**Teams**

*How well does your project team really work together?*

In a small business or charity, every person’s contribution counts. It’s crucial to build a **high-performing team** where members communicate, trust each other, and understand their roles. Poor team coordination can lead to mistakes and burnout – in fact, over half of workers report stress and fatigue due to communication issues at work. To avoid this, small organizations should cultivate a supportive team culture and clear communication practices. For example, a neighbourhood café might hold brief daily huddles so that kitchen and front-of-house staff stay in sync, or a nonprofit might celebrate “mission moments” in staff meetings to keep everyone connected to the cause.

**Building a Collaborative Team Culture**

Start by ensuring **clear communication** within your team. In a small enterprise – whether a restaurant, retail shop, or charity – open communication keeps everyone on the same page and prevents costly misunderstandings​. Encourage team members to speak up with ideas or concerns and establish regular check-ins (e.g. weekly team meetings or quick daily stand-ups). This kind of transparency fosters trust and a positive work environment where people feel heard and motivated​. Also make sure everyone knows the organization’s mission and how their work contributes to it. As one guide notes, don’t assume your staff can “read your mind” – **spell out goals, deadlines, and expectations clearly, then check for understanding**​. Small business owners new to managing teams often learn that being explicit and setting *“clear signposts”* for projects greatly reduces confusion​.

Define team **roles and responsibilities** so that people know what’s expected of them. Many small teams benefit from a simple RACI chart (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) to clarify who is doing what. For instance, if you run a community food pantry project, designate one person *Responsible* for volunteer scheduling, another *Accountable* for final sign-off, others to be *Consulted* for input (e.g. suppliers or advisors), and those to be *Informed* (like board members)​. Clearly outlining roles upfront mitigates the risk of tasks falling through the cracks​. It also empowers team members by giving them ownership of specific duties. Everyone should understand how their role fits into the bigger picture and feel comfortable collaborating without stepping on each other’s toes. Consider creating a simple one-page **Team Charter** document that lists each member, their role, and their main responsibilities and communication channels. This can be especially helpful if you rely on volunteers or part-timers who need quick onboarding.

**Empowering and Supporting People**

Great small-business teams are **empowered** teams. Trust your staff (or volunteers) with real responsibility and decision-making power in their areas – this shows respect and engages them more deeply. When employees feel trusted, they are more likely to take initiative and contribute innovative ideas​ for example, the owner of a bakery might empower an experienced baker to experiment with new recipes for the seasonal menu, or a charity director might let a volunteer leader organize an event in their own style. Back up this trust with **training and development** opportunities. Even on a tight budget, you can cross-train team members in new skills, bring in a mentor for a day, or share free online courses. Investing in your people’s growth not only boosts their productivity but also increases job satisfaction and loyalty​. A small family restaurant could send its chefs to a local food safety workshop, or a nonprofit could host a quarterly skills-sharing session for staff and volunteers. These steps show your team you’re committed to their success.

Regular **feedback and recognition** are also key to team performance. In a busy small company, it’s easy to focus only on problems, but don’t overlook praising good work. Something as simple as thanking an employee in front of the team or highlighting a volunteer’s contribution in the charity newsletter can go a long way. Schedule periodic check-ins or performance reviews (at least annually, with informal feedback more frequently) to discuss each person’s progress and goals. This helps people feel valued and allows you to address issues early. Remember that feedback should be two-way: encourage your team to give you input on how things are going. Listening to employees can be a “force multiplier” for your business – their front-line insights can spark improvements you might miss on your own​. Whether it’s a barista suggesting a better system for morning rush, or a program coordinator in a nonprofit identifying a community need, those perspectives can enhance your operations.

**Effective Team Management Practices:**

* **Communicate Clearly:** Make open communication a norm. Share information, set clear instructions, and confirm everyone understands their tasks. This reduces errors and keeps the team aligned​
* **Set Shared Goals:** Involve the team in setting SMART goals for projects. When everyone knows the target and what success looks like, they stay focused and accountable.
* **Empower Your People:** Give team members autonomy to make decisions in their roles. Trust and empower them with the resources they need – engaged employees who feel ownership will go the extra mile​.
* **Develop Skills:** Provide training, mentorship, and growth opportunities. Nurturing talent strengthens your team’s capabilities and shows you value them, improving retention​.
* **Recognize and Feedback:** Celebrate wins and acknowledge individual contributions. Conduct regular feedback sessions so employees and volunteers can improve and feel appreciated. Positive reinforcement and constructive guidance build a stronger team.

By focusing on these areas, even a very small company or nonprofit can build a team that is cohesive, motivated, and high performing. When your team members understand their purpose and feel supported, they’ll deliver better results for your projects – and enjoy working together. A strong team spirit can also make work more fun, turning your business into a place where people are excited to contribute.

**External Resource:** *For more tips on building a great small-team culture, see* *“How Small Nonprofits Can Build a Thriving Team Culture,”* Forbes (2025). *This article shares ideas like dedicating time in meetings for staff to share mission-related success stories, which can reconnect everyone with the impact of their work.*