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How to Build an MDT Leadership Team



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What is an MDT Leadership Team?

An MDT leadership team is a group of leaders representing each discipline of the multidisciplinary team (MDT) who come together to provide leadership and direction to the multidisciplinary child abuse response system operating within their community. This collaborative body makes shared decisions about how the MDT does its work. MDT leadership teams can be instrumental in cultivating and sustaining successful and effective teamwork. They take care of all aspects of the work that contribute to the shared mandates, goals, and objectives of the MDT partner agencies.



A Growing Need for MDT Leadership Teams

“Leadership is a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others towards the achievement of a goal”
(Kruse, 2013).

The Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC) model began as a grassroots movement, fueled by leaders working together across disciplines to make their communities safer for children. As the goal of establishing CACs and MDTs was realized, many of these natural leadership teams disbanded, with the focus shifting away

from system challenges and toward day-to-day operations and agency-specific troubleshooting. This created a leadership void, often leaving the CAC to try and lead the MDT, without authority, to tackle the high-level, cross-agency challenges that all MDTs face. The establishment of an MDT leadership team can reignite the shared leadership needed to guide effective interdisciplinary work.

Key Steps to Building and Sustaining an Effective Leadership Team

1. Envision your leadership team

Many leaders spend too little time envisioning their team, often rushing to launch the team only to realize they've not considered some important factors (Hackman, 2002). Below are some guiding reflection questions to help your CAC imagine and be able to communicate its vision for the MDT leadership team.

Role of a Leadership Team

- Make shared decisions
- Improve team functioning
- Revise protocols
- Set vision, mission, purpose
- Enhance commitment and buy-in
- Solidify team processes
- Cultivate partnerships

- **What do they do?** MDT leadership teams gather to assess team functioning, anticipate challenges, and cultivate a collaborative response to child abuse. Through shared decision-making, MDT leadership teams work to support the entire MDT system and enhance the quality of services to children and families within their communities.

- **Why have one?** In a system where no individual or discipline has full authority, the MDT leadership team provides direction, oversight, and accountability. These teams help to set goals, promote alignment, streamline team tasks, and improve the experience of MDT members and those they serve. The leadership team fosters a shared understanding of the team's purpose, setting a clear mission and vision for the MDT's collaborative work.
- **Who participates?** The leadership team should include representatives from each discipline involved in your community's response to child abuse, reflecting the composition of your local

Ideal Member Qualities

- Teamwork and collaboration skills
- Capacity to see the whole puzzle, not just their individual piece
- Commitment to continuous team improvement
- Communication and leadership skills

(Wageman, 2023)

MDT. Consider recruiting individuals with strong teamwork skills rather than inviting members to join the leadership team based solely on the positions they hold within their employing organizations (Wageman et al., 2008). Supervisors, managers, and experienced mid-level team members who are well-positioned to influence both policymakers and direct service providers in their respective agencies and are closer to the client and community-facing work of the MDT are often more effective team members than top agency administrators, senior leaders, or political figureheads. Team size matters: 6-10 members is ideal for a leadership team.

“Teams often need longer, less frequent planning meetings to wrestle with important decisions or dive deep on ongoing issues”
(Landles-Cobb et al., 2018).

- **When should they meet?** Each leadership team must decide its own meeting cadence. Some MDT leadership teams find it helpful to meet monthly while others find quarterly to be a better fit. Leadership teams should choose the meeting format and cadence that best allows them to tackle the work they need to accomplish.
- **How should they conduct their work?** Identifying a clear approach to their work will ensure that the MDT leadership team members understand how they will conduct themselves. Establishing and clarifying intentions early can create alignment around specific goals and objectives. Leadership teams benefit from well-structured meeting agendas that support focused, productive, and timely discussion of relevant topics.

Carefully reflecting on these questions will help you communicate the vision for the team when moving on to the next step, recruitment.

2. Invite your leadership team members

Whether replacing an MDT leadership team member or developing a new leadership team, it is important to extend an intentional invitation from the leadership team members to a specific individual. Invitations should include a description of the team and its purpose, along with clear expectations of membership. Specifically naming how the invited person can contribute to the team helps build understanding and engagement.

