

## **IEP Facilitation Background and Context**

The 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) or an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for a child receiving services. The IEP/IFSP team is legally required to include at least one parent as well as the educators and service providers responsible for implementing the IEP/IFSP written by the team. Decisions are made when all participants agree, in other words, by consensus. An IEP/IFSP 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 or IFSP 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 IEP/IFSP meetings.

As a result, many misunderstandings and disagreements which might be resolved when they first present themselves at an IEP or IFSP 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 or IFSP process. When IEP or IFSP 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.

### **Definitions: IEP/IFSP Facilitation & IEP/IFSP Facilitator**

**IEP/IFSP Facilitation** is the practice of using an individual (**IEP/IFSP Facilitator**) with training in meeting management, decision-making and conflict resolution skills, who is not a member of an IEP/IFSP team, to facilitate (or make easier) the IEP/IFSP meeting process.

An **IEP/IFSP Facilitator** is an individual who uses communication skills, negotiation techniques and problem-solving strategies to create an environment at IEP/IFSP meetings in which IEP/IFSP team members work together cooperatively and collaboratively to develop a high quality IEP or IFSP designed to provide the best educational outcome for the child.

## **Job Description: IEP/IFSP Facilitator**

### **FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES:**

Facilitates IEP/IFSP 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.

#### During the meeting~

1. Creates a meeting agenda and assist in generating ground rules for the meeting.
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. Participates in process evaluation, self-assessment and improvement activities.
2. Participates in monitoring progress with implementation of the IEP/IFSP as appropriate.

### **QUALIFICATIONS**

Qualifications are generally expressed in terms of training and experience, rather than education and degrees.

Training requirements may vary from a 30, 40, or 50 hour training to no training required where the individual is considered qualified because of another position held, for example, as a mediator or special education professor. In some programs, there is a basic facilitation component, supplemented by a component focused on special education facilitation. Experience as a facilitator or mediator is usually required. A background working in special education or knowledge about special education programs and law is sometimes considered desirable.

Continuing education is usually required and may be offered on a quarterly, semi-annual, annual or biennial basis. The number of hours required varies, as does educational content. Training usually includes facilitation skills and conflict management training and may include information about special education law and case law decisions. Training content may be determined by whether the facilitator's role includes providing content expertise in addition to process expertise.

### **COMPENSATION**

Some programs use unpaid volunteer facilitators. When paid, rates may be hourly, daily or per facilitation. Rates vary from \$50 to \$150 per hour and from \$350 to \$650 per day. Some programs pay expenses and a lower hourly rate for travel.