Engaging Parents in Early Childhood Collaborations

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INTRODUCTION

Handbook Overview

This resource is organized into three components and includes:

- Parent Engagement Framework
- Getting Started with Parent Engagement
- Implementing Parent Engagement Roles in the Community Systems and Policy Sphere

Rationale and Background

Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) created this handbook as part of its statewide training and technical assistance efforts known as the Community Systems Statewide Supports (CS3) project. The handbook serves as a parent engagement resource for early childhood collaborations, local bodies made up of early childhood stakeholders who work together to develop and implement collaborative strategies to improve early childhood services and systems. IAFC created this resource in response to early childhood collaborations continuously raising parent engagement as a growth area for which they needed additional support.

We reviewed existing research in the field and learned that current resources often focus on engaging parents at the program level or a very high level within the early childhood system. Almost no resources exist for engaging parents in early childhood collaborations. Additionally, the few resources that we found focused more on defining parent engagement and not on how to carry it out.

Although limited in number, the few parent engagement resources that we found are compiled and adapted into this parent engagement handbook. Even more integral to informing this handbook were the experiences and parent engagement models that are being implemented by Illinois early childhood collaborations. This handbook is informed by focus groups with parents currently and/or recently engaged in an early childhood collaboration as well as by interviews with collaboration staff about their parent engagement experiences.

Purpose of This Resource

This handbook is created to support Illinois' early childhood collaborations to begin and/or deepen their parent engagement practices, an integral component of community systems works.

Research and experience demonstrate that parent engagement in their children's education results in better academic, social, and health outcomes for children. Engaging parents in early childhood collaborations is no exception.

When parents are meaningfully engaged in collaborations, they:

- Gain knowledge of available early childhood programs and resources.
- Build skills, knowledge, and leadership (self-determination/ parent empowerment).
- Develop a support network.
- Strengthen relationships with community.
- Trust the early childhood system to be responsive to family and community needs.

Equally important, early childhood systems that engage, listen to, and act on parent input are better positioned to address early childhood system problems. Parent engagement in community systems and policy work leads to early childhood programs and systems that work for all children and families.

Intended Audience

This resource is aimed at early childhood "collaboration members" – members who are participating in their local collaboration as part of their professional/work-related role. While parents may be part of the collaboration membership, which is the process goal of parent engagement, the onus to engage parents lies with collaboration members. Therefore, this resource is aimed at helping collaborations deepen, expand, and/or begin parent engagement practices.

How to Use This Handbook

We understand that collaborations' work happens in an environment of competing and scarce resources, with varying community needs. We recommend that collaboration members implement the recommended parent engagement strategies at a scale and pace that works best for their respective collaboration and community.

Handbook Key

Throughout this handbook, you will see references to a tool that is available in the Appendix. There will also be community examples to illustrate how a specific practice and/or strategy has been implemented in a given community.

🔧 Tool available in Appendix

👥 Community examples

Parent Engagement Framework

The framework outlines parent engagement definitions, core beliefs, pillars, and roles within the context of early childhood collaborations and systems. It offers an understanding of what parent engagement is, what it looks like, and why it is important. The framework offers a baseline understanding of parent engagement that collaborations can use as a starting point when building their collective understanding and commitment to parent engagement.

THEORY OF CHANGE

The theory of change below illustrates how implementing intentional parent engagement leads to partnership between parents and early childhood collaboration members that ultimately results in a more equitable early childhood system. The theory of change brings together the ideas reflected in this handbook in a visual description.

CLARITY & COMMITMENT
Collaboration has a shared understanding, capacity, and commitment to parent engagement.

ELIMINATE OBSTACLES
Collaboration eliminates obstacles to parent participation and creates opportunities for engagement.

PARTNERSHIP
Collaboration members and parents build effective and equitable partnerships. They share responsibility, expertise, and/or leadership in the collaboration's work.

CHANGE
Collaboration is better positioned to identify, prioritize, and address early childhood system problems.

EQUITY
All children and their families in communities served by collaboration receive equitable, high-quality, accessible early childhood services.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT CORE BELIEFS

Beliefs shape the way one moves through the world; they are a compass. What one believes about parents in relation to the early childhood system will determine how one engages or does not engage them. The following is a list of parent engagement beliefs that undergird this handbook.

CORE BELIEFS

1. Parents have their children's best interests in mind. They have the right to participate in every decision that directly affects them, their families, and their communities.

2. Parents are essential and valued partners at every level of the early childhood system – in programs and community systems development work.

3. Parent engagement happens in the context of relationship building between everyone involved.

4. Parent leadership is an important aspect of parent engagement. Parents, children, families, programs, and systems benefit when parents grow as leaders.

5. There are significant institutional, systemic, and structural barriers to parent participation and partnership in early childhood systems. It is the collaboration's responsibility to eliminate barriers to parent participation and partnership at all levels of the early childhood system.

6. Parents are not all the same – they have different family backgrounds, histories, cultures, circumstances, and interests. We must recognize parents are not a monolithic group and be prepared to meet them where they are.

7. In order to achieve equitable outcomes for children and their families, it is necessary to engage parents who are representative of the communities that the collaboration serves, prioritizing the most underserved.

8. Everyone in the collaboration has a role and responsibility in championing parent engagement; parent engagement is everyone's work.

9. Sustainable parent engagement requires resources.

DEFINITIONS

The terms "parent" and "parent engagement" can mean different things depending on context and interpretation.

This handbook uses Head Start's definition of "parent" and defines "parent engagement" in the context of early childhood collaborations.

Parent – All adults who interact with early childhood systems in support of their child, including but not limited to biological, adoptive, and foster parents; grandparents, legal and informal guardians; uncles, aunts, and adult siblings.[1]

Parent Engagement – We define parent engagement in early childhood collaborations as both a process and an outcome.

- **As a process** – Parent engagement is a process by which parents inform and influence the collaboration's priorities, strategies, and decision-making. It requires an intentional effort by the collaboration to provide the opportunity and support that parents need to participate.

- **As an outcome** – Ideal parent engagement is successfully achieved when parents and collaboration members build effective partnerships and share responsibility, expertise, and/or leadership in the collaboration and its work.[2]

Collaborations meaningfully engage parents when they:

- Maintain a culture of diversity, inclusivity, and equity in all the collaboration's work and spaces.

- Eliminate obstacles for parent participation in the collaboration.

- Listen and respond to the aspirations and needs of parents, families, and their communities.

- Elevate and center parent voices in collaboration work, as parents and their families are most directly impacted by the collaboration's work.

- Include parents as owners, planners, and decision-makers in all parts of the collaboration's work.

- Provide parents the opportunities, preparation, and support they need to participate in the collaboration.

Parent Leadership – We define parent leadership as having the knowledge, skills, and confidence to shape the direction of one's family, program, community, and/or systems. It is a process in which many parents can engage, not a position that only a few parents can hold.[2]

Shared Leadership – Shared leadership is successfully achieved when parents, families, and collaboration members build effective partnerships and share responsibility, expertise, and leadership in decisions being made that affect families and communities.[3]

FOUR PILLARS OF INTENTIONAL PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATIONS

Engagement activities and roles vary by collaboration and parent needs. While the possibilities of engaging parents in early childhood collaborations can be endless, we offer a list of the typical parent engagement roles as a starting point. Our framework for HOW to engage parents in every and any engagement role includes four pillars of intentional parent engagement.

The four pillars outline the foundational components of intentional parent engagement in early childhood collaborations:

1) **Systemic Approach**

2) **Ongoing Capacity Building**

3) **Equity-Driven Practices**

4) **Shared Responsibility and Leadership**

Follow all four pillars for intentional and sustainable parent engagement that leads to a more equitable early childhood system.

FOUR PILLARS OF INTENTIONAL PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATIONS

Pillar 1: Systemic Approach	Pillar 2: Ongoing Capacity Building	Pillar 3: Equity-Driven Practices	Pillar 4: Shared Responsibility and Leadership

Pillar 1: Systemic Approach

What does it mean?
Collaboration members work together to engage parents. The collaboration has a shared understanding of and commitment to parent engagement. Members coordinate and reinforce each other's parent engagement efforts in order to maximize impact. They understand each other's roles and how they are connected to others in the system. Parent engagement is everyone's business.

Why is this important?
Working as a system increases a collaboration's effectiveness to:

- Support members to learn from each other's parent engagement strategies.
- Create buy-in among members.
- Coordinate and reinforce parent engagement efforts across the communities the collaboration serves.
- Maximize scarce resources.

Pillar 2: Ongoing Capacity Building

What does it mean?
Collaboration ensures parents can take on meaningful roles within the collaboration by providing intentional and ongoing opportunities for parents to gradually develop their parent leadership. The collaboration also supports its members to gain the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to engage parents at the collaboration level.

Why is this important?

- Parents are more likely to take and keep a role within the collaboration if they feel equipped to fulfill its responsibilities.
- Leadership development increases parents' knowledge, skills, and self-determination, which translates into improved outcomes for their families, programs, communities, and systems.
- Ongoing capacity building ensures that all parents, regardless of their previous education and training, have what they need to participate in the collaboration.
- Collaboration members need to know how to engage parents in order to support the collaboration's engagement efforts.

Pillar 3: Equity-Driven Practices

What does it mean?
Collaboration demonstrates progress addressing issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity. It eliminates barriers to full parent participation and partnership to engage parents who are representative of the diversity of the communities it serves.

Why is this important?
Equity-driven practices:

- Eliminate the significant institutional, systemic, and structural barriers that perpetuate inequities in early childhood systems.
- Create the conditions that support effective parent engagement and partnership with parents from diverse populations and experiences.

Pillar 4: Shared Responsibility and Leadership

What does it mean?
Parents and collaboration members share responsibility, skills, expertise, and leadership in the collaboration; they influence and/or shape its initiatives, events, and/or decisions.

Why is this important?

- Parents have the right to make decisions about issues that directly impact them, their families, and their communities.
- Parents know their children, families, and communities best and are often at the nexus of multiple systems. Their unique vantage point helps identify barriers to, and solutions for, obstacles families face when trying to access equitable and high-quality early childhood services.

FOUR PILLARS OF INTENTIONAL PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATIONS

Pillar 1: Systemic Approach	Pillar 2: Ongoing Capacity Building	Pillar 3: Equity-Driven Practices	Pillar 4: Shared Responsibility and Leadership
What can this look like?	**What does it look like?**	**What does it look like?**	**What does it look like?**

Pillar 1: What can this look like?

- Members are familiar with each other's parent engagement practices.

- Collaboration has a shared understanding of and commitment to parent engagement, which has been integrated into collaboration governance protocols, core principles, values, and public materials.

- Collaboration incorporates parent engagement into an action plan, designating parent engagement goals, desired outcomes, roles, and needed resources.

- Members pool and leverage existing resources to support parent engagement efforts.

- Collaboration maintains a variety of parent engagement roles and opportunities.

- Members regularly connect the parents they engage at the program level to the collaboration's engagement roles.

- Collaboration uses an action learning process to regularly reflect on and improve their parent engagement practices in real time.

Pillar 2: What does it look like?

- Collaboration intentionally implements and connects a range of parent engagement roles that gradually increase in responsibility and commitment; parents use these engagement experiences as a leadership pathway, an intentional sequence of opportunities for parents to learn, grow, and practice their leadership skills.

- Parents are trained on the skills and knowledge they need to fulfill their specific engagement role(s) and further develop their leadership.

- Parents receive regular coaching and guidance to help them apply what they learn from the trainings and grow as leaders.

- Parents mentor and engage other parents.

- Collaboration members go through a baseline parent leadership training and continue to regularly participate in parent engagement professional development experiences.

Pillar 3: What does it look like?

- Collaboration engages parents who are representative of the racial, linguistic, economic, and cultural diversity of the communities it serves, prioritizing the engagement of underserved populations.

- Collaboration eliminates barriers to participation and partnership by providing the following supports:
  - o Generally convenient meeting schedules and locations.
  - o Childcare.
  - o Transportation support.
  - o Refreshments/meals at meetings for parents and their families.
  - o Key materials available in formats and languages parents can understand in a timely fashion.
  - o Compensation for parent time and contribution.
  - o Technology support.

- Collaboration offers parents the opportunities to build relationships with other parents and collaboration members.

- Collaboration values and incorporates parents' cultures into their engagement efforts. The collaboration represents the cultures of the families in the community.

Pillar 4: What does it look like?

- Collaboration listens and is responsive to the aspirations and needs of parents, families, and their communities.

- Collaboration elevates and centers parent voices in their work, because they are most directly impacted by the work.

- Collaboration includes parents as owners, planners, and decision-makers in all parts of the collaboration's work – from brainstorming and choosing a focus to planning, implementation, and evaluation.

- Parents speak for themselves. The collaboration supports parent leaders to present and lead discussions at conferences, meetings, and workgroups.

- Parents have the flexibility and support to implement their own early childhood system priorities and projects.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT ROLES

What are parent engagement roles?

The parent engagement roles listed and described in this resource consist of general functions parents may hold in early childhood systems; by no means is this list exhaustive. The roles span three areas of parent influence within early childhood systems: Self and Family, Programs and Services, and Community Systems and Policy.[4]

Why use parent engagement roles?

Clear and defined parent engagement roles assist collaborations, and early childhood partners, to intentionally choose and plan their parent engagement efforts.

The Self & Family Parent Sphere of Influence

Most parents get involved in early childhood to advance their children's development and their own. They often begin their engagement with what interests them the most and with what they are most familiar. They typically become involved with the early childhood system in the "Self & Family" parent sphere of influence. This area can include but is not limited to the following types of engagement roles: Potential Early Childhood Client, Adult Learner, and First Teacher.[5]

The Programs & Services Parent Sphere of Influence

As parents' confidence and leadership increase, some will want to continue to deepen their engagement with the early childhood system by taking on additional roles. The next level of engagement that parents naturally may get involved with is the "Programs & Services" parent sphere of influence. This area can include but is not limited to the following types of engagement roles: Participant, Volunteer, and Partner.[6]

The Community Systems & Policy Parent Sphere of Influence

The Community Systems & Policy sphere is perhaps the most relevant to early childhood collaborations, since this is the sphere where collaborations tend to concentrate their work. The roles in this sphere include but are not limited to: Family & Community Expert, Outreach Ambassador, Collaboration Parent Leader, Advocate.[7]

Community Systems & Policy

Family & Community Expert · Outreach Ambassador · Collaboration Parent Leader · Advocate

Programs & Services

Participant · Volunteer · Partner

Self & Family

Potential Early Learning Client · Adult Learner · First Teacher

SELF & FAMILY SPHERE OF INFLUENCE [8]

Parent Engagement Role	Role Description	Engagement Examples	Parent & Children Outcomes
POTENTIAL EARLY CHILDHOOD CLIENT	• Learns about early childhood options.	• Receives information about early childhood services and program options either in person or via printed materials, website, or phone.	• Builds knowledge of available resources. • Makes informed care decisions. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.

