Getting Started: The Basics of IEP Facilitation

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Warm up

Turn to the person next to you. Decide who will be speaker A and who will be speaker B.

• **Speaker A:** Talk about the worst IEP meeting you’ve ever attended. What aspects of the meeting do you believe contributed to its dysfunction?

• **Speaker B:** Talk about the most successful IEP team meeting you’ve attended. What were the components that you believe contributed to this meeting’s success?
Characteristics of Bad Meetings

- Starts and ends late
- People don’t know each other
- People do not feel safe or respected
- One or two dominate the meeting
- Nobody really listens
- The meeting has no clear purpose
- The team makes poor use of its time
- The seating is uncomfortable
- People have hidden agendas
- Lots of interruptions

- Roles are unclear
- People are unprepared
- Nothing is accomplished
- The room is too hot or too cold
- No snacks or drinks are available
- A sense of team spirit is missing
- People are scattered or doing other things
- People are present only in body

A Guide to Collaboration for IEP Teams, Nicholas R.M. Martin

Training Outcomes

- When to facilitate an IEP meeting
- Role of the meeting facilitator
- Logistical components of a facilitated IEP
- Facilitator’s Toolkit
When to Facilitate an IEP

When to Facilitate an IEP Meeting

- The relationship between the parent(s) and the local education agency is strained
- Lack of a perceived “level playing field”
- When the IEP team has not been able to reach consensus
- Other ideas...
When to Facilitate an IEP Meeting

- May build and improve relationships.
- Models effective communication and listening.
- Clarifies points of agreement and disagreement.
- Provides opportunities for conflict resolution.
- Encourages new options to address unresolved problems.
- Is typically less stressful than formal proceedings.
- Supports follow through and follow-up.

Benefits of Facilitating an IEP Meeting

facilitated IEP a Consideration

High Content

Facilitated IEP appropriate

High Emotion

Low Content

Facilitated IEP a Consideration

Low Emotion
Roles of the Meeting Facilitator

Facilitate - Definition

fac·il·i·tate
fa'silə,tāt/
verb
verb: facilitate; 3rd person present: facilitates; past tense: facilitated; past participle: facilitated; gerund or present participle: facilitating
make (an action or process) easy or easier.
Types of IEP Meeting Facilitation

**External Facilitator**
- Facilitation expert
- Not an IEP team member
- Impartial
- Does not participate in content-related discussions
- Assists the group in making process-related discussions

**Internal Facilitator**
- Skilled in facilitation, but not an expert
- Member of either the school district or a parent advocacy group, but not a member of the IEP team
- Impartial to the specific situation but not to the global impact
- Doesn't participated in content-related discussions unless asked
- Assists the group in making process-related decisions

**Facilitative Leader**
- Skilled in facilitation, but not an expert
- Member of the IEP team
- Not impartial
- Participates in content-related discussions and decisions
- Assists the group in making process-related decisions

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Role of the Meeting Facilitator

1. Ensure a welcoming and positive environment (host)
2. Establish/enforce process
3. Keep the team focused
4. Commit to neutrality
5. Be an example
6. Encourage collaboration and participation
7. Promote positive communication
8. Explore interests
9. Clarify concerns
10. Clarify agreements
11. Address unproductive communication
12. Bring meaningful closure
Role of the Meeting Facilitator

Sometimes, people just need to tell their story.

Stories matter...
- Share Information
- Gather Information (Listen)
- Get to the root/Find the needle in the haystack

“Maybe stories are just data with a soul.” - Brené Brown

Role of the Meeting Facilitator

“Put your energies into guiding rather than ruling. The more unobtrusive you lead, the more people will grow and learn to use their powers wisely. Make your aim as a leader to be unnoticed and eventually unneeded!”

