

**UNDERSTANDING COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY**  
*Excerpted from the Applicant Guidance Document*  
**2024 Catalyst Fund Grant Cycle**

Collaborative capacity can be understood as the elements that allow groups of partners to work together effectively across organizations/entities and be able to function collectively to achieve a shared purpose. Robust collaborative capacity is what allows a group of partners to successfully produce more impactful and durable conservation and stewardship outcomes than can arise from any single organization working on its own.

A recent publication from the California Landscape Stewardship Network ([Increasing Collaborative Capacity and Infrastructure for Landscape Stewardship](#)) captures a framework for clarifying the needs that allow collaboratives to perform for landscape outcomes. This framework describes six structural elements of collaborative capacity:

- Collective purposes and goals;
- Shared strategies and priorities;
- Collaborative practices, skills and tools;
- Systems and infrastructure;
- Decision-making structures; and
- Coordination capacity.



The framework also identifies three binding elements of collaborative capacity:

- Inclusive culture;
- Meaningful relationships, and
- Collaborative mindset.

The structural elements of this framework are the specific—and fundable—needs that create the “scaffolding” that allows a collaborative to function effectively over time. The binding elements reflect the quality of the scaffolding and are the enabling conditions that can set the collaborative alight: experience suggests that a collaborative can persist at a basic functioning level with the structural elements in place, but it is the concomitant development of the binding elements that allows a collaborative to fully actualize and optimize performance.

Collaborative capacity can be thought of as a keyhole: when the structural elements are resourced and developed, and when the binding elements are attended to and intentionally cultivated and stewarded, a suite of partners can come together and turn in lockstep to unlock the door of potential for accelerating conservation and stewardship outcomes over time in the landscape they care for.

**STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS:** The following<sup>1</sup> provides greater clarity on the six structural elements of collaborative capacity, and specific examples of fundable components of each element:

- **Coordination Capacity**—the basic staffing support and coordination “glue” for holding together the logistics of the Partnership. Examples include:
  - Dedicated staff time and/or contracted services for essential backbone coordination and administrative support, including facilitation, meeting management, communications, progress tracking and measurement, collective administrative needs, etc.
  
- **Systems and Infrastructure**—the basic operational and communication structures that allow for internal connectivity, alignment, and information flow. Examples include:
  - Communications and data-sharing systems for dissemination of resources (e.g., information and tools).
  - Partnership connectivity structures, including meetings/convenings.
  - measurement tools to gauge and grow partnership impact and health.
  - Fiscal management support to oversee collective business needs.
  - Fundraising and grant-writing support to enable planning, design, and implementation of collective goals.
  - Technical services and support to meet science, technology, engagement, and other project- and program-specific needs.
  
- **Decision-Making Structures**—Partnerships exist and operate in the space between organizations, which necessitates transparent and commonly understood pathways for reaching and executing decisions. Examples include:
  - Development of a governance model to steer a co-created vision and ensure equity and accountability.
  - Support for equitable participation and engagement to ensure responsive, durable project or program design.
  
- **Collaborative Practices, Skills, and Tools**—working in the space between organizations requires a unique skillset, and this knowledge and expertise differs from what we have traditionally been called to deliver in our conservation and stewardship backgrounds. Examples include:
  - Skill-building and competency-based training opportunities to build key collaborative leadership abilities and culture.
  
- **Shared Strategies and Priorities**—a shared and clear understanding of how the Partnership is going to work together and what it will strive to do. Examples include:
  - Strategic plan and/or roadmap development to outline the collective vision, goals, work plans, actions, and activities that provide a shared understanding of partners’ roles, resources, and capacities.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Appendix A of [Increasing Collaborative Capacity and Infrastructure for Landscape Stewardship](#).

- **Collective Purpose and Goals**—the “north star” or the animating purpose that is holding the partnership together. Examples include:
  - Development of agreements (e.g., MOU, charter, etc.) to outline Partnership's collective vision, purpose, and desired collective impacts, including partner roles.

**BINDING ELEMENTS:** The three binding elements are qualities to be embodied in all aspects of collaborative work and can be thought of as enabling conditions for effective collaboration. These are interwoven and support/build from one another:

- **Collaborative Mindset**—comprised of a deep belief in the power of collaboration, a commitment to working through collaborative approaches, and an understanding of—and ability to benefit from and/or overcome—the unique opportunities and challenges that arise in working through collaborative rather than organizational pathways.
- **Inclusive Culture**—comprised of fostering a common sense of belonging across all participants and the valuing of all voices and perspectives within the landscape—with clear understanding that many voices and communities have been systematically marginalized historically in conversations around land and water, and that legacies of distrust persist.
- **Meaningful Relationships**—comprised of a recognition, honoring, and celebrating of the “humanness” that we all carry with us, and an intentional and caring exploration of how our individual humanness intersects with and connects to the humanness of those around us. It is, after all, through human relationships that collaboration is manifest.

Together the nine elements of collaborative capacity are what allows a partnership or collaborative to achieve durable and inclusive environmental and social outcomes over the long term in the landscape in which it operates. In preparing your proposal for the Catalyst Fund, we encourage you to **consider how you see your Partnership in its current form reflected in this collaborative capacity framework, and where you are hoping to utilize Catalyst Fund support to strengthen or build new collaborative capacity that will move your Partnership forward in specific ways.**