

Starter Kit
1f: Setting Ground Rules¹

Navigating the Roadmap

Activity 1: Build a genuine, collaborative policy team.

Introduction

Establishing ground rules for how a team will work together is an essential step that teams should take before embarking on any collaborative endeavor. Developing ground rules sets an important foundation for how the team is expected to work together in order to accomplish its goals and serves as a reminder of the values the team intends to uphold.

Purpose

- To help your team consider ground rules that might help you work collaboratively and remain focused on your work
- To assist you in reaching consensus on the ground rules that will guide your work together

Participants

All policy team members should be involved in the development of your team's ground rules.

Instructions

1. Begin by asking each team member to consider the expectations they have of one another throughout this process. Have them jot down these ideas on a sheet of paper.²
2. Using a round-robin approach, ask each participant to share one item on their list. Note these on a flip chart. Go around as many times as necessary until all items are recorded.
3. Combine and clarify the suggestions.
4. Discuss whether the suggested ground rules are
 - comprehensive—are any ground rules missing?
 - agreeable—do *all* team members consent to abide by these rules?
5. Arrive at a consensus on the set of ground rules you will use to govern your work.

Sample Ground Rules

- One person speaks at a time.
- No side conversations are permitted.
- No cheap shots are allowed.
- War stories are limited.
- The group works toward consensus.
- Parochial interests are left at home.
- A problem solving orientation is adopted.
- Group members hold each other accountable.

(CEPP, 2006)

¹ Language adapted from Center for Effective Public Policy (CEPP), 2005.

² For more information on team member expectations, see 1g: Building a Collaborative Climate.

6. Document your ground rules so that you have a written record.
7. Consider laminating and posting these rules in your regular team meeting room. Review them before each meeting. Team members will then have a constant reminder of the rules under which the team agreed to operate.
8. Periodically review the ground rules to ensure that they are still relevant to the team's work and agreeable to all members (especially if new team members are added). Add new rules as a team, if the need arises.

Tips

When setting ground rules, consider the following questions:

- Have you set an expectation for how much each team member is expected to contribute?
 - Who will be responsible for work products, doing “homework” between meetings?
 - Will members of the team hold each other accountable for completing assignments?
 - Will members be expected to attend all policy meetings? When is missing a meeting acceptable?
 - Will the use of proxies or designees be allowed?
- Is there an expectation about how group decisions will be made?
 - Will decisions be made by consensus or majority vote?
 - What level of evidence or support will be needed to make a decision?
- Is there clarity around how members will conduct themselves during team meetings?
 - Are members asked to refrain from sharing personal war stories?
 - How will team members deal with confrontation?
 - How do team members define “respect”?
- How will information sharing and confidentiality be addressed?
 - What kinds of information will be shared with non-team members?
 - When will information be kept confidential within the policy team?
 - How will team members handle questions from the press?

Ground Rules in Action

In Ramsey County, Minnesota, the team decided to display a laminated poster of their ground rules during all policy team meetings. They referred to the rules periodically to ensure that all members were clear about the expectations for conduct.

In Grant County, Indiana, ground rules were referred to during key strategic planning sessions, particularly when the team was preparing to make critical decisions about the change targets they wanted to pursue.

Some other tips for creating ground rules include the following:

- *Foster a culture of honesty.* Suggest that it is as dishonest for group members to “put up with” something they don't agree with, or can't live with, as it is to speak untruthfully.
- *Practice listening.* Every voice deserves to be heard, even if people don't initially agree with the point of view being expressed.
- *Recognize the need for full participation.* This includes both encouraging team members not to hold back and valuing the opinions of others.³
- *Everyone needs to take a fair share of the group work.* This does not mean that everyone has to do the same thing. It is best when members of the group agree on how tasks will be allocated.

³ From John's Hopkins University: http://www.jhu.edu/virtlab/misc/Group_Rules.htm

- *Remember that everyone brings different strengths.* The work of a group can be achieved efficiently when tasks are allocated according to the experience and expertise of each member.
- *Cultivate philanthropy.* Group work sometimes requires people to make personal needs and wishes subordinate to the goal of the group. This is all the more valuable when other group members recognize that this is happening.

Example: Grant County, Indiana, Policy Team Ground Rules

The following ground rules and operating norms have been established, and team members have agreed to hold each other accountable for adherence to these rules and norms:

- Decision-maker attendance is expected.
- Be on time and prepared for meetings.
- All opinions are valued. Critique the opinion, not the person.
- Be candid but respectful.
- Team decisions will be made by consensus while preserving the autonomy of individual office holders and department heads.
- Membership may evolve and sub-committees may include non-members.
- New members will only be added by consensus.
- Members will consider data and unintended consequences when making decisions.

Example: Mesa County, Colorado, Policy Team Ground Rules

1. Agree on what we agree on.
2. No one has veto power.
3. No one vehemently opposes a decision; everyone has to be able to live with it.
4. We have each others' backs.
5. Leave personal agendas at the door.
6. Trust issues
 - a. No personal details are shared, no one is critical about emotions, and storytelling is not allowed.
 - b. Be clear about the purpose of information shared.
 - c. Share only information meant to promote the purpose of this group.

Additional Resources/Readings

Center for Effective Public Policy (CEPP). (2005). Teamwork exercise: Developing ground rules. Retrieved from <http://www.collaborativejustice.org/how/tools/climate/teamex-climate.htm>

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