

# Designing Collaborative Governance Decision-Making in Search of a 'Collaborative Advantage'

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## Abstract

Collaborative governance institutions consisting of government and civil society actors often emerge to solve complex policy problems. Yet decades of research on collaborative governance has found that realizing the ‘collaborative advantage’ is often very difficult given the multitude of actors, organizations and interests to be managed. This article deploys a participant observation approach that also harnesses data from a natural experiment in collaborative governance for homelessness policy in Vancouver, Canada, to reveal the distinct collaborative advantage produced in terms of policy, using empirical decision data and counterfactual analysis. The data reveal that nearly 50 per cent of the policy decisions made in the collaborative institution would not be made in the alternative scenario of unilateral bureaucratic control. The collaborative advantage realized in this governance institution that is premised on horizontality, deliberation and diversity is the result of a series of small interventions and the strategic deployment of rules devised by the bureaucratic metagovernor in charge of steering the governance collaboration.

## Key words

Collaborative advantage, collaborative governance, metagovernance

# DESIGNING COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE DECISION-MAKING IN SEARCH OF A ‘COLLABORATIVE ADVANTAGE’

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## INTRODUCTION

It is not controversial to suggest that the practice of government has changed in the past 30 years from a context in which the state was the dominant unitary actor setting policy, to one in which policy influence is more horizontally distributed among state and civil society actors. Such governance trends can be characterized as ‘collaborative governance’ and are in practice across various policy areas and jurisdictions (Ansell and Gash 2008).<sup>1</sup> Collaborative governance can be more precisely defined as ‘a method of collective decision-making where public agencies and non-state stakeholders engage each other in a consensus-oriented deliberative process for inventing and implementing public policies and procedures for managing public resources’ (Johnston et al. 2011, 699).

Collaborative governance is often justified, implicitly or explicitly, on the basis of what Huxham (1993) has termed the *collaborative advantage* – that they are created to resolve policy and coordination problems that could not be achieved by an organization or a government department acting alone. It represents a ‘synergy that can be created through joint-working’ (Vangen and Huxham 2010, 163). Studies in collaborative governance literature have tended, until recently, to view this governance trend through a mostly positive lens, and simply assume that a collaborative advantage is realized because of their existence (McGuire 2006). This is despite Huxham’s (1993) early warnings and subsequent empirical studies (summarized in Huxham and Vangen 2005) that the *collaborative advantage* is rarely evidenced in practice given the difficulties of managing the complexity of the institutions, actors and their competing interests, leading instead to ‘collaborative inertia’ (Vangen and Huxham 2010, 163).

Such critical assessments of collaborative governance have emerged in recent years that demonstrate the challenge to those designing or participating in collective decision-making. Rigg and O’Mahony (2013) find that a consistent theme on the ground is the high level of frustration among participants at not achieving their expectations from the collaboration and identify low attendance, personal agendas, poor managerial relationships and low trust as key barriers to effective collaborative efforts. Dickinson and Glasby (2010) likewise identify a backlash towards collaborative efforts in the United Kingdom as a result of it being over-employed as a panacea for social or political ills, and that this way of organizing or governing is not always worth the effort and does not always deliver value for money. Yet others retain an optimistic sense of the potential of collaborative governance, but lament the perennial gap in research: empirics that test whether more inclusive and deliberative collaborative governance achieves its objectives (Collaborative Democracy Network 2006). In particular, are the policy outputs from collaborative governance substantively different than that which would have been produced from more traditional bureaucratic policymaking? This is the focus of this study.

This question is often difficult to answer in a systematic way given the empirical challenges associated with access to data, measurement and the counterfactual premise

– that is, how would policy decisions unfold if there was no collaborative governance? The unit of analysis in this study therefore is collaborative governance as a tool for policy implementation. This article aims to respond directly to this question using empirics that are not typically available to researchers from a case of collaborative governance focused on homelessness policy in Vancouver, Canada. By leveraging naturally occurring data produced by collaborative governance actors when they are faced with a decision task (in this case how to prioritize and invest public dollars), we are uniquely equipped to demonstrate the extent of a *collaborative advantage* in policy terms.

This article is organized into four parts. The first section situates this empirical study in the collaborative governance literature, which, while extensive, remains puzzled by fundamental questions around how the design and management of collaborative governance conditions policy outputs, and, in particular, generates a collaborative advantage. The second section introduces the case of collaborative governance in homelessness policy in Vancouver, Canada, which involves state and civil society actors collaboratively devising and implementing policy, and then presents the real decision-making scenario from which data has been extracted to allow for a unique form of empirical counterfactual analysis. The third section leverages the real decision data to demonstrate that (i) civil society actors and bureaucrats bear distinctive knowledge and perspectives, such that if only bureaucrats were in charge, nearly 50 per cent of the decisions would be made differently (than what would occur under collaborative governance), and (iii) that collaborative governance deliberations resulted in these different perspectives being transformed to shape the ultimate policy choices and programme investments, thus constituting evidence of a collaborative advantage in the context of collective decision-making. The final section reflects on the institutional design characteristics that facilitated the collaborative advantage in this setting, with lessons for those designing and participating in collaborative decision-making.

## **COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE**

While public administrators have always collaborated within and outside of the state, in the past decades, there has been remarkable growth in the scale and magnitude of collaborative governance across many countries and policy areas (Ansell and Gash 2008). This study is situated in the collaborative governance literature, but there are other conceptualizations of these emergent governance trends, including 'network governance', 'empowered participatory governance', 'partnerships' and 'collaborative public management'. While the various conceptualizations may focus on different analytical dimensions of the phenomenon, they are all fundamentally rooted in the inquiry of multi-organizational arrangements involving state and civil society actors designed to solve public policy or coordination problems that cannot be solved by an

agency, department or civil society organization acting alone (Huxham 1993; Huxham and Macdonald 1992; Agranoff and McGuire 1998). Precisely this result – achieving a policy or coordination outcome that could not be realized by a single organization acting alone – has been coined the term ‘collaborative advantage’ by Huxham and Macdonald (1992), and despite this term not being widely invoked in the broader governance literature, it is an implicit and important metric among most scholars studying collaborative governance.

