Human Resources Administration. Deputy

Commissioner Schretzman recalls, “Initially, we went to NYCHA to get Section 8s...Then we went to Pat [Smith, First Deputy Commissioner of the Human Resources Administration], because we needed public assistance to satisfy the tenant’s rent under Section 8.” HPD was asked to participate in an attempt to determine how to increase priority access to units within its financed housing developments. In a sense, DHS chose partners for their collaboration simply based upon who had what DHS needed in order for DHS to solve its problem. Other relevant agencies such as the Law Department and the Office of Management and Budget were brought in as needed. In fact, all these agencies joined together to facilitate a one -city strategy in to maximize and expedite the moving of families from a shelter to their own home.

Engaging collaboration partners: the importance of listening and learning

Selecting potential partners and “bringing them to the table” is only the very first step in the actual process of interagency collaboration. The next step is convincing these partners to collaborate, and building a rapport and relationship to form the basis on which to work together. Although the general reasons and willingness to collaborate may seem clear and unproblematic, in actuality, building such a relationship is no simple matter. It not only involves a clear elaboration of the problem and a convincing argument for why the partners have a crucial role in solving the problem, it also involves a willingness to listen and be helpful. In cases where one organization has called for or is leading the collaboration, this organization plays an important role as convener, engaging the prospective partners, often spending time with each partner individually. This lead organization should not only consider what it needs from partners, but also what it can do to make it easier for these partners to help the lead organization. And for those possibly skeptical potential partners, an attitude of cooperativeness and willingness to listen is crucial.

In the case of the Homeless Housing Working Group, under the leadership of the Mayor’s Chief of Staff, Peter Madonia played the role of convener. DHS clearly had expectations about what it wanted (“We thought it was simply a question of how many [Section 8 vouchers] do we need.”), it nonetheless was willing to listen to, take into account, and even respond to the challenges and competing demands played by their prospective partners: “It was an amazing learning experience to learn of the different mandates of city agencies and to understand what they were dealing with, and learn how we fit in and how we can be helpful to them.” Rather than simply make demands on their potential partners, DHS strategically listened to the challenges raised by NYCHA, HRA, and HPD, and considered ways that they could be of assistance to these partners, rather than simply be another source of demand. Sanitation assumed a similar attitude and orientation of humility. Already cognizant of the fact that it had gaps in expertise that its potential partners could fill, although Sanitation played a key role they listened and learned. As Commissioner Doherty reflects, “We learned a lot. [The collaboration partners] started to bring points that Sanitation didn’t consider.”

On the opposite end, the prospective partners in the Homeless Housing Working Group case example were skeptical, facing a number of competing demands for their resources. Peter Cantillo of NYCHA recalls, “We were drawn in kicking and screaming. We have a waiting list that exceeds 150,000 families on any given day. We didn’t need any more clients.” At the same time, NYCHA’s leadership, facing no mandate to collaborate, nonetheless assumed a willingness to listen and cooperate: “Housing Authorities are not officially part of government, but Chairman [Tino Hernandez] couldn’t resist.” Similarly, HPD’s Special Counsel Harold Shultz was also initially skeptical: “We were concerned about the impact of policies on buildings. Things that look like

solutions to DHS or HRA are disasters for HPD. To the extent that DHS had programs that placed people temporarily in buildings, those buildings were becoming problems.” Nevertheless, in an attitude of openness and breadth, HPD recognized that it was in their own benefit to work with DHS to solve their problem: “We were under attack from advocates and under threat of litigation... We knew we needed to look at both of [our agency’s problems] to get a policy that works.”

Key Leadership Challenge: Moving from Thought to Goals

Arguably the most difficult step in any collaboration is the move from the questions of who and why to what. All too often collaborations never advance beyond a few initial meetings and discussions about where to focus the collaboration. Few collaborations ever actually define a concrete set of goals, let alone achieve them. The cases presented at the Executive Briefing were both examples of interagency collaborations that did define concrete goals, in one case, the development and adoption of a viable plan, and in the other case, a re-allocation of resources and a plan for delivering them. In both cases, setting a direction was gradual and time consuming. What helped both collaborations achieve this clear definition of goals and direction success seemed to be three factors: a routinized process, a willingness to examine and re-examine the problem from multiple vantage points, and the use of a range of tools, strategies, and approaches for solving the problem. Another key factor was having a champion at City Hall, Peter Madonia the Mayor’s Chief of Staff , who was a part of the “routinized process.”

