FACILITATOR PREPARATION MANUAL

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition

Alycia J. Sterenberg
Paula D. Kohler
Jennifer L. Coyle
June E. Gothberg
Drew Andrews

Western Michigan University
Career Connections Research Center

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Career Connections Research Center
Western Michigan University
3506 Sangren Hall
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
Phone: 269.387.6181
Fax: 269.387.2826
http://www.transitionta.org
http://www.wmich.edu/ccrc/

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Acknowledgments

This *Facilitator Preparation Manual* is adapted from *How to Facilitate Groups*, published by the National School-to-Work Opportunities Team in the mid-1990s and the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center in the 2000s . We acknowledge that we used much of the STW team's text, and then enhanced the examples and procedures to align with NSTTAC and now NTACT's transition institute model. We thank them for this earlier work and their insights into the group process. Having used the original guide for the past 25 years, we determined that an updated version, aligned with NTACT's work to build state capacity to improve secondary education, rehabilitation, and transition services for students with disabilities, would further improve our facilitator preparation and group strategic planning process.

In addition, we acknowledge the hundreds of facilitators with whom we have worked during our national and state transition institutes for their input and suggestions to improve the facilitation experience. In particular, we acknowledge our colleagues at the following organizations for their collaboration:

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Michigan Postsecondary Education and Employment Collaborative

Paula D. Kohler, Ph.D.
NTACT Co-Investigator

Introduction:

Purpose of Manual

This manual was initially designed to help prepare facilitators for their role in NTACT's transition institute model, focused on improving transition education, services, and outcomes of students with disabilities. In this model, more fully described in the *Capacity Building Institute Toolkit*, the facilitator plays a key role in leading strategic planning sessions for state and/or local teams.

In the following pages, we describe general characteristics of team planning time, strategies for preparing for and leading team meetings, and approaches for solving problems and achieving consensus. Specifically, this manual is intended to assist facilitators with the following:

- Understand the institutes model and strategic planning process
- Understand their role as a facilitator within the model
- Design and prepare for team meetings
- Strengthen facilitation skills, including:
  - Opening team sessions
  - Leading group discussions
  - Setting up and working with small groups
  - Using easel charts
  - Helping groups reach consensus
  - Resolving conflict
- Evaluate team meetings

The Facilitator's Role

The active facilitation approach sees the role of the facilitator as a temporary group or team leader. This leadership role has a very significant impact on group

effectiveness, despite the fact that the facilitator does not get involved in the content of the group's work. The facilitator employing the active facilitation approach enables the group to focus its work on the task at hand knowing an unbiased professional is providing the structure, processes, and the push—this is probably the most distinguishing characteristic of the approach—to help the group get where it is trying to go.

The facilitator in the active facilitation approach has a strong attachment to the group and its task. Unlike conventional facilitation approaches, in this approach, the facilitator shares responsibility with the group for getting their task accomplished. The roles and responsibilities of the facilitator can be summarized in three primary areas.

Neutral Servant of the Team. As in all group facilitation, the facilitator in the active facilitation approach has an unbiased service role. He or she is bound to be neutral, that is, to treat all participants and all ideas in the group with the same respect. The facilitator has no interest in what decision is made, but has a strong interest in a decision being made; no preference for one outcome over another, but a strong preference that an outcome be reached; no preference that one team member or another being heard, but a clear interest in all participants having a chance to be heard.

Process Advocate. The facilitator proposes processes for helping the group get its work done, invites ideas for process alternatives from team members, and ensures that the agreed-upon process is used so long as it is working. The responsibility of the facilitator is not to advocate one particular process, but to advocate whatever process the group has agreed to use. In this way, the facilitator helps the group stay on a productive course.

Progress Advocate. The facilitator is responsible for helping the group establish and maintain forward movement. It is this push factor that frequently earns the facilitator using the active facilitation approach the undying appreciation of

groups. As progress advocate, the facilitator is continually assessing the group's progress toward its objectives and managing both group and task processes.

What the Facilitator Does In the Active Facilitation Approach

Compared to conventional facilitation methods, the facilitator in the *active facilitation approach* has a more extensive role in planning for, facilitating, and following up on a team meeting.

Before The Meeting

Learn about the purpose and objectives for the meeting. The facilitator meets with the meeting initiator(s) to find out what the meeting is expected to accomplish. The format of these meetings can vary and can be conducted effectively via webinar, teleconference, and/or in person.

Develop an understanding of the issues impacting the meeting. Through such means as review of related materials or pre-meetings with a planning team the facilitator becomes knowledgeable about issues affecting the group and the meeting. In meetings of significant duration and complexity, the facilitator often presents what he or she has learned to the group at the beginning of the meeting to check for accuracy and to be sure the right issues are before the group. Especially important is the role of the facilitator in putting issues before the group that members may be reluctant to bring up themselves in the group setting.

During The Meeting

Facilitate the group. This broad category of activities includes the following:

- Manage the agenda and progress of the group:
- Adjust time, tasks, and processes
- Give the group feedback on progress
- Encourage the group
- Keep the meeting objectives before the group
- Ensure that all participants and ideas have a chance to be heard.
- Help the group reach consensus and make decisions in other ways.

- Help the group resolve differences.
- Track ancillary issues (issues raised at a time when the group can't productively deal with them).
- Track follow up or action items.

Help the group plan for follow up. Ensure that next steps, who's responsible for doing what, and due dates for follow up are clearly established before the meeting ends.

Help the group evaluate the meeting. Ensure that participants complete the institute's (or other group meeting's) evaluation. Also gather information about "what worked" and "what didn't", covering both task and process aspects of the institute.

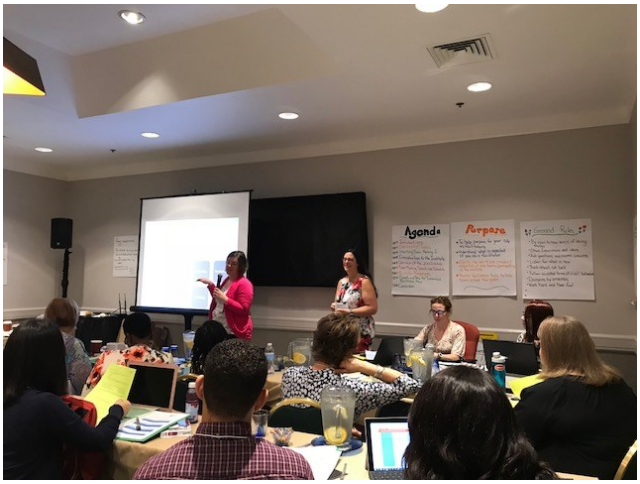
After The Meeting

Report Out. Facilitators will be involved in a brief report-out session at the end of each day of the institute. This session will involve all facilitators and include sharing feedback from their team regarding "What worked" and "What didn't", which institute planners will use to improve the next day's sessions.

