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# The Art Of Collaboration: Interlocal Collaboration In The Provision Of Fire Services In The Metropolitan Detroit Area

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**THE ART OF COLLABORATION:  
INTERLOCAL COLLABORATION IN THE PROVISION OF FIRE  
SERVICES IN THE METROPOLITAN DETROIT AREA**

by

**WILLIAM D. HATLEY**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School of

Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

2010

MAJOR: POLITICAL SCIENCE

Approved by:

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Advisor

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Date

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## DEDICATION

To my wife Karen Marie Anne, whose love, support, persistence and stubborn refusal to let me give up, helped keep me grounded, kept my academic, work and home life in perspective, and ultimately made the completion of this dissertation possible.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEMS OF GOVERNING FRAGMENTED METROPOLITAN AREAS

Metropolitan regions have emerged in the United States as important economic units participating in a larger international community (Feiock 2009). Many of the metropolitan areas in the United States developed with numerous small local governments, each providing various public services. Today the 330 metropolitan areas in the United States are home to approximately 60 percent of this nation's population. The typical metropolitan area contains about 100 independent local governments with a variety of specific individual public service functions and often overlapping jurisdictions (Rawlings 2003). Given the large number of local jurisdictions engaging in interlocal collaboration, there is considerable academic interest in its nature and consequences. Further study will prove useful.

Today there is a dearth of systematic "information about particular interjurisdictional actions that have promoted various forms of cooperation, how and why these structures evolved, and what happened as a result of the cooperation" (Nunn and Rosentraub 1997, p. 206). Feiock (2008) concluded that little is currently known about the dynamics of how governance mechanisms emerge and operate in fragmented metropolitan areas. Much can be learned by studying how jurisdictions collaborate to address problems, knowing what works and what does not will give administrators the knowledge needed to properly design and operate collaborative ventures.

Feiock (2009) found that much of the literature pertaining to urban politics and public administration tends to focus on regional governments and authorities as a way of solving collective action problems in metropolitan regions. Contrary to that literature,

Feiock argues “there are an array of mechanisms that vary in the extent to which self-organization is evident in their creation and use” (Feiock 2009, p. 358). This study uses Feiock’s ICA framework to analyze how such mechanisms arise and are used to solve service provision problems.

Some research examining how metropolitan areas work to produce and provide services shows that a “complex, multijurisdictional, multilevel organization is a productive arrangement” (Parks and Oakerson 1989, p. 18). Such findings however, run counter to the metropolitan reform literature that contends these areas must consolidate into fewer independent jurisdictions in order to achieve improvement in quality and cost of public services.

There exists a need for a clear model of cooperation that can be used by practitioners to plan cooperative activities to address some of the more pressing issues in local government administration. Cooperation should be relatively easy when all parties concerned expect to gain from the activity. What is needed at this juncture is a better understanding of how cooperation can be accomplished when issues are more complex, and resistance from one or more source is expected.

Frederickson (1999) has argued that metropolitan areas have become so fragmented in their approach to service delivery that they constitute what he describes as a “disarticulated state.”

In the high fragmentation of the American metropolis one can find most of the features of the disarticulated state-the declining salience of jurisdiction, the fuzziness of borders, a growing asymmetry in the relationship between the governed and those who govern, and an erosion of the capacity of the local jurisdiction to contain and, thereby, manage complex social, economic and political issues (Frederickson 1999, p.707).

It is becoming increasingly clear that the political boundaries of these local governmental units often are not the same as their relevant economic or problem-solving boundaries. Many of the problems that afflict local governments transcend local governmental boundaries. "Fragmentation creates diseconomies of scale, positive and negative externalities, and common property resource problems" (Feiock 2009, p. 357).

Given the interdependency typically found in metropolitan areas, some jurisdictions such as Miami-Dade, Florida and Louisville, Kentucky, have concluded that the consolidation of metropolitan jurisdictions is the correct method for dealing with these problems. However, consolidation has frequently been resisted. Carr (2004) has noted that for every community that approves the consolidation of city and county governments, eight to ten other communities reject such a proposal. Frederickson (1999) has argued that citizens actually prefer the fragmented nature of their metropolitan areas and will generally resist consolidation of jurisdictions.

One of the problems this research is designed to address is the lack of a clear understanding of the role played by factors in collaboration decisions. For example, existing literature is somewhat conflicting in terms of the likely effect of fiscal stress on a community when encouraging collaboration. When cost savings are likely, fiscal pressures are noticeable and political opposition weak, Morgan, Hirlinger and England (1988) argued that local officials are more likely to engage in interlocal arrangements. Bartle and Swayze (1997) concluded that fiscal pressure was a frequently mentioned reason for interlocal collaboration. Agranoff and McGuire (2003) contend that financially stable jurisdictions are less likely to engage in collaborative activities. Krueger and McGuire (2005) argue that fiscal stress often leads to more collaborative activity.

Zeemering's (2007) research indicated that fiscal pressure stimulus is consistently mentioned as a reason for collaboration.

Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) argue to the contrary, noting that fiscal stress in a community is not a major incentive for contracting out. Thurmaier and Wood (2004) also concluded that cost savings and the presence of fiscal stress were not major reasons for cities and counties in their sample to collaborate. Likewise, Carr and LeRoux (2005) examining data gathered in a Citizens Research Council of Michigan study, concluded that fiscal constraints do not provide a universal rationale for undertaking collaborative efforts.

Given the significant financial strain Michigan municipalities confront at the end of the first decade of the new millennium, a better understanding of the role played by fiscal stress is critical. Local officials in Michigan and elsewhere are actively searching for ways to reduce costs but maintain service levels. In some instances, local officials conclude that they can resolve their fiscal problems more effectively by collaborating on selective services, while remaining separate and independent in other areas of service delivery. Recent work by Andrew (2009) illustrated that in the current fiscal environment, local governments may find that interjurisdictional agreements for the provision of public services are important tools for increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

In this dissertation, the focus is on collaboration among local governments because that is the level where most government service provision actually occurs. Local government is the most visible and, arguably, the most important level of government to

most Americans. There are an estimated 89,476 local governments currently in the United States (U. S. Census Bureau 2007).

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Before proceeding further into this study, it is useful to define a few of the key terms that will be encountered. The term “governance” is widely used today in both public and private sectors. This term broadly refers to the methods and practices used by local governments to provide for the numerous goods and services demanded by citizens. Governance has come to include local and global arrangements; it can be encountered in formal structures and informal norms and practices. Governance may occur in a spontaneous way as well as through intentional systems of control (Williamson 1996). Lynn, Heinrich and Hill (1999) have defined governance as the way government is organized and the consequences that flow from that organizational structure. The activities of governance include the participation of many actors from the public, private and nonprofit sectors in pursuit of public goals.

The terms collaboration and cooperation are often used interchangeably in research to describe joint service provision. There does not seem to be a firm consensus in the literature. Collaboration can be defined in several different ways and is seen by some analysts as an activity apart from cooperation. Eugene Bardach (1998) defines collaboration as activity between government agencies that results in increased value, more than can be obtained by working separately. Cooperation, on the other hand, is defined as an effort “to work together toward a common end or purpose” or “an

association of persons for mutual benefit.”<sup>1</sup> Oftentimes, cooperation occurs without formal contracts between jurisdictions. Robert Axelrod has identified what he terms a classical form of cooperation in which groups “pursue their own self-interest without the aid of a central authority to force them to cooperate with one another” (Axelrod 1984, p. 6). Other scholars have described cooperation as emerging “when localities, to further shared objectives, cooperate with regional planning councils, nonprofit corporations . . . informal alliances . . . interlocal agreements” (Nunn and Rosentraub 1997, p. 206).

For purposes of this dissertation, the terms collaboration and cooperation will be occasionally interchangeable. However, in some contexts there may be subtle differences. Robert Agranoff and Michael McGuire have stated that the terms collaboration and cooperation are slightly different when used in studying interlocal activities and should not be confused. This distinction is subtle, but important when examining interlocal relationships. They define collaboration as a “purposive relationship designed to solve a problem by creating or discovering a solution within a given set of constraints such as time, knowledge, money or competition” (Agranoff and McGuire 2003, p. 4). Cooperation is described as an activity where actors work jointly to some end and be helpful to one another as opposed to being hostile or working against one another.

Cooperation between governments can take many forms. These include interlocal agreements between two or more governments. Also, coalitions or councils of government established in order to seek federal grants and influence federal policy in a variety of areas. Post states that “local intergovernmental cooperation, broadly defined, includes all policy activities that require some level of policy coordination between one or more local governments. These efforts may include formal or informal agreements

<sup>1</sup> *American Heritage College Dictionary, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2002, page 314.*

among local jurisdictions and may or may not require the exchange of revenue” (Post 2002, p. 6). Cooperation can also be encouraged through regional authorities (Feiock and Carr 2001). Special districts may be formed for purposes of collaboration between different governments. Both competition and cooperation are present in almost all local government systems and may be complimentary or not (Feiock 2004).

### **Current Understanding of how Metropolitan Areas are Governed**

Communities in a metropolitan area such as the one studied here are thought to compete in a market-like fashion to provide their residents with an optimal level of goods and services while maintaining the lowest possible tax to service ratio. Such competition should motivate those communities to increase services or lower taxes (Tiebout, 1956). One of the possible ways to do that is through the creation of “slack resources made available through the joint implementation of services with another city” (Krueger and McGuire 2005, p. 7). Yet the work of Tiebout (1956) and Schneider (1986) might suggest that cities close together geographically providing similar levels of goods and services, like the five communities examined in this dissertation, compete with one another and thus have a difficult time collaborating. For collaboration to be successful, there may be other factors present strong enough to overcome this obstacle.

There has been a considerable amount of scholarly work on interlocal collaboration. Nunn and Rosentraub (1997) developed a model which took into consideration four specific dimensions of interjurisdictional cooperation with a sliding scale of what can be expected depending on how the effort is structured. They found that cooperation became more difficult when it changed existing patterns of access to

resources or involved a redistribution of resources. The existing arrangement has established winners and losers, and current winners typically resist new arrangements.

Oakerson (1999) argues that effective metropolitan governance can and often does occur without a metropolitan-wide government being in place, even when the area consists of a large number of small municipalities. While earlier research emphasized the need to use coercion in order to accomplish collective activities (Olson 1965), Oakerson and others have concluded that coercion is a very expensive tool. Governments will take action to avoid being coerced, with the result that there will be failure to take collective action that may be in the best interests of the region. Parks and Oakerson (1989) have shown that to facilitate better processes of governance, it is first necessary to develop governance structures which are based on the willing consent of the participants.

#### Polycentric Metropolitan Areas

The development of various governing structures in a metropolitan area occupied by numerous, often competing local governments, has been described as a “polycentric relationship,” one well-suited to a fragmented metropolitan region (Ostrom, Tiebout and Warren 1961). Polycentric systems develop through the interactions of multiple independent sources of authority in the public, private and nonprofit sectors. Polycentric systems stand in opposition to the monocentric system usually associated with the reform movement that stresses governmental consolidation. Oakerson (2004) argues that a polycentric system of governance allows for a greater amount of civic space that enables a variety of opportunities for participation by non-governmental players in the area.

Allowing such interaction between government and citizens can lead to a much more productive approach to problem solving and produce general benefits to the community.

Frederickson (1999) notes that in the absence of a central authority, and under conditions of the high interdependence that is often found in metropolitan areas today, there exist highly developed systems of cooperation that serve essentially the same purpose as the practices of diplomacy between nation-states.

### Administrative Conjunction

In order for local governmental actors to balance competing demands for local autonomy created by fragmentation with expectations that inter-jurisdictional problems be confronted effectively, Frederickson argues that local governments must practice “administrative conjunction.” Frederickson’s definition of such activity is “the array and character of horizontal formal and informal association between actors representing units in a networked public and the administrative behavior of those actors” (Frederickson 1999, p. 708). Administrative conjunction is one way in which the costs of cooperative action can be kept low. These costs, which include those associated with establishing and maintaining the trust of partners, monitoring performance and enforcing agreements, are often reduced because the actors know one another and have repeated contacts. Repeated voluntary cooperation takes the place of a centralized authority in governing the collective activities of a metropolitan area. Frederickson (1999) argues that the key to understanding why much of this cooperation occurs is the interdependence of local jurisdictions within metropolitan areas. He asserts that no jurisdiction is more interdependent than those making up metropolitan areas. Cooperation between local

governments is often driven by recognition of such interdependency and the natural desire of elected public officials and administrators to reduce uncertainty. Frederickson concludes that effective public administration practiced by local government administrators is the key to cooperation within metropolitan areas attempting to deal with the disarticulation of the state.

### The Roles Played by Elected and Administrative Officials

This is an aspect of interlocal collaboration that is still underdeveloped. Dealing with problems on a metropolitan-wide basis to achieve economies of scale or other benefits is thought to be an unpopular choice for elected officials (Frederickson 1999; Clingermayer and Feiock 2001). Prior research dealing with interlocal cooperation examined by Zeemering (2007) concluded that elected officials play a lesser role in facilitating collaboration. It was argued that it is efforts of a professional city manager that are more significant. Elected officials are seen as having a more parochial outlook and less concerned with the environment outside their community. They are relatively unconcerned with activities that they cannot clearly take credit for at election time. Zeemering's own research however concludes that elected officials play a far more important role in cooperation decisions than was previously thought.

Frederickson and Matkin (2009) surveyed elected and administrative officials in the metropolitan Kansas City area to measure differences in the ways that local elected and administrative officials made decisions about interlocal collaboration. The findings of this study were that "contrary to common views that metropolitan cooperation is more likely to be supported by the norms of administration and opposed by the norms of elected office, we did not find a difference . . . in their willingness to participate in the

proposed project” (Frederickson and Matkin 2009, p. 60). The findings of this study suggest that elected officials may be more inclined to support interlocal collaboration than was previously believed.

LeRoux and Carr (2010) examined networks of interlocal agreements in the metropolitan Detroit area, in part, to test the Frederickson (1999) Administrative Conjunction theory and Williams (1971) Lifestyle Model. The findings of this study “suggest that interpersonal networks may be more important to motivating cooperative behavior in elected officials than for public managers” (LeRoux and Carr 2010, p. 19). This study found that relationships between elected officials increased the likelihood that local governments would cooperate through the use of interlocal agreements, thus indicating that elected officials may play a larger role than was previously thought.

### **Factors that Motivate or Inhibit Collaboration**

Much of the literature on public service cooperation examines the factors that make communities more or less likely to engage in collaborative activities. There are many common issues faced by local governments in collaborative situations; how to maintain sufficient control over service quality and the political costs to be paid, if any, in relinquishing local control over services. The issues of asset specificity and service measurability are also important subjects to examine when studying collaboration.<sup>2</sup>

A widespread presumption in the literature is that relatively homogeneous communities are more likely to collaborate with one another (Morgan, Hirlinger and

---

<sup>2</sup> Asset specificity is defined as those assets that must be specifically devoted to a particular use and cannot be easily used elsewhere. It often becomes an important factor in fire service because of the expense of purchasing items such as fire trucks which can cost between three hundred thousand and one million dollars. Service measurability is the ability to easily or accurately measure the quality and quantity of services and is central to understanding the risk to individual governments from collaboration on public services.

England 1988; Rawlings 2003; Feiock 2007; Feiock 2008). What is not sufficiently understood is what specific factors in homogeneous or heterogeneous communities make them more or less likely to engage in interlocal collaboration.

Campbell and Glynn (1990) indicated that communities with a city manager were no more likely to enter into collaborative arrangements with other communities for the provision of services. Contrary to that finding, Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) found that the presence of a city manager did facilitate more intergovernmental contracting, but usually only in the provision of public safety services which are the subject of this research. Supportive research by Brown and Potoski (2003) found that the presence of a city manager in the community was positively related to whether that local government would participate in collaborative service provision. Further supporting that conclusion, Carr and LeRoux (2005) found that the council-manager form of government is a strong predictor of interlocal contracting. They found that the city manager function can be viewed as a mechanism for reducing the cost of gathering information. What is still missing in the literature is a fuller understanding of why having a city manager appears to make interlocal collaboration more or less difficult.

#### Demographic Characteristics of Communities

Demographic characteristics are also thought to play a significant role in whether or not a community will engage in collaboration and if so, what form it will take. Brown and Potoski (2003) have shown that older industrialized communities such as the five examined here are more likely than are the newer communities of the southwest to produce public services through joint contracting or out-sourcing.

Feiock (2007) argues that demographic homogeneity is important as it reduces the transaction costs for officials negotiate collaboration agreements with other communities. There is some statistical correlation between the demographic homogeneity of a community and the homogeneity of preferences within and between communities (Feiock 2007). While demographic homogeneity between collaborating communities is thought to reduce the cost of cooperating, homogeneity within each community is also an important factor as it may reflect homogeneity in service preferences (Feiock 2008).

The percentage of persons aged sixty-five and older has been cited as an important variable for predicting collaboration. Research has shown that the larger the percentage of such persons in the population, the more resistant the population is to any proposed change in the existing level of services (Morgan, Hirlinger and England, 1988).

Race can also be an important factor in analyzing the likelihood of collaboration in the production and delivery of public services. Research by Morgan, Hirlinger and England (1988) indicated that the percentage of blacks in the population appeared to significantly reduce the likelihood of contracting out for health and human services activity but not necessarily for other kinds of services.

In a comprehensive review of much of the theoretical and empirical literature on metropolitan fragmentation and interlocal cooperation, Rawlings (2003) found that heterogeneity, particularly racial heterogeneity, is believed to have a negative impact on levels of cooperation. Yet contrary to the bulk of the literature, Rawlings own research involving Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) across the nation found that racial variation within a metropolitan area is positively linked to greater levels of interlocal collaboration. Research by Lackey, Freshwater and Rupasingha (2002) indicated that

local government officials and residents in rural areas were often more suspicious of collaboration than their urban counterparts.

Housing characteristics in a city are an important factor in collaboration on fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS), such as those investigated in this study. Communities with similar types, age and value of housing are thought to make better potential partners. Krueger and McGuire (2005) found that cities that enjoy a high taxable value and high tax revenues were among the least likely to seek additional revenues through interlocal collaboration. Having similar taxable values, and the potential to raise similar levels of revenue to financially support the effort are important factors if two or more communities are going to collaborate on the provision of services.

In the case of the communities examined in this study, the continuing decline in available revenues with which to provide public services has reportedly been a strong incentive to search for alternative solutions. The relative openness to collaboration in general and a more proactive approach to public policy may be factors stimulating this effort. "Cities that have a more proactive policy agenda and viewpoint should be more interested in collaboration" (Krueger and McGuire 2005, p. 16).

#### Shared Geographic Borders and Repeat Interactions between Government Actors

Shared geographic borders are another factor that can influence the decision to collaborate. Past interactions between interlocal neighbors can have a positive or negative effect on the decision to collaborate. "Trying to negotiate with uncooperative or adversarial neighbors is likely to discourage further attempts at cooperation" (Nice and Fredericksen 1995, p. 129). Foster (1997) found that the absence of natural barriers often facilitates ties between local governments which find it easier to collaborate across

political boundaries. There are no natural barriers separating the five cities examined in this dissertation. They are contiguous, tightly-packed and share common geographic borders. Post (2002) found that the geographic density of metropolitan area governments is a significant predictor of the occurrence of interlocal agreements. Fixed geographic borders often require repeat play among neighboring communities, which can reduce transaction costs (Feiock 2007). Shared borders can “increase exposure to positive and negative externalities and lock local neighbors into repeat play that provides opportunities for mutual assurances” (Feiock 2008, p. 12).

Yet another factor that is examined in this study is the role that trust plays among collaboration partners. Lackey, et al., (2002) found that a good and long-established relationship among cooperating jurisdictions increases the chances of continuing success. In such circumstances, processes often run smoothly because of accumulating levels of trust between collaborating partners. Park and Feiock (2003) found that the longer the partners have collaborated the more likely they are to collaborate further. When clustered together and with repeated contacts, each community can benefit from acquiring and preserving their reputation for cooperation and commitment. Successful collaboration in the past could potentially create a reservoir of social and political capital that can be used to encourage future efforts. Repeated contacts create social capital between the participants which can often lead to better cooperation (Lackey, et al. 2002). Higher levels of social capital have a positive effect on levels of intergovernmental cooperation across the nation as a whole (Rawlings, 2003).

## **The Research Setting and Organizing Framework of Dissertation**

Many scholars argue that “collaborative management is a core activity for today’s public manager...and that more and more governments are deeply in the game of managing at their borders” (Agranoff & McGuire 2003, p. 15). This dissertation explores aspects of collaboration among local governments with regard to the provision of fire and emergency medical services in a five-city area in Metropolitan Detroit through a single combined fire authority. These five contiguous cities are located in the “Downriver” area of Wayne County, south of Detroit. The proposed collaboration would replace five separate municipal fire departments with a single fire authority and establish a mechanism for sharing the costs of the service among these cities.

This case study provides important insights into the obstacles local government officials confront in attempting interlocal collaboration. These communities are highly similar demographically and economically. They all employ full-time fire fighters, train in similar ways and purchase similar fire fighting equipment. All of these communities have a mayor-city council form of government operating under Michigan’s Home Rule Statute. All of these communities employ a city manager or someone whose job description embodies traditional city manager style functions.

A good explanation of the role played by transaction costs has appeared in the work of others (Feiock 2009; Carr, LeRoux and Shrestha 2009). What is missing in their work is a clear understanding of how individual actors react to those costs and which costs are perceived as being most important. Therefore, a chief aim of this research is a better understanding of the role played by the transactional characteristics of goods, the

characteristics of communities and regions, the importance of institutional structures and the characteristics of the services themselves.

### The Institutional Collective Action (ICA) Framework

To better understand the processes and actors involved in collaborative service delivery arrangements, it is useful to have a framework that helps to understand how organizations and persons operate within such a system. The Institutional Collective Action (ICA) framework developed by Feiock provides an excellent tool to organize an examination of these factors. Much of our current understanding about these terms in context comes from the modern effort to decentralize regional governance and encourage self-government through the use of horizontally and vertically linked organizations. The ICA framework builds upon the logic of individual collective action to describe a process whereby “local governments can act collectively to create a civil society that integrates a region across multiple jurisdictions through a web of voluntary agreements and associations and collective choices by citizens” (Feiock 2004, p. 6).

While the ICA framework is an excellent mechanism for grouping the most commonly studied factors into a few broad categories, it also reveals the lack of scholarly attention to several other important factors. An advantage of the ICA framework is that it provides a means to categorize the factors expected to directly affect the incentives for interlocal cooperation. These factors can be grouped into four categories: (1) state level rules defining the powers and structure of local units, (2) the service attributes or characteristics of goods which take into consideration factors such as asset specificity, difficulty of measurement, production costs, scale economies, capital intensiveness and labor intensiveness, (3) the demographic and economic characteristics of communities

and regions, and (4) the administrative and electoral institutions of the governments themselves.

Governments are, first and foremost political institutions that are spatially bound and legally constrained in function. What local governments can do is determined by legislation passed by state government. Therefore, another important factor to examine is whether state laws promote or even permit collaboration between local governments. Carr, LeRoux and Shrestha (2009) noted that state level factors such as tax limitations, mandated services, ways in which governments are formed and potential restrictions on interlocal collaboration can affect service production decisions.

“State level rules” refer to externally imposed rules such as state statutes and constitutional provisions that define the legal authority of local governing units and determine the specific ability of the units to deal with ICA problems. Such rules shape the strategies available to local units and the incentives that may be provided to encourage or discourage collaboration. Thus, state tax and revenue restrictions, such as those present in Michigan, can affect a local unit’s ability to cope.

Feiock’s second factor, the terms “service attributes” and “service characteristics” of goods encompass matters such as “asset specificity” and “meterability,” the difficulty of measuring the quality and quantity of output. If certain activity requires that specific investments be made, and those assets cannot easily be redeployed elsewhere, the local unit may be reluctant to accept a proposed collaborative effort. Carr, LeRoux and Shrestha (2009) have argued that asset specificity can create significant costs such as monitoring activity closely to ensure that a contractor not act opportunistically. If the nature of the goods establishes a dependency among the local players that locks them into

a long-term commitment, they may be reluctant to collaborate. If a particular service requires a large capital expenditure, local governments may conclude that it is better to contract out its production to a private for-profit entity or in some instances, a non-profit agency. If the quantity and/or quality of the service provided is difficult to measure or quantify, local governments may decide that it is better to keep that function in-house.

A third factor identified by Feiock highlights the importance of the economic and demographic characteristics of communities and regions. How do shared borders and repeated interaction among neighboring units affect how local government views any potential collaboration? Moreover, demographic homogeneity within a jurisdiction, and among collaborating jurisdictions, may make collective effort easier to establish and maintain. Successful collaboration is more likely when potential partners share similar political and economic interests (Feiock 2004).

Finally, Feiock argues that administrative and electoral institutions of the governments themselves will impact their ability to collaborate. Whether city council members are elected by district or at-large may affect how they view various proposals involving collaboration. Whether or not a city manager is present may influence whether or not a unit will collaborate with its neighbors. The presence of progressively ambitious politicians who harbor plans for higher office and desire to take credit for collaborative efficiencies may enhance the likelihood of collaborative activities being undertaken (Feiock 2008).

Another aspect of the ICA framework is the concept that repeated contacts between local government actors over time can play a significant part in determining

whether interlocal collaboration will occur. It is thought that the form that such repeat play takes can also affect if and how local jurisdictions chose to collaborate.

The relationships that may or may not exist between local government actors can also play an important role in collaboration decisions. “Local government officials may be linked through personal relationships, professional associations, regional councils, and other forms of networks that present opportunities for information sharing that may increase the likelihood of interlocal service cooperation” (Carr, LeRoux and Shrestha 2009, p. 404). This dissertation will examine the relationships and networks that exist among the participants interviewed to determine whether such factors play a significant role in collaboration decisions.

Frederickson (1999) has argued that professional city administrators share a common professional perspective on issues of cooperation due to their education and membership in local professional networks and national organizations such as the International City County Management Association (ICMA). Professional associations may be a factor in promoting interlocal collaboration (Carr, LeRoux and Shrestha 2009). Brown and Potoski (2003) have argued that such professional affiliations can help in developing common understandings and practices among city managers. This dissertation will examine whether or not such factors are relevant to the collaboration decision.

The framework developed by Zeemering (2007) is also used to obtain a better understanding of how collaboration actually occurs at the local level. Zeemering developed and uses this framework to measure the conjunction of policy stimuli, perceptions of intergovernmental partners and social capital, and the actual terms of the proposed collaboration. Zeemering argues that “decisions in favor of collaboration

depend on the officials perceptions of an agenda for collaboration, their assessment of the terms of collaboration, and their opinion of potential government partners” (Zeemering 2007, p. ix). Zeemering ultimately concludes that collaboration is most likely to occur when all three causal conditions are present.

This research uses the case of five communities to describe the factors needed for intergovernmental cooperation to occur and be successful, identify the elected and administrative actors who usually drive this activity, and explain how they overcome the sometimes significant transaction costs associated with inter-jurisdictional cooperation. This research also explores the role that trust between actors play in collaborative activity. A better understanding of the role of trust, what it means in this context, and how it is gained or lost, is a significant contribution to the literature on municipal collaboration activities.

Some of the broad questions asked in this research include the following; 1) what kinds of conditions and events trigger collaboration, 2) are policy entrepreneurs important to the collaboration process and if so, what kinds of activities do they engage in, 3) are fire services easier to collaborate on than other types of public services, 4) is retaining control over services important to local governments, 5) is trust important to collaboration and if so, how is it developed, maintained or damaged, 6) how do collaborating communities choose one another, 7) what kinds of activities can elected officials engage in to facilitate collaboration, and 8) what kinds of activities can administrative officials engage in to facilitate collaboration.

## Conclusion

The balance of this dissertation examines the questions raised in the introduction. Chapter Two reviews the extant literature on this topic and examines different aspects of interlocal cooperation. It is organized around the Institutional Collective Action framework developed by Feiock as well as that developed by Zeemering. Chapter Three describes the methodology used for this research and gives a fuller description of the characteristics of the area that is the focus of this study.

Chapters Four through Eight discuss a case study of a recent effort to form the “Downriver Fire Authority” among the Metropolitan Detroit cities of Allen Park, Lincoln Park, Melvindale, Southgate and Wyandotte. The discussion and analysis in these chapters is based on information about the effort obtained through in-depth interviews with participants directly involved in the effort to create the fire authority as well as a follow up interview done in 2009.

Chapter Four examines the factors motivating five local governments to consider collaborating with one another in the provision of fire services. Chapter Five examines what these local governments sought in the operating terms of the collaboration agreement. Chapter Six examines what is important to these five local governments in terms of their partners in the collaboration. Chapter Seven examines the differences in the roles played by elected and administrative officials in these communities when they attempt to engage in interlocal collaboration. Chapter Eight is drawn from a separate follow-up interview done with the local government participants.

Chapter Nine is the Summary and Implications of Research. In theory, all of these communities should make good collaboration partners. The existing literature would lead

to the conclusion that these communities should be able to successfully collaborate on the merging of their five fire departments into a single consolidated fire authority. Requirements necessary for communities to collaborate on this kind of service provision is the central focus of this research.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH AND THEORY RELATIVE TO INTERLOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE COLLABORATION

There are many reasons why communities may choose to collaborate with one another. Demographic differences among communities, real and perceived, can be an important factor. More homogeneous cities collaborate less intensively than cities in more heterogeneous markets (Krueger and McGuire 2005). The U. S. Census of Governments shows that nationwide, there is collaboration occurring. The Census of Governments indicated that approximately 68 percent of the cities in the study collaborate with each other and the average value of their efforts was one million dollars each. The total value of interlocal collaboration was 3.9 billion dollars (U.S. Census Bureau 1997). “That figure represented 3.4 percent of the total municipal budgets for all cities that participated in some form of collaboration” (Krueger and McGuire 2005, p. 21).

This examination of the relevant literature will reveal what is currently known and what is not known about how and why local governments collaborate in the provision of public services. There is a significant amount of collaboration occurring in a variety of settings across the nation. There is some understanding of why collaboration occurs in the provision of certain services but why it doesn't occur in others or is perceived as difficult to accomplish in certain service areas is less clear.

Using the Institutional Collective Action (ICA) framework of Feiock (2004), this chapter examines the factors that make collaboration more or less likely to occur.

Examining state level rules reveals that the part played by interlocal agreements is not fully understood. When examining the transaction and production cost characteristics of public services, a better understanding of the various nuances of transaction and political costs is needed.

The extant literature reveals conflicts or gaps in our understanding of the role played by fiscal stress in a community on the decision to collaborate. It is unclear at this time what collaborating communities are specifically looking for in terms of their partners. A better understanding of the role of demographics and fiscal capacity in the decision-making process is needed. There is a lack of consensus in the literature as to the importance of having a professional city manager present and what specifically it is about that presence or absence that makes collaboration more or less likely. There is also no consensus in the literature on the importance of the roles played by elected and administrative officials, which group drives the decision to collaborate and specifically how is it done.

This chapter endeavors to sort out some of the conflicting theories and to identify the gaps in our understanding that currently exist. The balance of this dissertation analyzes research done in an effort to fill in some of those gaps and obtain a clearer understanding of the process of interlocal collaboration.

### **Which is Better? Polycentric or Consolidated Regions**

Much has been written about the disarticulation of the modern state and how it makes administering governments more difficult. There is increased attention being paid to related topics such as the difference between government and governance. No matter

what term is used to describe it, “the hollow state” (Milward & Provan, 1993, 2000) “third party government” (Salamon, 1981) or “the market state” (Bobbitt, 2002) there is little doubt that government and governance have changed dramatically in the United States over the past fifty years. Whether it is called cooperation, collaboration (Agranoff and McGuire 2003) or administrative conjunction (H. George Frederickson 1999), the public sector is slowly changing to accommodate America’s transformation from an industrial to an information or knowledge-based society.

One of the ways that local governments are coping with these changes is through collaboration in the production and provision of public goods and services. One of the clearest findings coming out of research in this area is that “(m)etropolitan governance does not require a metropolitan government able to provide or produce services” (Parks and Oakerson 1989, p. 24). While there are costs and conflicts associated with fragmented authority spread horizontally between competing local governments, “urban metropolitan regions are where the inevitable tradeoffs required to coordinate policies can potentially optimize the public value of collaboration by taking advantage of specific local conditions” (Feiock 2008, p. 1).

Critics however, look at the relatively low level of collaboration as proof that voluntary efforts are insufficient. They argue that there are too many separate local governments but not enough governance in metropolitan areas. What is really needed is a reduction in the number of governing units through consolidation. Some research has indicated that the costs of fragmented local government far outweigh benefits. “Those arguing in favor of fragmented metropolitan area governance contend that such fragmentation generates competition and leads to more efficient local governments.

Those calling for more consolidated metropolitan governance contend that fewer local governments generate economies of scale, minimize externalities and lessen inequalities between localities” (Post 2000, p. 3). There is research indicating that externalities, asymmetries of information and the lack of economies of scale more than offset the efficiency gains that may be generated by local government competition in a fragmented metropolitan area. It is also argued that consolidation in metropolitan areas reduces the service inequalities often present in such areas (Hill 1974).

A second school of thought, anchored in the seminal work of Ostrom, Tiebout and Warren (1961), contends that the plethora of governmental units constitutes a polycentric system of metropolitan governance that may, nonetheless, function in a coherent and successful manner. Post (2002) argues that both proponents and opponents of the polycentric model are, in part, correct. She contends that both groups ignore that certain factors can and do cause local governments in a fragmented area to cooperate when it is in their best interest to do so, but that such cooperation is neither easy nor automatic.

There are local factors that must be taken into consideration when developing informal organizations for dealing with metropolitan problems. The United States has a strong tradition of local self-determination and local autonomy. Michigan is an excellent example of a state with a strong home rule tradition, and such a tradition can complicate organizational and collaborative efforts. It would seem to naturally lead to a preference for a polycentric system of metropolitan governance. A polycentric system of governance should be easy to adopt when cooperative ventures produce a greater return on investment for all concerned.

Agency costs can be yet another problem associated with collaborative activities by governments. Principal-agent theory suggests that problems can arise when collaborating governments have officials negotiating and operating on behalf of the entire community. The government agents that negotiate collaboration agreements on behalf of the local community may have different preferences than the majority of the citizens of that community. “The conditions for successful regional governance can be found in the types of policies, the characteristics of the community, political institutions and the formal and informal network structures in which local actors are embedded” (Feiock 2007, p. 10).

Some scholars have argued that regionalism, dealing with problems as a part of a larger group as opposed to operating solely as individual communities, is re-emerging as a preferred solution for localities (Dodge 1990; Gage, 1992). Negative externalities that can be resolved to the mutual benefit of all (Pareto criterion) must be distinguished from those whose resolution entail costs for some localities and benefits for others. “Mutual benefit issues will generally support interlocal or regional coordination while those with negative externalities will frequently frustrate efforts to collaborate” (Julnes and Pindur 1994, p. 423). The latter may be candidates for more coercive “metro-wide” solutions.

Much of the literature has questioned the wisdom of the ways in which governmental power in metropolitan area governments is organized. The “consolidation” perspective calls for broader governance, perhaps imposed by higher level governments. Parks and Oakerson (1989) counter that there is no one best way to organize the metropolis but that rather “metropolitan areas require patterns of governance that are sufficiently open to allow for diverse solutions that respond to variable conditions.” They

argue for a *local public economy approach* that views the metropolitan area as “complexly organized by a variety of both small and large provision units linked in numerous ways to a variety of production units. Jurisdictional fragmentation is augmented by organizational overlays that may provide and/or produce services” (Parks and Oakerson 1989, p. 23).

Fragmentation is generally “measured as a ratio of the number of jurisdictions in a metropolitan area to population” (Parks and Oakerson 1989, p. 20). Although a fragmented metropolitan area is diverse and complex, this does not necessarily signal failure. Some research has argued that more fragmentation tends to equal more efficiency. One study found that the growth in local expenditures was slower in a fragmented metropolitan area than it was in a more consolidated area (Schneider 1986).

Parks and Oakerson found that the metropolitan areas they studied tended to develop multi-level and multi-scale mechanisms for dealing with the diversity of preferences of their residents and the economies and diseconomies of scale they encountered. Using their local public economy theory, these arrangements are seen as rational accommodations to the diversity found in modern metropolitan areas. Rather than seeing the metropolitan area as a group of isolated, individual communities research found that “(l)ocal economies . . . are linked organizationally by webs of interlocal agreements and overlaid by larger scale arrangements for specific purposes” (Parks and Oakerson 1989, p. 23).

Richard C. Feiock points out that much of the literature assumes that governmental fragmentation precludes a concerted response to inter-jurisdictional problems. Rational choice theories primarily conclude that competition is the

coordinating mechanism of local public economies. Feiock argues that most of the literature deals with local government service networks and focuses on the consequences of collaboration rather than on how they are born and begin to grow in the first place (Feiock 2007).

### **Overcoming Obstacles to Interjurisdictional Collaboration: The Institutional Collective Action Framework**

Given that inter-jurisdictional collaboration imposed by a legally superior government is not common, the work of Feiock provides a useful lens to examine this topic. His work combines transaction cost and social exchange theories within the Institutional Collective Action framework to explain how collaborative arrangements arise, and how they evolve over time. He finds that collaboration is stimulated when it generates “collective benefits by producing efficiencies and various economies of scale in the provision and production of services and by internalizing spillover problems” (Feiock 2007, p. 3). Feiock contends that the more serious the underlying service problem, the larger the aggregate gains from resolving it and the more likely a local government unit might be to use a form of collaboration to solve its problem.

Feiock’s Institutional Collective Action (ICA) framework identifies four factors affecting the costs and benefits of collective action by local government. As discussed in Chapter One, the four main categories examined by the ICA framework include the state rules that establish the institutional framework within which local government collaboration operates, the incentives for cooperation arising from the attributes of the public services that are the object of the cooperative efforts, the characteristics of the cities and their regions that affect the incentives for collective action on public services

and the institutions of local government. Variations in the powers provided to local elected officials and to public administrators affect the incentives of these actors to pursue and maintain collaborative service arrangements.

### **State Level Rules**

State level rules are collective choice rules that delineate the kinds of local actions that are permitted, forbidden or required (Ostrom 1990). Vertical intergovernmental relations and state level rules that authorize or restrict the actions of general purpose local governments, establish the tone and ground rules under which horizontal collaboration may occur within the state (McCabe 2000). State level rules affect the ability of local government actors to organize and act collectively to address the problems facing them. Imposed upon local governments they dictate the authority available to them and the set of strategies that they might employ. Some state statutes encourage collaboration between local governments while others hinder it. Feiock and Carr (2001) contend that state laws relative to incorporation and annexation can give cities important bargaining power with neighboring communities. In Michigan, incorporation is relatively easy and annexation relatively hard. Faced with the difficulty of annexing surrounding small jurisdictions, local municipalities may view inter-jurisdictional collaboration as a functional equivalent of and alternative to actual annexation.

Research by Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) found that the presence or absence of legal constraints was often a reason governments look at alternative service provision sources. State laws can be restrictive to a local government's ability to collaborate across jurisdictional lines, raise and allocate revenues, or use inter-governmental agreements.

“Political institutions are linked to successful interlocal cooperation because they shape the information available and the structure of incentives faced by government officials” (Feiock 2007, p. 15).

Rawlings (2003) found that state incentives play a significant role in fostering cooperation. “States can either frustrate or facilitate the natural desire to cooperate” (Rawlings 2003, p. 53). Incentives might take the form of monetary grants or assistance from one or more state agency. A state might require that local planning or service provision occurs on a multi-jurisdictional or regional basis which might encourage and act as an incentive to collaboration. Thus a state “might create special districts, authorize joint action or authorize interlocal agreements to help facilitate collaboration” (Rawlings 2003, p. 131). Similarly, Morgan, Hirlinger and England (1988, p. 367) conclude “(l)ocal communities operating under tax revolt era tax limitations are more inclined to engage in contracting arrangements.” The Headlee Amendment to the Michigan Constitution passed in the late 1970s is just such a tax revolt era limitation that might encourage collaboration since it makes local revenue increases difficult.

#### Tax Limitation

Tax limitations imposed by state law can impact the use of contracting or other forms of collaboration. Morgan, Hirlinger and England (1988) looked specifically at cities operating under pre and post-1978 tax limitations. The reason for delineating that year was to test whether the tax revolt era limitations imposed in the late 1970’s had a different effect than other types of legal limitations. They found that the presence of tax limitations was statistically significant to the decision to contract for service provision

(Morgan, Hirlinger and England 1988). Such external service provision might take the form of collaboration with a nonprofit organization, a for-profit firm or another unit of government. Brown and Potoski (2003) examined the role of tax limitations in creating fiscal pressures for local government units. While pointing out that any type of tax limitation might create fiscal pressure, the results of the post-1978 tax limitations had the express purpose of reducing the role of government in society and were consequently highly restrictive. Such restrictions forced local governments to look for more efficient ways to produce public services. Those factors are important to this study because Michigan operates under just such a late 1970s era tax limitation.

#### Special Districts as an Alternative to Consolidation or Collaboration

While formal efforts to consolidate governments are relatively rare (Feiock and Carr 2000), special district<sup>3</sup> formation is a more common reaction when local governments seek to efficiently provide services. McCabe (2004) argues that special districts are more often used because they have lower political transaction costs associated with them than does the consolidation of governments. When a state imposes fiscal limits on local government, such as assessment and property tax limits, it can lead to reductions in a local governing unit's ability to raise revenues, spend or borrow to meet

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<sup>3</sup> Organized local entities other than county, municipal, township or school district governments. Special districts are authorized by state law to provide only one or a limited number of designated functions, and with sufficient administrative and fiscal autonomy to qualify as separate governments; includes a variety of titles; such as, districts, authorities, boards, commissions, etc., as specified in the enabling state legislation (U.S. Census Bureau website 2010, List & Structure of Governments, [govs.org@census.gov](http://govs.org@census.gov)).

the demands they face for services. Such restrictions may in turn lead to the creation of more special districts (McCabe 2000).

Increasingly, special districts are coming to provide the types and kinds of services that were once provided by cities (McCabe 2000). McCabe also noted that state level rules had a definite influence on the creation of special districts. Special districts perform fire protection, water supply, housing and community development and drainage which are often provided by general purpose local governments (McCabe 2004). When state level rules prompt the formation of special districts or allow for the creation of an authority, that should encourage, rather than hamper, their organization.

#### Interlocal Agreements as a Form of Collaboration

Frederickson (1999) describes the “disarticulation of the state” in the following way. “As the borders and the sovereignty of jurisdictions decline in importance, there is a corresponding decline in the capacity of jurisdictions to significantly contain some public policy issues and, therefore, in the jurisdictions ability to manage them” (Frederickson 1999, p. 703). Because of the conditions described by Frederickson, many local jurisdictions have turned to interlocal agreements as one way to collaborate in dealing with various social and economic issues (Thurmaier and Wood 2004).

Interlocal agreements entered into by local governments are often created at the administrative level. Much of the interlocal agreement activity observed appears to be the result of actions of the local manager as opposed to elected authorities such as a city council (Thurmaier and Wood 2004). As suggested by the work of Frederickson (1999), local administrators more often seem to be engaged in collaboration with their

metropolitan area counterparts than are the local elected officials. Bartle and Swayze (1997) concluded that interlocal agreement activity is typically driven by the administrative staff of local governments as opposed to calls for change by the media, citizens or any interest groups.

Attempts to capture some economies of scale are often cited as the reason why local jurisdictions enter into interlocal collaborations (ACIR 1985). The Bartle and Swayze (1997) study indicated that fiscal pressure was a frequently cited reason for developing interlocal agreements to collaborate. Thurmaier and Wood (2004) concluded however, that cost saving and the presence of local fiscal stress were not major causes of cities and counties collaborating. Instead, respondents in that study indicated that providing a better level of service and being good neighbors was the motivation behind interlocal agreements.

There are other reasons why local governments may enter into interlocal agreements. “Interlocal agreements have lower political costs and have the ability to increase effectiveness, equity, and allocative technical efficiency” (Thurmaier and Wood 2004, p. 124). Interlocal agreements have the potential to improve or equalize the distribution of social resources across a metropolitan area. They can also be useful in reducing duplication of services and potentially reduce the costs of those services (Thurmaier and Wood 2004). Respondents in the Kansas City study indicate that interlocal agreements required a level of trust between officials. Recent work examining interlocal agreements by Andrew (2009) found that in transactions that call for high asset specificity, local governments will generally work with only “high-status” actors. In

transactions which have measurement of service difficulties, local governments will generally hedge their bets by working with partners of their existing partners.

### Annexation Laws

State level rules impact the prospects of interlocal collaboration in yet another way. They dictate the possibility, and difficulty, of incorporated areas annexing surrounding unincorporated areas. “State rules influence annexations by determining the range of powers available to local governments and by shaping the incentives of local actors to pursue this option” (Carr and Feiock 2001, p. 459). In states with overly restrictive annexation rules, special districts may be established to provide services (McCabe 2000).

The annexation of surrounding unincorporated areas in order to extend local government boundaries may often benefit municipal residents by taking advantage of various economies of scale. Yet surrounding areas may oppose annexation because they would rather pay a higher price for some services than assume the burden of paying for redistributive policies that benefit mostly central city residents (Carr and Feiock 2001). Examining annexations in all fifty states between 1990 and 1999, Carr and Feiock (2001), found that state level rules attempting to restrict annexation activity actually had the opposite affect and stimulated annexations. “Ironically, where state laws attempt to make annexing land or populations more difficult, municipal officials seeking to increase their populations and tax base have incentives to circumvent these constraints by engaging in more frequent, but smaller, annexations” (Carr and Feiock 2001, p. 468). Carr and Feiock found that those advocating annexation were able to manage the “scope

of conflict” (Schattschneider 1960) by the procedures they selected and therefore, state level rules governing annexation play an important role in the process.

