

# AUDACIOUS<sup>TM</sup> INQUIRY

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## Finding Common Ground: Overcoming Consensus Challenges in Public Health

AIRA National Meeting 2026

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# Agenda & Speakers

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Overview of Purpose & Common Ground  
Playbook

2

Deep Dive and Group Discussion – 3  
Prompts

3

Report out and wrap-up

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**Fun Fact**

Has hiked (portions of)  
the Great Wall of China



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**Fun Fact**

Followed wildflower  
season from California to  
Montana one year.



# Session Objectives



Identify approaches for **defining shared modernization goals** across programs and partners.



Explore methods to **strengthen internal coordination** and collective progress toward **common objectives**.



Share solutions that **improve communication, governance, and accountability** across public health entities.

# Why Alignment Matters



## Working together toward shared goals

- Data Modernization requires cross-team coordination to be hand-in-hand with technology goals
- Partners share goals but function differently in working towards those goals.
- Without aligning technology, strategy, and execution plans, projects may slow, stall, or perhaps not start in the first place.

## To gain and maintain alignment, focus on:

1. Project Purpose and Scope
2. Roles & Responsibilities
3. Communications



## The Coordination Challenge

### Bringing diverse groups together and reaching consensus

- Most modernization projects bring together many partners of various skillsets, programs with competing priorities, and perspectives based on experiences.
- All these diverse groups come with unique mandates, leadership expectations, timelines, pressures, and expertise

### Participation is only the first step towards progress, subsequent steps include:

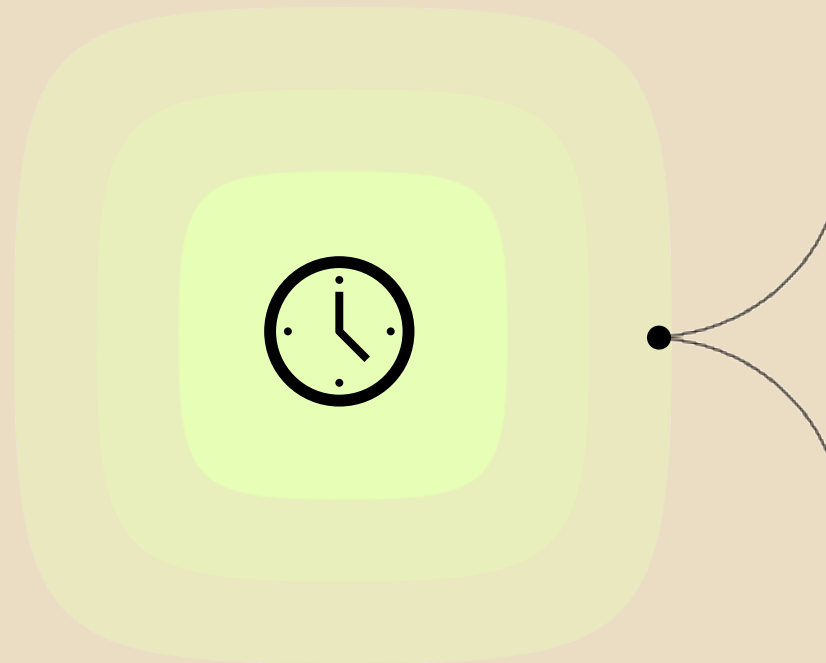
- Managing personalities and working styles – establishing norms and ground rules through a project charter
- Ensuring necessary knowledge and skillsets at the table
- Aligning to a common playbook with shared mission

# The Reality of Incongruous Timing and Readiness

Partners move at different speeds

Readiness varies across programs, team members, agencies, etc.

REMEMBER: “not now” does not mean “never”



Continue working with:

- Persistence
- Transparency
- Accountability

Risks arise:

- Acknowledge them and define mitigation strategies
- Communicate openly with project partners
- Revisit commitment to shared goals

# Building and Maintaining Momentum

Because progress builds confidence and momentum snowballs...

- Identify early, meaningful wins
- Use successes to:
  - Build Trust
  - Demonstrate Value
  - Create or leverage shared urgency
- Change Management: Know when to pivot or re-define the approach
- Regularly remind partners of your shared goal and vision, especially as conflicts arise



# The “Finding Common Ground” Playbook

## Play 1: Purpose and Scope



When group work stalls, it's often because teams are solving different problems without realizing it. This play anchors everyone in a shared purpose and defined scope

## Play 2: Roles and Responsibilities



Unclear roles create friction, slow progress, and erode trust. This play helps teams surface assumptions and establish clear ownership.

