

Event 5

Select the Initial Core Team

When and Why To Use this Event

Who conducts this event. The facilitator.

Context. You, the facilitator, have just analyzed the district's capacity for systemic change (Event 4) and made a final commitment to work with the district (school system and community). Now this event entails selecting the school and community leaders who will comprise the Initial Core Team. It will be followed by team norming processes and building knowledge of, and motivation for, systemic change.

Intent. The primary intent of this event is to decide who will be on the Initial Core Team. The purpose of this team is to create a climate and culture in which designing for systemic change can flourish. The Initial Core Team will not make design decisions; rather it will be integrally involved in the creation of the Design Team (which will do the actual designing) and the Decisioning Team (which will make the decisions/recommendations about the design) and so will have great impact on the whole change effort. It is important for you to recognize that the Initial Core Team is a place where the culture of design is created as a seed which then grows when the team is expanded to include a broader range of stakeholder participants.

When. We recommend that this event be done for **every** change effort. This event should not be undertaken until you have entered into a formal agreement with the district (Event 3) and found out what capacities you have to work with and which ones need to be improved (Event 4).

Synopsis. This event entails your adapting the **criteria** and selection **process** for the Initial Core Team to your situation with the help of the Leadership Team, identifying **types of people** for the initial team, selecting the **initial slate** and alternates with the help of key leaders, meeting the **individuals** to make sure they will all be appropriate, **recruiting** the members, and **announcing** the team membership to the public, all while creating a good public awareness and image of what is going on. If you are an old-timer with political "baggage," some special precautions should be heeded.

Rationale. If you skip this event, you may find the district leadership appointing team members or adopting the members of an existing team. This can have two immediate negative effects, and one longer-range effect. First, public perception may result in some stakeholder groups being angry or dissatisfied with the selections. The community may perceive the team as "stacked" and then refuse to buy into anything proceeding from the team. This would seriously jeopardize the success of the change process. Second, the quality of the team may be hurt. Third, the quality problem would probably hurt the establishment of an appropriate culture and climate for building the Design and Decisioning Teams, which could also jeopardize the success of the change process.

Event 5**Select the Initial Core Team**

Implied Values. Establishment of an appropriate culture and climate for change, balance of power, inclusion of important groups, facilitator neutrality, open and honest communication with the community.

Prerequisites. Events 1-4

Calendar Time. 2-3 weeks

Goals

To choose appropriate **team members** for the Initial Core Team.

To establish a positive **public perception** of the change process.

Process

1. Prepare yourself.

You, the facilitator, should **review** this selection process and the criteria outlined below, and **customize** them to the needs and conditions of the district (meaning the school system and the community). *Each community is unique and may need variations on this selection process. However, these guidelines should be useful to consider as you make whatever appropriate changes to the selection process and criteria that are needed.*

(Time: 2 hours)

2. Refine the process and criteria.

Take the customized process and criteria to the **key leaders** (that is, the Leadership Team and other people who are influential in the major stakeholder groups) for any suggestions, revisions and endorsement. *It is important that you gain the support of the district leadership as to how you will make these decisions because if they do not agree with the process or criteria you use to select members, you may find it difficult to get them to accept anything that results from this initial core team, and their influence with their respective groups is important to the success of the change effort.*

(Time: 3 Days)

3. Work on public relations.

Inform the **public** about the formation of the Initial Core Team, and invite them to become involved in the effort by contacting you. An article in the local newspaper is one possible way to do this. *The policy of stakeholder inclusion and participation should be established very early in the change process. It will help to set a nonthreatening tone and will reduce future resistance to the effort.*

(Time: 1-4 hours)

4. Create a sketch of the team.

Identify the types of members for a small 5-7 person team, based on your revised criteria (Step 1 above) and identified power groups (see "Power Groups" below). While it is tempting to create a larger team, it is important that the initial team remain small.

