

## Funder Scenario #1: Foundation

The ABC Kids and Family Foundation is committed to improving outcomes for children and families and building healthy communities. It currently funds several grants on a three year cycle. On her most recent site visits, the Senior Program Officer noticed that a number of programs had informal quality improvement processes, but did not have a formal process for evaluating effectiveness. In addition, the Board noted in its annual program review that a number of the non-profits funded continue to have sustainability issues, and that it was difficult to assess their long term impact.

In response, the Foundation revised their grant making process to incorporate the Principles of Family Support and Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework into all new initiatives. Along with this new emphasis, the Foundation updated its oversight and monitoring procedures to include annual reports, site visits and grantee work plans that contain a provision for program assessment and action plans for continuous quality improvement. The foundation also committed to funding capacity building through ongoing training and technical assistance to integrate accountability and the learning processes into program operations.

All Grantees are provided training and technical assistance in family support principles and protective factors to increase knowledge and improve practice skills. And additional support through coaching on developing action plans and continuous quality improvement processes.

The Foundation decided to begin the process by having programs complete the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment to establish a baseline for practice and identify areas for growth and build on protective factors. Next, the Foundation will work with grantees to select an assessment tool that best fits their program for annual program assessment. The tools may change from year to year based on identified need. For example:

- For programs that are functioning informally and do not have a consistent way of demonstrating how they are doing their work, a second round of the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment is recommended. In addition to measuring practice, programs will benefit from a more formal way to communicate with both funders and community about the progress they are making on building protective factors.
- The Foundation encourages programs that need a “spot check” on a specific program practice to use the FRIENDS tool, *Understanding the Role of Program Assessment in Child Abuse Prevention: Tools for Peer Review and Beyond*, to review their organizational infrastructure. The FRIENDS tool provides assessments structured around five topical areas with multiple subsets in each of the following areas: Program Administration, Program Services and Activities, Community Collaboration, Continuous Quality Improvement and Engaging, Retaining, and Supporting Families. One key benefit of this tool is individual sections can be used to improve on a particular area of interest and/or growth. *For example, in one rural non-profit, a number of issues related to the organization’s infrastructure have led to lost grants and staffing cutbacks. This non-profit decides to complete the Program Administration section of the program assessment. Through this process, key gaps were identified and an action plan to improve sustainability was developed. The Foundation recommended that in the following year the non-profit participate in a peer review process using the program assessment tool with another similar rural site in order to reduce isolation and increase opportunities for shared learning.*

- The foundation decided to phase in the use of shared standards across all of their funded programs. The Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support assessment tool is designed as a blueprint for implementing best practices and can be used for setting up a new program or strengthening an existing one. The Standards tool integrates and operationalizes the principles of family support and protective factors throughout its five sections and 17 standards. It may be most helpful to programs that want to take a deeper look into how they are integrating and operationalizing the principles and protective factors. *For example, The Foundation decided to start implementation with a network of providers in one county by providing funding to the network to train members in the standards and provide technical assistance. A benefit to the network support is that the Foundation can broadly build the field of family support and promote quality practice even with programs that they do not directly fund. The use of shared standards, and ongoing program assessment, will ultimately aid the Foundation in making funding decisions and aligning practices across a broad array of family and child serving organizations.*

## Funder Scenario #2: County Government

The First County Department of Social Services (DSS) funds several types of services to support families' healthy development, including home visiting programs, family resource centers, and a father engagement initiative.

DSS is having a hard time understanding what quality practice looks like, as there are multiple organizations providing services to several diverse populations. DSS seeks a common language across all programs to ensure quality and consistency. Ideally, this common language could also be used with other departments, such as the Department of Public Health and the Department of Education, including individual school districts.

As a grant requirement, all of their programs are asked to embrace the Strengthening Families Protective Factors framework, but they would like to identify a tool for integrating it across all of their programs.

DSS learns about the Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening & Support and shares it with the management team. They are particularly interested because, the Standards are based on the Protective Factors, can measure various levels of quality practice, emphasize ongoing quality improvement, and can be used across diverse programs. After discussing and reviewing the Standards with their grantees at their quarterly meeting, DSS determines that they will meet their identified need and proceeds forward with next steps.

