ecta Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center

National Center for Pyramid Model INNOVATIONS

Effective Teaming Strategies

Working with others is critical to our implementation, scale up and sustainability approach. Therefore, we have studied and provided technical assistance to our state and local leadership teams on strategies that are effective as well as efficient.

Have you ever participated in a meeting or team effort that didn't seem worth your time and/or was not productive? Most of us have. Below is a list of strategies and resources that will lead to team work, collaboration and meetings that are productive, efficient and that keep your team moving toward the goal of high fidelity implementation of evidence-based practices. The **State Benchmarks of Quality** will help to keep your team on track and document progress.

It's critical for the facilitator of the team to foster adherence to the agenda's, BoQ items and process, suggested timelines and milestone activities while also being respectful, ensuring shared decision making and maintaining a sense of humor. These dispositions are critical for both the productivity of the team and each meeting as well as contributing to the positive relationships, collaboration and well-being of the team.

1. **Form a team.**

   Whether at the state leadership team level or the local/program leadership team level, implementation requires a team of people. Why? Because two (or 10) heads are better than one! You will make better decisions, there may be opportunities to share resources and making decisions with all the stakeholders represented will lead to better understanding and buy-in of the initiative and practices.

   The team should be no more than 15 people otherwise it is too big to build relationships and to make efficient decisions. Select key stakeholder and/or their representative.

   The team should plan to meet for at least 2-3 years and to meet monthly for at least 3 hours in the first year. In the subsequent years, the team may not need to meet as often.

2. **Use collaborative decision making.**

   No one person is making the decisions. The team is. This will lead to better decisions and buy-in or support of the new way of doing things. Share facilitation of each meeting. Use decision making activities that help to get everyone's voice and good ideas such as round robin, small group discussion, sticky wall brainstorming. Use consensus not voting to reach decisions.

3. **Write a vision statement.**

   In the first or second meeting, the team should develop a written vision statement. This will set the direction and goal of the work. It should be short (two or three sentences) and clear so that all team members as well as others know exactly what the goal of the work is.

4. **Adopt team ground rules/norms.**

   In the first or second meeting, the team adopts a set of meeting ground rules or norms to ensure that meetings run smoothly and are productive and efficient. Examples of critical logistics and ground rules from previous teams are:

   Sample Team Meeting Ground Rules

   - **No substitutes:** members attend rather than sending representatives to ensure consistency, efficiency (no need to constantly rehash past decisions) and build relationships and trust.
   - **Decision making:** members support decisions made in their absence; use consensus if possible. If consensus cannot be achieved, use: "*modified consensus*", i.e., what can be changed so that we can live with this decision and publicly support it?
   - **Meeting facilitation:** meetings must be facilitated by an objective person who plans decision making activities to make sure the meeting is productive, meets its objectives and everyone feels like they were heard and valued. This does not require an outside expert. Meeting facilitation can be done by one member or members can rotate facilitation.
   - **Share meeting responsibilities:** members volunteer to facilitate, serve as timekeeper (to ensure the agenda is followed and is kept to time allotments), note taker, snack provider, etc.
   - **Set meeting time and place:** for at least 6 months in advance.
   - **New Member Orientation**: Members provide an orientation session along with "Buddies" for each new member.
   - **Interactions**: Respect all opinions (all ideas have value), share decision making, share the floor, each person should have the opportunity to talk before another speaks twice, honor confidentiality.
   - **Stakeholder Input**: use of ad hoc participants, workgroups, focus groups, survey, interviews, special projects, etc. as needed to ensure broad representation and input.
   - **Start and end on time**.
   - **Stay outcome-focused:** Use "Parking Lot" when appropriate to deal with subjects not on the agenda.
   - **If meetings have to be canceled due to weather:** Chair(s) or staff will send an email by 7:00 a.m. the day of the meeting.
   - **Materials for meetings:** to be sent out one week prior, or copies will be brought (double sided).
   - **Celebrate big and small accomplishments**

5. **Use a meeting agenda, meeting summary and meeting evaluation format that facilitates a well-organized meeting.**

   Meeting agendas should be written and send ahead of time. They should include the time and place for the meeting, meeting roles (facilitator, snack provider, timekeeper, etc.), the objectives for that meeting, agenda items with time allotments. Meeting summaries should be short and essentially document decisions made. The summary could be an extension of the agenda form.

   Meeting evaluations ensure that team members consider it an important use of their time. A specific evaluation can be completed individually and summarized by the coordinator and sent out to the team after each meeting or a group discussion of what worked or what needs to be improved can be held after each meeting.

6. **Participating remotely.**

   While it is important to meet as often as possible face to face to build relationships, sometimes, team members need to participate at least occasionally remotely. It is strongly encouraged that the first 3 or 4 meetings be face to face to build relationships and to continue to meet face to face as often as possible. However, if some members need to meet remotely occasionally, here are some suggestions to ensure productivity and feelings of full participation: materials are sent ahead of time, audio and visual technology is working well, and the meeting facilitator checks in with remote members frequently to ensure their perspectives are shared.

7. **Develop an action plan.**

   In the second or third meeting, the team identifies challenges to the vision (why aren't we there yet?). Based on these challenges, the team then identifies strategies for addressing the challenges. The Benchmarks of Quality can be used in this process. Once these strategies are identified, a written action plan is developed. The Benchmarks of Quality and the written action plan should drive every meeting and document progress.

Resources

State Leadership Team Meeting Planning and Evaluation Package

http://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/sig/6_1_team_meeting_package.pdf

Templates: Team Meeting Agenda, Team Meeting Role Sign-up Sheet, Team Action Planning Form, Team Meeting Evaluation

The contents of this document were developed under cooperative agreements from the U.S. Department of Education, #H326P120002, #H326P17001, and #H326B170003, from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. ECTA Center Project Officer, Julia Martin Eile and NCPMI Project Officer, Jennifer Tschantz.

IDEAs that Work
Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education

This document can be found at:
http://ectacenter.org/sig

ecta Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center

National Center for Pyramid Model INNOVATIONS