

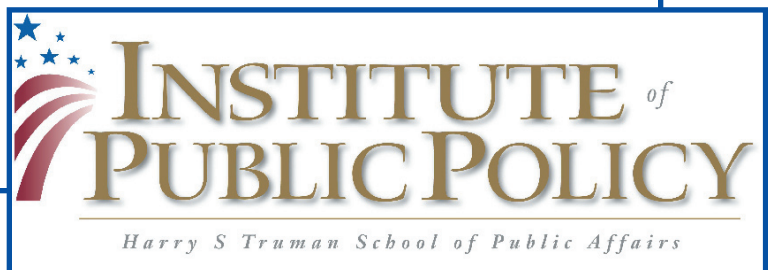
# Collaboration: Transforming the Concept to Practice in Missouri Judicial Circuits

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## Introduction

The impacts of child abuse and neglect are felt throughout the social service system. Assisting the child(ren) and the families in the child welfare system requires interaction between multiple agencies. Although there is a single goal, that of helping children and their families in the best manner possible, each agency has a separate role and purpose. These differences in agency role and purpose can impede the formation of a collaborative, effective interagency team.

In Missouri, state statutes often require multiple agencies to work together to develop a plan that best meets the needs of abused and neglected children. The statutes may require coordination among the agencies but conflicting agency cultures and roles may stymie these efforts. The issues are frequently rooted in historical differences between agency cultures and organizational structures. These differences can be magnified at the local level when the employees of one agency are unfamiliar with the roles of the other agency. Added to this mix is the high turnover rate for positions central to the management of child abuse and neglect cases. The influx of new workers may lead to an environment where team members are continually learning their own roles as well as the role of the other agencies, an environment that makes interagency collaboration more difficult to achieve.

While anecdotal evidence had suggested some child welfare teams faced relationship and cooperation difficulties, findings from the Comprehensive Child Welfare Conference (CCWC) held in the spring of 2005 illustrated the depth of the problems some circuits were facing. The CCWC was the first educational opportunity in recent history for instruction on changes in the child welfare statutes to teams composed of both Children's Division, Missouri Department of Social Services and juvenile / family court employees at the same time. Based on participant evaluations of the interagency regional training, follow-up conversations with selected circuits around the state on the needs of child welfare teams, and findings from a CCWC survey conducted six months later, a common theme surfaced. Difficult relationships between team members and / or agencies presented barriers to the effective processing of child welfare cases in some circuits.

In fiscal year 2006, the Missouri Department of Social Services, Children's Division (CD) and the Office of State Courts Administrator (OSCA) decided to partner again. The two agencies decided to offer a training opportunity specifically tailored to meet the team building needs of child welfare teams. After reviewing possible curriculums from a number of organizations, the educational team (composed of representatives from CD and OSCA) selected the "Collaboration: A Training Curriculum to Enhance the Effectiveness of Criminal Justice Teams" from the State Justice Institute to provide the training necessary to address the issues facing Missouri's child welfare teams.

The *Collaboration* curriculum recognizes the diverse roles and purposes present on criminal justice teams and seeks to promote a better working environment by accepting those differences and moving forward to a common goal. In the case of child welfare teams, this goal is to meet the best interests of the child. By focusing on the common goal and not their differences, a child welfare team can learn to collaborate rather than cooperate. The outcomes for the child can be improved, as a result of this enhanced team functioning. The *Collaboration* curriculum also met other goals identified by the educational development team. The curriculum encourages small teams working in a neutral location and combines education with group exercises designed to enable groups to identify common goals, clarify responsibilities, and develop action plans for the future.

This assessment of the Collaboration Workshop, conducted by the Children's Division and the Office of State Courts Administrator, is divided into four major sections. The first section details how circuit teams were selected and facilitators were trained. The next section focuses on the Collaboration Workshop through the use of facilitator observations and participant evaluations. The third section analyzes the results of the post-conference assessment and the report concludes with recommendations for future Collaboration Workshops.

## Preparation for the Collaboration Workshop

### Selecting Teams

Each of the 45 circuits in Missouri was invited to apply to the Collaboration Workshop for training of its child welfare team.



The application packet consisted of a one page introductory sheet explaining the importance of collaboration in child welfare, a brief description of the curriculum, the participation expectations for selected circuits, and the selection process. Each circuit that applied for this free educational opportunity was asked to provide a description of the team members, a brief history of how the team has worked together in the past, and the reasons why improving collaboration was critical to the team's efforts at this time. Additionally, each member of the circuit team was asked to complete a Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory and sign a statement agreeing to participate if selected. Teams were limited to six individuals with at least two court personnel and two Children's Division personnel.

Nine circuit teams applied to participate as one of the five possible circuits in the Collaboration Workshop. A team of personnel from the Children's Division, the Office of State Courts Administrator, and the University of Missouri-Columbia met in Jefferson City on December 21, 2005 to review the applications and select the five teams that would be invited to participate in the workshop. During the meeting, the selection committee reviewed the written statements from each circuit and analyzed the results of the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory.

The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (WCFI) is a validated instrument developed by Paul Mattessich (2001).<sup>1</sup> The slightly modified version of the WCFI included in the application packet consisted of 32 statements for each team member to rate on a five point scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). Example statements include "the time is right for this collaboration workshop" and "people on this team communicate openly with one another." The scores for each of the 32 statements were then averaged for each team and categorized into 16 larger factors such as flexibility, adaptability, shared vision, and mutual respect. While the WCFI does not provide "definitive interpretations" of the scores, a score of 2.9 or lower can reveal a concern for the group's future effectiveness in collaborating. The WCFI used in the application packet is included in the Appendix.

