Learning Circles:

An Introductory Manual

Western Workforce Initiative

Developed by:
Butler Institute for Families
University of Denver
Denver, CO

Author:
Charmaine Brittain, MSW, Ph.D.

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A Service of the Children's Bureau
Western Workforce
Colorado • North Dakota • Wyoming

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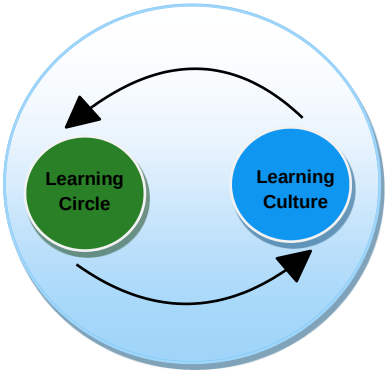
to Western Workforce Initiative

SECTION 1

Introduction to Western Workforce Initiative

Welcome to the Learning Circle Manual, a guide for Learning Circle facilitators. This manual will provide information on how to guide Learning Circles with your team.

Over the years, much discussion, training, and research has been devoted to the topic of meaningful change in child welfare. Too often, policies are handed down and agencies are reorganized in order to bring about change from the top down. The Learning Circle model represents a radical new approach that creates change at the team level that then moves outward to the rest of the agency. Learning Circles are about change that starts at the unit level and flows up. This approach is grounded in research and inspired by real world experience. The heart of the model is to develop a learning culture at the team level to improve practice and agency/team functioning. Teams will engage in a problem-solving process informed by multiple sources that results in action plans that address the issues most important to them. Learning Circle topics are chosen by the team, but a specific process guides the Learning Circle model. Instead of decisions being made at the "top" and then handed down to teams for implementation, Learning Circles identify their own issues, make decisions about how to address those issues, and then implement changes. Each team selects the "what," while this manual provides the "how" for engaging in Learning Circles. By focusing on learning, team members can develop a new kind of learning culture that allows the group to think, explore, and act together, while drawing upon the larger child welfare community for the most promising approaches to practice.



The Learning Circle intervention is nested in the broader Western Workforce Initiative, which is funded by the Children's Bureau to improve workforce issues at sites in three states: Denver County, Colorado; Casper, Wyoming; and tribal nations in North Dakota—the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes of Fort Berthold, and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa sites. Our overarching goal is to *collaboratively develop and test a workforce intervention model for child welfare that responds effectively to diverse local needs*. We do this by conducting a comprehensive organizational health assessment (COHA) of each site in order to understand each agency's strengths and issues. The COHA provides information about what is and what is not working at the agency, so that teams at three agency levels—the Learning Circle (team level), the Design Team (agency level), and Macro Team (state/tribal/community/ level)—can

develop strategies to address those issues. At the same time the Learning Circles are occurring, we will be working with the other teams to address workforce issues at the agency and macro level, thus creating a multi-level intervention.

Learning Circles can transform a team by focusing on improving practice and group and agency functioning. Here is how one team approached an issue plaguing them in a Learning Circle:

Kara's team was leery of these new Learning Circles and approached the first set of meetings reluctantly, but their manager assured them that they had the power to make a difference to improve outcomes for children and families. During the "plan" phase, the team decided to tackle visitation between bio families and kids in foster care, as their reunification rate was much lower than other areas of the state. Kara discussed this with her manager, Sheila to make sure that this was an appropriate topic for the team. During the Learning Circle they discussed the topic and started to devise an action plan. First, Duane searched the Child Welfare Information Gateway and found some great publications, including a guide from Minnesota and a Casey Family Services Report about an evaluation of a project to improve permanency for older youth. While Duane was working on finding publications, Deidre spoke to a local child development center about how to improve the quality of visitation, and everyone on the team took on the task of talking to at least one client about ways that visitation could be improved. From all of this information, they decided to put in place a formal visitation program to improve the quality of visits between parents and their children, thus moving into the "act" phase. They took their idea to Patricia and she obtained full support and approval from agency management. After a month, team members came back with a report about how the process worked with their families. Several families were already on track to be reunified. During the "reflection" stage, they decided their case aide, Tamara, should be more involved in the visitation process and the assessment of each visit. Next, they created a new plan for the "adapt" phase that included Tamara and refined other aspects of the program. Results were provided to Sheila to share with agency management who began to consider wider replication. Sheila and agency management were supportive of their efforts and congratulated them on their interim results. Kara's team now believes in the power of Learning Circles to improve practice.

Team members have the power to create meaningful change through the Learning Circle process for children and families. In this manual, you will find all the information you need to guide your Learning Circles. Competencies and principles describe the skills, knowledge, and values that underlie successful Learning Circles.

One section will guide you step-by-step on how to conduct a Learning Circle meeting. Another includes research, training, and resource material to help you run a Learning Circle. We also offer some ideas for guiding the group with essential facilitation skills. All forms required by the project are also provided in this manual. A list of resources to help target your search for best and promising practices is included to assist you with your own Learning Circle planning.

The Western Workforce team at the Butler Institute for Families and the Native American Training Institute is always available to answer questions and provide you with support. Your commitment to the project is so appreciated. We look forward to partnering to define a new era in child welfare practice that will result in a stronger workforce and ultimately will improve the lives of the families and children we serve.

Learning Circle

Competencies and Principles

2

Learning Circle Competencies and Principles

2.1 Competencies

All Learning Circle members will be able to:

1. Understand how to create a learning organization that actively seeks new information for continuous organizational improvement.
2. Promote improved organizational climate at the team level through incremental improvements to practice.
3. Use a strengths-based approach grounded in the agency's overall mission and values regarding interactions with the families, the team, the agency, and the larger community.
4. Implement interventions agreed upon during the Learning Circle meeting and expressed in the Learning Circle plan.
5. Use information from a variety of sources to inform practice approaches.

Learning Circle facilitators will be able to:

1. Understand and identify group dynamics and establish group norms to encourage full participation by all team members.
2. Distribute leadership so all team members contribute to problem solving and decision making within the team to arrive at and implement solutions that will improve practice to children and families.
3. Employ a culturally responsive approach to interactions, both within and outside the team, and seek solutions that reflect cultural responsiveness.
4. Facilitate a Learning Circle process that encourages dialogue among team members about key practice and team functioning issues.
5. Provide ongoing support to team members to monitor the Learning Circle plan.
6. Model self-awareness about one's own biases and behaviors to encourage team and individual learning and adaptation to change.

2.2 Principles

Learning Circles…

- Create organizational change through solution-focused discussions and subsequent actions at the team level.
- Inspire a learning organization committed to improved practices and functioning.
- Address challenges or practice issues relevant to and actionable by the Learning Circle team.
- Connect practice change to the agency's mission, values, and practice model.
- Employ interventions based upon careful assessment of the current situation.
- Empower team level staff to improve practice for more positive organizational climate.
- Use strengths-focused interventions.
- Embody a culturally-responsive approach.
- Use comprehensive, incremental interventions for long-term sustainability.
- Expect full, open, and unbiased participation that encourages communication by the team.
- Empower team members to engage in collaborative, balanced, and supportive behavior.
- Interact with other agency staff to determine appropriate topics, gather information, and implement interventions.
- Emphasize ongoing evaluation to improve effectiveness and achieve desired outcomes.

Western Workforce

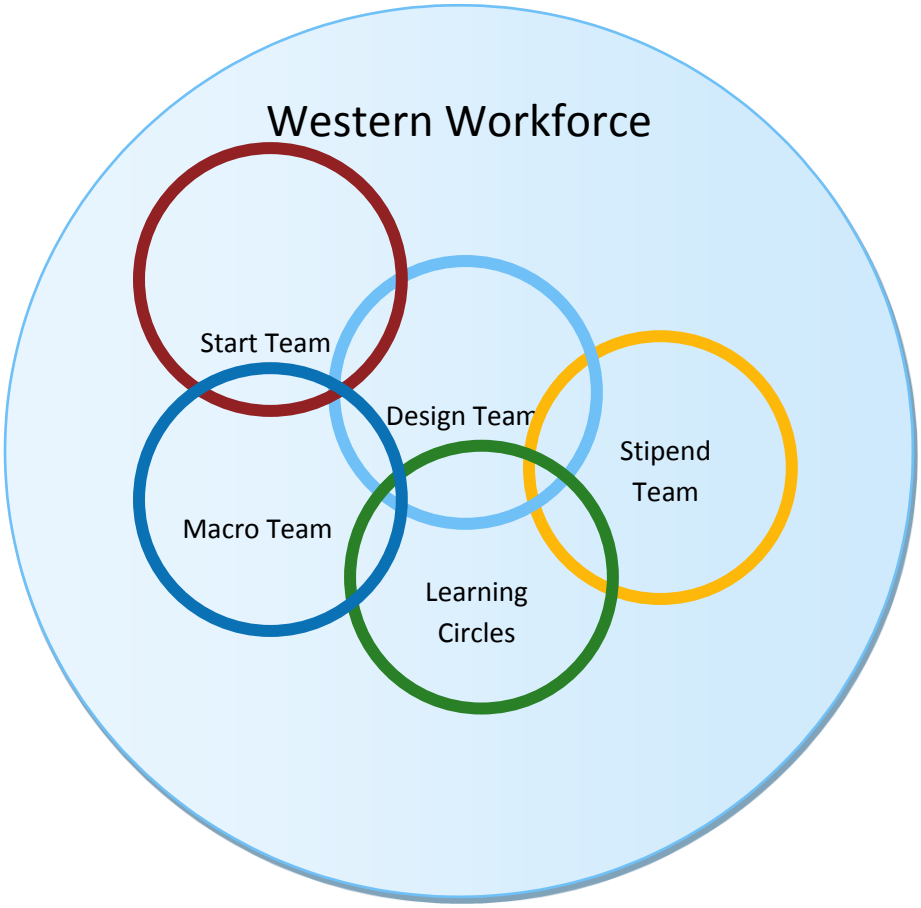
Team Overview

SECTION 3

Western Workforce Team Overview

Learning Circles are a key part of the larger Western Workforce Initiative. The Western Workforce Initiative has designated several project teams in order to achieve the goal of building an improved child welfare workforce. While distinct, the teams also greatly overlap. Over the course of the project, Learning Circle facilitators will be a part of or be communicating with each of the teams. Please see Figure 1 for a diagram of the relationship of the teams to one another and to the full Western Workforce Initiative.

Figure 1



3.1 Start Team

Who: Agency managers, supervisors, caseworkers, key community stakeholders, and family representatives.

Goal: To "jumpstart" the project within the agency.