ADULT LEARNER	• Takes formal adult education classes.
	• Participates in workshops or trainings.
		• Participates in GED (General Education Development), ESL (English as a Second Language), adult literacy, and financial literacy classes.	• Increases:
			  o Personal self-efficacy.
			  o Human and social capital.
			  o Access to better personal and professional opportunities.
			• Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.

FIRST TEACHER	• Acquires and shares knowledge, skills, and strategies to engage with children. • Takes formal adult education classes. • Participates in workshops or trainings.	• Attends workshops on child development, child needs, and/or parenting strategies. • Attends playgroups and other social family events.	• Understands children's needs and strengths. • Bonds through interactions. • Builds skills, knowledge, and self-determination. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES SPHERE OF INFLUENCE [8]

Parent Engagement Role	Role Description	Engagement Examples	Parent & Children Outcomes
PARTICIPANT	• Family receives early childhood services. • Participates in community-building events and workshops. • Provides feedback about services.	• Participates in Head Start or home-visiting program. • Participates in parent cafes, parent breakfasts, etc. • Completes program's surveys on needs or interests.	• Accesses supports for self and family. • Develops support network. • Builds skills, knowledge, and self-determination. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.
VOLUNTEER	• Offers to assist in early childhood programs. • Helps with events for children and families.	• Volunteers in the classroom. • Volunteers to organize a program's Día del Niño event.	• Develops skills and knowledge of programs. • Increases self-determination. • Builds community. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.
PARTNER	• Identifies needs, plans, and evaluates services. • Engages in program decision-making. • Mentors other parents.	• Serves on parent advisory committees (PAC) or program policy councils.	• Gains knowledge of programs and early childhood system. • Learns about the mechanics of program leadership meetings. • Builds skills, knowledge, and self-determination. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.

COMMUNITY SYSTEMS & POLICY SPHERE OF INFLUENCE [8]

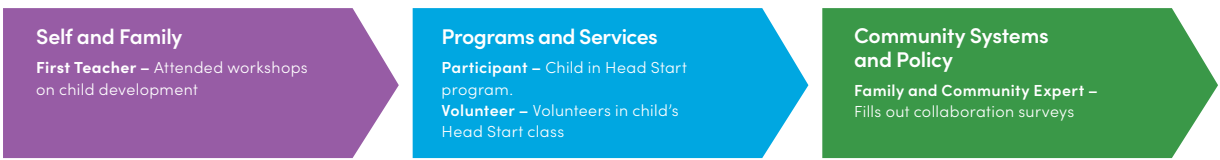| Parent Engagement Roles	Role Description	Engagement Examples	Parent & Children Outcomes	Intended Collaboration Objective(s)
FAMILY & COMMUNITY EXPERT	• Provides feedback that informs community systems change. • Influences the prioritizing of community systems change issues.	• Provides feedback through: o In-person surveys. o Online surveys. o Focus groups. o Small group meeting discussions.	• Becomes familiar with early childhood entity leading the outreach effort. • Reflects on family needs and strengths. • Increased trust in early childhood system. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.	• Obtains input from a targeted and/or broad section of parents with lived experience. • Aligns community systems change work and outcomes to community needs.
OUTREACH AMBASSADOR	• Carries out peer-to-peer outreach to: o Get community feedback. o Offer service referral. o Invite parents to engage. • Tallies and makes sense of outreach data. • Plans outreach strategy.	• Goes door-knocking to share information on the importance of early childhood education and get referrals for early childhood resources.	• Strengthens relationships with community. • Gains knowledge of available early childhood programs and resources. • Practices working as a team. • Builds skills, knowledge, and self-determination. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.	• Reaches community members – both to give them information and hear from them. • Connects with families who are not currently a part of the local early childhood system. • Increases program recruitment and registration. • Aligns community systems change work and outcomes to community needs.
COLLABORATION PARENT LEADER	• Participates in community systems change. • Engages in decision-making. • Listens to and represents community children and families. • Engages and mentors other parents. • Represents collaboration externally.	• Participates in early learning collaboration as a member. • Participates in collaboration's parent leadership team. • Develops and implements parent projects with parents for parents (e.g., parent cafes).	• Gains knowledge about early childhood system. • Learns how to carry out meetings and workshops. • Develops support network. • Practices working as a team. • Builds skills, knowledge, and self-determination. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.	• Increases parent participation and leadership in collaboration. • Collects real-time parent input on all collaboration efforts. • Aligns community systems change work and outcomes to community needs.
ADVOCATE	• Decides policy priorities. • Testifies to decision-makers. • Organizes other families to advocate.	• Participates in advocacy days with local, state, or federal elected officials. • Circulates a petition or leads phone-banking campaign.	• Builds relationships with decision-makers. • Gains knowledge of legislative and policy-making process. • Gains knowledge of parent and families' rights. • Builds skills, knowledge, and self-determination. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.	• Elevates parent voice and stories to policy and systems change work. • Aligns community systems change work and outcomes to community needs.

Why look at parent engagement roles across ALL three spheres of parent influence?

Identifying the level of parent engagement across the three spheres of influence allows a collaboration to:
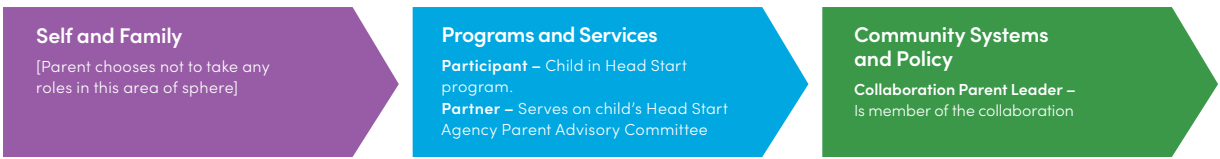
- Meet and recruit parents where they are and at their level of interest.

- Connect engagement opportunities to support leadership development.

When engaging parents, it's important to meet them where they are in terms of interest and comfort level. Knowing where and how community partners are currently engaging parents allows a collaboration to build off existing efforts and recruit parents who are already engaged. Already-involved parents may be more open to making the leap into the Community Systems & Policy sphere. These parents can, in turn, recruit other parents through word of mouth.

Parent Leadership Development

Knowing what roles are offered across a local early childhood system enables early childhood partners to work together to connect these engagement roles to one another. That way, parents who want to can progress from one role to another, and from one sphere to another, while building their leadership skills and confidence over time, until they feel ready to take on roles with the collaboration.

For instance, a parent might get involved with the early childhood system when they enroll in a home-visiting program for their child; at this point the parent is a "Participant" and a "First Teacher." Then their family might transition to a Head Start program and decide to get involved in the Parent Advisory Council, progressing to a "Partner" role. Recognizing the parent's interest in the Parent Advisory Council, a local collaboration organizes the parent to join their annual advocacy trip to the state capitol to testify before state legislators about how the Child Care Assistance Program benefited her family (Advocate Role).

It's important to note that parents may take on multiple roles at the same time and move in and out of roles and spheres at any point of their engagement. See examples below of role combinations parents might take on.

PARENT A'S ENGAGEMENT ROLES

Self and Family	Programs and Services	Community Systems and Policy
First Teacher – Attended workshops on child development	**Participant –** Child in Head Start program. **Volunteer –** Volunteers in child's Head Start class	**Family and Community Expert –** Fills out collaboration surveys

PARENT B'S ENGAGEMENT ROLES

Self and Family	Programs and Services	Community Systems and Policy
[Parent chooses not to take any roles in this area of sphere]	**Participant –** Child in Head Start program. **Partner –** Serves on child's Head Start Agency Parent Advisory Committee	**Collaboration Parent Leader –** Is member of the collaboration

Getting Started with Parent Engagement

This section covers the steps and strategies that early childhood collaborations can take when starting or strengthening their parent engagement practices. The steps are the most helpful if followed in the order they are written. However, since parent engagement is not a linear process, feel free to start your engagement journey wherever makes the most sense for your collaboration and community needs.

BEFORE ENGAGING PARENTS IN COLLABORATIONS

1. Review or Learn About Parent Engagement in Early Childhood Systems

All collaboration members, no matter their experience level, should know and be aware of each other's parent engagement efforts and have the same understanding of how to engage parents as a collaboration.

STRATEGIES & TOOLS

Learn About Parent Engagement from Collaboration Members' Individual Organizational Parent Engagement Practices.

You can help collaboration members become familiar with one another's parent engagement efforts by creating time and space at collaboration meetings for programs to present on how they engage parents and families. Alternatively, you can send out a survey to members about their parent engagement efforts and share the results with collaboration members.

Collaboration Members Participate in the Same Parent Engagement Learning Experience.

Encourage members to learn more about parent engagement to develop a shared understanding of how they can support parents programmatically and with the collaboration. Go through a training together, review a parent engagement framework, and then discuss as a group, or participate in any experience that will enhance their individual knowledge of parent engagement.

Four Pillars of Meaningful Parent Engagement in an Early Childhood Collaboration APPENDIX A

2. Arrive at a Shared Understanding of and Commitment to Parent Engagement

There is a broad consensus in early childhood systems building that parent engagement is "good." However, programs and collaborations often stop short of defining exactly WHAT parent engagement means to them and WHY they want to engage parents. Being clear on what parent engagement means to your collaboration increases the likelihood of full member buy-in to engaging parents, follow-through, and successful outcomes.

STRATEGIES & TOOLS

Set or Revisit Collaboration's Parent Engagement Beliefs.
A collaboration's belief statements about parent engagement are their views on parents and families in relation to the early childhood system. The process of developing belief statements creates member consensus and buy-in on parent engagement work. Additionally, the belief statements provide a guide for a collaboration's parent engagement work.

🔧 *Developing an Early Childhood Collaboration's Belief Statements on Parent Engagement* APPENDIX B

Set or Revisit Collaboration's Parent Engagement Definition.
A collaboration's parent engagement definition outlines what parent engagement means to your collaboration as a whole. The process of collectively defining the term creates member consensus and buy-in on the collaboration's parent engagement work.

🔧 *Setting an Early Childhood Collaboration's Parent Engagement Definition* APPENDIX C

Develop Parent Inclusion Policies for the Collaboration.
A collaboration's parent inclusion policies are a list of practices it commits to implement to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for parents.

🔧 *Developing Parent Inclusion Policies for the Collaboration* APPENDIX D

3. Integrate Shared Parent Engagement Understanding and Commitment into Governance Protocols and Public Materials

One way to ensure that a collaboration has a strong understanding and commitment to parent engagement is to integrate definitions, frameworks, and parent inclusion policies into its governance protocols and written collaboration materials. Review protocols and materials every two years or when making changes to parent engagement definitions and beliefs.

STRATEGIES & TOOLS

Update Governance Protocols to Reflect the Collaboration's Understanding of and Commitment to Parent Engagement such as:
- Mission
- Vision

Update Written and Public Materials to Reflect the Collaboration's Understanding of and Commitment to Parent Engagement such as:
- Pamphlets
- Websites
- Social media accounts

4. Create a Collaboration's Parent Engagement Action Plan

Once a collaboration is clear on what parent engagement means to them, and on why and how they want to engage parents, they are ready to plan their engagement efforts. Planning engagement implementation ahead of engagement helps a collaboration ensure that their engagement aligns with their intended outcome(s) and available resources.

STRATEGIES & TOOLS

Understand and Consider Resources Needed to Carry Out Parent Engagement.
Often a collaboration's intentions do not match the amount of resources they are able or willing to put toward their parent engagement practices, and their efforts fall short. To set your collaboration up for success, make sure all members are clear about the work and resources necessary to carry out their intended parent engagement practices. These goals should reflect what the collaboration can accomplish with the existing resources available.

🔧 *Important Resources for Effective Parent Engagement* APPENDIX E

Identify Strengths and Gaps in Existing Collective Local Parent Engagement Efforts.
To build or strengthen your collaboration's parent engagement practices, you can start by finding out what parent engagement activities local early childhood stakeholders are carrying out, and to what extent they are connecting these efforts to one another. Identify potential gaps the collaboration can fill with their engagement and/or existing efforts they can help connect to one another.

🔧 *Choosing Parent Engagement Roles to Implement in an Early Childhood Collaboration* APPENDIX F

Decide What Parent Engagement Roles the Collaboration Will Implement.
Consider your existing resources, capacity, and desired engagement outcomes to decide which parent engagement roles the collaboration will implement and plan for each role individually.

🔧 *Choosing Parent Engagement Roles to Implement in an Early Childhood Collaboration* APPENDIX F

🔧 *Collaboration Parent Engagement Planning Form Tool* APPENDIX G

Create a Collaboration's Parent Engagement Action Plan or Integrate the Parent Engagement Goals into the Collaboration's Existing Action Plan.
An effective parent engagement implementation plan:

- Outlines parent engagement goals.
- Ensures goals align with expected outcomes.
- Clarifies what resources are required to reach the goal.
- Formulates a timeline for when specific tasks need to be completed
- Delegates engagement responsibilities.
- Breaks engagement goals down into more manageable pieces.

🔧 *Action Plan Template Tool* APPENDIX H

5. Gauge Collaboration's Readiness to Begin Engaging Parents

Confirm the collaboration's readiness to begin engaging parents before jumping into action! Some aspects of collaboration work are trial and error; however, there are steps a collaboration can take before engaging parents to set your engagement efforts up for success.

Check to see if the collaboration:

- Is committed to engaging parents.
- Has a shared understanding of what parent engagement means.
- Is clear about why they are engaging parents.
- Has a plan for how they will engage parents that aligns with their "why."

STRATEGIES & TOOLS

Gauge Collaboration's Readiness to Begin Engaging Parents.
Use the Collaboration Parent Engagement Readiness Questionnaire Tool to gauge your readiness.

🔧 *Collaboration Parent Engagement Readiness Questionnaire* APPENDIX I

ENGAGING PARENTS

1. Recruit Parents for the Long Haul

Getting parents through the door is only half of the recruitment effort. Helping them stay in an engagement role that they want to be in is the other half.

When recruiting parents, the following practices may increase the likelihood of parents finding a good match for their engagement interest, and sticking to it:

- Be as clear as possible about the expectations and what the role consists of.
- Meet parents where they are (use the engagement role as a guide).
- Build relationships with parents whom you want to recruit.

STRATEGIES & TOOLS

Leverage Existing Relationships to Recruit Parents from Existing Engagement Efforts.
Parents usually become engaged by someone with whom they have a relationship and trust. Leverage existing relationships by having staff who engage parents in other roles, and in other spheres, personally encourage parents to participate in the collaboration's engagement roles.

