

Strategies for Collaboration: Establishing Logistics and Setting Ground Rules

Setting ground rules is an important piece of collaborative work because it helps clarify expectations for stakeholders and can support transparency, clear communication, and accountability.

The following is a list of key questions that that can help your coalition work more smoothly together.

- When will this coalition/collaborative **meet**?
- Where will the meetings happen?
- Who is responsible for each of the following for meetings?
 - Organizing (where/when)
 - Facilitating
 - Note Taking
 - Setting the Agenda
- Is this until further notice, or on a rotating basis?
- How will Accountability be handled?
 - What happens if a member misses meetings?
 - What if a member does not fulfill their responsibilities to the group?
- Will any members be compensated for their time, childcare, or transportation?
 - If so, which members, and how?

Tips for Facilitators

- Be intentional about working to create positive, respectful, and inclusive culture to the meetings.
- Use protocols that help ensure each member has a chance to speak.
- Make decisions transparently with the whole group (avoiding behind-the-scenes decision making that tends to alienate people).

An Example of the Importance of Ground Rules:

In one collaborative, members admitted to each other that although meeting are necessary, they often get long, boring, and unproductive. To avoid these problems, they decided on the following strategies:

- Each meeting would be held at a different member's workplace. No matter who was hosting, the meeting would begin with a tour of the space to help the other members understand more about their day-to-day operations.
- They identified a small group of experienced facilitators who would trade off the responsibilities of running each meeting, keeping energy high and discussions on topic.
- Each member was assigned a partner. Members made sure that their partners understood any jargon being used, helped them voice their concerns, and filled them in on any meetings they had missed.

A Note on Power Dynamics:

Power differentials are a challenge for collaboratives working with stakeholders with significantly different levels of power and control within the publicly and privately funded systems that intersect with the work of the coalition. The differentials exist within all organizations and relationships, so it is important to acknowledge how they may play out within the collaborative work. Power differences (such as funders, including government agency staff that administer funding, or policy makers who write the policies that shape the policy or programmatic context of others at the table) can lead to some people feeling intimidated and others feeling emboldened to dominate the conversation. Ground rules can help level power imbalances and help the collaborative stay focused on the work by elevating the voices of the people closest to the challenges. For example, the simple protocol below, created by Dr. Jessie Gillard at the Ounce of Prevention Fund, was designed to create space for contributions from all participants, based on proximity to children/families. Consider weaving ideas like this into your collaborative ground rules.

"Policy is power frozen"

~ Erik Liu

Elevating Voices Continuum Protocol:

Ask participants to consider which category best describes them individually and to self-assign the appropriate number.

- 1 - In my role, I interact with children and/or families regularly.
- 2 - In my role, I interact with children and families intermittently.
- 3 - In my role, I do not regularly interact directly with children and families.

Once everyone has selected a number, explain that whenever we engage in small- or large-group dialogue we are going to ask that participants invite number 1's to speak first (if they have something to say), then 2's, then 3's. The intention of using this technique is not to prioritize one person's voice over another, but to ensure that we are creating space for those with potentially greater stakeholder perspective.