About: Start Team members introduce the project to the agency and lay the groundwork for future implementation. They provide feedback on the development of the comprehensive organizational health assessment (COHA), and then help to facilitate the actual assessment. Once the assessment results are in, this group helps to interpret findings and identify workforce issues needing targeted improvement from the Macro Team, the Design Team, or the Learning Circles. Once the Start Team concludes, team members may migrate to either the Design Team or the Macro Team depending on their interest and availability to make a longer-term commitment to workforce issues. Start Team members meet approximately every six weeks for the first year or so of the project.

3.2 Learning Circles

Who: Supervisors and their workers together in learning teams.

Goal: To build a learning culture through frequent meetings focused on improving practice, outcomes, and climate at the small group level.

About: Meetings focus on organizational climate and implementing interventions at the supervisor/worker group level. As appropriate, participants send ideas to other teams to support organizational climate change. Learning Circles meet at least monthly for approximately one year.

3.3 Design Team

Who: Child welfare managers, supervisors, caseworkers, case aides, and other support staff; key community stakeholders, family representatives, and University partners.

Goal: To become the workforce leaders and champion the Western Workforce Initiative within the agency.

About: Based upon COHA results, this team prioritizes goals related to workforce issues, chooses strategies, implements those strategies, assesses results, and revises plans as appropriate. Membership reflects all agency levels from the agency manager or director to case aides. As appropriate for the agency, these teams may also choose to invite community stakeholders and family representatives. Jointly, this team works together to implement their agency-specific workforce plan. These plans are evolving in nature, using a constant plan, act, reflect, adapt loop (known for this project as the PARA approach). Specific interventions may address a wide variety of issues identified by the COHA (e.g. recruitment, worker preparation, retention issues)

The steps of building a learning culture are inherent in this process. The focus is to take the issues plaguing the agency and develop innovative solutions. Here, the seeds of a learning culture take root through constant cultivation and nurturing.

The Design Team meets at least every month for the project duration. Membership will likely rotate during the project period.

3.4 Macro Team

Who: State or County agency/Tribal leaders, University partners, community stakeholders, and family representatives.

Goal: To focus on external agency relations and address policy and macro barriers that may inhibit implementation plans related to workforce issues

About: Some strategies related to effective workforce practices can only be addressed at the macro level. Interventions at the macro level focus on common issues that exist across the state or a large county that impact the workforce (e.g. centralized recruitment efforts or the establishment of better relationships with the court). Strategies emanating from the Macro Team will address crosscutting policy and possibly legislative issues that impact the entire workforce. Participants will meet approximately quarterly during the project period.

3.5 Stipend Committee

Who: Agency representatives, University representatives, and stipend students.

Goal: To recruit and select child welfare stipend students, provide oversight of the Western Workforce stipend students program, and assist in implementing internship programs at child welfare sites that meet the needs of the agencies, students, and universities/colleges.

About: This team focuses on recruiting students for BSW/MSW stipends. The committee develops the selection process and procedures then sets criteria for awarding stipends. Selection criteria may include grades, experience, diversity, and population served. Committee members participate in the selection process by screening applications, serving on interview panels, and scoring and choosing award recipients. During the oversight phase, committee members provide ongoing management and decision making. Additionally, they develop a collaborative stipend student internship program, monitor student compliance, provide problem solving and arbitration for students and agencies as well as offer input to the curriculum. This committee meets regularly as necessary and for the duration of the project. By focusing on professional development, the entire organization grows.

Learning Circle

Approach

SECTION 4

Learning Circle Approach

The next section provides information on how to conduct Learning Circles with your team and explains the basic approach—PLAN, ACT, REFLECT, and ADAPT. Since initial Learning Circle meetings will be somewhat different from later meetings, there is also information about how to conduct Learning Circle meetings over time. Our intent is to provide Learning Circle facilitators with a general guide rather than a prescribed formula for the meetings, so that they can promote a flourishing learning culture within their own team.

A Learning Culture is an environment that promotes and fosters individual, team, and organizational learning (Garvin, 1998).

4.1 Learning Circle Membership

Learning Circle members serve on a specifically designated team. Typically, the team will be made up of the supervisor and his/her workers and case aides assigned to that team, though smaller agencies may define the team differently and adapt membership to any group members who regularly work together. Learning Circles (LC) are facilitated by the team's supervisor or designee, who is specially trained in the LC approach and facilitation techniques. During the initial Learning Circles, the meetings will be co-facilitated with a designated LC coach, with responsibility gradually handed over as supervisors (or other designated persons) develop their own LC facilitation skills. Agency management will be asked to refrain from participating in the Learning Circle, as this is a team-level intervention.

4.2 PARA: PLAN – ACT – REFLECT – ADAPT

Learning Circles use the PLAN, ACT, REFLECT, and ADAPT (PARA) approach that mirrors many strategic planning and problem-solving processes. As a structured, formal process, it first appeared in the early twentieth century, and then later, it was adopted in the healthcare field by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) and the Associates in Process Improvement (API). In 1995 Casey Family Programs used the process known as "plan, do, study, act" to guide their Breakthrough Series Collaborative initiatives. This process, known by many acronyms and names, has been widely used by many fields interested in using a problem-solving approach to address organizational issues. The PARA method manifests the learning organization's philosophy of building a learning culture through a systematic approach to acquiring and building knowledge.

The PARA approach adapted by the Western Workforce Initiative has been made relevant to the needs and realities of child welfare agencies with easily identifiable terms that resonate with child welfare workers and supervisors. These steps are:

PLAN

- Assess the situation. (What are agency/community strengths? What policies should be considered? What is the agency/community context?)
- Use data and other documents to inform the discussion.
- Consider information about what has worked elsewhere.
- Determine an approach and strategies.
- Create a plan to address the issue (who, what, where, when, how).

ACT

- Implement the plan focusing on both short- and long-term strategies.
- Analyze information.
- Document problems and unexpected results.
- Acknowledge and celebrate successes.

REFLECT

- Gather information from the actions and strategies employed.
- Compare information to the expectations within the plan.
- Summarize what was learned.
- Discuss alternative strategies and approaches. (What worked? What did not?)

ADAPT

- Make adjustments to the plan.
- Implement the process again reflecting the latest realities.
- Communicate the plan's status to other teams and the agency.
- Make recommendations for future intervention points.

This approach is not linear, but rather simultaneous or overlapping as each step does not wait for the others to finish. When in the process of *acting*, the implementers may *reflect* and recognize that the *plan* is not proceeding as anticipated, so *adaptation* may be immediately necessary. During all phases, Learning Circle members will be *thinking* about the current topic. Also, interventions focus on topics that address both small and larger issues. Teams design plans with solutions that address the issues that most impact their own

practice to improve child and family outcomes as well as team and agency functioning. Implementation of these plans may not be easy, and it is important for the supervisor to know how to address the barriers the team may face as they implement a different approach to practice.

The PARA process runs through a sequence of Learning Circles for each topic, and each meeting may only cover a portion of a phase. In particular, the PLAN phase may require several meetings to discuss thoroughly the chosen topic. It is more important to think carefully through the topic rather than to rush through the PARA phases. The PARA phases are meant to provide a framework for learning about a topic together, and then working to address that topic with your team. The goal is for each topic to move through the PARA process to maximize the potential for successful resolution and implementation. Actions in the PARA process become the seeds for the growth of both improved child and family outcomes and a learning culture within the team and, ultimately, the agency.

4.3 Goals and Objectives

Overall Learning Circle goals and objectives are defined as:

1. Establish a learning culture within the team in order to improve practice and ultimately, outcomes for children and families.
    a. Relate the characteristics of a learning organization to the Learning Circle approach.
    b. Value new ideas, experimentation, innovation, and risk.
    c. Connect the agency vision and mission to the Learning Circle approach.
    d. Develop skills to dialogue in a trustworthy and responsible manner to improve team functioning and child welfare practice.
2. Establish Learning Circles as a model for practice improvements that result in improved agency functioning and ultimately, outcomes for children and families.
    a. Identify meeting logistics (i.e., scheduled meeting times, location, and record keeping plan).
    b. Establish norms around the Learning Circle meetings.
    c. Develop targeted action plans for practice improvements.
    d. Connect organization mission and values to practice change and improved outcomes.
    e. Improve the professionalism of the workforce to increase staff retention and job satisfaction.

3. Identify areas for targeting intervention.
    a. Review COHA and recent CFSR/PIP and state-specific QA findings.
    b. Assess team practice for areas that could be strengthened.
    c. Identify team strengths that can be employed to address areas requiring intervention.
    d. Talk with administrators and managers to identify target areas.
4. Strengthen team-level functioning through the Learning Circle process.
    a. Collaborate in developing and recording intervention action plans.
    b. Determine a process for management of ongoing knowledge collection.
    c. Provide support and expertise to team members for action plans.
    d. Model critical thinking, problem solving, and conflict resolution to team.
    e. Reflect on intervention planning on an ongoing basis.
5. Establish accountability for overall Learning Circle effectiveness.
    a. Assess effectiveness of team-level Learning Circle interventions.
    b. Develop a process for utilizing evaluation findings to improve intervention.
    c. Utilize data as part of the proactive development process.
    d. Make adjustments to the intervention plan as appropriate.
    e. Interface with the overall Western Workforce Initiative evaluation.

In addition to the overall goals and objectives, each Learning Circle will develop specific action plans relevant to chosen topics and approaches across project sites.

4.4 Topic Selection

During the initial meeting(s), the topics will be selected that will be addressed in the Learning Circle. Everyone on the LC team participates in the topic selection. Multiple sources may inform topic selection:

- The COHA. For example, the COHA may indicate that families do not have access to resources or that community collaboration needs to be improved.
- CFSR/PIP information. Data reports may indicate that the agency/office may need to improve in specific areas, such as face-to-face contacts or diligent search for relatives.
- Other agency data sources from SACWIS and Quality Assurance.
- Start Team. Members of the Start Team may identify issues that impact the teams from their review of the COHA.
- The Learning Circle. Learning Circle participants may identify practice issues that are relevant to them.
- Agency management. Check in with agency leadership to find out if they have any suggestions, or even mandates they need line staff to implement, for topics that the group had not yet considered. This two-way conversation also keeps agency management informed about the ongoing process for the learning circles.

(See Section 5: Western Workforce Using Agency Results for more details.)

Whatever topics are chosen, they must meet criteria for relevancy to the Learning Circle and must:

1. Be actionable at the team level. For example, do address the team's relationship with law enforcement by creating opportunities to exchange information, but don't try to write a new memorandum of understanding between the agency and law enforcement.
2. Address practice or organizational climate issues within the team's span of influence. For example, do look at issues around how visitation is arranged by team members, but don't try to tackle the systemic visitation issues.
3. Not require policy changes or deviate from expressed policy. For example, do try to address work schedules, but don't try to rewrite policy for workers to move positions from full- to part-time.

