

# THREE SIGNATURE PRACTICES

## SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND ACADEMIC LEARNING FOR FACILITATING MEETINGS AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ENGAGEMENTS

*Adapted from the work of Ann McKay Bryson, SEL Specialist (CASEL) and the Oakland Unified School District's Office of Social Emotional Learning*

Highly engaging, effective and purposeful meetings and professional learning experiences are created using three key Social, Emotional and Academic Learning (SEAL) practices:

- WELCOMING RITUALS** · *Activities for inclusion*
- ENGAGING PRACTICES** · *Sense-making, transitions, brain breaks*
- OPTIMISTIC CLOSURES** · *Reflections and looking forward*

The **Denver Afterschool Alliance** and **Denver Public Schools** are working in partnership to make SEAL a priority for all youth and adults across the City of Denver. The Three Signature Practices support this effort by intentionally creating culturally empowering and inclusive spaces for everyone to learn, grow and thrive.



You can start using this strategy immediately! When intentionally selected, effectively facilitated and thoughtfully debriefed, these practices create a solid foundation of safety, consistency and joy in adult learning environments. They create conditions for growth and learning across all **three SEAL competencies** while using culturally responsive strategies. They also build upon and are aligned with the principles of adult learning, Restorative Approaches, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, and trauma-informed practices.

*The three SEAL competencies: Self Awareness and Self Management, Decision Making, and Social Awareness and Relationship Skills.*

Establishing these three practices is beneficial for **every adult participant**. Research indicates that:

- Adults who walk into meetings after a day, week or lifetime of difficult situations need **calming, centering and focusing routines to participate fully**.
- Humans are internally soothed by sameness while our brains crave freshness, too. Balancing novelty within routines allows us to move with confidence through our work days while navigating multiple competing demands on time, energy and attention. These rituals provide a **solid foundation for overextended participants to be engaged as learners and contributors**.
- For learning to be purposeful, adults need **direct, concrete experiences to use what they've learned** and **structures that promote self-direction**.



Productivity and creative thinking are possible when **basic human needs are met** and the **neocortex is engaged**.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The activities selected should be intentional and connect to your meeting or professional learning event and objectives. The type of activity selected can vary based on time allotted. Follow the guidelines below. Examples are included for each practice.

### WELCOMING RITUAL: ACTIVITIES FOR INCLUSION

Adults bring their experience; allow them to use it.

Ritual openings establish safety and predictability, support contribution by all voices, set norms for respectful listening and allow people to connect with one another, creating a sense of belonging. To be successful, rituals must be: intentionally chosen, connected to the work of the day, engagingly facilitated and thoughtfully debriefed. (1-9 minutes)



**Community building.** Using an open-ended question, build community in a quick and lively way. Each participant shares their response with a partner. After sharing, ask for 2-3 comments from the whole group.

**Check-in.** Begin with a sentence starter. "A success I recently had was \_\_\_\_." "One thing that's new about me is \_\_\_\_." "One norm I will hold today is \_\_\_\_."



### ENGAGING PRACTICES: SENSE-MAKING, TRANSITIONS AND BRAIN BREAKS

Adults want to make their own meaning and have fun.

Engaging practices are brain-compatible strategies that can foster: relationships, cultural humility, responsiveness, empowerment and collaboration. They intentionally build adult SEAL skills. These practices can also be opportunities for brain breaks that provide a space for integrating new information into long-term memory—otherwise, it is soon forgotten. (1-15 minutes)

**Think time.** 30-90 seconds of silent think time before speaking, then sharing.

**Turn to a partner.** Sharing and listening to make sense of new input.

**Think-ink-pair-share.** Generating ideas and deepening understanding.

**Brain break.** Stand and stretch. Refresh and reset the brain.

**Opportunities for interaction.** Cultivate practices that involve interactions in partnerships, triads, small groups and as a whole group.

### OPTIMISTIC CLOSURE: REFLECTIONS AND LOOKING FORWARD

Adult learning occurs when behavior changes.

End each meeting or professional learning by having participants reflect on, then name something that helps them leave on an optimistic note. This provides positive closure, reinforces the topic and creates momentum towards taking action. (3-5 minutes)



**Things to think about:**

"What are my next steps?"

"Who do I want to connect with about this topic?"

"A word or phrase that describes how I feel about moving forward with this is \_\_\_\_."

"I appreciate this person, \_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_."

"I'm eager to learn more about \_\_\_\_."