



# Developing Family-Service Provider Collaboration and Leadership

## Questions, Strategies, and Ideas to Consider

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## Introduction

Because young children are inseparable from their families, families are key players in planning and implementing intervention services. It is widely recognized that family involvement in early care and education programs is a key to success. Family involvement means much more than volunteering in the classroom or going to meetings. It means involving families in partnership with service providers in service delivery and leadership positions. Families are currently “living the effects” of service delivery systems, and their insights, grounded in their daily experiences, can help service providers to identify problems or see inconsistencies that service providers themselves may not be able to see. Indeed, the family’s perspective, often unconstrained by the bureaucratic traditions affecting service providers, can help move the service delivery system to the next level. In addition, family stories and perspectives help service providers connect theory to family realities (Little, 2000). However, recent research has documented that family-service provider collaboration and joint leadership face numerous barriers and has identified the need for training families and service providers in these areas (Little, 2000). Fortunately, family-service provider collaboration is supported by the policies, recommendations and mandates of early care and education, Early Head Start and Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The field of **early care and education** has identified the need for early care and education curriculum, environments, policies, and procedures to be responsive to the individual children and families they serve, reflecting their unique social and cultural contexts. While early care and education programs do not have the power of federal mandates to inform practice, a strong professional stance from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has influenced decisions and practices at all levels of the field. The importance of family involvement and collaboration are highlighted in NAEYC’s position statement, “Guiding Principles for the Development and Analysis of Early Childhood Public Policy.”

**Early Head Start** is based on the principles of family involvement and leadership at all levels of the program. The Head Start Performance Standards require that programs create opportunities and supports for families to participate in collaborative and leadership activities for themselves and their child and on behalf of other Early Head Start families and children. Grantee and delegate agencies must support family participation in the evaluation and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) development process for infants and toddlers enrolled in their program. Head Start programs must also engage in collaborative partnerships with families to establish mutual trust and to identify family, goals, strengths, and necessary services and other supports.

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The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** was written in collaboration with family leaders. **Part C of IDEA** requires that services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families are developed and implemented as a collaborative effort between families and service providers. This mandate is based on the recognition that services to infants and toddlers cannot be provided in isolation from the family, and that early intervention services are most effective with active family participation.

Collaboration is built upon relationships with families and the partners serving infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Respect for what each partner brings to the relationship is essential. Collaborative efforts in providing services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families set the stage for collaborative leadership at program, community, state, and national levels.

In order to create significant changes in the service system, collaborative relationships between families and service providers must be valued and be part of all aspects of the program and community. Building collaborative relationships takes time and requires intentional efforts by both families and service providers. The benefits of collaboration far outweigh the efforts.

As families develop and implement plans with service providers, they continually learn from, and about, their child and the service delivery system. This allows families to become informed decision makers. They provide leadership within their own family and may support other families and service providers in continually improving programs and service delivery systems.

The purpose of this guide is to address the development of family leaders at the family, local, state and national levels for service delivery and policy making, to highlight issues, and to describe strategies that foster meaningful family-service provider collaboration and leadership. The guide is structured around the key points described in the model (see page 6). Each section includes the following:

- ◆ *A brief description*
- ◆ *What families and service providers might do or need*
- ◆ *Questions programs can use to assess how well they are doing*
- ◆ *Suggested strategies for collaborative activities*
- ◆ *A space to record ideas to consider*

Each team and community can select and adapt strategies that best meet its needs.

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This document is adapted from *Family-Professional Collaboration in Local Interagency Planning: A Self-Assessment Guide* by Linda Brekken, Chris Drouin, Lois Wainstock, and Kathleen Sullivan, at the California Early Intervention Technical Assistance Network (1990). These materials are based on a model for supporting family-service provider collaboration and leadership developed through the Parents and Professionals Advocating for Collaborative Training (P-PACT) project by Jeanne Mendoza, Ph.D., and Pat Cegelka, Ed.D., at San Diego State University. Self-assessment guide issues and strategies were collected from families and professionals involved in collaborative leadership activities.