Learning Circles are encouraged to start "small" so that they can immediately realize success, and to focus on either practice outcomes or team climate issues that most impact them as individuals and as a team. Learning Circles should also

focus on child and family outcomes that they can most immediately impact. Even if "big" topics are chosen, the team may decide to tackle "small" parts of those bigger topics. Larger issues could also be referred to either the Design Team or the Macro Team for other types of intervention. Learning circles may also find that the issues that they are tackling have applicability to the larger agency and may want to share that information with the larger agency. Learning Circles will be empowered to choose the topics from all the aforementioned sources that are most important to them. Otherwise, the likelihood of learning and plan implementation is diminished. Topics may span multiple Learning Circle meetings to fully explore issues and seek comprehensive solutions.

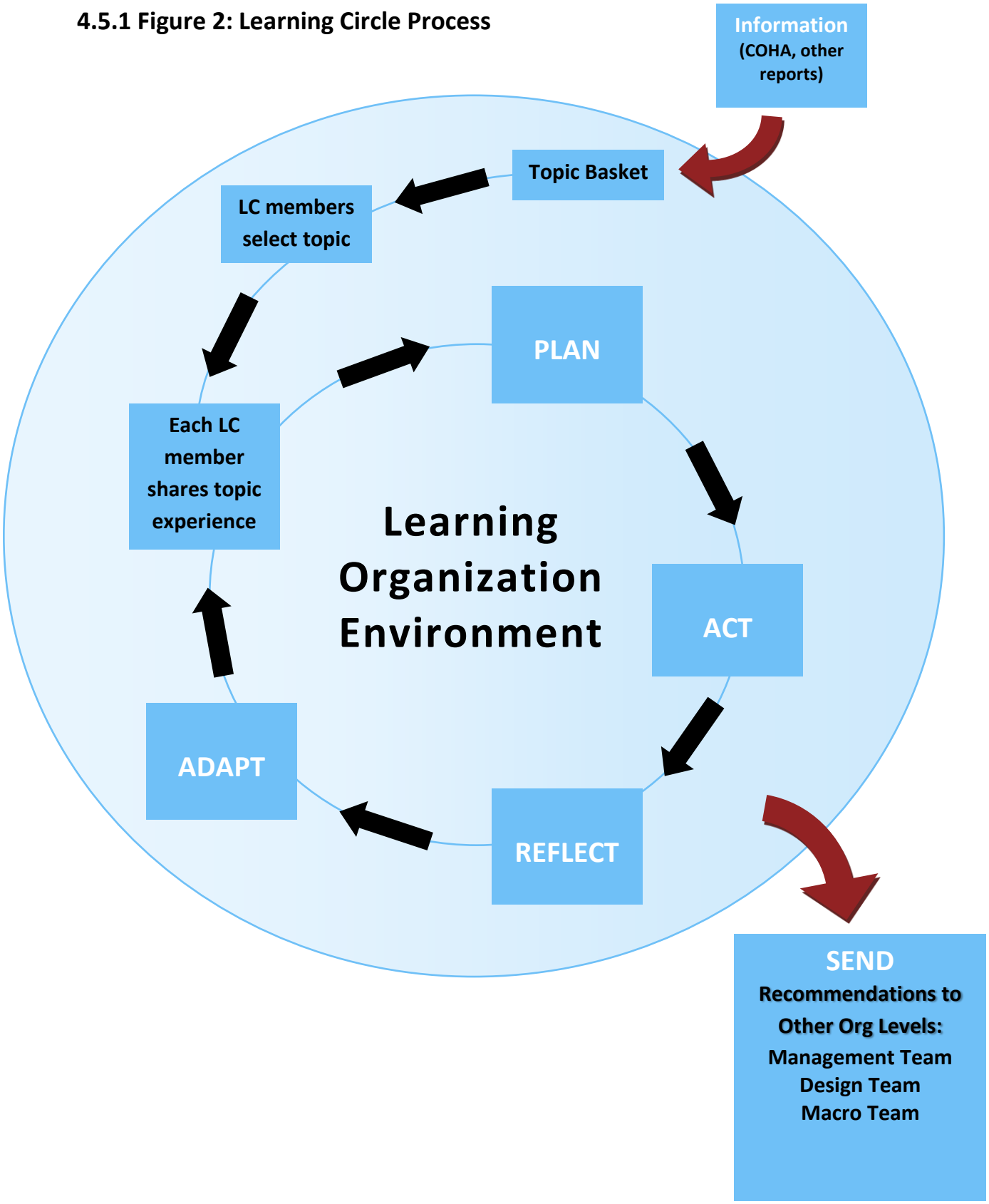
Learning Circle topics chosen by other learning circles:

- Team cohesion
- Unit scheduling
- Emergency placements (process)
- Morale
- Certification of adoptive families
- Secondary Trauma
- Gossip/interpersonal issues
- Internal/external resource sharing
- Communication (internal and external)
- Contact documentation
- Transfer of training to the job

4.5 Learning Circle Meetings

Over time, Learning Circle meetings follow the cyclical PARA process as depicted in Figure 2: Learning Circle Process.

4.5.1 Figure 2: Learning Circle Process



4.5.2 Guide for Initial Meetings

Over the course of the first few meetings, LC facilitators prepare the team to engage in Learning Circles and then select topics. During these initial meetings, LC facilitators will educate the team about Learning Circles and the development of a learning culture that leads to a learning organization. For the initial meetings, teams may need to meet multiple times to make sure team members are ready to engage in the Learning Circles. The LC facilitator should consult with his/her Western Workforce Initiative representative to assess progress and readiness for the implementation of the Learning Circles.

Prior to the initial meetings, consider gathering the following documents and have them available for distribution to all team members:

1. Agency mission and values
2. Learning Circles Principles
3. COHA Report
4. Most recent CFSR/PIP information or other program information/data
5. Learning Circle Process diagram

Meet with your manager and find out what he/she thinks would be a good topic for intervention and bring this to the group. Be careful not to overwhelm team members with information; instead, refer to these documents when supporting material is needed.

During the initial set of meetings, four main topics will be covered:

1. Setting the context for the development of a learning culture (orientation meetings): Explain the goal for conducting the Learning Circles—that is, to establish a culture where problem solving as a team leads to decision-making and activities that improves the team as well as the agency. This cyclical process leads to a learning organization. Ultimately, a learning culture will result in an improved workforce and better outcomes for children and families. Using the materials provided, review the meaning of a learning culture for team members and how it relates to the ongoing Learning Circles. Review your agency's mission and values and link the Learning Circles to these guiding statements. Remind team members that they are there because they are all committed to children and families, and this process helps to build a positive agency climate.

2. Reviewing the Learning Circle principles: Refer to the Learning Circle principles and review them with the team members. Review each principle and discuss how this principle is relevant to them. For example, "Expect full, open, and unbiased participation that encourages communication by the

team" means that all LC members participate in the Learning Circle discussion in an honest and straightforward manner and have a role in the tasks associated with the plan.

3. Establishing a framework for working together: Walk the LC members through the Learning Circle process and describe how each meeting should be conducted. Review the Learning Circle Process (Figure 2) and explain the Learning Circle flow of events. Distribute the Learning Circle materials and discuss the Learning Circle process with team members. Consider conducting an activity to establish the unit members' attitudes towards change. (See the box for instructions on conducting a change activity.) Assess the baseline attitude of team members that currently work together. Give them an assignment and ask team members to pair off (not with their best friend) and respond to two questions:

    a. How do we currently work together?

    b. How do we want to work together in the future?

    Help team members process this experience as a group and set some mutual goals for working together in the future. Type these up and distribute to team members at the next meeting.

4. Selecting topics for Learning Circle intervention: Guide the team through the resource materials (see above) to help identify those issues that could benefit from a team-level intervention. The LC facilitator should brainstorm a list of appropriate issues based upon all the sources mentioned above. When determining the viability of a topic, ask the team a series of questions to generate discussion. For example:

    1. Is this issue relevant to our team?

    2. Is this an issue that our team is interested in tackling?

    3. Could an intervention by our team impact this issue?

When responses to these questions are affirmative, the LC facilitator should write the issue on the flip chart. They may also want to check in with agency management to find out their ideas for appropriate topics. Once the discussion is complete, team members will vote on the preferred topic to be the focus of the Learning Circle intervention. Once determined, the group should also inform agency management about their topics so that the communication loop continues. Topics not chosen will be put in the "Learning Circle Topic Basket" for future Learning Circle interventions. Record these topics on the form,

Change Activity for Learning Circles

The curriculum below explains how to present the material related to change to your team.

1. Introduce the next topic, readiness for change. Explain:

Developing a learning organization is predicated on the belief that positive change is a necessary condition for learning organizations to flourish. But change is hard! Especially, since this is a bureaucracy and is *supposed* to be stable. Therein lies the main issue, this is a public agency and may not be good at change or at the very least, entirely comfortable with the notion of change. But, change has become central to the agency's practice, despite the resistance to it. Think about all of the practice changes in the last few years. Think about the CFSR results and the PIP plan and how they've driven practice. If there's one thing that can be counted on, it is change. An organization committed to the development of a learning culture more successfully navigates change.

Refer participants to **Handout: Readiness for Change questions.** Ask them to spend a couple of minutes reviewing these questions and jot down how they would respond to them now on a scale of 1 -5 with 5 being strongly agree and 1 being strongly disagree.

The COHA assessed this agency's readiness for change by asking the following questions:

1. Staff understand that specific changes may improve outcomes for children and families.

2. Some staff members resist any type of change.

3. Most staff are willing to try new ideas.

4. It is easy to change procedures to meet new conditions.

5. Some staff are too cautious or slow to make changes.

6. Staff members ask questions and express concerns about changes.

7. Staff members are encouraged to discuss and explore evidence-based practice techniques.

8. Staff adapt quickly when they have to shift focus to accommodate program changes.

Ask them to hold these ratings in mind for the next activity.

Continued on next page

Learning Circle Topic Basket, and place in the binder. (See the Forms and Worksheets section for a blank copy of all forms mentioned in this manual.) Make a plan for finding information related to the first topic chosen for the Learning Circle meeting. Review accomplishments from the meeting and adjourn the initial Learning Circle. Once topics are selected, the team is ready to begin the ongoing implementation of the Learning Circles.

Continued

2. Distribute one piece of flip chart paper and markers to all participants. Ask participants to think about their attitudes towards change and **write a statement or draw a picture** about this attitude on their flip chart paper using the markers provided. Next, ask participants to walk around and read these statements and comment on the flip chart paper using the markers. Ask them to do this silently and comment on all flip chart papers if possible. Allow about 10 minutes for the walk around activity.

