

INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW

Overview and Definition

To have an effective research-based systems improvement process, county/community collaboratives must have in place a collaborative infrastructure that seeks to improve the lives of children and their families.

A collaborative infrastructure is defined as a county/community collaborative comprised of diverse stakeholders (including parents) and has a structure and process that regularly assesses community needs. It obtains and uses data on an ongoing basis to identify and prioritize child, family and community outcomes and uses data to inform and continuously improve practice and policy for quality systems improvement.

Counties should continue to use funds available through the FSSR initiative to support and invest in the development or expansion of the cross-system collaborative and enhance its related infrastructure, leading to improved child, family and community outcomes.

Under the belief that families, communities, and government must partner together to ensure child safety and well-being, parents, consumers and residents must regularly be involved in collaborative decision-making roles that develop effective community-based strategies and improve service delivery mechanisms that are family focused. Strong involvement of these groups within the community collaborative is necessary to foster cooperation, collaboration, and communication between professionals and families. As part of an effective community collaborative infrastructure, parent, consumers and resident recruitment and sustained family involvement is necessary. To be successful in recruiting and retaining these groups, strategies and opportunities need to be developed and implemented as part of the overall work of the collaborative.

Formulating a rationale (theory of change, logic model, business plan) that adopts strategies and draws upon research and evidence-based programs is fundamental. These strategies are to connect to outcome areas and indicators, leading to the achievement of the intended outcome goals. By establishing an effective community collaborative infrastructure, developing a sound rationale which builds upon resources/strengths of communities, and implementing research-based and evidenced-based programs, improvement can be made in child, family and community outcomes.

Collaboratives are expected to draw from research and evidence in developing their strategies, replicating or adapting proven programs or strategies, where at all possible.¹ Information on research-based strategies, programs and other related published resources is available through the Center for Schools and Communities regional technical assistance staff.

Given the core principles associated with system change, recruiting and maintaining meaningful participation of parents/consumers is essential. As part of the FSSR infrastructure, effective strategies to engage and sustain parent/consumer involvement on the board, and to provide opportunities for their empowerment as decision makers, must be in place. Parent leadership resources are available to assist in the development of this aspect of the infrastructure plan.

FSSR infrastructure should include:

- County/Community Planning and Design
 - organizing, developing and supporting a county/community collaborative structure
 - analyzing community wide data to prioritize child, family or community outcomes
 - identifying community, program and system level outcomes affecting children and families
 - establishing a process of decision-making, data utilization and outcomes tracking by the collaborative
- Evaluation of Infrastructure and FSSR Planning
 - evidence of the Collaborative's inclusiveness
 - evidence of the Collaborative's use of data for priority setting and attempts to identify model programs for established priorities
 - evidence of the Collaborative's attempts to implement model programs and monitor outcomes/results of initiatives or other "value added" results
 - evidence by the Collaborative of using outcome data for systems improvement and showing that outcomes are improving for children and their families

¹ For programs, this research literature includes the Violence Prevention Blueprint series, the *Communities That Care Prevention Strategies*, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) monograph on research-based mental illness prevention programs, the programs described in *Within Our Reach* and *Common Purpose*, and other published research reports. For strategies, this includes the Wilder Foundation report on effective collaboration and other published studies on service integration, systems reform, and collaboration, including those from the Aspen Institute and the National Center for Service Integration.

Collaborative Development

The purpose and function of a collaborative is to lead this research based system improvement process. There is no prescribed formula for the development of this leadership; but there are essential principles that should characterize the functioning of all collaboratives.

These include the following:

- the community collaborative leads by serving the interests and priorities of the county/community; no one is excluded or overlooked;
- its membership represents all segments of the community and reflects its racial and ethnic diversity;
- parents are essential to the composition and focus of the collaborative and must have meaningful roles in it's work and decision making process;
- all members have an equal voice in this process;
- The County is the recipient of these federal grant funds for FSSR, with the grant payments being made directly to the County Children and Youth Services Office. The County, as the fiscal agent, is a partner in the process; but it is the collaborative as a whole, that represents the county/community and acts as its agent in guiding the development of this county-wide/community-wide effort and in monitoring its activities.

Collaborative Membership

The collaborative's membership should reflect the county/community as a whole. This requires a broad-based reflection of those living in the county/ community. Each member will be a contributor to this effort and an agent for the interest or organization they represent. Membership may be broad and diverse as the community's interests require, but must include the following:

- Parents and youth must be represented and have the opportunity for meaningful influence (including parents and youth who are service recipients);
- A county commissioner or county executive (depending upon the type of county government. The intent here is to identify a representative with executive authority);
- School district superintendent;
- Health care provider;
- Others as identified by the collaborative.