Support Group Facilitator Guidelines

**Updated May 2014**

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# Executive Summary and Background

The Brain Injury Support Group Network (BISGN) was founded in February 2010 to provide coaching, training and networking opportunities for Brain Injury Support Group Facilitators. BISGN empowers facilitators to create, maintain and expand healthy support groups in Washington State. BISGN is a collaborative effort of the Brain Energy Support Team (BEST), People First of Washington, Explorations Consulting and GReat Kreations.

BEST distributes DSHS mini-grant funds to facilitators meeting criteria as described in these guidelines. The BISGN has used best practices for support groups to create the guidelines in this document with the goal of ensuring that brain injury support groups are healthy and safe. These guidelines detail the requirements and expectations of brain Injury support groups and their facilitators in the State of Washington who receive Washington State TBI mini-grants and also describe best practices for leading, growing and developing brain injury support groups.

The BISGN’s first priority is the safety of the individuals who attend brain injury support groups and the creation and maintenance of support groups that provide respect, guidance, support and opportunity to members. Members of support groups must feel safe.

These guidelines have grown from these priorities and the BISGN bases its coaching, training and decisions regarding grant funding upon these priorities. All programs supported by BISGN are required to follow the set of standards outlined in this document. These standards are modeled after the International Center for Clubhouse Development (ICCD) standards that have been successfully utilized by mental health clubhouses for over 50 years.

The guidelines serve as a “Bill of Rights” for members and facilitators and a code of ethics for everyone involved in brain injury support groups.

Participation with BISGN is voluntary and facilitators can choose how they utilize the BISGN. Training opportunities, coaching, and networking opportunities are available to all state funded support group facilitators. All facilitators, including those who choose not to receive state funding may access our written and recorded materials online at www.brainenergysupportteam.org.

# 2. Roles Defined

**Facilitator & Co-facilitator** – A facilitator is someone who helps a group of people understand their common objectives and assists them to plan to achieve those objectives. A facilitator & co-facilitator in a support group have the additional responsibility of organizing, publicizing and directing meetings.

Ideally, the leaders have collaborated with other community members who are interested in brain injury, including health care professionals, non-profits, individuals with brain injury and caregivers of people with brain injury, media representatives, representatives of faith communities, and civic or voluntary organizations.

**Advisors** – An advisor is a professional or para-professional who has experience working with individuals with brain injury. An advisor is someone who can answer questions about group dynamics, brain injury topics and act as the group's professional resource consultant.

**Support Group Coach** – A Support Group Coach provides training and one-to-one support to all state funded facilitators so that they can create, maintain, and grow health brain injury support groups. What BEST offers facilitators is outlined in detail in Section 5, beginning on page 7.

**Training Coordinator** – The BISGN Training Coordinator develops the curriculum for the annual regional training, assists with development of online webinars, and coordination of monthly online facilitator support meetings. The Training Coordinator will assist with questions regarding the alternative training methods outlined in Appendix 1.

**Funding Coordinator** – The BISGN Funding Coordinator maintains all relevant records for DSHS TBI Support Group contracts and WA State funded brain injury support groups. The Funding Coordinator can assist facilitators in completing a WA State TBI Mini-Grant application and/or annual budget.

# Requirements for State TBI Support Group mini-grant funds

To receive Washington State DSHS Mini-grant Support Group Funds, a facilitator of support groups must:

* Complete an annual criminal background check (See Appendix 1)
* Fulfill the training education requirement by participating in the regional facilitator training presented by the BISGN each year. If this is not possible, because of schedule conflicts or illness, facilitators may instead complete 5 hours of learning and document. (See Appendix 1 for full policy and form)
* Find and hold meetings in a location that is ADA accessible. (See Appendix 3 for helpful resources)
* Ensure that the majority of regular support group participants have a personal relationship to brain injury
* Have a background in, and knowledge of, brain injury &/or working with people with disabilities
* Ensure the group has a safety plan in place which has been approved and adopted by the group
* Behave in accordance with the standards outlined in section 7 to ensure that all interactions are conducted respectfully.