3. Bring the group back together and ask questions to process the activity. Ask people to explain their pictures. Questions to process include:

- What were some of the similarities in the comments?
- What were some of the differences?
- How can they use this awareness of attitudes towards change for conducting the learning circles?

This activity illuminates the challenge of change.

4.5.3 Guides for Ongoing Meetings

Learning Circles follow a loose structure to maximize the meeting time and ensure fidelity to the Learning Circle approach that facilitates the interaction leading to a learning culture. Learning Circles are cumulative and exploration of one topic may start while action on another topic is still being undertaken. The discussion of a topic may also span several meetings. Thorny issues at the practice or functioning level are not typically resolved in an hour-long meeting. Realistically, it may take a few weeks to review information and develop a plan, so the PLAN phase may take some time to complete. It is most important to *think* and *talk* together around issues that matter most to the team and then take action to address them.

A successful meeting is not just developing a plan, but when the group members have engaged in an active debate about the topic. Sometimes, issues or problems are not easily solved, but the act of discussion regarding the topic does move practice in a positive direction. Therein lies the intent of an effective

Learning Circle—to inspire lively discussion about issues most affecting the team and the larger agency by bringing to bear information from the larger child welfare community, thus creating an orientation to reflective practice that builds a learning culture. Learning Circles, by nature, build upon each other and may require several rounds of the PARA approach to fully address and/or resolve the topic at hand. It is quite easy to just give up when a strategy does not work and then dismiss the process as unworkable. Instead, the Learning Circle process asks team members to engage in active problem-solving to address those intractable issues that plague the team and the agency. If one strategy does not work to address an issue, then try something else, figure out whether or not is working and continue the process. Topics may span multiple Learning Circle meetings as members PLAN, ACT, REFLECT, and ADAPT together. Team members may struggle during the Learning Circle meetings to find the right solution, to come to agreement on key points, etc., and this should be seen as an opportunity for growth.

Steps for Every Meeting

The main purpose of Learning Circle meetings is to reflect, discuss, and plan as a team to improve practice, and team and agency functioning. Meeting steps are provided to help the LC facilitator manage the meeting, but not every step needs to be completed. The steps are meant to help guide the process of learning to solve issues facing the team. Learning Circle meetings should be held at least every month to integrate learning from the last meeting, and then take action to implement that learning. Meeting duration is approximately 1-2 hours. Learning Circle facilitators may conduct the meetings using the following steps as a guide. Remember to make sure to hear all voices within the meeting, including those of our children and families. We must consider the impact of our actions on the children and families with which we work. Meetings will generally move through the following steps:

> *Step 1:* Convene the meeting. Check to see if anyone has any "baggage" to check before the meeting commences (for example, Justin just got an earful from a client and is feeling pretty upset). This is not an opportunity to vent, but rather just to get something out so the meeting can proceed forward. The point is to acknowledge the immediate context in which the team is working.
>
> *Step 2:* Assign or acknowledge the Learning Circle recorder for the meeting. This person will also be responsible for sending the LC Meeting Journal to the Butler Institute staff.
>
> *Step 3:* Remind all team members of the Learning Circle principles

established at the initial meetings and the purpose for the meeting—that is, to create a learning culture.

Step 4: Facilitate dialogue about the designated topic. Remind participants of the topic and the phase that the PARA the Learning Circle is addressing. Use questions for the appropriate PARA phase to guide the discussion.

Step5: Discuss what has been learned from the day's Learning Circle and review the plan.

Step 6: Set the next meeting date. Adjourn the meeting.

Step 7: Complete the **Learning Circle Meeting Journal** and post on the team/agency network and transmit to Butler Institute staff.

Success happens when the Learning Circles inspire team members to grow individually and collectively and develop a learning organization culture. Teams will also have brought in the voices of multiple stakeholders to the Learning Circle dialogue. Fresh ideas and perspectives feed upon each other and the organizational climate becomes charged with the possibility of change. Small, incremental steps over time then validate that the possibility of change has become a reality. Problem solving and decision-making occurs at the team level of the agency to empower staff members to address the issues most affecting them.

Record the meeting's learning points on the **Learning Circle Meeting Journal** found in the Forms and Worksheets section (also available electronically). The LC Journal asks for the following information:

1. Meeting Attendees (Please PRINT the first and last name of all meeting attendees below):
2. What phase of the PARA process best describes the focus of your meeting?

☐ Plan ☐ Act ☐ Reflect ☐ Adapt

3. What was/were today's topic(s)?
4. Summarize today's meeting discussion here.
5. What is your action plan for addressing your topic (if appropriate)? (Who will do what by when?)

Typically, the PLAN phase will be the most time intensive and may span several meetings, while other phases might just require a brief check-in. The point of the PARA process is to carefully think through issues to develop a plan, act on that plan, reflect on what happened, and then adapt the plan accordingly. Thus,

different questions and meeting steps guide the distinct phases of the PARA process and are presented in the next section.

PLAN Phase

Once topics have been chosen and everyone has a good understanding of the Learning Circle approach, team members move to the first phase of the PARA process—that is, the PLAN phase. The basic structure for a Learning Circle meeting about a new topic is:

a) Topic exploration (current situation, challenges, strengths)
b) Plan development (strategies, resources, barriers)

These steps may extend over multiple meetings, as it may not be possible to fully explore a topic in its entirety during one meeting. Alternatively, the discussion might lead to the desire for more information about a topic, so continue the dialogue after collecting more information. Most importantly, be *flexible* and do not rush the process, as it is the *process* that provides the value of a Learning Circle.

Prior to the PLAN meeting, assemble relevant information that has been gathered to assist with the discussion. As appropriate, provide copies to the Learning Circle members and refer to these documents as needed. The person who gathered the information should be prepared to summarize it for the group.

Learning Circle facilitators use the **Learning Circle Question Guide** (a laminated card found in the pocket of this binder) to steer the dialogue around the dimensions of the chosen topic during the PLAN phase. Remember, it is not a full protocol, but more of a general guide to help the LC facilitator keep the conversation flowing. During the PLAN phase, discuss the following questions:

Topic Exploration Questions

1. What are this team (agency's) strengths regarding this topic?
2. What do we hope will happen by addressing this issue?
3. What is the agency policy around this issue?
4. How does this issue affect our clients?
5. What data or other performance measures inform this topic?
6. What are the challenges that we all face around this issue?
7. Where can we go to find information about this topic?
8. According to external information, what are the best ways to deal with this issue?
9. According to external information, what should we be considering?

10. What are the pros/cons to this (these) approach(es) suggested by external information?

Plan Development Questions

11. What strategies can help to address this issue?
12. What supports might help with this issue?
13. What resources can we draw upon to assist with this issue?
14. What barriers might be anticipated? How can they be addressed in advance?
15. Is permission needed? Who else needs to be made aware of the plan?
16. How will we know we are successful in addressing this issue?

One person is designated as the LC recorder. Record and summarize the meeting(s) discussion and complete the **Learning Circle Meeting Journal**. Additionally, we offer several worksheets that can be used to summarize each of the PARA phases. Learning Circles may find these to be useful to reflect and integrate the process, but they are not mandatory for completion. Once a topic has been fully explored and the plan developed, the learning circle may choose to record this on the **PLAN Summary Worksheet**. The **PLAN Summary Worksheet** also includes space for the team to record those issues that could be sent to either the Design Team or the Macro Team for further assistance. The **PLAN Summary Worksheet** only needs to be completed once, after team members feel that they have sufficiently discussed the components of the PLAN phase and are ready to move to the ACT phase. Subsequent meetings that reflect a different phase of the PARA cycle for a topic should be recorded on the corresponding form (either the **PLAN**, **ACT**, **REFLECT**, or **ADAPT Summary Worksheet**). Learning Circle recorders should make the completed forms available to all team members and send them to their Western Workforce Initiative liaison as well. Only record the results from each phase once on the appropriate meeting tracking form. For example, if a topic is discussed over three Learning Circle meetings, just record it once on the **PLAN Summary Worksheet** after the PLAN phase concludes. The meeting tracking forms provide a roadmap through each phase of the PARA process, but it is not necessary to record all stops along the way, just the major landmarks that would assist in the integration process.

Steps for the PLAN phase (along with the regular steps for every meeting):

Step1: Distribute articles or other supporting documents that will inform the topic discussion.

Step 2: Discuss the LC topic of the day. Use the laminated **Learning Circle Question Guide**, *Topic Exploration Questions*, to facilitate a discussion that explores the current situation and corresponding strengths and challenges.

Step 3: Review the information, research and/or other supporting documents that have been gathered to inform the discussion on the topic. Discuss information to explore how this issue has been addressed by other entities.

Step 4: Develop an intervention plan to address the issue. Use the laminated **Learning Circle Question Guide**, *Plan Development Questions*, to facilitate the discussion.

Step 5: Determine the tasks and timeframes for each of the plan's components. As a group, determine responsibility for each task. Record the plan on the **Plan Summary Worksheet**.

See Table 1 for a summary of the full meeting steps and associated resources for the PLAN phase. Remember, this phase may span several meetings to sufficiently discuss the topic at hand and develop a workable plan.

Table 1: Meeting Steps & Resources for the PLAN Phase (may span multiple meetings)

Step	Activity	Resource
Step 1	Convene meeting	
Step 2	Take care of business	Relevant PARA form
Step 3	Review principles	LC Principles
Step 4	Distribute information	Articles and other relevant info
Step 5	Discuss topic	LC Question Guide
Step 6	Review information	Key informants, Articles, LC Question Guide
Step 7	Develop a plan	LC Meeting Journal, PLAN Summary Worksheet

Step 8	Determine tasks and timeframes	LC Question Guide
Step 9	Review learning from LC	LC Meeting Journal
Step 10	Set next meeting date	

During the time between LC meetings, team members will fulfill their assigned tasks for the LC intervention plan and communicate ongoing efforts to their team.

For example, a team member volunteers to talk to the Foster Parent Association about developing a better plan for transportation of children in foster care and then communicates the outcome of that meeting via email. Another task might be to develop a log for tracking case activities that can then be sent via email to all team members.

Western Workforce Initiative staff members are available to assist with problem-solving or finding resources on an ongoing basis. Ongoing implementation will be addressed in subsequent Learning Circle meetings.

ACT Phase

Most of the work for the ACT phase occurs outside the Learning Circle meetings as team members implement the plan and carry out the tasks as designated in the plan. During the ACT phase of the PARA cycle, team members check in with how implementation is proceeding and make modifications as necessary. For example, perhaps a team member was assigned the task of talking to a volunteer about supervising visits between parents and their children, but found out that the volunteer did not have time for this activity. The group should brainstorm other ideas for supervising the visits. Record the meeting events in the **Learning Circle Meeting Journal**. Questions that should be discussed during the ACT phase are:

- What are the successes?
- What problems/barriers were encountered?
- What strategies can be used to address the barriers?