## References

Little, L. (2000). Parents take the lead: Seeking input from constituents. *Early Developments*, 4, 10–12.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. 1992. *Guiding principles for the development and analysis of early childhood public policy*. Retrieved November 2006 from [www.naeyc.org/resources/position\\_statements/psguid98.htm](http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/psguid98.htm)

## Resources

Information and resources on current legislation and standards are available from the websites listed in Appendix B of the “Facilitator’s Guide.”

Head Start Bureau  
[www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/)

Child Care Bureau  
[www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/)

National Association for the Education of Young Children  
[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

National Child Care Information Center  
[www.nccic.org](http://www.nccic.org)

National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center NECTAC  
[www.nectac.org](http://www.nectac.org)

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## Development of Family-Service Provider Collaboration and Leadership

The “Development of Family-Service Provider Collaboration and Leadership” model was adapted from materials that emerged from a creative collaboration between family members and service providers in California. The model on the next page, which shows the development and ongoing nature of Family-Service Provider Collaboration and Leadership, was designed to reflect the contributions of both families and service providers in collaboration around services and in leadership activities. In addition, the cyclical nature of collaboration is reflected in the two-way arrows. Families and service providers pass through various phases as circumstances change, such as when a child is identified as having a disability or when new service providers join the team working with a family. When families and service providers work together to serve an individual child, they build the foundation for collaborative leadership. As part of this collaborative leadership, families and service providers review and improve plans and systems together. Families and service providers expand their spheres of influence when they reach this phase of collaboration, together influencing services in other systems and for other families.

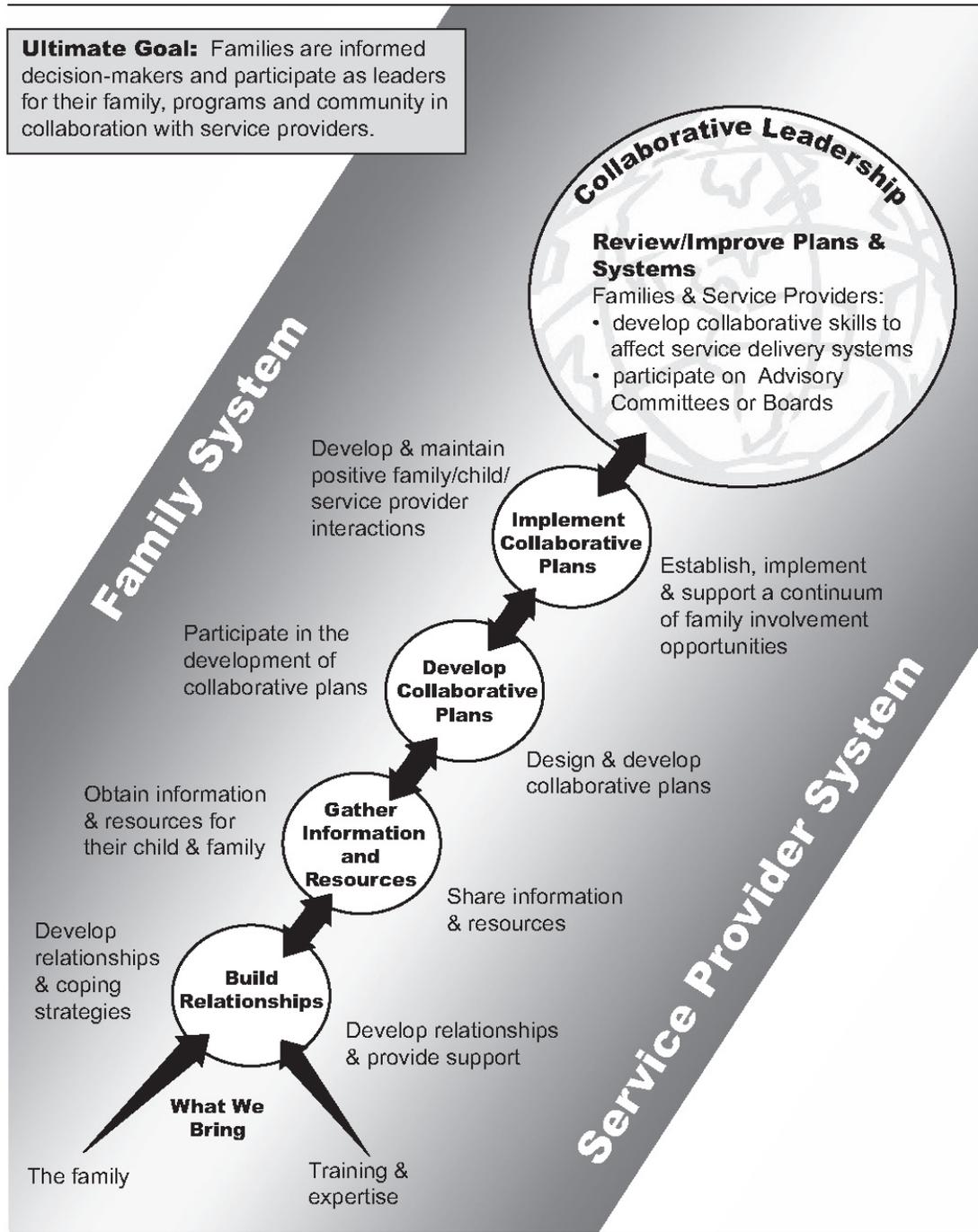
The energy, experience, and expertise brought to collaborative relationships strengthen service delivery for the individual family, and also for other families in the program, the community, and beyond.