The five circuits invited to participate in the Collaboration Workshop were from around the state of Missouri and represented a mix of single and multi-county circuits. The cumulative scores of the five teams indicated some need for discussion on the state of the team's collaborative efforts but none of the factors scored below 3.08. Three factors on the WCFI, mutual respect, flexibility, and having a clear understanding of roles and policy guidelines, were rated below 2.9 for three of the individual teams. While the information provided by the WCFI was a helpful tool in the evaluation of applications, the questions regarding the history of the team and the need for working on collaborative issues provided a better basis for selection.

### Curriculum Training

The *Collaboration* curriculum combines plenary sessions, experiential exercises, and the use of a facilitator for each team. Because the role of the facilitator is an integral part of the curriculum, the five facilitators (two from the Children's Division, two from the Office of State Courts Administrator, and one from the University of Missouri-Columbia) were asked to take part in several informational sessions prior to the start of the Collaboration Workshop. On January 6, 2006 the facilitators had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Kurt Bumby from the Center for Effective Public Policy. Dr. Bumby works with the Collaboration curriculum on a regular basis and has served as a facilitator for circuit teams at the national level. During the meeting, Dr. Bumby stressed the importance of the facilitators developing a rapport with the teams and guiding the process. On February 6, 2006 all of the facilitators gathered with Mary Brennell, the Collaboration Workshop leader, to review the curriculum in detail, discuss the logistics of the set-up for each facilitator's room, and practice some of the group exercises. A second facilitator training occurred on February 15, 2006 following some adjustments to the curriculum and the facilitator packets.

The majority of plenary (or short educational) sessions used to introduce the concepts behind group exercises were presented by Mary Brennell of the Office of State Courts Administrator. Other plenary sessions were presented by guest speakers chosen by Mary Brennell. These guest speakers included Dr. Kurt Bumby of the Center for Effective Public Policy, Michael Buenger the State Court Administrator for Missouri, and Dr. Joe Silsby an Education Specialist for the Office of State Courts Administrator. Ms. Brennell worked with each speaker to explain the purpose of the training and the approach desired to convey the content of the plenary session.

### **The Collaboration Workshop**

The Collaboration Workshop was held from February 27 through March 1, 2006 in Jefferson City, Missouri. A total of 30 individuals attended the training (six representing each of the five teams). Fifteen participants worked for the juvenile court, thirteen worked for the Children's Division, and three were either guardian ad litem or prosecuting attorneys. Four of the teams included a judge from the juvenile court as one of the participants. As can be seen in Table 1, the Collaboration curriculum is time intensive. Snacks and lunch were provided but, rather than being breaks, most were combined with group work activities. The meeting time ended at 2:30 pm on the second day to provide time for each team to complete a group assignment (the experiential exercise).



**Table 1. Start and end times for each day**

Day	Start Time (AM)	End Time (PM)
February 27	9:00	5:00
February 28	8:30	2:30
March 1	8:30	4:00

### Assessment of Training Quality

The length of the Collaboration Workshop and the breadth of the educational techniques used required multiple methods for assessing overall training quality. The methods used for assessing the quality included participant evaluation forms at the close of the workshop, analysis of notes recorded on flip charts during the group exercises, and the observation of the facilitators. Rather than discussing the results generated by each method of assessment, the following section provides an overview of the curriculum, highlights of findings for a group exercise, and rated responses from the evaluation for each day of the workshop. (Twenty-nine of the 30 participants completed an evaluation form at the close of the workshop.) The section concludes with the overall findings from the evaluation assessment, facilitator observations, and comments of participants on their experiences at the Collaboration Workshop. A copy of the evaluation assessment is included in the Appendix.

#### Day One

On the first day of the Collaboration Workshop, circuit teams focused on learning the concepts of collaboration, developing the values, vision, and mission for the team, and discussing personality differences that can impact group dynamics. The day started with a welcome from representatives of the Children's Division and the Office of State Courts Administrator. Mary Brennell then introduced the circuit teams, including the facilitators, and provided a brief overview of the agenda for the next three days. After the opening remarks, Dr. Kurt Bumby provided an overview of the concepts in the curriculum and explained the impetus behind Missouri choosing this educational experience.

The first group exercise started with each team member completing the Collaboration Survey. The goal of the Collaboration Survey was to gauge the current state of collaborative efforts and develop a framework for identifying the expectations, concerns, and behaviors of the circuit for the remaining team work sessions. The results of the Collaboration Survey were then scored by the facilitators and the cumulative scores of the team were discussed in terms of the average score for each factor and the range of scores provided by the team. Factors with strong agreement between team members were highlighted to point out the strengths the team already had in place. Factors with a high range of responses (little agreement between team members) were then discussed in more detail. The issues identified by the team through the Collaboration Survey served as a starting point

for elucidating individual expectations and concerns with the Collaboration Workshop.

Team expectations for the workshop, as recorded on the flipcharts in each circuit breakout room, varied but the teams' expectations followed common themes. Most expectations focused on developing better relationships, understanding the roles of each agency, and improving the work of the circuit. After listing expectations, circuits were invited to list concerns about the Collaboration Workshop experience. The overwhelming theme was that nothing would change as a result of the workshop and that individuals would leave with negative feelings rather than positive ones. Circuits were then challenged to change the concerns into positive expectations. These new expectations then served as the "ground rules" for team discussions throughout the rest of the workshop. These ground rules provided the framework for how team members should interact in effort to provide the most positive experience to all individuals.