Section 1: Team Meeting Format

The amount of time and effort that goes into the institute's design varies according to the duration, complexity, and size of the institute. The time invested in careful institute design has a high payoff: an agenda which enables participants to achieve their objectives, appreciate the outcomes of the institute, and often, actually enjoy the experience. Prior to the institute, the team meetings have already been designed and organized as part of the team meeting agenda. The facilitator does not design the team meeting, but instead, becomes important in its function.

Before facilitating a team meeting, it is important to understand what makes team meetings work. The most important considerations are the needs and interests of the team participants, the facilitator's key *customers* once the institute is underway. For team meetings to be most effective, participants need to have:



- A clear understanding of the objectives and intended outcomes
- A clear understanding of the processes to be used and confidence in the facilitator who will manage the processes
- A clear understanding of the role of everyone in the room (including themselves)
- Confidence in the utility of the meeting; belief the goal is reachable
- The opportunity to participate substantively
- The opportunity to have input to process changes
- Confidence that follow-up will occur and be managed

Virtually everything a facilitator does in preparing for a meeting is intended to address one or more of these customer standards.

A number of steps are involved in facilitating a team meeting.

Step 1: Learn client objectives.

From meetings with the initiator, the planning team, some or all of the participants, or from other sources such as a survey of participants or review of written materials. This could include documents created by the team prior to the meeting, such as the previous year's team planning tools.

Step 2: Gather basic information about the team and its participants.

Find out how many people are expected to participate on the team(s) you will facilitate, who they are, how much time is available for the meetings, and when and where they will be held.

Step 3: Learn about issues impacting the meeting.

Again, in meetings with the initiator, the planning team, some or all of the participants, or from other sources, focus on such issues as:

- The history of the issue and/or the group.
- Relationships within the group or between the group and others.
- Feelings within the group about the task or the group.

Step 4: Consider the complexity of the meeting(s).

Determining the complexity of the institute and the meetings within it is essential for understanding the facilitation requirements and involves analysis of the following considerations:

- Length of the institute—the longer an institute lasts, the more complex the facilitation challenge can be.
- Nature of relationships among the participants—if, for example, participants have a history with one another that is characterized by personality differences or difficulty reaching agreement, the facilitation requirements for a meeting of the group are greater. If participants know each other and do not have a history of difficulties, the facilitation task is not so complex. The same is true if participants have no past experience with one another; the facilitation challenge is not as complex as for a group with problems in its past.

Step 5: Review institute materials.

It is important that you become familiar with the materials that will be presented or discussed at the institute, such as the team planning tool and institute agenda. These materials could also include any number of documents contained within the *Toolkit* or team specific materials.

Step 6: Develop a draft agenda for each session.

The NTACT institute model typically includes a very specific agenda for each team meeting, which includes opportunities to discuss content, meet with content resources, generate and analyze information, and provide feedback. Remember, as you prepare to implement the agenda, there may be unique considerations regarding any particular meeting. Be sure to incorporate as many of the following considerations as apply:

- Maximize interaction, this is paramount.
- Put issues and tasks in logical order, the first consideration in ordering topics.
- Consider the nature and difficulty of the tasks or processes:
  - Schedule less interactive segments early in the *day*, when people can listen with greater efficiency
  - Set and enforce short time frames for certain meeting elements, for example, presentations of information
- Remember that interactive processes take longer, so allow enough time:

- It takes time to discuss and time to agree
- Small group processes must always include time for reports from small groups about what was discussed

Section 2: Opening a Team Meeting

Team meetings often open with welcoming and other introductory comments by the facilitator, who also generally assumes the role of meeting leader and in various ways proceeds to guide the group through its agenda and its various tasks to its desired outcomes.

The facilitator's goal in opening a group session is to begin the process of creating an environment in which participants:

- Know what to expect and what is expected of them
- Believe the team meeting is a good investment of their time and energy
- Develop trust in the facilitator and the other participants
- Have confidence that a product will result from their work

The facilitator begins addressing these prerequisites to active participation at the very beginning of the team meeting using the following techniques.

Welcoming Participants

Your first words to participants give you a chance to set a positive tone and begin to demonstrate how you will conduct yourself. It's best to be yourself, a difficult goal when you may be a bit nervous about the task ahead of you. Speak informally, in a friendly tone, and in the same way you would speak to colleagues, for example:

> *"Good morning, everyone. My name is Rebecca Carson, and I'm going to be your facilitator this week. We are ready to begin the first planning session, so I'd like to start by saying 'welcome' to you all."*

Introduce Yourself

If you are certain that everyone in the room knows you, then, of course, introducing yourself is not necessary. But, if there is *anyone* in the room who does not know you, or does not know you well, it's a good idea to introduce yourself so no one is reluctant to call you by name.

When you introduce yourself, do it before you begin participant introductions. Give your name again, write it on an easel chart, and post the easel chart on the wall. If you are *unknown* to anyone in the room, explain *in two or three sentences* your qualifications to be facilitating this meeting, especially your experience in this organization or similar ones and your experience doing this kind of facilitation.

Have Participants Introduce Themselves

If *all* participants know each other well, then participant introductions are not necessary. If you're not sure how well they know each other, ask one or two of the participants before the meeting begins. If participant introductions are needed, it is important to understand the following information, in order to allow the appropriate time for introductions:

- How well participants know one another.
- How well participants *need* to get to know each other, for example, is this the first meeting of a team that needs to develop close relationships? Is this a group of people with adversarial views who need to develop enough personal rapport to be able to work collaboratively? Or, is this a group who will meet just once, with a light task?
- How much time participants will be spending together; longer meetings generally have more in-depth interactions and require participants to know each other better from the start.
- How much time is available for introductions; introductions can be time consuming, so encourage participants to be brief.

Once the above considerations have been addressed, each person should briefly introduce themselves to the whole group.

Another method is to encourage participants to partner together and interview one another. This method takes about 15 minutes to instruct and carry out the interviewing step with about three minutes per participant for the introductions. If each interviewer is asked to create an easel chart about his or her partner, add another few minutes per participant to your calculations.

Introduce a Team Meeting

Since there is important information to be conveyed about the team meeting at the beginning, it is helpful to have the key points you want to make on a series of easel charts. There is flexibility regarding the order in which you present this information and the particular information you cover, but, at a minimum, do the following:

Review the meeting schedule. Become familiar with the institute's agenda so that you know when and where your team meetings will occur. The "team tasks" and meeting schedule will be provided to you prior to the institute's beginning. This information will help you prepare meeting materials in advance (e.g., easel charts with meeting agenda, content resource schedule, etc.) so that valuable time is not wasted at the beginning of the team meeting. Be sure to indicate that lunch and stretch breaks will be taken each day, how long each will be, and about when they will occur.