# Funding Administration

When state funds are available, the BISGN Funding Coordinator can assist facilitators with the funding application, understanding authorized usage of the funds, establishing a budget, and understanding facilitator reporting requirements.

All Washington State DSHS Mini-Grant funds must be used effectively and economically in accordance with RCW 74.31. Funds may be used for:

* Transportation for support group members and/or facilitator to and from meetings and facilitator training.
* Advertising for support group meetings.
* Materials and postage cost to send out meeting notices and relevant information.
* Meeting space cost.
* Refreshments offered at support group meetings.
* Information resources such as books, pamphlets, videos, toolkits, and resource guides.
* Registration fees for up to 25% of support group members to attend the annual TBI Conference.

Mini-grant funds are distributed in two parts. The first part is distributed within 60 days from the time the Brain Energy Support Team (DSHS Contractor) receives funds for distribution. The second half of the mini-grant funds will be distributed on or about the end of January of the funding year. Second half distributions are contingent on the following;

* Facilitator participation in BISGN training,
* Completion of monthly reports using the BISGN Support Group Activity Report,
* A current safety plan submitted to the BISGN Funding Coordinator, and
* Demonstrated compliance with the terms and conditions of the BISGN Guidelines

The BISGN Support Group Activity Report can be completed online at http://www.bisgn.org/support-groups/facilitator-check-in-form/

Costs incurred between the date of the grant announcement on the BISGN website and the effective date of mini-grant funds distribution to support group facilitators, are eligible. However, BEST and the BISGN team do **not** assume any responsibilities for any costs should a change in funding occur.

Any budget adjustments a facilitator may need to make during the funding year shall be reviewed with the BISGN Funding Coordinator.

# What BISGN Offers Facilitators

BISGN offers facilitators and support groups the following services and support:

* BISGN offers expert coaching and support for each support group facilitator. The BISGN coaches are skilled facilitators who can provide one-to-one support for challenges that facilitators may face. BISGN coaches also assist facilitators with creating strategies to grow and strengthen their groups.
* An annual workshop for facilitators in three regions provides facilitators with access to professional trainers presenting best practices for facilitation. These workshops are free of charge for facilitators that receive Washington State TBI mini-grant funds.
* A comprehensive support group facilitator manual is available at http://bisgn.org/library/BISGN\_Facilitator\_Manual.pdf. This manual is a guide that explains the elements necessary to starting and sustaining a group. Sections cover logistics of starting a group, ongoing administrative tasks, group dynamics, planning, resources, and media information.
* A website with a library of training documents and webinars created by the BISGN team. These can be found at http://www.bisgn.org/facilitator-trainings/
* Networking opportunities and a monthly Online Support Group for facilitators to mentor each other. The online meeting offers a place for discussion about relevant and emerging support group topics. These opportunities are also an excellent forum for sharing experiences, tips, questions, and strategies.

# When Guidelines Are Not Met:

If a situation arises that threatens the health and well-being of a member and/or group the following actions can and may be taken. Concerns may be brought by support group members, facilitators, or community members.

The BISGN will:

* Conduct an objective evaluation of the situation
* Assist in providing tools and resources to improve the situation
* Work with the facilitator and group member(s) to remind them of these standards
* Perform periodic evaluations of the groups and or facilitators to proactively address procedures and performance that is not best practice
* Seek consultation with an advisor specializing in a specific behavioral issues within groups
* Provide guidance and assistance in transitioning a new facilitator into the group when a facilitator no longer wishes to perform in the role
* Consider possible expulsion should the offender fail to follow through with corrective action resulting in improved behavior

When concerns from group members or community members are presented to BISGN coaches about the facilitation of an individual support group, these concerns will be investigated and shared with the facilitator.

If BISGN coaches determine that the current facilitator is unsafe for the support group members, appropriate next steps may include contact local police, contacting management of facility that group meets at, in person visit, all reporting protocol required by mandatory reporting requirements of the State of Washington.

