A Systems Approach
to Substance Use Services in Canada

CCSA - CCLAT
Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse
Centre canadien de lutte contre l'alcoolisme et les toxicomanies

Systems Approach Workbook
Working with Teams

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Who should read this?

- Leaders and decision makers in the substance abuse and mental health services field, such as regional directors and program managers

- Anyone interested in learning more about working with teams to support system change or project implementation

Why are teams important to a Systems Approach?

- This resource is part of the Systems Approach Workbook, which is intended to assist those using the Systems Approach report as a guiding framework for improving the accessibility, quality and range of services and supports for substance use in Canada

- Teams often play an important role in change management approaches

- Those working in substance use and related fields often work in team settings at the service delivery level

- Well functioning teams have the ability to increase collaboration, communication and commitment within and across substance use and related services

- This resource provides tools and guidance for establishing, working with and leading teams

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Executive Summary

Why are teams important to substance use systems?

A comprehensive approach to substance use requires the involvement of many diverse perspectives. Well-functioning teams have the ability to increase collaboration, communication and commitment within and across substance use and related services, making them very valuable in supporting a Systems Approach to planning and development.

What is a team?

According to Katzenback and Smith (1993), a team is "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable." Although there is no set limit to the number of people on a team, most have between five and 15 members.

Why use teams?

In addition to distributing workload, using a team approach ensures the perspectives and concerns of all the individuals or groups involved in system change or project implementation are taken into account. By bringing different perspectives to the table, working in teams can enhance creativity, strategic thinking and accountability for planning and implementation. Teams are also invaluable in promoting multi-directional rather than hierarchical communication, reaching a broader base of stakeholders than a single leader could manage alone.

How do I form a team?

There are many different models or types of teams, each suited to different contexts and functions. This resource discusses several kinds of teams and provides examples of situations relevant to the substance use field. It also explores specific challenges and strategies associated with the rapidly increasing use of virtual teams.

How do I work with a team?

From role conflict to communication to alignment, every team faces challenges. This resource provides a number of strategies for addressing these challenges, including a summary of best practices for leading teams (complemented by the Systems Approach Effective Leadership brief). It also provides instructions for using a RASCI (responsible, accountable, support, consulted, informed) matrix as a teamwork tool.

Working with Teams

Improving the accessibility, quality and range of services and supports for substance use in Canada involves coordinating a broad range of services and supports. Changes are required at both the broad system level and at the individual service level (National Treatment Strategy Working Group, 2008). Effective change within complex systems requires a collaborative rather than a hierarchical approach.

This resource provides information and practical guidance for using teams to support system change or project implementation. It is one component of the Systems Approach Workbook, a collection of modules and briefs that support taking a change management approach to the development of a collaborative and comprehensive continuum of services and supports for substance use.

> Other components of the Systems Approach Workbook that complement this Working with Teams brief include:
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> - Change Management
> - Effective Leadership
> - System Thinking and Complexity in Substance Use Systems
> - Collaboration in Substance Use Systems
> - Implementation Plan Template
> - Communications Tools

What is a team?

According to Katzenback and Smith (1993), a team is "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable." Teams may have anywhere from three to 30 members, although most have between five and 15. And while there are no hard and fast rules regarding team size, there are three key points to keep in mind:

- No one size is best for all situations;
- More people mean more resources; and
- More people require more skills and effort to coordinate.

Why use teams?

The expression "many hands make light work" certainly applies when considering a team-based approach for supporting initiatives that are multi-faceted, interconnected and complex. Well functioning teams have the ability to increase collaboration, communication and commitment within and across substance use and related services, making them very valuable in supporting a Systems Approach to planning and development. Working in teams also brings different perspectives to the table and can enhance creativity, strategic thinking and accountability for planning and implementation.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that teamwork takes additional time and requires more resources and supports than individual or informal small group work. Teams require increased coordination and facilitated meetings, and tend to have greater communication demands and issues with cohesion. A question that needs to be answered early in the planning stages of an initiative is whether or not a team approach is required and, if so, which type of team is needed.

> The Change Management Modules in the Systems Approach Workbook provide additional guidance for planning a system change or new initiative.

Taking the time to evaluate the situation and weigh the benefits of using teams against the costs is worthwhile. Oliver Serrat (2009) proposes a team approach as being useful when:

- The problem is relatively complex, uncertain or holds potential for conflict;
- The problem and its solution have important organizational consequences;
- There are tight but not immediate deadlines; or
- Widespread acceptance and commitment are critical to successful implementation of a response to a situation, condition or issue.

Forming a team

Once the decision has been made to utilize a team or several teams, it then becomes the responsibility of leadership to create the conditions for effective team functioning. There has been a fair amount of research into what defines high performing teams. Common characteristics include:

- A clearly defined and shared vision or purpose;
- Well defined and understood roles and responsibilities;
- Trust and support within the team;
- Effective communication and conflict resolution;
- Interdependence;
- Being empowered and accountable for the issue and resolutions; and
- Enjoyment and satisfaction from working together.