Some researchers have argued that governments in states like Michigan, with extensive property tax limitation combined with provisions that make annexation difficult, may be inclined to seek outside service production (Brown and Potoski 2003). “Cities with strict limits on annexation authority are more likely to produce services externally, through either complete or joint contracting, than cities with extensive annexation authority are” (Brown and Potoski 2003, p. 448).

Because annexation of surrounding communities in order to capture any available economies of scale does not appear to be a reasonably available alternative in states like Michigan, communities may be more inclined to actively pursue the option of collaborating across jurisdictional lines. Rather than deal with the inherent political conflict involved in annexation, larger jurisdictions may be inclined to attempt to lead their neighbors toward the joint provision of public services.

### **Transaction and Production Cost Characteristics of Public Services**

Feiock’s ICA framework strongly emphasizes the role played by different types of costs which affect collective action. The first set deals with transaction costs of collective action. Consistent with this framework, but given less attention, is a second set, the production costs of public services. Largely ignored by the ICA framework, is a third set of costs facing local government officials, the political costs which create a disincentive for local cooperative ventures.

## Production Costs and Economies of Scale

The characteristics involved in the provision of public goods must be taken into account before attempting collaborative activities. For collaboration to occur, public services must first be packaged so that those who do not pay for the service are excluded from its use. Thus “pure” public goods that are both non-rivalrous and non-excludable are poor candidates for collaborative production or provision. Private goods tend to be much more easily packaged and differentiated than are public goods. Effective standards of measurement must be developed so that production and provision can be adequately monitored. Such production costs potentially make interjurisdictional collaboration more difficult.

Some communities dealing with problems of production have achieved greater economies of scale through collaboration. Economies of scale occur when a decline in the average cost of production occurs as output increases. Local government officials frequently give that as the reason for engaging in inter-local agreements. Local governments can often capture the benefits of spillovers or positive externalities made possible by cooperation. Positive externalities can produce strong incentives for local government leaders to pursue joint efforts and goals (Feiock 2007).

Julnes and Pindur (1994) found that local officials in Virginia supported taking advantage of economies of scale achieved through service provision by regional councils. This support was primarily a result of previous council activity and the technical assistance provided. Such support “is associated more with serious problems in the region such as transportation and housing” (Julnes and Pindur 1994, p. 411).

It may be easier for a small number of local governments to cooperate because the transaction costs are relatively small when compared to situations where there are a large number of governments. Having a smaller number of participants has been found to be conducive to success (Lackey, Freshwater and Rupasingha 2002).

### Transaction Costs

Brown and Potoski (2003) define transaction costs as “essentially the management costs associated with either internally producing the service or buying it through contracting . . . (t)he factors that give rise to transaction costs result from limited information and uncertainty” (Brown and Potoski 2003, p. 443). Difficulty in monitoring an intergovernmental agreement is one of the important transaction costs involved in collaboration (Agranoff and McGuire 1998 and 2003). Research suggests that transaction costs affect decisions in that “if they are lower then collaboration is easier but if they are higher such agreements are more difficult” (Krueger and McGuire 2005, p. 8). Feiock has made a similar argument in his discussion of the Coase Theorem (Coase 1960), which states “if transaction costs are sufficiently low, rational parties will achieve a Pareto-efficient allocation through voluntary bargaining” (Feiock 2007, p. 6). This theory states that collaborative actions are expected when benefits are great, and transaction costs such as negotiating, monitoring and enforcing the agreement are relatively low.

Brown and Potoski use a transactional costs framework to argue that governments are often motivated by an aversion to risk that is associated with certain types of service production. They build on previous transaction cost scholarship by looking at three

specific risk factors: (1) service specific characteristics, (2) the service marketplace and (3) goal incongruence.

Under the heading of service specific characteristics, the authors describe two common factors appearing in much of the literature: asset specificity and service measurability. “Asset specificity refers to whether specialized investments are required to produce the service . . . (s)ervice measurability refers to how difficult it is for the contracting organization to measure the outcomes of the service, to monitor the activities required to deliver the service, or both” (Brown and Potoski 2003, p. 444). When assets become very specific to a particular production method, governments tend to bring that service production in-house as opposed to contracting it out. However, when such asset specificity becomes extreme and requires a large up-front expenditure of resources, governments may decide to employ outside resources rather than incur those costs.

The proper measurement of service production is another important issue. In the case of some services, the outcomes, or even the activity itself, cannot be easily identified. Thus, the outputs of social services such as housing counseling, poverty advocacy or the national D.A.R.E. (Drug Awareness Resistance Education) program are much more difficult to measure than are garbage removal or the sale of units of water. When a government finds itself with a service that is difficult to measure, it may turn to a joint production mechanism, whereby, it produces one part of the service and another entity produces another. Through this method, the government often finds it easier to monitor the activity and the quality/quantity of the service. Brown and Potoski speculate that when “services become more difficult to measure, governments produce more services through joint contracting and . . . governments internally produce services that

are extremely difficult to measure” (Brown and Potoski 2003, p. 445). When services are difficult to measure, governments turn to joint-contracting because that method allows them to be more directly involved in the provision of services and able to monitor it more closely. When services become extremely difficult to measure, governments are unable to properly control for potential vendor opportunism and hence often decide to provide such services internally instead. Brown and Potoski conclude that

when governments contract for highly asset-specific services, those that tend toward monopoly provision, they choose mechanisms that lower the risk of vendor opportunism . . . When services are more difficult to monitor and measure, governments increase their use of joint contracting and internal service production . . . government’s contract less when service marketplaces contain fewer vendors, because the risk of vendor opportunism is enhanced (Brown and Potoski 2003, p. 442).

This finding is supported by other work. Krueger and McGuire (2005) suggest that collaboration is a function of transaction costs that vary with different institutional arrangements utilized in cities, as well as the degree of competition between cities. The belief is that cities facing high transaction costs and high competition are less likely to participate in collaboration or may participate less deeply. By participating less deeply, Krueger and McGuire mean the degree of participation on the part of a local government, measured in terms of the number of dollars transferred from one city to another.

#### Political Costs

In 1971 Oliver P. Williams proposed an alternative methodology for analyzing urban areas which he called the “Social Access Approach”. This framework emphasizes distinctions in the political saliency of public services and the implications of these distinctions for the prospects of centralizing service production in urban areas.

Williams distinguishes between two types of urban policies: “*lifestyle*” policies and “*system maintenance*” policies. Lifestyle policies are those “which involve a direct expression of preferred interactions” and system maintenance policies are those “which generally facilitate the choice of interactions” (Williams 1971, p. 88). Lifestyle policies are those dealing with education, zoning, land use and in some instances libraries and police services. Such policies reflect the preferences and in some ways regulate the interactions of those persons living in a particular area. System maintenance policies deal with less value-laden issues: water, sewer, transportation, stadiums and utilities. Williams argues that lifestyle policies are less likely to be jointly provided because they are closely identified with the unique character or identity of a specific community and are so closely aligned with what is perceived to make one community different from another. Williams concluded that such decentralization is made possible by “sets of intergovernmental collaboration arrangements for specific functional areas” (Williams 1970, p. 79). Ultimately, he concludes that “policy areas which are perceived as neutral with respect to controlling social access may be centralized but those which are perceived as controlling social access will remain decentralized” (p. 93).

Another characteristic of public service provision are the political consequences of the decisions made relative to collaboration with neighboring jurisdictions. Bickers (2005) suggests that collaborative efforts might result from an elected officials desire to prevent the dilution of voter group strength, groups that the elected officials may rely upon for future electoral support. Elected officials may be forced to give up some amount of control or authority in order to achieve collaborative benefits, yet if elected public officials voluntarily relinquish control that may have political consequences detrimental

to their electoral aspirations. Although collaborative activities may be highly beneficial to the local community, some local voters may oppose them and show their disapproval at the polls. This may be one of the reasons why research has consistently shown that city managers are far more supportive of collaboration than locally elected mayors and city council members (Feiock 2007).

A local politician with progressive ambition, who has regional or statewide political aspirations or future job hopes, may be more supportive of collaboration than an elected official simply hoping to continue serving his or her local community. Gillette (2000) has argued that such electoral ambitions can sometimes lead local officials to address interlocal needs even in the face of weak internal demands for such collaborative activity.

### **Characteristics of Regions and Communities**

The following two sections look at the effects that characteristics of regions have on collaborative activity. The ICA framework focuses on the incentives the characteristics have for interlocal cooperation. Regional characteristics include the number and proximity of other local governments that are suitable collaborators. These characteristics are expected to make collaboration more or less likely to occur.

A second set of factors that may impact collaboration is the demographic, economic, and fiscal characteristics of individual local communities. Many studies focus on the incentives for local public officials to collaborate because of fiscal stress, population loss, and other factors.

## Characteristics of Regions

Regional institutional homogeneity, defined as the similarity in political institutions across government units in a given region, can serve to facilitate collaborative exchanges because relevant actors tend to cluster with other actors who share similar values, norms and beliefs. Such similar attitudes toward collaborative activity should facilitate greater amounts of such activity (Carley 1991 and Sabatier 1999). This could be the result of greater levels of trust, but it may be just as likely that such actors view issues in much the same way, which makes collaboration easier to arrange.

The geographic location of potential collaboration partners is another salient factor. Fixed geographic borders often require repeated interactions among neighboring communities. This can reduce transaction costs by creating interdependencies and providing opportunities for key players to become familiar with, and more trusting of, each other. Efforts at collaboration between players not as familiar with one another can be much more costly. These players take time to get to know one another and develop the trust necessary to successful collaborative efforts (Feiock 2007).

Richard Campbell and Patty Glynn investigated interlocal cooperation in Georgia and tested the extent to which general purpose local governments cooperate with the state and other local governments in the provision of local public services. They found that counties spend more than cities to purchase services from other governmental units and that intergovernmental cooperation is related to population size, regardless of metropolitan status or form of government. While both metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties engaged in interlocal service provision agreements, metropolitan cities like the ones examined in the following chapters, were slightly more likely than

non-metropolitan cities to do so (Campbell and Glynn 1990). Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) found that if the community is located within a metropolitan area, it is much more likely to find other jurisdictions to contract with, but the desire to retain local independence of action induces local officials to steer clear of agreements with other political entities.

Research by various scholars suggests that geographic density may trump fragmentation. Post's (2002) research found that the geographic concentration of local governments can lead them to cooperate and confirmed that the geographic density of metropolitan area governments is a significant predictor of the occurrence of intergovernmental agreements. Likewise, geographic remoteness could lead to non-cooperation because those communities had no previous interaction with close neighbors and had no built-up levels of trust and reciprocity (Lackey, et al. 2002).

Location is another characteristic of a community which affects its' decision to collaborate. Central cities and suburbs react differently, and a city outside an MSA acts differently than the other two (Agranoff and McGuire 1998 and 2003). Cities outside of metropolitan areas are least likely to enter into service contracts with another unit of government, which may indicate that the lack of available suppliers is a critical factor (Morgan and Hirlinger 1991). Beverly Cigler (1999) found collaboration among rural governments to be rare.

Another characteristic that was found to discourage cooperation was "(h)aving too many chiefs involved in the process made it extremely difficult to satisfy everyone" (Lackey, et al. 2002, p. 146). If everyone involved is expecting to be in charge of the collaboration and making the important decisions, such a characteristic could make

interjurisdictional collaboration more difficult to achieve. It is often assumed that adjoining local jurisdictions will have a history of past interactions and that those interactions might influence current decisions relative to cooperating. Hostile past confrontations between regional actors were found to hinder efforts at cooperation. A mismatch in fiscal capacity of the jurisdictions was a huge barrier to successful collaboration. “Shortsightedness, greed and the lack of political demand for change were also factors that inhibited cooperation” (Lackey, et al. 2002, p. 148). If one of the jurisdictions considered itself the “big dog” that fact could hinder cooperative efforts.

Rather than simply turning to the costly and politically significant activity involved in formal consolidation of governmental units, Post contends that “fragmented metropolitan area governments may often be able to realize the economies of scale and other savings usually attributed to consolidated governments by choosing instead to collaborate” (Post 2002, pp. 3-4). Post found that repeated contacts between local government actors led to greater levels of trust and performance experience which often led to increased levels of cooperation between government units in a metropolitan area.

Summing up, the close geographic location of potential partners and having adjacent geographic borders can lead to repeated interaction between local actors that in turn leads to the building of trust and performance expectations between them. In areas that are densely populated with local governments, the availability of potential partners is increased and enhances collaborative opportunities. We also discover that it is important that potential partners have similar political institutions, fiscal capacity and view one another as relative equals.

## Incentives for Regional Action

The Regional Impulses Framework developed by Kathryn A. Foster (1997) provides additional insight into the factors that determine whether local governments within a metropolitan area will collaborate in the delivery of public services. Foster describes “*regional impulses*” as factors that motivate local governments to engage in cooperative activity. The absence of natural barriers often facilitates regional ties as local governments find it easier to collaborate across jurisdictional boundaries. Local jurisdictions with similar macroeconomics are more likely to work cooperatively than are jurisdictions that are dissimilar economically, politically or socially. Jurisdictions that have had uneven growth experiences that led to increased competition might be less inclined to cooperate. Fiscal impulses can contribute to cooperation between local jurisdictions when there are economies of scale to be captured. Local communities are concerned with the relative fiscal capacity of any jurisdiction they may consider cooperating with. If a community is concerned that it is bringing more resources to the table than a neighbor or is concerned that the neighbor may not have the fiscal integrity to carry-out long-term projects, they are much less likely to cooperate (Foster 1997). If one community believes that it is being fiscally exploited by another, it is unlikely to cooperate. Collaboration may be easier when adjacent jurisdictions share political leanings or party affiliation. Every area has its own unique combination of leaders, interest groups, institutions, power relationships and policies that shape its’ outlook on cooperation. (Foster 1997).

### Availability of Potential Partners

It is important that potential collaboration partners have sufficient information to make an informed decision as to whether or not a particular joint effort will prove to be mutually profitable. According to Feiock (2007) actors need to know who is or isn't a good potential collaborative partner. With imperfect information and no previous experience working together, potential collaborators face relatively high start-up costs. Each local collaborative partner wants joint gains from collective activities but also wants a larger relative share of the benefits. With both communities expecting joint benefits and perhaps a little more of the total, it would seem likely that collaborating communities must be similar to one another and approach the bargaining situation from equally strong positions. Such factors further limit the potential pool of collaborative partners that a local government can choose from.

In addition, the circumstances of each community may change over time. What seems to be a very good bargain today may not seem so in the future. Such changes may prompt some collaborative partners to default on their initial agreement (Keohane and Martin 1995). Feiock (2007) concludes that the higher the probability that respective partners interests may drift apart, the less likely communities are to form a contractual relationship. Enforcement of collaboration responsibilities can become a costly transaction feature under such circumstances.

Finally, existing research has shown that it is important that there be competition between service providers in order to maintain an equal bargaining field. It is also important that local government maintain the ability to provide some public services

internally in order not to become a “hollow state” that is no longer capable of producing and providing certain public goods and services (Milward and Provan 2000).

It is argued that competitive markets have a tendency to make contracting more effective and less risky because transaction costs are lowered. In the absence of a competitive market some would argue that cost savings may never materialize because outside providers cannot be compared, and without competition they will tend to charge more for the goods and services and/or work to cut corners relative to their costs. Urban areas are more likely to contract for services because of the existence of a competitive market with a larger number of entities that can provide a given service. In those situations, governments may be more likely to produce public services through complete or joint contracting because competition lowers the risk of doing so.

#### Presence of Networks Linking Local Government Officials

The work of Robert Putnam has demonstrated that norms of reciprocity, levels of trust and networks of civic engagement can help promote cooperation. Putnam argues that voluntary cooperation is easier to accomplish when substantial stocks of social capital are available (Putnam 1993). Racial and ethnic disparities can result in less trusting societies and lessen the ability of people and groups within an area to cooperate (Dodge 1992). A good, long-established relationship among cooperating jurisdictions increases the chances for continuing success. Processes run smoothly because of accumulated levels of trust among the participants (Lackey, et al. 2002).

Local government actors who are linked with other local government actors not currently collaborating, can be particularly important in building such networks. As local

government actors become more acquainted with one another and trust is accumulated, network members are encouraged to undertake further activities. Such trust is particularly important in settings where there is high potential for shirking or defection by some members of the network. While there is always that potential, increased levels of trust may reduce the likelihood of it occurring. Scholz, et al.; (2005) refer to this phenomenon as the “credibility-clustering hypothesis.” Threats of shirking or free-riding impose a cost on actors that have already invested resources in the collective effort. Such a reliable network reduces the costs of both monitoring and enforcing compliance, two important transaction costs.

Cooperation is more likely the longer the actors have cooperated with one another. In a tightly clustered network with repeated contacts, each can benefit from acquiring and preserving a reputation for cooperation and commitment (Park and Feiock 2003). A history of positive cooperation between local government actors leads to the development of norms of behavior that build social capital, and thereby reduce transaction costs. Declining transaction costs further encourage local government actors to collaborate. Feiock’s recent work confirms the argument that “the attributes of local government actors and the relationships that develop between them need to be accounted for in explanations of how and why they collaborate” (Scholz, Feiock and Ahn 2005, p. 24).

Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) found that a lower commitment by local public officials to retaining local control of service delivery is a factor that motivates them to look to other units of government. However, current research indicates that local

governmental units will generally resist giving up any authority they currently have to other local units or to higher levels of government (Feiock 2008).

Through the development of informal social and policy networks, local governmental actors can overcome many of the unwanted costs associated with collective action. “Informal network structures emerge unplanned from interactions among institutional actors. Informal networks coordinate complex decisions within the formal structure. They preserve full local autonomy and require no formal authority” (Feiock 2008, p. 7).

#### Presence of Councils of Government

The research discussed in the following chapters examines the importance of an area-wide council of government (COG) in a region. It is relevant to the discussion of interlocal collaboration to discuss the impact on cooperation that higher levels of government and area-wide COGs might have. Results of research conducted in the 1980s indicated that interlocal cooperation is an ineffective substitute for federal intervention. In the absence of sanctions or incentives from a higher authority, communities can often cooperate well if benefits are shared and/or the costs of collaboration are hidden. Otherwise, they do not collaborate well (Wrightson 1986, p. 261). According to Peterson (1981), distributive policies can be implemented effectively without federal intervention because the costs are hidden or diffused. Wrightson (1986) noted that in many cases it was found that the presence of a COG made the process smoother and more effective. Because COGs are voluntary associations of local elected officials of member governments they are well-suited to cooperate.

More recent research by LeRoux (2008) suggests that COGs may be less effective in facilitating interlocal collaboration than previously thought, but that the smaller nonprofit community conferences found in many metropolitan areas may be quite effective in doing so. LeRoux analyzed the role played by the South East Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), the Downriver Community Conference and the Conference of Western Wayne in increasing or decreasing the likelihood of interlocal cooperation in the service areas of police, fire, roads and bridges, utilities and environmental management. LeRoux found that “nonprofit community conferences examined here had a positive and fairly consistent effect on the likelihood of engaging in interlocal service delivery and the extent to which jurisdictions contract with other local governments for additional components of a service” (LeRoux 2008, p. 170).

However, LeRoux found that membership in a COG had no effect on interlocal service delivery. The data gathered in this research suggests that “networks are not equally effective in producing this outcome. Belonging to a small organization made up of similar members appears to be more important than belonging to a large organization whose members are more likely to have diverse interests” (LeRoux 2008, p. 170). LeRoux further suggests that it may not be the voluntary nature of COGs that leads to this inability, but rather its large membership and diversity of interests.

#### Characteristics of Individual Communities

Feiock (2007) argues that specific characteristics of the community, along with both formal and informal institutional arrangements, act to reduce transaction costs in terms of information, coordination, negotiation, enforcement and agency costs. Agency costs can arise when a public official, as a bargaining agent for his or her community, is

supposed to represent the interests of that community, but fails to do so. Also, in situations where the preferences of different constituencies within the community are unknown, unclear, or vary a great deal, a public official may simply not know what the community wants and what he or she should do. The public officials may instead pursue their interests. When such problems are encountered, it is said that an agency problem exists (Feiock 2007).

As noted earlier, shared borders can “increase exposure to positive and negative externalities and lock neighbors into repeat play that provides opportunities for mutual assurances . . .” (Feiock 2008, p. 12). Other important factors examined by the ICA framework include the homogeneity of preferences within communities and across all communities in a region. Demographic homogeneity between collaborating communities is thought to reduce the costs of cooperating (Feiock 2008).

The fear of losing local control over service production is strong and therefore the net gains of turning to external sources must be substantial (Ferris 1986). Some research shows that when local officials fear the loss of local control, less intergovernmental contracting tends to occur (Morgan & Hirlinger 1991).

In general, Morgan, Hirlinger and England reached the same basic conclusions that Ferris did earlier in regards to the forces influencing the contracting decision. Local officials will more likely choose external service provision over internal when: (1) suppliers are readily available and cost savings likely, (2) fiscal pressures are prominent, especially when created by tax limitation measures and (3) a lower percentage of the community’s population is composed of dependent persons, those of low to low/moderate income (Morgan, Hirlinger and England 1988).

Research by Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) indicated that fiscal stress in a community is not a major incentive for outsourcing. Fiscal pressure and cost savings can be inducements to local governments in contracting out, but political opposition is still a significant factor in the final decision. As Shulman (1982) argued, unions and municipal employees often fight hard against it.

Several factors do, however, appear to positively influence the decision by local officials to use non-traditional service delivery options. Among the reasons most often given by respondents, expected cost savings appear to be most important. Availability of alternative sources of delivery was a consideration often cited. Ineffectual political opposition was another inducement (Morgan and Hirlinger 1991). Other research has shown that those communities more dependent on outside funding sources are more likely to suffer fiscal stress (Bowman 1981). Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) hypothesized that the percentage of city revenues derived from federal and state sources would be positively related to the decision to use outside service providers.

#### Fiscal Capacity of the Community

The fiscal capacity of a community and the fiscal stress it confronts are factors that have been examined by many researchers. As noted earlier, James Ferris (1986) argued that municipalities may not be eager to outsource services but rather would prefer to maintain direct local control. Noticeable fiscal pressure was one of the conditions that Ferris concluded was necessary in order to explain any incidence of outsourcing. Contrary to her own predictions and reaching a seemingly counter-intuitive conclusion,

Foster (1997) argues that empirical evidence shows that widespread fiscal stress appears to hamper rather than encourage regional consolidation.

Cities are thought to compete in a market-like fashion to provide an optimal mix of goods and services at the lowest possible overall tax rate (Tiebout 1956). One way to accomplish this is by “creating slack resources made available through the joint implementation of services with another city” (Krueger and McGuire 2005, p. 7). Another potential problem in interlocal collaboration is the propensity for cities to act opportunistically when competition is high and transaction costs are low. Cities with more severe needs are even more motivated to generate slack resources so that they can be used to help alleviate various problems (Krueger and McGuire 2005). Krueger and McGuire found that cities already enjoying high taxable values and high tax revenues among the least likely to seek additional revenues through interlocal arrangements.

#### Demographic/Socioeconomic Composition

Lackey, Freshwater and Rupasingha (2002) found that many rural local government officials and residents are suspicious of collaborative efforts. The authors investigated the effects of several independent variables on collaborative efforts. They found that higher education levels had a strong positive correlation with trust and cooperation.

Brown and Potoski (2003) elaborate on the differences between older industrial cities such as those found in the northeast and Midwest United States and the newer post-industrial cities found in the southwest and western states. The authors hypothesized that “older industrial cities are more likely to produce services externally, through either

complete or joint contracting, than younger postindustrial cities are” (Brown and Potoski 2003, p. 448). Those cities providing a larger proportion of public services through intergovernmental contracting tended to have lower labor costs (Morgan and Hirlinger 1991).

Generally the literature argues that the larger the group, the harder it is to organize. There are mixed opinions regarding the effect of a strong central city such as Detroit in the metro area. There is disagreement regarding the effects of political culture on governmental cooperation. Social capital can often lead to better cooperation. Higher levels of social capital were found to have a positive effect on levels of intergovernmental cooperation across the nation as a whole (Rawlings 2003).

The economic, social and political characteristics of a community’s population can help shape their preferences for public goods and also help determine the potential gains from collaboration and the transaction costs associated with it (Feiock 2007). Communication costs will be greater in a heterogeneous community as opposed to a more homogeneous one and hence, increase the cost of collaboration.

One of the political indicators of whether a community will contract out or collaborate on service provision is the percentage of elderly persons in the community’s population. Measuring the number of persons in the population that were sixty-five years or older, Morgan, Hirlinger and England (1988) found that a larger percentage of such persons in the population correlated with that community being more resistant to any proposed change in the existing level of services. These researchers characterized elderly persons as that part of the community that is more dependent on public services and hence more resistant to any proposed changes in services.

Examining data from a 1983 ACIR/ICMA survey combined with other data related to social, economic and fiscal data for cities, Morgan and Hirlinger confirmed the earlier conclusion and argued that “cities with larger proportions of elderly are less inclined to use IG service arrangements” (Morgan and Hirlinger 1991, p. 138). The researchers hypothesized it may be that elderly residents are more politically aware and likely to monitor service levels more closely than other groups in the community.

Analyzing the literature on interlocal cooperation Lynette Rawlings (2003) noted that some studies have found that “individuals in racially fragmented areas are less willing to pool their fiscal resources to provide public goods” (Rawlings 2003, p. 5). Rawlings noted that most of the empirical literature she reviewed had concluded that heterogeneity, particularly racial heterogeneity, has a negative impact on cooperation. Contrary to that literature however, she concluded that, “Metropolitan area racial variation was found to be positively associated with interlocal cooperation” (Rawlings 2003, p. 19).

The percentage of lower income households has been found in some research to be a negative indicator of a community’s propensity to consider external service delivery. Using the percentage of households with annual incomes of \$30,000 or less, Morgan and Hirlinger (1988) found that “the higher the percentage of the city population in the lower and middle income brackets . . . the less likely a municipality will enter into agreements with external service providers” (p. 367). However, their subsequent research (Morgan and Hirlinger 1991) found that both poorer and wealthier communities tended to favor intergovernmental contracting. Other research has concluded that the causal link is not clear between area economic health and levels of cooperation (Rawlings 2003).

## Political Structures

Finally, the ICA framework highlights the role played by the institutional structure of the local government in structuring incentives for interlocal collaboration. “Electoral institutions shape the information available and the incentives faced by government officials. Administrators and elected officials each participate in networks and contractual relationships, but they differ in bargaining resources and institutional position” (Feiock 2008, p. 13). The political structure of a community is an important variable in understanding why some communities collaborate and others do not. It also may explain why some collaboration efforts undertaken fail while others are more successful. Local government sophistication in the monitoring of such arrangements is another indicator of a city’s likelihood to participate in collaboration (Krueger and McGuire 2005).

One of the reasons that local governments have not engaged in more collaboration is the belief that it requires substantial incentives to overcome the inherent difficulties involved and the loss of policy/political autonomy. Krueger and McGuire (2005) concluded that three institutional factors seemed to matter in these situations: first, city manager versus other forms of government; second, at-large versus single-member or ward/district representation, and third, partisan versus non-partisan elections. Single-member districts motivate politicians to focus on narrow interests (Kettl 2002), whereas at-large districts curb such parochialism by creating an incentive structure which motivates politicians to focus on services to the majority. “Political parties help reduce the information gathering costs for voters but non-partisan elections have little impact on the choice to collaborate or not” (Krueger and McGuire 2005, p. 5).

## The Presence of a Professional City Manager

The public administration literature maintains that professional city managers share a common type of training, orientation and in-service experiences which can lead to a common set of values emphasizing efficiency and professionalism. Local leaders may also pursue collaborative activities because of political and career incentives that they wish to pursue as a result of joint action. Such political incentives may include the desire to run for higher office. Other research (Feiock, et al. 2004) indicates that the professional standing and future employment opportunities of city managers can be enhanced by their engaging in collaborative service innovations.

The empirical literature is contradictory regarding the impact of the presence of a professional city manager on the likelihood of collaboration. Data gathered in Georgia indicated that, “local government units with city managers were not more likely to enter into agreements with other local governments for service provision” (Campbell and Glynn 1990, pp. 126). Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) found that the presence of a city manager did facilitate more intergovernmental contracting in the area of public safety.

Brown and Potoski (2003) argue that there are institutional explanations for why governments choose one production method over another. Council-manager forms of government often produce services externally because of the professional norm of running government more like a business. Being a member of the ICMA or similar professional organizations may lead to the use of industry standards when choosing between production methods. The presence of a city manager working in a local community can be an important source of policy innovation, particularly in the use of intergovernmental or collaborative contracts (Morgan & Hirlinger 1991).

Carr and LeRoux (2005) and Krueger and McGuire (2005) have reported that the council-manager form of government is a strong predictor of interlocal contracting and that the city manager function can be viewed as a mechanism for reducing information costs associated with policy-making in a complex environment. It can also reduce the transaction cost of rent-seeking that potentially exist in networks of collaborators. A similar role played by professional administrators is described in Thurmaier and Wood's (2002) account of interlocal agreements among governments in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Finally, Brown and Potoski (2003) found that the presence of a city manager was positively related to whether the government would engage in collaborative activities.

#### Organization and Election of City Councils

The literature also indicates that how a city council is organized and elected can have an impact on the success or failure of collaborative efforts. Gerber and Gibson (2005) note that there is a political dilemma in that collaboration requires local officials to give up a certain amount of authority to achieve regional goals. Local officials who are elected on a city-wide or at-large basis may share the regional viewpoint of the chief elected officer and be more willing to relinquish authority than are local officials elected on a district basis. Such officials may be more concerned with negative repercussions from voters who hold them accountable for collaborative activities with which they disagree or that go awry (Gerber and Gibson 2005). The relatively short-term focus of local elected officials caused by frequent turnover and short election cycles of two to four years may make cooperation more difficult (Clingermayer and Feiock 2001).

## Differences in Elected and Administrative Officials

While much of the previous literature examined the role of administrative officials, Zeemering (2007) argues that elected officials play a much more significant role than was previously thought. Zeemering argues that “decisions in favor of collaboration depend on officials perceptions of an agenda for collaboration, their assessment of the terms of collaboration, and their opinion of potential government partners” (Zeemering 2007, p. ix).

Zeemering developed a three-part framework measuring the conjunction of policy stimuli, perceptions of intergovernmental partners and social capital and the actual terms of the proposed collaboration (Zeemering 2007). Zeemering conducted research in a number of communities in western Michigan and conducted interviews with elected officials throughout that region. Zeemering concluded that a positive stimulus or agenda status is a necessary condition for collaboration. Additionally, he contends that positive terms of collaboration and a positive stimulus or positive perceptions of potential collaboration partners and a collaborative stimulus together are sufficient for collaboration to be undertaken.

Zeemering ultimately concludes that collaboration is most likely to occur when all three causal conditions are present. Contrary to existing theory, Zeemering argues that such positive perceptions of potential partners can develop during the process of negotiating a collaboration agreement as opposed to being a necessary condition preceding collaboration (Zeemering 2007).

## Research Gaps

There is contradictory evidence in the literature concerning what motivates local jurisdictions to collaborate on public services. As this review of the extant literature concludes, there are far more questions than answers. The characteristics of individual communities and regions have an influence on whether or not they collaborate. Communities subject to state level rules can be encouraged or inhibited relative to collaboration. Transaction costs associated with collaborating can also influence communities to engage in or forego collaborative activity. Finally, the political structures present in an area will frequently influence whether or not collaboration is attempted. This review of prior research reveals research gaps and limitations in understanding. The balance of this dissertation will address the following research gaps:

- A clear understanding of the role played by fiscal stress in the decision of whether or not to collaborate.
- Why having a city manager present makes interlocal collaboration easier and what is present in the training and experience of those actors that make them central players. How important is their professional training? How important is their participation in professional associations and in area networks?

- What roles in collaboration do elected and administrative officials play in the collaboration process and what specific activities do they undertake in furtherance of their goals.
- What factors lead communities to collaborate and specifically what are they expecting to gain from their participation, what specific terms are they looking for in the collaboration agreement?
- Is the loss of control over individual community service provision a serious issue that may inhibit collaboration?
- What kinds of communities make good or bad potential partners for one another? What specific characteristics are decision-makers in one community looking for in other communities they hope to collaborate with? Specifically, how are collaboration partners selected?
- What role does trust play in the collaboration decision-making process and how is trust gained, damaged or lost? Can written agreements take the place of trust in some circumstances?
- What role is played by prior contacts and experiences that collaborating communities have had with one another?

- What role, if any, is played by the formal networks and organizations present in the metropolitan area? How important are they in getting collaborations started and maintaining such activity?
- What role, if any, is played by the informal networks of elected and administrative actors in the metropolitan area?
- Is it important to have a political constituency for collaboration within communities or will decision-makers act in the absence of one or even against public opinion?
- Is collaboration in the provision of fire services easier or harder to undertake and why?
- How important is the role played by area community conferences?

This dissertation attempts to address these gaps, using data gathered from surveys and long interviews conducted with elected and administrative officials in five suburban cities in the metropolitan Detroit area attempting to form a fire authority to replace their five separate fire departments.

The ICA framework of Feiock is useful in determining some of the larger factors that go into the interjurisdictional collaboration process. However, what is missing from this rational choice based argument is a clear understanding of who makes the ultimate

decision to collaborate or not and what factors play an important part in their decision-making.

The following chapters examine all of these factors as regards an attempt by five separate communities to pool their resources to form an authority to provide fire and emergency services on an area-wide basis.

## CHAPTER 3

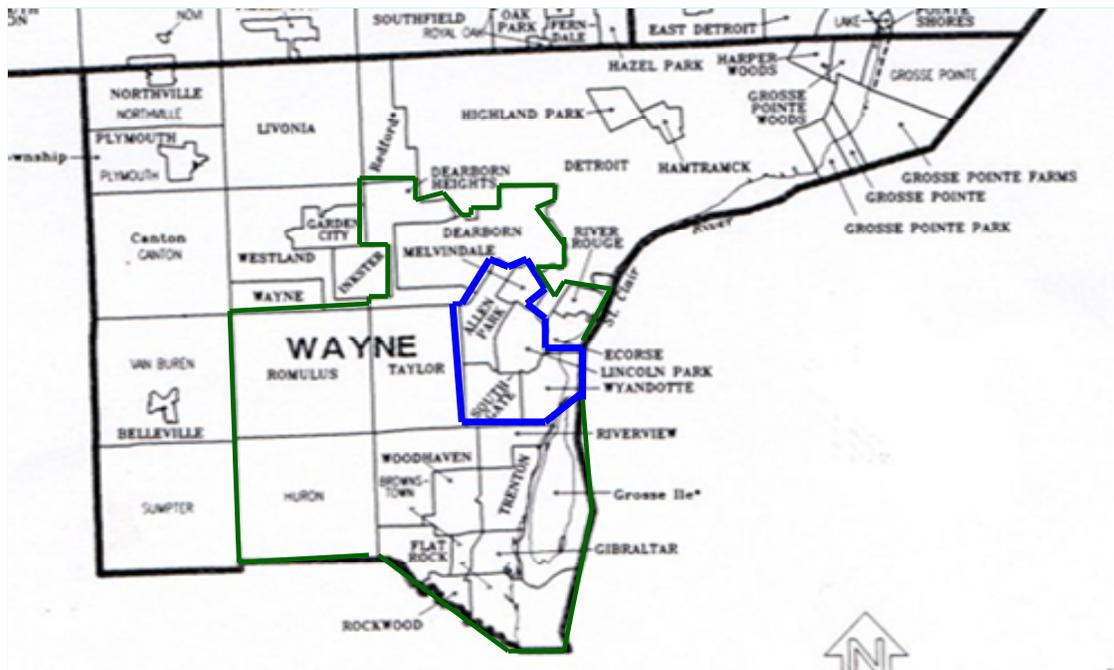
### CASE SELECTION AND DATA COLLECTION

In the preceding chapter, I examined the theoretical and empirical literature concerning the factors that either encourage or impede collaboration among local governments. The next five chapters explore the dynamics of one particular effort at interlocal collaboration, the efforts of five suburban communities located in the “Downriver” area of Metropolitan Detroit, to create a joint fire authority.

In 2006, five Downriver communities began discussions centered on the idea of creating a single fire and emergency medical services (hereinafter fire/EMS) authority that would serve all of the communities. The Downriver area is located just down river or south of Detroit, Michigan in the southeastern portion of Wayne County.

Figure 3.1 shows a map of Wayne County, Michigan indicating the twenty member communities of the Downriver Community Conference outlined as a group and the five communities that are the subject of this research (Allen Park, Lincoln Park, Melvindale, Southgate and Wyandotte), more heavily outlined within that grouping. The Downriver Community Conference (DCC) member communities had been cooperating on a variety of fronts for many years and have had numerous opportunities for interaction prior to undertaking this fire/EMS collaboration effort.

**Figure 3.1: Map of Wayne County, MI. and Collaborating Communities.**



In-depth interviews were conducted in 2007-2008 to examine the current effort to form an authority and also a previous attempt in the 1990s that failed. The individuals selected to participate in this study were those engaged in the planning and development of this authority. The interviews produced important insights about the motivations of the participants and the obstacles encountered in this effort to create the authority.

This research contributes to a better understanding of interlocal service cooperation in several ways. The study examines the factors that stimulate interlocal cooperation, what participants are seeking from cooperation in terms of costs and benefits and what characteristics they seek in a partnering community. Also, the study extends the work of Eric Zeemering (2007) by examining differences in the ways that elected and administrative actors perceive the factors involved in interlocal cooperation and differences in the roles these two groups of officials play in the collaboration process.

## Earlier Effort to Collaborate: History of the Downriver Mutual Aid Agreement

Previous research has indicated that characteristics such as shared borders or contiguousness of communities often leads to repeated contact between local government neighbors and the growth of mutual assurances that make collaboration opportunities more likely (Feiock 2008). Through a collaboration effort known as Downriver Mutual Aid (DMA) started in 1967, the communities of the DCC have shared resources and provided personnel backup to one another in the areas of police services, anti-drug activities, fire services, and much more. It was because of the successful experience of the DMA that in 1977 these communities formed the DCC to undertake greater collaborative efforts in a variety of program areas.

These communities also have a history of collaboration in the area of public health. For many years in the 1950s through the 1980s, the communities of the Downriver area operated the People's Community Hospital Authority (PCHA) in order to build and operate hospitals to serve the residents of the member communities. It is important to understand before examining the current effort that these communities have a long and successful history of collaborating with one another for the collective benefit of the Downriver area.<sup>4</sup>

In 2006, the fire chiefs of the respective cities and several of the elected and appointed officials began to meet and discuss increasing their collaboration on fire services. These meetings were held at the offices of the DCC. The DCC provided a forum over many years for the discussion of a variety of issues of concern to the member communities and acted as a facilitator of this particular effort in collaboration. Each of

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<sup>4</sup> The writer of this dissertation has lived most of his life in the Downriver area and has also worked for the cities of Lincoln Park, Melvindale and River Rouge. Much of the background material for this dissertation is the result of that experience over a period of more than twenty years.

the member communities has one voting representative and one alternate representative on the governing board of the DCC. The DCC has acted in many ways to facilitate cooperation between the member communities on a variety of services.

Another factor that gave rise to this effort is a grant from the state of Michigan Centers for Regional Excellence (CRE) Program in the amount of \$25,000 to study the feasibility of collaborating on fire services. The DCC Mutual Aid Committee, with the support and assistance of the Wayne County Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, engaged the services of Plante-Moran, LLP (Plante-Moran) to conduct a feasibility study of regionalized public safety services and to specifically examine the Downriver Fire Authority concept. That study, known as the Downriver Community Conference Fire & EMS Consolidation Feasibility Study, was completed in December of 2006 and concluded that the joint fire/EMS authority could be created under state law and would result in reduced costs for services in the respective communities.<sup>5</sup> The Plante-Moran study provided a current listing of equipment, manpower and physical locations. The report included a cost model and proposed Articles of Incorporation pursuant to the recommended use of Act 57 of the Public Acts of Michigan.

Michigan Public Act 57 of 1988, also known as *The Emergency Services Act*, allows local governments to form a joint emergency services “authority” specifically to jointly provide emergency services, including fire services. Such an authority is a body politic capable of entering into contracts and levying taxes. Using this device, each community adopts a governing agreement by a majority vote of the local government’s legislative body. The working jurisdiction of this newly created authority would be the

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<sup>5</sup> Plante-Moran., PLLP. Downriver Community Conference Fire and EMS Consolidation Feasibility Study, December 2006.

combined jurisdictions of the communities joining the authority. Communities joining can later withdraw from the authority by resolution of the Board, but would remain liable for outstanding debts incurred up until the point in time that they withdrew. Fire service employees are given an amount of protection in that existing contracts must be honored for their remaining term even if their employing community joins in such an authority. After their community joins an authority, the employees presumably would negotiate a new contract. Pension, seniority and benefit issues are handled in a similar fashion.

The Plante-Moran study recommended a transfer of assets and liabilities from the individual communities to the Authority. The study recommended the independent funding of the Authority through a millage dedicated to that purpose. In essence, the Authority would operate like a special district. The feasibility study developed a cost model which indicated the potential for long-term savings. Under their currently separate circumstances, residents of the five communities in the study area pay an average of \$109 per person per year for fire and emergency medical services. The study concluded that the Authority, if formed, would ultimately provide a better level of service and also achieve National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710 compliance for a cost of about \$88 per person per year, a 20 percent cost savings. Currently the five communities in the study area provide slightly different services, with some providing transportation to the hospital while others do not. According to many of the fire personnel interviewed for this research, most of the five communities in the study area are not completely NFPA 1710 compliant. The cost model developed in the Plante-Moran study assumes that eventually all of the communities in the Downriver area will join the Authority and it will

be able to capture the economies of scale that are potentially available under the new arrangement.

### **Comparison of the Participating Communities**

According to the elected and administrative officials interviewed for this research, it became apparent to them at a fairly early stage that attempting to consolidate all twenty DCC member community fire departments at once would be too difficult. This view is supported by the research of Lackey, Freshwater and Rupasingha (2002) which found that it may be easier for a small number of governments to cooperate because the transaction costs are lower. The findings of this research support the results of Rawlings (2003) study, which theorized that the larger the group, the harder it may be to organize. Adding to the difficulty of merging all twenty fire departments in the Downriver area is the fact that some are full-time paid professional departments while others are part-time, or volunteer, fire departments.

There are some other important distinctions in these communities. Some of the communities are urban and densely populated, while others are more rural and less densely populated. Some of the communities are home rule cities and others are townships with very different methods of organization and electoral politics. Many of the communities are predominantly bedroom communities with mostly single-family homes. A few of the communities contain heavy industry, chemical plants and automotive manufacturing plants that require different fire fighting skills and equipment. One of the communities, Grosse Ile, is an island in the Detroit River and can only be accessed by

**Table 3.1:**  
**City Population, Size, Budget and Fire Department Characteristics**

one of two bridges, one of which had previously been disabled for a significant period of time and the other is quite old and out of service periodically for maintenance.

As a result of real or perceived problems, many of the communities took a wait and see attitude and ceased to actively participate in the collaboration effort. However, a core group of five communities decided to continue planning for an Authority. The five cities of Allen Park, Lincoln Park, Melvindale, Southgate and Wyandotte elected to move forward together in planning for the fire/EMS authority. These five communities are geographically contiguous and located on the northern tier of the Downriver area. The five are located near the city of Detroit and are among the oldest communities in the Downriver area. These five communities have a combined population of 138,300 and cover 28.4 square miles. Their fire departments have a total of six fire stations and 135 fire fighting/emergency medical personnel. Together, these communities spend about \$15.1 million annually on their fire/EMS service provision (Rujan and Andrysiak 2006, p. 24). Table 3.1 compares the population, size, budgets, and fire department staffing and equipment levels for each of the potentially collaborating cities. Table 3.1 also includes activity data for each fire department.

COMPARISON OF CITIES	Allen Park	Lincoln Park	Melvindale	Southgate	Wyandotte
1990 Population	30,673	41,832	11,216	30,771	30,938
2000 Population	29,070	40,008	10,735	30,136	28,006
May 2007 SEMCOG	27,050	37,494	10,624	28,686	25,942
Total Acres in Community	4,486	3,744	1,740	4,400	3,316
General Fund Budget (2009-10)	22,863,465	23,352,647	10,145,000	21,454,555	20,615,192
Fire Dept Budget (2009-10)	3,456,590	3,276,523	1,439,000	3,266,526	3,353,490
Fire Spending per capita (2009-10)	\$127.79	\$87.39	\$135.45	\$113.87	\$129.27
Number of Fire Fighting/EMS Personnel	30	33	15	27	30
Fire Suppression/EMS Staff	28	30	14	22	28
Fire Runs Annually	91	112	197	329	579
Percentage of fire runs to total runs	3.78%	2.96%	11.93%	10.32%	19.21%
EMS Runs Annually	2,318	3,678	1,453	2860	2,435
Avg. Response Time EMS	4 min./less	3.21 minutes	3-4 minutes	4-5 minutes	6.00 minutes
Avg. Response Time Fire	4.00 minutes	3.96 minutes	2-4 minutes	4-5 minutes	5.00 minutes
Current Number of Fire Stations	1	1	1	1	2
Current Number of Pumper Trucks	2	2	2	2	2
Current Number of Ladder Trucks	1	1	0	1	1
Current Number of Rescue Units	3	2	1	1	2

Source: City web sites and individual Fire Department Annual Reports

Much of the literature on public service cooperation examines the factors that make communities more or less likely to engage in collaborative activities. A widespread presumption in the literature is that relatively homogeneous communities are more likely to collaborate with one another (Morgan, Hirlinger and England 1988; Rawlings 2003; Feiock 2007; Feiock 2008). The next several sections examine the homogeneity of the five communities in terms of type of government, type and size of fire department,

demographic characteristics, land use patterns, and the similarity of their built environment. The five cities that are participating in this fire/EMS collaboration have very similar forms of government and very similar types of fire departments. Table 3.2 details the characteristics of the government and fire department of these five cities.