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## Development of Family — Service Provider Collaboration and Leadership

**Ultimate Goal:** Families are informed decision-makers and participate as leaders for their family, programs and community in collaboration with service providers.



Hilton/Early Head Start Training Program

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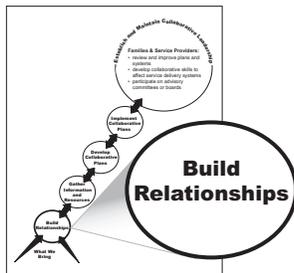


## Part 1

### What We Bring

The purpose of collaboration between families and service providers is to assure that services enhance the family’s ability to promote optimal growth and development of their child in the context of their family. Each collaborative partner brings something to the relationship, even before the relationship begins to be built.

- ◆ *Family members bring who they are and how they think about and do things. Most families do not have a choice about having a child with a disability. When a child is identified as having a disability, the family members are introduced to a service system that they may not have even known about.*
- ◆ *Service providers have chosen to be a part of the service system and bring their knowledge, professional training, experience into the relationship.*



### Build Relationships

During the process when a child is identified as having a disability, families and service providers must build relationships with one another. The relationships can be positive, negative, or somewhere in between. However, the first relationship in the service delivery system is critical for future collaborative efforts. Relationship building continues throughout the time the child is receiving services, as those services change and different service providers join or leave the service delivery team. New relationships are developed as families begin to support other families and work with service providers to make system-level changes in programs, communities, and states.

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<b>Build Relationships</b>	
<p><b>Families</b> Families build relationships with many different service providers during their first three years. It can be difficult for families to understand and remember the roles and responsibilities of each service provider with whom they interact. In fact, one estimate is that families of infants and toddlers with disabilities interacted with over 100 professionals and service providers by the time their children turned three. In addition, families are most likely dealing with changes in expectations and experiences for their child and family, as a result of sometimes unexpected circumstances that may influence how relationships are formed.</p>	<p><b>Service Providers</b> Service providers have the responsibility, when a child is identified as having a disability, of ensuring positive interactions that lead to strong and supportive relationships. To be most supportive, service providers must understand family systems in a culturally diverse society and appreciate the uniqueness of each family. They must use appropriate communication, interviewing, and problem-solving strategies to build relationships with each family and support them in this new experience. They should identify and emphasize family strengths and resources. They may need support and training to nurture family strengths and coping strategies.</p>



### Questions to Ask

- ◆ *How warm and inviting are the initial contacts families have with your program? How is the phone answered? Are the entry ways into your building welcoming? Are written materials clear, appealing, informative, and easy to read?*
- ◆ *What resources (such as training, coaching, and reflective supervision) are available for early childhood care/education and early intervention staff to develop the skills needed to support families' efforts to provide the best services for their infants and toddlers with disabilities?*

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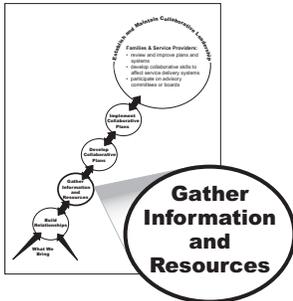
## Suggested Strategies

