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Caudle, Sharon

Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School

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Basic Practices Aiding High-Performance Homeland Security Regional Partnerships

Sharon Caudle

INTRODUCTION

Required by Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, the National Preparedness Goal is a national domestic all-hazards preparedness goal intended to establish measurable readiness priorities and targets. All states and urban areas are to align existing preparedness strategies within the National Preparedness Goal's eight national priorities.¹ A national priority under the Goal is the use of geographic regions across the nation to share risk, engage in joint planning, and share resources to develop and sustain risk-based capability levels.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) required states and urban areas to assess their preparedness needs by reviewing their existing programs and capabilities. These findings were then to be used in developing a plan and formal investment justification outlining major statewide, sub-state, or interstate initiatives for which they will seek federal funding under the Homeland Security Grant Program. According to DHS, the funding initiatives are to focus efforts on how to build and sustain programs and capabilities within and across state boundaries while aligning with the Goal and national priorities. In fiscal year 2006 DHS funding guidance, regional collaboration included specific implementation benchmarks. These benchmarks included (1) formalizing mutual aid agreements with surrounding communities and states to share equipment, personnel, and facilities during emergencies; (2) conducting exercises of the execution of mutual aid agreements to identify the challenges and familiarize officials with resources that are available in the region; and (3) coordinating homeland security preparedness assistance expenditures and planning efforts on a regional basis to avoid duplicative or inconsistent investments.

There are tremendous challenges in developing and implementing regional collaboration strategies. This article examines these practices, based on an analysis of several published sources elaborating on critical success elements or factors for successful collaborations, partnerships, or strategic alliances and performance management and strategic planning, including those for homeland security.

IMPORTANCE AND CHALLENGES OF REGIONAL APPROACHES

Others besides DHS have emphasized the importance of multi-organizational relationships, coordination, and collaboration such as regional approaches to homeland security preparedness, response, and recovery. For example, Donald F. Kettl characterized homeland security as being fundamentally about coordination involving multiple federal agencies, complex partnerships with state and local governments, and intricate ties between the public and nongovernmental sectors.² Kiki Caruson, Susan A. MacManus, Matthew Kohen, and Thomas A. Watson also have written that regionalism offers a powerful tool for encouraging

greater intergovernmental cooperation and improved homeland security preparedness. Assessing Florida's regional approach, these authors highlighted the importance of regionalism in fostering strong vertical and horizontal networks, intergovernmental cooperation, and security preparedness. They found that regional organizational structures are most effective in promoting intergovernmental cooperation and homeland security preparedness where there are (1) a large number of counties, cities, special districts, and multi-county special districts operating in each region and (2) a number of vulnerabilities, including high-risk physical targets, at-risk populations, water geography, and population size and density. Under these conditions, they found local officials tend to report higher levels of intergovernmental cooperation, better-quality networks, and a high level of preparedness. Regions where these conditions were not present tended to report less cooperation among government entities and lower preparedness ratings.³ The Homeland Security Policy Institute Task Force also emphasized that regional preparedness is critical to building a national response system. The Task Force noted that regional coordination and cooperation maximize the effectiveness of scarce preparedness funds, eliminate duplication of effort, and build effective preparedness and response networks by integrating federal, state, and local assets.⁴

The Task Force mentioned mutual-aid agreements, regional coordination plans and interstate compacts such as the Emergency Management Acceptance Compact as means to facilitate regional coordination. However, agreements, plans, and compacts, while important, are not nearly sufficient for serious regional collaborative efforts and the outputs of a much more complex process. For example, goals and objectives must be mutually agreed upon by various stakeholders in a region as a foundation for using resources in a complementary way.⁵ Thus a regional planning effort should reflect national, state, and urban area homeland security strategies, not just the National Preparedness Goal and its related national target capabilities. The national requirements are but one part of developing regional preparedness, response, and recovery assessments and funding priorities specific to a region. Organizations involved in a regional approach will need to formulate specific homeland security objectives and related strategies, determine the capabilities and resources needed to carry out and sustain the strategies, set up governance structures for the regional effort, and evaluate that effort on an ongoing basis.

