

Engaging Families in ECCE Systems Design and Improvement Family Council Establishment Guide and Self-Assessment

Family Councils (FC), a leadership and/or shared governance model for involving families in decision-making processes, can be a sturdy mechanism for ongoing family engagement and input. They are viable conduits for ensuring local, state or regional Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) systems are designed and implemented to be responsive to family voice and choice and grounded in equity and continuous improvement.

This tool has been created to support systems leaders' developing capacities to establish and maintain robust FCs recognizing that the work of engaging families in systems design is complex. This tool offers a framework for gauging strengths and growth opportunities of FC development and operations. The tool identifies five Practice Areas of high functioning FCs, with key indicators in each Practice Area positioned along a developmental continuum¹. Systems leaders and FCs can assess current practices and set goals to strengthen operations and support inclusive, transparent, and equitable family leadership through FCs.

It is not the expectation that any one person or appointed Family Engagement staff will hold all the skills and capacities to support the work of integrating family voice into systems decisions (e.g., facilitation, data literacy, understanding of equitable access, etc.) or that FCs are the sole source/responsible entity for 'family voice.' The objectives for integrating family voice systemically are most likely to be accomplished collaboratively, with support across program, agency or organizational leaders, staff and partners, and shared governance bodies.

Program/Agency/Organization – Family Council Practice Areas

- Recruitment and Retention: A diverse FC representative of the community or locality/region of families is convened and supported.
- Orientation of Members: FC members understand the purpose, processes, and responsibilities of Program/Agency Organization and the FC.
- Processes and Practices: The FC communicates effectively and coordinates collaborative engagement in FC meetings and activities.
- Ongoing Skill-building and Professional Learning: FC members understand the ECCE landscape, develop effectiveness as FC leaders, and are supported in understanding ECCE systems issues.
- Engaging Family Voice in ECCE Systems Design: The FC brings family voice and choice to inform ECCE systems design.

Program/Agency/Organization – Family Council Practice Area Developmental Levels

- Establish/Inform: Program/Agency/Organization staff are the primary drivers of the FC processes and decisions.
- Consult/Involve: Program/Agency/Organization staff seek and incorporate input from FC members to inform FC processes and decisions.
- Collaborate/Defer: Program/Agency/Organization staff collaborate with and/or defer to FC members in determining FC processes and decisions that equitably reflect families' needs and preferences.

¹ This tool uses tenets of the [Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#) framework. Visit the [Movement Strategy Center](#) webpage for more information relating to this resource.

Practice Areas and Key Elements	Not yet established (X)	Establish/Inform Program/Agency Organization staff are the primary drivers of the FC processes and decisions	Consult/Involve Program/Agency/Organization staff seek and incorporate input from FC members to inform FC processes and decisions	Collaborate/Defer Program/Agency/Organization staff collaborate with and/or defer to FC members in determining FC processes and decisions that equitably reflect families' needs and preferences
1. Recruitment and Retention A diverse FC, representative of the community or locality/region's families* is convened and supported. *Includes mothers, fathers, grandparents and others raising infants, toddlers, and preschoolers including children with disabilities/delays. The FC mirrors the racial, ethnic, geographic, linguistic, and other demographic make-up of the region's families.	1A. Build relationships	Staff design and lead strategies to build relationships with families/ potential FC members.	FC members help program/agency/organization design and lead strategies to build relationships with families/potential FC members.	Staff and FC members co-plan and co-lead strategies to build relationships with families/potential FC members.
	1B. Recruitment and retention	Staff design and lead recruitment and retention of a diverse and regionally representative FC.	Staff solicit input from FC members on how to recruit and retain a diverse and regionally representative FC	Staff and FC members regularly assess membership and participation, and co-plan and collaboratively implement recruitment and retention strategies that ensure families underrepresented in the region's ECCE system are well-engaged.
	1C. FC representation	Recruitment and retention efforts focus on families who are eligible for publicly funded programs.	Recruitment and retention efforts include families who are and are not eligible for publicly funded programs.	FC members and Staff review regional family data, make decisions, and co-plan and collaboratively implement recruitment and retention of a range of families representative of the community or locality/region.

