

Tips for Group Leaders and Facilitators for meaningful Family Involvement on Committees and work groups

Selecting Families to Serve as Advisors

- ❖ Look for people who are:
 - interested in the topic being addressed by the committee or task force;
 - comfortable in speaking in a group with candor;
 - able to use their personal experience constructively; and
 - able to listen and hear differing opinions.

- ❖ Having just one family member on a committee is not usually successful. Strive for family members to be one-third to one-half of the committee's membership. (Note: MHO advisory committees are 51 percent family/young adult/advocate members.)

- ❖ Remember that serving as a family advisor is a new role for many people. Some family members will need more support than others. Recognize that individuals can grow and develop in this role.

Preparation for Meetings

- ❖ Consider the convenience and schedules of families as well as staff in planning the times and locations for meetings. Often during school hours or evening hours work best for families.
- ❖ Send agenda and minutes ahead of time to all committee members, remembering to allow time for material to reach families who may not have fax machines, email, etc.
- ❖ Provide a list of committee members with a brief description of each person.
- ❖ Offer a mentor, an experienced family advisor or another committee member, to support a new advisor.
- ❖ Offer to have someone come to the first meeting with a new member and debrief afterwards.
- ❖ Remember that this type of collaboration is new for many people so an orientation to the committee (name, function, mission, past accomplishments, for example) is important for family members.
- ❖ Plan for compensation of time, expertise, and expenses for families. Often just a stipend is needed to cover mileage, child care and parking. Don't wait for them to ask—offer this to all your families.
- ❖ Designate one staff member to be responsible for reimbursement and other practical or logistical issues for family advisors.

During Meetings

- ❖ Spend extra time on introductions at the beginning of a meeting, especially for a new committee or when there are new members.
- ❖ Provide clear written information about the purpose of the committee or task force and the roles and responsibilities of individual members.

- ❖ Consider using a co-chair model: one professional and one family member co-chair the meetings, develop the agenda, etc.
- ❖ Co-chairs should discuss the concept of collaborating with families explicitly, recognizing that it is a process with everyone learning together how to work in new ways. Convey that it will be important for the group to discuss how the process is working from time to time.
- ❖ Avoid using jargon. Explain technical terms when used.
- ❖ Consider beginning some meetings with a brief story that captures families' experiences and perceptions of care.
- ❖ Acknowledge that there will be tensions and differing opinions and perceptions.
- ❖ Ask for the opinions of families during discussions, encouraging their participation and validating their role as committee members.
- ❖ To avoid becoming stuck in the power of a negative situation, acknowledge the negative experience and ask if there was anything supportive, helpful, or positive for the group to learn from the situation. Ask for ideas and suggestions to prevent or improve the situation.
- ❖ If a personal story becomes very prolonged, acknowledge the power and importance of the story, suggest that some policy implications can be learned from the story and that there may be other more appropriate forums where this story should be shared.
- ❖ When there are extreme differences in opinions or perceptions, consider:
 - appointing a task force for further study of the issue;
 - asking the opinion of other groups (e.g., another committee or family advisory group);
 - delaying a decision and considering at a future meeting.

Anticipate Family Demands and Circumstances that may lead to absences

- ❖ Family members may not be able to attend every meeting. There are other demands on their time and stamina.
- ❖ Acknowledge to families themselves and to the committee as a whole that their presence was missed and their participation is valued when they are able to participate. Mailing the minutes and future agendas helps reinforce that their participation is valued.
- ❖ Having shared memberships, or alternates, for family members on the committee may help.
- ❖ Consider having a "family leave policy" so that family members can choose an inactive role but maintain their membership should there be circumstances that require some time off.
- ❖ Creating a variety of ways for families to participate in the consideration of issues may be useful (e.g., conference calls, written review of materials, focus groups, surveys, etc).

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