

## Turf Issues in Child Protection Teams

Collaboration, cooperation, coordination and coalitions between two or more organizations can only occur when there are recognizable, concrete benefits to combining resources to work toward a common goal.

Turf issues emerge when there is an imbalance – real or perceived – of benefits to the organizations involved. When left unresolved, tensions can develop that lead to controversy, conflict, loss of effectiveness, and even dissolution of the working relationship.

### **Turf issues happen because:**

*Competition:* One organization views the other(s) as a direct and/or regular competitor that threatens its domain.

*Cost/Benefit:* One organization perceives the benefits it will receive from the relationship are less than or barely equal to its involvement.

*Flexibility:* The extent to which an agency can reasonably change its current mission, goals, and tasks to fit the collaborative is minor.

*Relationship:* The lack of understanding or mistrust of another organization leads to a perception of unequal exchanges or power inequities.

### **Turf battles happen when:**

*Goals:* The general goals of the collaborating organizations seem to be mutual, however a proposal for joint action is viewed as working against the interest of one or more of the participating agencies.

*Resources:* Access to grants, public or private fund, shared staff, supplies, facilities, etc. may be unequal. Also, how many resources each participating organization should put in to the joint effort can lead to conflict.

*Geography:* One organization views the services they provide or interests they represent to be exclusive to specific areas. To allow another agency to operate in this area could be perceived as duplication or an inference that the original organization was not doing their jobs.

*Methods:* Agencies have an agreement on which collaborative goals to pursue, but one feels the action proposed to reach the goals would not be effective or would jeopardize their interests or agency. Also, issues of “ownership” over the methods can result in reduced buy-in from the participating organizations.

*Identity or Image in the Community:* An agency believes that collaboration would involve them in something not specified in their mission. There is also a fear that cooperating

with other organizations would harm their reputation as an agency who gets the job done.

*Personalities:* There is a personality conflict between representatives of two different organizations. It stems from an unresolved incident that has no bearing on the current collaboration, but is affecting the ability of the group to work effectively.

### **How to avoid turf battles**

It is a very human tendency to ignore potentials for conflict, particularly when time, people, and resources are being stretched to the maximum. It is also very easy to forget that organizations in collaboration need to attend to their own goals and programs, and the cooperative efforts may be only a small part of their total activity or domain.

For long-term success of the collaboration, remember:

1. Collaborative goals are never 100 percent compatible with the goals of each agency or representative involved. Participants must be prepared to modify their insistence on specific goals and to help others adjust as necessary.
2. Spend the time to develop and clarify collaborative goals with the group. The more ownership an agency has in the collaboration itself, the more committed they will be to the consensus process necessary to cooperative efforts.
3. Develop goals that are realistic and that can be met with mostly existing resources. It is important to establish a record of success and momentum before taking on large and long-term projects.
4. Confine the recruitment of agencies and their representatives to those whose organizational goals and even personal goals will be largely met through collaborative action. Organizations and individuals with similar goals have less conflict.
5. Make sure that the team's size is manageable. A large group can be useful for information sharing and getting community buy-in but can present a communication and consensus problem. Small groups develop an over-dependence on their members and can be the cause of early burn out.
6. Groundrules and expectations for the participating organizations and their representatives should be clarified and enforced. Negative feedback, group domination and sporadic attendance can lead to conflict and lessen the collaboration's effectiveness.
7. Maintain open communication and a forum for discussion of differences. Ignoring potential trouble can lead to resentments, sub-group alliances, and sabotage of the cooperative effort.

### **Dealing with turf battles**

Despite the best intentions and efforts, turf battles can still happen. Recognize this and open it up to discussion by the group.

*Turf battles can stem from two major areas:*

**Substantive** – conflicts related to tasks, goals, methods, resources and geography.

Affective – conflicts related to emotions, inter-personal relations, identity, values and philosophy.

To deal with turf battles, identify the real issue. It is substantive or affective?

Substantive can be:

- ◆ Incorrect or incomplete information
- ◆ Uneven demand for resources
- ◆ Geographic and/or organizational limitations.

Focus on the issue and have the group assist in problem-solving. Solutions should pertain to the whole group rather than the specific organizations involved. Structural changes in the collaboration or changes in the expectations of participants can alleviate many of these issues.

Affective can be:

- ◆ Poor listening and communication skills
- ◆ Perceived or real intimidation
- ◆ Political, social, educational, or economic differences.

Reframe the issues into a task related problem to diffuse the emotions. Model good listening and communication skills. Collaboration leadership can mediate outside of regular work sessions. Recognize to the group each participant's unique contribution to the whole.

If all efforts fail, and they might, the last recourse is to ask the participating organizations to appoint a different representative. If this is not possible, it may be necessary to drop the agency from the collaborative and revise the structure, mission and goals accordingly,

Adapted from the National Children's Alliance – Western Region Child Advocacy Center