



The Center for
**FAMILY
VOICE**



Amplifying Family Voice
WORKBOOK

Published: September, 2023
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Groundwork Ohio.

About Groundwork Ohio:

Groundwork Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization committed to championing high-quality early learning and healthy development strategies from the prenatal period to age five, that lay a strong foundation for Ohio kids, families and communities.

Table of Contents



SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

What is the Center for Family Voice at Groundwork Ohio?	5
How to use this workbook.....	6
Who are you?	7

SECTION 2: MAKING THE CASE FOR WHY FAMILY VOICE MATTERS

.....	8
-------	---

SECTION 3: PRINCIPLES FOR AMPLIFYING FAMILY VOICE

.....	17
-------	----

SECTION 4: THE CONTINUUM OF FAMILY VOICE

.....	23
-------	----

SECTION 5: BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING FAMILIES

.....	27
-------	----

SECTION 1

Introduction



The Center for Family Voice, a “center for excellence” at Groundwork Ohio, is dedicated to authentically engaging Ohio parents and families in the policies and practices that impact the healthy development of their children.

What is the Center for Family Voice at Groundwork Ohio?

In fulfilling Groundwork Ohio's advocacy-focused mission, supporting its coalition work, and operationalizing equity in our work, it operates the Center for Family Voice, a "center for excellence" at Groundwork dedicated to authentically engaging Ohio parents and families in the policies and practices that impact the healthy development of their children.

Unique to Ohio, the Center is an ongoing, multi-year committed learning process focused on eliminating disparities in systems that serve pregnant women, young children, and their families. Ultimately, the Center will drive programmatic, policy, and practice changes at local, regional, and state levels by integrating the family voice into the decision-making process of Ohio's family serving systems. The Center for Family Voice was developed as an innovative response to the lack of authentic family voices in the development of policy and practices that deeply impact Ohio pregnant women, young children, and their families.

The Center completed an extensive environmental scan across the state of Ohio and nation to explore best practices that successfully engage families in public services delivery to inform state and local programs, practices, and policy development. This scan included over 40 local and national interviews in addition to an extensive literature review. A summary of these findings from this scan was published in the [*Amplifying Family Voice to Advance Equitable Outcomes for Young Children*](#) report in June 2021.



How to use the workbook

This Family Voice Workbook is designed for community-based organizations and leaders. It invites them to walk through a similar process that Groundwork has completed in determining how we will authentically engage family voices in our mission-driven work focused on early childhood advocacy. The Workbook is intended to be used as a companion to [*Amplifying Family Voice to Advance Equitable Outcomes for Young Children*](#).

Whether it's an organizational mission or program initiative, the tools and activities can assist in providing a guide for action—what is the next right thing you can do or explore to cultivate family engagement? We look forward to supporting you in engaging families more deeply in your work so that they can have increasing influence over decisions made at both programmatic and policy levels when it concerns them and their families. We invite you to share your planning, learning, and progress ongoing by engaging the Groundwork team. It is Groundwork's desire

to create a learning community in the future focused on this workbook so that you can learn and share among peers. Groundwork can also engage your organization in facilitated training utilizing this workbook.

Please reach out to Lynanne Gutierrez if you are interested in planning a session for your group or organization.

Email: lgutierrez@groundworkohio.org

Who are you?

Name:

Organization:

Your Role:

What is your organizational or programmatic mission?

What brings you to explore how you can engage and amplify family voices?



SECTION 2

Making the Case for Why Family Voice Matters

“Family voice is
extremely important
in every child
serving system.”

Why does family voice matter?



“I think the policies that are being written are for the people that do not directly have a seat at the table in the policies that are written for them—that is where the disconnect is.”



“If you engage a parent and you listen to the parent voice, then you’ll be able to help the kids more readily.”

“I think that when you get parents in a room—particularly because, let’s face it, when you’re a parent, you work and you parent and you don’t necessarily have as many opportunities for socialization or interacting with an adult—if you get a chance to share your story with a group of people who are saying, ‘yeah, that’s my life too,’ it feels good.”

“[Engaging family voices] is not just important, it’s a key part of how the work can get done in an actual and meaningful way...We’re talking about how uniting the caring power of people can change lives...You can’t actually create real and substantive change unless you’re asking the community what that change looks like.”



“Family voice is extremely important in every child serving system.”



“Including family voice is an absolute necessity.”



photo credit: Paul Joseph Brown

Activity:

Ask yourself and five others on your team or in your community...

Why do family voices matter in the decisions that you make for your organization or program?



