



## **Notes from Breakout Groups on Family and Youth Involvement in Policymaking**

### **Preparing for Family and Youth Involvement in Policymaking**

| <b>Themes</b>  | <b>Ideas</b>   |
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| Creating Involvement Opportunities                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate requirements around family involvement in state issued requests for proposals.</li> <li>• Create a variety of family and youth advisory boards to address the range of youth issues in the behavioral health system.</li> <li>• Create a mechanism for evaluating the success of individual meetings and overall family and youth involvement.</li> <li>• Create family and youth leadership opportunities at all levels, including in the Behavioral Health Coordinating Council.</li> <li>• Have leadership define more clearly and train staff on “meaningful involvement,” why family and youth are experts who are needed at the table.</li> </ul> |
| Structuring Meetings to be Family and Youth Friendly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold meetings at existing events in communities - take the meetings to the families and youth, instead of asking them to come to the system.</li> <li>• Have meaningful, action-oriented meetings.</li> <li>• Have family &amp; youth members help construct the agenda for the meetings.</li> <li>• Provide food and childcare at the meetings.</li> <li>• Have the various organizations bring in resources, information, and linkages to their program.</li> <li>• Use something less formal than Roberts Rules.</li> </ul>  |

### **Recruiting Families and Youth**

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| Marketing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect and disseminate information about opportunities for involvement through a variety of mechanisms, such as local newspapers, school folders (include with school and district policies at the beginning of the year), school websites, newspapers, flyers, emails.</li> <li>• Use youth friendly venues, such as youtube or myspace, to advertise opportunities for partnership and leadership.</li> <li>• Reach out to those who have been through the programs/ systems to come back and serve as family members on boards.</li> <li>• Post flyers about meetings in diverse neighborhoods, instead of relying on electronic communication or mailings (both of which will miss individuals who are transient and/or homeless).</li> <li>• Don’t ask for specific skill sets to participate - it limits who will participate and limits feedback if it is consistently the same people.</li> </ul> |
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**Retaining Families and Youth**

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| Resources/<br>Compensation                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify a range of cash and non-cash options to compensate for involvement, such as the use of credits or points toward core services, respite, transportation, gifts cards etc. Make sure to ask each family member or youth what they would prefer.</li> <li>• Look at different funding streams, like TANF reserves, to see where dollars can be drawn down to support family involvement.</li> </ul>   |
| Training, Mentoring,<br>and Ongoing Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a good orientation package for family and youth members including history of the board and expectations for participants.</li> <li>• Help family and youth members see themselves as experts.</li> <li>• Have multiple family and youth members on boards.</li> <li>• Involve youth by offering trainings they may need without intimidating them; provide the trainings after school hours.</li> <li>• Help educate the families and youth before they come to the meeting and help them do their homework so they can participate effectively.</li> <li>• Provide coaching (support and advice) by teaming with another family member/youth, to help address the sense of isolation.</li> <li>• Create a mentoring template with history, resources, and what mentee needs to know, to support family and youth members who mentor other families and youth on the board.</li> </ul>  |
| Develop a Culture of<br>Inclusiveness       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agencies must make hearing family and youth a priority; often they say that they want families involved but when they have other pressing items it doesn't get the attention that it should</li> <li>• Reduce stigma and be respectful of all cultural groups including GLBT. Use empowering language.</li> <li>• Cultural responsiveness is critical through all stages: all cultures have different communication styles, so being mindful and helping boards learn these will help with work</li> <li>• Verbal and non-verbal responses need to encourage, not discourage, involvement</li> <li>• Don't talk down to families and youth; the assumptions that people can have is that the "professionals" has the education and expertise but the family/youth do not/cannot understand</li> <li>• Believe that families are not exaggerating when explaining about their children; they live with them everyday</li> <li>• Create a variety of venues and approaches to providing input - don't assume silence equals a lack of interest</li> <li>• Build trust before expecting families to share their real-world stories that may leave them vulnerable to systems responses (e.g. child welfare involvement)</li> <li>• Use language that is youth, family, and system friendly, avoiding acronyms and jargon, and using words that are empowering and respectful</li> <li>• Allow youth and family members to introduce themselves as</li> </ul> |

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|  | <p>something other than the consumer or parent, e.g. a project consultant, content expert, or parent leader, because they have both professional and personal reasons to be there.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create non-professional questions to personalize (e.g. “what is the one thing you bring?”) and level the playing field during introductions.</li><li>• Be respectful that some “fun” introduction questions can highlight inequalities between family/youth and professionals.</li><li>• Provide family members with business cards, just like any other expert in the room</li><li>• Be accountable and transparent about how the family and youth input is being used, including in decisions, implementation, reports, and evaluation</li></ul> |
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