



Growing Your Capacity to Engage Diverse Communities



by working with
Community Liaisons
and
Cultural Brokers

... keeping families at the center of children's health care

OUR MISSION

Family Voices aims to achieve family-centered care for all children and youth with special health care needs and/or disabilities. Through our national network, we provide families tools to make informed decisions, advocate for improved public and private policies, build partnerships among professionals and families, and serve as a trusted resource on health care.

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INTRODUCTION

Linking families of children with special needs and/or disabilities to other families for information, resources and support has proven over time to be a successful model for supporting parents and assisting them to navigate complex systems. Family leaders and family organizations often describe the process of engaging families with whom they share similar backgrounds, experiences, values, beliefs and practices as being an easy one. Sometimes when family leaders attempt to engage with families from different backgrounds, the process is viewed as challenging. However, these challenges may have more to do with a lack of familiarity with the cultural norms and values that influence how families and communities engage with new or unfamiliar groups and organizations than with the fact that the families are from diverse backgrounds. New strategies and approaches to engaging with families and communities are being developed and practiced every day.



The keys to engagement for most communities and the families that live in them are based on relationship building, establishment of trust, the presence of welcoming attitudes and behaviors, and effective communication.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide information about one approach to family and community engagement - working with community liaisons and cultural brokers. This booklet is grounded in the knowledge and experiences of the Family Voices network* and family leaders around the country who have shared what they have learned in their

* For more information about the Family Voices network, visit <http://www.familyvoices.org>.

efforts to serve the full range of families of children and youth with special health care needs and/or disabilities.

Between December 2004 and March 2005, Family Voices obtained information from Family Voices Network members, Regional Coordinators, and Health Resources and Services Administration funded Family-to-Family Health Information Center** staff across the country through e-mail and phone responses to a questionnaire. A booklet, *Building Community Using Community Liaisons/Brokers*,¹ summarizing information collected in the questionnaire, was distributed in 2005 and was well received. However, in feedback, family leaders requested more information on the process of engaging not only with families and communities but of the steps involved in identifying community liaisons and cultural brokers.

To respond to these requests, the Family Voices National Center for Family Professional Partnerships (NCFPP) partnered with the National Center for Cultural Competence's Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs Project (NCCC- CYSHCN) to enhance and update the wealth of information presented in the previous booklet. Our ultimate goal is that all children with special needs and disabilities will have access to the information and support they need to ensure the highest quality care for their family.

** Family-to-Family Health Information Centers support the development of comprehensive health information centers providing families of Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) with information about health care and health care financing.

DEFINITIONS

What is a community liaison?

While there are many definitions for community liaisons, for the purposes of this booklet, Family Voices defines community liaisons as “trusted individuals who may or may not live in a certain community, yet have knowledge of a community’s strengths, preferences and needs.” Community liaisons can act as relationship brokers, providing information and linkages between individuals, families and communities and the organizations and systems that seek to provide services and supports.¹

What is a cultural broker?

Cultural brokers function much like community liaisons but also have knowledge of the values, beliefs and practices of a cultural group or community and specific organizations and systems with which they have learned to navigate effectively, either for themselves, their families and/or their communities. Cultural brokers can play a key role in informing family leaders and organizations about the most culturally appropriate ways of joining with families and communities from different backgrounds.¹



What is family-centered care?

Family-centered care assures the health and well-being of children and their families through a respectful family-professional partnership. It honors the strengths, cultures, traditions and expertise that everyone brings to this relationship. Family-centered care is the standard of practice which results in high quality services.²

What are the principles of family-centered care?

The foundation of family-centered care is the partnership between families and professionals. Key to this partnership are the following principles:

- Families and professionals work together in the best interest of the child and family. As the child grows, s/he assumes a partnership role.
- Everyone respects the skills and expertise brought to the relationship.
- Trust is acknowledged as fundamental.
- Communication and information sharing are open and objective.
- Participants make decisions together.
- There is a willingness to negotiate.³

What does family-centered care look like in action?

Based on the partnership between families and professionals, family-centered care:

1. Acknowledges the family as the constant in a child's life.
2. Builds on family strengths.
3. Supports the child in learning about and participating in his/her care and decision-making.
4. Honors cultural diversity and family traditions.
5. Recognizes the importance of community-based services.
6. Promotes an individual and developmental approach.
7. Encourages family-to-family and peer support.
8. Supports youth as they transition to adulthood.
9. Develops policies, practices, and systems that are family-friendly and family-centered in all settings.
10. Celebrates successes.^{3,4}

What is cultural competence?

