



FIRST THINGS FIRST

Ready for School. Set for Life.

COORDINATION STANDARD OF PRACTICE- Community Partnerships

In March 2008, the Early Childhood Development and Health Board defined the strategic direction of First Things First with the adoption of the Strategic Plan Roadmap. Within this comprehensive document, Coordination is identified as a one of six Goal Areas that will be accomplished by First Things First in order to build the Arizona early childhood system.

Specifically, to accomplish the Coordination goal, First Things First is directed to foster cross-system collaboration efforts among local, state, federal and tribal organizations to improve the coordination and integration of Arizona programs, services and resources for young children and their families.

It is generally believed that by participating in cross-system efforts, organizations will begin to look at how they can change the way they work together so that services are delivered to children and families in new, more effective and efficient ways. Service agencies that work together are often easier to access and are implemented in a manner that is more responsive to the needs of the families. Cross-system efforts may also result in greater capacity to deliver services because organizations are working together to identify and address gaps in service. Therefore, by supporting a variety of cross-system efforts, First Things First will be instrumental in creating a high quality, interconnected, and comprehensive delivery system that is timely, culturally responsive, family driven, community based, and directed toward enhancing a child's overall development.

COORDINATION STANDARDS

Cross-system efforts may include a wide variety of activities. However, the desired outcome of all cross-system efforts is to support organizations to develop relationships that allow them to achieve results they would not likely have achieved alone. A number of terms can be used to label organizations that work together toward mutually beneficial goals. Among these terms are: alliances, coalitions, collaborations, cooperatives, networks and partnerships.

While all cross-system efforts involve two or more organizations working together for a common purpose, these efforts operate at varying levels of intensity. Typically, formal collaboration is viewed as most intensive, requiring the greatest amount of work, commitment and risk. It also is the level at which true system changes are most likely to occur. **The intent of coordination strategies developed by First Things First is to support participants in achieving increasingly intensive levels of coordination.**

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|------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| Networking | Cooperation | Coordination | Collaboration |
|------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|

lower intensity  higher intensity

Networking: Activities that result in bringing individuals or organizations together for relationship building and information sharing. Networking results in an increased understanding of the current system of services. There is no effort directed at changing the existing system. There is no risk associated with networking.

Cooperation: Characterized by short-term, informal relationships that exist without a clearly defined mission, structure, or planning effort. Cooperative partners share information only about the subject at hand. Each organization retains authority and keeps resources separate. There is very little risk associated with cooperation.

Coordination: Involves more formal relationships in response to an established mission. Coordination involves some planning and division of roles and opens communication channels between organizations. Authority rests with individual organizations, however, risk increases. Resources are made available to participants and rewards are shared.

Collaboration: Collaboration is characterized by a more durable and pervasive relationship. Participants bring separate organizations into a new structure, often with a formal commitment to a common mission. The collaborative structure determines authority and leadership roles. Risk is greater. Partners pool or jointly secure resources, and share the results and rewards.

To simplify, the term *coordination* will be used throughout this document to describe the variety of cross-system efforts, from networking through collaboration, that lead to accomplishment of the First Things First Coordination goal. When the word *collaboration* is used, it specifically refers to the highest level of coordination efforts, as described above.

To foster increased community capacity in order to provide high quality early childhood services that work together across First Things First regions and at a statewide level, First Things First Regional Partnership Councils will foster and facilitate coordination (i.e. cross-system) activities within their region. These activities may include: conducting regional needs assessments; convening regional and cross-regional meetings of First Things First grantees and other service providers; participation in interagency coordinating councils; engaging service

providers to conduct strategic planning; and supporting communications and information exchange networks. These activities may be provided by Regional Partnership Councils and Regional Office staff directly or through grant agreements.

First Things First coordination strategies may occur at any level, from networking to collaboration. One approach to coordination, which is most effective in communities with little history of working together or where trust is lacking, is to first bring service providers together for networking. As successes occur, the group is able to transition to more intensive levels of working together.

COORDINATION COMPONENTS

In developing coordination strategies, Regional Partnership Councils and grantees should be cognizant of the components that lead to successful collaboration. Creating and maintaining collaborative efforts is a difficult process. In fact, poorly managed community coordination and collaboration activities can damage relationships and result in distrust and territorialism.

Research has identified six broad categories that influence the success of collaborations (Mattessich, et al, 2001). They are:

1. *Environment*: the extent to which the community has a history of collaboration and whether the community views collaboration as a legitimate effort.
2. *Membership Characteristics*: the degree to which there is mutual respect and trust among members.
3. *Process and Structure*: the presence of clearly understood roles, rights and responsibilities of members that lead to a feeling of ownership that collaboration members feel about the work.
4. *Communication*: the existence of fully developed and utilized lines of communications resulting in high interaction between individuals.
5. *Purpose*: having a shared vision, with clearly articulated goals and strategies, that is affirmed by each member. The mission, purpose and delivery system of the collaborative is distinctive from those of participating organizations.
6. *Resources*: the extent to which the collaboration has sufficient financial, human and in-kind resources to achieve its goals.

COORDINATION STRATEGIES

Specific activities can foster the development of increasingly intensive levels of coordination. In order to be successful, coordination strategies should consider incorporating a variety of these activities.

READINESS ASSESSMENT

Before beginning a coordination effort, an assessment of the community's readiness may occur. Various tools can be used to assess readiness to coordinate. Among the items evaluated in a readiness assessment are: existence of a shared vision; inclusion of key organizational and individual stakeholders; and leadership capacity. Having a clear understanding of the factors that impact successful coordination will help direct initial efforts. In fact, coordination strategies may also include capacity building that increases the readiness of individuals, organizations and communities to engage in meaningful cross-system efforts.