In sum, although regional approaches to confront difficult, large-scale public problems such as homeland security are not new, developing and implementing regional approaches will sorely test the management skills of all those responsible for regional initiatives. Success in implementation is not assured and certainly is not easy. With one exception, states and local jurisdictions generally will need to take steps to self-organize themselves into a region for joint planning and resource allocation. Only one area in the nation – the National Capital Region (NCR) comprised of the District of Columbia and surrounding counties and cities in the states of Maryland and Virginia – has a statutorily designated regional coordinator, the Office of the National Capital Region Coordination (ONCRC) within DHS.⁶ The ONCRC is responsible for overseeing and coordinating federal programs for and relationships with state, local, and

regional authorities in the NCR and for assessing, and advocating for, the resources needed by state, local and regional authorities in the NCR to implement efforts to secure the homeland. Representatives of the NCR's Homeland Security Senior Policy Group testified before Congress in March 2006 on the NCR's readiness and discussed the challenge of regional collaboration and decision-making involving multiple sovereign jurisdictions. They observed that there was no single person, office, level or branch of government that had the authority to direct all preparedness activities across all others in the region.⁷ However, they observed that NCR must operate as a collaborative enterprise to accomplish the readiness levels corresponding to the priorities of all of the region's stakeholders.

Others have identified similar challenges. Kettl wrote that simulations conducted by the federal government illustrated how hard it is to build effective networks for coordination.⁸ In addition, discussing what he learned from watershed performance-management systems involving multiple actors, Mark T. Imperial noted implementation challenges. For example, performance management raises questions of competing interests and values among the individual organizations responsible for managing a watershed. There are different enabling statutes, competing public interests, and demands from their respective constituency groups. In addition, there are problems associated with the complexity of natural processes; difficulty in establishing cause and effect relationships, including the impact of human-induced changes or natural variations; and long time lags between action and observable environmental changes.⁹

Given the challenges, managers might consider what practices underlay a successful regional effort, as part of a high-performance regional partnership. A review of several key literature sources provided the basic set of practices for successful partnerships. The National Academy of Public Administration produced a monograph on high-performance partnerships.¹⁰ Robert Klitgaard and Gregory F. Treverton also described key factors,¹¹ as did the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in discussing practices facilitating greater collaboration among federal agencies,¹² factors characterizing regional coordination,¹³ and practices in developing pertinent information-sharing relationships and procedures.¹⁴ Russell Linden,¹⁵ Imperial,¹⁶ and Yves Doz and Gary Hamel¹⁷ discussed the challenges of collaboration and strategic alliances, and A. Bone et al.¹⁸ discussed cross-sectoral partnerships. In addition, GAO work in which I participated on performance management and strategic planning practices provided other possible regional practices for homeland security performance.¹⁹ Additional sources were also used, noted individually in the sections that follow.

These practices are categorized into strategic practices and enabling practices. The strategic practices value and justify the partnership while the enabling practices support developing, implementing, and sustaining the partnership.

STRATEGIC PRACTICES: PARTNERING TO OUTCOMES

The first set of practices for successful regional partnerships is those I consider strategic. These elements are (1) implementing a formal regional partnership; (2) assessing the value and content of a regional partnership on an ongoing basis;

and (3) defining and articulating a common mission and specific regional partnership strategic outcomes.

Formal Regional Partnerships

The first strategic practice is implementing formal regional partnerships, not collaborative networks. While regional collaboration is certainly needed, using the term “collaboration” implies to me a temporary, coordinative effort with fluidity of members, commitment, and resources targeted for collaboration. If we are to leverage regional collaboration for the four mission areas of homeland security—prevention, protection, response, and recovery—we should consider the stronger descriptors and leveraged relationships of “partnerships” or “strategic alliances.”