Framing, Reframing, and Disaggregating the Problem

Where many collaborations fail to progress is in achieving agreement around the nature of the problem to be solved, or in Gordon Campbell’s terms, “coming up with a construct.” Attempts to comprehensively address homelessness, for example, have often been frustrated by disagreements regarding the nature and cause of the problem. Referring to such collaborative failures as “intractable policy controversies,” Schön and Rein (1994) described how a planning effort to solve homelessness in Massachusetts was stymied by a debate between those who thought the problem was purely economic and other who thought the problem was behavioral and health-related. In the face of such intractable policy controversies, interagency collaboration becomes impossible. On the other hand, if parties at the discussion are open to shifting and revising the frames with which they view and understand the problem, they can form a solid foundation upon which to pursue collaboration. This process of reframing starts with the recognition of the problem as multifaceted, as well as the recognition by each partner as having a particular institutional frame with which they view the problem. Then, through a deliberative process, partners attempt to actively listen to and learn from one another’s frames to get to a more comprehensive understanding of the problem. As Schön and Rein wrote of the Massachusetts effort to solve homelessness: “policy and practitioners...demonstrated, at least intermittently, a cumulative inquiry into the changing policy situation. A kind of background learning percolated through the whole policy arena.” To advance their collaborations beyond policy discussions or disputes, leaders of or within interagency collaborations should strive to create environments and conditions conducive to such cumulative inquiry, not to mention welcome a new understanding of the problem themselves.

[For more information on intractable policy debates, frame reflection and reframing, see Donald Schön and Martin Rein’s *Frame Reflection*]

The attempt to reframe the problem took place in both case studies on interagency collaboration presented at the Executive Briefing. In the Solid Waste Management Working Group, this reframing started with Commissioner Doherty himself, who recognized early on that the problem of solid waste was not simply a sanitation issue alone, but a multifaceted one, including environmental, transportation, community relations, and political aspects as well. This informed his decision to seek assistance from City Hall, as well as Mihaltses' decision about who to bring in to the collaboration. As Gordon Campbell puts it, the convening of diverse persons from various agencies resulted in the intermingling of "two very different cultures...command and control...Wall Street and economic development." Moreover, each member of the working group seemed to exhibit awareness that his or her perspective was only a part of a larger whole.

Thus, whereas Commissioner Doherty brought in his perspective and experience in Sanitation, EDC Executive Vice President Kate Ascher "brought a business perspective." At the same time, Ascher also had experience working in context similar to Sanitation's: "I actually came out of the Port Authority, which is very operations and uniform. It is a culture that I am familiar with. That helped. [Sanitation] is used to working with uniform city employees and all of the sudden they are dealing with private sector companies." Having both familiarity with a uniform "command and control" culture and the "business perspective" allowed Ascher to serve as a bridge and translator between the two frames. Meanwhile, Mihaltses brought her knowledge of the political aspects of the plan, particularly the complex politics involved in obtaining City Council support: "If we didn't have a solid plan, we would have never gotten it past the Council...We went to the Council and said it was simple. We want to open four transfer stations and four need to go through [the uniform land use review procedure]. We explained what needed to happen. Every Councilmember understood that we have to take care of our garbage, and that this is a good plan." Ascher sums up the end result, "Every single component was stress-tested for its political feasibility, operations and managerial feasibility as well."

A willingness to reframe of the problems also helped the members of the Homeless Housing Working Group advance to a set of concrete goals and solutions. Schretzman recalls that when she and Commissioner Gibbs approached NYCHA about increasing their Section 8 voucher allocation from 1,500 to 6,000, the NYCHA officials looked at us in astonishment and wondered how were we going to use 6,000 vouchers. And there was a little haggling back and forth, and they asked, "Will you really use them?" What then could easily have turned into an intractable policy debate about the nature and causes of the homelessness in general instead turned into a practical discussion about what could be done to solve DHS' problem of rising shelter census. As Harold Shultz recalls, "[W]e wanted the shelter system to be rational. Perhaps [shelter] is not the right policy answer. This triggered joint research efforts around the housing/homelessness problem, and the use of data to formulate questions about what should policy be and how should we alter it." Peter Cantillo notes that the first step was identifying NYCHA's own potential contribution to lengthening the shelter stays of homeless families: "We realized that the front door of DHS was being pounded upon. They needed an exit strategy quickly. NYCHA's work is slow and deliberate. The process of getting a voucher takes a year from the time people get interviewed to the time that they get a lease. That did not work [for DHS]. The real focus of our team was how to expedite the process. We realized we needed to share information. We had a database, they had a database, so we put them together."