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photo credit: Paul Joseph Brown



THE AMPLIFICATION EFFECT

*The activity & leadership of
the Center for Family Voice
will spread or amplify influence
to achieve its objective.*

The **Amplification Effect** is a proposed **theory of change** to understand how the Center for Family Voice will advance policy transformation and improved outcomes for young children in Ohio. It is a working framework for which the Center hopes to successfully demonstrate—and it will continue to be reviewed and honed over time in partnership with families and stakeholders.

“ I think [family engagement] is important from a programmatic standpoint and from an advocacy standpoint. But until we engage families in defining solutions, either programmatic solutions or policy solutions, you can’t engage them to advocate if it isn’t something that came from their heart and their experience.”

The Center for Family Voice implements core functions of the Center in alignment with its principles and values.

Build & Enhance Capacity of families & local stakeholders by:

- Increasing their skills & knowledge
- Expanding their connections
- Building confidence & self-efficacy

Empower Local Stakeholders

- to:
- Connect family engagement to services
 - Engage families in diverse roles including as co-creators of solutions
 - Honor family contributions
 - Create inclusive cultures

Develop Effective Partnerships

between families, local stakeholders, & Groundwork Ohio that support shared policy goals & advocacy so that policymakers see families & effective partnerships as assets.

Advance Policy Transformation & Improve Outcomes

for young children & their families through our effective partnerships.

Groundwork Ohio develops and supports the Center for Family Voice. It integrates the expertise and activity of the Center in all its strategies.

Source: The Amplification Effect is the theory of change developed for the Center for Family Voice and is informed by the totality of Groundwork Ohio’s research and interviews with diverse stakeholders, but draws heavily on and utilizes concepts from two existing frameworks: 1.) “[The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#),” developed by Dr. Karen Mapp 2.) “[The Ripple Effect Theory of Change](#),” developed by the Parent Leadership Indicators Project.

Why family voice matters

“The Amplification Effect” is supported by literature that draws a connection between efforts to elevate family voice to improve child and family outcomes, and, ultimately, social change. The Center’s theory of change depicts short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes that can accrue at the individual, programmatic, and system levels.

While it can be very difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of advocacy given so many changing variables in any political landscape,ⁱ the value of including family voices in policy change is widely recognized.

Research demonstrates that “when parents are engaged as partners and leaders in the programs, services and policies that support young children’s learning and healthy development, children thrive and systems improve.”ⁱⁱ

Evolution of Parent Leadership

In September of 2020, the Michigan Home Visiting Initiative and Early Childhood Investment Corporation published a report detailing the evolution of parent leadership in Michigan.ⁱⁱⁱ They have continued to develop companion materials to support the continued building of capacity of family leaders that are instructive to the Center’s work.^{iv} Given their experience over the past three decades in engaging Michigan parents in a movement to elevate family voices and empower parents to engage in decision-making, the report details that they find “their efforts prove that when parents are supported in becoming leaders and agents of change, the benefits are clear.” They identify that families are stronger, children, families, and programs have better outcomes, and systems are more effective because parents help shape decisions that are equitable, culturally competent and customer-centric.

“Existing evidence shows that family engagement with health care professionals improves care coordination and health outcomes at the individual level—for that child, and that family.”^v Similar findings exist from a synthesis of literature on family engagement and educational outcomes.^{vi}

“Parents from diverse backgrounds, when given direction, can become more engaged with their children. And when parents are more engaged, children tend to do better.”^{vii}

Further, research shows that supporting and strengthening family engagement is associated with increased protective factors for parents and children, which decreases the likelihood of experiencing trauma including child abuse and neglect, promotes family strengths and contributes to healthy child development.^{viii}

Research has also demonstrated the impact of efforts to cultivate family leadership development. In their innovative synthesis of findings from the Parent Leadership Evaluation

The Center for Family Voice hopes to build upon the evidence-base for supporting parents in becoming leaders and agents of change.

Network, Geller and colleagues (2019) identified the impact themes from participatory research from seven parent leadership initiatives.^{ix} These themes included,

- “Development of deep and supportive social connections resembling a ‘second family’”
- Discovery of parent’s own self-worth and voice
- Shifting blame from self to systems
- Working across differences
- Community-level change
- Expanded vision of possibility for their own lives, as well as for their families, and communities—“Doing what they never thought possible”
- Multi-generational benefits ^x

Additional research examining efforts to strengthen parent engagement in their child’s education noted that when parents view themselves as leaders, their confidence increases as well as their capacity to be effective advocates and parents.^{xi} This broader engagement and leadership indicates a ripple effect that emphasizes families’ strengths and action as a basis for systems-level engagement and change in early childhood systems. Family Voices also concluded that family engagement at the systems-level “has the potential to be a powerful catalyst for reducing system fragmentation, [and] removing barriers to health care.”^{xii} The conclusion confirmed by this research base has further been

presumed and demonstrated by national early childhood education and health leaders and Ohio early childhood stakeholders.