Staff can do a warm handoff by inviting collaboration representatives to attend their parent meetings to recruit parents to get involved in the collaboration. By encouraging parents to get involved with a collaboration, staff are also supporting parents to take on new engagement roles and impact different spheres of the early childhood system. It is especially effective if a parent who is currently involved with the collaboration speaks to other parents about why they are involved. For instance, collaboration members attend a Head Start Parent Advisory Council to invite parents to participate in their Parent Outreach Ambassador efforts.

Be Clear About Engagement Role, Responsibilities, and Timeline.
- Share as much information as possible with parents during recruitment. Parents should be able to make an informed decision about what they are committing to, so that they and the collaboration do not waste each other's time.
- If ideas or activities are still in formation, be honest about what has not been figured out and include parents in the planning process.

Build Parent Lists and Relationships.

- Relationships are such an integral part of collaboration work; engaging parents is no exception. Collect names and contact information of all parents interested in taking on the engagement role that you are recruiting for and understand their preferred communication method (phone, email, text, etc.)

- Follow up with a phone call and/or a one-on-one coffee meeting to get to know each other and answer any questions they may have about the engagement role. This relationship building is especially helpful in engagement roles that require relatively more time and commitment, such as Outreach Ambassador or Collaboration Parent Leader.

2. Engage Parents

After all this preparation and planning, it is time to engage parents! The steps, strategy options, and tools previously outlined in this toolkit should guide the work. (See Implementing Parent Engagement Roles in the Community Systems and Policy Sphere for detailed recommended implementation steps for each role, pg. 17.)

After following this toolkit's guidance, a collaboration should have the following:

- Knowledge about parent engagement in early childhood systems.

- A shared understanding of and commitment to parent engagement integrated into collaboration governance protocols and public materials.

- A decision on how the collaboration will engage parents.

- A plan for how collaboration will engage parents.

- Ideas for parent recruitment.

Put Your Plans into Action and Engage!

As you are putting your knowledge and plans to use, keep the following in mind:

- Plans are fantastic guides, but flexibility is the key when working with parents. There are many ways to reach the same goal. Listen to parents; they will have ideas about how to improve the engagement efforts and the collaboration's work in general.

- Parent engagement efforts take time. It may take months or years to see the desired outcomes, and that's okay. It is worth the investment. Keep up the good work!

3. Review, Improve, Repeat – Using an Action Learning Process

Once you begin to implement the parent engagement roles, it's important to regularly check your engagement efforts for what is going well and what can be improved to make changes along the way.

Action learning is an ongoing cycle of collecting data and using it to make decisions to gradually improve processes.[9] It is used to capture lessons learned and transform them into a more effective way of doing things.

STRATEGIES & TOOLS

Regularly Collect Data to Evaluate Effectiveness of Parent Engagement Efforts

Ask engaged parents for feedback about their engagement process and document their feedback using evaluations and/or group debrief meetings to collect data for your action learning process.

Use a Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) Cycle as Method for Action Learning.

Use an action learning process such as a PDSA cycle to reflect on big events or ongoing regular events. Include the people who are responsible for the parent engagement effort that you are reflecting on.

PDSA Cycle Guide APPENDIX J

COMMUNITY EXAMPLE

Continuously Improving Parent Engagement

A collaboration organizes a parent cafe at 11:30 am, but not many parents come. After speaking to the parents who attended and reading their evaluations of the cafe, the collaboration realizes that 11:30 am is not a good time for parents because that's the same time their ESL (English as a Second Language) classes start. The parents who came were the few not taking ESL classes. After going through an action learning process, the collaboration works with parents to decide the best time for the parent cafes. Together, they change their next parent cafe to 9:00 am, in the same building as the ESL classes, so that parents can attend both.

Implementing Parent Engagement Roles in the Community Systems and Policy Sphere

This section will cover the four engagement roles of the Community Systems and Policy sphere that parents can take on to influence community systems and public policy in early childhood:

- Family and Community Expert
- Outreach Ambassador
- Collaboration Parent Leader
- Advocate

Community Systems & Policy

Family & Community Expert

Outreach Ambassador

Collaboration Parent Leader

Advocate

Programs & Services

Participant

Volunteer

Partner

Self & Family

Potential Early Learning Client

Adult Learner

First Teacher
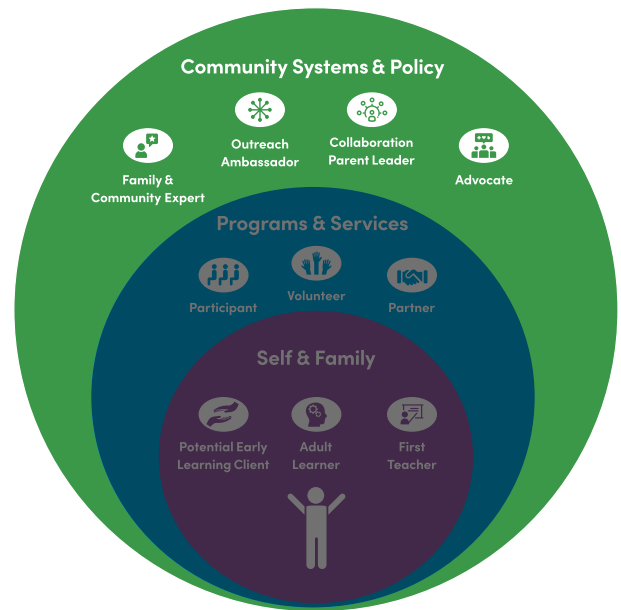
This handbook does not cover tools and strategies for the other two spheres – Programs & Services and Self & Family – because there are plenty of effective resources on this topic. (If you are interested in a toolkit for parent engagement at the program level, we recommend [The Seven Standards of Quality for Family and Community Engagement: A Toolkit.](#))

We consider the three spheres as interconnected. We encourage programs to continue to work toward a strong parent engagement practice, since meaningful engagement at the program level builds a strong foundation for engagement at the collaboration level.

When engaging parents in any role, it is important collaborations remember and follow the Four Pillars of Effective Parent Engagement in Early Childhood Collaborations:

- **Systemic Approach** – Work together as a collaboration to support the effort.

- **Capacity Building** – Make sure that everyone who will be supporting the work has everything they need to fulfill the responsibility associated with their role.

- **Equity-Driven Practices** – Take intentional actions to increase equity in engagement as well as in the early childhood system as a whole.

- **Shared Partnership and Leadership** – Ensure parents have a voice at every step of the engagement endeavor (i.e., brainstorming, shaping, implementing, evaluating, and improving engagement efforts).

These four pillars will help your collaboration work together to equitably recruit and support parents as partners at the community systems and policy level, to create an early learning system that works with and for all families.

Parent Engagement Planning Form Tool APPENDIX G

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY EXPERT

Role Explanation

To engage a parent in the role of Family and Community Expert is to listen to parents about their individual, family, and community's strengths, needs, and experiences with the early childhood system. In this role, parents convey their expertise and feedback through a variety of mediums such as surveys, focus groups, small in-person meetings, etc. Collaborations often develop a "listening campaign" to engage parents as a "Family and Community Expert" as a community-wide strategy to hear from parents directly.

Why?

Parents are in a unique position to inform and influence community systems development. Parents know their children and the people, culture, and norms of their communities.

Part of parents' valuable lived experience often includes being at the intersection of multiple systems. They also have the right to participate in all decision-making processes that impact them, their families, and their communities.

Engaging parents as Family and Community Experts helps collaborations:

- Better align community needs and services.

- Identify and prioritize system change leverage points that will make the biggest impact for families.

- Include a wide range of parent experiences and perspectives in the collaboration's community systems change process.

- Engage parents in a role that is respectful of their time and commitment.

Engaging parents in the role of Family and Community Expert can offer insight on one or more of the following:

- Strengths of the local community.

- Gaps or problems of the local community systems.

- Community needs and interests.

- Solutions to community systems issues, including policy ideas or recommendations.

STRATEGIES & TOOLS

a) Identify what you want to learn, why, and from whom

To get the most out of this engagement effort, make sure the collaboration is clear on what they want to find out, why, and from whom each time they engage parents as a Family and Community Expert. For instance, if the collaboration wants to know obstacles to preschool enrollment and registration, they might want to hear from parents with preschool-aged children who are not enrolled in preschool. Parents can advise the collaboration on how, when, and where to find the parents they are looking to learn from. Knowing what you want to learn from this engagement effort will increase the probability that you get the data you need to gain clarity on your question(s).

Start by identifying what you are looking for. List specific statements about what you want to gain clarity on. For example: Collaboration wants to learn about gaps or problems of the local community systems.

More specifically, they want to learn more about:

- Why parents whose 3- and 4-year-olds are not enrolled in preschool chose to not enroll them.

- Families' preschool enrollment experience.

- Obstacles to children participating in preschool.

- What can be done to eliminate obstacles to preschool participation for families.

b) Determine how you will engage parents as Family and Community Experts

Some options include:

- *Surveys* – potential to reach a large number of parents, especially parents not currently involved in early childhood systems.

- *Focus groups* – targeted outreach that allows for digging deeper into issues.

- *Small in-person meetings* – reaches a good number of parents, serves to ascertain general thoughts and experiences, but might be challenging to tease out individual experiences.

- *One-on-one meetings* – allows for flexibility, takes longer to carry out.

- *Parent cafes* – might feel like a more natural format for parents, serves to ascertain general thoughts and experiences, but might be challenging to tease out individual experiences.

c) Draft parent-friendly questions

- Keep it simple and easy to understand – avoid jargon or acronyms.

- Have a mix of multiple-choice, check-box, and open-ended questions.

- If possible, run the list of questions by parents to ensure they are clear and easy to understand.

- Translate the survey into the languages spoken by parents you want to get feedback from.

Listening Campaigns Sample Open-Ended Questions for Parents APPENDIX K

d) Eliminate obstacles to parent participation

Eliminate obstacles to participation for parents by providing the following supports:

- Convenient meeting schedules and locations.

- Childcare.

- Transportation support.

- Refreshments/meals at meetings for parents and their families.

- Creating an inclusive and parent-friendly meeting/event.

- Key materials available in formats and languages parents can understand in a timely way.

- Parent stipends for their time and contribution (if applicable).

- Opportunities to build relationships with other parents.

- Training, coaching, and guidance (as needed).

- Technology support.

Reference "Resources Needed to Carry Out Effective Parent Engagement" for more details about supports.

Resources Needed to Carry Out Effective Parent Engagement APPENDIX E

e) Use soft touches and/or existing meetings to find parents

To avoid making more work for everyone, use soft touches – that is, meetings or spaces where program staff are already interacting with parents (e.g., during program intake or existing meetings).

f) Include parents in understanding the data and making sense of it

The group of people who are carrying out this parent engagement effort should meet on a biweekly or monthly basis to debrief their experiences, look for patterns in data, and troubleshoot any implementation issues. Make sense of the data from surveys and conversations by coding it, that is, assigning a code to the data for identification or classification purposes.[10]

Coding Your Qualitative Data APPENDIX L

Contextualize the information gathered by asking parents and stakeholders for their opinion on what is reflected in the data and why. A great way to work with the community to contextualize the information collected is to carry out a data walk.

Data Walk Protocol APPENDIX M

g) Let parents know their feedback is making a difference

Survey fatigue is real. Parents are constantly asked for feedback, and they often do not know what came from their time and expertise. Parents may be more inclined to continue to share their personal information if they know that their participation is making a difference, especially if you plan to ask regularly.

Let parents know their input is making a difference by:

- Inviting parents to a collaboration event or meeting to share the system scan findings and invite the parents to join the collaboration's work.

- Giving a presentation at the setting where you asked them the system scan questions.

- Sharing a one-page data summary with them.

OUTREACH AMBASSADOR

Role Explanation

Parents are great Outreach Ambassadors and can be paid to carry out peer-to-peer outreach, where they go out into their community to talk and listen to their peers. In this capacity, parents are considered Outreach Ambassadors. (Refer to Appendix E, "Resources Needed to Carry Out Effective Parent Engagement," to learn more about guidelines for parent stipends.)

In this role, parents typically do one or more of the following:

- Share important early childhood information with other parents and families.

- Get feedback from parents in the form of a short survey, conversation, or questionnaire.

- Offer referrals to early childhood services.

- Invite parents to engage with a specific parent engagement effort (e.g., invite parents to an early intervention screening event).

Why?

Parents are more likely to listen to their peers; this is especially the case for parents who distrust institutions or government programs. Parents can relate to parent Outreach Ambassadors who share their own experiences with early childhood programs. Also, Parent Ambassadors also know where to find other parents.

a) Have a clear objective for outreach

The collaboration should be clear about the purpose and intended outcome(s) of the outreach before you begin your outreach. This clarity will help you align your materials, messaging, and plan with your larger goals and purpose.

b) Eliminate obstacles to parent participation as an Outreach Ambassador

Eliminate obstacles to participation for parents by providing the following supports:

- Convenient meeting schedules and locations when conducting outreach or planning for the community outreach.

- Create inclusive and parent-friendly meetings and outreach events.

- Key materials available in formats and languages parents can understand in a timely way.

- Parent stipends should be offered compensation for their time and contribution, including costs associated with childcare and/or transportation.

- Training, coaching, and guidance (as needed) on the outreach plan, messaging, and how to talk to other parents.

Reference "Resources Needed to Carry Out Effective Parent Engagement" for more details about supports.

Resources Needed to Carry Out Effective Parent Engagement
APPENDIX E

c) Provide outreach materials and training

After the collaboration defines the outreach objective(s), they can develop materials and training to support the outreach effort.

Outreach materials may include:

- *Tally to track the outreach effort and contact information sheets for follow-up*s – Forms that parents will use to capture data from their outreach as they are out in the field.

- *Surveys* – If you are carrying out a survey, you will want to print these surveys out for parents to fill out. If you are using a tablet or technology for the on-the-spot and electronic completion, make sure parents are trained on the technology.

- *Materials with list of resources* – Have a summary of all the early childhood programs in the area and their phone numbers that can be left behind for parents. This information on additional resources available to families, such as food pantries or housing services, helps develop a referral process.

- *Flyers* – If you are inviting parents to participate in a specific meeting, event, or training, make sure you leave them a flyer with all the invitation details.

🔧 *Outreach Ambassador Conversation Guide* APPENDIX N

🔧 *Tally and Referral Sheet Tool* APPENDIX O

Train parents on your outreach efforts. Topics covered may include:

- An explanation of the project, including objective, and role responsibilities and expectations. Have parents sign a commitment form, indicating that they understand and commit to carrying out the responsibilities of the outreach role.

- Review outreach materials, including an outreach and referral tally sheet.

- A demonstration on how to have an outreach conversation with their peers and how to fill out the referral and tally sheets.

- A review of any other tools parents will use, e.g., timesheets or other forms for parents to keep track of their outreach hours.

