

Facilitator Guidelines: A Quick Reference on Active Facilitation Techniques

Prepared for State Alignment Planning Team Facilitators



National Symposium: Policy and Practice to Ensure High Quality Teachers for Children and Youth with Disabilities

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THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR IN THE "ACTIVE FACILITATION APPROACH"

The Facilitator shares responsibility with the group for getting its task accomplished. The roles and responsibilities of the facilitator can be summarized as:

NEUTRAL SERVANT OF THE GROUP—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 group 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 group 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 considering and proposing not only:

GROUP PROCESS, for example, ways to manage participant interactions or optional decision making methods, but also

TASK PROCESS, for example, breaking the group into sub-groups to get several tasks done concurrently, proposing a planning step be inserted before the group launches into a discussion of an issue, or eliciting commitments to follow up assignments by individual members of the group.

WHAT THE FACILITATOR DOES IN THE "ACTIVE FACILITATION APPROACH"

The facilitator has an extensive role in planning for, facilitating, and following up on a work session. What the facilitator does includes:

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.

DEVELOP AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISSUES IMPACTING THE MEETING--Through such means as review of related materials, pre-meetings with a planning team, or advanced surveys of meeting participants, the facilitator becomes knowledgeable about issues affecting the group and the meeting. In the group meetings, the facilitator often presents what he or she has learned to check for accuracy and to be sure the right issues are before the group. Especially important is the role of 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:

- 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)

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.

AFTER EACH OF THE STATE ALIGNMENT PLANNING TEAM WORK SESSIONS

- Process the State Alignment Planning Team work sessions with other facilitators during the facilitator feedback sessions, held immediately following each Team work session.
- Use the following resources during facilitator feedback sessions to clarify, stimulate, and resolve issues that have arisen during previous work sessions:
 - National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education (NCPSE) Staff/consultants
 - Regional Resource Center (RRC) Staff
 - National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) Staff
- Share successful “process” tips with other facilitators who may be having difficulty moving their work groups toward the desired goals.
- Participate in an informal evaluation of the facilitation process at the luncheon for Facilitators, to be held after the Symposium closing session.