

A FAMILY ENGAGEMENT HANDBOOK

Engaging Families in Early Childhood Collaborations



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Second Edition

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Second Edition

The first edition of this handbook was created by the Community Systems Statewide Supports (CS3) team at Illinois Action for Children, with Janet Vargas as the primary author. Families, groups, and organizations with early childhood education and care community systems improvement experience in Illinois inspired and informed the original handbook.

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- **The Illinois Early Learning Council's Family Engagement Implementation Subcommittee (FEIS)**
- **The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)**

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Introduction

How to Use This Handbook

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 resource for early childhood collaborationsⁱⁱ to begin or deepen their family engagement practices, an essential element of community systems work.

We understand that collaborations work in an environment of competing and scarce resources with varying community needs. We recommend that collaborations implement the family engagement strategies outlined in this resource at a scale and pace that works best for their collaboration and community.

Early childhood systems that engage, listen to, and act on family input are better positioned to address early childhood system problems. Family engagement in community systems and policy work leads to more equitable early childhood programs and systems.

Handbook Key

Throughout this handbook, you will see references to a tool available in the Appendix. There will also be Family Perspectives from families who have participated in an early childhood collaboration.



Tool available in Appendix



Family Perspectives

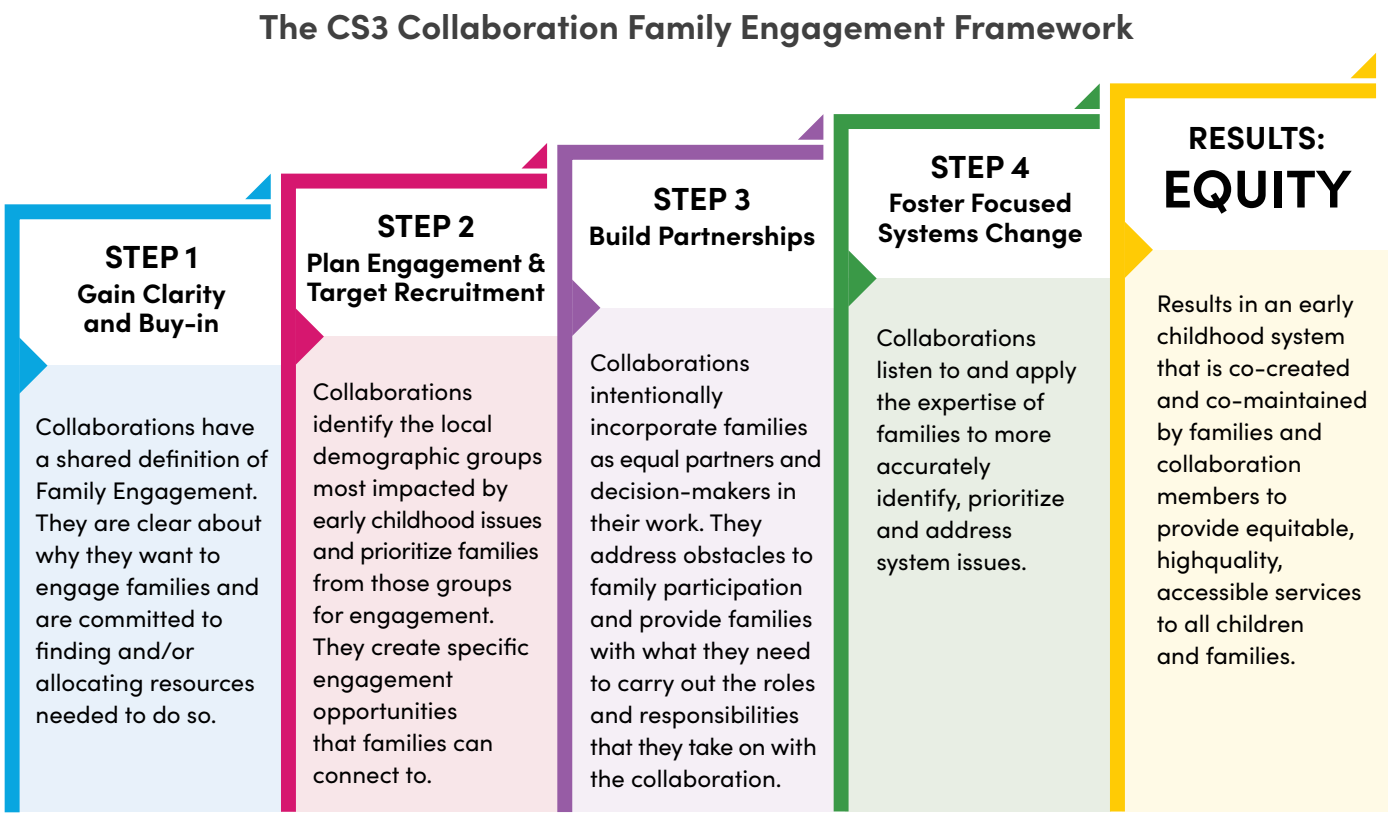
Who Should Use This Handbook

This resource is aimed at the person or group of people who have taken on the responsibility, paid or unpaid, to coordinate the work of an early childhood community collaboration. The Handbook is written as a guide for collaborations to lead their broader membership in informing, planning, and carrying out the collaboration's family engagement practices.



The CS3 Collaboration Family Engagement Framework

The CS3 Collaboration Family Engagement Framework outlines the steps, and accompanying strategies, an early childhood collaboration can take to begin or deepen its engagement. The Framework demonstrates how a collaboration can engage families to help create a more equitable early childhood system. Begin using the handbook at the framework step that best reflects your collaboration’s needs and circumstances.



Find Your Starting Point on the Collaboration Family Engagement Framework

Collaborations are in different places in their family engagement work. Use the following tool to find the best starting point on the Framework for your collaboration:

 **Appendix A Finding Your Starting Point on the Collaboration Family Engagement Framework**

We also understand that not all collaborations have the same resources or goals. The handbook includes tools and guidance for collaborations to choose at what scale and pace to implement the framework steps and strategies. For example, a collaboration with limited resources might choose to begin engaging families in the engagement role that takes the least amount of resources and is the most relevant to their work until they obtain the resources necessary to engage families in all the roles they want.

Implementing the CS3 Collaboration Family Engagement Framework

Step 1. Gain Clarity and Buy-In

The first step is all about being on the same page about family engagement as a collaboration. It's when collaborations determine what family engagement means to the group and why they want to carry it out. Collaboration members learn more about typical engagement roles and the resources needed to implement them. They choose how they will engage families in alignment with their beliefs, goals, and resources.

Going through a collective process to ensure clarity on their family engagement practices increases a collaboration's likelihood of full member buy-in, follow-through, and successful outcomes.

Strategies and Tools:

- A. Set collaboration's family engagement belief statements
- B. Define what family engagement means for the collaboration
- C. Learn about collaboration family engagement roles and outcomes
- D. Understand important resources for family engagement
- E. Decide how to engage families

A. Set Collaboration's Family Engagement Belief Statements

A collaboration's family engagement belief statements are their beliefs and views on families concerning the early childhood system. Not all collaboration members will have the same beliefs and opinions about family engagement, but they should all understand and accept the collaboration's family engagement beliefs.

Family engagement belief statements:

- Create member consensus and buy-in on their family engagement work
- Provide a guide for family engagement work

Lead collaboration members in setting the collaboration's Family Engagement Belief Statements using the following tool:

Appendix B Developing an Early Childhood Collaboration's Family Engagement Belief Statements



"Parent and family engagement...means that we see each other as true partners. Parents aren't just some folks who are at home and they gave birth to a child that you can take control of. It's a partnership where we're communicating, we're seeing through the eyes of each other what's working well, what's not working well."

- Collaboration Parent Leader



Example: CS3 Family Engagement Belief Statements

1. Families have their children's best interests in mind. They have the right to participate in every decision directly affecting them and their communities.
2. Families are essential and valued partners at every level of the early childhood system – in programs and in community systems development work.
3. Family engagement happens in the context of relationship building between collaborations, stakeholders, and the community.
4. Family leadership is an important aspect of family engagement. Parents, children, families, programs, communities, and systems benefit when family members grow as leaders.
5. Significant institutional, systemic, and structural barriers exist to family participation and partnership in early childhood systems. It is the responsibility of the collaboration, stakeholders, families, and community to help identify and eliminate barriers to family participation and partnership in the early childhood system.
6. Families are not all the same – they have different backgrounds, histories, cultures, circumstances, needs, and interests. Collaborations and stakeholders must recognize and respect that families are different and should meet them where they are.
7. To achieve equitable outcomes for children and their families, it is necessary to engage families representative of the communities that the collaboration serves, prioritizing families with the least access to opportunities, services, and resources.
8. Everyone in the collaboration has a role and responsibility in championing family engagement; family engagement is everyone's work.
9. Collaborations require sustainable resources to provide ongoing, high-quality family engagement.



B. Define What Family Engagement Means for The Collaboration

Establish a family engagement definition in writing for the collaboration.

A collective family engagement definition ensures that all members understand family engagement to mean the same thing. It creates member consensus and buy-in on the collaboration's family engagement work.

CS3 Family Engagement Definitions

The CS3 team defines family* engagement in early childhood collaborations as both a process and an outcome.

Process – Family engagement in early childhood collaborations is how early childhood stakeholders** build effective, authentic partnerships with families. It requires an intentional effort by early childhood stakeholders to provide families with the opportunities and supports needed to participate, inform, and influence community systems. Shared responsibility, decision-making power, and expertise are essential to community systems development work***.

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

Other Definitions

***Family** – all adults who interact with early childhood systems in support of their child, including biological, adoptive, and foster parents; grandparents; legal and informal guardians; and adult siblings.

****Early childhood stakeholders** – refers to individuals or groups vested in early childhood education and care outcomes.

*****Community systems development work** – Community systems development is a process by which a community takes collective responsibility for its young children by building an aligned, high-quality, accessible early learning system that supports all children in becoming successful.

Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, Framework by The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement.

Lead collaboration members in setting the collaboration's family engagement definition using the following tool:

Appendix C Setting a Collaboration's Family Engagement Definition

C. Learn About Collaboration Family Engagement Roles and Outcomes

Learn about roles collaborations can engage families in and their respective outcomes.

Family engagement is invaluable to community systems work and can take many forms. Clarity on what roles you want to carry out and objectives for the engagement makes it easier to plan the engagement.

Family engagement has different goals and looks different depending on the context. Collaborations tend to engage families in their work to impact community systems & policies. We identified five typical roles collaborations can create and support families to take on within the collaboration and its community systems and policy work.

