

Recommendations for Meaningfully Involving Families in State Planning Meetings

Individualized Supports

- Contact the Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs), Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs), and any state coalition to identify possible parents to serve on state planning teams, keeping in mind factors such as having parents whose children are currently enrolled in inclusive preschools, having parents with accumulative years of experience, and having parents from diverse backgrounds.
- Develop a strategic plan to include families who have lower incomes, have diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds, and whose native language is not English.
- Define acronyms when speaking with families (or with cross-agency teams).
- Acknowledge that parents' challenges are great. They are giving up a lot to be involved with these groups.
- Allow families to define "family involvement."
- Consider the impact on families when the degrees and titles of professionals are used on nametags and on participant lists. Consider ways to "even the playing field" for parents to avoid parents perceiving themselves as "just parents" in the midst of people with professional credentials.

Financial Supports

- Provide financial compensation for families who are not employed by an organization, including all expenses and an honorarium in the range of \$100-\$250 per day.

Communication and Coordination

- Ensure that meetings are accessible and participatory – before, during and after meetings. Use web-supported technology to let people be involved from home if necessary. If you use technology for meetings, have opportunity for face-to-face contact first.
- Provide technical assistance and facilitation at meetings to ensure that all voices are heard.

Leadership Development and Orientation

- Keep in mind that young families with young children can be overwhelmed dealing with all of the issues. Provide guidelines for involvement.
- Contact parents in advance, provide an overview of the meeting, and offer to answer any questions.
- Designate a contact person at the meeting who is available to provide explanations to parents and answer their questions in private.
- Invite parents who have previously served on state planning groups to mentor parents who are new to the effort.
- Develop a way to connect team members to provide support.
- Involve family members together with professionals in professional development. When parents and professionals get the same information, it enhances collaboration.

Values and Outcomes

- Develop an action plan with goals and outcomes for the quality and quantity of parent partnerships in planning. Provide technical assistance to increase the capacity of the state planning group to implement the action plan for genuine and authentic parent partnership.
- Shared ownership—have buy-in from all professionals and families so that everyone “owns” the work.
- Involve families from the beginning.
- If families cannot participate:
 - develop and share case studies illustrating family needs and concerns.
 - collect and share compelling family stories by conducting interviews—use a microphone at parent conferences to collect them.
- Weave together the “anecdotal/synthesis rich information” from family stories with the “data rich information” to make points in meetings.

An excellent resource on this topic:

Caldwell, J., Hauss, S., Richins, G., & Stark, B. (2006, March). *Consumer advisory committees: Recommendations for meaningful participation of individuals with disabilities and families*. Silver Spring, MD: Association of University Centers on Disabilities.

http://www.aucd.org/template/news.cfm?news_id=390&id=295&parent=295