

WHAT IS A COLLECTIVE?

22

FACTSHEET

A collective is a group of individuals who work together on a common project without relying on internal hierarchies. Collectives can be large or small. In collectives, leadership happens naturally and fluidly. Everyone's skills and knowledge are recognised, valued and used when appropriate.

The decisions are made with each other rather than a traditionally top down approach. This promotes a more equal distribution of power and encourages an atmosphere where people involved feel invested and therefore more empowered in decision making. There is no exact size for a collective, obviously if it is very large decision making becomes more difficult, below details what will support effective collective working.

Structure

Structures should not be seen as fixed and immutable. They should be flexible and responsive to the needs of the group and individual members. Some guiding principles should be adhered to.

1. Defined decision making process.
 2. Regular Meetings.
 3. Defined joining and training procedure for new people.
 4. Defining a level of commitment for working in the group.
 5. Delegation of specific responsibility.
 6. Rotation of all tasks.
 7. Regular social events.
 8. Rosters for tasks to be undertaken.
 9. Evaluations of Meetings.
- Your group could decide to use any or all of the above structures, plus several others which the group may formulate for its own particular needs.

Decision making

Quite often in a small group most decisions will be made using an informal consensual approach. Majority voting is also sometimes used as a backup method if consensus fails.

The method most effective for sharing power when used by small groups is consensus. Consensus decision making is not always an easy process and can sometimes involve a lot of energy, time, and commitment to each other. On the positive side, this method of decision making encourages the participation of all members in formulating all decisions. This builds group cohesion and trust. It also tends to make for better quality decisions.

Collective working ensures that the opportunity and space for learning and hearing from each other is created. Collective working is planned but it is not tight or preset and allows exploration and experience to be valued.



WHAT IS A COLLECTIVE?

22

FACTSHEET

Opportunities and Barriers to Collective Working

Opportunities

Recognise and address power imbalances
Delegate responsibilities to group members
Uncovering new skills and knowledge
Practice equality
New ways of addressing complex issues
Active listening and speaking practices
Accountability to group
Build new relationships

Barriers

Ignore power imbalances
Poor decision making mechanisms
Information not shared formally between members
Revert to traditional styles of governance
Too much or too little structure
Inflexibility
Fear of new ways of working
Time

FACT Collectives have clear roles and responsibilities

MYTH Collectives are unstructured and unmanaged

Roles Within A Collective – these can be delegated to individuals and ideally should be regularly rotated, this allow people to develop their skills, builds confidence and guards against stagnation.

Facilitator

The role of a facilitator is to ensure the meeting stays focused on the issues being discussed, and discussion runs smoothly.

Minutes Keeper

The minutes keeper is delegated with writing an accurate record of the meeting - which may include only the decisions taken, major discussion points, or much of the discussion as well, depending upon the guidelines set by the group.

Time Keeper

Time keeping enables the group to evaluate its progress through the meeting, and further ensures discussions kept to the relevant point.

Mood Monitoring

This is someone who will be confident to address falling energy levels or can alert the group to rising emotions. However this role can be non-delegated and performed by the group as a whole if they understand that it is an important part of the process.

Below are the key functions that these 4 roles need to be aware of as they guide the collective through their gatherings. Importantly the group should also be aware of each of these as they work

- Guiding the agenda
- Keeping discussion on track
- Ensuring that everyone understands what is being heard

- Providing opportunity and environment where everyone can participate
- Summarising
- Recognition and addressing emotions
- Conflict management
- Testing for agreement
- Feedback next steps.

CDHN values collective working and sees it effect change in a number of different ways.

Through the work of the Building Community Pharmacy Partnership (BCPP) we see health professionals and local people coming together to work on areas affecting health and wellbeing. Key to the success of this programme is that both the Health professionals and the communities see the importance of each other's wealth of knowledge and experience.

As CDHN have developed Co-production as a way of addressing complex and difficult issues within communities, collective ways of working has been an effective way to support and sustain change. Traditionally work practices have created barriers to communities being active participants in making decisions which affect them. Collective working finds more appropriate ways to engage with and build relationships with communities and between the people who live in them.

Duneane Collective member

"People got to know each other better, better friends, a lot more understanding of what's happening in the community."

This factsheet has been produced by CDHN but has relied on the work detailed below for information.

References

<https://www.sproutdistro.com/about/what-is-a-collective/> accessed 18/07/16

<https://organizingforpower.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/working-in-collective-organizations.pdf> accessed 18/07/16

Wadsworth, Y. (1998) What is Participatory Action Research? Action Research International, Paper 2.

Available on-line: <http://www.aral.com.au/ari/p-ywadsworth98.html> accessed 18/07/16

