

Tips for State Title V Programs: *Partnering with Family Organizations*

Practice recommendations for Title V:

Put your money where your values are. To have effective partnerships with families, Title V must be willing to support family participation through more than reimbursement for expenses and stipends. Every budget prepared should include payment for meaningful family engagement.

Establish effective relationships with family led organizations. Building relationships and contracting with family led organizations is an effective way to deepen family involvement across many aspects of Title V programs. Collaborating with and financially supporting family-led organizations provides support to participating families and ensures perspectives that represent a wide range of family experiences.

Family-to-Family Health Information Centers (F2Fs) are funded by MCHB and partnering with Title V is one of their priorities. Although originally funded through the Division of CSHCN, F2Fs partner in many ways beyond CSHCN. Their expertise and experience is invaluable to all MCHB programs. F2Fs can connect Title V to multiple other family led groups organized around issues beyond CSHCN such as early child hood, safety, breastfeeding,, etc.

Undertake many avenues of family engagement. Offer opportunities for engagement at levels from the community to statewide. Families can contribute through roles on committees, (short term or on-going), roles in family and staff training; participation in or facilitating focus groups, stakeholder groups and key informant interviews; roles in policy development or public comment/review process; assistance with community assessment/needs assessments and outreach activities; providing links to other agencies; developing, reviewing and disseminating materials; recruiting, mentoring and supporting other families to participate in Title V activities; building bridges to all communities served; identifying resources for families. Family-led organizations such as F2Fs are particularly effective at recruiting and supporting families from multiple diverse populations; providing ongoing mentoring and support to families; providing efficient methods to pay families for time and expenses; sharing data that they collect on family needs; providing critical partnership in proposals; providing peer support for individual families hired by or volunteering with Title V.

Encourage connection of family leaders across the country. Families and family led organizations who engage with Title V program need to be connected with each other within their communities, states, and across the country. Always engage more than one family in any initiative. Connecting family members who are employed within a Title V program with F2Fs will expand and enhance Title V's family engagement. The Family Voices National Center for Family Professional Partnerships offers multiple opportunities to connect. (www.familyvoices.org; www.fv-ncfpp.org)

Invite family-led organizations to partner with you in grant writing, joint sponsorship of conferences, quality assurance, materials development, and more. Such opportunities involve creative new work and provide opportunities for funding and products. Working collaboratively on a new initiative levels the playing field.

Utilize family-led organizations to expand the engagement of families from diverse communities and to regularly recruit new families. Partnering with diverse families and youth who are the recipients of services is essential to truly meet needs and create change. F2Fs have successful strategies for reaching and supporting underserved families to take on roles in program and policy. Partnerships with F2Fs can help Title V programs reach diverse communities, continually renew their recruitment of new families to participate, and represent all populations served by their programs.

Solicit feedback from family partners for monitoring progress and rating performance on family engagement. Regularly review your family engagement strategies and invite partner family-led organizations to assess your progress using the same tools/questions used internally or by other groups. Compare findings to help inform next steps. Engage family led organizations in tracking progress on family-centered care around both CSHCN and other MCH programs.

Invite a partner family-led organization to participate in your Block Grant Review. States that have engaged a parent in the development of their state application and in the review process and meetings have indicated that this has been of great benefit and has provided important new perspectives. Engage family-led organizations to work with you on assessing your performance measures.

Recognize and celebrate your successes. Publicly recognize important contributions by both family leaders and professionals to this collaborative work and its impact.

Strategies for building partnerships:

Nurture personal relationships. Building relationships across different experiences, styles, expectations, and cultural and linguistic perspectives to reach common understandings and develop consensus can be challenging.

Recognize that the process of partnering takes time. Plan for adequate time and resources to build and sustain partnerships. Regularly assess progress from both the family and the program staff perspective.

Commit the resources needed. To ensure ongoing family partnerships, family leaders need sufficient resources up front and throughout the partnership to support authentic involvement. Programs need to support the needed staff commitment.

Seek commitment from all levels. A critical ingredient for success is having the people at the highest level of the program committed to partnering with family leaders and valuing the perspective that families bring to their decision-making process. Building support among staff throughout the agency, including those most likely to interact directly with families, is also important. Start where you find interest and work to build further support.

Be clear about expectations. Provide information, support, clear expectations and defined roles for families. Spend time discussing what is expected. Provide opportunity for feedback on these expectations and roles. Listen to family expectations. Help each party answer the question “What’s in it for me?” Both family leaders and agencies have to receive benefit from the partnership. Know how to answer that question from the perspective of your partners as well as your agency.

Acknowledge responsibilities. Sorting out roles and responsibilities means asking the difficult questions, “What have we agreed to?” “What do we disagree about?” Through ongoing honest communication, partners can find ways to approach problems, assess the realities of the relationship, and incorporate them into ongoing plans. Recognize that all partners have responsibility for both the process of partnering and for the end product itself. While each party bears responsibility, roles are different for the partners.

Include a thorough planning process to ensure success. Plan, plan, and then plan some more. Partnering with existing family leaders with whom you have productive relationships in the planning process can be very helpful. Brainstorm practical and philosophical issues that might arise for the program, for the agency, for the staff, and for the family leaders. Examine each one of the issues from a 360-degree perspective. You will avoid making mistakes and causing resentments if you take time to think things through.

Think proactively about the challenging issues. Partnership involves taking risks. In some cases, partners may not be natural allies and, in addition to bringing their strengths to the partnership table, each may bring preconceptions, protectiveness of “turf” and suspicions. The building blocks of trust are time, open communication, transparency, and cultural reciprocity. Transparency includes revealing limitations, competition from related objectives that may affect the partnership, expectations around benefits and results. Communication and negotiation skills, as well as attitudinal factors such as a willingness to explore new ideas, are important for all partners.

Create opportunities for everyone involved to express concerns and resistance. The more time and space people have to discuss their ideas and reactions (both positive and negative) the greater their “buy in” will be. Create a climate where it is safe to express doubts; respect the passion that families have for change. Encourage dialogue, be respectful of different opinions, and express optimism about the benefits of family partnerships. An effective collaboration rests on securing the commitment of stakeholders at all levels of the agency and community.

Anticipate and address barriers: Families may be wary of agencies; staff may be uncertain about partnerships with families without formal training; there may be worries about confidentiality, there may be a lack of resources to support partnerships. Plan to address these and other barriers that you encounter.