Family Engagement Toolkit

A Guide for Afterschool and Summer Program Providers

ACTNOW!
Afterschool for Children and Teens

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Introduction

Hello Readers! This Family Engagement Toolkit was developed by the Afterschool for Children and Teens (ACT Now) Coalition to aid afterschool and summer program administrators and staff as they navigate the family engagement process, regardless of their starting point. We seek to ensure that programs are inclusive, accessible, and welcoming for all families. To help achieve this goal, ACT Now used the principles developed by the **Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE) Family Engagement Framework**[1] while developing this toolkit. These principles include:

1. **Developing a Family Engagement System**
2. **Building a Welcoming Environment**
3. **Enhancing Communication**
4. **Include Families in Decision Making**

Definition of Family Engagement

ACT Now defines the term "family engagement" as the **process by which afterschool and summer programs build meaningful, impactful, lasting relationships with families to support them and their children.** The term "family," when used in this toolkit, refers to the caregivers present in a child's life. Caregivers could include a mother or father, but could also include aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, older siblings, neighbors, and other individuals who are invested in and supportive of the growth and development of a child. Family engagement relies on the core assumption that all families are committed to and invested in supporting their child. Additionally, all relationships between families and program providers must be based in trust, where **families of all cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds** are included and treated as equal members in a child's learning process.[2]

Importance of Family Engagement

Families play a unique and important role in a child's academic, social-emotional, and behavioral development. Family members and caregivers are a child's first and most important teachers. Including families in afterschool and summer programs has not only been shown to benefit children, but also their families.[3]

Benefits for Children	Benefits for Families
• Improved academic achievement • Developed positive behavioral and social-emotional skills • Enhanced self-confidence • Increased high school graduation rates	• Increased awareness of educational supports and programs • Connected with community organizations and family services • Formed family support networks • Improved knowledge/leadership skills

Taking the time to develop relationships with families allows program providers to learn about families' diverse experiences and needs. Whether it's through one-on-one conversations, family-focused events, or resource sharing, effective family engagement strategies can ensure that families have the skills and resources necessary to support and advocate for their children long after they leave your program.

Family Engagement Framework

In addition to ISBE's Family Engagement Framework, National PTA's Center for Family Engagement's Framework was used to develop this toolkit.[4] This framework highlights the idea of *transformative family engagement*, that all family engagement efforts should focus on transforming the lives of families and children by empowering them to reach their full potential. The four guiding principles, referred to as the "Four I's," state that family engagement must be **Inclusive, Individualized, Integrated, and Impactful.** Keeping these principles, as well as those created by ISBE, in mind while developing your own family engagement plan can ensure that families have the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to support their children's health, development, and well-being long after they participate in your afterschool or summer program. This toolkit will include icons of the four I's to help readers recognize how to implement the principles in their own family engagement plans.

Inclusive		Families should feel welcome, valued, and engaged. Programs should focus on building intentional relationships with families and inviting and including diverse perspectives.
Individualized		Programs should individualize their relationship with families based on the unique backgrounds, experiences, and needs of that family and respond to their feedback and input.
Integrated		Programs should continuously find ways to connect families with their work, providing multiple avenues for families to interact with their child's learning and their community.
Impactful		Family engagement opportunities should prepare families to support their children and connect with their communities outside of an afterschool or summer program.

Where to Begin

Before your program considers how to improve family engagement, it is important to take into account what work your program is already doing. Taking the time to assess your team's beliefs, goals, and vision for family engagement helps to build a strong foundation on which to create meaningful future family engagement opportunities.

Evaluate Current Practices

Working as a team, your program should assess what efforts are currently being made to connect with families. This may include reviewing existing family engagement plans and previously hosted family-focused events.

For programs new to family engagement, this could include listing ways your program communicates with families (text, emails, face-to-face meetings, etc.), discussing feedback staff members have received from families, or compiling resources your program historically has shared with families. To help guide this evaluation, we created a **Family Engagement Brainstorming Tool,** found on **page 27** of the toolkit.

Share your past experiences with family engagement efforts!

What do you think are the strengths or weaknesses of your program's current family engagement work?

Where, in your experience, have you been able to successfully engage with families?