- Quoted in My Tao by R.W. Russell
Logistical Components of the Facilitated IEP

Components of a Facilitated IEP

- Preparation
- Room Environment
- Establish Ground Rules
- Establish Agenda
- Visual Aids (Parking Lot)
Preparation

Timing
- Make sure all attendees understand the meeting start/end time and can attend the entire meeting.
- If a member cannot attend the entire meeting ensure that parents give permission.
- Make sure the meeting notice was sent to all attendees specifying the correct date, time, location, and participants.
- Ensure you have the room for the amount of time needed.
- Send reminders

Preparation

Prepare Materials
- Name tags
- Food/water
- Agenda
- Posters/visuals and pens
- Kleenex

Have copies of all documents available for EACH member:
- Old IEP
- Draft IEP
- Evaluation reports
- Work samples
- Attendance records
- Report cards/progress reports
- Behavior data
Preparation

Make contact with IEP team members

• Explain your role as the facilitator
• Consult with all team members on potential or known issues
• Identify individual goals for the meeting
• Ensure that all participants understand their role in the meeting

Preparation

Assign preparation responsibilities

Who will:

• Draft Meeting Agenda
• Provide documents prior to meeting for review
• Draft proposed academic and behavioral goals
• Request student work samples for each goal
• Take notes
• Write the IEP
Agenda

• Encourages pre-planning
• Demonstrates intentionality in planning the meeting
• Provides a roadmap for the meeting
• Let’s participants know what’s coming next
• Assists in keeping the team focused and on-track
• Allows the early opportunity for the facilitator to build agreement
• Provides a third point

Sample Agenda

• Welcome/Start Up
• Introductions
• Purpose/Expected Outcomes
• Time Parameters
• Agenda Overview
• Ground Rules
• Child/Parent Rights
• Present Levels of Performance
• New Goals/Objectives Based on Current Needs
• Supports, Services, Accommodations, State Testing
• Placement & Consideration of LRE
• Consent
Room Environment

- Inclusive room arrangement
- Provide name tags and adult-sized chairs
- Keep the room temperature comfortable
- Make sure food, water, Kleenex, notepads, and pens are available
- Ensure that visuals/posters are easily viewed from all seats in the room and good quality poster pens are available
- Provide documents to all participants

Establish Ground Rules

Protect groups from unproductive behavior.

In order for ground rules to be effective, the group needs to agree upon:

- Each ground rule
- Who will enforce the ground rules
- The consequences for failing to follow a ground rule.
- The facilitator is empowered to enforce the ground rules. The facilitator may also decide to empower the group to state when they believe the ground rules are not being followed.
- Very skilled facilitators may decide not to use ground rules.
Establish Ground Rules

Sample Ground Rules:

- One person may talk at a time
- Be courteous and respectful
- Silence cell phones
- Commit full attention to the process
- Follow the agenda
- Remain child focused
- Be an active listener and participant
- Work together to reach consensus

Visual Aids

Use visual aids

- Post visual aids so they can clearly be seen by all team members.
- Confirm that individual members’ agreements, concerns, and comments are documented accurately.
- Use visual aids as a third point to shifting the cognitive and emotional energy from team members to the data.
- Rely upon visual aids for group memory.
Visual Aids

Parking Lot:

• For issues that arise that require follow up
• For issues that are not IEP related
• To acknowledge issues that are keeping a team member from moving forward

Visual Aids

• Agenda
• Work Samples
• Ground rules
• The projected IEP
• Competing pathways charts
• Student strengths/needs
• Placement options (+ and -)
The Facilitator’s Toolkit

You can’t change how other people act in a conflict, and often you can’t change your situation.

But you can change what you do.
Facilitator’s Toolkit

- Diplomacy
- Listening
- Identifying Positions and Interests
- Questioning
- Facilitative behaviors
- Building Agreement

Diplomacy

- Be supportive, understanding, and encouraging
- Provide a climate of safety
- Look for underlying feelings
- Respect feelings and thoughts at all times
- Encourage clarification of thoughts
- Use the softest possible touch and the least necessary force
- Remember that truth without kindness can have very sharp edges.

10% of conflict is due to difference in opinion and 90% is due to delivery & tone of voice

(Nicholas Martin A Guide to Collaboration for IEP Teams)
Benefits of Listening

Listening...

• Helps us understand. We can’t resolve conflicts unless we understand all perspectives.
• Helps us connect with the other person. Builds rapport and trust.
• Makes it more likely that the other person will listen to us.

