



# Developing a policy for family engagement

Developed by Family Voices

May, 2025



# Objectives

- **Explain** what a family engagement policy is
- **Describe** the components and strategies used when creating policies for family engagement
- **Discuss** the value of family input in co-creating family engagement policies to impact improvement across the organization
- **Discuss** challenges in implementing family engagement policies

# Why do you need a family engagement policy?

When we bring families to the table, we need to do it meaningfully. **What does that mean?**

We must create an environment where families feel welcome and included and where diversity and culture are respected.

We must ensure that families, regardless of background, can participate.



# What is a family engagement policy?

A family engagement policy is a **formal statement** or framework developed by an organization, school, district, or government agency that outlines its **commitment to partnering** with families in meaningful ways to support the learning, development, and well-being of children.

The family engagement policy should include:

- Clear goals
- Strategies
- Expectations for how families will be engaged in decision-making, communication, collaboration, and shared responsibility

*The values you state in your family engagement policy should be apparent in your recruiting materials and accommodations, including transportation, childcare, and language access.*



# Components of Family Engagement Policies

Several components need to be considered when creating these policies:

## Purpose

What do you want to achieve?

## Definitions

How do you define “family”?

## Procedures

What are families expected to do?



# Components of Family Engagement Policies

Several components need to be considered when creating these policies:

## Responsibilities

What are the families' roles and responsibilities?

## Building Capacity

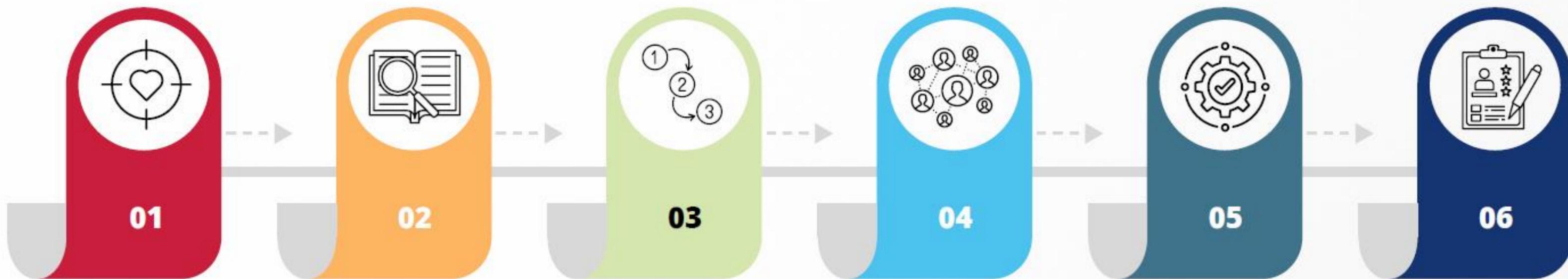
What kind of training is going to be provided for staff and families?

## Impact & Evaluation

How will you tell the story of how family engagement changed the course of your work?



# Building a Family Engagement Policy



## Purpose

Why the policy exists

- Alignment with the organization's mission
- Value statement about the intended impact of family engagement

## Definitions

Terms used in the policy and important acronyms

- A definition for family engagement that aligns with the organization's mission and vision
- Definitions of titles, such as "parent leader"
- Definition of terms like "collaborate" and "partnership"

## Procedures

Guidelines for implementation

- How the organization will engage families, including frequency of engagement
- Supports provided to family leaders, including compensation and translation
- How the family engagement policy will be improved over time

## Responsibilities

Roles and duties of individuals involved in policy implementation and compliance

- Family role description and participation expectations
- Staff roles and expectations

## Building Capacity

Training Plan for Families and Staff

- A list of training topics for families, co-created with families
- A list of training topics for staff, including best practices for engaging families

## Evaluation

A plan for measuring the effectiveness of the engagement policy

- How family input will be included in measuring the effectiveness of the policy
- Evaluation activities such as surveys, focus groups and feedback surveys

# Family Engagement Policy Template

The family Engagement Policy Template consists of the following parts:

- Commitment
- Purpose
- Definitions
- Procedures
- Responsibilities
- Building capacity
- Evaluation



## Family Engagement Policy Template

*When co-creating policies with families, use the Family Engagement Policy template to include the elements of a written policy guide and ensure that policies consider families' needs and circumstances.*

### Introduction and Commitment

*Share your organization's mission and values.*

[Organization's name] is committed to including family perspectives and leadership in [initiative goal], for example "improve the health outcomes of children and youth with disabilities." We want to establish meaningful and lasting partnerships with families and with the community. We believe [vision for family engagement] when [organization's name] and the community work together to [organization's vision].

### Example of completed Introduction and Commitment section

ABC Health is committed to including family perspectives and leadership in improving the health outcomes of children and youth with disabilities, which aligns with our mission to support the health of children in the Z state area. We want to establish meaningful and lasting partnerships with families and with the community. We believe everyone benefits when ABC Health and the community work together to promote health access for the well-being of our children.

### Purpose

In order to [why the policy exists], [Organization's name] has developed this parent and family engagement policy that establishes [Organization's name]'s goals and objectives for meaningful family engagement. This policy guides the strategies and resources that strengthen the services offered and the partnerships developed with [Organization's name] and describes our commitment to engage families in co-creation and collaboration to

# Implementing a family engagement policy

## Family involvement in implementation

Involving families in implementing a family engagement policy **ensures** meaningfulness and effectiveness.