Identify Goals

After your team explores what work has previously been done to engage families in your program, continue the discussion by asking team members to consider their **core beliefs about family engagement.** Have your team members take some time to reflect on their experiences with families and what individual beliefs or philosophies they have about family engagement work. These could include:

- All families have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
- No two families are the same, they have different backgrounds, cultures, resources, and interests.
- All families have the capacity to support their children's learning.
- The responsibility for building partnerships between programs and home rests primarily on the program staff, especially program leaders.[5]

Considering your team member's beliefs about family engagement, discuss what **ideal high-quality family engagement practices** would look like for your organization. This could include creating an environment where families of all backgrounds and identities feel welcomed and included, or where students feel supported in their learning both while at your afterschool or summer program and while with their families at home. Using these discussions about current beliefs and ideals surrounding family engagement, create a family engagement vision statement for your organization.

The vision statement your team develops **can help identify future goals and create concrete steps to achieve this vision.** Whether short or long-term, creating a set of family engagement goals as a team can help drive your group's future work. While creating these goals, keep in mind the four I's of transformative family engagement.

Short-term goals could include:
- Increasing turnout at an event
- Creating/sending families a list of community resources
  - Example: Where to find free meals for children, upcoming language/job training classes, events happening in the community, etc.

Long-term goals could include:
- Creating a family engagement advisory board to advise and support your program's family engagement efforts
- Hosting a series of family-oriented events

Create a Family Engagement Plan

Diverse Families, Diverse Students, Diverse Needs. As your team begins to create your own family engagement plan, it will be important to continuously consider the the diverse backgrounds and needs of your program's students and families. Your family engagement plan will look different from those of organization's working in other communities and will look different from year to year, as new children and families participate in your programs.

The term **"diversity"** encompasses the countless unique characteristics found in individuals and groups. This could include one's race; ethnicity; language; age; gender identity; sexual orientation; socio-economic background; neurodivergence; physical ability; religion; and more.

Develop a Plan

Work with your team to develop a broad family engagement plan, keeping in mind the ISBE Family Engagement Framework and the 4 I's. Use your teams' conversations about goals and visions to begin crafting your family engagement plan. If your organization has an existing family engagement plan, focus on areas that your team hopes to improve upon or those that haven't yet been explored. If your organization is creating a new family engagement plan, consider breaking family engagement strategies into different categories, such as communication, in-person or virtual family events, and community-based resources and learning opportunities. The following sections will introduce these family engagement strategies and provide examples of various methods to achieve your organization's family engagement goals.
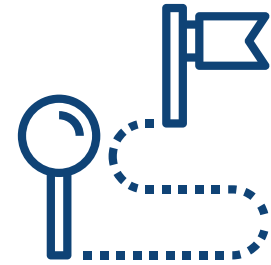
Communication

