How to Organize and Implement Collaborative Staff Meetings

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SLIDE 1: Welcome

Welcome to Collaborative for Children’s Online Child Care Provider Training Program, hosted by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. “How to Organize and Implement Collaborative Staff Meetings” is a 2-hour course designed to help you learn how to conduct high-quality staff meetings.

SLIDE 2: Learning Objectives

Let’s begin by going over the learning objectives for this training. By the time you complete this course, you will have learned a three-step process for planning and implementing collaborative staff meetings.

The steps that you will learn include how to design collaborative staff meetings by:

- Goal setting,
- Putting collaboration into practice, and
- Conducting post meeting actions.

SLIDE 3: The Purpose of Staff Meetings

Leaders of early childhood organizations have many important responsibilities. One of these includes continually sharing new information related to the day-to-day operation of the organization with the staff. Most teacher-leaders conduct staff meetings as a way to share new information. The main purpose of staff meetings is to allow the staff opportunities to explore knowledge, skills, challenges, and actions necessary for improving their organization.

SLIDE 4: Many People Dislike Meetings

Staff meetings are part of virtually every early childhood organization. Yet, when was the last time you heard someone say “Oh boy, it’s time for another staff meeting!” It is no surprise that many people dislike staff meetings. Many people think of staff meetings like dentist appointments. They dislike going to them, but know that in the long they’ll be better off by having attended (Notter, 2006, p. 1).

SLIDE 5: Traditional Meetings
What is it about staff meetings that so many people dislike? Some argue that it is not that people dislike learning new information via staff meetings, but rather they dislike how staff meetings are typically run. Typical staff meetings, which for the purpose of this training we call Traditional Meetings, are passive gatherings. For example, when you ask the average teacher - “What comes to mind when you hear the term staff meeting?” - they are likely to picture a gathering where everyone is expected to sit in silence for long periods of time while one person presents, what seems to be, an endless series of information (Notter, 2010).

Traditional Meetings are similar to lectures. They involve one-way communication, where a “Sage on the Stage” controls all or most of the speaking and staff leave the meeting having to figure out what to do with new information on their own. As with lectures, often, most of what is learned in Traditional Meetings is quickly forgotten. Furthermore, many researchers argue that Traditional Meetings do not result in long-term improvements in teacher practices (Alber & Nelson, 2010). In short, Traditional Meetings often leave staff feeling unheard, unsupported and unmotivated to change their practices.

SLIDE 6: Effective Leadership Necessitates Strong Relationships

Another equally important, yet sometimes unintentionally overlooked, teacher-leader responsibility involves the need to continually strengthen staff relationships (Carter & Curtis, 2010). Strong professional relationships between staff members and their leaders build trust. Many researchers suggest that trust is the single most important factor upon which all effective organizations are built. Therefore, arguably, every teacher-leader’s action, including how they run their staff meetings, should be aimed, entirely, or at least in part, at building trust.

SLIDE 7: How Can We Build Trust Through Staff Meetings?

How can teacher-leaders build trust through their staff meetings? Contemporary research states that trust is built during staff meetings when staff members have many opportunities to collaborate (Alber & Nelson, 2010).

SLIDE 8: What Does ‘Collaboration’ Mean?

Collaboration is defined as…

- The act of working together with one or more people in order to achieve something.
- Something jointly created by individuals working together.
- To willingly assist one another for the purpose of creating mutually agreed upon actions.

(Online Marriam-Webster Dictionary, 2012)

SLIDE 9: What Are ‘Collaborative Meetings’?
We call staff meetings that are designed to build trust - Collaborative Meetings. Collaborative Meetings are planned for all staff members to be actively involved in sharing the role of speaker and listener while learning new organizational information. This is not to say that ALL information shared within a collaborative meeting needs to be discussed collaboratively. The rule of thumb is that during collaborative meetings at least half of the meeting time is devoted to active staff collaboration that includes multiple opportunities for all participants:

- to reflect upon, and share, their thoughts on at least a few of the key meeting topics,
- to listen and consider alternative opinions shared by coworkers, and
- to ask and answer questions.

Collaborative meetings focus on people not paper! In other words, they focus on the roles that people can play towards contributing to problem solving and finding solutions for addressing their organization’s needs and goals (Carter & Curtis, 2010).

All teacher-leaders can benefit from conducting collaborative meetings because collaborative meetings are much more likely to result in the staff’s higher retention of new information. These kinds of meetings are also more likely to result in encouraging staff to accept and to put forth the necessary effort for changing their practices.

**SLIDE 10: All Teacher Leaders’ Decisions Must Be Based on Standards**

All teacher-leaders’ decisions must be based on standards. In the state of Texas, we have clearly defined standards that recommend best practices for teacher-leaders. These standards are titled: The Texas Core Knowledge and Skills in Early Care and Education for Trainers. Several of these standards focus on the principles of collaboration. For example, Section III of these standards mentions the need for all early childhood trainers to understand:

- the principles of group management,
- their role as a facilitator of learning, and
- the dynamics of creating group interaction as a teaching tool.

Group management, facilitation, and creating group interactions are all core components of collaboration. After this training, if you choose, you can locate and learn more about these standards by going to the website on your screen.