Interagency data matches helped the partners to map out the process by which homeless families could use Section 8 vouchers to move out of shelter into housing, so as to identify the "bottlenecks" that prevented increased utilization of vouchers. These data matches revealed several sources of

these bottlenecks. First, NYCHA realized that its own screening process involved “all these [criminal] background checks,” and that these criminal background checks prevent most homeless families from obtaining approval. Flexibility around these checks could facilitate increased utilization. Second, through data matches, NYCHA found that numerous homeless families had actually received vouchers, but didn’t use them because they continued to reject the apartments that they could afford with them. Upon learning this, DHS recognized that it could solve this problem by limiting their clients’ degree of choice over apartments: “We had to struggle with client choice, but came to the point where we realized that most New Yorkers don’t have choice, so we decided that we would limit families’ choice in selecting apartments.” Third, DHS and NYCHA found that “people needed PA, and family size was an issue. HRA had to come up with approval and paperwork to make this work.” It was at this point that HRA was brought in as a partner. Fourth, the partners recognized that by linking their databases, to the extent allowed by confidentiality laws, they “didn’t have to fax new papers everyday, and could shave time down.” In sum, the willingness to look concretely at the problem and disaggregate it helped the collaboration identify roles for each partner in addressing them.

Crafting joint solutions through task sharing and compromise

The reframing of problems can help leaders to move beyond intractable disputes, and to identify concrete ways to advance the collaboration. In particular, the disaggregation of the problem into separate parts helps to give clear roles for each collaboration partner. In the case of the Solid Waste Management Working Group, the early disaggregation of the problem by Doherty and Mihaltses led to the selection of the collaboration partners, who each had their areas of expertise and a corresponding set of expectations. For the Homeless Housing Working Group members, however, the specific roles and contributions for members were less clear. Here, the process of reframing and disaggregating the problem helped define how each member could contribute to its solution. This case study provides three lessons for how the disaggregation of the problem led to joint solutions.

One means of reaching a solution was simply to consider exchanging or sharing tasks. DHS, for example, found that they could expedite voucher utilization among homeless families by taking on some the procedural review work typically done by NYCHA: “DHS helped and picked up the ball with apartment inspections, in order to facilitate and prioritize their own workload.” Taking up a job typically relegated to NYCHA, DHS simply “realized that we could move faster if we inspected the apartments ourselves.” In reaching this solution, both DHS and NYCHA overcame the tendency to view the problem as belonging only to one agency or another—an orientation that leads to finger-pointing and “buck passing”—but rather from an objective and shared standpoint which led to a joint solution—the sharing of tasks to achieve greater efficiency. Schretzman explains, “It was about supporting [NYCHA] and setting things up to make it easier for them, and make them realize it was not all on them and that it was a partnership.”

Another means was through the search for ways to accommodate special cases that maintained consistency with the missions of all parties, but that still achieved common purpose. HRA, for example, recognized that public assistance was needed by homeless families, and that its requirements for maintaining public assistance were unrealistic for homeless families, but did not want to overhaul its own regulations to accommodate them. Pat Smith recalls her own process of reflection: “Our mandate is that wherever a person is housed, they should be at a maximum level of self-sufficiency. Our main criteria under the federal law, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) was that a person in shelter was not precluded from moving towards work...In the early days of welfare reform, it used to be job first, job first.

But for shelter clients, [we needed to have] a whole different eligibility standard. But we didn't want to get rid of our work requirements." Eventually, HRA and DHS came to a compromise: "You can even have income and a higher level of income in shelter, but still be on public assistance... One of the goals was that we wanted to increase the number of people on public assistance, and then when they leave the shelter, to have some sort of income... The goal is not different, how you get there is different." Through a process of deliberation and "cumulative inquiry," HRA recognized that the situation for DHS and homeless families was sufficiently unique to merit an accommodation in policy that could accommodate different needs, while still meeting HRA's mission and objectives.