One of the most beneficial ways to increase family engagement is to employ methods of two-way communication between your program and families. **Successful two-way communication strategies are those that invite families to be in discussion with your program, rather than simply receiving information from your program.** Two-way communication strategies can help make families feel more included and involved in your program. Below are some examples of two-way communication strategies.
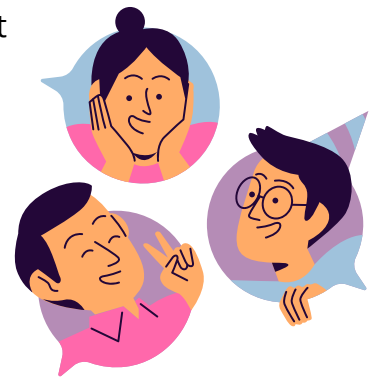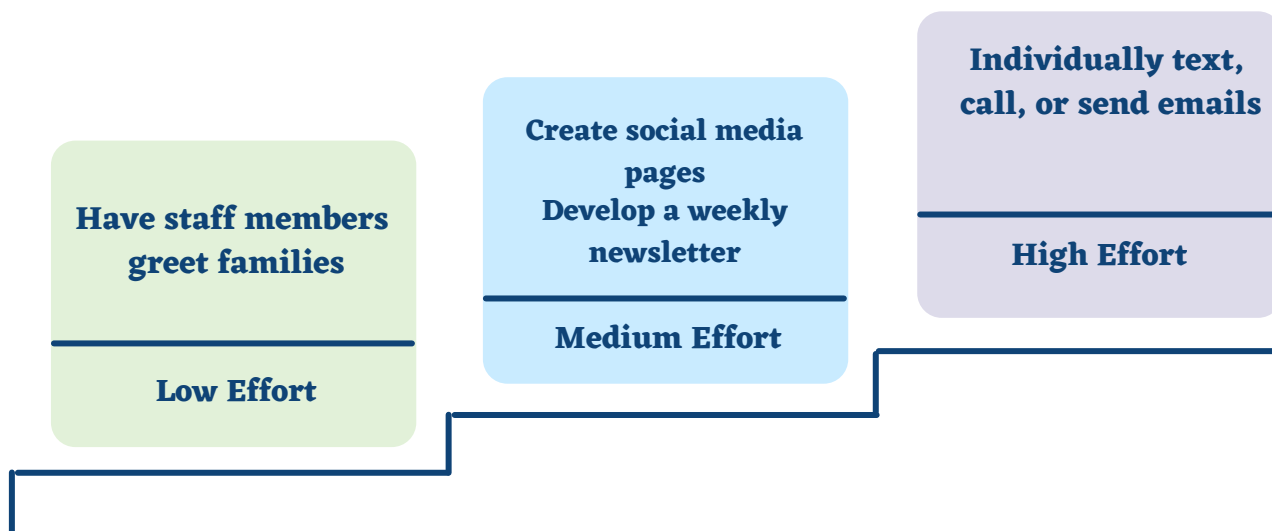
One-To-One Communication

- **Individually text, call, or send emails** to family members to update them about your program or about their children. Use their first name in correspondence to indicate that your message is specifically meant for them! To see an example of a possible **Family Welcome Letter**, visit **page 29** of the toolkit.
- **Have staff members greet families** during program pick-up and drop-off. Asking short, direct questions such as "How has your week been?" or providing quick updates about their children, like "Kara made a great painting today during our craft time" helps families to feel informed and included in your program.

Group Communication

- **Create social media accounts** to connect families with your program and to connect families with one another. By creating a Facebook page or group for family members, your program can invite families to upcoming events or ask families for feedback. Your program could consider asking families for consent to take and post photos of their children during the program, sharing these photos on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram with family members at the end of each week/program session.
- **Develop a weekly newsletter** for families to be sent out via email, text, and/or social media. Include relevant updates and resources for families in the newsletter, such as upcoming community events for families, places to find free afterschool/summer meals, or free online resources for children, like new learning apps or places to access free copies of books online.

Individually text, call, or send emails

High Effort

Create social media pages
Develop a weekly newsletter

Medium Effort

Have staff members greet families

Low Effort

Communication with families heavily depends on the capacity of your program's team members. Depending upon the size of your team and the pre-existing responsibilities of team members, **tailor your communication strategy to fit the needs of both staff members and families**. It may take trying different methods of communication before you find what works best for your program. To track communication with families, we created a **Digital Family Engagement Tracker Tool,** found on **page 28** of the toolkit. The pre-formatted, downloadable document can help your organization keep track of which families staff members have talked with, when the conversations happened, the content of the conversation, and prepare for future communication with family members.

In-Person or Virtual Events

In-Person and virtual can connect families with program staff and with other program families. When planning events, make sure to consider the diverse backgrounds and needs of your program's families. **The more relevant, informative, and fun your events are, the more likely your families are to attend!**
In an effort to achieve continuous family engagement, look to host some "one time only" events and some that reoccur weekly or monthly. Below are some examples of family engagement events.

Social Events

- **Weekly Coffee Chats:** Find a time, or multiple times, that are accessible for family members to attend, maybe right after drop-off or right before pick-up. Offer free coffee and snacks and have a few program staff members present. Allow families the opportunity to ask questions or engage your staff and other attendees in conversation.
- **Family drop-in hours:** Allocate time each week to allow family members to join in during program activities. This time could be used for families to watch their children participate in a performance or show-and-tell activity or make a craft/recipe alongside their children.

