

Youth-to-Youth and Youth-to-Adult

Principles of Collaboration

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Introduction

This paper is about the Principles of Collaboration, guiding youth working together, and youth and adults working together. These principles are to be used as a guide to collaborations between all people and particularly those in the environmental justice movement.

We define “principles” as a foundation of set guidelines that keep you on track to reach an objective and final solution with integrity. We define “collaboration” as collectively working together to reach out and build alliances through understanding, communication, compromise and commitment to a common goal. Through collaboration we will build capacity to share resources and power.

Along with introducing the principles set by working groups of the youth caucus, this paper will explain the process we used to come up with these principles and an evaluation of that process. We began this process by telling stories and sharing our experiences of positive and negative collaboration. These stories were the foundation for the following principles of collaboration.

Principles of Youth-to-Youth Collaboration

- 1. Respect cultural, geographic and economic differences**

We all come from different backgrounds, be they racial, economic, gender, sexual orientations, religious, spiritual, ethnic, ideological and/or spatial, like in our communities and neighborhoods. We must recognize the totality and unique quality of people's experiences and not make assumptions about them. In that, we should have consideration for each person's humanity, be careful not to offend those around us, and actively seek knowledge and understanding, when we don't get it.
- 2. Respect one another's time and space**

We define space as both physical and mental. We must realize that we as people like to express ourselves and sometimes we use big words without knowing that we lead the conversation in a different direction. To stay in the right direction, we have to try not to repeat what someone else has said in a different statement.
- 3. Youth should have the space and opportunity to learn from and teach each other**

It is necessary that we share the knowledge acquired through struggles, workshops, etc., with each other. Youth's experiences are generally most relevant to and understood by other youth. Given that, we should not miss the opportunities for information and resource exchange amongst each other. Furthermore, we must cultivate a supportive environment that fosters youth learning.
- 4. Be open minded to everyone**

We realize that the barriers to being open minded include such things as age, interests, experiences of oppression, culture, language/talk and fears. Even so, it is the beliefs that must be challenged, not the person. Everyone must also be open to questioning their own beliefs, even if issues do not directly relate to them.
- 5. Maintain positive action between collaborators**

Once a commitment is made, keep ideas flowing. Put action to thought, and don't start what you can't finish.
- 6. Be resourceful with the tools to be able to communicate with each other and agree how to use them**

Recognize that there are different ways for people to communicate and a group must agree to use ways that accommodate all members of the group (phone, email, fax, letters, etc.). As people share and use these ways, understand that these become collective resources that can also help us set our own limits. Also, one must look for ways to make their voices heard. This process of identifying and using these different ways contributes to building leadership.
- 7. Have integrity in all aspects of collaboration, including communication, purpose, action and evaluation**
- 8. Focus on the issue and make distinctions between personal and political situations**

Although we recognize that the personal is political, it is important for us not to confuse personal and organizational issues. When personal issues arise, deal with them in a one-on-one situation, take a moment before reacting to make sure that the challenge is of a personal nature and not a group issue, and respect the group space so as to not overwhelm the process with personal feelings. Furthermore, be considerate of people's feelings and sensitivities when critiquing the space and process of engagement and have the space to respectfully disagree.
- 9. Come to a similar understanding of what youth means, recognizing the cultural differences that exist in the definition of youth**
- 10. Create, maintain and leave a legacy that other youth can learn from**

We should consistently develop the capacity of ourselves as we transition out of the youth category and create new space for new youth to fill. Older youth must check themselves on how much space they are taking up. We should also try not to burn bridges and we should present ourselves in a positive manner, while working toward solutions together in a stable condition and in a unified environment.

Principles of Youth-to-Adult, Adult-to-Youth Collaboration

- 1. Build common roots. Know and share with each other the experiences and perspectives of where people are coming from**
Trust that people speak to the best of their knowledge. When building common ground, know and understand what your goal is.
- 2. Respect experiences and passions regardless of age**
Try to understand older/younger peoples' experiences. Do not assume you won't understand people's experiences; be open to them first. If you can't say anything in a respectful manner, then don't say anything at all.
- 3. Highlight and respect each others' experiences**
Me at 15 is different from you at 15. We must share and listen to each other's stories, but as adults, you must beware when you compare. Respect each person's reality, regardless of their age, as their truth for that time. Don't belittle or demean their experiences because your reality is different or your experiences have led to another reality. Instead all must be in a space of open mindedness and compromise.
- 4. Work together with defined youth and adult roles**
Make sure everyone defines and decides all roles. Adults should not be the ones making all decisions or having control, and leaving the youth to just follow. In addition, do not assume that certain roles are automatically for youth or for adults.
- 5. Understand the language and tone of youth**
Respect the message of the youth. Respect the youth's words and commit to learning slang. Adults also need to keep listening to what youth say, and reflect it back to see the youth if what's said is understood until the youth feels like they are understood.
- 6. Have equal respectability and representation**
Give people equal time to speak and share.
- 7. Reciprocate learning**
Each person is both teacher and student. Acknowledge that everyone is in a space of learning. Give as much as you take, while providing everyone the time and space they need to learn. Come with an open mind.
- 8. Present opinions in a positive manner**
Work towards solutions together in a stable condition and in a unified environment. Try not to burn bridges, and adults must check themselves on how much space they are taking up so as not to overstep their power on youth.
- 9. Have integrity in all aspects of collaboration, including communication, purpose, action and evaluation**
- 10. Youth must not carry the baggage of the old school**
While we realize historical relationships, as youth we cannot carry beefs from yesterday that could be potential allies today. We cannot try to let our issues of division tear us away from collective goals.

How we did this and who did this

How:

We started out by telling our stories of positive and negative experiences of collaboration. We wanted to use the negative experiences as lessons for how not to collaborate with each other, as well as the positive experiences as a good foundation for collaboration.

Positive experiences with collaboration fell in the following areas:

- Networking of communities and people
- Generation of new ideas and education
- Victories and support
- Building new allies and unity
- Building power, capacity and strategies to organize

Negative experiences fell in the following areas:

- Decision making
- Politics
- Views
- Values
- Campaign development
- Goal setting
- Agenda
- Strategy
- Objectives
- Communication
- Participation
- Voices not heard
- Follow through
- Role setting
- Leadership
- Money

Facilitation followed the following ground rules: Have space for younger youth to speak; stick to issue when we talk; and respect the process already committed to. In addition, facilitators created activities to make it as interactive as possible, and were conscious about creating a safe space for the younger youth to speak. Facilitators also broke the larger groups into small groups to allow for deeper discussion and further explanation on the principles that we came up with that could not have happened in a large group discussion. Small group discussions were brought back to the larger group for feedback. We also evaluated our process.

Positive outcomes included:

- Facilitation among younger and older youth
- Review of processes brought people up to speed
- We broke it down!
- Vibes!
- Flexibility
- We collaborated well
- People were already thinking about collaboration
- Thinking reflects a deep understanding

Areas to be improved include:

- Lack of space (because of event planning)
- Lack of time (because of event planning)
- Lost people (because of event planning)
- Scheduling of workshops/meetings (because of event planning)
- Lack of geographical diversity (because of event planning)
- Lack of respect for young people's prep time (because of event planning)