



# PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

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## INTRODUCTION

Collaboration is how movements grow, but it works best when it's intentional. Being a good collaborator means showing up with clarity, trust, and care, so that our work together builds power instead of friction. This toolkit offers practical tips for collaborating in ways that build trust, strengthen relationships, foster care, and avoid burnout.

## WHO THIS IS FOR

Anyone working in partnership with others, whether you're co-organizing an event, joining an existing organization, or building something new from scratch.

## PRINCIPLES

These principles are not rigid rules. They're practices you can adapt to your group's culture, capacity, and goals.

### MOVE AT THE SPEED OF RELATIONSHIPS

Strong movements are built on strong relationships, and those can't be rushed. Before diving into a project together, take time to get to know the people you're working with: not just their skills or resources, but their values, priorities, communication styles, and boundaries. Trust is built in conversations, shared work, and follow-through over time.

Moving at the speed of relationships means resisting the pressure to "go fast" just because the work feels urgent. Urgency can push us into agreements that aren't clear, relationships that aren't solid, and commitments we can't sustain. When we move too quickly, small cracks in trust can grow into big conflicts.

## PRACTICAL WAYS TO DO THIS:

- **START SMALL**

Test out the relationship with a small project or shared task before committing to something bigger. This might mean you co-host an activist meetup before deciding to undertake a protest action or a longer-term project.

## • TALK ABOUT PREFERENCES EARLY ON INSTEAD OF MAKING ASSUMPTIONS

Talk openly about values, communication/decision-making styles, and boundaries before deadlines or stress kick in. Consider a structured check-in to get this conversation started.

### *Specific things to check-in about might include:*

- Preference for written versus verbal communication; preference for or desire to avoid various communication platforms; personal contact preferences ie “please send me a Signal message before calling” or “I typically need to process information for a day or two before I’m able to contribute to a discussion.”
- Any needs for disability accommodations.

## • MAKE SPACE FOR CONNECTION

Start or end meetings with a quick check-in so you’re not only talking about tasks.

## • FOLLOW THROUGH OR CHECK IN

Accountability includes adjusting plans when needed.

## • NAME THE PACE

If you need more time to build trust, say so. It’s easier to slow down than to repair a broken

## SET CLEAR AGREEMENTS TOGETHER

Collaboration works best when everyone knows what’s expected, and what isn’t. Clear agreements prevent misunderstandings, keep the work on track, and ensure everyone’s efforts are recognized.

An agreement can be simple: who’s doing what, when it’s due, and how you’ll check in. The key is making sure no one’s guessing about roles, responsibilities, or decision-making. Agreements should be flexible enough to change as the work changes, and those changes should be talked about together.

## PRACTICAL WAYS TO DO THIS:

- **BE SPECIFIC:** Say exactly what’s being done, by who, and by when.
- **WRITE IT DOWN:** Use a shared doc, email, or even a group text so no one has to rely on memory.
- **CHECK UNDERSTANDING:** Make sure everyone understands the same plan before moving forward.
- **PLAN FOR CHANGE:** Talk about how you’ll handle missed deadlines or shifting priorities.
- **REVIEW OFTEN:** Use check-ins to see what’s working and what needs tweaking.

## MAKE THE WORK SUSTAINABLE

Good collaboration isn’t just about getting results, it’s about making sure the people doing the work can keep going. Burnout drains energy from movements, weakens relationships, and can push people out of organizing altogether.

Burnout builds when the workload falls on just a few people, when boundaries aren’t respected, when folks feel overextended or undervalued, or when communication breaks down and creates extra stress. Protecting each other from burnout means sharing the load, respecting capacity, and checking in on each other’s well-being.

## PRACTICAL WAYS TO DO THIS:

- **SHARE THE WORK:** Spread tasks fairly and rotate jobs when possible.
- **RESPECT BOUNDARIES:** Don't expect people to work beyond what they've agreed to.
- **BE HONEST ABOUT CAPACITY:** Be honest about what you can take on and encourage others to do the same.
- **PLAN FOR BACKUP:** Build buddy systems, co-leads, and regular check-ins so the work doesn't depend on one person.
- **MAKE IT OKAY TO STEP BACK:** Create a culture where rest isn't punished or shamed.

