

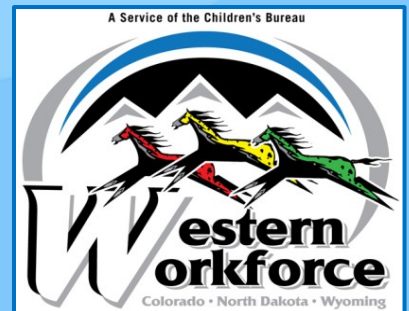
# Learning Circles: An Introductory Manual

**Western Workforce Initiative**

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

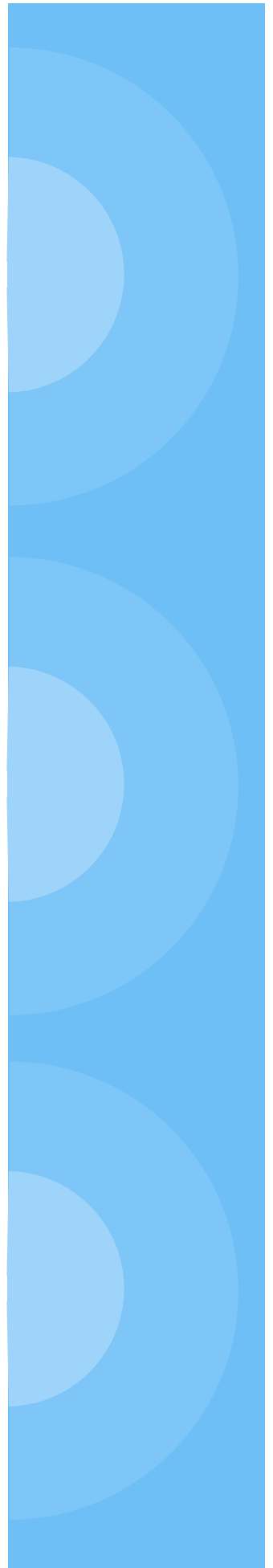
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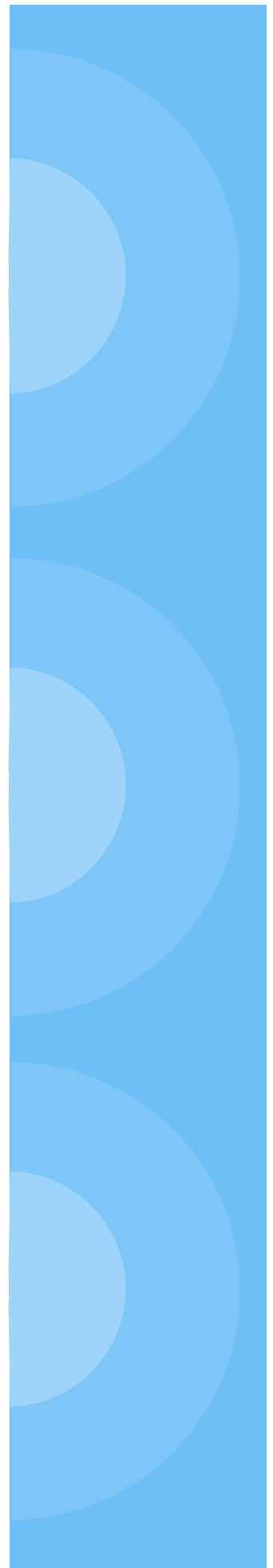


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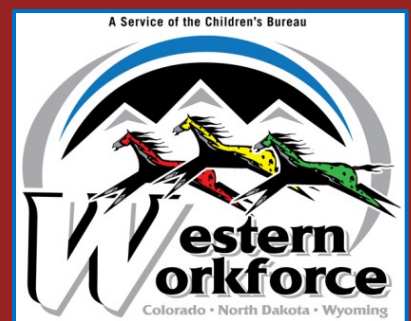


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# **Introduction**

**to Western Workforce Initiative**

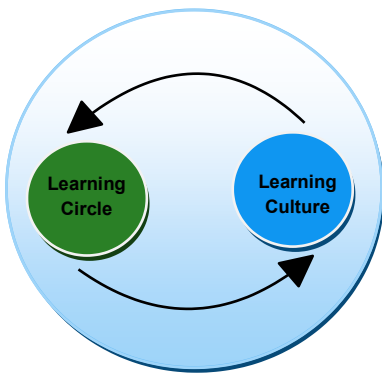


**SECTION 1**

# Introduction to Western Workforce Initiative

Welcome to the Learning Circle Manual, a guide for Learning Circle facilitators. This manual will provide information on to 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 balance 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 team functioning through a best practice approach. In other words, teams will have access to information on what is really working in the field and will use this information to guide their learning process leading to meaningful action plans. Learning Circle topics are chosen by the team, but a specific process guides the Learning Circle model. Each team selects the “what,” while this manual provides the “how.” Also included here is contextual information about the “why,” so that Learning Circle facilitators understand the basic rationale for implementing Learning Circles. By focusing on learning, team members can develop a new kind of culture, a learning culture that allows the group to think and explore 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, 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 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 how the group works together. 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. 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. After a month, team members came back with a report about how the process worked with their families. Several families are 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 includes Tamara and refines other aspects of the program. Their manager, Sheila, has been supportive of their efforts and congratulated them on their interim results. Kara's team now believes in the power of the Learning Circle to improve practice.

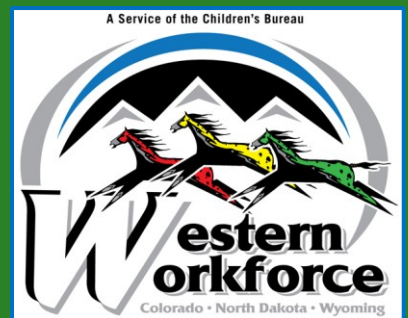
Team members do have the power to create meaningful change through the Learning Circle process for children and families. In this manual, you will find all the information you need to guide your Learning Circles. Information is included on the supporting theories and research that led to the development of the Learning Circle approach. 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 will also 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 working with you in a partnership 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



SECTION 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 best 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. Understand mechanisms for finding best and promising approaches to practice using a variety of resources.
6. Understand the importance of best and promising practices that present evidence of practice effectiveness with the child welfare target population.
7. Use information from a variety of sources to inform practice approaches.













### Learning Circle facilitators will be able to:

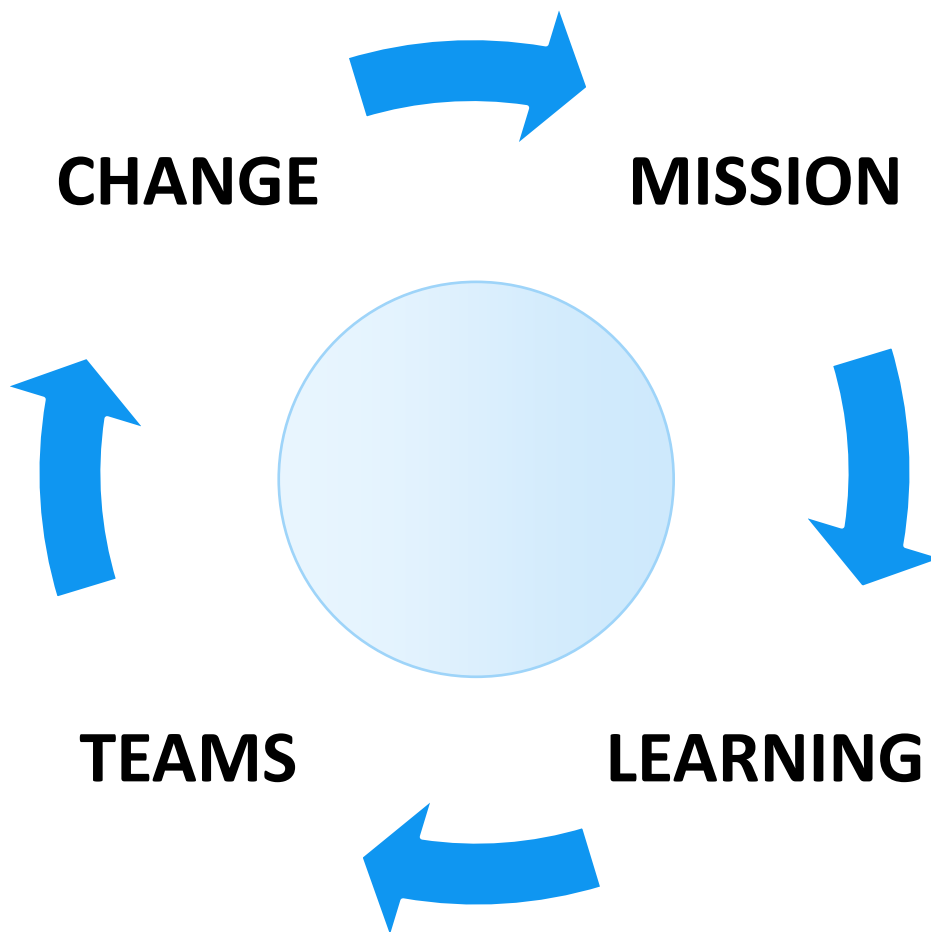
1. Understand and identify group dynamics and establish group norms to encourage full participation by all team members.
2. Encourage inclusive leadership to hear all perspectives, and distribute leadership so all team members contribute to problem solving and decision making within the team to arrive 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 authentic dialogue amongst team members about key practice and team functioning issues.
5. Provide ongoing mentoring and coaching 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

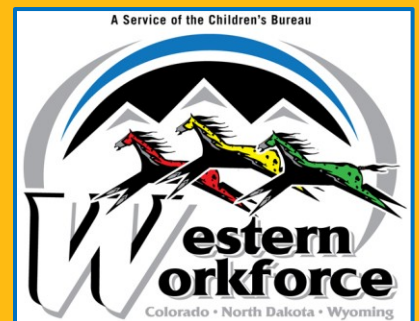
### Learning Circles...