A third lesson in advancing to solutions is the use of data and technology. The Homeless Housing Working Group used technology in two ways. The first, as already mentioned, was the use of a data match between NYCHA and DHS, which led to the identification of client apartment rejection and criminal background checks as two bottlenecks in the voucher utilization process. The second was the use of data and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to further understand the homelessness problem as described by Harold Shultz: "After we moved from beating up on NYCHA to figure out how to solve the problem, we started asking questions about where are the homeless coming from, why are they homeless, and why are they coming back. These were good questions to ask. We learned to use GIS, and other tools. We embarked on research efforts, and how to think about the problem." Such applications of data analysis and GIS were new for DHS. And Schretzman notes how the exchange of technical know-how helped further build relationships between the partners: "This is about getting people together, pulling people up and getting to know people.... HPD taught us [how to use mapping] and NYCHA taught us about how to do inspections. [The Department of] City Planning was unbelievable with us early on with [helping us think] about geographical and spatial information, and mapping." Here again, as the leader of the collaboration, DHS played the role of an eager student, learning from its collaborative partners how to use technology to help solve its problem, and in so doing, helping to engage other agencies to become more invested partners in the collaboration.

Key Features of Successful Interagency Collaborations

Recognizing the need for collaboration, bringing in and engaging partners, reframing and disaggregating the problem, and creating solutions through shared tasks and compromise are all critical elements that leaders must consider in pursuing interagency collaboration. These considerations are equally important for those leaders at the center of collaboration, for whom the problem at hand is most pressing, as well as those who have expertise or resources needed by other agencies. Two other features stand out from the briefing as critical to interagency collaboration. These features seem minor at first glance—the first an issue of mere logistics, and the second a notion so common sense in nature—and tend to be overlooked. However, the panelists at briefing emphasized both as key to advancement of their initiatives. The first is the idea of establishing a routine for the collaboration, both in terms of the frequency and scheduling of meetings as well as the structure and process of the meetings. The second is the inclusion of high-level leaders, such as Deputy Mayors and the Mayor's Chief of Staff, who have oversight authority over all parties, to function as a kind of referee.

Routinizing collaboration

One key lesson in advancing a collaboration that emerges from both case studies is the importance of routine, ritual, and formality. While it is true that city agencies, their leaders, and staff often work

together and encounter one another through the course of their work, it is the formality of structure and routine that distinguishes true collaboration from mere accidental encounters. Such structure and routine, though tedious, creates a venue for the examination of the problem, the articulation of goals, and the resolution of conflicts. On the other hand, when collaboration is happenstance or serendipitous, the partners may never move beyond a continuing or endless discussion of the problem. Or when conflicts arise in informal collaborations, partners may simply choose to delay or cease participation. Routinizing the collaboration, including both the meeting times and task deadlines, forces partners to work through conflicts and continually make progress. Moreover, formalizing a process for measuring success can help ensure ongoing buy-in and accountability to the collaboration, as well as provide a morale-boosting sense of success or rousing sense of urgency.

From the onset, the Solid Waste Management Working Group set up a routine process for meetings. Mihaltses recalls that the collaboration partners “started meeting every week, on Tuesdays.” Eventually, as Kate Ascher, Executive Vice President for the City’s Economic Development Corporation, recollects, “it became *two* meetings per week for a little over a year.” Susan Kath describes the formality of the collaboration process in detail:

We had a pretty formal process that we set up. It started out with a memo from [Deputy Mayor] Peter Madonia to all agency heads setting up the mandate. In our original group of six, we had committees, and we assigned each other tasks. We had an agenda and that was really important. The formality was very important for discussion or progress...Setting up very formally, having an agenda for our City Hall meetings l-there was a lot of behind the scenes work in our working group meetings-but that was a very important element to getting the work done.

Such a simple, and seemingly excessive meeting structure, forced the collaboration partners to work through conflicts of both substance and personality. Commissioner Doherty admits that “[t]his group got together and we didn't love each other every day, but it worked well and was amazing.” Susan Kath elaborates that “[w]hen there was conflict, we really leveled with one another and focused on that day's issue.”

Likewise, members of the Homeless Housing Working Group recognized the value of structure and formality. In fact, Deputy Commissioner Pat Smith of HRA points out that collaboration between these agencies was already happening in an informal, disorganized manner: “At the lowest levels, we always worked together.” Moving to better solutions for homeless families, however, required more formality and structure: “The problem was how to work together at a higher level. We always had a homeless diversion unit, HPD had a homeless housing unit, but all of these lower level things were not in the City’s goals. People were going at this at other levels of the agencies...People would go to meetings and things would bubble up and we would say, ‘What meeting?’”