Explain the purpose of the meeting. That is, explain the outcomes expected for the institute and the specific tasks for each team meeting, for example:

"Develop the ground work for a strategic plan to guide the team's work over the coming year," or

"Share information about current activities among the various group members' organizations"

Present the objectives for the meeting. Describe specifically what participants are expected to accomplish, in three or four statements, for example:

"To assess where things currently stand in each key program area."
"To develop broad strategies for moving the program forward over the coming year."

"To create a plan for continuing the planning process after the meeting is over and everyone is back at work."

Explain the meeting and facilitation approach. Describe what participants can expect to happen in the meeting, for example,

"This meeting will have plenary sessions each day in which information and ideas will be presented to the whole group. There will also be daily concurrent breakout sessions in which more specific information will be presented and discussed. Also each day, there will be planning sessions during which each team meets with its facilitator to work through the planning process using information gained in the content sessions."

"I will be helping you with your work in the team meeting sessions. I will open the team meetings, help you stay on track with the planning guidance we've been given, record your ideas and decisions on easel charts, and generally try to ensure that everyone has a chance to be heard and that agreement is reached on key points before you move forward. I'll also keep track of the time and be sure our planning sessions end when you have agreed they should end. If anyone has any ideas for other ways I could help or ideas for how the process should work along the way, please do not hesitate to offer me suggestions."

Review the agenda. Use your team meeting materials to describe each meeting's agenda. Since agendas have to be somewhat flexible, make the following points:

"I may not stop an interesting discussion to take a stretch break precisely on schedule, but if I wait too long, just let me know. Also, the agenda times may change if a topic requires more or less time than originally estimated. I will, however, be sure we break for lunch on time and open and close the meeting on time."

Review administrative information. Explain how meals will be handled, where bathrooms are located, any after-hours events that have been planned, any paperwork requirements of participants, etc.

Establish Ground Rules

Ground rules in meetings serve as an informal contract that lays out how things will work and how people will act in the meeting. They are presented after expectations have been gathered. Two kinds of ground rules include process and behavioral. They typically appear on facilitators' lists and include the following examples.

Process ground rules:

- Make decisions by consensus.
- Post decisions on an easel chart.
- Track follow-up or action items as we go.

Behavioral ground rules:

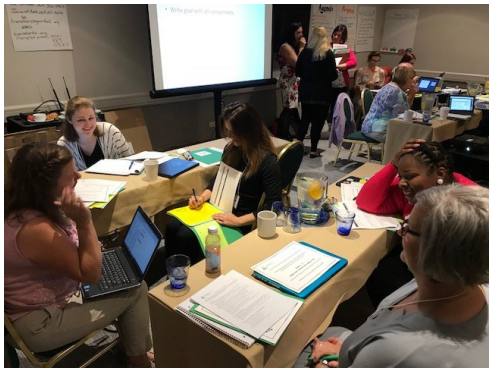
- Attend all sessions and be on time.
- Treat all ideas with respect.
- Raise differences openly and constructively.

The two kinds of ground rules do not need to be separated when presented to participants; both behavioral and process ground rules are often intermingled on the same list. If the group is experienced with the group process, you might ask the participants to generate a list of ground rules themselves, after you have given them the introductory information (purpose, objectives, meeting approach, agenda).

Section 3: Leading Group Discussions

Discussions can be a creative and productive way to develop a shared understanding of a subject within a group and to explore a subject in some depth. Discussions are a critical precursor to a group developing a consensus decision where that is a goal. The reasons for having group discussions in a meeting are several:

- Help participants get interested and involved in a subject.
- Enable participants to fill in information gaps and to clear up misunderstandings.
- Enable participants to review and analyze subject matter that has been presented to the group verbally or in writing.
- Identify areas of agreement and disagreement in the group so that differences can be understood and resolved.



Prepare for a Group Discussion

Think through your objectives for the group discussion prior to the session, and decide the key outcomes you would like to see the discussion produce. These are generally outlined in the facilitators' team meeting task document provided during facilitator preparation. With your objectives in mind, develop and write down two or three open-ended questions to help start and guide the discussion. Plan to begin with a very general, open-ended question (one that cannot be answered by, "yes", or, "no"), and follow with more targeted open-ended questions. An example for a planning session follows:

First ask: *"What do you think of this approach?"*
Then ask: *"What do you consider the most valuable aspects of it?" "What are the most challenging?"*
Then ask: *"If the team were to recommend this approach, how do you think local program people can be convinced of its utility?"*

Starting a Group Discussion

Introduce the discussion topic and objective(s), and pose the first, general, open-ended question. Wait for the first response and be patient. Try counting to 15 silently to give space for thoughts. It often takes time for the first person to organize a thought and decide to express it. If no one comments, try the question in a new way.

"*Any thoughts on the idea to provide state teams with training on transition assessment? Anything you want clarified?", or*

"Anything you particularly like about this proposal? Don't like about it?"

Once the first person speaks up, others will generally follow without delay. When comments begin, treat each one with respect. To speak up in a group session involves at least a little bit of risk and vulnerability for participants. If they feel you may dismiss or criticize their comments, they may prefer not to speak up at all. Build confidence in both teams and participants to share their voice to encourage group discussion.

Encourage Continued Discussion

The first rule for facilitators is to listen carefully to each comment. Restate or paraphrase comments from time to time to show participants that you are listening and subtly reaffirm the value of participants' points. It is very important that the facilitator not evaluate comments either positively or negatively; rather you should acknowledge them supportively, but neutrally. Definitely DO NOT criticize participants or cast their comments in a negative light.

Do say: *"I see what you are saying--it will take a lot of resources." or "So, you found that the last training from that contractor was very valuable."*

Don't say: *"That doesn't sound like a very fair evaluation of the Com-*

missioner's comments." or "You're probably the only person who would look at this subject that way."

The facilitator also has a role in reinforcing the group's efforts in the discussion, saying, for example:

"This discussion has brought up some interesting points; I can see that there are a lot of opinions about state teams' roles in conducting professional development training in this group. Does anyone else have a comment?"

"This topic has proven more complex than it appeared to be; your discussion raises a number of issues about system building. Are there any more ideas?"

It is helpful to the participants for the facilitator to restate the initial topic of the discussion from time to time to help them stay on track, especially if a sub-point or related but different topic has absorbed the group's attention for several minutes.

