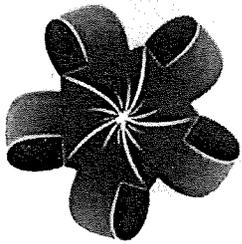


# Engaging Stakeholders with Focused Conversation

Rural Health Network Development Planning Program  
Grantee Meeting

Rockville, MD

May 2016



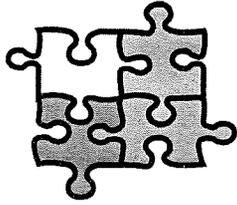
MN Technology of Participation  
[www.mntop.us](http://www.mntop.us)



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[www.ruralcenter.org/rhi](http://www.ruralcenter.org/rhi)

# TOP® FOUNDATIONAL VALUES

- **INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION**  
invites and sustains the participation of all members of a group. TOP® recognizes the importance of each member of the group and understands each member holds an important piece of the puzzle and each person's insights help to create a whole picture.



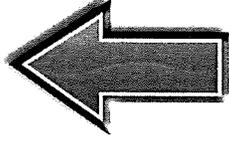
- **TEAMWORK & COLLABORATION**  
assumes teamwork and collaboration are necessary to get a task done in the most effective, efficient and economical way. Creates a deep sense of collegiality among members of the group.



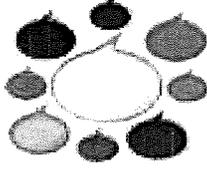
- **INDIVIDUAL & GROUP CREATIVITY**  
brings out the best of each person's rational and intuitive capacities. By encouraging a dialogue between head and heart, people experience the magic of group creativity breaking loose.



- **ACTION & OWNERSHIP**  
positions the group to take action on decisions owned and supported by members of the group. Group ownership of decisions moves the group toward action.



- **REFLECTION & LEARNING**  
confirms individual and group resolve and allows for full appreciation of the value and importance of consensus and collective action. Learning and transformation occur with depth reflection.



# ADVANTAGES OF THE FOCUSED CONVERSATION

1. TOP® methods apply a **structure to group process**, preventing a group from drifting aimlessly. This structure is grounded in brain research on “how we think when we are thinking effectively”.
2. TOP® methods are **extremely versatile**, which means they work as well with groups of strangers as with long-term colleagues. They work well with groups that may never be together again and with well-established groups. They work with people of mixed backgrounds and ages and with homogeneous groups. They can be applied in all settings of your life and work.
3. TOP® methods provide **excellent ways to focus** people on a topic long enough to determine what direction is needed and to provide an effective way for a group of people involved in implementing a decision to think through issues or actions together.
4. TOP® methods provide room for **real listening**. People don't have to raise their voices or fight for the floor to be heard. Nor do they have to repeat previously state positions for emphasis or to indicate agreement or support.
5. TOP® methods have a **way of eliminating politicking and power plays**. They encourage understanding rather than criticism. They are helpful when bringing different information or perspectives together in order to create a commonly held comprehensive or “bigger” picture of an issue or objective.
6. TOP® methods **help to discourage negative thinking**. Each person's comments are received, and none are disqualified or struck from the record.
7. TOP® methods draw out both the **rational and emotional** responses and experiences of the participants. They provide a safe structure for saying things that may be difficult to say.
8. TOP® methods **enable honesty**: people who know that their responses will be accepted like everybody else's feel free to say what they really think and feel. The experience of such honesty is often releasing, surprising and refreshing.

Adapted from the book *The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 Ways to Access Group Wisdom in the Workplace*, R. Brian Stanfield, General Editor, The Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs, 1997.

# Types of Leadership

Hierarchical Leaders <i>Top Down</i>	Trainers	Consultants	Facilitators
Assume	The leader is the authority	The group is seeking wisdom	The group has both the experience and wisdom
Know	What to do	Content	What others have done
Seek	The right decisions	Learner clarity	Compliance to recommendations
Rely on	Individual abilities	Research and their own learning and training	Their own experience
Expected results	Decisions and plans	Understanding	Change
			Commitment to action

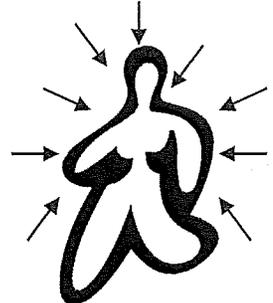
# THE FOCUSED CONVERSATION METHOD STRUCTURE

*U-Tube rural health video*

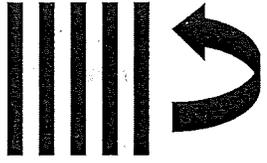
**OBJECTIVE**



People walk in; take things in with their senses.