- An effective family engagement policy = **co-created with families.**
- Involve families in the **early stages of implementation.**
- Families you serve know **what works** and what doesn't.
- The importance of having a **champion staff member**



# Implementing a family engagement policy

## Implementation of goals and expectations

Create an organizational chart that shows **how** the family is involved and who is responsible for making progress.

- The **org chart** should state an organizational value for family participation
- **Include family engagement** in the strategic plan
- Create **staff positions** to support family engagement
- Include family engagement in **staff job descriptions**



# Challenges in implementing a family engagement policy

- **Effective communication** with staff
- Staff **training**
- Communication **barriers**, including language and cultural
- Regularly **reviewing and updating** policies
- **Sustainability**
- Family **recruitment**

# The value of family input in co-creating family engagement policies

- Families have important perspectives that can help shape policies that support their engagement.
- When families are included in policy development, their real-life experiences and different points of view make the work more authentic, relevant, and fair.
- Enhances relevance and **responsiveness**
- Builds trust and **partnership**
- Increases equity and **inclusion**
- Boosts buy-in and **implementation**
- Improves **outcomes**
- Promotes **innovation**



# Practices to Avoid Challenges

## Tokenism

One person cannot possibly represent an entire community

## Paternalism

Believing that only professionals have answers and not realizing that families have expertise

## Exploitation

Using families as a prop, “allowing” them a seat at the table but not fully participating in the conversation or decisions

## Inflexible processes

Not every family can adapt to your schedule. Be flexible to have the most voices

## Ignoring power dynamics

Power dynamics impact what and how people share. Consider how you will create safety



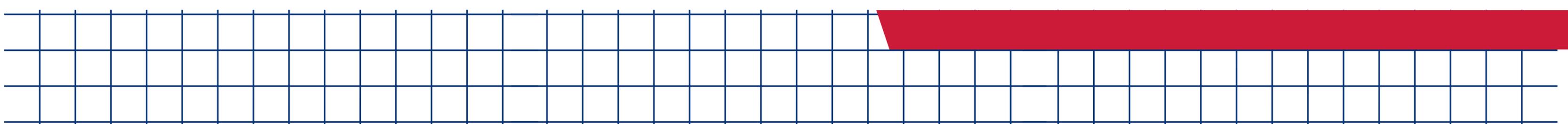
**Thank you**



# Discussion Questions

**Think about the following questions to assess current policies or practices that you are currently engaging with families.**

- Review your mission and vision, initiative, description, or focus.
- How are families involved?
- What is currently happening, and how are families involved?
- How are you co-creating? Provide examples.
- What barriers have you encountered?
- What successful family engagement approaches do you have?
- How are you currently tracking the impact of family engagement on your initiative?



# Office hours

First and third Thursday of each month from 4-5 pm ET

First Thursday link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84569628237?pwd=tbg9Ugc5yLqbeLenFUfvLqT6oitvQr.1>

Third Thursday link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/ePEzXVK8RI0isgGLQ3wxig>





## PSP Technical Assistance (TA) Plan

### Who will benefit from TA?

Proof Point communities and family leaders who join the TA office hours or schedule a one-on-one session with the Family Voices (FV) team.

### Who will be providing TA?

The Family Voices team provides technical assistance. The Family Voices team comprises Dr. Allysa Ware, Roseani Sánchez, and Vanessa Rodriguez. Other staff members may assist as needed.

### Type of TA

Family Voices offers individual/intensive TA. This may include training, office hours for PPCs, and monthly meetings with family leaders. These activities help the teams to improve family engagement efforts in their practices. The training and activities help to build the skills needed to promote family participation and leadership.

### Potential topic areas

- Family engagement and leadership
- Utilization and implementation of the FESAT
- Family partnership and co-creation
- Continuum of Engagement
- Health literacy, plain language, translations, and cultural adaptations
- Strategies for recruiting diverse family leaders
- Data tracking and evaluation around family engagement
- Sustainability of family engagement
- Community engagement plans and partnerships
- Group dynamics and facilitation
- Other topics as requested



### Potential modalities

- Individual calls
- Training sessions or workshops
- Resource sharing
- Written guidance
- Language access support and guidance

### When TA is offered

- The FV team will hold twice monthly office hours for the teams. These will be informal opportunities for teams to share their concerns, issues, or questions. They will be first come, first served in a virtual group environment.
  - Office hours will be scheduled on the first and third Thursdays of each month from 4 pm ET to 5 pm ET.
- Depending on availability and capacity, teams can arrange a one-on-one meeting with the FV team. These virtual meetings may range from 30 to 60 minutes long, based on need and topic, with specifics discussed with Family Voices upon scheduling.
- Monthly meetings with the family leaders to continue building their capacity and provide support for them within their teams.

### Evaluation

- A survey after each training session or one-on-one session
- A follow-up email after office hours to summarize the discussion and assess satisfaction
- Final summary of results of training sessions

# Next training

## Building a case Session 1

- Date: June 3
- Time: 1-2:30pm ET

## How to Identify a champion for family engagement

Date: July

Time: 4-5pm ET



# Additional resources

- [Measuring What Matters: Using Data to Support Family Progress | HeadStart.gov](#)
- [FESAT/Family Engagement in Systems Assessment Tools](#)
- [Evaluating Family Engagement](#)
- [Shared Power](#)
- [What is a Policy? Definition and Explanation | AllVoices](#)
- [Follow Continuous Quality Improvement \(CQI\) Best Practices.](#)

# Questions?



Please complete the follow-up survey after the training using the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PPCteams>



thank  
you