Once team members feel that the ACT phase has concluded, they may complete the **ACT Summary Worksheet as a way to summarize the events of this phase**.

At the conclusion of each meeting, the recorder should synthesize the meeting in the **Learning Circle Meeting Journal**.

REFLECT Phase

The REFLECT phase is a time for regrouping and thinking through whether the plan worked. Team members will carefully sift through information or, if possible, formal evidence such as data indicators to assess strengths and areas needing improvement. Questions guiding the REFLECT phase are:

- What was your plan?
- What sources of information inform your reflection?
- What did you expect to happen?
- What were the results? (What worked? What didn't?)
- Has the situation been made better?
- If a different plan is necessary, what alternative strategies can be used?

If helpful, the group may record the conclusions from the REFLECT phase on the **REFLECT Summary Worksheet**.

ADAPT Phase

At this point, team members will have determined what has worked and what has not, and will be ready to move forward to full implementation. The ADAPT phase is the final phase in the PARA process and is a time to make adjustments to the plan to improve the likelihood of long-term sustainability. It is also a time to assess the lessons learned from the plan and, when necessary, send issues to the Design Team and/or the Macro Team for further consideration. Questions to guide the ADAPT phase include:

- What is your new plan?
- What are the lessons learned?
- What needs to be brought to the Design Team?
- What needs to be brought to the Macro Team?

Once this phase is concluded, the **ADAPT Summary Worksheet** may be completed.

4.5.4 Communicating with other Western Workforce Teams

Learning Circles will focus on those strategies that can be implemented at the team level, but during the dialogue, the team may recognize that there are

some issues and/or strategies that are beyond the scope of the team level and must be passed along to a higher organizational level, either the Design Team or the Macro Team, for more resolution or implementation (for example, a change in policy). The meeting tracking forms will help teams record those issues and track the status of those issues over time.

4.5.5 Western Workforce Mentoring Role

Western Workforce Initiative staff and designated coaches will support supervisors as they develop their Learning Circle facilitation skills by mentoring them during the first several months of conducting the meetings. Mentoring supervisors at this early stage is intended to provide assistance and feedback when needed. The LC model is a complex set of processes that supervisors will be learning alongside their unit staff while they are actually facilitating the meetings. Project mentors/coaches will be there to answer questions and to provide ready assistance in integrating the LC processes. Mentors will also provide coaching and feedback to supervisors on specific aspects of LC facilitation according to each supervisor's needs. During this mentoring period, supervisors should feel free to use their mentors as professional coaches to address specific concerns that may arise while they become familiar with and proficient at LC facilitation.

References

Austin, M. (2008). Strategies for transforming human service organizations into learning organizations: Knowledge management and the transfer of learning. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work.* Vol. 5(3-4), p. 569-596.

Garvin, D. (1998). Building a learning organization. In Harvard Business Review (Ed.), *Knowledge Management* (pp. 47-80). Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Using Agency Results

SECTION 5

Using Agency Results

One of the skills that supervisors will develop in the Learning Circles is the effective and efficient use of agency reports in planning and developing LC interventions. In most child welfare organizations, data and other types of reports are readily available to supervisors. The challenge is having the time to interpret the results of these reports, and then to find ways to use these reports to initiate improvements at the practice level. In attempting to interpret agency reports, some fundamental questions to ask are:

- What does this information tell us about our practice?
- What does this information tell us about child and family outcomes?
- How are data about practice and outcomes connected?
- What other contextual factors may be related to the results (external or internal)?

The comprehensive organizational health assessment (COHA) results are meant to inform discussion about needed interventions in the Learning Circles. However, the child welfare agency will have many current data and evaluation reports that have been generated for other uses that may inform the LC process. These reports may contain valuable information about the organization, the staff, their practice, and child and family outcomes that could provide fundamental context information for the LC members when planning and developing actions plans. Supervisors, as facilitators of the Learning Circles, must remember that there are many layers of research evidence that may be relevant to their LC work. Just as best practices and evidence-informed practice information provides supervisors and practitioners information about what works in child welfare, agency reports also provide research evidence that must be taken into account. Information must be examined through the filter of the local agency context and the practitioner's "practice wisdom" (Barratt & Hodson, 2006).

Agency management will be another source of information. They have extensive information about what has worked and what has not in the past as well as important contextual information for implementing strategies designed in the learning circles. Learning circles are encouraged to maintain a strong communication loop when selecting topics and implementing plans.

5.1 Using Results from the COHA

The COHA provides information about agency factors at multiple levels: individual, unit, and organizational. Determining what information to select from the COHA will depend on what data resonates with the LC members regarding the overarching practice or outcome area they have chosen to address in their targeted intervention. COHA information can support a hunch or intuition, or provide concrete evidence verifying a unit or outcome issue that needs to be targeted. It can also provide LC members with a practice area or domain to research prior to developing an action plan.

COHA Results Example:
In one agency, the COHA revealed that vicarious trauma is an agency-wide area of concern. Vicarious trauma happens because of the long-term distress caseworkers experience as a result of their work. The LC members in this agency identified worker stress as a target for action planning. The COHA results supported their hunch that this topic needed attention. They identified vicarious trauma as a topic to research. The main research question became: What information exists on interventions for social workers experiencing vicarious trauma? In this example, the COHA results helped LC team members to target an area of best practice research to explore.

5.2 Using Results from the CFSR or PIP

The CFSR and PIP reports target specific child and family outcomes that are likely to overlap with many topics that LC members may identify for intervention. This is because CFSR outcome domains were developed as data indicators of each state's ability to provide the fundamentals in ensuring children's welfare—safety, permanency, and well-being. Program improvement plans target specific areas where states need to improve, and therefore provide excellent data on where there may be organizational supports in place to align with any LC intervention efforts.

Like the COHA, CFSR and PIP reports will provide data at multiple levels of an organization, child and family outcome factors, as well as systemic factors. Using that information in Learning Circles will entail careful integration and

interpretation of the relevant results in combination with best and informed practice research.

CFSR/PIP Reports Example:
In one agency, the latest CFSR report provided evidence that caseworkers were not completing their required child and family visits in a timely manner. The supporting PIP report provided further information on a specific percentage of overall completed visits in a given month. This information may be used as a baseline so that the LC team members will be able to monitor the progress of their intervention aimed at improving timely caseworker child and family visits. Questions to be asked during the planning phase are: What does the PIP report tell us about how far we are from our target? What best practice information exists on improving timely child visitation rates?

5.3 Other Sources

There are many other sources from which agency reports may be generated. Internal data analysts may generate regular reports to monitor worker performance, internal case processing, and changes in targeted child and family related outcomes (e.g., monthly provider referrals, reunifications, kinship placements). The LC members should become adept at identifying the reports that are available that may be relevant to their LC intervention work. In addition, if the agency has data or research analyst capacity, the LC members should try to use this resource to develop reports that monitor and track progress on the intervention specific outcomes as the LC moves forward on their action plans.

References

Barratt, M. & Hodson, R. (2006). Firm foundations: A practical guide to organizational support for the use of research evidence. *Research in Practice Series*.

Learning Circle

Finding Information

SECTION 6

Finding Information

One of the key characteristics of a learning organization is the ability to seek out and utilize information. This is an important part of the Learning Circle process. As practice issues are raised and targeted for intervention in the Learning Circles, it will be important to gather and review all of the relevant information (from research and other sources) that may be related to and inform the Learning Circle's planned intervention to improve specific practice issues.

6.1 Sources of Information

Sources of information can be internal and/or external to the child welfare organization. Some of the best information will likely not exist in written format but will be the experiences of other individuals and agencies who have faced similar challenges. One of your primary sources of information should be informal interviews focused on how other workers, units, and/or agencies have dealt with similar situations in the past.

Many resources, including websites, downloadable resources, and books, are available to help you find information.

Websites with Searchable Libraries

The Campbell Collaboration Library of Systematic Reviews: The Campbell Library
http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/library.php

Child Welfare Information Gateway
http://www.childwelfare.gov/

The National Guideline Clearinghouse
http://www.guideline.gov/

Promising Practices Network on Children, Families and Communities
http://www.promisingpractices.net

SAMHSA'S National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices
http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/

Downloadable Resources

Wilson, C. & Alexandra, L. (2005). *Guide for Child Welfare Administrators on Evidence Based Practice*. Retrieved February 12, 2010, from: http://www.aphsa.org/home/doc/Guide-for-Evidence-Based-Practice.pdf

Targeted WebPages (some with resources list)

The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare – Importance of Evidence-Based Practice
http://www.cebc4cw.org/importance-of-evidence-based-practice

Child Welfare League of America – Research to Practice Toolkit Series
http://www.cwla.org/programs/r2p/toolkit.htm

Health Youth Colorado – Resources List
http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/ps/adolschool/healthyyouthcolorado/resources.html

National Association of Social Workers: Research webpage
http://www.socialworkers.org/research/default.asp
Keeping Up With New Research
http://www.socialworkers.org/research/naswResearch/0108KeepingUp/default.asp

Research in Practice: Supporting Evidence-Informed Practice with Children and Families. (n.d.). Finding research: A beginner's guide. Retrieved February 12, 2010, from:
http://www.rip.org.uk/research_resources/finding_research.asp#intro

Social Programs That Work (website sponsored by the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy)
http://evidencebasedprograms.org/wordpress/

Other Resources (for purchase)

Newman T., Moseley A., Tierney, S., & Ellis, A. (2005). *Evidence-based social work: A guide for the perplexed*. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing. Paperback can be purchased online at:
http://www.russellhouse.co.uk/?state=pre_display_stockcode&session=&stockcode=978-1-903855-55-3
Do you want to base your practice on the best possible evidence of effectiveness? Know how to find information relevant to your decision making? Be able to tell the difference between stronger and weaker evidence? Enable your clients to feel confident they are being served by a well informed professional? If so, then you are working towards being an evidence-based social work practitioner. This book advises you how to: formulate practice questions; find information which can answer these questions; appraise the information for trustworthiness and relevance; build this process into your practice on a regular basis. Evidence-Based Social Work is aimed at professionally qualified practitioners and students. It addresses key aspects of the new three-year social work training programme. Many of the procedures and

principles discussed will also be relevant to the broader social care workforce, and to allied professions. This is a resource that explains not only the "what" of evidence-based practice, or the "why," but also the "how." Containing many practical examples and case studies, it is an eminently accessible introduction on how an evidence-based approach to social work can become a reality. As the Director of UK Services at Barnardo's, Dr. Chris Hanvey, and the Director of the Centre for Evidence-Based Social Services at the University of Exeter, Professor Brian Sheldon, say in their joint foreword: "Now we have a book which not only explains evidence-based social work but illustrates its importance in improving outcomes for those with whom we work. The authors' achievement is to have combined the best, that is, the most robust and bias-reducing research with a detailed knowledge of the demanding challenges of day-to-day practice."

