

## 4 - ACTIVE INVEST IN GROUP DYNAMICS

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Partnership development and innovation take time. Effective communication, trusting relationships, awareness of team dynamics and stages and keeping partners engaged are essential to sustaining partnerships over the long term.

It takes a long time and you have to develop a level of trust between the two parties. The labor side has to understand that management looks at them as a very important resource and a part of the industry. And management has to understand that labor wants to work with us and they want to make things more successful to create more job opportunities for people they represent. It can be a win-win situation if you approach it the right way.

Successful partnerships are often characterized by:

- x Trust, openness and mutual concern
- x Patience, flexibility and adaptability
- x Understanding and respect for the mission of each partner's organization
- x Recognition of and respect for what each partner does well
- x Respect for the autonomy of each partner
- x Willingness to share resources for the benefit of all
- x Willingness to make decisions

[Adapted from: National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. (2012). Partnerships for Environmental Public Health: Evaluations Metrics Manual, Chapter 2, Activity 1: Identify Partners, <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/supported/dert/programs/peph/>]

These characteristics have been described as the “glue” that keeps partnerships together.

This section focuses on the types of activities partnerships can undertake to strengthen their group dynamics and ensure that partners remain engaged and are prepared to address and overcome potential conflicts.

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## 4.1 DEFINE THE PARTNERSHIP'S STYLE

Anyone who has collaborated on a project, committee or partnership can describe characteristics of group interactions that did or did not work well. Having a clear understanding of what partners believe contribute to positive

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## 4.2 WORK EFFECTIVELY AS A TEAM

Partnerships are about being able to work effectively as a team. Teams go through different phases over time and, as with any collaboration, there may be points of potential uncertainty or conflict. Typical stages of a partnership include Forming Storming Norming and Performing

[Adapted from Tuckman, B. & Jensen, M. (1975). Stages of Small Group Development. Group and Organizational Studies 419-427.]

Even though a stage such as Storming might seem unproductive or better to avoid, each stage has value, and going through it can contribute to a partnership's strength and ability to achieve its goals.

Forming Stage Partners are getting to know each other.

At this stage, partners may be just getting to know each other or be working together for the first time on safety and health issues. Creating a group resume (Tool 4B) is one way to help your partners become better acquainted and aware of the knowledge, skills, and experience each partner brings to the partnership. This activity can be especially effective if the information gathered for the resume is focused on the reason your partnership is being formed.

#### TOOL 4-B: FORMING PARTNERSHIP RESUME

##### Instructions:

1. Introduce this exercise by telling the partners that they represent an incredible array of talents and experiences. Explain that this exercise is intended to identify the partnership's collective knowledge, skills, and resources that they are bringing to bear on the issue(s) the group is addressing.
2. Depending on the size of your partnership, you may want to divide the group up into pairs or small groups. Using a flip chart or a whiteboard to keep track of responses, ask each group (or the group as a whole) to list the items that would be included in their collective resume. Explain that a resume can include the following types of information, as well as any other relevant categories the partners come up with.
  - ❖ Work experience
  - ❖ Educational background
  - ❖ Knowledge each partner brings to the table related to the partnership's issue(s) and/or goal(s) (the purpose of the partnership)
  - ❖ Positions held
  - ❖ Professional skills
  - ❖ Major accomplishments
  - ❖ Professional organizations
  - ❖ Other



## Identify and Address Dysfunctional Behavior

Behavior	Description	Facilitator Action
Backbiting	Partners complaining and finding fault with one another, then talking with outsiders about this instead of the partnership as a whole	Be aware of partnership dynamics; establish ground rules around direct communication; conduct a general group discussion about the issue without blame
Blaming	Not taking personal responsibility; pointing the finger at others/situations for a problem that haso	

[Adapted from: Team Building Toolkit: KEYS to Enhance Your Supervisory Success Berkeley Center for Organizational and Workplace Effectiveness <http://hrweb.berkeley.edu/files/attachments/TeamBuildingToolkitKEYS.pdf>]

### Norming Stage Partners are engaged and value each other's contributions:

Partnerships that reach the Norming stage have learned to work through differences in the Storming stage. At this point your partnership may be starting to implement its plan and work toward its goals (see Section 5: Identify and Disseminate Solutions). Work during this stage may take time, so it is important for partnerships to take steps to keep all of the partners engaged and informed.

