

Families at the Center

Leading for Home Visiting Systems Change



The Center for Coordinating Oregon Home Visiting Systems (CCOHVS) launched in February 2024 at the Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services at Portland State University. The CCOHVS functions as a program-neutral backbone organization for a coordinated system of prenatal and early childhood home visiting services. Its work will move the state closer to the vision described in the Raise Up Oregon 2.0 (RUO) strategic plan¹ for early childhood systems, namely to create “equitable, integrated, accessible, inclusive, anti-racist and family-centered” early learning services, with a focus on ensuring this system meets the needs of pregnant people and families with infants and toddlers.

To reach this goal, the CCOHVS team uses an inclusive, relationship-focused approach to build on emerging innovations that are building and changing existing systems. Working with local, regional, and state agency partners the CCOHVS team provides needed capacity and support to achieve home visiting system goals, including ensuring family leadership in home visiting system transformation at the state and local levels.

To this end, the CCOHVS team prepared this Learning Brief, which summarizes key principles and practices that Oregon’s Home Visiting System Initiatives (HVSIs) governance and advisory groups should consider in their approaches to engaging families in leadership and decision-making to inform and shape home visiting systems change.

How do we define family leadership in decision-making?

Because “family leadership” can take on many meanings and forms depending on context, values and interpretation, we want to define key principles of family leadership for CCOHVS-focused work in Oregon. We favor Ann Ishimaru’s definition² of family leadership and “equitable collaboration,” which entails a shift in power and decision-making so families with young children can meaningfully transform the early learning system.

One framework that we find particularly useful, and which aligns with equitable collaboration, is the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership.³ It describes the key features of the ways that families or communities are engaged in leadership and decision-making. The CCOHVS team proposes that family leadership in home visiting systems should embody these principles for transforming the early childhood system at the state level for near-term work. At the same time, we recognize the need to build the capacity and skills of parents/caregivers—and those of the home visiting system and people in professional roles—to increase family-driven decision-making, influence and ownership of systems change.

Why is family leadership in decision-making important?

Popular education concepts⁴ are foundational to the CCOHVS team’s articulation of why family leadership is important to systems change. People who are directly impacted by an issue are consequently well positioned to define problems that need to be addressed and to develop possible solutions. There is value in people who are affected by a common issue sharing their experiences with each other and building collective knowledge and understanding.