Roberts, A. R. & Yeager, K. R. (Eds.). (2006). *Foundations of Evidence-Based Social Work Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press. Available for purchase online from: http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/SocialWork/?view=usa&ci=9780195305586#Product_Details
This concise introduction to evidence-based social work is a student-friendly overview of the issues and methods most frequently encountered while preparing for evidence-based social work practice. Part I defines terms and critical issues, introducing students to the language and importance of evidence-based practice and critical thinking. Chapters will explain how to search for and evaluate evidence, how to ask the right questions, how to develop standards, and how to make use of the best research. Part II illustrates practical applications, including such topics as cognitive-behavioral approaches to suicide risks, manualized treatment with children, treating juvenile delinquents, and interventions for OCD, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, PTSD, depression, and recovery. This much-needed overview familiarizes students with the process and practice of evidence-based social work, teaching them to be critical thinkers and judicious decision-makers. The guidelines it distills are equally valuable to seasoned practitioners seeking to better serve their clients, making this an excellent foundation for the study and practice of evidence-based social work.

Implementing Best, Promising, and Evidence-Based Practices

Websites with Searchable Libraries

Child Trends: http://www.childtrends.org

Child Welfare Information Gateway: http://www.childwelfare.gov/

National Implementation Research Network: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~nirn/

Downloadable Resources (free)

American Psychological Association Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice for Children and Adolescents. (2008). *Disseminating evidence-based practice for children and adolescents: A systems approach to enhancing care.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Retrieved February 12, 2010 from: http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/evidence-rpt-full.pdf

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2009). *Strengthening families and communities: 2009 resource guide* [Electronic version]. Retrieved February 15, 2010 from: http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/res_guide_2009/guide.pdf

Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M., & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature* [Electronic version]. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, The National Implementation Research Network (FMHI Publication #231). Retrieved February 15, 2010 from: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~nirn/resources/publications/Monograph/

Foster Family-based Treatment Association. (2008). *Implementing evidence-based practice in treatment foster care: A resource guide*. Retrieved February 10, 2010 from: http://www.ffta.org/publications/EBPguideFinalWeb.pdf

McCall, R. M. (2009). Evidence-Based Programming in the Context of Practice and Policy [Electronic version]. *Social Policy Report*, *23*(3). Retrieved February 15, 2010, from: http://www.srcd.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=654

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement. (2008). Implementing change at the local level: Strategies for success. *Child welfare matters*, *Fall/Winter 2008*. Retrieved February 15, 2010 from: http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/rcpdfs/cwmatters8.pdf

The Urban Institute. (2004). *Using Outcome Information: Making Data Pay Off*. Retrieved February 15, 2010 from: http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311040_OutcomeInformation.pdf

Targeted WebPages (some with resources list)

The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare – Implementation Resources Section
http://www.cebc4cw.org/impresources

Child Welfare Information Gateway – The Role of Evidence-Based Practice in System Reform [List of resources]
http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/reform/building/ebp.cfm

National Resource Center for Organizational Improvement – Using Data in Decision Making
http://tatis.muskie.usm.maine.edu/pubs/pub2Wtemp.asp?SUBJECT_AREA=Using data in decision making

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections – Evidence Based Practice Resources
http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/evidence-based-practice.html

The Results-Based Accountability Implementation Guide
http://raguide.org/

Other Resources (for purchase)

Austin, M. J. (Ed.). (2009). *Evidence for Child Welfare Practice*. New York: Routledge. Available for purchase online from:
http://www.routledge.com/shopping_cart/products/product_detail.asp?curTab=DESCRIPTION&id=&parent_id=&sku=&isbn=9780789038159&pc
This book provides a "work-in-progress" that seeks to capture the micro (direct service) and macro (managerial) perspectives related to identifying evidence for practice within the practice domain of public child welfare. It is divided into two categories; namely, evidence for direct practice and evidence for management practice. In Part I, the articles are categorized in the areas of child welfare assessment and child welfare outcomes. Expanded versions of the chapters can be accessed at www.bassc.net. In Part II, the focus is on organizational issues that relate to evidence for management practice. This section includes an overview of evidence-based practice from an organizational perspective, along with evidence related to the experiences of others in implementing evidence-based practice. This book pushes the discussion of evidence-based practice in several new directions regarding: 1) the use of structured reviews to complement the systematic reviews of the Cochrane and Campbell Collaboratives; 2) the process of viewing the call for evidence-based practice as a goal or future vision of practice and evidence for practice provides a more immediate approach to promote

evidence-informed practice; and 3) a recognition that evidence-informed practice is part of building agency-based knowledge sharing systems that involve the tacit and explicit knowledge needed to improve the outcomes of social services. This book was published as a special issue of the *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*.

Corbett, T. & Lennon M. C. (Eds.). (2003). *Policy into action: Implementation research and welfare reform*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press. Available for purchase online from: http://www.urban.org/uipress/publications/210781.html
The sweeping changes of 1996's welfare reform legislation are more than just new policies. They represent a profound transformation of the character and structure of social policy institutions in the United States, a shift from a bureaucratic, centralized mode for income transfer, to a "professional" mode aimed at complex behavioral change. The evaluation community has responded with a shift from traditional impact analyses to implementation studies that get inside the skin of this new, more flexible structure. Implementation research explores the translation of concepts into working policies and programs, and evaluates how well the administrative and management dimensions of these policies work, and how the programs are experienced by all involved. *Policy into Action* offers state-of-the-art thinking on implementation research from leading policy researchers and evaluation practitioners.

Research in Practice. (2006). *Firm foundations: A practical guide to organizational support for the use of research evidence*. Dartington: Research in Practice. Available for purchase online (paperback or electronic version) from: http://www.rip.org.uk/publications/handbook_detail.asp?pub_id=39

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Bies, A. (2002, Spring). Accountability, organizational capacity and continuous improvement: Findings from Minnesota's non-profit sector. *New Directions in Philanthropy*, 31 (Special Issue), 51-80.

Keehley, P., Medlin, S., MacBride, S., & Longmire, L. (1997). Benchmarking for best practices in the public sector: Achieving performance breakthroughs in federal, state and local agencies. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Learning Circle

Facilitation: Essential Skills

A Service of the Children's Bureau

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SECTION 7

Learning Circle Facilitation: Essential Skills

Effective Learning Circles require attention to managing a group process that engages team members so that learning, the main purpose of the Learning Circle, takes place. Good facilitators also need to understand the difference between the *process* and the *content*. *Content* is the subject of the meeting, while *process* is the interactions within the meeting. For the Learning Circles, the process is just as important as the actual content, as it is through the process that a learning culture is built. Another important consideration is to understand the developmental stage of the group and how that might affect the dynamics within the group. All of these issues will be discussed in this section.

7.1 The Nature of Teams

There are differences between high and low performing teams in terms of the processes in which they engage, and understanding these distinctions is especially important for the long-term success of the Learning Circle. Not only must Learning Circles address their chosen content, but their processes must also be effective. In high performing teams (Wheelan, 2005):

1. Members are clear about and agree with the team's goals.
2. Tasks are appropriate to team versus individual solutions.
3. Members are clear about and accept their roles.
4. Role assignments match members' abilities.
5. The leadership style matches the team's developmental level.
6. An open communication structure allows all members to participate.
7. The team gets, gives, and utilizes feedback about its effectiveness and productivity.
8. The team spends time defining and discussing problems it must solve or decisions it must make.
9. Members also spend time planning how they will solve problems and make decisions.
10. The team uses effective decision-making strategies.
11. The team implements and evaluates its solutions and decisions.
12. Team norms encourage high performance, quality, success, and innovation.
13. Subgroups are integrated into the team as a whole.
14. The team contains the smallest number of members necessary to accomplish its goals.
15. The team is highly cohesive and cooperative.

16. Periods of conflict are frequent but brief, and the group has effective conflict management strategies.

In order to be productive and function well, teams have needs that must be met. See Figure 4 for a depiction of a team's multiple needs.

Figure 3*

*Rees, 2001

When working with your Learning Circle, ask yourself, "Are all of my team members' needs being met?" If not, figure out how to address

those needs, either within the Learning Circle or outside of it. For example, if there is a lack of mutual trust within the group, the Learning Circle may choose this as a topic to address in their Learning Circle with the goal of improving trust among team members. Another example would be if one individual has trouble participating, perhaps it is due to a personal self-esteem issue that might need to be addressed outside the Learning Circle in individual supervision.

7.2 Leading the Team

Principles of effective leadership inform how the team leader guides the team. According to Rees (2001), the effective leader:

1. Knows when to act as a facilitator.
2. Is skilled at helping groups solve problems.
3. Knows how to develop, maintain, and motivate teamwork.
4. Models desired behavior.
5. Listens well.
6. Encourages others to participate in decisions and plans.
7. Genuinely values the knowledge, information, and expertise of every team member, and knows how to draw out that knowledge.
8. Pitches in and does some of what team members do, when necessary.
9. Knows how to coach and inspire.
10. Knows how to help people focus.
11. Develops team members' level of performance without threat to self.
12. Empathizes with what the team struggles with.
13. Is willing *not* to be "the expert."
14. Is comfortable with relying on the expertise of others.
15. Understands and anticipates change.
16. Fosters team communication.

7.3 Facilitation Skills

Effective process happens when LC facilitators skillfully manage the group. During the Learning Circle, team members are thinking and learning together and focusing on changing—that is the essence of a learning culture.

The skilled facilitator can use many techniques to *encourage discussion* within the group. They can be grouped into four main areas:

Transforms the Environment - sets the context and fosters an environment conducive to interaction.

Engages Team Members – encourages participation by all team members.

Acts as a Leader – models desired behavior and inspires the group.

Manages Behaviors – skillfully manages troublesome behaviors to keep the group focused.

Note, that these four areas spell the acronym, TEAM. The ultimate goal of developing your group facilitation skills is to build your TEAM. Many techniques and skills are used to facilitate these four areas of group facilitation. You have likely seen these techniques used before during your past participation in groups. Next, we are going to discuss the techniques that you, the group facilitator, can use to more effectively facilitate your group.

Behaviors associated with each TEAM area include:

Transform the Environment

- Maintains a climate conducive to participating, listening, understanding, learning, and creating.
- Listens actively.
- Creates a safe environment for thinking and learning together.
- Knows how to help people focus.
- Asks questions and listens to the entire response.
- Reserves judgment and keeps an open mind.
- Provides structure and guidance to increase the likelihood that objectives will be accomplished.
- Suggests and directs processes that empower and mobilize the group to do its work.
- Encourages the group to evaluate its own progress or development.
- Helps people arrive at consensus.