Before advancing to the next slide, you may want to write down the Universal Record Locator website down on a piece of paper or save it as a book mark on your computer.

**SLIDE 11: Planning**

The first step in learning how to conduct collaborative staff meetings is to plan. Planning involves reflecting upon, prioritzing, and organizing staff meeting actions prior to the onset of the meeting. Foremost, all collaborative staff meetings must be planned to provide staff with multiple opportunities to be seen and heard as they participate in the process of helping meet their organization’s goals.
“One of the deeper longings of the human soul is the longing to be seen [and heard]” (O’Donohue, 1997, p. 25). Trust cannot occur unless this longing is met!

SLIDE 12: STEP 1 - Goal Set

Clarifying what we want each of our staff meetings to accomplish, or in other words clearly establishing the goals of each of our staff meetings, is an important planning component.

Effective goal setting practices include:

- Engaging in evidence-based reflections,
- Beginning with the end in mind, and
- Creating effective agendas.

We will explore each of these practices over the next few slides.

SLIDE 13: Not All Meeting Topics Merit Collaboration

Collaborative staff discussions take time. Therefore, teacher-leaders must decide and prioritize which kinds of information shared within a staff meeting are best suited for collaborative discussions and which are not. For example, let’s pretend that teacher-leader ‘A’ decides that the primary purpose for sharing one source of new information within a staff meeting is to inform the staff of the exact days and times when they can schedule their parent-teacher meetings. In this case, there is no reason to discuss this kind of information collaboratively. There is no reason because no amount of staff discussion would likely change the outcome of this information which is simply to inform the staff of a non-negotiable, compliance type, directive. Some researchers even argue that most kinds of non-negotiable organizational information that is shared within staff meetings could instead be shared with a staff memo or newsletter (Carter & Curtis, 2010).

On the other hand, during this same staff meeting teacher-leader ‘A’ may also decide that one of her goals for sharing another source of new information is to support the staff in arriving at a common understanding of how to improve a specific child care service. In this case, the teacher-leader may deliberately choose not to firmly establish the exact kinds of improvements to practices that the staff might begin putting into place because he or she wants the staff’s input into determining the improvements. In this instance, this source of information WOULD warrant collaborative discussions. This kind of staff meeting information IS suited for collaborative staff discussions because this information does not concern a non-negotiable compliance matter but rather an organizational need that the teacher-leader has decided could have many possible solutions that the staff’s collaboration could help determine.

SLIDE 14: Engage in Evidence-based Reflections
Planning for collaborative staff discussions can be enhanced when a teacher-leader engages in evidence based reflection. Evidence-based reflection involves the teacher-leader first reflecting upon and writing down a variety of possible organizational services that might benefit from change and therefore might need to be included as topics within one or more collaborative staff meeting throughout the year. This reflection process can be done annually, semiannual, or more frequently. After a preliminary list of possible meeting topics have been created, a review of available data, such as observational data of the staff’s current level of services, should be analyzed to confirm or rule out each proposed topic. Data can assist teacher-leaders in deciding which organizational topics to include within a collaborative staff meeting or not (Cheslock, n.d.). A teacher-leader may have a hunch that their organization could benefit from a change to a certain practice, but if there is no data to support their hunch, then in most instances, this topic should be ruled out as a collaborative staff meeting topic.

The most powerful form of data that a teacher-leader has at his or her disposal is observational data. Observational data of numerous staff member’s service provisions, that has been collected across time, for example, over a period of one or two weeks or months, can reveal trends in both the strengths and possible needed improvements in organizational practices. Moreover, data can serve to assist a staff in understanding the purpose for discussing a meeting topic. When staff are presented with data-informed evidence regarding the need for improvement in a certain area, they are much more likely to accept change than when they perceive the root of change as being solely the opinion, perception, wishes, preferences, or whims of the person in charge.

**SLIDE 15: Communicating Data**

Teacher-leaders should present data at the onset of a collaborative staff meeting as the rationale for discussing the meeting’s topics (School Improvement in Maryland, 2012). It is recommended that all data shared during these meetings exclude individuals’ names.

For example: A teacher-leader plans on conducting a collaborative staff meeting that includes discussing needed improvements to the time it takes the staff to transition students from one activity to the next. In the effort to use data as the basis for explaining why the staff has been gathered to discuss this topic, the leader could make the following announcement at the onset of the staff meeting:

“Staff, today one of our meeting goals is to discuss our use of transition time. Data collected on this topic during the last few weeks shows that over 90% of us are using songs and/or rhymes to signal our students to transition. As we learned in previous staff meetings, this is a very effective research-informed way to help our children transition. However, the data also shows that on average 75% of us are spending 10 or more minutes transitioning our children. Research says that effective transitions for the age of children that we care for should take no longer than 3 minutes. So, today we will spend some time reflecting upon and sharing our thoughts on ways by which we can improve our transition time.”

As you heard in this example, data was presented as the reason for why the staff was expected to discuss the meeting topic of transition time. In addition, during the discussion of data, no staff
member’s name was mentioned. Moreover, the data was first used to communicate to the staff that what they are already doing is going well and then, afterwards, data was also used to communicate the rationale for needed changes.

