

Case Study: Motivational Interviewing for Policy Change Training

Tobacco Free Florida



THE CLIENT'S CHALLENGE

Tobacco Free Florida (TFF), a statewide tobacco education and use prevention program, works to reduce tobacco use and its health impacts by expanding tobacco-free policies, preventing youth initiation, and increasing access to cessation support.

TFF's Policy Manager recognized that traditional advocacy approaches centered on educating stakeholders were often ineffective, particularly when engaging individuals who were politically opposed or resistant to suggested policy changes. To advance tobacco control initiatives, prevention providers needed stronger relationship-building skills that would help them identify shared values, reduce resistance, and foster productive dialogue across differing viewpoints.

THE SOLUTION: MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING TRAINING

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is an evidence-based communication approach that helps people build trust, navigate resistance, and encourage meaningful conversations about change. Rather than persuading or debating, MI focuses on understanding others' perspectives, identifying shared goals, and fostering collaboration.

From March–May 2026, TFF partnered with Sustainable Behavioral Solutions to deliver a four-part virtual MI training series for prevention providers across Florida.

The series began with a 90-minute interactive training that introduced participants to the spirit and core skills of MI, including strategies for building rapport, asking effective questions, listening reflectively, and responding to resistance. Then, participants joined a series of small-group coaching sessions, where they strengthened their skills through facilitated discussion, role-play, and application to real-world tobacco policy and advocacy scenarios.

IMPACT

More than 30 professionals attended the initial 90-minute training, and 73% participated in at least one of three follow-up small-group coaching sessions. Participants reported increased confidence in their ability to build relationships with stakeholders, navigate challenging conversations, and apply MI techniques to support policy change efforts.

92% increased confidence	100% would recommend	30+ professionals trained
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WHY THIS TRAINING WORKED

- ✓ Customized to real policy challenges
- ✓ Small-group coaching for skill practice
- ✓ Role-play using actual stakeholder conversations
- ✓ Focus on relationship-building rather than persuasion
- ✓ Immediate application to participants' daily work

ABOUT LAUREL SISLER DEWITT & SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIORAL SOLUTIONS

Laurel Sisler DeWitt, LCSW, NCTTP, is a behavioral health consultant and trainer with more than a decade of experience in Motivational Interviewing, tobacco treatment, public health, and systems change. She has trained healthcare professionals, prevention providers, and policy advocates nationwide to use evidence-based communication strategies that strengthen relationships, reduce resistance, and support meaningful policy change.

BRING THIS TRAINING TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

Customized for tobacco or substance use prevention, healthcare, behavioral health, or any complex public health challenge.

Reach out today to schedule a free consultation.

www.sustainablebehavioralsolutions.com
LaurelSBS@gmail.com
919-410-1262

From Resistant to Ready

BEFORE TRAINING 50% reported using MI "never" or "rarely"	AFTER TRAINING 83% reported using MI "sometimes" or more
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FEEDBACK

"This training fundamentally changed how I approach difficult policy conversations. The practical tools and coaching immediately improved my confidence. Laurel was extremely knowledgeable and easy to listen to and broke down the basics of MI in a way that felt practical. I also found it helpful to learn specific strategies to evoke a person's internal motivation rather than trying to persuade or direct them."

— Training Participant, Prevention Provider, TFF

"When conversations about policy can get derailed so quickly by polarization and ideology, Motivational Interviewing really helps short circuit the defensiveness that can get in the way. By focusing on people and relationships first, it creates space for real connection and collaboration, grounded in the values and motivations we share."

— Ron Davis, Policy Manager, Tobacco Free Florida