

## Developing and Maintaining a Network

### What is a network?

A network is a system of relationships in which people exchange information and resources to achieve common goals or serve common interests. Networks are easy to join or leave and tend to be informal. However, networking can also take place through planned meetings (like the Wisconsin Lakes Partnership's annual convention). These meetings may or may not meet regularly and may or may not pursue joint initiatives.

Networking is a process for expanding resources while maintaining your organizational autonomy. For most, the motivating factor for being in a network is the access to valuable information and the expertise of others in the group. With more people involved, creativity and options increase. Networks can also provide a strong support system (USDA NRCS Social Science Team 2002).

### Why should you network?

Networking can raise people's awareness of their relationship to the environment and lake community. It promotes understanding of groups and their respective missions.

### With whom should I network?

1. Who shares our issue(s)?
2. Who shares our lake citizens?
3. Who has resources we need?
4. Who needs our resources?
5. Who has a similar mission / vision?
6. Who might be a "resistor"?

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## BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR STRONG LAKE COMMUNITIES IN WISCONSIN: IDEAS & RESOURCES TO PONDER

In recent years, local lake partnerships have grown in number. Currently, Wisconsin has over 900+ lake organizations around the state working in community partnerships to do good things for lakes. Lake citizens have gradually come together to participate in these efforts because they are increasingly made aware of lake health concerns, as well as and town, county, and state government support for local lake group efforts.

Partnership is a broad term used to describe working with other organizations. Most partnerships move up and down a "continuum of collaboration" based on the degree of commitment, change required, risk involved, levels of interdependence, power and turf sharing, and trust. The diagram on the right (figure 1) explains this continuum in more detail. Tailoring environmental protection efforts with local realities and partnering with community members lead to greater public support and involvement, and ultimately to better lake conservation.

Lake community partnerships can include any person or group interested in lake health. Typically these lake partnerships include many watershed stakeholders: shoreland property owners, assorted elected officials- representatives of federal, tribal, state, and local government agencies; agricultural organizations, resorts, various business organizations, conservation clubs, chambers of commerce, student groups and senior citizen organizations, among others.

Lake conservation partnerships ultimately bring people together to work collaboratively to:

- Coordinate their efforts with each other.
- Exercise flexibility in how they apply resources and skills.
- Help describe environmental and socio-economic characteristics.
- Make existing resources more readily available and leverage assets.
- Determine appropriate opportunities for input with assorted lake projects and activities.
- Provides a mechanism for good communication and networking.
- Celebrate successes and model the way for others—a great way to educate is through public recognition of successful results.