	<b>Allen Park</b>	<b>Lincoln Park</b>	<b>Melvindale</b>	<b>Southgate</b>	<b>Wyandotte</b>
Type of Government	Mayor-Council	Mayor-Council	Mayor-Council	Mayor-Council	Mayor-Council
City Manager Present?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year City Founded	1957	1925	1932	1958	1854
Class of City	Home Rule	Home Rule	Home Rule	Home Rule	Home Rule
Full-Time Unionized Fire Fighters?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Current Fire Dept. Budget	3,456,590	3,276,523	1,439,000	\$3,266,526	\$3,353,490
Taxable Value in City	\$595 M	\$781 M	\$672 M	\$941 M	\$707 M
Equivalent Millage/Fire Services	5.26	4.28	2.1	2.87	3.42

Sources: City Websites, Fire Department Annual Reports and Plante-Moran December 2006 Feasibility Study

### Government Structure

All of the communities studied here are “home rule cities” which means that they are organized and governed in such a way as to give them the maximum governing flexibility allowed under state law. Michigan’s Home Rule City Act, Public Act 279 of 1909, was designed to give power to local communities to govern themselves through their citizens, under the framework provided by Michigan’s constitutional and statutory provisions. The 1963 Michigan Constitution gave local units of government a broad framework by which to operate and directed Michigan courts to give a liberal or broad

construction to provisions dealing with local government (Michigan Municipal League 2010).

All of the cities have similar size fire departments relative to their population. All of the fire departments experience a far greater percentage of emergency medical/rescue runs than they do fire fighting runs. All of these cities have similar types and numbers of fire fighting equipment relative to their population. Four of the five cities operate out of a single, centrally located fire station.

All of the fire fighters working in these cities are unionized employees. Michigan is considered by some to have a heavily unionized public sector workforce. Public Act 312 was passed by the state legislature in order to deal with the problem of “blue flu” that plagued cities like Detroit in the 1960s and 1970s. This legislation is argued by some to restrict the ability of municipal managers to respond to the severe fiscal stress they are currently experiencing. Public sector unions contend that the legislation is necessary since they do not have the right to strike like private sector employees do (Michigan Municipal League 2009).

#### Demographic Characteristics

Previous research has indicated that demographic characteristics play a significant role in whether a community will engage in collaboration and if so, the form it will take. It is significant that these communities are located in the Midwest, are predominantly residential with some industrial uses, and have housing and infrastructure that is relatively the same age. Brown and Potoski (2003) have shown that older industrialized

communities such as these five are more likely to produce public services through joint contracting or out-sourcing than are the newer communities of the southwest.

Richard C. Feiock (2007) argues that demographic homogeneity is important because it reduces the transaction costs for officials who have to negotiate collaboration agreements with other communities. Demographic homogeneity between collaborating communities is thought to reduce the cost of cooperating; however, homogeneity within each community is also an important factor because it may reflect homogeneity in service preferences (Feiock 2008).

In many ways, these five communities are highly homogeneous and have developed in very similar ways. If previous research is correct, their homogeneity should make them more willing and able to collaborate than less homogeneous communities.

<b>DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS</b>	<b>Allen Park</b>	<b>Lincoln Park</b>	<b>Melvindale</b>	<b>Southgate</b>	<b>Wyandotte</b>
1990 Population	30,673	41,832	11,216	30,771	30,938
2000 Population	29,070	40,008	10,735	30,136	28,006
May 2007 SEMCOG	27,050	37,494	10,624	28,686	25,942
2030 SEMCOG Forecast	24,318	33,553	9,733	25,714	22,461
Percentage of population over 65 years of age in 2000	21%	14%	13%	33%	29%
Percentage White	96%	93%	87%	94%	96%
Percentage Black	1%	2%	5%	2%	1%
Percentage Hispanic	3%	6%	9%	4%	3%
Individuals Living Below Poverty Level	3.2%	7.7%	11.4%	4.6%	6.2%
Percentage non H.S. Grad	13%	25%	28%	19%	20%
Percentage Graduated H.S.	35%	41%	41%	39%	37%
Percentage Some College	26%	22%	21%	22%	24%
Percentage Associate Degree	7%	5%	4%	7%	6%
Percentage Bachelor's Degree	14%	5%	5%	9%	9%
Percentage Grad. or Professional Degree	6%	2%	1%	4%	4%

Source: 2000 United States Census and SEMCOG Community Profiles, 2008.

Table 3.3 compares the five communities in terms of demographic measures. Demographically, the five communities of the proposed DFA are relatively homogeneous in terms of race, age, religion, education and socioeconomic factors. Populations in the cities range from 10,624 persons to 37,494. The percentage of persons aged sixty-five years and older has been cited as an important variable for predicting collaboration. Previous research has shown that the larger the percentage of such persons in the population, the more resistant to any proposed change in the existing level of services

(Morgan, Hirlinger and England, 1988). In terms of the percentage of their population aged 65 years or older, the five cities display some variance with the lowest percentage being thirteen and the highest being two and one half times that at thirty-three.

In a comprehensive review of much of the theoretical and empirical literature on metropolitan fragmentation and interlocal cooperation, Rawlings (2003), found that heterogeneity and particularly racial heterogeneity is believed to have a negative impact on levels of cooperation. Yet contrary to the bulk of the literature, Rawlings own research involving MSAs across the nation found that racial variation within a metropolitan area is positively linked to greater levels of interlocal collaboration.

Education levels in these communities are also relatively homogeneous as the percentage of non-high school graduates, high school graduates, those persons with some college education and those with a four year college degree display little variance across the five cities. The percentage of persons with post-graduate or professional degrees is relatively low in the study area.

#### Land Use Characteristics

Another important variable in predicting collaboration activities is the urban or rural character of a community and the land uses present in the city. Research by Lackey, Freshwater and Rupasingha (2002) indicated that local government officials and residents in rural areas were often more suspicious of collaboration activities than their counterparts in urban areas. The five communities involved in this study are all urban in character and a part of the Detroit Metropolitan MSA. All five of these communities are nearly fully developed. Table 3.4 shows the greatest single use of land in all of these

communities is for the construction of single-family homes. The housing density of the neighborhoods in these five cities is relatively high, ranging from 5.2 units per acre to 7.0 units per acre.

Community Characteristics	Allen Park	Lincoln Park	Melvindale	Southgate	Wyandotte
Percentage used for Single-Family	51%	65%	37%	48%	57%
Percentage used for Commercial and Office	6%	11%	8%	15%	8%
Percentage used for Institutional	7%	7%	6%	8%	5%
Percentage used for Industrial	11%	3%	13%	2%	8%
Percentage used for Transp./Comm./Utility	14%	6%	20%	3%	7%
Percentage used for Cultural/Recreation/Cemetery	3%	3%	4%	3%	7%
Grassland and Shrub	2%	2%	8%	7	5%
Total Acres in Community	4,486	3,744	1,740	4,400	3,316
Residential Density (Units per Acre)	5.20	6.65	7.00	5.66	6.32
Land in Community Developed	93.30%	96.80%	89.60%	84.50%	93.90%

Source: SEMCOG Community Profiles, 2008

Very little of the land within these communities is used for industrial purposes, which gives them similar requirements for their fire services. This commonality should make cooperation easier to achieve. If one of the communities was heavily industrialized, that city could have very different fire fighting requirements and costs than the other predominantly residential communities. Those communities might not make good collaboration partners because of different levels of staffing, training and equipment needs. Given that these five communities have very similar fire department staffing, training and equipment needs, they are seemingly good potential partners for this proposed collaboration.

## Housing and Taxable Value Characteristics

Prior research predicts that the land use and housing characteristics of a city are also important factors in collaboration on fire fighting and EMS services. Communities with similar types, age and value of housing make better potential partners for one another. Skip Krueger and Michael McGuire (2005) found that cities that enjoy a high taxable value and high tax revenues were among the least likely to seek additional revenues through interlocal collaboration. Having similar taxable values and having the potential to raise similar levels of revenue are important factors if two or more communities are going to collaborate on the provision of services.

<b>Housing Characteristics</b>	<b>Allen Park</b>	<b>Lincoln Park</b>	<b>Melvindale</b>	<b>Southgate</b>	<b>Wyandotte</b>
Number of Households/2000	11,974	16,203	4,500	12,836	11,817
Percentage with Children	30%	34%	32%	29%	24%
Median Households Income (in 1999 dollars)	\$51,992	\$42,515	\$37,954	\$46,927	\$43,740
Percentage of Persons in Poverty	3.2%	7.7%	11.4%	4.6%	6.2%
Percentage Owner Occupied Housing Units	86%	76%	64%	68%	70%
Median Housing Value (in 2000 dollars)	\$118,700	\$84,100	\$78,500	\$109,200	\$101,700
Percentage of Housing Units Vacant	2%	4%	5%	4%	4%
Percentage of Single-Family Units	91%	83%	72%	72%	77%
Percentage of Two-Family/Duplex Units	< 1%	4%	5%	0%	8%
Percentage Multi-Units Apartments	9%	12%	21%	27%	15%
Percentage Mobile Homes	< 1%	1%	3%	1%	< 1%
Avg. Annual Res. Bldg. Permits/1996-2000	3	8	4	173	29
Avg. Annual Res. Bldg. Permits/2001-2005	3	9	9	66	48
Total Housing Units in 2000	12,254	16,821	4,760	13,361	12,303

Source: SEMCOG Community Profiles, 2008

Fighting a residential house fire in a structure seventy plus years old is different from fighting one in a newer structure. Both are different than fighting a fire in an industrial structure. The equipment, staff and training needed for each are different and it would seem logical that a city considering collaboration would look for a potential partner that fights fires similar to those usually encountered by their own fire department. One city containing several high-rise apartment buildings attempting to collaborate with another that contains only single story, single-family residential homes can present difficulties when establishing the staff, equipment and training needed by a joint fire authority. As Tables 3.4 and 3.5 indicate, these five communities are very similar in terms of the land use and housing characteristics found in each of them and hence in the kinds of fires they are typically called upon to fight.

#### Current Fiscal Capacity

The existing literature is somewhat mixed in terms of the likely effect of fiscal stress on a community when it comes to encouraging collaboration. When cost savings are likely, fiscal pressures are noticeable and political opposition is weak, Morgan Hirlinger and England (1988) argued that local officials are more likely to engage in interlocal arrangements. Bartle and Swayze (1997) concluded that fiscal pressure was a frequently mentioned reason for interlocal collaboration. Agranoff and McGuire (2003) contend that financially stable jurisdictions are less likely to engage in collaborative activities. Krueger and McGuire (2005) argue that fiscal stress often leads to more collaborative activity. Zeemering's (2007) research indicated that fiscal pressure stimulus is consistently mentioned as a reason for communities collaborating.

However, Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) argue that fiscal stress in a community is not a major incentive for contracting out. Thurmaier and Wood (2004) also concluded that cost savings and the presence of fiscal stress were not major reasons why cities and counties in their sample collaborated. Likewise, Carr and LeRoux (2007) concluded that fiscal constraints do not provide a universal rationale for undertaking collaborative efforts.

In the case of the communities examined in this study, the continuing decline in revenues available has reportedly been a strong incentive to search for alternative service provision solutions. The relative openness to collaboration in general and a more proactive approach to public policy may be factors stimulating this effort. “Cities that have a more proactive policy agenda and viewpoint should be more interested in collaboration” (Krueger and McGuire 2005, p. 16).

### Shared Geographic Borders

Foster (1997) found that the absence of natural barriers often facilitates ties between local governments who find it easier to collaborate across political boundaries. There is no natural barrier separating the five DFA collaboration cities. They are contiguous, tightly packed together and share common geographic borders. The City of Allen Park shares borders with Melvindale, Lincoln Park and Southgate. The City of Lincoln Park shares borders with all four of its potential collaboration partners. The City of Southgate shares borders with Lincoln Park and Allen Park. The City of Melvindale shares borders with Allen Park and Lincoln Park. The City of Wyandotte shares borders with Lincoln Park and Southgate. Post (2002) found that the geographic concentration of

local governments can cause them to cooperate and geographic density of metropolitan area governments is a significant predictor of the occurrence of interlocal agreements.

Lackey, et al., (2002) found that a good and long-established relationship among cooperating jurisdictions increases the chances of continuing success. In such circumstances, processes often run smoothly because of accumulated levels of trust between collaborating partners. Park and Feiock (2003) found that cooperation is more likely the longer the partners have collaborated. When clustered together and with repeated contacts, each community can benefit from acquiring and preserving their reputation for cooperation and commitment to the effort. This research predicts that successful past experiences are an important factor stimulating interlocal collaboration. Successful collaboration in the past could potentially create a reservoir of social and political capital used to encourage future efforts. The literature also indicates that past interactions between interlocal neighbors can have a positive or negative effect on the decision to collaborate. "Trying to negotiate with uncooperative or adversarial neighbors is likely to discourage further attempts at cooperation" (Nice and Fredericksen 1995, p. 129).

For many years, these five communities have cooperated with one another through a Mutual Aid System, whereby one community can call upon a neighboring community for help in fighting a fire. They have had repeated contacts with one another and fought fires in one another's cities. Such repeated contact creates a kind of social capital between the participants as individuals and as governmental units. Social capital can often lead to better cooperation (Lackey, et al. 2002). Higher levels of social capital have a positive effect on levels of intergovernmental cooperation across the nation as a

whole (Rawlings, 2003). “Strong social capital was associated with increased cooperation in the US as a whole and in the Midwest” (Rawlings 2003, p. 24).

The literature indicates that collaboration is more likely to occur “when officials believe that the benefits of cooperation will probably outweigh the costs.” (Nice and Fredericksen 1995, p. 129). Therefore, a series of questions were asked that are designed to elicit information about what the participants in the DFA collaboration hoped to gain.

### **Data Collection Strategy**

In order to better understand why these communities were actively pursuing collaboration, a series of extended interviews were conducted with the participants in the Downriver Fire Authority (DFA) collaboration effort. Many of the questions developed for these interviews are based on the factors identified by the Institutional Collective Action framework of Richard C. Feiock (2007) and the conceptual framework used by Eric Zeemering (2007) to study the roles played by elected and administrative officials in promoting and maintaining cooperation on public services. Following Zeemering, the interview questions were grouped into three main categories: a) the factors stimulating interlocal cooperation, discussed in Chapter Four; b) the participants’ perceptions of the terms of the collaboration, discussed in Chapter Five; and c) the participants’ perceptions of the partners and potential partners in the collaboration effort, discussed in Chapter Six. The questions in Chapter Seven deal with the differing roles played by elected and administrative officials in undertaking collaboration efforts. Copies of the interview questions and all materials provided to the interviewees are provided in Appendix A. A

follow-up or supplemental interview was conducted as well and that survey instrument is provided as Appendix B.

#### The Downriver Community Conference

The Downriver Community Conference (DCC) is a regional organization in southern Wayne County. It was established in 1977 in order to facilitate better programmatic cooperation between the twenty communities in the area. Because the DCC was the facilitating organization through which this specific collaboration was begun, a listing of all of the persons that currently were or had been actively engaged in the discussion and planning of the DFA collaboration, was obtained. The list contained the participants name, city, title, email address and telephone number. The listed participants were all contacted via an email message, and the basis and purpose of this research was explained to them. The lead investigator was identified as the person sending the email and the person that would be conducting the interviews. The professor directing this dissertation research, Dr. Jered Carr, was also identified and his telephone number supplied. The persons contacted were encouraged to discuss the research with Dr. Carr if they had any questions or concerns about the research that the lead investigator had not answered.

Of the thirty persons identified by the DCC as having participated in the planning process, several had moved out of the area or were no longer working for one of the cities. Efforts were made to contact everyone listed and twenty agreed to be interviewed and to participate in this research. I attended two of the monthly meetings of the DFA

planning group at the DCC to introduce myself and start making appointments for the interviews with these participants.

Initial face-to-face interviews were conducted between August of 2007 and January of 2008. Elected officials, administrative officials, fire command officers and rank and file fire personnel were interviewed in order to gather data on the causes and effects of collaboration between these communities. In each case, the interviewee was asked a series of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Although there were variations in the length of time of the interviews, they averaged between 60 and 90 minutes each. In addition to writing down the participant's responses to the interview questions, their responses were audio-taped, with their permission, and subsequently transcribed to ensure completeness and accuracy. The interviewees were informed that they could request confidentiality.

Table 3.6 lists the persons interviewed as a part of this research and indicate the city they work in, time there, whether they reside in that city, their current position, other positions that they have held, if they have worked for other communities and what they did there. The names of the interviewees are not disclosed to protect the respondents.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the respondents, fictitious names are used for each city in the remaining chapters and the names of the respondents themselves are not used at all. All other information provided such as job titles and time in the organization is drawn from actual responses given. In place of the actual city names the following fictitious city names will be used: Coletown, Eliseville, Detour, Acme and Bedford Falls. This method will protect the confidentiality of the respondents while at the same time permitting the analysis to focus on commonalities and differences in the

responses from individuals within the same city and among those in similar positions in the five governments.

**Table 3.6:  
Persons Interviewed for this Research**

	City	Time with City	Resides in City	Current Position	How Long in Position	Other Positions with this City	Other Downriver Cities worked for	Previous Elected administrative experience
1	Melvindale	4 yrs	Yes	Council Pres.	4 yrs	No	No	No
2	Melvindale	11 yrs	Yes	Union Pres.	8 yrs	Union Sec 3 years	No	No
3	Melvindale	29 yrs	No	Fire Chief	3 yrs	Fire Fight, Sgt. & Lt.	No	17 years on local School Board
4	Allen Park	37 yrs.	Yes	Mayor	4 yrs	City Manager 20 yrs	No	City Manager and County Road Commissioner
5	Allen Park	11 yrs	Yes	City Manager	3 yrs	H.R. Director 8 yrs	River Rouge, MI.	Personnel Director in River Rouge, MI. 4 yrs
6	Lincoln Park	3 yrs	No	City Manager	3 yrs	No	No	Howell, MI. Corona, MI. Marysville, Ca. & Sterling Heights, MI.
7								Requested Confidentiality
8	Allen Park	30 yrs	No	Fire Chief	2 yrs	Fire Fighter, Sgt. & Captain	No	No
9	Allen Park	17 yrs	Yes	Lt. & Fire Inspector	9 months	Fire Fighter, Sgt. Engineer	No	Active in PTA
10	Wyandotte	25 yrs	Yes	Fire Chief	3 yrs	Fire Fighter, Sgt.	No	No
11	Lincoln Park	4 yrs	Yes	City Council	4 yrs	No	No	No
12	Wyandotte	17 yrs	Yes	Fire Captain	2 yrs	Fire Fighter, Eng. & Lt.	Riverview & Melvindale F.D.	No
13	Southgate	2 yrs	No	City Mgr.	2 yrs	No	Allen Park, MI.	City Council and Mayor
14	Wyandotte	50 yrs	Yes	Mayor	40+ yrs	City Council	No	Former Director of MI. DOT
15	Lincoln Park	29 yrs	Yes	Fire Chief	6 months	Fire Fighter, Sgt. Eng. & Lt.	No	No
16	Lincoln Park	14 yrs	No	Sgt. & Union President	5 yrs	Fire Fighter & Eng.	Ecorse FD & Allen Park FD	No
17	Wyandotte	9.5 yrs	No	Sgt.	4 months	Fire Fighter, Pipeman, Driver	No	No
18	Allen Park	12 yrs	Yes	New Mayor	5 months	City Council 12 yrs	No	Wayne County Sheriff 31 yrs. Wayne County Executive 4 yrs
19	Lincoln Park	2.5 yrs	Yes	City Council	2.5 yrs	Asst. Dir. Parks /Rec	No	No
20	Lincoln Park	32 yrs	Yes	Council Pres.	1 yr	City Treasurer	No	No

## CHAPTER 4

### FACTORS IN THE EFFORT TO COLLABORATE

#### ON FIRE SERVICES

This chapter examines factors that stimulated the effort to create a fire authority for these five communities. The questions in the survey instrument used to examine this topic draw on the Institutional Collective Action framework developed by Richard Feiock and are also based to a large extent on research questions developed by Eric Zeemering. Zeemering interviewed elected and administrative officials in Michigan to determine what stimulated their collaboration efforts. He specifically examined the factors that stimulated collaboration and the perception of the interviewees regarding both the terms of collaboration and their intergovernmental partners.

Chapters Four through Seven are drawn from interviews done while the collaboration was being actively developed. Chapter Eight, the Epilogue, is drawn from a second, follow-up interview.

This chapter is organized around the questions used in the survey instrument. The tables at the end of the chapter give the reader the answers of all respondents and are grouped by the role of the respondent and by the respondent's city of employ. In order to alleviate the need to refer to the tables at the end of the chapter, those tables have been broken down into several smaller tables throughout the chapter to aid in the readers understanding of the data.

The first section of the chapter deals with the responses to a group of closed-ended scaled questions. The second section deals with the responses to a group of open-ended narrative questions. Each section is then analyzed and important findings summarized.

### **Factors Stimulating Interlocal Cooperation: Responses to Scale Questions**

The first group of questions asks the respondent how open their organization is to new ways of doing things and to collaborating with other communities.

<b>Table 4.1:</b>		
<b>Openness of Organization to New Ideas and Collaboration</b>		
<b>All Respondents (n=20)</b>		
<b>Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>10=Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Mean of All Respondents</b>
(a) My organization is usually receptive to doing things in new ways		6.85
(b) My organization usually approaches problems proactively		6.35
(c) My organization is usually open to possibilities for collaborating on services with other local governments (other than the county)		6.85

The mean response to question (a) is (6.85), indicating that most of the interviewees agree that their organization is relatively open to new ways to provide public services. As can be seen by examining the standard deviations in Table 4.16, there is some variation in their responses when comparing the different roles of the respondents. Mayors give an average response of (8.00) to that question, which is the highest average response of any group. This indicates that they agree that their organization is receptive to doing things in new ways. City council members, as a group, responded to that question with the lowest average response of (5.66). This indicates a

rather neutral opinion near the mid-point of the scale. City managers in the sample give the second highest response of any group with an average response of (7.00) to the question. This indicates that they agree with that statement displaying thinking much more like the mayors group than the city council group. Fire chiefs, as a group, with an average response of (6.20) and rank-and-file fire fighters with an average response of (6.80) gave responses relatively close to one another, but lower than either the city manager or mayor groups.

<b>Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree      10=Strongly Agree</b>	Detour (n=5)	Eliseville (n=6)	Acme (n=3)	Bedford Falls (n=2)	Coletown (n=4)
(a) My organization is usually receptive to doing things in new ways	8.20	4.83	7.33	7.00	7.75
(b) My organization usually approaches problems proactively	7.80	4.50	6.33	6.50	7.25
(c) My organization is usually open to possibilities for collaborating on services with other local governments (other than the county)	7.00	5.67	8.00	7.00	7.50

<b>Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree      10=Strongly Agree</b>	Mayor (n=4)	City Council (n=3)	City Mgr (n=3)	Fire Chief (n=5)	Fire Fighter (n=5)
(a) My organization is usually receptive to doing things in new ways	8.00	5.66	7.00	6.20	6.80
(b) My organization usually approaches problems proactively	7.33	5.00	6.67	5.80	6.80
(c) My organization is usually open to possibilities for collaborating on services with other local governments (other than the county)	7.33	6.67	7.67	6.40	6.40

When asked if their organization usually approaches problems proactively, (question b), the mean response of all interviewees is (6.35) indicating a general consensus that the organizations they work within usually approach problems proactively. The average response of all five cities to that question is (6.48), but there is some variance between the cities. Detour averaged the highest response at (7.80) but the average response of Eliseville was a mere (4.50), indicating that they think their organization does not proactively approach problems. The average responses of the other three cities were much closer to that of Detour and closer to one another. A comparison of the average responses grouped by role also indicates variance in the answers given. The city council members and fire chiefs had the lowest average responses at (5.00) and (5.80) respectively. The mayors had the highest average response at (7.33). The city managers and fire fighters responded in similar ways with average responses of (6.67) and (6.80) respectively.

When asked if their organization is open to collaborating with other local governments, (question c), the average response of all those interviewed is (6.85). There is not a great deal of variance among the average responses of the different groups to this question. However, the mayors and city managers registered the higher or most strongly agree responses at (7.33) and (7.67) respectively. A comparison of the responses grouped by city shows little variance with four of the cities averaging responses between (7.00) and (8.00). The one exception in this group was Eliseville. That city had an average response of (5.67), the lowest of all five cities and significantly below the others.

The response to this set of questions clearly indicates that these organizations are perceived by these respondents as generally open to new ideas, acting proactively and looking for ways to collaborate with other local governments.

Interestingly, the average response of Eliseville interviewees to (question a) (4.83) is considerably below that of the other four cities and indicates that, as a group, they think their organization less receptive to doing things in new ways than the respondents from other cities. Again, the average response of Eliseville interviewees to (question b) at (4.50) and (question c) at (5.67) is well below that of the other four communities. Yet, that community was consistently seen by the other respondents to be taking a leading role in advocating for the collaboration. That seeming inconsistency may be explained by the presence of a City Manager who has worked for several other cities and brings a more proactive approach to his work for Eliseville. He is frequently mentioned by other respondents as being a leader or policy entrepreneur in this DFA collaboration effort.

A second group of questions (d-i) asked respondents their perceptions on how the residents of their community view efforts to collaborate on public service provision. When asked if they think their residents prefer to have most public services provided in-house by local government employees, (question d), the mean response is (6.95), indicating a general perception that residents prefer to keep service provision in-house. A comparison of the responses grouped by city indicates some variance, the mean being (7.21) with a standard deviation of 1.09. Two of the communities, Acme and Bedford Falls, have an (8.00) average response, indicating that they agree more strongly than the other cities with that statement.

<b>Table 4.4: Respondents' Perceptions of Community Residents All Respondents</b>		
Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree	10=Strongly Agree	Mean All Respondents
(d) Our residents demand that direct provision be the default option for most basic public services		6.95
(e) Our residents demand that we consider what's good for Downriver when we make decisions about providing important public services		4.05
(f) Our residents tend to be suspicious of the motivations of elected officials from the neighboring jurisdictions		7.05
(g) Our residents do not care about how services are delivered because they focus only on the quality and cost of these services		5.10
(h) Our residents would rather we contract with other local governments than with private or non-profit organizations for most services		5.60
(i) Our residents want us to let the county provide services whenever possible		2.05

Detour's responses are relatively close with an average of (7.80) and the average response of Coletown was (6.75). Eliseville had the lowest average response at (5.50) the mid-point of the scale, indicating a neutral perception that in-house provision is not preferred. Generally, these responses indicate that it is the perception of the respondents that the residents of their respective cities predominantly prefer that most public services be provided in-house. It is important to ask this question because such perceptions, if correct, could lead to possible political opposition that might hamper collaboration efforts.

When grouped by role, the comparisons indicate some variance between the groups in their responses to (question d). The mayor group had the lowest average response at (5.00), indicating they were neutral on this statement. All four of the other groups had a higher average response than the mayor group. The city council group is closest to the mayors' at (6.00) and the city managers' group is closer to the fire chief and fire fighter groups at (7.00). The groups of fire chiefs and fire fighters had identical average responses to this question at (7.80) and were the highest average response of any group.

<b>Table 4.5: Respondents' Perceptions of Community Residents Grouped by City</b>						
Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree 10=Strongly Agree	Detour	Eliseville	Acme	Bedford Falls	Coletown	
(d) Our residents demand that direct provision be the default option for most basic public services	7.80	5.50	8.00	8.00	6.75	
(e) Our residents demand that we consider what's good for Downriver when we make decisions about providing important public services	3.60	3.17	5.67	4.50	4.50	
(f) Our residents tend to be suspicious of the motivations of elected officials from the neighboring jurisdictions	8.20	7.00	5.67	6.50	7.00	
(g) Our residents do not care about how services are delivered because they focus only on the quality and cost of these services	6.00	5.33	3.00	7.00	4.25	
(h) Our residents would rather we contract with other local governments than with private or non-profit organizations for most services	5.40	6.00	7.00	4.00	5.00	
(i) Our residents want us to let the county provide services whenever possible	1.40	2.67	1.67	3.50	1.50	

Question (e) was asked in order to measure whether the respondents think community residents tend to ponder what is good for the entire metropolitan (Downriver) area or whether they tend to be more concerned about their own community. The average response rate of all interviewees is (4.05), falling well below the mid-point of the scale. Respondents clearly perceive that their respective residents are more concerned about what is good for their own community. The average response of Detour and Eliseville registered well below the mid-point of the scale at (3.60) and (3.17) respectively. The average response rate of Bedford Falls and Coletown is (4.50). The average response of only one city, Acme, inched above the mid-point of the scale at (5.67). That difference may be partially explained by the assumption expressed by many of the respondents that the City of Acme has a great deal more to gain from this collaboration effort than do the other communities. The City of Acme has far fewer resources than the other cities and should therefore benefit more from collaboration.

Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree 10=Strongly Agree	Mayor	City Council	City Manager	Fire Chief	Fire Fighter
(d) Our residents demand that direct provision be the default option for most basic public services	5.00	6.00	7.00	7.80	7.80
(e) Our residents demand that we consider what's good for Downriver when we make decisions about providing important public services	6.00	3.67	3.33	4.00	3.60
(f) Our residents tend to be suspicious of the motivations of elected officials from the neighboring jurisdictions	5.33	7.00	5.33	8.60	7.60
(g) Our residents do not care about how services are delivered because they focus only on the quality and cost of these services	7.00	6.67	6.33	3.80	3.40
(h) Our residents would rather we contract with other local governments than with private or non-profit organizations for most services	5.67	5.67	6.33	4.00	6.60
(i) Our residents want us to let the county provide services whenever possible	1.00	3.67	3.67	1.40	1.60

When asked their opinion as to whether or not their residents tend to be suspicious of the motivations of elected officials from neighboring jurisdictions, (question f), the average response of all interviewees is (7.05), indicating the respondents agreed that their residents are somewhat suspicious of the motivations of elected officials from neighboring communities. Comparing the answers grouped by city indicates agreement across cities with that statement. The lowest average, Acme, is (5.67) and the highest, Detour, is (8.20). The other three cities show a consistent average response ranging between (6.50) and (7.00). Several of the respondents volunteered that in their opinion, in addition to residents being suspicious of neighboring elected officials, their residents are also somewhat suspicious of the elected officials within their own community.

It is important to note that these responses are from elected and appointed administrative officials as well as rank-and-file fire fighters. These communities share common borders and these officials have repeated contacts. They have a long history of

cooperation through the DCC and also share a common local newspaper, *The News Herald*. Even though citizen attention to local politics is generally considered to be very low, such factors would allow for speculation that the residents of these five communities have had numerous opportunities to observe and form valid opinions about the actions of elected officials from neighboring communities.

Asked if they think their residents do not care how services are provided, because they focus only on the quality and cost of services, (question g), the average response of all interviewees is (5.10), below the mid-point of the scale. When compared by city, some interesting variance is revealed. Acme has the lowest average response of (3.00) and Coletown only (4.25). Eliseville, Detour and Bedford Falls showed considerably higher average responses at (5.33), (6.00) and (7.00) respectively. Such responses indicate that the perception of the respondents is that their residents are divided or relatively neutral as to this statement.

Another interesting variance is illustrated when a comparison is made based upon the role of the respondent. The average responses of mayors (7.00), council members (6.00) and city managers (6.33) indicate that they moderately agree with this statement. A considerable difference of opinion arises when the same question is asked of fire chiefs and fire fighters whose average response is (3.80) and (3.40) respectively, indicating moderate disagreement with this statement. The respondents employed in the fire service perceive the public as more concerned about how services are provided than the other groups of respondents.

When asked to assess resident preference for using other local governments for service provision as opposed to private firms or nonprofit organizations, (question h), the

average response of all interviewees is (5.60), just above the mid-point of the scale, indicating a neutral position on this statement. It does show that there is a general perception among the respondents that their residents are not necessarily averse to using private firms or nonprofit organizations for service delivery.

Grouped by role, the average response is fairly consistent at ranges between (5.67) and (6.60). The exception is the response by the fire chiefs, which, as a group, provided an average response of only (4.00) indicating moderate disagreement. Grouped by community, the average responses ranged between (5.00) and (7.00), indicating a general consensus that their residents are relatively neutral to somewhat in agreement with this statement. Again, the respondents from one city, Bedford Falls, provided an average response of (4.00), well below the other four communities.

Especially interesting was the response to (question i) which measured the respondent's perception of their resident's preference for letting the county (Wayne) provide services whenever possible. The average response of all the interviewees is a mere (2.05) indicating a very strong consensus that their residents oppose letting the county provide services to them. When grouped by city, the average responses range from a high of (3.50) Bedford Falls to a low of (1.40) Detour. When grouped by role, the responses indicate some variance, with mayors averaging a response of just (1.00) and fire chiefs and fire fighters averaging responses of (1.40) and (1.60) respectively. The highest two groups, although still below the mid-point of the scale, are the city council members and city managers with identical average responses of (3.67).

The responses to this question were by far the lowest in the study. Although there is some variance in the answers given, they are overwhelmingly negative in response to

allowing the county to provide services to local communities. Several of the respondents volunteered that they thought their residents would be opposed to working with Wayne County in particular, and mentioned unpleasant experiences they had working with the County in the past. Three or four of the respondents volunteered that several counties across the United States provide fire services contractually to their municipalities and that such arrangements work well. The respondents expressed doubt that such would be the case with Wayne County and were convinced their residents would be opposed to such an arrangement.

<b>Table 4.7:</b>		
<b>Perception of the Importance of Maintaining Local Control of Fire Services</b>		
Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree	10=Strongly Agree	<b>Mean All Respondents</b>
(j) Our residents place more value on protecting our city's control over public services than on lowering costs		6.00
(k) Our residents place more value on protecting our city's control over public services than on improving service effectiveness across the Downriver communities		6.05
(l) Our residents see themselves as highly interdependent with the local governments that surround this community		4.85
(m) There is a significant constituency in my community for seeking regional solutions to our problems		5.10

Questions (j-m) are designed to measure the respondent's perceptions of their residents' opinions on the importance of the city maintaining control over service provision. Previous research often asserts that the fear by local public officials of losing control over service production and provision can hamper efforts at interlocal collaboration. "If management thinks interlocal contracting adversely affects its capacity to exercise close control over municipal services, the city is much less likely to pursue

contracting with another jurisdiction” (Morgan and Hirlinger 1991, p. 138). These questions identify their views of the attitudes of residents about this issue.

Asked their opinion of the statement that their residents place more value on protecting the city’s control over public services than on lowering costs, (question j), the average response of all interviewees is (6.00). This indicates that the respondents believe that their residents are somewhat more concerned with maintaining control over public services than with lowering costs.

<b>Table 4.8: Perception of the Importance of Maintaining Local Control of Fire Services Grouped by City</b>						
Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree      10=Strongly Agree	Detour	Eliseville	Acme	Bedford Falls	Coletown	
(j) Our residents place more value on protecting our city's control over public services than on lowering costs	6.60	5.33	5.67	6.50	6.25	
(k) Our residents place more value on protecting our city's control over public services than on improving service effectiveness across the Downriver communities	6.80	5.00	6.00	7.00	6.25	
(l) Our residents see themselves as highly interdependent with the local governments that surround this community	4.80	4.00	6.00	5.50	5.00	
(m) There is a significant constituency in my community for seeking regional solutions to our problems	5.60	5.50	7.67	4.50	2.25	

Grouped by city there was relative consistency among the five cities. Eliseville had the lowest average with (5.33) and Detour the highest with an average response of (6.60). When a comparison is made by grouping the respondents by role, there is also considerable consistency in the average responses. City council persons provided moderate disagreement with that statement at (5.00) and fire fighters the strongest average agreement at (6.80).

<b>Table 4.9: Perception of the Importance of Maintaining Local Control of Fire Services Grouped by Role of Respondent</b>						
Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree	10=Strongly Agree	Mayor	City Council	City Manager	Fire Chief	Fire Fighter
(j) Our residents place more value on protecting our city's control over public services than on lowering costs		5.33	5.00	6.00	6.40	6.80
(k) Our residents place more value on protecting our city's control over public services than on improving service effectiveness across the Downriver communities		3.67	4.67	6.67	6.40	7.20
(l) Our residents see themselves as highly interdependent with the local governments that surround this community		5.00	4.33	3.67	6.20	5.00
(m) There is a significant constituency in my community for seeking regional solutions to our problems		5.33	6.33	4.67	5.00	5.20

When asked their opinion about the value their residents placed on maintaining control over public services in terms of potential improvements to the effectiveness of services across all of the area communities, (question k), the average response of all persons interviewed is (6.05). This score indicates respondents believe their residents are inclined to consider maintaining local control over services slightly more important than improving the service provision in the region as a whole.

The average response to this question is fairly consistent across the five cities, ranging between (5.00) and (7.00). The lowest average response of (5.00) was recorded in Eliseville. That lower average response may be partially explained by some of the answers given to open-ended questions asking about the same issue. Eliseville respondents by and large think that the city has very little control over fire services now. Consequently, they may not see this as a serious issue. The answers given by Acme respondents were just above the mid-point of the scale at (5.67). Detour, Bedford Falls and Coletown averaged more moderate agreement with this statement, recording responses of (6.60), (6.50) and (6.25) respectively.

When the average responses to (question j), are analyzed based on the role of the respondent, a fairly consistent pattern is shown, ranging just below or above the mid-point of the scale. However, a revealing difference between elected and administrative officials emerges. Mayor and city council members responded below the mid-point of the scale indicating moderate disagreement with the statement at (5.33) and (5.00) respectively. City managers, fire chiefs and fire fighters all recorded scores above the mid-point of the scale at (6.00), (6.40) and (6.80) respectively, indicating they somewhat agree with this statement.

Frederickson (1999) argues that in the absence of a central authority and under the conditions of high interdependency as is often found in metropolitan areas, there exist highly developed systems of cooperation that serve essentially the same purpose as diplomacy among nation-states. Cooperation is driven by recognition of the interdependence among the local jurisdictions. Other analysts have proposed that “such interdependency and common service delivery is potentially one way that inequities in socioeconomic conditions, fiscal capacities and service distribution within a region can be reduced” (Parks and Oakerson 2000, p. 174).

When asked if their residents see themselves as highly interdependent with surrounding cities, (question l), responses averaged (4.85), slightly below the mid point of the scale. This response suggests that the opinion of these elected and administrative officials is that their residents do not think they are particularly linked or interdependent with residents in the surrounding communities. When grouped by city, the average response shows relative consistency around the mid-point of the scale. The lowest average response was that of Eliseville at (4.00) and the highest was that of Acme at

(6.00). When grouped by the role of the respondent, the answers ranged from a high of (6.20) for fire chiefs, to a low of (3.67) for city managers. The fire chiefs are the only group recording a response above the mid-point of the scale. The average responses of the other four groups ranged from (5.00) for the mayors and fire fighters to (4.33) for city council members and (3.67) for city managers, revealing moderate disagreement with this statement.

Ostrom, Tiebout and Warren (1961) argued that a political community may not be coterminous with existing community boundaries, and that some mechanism must be developed for dealing with the problems associated with the provision of services across differing governmental jurisdictions. Question (m), was designed to measure whether the respondents perceived any political demand in their respective community for developing such a regional approach to problems. When asked if there is a significant constituency within the community who wish to seek regional solutions to the problems facing it, the response rate for all persons interviewed is (5.10), just below the mid-point of the scale indicating a relatively neutral position on this question.

When grouped by city, the responses showed considerable variance, ranging from (2.25) Coletown to (7.67) Acme. Clearly, the perceptions of community support for regional solutions by the respondents of these two cities differ greatly. The responses from Coletown respondents suggest they are engaging in the DFA collaborative without the support of their city's residents. When grouped by the role of the respondent, there is relative consistency around the mid-point of the scale with scores ranging between a high of (6.33) for city council members to a low of (4.67) for city managers. These responses

reveal that in the opinion of the respondents, their residents are relatively neutral to somewhat in agreement with this statement.

<b>Table 4.10</b>		
<b>Respondents' Personal Views Regarding Collaboration</b>		
Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree	10=Strongly Agree	<b>Mean All Respondents</b>
(n) I personally think that it is generally a good idea to look for ways to collaborate with surrounding jurisdictions regardless of the service type or the problems faced		8.80
(o) I think that the Downriver communities are interdependent in terms of the problems they face and possible solutions to those problems		8.40
(p) I think the Downriver communities should work collaboratively on providing services whenever it will benefit these communities as a group even if some of the communities would rather provide the service independently		8.35

The last set of questions (n-p) in the first section of the interview instrument are designed to reveal the respondent's personal views on the topic of collaborating with surrounding communities. The response of all persons interviewed to (question n), (8.80), indicated agreement with the concept that generally it is a good idea to collaborate with surrounding communities on service provision. Comparing the responses when grouped by city reveals they either moderately agree or agree with this concept. Bedford Falls displayed the lowest, yet still high, response of (7.50) and Acme the highest at (9.33). When grouped by role, the responses to this question again display remarkable consistency. Fire chiefs had the lowest average response of (8.20) and mayors had the highest average response of (9.33).

When asked if they think the area communities are interdependent in terms of problems faced and possible solutions, (question o), the average response of all persons interviewed is relatively high (8.40) indicating that the respondents agree that area communities are interdependent.

<b>Table 4.11: Respondents' Personal Views Regarding Collaboration Grouped by City</b>						
Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree	10=Strongly Agree	Detour	Eliseville	Acme	Bedford Falls	Coletown
(n) I personally think that it is generally a good idea to look for ways to collaborate with surrounding jurisdictions regardless of the service type or the problems faced		9.20	8.83	9.33	7.50	8.50
(o) I think that the Downriver communities are interdependent in terms of the problems they face and possible solutions to those problems		7.60	8.83	9.67	9.50	7.25
(p) I think the Downriver communities should work collaboratively on providing services whenever it will benefit these communities as a group even if some of the communities would rather provide the service independently		7.80	8.00	9.33	9.00	8.50

When grouped by city, the average responses display a small amount of variance, with Coletown reporting (7.25) as the lowest, and Acme displaying the highest score of (9.67). When grouped by role, the average responses again display modest variance, with fire chiefs recording the lowest at (7.20) and city managers reporting the strongest agreement at (9.67). Responses to this question indicate moderate to relatively strong agreement among those working in them that area communities are interdependent.

<b>Table 4.12: Respondents' Personal Views Regarding Collaboration Grouped by Role of Respondent</b>						
Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree	10=Strongly Agree	Mayor	City Council	City Manager	Fire Chief	Fire Fighter
(n) I personally think that it is generally a good idea to look for ways to collaborate with surrounding cities regardless of the service type or the problems faced.		9.33	9.00	9.00	8.20	9.00
(o) I think that the Downriver communities are interdependent in terms of the problems they face and possible solutions to those problems.		9.33	9.33	9.67	7.20	7.80
(p) I think the Downriver communities should work collaboratively on providing services whenever it will benefit these communities as a group even if some of the communities would rather provide the service independently.		9.33	8.33	9.67	7.80	8.00

When asked if the respondent thinks the area communities should work collaboratively, even if some of do not want to do so, (question p), the average response of all respondents is (8.35). This indicates agreement with the concept that the DFA area communities should work collaboratively, even against the wishes of some of the area communities. Grouped by city, the average response is consistently strong with a range of (7.80) in Detour and (9.33) in Acme. Grouped by role, the responses show moderate to strong agreement with this question ranging between (7.80) among fire chiefs and (9.67) among city managers. Figure 4.1 highlights the closed-ended questions that evoked the strongest responses.

**Figure 4.1: Questions to which Respondents Expressed Strongest Agreement**

<u>Question</u>	<u>Opinion of Respondent</u>	<u>Mean Response</u>
f	Residents are suspicious of neighboring elected officials	7.05
n	Think it is a good idea to collaborate generally	8.80
o	The area communities are interdependent	8.40
p	Should collaborate across area even if some disagree	8.35
i	Residents want us to let the county provide services	2.05
	1=Strongly Disagree                      10=Strongly Agree	

### Summary Analysis of Closed-Ended Questions

The conclusions that can be drawn from the results of these closed-ended questions provide some insights into the causes and factors important to communities considering collaboration in the provision of public services. All of the respondents participating in this collaboration are strongly opposed to allowing the county to provide services. In general, the respondents to this survey were inclined to think collaboration with surrounding jurisdictions is a good thing. The respondents to this survey also clearly recognized that the area in which they operate (Downriver) is interdependent, and recognize that they have a long history of successful collaborations.

### Factors Stimulating Interlocal Cooperation: Responses to Open-Ended Questions

The following series of open-ended questions were also asked of each respondent. These questions are designed to elicit the respondent's perceptions about why their city is seriously considering collaboration on fire services. The questions are designed to reveal whether policy entrepreneurs are present and if so, what kinds of activities they undertake. Finally, this set of questions is designed to show whether the respondents think fire services in particular are easier or harder to collaborate on than other public services.

<b>Table 4.13</b>	
<b>Open-Ended Question: Factors that Motivate Interlocal Collaboration</b>	
Question B-2	In your view, what are the factors that led to this effort?
Question B-2(a)	Were there any specific events that directly encouraged your city's participation in this effort?
Question B-2 (b)	Is there a person in your city that has stood out as a policy entrepreneur/leader in this effort? If yes, who? What are some examples of the activities this person undertook? Why do you think this person took on this role? What motivated his or her efforts in this regard?
Question B-2 (c)	In your view, has a person from another city been instrumental to this effort going forward? If yes, who? What are some examples of the activities this person undertook? What do you see as his or her motivations for this leadership role?
Question B-2 (d)	Are there any third parties whose involvement was instrumental to this collaboration moving forward? If yes, who? How so? Can you offer some examples of how they helped? Do you have any thoughts about their motivations for involvement in this effort?
Question B-3	This effort involves collaboration on fire services. Does the fact that it involves fire services make it more or less easy to do this? Please explain.

