Stakeholder Alignment Sprint

Facilitation guide · team, one facilitator

What this is: a facilitated sprint you run when a decision needs several people's backing and you can't be sure the support is real. Instead of asking "do you support this?" and getting a nod, you ask each stakeholder what would stop them backing it, map where they actually stand, and make each one commit to a specific, costly action by a named date. It takes about 30–60 minutes and needs the position map. Your job is to hold the barrier framing, and to refuse to let an abstract "I'm on board" stand — every stakeholder leaves with one commitment you can see.

The one line to hold: silence isn't support. A room where no one objects feels like alignment, but agreement in a meeting costs nothing and vanishes against the first competing priority. Your whole job is to turn declared support into observable support. **Support isn't measured by agreement — it's measured by what people commit to do.**

· WHEN DO I USE THIS?

Use this when

GOOD FIT

A decision or change that needs support from several people you can propose to but can't instruct; everyone "agreed" in a meeting and you're not sure the support is real; a cross-team initiative about to depend on people following through. Bring a real decision, before it launches — not after it stalls.

WRONG TOOL

Moving one specific person you can't instruct › Influence Without Authority. A team that can't agree on priorities › The Reveal. An open dispute to resolve › Trade-off Conflict Resolver. This one is for aligning the several people whose backing a decision needs.

The boundary that matters most: this shares the Win-Buy-In shelf with **Influence Without Authority** — but they do opposite-scale jobs. **Influence Without Authority moves one person you can't instruct. Stakeholder Alignment Sprint aligns the many people whose backing you need.** One relationship vs the whole map.

TWO WIN-BUY-IN TOOLS — ONE PERSON vs MANY



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PART 1 RUNNING THE SPRINT

team, one facilitator

1 · WHAT IS THIS REALLY DOING?

The one idea

You explained the decision, no one objected, so you assumed you had support — but agreement is free, and it costs nothing to withdraw the moment a competing priority appears. The owner usually thinks the problem is difficult stakeholders. The real problem is that they secured agreement, never commitment. Projects rarely fail because people disagree; they fail because everyone assumes someone else will make it happen. This sprint surfaces each real position, then makes every stakeholder's support observable — a specific, costly action, by a named date, that you can actually see.

THE POSITION MAP — WHERE EACH STAKEHOLDER ACTUALLY STANDS



Place each stakeholder by their real position — not the one you assumed in the room.

2 · WHAT DO I NEED?

What you'll need

A real decision (core)	A specific decision or change that needs support from several people before it can move forward. Not stakeholder management in general.
The right stakeholders (core)	The people whose support the decision genuinely depends on. They should attend the session or provide their position directly.
The position map	A support-and-influence grid with named zones — Champion, Supporter, Neutral, Resisting. Prepare the map before the session begins.
One facilitator	Keeps the discussion moving, asks every barrier question consistently, and ensures every stakeholder leaves with one specific, dated commitment. The capture sheet carries the map and the commitments.

Alignment · Win Buy-In · about 30–60 minutes, depending on how many stakeholders you're aligning.

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3 · HOW DO I RUN IT?

The run-sheet

Brief the room, then run these in order. The bold part is what you say or do; the move under it is where you add the most. The two beats are the tool: Beat 1 (the barrier question) surfaces real positions; Beat 2 (the commitment proof) makes support observable. Protect both.

1. Define the decision	**5 min**	*"What's the decision that needs backing, and whose support does it depend on?"* State it plainly. List every key stakeholder. Appoint a facilitator.
2. Ask the barrier, one by one	**12–15 min**	*For each: "what would stop you backing this?" Never "do you support this?"* If they say "nothing," ask "if something did stop you, what would it most likely be?" Record each barrier — but don't solve it yet. **Ask every stakeholder before discussing any solutions** — capture every barrier first, and discuss solutions only after the whole room is mapped.
3. Map where everyone stands	**8 min**	*Place one stakeholder at a time on the support-and-influence map.* Champion, Supporter, Neutral, Resisting. Compare the alignment you assumed with the alignment you actually have.
4. Force the commitment proof	**12–15 min**	*Each stakeholder names one specific, costly action: "I will ___, by ___, evidence ___."* One action only — exactly one commitment per stakeholder. No abstract "I'm on board" is allowed to stand.
5. Assign owners to every unresolved barrier	**6 min**	*Every unresolved barrier gets one owner and one review date.* No unresolved barrier leaves the room without both — so no one leaves assuming someone else will act.