**Increasing Collaboration Tip: Create a “Leadership Team”!**

It is important to note that the decisions regarding which topics of discussion to include in collaborative staff meetings and the communication of data during these meetings does not always need to be the sole responsibility of the teacher-leader. Rather, these decisions can become a shared responsibility of a Leadership Team. Leadership Teams consist of representatives from across the staff. For example, a Leadership Team may consist of: the teacher-leader, along with a teacher who teaches each of the age groups - infants, toddlers, preschoolers and afterschoolers, etc. Once you form a Leadership Team, this team can be charged with collecting, analyzing and/or reporting data during collaborative staff meetings, but they can also be charged with planning some, or most of the other decisions necessary for conducting these meetings.

**SLIDE 16: Activity 1**

Take a moment to complete this activity which will be presented over the next four slides. First, read the scenario and then answer the question that follows. Record your answers on a piece of paper. When you finish, check your response against the answers provided on the next slide.

Scenario 1: On Monday morning, Mrs. Smith, a teacher-leader, realizes that there is a staff meeting scheduled in a half an hour. She has made no preparation plans but has a hunch that the staff could benefit from being informed that they need to improve how they meet and greet parents each day. So, she quickly decides that the main meeting topic should be to inform the staff that they need to improve upon how they meet and greet parents. Since the meeting time is limited, she does not plan to provide any suggestions regarding how to meet and greet parents appropriately but feels it reasonable that the staff should be able to figure out how to make these improvements on their own.

1. Did Mrs. Smith make good use of data for designing her meeting?

2. Based on the above scenario, does Mrs. Smith’s meeting topic warrant staff collaboration? Yes or No and Why?

**SLIDE 17: Answers**

1. The answer is likely “No” because:
   a. The teacher leader used no evidence in the form of data to support her hunch.

2. The answer is likely “No” because:
a. Her plan is to simply tell the staff what they are not doing well, and
b. She expects that the staff should figure out what to do about her concern on their own.

**SLIDE 18: Activity 1 continued**

Follow the same procedures for answering the question on this slide.

Scenario 2: Mr. Jones, a teacher-leader, has data to confirm that his staff needs to improve upon their classroom management routines. So, he schedules a staff meeting aimed at sharing data to let the staff know what they are doing well in terms of their classroom management routines and to engage in discussions so that everyone has an opportunity to talk about possible improvements in this area.

1. Did Mr. Jones make good use of data for designing his meeting?
2. Based on the above scenario, does Mr. Jones’ meeting topic warrant staff collaboration? Yes or No and Why?

**SLIDE 19: Answers**

1. The answer is likely “Yes” because:
   a. He used data to confirm his hunch, and
   b. His plan is to use data to inform the staff of what they are already doing well in terms of classroom management.

2. The answer is likely “Yes” because:
   a. The main purpose of the meeting topic is to support the staff to engage in discussions so that everyone has an opportunity to talk about possible improvements in this area.

**SLIDE 20: Begin with the end in mind**

Planning collaborative staff meetings demands clarifying the kinds of changes to child care services that you would like to see as a result of the staff meeting. Think about it, if a teacher-leader does not clarify the specific changes to staff practices that should result from a staff meeting, then how can the leader evaluate if the meeting has had any impact on the organization? Beginning with the end in mind is vital for evaluating a staff meeting’s impact on organizational improvements!

Teacher-leaders can clarify their desired changes to staff practices by using Backward Planning Design. Backward Planning Design involves reflecting on the general desired outcomes of each major meeting topic (Isecke, 2011). In other words, it involves beginning with the end in mind! Keep in mind, however, that the final decision as to the specific kinds of practice changes that
will be expected as a result of a collaborative staff meeting should be developed with the staff’s input. Therefore, teacher-leaders’ desired changes to practices should be reflected upon before the collaborative staff meeting but then *clarified* and *confirmed* during the meeting.

During a collaborative staff meeting, the process of clarifying and confirming changes to practices demands group discussion and voting. After a meeting topic has been collaboratively discussed, summaries of the proposed changes to practice should be written down and announced. Immediately afterwards, the staff must be given the opportunity to vote on the content of the written summary before moving onto a new meeting topic. If the majority of the staff does not agree with the summary, then rewrite the summary and/or ask for additional input until you can arrive at a majority vote. Always endeavor to summarize and create your final expected changes to practice by using positive language, such as “*We will greet every parent each morning, by shaking their hand, saying their name, and asking them how their morning is going*” and not in the negative, such as, “*Do not forget to say hello to a parent!*” Once the majority of the staff agrees with a discussion summary, announce that from here on out the contents of the summary statement will become the new standard for the staff’s expected changes to practice on the topic discussed.

**SLIDE 21: Activity 2**

Take a moment to complete this activity. First, read the scenario and then answer the question that follows. Record your answers onto a piece of paper. When you finish, you can check your response against the answers provided on the next slide.

Scenario: Mr. Davidson, a teacher-leader, had a hunch that one of the needed staff improvements was “Morning Routine” practices. His review of morning practices and the data he collected confirmed his hunch. So, he planned a collaborative staff meeting to provide the staff with opportunities to talk about the kinds of needed changes to this practice. During the staff meeting he realized that the staff’s opinions on this topic varied greatly. So, since 100% of the staff members did not agree on any one change, he thanked them and then ended the meeting. Unfortunately, a month after the meeting, he saw no changes to this practice.

