Principle: Be Collaborative

Overview

Being collaborative means sharing information, insights, strategies and resources across projects, organizations and sectors, leading to increased efficiency and impact. This Principle brings all the others together in practice. People working in digital development have a shared vision to create a better world, and collaboration is essential to making this vision a reality. No single initiative or organization can make it happen alone. We have the most impact when we work together across geographies, focus areas and organizations and in partnership with local communities and governments. By collaborating, those working in digital development and beyond can pool their resources and expertise not only to benefit each initiative but also to strengthen the global community. Collaborating does not just happen accidentally; it requires time, planning and dedicating resources to look for and develop opportunities.

Core Tenets

- **Understand how your work fits into the global development landscape.** Identify others working on the same problem in other geographies, and determine if there is a community of practice. Find the technical leaders in global and regional organizations (such as the World Bank, the World Health Organization, etc.) who can help you disseminate your work to other teams, regions and countries.
- **Engage diverse experts** across disciplines, countries and industries throughout the project lifecycle. Create an engagement plan to apply this expertise at all phases, and incorporate insights through feedback loops. Look for tools and approaches from other sectors, and publish your findings so they are available to other groups and countries.
- **Plan to collaborate from the beginning.** Build collaborative activities into proposals, work plans, budgets and job descriptions. Identify indicators for measuring collaboration in your monitoring and evaluation plan.

PROJECT LIFECYCLE GUIDANCE

The following recommendations, tips and resources are drawn from the digital development community to give you options for applying this Principle during each phase of the project or software lifecycle. This guidance is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to suggest actions you can take to apply this Principle in your work. If you have other tips, resources or comments to add, please share them with the community at https://forum.digitalprinciples.org/.

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- **Document work, results, processes and best practices.** Share your code with the open source community, publish documents under a Creative Commons license, and participate in digital development conferences and other forums to share lessons you have learned and to learn from other practitioners.
- **Define how your project will contribute locally.** Collaboration is the first step in interoperability; define how your work can connect with local systems and which standards you need to adopt to make these connections. Engage with organizations that support these standards, and participate in local technical strategy groups and roundtables to ensure that you are a part of the larger whole.

Analyze & Plan

Take the time to consult with other digital development practitioners when planning your initiative. Lessons learned from colleagues in your sector and in other sectors can help guide your analysis.

- **Identify individuals who have knowledge that applies to your initiative and ask them to collaborate throughout the project lifecycle.** Seek out research, reports and case studies relevant to your program to find collaborators [http://digitalprinciples.org/category/resources/resources-casestudies/]. Conduct a stakeholder analysis to identify people and organizations affected by your initiative who should be engaged throughout the project lifecycle. Consider working with individuals from different types of organizations (e.g., nongovernmental organizations, research institutions, community groups and local, regional or national governments) to provide a variety of perspectives and insights. It may be especially useful to identify individuals with an understanding of the legal, regulatory and market environment. Your collaboration could take the form of formal partnerships working together to convene learning events and feedback sessions, or setting up in-person or virtual opportunities to share results regularly and co-develop solutions to challenges.
- **Apply knowledge in your organization across programs and offices.** Invest time to foster cross-organizational collaboration.

ANALYZE & PLAN

TIPS AND RESOURCES

- **TIP:** Consider and be open to the many forms that collaboration can take, including formal in-kind or funded partnerships, shared funding relationships, implementation support and knowledge sharing.
- **RESOURCE:** Stakeholder Analysis Matrix Template, tools4dev. http://www.tools4dev.org/resources/stakeholder-analysis-matrix-template/
- **RESOURCE:** Unconference methods, Unconference.net: http://unconference.net/methods/.
- **RESOURCE:** What is Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA)? USAID Learning Lab. https://usaidlearninglab.org/cla-case-competition#6.

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Write collaboration into roles and responsibilities, and build it into budgets.