- ◆ *Identify and replicate intake processes of model programs. For example, some communities have developed a “single point of entry,” while others review referrals weekly to coordinate their planning.*
- ◆ *Ask families to review intake strategies and forms to determine if they are family-friendly.*
- ◆ *Review intake materials and procedures with families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to identify any potential barriers.*
- ◆ *Sponsor professional development workshops highlighting family systems, active listening, and nonjudgmental interviewing.*
- ◆ *Establish or link with existing interagency cross-training programs so that service providers in all community programs have a consistent approach to welcoming families into their programs and facilitating referrals to other needed services.*
- ◆ *Use reflective supervision to help staff develop skills to obtain positive and reciprocal interactions with children and families, as well as with other service providers.*



## Other Ideas to Consider:

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## Gather Information and Resources

During the time when a child is initially identified as having a disability, information and resources need to be gathered and shared between families and service providers. New information and resources will need to be identified and shared between families and service providers as the child changes, grows, and develops; as the family circumstances change; and as the service delivery system changes. Also, sorting through all of the information can be overwhelming. Collaboration between families and service providers can make the information gathering more meaningful, useful, and less overwhelming. As the family members take on leadership activities on behalf of other families, they will need new information and resources to ensure that they can effectively participate in making decisions about changes in policies and programs.

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### Gather and Share Information and Resources

#### Families

Families know their child best and understand things about their child that no one else does. If families are to make informed decisions for their children, they need to receive information about disabilities, potential interventions, as well as assistance in identifying options for intervention and using available community resources to support the optimal development of their child.

#### Service Providers

Service providers are in a unique position to help families, especially those who are new to the service delivery system, locate information and resources. They can also link families to other supports such as Family Resource Centers, parent-to-parent groups, and Parent Training and Information Centers. They must be current in their information about various disabilities and resources, and they must be prepared to assist parents in accessing various local, state, and national resources. They should also encourage families to share their knowledge about their child's strengths, challenges, and unique needs so that service providers can tailor their information sharing to particular family interests and needs.



### Questions to Ask

- ◆ *What opportunities are available for families to learn about their child's disability, intervention options, family support services, early childhood services, and other community resources?*
- ◆ *What resources are available for program staff (early childhood care and education and early intervention) to become knowledgeable about community resources, particularly family support services?*
- ◆ *What training and supervision is provided to staff to promote effective communication about family support opportunities and community resources?*
- ◆ *How are agency staff trained to assist families in accessing needed services and resources?*
- ◆ *Are programs available to provide support and information to families by another family who has had similar experiences locating and using services for their child who has a disability?*

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## Suggested Strategies

- ◆ *When a child is initially identified as having a disability (and as needed) refer families to parent-to-parent support services within the community or on the Internet (Family Resource Centers, Parent Training and Information Centers, etc.).*
- ◆ *Ask families who have used services in the community to identify barriers to gathering information and resources and to discover the most beneficial types of information and support.*
- ◆ *Maintain and update a community directory that identifies agency eligibility criteria, timelines, intake procedures, service boundaries, and fees. Keep a copy at each agency and train staff to use it.*
- ◆ *Develop and print a summary version of the community directory and distribute it to families.*
- ◆ *Compile and make available to families and staff a list of websites that provide information, resources, and support to families of children with disabilities.*
- ◆ *Sponsor a community resource fair for families and service providers.*
- ◆ *Collect copies of agency handouts and pamphlets and prepare a catalog of the material. Compile this information in a Disabilities Services Resource Manual and develop plans for how you will use this resource.*
- ◆ *Conduct community-based workshops outlining the service delivery system for families and agency staff.*
- ◆ *Practice accessing community resources and services using role playing to model and coach appropriate interactions between families and service providers. This might prepare families for occasions that require them to access community services or for service providers to practice discussing concerns with families.*
- ◆ *With your community partners, develop a variety of methods to inform families about agencies' policies, services, and procedures (such as pamphlets, brochures, videotapes, meeting agendas, and presentation outlines).*
- ◆ *Develop a speaker's bureau of parents and service providers who are knowledgeable about different agencies and are willing to share that knowledge of services and procedures with other family members and service providers, either individually or in groups.*
- ◆ *At the administrative level of each agency's organization, identify a contact person who can answer questions from family members and service providers.*