For this working group, part of formalizing the collaboration involved similar kinds of structure and routine, such as formal agendas. Deputy Commissioner Schretzman notes that a routine soon emerged just around the setting of the agenda: On Wednesday, we would call all the key partners and suggest agenda items or follow-up items for discussion. We would send the agenda to Peter Madonia and his special assistant would keep track of commitments. At times there might be an item that some parties would have preferred to resolve before discussing it at the weekly meeting, but such was the standard of accountability. In many ways, the agenda was driven by DHS, since the challenges of our mandate were ever present, and we needed the resources of the other agencies. They would negotiate with us about the agenda and what should be on it. Sometimes we had to push hard for items to be on the agenda.” Another area of formalization was a routine

process for measuring progress and achievement. Harold Shultz explains that, “Peter [Madonia] always kept us on meeting the outcomes: the chart of homeless families going up and how can we make it come down.” Peter Cantillo further explains, “For us, it was really about metrics. You didn’t have to explain yourself if you met your numbers. It was really about how we were doing with regard to metrics. At the beginning of every meeting were numbers.”

Including a referee: the role of the Mayor’s Chief of Staff

Neither cases of interagency collaboration presented at the briefing were mandated from above, by City Hall or any of its officials. And while the Mayor’s Chief of Staff, in fact was involved in both collaborations, his role was not that of an explicit leader, setting the agendas, facilitating the meetings, designating roles and tasks, and overseeing achievement. Instead, Chief of Staff Peter Madonia played a unique and fascinating role that can best be described as that of an impartial referee. This role stands out among and in contrast to the other roles played by collaboration members: the initiators (Sanitation, DHS), the relationship broker (Intergovernmental), the experts (Law Department, EDC, HPD), and the resource gatekeepers (NYCHA, HRA, HPD, Law Department, OMB). As a referee, Chief of Staff Madonia played no formal role in the agenda or direction setting of the initiative, nor dictated the specific roles for any of the collaboration partners. Instead, his role was to mediate conflicts, provide general support, and ensure that the collaboration continued and advanced, whichever direction the agency members wished to take it.

Haeda Mihaltses explains that Mr. Madonia played a key role in ensuring that the partners who she recruited to assist the Department of Sanitation participated in the working group: “Peter didn’t make all the decisions, but brought the right people to the table and this would not have happened without his role.” Moreover, the ritualization of collaboration is also attributed to Madonia: “We had a pretty formal process that we set up. It started out with a memo from Peter Madonia to all the agency heads setting up the mandate.”

Once the working groups were meeting regularly, Madonia again played a somewhat inactive, but nonetheless important role. As Peter Cantillo recollects, “Peter Madonia played an interesting role. He was there [at the meetings], but mostly silent. And if all was running well, you wouldn’t hear from him, but if something went wrong, you would hear from him.” Having a silent but known presence, Madonia was able to exert his influence (or that of City Hall’s) over the process, and particularly over some of the working group members. Cantillo recalls, “We always felt under pressure as if we were holding the problem up.” At the same time, he made efforts to help make all the parties feel that the discussion was a fair one. This helped to ensure the continued engagement of certain members like NYCHA, who came into the initiative with no small degree of skepticism and defensiveness. In describing Madonia, Peter Cantillo suggests how Madonia was trusted by NYCHA as an ally of its interests: “Peter [Madonia] also understood how holding affordable housing up was important. He knew that we needed to keep a balance between working families and public assistance families. We could rely on Peter to keep balance.”

It was in this role as a “mostly silent” peacekeeper or referee that Madonia’s role was most critical to the collaboration. At critical junctures, where conflict and debate were fierce, “Peter served a vital role...He played the role of the tiebreaker.” In some instances, this referee role involved directly helping the members overcome perceived conflicts: “Where we had conflicts, Peter said ‘Oh, that’s not an issue at all.’” In other instances, where resolutions to conflicts were not easily seen and the collaboration was at an impasse, he would help sustain and advance the collaboration by diverting attention to other topics: “Sometimes Peter would think about it, or sometimes make us think about

something else. Peter was a great leader, he would listen to us, and sometimes would have us think about something else.” In short, Madonia’s neutral role as mediator and referee proved key to both collaborations. As Harold Shultz plainly states, in order to deal with and overcome inevitable conflict, leaders “need a champion at City Hall.”