While most authors writing specifically about the ‘collaborative advantage’ are often more concerned with *governing* of inter-sectoral collaborations rather than collaborative *governance*, which has an explicit democracy-enhancing or policy-generation focus (Vangen, Hayes, and Cornforth 2014), questions about whether an ‘advantage’ is produced as a result is a critical question for both tracks of inquiry. Scholars motivated by questions in the collaborative governance domain may not invoke the precise language of *collaborative advantage*, but are nonetheless focused on understanding their ‘added value’ and if they ‘realiz[e] benefits that would not otherwise be available to the participants’ (Skelcher and Sullivan 2008, 754). Likewise, when Johnston et al. (2011) investigate whether the collaborative governance approach can lead to ‘higher levels of process and program success’ (700), they are implicitly inquiring about an advantage to collaboration in policy terms beyond that which is possible from traditional siloed or hierarchical governance methods (see also: Fung and Wright 2001; Hicks et al. 2008). In fact, studies situated in collaborative *governance* domain – such as this one which involves collaborative governance funded by government and tasked with making policy and investment decisions in the area of homelessness – should care perhaps even more (than those in the *governing of collaborations* domain) about whether an ‘advantage’ is produced from this type of activity, given that public policy and public dollars are at stake.

The purported mechanism producing a collaborative advantage is not simply through diverse policy actors working together to better manage a policy issue, but is primarily driven from the transformative possibilities of policy debate and problem-solving in collaborative governance. Collaborative governance is therefore fundamentally rooted in a deliberative ethic to decision-making. Iris Marion Young (2000) argues that in deliberative arenas like collaborative governance, the activity becomes not about expressing interests or preferences, but about transforming them through learning or revealing ignorance. According to a public manager cited by Thompson and Perry (2006), the best collaborations are ‘transforming in the sense that you don’t leave the same way you came in. There is some sort of change. Something new has been created. Something happens differently because of the process’ (20). When collaborative governance works, the various parties come to see issues differently (Gray 1989). Edelenbos and Klijn (2006) characterize this criterion as *enrichment* (of ideas): a measure of whether the substantive process of collaborative governance resulted in ‘good outcomes’. In their study, Edelenbos and Klijn (2006) traced the ideas, solutions and proposals that came up in the process of collaboration and compared them with the

initial ideas that were present among actors. So 'enrichment [is] large if many different ideas were generated which were not available at the start' (Edelenbos and Klijn 2006, 424), which demonstrates that there is substantial alignment between the 'enrichment' measure and the understanding of collaborative advantage in policy terms.

Collaborative governance is therefore not advanced merely to satisfy a vague notion of more inclusive decision-making, but rather 'to engage different "ways of knowing" in the continuous processes of problem solving' (Feldman et al. 2006, 93). Given that it is precisely the rationale behind collaborative governance, we might expect that public servants and civil society actors view policy problems and solutions differently, such that collaborative governance results in different decisions being made than would otherwise occur if under traditional bureaucratic decision-making (which excludes civil society actors). Indeed, some scholars argue that go-alone strategies and traditional hierarchical policy processes often lead to poor or narrow solutions precisely because one rationality or perception dominates the formulation of the policy and others are excluded (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000). Fung (2004) provides a rich empirical example of community participatory policing boards in Chicago, demonstrating that citizens and organizations often develop different priorities and approaches than professional police officers would have developed on their own, given their unique placement and experience, as well as their freedom from the sometimes stale arguments in the professional ranks.

Whether bureaucrats and civil society actors in fact display systematic differences in policy analysis and decision-making is therefore a critical empirical question for collaborative governance research. Previous research has theorized such differences, but rarely draws on empirics to demonstrate them. For example, to some, civil society thinking is 'inherently different from state thinking' (Hendriks 2006). Civil society actors, who are generally more connected to the issues on the ground than public servants, may offer a diversity of lived experience (tacit knowledge) and therefore information, interpretations, priorities and perspectives about what works and is worthwhile in terms of policy (Head 2008; Andrew 2013; Agranoff 2006; Edelenbos and Klijn 2006). Bureaucrats also face rather different incentive structures than civil society actors in collaborative governance, tending to operate in an institutional environment that breeds risk-aversion and rewards conventional interpretations of policy problems and solutions (Meier and O'Toole 2006; Bozeman and Kingsley 1998; Wilson 1989; Tirole 1994).<sup>2</sup> Thus, an important empirical question is whether the theorized differences between bureaucrats and civil society actors manifest themselves in terms of policy priorities and investment decisions in collaborative governance versus traditional decision-making structures led by bureaucracies.

Even if civil society actors demonstrate diverse knowledge and perspectives in relation to bureaucrats, this alone does not guarantee a collaborative advantage with respect to policy by merely throwing them together in collaborative governance. In fact, a key lesson from recent literature on collaborative governance is that these are

very difficult institutions to manage and are more likely to fail or flounder rather than produce a collaborative advantage. Separate from scholars investigating the collaborative advantage, Friend and Hickling (2005) have advanced the *strategic choice approach* to collaborative decision arenas, a framework that delineates how collective decision-makers can effectively work through complex decision tasks, and includes important considerations with regard to the design and facilitation of group decision-making. A common lesson derived across all types of collaborative governance is that they require at least some form of steering, coordination and management in order to function – what Edelenbos and Klijn (2006), Friend and Hickling (2005) and others would call ‘process management’. Thus, it has been established that collaborative governance performance is aided by formalized coordination mechanisms associated with institutional design and ground rules for participation and decision-making (process-oriented rules), as well as the abilities of the (usually bureaucratic) manager of the collaboration, referenced in some contexts as the ‘metagovernor’ (Agranoff and McGuire 1998; Bardach 1998; Bazzoli et al. 2003; Klijn 2008).

