

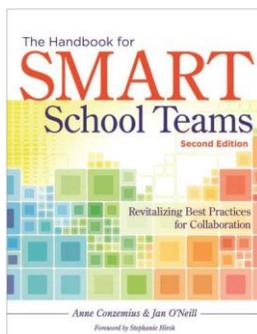
Guidelines for Creating Team Norms

After you've brought people together and before you dive into the task, take some time to talk about how everyone will work together. How often will the group meet? Will the group be open to all? How will disagreements be handled? How will decisions be made - e.g., consensus or majority vote? How will participation be balanced so that no one person dominates? The answers can become ground rules that help the group take ownership of its behavior. They should be generated by the group, reviewed often, discussed with new members, visible at all times, discussed honestly and respectfully when members violate them, and revised as needed. They can be established early on in a group's development, or after several meetings once the group has a sense of its normal dynamics.

One method for starting the discussion is to pose open questions like, *What drives us crazy about meetings?* The "Cotter Question"¹ - *What could this group do to assure that we fail?* - usually generates some laughter; but after the group begins to really think about it, they discover that some of their previous team experiences were bad enough to have been planned that way! Had they thought through the behaviors they had wanted to avoid, those experiences would have been quite different.

Another method is to have the group discuss various categories of behavior. Topics to consider include:

- Attendance – Is everyone expected to attend 100% of the time? Will substitutes be allowed?
- Participation – What are the expectations for between-meeting work? For serving on other work teams or committees?
- Interruptions – Will cell phones be turned off or to vibrate? What about the use of laptops and other devices during the meeting?
- Timeliness – Will meetings start and end on time even if all people aren't present?
- Decision-making – Will we discuss the best decision-making method for each situation or will we always use consensus?
- Conflict management – Will we be direct in our feedback? Will we talk about issues in the group?
- Communication – When will agendas be distributed? Meeting notes? How will we stay in touch in between meetings?
- Jargon watch – How will we ensure that we don't unintentionally exclude those who don't know the "lingo" in our discussion?



More about creating norms and other examples of norm topics can be found on pages 47 through 49 of *The Handbook for SMART School Teams (Second Edition): Revitalizing Best Practices for Collaboration*.

¹ Named for its creator, Maury Cotter, Director of the Office of Quality Improvement, University of Wisconsin