- A discussion on how to stay safe while out in the field.

c) Develop safety guidelines for Outreach Ambassadors
Keep Outreach Ambassadors safe by setting and discussing safety guidelines, which may include:

- *Use the buddy system* – Parents should always pair up to do outreach; one person talks, and the other person documents the conversation or records the outreach. Encourage parents to go out as a team and cover the same area, while keeping an eye on each other.

- *Have a bathroom plan* – Parents can use restrooms at a public location.

- *Instruct parents not to go inside people's homes* – Instruct Outreach Ambassadors not to enter anyone's homes, even if invited. Practice how to decline an invitation.

- *Emergency plan* – Make it clear that everyone's safety comes first. Work with Outreach Ambassadors to create an emergency plan that includes what to do in case of an emergency. Ambassadors should exchange phone numbers, and the main organizer should have everyone's phone numbers.

- *Extreme weather plan* – Plan for bad weather, including rain, snow, or extreme temperatures. For instance, set up at indoor locations such as laundromats on extreme weather days.

- *Have Identification* – For the credibility and safety of the Outreach Ambassadors, they should have an ID badge that clearly states who they are affiliated with. The badge can be simple and printed in the office in a plastic badge holder. Matching T-shirts also help parent teams identify each other and legitimizes them to their neighbors. If the collaboration does not have any T-shirts, parents can coordinate to wear the same color.

d) Hold regular check-in and check-out meetings with Outreach Ambassadors
For outreach events, establish a check-in and check-out time with your Outreach Ambassadors. It helps with establishing expectations and ensuring safety. At the check-out, you can collect outreach sheets or quickly discuss reflections of the day. Consider holding regular check-in meetings that parents can attend to share, celebrate, and hand in and/or pick up new tally and referral sheets, troubleshoot issues, debrief how their outreach is going, and plan their next outreach routes. Outreach is not easy work; take every opportunity at this meeting to celebrate the Outreach Ambassadors' hard work and reassure parents when they hit obstacles.

e) Offer incentives and/or giveaways
Parents are more receptive to a conversation when offered an incentive and/or giveaway. Some giveaways can include books or toys. Ask local businesses for books or giveaway donations.

f) Set outreach efforts to span intervals of 2-4 hours
Anything less than 2 hours is often not worth the time parents spend getting to and from the outreach location. Anything more than 4 hours is a lot to ask from parents. Plan for parents to take a 15-minute break for every 2-hour outreach interval.

g) Provide a variety of outreach opportunities
Offer Outreach Ambassadors a variation of outreach events such as attending a local community event, door-knocking, or tabling at a fair. A variety of events can maintain their interest. Door-knocking, the process of going door by door to talk to

community residents, can be slow and hard. Even if you manage their expectations by letting them know that out of every 10 doors they will find one to two people at home, or hold door-knocking on weekends and evenings to increase the likelihood of reaching families, it can be hard for Outreach Ambassadors. While door-knocking helps find families who might be socially isolated, if Outreach Ambassadors are doing the same type of engagement, they may not be energized or excited.

To ensure you are reaching a critical mass of parents and to boost Outreach Ambassador morale, balance your outreach between door-knocking and attending community events or locations where families congregate organically, such as parks or laundromats.

h) Have a follow-up plan

When running an Outreach Ambassador program that has a referral component, have a clear follow-up plan to respond to parents' interest in more services or resources. Have a follow-up strategy such as dedicating at least one person to call families and help them find an early childhood program within 24-48 hours of the initial contact. Outreach Ambassadors put their relationships and community trust on the line when they tell families that someone will follow up with them. If no one calls the families, they will see it as a breach of trust with the Outreach Ambassadors.

COLLABORATION PARENT LEADER

Role Explanation

In the role of Collaboration Parent Leader, parents take part in community systems development efforts by actively participating in an early learning collaboration. In this role, parents listen to and represent their community's children and families. They share leadership and decision-making with other collaboration members. They engage and educate other parents in addition to developing and leading their own projects.

Why?

Overall, parents offer valuable, unique, and diverse perspectives, ideas, and solutions. They are also formidable partners and leaders and can contribute to the collaboration's ability to advance systems change by leading and managing aspects of the collaboration's work.

Collaborations benefit greatly from engaging parents as collaboration leaders. Parents have shared that as collaboration leaders, they were able to leverage this role to connect their children, extended families, and neighbors to early childhood programs – further advancing the collaboration's purpose and mission.

Parents also shared that their involvement with the collaboration helped them take a more proactive role in their children's education and obtain new jobs and/or other community leadership opportunities, such as joining the Bilingual Advisory Council and a school district Parent Advisory Council.

STRATEGIES & TOOLS

a) Build a team comprising parents for the collaboration
While some parents will be ready to join the collaboration as members right away, many may feel intimidated and unprepared to attend a meeting. Too often, we see parents attend meetings and not return. A collaboration meeting can be daunting for parents.

One way to help parents ease into the collaboration is to offer them the option of joining a collaboration parent team. A collaboration parent team is a group of parents who meet regularly with the guidance and support of one to two people from the collaboration's parent engagement work. The collaboration parent leadership team can take the shape of a formal body, such as a parent advisory board. However, a less formal entity, such as a parent team, may

seem less intimidating for parents to join. We are using the language "collaboration parent team" in this resource, but collaborations can call this group of parents by a different name, or even better, parent leaders can name the team.

A parent team serves as a leadership incubator, a safe space for parents to gain skills, knowledge, and confidence to participate as members of a collaboration. Once they feel ready to attend a collaboration meeting, they can join with their team to represent more than themselves.

Use the parent team space to help parents:

- Build a network of trust and support, with both peers and with collaboration parent engagement lead(s).

- Collectively identify and prioritize early childhood issues to share with the collaboration.

- Review and provide feedback to the collaboration.

- Develop their leadership through capacity-building trainings and opportunities (including taking on other leadership roles within the early childhood system such as Family and Community Expert, Outreach Ambassador, and/or Advocate).

- Practice applying what they learn by setting and working together to accomplish their own early childhood team goals and projects (e.g., facilitate parent cafes or organize a coat drive for early childhood families).

Make sure and give parents the option to join the parent team and share your reasoning behind having a parent team.

b) Eliminate obstacles to parent participation

Eliminate obstacles to participation for parents by providing the following supports:

- Convenient meeting schedules and locations.

- Childcare.

- Transportation support.

- Refreshments/meals at meetings for parents and their families.

- Parent-friendly and inclusive meetings/events.

- Key materials available in formats and languages parents can understand in a timely way.

- Parent stipends for their time and contribution (if applicable).

- Opportunities to build relationships with other parents.

- Training, coaching, and guidance (as needed).

Reference "Resources Needed to Carry Out Effective Parent Engagement" for more details about supports.

Resources Needed to Carry Out Effective Parent Engagement
APPENDIX E

Make sure your collaboration is family-friendly and parent-friendly by eliminating barriers to parent participation and partnership. Apply your collaboration's Parent Beliefs and Parent and Family Inclusion Policies.

Setting Your Collaboration's Parent Inclusion Policies Tool
APPENDIX D

Setting Your Collaboration's Parent Engagement Beliefs Tool
APPENDIX B

COMMUNITY EXAMPLE

Parent Insight on Collaboration Meetings

I have gone to [collaboration] meetings, but everyone was there representing something, an agency or a group. They have an agenda. It would be different if I was there representing a group of parents with other parents. I just listen and learn because I don't feel my words have any weight, I was alone. I just took the information back. We go and learn from presentations; I don't feel like I'm bringing anything to that space.

c) Provide training, coaching, and guidance for Collaboration Parent Leaders

When engaging underserved and underresourced communities, keep in mind that not everyone has had the same access to educational and professional opportunities. Not everyone will have the same amount of human capital – "the abilities and skills of any individual, especially those acquired through investment in education and training..."[11] Offer continuous training, coaching, and guidance to Collaboration Parent Leaders to make sure they are knowledgeable and confident about the information they are learning through their collaboration work.

Invite parents to a series of leadership development workshops to bring parents onto the parent team. Trainings offer a structured and familiar format of engagement for most parents, building parent leadership and creating a network of peer support in the process. Plan to offer leadership development trainings every one to two years to develop skills and knowledge and to identify new Collaboration Parent Leaders. At the end of the training series, invite participants to join the parent team.

Coaching and guidance can include:

- Supporting parents to apply what they have learned – Offer tools, materials, and moral support to assist parents in applying new concepts. As with most of us, practice and guidance are needed to lock down new concepts and practices.

- Helping parents manage their time – Parents have their hands full with family responsibilities and may not be used to having a calendar. Support parents in building up those skills, but in the meantime, a reminder text or phone call about upcoming meetings will go a long way.

- Making sure parents have what they need to participate in their role as leaders – Help parents prepare for upcoming tasks. For example, if parents are getting ready to host an event, parent engagement support staff might work with parents to create a to-do list and check in to see how they are doing and if they need any help. Try to anticipate parent needs – especially for parents who are new to their role – and offer supports.

- Creating opportunities for parents to learn and grow – Create and support parents in taking on new learning opportunities. For example, have parents take turns facilitating their parent leadership meeting (help them

prepare ahead of time and support them during the meeting). Support parent leaders to present and lead discussions at conferences, meetings, and workgroups, discussing policy and systems change. To make sure parents get the most from learning opportunities, debrief honestly with them about what they did well and what could improve. Offer tips to help improve growth areas.

d) Have parent leadership team representation, decision-making power, and influence at the collaboration

- *Intentional Parent Representation* – The whole team can join the meeting, but it is a good practice to have the parent leadership team elect two parents to represent them on the collaboration.

- *Decision-Making Power* – Parents should have a vote in the decision-making power process, which should be clear and transparent. The amount of influence, or to what extent the collaboration takes parent feedback and incorporates it into their work, will depend on how much the collaboration values their input.

- *Uplift Parent Voice* – Consider having a designated spot on the collaboration agenda for the parent team representatives. This agenda item holds space and time for them to update the collaboration on what the team is working on and speak about any issues that are coming up for parents.

- *Feedback Loop* – Make sure that whatever is being discussed and decided upon in the full collaboration team is conveyed back to the full parent team at their next meeting.

ADVOCATE

Role Explanation

In general, "[a]dvocates are people that care passionately about an issue and take action to create meaningful change.[12] Similarly, community organizing is "a method of engaging and empowering people with the purpose of increasing the influence of groups historically underrepresented in policies and decision making that affect their lives."[13]

Specifically, "advocate" as a parent engagement role refers to parents participating in advocacy and community organizing efforts on issues that will improve the early childhood system. They participate in setting policy priorities, share testimonies with policymakers, and mobilize other families. For example, parents can participate in advocacy days with local, state, or federal officials, where they visit elected officials to speak in favor of or against specific issues or legislative bills. Parents can circulate a petition or lead a phone-banking campaign.

Why?

Parents, as the most impacted by early childhood services or lack thereof, are in the best position to advocate for systemic change to decision-makers. Supporting parents to be an Advocate also helps them directly understand how policies impact the services that are available to them. It gives them an opportunity to have a voice in policy and social change and deepen an understanding of civic engagement.

As Advocates, parents remind decision-makers that their decisions impact real people. Parents are a powerful messenger on how policies are impacting their families and community.

STRATEGIES & TOOLS

a) Partner with organizations, agencies, and coalitions that specialize in advocacy

Partner with local organizations and agencies that specialize in advocacy and community organizing to move your collaboration's goals forward by supporting parents and families to:

- Work with local organizations that focus on policy and advocacy work (e.g., Illinois Action for Children or Start Early).

- Attend an annual legislative advocacy day in Springfield or in your local community.

- Partner with community-based organizations on their early childhood campaigns.

- Give testimonies – share their stories of how specific issues impact them, their families, and communities.

b) Eliminate obstacles to parent participation

Eliminate obstacles to participation for parents and families by providing the following supports:

- Convenient meeting schedules and locations.

- Childcare.

- Transportation support.

- Refreshments/meals at meetings for parents and their families.

- Parent-friendly and inclusive meetings/events.

- Key materials available in formats and languages parents can understand in a timely way.

- Parent stipends for their time and contribution (if applicable).

- Opportunities to build relationships with other parents.

- Training, coaching, and guidance (as needed).

Reference "Resources Needed to Carry Out Effective Parent Engagement" for more details about supports.

Resources Needed to Carry Out Effective Parent Engagement
APPENDIX E

c) Offer training and supports

Partner with advocacy organizations to offer trainings on advocacy and how to be an advocate. Advise advocacy organizations to develop content for the training that prepares parents to take on the role of Advocate.

The training should include general information on the legislative process, community systems change, the roles and responsibilities of elected officials, and how to meet and build relationships with decision-makers.

Advice for creating a parent-friendly advocacy training:

- Keep the training content high level and general – Provide a general overview of why advocacy matters and an understanding of policy. Refrain from getting too detailed about the legislative process because it might be overwhelming.

- Go over how this advocacy connects to the issues they care about – Draw on policy examples that connect and resonate with families and explain how a policy change would benefit families.

- Include some hands-on training and practice – Create an interactive training for parents. Parents can practice talking to decision-makers and telling their stories.

When parents participate in advocacy efforts, partner them with other experts in the field who can answer any specific questions regarding the issue parents are advocating for or against. If experts cannot accompany parents, let parents know that it is okay not to know an answer to a question. Encourage them to write down the question(s) and the best way to reach the decision-maker so that someone can follow up with them.

Conclusion

*Visit our website, **PartnerPlanAct.org**, for additional parent engagement resources, including an on-demand online learning course based on this handbook.*

Parent engagement is a necessary part of collaboration work. Like anything worth doing, it takes intentionality and effort. This resource offers a lens through which to better understand the what, how, and why of intentional parent engagement in early childhood collaborations. The handbook aims to equip collaborations with the knowledge, tools, and skills needed to engage parents in the way that best fits their collaboration and the communities they serve. We hope it offers a full picture of what parent engagement can be at the collaboration level and allows you to take the first step in engaging families.

A PARENT ENGAGEMENT HANDBOOK:
ENGAGING PARENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATIONS

Appendices

Partner Plan ★ Act
illinois action for children

Use this tool to:

Get familiar with the four pillars for intentional and sustainable parent engagement that leads to a more equitable early childhood system.