The ground rules for each team are illustrative of the perceived problems in team functioning prior to the workshop. Several circuits focused on letting everyone have a voice ("don't talk over others"), maintaining privacy for group discussions ("what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas"), and sustaining a positive attitude. Others focused on each member staying engaged in the efforts of the team during the workshop and offering honest feedback without attacking individuals personally. As one team stated "offer a solution with a problem" rather than continually tearing down ideas.

One circuit had a particularly difficult time with these beginning exercises as a result of a history of ineffective team function. While several teams lacked a history of working together, this circuit was enveloped in struggles that were more personal in nature. The previously asserted positions on issues hindered even introductory discussions about the nature of the team and led to limited conversation on expectations and concerns. The one ground rule established by the circuit, "the golden rule" (do unto others as you would have done to you), foreshadowed many of the difficulties this team would experience over the course of the workshop.

After establishing the ground rules for discussion and coming to a common understanding of expectations, the teams moved to the development of values, a vision statement, and a mission statement. Values varied between the groups with some focusing more on concepts such as honesty, integrity, and hard work while other circuits were more specific, listing child safety, nurturing of juveniles, and educating families as their values. The vision statements reflected a combination of the two approaches with each including the needs of children as a cornerstone of the circuit's efforts. As can be seen from the statements listed below, three of the four circuits who successfully completed a vision, included working together as a main tenet.<sup>2</sup>





1. *In a cooperative spirit of professionalism and concern, the Child Protection Team will diligently seek to promote safety and permanence for children and families.*
2. *By diligently working together, we will assure the health, education, and safety of the children and families in our communities.*
3. *We envision a collaborative workforce that provides excellent services to promote and insure the safety of families, children and communities with integrity, passion, and commitment.*
4. *The [circuit team], as members of society, believe that every person is important; that we exist to serve the well-being of children, including their family as defined by the child. As part of the community, we are accountable for helping society overcome the downward spiral of child abuse and neglect. As paid representatives, we expect to be held to high standards of professional ethics.*

After developing a vision statement, circuits were asked to list the problems confronting the team. Some of the problem statements addressed organizational issues such as inadequate staffing, high turnover rates for staff, and a lack of resources including time. Other problem statements focused on the lack of communication, credibility and accountability. For one circuit, the problems focused on the bigger problems confronting the field of child welfare (drug abuse, single family households, and criminal activity) rather than the issues confronting the team. The teams then chose a problem upon which to develop a mission statement for future action. While many of the circuits touched upon similar concepts when listing problems, the mission statements were remarkably different in direction.

1. *To facilitate better communication between and within cooperating agencies, the Child Protection Team will commit to meet monthly. At six months, we will assess outcomes and develop future plans.*
2. *Our two year mission will be to routinely educate the community about abuse and neglect issues at every opportunity.*

3. *Building strong families and capable children, while insuring collaboration in our processes through communication, cooperation, and accountability.*
4. *To develop a circuit protocol by July 1, 2006 that assures all participants have input and that information about the child and family is communicated to the decision-makers (including but not limited to the judge) in a concise and current format.*
5. *By January 1, 2007, require parents of children under court jurisdiction to attend and successfully complete parenting and anger management classes. Parents shall demonstrate implementation of skills learned.*

The third and fifth teams generally address an issue listed as a problem in the mission statement although the fifth team had a more outward, parent-based focus. Poor communication was listed as a problem for the first team and this issue is specifically reflected in the mission statement of the team. The fourth team, who listed a variety of procedural concerns as problems that needed to be addressed, concentrated on these same issues in the mission statement. For the second team, however, none of the problem statements, which focused primarily on interpersonal issues, are included as an aspect of the mission statement. Based on the comments of the facilitator for this circuit, interpersonal conflicts continued to plague this circuit during the exercise. Although the interpersonal topics were addressed in the problem statement portion of the exercise, the volatile nature of the matter made confronting these problems impossible. As a result, the circuit chose to focus the mission statement on concerns outside of the group dynamics.

The first day concluded with a session discussing differences in personalities and how these variations can contribute to challenges if not recognized by team members. Dr. Joe Silsby led participants through a personality inventory (*Personality I.Q.*) and circuits spent a few minutes considering how these differences can impact the work of the team. One interesting thing to note about the individual findings was the over-representation of one personality type across the circuits. Teams were encouraged to discuss how the lack of one or two personality types on a team could lead to difficulties and how members could compensate. Suggestions from Dr. Silsby included asking a team member with a secondary trait in that area to bring those skills to the team. For example, a team lacking a strong researcher personality (as was the case for all but one team) could encourage one team member to take on that role.



Based on the evaluations, a strong majority (93 – 96%) of the participants reported each of the plenary sessions on the first day were helpful. A similar number of participants indicated the group exercises were relevant to the work of the team.

#### Day Two

Defining the roles and responsibilities of each team member dominated the Day Two agenda. The opening plenary session focused on why clear roles and responsibilities would help the circuit team function in a more collaborative manner and the benefits that would accrue as a result. The teams then went to breakout rooms for a group exercise that lasted approximately three hours.

The group exercise was conducted in a slightly different manner by each of the facilitators but the content remained essentially the same. Participants were first asked to list their duties and responsibilities to the team. After listing the duties, participants were asked to record what they perceived the other team members expected from them as a member of the team. The purpose of these first steps in the group exercise was to define how each person saw their role on the team. After completing this list, individuals were asked to shift focus and list expectations of the other team members. Once all participants had listed expectations for the other team members, the differences between the individual's lists and the list of the other team members was discussed in an effort to clarify roles.