The Michigan report referenced on page 12 points out that there is much work to do in this space—that while their success stories are real, including personal growth of parents and changes at the community and state level, “those working closely to promote authentic parent voice and leadership in programs and policy admit they are still very much in the phases of testing, learning and growing.” The Center for Family Voice hopes to build upon the evidence-base in Ohio and across the nation for supporting parents in becoming leaders and agents of change that influence state policy as it too tests, learns and grows.

Upon review of all the existing literature that supports the connection between family engagement and individual, programmatic and systems change, in Ohio it is uncommon for families to have more than superficial influence and power when it comes to the care of themselves and their children in state early childhood systems. The Center will be central to the Ohio movement to strengthen children, families, program outcomes and system effectiveness and equity.

Developing Your Amplification Effect

Activity:

Please consider how you could engage families to advance your mission or objective. Referring to Groundwork's "Amplification Effect," what things look similar or different from where you stand? Who do you need to engage alongside families to close the gap between investing in families and advancing your mission? You will need to return to this activity as you move through the workbook to see if it continues to make sense and have the potential to be effective.

_____ (organization name)

will engage families in alignment with our principles and values.

Build & Enhance Capacity by:

Empower

_____ (who/what?)

to:

-
-
-
-

Develop Effective Partnerships between:

_____ (Insert your mission or goal below)

through our effective partnerships.

_____ (organization name)

engages families and integrates family engagement into all of our activities and strategies that support our mission or programs.



Discussion:

What roles do the advancement of policy and the transformation of child or family outcomes play in your mission-driven work?

Do you currently view policy or advocacy (the act of educating or influencing others to advance policy) as part of your work?

Should it be?

Could it be?

Discussion:

What other proof points (literature, personal, or professional experience) do you have that supports the evidence that when families are engaged and heard, that children, families, programs, and systems benefit?





SECTION 3

Principles for Amplifying Family Voice

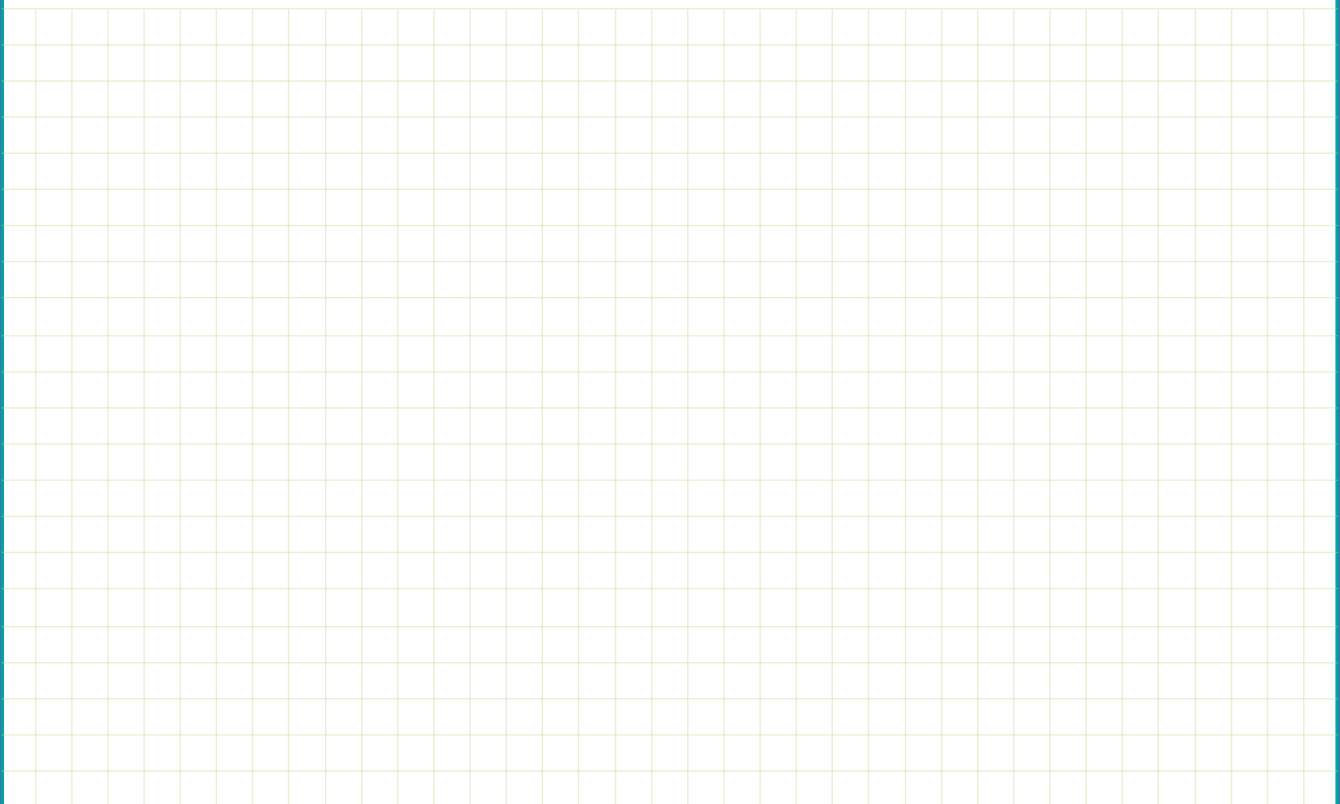
As the Center for Family Voice acts on implementing “The Amplification Effect,” it does so by adopting the following definition of family voice created by Family Voices:

“**An authentic partnership between professionals and family leaders who reflect the diversity of the communities they represent, working together at the systems level to develop and implement better policies and practices.**”

Activity:

As you consider seeking family voices to advance your mission or goals, does the definition of family voices above feel applicable to you? What is missing? What needs to be added? How could you be more specific and tailor it to the needs of your organization or community?

Example: *If I am a federally qualified health clinic providing clinical services in Gallia County, Ohio, could this definition be more operational? “An authentic partnership between early childhood mental health professionals and family leaders who reflect the diversity of the Ohio Appalachian community, working together at the program level to develop and implement better policies and practices.”*



Additionally, based upon the review of literature summarized in this report and interviews with Ohio early childhood stakeholders, the following are principles for supporting family engagement through all the Center's anticipated work.



Activity:

In the following pages, let's explore what these principles mean. How can they inform "how" and "what" we do to integrate family voice in your work?

What are other principles you would add to this graphic?

This form is a template for adding new principles. It features a central microphone icon identical to the one in the diagram above. Five white boxes with teal borders are arranged around the microphone, intended for users to write their own principles. The boxes are: one at the top, one on the left, one on the right, one at the bottom left, and one at the bottom right. Light green curved lines radiate from the microphone.

Operationalize Equity

Income, race, place, and privilege play an undeniable role in any family engagement effort.

“The toughest part of engaging families, particularly low-income, struggling families, is that most of us... Don't genuinely understand the barriers.”

Discussion:

Do you know the barriers that families you work with or seek to work with have? Have you made any assumptions in defining those barriers? How could you get to know those barriers? What types of practices or considerations might you consider to overcome these barriers?

Build Trust

Trust is the currency of all Groundwork Ohio's work and is deeply critical to engaging with families because it is the foundation of any relationship. Trust is more than just eliminating barriers to families participating—it begins with making them feel valued, knowing they are heard, and ensuring that decisions will be influenced by their sharing or participation.

Discussion:

Is trust important to you and your organization? How does trust or the lack of trust impact your work? How does it impact children and families? What are some tactics you use to build trust with others?

Honor Relationships

Organizations must honor existing relationships in local communities where relationships with families do exist. This means partnering with and adding value to the work of community-based organizations that already have trusted relationships with families.

Discussion:

What relationships are mission critical for you in your community? Do those relationships include families right now? How do relationships with people other than kids and families, impact families? How do you honor or build these relationships?

Respect Experts

Families and parents are the experts in their own lives and the lives of their children. Making families feel valued and building trust begins with knowing they are heard, and that decisions will be influenced by their act of sharing and participating. Listening and acting on family voice requires other voices to acknowledge that, regardless of education level, experience in policy and advocacy, or otherwise, parents are indeed experts. *“Families’ lived experiences make them uniquely qualified to partner in shaping systems-level policies that can improve systems of care for all children.”*

Discussion:

How do you define expertise? What kind of expertise is most valued at your organization? How is this similar to or different from the expertise families bring or could bring to your work?

Shift Culture

When expressing the intent behind family engagement work, the mantra *“nothing for us without us”* is often used. These simple yet powerful words operationalized require a culture shift and change in mindset at all levels of leadership in early childhood systems. It starts with a shift in the mindset of traditional decision-makers, it involves change in how agencies engage with families, and it requires true investments in parents so those who choose it can advance along a continuum from parent involvement and engagement to empowerment and active leadership.