Formal collaboration should result in actions that change and improve services. Groups move through stages of development to arrive at effective collaboration.

POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES

| Stage of coordination | System Level | Family level |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Networking | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bring people with diverse perspectives together for relationship building, and information sharing,• Increase knowledge of services | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increasing knowledge of services• Increasing access to services• Family assessments-matching services to needs |
| Cooperation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opportunities to increase/improve communication• Create a vision and clarify expectations.• Develop cross-referral processes• Developing Leaders-identifying and supporting leaders to manage challenges, seek out | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing an information exchange system to reduced duplication, improved delivery timeframes• Service plan coordination• Service delivery coordination |

| | | |
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| | opportunities, build partner commitment and cultivate crucial relationships. | |
| Coordination | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategic plan, establish accountability, gather resources. • Identify needs, measure and evaluate results, assess strategies and resources, adapt to changing conditions • Asset mapping, gap analysis, and identification of actions to address gaps; • Identification of system improvement measures to be implemented • Identify and resolve “turf” issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated outreach • Joint family-centered service planning- services designed to meet family needs, flexibility in delivery, removing “turf” battles • Clear and consistent communication to families |
| Collaboration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make changes part of a structured system, recognize goals reached, determine whether the partnership should continue as is or move to a different level • Negotiate agreements and contracts, strengthen community support • Identify opportunities and begin shared planning • Identify opportunities and begin to share resources and risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated seamless service planning • Seamless shared service delivery |

COORDINATION OUTCOMES

Coordination efforts funded by First Things First should build on community strengths. It is recommended that coordination strategies incorporate a readiness assessment. Further, it is important that all coordination efforts include the use of outcome measures to demonstrate effectiveness and to increase accountability.

Examples of possible outcomes (and measures) that can occur as a result of coordination efforts are:

1. Minutes and attendance records of meetings held;
2. Development of partnership and governance agreements;
3. Development of a strategic plan, with action steps that result in systems change;
4. Asset mapping, gap analysis, and identification of actions to address gaps;
5. Identification of system improvement measures to be implemented, such as implementing coordinated outreach for programs of a similar type (e.g. home visitation, parent education) to help ensure that families are referred to the service that best meets their needs or developing an information exchange system to identify families served by more than one service organization to identify opportunities to coordinate and reduce duplication;
6. Increased satisfaction of families served through coordinated efforts.

Examples of possible data that can be used to demonstrate the effectiveness of cross-system efforts are:

1. Community score cards or other community-wide indicators of wellbeing that can be monitored publically and annually, including data which can be disaggregated by ethnicity and geography;
2. Budget analyses that break out all spending for children, youth, or some other identified purpose in ways that are not customarily tracked by budget offices;
3. Self-assessment tools that allow a collaborative to gauge its progress against a framework for reviewing the systems outcomes of a collaborative.
4. Client surveys to gauge changes in referral networks, ease of service access, and satisfaction with services received.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS:

Knowledge of human services systems and community development; experience in facilitating coordination and collaboration. Knowledge of and experience with tools and resources to assess systems coordination. Typically individuals with advanced academic degrees possess these attributes.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

To address cultural competency objectives, early childhood practitioners /early childhood service providers shall ensure that children and families receive from all staff members effective, understandable, and respectful care that is provided in a culturally competent manner- a manner compatible with their cultural beliefs and practices and preferred language. Early childhood practitioners /early childhood service providers should ensure that staff at all levels and across all disciplines receive ongoing education and training in culturally and linguistically appropriate service delivery. Early childhood practitioners/early childhood service providers should develop participatory, collaborative partnerships with communities and utilize a variety of formal and informal mechanisms to facilitate community and family-centered involvement to ensure that services are delivered in a manner that is consistent with the National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services and/or the National Recommendations on Cultural and Linguistic Competence for the National Association for the Education of Young

Children.” <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=15>
; <http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/linguistic>

TYPES OF COORDINATION STRATEGIES

Coordination strategies within First Things First generally fall within four categories which require specific considerations. These categories include:

- Capacity-Building
- Court Teams
- Community Partnerships
- Service Coordination

Standards and specific considerations for these strategy categories can be found in the following pages.



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COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The development of community partnerships is a system-level intervention designed to establish or strengthen the working relationship of two or more family service agencies or organizations. The primary goals of community partnerships are to:

- increase availability of services to families and children
- develop a strategic plan to serve the community based on identified needs and gaps
- foster leadership capacity among service providers
- share expertise and training resources

There is no prescribed model for community partnerships. The number of partners, tasks, structure and length of the partnership may vary depending upon the community's needs. For example, a community partnership in a region may be focused around a subject such as Early Literacy or Family Support, while in another region the partnership may be focused upon a specific community in the region. As partnerships are developed, it is important to identify a core group to begin the process. As the group develops, additional partners can be added strategically to further the partnership goals.

To be successful, partnerships should establish a shared vision and commitment to the goals and objectives identified by the partners. This includes the commitment of staff time and resources. Successful partnerships require the clear definition of roles and responsibilities for each partner. Partnerships may vary in structure but their activities generally include the following:

- Identifying key community issues for which there is shared concern
- Strategic planning
- Sharing program and service information
- Identifying the role and tasks of each partner
- Designing an operational structure that promotes communication and provides for accountability
- Regularly assessing barriers, developing action plans and charting progress
- Identifying additional partners integral in achieving needed community change and successfully reaching objectives and goals.