



THE ANNOTATED PROTOCOLS GUIDE

Project Roadmap created annotated protocols in response to regular requests for resources and support. ECM Coordinators/Directors, who often take a leadership role in creating written protocols, along with other subject matter experts, also helped to inform this guide.

This series of annotated protocols offers practical guidance, sparks meaningful discussion, and serves as a reference for both the content and scope of effective protocols. Each numbered heading outlines key elements to consider, explains their significance, and provides sample language to help task forces tailor protocols to their unique needs.

Why Protocols Matter

In the early stages of a multidisciplinary task force's development, it is common for members to question the need for formal or extensive protocols especially as they are still evolving. Although protocol development may seem unnecessary at first, it is critical for consistency, longevity, and sustainability.

Protocols help task forces:

- Build transparency and trust among members
- Avoid tension and misunderstandings
- Provide a clear process for addressing any conflict
- Establish clear accountability
- Ensure fair and consistent decision-making

Whether your ECM task force is just beginning or refining long-standing practices, this guide can help facilitate thoughtful conversations and intentional planning around protocol development.

Annotated Protocols

- Information Sharing
- Membership
- Data Collection
- **Decision Making**



Additional Protocol Development Resources

[*Enhanced Collaborative Model \(ECM\) Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force Protocol Development Checklists*](#)

[*Human Trafficking Task Force Protocol Development Training Video Series*](#)

[*Multidisciplinary Collaborative Model for Anti-Human Trafficking Task Forces: Development and Operations Roadmap*](#)

Task Force Decision Making Protocol (Annotated Example)

Below is an annotated example protocol for decision making within a multidisciplinary human trafficking task force. Each provision begins with an explanation as to why that information is relevant/important and is followed by sample language. This is a tool, that when combined with other resources and discussion, will help task forces develop protocols that suit the needs of their circumstances.



1. Purpose and Scope

Establishes why the protocol exists and sets a standard of collaboration and transparency in how decisions are made.



Sample Language: This protocol outlines the principles, processes, and structures through which decisions are made within the [Task Force Name], ensuring transparency, participation, and accountability.



2. Protocol Created By

Names who designed the protocol to signal legitimacy and build buy-in. Shows cross-disciplinary input, which encourages adoption and helps prevent bias toward one sector's norms (e.g., law enforcement vs. victim services).



Sample Language: This protocol was developed collaboratively by the task force, with input from task force members.



3. Who is Involved in Decision-Making

Defines who is involved with different types of decisions, and ensures all relevant disciplines have a say.



Sample Language: Those involved in decisions include representatives from the funded law enforcement and victim service provider partners, the Coordinator/Director, local and federal prosecutors, and a paid representative with lived experience. Each agency has one vote.

Note: Task forces may structure voting authority differently. In some models, the Coordinator/Director votes only when needed to break a tie; in others they vote as a regular member to support shared decision-making.



4. Group Agreements for Dialogue

Sets an expectation of mutual respect in communication and decision making, even when members disagree.



Sample Language: All decision-making meetings will be guided by agreed principles: respectful dialogue, space for dissent, and consensus-seeking.



5. Decision Types and Delegation

Notes the different types of decisions a task force makes, clarifies who decides what, prevents power concentration, and speeds up small decisions while protecting significant decisions.

Examples of Different Types of Decisions a Task Force Might Make

Simple, day-to-day: Routine operational decisions that support ongoing coordination and do not materially affect task force structure, policy, or case strategy

- Scheduling meetings, trainings, or workgroup sessions
- Selecting meeting agendas or facilitation formats
- Determining which updates are shared at meetings
- Adjusting timelines for deliverables or activities
- Identifying logistical needs (e.g., meeting space, virtual platforms, materials)

Planning and strategy: Decisions that shape task force priorities, capacity-building efforts, or use of resources, typically made with broader partner input

- Identifying training priorities or audiences (e.g., law enforcement, service providers, prosecutors)
- Determining which sectors or populations to focus on outreach efforts on
- Setting annual or multi-year strategic priorities
- Deciding how to allocate resources across activities (training, outreach, coordination)
- Selecting data points to track for performance or planning purposes

Case planning and response: Decisions related to coordinated case response that require careful attention to roles, confidentiality, and victim safety

- Determining which partners are involved in a coordinated response
- Deciding when and how to convene a case staffing or case coordination meeting
- Identifying lead investigative or prosecutorial roles
- Coordinating referrals for services or supports
- Determining what information may be shared among partners for a specific case

Significant: High impact decisions that may affect task force structure, policy, risk exposure, or public accountability, and that typically require formal processes or approvals
See Appendix for more on Significant Decisions.

- Changes to governance, leadership, or membership structure
- Adoption or revision of core policies or protocols
- Decisions involving public communications, media engagement or advocacy positions
- Decisions that materially affect confidentiality, data use, or information sharing
- Major shifts in task force scope, focus or operational model



6. Voting Logistics/Structure

Defines and creates parameters around different types of decision making for more efficient and productive efforts. Helps ensure all appropriate members regarding the topic have the opportunity to participate.