FOUR PILLARS OF INTENTIONAL PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATIONS			
Pillar 1: **Systemic Approach**	**Pillar 2:** **Ongoing Capacity Building**	**Pillar 3:** **Equity-Driven Practices**	**Pillar 4:** **Shared Responsibility and Leadership**
What does it mean? Collaboration members work together to engage parents. The collaboration has a shared understanding of and commitment to parent engagement. Members coordinate and reinforce each other's parent engagement efforts in order to maximize impact. They understand each other's roles and how they are connected to others in the system. Parent engagement is everyone's business.	**What does it mean?** Collaboration ensures parents can take on meaningful roles within the collaboration by providing intentional and ongoing opportunities for parents to gradually develop their parent leadership. The collaboration also supports its members to gain the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to engage parents at the collaboration level.	**What does it mean?** Collaboration demonstrates progress addressing issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity. It eliminates barriers to full parent participation and partnership to engage parents who are representative of the diversity of the communities it serves.	**What does it mean?** Parents and collaboration members share responsibility, skills, expertise, and leadership in the collaboration; they influence and/or shape its initiatives, events, and/or decisions.
Why is this important? Working as a system increases a collaboration's effectiveness to: • Support members to learn from each other's parent engagement strategies. • Create buy-in among members. • Coordinate and reinforce parent engagement efforts across the communities the collaboration serves. • Maximize scarce resources.	**Why is this important?** • Parents are more likely to take and keep a role within the collaboration if they feel equipped to fulfill its responsibilities. • Leadership development increases parents' knowledge, skills, and self-determination, which translates into improved outcomes for their families, programs, communities, and systems. • Ongoing capacity building ensures that all parents, regardless of their previous education and training, have what they need to participate in the collaboration. • Collaboration members need to know how to engage parents in order to support the collaboration's engagement efforts.	**Why is this important?** Equity-driven practices: • Eliminate the significant institutional, systemic, and structural barriers that perpetuate inequities in early childhood systems. • Create the conditions that support effective parent engagement and partnership with parents from diverse populations and experiences.	**Why is this important?** • Parents have the right to make decisions about issues that directly impact them, their families, and their communities. • Parents know their children, families, and communities best and are often at the nexus of multiple systems. Their unique vantage point helps identify barriers to, and solutions for, obstacles families face when trying to access equitable and high-quality early childhood services.

FOUR PILLARS OF INTENTIONAL PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATIONS

Pillar 1: Systemic Approach	Pillar 2: Ongoing Capacity Building	Pillar 3: Equity-Driven Practices	Pillar 4: Shared Responsibility and Leadership

What can this look like?
 	
• Members are familiar with each other's parent engagement practices.
 	
• Collaboration has a shared understanding of and commitment to parent engagement, which has been integrated into collaboration governance protocols, core principles, values, and public materials.
 	
• Collaboration incorporates parent engagement into an action plan, designating parent engagement goals, desired outcomes, roles, and needed resources.
 	
• Members pool and leverage existing resources to support parent engagement efforts.
 	
• Collaboration maintains a variety of parent engagement roles and opportunities.
 	
• Members regularly connect the parents they engage at the program level to the collaboration's engagement roles.
 	
• Collaboration uses an action learning process to regularly reflect on and improve their parent engagement practices in real time.
	What does it look like?
	
	• Collaboration intentionally implements and connects a range of parent engagement roles that gradually increase in responsibility and commitment; parents use these engagement experiences as a leadership pathway, an intentional sequence of opportunities for parents to learn, grow, and practice their leadership skills.
	
	• Parents are trained on the skills and knowledge they need to fulfill their specific engagement role(s) and further develop their leadership.
	
	• Parents receive regular coaching and guidance to help them apply what they learn from the trainings and grow as leaders.
	
	• Parents mentor and engage other parents.
	
	• Collaboration members go through a baseline parent leadership training and continue to regularly participate in parent engagement professional development experiences.
		What does it look like?
		
		• Collaboration engages parents who are representative of the racial, linguistic, economic, and cultural diversity of the communities it serves, prioritizing the engagement of underserved populations.
		
		• Collaboration eliminates barriers to participation and partnership by providing the following supports:
		  o Generally convenient meeting schedules and locations.
		  o Childcare.
		  o Transportation support.
		  o Refreshments/meals at meetings for parents and their families.
		  o Key materials available in formats and languages parents can understand in a timely fashion.
		  o Compensation for parent time and contribution.
		  o Technology support.
		
		• Collaboration offers parents the opportunities to build relationships with other parents and collaboration members.
		
		• Collaboration values and incorporates parents' cultures into their engagement efforts. The collaboration represents the cultures of the families in the community.
			What does it look like?
			
			• Collaboration listens and is responsive to the aspirations and needs of parents, families, and their communities.
			
			• Collaboration elevates and centers parent voices in their work, because they are most directly impacted by the work.
			
			• Collaboration includes parents as owners, planners, and decision-makers in all parts of the collaboration's work – from brainstorming and choosing a focus to planning, implementation, and evaluation.
			
			• Parents speak for themselves. The collaboration supports parent leaders to present and lead discussions at conferences, meetings, and workgroups.
			
			• Parents have the flexibility and support to implement their own early childhood system priorities and projects.

DEVELOPING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATION'S BELIEF STATEMENTS ON PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Use this tool to:

Develop your collaboration's belief statements on parent engagement.

What are belief statements on parent engagement?

A collaboration's belief statements on parent engagement are their views on parents and families in relation to the early childhood system.

Develop belief statements to:

- Create member consensus and buy-in on their parent engagement work.

- Have a guide for your parent engagement work.

The following provides an overview of how a collaboration facilitates the process for developing belief statements on parent engagement.

PREPARE TO SET COLLABORATION BELIEF STATEMENTS ON PARENT ENGAGEMENTS

Participants: All collaboration members.

Materials needed: None.

Exercise objective: Prepare collaboration members to set parent engagement belief statements.

Time needed: 30 minutes.

Instructions for facilitation: Invite collaboration members to think through the following questions individually:

- Do you think it's important to engage parents in the collaboration's work? Why or why not?

- Which parents should the collaboration engage?

- How should the collaboration engage parents?

- Are there obstacles to parent participation? If so, what are they?

- What do parents need to participate?

- What do collaboration members need to engage parents?

- Who within the collaboration should carry out the parent engagement?

- What resources would we need to fulfill your parent engagement vision?

You can email these questions to members in advance of meeting in person. Members do not need to send in the answers but should bring their answers with them when they participate in the exercise to set the parent engagement belief statements.

SET YOUR COLLABORATION PARENT ENGAGEMENT BELIEF STATEMENTS

Participants: All collaboration members.

Exercise objective: Set your collaboration's parent engagement belief statements.

Materials needed: Blank paper for each participant, chart paper, markers, pens.

Time needed: 1–2 hours, depending on collaboration size.

BEFORE MEETING

1. Set context: (5 minutes)

- Explain what parent engagement belief statements are and why your collaboration has decided to set their own statements.

- Invite collaboration members to refer to their reflection question answers as they participate in this activity (see reflection questions above).

MEETING ONE

2. Individual reflection: (5 minutes)

Hand out a blank sheet of paper to each participant. Instruct everyone to take 5 minutes to write down as many of their beliefs regarding parents and families in relation to early childhood systems. Offer an example to the group: "I believe parents are children's first teachers."

3. Compiling ideas: (15 minutes)

- Give everyone 2–3 minutes to circle their top 5 out of their list of parent engagement belief statements.

- Have everyone find a partner and share their top 5 beliefs with each other. The pair should pick their top 3 beliefs to report back to group.

4. Report back: (15–30 minutes)

Have every pair report back on their top 3 parent engagement belief statements while a facilitator captures each on chart paper. Note beliefs that come up more than once.

5. Discussion and consensus: (15–30 minutes)

Talk through any questions or objections for each belief. Focus the group's discussion on ideas and important language, not wordsmithing. Members may choose to combine similar beliefs into one.

6. Compare with this handbook's parent engagement beliefs: (10–15 minutes)

You can choose to share the list of Community Systems Statewide Supports' Parent Engagement Belief Statements found in the Resource for Engaging Parents in Early Childhood Collaborations (pg. 4) to compare beliefs the group agrees with that are missing from their list.

MEETING TWO

7. Review and approve parent engagement belief statements:

- Carry out necessary editing and wordsmithing (carried out and shared with group prior to meeting) to the list of beliefs and present to group for review and approval.

TO REINFORCE YOUR COLLABORATION'S PARENT ENGAGEMENT BELIEF STATEMENTS:

- Review them on a biannual basis to see if they are still relevant.

- Integrate them into the collaboration's governance protocols and public presence – collaboration governance charter, written material, website, social media.

- Include them in new member onboarding process.

SETTING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATION'S PARENT ENGAGEMENT DEFINITION

Use this tool to:
Set your collaboration's parent engagement definition.

Why set a collaboration parent engagement definition?
A collective parent engagement definition creates member consensus and buy-in on collaboration's parent engagement work.

Before you use this tool:
- **All collaboration members should go through the same baseline parent engagement learning process** (e.g., training, reviewing of framework toolkit, etc.) to ensure everyone can meaningfully participate in the definition-setting process.

- **Help collaboration members become familiar with one another's individual organizational parent engagement efforts.** You can do so by creating time and space at collaboration meetings for programs to present on how their programs engage parents and families. Alternatively, you can send out a survey to members about their parent engagement efforts, and compile and send out results to the collaboration.

PREPARE TO SET PARENT ENGAGEMENT DEFINITION

Participants: All collaboration members.

Materials needed: 1 Chart paper for every 5 participants, 4 markers for every 5 participants, tape, 1 piece of paper per participant, 1 pen per participant.

Exercise objective: Prepare collaboration members to set parent engagement definition and energize them to begin their joint parent engagement work.

Time needed: 1-1.5 hours, depending on size of group.

Instructions for facilitation:

1. Ask participants to visualize what their IDEAL parent engagement practices would look like for the collaboration (5 minutes).

Ask everyone to close their eyes and visualize what their IDEAL collaboration parent engagement practices would look like. Encourage the group to think about what's working well with their program's parent engagement practices that they want to see replicated at the collaboration level. Ask them to think about other members' effective parent engagement practices. Read the following list of questions out loud to guide their thought process:

a. Imagine our collaboration engaging parents and families without any obstacles. What is your vision for the ideal parent and family engagement practices in our collaboration?

b. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? How do you feel?

c. Which parents are we engaging?

d. Where are we engaging them and how?

e. Who is engaging them?

f. How are parents and children benefiting?

g. How is the collaboration benefiting?

h. What is happening in the community because parents are engaged with the collaboration?

2. Instruct everyone to open their eyes and write down any notes that will help them remember their vision for the ideal parent engagement practices at the collaboration (3 minutes).

3. Divide collaboration members into groups of 5-6 and hand out a piece of chart paper and 4-5 markers per team (2 minutes).

4. Give teams 10 minutes to discuss their individual visions, and come up with and draw their collective vision on poster paper. Let them know that they will be reporting back to the whole group, and they should figure out who will report back (10 minutes).

5. Give each group 5 minutes to present on their vision (30 minutes).

6. Debrief discussion. Use the following questions to cultivate dialogue:

a. How was that visioning experience for you?

b. How did it make you feel?

c. Do you see any patterns across the visions?

d. (For a collaboration that is already engaging parents and families) – How does this vision compare to what we are already doing to engage parents and families in the collaboration?

e. Did anything surprise you about these visions?

f. What is needed to make these visions a reality?

EXERCISE FOR SETTING COLLABORATION PARENT ENGAGEMENT DEFINITION

Participants: All collaboration members.

Exercise Objective: Participants can use this exercise to set a collaboration parent engagement definition.

Materials Needed: Three to four parent engagement definitions from reputable sources printed and individually cut, and tape.

Time needed: This activity should be done over the course of two collaboration meetings. Time needed in first meeting – 30 minutes to 1 hour, depending on size of group. Time needed in second meeting – 30 minutes.

1. Write out or print 3-4 parent engagement definitions from reputable sources in the field (see below for sample parent engagement definitions) in a font size that is easy to read at a distance of about 2 feet and post the definitions separately around the room. Print each definition once for every 10-12 participants.

2. Ask collaboration members to read all the definitions and stand by the definition that best resonates with them and the organization, agency, or program that they represent.

3. Facilitate a conversation about why those definitions stood out to them and help participants piece together any language or ideas they liked from the definitions they didn't choose.

Sample questions:
a. What stood out to you about the definition you are standing next to?

b. How does that definition relate to your agency's/program's parent engagement definition?

c. Are there parts of other definitions that stood out to you? Which ones and why?

4. Take everyone's feedback and use it to draft 2-3 parent engagement definitions to present at the next collaboration meeting. Aid collaboration members to choose/tailor the draft definitions into the collaboration's own definition of parent engagement.

5. Vote to integrate definition into the collaboration's governance protocol.

SAMPLE PARENT ENGAGEMENT DEFINITIONS:

Community Systems Statewide Supports' Parent Engagement Definition:
We define **parent engagement** in early childhood collaborations as both a process and an outcome.

- **As a process** – Parent engagement is a process by which parents inform and influence the collaboration's priorities, strategies, and decision-making. It requires an intentional effort by the collaboration to provide the opportunity and support parents' needs to participate.

- **As an outcome** – Ideal parent engagement is successfully achieved when parents and collaboration members build effective partnerships and share responsibility, expertise, and/or leadership in the collaboration and its work.[14]

Parent engagement results in an early childhood system that is co-created and co-maintained by parents and collaboration members to provide equitable, high-quality, accessible services to all children and families.

Illinois State Board of Education Family Engagement Framework –
A Guide for Illinois School Districts, Schools and Families[15]

It is widely acknowledged that learning begins at birth and takes place in the home, school, and community. Meaningful family engagement is based on the premise that parents, educators, and community members share responsibility for the academic, physical, social, emotional, and behavioral development of youth. Family engagement is fostered through a deliberate process that is embraced throughout the school. It empowers adults to jointly support student growth, addresses any barriers to learning, and ensures college and career readiness. Foremost, effective family engagement systems, policies, and practices are mindful of diverse school-communities that are rich in language, culture, and school experiences. They are responsive to student and family needs.

Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework (PFCE) for Early Childhood Systems

Family Engagement – an interactive process through which early childhood education (EC) providers and other EC professionals, family members, and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. Building and maintaining these relationships is a shared responsibility of families and professionals that requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. Family engagement means doing with – not doing to or for – families.

Head Start Family Engagement at Systems level – Early childhood leaders partner with parent leaders and programs to promote family well-being, positive parent-child relationships, and ongoing learning and development for providers and families.

At both program and system levels, early childhood providers work together with families, other professionals, and community partners in ways that promote equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness.

The Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework: Maryland's Vision for Engaging Families with Young Children

Family engagement is a shared responsibility of families, schools, and communities for student learning and achievement; it is continuous from birth into the school-age years; and it occurs across the various early care and learning settings where children are. Family Engagement means building relationships with families that support family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and the ongoing learning and development of parents and children alike. It reflects culturally competent and universal design approaches, encompassing the beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and activities of all families, as well as early care settings that support all children's positive development. Family Engagement happens in the home, early childhood settings, school, and community. Sustainable family engagement operates with adequate resources, including public-private partnerships, to ensure meaningful and effective strategies that have the power to impact student learning and achievement.