The National Academy of Public Administration defines a partnership as a mutually-beneficial and reciprocal relationship where entities share responsibilities, authority, and accountability for results.²⁰ To qualify as a partnership, the individual organizations must form a structure for the involved organizations to share authority, responsibility, resources, and accountability for achieving mutual goals. Normally, partnerships will emerge from collaborative initiatives as those involved in the collaboration identify joint interests and goals. As the relationships evolve from limited collaboration to partnerships, trust is built and policy and process boundaries between the joint actors begin to merge and tightly integrate in strategic initiatives important to the individual partners.

Value and Content of a Regional Partnership

A second strategic practice is assessing the value and content of a regional partnership initially and on an ongoing basis – deciding to partner at all and then deciding if the partnership should be sustained. Considering a partnership involves a complex set of factors, including evaluating in what environment the partnership must perform; what should be the right mix of capable partners; who are potential partner candidates, including those organizations that should not be included in the partnership; and what value each partner might bring to the partnership. Those deciding on a partnership should include representation from many different jurisdictions and diverse stakeholders as part of discussing public policy problems and agreeing on possible solutions. Decisions made collaboratively within the partnership are likely to have broader support than those that are unilateral.

As several authors pointed out, the central issue in deciding to partner is the creation of value – for who and where, for what benefits and in return for what efforts, and in what time frame. In simple terms, a partnership should only be used when the partnership produces more in value than can be achieved by working alone. The National Academy of Public Administration further defines more robust, “high performance partnerships.” Similar to a normal partnership, a high-performance partnership leverages each partner’s individual strengths. However, high performance partnerships are those that produce *significant* outcomes that could not be reached by an individual partner alone.

In contrast to collaborations, a high performance partnership stems from a critical and thorough assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the organizations who could partner. A joint assessment will include organizational capabilities and capacities such as financial resources or sources of funding, political skills and contacts, knowledge and experience, organizational structure and governance, information sources, and experiences. In a formal partnership, it is understood that each partner must carry out its commitments or risk undermining the benefits for all. Moreover, none of those involved in partnership should use the partnership to shirk or transfer its responsibility or attempt to cut or shift costs to the other partners.

The assessment will determine what capabilities and capacities individual partners can leverage or directly commit to shared goals and what actual partnership synergy could be achieved and sustained for mutual benefits. As part of the individual calculations of joining or not joining with others, potential partners will weigh what might be achieved together and what might be achieved individually and if the partnership will have staying power to create the expected value for all parties. It is a fact of partnering life that individual partners, even though they come together to produce joint benefits, also keep an eye on what “extra” benefits might come their way within the partnership – part of “winning” within the partnership.

Interdependence, based on the leveraging of capacities and capabilities, is the bedrock of a successful partnership and, for homeland security regions, certainly true. Once the partners commit to a formal partnership, the joint and individual assessment of partnership value and the balance of power within the partnership never ends. Managers of an enduring partnership will develop a process for evaluating benefits and periodically renegotiate the compact between partners. The environment of the partnership may change, as partners become rivals in securing funding, missions change, or the mix of products or services undergoes major changes. Over time, the capabilities and capacities of individual partnership may change, as well as the interest in sustaining a partnership for mutual gain. In addition, the balance of power of individual partners within the partnership can shift widely over time, particularly as the relative importance and specialization of the capacities and capabilities contributed by each partner varies. For example, one partner may defer to other partners for key competencies and become too narrowly specialized. As a result, it becomes too dependent on the partnership and actually can be in danger of termination from the partnership as the other partners find better partners. That partner also can be at organizational risk if the partnership dissolves and it no longer can rely on the vital capacities and capabilities provided through the partnership.

That said, the partnership has to be prepared to terminate a partner if that partner no longer provides the synergy for added value. Those involved as partners in a homeland security region will find this a particularly tricky issue – as well as the reverse concern when a well-resourced partner decides it no longer wishes to support a regional homeland security partnership. In addition, reassessing the partnership may also involve the network of partnerships each partner may have. Partners rarely are aligned with just one partner. Instead, each partner has its own partnerships and what occurs in the others has

implications for the partnership. Part of a partnership value analysis should include surveillance on developments in other partnerships and what their impact might be on the partnership. For homeland security, this likely would involve alliances with nongovernmental organizations and the private sector, as well as mutual aid agreements with jurisdictions outside of the region.

