

**Independent Facilitation in Ontario:
Governance and Structure Issues**

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Let us begin by exploring the nature of Independent Facilitation and Planning. Note, by the way, that I will intentionally only use the words ‘Independent Facilitation.’ This to emphasize that ‘facilitation’ is the main entity we are exploring and that ‘planning’ is only one of the things facilitators actually do.

Independent Facilitation has emerged as a key element in progressive policy in response to the growing recognition that citizens with disabilities want to have control over the decisions that affect their lives. Independent facilitation is seen by many as an important ‘infrastructure support’ to the growth of direct, individualized funding. If people are receiving funds for their disability supports, wouldn’t it make sense to be sure that facilitators are made available to assist people to think and act on all the ways they can participate and contribute to community life? This includes supporting the development of goals and support plans, as well as how people might actually spend the money to support those goals. In this way, facilitators also assist people with things like network development, connecting with the community, and finding ways to build on strengths.

During this Symposium, most of our discussion has been about functions – we have explored ‘what is facilitation’ and ‘what facilitators might do in a transformed service system.’ It is totally appropriate that we have saved governance and structure to the end of the day. This is in keeping with the truism that “form should follow function.” In other words, before we create the governance approaches for Independent Facilitation, we need

to know what functions that we want the structure to hold. Before we build the structure of a building, we want to know its purpose and functions – is it for a family, is it for a restaurant?

Creating the ‘right’ structure is very important work and is considered by some theorists as essential work in the progress of humankind. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French philosopher, once said, “What defines humanity ... is the capacity of going beyond created structures in order to create others.” As human beings, we are creative and enterprising and we are always creating new structures to respond to emerging functions and issues. Since experience and research is showing the power of facilitation in the lives of people with disabilities and their families, it is time to consider some of the governance and structure issues that we will face as we build this new entity across Ontario.¹

Assumptions about Functions and Governance Structures

One of the key questions in the transformation of our conventional service system is: How do governance structures support the delivery of Independent Facilitation that includes functions such as planning, brokerage, community development, and the building of social networks?

As we begin to answer this question, we need to make *three assumptions* about functions and how they will influence the governance structures we are creating.

- First, regardless of which community we are from, we have clearly figured out the functions of facilitation and the role of the facilitator.
- The second assumption is that we need to have similar facilitation functions practiced throughout the province, even though the structures might be quite different. A family receiving Independent Facilitation in London should be able to access similar types of facilitator support as people in Ottawa. In both places, facilitators should be well trained, spend time with individuals and families, be effective network builders, know how to facilitate community development, and work from a strong set of values and principles.
- Third, it is assumed that governance structures will vary across the province in keeping with modern governance theory which suggests that structures and governance must be designed to fit the functions **and** to fit the community. In other words, the structure that holds Independent Facilitation in a large rural area will likely be quite different than the structure that holds the functions in a densely populated urban area.

Traditional and Modern governance

Traditional governance structures typically focus on three components:

- Financial accountability
- Strategic thinking and planning
- Monitoring process and outcomes

Modern governance theory might add *governance as generative leadership*. This new component implies that the people in charge of the governance must have vision and adaptable leadership skills. This will be very important across the province as communities work to create these new entities. We must find leaders locally and nurture them to be creative, collaborative leaders who can build and sustain effective governance structures.

What Grounds an Effective Governance Structure?

Research and experience point to four things that ground effective governance structures for Independent Facilitation. Without all four in place, the structure will always be built on a shaky foundation.

First, whatever form the structure may take, **values and principles** ground the enterprise. We talked about values this morning and many of those values will apply – the values of community, citizenship, and self-determination.² Effective governance also requires that clear principles guide the composition of the leadership. Here are examples of principles that can guide the building of Independent Facilitation:

- The governance structure must be peer or family driven, and a majority of decision-making roles must be family members and /or people with disabilities
- Facilitators must be housed in a way that ensures that they are fully independent from service provision. In a recent paper, David

DeVidi, argues persuasively why the ‘Independence’ of facilitators is so important.³

One key to building effective governance structures is to be intentional about the values and principles that will guide the decision-making and governance approach.