3. Launch your leadership team

How a team begins sets the stage for its effectiveness (Hackman et al., 2009). Consider planning a team “launch” event, creating an initial space to start up the engines of collaboration and partnership. A half- or full-day team “launch” event is an opportunity to name the leadership team’s shared purpose, discuss how the leadership team will function, and build trust among leadership team members. Your newly formed – or reconfigured – leadership team should reflect on, and collectively answer, the key questions listed in the “Design Your Leadership Team” worksheet in Appendix A. Completing the worksheet together will help your team build alignment around its purpose and identify how it will operate.

Relationships are the backbone of effective teamwork. Opportunities to get to know and appreciate one another will help foster effective collaboration.

4. Build connections

Strong relationships are built on trust, respect, and connection. Creating opportunities for team members to get to know each other makes partnerships more enjoyable and effective. Try strategies like starting your meetings with a check-in question, hosting an annual retreat, or inviting leadership team members to meet for coffee.

5. Run effective meetings

Productive, well-run meetings support and enhance leadership team member engagement and buy-in.

- a. Facilitation** – Identify a trained facilitator who can keep meetings focused and solution-oriented. Often an experienced MDT facilitator will run leadership team meetings, playing a neutral and supportive role.
- b. Agenda and communications** – A structured agenda that follows a clear and predictable process helps to support effective meetings (see sample agenda in Appendix B). Share the agenda in advance of each meeting and offer team members an opportunity to add to it.
- c. Shared decisions** – MDT leadership teams must make decisions together, and each member should give input as the group works to reach agreements. A skilled facilitator can help cultivate an inclusive process for making shared decisions during meetings.

- d. Logistics** – Meeting time and location make a difference. Selecting a standing day, time, and location for leadership team meetings can increase participation. To facilitate regular attendance, consider the schedules of each discipline when deciding meeting logistics.
- e. Metrics** – Effective teams share information in useful ways. Consider sharing key metrics about MDT performance at each meeting to identify trends, measure progress toward shared goals and objectives, and celebrate success.

6. Assess and adjust

All teams require ongoing assessment and adjustments to keep them functioning optimally.

- a. Leadership teams often benefit from an outside perspective. Consider periodically engaging a facilitator to help reflect on team functioning and performance.
- b. Goal setting allows teams to engage in continuous quality improvement over time. Annual goal setting can be a valuable tool for MDT leadership teams to monitor success, growth, and development.
- c. Periodic “re-launches” may be necessary to reset after turnover in membership or to help refocus the team’s purpose.

MDT leadership teams play an important role in sustaining an effective local response to child abuse. With care and intention, communities can establish leadership teams that will help guide, grow, and improve their MDTs’ ability to provide supportive services to children and families impacted by abuse. Consider reaching out to your State Chapter or Regional Children’s Advocacy Center about assistance and resources for establishing and supporting a healthy and impactful MDT leadership team.

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Appendix A

Key Questions to Help Design Your MDT Leadership Team

Use the following questions to help launch the development of your MDT leadership team. Capturing the answers in a guiding document, or “team charter,” can help clarify why your MDT leadership team exists and how it will operate.

1. What does the leadership team do?

Leadership teams should explore what role they will play in their local MDT system, considering the unique realities of their community. Creating a mission that members can unite behind is a helpful first step.

2. What can we offer our team and community?

Reflecting on how having a leadership team benefits the MDT can help foster a shared sense of ownership and meaning. Naming and measuring impact can help assess and validate the team’s efforts.

3. Who are our MDT leaders?

Careful and intentional consideration of membership is one of the most important steps in the design process. Consider position as well as teamwork skills when deciding who to invite. Invitations should include a description of the team and its purpose, along with clear expectations of membership.

4. What will we focus on?

Create clarity by naming which issues and challenges the leadership team will focus on, and which will be out of scope. Adjust the scope as the team’s needs change and evolve.

5. How often do we need to come together?

Meeting just for the sake of meeting often results in frustration and disengagement for team members. Find a meeting cadence that will work best for your leadership team.

6. How will we do our work?

Teams with predictable, clear work plans generally thrive. Consider how you will structure meetings, collect and review data, and decide which topics to discuss.

Appendix B

Sample MDT Leadership Team Meeting Agenda

- Welcome and check-in
- Announcements
- Dashboard review (statistics about the last month/quarter reports, services, outcomes, etc.)
- Staffing changes (anticipated or pending changes in MDT members)
- Identified training needs and upcoming training opportunities
- Focused discussion items (shared by members in advance or carried over from the previous meeting)
- Review of action items discussed
- Next meeting date
- Closing

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