Common Regional Mission and Specific Strategic Outcomes

A third strategic practice is defining and articulating a common mission and deciding on specific, high-level regional partnership strategic outcomes or priorities. A common mission is the shared, clear, and compelling purpose for the partners to work together. For example, an initial NCR homeland security mission statement was to “build and sustain an integrated effort to prepare for, prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from ‘all-hazards’ threats or events.”²¹ Washington State’s Region 6 (geographic King County) 2005 mission statement was “to protect the citizens, property, environment, culture and economy of Region 6 (geographic King County) from acts of terrorism and natural disasters and to minimize the effects of these emergencies.”²²

These mission statements should be focused and encompass all of the homeland security programs involving the partners. A clear, concise mission statement will form the foundation for a coordinated, balanced set of more specific strategic goals, objectives, performance measures, and detailed strategies to implement the goals. Without such a mission statement, it will be difficult to develop an appropriate hierarchy of regional goals, measures, and strategies across the partners and to clearly relate the associated outputs and outcomes to the regional homeland security mission.

Further, the partnership mission statement should be a call to action, clearly interrelated with the missions of the individual partners and their respective goals. A strong common mission statement is a necessary vehicle to help overcome significant differences in individual partner organizational missions, cultures, and established ways of doing business while still satisfying respective operating needs.

Once a mission statement is ready, the partnership would define high-level results – strategic outcomes or priorities – the partnership should accomplish. In defining regional outcomes, the partnerships should conduct comprehensive internal and external assessments to identify regional homeland security customers and stakeholders and articulate expected outcomes for any regional homeland security programs. Partners, working with customers and stakeholders, would develop a specific and precise definition of outcomes based on the partnership mission statement. For example, Washington State’s Region 6 has seven priorities: (1) coordinate and strengthen regional emergency preparedness, prevention, mitigation, response, and recovery; (2) assess and address regional assets, needs, threats, and vulnerabilities; (3) make decisions that will generate long-term regional benefits and sustainability; (4) promote critical infrastructure protection, continuity of operations, and continuity of government plans for public, private, and non-profit organizations, and tribal nations; (5) develop region-wide interagency and interoperable communications capabilities and strategies; (6) develop region-wide public information, public

education, and outreach strategies; and (7) enhance the coordination, capabilities, and surge capacity of the region's public health and healthcare system.²³

The outcomes or priorities must be those that will convince all involved that their return on investment warrants the time and resources devoted to the regional partnership and the costs of sustaining a partnership. The costs include money, management or staff time, sharing data and reports, and designing and implementing joint incentive and evaluation systems. The outcomes should also consider the costs of not forming a partnership, such as misunderstandings, the failures to coordinate, and duplications.

ENABLING PRACTICES: LEADERSHIP TO PERFORMANCE SYSTEMS

The second set of practices defines the enablers for implementing a high-performance regional partnership. Enabling practices include (1) having leadership to champion commitment to a regional partnership and high-performance; (2) crafting the regional partnership's organizational infrastructure and norms to perform effectively; (3) setting joint regional strategic goals, objectives, measures, and strategies across regional jurisdictions to accomplish the strategic outcomes; (4) providing resources from both joint and individual regional partner sources to initiate and sustain the regional goals, objectives, and related strategies; and (5) setting a regional partnership performance management system for outcomes and individual performance management systems to reinforce partnerships.

Regional Partnership Leadership

The first enabling practice is having leadership to champion commitment to a regional partnership and high-performance. Experts point out that partnerships appear to thrive when individual champions, representing senior leadership in their own organizations, make a commitment to the partnership and tackle the challenges in working across organizational boundaries. These champions invest their personal reputation, resources, and time until the understandings providing the partnership's foundations are reached and a process put in place to define goals and how they will be achieved.

