THE ROADMAP TO YOUTH AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Supporting Youth, Alumni and Parent Leadership on Advisory Boards

Acknowledgements

The Roadmap to Youth and Family Engagement (Roadmap) is a collaborative effort of the Pennsylvania Child, Youth, and Family Program Improvement Plan Workgroup, Families and Communities United (FCU), the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB), and the many people who lead youth and family engagement efforts across Pennsylvania.

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Office of Children, Youth and Families

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PA Child Welfare Training Program

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Electronic Access and Copies of Publication

The Roadmap is available for free download online at the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program's website http://www.pacwcbt.pitt.edu/

The Roadmap may be reproduced or copied with citation of the original source. Updates will be completed in electronic format and hosted on the website.

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I. Roadmap Overview

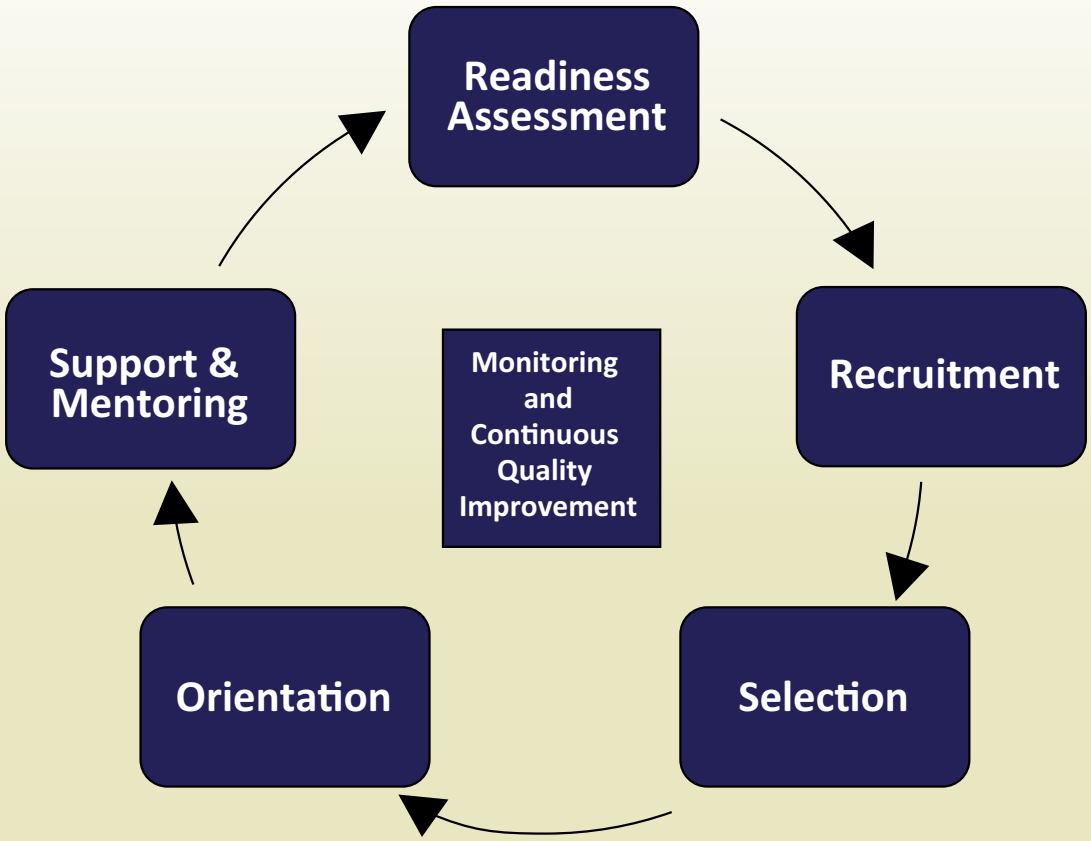
Purpose

The Roadmap is a quick and easy tool to help support and sustain parent and youth engagement and to build highly functioning boards. It provides information and resources to drive collaboration between youth, young adults, family members, state officials, child welfare professionals, cross system partners, and communities.

How to Use

The Roadmap presents a framework for youth and family engagement on advisory boards; users can access any part of the guide through the table of contents for useful information and concrete tools and resources. References and web links are located throughout and can be accessed directly from the document.