The conversations that resulted proved to be one of the most beneficial aspects of the Collaboration Workshop for participants because of the differences in the three lists. Frequently, individuals listed duties and responsibilities that were unlike the expectations of the other team members. For example, an individual may list organizational skills as a duty and an expectation that others have while the rest of the team may concur that organizational skills are important but believe that the individual better serves the team through strong staff training. The role clarification exercise forced members to openly discuss the expectations for each person and modify perceptions of how the team operates.

Another interesting outcome of the role clarification exercise was a move toward more equal power relationships between team members. Collaboration can not occur without trust and it is challenging to trust a member of the team in a position of authority. For child welfare teams, judges are frequently viewed as the member with the most authority and as the least likely to serve as a collaborative team member. For example, members of a team may not disagree with a judge for fear of offending or causing future problems. Providing team members with an opportunity to state expectations for the judge allowed the judge to be seen less as an authority figure and more as an individual who can and should contribute to the collaborative environment the team is working to achieve.

Children's Division employees were particularly likely to change their perception of the judge. Traditionally, juvenile officers and judges work together on a more frequent basis and, as a result, tend to have a better understanding of team roles and responsibilities to each other. Children's Division employees, on the other hand, have more limited involvement with the judge and the contact tends to be in formal settings. By allowing the Children's Division employees a chance to view the judge in a new manner, as a member of the team, unexpected discussions on the differences between agency cultures also occurred. It should also be noted that there were similar changes in how individuals viewed members of the team from their own agency. There are clear power structures in the Children's Division and juvenile offices and this exercise allowed for the managers and staff (as defined within each agency) to develop a new understanding of roles and responsibilities.

The final part of the group exercise centered on the leadership attributes and characteristics essential for the team's success. The leadership characteristics commonly cited by circuits included supporting the efforts of the team, sharing the leadership role, and serving as a positive role model for those not on the core circuit team. One significant theme among the groups was the concept of a "new era". The teams wanted to illustrate the changes in attitude and the growth occurring when they returned home by "leading by example" and supporting each other in an environment that may not understand the depth of the changes in their attitudes resulting from the Collaboration Workshop.

After a facilitated lunch discussion with professional colleagues from other circuits, Michael Buenger, Missouri State Court Administrator, gave a presentation on Collaboration in American History. The well-received presentation was followed by an explanation of the group experiential exercise.

The experiential exercise is one of the most unique aspects of the Collaboration curriculum. According to the Collaboration curriculum, "when individuals have a concrete experience, they reflect on that experience, abstract from it, and then act on their learning." In the experiential exercise, teams are directed to visit a local historical area and learn the lessons of collaboration that the location has to offer. Teams are not provided any material or information on the experiential exercise until a few moments before it began providing a level playing field for all teams. The teams then had the rest of the day to plan their excursion, visit the destination, reflect on how the collaboration relates to their own collaborative efforts, and prepare a "report-out" for the next morning. The report-out could be no longer than five minutes, needed to address a specific list of questions, and teams had to be creative in the methods of presentation used.



To assist with the preparation of the report-out, each team had the option of borrowing a digital camera and a laptop from the Office of State Courts Administrator. There was caveat for the use of the equipment – all technical difficulties had to be solved by the team, not by the OSCA employees. (This caveat proved to be a point of contention for some of the circuits who did experience technical difficulties.) The reason for not assisting teams with technical difficulties is the belief that the teams will have to rely on each other to solve problems when they return to their circuit. This exercise seeks to simulate the difficulties of collaboration while underscoring the team’s ability to solve problems. With a list of ten historical locations in Mid-Missouri and instructions on the experiential exercise, each circuit was dismissed for the day.

### Day Three

The morning started with each circuit reporting on the experiential learning exercise. The presentations of the teams varied in many ways including the number of people who spoke during the report, the quality of the presentation, and the method of presenting the material. For example, one circuit had each member stand at the front but only one person spoke. Another circuit sent three team members to the front, individually, while the remaining members stayed seated. One team displayed true collaborative spirit through a group presentation in which everyone stood at the front of the room and every person had a speaking role.

The quality of the presentations also varied with some of the circuits opting to use PowerPoint and others relying solely on verbal communication. The technical presentation of the experiential exercise, however, was not indicative of the extent to which team members worked together. For two of the circuits, one person was responsible for the development and completion of the PowerPoint after the rest of the group finished for the day. One circuit completed the PowerPoint presentation as a group.

The experiential exercise was, on the whole, successful although individuals did vary in reactions. One respondent felt the experiential exercise was fun “but the problems with the equipment [were] ridiculous!” As an alternative, the respondent suggested having circuits bring their own equipment. Rather than suggesting teams bring equipment for future workshops, it may be better to more fully explain the reasoning behind not providing technical assistance. On the whole, 96 percent of respondents felt the experiential exercise was helpful.

The remaining time at the Collaboration Workshop focused on group dynamics, team and project lifecycles, and development of an action plan for each circuit. During the group dynamics exercise, the teams were asked to individually plot where the group fell on a graph listing task functions and process functions. The four task functions

– orientation, organization, data flow, problem solving – describe how a team collects and uses information to solve problems. The four process functions – forming, storming, norming, and performing – focus on the manner in which the team approaches its work. The team then discussed the differences in the dynamics of the group and attempted to reach a compromise on the current state of the team.<sup>3</sup>

After identifying the placement of the team on the graph, the group discussed how the work of the team could be furthered. This exercise led directly to the final group exercise when circuits were asked to develop goals, objectives, and critical work activities to continue efforts following the Collaboration Workshop.