While champions provide initial direction and support for a partnership, sustainable partnerships require sharing authority, ownership, and joint accountability for results. The initiating champion must be supported by and then supplanted by managers of the joining partners. The champion and these managers should see the partnerships as the means to extend their own organizations' resources, not as remedies for past failures. Top management of all the partners should be committed to successful implementation of homeland security performance-based management and the achievement of agreed-upon outcomes. These outcomes should be made high priorities of the partnership and individual partners. Top management buy-in and commitment, a high level of involvement, and consistency in leadership should characterize the partnership. Top managers from the involved jurisdictions should be involved in all aspects of

regional performance-based management, from developing a performance monitoring and evaluation system to identifying and assessing key measures.

Partnership Organizational Infrastructure and Norms

A second practice is crafting the regional partnership's organizational infrastructure and norms to perform effectively. Organizational infrastructure and norms include a governing and decision-making structure, policies, procedures, processes, communication, and data systems, central to operating across agency boundaries.

Partners should follow the principal that "form follows function," or in this case, form follows the intended results described in the regional homeland security mission statement and strategic goals. The governance and decision-making structure for the regional partnership – developed by and accepted by all individual partners – provides the leadership, processes, and resources for partnership decisions, the allocation of resources to implement the decisions, and the means to resolve the unavoidable conflicting priorities and concerns within the partnership. The NCR Senior Policy Group, for example, plays a central role in interaction across the NCR jurisdictions. The Group provides continuing policy and executive level focus on the region's homeland security concerns. It has the mandate to determine priority actions for increasing regional preparedness and response capabilities and reducing vulnerability to terrorist attacks. It is the final adjudicator for decisions, relying on extensive input and advice from local government's Chief Administrative Officers committee.²⁴

All partners and their stakeholders should know how to access the partnership decision-making structure and what to expect from it. The organizational infrastructure and norms should vary depending on the political traditions and authority of state, regional, and local entities that are involved in the partnership. However, political traditions and authorities may not promote partnerships that cross organizational or jurisdictional boundaries. For example, David Robertson observes that the power given to cities and counties is determined by the states.²⁵ This complicates emergency planning and decision making when jurisdictions are not located in the same state and there are conflicting laws. Where there are conflicts or complications, those forming the partnership might consider more prescriptive, minimum requirements for membership, decision-making processes, and planning.

To facilitate boundary-spanning partnerships, partnering organizations should address the compatibility of standards, policies, procedures, processes, and data systems that will be used in the partnership. Partnership norms such as a common set of values, language, and glossary of terms also can guide joint activities and build mutual trust. To assist in crosscutting efforts, partner organizations could increase the usefulness of their common data sharing by establishing common data definitions and information systems. Common data definitions help ensure that data used for common purposes would be consistently defined, collected, calculated, and interpreted. Partners might also identify existing information systems within each partner organization that might serve common interests and information that is already shared across partner organizations.

Crafting the partnership organizational infrastructure and underlying trust generally requires a number of shared experiences to become robust. Repeated interactions across the partners encourage their organizations to make investments in partnership processes and resources such as shared databases and specialized staff. Frequent interactions to exchange information and ideas build trust in the partnership and personal relationships. However, these interactions should not be left to chance or the individual efforts of those involved in managing or staffing the partnership. Part of the partnership organizational infrastructure and norms should include concrete activities and processes to build ongoing personal relationships over time. The partnership should hold regular – bimonthly, quarterly, or annual – meetings or forums to discuss issues and continue valuable face-to-face contacts. The partnership should encourage consistent member participation, building trust through members consistently attending and participating in the partnerships' activities. Members should also be encouraged to consistently involve the same representatives and not rotate different people as representatives.

In addition, the norms and understandings of the partnership activities should establish an atmosphere where each partner's issues and expertise merit consideration regardless of his or her organization or the individual's position in the organization. Procedures are also needed when there are violations of the understandings that dictate the governance and decision-making processes. Violations would undermine trust and thus the partnership purpose. The governance and decision-making structure should be designed to quickly resolve conflicts and concerns which, if left unchecked, can undermine the commitment of individual partners or even destroy the entire partnership. A formal communications plan also can stress constant sharing of information. Organizations should use several methods of communication to explain the purpose, processes, implementation strategies, and staff responsibilities for homeland security performance management and measurement.