-  Create organizational change and improved outcomes through a focus on best practice at the team level.
-  Inspire a learning organization committed to improved practices, functioning, and outcomes.
-  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 evidenced-based approaches.
-  Empower team-level staff to improve practice for more positive organizational climate and client outcomes.
-  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.
-  Emphasize ongoing evaluation to improve effectiveness and achieve desired outcomes.



# **Western Workforce**

**Team Overview**

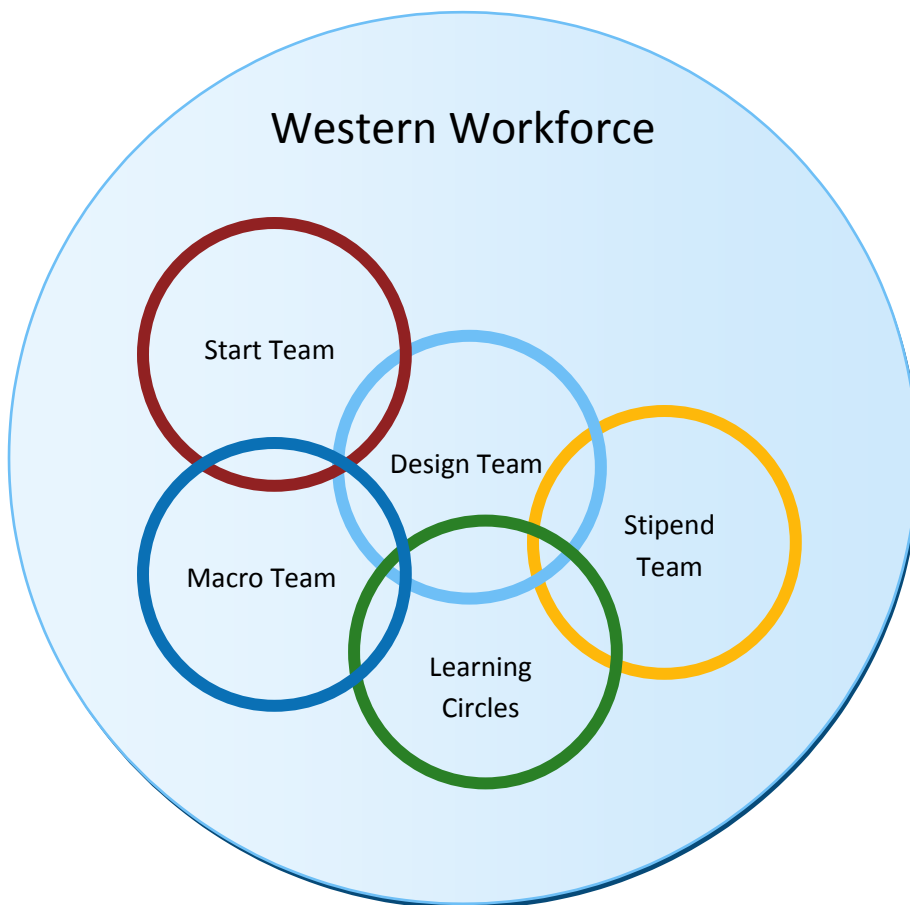


**SECTION 3**

## Western Workforce Team Overview

Learning Circles are a key team within the larger Western Workforce Initiative. The Western Workforce Initiative designates several project teams for the planning and implementation of the project in order to achieve our outcome of 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 each other and 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 with 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 best practice approaches at the supervisor/worker group level. As appropriate, participants send ideas to the Design Team and the Macro Team to support organizational culture change. Learning Circles meet bi-weekly 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, the Design Team prioritizes goals related to workforce issues, chooses strategies, implements those strategies, assesses results, and revises plans as appropriate. Membership within the Design Team will reflect all agency levels, from the agency manager or director to case aides. As appropriate for the agency, the Design Team may also choose to invite community stakeholders and family representatives. Jointly, the Design Team works together to implement their agency-specific workforce plan. These plans are evolving in nature, using a constant PLAN, ACT, REFLECT, ADAPT loop. Specific interventions may address a wide variety of issues identified by the COHA—for example, recruitment, worker preparation, or retention issues.

The Design Team meets at least every two months 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 systemically 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 really only be addressed at the macro level. Interventions at the macro level focus on common issues across the state or a large county that impact the workforce—for example centralized recruitment efforts or the establishment of better relationships with the court. Strategies emanating from the Macro Team will address crosscutting policy and possibly even legislative issues that impact the entire workforce. Participants will meet approximately quarterly during the project's life.

### **3.5 Stipend Committee**

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

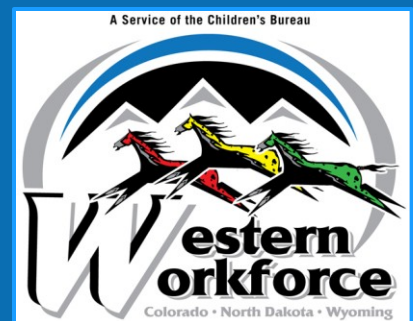
*Goal:* To recruit and select child welfare stipend students, provide oversight of Western Workforce stipend students program, and assist in implementing internship programs at the child welfare sites that meet the needs of the agencies, students, and the universities/colleges.

*About:* For the recruitment phase, the Stipend Committee develops a marketing plan to generate BSW/MSW applicants from students, the agency, and the community. During the selection process, the committee develops an application format and procedures, and 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, participating 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. Stipend Committee members meet regularly, as necessary, and for the duration of the project.



# Learning Circle

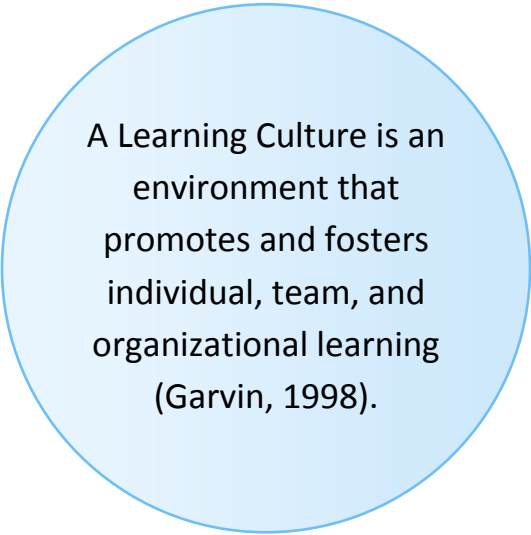
Approach



SECTION 4

## Learning Circle Approach

The next section provides information on how to conduct Learning Circles with your team. It explains the basic approach—that is to PLAN, ACT, REFLECT, and ADAPT—and the associated rationale and meeting steps for each phase. Initial Learning Circle meetings will also be somewhat different from later meetings, so information about how to conduct Learning Circle meetings over time is also presented. Our intent is to provide Learning Circle facilitators with a loose 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 consist of one designated team. Typically, this will be 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, who will be 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 most strategic planning or even problem-solving processes; that is to plan, implement, re-assess, and then begin the cycle anew. As a structured, formal process, it first appeared in the early twentieth century, and then was later adopted by 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 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 leading to a learning culture 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 best practice approaches.
- 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 thus far.
- 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 small as well as larger issues. Teams design plans with solutions that address the issues most affecting their own practice to improve child and family outcomes, and team functioning. Implementation of these plans may not be easy, and it is important for the supervisor to know how to address the barriers they may face as they implement a different approach to practice to improve child and family outcomes and team functioning.

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 thoroughly discuss the chosen topic. It is more important to carefully think through the topic rather than to rush through the PARA phases. The PARA phases simply provide a framework for learning about a topic together, and then working to address that topic with your team. The point 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 outcomes for children and families.
  - a. Relate the characteristics of a learning organization to the Learning Circle approach.
  - b. Transmit a value towards 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 with children and families.
2. Establish Learning Circles as a model for practice improvements that result in improved 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 methods for researching best practice approaches for areas of intervention.
  - d. Develop targeted action plans for practice improvements.
  - e. Connect organization mission and values to practice change and improved outcomes.
  - f. 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.
- 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 LC 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 intervention goals and corresponding objectives relevant to chosen topics and approach 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.

(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. For example, do look at issues around how visitation is arranged for 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.