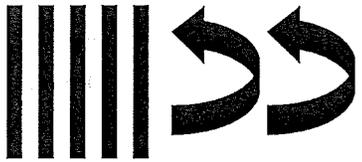
**REFLECTIVE**



Begin to sense, like, don't like, emotions & feelings stir, associations are made, memories rise to the surface



**INTERPRETIVE**

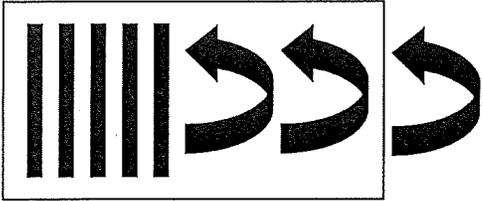


Make conscious connections, thoughts arise, words, ideas form, understanding, we think about what's going on



So then, my idea is...

**Decisional**



Consider actions, decisions, choices, what to do, how to respond, how to relate



SHALL I VOLUNTEER? I THINK I'M GOING TO... GET TO THE BOTTOM OF... SO, WHAT I LEARNED... HERE'S MY P... FOR ME!!... IS A SOLUTION... PROBLEM. PERH... R-RECT IN M... I DON'T THINK I AGREE WITH THIS

*process that helps groups go thru a journey; build shared awareness, creates shared learning, more adaptable to change*

*purpose*

# THE FOCUSED CONVERSATION METHOD STRUCTURE

**Topic:** The focus or subject of the conversation. It sets the boundaries of the conversation.

**Rational Aim:** The internal or practical goal of the conversation. It guides the collective thinking process and determines the direction of the conversation.

**Experiential Aim:** The inner impact of the conversation. It affects the mood of the group and sets the tone of the communication between participants.

**Opening:** To set the stage for the conversation and introduce the topic.

**Objective Level Questions:**

- To engage the five senses (sight, sound, taste, smell & touch)
- Invites inclusive participation
- Gets out the facts and objective data

**Reflective Level Questions:**

- To elicit and acknowledge imaginative, intuitive and emotional responses
- Acknowledges emotions, memories and initial associations
- Invites participants to use their imagination

**Interpretive Level Questions:**

- To elicit the sharing of experiences and individual meaning
- Builds collective consciousness and shared awareness within the group
- Identifies available options and possibilities

**Decisional Level Questions:**

- To develop depth level collective opinions or resolve that may lead to future action
- Draws out deeper meaning from participants
- Makes conversation meaningful and relevant to the future
- Exposes individual and group choices

**Closing:** To confirm the individual's or group's opinion or resolve

# FOCUSED CONVERSATION METHOD

Objective  
Reflective  
Interpretive  
Decisional

## HINTS AND TIPS

**First Task:** Determine your **Rational** and **Experiential** Aims

Rational Aim = What the group needs to know, to understand or decide.

Experiential Aim = What experience do we want our participants to have.

- **Opening** – Explain the goal and experience in your own words.
- **Flow of Questions** – Have a couple questions at each level you can pick from.
- **Closing** – Thank the group for its participation and confirm individual or group resolve.
- **Start at the “what” level** (objective) it is not as easy as it sounds.
- **All voices heard** at the easiest level (objective)
- Affirm **Participation**, neutral on **Content**.
- Practice **“Balancing Questions”**, particularly at the Reflective level. *like/dislike question*
- Ask **One Question** at a time. Repeat if needed.
- Ask **Open Ended** questions.
  
- Avoid **Yes/No** questions
- Avoid **Summarizing** (ask questions to elicit!)
- Avoid **Why** questions
- Avoid **Calling Out** one individual

## MISCONCEPTIONS

1. Facilitation is not a New Name for Training.
2. ‘Participation is Easier’ - Facilitation is not a “breeze”.
3. Facilitation is getting lost in the Whirlwind of ideas or data.
4. Facilitation is the latest buzz word for asking questions, or assigning small group work.
5. Facilitation is not a magic bag of tricks, gimmicks or surprises that can be pulled on a group.

# SAMPLE CONVERSATION

FAR

How does the perspective of being a facilitative leader help me be a better network leader?

