

Community Activators

Five Skills of an Ally

Full Training Descriptors

Any person who finds him or herself in a position to support and guide another person or group is called, in old community language, an ally. Multicultural stories about allies—who appear as trusted guides, mentors, and teachers—repeatedly show us they have five essential responsibilities. Modern helping research also confirms these five skills are essential, and demonstrates that they can be defined, practiced, and improved.

The *Five Skills of an Ally* core training series consists of five distinct modules that prepare an ally to provide strength/asset-based and culturally competent “good help” in any kind of social service, education, or community organizing environment. Each module can be used as a “stand-alone” training or combined with other modules. When all five trainings are combined and delivered in a series, it results in a powerful paradigm for helping which can significantly increase both organizational outcomes and employee satisfaction. The complete series can be used to get a group off on the right foot, or as further reorientation towards a strength/asset-based approach.

MODULE ONE: Using Powerful New Capacity Assessment Tools: Identifying Gifts, Talents, and Skills

Strength-based practices require identifying and utilizing the capacities in a person as a significant tool in helping them to move forward in their life. Leading-edge practitioners are discovering the benefits of recognizing that a strength is not simply a strength—it is a skill, a talent, or a gift. Knowing the difference, and using each of them in different ways during planning and subsequent ongoing support activities, is critical because 1) motivation is directly tied to the distinction between skills, talents, and gifts, 2) behavior change can be targeted and supported with this knowledge, and 3) clarity about talents and gifts gives deep insight into how to structure opportunities for a person to be welcomed and included in community places of his/her choice. During this intensive and hands-on training, participants will learn how the idea of gifts originated and was used in older cultures, why it’s essential to reframe “problems” as “initiations,” learn the Capacity Assessment Tool process, and receive specific information about how to use gifts, talents, and skills for planning and action with whatever types of individuals or groups they are working with. Activities include each participant identifying his or her core gift and primary talents.

Suggested Time: 1.5 days

Core Competencies:

1. Understand the evolution of strengths tools in social service practice.
2. Identify how initiations reframe a deficit model into a strength-based model of service.
3. Identify how welcoming, recovery, and gifts are interconnected in current social service practice.
4. Break down a strengths list into skills, talents, and gifts, and core gift.
5. Use the Capacity Assessment Tool.

6. Identify the five primary ways to use this methodology within social services environments.

MODULE TWO: Increasing Your Creative Solution-Finding Skills

When a person or is facing difficult times, their problem-solving ability begins to shut down as they move from a proactive to a reactive stance. Part of the job of an ally is to help the person expand their imagination—correctly identifying the real problem, coming up with a solution, and then developing a workable plan. What we know for sure is this: none of us is naturally good at all steps in problem solving. For example, some of us are good at brainstorming ideas while others are good at making detailed plans. Our strongest problem-solving skill indicates a corresponding weakness in another area of problem solving. During this training, participants will clarify their own creative problem-solving process, compare it to the standard seven-step methodology, and refine their skills. The session is a mixture of presentation, reflection on personal styles and attributes, and practice in small groups solving real-life issues. The focus is on building skills for time-limited focused problem solving with individuals and groups. The session also includes an overview and practice of the Strategic Questioning technique, which expands a facilitator’s ability to ask powerful questions.

Suggested Time: 1 day

Core Competencies:

1. Understand the seven process steps for effective problem solving.
2. Identify your natural strengths and weaknesses in the 7-step model.
3. Practice leading a problem-solving session and receiving feedback.
4. Observe other participants facilitating problem-solving sessions and provide feedback.
5. Learn and practice the Strategic Questioning model of question development.
6. Identify your most creative environment for solution-finding.
7. Identify the five levels of authority in decision-making.

MODULE THREE: Encouraging Motivation and Hope in Others

Many helpers and community organizers depend on two primary strategies to motivate others. The first is to keep the person moving by cajoling and constant reminders. The second is to use the personal energy and enthusiasm of the helper/organizer as the source of motivational energy. Both of these methods will eventually result in exhaustion and burnout. Your success as a motivator can be measured by asking one question: “Is the person or group motivated when you aren’t around?” This training focuses on four specific strategies to develop lasting internal motivation in a person or group making a change. Each strategy involves using a specific communication tool selected by the motivator based on the need of the person or group at the time. The strategies include: *Six Questions to Increase Hope*, *Five Essentials for Powerfulness*, *Raising Courage*, and *What Do You Want From the Ally?* Participants will receive a theoretical overview of how each tool works and when to use it, and have the opportunity to practice it with

another participant. Participants will also learn how to help a person define the specific environmental conditions which help them to be motivated and think clearly.

Suggested Time: 1 day

Core Competencies:

1. Can identify the four seeds for motivation.
2. Has learned six critical features affecting a motivational conversation.
3. Can identify the difference between the steps in problem solving and motivation.
4. Understands theory and can use four primary motivation communication strategies.
5. Has identified manipulative motivation strategies currently used.
6. Can help a person identify their most powerful decision-making environment.

MODULE FOUR: Stories Work! How to Choose, Create, and Use Powerful Stories to Encourage Change in Individuals and Groups

The telling of stories can create change that is difficult to reach by our usual methods of logical persuasion or simply stating the facts. Facts establish basic truths, but stories are the way we learn. When we hear a powerful story, we may discover a reason to change, see how other people have been through a similar situation and get problem-solving tips, and believe we might have a chance to make it, too. Several attributes related to stories are shifting in social service and community organizing, including boundaries related to telling personal stories, the kinds of stories that are used to help others, and the use of stories as a self-advocacy tool. This workshop is designed for individuals who are interested in expanding their storytelling skills to capture the opportunities for change that surface when a powerful story is told. During this training you will learn the “circular” storytelling technique, identify what stories to use in particular situations, learn how to reduce nervousness, and how to enhance your own style. This is not a public speaking seminar! The focus is on telling informal stories in daily situations when you want to make an impact.

Suggested Time: 1 day

Core Competencies:

1. Understands function of stories in empowerment processes.
2. Can use “circular” story technique.
3. Knows and practices the four rules for reducing nervousness.
4. Has identified and crafted three personal ally stories for telling.
5. Can understand and follow the eight rules for using personal stories.
6. Has knowledge of current boundary rules in their organization.

MODULE FIVE: Creating Welcoming-Based Cultures in Organizations and Communities

Creating a welcoming culture in any group requires a focus in four distinct areas. First, continuing to learn how to help people find places in the community where they are

valued. Second, carefully evaluating how well we welcome and create a positive experience for people when they show up on our doorsteps asking for help. Third, our connections and collaboration with other civic, faith, and social service organizations. And fourth, how well we work together and welcome the unique contributions of each of our employees. Research shows that employees will not be more welcoming to customers than they feel welcome within their own organization, so this area is critical to making substantial improvements in overall welcoming capacity in an organization. During this training, we will describe in detail how to build a welcoming culture in any social service program. Part One includes an overview of welcoming philosophy and its ties to social services, cultural competence, and community development. Part Two includes an opportunity for employees and advocates to evaluate the current condition of the organization in the four welcoming focus areas described above. Part Three provides the time and structure to create a specific action plan which will be put into motion when participants walk out the door.

Suggested Time: 1 day

Core Competencies:

1. Can describe the four primary links between welcoming, community development and social-service practices.
2. Define the word welcoming.
3. Understands how concepts of initiation and exiles relates to creating welcoming culture.
4. Understand the four focus areas for developing a welcoming organization.
5. Complete Creating Welcoming Places Inventory for their group or organization.
6. Can identify at least four individual and group improvements in welcoming capacity.