SETTING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATION'S PARENT INCLUSION POLICIES TOOL

Use this tool to:

- Set your collaboration's parent inclusion policies.

- Create an inclusive and welcoming culture for parents in all collaboration processes and spaces.

What are parent inclusion policies?

A collaboration's parent inclusion policies are a list of practices it commits to implementing to create an inclusive and welcoming space for parents in all collaboration spaces.

SETTING A COLLABORATION'S PARENT INCLUSION POLICIES

Participants: All collaboration members.

Materials needed: Blank paper, pens, 3–4 markers, 2–3 sheets of chart paper, tape.

Exercise objective: Set collaboration's parent inclusion policies.

Time needed: Depends on the number of participants, about 30–60 minutes.

Instructions for facilitation:

1. Individual Reflection – Ask collaboration members to individually write 7–10 ways that the collaboration may make it hard for parents to be engaged in the collaboration.

2. Pair Share – Instruct participants to find a partner. Give each pair 6 minutes to share their lists and choose their top 5 ideas as a team. Let them know that they will be sharing with the group.

3. Report Out – Have the groups report out their top 5 ideas. Someone should write the options on chart paper or on a board. Use checkmarks to flag ideas that are similar each time they are mentioned.

4. Choose Parent Inclusion Policies to Adopt – Lead collaboration in identifying their top 8–10 parent inclusion policies. Use the policies that were mentioned the most, and/or the ones that will make the most difference for parents. Keep in mind, policies should include the practices you are willing and able to do.

5. (Optional) Review Community Systems Statewide Supports' Parent Inclusion Policies Example – Have participants review the Community Systems Statewide Supports' Parent Inclusion Policies examples (next page) to identify policies that they might want to add to their own.

COMMUNITY SYSTEMS STATEWIDE SUPPORTS' PARENT INCLUSION POLICIES EXAMPLE

Our collaboration commits to creating an inclusive and welcoming culture for parents by:

1. Eliminating barriers to participation and partnership by providing the following supports:

- Convenient meeting schedules and locations.

- Childcare.

- Key materials available in formats and languages parents can understand in a timely fashion.

- Transportation support.

- Refreshments/meals at meetings for parents and their families.

- Parent stipends for their time and contributions.

2. Preparing parents to take on roles and responsibilities within the collaboration by offering clear engagement opportunities, training, tools, and guidance.

3. Engaging parents who are representative of the racial, linguistic, economic, and cultural diversity of the communities the collaboration serves, prioritizing the engagement of underserved populations.

4. Creating opportunities for relationship building between parents and between all members and parents.

5. Listening and being responsive to the aspirations and needs of parents, families, and their communities. We commit to elevating and centering parent voices in our work.

6. Including parents as owners, planners, and decision-makers in all parts of the collaboration's work – from brainstorming and choosing a focus to planning, implementation, and evaluation.

7. Encouraging parents to speak for themselves. We will support parents to present and lead discussions at conferences, meetings, and workgroups.

8. Offering parents the flexibility and support to implement their own early childhood system priorities and projects.

9. Valuing and incorporating parents' cultures into our collaboration work and engagement efforts.

IMPORTANT RESOURCES FOR EFFECTIVE PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATIONS

Use this tool to:

- Understand important resources for effective parent engagement in an early childhood collaboration.

- Set guidelines for parent stipends.

- Invest in parent engagement practices even in the midst of scarce resources.

What are parent engagement resources?

The time, energy, funds, and/or in-kind donations needed to cover the work and costs associated with parent engagement activities and practices of a collaboration.

IMPORTANT RESOURCES FOR EFFECTIVE PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Parent Engagement Lead(s) – People to lead and/or carry out the ongoing parent engagement and leadership development efforts. Their work may include leading parent recruitment efforts, coordinating parent participation supports, and supporting collaboration members to build parent engagement capacity.

Having a part-time staff whose job is focused on parent engagement is ideal, but not necessary. Collaboration member(s) can volunteer to lead the parent engagement work. Set parent engagement goals that are aligned with the collaboration's capacity to achieve them.

Translation & Interpretation – Offer interpretation services at all meetings and events in the languages spoken by parents in the community to eliminate obstacles to parent participation. You can choose to offer simultaneous interpretation via headset equipment or consecutive interpretation, where the speaker pauses every few sentences to allow for an interpreter to translate the message. Written materials should also be translated.

Refreshments – Offer refreshments at all meetings and events. If the meeting takes place during mealtime, offer meals for parents and their children. On average $2-3 per person should cover refreshments, and $8-10 per person should cover meals. Do not forget to count children in your estimates!

Childcare – Offer childcare and childcare materials (age-appropriate activities, arts and crafts, toys, etc.) for families at all meetings and events.

Transportation – Offer travel supports to and from in the form of public transit cards or mileage reimbursement. If you do not have resources, help parents organize a carpool.

Parent Stipends – Whenever possible, pay parents a stipend for their time and contributions. Most collaboration members participate at the collaboration as part of their job responsibilities; it is only fair that parents get paid too. Stipends also incentivize parent participation. (See below for guidelines re: parent stipends.)

Parent Compensation – Whenever parent stipends are not available, consider other ways to compensate parents for their time and contributions, such as gift cards, entry into raffles, early learning gifts, training scholarships, internships, etc.

Professional Development – Professional development for the parent engagement lead(s) on engagement strategies and application, professional development for all collaboration members on introductory parent engagement ideas, and leadership training for parents.

SETTING PARENT STIPEND GUIDELINES

Collaborations may not be able to pay every parent every time for all engagement roles. (We recommend finding other ways to compensate parents for the time and contribution.) For this reason, it is important that collaborations have clear and transparent guidelines for parent stipends. These guidelines should outline what roles and activities are to be paid and which will be compensated otherwise.

Choosing When to Pay Parent Stipends

- Prioritize stipends for engagement roles if:

  o The engagement role(s) requires parents to use a significant amount of their time to provide the collaboration their expertise (e.g., parents participate in focus groups, speak on panels).

  o The engagement role(s) requires parents to carry out a job for the collaboration during a defined time period (e.g., work as parent Outreach Ambassadors, facilitate workshops or events).

- Consider compensating parent time and contribution with a non-stipend alternative (if absolutely necessary) if:

  o Roles and activities take a short time, such as filling out a survey, or those that are long term and therefore might be harder to pay parents for their participation (e.g., serving as a collaboration parent leader).

Include the Following in Parent Stipend Guidelines:

- **Clear and transparent parent selection process** – If paid positions are limited, have a transparent and fair process to select who gets the paid roles.

  Example – Your collaboration might regularly engage 30 parents, but your budget might only allow for 10 parents to work as parent ambassadors. If more parents than you have positions for apply, some factors to take into consideration in the selection process are length of engagement, attendance, and best fit for role.

- **Clear and transparent role expectations** – Clarify role expectations, stipend amount, and timeline associated with the engagement opportunity with parents before the stipend work begins; make sure to do so verbally and in writing. Parents can make an informed decision to select in or out of engagement opportunities based on their interest or availability if they have all the information regarding the role ahead of time.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF SCARCITY

Funds and resources are scarce for early childhood collaborations, and parent engagement may seem overwhelming to plan or fund. However, a systemic approach to parent engagement allows the collaboration to have a mindset shift that no one stakeholder is solely responsible for supporting the parent engagement practices. A collaboration can still engage parents by pooling existing and potential resources.

- **Leverage existing resources**
  Ask collaboration members for an in-kind contribution, based on their strengths and available resources. In-kind contributions include:

  o *Staff Time* – Some individual members already working with parents may be able to support the collaboration's parent engagement work. If so, they can contribute a few hours a week to support engaging parents.

  o *Participation Supports* – Members can take turns providing parent participation supports (e.g., refreshments, childcare, translation services) to spread the cost.

  o *Space* – Members can find convenient meeting spaces for parents.

  o *Professional Development* – Members can open up professional development opportunities related to parent engagement to their other collaboration members or parents.

  o *Parent Trainings/Leadership Development Opportunities* – Programs can open up parent leadership development opportunities for parents across the community, not just parents who attend their program.

- **Apply for joint funds**
  There are small grants that promote joint community efforts. Collaboration members can apply for a joint grant to support the collaboration's parent engagement efforts.

CHOOSING PARENT ENGAGEMENT ROLES TO IMPLEMENT IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATION

Use this tool to:

- Learn about potential early childhood parent engagement roles.

- Map and identify strengths and gaps in existing local parent engagement efforts.

- Choose which parent engagement efforts to implement.

Why use parent engagement roles when implementing parent engagement?

Clear and defined roles help collaboration members understand parent engagement, making it easier to plan and implement existing and future parent engagement efforts.

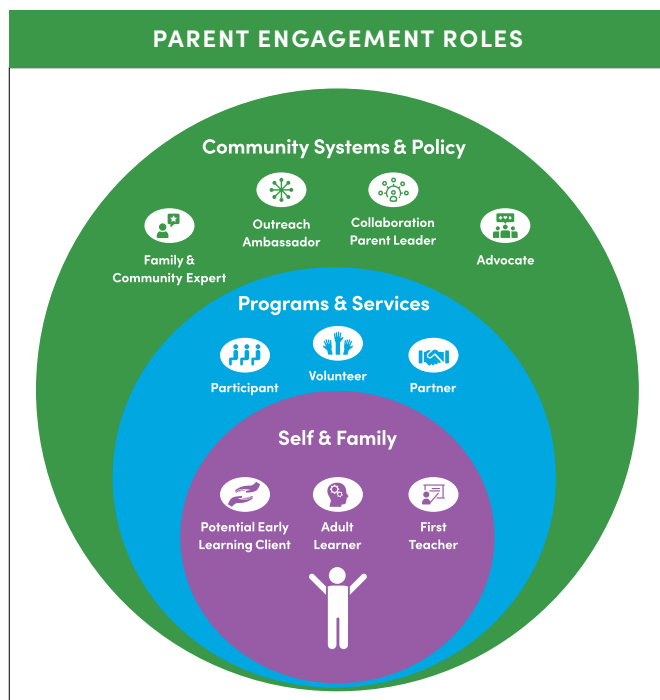### THE SELF & FAMILY PARENT SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Most parents get involved in early childhood to advance their children's development and their own. They often begin their engagement with what interests them the most and with what they are most familiar. They typically become involved with the early childhood system in the "Self & Family" parent sphere of influence. This area can include but is not limited to the following types of engagement roles: *Potential Early Childhood Client*, *Adult Learner*, and *First Teacher*.[16]

THE PROGRAMS & SERVICES PARENT SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

As parents' confidence and leadership increase, some will want to continue to deepen their engagement with the early childhood system by taking on additional roles. The next level of engagement that parents naturally may get involved with is the "Programs & Services" parent sphere of influence. This area can include but is not limited to the following types of engagement roles: *Participant*, *Volunteer*, and *Partner*.[17]

THE COMMUNITY SYSTEMS & POLICY PARENT SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

The Community Systems & Policy sphere is perhaps the most relevant to early childhood collaborations, since this is the sphere where collaborations tend to concentrate their work. The roles in this sphere include, but are not limited to: *Family & Community Expert*, *Outreach Ambassador*, *Collaboration Parent Leader*, *Advocate*.[18]

PARENT ENGAGEMENT ROLES

Community Systems & Policy

Outreach Ambassador

Collaboration Parent Leader

Family & Community Expert

Advocate

Programs & Services

Participant

Volunteer

Partner

Self & Family

Potential Early Learning Client

Adult Learner

First Teacher

SELF & FAMILY SPHERE OF INFLUENCE [8]

Parent Engagement Role	Role Description	Engagement Examples	Parent & Children Outcomes
POTENTIAL EARLY CHILDHOOD CLIENT	• Learns about early childhood options.	• Receives information about early childhood services and program options either in person or via printed materials, website, or phone.	• Builds knowledge of available resources. • Makes informed care decisions. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.

ADULT LEARNER	• Takes formal adult education classes.
	• Participates in workshops or trainings.
		• Participates in GED (General Education Development), ESL (English as a Second Language), adult literacy, and financial literacy classes.	• Increases:
			  o Personal self-efficacy.
			  o Human and social capital.
			  o Access to better personal and professional opportunities.
			• Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.

FIRST TEACHER	• Acquires and shares knowledge, skills, and strategies to engage with children. • Takes formal adult education classes. • Participates in workshops or trainings.	• Attends workshops on child development, child needs, and/or parenting strategies. • Attends playgroups and other social family events.	• Understands children's needs and strengths. • Bonds through interactions. • Builds skills, knowledge, and self-determination. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES SPHERE OF INFLUENCE[8]

Parent Engagement Role	Role Description	Engagement Examples	Parent & Children Outcomes
PARTICIPANT	• Family receives early childhood services. • Participates in community-building events and workshops. • Provides feedback about services.	• Participates in Head Start or home-visiting program. • Participates in parent cafes, parent breakfasts, etc. • Completes program's surveys on needs or interests.	• Accesses supports for self and family. • Develops support network. • Builds skills, knowledge, and self-determination. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.
VOLUNTEER	• Offers to assist in early childhood programs. • Helps with events for children and families.	• Volunteers in the classroom. • Volunteers to organize a program's Día del Niño event.	• Develops skills and knowledge of programs. • Increases self-determination. • Builds community. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.
PARTNER	• Identifies needs, plans, and evaluates services. • Engages in program decision-making. • Mentors other parents.	• Serves on parent advisory committees (PAC) or program policy councils.	• Gains knowledge of programs and early childhood system. • Learns about the mechanics of program leadership meetings. • Builds skills, knowledge, and self-determination. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.

