



Engaging Community Partners to
Strengthen Family Services



Tools for Planning Community Partnerships



NATIONAL CENTER ON

Parent, Family and Community Engagement

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Tools for Planning Community Partnerships

Effective community partnerships strengthen the services that programs provide for children, families, and communities. Developing an effective, engaged community partnership involves comprehensive planning.

In this resource you will find six steps to guide a planning process for engaging in community partnerships. Use these steps to explore partnerships to strengthen family well-being in ways that support with your program goals. You will also find templates to help you:

- Highlight the community strengths you discover through your program’s Community Assessment
- Develop a plan of action to guide your community partnership
- Draft a memorandum of understanding with your community partner

Parent leaders, family services professionals, program leadership, and management teams can use this resource as part of the planning for the five-year grant period or other planning efforts.



Three Priorities for Community Engagement

Engaged community partnerships benefit children, families, program staff, other agencies, and the community. All partners—including Head Start and Early Head Start programs—are more likely to meet their goals by working together. Programs can engage with community partners to focus on three priorities and learn how to best support:

- 1 Individual Families in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs—partnering with parents to set goals in the Family Partnership Process
- 2 Groups of Families in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs—developing partnerships in the community to serve groups of families with similar interests in the program
- 3 Families in the Community—developing partnerships in the community to improve services for all families

Head Start Program Performance Standard: Determining Community Strengths, Needs, and Resources

Subpart A 1302.11(b)(2): A program must review and update the community assessment annually to reflect any significant changes, including increased availability of publicly funded pre-kindergarten (and an assessment of how the pre-kindergarten available in the community meets the needs of the parents and children served by the program, and whether it is offered full school day), rates of family and child homelessness, and significant shift in community demographics and resources.



Steps for Planning an Engaged Community Partnership

Head Start and Early Head Start programs can use engaged community partnerships to support program goals and community engagement priorities.

Developing an effective, engaged community partnership involves a comprehensive planning process. This process is described in the six following steps. Use the questions in each step to guide your program planning.

You can use this six-step process as a framework for collaborative action. You also can use the process to consider opportunities for partnering with community organizations to strengthen family well-being. As you consider and add community partners, repeat the steps within the process.



Step 1: Define the purpose of the partnership.

Identify the organizations in the community that you currently work with (or may want to work with). Think about what you hope to achieve through an engaged community partnership. Choose one organization to focus on.

Think big! Go beyond current challenges or issues. Consider these questions :

- Who are the stakeholders in this partnership?
- What do we know about the community organization and the stakeholders, including families? How can we learn more about the organization as partner?
- What is our shared purpose? What is the vision for our work together?
- What are our partner's interests and needs? How will our partner benefit (or continue to benefit) from the partnership?

Step 2: Assess the environment and the partnership's capacities.

Consider the organization you have chosen. Assess the strengths and challenges of this partnership. Explore these questions for the partner:

- What type of partnership do we (or should we) have? What roles do (or will) families, staff, and the management team play in the partnership? What role does (or will) the partnering organization play in the partnership?

- What are the current (or potential strengths) of the partnership? How can we further strengthen the partnership?
- What are the current (or potential) challenges or barriers? What do families and staff at the program and at the partnering organization need in order to work effectively together?

Step 3: Establish the partnership's goal and expected outcomes.

Use your program goal(s) and data to decide what change you want to see as a result of the partnership. Think about your community engagement priorities for families in the program and families in the community. Consider these questions:

- What is our program goal for family well-being? What are our expected outcomes?
- How does our program goal support a shared vision for working together with the partnering organization?
- How would a closer partnership with the partner organization help us all reach our goal and expected outcomes?

Step 4: Explore and select strategies for supporting the partnership's work.

Explore ways to support the partnership. Choose strategies to support the goal and expected outcomes with the community partner. Consider the following questions:

- What information do we need from our partner to support the partnership? What information does our partner need from us? What information do we need from families, and what information do they need from us?
- What strategies should we use to communicate regularly with the community partner and families and other stakeholders?
- How can we gather and learn from the feedback provided by families?
- What data can be shared (with permission) with the partnering organization and stakeholders to help with decision-making?
- What new training and experiences would help staff at both the program and the partner organization be more effective partners? What new training and experience would help support more effective work with families?