Cultural competence is defined as “a set of values, behaviors, attitudes, and practices within a system, organization, program or among individuals and which enables them to work effectively cross culturally.” Further, it refers to the ability to honor and respect the beliefs, language, interpersonal styles and behaviors of individuals and families receiving services, as well as staff who are providing such services. Striving to achieve cultural competence is a dynamic, ongoing, developmental process that requires a long-term commitment. At a systems, organizational or program level, cultural competence requires a comprehensive and coordinated plan that includes interventions on levels of: (1) policy making; (2) infrastructure building; (3) program administration and evaluation; (4) the delivery of services and enabling supports; and (5) the individual.⁵



HOW DOES WORKING WITH COMMUNITY LIAISONS AND CULTURAL BROKERS ASSIST FAMILY ORGANIZATIONS OR FAMILY LEADERS?

Community liaisons and cultural brokers are often able to enhance the capacity of family leaders and family organizations to tailor their approaches to outreach, community engagement, family involvement and service delivery to meet the preferences and needs of the range of families from diverse populations, especially those from different cultural, linguistic, social, religious, gender, geographic, marginalized or underserved populations. Community liaisons and cultural brokers can help family leaders, service providers and others gain entrée into communities. Such individuals may be affiliated with a variety of settings, both formal (i.e., schools, clinics, and social services) and informal (i.e., ethnic specific social clubs, neighborhood stores, barber or hair salons, or a traditional healing setting).

Within an organization or agency, almost anyone can have the knowledge and experience to be considered a community liaison or cultural broker, ranging from the boss or administrator, to a member of the house keeping staff, and any role in between. The table on the next page identifies settings in which family leaders and Family Voices Network members have found community liaisons and cultural brokers.



Identifying community liaisons and cultural brokers

Families: moms, dads, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents

Communities: community leaders, home-based and center-based child care providers, babysitters

Schools: educators/teachers, school nurses, safety/officers/crossing guards, librarians, family resource staff

Disability-specific organizations: United Cerebral Palsy, The Arc*, developmental disability staff

Faith-based organizations: clergy, first wives, deacons, secretaries, parishioners

Universities: university program staff, college students, sororities, fraternities

Social service organizations: social workers, case managers, case workers

Health and related services: nurses, receptionists, pediatricians, therapists, speech & language pathologists; program administrators and staff within Departments of Health, Public Health, Behavioral and Oral Health programs, community clinics

Government Programs: staff within programs such as Early Intervention, Head Start and Early Head Start, Title V, and Medicaid programs; community guides in Aging and Disability Services Administration

Local government: community leaders, firemen, City Parks and Recreation department staff, community-based program family advocates, juvenile justice staff, pow-wow planners

Non-profit Agencies: staff within YMCAs, Children's Rehabilitation Services, refugee resettlement programs, Women's Alliance, regional resource centers, Kids Care Coalition, American Red Cross, small business associations, Childcare Resource Services

Other Service Providers: translators and interpreters ¹

** The Arc is a nonprofit, community-based organization of and for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



HOW CAN I FIND A CULTURAL BROKER OR COMMUNITY LIAISON?

Linking with community liaisons and cultural brokers is easiest when they are part of organizations with which family leaders and family organizations already have a relationship. It may be more challenging when a family leader is seeking a broker or liaison to help them join with a community or agency with which they are unfamiliar. In many instances, the yellow pages or the internet are not the gateway to cultural brokers or community liaisons; sometimes the family leader or family organization may have to reassess its approaches and expand its tool kit to make linkages within diverse communities. Ethnography or ethnographic strategies can be particularly useful to family leaders and family organizations interested in learning more about diverse communities and cultural groups.

The following section describes a number of “ethnographic” strategies and approaches that are specifically intended to assist in learning about the cultural values, beliefs and practices of a given group or community. The strategies described below can be used as possible first steps to finding community liaisons and cultural brokers.