If BISGN coaches determine that remedial training and additional coaching is required, a written response with next steps will be provided to the facilitator(s) within 30 days. **All State mini-grant funding will be suspended until such time that the situation has been resolved and the facilitator(s) are again in compliance with these Guidelines.**

# Grievance procedure:

The entire BISGN team strives to ensure that everyone is treated fairly. If a facilitator believes that a decision or action taken by a Facilitator, Support Group Member, BISGN Coach, Trainer, or staff of the Brain Energy Support Team was unfair or made in error they can follow the procedure outlined below to have the complaint addressed and resolved.

The first step in resolving a problem a facilitator cannot solve alone is to request that a BISGN facilitate a conversation with those involved in the situation. The BISGN coaches are trained facilitators and can assist with conflicts within the group and grievances that might arise.

If all efforts to address the situation directly with the assistance of a BISGN Coach do not satisfactorily resolve the issue the next step is to submit a written letter to the Executive Director of the Brain Energy Support Team explaining the details of the situation. Your complaint should include:

* A clearly written explanation of your grievance including the steps that have been taken to resolve the issue, and why it is believed a reasonable solution has not been reached.
* Any relevant documentation that supports the complaint. Relevant documents could be emails, letters, photos, etc.
* Suggest a reasonable solution the BISGN would consider.

The Executive Director of BEST will review the situation including, but not limited to, following up with all persons mentioned in the complaint and then respond in writing within 30 days.

If the grievance is not satisfactorily resolved once the steps outlined above have been completed a complaint may be submitted to the DSHS TBI Program Coordinator.

# 7. Code of Conduct for Facilitator and Members

Facilitators are held to the highest professional standards to ensure the safety of everyone in the group. The following Code of Conduct Policy outlines basic expectations the BISGN team has of each brain injury support group facilitator.

### Violence

All members have the right to expect to attend meetings free from behavior that can be considered harassing, abusive, disorderly, or disruptive. Any violent behavior or behavior that creates a climate of violence, hostility, or intimidation will not be tolerated, regardless of origin. Proactive measures will be taken to minimize the potential for violent acts. Each act or threat of violence will result in an immediate and firm response that could, depending on the severity of the incident and/or other relevant considerations, include expulsion from the support group.

These acts can include, but are not limited to, the following behaviors and situations:

* Violent or threatening physical contact (including fights, pushing, and physical

intimidation.)

* Direct or indirect threats
* Threatening, abusive or harassing phone calls
* Possession of a weapon
* Destructive or sabotaging actions against the group, any member, or any member’s property
* Stalking
* Violation of a restraining order
* Threatening acts or abusive language that leads to tension within the group environment

Any person who makes substantial threats, exhibits threatening behavior, or engages in violent acts shall be removed from the premises as quickly as safety permits, and shall remain out of the group until such time a decision can be made regarding continuing participation in the group. No existing BISGN or support group policy, practice or procedure should be interpreted to prohibit decisions designed to prevent a threat from being carried out, a violent act from occurring or a life-threatening situation from developing.

A facilitator facing these kinds of behaviors from a support group member is encouraged to call a BISGN Coach.

### Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment of any kind will not be tolerated and could be cause for immediate expulsion from the support group. Sexual harassment can be a continuing pattern or a single incident of unwelcome sexual advances, requests, or demands for sexual favors, physical contact of a sexual nature, and verbal abuse or threats of a sexual nature under any of these conditions.

Facilitators are urged to take a complaint of sexual harassment to a BISGN Coach immediately. The BISGN Coach is responsible for investigating all charges fully and completely, regardless of the manner in which they are made and who is involved. All complaints and the investigation of the complaint are to be kept strictly confidential. All complaints will be investigated fully without bias and prejudgment. Such an investigation will include interviews with both parties to the complaint, support group members, and any witness who may have knowledge of the situation. If required, an investigator will be appointed by the BISGN, and the investigator will be granted all necessary access to information.