There has been considerable development of the metagovernance concept in recent years (Bell and Hindmoor 2009; Sørensen and Torfing 2009), with direct relevance to collaborative governance scholarship, though has not been explicitly connected.<sup>3</sup> Turrini et al. (2010) identify two categories of predictors of collaborative governance performance: coordination mechanisms (such as information sharing systems and decision-making rules) and the abilities and choices of those managing or steering the collaborative effort. Cristofoli, Markovic, and Meneguzzo (2014) likewise suggest that high performance is only possible if a well-defined set of rules and procedures is supervised by a group of managers. Friend and Hickling (2005) also find that the skills of what they call the ‘process manager’ are critical to the success of the endeavour, specifically stressing skills in the management of information flows and mediation. This leads to the counter-intuitive suggestion that successful collaborative governance efforts appear to hinge on institutional design features normally associated with bureaucratic and hierarchical organizations, despite being conceptualized as an evolution away from them.

Institutional design refers to the basic protocols and ground rules for collaborative activity, though there is no standard design or blueprint for collaborative governance in this regard (Edelenbos and Klijn 2006). Sullivan, Williams, and Jeffares (2012) suggest that collaborative governance is fraught with difficulty, requiring careful design and management and, importantly, is very much contingent on the macro- and micro-level factors associated with the collaboration (see also Rigg and O’Mahony 2013). Yet several authors hypothesize that design features such as the amount of time given to deliberation, the number of participants, the tasks to which they are directed and the management of information are particularly consequential to the performance of the collaborative activity (Johnston et al. 2011; Ansell and Gash 2008; Friend and Hickling 2005). Facilitative leadership is likewise crucial for maintaining clear ground rules,

building trust and facilitating productive deliberations, all of which may involve direct action on the part of metagovernors to steer activity towards productive ends (Vangen and Huxham 2003). Although Friend and Hickling (2005) identify important facilitative and leadership characteristics of collaborative decision-making in their *strategic choice approach* – like skills in the management of information and mediation – Johnston et al. (2011) identify further gaps in our understanding of precise rules and facilitative leadership appropriate in various collaborative contexts.

In response to the foregoing gaps in the collaborative governance literature, this study draws on participant observation and a unique set of quantitative and qualitative data from a real decision-making scenario for a homelessness collaborative governance in Vancouver, Canada, to answer the following empirical questions aimed at measuring the extent of a collaborative advantage and understanding how it was achieved:

- i. Are there systematic differences between the policy choices of civil society actors in collaborative governance and those of bureaucrats?
- ii. Are collaborative governance deliberations actually transformative (such that actors change their perspectives)?
- iii. What features of the design and management of collaborative governance facilitate the emergence of a collaborative advantage in policy terms?

## METHOD AND CASE STUDY

To answer these empirical questions, this study has been conducted with ethnographic methods involving extensive participant observation and harnesses real decision-making data from homelessness collaborative governance in Vancouver, Canada, during a several week-period of deliberations around policy priorities and investment decisions. This approach has the benefit of *revealing* actor behaviour in collaborative governance rather than merely through post hoc recollection and rationalization of behaviour via interview methods. This type of empirical analysis responds to a recent call from Ansell and Gash (2008) to take advantage of 'natural experiments' to test whether or not collaborative governance produces that 'sweet reward' in terms of policy and governance (561).

Extracted as a result of participant observation is a set of quantitative data on individual and group scoring of proposed homelessness programmes conducted by collaborative governance members as they contemplated how to allocate public funds towards homelessness services for the next 2 years. The researcher was present for all associated meetings of decision-makers and support staff, and thus much of the complementary qualitative data collected consists of observational notes and quotes captured verbatim in the course of the deliberations and decision-making. Notes were also made during opportunistic informal chats during coffee and lunch breaks with participants. The researcher also conducted interviews with ten collaborative



governance members to reflect on their experience after the decision-making was complete. All observational notes and interview data were analysed and coded into themes that represent patterns that emerged from the data and inform the focus of the data analysis that follows, particularly around how persuasion and transformation in such decision-making settings can generate a collaborative advantage.

The case of collaborative governance examined through these means is as follows. The Metro Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (RSCH) was created in 2000 under the auspices of the Government of Canada's National Homelessness Initiative (NHI), which provides financial incentives for collaborative governance at the local level, consisting of diverse government and civil society actors to jointly devise policy priorities and make investments of public dollars towards service and housing projects and programmes. The RSCH is managed – or 'metagoverned' – by Metro Vancouver regional government bureaucrats, and thus represents the Network Administrative Organization (NAO) mode of 'network governance' specified by Provan and Kenis (2008), which is characterized by an entity independent from the members set up specifically to coordinate and sustain its activities. Prioritizing and allocating public dollars on behalf of the central government is not the only task of RSCH collaborative governance in Vancouver – it also conducts homelessness counts and data analysis, works with local governments to harmonize policy, coordinates the activity of service providers and engages in advocacy. But its authority to allocate public funds is perhaps its most important task, and certainly the most concrete task for which to evaluate the extent of a collaborative advantage, in policy terms, emerging from its activity.

From December 2011 to February 2012, the researcher was embedded as an observer among the RSCH as it prioritized, deliberated and allocated \$11 million dollars towards services and housing programmes for the Vancouver area for the next 2 years. The decision-making process proceeded as follows. The RSCH issued a call for proposals for local homelessness and housing service providers to apply for funding of programmes for up to 2 years, and received a total of 87 homelessness programme proposals, amounting to nearly \$30 million in programme support requests. The proposed programmes included providing outreach services, shelter and supports, transitional housing, mental health and addiction treatment, life skills programmes and youth safe houses, among others, across the Vancouver area. To review the proposed programmes and decide which among them to support as the policy response, the bureaucratic metagovernor of the RSCH selected twenty-four members to a special review committee, which would collectively deliberate and decide on the investment priorities. The RSCH decision-makers consisted of diverse civil society representatives from homelessness service providers, client group representatives (youth, Aboriginals, women) and community-based philanthropic organizations in four groups (each consisting of five to six members) to share the burden of reviewing the homelessness programme proposals. Each RSCH member individually reviewed and scored their

group's share of the proposed programmes and then all met collectively to deliberate which among them should be prioritized and receive investment.

