

Article from **Policy Perspectives**

(http://www.imakenews.com/cppa/e_article000758288.cfm?x=b6Gdd3k,b30DNQvw,w)

February 23, 2007

Managing Workgroups

by Ken Embley, CPPA

Requests for help in managing workgroups are on the rise. By workgroup, I mean a group of people from throughout the community who have common interests in a particular issue—issues such as the prevention of heart disease and stroke, promotion of healthy lifestyles, identification of efficiency benchmarks for Utah cities, or methods to reduce rates of recidivism in our criminal justice systems. By workgroup, I mean to imply that the group is suppose to do work—work that results in betterment of the common interest issue.

However, as the old saying goes, there seems to be a few flies in the common interest issue ointment. What seems to happen is people are well intended, but demands on their time and a host of other challenges make for great starts and disappointing finishes. What follows is a series of suggestions that might make it easier to manage workgroups and just maybe lead to satisfying finishes.



Suggestion for managing workgroups:

- **Select a person** to have bottom line responsibility to organize and manage the workgroup. Workgroup members and workgroup mission and vision should rule the day, but there must be a respected person who can initiate, mentor, cheerlead and offer support throughout the entire effort.
- **Charter** the workgroup and do so in a **disciplined** manner. What this means is to establish or reaffirm the workgroup mission, vision, outcomes, stakeholders, methods of operation and strategies to achieve the mission as measured by the outcomes.

What I typically find is that the discipline required is frequently missing. Typically, workgroups write a mission, have some goals, someone writes some strategies and people do their best but everyone knows the workgroup is falling short of its potential. Other demands quickly capture the discretionary time of members and the workgroup fades. To make a workgroup work—the group needs to discipline itself to a chartering process.

- Insist on the use of good **meeting management** techniques. Members in the workgroup must agree on how to start, conduct and end each meeting. Each meeting should have a meaningful **agenda** that includes a purpose, outcomes and methods. Each meeting should have meaningful **minutes** where the group documents its progress, assignments and commitments.

Good meeting management techniques also mean that members agree to **ground rules**. Groups start to fall away when members are late for meetings, do not show to meetings, and fail to complete assignments. Members need to feel committed. When a group fails to establish or enforce ground rules, members frequently lose interest, in part, because they are not holding themselves accountable for their own participation.

- **Keep the eye on the prize—the group outcomes**. Recognize and celebrate success when making progress in strategy implementation and, of course, when the group actually achieves the outcomes.

- I will say this bluntly: when the group achieves stated outcomes—***kill the workgroup***.

Workgroups need to have a meaningful beginning and a meaningful end. People who have significant demands on their time and significant interests in their communities need to have closure—a sense of mission accomplished.

One might say, wait a minute; my organization needs these folks to continue to work and achieve other outcomes. Well then—charter a new workgroup. As appropriate, ask the current members of the workgroup to do the chartering. This will give members the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment, or this will provide an opportunity for members to make room for people who may be more suited to the new mission.

Repeatedly, my experience shows that when a workgroup fails, it fails due to one or more violations of the concepts listed. Workgroups do require work, and that is the bad news. The good news, with a little effort, workgroups can realize their promise.

Published by [Center for Public Policy & Administration](#)

Copyright © 2007 The University of Utah. All rights reserved.

The Center for Public Policy & Administration offers research, education and services to public and nonprofit organizations that will strengthen administration, leadership and public policy making.

Powered by [IMN](#)