II. The Roadmap to Youth and Family Engagement: Supporting Youth, Alumni, and Parents on Advisory Boards



III. Readiness Assessment

Be aware of personal and organizational board values. Examining your personal values and history as well as those of the organization or board is a critical first step in creating an environment for meaningful parent and youth engagement. The entire organization must believe and be able to demonstrate the value of partnering with youth and parents for success. There are many free online tools to assess your values and the values of teams/organizations. What your organization believes in is important.

Understand the "climate" of your organization. What are the current practices of your organization? How are people treated? How are new people welcome? How are decisions made? Meaningful youth and parent engagement allow for collaborating and partnerships at all levels of the organization. The executive administrators and managers must be committed to facilitating this level of participating before partnering with youth and parents.

Assess needs. You must first know the individual, board, or organizational needs before developing a plan to achieve your goals. The needs assessment should encourage collaboration and team cohesiveness. The assessment can take many forms including surveys, focus groups, and needs assessment tools. The learning curve for meaningful youth and parents participating on boards is crucial. Agencies must be willing to provide support, trainings, or workshops to enhance everyone's knowledge and interconnectedness.

Assess your leadership. You do not have to be "in-charge" to be a leader in an organization. Does your organization offer youth, parents, and alumni opportunities for leadership roles? Offering this opportunity may help diversify your organization in terms of race, language, income, consumer experience, and education. Parents and youth should also be afforded the opportunity to recommend meeting times and locations that are convenient for them.

Review and advocate for supportive policies. Do your policies reflect and support youth/parent/family leadership? Can they easily be understood or do they include a lot of jargon? It is important to actively collaborate with others and encourage the implementation of policies at the state, county or national level that support parent/family leadership. The policies should encourage family members to develop, review, and recommend changes to the board structure as well as any outreach materials being sent to families or stakeholders.

Review your procedures. While policies are important, what actually happens during implementation will determine your success or failure. A board or agency that supports youth and parent leadership will welcome participation at all levels from program development, assessment, implementation, and ongoing monitoring. Assess all procedures including communication, conflict resolution, decision making, marketing, and daily activities. Share your findings and develop a comprehensive board plan to ensure what happens supports your mission, vision and values.

Assess diversity. Who is on your board? How are new members recruited? Individuals committed to the same goal each bring their own experiences and uniqueness to form your team. Diversity creates understanding and greater awareness and appreciation. Existing members should be prepared for the transition of new members.

Assess your evaluation plan. What is your plan to monitor your success? How will you know the board is progressing in a positive direction? How will you know board members are satisfied? A continuous improvement plan supports your board or organization knowing where you want to go as well as ongoing monitoring of your progress. A monitoring plan as can prevent issues before they arise and facilitates the incorporation of lessons learned. As an agency supporting meaningful family engagement, it's important to continue monitoring how things are working. Parents and youth should be encouraged to provide ongoing feedback regarding the effectiveness of the agency's efforts to sustain youth and family participation in the organization.

References:

http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_fam_engagement/f_fam_engagement2.cfm

http://www.cssp.org/publications/growingandsustainingparentengagementtoolkit.pdf

http://www.friendsnrc.org/

http://www.westernstatescenter.org/tools-and-resources/Tools/assessing-our-organizations-lgbtq

http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/nonprofits/management/documents/assessment.pdf

IV: Recruitment

Have a strategic recruiting plan. Based on your mission, vision, and values, develop, implement and monitor a creative plan to bring new people on board. You plan should be specific and quantifiable and include your objectives, timeframes, diversity, priority outreach, marketing strategies, benefits of joining, and accomplishments. Consider having an annual recruitment event in conjunction with a national awareness day (http://www.healthfinder.gov/nho/nho.asp).

Develop recruitment materials. Your electronic and hard copy outreach materials are a reflection of your board or organization. First impressions count. Be sure to include your purpose, key messages, personal stories, and accomplishment to motivate others into action. Be sure to use a variety of recruitment methods (as approved by your board) including brochures, poster boards, community fairs, websites, distribution lists, social network sites, public service announcements, free newspaper and radio advertisements, and don't forget personal contact. Support board members and agency staff in being part of your recruitment efforts.

Define the process. Have clear job descriptions/formal volunteer contract, term commitments, board structure, and orientation procedures and share these during recruitment so that candidates know what is expected and provided. Develop and implement a standardized application, reference check and selection process. Ensure applicants understand your process and timeframes.
Know what you are looking for. All board positions are not the same. Some boards have specific seats for specific representation. Ensure your recruitment efforts are aligned with your needs. While agency administrators or staff may have children and be parents, they may not have consumer experience and as employees of the agency they function in the role of professional practitioners not your parent representatives.