Second, a strong **autonomous family group** in the community helps to ground the Independent Facilitation enterprise. Family groups and family networks play a key role in any transformed system. Families help monitor the work of the new structure and they play advocacy roles as required.⁴

Third, a **separate individualized funding process** helps ground the governance structures. When individuals and families are receiving funds directly for their disability supports, they experience autonomy in ways that are a good fit with Independent Facilitation. Unlike conventional systems, direct funding also means that facilitators ‘stand with the person and family’ and do not play any role in determining funding arrangements.

Fourth, **responsive service providers** who understand and support Independent Facilitation help ground the governance structures. Responsive service providers refer people for facilitation and work in a collaborative way with facilitators. As Ontario communities build their functions and structures, we are seeing families and service providers working together to create new independent initiatives.

Four Governance Structures that can Support Independent Facilitation

There are at least four ways that communities can create structures that support Independent Facilitation. While each approach has strengths and weaknesses, all have possibilities for being effective.

1. Stand Alone, Independent Organization

The stand alone, independent organization in many ways is the ideal governance structure for Independent Facilitation. In Ontario, Windsor-Essex Brokerage for Personal Supports best represents this type of governance structure. Brokerage, as it is called, is a Ministry of Community and Social Services transfer payment agency and has a board of directors with a majority of family members. The provision of unencumbered facilitation has enabled Brokerage to be independent of service provision and to be able to stand with individuals and families. Windsor-Essex is also blessed with a very effective Family Network, which ensures that the family voice and advocacy is strong in the region. The Family Windsor-Essex Network endorses individualized funding and Independent Facilitation.

This approach to governance is particularly effective in areas where there are only a few large service providers. The independence of this structure enables leaders to focus on ‘building capacity,’ by nurturing family strengths, identifying part-time facilitators, and creating new approaches to supporting families who have individualized funding. The strength of this approach is that all the work is coherent with the key values and principles, because there is no

distraction or other service agendas to get in the way. For this approach to be effective, the leaders must be able to build positive relationships with service providers, who continue to hold the majority of resources for people with disabilities.

2. Facilitation Embedded in Peer or Family Driven Organization

Embedding Independent Facilitation within a peer or family driven organization has merits as well as challenges. Families for a Secure Future is an example of such an arrangement in Ontario.⁵ Facilitation is one key to the way this organization works, and it provides support to family groups as well as to individuals. This kind of governance helps to insure that the family driven values and principles are supported throughout the organization. Such arrangements also create a strong buffer for facilitators, who often face significant challenges in their work with service providers.

In the U.S. and the U.K., some Independent Facilitation is being placed in Independent Living Centres, organizations driven by people with disabilities. Because IL Centres provide peer support, this location helps insure that the model is driven by people with disabilities. In Ontario, eleven Independent Living Centres already provide support to consumers who are part of the Direct Funding Project for people with physical disabilities. The strength of embedding Independent Facilitation within existing family or peer groups is that funds would only be required for facilitators, not the entire organization's operation.

The dilemma with this governance structure is that the family or peer group would be less able to advocate for the person who is receiving facilitation support, because there may be a conflict of interest. Several U.S. states are supporting family governed approaches, but to date Canadian provincial governments have been cautious to support such approaches.

3. Hybrid Approach Where Services Spin off Resources to New Entity

In several areas of Ontario, family leaders and service providers are working together to build an Independent Facilitation entity. One possible outcome of this work is that service providers will “spin-off” staff resources to a new entity. There are many examples around the province where community agencies have collaborated on issues and shared resources in ways that produce better outcomes. Typically, staff from various agencies would join the new entity and be responsible to the new structure. In the interim, one agency may have to hold the funds.

This approach to Independent Facilitation seems particularly well suited for geographical areas that are quite dispersed and could benefit from agencies collaborating around a new structure. With this approach, agencies would make a joint commitment to the values and principles of Independent Facilitation. Each agency would then provide facilitation staff to the new entity and the Ministry would provide incentives. For example, the Ministry might provide some core funding to insure that no one agency was burdened with operational costs. As outlined in the Signature Paper from the Individualized Funding

Coalition for Ontario, such an approach requires a lot of community development work in order to be sure that family groups and service providers are all committed to the same values and directions.

This hybrid structure is well-suited to those areas of the province where service providers have created planning/facilitation departments, but have realized the limitations of such in-house planning. As more and more families receive individualized funding, such as Passport, service providers are realizing the value of third party facilitation. This approach to governance requires that trust be built among the key agencies and that family members play a driving role in the development.