Based on this scenario, what kinds of additional effective planning practices could Mr. Davidson have used for ensuring that the staff meeting resulted in a more favorable outcome?

**SLIDE 22: Answers**

Possible answers include:

- Mr. Davidson could have used Backward Planning Design to first reflect upon the changes to staff practices that he intended the meeting to impact, or

- Mr. Davidson could have summarized and allowed the staff to vote on specific changes to Morning Routine practices that were discussed during the meeting.
SLIDE 23: Creating Effective Agendas

Once meeting topics have been reflected upon and confirmed, the next step in the planning process of collaborative meetings is to design an effective meeting agenda. Agendas should be distributed to staff one or more days before the meeting to give the staff an opportunity to come to the meeting prepared to discuss various meeting information.

Creating an effective agenda is an important part of a collaborative staff meeting. Agendas can assist in keeping staff discussions focused and on track; they also help to make effective use of the staff’s time. At minimum a meeting agenda should clearly outline all of the major meeting discussion topics and of course the date, time and location of the meeting. However, agendas can also include other important information, such as:

1. The discussion leader for each topic,
2. The maximum time allotment for discussing each topic,
3. Reflective questions for each major discussion point, and
4. A motivational quote to set the tone for the meeting

A copy of every staff meeting agenda should be kept in a paper and/or electronic storage system (for example a binder or computer Word file folder). This storage system can be referred to throughout the year as another source of data. Agendas of past staff meetings can assist leaders in determining the frequency with which, over the course of a year, certain topics were or were not discussed (Bloom, 2000).

Complicated organizational needs and goals, such as, “How can an early childhood organization increase its community helper support?” likely deserve discussions over several staff meetings. Therefore, one way to evaluate if sufficient time has been devoted throughout the year to discuss your organization’s complex needs and goals is to count the number of times that these topics have been included within your organization’s agendas across the year. On the other hand, simple topics, such as, how to create more effective routines for storing materials at the end of the school day would, most likely, deserve discussions during only one or two meetings. Therefore, if meeting topics are being carefully planned and prioritized, we could expect that simple organizational topics should only appear in one or two agendas across the year.

Increasing Collaboration Tip: Create an “Agenda Planning Committee”!

Keep in mind that staff meeting agendas do not always need to be designed solely by the teacher-leader. Rather, the responsibility for the design of your organization’s agendas can be assigned to an “Agenda Planning Committee.” An Agenda Planning Committee can consist of representatives from across the staff, with the teacher-leader’s guidance, and can be charged with designing, writing, distributing, storing, and/or analyzing the organization’s agendas.

SLIDE 24: Agenda Making Tips

1. Use “Inclusive Language”!
Discussion points within agendas for collaborative staff meeting should use Inclusive Language, such as the words: “us”, “our”, “we” and, “joint”; instead of Exclusive Language such as the words: “my” and “you”.

2. Use “Action Words”!

Action words include words such as, “discuss”, “analyze”, “select” instead of words that communicate passive learning such as “listen to” or “become aware of”

For example, well-defined discussion points with an agenda for a collaborative staff meeting might indicate:

Meeting Topics:

- We will discuss possible solutions for how to improve on our ability to attract more customers.
- We will develop our organization’s mission statement based on our shared input.

This is in contrast to *Traditional Meeting* Agenda Discussion Points, which might include the following Meeting Topics:

- To learn what you must do differently so that this organization can attract more customers, and
- To learn about my vision for this center’s future.

**SLIDE 25: Activity 3**

Take a moment to complete this activity. First, read the agenda items and then answer the question that follows. Record your answers on a piece of paper. When you finish, you can check your responses against the answers provided on the next slide.

**Sunshine Day Care Center**

Meeting Agenda

Today you will learn about…

1. New State Regulations: How to clean the materials that your children play with
2. The mentors that I will be assigning to each of you, and
3. My solutions for how you can improve my center.

What suggestions would you make towards improving this agenda?

**SLIDE 26: Answers**
Possible answers:

- The meeting date, time and location should be added to this agenda.
- All of the agenda items should include inclusive items such as, “Today, we will…”
- Actions words should be included in all of the agenda items, such as “We will discuss New State Regulations, etc….”
- All of these agenda items seem to concern non-negotiable compliance type matters. Therefore, the teacher-leader should consider informing the staff of this new information via a memo unless the leader’s goal is to have the staff discuss solutions to these agenda items.

**SLIDE 27: STEP 1 - Goal Set Summary**

Let’s summarize what we just explored. Planning is fundamental to creating staff meetings aimed at building trust (Carter & Curtis, 2010). Planning involves goal setting. Practices that can enhance goal setting include:

- Engaging in evidence-based reflections by analyzing and communicating observational data as the basis for discussing collaborative meeting topics,
- Beginning with the end in mind by using a Backward Planning Design to determine changes to practice that what you would like to see as a result of the meeting, and
- Creating effective agendas by using Inclusive Language and Actions Words.

Collaboration Tips Summary:

Create:

- a Leadership Team, and
- an Agenda Planning Committee

**SLIDE 28: STEP 2 – Put Collaboration into Practice**

The next step in the process of making use of collaborative meetings is to plan and implement activities designed to support the staff in being able to effectively collaborate during staff meetings. As we have explored previously, collaborative staff meetings involve the open exchange of individual staff members’ perspectives on organizational topics. Unless staff meetings are designed to encourage open, active participation, trust cannot be built. However, it is important to understand that allowing the open exchange of ideas within a staff meeting is not without challenge.