- **Reflect on internal and external barriers to collaboration and how to reduce them.** Competition, funding and lack of incentives can all stand in the way of collaboration. Host an event where open sharing and co-creation is encouraged, like a hackathon, unconference [http://unconference.net/welcome/] or networking event. Offer incentives to encourage collaboration, such as opportunities to co-present or co-author on the savings achieved by partnering to scale up an initiative or tool. Consider how to support collaboration from the beginning of your initiative by writing collaborative activities into proposals, work plans and budgets.
- **Plan to publish materials under a Creative Commons license and share code by default.** A Creative Commons license allows the creator to retain copyright while allowing others to copy, distribute and make use of their work for non-commercial purposes. [https://creativecommons.org/licenses/] Ensure that you have a strong rationale if another approach is taken, and share your reasoning with the community to be as transparent about the decision as possible.
- **Learn how funders support collaboration.** Active collaboration can be a competitive advantage for your organization. For example, the U.S. Agency for International Development has adopted Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) as a set of practices to improve development effectiveness [https://usaidlearninglab.org/faq/collaborating-learning-and-adapting-cla].

Design & Develop

As you design an initiative, contact the stakeholders you identified during planning and analysis to get their feedback and input. Include these activities in your work plan and budget to ensure that you have the time and resources to carry them out.

- **Connect with existing communities of practice** to see what tools already exist and whether they can be reused or improved upon for your program. Open source tools such as Open Data Kit [https://opendatakit.org/participate] or OpenMRS [http://openmrs.org/join-the-community/] have communities where you can ask questions and share tips

> "People need to talk more to each other. We tend to run in circles of those with similar technical expertise, and this develops collective blind spots. Within organizations there needs to be an effort to see how what one group is working on can be amplified by what another group is working on."
>
> — MERYWEN WIGLEY
> FHI 360

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[http://digitalprinciples.org/reuse-and-improve/]. There also may be regional and sector-specific networks you can engage with; for example, Grow Asia brings together nongovernmental organizations, private-sector companies and governments to share knowledge and collaborate on scaling initiatives related to sustainable agriculture and food security [https://www.growasia.org/].

- **Seek consensus within your immediate team.** In addition to collaborating with those outside your organization, ensure that you consult with people at different levels within your organization, in headquarters and field offices, as you design and develop your initiative or tool. Seek consensus on the way forward to ensure agreement during implementation.
- **Design your solution collaboratively with end users and other partners.** Engage technologists with civil society, students, government officials and other targeted users and partners who understand the local context to improve on existing solutions or develop new ones through an interactive workshop such as a TechCamp [https://techcamp.america.gov]. Determine channels for following up with workshop participants, so you can continue to seek out feedback from these stakeholders as you refine your solution [http://digitalprinciples.org/design-with-the-user/]
- **Present your initial design to other practitioners for feedback.** This can also be a good opportunity to identify implementation partners. For example, the Mobiles for Education Alliance hosted a "commit fair" where presenters pitched their initiatives and tools, received feedback and identified partners [https://www.ictworks.org/2013/06/26/is-your-project-ready-to-launch-scale-or-partner-apply-to-present-at-the-3rd-annual-meducation-alliance-international-symposium/]. Consider inviting those outside of your sector who might have similar needs and who can learn from or adapt your design.
- **Share preliminary technology and resources early and regularly.** For example, develop code and resources in public (e.g., on a web-based software development platform like GitHub or on a wiki) so that others are able to review early and regularly.
- **Develop modular, interoperable components** instead of those that stand alone, and share them with the community. Collaboration supports interoperability.

DESIGN & DEVELOP

TIPS AND RESOURCES

TIP: If you are considering designing a new community of practice or learning network, first conduct a landscape analysis to understand existing networks; determine how your network would be different and what you can learn from other networks. An example of this process is the Landscape Analysis of Digital Health Learning Networks in Africa that was conducted by PATH [http://www.path.org/publications/files/DHS_analysis_africa_rpt.pdf].

RESOURCE: Participatory Design Tools and Methods, The UX Blog. https://medium.theuxblog.com/participatory-design-tools-and-methods-741543b1ff5b

RESOURCE: TechCamp, U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Information Programs. https://techcamp.america.gov/

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- **Gather feedback from local, regional or national government officials.** Government ministries or other bodies can provide important feedback on how a tool either does or does not align with government priorities and current systems. Achieving alignment prior to deployment is essential to developing a tool that meets local needs and can be sustained in the long term [http://digitalprinciples.org/build-for-sustainability/].
- **Reach out to countries or regions where you hope to scale your initiative.** You can save time and reduce challenges later if you also consider the needs of future users in your design [http://designprinciples.org/design-for-scale/].