You may wish to consult with school leaders as you create this sketch. The sketch should not yet include names of participants, only indication of the stakeholder group with which the person should be influential, and the criteria that are most important for that person. As you create your team sketch you should be sure to consider power issues and balance. Issues associated with balance between internal and external school participants is one of the most commonly faced. It is better to err on the side of too many external participants than the reverse. Your sketch should be approved by the board and superintendent. *The smallness of a group is related to the ability of the group to form the sort of change culture and climate that is the main function of this team. Although it may be tempting to use an already existing team which may (or may not) be larger, it is important to make this a new small team so that the design culture can be freshly established. If you do not explicitly consider issues associated with the power that various factions and representatives may wield on this team you may face fallout from the community as well as an unhealthy team culture rather than the generative design oriented one that is the goal of this team.*

(Time: 1 week)

5. Create an initial slate for the team.

Based on your sketch, the revised criteria, and your observations of personalities, determine an **initial slate** of potential core team members and alternates. There are two different ways to proceed here:

- If you are an external facilitator (without political "baggage") and/or the community has exhibited a high degree of trust in the school leadership, you may want to create the slate with the superintendent and take it to all key leaders for approval.
- If you are an internal facilitator and recognize that there are some difficulties with *perceptions* of your personal biases and motives (see "Potential Problems" below) and/or the community has exhibited a high degree of concern over school leadership decisions, you may want to work with the key leaders in the district (school system and community) to create the slate as a small group.

(Time: 3-6 hours)

6. Personally check out the initial slate.

You should **meet** with the individuals on the initial slate and their alternates to make sure that all seem to meet the criteria and to establish a personal relationship with each person. Make any necessary revisions to finalize the slate and alternates, negotiating with the key leaders as necessary.

(Time: 5-7 hours)

7. Develop a recruiting plan for each slate member.

During or after you gain approval of the final slate, or as you negotiate the initial slate with a group of key leaders, you should also take a moment to identify effective **recruiting strategies**. *Each person is likely to be motivated by different things and the most effective manner or person to contact them may not be you or the superintendent.* It is a good idea to brainstorm the answer to this question, "How do we get John to commit to this team?" as you create the list. This also helps to identify those potential candidates who may not be willing to commit, because some of the key leaders may be able to tell you that it is just impossible to get a strong commitment from that person. A plan for recruiting should be developed at the time of final slating.

(Time: 1-2 hours)

8. Recruit the Initial Core Team members.

If a number of people were chosen as recruiters, it is very important that a consistent message is communicated across recruiters to all new Initial Core Team members. *The absence of clear communication from recruiters can result in confusion over the team's purpose, function, and role, and thus confusion in the community at large as these expectations are shared through the grapevine.* In addition, the strong commitment that is necessary for such a team should be clearly explained by all recruiters. *It is important that members are strongly committed since there are relatively few, and a lot of energy will have to come from them in the upcoming work prior to expanding this core team.* Therefore, it is a good idea to express to members that if they are not willing to commit a substantial amount of their time, they should decline participation at this point so that you may seek an alternate member.

(Time: 2-5 days)

9. Reformulate the slate, if necessary.

Once those on the final slate have committed or declined, you may find that there are still some open slots despite your attempt to deal with this by choosing some alternates. You may need to reformulate the slate based on the acceptance of some of your initially slated members. If so, make a second slate based on the open slots and acceptances, and gain approval of this second slate. Again, you may choose to do this individually or as a small group. Finally, recruit these potential members to commit.

(Time: 0-3 days)

10. Publicize the change effort and the formation of the team.

Finally, you should share information regarding the change effort and the team membership list with the **public**. Alternatives here include press releases, school newsletter announcements, school letters home to all parents, church bulletin announcements, or a celebrative reception for the members, to which the public is invited. This event would be an opportunity to share the good news that change has begun in the community, to inform the community as to who is on the initial core team, to provide an opportunity for everyone to meet the members, and to emphasize the importance of their (the community members') involvement in the change effort. *Making these early connections with the community allows the team to begin to build the sorts of relationships that will become important as change progresses. Also this is an opportunity to celebrate, which is very important in building a strong culture among participants.*

(Time: 3-6 hours)

Potential Problems with the Process

The following are some problems you may anticipate while conducting this process:

- The team that you create is a clear message to the broader community. It is important that you not create a team that conveys the wrong types of messages and relationships, such as the perception of a “stacked” team or a team that is not open to input from others.
- As the facilitator it is important to recognize that if you are an external facilitator, you may be the most unbiased selector of the initial core team, however your understanding of the context may still be weak. You should try to get as much information about the stakeholder groups as possible. If, on the other hand, you are an internal facilitator, you must be aware that you may not be perceived as terribly neutral in the matter of team membership. Although you understand the context very clearly, you bring your own political values and biases with you into the process of selection and this can create negative perceptions.
- Your initial tendency may be to make the team larger to include all possible stakeholder groups, reticent factions and opinion leaders. However, it is important to remember that less may be better here than more. Too many members of the core team can make meetings difficult to arrange and although the tradition in the school may point to low attendance at such meetings in the past, firmly committed members should all attend every meeting so that rework is minimized at each meeting. Try to limit your group size to between 5 and 7 members and resist the temptation to grow beyond these limits. Another common tendency here is to allow an already existing team, which is concerned with broad school issues, to serve in the capacity of the core team. This is not a good idea because it is important for the group to establish an entirely new identity of its own and a very different working culture. This cannot be accomplished using a group that has already established identities and morés.
- The quality of the team may not end up being as high as you need for the change effort to be successful. This may be due to caving in to political pressures in the selection process, or to not including the most important criteria, or to not gathering enough information about the individuals to be able to apply the criteria accurately, or to a host of other reasons. But the consequence is not being able to build and transfer an appropriate culture and climate for change to the expanded core team. It is essential that the people you pick are well respected and influential within their respective stakeholder groups, if not more broadly, and that they have mindsets and personalities that are conducive to forming the appropriate culture and climate for systemic change.

