



# Virginia Department of Corrections

## Administration and Organization

### Operating Procedure 010.2

#### *Learning Teams*

#### **Authority:**

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## REVIEW

The Content Owner will review this operating procedure annually and re-write it no later than three years after the effective date.

*The content owner reviewed this operating procedure in July 2022 and necessary changes are being drafted.*

*The content owner reviewed this operating procedure in June 2023 and necessary changes are being drafted.*

*The content owner reviewed this operating procedure in May 2024 and necessary changes are being drafted.*

## COMPLIANCE

This operating procedure applies to all units operated by the Virginia Department of Corrections. Practices and procedures must comply with applicable State and Federal laws and regulations, ACA standards, PREA standards, and DOC directives and operating procedures.

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## DEFINITIONS

**Dialogic Practices** - A set of four skills that are used in Dialogue to raise concerns openly and genuinely (voice), to understand what other people think and feel (listening), appreciate how other's situations are different than own self (respect), and revealing what is seen or heard, what is taken away, and what is needed in the future (suspension).

**Evidence Based Practices (EBP)** - Correctional decision making derived from research findings about practices proven to change inmate/probationer/parolee behavior thereby reducing the risk for recidivism.

**Learning Organization** - An organization that is flexible, adaptive, and committed to creating an environment where all members are equipped with the tools and guiding ideas for continual learning in order to create desired outcomes as a team.

**Learning Team** - A small group of employees that meets regularly (long term) to communicate, learn together, grow professionally, and continually develop the organizational culture to better achieve its mission.

- **Ad Hoc Learning Team** - A small group of employees that meet for a specified period of time (short term) to consider a specific topic.
- **Executive Learning Team** - A Learning Team designated for the executive team of facilities and P&P Offices that focuses on modeling desired skills and attributes in a manner that encourages employee engagement and supports the creation and sustainment of a healing environment.
- **Subject Matter Specialist (SMS) Learning Team** - A Learning Team designated for leaders of learning teams that focuses on modeling desired skills and attributes in a manner in which they share experiences and continue their growth in leading others.

**Organizational Unit** - A DOC unit, such as a correctional facility, Regional Office, Probation and Parole Office, Virginia Correctional Enterprises, Academy for Staff Development, Infrastructure and Environmental Management Unit, Agribusiness Unit, and individual headquarters units, e.g., Human Resources, Offender Management, Internal Audit.

**Organizational Unit Head** - The person occupying the highest position in a DOC organizational unit, such as a correctional facility, Regional Office, Probation and Parole Office, Virginia Correctional Enterprises, Academy for Staff Development, Infrastructure and Environmental Management Unit, Agribusiness Unit, and individual Headquarters units, e.g., Human Resources, Offender Management, Internal Audit.

**Safe Container** - An energetic environment in which staff can openly and freely express their thoughts and feelings in a respectful manner, without fear of reprisal, which supports an atmosphere of accountability and change.

**Subject Matter Specialist (SMS)** - A person who is recognized to have the skill set, role modeling, and self-motivation abilities to lead and facilitate a Learning Team after completing adequate training for identified subject matters.

**PURPOSE**

This operating procedure establishes and provides guidance for Department of Corrections (DOC) Learning Teams.

**PROCEDURE****I. Learning Organization**

- A. DOC Leadership recognizes that in order to be a learning organization that continually seeks to improve operations and the provision of services, it is necessary to create purposeful opportunities for employee communication and professional learning that supports the Healing Environment, evidence based practices initiatives, and the DOC mission of public safety.
- B. DOC Leadership is committed to using organizational unit level Learning Teams as a vessel for employee communication, professional learning, and for developing and improving essential employee skills and various tools in a safe container.
- C. Depending on the situation and purpose of the Learning Team, each team should operate in a safe container and utilize dialogic practices to support evidence based business practices, e.g., Effective Practices in Correctional Setting (EPICS), motivational interviewing, case planning, risk/needs assessment, and effective communication.
- D. Dialogic practices are used to help maintain a safe container and to encourage team member participation.