Deploy & Implement

In the implementation phase, share your technology, processes and lessons learned with collaborators and the community as soon as possible, and keep learning from others along the way.

- **Commit to moving away from traditional international-development paradigms that encourage competition over sharing and openness.** Consider signing the Doing Development Differently manifesto [https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/doing-development-differently] developed by the Center for International Development at Harvard University.
- **Develop a plan to collaborate internally and externally.** Consult with your program's or organization's leadership to develop practices and standards that encourage collaboration. For example, Search for Common Ground has an Institutional Learning Team [https://www.sfcg.org/ilt/] whose mandate includes ensuring that lessons learned in one region are transferred and adapted to another and that tools, resources and research results are widely published and shared with outside organizations.
- **Participate in open source communities.** Identify the global or local user communities for your tool. If there is not an active local community, consider how to bring users and developers together, in person and virtually, to collaborate. Open source communities, such as the Open Health Information Exchange (OpenHIE), provide opportunities for peer learning and collaborative problem solving [https://ohie.org/]. OpenHIE supports an implementers' network, a forum where country

DEPLOY & IMPLEMENT

TIPS AND RESOURCES

- **RESOURCE:** Doing Development Differently, Harvard University Center for International Development. https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/doing-development-differently
- **RESOURCE:** Building Welcoming Communities, Open Source Guides. https://opensource.guide/building-community/

implementers and developers wanting to adopt and implement OpenHIE can bring their questions, problems and ideas. In addition to developing or participating in these kinds of forums, be sure to contribute any adaptations or code you develop back to the user community.

- **Work with local stakeholders to understand emergent standards.** Proactively engage in local technology working groups or standards bodies so that you remain compliant with changing standards and norms.
- **Report back to stakeholders who participated in the design phase.** Depending on your context, virtual tools, such as Facebook or a WhatsApp group, could work well for this purpose. Share your initiative's outputs and progress toward your established outcomes. Gather additional feedback to improve implementation and future replication.
- **Consult with your collaborators regularly to get feedback and learn from their experiences.** One way to achieve this is to set up technical working groups [link to TWG How To--*mk note: need this link*] or hold brainstorming meetings so that you can regularly share your work with one another.

Cross-cutting: Monitor & Evaluate

Commit to being open with your findings and data so that others can learn from and build on your efforts.

- **Share work products and system components that have potential benefit to the larger community.** Document and publish your initiative and technology outcomes, success stories and lessons learned. Share components of your tool or system that are reusable, and publicize these with the digital development community [http://digitalprinciples.org/use-open-standards-open-data-open-source-and-open-innovation/].
- **Share your failures to help others avoid making the same mistakes.** Try to be specific about exactly what went wrong and why. Include guidance on how to avoid the same missteps in similar initiatives. One way to share failures is by participating in or organizing a Fail Faire [http://blogs.worldbank.org/edutech/failfaire-internal].
- **Find ways to report back to the users who collaborated in the design and deployment phases.** Adopt participatory evaluation

CROSS-CUTTING:
MONITOR & EVALUATE

TIPS AND RESOURCES

- **TIP:** Ask colleagues where they publish their findings, and consider sharing what you have learned with the same publications to ensure that the knowledge will be accessible and used.
- **RESOURCE:** Open Source and the Creative Commons: A Primer for Humanitarian Aid and International Development, Code Innovation. http://digitalprinciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Primer-on-Open-Source-and-the-Creative-Commons-for-Aid-and-Development-Code-Innovation.pdf.
- **RESOURCE:** Licenses, Open Data Commons. https://opendatacommons.org/licenses
- **RESOURCE:** Collaborative Outcomes Reporting, BetterEvaluation. http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/cort
- **RESOURCE:** Most Significant Change, BetterEvaluation http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/most_significant_change
- **RESOURCE:** Design Based Implementation Research. http://learndbir.org/.

techniques that encourage sharing results with users, such as Collaborative Outcomes Reporting [http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/cort] or Most Significant Change [http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/most_significant_change] or Design Based Implementation Research [http://learndbir.org/].