



Learning Tool 17

Effective Collaborations in Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention: Wisdom from the Field

I. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) State Lead Agencies (SLAs) with ideas and “how to” strategies for effective collaborations. It draws on the collective wisdom, learning, and experience of a cross-section of experienced CBCAP SLAs. It represents the collaborative efforts and ideas they have used in building and sustaining effective collaborations with stakeholders and systems, in particular child welfare, to prevent child abuse and neglect. The “*In the Trenches*” roundtable discussions conducted at the 2013 CBCAP Grantee Meeting provided initial input. Two main themes emerged as critical to fostering effective collaborations for systems reforms and improvement to prevent child abuse and neglect: a) collaboration is all about relationships and the specific steps taken to develop and sustain them; and b) the resources and supports needed to develop and sustain collaborations. Subsequent follow-up conversations with experienced CBCAP SLAs helped provide clarification and further details.

Whether you are a new or experienced CBCAP SLA that might be struggling to develop a new collaboration or struggling to sustain an existing collaboration, this information provides strategies and ideas from SLA peers that have figured out how to make their collaborations work. The following sections are provided for use and reference as CBCAP SLAs work to build collaborations and engage stakeholders and partners. Section II presents the two main actions (outreach and engagement) related to developing and building collaborative relationships, while Section III highlights actions and activities that the SLAs found important for sustaining collaborative relationships. Both Sections include the resources and supports found to be important for conducting outreach and engagement, and for sustaining collaborative relationships.

Additional resources related to developing and sustaining collaborations are noted at the end of the document. The goal of this document is to provide useful ideas and strategies to support CBCAP SLA collaborative efforts move forward.



II. Building Collaborative Relationships

SLAs have observed that building collaborative relationships requires thoughtful planning based on clearly defined goals and objectives. They indicated that the way collaborative relationships are built can influence the quality of the relationship as well as the degree to which the relationship is sustained. Outreach and engagement were identified as essential in the building of collaborative relationships. This section offers insight into activities and actions that have been implemented and used in conducting outreach to and engagement of potential partners in collaborations for child abuse and neglect prevention.

A. Outreach

Outreach to other systems should be strategic and driven by the mission and goals of the organization. The way outreach efforts are implemented will have an impact on the quality of any resulting relationship. The CBCAP SLAs identified the following actions as helpful to them in implementing effective outreach and the resources and supports that contributed to effective outreach:

Actions

- ◆ Understand the organizational structure of potential partner agencies/systems and identify the key decision-makers as well as those with direct responsibility for program implementation to assure that the right people are at the table.
- ◆ Identify and build on existing structures (committees or workgroups related to prevention) within your organization as well as other organizations (public and private).
- ◆ Have an honest conversation about what you want the relationship to be—the goal and outcome.
- ◆ Identify common/shared values and goals of both systems (yours and the one(s) you are trying to engage) as a tool for initial outreach.
- ◆ Know the language of the other system(s). Understand terminology and acronyms of the other system(s). Take time to establish the same language.
- ◆ Be aware of how your organization is perceived in the

community and within other organizations and systems. Be aware of your own individual reputation.

- ◆ Do upfront work to identify and address organizational, population, and community-related cultural differences.
- ◆ Consider timing and identify the best time to make outreach by learning how events and activities are scheduled in the other system(s). Respect the time of others.
- ◆ Identify the demographics of shared populations. For example, selected high-risk areas of the community, county, or state which may be served by both systems.
- ◆ Use existing individual relationships to make connections within the other system(s).
- ◆ Ask communities and partners what they need and works best for them to sustain program and service integrity.

Resources and Supports

- ◆ A critical part of driving collaborative efforts is the support of key leader(s) either in the organization or system that the CBCAP is part of, the other agency(ies) and/or system(s) to be engaged, or the Governor's office.
- ◆ A vision for prevention of child abuse and neglect that can be promoted by leadership within the organization/system the CBCAP is part of.
- ◆ Opportunities for outreach and communications between leadership across systems to share identified child and family needs in the community.
- ◆ Opportunities for all staff to have access to an orientation on a family strengthening and Protective Factors framework. This encourages infusion of the application of prevention as a concept across all services and programs within the organization.
- ◆ Targeted budgeting and funding for dedicated staff to lead the collaborative efforts.