Parallel to all of this activity was a group of bureaucratic staff from the Metro Vancouver regional government who individually reviewed, scored and deliberated all eighty-seven proposed programmes in order to administratively support the collaborative decision-making at the RSCH – and thus they can be compared directly with RSCH member scoring and evaluation to estimate the extent of a collaborative advantage derived from RSCH collaborative governance decision-making. The role of the bureaucratic staff was to assist RSCH members in their decision-making by understanding each programme proposal and to make sure the deliberations are structured to be effective, efficient and under conditions of maximum information. The researcher was also present for all staff-level meetings that designed the deliberative decision-making context, as well as all RSCH deliberations at which the final investment decisions were made. As a result of the researcher's extended presence among the RSCH, support staff agreed to release the scoring data for all RSCH members and bureaucrats, before and after deliberations, provided that no identifying information on individuals or organizations was published.

This data is uniquely positioned to assess the extent of the collaborative advantage, in policy terms, of homelessness governance in Vancouver. First, none of the participants knew at the time of decision-making that this scoring and deliberative data would be subject to academic study, which reduces the risk of an observer effect from the researcher on the subjects. Second, this decision-making context offers built-in analytical controls in which to compare how bureaucrats (who represent traditional public administration decision-making) and the diverse civil society actors involved in RSCH collaborative governance conceptualize policy problems and solutions. RSCH members (civil society actors) and bureaucrats separately evaluated and scored *precisely the same homelessness programme proposals*, using the same fifteen criteria, thus affording the opportunity to compare them to reveal similarities and differences, extrapolate to counterfactual scenarios of decision-making (e.g. what if just the bureaucrats made investment decisions?) and track how deliberations affect policy choices in collaborative governance.<sup>4</sup>

This unique data set of discrete decision-making around programme investments can help us better understand the fundamental features and dynamics of collaborative governance, revealing how different policy actors respond to the same policy problem stimuli, how they deliberate, as well as how public administrators should design and manage collaborative governance to achieve a collaborative advantage. A collaborative advantage in policy terms is operationalized and measured by tracking the transformation of policy preferences of actors from before to after deliberations. Simple compromise and horse-trading as a means to achieve consensus are not representative of a collaborative advantage, and participant observation among the deliberations allows for the differentiation between compromise and transformation as paths towards consensus and collaborative advantage in this decision-making context.

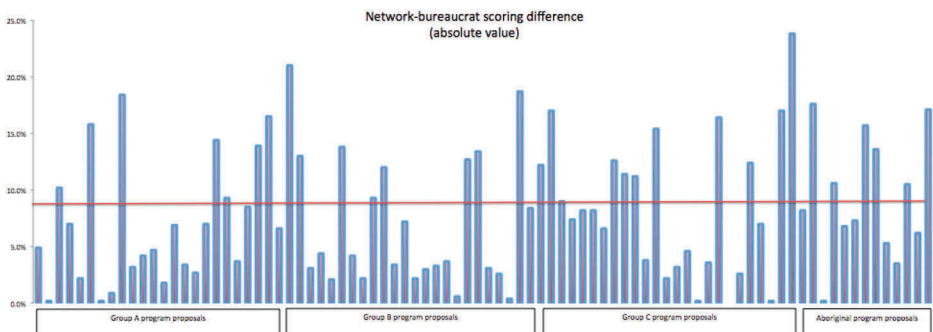
## DATA AND RESULTS

The data and analysis are presented in three parts: (i) exploring differences between how civil society actors in collaborative governance and bureaucrats at the regional government score proposed homelessness programmes; (ii) tracking how deliberations among collaborative governance actors caused shifts in their respective preferred investment choices; and (iii) identifying the design and management features of decision-making at the RSCH facilitated a collaborative advantage in policy terms.

### Question 1: Are there systematic differences between the policy choices of RSCH members and those of bureaucrats?

The first step to analysing collaborative governance in this context is to establish whether RSCH members – civil society actors, service providers, client group representatives – view policy and programmes differently from bureaucratic actors (who represent traditional, non-collaborative governance decision-making).<sup>5</sup> Figure 1 below presents the difference in scores for each of the eighty-seven programmes evaluated by RSCH members and bureaucrats, calculated by subtracting the average bureaucratic staff score from the average RSCH member score (for the same homelessness programme), in percentage terms.<sup>6</sup> The average difference in scoring across all 87 proposed homelessness programmes is 8.1 percentage points, represented by the horizontal line in the graph.

Figure 1 shows that for some proposed programmes, RSCH members had rather distinct views from the group of bureaucrats reviewing precisely the same programme proposal. For example, the proposed homelessness programme with the largest score difference received an average score of 80 per cent from bureaucrats and 47 per cent from RSCH members – a clear difference in perspective on the value of that particular



**Figure 1: Average score difference between RSCH members and bureaucrats for each proposed homelessness programme**

homelessness programme. And across the eighty-seven proposed programmes, there are dozens with similarly large and systematic differences between the two groups.

An important empirical test for the collaborative advantage is the difference in scoring *among* RSCH members compared to the differences *among* bureaucrats for each proposed programme. Collaborative governance theory would lead us to expect that RSCH members (diverse civil society actors) are likely to disagree with each other on the merits of a particular homelessness programme more than bureaucrats would disagree with each other, precisely because they come from very different perspectives and parts of the homelessness sector (e.g. shelter provider, mental health professional, person with lived experience, etc.), whereas bureaucrats are comparatively alike in terms of policy analysis and evaluation, given professional norms (Head 2008; Fung 2006). If bureaucrats vary in scoring over the same programme as much as RSCH members, it would undermine the claim that the diversity of actors contributes to a collaborative advantage.

One way to measure the degree of difference in scoring among RSCH members and bureaucrats is to calculate the average standard deviation for each programme for each group. And with this we see evidence of diversity manifested: RSCH members display more than twice the standard deviation as bureaucrats (18 to 8 per cent, respectively, statistically significant at  $p = 0.01$ ;  $F_{\text{test}} = 3.13 > F_{\text{crit}} = 1.65$ ), meaning that RSCH members' individual scores are much further away from their mean than individual bureaucrat scores are from their mean for each proposed programme. This is concrete evidence suggesting that RSCH members indeed bring in diverse perspectives to their policy analysis compared to bureaucratic actors, whom the data suggest tend to agree with each other more closely than civil society actors. This variance is a key component of generating a collaborative advantage.

