



Tensions over turf: how to minimise conflict in partnerships

Crime prevention partnerships are often beneficial, but relationships between different agencies can affect success (see CRM no. 49). Even when partnerships are successful, there is often some form of tension in the relationship. Cohen and Gould (2003) refer to this as turf wars. The turf can include resources, time, recognition for work or funding, and tension can exist on many levels: between members and lead agencies, between individual agency representatives and the partnership, and between individual members of the partnership. Cohen and Gould have developed some practical tips for minimising problems arising from turf wars.

When starting a partnership, it is important to establish why each member is participating and together acknowledge where potential for turf issues may occur. Once this is clear, it may be worthwhile to delineate the roles and responsibilities of each member and their organisation in a collaborative document that also includes things such as a budget and timeframes. A consistent and fair decision making process should also be developed and uniformly applied for each proposed action, including setting time aside for member discussion on how the proposed action will affect individual organisations. This should ensure that actions are genuinely supported by the group, and that each action has been implemented as fairly as possible. A reasonable consensus that members can live with is preferable, but if an agreement cannot be reached than a majority rules decision should be employed. Decisions that may alienate or put a few members at a disadvantage should be avoided where possible. Creating a flexible environment that makes people comfortable with expressing different views and perspectives while also listening to others is also crucial to minimising problems.

Throughout the partnership, each member and organisation should feel they offer an equitable contribution to the group, and that they benefit from it equitably as well. Sharing resources among members is considered an important tool for partnerships to work. Partners should obtain resources not only for the projects, but also to sustain the partnership. Since organisations and agencies vary in size and resources, not all partners have the capacity to contribute equal amounts financially, so members should be able to provide resources at different levels. For example, this could include staff time, financial help or doing research. As much work is often voluntary, when the success of one of the member agencies is publicised or a milestone is reached, it should be recognised and celebrated within the group. Shaping a collective identity is important, and this could be encouraged by sharing the limelight amongst members. Therefore, all members should have the chance to represent the group in the media, at other meetings, and even hosting the partnership meetings. An open, amiable atmosphere should be actively promoted during meetings, as people who get along tend to work more efficiently. This could be as simple as offering refreshments during a meeting and encouraging socialising.

When turf tension arises, it is essential to make the struggle overt. Issues cannot be tackled unless the members involved admit there is a problem. It could be useful to have neutral members to help address any problems, and often it may help to remind the affected members of the partnership's purpose so the bigger picture, that is the purpose of the partnership, is not lost. More information and other prevention resources can be found at www.preventioninstitute.org

References

Cohen L & Gould J 2003. *The tensions of turf: making it work for the coalition*. California: Prevention Institute.