

# Action Learning: Taking off the Cape

Title V Federal-State MCH Partnership Meeting

MCH Director's Meeting

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# Break Activity

- Before you take a break, use the sticky notes at your table to jot down your ideas.
- Use a different sticky note for each idea, so that we can sort them into themes later.
- As you move to break, add your sticky note ideas to the flip charts on the walls.

Respond to these questions:

- Reflecting on your Title V Agency:
  - 1-2 things you're excited about for the coming year
  - 1-2 things that worry you most about the upcoming year



# Agenda

- Overview of Action Learning
- Types of Leadership Challenges
- How do Action Learning Sets Work?
- Practice



# Overview of Action Learning



# What is action learning?

- Process that involves a small group working on real problems, taking action, and learning as individuals, as a team, and as an “organization”
- Tested approach for accelerating learning so that individuals can handle complex situations more effectively
- Helps leaders practice leadership action and behaviors
- Solves problems and develops leaders simultaneously because its simple rules force participants to think critically and work collaboratively



# How do we know it works?

- Case study reports were collected from 139 action learning coaches (Peacock et al, 2016)
- Findings included over 100 examples of where skills learning through action learning were transferred to the workplace

## Five key themes:

- Participants appreciated the safe environment that they could practice their chosen leadership skills.
- Team members saw how easy it was to practice their chosen leadership skill and appreciated the real-time feedback.
- Team members transferred the newly practiced skills to their organizations.
- The development of leadership skills is a natural outcome of action learning.
- The organization learned that creating breakthrough strategies could be achieved while developing leadership skills.



# When should we use action learning?

Action Learning is especially effective when:

- Issues are complex, usually in an organizational setting,
- There is no obvious solution (e.g. there is no expert with the answer),
- There are several viable approaches/solutions and people disagree,
- Conditions are unstable, changing, or unpredictable,
- Senior managers are open to experimentation, and
- People are willing to take a risk and take action.



# What are the goals of action learning?

- Help change leaders become more strategic through practicing leadership actions and behaviors.
- Facilitate progress on a change leadership challenge faced by participants
- Engage with colleagues who will challenge and support one another
- Gain courage and support from a group of peers on a common journey.





# Action learning leadership challenges

- Personally meaningful
- Organizationally meaningful
- Actionable within reasonable time frame
- Something you control

NOT:

- Technical
- Too general

BUT RATHER:

- Something that can be improved, but not resolved
- Often related to partnerships, innovations, equity, culture





What's my  
leadership  
challenge?

# Action Learning Sets



# Sample Set Agenda

- 1) Welcome and Introductions
- 2) Session presenters share goals, context, challenge
- 3) Set members ask the presenters questions to support and challenge their thinking
- 4) Presenters close with specific actions they are planning to take
- 5) Facilitator “checks in” – what are key learning points, what questions were most helpful, how can the next set meeting be more effective?



# Set Member Responsibilities

- Make explicit and visible your current approaches to the challenges.
- Reflect on whether your approaches are wise and fruitful.
- Consider new insights based on questions from others.
- Try new approaches that you craft with the help of other set members.
- Report back about what you learn from your action.



# Sample Set Questions

## SAMPLE SET QUESTIONS FOR LISTENERS

<p><b>Ask about What Is Working (Appreciative Inquiry)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is going well?</li> <li>• What do you appreciate most about the people you are working with?</li> <li>• What are your assets?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ask about a “Solved State”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would things look like if they were going right?</li> <li>• What would be happening – that isn’t?</li> <li>• What do you want you don’t have?</li> <li>• How will you know the problem is solved?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ask about Individual Leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you want?</li> <li>• Why is this challenge important to you? What are you most excited about?</li> <li>• Do you have similar experiences in your past?</li> <li>• What feedback have you received that may be relevant?</li> <li>• What is helping you? What is holding you back?</li> <li>• What attitudes and self-beliefs would help you be successful?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ask about Other Stakeholders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whose opinions should you consider in addressing this challenge?</li> <li>• What agreements do you need to proceed, or to be successful?</li> <li>• Who <u>has to own</u> <u>the</u> shared vision?</li> <li>• Who else knows about this? Who else cares?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ask about Support from Networks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who would be a helpful advisor or consult on this?</li> <li>• What do you need? Who can assist you? Where is your personal support?</li> <li>• How might these influence your leadership goals, strategies, or actions?</li> <li>• Do you want to hear a story about what <u>may be a similar situation</u>?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ask about Restraints and Constraints</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your restraints and constraints?</li> <li>• What are all the things you must do?</li> <li>• What are all the things you can’t do?</li> <li>• Who says? Are the restraints real or imagined?</li> <li>• What are you assuming? What are you overlooking?</li> <li>• Can you get there from here?</li> <li>• What <u>has to give</u>? Resources? Results? Time? Money?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ask about a Course of Action</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your options?</li> <li>• What are their costs? What are their benefits?</li> <li>• What are their side effects?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ask about Plans and Schedules</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of time frame are you talking about?</li> <li>• What could go wrong?</li> <li>• How will you know if things are going okay or not?</li> </ul>





Practice



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