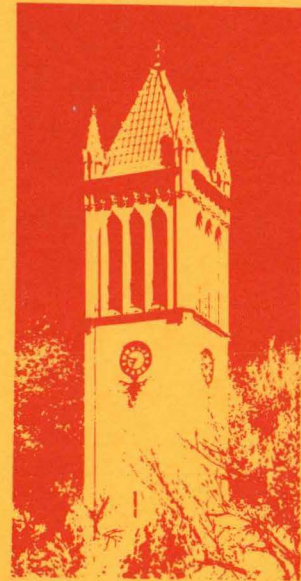


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**CREATING  
INTERORGANIZATIONAL  
COORDINATION:  
AN ORIENTATION**

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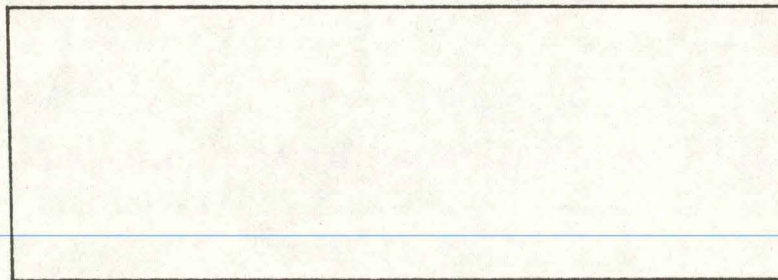
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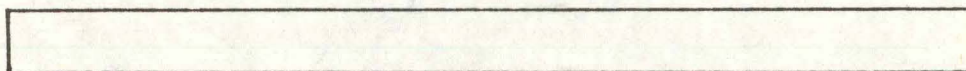
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## CREATING INTERORGANIZATIONAL COORDINATION: AN ORIENTATION

### Introduction

One of the first things that Europeans noticed about Americans as we went about the business of developing our country was how often we formed organizations to solve problems at the local level. Americans like to participate; they are "joiners" in the best sense of the word. When Americans see a problem that needs solving they almost always assign the job to some community organization. Count the membership cards in your billfold. Count the organizations in your local government and in your community. No, don't really count them! You would be at it too long. Most American communities have scores, even hundreds, of organizations.

Americans have always thought that most problems should be solved at the local level. For example, nearly every community has locally controlled fire and police services. Local schools, utilities, and hospitals have long traditions. Even our local voluntary organizations that have higher ranking units at state and national levels (for example, the PTA, YMCA, YWCA, Little League Baseball and Scouts) become angry if it appears that their control over local programs is threatened. Your local organization continues this tradition. Local communities represent the place "where the real action takes place." Many people believe that units at state and other higher levels exist primarily to provide guidance and assistance to you and your organization.

Organizations like yours have specific missions that relate directly to their reasons for existing. These organizations in turn must obtain resources from their members, clients, or the public in order to continue. Few if any organizations can regard themselves as "closed" to the influence of the community in which they function.

### Unique Problems of Local Organizations

Although local organizations have some of the same characteristics as organizations at area, state, regional and federal levels, they have

several characteristics that make your work as a coordinator much tougher than the work of leaders who try to coordinate at higher levels.

- Local organizations often have to depend on volunteers.
- Maintaining their interest and support is often difficult.
- The problem of "turnover" can't be forgotten.
- Government services like fire, police and so on are highly "visible" and may not have worked together a lot. Sometimes leaders in these services may be used to working together, but may be reluctant to work with organizations that rely on volunteers or with organizations that they consider to be "newcomers."
- The budget and "people resources" of many local organizations are too small to accomplish the desired goals. The cooperation of other organizations may be needed in order to be successful.
- It may be necessary to work with people and organizations in local government, and with others in the private sector who can't be ordered to do anything.

#### You Can't Do the Job Alone

In a way some of the disadvantages mentioned above can be turned to your advantage. It's true your organization isn't likely to obtain enough money and people to do all the planning necessary and to be able to handle all of the programs that are needed to meet your goals. In fact, as your budget gets bigger, it may be harder to obtain the cooperation of other organizations. They will each expect your organization to do what needs to be done since you've "got all that money and those people." Selling an organization's program and/or your job as a facilitator and coordinator may be easier if your staff and budget isn't too large. Other organizations and services aren't as likely to see you as a threat to them. Any problem will probably be solved better if people from different organizations work together. You need each other.

