

# TRAINING FOR CHANGE *HANDOUT*

WWW.TRAININGFORCHANGE.ORG

## People-Centered versus Curriculum-Centered Design

*When putting together a workshop or meeting, there is much to consider. One consideration is the **curriculum**: does the content of each activity build on the previous in logical ways? Another is the **people and their knowledge, situation, and preparation**: does the design respond to the psychological needs of the participants in order to access the content?*

*These are different design approaches and sometimes compete. The field of “curriculum developers” trend towards highly curriculum-centered, building from one core competency to another. However, these designs fail if they do not account for people’s psychology.*

### The approaches in action: an example

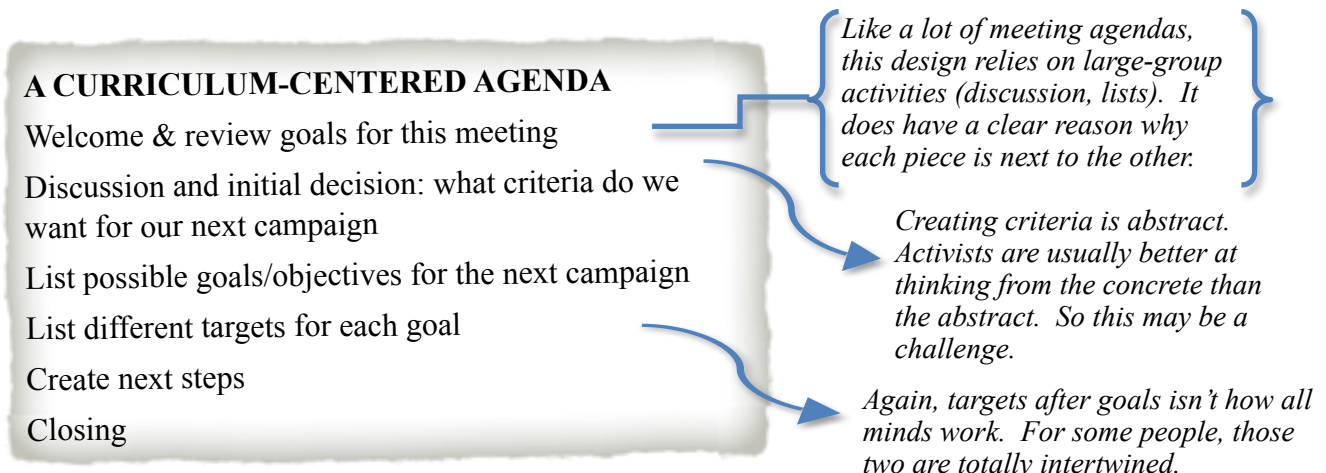
A group of environmentalists thought it was possible they might be close to winning their campaign. There was a flurry of activity and growing numbers at their events – plus indications their target (opponent) was ready to crack. So to think ahead, they called a session to think about a next campaign and what new campaigns goals they would select.

Therefore they held a 2-hour session. It wasn’t a decision-making meeting, but instead a chance for free brainstorm to think about the next campaign. *So what agenda should they use?*

### The curriculum-centered approach

The **curriculum-centered approach** starts with the list of things needing to be done: step 1: decide on criteria for the next campaign, step 2: brainstorm possible goals/objectives, step 3: from those goals, decide which targets they should select.

That agenda might look something like this:

