

INTRODUCTION

I. About This Training

Building Leadership for Community Development has been written as a companion document to the Free to Grow implementation manuals. It was developed and tested in the Audubon Area and New York City ACS/Head Start Free to Grow programs.

This manual is intended for use by those who will be responsible for facilitating the training that supports Free to Grow community strengthening strategies, as well as for those who will facilitate the project's community action component. While the training was specifically designed for the Audubon Area and New York City ACS Head Start Free to Grow models, it is also highly relevant to many of the other Free to Grow models.

In writing up our training practices, we tried to give facilitators as much guidance and detail as possible to help them grasp the structure of each training activity, as well as the context in which the workshops will take place. For each workshop, we begin with introductory comments suggesting key issues or themes that the facilitator may want to think about before conducting the workshop. Helpful hints and illustrations are also provided throughout the workshop text to lend clarity and give life to the training activities.

We hope that this manual will be viewed as a guide rather than a script. Inevitably, a training process loses something in translation. It is impossible to convey in writing the nuances that only a skilled facilitator can intuit and capture. Each facilitator will, of necessity, find ways to make it his/her own—making adaptations in some of the exercises to suit personal style and community needs. There are many excellent materials currently in circulation that share the program's core principles and concepts. These materials can be used to supplement the core curriculum. We hope that you find this manual a useful tool for adapting and implementing Free to Grow.

II. Purposes of Training

One of the key components of the Free to Grow program is building a cadre of leaders trained to carry out substance abuse prevention activities aimed at reducing risk and strengthening protective factors within their communities. To fulfill this role, program participants need to understand the principles of the Free to Grow primary prevention approach and master key skills essential for group facilitation and community action.

From the project's inception, Head Start staff knew that these would be new skill sets for many of their program's parents, other community residents, as well as the staff and prospective partners with whom they hoped to work. They realized that a strong leadership development training program was an essential first step for effective implementation of community action work.

Thus, *Building Leadership for Community Development* was born. The training program is designed to serve four main purposes.

- The training introduces the core principles of Free to Grow and explores the concepts of risk and protective factors, key strategies to facilitate community action and environmental approaches to community change.
- It gives participants opportunities to practice some of the primary skills critical to carrying out the project's work, including community relationship building, group facilitation, community assessment, and action planning.
- The training program is also designed to support and enhance the group-building process that emerges as residents meet together over an eight- to ten-week period. The program's experiential activities are structured to illustrate and practice program principles. "Icebreaker" activities provide a counterpoint to some of the more theoretical sections of the training, as well as expand

opportunities for relationship-building among group members.

- Finally, the training and facilitation process is designed to help participants become more reflective of the group dynamic itself. Specifically, participants learn to analyze how their relationships with one another impede or support the overall goals and activities of the group. This skill is critical to helping community action groups to weather the inevitable conflicts and transitions that occur in the life of a functioning group.

III. Scope of the Curriculum

Building Leadership for Community Development is divided into ten workshops, each lasting between three and three-and-one-half hours. The workshops are designed to take place weekly. Each workshop seeks to incorporate experiential activities that support the session's knowledge or skill development objectives. The workshops are intended to build upon one another. Homework assignments give participants a chance to practice the skills introduced in each workshop.

In designing this curriculum, the Free to Grow National Program Office, consultants, and Head Start staff members worked together, drawing upon existing training and facilitation approaches utilized throughout the country and from a variety of disciplines. The training incorporates many of the core principles found in the field of group dynamics and intergroup relations, as well as shared knowledge and experience regarding the community action approach. The workshops also integrate some of the key concepts contained in many existing prevention training curricula.

The curriculum incorporates the expertise embodied in this broad range of approaches and adapts it to meet the specific needs of the Free to Grow program. Training exercises and simulations are geared to the program's primary prevention theme as well as to the audience for whom the curriculum is intended. As a result, our curriculum has a great deal in com-

Using Homework to Practice Skills

Most educators will acknowledge that properly crafted homework can help individuals integrate new skills. But assigning homework to busy adults who have young children and multiple responsibilities provides unique challenges. The homework assignments incorporated into the Free to Grow training curriculum have been designed to give group participants an opportunity to practice many of the range of tasks that will be necessary to support their community action work, and to begin to collect information that can support the community action process. Facilitators need to establish that the homework is not "busy work" or material that will not be used once the training is over. Reviewing and discussing the significance and utility of each homework assignment and linking the homework to overall project goals and ongoing activities—is particularly important.

mon with other leadership and community development now in use across the country. At the same time, it reflects the unique lessons learned during the Free to Grow model development period.