#### Factors Stimulating this Effort

As discussed in Chapter Three, the existing literature is somewhat mixed in terms of the likely effect of fiscal stress on a community in encouraging collaboration. While a variety of answers to question (B-2) were given, the most frequent response, by far, was that declining revenues available to the community is the strongest motivation for the

DFA collaboration. For example, the Acme city council president said it was “money, the continuing cuts in revenue sharing received from the state.” Acme’s fire union president indicated that the most important factor was the “lack of funding that is out there for municipalities to obtain.” Acme’s fire chief stated that the leading cause was “shortcomings on revenues from the federal and state governments to the cities . . . we’ve been cut to the bone and there is nowhere else to cut.” The fire chief of Bedford Falls said it was the “downturn in revenues . . . coupled with the increasing cost of equipment.” Bedford Falls city manager indicated that Michigan has a systemic tax revenue problem in that “the Headlee Amendment working with Proposal A is putting us in a real bind.” The fire chief in Eliseville, who oversees a large department, stated that it is “purely economics.”

Almost universally, the elected and administrative officials interviewed indicated that it is the reduction in revenues, coupled with the increasing costs of equipment, forcing them to consider collaboration. The respondents mentioned the multi-year reductions in revenue sharing dollars coming to them from the state as a serious problem for all Michigan municipalities. More than one respondent indicated that they believed that Michigan has a structural tax problem that is long term and must be addressed soon. The city manager of Eliseville stated that the way local government in Michigan is financed is broken and needs to be fixed.

The fiscal stress that these communities are experiencing, coupled with the rapidly increasing cost of equipment and labor in the provision of fire/EMS services, has led them to seriously examine the idea of further collaboration in public service provision. Yet, in assessing the factors that are motivating these communities to

collaborate, it is worth noting that these same communities undertook a serious effort to collaborate in the early 1990s when the fiscal situation was less severe. Although the general condition of the United States and Michigan economies experienced a slow down in the early 1990s, it is certainly not comparable to the fiscal stress that these communities are currently experiencing. Hence, there must have been factors other than severe fiscal stress in the early 1990s that led these communities to consider collaboration. When asked about such factors, none of the respondents could remember any of the particular reasons that motivated that attempted collaboration.

#### Specific Events that Trigger Collaboration

The interviewees indicated that there were certain relevant conditions leading them towards collaboration. In response to the question regarding specific events encouraging collaboration, Acme's city council president said that more than anything the cities in this area have a "long history of cooperation, through the Downriver Community Conference and otherwise." Detour's mayor stated "I was involved in the original study on fire consolidation that was done by the Downriver Community Conference" and that he has long advocated this kind of cooperation. The mayor of Coletown said that it was "the good experience we've had through Mutual Aid" that made collaboration seem feasible.

The cities undertaking this DFA collaborative effort have participated, for many years, in the Downriver Mutual Aid Pact organized through the DCC. Under that Pact, each community may call upon neighboring communities for help when a problem is encountered that strains their resources to handle alone. The Mutual Aid experience has

led these jurisdictions to train personnel in very similar ways and to purchase similar kinds of equipment. The fire chief of Eliseville stated that “there are a lot of fire chiefs in this area that have been talking about some kind of regional effort. Mutual Aid experiences have been driving it this way for a while. The bottom line is the driving factor.”

The findings of this research are consistent with previous research, showing that a long-established relationship among cooperating communities increases the chances of collaboration (Lackey, et al. 2002). Cooperation is more likely the longer the actors have cooperated with one another (Park and Feiock 2003).

In addition to the history of cooperation through the Mutual Aid Program that nearly every respondent mentioned, several specific events were mentioned by the interviewees as pulling them toward greater levels of cooperation over time. The city council president in Acme mentioned that “there was a power outage in 2003...Marathon Oil had a significant and frightening problem with their tank farm and there was a positive response by several of the area communities. . . and that event led to further cooperative development.” During that power outage, the public safety departments of these communities engaged in significant cooperation. This event also raised awareness that the communities share some common problems and that working together in the face of serious problems is a better approach to take.

Acme’s fire chief said that his interest in this kind of collaboration started with the automatic aid system his community developed with another city. Under automatic aid, both fire departments are dispatched simultaneously to a fire in either city. This arrangement has allowed each city to increase the number of fire fighters initially on site

and fighting a fire. This dramatically increased their success rate and the safety of their fire fighters. The chief also said the arrangement did not greatly increase the costs of service to either city.

Respondents from two of the cities mentioned the success of the Police Information System Consortium initiated by the City of Bedford Falls as an event that led to further efforts of cooperation. The city manager of Eliseville stated that one contributing factor was the “fairly quick success of the police information system consortium involving these same five cities.” The city manager of Bedford Falls described how that consortium came about.

Our information person came to me with a proposal to invite other communities to share our computer server in order to share our police information service, the Law Enforcement Information Network (LEIN) System, the mapping software for dispatching, etc. as a way of potentially saving a substantial amount of money. That made sense to me and we are now up to 12 communities sharing the same information technology. This includes the (Wayne) County Sheriffs Department by the way too... Having a common dispatching operation is really important to this kind of collaboration. It really has to be in place before we can seriously consider a joint fire service or police service.

These computer services have the potential to facilitate joint dispatching of fire and police assets and the sharing of information in a timely manner at a price that is greatly reduced from the cost each individual community would bear. It was the success of this information sharing effort that gave these cities the idea that they could accomplish more by working together.

In sum, the communities participating in the DFA collaboration have a long history of successfully cooperating. Through the operation of the Mutual Aid System fostered by the DCC, these communities have fought fires together and have come to train in similar ways and purchase similar types of equipment.

## The Role of Policy Entrepreneurs

This study also seeks to identify if any policy entrepreneurs, either elected or administrative, are active in leading the DFA collaboration effort and what such entrepreneurs do to advance the effort. John Kingdon (1984, 2003) discusses the idea of policy entrepreneurs or persons instrumental in pushing an idea onto the local decision-making agenda and making sure that it moves forward. Such policy entrepreneurs can play a significant role in the development of new joint service arrangements by lending their expertise and experience to the group. Such people may expend considerable amounts of time and prestige in the effort and can play a critical part in the successful adoption of the new policy. Eric Zeemering (2007) found that city managers were regularly mentioned as policy entrepreneurs doing the necessary work of collaboration among communities.

When asked about persons in their own city who have acted as a policy entrepreneur or policy leader in this effort, Acme's city council president mentioned Acme's mayor and said, "he is a financial guy, a vice president of a local bank, so he is very concerned about the fiscal well-being of the city." The city manager of Detour named the mayor of his community as one of the leaders in the effort and stated that "he was an original proponent of the idea...we formed an auto-aid system." Detour's fire chief mentioned that the mayor "is the chairperson of the collaborative, he was instrumental in setting everything up." The fire chief of Eliseville mentioned the union president of his own fire fighters local and said that "he was motivated by a desire to do some extra work to help educate and steer the direction of how this effort might go." The city council president of Eliseville stated that his city manager "is probably one of the

more aggressive administrators in trying to facilitate the actual construction of that fire authority.”

Respondents were also asked about the existence of policy entrepreneurs in other communities. The city manager of Eliseville was consistently mentioned as a driving force. The mayor of Detour, who mentioned that he was the primary facilitator of the effort in his community, went on to also mention the city manager of Eliseville and said “he has the same vision, the same thought process and it’s interesting now that we have somebody in the political realm and somebody in the administrative realm that are looking at this basically through the same binoculars. He is a dynamic leader.” Detour’s fire chief said that the city manager of Eliseville “has taken a leading role in this effort.” The fire chief of Coletown, identifying that same person said that he “was the most outspoken promoter of this idea.”

#### The Importance of Governance Structures

Oakerson (2004) argued that in order to facilitate better processes of governance it is first necessary to develop governance structures that are based on the willing consent of the participants. Curtis Wood (2004) in his examination of the Kansas City Metropolitan area noted that the presence of area councils of government was very helpful in overcoming the difficulties of collaboration. Respondents were asked if there were any third parties such as agencies of other governmental levels, networks or groups whose involvement was instrumental to this collaboration. While a few of the interviewees did not think there was any such third party, a majority of them indicated that the DCC has been instrumental in organizing the collaboration effort and keeping it

moving forward. The mayor of Detour said “the DCC, they seem to have a lot of influence . . . whatever studies have to be done they seem to be the backbone that people can fall back on to get information . . . a good contact point.” The city manager of Eliseville stated “I think the network of the DCC provided the organizational structure that aided and supported these individual initiatives. They provide a common platform to facilitate and communicate. They are like a mini-regional voluntary government in some sense.” The fire chief in Coletown said that “The Downriver Community Conference . . . they have a role in it as facilitators.” The fire chief of Eliseville said the “Downriver Community Conference was instrumental in getting the initial grant which was used to fund the feasibility study.”

The city manager of Detour also mentioned that the consulting firm Plante-Moran assisted them in putting the collaboration plan together. The fire union president of Eliseville stated that “The IAFF (International Association of Fire Fighters) and also the Michigan Professional Fire Fighters Union” were instrumental in assisting in the effort. He went on to say that most of the dialog relative to the DFA collaboration was occurring among the fire fighter unions.

**Figure 4.2: Factors Mentioned most often as Motivating Collaboration.**

<u>Factors Motivating Collaboration</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents Mentioning This Factor</u>
Previous Collaboration through the Downriver Mutual Aid Pact	95%
Fiscal Stress caused by Declining Revenues	94%
Presence of a Council of Government	85%
Presence of a Policy Entrepreneur Leading Effort	85%
Collaboration on Police Information System Consortium	40%

These responses show that there are individual policy entrepreneurs active in the DFA collaboration effort. There is a consulting firm and both formal and informal networks providing encouragement and guidance in the development of the authority. The formal network mentioned frequently is the DCC. The informal networks mentioned frequently are the Downriver Fire Chiefs Association, the Downriver City Managers Association and the fire fighting union locals in the area. The DCC is repeatedly mentioned as a source of information and a facilitating influence in this effort. The city manager of Eliseville is mentioned repeatedly as a driving force in the attempt to make the DFA collaboration a reality. This research reinforces previous research on the importance of policy entrepreneurs who work to facilitate collaboration and also the importance of networks such as the DCC in helping to facilitate an effort and to overcome the difficulties.

#### Is It Easier or Harder to Collaborate on Fire Services?

Different kinds of public services present differing opportunities and obstacles. State level rules may make it easier or harder to achieve collaborative success. Collaborative fire services have existed in different sections of the country for many years. Some aspects of fire service have clear products or functions that make it a good candidate for collaboration with other communities. However, the visibility of fire protection to the public may also make it a difficult service to deliver through an independent authority. Hence, it is useful to probe the participant's views regarding whether a collaborative effort to provide fire services was easier or harder to achieve than other services, and why.

Acme's city council president said that it was harder to collaborate on fire services because "people are use (sic) to a really excellent level of service . . . it's important to them that *their* fire fighters are very happy . . . they don't want them getting lost in a bigger organization...they worry that they would suffer a loss in the level of service."

Detour's city manager thought it would be,

harder I believe. I think it stems from the fact that many cities are so used to having *their* fire people respond to a rescue or whatever and that *their* fire trucks show up . . . citizens feel that they are paying taxes to this city and they should get this city's fire personnel . . . they're worried about service.

The fire chief of Bedford Falls said it would be "harder . . . there is a public sentiment against it. They like having local control." He also indicated that "there are just so many little things to consider such as going to a single key commercial building lock system. The union rules that have been bargained for over a long period of time would be difficult to mesh together into one authority." A fire department lieutenant in Detour stated that it would be harder because the fire departments have such strong union representation. A fire department captain in Coletown thought it would be harder because their citizens are "very protective of the fire services." He went on to indicate that he thought people would have different opinions depending on the services being considered for collaboration. "I think our citizens view their fire department like their sports team . . . I think our citizens feel that way about us." The city council president in Eliseville said "harder I think . . . you're dealing with life and death issues...much more intense issues involved in public safety. It's different than if you get your trash picked-up or if the road gets fixed . . . it's different. It's much more serious and thought provoking."

On the other hand the city manager of Eliseville said “easier I think, because fire services have more national standards and uniformity of service characteristics.” Acme’s fire union president indicated that he thought it would be easier because they are already working collaboratively through the Downriver Mutual Aid Program. The mayor of Eliseville stated that “it’s a little easier because the IAFF and the fire services have been moving toward standardization for some time now . . . there is already a certain amount of uniformity in the fire services . . . they all tend to deliver services in the same way.” Reflecting some of the conflicting opinions on this subject, the fire union president in Eliseville said “I think it makes it harder and easier. The fire service is slow to change; we rely on consistency a lot. We work from a teamwork multi-station tradition.”

Clearly there is a considerable amount of disagreement as to whether fire services are harder or easier to collaborate on than other public services. Several respondents mentioned that it should be somewhat easier because the fire services have been moving toward national standards for some time now and they have already been collaborating to a much greater extent than other types of public services. Certainly the adoption of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards would seemingly lead to greater uniformity in fire services which in turn should make it easier for different departments to collaborate with one another. According to the scope described in section 1.1.1 of NFPA 1710, the NFPA standards are the “minimum requirements relating to the organization and deployment of fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations, and special operations to the public by a substantially all career fire department.”

Yet in contrast to such uniformity and apparent ease of interlocal collaboration, several respondents mentioned that residents of their communities are very parochial

about their fire department and generally opposed to collaborating with other communities. It should be noted that most of the respondents who cited “citizen opposition” to interlocal collaboration are working members of the community fire department. If the respondents are correct in their assessment of the perceptions of their community’s residents, political opposition to transferring fire service operations to an authority could be a serious hindrance to collaboration. Citizen opposition is an issue that must be taken into consideration by any community contemplating collaboration on fire/EMS services.

### **Summary Analysis of Open-Ended Questions**

The responses to these open-ended questions reveal several factors that are thought by these respondents to be important in this effort at collaboration. The issue of fiscal stress is mentioned repeatedly by nearly all of the respondents as a major contributing factor leading them to undertake this effort. The decreasing revenues available to the cities, coupled with the increasing cost of labor and equipment is a motivating factor for these respondents. Several of the respondents mentioned specific events that led them to undertake this collaboration. A power outage in 2003 caused the public safety departments of these communities to cooperate in a very real and significant way which led directly to discussions of this collaboration. The success of the collaboration on a police information system was another event that lead to further discussions.

The long established working relationship these communities have developed as a result of the Downriver Mutual Aid Pact was mentioned by nearly every respondent as an

important motivating factor. These responses also reveal that policy entrepreneurs are present in this area and are actively working to enable greater levels of collaboration among the fire departments.

A formal network, the DCC, is frequently mentioned as being a critical motivating factor in this collaboration. The DCC has long provided a forum for the discussion of these issues by elected and administrative officials. The DCC applied for and was awarded a grant from the State of Michigan to investigate the feasibility of undertaking this form of collaboration. The DCC also provided meeting rooms and staff support to this effort.

As to whether it is harder or easier to collaborate on fire services than other kinds of services, the respondents had mixed opinions. Many of the respondents think it should be easier, because the fire services have been developing uniform (NFPA) standards for some time now as well as standardized training for their personnel. On the other hand, many of the respondents indicated that collaboration on fire services might be more difficult because the residents and some elected officials are committed to maintaining and controlling their own individual fire department.

The next chapter will examine what potentially collaborating cities are looking for in the specific terms of a collaboration agreement. In particular, this part of the research study explores what cities are looking for in terms of the operating agreement and what they expect to gain. The interview subjects are asked if they are expecting short or long term cost savings as a result of collaboration. The issue of fiscal equity between the collaborating communities is also examined. Finally, this section of the study examines

the satisfaction levels of the participants and asks them to perform a cost benefit analysis of the activity.

**Table 4.14:**  
**Factors Stimulating Interlocal Collaboration / All Respondent**

Respondent	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	
1	7	6	8	8	4	6	5	5	3	6	6	5	7	8	10	8	
2	8	7	10	9	7	4	1	9	1	6	6	6	7	10	9	10	
3	7	6	6	7	6	7	3	7	1	5	6	7	9	10	10	10	
4	8	8	8	7	7	10	7	6	1	6	7	6	5	10	10	10	
5	8	8	10	10	4	4	9	8	3	7	6	4	4	10	10	10	
6	4	4	5	4	3	7	3	6	2	8	7	4	3	8	9	9	
7	5	5	6	9	6	8	7	3	1	10	7	8	2	6	9	8	
8	7	6	4	5	1	10	3	1	1	5	5	2	7	8	5	8	
9	8	10	5	10	2	10	5	6	1	10	8	10	10	10	5	5	
10	8	8	10	10	5	8	2	2	1	6	7	10	2	8	3	8	
11	6	5	6	4	4	1	7	4	1	5	2	2	8	10	10	10	
12	4	4	4	8	2	8	2	8	2	6	8	1	1	8	8	8	
13	9	8	8	7	3	5	7	5	6	3	7	3	7	9	10	10	
14	10	9	8	4	7	5	7	7	1	5	2	7	3	8	8	8	
15	4	4	6	8	2	10	4	7	3	6	7	4	5	9	9	5	
16	5	5	5	7	3	9	3	7	2	4	6	6	5	7	7	7	
17	9	8	8	5	4	7	6	3	2	8	8	2	3	10	10	10	
18	10	7	8	7	4	7	6	6	1	5	8	2	2	8	8	6	
19	5	4	6	7	4	6	7	7	5	6	5	5	8	9	9	10	
20	5	5	6	3	3	9	8	5	3	3	3	3	4	10	9	7	
Mean	6.85	6.35	6.85	6.95	4.05	7.05	5.10	5.60	2.05	6.00	6.05	4.85	5.10	8.80	8.40	8.35	
STD DEV	1.98	1.84	1.90	2.16	1.79	2.42	2.31	2.11	1.43	1.89	1.85	2.64	2.63	1.20	1.98	1.69	
Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree													10=Strongly Agree				

**Table 4.15:**  
**Closed-Ended Questions Relative to Factors Stimulating Interlocal Collaboration / Grouped by City.**

	<b>Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>10=Strongly Agree</b>	Detour	Eliseville	Acme	Bedford Falls	Coletown	Mean	STD DEV
	<b>Interview Question</b>		N=5	N=6	N=3	N=2	N=4	N=20	N=20
a	My organization is usually receptive to doing things in new ways		8.20	4.83	7.33	7.00	7.75	7.02	1.31
b	My organization usually approaches problems proactively		7.80	4.50	6.33	6.50	7.25	6.48	1.25
c	My organization is usually open to possibilities for collaborating on services with other local governments (other than the county)		7.00	5.67	8.00	7.00	7.50	7.03	0.87
d	Our residents demand that direct provision be the default option for most basic pub services		7.80	5.50	8.00	8.00	6.75	7.21	1.09
e	Our residents demand that we consider what's good for Downriver when we make decisions about providing important public services		3.60	3.17	5.67	4.50	4.50	4.29	0.96
f	Our residents tend to be suspicious of the motivations of elected officials from neighboring cities		8.20	7.00	5.67	6.50	7.00	6.87	0.92
g	Our residents do not care about how services are delivered because they focus only on the quality and cost of these services		6.00	5.33	3.00	7.00	4.25	5.12	1.55
h	Our residents would rather we contract with other local governments than with private or non-profit organizations for most services		5.40	6.00	7.00	4.00	5.00	5.48	1.12
i	Our residents want us to let the county provide services whenever possible		1.40	2.67	1.67	3.50	1.50	2.15	0.91
j	Our residents place more value on protecting our city's control over public serv than lowering costs		6.60	5.33	5.67	6.50	6.25	6.07	0.55
k	Our residents place more value on protecting our city's control over public services than on improving service effectiveness across the Downriver communities		6.80	5.00	6.00	7.00	6.25	6.21	0.79
l	Our residents see themselves as highly interdependent with the local governments that surround this community		4.80	4.00	6.00	5.50	5.00	5.06	0.75
m	There is a significant constituency in my community for seeking regional solutions to problems		5.60	5.50	7.67	4.50	2.25	5.10	1.97
n	I personally think that it is generally a good idea to look for ways to collaborate with surrounding jurisdictions regardless of the service type or the problems faced		9.20	8.83	9.33	7.50	8.50	8.67	0.73
o	I think that the Downriver communities are interdependent in terms of the problems they face and possible solutions to those problems		7.60	8.83	9.67	9.50	7.25	8.57	1.10
p	I think the Downriver communities should work collaboratively on providing services whenever it will benefit them as a group even if some of the cities would rather provide service independently.		7.80	8.00	9.33	9.00	8.50	8.53	0.65

Table 4.16: Closed-Ended Questions Relative to Factors Stimulating Interlocal Collaboration / Grouped by Role									
	Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree	10=Strongly Agree	Mayor	Council	City Mgr	Fire Chf	Fire F.	MEAN	STDEV
	Interview Question		N=4	N=3	N=3	N=5	N=5	N=20	N=20
a	My organization is usually receptive to doing things in new ways		8.00	5.66	7.00	6.20	6.80	6.73	0.88
b	My organization usually approaches problems proactively		7.33	5.00	6.67	5.80	6.80	6.32	0.92
c	My organization is usually open to possibilities for collaborating on services with other local governments (other than the county)		7.33	6.67	7.67	6.40	6.40	6.89	0.58
d	Our residents demand that direct provision be the default option for most basic public services		5.00	6.00	7.00	7.80	7.80	6.72	1.21
e	Our residents demand that we consider what's good for Downriver when we make decisions about providing important public services		6.00	3.67	3.33	4.00	3.60	4.12	1.08
f	Our residents tend to be suspicious of the motivations of elected officials from neighboring cities		5.33	7.00	5.33	8.60	7.60	6.77	1.44
g	Our residents do not care about how services are delivered because they focus only on the quality and cost of these services		7.00	6.67	6.33	3.80	3.40	5.44	1.70
h	Our residents would rather we contract with other local governments than with private or non-profit organizations for most services		5.67	5.67	6.33	4.00	6.60	5.65	1.01
i	Our residents want us to let the county provide services whenever possible		1.00	3.67	3.67	1.40	1.60	2.27	1.30
j	Our residents place more value on protecting our city's control over public serv than lowering costs		5.33	5.00	6.00	6.40	6.80	5.91	0.74
k	Our residents place more value on protecting our city's control over public services than on improving service effectiveness across the Downriver communities		3.67	4.67	6.67	6.40	7.20	5.72	1.49
l	Our residents see themselves as highly interdependent with the local governments that surround this community		5.00	4.33	3.67	6.20	5.00	4.84	0.94
m	There is a significant constituency in my community for seeking regional solution to our problems		5.33	6.33	4.67	5.00	5.20	5.31	0.62
n	I personally think that it is generally a good idea to look for ways to collaborate with surrounding jurisdictions regardless of the service type or the problems faced		9.33	9.00	9.00	8.20	9.00	8.91	0.42
o	I think that the Downriver communities are interdependent in terms of the problems they face and possible solutions to those problems		9.33	9.33	9.67	7.20	7.80	8.67	1.09
p	I think the Downriver communities should work collaboratively on providing services whenever it will benefit them as a group even if some of the cities would rather provide service independently.		9.33	8.33	9.67	7.80	8.00	8.63	0.83

## CHAPTER 5

### WHAT PARTICIPANTS EXPECT FROM THE TERMS OF COLLABORATION

This chapter examines how elected and appointed officials in the five communities view the terms of collaboration for a joint fire/EMS authority. At the time of the interviews, the respondents had been discussing collaboration for several years and actively engaging in the planning of the fire authority for approximately eighteen months. In general, community officials have enjoyed a good, cooperative relationship with officials in other communities and have a relatively positive outlook toward collaboration.

This chapter examines what participants expect to gain from this collaboration. Virtually all of the respondents are concerned about the financial condition of their community and the fiscal outlook for the future. As detailed in Chapter 4, fiscal stress is mentioned repeatedly as a causal factor driving the community to pursue collaboration. This chapter examines other possible factors motivating this potential fire authority collaboration. It also examines how collaboration is expected improve the fiscal situation of the partnering communities.

Finally, this chapter examines the respondents' assessments of the benefits and costs of collaboration, and how satisfied officials are with the amount of input they have in planning the fire authority.

The first portion of this chapter addresses a series of closed-ended survey questions using a scale of one (not important at all to the respondent) to ten (critically important to the respondent). These questions are designed to elicit the answer to, among other things, what costs savings are expected, whether service quality will be improved, if any jobs will

be lost, and will access to resources be improved. This series of questions is designed to assess the respondents' perceptions of the necessary terms of collaboration. What specific results are potentially collaborating communities looking for when they consider cooperating? The second portion of this chapter deals with a series of open-ended questions designed to encourage the respondent to explain more fully and in a narrative style what is important to them regarding the terms of collaboration. Tables 5.18, 5.19 and 5.20 at the end of the chapter contain all of the data gathered from the scaled portion of the survey instrument. Smaller tables are interspersed throughout the chapter to make it easier for the reader to refer to the information being discussed.

The terms of collaborative activity are important to study because it is important whether participants are looking for the same things regarding any collaborative activity. It is possible that public managers may not have a thorough understanding of what the terms are before undertaking cooperation. Like any human relationship, if the participants are expecting very different outcomes from the same activity, they will probably be very disappointed with the results of that activity. If one community is interested in short term cost savings while another is interested in long term service quality and enhancements, they may not make the best partners and the relationship may quickly break down. If the financial or other types of commitments are not equal and well understood beforehand, the collaboration is likely to end badly.

Earlier research (Lyons, Lowery and DeHoog 1992) showed that local elected officials are often concerned about citizen satisfaction with services. Officials may also be concerned about the cost savings available through joint service production. Officials may be more concerned with potential public criticism of the collaboration than with the

economics involved. Eric Zeemering (2007 p. 80) has concluded that “from a political economy and public contracting perspective, we know that local governments seek to provide high quality public services at low cost. However, we are uncertain how these officials weigh different aspects of the terms of collaboration in their decision-making.” Thus the terms of collaboration and how those terms are perceived by the local actors may have a significant impact on if and how collaborative activity takes place. Therefore, a better understanding of how officials view the terms of collaboration can help in predicting when collaboration will occur and when it may not.

### **Perceptions of Collaboration Terms: Responses to Scale Questions**

#### Importance of Short and Long-term Savings

Previous research by Visser (2004) indicates that it is important that the local governing unit be convinced that collaboration will have a positive outcome for their communities. The following questions are designed to discover how potential cost savings factor into the decision-making process and whether participating communities are looking for short or long term savings.

<b>Table 5.1:</b>		
<b>Perceptions of Respondents Regarding the Terms of Collaboration</b>		
<b>All Respondents (n=20)</b>		
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Mean All Respondents
a	Our city will save money in the short run (3-5 years)	4.55
b	Our city will save money in the long run (over 5 years)	8.45
c	Our residents see improvements in the quality of the service over what we have provided previously	7.75

Asked how important it is that their city save money in the short run (question a), defined as three to five years, the mean response of all respondents is below the mid-point of the scale at (4.55). The standard deviation in the responses is (2.65), indicating considerable variance in the answers ranging from the lowest at (1.00) indicating it is not important to the respondent, to the high point of the scale at (10.00) indicating that it is critically important.<sup>6</sup>

Grouped by city, a comparison of the data shows the mean response is (4.15) with a standard deviation of (1.59). The responses ranged from a low of (2.00) in Bedford Falls to a high of (5.60) in Detour. Eliseville responses are at (5.50), and Acme and Coletown had relatively low responses at (4.67) and (3.00) respectively.

	<b>Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important</b>	Detour (n=5)	Eliseville (n=6)	Acme (n=3)	Bedford Falls (n=2)	Coletown (n=4)
a	Our city will save money in the short run (3-5 years)	5.60	5.50	4.67	2.00	3.00
b	Our city will save money in the long run (over 5 years)	8.80	8.67	9.33	8.00	7.25
c	Our residents see improvements in the quality of the service over what we have provided previously	7.60	7.50	7.67	8.00	8.25

Table 5.2 compares data grouped by city and Table 5.3 compares that same data grouped by the different jobs held by the respondents. When a comparison is made of the responses based on the role of the respondent, the mean is higher but still below the mid-point of the scale at (4.75). The standard deviation is (1.87) indicating even more variance

<sup>6</sup> See Tables at the end of the chapter for standard deviations.

there than between the cities. Fire chiefs register the lowest response to this question at (2.80) and city council members have the highest response at (7.00). Mayors have the second highest response at (6.50). City managers and fire fighter responses are most closely aligned with fire chiefs at (3.67) and (3.80) respectively.

<b>Table 5.3: Perceptions of the Respondents Regarding the Terms of Collaboration Grouped by Role</b>						
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Mayor (n=4)	City Council (n=3)	City Mgr (n=3)	Fire Chief (n=5)	Fire Fighter (n=5)
a	Our city will save money in the short run (3-5 years)	6.50	7.00	3.67	2.80	3.80
b	Our city will save money in the long run (over 5 years)	9.00	9.00	7.67	7.80	8.80
c	Our residents see improvements in the quality of the service over what we have provided previously	8.00	7.00	8.33	7.40	8.00

Overall, the elected officials had much higher expectations of saving money in the first three to five years than did the administrative officials and fire fighters. Having very different expectations about the outcome of this collaboration may create obstacles to the effort. It would seem helpful to the success of the collaboration to address such differences early on in the process to avoid a breakdown in negotiations after considerable time and other resources have been expended. However, based on these responses it seems that the expectations for cost savings have not been adequately addressed by the respondents.

When asked how important it is that their city save money in the long-term, defined as over five years (question b), the respondents indicated that it is very important to them (8.45). The individual responses ranged from a low of (6.00) to a high of (10.00) which clearly indicates an expectation that the collaboration effort will result in cost savings. When the responses are grouped by city, it is clear that all of the cities have a high

expectation that they will save money in the long run due to this collaboration. The lowest average city response is in Coletown at (7.25) and the highest is reported for Acme at (9.33). When the responses are compared based on the role of the respondent, the elected officials again indicated higher expectations of cost savings than did the appointed and administrative officials or employees. Both the mayors and city council members had a response of (9.00), while fire fighters, fire chiefs and city managers had slightly lower expectations as groups at (8.80), (7.80) and (7.67), respectively.

These findings support the conclusions of Visser (2004) that before local government officials will seriously consider collaboration, they must be convinced that it will have a positive outcome for their community. The administrative respondents' answers indicate that they generally do not anticipate very much in the way of cost savings in the first few years. In contrast, the elected officials do have expectations of near-term cost savings. When considering the anticipated cost savings after the first five years of collaboration, the elected officials again have higher expectations for such savings than the employees or the administrative officials. Figure 5.1 indicates a considerable difference in the expectations of elected and administrative officials, especially in terms of short-term cost savings.

**Figure 5.1: Differences in Expectations for Cost Savings**

	Elected Officials <u>Range of Mean</u>	Administrative Officials <u>Range of Mean</u>
Expectations for short-term savings (first 3-5 years)	6.50 - 7.00	2.80 - 4.75
Expectations for long-term savings (after 5 years)	9.00	7.67 - 8.80

These findings indicate that for this collaboration effort, there does exist something of a disconnect between the expectations of elected officials who will make the final decision on whether to engage in this collaboration. The employees and administrative officials will be charged with implementing the authority and making it work on a daily basis. Such findings could indicate a problem in negotiating the operating agreement and the labor agreement required for this collaboration. A clear understanding of the cost savings that can reasonably be expected is needed in order to negotiate labor and other costs. Such expected cost savings would also need to be factored in to the funding agreement for the collaborative. Such differences could potentially lead to trouble in the monitoring and evaluation phase after the authority is in operation. If the administrative officials who are charged with making the collaboration work are anticipating that there will not be any short term cost savings but the elected officials are fully expecting to enjoy such costs savings, a serious issue might arise when the authority is created.

#### Importance of Residents Seeing Improvements in Service Quality

Respondents were asked how important it is that the residents of their respective communities see improvements in the quality of services over what is currently provided as a result of collaboration (question c). The responses make it clear that most respondents consider it important that residents see some improvement in services, but there is variance in the opinions. In terms of the cities as a group, the mean is (7.80) indicating that this factor is perceived as very important by these communities. The issue was the most important to the respondents from Coletown (8.25) and the least important (7.50) to the Eliseville officials. When answers are compared based upon the role of the respondent, it is

clear that regardless of role, this factor is perceived to be important to community residents. City managers have the highest response rate at (8.33) and city council members have the lowest at (7.00).

Thus, in addition to obtaining cost savings as a result of this collaboration, achieving an improvement in service quality is clearly thought by these respondents to be very important to the residents of these five communities. There is serious disagreement as to when such cost savings might be realized, but both elected and administrative officials expect savings, at least in the long term. Both groups of respondents believe it is important to residents to see service improvements as a result of collaboration.

<b>Table 5.4</b>		
<b>Importance to Respondents of Achieving Financial Equity / All Respondents</b>		
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically important	Mean All Respondents
d	Cost savings are distributed equally among the participating communities	6.95
i	The authority will distribute future nonlocal(state and federal) resources among the Downriver communities in a more rationale way than is now the case	8.35
j	Creation of this authority results in equal spending on fire protection among the participating jurisdictions	7.25

#### Is Achieving Financial and Service Equity among Participating Communities Important?

Three of the questions in this section (d, i and j) are designed to assess the importance to the participants of achieving financial equity among the communities. When asked how important it is that cost savings are equally distributed among the communities (question d), the average response among all respondents is (6.95). When the responses are compared grouped by city, the mean remains relatively high at (6.74), but there is a

considerable difference of opinion as to how important this factor is in motivating these communities to collaborate. The officials of Detour indicated equality in cost savings was extremely important (9.20), but the Acme (7.00) and Coletown (7.50) officials indicated this objective was less important to them. Eliseville (5.50) and Bedford Falls (4.50) respondents consider this factor to be less important than the respondents from other cities.

	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically important	Detour	Eliseville	Acme	Bedford Falls	Coletown
d	Cost savings are distributed equally among the participating communities	9.20	5.50	7.00	4.50	7.50
i	The authority will distribute future nonlocal(state and federal) resources among the Downriver communities in a more rationale way than is now the case	8.80	8.00	9.00	7.00	8.50
j	Creation of this authority results in equal spending on fire protection among the participating jurisdictions	7.40	6.33	7.67	5.00	9.25

When asked how important is it that future state and federal funds be distributed in a more equitable way (question i), all respondents registered a relatively high response of (8.35) with a standard deviation of (1.42), indicating that it is very important to the participants that such resources be more rationally and equitably allocated.

State revenue sharing in Michigan is distributed based largely on population and, without a statutory change, will continue to be allocated as it is now. The resource that these respondents mentioned most often as being, in their opinion, irrationally allocated is federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding. CDBG funds are distributed based upon a formula that takes into account population, age of housing,

unemployment and several other demographic characteristics of the community. These cities consider the current allocation to be irrational or unfair because of the entitlement status of each city. Direct entitlement communities like Eliseville deal directly with the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). These communities receive a great deal more in CDBG funding each year than do non-entitlement communities, such as the other four participating in this collaborative effort. Non-entitlement communities receive CDBG funding through the HUD sponsored Urban Counties Program or in some cases the Small Cities Program of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), also funded by HUD. According to the websites and/or financial departments of these five communities, for the 2008-2009 fiscal year, Eliseville, as a direct entitlement city, received \$850,651 in CDBG funding. The amount of CDBG funding that Eliseville receives is five to seven times the amount that each of the other four communities receives each year. The other four cities receive that much less in CDBG funding each year because they are not direct-entitlement communities under the HUD Program.

Historically, these communities have used at least a portion of their annual CDBG allocation to support fire fighting activities. The problem with using CDBG funds to support such activities is that the funding is allocated on a community specific basis and must be used within that community. Without a statutory change or some sort of official waiver from HUD, CDBG funding could probably not be a part of the budget of the new fire authority. If a different allocation of CDBG funds is a significant reason for the smaller communities to participate in this collaboration, they will in all probability be disappointed if a different allocation of CDBG funds does not occur.

	Scale: 1=Not Important at All      10=Critically important	Mayor	City Council	City Mgr.	Fire Chief	Fire Fighter
d	Cost savings are distributed equally among the participating communities	7.50	5.00	7.67	6.40	7.80
i	The authority will distribute future nonlocal(state and federal) resources among the Downriver communities in a more rationale way than is now the case	8.75	8.33	8.33	7.60	8.80
j	Creation of this authority results in equal spending on fire protection among the participating jurisdictions	8.25	4.67	6.33	7.60	8.20

Some of the responses to the open-ended questions examined in this chapter indicate that there is a perception in some of the communities that other communities no longer have sufficient resources to assist in handling emergencies through the existing Mutual Aid System. When asked how important it is to the respondents that the DFA collaboration results in more equal spending on fire services among all of the participating communities (question j), the overall response of all of those interviewed is (7.25). While there is some difference of opinion, the majority of the respondents consider this an important causal factor for collaboration.

When the responses are compared across cities, Coletown respondents indicated equal spending was extremely important to them (9.25), but the Bedford Falls respondents were far less concerned (5.00). When this same data is analyzed based on the role of the respondents, some interesting differences become evident. Mayors as a group indicated that this issue was very important at (8.25) while city council members indicated it was moderately important to them (4.67), below the mid-point of the scale. Fire fighters had the second highest response at (8.20) while fire chiefs and city managers rated it as slightly less important at (7.60) and (6.33) respectively. This indicates that this issue ranges from important to very important to them. It is unclear why city council member respondents

might consider the equal dedication of resources by all participating cities as less important.

Overall, when asked if achieving relative financial and service level equity among the participating communities was an important reason for these cities to collaborate, the overall responses of (6.95), (8.35) and (7.25) indicate that the respondents consider these factors very important in motivating their collaborative efforts.

#### How Important Is It that None of the Fire Fighters Currently Working Lose their Job?

This particular question was posed to the respondents because the metropolitan Detroit area is heavily unionized and all five community fire departments employ full-time professional unionized personnel. According to the information gathered during these interviews, the fire fighters' union locals have taken a very active role in the feasibility study and the planning of this collaboration. The fire union local president in Eliseville stated that most of the discussion regarding this collaboration is taking place between the union locals of the five communities.

“Local authority to enter into interlocal agreements is derived from state constitutions and enabling legislation” (Feiock 2007, p. 55). Michigan statutes provide a certain level of protection to fire fighters under Public Act 312 and other legislation. This question is designed to measure the perceptions of the participants about how important maintaining jobs is for this effort to be a success?

<b>Table 5.7:</b>		
<b>Perception of the Importance of Maintaining Jobs and Gaining Additional Resources</b>		
<b>All Respondents</b>		
	Scale: 1=Not important at All 10=Critically Important	Mean All Respondents
e	None of our fire department staff will lose their jobs due to this collaboration	8.70
f	Participation in the authority gives our community access to existing facilities & equipment currently unavailable to us because of their location in another jurisdiction	7.60
h	Participation in the authority gives our community access to the financial resources needed to construct facilities or purchase equipment that we cannot afford by ourselves	8.30

When asked how important it is that no current fire department personnel lose their jobs because of this collaboration (question e), the average response is (8.70). Only two people responded below the mid-range of the scale. Sixty-five percent of the respondents registered (10.00), the highest response they could give this question. When this data is examined grouped by city, the mean response is (8.99). Eliseville participants registered the lowest group response at (6.83). The other four cities registered responses between (9.00) and (10.00).

<b>Table 5.8:</b>						
<b>Perception of the Importance of Maintaining Jobs and Gaining Additional Resources</b>						
<b>Grouped by City</b>						
	Scale: 1=Not important at All 10=Critically Important	Detour	Eliseville	Acme	Bedford Falls	Coletown
e	None of our fire department staff will lose their jobs due to this collaboration	9.60	6.83	10.00	9.50	9.00
f	Participation in the authority gives our community access to existing facilities & equipment currently unavailable to us because of their location in another jurisdiction	7.60	8.17	7.00	5.50	8.25
h	Participation in the authority gives our community access to the financial resources needed to construct facilities or purchase equipment that we cannot afford by ourselves	8.80	8.00	8.67	8.00	8.00

When the same data is examined grouped by the role of the respondents, interesting variances are revealed. Mayors registered the lowest response at (6.50) and fire chiefs the highest at (10.00). The fire chiefs had a higher group response than did the fire fighters (9.20). City council members were more concerned (9.33) that none of the fire fighters lose their jobs. City managers registered the second lowest response as a group, but even this group considered the job retention issue very important (8.00).

<b>Table 5.9: Perception of the Importance of Maintaining Jobs and Gaining Additional Resources Grouped by Role</b>						
	Scale: 1=Not important at All      10=Critically Important	Mayor	City Council	City Mgr.	Fire Chief	Fire Fighter
e	None of our fire department staff will lose their jobs due to this collaboration	6.50	9.33	8.00	10.00	9.20
f	Participation in the authority gives our community access to existing facilities & equipment currently unavailable to us because of their location in another jurisdiction	8.75	6.33	8.67	5.80	8.60
h	Participation in the authority gives our community access to the financial resources needed to construct facilities or purchase equipment that we cannot afford by ourselves	8.75	8.00	8.00	8.20	8.40

Had this question been asked only of fire department personnel, such a high average response would perhaps not be surprising. However, this question was also asked of non fire department administrative officials such as mayors, city council members and city managers. Whether these answers indicate that the respondents generally think that current fire fighting personnel levels are necessary and perhaps painful cuts have already been made; or whether they reflect the perception by the respondents that strong union opposition would harm the effort is unclear from this data.

### Is It Important That You Obtain Access to Greater Resources Than You Have Now?

Two other questions within this section (f and h) were designed to assess if the participants think it is important that this collaboration improve their city's access to physical and financial resources. When asked how important it is that this collaboration result in the respondents' city gaining better access to facilities and equipment that are located outside of their own city (question f), the mean response of (7.60) indicates this issue is very important to them. When comparing the data based on the role of the respondent, the mean response is (7.63). The mayors (8.75), city managers (8.67) and fire fighters (8.60) consider this factor more important than all the others.

When the data is examined based on city, the mean is slightly less at (7.30). Coletown (8.25) and Eliseville (8.17) respondents consider this a very important factor. Bedford Falls respondents registered the lowest group response of (5.50) to this question, indicating ambivalence on the issue of obtaining access to existing facilities and equipment.

When asked whether they think it is important that this collaboration give them access to financial resources needed to construct facilities and purchase equipment that they can not afford on their own (question h), the respondents indicated it is very important to them (8.30). The responses to this question do not vary significantly by city. The average response for all five cities was between (8.00) and (8.80), indicating access to additional financial resources is a very important motivating factor.

When the responses are examined by the role of the respondent, little variance in responses is seen. Essentially, all groups of respondents indicated that this factor is a very important causal factor for collaboration. The responses ranged from the mayor's high of

(8.75) to the city council member's and city manager's low of (8.00). Fire fighters and fire chiefs registered responses of (8.40) and (8.20) respectively. Clearly the respondents think it is important that the DFA collaboration enhance their access to greater financial resources and the facilities and equipment they cannot afford on their own. This is a goal of collaboration they expect to achieve. Figure 5.2 indicates the respondent's perceptions as to which specific terms of collaboration are most important to them.

**Figure 5.2: Importance of the Terms of Collaboration.**

<u>Potential Benefit of Collaboration</u>	<u>Mean Response</u>
Better allocation of state & federal resources	8.35
More equitable commitment of resources	7.25
No current fire fighters lose their jobs	8.70 *
Better access to resources outside of city	7.60
Resources to purchase facilities & equipment	8.30

\* 65% of respondents answered 10.  
1= Strongly Disagree                      10= Strongly Agree

How Satisfied are you Personally with this Effort?

The last group of questions in this section (k, l and m) are designed to measure how satisfied the respondents are with the collaboration thus far. Initially, the respondents were asked to perform a personal cost-benefit analysis of the collaboration from their perspective. Secondly, the respondents were asked how satisfied they are with the amount of input they are having on the collaboration.

When asked about their satisfaction with the benefits associated with the DFA collaboration (question k), the average response is (7.45). This indicates that generally the participants are very satisfied with what they perceive as the benefits of this collaboration.

However, several of the respondents added that it is too soon to accurately assess the benefits as this collaboration is still in the planning phase.

<b>Table 5.10: Respondents Satisfaction with Costs, Benefits and Input in the Process All Respondents</b>		
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Mean All Respondents
k	I am satisfied with the benefits associated with this project	7.45
l	I am satisfied with the costs associated with this project	5.95
m	I am satisfied with the amount of input I have on this joint project	7.10

When analyzed by city, the mean response to this question is (7.52). All of the communities appear to be satisfied with the benefits of this collaboration. Acme registered the highest response to this question (8.67), which reinforces the opinion expressed by many of the respondents that Acme has the most to gain from this collaboration.

When analyzed by role, the mean response to this question is (7.56). The city managers are the most satisfied with the benefits of this collaboration, with a group response of (9.00). The other four role groupings are clustered within a range of a high of (7.33) for city council members to a low of (7.00) for fire chiefs.

When asked how satisfied the respondents are with the costs associated with this collaboration (question l), responses were somewhat lower. The overall mean response of (5.95), with a standard deviation of (2.69), indicates that the respondents are not as satisfied with the perceived costs as they are the expected benefits of this collaboration. Grouped by city, the mean response is (6.24). Interestingly, two large communities, Detour and Eliseville, registered the lowest level of satisfaction with the costs of this collaboration

with responses of (4.20) and (5.50) respectively. Coletown (7.50), Bedford Falls (7.00) and Acme (7.00) expressed higher levels of satisfaction as to the costs of collaboration.