<b>Rational Aim:</b> To better understand Facilitative Leadership and how it		<b>Experiential Aim:</b> To listen to each other's experiences and to feel empowered to be facilitative leaders
<b>Opening:</b> We have 10 minutes to take the opportunity to discuss the facilitative leader role. We would like to discuss what you heard and what your reactions and thoughts are, and how you might use this in your work. I have some questions to get us started. This is a 'real' conversation... so jump in!		
<b>Objective</b> Facts, Information, Sensory Impressions		
You can refer to the chart on page 2 in your handout if you would like. • Let's start with a go around question. What is one word or phrase you remember about the Facilitative Leader conversation? • Anyone now, what other words or comments do you remember?		
<b>Reflective</b> Personal Reactions, Associations, Emotions, Images		
• What intrigues you about the facilitative approach to being a leader? • What might you be skeptical about at this point?		
<b>Interpretive</b> Meaning, Values, Significance, Purpose, Implications		
• What do you think might be the impact of using a Facilitative leadership style with the groups you work with? • How might this approach be useful when working with people from other organizations? • What would the implications of being a facilitative leader be for you?		
<b>Decisional</b> Resolution, Action, Future Direction, Next Steps		
• What is an example of how you could demonstrate facilitative leadership? • What can you already see yourself doing differently?		
<b>Closing:</b> Thanks for taking the time to share your reactions and ideas. I appreciate your participation in our conversation		

Senses  
see hear  
feel smell  
emotional  
emotions  
feel  
meaning  
action  
open

WHAT  
FACTS  
GUT  
Attitudes  
SO  
WHAT  
ideas  
New  
WHAT  
RESULTS

# WHEN TO USE THE FOCUSED CONVERSATION METHOD

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## Situations for Use:

- Management team developing plan
- Staff/Team team-building meetings
- Project planning team
- Annual staff planning meetings
- Retreat ice-breaker
- Advisory board meetings
- Client sessions
- Planning meeting introduction
- Customer interviews
- Performance reviews / evaluations
- Procedures for evaluation of a group or process
- Reorganization planning task force
- Self-directed team
- Internal management team
- Virtual meetings and conference calls
- Analyzing supplier proposals
- Working as a group on presentations or reports
- Conference planning
- First meeting of a new task force
- Customer service training
- One-on-one conversations
- Year-end evaluation and planning
- Staff training
- Pre-retreat planning session
- Leadership retreat.
- Conference breakout sessions
- Values clarification group
- Quality team meeting with engineers & marketing
- Top management team meeting
- Facilities staff design meetings
- Cross-functional team needs meetings
- Change management meetings
- Creative problem solving
- To collect and review data or ideas

1st task own a rational & experiential aim (goal)  
 ① what does the group need to know  
 ② what experience do we want the participants to have  
 ③ few of questions at  
 ④ crossing over word  
 T.Y.

Sample Questions for Each Level of a Top Focused Conversation

Objective Questions	Reflective Questions	Interpretive Questions	Decisional Questions
Facts, Information, Sensory Impressions	Personal Reactions, Associations, Emotions, Images	Meaning, Values, Significance, Purpose, Implications	Resolution, Action, Future Direction, Next Steps
1. What object do you see? What did you see? 2. What words stand out? 3. What are some of the things we did today? 4. Who were the characters? Who was there? 5. What are some events you recall in the past year? 6. What do you notice about this new form? 7. Who was present at the meeting? Who spoke? 8. What scenes do you remember? What facts do we know about this situation? 10. What caught your attention about _____? 11. What are some of the teams you've been a part of? 12. What headlines have caught your attention this week? 13. What lines of dialogue do you recall? 14. What do you think of first when I say the word(s) _____? 15. What were the key points in the speech? 16. What behaviors or responses have you observed?	1. What parts reminded you of your own _____? 2. What were your first reactions? Where did you feel anxious? 3. Where did you feel anxious? What made you feel appreciated? 4. What made you feel appreciated? 5. What seemed boring? 6. What is most exciting? 7. Where are you really clear? 8. Where confused? 9. What concerns you? 10. What was annoying? 11. Where are you confident? Where is there more work needed? 13. What gives you courage? 14. What seems the most critical? 15. What are you most doubtful about? 16. What was inspiring? 17. What color would you add? Please explain. 18. What was really easy? Most difficult? 19. What familiar behavioral patterns did you notice in yourself? In the group? 20. What music would you play? Please explain.	1. What is the importance of this? What new vantage point has this given us? 3. What difference will it make? What would you say lies underneath these issues? 4. What would you say lies underneath these issues? 5. How has this been beneficial to you personally? 6. What appears to be the central issue or key problem area? 7. What other things do we need to consider? 8. What kind of decisions do we need to make as a group? 9. What is being recommended here? 10. What options are open to us? What questions did this raise for you? 12. What insights are beginning to emerge? 13. How have other groups dealt with this issue? 14. What kinds of changes will we need to make? 15. What is the meaning of this experience for you? 16. What are the values we are holding here?	1. What are these themes really about? 2. Tell a story about what this is about. 3. What would it look like for you to act in this way? 4. What does it mean to have experienced this? 5. So just what have we decided? What does this mean for our future? 7. How will you title or name our final product? 8. So, just what have you learned? If we did this again, what would we change? 10. What are we really committed to? 11. What are the first steps we need to take? 12. What is the resolve of this group? 13. How would you articulate our consensus? 14. What will you do differently? What support do you need to make this change? 15. What support do you need to make this change? 16. What applications or action ideas has this session suggested for you?