Step 5: Develop a plan of action.

Reflect on the identified goal for the partnership. Think about how you can work with the community partner to reach that goal. Consider these questions for the current or future partner:

- What actions do we plan to carry out? How should we prioritize them? What is feasible? What is our timeline?
- How will we define success? How will we track our progress? What is our plan to collect and analyze data about our efforts? How will we use data to learn and enhance our work together?
- How will we share our progress with families, staff, the staff of our partnering organization, and other stakeholders?

Step 6: Consider opportunities for community impact.

Explore the impact of the partnership for families in the program and for families in the community. Think about the difference the partnership can make beyond the program. Consider these questions:

- What kind of impact would we like to have in our community as a result of our work together—our community impact?
- How will things be different for families in the program and in the community as a result of our partnership?
- How can we strengthen how services are delivered to families in the community?
- How can we enhance services and fill any existing gaps through our partnership?

Explore the next section of this resource for three tools to support engaged community partnerships.

Programs can use data to guide their decisions about their priorities for community engagement that support program goals. Examples of data sources include:

- Family Partnership Agreements
- Family Assessments
- Community Assessment
- Community Strengths section of the Community Assessment Matrix
- Current program goals and related objectives
- Program data (for example, Program Information Report [PIR], surveys, interviews, observational tools, feedback from families)
- US Census and other data

See Related Tools (page 6) for the Community Assessment: Exploring Community Strengths.

Related Tools for Engaged Community Partnerships

Community Assessment: Tool for Exploring Community Strengths

Purpose: Use this tool to identify the activities and resources available in the community for families and to learn more about the community's strengths. This template is based on the Community Assessment Matrix found on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website.

Consider the following questions with your team or on your own. You can add your own questions on page 7. Write your responses in the table below.

- What have we learned from the Community Assessment Matrix Data about the activities and resources available in the community for families? (Column 1)
- What are the strengths of these community resources? What do we know and what do we want to know about these resources? (Column 2)
- Where can we find the answers? What data sources can we use? (Column 3)
- What is our plan for finding this information? Who will do what? When? (Columns 4–7)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Community Assessment Matrix Data Resources and Activities	Questions about Community Strengths and Resources	Information Source	Responsible Team Member	Start Date	Finish Date	Notes
What is available to families in the community?	What do we want to know about access, cost, safety, fees, age range, and other information?	Where can we find the answers? What data sources can we use (for example, data from an agency, group, families, or program)?	Who will find this information?	When will they start?	When will they finish?	What else is important to note?

Community Assessment: Tool for Exploring Community Strengths, cont.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Community Assessment Matrix Data Resources and Activities	Questions about Community Strengths and Resources	Information Source	Responsible Team Member	Start Date	Finish Date	Notes

Plan of Action for an Engaged Community Partnership

Purpose: Use this tool to create a plan of action to support engaged community partnerships. These partnerships can strengthen family well-being and other positive outcomes for families and children.

- 1 Choose ONE of your program goals from the goals identified for the five-year project period. Write this goal and related objective(s), expected outcome(s), and community engagement priority.
- 2 Choose ONE community partnership that you need or want to strengthen that is related to this specific program goal. Describe the purpose of the partnership. Write action steps, name the person(s) responsible, and create a timeline.

You and your team can complete this planning template with your community partner. Together, you can review this plan of action to track progress toward your shared vision and goals over time.

Plan of Action for an Engaged Community Partnership		
Program Name:		Program Year:
Program Goal:	Objective(s):	Outcome(s):
Community Engagement Priority:		
Purpose of the Community Partnership		
Partner Agency or Organization		Contact: Phone: Email:
		Contact: Phone: Email:

Plan of Action for an Engaged Community Partnership, cont.

Action Steps	Person Responsible	Start Date	End Date

Memorandum of Understanding Template for an Engaged Community Partnership

Purpose: You can use this resource to develop and revise a memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreement with a community partner. The template includes three sections: Partnering Organizations and Purpose, Activities and Responsibilities and Signatures. You will find a short description and example(s) in each section.