Engages Team Members

- Encourages dialogue and interaction among participants.
- Capitalizes on differences among group members for the common good of the group.

- Affirms responses (yes, exactly, say more, good example).
- Respects all participants and their opinions (unless this is detrimental to the group).
- Calls on specific people, (Jacob, what are your thoughts on this?) as well as a variety of people (avoid calling on the same people).
- Engages the group through questions.
- Waits for silence after asking a question (I'm patient; you're a thoughtful group today).
- Pays attention and responds to the group.
- Uses humor.
- Connects participants' personal experience (work, life, etc.) to the subject.
- Genuinely values the knowledge, information, and expertise of every team member and knows how to draw out that knowledge.
- Invites diverse viewpoints.

Acts as a Leader

- Helps the group establish and accomplish its own objectives.
- Keeps the group focused on its objectives.
- Validates and engages the expertise in the room (Kyle, you were a therapist for many years, what are your thoughts on this approach?)
- Models desired behavior.
- Pitches in and does some of what team members do, when necessary.
- Knows how to coach and inspire.
- Comfortably relies on the expertise of others.
- Understands and anticipates change.
- Teaches others how to solve problems without solving the problems themselves. (Example: Asks team members for their ideas, even if you have a good one in mind.)

- Shares credit with team members and ensures that credit goes where credit is due.
- Encourages team members to take responsibility for issues, problems, actions, and projects.
- Understands and acknowledges that people's individual needs (social, personal, career, lifestyle, work preference) affect teamwork and works with, not against those needs.

Manages behaviors

- Defuses tension in the room.
- Attends to distractions (Let's all put our phones on vibrate).
- Addresses conflict.
- Confronts troublesome behaviors.
- Notices when team members are restless or lethargic.
- Attends to side-bar conversations and manages them.

Building these essential skills results in leading more effective learning circles and ultimately helps create a learning organization.

What to Say
"Jake, you've made some great points; now let's hear from someone else."

"Monica, you made that point earlier—it's written on the flip chart."

"Dawn and Jenny, is there something you'd like to share with the group"

"Alex, it doesn't seem that you like that approach. Why? What would you like to see happen?"

Getting Back on Track

Sometimes the group discussion may go awry and drift from the intended content. At those times, the group facilitator's skills are even more important to bring the group back to the intended discussion. Sometimes a simple statement, such as, "We seem to be drifting here," or "We seem to be stuck on this point," will help move the conversation back on track. See the dialogue box for more suggestions on what to say when the group strays. When an issue or bad behavior emerges, acknowledge it in a forthright manner, and try to ask questions to bring the conversation back on track. Another technique is to mirror the substance of their opinions, and then try to sort out their different thoughts and opinions. See the strategies above for more ideas on refocusing the Learning Circle. Remember, the Learning Circle is about creating a *learning organization* through a focus on both *content* and *process*.

7.5 Learning Circle Questions[1]

Learning Circle facilitators ask multiple questions to explore topics and generate discussion. Below are lists of questions categorized by the intent of the question to be used within Learning Circles.

Creating a Future

What are your hopes and dreams about this?

What can you see developing out of this in the future?

Imagine yourself in the future. What do you see?

What are the steps that will lead us into the future?

If we look through the fog, what do we see?

What's the best way this could turn out?

Drawing out Issues

What are the issues here?

There are several issues within this discussion. Let's draw them out and address them one at a time.

Would someone like to play the role of devil's advocate?

There seems to be an underlying issue here which we are missing. Can anyone identify it?

How do these issues fit together?

What is the key issue here?

Keeping on Task

We are getting distracted. Let's get back on task.

Can anyone summarize what we have determined so far?

How can we move this issue forward?

What is the main task?

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[1] *Adapted from:* Hunter, D., Bailey, A., & Taylor, B. (1995). *The art of facilitation.* Cambridge, MA: Fisher Books.

What steps can we take?

Let's put this new issue on the agenda for later and get back to the first issue.

Who will take responsibility for carrying out this task?

When will it be done?

There are a lot of distractions happening—let's get back to the issue/task.

What do we need to consider or take into account to have this resolved?

Cutting through Patterned behavior

You have said what you don't want to happen, Joe. Can you tell us what you would like to happen?

Can you propose an alternative possibility?

This conversation is going around in circles. Let's tackle something we can work on.

You have made a number of criticisms, Deb. What has tripped you up? What has come up for you?

What is your bottom-line concern, Jake?

Alex, you have had time to put forth your views. Let's hear from someone else.

Please don't interrupt when John is speaking.

Can we have one conversation at a time?

Let's separate the person from the issue.

What's not Being Said

I sense that there is something present here that is not being said. What is it?

There is something going on under the surface. Can someone say what it is?

There is a gremlin in the woodwork. Can someone see it and tell us what it is?

Jen, I sense that you are holding back. What do you really want to say?

The unsaid is louder here than the spoken.

There seems to be a lot that people are not saying.

Who can say what's missing here?

Let's have a round on what's missing in this discussion.

How do you account for the (low energy/anger/lack of participation/etc.) in the group? What does it suggest to you?

What do you think is happening here?

Identifying agreement and disagreement

Can someone sum up the agreement already reached? Now let's check that out with the whole group.

The agreement we seem to have reached is…Does everyone agree? The areas of agreement are:….

The areas of disagreement are: …….Is this how everyone sees it?

We do not have agreement. Let's capture the different perspectives…

Can you or someone else summarize your perspective?

Who is not happy with this solution?

What would you like changed? Can you live with this decision?

Learning

What did you notice? Were there any surprises?

How does this connect with what you already understand?

How will you use these ideas?

If you did this again, what would you like to be different?

What have been your major learnings from this learning circle?

What is the essence of your learnings—in one sentence?

Feedback and acknowledgment

Let's have a round of constructive criticism.

Let's have some feedback on that idea. Is there any further constructive criticism?

Now let's have positive feedback and acknowledgment.

I acknowledge you, Alex, for…

References

Hunter, D., Bailey, A., & Taylor, B. (1995). *The art of facilitation.* Cambridge, MA: Fisher Books.

Rees, F. (2001). How to lead work teams: Facilitation skills. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer.

Wheelan, S. (2005). Creating effective teams: A guide for members and leaders. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Western Workforce

Evaluation

SECTION 8

Western Workforce Evaluation

8.1 Model Fidelity

Learning Circles can help to create a learning culture that is fundamental to a learning organization. But the link between the Learning Circle and the outcomes of improved climate and the establishment of a learning organization can only happen when there is fidelity to the Learning Circle intervention model.

Fidelity is defined as "adherence to the standards and principles of a program model (Bond, Evans, Salyers, Williams, & Kim, 2000). Fidelity to the LC model involves a commitment on the part of supervisors to adhere to the basic tenets and principles of the model and to promote their importance to their staff through dialogue and modeling. Specific benchmarks will help to assess the fidelity of implementation of the Learning Circle model at each site.

- Attendance to Learning Circle principles: Do the Learning Circle meetings and subsequent interventions reflect the principles established by the Western Workforce Initiative?
- Occurrence/frequency of meetings: How often do meetings occur and are they fully devoted to the Learning Circle?
- Adherence to meeting protocol: Do the meetings follow the structure as presented in the Learning Circle manual?
- Adherence to team process of collaborative inquiry: Does the Learning Circle engage in the iterative process of planning, action, reflection, and adaptation?
- Participation and commitment of team members: Do all team members fully participate in the Learning Circle meetings and subsequent interventions?

A fidelity assessment should be conducted periodically to assess the extent to which the Learning Circle intervention has been carried out as set forth by the Western Workforce Initiative. By engaging in this process, mid-course corrections can be made when needed, and assessment of the effectiveness of the Learning Circle intervention model as a contributor to the development of a learning organization can be better determined. Reports on LC model fidelity will also provide vital information for organizational decisions to sustain the model after the Western Workforce Initiative formally concludes.

The fidelity and outcome assessment for the evaluation involves the following methods:

- Completion of a baseline survey at the beginning of the project period in order to obtain a baseline from which to measure changes over time.
- Completion of a brief Learning Circle member survey at the 6-month Learning Circle meeting. A Butler Institute staff member will come out and administer the survey at one of the Learning Circle meetings.
- Completion of a brief Learning Circle member survey at the 12-month learning circle meeting. A Butler Institute Staff member will come out and administer the survey at the 12 month mark.

In addition to the surveys, Learning Circle facilitators are asked to complete the Learning Circle Meeting Journals after every meeting that is held by the Learning Circle to help monitor the process. Completed Learning Circle Journal forms must be transmitted to the Butler Institute via fax, email, or through an on-line survey. These meeting journals will help the Western Workforce assess the status of the Learning Circles and make mid-course corrections when needed. Reports on LC model fidelity will also provide vital information for organizational decisions to sustain the model after the Western Workforce Project formally concludes.

Learning Circle

Forms and Worksheets

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SECTION 9

Forms and Worksheets

The forms that follow provide space to document topics selected by the group, record daily meetings, and then summarize each PARA phase (PLAN, ACT, REFLECT, or ADAPT). Use of the Learning Circle Meeting Journal form is mandatory while the use of the other forms is optional.

Learning Circle Topic Basket

Date:

Topics:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Learning Circle Meeting Journal

PLEASE PRINT legibly and FAX to: Laricia Longworth-Reed at (303) 871.4980,

or email: Laricia.Longworth-Reed@du.edu **Thank You**

Facilitator:_____ **Unit**

Supervisor:_____

Date of Meeting: ____/_____/_____ **Coach Present?** ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

1. Meeting Attendees (Please PRINT the first and last name of all meeting attendees below):

2. What phase of the PARA process best describes the focus of your meeting?

☐ **Plan** ☐ **Act** ☐ **Reflect** ☐ **Adapt**

3. What was/were today's topic(s)?

4. Summarize today's meeting discussion here.

5. What is your action plan for addressing your topic (if appropriate)? (*Who will do what by when?)*

PLAN Summary Worksheet

Topic: _____

1. What is your assessment?
2. What is your best practice approach?
3. What is your goal?
4. What was learned from today's Learning Circle?
5. What is your plan?

6. Short-term (in the next 30 days):		
What?	Who?	When?

7. Long-term (beyond 30 days):		
What?	Who?	When?

8. What needs to be brought to the Design Team?

9. What needs to be brought to the Macro Team?

ACT Summary Worksheet

Topic: _____

Goal: _____

1. What is your plan?	
2. Short-term (in the next 30 days): **What? (record from Plan form)**	**Status?**
3. Long-term (beyond 30 days): **What? (record from Plan form)**	**Status?**
4. What are the successes?	

