Introduction

On April 20, 2008, CNA, the Virginia Tech Disaster Risk Management Institute (Virginia Tech) and the Cooperative Leadership Institute (CLI) held an executive level discussion to further collective understanding of how collaborative, regional homeland security partnerships form among public, private, and academic organizations, the value they generate, and how they are sustained. This dialogue is part of a broader Multi-Organizational and Networked Alliances (MANA) initiative designed to facilitate and support the development and management of sustainable networks of public and private leaders in support of regional preparedness and risk management capabilities that will advance our nation’s safety and security. The initiative’s goal is to provide executives and leaders with the knowledge and the analytical and collaborative tools they need to create and engage with such collaborative networks in support of information sharing, infrastructure protection, disaster management planning and operations, and other homeland security missions.

This report presents key elements identified during this executive-level session as critical to the success of multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional collaborations, and summarizes the nature of the discussion. This report is intended to share the product of this discussion and to help identify areas for further research in this area.

Overview of initiative

Of particular relevance to this initiative are recent studies of emerging global trends which indicate that the world is growing increasingly more complicated and interconnected. This trend has lead to the creation of new types of vulnerabilities and challenges, especially for advanced economies and social systems, and traditional top-down management approaches of large hierarchical organizations are becoming less effective at addressing 21st century vulnerabilities and crises. In response to these new challenges, new leadership approaches are emerging. One such approach involves horizontal leadership aimed at stimulating and cultivating the organic formation of localized collaborative networks of stakeholders and peers to address new threats in dynamic fields such as business, economics, and disaster response and recovery.

Localized networks can be effective in confronting complex challenges in these areas; often they exist at the cutting edge of the crises and can respond rapidly, share knowledge efficiently, adapt quickly, and be sustained over time. In many respects, they are inherently more resilient than organizations with traditional top-down leadership structures. In this context, sustainable regional networks linking multiple organizations can make valuable contributions to increasing the resilience of communities and the nation to the full range of threats and hazards we face. Examples of existing collaborations that have formed with a homeland security nexus include:

- The Great Lakes Partnership was established to create an arena in which public and private sector leaders can come together to address and resolve issues of business continuity, preparedness and critical infrastructure interdependencies; and to engage in pilot projects to test best practices that can then be shared with other regions with a focus on innovation and economic stimulus.
- The National Capital Region’s All-Hazards Consortium (AHC) is a Maryland-based nonprofit...
the participating states to support regional multi-state collaboration efforts among stakeholders from government, private sector, higher education and non-profit/volunteer organizations.

- The Pacific Northwest Economic Forum (PNWER) is a regional U.S.-Canadian forum dedicated to encouraging global economic competitiveness and preserving our world-class natural environment. PNWER is recognized by both the United States and Canada as the “model” for regional and bi-national cooperation because of its proven success. PNWER is a respected voice and resource for our region, and provides the public and private sectors a cross-border forum for unfiltered dialogue that capitalizes upon the synergies between business leaders and elected officials who work to advance the region’s global competitiveness.

- The Sahana Free and Open Source Disaster Management System (Sahana) was conceived during the 2004 tsunami. The system was developed to help manage the disaster and, based on the success of this initial application and the dire need for good disaster management solutions, particularly to handle large-scale disasters, the Swedish International Development Agency funded a second phase to generalize the application for global use in any large-scale disaster. The project has now grown to become globally recognized, with deployments in many other disasters.

- Hokies United is a Virginia Tech student-driven volunteer effort organized to respond to local, national, and international tragedies that may impact university students and the community.

Elements of success

Of significant note is that these collaborations have started to form, and a dialogue has started about the issues. Unfortunately, many other collaborations have struggled to mature and sustain themselves in the face of complex challenges associated with bringing various governmental and non-governmental organizations with divergent value systems and motivations together to craft solutions. When working collaboratively across multi-state regions, there are few laws to influence governance, and oftentimes fewer rules to follow. In the case of homeland security and disaster response, developing sustainable networks of public and private partnerships in support of regional preparedness and risk management objectives is critical to achieving national preparedness goals and realizing a resilient society. The criticality of these networks makes furthering our understanding of how they form, what makes them successful, and how they are sustained is essential. The following section presents the discussion related to the key elements identified as critical to build a successful collaboration broken into two main categories: leadership and trust.

Leadership

Traditional leadership structures are having difficulty adapting to the new global phenomenon for partnership. 9/11 and the 2004 tsunami have changed the landscape of how we look at disaster response and recovery. Hierarchically structured models have struggled to deal with events of this scale and complexity, giving rise to new, more decentralized, network-based approaches. Network-based models have the ability to withstand the loss of one of one or more components and have the capability to regenerate themselves and adapt to a changing environment. Leadership is being redefined in these areas and a broader, new body of knowledge is being generated in many different fields. We need to begin to tie together this body of knowledge, and to bridge the gap between knowledge (academia) and practical application in the homeland security field.

