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A STRATEGY FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES

A Framework for Evidence-Based Decision Making in State and Local Criminal Justice Systems

Starter Kit
1m: Managing the Policy Team: The Local Coordinator

Navigating the Roadmap
Activity 1: Build a genuine, collaborative policy team.

Introduction
Since policymakers are busy people, designating an individual to manage and facilitate the collaborative policy team is crucial to its success. For the planning phase of this initiative, this responsibility may fall to a designated local coordinator, who may at times play multiple roles, including facilitator, staff support person, or other roles needed by the policy team. For example, the designated local coordinator might be responsible (either directly or indirectly) for

- developing long- and short-term work plans, and determining how each meeting will fulfill them;
- making sure that meetings occur when needed;
- preparing materials for team meetings, most importantly, developing meeting agendas;
- taking meeting minutes and creating accurate and helpful meeting records;
- providing follow-up to meetings;
- collecting and synthesizing data and information to support members' work;
- providing information (e.g., data, concerns about progress) to policy team members;
- developing detailed proposals for action (based on team guidance); and
- preparing reports and other documents.[1]

Purpose
To provide local coordinators with some tips and resources that will assist them in managing their policy teams[2]

Participants
This document is geared toward local coordinators. Local coordinators may share this information with others as appropriate.

Instructions
Below are some suggestions for activities you might engage in during your first few meetings to set up your team for success.[3]

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[1] NIC, 1993.
[2] For additional guidance, see 1o: Creating Useful Meeting Records and 1n: Developing Meeting Goals and Agendas.
[3] CSOM, 2007.

NIC
National Institute of Corrections

Consider devoting one team meeting to **organizing yourselves and your work**.

- *The genesis of the team:* Discuss who decided to bring the group together and why.
- *Introduction:* Have each member introduce themselves and share a bit about their current professional work, their professional or academic background, and maybe even a personal fact or two.
- *Team composition:* Discuss the team's composition (this will probably be the first of several times that you will talk about this topic), the reactions of individuals asked to participate, and those who might join the team in the future.
- *Team roles:* Consider how best to fill the roles of chairperson, team coordinator, research coordinator, facilitator, and staff support, etc.
- *The team's name:* Agreeing on a title for the team can be fun and often begins to focus the group on its common purpose.
- *The establishment of subcommittees:* Begin a discussion about how the team's work will be organized, considering for a moment the potential number of team members and the scope of the tasks you will undertake. Discuss the pros and cons of establishing a core committee and subcommittees. Again, it may be too soon to make a final decision on these matters, but it is not too soon to begin thinking about them.
- *Communication method:* Establish a communication method that will work best for all team members. Perhaps you will use the "grapevine" method, where each person is responsible for contacting another. Alternatively, you may designate one person to be the information gatekeeper; this person will then be responsible for keeping everyone else informed. Discuss telephone contacts, email, and paper correspondences. What works best for the majority of members?
- *Regular meeting times:* There is no doubt that coordinating meeting times may be one of your most difficult tasks. It is often easiest if you agree in advance on a regular time—say the first and third Wednesday of every month from 10 a.m. to noon—and suggest that members permanently mark these meetings in their calendars.

Role of the Local Coordinator

In Charlottesville-Albemarle County, Virginia, a steering committee was formed to guide the work of the 16-person policy team representing both city and county interests.

Due to the team's size, it was agreed that the team's local coordinator would serve as the "information gatekeeper" and main liaison with all parties involved in the work. The local coordinator served on both the steering committee and the policy team and was responsible for

- taking the lead on administrative tasks;
- taking meeting minutes;
- preparing materials for meetings;
- ensuring tasks were completed fully and on time;
- coordinating dates for meetings and timelines;
- supporting the policy team's work by collecting and organizing data where applicable; and
- serving as a communication liaison with all parties.

Consider devoting one meeting to **exchanging information about one another**.

- *The agencies at the table:* In advance of the meeting, assign each member with the task of preparing a presentation on their agency for the next meeting. Control the amount of time for each presentation. Have each member describe what the agency does in general and specifically. Also have each member discuss their agency's interest in the team's work and what the agency stands to gain from it.

- *The individuals at the table*: In the same (or, depending upon the time, a different) meeting, have each member discuss the reasons they are interested in being on the team and what they have to gain from participation. Have each member discuss what it means to them to be a meaningful participant. Have each person on the team, one by one, tell every other member why they feel that member is important to the team.
- *Meaningful work:* Have each member indicate what will keep them coming to the meetings and what will cause them to drop off the team. Note these responses and pay careful attention to them over time.

Consider using a meeting to discuss the **external environment (or context)** in which your work is taking place.

- *Identify external conditions:* Have members brainstorm a list of all the current external conditions that might influence your work, for example, a highly publicized case, a budget crisis, or an upcoming election.
- *Identify and prepare for possible influences:* For each condition identified, consider the possible influence this may have on your work. Make plans to respond to influences that seem particularly worrisome and continue to monitor the others. Revisit this discussion over time.

