Program quality is intimately connected to professional development. All staff in organizations need professional development, including para-professionals, volunteers, youth workers/practitioners, program managers and administrators.

Types of Professional Development

When you begin to think about professional development (PD), you should think about the range and intensity of the training. Some training can be done fairly informally and quickly, through chats over coffee and in passing. Other training can be done at staff meetings, through modeling an icebreaker or an active listening technique. Other PD can be more formal, and explore a topic or a skill in a more long-term, in-depth manner.

Sometimes you can bring in outside 'experts', who have in-depth knowledge of a particular topic. In other cases you can draw from the internal expertise found at your own program or staff who may have been using a special technique or developed a successful way of working with children and youth that can be shared with others. You should also think of ways to get information to staff on a regular basis through such vehicles as ongoing emails and newsletters. You might want to also use the agency or district website or create a Facebook page as a vehicle to share information with staff and for them to share their good work with the larger community of educators.

The following is a list of other opportunities for training that you can provide for staff in their development.

Networking. Networking is one of the most simple forms of professional development, and yet perhaps the most important. Networking is achieved simply by providing a structure and meeting place where professionals can come together and share their experiences. Networking works best when there are less structured activities and more time for people to engage in dialogue with each other. Online networking sites are also a great vehicle for sharing ideas and to meet others.

Workshops. Workshops are short-term, intensive events, usually occurring on a single day and lasting 1-3 hours. Workshops are topic-based, and tend to be narrowly focused. For example, a topic for a workshop might be, “Principles of Youth Development.”

Institutes. Institutes are usually one to two days but can last as long as a week. Institutes provide intensive and extensive experiences where a group of participants engage in learning
activities such as workshops, panels, and seminars as well as to engage in opportunities to network with each other. Institutes usually have a wide focus or a topic, such as a two-day institute on “Working with College-Bound Youth.”

**Resources for training and professional development**

- **Local colleges and universities.** The local college and university can often be a good resource when looking for training or information about programs. Colleges often have community service requirements for social worker graduate students, and may be a good linkage when looking for volunteers or for presentations from outside experts. For example, some colleges offer majors in drug abuse counseling and prevention, and you may want to have someone majoring in the program come and make a presentation to staff about resources or what to look for and prevention ideas. Colleges and universities may also be a resource when looking for training space and other in-kind contributions.

- **Technical assistance agencies.** Technical assistance agencies are specifically set up to provide training and sometimes on-site technical assistance and support. For example, in most states there is a statewide network funded by the Mott Foundation. This network often provides training and other PD opportunities.

- **Other Community-Based Agencies/County Agencies.** Sometimes other nonprofit agencies or County Agencies in the community are funded to provide specialized training or can help design training because of staff’s area of expertise. For example, there may be an HIV/AIDS prevention agency that has staff skilled in working with youth.

**Basic Principles in Designing Professional Development**

The first thing you should do when you begin to design training is to identify your intended outcomes. Questions you should ask yourself include:

- What are you trying to accomplish?
- How are you going to get there, and how will you know you've gotten there?
- What’s the best format for the training (workshop, institute, conference, one-to-one session with staff)?
- How long should the training take and over what period of time?

Very often when we are new to training, we revert back to comfortable models that we’ve experienced ourselves, whether they were the best or most engaging. That sometimes means a lecture-style approach to delivering materials. While lectures are sometimes appropriate for sharing information, this model is not necessarily the best, and there are other, more desirable, approaches that are engaging and participatory.