*When we protect each other from burnout, we're not slowing down the movement, we're making sure it can last!*

## BUILD ON WHAT ALREADY EXISTS

In collaboration, our job isn't just to get things done, it's to get things done together. Before starting something new, ask: Is this already being done, and by whom?

When we skip this step, we risk duplicating efforts, splitting resources, and unintentionally competing with potential allies. When we build on what's already there, we grow trust, expand reach, and make our work stronger.

## PRACTICAL WAYS TO DO THIS:

- **DO YOUR HOMEWORK:** Ask your network, search online, and talk to people doing similar work before you start.
- **APPROACH AS A PARTNER:** Reach out to collaborate, not compete.
- **JOIN FORCES WHEN POSSIBLE:** Even if you have a different approach, see if your ideas can strengthen what's already underway.
- **ACKNOWLEDGE AND CREDIT OTHERS:** Recognition builds goodwill and deepens trust. Acknowledge the people who've done the groundwork.

Collaboration doesn't mean you can't start new things, it means you start from what exists, so our energy builds collective power instead of scattering it.

*Use Shout Your Abortion's Landscape Analysis 101 Toolkit to assess what work is already being done, and what gaps in access exist.*

## RESPECT PRIVACY AND BOUNDARIES

Collaboration works best when people feel safe and safety starts with respecting each other's privacy and boundaries. That means treating personal information, contact details, and behind-the-scenes conversations with care.

It's easy to think "sharing is helping," but passing along someone's contact info, adding them to a group thread, or tagging them publicly without consent can put them in uncomfortable or even unsafe situations. Boundaries also apply to time and capacity: no one owes instant replies, 24/7 availability, or more labor than they've agreed to give.

## PRACTICAL WAYS TO DO THIS:

- **ASK BEFORE SHARING:** Always get consent before giving out contact info or adding someone to a list, chat, or meeting.
- **BE MINDFUL OF PUBLIC VISIBILITY:** Check before posting photos, tagging people, or quoting them.
- **RESPECT TIME:** Avoid last-minute asks or expecting immediate responses unless previously agreed upon.
- **DON'T JUMP IN WITHOUT ASKING:** Even with the best intentions, jumping in without asking can disrupt plans, cause duplication, or create confusion. Always check before taking action on someone else's work.
- **MODEL BOUNDARIES:** Share your own boundaries and stick to them. It gives others permission to do the same.

## TEND TO TENSION

Tension is a natural part of working with other people. Collaboration can be powerful and rewarding, but it will always come with challenges. Conflict is natural, and it isn't inherently negative. Instead of avoiding tension, treat it as a chance to strengthen your communication and deepen trust.

Addressing issues early is not about speed, it's about presence. It's about noticing the shift and choosing to tend to it while it's still small enough to move gently. Every time we have the courage to bring something up, we strengthen the culture of honesty and care in our work.

## PRACTICES FOR MOVING TOWARD TENSION WITH CARE:

### • NOTICE THE CHANGE

Pay attention when you feel yourself withdrawing, bristling, or holding back. That's a signal.

#### *Examples:*

- "Something's been feeling off for me. Can we check in about it?"
- "I noticed myself feeling \_\_\_ in that meeting, and I wanted to talk about it while it's still fresh."

### • BE CURIOUS, NOT COMBATIVE

Ask questions to understand before assuming you know the full story. Ask: What's really going on here? What don't I know yet?

#### *Examples:*

- "Can you tell me more about how that decision came about?"
- "Is there anything that shaped your choice that I might not know about?"

### • NAME YOUR EXPERIENCE

Speak from what you feel and see, not what you assume is true.

