

Starter Kit

1g: Building a Collaborative Climate

Navigating the Roadmap

Activity 1: Build a genuine, collaborative policy team.

Introduction

One of the eight characteristics of highly effective teams is that they operate within the context of a “collaborative climate.”¹ A collaborative climate is built upon a foundation of trust among members. Trust promotes efficient communication and coordination and allows team members to stay solution-focused, thereby improving outcomes. Trust is earned, over time, when the following conditions are true:

- **Honesty:** Members operate with integrity and are truthful.
- **Openness:** Members are willing to share and be receptive to new ideas.
- **Consistency:** Members are predictable in their behaviors and responses.
- **Respect:** Members treat others with dignity and fairness.

Purpose

Too often groups do not take the time to assess their working relationships or to consider how best to foster these relationships to increase their likelihood of success. The purpose of this document is to encourage teams to pay as much attention to this aspect of their work as they do to understanding evidence-based practice and decision making, and to put as much care into building and sustaining the team as they do in planning and implementing change initiatives.

Participants

All policy team members should be actively engaged in the process of building and sustaining a collaborative climate. However, it might be useful to identify a few team members who are particularly attuned to these kinds of issues to make regular observations of the team’s collaborative climate and to elicit feedback from members on how well the team is working together.

Instructions

Identify “Temperature Takers” to Monitor the Collaborative Climate

¹The eight characteristics of highly effective teams identified by Larson and LaFasto (1989) are: a clear and elevating goal, a results-driven structure, competent team members, a unified commitment, a collaborative climate, standards of excellence, external support and recognition, and principled leadership.

While it is clearly the responsibility of every member of the team to contribute to and thereby build a collaborative climate, some individuals are keenly adept at assessing climate and at recognizing and seizing opportunities to improve teamwork, while others may not be as strong in this area. Simply stated, some people almost instinctively notice when things are going well and when the collaborative climate is faltering. This may be reason to specifically identify one or more team members to monitor the collaborative climate, to initiate dialogue about how well the team is working together, and to identify and facilitate activities that are likely to promote trust and support a positive, collaborative climate.

Utilize Tools and Strategies for Monitoring the Climate

There are a variety of methods of assessing the level of collaboration among team members.

1. The survey *Working Together: A Profile of Collaboration* is one method of objectively assessing members' perceptions of how well the team is working together.² The initial administration of this survey will establish a baseline of data around the team's functioning. Re-administer the survey periodically (e.g., every six months) to identify improvements or new challenge areas.
2. Periodically review the team's ground rules to discuss how well members are adhering to them.
3. Provide team members with a list of expectations of their participation.³
4. Consider asking team members to periodically assess themselves with respect to these expectations, to report back to the group the strength they believe they most consistently bring to the team and the one they most need to work on, or to ask team members to provide one another feedback on some or all of the individual expectations on the list.
5. Periodically include an item on the team agenda that provides for an open dialogue about the team's effectiveness working together.
6. Alternatively, reserve time at the end of a team meeting to pose a set of structured questions such as the following. These questions can be answered anonymously (each member can write their responses (yes/no) on a sheet of paper and these can be collected and tallied) or members can provide their responses in an open forum.
 - a. Generally speaking, are our meetings productive and helping us work towards our vision/mission?
 - b. Do we work from agendas that provide structure and purpose to our meetings?
 - c. Do all members actively participate in our meetings?
 - d. Is there a sufficient level of trust among group members to allow for candid discussion?
 - e. Are all members respectful, even when their perspectives or opinions differ?
 - f. Do members feel "heard" when they share their views?
 - g. Are all members equally committed to the vision/mission?
 - h. Are all members equally contributing to the work of the team?
 - i. Do members believe we can accomplish something together that we could not accomplish separately?

² For more on the *Working Together* survey, see 1b: Administering a Collaboration Survey.

³ For some ideas, see the Appendix.

- j. Do members feel that the team is “in this together,” even when things become difficult?
 - k. What can we be doing to further strengthen our team?
7. Solicit the assistance of an outside, neutral individual to interview team members about how well the team is functioning, then report that information back to the group as a whole for consideration and action planning, where needed.

Additional Resources/Readings

Carter, M. (2005). *Collaboration: A training curriculum to enhance the effectiveness of criminal justice teams*. Retrieved from

<http://www.cepp.com/documents/2005CollaborationCurriculum.pdf>

CEPP (2005). *Collaborative Justice*. Website. <http://www.collaborativejustice.org/>

Chrislip, D. D., & Larson, C. E. (1994). *Collaborative leadership: How citizens and civic leaders can make a difference*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Larson, C. E., & LaFasto, F. M. J. (1989). *Teamwork: What must go right/what can go wrong*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Appendix: Ten Tips for Effective Team Participation⁴

One of the hallmarks of a collaborative team is that every team member is equally important and the contribution of each member is necessary to the success of the team. These are some of the ways that individual team members can contribute to effective collaboration:

1. Show up on time, turn your cell phone or pager to vibrate, and respond only to emergencies. Give the group your full attention.
2. Show up consistently. When team members make an effort to be present, others understand that as a demonstration of commitment and are therefore more willing to make the commitment themselves.
3. Adhere to whatever ground rules or standards are established by the group. If none are articulated, set your own standards high. Better yet, suggest that the group establish ground rules and standards.
4. Be prepared and participate. If there is a group assignment (such as reading a report) or if you agree to perform a specific task for the group, do it. Take advantage of process activities to get to know other members of the team.
5. Be aware of your body language. Don't let your posture or facial expressions communicate a lack of interest or lack of respect for another team member's contributions. Instead, listen actively and make an effort to understand what others are trying to say before responding.
6. Stay focused on the vision and mission of the team. Leave personal agendas aside.
7. Practice good conflict resolution skills. Conflict, dissent, and disagreement are essential to effective problem solving. Look for ways to use the information that comes out of conflict to improve the work you are doing together.
8. Look for opportunities to exercise leadership.
9. Challenge yourself. If you are typically one who dominates conversations, sit back and listen. If you are typically reluctant to share your ideas, try to speak up.
10. Be willing to be held accountable. And be willing to hold others accountable. Holding each other accountable is a sign of respect and it demonstrates that group members have high expectations of each other.

These basic practices are fundamental to all kinds of group work, but are especially important when working in collaboration with others. Successful collaboration requires trust, and these practices help to build a climate of trust so that effective collaborative work can take place.

⁴ From <http://www.collaborativejustice.org/tipsideas/participation.htm>