

RED FLAGS IN THE COLLABORATION PROCESS

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Red flags are hazard indicators. They are storm warnings that suggest possible dangers that could jeopardize the success of an intended collaboration process. Some flags may turn into showstoppers. Others could be game-changers or potentially have other rippling or cascade effects.

I. Conceiving the Process

1. Sponsors and/or conveners express vague intents. They aren't clear about why they want to undertake a process, what they want to accomplish, and what kind of end-product might result.
2. Multiple sponsors and/or conveners have different views of what is being undertaken and why.
3. There are unrealistic expectations about the time and money that will be needed. Sponsors want to undertake a process on the cheap.
4. Sponsors/conveners seek to do something that, on the face of it, has low likelihood of success.
5. A sponsor or convener is overly wedded to a particular outcome.
6. The political timing of a proposed effort is questionable.

II. Assessment, Scanning, and Scoping

7. Another similar or overlapping collaborative process is underway.
8. There doesn't appear to be a real policy driver or political gravitational "pull." It's possible a collaboration could produce results that no one is interested in.

9. Early discussions suggest that there is so much old baggage or that ideologies are so unwavering that breakthroughs are unlikely for a particular effort or in the current window of time.
10. Early contacts with a few key thought leaders suggest no one is interested.

III. Planning the Process

11. The sponsor or convener refuses to undertake an assessment. They want to skip straight to meetings.
12. First contacts with prospective stakeholders suggest there is little or no buy-in from key thought leaders.
13. It may be able impossible to bring together balanced representation. People on one side of an issue prefer other options.
14. Prospective stakeholders want to do something different from the prospective sponsors and conveners.

IV. Launching and Convening the Process

15. As the process gets underway, there is deep skepticism and disbelief that this particular process is worth time, energy, and attention.
16. Many stakeholders are fatigued from previous attempts at collaboration on similar issues.
17. Some key individuals believe they can accomplish more in the normal political and legal processes.

V. Deliberating

18. Stakeholders are impatient. They want to slap down proposals and go straight to solutions before the problem has been defined.
19. Stakeholders are in avoidance mode. They prefer to not to confront the issues and continue to circle.

20. Stakeholders are impatient or intolerant of “messiness.”
21. Discussions are dominated by dueling experts.
22. New stakeholders enter the process.

VI. Reaching Conclusions

23. Some key stakeholders are unwilling or unable to tolerate multiple conceptions of the problem and remain fixated on their own “perfect” solution.
24. The group’s analysis is truncated. They jump on the first solution (satisficing).
25. Ethical dilemmas arise regarding impacts on others not present but affected by any solution.
26. New stakeholders enter the process

VII. Finalizing and Memorializing Results

27. There is no real plurality - a significant number of stakeholders are holding out from any proposed solution.
28. The agreements that are emerging are abstract “motherhood statements.”
29. Deep conflict continues even after extended discussion. The negotiations are harsh and angry.

VIII. Concluding Things

30. As the process concluded, there is no clear accountability for who will do what, by when, and how.
31. Stakeholders distance themselves from the process and the product.
32. The outcomes achieved are unlikely to survive legal challenges or changes in political administration.