<b>Table 5.11: Respondents Satisfaction with Costs, Benefits and Input in the Process Grouped by City</b>						
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Detour	Eliseville	Acme	Bedford Falls	Coletown
k	I am satisfied with the benefits associated with this project	7.20	7.00	8.67	7.00	7.75
l	I am satisfied with the costs associated with this project	4.20	5.50	7.00	7.00	7.50
m	I am satisfied with the amount of input I have on this joint project	6.80	6.50	8.67	5.50	8.00

When the data is examined based on the role of the respondent, an interesting variance in opinion is revealed. City managers are most satisfied with the costs of this collaboration with a group response of (7.67). City council members (5.33), fire chiefs (5.40) and fire fighters (5.60) are less satisfied with the costs of this collaboration. The satisfaction level of the mayors (6.25), is below that of city managers (7.67) and closer to the other groups.

The responses to this question, three above the mid-level of the scale, and two below, may indicate that the cost-benefit tradeoffs involved in this collaboration may not be completely satisfying to the respondents. This response may indicate that not all of the costs of the DFA collaboration are known or fully understood because the collaboration is still in the planning stage and has not yet been implemented. It may also indicate that the respondents do have a good understanding of the costs and benefits of this collaboration and simply disagree with other groups in how it applies to their city.

	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Mayors	City Council	City Mgr	Fire Chiefs	Fire Fighters
k	I am satisfied with the benefits associated with this project	7.25	7.33	9.00	7.00	7.20
l	I am satisfied with the costs associated with this project	6.25	5.33	7.67	5.40	5.60
m	I am satisfied with the amount of input I have on this joint project	7.00	6.33	9.33	5.60	7.80

When asked if they are satisfied with the amount of input they have in the collaboration (question m), the mean response is (7.10) with a standard deviation of (3.06). These scores indicate that in general, the respondents are satisfied with the amount of input they have in the planning of this collaboration, but there is a considerable amount of variance in the responses. When examined by city, the responses reveal a potential problem for this collaboration. The mean response is (7.09) with a standard deviation of (1.25). Two of the communities, Acme and Coletown, indicated they are very satisfied with the level of input they have in this collaboration, with responses of (8.67) and (8.00) respectively. In contrast, Detour (6.80) and Eliseville (6.50) indicated less relative satisfaction with their input. The Bedford Falls respondents averaged only (5.50) to this question. The wide range in satisfaction across the cities may indicate the collaboration has a basic problem; or it may merely indicate a temporary rift between some of the actors.

Examining the responses to this question based on the role of the respondent, indicates some interesting differences of opinion. City managers (9.33) averaged the highest level of satisfaction with the input they were having in the process. Fire fighters (7.80) and mayors (7.00) also indicated that they are satisfied with their level of input. However, city council members (6.33) and fire chiefs (5.60) indicated they are far less

satisfied with the level of input they have in the process. A satisfaction level at or just above the mid-point of the scale indicate a potential problem for this collaboration. City council members will have to vote on the approval for this authority and fire chiefs will be charged with the day-to-day operation of the authority. It would seem prudent to ensure that they enjoy higher levels of input during the planning process.

### **Initial Conclusions Drawn from Responses**

It is clear that the non-elected officials do not expect short-term labor cost gains but instead are expecting long-term cost savings as a result of this collaboration. Perhaps these responses reflect a belief that current fire fighting personnel levels cannot be reduced. Perhaps these responses are just indicative of the high unionization levels in the Metropolitan Detroit area. Whatever the reasoning behind the answers, these responses indicate that it is very important to the respondents that none of their current fire department personnel lose their jobs as a result of the DFA collaboration.

It is also clear from the answers given that the respondents think it is important that all of the jurisdictions share equally in any cost savings resulting from this collaboration. Based on these answers it is also quite clear that the respondents see collaboration as an important tool that will allow them access to financial, facility and equipment resources that they do not currently have.

It appears from this data that the participants are generally satisfied thus far with the benefits and costs associated with this collaboration. However, the variances in the responses when grouped by city and by role reveal a potential problem. Elected officials have higher expectations for saving money in the first three to five years than do the

administrative officials and fire fighters. Even longer term, the elected officials have higher expectations for savings than do the administrative officials and fire fighters. Such a significant difference in expectations could prove a serious issue for the DFA collaboration.

Finally, variances in answers to the question measuring satisfaction with the level of input, reveals that generally the participants are satisfied with the level of input they have, but some of the participants are not as satisfied. In particular, city council members and fire chiefs are less satisfied with their input into the process.

### **Perceptions of the Terms of Collaboration: Responses to Open-Ended Questions**

In an effort to elicit fuller and more narrative responses to the issues surrounding the terms that participants are looking for in their collaboration effort. Table 5.13 lists the open-ended questions which were asked. These questions are designed to attain a better understanding of the role played by metropolitan area interdependencies, the use of an authority as the vehicle for collaboration and the issue of maintaining control over local fire service provision.

<b>Table 5.13: Respondents Perceptions of the Terms of this Collaboration</b>	
Question C-2	Are there benefits I have not mentioned that you hope will result from this collaboration?
Question C-3	Previously, we discussed the perceptions of your city's residents about the existence of interdependencies among the Downriver communities. I would like you to elaborate further on this question on interdependence.
Question C-3(a)	Do you agree these interdependencies exist among the Downriver communities?
Question C-3(b)	If so, what do you think is the nature of this interdependence?
Question C-4	Turning to the specific issue of the fire authority as the mechanism for this collaborative effort, I have several questions about your views of and expectations for the authority.
Question C-4(a)	Is the use of a fire authority important to your support for this effort? Why or why not? How confident are you that your city will be better off by participating in this authority?
Question C-4(b)	Are you confident that your community will retain sufficient control over the quality of services provided to your residents? If so, why?
Question C-4(c)	In your mind, how do the potential gains of the fire authority outweigh the loss of complete control over this service?
Question C-4(d)	How confident are you that the elected officials of your community will be able to exert meaningful influence over the managers of the fire authority?
Question C-4(e)	If your residents become dissatisfied with this arrangement, can it be easily altered? Can your community easily withdraw from the authority?
Question C-4(f)	How will the costs of fire authority be allocated among the communities?

#### Additional Benefits not Previous Mentioned

The first question (C-2) is designed to discover some additional causal factors that this research has not anticipated. When asked if there are any benefits not mentioned by the researcher that the respondent hopes will result from this collaboration, the Acme city council president indicated that she was “looking for a better and safer environment for the fire fighters as a whole . . . a more stable fire fighting workforce . . . there is a lack of a mix of younger fire fighters and older more experienced ones...we hope to get a better mix with the new authority.”

The Detour city manager raised the question “how do we use equipment purchased with Community Development Block Grant (federal) funds outside of the city?” As discussed previously in this chapter, CDBG funds are allocated by the federal government through HUD. CDBG funds have been used to purchase fire trucks, fire rescue units, fire hose, turn-out gear, decontamination equipment, site illumination equipment, jaws-of-life

devices and a variety of other kinds of fire-fighting equipment. The CDBG Program has contributed critically needed funds to the operation of these fire departments over the years. All of the communities participating in this collaboration have previously or are currently using CDBG funds to purchase equipment for their respective fire departments and, it would be a benefit if they could use those funds through the fire authority.

Both the fire chief of Coletown and the fire chief of Bedford Falls stated that it is important that the area fire departments achieve National (NFPA) 1710 Standards for everyone's benefit and safety. It is the consensus among fire-fighting personnel interviewed that the cities in the DFA collaboration are not currently meeting all of the requirements of this national standard.

The mayor of Eliseville indicated that he "actually saw the opportunity for improving services" through this collaboration, not just maintaining existing services. The mayor of Coletown expressed his hope that this collaboration would advance the "concept that we as cities can work together successfully." One of the more interesting comments came from the fire union president of Eliseville, a person very active in the planning phase of the collaboration. He stated "I think reflection on where we are right now is a benefit...Talking about these issues is a benefit in and of itself."

The responses to this question make it clear that the participants have a variety of expectations relative to potential benefits that may be realized as a result of this collaboration.

### Is the Interdependency of Jurisdictions a Motivating Factor in Collaboration?

One factor often mentioned in the literature (Frederickson 1999; Parks and Oakerson 2000) is the idea that cities within urban metropolitan areas in the United States are interdependent as a result of several factors and that such interdependency may lead them to consider collaboration in the provision of public services. Cooperation is often driven by recognition of this interdependency and the natural desire of local government officials to reduce uncertainty (Frederickson 1999). Collaborative service delivery arrangements are one way that local governments can bridge the inequities in an area (Parks and Oakerson 2000).

<b>Table 5.14:</b>	
<b>The Interdependency of the Collaborating Communities</b>	
Question C-3(a)	Do you agree these interdependencies exist among the Downriver communities?
Question C-3(b)	If so, what do you think is the nature of this interdependence?

When asked if the area communities are interdependent, the Acme city council president stated that she agreed that the area communities are interdependent because they are small and “they cross each other...if we have a fire it’s often near our border with another community . . . it doesn’t make sense not to respond . . . the physical locations of the cities make them interdependent . . . the small size of each...we are all inner-ring hub cities and we have never been really alone in this.” The Acme fire chief agreed that the Downriver cities are interdependent and added that the “lack of resources makes us interdependent...when something major comes up, you have to rely on your neighbor to come and help you out.” The Eliseville city manager said that he agreed there existed a

great deal of interdependence and said “on a daily basis there is mutual aid . . . our borders are seamless.” Detour’s fire chief concluded that “hardly a day goes by that we don’t call on each other for help . . . we rely on each other.” A Detour fire department lieutenant stated “we’re all individuals, but we are very reliant on one another . . . we depend a lot on Mutual Aid now.” The mayor of Eliseville said “absolutely . . . city barriers don’t mean as much as they used to mean . . . these artificial barriers, artificial city lines . . . it’s kind of ridiculous . . . we are very interdependent.”

A fire captain in Coletown stated “our commonalities make us more interdependent. We are all bedroom communities, very similar in nature . . . our people are similar, our schools are similar, our housing is remarkably similar. If Ford Motor Company should lay off employees in this area, we all feel it.” A former city council member and the newly elected mayor of Detour put it this way, “these communities have a lot in common with one another. We are all somewhat industrial, older cities; our residents are similar to one another. We have common objectives, similar socioeconomic status.” The Eliseville city council president summed it up stating “we have a lot of the same problems.”

Analysis of these responses would seem to indicate that the recognition of an area’s interdependence is an important causal factor motivating communities to consider collaboration. The responses to these questions make it abundantly clear that the participating communities in the DFA collaboration consider themselves highly interdependent. The responses indicate that the close geographic proximity of these communities, their similarities, and a long-standing tradition of assisting one another have resulted in a general feeling of interdependency. The responses also indicate that they have

been interdependent for some time now and recognized that fact some 40 years ago with the development of Mutual Aid. These communities share a lot of the same problems and are remarkably similar in terms of age, population and resources.

**Figure 5.3: Most Frequent Responses Regarding Collaboration**

	Percentage of Respondents Mentioning This Factor
These Cities are very Interdependent	95%
We've been Cooperating for Years	95%
Our Communities are so Similar	60%
Our Borders are Seamless	40%

<b>Table 5.15:</b>	
<b>Responses Related to the use of a Fire Authority</b>	
Question C-4	Turning to the specific issue of the fire authority as the mechanism for this collaborative effort, I have several questions about your views of and expectations for the authority.
Question C-4(a)	Is the use of a fire authority important to your support for this effort? Why or why not? How confident are you that your city will be better off by participating in this authority?

How Important is the Use of an Authority in Facilitating this Collaboration?

The respondents were also asked about the importance of the proposed authority as a vehicle to pursue collaboration on fire protection services. The specific questions asked are provided in Table 5.15. In response to this question the Acme city council president replied, “yes, it is very important. We already have Mutual Aid and even Auto Aid with one other city and I don’t think that totally solves the problems.” Acme’s fire union

president stated “yes, it’s important . . . one city could not control it . . . there are three or four (fire) authorities operating in Michigan right now and they work well.” The Acme fire chief said “I don’t know how else you would do it with each of the cities having their own jurisdiction.”

The city manager of Detour said “by going with an authority, we have more options to tax and do some things to level off or reduce our in-house costs.” The city manager of Eliseville indicated that

given the nature of state law allowing us to do these things, the authority makes sense right now...formation of a larger department would not work here, we need equal representation . . . the authority creates a better governance mechanism . . . it has the utility of size and the ability to raise resources on a larger geographic basis.

The Detour fire chief concluded that,

yes, I think it’s important. It’s becoming apparent to me that the mutual aid system is starting to fall down because we don’t have the people to send each other. Also, some of our personnel now live 25 miles outside the city and it’s getting harder to get them in quickly. A larger department would have less of a problem as I see it.

The mayor of Eliseville stated “I cannot imagine how else we would manage collaboration like this without the formation of an authority . . . we can streamline administrative costs . . . frankly having five separate entities like we do now is just kind of costly and ridiculous.”

The Bedford Falls city manager said “I think using the authority is important. In the long run it’s important that the fire service have a separate millage and a dedicated revenue source. The fire service shouldn’t have to compete with other city departments for the money.” The fire union president of Eliseville stated “I think the authority is the only way

to get an equitable return . . . a good partnership. The only way we can all mutually benefit, establish some uniformity.”

Very few of the respondents indicated that they were indifferent to the method of organization used for this collaboration. None of the respondents indicated that they believe using an authority for collaboration purposes was a bad idea.

It is readily apparent that nearly every one of the participants in the DFA authority has concluded that using a fire authority is important to the success of this collaboration. The fire authority is seen as providing better flexibility and a more stable revenue source than other alternatives. Interestingly, the elected and administrative officials were in strong agreement with the fire fighters and fire command officers that a fire authority is the best institutional arrangement for this problem.

#### Will the Cities Be Better Off Collaborating?

With the exception of the fire chief of Bedford Falls and a fire lieutenant in Detour, everyone interviewed described themselves as very confident their city would be better off by participating in this proposed authority. The Acme fire chief said that he was “100% confident that we’ll be better off as a result of participating.” Detour’s mayor said “I’m very confident they will be better off. Our people in the long term will get better protection.” The Eliseville city manager stated “I’m very confident that we’ll be better off.” Likewise, the mayor of Eliseville said “I’m 100% confident that our community will be better served both financially and through service improvement.” Only one respondent, a fire lieutenant in Detour voiced opposition stating “no, I’m not that confident that we’ll be better off. If the finances are not there, it won’t be a good thing.”

### Importance of the Potential Loss of Control over Service Provision

Much of the literature has concluded that the fear of losing control over the provision of public services is a serious concern for local officials. The fear of losing control over service production is strong and therefore benefits from new arrangements must be substantial (Ferris 1986). A major obstacle to collaboration often cited is the reluctance of local government officials to surrender autonomy and resources to other governments (Morgan, Hirlinger and England 1988, Morgan and Hirlinger 1991).

Reaching a mutually acceptable agreement for joint service provision may also be an important causal factor motivating collaboration. Visser (2004) found that it is important that local governments be allowed to maintain their autonomy and that the effort be locally driven rather than imposed on them by a higher level of government. Bickers (2005) proposed that elected officials may have to give up a certain amount of control in order to achieve collaborative benefits, but that doing so might have detrimental political consequences for them. Most recently, Feiock (2008) argued that local governments will generally resist giving up authority to other units or higher units of government.

<b>Table 5.16:</b>	
<b>Maintaining Control over Community Fire Services</b>	
Question C-4(b)	Are you confident that your community will retain sufficient control over the quality of services provided to your residents? If so, why?
Question C-4(c)	In your mind, how do the potential gains of the fire authority outweigh the loss of complete control over this service?

When asked how confident they are that their community will be able to retain sufficient control over service quality, the Acme city council president indicated that she was not at all concerned about the potential loss of control by her community because fire

services are regulated by the state. The Acme fire union president stated that he was not concerned because his community would have one of the five representatives sitting on the governing board of the authority and he was satisfied that person would still have his community's best interest at heart. Acme's fire chief said that he thought the quality would actually improve because a centralized dispatch center would be better able to send the appropriate equipment and personnel to any given emergency scene. The mayor of Detour said that with each of the five cities having an equal voice in the governing of this new authority, he was not concerned about a lessening of control. The Eliseville city manager echoed that sentiment saying that with equalized representation, control should not be an issue. The fire chief of Bedford Falls stated that he thought control might even improve in some ways.

However, not all of the respondents agreed that the loss of control was not a serious problem. A fire department captain in Coletown stated that, "loss of control is an important issue . . . we are aware of that danger, but the benefits potentially outweigh that loss." The Detour fire chief was not sure how much control his community would retain until the authority was up and running. A fire lieutenant in Detour stated that he thought there would be a loss of control because his city would be only one of five votes on the governing board of the authority.

Concluding that control was not the most important issue to be considered, the mayor of Eliseville stated that, "as an elected official I don't have any control of (SIC) them now . . . we don't have complete or direct control over fire services now. We have the responsibility to pay for them, but have no control over them really." The Eliseville fire union president stated that, "yes, absolutely. Being equal and having control is different.

What control does a politician have over the fire service now? The control is perceived at best. Control is overestimated I think.”

The response from a Coletown Fire Department sergeant straddled the two view points saying, “I think from what I know now, yes, each city would give up some authority but it would be the same for each.” The Eliseville city council president said that he wasn’t sure whether or not his city would suffer a loss of such control, but that he wasn’t worried about it “because we can pull out if we are not satisfied.”

The reduction in direct control over the provision of services is often presented as a significantly inhibiting issue in the formation of authorities and other forms of service collaboration or consolidation. Information provided by these respondents indicates that collaborators are not concerned about the issue or think that control of this service is illusory. Some respondents indicated that the loss of control, if any, was equally shared by all five cities and would therefore not prohibit their collaboration. Several other respondents indicated that although they do anticipate a loss of control as a result of the DFA collaboration, the potential benefits far outweigh that loss of control.

When asked how the potential gains of the fire authority outweigh the loss of complete control over service the Acme city council president responded that she thought the loss of some control was actually an important benefit. She thinks it is better to place the control of fire services in the hands of professionals that have statewide and national standards for acceptable levels of equipment, personnel and methods of fighting fires. In her mind, this benefit more than compensated for any loss the city might suffer in terms of control over service provision.

The Acme fire union president indicated that the benefit of improved staffing, better equipment and potential grant funding offset any loss of control. He mentioned that Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm recently gave a speech in which she offered additional state funding to communities that engaged in this sort of collaboration. Additional funding would be an important benefit for communities such as these five that are currently suffering significant fiscal stress. The Acme fire chief stated, “people shouldn’t be worried about losing control . . . that is why such collaborations failed in the past, everyone wanted to know what was in it for them . . . it’s all about improving services and that is what people should be thinking about.”

The mayor of Detour described the geographic layout of the collaboration area and stated that he could see other community fire departments reaching points in his city faster than his own centrally located fire personnel could at times. He also stated that he believes such rapid response is a very important potential benefit of the DFA collaboration effort.

The city manager of Detour said that the only control issue he was concerned about was the loss of control over hiring practices. The control of personnel hiring was an important issue to this public manager, but he thought such issues could be worked out by the DFA collaboration planning group. The city manager of Eliseville said, “I don’t consider this a loss of control. The mayor and city council will still appoint a representative to the board . . . very similar to how our Public Safety Commission works now . . . the police and fire services are separate already.” Among the many benefits this public manager saw resulting from this collaboration was a more professional fire service, enhanced training, better fire prevention efforts, increased service levels, better long-range planning, better use and replacement of assets and the spreading of the costs over a larger

base. The Eliseville city manager concluded his response with “such control is illusory, I think.”

An Eliseville city council member agreed “we don’t have control of our Public Safety Commission as it is, except for their budget. In anything else they are independent. That is the control we would be giving up, financial and what difference does that make just as long as you’re getting the service you want?” The fire union president in Eliseville said that “the gain is that we’ll actually have a competent fire service for the citizens. The control is illusory.” The fire chief of Eliseville stated succinctly “anything that brings more hands to the task, the better off we’ll all be.”

The fire chief of Bedford Falls said he didn’t really see any loss of control or any huge gains, but the potential financial stability from a dedicated tax was the real benefit from this collaboration. The Detour fire chief agreed saying that a real benefit of this collaboration was the potential that it “could be funded with its own tax base . . . the manpower available would be better . . . a larger pool of people for the inspectors and other specialized jobs.” The fire chief of Coletown stated that “non-residency has changed the dynamics of this industry too. Some of our guys live farther out of town and getting them here in an emergency is an issue.” He saw better utilization of personnel as a main benefit of the collaboration. A fire captain in Coletown stated “personally I would rather be a member of a 130 member fire authority than a 28 member city fire department. In terms of job security, potential advancement, training . . . gains of consistent services, better and quicker response to emergencies.” The Eliseville city council president summed it up nicely saying “if we get the cost savings and service, I’m not concerned about the control.”

<b>Table 5.17: Importance of Having Influence on the Authority Governing Board</b>	
Question C-4(d)	How confident are you that the elected officials of your community will be able to exert meaningful influence over the managers of the fire authority?
Question C-4(e)	If your residents become dissatisfied with this arrangement, can it be easily altered? Can your community easily withdraw from the authority?

When asked the closely related question of how important political control of the authority's governing board is and how confident they are that the elected officials will be able to exert meaningful influence over the fire authority, the council president of Acme stated "there is always some loss of authority with a collaboration . . . I think we will lose some control and it's okay to lose it . . . we will be able to require that state standards are maintained." The Acme fire union president commented "I know it is hard sometimes for elected officials to give up their identity, their name on the side of the fire truck, but if they place the right person on the board they will still be able to voice their opinion and exercise some control." The fire chief of Acme stated "as long as the authority is shared five ways and everybody has an equal say, I don't see any problem." The mayor of Detour stated "what is meaningful control? If it gets unacceptable to a city they can withdraw."

The city manager of Detour said "if we have input and influence over the management, it's not really a big concern for us." The city manager of Eliseville said that he was very confident elected officials would have meaningful influence, "it will be a performance-based organization and will, I think, have greater accountability." The city manager of Bedford Falls stated "nobody should think that they have to have complete control. Thinking about it, frankly how much control do they have right now? Probably not as much as they think." The fire union president of Eliseville said "the perception of power

is different than it really is. They will control the purse strings...it forces you to do things for the right reasons.” An Eliseville city council member said that “it would have a lot to do with time. At the beginning it will be rocky, but over time it should run more smoothly.”

Expressing a contrary view, the fire chief of Bedford Falls said “I’m not sure they necessarily will...think about the Huron-Metro Authority (a multi-jurisdictional parks authority in the region), how much control do we have there? None, they are autonomous...we approve or turn down tax proposals but there isn’t much control.”

The responses to this question consistently show that the potential loss of control to the fire authority governing board is not seen as a serious problem. The benefits expected to be generated by this collaboration are seen to greatly outweigh any potential loss of control. Many respondents indicated a belief that control over the fire service was illusory and not affected by this change.

#### Importance of Having an Escape Clause in the Interlocal Agreement

Given the difficulty that often accompanies the planning and start-up phases of collaboration, most participants interviewed considered it important that all partners have a similar commitment to the collaboration. However, nearly all participants interviewed for this study indicated that there had to be an escape clause in the agreement no matter how difficult it might be in reality to accomplish.

When asked if the arrangement can be altered if residents become dissatisfied with this arrangement, the Acme city council president stated that while her city could withdraw from the collaboration it “would be difficult and expensive to alter or withdraw after we’re

in it.” The fire union president from that same community said “it wouldn’t be an easy thing to do after we’re in it.” The mayor of Detour indicated that “there are terms being written into the process that will allow for the dissolving of the authority” but that withdrawal by any one city would be very difficult. The mayor of Eliseville said that withdrawal was possible because, “nobody will have a gun to anybody’s head. Once we join I assume it would be difficult and costly to withdraw.” The mayor of Coletown said that withdrawal would be “very hard, almost impossible because you would have to build your fire department from scratch . . . it would be cost-prohibitive I think.”

A few of the respondents raised the issue of how shared assets would be divided if any city decided to withdraw from the authority, and how a new fire department could be established after that. The Eliseville city manager stated that “withdrawal is possible . . . obviously some division of assets has to be determined, a new department would have to be formed and personnel transferred from the authority or newly hired. It can be done but it’s not easy.” The fire chief of Bedford Falls said that withdrawal would not be easy and “it would be a very costly adventure.” The fire chief of Detour said “if stations and equipment are sold how do we start all over again?” A fire lieutenant in Detour said that while withdrawal was possible it wouldn’t be easy “after everything is transferred over to the authority.” An Eliseville city council member summed it up well when he stated “you have got to go into this thinking this is long term.”

These responses indicate that participants are aware that although an escape clause is expected to be written into the DFA collaboration agreement, it would be very difficult and costly to withdraw once the authority is in operation. The responses indicate that participants believe it is important to think long-term when considering such a

collaboration effort, and potential collaborators must share a commitment to making the effort a success.

<b>Table 5.18: Responses as to How the Costs will be Allocated among Communities</b>	
Question C-4(f)	How will the costs of the fire authority be allocated among the participating communities?

#### Issue of Funding and Cost Allocation among these Communities

When asked how the costs of the fire authority will be allocated among the participating communities, the city council president of Acme stated that she was unclear about the particulars of the issue but that her understanding is “it would be independently funded by a percentage from each individual city.” According to the mayor of Detour “there have been several thoughts on that, several formulas that could be used for that.” The city manager of Detour said “I really don’t know yet, we have not really decided on that yet. I have not heard anything for sure.” The city manager of Eliseville said “several formulas are being discussed . . . we’re considering ad valorem, start up with the existing five budgets . . . special assessments, a per capita basis.” The fire chief of Bedford Falls thought “it would probably be a dedicated millage that would ultimately be a tax increase to the taxpayers . . . it might be a hard sell to the taxpayer.” The fire chief in Detour believed it might be “total SEV of the city, number of runs made, but nothing really concrete yet.” A fire captain in Coletown stated that it was his “understanding that a dollar amount per city will be contributed . . . my thought is that we will be able to get away from the city and go to the citizens of the whole area and get a dedicated revenue stream

separate for the fire authority.” An Eliseville city council member said that it “never got that far really as far as I know.”

### **Summary Analysis of Open-Ended Questions**

How collaboration activities are going to be funded in both the short and the long term is a basic issue that must be addressed by any group of local governments considering collaborative activity. One of the problems that arose early in the planning phase of this collaboration was how the authority is to be funded and what sort of cost-sharing mechanism would be used to distribute costs among the participating communities. After reviewing the answers of all respondents, it is apparent that the issue of funding and cost-sharing had been delayed until a later time and that no two respondents had exactly the same concept of how the authority will be financed or this problem addressed.

Although the planning and discussion for this collaboration had been underway for over eighteen months at the time of these interviews, almost everyone interviewed thought that the financing posed a serious question, yet the group as a whole is failing to address it in any significant way. The lack of a clear understanding among the participants as to how the authority is to be funded could potentially be a serious issue. Most of the respondents indicated during their interviews that relative equity among the participating communities is important to them and that any cost savings be shared equally between the communities.

Yet when dealing with communities of different size and fiscal ability, equity and equality are not the same thing. It is important that such issues be addressed before the authority is implemented. These responses indicate that it is important that each of the

communities provide a relatively equal share of the resources necessary to make the collaboration successful.

Clearly, these respondents believe the Downriver communities are interdependent and that such interdependency should make collaboration easier. Some of the factors mentioned by the respondents are the shared borders, collaboration for many years through the Downriver Mutual Aid Pact, and many similar economic forces affecting them all.

Turning to the issue of using a fire authority as the vehicle for creating and operating the collaborative, nearly every one of the respondents agreed that use of an authority was the best alternative. Respondents indicated that the Mutual Aid arrangement is working to its fullest extent and a more formal arrangement is needed. None of the respondents indicated that using an authority was a bad idea.

The responses to the three questions dealing with the potential loss of control over fire services indicate that many of the respondents do not believe presently their city has much control over the fire service. Many respondents indicated that such control was illusory and that the state of Michigan has preempted many of their prerogatives for dealing with public safety. Those respondents that did indicate there would be a loss of control believe the benefits outweigh such costs.

As to the issue of an escape clause in the operating agreement allowing a city to leave if dissatisfied, such a clause is considered a necessary condition to this kind of collaboration. However, many of the respondents elaborated that once such an authority is established and assets and personnel are transferred to the authority, it would be very difficult and costly to establish a new fire department for their individual city.

**Table 5.19:**  
**Perceptions of the Respondents Regarding the Terms of Collaboration**  
**All Respondents**

Interviewee	a	b	c	d	e	f	h	i	j	k	l	m
1	5	8	3	1	10	1	7	8	3	8	6	8
2	5	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	10	8	8	10
3	4	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	10	7	8
4	6	9	8	10	10	8	9	9	9	10	8	10
5	4	8	8	10	10	10	7	8	9	10	6	10
6	5	6	8	6	5	7	8	8	7	8	8	9
7	2	7	7	2	10	2	7	5	7	5	5	2
8	3	7	5	10	10	5	10	10	10	9	4	9
9	10	10	10	10	10	5	8	8	3	5	1	5
10	2	6	8	8	10	6	6	9	9	7	7	8
11	8	10	10	7	2	10	8	10	10	10	10	10
12	1	8	9	5	10	10	8	8	10	8	8	8
13	2	9	9	7	9	9	9	9	3	9	9	9
14	7	7	7	7	6	7	8	7	8	7	5	8
15	3	9	7	2	10	6	8	5	2	4	4	1
16	1	8	2	4	6	8	7	8	8	6	1	8
17	2	8	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	8
18	5	10	7	6	8	10	10	9	6	2	2	0
19	9	9	8	6	10	9	9	9	5	5	5	4
20	7	10	10	8	8	9	8	8	6	9	5	7
Mean	4.55	8.45	7.75	6.95	8.70	7.60	8.30	8.35	7.25	7.45	5.95	7.10
STD DEV	2.65	1.36	2.24	2.96	2.25	2.72	1.17	1.42	2.77	2.28	2.68	3.06

Table 5.20: Perceptions of the Respondents Regarding the Terms of Collaboration Grouped by City								
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Detour	Eliseville	Acme	Bedford Falls	Coletown	MEAN	STDEV
	Interview Question	N=5	N=6	N=3	N=2	N=4	N=20	N=20
a	Our city will save money in the short run (3-5 years)	5.60	5.50	4.67	2.00	3.00	4.15	1.59
b	Our city will save money in the long run (over 5 years)	8.80	8.67	9.33	8.00	7.25	8.41	0.80
c	Our residents see improvements in the quality of the service over what we have provided previously	7.60	7.50	7.67	8.00	8.25	7.80	0.31
d	Cost savings are distributed equally among the participating communities	9.20	5.50	7.00	4.50	7.50	6.74	1.82
e	None of our fire department staff will lose their jobs due to this collaboration	9.60	6.83	10.00	9.50	9.00	8.99	1.26
f	Participation in the authority gives our community access to existing facilities & equipment currently unavailable to us because of their location in another jurisdiction	7.60	8.17	7.00	5.50	8.25	7.30	1.13
h	Participation in the authority gives our community access to the financial resources needed to construct facilities or purchase equipment that we cannot afford by ourselves	8.80	8.00	8.67	8.00	8.00	8.29	0.41
i	The authority will distribute future nonlocal (state and federal) resources among the Downriver communities in a more rational way than is now the case	8.80	8.00	9.00	7.00	8.50	8.26	0.80
j	Creation of this authority results in equal spending on fire protection among the participating jurisdictions	7.40	6.33	7.67	5.00	9.25	7.13	1.58
k	I am satisfied with the benefits associated with this project	7.20	7.00	8.67	7.00	7.75	7.52	0.71
l	I am satisfied with the costs associated with this project	4.20	5.50	7.00	7.00	7.50	6.24	1.36
m	I am satisfied with the amount of input I have on this joint project	6.80	6.50	8.67	5.50	8.00	7.09	1.25

Table 5.21: Perceptions of the Terms of Collaboration Grouped by the Role of Respondent								
Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important		Mayors	City Council	City Mgr.	Fire Chief	Fire Fighter	MEAN	STDEV
Interview Question		N=4	N=3	N=3	N=5	N=5	N=20	N=20
a	Our city will save money in the short run (3-5 years)	6.50	7.00	3.67	2.80	3.80	4.75	1.87
b	Our city will save money in the long run (over 5 years)	9.00	9.00	7.67	7.80	8.80	8.45	0.66
c	Our residents see improvements in the quality of the service over what we have provided previously	8.00	7.00	8.33	7.40	8.00	7.75	0.54
d	Cost savings are distributed equally among the participating communities	7.50	5.00	7.67	6.40	7.80	6.87	1.19
e	None of our fire department staff will lose their jobs due to this collaboration	6.50	9.33	8.00	10.00	9.20	8.61	1.38
f	Participation in the authority gives our community access to existing facilities & equipment currently unavailable to us because of their location in another jurisdiction	8.75	6.33	8.67	5.80	8.60	7.63	1.44
h	Participation in the authority gives our community access to the financial resources needed to construct facilities or purchase equipment that we cannot afford by ourselves	8.75	8.00	8.00	8.20	8.40	8.27	0.32
i	The authority will distribute future nonlocal (state and federal) resources among the Downriver communities in a more rationale way than is now the case	8.75	8.33	8.33	7.60	8.80	8.36	0.48
j	Creation of this authority results in equal spending on fire protection among the participating jurisdictions	8.25	4.67	6.33	7.60	8.20	7.01	1.52
k	I am satisfied with the benefits associated with this project	7.25	7.33	9.00	7.00	7.20	7.56	0.82
l	I am satisfied with the costs associated with this project	6.25	5.33	7.67	5.40	5.60	6.05	0.98
m	I am satisfied with the amount of input I have on this joint project	7.00	6.33	9.33	5.60	7.80	7.21	1.44

**CHAPTER 6****WHAT ARE POTENTIAL COLLABORATION PARTNERS****LOOKING FOR IN ONE ANOTHER?**

This chapter questions what characteristics potential collaborators seek in their partners. What are the factors and characteristics that make another city a good or bad partner to an interlocal agreement or for any other form of interlocal service arrangement? The importance of partnering cities being adjacent to one another? What importance is attached to past interactions between cities and individuals and does the racial and socioeconomic composition of a community make any difference in the decision to cooperate? Is it important that all potential partners seek the same results from their collaborative effort? And finally, how important are informal networks, developed over time among the actors, to the decision to collaborate?

As outlined in earlier chapters, the five communities that are the participants in the DFA collaboration have a long history of cooperating with one another to provide a variety of public services. This includes fire services. Through the Downriver Mutual Aid Pact, these communities can, and often do, call upon one another to help with fire and police-related services. These communities have also assisted one another in the provision of public works services, recreational services, and three of them cooperate in a popular annual vintage car cruise along a state highway (M-85) that passes through their communities. Successful past interactions are expected to exert a positive influence on the perceptions of participants toward one another, and encourage them to collaborate again.

Using the IGR framework developed by Eric Zeemering (2007), this chapter examines the perceptions that officials interviewed for this study have toward actual and potential partners in collaborative activity. Of particular interest is how similar or dissimilar communities must be to collaborate. In most collaborative activity, both communities want joint benefits. That collaborating cities should be similar to one another and approach the bargaining situation from equally strong positions is a common theme in the literature on local government cooperation (Feiock 2007).

These communities have competed with one another for retail and commercial developments. Eliseville and Coletown both have traditional downtowns that developed early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and were considered retail destinations before the creation of regional shopping malls in the 1960s. Detour and Bedford Falls both have newer style shopping venues and large box retailers. In terms of traditional retail/commercial development, these cities would be considered to be and consider themselves to be in competition with one another for future development.

The first portion of this chapter deals with a series of closed-ended survey questions using a scale of one (not important at all to the respondent) to ten (critically important to the respondent). These questions are designed to elicit, among other things, what the respondents seek in potential collaboration partners. The interviewees were asked questions related to characteristics of other cities that might be important to them: the similarity of the cities in terms of wealth and racial composition, whether it is important that the cities be in competition with each other for residents and economic development, and whether it is important that the cities they partner with have similar governmental structures. Another section of the closed-ended questions deal with issues

such as the importance of having similar resources available, seeking the same benefits from collaboration, and having similar land uses and fire service requirements. Finally, a series of questions posed to respondents, examines the importance of networking and having frequent contact with potential partners. This series of questions is designed to assess the respondents' perceptions of potential partners.

The second portion of this chapter deals with a series of open-ended questions that are designed to encourage the respondent to explain more fully and in a narrative style what is important to them regarding the terms of potential collaboration partners. The Tables 6.18, 6.19 and 6.20 at the end of the chapter contain all of the data gathered from the scaled portion of the survey instrument. Smaller tables are interspersed throughout the chapter to make it easier for the reader to refer to information being discussed.

These questions also provide insights into the level of existing trust among the participating communities prior to this collaboration and how confident the participants are that the other communities will meet their obligations. The transaction costs associated with establishing and maintaining interlocal service arrangements, monitoring performance and enforcing the collaborative agreement can be reduced when the local government actors have repeated contacts with one another, over time (Feiock 2007). In some cases, voluntary cooperation takes the place of a centralized authority in governing the collective activities of a metropolitan area (Frederickson 1999).

Table 6.1 presents detailed information about the DFA communities, including each city's population, racial makeup, average age of residents and characteristics of its

housing stock. The information in this table also indicates the density of each community and the size and total value of the housing stock.

<b>Table 6.1: Community Characteristics, Population, Race, Age and Housing</b>					
	<b>Detour</b>	<b>Eliseville</b>	<b>Acme</b>	<b>Bedford Falls</b>	<b>Coletown</b>
2007 Population Est.	27,356	37,494	10,624	28,686	25,942
Percentage White	96%	93%	87%	94%	96%
Percentage Other	4%	7%	13%	6%	4%
Median Age	41.0 yrs	35.5 yrs	35.7 yrs	38.0 yrs	38.0 yrs
Percentage Population 65+ Years old	21%	14%	13%	16%	16%
Size of City	4,486 acres	3,744 acres	1,740 acres	4,400 acres	3,316 acres
Total Housing Units	12,254	16,821	4,760	13,987	12,303
Median House Value	\$118,700	\$84,100	\$78,500	\$101,700	\$101,700
Median Household Income	\$53,503	\$42,515	\$37,954	\$46,927	\$43,740
Households in Poverty	4%	8%	11%	6%	6%
Single Family Detached	90%	82%	70%	69%	75%
Multi-Unit Apartments	8%	12%	21%	27%	15%
Percent of Land Developed	93.30%	96.80%	89.60%	84.50%	93.90%
Residential Density (Units per acre)	5.20	6.65	7.00	5.66	6.32
SEV per Capita	\$41,127.32	\$25,324.63	\$26,111.30	\$35,759.40	\$31,744.15

### **Perceptions of Partners: Responses to Scale Questions**

The series of questions listed on Table 6.19 asks how important the presence or absence of certain characteristics are in a potential local government partner. The participants are asked to think of these questions as pertaining to general principles of collaboration rather than just their current collaboration.

The questions are prefaced with the statement “Our local government partners should be...”

<b>Table 6.2: Perceptions of Collaboration Partners All Respondents (n=20)</b>		
	<b>Scale” 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important</b>	<b>Mean All Respondents</b>
	<i>Our local government partners should be</i>	
a	Communities we do not directly compete with for residents and development	4.60
b	Similar to our community in terms of wealth and racial composition	4.30
c	Similar to our community in terms of governmental structure (i.e.) either both council-manager or both mayor-council systems	5.25
d	Similar to our community in terms of powers (i.e.) both cities or both townships	5.50

### Competitors as Partners

When asked how important it is that the collaborating cities not be in direct competition with one another for residents and economic development (question a), the respondents average response was (4.60), below the mid-point of the scale. When responses are examined by city, some variation is evident. Respondents from Detour (6.33) and Bedford Falls (6.00), the communities with much newer and larger retail and commercial developments, consider such competition to be a more important obstacle than do the older cities of Coletown (4.00) and Eliseville (4.00). Acme respondents also averaged (6.33) on that question, the same score as Detour respondents. These two cities have close commercial and economic ties.

When the responses are grouped by the role of the respondent, additional differences are evident. Fire chiefs (6.20) and fire fighters (5.80) consider this factor more important than the other three categories of respondents. The city council members (3.67), and city managers (3.67), and mayors (2.50) did not consider competition to be an important obstacle to potential collaborative activities. Given the tremendous amount of personnel and resources that these communities and others in the Downriver area devote to economic development, the responses by the elected officials and the city managers

was unexpected. These responses may indicate that the actors involved in this collaboration are able to compartmentalize their various activities. They might be willing to collaborate in the provision of fire services, but equally unwilling to collaborate on issues involving economic development.

<b>Table 6.3: Perceptions of Collaboration Partners Grouped by City</b>						
	Scale** 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important <i>Our local government partners should be</i>	Detour (n=5)	Eliseville (n=5)	Acme (n=3)	Bedford Falls (n=2)	Coletown (n=4)
a	Communities we do not directly compete with for residents and development	6.33	4.00	6.33	6.00	4.00
b	Similar to our community in terms of wealth and racial composition	6.33	5.00	6.33	4.50	3.25
c	Similar to our community in terms of governmental structure (i.e.) either both council-manager or both mayor-council systems	6.67	4.83	6.67	5.50	5.00
d	Similar to our community in terms of powers (i.e.) both cities or both townships	7.00	4.50	7.00	5.00	5.50

The obstacles to cooperation created by large differences across communities in wealth and racial composition is a constant theme in the extant literature. Morgan, Hirlinger and England (1988), found that the percentage of blacks in the population appeared to significantly reduce the likelihood of that city contracting out for health and human service activities. Krueger and McGuire (2005) found that cities enjoying high taxable values and high tax revenues were among the least likely to seek additional revenues through interlocal agreements. The economic, social and political characteristics of a community's population can help shape populations' preferences for public goods. Demographic homogeneity is important, because such features reduce the transaction costs for the officials who are negotiating collaborative agreements (Feiock 2007).

### Homophily in Race and Wealth

When asked how important it is that partnering communities be similar in terms of the wealth and racial composition of their populations (question b), the mean response of all respondents is (4.30) with a standard deviation of (2.63). The respondents express ambivalence toward or a neutral stance regarding such differences in terms of racial composition and relative wealth of the communities. When the data is examined grouped by city, there was some variance in the answers. Coletown (3.25) respondents think these factors are only somewhat important. Detour and Acme both registered the highest response at (6.33), indicating it is important to them. Eliseville (5.00) and Bedford Falls (4.50) hovered below the mid-point of the scale, indicating that these factors are moderately important.

When responses are examined in terms of the role of each respondent, other differences are seen. The city council members (6.00) reported similarity in wealth and racial composition to be important while the city managers averaged a response of just (3.00) indicating that it is only somewhat important. The responses of the mayors (4.00), fire chiefs (4.40), and fire fighters (4.20) expressed the opinion that this factor is only moderately important.

All of the city council members in these five communities are elected on an at-large or city-wide basis. The racial composition shown in Table 6.1 for these communities indicate that all five cities are relatively racially homogenous, with the

percentage of the population reporting themselves as white ranging from a low of 87 to a high of 96. The low average response to this question may simply reflect that racial composition is a non-issue in these communities because of such homogeneity.

<b>Table 6.4:</b>						
<b>Perceptions of Collaboration Partners</b>						
<b>Grouped by Role</b>						
	Scale” 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Mayor (n=4)	City Council (n=3)	City Manager (n=3)	Fire Chief (n=5)	Fire Fighter (n=5)
	<i>Our local government partners should be</i>					
a	Communities we do not directly compete with for residents and development	2.50	3.67	3.67	6.20	5.80
b	Similar to our community in terms of wealth and racial composition	4.00	6.00	3.00	4.40	4.20
c	Similar to our community in terms of governmental structure (i.e.) either both council-manager or both mayor-council systems	3.75	4.67	6.00	5.80	5.20
d	Similar to our community in terms of powers (i.e.) both cities or both townships	3.50	5.67	6.00	6.60	5.60

#### Importance of Similarities in Structural Powers

Another issue examined in this research is the importance of similar forms of governmental structure and power among potential collaborators. A political community may have different boundaries than do existing cities, and some mechanism must be developed for dealing with the problems that arise with the provision of services across different governing entities (Ostrom, Tiebout and Warren 1961). Campbell and Glynn (1990), examining interlocal cooperation in Georgia, concluded that the presence of city managers did not make the community more likely to collaborate. Contrary to that study, Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) argue that the presence of a city manager does facilitate more intergovernmental contracting, especially in the area of public safety, the same type

of service that is the focus of this study. Brown and Potoski (2003) argue that the presence of a city manager is positively related to collaborative activities. Carley (1991) and Sabatier (1999), contend that similarity in political institutions across government units in a region can serve to facilitate collaborative exchanges, perhaps because local actors view issues in much the same way which makes collaboration easier.

When asked how important it is that the collaborating partners have similar governmental structures (question c), the average response of all respondents is (5.25) indicating a neutral stance on this issue. The use of the phrase “governmental structures” in this question is designed to measure how important it is that collaborating cities all be either council-manager or mayor-council types. Interestingly, the mayor’s response (3.75) indicates they believe this factor to be somewhat important, while the city managers value this factor quite differently with a response (6.00) indicating it is important. Clearly, the mayors consider this issue to be less important than the city managers. Also the responses varied by city, ranging from (4.83) in Eliseville indicating it is moderately important to (6.67) in Detour and Acme indicating it is important to very important to those respondents.

When asked how important it is that partnering cities are similar to one another in terms of the powers they have and specifically, whether cities and townships could effectively collaborate (question d), the mean response (5.50) was the mid-point of scale and similar to the mean response to (question c) at (5.25). The responses did vary somewhat across the cities. The respondents from Detour (7.00) and Acme (7.00) consider the factor more important than their counterparts in Eliseville (4.50), Bedford Falls (5.00), and Coletown (5.00) do.