As a consequence of the goals, objectives and critical activities group exercise; one team revised its mission statement and completed the unfinished vision statement from the first day. In the original mission statement, the team focused on the actions of the parents of children under court jurisdiction. By the third day, the focus had shifted to the actions of the team and building better communication between agencies. The vision statement also reflects the change of the team from one of “fixing parents” to working together to help families.

### Original Mission Statement

*By January 1, 2007, require parents of children under court jurisdiction to attend and successfully complete parenting and anger management classes. Parents shall demonstrate implementation of skills learned.*

### New Mission Statement

*By June 1, 2006, the team will work to establish better communication among the agencies and individuals that directly serve children and families in need.*

### New Vision Statement

*Our vision is to respectfully assist families in providing a safe environment for their children.*

After the final group exercise, each circuit presented future action plans. Several circuits planned to convene gatherings of personnel from the Children’s Division and the juvenile office (informal picnics and formal meetings) to discuss the Collaboration Workshop. Each circuit hoped the joint gathering would provide a unified explanation of the work completed by each team, foster an environment of inclusiveness, and model the behavior the team hoped to establish for the circuit. The workshop concluded with a short video illustrating the importance of collaboration in



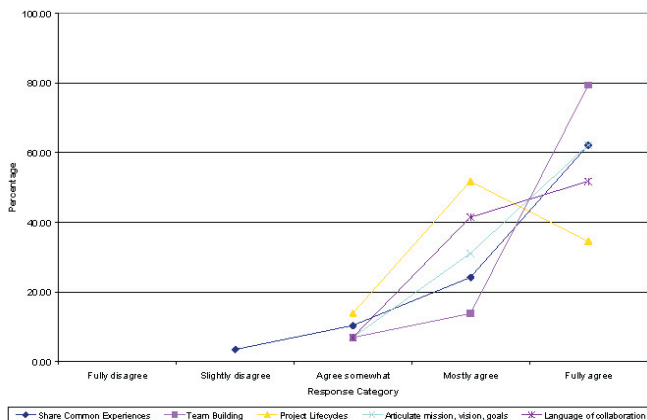
nature and entreaties to complete the evaluation form in the packet.

**Overall Findings**

On the evaluation sheet distributed at the end of the workshop, participants were asked if the plenary sessions, team sessions, agenda flow or other components of the workshop worked best. While participants could pick all of the options as a response, only four respondents marked more than one category as working best for the workshop. Twenty-five respondents (86%) indicated the team sessions were the part of the curriculum that worked the best. The agenda flow, or a combination of the plenary and teamwork sessions, were considered a positive aspect of the workshop by 24 percent of respondents and 7 percent of respondents stated the plenary session worked best.

Participants were also asked to indicate how successful the workshop was in achieving its goals by rating five statements from 1 (fully disagree) to 5 (fully agree). The statements covered the following issues: promoting a common language of collaboration; providing the team an opportunity to articulate its vision; enabling the team to understand project lifecycles; promoting team building; and sharing common experiences with one another. Seventy-nine percent of respondents fully agreed the workshop promoted team building. The workshop was also successful at allowing teams to share common experiences with one another (62%) and in providing the team an opportunity to articulate their vision, mission, and goals (62%). Only 34 percent of respondents fully agreed the workshop enabled the team to understand project lifecycles. The lifecycles session was one of the more difficult concepts to convey to the circuits and it occurred on the last day of the workshop. These two factors may account for the lower positive rating. The range of responses for each category is presented in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1. Percentage of respondent ratings on overall success of the workshop**



Respondents also provided feedback on the overall quality of the workshop and the sessions. The majority of comments were highly positive, including one participant who felt that the workshop was “the best training I have had with the state in 8 years”. Another called the workshop “eye-opening, challenging, [and] confirming”. Respondents frequently mentioned team growth and discussed what a “great opportunity” the workshop had been. As one respondent explained “we had made a lot of progress in the past but this showed the gaps that we did not realize existed.” Others appreciated having the opportunity to “get to know each other on a more personal level.”

Despite the glowing comments on how the workshop helped the teams grow, respondents felt there were improvements that could be made. Several respondents felt the curriculum for first and second day of the training should be reversed. As one individual stated “the roles and responsibilities exercises began [a] break through while some of the Day 1 sessions . . . added to mistrust, i.e. listing of problems.”

Several respondents suggested including more breaks in the schedule. Others wanted the workshop “increase[d] by at least half day or full day.” A few comments revealed participants may have been hesitant to attend a three day workshop but concluded that “looking back over the three days, I understand and agree with the format.” Another thought it “was odd to do for three days; but worthwhile.”

A handful of respondents wanted some measurement of team growth in the future through a follow-up administration of the “working together” questionnaire administered during the first day or have a follow up session in one year “to see progress.” Another person asked “how will we know how effective this is within the other circuits?” and suggested it “would be interesting to know the outcome and whether or not our facilitator will come check out the progress.”

Facilitators were also assessed through the evaluation form. All respondents agreed the facilitator for their team was knowledgeable, well prepared, and encouraged a culture of respect and collaboration for each member of the team. There was also full agreement on the facilitators’ ability to guide the team through learning activities and engage each member of the team. The facilitators were described as “energetic,” “very patient and skilled,” and able to keep the teams on task. Each facilitator was, in some fashion, described as playing a crucial role in the process and in the progress of the team. For example, one facilitator was described as a “necessary person in this workshop” while another was an “integral part of the progress made by our group.”