Record the Discussion

Write participants' comments on easel charts or other agreed upon media. This will encourage further comments, allow you to be sure all comments are considered, and allow participants to review or summarize the discussion as needed. Be sure to:

- Write their actual words (not every word, just key words); do NOT change their comments to make a particular point. It's better to introduce your own thoughts directly if needed, rather than change participants' thoughts.
- Write down all comments, even those that are not exactly on the subject. If comments seem unrelated to the subject, you may want to start another page titled "Ideas to Discuss Later" or “Parking Lot”. Just be sure to return to the list at a later point.
- Write down any action items for follow-up that may come out of a discussion. Start a separate easel chart that can be added to throughout the meeting and

reviewed at the end to be sure no follow-up assignments fall between the cracks.

Engage All Participants in the Discussion

Your goal is to ensure that everyone has a chance to participate. This enables the group to have the benefit of everyone's thinking and to help the group form a common view of a topic. It is *not* important that *everyone* speak up a certain number of times or that all participants contribute at the same rate. Some people naturally talk more, others less. It is desirable for most participants to join in a discussion for it to be of greatest interest and value to the group, but it is most important that everyone knows that he or she *can* contribute at any point they choose to.

How to Engage Quiet Participants

Welcome comments from quiet participants, but don't call on people by name or be too insistent. Respond to quiet participants' unspoken, but apparent concerns (a quizzical look, a furrowed brow), but don't try to interpret them. Invite questions or comments in a general way:

Do ask: *"It looks like there might be a few questions or comments...."*

Don't say: *"You look confused, Ed."*

Get the Views of the Whole Group

If you wish to elicit the views of all participants on a topic, you can poll the group, and ask each person to respond briefly. When you poll the group, give people the option to pass and not speak; it's best not to *force* participants to speak, but rather say something like:

"Will each person please give us your thoughts about the issue of requiring transition related assessments for all ninth graders? Those who don't have a comment at this time may just say, `I pass'".

Handling Problem Behavior Constructively

Your goal is to ensure that the behavior of some people does not reduce the value of the discussion to the whole group. Often "problem" behavior can be avoided if you establish clear ground rules and ensure that everyone has a chance to participate. If that is not enough, try these techniques:

How to Respond To Challenges

Don't over-react, just acknowledge the points the participant makes. If possible, find merit in what he or she has said, agree with what you can, and then move on.

How to Respond To Unanswerable Questions or Irresolvable Concerns

If a participant asks you a question you cannot answer, check to be sure you understood the point, and if you don't know the answer say so openly and see if any others in the room know the answer or offer to get it:

"I don't know the answer to that question, Grace. I'll check on it this evening and give you the answer tomorrow." or "I don't have the figures you are asking about; does anyone in the group have them?"

How to Handle Side Conversations

Do not cause embarrassment to the participants. The best tack is to talk with persistently disruptive people during a break. If you feel you need to do something during the meeting, do it gently, for example, you might try:

Option 1. If only two people are engaged in a side conversation, you can glance at them, or if that doesn't help, walk toward them (without changing your own

behavior--continue making your points or facilitating the discussion); once you get their attention they will usually stop talking on their own.

Option 2. If two or more side conversations start up, you can refer the group as a whole to the ground rules (assuming you have a germane one), or if no ground rule looks appropriate, you can say something like:

"We need to have just one conversation at a time!"

If the group does not have a ground rule you can use to reduce side conversations, for example one addressing side conversations or one on the importance of listening, you might suggest that the group add one. If your relationship with the group is a close one, this situation can sometimes be handled with humor.

How to Handle Non-Relevant Comments

Sometimes a participant makes a comment that does not appear to be on topic, or that introduces a side track you'd rather not have the group pursue. If that happens, wait for the point to be made, acknowledge it, write it on the easel chart if you are recording other ideas, integrate it if possible, and restate the intended subject of the discussion before you ask for the next comment from the group.

How to Handle a Person Who Makes Too Many Comments

If one participant seems to speak up too often for others to have a chance to talk, look around for others who want to talk and call on them for a while. If needed, give the too-talkative participant a special job that will give them another way to contribute to the session. For example, you can ask a participant to make a brief presentation on an area of his or her special experience with the subject, or ask him or her to assist you by recording others' comments on the easel chart.

Extracting Key Points from a Group Discussion

For participants to get the most from group discussions, they need a chance to sort out the *key* points from the various thoughts that may be brought out. A quick way to do that, and not over-control the discussion or interrupt its flow, is to summarize key points from time to time and at the end of the discussion use either of the following techniques.

Option 1: Get participants to identify key points. Ask the participants to summarize what points stand out to them from the discussion by posing such questions as:

"What key points have emerged so far in this discussion?"
"What are ideas you will take away from this discussion?"
"What should we conclude from this discussion?"

Option 2: Identify key points yourself. You may wish to suggest additional summary points to those made by participants, or at times, summarize the discussion yourself to ensure that certain points are highlighted. Be sure when you do that you restate the key points *as the participants stated them*. Refer back to the easel charts for the right language if you have recorded discussion points. It is important not to mischaracterize participants' comments. Check with the group to be sure you have captured their main ideas accurately and completely.

Using Brainstorming as a Form of Group Discussion

Brainstorming is a tool used to gather information or generate ideas. In a brainstorming session, participants offer as many ideas about a particular issue as they can think of, as quickly as they can. What distinguishes brainstorming from other group discussions is there is no give and take, ideas are put out and *not* actually discussed, just listed. Because ideas are not challenged, brainstorming promotes openness and creativity. Because ideas are not discussed, it allows a group to generate many thoughts in a very short time. Facilitators use brainstorming for a number of purposes, including:

- To elicit participants' views on a subject about to be dealt with in greater depth, and thus build their interest in the discussion topic, for example: *"What are the main problems associated with transition planning?"*
- To define a problem which is more appropriately defined by participants than by the facilitator, for example: *"What does the report suggest about how traditional career-tech programs are viewed by the public?"*
- To stimulate new or creative thinking, for example, *"What are some ways to respond to this problem that have never been considered or tried before?"*
- To get participants to consider an issue from a new point of view, for example, *"How would this issue look to you if you were all working in general education instead of working in special education?"*

- To get participants involved in a topic.
- To enable participants to contribute a great deal to the meeting with a very small investment of time.

The main roles for the facilitator in a brainstorming session are to get it started, to document ideas, and to enforce the ground rules. Otherwise, there is very little direct involvement of the facilitator during brainstorming.

How to Get Brainstorming Started

Explain the process to participants before you start. To ensure that the brainstorming stays on track, start with a brief explanation of the process, a clear question to be responded to, and a few ground rules, for example:

"Let's set some ground rules for brainstorming:
Think of as many ideas as you can.
No debate, discussion, or evaluation of ideas.
All ideas have value, however unusual they might seem."

How to Get Many Diverse Ideas

Encourage participants to toss out ideas spontaneously; ask them not to edit their thoughts. Reassure them that all ideas are welcomed; none is too insignificant or too unusual to bring up. Sometimes very substantial or practical ideas emerge from seemingly trivial or unrealistic ideas.