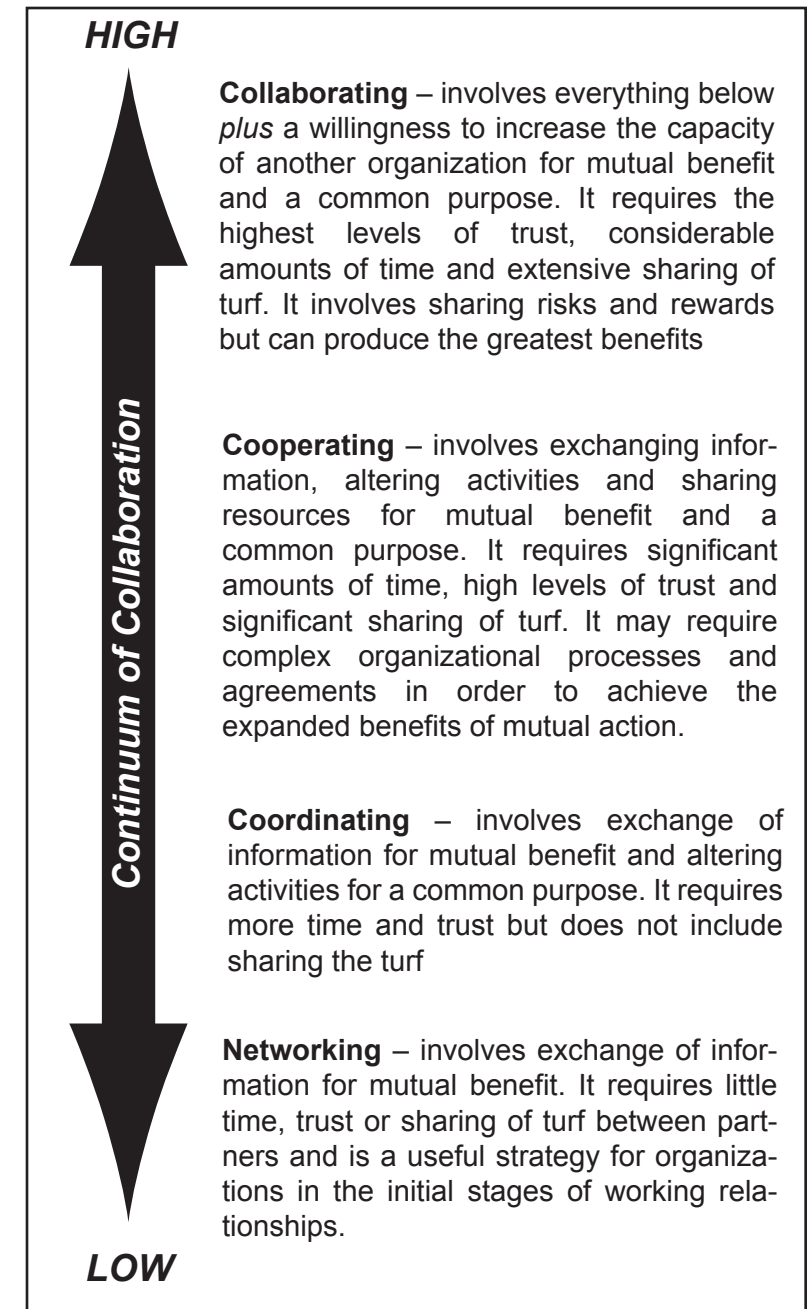


Figure 1: Continuum based on the degree of commitment, change required, risk involved, levels of interdependence, power and turf sharing, and trust.

**A partnership is an arrangement where parties agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests.**

## Elements of Community-based Lake Conservation Partnerships

Identifying the geographic area around a lake (lakefront property owners, watershed-wide, regionally, etc.) that is the focus of your conservation efforts is critical. Match the area with the problem.

Involving diverse community members from all walks of life is important when developing a vision, goals, priorities, and action items for your lake conservation work—citizen-based conservation efforts can make a big difference.

Assessing the local ecosystems, including the ecological, human health, economic, and sociocultural aspects of the lake community that relate to the environment is essential.

Developing a lake management plan aimed at meeting the ecological, economic, and social goals of your lake community in a sustainable manner.

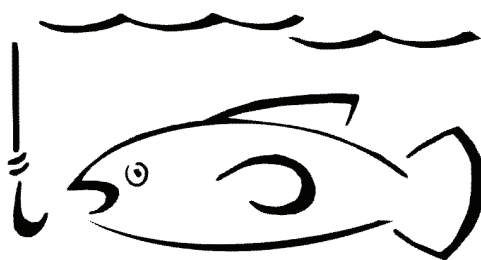
Taking on lake stewardship actions and activities through a wide array of voluntary, educational, and regulatory frameworks provides options for participation at different levels.

Increase your conservation work's efficiency and focus by building partnerships and leveraging resources, time, and expertise, and by developing better ways of informing, assisting, and involving lake citizens in meaningful ways.

Conduct research projects to assess needs of the lake community and help identify gaps that require attention

Promote lake needs and advocate for changes through legislative and other policy avenues.

Linking the expertise of natural resource professionals with that of education professionals can be central to successful lake conservation (U.S.EPA, Office of External Affairs 1998).



## The Tragedy of the Commons

In "The Tragedy of the Commons," Garrett Hardin (1968) elaborates on the problems associated with using community resources like lakes (referred to as "the commons"). According to Hardin, if individuals and organizations were to pursue their own economic self-interests in accessing a given resource, the resource would be put at risk of becoming depleted or destroyed and providing no value to anyone. Society, therefore, has a responsibility to protect and maintain the commons so they will be available to both current and future generations. This notion underscores the concept of resource management and the balance that must be struck between current economic considerations (such as jobs or growth), social interests (such as quality of life), and long-term investments in the future. Partnerships are a useful tool in advancing the cause of the commons.

## Finding Partners, Finding Focus

By including many interest groups, local lake community partnerships tap the varied skills of different partners, increase credibility, reduce duplication of effort, and maximize results from limited funds.

Partnerships spring from all sorts of places. Sometimes they emerge from a working relationship—the leaders of conservation organizations see common ground and decide to pool their resources within the community to explore better ways of working together (De Vita and Fleming 2001).

Opportunities—especially funding opportunities—bring partners together. And all too often, a crisis or a particularly shocking incident brings partners together—like AIS for example.

The belief that holistic, place-based (i.e., lake community) conservation efforts will lead to more effective long-term protection is the basis of community driven water conservation. Decisions and actions made today ensure future generations may benefit and enjoy Wisconsin's lakes.