<b>Table 6.5:</b>		
<b>Similarity in Resources Contributed and Benefits Sought</b>		
<b>All Respondents</b>		
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Mean All Respondents
	<i>Our partners should be</i>	
e	Able to provide similar levels of resources to the effort	7.40
f	Seeking the same benefits of this collaboration as we are	8.50

#### Importance of Comparable Resources and Similarity of Goals

A persistent and important theme in the literature on interlocal cooperation is that the fiscal capacity of the jurisdiction does matter. If one community brings more resources to the table than its partner, it is presumed to be much less likely to cooperate (Foster 1997). The responses from this group of participants support this view. When asked how important it is that all collaborating partners are able to provide similar levels of resources to the effort (question e), the mean response was (7.40) with a standard deviation of (2.44) indicating that, although there was some variance in the responses, this factor is generally considered very important.

<b>Table 6.6:</b>						
<b>Similarity in Resources Contributed and Benefits Sought</b>						
<b>Grouped by City</b>						
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Detour	Eliseville	Acme	Bedford Falls	Coletown
	<i>Our partners should be</i>					
e	Able to provide similar levels of resources to the effort	8.00	8.00	8.00	5.50	5.50
f	Seeking the same benefits of this collaboration as we are	8.33	8.83	8.33	5.50	8.50

Examining these responses by city and by role shows some interesting differences. The officials from Detour, Eliseville and Acme averaged an (8.00) on a 10

point scale indicating this issue is very important. In contrast, at almost three points lower, the officials from Bedford Falls (5.50) and Coletown (5.50) thought this issue was less important. It is unclear based on other responses from the officials of these two cities why they would rank this issue so much lower than the other three. When the responses to that question are examined by role of the respondent, city council members (8.00), fire chiefs (8.00), and mayors (7.50) all considered this factor very important. Fire fighters (6.80) and city managers (6.67) consider this factor important but less than the other three groups.

<b>Table 6.7: Similarity in Resources Contributed and Benefits Sought Grouped by Role</b>						
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Mayor	City Council	City Manager	Fire Chief	Fire Fighter
	<i>Our partners should be</i>					
e	Able to provide similar levels of resources to the effort	7.50	8.00	6.67	8.00	6.80
f	Seeking the same benefits of this collaboration as we are	9.25	8.00	6.67	9.00	8.80

There was far less variation in the responses to the question about the importance of potential partners seeking similar benefits from the collaboration. The average response to (question f) the respondents is (8.50) and nearly forty percent of the respondents responded with a (10.00). This indicates that it is critically important that their partners seek the same benefits from their collaboration. When the data is examined grouped by city, only one community deviates from this position. The Bedford Falls respondents ranked this factor at (5.50), the mid-point of the scale. Respondents from the

other four communities ranked this factor much higher, ranging from (8.83) to (8.33), indicating similar benefits sought is a very important issue to the group.

<b>Table 6.8: Importance of Past Collaboration and Frequency of Contacts All Respondents</b>		
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All <i>Our partners should be</i>	10=Critically Important Mean All Respondents
g	Communities that have successfully collaborated with us in the past	6.65
h	Communities whose elected officials are in frequent contact with ours	7.65
i	Communities whose senior administrators are in frequent contact with ours	8.40

#### Importance of Past Interactions and Frequency of Contact

The next series of questions examines the importance these participants place on having collaboration partners who have cooperated in the past and how important it is that elected and administrative officials have regular contact with one another. Research has shown that repeated contact between local government actors leads to greater levels of trust and performance experience, which often leads to increased levels of cooperation between government units in a metropolitan area (Post 2002). Fixed geographic borders require repeat play among neighboring communities. Positive experiences reduce transaction costs and make collaboration easier (Feiock 2007).

When asked how important it is that partnering communities have successfully collaborated with one another previously (question g), the response of (6.65) indicates these participants consider it an important factor. Some variation in this view emerges when the responses are grouped by city. The respondents from Coletown (8.25) consider this factor to be very important, while those from the neighboring community of Bedford Falls (4.00) ranked this issue as far less important. Detour and Acme once again had

identical responses (7.33), indicating this issue is very important to them. Eliseville, as a group, responded at (5.50), the mid-point of the scale, revealing a neutral position on the importance of this issue. When the same data is examined grouped by the role of the respondent, there is not nearly as much variation in the responses. Fire fighters ranked it the most important at (7.40) and city managers the least important at (6.00).

When asked the importance of elected officials of prospective partners being in frequent contact (question h), the responses average (7.65), indicating that the typical respondent considers this to be a very important factor to successful collaboration. When grouped by city, the responses show little variance, with a mean of (7.83) and a standard deviation of 0.88. The responses are also consistent among all roles of the participants. The fire fighters and city managers considered frequent contact between elected officials the most important with rankings of (8.80) and (8.67) respectively.

<b>Table 6.9: Importance of Past Collaboration and Frequency of Contacts Grouped by City</b>						
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Detour	Eliseville	Acme	Bedford Falls	Coletown
	<i>Our partners should be</i>					
g	Communities that have successfully collaborated with us in the past	7.33	5.50	7.33	4.00	8.25
h	Communities whose elected officials are in frequent contact with ours	8.67	6.83	8.67	7.00	8.00
i	Communities whose senior administrators are in frequent contact with ours	8.33	8.00	8.33	7.50	8.25

Responses to the question about the importance of senior administrative officials of the collaborating communities being in frequent contact (question i) averaged (8.40). This indicates the group considers this contact to be very important to a successful

collaboration. Their responses to this question are roughly one point higher than the (7.65) score averaged for the question about contact among elected officials.

<b>Table 6.10: Importance of Past Collaboration and Frequency of Contacts Grouped by Role</b>						
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Mayors	City Council	City Managers	Fire Chiefs	Fire Fighters
	<i>Our partners should be</i>					
g	Communities that have successfully collaborated with us in the past	6.25	6.67	6.00	6.60	7.40
h	Communities whose elected officials are in frequent contact with ours	7.50	6.67	8.67	6.60	8.80
i	Communities whose senior administrators are in frequent contact with ours	9.25	6.67	8.67	8.00	9.00

The respondents indicated contact among administrative officials is very important to collaboration, regardless what community they belong to or the role they play. When grouped by city, the responses averaged (8.08), with a standard deviation of (0.35). When the responses are examined in terms of the role of the respondent, minimal variation is seen. Of the five groups, mayors (9.25) and fire fighters (9.00) consider this factor the most important, followed by the city managers (8.67) and the fire chiefs (8.00). City council members ranked this factor lowest at (6.67). They considered administrative contact to be an important factor in a successful collaboration, but saw it as less important than the other four groups of officials.

## Importance of Similarities in Service Requirements and Operations

<b>Table 6.11:</b>		
<b>Similarities of Land Uses, Service Requirements, Equipment and Training</b>		
<b>All Respondents</b>		
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Mean All Respondents
	<i>Our partners should be</i>	
j	Communities that have similar land uses to ours (i.e., mostly residential)	6.00
k	Communities that have similar service requirements to ours (i.e., non-industrial)	7.55
l	Communities that have equipment and training similar to ours	8.15

The first question in this section measures the importance placed on the communities involved having similar land use, in this case, mostly residential. This issue affects the types of fires a community fire department is called upon to fight, and this affects the costs and risks of collaboration. This issue is potentially very relevant to the DFA, because there are serious differences in land use patterns among the five communities. Does it matter whether one partnering community has all residential and another has some industrial? Does it matter that one of these communities borders a large oil refinery and tank farm and they would be called upon in the event of a fire or other emergency there? Does it matter that two of these communities have a greater number of and larger commercial developments than the others do?

When asked the importance of their partners having similar land uses (question j), the average response was (6.00), with a standard deviation of (2.43). The respondents clearly perceive this an important factor, but there is considerable variance of opinion on this question. Respondent's indicating this factor was very important or very unimportant, were asked a follow-up question why it was or was not important. Those that responded that this factor was very important generally answered that too great a

difference in the typical types of fires fought would make collaborating with that community more difficult. Those who responded that it was not very important added that because of the Mutual Aid Agreement they currently operate under, these five communities are already required to assist one another in fighting fires regardless of the type. This collaboration would not change that.

<b>Table 6.12: Similarities of Land Uses, Service Requirements, Equipment and Training Grouped by City</b>						
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Detour	Eliseville	Acme	Bedford Falls	Coletown
	<i>Our partners should be</i>					
j	Communities that have similar land uses to ours (i.e., mostly residential)	7.67	5.50	7.67	4.50	6.75
k	Communities that have similar service requirements to ours (i.e., non-industrial)	8.33	7.33	8.33	5.00	7.00
l	Communities that have equipment and training similar to ours	7.67	8.50	7.67	5.50	7.75

In terms of the different cities, the average responses are clustered around the mid-point of the scale. Bedford Falls (4.50) was the only community with an average response below the mid-range of the scale and Eliseville (5.50) responses averaged the mid-point. Detour and Acme had the same average response (7.67) and Coletown averaged (6.4). Examining their responses in terms of their role in the city reveals that fire fighters (6.60) and city council members (6.67) are similar in their assessments of the importance of having similar land use. Mayors (5.50) and fire chiefs (5.40) were also closely aligned on this question. The city managers response (6.00) fell between the other four.

<b>Table 6.13: Similarities of Land Uses, Service Requirements, Equipment and Training Grouped by Role</b>						
	Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important	Mayors	City Council	City Managers	Fire Chiefs	Fire Fighters
	<i>Our partners should be</i>					
j	Communities that have similar land uses to ours (i.e., mostly residential)	5.50	6.67	6.00	5.40	6.60
k	Communities that have similar service requirements to ours (i.e., non-industrial)	8.00	8.00	6.33	6.80	8.40
l	Communities that have equipment and training similar to ours	8.75	7.33	6.67	8.80	8.40

The last two questions in this section examine a closely related factor, the importance of partnering communities having similar service requirements, training and equipment for their fire departments. The term service requirements is understood to mean the type of training that community fire fighters need, types of equipment normally required and any special equipment or training. The first question asked them to indicate the importance of having similar service requirements (question k). The mean response from the interviewees as a group is (7.55), indicating this is a very important factor to these respondents.

When the responses are examined by the role of the respondent, the answers ranged from a high of (8.40) for the fire fighters to a low of (6.33) for city managers. The mayors and city council members were closely aligned with the fire fighters on this question providing a mean score of (8.00) each. Fire chiefs (6.80) and city managers (6.33) were the only two groups under (8.00). The data indicates that the two groups of senior administrators (fire chiefs and city managers) place less importance on this factor than other groups. Similar variation is seen in the responses across cities. The responses of four of the communities are grouped together ranging from a high of (8.33) in Detour

and Acme to a low of (7.00) in Coletown. Once again, the Bedford Falls (5.00) respondents viewed this issue as less important than the others.

When asked how important it is that potential collaboration partners have similar fire equipment and training (question 1), the respondents as a group (8.15) indicated that this factor is very important to them. In terms of the different cities, Eliseville (8.50) respondents think it is more important than do the Bedford Falls (5.50) respondents. The other three cities had very similar average responses ranging from (7.75) to (7.67). City managers (6.67) considered this issue less important than the others and the fire chiefs (8.80) considered it more important than the rest. The other three groups fell between (7.33) and (8.75). Mayors (8.75) and fire fighters (8.40) provide answers similar to fire chiefs. City council (7.33) members were closer to the city managers on this question.

Figure 6.1 displays the mean responses of all the interviewees in terms of questions asked and ranked from most important to least important in their opinion.

**Figure 6.1: Importance of Particular Traits in a Partner.**

<u>Trait in Partner</u>	<u>Mean Response All Respondents</u>
Seeking the Same Benefits we are	8.50
Frequent Contact of Administrative Officials	8.40
Have Similar Equipment and Training to ours	8.15
Frequent Contact of Elected Officials	7.65
Have Similar Service Requirements to ours	7.55
Successfully Collaborated with us Previously	6.65
Have Similar Land Uses to ours	6.00
Have Similar Governmental Powers to ours	5.50
Have Similar Governmental Structures to ours	5.25
Not in Direct Competition with us	4.60
Similar to us in Terms of Race and Wealth	4.30

Scale: 1=Not Important at All 10=Critically Important

### **Initial Conclusions Drawn from Responses**

The frequency of contact between officials from neighboring communities is a potentially important area of study. Previous research has indicated that formal and informal metropolitan networks such as the DCC, the Downriver fire chiefs group, and other social and professional networks can facilitate collaboration and problem solving (Frederickson 1999, Thurmaier and Wood 2002). However, past interactions, perceived negatively, may prevent future collaboration.

Jurisdictions that share borders and have repeated contacts with one another have numerous opportunities to consider collaboration. Over the course of many years of interaction, neighboring jurisdictions have experienced positive and negative encounters. It is important to future local government actors considering collaboration to have a better understanding of what role these perceptions play in determining the success or failure of collaboration activity. Their responses indicate that they consider it important that the elected and administrative officials from collaborating communities had prior regular contact with one another. The responses also made it clear that the participants believe it important for the communities to have similar requirements in terms of types of fires and equipment and training needed.

The long history of successful collaboration among these five communities through the Downriver Mutual Aid Program has likely affected their attitudes toward each other. They have purchased similar types of equipment and engaged in similar training over a period of many years. Their responses indicate that they see similar fire fighting needs, the purchase of similar equipment, and similar training of personnel as important factors when considering prospective partners for collaboration.

Theorization on this subject usually emphasizes the importance of similarity among communities in terms of racial composition and wealth, and suggest homogenous communities find it easier to collaborate than do heterogeneous ones (Feiock 2007, Morgan, Hirlinger and England 1988 ). However, respondents to this survey did not indicate that racial and wealth issues were important to them in terms of their willingness to undertake this collaboration.

### **Perceptions of Potential Partners: Responses to Open-Ended Questions**

The interviewees were also asked a series of questions designed to elicit more detailed narrative answers. These questions examine the respondents' perceptions of their partners. In particular, the issue of the development and maintenance of trust is examined and how partners for this collaboration were selected.

<b>Table 6.14: Perceptions of Potentially Collaborating Partners</b>	
D-2	A general concern about intergovernmental collaborations on public services involves the level of trust among the participating governments. We are interested in understanding how trust is developed, maintained and lost.
D-2 (a-b)	Do you agree that the level of trust your residents and government officials have for the officials of potential local government partners is an important factor in the success of intergovernmental collaborations? If yes, why? If no, why not?
D-2 (c)	How do you define trust in this context (joint service provision)?
D-2 (d)	How can the required trust be developed?
D-2 (e)	Can this trust be undermined? If so, how?

#### **The Issue of Trust among Collaboration Partners**

As in any ongoing relationship, the issue of trust is an important one. It is important to future collaboration to better understand the role trust plays in this activity.

Is trust necessary? How is such trust developed and nurtured? Can such trust be damaged

or destroyed and, if so, how? Finally, what can elected and administrative officials do to ensure that the necessary trust is maintained?

The respondents were asked if they agreed that the level of trust their residents and government officials have for the officials of potential local government partners is an important factor in the success of intergovernmental collaborations (question D-2a). If so, they were also asked why this trust is important (question D-2b). The city council president of Acme stated “people work better if they can establish a level of trust . . . set up some common understanding.” The fire union president of Acme said that it was indeed important and that “all the cards must be on the table . . . in order for trust . . . can’t be any surprises.” The mayor of Detour said it was important, but not the most important thing. He said “it’s a matter of how you structure the legal framework so that they have the protection necessary to meet the mission . . . structure is more important [than trust].”

The fire chief of Bedford Falls said that it was absolutely important that collaborating partners trust one another. “You’ve got to trust your partners . . . you have to have shared goals.” The Bedford Falls city manager stated “you can’t work with folks you don’t trust.” The Eliseville fire union president, who was instrumental in the planning phase of this collaboration, said “creating a partnership requires trust . . . less trust equals less ability to collaborate.” The mayor of Detour thought “a level of trust is really a prerequisite to undertaking something like this.”

### The Issue of Trust within Each Community

While agreeing that trust among collaborating jurisdictions is an important factor in establishing collaboration, three respondents expressed concern that the required trust did not currently exist in this particular effort within their city. A fire department lieutenant in Detour stated “we don’t completely trust our own elected officials right now.” The fire chief of Coletown said “we have a lot of suspicions right now between our citizens and the elected officials.” A fire captain in Coletown said “ultimately, it’s very important. There is some lack of trust right now...as soon as it becomes adversarial the trust breaks down; it becomes us versus them and you might as well put cinder blocks around your feet.”

### How is Trust Defined by these Respondents?

When asked to define trust in the context of joint service provision (question D-2c), and how they personally define trust, common themes emerged. The Acme city council president stated that she defined it as the ability to “believe what people have said, that they have a proven track record.” The mayor of Detour said it meant “that you have the same vision, the same mission, a common understanding of the services that need to be provided . . . I don’t have to agree with everything the other mayors say, but I can trust them if I believe we are headed down the same road.” The Eliseville city manager defined trust as a “sharing of the work-load during the development and governance of the authority. The more that people have done of their own heavy lifting in a project the less likely they are to mistrust the motives of others.” The Detour fire chief said “I think you make a statement . . . we expect you to follow through on that . . . you

stay committed once we start this effort. I have a genuine belief in your sincerity.” A fire department lieutenant in Detour said it meant “doing what you say you will . . . respect for one another.”

The fire captain in Coletown defined trust as “winning some and losing some . . . doing what you say you’ll do.” The city manager of Bedford Falls said that to him it meant “people who say what they mean . . . are not devious . . . that are straight shooters . . . their word is good, you can count on them.” The fire chief of Eliseville said that it meant “at some point having to take on faith what people are telling you and just moving forward.” The Eliseville city council president concluded that trust was “being able to sit next to somebody and being able to trust that people will be true to their word . . . some people don’t have the intestinal fortitude to be good partners . . . people have to have some backbone to work at this sort of thing.”

#### How is Trust Developed?

When asked how this required trust can be developed (question D-2d), the Acme fire union president stated that “at the beginning we made a gentlemen’s agreement that there would not be any hidden agendas . . . everybody would be up front.” The mayor of Detour said it takes “communication . . . open, candid, adult communication . . . I would rather someone tell me I’m full of shit to my face and then discuss that with me than to have somebody go behind my back and say it.” The city manager of Eliseville said trust is developed as “an act of participation and it needs to be reevaluated constantly . . . it takes a certain emotional mix of people and perhaps a certain level of experience.” The fire chief of Bedford Falls said that when it came to developing trust “actions speak

louder than words . . . it has to be developed . . . focus on the goals . . . don't become jaded." The fire chief in Coletown said "the cities can't just think of this as a quick fix to their current problems . . . it has to be much more than that . . . a long-term solution to these fundamental issues."

The mayor of Eliseville thinks that trust is developed by "working together over the years on various projects . . . I've come to trust many of my colleagues through our work at the Downriver Community Conference." The city manager of Bedford Falls said that trust was developed "by working together . . . you learn pretty quick who returns phone calls, who shows up for meetings." The mayor of Coletown said that trust couldn't be taken for granted. "After a while you can tell if the person is just trying to sell you something rather than working with you." The fire chief of Eliseville said that trust "to a large extent comes from people taking a leap of faith and letting folks do things . . . it's easy for someone to say 'trust me' . . . it's harder for someone else to believe that." The fire union president in Eliseville said "it takes time . . . working together, cities following through on their commitments to one another." The mayor of Detour indicated that trust is developed "by working together on common projects . . . working through issues together in the Michigan Municipal League, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, that kind of thing." The Eliseville city council president said "it's a time thing . . . it takes time and it's difficult because of the changes in personnel, elected and appointed, that makes it tough. But over time I think it builds on itself."

### How is Trust Undermined?

When asked if trust can be undermined (question D-2e) in any way and, if so, how, several respondents had strong views. The mayor of Detour said that trust could be damaged if “you have a problem and you aren’t communicating...you are not both wanting the same things from the collaboration.” The city manager of Detour said that trust was damaged if the “collaboration doesn’t deliver . . . don’t promise something that you can’t deliver. People don’t want to hear excuses in the public sector.” The city manager of Eliseville said that trust is damaged when someone “takes a contrary position without warning the group beforehand . . . making it an (us versus them) issue and redefining the group’s interest as individual interests.” The fire chief of Bedford Falls stated that trust could be damaged by “inappropriate political influence.” The fire chief of Coletown said trust could be damaged “if one partner portrays our efforts publically in a bad light, if one of the shareholders betrays it; that can damage the effort a lot.” The mayor of Eliseville stated that damage results when “my partners tell me one thing and go back to their own city and say something different; that damages the relationship.”

The city manager of Bedford Falls said that trust could be destroyed if someone “didn’t do what they agreed to . . . lied about what they agreed to. Actually, I thought I had seen the worst of humanity in practicing law . . . it turns out that I hadn’t . . . my years in the Mayor’s office of another city . . . I believe I found the lowest forms of life in politics.” The fire chief of Eliseville said it is the “same for communities as it is for individuals . . . if honesty prevails you have trust if not, you don’t.” A former city council member and the current Mayor of Detour said that trust could be damaged “by a more powerful community dictating to another as opposed to working with them.” He went on

to explain that throughout his years of working for Wayne County he had experienced “the City of Detroit dictating to surrounding communities, and that has been a trust killer over the years.”

Figure 6.2 is a synopsis of several of the commonly mentioned factors that, in the opinion of these respondents, can develop or undermine trust in the context of a collaborative effort.

**Figure 6.2: Developing and Undermining Trust in Collaboration**

How is Trust Developed?	Percentage of Respondent's Mentioning Factor	How is Trust Damaged?	Percentage of Respondent's Mentioning Factor
Working together over time	55%	Saying one thing and doing another	45%
Communication	25%	Not communicating	25%
Focus on the goals	20%	Not delivering on promises	25%
No hidden agendas	15%	Inappropriate political influence	20%
Thinking long-term	15%	Not doing assigned tasks	10%
Taking a "leap-of-faith"	5%	Bigger cities bullying smaller ones	5%

### **Insights about the Importance of Trust to Collaboration**

These respondents strongly believe that trust among participants is a necessary prerequisite to successfully starting and implementing collaboration. Ultimately, every one of the respondents indicated that it was important to develop and maintain trust. The responses to these questions also indicate that open and honest communication is an absolute necessity for the participants in a collaboration like the DFA. Not doing what you say you will do, not following through on commitments and saying one thing within the group and something different in your own community are seen by these respondents as serious problems that would interfere with the development and maintenance of trust

among the participating partners and communities. The respondents were clear that the necessary trust, once developed, could most definitely be destroyed by inappropriate actions on the part of collaboration participants.

#### How Partners were Selected

With imperfect information and no experience working together, potential partners may face relatively high start-up costs (Feiock 2007). To examine this issue, several questions were asked to delve deeper into how the participants for this effort at collaboration were selected. The authority might have included all twenty of the DCC member communities, but the effort went forward with only five. Geographically nearby are other communities that expressed some interest in participating, but did not end up in the group. Other communities in the area who seemed to be good potential partners were also excluded. The basis for choosing the cities in this effort is explored in the next few sections.

<b>Table 6.15:</b>	
<b>Selection of Potential Collaboration Partners</b>	
D-3	I am interested in understanding how the participants in this effort were decided on.
D-3 (a)	How were the participants decided on? Is this the final group or do you envision others will be added in the future?
D-3 (b)	Are there any nonparticipating communities that you wish were involved? If yes, who and why do you think they are not participating at this time?
D-3 (c)	What makes the current participants good partners for your community on this service?
D-3 (d)	Can you think of any Downriver jurisdictions that would <b>NOT</b> be good partners for your community? If yes, who and why?

When asked how the final five communities were selected to participate in this collaboration, the fire union president of Acme indicated that “we all touch borders in some way. They tried this once before, but it was too big and didn’t work.” The fire chief

of Acme explained, “the five mayors got together through the Downriver Community Conference.” The city manager of Detour stated that these five “were picked because of their contiguous borders . . . also probably because similar services are being offered.” The city manager in Eliseville concluded “we were doing the Information System Joint Project and we started to discuss the Auto-Aid program that two of the cities were implementing . . . All of these different initiatives kind of raised a new dialog about these issues . . . partly it was the fire chiefs’ discussions and then with the auto-aid discussion we had a kind of perfect storm.” The fire chief of Bedford Falls said “I think they were chosen because of a geographic perspective. They share borders; it’s almost like a square box . . . it makes sense . . . these five I think are more financially stable.” A fire department lieutenant in Detour said “originally we talked to all of the Downriver communities . . . but there were so many issues, part-time versus full-time . . . on-call . . . it was just too hard.” Coletown’s fire chief attributed the selection of the five to “some fire chiefs volunteered and others didn’t...it rather quickly narrowed down.”

The mayor of Eliseville thought it was “almost organic how we came together . . . we border one another . . . we have very similar populations, same demographics . . . it was a natural sort of thing. We also shared the same auditing firm (Plante-Moran, LLP) and we had discussed these issues through them.” The city manager of Bedford Falls asserted “these five were chosen because they were close enough together so that the sharing of resources seemed to make sense. With our computerized police information sharing you don’t have to be close geographically . . . but with fire you need to be close together to effectively use the equipment.” The fire union president for Eliseville thought “originally the whole Downriver Community Conference group of cities was looked at

but it became apparent that it would be too complicated . . . mix of urban and rural would be difficult.” The city council president of Eliseville believed that these five were selected because of their “similarity in needs, structure and capabilities. They have to be able to contribute to the joint effort. These five are all relatively solid financially and that makes for a good partner.”

The respondents were then asked the follow-up question why the nearby cities of Ecorse and River Rouge were not invited to join the collaboration. They are adjacent to some of the other collaborating communities and geographically, seem to be a natural fit. They are approximately the same size in terms of land mass and have about the same size population as two of the other collaborating cities, but the two cities are much more racially diverse than the other five. The City of River Rouge also has a single chief in charge of the police and the fire departments, which is unusual in the Downriver area.

The fire union president of Acme indicated that he was told their inclusion would make the authority too large. The fire chief of Acme was called by his counterpart in one of those cities and specifically asked why they had not been included. He told the other fire chief, “you better talk to your mayor” because he believed the mayors had made those decisions. The fire chief of Bedford Falls thought that it was more a financial issue, due to the belief that Ecorse and River Rouge are not as financially stable as the other five cities. He then went on “I think its politics . . . there is no stability in those [fire] departments.” The Coletown fire chief said “I think River Rouge and Ecorse could be easily incorporated into this authority. I don’t know of any underlying issues for them not being involved except for their financial issues and the political issues going on in those cities.” The city manager of Detour who formerly worked for another nearby city said,

I wish River Rouge and Ecorse had been included. I think there may have been other reasons for why they were not involved... they are heavily industrialized, they are older...they are mixed race communities and I think that may have played a part in it. I don't know but I think it might have.

#### Addition of other Communities to the Group

Another follow-up question asked the respondents if there are any other cities not currently involved in the collaboration that should be. The fire union president of Acme indicated he would like to see the cities of Ecorse and River Rouge included because “they are close by and it would be a bigger authority with them and they could bring resources to the table. If they are left out they can still call on us through the Mutual Aid Pact.”

Most of the respondents, however, seemed to think that the initial five communities is a big enough group to start the process and others could be added later. The fire chief of Acme said “I think with five cities it's already a full board to handle all of this.” Detour's mayor said “no, I think this is the right size and the right group to get this thing started right now. You can be too big and you can be too small . . . there is a best size.” The mayor went on to comment generally on the polycentric nature of many urban areas and said, “with all this proliferation of small cities in a metropolitan area, especially of 5,000 or 10,000 . . . can the taxpayers really afford all of these administrators and staff, chiefs, school superintendents?”

The city manager of Eliseville responded “at this point no, I wouldn't want any others. Group size has a lot to do with it. I don't know what is too big or too small but functionally, five is a workable group . . . we have modeled it for expandability so we can add to the authority later on.” The fire union president of Eliseville agreed stating “no,

the idea was to start small and to work from there.” Arguing a contrary approach, the Bedford Falls city manager believed “yes, any city that borders our authority I think . . . we would all be better off with a larger group.”

### Explicit Selection Criteria

It is clear from their responses that deciding who is a good potential partner for collaboration involves logistical considerations, the similarities or dissimilarities in community make-up and financial issues. The interviewees were asked whether participation in the fire authority was open to all interested local governments or if selection criteria were employed to choose or limit participants. While many of the respondents seemed not to fully understand how these five communities were selected for participation, other responses indicated that it was the financial considerations that played the largest part in deciding which communities were included. Also, to a certain extent, some respondents thought that the five communities were simply the coalition of the willing. Other respondents believed that the cities of River Rouge and Ecorse would make good partners in the DFA collaboration as well. At least one of the respondents indicated that there may have been underlying issues that prevented those two racially mixed communities from participating in the effort.

Interestingly, the responses to that particular question showed differences between the opinions of elected and appointed officials. Most of the elected officials seemed to think that the initial five collaborating communities were enough, at least to start with. However, many of the fire chiefs, command officers, and union officials thought that

other nearby communities such as Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, Taylor, Riverview and Trenton would have been good partners to include in that initial group.

When asked to consider what makes the current participants good partners for their community, the Acme city council president said that it was “nearness . . . size of the community . . . having shared interests with us.” The fire union president for Acme said that what made them good partners was the “working relationships that we already have . . . Mutual Aid with all of them and Auto-Aid with one of the others.”

The mayor of Detour said it was the “commonality of quality of life, services, and people . . . common social and economic makeup of these cities.” The city manager of Detour said it was the fact that “the mayors have worked well together in the past and the city administrators too.” The city manager of Eliseville made a particularly interesting observation responding, “proximity . . . similar characteristics as far as density, population grouping . . . the pure happenstance of current fire station locations. If you looked at this whole 30 square miles and tried to figure out where to drop the five fire stations they are already pretty much where you would want them to be.”

The fire chief of Eliseville said that the important factors were “adjacent geography, first and foremost . . . they’re all mature communities . . . similar services being offered . . . training levels/types are similar . . . we have a lot of knowledge of one another because of Mutual Aid . . . we’ve fought fires in each others communities already.” The fire union president in Eliseville pointed out that all five cities and fire departments “are structured the same way...all mayor and city council, all full-time fire personnel.”

### Characteristics of Bad Partners

The respondents were also asked if any Downriver jurisdictions would be a bad partner for their community. The city manager of Detour said that yes, “any community that has a volunteer or part-time department might not be a good partner. Then you’re talking different wages, different personnel . . . also a city that is too much larger than the others might try to dominate the authority.” The city manager of Eliseville said “a city that was not contiguous to us would not be a good partner . . . how do you jump over the community in between . . . logistics would be difficult.” The city manager of Bedford Falls pointed out that the nearby Township of Grosse Ile would be difficult to incorporate into the authority because it is an island. “it’s isolated you know . . . how would you handle getting equipment across the bridge...what if one of the two bridges was out like one of them is right now.” An Eliseville city council member pointed out that a city might not be a good partner “because of their lack of financial resources.”

**Figure 6.3: Characteristics of the Partners Selected Most Often Mentioned.**

<i>Good partners for us would be cities with</i>	Percentage of Respondents Mentioning this Factor
Similar Demographic Characteristics to ours	45%
Geographic Proximity to us	40%
Same Governmental Structure as ours	35%
Good Previous Collaboration with us	30%
Financial Ability to Participate Effectively	20%
Shared Borders with us	20%

Their responses indicate that it is very important to the participants in the DFA collaboration that the participating communities be geographically contiguous. All five communities share borders with one another and are very similar in terms of size, population, type of fires, equipment and training. Their responses also reveal that it is

important to these officials that the included cities have cooperated on fire and other public services over a long period of time. This finding is consistent with the conclusions drawn from the research of Bingham (1981) and Post (2002). When asked what factors might make a community a bad partner, the respondents again indicated that geography played a central role. The logistics of crossing through non-partner communities to get to partner communities would prove problematic. According to these respondents, mixing full-time with part-time or volunteer personnel would also make it difficult to effectively collaborate on fire services.

<b>Table 6.16:</b>	
<b>Affect of Past Collaboration Experiences</b>	
D-3 (e)	How are your perceptions about these actual and potential partners affected by past interactions? Please explain with an example or two.

The final question asked regarding this topic was how the respondents' perceptions about these actual and potential partners are affected by past interactions. The fire union president of Acme said that he had a positive view of surrounding cities because "we have worked in other cities over time, we've had a good relationship and good communications." The fire chief of Bedford Falls said "I've had good positive interactions in the past . . . we all get along well, we use Mutual Aid . . . fires bring fire fighters together; we all attack the beast and put the fire out." The fire chief of Coletown stated that "we have a long history through Mutual Aid . . . we have a fairly good relationship with them."

The mayor of Coletown said "my experience with the other mayors over a long time has been very good. If not, I would have been a lot more cautious . . . I would have

preferred to merely enhance our current Mutual Aid Agreement rather than go through all of this to create an authority.” The fire chief of Eliseville stated that he had positive experiences over the years with other fire departments . . . “in the fire services you don’t come in here being trusted . . . you have to earn that trust and earn that respect.”

An Eliseville city council member said he had “long standing relationships with surrounding cities relative to the provision of parks and recreation services. They were good relationships so because of that I was looking forward to working with them on this fire authority . . . I think we could collaborate on a variety of other services like engineering, site plan review, building inspectors.” The city council president of Eliseville said “we’ve had some good experiences working through the Downriver Community Conference. Mutual Aid has worked well, DRANO [an area-wide anti-narcotics working group] has been a positive experience.”

<b>Table 6.17: Current Collaboration and the importance of Public Opinion</b>	
D-4	Does your city already cooperate on any of the services that will be provided through the fire authority? If yes, could you talk about specific services, which of the Downriver cities are involved and the nature of the cooperative arrangement with the city?
D-5	What has been the public reaction in your community to this effort?

#### Existing Collaboration of these Services

When asked if they already collaborated to a certain extent on some of the same services with their DFA partners, respondents indicated that a considerable level of collaboration already exists in the provision of fire services. When asked if they already collaborate on the services that would be a part of the DFA collaboration, the fire chief of Acme stated that his city already collaborated to a lesser extent with many of their partners and other communities through their participation in the Mutual Aid Agreement.

He also indicated that they had even enhanced that system with one of their neighboring partners by instituting an automatic-aid system between their two fire departments. The city manager of Detour said “yes, through Downriver Mutual Aid we already share a lot, most of these services.”

Indicating a slightly different position, the city manager of Eliseville added “we share legislative concerns through the Michigan Municipal League . . . we are all in the same MML risk pool for insurance . . . we are all in Wayne County so we have mandatory cooperation on sewers . . . we all use the same land fill . . . there are a lot of things we already collaborate on.” The fire chief of Coletown noted that although they were already collaborating on most of the services the authority would provide, “with a bigger department we could have specialized training . . . we could have real ladder companies, more rescue units . . . it would give our guys more opportunities to specialize in various areas.” The mayor of Eliseville stated that “we have a long and rich history of cooperation.” Coletown’s mayor stated while they already collaborate on many of the same fire services, he hoped to achieve through the new fire authority “the purchase of equipment, standardization of equipment is what we are trying to enhance. We don’t have that through Mutual Aid now and it would have some real value and savings.”

The responses to this question indicate that the participants have enjoyed good working relationships with surrounding jurisdictions on a variety of services. That experience has favorably inclined them to consider the DFA collaboration on fire services. This is consistent with previous work (e.g., Bingham 1981 and Post 2002) that repeated contacts between local governments that have been successful and increased levels of trust between the actors made increased levels of collaboration easier. If their

previous attempts had not been successful, many of the respondents indicated they would have been much more cautious in undertaking this effort. Specifically, many of them mentioned that their cooperation through the DCC Mutual Aid System has been a very beneficial experience and has led them to consider enhancing that system and/or undertaking the DFA authority.

### Public Reaction to Proposed Authority

When asked to describe the public reaction in their community to this specific effort at collaboration, most of the respondents indicated that the public was uninformed or generally opposed to efforts to collaborate with neighboring jurisdictions. The Acme fire union president said “they have a lot of questions that we can’t answer . . . there are still a lot of unknowns and we are taking baby steps.” The fire chief of Acme said that public reaction was “kind of negative at first, but when we explain that service should actually improve, they kind of like that idea.” The mayor of Detour responded that “we went through a fear period . . . but since then it’s been a wait and see . . . political leaders need to do a better job of educating the public about what is going on.”

The fire chief of Bedford Falls stated “some citizens are guardedly pessimistic . . . I have not gotten any positive feedback on this effort from our citizens at all.” The fire chief in Coletown said that “a lot of them are suspicious . . . our city has a long history of being self-sufficient . . . we have our own hospital, our own water, power, cable and have had them for a long time . . . this is going to be hard for us to sell to the citizens because of that sense of identity, separate identity.” The captain of the Coletown Fire Department said “our citizens want to keep *OUR* (emphasis is respondents) fire department.”

Expressing a much different point of view, the Bedford Falls city manager said that he does not “think that citizens really care . . . they want the services provided, that’s all.” The fire chief in Eliseville said that he had gotten mixed reviews “probably 50-50 for and against this thing.” The Eliseville city council president said “as long as it saves money and provides a good service then I think our people are favorable toward this idea.”

Most of the respondents indicated that there was not a great deal of public support for the DFA collaboration effort among the citizens of their communities. Several of the respondents did not think that the public was very well informed about their efforts yet and needed to be educated about what is being attempted. At least one respondent indicated that elected officials need to do a better job of educating the public about this activity.

The responses to this question revealed some differences in the answers, depending upon whether the respondent was an elected or an administrative official. Most of the elected officials indicated that they needed to do a better job of educating their citizens, of making them more aware of the specifics. They expressed the belief that with better understanding, the public would be more accepting of the concept of joint service provision. In contrast, the majority of the fire administrative officials indicated that the public is strongly opposed to the DFA collaboration or at the very least, fearful about what it means for their community. Two of the fire officials indicated that their citizens are very protective of *their* fire department personnel and would probably be opposed to the collaboration.

### Summary Analysis of Open-Ended Questions

The responses to these questions make it clear that in the opinion of these respondents, trust is an important to very important factor in the decision to collaborate. Not only must trust among the cities exist, but there must also be trust within each city between the elected officials and the employees.

The respondents had several different definitions of trust such as “doing what you say you’re going to do”, and “not saying one thing in meetings with your partners and then going back to your own city and saying something else.” One city manager indicated that trust comes in time, from “doing your own share of the heavy lifting” in collaboration and is something that must be constantly reevaluated. Trust can be damaged as well. A few respondents mentioned that elected officials grand-standing for their home crowd damaged this effort. One command officer stated that having the Auto-Aid system forced upon them after losing a court fight damaged this collaboration.<sup>7</sup>

Respondents were asked how these five cities were selected to be partners in this effort. Most of the respondents thought that involving all twenty Downriver communities would have been an obstacle to collaboration. Several of the respondents indicated that these five were selected because they are close geographically, very similar and financially stable enough to undertake this effort.

The respondents were asked about the affect of past collaboration on this effort. Almost every one of the interviewees indicated that having good past collaboration experiences make them more willing to attempt this effort. Had they not had good experiences already, they would be reluctant to try anything new.

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<sup>7</sup> The Auto-Aid system was an agreement between two of the five cities to work more closely and respond immediately to fires in each others city.

Finally, the respondents were asked if they were already collaborating on most of the services being proposed for the authority. While they admit that they are already collaborating on these services, most respondents indicate that they believed they had accomplished as much as they could under the current service arrangement and needed to undertake the authority to maintain or improve the quality of services.

The next chapter examines the differences in the roles played in collaboration efforts by elected and administrative officials. Elected and administrative officials play different roles, but they are complimentary in many ways and both have an important role in making collaboration work.

**Table 6.18:**  
**Perceptions of Partners in the Collaboration**  
**All Respondents**

Interview	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l
1	4	4	3	5	5	5	4	6	6	6	6	4
2	5	7	9	5	10	10	10	10	10	8	10	10
3	10	8	8	9	8	10	8	10	9	9	9	9
4	4	5	5	5	8	10	6	5	9	7	9	9
5	5	1	8	8	10	10	8	10	10	9	9	9
6	3	6	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	9
7	9	7	9	8	9	9	6	6	7	7	8	9
8	2	2	6	8	9	10	8	5	8	5	9	10
9	8	5	5	9	8	8	8	10	10	5	10	10
10	4	4	4	6	6	8	8	7	7	4	5	7
11	3	4	3	2	8	10	3	6	9	5	8	8
12	2	1	1	2	2	8	6	6	7	5	5	5
13	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	8	8	2	2	2
14	1	5	6	5	5	8	9	9	9	8	8	9
15	6	1	2	2	8	8	3	5	9	2	3	9
16	5	5	5	3	5	8	3	8	8	5	7	7
17	9	3	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
18	2	2	1	2	9	9	7	10	10	2	7	9
19	4	5	8	9	9	9	7	7	9	9	9	9
20	3	9	3	3	10	10	9	7	5	5	9	9
Mean	4.6	4.3	5.25	5.5	7.4	8.5	6.65	7.65	8.4	6	7.55	8.15
STD DEV	2.58	2.36	2.79	2.8	2.44	1.99	2.46	1.9	1.43	2.43	2.28	2.16
<b>Scale: 1=Not Important at All</b>						<b>10=Critically Important</b>						

**Table 6.19:  
Perceptions of Partners in the Collaboration  
Grouped by City**

	Our local government partners should be...	Detour	Eliseville	Acme	Bedford Falls	Coletown	MEAN	STDEV
	Interview Question	N=5	N=6	N=3	N=2	N=4	N=20	N=20
a	Communities we do not directly compete with for residents and development.	6.33	4.00	6.33	6.00	4.00	5.33	1.22
b	Similar to our community in terms of wealth and racial composition.	6.33	5.00	6.33	4.50	3.25	5.08	1.31
c	Similar to our community in terms of governmental structure (i.e.) either both council-manager or both mayor-council systems.	6.67	4.83	6.67	5.50	5.00	5.73	0.89
d	Similar to our community in terms of powers (i.e.) both cities or both townships.	7.00	4.50	7.00	5.00	5.50	5.80	1.15
e	Able to provide similar levels of resources to the effort.	8.00	8.00	8.00	5.50	5.50	7.00	1.37
f	Seeking the same benefits of this collaboration as we are.	8.33	8.83	8.33	5.50	8.50	7.90	1.36
g	Communities that have successfully collaborated with us in the past.	7.33	5.50	7.33	4.00	8.25	6.48	1.71
h	Communities whose elected officials are in frequent contact with ours.	8.67	6.83	8.67	7.00	8.00	7.83	0.88
i	Communities whose senior administrators are in frequent contact with ours.	8.33	8.00	8.33	7.50	8.25	8.08	0.35
j	Communities that have similar land uses to ours (i.e., mostly residential).	7.67	5.50	7.67	4.50	6.75	6.42	1.39
k	Communities that have similar service requirements to ours (i.e., non-industrial).	8.33	7.33	8.33	5.00	7.00	7.17	1.57
l	Communities that have equipment and training similar to ours	7.67	8.50	7.67	5.50	7.75	7.42	1.13
<b>Scale: 1=Not Important at All</b>							<b>10=Critically Important</b>	

**Table 6.20:  
Perceptions of Partners in the Collaboration  
Grouped by Role**

	Our local government partners should be...	Mayor	City Council	City Manager	Fire Chief	Fire Fighter	MEAN	STDEV
	Interview Question	N=4	N=3	N=3	N=5	N=5	N=20	N=20
a	Communities we do not directly compete with for residents and development.	2.50	3.67	3.67	6.20	5.80	4.37	1.57
b	Similar to our community in terms of wealth and racial composition.	4.00	6.00	3.00	4.40	4.20	4.32	1.08
c	Similar to our community in terms of governmental structure (i.e.) either both council-manager or both mayor-council systems.	3.75	4.67	6.00	5.80	5.80	5.20	0.97
d	Similar to our community in terms of powers (i.e., both cities or both townships).	3.50	5.67	6.00	6.60	5.60	5.47	1.17
e	Able to provide similar levels of resources to the effort.	7.50	8.00	6.67	8.00	6.80	7.39	0.64
f	Seeking the same benefits of this collaboration as we are.	9.25	8.00	6.67	9.00	8.80	8.34	1.05
g	Communities that have successfully collaborated with us in the past.	6.25	6.67	6.00	6.60	7.40	6.58	0.53
h	Communities whose elected officials are in frequent contact with ours.	7.50	6.67	8.67	6.60	8.80	7.65	1.05
i	Communities whose senior administrators are in frequent contact with ours.	9.25	6.67	8.67	8.00	9.00	8.32	1.03
j	Communities that have similar land uses to ours (i.e., mostly residential).	5.50	6.67	6.00	5.40	6.60	6.03	0.59
k	Communities that have similar service requirements to ours (i.e., non-industrial).	8.00	8.00	6.33	6.80	8.40	7.51	0.89
l	Communities that have equipment and training similar to ours.	8.75	7.33	6.67	8.80	8.40	7.99	0.95
<b>1=Not Important At All</b>		<b>10=Critically Important</b>						

**CHAPTER 7**  
**DIFFERENCES IN THE ROLES PLAYED BY ELECTED**  
**AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICIALS**

Frederickson contends that modern public administration has developed techniques to deal with the problems associated with what he calls the fragmented and disarticulated state. Much of the existing literature on interlocal collaboration examines and emphasizes the role played by administrative officials. Elected officials are usually described as having a narrow or more parochial view of interlocal issues, but administrative officials, because of their training and participation in professional organizations, are thought to have a broader or more metropolitan view. H. George Frederickson argued that “there are few incentives for elected officials to spend much energy or political capital in the interests of non-constituents who cannot vote for them” (Frederickson 1999, p. 710). According to this line of reasoning, while elected officials are more concerned with jurisdictionally based issues, their administrative counterparts are engaged in networks to solve various intergovernmental problems (Frederickson 1999).

The one major exception to this approach is Eric Zeemering’s case analysis of interlocal cooperation in western Michigan. Contrary to Frederickson’s predictions, Zeemering (2007) shows distinct differences in the roles played by elected and appointed officials engaged in collaboration activity. Zeemering’s research showed the elected officials interviewed had a clear understanding of their roles and that the involvement of elected officials is “rarely assessed in current inter-local cooperation research . . . elected officials are attentive to the terms of collaboration and the economic implications of service sharing for their jurisdictions” (Zeemering 2007, p. 331).