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### Suggested Strategies, continued

- ◆ *Develop a map of the various services available in the community and continually update the map to help families locate a variety of current services to meet their unique needs.*
- ◆ *Consider the family's perception of their needs, priorities, and resources when selecting information to share with the family.*
- ◆ *Provide opportunities for families to provide support and information to each other.*



### Other Ideas to Consider:

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## Develop Collaborative Plans

Part of the service delivery process for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families includes developing a specific plan for a particular child and family. Individual Family Service Plans (IFSPs) mandated by Part C of IDEA, Family Partnership Agreements (FPAs) required by the Head Start Performance Standards, and other service plans must be developed collaboratively with families and service providers. The more service providers and programs a child and family are involved with, the greater the need to coordinate services. These plans need to be modified regularly to reflect changes in the child, the family, and the service delivery system. Collaborative planning between service providers and families around an individual child prepares them to work together to evaluate and refine programs for their community and beyond.

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### Develop Collaborative Plans

#### Families

Families participate in the development of service delivery plans to ensure the unique strengths of and information about their child and family are included in all aspects of service delivery. The family's signature on the plans indicates that family members have been informed about the services that will be provided to them and their child and that they agree to these services. As families enter the service delivery system, they may be unsure of systems, their rights, or services they or their child need. However, as they learn more, they are better able to be a leader for their child and family by asking for what their child needs, as well as for what they need to support their child.

#### Service Providers

The service provider brings his/her knowledge, expertise, and professional skills to the development of individualized plans for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Service Providers are responsible for helping families learn about the services and why they are needed, how they are delivered, and who will provide services, and the various service delivery processes (like IFSP and FPA development). They also help families understand who is required to do different things to support the family and child, along with their legal rights. Service Providers must be intentional in making sure the family becomes a part of the planning, has the information and skills to knowledgeably participate and remains involved in this process.



### Questions to Ask:

- ◆ *What information and support do families receive to prepare them for the planning process (for example, information about their child, disabilities, and the Individualized Family Service Plan)?*
- ◆ *What opportunities and options are provided to professionals to assist them in refining their skills in developing collaborative plans with families as partners?*
- ◆ *How does the community foster development of collaboration skills in families and professionals?*
- ◆ *What mechanisms have the agencies in your community established to support family involvement throughout the processes for identifying a child with a disability, planning programs and delivering services?*
- ◆ *How do agencies in your community coordinate and streamline their planning processes for families?*

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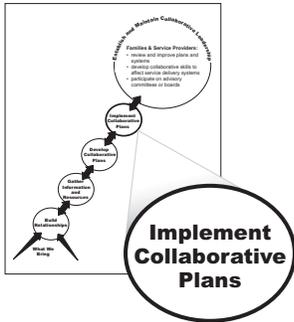
### Suggested Strategies:

- ◆ *Establish a set of timelines and activities that lead up to each step in the process of developing an individualized service plan.*
- ◆ *Develop procedures to prepare families for actively participating as informed team members in planning meetings, such as IFSP meetings, transition planning meetings, and IEP meetings.*
- ◆ *Develop a sample set of timelines for family support activities leading up to various steps in the planning process, and complete an IFSP preparation sheet.*
- ◆ *Develop guidelines or checklists for families to complete before each critical event in the service delivery process (for example, assessment information, IFSP goals, and intervention services). Assist families in completing this information.*
- ◆ *Prepare a list of commonly used terms, acronyms, and abbreviations.*
- ◆ *Prepare a set of ground rules for families and service providers to use during meetings (for example, “explain acronyms,” “ask questions about things you do not understand”). Videotape meetings and critique them based on the ground rules.*
- ◆ *Offer child care and transportation services.*
- ◆ *Call on experienced parents to assist other families through the process.*



### Other Ideas to Consider:

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## Implement Collaborative Plans

Research shows that if children are given services frequently within the routines of their day, they make greater gains. Collaboratively implementing service plans at home and throughout the day gives parents the knowledge and skills to continue intervention with their child after hours and in places away from the service delivery programs. Strategies to implement plans may vary and change over time. In addition, effective family involvement activities provide part of the experiential basis for family-service provider collaboration and leadership.