Anyone who engages in sexual harassment in violation of this policy will be subject to review and possible disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the support group.

### Dating / Sexual Relationships

Facilitators, Co-Facilitators, and Advisors cannot date, become romantically involved with, or have sexual relations with a support group member. These behaviors can complicate the relationships with other members of the group, create the appearance of improper use of authority and sexual harassment. They can also lead to feelings of favoritism, an uncomfortable and potentially unsafe atmosphere in the support group.

The BISGN recognizes that the question of whether a relationship constitutes fraternization or simply a social relationship is a very personal issue. However, because of the potential for inappropriate conduct any facilitator contemplating this type of personal relationship with a group member is required to contact the BISGN for assistance with the situation. Should a personal relationship that is prohibited by this policy exist, the BISGN team will take whatever action it believes necessary to resolve the situation for the safety and best interest of the group.

# Appendix 1. Training Policy for Facilitators

Facilitators of groups who receive grant funding from the state of Washington DSHS are required to attend the annual regional facilitator training. If you attend the regional training, no other action is required to fulfill the training requirement.

If you cannot attend the regional training because of schedule conflicts or illness, you must:

* complete 5 hours of training between July 1, 2013 and May 30, 2014, and again between July 1, 2014 and May 30, 2015
* fill out the attached tracking sheet Appendix 1 to record the ways that you meet the training requirement
* submit the form to the BISGN Training Coordinator, Janet Novinger, janetn@brainenergysupportteam.org no later than May 30th.

Alternate ways to meet the education requirement include 5 hours of any combination of the following:

* participating in BISGN monthly online support groups
* participating in BISGN webinars, when offered
* writing a summary of learning on any of the following activities:
* watching BISGN webinars online at www.bisgn.org
  + reading books related to brain injury or facilitation
  + attending author lectures/book readings
  + watching relevant TED Talks
  + completing professional development through your workplace or attending workshops
  + seminars or classes that pertain to facilitating and/or brain injury

The training must be something that will make you a better facilitator for your support group, and could include, but is not limited to:

* information about brain injury
* facilitation skills
* communication skills
* dealing with difficult behavior skills

**Individual Training Report for July 2013 – June 2014**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Support Group: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date Submitted: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Here are the ways I received training from July 1, 2013 to May 30, 2014

* Online Facilitator Support Groups Attended:
* Webinars Attended:
* Webinars watched on line
* Professional Development:
* TED talks watched:
* Books read:
* Conferences/workshops attended:
* Author lectures/book readings:

My most significant learning about facilitating a brain injury support group this year was:

What I would like to share with other facilitators about what I learned is:

During the next year, I would like to receive training on:

Where I think my skills as a facilitator are strongest is:

Where I think my skills as a facilitator could use improvement is:

**Individual Training Report for July 2014 – June 2015**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Support Group: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date Submitted: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Here are the ways I received training from July 1, 2014 to May 30, 2015

* Online Facilitator Support Groups Attended:
* Webinars Attended:
* Webinars watched on line
* Professional Development:
* TED talks watched:
* Books read:
* Conferences/workshops attended:
* Author lectures/book readings:

My most significant learning about facilitating a brain injury support group this year was:

What I would like to share with other facilitators about what I learned is:

During the next year, I would like to receive training on:

Where I think my skills as a facilitator are strongest is:

Where I think my skills as a facilitator could use improvement is:

# Appendix 2. Complete an Annual Criminal Background Check

The health and well-being of support group facilitators and support group members is the number one priority of the BISGN. Therefore, anyone in an influential position within a support group such as facilitators, co-facilitators, support persons, advisors, etc will be held to the highest standards of behavior. These standards include a criminal background check of anyone wishing to be considered for one of these roles.

The BISGN has adopted the same guidelines as published by the Department of Social and Human Services (DSHS) for what crimes and negative actions can and will be cause for denial of someone wishing to fulfill one these roles.