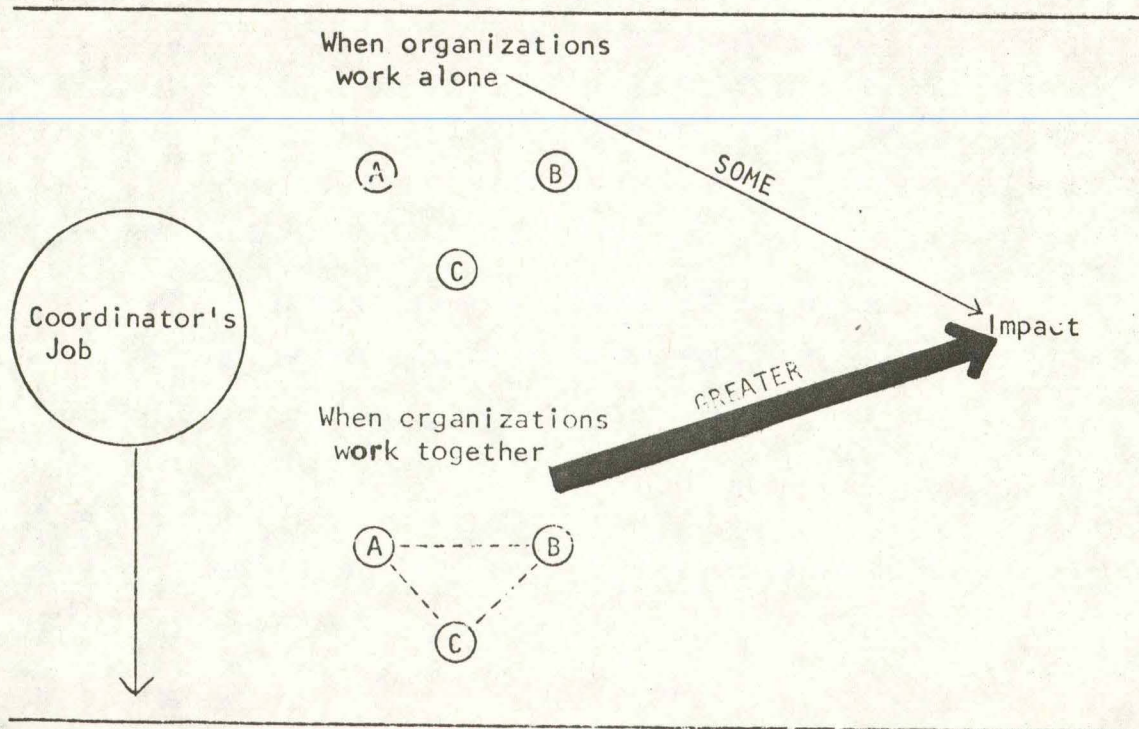
#### Increasing Pressure For Coordination

Many people and organizations are increasing the pressure for coordination. Many public and private organizations, and state and

federal governmental units have decided that some problems such as crime, health, pollution and so on can't be solved by any one organization. They insist that coordination must occur in order to qualify for federal and state dollars. The public is tired of duplication, overlap and competition. "John Q. Taxpayer" wants coordination too. Today, the professional role of "coordinator" is rapidly becoming accepted and those individuals who have these skills are in demand. Many of these coordinators, service chiefs, and leaders in voluntary organizations have seen that coordination can pay big dividends. Even though some local officials have the title "director" they insist that they are "coordinators" and not "directors" for these reasons. It is true, though, that you have to be a better leader to be able to coordinate effectively. It does take time and requires special skills and abilities. The questions many still ask though are: "But will it work for us? What will really happen if my organization tries to participate in joint projects?"