The core components of the curriculum include:

- Workshop One: Introduction to Free to Grow Program Principles
- Workshop Two: Introduction to the Principles of Community Action
- Workshop Three: Learning About Ourselves and Our Communities—Understanding Diversity and its Impact on Community Life
- Workshop Four: Basic Communication and Leadership Skills
- Workshop Five: Effective Meetings
- Workshop Six: Group Facilitation
- Workshop Seven: Visioning Community Change
- Workshop Eight: Community Mapping
- Workshop Nine: Defining Issues for Action
- Workshop Ten: Moving Issues to Action

In practice, members of the leadership training group complete the first eight training sessions first. These graduates form the core of the program's community action group that carries out a community assessment to determine priority issues for action. As priority issues are defined, sessions nine and ten of the training cycle are used to carry out strategic planning for community action. While this break in the training cycle may seem unusual, experience has shown that group members are better able to grasp the concepts related to "Defining Issues for Action" once they have identified concrete issues that they want to work on within their community.

IV. Reinforcement of Training Principles

While the scope of the leadership training is extensive, the sessions are intended only as the beginning of a learning process. The learning curve is often steep, especially for participants who have limited experience in community action. The training's skill sets can be challenging, and while the training provides a foundation, complicated skills such as group facilitation, strategic planning and community action have to be practiced over and over again before they can be mastered. Participants need time to integrate the learning and to apply it in order for it to become real. The training provides participants with an introductory tool kit, as well as a set of personal relationships, that can form a strong foundation for the work to come. But the real work starts after the training is over.

In short, as you facilitate training sessions, you are beginning an ongoing process of facilitation and support to the community action groups. The training sets the tone for the group's work and forges relationships among group members that will be critical for their later success. As you work with trainees and the community action group, you can draw upon the training experience to help participants better understand the real-life situations they are addressing and to analyze and reflect upon group progress. Principles introduced in the training can be reinforced and re-emphasized as

Respecting Your Group's Learning Curve

No two community action groups are ever the same. Group members bring different skills to the table, and the range of personalities within the group will always affect its dynamics. The transition from completion of leadership development training to the establishment of the community action group is a delicate moment. Facilitators need to be attuned to the emerging group process, assessing how well key program concepts introduced in the training are being translated into practice. As the group process emerges and group members try to integrate new skills, they may well need additional support from facilitators. You may choose to build some follow-up training into each group session, or to identify issues and "teach off of the action." Take the time you need to make explicit links between the emerging work and key program principles until group members begin to make these connections on their own.

the group moves forward, building consensus about the direction of their community action work and tackling new problems.

V. Training Audience

The Free to Grow program implementation manuals describe in detail the steps involved in outreach and recruitment for the Free to Grow leadership development training. This recruitment process will provide program participants with a general introduction to Free to Grow. During recruitment, potential training participants attend a brief orientation about the Free to Grow program to become familiar with its goals, objectives, and key components. Most group members also meet one-on-one with Head Start Free to Grow staff to learn more about the program and review the application process. Before selection, a program team interviews potential candidates. During this application and interview process, candidates talk

about why they are interested in participating in the program and what they hope to accomplish in their communities. They have a chance to discuss their past leadership and community advocacy experiences. Facilitators can assume that when trainees arrive for the first session, they will not have an in-depth understanding of program principles, but they will have some familiarity with the program's goals and objectives and have made a preliminary commitment.

Building Leadership for Community Development was designed for individuals who have had minimal exposure to the concepts and skill areas that the curriculum covers.

