



Paying Parents as Family Support Facilitators

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Many local IEIC Family Support Subcommittees wonder if it is acceptable to pay parents to assume family support responsibilities. Professionals who do this work are typically paid. Committees who are considering this idea may have questions like these.

Can parents who take on family support responsibilities in their communities be paid?

Yes, this approach has been used successfully in several communities. Organizing and accomplishing family support tasks can take considerable time and energy. Parents often have abilities and characteristics that can greatly contribute to the quality of family support efforts. They also often bring passion for and commitment to connecting families with one another and sharing information. Some examples are:

- Facilitating parent to parent connections
- Editing a family support newsletter
- Serving as the Family Support Contact on the annual plan
- Leading the family support subcommittee
- Organizing and facilitating events
- Serving as the link to the IEIC

How are they paid?

Typically the parent is paid in one of several ways:

- Contract for service within the fiscal host
- Subcontract with another agency
- Stipend for specific tasks or efforts

Topics such as union issues, graded pay scales and outside contracting are areas that need to be addressed when considering these approaches to paying parent facilitators. These topics have been successfully resolved in communities who genuinely desire to work with and pay parents. It is essential to comply with business requirements. If procedures like reimbursement for expenses create significant delay or cumbersome and unnecessary procedures, consider finding another fiscal host for this component of your family support efforts.

Some communities have chosen to pay parents for family support work through stipends; paying an agreed dollar amount for the completion of certain tasks, sometimes sharing those tasks among a pool of parents. Other communities reimburse based on hourly work.

What are some indicators of quality when this is done well?

- Partnering. In order to be most effective, parents who assume significant responsibilities often need the support and benefit of the information a professional partner provides. This professional partner will serve as “home base” for them, working with them to provide orientation and mentoring, resources, shared problem solving, advice, ideas, and oversight.

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- **Fiscal arrangements flow smoothly.** It is important that there is a professional contact person designated to work closely with the parents who has knowledge of the system and can help find local answers to questions, such as:
 - How is the parent to be paid?
 - What type of arrangement is in place so the fiscal host can pay bills directly?
 - Are there situations where parent facilitators would be expected to pay for purchases themselves and later be reimbursed?
 - In that situation, how soon can reimbursement be expected after the bills are turned in?
 - What is the procedure for reimbursement?
- **Shared ownership.** When many parents are energized and working together on a task they believe is important, that experience can become a key to self-growth and emerging leadership. Offering the opportunity for that experience is part of the responsibility of local interagency teams. There are two basic types of organizational patterns that seem to emerge.
 - **Anchored team.** In this approach, one person, parent or professional, serves as the team's anchor. While the entire team is responsible for the planned activities and work, tasks are assigned and parents are paid for specific tasks, i.e. editing the newsletter, organizing a sibling event.
 - **Parent facilitator.** Here one parent is hired to oversee the implementation of the family support plan. With the partnering support of a designated service provider who works within the system, that person recruits and rallies other parents in order to build a network of family support. The parent facilitator builds a working team with parent volunteer leaders who represent various communities or groups within the catchment area. While the parent facilitator has the responsibility for the overall plan, local parents work and network to provide family supportive input in their area or with their particular group.

What are some cautions when considering hiring parents as family support facilitators?

It is important that the responsibility for team family support work belongs to more than one person in order to avoid some common pitfalls:

- dumping the “family stuff” on one person to the point of burnout and fatigue
- setting up one parent who speaks for all
- creating a long-term isolated job out of family support over a period of years with no real professional teamwork or partnering
- factions that develop if the parents do not perceive themselves as partners of the service providers or they do not experience the supportive partnership of the service system

IEICs who want a paid parent facilitator to be successful support these parents by **partnering, supportive oversight** and **shared responsibility**. This opportunity to work together on tasks for such an important purpose can be empowering for parents who experience the synergy of a committed group working together.