## Play 3: Communication



All teams struggle without purposeful communication. This play focuses on how teams stay connected, surface issues early, and maintain trust over time.

# Deep Dive

# Scenario Deep Dive Topic 1 – Name the Friction

## Scenario A – Cross Program Coordination

A state health department is modernizing its IIS while:

- Another program is launching a parallel data initiative
- Your IIS program is combining IT resources with the epidemiology program in your state?
- Funding timelines don't align, don't have enough staff to get it done in time – must be completed during federal fiscal year or state grant
- Each program believes its priorities should come first

## Scenario B – State/Federal Alignment

A federal partner introduces new guidance or new expectations:

- Your colleague believes this new guidance is an unfunded requirement
- Requirements are unclear and you lack authority to make decisions
- Continued funding is dependent on participation
- Detailed information is not available from key resources or public repositories

## Scenario C – Preparing for Data Exchange

Multiple partners must align on data exchange readiness:

- Project documentation is shared through different forums: email, chat, documentation.
- Each conversation requires scheduling a new meeting on already busy calendars resulting in delayed meeting.
- Meetings include an array of policy and technology topics and agenda topics are not communicated in advance.

## Scenario D – Choose Your Own Adventure

Choose a real-world example from your own experience to tackle.

- Who was involved?
- What was the project goal?
- What barriers did you face?
- How did you overcome obstacles?

# Prompt 1: Name the Friction

## Identify 2 –3 barriers as a group

- What is the real barrier to consensus in this scenario?
- Is the challenge mostly about:
  - Purpose and Scope (shared goals, decision making, drivers)?
  - Roles and Responsibilities (people, roles, norms, governance, skillsets)?
  - Communication (monitoring, follow-through, risks, wins)?
  - Timing & readiness?
- Where do conversations usually get stuck?

# Scenario Deep Dive Topic 2 – Apply the Common Ground Playbook

## Scenario A – Cross Program Coordination

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# Prompt 2: Apply the "Finding Common Ground" Playbook

- Which Play matters most in this scenario?
- What is missing right now?
  - A shared decision?
  - Clear authority?
  - A forum boundary?
  - A monitoring mechanism?
- What is one specific practice that could improve alignment?

# Scenario Deep Dive Topic 3 – Formulate Action Plan

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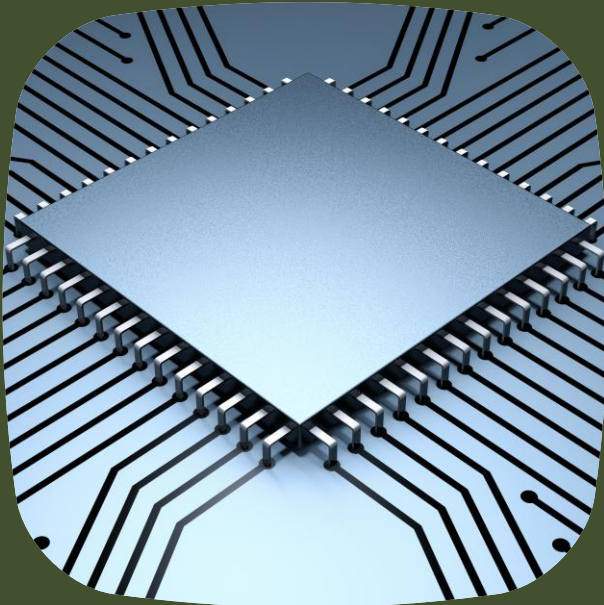
- Who was involved?
- What was the project goal?
- What barriers did you face?
- How did you overcome obstacles?

# Prompt 3: Define the “Minimum Viable Next Step”

- If this group had 30 days, what is the smallest meaningful step that could:
  - Reduce friction?
  - Build trust?
  - Signal forward movement?
- Who would need to be involved?
- What would success look like (even temporarily)?

# Closing Thoughts

Modernization succeeds  
through intentional alignment



Progress depends on clarity,  
coordination, and trust



Finding common ground is  
ongoing work



# Thank You

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