Inevitably, the training groups will include individuals with varying degrees of experience in community advocacy, group facilitation, and community action. But over the years in which Free to Grow has been pilot tested, we have found that most of the families with young children targeted by the program, as well as the Head Start staff working within these communities, have only limited experience in the skill areas related to community action. Much of the leadership development training conducted by Head Start programs around the country has focused on the individual, without supporting group facilitation or community development skill-building. Generally speaking, the program's focus on environmental responses to community problems and its emphasis on policy change are areas in which staff and residents have little experience.

Facilitators will want to assess training participants' familiarity with some of the curriculum's core concepts, and adjust their group approach accordingly. Facilitators can use more experienced group members to assist those for whom the principles and skill areas are newer, and to help model skills through some of the experiential exercises and simulations. Use participants' experience to strengthen the group dynamic and help individuals enhance existing skills.

The Participant Assessment Tool

To better assess participants' levels of past community engagement levels and to provide a baseline for measuring change, the Free to Grow National Program Office developed a Participant Assessment Tool and supporting data base. This simple instrument allows you to collect basic demographic information about training participants and provides a scale for analyzing their prior levels of community engagement. The database allows your program to enter this information onto your computers, summarize it and then track community engagement of individual program participants across the duration of the project. The Participant Assessment Tool can be used in a number of ways. Some programs use it during the screening and recruitment process to help determine an applicant's readiness for participation in the project and compare potential candidates with one another. Other programs use the assessment tool after leadership development candidates have been chosen to help them better understand the community engagement baseline from which they are working. Either way, the data collected with the Participant Assessment Tool provides a valuable source of information for the training facilitator. Facilitators can use the tool to determine some of the possible strengths and experiences of group members, and to help them gauge the group level. Facilitators should review the summary analysis of this tool at the beginning of the training cycle to gain a deeper understanding of the diversity, skill level and background of the group members with whom they will be working.

VI. Training Logistics

Before beginning your first training cycle, establish dates, times, and locations for the training sessions. Program staff should canvass potential participants for optimal days or times, considering the limitations that childcare, employment, education, or other obligations place upon participants. They should also consult a calendar to minimize potential conflicts or interruptions, such as holidays, major community events, or school requirements, during the training period. The training should be scheduled at a time that allows as many accepted applicants as possible to participate.

Arrange for the training to take place in the target area and to be easily accessible. Try to identify a site that can be used for all of the training sessions and feels neutral to all training participants. Don't choose a building or neighborhood agency that may have political connotations to participants. Choose a neutral family-friendly location where participants will feel welcome.

Establish a training environment that is conducive to interaction and discussion. Look for a training space that is pleasant, well lit and comfortable. Be sure that chairs and tables can be set up so that people can make eye contact with one another and individuals can move in and out of small groups with relative ease. Make sure that you have chart tablets and an array of markers for both facilitators and participants to use. Have plenty of masking tape on hand so that brainstorming lists and other experiential exercises can be posted on walls for all to review. Prepare training notebooks for participants. Loose-leaf notebooks with dividers that allow participants to store training handouts are particularly nice, and can be used for community action group meeting agendas, strategy charts and research materials after the training is completed.

Be sure to provide support for training sessions to maximize participation. Childcare is critical if parents with young children are to participate. On-site childcare is the most cost-effective option if your program has the space and staff to provide the range of care needed.

Daytime or Evening Training? Being Responsive to Community Needs

When working with the families of young children, finding a time of day that works for everyone can be challenging. Fewer and fewer parents are available during the day, and for those who work, responsibilities don't stop at the end of the work day. Early evening training sessions, which begin with dinner and provide child care are a possible solution. In communities with many single parents, however, family obligations make early evening sessions difficult unless your program provides a child care reimbursement or stipend that allows someone else to be home taking care of homework and bedtime. Some programs have successfully experimented with Saturday morning training sessions by providing recreational or educational activities for children while parents are attending training sessions. Others have found that they have more parents working part-time or on later shifts that allow them to schedule morning training while children are in school or in Head Start. In making these decisions, flexibility is the key, and input from the training group is the most crucial determinant in the planning process.

Childcare stipends may be more appropriate if participants have too many children to provide on-site care or if many participants have infants. If your program is in a rural area or in a community with poor public transportation, transportation to the training site may also be a crucial service. It is also a good idea to provide a light meal or snack for participants during the three-hour workshop.

