



Discover the Possibilities: Planning and Implementing

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Discover the Possibilities: Planning and implementing effective family support initiatives

Family support initiatives can be planned and implemented in different ways. They can be done in a closed room with a few people and very little outside input, or you can take a look at the wealth of information and feedback that is available to you and do the most effective planning and implementation possible. Involving more people in the process increases the energy and enthusiasm.

Implementing successful family support initiatives requires effective planning. In order to plan well, you need to have information. This information comes from the community, and needs to be collected and analyzed before you make decisions.

There are numerous places and ways to gather information to aid in planning the family support initiatives in your area. Questions to think about as you move forward with your family support plans are:

- What already exists in our area?
- What information do we already know? How current is this information?
- What do we still need to know?
- What local influences are there?
- What parents are already participating?
- How do I bring all this information together into a workable plan?

Take the time to plan—get a “lay of the land” and discover the possibilities. Using one or more of the tools below, work with your team and gather the information. It is not necessary for you to use all of these tools at the same time or in the same year. Using these tools will give you a compilation of what currently is available, offer a review of existing initiatives and provide data to justify your efforts.

INVENTORY:

An inventory will provide you with a complete listing of what family support efforts already exist in your area. This listing will allow you to:

- discover major gaps in the availability of family support efforts
- avoid duplication of family support efforts that already exist
- point out limitations and restrictions of family support efforts
- find partners to strengthen existing efforts

EXISTING FEEDBACK:

Review feedback that you have collected from participants at family support events. This

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information will:

- reflect the opinions of those who are currently participating in your family support efforts
- provide helpful ideas to improve existing strategies
- suggest new ideas to try

LOCAL INFLUENCES:

Consider the various community influences that impact local decisions, including:

- customs of the community
- history of the community
- personality of the community
- professional perspectives over time
- the “loudest voice”

PARTICIPATION:

Analyze family participation to reveal what percentage of families are currently involved in family support efforts. This information will determine:

- the degree to which ALL eligible families are connecting with at least one family support initiative
- if particular types of families are underserved (families from different communities, with children of different ages, with different types of special needs, with different racial/ethnic backgrounds, different primary languages, etc.)
- if efforts, as designed, are meeting the needs of families

SURVEY:

Ask all eligible families to gather direct feedback. This will offer:

- broad based feedback (not just from those who are currently participating)
- specific information from a separate population or area
- an opportunity for families to be heard anonymously
- facts and information to use in planning; more than just anecdotes

THE BIG PICTURE:

Summarize and analyze the information. Prioritize the needs you want to initially address. Share these findings with key stakeholders and community partners. This data has more than one application. It is a useful reference and can supply information to other community partners. It may also work to develop more community buy-in for family support efforts.

Effective planning is the first step. Move on next to implement your family support efforts. The time and energy devoted to gathering information is a valuable way to set priorities and assure the support needs of families are addressed in your community.