Evidence from intensive studies with hundreds of local coordinators indicates that you really have almost no other choice. You have to coordinate to be effective! One organization can't go it alone and be successful. The job of a coordinator is to try to achieve greater impact from organizations by having them work together. As shown in Figure 1, it is assumed that organizations A, B, and C may have some

Figure 1. Coordination and Impact



impact if they work alone. But we think that many times a community's problem will be solved better if local coordinators can convince local services and organizations to work together. You know that you'll be able to get some services and organizations together easily and others will be harder to convince. An ace in your hand exists when you realize that there are several ways that organizations can work together. Options and alternatives do exist! The job of the coordinator is to examine the options and to chart the course toward coordination.

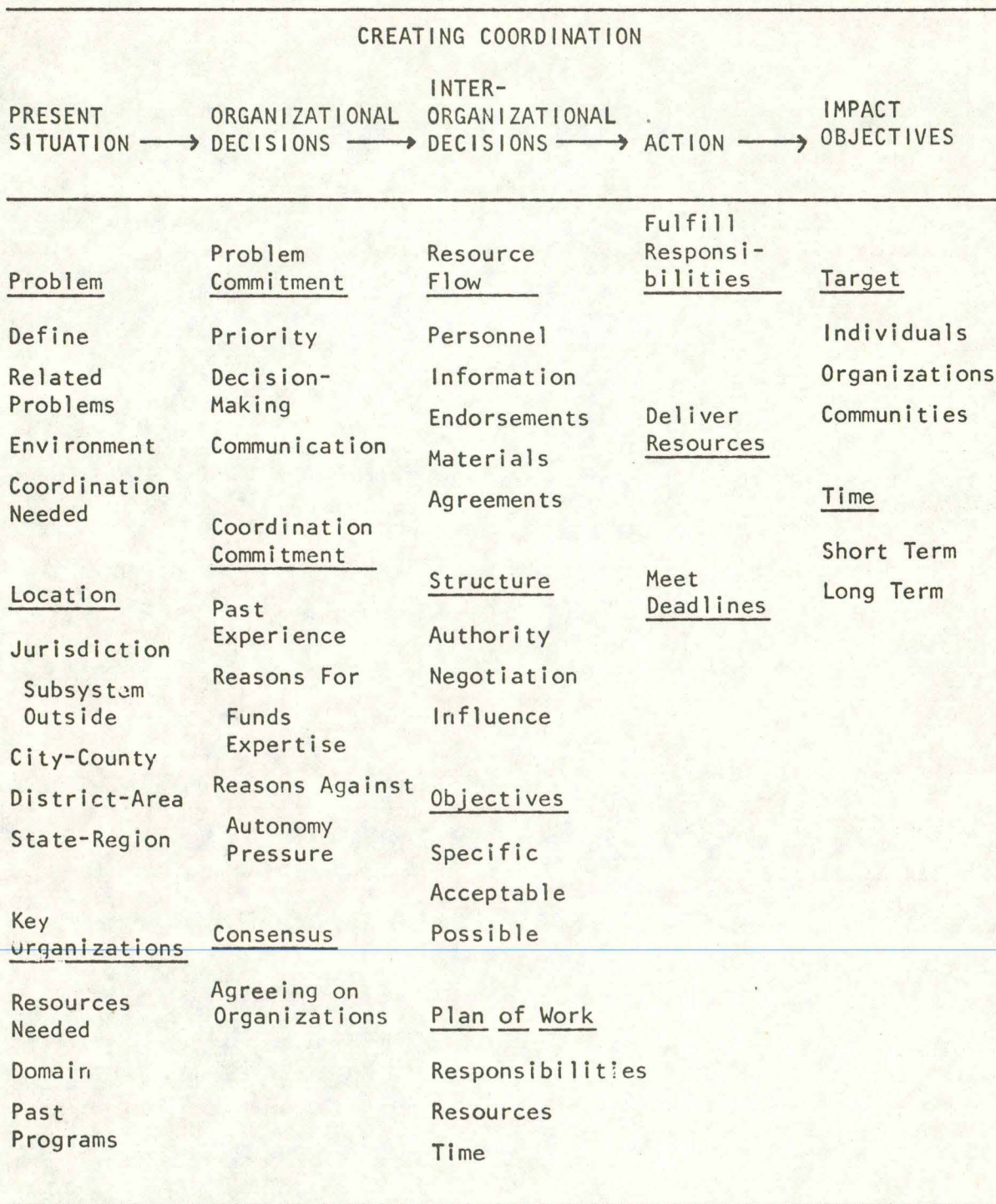
#### Steps to Coordination: A Map to Follow