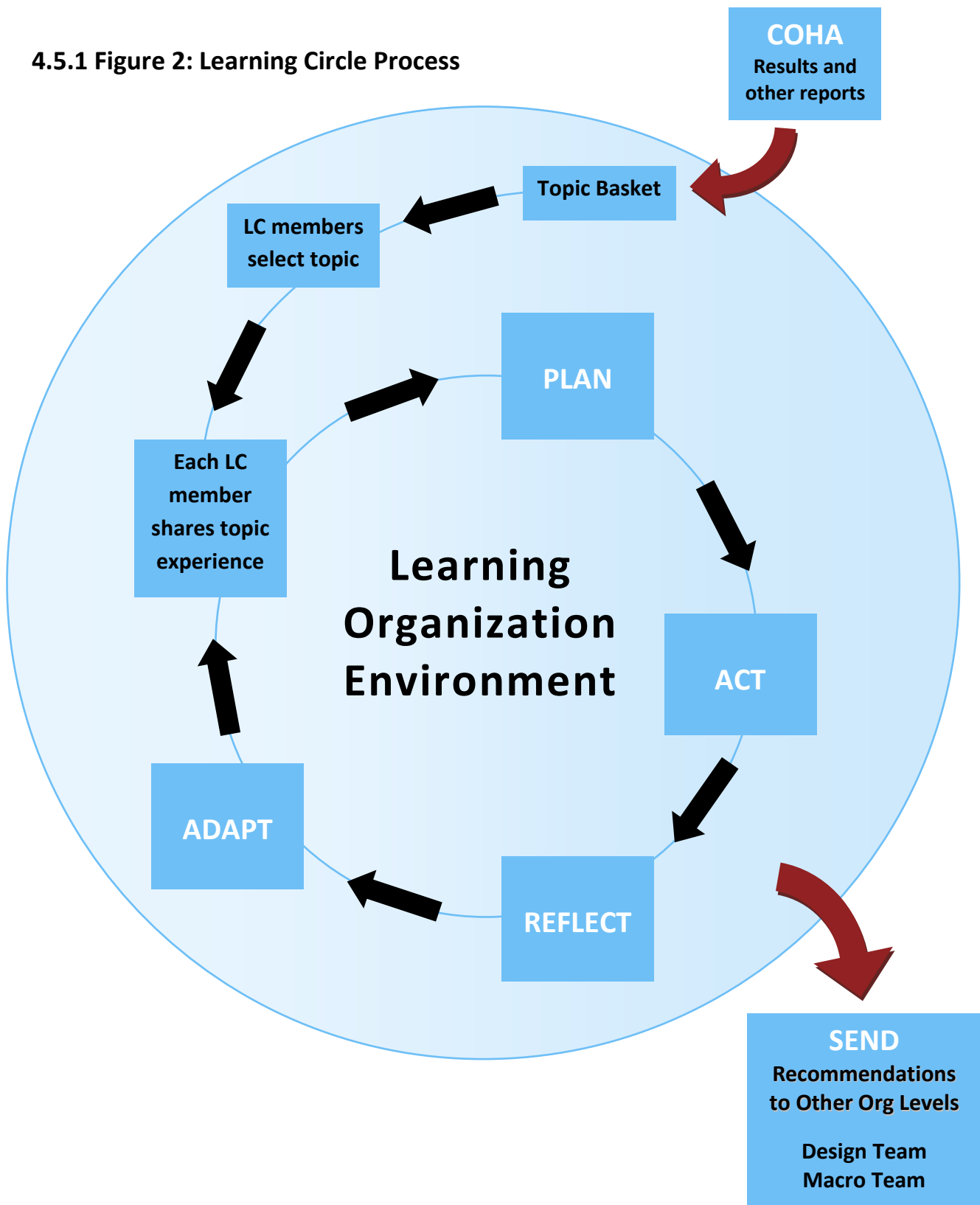
Learning Circles are encouraged to start "small" so that they can immediately realize success, and to focus on either practice and outcomes or team climate issues that most impact them as individuals and as a team, or those child and family outcomes that they can most immediately impact, though, even 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 will be empowered to choose the topics from all the aforementioned sources that are most important to them. Otherwise, the likelihood that learning takes place and the plan will actually be carried out is diminished. Topics may span multiple Learning Circle meetings to fully explore issues and seek comprehensive solutions.

## **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, gather the following documents and have them available for distribution to all team members:

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

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 learning culture that 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 to 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 will 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 begin with the Start Team recommendations and ask their 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. Once the discussion is complete, team members will vote on the preferred topic to be the focus of the Learning Circle intervention. Topics not chosen will be put in the "Learning Circle Topic Basket" for future Learning Circle interventions. Record these topics on the form, **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. See the section, "Searching for Best Practice Information" for tips on how to accomplish this task. 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.

### 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 the 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*

*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, and discussion of a topic may 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.

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 so easily solved, but the act of discussion regarding the topic does move practice in a positive direction. Therein lays the intent of an effective Learning Circle—to inspire lively discussion about issues most affecting the team by bringing to bear evidenced-based practice 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. Topics may span multiple Learning Circle meetings as members PLAN, ACT, REFLECT, and ADAPT together. Team members may very well 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**

Learning Circle meetings' main purpose is to reflect, discuss, and plan as a team to improve practice, child and family outcomes, or team functioning. Meetings 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 will be held approximately every two weeks to allow sufficient time to integrate learning from the meeting, and then action to implement that learning. Meeting duration is approximately 1 hour—no less than 45 minutes and no more than about 90 minutes. Learning Circle facilitators may conduct the meetings using the following steps as a guide. Remember to make sure that all voices are heard within the meeting, including those of our children and families—that is, we consider the impact of our actions on the children and families with which we work. Every meeting will 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:* Acknowledge the Learning Circle recorder for the meeting.

*Step 3:* Remind all team members of the Learning Circle principles that were 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 of the PARA the Learning Circle is addressing. Use questions for the appropriate PARA phase to guide the discussion.

*Step 5:* 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 Western Workforce Initiative staff.

Success happens when the Learning Circles inspire team members to grow individually and collectively. 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. Record the meeting's learning points on the **Learning Circle Meeting Journal** found in the Forms and Worksheets section (also available electronically). Each quadrant of the circle records the significant information discussed at the day's Learning Circle. The questions in the quadrants are:

- 1) What topic(s) were discussed today?
- 2) What were the significant learning points discussed in the meeting?
- 3) What needs to be done before the next meeting?
- 4) Who will be doing what task?

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 standard structure for a Learning Circle meeting about a new topic is loosely:

- a) Topic exploration (current situation, challenges, strengths)
- b) Best practices discussion (best practices and other supporting information)
- c) Plan development (strategies, resources, barriers)

These steps may extend over multiple meetings, as it just may not be possible to fully explore a topic in its entirety during one meeting. Or the discussion might lead to wanting more information about a topic, so the dialogue may need to be continued after that information has been collected. 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 the relevant articles and other information that have been gathered to inform 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 his or her findings to the balance of 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's not a full protocol—more of a loose guide to help the LC facilitator keep the conversation flowing. During the PLAN phase, discuss the following questions:

*Topic Exploration Questions*

1. When this is going well, what has worked to make this happen?
2. What is the agency policy around this issue?
3. What challenges do our clients face around this issue?
4. What are the challenges that our workers face around this issue?
5. What are the agency's and this unit's results/current outcomes around this issue?

*Best Practice and Research Questions*

6. What does the research say about improved practice approaches related to the issue?
7. What is the evidence around these issues?
8. How do our own practices compare to those supported by research?

*Plan Development Questions*

9. What strategies can help to address these challenges?
10. What community supports might help with this issue?
11. What resources can we draw upon to assist with this issue?
12. What barriers might be anticipated? How can they be addressed in advance?

One person is designated as the LC recorder. Record and summarize the meeting(s) discussion and complete the **Learning Circle Meeting Journal**. Once a topic has been fully explored and the plan developed, record this on the **PLAN Summary Worksheet**. The **PLAN Summary Worksheet** also includes space for the team to record those issues that should 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 available the completed forms 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. So, if a topic is discussed over three Learning Circle meetings, just record it once on the **PLAN Summary Worksheet** after the PLAN phase has concluded. The meeting tracking forms provide a roadmap through each phase of the PARA process, but it's not necessary to record all stops along the way, just the major landmarks.

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

*Step 1:* 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 the discussion that explores the current situation and corresponding strengths and challenges.

*Step 3:* Review the research and other supporting documents that have been gathered to inform the discussion on the topic. Discuss the research related to best practice approaches and other information to explore how this issue has been addressed by other entities. Use the **Learning Circle Question Guide, Best Practice and Research Questions**, to guide the discussion.

*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 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 research	Articles, LC Question Guide
Step 7	Develop a plan	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 intervening 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 volunteer visitation program, and then communicates the outcome of that meeting via email. Or 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 actually 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, so the group will brainstorm other ideas for supervising the visits. Record the meeting events on the **Learning Circle Meeting Journal**. Questions that should be discussed during the ACT phase are:

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

Once team members feel that the ACT phase has concluded, they should complete the **ACT Summary Worksheet**. At the conclusion of each meeting, the recorder should synthesize the meeting on 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?
- How are the results? (What worked? What didn't?)
- If an alternative plan is necessary, what alternative strategies can be used?

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's 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, complete the **ADAPT Summary Worksheet**.

#### **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, it may be recognized that there are some issues and/or strategies that are beyond the scope of the team level and must be passed along up 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 appropriate meeting tracking form will record those issues and help to track the status of those issues over time.

