



STUDENT GROUP LEADERS' WORKSHOP: Encouraging Successful Collaborations

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Collaboration:

A mutually beneficial well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations [or identified groups] to achieve common goals. Collaboration is the process of various individuals, groups, or systems working together but at a significantly higher degree than through coordination or cooperation.

Collaboration typically involves joint planning, shared resources, and joint resource management.

Collaboration occurs through shared understanding of the issues, open communication, mutual trust, and tolerance of differing points of view. To collaborate is to “co-labor.”

Source: www.ncccv.org/resources/terms.html

Think of the very best working group experience you have ever had. What were qualities of that working group that made it such a good experience for you?

Which of those qualities could you use to improve your student group?



Characteristics of Successful Collaborations

Rate the characteristics of your student group by circling the number that best describes your collaborative group's typical behavior:
0 – None of the time 3- Some of the time 5 – All of the time

Characteristics	Rating	This could be encouraged if we ...
Partners (<i>i.e., participants, staff & volunteers</i>) have clearly and specifically defined outcomes and benchmarks. They have developed a clear and shared vision.	0 1 2 3 4 5 or N/A	
There is strong and clear student group leadership.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Partners are committed to improving one or more conditions within the community for the long run.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Partners are willing to define their commitment and specific roles.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Partners are willing to ask for information, resources, skills, and authority.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Partners support each other and acknowledge (give credit to) those who support and help the student group.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Partners are open to and accepting of change and adjustment.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Partners acknowledge, understand, and share in risk taking.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Partners do not come to the table with preconceived notions of the "right way to solve a problem."	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Partners monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the collaboration.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Communication occurs openly and honestly.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
A learning environment is encouraged. Curiosity and creative problem solving is encouraged and supported.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
There is a balance between achieving results with a concern for people.	0 1 2 3 4 5	
A high level of trust has been established among all collaborating organizations through planning, flexibility and tolerance.	0 1 2 3 4 5	



Common Pitfalls To Collaboration

There are a variety of common pitfalls when two or more groups collaborate towards an end goal. Read through the following list and check any that have or could occur regarding your student group. Jot down your thoughts on how those student group pitfalls could be prevented in the future.

COMMON PITFALLS	This could be prevented if...
<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership has difficulty sharing control and/or making decisions. This is often based on personal ego issues, the difficulty in not just thinking about one's own agency and instead transferring to thinking of the "common good," the merging of different leadership styles, and/or a change from leading "staff" to leading "colleagues."	
<input type="checkbox"/> Unorganized and hurried choosing of partners often happens because organizations do not make a detailed assessment of possible partners, they focused on justifying the collaboration instead of scrutinizing it's value, or they only look at possible partners' financial and programming fits - ignoring each organizations cultural climate, core values and assumptions.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Overestimating synergies and underestimating costs.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not managing the "merger syndrome." The merger syndrome described by Dixon and Marks (1996) is the "reaction [of employees, clients, community, etc...] to the uncertainty and stress of consolidating."	
<input type="checkbox"/> Inattention to human resources issues.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Failure to train (re-train) staff on new concepts, initiatives and procedures.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor communication. Dixon and Marks (1996) state, "Employees have thirst for information but often times the leaders under communicate or offer "misleading missives" (i.e. "It's business as usual")."	
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor record keeping and planning including not following a methodical strategic process.	
<input type="checkbox"/> An unclear business purpose and strategy. This can raise questions such as "why are we merging" and "what do we hope to achieve." These should be answered in the beginning stages.	



Group Patterns

Every time two or more people gather, a group forms. As people come together in groups to achieve goals, there are specific communication practices that can contribute to productivity and build credibility. Conversely, there are communication practices that can destroy or implode a working group. There are critical communication patterns during group development. First it is important to understand the stages of group development and the communication that occurs during these stages. Read through these descriptions and then look at the questions on the following page.

Stage & Description

FORMING

In the first stage of forming, the behavior of group members is very dependent on direction from the facilitator to get things started. Group members are usually polite and hesitant to participate. They look to a leader to guide them. Introductions and gentle icebreakers or sharing of information is critical. Often, group members stereotype others based on first impressions. Conversations, therefore, need to be about safe and acceptable topics, not controversy. Avoid the requirement of disclosure and hard feedback in this initial "getting to know each other" stage.

STORMING

This is often the stage where groups crash and burn. Conflict is a healthy and natural part of group dynamics and "storming" always occurs after the ice has broken for the group. Typically, this is when each member of the group feels the need to take care of him/herself. Competition, close-mindedness, and the forming of cliques can occur here. Damage is done if individual needs are not recognized or creativity is suppressed. It is important for the facilitator to expect conflict and incorporate some group activities to process through this second stage.