- **Family Fun Nights:** As a team, think creatively about fun, feasible, and financially-accessible events that families and children would enjoy. Work with local businesses (bowling alleys, mini golf courses, museums, zoos) to offer free or reduced price tickets for program families. Ask a community center to use their auditorium or gym to host a movie night. Use your program facilities to host an outdoor picnic or field day. Send families a Zoom link and host a virtual trivia night.
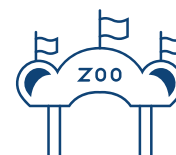
> As you plan, think about ways to make your events accessible to all families. For example, if you have the capacity, provide free childcare services and snacks/meals during events. Additionally, if some of your families have non-traditional work schedules, vary the timing of your events.

Skill-Development Events

- **How-To Presentations:** Host informational presentations on topics relevant to families. Depending upon the presentation topic, either have trained staff host presentations or invite experienced community members to present. Sessions could include supporting social-emotional learning at home, how to navigate hybrid or virtual learning environments, or how to advocate for children's needs in K-12 schools. Presentations should be tailored to meet the **diverse needs** of program families, and could be held in-person or via Zoom.
- **Support in Times of Transition:** Periodically, your program could host events for families whose children are about to go through points of transition. Inviting relevant community members and local educators, events could include sessions on how to support children transitioning between elementary/middle school and middle/high school. For families with older children, presentations could include how to help students prepare for the ACT/SAT, resources available to aid in the college application process, or various career readiness programs.

Identity-Focused Events

- **Family Affinity Groups:** Similar to weekly coffee chats, your program could provide a meeting space (or host virtual meetings) for families with similar characteristics and backgrounds. Examples of affinity-based family groups include racial or cultural groups, religious groups, family types (single-parent families, families built through adoption, LGBTQ+ families), or groups focused on children's identities (families with diverse learners, families of LGBTQ+ youth). Provide space for families to talk with one another and lead discussions about topics meaningful to them.

- **Holidays or Cultural Celebrations:** Your program could offer to provide funding for, or host, holiday/cultural celebrations. Events could include a Pride Month picnic, a Hanukkah potluck dinner, or a Black History Month movie night. Staff members could help share information about these events with families, provide access to facilities, and if possible, provide food and childcare at the events.

Community Connections

Connecting families with community organizations and resources, or working with community organizations to create family-focused opportunities, is another method of family engagement. One of the overarching goals of family engagement is to provide families with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to support their children after they leave your program. Below are some examples of community-based opportunities that can help achieve this goal.
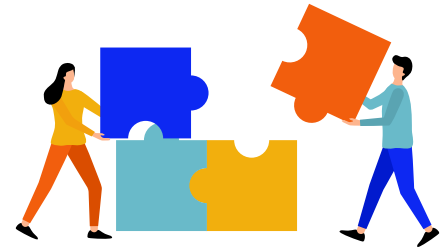
- **ESL/GRE Classes**: Your program could host English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, Graduate Record Examination (GRE) practice sessions, or other continued education classes in your facilities after hours. If there are organizations in your community that already offer these services, consider ways to connect families with these opportunities.

- **Career Development Opportunities:** Depending on the capacity of your program's staff members, either staff or community members could host presentations on topics relevant to job and career training. These could include presentations on how to use networking websites like LinkedIn, how to create a resume and cover letter, or where to look when applying for jobs. Sessions could include time for staff or community volunteers to read over families' job application materials.

Remember: The key to family engagement is finding what works best for your program's families. Whether you use the example strategies and events listed in this toolkit or develop your own, your program's primary goal should be to communicate and connect with families, to learn about their needs and how you can support them. As your team works to design a family engagement plan, remind yourselves that no plan will be perfect. Your plan will change over time: your program will identify what strategies work for your families, modify strategies that were unsuccessful, and reassess families' diverse backgrounds and needs from year to year.

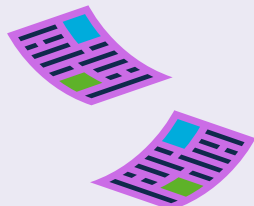# Building Relationships with Families and Community Partners

Family engagement is a continuous, cyclical process. While developing a family engagement plan is one important step of that process, another step is building relationships with families and community partners.

Develop a family engagement plan → Build relationships with families and community partners → Continue to grow and improve engagement efforts

Connect with Families

Relationships with families will **naturally develop** as you implement your program's family engagement plan. However, the following strategies may help to deepen these connections.