**Facilitator Feedback**

At the conclusion of the Collaboration Workshop, each facilitator was asked to write a short paragraph discussing if and how a circuit progressed through the course of the





sessions. Overall, each facilitator (including an author of this report) was impressed by the changes that occurred within the teams. Each team started with varied levels of trust between the members of the team and between the agencies. A few of the teams had made initial steps towards collaboration prior to the workshop but others had never worked together as a team. The reasons for not working together in past covered a range of issues including circuit cultures, new hires, and personality conflicts. Each circuit, despite different starting points, took steps to establish trust among individual members and to work through the personal and organizational wounds of the past. Each facilitator commented that the value of collaborative efforts became more evident through the course of the workshop and there was a transition from an individual approach to a jointly-held feeling of “team” by the end of the workshop. Most importantly, in some respects, none of the teams felt the workshop was the stopping point according to the facilitators. Each team recognized the work that is left to be done and the continued commitment to collaboration necessary to reach goals.

**Post-conference Assessment**

On May 2, 2006 each Collaboration Workshop participant was emailed an invitation to participate in a follow-up assessment. The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory and a few questions regarding team actions since the Collaboration Workshop were posted online for participants to complete. The participants were given ten days to complete the assessment and a reminder email was sent four days after the initial letter. Of the 30 participants, 16 completed the assessment for a 53 percent response rate. At least two individuals from each circuit team completed the online assessment with an average of 3.2 completed by each circuit. The low response rate for the follow-up was disappointing but the information from those who did complete the assessment was valuable.

The results of the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory are difficult to assess on a circuit-by-circuit basis due to the low response rates. Cumulatively, there was no more than .64 variation in each of the factors between the Workshop and the post-workshop assessment (see Table 2). Most factor scores improved but there were a few exceptions. The history factor had the largest negative change between the pre- and post-test (-.38). One possible explanation for the negative change in the history factor is that respondents had a modified definition of “collaboration” as a result of the workshop. A change in participants understanding of collaboration may have led some participants to think of past efforts of staff working together and trying to solve problems as not being truly collaborative in nature. The other factors with negative changes between the pre- and post-test may have been similarly impacted by a redefinition of the term collaborative.

The largest positive increase between the pre- and post-test occurred in the “development of clear roles and policy

guidelines” factor. The positive movement in this factor is especially heartening in view of the amount of the time the Collaboration Workshop spent on defining team roles. In the areas of the Collaboration curriculum most directly correlated to the factors in the WCFI, all showed positive increases, albeit small in most cases. For example, concrete, attainable goals and objectives were discussed throughout the three day workshop and, overall, the respondents seem to feel their circuit is moving in the right direction. While the goal is to move each circuit to a place with only positive changes, the lower scores may also reflect a better understanding of what it means to collaborate and what each team needs to accomplish next.

**Table 2. Differences in cumulative average scores in the pre- and post-test**

Factors	Post	Pre	Difference
History of collaboration or cooperation in the community	2.94	3.32	-0.38
Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community.	3.88	3.86	0.02
Favorable political and social climate.	4.38	4.25	0.13
Mutual respect, understanding, and trust.	3.16	3.31	-0.15
Appropriate cross-section of members	3.66	3.94	-0.28
Members see collaboration as in their self-interest.	3.97	3.82	0.15
Members share a stake in both process and outcome.	4.06	3.91	0.15
Flexibility	3.44	3.31	0.12
Development of clear roles and policy guidelines.	3.72	3.08	0.64
Adaptability	3.75	3.64	0.11
Open and frequent communication.	3.65	3.50	0.14
Established informal relationships and communication links.	3.97	4.06	-0.09
Concrete, attainable goals and objectives.	3.83	3.64	0.19
Shared vision	3.72	3.65	0.06
Unique purpose	4.44	4.51	-0.07
Skilled leadership	4.13	4.22	-0.10

Note: Based on a five point scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

The follow-up assessment also included questions about the changes in the circuit team and the status of implementation efforts following the workshop. The most common theme



respondents listed for the changes in the circuit team centered on improving communication. Respondents describe communication as “more frequent,” “more relaxed,” and “more open.” One respondent explained “there is significantly more communication and a much more productive tone to that communication” following the workshop. Another person believed “members of our team are openly trying to be inclusive, to generate more dialogue, and to work better together.”

Implementation of the team objectives is also proceeding according to respondents. Several circuits have developed better reports including a “unified information packet for both counties” and new forms. Another circuit has adjusted the amount of notice the juvenile court receives for a Family Support Team Meeting and the number of days before a court action that reports from the Children’s Division are submitted. Improving the culture between the agencies for all staff was the goal of one circuit. To achieve this goal, the circuit is enforcing a policy “that discourages open complaints and criticisms of members of the other agency.” As a result of this policy, “there is much less negative chatter between individuals of one agency about members of the other.”

Of the five participating circuits, one had not yet experienced any forward movement since the workshop. A member of the circuit team left following the Collaboration Workshop and a replacement had yet to be hired when the follow-up assessment was administered. An underlying goal of the Collaboration Workshop was to build a multi-agency culture where collaboration can continue to be the expectation and the norm despite changes in the team composition. For this team in particular, reaching the underlying goal would have been challenging. Distrust and individual level conflicts prior to the workshop hindered progress toward collaboration even within the Collaboration Workshop setting. While the workshop provided an opportunity for the circuit team to approach these issues, it will take more time to build a culture of trust and possibly attendance at a future Collaboration Workshop (or similar learning experience) with the new team member.

