

Background and Context

The most common type of facilitation is for IEP Team meetings. IDEA provides for a Team meeting in which parents and educators will bring together their best ideas and thinking to design an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for a child receiving services.

The IEP Team is legally required to include at least one parent as well as the educators and service providers responsible for implementing the IEP written. Decisions are made when all participants agree to support the decision of the team, in other words, by consensus. An IEP Team is not required to, and often does not, have among its members a person who has meeting management skills or the ability to guide a consensus decision-making process.

Anyone who has attended a poorly conducted meeting knows that an effective and productive meeting is more than a group of people talking about a subject of mutual interest and concern. IDEA, however, does not make any provisions for the possibility that the participants in an IEP meeting might have difficulty bringing disparate ideas and thoughts into a coherent design that all agree will best serve the child's educational needs. No provision is made for the resolution of conflict or disagreement about the appropriate type or frequency of services and other issues about which reasonable and caring adults disagree during Team meetings.

As a result, many misunderstandings and disagreements which might be resolved when they first present themselves at a meeting remain unresolved and may eventually grow into conflicts which require additional expenditures of financial and human resources.

All meetings benefit from skilled and capable facilitators who can assist the team in crafting agreements that lead to educational programs with beneficial outcomes for students with disabilities. Increasingly someone with expert facilitation skills is asked to help the team complete the IEP process. When IEP teams reach an impasse or meetings are expected to be contentious, an independent, trained facilitator may help guide the process. While considerable variability exists related to this practice and those who serve as facilitators, SEAs and LEAs are increasingly turning to this approach.

A facilitator helps keep members of the team focused on the development of the IEP/IFSP while addressing conflicts and disagreements that may have occurred before or emerge during the meeting. Such assistance, coming from an individual who is not a member of the IEP/IFSP team, can encourage cooperation among team members and help the IEP/IFSP development process or meeting to be more successful.

Types of Meetings Available for Facilitation

- IEP/IFSP team meetings
- Eligibility/Evaluation team meetings
- Three-year re-evaluation meetings
- Manifestation determination meetings
- Due Process Hearing resolution session meetings
- Informal meetings addressing IDEA related issues between parents and districts

Job Description: IDEA Facilitator

FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

Facilitates IDEA meetings in all or most of the following ways:

Before the meeting

1. Contacts team members to schedule team meetings.
2. Collects and disseminates necessary documentation needed for development of IEP/IFSP or other IDEA related meeting.
3. Develops the meeting agenda.

During the meeting

1. Sets tone for meeting and takes responsibility for process.
2. Guides the discussion by keeping the team's energy centered on student outcomes.
3. Assists the team to resolve conflicts and disagreements that occur.
4. Helps to maintain open communication among all members.
5. Asks clarifying questions about issues, interests and potential solutions.
6. Helps to keep team members on task and within the time allotted for the meeting.
7. Maintains impartiality and confidentiality at all times.
8. Does not take sides, place blame or determine if a particular decision is right or wrong.
9. Does not impose a decision on the group.

After the meeting

1. Communicates completion and outcome to DR Coordinator
2. Participates in process evaluation, self-assessment and improvement activities.
3. Participates in additional meetings, as approved by DR Coordinator.

QUALIFICATIONS

Qualifications may vary, but most facilitators have a master's degree in education, communication, psychology or a related field. Most have additional training and experience in mediation and or facilitation.

Training requirements may vary depending upon the experience of the contractor. Most can demonstrate 75+ hours of facilitation and or mediation training as well as experience garnered in another position held, for example, as a mediator or special education professional. Experience as a facilitator or mediator is usually required, as well as a background working in special education or knowledge about special education programs and IDEA law is desirable.

Yearly continuing education is required and is offered on a quarterly annual basis. Training usually includes facilitation skills and conflict management training and may include information about special education law and case law decisions.

COMPENSATION

The Idaho State Department of Education (SDE) pays \$65.00-\$70.00/hour of facilitation preparation and meeting time, with \$35.00 per hour for travel. The SDE reimburses for approved travel expenses.