The average RSCH member–bureaucrat score difference and the disparity in standard deviation for the eighty-seven proposed homelessness programmes reveal that there are several important dimensions of difference between these two groups of policy actors. Yet are these differences in scoring and evaluation consequential from a policy perspective? That is, would different programmes end up being funded if the bureaucrats, rather than the RSCH members in collaborative governance, had full decision-making authority? This can be estimated by comparing the rankings of the programmes after initial individual rankings and aligning them against each other, and then adding them up until we reach the total funding envelope of \$11 million.

Table 1 below captures the highest-ranked programmes from collaborative governance actors and bureaucrats after the initial evaluation, along with their budget request, which are added until the funding envelope has been allocated (\$11 million). The highlighted portion in each column represents choices made by one group that would not be made by the other in this hypothetical scenario. Table 1 demonstrates that there would be significant differences in the programmes

**Table 1: RSCH member and bureaucrat differences in programmes funded, based on initial evaluations**

<i>NETWORK initial selections</i>		<i>BUREAUCRAT initial selections</i>	
<i>Programme name</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Programme name</i>	<i>Budget</i>
UNYA	\$175,000	Salsbury	\$99,422
LU'MA	\$90,000	Journey Home	\$259,914
Sources	\$928,924	Alouette Youth	\$799,513
SA MR CWW	\$275,185	Aboriginal Mother	\$296,592
Hollyburn Outreach	\$434,848	Sources	\$928,924
Hope for Freedom	\$267,972	Progressive	\$514,199
Hollyburn Youth	\$1,149,655	E Fry HTF	\$68,597
YWCA	\$172,488	Hollyburn Youth	\$1,149,655
VCH PRISM	\$781,861	CFS Outreach	\$132,460
ACCESS	\$629,782	Fraserside	\$134,027
Atira	\$277,318	VCH PRISM	\$781,861
CWENENGITEL	\$186,878	Alouette Outreach	\$186,069
Watari	\$252,937	Community Builders	\$219,506
Last Door	\$453,942	La Boussole	\$498,863
Alouette Youth	\$799,513	RainCity	\$530,320
BC SS	\$379,240	Watari	\$252,937
Covenant house	\$877,369	New Hope	\$189,885
EMBERS	\$221,290	Aunt Leah's	\$315,800
Salsbury	\$99,422	BC SS	\$379,240
McLaren	\$489,700	Shiloh	\$324,640
BC Coal. Dis.	\$353,393	WINGS	\$121,053
Auhnt Leah's	\$315,800	YWCA	\$172,488
SA VCS	\$331,668	Atira	\$277,318
CFS Outreach	\$132,460	Lookout Metro EWR	\$151,672
Pivot	\$128,300	JFSA	\$585,772
Alouette Outreach	\$186,069	BC Coal. Dis.	\$353,393
RainCity	\$530,320	Covenant house	\$877,369
St.Paul's	\$154,886	CHIMO	\$34,000
		LU'MA	\$90,000
		Aldergrove	\$288,444
TOTAL \$	\$11,076,220	TOTAL \$	\$11,013,933
% Disagree with other group	41%	% Disagree with other group	43%

funded based on the initial individual evaluations (before deliberations). For example, of the thirty-one programmes that the collaborative governance actors would have funded, thirteen (or 43 per cent) of those the bureaucrats would not. That is,

*nearly half the programmes prioritized by the respective groups would not have been prioritized by the other.*

So while we can be confident that civil society and bureaucratic actor differences in scoring based on initial reviews would result in different programmes being prioritized, what is not clear yet is whether the funding differences would have policy implications. Would different types of services be funded? The data suggests yes, and at times, substantial differences. The most significant differences among RSCH member and bureaucrat evaluations are with outreach, mental health and addiction and employability services. Bureaucrats would allocate twice the resources to outreach services than RSCH members, which amounts to over \$1.7 million in variation in allocations to this service. RSCH members, by contrast, would allocate twice as much in mental health and addiction services, amounting to nearly \$700,000 difference in investment, as well as \$600,000 more in employability services (when bureaucrats would invest \$0). With respect to the various subpopulations among the homeless, bureaucrats show a tendency to fund services that target the general homeless population – that is, services which all can access – allocating 12 per cent (\$1.3 million) more than RSCH members, whereas RSCH members would allocate 12 per cent (\$1.3 million) to Aboriginal-specific programmes, at the expense of general services. This patterned variation reflects value differences in goals and preferences, with corresponding implications for policy development in collaborative governance (versus the alternative of traditional, closed decision-making in bureaucracies).

## **Question 2: Are collaborative governance deliberations actually transformative (such that actors change their perspectives)?**

The foregoing analysis has demonstrated that not only do RSCH members and bureaucrats evaluate programmes differently on an individual basis, but also that it has policy implications for the types of services and programmes funded. Yet policy choices and funding allocations in this collaborative governance context are not made on the basis of merely aggregating individual actor scores. Rather, RSCH members come together after their initial individual evaluations to deliberate and make collective decisions on which programmes to fund, with bureaucratic staff present to assist (administratively) with decision-making. After all RSCH members completed their individual evaluations of the programme proposals assigned to their subgroup, they met collectively to discuss each programme, deliberated over their strengths and weaknesses before selecting those which would receive investment. Deliberations on each proposed programme ranged from 20 minutes to over an hour, followed by several hours of synthesizing and mapping out the service and policy landscape they were creating with their decisions. The bureaucratic actors were present in these deliberations to help structure the decision-making, to manage all the information and data, as well as to provide technical advice when requested by RSCH members, the actual decision-makers.

