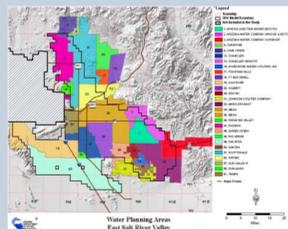




The East Valley Water Forum

- The City of Mesa believes in collaboration and currently participates in numerous collaborative efforts. The City would like to better understand the collaborative process in order to continue with good, successful collaboration in the future
- The Forum is a voluntary partnership of tribal, public, and private water providers and agencies, as well as other interested stakeholders who share a common interest in water resources management within the East Salt River Valley
- The Forum has successfully collaborated on several research projects regarding groundwater in the East Salt River Valley Sub basin, ¹ and is currently contemplating their next steps forward
- **What aspects of the Forum's collaborative process and environment foster or inhibit consensus building between the stakeholders?**



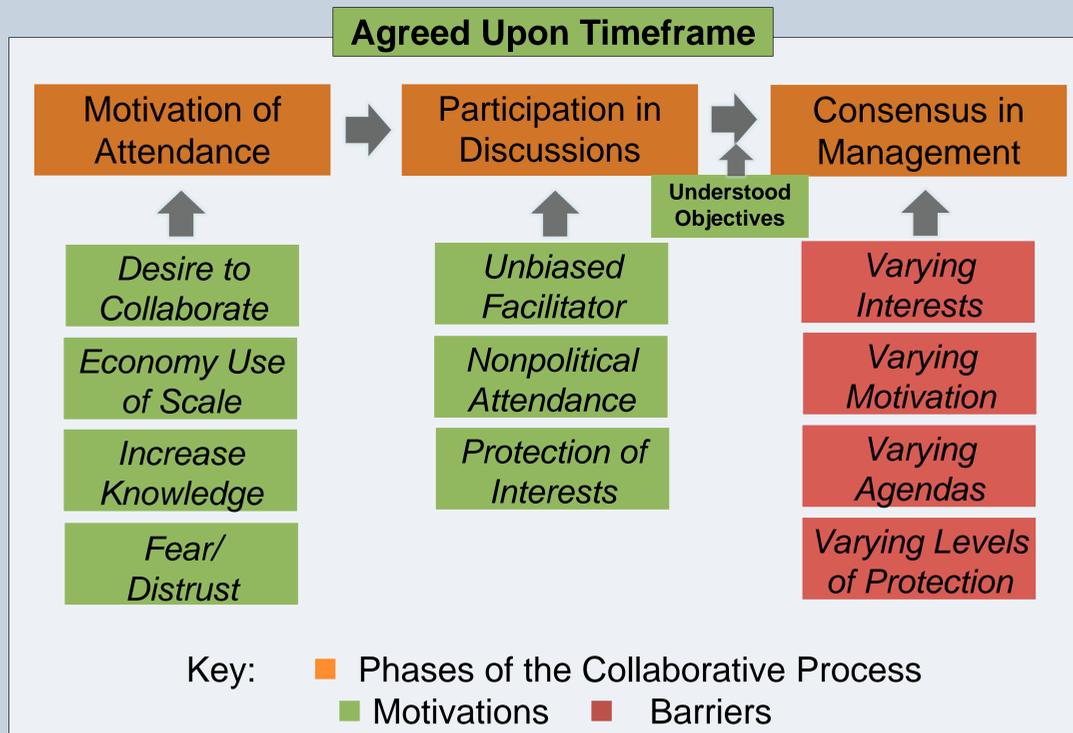
The East Salt River Valley Sub basin is comprised of the colored sections.

Map provided courtesy of the "East Valley Water Forum's Management Plan" (June, 2007)

Methods

1. Selecting 12 Participants
 - Time restraints limited the ability to have all stakeholders participate in study
 - Only a portion of large entities located over the East Salt River Valley Sub-basin were selected
2. Exploratory Web-Based Survey
 - Elicited logistical facts about the entities
 - Gauged opinions of the Forum's current format and of potential steps forward
 - Web-based survey analyzed prior to interviews
3. In-dept Follow-Up Interviews (1 – 1.5 hours)
 - Discussed key aspects of collaborative environment and process such as motivations for attendance/ participation and barriers in discussion
 - Individual interviews allowed stakeholders to speak openly

The Collaborative Process



1. **Agree Upon Timeframe:** all collaboration must move at a critical pace in an agreed upon timeframe in order to remain relevant and to sustain stakeholders engagement
2. **Attendance of Forum Meetings**
 - The *desire to collaborate* between entities leads to most attendance of meetings
 - Pooling *resources* (especially financial resources) in order to create more efficient planning and infrastructure for groundwater use is a major motivation
 - Increasing *knowledge* through information sharing can help stakeholders to better understand regional groundwater issues
 - Stakeholders less interested in collaborating still attend meetings out of *fear* that they will not have a voice in regional plans that could impact their interests
3. **Participation in Discussions**
 - The *facilitator* has no personal stake in water and completely focuses on developing the discussion for stakeholders to reach their own consensus in problem solving
 - Stakeholders feel comfortable in discussions because *elected officials* do not attend meetings, so there is little fear of retribution in the Forum
 - Wary stakeholders, who fear potential outcomes, contribute in discussions to *protect* their interests, but yet they are part of a successful outcome
4. **Understood Objectives:** stakeholders felt that despite good discussions, a wide variety of conflicting objectives could hinder collaboration. Therefore, unified and understood objectives are critical for successfully moving collaboration forward
5. **Consensus in Management**
 - Although the wide variety of conflicting *interests, motivation, agendas, and levels of protection* can slow the achievement of a consensus through potentially altering trust and participation of the stakeholders, a consensus can still be successfully reached

Key Findings

- Stakeholders have different interests in collaborative projects, different reasons for participating, different desired outcomes, and different levels of trust that inspire different levels of protection of entities
- Although these barriers can slow consensus-building, they have yet to completely stop collaboration in the Forum, where the stakeholders all genuinely want to collaborate and can be brought back to the table by topics that address their interests
- While stakeholders have specific interests, which can conflict with each other, they are still able to compromise and find common ground at the end of the day
- No individual stakeholder receives everything that it wants, but everyone within the Forum receives something that they want
- Adhering to a distinct timeframe maintains stakeholder interest and ultimately affects the attendance and participation of stakeholders
- The stakeholders who attend the meetings without an agenda help to define a positive collaborative atmosphere in the Forum
- **Stakeholders are most likely to collaborate when they are the drivers of the discussion and they feel that they are in control of the development of the consensus in a round-table format**
- Outside influences, in particular political or academic or others with preconceived notions, may impact the stakeholder's comfort and willingness to openly participate in the discussion

Future Research Suggestions

- Surveying and interviewing the smaller entities within the Forum for a more comprehensive perspective of the collaborative environment in the Forum, specifically looking at motivations and barriers for this group
- Determining an objective that would engage all stakeholders and perpetuate the momentum within the Forum