Ethnography

Ethnography literally means 'a portrait of a people.' An ethnography is a written description of a particular culture - the customs, beliefs, and behavior - based on information collected through observation, participation, and research.⁶

Ethnography is a social science research method that relies heavily on up-close, personal experience and possible participation, not just observation; ethnographic research can enhance language and culture learning, by using a blend of historical, observational, and interview methods.⁷

**** Reading and research** - Reading community bulletins and newspapers can provide valuable information about local agencies and leaders who may serve as community liaisons or cultural brokers. Such community bulletins and newspapers generally inform of upcoming community events and contact persons, offering an initial opportunity for engagement or a venue for placing an introductory ad or announcement that introduces the services and supports of family leaders and/or the organizations they represent.⁸ Such bulletins and newspapers can often be found in

libraries, community grocery stores, hair salons, barber shops, pharmacies and faith-based organizations. ⁶

**** Radio** - Many communities listen to and actively advertise events, community-based services, service providers and vendors on community or ethnic-specific radio stations. These stations may provide avenues to reaching individuals who have the potential to serve as community liaisons or cultural brokers. Listening to and connecting with such radio stations can provide an opportunity for a family leader or



family organization to share information through the medium of a trusted and credible community voice. In turn, this may draw the interest and attention of community liaisons and/or cultural brokers who understand the need for a linkage to the services and support you or your agency can provide. Additionally, you may learn about a vendor, provider or event that you can contact to inquire about

finding a broker or liaison. Those interested in using this approach should consider listening to stations that focus information to English-speaking groups.

**** Cable television** - Local cable stations offer a wealth of information and announcements about community activities, providers, educational, recreational and health related programs. Consider contacting your local cable station to inquire about ways in which you might partner to make your organizations's information available to the community and/or to follow-up on cultural information or announcements of interest.

✱ **Participant Observer** - A participant observer enters the community or attends cultural venues, events, festivals, religious celebrations, etc. as a guest or visitor (sometimes at the invitation of friends, colleagues or families) with the purpose of experiencing the activity or venue and perhaps also learning about community or cultural beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices.⁸ Being an observer offers a birds-eye view of a community or culture in action, where prospective community liaisons or cultural brokers can be observed and noted for future contact. While in the observer role, it is appropriate to approach someone with whom that you'd like to make contact. Be sure to have a flyer or brochure about your organization that also has your contact information on it. This casual exchange can be the beginning of a collaborative relationship.

✱ **Community or Cultural Informant** - A trusted and respected guide who can describe aspects of a community or culture from her own experiences of living and/or working bi- or transculturally.⁸ A person from an agency working in a given community or with families from ethnic or culture-specific backgrounds with whom a family leader or family organization has formed a trusting relationship can be approached to serve in this capacity.

✱ **Interviewing** - Conducting structured or unstructured interviews with key community partners or cultural informants is a way to gather information from the unique perspective of a member of a community or cultural group, affording the opportunity for learning personal points of view and perspectives.⁶ The interpersonal sharing can contribute to building a personal relationship and can also support opportunities for deeper sharing and partnering over time.

❖ **Family Involvement Activities** - Paying attention to radio

show/announcements, newspapers, faith-based or community bulletins can help family leaders or family organizations keep abreast of focused community activities, especially those emphasizing family involvement. Joining such activities, whether as an observer or as a participant, can provide the opportunity to learn and experience first-hand those approaches that are “tried and true” for a particular community or cultural groups (i.e., inviting grandparents or community elders to get buy-in, convening meetings in neutral environments or at times that respond to community needs). Further, attending pre-established family involvement activities places the family leader in the position of establishing contact with potential community liaisons, cultural brokers or partners.

When using ethnographic approaches, it is critical to focus on the unique nature, strengths, resiliency, and experiences of each individual, family or community. Engaging community liaisons and cultural brokers focuses on individualization and ensures authentic relationships that support the growth, development and well-being of all children and their families.





WHAT ARE SOME OF THE STEPS NEEDED TO FORM TRUE COLLABORATIONS WITH COMMUNITY LIAISONS OR CULTURAL BROKERS?

Working effectively with a community liaison or cultural broker requires developing an effective collaborative partnership. There are a number of models that describe how relationships among potential partners develop in to effective collaborations. Himmelman⁹ presents a framework that suggests a series of steps that individuals, groups and organizations go through in the process of arriving at collaboration.

Networking - exchanging information for mutual benefit with an informal relationship and beginning trust.

Coordinating - exchanging information and altering activities for mutual benefit to achieve a common purpose with higher levels of relationship and trust.

Cooperating - in addition to altering activities, this stage involves sharing resources to achieve a common purpose and may involve formal agreement and higher levels of trust and time together.

Collaborating - in addition to the previously noted activities, collaborating groups work to enhance the capacity of others involved and the groups share risks, responsibilities and rewards.