The increased interest in creating effective coordination among agencies and organizations has generated an interest in developing applied training materials to teach the principles of effective coordination. The remainder of this report is a brief summary of an applied model to help plan and create coordination between agencies, organizations and other groups in their jurisdiction. Although the model was developed primarily for local coordinators, it should be useful for personnel area, state, regional and national levels whose job requires coordination. The applied model **contains** ten planning steps that usually should occur before the desired action actually takes place.

In a sense each step or decision making area represents a barrier to interorganizational coordination that must be overcome for effective impact results. For example, if a local coordinator doesn't correctly and fully understand the problem commitment of agencies, coordination is less likely to occur.

The steps in the applied model are briefly outlined in Figure 2. The model was designed primarily for local coordinators whose job it is to get different organizations to work together. However, an equally useful perspective is that the model is quite useful for a representative of one organization who is trying to get other organizations to work with its organization or its organization to work with others.

Figure 2. Model for Creating Interorganizational Coordination



### The "Map" Emphasizes Factors Coordinators Can Influence

You will note that as the coordination "map" unfolds, we have seemingly ignored certain factors that affect coordination success. Factors such as the population of the community, geographical region of the country, number of organizations that exist in the jurisdiction and so on do affect the chances for interorganizational coordination. However, these factors are largely static, e.g., they cannot be controlled or influenced to any extent, even by a highly skilled coordinator. Therefore, we have included in the "map" or applied model a major focus upon dynamic factors that can be influenced by the coordinator.

#### Impact Objectives

We suggest that you begin by thinking about impact objectives. Impact has to do with deciding how you will evaluate the coordination effort when it is finished. Remember that impact can occur when organizations work alone, but the point being advanced is that impact should be greater when organizations work together in a coordinated effort. Side benefits from coordination also occur. Good relations may be developed and organizations may come to feel a sense of fulfillment. Impact can be directed at individuals, organizations or at the whole community. Quite often notions about impact are vague, too general, or there is a lack of agreement about the desired impact. How can one ever know if a project was successful if the impact objectives are not known?

A time perspective should be taken too. Will the impact occur in a short time, in stages, or is an ultimate and long time perspective assumed? For practice, think about examples of desired impact you would like to achieve through a coordinated effort. Can you specify the types of impact and discuss the time perspective? Can you answer this question, "Why is a coordinated effort likely to produce more impact?" Play the "devil's advocate" for a while. "Is coordination really needed?"



### Present Situation

If coordination is needed consider the Present Situation next. Three important steps or decision making areas need to be considered, namely, defining the problem, specifying the location for the coordinated effort and making a tentative selection of key organizations to be included.

Step 1: Problem The first planning step deals with selecting and defining the problem and deciding if a coordination effort involving several organizations is necessary to solve the problem.

The coordinator and others come to think that a problem exists about which something can be done. Sometimes people in organizations at higher levels influence our perceptions about problems and sometimes people in organizations in our community influence us. Remember that problems must be specific, clearly stated and solvable. By "solvable" we mean the problem can be solved because resources are available and that it is thought that organizations will be willing to work in the problem area.

If a coordinator can "link" the problem to problems thought to be important by other organizations and for which there is concern it may be easier to rally support for the problem. Coordinators should be aware that forces in the environment influence our perceptions of problems, e.g., it may be easier to get people to talk about natural disaster preparations in the "tornado belt" than in other regions. Other forces in the environment that influence our perceptions of problems include ecological ones, population changes and new technology.