COMMUNITY SYSTEMS & POLICY SPHERE OF INFLUENCE [8]

Parent Engagement Roles	Role Description	Engagement Examples	Parent & Children Outcomes	Intended Collaboration Objective(s)
FAMILY & COMMUNITY EXPERT	• Provides feedback that informs community systems change. • Influences the prioritizing of community systems change issues.	• Provides feedback through: o In-person surveys. o Online surveys. o Focus groups. o Small group meeting discussions.	• Becomes familiar with early childhood entity leading the outreach effort. • Reflects on family needs and strengths. • Increased trust in early childhood system. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.	• Obtains input from a targeted and/or broad section of parents with lived experience. • Aligns community systems change work and outcomes to community needs.
OUTREACH AMBASSADOR	• Carries out peer-to-peer outreach to: o Get community feedback. o Offer service referral. o Invite parents to engage. • Tallies and makes sense of outreach data. • Plans outreach strategy.	• Goes door-knocking to share information on the importance of early childhood education and get referrals for early childhood resources.	• Strengthens relationships with community. • Gains knowledge of available early childhood programs and resources. • Practices working as a team. • Builds skills, knowledge, and self-determination. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.	• Reaches community members – both to give them information and hear from them. • Connects with families who are not currently a part of the local early childhood system. • Increases program recruitment and registration. • Aligns community systems change work and outcomes to community needs.
COLLABORATION PARENT LEADER	• Participates in community systems change. • Engages in decision-making. • Listens to and represents community children and families. • Engages and mentors other parents. • Represents collaboration externally.	• Participates in early learning collaboration as a member. • Participates in collaboration's parent leadership team. • Develops and implements parent projects with parents for parents (e.g., parent cafes).	• Gains knowledge about early childhood system. • Learns how to carry out meetings and workshops. • Develops support network. • Practices working as a team. • Builds skills, knowledge, and self-determination. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.	• Increases parent participation and leadership in collaboration. • Collects real-time parent input on all collaboration efforts. • Aligns community systems change work and outcomes to community needs.
ADVOCATE	• Decides policy priorities. • Testifies to decision-makers. • Organizes other families to advocate.	• Participates in advocacy days with local, state, or federal elected officials. • Circulates a petition or leads phone-banking campaign.	• Builds relationships with decision-makers. • Gains knowledge of legislative and policy-making process. • Gains knowledge of parent and families' rights. • Builds skills, knowledge, and self-determination. • Children exhibit better academic, social, and health outcomes.	• Elevates parent voice and stories to policy and systems change work. • Aligns community systems change work and outcomes to community needs.

ACTIVITY TO MAP LOCAL EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS' ENGAGEMENT ROLES FOR PARENTS

Participants: All collaboration members.

Materials needed: Chart paper or board and Post-it Notes

Exercise objective: Identify existing local early childhood systems' parent engagement efforts. Gauge their level of connectivity to help the collaboration decide which parent engagement roles to implement.

Time needed: 30 minutes.

1. Print or draw the Parent Engagement Roles diagram on the wall, so it can be seen from across the room.

2. Have collaboration members individually review the Parent Engagement Roles charts 1–3.

3. Using Post-it Notes, have collaboration members write down how they are engaging parents as an agency, school, organization, collaboration, etc. If an agency has more than one collaboration member present, they should work together. Make sure to use one post-it note for each effort and write down the name of your agency, school, or organization.

4. Have each person who placed a post-it come up and explain how they are engaging parents.

5. Take a few minutes for everyone to look at the Parent Engagement Roles diagram, then facilitate a discussion using the following questions:

a. In which area of influence do we engage parents the most? In which area of influence do we engage parents the least?

b. Where are our collective parent engagement strengths?

c. How are our parent engagement efforts connected? (Possible answers are - parents are participating in multiple roles, engaged parents are from the same community, etc.)

d. Are we, as early childhood partners, intentionally connecting these engagement opportunities to each other? (Use a marker to capture the connections on the Parent Engagement Roles diagram as they are shared)

e. Do we see any opportunities for connecting these efforts to one other? (Some opportunities for connecting these efforts include helping parents who are involved occupy other roles, if they want.)

f. What would happen if we saw parent engagement work as something that is connected and something that we do together?

g. Are there any obstacles to connecting our parent engagement opportunities?

h. Any other reactions?

EXERCISE TO HELP COLLABORATION CHOOSE WHICH PARENT ENGAGEMENT ROLES TO IMPLEMENT

Participants: All collaboration members.

Materials needed: Chart paper or board and Post-it Notes.

Exercise objective: Identify which parent engagement implementation roles to implement.

Time needed: 45 – 60 minutes.

1. Review the Community Systems & Policy Sphere of Parent Influence chart. The chart outlines parent engagement roles that take place in the Community Systems & Policy parent sphere of influence, the area where collaborations concentrate a lot of their work, and parent engagement roles that might align with their work.

2. Lead a discussion on the following questions below. Encourage everyone to keep the map of existing parent engagement roles and the Community Systems & Policy Parent Sphere of Influence Chart in mind when entering into this discussion.

Discussion Questions:

- In what roles does the collaboration engage parents? (refer to the parent engagement map)

- Are there gaps in the collaboration's parent engagement practices/activities?

- Does the collaboration implement a variety of (more than one) parent engagement roles? Is it important to implement a variety of roles? Why or why not?

- Do the collaboration parent engagement roles match the collaboration's intended outcome(s)? If not, are there any roles that are missing? Is the collaboration implementing any roles that no longer align with its intended outcomes?

- Have parents indicated they want to be engaged in a role that is not currently offered by the community?

- What resources is the collaboration willing and/or able to allocate toward implementing additional roles?

3. Utilize the information harvested during this discussion to discuss the parent engagement roles and activities to move forward with as a collaboration.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT PLANNING FORM

Use this tool to:

Plan a collaboration's parent engagement strategy.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT ROLE Circle the role you are using this form to plan for:	
Family and Community Expert **Outreach Ambassador** **Collaboration Parent Leader** **Advocate** **Other:**	
Why? • Why are we engaging parents in this role? • What do we want to accomplish?	
How? • How are we engaging parents in this role? (e.g., carrying out focus groups and surveys for family and community expert role) • How are we resourcing this engagement effort?	
Who? • Who are we engaging? • Who will be responsible for engaging them?	
Where? Where will the engagement take place? (e.g., a specific neighborhood or at specific programs)	
When? What is the timeline and schedule for engagement?	

Systemic Approach to Parent Engagement How is the collaboration working together to support this effort?	
Ongoing Capacity Building • What do parents need to carry out this role (materials, knowledge, skills, etc.)? • What do the people engaging parents need to engage them (materials, knowledge, skills, etc.)? • How and when will we provide it?	
Shared Partnership and Leadership What are the ways parents will have a voice at every step of this endeavor (i.e., brainstorming, shaping, implementing, evaluating, and improving engagement efforts as a participant in those efforts)?	
Equity-Driven Practices • How will we eliminate barriers to parent participation and partnership? • How is this engagement effort building a more equitable early childhood system? • What are we doing to continue creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for parent participation?	

Post Engagement Questions

1. Did this parent engagement information inform and/or influence any collaboration action? If so, how?

2. How will the collaboration let parents know the results of their input?

PARENT ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

Use this tool to:

Create a collaboration parent engagement action plan.

Create a parent engagement action plan template tool to:

- Outline parent engagement goals.

- Ensure goals align with expected outcomes.

- Clarify what resources are required to reach the goals.

- Formulate a timeline for when specific tasks need to be completed.

- Delegate engagement responsibilities.

- Break engagement goals down into manageable pieces.

Template sections explained:

- **Time Frame** – The amount of time it will take to carry out engagement. It's a good idea to plan in terms of years. Parent engagement takes time. If possible, plan for 2–3 years at a time.

- **Goal** – A goal is a destination. It should answer the question of who we are and what we want to accomplish. It is a written, relevant, attainable, observable, broad statement of a desired end. Goals reflect the mission of the group and give common focus to the group's efforts.[19]

- **Objective** – These are specific actions to reach your goal/how you will reach your goal. They should be explicit, measurable, concise but clear.[20]

- **Action Steps** – The steps and resources needed to meet the objective(s).[21]

- **Resources** – Time, energy, funds, and/or in-kind donations to cover the work and cost of carrying out a parent engagement goal.

If collaboration does not have a budget, consider goals that do not require as many resources or pooling and leveraging existing resources. Consider a goal to seek more funding and/or resources to allocate toward parent engagement activities.

TIME FRAME: (Year 1)	
Goal #1:	Objective 1.1:
	Objective 1.2:
	Objective 1.3:
Goal #2:	Objective 2.1:
	Objective 2.2:
	Objective 2.3:

GOAL #1:

OBJECTIVE 1.1:

Action Steps	Resources Needed	When (by when will this action take place?)	Who (who is responsible – for what?)	Outputs (measures of strategy's activities)	Outcomes (who or what has changed?)
		•	•	•	•
		•	•	•	•
		•	•	•	•

[Copy and paste additional Objective charts]

GOAL #2:

OBJECTIVE 2.1:

Action Steps	Resources Needed	When (by when will this action take place?)	Who (who is responsible – for what?)	Outputs (measures of strategy's activities)	Outcomes (who or what has changed?)
		•	•	•	•
		•	•	•	•
		•	•	•	•

[Copy and paste additional Objective charts]

TIME FRAME: [starting month – ending month] Year 2		
Goal #1:	Objective 1.1:	
	Objective 1.2:	
	Objective 1.3:	
Goal #2:	Objective 2.1:	
	Objective 2.2:	
	Objective 2.3:	

GOAL #1:

OBJECTIVE 1.1:

Action Steps	Resources Needed	When (by when will this action take place?)	Who (who is responsible – for what?)	Outputs (measures of strategy's activities)	Outcomes (who or what has changed?)
		•	•	•	•
		•	•	•	•
		•	•	•	•

[Copy and paste additional Objective charts]

GOAL #2:

OBJECTIVE 2.1:

Action Steps	Resources Needed	When (by when will this action take place?)	Who (who is responsible – for what?)	Outputs (measures of strategy's activities)	Outcomes (who or what has changed?)
		•	•	•	•
		•	•	•	•
		•	•	•	•

[Copy and paste additional Objective charts]

PARENT ENGAGEMENT READINESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Use this tool to:
Help your collaboration gauge its readiness to begin engaging parents.

Confirm your readiness to begin engaging parents to:
Increase the probability of full member buy-in, follow-through, and successful outcomes.

COLLABORATION PARENT ENGAGEMENT READINESS QUESTIONNAIRE		
1. Do collaboration members believe that engaging parents at the collaboration level is a central strategy to achieving positive, equitable outcomes for children and their families?	☐ Yes	☐ No
2. Does the collaboration have a shared parent engagement understanding (e.g., parent engagement beliefs and definition)?	☐ Yes	☐ No
3. Does the collaboration know why it wants to engage parents?	☐ Yes	☐ No
4. Does the collaboration have a parent engagement plan that outlines: • What roles it will engage parents in? • How collaboration members will support parent recruitment? • How it will prepare and support parents to carry out the responsibilities that come with their engagement role? • How it will prepare collaboration members to engage parents? • Who will engage and support parents? • The necessary resources to engage parents?	☐ Yes ☐ Yes ☐ Yes ☐ Yes ☐ Yes ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ No ☐ No ☐ No ☐ No ☐ No
5. Do you have the resources to engage?	☐ Yes	☐ No

TO SCORE: Add up the numbers associated with each answer to get your score. Yes = 1, No = 0.

Score is_____.

Use the chart below to see if the collaboration is ready to begin engaging parents in collaboration.

SCORE	NEXT STEPS	TOOLS THAT CAN HELP
≤ 8	***Collaboration is Ready to Engage Parents!*** Collaboration has intentionally thought through its parent engagement plans and is ready to begin new parent engagement efforts.	Resource for Engaging Parents in Early Childhood Collaborations, Engaging Parents
≤ 5	***Collaboration May Need More Planning Before it Begins Engaging Parents*** – Collaboration has made progress, but the plans might need a little more fine-tuning.	Resource for Engaging Parents, I. Parent Engagement Framework in Early Childhood Collaborations

PDSA CYCLE GUIDE

Use this tool to:

- Reflect on actions carried out.

- Set, make, and test improvements for actions carried out (strategy implementation, projects, meetings, etc.).

What is a PDSA cycle?

The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle is shorthand for testing a change – by planning it, trying it, observing the results, and acting on what is learned. This is the scientific method, used for action-oriented learning.[22]

When to use PDSA?

Options for when to use PDSA cycle:

- After carrying out an action (e.g., after carrying out an important meeting).

- At regularly scheduled intervals for ongoing work (e.g., monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly).

- At the end of a project or fiscal year.

- For each action or you can have multiple simultaneous cycles focused on different components of the action.

PLAN, DO, STUDY, ACT (PDSA)			
PLAN: • State the objective • Make predictions about what will happen • Develop a plan to make the change	**DO:** • Make the change • Document observations and problems	**STUDY:** • Study the results and analyze any new data • Compare predictions to results • Summarize and reflect on what was learned	**ACT:** • Based on what was learned, decide if you need to refine the change and retest • Determine what modifications should be made • Prepare a plan for the next iteration

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	THOUGHTS
PLAN • What went well? What can improve? • What change will we make? • What do we predict will happen? • What do we need to do to get ready? • When will we make the change? • Who will be involved? Who will collect the data? • How will we evaluate how it went? • Who are the key groups impacted? How will these groups be involved?* • What are the racial implications of our plan?*	
DO • What did we observe when we changed/tested/developed/implemented? • What challenges were there, if any?	
STUDY • What were our key findings? What did we learn? • What did the data we collected tell us? • How did our findings compare to our predictions from the plan phase? • Where do we see disparities in the data?* • What were the benefits, and who received them?* • What were the burdens, and who bore them?*	
ACT • How do we want to apply what we learned? • Do we need to modify our change and test again? • Do we need to test the same change again to make sure it works? • Do we have a different change we want to test? • What are different options to make this more racially equitable?* • How will our stakeholders engage in ensuring equitable outcomes?*	

*Equity Consideration(s)

LISTENING CAMPAIGNS: SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS[23]

Use this tool to:
Draft parent-friendly questions for a listening campaign.

What is a listening campaign?
A listening campaign is a process by which a collaboration listens to parents about their individual, family, and community's strengths, needs, and experiences with the early childhood system. In this role, parents convey their feedback through a variety of mediums such as surveys, focus groups, small in-person meetings, etc.

Data collected in a listening campaign can offer insight on one or more of the following:

- Strengths and interests of community systems and local early childhood service delivery.

- Needs and problems of community systems and early childhood service delivery system.

- Solutions to community systems problems.

SAMPLE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS
General

- What services and supports are helpful for families with children 0-5 years old?

- What services and supports do families with children 0-5 years old need that are not available to them?

- In your opinion, what does it mean to have/do_____?

- What do you think about _____?

- What is it like to try to change_____in this community?

- What have been your experiences with _____in this community?

- Why do you think_____is happening?

Mindsets

- What do you think people think about_____?

- What thoughts or beliefs are adding to _____?

- What are local people's thoughts or assumptions about residents going through _____?

Components

- What is it like trying to access_____in your community?

- What gets in the way?

- Why is this happening?

- How easy or difficult is it to understand forms or letters that local organizations (such as_____) send out to you?

- What services (such as_____) and supports (such as_____) does your community need to help people_____?

- What local programs have/have not been helpful in addressing_____?

- If so, who and in what ways?

Connections

- Are stakeholders (e.g., local organizations and service providers) working together to help with_____?
  If so, how? What can they do better?

- Are local organizations and service providers referring (connecting) people to the resources they need to _____?
  If so, how? What can they do better?