Five Typical Collaboration Family Engagement Roles:



Lived Experience
Expert



Collaboration
Partner



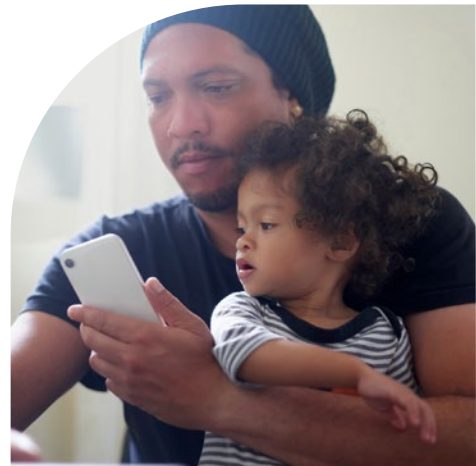
Outreach
Ambassador








Advocate



Facilitator



Typical Collaboration Family Engagement Roles

Family Engagement Roles	Role Description	Intended Collaboration Objective(s)	Family Outcomes	Engagement Examples
Lived Experience Expert 	Families share their early childhood lived experiences, needs, and strengths with the collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn about families' experiences with the early childhood system Align the collaboration's goals to community needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflects on family needs and strengths Families become more familiar with the collaboration 	Providing feedback through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-person surveys Online surveys Focus groups Small group meeting discussions
Collaboration Partner 	Families: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Become collaboration members Participate in the collaboration's decision-making Represent the family perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase family participation in collaboration Collect real-time family input on all collaboration efforts Align the collaboration's goals to community needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gains knowledge about early childhood system Develops support network Builds skills, knowledge, and confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating in collaboration as a member and partner
Outreach Ambassador 	Families carry out peer-to-peer outreach to do one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get community feedback Connect families to services Invite families to engage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect with families not currently a part of the local early childhood system. Align the collaboration's goals to community needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthens relationships with community Gains knowledge of available early childhood programs and resources Builds skills, knowledge, and confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tabling at a community event to share the importance of early childhood education with other families and connect families to services Directing other families to early childhood resources via social media posts and messages
Advocate 	Families share personal testimonies about lived experiences with decision-makers to gain support for or against an early childhood issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate family voice and stories to policy and systems change work Align the collaboration's goals to community needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds relationships with decision-makers Gains knowledge of legislative and policy-making process Gains knowledge of families' rights Builds skills, knowledge, and confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating in advocacy days with local, state, or federal elected officials
Facilitator 	Collaborations support families to plan and/or facilitate activities that align with the goals of the collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring workshops and activities to the broader community Increase social supports and mental well-being for families participating in workshops and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds skills, knowledge, and confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carrying out Parent Cafes Co-facilitating parent leadership trainings Running early childhood activities for families in public places such as the park or laundromat

Learn more about typical early childhood family engagement roles using the following tool:

 **Appendix D Typical Early Childhood Collaboration Family Engagement Roles and Outcomes**


D. Understand Important Resources for Family Engagement

Resources for family engagement include the time, energy, funds, and in-kind donations needed to cover the work and costs associated with engagement practices of a collaboration.

Understanding what it takes to engage families helps the collaboration plan effectively.



Important Resources for Family Engagement

Family Engagement Lead(s)	People who coordinate and carry out the ongoing family engagement efforts. Having a part-time staff member whose job is focused on family engagement is ideal but not necessary. Collaboration member(s) can volunteer to lead the engagement work. Their work may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planning and conducting the family engagement and recruitment efforts• Coordinating family participation supports• Supporting collaboration members to build engagement capacity
Translation and Interpretation	Interpretation services and translated materials at all meetings and events in the languages spoken by the families targeted for engagement. Popular interpretation options include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simultaneous interpretation – via headset equipment or zoom features where only participants who need interpretation can hear it.• Consecutive interpretation – Everyone who speaks pauses every few sentences to allow an interpreter to translate the message; all participants can hear the translation. You will need to double the meeting time to allow for this type of interpretation.
Meeting Supplies	Any supplies and materials needed to participate in meetings and engagement activities, including but not limited to pens, paper, markers, folders, clipboards, nametags, etc.
Refreshments	Refreshments can consist of snacks if the engagement activity is outside of mealtime hours and a full meal if it takes place during mealtime hours. Do not forget to count children in your estimates.
Childcare	Childcare and childcare materials (age-appropriate activities, arts and crafts, toys, etc.) for families at all meetings and events. Plan for a separate room or space for childcare if possible.
Transportation	Travel supports to and from engagement activities. Options for supports can include public transit cards, mileage reimbursement, or a rideshare. If you do not have transportation resources, help parents organize a carpool.
Stipends	Payment to families for their time and contributions. Collaboration members often participate in the collaboration as part of their job responsibilities; it is only fair that families get paid, too. Stipends also contribute towards families' income, which benefits their children and incentivizes their participation. See:  Appendix E Important Resources for Engaging Families in Early Childhood Collaborations
Alternative Compensation	Whenever stipends are unavailable, consider other ways to compensate families 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 family engagement lead(s) on engagement strategies and application, professional development for all collaboration members on introductory family engagement ideas, and leadership training for parents.

E. Decide How to Engage Families

There are limited resources for collaboration work and quite a few different ways to engage families. Choose which roles to engage families in that align with your collaboration's goals and available resources. When deciding which role(s) to implement, use:

Appendix F Choosing Family Engage Roles to Implement in Early Childhood Collaborations

Step 2. Plan Engagement and Target Recruitment

During the second step of the framework, collaborations plan the engagement opportunities for families and their recruitment process. They identify and target those most impacted for engagement.

Strategies and Tools:

- A. Plan for each family engagement role
- B. Identify those impacted
- C. Prioritize those most impacted for engagement
- D. Engage those most impacted
- E. Recruit families for the long-haul
- F. Practice a trauma-informed and healing-centered approach to family engagement








A. Plan for Each Family Engagement Role

Plan for each family engagement role separately before beginning to recruit families. Family engagement takes work, and coordinating an intentional planning process sets up a collaboration for success. Use the tool:

 **Appendix G** Family Engagement Planning Form to plan each family engagement role



Strategies and Tools for Engaging Families by Role

1		Lived Experience Expert	 Appendix H Strategies & Tools for Engaging Families as Lived Experience Experts
2		Collaboration Partner	 Appendix I Strategies & Tools for Engaging Families as Collaboration Partners
3		Outreach Ambassador	 Appendix J Strategies & Tools for Engaging Families as Outreach Ambassadors
4		Advocate	 Appendix K Strategies & Tools for Engaging Families as Advocates
5		Facilitator	 Appendix L Strategies & Tools for Engaging Families as Facilitators

B. Identify Those Impacted

One of the best ways to address an early childhood system inequity is to engage the families who are most impacted by that issue. Families who are not being served or who are being underserved can provide invaluable insight into the obstacles they are experiencing and possible solutions to those obstacles.

1. Make a list of the groups impacted by the issue you are trying to address.

While we understand that families are all unique, we also recognize that families have commonalities that shape their experiences with the early childhood system. A good place to look for service delivery and outcome inequities is to look at how service and outcomes vary for different groups who have historically and are currently being left out of the early childhood system.

2. Ask early childhood stakeholders which families are being underserved or not served at all.

One way to start finding those most impacted is to have conversations with stakeholders who regularly interact with families in the community about which groups of families are being underserved or not served at all.

3. Cross-check that list with local disaggregated early childhood data.

It's important to confirm anecdotal data with quantitative early childhood data. The state regularly identifies priority populations and groups of families that the system is currently struggling to reach and serve. Look at local data with special attention to how the most updated priority populations and historically oppressed races and ethnicities fare in comparison to other populations.

Make a list of the groups impacted by the issue you are trying to address.

Ask direct service community partners who regularly interact with families with young children such as:

- Community-based organizations
- Welcome Centers
- Food pantries
- Shelters

AND

Examine local disaggregated early childhood quantitative data to cross-check what you hear from community partners. Pay close attention to how marginalized groups fare in your community, such as:

- Non-white races and ethnicities
- [State priority populations](#)
- Other groups who are left out by structural inequities



*"[Parents'] needs are very different because each parent is very different. But sometimes there's one [need] in common and that's what we can work on."
- Collaboration Parent Leader*

Reliable sources of local early childhood quantitative data:

- Local and county data
- [State data on the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map \(IECAM\)](#)
- [Birth to Five Regional Assessments](#)
- [KIDS: Data and Reports](#)

You can visit partnerplanact.org for additional support on working with early childhood data in community systems development.



C. Prioritize Those Most Impacted for Recruitment Engagement

Once you have a list of all the groups of impacted families you can tease out which groups are the most impacted from the list to target them for recruitment and engagement.

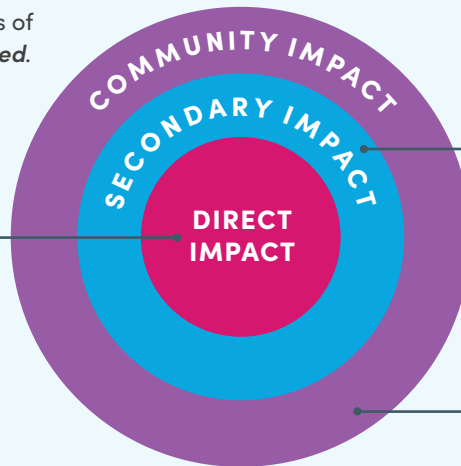
This tool, adapted from [Chicago United for Equity \(CUE\)](#), can be used to identify which groups of families are the most impacted out of all the impacted groups.

Prioritizing Those Most Impacted Tool

Direct Impact: The opinions and needs of those most affected should be *prioritized*.

Which families are:

- Not accessing services at all?
- Accessing services at a lower rate than average?
- Accessing services but not seeing the same outcomes as other groups?



Secondary Impact: The opinions and needs of those directly serving or connected to those most affected should be *considered*.

- What stakeholders are directly serving or connected to those most affected who can provide insight on the issue (E.g., Program providers and/or administrators)?

Community Impact: The opinions of the community should be *acknowledged*.

- Who else care about and/or understands the issue at hand and a can provide some insight?

Adopted from Chicago United for Equity

Example: Engaging Those Most Impacted

Example: Collaboration X wants to start engaging families.

Collaboration X wants to start engaging families. They ask their collaboration partners about the families who are not being reached, enrolled and/or served by early childhood education and care programs. The partners believe that those most impacted are families in deep poverty and Black families based on their experiences (qualitative data).

Collaboration X is familiar with their local census data and knows that the historically marginalized demographic groups in their community include families with children in deep poverty, Black families, and Latinx families. The collaboration looks at KIDS data and confirms that families in deep poverty and Black families are not ready for kindergarten at the same rate as the other children in the community (quantitative data). In addition, the data indicates that Latinx children are also not ready for kindergarten at the same rate as other groups. The collaboration wants to learn from those most impacted about what they need to access early childhood programs and be ready for kindergarten. They use the tool to prioritize who to engage. Their answers are on the next page.



