

MAKING COMMUNITY COLLABORATION WORK

Community collaborations are a very powerful tool for victim services advocates, law enforcement personnel and other collaborative partners. These groups create opportunities that expand resources, provide a forum for addressing the complex issues facing victims of crime and enhance the impact of the coalition in your community. There is much to be gained by collaborating and much to lose by not; so it is worth taking the risk of trusting others and sharing the workload and resources with other agency personnel and the community. It is important to note that strong coalitions may take years to develop into strong organizations with impact in the community. Equally important is to understand that strong coalitions can easily be undone when members have hidden agendas, do not do their part and are not effective communicators. Collaborative work requires that all members check their egos and need for power and control at the door.

These are some simple and general rules for being a good team player.

1. Communication is a key component. Communicate with your team members as often as possible and as is necessary. Explore the concerns of everyone and listen for understanding as your team is created and organized
2. Know what is expected of you. Have well defined task descriptions for each member of the team for each phase of the project or process; include due dates and formats if needed.
3. Stay up to date on what is to be done. Communicate with the team any changes in the tasks or process since your last status meeting. Keep records of your progress and meetings.
4. Start working on your task or project immediately. Once you are clear about the team's expectations of you then move forward with your part of the project or process. Procrastination is stressful for you and damaging to the group's process.
5. Know your team members. Try to learn about the expertise, weaknesses and functions of each person with whom you are working. This will help you solve problems much quicker by approaching the right person for help. It will also give you a chance to help others and thereby make the team stronger. Make "Different People" out of "Difficult People". Without mutual support, your team can only be as good as its weakest members. Most importantly, respect the skills and expertise of your team members; they will be your best help.
6. Respect your team members. Never overlook this simple ingredient in collaborating effectively. Bearing grudges against people you have to work with does not help in forming a good work relationship. Channel your efforts and skill into solving the real program at hand, which is the project; do not let your fellow workers be the problem. In extreme cases of disagreement with a fellow member of your team, try to arrive at a compromise or agree to disagree.
7. Communicate with others in your team. Speak freely but effectively. Bounce ideas off of other people, if and when possible. Keep them informed of your progress. Communication is essential to the success of your project. This point cannot be stressed enough and so it must be revisited here. Lack of communication is a pathway to failure for collaborative teams.

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