Search Committee Ground Rules and Norms Protocol[24]

Ground Rules, or Norms, are important for a group that intends to work together on difficult issues, or who will be working together over time. They may be added to, or condensed, as the group progresses. Starting with basic Ground Rules builds trust, clarifies group expectations of one another, and establishes points of reflection to see how the group is doing regarding process.

Time: Approximately 30 minutes
1. Do a quick review of the outcomes of the Hopes and Fears Protocol activity and key points from the search committee training.
2. Each participant should write down what he/she needs to work productively in a group, giving an example of one thing the facilitator needs, i.e., "to have all voices heard," or "to start and end our meetings when we say we will." This is to help people focus on process rather than product.
3. Each participant names one thing from his/her list, with no repeats, and as many circuits as necessary to have all the ground rules listed.
4. Ask for any clarifications needed.
5. If the list is more than 10 Ground Rules — ask the group if some of them can be combined to make the list more manageable. Sometimes the subtle differences are important to people, so it is more important that everyone feel their needs have been honored than it is to have a short list.
6. Ask if everyone can abide by the listed Ground Rules. If anyone dislikes or doesn't want to comply with one of them, that Ground Rule should be discussed and a decision should be made to keep it on the list with a notation of objection, to remove it, or to try it for a specified amount of time and check it again.
7. Ask if any one of the Ground Rules might be hard for the group to follow. If there is one or more, those Ground Rules should be highlighted and given attention. With time it will become clear if it should be dropped or needs significant work. Sometimes what might appear to be a difficult rule turns out not to be hard at all. "Everyone has a turn to speak," is sometimes debated for example, with the argument that not everyone likes to talk every time an issue is raised, and others think aloud and only process well if they have the space to do that. Frequently, a system of checking in with everyone, without requiring everyone to speak, becomes a more effective ground rule.
8. While work is in progress, refer to the Ground Rules whenever they would help group process. If one person is dominating, for example, it is easier to refer to a Ground Rule that says, "take care with how often and how long you speak," than to ask someone directly to stop dominating the group.
9. Check in on the Ground Rules when reflection is done on the group work. Note any that were not followed particularly well for attention in the next work session. Being sure they are followed, refining them, and adding or subtracting Ground Rules is important, as it makes for smoother work and more trust within the group.

Examples of Team Norms[25]

Team Communication Norms
- We communicate transparently, without any hidden agendas.
- We don't shoot the messenger.
- We communicate decisions quickly.
- We share all the information we have up front.
- We acknowledge when we lack answers, and we seek solutions collaboratively.
- We present problems in a way that promotes mutual discussion and resolution.

Team Meeting Norms
- We circulate meeting agendas at least one business day before each meeting.
- We come prepared for the topics and materials outlined in the meeting agenda.
- We discuss problems directly and find solutions instead of playing the blame game.
- We believe in speaking and listening — balanced participation.
- We're present in meetings and respect others' time by limiting the use of electronics to emergencies only.

- We begin and end meetings on time.
- If we have something to say, we say it immediately instead of waiting.
- For virtual meetings, each virtual teammate participates fully in each meeting they're asked to attend. The team gives equal regard to remote and co-located individuals.

Brainstorming Norms
- All ideas are good ideas, and each contributor has value.
- Stay focused on the topic. We channel our energy into discussions that propel us forward.
- We build on the ideas of others instead of shutting them down.
- Judgment of ideas takes a backseat during brainstorming.
- We keep resource constraints in mind.

Conflict and Disagreement Norms
- Personal attacks are a no-no.
- We debate ideas in search of better solutions.
- We don't throw each other under the bus.
- We raise issues with the appropriate people instead of whispering behind their backs.
- We don't just say — we reason. We don't say, "District says so" — instead, we provide constructive feedback or information.

Project and Work Norms
- We expect confidentiality around our operations.
- We all own our decisions.
- We are always trying to improve how we conduct our work to achieve the district's objectives.
- We share accountability for our committee's performance.
- We adjust our priorities to address critical issues that affect our search.
- We respect and meet deadlines.
- We raise issues that affect committee performance, even if they're outside our usual turf.
- We ask for clarification and district support when needed.

General Conduct Norms
- We follow up on requests or questions.
- We arrive on time for meetings and events.
- We acknowledge our mistakes.
- We don't shy away from asking for assistance when necessary.
- We accept constructive feedback.
- We do what it takes to meet team goals.
- We produce quality, consistent work.
- We stick to the playbook when it comes to our processes and procedures.
- We're polite.
- We complete all assigned tasks on time.
- We accept responsibility for the outcome of the search.
- We do our best to achieve our goals and do our part to help in the success of the search.