#### **4.5.5 Western Workforce Mentoring Role**

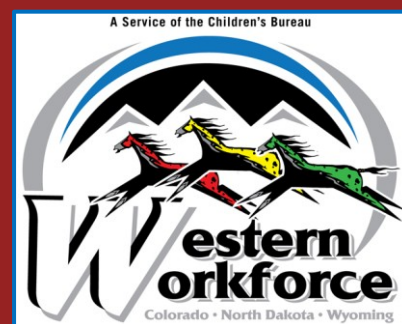
Western Workforce Initiative staff and designated coaches will support supervisors as they develop their Learning Circle facilitation skills by mentoring them during the first several months of conducting the meetings. Mentoring supervisors at this early stage is intended to provide assistance and feedback 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.

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# **Western Workforce**

**Using Agency Results**



## **SECTION 5**

## Western Workforce 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 those 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 about what works in child welfare, agency reports also provide research evidence that must be taken into account. Best practice and evidence-based practice information must be examined through the filter of the local agency context and the practitioner's "practice wisdom" (Barratt & Hodson, 2006).

### 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 best practice area or domain to research prior to developing an action plan.

**COHA Results Example:**

In one agency, the COHA reveals that vicarious trauma is an agency area of concern. Vicarious trauma is defined as the cumulative impact of distress that client trauma content and stories have on a professional. The LC members in this agency have identified worker stress as a target for action planning. The COHA results support their hunch that this topic needs attention. They identify vicarious traumatization as a topic to research. The question is: What best practice information exists on interventions for social workers experiencing vicarious trauma? In this example, the COHA results have 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 the case 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 to a Learning Circle's best advantage 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 provides evidence that caseworkers are not completing their required child and family visits in a timely manner. The supporting PIP report will then provide further information on a specific percentage of overall completed visits in a given month. This info can 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.

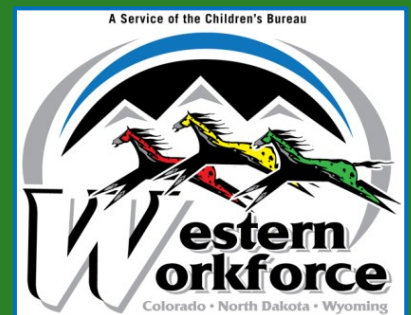
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# Learning Circle

**Best Practice Information:  
Searching and Application**



SECTION 6

## Learning Circle Best Practice Information: Searching and Application

One of the key characteristics of a learning organization is the ability to search for and utilize best practices information. This will be 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 What are best practices?

To better understand and develop an ability to appropriately apply best practices, we must first define the term and clarify what best practices are and what they are not. Not surprisingly, there is not a single accepted definition of best practices for child welfare or across related disciplines. A search of the term yields many similar themes, and several well-articulated definitions include one from the literature examining family planning and reproductive health work in Africa:

*A best practice is a specific action or set of actions exhibiting quantitative and qualitative evidence of success together with the ability to be replicated and the potential to be adapted and transferred. Best practices represent the "Gold Standard" of activities and tools that can be implemented to support program objectives.<sup>1</sup>*

One of the difficulties in defining best practices is that it is a "multi-dimensional" concept and exactly what constitutes best practice is dependent on the specific issue and definition of the targeted practice area (Bies, 2004, p. 261).

In examining the literature relevant specifically to best practices in child welfare, Bies (2004) suggests supervisors look at the following qualities when searching for best practice research:

- Does the practice present a clearly defined framework and process?
- Is the practice replicable and transferable from one organization to another?
- Is the development of the practice explicitly described?

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<sup>1</sup> Advance Africa Best Practices Compendium

- Is there discussion of what benefits would be expected by adoption of the practice?
- Does the practice have a demonstrated record of success?

Accordingly, if the best practice model being researched does not possess one or more of these characteristics, it is not a best practice. There are a number of models that have been developed to categorize best practice, debate of which is beyond the scope of our discussion. These models are referenced in the Resources section of the manual. The primary concern is the quality of evidence of success that supports the given best practice.

## 6.2 What are promising practices or approaches?

It should be noted that many practices might be in the process of being tested as best practice models but may not yet have enough supporting evidence to be deemed a best practice. These models are sometimes called “promising practices.” A good definition of these “practices in waiting” comes from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration that states:

*[P]romising practices are programs and strategies that have some quantitative data showing positive outcomes... over a period of time, but do not have enough research or replication to support generalizable outcomes.<sup>2</sup>*

Another helpful definition of “promising approaches” comes from the systems of care literature, which states:

*Promising approaches show evidence of effectiveness through experience of key stakeholders (e.g., families, youth, providers, administrators) and outcomes data.<sup>3</sup>*

As you can see from these two definitions, promising practices or approaches have some evidence behind them to support their effectiveness, but this evidence may not be as substantial as the evidence supporting best practice programs. In addition, promising practices or approaches programs may not yet have been replicated sufficiently or shown evidence of adaptability to different contexts, which is key to best practices programs. Promising practices or approaches play a role in developing and targeting interventions in child welfare and should be considered by supervisors in their Learning Circle work. Some examples of promising practices include:

<sup>2</sup> From: <http://captus.samhsa.gov/western/resources/bp/step6/index.cfm>

<sup>3</sup> Pires, S. (2002). Building systems of care: A primer. Washington D.C.: Human Service Collaborative.

- Wraparound Service Approaches
- Family Support and Education
- Family Group Decision Making

### **The Big Picture**

Another important point to remember when defining best practices is that the way a child welfare organization defines expectations around identification and use of best practices influences and is affected by many different organizational contexts. Figure 3 shows some of the many organizational contexts that may influence the selection and fit of a specific best practice model (Bies, 2004; Keehey et al., 1997; Bernstein, 1997). For example, one might not immediately think of best practices as being affected by or having an effect on policy and planning at the organizational level, but in a learning organization, policy should dictate the use of evidence-based or best practices. For supervisors, as the primary drivers of “practice” standards in a child welfare organization, this means that searching for and using best practices must be a regular part of their job. In a learning organization, supervisors would be expected to identify and weigh in on needed policy changes that may run counter to established best practice standards. In turn, if a child welfare organization is engaged in a system change process (i.e., involving planning and policy changes) to integrate a standardized practice model, elements of the best practices that are in current use would need to be integrated into the planning process. In this situation, supervisors would be key players in evaluating information about existing and needed best practices in organizational decision making about the proposed practice model system change. Another example is the context of performance management. Child welfare supervisors devote a lot of time to managing the performance of their staff. If use of best practice is a standard in a given child welfare organization, then the standards of practice that the best practice model provides will also give the supervisor criteria to use in gauging the performance of their workers. And the degree to which a supervisor uses that information to manage their workers will be related to the fidelity of that practice across the entire organization.

This “big picture” conceptualization is especially relevant to the Learning Circle model because one of the skills that supervisors will focus on as facilitators of Learning Circles is connecting the interventions developed in the Learning Circle to the broader mission and values of the organization. Supervisors will become adept at identifying and articulating how the planned practice changes developed in Learning Circles reflect the mission and values, and will lead to the desired outcomes of the child welfare organization. In this way, supervisors will lead and promote the shared visioning and systems thinking that are essential to a learning organization.

Figure 3



### 6.3 What are evidence-based practices?

A helpful definition of evidence-based practice (EBP) states that these practices:

*Show evidence of effectiveness through carefully controlled scientific studies, including random clinical trials.<sup>4</sup>*

There are clear similarities between EBP and best practices, in that both focus on identifying the best possible evidence available for a targeted practice area. For the purposes of our discussion, we can simplify the distinction by stating that EBP are those that meet an extremely high standard in terms of using controlled experimental designs, large samples assigned to randomized groups, and discrete outcome evaluations. Based upon this distinction, one can see that most EBPs could be considered best practices, but not all best practices would be considered EBPs.

Given the tendency for both of these terms to be used rather loosely, and sometimes interchangeably, it's important to note that the overarching goal is to "provide an analytical perspective, which will enable the identification of the best work that is going on, so that what is done well will be acknowledged, celebrated, and learned from so that it may be done more often" (Ferguson, 2003).

### 6.4 What are the sources of best practices?

The sources of best practices can be internal and/or external to the child welfare organization. Some well-known examples of best or promising practices external to a child welfare organization would include multi-systemic therapy and differential response models. However, there may be current models or initiatives that have been previously implemented internal to a child welfare organization that must be assessed in one's search for best practices.

### 6.5 How do you determine the quality and fit of best practices?

First, sufficient time must be allotted to adequately assess the quality of the evidence for a given best practice, as well as its appropriateness for each individual organization.

Here are some important points to consider when evaluating the quality of the evidence:

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<sup>4</sup> Pires, S. (2002). Building systems of care: A primer. Washington D.C.: Human Service Collaborative.

- Has the practice been replicated in many different settings and organizations? You want to see evidence that indicates the practice has been used in different organizations with similar positive outcomes.
- Is evidence of transferability provided? You want to see information about how to apply the practice in different settings to know that the details of transferring the practice have been sufficiently determined.
- Was a randomized control trial conducted? This is the hallmark of a well-tested practice. Randomized control trial studies in child welfare practice settings are relatively rare, but they have the potential to provide valuable evidence of practice model effectiveness.