Ask for and encourage participants to offer a lot of ideas. When people are free to give their imaginations a wide range, useful ideas eventually result. Quantity often breeds quality. Restate ideas as they come forward and continually encourage many ideas.

How to Get Ideas Fast

Do not allow evaluation, debate, or discussion of any ideas brought up. If people judge, challenge, or even expand on ideas, two things can happen: (a) participants may become reluctant to speak spontaneously, or (b) the development of ideas will end and a discussion will begin. All commentary should be ruled out so the process can move quickly and remain true brainstorming.

How to Record Ideas

Write participants' thoughts on an easel chart or other agreed upon media. It is important not to interpret or change people's ideas; this might cause a meaning to be lost or discourage further participation by inadvertently giving people the impression their ideas are not valued. Review the recorded ideas quickly for the group if brainstorming slows down; this helps to generate new ideas.

How to Manage the Time for a Brainstorming Session

Set a specific time limit of no more than five minutes or set an approximate time limit, for example, a few minutes. Tell participants when the brainstorming starts and finishes. Stop the group when the time is reached or, if an exact time has not been set, stop when ideas start to come more slowly. If participants aren't finished when the time limit has been reached, extend the brainstorming for one minute at a time as long as ideas continue to come in quick succession.

Section 4: Facilitating Smaller Groups Within a Larger Group or Facilitating Multiple Groups

Sometimes the work of a meeting can be best accomplished by the group working as a whole. Other times, it is useful to break the larger group into smaller groups so that:

- Several issues can be worked on concurrently.
- Complex issues can be discussed in greater depth.
- People who are less comfortable bringing up points in a large group have a more comfortable forum in which to express their views.

When using small group discussions in meetings, keep in mind that the ideal size of a small group is from four to eight participants. This size is big enough to generate diverse ideas and yet small enough to enable all participants to be actively engaged in the discussion.

Creating Small Groups

Whenever you create small groups which require participants to change locations in the meeting room or into break out rooms, be sure that each group understands where it is to convene. If small groups will work within the room, indicate the area in the room where each group should convene. If small groups will be leaving the room to work, write the groups and their locations on an easel chart so you know where each group will be in case you need to talk to them during the discussion period.

Facilitating Multiple Groups

Facilitators are often assigned to work with two or more small groups. This will create a scenario where it becomes critical to manage your valuable time and attention among groups, for example:

- Share content resources among teams with similar needs.
- Work with one team individually while the content resource is helping the other.

- Combine like tasks to include all teams:
  - Introductions
  - Ground rules
  - Content session report outs

Be flexible regarding individual team needs. Teams can come to the table at various stages of the transition planning process. You may have one “new” team attending the institute for the first time, starting a new team planning tool, while another team may have come to the table with the experience of past institutes.

Section 5: Using Easel Charts

Easel charts are an important tool in facilitation. First, visual presentation of discussion points increases participants' comprehension and retention of the information that is presented or developed in a meeting. Second, each time the facilitator writes a participants' idea on an easel chart, he or she shows respect for that idea. This has the effect of encouraging participants to put more ideas forward. Third, easel charts transform the individual comments of participants into a group product; once a set of ideas is recorded on easel charts; the ideas belong to the group. Participants are generally more willing to deal objectively with ideas that have been listed visually they are with ideas at the moment individuals put them forth. Last, easel charts create a record of the group's work which is valuable for preparing minutes of key outcomes of the meeting after it is over.

Easel charts are used in two ways during team meetings. The first use is to help *give* information to participants, and second to help *collect* information from them. Facilitators can use easel charts to assist in presenting the purpose, objectives, etc. at the opening of the meeting and to gather the comments of the participants throughout the meeting. Facilitators can personalize their easel charts and develop a system that will be most conducive to their individual style of facilitating and to their groups needs.

General easel charts used with the NTACT model include, but are not limited to:

- Welcome
- Introductions
- Agenda
- Objectives or Purpose
- Ground Rules
- Ideas
- Parking Lot
- Definition of Consensus
- What Worked
- What Didn't Work

Preparing in Advance to Use Easel Charts

Typically, you will be given the materials necessary for creating easel charts during facilitator preparation. These generally include an easel, easel chart pad, markers, and tape. It is then the facilitator's responsibility to create their individualized easel charts. Depending on time and/or artistic constraints, easel charts can look very different from one facilitator to the next.

Using Easel Charts to Give Information

Easel charts can be a valuable presentation aid when facilitators present information to participants. Unlike other visual aids, easel charts are uniquely well-suited to the group process and an informal interaction style. First, the facilitator can easily face the participants and even walk around the room while presenting information. Second, the facilitator can write on the prepared easel charts to highlight key points or make points more dynamically.

Preparing To Use Easel Charts for Presenting

The easel charts you plan to present from should be prepared in advance of the team meetings. If you write the easel charts as you present, your back will be to the meeting participants and your presentation will be slowed down significantly since writing takes longer than talking. Easel charts prepared in advance may be left in, or taped into a easel chart tablet for transporting to the meeting room. Al-

ternatively, they may be removed from the tablet, rolled up, and either wrapped with an extra sheet of paper or put into a mailing tube for protection.

Arranging Information on the Easel Charts Page

Write big enough on the easel chart for everyone in the room to see (1-1/2 inch high letters usually work well); practice with the markers you plan to use so that you are comfortable with them and can write clearly and evenly on the page. Leave lots of white space on the pages. Put only four or five lines of print or only one or two images on a sheet. If the page is too crowded, it will be difficult for people to simultaneously follow what you say and read the information.

Reminding Yourself of Key Points

If you have a number of specific points you want to make regarding an item on the easel chart, or if you have a particular example you want to remember to use, write lightly in pencil on the easel chart near the item to prompt yourself. If you do this just right, you will be able to read your reminders as you stand near the easel chart, but the participants will not even notice them!

Using Easel Chart Markers

Use varied color markers to set off points and keep participants' attention. For words and illustrations use markers that are dark enough to be easily read from the farthest seat in the room: black or dark shades of green, blue, brown, or purple work well. To highlight points and make the easel charts more visually appealing use underlining, arrows, bullets, etc. on your easel charts. For these purposes you can use lighter and brighter colors, for example, red, yellow, orange, or pink.

Using Easel Charts to Gather Information

When facilitators write participants' comments on easel charts, several purposes are served. First, participants feel their points are appreciated. Second, ideas on easel charts can be used later in the meeting to prioritize points, track the flow of a discussion, or summarize key points. Third, the easel charts are a record of the discussion that can be kept for use in follow up to the team meeting, for example, developing minutes.

