

What You Need to Complete This Activity

- **A facilitator:** Anyone on the team can play this role by following the directions in the Activity Guide and Worksheet.
- **A worksheet note taker:** Anyone on the team can play this role by taking notes into the worksheet to capture the team discussion.
- **A copy of the worksheet** for each team member.
- **For teams meeting virtually:** A word document or virtual whiteboard – that all team members can view on the meeting platform – to record the ground rules that are discussed in Section 3. Ideally teams meeting virtually will use a platform that allows for the pairs in Section 1 to meet in breakout rooms.

Your team will need about 1 hour to complete this activity, followed by some time to distribute the ground rules to the team for feedback.

Activity Goal

In completing this activity and worksheet, your team will work together to identify ground rules that will foster respectful and productive disagreement, which can create synergy.

Ground Rules: Identify specific behaviors for team members to follow and are based on team norms.

Productive Disagreement: Occurs when team members express differing views and come to a shared understanding.

Synergy: Occurs when two or more team members blend differing opinions or approaches to create something that is greater than what each individual member could create on their own.

Ground rules describe specific behaviors or actions that team members should or should not take to uphold a team norm or shared agreement about how the team will work together. Ground rules can be used to provide specific guidance about how to have productive disagreements. For example, a ground rule might address how a team member should present their reasons for disagreeing with an idea or how a team member should respond when another team member asks questions about their idea.

Who Should Participate and When?

This activity is best done by the entire team. It is best to do after the team has developed a shared vision and team norms. It is important that as many team members as possible – including stakeholders – participate so that all team members agree to the ground rules. More established teams may also find it useful to do this activity to discuss existing ground rules and modify them as needed.

Why This Matters

Ground rules that support productive disagreement will allow team members to feel comfortable enough to openly disagree about ideas or content (e.g., how to interpret the data), which can help the team identify effective solutions.

Step-by-Step Directions

- 1 Agree to complete this activity and worksheet as a group, and schedule time to work together.**
- 2 Assign the roles of facilitator and note taker.** The facilitator and note taker should meet briefly to confirm what each will do during the meeting.
- 3 The facilitator starts the activity by discussing how ground rules can help foster productive disagreement, reviewing the activity goal, and sharing the time allotted for the activity.**
- 4 The facilitator introduces the worksheet and states the time allotted for each step.** Section 1 has a single question for pairs to answer; this section will take about 10 minutes. In Section 2, the pairs will present each other's ground rules to the full team, which should take about 20 minutes. Then, in Section 3, the full team will discuss and decide on ground rules for productive disagreement, which should take about 30 minutes.
- 5 After the team completes the activity, the facilitator and note taker should share the final list of ground rules with all team members and ask them to agree to these ground rules for group discussions.**

Additional Guidance for the Facilitator

- **It may be helpful to share the team norms with the team before the meeting.** Seeing the team norms may help the team think of ground rules that support productive disagreement.
- **At the beginning of the meeting, remind team members about the difference between productive disagreement and personal conflict.** Remind the team that differences and even disagreements can be productive, helping the team get to know and learn from each other and become more effective partners. Personal conflict between team members, however, is not productive and should be avoided. It can slow down progress and make a team less effective.
- **Offer team members the opportunity to anonymously suggest other ground rules.** For example, you may want to email a link to a shared document that they could complete on their own. Add these rules to the list in Section 2 and discuss with the team as needed.

Worksheet

Section 1 • Questions for Pairs (10 minutes)

One person spends about five minutes answering the question below while their partner records the key points. Then, they switch roles.

Question: What ground rules do you think are necessary to foster productive disagreement?

In answering this question, think about which ground rules are important to you during difficult conversations. For example:

- Avoid making assumptions about others and their beliefs
- Stay on topic
- Allow others to finish before you speak
- Respect confidentiality

Your partner's answers:

Worksheet

Section 2 • Sharing from Pairs to Team (20 minutes)

In the full team, each pair shares for 2-3 minutes about the ground rules they discussed while other pairs listen.

After all pairs share, team members spend a few minutes pointing out what was similar or different across the pairs.

Note taker records a list of ground rules shared by the team and notes any overlap:

Worksheet

Section 3 • Team Decides on its Ground Rules for Productive Disagreement (30 minutes)

Facilitator leads a team discussion with these questions:

1. **Based on what we learned about our team’s preferred ground rules, which ground rules do the full team, or a majority of team members, support? What are the pros and cons of each?**
2. **Are there any suggested ground rules individuals feel strongly about that weren’t discussed or supported by a majority of the team?**
 - a. Can the rest of the team agree to these ground rules?
 - b. What compromises can be made?

Note taker captures key points of the team discussion and records ground rules the team has decided on. Facilitator shares final ground rules back with the team, for example in a shared document sent by email, to guide productive disagreements going forward.