Your partnership may want to consider setting milestones during the planning process to recognize the partnership's accomplishments. This recognition can be something as formal as a press release or articles in the partners' publications, or something as simple as taking a moment at the beginning of your next meeting to acknowledge the success and thank all the partners for their hard work.

Acknowledging success can lead to more success. Recognition and celebration can give partners that extra boost of energy or confidence to keep things going when the going gets tough. When partners feel good, their good feelings reverberate into other interactions.

### Performing Stage The partnership shows cohesion:

Partnerships at the performing stage show cohesion, and partners are fully committed to the partnership's success.





process continues until the partners have narrowed it down to the option they feel is best. This approach involves less discussion than consensus building or negotiations, but for certain decisions where there are many viable, noncontroversial options this noncompetitive approach may work best. (The Facilitator's Tool Kit referenced in Additional Resources later in this section has more details on how to carry out Majority Voting Decision Making)

- ❖ Majority Voting is systematic, objective, democratic and may be a useful approach for issues

## TOOL 4-C: GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

### Instructions:

1. Draw the gradients of agreement scale (below) on a flip chart or whiteboard so the whole group can see it. Review the four levels.

[Adapted from: UC Berkeley Center for Organizational and Workplace Effectiveness Building Toolkit: KEYS to Enhance Your Supervisory Success. <https://hrweb.berkeley.edu/files/attachments/TeamBuildingToolkitKEYS.pdf>]



## 4.4C

- ❖ Since some terms may mean different things to different groups, avoid slang, spell out terms and make sure everyone feels comfortable asking for clarification.
- ❖ Ask for volunteers to assist with communications or rotate responsibility among the partners (e.g., a monthly volunteer to take and send out meeting minutes)
- ❖ Use technology to save time. Set up a Dropbox ([www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com)) or internet-based space to store materials, and online tools such as Doodle ([www.doodle.com](http://www.doodle.com)) to schedule meetings
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## 4.5 MAINTAIN PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

Keeping all partners engaged is a challenge for all partnerships every stage of development. In addition to facilitating effective meetings (see Section 2 Facilitate the Partnership Process) and promoting communication (see 4.4: Communicate Effectively), engagement can be fostered through networking, holding small working groups, and involvement in partner organizations' events and programs.

As mentioned in the discussion of a partnership "Norming" phase, celebrating the partnership's work and success is a way to promote further success and keep momentum going. Continued relationship building also helps because as relationships develop, partners are more likely to be willing to help and hold each other accountable.

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## Tip Sheet #1: "Baggage Handling"

- ❖ Everyone comes with "baggage" encourage partners to "check it at the door"
- ❖ Work to form common ground. Make efforts to regularly remind the group of shared values and interests
- ❖ Arrange the room and breakouts to ensure interaction
- ❖ Don't allow underhanded or coded comments or jokes. ~~Way~~ to accomplish this is to ask the person to explain what they just said
- ❖ Validate important fights and history
- ❖ Help the group stick to the issue at hand

## Tip Sheet #2: "Inviting Participation"

- ❖ Directly solicit input from a partner who is not participating
- ❖ Give partners the time and space to pause, reflect, and think critically
- ❖ Validate different forms of participation
- ❖ Don't let one person take over or sabotage the conversation
- ❖ Don't create unnecessary divisions

## Tip Sheet #3: "Interrupting Power Plays"

- ❖ Look out for conflict in the room. Be particularly cognizant of individuals retreating because they felt attacked and/or disrespected
- ❖ If there is conflict from power imbalance in the room, be careful not to step in too harshly. You may want to shift the topic and create the space to review group norms and ground rules and recreate equilibrium
- ❖ Call a break to lower tension
- ❖ Use tension as an opportunity to learn

[Burke, B., Geronimo, J., Martin, D. A., Thomas, B., & W(2002). Education for Changing Unions (Chapters 7 and 8). Toronto: Between the Lines.]