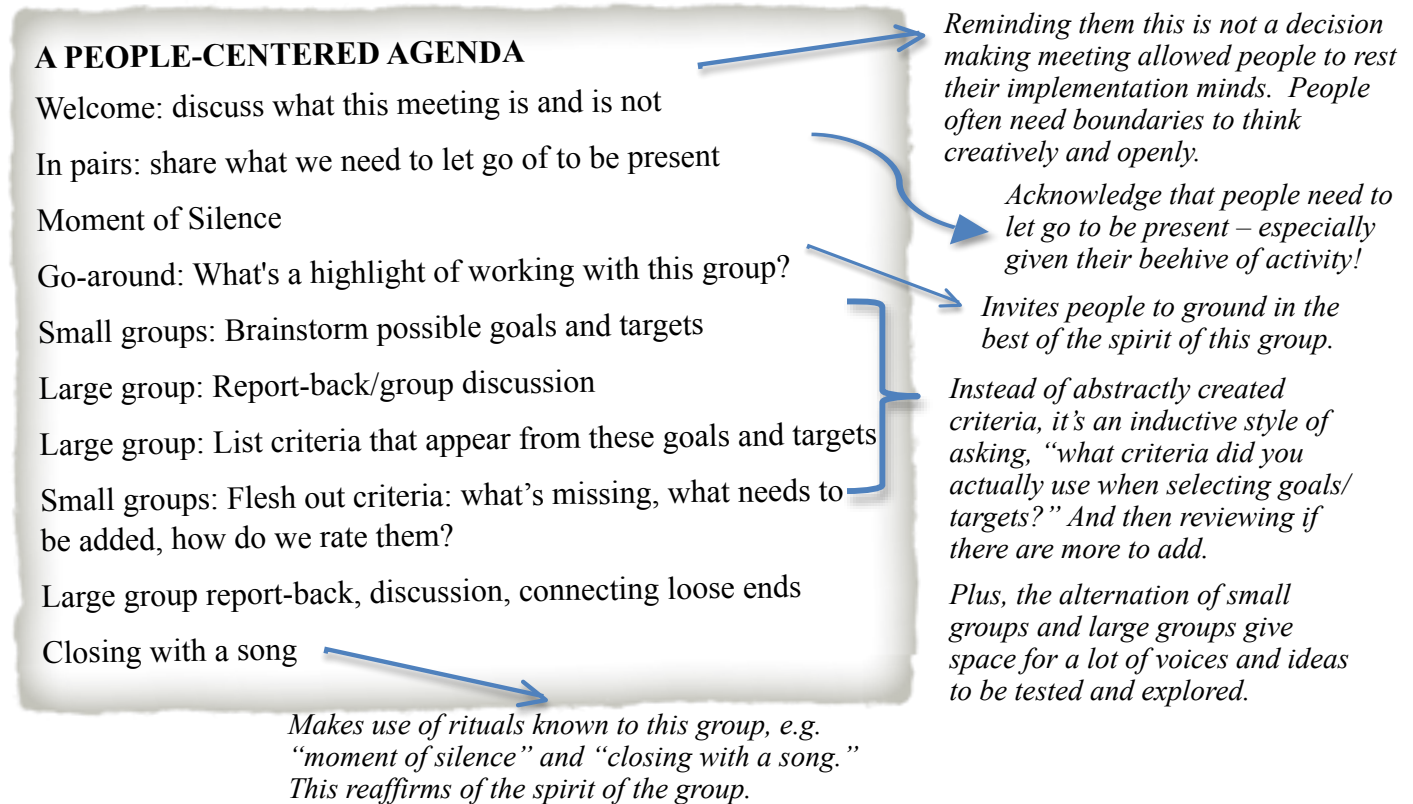


It has what appears to be a logical flow of the curriculum: deciding criteria before picking goals and goals coming before the selection of a target. It wins on moving through the steps of the curriculum – but it’s not complete. It creates very little energy, doesn’t set people up to be present to the task. In short, it is complemented by the people-centered approach.

## The people-centered approach

The people-centered approach comes at a task from a different position. Instead, it thinks about the questions: *How do people think and work? How do they make decisions? What would get in this group's way? What sets them into the right tone for this session?*

The people-centered approach, by contrast, was modeled by one of their activist facilitators:



This design worked amazingly well – getting people into deep reflection, all the while increasing people's motivation to work with the group. And while it did require more time on the set-up (15 minutes until people started listing possible goals and targets), it saved time on the whole because the *quality* of the thinking was so much fresher and less weighted than if they had run into the agenda with all the pressures of the next big action weighing them down.

*Handout written by Daniel Hunter, Training for Change ([www.trainingforchange.org](http://www.trainingforchange.org))  
People-centered design created by Lina Blount, Earth Quaker Action Team ([www.eqat.org](http://www.eqat.org))*