> The characteristics of effective teams also translate to effective work at the system level. Collaboration and coordination, for example, are guiding concepts of the Systems Approach Tiered Model.

These characteristics and competencies form the foundation of successful teams. It is of particular importance that team members understand their individual roles and responsibilities within the team. The confusion over who should be doing what (and toward what goal) has proven to be the undoing of many teams, resulting in incomplete or unsuccessful projects. It is leadership's responsibility to ensure clarity about responsibilities so team members fully understand what their contribution to the team and organization includes.

Leadership must also be clear about what is both in and out of the project's scope to help guard against "scope creep". A clear and detailed work plan that maps out the path and associated tasks that need to be accomplished will ensure team members do not end up meandering without direction or purpose.

Terry Dettman (2000) states that effective team members need very special skills to succeed in a team environment. Although not everyone has these skills initially, most people can learn them through a combination of training and practical experience. However, he also cautions that not everyone can or will adopt these skills.

As such, leadership must be prepared to remove team members who cannot master the ability to:

- Listen well;
- Participate and contribute;
- Represent their own area of expertise;
- Give up turf issues for the sake of the whole;
- Take a multifunctional perspective on the issues;
- Set aside their own egos; and
- Be flexible, secure, competent and inclusive.

Once the qualities and competencies of team members have been established, how a team is assembled depends on the scope, complexity and impact of the change initiative. Using a Systems Approach, the following questions can assist planners in determining the extent of an initiative and the type of team(s) required.

Does the project involve:

- One system or several?
- A single organization or numerous sites?
- Stakeholders, allied service providers and referral agents?
- A single community, several communities or a broader region?
- People who are recipients of the service?
- Policy or procedural changes?
- Background research and analysis?

Multiple teams may be developed for different purposes or one team may be developed that has several roles and functions. Table 1 provides examples of types of teams that have been found to be useful in substance use service planning.

Table 1. Types of teams

Team Type	Example Application
Consultation team: Provides content knowledge, expertise and experience that will inform planning and decision making. This could include researchers, practitioners, service users, representatives from different cultures and other diverse populations. The consultation team is not directly tasked with decision making.	A trauma-informed practice toolkit is being developed that will support a broad array of service areas and will require research as well as practice perspectives. The consultation team includes aboriginal members as well as other groups where there is a high incidence of trauma. Various representatives from health and human services systems who need to be aware of the impact of trauma on clients and patients are also included.
Planning and implementation team: Oversees all phases of planning as well as overall project management, including scope, timelines, cost, quality assurance, human resources, risk, procurement, evaluation, communications, etc.	A new regional, purpose-built residential treatment centre is being developed to add to the system of service provision. All phases of the project will be developed and delivered under the guidance of the planning and implementation team. A consultation team will also be utilized during the planning phase.
Integration team: Specializes in merging new information and practices within existing services and across systems. This may include system analysis, client journey mapping, and various knowledge exchange and workforce development strategies.	Revised intake and assessment processes as well as revamped tools are being introduced into regional services. The integration team works with the planning and implementation team as well as practice leads, IT experts and educators to develop an implementation and monitoring strategy. The strategy may, for example, include consultation with affected staff regarding integration of the tools, piloting, training, supervision and mentoring.
Transition team: Focuses on preparing the organization or service for change and developing a plan to manage the change process through implementation as well as follow-up. There may be overlap with the integration team (for example, in developing knowledge exchange and learning strategies).	An electronic health record system is being introduced to replace a paper filing system. This will require the development and implementation of a plan that transfers relevant archived and current information into the new system. The transition team assesses educational needs and designs supports for orientation and training in new technology and processes. Planning for ongoing support and orientation for new staff will also be developed, piloted and evaluated.
Communication team: Develops and coordinates all aspects of a communication strategy and produces materials such as updates, newsletters and press releases. Also deals with any media issues.	A contract to open additional needle exchange programs has been awarded to a non-profit organization in an urban setting. The communication team works with the municipality, affected communities, allied service providers and the general public to build support and address concerns and assumptions about the plan.

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For smaller initiatives, services and systems, one team may handle some or all of the functions of the specialized teams outlined above. Members are then selected for their specific expertise or perspective. When developing a multi-functional team, Wilemon (1998) says problems arise from having members who do not bring the required skills and competencies to their role. In some instances, there may be an opportunity to train people "up" as part of team development. However, if this is not the case, choosing people with the appropriate background and who know how to work well with teams is important. Otherwise, the whole team may feel the impact of those who cannot fulfill their responsibilities and overall team functioning and morale may be affected.