Step 2: Location By location we mean the geographical area in which the coordinated effort will take place. Revenue sharing and federal guidelines mean that some problems today have to be solved on a city or county-wide basis or perhaps even upon an area basis. The coordinator chooses the appropriate location (geographical area) after locating the target audience, following guidelines set by funding sources, and including organizations known to be relevant. The nature of the problem also influences location, e.g., flooding would probably have to be dealt with on an area wide basis as would some transportation, utility and health problems.

Step 3: Key Organizations Next, the coordinator makes a tentative list of key organizations. Organizations are "key," and should be included if they possess needed resources, have related programs or experiences, or if their staff has expertise that is needed. Remember, you can't work with all of the organizations in an area. Choose the key ones. Until now, the coordinator may have worked alone or perhaps consulted only a few people. It is now time for the coordinator to approach the key organizations.

#### Organizational Decisions

The task in this phase is to understand three important decisions each key organization will have to make in deciding whether or not to consider working on the problem with you and other organizations. The three decision steps are problem commitment, coordination commitment and consensus. If the coordinator is successful in moving each key organization through these steps, chances for a successful effort are increased. If some key organizations don't decide to move through these steps your success chances may be reduced, but you can usually still move forward with the coordinated effort.

It is important to note that the coordinator will have to have interaction with each key organization as he goes through these steps.

Step 4: Problem Commitment Each organization must be committed to the problem before it will be willing to work with other organizations on the problem. Thus, the coordinator needs to know where his problem lies in the goal priority list of each key organization. The problem may not need to be the highest priority but the problem must be important enough that the organization will devote resources to solve the problem. In some cases it may be necessary for the coordinator to use strategies to convince an organization it should work on your problem, i.e., move your problem up on their priority list. He also needs to know who makes decisions about priorities in the organizations and what communication takes place in setting these priorities.

Step 5: Coordination Commitment Next, the coordinator hopes to get from each of the key organizations a coordination commitment, e.g., a commitment to work with other organizations on the problem. Organizations coordinate for several reasons. Some do because of

increased funding or cost sharing resulting from participation. Others are pressured into it by the public, state, or national levels. Still others have experienced staff or related programs that can enhance your effort. Hopefully, organizations will realize that greater impact can occur when organizations work together.

There are also several reasons why organizations often don't want to coordinate with other organizations. Many fear a loss of autonomy regarding decision making and control of funds as well as who will get the credit if the effort is successful. Others may hesitate because of possible adverse member reaction or because it will cost too much. Sometimes organizations refuse to coordinate because it just has never worked with other groups before.

Each coordinator should also utilize appropriate strategies to overcome any organization's reluctance to coordinate. Being able to empathize with the other organization, understanding and using relevant reference groups and clearly analyzing the proportional investment of an organization may all be helpful in obtaining a coordination commitment.

Step 6: Consensus By consensus we mean that all of the key organizations come to agree that each should be included in the coordinated venture. Sometimes one or more of the key organizations do not want to work with other key organizations, even though they may be willing to work with you. Organizations must come to see that each of the key organizations is special and needed for particular reasons. Sometimes consensus is reached after the problem area is more clearly specified and agreements reached about how long the coordinated effort will last.

#### Interorganizational Decisions

Up until now, it would be possible for a coordinator to accomplish all the tasks either in his office or by working with the key organizations one at a time. But now the representatives of key organizations will probably have to come together because they will be making decisions that involve more than their own organization. The representatives must discuss resources that will be needed, how the organizations will relate to each other, how specific goals will be set, as well as develop an acceptable plan of work.

Step 7: Resource Flow Resources are anything that can be used directly or indirectly to help bring about change to solve the problem. Resources include personnel, information, endorsements, materials, and agreements. Resource flow refers to the flow of resources from individual organizations to the coordinated effort. In this step, the resources needed from each key organization for the coordinated effort are specified. In most cases it is necessary to exchange some information first and for personnel to get to know one another before they are willing or able to discuss the other interorganizational decisions.