Tips

It is important to keep a watchful eye on the collaborative team over the course of your work together. The ideas below will go a long way in helping to keep your team together and performing well:

- **Build meeting agendas together:** Seek suggestions for meeting agenda items from team members and attempt to include all items. This builds investment in the meeting's content. The chair or coordinator, facilitator, and potentially the staff should work together to develop the next meeting's agenda well in advance.

- **Make clear work assignments:** Develop an action plan for all new work tasks identified. Be clear to identify the member or members who will take responsibility for each task, how it will be carried out, and when.

- **Keep meeting records:** Designate an individual to create an official record of each meeting, or rotate this responsibility. Indicate those present, the items discussed, agreements made, and action items assigned. Attach a copy of the meeting agenda. Prepare and distribute copies of the meeting record in a timely fashion. The record will inform absent members of the team's work and serve as a reminder of assigned tasks.

- **Establish and maintain legitimacy:** Work to establish the team's legitimacy among its colleagues and partner agencies. Failing to establish legitimacy in the first place—or losing it once you have it—will undercut your ability to effect change.

- **Address turnover in membership:** Members should be ready to suggest replacements to the team if and when a member leaves. It is important to identify new members as quickly as possible. Invest as much time as is necessary to bring new members up to speed, and assist them in establishing rapport with the rest of the team.

- **Remain alert to conflicts:** It is common for groups to experience conflict at one time or another. Stay alert to disagreements or misunderstandings that might damage relationships or jeopardize your work, and address them directly before problems escalate.

- **Produce regular products:** Document the team's activities as discrete pieces of work are concluded. Work products—whether they are flow charts, detailed reports, or summaries of interviews conducted—provide a sense of accomplishment in addition to serving as an historical record.

- **Build in early accomplishments:** As you begin your work together, attempt to identify some small but meaningful problems you can resolve quickly. For example, as you develop your system map, you may identify an inefficiency that can be easily rectified. We are not suggesting tackling prematurely major system changes that require careful analysis and planning, but rather remedying small glitches in your system that can be resolved quickly and provide some early "wins" for the team.[4]

Here are some other tips for activities that are worth doing and repeating:[5]

- Refer to the group's vision often.
- Regularly review the group's mission, goals, and objectives.
- Stay in touch with individual policy team members to keep them engaged; "interview" them about their hopes, concerns, goals, etc.[6]
- Conduct and repeat team-building exercises as necessary.
- Determine if your meetings are effective. See the Appendix: Signs of Effective Meetings.

Example: Ramsey County, Minnesota, Policy Team Meeting Survey

In Ramsey County, Minnesota, the local coordinator distributed a survey at the end of each policy team meeting in order to collect feedback from the policy team members on how the meeting went. The survey asked each member to jot down the following:

Plusses: What worked well	Wishes: What else can be done

[4] CSOM, 2007.
[5] NIC, 1993.
[6] For a list of interview questions, see NIC, 1993, p. 28.

While this is a very simple idea, this strategy helped the chair and the local coordinator regularly "take the temperature" of the engagement and satisfaction levels of team members and continually assess the effectiveness of the meetings.

Additional Resources/Readings

CEPP. (2005). Signs of effective meetings. Retrieved from http://www.collaborativejustice.org/tipsideas/signs.htm

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McGarry, P. (1993). Essential ingredients for success. In National Institute of Corrections, *The intermediate sanctions handbook: Experiences and tools for policymakers* (pp. 21–26). Retrieved from http://nicic.gov/library/000213

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Appendix: Signs of Effective Meetings

There are several indicators teams can use to assess the effectiveness of their meetings. Some common signs of an effective meeting include the following:

- There is a detailed agenda that describes what will be covered, the goal of the meeting, who will discuss each item, and a time estimate for how long each item will take.
- Responsibilities for facilitator, timekeeper, and record keeper are assigned.
- A set of ground rules is established and posted.
- There is clarity about the mode of decision making that will be used.
- There are periodic checks during the meeting to ensure that progress is being made.
- There are clear strategies to resolve conflict.
- A record of the meeting is kept and specific action items are outlined.

If any of the following signs are present, it may indicate that teams are convening ineffective meetings and should consider changes to help make their meetings more productive:

- Meeting goals are unclear.
- The meeting agenda is vague or nonexistent.
- There are no time limits on discussions.
- There is no process for working on important issues.
- No one is facilitating the discussion.
- Participants haven't done their homework.
- Discussions are unfocused.
- There is a lack of closure to discussions.
- Participants argue—rather than debate—different points of view.
- Not all team members participate.
- The meeting ends without action plans or next steps being developed.
- There is an absence of any check-in about how the meeting went.

From: http://www.collaborativejustice.org/tipsideas/signs.htm