

5 Facilitating Effective Workgroups

Many people have had the experience of being a member of a workgroup or task force that does not seem to accomplish its goals, either because the goals or expectations were not clearly defined or communicated, or because the right people with the right expertise or decision-making authority were not at the table. Launching a workgroup or task force with community disability partners to improve inclusive and accessible planning for public health emergencies is subject to similar pitfalls.



Benefiting from the diversity represented among the workgroup members is a win-win situation for all, but it can take time for the different types of benefits and resources to emerge and be organized into action. Here are a few tips to navigate typical meeting pitfalls, address accessibility challenges, and work with stakeholders from diverse industries and with diverse life experiences and backgrounds.

Overarching Guidance and Tips



Take Time To...

- Encourage group members to share related experiences, verbalize their priorities, describe their clients, etc., so that members get to know each other.
- Recognize that the best decisions are not always the fastest decisions. Progress takes time.
- Allow people to be heard, feel valued, and reciprocate. Effective communication is important for people to get to know one another. This underscores how important it is for communication to be accessible.
- Consider using a neutral third-party meeting facilitator.

Develop a Foundation and Shared Priorities

Effective communication is key to meaningful partnerships, effective workgroups, and collaboration. In this context, this means not only accessible documents, assistive technology, and interpreters, but also the type of information necessary to facilitate meaningful and respectful engagement.

- Clearly communicate workgroup purpose, expectations, and objectives using accessible and redundant formats.
- Distribute roles and responsibilities across members, creating equitable opportunities for member engagement, contribution, and leadership.
- Assign leadership and decision-making authority to representatives from the disability community.

- Clearly articulate roles and responsibilities regarding note taking, posting meeting minutes, agenda-setting, etc., so that members may know what to expect and engage appropriately.
- Identify all sponsoring organizations or agencies, assigned role or responsibility, and be transparent about the reason for engagement.
- Clearly state that ensuring accessibility before, during, and after meetings is an ongoing priority, and be transparent about strategies to ensure provision of accommodations.

The RACI model is an organizational tool that identifies how each key stakeholder is involved in a project, and each person's role in project completion. RACI is an acronym for Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed. The four roles are assigned to the people collaborating for a common goal.

Responsible: Responsible for completing the work.

Accountable: Accountable for overall completion of the task or project.

Consulted: Communicates/consults with task owner on providing information to complete the task.

Informed: Informs team on updates and task progress.

Below is an example of a RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed) chart:

Tasks	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Person 4
Task 1	R	I	C	A
Task 2	A	R	I	C
Task 3	C	A	R	I

Prioritize Accessibility to Build Trust

Prioritizing accessibility throughout all workgroup processes is a way your organization can demonstrate a commitment to respectful engagement and an eagerness for collaboration.

- Ensure workgroup meeting locations are accessible.
- Develop and provide accessible meeting materials, such as handouts and presentations, in alternate and redundant formats.
- Schedule workgroup sessions with consideration of times and locations that are more accessible or accommodating to people with disabilities.
- Use a document sharing or team collaboration platform that is fully accessible for all members.
- Promote an environment in which members feel comfortable asking about or for accommodations.

Working Together

Inclusive planning and ensuring accessibility throughout all workgroup progress allows for meaningful engagement by all members. Fostering an environment for solution-focused collaboration includes multiple, accessible opportunities to share input; consensus-driven and transparent decision-making; and diversity across leadership positions.

- Reach consensus regarding use of conflict resolution strategies in initial stages of workgroup.
- Solicit feedback on workgroup communication strategies, progress, etc., from members using accessible evaluations at the conclusion of each meeting.
- Arrange for virtual meeting options to ensure accessible options for all members.
- Distribute roles and leadership responsibilities across members representing different sectors, industries, or disability status, creating equitable opportunities for member engagement, contribution, and leadership.
- Set SMART goals with a timeline that allows for relationships to develop and collaborative work to occur between disparate groups. SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound.

Tips for Accessible Virtual Meetings



There are a number of considerations specific to virtual meetings. In addition to the list found in Workbook #3 Planning for Accessible Meetings, Virtual Accessibility section, here are some items to keep in mind when conducting virtual meetings with your partners:

- Turn on your video so that your colleagues may use facial expressions to better understand the context of your message.
- Caption and record meetings to allow participants to review and refresh their memory as needed.
- Provide the invitation to request accommodations before every meeting. People's needs may change so do not assume that if an accommodation was not asked for previously that it is not needed. Similarly, do not assume that all participants with the same disability will need the same accommodation.
- Announce yourself when speaking so that individuals with visual disabilities remain aware of discussion.
- Use design features that make it easy to create accessible meeting presentations and documents, such as accessibility checker, accessible templates, alt tags, etc., allowing attendees to view meeting materials in

advance, follow along during the meeting, or refer back to them for future guidance.

- Use multiple methods for group discussion and question and answer sessions, including audio and chat features.

Tips for Conflict Resolution

Resolving conflict among meeting attendees is an important step in moving beyond challenges, achieving goals, and building strong partnerships. Consider these strategies when developing a conflict resolution strategy:

- Consider each person's mental model as a piece of the larger puzzle.
- Look for information that will help people move forward.
- Repeat and reflect what speakers are saying to demonstrate that they are being heard.
- Listen to ideas as if for the first time.
- Ask what data or logic might change their views.
- Understand when a conversation may need to be placed on hold (or put in the parking lot) if other de-escalation efforts are unsuccessful.
- Use meeting facilitation strategies to encourage a diversity of speakers and allow the conflict to defuse through conversation.

Tips for Meeting Evaluation and Assessment

It is important for meeting organizers to provide an opportunity for meeting attendees to report whether meeting logistics and processes, such as facility accessibility or communication leading up to and during the meeting, presented any unforeseen accessibility barriers. This opportunity allows meeting attendees to provide feedback in a respectful and non-intimidating way, so that meeting organizers can improve processes or address any unrealized accessibility barriers.

- Develop evaluation questions in collaboration with disability stakeholders to ensure comprehensive assessment of potential accessibility and inclusion barriers.
- Provide meeting attendees multiple opportunities to obtain, complete, and return meeting evaluation forms, which include alternate and accessible options (e.g., online, over phone, in person, etc.). Share feedback with meeting attendees and workgroup members, and be transparent about steps taken to address accessibility barriers.

Challenges and Barriers	Suggestions for Solutions	Confirmed Solution
Transportation of participants to meetings		
Virtual meeting location		
Refreshments/funding limitations		
History		
Challenge/Barrier		
Challenge/Barrier		
Challenge/Barrier		

Sustainment Strategies

Sustaining workgroup projects long term can be challenging. Meaningful results through stakeholder collaboration based on mutual respect and trust takes time. Workgroup planning should include identifying and implementing sustainment strategies that facilitate workgroup engagement long enough to see results and spur ongoing momentum.

- Set short, intermediate, and long-term goals and plan project activities accordingly.
- Pursue long-term funding opportunities to ensure workgroup sustainment, and support implementation of identified solutions.
- Connect workgroup activities with initiatives or activities of allied organizations or groups with similar or overlapping interests.
- Focus on topics and areas in which progress can be measured, achieved, and documented.
- Document and celebrate success through traditional and social media, highlighting benefits of partnership for involved parties.

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