Criteria

There are many criteria for membership in the initial core team. However, two of the most important are:

- A. Core team members should be either formal or tacit leaders in the community or district. *Gaining participation from leaders in this initial core team may be difficult because they are typically very busy, but the investment will pay off if they are able to make the commitment because they will lend a high degree of credibility to your efforts.*
- B. Core team members should be change advocates. They should exemplify change in their own lives as well as in what they say. They should be models of learning—by outward action the community should know that they are open to change because they are constantly re-creating themselves. *This is important because we recognize that change begins first within each individual and the team must be able to recognize that in their own lives. In addition, if they are going to suggest changes to others, they must be models of change themselves so that they are beyond reproach during difficult decision making about the changes.*

Additional criteria that you may want to consider include:

- C. Willingness to negotiate their lives and commit the necessary time. *This is very important because when team meetings are missed, the culture changes and much has to be re accomplished when the absentee re-enters the process.*
- D. High level of credibility and respect among stakeholder group (related to opinion leader)
- E. Persuasive and/or cooperative personality
- F. High level of dissatisfaction with current system (related to change advocate)
- G. Public/school relations abilities
- H. Balance of representation across stakeholder groups
- I. Balance of representation across gender, race, class, age and role
- J. Consensus-oriented
- K. Process oriented
- L. Open-minded
- M. Compatible personality with other group members
- N. Honest, self-disclosive and self-critical.

Power Groups

Some types of people have usually been found to be important to include in the Initial Core Team. In some cases, it may not be wise to include all these people, but in most cases it is appropriate.

Superintendent: This is a good choice if s/he is a strong change advocate and a positively viewed influence in the community.

The "right" Board of Education member: Since any changes will have to be approved by the board, it is important to find an open-minded, change-oriented board member who is sufficiently respected by other board members to be able to influence their thinking.

Teacher of the year: Or some other highly respected teacher voice should be on the team. This may or may not be a union representative. It should be an open-minded, change-oriented teacher who is sufficiently respected by other teachers to be able to influence their thinking.

Parent: The parent voice is perhaps the most oft overlooked resource. This may or may not be someone from the PTA/PTO or other strong parent group, but it should be an open-minded, change-oriented parent who is sufficiently respected by other parents to be able to influence their thinking. Such a parent voice has the potential to become a great support for change in the district, for parents are highly motivated stakeholders who can generate the energy necessary to carry the team through difficult times. They can also take the wind out of the sails of a vocal minority.

Business owner, social service agent, or senior citizen: You should identify the most influential groups in the community, and include open-minded, change-oriented people who are sufficiently respected by those groups to be able to influence their thinking. These community members bring new and different perspectives on education to the process, and they are important for stakeholder and community acceptance over the long run. Furthermore, people who know how to get things done in the community can be invaluable.

Resistant faction(s): If you have a group that is particularly concerned or historically negative toward educational change, it is wise to find a representative of it who is open-minded and sufficiently respected by the group to be able to influence their thinking.

Understandings

Given the difficult task of selecting members for the initial core team, we offer the following suggestions for specific understandings you may find helpful to cultivate. Again, please do not feel you have to use these understandings, and we hope you will identify other understandings you think are important. We encourage you to carefully consider *why* you are accepting, rejecting, modifying, or adding each understanding.

A. Selection criteria

What criteria should selection be based on?
What makes a good, powerful group member?

B. Stakeholder groups

What groups are most important to be represented on the initial core team?

C. Recruiting

What motivates busy people to be involved?
How can we build an optimal initial core team?

D. Balance

What is an appropriate balance among stakeholder groups, working styles, roles, classes, genders?

What would balance look like on our team?