Thus, whereas the previous section’s data analysis captures the fundamental differences between RSCH members (civil society actors) and bureaucratic actors in terms of policy preferences, this section investigates the effect of deliberative activity in collaborative governance on decision-making. The individual scoring by RSCH members considered the programme proposals in the abstract, according to their individual merit. But the deliberations forced RSCH members to think about the programmes in relation to one another, and what would be the consequences for funding certain programmes over others, particularly in terms of location, service and target population. Thus the question: Were the collaborative governance deliberations actually transformative, such that actors change their perspectives?

The deliberations were demonstrably transformative, as evidenced by Figure 2 below, which shows how the initial rankings based on the aggregation of individual scores by the RSCH members changed quite substantially *after* deliberations. This outcome is consistent with the criterion of *enrichment* (of ideas) established by Edelenbos and Klijn (2006) as a measure of whether the substantive process of collaborative governance resulted in ‘good outcomes’. For example, in Figure 2, the highest column among the Group A programmes increased from an initial RSCH member rank of 18 (out of twenty-six) to become the third most preferred programme for Group A, a dramatic shift in rank. Other substantial rank increases and decreases after deliberations are identifiable for each RSCH group in the figure. Not all rank changes were as dramatic, but Figure 2 reveals that a significant amount of reordering of preferred programmes occurred as a result of deliberations, and the longest bars denote the programmes that were subject to the largest shifts.

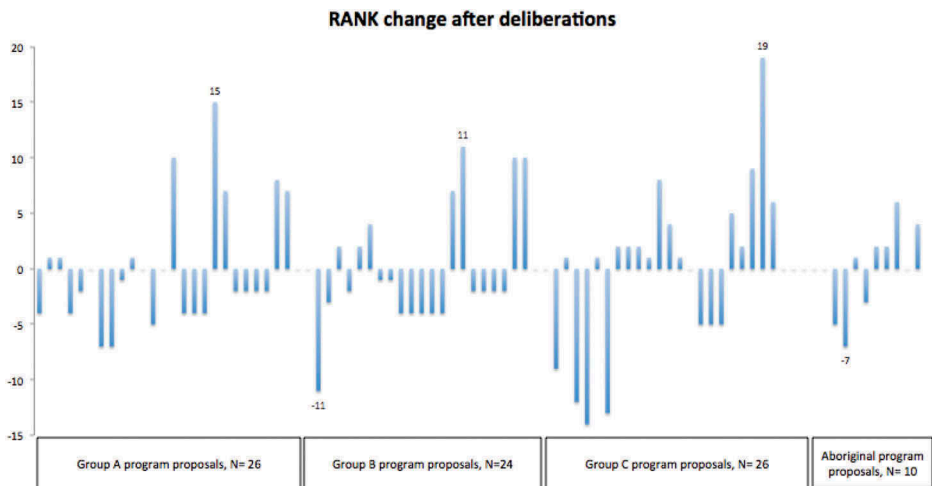


Figure 2: Change in rank of programmes after deliberations, all RSCH teams

**Table 2: Final decisions by RSCH after deliberations**

<i>NETWORK final funding decision</i>			
<i>Programme name</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Programme name</i>	<i>Budget</i>
Salsbury	\$99,422	Hope for Freedom	\$267,972
Sources	\$496,480	UNYA	\$150,000
BC SS	\$319,422	EMBERS	\$221,290
YWCA	\$802,704	SA MR CWW	\$275,185
Hollyburn Youth	\$802,704	St. Paul's	\$125,518
Alouette youth	\$769,223	CWENENGITEL	\$186,878
CFS Outreach	\$123,360	Journey Home	\$259,914
Aunt Leah's	\$313,800	E Fry HTF	\$34,299
Atira	\$277,318	La Boussole	\$254,212
Alouette Outreach	\$186,069	Shiloh	\$324,220
RainCity	\$530,320	Progressive	\$320,134
BC Coal. Dis.	\$353,393	Community Builders	\$219,506
Hollyburn Outreach	\$120,000	WINGS	\$121.05
John Howard	\$270,044	Lookout Metro EWR	\$68,200
LU'MA	\$90,000	Aboriginal Mother	\$196,600
Stepping Stone	\$105,195	Aldergrove	\$278,444
Covenant house	\$877,369	SA CWW	\$247,444
		Broadway youth	\$204,832
		Together We Can	\$126,224
		E Fry Dropin	\$184,986
		Spirit Children	\$181,798
		Circle of Eagles	\$257,000
		Aboriginal Friend	\$90,000
% Agree initially	43%	% Disagree initially	57%

Table 2 below shows that the final decisions achieved by consensus represent a fusion of homelessness programmes that RSCH members and bureaucrats both initially preferred, those that RSCH members initially preferred and bureaucrats did not (and vice-versa) and, perhaps most surprisingly, homelessness programmes that neither group initially favoured. These results demonstrate that deliberations can indeed be dynamic processes where the ground can shift substantially when diverse actors are tasked with reaching consensus.

Table 2 shows that the final decisions reached by consensus after deliberations represent a fusion of the policy priorities and preferences of RSCH members and bureaucrats: in the end, RSCH members and bureaucrats transformed their preferences



on homelessness programmes that neither initially appeared to favour. The systematic variation between the two groups of policy actors in initial evaluation and the transformation of policy preferences and choices after deliberations is evidence of the *collaborative advantage* – namely, final decisions on policy and programmes unlikely to have been achieved without the collaboration of diverse policy actors.

The changing of minds in this context is not fundamentally characterized by compromise, but rather was about learning, persuasion and transformation. Examples identified from participant observation can help demonstrate how arguments were accepted, transformed or ejected from deliberations, and ultimately shifted the collective policy choices. In the RSCH deliberations, with some of the most significant shifts in ranking of preferred programmes, RSCH members introduced new data and the perception of the value of the proposed programme changed among other members. New data included knowledge about what was happening on the ground (e.g. a shelter in the area is about to close), correcting a misconception about the organization or proposed programme, or that evidence in the literature challenges a particular service model or approach. In fact, almost all RSCH members introduced at least one piece of information unknown or previously undervalued by other members or bureaucratic staff during the deliberations which affected the ranking (good or bad) of a particular programme proposal. For example, by virtue of one RSCH member's professional position and expertise in the private sector, the consensus around an employability/skills programme – which was initially ranked very low by other RSCH members – shifted after this individual credibly articulated stories of programmatic successes.