The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership

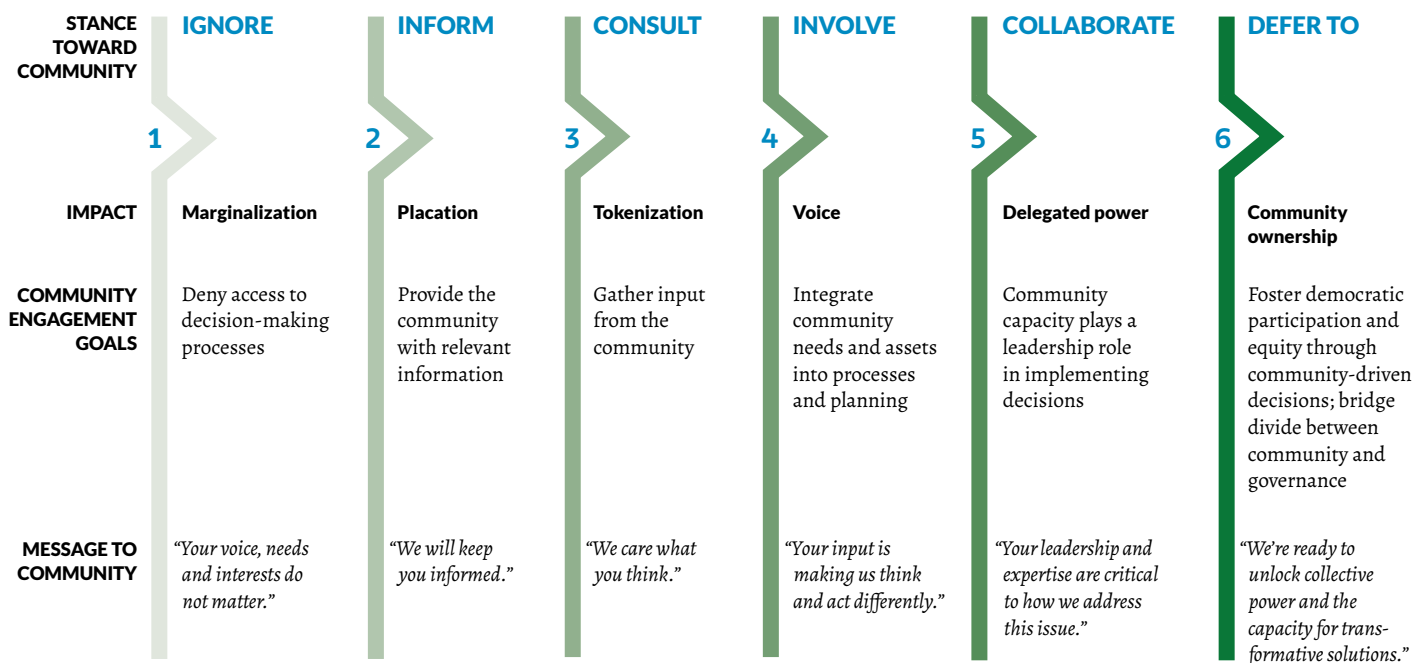


Chart adapted from Community Commons: <https://www.communitycommons.org/entities/3aec405c-6908-4bae-9230-f33bef9f40e1>



“Families are most familiar with system barriers and the needs that services are designed to address. Therefore, family engagement can also promote the most efficient use of resources and can help services be more effective at improving target outcomes.”

—KIT STRONG & SARAH CROW (2023)⁵

This process of critically examining the range of experiences and impacts raises the consciousness of participants in the co-learning process while also strengthening the possible responses and strategies the group can employ to address the issues at hand. Families working in true partnership with people in professional roles within human-serving organizations have the potential to lead to improved child and family outcomes, as well as the potential to “accelerate improvement in outcomes.”⁶

In the same way that parents/caregivers can inform improvements to individual home visiting programs and coordination with other family support services, systems change can benefit from parent/caregiver involvement and leadership. For example, a home visiting collaborative group may not question the inclusion of pediatric practitioners because they can “point to evidence supporting the importance of well-child visits for school readiness” and the connection to home visiting programs that help families prepare for those visits. Parents are just as necessary to the collaborative effort: “Articulating the benefits of parent engagement is equally important — but doing so may take some work, requiring a shift from thinking of parents as ‘participants’ to parents as ‘partners.’”⁷

Partnering may be particularly important for initiatives focused on addressing disparities and inequities in home visiting or early childhood system access, utilization and outcomes. In order to understand and

How is Oregon's home visiting system engaging families in decision-making?

respond to the experiences of systematically marginalized groups, efforts to change home visiting systems should engage parents/caregivers with those experiences.⁸

In the context of Oregon's early childhood and home visiting systems, we know that birthing people and parents/caregivers of young children have a wide range of experiences in finding early childhood services across geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity; accessing services in their community; and getting the highest-quality supports based on their needs, values and expectations. Families with current or recent experiences navigating the early childhood systems of supports have a range and depth of unique and vitally important perspectives to inform equitable systems change. Further, parents/caregivers are not only their child's first teachers but are also ideally situated to be their child's strongest advocates.

Oregon Early Learning Hubs ("Hubs") are 16 regional organizations that coordinate early childhood services across the entire state. As of 2021, Hubs were required to form Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) to engage families with young children as leaders in decision-making. Individual PACs are currently at different stages of implementation and play different roles in their region.



How are other states embracing family leadership to inform home visiting systems change?

Hubs engage parents/caregivers in a range of capacities⁹ as reflected in the Spectrum of Community Engagement, including informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and, to some extent, deferring to.

Early childhood home visiting programs in Oregon also vary in the degree to which families are involved as leaders in decision-making. Some programs are contractually or legally required to convene parent/caregiver leadership or advisory groups; these include Family Connects Oregon, Family Support and Connections, and Early Head Start. Others are not required to have parent/caregiver leadership or advisory groups but still prioritize bringing families together to share feedback and input, as many relief nursery programs do. Also, other home visiting programs may involve families as leaders in decision-making in other ways that are specific to their tribal, community or organization values.