Ongoing recruitment. Recruit a pool of candidates, not just one. Maintain a continuous list of your volunteers, committee members, and stakeholders. Consider accepting ongoing applications for board membership. Track term limits and completions and anticipate potential openings on the board. Encourage members to let you know in advance if they are anticipating a change in their participation so you can be proactive and strategic in your recruitment efforts.

Consider potential barriers. In recruiting parents and youth to be on boards, consideration must be given to barriers such as transportation, day care during meetings, location, dates and times of meetings. Decide how your board can or can't address these real life issues that impact participation then share this information during your recruitment.

Review your recruitment efforts. Successful boards evaluate their recruitment efforts and make adjustments toward success. Ensure that your recruitment plan includes a regular timeframe for you to review your efforts to ensure you are achieving your goal to create a highly functioning team with confident and committed team members.

References

Parent Engagement Resources
http://www.friendsnrc.org/

Guidelines for Recruiting New Board Members
http://managementhelp.org/boards/recruiting-members.htm

Recruiting For Board Members
http://www.help4nonprofits.com/NP_Bd_Recruit_Article.htm

Not for Profit Board of Directors Job Description
http://www.ehow.com/about_6517945_not_for_profit-board-directors-job-descriptions.html

Board Member Recruitment - 11 Creative Ways to Find Exceptional Candidates
http://ezinearticles.com/?Board-Member-Recruitment---11-Creative-Ways-to-Find-Exceptional-Candidates&id=3036840

Recruiting for Board Members Process? What Process?
http://www.help4nonprofits.com/NP_Bd_Recruit_Article.htm

V: Selection Process

Target your selection of board members. Outreach and recruitment efforts for youth and family members should be targeted to ensure diversity in the composition of an advisory board that reflects the community in which services are delivered as well as the individuals served.

Define the diversity you are looking for on your board. Characteristics that should be considered in diversity discussions include culture, race and ethnicity, as well as educational background, professional and employment experiences, economic status, age, sexual orientation, gender, experience as a consumer of services or a family member of a consumer, work, and living locations.

Interview potential board members early in the process. Interviews with interested individuals are helpful as an opportunity to share advisory board activities and the responsibilities and expectations of advisory board members. They also serve as a good opportunity to answer questions that the youth or family members may have. Interviews can be by phone or in person and are best conducted by one or two experienced advisory board members.

Invite potential board members to attend a meeting as a guest. An invitation to attend a regular meeting as a guest provides a great opportunity for potential board members to see roles and responsibilities in action before committing.

Dare to document what is necessary to be on the board. Do not hesitate to set clear criteria for selection of advisory board members including references and child abuse/state police background clearances. This protects the integrity of the advisory board as well as individual members. It is not meant to scare potential members away but rather to build a strong and solid advisory board structure.

Focus on the big picture. While it is often valuable to have advisory board members with direct experience as a consumer or family member, participation on an advisory board should not be viewed as an opportunity to drive an individual agenda or seek resolution of an individual's issues. The strength of an advisory board comes from working to increase awareness and understanding of issues to support responsive and solution focused recommendations and actions.

Promote the benefits of participating on your board. Participation on an advisory board should be positively framed as an opportunity for personal growth and professional development. While it is important to have advisory board members understand roles and responsibilities, it is also important to reinforce the personal satisfaction gained from developing relationships with others committed to shared concerns. Advisory board participation is a positive and fulfilling experience if members are supported and comfortable in their roles.

Encourage growth for all of your board members. Reinforce that everyone learns from asking questions and observing others. Questions should be addressed at the advisory board table, not outside.

Plan for Succession. Make sure to consider ongoing continuity on the advisory board while replacing members as they leave by tracking the diversity characteristics valued by the advisory board that are connected to each member. Succession planning is important to maintaining the vitality of the advisory board.

VI: Orientation

Share roles and responsibilities for everyone on the board. Roles, responsibilities and expectations should be discussed and explained. It is important to make sure all board members understand what is expected of them.

Explain the mission, vision, and values of your board. If you haven't developed a mission, vision, or values for your board, now is a good time to do so. New board members, particularly parents and youth, will benefit from understanding the purpose of the board and its vision for the future.

Make sure youth and parents understand the logistics and details of participating on the advisory board. Child Welfare professionals can have a tough time joining a new board and understanding all of the details. Therefore, it is even more important to discuss and explain all of the "ins and outs" of your board. This includes standing agenda items, meeting structure, date, time and location of meetings, frequency of meetings, previous meeting minutes, by-laws, a list of common acronyms used, and any other materials that could be useful.