Part of the benefit of being a participant observer in all elements of the collaborative governance deliberations means that one can be attentive to alternative paths to consensus, like horse-trading, either overt or in backrooms. In this context, horse-trading and compromise were not fundamental dynamics at play – rather, it was learning and transformation among collaborative governance members that produced a collaborative advantage in policy terms. One of the RSCH members involved in the deliberations later reflected in an interview that she 'came in with an attitude that it was really obvious to me what the real problem was and how to solve it', yet, like others who initially adhered to a singular solution like employment, shelter or mental health services, 'and obviously I was wrong, too because I thought that was all that was to it. I learned how complex it is' (Sundberg, Interview, 2012). In fact, it was the bureaucrats interviewed who were most emphatic that transformation is the key dynamic at work: 'the members come in with their own scores [for proposed programmes] and then you talk about it and it's a great way to learn new things' (Maboules, Interview, 2012). Another participant reflected that 'we heard specific examples of what [programmes] did work for [homeless] individuals, which sometimes was very helpful and especially when it was contrary to the evidence [produced in bureaucracies]' (Anhorn, Interview, 2012).

This is representative of a collaborative advantage in policy terms, because this is not expected to occur under traditional decision-making within bureaucracies, because recall that bureaucrats scored the proposed programmes quite similarly (a standard deviation half that of RSCH members) and observations of deliberations among only bureaucrats revealed significantly more groupthink on proposed programmes. In contrast, deliberations among RSCH members were dynamic, passionate and transformative, as evidenced by observing and documenting the changes in programme preferences and rankings.

### **Question 3: What features of the design and management of collaborative governance facilitate the emergence of a collaborative advantage in policy terms?**

Evidence from participant observation of this decision-making scenario reveals that what makes the RSCH generate a collaborative advantage in policy terms is not just the presence of deliberation and exchange among diverse policy actors, but also, perhaps counter-intuitively, by how it was designed to constrain and channel the debate among actors by those in charge of managing RSCH collaborative governance – the bureaucratic metagovernors. Metagovernance that is too restrictive and hierarchical can give rise to resistance and conflict, stifle policy innovation and reduce the willingness of policy actors to invest themselves in joint problem-solving (Damgaard 2006), whereas metagovernance that is too flexible can lead to governance chaos and even failure (Torfing 2012).

Recall that it has long been noted that collaborative governance requires considered institutional design and facilitative leadership in order to function effectively (Ansell and Gash 2008; Huxham and Vangen 2005). Institutional design refers to the basic protocols and ground rules for collaborative activity, which are critical for the procedural legitimacy of the collaborative process. Facilitative leadership is likewise crucial for maintaining clear ground rules, building trust and facilitating productive deliberations, all of which may involve direct action on the part of metagovernors to steer activity towards productive ends (Vangen and Huxham 2003). As a result of immersion within the case of homelessness collaborative governance at the RSCH, we are in a position to reflect on the design and management conditions that contributed to a collaborative advantage in policy terms in this case of government-funded collaborative governance. In doing so, we can build on the efforts of Friend and Hickling (2005) and Johnston et al. (2011) to theorize facilitative and leadership characteristics of successful collaborative decision-making.

Three features of institutional design and facilitative leadership emerge from participant observation in this context as consequential to deliberations and decision-making at the RSCH that produced a collaborative advantage: *time*, *task* and *target*. Each are described and illustrated with examples below.

Perhaps the most critical administrative rule set by the metagoverning bureaucrats at the onset was a powerful motivator for collaborative governance actors to deliberate in good faith and to reach consensus was related to *time*: the \$11 million to invest would effectively be lost if consensus was not reached. Collaborative behaviours are incentivized when costs of failure are so high for all involved. The effectiveness of restricting time in this context in part contradicts the findings of Johnston et al. (2011) that more time is better to achieve meaningful collaboration to achieve consensus. While the deliberations had no artificial deadline imposed by the metagovernor, it was also not an entirely open-ended process (only a few extra days were offered to spill over into if needed), which a number of RSCH members signalled in informal chats during the break was essential to keep discussions focused. Friend and Hickling (2005) reconcile the findings in this study with Johnston et al. (2011) when they specify that an important feature of process management is to not only structure decision-making with an explicit time frame, but also allow for what they call 'slop' time in the schedule for when particular moments of deliberation require it (though were unanticipated by metagovernors). One RSCH member reflected that

we initially disagreed on a number of fronts, and so we needed enough time to work through those... any less time and I think we would have resorted to a more basic process of compromise [on programmes], not working through the basis of those disagreements. (Confidential interview, 2012)

Thus, the problems associated with too much time are not cured by dramatically reducing time for deliberations; the key is to balance it against the specific task at hand, whether it is concrete decision-making around investments, exploratory policy planning or coordination efforts, the latter of which likely require more time for effective collaboration. Decisions on how much time to allow for discussion and decision on a particular programme among the group were made by the metagoverning bureaucrats in the spirit of flexibility, which is characteristic of *adaptive process management* conceptualized and discovered by Edelenbos and Klijn (2006) to be most associated with good outcomes.

In addition to the dimension of time, the metagoverning bureaucrats also strategically managed the *tasks* of RSCH members in this decision setting, mindful that putting all twenty-four into a big room to prioritize millions of dollars of homelessness programmes would be a recipe for disaster. RSCH members were split into smaller groups of five or six, each with a share of the proposed programmes to consider and thus were brought in for a relatively short period of time (e.g. three full days, though not consecutive) and the metagoverning bureaucrats conducted the bulk of the background work to collate information and data. Effective task management as a finding in this case aligns with Friend and Hickling (2005) suggestion that both *treatment of scope* and *treatment of complexity* need to be carefully balanced for successful collaborative decision-making. The strategic use of decision-maker time was essential to avoid exhaustion and frustration that would emerge in a wide-open decision context, such that they were able to remain focused and engaged in meaningful knowledge exchange

and deliberation. RSCH members remarked openly during breaks in the proceedings how they were grateful that they had delimited tasks within the process and that background work was done to marshal data such that deliberations could focus on the policy dimensions. Finding the value of breaking up decision-making into smaller tasks and groups in this context is consistent with Johnston et al. (2011), who found, using experimental methods, that groups larger than six were significantly less likely to collaborate effectively.

