ACTIVITY: USING THE FISHBONE DIAGRAM TO GENERATE ACTION PLANS

Moving from identifying key objectives to achieving those objectives requires a well-thought-out action plan. Roca used the fishbone process with great success to help the group formulate thorough plans of action and then introduced the process to the other KLCC II sites. The following version of the process for developing a fishbone diagram – which takes its name from the diagram's shape – was adapted from a tool designed by a Japanesebusiness management scholar, Kaoru Ishikawa (Adapted from *Guide to Quality Control*. Asian Productivity Organization, 1986), and first used in the 1960s. It is also called the "Ishikawa diagram" or "cause-and-effect diagram."

OVERVIEW
The Fishbone diagram can help your group collectively generate objectives for its work and then develop an action plan for achieving these objectives.

OBJECTIVES
- To set achievable goals
- To rank ideas that are most important for the group to pursue to advance its goals
- To identify key tasks and who will do them
- To move from ideas to action

TIME REQUIRED
The process of completing the entire Fishbone diagram will likely require more than one meeting. We've included time allotments with each phase; however, these are only estimates. The time required to complete each step will vary by group and issue.

SUPPLIES
You'll need a flip chart, markers, and sticker dots (three for every participant) for this activity.

PHASE I: SETTING GOALS
This initial step is especially useful if your group is large and has been working together for a while. Your group may have a number of ideas but struggle to select a focus and advance to action.

From your entire group, ask for a few volunteers who are ready to move to action to form a committee. This committee will frame the goals that the group has expressed excitement about. The job of this committee is to develop goal statements that prepare for a meaningful discussion by the whole group, not to make decisions for the group.

Potential goal statements should describe clearly what the large group is trying to achieve, for example:

- Reduce the dropout rate at the high school
- Improve access to services for immigrants new to the country
- Reduce acts of violence among teens

When the committe has prepared goal statements, its members will present these options to the full group. Ask the committee to lead the group through a process to select one or more goals for action. This typically takes 30–60 minutes. In this process, the committee asks the full group to consider these questions:

- What is doable in the time frame we have and with the number of people we have?
- What is feasible?
- What do you have passion to work on?
- Who is ready to work with us to make something happen?

See the **Checklist for Choosing an Issue** on page 139 for a more detailed set of guidelines to help you compare and evaluate issues.

Try to have the entire group discuss these questions, to see whether they help identify the goal that has the most energy and the most people committed to it. If there is passion for more than one goal, make sure there's also sufficient commitment to work on more than one goal.

If your group is too large for everyone to engage in this discussion, you can split into smaller groups of four to six to discuss the questions. When you reconvene, ask each smaller group to report on the top goal(s) it selected. This approach gives all group members an opportunity to engage in this important discussion.

Roca, for example, set a goal to reduce the dropout rate at the local high school. This goal is drawn as the head of the fish.

Fishbone Figure 1
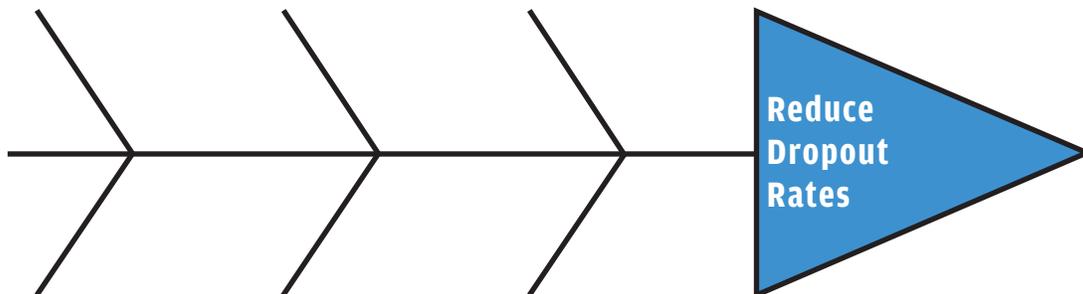
PHASE II: IDENTIFYING AND RANKING INFLUENCING FACTORS

Present the goal statement to your group and invite members to describe what the statement means to them: What would success look like? What would change? Ask members to divide into pairs and share their answers to these questions with each other.

Then reconvene as a full group and ask members to brainstorm all of the "influencing factors" that might make a difference in achieving the goal, for example:

- Policies
- Practices
- Attitudes
- Access to services
- Opportunities

The objective is to list as many ideas as possible without evaluating each idea as it's offered. Ask the group members to hold comments until you've listed their ideas of influencing factors on a flip chart.