# Focused Conversation Worksheet

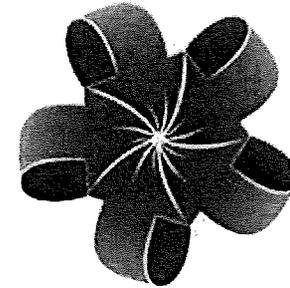
## Topic:

<b>Rational Aim:</b>	<b>Experiential Aim:</b>
<b>Opening:</b>	
<b>Objective</b> Facts, Information, Sensory Impressions	
<b>Reflective</b> Personal Reactions, Associations, Emotions, Images	
<b>Interpretive</b> Meaning, Values, Significance, Purpose, Implications	
<b>Decisional</b> Resolution, Action, Future Direction, Next Steps	
<b>Closing:</b>	

# SCRAMBLE CONVERSATIONS

<p><u>Gain Consensus Agreement on Network Goals.</u></p>	<p><b>O</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are our stated goals now?</li> <li><b>R</b></li> <li>• Which of these seem most critical?</li> <li>• Which are unclear?</li> <li><b>I</b></li> <li>• What values do we want to base our goals on?</li> <li>• How would these goals represent our network?</li> <li><b>D</b></li> <li>• Which goals do we want to move forward with?</li> </ul>
<p><u>Presenting a Quarterly Progress Report to a Board</u></p>	<p><b>O</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As you heard the report, what statements or points caught your attention</li> <li><b>R</b></li> <li>• What surprised you?</li> <li>• Where has it been more difficult than you expected?</li> <li><b>I</b></li> <li>• What will it take to keep us on track for next quarter?</li> <li><b>D</b></li> <li>• What are the next steps?</li> <li>• Who needs to do the next steps?</li> </ul>
<p><u>End of Meeting Debrief</u></p>	<p><b>O</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What words or comments do you remember from our meeting?</li> <li><b>R</b></li> <li>• What was a high point?</li> <li>• What is still of concern?</li> <li><b>I</b></li> <li>• How would you state what we accomplished?</li> <li>• What insights are emerging?</li> <li><b>D</b></li> <li>• What are our next steps?</li> </ul>
<p><u>Applied for a Grant and Did Not Get It.</u></p>	<p><b>O</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you remember about the response to our request?</li> <li><b>R</b></li> <li>• What was your reaction?</li> <li><b>I</b></li> <li>• What options are open to us at this point?</li> <li>• What can we learn from this?</li> <li><b>D</b></li> <li>• What kind of changes do we need to make as a result of this? What does this mean for our future?</li> </ul>
<p><u>Gain Insight on Impact of New Health Care Regulation</u></p>	<p><b>O</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What exactly is in the regulation?</li> <li><b>R</b></li> <li>• What concerns does this raise?</li> <li>• What might be a new perspective?</li> <li><b>I</b></li> <li>• What are the key impact areas for us? What difference will this make for us?</li> <li><b>D</b></li> <li>• What action steps are needed to implement it?</li> </ul>

*"The important thing is to never stop questioning."  
--Albert Einstein*



## A Mini Bibliography:

### **The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 Ways to Access Group Wisdom**

General Editor: R. Brian Stanfield, The Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs

### **The Art of Focused Conversation for Schools: Over 100 Ways to Guide Clear Thinking and Promote Learning**

Jo Nelson, The Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs

Both books are available from our MNTOP Office at [www.mntop.us](http://www.mntop.us) or from the ICA-USA website [www.ica-usa.org](http://www.ica-usa.org)

## Presenter

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