The importance of administrators, often city managers, in the use of external service delivery arrangements has been examined in many studies. For instance, Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) found that the presence of a professional administrator was associated with greater levels of intergovernmental contracting. This general finding is also supported by Brown and Potoski (2003), Carr and LeRoux (2005) and Zeemering (2007). This research tends to equate the lack of a city manager with an absence of incentives to adopt external service production arrangements, including collaborative arrangements with other governments.

Zeemering shifted attention back to the role that elected officials play in these issues. This is an important shift, because elected officials are key actors in local governments. Their role in these issues must be fully understood. Elected officials must give the final approval to any decision to collaborate inter-jurisdictionally. Elected officials play an important part in making our democracy work at the local level, indeed at every level of American federalism. Obtaining public approval and support of collaboration activities may be desirable but not always possible. As Lyons, Lowery and DeHoog (1992) have argued, local citizens do not always demonstrate a thorough understanding of or appreciation for how public goods and services are produced and provided. The national government has been trying since the Great Society days of the 1960s to foster, at the city level, greater citizen involvement in the decision-making process of policies and programs affecting them. Those efforts have provided mixed results.

The American governmental system is a representative democracy. Encouraging citizen involvement and approval of government actions is important. Yet, in a modern metropolitan area, obtaining that involvement can be problematic. In one sense, elected

officials provide a channel through which such citizen involvement is achieved. “In a representative democracy, our attention should turn to the role of local elected officials, serving as intermediaries for citizens in the negotiation of intergovernmental service arrangements” (Zeemering 2007, p. 22). Elected officials can serve to articulate the preferences of their residents because “elected officials enter into intergovernmental discussions as direct representatives of citizens, but also as representatives of a government with authority and responsibilities for its citizens” (Zeemering 2007, p. 23).

This chapter builds on Zeemering’s work by uncovering the different roles played by the elected and administrative actors in planning, negotiating and facilitating the DFA collaboration. As seen in previous chapters, elected and administrative actors in collaboration think differently about the relevant issues in some respects. Question B-1(j) in Chapter Four asks for the interviewee’s perception of whether they thought their residents placed more value on protecting the city’s control over public services than on lowering the costs of those services. City council members averaged the lowest group response at (5.00) and fire fighters registered the highest group response at (6.80).

Question C-1(a) in Chapter Five asks the respondents how important it is that their city save money in the first three to five years. Elected officials had much higher expectations of saving money through this collaboration than the administrative officials. Question C-1(b) asks how important it is that the city save money after the first five years. Elected officials registered a mean response of (9.00) to that question while administrative officials (fire chiefs 7.80 and city managers 7.67) had lower expectations for savings.

Question D-1(a) in Chapter Six asks how important it is that collaborating cities not directly compete with one another for residents and economic development. Fire chiefs

(6.20) and fire fighters (5.80) gave the highest group responses. City council members (3.67), mayors (2.50) and city managers (3.67) consider that issue as less important. Question D-1(b) asks how important it is that collaborating partner cities be similar to one another in terms of wealth and racial composition. City council members (6.00) and city managers (3.00) perceive the issue much differently. Question D-1(c) asks how important it is that collaborating partners have similar governmental structures. The mayors (3.75) and city managers (6.00) perceive that issue much differently.

### **Roles of Elected and Administrative Officials: Responses to Open-Ended Questions**

Elected officials and administrative officials in this study tend to view the issues in collaboration differently. A series of open-ended questions were asked of elected and administrative officials to gain a better understanding of the role of regular contact among collaboration partners and the role networks play in collaboration efforts. These questions are designed to also reveal what kinds of activities officials engage in, whether other options were considered, what is the most difficult aspect of pursuing collaboration, and the official's biggest concerns about this effort.

This dissertation uses a case study and qualitative data to test theory and achieve a better understanding of the role that both elected and administrative officials play in the development of collaborative activities. These questions also provide insights into the role of elected and administrative officials and the important activities of, and influences upon, each. Tables are interspersed throughout the chapter to make it easier for the reader to refer to the question being asked.

This chapter reads differently than the previous empirical chapters as scaled questions were used. A series of open-ended narrative questions are used to delve the perceptions of these respondents and gain a better understanding of the roles played by elected and administrative officials in this DFA collaboration.

<b>Table 7.1: Regular Contact, General Cooperation and the Perceptions of Officials</b>	
E-1 (a)	Do you talk with officials from other local governments on a regular basis? If so, how often would you say you do in a typical week? Month? Or year?
E-2	Do you think local governments in this area work together on public policy/public service quite a bit? some? or not much at all?
E-3	Assuming there is no right or wrong way to do so, do you think administrative officials and elected officials think about the issue(s) of collaboration in the same way or differently? If differently, what might account for any differences between them?

#### Attitudes toward Interlocal Issues

In an effort to better understand the frequency and importance of networking among collaboration partners, the respondents were asked if they talked with officials from other local governments on a regular basis (question E-1a). The Acme fire union president indicated “pretty regular contact with my counterparts in other cities.” All five fire chiefs stated that they had regular contact with their counterparts at least monthly and often weekly. The elected officials interviewed responded that they have regular contact with each other, ranging from a high of weekly contact to a low of contact at least once a month.

When asked what form these regular contacts took, the administrative official respondents noted that they spoke with one another on the telephone, most of them regularly sent email messages to one another and met regularly at meetings of the Downriver Fire Chiefs Association, City Managers Association or at monthly union meetings of the fire fighters locals. The elected officials indicated that they had regular

contact through the DCC, the Michigan Municipal League and less formal social gatherings in the area, but do not have the same frequent contact with their counterparts that administrative officials do. Contact among administrative officials tended to be less social and more substantive or work-related. When asked if they consider this regular contact important, the majority of the respondents thought that this regular contact was a significant contributing factor to this collaboration.

When asked if, in their opinion, the local governments in their area cooperated quite a bit, some or not much at all (question E-2), the respondents answered overwhelmingly some or not much at all. The responses of the elected and the administrative officials tended to be somewhat different. The administrative officials indicated that they regularly discuss and cooperate on the development of fire-related policy. The elected officials indicated that they did not discuss or cooperate on policy development to any real extent. Any discussions relating to policy was reportedly during DCC meetings but otherwise was conducted on a strictly informal basis, often at social or political gatherings.

When asked if elected and administrative officials think the same way about the issues involved in collaboration and if differently, what might account for that (question E-3), the Acme city council president said she believed elected and administrative officials thought “differently. The administrators consult one another.” The Acme fire union president believed they think “differently . . . I think they have different time frames . . . elected officials have to work in the here and now and other people [administrative officials] have to plan twenty years down the road.” The Acme fire chief said “elected officials are more concerned with the money being paid . . . administrators have to be

concerned with how to make it work.” The city manager in Eliseville said “I think administrators think more on the mechanics, nuts and bolts of costs savings . . . the elected official is more concerned with the political ramifications, how this will affect my political base.”

A fire lieutenant in the Detour Fire Department said “elected officials are thinking about their legacy, their reelection.” The Coletown fire chief stated “differently I think, elected officials are looking at the financial end of things . . . administrative officials like myself are more concerned with the day-to-day operations of making this thing work properly.” The mayor of Eliseville concluded that they “think differently . . . their motivations are different . . . administrators should be looking for efficiency and effectiveness . . . elected officials sometimes have other motivations, I think.” A fire captain in the Coletown Fire Department said that they are remarkably different, “elected officials are more focused on the budget, battles won and battles lost. Appointed officials like me have to be more practical in their approach . . . we all have to win with this collaboration . . . I think some elected officials want a win and that mentality is not going to work here.”

The four respondents who have worked as elected and administrative officials over the course of their careers provided interesting insight on this issue. The mayor of Detour was previously a city manager for over thirty years. He said that “we think the same way . . . when I was a city manager the mayor and I thought in pretty much the same ways.” The city manager in Bedford Falls was previously the mayor in another city. He said “I think that they see it differently. Administrators think in terms of efficiency but elected officials don’t want to anger the electorate.” The newly elected mayor of Detour, who previously

worked as an administrator for many years at the County Sheriffs Department and then in administration in the same County said that he believed they thought “similarly . . . cost factors are important to both of us.” Finally, an Eliseville city council member who had worked for over thirty years as a city administrator, said “I’ve been on both sides . . . I see a bigger picture now that I’m an elected official. I think we need to have better communication and understanding between elected and administrative officials on these issues.”

These responses suggest that the majority of elected and administrative officials involved in this joint effort do think differently about the issues involved in collaborating on these services. When asked if they thought elected and administrative officials think about the issues of collaboration in the same way, both elected and administrative officials overwhelmingly concluded that they think differently. Generally, both groups indicated that elected officials have to be worried more about the budget, public reaction and the political consequences. The consensus was that administrative officials are generally more focused on the day-to-day operations of the fire service, making things work smoothly and properly. Some administrative officials expressed concern that some elected officials were more interested in a “win” rather than on ensuring the collaboration was organized and operated in the best interest of the public.

<b>Table 7.2: The Importance of Area Networks</b>	
E-4	In your opinion, was there any formal or informal network or group of persons, cities or agencies that were instrumental to the start-up of this collaboration? If yes, please explain how it started and why it matters to this collaboration effort.
E-5	Obviously you're employed by this community and your work is designed to improve the conditions of this community. That being said, do you think your work should have any broader implications or benefits for the larger metropolitan community?
E-6	Whether or not you belong to them, are there any professional organizations or local networking groups that have been important to this effort?
E-7	Do you think that an officials participation in the Michigan Municipal League, the International County-City Management Association, the National League of Cities and other similar organizations or having professional training or a college degree in administration (i.e. MPA or MBA) influences how or even if an official might approach the issue of interlocal collaboration? If yes, how?

### Effects of Local Area Networks on Collaboration

Previous research emphasized the importance of area networks of local government officials. Research by LeRoux (2007) showed that community conferences in the Metropolitan Detroit area played an important role in encouraging the formation of networks among the local government officials of nineteen separate governments. Thurmaier and Wood (2002) concluded that regional organizations like the Kansas City Metropolitan Area's Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) may foster collaboration among jurisdictions in their area. The respondents were asked several questions to illustrate the role of professional networks in this collaboration.

The communities involved in this DFA collaboration have cooperated through a system of mutual aid to deliver public safety services for many years. The respondents' answers indicate that these communities, and most especially the staff at the five fire departments, have come to trust one another and depend on one another to a considerable extent. "Interlocal agreements are more likely the products of positively connected exchange relationships facilitated by a regional norm of reciprocity and a brokering role

that synergistically augments local resources into the provision of effective government services in a metropolitan area” (Thurmaier and Wood 2002, p. 590).

When asked about the presence of formal or informal networks or groups of people instrumental to the start-up of this collaboration, the respondents repeatedly mentioned the importance of organizations facilitating the development of local networks. Over half of the respondents mentioned the DCC as being important to their efforts, especially early on. The Acme city council president said that “the Downriver Community Conference was one agency that contributed strongly.” The mayor of Eliseville stated “the Downriver Community Conference has been instrumental.” Other groups important to the development of this collaboration were the Downriver Fire Chiefs Association, the network of local fire fighters unions and the long-standing informal relationships that had developed among the mayors of these communities.

This research also examined the views of these elected and administrative officials about how important their work is to neighboring cities. Asked if their work should have significance beyond the community in which they are employed, the vast majority of the respondents indicated that they believe their work should have benefits for communities beyond their employing jurisdiction.

The Acme fire union president stated “yes, I think more fire fighters working . . . you have better safety in numbers . . . you can provide a better service . . . I think my work definitely benefits the surrounding communities.” The mayor of Detour said “our quality of service depends a lot on the whole area . . . if we can improve our lot by helping Eliseville, then we are better off . . . you never lose your next door neighbor without hurting yourself . . . we are still neighbors.” The mayor of Coletown said, “I’m a great

believer that what happens in the city next door is important to my city . . . our people live in one city, work in another, play ball somewhere else . . . we intermingle to a great extent . . . we are all concerned about one another's city."

The city manager of Detour said "my major efforts are in Detour, but I also think my efforts should benefit the entire Downriver area . . . Times are telling economically . . . wherever I go I try to promote the region . . . we all have the same issues, just in different degrees." The city manager of Eliseville said "yes, I think state planning laws now say you have to notify your neighbors on issues . . . none of us is an island anymore, we all affect each other . . . we have to consider how this is going to work in the region." The mayor of Eliseville stated "Yes, absolutely. You would have to be a fool to believe that you can contain your actions within your borders . . . again, these artificial borders, these lines drawn on a map mean nothing to developers or people looking for a new home." The mayor went on to speculate about area development, "a new plant is going to potentially involve pollution coming into my city . . . I think you always have to be thinking in a broader context."

Overall, the administrative officials interviewed appeared consistent in the opinion that their work had impact beyond their own city. However, one exception to this view was expressed by the newly elected mayor of Detour. He stated "I serve the citizens of this city . . . higher levels of government can worry about the larger area . . . the County Executive looks out for the County, the Governor watches out for the state."

With very few exceptions, the respondents indicated that their work, while primarily benefiting their own community, should and does have significance for the surrounding area. Responses to this question reinforce the idea that the tightly-packed

communities making up this regional area are interdependent and that what each community does has an impact on its neighbors. This data shows once again that metropolitan area elected and administrative officials express a belief that the artificial boundaries drawn on a city map do not accurately capture the essence of how these regions are actually organized and how they operate on a daily basis.

When asked if there are any professional organizations or local networks important to this collaboration effort, the respondents were almost unanimous in their response. The city council president of Acme said the “Michigan Municipal League has been an important tool for our city and others to discuss collaboration.” The DCC, the Michigan City Manager Association, the Michigan Association of Mayors, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, the Michigan Municipal Finance Officer Association, the Michigan Fire Fighter Association, the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, the International Fire Fighter Association along with the Downriver Fire Chief Association were all mentioned as organizations that promoted collaboration generally or facilitated networks critical to the collaboration.

**Figure 7.1: Networks Mentioned as Valuable in Facilitating this Collaboration.**

Networks	Percentage of Respondents Mentioning this Network
Downriver Community Conference	55%
Downriver City Managers Association	35%
Downriver Fire Chiefs Association	30%
Michigan Suburbs Alliance	20%
Michigan Municipal League	15%
Southeast Michigan Council of Governments	15%
International Association of Fire Fighters Locals	5%

Several respondents indicated that one or more of these organizations provided white papers, model formats and model agreements that were useful in getting their collaboration started. Many of the respondents also indicated that the issues surrounding collaboration had been a topic of conversation within these networks for some time and that those conversations had helped prepare them for this activity.

It is clear from this data that these participants have a strong perception that networks of professional organizations do have a positive influence on this potential collaboration by fostering conversation and debate about the topic and by developing model agreements used to organize collaborative activity.

When asked whether they thought that certain kinds of professional education or participation in certain professional organizations might influence how they approach this issue (question E-7), the consensus was that education, particularly a Bachelors or Masters degree in Public Administration (MPA) or a Bachelors/Masters degree in Business Administration (MBA), changed the way they did their job and how they viewed issues like collaboration. A sergeant at the Coletown Fire Department indicated that “yes, education plays a significant role . . . I have a B.A. in Business Administration and it clearly influences how I approach these issues. I think it makes you more realistic, you’re exposed to more.” The city manager in Eliseville stated “it’s that common platform they are working from on similar programs and topics . . . I have an MPA and it changes how you look at issues.”

Most of the respondents also said that participation in professional organizations such as the Michigan Municipal League, the International City-County Management Association and other similar organizations influenced how collaboration was discussed

and undertaken. The fire chief in Coletown said “absolutely, in professional organizations we meet and discuss these issues all the time . . . we have a common education/training/life experiences that definitely impact our approach to how we do these things.” The mayor of Eliseville stated “I think that this kind of progressive idea of collaboration is advanced by these kinds of professional organizations.” The Bedford Falls city manager concluded that “participation in the Michigan Municipal League helps . . . you get a broader perspective by talking to people from other cities . . . you develop a broader network . . . you tend to be less parochial in your views.” The city council president of Eliseville said that “through those connections and the experience they offer . . . you have the ability to look at things from different viewpoints.”

The responses to this question indicate that having an education in specific areas and participation in professional organizations which promote the concept of collaboration can have a significant affect on how these issues are perceived and acted upon. Professional organizations provide a forum or platform where these issues can be developed and refined before they are put into practice.

#### The Importance of Political Constituency in Supporting Collaboration

The next set of questions focuses on the importance of political constituencies in favor of collaboration and how such a supportive constituency can be created. These questions also examine the respondents’ perception of who works hardest, elected or administrative officials, to facilitate collaboration.

<b>Table 7.3: Political Constituencies &amp; the Activities of Elected &amp; Administrative Officials</b>	
E-8	Is it important to have a political constituency for cooperation? Do you think administrators play a role in creating one?
E-9	Thinking in terms of the overall effort to establish this collaboration, what percentage has been driven by administrative officials and what percentage has been driven by elected officials?
E-10	What kind of activities can elected officials engage in to accomplish this kind of collaboration?
E-11	What kinds of activities can administrative officials engage in to accomplish this kind of collaboration?

When asked if it is important to have a political constituency support a collaborative activity (question E-8), the fire chief of Acme said “yes it was important to have the people on board, to have them understand.” The mayor of Detour said that “it’s important, but even without it I would still pursue it . . . if they’re against it maybe I haven’t explained it well enough . . . they can always vote me out of office, but I’m not going to change my standards for political reasons.” The city manager in Eliseville, who others describe as a driving force in the DFA collaborative, said “I don’t think there is one . . . individual officials may be for or against it but I don’t think it’s critical to have one before you proceed.”

The fire chief of Detour stated that “if the citizens were strongly against it, were negative about it, we would not be involved in this collaboration.” The mayor of Eliseville said that “yes, a political constituency is helpful.” The Bedford Falls city manager said “yes I do, I think you have to have it.” He went on to explain that since this happens through a political process it was most important from his perspective to have a “city council that will approve it.” The mayor of Coletown said “yes, to a certain extent I think it’s important.” An Eliseville city council member said “yes, it is overall eventually, but it is not a critical issue before starting something like this.” The Eliseville city council president concluded “no I don’t...we could do it without that support if we had to.”

Although most respondents agree that it is good to have public support, there is not a clear consensus on this. Many respondents indicated that they would go forward without such constituency support if they believed it was in the best interest of the community.

When asked what percentage of the initial work to establish the collaboration was conducted by administrative personnel and what percentage by elected officials (question E-9), the responses appear to depend on the role of that respondent in the organization. Although there were exceptions, administrative personnel generally responded that 50 to 80 percent of the overall effort was accomplished by the administrative personnel working on the collaboration and that less than 50 percent generally was contributed by the elected officials. Elected officials generally reported that they thought that 50 to 80 percent of the initial effort was attributable to the elected officials involved in the collaboration and 50 percent or less was attributable to the administrative personnel. The exception to this pattern is seen in the responses of the fire chiefs who universally indicated that 60 to 100 percent is attributable to the activities of the elected officials.

When asked what kinds of activities elected officials could engage in to better facilitate this collaboration (question E-10), a dominant theme mentioned was educating the public about the benefits of collaboration. The Acme city council president stated that they could “educate the people.” The mayor of Detour said that they could “help in the education of administrative personnel and citizens.” The city manager of Detour mentioned that “they need to guide the overall policy effort.” The Eliseville city manager said that they could help “by maintaining a positive role in the effort . . . they can give encouragement to the administrators and let them know that it’s important and a part of their regular duties.” The fire chiefs of Detour and Eliseville both said they “should

educate the public about the benefits of this collaboration.” The mayor of Eliseville noted that elected officials should “stay informed, stay focused on the end, the goals . . . put away our personal gains and think about the greater good.”

When asked what administrative officials could do to better facilitate this collaboration (question E-11), the fire chief of Acme said that he could “free-up his union representatives to be actively engaged in the effort.” The Detour city manager said that “the biggest thing we cannot do is to get frustrated by the process...stay positive about it.” The city manager in Eliseville stated that they could help “by conducting good analysis of what you’re doing . . . know for sure whether or not it’s a good thing for your city . . . stay up to date on what’s going on in your region, your state.” The fire chief of Bedford Falls said that it was “maintaining a positive perspective.” The Coletown fire chief said that his most important contribution was “keeping an open line of communication with our fire employees.” The mayor of Eliseville said that the administrative officials should “stay educated, articulate and up to date on the collaboration.” The Coletown mayor said that they should “provide information to us that is fair and accurate.”

**Figure 7.2: How Elected & Administrative Officials Facilitate Collaboration**

Elected Officials	Percentage of Respondents Mentioning	Administrative Officials	Percentage of Respondents Mentioning
Educate Public on the Benefits	55%	Provide Fair and Accurate Information	55%
Stay informed and Stay Focused	35%	Keep Lines of Communication Open	40%
Maintain a Positive Role	25%	Maintain a Positive Perspective	30%
Encourage Administrators	20%	Stay Current on Developments	20%
Educate Administrators on Benefits	15%	Not get Frustrated by the Process	20%
Focus on the Greater Good	15%	Conduct Good Analysis	20%
Guide the Overall Policy Effort	10%	Free up Subordinates Time to Participate	5%
Forget about Personal Gains	10%		

The responses to these questions indicate that both elected and administrative officials play important roles in the collaborative process. Also, the consensus is that while they play different roles, both have roles to play with a significant impact on the outcome of the collaboration. The respondents said that it is important for administrative officials working on collaborative activities to maintain a positive attitude, stay up to date on the activity and keep lines of communication open, while providing accurate and pertinent information to elected officials. Elected officials need to encourage their administrative officials, let them know that collaboration is an important part of their “regular” work and help educate the public about benefits that can be gained.

<b>Table 7.4: Can Problems be Addressed Internally</b>	
E-12	Is there any way that these issues could have been resolved solely within your jurisdiction? If yes, how?
E-13	Have you or has your jurisdiction ever engaged in cross-functional coordination within your community such as public safety officers or similar activities? If so, how did that come about and what were the results?

### Other Avenues for Addressing these Problems

When asked if the problems faced by the city could be resolved internally without collaboration (question E-12), the Acme fire chief said that they could not handle these problems alone “because of the issues . . . the cities are doing things totally different, it’s like night and day . . . it’s too hard to act jointly right now and accomplish everything we want to.” The Detour city manager said, “no, this collaboration is a must knowing what is coming up for us . . . increasing cost of equipment.” The fire chief of Bedford Falls noted “I don’t think we could . . . we can’t control our costs or our revenues so it’s getting out of our control.” The Coletown fire chief said “no, finances would be just too much of a problem . . . we have been hit hard over the past three years . . . we can only restructure so much.” An Eliseville city council member said “no, we can’t do this on our own . . . we can’t even maintain the level of services we have now . . . the quality of service cannot be maintained unless we figure out some way of working with other groups.” The Eliseville city council president said “you can only cut so much and then service levels become unacceptable . . . we need a bigger organization.”

A few respondents identified internal solutions to these problems. A lieutenant in the Detour Fire Department responded that he thought they could possibly address these issues successfully on their own, “people have a lot of pride in this town. If we had to increase taxes to keep good fire services here, I think they would go for it.” The fire chief in Bedford Falls stated “sure, add money to the mix and we can solve a lot of this . . . [we should] separate medical rescue from fire fighting.” The newly elected mayor of Detour stated “yes we could, legacy costs are a big issue . . . we need to go to a defined

contribution pension system . . . change some of the union contracts . . . we need to change the systems for new hires.”

When asked this question, all but three of the respondents indicated there was no way that the problems they were encountering could be resolved by each community alone. Given the increasing costs of labor and equipment necessary to provide a modern fire service, coupled with the decline in state revenue sharing and anticipated decline in local tax base as a result of declining home values, the respondents do not believe solving the problems alone is a realistic alternative. Most of the respondents also said that they believe they have accomplished as much as they can through the DCC Mutual Aid System and that better collaboration is necessary to maintain an adequate level of public services. Those indicating these issues could be addressed by individual communities stated that doing so will require significant increases in funding, an alternative that looks increasingly unlikely given the current economic outlook in this area and statewide.

When asked whether their city had ever considered or engaged in cross-functional internal collaboration such as combining police and fire fighting services (question E-13), the Acme fire chief said “we have talked about it, eight or nine years ago but not lately. It never happened, because you know, if my guys wanted to carry a gun they would have checked that box . . . they are different kinds of people.” The Detour city manager said “no, I think we should, but I have not been able to convince folks here of the wisdom of doing that . . . I think this city would be perfect for a public safety kind of coordination but when I bring it up, I get the cold shoulder.” The fire chief in Bedford Falls stated “it’s been brought up as a threat before.” The fire chief in Detour said “we have discussed public safety officers before, but it never went very far . . . a mayor previously tried to actually

appoint a public safety chief over both police and fire . . . it didn't go far." The mayor of Eliseville said "it was discussed here previously, but never came about. I don't think it could ever happen here." The newly elected mayor of Detour said "it was discussed previously, but shot down quickly . . . the unions have strongly objected to this."

The strategy most often mentioned by the respondents in answer to this question was an attempt to combine or coordinate fire and police services. All of the cities had at least seriously discussed the possibility, but none actually attempted to combine such service provision. Many of the respondents mentioned the strong union presence in their region as a major reason such coordination was never seriously undertaken. Not believing such coordination to be a true alternative, these communities began to discuss the possibility of forming an inter-jurisdictional fire authority some time ago.

### Looking Back and Looking Forward

The following represents a final set of questions asked of the interview subjects as a way of concluding the research interview and asking them to pause for a moment and look ahead at the potential implementation of the DFA collaboration.

<b>Table 7.5: Looking Back and Looking Forward</b>	
F-1	In your view, what is the most difficult aspect of pursuing this effort?
F-2	As you look forward, what are your three biggest concerns about the future of this effort?
F-3	If you made decisions on this project again with the information you have now, would you still support working with another jurisdiction?

All of the respondents had been involved in the planning of the DFA collaboration for over eighteen months at the time of these interviews and many participated in the planning of the same type of collaboration back in the early 1990s. When asked what the

most difficult aspect of pursuing this collaboration was (question F-1), the Acme city council president indicated that it was achieving a win-win solution for all five communities because of their differing constituencies. Echoing the work of John Kingdon (2003) on policy streams and policy windows, the council president went on to point out “this is complicated by the fact that each community has elected officials that will change, newly elected officials may not be supportive . . . there is a time window during which we may achieve success.” The fire chief in Acme thought “putting the labor agreement together” was the most difficult aspect. The mayor of Detour said that “getting the implementation plan in written form so as to address the concerns of all five communities” was a big issue.

The city manager in Eliseville stated that it was “keeping the energy level up . . . it takes a lot . . . it isn’t part of your daily work . . . we’re currently negotiating a new labor agreement with our fire department while at the same time working to establish this fire authority . . . it’s a challenge in many ways.” The fire chief of Bedford Falls said “I liken it to taking five established families and putting them into one house . . . and most of those people are going to have new parents . . . new rules to live by . . . try making that work.” The Coletown fire chief thought that “trying to establish a stable funding source” for the fire authority was the most difficult problem. The mayor of Eliseville said,

these local principalities that are deeply rooted politically are difficult and you cannot discount them . . . there is a lot of influence coming from the labor organizations . . . they have a long history of sending retired firemen and policemen to serve on the city council to ensure the continued flow of benefits to their groups.

The mayor of Coletown said it was “the union issues . . . an unwillingness to start new.”

The city manager of Bedford Falls thought it was “the attitude of some of our fire fighters

. . . their mistrust . . . some of our fire fighters think we're doing this just to screw them over somehow, that's not true." The fire chief in Eliseville indicated that the most difficult part for him was "finding the time to be really active in the process."

**Figure 7.3: Biggest Concerns about the Future of this Collaboration.**

Future Concerns Most often Mentioned	Percentage of Respondents Mentioning this Issue
Putting Together a Labor Agreement	60%
Establishing a Stable Funding Source	35%
Putting Implementation Plan Together	35%
Achieving a "Win-Win" for Everyone	35%
Lack of Trust between Labor and Management	15%
Keeping our Energy Level up	10%
Losing Control over Services	5%
Changes in Elected Participants	5%

The responses to this question indicate that getting an operational plan and labor agreement in place was the most difficult aspect of collaboration. Several respondents stated that it was very difficult maintaining day-to-day operations while simultaneously working to develop and implement such a big change in those very same day-to-day operations.

There is significant agreement among the respondents about their three biggest challenges in the future (question F-2). Three-quarters of the respondents indicated that getting a labor agreement that covered the new authority in all five cities would be a big challenge. Yet, even with such consensus about how important writing the labor agreement was, not even a rough draft of a labor agreement had been produced to date and there was considerable disagreement as to which side would make the first move in drafting one. The responses indicate that the two sides are far apart on their understanding of how the labor issues will be addressed.

A second issue raised by nearly half of the respondents is how the new fire authority will be funded. Agreeing on a stable source of funding for this collaboration is clearly critical to this effort, yet this issue did not seem to be very far along toward resolution at the time of these interviews. When asked specifically about the funding source, the respondents had different ideas about how the authority would be funded. Some thought a separate millage would be introduced to fund the operations. Others that each of the five communities would merely contribute what they were already spending for their fire services and from those resources provide the funding for the new authority. Some of the respondents speculated that a combination of tax base and fire runs would be used to assess the costs to each city. Finally, some of the respondents simply said they did not know how the new authority would be funded.

Several of the respondents also mentioned the operating agreement of the fire authority itself as a major concern going forward. Among the important issues mentioned was making sure that the relationship is a stable one and that there are guarantees providing each city the option of leaving the authority. Another issue is how the differences in operating costs of the five cities would be resolved by the agreement. All five fire departments currently have different pay rates, pension benefits, health care options, vacation and leave time policies and operating rules.

Another issue raised was whether state statutes governing fire departments somehow guaranteed that no bargaining unit would suffer a loss as a result of consolidating operations in this way. Most respondents were not exactly sure what that meant in a practical sense. Some respondents feared this might mean that all personnel of the new fire authority would have to be brought up to the highest existing pay and benefit

level of any of the five cities. If so, many wondered how the cities could possibly achieve any kind of cost savings. The two statutes raising the most concern are the Michigan Public Act 312 of 1969, mandating binding arbitration for fire union contract disputes with communities, and the Michigan Urban Cooperation Act of 1967. If the Michigan Urban Cooperation Act is used to form this new organization, the law may require that all members of the new organization be paid the highest wages and benefits existing in the previous constituent communities.

Another major concern reported by the respondents is the need to convince the public of the benefits of collaboration once all agreements and plans are in place. The fire union president in Eliseville said that his major concern going forward was “that people will grow tired of this effort . . . that they’ll settle for less than what is needed . . . if this collaboration doesn’t move forward then we have some serious safety issues.”

At the time this research was conducted, the respondents had been actively engaged in the planning of the DFA collaboration for eighteen months. Many of them were active in the failed attempt to collaborate in the 1990s. Looking back on their experiences over this time frame, the respondents were asked if knowing what they know now, would they still support working with another jurisdiction on such collaboration again in the future (question F-3). Without exception, every one of the respondents said yes, they would support such collaborative activity again in the future, even if this current effort ultimately fails. The Acme fire chief said that “even if some of these cities drop out, I would go forward and I would do this again.” The mayor of Detour said “definitely, without hesitation.” The Detour city manager went even further and said “hell, yeah, I’ll do any

collaboration I can . . . this is a good idea in general . . . we have to start thinking in these terms . . . if it works well for us, lets do it.”

The city manager in Eliseville said

yes . . . if the principles are good, the operating plan is good, improvements in service are good. It should not be an idea that anyone should give up on . . . there are significant challenges because this is the first time such a highly represented group in the public sector is trying this . . . it’s done in the private sector all the time but this is somewhat new for us in the public sector . . . the labor and management relationship issues in the public sector are daunting.

The Coletown fire chief said “yes, if the benefits are there...as a stand alone department we are struggling . . . if this fails we have to do something . . . it’s not safe the way we are operating now.” The mayor of Eliseville said “yes, the public benefit far outweighs the

pain you have to go through to get there . . . I would do it again, in a heartbeat, absolutely.”

A captain of the Coletown Fire Department stated “what we’re doing now, service wise, it’s a disservice to our citizens.” The city manager in Bedford Falls said “yes, absolutely,

collaboration is not always the answer but it is certainly worth considering.” The city council president in Eliseville responded,

definitely, I think the rewards are great and not being willing to look at alternatives is stupidity in this day and age . . . If I could talk to other elected officials about this issue, I would say, go for it . . . there isn’t any reason to not at least consider collaborating like this. When costs are spiraling and services are declining why not look at doing this?

### **Summary Analysis of Open-Ended Questions**

These responses illustrate that the administrative respondents in this study believe they have much more regular and substantive contact with their counterparts and that such regular contact is an important factor in this collaboration. The responses also show that

administrative and elected officials predominantly believe that the communities in this study area do not cooperate on public policy issues to any significant extent.

When asked if elected and administrative officials think alike or differently about the issue of collaboration, the overwhelming response was that they think differently. Administrative officials have to be concerned with making the system operate well, regardless of the circumstances, while elected officials are more concerned with the politics involved, the budgetary issues and how residents perceive collaboration efforts.

The respondents indicated that networks are an important part of collaboration and several are important to this specific effort. The Downriver Community Conference, the Downriver City Manager Association, the Downriver Fire Chief Association, the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, the Michigan Municipal League and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments were mentioned frequently by these respondents.

Examining the respondent's views about collaboration, it is clear that many of them believe that their work, while predominantly benefitting their employing community, should also have a beneficial impact outside that city. Many of the respondents also expressed the belief that having an MPA or other college degree affects how they view their work in general and collaboration specifically. The responses reveal the belief that membership in organizations such as the International City/County Management Association and the American Society for Public Administration also influences how these administrators view collaboration.

When asked if a political constituency is a necessary factor for collaboration, no clear consensus emerged. When examining what kinds of activities elected officials could undertake to facilitate collaboration, several were mentioned. Those activities mentioned

most often included: educating the public about the benefits of collaboration, staying informed, maintaining a positive role and encouraging administrative officials. Activities mentioned most often for administrative officials included providing fair and accurate information, keeping the lines of communication open, remaining current and positive and conducting good analysis of the issues.

When asked if these problems could be solved internally without collaboration, nearly all of these respondents said they could not. The few that said they could be solved internally all indicated that doing so would involve the infusion of large sums of additional money.

Finally, when asked what were the most difficult problems faced and the biggest concerns for the future of this collaboration, respondents mentioned putting together a labor agreement, coming up with an acceptable funding source for the new authority, putting together an acceptable operating agreement and achieving a win-win result for all parties.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE REST OF THE STORY: THE COLLAPSE OF THE DOWNRIVER FIRE

#### AUTHORITY COLLABORATION EFFORT

While the information and data of this study was being tabulated and analyzed in early 2009, the five communities that spent almost two years attempting to form a fire authority to replace their five separate fire departments, decided to suspend their efforts. Given this unexpected development, I decided to re-interview as many of the participants as possible. Those epilogue interviews took place between April 6 and August 21, 2009. All of the original interview subjects were contacted and asked if they would participate in the epilogue interviews. A total of sixteen of the original twenty interview subjects (80 percent) agreed to be interviewed again. All five of the cities are represented in these interviews and the following elected and administrative roles were represented. Most of the interviews were again conducted face-to-face, but a few of the respondents answered these questions by email. The roles of the actors interviewed are detailed in Table 8.1.

Mayors	25 %
City Council Members	6 %
City Managers	13 %
Fire Chiefs	30 %
Fire Command Officers	13 %
Fire Union Representatives	13 %
Total	100%

## Summary and Analysis of Second Interview

Following are the questions asked in an effort to explore specifically what happened to cause these actors, after nearly two years of effort, to suddenly stop all efforts to form a joint fire authority to serve these five communities. What are the main factors present that caused this collapse? Is there anything that can be done to re-start this collaborative effort? Did the intervening political election have any impact on the collapse? If fiscal stress was such a major factor as most of these actors previously indicated, what has changed to alleviate that stress? Of what importance was the actors inability to draft a labor agreement, and develop the method for funding the fire authority?

What is the Current State of this Effort?

The city manager of Eliseville indicated that discussions between several of the participants continue to surface relative to current plans for a police and fire central dispatch. The city manager of Bedford Falls indicated that the effort is merely stalled and the subject continues to come up from time to time. With the exception of two city managers, all of the others interviewed responded that this is a dead issue, no longer under active consideration.

Did the Last Election Impact the Decision to Stop Collaborating?

Why did the DFA effort collapse? There does not appear to be any single cause for the collaboration failure, but there is a consensus that the end came abruptly. However, electoral change seems to have been a major factor. All five communities held elections in November of 2008 and at the next meeting of the DFA, held post-election, it was obvious

that this collaboration effort was not going to move forward. The mayor of Eliseville attended the first meeting after the elections and stated that “within a matter of twenty minutes, eighteen months of work went right out the door.” That mayor went on to explain that “the unions got very active in that election; they had a lot of influence in the process.” Four of the five communities elected new mayors at that time and the mayor of Eliseville concluded that three of them were not up to speed on the effort to form the authority or were actually hostile to the idea. He went on to state “I can think of no other reason for this than the change in political leadership.” The city manager of Eliseville echoed that conclusion stating “we believe it failed for political reasons in Bedford Falls and Detour as the change in position of these two cities followed the last general election.” The city manager of Bedford Falls said “policy makers as a whole chose not to support it.” The fire union president of Acme said that “two of the supportive mayors involved did not get a second term.” The former mayor of Detour lost his bid for reelection and stated “the fire union . . . worked to defeat two of the mayors and were successful. They had two of the remaining mayors questioning the high cost.”

The majority of the respondents answered that the intervening elections did have an influence in the decision to cease the attempt to collaborate. Nearly half of the respondents stated that the results of the elections were a factor in the decision not to form a fire authority. The city manager of Eliseville stated, “from public statements, it appears that was the case in Detour and Acme as those new mayors stated they did not wish to continue.” The city manager of Bedford Falls responded that yes, “two or three of the new mayors did not support the idea.” A fire command officer in Coletown stated that “the loss of the mayor of Detour and the mayor of Acme who had been strong supporters of

collaboration hurt the effort.” The fire chief of Eliseville said that “absolutely the election had a very strong impact in Detour and Bedford Falls. In my opinion, there was a real serious change in the wind right after that election.” The fire chief in Detour responded that “yes, in some sense, I think the political views changed . . . the new politicians expressed very pro-union sentiments during their election campaigns. This is a hard working union town and I think that influence is going to be felt.”

Twenty-five percent of the respondents answered that the intervening elections may have or probably had some influence in the decision to cease collaboration efforts. The fire chief in Bedford Falls said “that occurrence does appear to have been a turning point.” The fire union representative in Eliseville said that two of the mayors who were strong motivators for the collaboration were not there after the election. He explained “I don’t think it was an organized deliberate thing as much as just the natural change that occurs over time.” Only a quarter of the respondents did not think the election influenced the decision.

#### Did Other Factors Contributed to the Collapse of this Collaboration?

The mayor of Coletown stated it was merely the lack of progress that provided the primary reason his city stopped participating. A difference in the expected results of collaboration appears to have been another reason the effort ceased. The fire chief of Bedford Falls said there were a “multitude of reasons but the initial, very quietly spoken catalyst or motivator of saving money for the taxpayers did not jump out as a by-product.” A fire command officer in Coletown indicated that he thought the effort failed because the mayor “started to posture saying he wanted changes in the pension system . . . started to

discuss the issue of Public Act 312 protections being applicable in the new authority.” The fire chief in Eliseville agreed responding “there were individuals who wanted to renegotiate contractually before they would move forward with discussing the forming of the authority . . . sort of damaged the trust levels between the groups.” The fire chief of Detour stated that he “saw a lot of posturing by some of the elected officials of other cities. They wanted short-term savings, they wanted concessions up-front and that just wasn’t going to work.” A fire command officer in Coletown agreed, stating “elected officials have short-term goals. The DFA would cost money up-front and probably not show a benefit for several years.”

#### Is the Lack of a Labor or Funding Agreement Significant?

The importance of having a labor agreement in place is one of the most significant findings of this research. While one or two respondents thought having a labor agreement and a funding agreement was not the biggest issue they faced, the overwhelming majority thought this issue of critical importance. The strongest and most elaborate responses were in reaction to this question. Nearly nine out of ten responded that not having those agreements in place made a difference, was very important, hurt immensely or was critical. The fire chief of Coletown responded that “the lack of a proposed labor agreement hurt immensely.” The city council president of Eliseville said “the labor agreement is critical.” The newly elected mayor of Detour stated “both of those issues were critical and never resolved.”

The fire union representative of Eliseville said “we should have had a master agreement to start with. We (the unions) were given the authority to draft it ourselves and

not doing that was a mistake I think.” He went on to say that “as it was, we didn’t narrow down the fears of people on the speculative nature of what we were doing. It’s hard when you’re used to traditional bargaining methods, it’s tough to show all of your cards and put everything on the table.” A fire captain in Coletown responded that “even the union couldn’t agree on the labor agreement . . . that was a mistake, the union not being able to agree on a draft of how we would handle all of these issues.” In regards to the funding agreement, the captain stated that “nobody had a good handle on how this would be funded, it never got that far.” Elaborating on why negotiations on these agreements did not progress, he noted that “elected officials have a shorter term focus . . . the benefits might be farther down the track, not on their watch. Nobody wants to do something that the next elected official gets to take all of the credit for. They need to think more long-term.”

Both the fire chief of Detour and fire chief of Eliseville made interesting comments relative to how these agreements could be developed. The fire chief of Eliseville stated “it would help if we had a model agreement to use for something like this. It could be developed by the state, unions, a third party, some outside source. It would have been helpful because the trust issue wouldn’t have been as difficult as between the cities and their employees.” The fire chief of Detour stated,

the labor agreement, not having it caused distrust to emerge in the process . . . it would have been helpful if a third party, outside party drafted a labor agreement and a funding agreement that the authority could then use . . . a standard agreement that we could use, capable of tweaking a little but a basic draft . . . at least some basic outlines, best practices, something that is working in another location.

The fire chief of Acme responded “the unions were afraid because they thought that if they drafted the labor agreement, that would cap them and they couldn’t ask for more, they wanted the city to write it.” In regards to the funding agreement, the chief went on to say “we got stuck on who was going to pay for the retirements, different rates of pay, legacy costs were a serious issue that we never overcame.” Agreeing with his colleagues in Eliseville and Detour, the fire chief of Acme went on to state “it would have been helpful to have a model labor and funding agreement ahead of time, but only if it was being used someplace else already and working successfully . . . best practices information would be helpful the next time we try to start something like this.”

#### Can the Collaboration Effort be Re-Started?

Nearly all the respondents said that possible collaboration on fire services will come up again, and may happen at some future date. They also agreed that it will take a higher level of government forcing, or at least encouraging, the parties to collaborate. Several of the respondents argued that it will take a serious problem such as the fiscal collapse of these cities or the death of somebody to bring everyone back to the table to make this collaboration happen. The city manager of Eliseville stated “this will happen, the crisis of the economy is very real and this is the end of the present way of funding municipal services as we know them.” The mayor of Eliseville said that it might take “one of these local cities going into receivership, which will get them serious about this kind of collaboration.” A fire captain in Coletown stated that it might take “the fiscal gun to everybody’s head.” The fire chief in Eliseville contends that it might take “total economic crisis . . . I think things will have to get worse.”

Taking a different approach to what might get the parties to collaborate in the future, the city council president in Eliseville said “I believe we need to get labor to agree to a middle ground pay and benefits package . . . perhaps look at a two-tiered arrangement for wages . . . it has worked elsewhere.” The fire union representative in Eliseville responded that it might take “somebody that is bold enough to do it, an outside party perhaps.” He also thought that the state fire fighters union “could take a position to make this happen if they wanted to. There is no official position on collaboration or consolidation . . . it makes a lot of sense for us to share, how can people not see that?”

Offering one final comment to this question, the fire chief of Detour stated “the cities and the unions need to be partners in the true sense of the word.”

Has the Problem of Fiscal Stress been Alleviated?

The issue of fiscal stress in these communities is frequently quoted as being a primary motivator in this effort. Because the collaboration failed, the interview subjects were asked if those fiscal stressors had somehow been removed. Every single respondent indicated that no, the fiscal stress was still present and most of them agreed it was growing worse. The city manager of Eliseville commented,

It has become the primary driving factor and will soon reduce municipal services so significantly that the successful ones will be those using cash balances at a slower rate. We are based on building fees, income tax, sales tax and real property values, all of which are crashing at double-digit rates. A regional fire service may not even be affordable now.

The city manager of Bedford Falls responded “in my opinion the fiscal stress remains, and is, if anything, worse than before. In my view cities will combine departments when they are so stressed that they have no alternative.” The former mayor of Detour said that his city

“has an estimated \$ 70 million unfunded liability for post-employment benefits . . . Ford Motor Company has reduced their personal property taxes to the city . . . most cities are in fiscal stress.”

#### What Obstacles or Mistakes Limited Collaboration?

There is a considerable amount of agreement about the biggest obstacles to this kind of collaboration and about the mistakes made in this effort. Table 8.2 indicates the obstacles the participants discovered in this effort to collaborate. The respondents were not prompted or led in any way when answering this question. The respondents were not given a list of obstacles or mistakes to choose from. Their responses are their own which makes the frequency with which the top obstacles and mistakes are mentioned, all the more impressive and significant.

Obstacle	Percentage of Respondents Mentioning Obstacle
Absence of Agreement on Goals	63 %
Lack of a Comprehensive Labor Agreement	63 %
Lack of Elected Leadership	56 %
Current Attitudes of Fire Fighters	50 %
A Comprehensive Funding Agreement	31 %
Sufficient Trust between the Parties	31 %
Current Employee Compensation Structure	25 %

The respondents were also quite frank in assessing what mistakes they think were made in this attempted collaboration. Table 8.3 indicates some of these mistakes. Many of these mirror judgments as to obstacles to collaboration.

