



GUIDE TO DEVELOPING

AND OPERATING A SUCCESSFUL

MULTIDISCIPLINARY SAFETY TEAM

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INTRODUCTION

Multidisciplinary safety teams (MDSTs) are active throughout Iowa. These teams meet on a regular basis to discuss safety topics, problems, projects, and improvements along local roadways within several regional areas of Iowa. A main goal of these teams is to promote safe mobility, which includes traffic incident management. The objective of this guide is to provide ideas on what to consider when developing a new MDST, how to successfully operate an MDST, and what to think about when succession planning.

Multi-Disciplinary Safety Teams (MDSTs) include a wide range of local and state participants from various safety related backgrounds. The professional positions of the members vary and can include:

- County and city engineers
- County and city officials
- Educators
- Emergency management – dispatch, notifications
- Emergency responders – fire, medical services
- Law enforcement – state patrol, city police, sheriff
- Iowa Department of Transportation – traffic safety, planning, construction, maintenance
- Towing services
- Transportation planners

EXISTING MULTIDISCIPLINARY SAFETY TEAMS AS OF OCTOBER 2018



The background of the members of these groups is generally focused on the resolution of local safety issues through problem identification, countermeasure proposals and implementation, and evaluation. The diversity of the team member backgrounds enables MDSTs to focus on solutions from various viewpoints.

The consideration of the following desirable characteristics about MDSTs and/or their meetings include:

DEFINED PURPOSE/ FOCUS/MISSION	AGENDAS	DIVERSITY OF ATTENDANCE AND INVITATIONS
SCHEDULING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance to multiple agencies • Discussion of current local safety issues by all agencies • Discussions about or focus on specific safety issue or locations • Safety strategy implementation and evaluation • Educational opportunities • Focus on local roadways and needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include members in engineering, education, emergency management, enforcement, planning, towing companies, and the general public
STATEWIDE PROGRAM COORDINATION ASSISTANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well in advance of date • Advance notification or reminder • Consideration of other regional meetings • Input from all the team members • Proper facilitation 	DEFINED EXERCISES, TASKS, OR PROJECTS
		POSSIBLE ADJUSTMENT OF LOCATION AND/OR AGENCY LEAD CHANGES

DEVELOPING A NEW MDST

Identifying the need for a team in your region is the first step towards collaboration, communication, and coordination on traffic safety. With the right people at the table, much can be accomplished from the expertise each multi-disciplined team member offers. Starting off on the right foot is essential to any successful group.

In order to build these important relationships and generate buy-in, it is important to recognize the value of each group member and utilize their full capabilities and expertise. MDST team members need to know the purpose of the group and understand roles and responsibilities. Having positive and productive interaction, ongoing commitment of the membership, and an element of multi-agency collaboration is the key to a diversified, successful MDST.

DEVELOPING OBJECTIVES AND DEFINING PURPOSE

One MDST objective is to help identify and resolve local crash causes and enhance local crash response practices. Identifying these issues often requires the expertise of multiple members to develop a good solution. MDST meetings need to have specific objectives and committed team members. In addition, meetings need to be effectively and efficiently run, with multiple team members active in the discussion. An example of how to do this might be to include each member on the agenda and ask each person to take a few minutes to discuss projects or traffic safety issues he/she is currently working on. By coordinating communication and collaborating with other stakeholders, participants gain a broader perspective on safety issues and learn best practices from professionals outside their area of expertise. This ultimately leads to the development of solutions that may not have been considered otherwise.

Without a vision, mission, and goals, the group may lack focus and direction. Setting well-defined, clearly-communicated goals motivates team members, thus making sure there is value added for each member. Goals provide benchmarks for determining whether the group is succeeding and therefore motivation for teammates to keep coming back. Good attendance and active participation will provide the professional input the group needs to be successful.

VOLUNTEERING A TEAM CHAIRPERSON

The chairperson is a fundamental component of each group and critical to the group's success. Success will depend on your chair's enthusiasm and commitment. A team with a clear purpose, a well-informed leader, and dedicated members is on its way toward accomplishing its goals.

The primary duty of the chairperson is to guide the group's discussions. He/she should encourage every member to participate in the meetings while also maintaining a focused discussion. Meetings should start and end as scheduled. Agendas should be followed as closely as possible. Team member networking should be encouraged. Structured meetings with productive conversations and tangible benefits to team members' agencies are key.



BUILDING AN MDST GROUP

Safety improvements on local roads require local input. To successfully identify safety concerns and develop solutions, multi-disciplinary teams play an important role. Identifying those members is key. An invitation list may include personnel from some of the following agencies: cities, counties, Metropolitan Planning Organizations/Regional Planning Affiliations, Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau (GTSB), Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT), and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Invitations seeking diverse participation will include multiple disciplines, such as: engineering, law enforcement, public health, emergency management, elder affairs, education, environmental, traffic operations, traffic records, towing companies, and first responders.