Collaboration X Example

<p>Direct Impact: The opinions and needs of those most affected should be <i>prioritized</i>. Which families are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not accessing services at all?• Accessing services at a lower rate than average?• Accessing services but not seeing the same outcomes as other groups?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Black Families with children kindergarten age and younger• Families in deep poverty with children kindergarten age and younger• Latinx Families with children kindergarten age and younger
<p>Secondary Impact: The opinions and needs of those directly serving or connected to those most affected should be <i>considered</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What stakeholders are directly serving or connected to those most affected who can provide insight on the issue, (E.g., Program providers and/or administrators)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Families with children who are ready for kindergarten• Education and childcare providers and administrators, especially those who serve Black and Latinx families, and children in deep poverty• Kindergarten teachers and administrators, especially those who serve Black and Latinx families, and children in deep poverty
<p>Community Impact: The opinions and needs of the community should be <i>acknowledged</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who else cares about and/or understands the issue at hand and can provide some insight?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A community-based organization that works with Black families in the community• The staff at a local housing organization that works with families in deep poverty• A Welcome Center that works with Latinx families in the community

To engage your collaboration in prioritizing groups of families to engage, use:

 **Appendix S Prioritize Those Most Impacted for Engagement**

D. Engage Those Most Impacted

Once you identify who is being impacted you can recruit and engage them. Two options for engaging those most impacted are prioritized engagement and proportional engagement.



Options for Engaging Those Most Impacted

Engagement Options	What Does It Mean?	Pros	Cons	Collaboration X Example: Community X is 40% Latinx, 20% Black, and 40% White
Prioritized Engagement	Focus engagement of families that belong to the populations who are the most impacted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families who are impacted the most can provide information about their experience and that of their communities without being tokenized. Families who are the most impacted will not get overshadowed by families with more privilege This option is the most equitable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community perception if they do not understand equity practices It takes more work and support to engage families who are not connected to the system and might have higher needs 	If Collaboration X wants to engage 10 families, they would aim to engage mostly if not all families who are Black and in deep poverty (the most impacted in their community)
Proportional Engagement	Engage families at a rate that is proportional to the community's broader demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families from across the board will be represented Community perception of fairness and more buy-in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More privileged families may overshadow the less privileged families Asking a few of the most impacted families to represent all of them can be a lot of work for them 	If collaboration X wants to engage 10 families, they might plan to engage 4 Latinx families, 2 Black Families, and 4 White families (Representative of community-wide demographics)

E. Recruit Families 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.

Recruit Families Who Are Engaged in Early Childhood Programs and Services

- Leverage existing relationships by having staff who engage families in early childhood programs and services personally encourage them to participate in the collaboration's engagement. Families usually become engaged by someone with whom they have a relationship and trust.
- Collaboration members can attend community meetings and spaces to recruit families for engagement in the collaboration. It is especially effective if a family who is currently involved with the collaboration speaks to other families about why they are involved.

Be Clear About Engagement Roles, Responsibilities, and Timeline

- Share as much information as possible with families during recruitment. Families 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 families in the planning process.

Build Lists and Relationships

- Collect names and contact information of all families 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 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 Partner.



"I was a destroyer in my community; now I'm a rebuildier. Rebuilding means to start from the inside out. So, the inside is going out inside the community, letting the people be aware of things that's going on..."

*- Collaboration
Parent Leader*

F. Practice a Trauma-informed and Healing-Centered Approach to Family Engagement

A Trauma-Informed Approach

This resource aims to be asset-based and equitable throughout, but it is worth explicitly highlighting the importance of a trauma-informed approach to engaging families who have been the most impacted by early childhood issues your collaboration is seeking to address.

Families who are the most impacted by early childhood issues also tend to be groups of families who have been historically and/or are currently marginalized. These families often have and/or are currently experiencing trauma, often caused or made worse by racial inequities.

A trauma-informed approachⁱⁱⁱ

1. Acknowledges how trauma affects people's lives and needs; and
2. Makes efforts to minimize the impacts and practices in ways that support recovery while limiting the risk of contributing to further trauma.

Collaborations should learn more about and consider a trauma-informed approach when engaging families who are the most impacted by early childhood issues.

A Healing-Centered Approach

Some schools of thought on trauma and healing believe that both are experienced collectively. One example is the healing-centered approach, "a holistic approach involving culture, spirituality, civic action, and collective healing."¹ The approach is based on "the idea that people are not harmed in a vacuum, and well-being comes from participating in transforming the root causes of the harm within institutions." Following this school of thought, families partaking in meaningful systems change via their early childhood community collaboration would be part of a healing-centered approach and action.

ⁱⁱⁱThe Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement | by Shawn Ginwright | Medium



Step 3. Build Partnerships



Equal partnership with families consists of creating an environment where families feel welcomed and can fully participate. To do so, collaborations can address obstacles to family participation and provide families with what they need to carry out the roles and responsibilities that they take on with the collaboration. A partnership also looks like families having a say in the collaboration's work.

Strategies and Tools:

- A. Include opportunities for relationship-building
- B. Create a welcoming and inclusive environment for families
- C. Provide families onboarding and continuous supports
- D. Give families a say in the work^{iv}



"And it's beautiful because when I talk to some of the fathers and some of the mothers they be like man how you know this? I'm a part of it and being a part of it, it's just a great feeling."

– Collaboration Parent Leader

A. Include Opportunities for Relationship-Building

Relationships are at the heart of collaboration work, including family engagement. Make time to get to know the families you engage and create structured opportunities such as icebreakers and team-building activities for them to get to know each other.

B. Create a Welcoming and Inclusive Environment for Families

It is not enough to invite families to attend collaboration spaces, they also need to be able to participate in those spaces. Ensuring families can participate in your collaboration often requires intentional changes to how business is done. It helps to identify a list of the practices that your collaboration commits to carry out to be a welcoming and inclusive space to families, which this resource calls Family Inclusion Policies, use:

 **Appendix T Developing Family Inclusion Policies Tool**





C. Provide Families Onboarding and Continuous Supports

Recommended supports collaborations can provide for families they engage:

- Training, coaching, and guidance (as needed) to carry out roles and responsibilities associated with engagement role(s)
- Compensate families with stipends for their time and contribution when possible
- Provide materials and supplies such as pens, paper, notebooks

Collaborations can also facilitate accessibility by providing the following for the families they engage:

- Help accessing and participating in online meetings
- Convenient meeting schedules and locations
- Key materials available in formats and languages that families can understand in a timely way
- Simple language – avoid jargon and acronyms
- Childcare
- Transportation support
- Refreshments/meals at meetings for their families, including their children

Anticipate and provide supports that families need to be able to fully participate in the collaboration, and always directly ask the families you are engaging what they need.

D. Give Families a Say in the Work

- Give families decision-maker power in the collaboration
- Designate collaboration agenda item for families
- Count on families to make real decisions that lead to concrete next steps
- Ask families how they would like to share their expertise
- Co-create or co-develop products and projects with families whenever possible
- Clearly include and address feedback that families provide

Step 4. Foster Focused Systems Change



The last framework step consists of listening and applying the expertise that families share with you to identify, prioritize and address system issues.

Strategies and Tools:

A. Apply What You Are Learning from Families in the Work of the Collaboration

Always ask yourselves, “How is this engagement influencing and impacting how the collaboration works and what we work on?”

- Connect the family engagement work to the collaboration:
 - Have families inform which community issues to address
 - Support family-led projects that advance collaboration goals, such as carrying out Parent Cafes or diaper drives
 - Ask families about potential solutions to early childhood community problems

B. Continue to Engage Families and Community at Different Stages of the Community System’s Work

- Have family feedback guide the issues the collaboration works on
- Engage families in helping connect the dots and give context to family’s stories about their lived experiences.
A great way to contextualize qualitative data is  **Appendix K Data Walk Protocol**
- Listen to families about proposed solutions to community systems issues
- Ask families to vote on a short list of possible solutions for the collaboration implement
- Support families in implementing collaboration solutions to systems issues
- Engage families in evaluating the process and outcomes of the collaboration’s work



Results: EQUITY

Intentional family engagement is a partnership with families who are being underserved or not served to redesign systems to include them and serve them; it is essential to collaboration work.

The result of intentional family engagement in collaborations is Equity, with a focus on *racial equity.

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

*CS3 Racial Equity Definition

Racial equity in early childhood collaborations is both a process and an outcome.

Process – Racial equity reforms the practices and policies of structural and systemic racism by 1) prioritizing services for those most impacted by racism; 2) assessing and addressing the advantages and disparities produced by unjust systems and practices; and 3) engaging those most impacted as experts in their own experiences, strategists in co-creating solutions, and evaluators of success.

Outcome – We achieve racial equity when race no longer determines how one fares in society; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live.



Conclusion

Family 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 family engagement in early childhood collaborations.

The handbook aims to equip collaborations with the knowledge, tools, and skills needed to engage families in the way that best fits their collaboration and the communities they serve. We hope it offers a full picture of what family engagement can be at the collaboration level and allows you to take the first step in engaging families.



"I'm able to, I think, kind of bridge or like be a like a bridge or a conduit between the different early child organizations just because I exist in the middle part like that."

– Collaboration Parent Leader

Appendix A

Finding your starting point on the collaboration family engagement framework

Use this tool to:

Find your starting point on the collaboration family engagement framework.

Why use this tool?

Collaborations are already engaging families. This tool aims to meet collaborations where they are in terms of their family engagement.

Questions	Choose one answer		
1. The collaboration has something in writing that defines and guides family engagement.	Yes	No	Unsure
2. The collaboration is familiar with typical engagement roles and their intended outcomes.	Yes	No	Unsure
3. The collaboration understands the resources needed to engage families and has committed to finding and/or allocating them.	Yes	No	Unsure
4. The collaboration's broader work and goals align with the way it engages families.	Yes	No	Unsure
5. The collaboration has identified and prioritized those most impacted by the early childhood issues they are working to change.	Yes	No	Unsure
6. The collaboration offers well-defined and specific engagement opportunities for families.	Yes	No	Unsure
7. The collaboration recruits families that are representative of those most impacted by the early childhood issues they are working to change.	Yes	No	Unsure
8. The collaboration incorporates families as equal partners and decision-makers in their work.	Yes	No	Unsure
9. The collaboration addresses obstacles to family participation. They have supportive spaces.	Yes	No	Unsure
10. The collaboration provides families with what they need to carry out the roles and responsibilities that they take on with the collaboration.	Yes	No	Unsure
11. The collaboration takes family input and applies it to address early childhood system issues.	Yes	No	Unsure
12. The collaboration lets families know the impact of their participation.	Yes	No	Unsure
13. The collaboration continuously improves their family engagement by asking families for feedback on what they can do better.	Yes	No	Unsure
TOTALS			

Count your total for each column, then use the table below to find your results.	
1-5 Yeses	Your collaboration may need some clarity on what family engagement means to them, why they choose to engage families, or the resources it takes to do so. Consider starting at Step 1 of the Framework.
6-7 Yeses	Your collaboration has well-defined engagement opportunities that align with its broader goals and engage those impacted in those roles. Consider starting at Step 2 of the Framework.
8-10 Yeses	Your collaboration's engagement opportunities are welcoming and inclusive; families can actively participate in the collaboration as equal partners with decision-making power. Consider starting at Step 3 of the Framework.
11-13 Yeses	Your collaboration partners with families to create focused change that will have an impact on families; you continuously tailor your family engagement practices to fit the needs of families. Consider starting at Step 4 of the Framework.