**SLIDE 29: Creating Group Norms**
It is highly unlikely that every person within your staff will share a common viewpoint on any one meeting discussion point. Humans’ ideas, beliefs, and perspectives are not a one-size-fits-all matter. For this reason, it is imperative that all collaborative staff meetings include well defined behavioral expectations that the staff as a whole can agree. Behavioral staff meeting expectations are called Group Norms. Group norms are a set of mutually agreed upon guidelines or norms that detail how a staff is expected to speak and act during staff meetings (Postmes, Spears & Cihangir, 2001).

**SLIDE 30: How to Create Group Norms**

Group Norms are most effective when the staff has been given the opportunity to provide input into establishing the Norms. Therefore, if you have not already done so, it is recommended that in the near future, you should conduct a staff meeting for the primary purpose of establishing Group Norms.

An effective means for creating Group Norms includes first thinking about specific meeting features of your organization’s staff meetings that you believe warrant a Group Norm and then to think of reflection questions that you could ask to help the staff focus on these features. For example, you may conclude that the staff could benefit from Norms that state what to say and do when they disagree with a coworker’s opinion during a meeting. So, instead of coming up with your own Norm and informing the staff of your expectation, you should develop and ask reflection questions that are designed to support the staff in providing input towards developing a Group Norm that addresses this meeting feature. For example, during a staff meeting designed to establish Group Norms you might say:

“*Ok, the main purpose of today’s meeting is to establish Group Norms that we can use to make our meetings run more smoothly. Let’s start by thinking about a norm that we might be able to use so that all of us understand what to do during our staff meetings to be able to respectfully disagree with a coworker’s opinion. So, at this time, I want you to think about and then share your thoughts regarding what you think we should do during our meetings when we disagree with a staff member’s opinion.*”

Then, you should facilitate the sharing of thoughts that will follow this question and at the end of the sharing session you should summarize the staff’s comments into Group Norms that takes everyone’s, or most individuals’, comments into account. After writing and announcing the summarized Group Norms, immediately take a vote to make sure that the majority of the staff agrees with each Norm. If the majority of the staff does not agree with how you summarized everyone’s thoughts, then rewrite the Norm and/or ask for additional input. Summarize and create your final Group Norms by using positive language, such as “*We will respect everyone’s opinion*” and not in the negative, such as, “*Do not disrespect others.*” Once the majority of the staff agrees with a Norm, announce that from here on out this will become one of the organization’s collaborative staff meeting Group Norms.

**Increasing Collaboration Tip: Create a “Group Norms Committee!”**
An effective means for creating and monitoring group norms includes establishing a Group Norms Committee. A Group Norms Committee could be charged with conducting some, most, or the entire Group Norms staff meeting. Moreover, during all collaborative staff meetings, the monitoring of the staff’s use of the organization’s Group Norms could be assigned to this same committee. For example, at the start of each meeting, this committee can be charged with reviewing the Group Norms. During staff meetings, when a norm is not adhered to, one or more of these committee members could be charged with gently and appropriately reminding and redirecting the staff’s attention to adhere to the staff agreed upon Group Norm.

**SLIDE 31: Creating Group Norm Reflection Questions**

To create Group norm reflection questions, you and/or your Group Norms Committee may want to refer to the following sample Group Norms features. Keep in mind that effective reflection questions are designed to be open-ended and not closed-ended.

Open-ended questions are questions that are designed to result in a variety of different possible answers, or in other words, they cannot be answered with a simple “yes or no,” “agree or disagree.” For example, an appropriate open-ended reflection question to ask the staff when establishing Group Norms would be, “What do you think we should do during our meetings when we disagree with a staff member’s opinion?” This is an open-ended question because it was designed to result in a variety of different possible answers. Examples of closed-ended and therefore inappropriate questions to ask would be “Which of these two norms do you like better?” or, “Should we include ‘Be Respectful’ into our group norms?” These last two questions are examples of closed-ended questions because they are designed to result in a single possible answer (Carter & Curtis, 2010).

Examples of Group Norm Meeting Features…

**FEATURE: Meeting Time**

- We will begin our meetings on time

**FEATURE: Attendance**

- Everyone will attend our meetings

**FEATURE: Listening**

- We will listen attentively:
  - By refraining from side-bar conversations, and
  - By refraining from cell phone or email use.

**FEATURE: Speaking**

- We will use appropriate language, including:
  - “Thank you, Please, Excuse Me,” etc.
SLIDE 32: Activity 4

Take a moment to complete this activity. First, read the scenario and then answer the question that follows. Record your answers on a piece of paper. When you finish, you can check your response against the answers provided on the next slide.

Scenario: Mrs. Henry, a teacher-leader, wants to begin using collaborative meetings but feels that several of her staff members do not know how to behave appropriately. So, she makes a list of Norms and tells the staff that from here on out they must adhere to these Norms during all staff meetings.

Below are her Group Norms:

- Do not talk out of turn
- Do not text or read emails
- Do not be disrespectful
- Do not leave the meeting room unless you are given permission
- Etc….