Effective teams and committees tend to have similar characteristics that result in the completion of tasks that meet the objective or purpose of the group. Many of these characteristics are discussed and listed above. Strong leaders communicate, organize, delegate, and guide. Members of teams listen, provide input, and complete tasks. Meetings are well planned, have a purpose, and include input from all members. They can be used to discuss task progress, delegate tasks, and plan activities. Effective teams need a clear purpose/focus/mission, open communication, and an understanding of success. The team members are motivated the most when the purpose of the team or committee and the tasks it completes challenge the individuals and match their interests.

Not all MDST groups are the same, they vary based upon many factors, not least of which are the specific traffic safety issues and active projects in their local region. For an example of a typical MDST meeting agenda visit sites.google.com/view/iowaltapmdst/home.

SUCCESSFULLY OPERATING AN MDST

Successful meetings educate and provide information for each person involved. People spend so much time in meetings that turning meeting time into sustained results is a priority for a successful MDST group. The following suggestions are meeting management ideas, solutions, and actions to guide attendees to achieve expected, positive, and constructive outcomes.

IDENTIFYING A MEETING LOCATION

Meeting venues can be as important as the group itself. When selecting a meeting location some of the following items should be considered:



SUITABILITY: Is the venue easily accessible to those attending? Is your venue easily accessible from major road networks? Is there a security restriction to access the facility? Does your meeting room have the necessary requirements for presentations?

AVAILABILITY: Is the venue available on the dates required? How flexible are they if you have to change the meeting date and time?

SIZE: Is the seating capacity suitable? Is the room comfortable for those attending? Is the room well laid out?

FACILITIES: Can the venue offer a projector, electronic whiteboard, Internet connection if needed?

COST: Since there is commonly no funding associated with these groups, it is important to consider what members may offer the use of a meeting facility at no cost. As everyone has to eat lunch, you may consider asking a local restaurant if you can use a meeting room for free. They often agree as you will be bringing business to them on a regular basis.



SCHEDULING A MEETING



The initial start-up/kick-off meeting should include key personnel from the agencies listed earlier. Questions to ask when considering meeting logistics: Who wants to commit to being the monthly host? What facilities will be available? Are there security restrictions to think about? Is there ample parking? Is there a reliable internet connection for presentations? To determine the meeting frequency, you need to think about the key players involved and how many safety issues you will be dealing with in your region. Estimate how many people are expected to attend and what technology may be needed for presentation purposes. As mentioned before, scheduling meetings around lunch time is always a good idea. Some MDST groups include a food menu each attendee can order from.

Each chair of the group may want to create a checklist before each meeting to ensure they are covering the expectations of each member. This could include:

NOTICE OF THE MEETING

Dates for meetings should be set well in advance. Although this sounds obvious, no matter how often the dates are agreed, some members still seem to say "I didn't have the date on my calendar". In order for a meeting to be effective all members should be present. The date and time of the next meeting should be included at the top of the agenda. It is a good idea to send a reminder of the date of meetings. Some groups have their meetings on a consistent day, for example, the first Wednesday of every month, to establish a pattern.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes are an essential record of what happened and what was decided at the previous meeting. It is important that minutes are prepared well, giving an accurate account of the most important actions and decisions taken at that meeting. The headings in the minutes should refer to relevant points on the agenda. For a committee member, receiving the minutes should not be a routine act of looking them over and forgetting about them. Members should review them carefully to make sure they are an accurate record and note if anything important has been left out. Members may want to discuss matters further at the next meeting. Also consider points of action to deal with before the next meeting. Make some notes, then store the minutes in the relevant file and bring it to the next meeting.

AGENDA FOR THE NEXT MEETING

An agenda simply lists the topics or issues that will be discussed at the meeting, and should give shape and direction to the meeting.

ANY RELEVANT PAPERS OR DOCUMENTS

Written reports and other printed materials will often accompany the agenda circulated prior to an MDST meeting. These relevant papers might include:

- Work reports on key outcomes.
- Project schedules and roadway closure plans.
- Crash reports.
- Special topics/presentation material.

DOCUMENT THE MDST'S EFFORTS

A written record of the meeting's proceedings should be prepared by the group's designated secretary and sent no later than a week prior to the next scheduled meeting. Previous month's meeting minutes should be discussed at each meeting, as well as any follow-up actions from the meetings. Minutes of the meetings should be distributed to all members, posted for other professionals to read, as well as sent to key personnel. Maximum benefit will be obtained by publicizing the group's efforts through the use of the LTAP website and each chair is encouraged to do so. Those benefits include increased safety awareness and keeping safety professionals and other agencies updated on the progress of the group and safety improvements statewide. For additional discussions on how to utilize the LTAP website www.iowaltap.iastate.edu/MDST, contact a representative.