Based on the result table to the left, what is your collaboration's suggested starting point on the Family Engagement Framework?

Step 1: Clarity and Buy-in

Step 2: Intentional Planning and Recruitment

Step 3: Partnership

Step 4: Focused Systems Change

Note: If you are still unsure at which step on the Family Engagement Framework your collaboration should start its family engagement work, please contact the Community Systems Statewide Supports team to request [On-Demand Consultation](#).

Appendix B

Developing an early childhood collaboration's belief statements on family engagement

Use this tool to:

Develop your collaboration's belief statements on family engagement.

What are belief statements on family engagement?

A collaboration's family engagement belief statements are a list of their views on families in relation to the early childhood system.

Develop belief statements to:

- Create member consensus and buy-in on your family engagement work.
- Have a guide for your family engagement work.

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



Before setting your collaboration family engagement belief statements

Share these questions with collaboration members in advance. Members do not need to send in their answers, but they can refer to them when they go through the exercise of setting the belief statements.

- Do you think it's important to engage families in the collaboration's work? Why or why not?
- Which families should the collaboration engage?
- How should the collaboration engage families?
- Are there obstacles to family participation? If so, what are they?
- What do families need to participate?
- What do collaboration members need to engage families?
- Who within the collaboration should carry out the family engagement?
- What resources would we need to engage families?

Set your collaboration family engagement belief statements

Participants: All collaboration members.

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

Time needed: Approximately one hour and a half, depending on collaboration size.

Appendix B (continued)

Meeting One

Set context: (5 minutes)

- Explain what family 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).

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 families in relation to early childhood systems. Offer an example to the group: "I believe parents are children's first teachers."

Compiling ideas: (15 minutes)

- Give everyone 2-3 minutes to circle their top 5 out of their list of family 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 the group.

Report back: (20 minutes)

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

Discussion and consensus: (30 minutes)

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

Compare with this handbook's family engagement beliefs: (15 minutes)

- You can choose to share the list of the CS3 Family Engagement Belief Statements on the next page to compare beliefs the group agrees with that are missing from their list.



CS3 Family Engagement Belief Statements

- Families have their children's best interests in mind. They have the right to participate in every decision that directly affects them and their communities.
- Families are essential and valued partners at every level of the early childhood system – in programs and in community systems development work.
- Family engagement happens in the context of relationship building between collaborations, stakeholders, and the community.
- Family leadership is an important aspect of family engagement. Parents, children, families, programs, communities, and systems benefit when family members grow as leaders.
- There are significant institutional, systemic, and structural barriers to family participation and partnership in early childhood systems. It is the responsibility of the collaboration, stakeholders, families, and community to help identify and eliminate barriers for family participation and partnership in the early childhood system.
- Families are not all the same – they have different backgrounds, histories, culture, circumstances, needs, and interests. Collaborations and stakeholders must recognize and respect that families are all different and should meet them where they are.
- In order to achieve equitable outcomes for children and their families, it is necessary to engage families that are representative of the communities that the collaboration serves, prioritizing families with the least access to opportunities, services, and resources.
- Everyone in the collaboration has a role and responsibility in championing family engagement; family engagement is everyone's work.
- Collaborations require sustainable resources in order to provide ongoing, high-quality family engagement.

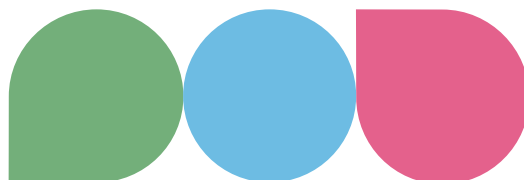
Meeting Two

Review and approve family engagement belief statements

- Carry out necessary editing and wordsmithing to the list of beliefs and present to group for review and approval. This work can happen in between meetings.

To reinforce your collaboration's family 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, and social media.
- Include them in your new member onboarding process.



Appendix C

Setting a Collaboration's Family Engagement Definition

Use this tool to:

Set your collaboration's family engagement definition.

Why set a collaboration family engagement definition?

A collective family engagement definition creates member consensus and buy-in on collaboration's engagement work.

Prepare to set family 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 family engagement definition.

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

Instructions for facilitation:

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

Ask everyone to close their eyes and visualize what their IDEAL collaboration family engagement practices would look like.

Encourage the group to think about what's working well with their program's family engagement practices that they want to see replicated at the collaboration level. Ask them to think about other members' effective family engagement practices.

Read the following list of questions out loud to guide their thought process:

- Imagine our collaboration engaging families without any obstacles.
What is your vision for the ideal family engagement practices in our collaboration?
- What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? How do you feel?
- Which families are we engaging?
- Where are we engaging them and how?
- Who is engaging them?
- How are families and children benefiting?
- How is the collaboration benefiting?
- What is happening in the community because families 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 family engagement practices at the collaboration (3 minutes)

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Appendix C (continued)

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)

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).

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

Debrief discussion. Use the following questions to cultivate dialogue:

- How was that visioning experience for you?
- How did it make you feel?
- Do you see any patterns across the visions?
- (For a collaboration that is already engaging families) – How does this vision compare to what we are already doing to engage parents and families in the collaboration?
- Did anything surprise you about these visions?
- What is needed to make these visions a reality?

Exercise for setting collaboration family engagement definition

Participants: All collaboration members.

Exercise objective: Participants can use this exercise to set a collaboration family engagement definition.

Materials Needed: Three to four family engagement definitions from reputable sources printed and individually cut (feel free to use the CS3 definition), and tape.

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

Instructions for exercise:

1. Write out or print 3-4 family engagement definitions from reputable sources in the field 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:

- What stood out to you about the definition you are standing next to?
 - How does that definition relate to your agency's/program's family engagement definition?
 - 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 family engagement definitions to present at the next collaboration meeting. Aid collaboration members in choosing/tailoring the draft definitions to the collaboration's own.
 5. Integrate definition into the collaboration's protocols.

Appendix D

Typical collaboration family engagement roles and outcomes

Use this tool to:

Learn about typical roles that collaborations can engage families in.

What are family engagement roles?

The family engagement roles listed and described in this resource consist of ways that early childhood stakeholders can engage families within the early childhood systems; by no means is this list exhaustive. The roles span the three spheres of family engagement within early childhood systems: Self and Family, Programs and Services, and Community Systems and Policy.

Why use family engagement roles when implementing parent engagement?

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

Early Childhood Family Engagement Spheres and Roles

The Three Spheres of Family Engagement graphic outlines the areas which families can influence change through their engagement within the early childhood system. This tool can help early childhood stakeholders plan their family engagement opportunities.^v






Appendix D (continued)

Self & Family Sphere:

Most families first get involved in the early childhood system to support their children’s learning and healthy development. Which often involves learning and growing for the adults. Families get involved to influence the Self & Family, thus the name Self & Family Sphere of family engagement. Three typical engagement roles in this sphere are Potential Client, First Teacher, and Adult Learner. The chart below goes into more detail on these roles and outcomes.






Self & Family Sphere Engagement Roles and Outcomes

Family Engagement Roles	Role Description	Family Outcomes	Engagement Examples
Potential Client 	Families learn about the local early childhood education and care services available and/or receive support navigating the application/enrollment processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Families have the information to access the services they need.• Families access early childhood education and care services.	Families receiving information about early childhood services and program options either in person or via printed materials, website, or phone.
First Teacher 	Families participate in opportunities that help them support their child(ren)’s learning and healthy development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Families learn strategies to interact with and support their children’s development at different ages and stages.• Children’s developmental delays are caught earlier.• Children are ready for kindergarten.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Families attend workshops on child development milestones, child needs, and/or parenting strategies.• Families attend playgroups and other early learning family events.
Adult Learner 	The adult members of families participate in learning experiences for their personal growth and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The adult members of families gain new knowledge, skills, and opportunities that benefit their children.• Access to better personal and professional opportunities.	Families participating in any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial literacy workshops• Parent leadership development workshops• ESL (English as a Second Language)

The Programs & Services Sphere:

As families enroll in the early childhood programs and services (Participants), some will want to become involved in ways that support (Volunteer) and shape (Partner) these spaces and experiences that play such a vital role in their children’s lives. Program and Service staff can engage families in the roles of Participant, Volunteer, and/or Partner. The chart below goes into more detail on these roles and outcomes.

Programs & Services Sphere Engagement Roles and Outcomes






Family Engagement Roles	Role Description	Family Outcomes	Engagement Examples
Participant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family receives early childhood services• Family participates in community-building events and workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accesses supports for self and family• Develops support network• Builds skills, and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participating in Head Start or home-visiting program• Participating in parent cafes, parent breakfasts, etc.
Volunteer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assists early childhood programs• Helps with events for children and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learns more about the early childhood programs their children are in• Builds community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Volunteering in the classroom reading to children• Volunteering to organize a program’s Family Breakfast event
Partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides feedback about services• Identifies needs, plans, and evaluates services• Engages in program decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gains knowledge of programs and early childhood system.• Learns about the mechanics of program leadership meetings• Shapes services to meet their family’s needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completing program’s surveys on needs and interests• Serving on parent advisory committees (PAC) or program policy councils



The Community Systems & Policies Sphere:

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.

Community Systems & Policy Sphere Engagement Roles and Outcomes

Family Engagement Roles	Role Description	Intended Collaboration Objective(s)	Family Outcomes	Engagement Examples
Lived Experience Expert 	Families share their early childhood lived experiences, needs, and strengths with the collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn about families' experiences with the early childhood system Align the collaboration's goals to community needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflects on family needs and strengths Families become more familiar with the collaboration 	Providing feedback through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-person surveys Online surveys Focus groups Small group meeting discussions
Collaboration Partner 	Families: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Become collaboration members Participate in the collaboration's decision-making Represent the family perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase family participation in collaboration Collect real-time family input on all collaboration efforts Align the collaboration's goals to community needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gains knowledge about early childhood system Develops support network Builds skills, knowledge, and confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating in collaboration as a member and partner
Outreach Ambassador 	Families carry out peer-to-peer outreach to do one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get community feedback Connect families to services Invite families to engage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect with families not currently a part of the local early childhood system. Align the collaboration's goals to community needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthens relationships with community Gains knowledge of available early childhood programs and resources Builds skills, knowledge, and confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tabling at a community event to share the importance of early childhood education with other families and connect families to services Directing other families to early childhood resources via social media posts and messages
Advocate 	Families share personal testimonies about lived experiences with decision-makers to gain support for or against an early childhood issue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevates family voice and stories to policy and systems change work Align the collaboration's goals to community needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds relationships with decision-makers Gains knowledge of legislative and policy-making process Gains knowledge of families' rights Builds skills, knowledge, and confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating in advocacy days with local, state, or federal elected officials
Facilitator 	Collaborations support families to plan and/or facilitate activities that align with the goals of the collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring workshops and activities to the broader community Increase social supports and mental well-being for families participating in workshops and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds skills, knowledge, and confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carrying out Parent Cafes Co-facilitating parent leadership trainings Running early childhood activities for families in public places such as the park or laundromat

Appendix E

Important resources for engaging families in early childhood collaborations

Use this tool to:

- Understand important resources for effective family engagement in an early childhood collaboration
- Set guidelines for family stipends

What are family engagement resources?