Capturing Participants' Comments on Easel Charts

The most important guidelines using easel charts to gather information from participants are be legible, be fast, and be accurate. Write big and with dark-colored markers. To help you write fast, don't worry about how your writing looks, and don't try to capture every word, just record *key* words. Importantly, be sure it's the participants' own words, you record, don't edit! Unlike easel charts you use to present information, easel charts you make as participants raise ideas need not have a lot of white space; you can fill each page with writing.

Posting Easel Charts

If you expect to refer to participants' comments during or after a discussion, post easel chart pages on a wall where they are visible to all participants. If there are a lot of easel charts generated, the walls can be "purged" periodically to avoid a chaotic visual environment for participants. Before the discussion starts, tear masking tape into strips to use in posting easel charts so you can hang the easel charts quickly.

Section 6: How to Help a Group Reach Consensus

Consensus decision-making is the heart of what makes groups more effective than individuals. Its special value is seen in the *quality* of decisions reached and the acceptance of and relative *ease of implementation* of decisions.

Principles of Consensus Decision Making

While the process of reaching consensus varies depending on the complexity of the issue, the composition and size of the group, a few general principles apply to the consensus-forming process.

Consensus reaching takes time. Group members need time to discuss an issue thoroughly, work out their differences, and find areas of common agreement.

Consensus requires a commitment to decide by consensus. Consensus decision-making is difficult if all members of a group are working in good faith toward agreement; it is impossible if one or some members of the group are not committed to the consensus process. Some groups are skilled at consensus reaching, for example, most mature teams have learned how to reach consensus with little difficulty in most situations. However, when the group is inexperienced with consensus decision-making, or the composition or history of the group alerts you to likely difficulty in reaching consensus, you may want to consider conducting an exercise to illustrate beyond question the value of consensus before the actual decision-making process begins.

Each element of the consensus reaching process must be facilitated with great care. From defining consensus, to agreeing on ground rules for consensus-reaching, to laying out the decision to be made and the decision-making process, each element of the consensus process must be given attention to improve the prospect of a successful decision. Where the group is small, collaborative and experienced with consensus-reaching, the consensus process may be reviewed quickly as a refresher. But where the group is large, adversarial, or inexperienced with consensus, the up-front preparation for the decision-making is critical.

Defining a Consensus Decision

It is important to have a *written* definition of consensus so that all members of the group understand the task in the same way. A good, workable definition of consensus is:

> *"A decision in which everyone participates and with which everyone can live and support."*

When reviewing the definition, it is helpful to reinforce the points that *everyone* participates, and that everyone must be able to *live with* and *support* the decision for it to qualify as a consensus.

In defining consensus decision-making, it helps to distinguish it from other forms of decision-making. Explain to the group that what consensus is *not* includes:

Voting. In voting, participation in discussion may be cut short, affecting the quality of the decision, and all members may not support the outcome.

Trading off. "You can have your idea included if you include one of mine". Trading off is efficient, but people don't generally support an idea that was included only as part of a bartering process.

Steamrolling. Arguing long enough to wear others down and have your idea prevail works, but discussion is suppressed and people almost certainly don't support an outcome achieved this way.

Withholding. It may help keep the peace, but when participants do not speak up, their ideas do not get a hearing, thus full participation of all doesn't occur.

You may also want to remind the group that consensus is not:

Perfect agreement. A consensus decision represents the common ground in the group's thinking; it is what each member of the group could live with and support that is not the same as perfect agreement.

Easy or fast. Consensus is difficult and takes time, but is worth the effort for important decisions because it ensures both quality *and* support of the decision.

Facilitating Consensus-Reaching

Consensus decision-making involves the following steps:

Define consensus and explain the consensus reaching process. Be sure that everyone in the group is operating with the same understanding of consensus. Write the definition of what consensus is and what it is not on an easel chart. Explain the process to be used, for example, lay out the steps described below, and refer participants to the ground rules relevant to consensus reaching. If no such ground rules were established at the beginning of the meeting, suggest some ground rules that will help consensus work, for example:

> *"Express your experience, opinions and logic openly"*
> *"Be open to others' experience, opinions, and logic"*
> *"Use `I' statements vs. `You' statements to express differences"*
> *"Express differences in terms of `concerns' and `interests"*
> *"Actively seek agreement--look for common ground"*
> *"When we have agreement, we will stop! (No revisiting a consensus decision unless the whole group decides to)"*

Agree on the issue to be decided. With the help of the group, write the decision task on an easel chart and adjust the wording as needed until everyone understands and agrees on the decision to be made, for example:

> *"Decision: How the group will approach the task of engaging agency providers in policy analysis and change. 'Agency providers' include rehabilitation service providers, state education agencies (including career-tech, general, and special education), mental health providers, family organizations, and other transition-related service providers at the state level. For the purpose of this decision, we are not considering Federal agencies or national labor organizations."*

Explore the issue. Facilitate an open discussion of the issue to be decided. Participants may comment on such aspects of the issue and the decision as: previous experience with the issue, problems constraining decision options, or information pertaining to the issue. This discussion may be lightly structured with open-ended questions from the facilitator, but should be free-ranging enough to get each participant's information, concerns, and insights before the group. Sometimes it is

helpful to ask the group members *not* to respond to others observations, but simply to make whatever points they want to in support of their point of view.

Develop guiding principles for the decision. As the group discusses the issue, points may be raised affecting the decision that seems to have general support in the group. If you hear such points, you may begin an easel chart on guiding principles. Or, you may wait until the discussion is finished, that is, when the key points seem to have been explored and comments from the participants are waning, to suggest that the group identify guiding principles for the decision, for example:

> *"Our design effort must involve no new travel or other significant costs."*
> *"All structural options should be considered, however radical a change they may represent from past ways of doing things."*
> *"All decisions of the design team will be communicated openly with all stakeholders."*

Solicit a proposal. Ask participants if anyone would like to make a proposal that integrates key points raised in the discussion and conforms with the guiding principles. Write the proposal on an easel chart so everyone can consider it exactly as it was proposed. You may yourself be able to make a proposal (based *entirely* on what participants have said during the discussion and the development of guiding principles), but it is usually best for the proposal to come from one or more of the participants. You may wish to take a preliminary poll of the group at this point to see how close they may be to consensus.

Refine the proposal. Ask participants to raise any concerns or ideas they may have about any aspect of the proposal. Explain to participants that the goal of this step is to make adaptations to the proposal so that all participants can support it.

Ask for a show of consensus. It is important in consensus reaching that each participant makes an affirmative statement or gesture showing his or her agreement with the decision. It is *not* adequate to informally check for agreement, for example by saying something like, *"Does everyone agree...we'll take no response as implied approval of the proposal."* Each person must make a personal commitment to the consensus decision. Some groups use a poll of the group — each participant stating his or her concurrence. Others use a show of thumbs up or thumbs down. It

is useful to provide participants with three options: (1) agree, *"I support the decision as written,"*, (2) disagree, *"I do not support the decision as written"*, or (3) agree with reservations, *"I can live with the decision as written"*. Thumbs sideways indicates the latter when the thumbs-method is being used to ascertain consensus.