Step 8: Coordination Structure By structure we mean how the organizations will relate to one another. As shown in Figure 3, three alternative structures are possible, namely, authority, negotiation or influence. As a coordinator you have already done some thinking about what structure will work best. Remember, that while authority may work in an agency, it is not likely to be acceptable to organizations in the private sector. Under authority, power is specified by the hierarchy, written expectations are known, and the chances for negative sanctions are great if an organization doesn't follow the rules. In contrast, when we coordinate by influence we rely upon informal power because no hierarchy or "chain of command" exist. The expectations are often unwritten and readily subject to change and reinterpretation when the participants wish.

Negotiation stands between the other two structures. No hierarchy necessarily exists between the organizations but a coordinator is usually needed. Some power is usually given to the coordinator. In any one problem effort it may be necessary to use two or even all three kinds of structures. For example, authority may be used within the executive branch of local government, negotiation might be needed when representatives of local services come together to plan, and influence might be best for working with some organizations in the private sector. The representatives of the key organizations will decide how they will relate to each other. Your job is to make certain they understand fully the structure they choose and that the structure they choose will work.

As shown in Figure 3 you can attempt to coordinate by getting agencies and organizations to relate to each other on the basis of authority, negotiation, or influence. With authority, for example in

local government, a chain of command is used. For example, a mayor may tell local service chiefs that they have to coordinate and some person is placed in charge. The arrangement is formal and all expectations are "put on paper." Sanctions can be used to get everyone to cooperate. Agencies often use this coordination structure. Under "negotiation" each organization helps to develop the written expectations, perhaps each writes an annex to the overall plan, and considerable "give-and-take" occurs. Sanctions exist but are usually informal.

Figure 3. Three Optional Coordination Structures

Social Power:	<u>Authority</u>	<u>Negotiation</u>	<u>Influence</u>
Formalization:	Central Authority develops written expectations	Participating Organizations develops written expectations	Informal unwritten expectations
Sanctions:	High	Some	Almost None
Example:	Agency	Coordinating Council	Informal Committee

Negotiation can be used when local service and voluntary organizations and businesses are needed. Negotiation is needed because authority can't be used, e.g. the local executive can't go around town ordering voluntary organizations to become involved. In fact, many coordinators

indicate that the authority form isn't even used too often in local government.

"Influence" is used when written expectations are not needed and when sanctions are not needed. With influence the organizations or services get together when needed and try to keep others informed when necessary. Some organizations may refuse to participate if authority or negotiation is considered. They may not be willing to take orders or to commit themselves to anything in writing even if they are given the chance to help develop the written plans, annexes or expectations.

Step 9: Objectives Once the questions about structure have been resolved, specific interorganizational objectives can be set. It is important when setting objectives that they are clear, specific and possible. The importance of "possible" can't be overlooked. If resources can't be obtained and if all participants don't agree on objectives the coordinated effort will be less successful.

Step 10: Plan of work The plan of work should specify each organization's responsibility for each activity, which resources each key organization will contribute and the date when the obligations are to be met. All of the participating organizations should have a copy of the plan of work.

### Action

After the planning is completed, it is time for action to begin. A common error is to attempt action too soon. The previous decision areas do require time but they can not be ignored. In the action phase of the effort the coordinator is concerned that resources are delivered when they are needed and responsibilities are met. It usually is necessary to have a specific person(s) assigned to monitor the action.

### Impact

After the action steps unfold the participants will be concerned about the desired impact which is what the coordination is all about. Sometimes it is not specified in advance how impact will be measured. Examples of coordinated efforts where impact and accountability reports must be made would include those partially funded by governmental or private agencies and foundations. Even local organizations will want

to know if the resources were used properly. The question is, "How will you measure the impact? What data or evidence will be obtained?"

This concludes an overview of the applied model for creating and planning coordination in local jurisdictions. After you are familiar enough with this overview to feel confident enough to make a brief orientation to a co-worker, or perhaps to some other local coordinator, you may wish to obtain more depth yourself. You might try using the map to discuss some problem that can only be solved with a coordinated effort. In time, you may wish to obtain more depth and training in creating interorganizational coordination.

If you are interested in learning more about orientation programs and training seminars that have been designed to help people become more effective in creating interorganizational coordination please see the enclosed insert.

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