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



Important resources for effective family engagement

Family Engagement Lead(s)	<p>People who coordinate and carry out the ongoing family engagement efforts.</p> <p>Their work may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leading family recruitment efforts• Coordinating family participation supports• Supporting collaboration members to build engagement capacity <p>Having a part-time staff whose job is focused on family engagement is ideal, but not necessary. Collaboration member(s) can volunteer to lead the engagement work.</p>
Translation & Interpretation	<p>Interpretation services and translated materials at all meetings and events in the languages spoken by the families targeted for engagement.</p> <p>Popular interpretation options include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simultaneous interpretation - via headset equipment or zoom features where only participants who need interpretation can hear it.• Consecutive interpretation- Everyone who speaks pauses every few sentences to allow an interpreter to translate the message; all participants can hear the translation. You will need to double the meeting time to allow for this type of interpretation.
Meeting Supplies	<p>Any supplies and materials needed to participate in meetings and engagement activities, including but not limited to pens, paper, markers, folders, clipboards, nametags, etc.</p>
Refreshments	<p>Refreshments can consist of snacks if the engagement activity is outside of mealtime hours and a full meal if it takes place during mealtime hours. 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!</p>
Childcare	<p>Childcare and childcare materials (age-appropriate activities, arts and crafts, toys, etc.) for families at all meetings and events. Plan for a separate room or space for childcare.</p>
Transportation	<p>Travel supports to and from engagement activities in the form of public transit cards or mileage reimbursement. If you do not have resources, help parents organize a carpool.</p>

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Appendix E (continued)

Stipends	Payment to families for their time and contributions. Most collaboration members participate at the collaboration as part of their job responsibilities; it is only fair that families get paid too. Stipends also incentivize family participation.
Alternative Compensation	Whenever stipends are unavailable, consider other ways to compensate families 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 family engagement lead(s) on engagement strategies and application, professional development for all collaboration members on introductory family engagement ideas, and leadership training for parents.



Setting parent stipend guidelines

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

Choosing When to Pay Family Stipends

Prioritize stipends for engagement roles if:

- The engagement role(s) requires parents to use a significant amount of their time to provide the collaboration their expertise (e.g., families participate in focus groups, or speak on a panel).
- The engagement role(s) requires families to carry out a job for the collaboration during a defined time (e.g., work as Outreach Ambassadors or Facilitator).

Consider compensating family time and contribution with an alternative compensation (if absolutely necessary) if:

- Roles and activities take a short time (e.g., filling out a survey).

Include the Following in Family Stipend Guidelines:

- **Clear and transparent family selection process** – If paid positions are limited, have a transparent and fair process to select who gets the paid roles. If more families 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 families before the stipend work begins; make sure to do so verbally and in writing. Families 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.

Appendix F



Choosing collaboration family engagement roles to implement

Use this tool to:

Learn about potential early childhood family engagement roles.

- Identify strengths and gaps in existing local family engagement efforts
- Choose which family engagement efforts to implement

1. Begin with your collaboration work in mind. List collaboration goals below:

2. Use the chart on the next page to identify the family engagement roles your collaboration is currently carrying out.




3. Lead a discussion with the collaboration to discuss its family engagement practices as captured on the Community Systems & Policies Family Engagement Roles Chart on the following pages.

Discussion questions can include the following:

- In what roles does the collaboration engage families? (refer to the family engagement chart)
- Do the collaboration family engagement roles match the collaboration's goals and intended outcome(s)? If not, are there any roles that are missing? Is the collaboration implementing any roles that no longer align with its goals?
- Are there gaps in the collaboration's family engagement practices/activities?
- Does the collaboration implement a variety of (more than one) family engagement roles? Is it important to implement a variety of roles? Why or why not?
- Have families 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?



4. Utilize the information harvested during this discussion to choose the family engagement roles and activities to move forward with as a collaboration. Which engagement roles does your collaboration commit to engaging families in?

Appendix F (continued)

Family Engagement Roles	Role Description	Intended Collaboration Objective(s)	Suggested Resources
Lived Experience Expert 	Families share their early childhood lived experiences and needs via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person surveys • Online surveys • Focus groups • Small group meeting discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach families who are not receiving early childhood services and programs • Obtain input from families with lived experience • Align the collaboration's work and outcomes to community needs 	Supports for Families
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of engagement activity • Translation/interpretation
			Time
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often a one-time interaction
			Compensation Options
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance into prize drawings • Individual participant gift cards
			Potential Reach
Collaboration Partner 	Families: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become collaboration members • Participate in the collaboration's decision-making • Represent the family perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase family participation in collaboration • Collect real-time family input on all collaboration efforts • Align the collaboration's goals to community needs 	Supports for Families
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onboarding & training • Translation/interpretation • Regular check-ins and ongoing coaching
			Time
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touch-base regularly (once or twice a month)
			Compensation
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hourly stipend suggested
			Potential Reach
Outreach Ambassador 	Families carry out peer-to-peer outreach to do one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get community feedback • Connect families to services • Invite families to engage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with families not currently a part of the local early childhood system. • Align the collaboration's goals to community needs 	Supports for Families
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onboarding & training • Outreach materials and supplies • Translation/interpretation • Regular check-ins and ongoing coaching
			Time
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be continuous or during key outreach weeks • Outreach is usually carried out in 2-4 hours at a time
			Compensation
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hourly stipend suggested
			Potential Reach
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach ambassadors • Potential to reach high number of families

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Appendix F (continued)

Family Engagement Roles	Role Description	Intended Collaboration Objective(s)	Suggested Resources
Advocate 	Families share personal testimonies about lived experiences with decision-makers to gain support for or against an early childhood issue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevates family voice and stories to policy and systems change work. Align the collaboration's goals to community needs 	Supports for Families
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support writing and practicing their testimony Handle logistics Accompany families to give their testimony
			Time
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usually a short-term interaction
			Compensation
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-time payment that takes into consideration prep, practice and travel time
			Potential Reach
Facilitator 	Collaborations support families to plan and/or facilitate activities that align with the goals of the collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring workshops and activities to the broader community. Increase social supports and mental well-being for families participating in workshops and activities. 	Supports for Families
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Onboarding & training Materials and supplies Check-ins and coaching as needed
			Time
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be short-termed but depends on what they are facilitating
			Compensation
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hourly stipend suggested for facilitation time and prep work
			Potential Reach
Other			Supports for Families
			Time
			Compensation
			Potential Reach

Appendix G

Family engagement planning form

Use this tool to:

Plan a collaboration's family engagement. Complete planning form for each family engagement effort.

Family engagement role	
Check the role you are using this form to plan for:	
Lived Experience Expert	Outreach Ambassador
Facilitator	Advocate
	Collaboration Partner
	Other
Why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are we engaging families in this role? • What do we want to accomplish? 	
How? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are we engaging families in this role? (e.g., carrying out focus groups and surveys for family and community expert role) • How are we resourcing this engagement effort? 	
What? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do families 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? 	
Who? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are we engaging? • Who will be responsible for engaging them? 	
Where? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where will the engagement take place? (e.g., a specific neighborhood or at specific programs) 	
When? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the timeline and schedule for engagement? 	

Additional questions to consider:

1. What is already taking place in the community that may be connected to what we want to do?
2. What are the ways families 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)?
3. How will we eliminate barriers to family participation and partnership?
4. How is this engagement effort building a more equitable early childhood system?
5. What are we doing to continue creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for family participation?

Post Engagement Questions:

1. Did this family 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?

Appendix H

Strategies and tools for engaging families as lived experience experts

Use this tool to:

Engage families as lived experience experts.

What does it mean to engage families in the role of lived experience expert?

Families are experts in their lived experience. Engaging families in the role of lived experience expert means listening to families about their individual, family, and community strengths, needs, and experiences with the early childhood system.

Strategies & tools for engaging families as lived experience experts

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 families as Lived Experience Experts. List specific statements about what you want to gain clarity on.

B. Determine how you will engage families as Lived Experience Experts

Some options include:

- **Surveys** – potential to reach a large number of families, especially families 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 families. They offer an opportunity for families to share their general thoughts and experiences, but it might be challenging to tease out individual experiences.
- **Parent cafes** – might feel like a more natural format for families. They offer an opportunity for families to share their general thoughts and experiences, but it might be challenging to tease out individual experiences.

C. Draft family-friendly questions

- Keep it simple and easy to understand – avoid jargon or acronyms.
- Have a mix of multiple-choice, checkbox, and open-ended questions.  **Appendix I Sample Open-Ended Questions for Families**

- If possible, run the list of questions by families to ensure they are clear and easy to understand.
- Translate the survey into the languages spoken by families you want to get feedback from.


D. Connect with families where they are

Connect with families in meetings or spaces where program staff are already interacting with families (e.g., during program intake or existing meetings).

E. Understand and use the data

Make sense of the data by coding it, that is, assigning a code to it for classification purposes. Coding qualitative data (families' stories) helps you measure how many times a theme came up to better identify patterns.

Appendix J Coding Your Qualitative Data

After coding, data is ready to be analyzed and contextualized. Present the information to families and stakeholders for their opinions on what is reflected in the data and why. A great way to do this is to carry out a data walk.  **Appendix K Data Walk Protocol**. Coding and contextualizing the data will provide insight into early childhood system problems that the collaboration can address and how.

F. Let families know their feedback is making a difference

- Invite families to a collaboration event or meeting to share what you learned and invite the families to join the collaboration's work.
- Give a presentation at the setting where you asked them for their input.
- Share a one-page data summary with them.

Appendix I

Sample survey and focus group questions by category

Use this tool to:

Write survey or focus group questions to engaged families as Lived Experience Experts.

Keep your objective in mind when drafting your questions.

What do you want to find out from this round of questions for families as Lived Experience Experts?

Select and adapt questions from the question bank below to create your family survey.

KEEP THE SURVEY TO SOMETHING THAT CAN BE COMPLETED IN FIVE MINUTES OR LESS.
USUALLY, 8 TO 12 QUESTIONS LONG, GIVE OR TAKE.

The list below suggests ideas for survey and focus group questions. These questions can be adapted as needed.

Family engagement survey questions banked by category

Family Demographic Questions

1. What is your zip code?
 - Range of area zip codes and space to enter other

2. Which school district best describes where you live? (School districts in area listed)

3. What neighborhood/city/town do you live in?

4. Which of the following best describes you?
 - Asian-American or Pacific Islander
 - Black or African-American
 - Hispanic/Latine/Latinx
 - Native American or Alaskan Native (Space to specify tribe of membership)
 - Multiracial or Biracial
 - White or Caucasian
 - Additional race/ethnicity not listed
 - Prefer not to say
5. What languages are spoken in your home?