Joint Strategic Goals, Objectives, Measures, and Strategies

The third enabling practice is setting joint regional strategic goals, objectives, measures, and strategies across regional jurisdictions to accomplish the strategic outcomes. This should be accomplished through regional and individual partner homeland security strategic and implementation plans that direct and coordinate regional programs to address joint priorities.

The planning process and plans also can be used to enhance the ownership of and commitment to the regional performance management efforts. Managers and staff across the region should participate extensively in the development of goals, targets, and measures, hopefully securing agreement on what will be used for detailed joint and individual partner planning and program management. The strategic and implementation planning should provide a clear rationale or logic for how specific objectives and strategies and their related inputs for individual programs will deliver regional homeland security outputs that can be connected to intermediate and final regional homeland security outcomes. These descriptions, often called program logic models, are not necessarily the more extensive models that might be used in more comprehensive program

evaluations, but concise descriptions of the basic flow from inputs to outcomes. The exercise of developing logic models can help those involved in regional homeland security initiatives (1) see the progression from outputs to end outcomes across the region; (2) see how changes in joint and individual partner program components and outputs might more effectively impact homeland security outcomes; and (3) better understand specific resource contributions to desired homeland security results. Performance measures and strategies should be consistent with the rationale.

Implementation plans across the regional partnership should clearly explain how regional goals, objectives, and measures will be implemented. These plans can serve as partnering agreements, whether formally or informally stated as agreements to implement. Using a “family” of partner implementation plans can encourage the direct linkage of regional strategic goals and measures to operational and support goals, measures, and related activities across the region and by partners who are acting individually to support the regional aims. Implementation plans for regional goals across the partnership should be a valuable mechanism to ensure each partner’s goals can be carefully integrated with those of the other partners. In sum, these plans direct partners’ strategies and activities to be oriented toward achieving the principal regional strategic goals and help avoid contradictory homeland security goals or the supplanting of those goals across the partnership and within individual partner organizations.

These implementation plans should define roles and responsibilities and resource commitments for achieving the regional goals and objectives. For example, part of the process should include establishing one lead organization or a specific leadership role among the partners for implementing the regional goals, perhaps even to the next lower objective level. To illustrate, Washington State’s Region 6 strategic plan notes that the region will implement each of the homeland security objectives by assigning to it a “coordinating lead.” The coordinating plan is to be responsible for bringing together any other entities and individuals engaged in implementing the objective. Consulting with any key stakeholders, the coordinating lead will develop an action plan mapping out the immediate steps necessary to accomplish the objective.²⁶

The plans also can be mapped to other plans of other jurisdictions to validate the content of the goals and their importance. For example, Washington State’s Region 6 plan includes two crosswalks. One crosswalk is of the regional homeland security strategic plan priorities to the Washington State and the National Preparedness Goal priorities and capabilities. The second crosswalk is of the Region 6 homeland security strategic plan priorities, goals, and objectives to the Washington State and Urban Area Security Initiative Seattle Urban Area Strategy.²⁷

The strategic and implementation plans are also important to the relationships in a partnership. The ability to work in partnerships requires mutual trust among the respective parties. The strategies and implementation plans articulate partnership priorities and commitments and facilitate shared beliefs and expectations that individual partners will carry out their part of the joint agreements.

Resource Commitment

The fourth enabling practice is providing resources from both joint and individual regional partner sources to initiate and sustain the regional goals, objectives, and related strategies. A regional partnership may have clear leadership and structure and well-defined strategies, but fail because resource allocation or commitments run into problems. Resources include tangibles such as financial resources, staff, assets, technology, and information, and such intangibles as knowledge, access, relationships, political support, and in-kind contributions. As mentioned earlier, partners have relative resource strengths and limitations, bringing different levels of resources and capacities to the effort. By assessing the resource strengths and limitations, partners can identify opportunities to address resource needs by leveraging each others' resources needed for the joint strategies.