When the list is complete, ask the group's members to consider which influencing factors they think they can affect most positively, using the same questions from the goal-setting phase:
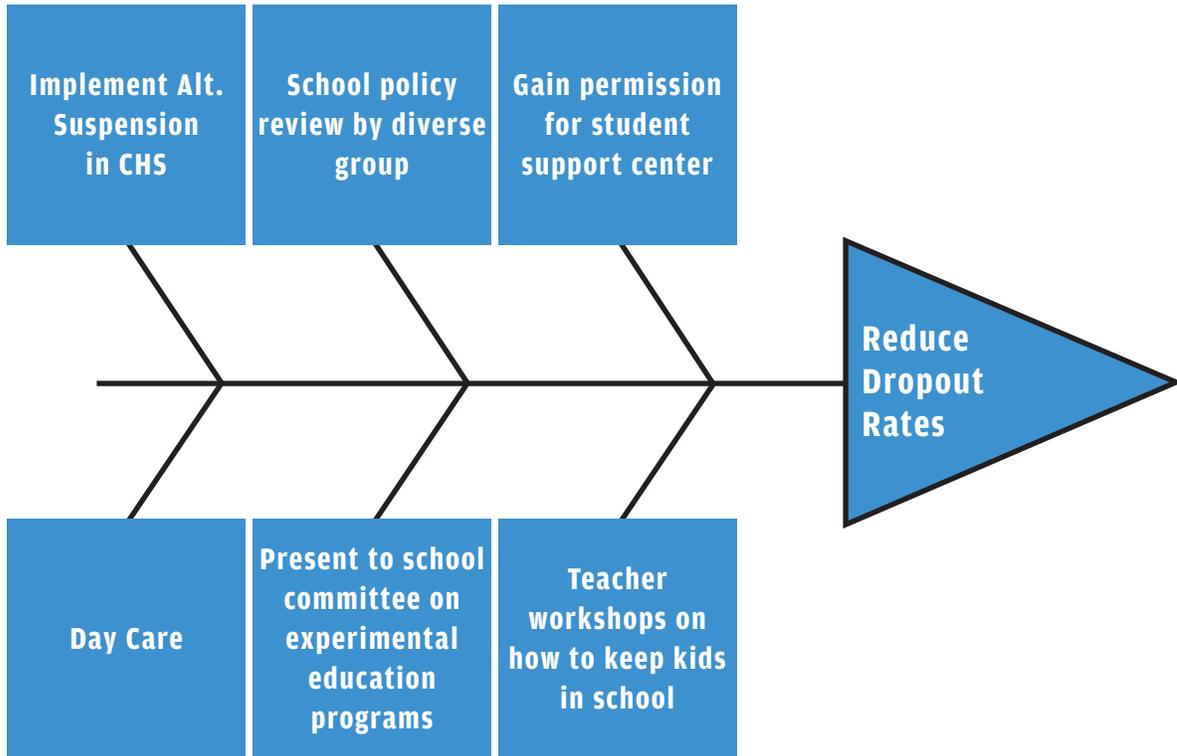
- What is doable in the time frame we have, and with the number of people we have?
- What is feasible?
- What do you have passion to work on?
- Who is ready to work with us to make something happen?

Give each person three sticker dots and have them put their dots on the flip chart next to the top three influencing factors they believe the group should take on. Participants should place only one dot per factor and need not use all three of their dots. When they're done, note the influencing factors that emerge as your group's top three priorities.

Draw these influencing factors as the first layer of the fishbone diagram.

Before adding the influencing factors to their fishbone diagram, Roca members asked themselves these questions:

- What activities need to happen for each of these influencing factors to be addressed?
- How will we measure the changes in these influencing factors and the process used to achieve changes?
- How will we communicate the work that's being done to address these influencing factors?

Fishbone Figure 2

| Implement Alt. Suspension in CHS | School policy review by diverse group | Gain permission for student support center |

Reduce Dropout Rates

| Day Care | Present to school committee on experimental education programs | Teacher workshops on how to keep kids in school |

PHASE III: MAKING AN ACTION PLAN AND RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