In summer 2024, the CCOHVS team will issue a comprehensive description of specific family engagement strategies and practices used by Hubs and home visiting programs.

Although the CCOHVS team continues to seek out additional information from other states relating to developing family leadership to inform home visiting systems change, we offer two examples below that illustrate possible approaches to building statewide parent leadership structures and processes.

- **Michigan's Home Visiting Initiative (MHVI)** convenes Local Leadership Groups (LLGs) to “work within their local/regional communities to support a comprehensive home visiting system that includes an array of services linking pregnant people and young children and their families to supports they may need.”¹⁰ This includes three regional LLGs as well as eight county level LLGs. The stated goals of the LLGs are to help communities understand how the home visiting system is connected, identify opportunities for improving home visiting services, and build knowledge of the array of home visiting services available. LLGs help parents/caregivers understand the home visiting system so that they can choose the best program for their family and provide feedback on services. The home visiting system benefits from LLGs through increased communication among programs, changes in policies and practices, and accountability/feedback loops for systems change.¹¹ The MHVI also convenes a Statewide Parent Leaders in Home Visiting Group to effect state-level systems change more directly. Impacts of parent leadership at the state level include parents gaining new knowledge and skills as leaders, applying these skills as stronger advocates for their families and in their paid and volunteer work, changing policies and practices for governance structures to better support the inclusion of parent voice, and improvements in program implementation and coordination.¹²



- **North Carolina’s Home Visiting and Parenting Education System Collaborative Board** convenes a Family Advisory Board (FAB), which works with the Collaborative Board toward a shared vision in which “all families have access to a range of parenting education supports, from the prenatal period to age 8, within a coordinated delivery system, which will positively impact parent-child relationships and family and child well-being.”¹³ Eight to 10 parents/caregivers serve as Parent Leaders on the FAB, attending two-hour virtual meetings every other month. To honor the time and wisdom of parent volunteers, they receive \$25 per hour as compensation. The Collaborative Board and the FAB share information bidirectionally: FAB members share ideas and experiences with the Collaborative Board, provide input and partner as equals where family leaders can “take action, make recommendations, develop questions, and share updates with the Collaborative Board.”¹⁴ Additionally, up to three Parent Leaders on the FAB can serve on the Collaborative Board and receive additional stipends for participation. The Collaborative Board provides staff support to onboard and orient Parent Leaders to the FAB, to facilitate FAB meetings and prepare materials, and to serve as a point of contact for the FAB between meetings.

Parents/caregivers were critical participants in the planning process that designed and articulated the structures of a family engagement framework, guiding principles, and conditions for success.¹⁵

What are some of the important considerations for building family leadership in Oregon's home visiting system initiative?

- **Cultivating clarity and shared understanding of goals for engaging families as leaders in decision-making.** Although members of HVSI leadership and advisory groups may share values for family engagement, it could be helpful for them to develop near- and long-term goals for family leadership. This could help groups develop and coalesce around a collective vision to involve families along the Spectrum of Community Engagement.
- **Learning about the ways families are currently engaged as local leaders.** The CCOHVS team is gathering further information on how Hubs and home visiting programs are currently engaging families. This includes reviewing the state's array of programs and how they involve families in leadership, as well as conducting interviews with parents/caregivers and Hub staff who are currently working together through PACs.
- **Building on or leveraging existing family leadership structures.** By learning more about successful structures in Oregon and other states, the CCOHVS team may be able to identify or create new pathways toward state-level decision-making for parents/caregivers who are already serving in local leadership roles.
- **Allocating the necessary resources for family engagement.** HVSI governance and advisory groups should be prepared to allocate staff time and funds to support parent/caregiver participation in decision-making processes. This may include resources for translation/interpretation, transportation, child care, meals, training for parents/caregivers, and technology tools. Staff or consultants who would be responsible for parent/caregiver outreach, facilitation or training should also be well prepared, and experienced in working with diverse groups and in helping parents/caregivers build community and shared power.
- **Developing a near-term plan for building relationships with families and identifying initial work priorities.** This could include shared learning among HVSI governance and advisory members based on a review of strategic resources for engaging parents/caregivers as leaders, such as the *Parent and Family Leadership Guidebook (2023)*,¹⁶ the *Lessons Learned from Oregon's Early Learning Hubs* report on PACs (2022),¹⁷ and materials developed through similar initiatives in other states. It could be helpful for a newly forming parent/caregiver group — or a state-level network of parents/caregivers — to have a concrete project to focus on while building collaborative relationships (exploring effective community awareness-raising and outreach strategies and materials, for example).

