



February 2020

Online Innovation Facilitator Training

Event Summary



The Problem: There are many pros to face-to-face events, but eXtension members often face barriers that limit their participation.

Our Innovation: For 2020, the Impact Collaborative has moved its events to a virtual format to make it more accessible to its members. There was no restriction per member institution to participate in this online Innovation Facilitator training. This resulted in the largest cohort of trainees. This online training was facilitated by Molly Immendorf and Annie Jones from the eXtension Foundation. Small teams of participants were coached by experienced Innovation Facilitators: Allison Young (Fort Valley State University), Bekah Sparks (Mississippi State University), Donna Schwarting (University of Idaho), Kittrane Sanders (North Carolina A&T), Jason Weigle (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), John Porter (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), Stacy Wang (North Dakota State University), Chuck Stamper (University of Kentucky), David Keto (University of Wyoming), Tira Adleman (eXtension), and Megan Hirschmann (eXtension). The training was delivered for 4 hours a day for three consecutive days over Zoom conferencing and a dedicated [Facilitator Training website](#). Aaron Weibe from the eXtension Foundation supported the technical aspects of this online training. Series description available [here](#).

Taking cues from successful elements from past face-to-face Innovation Facilitator training and the recently offered [online Innovation Skill-Building Experience](#), the first two days of the training focused on helping participants learn the basic concepts, tools, and skills of the Innovation Skill-Building Experience along with facilitation tips and the third day was turned over to the participants to lead specific ISBE sections within their small teams while being observed by their team coach.

What Worked:

100% of Zoom poll responses will or may recommend the online Innovation Facilitator Training (n=50, 80% yes, 20% may)

Features of the training most liked (n=50):

- 76% content
- 76% facilitators
- 72% coaches
- 64% online

Even though we had some major technology glitches, especially on day one, 81% (45/55) of participants who started on the first day stuck with it and completed the training.

98% of participants intend to use their new skills (n=44, 80% will use, 18% probably will use, 2% has not decided).

93% of participants intend to contribute to the Facilitation Network (n=44)

Participants found the small groups (teams) with coaches helpful. (n=44) Sample responses:

“Small group work and great coaches in the small group activities”

“The coaches in the breakout room were the most helpful. They really helped clarified information shared in the larger room.”

“breaking out into smaller teams and working with a coach/facilitator”

“The ratio of coaches to trainees worked very well.”

Participants commented that the practice day three was helpful. (n=44) Sample Responses:

“The opportunity to practice amongst our peers and receive immediate feedback”

“Practicing on the last day. Helped to increase confidence and understand the information better.”

“Actually leading a section and getting immediate feedback on how to improve my skills”

What We Learned:

70% of participants found the length of the training to be the most challenging feature. (n=50)

Facilitating and hosting a live 3-day for 45+ participants with high expectations tested everyone supporting the event including all Coaches, Facilitators, and technical support staff. The biggest lesson learned was the power of our team and the nimble flexibility everyone exhibited.

One assumption we were testing was the ratio of coaches to teams in a virtual environment. Coming into the event, we planned for no more than 2-teams per coach. About 50% of registrations ultimately participated, so we were able to have 1 coach per team during the break-outs. This was a happy occurrence because all involved agreed that in the virtual environment, 1:1 coach:team worked while all doubted that it would have been as successful with 2:1 ratio.

Another assumption made was that all participants and coaches would be technically adept enough to use the tools (Zoom, Google docs, Adobe Acrobat Reader) to be able to participate or support fully. This uncovered the need for technical training prior to future training events.

The timing and length of the event need to be tweaked. Three 4-hour sessions on consecutive days proved to be too long for all involved.

Next Opportunities:

We will continue to offer additional online Innovation Facilitator Training in 2020. We plan to shorten the duration of each session to two hours and provide at least one day in between sessions. Additionally, more asynchronous “flipped classroom” resources will be added to help participants engage with the curriculum and each other. We will use the technical lessons, coach to team ratio, as well as other content improvements in our upcoming April Summit. Participant responses to the facilitator competencies pre/post surveys will be used to determine additional professional development in facilitation, innovation, and leadership skills.