B. Engagement

The outreach-related actions set the foundation for engagement that will create collaborative relationships. SLAs viewed engagement as a continuous process. The following are the engagement actions and activities, and resources and supports that the SLAs found useful in developing and building collaborative relationships:

Actions

- ◆ Show respect for the other organization by:
 - Identifying its strengths and the strengths of individuals within the organization;
 - Making inquiry as to what they (organization and individuals) are doing and related outcomes; and,
 - Assume a “we are in this together” approach;
- ◆ Think broadly about who should “be at the table” and be inclusive.
- ◆ Identify common ground, be open to hearing different opinions, and address any differences.
- ◆ When the collaborative relationship involves a work group, help the group to define guiding principles and expectations for their work together.
- ◆ Establish time for developing quality individual relationships with colleagues in the other organization(s) you are trying to engage.
- ◆ Extend invitations to trainings, meetings, participate in the planning of and attendance at the annual prevention conference, and other special events. Create opportunities for cross-system training, and participate in opportunities offered by the other system(s).
- ◆ Volunteer for workgroups and committees. Be assertive and respectfully invite yourself when the opportunity presents itself and is appropriate.
- ◆ Share data and information relevant to the work of other systems to promote enhanced planning, implementation and evaluation of program outcomes.
- ◆ Identify and use outside speakers as a means of sharing information, building knowledge and learning together.
- ◆ Be consistent, available, and keep your word when commitments or promises are made, thus establishing and building trust—“proving yourself to others.”
- ◆ Support local-level programs by exploring joint efforts for securing funding opportunities.
- ◆ Acknowledge and own up to mistakes.
- ◆ Understand and acknowledge that change is difficult (there may be resistance), is a process, and takes time. However, the “seeds for change” must be planted and the need for patience accepted.

Resources and Supports

- ◆ An internal organizational culture that:
 - Appreciates the importance of collecting, analyzing, and applying data and research to program design and implementation, which encourages a learning environment; and,
 - Emphasizes the importance of understanding and valuing the mandates and work of other systems and disciplines as well as viewing staff from other systems as colleagues.
- ◆ Statistical data on child abuse and neglect, prevention efforts, and progress should be made available. This can be done using such mediums as social media and newsletters.
- ◆ A collection of success stories to promote continuous attention to the value of prevention.
- ◆ Memorandums of Understanding between systems to provide a clear structure and framework of the collaboration and partnership.
- ◆ Outside trainers, experts, facilitators, and consultants that can conduct meetings and trainings as they represent a neutral perspective.

III. Sustaining Collaborative Relationships

Strategic outreach to and engagement of other systems can lead to productive relationships and partnerships that support coordinated services and access to resources to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. Once established, sustaining relationships is a continuous process. SLAs identified the following actions and activities as critical to maintaining established relationships:

Actions

- ◆ Promote strong positive intra-agency staff relationships.
- ◆ Establish continuous and consistent contact through joint trainings and meetings. Volunteer to be a resource to the other organization and serve on interdepartmental workgroups.
- ◆ Explore ways to share resources, including funding and work sites when possible and appropriate.
- ◆ Create opportunity for joint projects across systems.

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- ◆ Support partner participation by providing a calendar of meeting dates and times. Provide meeting agenda and related documents in advance and have copies available at meetings for individuals who may not bring them to the meeting.
 - ◆ Use online technology (such as video conferencing, webinars, SKYPE, Google+), to inform others on issues related to building strong families, the protective factor framework, child abuse and neglect trends, and other topical areas concerning prevention. Feature information on what other systems are doing related to prevention.
 - ◆ Develop pilot projects to evaluate the impact of cross-system and discipline collaborative partnerships on improved prevention practice and outcomes.
 - ◆ Plan joint procedures and protocols for identifying and measuring family and child outcomes within specific organizational programs in other systems.
 - ◆ Demonstrate flexibility as organizations change. Be prepared to make outreach to and engage new leadership when it occurs in organizations, especially in public systems when appointed leadership may change.
 - ◆ Strive to build relationships among partners.
- ◆ Open expression of appreciation for each other's roles and responsibilities.

IV. Additional Resources

The following resources are helpful in exploring the issues of partnerships, working toward system change, and the role of child welfare in supporting families and assuring safe and nurturing environments for children.

<http://friendsnrc.org/cbcap-priority-areas/collaboration>

<http://friendsnrc.org/cbcap, 2012 CBCAP New State Leads Orientation Manual>

<http://friendsnrc.org/, Implementing Systems Change: How Neuroscience Informs the Process and Lessons from the Field>

<http://www.cwla.org/programs/standards/blueprint.htm, National Blueprint for Excellence in Child Welfare>

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Resources and Supports

- ◆ Knowledge and understanding of how state-level work on prevention can filter down to local-level agencies.
- ◆ Funds for lunches and snacks during meetings and events. This is especially helpful when meeting and event participants have to travel long distances or meetings are held during what would be considered lunch time. It demonstrates consideration for others.
- ◆ Available technology such as SKYPE as a substitute for in-person meetings.
- ◆ Funds for state-wide meetings allowing staff from other systems and collaborative partners to meet annually, at a minimum.



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