Sample Language: Decisions affecting the larger task force will be opened up to the wider membership for voting. Depending on the decision to be made and its reach, voting may be restricted to the task force leadership team. All decisions will be recorded in meeting minutes and stored in shared files. Members may vote remotely if absent, provided responses are received before a set deadline.



Sample Language: Unless otherwise specified, the task force will make decisions using a consensus model. If consensus cannot be reached after a mutually agreed upon amount of time, a quorum and majority vote will be used.



7. Process for Making Significant Decisions

Makes the process predictable and replicable. Encourages reflection, feedback and transparency.



Sample Language:

Step 1: Issue raised by Director/Coordinator, member or subcommittee.

Step 2: Information gathered via survey, interviews, or meeting discussion.

Step 3: Review information gathered and make a preliminary decision.

Step 4: Share preliminary decision with members and receive feedback.

Step 5: Leadership team discusses (in person or virtually), seeks consensus.

Step 6: If consensus is not reached, formal vote conducted, with deadline for any absent members.

Step 7: Decision is documented and shared with full task force.



8. Recusal from Decision-Making

Ensures that task force decisions are made fairly and without undue influence. Promotes transparency, protects the integrity of the process, and helps create space for open dialogue.



Sample Language: To maintain integrity, fairness, and trust within the taskforce, members must recuse themselves from decision-making when a conflict of interest or personal bias could influence the outcome or hinder open dialogue.



9. Reporting Decisions

Creates accountability and transparency without breaching confidentiality.



Sample Language: Final decisions will be summarized and shared with the general membership during monthly meetings and/or by email. Public-facing decisions will be shared externally through approved channels.



10. Access to Information about Decision-Making

Recognizes that some decisions – such as those involving ethical concerns or personal matters – might be limited to a smaller group that members trust to ensure confidentiality, protect integrity, and maintain trust in the process. Explains that information about how certain decisions are made may not be fully accessible due to the sensitive nature of the topic.



Sample Language: Some decisions – especially those involving ethics or sensitive personal matters – may be made by a trusted leadership group to protect confidentiality and integrity. While full details may not be shared, the task force commits to explaining decision processes when possible, to maintain trust and accountability.



Sample Language: While transparency is a core value, information about how certain decisions are made may not be fully accessible to all members due to the sensitive nature of the topic. In some cases – such as ethical concerns or personnel matters – discussions may be limited to a small, trusted, group to ensure confidentiality, protect integrity, and maintain trust in the process.



11. Changes in Representation Notification

Ensures continuity during turnover and avoids confusion about who has decision-making authority.



Sample Language: Each agency must designate a primary and alternate voting representative. Any change must be communicated in writing to the Coordinator/Director.



12. Tie-Breaking and Deadlocks

Prepares for deadlocks without escalating conflict. Promotes collaboration over control.



Sample Language: If a tie occurs, the Coordinator/Director will facilitate an additional discussion round. If the tie persists, the item may be tabled or referred to an external advisor or funder for guidance.



13. Ownership, Review, and Revision

Reinforces adaptability and responsiveness. Makes room for growth and learning. Allows for adjustments based on circumstances.



Sample Language: The protocol will be reviewed annually and amended based on feedback, grant requirements, or lessons learned. Proposed changes must be approved by the leadership team. Changes and updates prior to annual review can be made upon agreement by the leadership team.

APPENDIX A: Significant Decisions

Decisions made by a multidisciplinary task force fall across a spectrum of impact. It is important to not only recognize this, but to have a plan in place for what types of decisions require more discretion and why, as well as talking points to appropriately respond to questions of this nature.

Significant decisions within a task force are those that have a substantial impact on its structure, operations, or membership. While each task force should define what constitutes a significant decision based on its unique context and goals, common examples may include:

Membership changes:

Adding or removing members, especially when influenced by external pressures (e.g., elected officials advocating for specific individuals), can be sensitive and politically charged.

Case-related decisions:

These may involve confidential information, legal considerations, or victim privacy, requiring discretion.

Restructuring or dissolving subcommittees

These decisions often stem from strategic shifts or inactivity and may affect member roles and responsibilities.

Leadership appointments

Choosing leaders for committees or subcommittees can influence power dynamics and future direction.

Because these decisions can affect the integrity, trust, and functionality of the task force, they may require intentional, closed-door conversations. The need for less transparency in these cases is not about withholding information unnecessarily, but rather about:

- Protecting sensitive information (e.g., case details or personal dynamics)
- Preventing undue influence or politicization
- Allowing candid discussion among leadership
- Managing internal conflict or dissent constructively

Ultimately, the goal is to balance accountability with discretion, ensuring that significant decisions are made thoughtfully and with the task force's mission and cohesion in mind.