



# Team-building Introduction

Before defining a team, let's remember that when you come together to form a team working toward creating change, the team needs to embody the change that they want to see in the world through how they form and maintain it. In this way, you practice and become a model for others to see and learn how you can work together productively, while unlearning and challenging the oppressive dynamics found in mainstream values, culture, ways of thinking and social structures. Just by consciously and explicitly working as a team in this way, the team does changemaking work even before taking on a project together.

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## 1.1 What is a Team?

In your work together, your team must challenge inequity and oppression through:

- ❖ Making sure everyone has a voice and equal and equitable opportunity to participate in team work
- ❖ Ensuring the roles and team culture empower one another to access their best selves, build skills and offer their individual gifts
- ❖ Honouring all ways of knowing, lived experience, and skills of all members (while avoiding over-prioritizing any one form of skill, knowledge or experience).
- ❖ Challenging the culture of individualism and embracing a culture of collaboration, coexistence and community.
- ❖ Challenging oppressive dynamics and values that prevent marginalizing people based on race, class, gender, sexuality, education, religion or personal capacity.
- ❖ Actively building a non-oppressive team structure, culture and environment.

A team is more than just a group of people with individual relationships between them. If you've been part of a team before -- perhaps for a project or sport -- you might have had a goal you all worked towards, like winning a playoff game, or had structured roles, like an outfielder or pitcher. If you've been in teams before: how did it feel, and why did it feel that way?

Team work, especially for group projects in school, often feels *bad* because there is no time to set clear guidelines for how you will work together, and sometimes, a few people will end up doing all the work because of lack of trust and cohesion. Good teams, on the other hand, have their own essence. One primary element is that members share a common purpose and goal, which they work toward together.

Four most important qualities of an effective team:

1. **Explicit shared purpose:** The team creates and works toward a vision for the future as a team, with tangible short and/or long term goals everyone is on board with.
2. **Balanced and trustworthy relationships:** The team has balanced and trustworthy relationships, between individuals and shared as a group. This means the team has stable relationships with each team member, and works towards an anti-oppressive structure.

3. **Interdependent roles and structure:** Every team member has a role that fits into the greater functioning of the team. Each role works toward the shared goals of the team and works cohesively with the other team members and their roles. Power and decision making are decentralized, meaning not made by only one person, and democratic.
4. **Explicit Norms:** The team creates agreements for how you meet and work together and are created with the entire team. These are then followed by everyone in the team as rules for how they expect to work together.

Other key qualities of an effective team:

- ❖ **Trusting and Accountable:** Everyone can rely on one another to be accountable for their work, commitments and trust in others to have their back.
- ❖ **Supportive:** Everyone actively supports one another in work, life and emotion.
- ❖ **Equitable and Radically Inclusive:** Everyone proactively creates an inclusive and *anti-oppressive* team environment.
- ❖ **Committed to Growth:** Everyone shows up and puts energy into the growth of the team and members.
- ❖ **Collaborative, Effective & Productive:** The team works together well, gets things done and collectively keeps momentum moving forward.
- ❖ **Resilient:** The team navigates challenges, adversity and conflict.
- ❖ **Fun:** Everyone contributes to creating a fun environment for all.

**Anti-oppression** - is the strategies, actions and practices that actively challenge systems of oppression on an ongoing basis. When a team is anti-oppressive, this means everyone gives up power structures and roles that are often built into society and culture. In the absence of oppression, is inclusion of all groups and people, having representation from them (when possible), and having decision-making policies, procedures and practices that stray from typical power-over structures. More can be learned in [the Anti-Oppression and Inclusivity Guidebook](#).

## 1.2 Brainstorm Exercise

→ USE WITH: [Brainstorm Exercise](#)

Purpose:

- ❖ To understand your team-members better so you can begin building a constructive team together.
- ❖ To discuss what you believe a good or bad team is like based on previous experiences.

Outcomes:

- ❖ Having a solid foundation before deciding on team norms and culture.

Time: 10 - 15 minutes