In evaluating the fit of the practice for your own organization:

- Examine areas of inconsistency with your organization's practice. In what ways is the practice fundamentally different from your current practice? Perhaps your organization employs a generalist caseworker model, and the practice has only been used in organizations that have specialized caseworker staff.
- Consider areas of overlap with current practice. What components of the practice may already exist in your organization? Perhaps your organization is currently using some form of family meetings in case planning with families, and you're researching family group decision making (FGDM) models. Your current practice may easily accommodate integrating FGDM standards into your existing model.
- Consider the feasibility of the practice for your organization. What are the costs and potential benefits of implementing the practice in your unit and organization? You want to choose a practice that can be supported by your existing or planned changes in organizational structure, as well as provide the desired outcomes.
- How does the practice align with your organizational mission and values? You want to choose a practice that embodies the explicit goals of your organization. If your organizational mission is to provide quality services to children and families, then the practice selected should connect directly to that mission and the related values.

## 6.6 How do you search for best practices?

As you can see from the discussion above, there are many things to consider when searching for best practices and evaluating whether that practice is best for your needs. Fortunately, a lot of good work outlining the fundamental steps has been done in various disciplines upon which we can draw. The worksheet provided on the next pages takes you through the basic steps one by one.

# 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?*



## 5. 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.*

## 6. GET SPECIFIC: Define Your Question.

*What exactly do you need to know?*

## 7. WHAT ARE THE MOST LIKELY RESOURCES?

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

## 8. 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

## 6.8 Where do you search for best and promising practices?

Many resources, including websites, downloadable resources, and books, are available to help you find best and promising practices.

### 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](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](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](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](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.fft.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.srpd.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_download&gid=654](http://www.srpd.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](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\\_AR\\_EA=Using data in decision making](http://tatis.muskie.usm.maine.edu/pubs/pub2Wtemp.asp?SUBJECT_AR_EA=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](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](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](http://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](http://www.rip.org.uk/publications/handbook_detail.asp?pub_id=39)

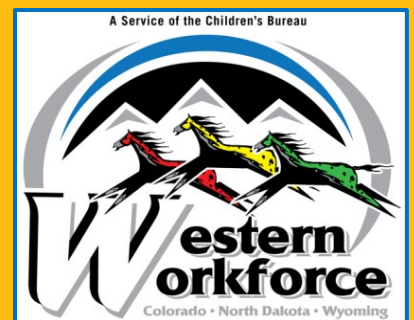
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- Bernstein, P. (1997). *Best practices of effective nonprofit organizations: A practitioner's guide*. New York: Foundation Center.
- Bies, A. (2002, Spring). Accountability, organizational capacity and continuous improvement: Findings from Minnesota's 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**



SECTION 7

# Learning Circle Facilitation: Essential Skills

Effective learning circles require attention to managing a group process that engages team members so that the 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. Effective process happens when LC facilitators skillfully manage the group. 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. Good facilitators exhibit specific *leadership skills* that reflect *authentic leadership capacities* that foster a learning environment. 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 solution.
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 4\***



\*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’s 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, 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.

The National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI) provides training to both supervisors and mid-level managers in child welfare on leadership that is particularly relevant for leading a team. The NCWWI leadership model defines the “pillars” of leadership as adaptive, distributed, inclusive, collaborative, and outcomes-focused. Striving towards a leadership style that reflects these pillars will result in the embodiment of the Learning Circle concept and ultimately more successful outcomes. See Table 2 for a brief description of each of the pillars.

**Table 2: NCWWI Description of Leadership Pillars**

<b>ADAPTIVE</b> <i>(Heifetz &amp; Linsky, 2002)</i>	<b>INCLUSIVE</b> <i>(Ryan, 2006)</i>	<b>DISTRIBUTIVE</b> <i>(Spillane, 2006)</i>	<b>COLLABORATIVE</b>	<b>OUTCOMES FOCUSED</b>
<b>Learning new ways for dealing with challenges</b>  1. Challenges own and other people's habits, beliefs, and values 2. Emphasizes a strategic /innovation mindset 3. Works with differences 4. Orchestrates positive conflict 5. Inspires others to challenge decision-making processes 6. Navigates changeable environments	<b>Collective process to promote inclusion</b>  1. Advocates for a full range of participants in the process (diverse participation) 2. Promotes leadership as a collective process 3. Creates sense of urgency around inclusion 4. Acknowledges disparities and seeks to mitigate them 5. Engages in continuous learning about inclusion-related issues 6. Engages diverse stakeholders	<b>Leadership encouraged and enacted at all organizational levels</b>  1. Distribution of decision-making and leadership responsibilities 2. Manages human, cultural, social, and economic capital 3. Encourages purposeful action 4. Promotes collective rather than individual action	<b>Community engagement</b>  1. Creates opportunities for collaboration outside agency 2. Encourages exchange of information and sharing/ pooling resources 3. Focuses on common purpose 4. Stresses process rather than the product 5. Has action orientation	<b>Meeting organizational and professional goals</b>  1. Applies technical knowledge 2. Analyzes problems 3. Uses data to inform decisions 4. Focuses on indicators leading to outcomes of safety, permanency, and well being 5. Stresses product/result rather than process

Compatible with the leadership pillars, *authentic leadership capacities* are specific ways of thinking and acting that develop effective leadership (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008). Authentic leadership capabilities include self-awareness, balanced processing, self-regulatory skill, and relational transparency.

*Self-awareness* means being self-reflective, acknowledging one's own biases and how the targeted topic relates to one's values. For example: perhaps a supervisor has been intimately involved in promoting a specific component of a practice model (e.g., team decision-making [TDM] meetings) in her agency for several years, and the selected LC topic is making some changes to that model because, as implemented, family outcomes have not improved as anticipated. That supervisor will need to reflect on her biases around commitment to that model, and be open to hearing opposing perspectives.

*Balanced processing* involves being able to see both sides of a given topic—both the positive and negative aspects of a particular approach. In the TDM changes example, balanced processing means that the supervisor should be ready to facilitate a discussion that provides a forum for presenting both positive and negative aspects of the current practice.

*Attending to self-regulation* means being consistent and transparent in the alignment of one's core values with the proposed actions. During the facilitation of a Learning Circle, supervisors must constantly be thinking about how their values and the values and mission of the agency are connected to the actions proposed by the team. In our TDM changes example, the supervisor should help her team reflect on, and then articulate how the proposed TDM changes are connected to better outcomes for families and children.

*Modeling relational transparency* is essential to supervisors developing the trust and support of their child welfare unit staff. This leadership skill involves developing a comfort level with "truthful self-disclosure," which means revealing one's personal motivations throughout the LC dialogue process, and being open to critique and honest feedback from both subordinates and peers (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). Once again, using our TDM changes example, the supervisor should feel comfortable openly acknowledging that her personal investment in the current TDM model may make it difficult for them to change her perspective.

Supervisors who engage in and develop these authentic leadership capabilities will more readily be able to promote *authentic dialogue among their team members*—that is the essence of the Learning Circle. (See Section 7.4 for facilitation techniques on how to encourage authentic dialogue in the Learning Circle.)

### 7.3 Developmental Dynamics

Groups of people working together do not become a team in a day. Teams evolve and become productive over time. Regardless of their size

or composition, teams go through certain *stages of development*. The length of each stage varies from team to team, and may be as short as one meeting or may last for several months. The sequence of stages is the same for each. Although the specifics of each stage may vary from team to team, the overall nature of each stage is consistent across teams. During the development process, some of the activities and feelings of team members may not appear to be productive. This is particularly true during the dissatisfaction stage, when a sense of frustration and incompetence frequently emerges. However, working through each stage is a crucial part of the team's evolution, as it leads to a fully functional team.

While your team has previously been together as a work unit, the Learning Circles are a new approach and a new purpose, so it would be expected that teams will move through each development stage as they unite around the effort to develop a learning circle. These stages, conceptualized decades ago (Tuckman, 1965), continue to be valid today.

### ***Stage 1: Forming***

This is the orientation stage, where members are eager and have positive expectations. They are concerned about and want to know:

- What is the purpose of the group/unit?
- What will we have to do?
- Who is our leader?
- Will our efforts be fruitful?

At this stage, members are dependent upon whoever is leading. Energy and time at this stage are focused on:

- Defining the goals/tasks of the team.
- Devising at least an initial means for carrying out tasks; i.e., team process and procedure.
- Trying out and becoming accustomed to team process and procedures.

At this stage, the group is focused on power, purpose, and strategy. Though the team may already be formed, it has a different purpose as a Learning Circle, thus will start in this phase.

### ***Stage 2: Storming***

This is the dissatisfaction stage of team development, where members become somewhat frustrated, because expectations and reality of the

team may not coincide; dependence on the supervisor/leader may become unsatisfying; appropriate resources may not be readily available; and some problems identified are not easily solved. At this stage, members may feel some anger toward the supervisor/leader, toward goals and tasks of the team, or toward other members. At this stage, conflicting values and preferences often have the appearance of storms.

Individuals may feel sad or discouraged; they feel they cannot do what they hoped, or they feel incompetent. At this stage, energy and time are focused on:

- Redefining the tasks in achievable terms.
- Determining strategies for solving long-term problems.
- Determining how best to accomplish the tasks.
- Resolving their sense of frustration and incompetence.
- Redefining their expectations so that they are more compatible with what is possible.