In many cases, we are not able to choose all of our team members or do not have the ability to remove team members who are not a good fit. The troubleshooting section on the following page provides suggestions for overcoming these common obstacles.

Virtual teams

Virtual teams are sometimes described as geographically dispersed teams because they are well suited to overcoming the geographical challenges, time zone variations, travel cost considerations and varied access to technology that are part of the organizational landscape in Canada. Virtual teams come in many shapes and sizes and are often hybrids that combine face-to-face meetings with virtual meetings. They can range from teams that support project planning and implementation to those that support specific areas of the work, such as communities of practice.

Much of the success of virtual teams requires the same leadership skills outlined in the Systems Approach Effective Leadership brief. However, there are some distinct differences that should be highlighted. In a virtual environment, leaders need to be even more aware of engaging those on the team through very direct and deliberate invitations to participate in the meeting. There is a tendency for participants to withdraw or become distracted when they do not feel that their presence is acknowledged or important.

The threat of invisibility is a particular challenge when a meeting involves a combination of face-to-face and tele- or web-conferencing. Too often those who are attending the meeting in person feel more connected to what's going on and forget to include participants who are not physically present. Many people can attest to finding themselves in the unfortunate position of having to interrupt others in order to participate because the facilitator has forgotten about them.

To ensure virtual teams are successful it is important to:

- Provide required materials such as agendas, presentations and other support materials well in advance;
- Align the choices of technology with those participants can easily access or where barriers such as firewalls can be addressed in advance of the meeting;
- Make sure the technology fits the tasks and activities required during the meeting (for example, think of the challenge of attending a meeting by teleconference and not being

able to hear most of the participants because there is an inadequate number of speakers to amplify their voices);

- Provide support for those that may not be well acquainted with the technology being used;

- Set up and test more complex technology well in advance of the actual meeting time; and

- Include communication strategies that create a sense of connection and engagement.

Troubleshooting with teams

Anyone who has been part of a team or led one knows teamwork is not without its challenges. Leaders need to be realistic and well prepared to avoid issues that undermine team effectiveness and jeopardize successful systems planning. Table 2 is based on problems identified by Wilemon (1998) when working with cross-functional teams. The potential solutions outlined here can help you prevent problems from occurring or intervene quickly as they're identified.

Table 2. Issues and solutions for teams

Issue	Description	Solution
Lack of clear objectives	The team does not know what the goal of the project is. The team stops performing or starts engaging in activities that do not promote the objectives of the project.	Make sure the goals and objectives of the initiative are clear and are reviewed on a regular basis. A shared vision is helpful.
Lack of alignment	Team members understand the goals but disagree and attempt to block their attainment.	Invite critique, feedback and questioning. Encourage different perspectives and have issues and concerns brought forward for discussion.
Poor meetings	Disorganized and poorly facilitated meetings drain the energy from a team very quickly, making it difficult to feel momentum.	Leaders require facilitation skills that ensure meetings are productive and support creative thinking and problem solving. Use an agenda with timelines for each item.
Conflict over roles	Lack of agreement about roles can create conflict and interfere with getting work done.	Utilize tools that bring consensus and build understanding of roles and responsibilities. (See the appendix for details about RASCI, an example of one such tool.)
Lack of follow-up	A team makes a decision but does not follow through with action steps.	All decisions should be noted with next steps and responsibilities made explicit.
Lack of information sharing	Team members may guard what they create and not want to share. They may want to be recognized individually or may be concerned with co-optation of ideas if trust levels are low.	People need to be recognized for their work and encouraged to share. Team building based on a sense of unified purpose is important to developing trust and giving credit where credit is due.
Lack of senior management support	The lack of senior management support often leads to low performance levels if teams do not feel the initiative is endorsed and supported.	Attain senior management support. Their knowledge and interest signals that the work is sanctioned and important to the organization.

Summary: The Team Leader's Role

Whether leading one team or many, in person or virtually, strong leadership is essential to developing and maintaining effective teamwork. Dettman (2000) emphasizes that the team leader has to be able to take on a number of tasks for the team, including:

- Facilitating the team;

- Developing the team and building its culture;

- Managing the organizational hierarchy;

- Coordinating team member efforts outside of meetings;

- Performing functional tasks; and

- Sharing leadership.

In addition, leaders ideally will have experience in leading teams or have the ability and interest to learn and develop these skills. Having content expertise in one or more key areas of the project is also valuable and, in some cases, essential. Bringing team members together through a shared vision, common purpose, and a strong sense of each person's role and responsibilities are important aspects of team leadership. Perhaps the most essential ingredient of leading successful teams in system planning may be the leader's ability to identify and tap into the needed strengths, abilities and expertise of the team members.

Effective leadership, strong teams, multi-directional communication and a comprehensive change management strategy are all necessary factors in improving the accessibility, quality and range of substance use services in Canada. The approaches to working with teams outlined in this resource will help ensure that the Systems Approach guiding concepts of collaboration and coordination are at the core of all components of a comprehensive system, including its leadership and change processes.