#### *Examples:*

- "I know you may have meant it differently, but here's how it landed with me."
- "That choice made it harder for me to \_\_\_, and I'd like us to talk about it."

## • CENTER THE RELATIONSHIP

Remember: we are here to keep working together.

### *Examples:*

- "I want to work in a way that feels good for both of us."
- "I want to make sure we're tending to our relationship as much as we're tending to the work."

## • CO-CREATE THE PATH FORWARD.

Ask, What's one small shift we could make so this works better for both of us?

### *Examples:*

- "What would make this feel better for both of us?"
- "How do we want to handle it if this comes up again?"

*Addressing issues early isn't about being confrontational, it's about protecting trust and keeping the work moving. Every conversation is a chance to practice the kind of world we're trying to build, one where we face what's hard without leaving each other behind.*

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Collaboration is how we survive, how we resist, and how we build the world we want to live in. It's not just about getting along, it's about relationships strong enough to carry us through conflict, scarcity, and change.

It's in every step of the work: asking a community space to host a meeting and respecting their needs; linking up with a group already doing similar work; calling a local artist to design a flyer; choosing a printer you trust; coordinating volunteers; checking in with a mutual aid network before a supply drive.

The future we're fighting for is one where collaboration is the norm, where we move together with trust, care, and shared purpose. Getting there isn't easy. Collaboration can be messy, slow, and uncomfortable. It asks us to be honest, navigate conflict, and keep showing up even when it's hard. But if we want that future, we have to practice it now, in every decision and every relationship, so our movements can sustain and protect everyone in them, even in hard times.

## KEY WORDS

**Accountability:** Owning your commitments and actions, and making things right when needed.

**Agreements:** Clear commitments about who will do what, by when, and how decisions will be made.

**Boundaries:** The limits we set to protect our time, energy, safety, and well-being.

**Burnout:** Physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that comes from unsustainable work, stress, or imbalance.

**Capacity:** The realistic amount of time, energy, and resources someone can commit.

**Collaboration:** Working together toward a shared goal in a way that values everyone's contributions and relationships.

**Conflict:** Disagreement or tension between people, which can be addressed in ways that strengthen relationships.

**Consent:** Getting clear, enthusiastic agreement before taking an action that affects others.

**Trust:** Confidence that others will follow through, act with care, and be accountable.

**Power:** The ability to influence decisions, shape outcomes, and shift conditions in our communities.

**Sustainability (in organizing):** The ability to keep doing the work in ways that protect well-being, strengthen relationships, and keep the movement strong for the long haul.

## RESOURCES

### ALL-OPTIONS TALKLINE:

Provides free and confidential support about any pregnancy related experiences.

1(888)493-0092 or [All-Options.org](https://www.all-options.org)

### DIGITAL DEFENSE FUND:

Provides information about digital security and abortion so you can have a private and secure abortion.

[DigitalDefenseFund.org](https://www.DigitalDefenseFund.org)

### EXHALE PRO-VOICE:

Text and phone-based emotional support after abortion.

[ExhaleProVoice.org](https://www.ExhaleProVoice.org)

### I NEED AN A:

A directory of abortion providers, funds, and abortion-related resources in every state.

[INeedAnA.com](https://www.INeedAnA.com)

### MISCARRIAGE + ABORTION HOTLINE:

Talk to pro-abortion doctors anonymously. Call or text (833)246-2632 or visit [MaHotline.org](https://www.MaHotline.org)

### National Network of Abortion Funds:

Connects people with local funds for procedure costs, travel, lodging, and other needs.

[AbortionFunds.org](https://www.AbortionFunds.org)

### PLAN C PILLS:

An information resource for self-managed, at-home abortion with pills.

[PlanCPills.org](https://www.PlanCPills.org)

### THE REPRO LEGAL HELPLINE:

Provides free and confidential information about abortion laws in your state, help you if the police have contacted you about an abortion, or help you if you are being denied an emergency abortion.

1(844)868-2812 or [ReproLegalHelpline.org](https://www.ReproLegalHelpline.org)