Regional partners should recognize that one of the biggest incentives for homeland security performance-based management is seeing results information integrated into budgetary structures and decision making. This also is an aim of DHS, where grant allocation is tied to impact. The partners should align their individual budgets with regional homeland security program activities which, in turn, should be tied to agreed-upon goals, targets, and measures. To support the regional partnership, each partner should allocate or redirect existing funding and other assets to meet the partnership's purpose. The degree to which resource allocation or redirection occurs is an important distinction between collaboration and a high-performance partnership. A regional partnership will fail if members retain independent control over the resources intended for the partnership or are free to change partnership commitments unilaterally. Each partner should understand what its organization is expected to contribute to the partnership and what it will receive in return.

To coordinate and better leverage resources for the partnership, a business plan and related formal agreements, if necessary, should be prepared at the very beginning of the partnership. The partners should collectively decide on criteria and mechanisms for allocating resources effectively and establish performance measures to assess resource utilization. In addition, the partnership should scale the mission and goals to available resources, but have a plan for growing resources if necessary. For example, other partners could be recruited if there are resource gaps that cannot be filled by the existing partners.

Partnership Performance Management Systems

The final enabling practice is setting a regional partnership performance management system for outcomes and individual performance management systems to reinforce partnerships. The regional governance structure should ensure that partners are accountable for the implementation of performance-based management by rigorously tracking and evaluating action items designed to implement strategic plans and meet performance expectations. Variances between actual performance and expected performance targets should be promptly identified and acted upon, with regional managers and staff actively

participating in the implementation and tracking of regional partner homeland security performance results.

Performance management systems can motivate those in the partnership to more effectively work together and meet their commitments. Kettl observes that cross-cutting performance management can serve as a language for talking about common action, encouraging members in a network involving other organizations to recognize their individual contributions to shared goals and to assess their effectiveness in doing so.²⁸

The partnership performance-management system should serve the needs of partners. Outcome measures and baseline data designed to assess the impact of the partnership strategies should be the critical few on which all partners can agree and which focus the partnership (acting jointly) and jurisdictions (acting individually) to pay attention to the strategies. In addition, a partnership performance-management system is a valuable tool in enforcing partnership agreements and placing a check on destructive partnership behaviors such as shirking agreed-upon responsibilities.

The partners also should use rigorous criteria to assess and select the actual measures that will be used in the partnership performance-management system. The selection criteria – such as availability, accuracy, validity, potential adverse consequences, balance, and relevance – recognize that meaningful performance-based management requires the use of a manageable number of useful measures. Tracking more measures results in an increased data collection burden for all partners, more adversely affecting those with fewer resources to handle measurement and accountability reporting. Not carefully screening measures results in measures that can be similar to others or that might be irrelevant to program results and operational needs. The result might be a large volume of measures that overwhelm those measures considered truly important for decision making and guiding regional homeland security operations.

However, as is the case with any other performance-management system, excessive monitoring and enforcement of partnership performance can breed difficulties. For example, excesses can create powerful disincentives for joining or sustaining a partnership. Those currently in the partnership or potential partners may fear possible reprisals and criticisms resulting from an overly-aggressive performance monitoring and enforcement approach. However, if properly constructed, performance-management systems and their performance reports can institutionalize the means to monitor, evaluate, and report on the results of the partnership. They further can identify areas for policy and operational improvement or changes in other areas, such as the partnership's organizational infrastructure.

Individual performance-management systems should also reinforce individual accountability for regional partnership efforts through the performance agreements and appraisal processes. Performance expectations in individual performance plans or performance agreements would require executives, managers, and other key staff involved in partnership activities to identify partnership-oriented individual goals. For example, these plans or agreements could include required competencies in working across organizational boundaries, such as breaking down barriers between organizations. Specific

individual performance responsibilities and accountabilities for operating in a partnership can (1) increase the visibility and importance of partnership performance management results and (2) encourage managers and staff to pay attention to partnership performance information and outcomes. In addition to the performance agreements and appraisals, the partners could also establish a firm link between the partnership performance expectations and monetary and non-monetary incentives.

