



7 (Easy) Steps to Collaborative Planning

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It is no secret that collaboration between professionals (and their agencies) in the juvenile and family justice field can lead to better outcomes for youth and families. But it can sometimes be hard to move beyond the buzz words and phrases – stakes in the ground! synergy! paradigm shifting! – to achieve real collaborative advantage. Collaborative advantage, capitalizing on the individual skills of a diverse group of leaders while creating interpersonal links to achieve an outcome, is incredibly rare. It is rare because it takes a lot of work and requires shared leadership and vision. Stakeholders are exactly that – individuals who have an invested interest in the welfare of their community. Harnessing the power of stakeholders' interest is paramount to successful collaboration.

If you are thinking about gathering a group of leaders together to further serve the youth and families involved in the juvenile and family justice system in your area and don't know where to start, below are some suggested easy first steps to get started.



USE THE POWER OF JUDICIAL LEADERSHIP

Judges play a key role in projects

designed to improve or enhance juvenile and family justice systems, and judicial buy-in is critical to whether or not an initiative will succeed. Judges set the tone in their courtrooms and they are often a primary referral source for ancillary programs. If you are a judge, congratulations! You are likely the natural leader and convener in your community – the first step of collaborative planning. If you are not a judge, find a judge in your community who shares your passion and vision for reform. One of the most important roles a judge can play on a collaborative team is that of convener. When a judge calls a meeting, people show up!



RECRUIT YOUR TEAM

Determine who you want on your team based on what your goals are. Remember, for the planning process you'll want to work with agency heads and others in leadership positions who can "say yes" on behalf of their agencies. In many cases, those you recruit to serve on the collaborative planning team will be professionals that you work with on a regular basis and who are also part of the juvenile and family justice system (e.g., probation department, state attorney office, public defender office). However, consider including agencies that you don't work with on a regular basis. For example, consider including

representation from the larger community; a representative from your school district or business association can broaden your view. As you begin your recruitment process remember to start with “what’s in it for them” rather than “what you want from them.” People are much more willing to join an effort if they understand how it will be beneficial to them and the issues they care about.



SHARE LEADERSHIP

The most effective collaborative teams share leadership within the team to leverage each member’s talents and resources. Sharing leadership requires both aspirational elements – a common vision, and practical elements – a concrete plan for working together. At the first few meetings as a team, spend time creating a vision for the initiative. Consider having the team participate in a visioning activity where the team creates a perfect world – if the team had its druthers, what improvements would be made. Ask a broad-based question related to the initiative: “What would our juvenile and family justice system look like in a perfect world?” Each member of the team would brainstorm ideas about what the “perfect world” would look like and then share those ideas with the group (e.g., youth in need would receive access to treatment services quickly). This is a great way to determine what the team, as a unit, is working toward.

Once the team has developed the vision, it is just as important to set practical ground rules for how the team will work together. At the outset decide: how often the team will meet, who will track progress via project mapping tools, who will serve as the historian (this role may rotate) – ideally you’ll create a team charter. Visit [mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_95.htm) for examples of team charters at: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_95.htm.

Make sure each team member has a specific role on the team and a task (or series of tasks) to complete toward shared goals. There is nothing worse than a team member who is underutilized. Remember you’ve brought together a team of highly skilled dedicated individuals who are used to making things happen. This is your greatest asset – use it!



PLAN WITH PURPOSE

Any collaborative planning effort must begin with the end in mind. Once the team has completed visioning and

determined how the team will operate, spend time talking about goals and objectives. As a team ask: What does your team want to achieve? How will we know if we’ve achieved it? The goals should be things that the collaborative planning team can control and change. While the ultimate goal may be to eradicate substance abuse in your community, that is not a goal that can be achieved by your planning team. Instead set measurable and time bound goals like “increase the number of youth who receive a drug or alcohol screen at intake by 25% in the next 6 months.”

At each collaborative planning meeting have a set agenda and timeframe. Make a commitment, as a team, to not get bogged down in cyclical discussions (i.e., going over the same issue or challenge at every meeting without coming to a resolution). At the end of every meeting have two things set in place: 1) at least one action item to be completed before the next meeting and 2) a set date, time, and topic for the next meeting. Being regimented in how the meetings are conducted will help the team gain momentum toward meeting the goals the team has committed to achieving.



COMMUNICATE FREQUENTLY

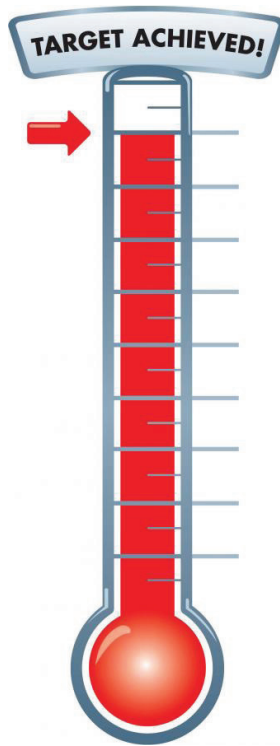
Effective teams all have one thing in common – communication. This communication extends not only to collaborative planning meetings, but also to between meetings. Establish a mechanism for communicating between meetings. Most teams find that a mixture of teleconferences and e-mail works well. As with meetings, have a plan for how often you want to communicate and what you want to share via e-mail or telephone. Consider having a member of the team, on a rotating basis, send out reminders about due dates and upcoming events.

A note of caution about communicating between meetings, for the most part it is important for the entire team to communicate, avoid sidebar calls or e-mails that can make members of the team feel out-of-the-loop. Also be prepared for conversations to take on a life of their own via e-mail or telephone calls. If it seems as if the conversation on a topic is getting out of hand (e.g., an e-mail chain with what seems like a hundred back-and-forth responses), suggest to the group that the conversation be tabled until the next in-person meeting.



CELEBRATE SUCCESS

Strategic planning takes a long time – usually 12 to 18 months. So it is important for the team to celebrate successes along the way. Build milestones into the strategic plan and each time a milestone is reached take time as a team to reflect on the process to reach that milestone and progress made toward the ultimate goal. The team may want to update others about the team’s progress, as well. As the team reaches each milestone, send out a press release or hold a town hall meeting to keep the public apprised of any progress made. Create a visual that the team can look to for a tangible reminder of successes already achieved.



joins the collaborative planning team, don’t simply inform them of the team’s vision and goals – invite new members to participate in a modified version of the visioning activity. Revisiting the vision and goals when a new team member starts is a great way for the new team member to buy-in to the project and a way for the existing team to renew its commitment to the project.

Collaborative planning is a long process and it requires the dedication and commitment of leaders. Capitalizing on the knowledge and expertise of your planning team can lead to improved outcomes for youth and families in your community. But there is no secret to achieving collaborative advantage – it’s nothing more than the right people, for the right task, at the right time who come together with a shared vision and a concrete plan for achieving that vision.



PLAN FOR TRANSITION

All great planning initiatives must come to end. The collaborative planning team should start to prepare for the transition from planning team to operational team from the very beginning. As a team, ask several questions:

- Who will implement the program that the team planned and developed?
- How will the program fit within the larger juvenile and family justice system?
- How will the program be sustained?
- How will the team create buy-in?
- How will the operational team be trained?
- Will the original collaborative planning team have a role in operations, and if so, what will it be?

The team will plan for this transition but will also need to plan for any turnover among the primary collaborative planning team. Because the planning process will take nearly a year, the likelihood of losing a team member is high. When someone new