Remember that dissatisfaction is a natural part of the team process and should not be viewed as a sign that the team is failing. Rather, it is a time for members to take stock and review goals, processes, resources, rewards, and outcomes. Since Learning Circles are a new concept for most team members, expect some conflict while everyone adjusts. Supervisors, as Learning Circle facilitators, play an extremely important role in redirecting team member's dissatisfaction at this stage toward a perspective that this frustration is a positive part of the natural process of team development.

### ***Stage 3: Norming***

This is the resolution stage of team development. During this stage, the frustration is dissipating—expectations are closer to reality, if not completely meshed. This is a time when the unit is establishing procedures for how they will work together. They are defining norms for acceptable behavior. Also, personal satisfaction is increasing, self-esteem is heightened, and pleasure in accomplishing tasks and getting positive feedback from other staff is occurring. And collaborations are occurring more effortlessly. At this point, the Learning Circles are starting to “click.”



### Stage 4: Performing

This is the last stage of team development, and members are once again eager to be part of the team effort. Individuals on the team are now feeling greater autonomy. Members are working well together; there is a sense of mutuality (we sink or swim together) and interdependence has developed. At this stage, energy and time are focused on achieving the purpose or goals of the team. Learning Circles realize their full potential and create a learning culture at this stage.

Group development is inherent to any team. Ways to cope with the natural evolution of a group (Wheelan, 2005) include:

- Learn about group development.
- Be patient—it may take a few months for the group to gel.
- Expects things to be somewhat unclear at the beginning.
- Expect conflict and welcome it as progress.
- Help the group manage conflicts.
- Don't get involved in personal feuds or personality conflicts.
- Compromise on issues when possible and help others resolve differences.
- Be supportive of each other.
- Complete tasks in a timely fashion.
- Encourage your group to regularly assess how it is functioning.

## 7.4 Facilitation Skills

Effective learning circles require attention to managing a group process that engages team members so that the 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. Effective process happens when LC facilitators skillfully manage the group. 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. 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 authentic dialogue* 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, also the ultimate goal for your group facilitation skill—to build your TEAM. Many techniques and skills are used to facilitate these four areas of group facilitation and as a group member in many different types of groups, you have seen these techniques used before. Next, we're going to discuss the techniques, 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.
- Listen 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 direct 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).
- Respectful of all participants and their opinions (unless it 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 respond 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 engage 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 for them. (Example: Asks team members for their ideas, even 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 any tension in the room.
- Attends to distractions ("let's all put our phones on vibrate).
- Gracefully addresses conflict.
- Confronts troublesome behaviors.
- Notices when team members are restless or lethargic.
- Attends to side-bar conversations and manages them.

Attention to these essential skills will result in more effective learning circles leading to the creation of 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*.

**“Cooperative Learning** is not so much learning to cooperate as it is cooperating to learn.” (Wong & Wong, 1998)

## 7.5 Cooperative Learning

One way Learning Circle facilitators engage the group is through a process called cooperative learning. *Cooperative Learning* is the structuring of small groups so that participants work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning as they work towards a common goal (Berkshire & Hanzel, 2006). The four elements of cooperative learning are:

1. Positive interdependence, a.k.a., a unique contribution to the joint effort;
2. Face-to-face motivational interaction;
3. Individual and group accountability to the group’s goals; and
4. Use of the relevant interpersonal and small-group skills.

Table 3 contains a summary of cooperative learning.

**Table 3: Cooperative Learning**

Element	What is it?	How do you use it?
1. <b>Positive Interdependence, a.k.a., a unique contribution to the joint effort</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each member must believe that they will either “sink or swim” together. Each individual has a role that contributes to the success of the goal.</li> <li>Each develops Positive Interdependence, or provides “a unique contribution to the joint effort.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each group member’s efforts are required and indispensable for group success (no free riders).</li> <li>Each group member has a unique contribution to make to the joint effort, because of his or her resources and or role and task responsibilities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The group must be clear on a common goal. Either the participants choose the goal or it is given to them.</li> <li>The goal should be relevant to all members and replicate the workplace.</li> <li>Each individual is clear on his or her assigned role and task responsibilities and how it contributes to the achievement of the goal. The group may choose roles, or they may be assigned.</li> <li>Each individual has the information, resources, or materials necessary to achieve group goals, and is given time to participate and share.</li> </ul>
2. <b>Face-to-Face Motivational Interaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals encourage and facilitate each other’s efforts to achieve, complete tasks, and produce, in order to reach the group’s goal. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They provide each other with efficient and effective help and assistance.</li> <li>Exchange needed resources.</li> <li>Challenge each other’s conclusions and reasoning.</li> <li>Encourage and support diverse ideas.</li> <li>Show respect and be trustworthy to each member.</li> <li>Maintain a moderate level of anxiety and stress.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set ground rules for group interaction.</li> <li>Give the group ideas of effective and efficient group interaction, such as brainstorming, with round robin, random and silent, anonymous, and written techniques, to gather input from everyone.</li> </ul>

Element	What is it?	How do you use it?
<b>3. Individual Accountability/ Personal and Group Responsibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All participants contribute to the success of the group. People learn when they contribute to the learning process. This requires the individual performance of each group member be assessed along with the product of the entire group. Each member is held accountable for his or her contribution to the entire group. Each is held accountable for the overall product.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep the size of the group small.</li> <li>• Each person in the group is assessed.</li> <li>• Each person in the group presents.</li> <li>• Each member of the group anonymously records and provides feedback to the others.</li> <li>• Assign one group member to monitor, to assure that everyone is contributing.</li> <li>• Have each individual teach the other members.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Interpersonal and Small Group Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members use the tools and skills that they use in the real world to demonstrate the content. They must coordinate efforts to achieve mutual goals. They can do this by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Getting to know and trust each other.</li> <li>– Communicating accurately and unambiguously.</li> <li>– Accepting and supporting each other.</li> <li>– Resolving conflict constructively.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a collaborative learning environment.</li> <li>• Bond participants together.</li> <li>• Model active listening, cooperation, respect for others.</li> <li>• Recognize team members as resources.</li> <li>• Model and discuss treating participants as a resource rather than a recipient.</li> <li>• State expectations for group interaction and create a list with participants identifying the following: “What would help their learning?” and “What would hinder their learning?”</li> </ul>

Cooperative learning is achieved *when group leaders facilitate rather than direct the process*. Recall the TEAM skills; in summary an effective Learning Circle facilitator (Rees, 2001):

- Listens actively.
- Asks questions and listens to the entire response.
- Reserves judgment and keeps an open mind.
- Actively seeks new ideas and opinions from others.
- Invites diverse viewpoints.
- Teaches others how to solve problems without solving the problems for them.
- Teaches and coaches others, and refrains from telling them what to do.
- Models the behavior he or she would like to see in others.
- Helps people arrive at consensus.
- Shares credit with team members and ensures that credit goes where credit is due.
- Shares power and authority with others.
- Encourages team members to take responsibility for issues, problems, actions, and projects.
- Is not afraid to address conflict.
- Understands and acknowledges that people's individual needs (social, personal, career, lifestyle, work preference) affect teamwork and works with, not against, those needs.

Attention to these essential skills will result in more effective learning circles leading to the creation of a learning organization.

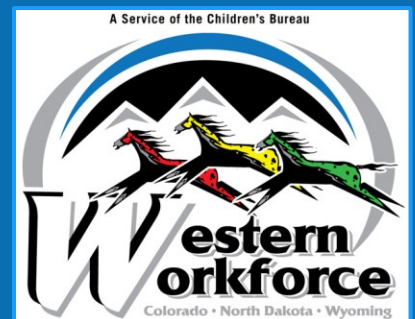


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# **Western Workforce**

**Evaluation**



**SECTION 8**

# Western Workforce Evaluation

## 8.1 Model Fidelity

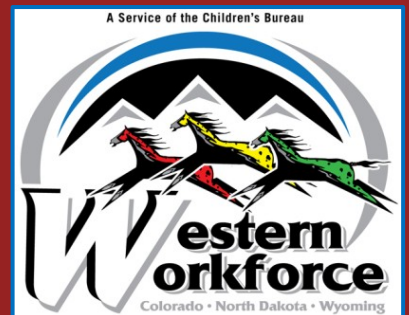
Learning Circles can help to create a learning culture that is fundamental to a learning organization. But the link between the Learning Circle and the outcomes of improved climate and the establishment of a learning organization can only happen when there is fidelity to the Learning Circle intervention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

# Learning Circle

Forms and Worksheets



SECTION 9

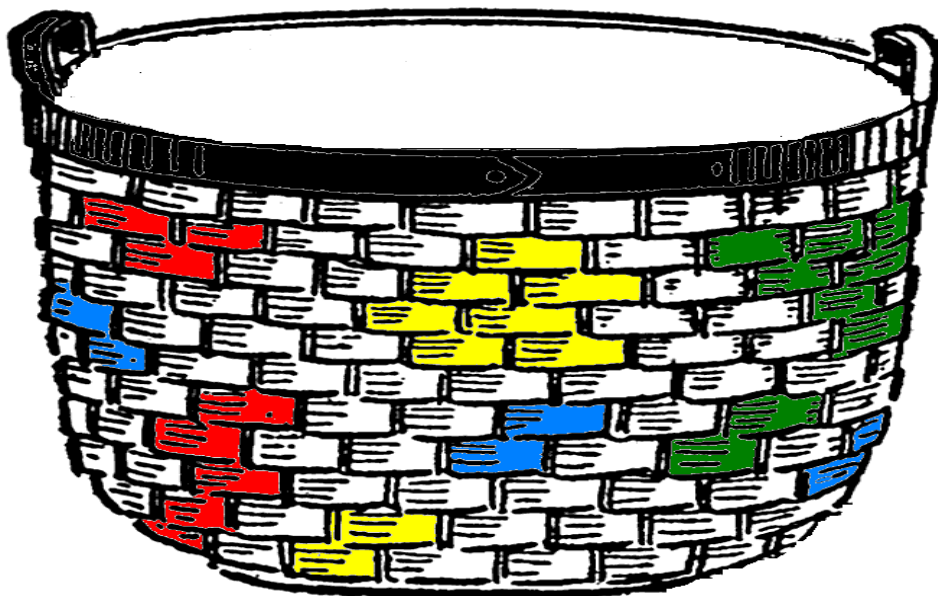
## Forms and Worksheets

The forms that follow provide space to document topics selected by the group, record daily meetings, and then summarize each phase: PLAN, ACT, REFLECT, or ADAPT.