6. Do you have a child or children under 5?
 - Yes
 - No

7. How many children are in your household? Indicate # of children in each age range.

8. What ages are the children who live in your household? (Select all that apply)
 - Birth to three years old
 - 4 to 5 years old
 - 6 to 11 years old
 - 12 to 15 years old
 - 16 to 18 years old
 - Older than 18 years
9. What is your relationship to the child(ren) in your household? (Select all that apply)
 - Single parent
 - Married parent
 - Foster parent
 - Grandparent
 - Family member (Stepparent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling, etc.)
 - Family friend
 - Court-appointed special advocate
 - Guardian
 - Other

10. Do you currently OR have you had (a) child(ren) in childcare or another type of early childhood program?
 - Yes
 - No

Appendix I (continued)

11. If one or both parents work, what describes the number of hours of work? (Select all that apply)

- Full time – 35 hours or more per week
- Part-time – fewer than 35 hours per week
- Number of hours varies per week
- Other

12. If employed, what neighborhood/ city/town do you work in?

Family Early Childhood Education and Care Preference(s)

13. What type of care would be your first choice?

- Care by friend or relative
- Care by parent
- Child care center
- Early Head Start full-day program
- Head Start full-day program
- Head Start half-day program
- Head Start school-day program
- Home visiting
- Licensed/registered family care home
- Nanny/babysitter in home
- Nursery school
- Older sibling
- Preschool in community program
- School district half-day early childhood program
- School district school-day early childhood program
- Combination of providers or services
- Other

14. Do you agree that high-quality early learning for children ages 0–5 leads to better quality of life outcomes (better health, high school graduation, college graduation)?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

15. What do you believe is a reasonable cost for preferred childcare services?

Family Early Childhood Education and Care Experience

16. Are you receiving the early childhood services and supports you need for your child(ren)?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

17. If you answered “No” or “Unsure” to the above question, why? (Select all that apply)

- I can’t afford services
- I don’t have transportation to get to a provider
- I don’t know what is available to help me or how to find resources
- I’m not sure what my child might need
- Not enough time in the day to access services/supports
- Service providers don’t speak the same language as me
- Services and support I need are not available in my community
- Slow process to receive services
- Trying to find/obtain services is overwhelming
- We are not eligible for the programs we need
- Other

18. What type of care/services are you using OR did you use within the last two years for your child(ren)? (Select all that apply)

- Care by friend or relative
- Care by parent
- Child care center
- Combination of providers/services
- Head Start/Early Head Start
- Home visiting
- Licensed/registered family care home
- Nanny/babysitter in home
- Nursery school
- Older sibling
- Preschool
- School district early childhood program
- Other

19. If your child or children are receiving early childhood services, how did you find out about community resources and supports? (Select all that apply)

- Community presentations
- Flyers or brochures
- Program websites
- Referral from an agency that already provides services to me/my child
- Referrals
- School
- Social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
- Word of mouth (friends, neighbors, relatives, at work, etc.)
- None of the above
- Other

20. If you have used or are using early childhood services, please indicate the reasons why you chose your specific childcare or early childhood program services: (Select all that apply)

- Appearance/cleanliness of the building
- Caregiver is a relative
- Caregiver trained/educated
- Children are happy in the program
- Cost
- Good learning/educational program
- Hours work for my schedule
- How I was treated during the initial visit
- Location – close to home or work
- Low adult/child ratio
- My other child was enrolled in the program (currently or previously)
- Non-traditional childcare hours (2nd or 3rd shift)
- Program accepted subsidy/ assistance
- Program nationally accredited
- Quality
- Recommended by other parents
- Teacher spoke my household’s native language
- Other

Appendix I (continued)

21. Of all the reasons selected above, which two are the most important to you?
- Appearance/cleanliness of the building
 - Caregiver is a relative
 - Caregiver trained/educated
 - Children are happy in the program
 - Cost
 - Good learning/educational program
 - Hours work for my schedule
 - How I was treated during the initial visit
 - Location – close to home or work
 - Low adult/child ratio
 - My other child was enrolled in the program (currently or previously)
 - Non-traditional childcare hours (2nd or 3rd shift)
 - Program accepted subsidy/assistance
 - Program nationally accredited
 - Quality
 - Recommended by other parents
 - Teacher spoke my household's native language
 - Other
22. Please share your experience in seeking child care or early childhood education services or programs in our area.
23. What resources have you used in the last two years?
- Childcare subsidies (CCAP)
 - Counseling for myself or someone in my family
 - Emergency housing (rent or mortgage assistance, utilities, other)
 - Help getting food (SNAP, WIC, food pantry, etc.)
 - Public health insurance (All Kids Health/Medicaid)
 - Services for a child with special needs
 - None of the above
 - Other

Family Early Childhood Education and Care Barriers

24. Is your child/children on a waitlist? If so, which programs? Check all that apply.
- Early Head Start (0–3)
 - Head Start (3–5)
 - Healthy Families Illinois (0–3)
 - Licensed Center Based Daycare (0–5)
 - Licensed In Home Daycare (0–5)
 - Parents As Teachers (0–3)
 - Private Preschool (3–5)
 - School District Preschool (3–5)
 - None of the above
 - Other
25. Have you ever experienced barriers to enrolling in an Early Childhood program? Check all that apply.
- Age of the child
 - Family didn't meet income or program guidelines
 - Paperwork requirements
 - Program schedule
 - Program was full
 - Transportation
 - Work schedule
 - None of the above
 - Other
26. If your child(ren) are/were attending childcare, have you had trouble paying in the last two years?
- Never
 - Rarely
 - Sometimes
 - Often
 - Always
27. In the last two years, have you received any financial assistance to pay for childcare?
- Yes
 - No
28. If you have received financial assistance, have you ever had trouble paying for your parent share fee or co-pay?
- Yes
 - No

29. Has COVID-19 impacted your decisions about childcare programs and services?
- Yes (If yes, how?)
 - No

30. Do you find anything difficult about getting services?

31. How can early childhood services and programs in this region better serve your household?

Family Engagement Closing Questions

32. Is there anything else you would like us to know? For example, what do you need or want in an Early Childhood program(s) in your region?
33. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with early childhood services and programs?
34. How do you prefer to receive information about new early childhood programs and services?
- Community presentations
 - Flyers or brochures
 - Program websites
 - Referral from an agency that already provides services to me/my child
 - School
 - Social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
 - Word of mouth (friends, neighbors, relatives, at work, etc.)
 - Other
35. Do you want to be contacted with information about services for your child who is under five years old? If yes, what is your name and phone number? (Consider linking to a separate form)
36. Would you be willing to discuss your answers further? If yes, what is your name and phone number? (Consider linking to a separate form)





Focus Group Questions

Focus groups are an opportunity to collaborate, gather input, learn more about individual/collective opinions, and most importantly, to guide future action. The document included in this library has sample questions for two types of focus groups; evaluating program success and better understanding family needs. For this purpose, questions are general, but keep in mind that specifically worded questions will yield the most actionable results.

Family Engagement Focus Group Understanding Family Needs

Engagement

- Share your name
- Which early childhood care or education programs or services do you or have you participated in?
- What qualities or values do you look for in an early childhood program or service?

Exploration

- What are some barriers you encounter or have encountered when getting involved with or accessing an early childhood program or service?
- What would improve early childhood programs or services in this community/region?
- Would you recommend this early childhood program or service to your neighbors? Why or why not?
- What do you want the Action Council in your region to know about the early childhood services in your region?

Exit

- Which groups in this community/region are not represented here? OR which groups do you think it's important that the Action Council hear from as part of this regional scan? (Does anyone have ideas on how to reach out to those groups?)
- What stands out as most important of everything discussed?

Family Engagement Focus Group Evaluating Program Success

Engagement

- Share your name and how long you have been participating in (early childhood program or services)
- How did you first learn about this (early childhood program or services)?

Exploration

- What were your first impressions of (early childhood program or services)?
- How has your opinion of (early childhood program or services) changed?
- Review program/services goals
- Were the goals of this project achieved in your opinion?
- Think back over the past year of program events. What went particularly well?
- For you personally, what has been the best outcome of participating in this (early childhood program or service)?
- What are some areas of this (early childhood program or service) that need to be improved?

Exit

- Is there anything you would like to add about the (early childhood program or service)?

Appendix J

Coding 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.

Reference: thefreedictionary.com/coding

Coding your qualitative data

Participants: People who are working with the data

Materials needed: Qualitative data (information you collect from families) and Coding spreadsheet (digital or paper)

Instructions for facilitation:				
Step 1. List the answers to each question on a spreadsheet				
	A	B	C	D
How I learned				
1	By participating in both small group and large group processes			
2	Participating in it, through the icebreaker			
3	Visuals, hands-on			
4	Through conversation and evidence-based (illegible)			
5	Visuals, activities			
6	Consensus activity, presentation, working with others			
7	Interactive, ppt			
8	Open discussions, small workgroups			
9	Listening			
10	Group and individual education and participation			
11	Visually, group activities and getting others' perspectives			
12	Visual videos, great communication in small group			
13	I loved the activity we did before lunch. Very good for networking and collaborating.			
14	Large group discussion, small group/plan/work time, group/whole body activity			

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Appendix J (continued)

Instructions for facilitation (continued):				
Step 2. Look for common themes in the answers and put each theme (or related group of themes) in its own column.				
	A	B	C	D
How I learned (the cells in yellow are the “common themes”)		Participating in activities, hands on/ interactive	Visuals	Conversation, listening
1	By participating in both small group and large group processes			
2	Participating in it, through the icebreaker			
3	Visuals, hands-on			
4	Through conversation and evidence-based (illegible)			
5	Visuals, activities			
6	Consensus activity, presentation, working with others			
7	Interactive, ppt			
8	Open discussions, small workgroups			
9	Listening			
10	Group and individual education and participation			
11	Visually, group activities and getting others' perspectives			
12	Visual videos, great communication in small group			
13	I loved the activity we did before lunch. Very good for networking and collaborating.			
14	Large group discussion, small group/plan/work time, group/whole body activity			

Appendix J (continued)

Instructions for facilitation (continued):				
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
How I learned (the cells in yellow are the “common themes”)		Participating in activities, hands on/ interactive	Visuals	Conversation, listening
1	By participating in both small group and large group processes	1		
2	Participating in it, through the icebreaker	1		
3	Visuals, hands-on	1	1	
4	Through conversation and evidence-based (illegible)			1
5	Visuals, activities	1	1	
6	Consensus activity, presentation, working with others	1		
7	Interactive, ppt	1	1	
8	Open discussions, small workgroups	1		1
9	Listening	1		1
10	Group and individual education and participation	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., $15/30 \times 100 = 50\%$) ...				
24	By participating in both small group and large group processes	1		
25	Participating in it, through the icebreaker	1		
26	Visuals, hands-on	1	1	
27	Through conversation and evidence-based (illegible)			1
28	Visuals, activities	1	1	
29	Consensus activity, presentation, working with others	1		
		15	11	15
		$15/30 \times 100 = 50\%$	$11/30 \times 100 = 36.6\%$	$15/30 \times 100 = 50\%$

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.



