

The / in Independent Planning and Facilitation
Why should Planning and Facilitation be *Independent*?

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**Published by the Modeling Community Change and Innovation Project
Paper Number 1 in the MCCI Resource Pages Series**

The Modeling Community Change and Innovation Project is funded by the Trillium Foundation

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Author's note: In this document I attempt to give a brief summary of the case that Planning and Facilitation need to be Independent. My reasoning is based primarily on discussions I have had with people who have worked as facilitators in various settings and with people I know who have received facilitation supports, and on my own experience as a member of a support circle. Some other useful sources behind my thinking are listed at the end of the document. While the Wellington Steering Group for Independent Planning and Facilitation supports the publication of this document, the opinions expressed in it are my own.

There is increasing recognition in Ontario that enabling people with disabilities to lead satisfying and productive lives involves having them *lead* their lives, and that this means recognizing them as autonomous citizens of the communities in which they live. This implies that they have control over key decisions about their lives, from how they will spend their days to with whom and in what sorts of circumstances they will live.

For many of those who receive government support funding, control of their own lives also involves making decisions about where the funding is best spent to meet their needs and goals for their own lives. Especially for those who have developmental or communication challenges, or for those whose life experiences have not provided them with the experience or information about options to make good decisions, an ongoing process of planning and facilitation is important to success.

This importance of Planning and Facilitation is recognized by many: self-advocacy groups, family groups, community groups, some service agencies, and the Ministry of Community and Social Services have all become very interested in the question of how planning and facilitation support can be provided to those who want and need it.

Many, including the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario, see *Independent* Planning and Facilitation as essential to the success of this process. Some organizations in Ontario are already providing *Independent* Planning and Facilitation services, while community groups are actively investigating what it would take to set up an independent planning and facilitation service in several other communities. This raises two questions: What does it mean to call such a service *independent*? And *why* does the service need to be independent?

What does “independent” mean? It is easy to be confused about what “independent” means. Obviously, the process of planning and facilitation is designed to make the individuals to whom it is provided more independent, but when people refer to independent planning and facilitation they don’t mean “any planning that increases independence”. Rather, it is the planning and facilitation process that is being called “independent”. And this means that those providing the planning and facilitation services are *independent from other agendas: they are working, and seen to be working, in the interests of the individual for whom they provide the service.*

In practice, this has implications for how the independent planner-facilitator is employed. One possibility would be that those providing the service (who we’ll simply call “facilitators”) are employees of some sort of incorporated entity that has as its sole mandate the provision of such services, based on a set of values and principles (as described below), where that entity

receives core funding from another source to sustain it. Another is that facilitators could work as independent contractors, paid out of an individual's support dollars for the services provided. Ideally, perhaps, there might be a combination of both possibilities in a community, assuring reliable access to independent planning and facilitation services of the sort most appropriate to an individual's needs. In any case, independence in this sense does mean that facilitators are not employees of an agency that is also involved in the provision of other direct supports to individuals, and is not employed by an organization that also makes decisions about levels of funding and other support individuals receive.

Why does Planning and Facilitation need to be independent? Here is a list of interrelated reasons, some more theoretical, others more practical.

1. Focus on a specific mission: Independent Planning and Facilitation is a process guided by certain values and principles, notably the values of *self-determination, autonomy, citizenship, and using the community "as the first resort and resource" for finding the needed supports for individuals*, and one goal is that people with disabilities be able to build meaningful lives in a community, enjoying reciprocal relationships and getting the supports that they need. If planning and facilitation services are provided by agencies that are also involved in providing direct supports, the missions of those agencies will necessarily be less focused, and the values guiding them vaguer and more general. For some jobs, there are certain advantages that come only with specialization, and independent planning and facilitation seems to be one.
2. Because of the broader mandate of agencies involved in direct supports, there are resource trade-off questions that arise, especially for those with complex needs. If supported decision making, planning, and community building for an individual are complicated and time-consuming, it is likely that corners will be cut in order to devote scarce resources elsewhere in the organization. For instance, if a person who does not speak is placed somewhere safe and secure and does not register complaints by some unacceptable behavior, it's easy to conclude the result is satisfactory and turn to other business. A focus on the goals and needs of the individual might reveal that the person is nevertheless unhappy, and would likely reveal that this person has little control over important decisions, few relationships outside family and service workers, and little opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the life of the community.
3. There is by now a significant body of empirical research from other jurisdictions that shows that independent planning and facilitation *results in different outcomes* from other planning and facilitation services. The advantages are especially evident in those studies which are careful to measure outcomes in terms of what planning and facilitation is supposed to enhance, which we might call *quality of life* indicators. These

try to measure such things as degree of self-determination, involvement in the community, involvement in meaningful and reciprocal relationships, and satisfaction with one's circumstances, not merely "quality and quantity of service provided".

4. Experience from facilitators who have worked in both independent and agency-based settings suggest that when working in an agency, whatever "firewalls" are supposed to be in place, the practice of looking to the community as a first resource and resort cannot be maintained. Instead, whether in times of crisis or as a part of a plan, the first resort for support and services is the employer agency or another agency. This is partly a natural result of what a person is likely to be aware of and to find natural when spending one's days working in an agency setting, and partly a matter of the pressures and expectations of the job in such a setting. Few of us in any field can avoid having the question of who is signing our pay cheques influence our behavior, so it's rather a lot to expect facilitators to be different.

Resources:

What is called "Independent Planning and Facilitation" in this document is also often called "Brokerage of Personal Supports," and sometimes just "Brokerage". There are some very useful written sources that have informed my thinking, and that provide more detail than I can in this short pamphlet.

Two important sources for understanding the role of a facilitator are:

Steve Dowson, "Who Does What?" (second edition). Available at:
<http://www.members.shaw.ca/bsalisbury/wdw.pdf>

Brian Salisbury, "Service Brokerage---Parameters of Best Practice".
<http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/service-brokerage.pdf>

Some empirical evidence for the claim that facilitation improves outcomes, based on research done in Ontario, can be found in:

John Lord and Peggy Hutchinson, "Individualized Funding in Ontario: Report of a Provincial Study," *Journal of Developmental Disabilities* **12** (2008) 44-53. Online at:
<http://www.oadd.org/>

Two of the many useful resources that can be found at the Individualized Funding Coalition of Ontario web site, <http://www.individualizedfunding.ca> , that are especially relevant . The first presents a case for Independent Planning and Facilitation in Ontario.

"Rationale for Independent Planning and Facilitation in Ontario: Why MCSS Should Move Quickly to Implementation"

The second, which incorporates the first, makes clear how Independent Planning and Facilitation fits together with the other components of an effective system of individualized funding.

"The Signature Paper. Transformation of Developmental Services: Expanding the Possibilities for Citizenship"