# FOREWORD

This book provides readers with an in-depth and comprehensive examination of the myriad issues surrounding collaboration undertaken in the pursuit of public purposes. John Butcher and David Gilchrist provide a wealth of information and insightful commentary on the voluminous literature on collaboration. Refreshingly, they also present direct commentary from organisational and community practitioners in five original case studies involving collaboration, reflecting on their experiences and the challenges facing them at both an interorganisational and an interpersonal level.

The book allows the reader to take a deep dive into this fascinating subject; but if you prefer a quick dip, you can do that, too, by turning to the 'practice considerations' that are presented at the end of each chapter. These should prove to be invaluable aids to individuals and organisations wishing to do collaboration better in future.

I am writing this foreword under the conditions of social distancing in a time of global pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis is driving home the fact that relationships are important and that the quality of cooperation, coordination and collaboration between nation-states, corporations, non-governmental organisations, institutions and citizens will be critical in meeting the social, health and economic challenges confronting us.

In some respects, social distancing might be regarded as antithetical to the kinds of collaborative practice described in this book. After all, one of the things emphasised by the research is the importance of the interpersonal dimension of collaboration. The many interviews conducted with practitioners in Australia and New Zealand reinforced the fact that collaborations embody relationships between people rather than between

organisations. Although organisations provide the authorisation and resources that enable collaboration to occur, collaborations are dependent on the values, aptitudes, skills and motivations of people.

Superficially, one might expect the strict application of social distancing to cause collaborative efforts to grind to a halt. Internationally, there are worrying signs of a resurgence of national self-sufficiency and a retreat from international cooperation.

However, in other respects, we may find that the COVID-19 crisis was a positive disruptor. People are finding ways to enable collaboration to occur. At work and at home, they are increasingly turning to digital technologies to collaborate via virtual conferencing platforms—and even enjoying it.

A key observation that runs through this book is that collaboration is often pursued almost as a last-ditch effort to find solutions to wicked problems. In other words, when traditional programmatic, siloed, bureaucratic frameworks either fail or cease to be effective, collaboration is invoked as a means to harness the capabilities of multiple actors. Collaboration is seen as an answer to incoherence and fragmentation.

Sometimes, collaboration swims against the tide of prevailing norms, institutional legacies and habits of mind. Recently in Australia, for example, Commonwealth and state political leaders have formed a national cabinet to collaborate and make significant policy decisions at breakneck speed. A conservative federal government has reached out to trade unions to find agreed solutions to social and economic problems exposed by the coronavirus.

We see the competition regulator working with the supermarket duopoly to ensure continuation of the supply of basic goods and the equitable distribution of life's essentials. Private businesses and corporations have agreed to share information, intellectual property, technology and resources to deliver such things as personal protective equipment and medical treatments. Citizens and community organisations are coalescing to deliver solutions for people who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of this crisis. All these efforts evoke the spirit of collaborative purpose.

Of course, collaboration for public purposes was a mantra in public administration long before the COVID-19 crisis. The research on which this book is based was carried out in a pre-COVID-19 era. That does

not, however, invalidate its findings and recommendations. Rather, the current global pandemic demonstrates the importance of collaborative approaches. Indeed, the necessity of collaboration—which spans the boundaries between institutions, programs, systems and communities—is amply demonstrated.

In a pre-COVID-19 era, collaborative approaches might have been urged on frontline practitioners without any clear guidance as to how to go about it, and with only rhetorical justification to embrace it. The pandemic has, or should have, cemented in the consciousness of public policy practitioners the absolute necessity for collaboration.

In my opinion, John Butcher and David Gilchrist have forensically examined the key elements of effective collaborative practice and have provided clear, comprehensible and, most importantly, actionable guidance for anyone contemplating collaborative endeavour for public purposes. I would also draw to the reader's attention that, although the cases selected for study were drawn from what might be broadly termed the social policy domain and involve collaborations that are led by the public sector, most—if not all—of the observations and practical guidance are highly transferrable to other policy domains and sectors.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity, in my role as Executive Director of the John Curtin Institute of Public Policy (JCIPP), to support the research on which this book is based. The JCIPP hosted the project and matched funding provided by ANZSOG. This was entirely consistent with Curtin University being the face of ANZSOG in Western Australia. We welcome and thank ANZSOG for its support.

While Butcher and Gilchrist will readily concede that this book does not represent the 'last word' on collaboration, reading it will certainly be of great value to policy practitioners in any sector seeking informed practical guidance and insight into the whys and wherefores of collaboration. I thoroughly recommend it to you.

John Phillimore
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