Appendix K

Data walk protocol

Use this tool to:

- Facilitate exercise that helps stakeholders engage with data
- Contextualize data – hear from stakeholders’ opinions 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 as a group. 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, and 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. | • What are your general reactions to the data? How, if at all, does this data connect to your personal experience? | • What questions does this data raise for you? |
| 2. Post prompts to help guide discussion, using the questions below or similar prompts: | • Why do you think this might be happening? | • 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 & 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.

Appendix L

Strategies and tools for engaging families as collaboration partners

Use this tool to:

Engage families as Collaboration Partners

What does it mean to engage families in the role of Collaboration Partners?

Families actively participate as equal members of your collaboration in the role of Collaboration Partner. They share their family's experiences and represent their community's families. They share leadership and decision-making with other collaboration members.

A. Build your collaboration's family leadership team

One way to help families ease into the collaboration is to offer them the option of first joining a collaboration's family leadership team, that is, a family group staffed and convened regularly by the collaboration.

A family leadership team serves as a leadership incubator, a safe space for families to meet where they can 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.

Meet regularly (1.5–2 hours, biweekly or monthly) with the family leadership team to help families:

- Build a network of trust and support, with both peers and with collaboration family engagement lead(s).
- Lead discussions and activities with families to identify and prioritize early childhood issues and possible solutions.
- Review and provide feedback to the collaboration on ongoing work.
- Carry out trainings and opportunities (including taking on other leadership roles within the early childhood system such as 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 to share your reasoning behind having a family team, when giving families the option to join.



Appendix L (continued)

B. Provide training, coaching, and guidance for families in the role of collaboration partners

When engaging underserved and under-resourced communities, keep in mind that not everyone has had the same access to educational and professional opportunities. Offer continuous training, coaching, and guidance to Collaboration Partners to make sure they understand and can fully participate the collaboration work.

Coaching and guidance can include:

- **Meeting reminders** – families have their hands full with family responsibilities and a reminder text or phone call about upcoming meetings will go a long way.
- **Supporting families to apply what they have learned** – Offer tools, materials, and moral support to assist families in applying new concepts.
- **Preparing families for upcoming tasks** – Make sure families have what they need to participate in their role as collaboration partners one meeting or task at a time. For example, if families are getting ready to host an event, family engagement support staff might work with families to create a to-do list and check in to see how they are doing and if they need any help. Try to anticipate family needs – especially for families who are new to their role – and offer support.
- **Supporting leadership development** – Find, connect, and support families through opportunities that help them continue learning and growing as leaders.

C. Have family leadership team representation, decision-making power, and influence in the collaboration

- **Intentional representation** – Whoever wants to attend the collaboration meetings from the family leadership team can join, but it is a good practice to have the family leadership team elect two families to represent them in the collaboration.
- **Decision-Making Power** – Families should have a vote in the decision-making process, which should be clear and transparent. The amount of influence, or to what extent the collaboration takes family feedback and incorporates it into their work, will depend on how much the collaboration values their input.
- **Uplift Family Voice** – Consider having a designated spot on the collaboration agenda for the family 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 families.
- **Feedback Loop** – Make sure that whatever is being discussed and decided upon in the full collaboration team is conveyed back to the full family leadership team at their next meeting.



Family leader's perspective 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."

Appendix M

Strategies and tools for engaging families as outreach ambassadors

Use this tool to:

Engage families as Outreach Ambassadors

What does it mean to engage families in the role of Outreach Ambassador?

Families are great at reaching and relating to other families. Engaging families in the role of Outreach Ambassador means supporting them to carry out peer-to-peer outreach, where they go out into their community to talk and listen to other families.

A. Have clear outreach objective(s)

Decide which of the following activities Outreach Ambassadors will be carrying out. Outreach objectives may include:

- Share important early childhood information with other families
- Get feedback from families (e.g., short survey, conversation, or questionnaire)
- Connect families to early childhood services
- Invite families to engage with a specific family engagement effort (e.g., invite families to an early intervention screening event)

B. Provide training outreach materials

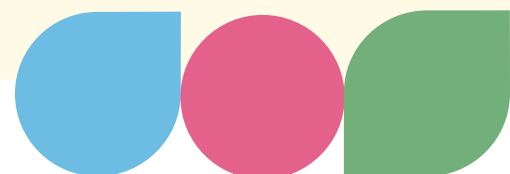
Train ambassadors on the outreach efforts.

Topics covered may include a:

- Description of the project, including objectives, role responsibilities, and expectations
- Review of outreach materials and how to fill them
- Demonstration on how to have an outreach conversation with their peers
- Review of any other tools ambassadors will use, e.g., timesheets or other forms for ambassadors to keep track of their outreach hours
- A discussion on how to stay safe while out in the field (Sample Safety Guidelines to the right)




Sample Safety Guidelines

- **Use the buddy system** – Ambassadors should always pair up to do outreach; one person talks and the other person documents the conversation or records the outreach.
- **Encourage families to go out as a team** and cover the same area, while keeping an eye on each other.
- **Have a bathroom plan** – ambassadors can use restrooms at a public location.
- **Instruct 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 ambassador teams identify each other and legitimizes them to their neighbors.
- If the collaboration does not have any T-shirts, ambassadors can coordinate to wear the same color.



Appendix M (continued)

Helpful outreach materials:

- Talking points or script on what they could say when talking to other families  **Appendix N Outreach Ambassador Conversation Guide**
- Forms to capture data from their outreach as they are out in the field  **Appendix O Tally and Referral Sheet Tool**
- If you are carrying out a survey, you will want to print these surveys out for families to fill out. If you are using a tablet or technology for the on-the-spot and electronic completion, make sure families are trained on the technology.  **Appendix I Sample Survey and Focus Group Questions**
- A summary of local early childhood programs and services and their phone numbers.
- If you are inviting families to participate in a specific meeting, event, or training, make sure you leave them a flyer with all the invitation details.

C. Hold regular check-in and check-out meetings with Outreach Ambassadors

Consider holding regular full group check-in meetings that ambassadors attend to:

- Share how their outreach is going
- Troubleshoot issues
- Celebrate their progress
- Hand in and/or pick up the new tally and referral sheets
- Plan their next outreach routes.

D. Offer incentives and/or giveaways

Families are more receptive to a conversation with ambassadors when offered an incentive and/or giveaway. Some giveaways can include books or toys. Ask local businesses for books or giveaway donations.

E. Set outreach efforts to span intervals of 2-4 hours

Anything less than 2 hours is often not worth the time ambassadors spend getting to and from the outreach location. Anything more than 4 hours is a lot to ask from them. Plan for ambassadors to take a 15-minute break for every 2-hour outreach interval.

F. Provide a variety of outreach opportunities

Balance your outreach between door-knocking and attending community events or locations where families congregate organically, such as parks or laundromats. A variety of events can maintain their interest and morale.

Door-knocking, the process of going door by door to talk to community residents, can be slow and hard but it is a good way to find families who might be socially isolated. Manage Outreach Ambassadors' expectations by letting them know that out of every 10 doors, they will find one to two people at home. Hold door-knocking on weekends and evenings to increase the likelihood of reaching families.

G. 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 families' interest in more services or resources. 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.



Appendix N

Outreach Ambassador Conversation Guide

Use this tool to:

Prepare Outreach Ambassadors to talk to other families in the community.



Conversation guide:

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

"Hi, my name is and I'm a family Outreach Ambassador with..."

We're in the neighborhood today talking to families 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 early 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.)

Appendix O

Outreach ambassador tally sheet

Use this tool to:

Keep track of and document community outreach.

Name of ambassador: _____ 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 D.O.B. Guardian Phone
2.	Knocked on door Talked to Left Materials	Needs Referral? Yes No	Parent/Guardian Name Child Name Child D.O.B. Guardian Phone
3.	Knocked on door Talked to Left Materials	Needs Referral? Yes No	Parent/Guardian Name Child Name Child D.O.B. Guardian Phone
4.	Knocked on door Talked to Left Materials	Needs Referral? Yes No	Parent/Guardian Name Child Name Child D.O.B. Guardian Phone
5.	Knocked on door Talked to Left Materials	Needs Referral? Yes No	Parent/Guardian Name Child Name Child D.O.B. Guardian Phone
Tally number of people talk to (on street or at events):			



Appendix P

Strategies and tools for engaging families as advocates

Use this tool to:

Engage families as Advocates

What does it mean to engage families as advocates?

Families participate in advocacy efforts on issues that will improve the early childhood system in the role of Advocate. This engagement often consists of families telling their stories of how they have been or could be impacted by a specific issue. Their stories inform policy priorities and remind decision-makers that their decisions impact real people.

A. Identify your collaboration's early childhood issues

While all early childhood issues are important it is not manageable to address everything all at once. We recommend collaborations choose their priority policy issues that are going to advance their system change goals. For example, if a collaboration goal is to increase early intervention screening in their community, they might want to support ongoing efforts that will increase funding for early intervention.

B. Identify which early childhood advocacy organization to partner with

Do not reinvent the wheel. Partner with local organizations and agencies that specialize in advocacy and community organizing and that best align with the collaboration's priority policy and systems change issues.

Research and meet with local advocacy organizations to:

- Share the issues your collaboration wants to promote
- Learn more about the issues they are working on
- Ask about existing advocacy opportunities and corresponding support for families
- Brainstorm how they can help your collaboration's advocacy efforts for families



Appendix P (continued)

C. Determine how you will partner with an advocacy organization

Options for partnering to engage local families include:

- Leading families in your own advocacy efforts or
- Connecting parents to existing advocacy opportunities

Example of collaborations leading own family advocacy efforts

- Supporting families to meet with their elected official(s) at their in-district local office
- Supporting families to invite and host their elected official for visit at a program or event
- Organizing a petition for/against a policy change

Examples of parents connecting to existing advocacy efforts

- Participating in an advocacy organization's annual advocacy day in Springfield
- Joining existing family leadership groups at the regional and state level
- Becoming members of an early childhood statewide campaign

Advocacy partners can support by:

- Providing trainings for collaboration support staff and family leaders
- Attending meetings with parents and decision-makers
- Being on-call to answer decision-makers' technical questions
- Offering insight on the current advocacy landscape and advising on strategic action

D. Ensure family advocacy trainings are accessible

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 families to take on the role of Advocate.

Family advocacy training recommendations:

- Keep the training general, broad and task specific.
- Support families to prepare a testimony that specifically outlines how the issue at hand impacts them directly
- Provide a general overview of why advocacy matters and an understanding of policy.
- Go over how this advocacy connects to the issues they care about and lead discussions with families about how a policy change might impact families.
- Include some hands-on training and practice – Create an interactive training for families.
- Families can prepare and practice talking to decision-makers and telling their stories.