If the step of refining the proposal has been handled thoroughly by the facilitator and by the group members, consensus is often achievable on the first request for a show of sentiment. However, if one or more participants has continuing reservations and do not support the proposal as written, request further refinements to the proposal, then ask for a show of consensus again.

Section 7: Managing Conflict in Groups

Conflict is inevitable when people work in groups to develop, explore, expand, and make decisions about subjects that matter to them. It is not only a natural human behavior, but in its positive form (differing, as opposed to arguing) it is also an important part of the creative process. Without the freedom to differ, groups may find themselves limited to only the most conventional, accepted kinds of thinking and problem solving. Furthermore, conflict is essential to critical thinking. Groups in which members do not effectively express their differences can fall into *group think*, a mode of group behavior in which ideas, even ideas which are not well thought through, may prevail despite the individual group members' ability to know the ideas are not useful, or worse, actually harmful to the group's goals.

Strategies for Managing Conflict

Regardless of the source of the conflict, strategies can be employed with groups which will resolve conflicts constructively in almost all instances. They include the following approaches:

Acknowledge conflicts as they emerge. If differences of a cognitive nature arise within a discussion or while working on a task, recognize them openly at the time they occur, before frustration has a chance to grow and create an emotional situation.

Use ground rules. Written, posted ground rules can help group members manage their own dinosaur behavior. The first point of return when the group experiences difficulties, whether of an individual or group nature, is the ground rules. It's a good idea for one of the ground rules to make it o.k. to differ and for another to call for all ideas to be treated with respect. A review of the ground rules may help group members get back into control when emotional behavior arises. If you know in advance that a subject for group discussion or an assignment within the group is likely to prompt emotional reactions, it is useful to discuss that fact ahead of time, and how to avoid emotional conflict before it happens.

Have group members explain and listen to conflicting views. When different points of view cannot be readily reconciled, it is helpful for (a) a proponent of each point of view simply and objectively state the point, while (b) others are asked to listen and *vice versa*. Remind the speakers to use *neutral* language in their statements. Often a clear restatement will help the group see that the views are not mutually exclusive and can be accommodated into the group's discussion or decision.

Look for common ground or compromise. If differences are not resolved once restated, the individuals or the group then look for commonalities, opportunities for merging different ideas, or ideas for a compromise.

Identify alternatives. If differences cannot be accommodated or a compromise cannot be reached by the participants, try to come up with an alternative idea — one that all can agree on which is neither of the contested ideas.

Review options. If an alternative cannot be identified, then review the options available to the group. Should neither idea be pursued or considered? Should both? Any other alternatives?

Postpone the issue. Sometimes it is useful to allow a cooling off period and postpone dealing with a difficult issue until later in the meeting or until another time. Often a combination of the chance to have positive experiences in the

group on other subjects and the passage of time make it easier to deal with a problem area later on.

Help individuals resolve conflict. If conflict between individuals is affecting the group's ability to do its work, you can try to help the people who are in conflict by gently asking them to work out their differences:

- Express concerns in terms of the group's need to do its work.
- Ask the individuals for ideas to resolve the problem; have them meet in a sidebar (a meeting outside of the meeting) to work it out, alone or with one other person.
- Offer alternatives that do not force a loss of face.
- Ask the individuals to meet with you or with a volunteer from the group in a mediator capacity outside of the meeting to resolve the conflict.

If your strategies have not solved the problem, consult with the institute staff or other facilitators for ideas to address the problem. In these conversations, be sure to use an objective approach and language so as not to fuel the fire.

Section 8: Facilitating Teambuilding

Understanding Team Formation

As a facilitator, you need a sound understanding of group dynamics in order to be of real help when working with teams. Teams have an especially challenging task in the early stages of their development. Five stages of development have been identified.

Stage 1: Forming

The forming process occurs when members of the team meet one another and begin exploring their roles in the team, their relationship with one another as team members, and ideas about how the team will operate. Even if the team members already know each other, if they are just beginning to work in *this* team, the form-

ing stage still occurs. This stage is generally characterized by uncertainty: members' tentative sharing of information and ideas, polite exploration of options, and careful scrutiny of other members of the team.

Stage 2: Storming

Storming begins when members of the team begin to understand their differences and encounter divergent ideas about their task, their roles, and the processes by which they will do their work. This stage is generally characterized by disharmony: competition of individuals, ideas, and approaches; conflict among members about differences; frustration about the lack of cohesion; sectionalizing of the team into differing camps, and threat of the group breaking down.

Stage 3: Norming

Norming occurs when members of the team begin to recognize a common interest in the team and its task, develop common goals for the team, clarify roles of individuals within the team, and develop strategies for working together smoothly. This stage is generally characterized by optimism: relationships in the team deepen, tensions ease, members' concerns are resolved, and the team's task and process are clarified and the formation of a team is underway.

Stage 4: Performing

Performing emerges when members of the team work productively to achieve their goals and carry out their work. This stage is generally characterized by productivity: a sense of progress and achievement on the part of the team develops, bonds are formed between members, and enthusiasm and creativity for the team's work are high.

Stage 5: Adjourning

Adjourning then occurs when members of temporarily-established teams, having completed their task, prepare to disband. This stage is generally characterized by reluctance to part: team members review their experiences together, evaluate

their accomplishments, and often arrange to keep in touch. For standing teams, especially if they are small, this phase occurs when a member leaves the team.

Helping a Team through the Forming Stage

Several strategies are available to the facilitator to help a team during the *Forming* stage, including the following.

Ensuring team members really get to know one another. Provide a process for in-depth introductions if team members don't know one another. If they do know each other, but have not worked in this team before, offer a process by which they can begin sharing their values about the work at hand, for example:

> *"As you introduce yourselves, please explain the reason or reasons why you signed up for this team."*
>
> *"As you introduce yourselves, please describe what you would like to see come out of this team experience."*
>
> *"After you have introduced yourselves, please develop a joint statement — a few sentences — about what you will be able to accomplish as a team that might not have been accomplished or accomplished as well if you were doing this work as individuals."*

Creating feelings of inclusion. Use non-judgmental, supportive language and behavior, for example:

- Acknowledge and reinforce different thinking and working styles in positive way vs. expecting all team members to adopt a particular, narrow set of beliefs, or practices.
- Respond to challenges in a receptive, non-defensive manner, establishing an open dialogue with all members of the team vs. demeaning or closing off discussion of concerns expressed by some members.
- Support each person in the team, especially when outlying views are expressed or special needs or problems emerge vs. allowing any individuals to become isolated in the team.