There are some basic principles that can be used when designing training. These principles can be used whether they are new, inexperienced staff or more experienced workers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle #1:</th>
<th>Provide opportunities for participants to have ‘hands on’ experiential learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principle #2:</td>
<td>Provide opportunities for participants to share what they know and to be viewed as experts in their own right</td>
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<td>Principle #3:</td>
<td>Participants need to have an opportunity to talk with each other</td>
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<td>Principle #4:</td>
<td>Participants need to connect what they learn with their work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principle #5:</td>
<td>Provide opportunities to reflect</td>
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<td>Principle #6:</td>
<td>Provide an agenda, stick mostly to it, and send people away with take-aways, such as handouts and articles.</td>
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**Basic Learning Principles in Designing Professional Development (PD) for Staff**

**Principle #1:**

**Provide opportunities for participants to have ‘hands on’ experiential learning**

Learn by ‘doing’ is a very important principle. That means when you are trying to introduce new knowledge or information, the best way to help people learn concepts is by engaging them with the material in a concrete way. For example, if you’re doing a workshop on summer reading, have participants actually handle, read, and discuss summer reading materials and books.

**Principle #2:**

**Provide opportunities for participants to share what they know and to be viewed as experts in their own right**

We should never assume that people are blank slates. All people, at all levels, have a range of experiences that they bring to the training. One way to assess what participants know right at the beginning of the PD is to have them articulate what they already know about the topic, and what they would like to learn about. You can also, at some point, have participants present their work to the group or assume other leadership opportunities.

**Principle #3:**

**Participants need to have an opportunity to talk with each other**

Having the opportunity to talk with others is a critical way to share experiences and use each other as resources. Create small group or partner work opportunities before or after you introduce content to allow participants to process the material, or to discuss how the material might apply to their own work.

**Principle #4:**

**Participants need to connect what they learn with their work.**

Help participants see the connections between what they’re learning and what they’re doing on the ground. Engage them in activities that use examples from real life situations, or case studies. They can also try things out and then return to discuss how the new approach worked (or didn’t).

**Principle #5:**

**Provide opportunities to reflect**

Reflection is one of the best ways to access knowledge, consolidate what you’ve learned, or assess where you might want to change what you’re doing. Have participants reflect through writing activities at a workshop or have them keep a journal. Drawing and art activities can also be a wonderful way to engage in reflection!

**Principle #6:**

**Provide an agenda, stick mostly to it, and send people away with take-aways, such as handouts and articles.**

Time is valuable, and participants need to feel that it is respected. The simplest way that a facilitator can do so is to have an agenda and to stick with it. That doesn’t mean that you can never diverge from your agenda, but only in rare situa-
Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is an umbrella term that is used for providing support and assistance to an agency. The TA provider usually is an outside consultant, but can also be a specially trained staff member who works with their own agency. They are usually experts with specific technical/content knowledge provides information to address an identified need.

TA can take a variety of forms. TA can include, among other activities, professional development/training. The TA provider can find or develop resources for an agency, such as curricula. TA providers can work with front line staff or teachers to help them improve their practice. Or, they can work with managers, to develop schedules, professional development plans or staff policies. TA can be delivered on-site at agencies or through emails and other technology, i.e. telephone conference calls or Google hangouts. TA providers can work 1 to 1 with individuals at an organization or can work with groups.

The best TA occurs when the agency has not only bought-in at a high level, but has communicated the goals of the TA with key stakeholders at the organization. Ideally, key stakeholders have been part of developing the TA plan. Otherwise, staff often do not know the role of the TA provider and/or are uncooperative. The administration, as well, needs to understand their role in making sure that staff are informed as well as following through on recommendations and institutionalizing what emerges from the TA.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Planning Sheet for Technical Assistance/Professional Development</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Who is the audience (volunteers, front line staff, managers, parents, etc.)?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the purpose?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What am I trying to accomplish? What are the goals/outcomes?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>What type of formats will it include (one on one coaching, workshop, presentation, institute, etc.)? For how many sessions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What materials will I need to prepare, i.e. handouts, agenda, etc.?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What learning principles (see above) will be addressed?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will I provide follow-up and how will I know that what is learned is being implemented at the program?</td>
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References


New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. www.nycdycd.org.


Academy for Educational Development. Has descriptions of local and international programs as well as the BEST Report, an evaluation of a youth worker training system. Can be downloaded for free off their website www.aed.org/youth.

Advocates for Youth. http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/about/international.htm

The Search Institute. www.search-institute.org. You can access lists of the 40 developmental and community assets, as well as publications and other resources.
