



# Fine-Tuning Team Dynamics

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## Purpose

Sometimes, teams can get stuck in a rut and need a new way to approach the work. Postsecondary Leaders can fine-tune team dynamics by helping team members think about issues in a new light, creating time and space for team members to learn more about each other, and/or facilitating conversations that frame conflict as a natural part of team development. It is important for team members to invest in the work and value each other so that growth and creativity can occur.

## How & When to Use

The first team-building activity in Tool Set D, the Tarp Protocol, is an effective way to help teams identify obstacles and use them as bridges to find solutions. The Compass Points protocol, often used with Network for College Success partner schools, helps each team member think about and socialize his or her work style. The team can then collectively assess how to work best together. Finally, the *Managing Conflict* article by Aguilar pushes educators to think about how conflict can be an opportunity for a team to reflect and grow.



## Fine-Tuning Team Dynamics

# Tarp Protocol

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An activity that acknowledges challenges and possible solutions to the team's collective work. The protocol promotes team building and helps participants think outside the box when solving issues by providing different approaches and pushing them out of their comfort zones.

## Tarp Protocol

### Purpose

As a team, participants must stand on the tarp and flip it over without touching the ground. The activity will promote team building and help participants think outside the box when solving issues. The activity will also give diverse voices the opportunity to lead and support the team.

### Materials

- Large plastic tarp
- Masking or painter's tape
- Markers

### Time

20-25 minutes

### Preparation

1. The facilitator explains to participants that the goal of the activity is to identify challenges they are facing and, as a team, symbolically “flip” them over to solutions.
2. The facilitator asks each participant to think of one to two challenges. The challenges must be words or phrases, not sentences. Participants will then write down the challenges on strips of masking tape with markers.
3. The facilitator asks each participant to write possible solutions on separate pieces of masking tape. The solutions can be specific to the challenge or general problem-solving tactics.
4. The facilitator labels one side of the tarp “challenge” and the other side “solution.”
5. Participants will tape their strips to the appropriate side.
6. The facilitator gives them the opportunity to collectively read both sides. Then, he/she asks them to stand on the challenge side.

### Rules

1. They need to problem solve together to flip the tarp onto the “solution” side.
2. They can use their hands.
3. Once they are on the tarp, no one can stand on the floor. Their feet must never leave the tarp. If someone touches the ground, the team starts over.
4. If you aren't leading, you have to support and cheer your team on.
5. You can allocate an open window of time (5-15 minutes) or set the challenge by assigning a specific amount of time.

**Debriefing**

This activity lends itself well to discussions on achieving success despite the obstacles in our lives. Lifelong success is rarely achieved through chance – instead, the successful make a plan, continually evaluate, then change the plan as needed. When everyone on the team is committed to the plan, success is much more likely.

- What strategies did you apply here to experience success and are any of these strategies applicable to real life situations?
- How is this activity just like real life? How is it unlike real life?
- How did you like the activity? Would you use it again?



## Fine-Tuning Team Dynamics

# Compass Points

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This protocol allows team members to consider their own working styles as well as the working styles of others. It also gives insight on what team members may need to know about each other in order to work more effectively together.

## Compass Points: North, South, East, and West

### An Exercise in Understanding Preferences in Group Work

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*Developed in the field by educators.*

#### **Purpose**

Similar to the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory, this exercise uses a set of preferences which relate not to individual but to group behaviors, helping us to understand how preferences affect our group work.

*Note: See the third page, Compass Points Explanations Expanded, for additional descriptions of the 4 preferences.*

#### **Process**

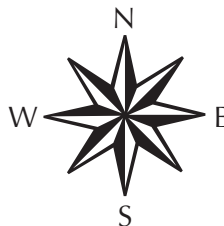
1. The room is set up with 4 signs on each wall — North, South, East, and West.
2. Participants are invited to go to the direction of their choice. No one is only one direction, but everyone can choose one as their predominant one.
3. Each direction group answers the 5 questions (see next page) on a sheet of newspaper. When complete, they report back to the whole group.
4. Processing can include:
  - Note the distribution among the directions: what might it mean?
  - What is the best combination for a group to have? Does it matter?
  - How can you avoid being driven crazy by another direction?
  - How might you use this exercise with others? Students?

#### **North**

*Acting — “Let’s do it”;  
likes to act, try things, plunge in*

#### **West**

*Paying attention to detail — likes to know the who, what, when, where and why before acting*



#### **East**

*Speculating — likes to look at the big picture and the possibilities before acting*

#### **South**

*Caring — likes to know that everyone’s feelings have been taken into consideration and that their voices have been heard before acting*

## North, South, East, and West

Decide which of the 4 directions most closely describes your personal style. Then spend 15 minutes answering the following questions as a group.

1. What are the strengths of your style? (4 adjectives)
2. What are the limitations of your style? (4 adjectives)
3. What style do you find most difficult to work with and why?
4. What do people from the other directions or styles need to know about you so you can work together effectively?
5. What do you value about the other 3 styles?



## Compass Points Explanation Expanded

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*Developed by Sue Horan, June, 2007.*

### **North**

- You take charge.
- You run the daily operation.
- You have lists of things to do and you need to get started and get them done.
- You get assignments in early.
- You don't have to ask questions to begin your work or assignment.
- You drive the work and get it done.
- You teach our children a complete curriculum.
- You will stitch the mosaic together and do the work.

### **East**

- You have the big picture, the frame that needs to be filled in.
- You need to see the final product and will work with the end in mind.
- You believe in working backwards, understanding by design.
- You don't get a project started until you are clear about the final product.
- You teach our children the big concepts.
- You know what the mosaic looks like in the end.

### **West**

- You ask the hard questions.
- You live by inquiry.
- You challenge us to identify the details.
- You don't start a project until you are clear about the details.
- You make our picture more complete.
- You lead by inquiry and engage in thoughtful discourse.
- You make us think and teach detailed concepts to our children.
- You fill in the details of the mosaic.

### **South**

- You take in the information, slow us down, and make sure everyone has voice and is heard.
- You include everyone, and make sure the human side is nurtured.
- You take care of us and bring up our affective domain.
- You make sure the emotional side of our work is heard.
- You make sure we are all included.
- You teach our children with strong relationships and care.
- You add beauty to the mosaic, make sure everyone participates in the creation, and keep us all comfortable.





## Fine-Tuning Team Dynamics

# Managing Conflict in School Leadership Teams

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An article by Elena Aguilar that pushes educators to examine how conflict can be healthy for a team once it is examined and collectively resolved.

[Click to here to read >>](#)