# DIAGNOSING INTERNAL CHALLENGES FOR COLLABORATIVE GROUPS: WHEN THE PROCESS GOES BAD & RECOGNIZING AND MANAGING GROUP THINK

## PURPOSES & BENEFITS

This tool helps a collaborative group to diagnose common internal challenges that impact the group's community organizing work. Once an internal challenge is diagnosed, the group can then better work toward solutions from a collective understanding.

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

The collaborative group can use these tools to:
- Indentify and understand common internal challenges for collaborative groups.
- Help diagnose internal challenges facing the collaborative group, giving the group an opportunity to then discuss possible solutions to the internal challenges identified.

# WHEN THE PROCESS GOES BAD …

We all know that, even with the best laid plans and intentions, it can sometimes go badly, and likely has, in some collaborative group we've been a part of. Here are some common challenges and ideas for addressing the challenges within the collaborative group:

| Challenge | Ideas for Addressing This Challenge |
|---|---|
| **Getting off of the issue** | • A facilitative leader restates the issue being discussed. Acknowledge that other issues may be identified that will need to be addressed at some point, but that the current issue is _____. <br> • Create a "parking lot" of ideas to set aside temporarily to come back to later. Be sure to revisit the list later and identify possible next steps for addressing the ideas on the list. |
| **Blaming Others** | • A facilitative leader listens to the issue and then restates the perspective shared, focusing on the issue without blaming anyone. |
| **Frustration or Hopelessness** | • The collaborative group may need to reconnect with its vision and mission statements or to vision a preferred future and then develop strategies, measurable outcomes and a work plan in order to reach that preferred future and/or its vision and mission statements. <br> ○ *For more information on vision and mission statements, see the "Developing Vision & Mission Statements" tool in Step 1B: Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success: Tools for Defining Your Purpose.* <br> ○ *For more information on strategic planning, see the tools in Step 3: Put Together an Informed Plan of the toolkit.* |
| **Dominant Personality** | • The collaborative group may need to either develop guiding principles (i.e., how the group agrees to work together) that honor the perspectives of all participants or revisit their guiding principles in order to ensure that this concept is captured and to gently hold each other accountable. <br> ○ *For more information on guiding principles, see the guiding principles tools in Step 1C: Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success: Tools for Determining How You'll Work Together of the toolkit.* <br> • The use of consensus building tools helps avoid the risk of a dominant personality when the group is making decisions. <br> ○ *For more information on consensus building tools, see* "Consensus Decision Process with Brainstorming and Consensus Tools" *in Step 1C: Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success: Tools for Determining How You'll Work Together of the toolkit.* <br> • Ultimately, group members as facilitative leaders are responsible for managing the dominant behavior and will lose the trust of the group if this person is allowed to continue. <br> ○ State to the full group, "Here is what I see happening: You keep coming back to the same issue, and the group appears to not be in agreement with this position. It looks like we have 99% agreement on our direction. Where are we trying to go as a group?" <br> ○ Another technique is to point out that it appears "the bus is ready to leave the station." Explain that, "We want you to join us, but it is apparent that the bus is leaving, regardless of your objections. What is it going to take to get you on board?" |

# RECOGNIZING & MANAGING GROUP THINK

Group think is another internal challenge facing some collaborative groups. Recognizing group think can be difficult, especially if you're a group member, because the group may be functioning effectively otherwise. This tool provides clues to recognition and also tips for managing it when it happens.

## How to Recognize Group Think
Group think happens when maintaining group cohesiveness and solidarity becomes more important than considering the facts realistically. The result is high unity, but a poor strategy that doesn't work when implemented in reality. Groups especially susceptible to group think tend to exhibit one or more of the following qualities:
- The group is highly cohesive
- The group believes it is invulnerable
- As a whole, the group discounts contrary information
- The group believes that what it wants to do is inherently moral
- The group is insulated from those with different views
- The group puts pressure on dissenters to silence them
- The group moves forward believing that "silence means consent"
- The group lacks a way to evaluate alternatives
- The group has strong, directive leaders who discourage dissent
- The group stays in a problem-solving mode rather than a vision-driven mode
- The group is under pressure to come up with a quick solution

## How to Manage Group Think
- Group members ask themselves:
  o *Are there other alternatives we should be considering?*
  o *What are we overlooking?*
  o *Have we considered all the consequences?*
- Group members next list existing conditions that support the idea (driving forces) vs. conditions that serve as obstacles (restraining forces). Revisit the idea being considered again after this activity.
- Watch for verbal and nonverbal cues that may signal the judgment of ideas as unacceptable or acceptable as they are being discussed.
  o For this type of group think, group members may need to either establish, amend or develop guiding principles to help manage groupthink. For more information on guiding principles, see the guiding principles tools in Step 1C: Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success: Tools for Determining How You'll Work Together of the toolkit.

Adapted from Aronson, E., Wilson, T., & Akert, R. (2003). *Social psychology media and research update (4th ed.).* Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, NJ.