- Are local_____organizations and service providers talking to each other and working together to help the same
  clients? If so, how? What can they do better?

- Are local programs and supports related to _____designed to benefit all residents, regardless of their situation?
  (May include information sharing, service coordination, referrals, service transitions, resource sharing, data sharing.)

- What is helping or holding this up?

Resources

- Are resources and opportunities related to _____available to all residents in a fair and equitable way in your
  community?

Power

- Do you feel like you have a say in decisions made about_____? If so, how?

- Are parents and families able to have a say in decisions made about_____? If so, how?

Regulations

- What policies or procedures make it difficult to receive services or supports related to_____?

- What policies or procedures make it difficult to provide services or supports related to_____?

- Which formal or informal policies or procedures are contributing to_____?

- In what ways are local decision-making processes – who participates and whose voice matters – contributing
  to _____?

- In what ways do current budget allocations contribute to _____?

CODING YOUR QUALITATIVE DATA

Use this tool to:

Sort, arrange, and tally qualitative data (data that is not in numbers, e.g., open-ended survey answers).

What does it mean to code data?

To assign a code to the data for identification or classification purposes.

CODING YOUR QUALITATIVE DATA

Participants: People who are working with the data.

Materials: Qualitative data from system scans and Coding spreadsheet (digital or paper).

INSTRUCTIONS:

Step 1: List the answers to each data scan question on a spreadsheet.

	A	B	C	D
1	**How I Learned**			
2	By participating in both small group and large group processes			
3	Participating in it, through the icebreaker			
4	Visuals, hands on			
5	Through conversation and evidence-based (illegible)			
6	Visuals, activities			
7	Consensus activity, presentation, working with others			
8	Interactive, ppt			
9	Open discussions, small workgroups			
10	Listening			
11	Group and individual education and participation			
12	Visually, group activities and getting others' perspectives			
13	Visual videos, great communication in small group			
14	I loved the activity we did before lunch. Very good for networking and collaborating.			
15	Large group discussion, small group/plan/work time, group/whole body activity			
16	I enjoyed the slides and handouts – learning from peers and discussion			
17	Visual/conversation			
18	Collective collaboration			
19	Ice breaker, team-building activities			
20	Execution of activity, the outcome wasn't as important as the process			
21	Discussion			
22	Team time was the best			
23	Small groups			
24	Through activities and visual cues			
25	1. Group dialogue, 2. Presentation of tool			
26	Our session on what is to come for our cohort provided insight			
27	Working and talking w/others			
28	Visual (illegible) of the training were more helpful			
29	Listening, observing, participating, engaging, discussing			

Step 2: Look for common themes in the scan answers and put each theme (or related group of themes) in its own column.

	A	B	C	D
1	**How I Learned**	Participating in activities, hands on/interactive	Visuals	Conversation, listening
2	By participating in both small group and large group processes			
3	Participating in it, through the icebreaker			
4	Visuals, hands on			
5	Through conversation and evidence-based (illegible)			
6	Visuals, activities			
7	Consensus activity, presentation, working with others			
8	Interactive, ppt			
9	Open discussions, small workgroups			
10	Listening			
11	Group and individual education and participation			
12	Visually, group activities and getting others' perspectives			
13	Visual videos, great communication in small group			
14	I loved the activity we did before lunch. Very good for networking and collaborating.			
15	Large group discussion, small group/plan/work time, group/whole body activity			
16	I enjoyed the slides and handouts – learning from peers and discussion			
17	Visual/conversation			
18	Collective collaboration			
19	Ice breaker, team-building activities			
20	Execution of activity, the outcome wasn't as important as the process			
21	Discussion			
22	Team time was the best			
23	Small groups			
24	Through activities and visual cues			
25	1. Group dialogue, 2. Presentation of tool			
26	Our session on what is to come for our cohort provided insight			
27	Working and talking w/others			
28	Visual (illegible) of the training were more helpful			
29	Listening, observing, participating, engaging, discussing			

Step 3: Note under the appropriate column each time a theme appears. (Some answers might fall under more than one theme, or under no theme.)

	A	B	C	D
1	**How I Learned**	Participating in activities, hands on/interactive	Visuals	Conversation, listening
2	By participating in both small group and large group processes	1		
3	Participating in it, through the icebreaker	1		
4	Visuals, hands on	1	1	
5	Through conversation and evidence-based (illegible)			1
6	Visuals, activities	1	1	
7	Consensus activity, presentation, working with others	1		
8	Interactive, ppt	1	1	
9	Open discussions, small workgroups	1		1
10	Listening			1
11	Group and individual education and participation	1		
12	Visually, group activities and getting others' perspectives	1	1	1
13	Visual videos, great communication in small group		1	1
14	I loved the activity we did before lunch. Very good for networking and collaborating.	1		
15	Large group discussion, small group/plan/work time, group/whole body activity	1		
16	I enjoyed the slides and handouts – learning from peers and discussion		1	1
17	Visual/conversation		1	1
18	Collective collaboration			1
19	Ice breaker, team-building activities	1		
20	Execution of activity, the outcome wasn't as important as the process	1		
21	Discussion			1
22	Team time was the best			1
23	Small groups			1
24	Through activities and visual cues	1	1	
25	1. Group dialogue, 2. Presentation of tool		1	1
26	Our session on what is to come for our cohort provided insight			1
27	Working and talking w/others			1
28	Visual (illegible) of the training were more helpful		1	
29	Listening, observing, participating, engaging, discussing	1		1

Step 4: Tally the number of times each theme has appeared. Divide that number by the total number of responses and multiply by 100 to obtain the percentage of incidence. (E.g., 15/30 x 100 = 50%)

	A	B	C	D
1	**How I Learned**	Participating in activities, hands on/interactive	Visuals	Conversation, listening
2	By participating in both small group and large group processes	1		
3	Participating in it, through the icebreaker	1		
4	Visuals, hands on	1	1	
5	Through conversation and evidence-based (illegible)			1
6	Visuals, activities	1	1	
7	Consensus activity, presentation, working with others	1		
8	Interactive, ppt	1	1	
9	Open discussions, small workgroups	1		1
10	Listening			1
11	Group and individual education and participation	1		
12	Visually, group activities and getting others' perspectives	1	1	1
13	Visual videos, great communication in small group		1	1
14	I~~Hg~~ved the activity we did before lunch. Very good for networking and collaborat-	1		
15	Large group discussion, small group/plan/work time, group/whole body activity	1		
16	I enjoyed the slides and handouts – learning from peers and discussion		1	1
17	Visual/conversation		1	1
18	Collective collaboration			1
19	Ice breaker, team-building activities	1		
20	Execution of activity, the outcome wasn't as important as the process	1		
21	Discussion			1
22	Team time was the best			1
23	Small groups			1
24	Through activities and visual cues	1	1	
25	1. Group dialogue, 2. Presentation of tool		1	1
26	Our session on what is to come for our cohort provided insight			1
27	Working and talking w/others			1
28	Visual (illegible) of the training were more helpful		1	
29	Listening, observing, participating, engaging, discussing	1		1
		15	11	15
		15/30 x 100 = 50%	11/30 x 100 = 36.6%	15/30 x 100 = 50%

ADVICE:

- Code and tally at regular intervals during your collection phase. The coding process is more manageable if you break it up into sections. Coding as you go will also allow you to troubleshoot issues as they come up.

- Limit the coding to one to two people, to reduce the chance of coding errors and inconsistencies.

DATA WALK PROTOCOL

Use this tool to:

- Facilitate exercise that helps stakeholders engage with data.

- Contextualize data – hear from stakeholders' opinion on what is reflected in the data and why.

What is a data walk?

This exercise allows stakeholders to engage with data. Participants take time to individually examine and process data presented in poster format, and then discuss the data collectively. This protocol is especially useful for engaging all stakeholders in making sense of data collected during a listening campaign.

DATA WALK PROTOCOL

Participants: Local Early Childhood Community Systems Stakeholders.

Materials needed: Large posters of data charts (data should be presented in a simple, clear visual format), Post-it Notes, bold pens (e.g., Sharpies).

Exercise objective: Stakeholders help to contextualize data and leave with major data takeaways. The exercise also has the potential to spark stakeholder action.

Time needed: 1 hour and 30 minutes.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATION:

Setup

1. Post relevant data charts throughout the room.

2. Post prompts to help guide discussion, using the questions below or similar prompts:

- What are your general reactions to the data? How, if at all, does this data connect to your personal experience?

- Why do you think this might be happening?

- What questions does this data raise for you?

- What further information would be helpful? Where might you find this information?

Directions

Introduction (5-10 minutes)
Explain each part of the activity (individual reflection; pair-share; large-group discussion; closing) as listed below.

1. Data walk + individual reflection (20 minutes)
Participants will walk around the room to study each chart and the data it shows.

Participants will be asked to use the Post-it Notes provided to write down and post reactions to the data seen; prompts are provided.

2. Pair-share (20 minutes)
Instruct participants to pair up with someone they haven't yet interacted with, and take time to discuss and share their thoughts, using the same prompts previously provided as a guide for the conversation.

3. Full group share-out and discussion (20 minutes)
Invite the whole group to come back together and share out observations that surfaced in their individual reflection and paired discussion. As a facilitator, seek to draw out the thoughts and feelings of those in the room in response to the data shown rather than offer insights yourself.

4. Closing (20 minutes)
Focus on forward-looking questions as you close, asking what actions they think can be taken.

OUTREACH AMBASSADOR COMMUNITY OUTREACH CONVERSATION GUIDE

Use this tool to:

Prepare Outreach Ambassadors to carry out community outreach.

CONVERSATION GUIDE

1. Introduction – Briefly explain who you are and why are you there.

"Hi, my name is_____and I'm a parent Outreach Ambassador with_____.
We're in the neighborhood today talking to parents about the importance of early childhood programs."

2. Figure out if they are the people you want to reach.
"Do you have any children ages 0-5 years old?"

"Are they in any early childhood programs such as home-visiting, Head Start, or childcare?"

If yes – "That's great! Your child is on their way to being ready for kindergarten! Thank you for your time!"

If no – "Are you interested in learning about the available learning programs for children?" (They might have grandchildren or nieces/nephews. If yes - continue to #3, if no – Say "Thank you for your time.")

3. Share the message about the importance of early learning programs!
"Did you know that a child's brain makes the most connections in the first three years of their life? Participating in an early learning program helps children make the most out of their first three years of learning and prepares for kindergarten. Early learning programs are a great way to set children up for success in school and in life."

(Feel free to share a personal experience of how early learning programs/activities helped your family.)

4. Make your pitch.
(Offer any materials with information on services available to families.)

"If you're interested, we can take down your information and someone can give you a call to talk to you about what early learning programs are available in this area to you and your family." (Use referral sheet to write person's information down if applicable.)

5. Thank you and goodbye!
"Thank you very much for your time! Have a great rest of your day!"

(Do not forget to capture this conversation in your tally sheet.)

PARENT OUTREACH AMBASSADOR TALLY SHEET

Use this tool to:

Keep track of and document community outreach.

Name of Ambassadors: _____ Date of Outreach: _____

ADDRESS	INTERACTION		FILL OUT IF PARENT/GUARDIAN NEEDS A REFERRAL				NOTES
1.	☐ Knocked on Door ☐ Talked to ☐ Left Materials	Needs Referral? ☐ Yes ☐ No	Parent/Guardian Name	Child Name	Child DOB	Guardian Phone Number	
2.	☐ Knocked on Door ☐ Talked to ☐ Left Materials	Needs Referral? ☐ Yes ☐ No	Parent/Guardian Name	Child Name	Child DOB	Guardian Phone Number	
3.	☐ Knocked on Door ☐ Talked to ☐ Left Materials	Needs Referral? ☐ Yes ☐ No	Parent/Guardian Name	Child Name	Child DOB	Guardian Phone Number	
4.	☐ Knocked on Door ☐ Talked to ☐ Left Materials	Needs Referral? ☐ Yes ☐ No	Parent/Guardian Name	Child Name	Child DOB	Guardian Phone Number	
5.	☐ Knocked on Door ☐ Talked to ☐ Left Materials	Needs Referral? ☐ Yes ☐ No	Parent/Guardian Name	Child Name	Child DOB	Guardian Phone Number	

TALLY # OF PEOPLE TALKED TO (ON STREET OR AT EVENTS):

REFERENCES

1 [Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework](#) by The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement.

2 Schmitz, P. Everyone Leads: Building Leadership from the Community Up, pg. 33.

3 Pathways to Meaningful Shared Leadership. https://parentsanonymous.org/assets/Research-on-Shared-Leadership-2005.pdf

4 *Ibid.*

5 Refer to "Self & Family Sphere of Influence" chart for explanation and examples of roles, pg. 9.

6 Refer to "Programs & Services Sphere of Influence" chart for explanation and examples of roles, pg. 10.

7 Refer to "Community Systems & Policy Sphere of Influence" chart for explanation, examples of roles, and intended collaboration objectives, pg. 11.

8 Franklin, Melia (2016). Ripples of Transformation: Families Leading Change in Early Childhood Systems. A Family Engagement Toolkit for Providers and Program Leaders. Commissioned by First 5 Alameda County with a grant from the Center for the Study of Social Policy. Retrieved from: https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/FirstFive-EngagementToolkit-5.pdf

9 Office of Adolescent Health Continuous Quality Improvement Part 1: Basics for Pregnancy Assistance Fund Programs. https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/sites/default/files/cqi-intro.pdf

10 https://www.thefreedictionary.com/coding

11 https://www.thefreedictionary.com/human+capital

12 Toolkit for Early Care & Education Advocates by Illinois Action for Children, pg. 3. https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/ACTFORCHILDREN/35e7dc4d-525c-45bc-ba2c-48e6466050e3/UploadedImages/IAFC_Advocacy_Toolkit_ENG_2016.pdf

13 https://www.britannica.com/topic/community-organizing

14 Pathways to Meaningful Shared Leadership. https://parentsanonymous.org/assets/Research-on-Shared-Leadership-2005.pdf

15 https://www.isbe.net/Documents/fe-guide.pdf

16 Refer to "Self & Family Sphere of Influence" chart for explanation and examples of roles, pg. 9.

17 Refer to "Programs & Services Sphere of Influence" chart for explanation and examples of roles, pg. 10.

18 Refer to "Community Systems & Policy Sphere of Influence" chart for explanation, examples of roles, and intended collaboration objectives, pg. 11.

19 http://www.fremontcouncilpta.org/system/files/downloads/GoalSetting.pdf

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*

22 Langley GL, Moen R, Nolan KM, Nolan TW, Norman CL, Provost LP. *The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organizational Performance* (2nd edition). Jossey-Bass Publishers; 2009.

23 All questions derived and/or adapted from the ABLe Change Framework. https://michirlearning.org/tools-for-action/your-inbox