4. A Co-ordinated Facilitator Network

In several areas of Ontario, facilitator networks are emerging. These networks create a safe place for facilitators to hold conversations, problem-solve together, and reflect on what works best when facilitating. In some U.S. states, mental health policy requires that independent facilitation be an option for all people who are users of the mental health system. In Michigan, for example, this governance approach involves a regional committee with a paid chairperson. This co-ordinated network holds government money to pay facilitators. Individuals and families can chose from a list of trained facilitators. The regional committee provides an over-site role that includes monitoring and training.

This co-ordinated facilitator network approach may work well in a dispersed population area. In reality, however, it is an option with real limitations. It is very hard to build free-lance facilitation capacity because the pay of facilitators is contingent upon work available. So, for this governance approach to be effective in Ontario would require a cadre of part-time facilitators.

As communities develop their functions and structures for Independent Facilitation, we may see one of these four approaches being more predominate, or we may witness a combination of approaches. For example, in a rural area, one could imagine a hybrid approach combined with a co-ordinated roster of facilitators drawn from a network. This would provide some stability with a core group of full-time facilitators with a few part-time facilitators being available as needed.

What Roles do Various Stakeholders Play in Implementing Effective Governance Structures?

There are several stakeholders that have important roles to play in implementing Independent Facilitation. When all stakeholders base their participation on a clear vision and set of values and principles, the outcome should be governance structures that support effective facilitation.

- The role of the Ministry of Community and Social Services could be to outline the key principles and parameters for Independent Facilitation and provide support and incentives to communities to

create the right structure. Provincial groups, such as the Individualized Funding Coalition, could be enormously helpful to the Ministry as they consider what kinds of incentives make sense. The Ministry cannot expect the positive outcomes associated with person-directed planning and facilitation without investment in good structures.

- The role of local service providers is to educate themselves about the value of Independent Facilitation and be a willing partner with families. As more service providers have direct experience with direct individualized funding, they are realizing the value of Independent Facilitation. The other key role for service providers is to actually provide staff support to new structures that are created.
- The role of families and people with disabilities is to prepare themselves and their communities for Independent Facilitation. In some cases, this means working in partnership with providers to build a new entity. In other cases, it means putting energy into building strong autonomous family groups that can advocate for Independent Facilitation. Knowledgeable and empowered families will help to insure that local structures are based on sound values.

To create vibrant, Independent Facilitation in Ontario, we need collaboration within communities. Family leaders and agency leaders must work together to build the structures that will house the key functions of facilitation. My experience in supporting several communities to build

Independent Facilitation is that a lot of community conversations and community development are needed to develop the commitment and capacity to change. Fortunately, we have several counties in Ontario where stakeholders are working together to build capacity of their community to hold the functions and structures of Independent Facilitation. This community development is important work that now needs the support of government and other provincial leaders.

In all social movements, commitment and timing play key roles in the change process. It is clear from the Ontario family movement, the wider community living movement, and the Ontario government that there is a broad based commitment to transform conventional service systems. This growing consensus is a significant change from even five years ago. The question now is whether ‘transformation’ means the same thing for all these stakeholders.

Victor Hugo said more than 200 years ago, “There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come.” The time has come to significantly change the way we support people with disabilities toward citizenship and full participation. Independent Facilitation is one of the key components of that change.

End Notes

- ¹ See, for example, John Lord and Peggy Hutchison (2008). Individualized Funding in Ontario: Report of a Provincial Study, *Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 14:2, pp 44-53.
- ² For a more detailed analysis of the values and principles underlying Independent Facilitation, see the website of the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario, www.individualizedfunding.ca
- ³ David DeVidi, *The I in Independent Planning and Facilitation: Why Should Planning and Facilitation be Independent?* A Commentary published by Modeling Community Change and Innovation www.modelingcommunitychange.com/resources
- ⁴ For a further analysis of the value of autonomous family groups, see John Lord *Autonomous Family Groups and Networks: A Promising Development*. A Commentary published by Modeling Community Change and Innovation www.modelingcommunitychange.com/resources
- ⁵ To learn more about Families for a Secure Future, see www.familiesforasecurefuture.com

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