Discussion:

Shifting culture is a humbling objective. Do you believe your organization or community is open to shifting culture when it comes to engaging families? What are the greatest opportunities to do so? What barriers can you identify to a culture shift in your work both internal and external to your organization. Can you identify any next steps to help bridge the gap between opportunities and barriers?

Activity:

What among the principles you have explored on previous pages seem the most important to amplifying family voices through your leadership, organization, or community? What other principles do you think may be important?

Discussion:

Refer back to your "Amplification Effect." How do you anticipate the principles you have identified showing up in your "Amplification Effect"?

Is there anything you may need to modify or add that you hadn't considered now that you've further explored these principles?





SECTION 4

The Continuum of Family Engagement

What does family mean?

In this report, we use “parent” and “family” interchangeably and have adopted an inclusive definition of both referring to all adults who have a primary role in caring for a young child. This includes biological, adoptive, foster and stepparents, grandparents, and other extended family. It also includes legal and informal guardians.

Further, viewing the family community wholistically is particularly important for engaging individual members of the family where, like in Ohio’s rural Appalachian region, there are families who have been in the community for generations. They trust and rely on one another and it’s important to build trust with the community while building individual relationships with family members. The Center’s work should seek to get feedback from the diverse family structures across the state—even when engaging in a targeted problem-solving effort focused on specific demographics based on income, race, gender or other social factors, seek to include diverse family voices.

Don’t forget about dad!

The work of the [Ohio Fatherhood Commission](#) and local communities, including [Learn to Earn Dayton](#) and the [Summit Education Initiative](#), highlight the importance of including dads and other male caregivers in policy development discussions impacting young children and families even where, and because, they have historically been left out the conversation. Learn to Earn Dayton convenes Black men and fathers to inform and improve the early childhood education of Black boys in the community. Similarly, the Summit Education Initiative convened a group of local Black men including community leaders, dads, coaches, siblings, uncles and pastors to co-create solutions and strategies to engage men in supporting young children to be Kindergarten ready. Additionally, the [Ohio Department of Health](#) has included dads to inform their work to eliminate disparities in infant mortality.

Activity:

What does family mean to you, your organization, and the work you do?

What are key family structures that you need to include or elevate in your work?

What additional considerations may be required to engage certain types of caregivers or family structures?

The spectrum of family voice participation

Below is a spectrum of family voice participation where the level of participation defines the role parents and families can play. This continuum has been adapted from IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation. It has also been influenced by Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation.

Increasing impact on the decision...



	<i>Involve</i>	<i>Inform</i>	<i>Consult</i>	<i>Engage</i>	<i>Collaborate</i>	<i>Empower</i>
Parent Participation Goal:	Parents are enrolled and receive a service.	To provide parents with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain parent feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with parents throughout the process to ensure that parent concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with parents in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of parents.
Promise to Parents:	The system will design policies and programs for you and other parent participants.	The system will keep you informed.	The system will keep you informed, acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how parent feedback influenced the decision.	The system will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how parent input influenced the decision.	The system will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	The system will implement what you decide.

Activity:

Utilizing the following graphic form and referring to the continuum shared on the previous page, do the following:

1. Identify or intake where you or your organization already work with families along the continuum of impact. What are your participation goals TODAY, in this moment?
2. What additional activities or tactics would you desire to add on this continuum IN THE FUTURE? For each of them, note whether you believe that is a short-term, mid-term, or long-term goal.

Discussion:

Reflecting on your activities today and what you would like to see in the future, is any type of activity on the continuum of impact more important than others or is all activity good? Should "empowering" activity, where families have the MOST impact on decision-making, always be the final goal, or are there other types of experts other than parents and families that should be consulted? How might this differ based on your organization's mission?

EXPERT TIP!

Refer back to *Amplifying Family Voice to Advance Equitable Outcomes for Young Children* on pages 20-25 to assist you in categorizing what you are doing and ideas for the future.

Increasing impact on the decision...

	<i>Involve</i>	<i>Inform</i>	<i>Consult</i>	<i>Engage</i>	<i>Collaborate</i>	<i>Empower</i>
Parent Participation Goals TODAY:						
Parent Participation Goals in the FUTURE:						

SECTION 5



Best Practices for Engaging Families

Implementing the Theory of Change

In order to successfully carry out the “Amplification Effect” and ensure that families have an increasing impact on decisions, the most important decisions one may make are not necessarily what activities it chooses to support and engage family and stakeholders—there are many activities and formats to increase participation and the impact of families on decision-making—but how it does so, guided by the principles established earlier in this report.