The follow-up assessment also asked if the respondent would recommend the Collaboration Workshop to other circuits. One hundred percent of the respondents would recommend the Collaboration Workshop to others but for a variety of reasons. Several individuals cited the neutral setting as a way to “air our differences” and focus “on issues without job distractions.” One attributed the neutral setting as providing “a chance to compromise . . . and work toward achieving” goals. Some described the facilitator as “the key” while the curriculum was “very valuable” to others. Part of the success of the workshop for individual participants was demonstrated by their desire to open up teams to include more people and stating “all circuits should be mandated to attend and complete this training.” A few selected comments

from respondents are provided below to further illustrate the success of the Collaboration Workshop.

*“It was a turning point for our circuit . . .”*

*“The experience created an opportunity to address a lot of relationship and communication issues that would otherwise not have been addressed.”*

*“This was the best possible thing for our circuit. It has improved our way of doing business which in turn has helped the children and families we serve.”*

### **Recommendations**

The high level of success for the Collaboration Workshop from the perspective of the participants and the facilitators does not preclude improvements in the future. Both the curriculum and the three day format were experimental for interagency efforts in Missouri and the overwhelmingly positive feedback on the Collaboration Workshop provides strong evidence about the value of the Workshop. By and large, most of the recommendations in this section focus on operational and technical issues rather than substantive changes to the Collaboration Workshop.

1. Recognize personality conflicts in some circuits can hinder movement through the curriculum. Prepare facilitators for this possibility in the future.
2. Expand the depth of the plenary sessions while reducing the amount of time in the plenary sessions. The plenary sessions are vital to moving the circuit teams on to new concepts but some participants voiced frustration with the differences between the information presented in the session and the group exercise that followed. Teams also enjoyed the exercises and the workshop may be improved by devoting more time to those group activities.
3. Consider using the “Working Together: A Profile of Collaboration” assessment as part of the application packet. If individuals complete the “Working Together” assessment rather than the Wilders Collaboration Factors Inventory, the results can be discussed immediately after the workshop begins. If the scoring is completed prior to the assessment, facilitators will have more opportunity to review and analyze the results and the team will have more time to interpret how the scores reflect the current status of the team. The same assessment can then be used to gauge changes in self-perception of the team during the follow-up evaluation.
4. Discuss switching the curriculum between the first and second day. Changing the curriculum may not be feasible or desirable but it should be considered due to the number of written and verbal suggestions from the participants.



5. Increase the expectations for the experiential exercise. Collaboration can not be forced upon the team but a little bit of competition among the circuits may go a long way in upping the ante for the presentations. One method of encouraging more thought and effort in the exercise is through the use of “prizes.” By identifying five components of collaboration and awarding each team a prize for demonstrating one of the five factors, teams may work on the presentations more as a group and reduce the number of incidents where only one person works on the presentation or provides the oral report.
6. Consider technical assistance for circuits after the workshop. Several circuits were anxious they would confront problems the team could not solve. While technical assistance can not solve team problems, an outside facilitator could offer solutions and encourage the team’s efforts after the workshop. In many cases the availability of technical assistance may be enough to fortify the team’s feelings of increased capability.
7. Increase the level of follow-up on the growth of the circuit teams after the workshop. Many of the circuit teams expressed a desire to “prove” how well they were going to do after returning home. It may be beneficial to support this desire by conducting another follow-up assessment in six months or by calling team members to discuss progress periodically. While the follow-up efforts may not be used as an evaluation assessment, the teams may feel bolstered in their efforts if there are more reminders of the purpose and goals of the Collaboration Workshop.

### **Conclusion**

The Collaboration Workshop required a large commitment of time and resources for the circuits, the organizing agencies, and the facilitators but, the effort produced impressive outcomes. Missouri would be well-served to continue this learning experience for additional circuits in future years.



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## Appendices

### Table of Contents

The Collaboration Factors Inventory.....	18
Collaboration Workshop Evaluation Form.....	21





**The Collaboration Factors Inventory**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Circuit/County(ies) \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Position Title \_\_\_\_\_

*Please answer all of the statements below to the best of your ability.  
 Your responses will not be shared with any other member of your circuit as individual responses.  
 Completed surveys are due by **Wednesday, December 7, 2005.**  
 See instructions for submitting at the end of this survey.*

Factor	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral, No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>History of collaboration or cooperation in the community</i>	1. Court and agency staff in our circuit have a history of working together.	1	2	3	4	5
	2. Trying to solve problems through collaboration has been common in this circuit. It's been done a lot before.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community</i>	3. Other agencies in this circuit who are not part of this team would generally agree that team participants are the right participants to deal with issues around child welfare.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Favorable political and social climate</i>	4. The political and social climate seems to be right for enhancing/improving our collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
	5. The time is right for this collaboration workshop.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Mutual respect,</i>	6. The people involved on our circuit team always trust one another.	1	2	3	4	5
	7. I have a lot of respect for the other people involved on this team.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Appropriate cross section of members</i>	8. The people involved in our circuit team represent a cross section of those who have a stake in what we are trying to accomplish.	1	2	3	4	5
	9. All the groups that we need to be represented on the team have representation on the team.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Members see collaboration as in their self-interest</i>	10. My court/agency/office benefits from being involved on the circuit team.	1	2	3	4	5
	11. People involved on our circuit team are willing to compromise on important issues.	1	2	3	4	5