Assign a mentor to each parent and youth member of the board. The mentor plays a key role during orientation. This person, an experienced member of the board, provides one-to-one support and guidance to the new parent or youth board member. Building this relationship at the very beginning is important to making sure everyone feels comfortable and ready to participate.

Provide training and professional development as needed. Joining an already formed board as a parent or youth representative can be intimidating. Training helps the parent and youth board members get "up to speed" on everything the board is working on as well as the inner workings of the board.

Teach your parents and youth how to safely and effectively share their personal stories. Parents and youth provide unique perspectives and insights based on their experiences in the child welfare system. It's important to make sure these parents and youth have the necessary tools to safely and effectively share their story with others. Casey Family Programs' Strategic Sharing Guide is a good place to start – http://www.casey.org.

Help everyone make connections. Personal friendships and connections are important for everyone participating on an advisory board. Making introductions and encouraging interactions between board members during orientation is important.

VII: Support and Mentoring

Maintain regular communication. Contact the new member to share the details of the meeting including time, duration, location, and parking information. Offer to email or text them meeting reminders.

Offer a pre-meeting. Meet with the new member prior start time of the meeting to familiarize them with the meeting room, practices, agenda, and participant responsibilities.

Follow up with the new member. Call or meet in person to answer any questions they may have, thank them for their participation and commend them for any feedback/ideas they may have shared.

Reinforce the importance of their involvement. Remind new members often of their value as a participant in the meeting and how their participation will benefit other families.

Inform member of expectations. Ensure the new member knows of the importance of being able to commit to the meeting process and knows the length of time they are expected to serve as a member.

Share available resources. Offer the new member access to office equipment and other resources to complete tasks as needed.

It's okay to disagree. Let the new member know that it is okay to express opinions based on their own experience and knowledge and that diversity is welcome and respected.
Explain meeting format. Share general guidelines of the meeting with the new member such as "Richard's Rules".

Share the group's overall goals. Make sure the new member knows and understands the mission and vision of the meeting.

Provide a list of the group's members. Inform the new member of who else will be in attendance at the meeting and what their roles will be in this meeting.

Resources:

Working with Members
http://www.cssp.org/publications/constituents-co-invested-in-change/community-decision-making/workingwith-members-learningguide-2.pdf

Say Y.E.S. To Youth: Youth Engagement Strategies
http://cyfar.cas.psu.edu/PDFs/yesbookweb.pdf

VIII: Monitoring

Monitoring is not a "once and done" event. Monitoring occurs throughout the entire life cycle of a project. For youth and parents on an advisory board, it is important to track their progress and the board's progress at regular intervals.

Be clear about what you are monitoring and why. A logic model can help you develop the outcome measures that are most important to parent and youth participation on an advisory board. Using a logic model builder with your advisory board can help determine what you want to monitor and why. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has developed an online logic model builder you can use for free - http://toolkit.childwelfare.gov/toolkit/.

Clearly determine your team's monitoring roles. It is important to determine who will be monitoring the team's progress towards involving youth and parents effectively in the work of the board. Monitoring is everyone's responsibility; however, it is smart to determine specific roles for team members. Clear monitoring expectations help to drive continuous quality improvement. Choose your monitoring tools. Once you are clear on what you want to measure, the next step is to determine how you will measure it. There are different tools that will help you monitor your progress: satisfaction surveys, research studies, evaluation forms, etc. Find the correct fit for your youth, parents, and board members.

Make adjustments as necessary. The purpose of monitoring is so you and your team can make improvements. If something is not working or showing promise of working then it is important to change course. Your parent and youth partners can be an excellent source for what is working and what needs improvement.

Accountability is key. Holding all team members accountable for their responsibilities on the board is critical. Developing and reviewing action plans before and after each meeting helps ensure the project moves forward. The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) Continuous Quality Improvement Planning Template is a good resource to help teams plan - http://www.aphsa.org/OE/OE_Products.asp.

Celebrate success and "quick wins." Long term goals and complex change efforts can take time. In order to keep parents, youth, and all board members engaged and energized, it is important to acknowledge efforts and short term goals. These accomplishments, better known as "quick wins", can help build and maintain momentum for a board.

IX: Implementation Resources

If you are a child welfare organization in Pennsylvania, training and technical assistance resources may be available to assist your efforts to support youth and parent participation and leadership on your board and in your organization.

For more information, please contact the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program at:

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