The Story
The Players
Palm Beach

• One of wealthiest communities in the nation
  – 4 out of Florida’s 10 billionaires
  – $15 billion in real estate
• Powerful with means to assure that their voice will be heard
• Not happy with inlet management
The Port

• Not happy with inlet management either
• Shoaling major disruption to navigation
  – Daylight, high tide, tug-assisted limits
• Frustrating the port’s growth
Palm Beach County

• Larger role
  – Economics and environment
  – Support port and beach nourishment
  – Participate in sand management responsibilities
  – Go-to environmental advisors for agencies
  – Want a voice in how decisions made

• History of bad blood between Town and County
  – Litigation on responsibilities, including financial responsibilities
The USACE

- Responsible for management of inlet
- Not always successful in getting sand to beaches or keeping inlet open
- Host of lingering, unresolved management options
- Balancing between Port, Town and County
- Atmosphere of litigation
The Facilitation
The Challenge

• Three powerful, important entities who disagreed about inlet management
  – Technical disagreement about execution of management options
  – Policy disagreements
  – Funding disagreements
  – USACE virtually immobilized on long range solutions
  – Threats of litigation

• Manifestation
  – No one was successful
Winds of Change

• Late summer of 2004, Port of Palm Beach saw several major phenomena:
  – New Port Director
  – Two hurricanes which caused devastating shoaling and beach erosion
  – Emergency dredging needed

• Extent of disagreements became clear
  – Temporary solution not enough when litigation loomed
  – Port Director reactivated a little used Memorandum of Agreement
The Tri-Party Coalition

- Port of Palm Beach, Palm Beach County and Town of Palm Beach
- USACE as Partner
- Facilitated Meetings
- Goal: Consensus-built approach to inlet management issues
Approach

• Role of Facilitator: Neutral problem-solver
  – Understanding of consensus-building techniques
  – Understanding of federal harbor project issues, USACE, environmental permitting and coastal processes
  – *Not the technical expert*
  – *Neutral on issues, but shared experience*
Setting the Stage

• Extensive Preparation
  – Interviews with key players
  – Review of documents
  – Understand issues and perspectives
• Got agreement on agenda and expectations before first meeting
• Did not try to resolve issues outside of meeting
First Meeting

• Extent of disagreement wasn’t overstated
• However, areas of agreement were in fact, self evident:
  – Preserve navigation
  – Protect beaches
  – Protect environment
• How to achieve goals became the topic
• As soon as this was established, group began to work together
Collaborative Process

• Management Solutions
  – Intensive policy and technical dialog
  – Special studies commissioned and incorporated into process
  – Every member had responsibilities and was accountable
  – Eventually, we all agreed on the specific solutions and goals
  – Dialog outside of meetings very important

• Policy Implementation
  – Developed a legislative and funding agenda
  – Second year that the coalition has presented together in Washington, D.C. to delegation
Benefits

• Coalition of allies
  – Powerful force from which each benefit technically and politically

• Future ramifications
  – Port/USACE embarking on expansion study
  – Coalition is basis for open communication and dialog on issues
Why Did it Work?

• Strong leadership
  – Coalition members smart, engaged and consistent
  – USACE committed to process and producing result
  – Technical issues could be resolved with modest compromises

• Members could show success on home front – the coalition means good business

• Follow-Through

• Meetings continue
  – Members involved and communicating
  – Serves as a proactive forum for new and evolving issues
Facilitation
Can’t Solve Everything

• Start process too late
• Lack of commitment in leadership and staff
• Expectations too high
  – Time and results
  – Often neutralization of opposition best hope
• Intentions and information withheld
• Technical basis unsound or disputed
Summary

• Facilitation can be a good tool for problem-solving
• It can be used in challenging circumstances, or as a regular consensus-building tool
• In severe situations, other types of collaborative processes might be needed
• Facilitation is a process