Based on what we’ve explored about appropriate Group Norms, what improvements would you suggest to Mrs. Henry’s Group Norm actions?

SLIDE 33: Answers

Possible answers:

- Set up a staff meeting for the sole purpose of providing the staff with opportunities to reflect on and to share their thoughts on which Group Norms the organization should consider and ultimately adhere to.

- She should have reflected on and then asked open-ended reflection questions throughout the Group Norms meeting to help the staff think of possibly needed Group Norms

- All of the organizations group norms should be written using positive language.

SLIDE 34: Create Individual and Small Group Meeting Roles

An important component of collaborative staff meetings is active participation (Bloom, 2002). For collaboration to occur, staff meetings must be designed to include many different kinds of opportunities for both individuals and small groups of staff to actively contribute to the meeting. This can be accomplished by planning individual and/or small group meeting roles. These roles are aimed at offering individuals and small groups of staff with specific responsibilities to fulfill before, during and after a staff meeting.
We have already discussed a few meeting roles that can be offered to small groups of staff members who volunteer to assume these responsibilities and/or that can be directly assigned to staff members. These small groups can include a: Leadership Team; Agenda Planning Committee; or a Group Norms Committee. Ideally, all such small groups should be made up of representatives from across the staff. For example, these groups should include the teacher-leader and one teacher from each of the age groups for which the organization provides services. You can also include parent volunteers, and/or community helpers in these kinds of groups.

Here is a list of a few suggested meeting roles that a teacher-leader could assign to individual staff members for increasing collaboration and active participation during collaborative staff meetings. It is recommended that throughout the course of the year, all staff members have an opportunity to assume different roles to play. Therefore, this means that it is likely that at times a teacher-leader will allow individuals and small groups of staff to assume meeting roles based on their volunteerism, while at other times they will have to directly assign some of these roles to individuals or small groups of staff.

Individual Meeting Roles:

Title: **Time Keeper**

Role: Announces the meeting *Start* and *End* times. When appropriate, makes a “Five Minute Remaining” announcement to signal that the staff has five minutes to finish discussing a meeting topic. Announces the start and end times for each meeting activity.

Title: **Note Taker**

Role: Writes down group agreed upon actions for each meeting point. Writes down group discussed next steps for each agenda discussion point.

Title: **Materials Manager**

Role: Gathers, brings, and distributes all materials needed for conducting a staff meeting to the meeting site. During the meeting this person gathers any additional needed materials for small and individual group work. At meeting close this person stores all materials back in their proper place.

Title: **Discussion Point Manager**

Role: At the end of each meeting point discussion, this person summarizes to the entire staff each staff agreed upon meeting point.

Title: **Vote Counter**

Role: This person counts and announces all staff votes during the meeting as well as announces which topics received majority vote.
The leadership role that a teacher-leader must play during collaborative staff meetings is that of Facilitator. A Facilitator is defined as someone who:

- Helps to bring about an outcome by providing indirect assistance, guidance, or supervision,
- Keeps discussions moving and focused,
- During discussions is careful to remain open-minded, never putting forth their opinions as the most important consideration but rather encouraging the group to consider solutions based on everyone’s input, and
- Acts as a 'lubricant' by helping a team effectively communicate and/or problem solve.

As you may have already inferred from these definitions, facilitation requires both listening and speaking (Bloom, 2000).

When initially beginning collaborative teacher meetings and when discussing meeting topics that are based on clearly documented standards, for example clearly defined National Association for the Education of Young Children (or NAEYC) requirements or state regulations, then, most often, the teacher-leader should plan on playing a more highly involved facilitation role. A highly involved facilitation role means that the leader will share the dual role of listener and speaker by:

- Being present for the entire meeting,
- Directing up to half of the meeting’s discussion topics,
- Assuming all or many of the meeting roles, and
- Clearly stating that the outcome of each discussion point is based on adhering to a clearly defined standard.

In contrast, once the staff has had multiple opportunities to participate in collaborative staff meetings and when discussing organizational topics that are not based on clearly defined outcomes, then the teacher-leader should consider playing a less involved facilitation role. A less involved facilitation role means that the leader will share the dual role of listener and speaker, but they may:

- Not be present during all or some parts of the meeting and instead allow the Leadership Team to direct all or parts of the meeting discussions,
• Direct a few of the meeting discussion topics and allow staff volunteer or appointees to direct the rest of the discussions,
• Assume a few or none of the meeting roles and allow the staff to assume and carry out the responsibilities for these roles, and
• Share the role in summarizing staff agreed upon outcomes of each discussion.

There is no hard and fast rule as to the degree of the teacher-leader’s facilitation during collaborative staff meetings. However, in terms of building trust through staff meetings, the more actively the staff is involved in all aspects of the meeting, then the more likely they will be to take ownership of what was discussed in these meetings. In addition, teacher-leaders who play less active facilitation roles during at least some of their staff meetings, cause their staff meetings to become opportunities for the staff to assume leadership roles and therefore to become empowered in the process of their organization’s continued growth (Bloom, 2000).