**"Seeking to develop...skills and resources, and also problem-solving capability, at five levels: the individual; within...teams; within... organizations; across organizations; and within the community"**

(Hawe et al. 1998).

## The "Language of Conservation" and Using the "Water Words That Work" messaging method

Citizens and agencies working in natural resource management have learned lessons regarding the language of conservation over the years. Lake enthusiasts and agency staff engaged in lake conservation work often use technical and specialized vocabulary. Translating this "policy and science speak" into everyday vocabulary that resonates and makes sense to the general public is critical to building successful partnerships. Communication specialist Eric Eckl has assisted citizens with tools for effective communication for a long time. You can make a splash with your communications by following his team's water words that work message method: [waterwordsthatwork.com](http://waterwordsthatwork.com)

### Seven Tips for Facilitating Community-based Lake Conservation

1. In education program or materials, demonstrate awareness of lake community issues/needs/concerns. Acknowledge local issues and don't step on toes.
2. Relate or link the lake conservation issue to community issues. Be relevant. Provide examples and activities that relate to the locality.
3. Tailor the education program to meet specific community needs (i.e. jobs for youth, improved recreation opportunities, unsightly blue-green algae blooms) with the lake topic as a parallel theme. Complement this approach with citizen data gathering and interpretation activities.
4. Work with residents so that citizens provide the lead for determining an education plan for a local lake issue. Involve citizens in community-based behavior change re-search or use a social marketing approach.
5. Support local lake groups and other community organizations. Find groups which already work with citizens on locally identified topics of any subject. Find an opportunity to relate a key lake topic or management activity to their ongoing work, or respond to requests from these groups. Facilitate development of data gathering and interpretation skills by group members.
6. Encourage/facilitate community development activities centered around lakes, i.e. those which identify community sustainability needs and assets, relate to a local vision, and which provide action steps that address the quality of life and the environment. Facilitate improvement of planning, leadership, and management skills of community members through programs like the Wisconsin Lake Leaders Institute
7. Information is not education, although education can't take place without information. Strong lake education outreach relies on the existence of a body of knowledge which is not only *transferred* to the individual but is instrumental in *transforming* the individual; see figure 2 above.

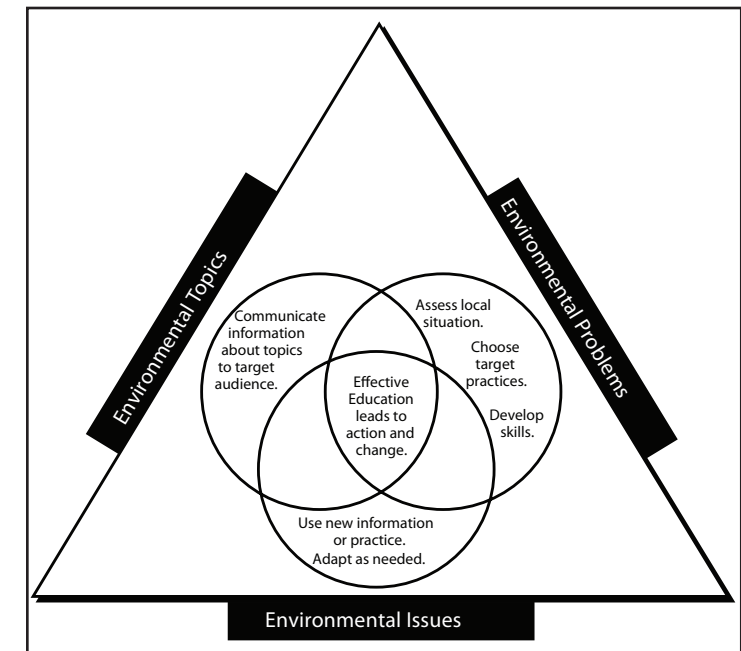


Figure 2: Effective Environmental Education

## Building Capacity in Partnership

Long-term improvement in water quality and habitat around lakes depends on building capacity in our communities for devising and implementing conservation and management goals. This process can take time. Building capacity in lake communities involves helping people continue lake conservation and management projects, assisting them with assessing community and citizen needs/values, supporting them in analyzing lake trends/issues, developing and producing materials and information needed to prepare education programs, providing tips and backing in the coordination and nurturing of volunteers, and aid in networking and building relationships with media (Andrews et al. 2000).

Each lake community boasts a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. A thorough map of those assets would begin with an inventory of the gifts, skills and capacities of the community's residents. Household by household, cabin by cabin, resort by resort, the capacity mapmakers will discover a vast and often surprising array of individual talents and productive skills, few of which are being mobilized for community-building purposes (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993).