Activity:

Review each of our 8 best practices and then consider how you would apply each of them to the hypothetical scenario in each section.

1**Eliminate barriers to participation for families.**

Consider a family's basic needs for in-person participation—provide food and consider onsite child care and transportation.

Utilize technology to overcome participation barriers including transportation, geography and weather, but do so where technology can be supported and where families have access to free Wifi. (ex. In Ohio's rural Appalachian Region families often use Facebook messenger to communicate and utilize free public Wifi libraries where they do not have broadband access). Provide technology devices, data and phone minutes to support virtual participation.

Choose thoughtful and convenient locations for families to participate. Where do families already have to go (ex. child care, church, food pantry)? Ohio stakeholders identified a well-known community gathering place for Hispanic families in Cleveland and an Ikea cafeteria in Cincinnati where Indian families met regularly from the nearby elementary school as examples of places that must be identified.

Choose a thoughtful time for participation that allows access to the target population of families.

Print resources in multiple languages and consider interpretation services both in-person and virtually that accommodate the needs of parents. Don't assume literacy.

Identify local community members who can help facilitate participation among the target population and inform what barriers exist.

Consider culture, food, and faith. Build participation opportunities and agendas around the culture of your target audience. For example, in the Appalachian region there is a long history of storytelling, so consider throwing out the formal agenda for open-ended discussion. Be sensitive to diet restrictions or preference and religious observances of racial and ethnic communities.

Consider the unique circumstances of parents and families with young children. The very reasons that families are such critical informants of systems change, may be the most significant barrier. In seeking to elevate the work of families, specifically with young children, it's important to consider that regardless of income or other social and environmental factors, there are a number of reasons that engaging parents of young children is difficult compared to parents of older children and other family communities.

Be flexible. Planning for and eliminating barriers is important, but it's not always transactional.

Keep it positive and build confidence among family participants. Make families feel valued as contributors and decision-makers by building upon their strengths.

Hypothetical Scenario Example: *A community partner offers you free space in a church to host a group of Black families with low-incomes from across the county so that you can learn more about how to meet the needs of infants, toddlers, young children, and their families who are experiencing food insecurity. How would you eliminate barriers to their participation?*

Your notes/response:

2 Compensate parents for their time and expertise.

Provide stipends or other forms of compensation such as gift and grocery cards to families to recognize their time, energy, and ideas contributed.

Be conscious of the financial impact on public benefits and tax reporting requirements when structuring stipends.

Reimburse families for actual costs accrued to participate including transportation, meals, and child care.

Consider access or exposure to an experience they otherwise wouldn't have to compensate or incentivize participation. (ie: trip to a zoo or museum with their children, or access to professional development like empowerment workshops.)

Hypothetical Scenario Example: *8-10 families who have young children from Northwest Ohio are coming to a 2-hour event alongside community leaders, early childhood professionals, & a couple of their state policymakers in Columbus. How will you compensate them for their expertise and overcome barriers to their participation?*

Your notes/response:

3 Communicate intentionally with families.

Explore and utilize all formats of digital and print communication with families including social media.

Communicate often, especially with thoughtful reminders where families have committed to participate in activities.

Engage in message testing, even for one-way communication, with Ohio families including unique target audiences among families based on race, age, geography, and other social factors. [See Frameworks Institute resources](#) on how to talk about family engagement.

Don't use jargon and use language that removes any perceived anxiety or barrier to participation.

Utilize electronic and virtual communication to support participation. Electronic communication can be highly effective.

Always follow-up before and after. When supporting family participation, this communicates clear expectations, processes, and protocols for participation activity.

Always report back to family participants the impact of their participation—what was learned and how it will be used.

Express gratitude constantly for what families give when they can.

Hypothetical Scenario Example: *You work with pregnant teen women in a series of rural communities in your state and are recruiting some of them to inform non-clinical prenatal supports and programs that you provide. How would you communicate intentionally in these circumstances?*

Your notes/response:

4 Ensure there are established connections and robust support for family participation activities.

Work with community partners who have trusted relationships where possible.

Use data (including disaggregated data by race and ethnicity) to inform your work, especially when you are targeting a unique population.

Seek to create a more equal power differential in decision-making processes to support the co-creation of solutions by bringing together families and community and systems leaders.