Conclusion

The two case studies on interagency collaboration presented at the March 28th Executive Briefing provide several key leadership lessons for achieving a successful collaboration. First, despite a culture of leadership that promotes a “do-it-yourself” orientation and a general notion that collaboration is more frustrating than it is beneficial, leaders should recognize moments where the need for collaboration is critical to achieving success. The two case studies revealed that such moments are typically those involving a shift in policy or approach that demands new kinds of solutions, and where outside expertise or resources are necessary to bring about those solutions. For the Department of Sanitation, this moment was the closing of Fresh Kills and the recognition that truck transport of solid waste was an unsustainable stopgap measure. Faced with the gargantuan task of obtaining approvals for four borough-based rail or barge transfer stations, Commissioner Doherty recognized that he needed expertise that could not be found within Sanitation. Similarly for DHS, the moment of realization arose with the shift in policy towards downsizing the homeless shelter system, including the rapid outplacement of families in shelter. To accomplish this downsizing, DHS needed access to affordable housing and other resources, and to engage those who had those resources.

Second, the case studies provide key lessons on how the agencies decided which agencies to include in the collaboration. In both cases, the collaboration partners were rather self-apparent and were based on where critical expertise or resources could be found. In the case of Sanitation, a third-party—the Mayor’s Office of Intergovernmental Coordination—played a key role in identifying where needed expertise could be found and brokering those connections. Third, to advance the collaboration, both collaboration initiators played a critical role in convening their prospective partners, in a sense, wooing them to the table through effective framing of the problem thus appealing to their sense of duty and common purpose, but also by assuming an attitude of humility. Both DHS and Sanitation played the role of a “student” or counselor, learning about and listening to the challenges that their prospective partners would face in meeting their demands. At the same time, both initiators were persistent in engaging partners’ help, actively listening for opportunities to obtain resources or achieve compromise.

Third, in order to advance from a willingness to collaborate towards the advancement of concrete goals and solutions, both sets of agencies and their leaders engaged in a kind of “cumulative inquiry into the changing policy situation” to use Schön and Rein’s phrase. Both working groups undertook a process of reframing and disaggregating the problem from a monumental or incomprehensible one to a manageable and reducible one. Doing so allowed for the identification of discrete problem components that could be tackled and for which a lead agency could be appointed. For Sanitation, the problem disaggregated nicely into components: operational or “uniform”, transportation, environmental, community, and political. For Homeless Services, reframing the problem into a solvable required some effort, but that eventually was focused around discrete steps involved in the Section 8 voucher utilization process: Section 8 application submission, client background checks, apartment inspections, client apartment selection (or rejection), public assistance approval, etc.

Fourth, the Homeless Housing Working Group illustrated two concrete ways that joint solutions could be crafted. The first was through the sharing of tasks across typical lines of responsibility, as when DHS realized that it could save NYCHA's time and effort by conducting apartment inspections for its own clients. The second was through the achievement of compromise, essentially by finding ways to help agencies remain true to their missions, while still making changes that could help solve problems. The example of this was HRA's decision to give homeless families flexibility around their work requirements in order to remain on public assistance.

Finally, the cases suggest two key elements or characteristics that should be included in any collaboration. The first is the notion of routine or ritual both with regard to the meeting schedule as well as the meeting structure and format (e.g. agendas, regular progress monitoring, etc.). Such seemingly rigid structure provides a regular forum and basis for collaboration, helping the collaboration partners stay within their focus, as well as ensure that partners remain engaged even during times of conflicts, whether over substance or personality. The second key element is the inclusion of a third-party referee, preferably one with authority over all of the agencies. Such a third-party referee would be a "mostly silent" partner, but whose presence would help keep partners, even reluctant ones, engaged. The referee also helps manage conflicts either by direct mediation or distraction.

Perhaps the most important lesson regarding interagency collaboration is summarized in Pat Smith's reflections about her own role as HRA's representation in the collaboration: "We all have the same goals, we are New Yorkers, and we should do what we need to do to help New Yorkers." Collaboration is the logical result when leaders in different areas and sectors of city government, each facing a different and sometimes competing mandate, are reminded of this larger perspective and mandate to serve their common public.