Collect Family Contact Information	At in-person events, use a check-in sheet for families to list their names, phone numbers, and emails. The sheet could also include an area for families to tick a box for what form of communication they would prefer, whether call, email, or text.
Create Hand-Outs	For families who may not use electronic communication methods, print out materials to hand out to families during pick-up, drop-off, or face-to-face events.
Send Thank You Notes	If you have families' contact information, send them a personalized thank you note (either by text, phone call, or email) or hand-written cards.
Ask For Feedback	Either virtually (via email, social media, phone calls, or texts) or at events, ask families for feedback on current and future family engagement programming.
Create a Family Engagement Committee	If a group of families are consistently engaging with your program, consider creating and/or inviting them to join a **Family Engagement Committee**. More information on these committees can be found on **page 24** of this toolkit.

Sample Family Engagement Plan Timeline

Aug/Sept	Oct/Nov	Dec/Jan
• Before the school year begins, consider what your team already knows about the backgrounds and needs of families in your community • Work with your team to develop a family engagement plan	• Begin building relationships with families, using either one-on-one or group communication methods • Host a variety of family-oriented events (social events, identity-focused events, etc.)	• Ask families for feedback (virtually, through one-on-one conversations, or at events) • Use feedback from staff and families to make adjustments to your program's family engagement strategies
Feb/Mar	**April/May**	**June/July**
• Use conversations with families and family feedback to identify additional community organizations and resources to connect your program's families with (if you have not already done so)	• Connect with families before the end of the semester (host an end of semester event, offer individual meetings with staff, or virtually communicate with families). Ask for feedback about their experiences with your program	• From staff experiences and family feedback, determine the strengths and weaknesses of your program's family engagement plan and make modifications for the next school year

Connect with Community Organizations

While creating a Family Engagement Plan, it will be important to find ways to **connect your program with community organizations and resources.** Connecting with community organizations can help your program expand the resources you offer to families, find additional funding for family-focused events and programs, and increase youth participation in your program in the future.

As your program builds relationships with and receives feedback from families throughout the year, you will likely identify community organizations for your program to connect with to support your families' diverse needs. Originally developed by the **Colorado Education Initiative**, the following are 5 tips for creating lasting and impactful community partnerships:[6]

1 **Common Purpose:** Find community partners that understand and share your organization's vision and goals. Shared visions and goals can create natural opportunities for connection and collaboration!

2 **Complementary Content:** Seek out community partners with expertise that compliments that of your program's staff. If your families are interested in language-learning opportunities, look to build relationships with community organizations that offer those services.

3 **Communication:** Maintain consistent communication between your program and your community partners, either virtually or through in-person meetings. Make sure that both groups understand their responsibilities and roles.

4 **Customized Partnerships:** Discuss the diverse backgrounds, identities, and needs of your program's families with your community partners so that they can help find ways to adapt their work to support your program's families.

Continuous Improvement and Sustainability: Connecting with community organizations, just like the family engagement process, is continuous. As your families' needs change, or as your program's goals and vision change, make sure to share these changes with your community partners.

Connecting with community organizations can be a daunting process. If your program is unsure with how to begin the process of communicating with community partners, know that you are not alone! **Additional resources** on how to create connections and build partnerships with community organizations can be found on **page 23** of this toolkit.

> **Use Pre-Existing Connections:** While communicating with families, your staff member may learn about existing connections between families and community organizations. For example, if your program is looking to partner with a local church, and you know that one of your families is actively involved in that church community, one of your program's first steps could be to work with that family to connect your program with members of the church's staff!

Professional Development for Family Engagement

Family engagement is an ever-evolving process, where your program learns how best to support families, families learn how to engage with your program, and your staff learns how to maintain these relationships with families over time. As your team implements different family engagement strategies, your staff will begin to identify areas that they need support or additional training in. The needs of your staff, just like the needs of your program families, are going to vary.

A program may have families with special needs students, families who are culturally and ethnically diverse, families who speak a different language from staff members, and/or families from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Providing staff professional development opportunities that **align with their previous family engagement experiences** can both improve your program's future family engagement strategies and create positive family engagement experiences for families and staff.