**II. Learning Teams**

- A. Each Organizational Unit Head will establish Learning Teams that meet at pre-scheduled times during an employee's regular work hours with only minimal need for overtime.
  - 1. All Learning Teams should meet a minimum of twice per month for 60 minutes per meeting, though frequency and duration may exceed the minimum.
    - a. The Evidence Based Practices (EBP) Operations Administrator may approve an exemption, on a case-by-case basis for a Learning Team to meet less frequently based on a temporary organizational unit operational need.
    - b. The Regional Administrator, Senior Deputy Director, Deputy Director for Programs, Education, and Re-entry, Deputy Director for Institutions, Deputy Director for Health Services, and the Deputy Director for Community Corrections must approve all EBP Operations Administrator exemptions.
  - 2. Subject Matter Specialists (SMS) Learning Teams will meet at a minimum of once a month.
  - 3. A Learning Team will not be approved to meet less than once per month.
  - 4. Ad Hoc Learning Teams should meet as directed by the Organizational Unit Head or designee.
- B. All DOC employees must be assigned to a Learning Team.
  - 1. Learning Teams should be comprised of employees who work together regularly as a team and should typically be structured around normal work processes so real world situations can be incorporated.
  - 2. Ad Hoc Learning Teams should include those employees that are specific to the topic as identified by the Organizational Unit Head or designee.
  - 3. Contract employees, hourly wage employees, and any other person whose daily work takes place at the organizational unit are encouraged to participate in Learning Teams.
- C. Learning Teams should be small enough to allow for participant input and the exchange of ideas, yet large enough to involve diverse voices of employees who work together regularly as a team.
  - 1. In most settings, the optimum Learning Team size is 8 - 10 participants. Learning Team size may vary depending on the number of employees available in the organizational unit.

2. Organizational unit Executive staff will participate in an Executive Learning Team.
  - a. Executive Learning Teams may be larger to accommodate all members of the team or may be broken into smaller teams.
  - b. In P&P Offices and small facilities where the leadership team is smaller, organizational units may partner with neighboring organizational units or with partner agencies for Executive Learning Teams.

D. A SMS, in addition to facilitating Learning Teams for others, will participate in a separate Learning Team to share their experiences and continue their growth in leading others. SMS Learning Teams will consist of 8 - 10 participants though size may vary depending on the organizational unit.

### III. Attendance

- A. Once established and approved, all employees present at the organizational unit and not on approved leave must attend their scheduled Learning Team meetings as part of their regular and expected duties.
  1. Absences from Learning Team meetings should be scheduled and approved through the employee's supervisor with as much advance notice as possible.
  2. The affected SMS will be notified as far in advance as practical of such absences by the approving supervisor along with the reason for the absence.
  3. Absences should only be approved for legitimate life, health, or safety needs that impact the operations of the organizational unit or for professional commitments that cannot be practicably rescheduled such as required training or Court appearances.
- B. The SMS will document staff Learning Team attendance on a *Learning Team Attendance Roster* and will forward the *Attendance Roster* to the Organizational Unit Head or designee upon completion of each Learning Team meeting; see *Learning Team Network* on iDOC.

### IV. Learning Team Content

- A. The Organizational Unit Head will designate an employee who, taking into consideration such factors as employee growth and skills, Unit needs, and current situations, is responsible for determining the content of organization unit Learning Teams.
- B. All Learning Teams will operate using the *DOC Learning Team Model*; see *Learning Team Network* on iDOC.
  1. Employees from all levels of the DOC are encouraged to develop and submit *Learning Plans* for use in Learning Teams.
  2. The *Learning Plan Template* and *Instructions for Creating New Learning Plans* are available on the *Learning Team Network*.
  3. Once completed, employees should submit the prospective *Learning Plans* to the Regional EBP Manager for review and approval.
  4. All approved *Learning Plans* will be placed in the *Learning Team Network* and be available for use by Learning Teams throughout the DOC.
- C. The emphasis for Learning Team content will regularly include evidence based business practices.

### V. Oversight

- A. The Organizational Unit Head or designee must regularly review *Learning Team Attendance Rosters* to ensure absences were approved in advance and were granted for legitimate operational needs of the organizational unit.
- B. The Organizational Unit Head is ultimately responsible for providing Learning Team oversight, ensuring safe containers are practiced, and ensuring Learning Teams meet as scheduled.

## **REFERENCES**

*Learning Team Network*

## **ATTACHMENTS**

None

## **FORM CITATIONS**

None