5. What problems/barriers have been encountered?
6. What strategies can be used to address the barriers?

REFLECT Summary Worksheet

Topic: _____

1. What sources of information inform your reflection?
2. What is your plan?
3. Short-term (in the next 30 days): **What? (record from Plan form)** **Status?**
4. Long-term (beyond 30 days): **What? (record from Plan form)** **Status?**

5. What did you expect to happen?
6. How are the results? (What worked? What didn't?)
7. If a revised plan is necessary, what alternative strategies can be used?

ADAPT Summary Worksheet

Topic: _____

1. What is your new plan?		
2. Short-term (in the next 30 days):		
What?	**Who?**	**When?**
3. Long-term (beyond 30 days):		
What?	**Who?**	**When?**

4. What needs to be brought to the Design Team?
5. What needs to be brought to the Macro Team?

Searching for Best Practices Worksheet

1. IDENTIFY WHAT YOU NEED.

What is the topic/issue of interest? This topic may come from the COHA, agency reports, or your own practice experience.

2. GET SPECIFIC: Define Your Question.

What exactly do you need to know?

3. WHAT ARE THE MOST LIKELY RESOURCES?

See list of best practice resources in Resources section of Manual.

4. SEARCH THE RESOURCE DATABASE.

What key words will you use?

Has the practice has been replicated in many different settings and organizations?	YES	NO
Is evidence of transferability provided?	YES	NO
Was a randomized control trial conducted?	YES	NO
Are there areas of inconsistency with your organization's practice? List those areas:	YES	NO
Are there areas of overlap with current practice? List those areas:	YES	NO
What is the feasibility of the practice for your organization? List the costs and benefits to your organization:		
Does the practice align with your organizational mission and values? List the areas of alignment or similarity:	YES	NO

Learning Circles

Frequently Asked Questions

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SECTION 10

Frequently Asked Questions

10.1 Questions and responses

Below is a list of frequently asked questions about Learning Circles.

1. What's the difference between a Learning Circle and a unit meeting? *A unit meeting deals with the day-to-day business of the unit while a Learning Circle typically focuses on one topic and is guided by the PARA (plan, act, reflect, adapt) process.*

2. Who conducts the Learning Circle? *The designated LC facilitator is typically the unit supervisor, but a lead worker could also facilitate so long as he/she has been trained at the LC Facilitator training.*

3. How many Learning Circles do I have to do? *Learning Circles are conducted at least once monthly for an indefinite period of time. The Western Workforce Project will be providing support and evaluating the process for one year after you begin. But as a problem-solving tool, you can use them indefinitely. The coach will attend up to five Learning Circles, then you'll be facilitating on your own.*

5. How long do I have to do Learning Circles? *Please see above. As part of the project, your agency has committed to the Learning Circles for a minimum of 1 year, but we hope you will use this tool indefinitely.*

6. What's an appropriate topic for Learning Circles? *Previous topics have included team cohesion, secondary trauma, scheduling, morale, communication, and documentation.*

7. Am I required to participate in the Western Workforce Project and Learning Circles? *Your agency has committed to the Western Workforce Project for the five-year funding period. As part of your job expectations, the management expects you to participate in the project and conduct Learning Circles. The staff at the Butler Institute will provide one year of observation and support.*

8. What's in it for me? *Learning Circles will help you to address issues and that most impact your team and your agency. Your team will decide together how to tackle these issues with an action plan. The process gives you control over issues relevant to you and your team. By engaging in Learning Circles, your team works to create a more positive organizational culture that reflects the qualities of a learning organization.*

9. How are these Learning Circles helpful to me in my job? *You and your team decide what to discuss and work on during Learning Circles. The solutions you develop in your Learning Circles should have a direct effect on how your team and agency functions, thus improving practice and job satisfaction.*

10. Do I always need to fill out the Learning Circle journal form? *Yes, as part of the evaluation process we need to know whether you're conducting Learning Circles as intended in the model (this is "fidelity"). Your Learning Circle journals also help us to understand what you are doing in your Learning Circle and then provide support to you in this project.*

11. Do I have to complete the evaluation survey? *In accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, completion of the surveys is completely voluntary. We are asking that you complete the surveys in order to assess the effectiveness of the Western Workforce Project interventions.*

12. Who is going to see the survey data? *All survey data are completely confidential. Only Butler Institute research staff have access to the securely-stored data. Your unique identifiers will help us to match surveys over time so we can understand your attitudes and reactions to the Learning Circles over the project period. Data will only be reported in aggregate and we will never report anything that could ever be attributed to any individual. We follow strict research protocols established by our IRB to protect your privacy.*

13. Why do we have to keep on taking all these surveys? *So that we can measure your attitudes about Learning Circles over time.*

14. What does my coach do? *Your coach will help you get your Learning Circle started by guiding you in both the content and process of Learning Circles. She'll be able to answer any questions that you have. Also, she'll be administering the surveys the Butler Institute is collecting at specific time points to assess the Learning Circle effectiveness. Your coach will be there to assist you in the ongoing implementation of the Learning Circles either in person or by phone.*

15. How do I get started with Learning Circles? *Excellent question! We will schedule an orientation on Learning Circles for your team during this training. Next, your coach will contact you to set up your first Learning Circle with her in attendance. Within 30 days, you should hold your first Learning Circle.*

Learning Circles

Resources

SECTION 11

Learning Circle Resources

11.1 Websites

Child Welfare Information Gateway (http://www.childwelfare.gov)

A service of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, this comprehensive website provides access to print and electronic publications, websites, and online databases covering a wide range of child welfare topics from prevention to permanency, including child welfare, child abuse and neglect, adoption, search and reunion, and much more. To find specific material, go to the "Library Search" link in the left-side pane.

National Child Welfare Resource Centers

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (http://www.nrcoi.org) offers technical assistance, training, teleconferences, and publications to assist states with the CFSRs, including strategic planning, quality improvement, evaluation of outcomes, facilitation of stakeholder involvement, and improvement of training and workforce development.

The National Resource Center for Child Protective Services (http://www.nrccps.org) focuses on building state, local, and tribal capacity through training and technical assistance in CPS, including meeting federal requirements, strengthening programs, determining eligibility for the CAPTA grant, providing support to state liaison officers, and collaborating with other NRCs.

The National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues (http://www.abanet.org/child/rclji) offers states assistance with their CFSRs, including the collection and analysis of data, legal and judicial issue analysis, promotion of stakeholder involvement, action planning, and the implementation of program improvement plans.

The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (NRCPFC) focuses on increasing the capacity and resources of state, tribal, and other publicly supported child welfare agencies to promote family-centered practices that contribute to the safety, permanency, and well-being of children, while meeting the needs of their families. The NRCPFC helps states and tribes to implement strategies to expand knowledge, increase competencies, and change attitudes of child welfare professionals at all levels, with the goal of infusing family-centered principles and practices in their work with children, youth, and families who enter the child welfare system.

The National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (http://www.nrccwdt.org) addresses a broad range of program and technical issues (including tribal and court child welfare issues) in assisting with the CFSR process. Services include training on data use and management, assistance with the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), coordination of peer consultation, and preparation and use of state data profiles.

The National Resource Center for Tribes (http:// www.nrc4tribes.org) engages Tribes to increase their access to and use of the T&TA Network, brokers T&TA, helps provide T&TA, facilitates peer-to-peer consultation among Tribes on child welfare issues, and increases cultural competence and sensitivity to Tribal voices in the T&TA Network and in State child welfare systems.

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption (http://www.nrcadoption.org) partners with states, tribes, and other NRCs to offer support in all phases of the CFSR process, including analysis of adoption and permanency options, exploration of systemic factors, building of cultural responsiveness, and promotion of stakeholder involvement.

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development (http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/nrcyd/) provides states with CFSR assistance, including promotion of stakeholder involvement, technical assistance, training, and information services. It also offers states, tribes, and other youth-serving organizations assistance in effectively implementing the Chafee Foster Care Independence and the Education and Training Voucher programs and supporting youth engagement in child welfare policy, planning, and program development.

The Collaboration to AdoptUsKids (http://www.adoptuskids.org) provides training and technical assistance to states and tribes in connection with the CFSRs on issues that pertain to the development and implementation of quality recruitment and retention services for foster and adoptive families.

The National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (http://www.ncsacw.samhsa.gov) works to develop knowledge and provide technical assistance to federal, state, and local agencies and tribes to improve outcomes for families in the child welfare and family court systems who have substance use disorders.

The National Abandoned Infants Assistance Resource Center (http://aia.berkeley.edu) works to enhance the quality of social and health services delivered to children who are abandoned or at risk of abandonment due to the presence of drugs and/or HIV in the family.

The National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Programs (www.friendsnrc.org) offers knowledge and expertise in the implementation of family-support strategies in a variety of

settings and for many purposes. It provides CFSR assistance, including building of networks, collection of data, and promotion of stakeholder involvement.

The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (http://www.cachildwelfareclearinghouse.org/) provides child welfare professionals with easy access to vital information about selected child welfare related programs. The primary task of the CEBC is to inform the child welfare community about the research evidence for programs being used or marketed in California, but anyone can use this website. The research for each program is reviewed and rated, if applicable, utilizing the CEBC SCIENTIFIC RATING SCALE to determine the level of research evidence for the program. The programs rated on the Scientific Rating Scale are then also rated on a Relevance to Child Welfare Rating Scale.

The Center for Research to Practice (http://www.cr2p.org/) is a non-profit organization dedicated to building bridges between research and practice in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health systems. R2P strives to link advances in research to improve outcomes for children and families involved in public service systems with changes in practice in those systems. Often, there is a need to go beyond tightly controlled research studies to apply programs and services to the complex problems that real people and public service systems experience. CR2P is dedicated to connecting these two worlds. R2P believes that integrating the best research on effective programming into the daily work of public service systems will improve the quality of care for children and families.

The Child Welfare League of America: Linking Research to Practice (http://www.cwla.org/programs/r2p/default.htm). The Research to Practice (R2P) effort is focused on discovering and presenting to the child welfare community, relevant information regarding programs and/or practices involved in any of the levels of research rigor.

11.2 National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (http://www.ncwwi.org/)

The purpose of the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI) is to build the capacity of the nation's child welfare workforce and improve outcomes for children and families through activities that support the development of skilled child welfare leaders in public, private, and tribal child welfare systems. NCWWI's workforce development activities promote:

> **Learning:** Fostering continuous learning that is interactive, reflective, and relevant.
>
> **Leading:** Cultivating diverse leadership at multiple levels within public, private, and tribal child welfare agencies.
>
> **Changing:** Supporting change through workforce development and organizational capacity building