Appendix Q Preparing to Meet with a Decision-Maker

E. Accompany families during advocacy efforts

When families participate in advocacy efforts, partner them with other experts in the field who can answer any specific questions regarding the issue families are advocating for or against. If experts cannot accompany families, let them 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.



Appendix Q

Preparing to meet with a decision-maker

Use this tool to:

Prepare to meet with decision makers

Template

Name of the person you are meeting with: _____

Date: _____ Location: _____ Note-taker for meeting: _____

Present at the meeting: _____

Is there any follow-up needed? If so, what and with who? _____

Meeting Segment	Who will lead this segment of the meeting?	Talking Points	Notes from Meeting
1. Introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain who you are representing (collaboration/organization/program)• Personal introductions (everyone can share their name, who they are and where they live)			
2. Explain why you are there <ul style="list-style-type: none">• E.g., We are here to talk to you about early childhood issues impacting our community; we are here to talk to you about bill HB 1201, etc.			
3. Answer the following questions as you share your testimony: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What early childhood changes do you want? How would this make a difference for your family?• Note: If possible, include your specific story with as much details as possible.			
4. Make your ask <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make a specific and clear ask (E.g., Can we count on your support for bill HB 1084? Can you come visit our programs?)			
5. Summarize next steps and thank them for their time			

Appendix R

Strategies and tools for engaging families as facilitators

Use this tool to:

Engage families as Facilitators

What does it mean to engage families in the role of Facilitator?

Another role that families can play in a collaboration is the role of a facilitator. Families can engage families by leading workshops and/or activities for other families with the support of the collaboration. This role also helps families keep learning and growing as community leaders.

A. Determine what you want to accomplish with a family-facilitated activity

As with all collaboration work, it's a good idea to begin with the end in mind. Determine what the collaboration, including families, wants to accomplish with a family-facilitated activity.

B. Find or create a family-led curriculum

The collaboration can create an activity for families to lead or partner with an organization that regularly trains families to facilitate.

C. Train families to facilitate

Provide training for families on what they will be facilitating. Trainings with family-friendly language and hands-on practice tend to be the most helpful.

D. Support families to plan and prepare

In addition to the training, it's helpful for families to prepare and practice carrying out the activity or training in full. Have families practice it in front of the family engagement lead(s) and give them feedback on what they can improve.

E. Debrief and improve

It is good practice to spend at least 15 to 30 minutes after the activity to reflect on what went well, what could be improved, and how it will be improved next time.

Types of family-led activities	Potential Objectives	Organizations that provide support and training
Guided early learning activities for families with their children, such as reading at the laundromat and guided playgroups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Families receive tools and tips to support their children's learning at home.	Collaborations are creating their own family-led early learning activities. Read what they are doing here
Family facilitated Parent Cafes Parent cafes can help families not feel so socially isolated and help their mental health. The cafes can also be tailored to cover specific topics relevant to early childhood and the collaboration's goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Decrease social isolation for familiesImproved family mental healthHear from families on Parent Café topics	Be Strong Families
Family leadership development workshops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Decrease social isolation for familiesImproved family mental healthLeadership development for participating families	Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)



Appendix S

Identifying and prioritizing those most impacted for engagement

Use this tool to:

- Identify those impacted by an early childhood education and care issue

Why use this tool?

One of the best ways to address an early childhood system inequity is to engage the families who are most impacted by that issue. Families who are not being served or who are being underserved can provide invaluable insight into the obstacles they are experiencing and possible solutions to those obstacles.

Identify Those Most Impacted

1. **Ask collaboration members and any relevant direct service providers which families are being underserved or not served by the part of the system that you are aiming to change.**
2. **Cross-check that list with local disaggregated early childhood data.**

It's important to also confirm anecdotal data with quantitative early childhood data. The state regularly identifies priority populations and groups of families that the system is currently struggling to reach and serve. Look at local data with special attention to how the most updated priority populations and historically oppressed races and ethnicities fare in comparison to other populations.

Make a list of the groups impacted by the issue you are trying to address.

Ask collaboration members and relevant direct service community partners who regularly interact with families with young children such as:

- Community-based organizations
- Welcome Centers
- Food pantries
- Shelters

AND

Examine local disaggregated early childhood quantitative data to cross-check what you hear from community partners. Pay close attention to how marginalized groups fare in your community, such as:

- Non-white races and ethnicities
- [State priority populations](#)
- Other groups who are left out by structural inequities

Reliable sources of local early childhood quantitative data:

- Local and county data
- [State data on the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map \(IECAM\)](#)
- [Birth to Five Regional Assessments](#)
- [KIDS: Data and Reports](#)

You can visit partnerplanact.org for additional support on working with early childhood data in community systems development.

Appendix S (continued)

Prioritize those most impacted for engagement

Once you have a list of all the groups of impacted families, tease out which groups are the most impacted from the list to prioritize their engagement and voice.

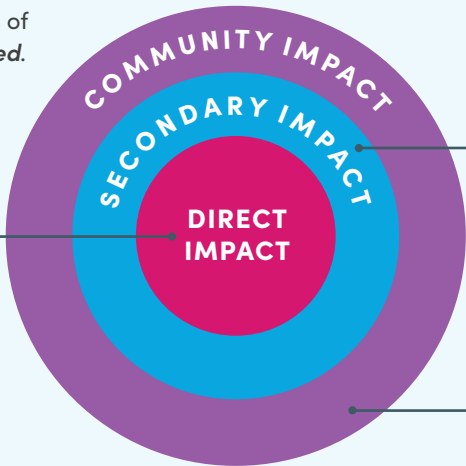
Identify groups of families affected by a specific issue (e.g., not receiving developmental screening or services at the same rate as other families) or left out of the system in general by leading collaboration members and direct service providers in answering the questions outlined in the Engaging Those Most Impacted Tool adapted from Chicago United for Equity.

Engaging Those Most Impacted Tool

Direct Impact: The opinions and needs of those most affected should be *prioritized*.

Which families are:

- Not accessing services at all?
- Accessing services at a lower rate than average?
- Accessing services but not seeing the same outcomes as other groups?



Secondary Impact: The opinions and needs of those directly serving or connected to those most affected should be *considered*.

- What stakeholders are directly serving or connected to those most affected who can provide insight on the issue (E.g., Program providers and/or administrators)?

Community Impact: The opinions of the community should be *acknowledged*.

- Who else care about and/or understands the issue at hand and a can provide some insight?

Adopted from Chicago United for Equity

<p>Direct Impact: The opinions and needs of those most affected should be <i>prioritized</i>. Which families are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not accessing services at all?• Accessing services at a lower rate than average?• Accessing services but not seeing the same outcomes as other groups?	
<p>Secondary Impact: The opinions and needs of those directly serving or connected to those most affected should be <i>considered</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What stakeholders are directly serving or connected to those most affected who can provide insight on the issue, (E.g., Program providers and/or administrators)?	
<p>Community Impact: The opinions and needs of the community should be <i>acknowledged</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who else cares about and/or understands the issue at hand and can provide some insight?	

Appendix T

Setting your collaboration's family inclusion policies

Use this tool to:

- Set your collaboration's family inclusion policies.
- Create an inclusive and welcoming culture for families in all collaboration processes and spaces.

What are family inclusion policies?

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

Setting a collaboration's family inclusion policies

Participants: All collaboration members.

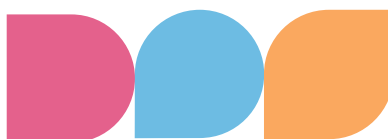
Materials needed: Blank paper, pens, 3-4 markers, 2-3 sheets of chart paper, tape.

Exercise objective: Set collaboration's family inclusion policies.

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

Instructions for facilitation:

1. **Reverse Brainstorming** – Ask collaboration members to share all the ways that the collaboration may make it hard for families to be engaged in the collaboration (“bad ideas” for family engagement). They can write one idea per post-it and put it up on a chart paper as they share their ideas out loud.
2. **Turn the Bad Ideas on their Head** – Lead a discussion with the group where you take each bad idea and turn them into “good ideas” for family engagement. For example, if a bad idea reads “tell families about meeting last minute”, ask the group what the opposite of this action is. Their responses might include “inviting them at least two weeks in advance”.
3. **Choose Family Inclusion Policies to Adopt** – Lead collaboration in identifying their top 8-10 “good ideas” to make up their family inclusion policies – a list of practices it commits to implementing to create an inclusive and welcoming space for families in all collaboration spaces. The group might want to consider the ideas that were mentioned the most, and/or the ones that will make the most difference for families. Keep in mind, policies should include the practices you are willing and able to do.
4. **Review Community Systems Statewide Supports’ Family Inclusion Policies Example** (Optional) – Have participants review the Community Systems Statewide Supports’ Family Inclusion Policies examples (next page) to identify policies that they might want to add to their initial list.



Community systems statewide supports' family inclusion policies example

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

1. Providing:
 - Needed materials and supplies such as paper, and pens
 - Convenient meeting schedules and locations
 - Childcare
 - Key materials available in formats and languages families can understand in a timely fashion
 - Transportation support
 - Refreshments/meals at meetings for families and their families
 - Compensation for their time and contributions
2. Preparing families to take on roles and responsibilities within the collaboration by offering clear engagement opportunities, training, tools, and guidance.
3. Engaging families 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 with each other and all collaboration members.
5. Listening and being responsive to the aspirations and needs of families and their communities. We commit to elevating and centering family voices in our work.
6. Including families 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 families to speak for themselves. We will support families to present and lead discussions at conferences, meetings, and workgroups.
8. Offering families the flexibility and support to implement their own early childhood system priorities and projects.
9. Valuing and incorporating families' cultures into our collaboration work and engagement efforts.

[§]Section includes ideas from: [Parent Tips for Effective Family Engagement | ECLKC \(hhs.gov\)](https://www.hhs.gov/eclkc/parent-tips/)

[¶]Early Childhood Collaboration – local bodies made up of early childhood stakeholders who work together to develop and implement collaborative strategies to improve early childhood services and systems

[¶][Trauma informed practice in early learning \(kidsfirstaustralia.org.au\)](https://kidsfirstaustralia.org.au/trauma-informed-practice-in-early-learning/)

[¶]Section includes ideas from: [Parent Tips for Effective Family Engagement | ECLKC \(hhs.gov\)](https://www.hhs.gov/eclkc/parent-tips/)

[¶]Adapted from 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: [FirstFive-EngagementToolkit-5.pdf](https://www.firstfivealameda.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/FirstFive-EngagementToolkit-5.pdf)



Each one of us has gifts and talents that are meant to be a part of everything that happens in this world and it doesn't matter if it's a small

thing or a big thing. It's equally important to what we're all trying to accomplish and that's the best for our children."

– Collaboration Parent Leader

actforchildren.org