- **Staff Feedback:** Through one-on-one conversations, all-staff meetings, or printed or virtual surveys, ask staff about aspects of family engagement that they find difficult or areas that they need additional support in to identify areas for additional professional development.

- **Community Connections:** Find organizations or individuals that offer professional development opportunities that align with the needs of your program. Utilizing community-based resources can help ensure that those hosting professional development sessions already understand the context of the community in which your staff are working.

- **External Resources:** Utilize virtual opportunities and resources, including those on the ACT Now website[7] Education organizations, including the Afterschool Alliance, Youth for Youth, and the Ed Leaders Network, host free, virtual professional development opportunities throughout the year.
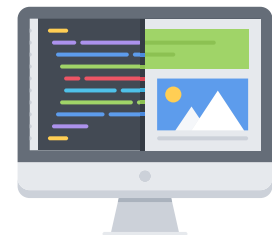
There are numerous areas for professional development in the family engagement sphere, and definitely more than can be addressed in this toolkit! For **additional professional development resources** for afterschool and summer program staff, **see page 25** of the toolkit.

Research on professional development from the Harvard Family Research Project reflects the importance of creating open, supportive environments for staff members to learn and grow.[8] Team leaders and program administrators should work to create a learning environment where staff members feel comfortable voicing their strengths and weaknesses regarding their work with family engagement. As staff members begin implementing what they learned during professional development sessions, they should feel comfortable making mistakes. Designing positive opportunities for staff to build on their family engagement skills can strengthen staff members' confidence in interacting with family members and help increase staff members' willingness to partake in future professional development sessions.

Sustaining Your Family Engagement Plan

ACT Now believes that **programs should try to find areas for growth and improvement.** The process for creating meaningful, impactful, and inclusive family engagement opportunities can start **at any point** in the life cycle of an afterschool or summer program.

Identifying standards for your program can serve as a method to monitor your program's family engagement growth over time. ACT Now, in partnership with afterschool leaders from around the state of Illinois, developed the Illinois Afterschool Quality Standards,[9] which provide a common definition of program quality and help programs improve youth outcomes. The Quality Standards represent best practices that research demonstrates lead to quality programs and positive outcomes for youth. .

The Illinois Quality Program Self-Assessment (IL–QPSA)[10] is a free online tool to help programs come together as a team to assess which areas of the Quality Standards are being met by program programs and which may need more attention.

Used in conjunction, the Illinois Afterschool Quality Standards and the IL-QPSA can help programs identify and understand the factors that support or inhibit program performance, take action to improve programs and make positive changes to existing family engagement strategies, and maximize the positive impacts of family engagement for staff, youth, families, and community partners.

No matter how big or small your program's family engagement efforts are, or where you are in the engagement process, remember to remind your team of the importance of their work, that **their efforts have positive real-world, impacts on the lives of those they work with.**

DISCUSS
Work as a team to discuss your program's family engagement beliefs, experiences, goals, and vision

PLAN
Create or modify a Family Engagement Plan that allows for inclusive, individualized, integrated, and impactful engagement opportunities

LEARN
Ask staff for their feedback. Use staff and family experiences to inform future professional development and learning opportunities

IMPLEMENT
Take the time to build relationships with program families and community organizations. Ask for their feedback

ACT Now deeply appreciates your organization's interest in developing and implementing family engagement strategies. We hope that, whether your program is just beginning its family engagement journey or is looking to refine its current engagement practices, that our toolkit provided insights, examples, and resources to support your program with this work.

If you have questions regarding family engagement in afterschool of summer programs or have feedback regarding this Family Engagement Toolkit, please contact a member of the ACT Now team.