The third critical dimension of institutional design and facilitative leadership from metagoverning bureaucrats at the RSCH was with respect to how deliberations were *targeted* towards areas of agreement first. The metagovernor intentionally steered the collective decision-makers to find areas of agreement first, pushing the most contentious and controversial aspects to the end. This was viewed as essential to not poison the deliberations early on, building an environment of trust and cooperation such that when areas of more intense disagreement were broached, there was a foundation of small wins. This element of facilitation was viewed by metagoverning bureaucrats as critical, given previous experiences with collaborative decision-making that were derailed by a contentious start to deliberations (Okyere, Interview, 2012). There were reflections offered by multiple RSCH members involved in previous years' deliberations around homelessness programme investments that corroborate these occasions, referencing an explosive set of deliberations that were so contentious and damaging that they resulted in some RSCH members withdrawing from the collaborative governance effort entirely. Metagoverning bureaucrats were thus committed to finding a way to better structure how contentious issues were confronted, and the strategy of front-loading small, easy wins proved in this case to be effective.

By focusing on the three design and management features related to *time*, *task* and *target*, the metagoverning bureaucrats demonstrate a reflectiveness that Vangen and Huxham (2010) identify as the 'managerial tensions' confronted in terms of managing knowledge transfer and interactions and harnessing difference within collaborative governance towards achieving the often-elusive collaborative advantage.

## CONCLUSION

The case of homelessness collaborative governance in Vancouver, Canada, demonstrates, with a unique set of real decision-making data, a *collaborative advantage* to their efforts in terms of the policy and programme decisions made. The data not only reveal that civil society and bureaucratic actors bring in diverse knowledge and perspectives to the policy issue, but also reveal that deliberations can be a genuine site of persuasion and transformation among actors in collaborative governance. The nature of the collaborative advantage that is produced is a set of policy and programmatic outputs that would not have otherwise been selected without the collaborative effort. We know this concretely from comparing the choices of RSCH members to what bureaucrats

revealed as their policy preferences, which were distinct from RSCH members but also comparatively uniform among themselves. The gulf between the two groups was surprising. As such, if collaborative governance did not exist, and traditional bureaucratic decision-making reigned, a very different set of homelessness programmes would have materialized, thus revealing a collaborative advantage.

Why does collaborative governance in this context work, while in others it is typically characterized by collaborative inertia or dysfunction? These findings not only confirm the potential of collaborative governance in policy terms, but also demonstrate the importance of institutional design and facilitative leadership of collaborative efforts, building on the theorization of Friend and Hickling (2005) and Johnston et al. (2011). The foregoing analysis thus emphasizes that while persuasion and transformation among RSCH members are the fundamental dynamics driving deliberations and decisions, the rules and process set by the metagovernor that facilitate the deliberations and set the parameters of the decision-making are critical to channelling the diverse policy actors to productive means to achieve a *collaborative advantage* in terms of policy. This finding not only confirms Edelenbos and Klijn's (2006) finding that process management of such governance institutions is 'of paramount importance to complex interactions' (32), but also elaborates on the precise procedures that appear most consequential to facilitate the achievement of a collaborative advantage in this decision-making context, building on the contributions of Friend and Hickling (2005) and Johnston et al. (2011) to the management of collaborative governance.

This study finds that three features of institutional design and facilitative leadership of collaborative governance emerge as particularly consequential to deliberations and decision-making to produce a collaborative advantage in policy terms: *time*, *task* and *target*. These three features emerge from the Vancouver case of homelessness collaborative governance as essential to its effective operation from extended observation of decision-making and interviews with participants, and not only build on theory, but provide useful lessons for practitioners charged with designing and managing collaborative governance efforts. Strategic use of rules and steering by bureaucrats keeps the ship on course while harnessing the dynamism of collaborative governance.

The findings in this article emerge from a single case study, and however unique the empirical data, they are tentative and require further empirical exploration, ideally with controlled comparative analysis of collaborative governance. Fortunately, many cases of collaborative governance are created or mandated by national governments, but are implemented locally, thus providing larger *N* opportunities to analyse them as natural experiments in governance with built-in controls to the analysis, just as was done in this study, while also leveraging variation in institutional design and facilitative leadership to build a more complete theory of collaborative governance.

## **DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## NOTES

- 1 The concepts developed in the literature to describe such governance patterns are varied – network governance (Sørensen and Torfing 2007), partnerships (Pierre 1998; Kernaghan 1993), new public governance (Osborne 2010), empowered participatory governance (Fung 2004) and collaborative public management (Huxham and Vangen 1996) – but they all share a focus on examining the relationships between interdependent government and civil society actors as they collaborate on public policy development and implementation.
- 2 This should not be interpreted as claiming that bureaucrats are cautious and conformist individuals, but 'that government bureaucracies are caught up in a web of constraints so complex that any big changes are likely to rouse the ire of some important constituency', and thus tend to favour the most defensible and objective criteria when making decisions (Wilson 1989, 69).
- 3 The 'network management' literature similarly aims to understand how governance networks are structured and managed, emphasizing strategies of 'process management' and institutional design as key levers for network managers that shape policy outcomes. Yet specific strategies for how network managers or 'metagovernors' steer productive collaborative governance decision-making remain under-specified.
- 4 This is rarely achieved even in the political experiment world, as it is very uncommon to get experimental and control groups to complete *precisely* the same tasks (Gerber and Green 2012). As such, we can directly compare their scoring and decision-making without engaging in typical (speculative) counterfactual analysis – in this case, we have data for the counterfactual.
- 5 Recall that RSCH members formally make the decisions, but parallel to all of this activity is a group of bureaucratic staff who individually review and score proposed programmes considered by each RSCH team as a system of support for the decision-making.
- 6 These values are measured in absolute value terms because at this point we are most interested in identifying difference, not the direction of difference.

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