Hypothetical Scenario Example: *You just received a contract from the county to do a series of listening sessions with a group of parents who are New Americans. You must complete 5 sessions over the course of 3 months with 8-10 families at each session. What community partners would you need to be successful? Are there any concerns you have in taking the contract?*

Your notes/response:

5 Invest in people first.

Ensure a representation of the diversity in the community when engaging families.

Expand families' connections and make them feel supported, in order for them to have the capacity to engage.

Don't underestimate the power of social interaction and relationships between family participants as an outcome of engagement activity—even where you can't solve every social problem.

Provide parents with targeted learning opportunities and leadership training so they have the tools and information they need to make contributions. [See the New York Parent Equity Fellowship >>](#).

Ensure adequate professional development for staff and leaders working to engage with families including implicit bias training and trauma-informed training.

Educate policymakers and system leaders about the value of family engagement so that they seek family voice in their decision-making processes.

Hypothetical Scenario Example: *You are one of three agencies that provide evidence-based home visiting services in your community. A new program requirement from your national model requires the development of a 5-person Community Advisory Council who currently benefit or have benefited from your program. The plan is that within two years of being developed, this Council will be merged with your current Board of Directors to embed family voices into your programmatic decisions (budgeting, staffing, advocating for increased funding). How will you build and sustain this group & ensure they are prepared to serve your organization in this capacity?*

Your notes/response:

6 Exercise humility.

Don't make any assumptions.

Don't underestimate families who are able to own the solutions that are proposed.

Commit to decision-making looking different and let go of presupposed outcomes.

Support professionals to be receptive to family input even if it goes against what they are accustomed to hearing or understanding.

Demonstrate the effect of family participation to all stakeholders including how it has informed or changed decisions.

Don't twist the truth or exploit family stories to meet the needs of your agenda. Ensure that families have the final say in whether their personal stories get disseminated.

Hypothetical Scenario Example: *Your organization is dedicated to decreasing disparities in infant mortality rates in your local community. Historically, you have focused on Safe Sleep practices and increased access to clinical services for moms and babies. After a series of robust community learning sessions and a marketing campaign featuring a handful of family stories you have collected, the number one priority that pregnant women identified in your community was a lack of safe, affordable, housing. You report this to your executive director who says it is out of scope for the organization's goals. How could you choose to move forward with this information? What do you share with families? What do you share with community partners?*

Your notes/response:

7 Sustain the rigor of effective family engagement.

No "one and done." There must be an infrastructure built to have ongoing relationships with families.

Advocate for resources to properly fund these activities. Family engagement activities must be well-resourced through public and private investment. This includes making sure that it is in someone's job description to connect with, and engage, families, for example.

Work to embed family engagement into practices that people and programs already have.

Work to require family engagement for programs through evidence-based models or protocols, or better yet, hold programs accountable to it through statutory or administrative law. For example, there is a rich history in the disability community of family engagement in policy development. This is because it is required by and embedded in federal and state policy.

Hold state government accountable to policy changes informed by families by supporting state sponsored engagement models and leadership opportunities.

Hypothetical Scenario Example: *You sit on the Board of Trustees for a local Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health agency where there are currently no members who have lived experience with addiction and/or mental health issues that have benefited from the organization's programming. The Board asked you to provide feedback to the proposal and budget for the community needs assessment. What questions could you ask?*

Your notes/response:

8

Measure what matters and demonstrate impact.

Use **family engagement assessment tools** to determine if efforts are effective up against goals for family engagement. Utilize the [Family Engagement in Systems Tool \(FESAT\)](#) developed by Family Voices as a starting point.

Develop and collect quantitative and qualitative process and outcome metrics to measure effectiveness for each aspect of family participation using a variety of tools before, during, and after participation activity.

Develop community analytics for family engagement projects to measure impact.

Track changes to policy.

Benchmark success up against public health and education outcomes measures for young children and families.

Circle back and provide families information or results on any data collected for which they were a part.

Activity:

Identify and brainstorm process and outcome metrics that could be used to measure success of family engagement efforts.

Your notes/response:

Discussion:

What was the most difficult part of applying these best practices to hypothetical circumstances? What more would you need to know? What type of resources would you need to implement these best practices? Did any particular best practice compete with another?

Equitable Outcomes

The Center will be thoughtful not to duplicate work that may already be occurring in Ohio at the local and state levels when identifying opportunities to provide this unique capacity and to translate and elevate family voice for the purpose of influencing statewide policy and advocacy—the Center will transmit family voice, not just create more noise. It will do so through the implementation of core capacities and commitments utilizing best practices shared in this report.