## Learning Circle Topic Basket

Date:

Topics:



## Learning Circle Meeting Journal

**Date:**

**Present:**

What topic(s) were discussed today?	What were the significant learning points discussed in the meeting?
What needs to be done before the next meeting?	Who will be doing what task?

# 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?*



## 5. 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.*

## 6. GET SPECIFIC: Define Your Question.

*What exactly do you need to know?*

## 7. WHAT ARE THE MOST LIKELY RESOURCES?

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

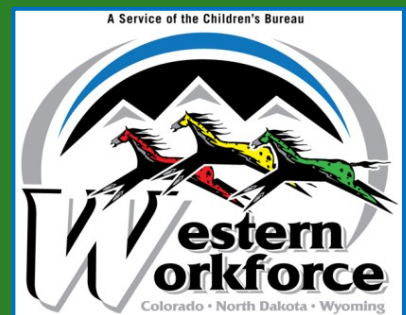
## 8. SEARCH THE RESOURCE DATABASE.

*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 Circle

Organizational Learning  
in Child Welfare



SECTION 10

# Organizational Learning in Child Welfare

## 10.1 Supporting Research & Theoretical Foundation for Intervention

The Learning Circle team of the Western Workforce Initiative is the practice level child welfare organizational change intervention component. In our approach, Learning Circles exist at the child welfare unit level, are led and facilitated by the unit supervisors, and are connected to multiple teams at other levels of context in the child welfare organization. In this conceptualization, distinct elements characterize the Learning Circle (LC) intervention component. These key elements include being experiential, practice focused, participatory, focused on problem-solving, and an iterative process that includes feedback loops of PLAN – ACT – REFLECT – ADAPT (Blase & Fixen, 2006; Institute for Healthcare Improvement, 1995; Wade & Hammick, 1999). In addition, Learning Circles are team processes of collaborative inquiry and shared learning, and are intended to maximize the use of practitioner and team content knowledge and skills to promote a learning culture, and help to shape a learning organization beginning at the unit level.

A *learning organization* can be defined as that which “is skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights” (Garvin, 1998, p.51 as cited in Austin, 2008). Senge (1990) described five fundamental processes in which organizations must engage to promote the development of a learning organization. These processes represent the theoretical foundation of the Learning Circle intervention approach and include: 1) systems thinking, 2) personal mastery, 3) mental models, 4) shared visioning, and 5) team learning. *Systems thinking* means that individuals and units should be aware of the “bigger picture” and how practice decisions connect to multiple levels and issues within their child welfare agency. *Personal mastery* has to do with a clear understanding that having skilled, knowledgeable, and competent staff strengthens an organization’s ability to adapt to the changing demands of their environment and the importance of building that capacity. *Mental models* address the process of questioning one’s underlying assumptions about practice (“thinking outside the box”; Rodriquez, 2004) and distinguishing areas where adaptations may be necessary and can be initiated. *Shared visioning* involves individuals and units coming to a common understanding of their vision, mission, and goals, and how their practice is connected to those overarching values and objectives. *Team learning* involves valuing the expertise and experiences of each team member in “generating new

learning” (Austin, 2008, p. 573) and building team capacity through the process of sharing that information within the team. All of these important processes are incorporated into the LC intervention model and importantly are facilitated by the unit supervisor as a key “transformational” leader in the development of a learning organization.

In contrast to previous “authoritative” models of leadership in child welfare, where leaders dictated authority to subordinates, supervisors today are expected to be collaborative leaders who mentor and nurture their staff.

According to this conceptualization, *transformational leaders*:

“stimulate interest among colleagues and followers to view their work from new perspectives, generate awareness of the mission or vision of the team and organization, assist colleagues and followers to develop to higher levels of ability and potential, and motivate colleagues and followers to look beyond their own interests toward those that will benefit the group.”

(Hopkins & Austin, 2004, p. 7; Bass & Avolio, 1994)

In our LC approach, supervisors take on and are uniquely placed in the child welfare organization to fulfill this role. Recent research aimed at developing a leadership competency framework for child welfare organizations by the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute supports our conceptualization of the unit supervisor as a transformational leader in the promotion of a learning culture and ultimately in the creation of a learning organization. According to this framework, five pillars of leadership represent the key characteristics of effective leadership in child welfare organizations and include being *adaptive*: “learning new ways for dealing with challenges” (Heifitz & Linsky, 2002); *inclusive*: facilitating a “collective process to promote inclusion” (Ryan, 2006); *distributive*: encourages that leadership be “enacted at all organizational levels” (Spillane, 2006); *collaborative*: encourages information sharing, common purpose, and opportunities for collaboration; and being *outcomes focused*: “meeting organizational and professional goals.” A fuller description of the pillars can be found in Table 2 on page 7.4.

Research coming from the positive organizational development domain also supports the importance of the child welfare supervisor as a key leader and facilitator of fundamental learning organization processes and the LC model. Specifically, the concept of *authentic leadership capabilities* is seen as fundamental leadership qualities that involve specific behavioral and cognitive processes and translate into enhanced organizational capacity for change (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008). Authentic leadership capabilities include self-

awareness, balanced processing, self-regulatory skills, and relational transparency. *Self-awareness* involves being self-reflective, acknowledging one's own biases, and how the targeted LC topic or dialogue relates to one's own core values. *Balanced processing* involves being purposeful and unbiased in providing critique of the targeted topic, and giving equal weight to both negative and positive aspects. Attending to *self-regulation* involves consistency and transparency in connecting and aligning one's core values with proposed actions and targeted outcomes. Modeling *relational transparency* is essential to supervisors developing the trust and support of their child welfare unit staff. This leadership skill involves developing a comfort level with "truthful self-disclosure," which means revealing one's personal motivations throughout the LC dialogue process and being open to critique and honest feedback from both subordinates and peers (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). These leadership qualities have particular relevance for the LC model, because they are thought to be skills that can be developed through training, coaching, and mentoring, are amenable to change over time, and can create an atmosphere conducive to learning across multiple levels of the given organization.

