

How does the Facilitator prepare?

In order to ensure neutrality, the Facilitator does *not* read IEPs, reports, or correspondence between the parties. Instead, the neutral Facilitator conducts pre-meeting interviews with both parties, giving them time to consider how they can move towards possible resolution and to focus the discussion during the FIEP meeting. The Facilitator may exchange information on resolvable issues between the parties, if they think this can narrow the focus of the FIEP meeting by resolving minor issues. These exchanges are done with full knowledge of both parties, as confidentiality is greatly respected by the Facilitator.

Once the neutral Facilitator has gathered all of the information they deem necessary, they will develop an Agenda and Process Agreements- the rules of conduct- for the meeting. They will distribute these in advance for approval from the team members. In developing the agenda, they may also prepare the Group Memory-charts that may be used during the FIEP meeting to record the meeting process and content.

What is the Facilitator's role in the FIEP?

The neutral facilitator will:

- Maintain the team's focus on the student's needs, and their future educational program.
- Encourage open communication.
- Ensure that all parties are heard.
- Support the IEP Team in collaboratively problem solving
- Assist the team in reaching consensus on as many points as possible.

As in any IEP *all* members equally share responsibility for the IEP meeting process and the results. Usually, collaboratively responding to these problem solving strategies helps the team

move forward with healed relationships. The neutral Facilitator will guide even the most sensitive interactions in a way that enhances future communication. Simply put, participants learn new ways of communicating that result in more respectful, open, and honest communication in the future.

To summarize, the role of neutral Facilitator is to ensure that the IEP Team does their best problem solving while interacting respectfully, with the focus on future action. Thus, the neutral Facilitator serves the whole group rather than an individual, and assists the group with the *process* of the IEP meeting rather than the *content* of the IEP. The agenda developed keeps the focus of the meeting on the student and their educational needs.

Benefits of Facilitated IEP Meetings

- Past experiences among IEP Team members may hinder future possibilities of working together productively. A neutral Facilitator (someone with neither history with the group nor any future relationship) often changes the environment and outcome of an IEP meeting by helping the IEP team find effective ways to problem solve and interact.
- The Facilitator enables the IEP Team to heal and build strong relationships among its individual members, problem solve as a group, reach true consensus, focus on the student's needs, and experience an efficient and productive meeting through effective communication skills.
- The Facilitator's skill set prevents the IEP meeting from getting off track with respect to either content or process. They can intervene effectively during the IEP meeting to get people back on track, should the team begin to engage in old habits.

Facilitated IEP Meetings

***An alternative solution for
families and schools
striving for productive IEPs***



San Mateo
County
SELPA

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Students with special educational needs do best when families and school staff work in partnership. Strong and effective relationships are grounded in mutual respect and trust and when communication is open and honest. Unfortunately, sometimes relationships are damaged, and the development of an IEP is stalled. Previously, the only solution was Complaints or Due Process. The San Mateo County SELPA offers a productive alternative.

Known as a Facilitated IEP (FIEP), this process uses a trained neutral Facilitator. This Facilitator is not a member of the IEP team, which means they do not contribute to the content of an IEP. Instead, they guide the process. When a team is stalled in their efforts to reach consensus in crafting an IEP, skilled facilitators guide the meeting in such a way that results in win-win solutions for the student.



Keys to Success

All parties (family, school staff, and facilitator) agree to be cooperative, courteous, honest, and open. The more IEP Team members are able to openly share relevant information during the FIEP, the more successful the team will be in developing and implementing the best IEP possible for a student.

When should an FIEP Meeting be used?

If you find yourself, either as a family member or a staff member, feeling frustrated because you are:

- Spending your time repeatedly participating in e-mails or phone calls about issues that do not deal with a student's academic progress- and feel that many of these interactions are hurtful.
- Attending multiple IEP Meetings for the same issues with little or no resolution. A team member might even state they are considering legal action.
- Leaving IEP meetings feeling that you are not being heard or you have not even been given the opportunity to give your input.
- Suspecting that someone on the team is really representing an interest group whose agenda is not focused on the student.

How Do I Know Which Option to Use — FIEP or Mediation?

This, of course, is up to either party, but here are some general considerations:

- If the IEP team seems deadlocked solely or primarily about specific IEP-related matters, then requesting an FIEP meeting may be the best option.
- If the IEP team's concern involves both communication/ relationship issues *and* IEP-related matters, requesting an FIEP meeting can be the most powerful and effective intervention. The neutral Facilitator is trained to be sensitive to communication and relationship issues, and to help IEP Team members repair their relationships so that they can move forward in a positive and productive manner after the FIEP.
- If there is concern is about systemic issues within the District (usually around Services and Placement that are not available, or

Procedural violations) then parties may wish to request Mediation. If the District's concern is that a family, by not signing an IEP is denying a student FAPE, then the District may file for Mediation.

Who can request a Facilitated IEP?

Family members, advocates, agency members, and school staff can independently contact the San Mateo County SELPA Office to request an FIEP by calling 650.802.5473. You will speak with the Facilitation Coordinator, who will determine the appropriateness of an FIEP.



What happens next?

The Facilitation Coordinator will send you a Request form. You can fill out the form and return it to the Coordinator, or give it to the other party to complete and submit. If you return the form without the other party's information and signature, the Facilitation Coordinator will speak to the other party and seek their agreement.

When both parties have agreed to an FIEP, how does the process work?

The Facilitation Coordinator will contact the District to schedule the FIEP no sooner than 10 days out. This gives the neutral Facilitator time to conduct interviews with both parties. These interviews will be either over the phone or in person. When interviewing both parties, the Facilitator is seeking information to clarify the issues, determine the Desired Outcomes each party seeks, and to explain the FIEP process in greater detail.