This list includes but is not limited to:

**Crimes**:

A person who has a crime listed below is denied unsupervised access to vulnerable adults, juveniles, and children.

If “(5 or more years)” or “(3 or more years)” appears after a crime, the person cannot be in a position to be left alone with a vulnerable adult unless 5 or more years or unless 3 or more years has passed since the date of the conviction.

After 5 or 3 years has passed, an overall assessment of the person’s character, competence, and suitability to have unsupervised access will determine denial.

Abandonment of a child

Abandonment of a dependent person

Abuse or neglect of a child

Arson 1

Assault 1

Assault 2

Assault 3

Assault 4/simple assault (3 or more years)

Assault of a child

Burglary 1

Child buying or selling

Child molestation

Commercial Sexual Abuse of a Minor/Patronizing a juvenile prostitute

Communication with a minor for immoral purposes

Criminal mistreatment

Custodial assault

Custodial interference

Custodial sexual misconduct

Dealing in depictions of minor engaged in sexual explicit conduct

Extortion

Forgery (5 or more years)

Incest

Indecent exposure/Public indecency (Felony)

Indecent liberties

Kidnapping

Malicious harassment

Manslaughter

Murder/Aggravated murder

Promoting pornography

Promoting prostitution 1

Prostitution (3 or more years)

Rape

Rape of child

Registered sex offender

Robbery

Selling or distributing erotic material to a minor

Sending or bringing into the state depictions of a minor

Sexual exploitation of minors

Sexual misconduct with a minor

Theft 1

Theft 2 (5 or more years)

Theft 3 (3 or more years)

Unlawful imprisonment

Vehicular homicide (negligent homicide)

Violation of child abuse restraining order

Violation of the Imitation Controlled Substance Act (manufacture/deliver/intent)

Violation of Uniform Controlled Substance Act (manufacture/deliver/intent)

Violation of the Uniform Legend Drug Act (manufacture/deliver/intent)

Violation of the Uniform Precursor Drug Act (manufacture/deliver/intent)

Voyeurism

**Negative Actions** are considered under individual program law and rule and may lead to denial of unsupervised access to vulnerable adults.

A **negative action** is an administrative or civil action taken against an individual and may include:

* A finding that an individual abused, neglected, exploited, or abandoned a vulnerable adult, juvenile or child issued by an agency, an Administrative Law Judge, or a court of law. A finding by an agency is not a negative action if the individual was not given the opportunity to request an administrative hearing to contest the finding
* Termination, revocation, suspension, or denial of a license, certification, and/or State or Federal contract
* Relinquishment of a license, certification, or contract in lieu of an agency negative action
* Revocation, suspension, denial or restriction placed on a professional license
* Department of Health disciplining authority finding
* A protection order issued under chapter 74.34 RCW. (A conviction for violation of a protection order issued under chapter 74.34 RCW is evidence that a protection order was issued).

# Appendix 3. ADA Resources

Below are things to consider when looking at meeting space for a support group. Determine whether barriers to accessibility exist before you agree to use the meeting room(s). Consider barriers to those with a wide range of impairments (visual, hearing, mobility, etc.) in all of the areas used including:

* Accessibility/availability of parking, hotel shuttles, and public transportation;
* Entrances and interior doorways – width, ramps, automatic door openers, etc.;
* Signage – location of accessible bathrooms, entrances, etc.;
* Corridors, doorways, and aisles – width for wheelchair access, etc.;
* Elevators – easy access and adequate numbers;
* Meeting rooms – allow for extra room capacity & table space to accommodate wheelchairs & assistance animals, including banquet/reception/meal areas. Also allow space for a clear line of sight to the interpreter/captionist from an appropriate number of seats in the audience;
* Lighting;
* Restrooms;
* Dining facilities & catering (including ability to provide for dietary restrictions);
* A quiet break space for people and;
* Toileting space for assistance animals.

Additional resources can be found at http://www.ada.gov