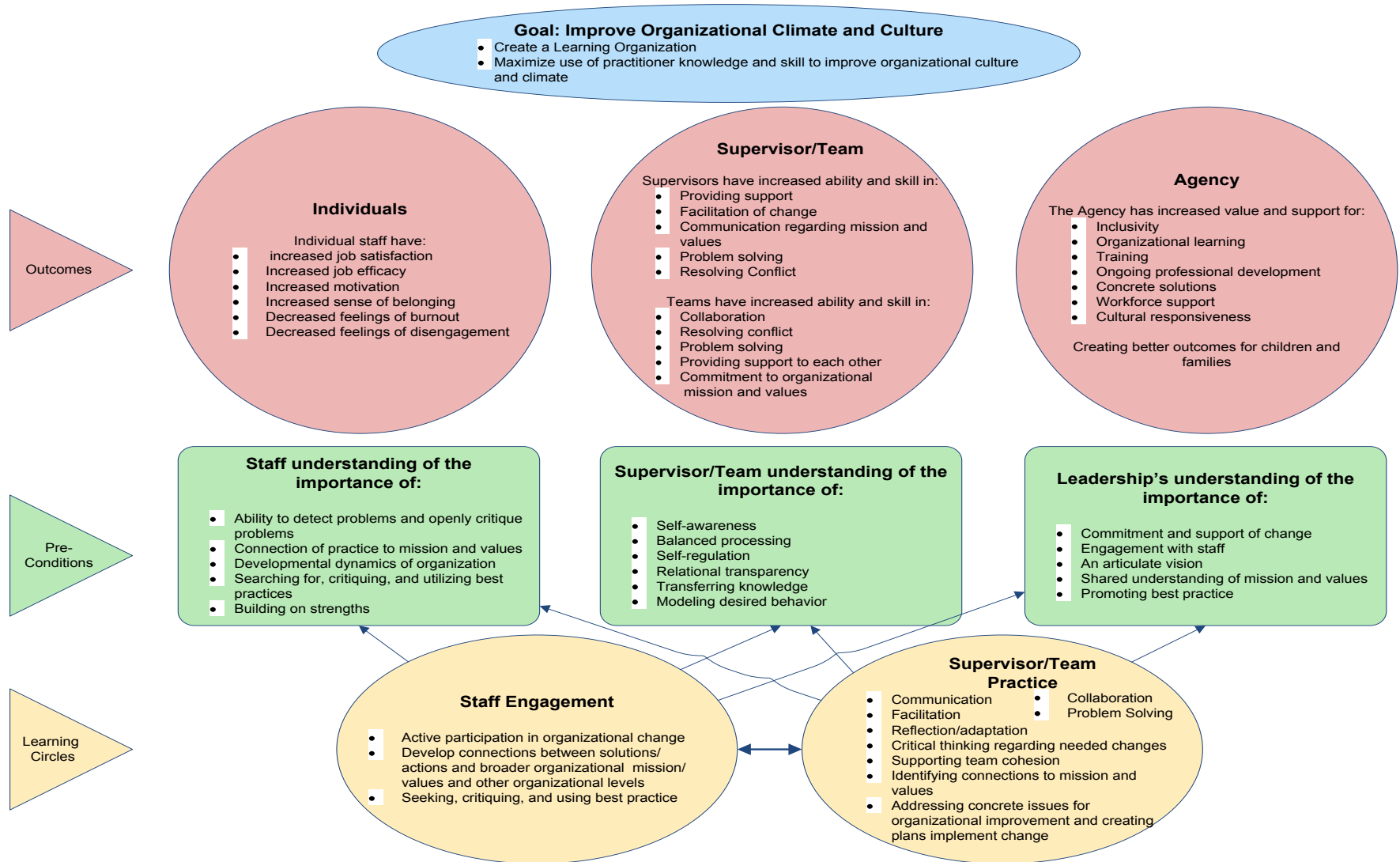
The five pillars of leadership and authentic leadership capabilities are essential to effective Learning Circle facilitation by supervisors in our LC model. Thus, the LC training will include an intensive component focused on the *development of competencies* in these specific skills. However, we also recognize the need for a more comprehensive supervisor training support component to build the long-term sustainability of the LC model. As noted by Blase and colleagues at the National Implementation Research Network, "materials and training alone will not work" for successful implementation of the best interventions (2008). Key elements of successful program intervention include an incremental set of training components that build on one another including a focus on theory, demonstration of skills during training, practice and feedback during training, and follow-up coaching during program implementation (Blase, 2006). Research examining the use of these training components in combination shows a high proportion of practitioners trained in this way demonstrating both the knowledge and skills of the program on which they were trained and the actual use of the program intervention in practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Other research on the effectiveness of adult learning methods also supports this "active learner" method of training (Dunst & Trivette, 2009a, 2009b). Learning Circle facilitators will be supported in the first several months of LC model implementation through coaching and mentoring by the Western Workforce Initiative team and in the longer-term by an integrated self-evaluation component.

Finally, the Learning Circle model feeds the development of a learning organization through helping to establish a *knowledge management system* within the child welfare organization. As Austin (2008) states, “individuals play a critical role in the process of creating organizational knowledge, because they provide the knowledge that can be included, augmented, and implemented as part of the organization’s knowledge base.” Supervisors and their teams will be integral to developing organizational knowledge in their Learning Circles by attending to fundamentals cited in the knowledge management literature: establishing observable links between knowledge sharing and organizational mission, values, goals, and expectations; creating an organizational context where knowledge sharing is expected and is integrated with the strengths of the organization; supporting existing natural networks for knowledge sharing within the organization; and using natural leaders and peers to promote knowledge sharing and create ways to integrate knowledge sharing into standards of practice (McDermott & O’Dell, 2001).

## 10.2 Learning Circle & Western Workforce Theory of Change

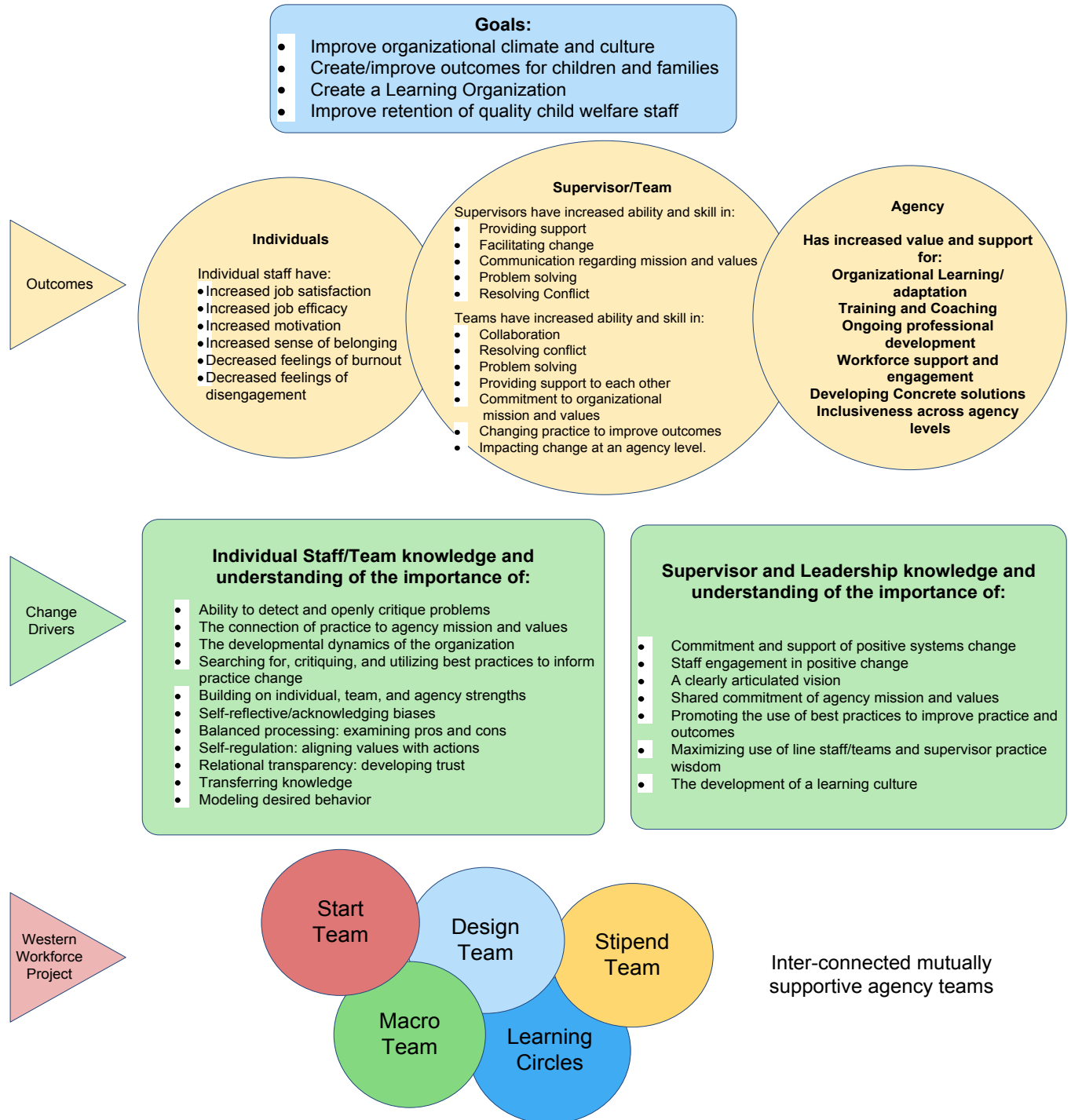
A theory of change is a simple way to see how the underlying assumptions of a program or intervention are connected to, and expected to result in, the overarching program goals. Theories of change “link outcomes and activities to explain how and why the desired change is expected to come about” (Clark & Anderson, 2004). The following graphics present a picture of: 1) Learning Circles, and 2) the Western Workforce Initiative theories of change. The ovals and circles at the bottom of each graphic show the actual behavioral changes; the blue rectangles in the centers show the cognitive changes that are expected to result from the behavioral changes; the pink ovals show the expected outcomes of both the behavioral and cognitive changes; and at the top of each graphic, the long-term learning circle and program goals are illustrated.

# Western Workforce Learning Circles Theory of Change



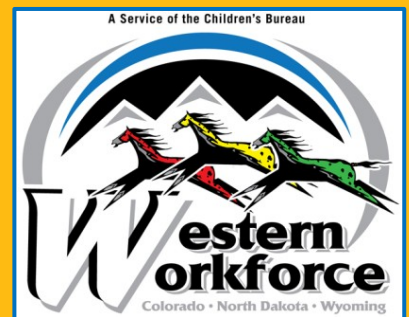


# Western Workforce Project Theory of Change



# Learning Circle

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>)

NRCOI 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 of federal requirements, strengthening of programs, eligibility for the CAPTA grant, support to state liaison officers, and collaboration with other NRCs.

#### **The National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues**

(<http://www.abanet.org/child/rclji>)

This NRC offers states assistance with their CFSRs, including the collecting and analyzing of data, legal and judicial issue analysis, promoting of stakeholder involvement, action planning, and 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>)

This NRC 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, exploring of systemic factors, increasing of cultural competence, 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 and 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](http://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/>)**

The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) 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/>)**

The Center for Research to Practice (CR2P) 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. We believe 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