SETTING AN AGENDA

Developing a well-structured agenda is the determining factor in creating the right balance of attendees. This will be the tool for professionals to base their decision in committing themselves to your meeting on a regular basis. They will often ask themselves, “do the items on the agenda affect me or my community, or my agency/job, directly or indirectly, and are they relevant to my agency?” A detailed and diverse agenda that focuses on local safety challenges might bring the right people to the table. Offering team members an opportunity to provide input on agenda items and scheduling a number of meetings in advance (followed by an additional notice nearer the meeting date) might help get the meetings on group members’ calendars.



The agenda of a meeting may vary, but typical ones include: record of attendance, review of recent accidents/injuries, unfinished or new business, special projects or presentations, and any guest speakers. Topics to include on your agenda could include:

- Member/agency updates
- Project updates
- DOT statewide operations
- Crash analysis review workshops
- Natural disaster awareness
- New diversion route software/consultant
- Local roadway safety plans
- FEMA/hazard mitigation plans
- Road safety audits/assessments

Other items to include in the agenda are instructions on how to get to your meeting. Including an address at the top of the agenda is useful. You may consider parking details or if there is a security procedure attendees need to be aware of.

EVALUATING OUTCOMES

Group effectiveness can be enhanced through annual reviews. Regular evaluations ensure that the goals of the group are being achieved and identifies strengths and weaknesses. Regular evaluations may also allow a committee to address a possible need for revision of goals, ensure effective leadership, and allow member turnover including group leadership. One way of checking the pulse of the group is to measure the level and types of communication and participation of each member. A number of tools and resources may be utilized including a group self-assessment tool, group member annual questionnaire, along with the group’s success stories. Providing feedback on these items and offering regular recognition to each active member of the group contributes to a successful MDST. For additional support and assistance with items mentioned above, please contact LTAP or visit www.iowaltap.iastate.edu/MDST.



SUCCESSION PLANNING

The best way to reduce the effect of lost leadership is through a strong succession plan. A strong plan identifies and fosters the next chair through mentoring, training, and assignments. Passing along some tasks helps the potential new chair understand the responsibilities they are considering accepting.



Succession planning also gives other colleagues a voice. Current and potential members gain an opportunity to express their needs and concerns, creating a sense of responsibility throughout the group which is critical for continued success. Through this process, the group should recruit a new chair, develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities, and prepare them for advancement into the role of the chair. Below is a list of steps to consider including in your succession plan for guiding your group to future leadership and direction.

- 1 Be proactive. It can take time to find and prepare a promising candidate for the role of chair. As such, don’t delay with this part of your succession plan. Even if you don’t think you’ll need a replacement in the near future, prepping someone to assume an important role creates an invaluable safety net for the group and helps maintain group momentum.
- 2 Keep an open mind. Identify those individuals who best display the skills necessary to thrive as a traffic safety advocate for the group.
- 3 Communicate the team’s vision. Include potential leaders in strategic conversations to help them acquire planning and the skills needed to assume the role of chair as well as gain a broad vision of the group structure and objectives.
- 4 Train potential candidates. As you identify a potential leader to take over as chair, offer mentoring and training to help them develop new skills and refine existing ones. Remember that strong MDST leaders are able to balance their technical acumen with strong communication skills, as well as tact and diplomacy.
- 5 Do a trial run. A vacation is a great time to have a potential successor step in to assume some responsibilities. The candidate will gain experience while you learn how prepared the person is to take on a bigger role. It is important to add in an overlap time of at least six months or more, depending on the group’s meeting frequency, so the person can get a good feel for how the meetings flow.

Finally, implement the process. Hand off the leadership responsibility to the new chairperson. Offer continued support as they take over and to a lesser degree as the new leader develops in his/her new role. Developing and implementing the succession plan helps group members feel valued for their contributions, efforts, and time commitment.

CONCLUSION

Identifying the need for an MDST in your local region is the first step towards collaboration, communication, and coordination on traffic safety issues. With the right people at the table, much can be accomplished from the expertise each team member offers. Since MDSTs include a wide range of local and state safety participants from various safety-related backgrounds, building upon these important relationships generates buy-in from safety advocates. These teams enhance a proactive approach and commitment to addressing traffic safety issues in Iowa. The element of multi-agency collaboration is the key to a diversified, successful MDST.



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