Ground Rules for Working Groups

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Questions to guide the establishment of ground rules for working groups

These questions should be addressed early on, and decisions recorded and shared with all working group members. Making ground rules explicit is an important part of the group process.

Meeting norms

- How will working group meetings take place, i.e. can some participants call in or join by web conference? What happens if additional working group meeting times become necessary?
- Where will working groups meet?
- How are working group meetings "made up" if several participants are unable to attend on a given date?
- Who will facilitate the working group sessions? Is the facilitator a rotating position?

Communication norms

- How will shared information be stored (e.g., on a wiki page? Shared drive?)
- How will group members communicate outside of meetings? E.g., wiki discussion board, email, phone conference?
- Who will take and share meeting notes (including decisions made on tasks, responsibilities, and deadlines)? Who will set and share meeting agendas?

Work norms

- How do we deal with participants who dominate or who do not participate?
- What will happen if someone doesn't follow through on a commitment (e.g., misses a deadline, doesn't show up to a meeting)?

Decision making

- How do we make decisions, e.g., consensus, majority vote, etc? For example: How is authorship for the working group manuscript decided? How will you decide who should do what on the manuscript and oral presentation? What happens if people have different opinions on the quality of the work?

Adapted (with permission) from Dr. Lori Breslow, M.I. T, 2000.