SLIDE 37: Implementing Collaborative Meeting Activities

Now, let’s explore a few core staff meeting activities designed to foster collaboration:

1. Reflection

2. Shared Discussions. This includes:
   a. Organizational Strengths, and
   b. Organizational Needs.

SLIDE 38: Reflection

Some staff members are not comfortable sharing their opinions during staff meetings, especially if they have not had a chance to think about the meeting topics before arriving at the meeting. For these reasons, all collaborative staff meetings must provide staff members with opportunities to reflect on meeting topics before they are expected to openly share their thoughts out loud.

Encouraging all staff members to express their ideas on organizational topics necessitates opportunities for staff to first think about what they already know; want they want to know; and what they think they know about a meeting topic (Carter & Curtis, 2010). Reflection is defined as:

• The act of carefully thinking about what one already knows, wants to know, or thinks they know about a topic,

• The process of considering previous knowledge of a topic, and

• Careful consideration of many possible alternatives for how best to address a topic.
Including reflection opportunities within staff meetings benefits the staff by giving them opportunities to think before they speak. Reflection assists individuals with clarifying their thoughts on organizational topics and to recall their specific experiences that they are relying on to base their opinions on meeting topics. Reflection also communicates to the staff that it is important for professionals to think before they act.

**SLIDE 39: Sample Reflection Activities**

Here are some examples of reflection activities that can be incorporated into staff meeting to foster collaboration:

- **Small-Group Discussions**

  This is a reflection technique where the teacher-leader and/or the Leadership Team creates reflection questions in advance of the staff meeting to guide small group meeting discussions on one or more meeting topics. All reflective questions must be open-ended. Remember, open-ended questions are questions that can have more than one answer or in other words they cannot be answered with a simple yes or no, agree or disagree.

  Examples of small group reflective question stems include:

  - What am I most thankful for (about this meeting topic)?
  - How far have I come – and where do I need to go (regarding the meeting topic)?
  - What matters most to me (about the meeting topic)?
  - Who is most important to me (about this meeting topic)?
  - What do I consider to be my most important experiences (with regard to this meeting topic)?
  - What unique skills have I learned in the past (about the meeting topic)?, and
  - What are some of my biggest challenges (with putting this meeting topic into practice)?

- **Directed Readings**

  Directed readings for staff meetings often take the form of a short reading regarding something related to a meeting topic. To get staff thinking about the topic, a teacher-leader and/or the Leadership Team can request that everyone read the short reading and then take a few minutes to reflect on it and to respond to a few post-reading reflection questions that have been prepared before the meeting.

- **Written Response Summaries**

  This form of reflection activity can be used at any point during a collaborative staff meeting when the facilitator wants the staff to summarize important points into their own words. It’s a way of helping staff members to both recall and translate information according to their own unique understanding. For example, after the facilitator guides discussions on an important meeting topic, they may ask participants to take a few
moments to think about what was said and then to summarize their thinking into one or two sentences on a piece of paper. Alternatively, at the end of the staff’s input on a discussion topic, the staff, by working in small groups, can be asked to summarize what they understood was said into one or two sentences on a piece of chart paper.

- **Think-Pair-Share**

  This reflection activity involves asking a reflective question and then requesting that staff members team up and take turns responding to the question by telling their partner what they think and then to take turns listening to their partner’s response.

- **Responding to Quotes**

  This reflection activity involves showing the staff a quote and then asking them to think about how this quote relates to the meeting topic.

**SLIDE 40: Shared Discussion**

Shared discussion is the heart of a collaborative meeting. Encouraging shared discussions demands several factors:

1. **Time** must be allotted so that staff members have time during staff meetings to talk about one or more meeting topics.

2. **Group Norms** must have been established so that everyone feels comfortable sharing.

3. **Reflection activities** must be considered and chosen so that everyone has something to think and talk about during the meeting.

4. Perhaps most importantly, the meeting facilitator must model all of the necessary behavioral expectations involved in shared discussions including: actively listening to others’ thoughts, asking open-ended questions of others’ opinions to stimulate further discussion, and trying not to defend one person’s position or convince others of their view on things.

5. **Feedback** on staff’s opinions must be neutral and void of judgment, and

6. Someone must be charged with monitoring the quantity and quality of discussions and with summarizing group discussions.

**SLIDE 41: Shared Discussions of Organizational Strengths**

Collaborative meetings must be designed with a model that all meeting topics must be discussed in a positive tone (Newman & Grigg, 2004). Staff meetings that focus primarily on informing a staff of what they are not doing well are not likely to motivate most individuals into wanting to take the risk of openly sharing their thoughts on meeting topics. Worst of all, meeting topics that
are introduced in a negative manner unwittingly model for the staff that the manner in which to discuss meeting topics is by communicating everything that is wrong with the topic.

All discussion points that seek to explore needed organizational changes should first be discussed by talking about what the staff is already doing well in relation to the topic before introducing possible needed changes. People are much more willing to consider both positive and challenging aspects of their job, when they see that their leaders are willing to do the same.

A powerful way to model positive communication during collaborative staff meeting is to use staff observation data to communicate what the staff is already doing well regarding the topic of discussion before expecting the staff to discuss what changes regarding the topic remain to be accomplished. Another way to set a positive tone is to communicate anonymous comments from parents about positive aspects of the organization’s services that relate to the meeting topic.

