

FAQ Facilitator-Answered Questions

Living and Working Well with a Disability Peer-to-Peer Series

Call #1: April 26, 2018

Managing Group Dynamics

Being a facilitator is a challenging and rewarding role, full of surprises and questions. Luckily, we have each other to talk to! This “FAQ” (Facilitator-Answered Questions) highlights some of the gems of wisdom that were shared on the first call in the Living & Working Well Facilitator Peer-to-Peer series.

Q: Ten weeks is quite a long time, and there is a lot of content to cover. How do you keep the momentum going and keep people engaged?

Facilitator Answers:

- “In the beginning of each class I'll just go around the room and talk to everybody for a couple minutes and ask them to discuss what they've been doing for that week to try to reach their goal. What work have they been doing for their short term or long term goals?”
- “One thing we do is bring in a guest speaker who may have an expertise in one of the chapters, like *Seeking Information*. I bring in our information referral coordinator from our independent living center, and she talks about seeking information. That kind of breaks it up. They're not always listening to me. I bring in individuals that are experts in certain chapters, and that helps.”
- “One thing I do is at the end of every week, at the end of each chapter, I ask the group to think about what they learned in this chapter and how they can utilize it one time in a way of achieving their goal. Then the following week I open up the class with, ‘Who would like to share how they used what they learned last week in achieving their goal?’ That starts conversation, and then each one of them starts bouncing back and forth talking. I've found that very effective.”
- “What I found is that you get the people involved in it, they're really excited about it, they are really pumped up with each other, they interact with each other, and they really try not to miss classes. Even between the classes they get each other's phone numbers and talk to each other and are excited about meeting back up with each other the next week.”

Q: Some people in the workshop may not show much interest in working on a goal, for a variety of reasons. What can you do in this situation?

Facilitator Answers:

- “I try to use it as a learning opportunity. Maybe that's a chance to talk with that individual about really identifying what some of those barriers are to achieving their goals. What's keeping them from doing work on that goal? Then, help them to do some solution-focused thinking around that.”
- “In my experience sometimes people might end up needing to take this information in one, two, maybe three times before they're really ready to do the work that they need to on their goals. I think that's just part of IL.”
- “Sometimes just practicing achieving small goals can help someone feel like, okay, I can do stuff, I can achieve goals. The experience of achievement is sometimes motivating for people to set larger goals.”

Q: Some people in the group may talk much more than others, sometimes too much. What can you do to get the conversation back on track?

Facilitator Answers:

- “I've had that happen to me a couple of times, and what I do is very politely say, ‘I'd be happy to talk with you after the class or another time, but we have to stay focused so we can get through the chapter,’ and you have to just let them know that we've got to talk about that later, and 9 times out of 10, they say great, no problem, we move on, and I meet with them after the class and talk with them about their concerns or what they're doing and what their needs were.”

Q: Over the course of ten weeks, a lot of things can happen in facilitators' and participants' lives. What can you do if something interrupts the workshop, and some people aren't able to finish?

Facilitator Answers:

- “We extended the group and invited them to a reunion of other graduates so they could meet other graduates, people that had successes with the course and had gone through and developed their healthy habits and achieving their goals. That really helps because the whole group was able to connect with other individuals that had been through the course before.”
- “I think sometimes as facilitators it's nice to just be able to tell yourself that it's unfortunate that they didn't get to finish the workshop, but they have more than they had before it started, and so it's a start. And I know that a lot of people will take *Living Well* two, three times. So maybe you could offer a summer session and invite them. And the other thing that I know a lot of folks have done, especially in rural centers, is either trying to finish up their missed a classes one on one, or attempting to have some of those conversations over the phone if they have transportation barriers.”

- “This can be a great learning experience for the group as well. Life throws us challenges, and when we're goal setting we're going to meet barriers. We might have those crises or those acute events happen, and how do you work through it?”

Q: What can you do if someone misses multiple sessions?

Facilitator Answers:

- “What we do is that if they miss one class, they can still continue the workshop. If they start to miss two or three classes, they lose out on that camaraderie and the connection and momentum of the group. So what I do is I offer them to take the next workshop, and, really, it's never been an issue.”
- “We keep our groups to 10 people, and we develop such a great connection, they start sharing and opening up and learning from each other. There is such great peer support there. If one of the people misses two to three sessions, because of family, health, whatever it may be, the momentum and that support kind of disappears and the dynamic of the group changes. The peer support they get from each other is immense and the relationship is so wonderful you see build amongst the people in the class.”

Q: Workshop groups are made up of people with lots of different experiences, identities, and disabilities. What can you do when a participant shares that they are uncomfortable because they feel different than the rest of the group?

Facilitator Answers:

- “I have found in a few of my sessions I may have some people who are quadriplegic, paraplegic, and wheelchair users, and then some individuals who may have a visual disability or a slight hearing loss, and they come to me and say, ‘I feel guilty because my disability isn't as severe as that person's.’ Those of us that are paralyzed don't look at the individuals that are able to walk and feel angry at them because they're walking, you know. So we don't want you to feel guilty that you can do this and we're not able to.”
- “Over time, participants realize that it's just about handling your disability no matter what it is. And as a facilitator, I think it's good for us to let people know that everybody's disability is a challenge to them, and it's not a competition. We're here to help each other live better with our disability.”
- “It's really uncomfortable to feel different in a group, but as time goes on, the participants will naturally feel more comfortable with each other.”

About the Peer-to-Peer Series:

The Peer-to-Peer Series conference calls are free conference calls open to all *Living and Working Well with a Disability* facilitators. During each hour-long conference call, facilitators share their experiences, skills, and challenges with the group. Each call focuses on a topic related to facilitation. All *Living and Working Well with a Disability* facilitators are invited to participate in these free calls.

Quotations above are from participants in the first call (on managing group dynamics) which took place on April 26, 2018. They have been edited for clarity.

Looking for more Living and Working Well with a Disability facilitator resources?

Visit [the Living and Working Well with a Disability program website](#), or email livingwell@ruralinstitute.umt.edu for more information, resources, and to be added to the Living and Working Well listserv.

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For Additional Information

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