Core Capacities of the Center’s Input:



The Center made the following commitments in July of 2021 to create a roadmap to implement our “Amplification Effect” in light of our goals to increase the decision- making power of families:

Advocate for recognition, resources, & accountability measures that embed & support family engagement infrastructure in state policy.

1

Family voice and engagement must be embedded into state public policy and public and private investments to ensure that family voice is included at all tables where decisions are being made about their lives and the lives of their children. The Center will bring systems-level expertise and advocacy when evaluating how existing and new policy and investment can include and support family voices in policy development by generating opportunities and contributing to the shifting of culture of state policymaking.

Invest in strategic projects that strengthen local partnerships between stakeholders and families.

2

The Center will bring resources and expertise to select public and private partners to evaluate and center family voice with the objective of improving policies and programs. These projects will foster collaborative problem solving that are accountable to improved outcomes for young children and families. These projects will contemplate direct or real-time impact to families and support legacy assets that cultivate long-term partnerships between families, local partners and Groundwork Ohio beyond the scope of any one project. The Center will focus on those projects that seek to improve outcomes and eliminate disparities by centering family voice and engaging multidisciplinary teams committed to sharing learnings that can inform state policy.

Develop and support a statewide family action network.

3

Work with local partners to create and disseminate information and materials, utilizing effective messaging for families, that provide accessible opportunities for them to inform policy development and engage in advocacy opportunities. The Center will translate Groundwork’s strong communication leadership in state policy and advocacy to families directly and through local partners and messengers so that family voice is regularly connected to policymakers and influencers.

Build and sustain a Family Leadership Fellowship.

4

Build upon local leadership capacity and create a pipeline of representative families to engage more deeply in state policy development and advocacy. Groundwork Ohio will bring its experience in leading two cohorts of early childhood professionals through it’s Early Childhood Leadership Fellowship to develop and administer specialized curriculum to a new cohort of family members seeking to build leadership and advocacy skills each year. The Center will draw upon existing local family leadership efforts and relationships with early childhood professionals to recruit family participants and seek to remove barriers to their participation. This new Fellowship contemplates engagement of alumni networks of family participants as yearly cohorts complete the program that create a leadership pipeline for state agencies and advisory groups and become integrated more deeply in the Center’s and Groundwork’s ongoing work.

Foster the use of best practices, identify ongoing learning opportunities, and provide a constant feedback loop for Center partners.

5

The Center will be a resource to and support the professional development of local and state partners who want to engage more deeply with families. The environmental scan revealed that so many partners are trying to do so with limited capacity and knowledge. The Center will identify short and long-term tactics to support this learning including peer learning communities and other collaborative communication efforts.

“Where is the standard and how can I start? It will be nice for us to have standards that’s not a one size fits all...but something other programs can take and say, ‘this is where we can start.’”

Develop meaningful process and outcome metrics to measure impact and benchmark success for Center activities.

6

Process evaluation of activity and initiatives of the Center will inform strategies and expectations for its work in consideration of its theory of change. The Center will seek to measure short-, mid- and long-term outcomes among all its activity using quantitative and qualitative methods. The Center will commit to using and informing a Groundwork Ohio early childhood data dashboard that monitors key health and education access and outcome metrics for young children and families to identify opportunities and gaps.

Employ leadership and staff at Groundwork Ohio that reflect a diverse set of skills and experiences to successfully implement the Center for Family Voice and deploy equitable principles.

7

The internal governance of the Center must align with external visions for the Center’s work. Groundwork Ohio will further strive to embed equitable principles, the Center’s work and learnings and unique family relationships across the Groundwork enterprise including staff, leadership and advisory structures.

“We all bring different representation, but you have to be mindful about diversity in leadership”

Secure sustainable funding that provides consistency and flexibility.

8

The Center and Groundwork Ohio must constantly seek sustained and diverse funding to implement all the Center’s work long-term, which requires dedicated financial resources.

Activity:

Reflect on your learnings so far and review your "Amplification Effect." Then identify what commitments you will make to act on operationalizing your "Amplification Effect" in consideration of your learnings.

Taking Theory to Action:





Reflections:



What information, expertise, relationships, and support do you still need to close gaps between your "Amplification Effect" and the commitments you have made?

How can Groundwork Ohio be a partner to you?

Family engagement is critical to early childhood advocacy. Family voices have to be engaged in advancing policies that impact the lives of children and families. How are family voices critical to your work? Do you now identify as an advocate or identify advocacy as part of your work? Why or why not?

Your Notes:





The Center for
**FAMILY
VOICE**

Amplifying Family Voice
WORKBOOK



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