Examples of how to Collaboratively Explore Organizational Strengths:

- At the onset of a discussion on a collaborative meeting topic, ask everyone to write down one or two specific practices that they routinely engage in that they consider to be positive ways of addressing the meeting topic. Then, summarize the staff’s comments on chart paper and title the chart – *Success in Action*!

- At the onset of a discussion on a collaborative meeting topic, use numeric data to announce what the staff as a whole is doing well in terms of the meeting topic or to highlight advances that the staff has made in comparison to previous months or years in terms of the topic of discussion.

- Ask the staff to think about a coworker that they feel exemplifies either dramatic growth or excellent application of the meeting topic. Then encourage staff to publically celebrate these coworkers by saying why they think this coworker deserves this recognition for their efforts on the meeting topic.

**SLIDE 42: Shared Exploration of Organizational Needs**

Perhaps the single most prominent feature that distinguishes collaborative staff meetings from traditional staff meetings is that collaborative staff meetings are aimed at supporting staff to be active contributors of solving the organization’s needs and goals. Therefore, shared exploration of organizational goals and needs should be a central part of every collaborative staff meeting (Bloom, 2000). A few guidelines towards supporting staff in contributing towards the exploration of organizational goals and needs include:

1. When possible, ensure to use research-based, or professional resources such as NAEYC’s recommendations to state the ultimate goals of meeting topics.

2. When applicable and appropriate, discuss challenges with implementing meeting topic
practices by first sharing your own past or present struggles with the practice before expecting others to discuss their own challenges.

3. **Adhere to the organization’s Group Norms** to allow and encourage differences in opinion when discussing how best to meet your organization’s needs and goals.

4. Appoint a person or persons, such as the teacher-leader or a Leadership Team member to summarize and tally the votes on the staff’s majority agreement on discussions of meeting topics aimed at clarifying organizational needs and goals.

5. After summarizing the staff’s discussion of an organizational need or goal, ask the staff to **vote on a summary of what will be done differently** after the meeting regarding the decision point.

**SLIDE 43: Putting Collaboration into Practice Summary**

Let’s summarize what we just explored. Effective collaboration during staff meetings can be accomplished through the use of a variety of key strategies, including: creating Group Norms, creating meeting roles for individuals and small groups, determining the teacher-leader’s degree of facilitation, and implementing meeting activities aimed at enhancing collaboration. All of these staff meeting strategies are aimed at supporting staff in sharing the role of making decisions for how best to overcome obstacles necessary for solving their organization’s needs and goals.

Now, let’s watch a video and listen in on what actual teacher-leaders have to say about their role as staff meeting directors. As you watch this video, I want you to try to answer the following questions:

- What can teacher-leaders do to encourage teachers to provide meaningful input?
- How much information do teachers need about a program’s administrative decisions?, and
- How often should teacher-leaders visit classrooms?

**Video clip**

**SLIDE 44: STEP 3 – Post Meeting Actions**

As you just saw in the video, effective leadership is highly dependent on planning (Bloom, 2000). Therefore, it is no surprise that the majority of the necessary decision actions needed for collaborative staff meeting must occur before and, to a somewhat lesser degree, during the meeting. Nonetheless, there are also a few key decisions and actions that must be made after conducting a collaborative meeting. Over the next few slides we will spend a few moments highlighting some of these key actions.

**SLIDE 45: Inspect What You Expect**
As we previously explored, a staff meeting’s impact can only be effectively determined if a teacher-leader and/or the Leadership Team has established clearly stated outcomes, or in other words clearly stated changes to staff’s practices prior to a collaborative meeting’s end. Establishing clearly stated outcomes allows a teacher-leader to inspect what they expect. Therefore, the most important post-meeting action is for the teacher-leader and/or the Leadership Team to conduct post meeting planned observations of the expected changes to practice that were agreed upon during the collaborative meeting (Bloom, 2000). The observed degree of the staff’s changes to their practices should then be compared against the intended outcomes of the staff meeting and against the pre-meeting observation data that was used to confirm the meeting topic.

SLIDE 46: Planning Future Collaborative Meetings

These data comparisons allow a teacher-leader and/or the Leadership Team to better plan future collaborative staff meeting. Data comparisons should be used to determine the degree of impact of a collaborative staff meeting topic and to prioritize which topics remain in need of future change and therefore discussion (Bloom, 2000). Moreover, these data comparisons should be shared with the staff during subsequent staff meetings as evidence of the successes and ongoing needs for their organization’s improvement.

SLIDE 47: Summary of Post Meeting Actions

As we have just explored, post-meeting actions are largely a matter of inspecting what we expect to plan for future collaborative meeting. Although these actions are brief in comparison to the other steps in the process of planning and implementing collaborative staff meeting they are nonetheless critical. The ultimate goal of adhering to the steps we just explored is to ensure that each of your staff meetings build upon previous meetings. This cycle will enable you to create staff learning opportunities that are grounded on building trust by empowering your staff to be active participants in the improvement of your organization.

SLIDE 48: Closing Slide

This concludes the information portion of this course. Click on the “Next Section” button at the bottom of this page to proceed to the Post-test. If you would like to review any of the previous sections, click on the desired title in the left menu bar.
References


15. The Washington Post (February, 6, 2005). Making Meetings Matter: Effective sessions have