When your group has selected the influencing factors, ask people to separate into smaller groups based on which issue they really want to work on. If there's an influencing factor that no one wants to take on, reconsider whether you want to continue pursuing it.
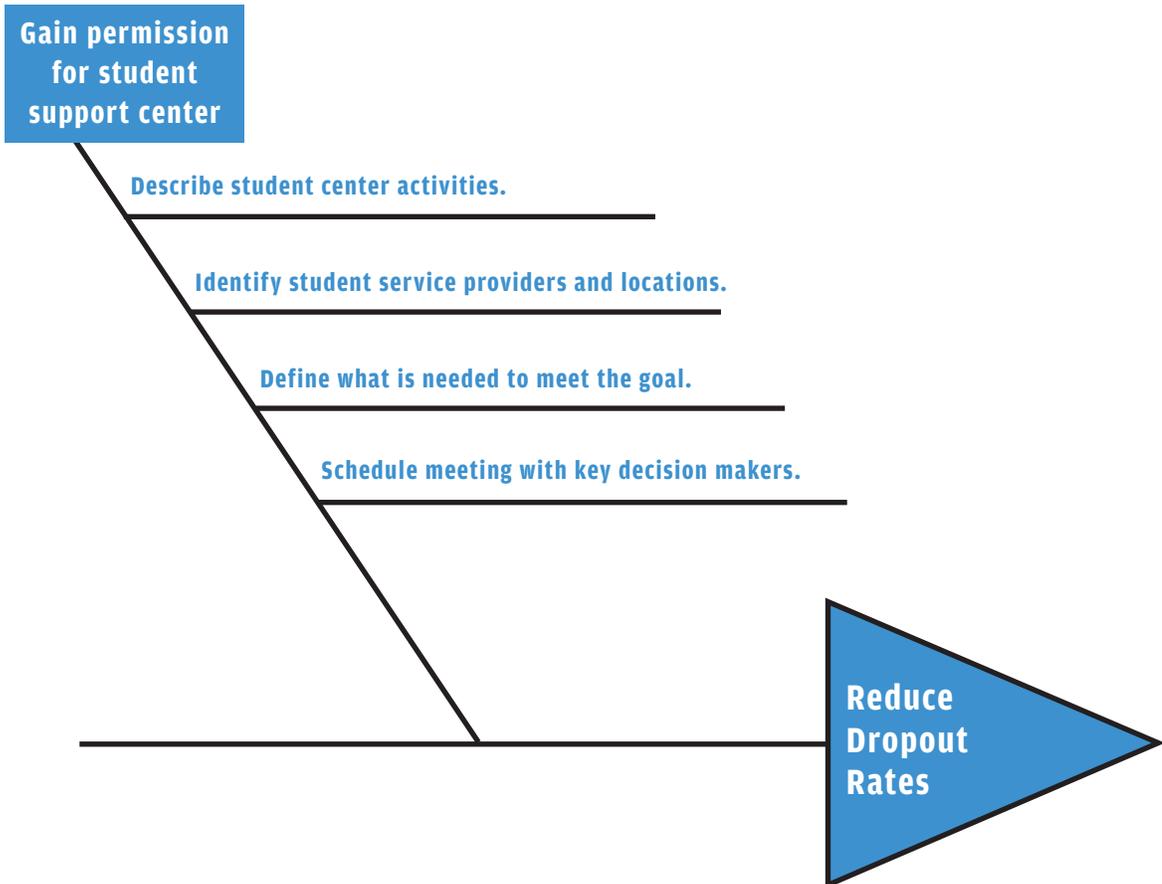
Using the Roca goal as an example, let's say that lack of student support services is a factor that influences the high school dropout rate. In this scenario, a group might seek permission to create a student support services center on campus, but to do that, its members must first perform other essential tasks. Such tasks include:

- Describing what will happen in the student support center, for example, tutoring and connecting students to other resources;
- Identifying people who can provide those services and spaces where the services could be provided;
- Preparing a presentation that explains clearly what you're asking and why you believe it will make a difference in achieving your goal and why the goal is worth achieving; and
- Arranging a meeting with members of the school's administration.

When the small groups have agreed on the tasks, ask for volunteers to perform each task. Ask volunteers to think about what they'll do to complete the task and come up with a timeline by which they'll do it. Give people a few minutes to consider these requests, then ask for their answers. Set aside a time for people to check in with one another and collaborate.

Ask the small groups to share their plans with the full group to get feedback, brainstorm new ideas, and see if others can help. This process can bring out new ideas, volunteers, and connections. As the small groups present their plans to the full group, draw the tasks and the names of volunteers as the next layer of the fishbone diagram.

Fishbone Figure 3

Gain permission for student support center

Describe student center activities.

Identify student service providers and locations.

Define what is needed to meet the goal.

Schedule meeting with key decision makers.

Reduce Dropout Rates

PHASE IV: BUILDING IN EVALUATION

When the action plans are in place, remind group members of the earlier discussion they had about what success looks like. Ask how they will measure the changes to see whether the influencing factors are addressing the issue.

Continuing with Roca's example: If the desire is to reduce the dropout rate, what data will we collect to find out whether the tutoring program in the support center is working? Is the program helping students stay in school? Is it helping to improve students' grades? Is it helping to improve students' feelings about school? Who will collect these data and report to the group?

Evaluation is important at every step of the fishbone process. Remember to build evaluation into your work from the beginning. Decide how you'll evaluate your efforts: what information you'll need, how and when you'll gather it, how it will be analyzed, and who'll be involved in those activities.

PHASE V: DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATION PLAN

Throughout the process of developing a fishbone diagram, it's essential to think about how you'll communicate the work you do to address influencing factors. There are many tools for developing communication plans. To start, consider:

- Who needs to know about what you're doing to make your efforts work?
- What are the key messages that you want those people to understand?
- How can you best reach them – meetings, posters, text messaging, parties, etc.?

As you start seeing success in your work, consider:

- Who needs to know about your successes so that they can join and support you?
- What are the key messages you want them to understand about what they can do?
- How can you best reach those people?

PHASE VI: CONCLUSION

Drawing the fishbone is a simple, visual way of organizing what's important and who is doing it. The fishbone approach requires that the group follow up with on what its members have agreed on and modify the fishbone diagram as the work advances.