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References

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Katzenback, J.R., & Smith, D.K. (1993). *The wisdom of teams: creating the high-performance organization.* Boston: Harvard Business School.

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Serrat, O. (2009). *Working in teams.* Retrieved from http://www.adb.org/Documents/Information/Knowledge-Solutions/working-in-teams.pdf.

Wilemon, D. (1998). *Project management handbook.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Additional Resources

Leading Virtual Teams: http://www.qualitydigest.com/sept00/html/teams.html.

Virtual Teams: http://www.seanet.com/~daveg/ltv.htm.

Twelve Tips for Team Building: http://humanresources.about.com/od/involvementteams/a/twelve_tip_team.htm.

Teamwork Skills: Being an Effective Group Member: http://cte.uwaterloo.ca/teaching_resources/tips/teamwork_skills.html.

Group Decision-Making: http://cte.uwaterloo.ca/teaching_resources/tips/group_decision_making.html.

Successful Strategies for Teams: http://www.clemson.edu/OTEI/documents/teamwork-handbook.pdf.

Appendix – RASCI: An Organizational and Planning Tool for Teams

A RASCI matrix is a table that identifies levels of responsibility and authority. Useful as a planning and monitoring tool, it should be used in the planning stages to clarify the decision-making structure and to identify who needs to be involved during different phases of a project. The benefits of using a RACSI are that it:

- Determines ownership of a particular project or task;

- Promotes teamwork by clarifying roles and responsibilities;

- Improves communication by getting the right groups involved;

- Increases efficiency by eliminating duplication of effort;

- Reduces misunderstanding between and across employees and key stakeholder groups;

- Improves decision making by ensuring the correct people are involved; and

- Provides the foundation for future alignment around a given project or initiative.

The RASCI acronym stands for the following:

- **(R) Responsible:** The person who is responsible for doing this task or making this particular decision.

- **(A) Accountable:** The person who signs off (approves) on this aspect of the project. This does not necessarily mean this person does the task, but they are accountable for ensuring it gets done. Ideally there is only one person who fills this role. The **Rs** are responsible to this person.

- **(S) Supportive:** The person who supports the task or decision by providing resources or assisting in some way.

- **(C) Consulted:** The person who provides substantive input and knowledge to the **Rs** in the planning stage (before they implement the task or make the decision).

- **(I) Informed:** The person who will be informed of the outcome when the task/activity has been completed or the decision has been made.

Steps in developing a RASCI

1. In your primary planning team, identify all tasks and decisions and list in the far-left column of the RASCI table.

2. Identify all the people and teams involved and list them along the top of the table above each column.

3. Put the appropriate letters in the cells to indicate who is responsible, accountable, supportive, consulted and informed for each task or decision. Note: Every item in the RASCI table requires at lease one **R** – a person who will take responsibility for the item.

4. Check to see if any items need to be divided into sub-tasks. If there are two or more **Rs** assigned to a task, it is worth taking another look to see whether you can divide it up.

5. Ensure there are no instances where nobody is identified as responsible.

6. Ensure there are no instances where more than one person is identified as accountable.

7. Once you have developed the chart, share it with the people who will be involved and make any adjustments according to their input.

8. Use the chart as part of your monitoring process to ensure the right people are being involved at key points in the process.

Table 3 provides an example of a RASCI matrix being used as part of a Systems Approach to revising and standardizing intake and assessment throughout a regional adult substance use system.

Table 3. Example of a RASCI matrix

Task/Activity/Decision *Develop standardized intake and assessment processes and tools across substance use services in the region.*	Project Leader	Consultation Team	Planning and Imple-mentation Team	Integration Team
Environmental scan of the current context	A	C	R	S
Determine desired outcomes and benefits	A	S	R	C
Engage leadership of organization and elicit support	R	I	A	S
Develop a shared vision amongst team members	A	S	R	I
Develop a project charter and/or detailed project plan	A	C	R	S
Develop an evaluation framework	A	S	R	C
Determine existing effective practices through consultation with practitioners	S	R	A	C
Conduct a collaborative inquiry with allied service providers and key partners (e.g., mental health)	S	R	A	I
Conduct a focus group with users of service	S	R	A	I
Research evidence and promising practice and develop a literature review	I	R	A	S
Disseminate finding and recommendations	A	S	R	C
Identify relevant organizational, regional and/or provincial policies	I	S	A	R
Review accreditation and other relevant standards	I	S	A	R
Develop draft of screening and intake tools	A	C	R	I
Bring back to groups where consultation has occurred for further input	A	S	R	I
Select pilot site(s)	A	S	R	C
Support, monitor and evaluate pilot site(s)	A	S	R	I