Improving Group Collaboration

# Challenge

Folks in the course have reported group members who they cannot contact or who are not responding and other group members who are not contributing to the projects.

# Things I Do Not Want

* To make a bunch of rules.
* To enforce a bunch of rules.
* To have unhappy, frustrated students.

# Solutions

We need some strategies that will address the challenges and help groups work more smoothly. Reflecting on the questions that have come up so far, I’m suggesting some things I would like all groups to do and then adding some things that groups can do if they want.

## Things I Would Like Groups to Do

* **Track meetings and plans in the new Group Updates Discussion.**You can help solve some of the issues by adding details to the new Group Updates Discussion. Keep a running update on what the group and group members are doing (group meetings, when a group member is out of town for the weekend, etc.). I’ll check this Discussion to find details on your group when I need them.
* **Focus on Project Management.**The focus of the group projects is not just to learn how to write proposals, progress reports, and formal reports. They’re also to learn about project management. Keep in mind that the *process* of writing the projects is just as important as the *product* you end up with.
* **Track your individual work for the Project Wrappers.**The Project Wrappers for these last three Major Projects will ask you to record how you contributed to each project. Keep track while you’re working so it will be easy for you to add them to the wrapper later.
* **Post contact info for group members.**Make sure everyone in the group has contact information for all members. Contact info can be whatever you want (email, phone numbers, etc.). I cannot give out email addresses because of FERPA guidelines. Here are two options:
  1. If you listed contact information in [Try-It #13: Group Contract, Schedule, & Meeting Minutes](https://canvas.vt.edu/courses/177045/assignments/1919117). upload a copy of Try-It #13 so everyone can find the information.
  2. If it’s not in Try-It #13 (or as a backup), list the details in the Group Updates Discussion.
* **Focus on these actions if someone does not do their part.**   
  Whether someone disappears, can’t be contacted, or is having trouble with the work, the goal of a team is to find a way to collaborate to get the work done. Here are the steps I would like you to try if this situation comes up:
  1. *Try to find out why.* Things happen. Maybe the person is sick (physically or mentally). Maybe the person is swamped with work. Maybe the person needs help finding the resources to get the work done. Whatever the reason, your group should start by trying to find out. Being humane and supportive is more valuable than a perfect memo.
  2. *Get them help if needed.* In some cases, you can help them yourselves. In other cases, you might want to suggest other resources. The Writing Center is a great resource if someone is having trouble getting started or needs help with any part of the writing process. You can also let me know what I can do to help.
  3. *Solve the issue among the group members.* Once you know what’s going on and address the issue, your group should be able to find a way forward. Maybe you need to adjust the work schedule. Perhaps you need to have a working meeting where members write together. As much as possible, try to solve the problem as a group.
  4. *Talk to me if you need more help.* Finding your own way is a large part of what project management is about. That said, I’m *not* saying that you can’t ask for help. Let me know what you’ve tried and what you’d like me to do.
  5. *Note what’s going on if it’s time to submit your work.* Everyone should have until the Target Due Date for each of the assignments. If the Target Due Date is here however,
  6. the missing details in the document don’t contribute equally (or at all).

## Things groups can do if they want

* Document any issues that come up with team members
* Create a team calendar for the rest of the term (provide template)
* Choose a better name for your group
* Keep an individual list of to-do’s in Canvas???
* Create a Kudos and Achievements Discussion
* Know what you can do as a group in Canvas
* Check your Canvas Notifications settings.