Finding and Forming Collaborations with Community Liaisons or Cultural Brokers *Examples from the Field:*

- Having discussions with other projects that work with community liaisons/cultural brokers about ways to work together
- Attending local community events to introduce yourself or your organization to the community
- Collaborating with other groups on community events such as health fairs, Special Olympics, Child Find, Pow Wows
- Actively recruiting and hiring individuals from within a community who have interests and skills to be community liaisons or cultural brokers
- Working with staff who are known and trusted in the community to train bilingual and monolingual family volunteers

Maintaining and Strengthening Relationships with Community Liaisons and Cultural Brokers *Examples from the Field:*

- Paying a competitive wage with benefits for community liaison/cultural broker services
- Offering benefits such as in-service training, continuing education, conference opportunities
- Providing peer support, exchanging ideas, celebrating successes
- Recognizing contributions through certificates and appreciation events
- Helping liaisons to prepare for additional roles such as becoming members of boards, committees, task forces



HOW DO COMMUNITY LIAISONS AND CULTURAL BROKERS HELP TO GAIN ENTRÉE INTO COMMUNITIES?

Cultural brokers and community liaisons can assist family organizations and family leaders to understand the unique experiences and perspectives of community and cultural groups. Being the trusted, credible voices within communities and cultural groups, these individuals can open doors that may formerly have been closed, provide linkages to a wealth of information and human contacts, and give credibility to the family leader or family organization. Community liaisons and cultural brokers can assist in bridging the gap between the family leader or family organization and the families and communities that have not been served.

Getting Started:

The following checklist offers suggestions for steps to help determine your own or your organization's goals, relationships and capacity to reach and serve new communities and cultural groups. The checklist is divided into two sections - Getting Started and Next Steps.

- Identify the cultural groups or communities that you are serving.
- Determine communities or cultural groups that are not being served or reached.
- Identify the reasons why certain communities or cultural groups are not being reached or served.
- Strategize approaches to improve your connections to the underserved community and/or cultural groups via:
 - o Media
 - o Local Cable TV stations
 - o Radio
 - o Ethnic-specific organizations (ASPIRA*, NAACP, Tribal organizations or consortia)
 - o Refugee Resettlement agencies
 - o Faith-based organizations (mosques, temples, churches, assemblies of God, etc.)
 - o Barber shops, hair salons, child care centers, markets, laundromats, cleaners, community centers, boys and girls clubs, clinics, dental offices, etc.

* National nonprofit organization dedicated to the education and leadership development of Latino youth.

** National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

- ❑ Determine whether you or your organization has authentic information or knowledge of the communities or cultural groups that are not being served or reached.
- ❑ List community allies or partners that may be able to provide information regarding the cultural group or community that you or your organization seeks to reach or serve.
- ❑ Work together with partners or allies to map the existing services and supports that are available to the cultural group or within the community you seek to reach or serve.
- ❑ If within the group of allies or partners there are no linkages to the communities or cultural groups that you or your organization seek to serve, utilize the ethnographic strategies above such as community bulletins or newspapers, radio, etc. to assist in identifying potential allies or partners from a given community or cultural group.
- ❑ Identify from the group of established allies or partners those that are trusted, credible sources of support or information for the community or cultural group that you seek to reach or serve.
- ❑ Within the group of established allies or partners, identify any individuals that may act as community liaisons or cultural brokers.
- ❑ Provide information to potential allies and partners about you and/or your organization's goals for increasing outreach or support.
- ❑ Ensure that you establish reciprocal relationships with the allies or partners, in which power, information and resources are shared.
- ❑ Identify ways to maintain, strengthen and support a healthy relationship with your allies or partners to ensure understanding and collaboration.
- ❑ List the benefits that these relationships will provide to your agency and the community or cultural group that you or your organization seeks to reach or serve.



Next Steps:

Develop an action plan to help you or your organization to implement your ideas for:

- Targeting specific communities or cultural groups for community engagement activities,
- Working with cultural brokers or community partners to identify existing community or culturally-based services and supports,
- Identifying community or culturally-based preferences, strengths and areas of growth related to services and supports you or your organization provide,
- Determining language preference and English ability for cultural groups that you seek to reach or serve,
- Planning for interpretation and translation services (costs, methods [telephonic, on-site, simultaneous, sequential]), and service providers,
- Developing short- and long-term goals for community engagement and outreach to new groups or communities,
- Identifying timelines for achievement of short- and long-term goals,
- Enlisting staff to implement the outreach and engagement activities, and
- Enlisting additional community partners or allies to enhance efforts (perhaps those identified in a community asset mapping process).





CONCLUSION

Family Voices members and family leaders have recognized the critical role of community liaisons and cultural brokers in extending services and supports to families of children and youth with special health care needs and disabilities from diverse communities and cultural or ethnic backgrounds whom they have not yet reached, especially new and emerging community and cultural groups. Cultural brokers and community liaisons are uniquely positioned to shape the perspectives of family leaders and family organizations and to assist in tailoring engagement and outreach activities to ensure appropriateness.