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### Implement Collaborative Plans

#### Families

Families interact with a number of service providers as their child moves through the service delivery system. Sometimes they provide information to service providers. Sometimes they get information from service providers. The most important interaction for the young child occurs within the family system, so each family should be given access to support services and opportunities to learn intervention strategies from service providers so that the family members can participate in their child's program. The amount of family involvement in implementing these plans may vary over time as the needs of the family and child shift and as available resources change. Families who participate in implementing their child's plans have a foundation for giving input into improving services that are responsive to their family and other families.

#### Service Providers

Opportunities should be made for families to collaborate with service providers and to take leadership roles in direct services for their child, in overall program planning, and in community- or state-level planning. To do this, families should be provided meaningful opportunities to implement plans for their child. They should also be a part of the design and implementation of new program options in their program and community, and they should be offered opportunities to be active participants with state-level groups as they plan and implement systems of service for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.



### Questions to Ask:

- ◆ *What mechanisms have programs in your community established to support family involvement throughout the entire service delivery process?*
- ◆ *What resources are available for staff to develop skills to support family involvement efforts?*
- ◆ *What opportunities are available for families in your program or community to learn critical information about their children's development, parenting strategies, and community resources and services?*

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### Suggested Strategies:

- ◆ *Talk with families who have participated in family involvement activities and ask them to identify and evaluate the most helpful types of information and support.*
- ◆ *Develop connections with Family Resource Centers and family-to-family support groups.*
- ◆ *Establish a speaker's bureau or consultant network of parents and service providers to conduct family involvement activities.*
- ◆ *Establish babysitting co-ops and ride-sharing programs to enable families to access family involvement activities.*
- ◆ *Ask families what they would like to learn and how, when, and where they would like to learn it.*
- ◆ *Augment current programs to address identified needs for family involvement and education.*
- ◆ *Identify family involvement and support services which programs or agencies already provide or are planning to provide. Establish a contact person and indicate who is eligible to participate in those services. Distribute this information to all agencies and parent organizations (for example, post on bulletin boards, publish in the local events section of the newspaper or broadcast on cable television). This information might be added to a Disability Resource Manual.*
- ◆ *Plan an overall community education effort for family involvement in early education and early intervention based on a needs assessment. Supplement existing offerings with new programs and activities.*
- ◆ *Involve the Head Start Policy Council or site committees in planning and implementing these efforts.*



### Other Ideas to Consider:

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## Part 2

### Review/Improve Plans and Systems

A strong foundation in collaborative service delivery is the basis for collaborative leadership to affect service delivery systems. Families should have opportunities to collaborate and use their leadership skills for their own child and family, as well as for other families. Working together, families and service providers can

- ◆ *Develop collaborative skills to affect service delivery systems and*
- ◆ *Participate on Advisory Committees or Boards.*

### Families and Service Providers

#### Develop Collaborative Skills to Affect Service Delivery Systems

Families and service providers who have the interest, commitment, and time may choose to participate in leadership training. They will learn to influence service delivery systems in ways that improve services for all children. Leadership training can take place in a variety of ways. Coursework through colleges and universities or other in-service activities are promising opportunities for individuals to develop the skills they need to become part of, and to develop, collaborative teams. There are many other training activities, including conferences and meetings, that families and service providers might attend together. Families and service providers who have worked together may also choose to work as a team to influence service delivery systems. It is important to remember that training at this level is collaborative and should be targeted to, and jointly planned by, families and service providers.

Collaborative teams of families and service providers may become trainers who prepare others to participate in collaborative service planning and delivery. These leaders will assist other families and service providers to collaborate with and negotiate the full range of programs and services in their community. They also will learn to affect the laws and regulations that govern these service systems and dismantle the barriers that may stand in the way of comprehensive and collaborative service delivery.

