Meeting Design and Facilitation at the Georgia Health Policy Center

The Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) focuses on solutions to complex issues facing health and health care today by conducting, analyzing, and disseminating qualitative and quantitative findings to connect decision makers with the objective research and guidance needed to make informed decisions about health policies and programs.

Meeting design and facilitation are central to the core talents of the team at the GHPC. The GHPC has successfully used the process of purpose-driven meeting design and facilitation for many critical projects since its founding in 1995. Our approach emphasizes meeting design, workshops, webinars, trainings, and technical assistance to meet the needs of specific audiences by working in partnership with the client.

Approach to Meeting Design

The GHPC employs the Whole Scale® meeting design concept that engages people from organizations and communities to achieve rapid, significant, and lasting change through a whole systems approach. This approach is used when organizational changes or issues arise that require aligning and engaging a group of people. The GHPC identifies, convenes, and facilitates a team of representative stakeholders to design the meetings. This team is a small-scale version of the whole system and, therefore, is reflective of the different stakeholders’ perspectives. The design team collaborates to identify the right issues to be addressed and determines the meeting’s goals, outcomes, and agenda.

Our meeting design process maximizes group interaction and minimizes content that strays from the meeting purpose. It is our experience that the wisdom lies with the meeting participants, and so meetings typically include interactive sessions to engage and utilize the knowledge and experience in the room.

GHPC guides the team through the process, engages appropriate speakers, provides pre-event planning, and prepares and distributes all meeting materials (agendas, handouts, meeting notes, etc.).

The GHPC’s Whole System Process Enables Participants To:

- Clarify and connect multiple, current realities
- Unite around a common picture of the future
- Reach agreement on action plans
- Build the processes, structures, and relationships that keep the organization or issue moving forward
- Align leadership and other stakeholders so that they can implement changes together

## Guiding Principles

Our approach to meeting design and facilitation starts with the overall guiding principles that are incorporated into all work at the GHPC. The guiding principles are:

- Create the right environment to have important conversations
- Provide relevant information from primary and secondary research, best practices, and thought leaders that is integrated, translated, and interpreted
- Build and value relationships
- Think systematically about difficult problems
- Continuously learn within and among projects and programs
- Advocate for a way to approach problems, rather than a specific solution
- Find creative ways to teach others what we have learned

## Meeting Facilitation Style

During the meeting, GHPC staff serve in a neutral role to convene stakeholders, facilitate the sharing of evidence-based information, and assist in complex decision-making processes. The GHPC recognizes the importance of tailoring tools and curricula to meet the needs and preferences of learners who are practical, self-directed, experienced, and goal-oriented. The GHPC employs strategies that are effective in increasing stakeholder engagement and fostering learning. Engagement of all meeting participants is key to the success of a meeting.

## Project Examples

### Leaders to Leaders

The GHPC was engaged by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to capture comments from the 3rd Annual Leaders to Leaders conference. The conference was designed for leaders in business, government, education, non-profit, and faith communities. After each panel presentation, the leaders met to discuss what they had just heard. These breakout sessions were specifically designed to solicit participants’ vision of a preferred future, their experience of what is already working, and their suggestions for possibilities to be explored in the near future. The panels were coordinated in such a way to engage speakers as both experts and participants, honoring the whole expertise of the group. The final conversation focused on policies and strategies that could make the U.S. a healthier nation. The GHPC captured these comments in a creative “Playbook for Action” organized to help leaders put their ideas into motion.

### Georgia Oral Health Summit

In response to a request from the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Office of Regional Operations, the GHPC led the design and facilitation of the Georgia Oral Health Summit. The broad-based audience of oral health advocates included more than 130 providers, physicians, advocates, elected officials, school nurses, educators, and representatives from the business community. The objectives of the Summit were to enable the development of system building and collaborative activities following the event; identify specific strategies and initial action plans based on local needs; establish community-level relationships among stakeholders; and gain an understanding of both general and local oral health. These strategies and plans dealt directly with the issues of improved access to dental services and the expansion of oral health preventive services, especially for children. A final report detailing the results of the Summit was shared with participants and interested parties.