Practice Areas and Key Elements		Not yet established (X)	Establish/Inform Staff are the primary drivers of the FC processes and decisions	Consult/Involve Staff seek and incorporate input from FC members to inform FC processes and decisions	Collaborate/Defer Staff collaborate with and/or defer to FC members in determining FC processes and decisions that equitably reflect families' needs and preferences
2. Orientation of Members FC members understand the purpose, processes, and responsibilities of Program/Agency Organization and the FC.	2A. Orientation		Staff plan and provide orientation for FC members about the community or locality/region and the FC as mechanism to influence systems design	FC members assist/support Staff to plan and provide orientation to new FC members about the Program/Agency Organization and the FC as a mechanism to influence systems design.	Staff and FC members collaboratively plan and implement orientation for new members. FC members may mentor or lead orientation of new members.
	2B. Purpose, protocols, roles, and expectations		Staff develop and communicate to FC members the articulated purpose of the FC, and FC protocols, roles, and expectations .	FC members provide input to strengthen and assist in communications about the articulated purpose of the FC and FC protocols, roles, and expectations .	FC members and Staff periodically review the articulated purpose of the FC and FC protocols, roles, and expectations and communicate revisions as needed.
	2C. Team culture		Staff lead team culture and norming activities for trust-building, collaboration, and promoting equity and inclusion.	FC members assist Staff to lead team culture activities for trust-building, collaboration, and promoting equity and inclusion.	Staff and FC collaboratively plan and co-lead team culture activities for trust-building, collaboration, with emphasis on ensuring equitable inclusion.

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3. Processes and Practices FC effectively coordinates collaborative engagement in FC meetings and activities.	3A. Meeting cadences and processes		Staff determine FC meeting cadences and processes, including potential leadership roles for FC members, and processes for communicating between meetings.	Staff engage FC members in setting meeting cadences and informing decisions about processes , including potential leadership roles for FC members, and for communicating between meetings.	Staff support FC members in setting meeting cadences and determining processes , including potential leadership roles for FC members and for communicating between meetings.
	3B. Agendas, facilitators, and notes		Staff create agendas , identify facilitators and determine how notes will be documented and disseminated and next steps will proceed.	FC members inform agendas and assist staff in identifying facilitators and determine how notes will be documented and disseminated and next steps will proceed.	Staff help FC members set agendas , identify facilitators , and determine how notes will be documented and disseminated and next steps will proceed. Staff and FC members routinely review these practices and attendance and participation data to ensure that they are successful in engaging FC members.
	3C. FC engagement and participation		Staff determine strategies to support FC engagement including compensation, translation and interpretation, meeting style (in-person vs. hybrid vs. virtual and ADA accessibility).	FC members weigh in on strategies to assure strong and equitable FC engagement including compensation, translation and interpretation, meeting style (in-person vs. hybrid vs. virtual and ADA accessibility).	Staff and FC co-create strategies to support engagement and assess attendance and participation of members - revising approaches as needed to ensure strong and equitable engagement.