Working with community liaisons and cultural brokers can help facilitate awareness and foster understanding of community- and culturally-based values, beliefs and practices of communities and cultural groups that are yet to be reached or served by family organizations. These trusted individuals can be found throughout the communities in which we live and work. As valued community members, they can enhance access and utilization of services and supports for children and youth with special health care needs and disabilities and their families.

Linking families, professionals and communities helps develop and promote a system of services that is community-based, accessible, comprehensive, coordinated and culturally and linguistically competent.



APPENDIX

Action Plan

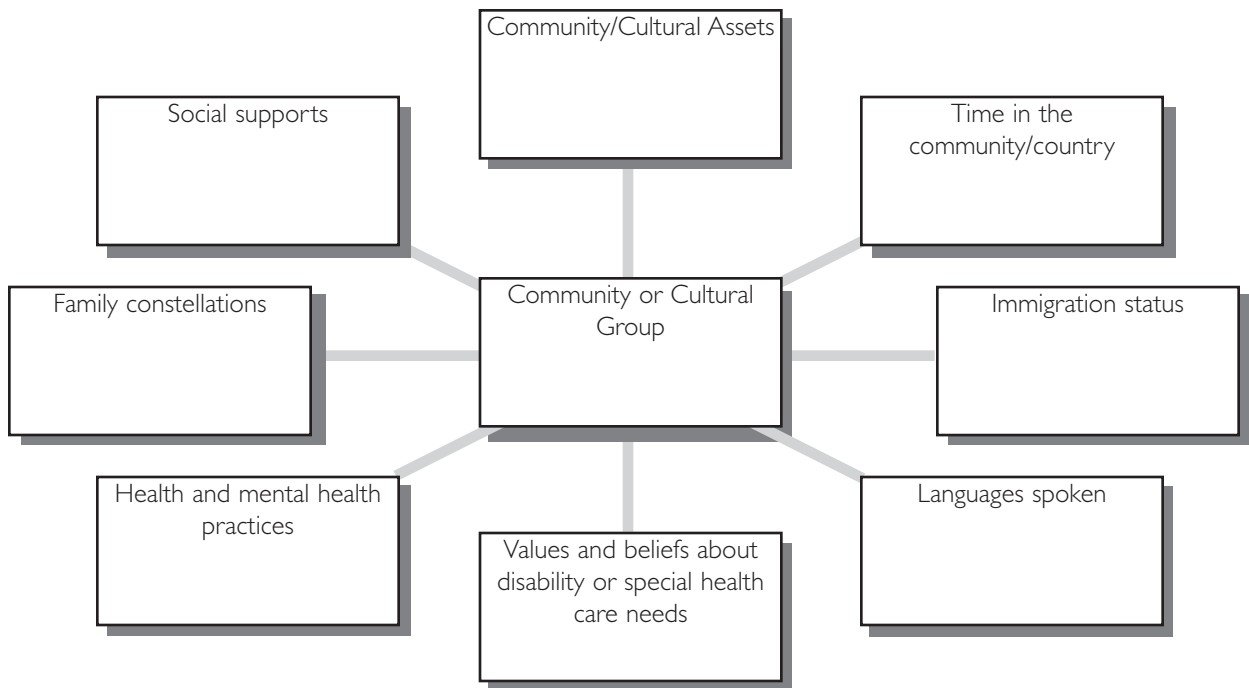
Developing an action plan can assist in implementation of community engagement and outreach activities with new and emerging community or cultural groups. Track your progress and celebrate your successes! The following action plan template is provided as a sample for use by family leaders and family organizations.

Long-Term Goals/Activities		
Short-Term Goals/Activities	Responsible Parties/Partners	Timeline



CULTURAGRAM

In 1994, Congress developed the Culturagram¹⁰ to help community-based workers increase their awareness and sensitivity of the families with whom they worked. Congress felt that staff had become desensitized to the unique characteristics of the individuals and families served because the majority of the families were from the same ethnic background. The diagram below is adapted from this earlier work on Culturagrams. It is presented here to provide a sample guide to your thinking about communication with community liaisons and cultural brokers and as an aid in searching for community- or culture-specific information. As you think about a community or cultural group which you wish to reach, consider each of the areas and other areas that you identify to help you begin to (a) assess the impact of culture on communities, (b) individualize outreach and engagement strategies for diverse cultural groups and communities, and (c) build awareness and knowledge regarding social supports within community or cultural contexts.





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