Helping a Team through the Storming Stage

Strategies to help a team during the *Storming* stage include the following.

Dealing with differences openly. Bring differences out into the open; use the ground rules to encourage different points of view being expressed, listened to, and respected.

Handling issues affecting the team, *in the team*. Help the team explore differences in team members' background, so differences in point of view can be understood in context. Involve all team members in resolving issues, for example, when issues about the team's work are raised by one or a few people, encourage the whole team to help define, analyze, and resolve the issues. Encourage the team to work out its issues together, and not to bring up complaints or disagreements outside of the team.

Helping a Team through the Norming Stage

You can expedite the team's progress toward and through the *Norming* stage with these approaches:

Get the team to agree explicitly on what it is trying to achieve. Have team members develop a consensus statement of the team's vision, mission, or common purpose early on in their work together. At the start of each meeting or each new task, have team members discuss what the objectives are for that specific situation.

Help the team develop common values. For example, lead a discussion on the importance of the project at hand, possible positive outgrowths of your efforts, or what would make this project or effort the biggest possible success. The team may also benefit from a discussion of what is a team, so that they can establish common values about themselves as a team.

Section 9: Evaluating Team Meetings

Because the best source of information about a meeting's effectiveness is the participants themselves, facilitators can get a good reading about how the meeting is going from daily participant feedback. This feedback will also be reported at the conclusion of each group meeting at a report out session for all facilitators. Such feedback should be:

- Actively requested.
- Systematically collected—(a) time set aside in the meeting for participants to respond, (b) in writing, to (c) a clear set of questions.
- Easy for participants to provide and for facilitators to analyze.
- Responded to and used by the facilitator.

Questions to capture information on what worked well each day and what needs to change can be as simple as:

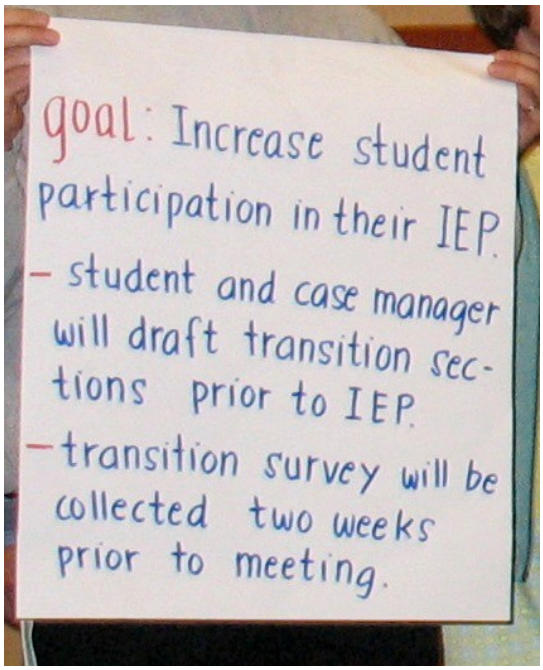
"What did you particularly appreciate about today?"

"What would you like to see done or done differently tomorrow?"

The NTACT institute model includes a facilitator debrief at the completion of the day, during which the feedback is presented and discussed. Issues or problems that can be addressed on site are solved, such as adding water stations or adjusting temperature controls. Long-term issues are addressed in future planning when feasible, such as increasing additional team time on the agenda.

At the next day's first large group meeting, the feedback is presented and actions taken described. This process illustrates that participants' feedback is taken seri-

ously. At the final team meeting, the facilitator also encourages team members to complete the institute evaluation.



Section 10: Tips from Veterans to New Facilitators

Because some of the best tips come from seasoned facilitators themselves, this section provides new facilitators with a list of tips on how to facilitate teams.

"Most Effective Tips"

- If you team seems stuck in the process, encourage them to consider bringing in one of the NTACT staff members to help them work through it. Sometimes a bit of clarification from [institute staff] can be helpful when it's connected with their plans and goals.
- Know your audience, some states may all know each other well, and you just need to follow their lead, others may need some activities to get them sharing and participating.

- I like having the start of each state meeting having each person share one "ah-ha" from the breakouts they attended and what they learned, then start the work on the goals/plan.
- I have learned I am most effective when I follow this motto - I am there to connect, not correct. Every state/group has positive attributes. Every state/group could be doing something better. My goal is to connect them with effective, meaningful information so they can make a plan to increase the success in their state.
- Neutral servant - We all come to the table with expertise, however, as a facilitator, it is imperative we keep our bias and perspective in check. What we know and can share is important, but first we should be actively listening to the needs of our team and providing resources/support/encouragement/kick in the rear in alignment with their need(s).
- Listen to what the teams are saying - and what they aren't saying. Sometimes the quietest team member has great insight into the direction the team can head to be more effective.
- Be flexible with your expectations in terms of where you want the team to be.
- Often they [the team] will come in with a very specific goal in mind that doesn't totally align with NTACT. It's good to ask for input on this from the NTACT team.
- You have to be able to read your team and not push your agenda too strongly. For example, don't feel the need to do chart paper if that's not the general feel with your team.
- Be flexible! Pay attention to your group to assess their needs and if necessary, flex!
- At the beginning of each team session, review the work to be completed according to the agenda. In addition, I like to set goals of how much progress we plan to make on the plan.
- Work to build a connection with each and every one of your team members. Spend time with them during breaks, lunches, sessions, and other times.
- During the first team meeting, map out a "rough" agenda for each time you will be getting together.
- Address "elephant in the room" issues up front to prevent frustration and conflict from building up.
- Take notice of interpersonal dynamics and work to ensure everyone has a chance to contribute.

- Take it seriously--participate in pre-institute prep calls and make a notebook with all your materials...and if you have it electronically, set up a google doc folder so you can pull it up from wherever!

Preparing for Capacity Building Institute

- Review the facilitator manual!
- Have flip charts pre-written - so your room is ready for the participants
- Read the manual.
- Attend previous conferences and seek out information on transition - so you can share out information when needed.
- I try to limit my time with people close to the team I'll be working with in order to lessen the potential for bias.
- Be prepared by reviewing agendas, any state data, etc. And be prepared to be flexible and patient, as teams may take a long time to "form", have heated "storming" sessions, and change their direction multiple times before developing a cohesive strategy to meet their needs.
- Nothing really, just go into it with an open mind.
- I review the facilitator's manual and attend the webinars.
- Another tip: Set a professional goal for yourself to achieve before the institute.
- Review the facilitators guide.
- Find out what sort of relationship your team has with the tool and how they want to use it over the course of the institute. If you can, talk to your state's team leader before the institute (see above). Become familiar with the tool.
- Read everything you can get your hands on -- beyond what is sent from the institute...do some websurfing on the subject, attendees, if you know who will be there...the more background you have the better!