Be sure to build flexibility into the training schedule. While workshops generally run from three to three-and-one-half hours, you may find that a particular training group needs to go more slowly, with additional time for questions or practicing certain key skill areas. If this is the case, you might consider breaking some of the training sessions into double ses-

Training Check List

Before beginning, check to make sure that:

- ✓ a training space has been reserved for the required dates and times;
- ✓ the room can comfortably accommodate the number of participants expected;
- ✓ the room is structured to allow for interaction among participants
- ✓ selected participants have all been notified of the training;
- ✓ selected participants are aware of the expectation for their participation and have made a commitment to attend the entire training;
- ✓ workshop co-facilitators have agreed to participate and been notified of the sessions to which they are committed;
- ✓ support services, including food, child-care and transportation, have been decided upon and arrangements have been made for the first session, with a clear understanding about who is responsible for making similar arrangements for all future sessions; and
- ✓ participant training notebooks have been prepared and are ready for distribution.

sions and, with the group's agreement, extending the training period by a few weeks. Be careful not to slow down too much, however. Remember that the training serves as the springboard for community action and that participants will have many opportunities to practice skills as the program's work moves forward.

Bear in mind that, despite your best efforts at accommodating schedules, motivating participants and securing their commitment, some will probably drop out after the training program has begun. Your staff should contact those individuals to find out why they have stopped coming and to try to draw them back. Other Head Start or partner agency staff may also be able to help you to find out why an individual has chosen to drop out. This personal contact is critical. Participants will often share perceptions that they are not willing to

share in the larger group, and may help you to better understand how training sessions are being received. It also sends an important message that their absence has been noted and that you care about their membership in the group. If a participant misses a session, but wants to continue with the training, try to arrange for an individualized "make-up" session. After the first round of training, these "make-up" sessions can be conducted by training graduates, who can help participants catch up on missed skill sets. If a participant does decide to drop out, determine the reason for their non-completion. This information may help you to better tailor the next training cycle.

VII. Leadership Development and Community Action: An Evolving Interaction

Your first cycle of leadership development training is only the beginning of your program's community strengthening work. Graduates of the first training class will form the core of your community action group. These graduates will perform a large-scale community assessment and begin to identify priority issues for action. As the work evolves, some of the graduates will stay with the project for many years, while others may be actively involved for a year or two and then move on to other responsibilities or activities.

As your program begins its work in the community, you will begin to engage other residents. Each year, your Head Start program and community partners will identify additional community members who are interested in participating in the program's primary prevention activities. Over time, a cycle of "rolling leadership" will begin to emerge, with additional individuals replenishing your community action group's leadership, while earlier leaders gradually move on into other roles in the community or within their personal lives.

Newly identified leaders need to be oriented and trained in the principles and skills that support your community action work without interrupting group activities to conduct an introductory training. Your community

should plan to offer a cycle of leadership development training at least once a year. In addition to reviewing basic principles and skills, each year's training should continue to move your community action work forward, and should not interrupt ongoing community action group meetings.

For this reason, the leadership development training must be understood as a living document that should be adapted to support your project's current status and provide the strongest continuity between ongoing training and community action activities. To accomplish this, review the leadership development training before scheduling each new cycle of training and ask yourself a series of questions:

- How can these sessions be adapted to support the issues that our community action group is currently addressing?”
- Are there group facilitation simulations that I can create that would be relevant to our current issues?
- Can any of the themes that we are exploring be used by participants to frame their relationship-building work in the community during the early phases of the training?
- Do we need to map our community in terms of a specific issue that we are currently addressing (such as the range of after-school services offered in our neighborhood or the number of vacant lots within a three-block radius)?

To assist you in this process, each workshop contains a box offering ideas for modifying the session's content for successive rounds of leadership training. These ideas are intended as suggestions. Your experience will ultimately provide the most useful insights into creating fluidity between the leadership development training and the community action work. And through your experience, it is our hope that *Building Leadership for Community Development* will provide a valuable tool in helping your community meet its primary prevention goals.

