

BUILDING TRUST AND MANAGING CONFLICT: KEYS TO SUCCESS

INSTRUCTIONS: This tool will allow you to assess how well your collaboration is doing at building trust and equity, and managing conflict. It will help to identify the source of any trust, equity or conflict issues and can facilitate discussion with partners regarding areas for improvement. Invite individual partners to complete the assessment tool to identify issues that might not emerge in a face-to-face conversation. Bring emerging themes regarding strengths, challenges and opportunities improvement to the collaboration table for discussion. Celebrate areas of strength and agree on where you need to make improvements.

Organizational Commitment and Support:

- Each of the individual participants has been delegated authority by their respective organization to make decisions at the collaboration table.
- Our partner organizations (not just the individual members) are fully engaged so they feel a sense of ownership for what we're trying to accomplish and can thereby be held accountable for achieving the results.
- Our partners are very open and honest about their organization's needs, interests, risk tolerance and any conflicts of interest that might arise.

Tips for Improvements:

- Clarify expectations of each of the individual partners and their respective organizations
- Strengthen communications with partner organization's to make sure that they are on side and are feeling ownership in the collaboration.
- Ensure that you have the right person from the organization at the table.
- Promote an open, honest and transparent environment where partner organizations feel comfortable disclosing needs, issues or concerns.

Processes:

- There is a clear and documented agreement among all our partners about our collaboration's purpose, intended outcomes and priorities and the strategies we employ to achieve them as well as any significant working arrangements.
- Values that guide our behavior and relationships are jointly negotiated by all partners, and include concepts of equity, fairness, transparency, respect and diversity.
- The roles, responsibilities and expectations of our partners are clearly documented and agreed to jointly.
- Decision-making processes are highly transparent and have been agreed to jointly by partners.
- Clear communication and information sharing processes and protocols have been developed between our partners and their organizations so no one feels uninformed or that important information is withheld.
- Formal processes have been established to negotiate differences and to manage conflict.
- Evaluation results are shared among all the partners, and include an assessment of the collaboration itself.
- The process for ending a partner's involvement in the collaboration is clearly articulated to prevent misunderstandings and unnecessary delays in addressing emerging issues/changes with partner organizations.
- The process for ending the collaboration itself has been clearly laid out so we avoid turmoil if the collaboration runs into difficulty.

Tips for Improvements:

- Write down agreements and processes and ensure they are comprehensive, and fully understood by each partner.
- Clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of each partner and their respective organization.
- Hold people accountable for adhering to processes and agreements by having clear expectations and consequences.
- Create space to discuss challenges, obstacles, and opportunities for improvement.
- Ensure that values or principles guide the development of processes.

Behaviours:

- The way we work together has integrated, as much as possible, the different cultures, styles and needs of our partners.
- A significant amount of time is spent consulting with our partners, and everyone feels they have a voice.
- Consensus building is used regularly in our decision-making so we find 'mutual gain solutions' rather than 'win-lose' or 'watered down' compromises.
- If a member is not abiding by the roles and responsibilities or is not meeting expectations, we talk about it openly and resolve it.
- The environment in our meetings promotes honest and open dialogue and debate; our agendas are shaped in consultation with all partners.
- If there are personalities or attitudes that don't mesh with our values and culture, we discuss it openly and work to resolve it.
- Recognition of partner contributions is regularly acknowledged and celebrated.
- We regularly reflect on and celebrate the work we do together towards our collaborative goals.

Tips for Improvements:

- Align the collective collaboration values and cultures with those of individual partners and their organizations.
- Regularly check in with partners, through discussion or by using more formal evaluation, to identify issues and acknowledge what is working well.
- Ensure that partners have been oriented to the agreed upon values and processes, and are supported to effectively implement them.
- Develop intentional strategies for ensuring that diverse voices, perspectives and experiences are heard (e.g. consultation, brainstorming).
- Address issues as they arise, before relationships are compromised.
- Find ways to balance the value of being inclusive of partner's perspectives with the need to get things done.
- Establish formal ways that partners will celebrate success both for individual participants as well as for the collaboration as a whole.

Skills and Capacities:

- Time is allocated for team building, and we recognize that it is a critical element of our work.
- Shared leadership is promoted within our collaboration, and is demonstrated through skills in facilitation, listening, managing change, consensus building, delegating, mediating and negotiating.
- Partners have strong interpersonal communication skills so they clearly communicate issues as they emerge and feel comfortable addressing differences and conflicts.
- When necessary we bring in a facilitator/trainer to manage more difficult conversations, to deepen reflections, or to model collaborative behaviours that promote trust and equity.

Tips for Improvements:

- Clarify the unique skills required to effectively lead and participate in collaborations.
- Invest in building key capacities through training, mentoring and education.
- Regularly evaluate performance.
- Be prepared to reflect on and learn from mistakes.
- Ask for help.