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### Questions to Ask:

- ◆ *What opportunities exist for training and developing family-service provider leadership teams in your community? At the state or national level?*
- ◆ *What strategies are used to identify and support potential leaders?*
- ◆ *What mechanisms have been established to educate both families and service providers about the legal and fiscal aspects of local service delivery systems for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families?*
- ◆ *What mechanisms have been established to clarify the roles and responsibilities of early child care and education and early intervention so that infants and toddlers with disabilities can be served in “natural environments” with the proper supports?*
- ◆ *What efforts have been made to establish contacts with policy makers and legislators to educate them about service delivery issues facing families of infants and toddlers with disabilities, particularly those in “natural environments”?*
- ◆ *What efforts are planned to keep families and service providers up-to-date on information and respond to current legislation and policies affecting services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families in “natural environments”?*



### Suggested Strategies:

- ◆ *Facilitate opportunities for families and service providers from your community to network with families and service providers from other communities and states through meetings, teleconferences, correspondence, etc.*
- ◆ *Involve families and service providers in designing and providing collaborative training to others.*
- ◆ *Sponsor an annual leadership seminar for families and service providers. Survey agencies and family organizations to identify and recruit interested persons.*
- ◆ *Create a shared vision for collaborative service delivery among the families and service providers who are working together to create change in their community.*
- ◆ *Identify the federal and state legal and fiscal bases of service delivery programs (including the authorizing legislation, eligibility criteria, and funding mechanisms for each program).*

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## Suggested Strategies, continued

- ◆ *Engage in a systematic process to identify barriers to coordinated service delivery. Analyze a situation where several agencies provide services to one family. Quirks in policies, regulations, and eligibility criteria that prevent agencies from providing needed services would be identified through this analysis. Systemic barriers can then be catalogued, and community agendas to address these barriers can be developed.*
- ◆ *Get to know your local legislators and state agency leaders in early child care and education and early intervention. Educate them about the issues their constituents encounter. Identify other legislators or policy makers who are interested in the same kinds of issues. Educate them about your cause and build relationships with them.*
- ◆ *Develop an organized communication system using telephone trees, listservs, e-mail, and other strategies to promote community-wide responses to issues the collaborative group wishes to address.*
- ◆ *Identify service and advocacy organizations with similar interests/issues. Lend your support to their efforts.*
- ◆ *Distribute copies of publications; draft legislation and policy or position papers; and facilitate family and service provider discussions about important issues.*
- ◆ *Use SpecialQuest Training Guides and Videos as tools to develop new community leaders.*



## Other Ideas to Consider:

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## Families and Service Providers Participate on Advisory Committees or Boards

Collaborative leadership may be displayed in many ways. Leaders may serve on panels, program advisory committees, and agency boards. They may become liaisons or executive officers for family and service provider groups, as well as members of government-appointed boards and committees. These efforts make it possible for both families and service providers to be more collaborative in developing joint policies, assessing community needs, and planning and implementing strategies for effective early childhood and early intervention services.



### Questions to Ask:

- ◆ *How representative are local advisory committees and interagency planning bodies?*
- ◆ *How well do these local planning groups' memberships reflect the community's cultural diversity?*
- ◆ *Have families been involved in all aspects of planning and development efforts?*
- ◆ *How has the advisory group institutionalized family-service provider collaboration in its bylaws and policies?*
- ◆ *How are the contributions of families and service providers contributions valued in group decision-making processes? Do some perspectives carry more weight than others?*
- ◆ *What role does your program play in supporting these collaborative planning and development efforts in your community?*

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### Suggested Strategies:

- ◆ *Take steps to identify families with leadership potential who represent the community's cultural and linguistic diversity. Identify those who are already active in programs, organizations, or issues.*
- ◆ *Support families of young children with disabilities who express interest in, or take advantage of, opportunities to become more involved in community activities. Support these family representatives' participation in community-wide efforts.*
- ◆ *Identify family representatives in all agency activities, including needs assessments, planning committees, and task force groups.*
- ◆ *Institutionalize family representation on program board positions. (Head Start has institutionalized family representation through their Policy Council membership requirements.)*
- ◆ *Work to ensure that the Head Start Policy Council has a representative who is the parent of a child with a disability.*
- ◆ *Develop standard practices for providing supports necessary for active family participation (for example, child care, transportation, stipends, and per diem expenses).*
- ◆ *Sponsor family participation in conferences, trainings, meetings, and hearings.*
- ◆ *Nominate family leaders from your community to participate on local, state, and national boards and committees. Institutionalize family representation on these boards or advisory groups.*



### Other Ideas to Consider:

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