Partnering Community Organization and Purpose

This section lists the names of the Head Start and Early Head Start program and of the community organization that are agreeing to work together. It describes the purpose of the partnership.

The purpose states the partners' understanding of the general nature of the MOU agreement. (You can use information from the **Plan of Action for an Engaged Community Partnership** on pages 8 and 9.)

Example

The [insert the name of the Head Start and Early Head Start Program] and [insert the name of the community organization] will work in partnership to support [insert the goal for the community partnership].

Purpose: The purpose of this partnership is [insert purpose].

Activities and Responsibilities

This section describes the activities (action steps) and responsibilities (organization(s) responsible for the action steps) that the partnering organization agrees to carry out. You may organize the activities into groups or categories. (Use information from the **Plan of Action for an Engaged Community Partnership** on pages 8 and 9.)

Example

Together the organizations will work to achieve [insert planned activities or objectives related to the goals for the community partnership].

- Develop policies and procedures for [insert the name of the Head Start Program] and [insert name of the community organization] to enhance collaboration and communication.
- Share information about related upcoming events/training and new resources.

Signatures

This section includes the names and signatures of the individuals from each partnering organization that will serve as the designated agents for the agreement. Include the date the agreement was signed.

Memorandum of Understanding Template for an Engaged Community Partnership, cont.

Example

We, the undersigned, approve and agree to the terms and conditions as outlined in this Memorandum of Understanding.

Role
Head Start and Early Head Start Program/
Organization

Role
Program/Organization

Date

Date

Closing Thoughts

Community engagement is at the core of Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Through a comprehensive planning process, programs can identify and develop community partnerships to strengthen family well-being. These partnerships can address the strengths, interests, and needs of the children and families in your program and community.

How do you currently plan for community partnerships?
What steps can you take to identify and develop new partnerships?

What are your community's strengths?
How can you work with community partners to build on those strengths to benefit children and families?

Explore Other Resources in the Series

- **Building Community Partnerships**
Explore how to use the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework to support community engagement. Consider three priorities for community engagement. Find recommendations for how staff and programs can engage in community partnerships.
- **Strategies and Examples for Community Partnerships**
Use this guide to explore strategies for building community partnerships. Consider these ideas to develop an approach to addressing priorities for community engagement. Find examples of steps that programs can take to make a positive difference for children and families.

Related Resources

Explore these related resources on the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website:

Family Engagement

Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework

Use this resource to understand the collaborative relationships among families and Head Start and Early Head Start programs, staff, and community service providers to promote positive, enduring outcomes for children and families.

Measuring What Matters: Using Data to Support Family Progress

Use this set of resources, including an overview, four exercises, and an e-course a three-part webinar series, to learn more about using data to track family and program progress. Explore program examples that consider how to use community assessment data to strengthen community engagement efforts.

Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement

Refer to this set of resources to review competencies for all early childhood professionals, including supervisors and leaders. Learn the knowledge, skills, and practices that form professional practice. Explore specific practices to connect families with community partners, follow up on referrals, and build and nurture relationships with community partners.

The Family Partnership Process: Engaging and Goal-Setting with Families

Use this guide to learn about the Family Partnership Process. Explore how to use data to inform decisions about program and community level services to address the strengths and challenges of all of the families in your program.

Sample Memorandum of Understanding Between Head Start and Domestic Violence Programs

Use this resource to develop and revise memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreements with domestic violence prevention and response programs.

Program Management and Fiscal Operations

Community Assessment Matrix

Use this resource to understand the context in which Head Start and Early Head Start programs operate. This matrix is useful for ensuring that the correct services are provided to the appropriate population.

Foundations for Excellence: A Guide for Five-Year Planning and Continuous Improvement, 2nd Edition

Use this comprehensive guide to learn what Head Start expects from programs' strategic planning. Discover ways to ensure that programming is responsive to community needs throughout the five-year grant period. Consider program examples that illustrate the role of community partnerships to meet planning objectives, goals, and expected outcomes.

Head Start Management Systems Wheel

Use this resource to understand the twelve program management, planning, and oversight systems that are critical to sound program infrastructure and high-quality service delivery. Specifically, refer to the Program Planning & Service System Design and Community and Self-Assessment systems to inform community engagement efforts.



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