Factor	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral, No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>Member share a stake in both process and outcome</i>	12. The individuals that belong to our team invest the right amount of time on current child welfare issues.	1	2	3	4	5
	13. Everyone who is a member of our circuit team wants to see it succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
	14. The level of commitment among the team participants is high.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Flexibility</i>	15. There is a lot of flexibility when decisions are made; people are open to discussing different options.	1	2	3	4	5
	16. People on this team are open to different approaches to how we can do our work. They are willing to consider different ways of working.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Development of clear roles and policy guidelines</i>	17. People on this circuit team have a clear sense of their roles and responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
	18. There is a clear process for making decisions among the partners on this team.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Adaptability</i>	19. This team is able to adapt to changing conditions, such as fewer funds than expected, changing political climate, or changes in leadership.	1	2	3	4	5
	20. This group has the ability to survive even if it had to make major changes in its plans or add some new members in order to reach its goals.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Open and frequent communication</i>	21. People on this team communicate openly with one another.	1	2	3	4	5
	22. I am informed as often as I should be about what goes on.	1	2	3	4	5
	23. The people who lead this team communicate well with the members.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Established informal relationships and communication links</i>	24. Communication among the people on this team happens both at formal meetings and in informal ways.	1	2	3	4	5
	25. I personally have informal conversations about child welfare issues with others who are involved with this team (not just those from my agency/ court/office).	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Concrete, attainable goals and objectives</i>	26. I have a clear understanding of what our circuit team is trying to accomplish.	1	2	3	4	5
	27. People on our circuit team know and understand our goals.	1	2	3	4	5
	28. People on our circuit team have established reasonable goals.	1	2	3	4	5



Factor	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral, No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>Shared vision</i>	29. The people on this team are dedicated to the idea that we can work effectively on issues surrounding child welfare.	1	2	3	4	5
	30. My ideas about what we want to accomplish seem to be the same as the ideas of the others.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Unique purpose</i>	31. What we are trying to accomplish with our circuit team would be difficult for any single agency/court/office to accomplish by itself.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Skilled leadership</i>	33. The people in leadership positions for this circuit team have good skills for working with other people and organizations.	1	2	3	4	5

**Please complete the survey and return to Mary Brennell by December 7, 2005.**

To send via email:

Save the completed survey to your computer as *Collaboration Survey, your name*. For example, "Collaboration Survey, Jane Smith." Send to Mary Brennell at [Mary.Brennell@courts.mo.gov](mailto:Mary.Brennell@courts.mo.gov).

Or, if you prefer, fax it to the attention of: Mary Brennell at 573-522-5013.



**Collaboration Workshop Evaluation Form**

February 27 – March 1, 2006  
 Judicial Education Building  
 Jefferson City, MO

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Team: \_\_\_\_\_

1. In general, what aspects of the meeting worked best for you? (Check all that apply.)

- Plenary Sessions
- Team Sessions
- Agenda flow (combination of plenary and teamwork sessions)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments on the workshop overall: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please indicate how successful the workshop was, in your view, in achieving its goals. Use the scale provided to reflect your responses by circling the most appropriate response:

The workshop promoted a common understanding of the language and concepts of collaboration.

Fully Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Slightly Disagree	Fully Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

The workshop provided teams an opportunity to articulate their vision, mission, and goals and the importance of collaboration to their work.

Fully Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Slightly Disagree	Fully Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

The workshop enabled teams to understand their team and project life cycles and assess their own place on these cycles.

Fully Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Slightly Disagree	Fully Disagree
5	4	3	2	1





The workshop promoted team building.

Fully Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Slightly Disagree	Fully Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

The workshop provided an opportunity for teams to share common experiences with one another.

Fully Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Slightly Disagree	Fully Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

3. Please comment on the overall effectiveness of the plenary, teamwork, and other sessions. Were the topics and information that were shared and discussed in each relevant and helpful to your team’s work? Please circle “yes” next to the sessions that were helpful and “no” next to those that were not helpful.

*Plenary sessions*

- |     |    |   |
|-----|----|---|
| Yes | No | What Is Collaboration and What Do We Know About It?                     |
| Yes | No | The Importance of Values and Vision to the Work of a Collaborative Team |
| Yes | No | Identifying Problems and Developing Clear Missions                      |
| Yes | No | Roles and Responsibilities of Team Members                              |
| Yes | No | Collaboration in American History                                       |
| Yes | No | Group Dynamics  |
| Yes | No | Team and Project Lifecycles   |
| Yes | No | Goals, Objectives, and Critical Work Activities                         |

*Team Sessions*

- |     |    |  |
|-----|----|--|
| Yes | No | What is the Current State of Our Collaborative Efforts? (Collaboration Survey) |
| Yes | No | Examining our Vision and Values  |
| Yes | No | Identifying the Problems and Developing a Clear Mission                        |
| Yes | No | What Are Members’ Roles and Responsibilities on our Team?                      |
| Yes | No | Experiential learning Exercise   |



- Yes No What Influences Do Our Group’s Dynamics Have on our Work as a Team?
- Yes No Where Are We in Our Lifecycle?
- Yes No Identifying the Goals, Objectives, and Critical Work Activities Necessary to Strengthen our Collaboration?

*Other sessions*

- Yes No Personality IQ
- Yes No Concurrent Discussion Groups
- Yes No Final Report Out
- Yes No The Goose Story video

Comments on the workshop sessions:

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**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Collaboration: What makes it work (second edition): A review of research literature on factors influencing successful collaborations, June 2001: Paul Mattessich, Barbara Monsey, and Marta Murray-Close.

<sup>2</sup> One circuit was unable to develop a vision statement during the time allotted for this group exercise. Rather than focus on the vision, the circuit opted to move directly to the development of the mission statement.

<sup>3</sup> During this exercise, the circuit experiencing high levels of interpersonal conflict decided to forego the rest of the agenda. Rather than participating in exercises aimed at a team, the circuit opted to concentrate on resolving the interpersonal conflicts that were preventing them from functioning as a team.

**Suggested Citation**

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