The CCOHVS team looks forward to ongoing information-gathering on parent/caregiver leadership in Oregon and around the country, particularly in summer/fall 2024. We see great potential for authentic family leadership to inform state-level changes in the home visiting and early childhood system so that all Oregon families with young children can thrive.

Endnotes

- 1 Oregon Early Learning Council. (2023). *Raise Up Oregon: A statewide early childhood system plan 2024–2028*. Department of Early Learning and Care. www.oregon.gov/delc/about-us/RUO_Documents/Raise_Up_Oregon-WEB-1117.pdf
- 2 Ishimaru, A. (2020). *Just schools: Building equitable collaborations with families and communities*. Teachers College Press.
- 3 Movement Strategy Center. (2019). *The spectrum of community engagement to ownership*. movementstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Spectrum-of-Community-Engagement-to-Ownership.pdf
- 4 Friere, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum International Publishing.
- 5 Strong, K. & Crow, S. (2023). *First 5 efforts to engage families and shift power: A review of current practices*. First 5 Center for Children's Policy. first5center.org/assets/files/Family-Engagement-Report.pdf
- 6 Mackrain, M., Levesque, Z., Jobe, J., & Raska, M. (2019). *Home visiting collaborative improvement and innovation network 2.0: Toolkit to build parent leadership in continuous quality improvement*. Education Development Center. https://hv-coiin.edc.org/wp-content/uploads/Parent-Leadership-Toolkit_FINAL-1.pdf
- 7 Education Development Center. (n.d.). *Elevating parent voice in home visiting: Preparing for authentic parent partnerships*. Maternal, Infant, & Early Childhood Home Visiting Technical Assistance Resource Center.
- 8 Early Childhood Systems Technical Assistance & Coordination Center. (2023). *Family leadership to inform maternal and early childhood systems*. Health Resources & Services Administration. <https://www.jbassoc.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/3-Family-Leadership-Maternal-EC-Systems.pdf>
- 9 Rodriguez, L., Green, B., Joseph, R., Lau, S., Guevara, A., & Ordonez-Rojas, D. (2023). *Exploring parent advisory councils: Lessons learned from Oregon's Early Learning Hubs 2022*. Center for Improvement of Child & Family Services, Portland State University.
- 10 Michigan Department of Health & Human Services. (2024). *Home visiting local leadership groups*. <https://www.michigan.gov/homevisiting/local-leadership-groups>
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Moore, J., Kelley-Stiles, T., Heany, J., Benn, K., & Morey, A. (2023). *Parent leaders in home visiting: The experience and impact of Michigan's statewide parent leaders in home visiting group*. Michigan Public Health Institute. https://www.michigan.gov/homevisiting/-/media/Project/Websites/homevisiting/Local-Leadership-Groups/Home_Visiting_Storytelling_Report.pdf
- 13 North Carolina Smart Start. (2021). *Role description for family advisory body*. North Carolina Home Visiting and Parenting Education System. https://www.smartstart.org/05_21_2021families_-_role_description_family_advisory_group/
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 North Carolina Partnership for Children. (2020). *North Carolina Early Childhood Family Engagement and Leadership Framework*. https://ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov/Portals/0/documents/pdf/F/FEandL_Framework.pdf?ver=2020-10-28-142947-087
- 16 Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative. (2023). *Parent and family leadership: A guidebook for early learning and parenting hubs*. Oregon State University.
- 17 See Reference 9 above.



“The PAC [Parent Advisory Council] is where we put in the work. We put in the brainstorming. We get thoughts going and ideas going. And we push them up the line [of the Hub] and say, ‘Hey, this is what we’d like to see more of. What can you do?’ I like that feeling of involvement and community.”

—OREGON PAC MEMBER