Leadership and organizational structure

During the discussion, participants noted that a successful collaboration/alliance is a byproduct of strong leadership and effective organization. In reviewing the literature pertaining to leadership and
organizational dynamics, it is evident that there is a need to build upon this research base with a specific focus on how these multi-agency/multi-jurisdictional groups form, and the elements necessary to make them successful. Additional research is needed to determine how best to foster these collaborations to promote sustainability, growth, and to establish best practices for others to follow.

**Organic formation of governance**

Often, the governance structure in collaborations is formed organically whereby leaders, missions, and goals emerge as the process of joining together unfolds. For example, the All-Hazards Consortium maintains a broad focus and actively fosters collaboration among government, academia and the private sector. Further research is needed in this area to identify successful governance mechanisms, and emergent trends for operating in this environment. A specific focus should be placed on identifying how to solidify governance processes while avoiding the dominance of leadership.

**Building a conceptual framework**

Building a conceptual framework and finding a model to base these collaborations on can be organic in itself; however, several issues/questions arise:

- How can they be useful?
- How do the frameworks link-up across the nation?
- How have successful collaborations negotiated challenges to achieve a positive outcome?
- What dictates the type/kind of approach employed?
- How can governance be employed to address a broad range of circumstances?
- What kind of governance processes have proven successful?

The sense among the participants was that finding people that own the problem and are passionate about addressing it is key; this process is a continuum and leaders will naturally emerge from it. Building upon that with a solid conceptual framework is essential to initiate a culture of collaboration as a staple to fostering trust.

**Trust**

The concept of building trust is the backbone to building a successful collaboration/partnership. Specifically, it is important to find effective ways for any collaborative body to scale and syndicate trust among its members in an effort to promote connectivity and cohesiveness. For example, Hokies United reported that after 9/11 they had to create systems to deal with the outpouring of support (created a financial system for donations, and in several instances took actions that went against University policy but which were warranted by the situation). This helped in response to the shooting event at Virginia Tech on 4/16 because they already had the support and trust of the campus administration. The campus response to 9/11 showed the tangible benefits of having an on-campus collaborative organization, which created the legitimacy that the group needed to move forward.

Gaining the trust of the community/constituency that the collaboration has formed to support is essential to ensuring its sustainability. Fostering sustainability and staying relevant in periods not requiring active engagement is a constant challenge. Without trust, collaborations can become competitive, and this competition can defeat the goal of the group (overlapping vital interests). In particular, the role of a neutral party was identified by several participants as being key to establishing credibility and ensuring that divergent viewpoints are represented across the collaboration.
Shaping future discussion

During the executive session, participants noted several actions that should be considered as next steps and issues requiring further study. The focus areas for future discussion include:

- **Launching cross-state discussions on catastrophic planning.** The challenges presented by catastrophic events transcend the capabilities of individual localities, states, and businesses to manage. These challenges cannot be solved individually, and can provide non-threatening starting points for bringing regional alliances together. Thus, these types of planning activities should be initiated and encouraged.

- **Mobilizing social capital.** The sense of being part of something greater than one’s self can be a powerful motivator. As society becomes increasingly interconnected, and our need for goods and services increasingly interdependent, how can this force be leveraged to bring people together to solve tough problems?

- **Modeling collaborations after other successful partnerships.** Much can be learned from examining other successful partnership models, such as community policing and Weed and Seed initiatives. How can lessons on motivation and group/organizational behavior learned from these efforts be applied to collaborative regional partnerships?

- **Focusing on the problem.** Smaller challenges can sometimes be more difficult to come together over than larger challenges; the mission has to be bigger than the differences among participants, and critical enough to motivate action.

- **Articulating a clear value.** The value gain from joining a collaborative approach must be clear to leaders if they are to be motivated to participate. There must be common elements of success that can appeal to a variety of different stakeholder/regional partners.

- **Identifying and establishing best practices for sustainability of collaborations.** In the cases where regional collaborations have successfully sustained themselves, what have been the core reasons for their success? Are they exportable and replicable, and if so, how? What are the governance structures and organizational logic that they employ and how do they contribute to their success?

- **Learning from failed efforts.** What has happened in cases where collaborative bodies were initiated, but did not take hold? Why were they unable to sustain their efforts, and what can be learned from their experiences?

Participants

Representatives from the following organizations participated in the April 30, 2008 workshop. The summary of the discussion captured here does not necessarily represent the views of these organizations.

- All-Hazards Consortium
- Booz Allen Hamilton
- CNA
- Cooperative Leadership Institute
- GE Security
- Hassett Willis and Company
- Hokies United
- Naval Postgraduate School/Center for Homeland Defense and Security
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security/FEMA
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Office of Infrastructure Protection
- Virginia Tech Disaster Risk Management Institute