Hosting Effective Workshops

Description:

This tool provides some tips for hosting an effective workshop, and steps to follow to help guide the process.

How it can be used:

The accreditation process is based on an organization-wide commitment to ongoing improvement. As such, any activities that build understanding, support and ownership within the organization can help lead to more success. Workshops are an excellent example of an approach that creates effective training and development opportunities. Follow the tips and steps in this tool while using a participative approach to increase involvement, empowerment and ownership in the process.

Workshop Tips

Preparing for the workshop

- Consider creating an annual plan for workshops so you can plan topics that support your accreditation stage and activities. You can demonstrate to leadership and staff that you have an overall approach that will cover many necessary areas.
- Integrate "mini-workshops" into regular team meetings to learn specific elements related to accreditation or your improvement plan.
- Ensure that the goals and key outcome of the workshop are clearly set out in advance.
- Find a facilitator that will engage with the group to encourage better participation and more effective learning. Ensure that they understand and will help you reach your workshop goals.
- Based on the goals of the workshop, determine who needs to or should attend.
- Confirm that the time of the workshop works for the intended participants.
- Send out notifications far enough in advance so people can coordinate their calendars.
- Working with the facilitator, develop a working agenda that includes your main themes, the visual aids you'll use, the type of activities that you'll include, timeframes etc.
- Develop a shortened agenda to provide to participants.
- Send participants an agenda if relevant.
- Find a venue that encourages a participative learning experience. Consider size, seating, lighting, space for activities, etc.
- Coordinate the hospitality for the workshop. Will you provide coffee/tea/juice/water etc.? Will you provide snacks and lunch? Be sure to include this on the agenda so participants can plan for their dietary needs (for example, there may be people with diabetes who need to eat at certain times).
- Depending on the size of the group, decide on a room layout. For example, do you need small tables for small group discussions? Or a large U-shaped setup?
- Ensure you have all the technology that you need (laptop, projector, screen, sound system, etc.) and that it works! Do a trial run before the workshop to avoid last minute problems.
- Gather all the necessary materials. Consider all activities including the icebreaker or warmup activity. Do you need name tags, table tents, masking tape, flipcharts, markers, sticky notes, fidget basket (optional – filled with mints, sticky notes, pens, paper, stress balls, etc.)
- Print out all documents that you will need, and ensure there are enough copies for all participants. For example, agenda, handouts for activities, additional reading resources, evaluation form, etc.
- Set up the room with all supplies in advance so you are available to greet people as they arrive.

During the workshop

- Acknowledge the Elder and start with a prayer if that is your cultural practice. Acknowledge the land that you're on. Welcome all participants to the workshop and thank them for attending.
- Provide participants with basic information (location of the restrooms, whether food is provided for lunch and breaks, any specifics concerning timing, etc.)
- Always begin with an icebreaker or warmup activity. This helps to get participants comfortable with each other and sets up the day.
- Consider establishing "norms" – expectations for how participants will interact during the workshop. Some examples could be:
  - All cellphones turned off or put away;
  - Only one person speaks at a time;
  - All perspectives are honoured;
  - The workshop will begin and finish on time (including after breaks and lunch, if relevant);
  - Ask if the group wishes to add their own expectations.
- Provide a mix of activities – large group discussion, small group discussions, and individual work. Ensure that you have enough materials for each person for each type of activity.
- Keep an eye on the time. It is important to balance how the process is unfolding, how the content is being explored and also how the participants are engaging. For example, if you have an Elder participating, you may need to allow extra time for comments. An experienced facilitator should be able to tweak other parts of the agenda so important elements (such as Elders' comments) are not missed or cut off.
- Continually scan the room to ensure that everyone gets involved in some way. The value of including a mix of activities is to allow for different learning styles and comfort levels of participating.
- Depending on your goals, consider mixing up people from different areas to help "cross-pollinate" information. It can be helpful for people to hear ideas and perspectives from other departments, partners, governments, etc.
- Provide materials (paper, pens, sticky notes, flipcharts, etc.) for groups to record their ideas.
- It is worth your time to come up with interesting activities and approaches as it keeps participants engaged and excited.
- Take time to answer questions where relevant, or set up a "Parking Lot" flipchart where ideas can be explored later or directed to the appropriate person.
- Reinforce workshop discussions by referring to what's been covered during the day. Follow the adage "Tell them what you're going to talk about…Talk about it…Tell them what you talked about". That will help remind them of what they've accomplished and put the various workshop elements into context.
- Hand out the evaluation forms. Do you have a "take-away" that you can give to participants when they submit their evaluation form?
- If relevant, offer that participants can take pictures of the flipcharts so they can bring the information back with them (once they have their phones back).
- Thank the participants for coming. Consider having a "round table" where last thoughts are briefly shared. Close the workshop with a prayer (if you began with one).

After the workshop
- Review the day. Did the workshop achieve the goals?
- In the spirit of continuous quality improvement, honestly assess the evaluation forms. Determine how you can improve the workshop for the next time.
- Provide any workshop information or follow-up to participants.
- Send thank you notes to key presenters, etc.