(William Ury, Getting To Yes)

Components of Effective Listening

Focus on the other person

• Effective listening occurs when a listener hears and understands a speaker’s essential thoughts and feelings.

Listen with care and empathy

• Try to understand the other person’s perspective and put yourself in his/her shoes.

Demonstrate understanding

• Tell the other person what you heard and get confirmation that you “got it.”
Eliminate Power Imbalance

• Consider seating and room arrangement
• Ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate
• Discuss the role of each attendee
• Make sure that everyone has all key reports and information, including drafts, in advance of the meeting
• Protect team members from personal attacks

Positions and Interests

• Try to understand not only what they want but also what they need, desire, and fear.
• To find out what they need, you have to “go below the surface.”
Positions and Interests

Positions and Interests - Activity
Why Focus on Interests?

- Positions polarize; interests integrate.
- Behind every position is at least one interest.
- Interests hold the seeds of solution.
- Positions are limited and limiting.
- Interests are more numerous than positions, and can be satisfied in many ways.

Use Questions...

- To assist you/the team in understanding another point of view.
- To clarify something that is not understood.
- To elicit more information or to uncover their interests.
Using Questions

Using questions to inquire:

• “What else is important about that?”
• “Could you be specific?”
• “What needs to be different?”
• “What is the most important component of this for you?”
• “How does this tie into the current situation?”
• “In what ways is that important?”
• “Could any of these ideas be combined?”
• “How might this look different for you?”
• “When did this happen?”
• “What ideas seem most workable to you?”

Using Questions

Using questions to clarify:

• “What would it take for you to...?”
• “Do you mean...?”
• “Are you referring to...?”
• “Are you saying that...?”
• “Can you tell me a little more so I can make certain I understand?”
• “Can you state that in a different way?”
• “Can you reframe that in different words for us?”
• “How does what you are saying relate to the issue we are discussing?”
• “Can you give us an example?”
Using Questions

Using questions to uncover interests:

- “What will it achieve for you if we...?”
- “As I understand your interests, they are...”
- “Have I misunderstood your interest? What am I missing?”
- “What are your key concerns?”
- “Help me understand why this is really important to you...”
- “Can you tell me more about that?”
- “Could you walk me through this step-by-step?”

Facilitative Behaviors
Facilitative Behaviors for Specific Circumstances

When you have a team member who won’t participate...

• Ask open ended questions
• After each section, ask for input

Facilitative Behaviors for Specific Circumstances

When you have a highly verbal team member...

• Use the Parking Lot to write down and acknowledge ideas
• Bring in other opinions
• Focus back to the agenda
Facilitative Behaviors for Specific Circumstances

When there are high emotions...

- Allow people the opportunity to vent respectfully
- Acknowledge what is happening
- Use summarizing techniques
- Focus back to the data
- Take a break

Facilitative Behaviors for Specific Circumstances

When people are disagreeing...

- Ask questions
- Uncover interests
- Focus back to the data
- Encourage response from other team members
Facilitative Behaviors for Specific Circumstances

When the team is getting off track...

• Remind each other of the ground rules: “We agreed earlier that we would stay on-task. How are we doing with that so far?”

• Share the observation: “We seems to be spending a lot of time on this and we have a lot to get through on our agenda.”

• Refocus: “What you’re saying is important, but I’m aware of our time commitments. I wonder if you could share the key points.”

Building Agreement

1. Present a proposal
2. Check for understanding
3. Check for agreement

Citation: Facilitation Speech by Shelley Walchak and Beth Filar Williams
Impasse

- Acknowledge the impasse
- Ask for suggestions on moving past the impasse
- Review progress/agreements
- Propose a “trial run”
- Discuss contingencies (if/then)
- Discuss benefits of reaching agreement
- When all else fails, propose another meeting

Ending the Meeting

- Review agreements
- Review parking lot issues – make sure you have documented who will follow up on those issues where appropriate and a time frame for follow-up.
- If IEP has not been completed:
  - establish a day/time to reconvene
  - Review what still needs to be accomplished
- Ask if anyone has anything additional to say
- Thank everyone for their participation and good work
References


Thank you!