Mistakes Made	Percentage of Respondents Mentioning Mistake
Failure to Agree on Goals of Collaboration	56 %
Failure to Develop a Labor Agreement	50 %
Too many Different Union Positions	44 %
Failure to Develop a Funding Agreement	38 %
Failure to Adequately Communicate	31 %
Involving Labor Representatives too soon	25 %
Involving Elected Leaders too soon	25 %
Failure to Develop an Operating Agreement	19 %

The city manager of Bedford Falls said that if he could do it all over again he would “go to extreme lengths to explain to all what their participation would mean . . . we cannot find out if the project will save money and provide better service without a labor agreement and an agreement about sharing resources.” The fire chief of Bedford Falls commented that elected officials should not “try to sell the idea as a safety improvement for fire fighters when in reality it is a cost cutting project.” The fire chief of Eliseville stated in regard to mistakes that were made that the “labor agreement is the most glaring example, a lot of lateral dancing but no forward movement.” The fire union president in Eliseville agreed stating “not getting an agreement up front of what our goals are was a mistake.” Noting that these same communities attempted this same kind of collaboration in the mid 1990s, he went on to say “we’ve tried it in good economic times and now we’ve tried it in bad economic times and we couldn’t get it done. Not writing a draft labor agreement was a big mistake. It would be helpful to have the state legislature come in and write a model agreement.”

## Concluding Comments

This research is based upon a single case study, so it is prudent to refrain from generalizing these findings too broadly. Still, some of the clearer findings of this study deserve to be tested in future research. Based on extant theories common to the applicable literature, these five cities should have been able to successfully collaborate in providing fire services. The follow-up interviews highlighted why this attempt at collaboration failed.

One of the initial problems this collaboration effort encountered was a significant difference in the expectations for short-term cost savings. The elected officials anticipated significant short-term cost savings. Overwhelmingly, the administrative officials of these five communities did not anticipate any significant short-term cost savings. The majority of these respondents indicated that it is very important that participants all seek the same benefits from collaboration, yet these officials clearly did not anticipate achieving the same benefits.

Roughly three-quarters of these respondents indicated that the political changes that occurred as a result of an intervening election in all five cities had a very strong influence on the decision to cease this effort. Of the three mayors who were the strongest proponents of this collaboration, two lost their bid for reelection and the third did not run. While there are differences of opinion as to how active the labor unions were in these changes in elected officials, it is clear that the changes had a significant and negative impact on this collaboration.

The vast majority (88%) of the respondents stated that it is critically important to achieve a labor and a funding agreement and that it was a huge mistake to not do so in this case. Many respondents indicated that it would be very helpful to have model agreements

in place before such collaboration was attempted again. It was proffered that such a model agreement should be drafted by the state legislature, the state municipal league, the state fire fighters organization or some combination of these groups working together. Not having a labor and a funding agreement in place allowed the inherent mistrust among the parties to emerge and seriously impair this effort.

In the future, a model labor agreement and perhaps even a model funding agreement will be required to ensure the smooth development of these types of authorities. Significant changes may need to be made in the enabling statutes that deal with this kind of public sector collaboration. Because public safety personnel in Michigan are heavily unionized, a method of capturing economies of scale, while still providing an acceptable level of protection for employees, will need to be developed. It is unrealistic to think that such developments can be accomplished on a city-by-city basis. Just as Public Act 312, non-residency for public safety personnel and other factors important to collaboration have been imposed by a higher level of government; these suggested changes too may have to come from the state legislature. Voluntary collaboration is quite possible but some of these basic preliminary issues may be best handled by the state government in order to ensure uniformity.

## CHAPTER 9

### SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

The study of interlocal collaboration undertaken here is important to scholars of local government, the administration of urban areas and especially to those charged with making policy decisions in times of increasing fiscal stress. The basic research questions this study was designed to help answer are (1) what specifically motivates interlocal collaboration? (2) what benefits are the collaborators hoping to gain from the terms of collaboration? (3) what attributes are important in a partner and what are partners seeking from one another? and (4) what are the roles played by elected and administrative officials in collaboration. This research helps advance our knowledge of these issues and provides a better understanding of collaboration in the provision of fire services among local governments.

#### **What Motivates Interlocal Collaboration?**

This research was undertaken in order to examine the reasons why the interview subjects attempted to collaborate. Of equal interest is the question of what mechanisms they developed for dealing with the transaction costs involved in horizontal collaboration? What incentives are present that encourage local public officials to collaborate? This study makes a valuable contribution to a better understanding of the factors that are important to collaboration efforts. Clearly the actors interviewed for this study have a positive attitude toward intergovernmental collaboration. The respondents in this study believe that the organizations they work in are generally open to new ideas, acting proactively and looking for new ways to collaborate with other local governments. This research illustrates that the

perceptions of local government actors regarding collaboration may be an important predisposition to voluntary collaboration.

### The Role of Trust in Collaboration

This research reveals that a certain level of trust among cities attempting to collaborate is important in order to deal with the transaction costs that are often encountered. The costs associated with developing a labor agreement, funding agreement and operating agreement are just such transaction costs. If insufficient trust exists among the participants, excessive drafting and re-drafting of documents and monitoring of partners performance is required which makes collaboration more difficult.

Respondents in this study perceived their residents as somewhat distrustful of the elected officials from surrounding cities and were also somewhat distrustful of the elected officials in their own city. Respondents frequently mentioned the lack of trust between labor and management representatives as being an obstacle to this collaboration. As a result of insufficient trust, a great deal of time was expended by respondents in attempts to pre-negotiate issues before even a draft labor agreement was completed. Respondents noted that the initial lack trust became, over time, a downward spiraling vortex that continuously lowered the level of trust. Given the long history of successful collaboration among these respondents, their inability to deal with this transaction cost, is somewhat surprising.

### Option of County Provided Services

One particularly interesting finding of this study was the overwhelming responses of the interviewees who believe that their residents strongly disagree with having the county provide services to them. There are counties in Michigan and across the nation providing an array of public services to local residents, but these respondents indicate a strong preference for not allowing the county to provide those services. This response was consistent across cities and across the different roles of the respondents. Elling and Carr (2009), found much the same in a survey of Michigan citizens. The response to this question, indicating disagreement with the concept of the county providing services, was by far the strongest negative reaction to any question asked.

### Loss of Local Control over Service Provision

Loss of control over fire services has long been thought to be an obstacle to collaboration. Previous research has argued that the fear of losing control over service production is strong and therefore the net gains of turning to external sources must be substantial (Ferris 1986). Bickers (2005), indicates that local public officials fear losing control over service delivery and that fear can be an obstacle to collaboration. Morgan and Hirlinger (1991), argue that when local officials fear the loss of local control, less intergovernmental contracting tends to occur. The desire to retain independence of action induces local officials to avoid agreements with other political entities. This research found only limited support for those conclusions.

Respondents perceive their residents to be only somewhat in agreement with the idea that maintaining control is more important than lowering costs or improving service

effectiveness overall. This response is fairly consistent across all five cities and across all five roles of respondents. When asked to indicate their own views rather than their perceptions of community residents, respondents said the potential loss of control was unimportant. Control over such services is seen by many respondents as illusory. For those respondents indicating that it was real; most argued that the benefits of collaboration outweighed any potential loss of control. When considering the issue of an escape clause in the authority agreement, which can be seen as reserving some control over these services, the respondents argued for the necessity of having one. However, they went on to explain that actually withdrawing from the authority and establishing a new city fire department would be very difficult and cost prohibitive.

#### Interdependence of Cities as a Motivating Factor

Cooperation on public services is generally thought to be driven, in part, by recognition of interdependence among local jurisdictions (Frederickson 1999, Parks and Oakerson 2000). This study illustrates, however, that it was the perception of these elected and administrative officials that their residents do not see themselves as particularly interdependent with the residents of surrounding communities. This study also indicated that the respondents, in general, do not believe there is a significant political constituency in their city for this collaboration, but they worked to bring about collaboration regardless. When asked if they thought it was appropriate to work collaboratively if it benefitted the whole collaboration area even against the desires of some jurisdictions, these respondents agreed they should collaborate even against the objections of other cities.

### General Conditions and Specific Events that Motivated Collaboration

Asked what was motivating the effort to collaborate, the most frequent response given was declining revenues and increasing costs. Many respondents mentioned that continuing cuts in revenue sharing from the state and declining property values are making it nearly impossible to provide the level of services that they have in the past. Respondents also frequently mentioned that their history of cooperation through the Mutual Aid Pact motivated them to attempt greater collaboration. This finding is consistent with the argument of Park and Feiock (2003), that cooperation is more likely the longer the actors have cooperated with one another.

Respondents also mentioned specific events that motivated them to collaborate. A multi-state power outage in 2003 led to a high level of cooperation among these cities which led to discussions of greater cooperation. The initial success of a computer server sharing arrangement for police information also led to discussions of greater collaboration among these cities.

### The Role of Policy Entrepreneurs and Area Networks

The findings of this study also provide strong support for the theory of John Kingdon (2003), that policy entrepreneurs can provide strong support for collaboration. This research revealed that a few policy entrepreneurs were active in this effort. Both elected and administrative actors were frequently mentioned as making significant contributions to the collaboration effort. In particular, one city manager was mentioned by nearly every respondent as being a primary actor driving this collaboration. In addition,

two elected officials were frequently mentioned by many respondents as being significantly engaged in moving the collaboration forward.

This research also provides support for previous research as to the importance of networks in helping to facilitate collaboration. Lackey, Freshwater and Rupasingha (2002), argue that a good and long-established relationship among cooperating jurisdictions increases the chances for continuing success. Processes run smoothly because of accumulated levels of trust among the participants. Putnam (1993) has demonstrated that networks of civic engagement can help promote cooperation. The Downriver Community Conference, a nonprofit network of twenty local governments in the study area, was consistently mentioned as a strong motivating force helping to facilitate this collaboration. The DCC provided initial support for collaboration, assisted in obtaining a state grant to study the feasibility of this collaboration and provided ongoing support to participants.

#### The Difficulty of Collaboration on Fire Services

This research found mixed perceptions as to whether it is easier to collaborate on fire services than on other kinds of public services. On one hand, fire services are seen as moving toward greater uniformity and a national (NFPA) standard of service characteristics. Yet, many of the respondents mentioned that it could be more difficult because of the strong unionization levels and the desire of local residents to maintain a separate fire department.

## **Overview of Findings**

This research reveals a number of factors that are important to collaboration and catalogs a few problems that local actors considering collaboration need to be on guard against. Although the respondents were generally positive about and open to collaboration, insufficient trust was a problem they could not overcome. This failure is surprising given that these cities have collaborated through a Mutual Aid Pact for many years and generally consider their cities to be highly interdependent.

This research also discovered that the potential loss of control over service delivery, generally considered to be an important obstacle to collaboration, was relatively unimportant to these respondents. Respondents believe that much of their control was already eliminated by the state government. Given the fact that these cities appear strongly opposed to the county providing services, this kind of horizontal collaboration is the most logical alternative open to them.

This research found that both elected and administrative policy entrepreneurs were present and played an active role in this effort. A nonprofit community conference (DCC) also played a significant role in facilitating this activity as did the network of local associations of city managers and fire chiefs. These networks laid the necessary groundwork for collaboration.

## **What Benefits are Expected from the Terms of Collaboration?**

Important insights have been obtained into what benefits participants expect to gain from the terms of collaboration. Seeking an answer to that question is important, because

collaborating cities are creating a contractual relationship and central to any contractual relationship is what the law refers to as a meeting of the minds.

#### Cost Savings from Collaboration

Respondents expressed a strong and consistent expectation that none of the current fire department personnel would lose their job as a result of this collaboration. When asked if they expected short or long-term gains from this collaboration, the respondents all clearly expected cost savings in the long-term, described as over five years. However, there is a significant difference of opinion in the expectations of the respondents relative to short-term gains, described as the first three to five years. Elected officials in this study had much greater expectations of short-term cost savings than did the administrative officials and fire fighters. There was not a common understanding between elected and administrative officials as to what savings could reasonably be expected in the short-term.

Such differences in expected benefits is a serious obstacle to the crafting of labor and funding agreements which require an accurate assessment of net operating costs. Responses indicate that it is very important that collaborating partners achieve a meeting of the minds as to their expectations. But a clear agreement on goals requires an operating agreement among the cities and a labor agreement with fire personnel so that costs can be accurately assessed.

A key finding of this study was that unfortunately, after eighteen months of meeting regularly, and working diligently on the planning of this fire authority, the issues of a detailed operating agreement, a detailed labor agreement and an agreement on how the authority would be funded, remained unresolved.

### Improved Service Quality and Financial Equity

This research revealed that nearly all of the respondents expected to achieve improvements in service quality through this authority and expected that cost savings would be equally distributed among the participating cities. This research also illustrates that the respondents anticipated achieving financial equity among the cities. Respondents expected to achieve a better allocation of state and federal resources than is now the case. They expected a more equitable commitment of resources by all participating cities. The respondents expected to gain better access to resources outside their own city and greater overall resources to purchase facilities and equipment. These are some of the primary factors motivating this collaboration and the benefits respondents anticipated would result.

### Overview of Findings

This research illustrates a variety of benefits that those participating in collaboration expect to gain. Interestingly, nearly all of these respondents went into this effort with the conviction that none of the current fire service personnel would lose their job as a result of collaboration. Given that personnel costs account for such a large proportion of the budget, it is a significant commitment to enter into collaboration planning with that understanding.

One of the most interesting findings of this research was the significant difference in the expectations of elected and administrative officials relative to short-term cost savings. Nearly all of the administrative officials expressed the belief that the cost savings of collaboration would be long-term. Although the Plante-Moran feasibility study anticipated a twenty percent cost saving long-term, and was partially contingent on

attracting new members into the collaboration, nearly ever one of the elected officials expected short-term cost savings as a result of this effort. That significant difference in expectations was one factor that foreshadowed the collapse of the collaboration.

Nearly every one of the respondents listed improved service quality as one of the benefits they anticipated from collaboration. Several of the respondents expressed a belief that some of the Downriver cities were not contributing sufficiently to the provision of fire services currently. Several respondents indicated that they did not have sufficient personnel to send to other cities under the current Mutual Aid Pact. Virtually all of the respondents indicated that another benefit of collaboration was that all of the cities would contribute equitably to the provision of fire services. Respondents also anticipated a better allocation of federal and state resources as a result of collaboration.

### **Important Characteristics of Collaboration Partners**

The economic, social and political characteristics of a community's population can help shape their preferences for public goods and also help determine the potential gains from collaboration and the transaction costs associated with it (Feiock 2007). These five cities are relatively homogenous in terms of racial composition but, there are differences in terms of wealth and the revenues available to each. The respondents in this study stated that such differences are relatively unimportant to them in terms of what they are looking for in a collaboration partner. Respondents said that it was relatively unimportant or that they were ambivalent on the issue of having partners with similar forms of governmental structure. But, all five of the cities that decided to collaborate in the DFA effort share a mayor-city council form, employ a city manager and are home rule cities. Several of the

respondents indicated that it would be difficult to collaborate in this way with townships. It may be that this is a more important issue than these respondents indicated.

This study also provides insight into how important it is that partners are able to provide similar levels of resources and are seeking the same benefits from collaboration. Nearly forty percent of the respondents indicated that it is critically important to them that their partners seek the same benefits from collaboration.

These five cities share common borders and their officials have repeated contacts with one another and have collaborated over a long period of time on fire and other services. A history of positive cooperation between local government actors leads to the development of norms of behavior that build social capital and thereby reduce transaction costs (Park and Feiock 2003). This research provides strong support for the work of Feiock and reveals that it is important to these respondents that their partners have successfully collaborated with them in the past. It is also important that their elected and senior administrative officials have regular contact. Feiock (2008) argues that shared borders expose neighboring cities to externalities, require repeat play and provide officials opportunities for mutual assurances. Efforts at collaboration among players not as familiar with one another can be much more costly, as key players take time to get to know one another and develop the trust necessary for successful collaboration (Feiock 2007). Overall, these respondents indicated that it is important to very important that they had a previously successful collaboration with their partners. Respondents also indicated that it is very important that their elected officials are in frequent contact and even more important that their senior administrative officials are in frequent contact.

### Land Uses and Service Requirements

The respondents in this study indicated that it is important to very important that their partner cities have similar land uses, similar service requirements and similar equipment and training needs. Many of the respondents further elaborated that this was not a critically important issue because under the terms of their Mutual Aid Pact, these five cities are required to assist one another regardless. The response to the question of how important it is that their partner cities have similar service requirements to theirs, indicated it is a very important issue to these respondents, more important than similar land uses. The most important factor of the three was the response to the question regarding partners having similar equipment and training.

### Trust of Collaboration Partners

Responses to several open-ended questions provided valuable insights relative to trust, how partnering cities are selected and the important characteristics collaborators are seeking in their partners. Post (2002) found that repeated contacts among local government actors led to greater levels of trust and performance experience which often led to increased levels of cooperation among governments in a metropolitan area. Providing support for that research, these respondents overwhelmingly indicated that trust in their partners is a very important factor. Many respondents stated it would be impossible to collaborate with officials that you do not trust and indicated that there was insufficient trust present in this effort.

Park and Feiock (2003), argue that cooperation is more likely the longer the actors have cooperated with one another. Supporting that finding, this research revealed some

interesting definitions of trust in the context of interlocal service collaboration. Trust was defined in terms of working together over time, and the ability to trust that their partners would pull their own weight and share goals and objectives. Trust was often defined in terms of having a proven track record in previous collaboration.

When asked how trust is developed, the respondents indicated that it often requires taking a leap-of-faith and simply beginning. Respondents stated that changes in personnel, elected and administrative, often made developing trust difficult. It is also clear that trust can be undermined and damaged. Lack of communication, not following through on promises and inappropriate political influence can damage trust levels.

#### How Collaboration Partners are Selected?

This research illustrates some interesting issues in terms of how collaboration partners select one another and what characteristics are important. This research provides support for Post (2002), that the geographic concentration of local governments can lead them to cooperate and that the geographic density of metropolitan area governments is a significant predictor of the occurrence of intergovernmental agreements. All twenty of the DCC area communities initially discussed this DFA collaboration but the five cities that moved forward share contiguous borders and are tightly packed geographically. The respondents indicated it is important that these five are close enough to share resources effectively. These five are very similar demographically and all employ full-time, unionized fire personnel. Several of these respondents stated that these five cities could contribute financially to the effort and are financially more stable than some other cities nearby.

It is clear from this study that how partners are selected involves strong logistical considerations. The similarities or dissimilarities of partnering communities and financial issues are very important. There was an interesting difference in the opinion of elected and some of the administrative officials on this issue. Most of the fire chiefs and fire fighters expressed the opinion that having more than these five cities currently participating would be a good idea. Most of the elected officials thought that expanding beyond these initial five cities was not a good idea at this time.

This research also confirms that having satisfactory past experiences with their partners made this collaboration easier to undertake. Many of the respondents indicated that they would be reluctant to consider collaborating with cities they had bad experiences with.

### **Overview of Findings**

Clearly, there exist several important factors local government actors consider when seeking a collaboration partner. This research illustrates that it is important that partners seek the same benefits and have similar equipment and training. There are strong logistical considerations to the process of selecting partners. There were mixed findings in this research as to what might be too large or too small a number of cities to successfully collaborate.

Although past collaboration experience is thought to encourage further efforts, the current collaboration of these five cities through the Mutual Aid Pact, may have been an obstacle in this case. Several of the respondents expressed the belief that simply enhancing Mutual Aid would be preferable to functionally consolidating these five departments.

Several respondents indicated that the cities had already accomplished as much as possible through Mutual Aid and that it was now necessary to develop an authority. Being able to capture some of the economies of scale such as joint purchasing, joint dispatching and joint training through the Mutual Aid Pact may have made the need for functional consolidation through an authority, seem less urgent to some of the participants.

### **The Roles Played by Elected and Administrative Officials**

The findings of this research provide support for the work of Zeemering (2007), as respondents predominantly indicated that elected officials do have a significant role to play in facilitating interlocal collaboration. Zeemering has shifted attention back to the role of elected officials in this kind of activity. Of the policy entrepreneurs most often mentioned as actively promoting this collaboration, one is a mayor and the other is a city manager.

However, elected and administrative officials in this study tend to view the issues in collaboration differently. A large majority of respondents indicated that regular contact among the officials of the cities engaging in collaboration is important. Yet, the kind of contact is different in type and frequency. The responses of elected officials reveal that contact with their counterparts in other cities was less regular and more often of a social nature. The responses of the administrative officials reveal that contacts with their counterparts are much more frequent, much more substantive and work-related in nature.

### **Cooperation on Policy and Service**

This research illustrates important differences between elected and administrative officials relative to their cities cooperating on public policy and service. Elected officials

for the most part indicate that they do not think they discuss or cooperate on these issues, with their counterparts in other cities, to any real extent. The administrative officials were more likely to respond that they discuss these issues and cooperate regarding them, with their counterparts in other cities, to a significant extent. These responses also illustrate the fact that elected and administrative officials think differently about the issues involved in collaboration. The majority of responses indicated that elected officials are more concerned with today, balancing budgets and not offending the electorate. Administrative officials on the other hand, are generally more concerned with making the collaboration work on a daily basis. They have to think long-term in planning, whereas elected officials tend to have a much shorter time horizon.

#### Networks, Professional Associations and Training

This research supports the findings of LeRoux (2008) on the importance of area networks of local government officials. The nonprofit Downriver Community Conference is repeatedly mentioned as playing a significant part in facilitating this collaboration. The Downriver Fire Chief Association, the fire fighter union locals and the Downriver City Manager Association were also frequently mentioned as important networks involved in this effort.

This research also found that the professional education of officials and membership in professional organizations influences how collaboration is approached. A few respondents mentioned that having an MPA or a BBA changed the way they viewed collaboration. Many of the respondents also indicated that participation in organizations such as the Michigan Municipal League, the International City-County Management

Association and the American Society for Public Administration influenced how collaboration was discussed and facilitated.

#### Need for a Political Constituency

Another difference between elected and administrative officials that was revealed in this research is the need for a political constituency in favor of collaboration. The majority of administrative officials, particularly fire chiefs and command officers responded that if city residents were opposed to collaboration they would not be attempting it. The majority of elected officials responded that a political constituency is nice, but that they would proceed without one. Such responses seem counter-intuitive because elected officials are generally expected to be more concerned with the desires of their electorate. The city managers responded with mixed opinions and therefore this research did not discover a clear consensus on this issue.

#### Collaborative Activities of Elected and Administrative Officials

This research also reveals different roles played by these officials in terms of the most important things they can do to facilitate collaboration. Asked what elected officials can do to facilitate collaboration, the three most frequently mentioned activities were to educate the public on the benefits, stay informed and focused and maintain a positive role. When the same question is asked relative to what administrative officials can do to facilitate collaboration, the three things most frequently mentioned are to provide fair and accurate information, keep lines of communication open, and maintain a positive perspective.

Another key finding of this research was a significant consensus between elected and administrative officials regarding the need for this collaboration. Asked if there was any way that the problems facing these cities could be handled internally without collaboration, the overwhelming majority of the respondents replied that they do not see a real alternative to collaborating in this way. Most of the respondents indicated that they had already cut back as much as possible and that everything that could be accomplished by individual cities had already been done. Respondents, who indicated that these problems could be solved internally, stated that it would take a significant infusion of new money to accomplish anything worthwhile.

#### Obstacles Encountered and Future Concerns

As for major obstacles to success, responses foreshadowed the subsequent collapse of the collaboration effort. Many respondents said one significant problem they had was convincing elected officials that collaboration was a part of their “regular work”. Echoing the work of John Kingdon (2003), many of the respondents expressed a concern that the window of opportunity to accomplish this authority might be closing. The five cities involved in this collaboration were all facing elections soon after these interviews were conducted. The results of those elections significantly influenced the collapse of the DFA collaboration.

The biggest concerns these respondents expressed about the future of this collaboration were drafting a labor agreement, establishing a stable funding source for the authority, drafting an implementation plan and achieving a win-win for everyone involved.

Respondents were for the most part satisfied with the benefits and costs of this collaboration but city council members were the least satisfied with the costs and the least satisfied with the level of input they had in the process. Fire chiefs were also less satisfied with their input than were other groups.

Finally, this research reveals that the use of an authority is seen by these respondents as the best alternative for achieving the goals of this collaboration. Most respondents concluded that they have achieved all they can as independent fire departments and that this collaboration was necessary in order to maintain current service levels and ensure the future delivery of quality services.

### **Overview of Findings**

Supporting the work of Zeemering (2007), this research revealed that elected officials do have important, although different, roles to play. Another finding of this research is that elected and administrative officials view collaboration differently and engage in different activities to help facilitate it. It is also clear that elected and administrative officials have different time horizons in terms of how collaboration will occur and when benefits can reasonably be expected.

This research illustrates that while regular contact among elected officials is important, regular contact among administrative officials is considered to be more important. That contact is also more substantive and work-related than contacts among elected officials. This research also reveals that respondents think professional education, such as an MPA degree, and participation in professional organizations, such as the ICMA or ASPA, influences whether and how collaboration develops.

Lastly, although nearly every respondent indicated that their city can not solve their service provision problems internally without a huge infusion of new resources, this collaboration failed. This study clearly shows how interdependent these cities are thought to be by the respondents. This interdependency is also shown to be perceived by the respondents as a major factor causing these cities to collaborate. All of these cities are suffering fiscal stress and it is growing worse. Many of the respondents mentioned that they share seamless borders, have repeat contact with one another, have fought fires in one another's cities over a long period of time and that the political boundaries drawn on the map are, in many ways, meaningless to them in terms of providing fire services. Yet, this collaboration failed. This failure appears to be largely a result of the participant's inability to deal with the transaction costs associated with collaboration.

### **Conclusion and Directions for Future Research**

As the discussion above has made clear, voluntary collaboration in the provision of fire services faces several obstacles. What local government actors can do to overcome such obstacles is an important area for future research.

*What role precisely does fiscal stress play in motivating interlocal collaboration?*

This study examined cities that attempted collaboration in relatively good economic times and in times of severe fiscal stress. The attempted collaboration was not successful in either case. Future research would benefit from examining whether fiscal stress is really the primary motive that these respondents thought it was. Can fiscal stress

that is too severe be an obstacle to collaboration? If fiscal stress is not the primary motivation for collaboration on fire services, what factors do provide such motivation?

*What Benefits Can Realistically be Expected from Interlocal Collaboration?*

This study clearly revealed that the elected and administrative officials involved in this two year effort at collaboration had significantly different expectations as to what benefits could realistically be expected from their joint effort. Future research would benefit from a better understanding of what the costs and the benefits of collaboration on fire services are.

*Is Local Control over Fire Services a Serious Impediment to Collaboration?*

The extant literature largely concludes that the potential loss of local control over services is an impediment to collaboration. However, this study indicates that many local elected and administrative actors consider such control illusory, at least in terms of control over fire services. It would be beneficial for future research to further examine this factor and whether or not it does inhibit collaboration.

*How Important is a Level of Trust Among Collaboration Actors?*

This research revealed quite clearly that a significant level of trust among interlocal actors is required for collaboration to succeed. Fire services are generally considered to be a system maintenance function and collaboration on such services should be easier to achieve than collaboration on other services. Future research would benefit from a better

understanding of precisely what the term “trust” means in relation to collaboration, and how such trust is developed, damaged and destroyed.

*The Role of Policy Entrepreneurs in Collaboration.*

A few policy entrepreneurs were active in this attempted collaboration, some elected and some administrative. Future research would benefit from a clearer understanding of the roles played by such entrepreneurs and what motivates, assists and inhibits their activities.

*The Role of Area Networks in Collaboration.*

The Downriver Community Conference played a significant role in facilitating the attempted DFA collaboration. It is unclear from this research what continuing role, if any, they maintained throughout this nearly two year attempt. Future research would benefit from gaining a fuller understanding of the roles played by such nonprofit community conferences and what they can do to facilitate this kind of collaboration.

*What Role is Played by the Informal and Formal Networks of Interlocal Actors?*

This research indicates that it is very important that senior administrative officials be in frequent contact in order to better facilitate collaboration. Although it is less important for elected officials to be in frequent contact, it is still considered important. Future research would benefit from a closer examination of how these local actors interact and what significance that has for potential collaboration efforts.

*What Role might the State Legislature or State Municipal League Play?*

Future research would benefit from examining the role that can be played by a state-wide municipal league and/or the state legislature in developing model frameworks relative to labor agreements, funding agreements and operating agreements among interlocal collaborators.

*What Role does Strong Unionization of Public Workforces Play?*

Future research would benefit from examining the role played by the level or intensity of unionization of the public personnel attempting collaboration on public safety services. Is there a significant role that can be played by the state-wide fire fighters' union in facilitating this kind of collaboration?

*The Differing Roles of Elected and Administrative Officials.*

This research reveals that elected officials play a far greater role in interlocal collaboration than was previously believed. Future research would benefit from a better understanding of the differing roles that elected and administrative officials play and how the interaction between these two groups influences the ultimate decision to collaborate.

I started this study in 2007 wanting to perform research that would provide practical and valuable information for practitioners at the local level, the level of government to which I devoted such a large portion of my adult life serving. I think that I have accomplished that goal. I chose a descriptive study because I think that it is currently missing from the literature. This study is a very detailed, descriptive analysis that delves

deeper into the complexities of local intergovernmental collaboration than other studies have. To my knowledge, no other study has examined so closely, and in such detail, the issues of collaboration dealt with in this research. I hope to do more of this research in the future.

## Appendix A

Wayne State University

Department of Political Science

Downriver Fire Authority Project

### Survey Instrument

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Place interview took place: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Time of the interview: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewer's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewee's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Organization's name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### A. Respondent Professional Experience

*A-1. I want to begin with some questions about your professional experience.*

- a) How long have you been with the city? Do you also reside in the city?
- b) What is your current position? How long have you been in it?
- c). Have you had other positions in this organization?
- d) Have you ever worked for any of the other cities participating in the DFA?
- e) Do you have any previous experience as an elected official (or as an administrator) in this or another local government?

#### B. Factors Stimulating Interlocal Cooperation

Next, I want to ask you a few questions about the factors that led to this current effort to cooperate on fire services across these several cities. Initially, I would like to focus on the stimulus for cooperating on fire services, not on cooperating in terms of a fire authority.

The fire authority is a specific approach to collaboration and I will ask you about the authority in the next section. At this point, I am interested in understanding the factors that simulated your city's interest in cooperating across jurisdictional lines on fire services.

*B-1. Please turn to Scale A on the back of the instructions I provided you. Use them to indicate the extent to which you agree with the following set of statements about how the organizational and political culture in your city affects the likelihood of these types of cross-border efforts emerging.*

*On a scale of 1-10, how much do you agree these statements generally describe your organization and/or community?*

- a) My organization is usually receptive to doing things in new ways.
- b) My organization usually approaches problems proactively.
- c) My organization is usually open to possibilities for collaborating on services with other local governments. (Here, we refer to governments other than the county.)
- d) Our residents demand that direct provision be the default option for most basic public services.
- e) Our residents demand that we consider what's good for Downriver when we make decisions about providing important public services.
- f) Our residents tend to be suspicious of the motivations of elected officials from the neighboring jurisdictions.
- g) Our residents do not care about how services are delivered because they focus only on the quality and cost of these services.
- h) Our residents would rather we contract with other local governments than with private or non-profit organizations for most services.
- i) Our residents want us to let the county provide services whenever possible.
- j) Our residents place more value on protecting our city's control over public services than on lowering costs.
- k) Our residents place more value on protecting our city's control over public services than on improving service effectiveness across the Downriver communities.
- l) Our residents see themselves as highly interdependent with the local governments that surround this community.
- m) There is a significant constituency in my community for seeking regional solutions to our problems.

*B-2. In your view, what are the factors that led to this effort? (Depending on the answer, follow up with the following prompts):*

- a) Were there any specific events that directly encouraged your city's participation in this effort? If yes, explain.

b) Is there a person in your city that has stood out as an entrepreneur/leader in this effort? If yes, who? What are some examples of the activities this person undertook? Why do you think this person took on this role? What motivated his or her efforts in this regard?

c) In your view, has a person from another city been instrumental to this effort going forward? If yes, who? What are some examples of the activities this person undertook? What do you see as his or her motivations for this leadership role?

d) Are there any third parties whose involvement was instrumental to this collaboration moving forward? If yes, who? How so? Can you offer some examples of how they helped? Do you have any thoughts about their motivations for involvement in this effort?

*B-3. This effort involves collaboration on fire services. Does the fact that it involves fire services make it more or less easy to do this? Explain.*

### **C. Perceptions of the Terms of Collaboration**

Now, I have a few questions about your view of the costs and benefits of cooperating on fire services. These include an identification of the benefits anticipated to flow from this collaboration and your expectations about how these benefits will be distributed among the cities participating in this collaboration. We are also interested in the expected costs, if any, of this collaboration and how the fire authority is expected to affect the costs and benefits of participating in this project.

*C-1. Turning to Scale B on the back of the instructions I provided you, please indicate your agreement with the following statement about the importance of these specific factors to your support of this effort to cooperate on fire services.*

- a) Our city will save money in the short run (3-5 years).
- b) Our city will save money in the long run (over 5 years).
- c) Our residents see improvements in the quality of the service over what we have provided previously.
- d) Cost savings are distributed equally among the participating communities.
- e) None of our fire department staff will lose their jobs due to this collaboration.
- f) Participation in the authority gives our community access to existing facilities and equipment currently unavailable to us because of their location in another jurisdiction.
- h) Participation in the authority gives our community access to the financial resources needed to construct facilities or purchase equipment that we cannot afford by ourselves.

- i) The authority will distribute future nonlocal (state and federal) resources among the Downriver communities in a more rationale way than is now the case.
- j) Creation of this authority results in equal spending on fire protection among the participating jurisdictions.

*C-2. Are there benefits I have NOT mentioned that you hope will result from this collaboration?*

*C-3. Previously, we discussed the perceptions of your city's residents about the existence of interdependencies among the Downriver communities. I would like you to elaborate further on this question of interdependence.*

- a) Do you agree these interdependencies exist among the Downriver communities?
- b) If so, what is the nature of this interdependence?

*C-4. Turning to the specific issue of the fire authority as the mechanism for this collaborative effort, I have several questions about your views of and expectations for the authority.*

- a) Is the use of a fire authority important to your support for this effort? Why or why not? How confident are you that your city will be better off by participating in this authority?
- b) Are you confident that your community will retain sufficient control over the quality of services provided to your residents? If so, why?
- c) In your mind, how do the potential gains of the fire authority outweigh the loss of complete control over this service?
- d) How confident are you that the elected officials of your community will be able to exert meaningful influence over the managers of the fire authority?
- e) If your residents become dissatisfied with this arrangement, can it be easily altered? Can your community easily withdraw from the authority?
- f) How will the costs of the fire authority be allocated among the participating communities?

#### **D. Perceptions of Partners (and Potential Partners) in the Collaboration**

Next, we are interested in your perceptions of the partners in this collaboration. We are especially interested in understanding the levels of trust that existed among the

participating communities prior to this collaboration and how confident you are that these other communities will meet their obligations to the others.

*D-1. Turning again to Scale B, how important are the following characteristics in a potential local government partner for ANY significant effort to collaborate on public services, and not just fire services? These can be thought of as general principles of collaboration. They should be.....*

- a) ...communities we do not directly compete with for residents and development.
- b) ...similar to our community in terms of wealth and racial composition.
- c) ...similar to our community in terms of governmental structure (i.e., either both council-manager or both mayor-council systems).
- d) ...similar to our community in terms of powers (i.e., both cities or both townships).
- e) ...able to provide similar levels of resources to the effort.
- f) ...seeking the same benefits from this collaboration as we are.
- g) ...communities that have successfully collaborated with us in the past.

*D-2. A general concern about intergovernmental collaborations on public services involves the level of trust among the participating governments. We are interested in understanding how trust is developed, maintained, and lost. First, using Scale B, please answer the following questions about trust in your collaboration partners.*

- a) I must be able to trust the political leadership in the other communities.
- b) In your opinion, how important to your community is the reputation of your collaboration partners for trustworthiness and cooperation?
- c) Do you think your community has a generally trusting orientation toward other communities?
- d) In your opinion, has the level of trust between the participants gone up, down or stayed about the same since this collaboration effort began?
- e) Do you trust your partners in this effort? All of them?
- f) how do you define trust?
- g) how can the required trust be built?
- h) how can this trust be undermined?

*D-3. I am interested in understanding how were the participants in this effort decided on.*

- a) How were the participants decided on? Is this the final group or do you envision others will be added in the future?
- b) Are there any nonparticipating communities you wish were involved? If yes, why do you think they are not participating at this time?
- c) What makes the current participants good partners for your community on this service?

d) Can you think of some local jurisdictions that would NOT be good partners for your community? If so, why?

e) How are your perceptions about these actual and potential partners affected by past interactions? Please explain with an example or two.

*D-4. Does your city already cooperate on any of the services that will be provided through the fire authority? If yes, could you talk about the specific services, which of the Downriver cities are involved, and the nature of the cooperative arrangement with the city. (Some examples are an interlocal services contract, mutual aid, etc.)*

*D-5. What has been the public reaction in your community to this effort?*

### **E. Differences in Roles Played by Elected Officials and Public Managers**

Next, we are interested in understanding the roles played by the elected officials and public managers in this effort. A common perception by researchers is that elected officials play a secondary role in interlocal arrangements. Elected officials are often described as having jurisdictional-based interests, whereas managers are said to be more likely to embrace solutions that involve intergovernmental cooperation.

*E-1. I would like to ask you a few questions about any institution(s) or network(s) either formal or informal that helped bring about this collaboration effort. (Interviewer: note whether interviewee is an appointed administrative person or an elected official)*

a) Do you talk with officials from other local governments on a regular basis? If so, how often in a typical year?

b) What form do these contacts take? (Choose all that apply.)

political meetings

SEMCOG

MML functions

DRCC

MSA

Regular meetings of city managers

Other

- a) Was any particular institution (hierarchy?) used in bringing about the start-up of this collaboration? If yes, what was that institution?
- b) How necessary was any institution to the emergence of this collaboration?
- c) How much time would you estimate you spend monthly on this collaboration effort?
- d) How much time would you estimate you spend monthly meeting with your counterparts in surrounding communities?
- e) In regards to working on this collaborative effort, how important do you think your knowledge, expertise and shared beliefs with your counter-parts is? Why?
- f) How difficult will it be/has it been to sell this collaboration to the political leaders of your community? How did you/will you do that?
- g) Is there any way these issues could have been dealt with solely within your jurisdiction? If yes, how?

*E-2. Do you belong to any professional organizations or local networking group that have been important to this effort?*

*E-3. Have you relied on your professional network within the participating communities in the development of this proposed fire authority? If yes, how? (Have we answered this with the above questions or do we still need something more?)*

*E-4. Is it important to have a political constituency for cooperation? Do administrators play a role in creating one?*

## **F. Final Questions**

In your view, what is the most difficult aspect of pursuing this effort?

As you look forward, what are your three biggest concerns about the future of this effort?

Are there any topics I have not covered that you would like to talk about?

If I have additional questions in the future, would it be okay for me to contact you again?

## Appendix B

Wayne State University

Department of Political Science

Downriver Fire Authority Project Research

2009 Supplemental Survey Instrument

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's name: Bill Hatley

Interviewee's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, my name is Bill Hatley and I'm a doctoral candidate from Wayne State University and I'm working on a project examining the proposed Downriver Fire Authority (DFA). I am working with Professor Jered Carr in the Department of Political Science. You will recall that I interviewed you previously and we discussed various factors and issues surrounding the effort to establish the DFA. Your participation in that phase of our investigation helped us to better understand interlocal cooperation in general and the DFA effort in particular.

We are currently examining the attitudes and insights of public managers and local elected officials as to the current state of the DFA collaborative effort. We are particularly interested in your thoughts as to why the DFA effort appears to be suspended and what may have happened that caused that.

We are interviewing several officials from each of the jurisdictions that previously participated in our study. Thank you for your willingness to participate again in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. Before you start to answer the following questions, I would like to highlight a few things:

- Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.
- You may refuse to answer any question or part of a question.
- You are free to withdraw from the research at any time.
- The transcript of your answers will be available only to members of the research team.
- Excerpts from these answers may be made part of the final research report.

We welcome any questions you might have about this research, now or in the future. Professor Jered Carr is my dissertation advisor and working with me on this project. He may be contacted through the WSU Department of Political Science (313-577-2630) or on his cell phone (313-310-3632) should you have any questions. I can be reached at 313-388-6210 or via email at hatleylaw@wowway.com.

Question #1: What do you believe is the current state of the effort to implement the Downriver Fire Authority? Is the planning group still meeting? When was the last meeting held? Is the concept still being discussed formally or informally, If yes, how?

Question # 2: If the DFA effort has been discontinued, what do you believe are the main reasons as to why the DFA effort has been discontinued? Were there any specific events that directly caused your city to stop participating in this effort?

Question # 3: Did the local elections of 2008 have any impact on your city's decision to continue or discontinue the DFA effort? For example, did the election of a new Mayor in three out of the five cities make any difference to your participation?

Question #4: When we conducted the last interviews for this research, the planning group had not yet drafted a proposed labor agreement nor had it drafted a proposed method for funding the DFA. What importance, if any, do you attach to those two factors?

Question #5: Do you believe that anything can be done to re-start the DFA collaboration? If so, what specifically?

Question #6: Our previous research indicated that all of the participating cities were experiencing considerable fiscal stress and had hoped to alleviate some of that stress through the DFA effort. Has that fiscal stress been eliminated in some other way? If yes, please explain how?

Question #7: Looking back on your effort to establish the DFA, what were the three biggest obstacles to your achieving your goals? What in your opinion are the biggest mistakes that were made in this effort to form the DFA?

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**ABSTRACT****THE ART OF COLLABORATION: INTERLOCAL COLLABORATION IN THE PROVISION OF FIRE SERVICES IN THE METROPOLITAN DETROIT AREA.**

by

**WILLIAM D. HATLEY****August 2010**

**Advisor:** Dr. Jered B. Carr  
**Major:** Political Science  
**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

Metropolitan regions have emerged in the United States as important economic units with numerous small local governments each providing various public services. The movement toward city-county consolidation has frequently been defeated at the polls. Frederickson (1999) argues that metropolitan areas have become so fragmented in their approach to service delivery that they constitute what he describes as a “disarticulated state”, characterized by the declining salience of jurisdiction, the fuzziness of borders and an erosion of the capacity of the local jurisdiction to contain and, thereby, manage complex social, economic and political issues. Feiock (2009) contends that much of the urban politics and public administration literatures tend to focus on regional governments and authorities as a way of solving collective action problems in metropolitan regions. Feiock (2008) also argues that little is currently known about the dynamics of how governance mechanisms emerge and operate in fragmented metropolitan areas.

This study sought to examine how such governance mechanisms develop in a metropolitan area and more specifically how fire services might be provided through

interlocal collaboration. Using the case study method, this research uses Feiock's (2004) Institutional Collective Action framework to examine the following issues and their relation to interlocal cooperation: (1) state level rules, (2) transaction and production cost characteristics of public services, (3) characteristics of regions and communities and, (4) political structures. This research also uses the three-part framework of Zeemering (2007) which measures (1) the conjunction of policy stimuli, (2) perceptions of intergovernmental partners and social capital and, (3) the terms of the proposed collaboration. This study also uses Zeemering's framework for examining the differing roles played by elected and administrative actors in collaboration.

Findings of this study indicate that a certain level of trust among, and prior experience with, partners is important in overcoming the obstacles to collaboration. Contrary to much of the literature, this study found that losing control over fire service delivery was not perceived as an important obstacle to collaboration. This study provides support for prior research that fiscal stress can be a significant motivation leading cities to collaborate. Supporting the work of Kingdon (2003), this study found the activities of policy entrepreneurs, both elected and administrative officials, to be important to this effort at collaboration. This study also provides support for the theory that social and professional networks may help facilitate interlocal collaboration (LeRoux 2006).

This study concludes that voluntary interlocal collaboration on fire services is difficult and a lack of trust among the cities participating, and between the labor and management within each city, is a significant obstacle to collaboration. This study also found that it is very important that participants in collaboration have a clear understanding of the goals they are seeking and have similar expectations of the likely benefits of

collaboration. Collaborating partners generally seek out cities that are adjacent to their own, have similar demographics to their own, fire service needs similar to their own and that have sufficient fiscal resources to facilitate the joint effort.

This study found strong support for the need to have an outside third party, perhaps a higher level of government, provide standard labor, funding and operating agreements for collaborative efforts to local governments rather than allowing them to attempt drafting individual agreements.

**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT****WILLIAM D. HATLEY**

William Hatley earned BA (1981) and MPA (1994) degrees from the University of Michigan at Dearborn. He earned a Juris Doctorate degree from the Detroit College of Law (1986) and a Ph.D. from Wayne State University (2010). He has maintained a private law practice for twenty-five years. During this time, he worked as a Budget and Efficiency Analyst for a national railroad corporation and then worked in the public sector for over twenty years. He has worked as an Assistant City Attorney for three different municipalities, and City Attorney for one. He has worked as a Professional Economic Developer and as the Director of Planning and Development for a Detroit area municipality. He has established and directed the operations of local Economic Development Corporations, Downtown Development Authority's and Brownfield Redevelopment Authority's. He also has extensive experience helping to establish and working with a wide variety of nonprofits over many years. He has taught undergraduate and graduate level courses at Wayne State University, Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan at Dearborn. He has taught classes in public administration, public policy, economic development and American government. His research interests include interlocal cooperation, nonprofit management, economic development and intergovernmental grants.