



Recruiting, Orienting and Mentoring Parents

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A focused and systematic plan to address recruitment, orientation, and mentoring of parents is critical to successful parent involvement. Recruitment addresses the question of how to find parents. Orientation and mentoring are equally important strategies to consider how to keep parents involved in a meaningful and authentic way. They are companion concepts and should occur together for success. Recruitment without orientation is not effective. Don't orient parents without mentoring them.

1. Recruitment:

Recruitment is everyone's job. While many think of this as a responsibility that belongs to a single person, or one particular group, it actually is bigger than that. Every contact sends messages, positive or negative, about the group to potential participants. Contact with **everyone**, from the administrators to the support staff who answers the phone, either welcomes parents as partners or distances them. Each staff member may have unique perspectives that can strengthen recruitment efforts. All staff members have repeated opportunities and a basic responsibility to spread the word, as do other parents. Everyone should have a common understanding of the group's mission, activities, and target population. Recruitment is:

- an ongoing process, not a one time event
- consists of communication and marketing
- includes formal systemic procedures, like canvassing all eligible parents, and informal approaches like word of mouth, or ongoing newspaper articles about events and opportunities
- occurs year round
- includes a periodic review of the process to ensure that efforts are effective
- includes a cross section of parents that is representative
 - more than one parent
- employs multiple strategies that are culturally appropriate
- occurs in print, media, personal contact, and letters with a follow up call
- is extended many times from multiple sources
- reflects cultural awareness and respect
- is user-friendly, adapted for the audience they are intended to attract

2. Orientation:

Create a packet of informational materials that is used to orient new members and take the time to go over it with them. These materials may already be assembled. If not, be aware that most of this material has probably already been written and exists somewhere. It should not be necessary to create this entirely from scratch. The packet should include

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information about:

- the charge and history of the IEIC; the impact on the community because the IEIC has existed
- the structure of the group (IEIC)
- funding streams or the flow of dollars
- the mission of the group and how it connects to other efforts
- subcommittees and their mission
- membership information including terms of office and makeup of members
- responsibility of members, and supports available to parents participating

3. Mentoring:

- provide a mentor to help new parent members feel comfortable
- provide ongoing individual orientation through relationships
- create a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere
- include parents in casual conversations
- make introductions more than a name or title
- follow up after a meeting with a phone call
- provide support information on reimbursement, system of billing, helpful acronyms
- seek balance in the relationship; opportunities to give and take
- create opportunities for active participation, not just presence
- probe and suggest opportunities for growth

Recruitment, orientation, and mentoring need not be complex or cumbersome processes. It will require effort and determination to get started, but there will be visible rewards.

Reference:

D'Angelo, D. and Beckstrom, S. (1995). Resources for Recruiters, RMC Research Corporation, 1000 Market Street, Portsmouth, NH 03801.