



# Developing Community Agreements

## Overview

Developing community agreements is a powerful strategy for coalescing a group into a team. The process of constructing agreements is often more important than the product. Agreements come from a consensus-driven process to identify what every person in the group needs from each other and commits to each other to feel safe, supported, open and trusting. As such, they provide a common framework for how people aspire to work and be together as they take transformational action.

## Tips for Developing Community Agreements

### 1. Frame the Conversation

- **Take time to define what a community agreement means.** Modify this definition if helpful:  
*"A consensus on what every person in our group needs from each other and commits to each other in order to feel safe, supported, open, productive and trusting... SO THAT we can serve our students (or clients) well, do our best work, and achieve our common vision."*
- **Delineate agreements from “rules” and “norms”.**

**Agreements** are an aspiration, or collective vision, for how we want to be in relationship with one another. They are explicitly developed and enforced by the group, not by an external authority, and as such must represent a consensus.

**Norms** are the ways in which we behave and are currently in relationship to each other, whether consciously and explicitly or not.

**Rules** are mandated and enforced by an authority, and do not necessarily reflect the will or buy-in of the group.

- Explain that there are two types of community agreements:

**Relational** community agreements are about how we want to be in relationship with each other (e.g. speak your truth using "I" statements; stay present; listen fully; seek out multiple perspectives).

**Operational** agreements identify procedures or structures we all agree to use (e.g. start & end on time; limit cell phone use; include process observations at each meeting; end with clear next steps).

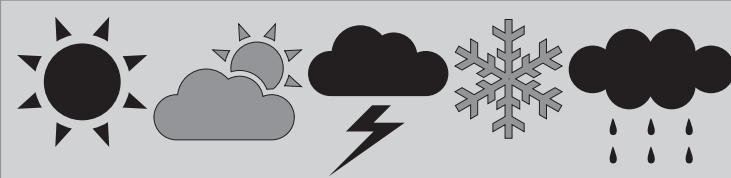
- Explain “why” community agreements matter.
  - We can’t achieve our vision in a hostile, disrespectful, or undermining group culture.
  - Some of the most critical conversations teams need to have are emotional, painful, and uncomfortable (e.g., equity issues, examining individual teacher practice), but we won’t engage or make ourselves vulnerable without emotional safety and trust.
  - Staff relationships model for students how human relationships should be; staff culture shapes school culture.
  - Healthy staff culture is key to personal sustainability in the challenging jobs of education.

## 2. Engage People in the Process

There are many pathways to engage your team in the process of developing community agreements. Take time to assess the factors to the right before designing a process that best meets your group where they are.

**Here's a suggested approach to engaging people in the process:**

1. **Journal on a prompt**, e.g. "What do you need from every person in this group in order to feel safe, supported, open, productive and trusting... SO THAT we can serve our students well, do our best work, and achieve our common vision?"
2. **Pairs or trios share list**. Ask these groups to agree on their top 1 -3 agreements in priority order, and rewrite each one in a simple phrase or sentence. You will likely need to model this.
3. **Each pair or trio shares only their top agreement with the large group and explains why it is important to them**. Large group asks clarifying questions, then discuss. When time expires, test for consensus with thumbs up/down/sideways. If no consensus, set aside.
4. **Repeat process for each pair or trio.**
5. **After meeting, facilitator simplifies language and synthesizes agreements under thematic headers.**
6. **Revised list brought back to large group in subsequent meeting for final approval.**



### Conditions

Before constructing agreements, assess the conditions that will influence the process:

- The group's experience with community agreements
- The group's existing culture
- How new or established the group is
- The size of the group
- The amount of time you'll have to work on the agreements
- How to scaffold the process to maximize safety and participation.