# COORDINATION

## HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CLUSTER COORDINATOR

This section covers:

- Considerations of what makes clusters work
- Skills for cluster coordination, and tips for relationship-building and meeting management

## OVERVIEW

An effective Cluster Coordinator and Co-Coordinator are important for the success of the Cluster. It might be useful to think of a cluster coordination team as *service providers* – tasked with delivery of the Cluster workplan, working for the benefit of Cluster members.

Some key aspects to consider:

- **Be inclusive** – identify, engage with, and involve all relevant CCCM actors: UN agencies, INGOs, NNGOs, local actors, government authorities, donors, private sector, academia, and affected communities
- **Ensure all partners have something to gain** from being a CCCM Cluster member
- **Respect differing priorities and mandates**

## WHAT MAKES CLUSTERS WORK?
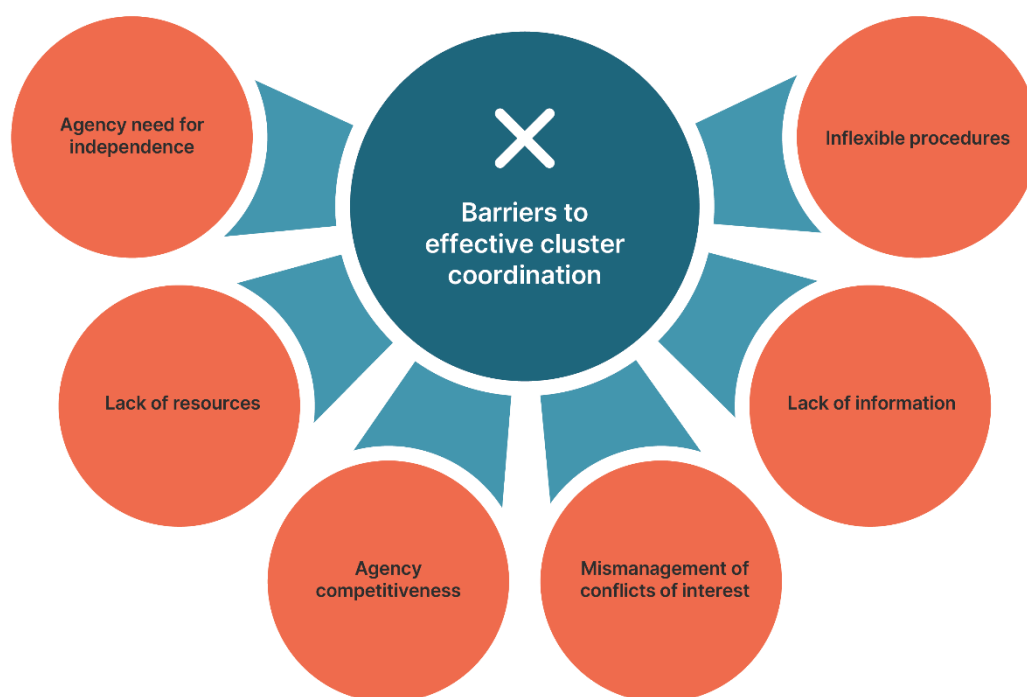
*Source of graphics: Global Health Cluster (2020)* Health Cluster Guide – A Practical Handbook *p.101 & 102*

# SKILLS FOR CLUSTER COORDINATION

A Cluster Coordinator or Co-Coordinator is most successful in getting Cluster members to agree and implement aligned activities when they:

- ✓ Are clear about their role
- ✓ Have 'soft skills' – relationship-building, facilitation, team building
- ✓ Actively use their strong communication skills
- ✓ Are seen as proactive and impartial, and are able to play the role of mediator
- ✓ Have support from a coordination team (IMs, sub-national, etc.) and Cluster members
- ✓ Actively work to develop relationships with Cluster members and other key stakeholders (and ideally do not rotate frequently)
- ✓ Have strong technical and context knowledge
- ✓ Take leadership and actively work to build consensus among Cluster members[1]
- ✓ Are able to operate in a neutral manner and avoid any potential conflict of interest between the CLA and the Cluster coordination daily roles and responsibilities

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[1] ALNAP, Exploring Coordination in Humanitarian Clusters, ALNAP Study, 2015

# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS & CONSENSUS

Taking the time to proactively build relationships with Cluster members and other key stakeholders is vital for the success of a coordination team – encouraging individuals and organizations to actively engage with the Cluster work and toward common goals.

It can be easier to build stronger relationships internally within your own organization, especially if you have worked for them in an operational role before, but this makes it more important to actively pursue relationship-building with other Cluster members. You might need to take a different approach to relationship building with UN/INGO Cluster members, national/local NGOs, and government counterparts. Plus, don't forget other key stakeholders, e.g CCCM donors, other clusters, and inter-cluster staff.

> **FIND OUT MORE**
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> For reflections on **management** types and tips for **communication** skills and **relationship-building** see: [Health Cluster Guide](Health Cluster Guide) **Chapter 3 – Key Coordination Skills**

## *Tips for effective relationship-building*

- ✓ Be active rather than passive – meeting people individually can be very effective
- ✓ Make time to speak more informally with Cluster members and government counterparts e.g., using the time before or after meetings
- ✓ Visit CCCM partner programmes to increase knowledge of the programmes and context
- ✓ Be sensitive to power dynamics, e.g.
    - Visit organizations in their own offices rather than UN offices
    - Ensure visits to programmes don't feel like Cluster members are being monitored
    - If the CLA (or other UN agency/INGO) fund implementing partners, engage with the organizations directly *as Cluster members* not just through the UN agency
- ✓ Build trust by:
    - Being open and transparent
    - Not assuming you have the answers to all issues
    - Being prepared to take criticism and hear things you might not like
    - Actively listening, and asking questions
    - Accepting when you have made mistakes, and rectifying them
    - Remaining approachable and keeping in touch with individuals and organizations
    - Being inclusive, and not privileging your own organization
- ✓ Seek to understand partners' expectations and constraints

## *Tips for consensus-building*

Establishing common goals and joint strategies can be a difficult task when organizations have different approaches and opinions!

- ✓ Take time – set up bilateral and informal discussions as well as meetings
- ✓ Encourage equal participation and openness
- ✓ Limit your own ideas and ask questions
- ✓ Ensure discussion is evidence-based
- ✓ Encourage discussion of different positions and underlying interests
- ✓ Identify and grow areas of agreement – the aspects on which the group agrees

# MEETING MANAGEMENT AND FACILITATION

Cluster meetings are a main point of interface with Cluster members and should be productive and inclusive.

**What makes a good meeting?** (relevant also to workshops!):

- ✓ Provide interpretation and translation if necessary
- ✓ Use a neutral venue that is convenient and equally accessible to all Cluster members
- ✓ Ensure that Cluster members can contribute to the meeting agenda
- ✓ Begin with a purpose and with a clear agenda so everyone knows why they are there, for how long, and what they need to accomplish
- ✓ Encourage open discussion, and encourage all participants to contribute
- ✓ Press for closure of each agenda item – agree action points of who will do what and by when (getting people to commit publicly to action points is a powerful tool!)
- ✓ Make sure that information about meetings, minutes, decisions, and current CCCM issues is readily available to all actors
- ✓ Discuss sensitive issues bilaterally

## RELATED RESOURCES

| Title | Type | Language | Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tips for running successful meetings | Guidance | English | 2013 |

**References & further reading**

- Global Health Cluster (2020) *Health Cluster Guide – A Practical Handbook*
- ALNAP (Clarke PK, Campbell L.) (2015) *Exploring coordination in humanitarian clusters*