To support both partnership and individual performance management systems, the organizations involved in the partnership should recognize that to successfully implement results-oriented homeland security strategies, they need managers and staff competent in at least the basics of performance management. The competencies are needed for two purposes. The first purpose is to understand the rationale of performance management and how measurement can be used. The second purpose is to go beyond understanding and actually put performance management and measurement to use in directly improving regional performance for homeland security. The partners should seek to build the necessary competencies through activities such as training and on-the-job activities.

CONCLUSIONS

It is encouraging that additional research is being done on regional preparedness, including standards. For example, the Emergency Management Accreditation Program pilot tested applying preparedness standards to the NCR, identifying additional components for regional assessments. These included (1) guidance for regional planning and coordination; (2) development of a regional online assessment tool to guide a region through self-assessment; and (3) table-top exercise(s) to test regional capabilities.²⁹ The practices I have presented here are intended to serve as aids as jurisdictions enhance current regional arrangements or build new ones. In large part, they are applicable to any partnership arrangement, not just homeland security regional initiatives. However, these practices might be considered the base set on which to begin or assess regional homeland security approaches, not the complete set.

A more complete set of practices would better inform the complexity and nuances of homeland security partnerships. For example, these practices might answer the following questions, beyond the scope of this article:

- What criteria should be used to form a geographic region and the “right” set of partners? Will all jurisdictions within the geographic region be required to join? How should partnerships cross international borders?
- What risk management approaches, on a regional basis, will inform strategic goals, objectives, and related measures?
- What changes are needed in laws – whether state, local, or federal – to foster cross-boundary homeland security arrangements?
- To what extent will DHS homeland security funding and regional-approach requirements strengthen or weaken a region targeting its resources toward regional needs, not national needs?

- What can be done about “free rider” partners within a regional partnership who reduce their partnership contributions, but still want the partnership benefit? What can be done about partners who, because of size or resources, impose priorities on the other partners, perhaps lessening regional homeland security?
- What incentives are needed to sustain a regional partnership and resource commitments over time when individual partners face pressure to prioritize non-homeland security programs?
- What specific partnership skills and capabilities should be taught and developed for homeland security and how can these competencies be rewarded? What can be done about gaps in these competencies across a partnership?
- What are the unintended consequences of homeland security regional partnerships, such as mutual aid agreements outside the region?
- What is the right set of measures to judge ongoing regional partnership performance for “all hazards?”

Answers to these questions and others should help us better understand, craft, and leverage regional homeland security partnerships. More importantly, stronger partnerships should overcome weaknesses in regional planning and coordination structures and capabilities revealed in major catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina.

Dr. Sharon Caudle is an assistant director with the U.S. Government Accountability Office's Homeland Security and Justice Team. She is also a senior fellow with The George Washington University's Homeland Security Policy Institute. She specializes in homeland security and national preparedness strategic policies, programs, standards, and management. She earned her master's and doctorate in public administration from The George Washington University in Washington, DC, and a master's in homeland security and homeland defense from the Center for Homeland Defense and Security, Naval Postgraduate School, in Monterey, CA.

This article represents the views of the author and not those of the Government Accountability Office.

¹ Those priorities are (1) implement the National Incident Management System and National Response Plan; (2) expand regional collaboration; (3) implement the interim National Infrastructure Protection Plan; (4) strengthen information-sharing and collaboration capabilities; (5) strengthen interoperable communications capabilities; (6) strengthen chemical, biological, radiological/nuclear, and explosive detection, response, and decontamination capabilities; (7) strengthen medical surge and mass prophylaxis capabilities; and (8) review emergency operations plans and the status of catastrophic planning.

² Donald F. Kettl, *System under stress: Homeland security and American politics* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2004).

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- ³ Kiki Caruson, Susan A. MacManus, Matthew Kohen, and Thomas A. Watson, "Homeland security preparedness: the rebirth of regionalism," *Publius* 35, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 143-187.
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