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4. Ongoing Skill-building and Professional Learning FC members understand the ECCE landscape, develop effectiveness as FC leaders, and are supported in understanding ECCE systems issues.	4A. Review and discuss data		Staff identify and share ECCE data (e.g., population, indicators of well-being, numbers of ECCE programs, slots, children served, etc.) disaggregated by disability and socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, and language.	Staff gather and discuss ECCE data as requested by FC to answer questions and build understanding about the ECCE landscape. This includes disaggregated quantitative and qualitative data about families' needs, preferences and lived experiences.	Staff and FC members regularly review and discuss disaggregated quantitative and qualitative data to understand the region's ECCE system. Staff provide information to FC as requested about persistent ECCE needs and inequities
	4B. Explore gaps and inequities		Staff provide information to FC about gaps and inequities in the ECCE system.	Staff lead discussions or bring in facilitators to deepen understanding and examine potential solutions to gaps and inequities in ECCE systems. FC members may assist.	Staff and FC members arrange for ongoing facilitation of open dialogue that centers equity, the lived experiences of families, and the exploration of ways equity/inequity have influenced ECCE systems.
	4C. Leadership, training, and effectiveness		Staff identify leadership needs and locate training or skill-building opportunities to increase FC effectiveness to influence the ECCE system.	Staff survey or ask FC members to identify leadership needs and Staff locate training or other skill-building opportunities to increase FC effectiveness to influence the ECCE system.	FC members identify change/influence skills of interest ; and Staff works to procure training/skill building. FC members collaborate with Staff and/or lead activities to increase FC leadership and effectiveness to influence the ECCE system.

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4. Ongoing Skill-building and Professional Learning FC members understand the ECCE landscape, develop effectiveness as FC leaders, and are supported in understanding ECCE systems issues.	4D. Preparing for meetings and decisions		Staff develop, solicit, or select materials to support FC members' understanding about specific ECCE issues or in preparation for meetings and decision-making processes.	Staff responds to input and requests from FC members to procure materials to support FC members' understanding about ECCE issues or in preparation for meetings and decision-making processes.	Staff regularly collaborate with and defer to FC members on how to best support FC members' understanding about ECCE issues or in preparation for meetings and decision-making processes.
	4E. Increasing FC members understanding of issues		Staff determine when extra time is needed to help FC members better understand issues on a customized, needs-based basis.	FC members help identify needs and suggest supports necessary to increase FC members' understanding of issues prior to scheduled convenings.	FC members collaborate with Staff leads or lead in determining the adequacy of, need for additional, and/or approach to support for increasing FC members' understanding of issues.

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5. Engaging Family Voice in Systems Design The Family Council brings family voice to inform ECCE systems design so that families have access to care that meets their needs and preferences.	5A. Identifying EC systems change and improvement priorities		Staff identify and suggest ECCE systems change opportunities and improvement priorities for FC input.	Staff lead discussions and guide the FC to identify concerns and build consensus for recommendations for ECCE systems improvement opportunities.	Staff and FC members collaboratively identify EC systems improvement priorities, grounded in data and continuous improvement processes.
	5B. Engaging the FC in informing systems design		Staff plan and lead activities that engage the FC in informing systems design and improvement.	FC assists Staff in planning and leading activities that engage the FC in informing systems design and improvement.	FC lead and/or collaborate closely with Staff in planning and leading activities that engage the FC in informing systems design and improvement , including connecting FC members with other decision-maker audiences that prioritize the needs of families typically underserved or marginalized by the ECCE system.
	5C. Connection to Shared Governance bodies (if applicable)		Staff arrange opportunities for FC to provide input on ECCE systems decisions as part of Program/Agency Organization Shared Governance bodies.	FC and Shared Governance have direct and routine opportunities to collaborate on ECCE systems decisions.	FCs are informing the Shared Governance agendas focused on ECCE systems opportunities.

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<p>5. Engaging Family Voice in Systems Design</p> <p>The Family Council brings family voice to inform ECCE systems design so that families have access to care that meets their needs and preferences.</p>	<p>5D. Community / locality or region-wide engagement of families in influencing systems change</p>		<p>Not expected at the Establish/Inform level</p>	<p>Staff identify and discuss with FC opportunities for community / locality or region-wide engagement of families in influencing ECCE systems change.</p>	<p>Staff and FC members identify and co-plan opportunities for community / locality or region-wide engagement of families in influencing ECCE systems change. There is an intentional focus on elevating the perspectives of families who have been under-served or marginalized by the ECCE system.</p>