NORMING

This third "norming" stage is great fun to reach. The group moves towards independence and is constructive. Real listening takes place. Attempts for control lessen and creativity begins in earnest. The roles of participants become identified and the leader becomes somewhat less identifiable or necessary for the group to exist.

PERFORMING

The fourth stage is where the group really shines or "performs." This is when a group is independent. Morale and esprit de corps is high. There is intense group loyalty while individual creativity is also encouraged by group members. Disagreement is ok because the group has learned in stage two how to work through conflict and remain a group. There are no cliques and the group often adopts an identification, either a name or symbol or nickname.



Group Pattern Analysis

Using the information on the previous page, how would you describe the stage of your student group?

What kind of communication is occurring in that stage?

Is it time to move into another stage?



Collaborative Groups Have 3 Communication Needs

1. Individual needs

Most members' predominating concerns when a group first meets are how they as individuals fit into the group and are received by it, and whether personal needs are being met. If these concerns are satisfied to an acceptable degree, they become of declining importance, though still present; if not, the group cannot reach the stage of functioning effectively and will remain liable to disruption.

2. Group needs

At the start, most group members are usually also concerned, though to a lesser degree, with how well this group they have joined is going to operate, what ground rules and procedures will emerge and would be best, and what kind of structure the group will have. This concern usually expands during the early phases of the group development process, as members confront the problems involved in making the group function well. In a successful group these problems are eventually largely resolved, and concerns with group needs diminishes, though it remains in the picture.

3. Task needs

Focusing on the group objective becomes the dominant concern for most members only when the issues of their own relationship within the group and those of the group's operation are largely resolved. This is true even though at a superficial level, the group is concentrating on task matters the entire time. These task-related discussions in the early stages of group development are often largely a vehicle for conducting the processes of resolving personal and group needs issues. This point can be verified by observing how often these opening discussions dry up inconclusively, get bogged down, provoke polarized positions or get diverted by red herrings.

Consider your group & discuss these questions:

- How have your individual needs been met?
- Have the ground rules for relationships and roles within your group been communicated clearly?
- What has happened to your ability to communicate as a result of this?
- Is your group bogged down or polarized in any way? How could it be in the future?

"I have always thought that the best way to find out what is right and what is not right, what should be done and what should not be done, is not to give a sermon, but to talk and discuss, and out of discussion sometimes a little bit of truth comes out." Jawaharlal Nehru



Transform controversy into productivity!

Use a Communication Process during the Storming Phase

Recognize the storming phase of group development and engineer the communication process to make the most of that experience. . How should group interaction be handled to benefit from productive controversy?

Strategy	How Could This Happen For Your Group?
Diversify groups	
Unite groups in cooperation	
Use inquiry process. Ask lots of questions & encourage space for safe & open discussion.	
Encourage controversy of ideas	
Develop persistence in the face of failure	
Encourage time for reflection	



Collaboration Communication Self Assessment & Action Plan

Consider your student group. Rate your communication tools & discuss.

0 – None of the time 3- Some of the time 5 – All of the time

In this group I have:	My score and an example: 0 1 2 3 4 5	In the future, I will:
Consistently treated everyone with respect.	Example: 0 1 2 3 4 5	
Kept an open mind.	Example: 0 1 2 3 4 5	
Actively listened to others.	Example: 0 1 2 3 4 5	
Shared openly and honestly.	Example: 0 1 2 3 4 5	
Made it safe for others to communicate	Example: 0 1 2 3 4 5	
Contributed	Example: 0 1 2 3 4 5	
Agreed to disagree.	Example: 0 1 2 3 4 5	
Taken responsibility.	Example: 0 1 2 3 4 5	
Monitored myself.	Example: 0 1 2 3 4 5	
Had a sense of humor.	Example: 0 1 2 3 4 5	

"Though force can protect in emergency, only justice, fairness, consideration and cooperation can finally lead men to the dawn of eternal peace." Dwight D. Eisenhower



Student Group SWOT ANALYSIS

	Strengths	Weaknesses
INTERNAL	<p>What are our strengths?</p> <p>What do we do well?</p>	<p>What is done poorly?</p>
	Opportunities	Threats
EXTERNAL	<p>What are the trends that will have the greatest impact on the success of our collaborative project?</p>	<p>What challenges are we facing?</p> <p>What are the potential obstacles?</p>



Closing

Let's process what we have discovered about encouraging our student group(s).

Which practices are contributing to the health of our student group(s)?

What practices are destructive?

What is one thing you will try to change/implement as a result of what we have discussed?

A good discussion increases the dimensions of everyone who takes part. -- Randolph Bourne