DSS makes a multi-year commitment to work with the Standards, beginning with investing in funding their county network of family strengthening providers to provide the Standards certification training. The certification training includes orienting organizations to use the Program Self-Assessment tool. Programs will be required to complete the tool annually and turn in the summary sheet to their program officers, who will review it with them during their annual site visits.

The network will also introduce programs to the FRIENDS tool, Understanding the Role of Program Assessment in Child Abuse Prevention; A tool for Peer Review and Beyond as a means of diving deeper into areas of practice included and identified in the Standards. *For example, if a program is interested in building support for parent leadership, they could further explore the parent leadership development component of the Community Building section of the Standards tool, then, as a next step, programs would be encouraged to utilize the Parent Leadership Subscale within the FRIENDS tool as an additional assessment to assess developing parent leadership.*

DSS will continue to work with their network of programs by providing training and technical assistance to build a system of continuous quality improvement and ongoing commitment to evidence-based programs.

## Program Scenario: Local Service Provider

The All Children Count Family Resource Center (FRC) has a broad array of services for children and families which have emerged in an organic manner, reflecting specific interests of community members, board and staff and responses to new funding streams. The FRC provides literacy classes, family fun nights, mental health services, tax preparation assistance for low-income families and parenting classes. When asked to describe their work, staff and board members found it difficult to summarize, often describing each program separately rather than a common purpose and consistent practice across all programs.

As part of a strategic review, the Board of Directors recognized that without a formal process in place to measure practice quality and demonstrate ongoing program improvement, it would be challenging to identify new funding opportunities or make the case for existing contracts. In response, the Board formally adopted the Strengthening Families approach as a way to create a common language and asked the Director to identify appropriate tools for the organization to engage in a self-assessment process. She introduces the Board to the three national program assessment tools available and offers to review them with the leadership team and make recommendations regarding which tool to choose. The Board agrees.

The Director meets with the leadership team and reports that the Board formally adopted the Family Support Principles and the Protective Factors Framework. She shares that the FRC will be moving forward with a program assessment process based on staff recommendations for a tool. Based on the work of the leadership team, the Director presents the following rationale for her recommendation to begin by using the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment Tool for Community Based Programs:

- The tool helps programs compare their practices with exemplary practice that supports families to build protective factors which lead to improved outcomes for children.
- It is organized around the five protective factors which would help us measure how we' re doing with integrating them into our practice; it also identifies areas for growth.
- The tool shows how protective factors can be supported through "small but significant changes" . For example, with small changes such as more outreach to isolated families, all of the FRC' s programs could be understood to have a shared purpose and help families build protective factors.
- Completing the program assessment tool takes about 90 minutes; each member of the team completes the form and then the team meets to share and compare. The team develops a consensus assessment which can be entered online allowing program to print reports showing strengths and areas to focus on for improvement as well as link to parent and staff surveys.
- The tool provides information on action planning for continuous quality improvement
- It seems doable given our staff resources and time available.
- The assessment tool is available at no cost to the FRC.

The Director tells the Board that building in time and resources for an annual program assessment process would be beneficial to the FRC. She feels confident that upon completing the assessment, the FRC will be better able to make the case to funders that their programs build protective factors and articulate a cohesive description of the FRC' s goals and approach. To further demonstrate the overall quality of their practice, the Director makes two additional recommendations.

First, The FRC is a member of a family network that recently received a grant from a community foundation to build member organizations' capacity to engage in continuous quality improvement. As part of the grant, the network will provide a Standards of Quality certification training. The director recommends getting staff certified in the standards. Once certified, the FRC would be prepared to use the Standards of Quality tool for their next program assessment, which would take a deep look into how they are doing as an agency.

Secondly, the FRC has an immediate interest in taking a look at measuring how they are doing with outreach, engagement, and retention of fathers. The FRIENDS tool, Understanding the Role of Program Assessment in Child Abuse Prevention: Tools for Peer Review and Beyond has a section on Engaging and Retaining Fathers, which would be helpful in examining current practices and identifying needed program development for engaging Dads in their Caring About Dads program.

Committing to the program assessment process, the FRC Board and Staff set the course for measuring the quality of their practice across their diverse programs and sharing their progress with funders and the community they serve. They also positioned the FRC for years to come by embracing a more strategic approach to decision making and by focusing on building a formal system of continuous quality improvement.