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ASK THE BARRIER, NOT THE POSITION — AND DON'T SOLVE IT YET

"Do you support this?" only ever buys a nod — and puts anyone with a doubt in the position of being the one obstacle. **"What would stop you backing this?"** lets people name a real barrier without becoming the barrier. When someone answers "nothing" (many will), don't accept it — ask **"if something did stop you, what would it most likely be?"** That one follow-up is where the real positions come out. And resist the pull to fix each barrier as it appears: capture every barrier first, map the whole room, and only then discuss solutions — otherwise the first barrier becomes a twenty-minute debate and you never reach the rest.

PART 2 GETTING IT RIGHT

why it works & common mistakes

4 · WHY DOES THIS WORK?

Why it works

Agreement costs nothing; commitment does. The barrier question separates assumed support from real support without putting anyone on the defensive. Requiring one specific, costly action by a named date turns support into something everyone can see. And projects rarely stall because people disagreed — they stall because everyone assumed someone else would act. A costly, dated action is the one thing a nod can never pretend.

THE VISIBILITY TEST — IS THIS REALLY A COMMITMENT?

People will offer "I'll support it" or "I'm on board." That is not a commitment proof. The test: **if the commitment can't be observed afterwards, it isn't specific enough.** Push each one until it passes:

- "I'll help" ✗ → "I'll review the proposal by Wednesday" ✓
- "I'm supportive" ✗ → "I'll allocate one engineer next week" ✓

Costly, specific, dated — something you could check later and know whether it happened.

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5 · WHAT IF IT GOES WRONG?

Common mistakes

What happened	The fix
You asked “do you support this?”	That only buys a nod and makes doubters the obstacle. Always ask the barrier: “what would stop you backing this?”
Someone said “nothing” and you moved on	Most will, at first. Follow up: “if something did stop you, what would it most likely be?” The real position is in the answer.
You solved the first barrier on the spot	One barrier becomes a twenty-minute debate and you never map the rest. Capture all barriers first; discuss solutions after the whole room is mapped.
A commitment stayed abstract	“I’m on board” isn’t observable. Push to a specific, costly, dated action: “I will ___, by ___, evidence ___.”
One person offered three actions	Exactly one commitment per stakeholder. Three vague promises are weaker than one you’ll actually check.
One stakeholder dominated the discussion	Give every stakeholder equal time before opening general discussion — the quiet Resisting position is often the one that matters most.
A gap was left unowned	Unowned means no one will act. Every unresolved barrier gets one owner and one review date before the room breaks.

Before you close the sprint

- ✓ Every stakeholder was asked the barrier question — not “do you support this?”
- ✓ Every “nothing” got the follow-up, and real positions are on the map
- ✓ Every key stakeholder named one specific, costly, dated action you can see
- ✓ Every unresolved barrier has a named owner and a review date

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6 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS STICK?

Take it back to work

THE HABIT

Before you count on someone's support, ask:

"What specific, costly thing have they agreed to do — by when?"

If the answer is "nothing yet," you have agreement, not commitment. The more you ask for a visible action instead of a nod, the less your initiatives stall on support that was never really there.

Appendix · Reference

You should not need this to start. Read it before, or if a run goes sideways.

7 · A WORKED RUN

Watch the facilitator move

The decision: "a platform change that needs five teams behind it."

Stage	What happened
Ask the barrier	In the room, all five "support" it. Asked **"what would stop you backing this?"**, one names a competing deadline, one doesn't trust the rollout plan. Two say "nothing" — the follow-up surfaces a resourcing worry and a dependency.
Map	Two Champions, one Supporter, one Neutral, one Resisting. The alignment assumed in the room was five Champions. The map shows the real situation — and notice that nobody changed position; the facilitator simply made the real positions visible.
Force the proof	Each names one costly, dated action. The Resisting lead: "I will free up two engineers, by Thursday, evidence: names in the sprint board."
Own the gaps	The rollout-plan doubt gets an owner (the tech lead) and a review date. No gap left for "someone else."

Five nods became a real map and five observable commitments. The initiative moved because support was visible — not assumed.

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· WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

The real need	Use this
Align the several people whose backing a decision needs	**This tool — Stakeholder Alignment Sprint.** One-to-many. Position map + commitment proof.
Move one specific person you can't instruct	**Influence Without Authority** — one-to-one. Build empathy for that one party. The primary boundary: one person, not the whole map.
A team that can't agree on priorities	**The Reveal** — surfaces team-priority misalignment, not stakeholder support for a decision.
An open dispute to resolve	**Trade-off Conflict Resolver** — settles a live disagreement, rather than securing backing for a decision.
Test whether an existing commitment is genuine	**Commitment Stress Test** — stress-tests a commitment *after* agreement exists. This sprint builds commitment *before* the work begins.

The move underneath: when you need people behind a decision, don't ask whether they agree — ask what would stop them, then make each one commit to something you can see. That move — from a nod to a costly, dated action — is what turns assumed alignment into the real thing, and stops initiatives stalling on support that was never there.

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