Building Common Ground[1]

Building common ground requires a rethinking of values, process, and the environment around how work is done by a group. The role of the leader is critical in this rethinking. The leader has to be prepared to model the behavior required and to maintain focus on building and sustaining common ground, especially when it becomes difficult to do so. Moreover, because building and maintaining common ground is a journey that, although it can become easier, does not end, the leader must be steadfast in his or her attention to where the group is standing and where they need to be.

For the purpose of this discussion, common ground will be defined as that *space in which the collective worldviews and experiences of members within the group serve as a foundation for shared learning and understanding in pursuit of a shared view of the world*.

This checklist identifies those components that can assist a leader to build common ground.

In responding to this assessment – you may assume that the group represents a collaborative, a workgroup, a taskforce, a council, a team, or any other collective that has been brought together to achieve specific outcomes.

The more 'YES' boxes that are checked, the more effectively you have as an organization or system recognized and created the environment for building common ground. Your responses to each of the sections can guide you in strengthening or developing the capacity to motivate, manage, and/or measure common ground.

	YES	NO
Do you have a shared understanding and definition for Building Common Ground within your group?		
Do you believe that members of your group share the same philosophy of practice, language, values, and guiding principles to inform and guide the work of the group?		
Does your group bring together a diverse group with unique knowledge, talents, ideas, and experiences?		
Does your group believe that it is not only important to listen to diverse voices but to invite them to participate?		
Does everyone in your group participate as an equal in your setting?		
Does your group believe that it (the group) is the source of the effort and acknowledge outcomes achieved as a collective effort?		

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[1] Sockalingam, S. and Waetzig, E.Z. (2010) in Blau, G.M. and Magrab, P.R. (Eds) The Leadership Equation: Strategies for Individuals Who Are Champions for Children, Youth, and Families, Chapter 6: Building Common Ground. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

At various points along the process, leaders must convey the importance of building common ground. Leaders must support the importance of taking time to participate and fully engage with a group of diverse stakeholders, and they must do so themselves. Leaders must model listening and learning as individuals within the collaborative. They must articulate personal values and visions and develop shared values and a shared vision. As the collaborative begins to build a mission and strategic direction from this shared vision, leaders need to be able to help the group negotiate and find common interests on which to base their mission and strategic directions.

	YES	NO
Creating an Environment of Safety:		
Does your group convey *closure* (acknowledgement of the approach and achievement of mutually determined destination)?		
Does your group treat *commitment*, as promises with obligations and model commitment through sharing personal values and vision?		
Does your group *communicate* in a way that involves receiving all information before responding and a separation of receiving from judging?		
Does your group in *speedy resolution*, act on values and principles rather than reacting to issues in order to create an environment in which people feel free to dissent?		
Does your group *respect* diverse opinions and hold all values in high regard, allowing people to feel heard, and by acting on the new understanding?		
Does your group take *responsibility* to create agreements, to share responsibility, rewards, burdens, passion, and challenge, as well as to convey empathy, consistency, and integrity intentionally?		
Communicating Effectively:		
Does your group engage in a process to develop shared *language* that takes into consideration diverse cultural origins, common terms and definitions?		
Does your group engage in *meaningful communication* (i.e., members within the group need to feel that they can be heard and, more important, they need to hear)?		
Does your group create a comfortable and "safe enough" environment for communication?		
Does your group create a sense of equal power within group members?		
Does your group acknowledge both cultural differences and similarities and how these influence individual worldviews and perceptions of reality?		
Does your group pay attention to the different patterns in nonverbal communication, such as eye contact, spatial difference, touching, tone, etc.?		
Does your group allow time for the narratives—time to "tell our stories" in our own way?		

	YES	NO
Decision-Making Through Consensus*:*		
Does your group see consensus as an "agreement that is supported by all, or most all, of the affected and/or involved members who seek common understanding about a given situation and/or mutually beneficial responses to that situation"?		
Does your group believe the processes and protocols are fair and that they will likely lead to a win/win solution?		
Does your group, when consensus is achieved feel assured that the common ground for which they are striving is strengthened and sustained?		
Does your group respect everyone's truth as equally valid, feel assured that members are achieving common ground and therefore will be predisposed to move forward with the work of the collaborative even if they are not totally convinced about the decision?		
Does the group have clear definitions and processes for building consensus that are designed to be clearly visible to your group?		
Does your group have clearly defined and normed decision-making protocols before consensus and decision making occur?		
Shared Vision:		
Does your group have a shared vision? (collective picture of what they want to create as a culmination of their common aspirations)		
Does your group have a shared vision to keep a focus on deeply held views and commitment, and identify and define a long-term investment in the ultimate goal?		
Does the shared vision engage everyone through personal ownership and support persistence in the interest of reaching the ultimate goal?		
Does the vision provide a rudder to keep process and progress on course?		
Does the vision encourage risk taking in the interest of reaching the ultimate goal?		

Building Common Ground: Managing the Process

Leaders must manage dynamics to encourage members to remain engaged in the collaborative process when the group reaches an impasse in times of conflict. To manage the process of building and sustaining common ground, leaders need to "hold the environment." In managing common ground, leaders must focus on protocols that sustain collaboration, engage in interest-based negotiation, and manage conflict when value and process conflicts arise within.

	YES	NO
Collaboration:		
Does your group recognize and ensure an established infrastructure with space, time, and supports to connect and build common ground?		
Does your group identify norms and ground rules that are developed to guide the group based on the personal values, belief systems, and expected behaviors of the individuals within?		
Does your group have the necessary supports in the form of an outside facilitator as needed, who can help move a group forward or help them through very substantial change or difficult conflict?		
Does your group identify and put to use resources (e.g., human, financial, time, and/or non-financial items) in building healthy groups?		
Creating Interest-Based Discussion		
Does your group focus on the interests (the "why it is important to you") of individuals rather than the positions (the "what you want")?		
Does your group look for mutual interests that are identifiable and supportable?		
Does your group take the time to explore the group's interests, frame the interests in a way that everyone in the group can understand, and identify the mutuality of the interests?		
Engaging in Conflict		
Does your group work to align group perspectives and honor existing differences?		
Does your group utilize the conflict that arises when differing perspectives exist, toward new ways of thinking and framing issues?		

CHANGEMATRIX

Sustaining Common Ground: Measuring Success

Leaders must find meaningful ways to identify, measure and celebrate successes for the group. These measures must be carried out intermediately to support and sustain the work of the group. Without this on-going evaluation groups can loose their sense of direction and feel no sense of progress.

	YES	NO
Does your group define the outcomes and indicators at the start as part of the process of building common ground?		
Does your group look at the norms and processes that must be in place to achieve the outcomes?		
Does your group review the shared vision to continue to motivate the group and to manage the ongoing work of building common ground?		