

A GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE COUNCILS

The needs of children, youth, and their families often require resources from more than one system at the same time, such as child welfare and mental health. Ensuring that the right resources are available can be a challenge when there is no single plan of care to guide community-level staff in their decision-making, to inform the coordination of services across agencies, or to align goals and intended outcomes across systems. This leaves policy, funding, and practice decisions made without the benefit of full information. When systems act independently of one another, the essentials that youth and families require may be overlooked, leading to disparities in care, poor outcomes, and involvement with additional systems such as juvenile justice. We are excited that you are dedicated to working in partnership across systems to serve children, youth, and families.

Youth and their families who have been involved with multiple systems (lived experience) have the unique knowledge, and insights necessary to help co-design solutions and support a shared approach – they are the natural bridge among systems. One way to benefit from lived experience is by forming a committee, advisory board, or council that welcomes youth and families as members, and that considers the broad input of their peers through affinity and focus groups.

Establishing, supporting, or retaining an effective committee requires a lot of planning. There are many things to think of before you begin to recruit members and hold meetings. This guide includes some areas for you to consider. We hope this document helps you establish an effective group to guide the important work you are doing in partnership. If you have challenges, let us know so we can help your committee be efficient and effective. We are available to provide you with tools and strategies for success!

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN DEVELOPING A COUNCIL

The following information relates to four primary areas, including checklists, prompts, or questions to guide your development of a structure to support your collaboration.



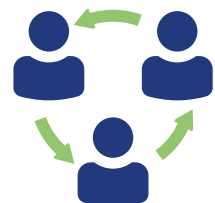
1 Setting the foundation



2 Strategies for recruiting members



3 Getting the work done



4 Sustainability

1 SETTING THE FOUNDATION

Describe the scope and authority of the group. People often think groups have more influence than they do. Youth and families may want to join because they think it is an opportunity to influence their personal circumstances, rather than representing the collective experience of their peers. Being clear helps to ensure that members join for the right reasons and prevents them from being disappointed in the focus of the group.

Purpose and Goals:

- Is its role advisory in nature (such as planning councils) or decision-making (such as governance)?
- Will it directly affect policy, practice, or funding decisions?
- What will it inform –and how? (shape program design, inform quality improvement, etc.)
- How will you recruit members who are aligned with the goals?
- What are your expectations of committee members? What are theirs of you?
- Let members know how much time it will take each month to fulfill their obligations. (include reviewing materials, developing the agenda, reading minutes, responding to e-mails, or attending sub-committee or ad hoc meetings)

Member Criteria:

Ensure a range of lived and professional experiences inform the work of your committee and reflect the culture of your community. Examples of lived experience are in the recruitment section of this guide. Are there system representatives, service providers, or policymakers who should be included? Are there natural allies in the community who can contribute to this work? Who else would be helpful?

Logistical and Tangible Support:

- Does the group have a budget to provide tangible support for member participation? (childcare, stipends, transportation, technology to support access to meetings, etc.) If so, will resources be available in the future?
- How will you track expenses? (Are there forms to complete? Will you contract with a family or youth organization to process payments?)
- Is there logistical support? (meeting space/ virtual platform, a coordinator)

Staffing the Committee:

- Will someone from your agency staff the committee? Will they be a voting member?
- Whose role will it be to coordinate meetings, disseminate materials, and take minutes?
- Will more than 1 person from your agency be on the committee?

Membership:

Ensure that group members have a range of diverse experiences that align with the group's purpose. Examples include youth and family lived experience, service providers, policymakers, community members, and interagency representatives. Do the youth and families represent experience at various ages and stages (infant and early childhood, school age, adolescent), and with various services (biological, kinship, foster care, adoption, etc.) as well as reflect the socioeconomic and cultural diversity of the community?

Once you know the type of expertise the group needs, you can determine the number of members. It is important to have more than one youth and more than one family member with lived experience, and equally essential that they are connected to and represent a collective voice (such as a youth- or family-run organization).

Evaluation:

It is important to gauge committee effectiveness and member perceptions of how their contributions are valued. Checking in with members after meetings (a quick touch base, or survey) or a more formal method every 12 -18 months can keep you informed, and help members stay engaged. Ask members to select the method and frequency they prefer.



2 STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITING MEMBERS

What are your Recruitment Strategies?

How will you include families with both seasoned wisdom and current experience? How will the experiences of people who are unhoused or incarcerated be included?

It is All About Relationships:

Spend time getting to know people – and how they can relate to the work – before trying to recruit them. Learn about their priorities and ideas so you see how their participation can be of mutual benefit.

Consider a Peer Approach:

Prepare people to perform outreach to others with 'like experience.' (Parent to parent, provider to provider, judge to judge, teacher to teacher) People with similar roles can best translate the opportunity to others and often make the best recruiters. Provide materials specific to the audience you hope to engage.

Level of Commitment:

Prospective members can be 'in over their heads' without reliable information upon which to base their decisions. Describing the anticipated time commitment will prevent members from feeling used or overwhelmed. Consider if there are sub-committee meetings, materials to review between meetings, special events/presentations, or other things that add to a routine meeting's time commitment.

Accommodations:

Know what members need to effectively participate and be prepared to ensure their access. Will students earn class credits for informing this work?

Be Strategic:

Understand the experience and skills required from members to achieve your goals – recruit accordingly.

3 GETTING THE WORK DONE

Supporting Engagement:

To be meaningfully engaged, members require a few basic things, including:

- A welcoming, judgment-free environment
- A transparent process
- Adequate time to prepare (getting materials and information ahead of time)
- Materials in a manner, language, and format that meets their needs (accessibility)
- Time to prepare and debrief with peers
- Ask if anyone has questions about materials before deciding on the information that is shared
- Check-in contact from a peer or group member if they miss a meeting and did not let the group know ahead of time
- Ask the group what is working or not – ask for technical assistance if needed

4 SUSTAINABILITY

Making Changes:

Using feedback from the group shows members their input is valued. Changing policies and protocols that do not work well will help retain members. Let members know whether the group will be ongoing, or if it is time limited. Inform policies that affect the work and ensure that a budget is available to continue supporting the group's activities.

Retaining Members:

- Achieving a recruitment plan is a great beginning –but keeping members requires you to be proactive.
- Show members that their contributions are valued (ask the group HOW they would know this)
- Ensure that members play a role in shaping the work of the committee
- Get member input before making decisions
- Manage discussions so the group can stay on topic
- Be certain that everyone has opportunities for input (encourage people who may be shy – ask for comments from others who have not yet contributed)
- Get clarification if what is stated is not clear (especially for minutes, recommendations, etc.)
- Identify a budget to support sustaining membership
- Celebrate accomplishments!