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Resources

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3. Illinois State Board of Education. (2015). *Family Engagement Framework Guide*. Retrieved from https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Family-Engagement-Framework-Guide.aspxThe National Parent Teacher Association Center for Family Engagement. (2020). *PTAs Leading the Way in Transformative Family Engagement*. Retrieved from https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/ptas-leading-the-way.pdf

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    http://www.actnowillinois.org/quality-standards/#:~:text=ACT%20Now%20is%20a%20statewide,afterschool%20and%20youth%20development%20programs.
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Sample Family Engagement Plans & Templates

- Build the Out-of-School Time Network. (2007). *Engaging Families in Out-of-School Time Programs Toolkit.*
  - **This toolkit includes a Family Engagement Checklist (pg 5) to assess current engagement efforts and a Family Engagement Action Plan (pg 8) to organize plans and designate tasks for future engagement work.**

- Public Library Association. (n.d). *Family Engagement Planning Guide.*
  - **The templates provided include space to list strategies, assign tasks to staff, identify action steps or needed resources to enact strategies, and create criteria for accomplishing family engagement goals.**

- Golden Rule Schools, Inc. (2016). *Golden Rule Pre-K Family Engagement Action Plan*.
  - **This family engagement plan provides an example of how to organize family engagement goals, the strategies and steps needed to achieve these goals, and ways to measure the results of engagement efforts.**

Connecting with Community Organizations: Tips & Toolkits

- The Colorado Education Initiative. (2015). *Designing Community Partnerships to Expand Student Learning: A Toolkit.*
  - **The toolkit contains several fillable templates and printable tools, including prescreening questions for community partners (pg 19), a communication and collaboration growth chart (pg 29), and a sample community partner and volunteer handbook (32).**

- Youth Development Executives of King County (Washington). (2020). *School-Community Partnership Toolkit.*
  - **Fillable, interactive tools are embedded within each section of this toolkit, including a partnership type identification checklist (pg 21), a shared decision making planning tool (pg 71), and an evaluation calendar template for partnerships (pg 115).**

- March of Dimes. (2012). *Making Community Partnerships Work: A Toolkit.*
  - **This toolkit not only provides guidelines on approaching community partnerships, but also highlights several case studies of effective community partnerships and examines how to address the power dynamics and cultural differences that may exist in relationships with community organizations.**

How To: Create a Family Engagement Committee

- Early Learning Coalition of Duval. (2018). *Planning Parent Advisory Council Meetings.*
  - **This powerpoint presentation is a succinct, easy to understand guide on the role of a family engagement committee, how to recruit family members, and how to host meetings.**

- Virtual Lab School. (n.d.) *Family Engagement Course: Lesson 2, Promoting Family Engagement.*
  - **Lesson 2 of the Virtual Lab School's Family Engagement Course includes information on how to include family engagement committee's or family advisory boards in a family engagement plan. The course also includes a 3-minute video that explains what these committees are and how to utilize them.**

Professional Development Resources

- Hanover Research. (2016). *Best Practices in Engaging Diverse Families.*
  - **This document provides researched-based strategies, suggestions, and case studies for staff to use as they work to engage with diverse families.**

- National Association of Elementary School Principles. (2017). *Six Steps to Partner with Diverse Families.*
  - **For those who are looking for a succinct, step-by-step guide on how to engage with diverse families, this 2-page document offers clear, direct suggestions on improving engagement efforts.**

- Language Castle. (2015). *Family Engagement Strategies for all Languages and Cultures.*
  - **These presentation slides provide clear goals for engaging with families from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and easy to understand steps on how to achieve these goals.**

- Boys and Girls Clubs of America. (n.d.) *Engaging Families and Communities in Support of LGBTQ Youth.*
  - **This resource includes suggestions on how to support LGBTQ+ youth and their families, how to engage with LGBTQ+ parents and caregivers, and how to work with communities on LGBTQ+ topics and issues.**

- Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. (2020). *Creating a Welcoming Early Childhood Program for LGBT-Headed Families.*
  - **These resources describes ways to engage LGBTQ-headed families, including how to create family settings that are welcoming and inclusive.**

- Virtual Lab School. (n.d.) *Family Engagement Course: Lesson 4, Working With Families of Children With Special Needs.*
  - **Lesson 4 includes instructional videos, interactive activities, and examples of engagement to support families of students with special needs.**

- Harvard Family Research Project. (2013). *Professional Development in Family Engagement: A Few Often-Overlooked Strategies for Success.*
  - **This article discusses the importance of professional development (PD) in the area of family engagement, points out effective professional development strategies, and highlights the changing nature of PD.**

- Illinois Afterschool Network (IAN). (n.d.) *Professional Development.*
  - **The IAN's website provides pre-recorded webinars and trainings on topics like examining implicit bias and supporting families during COVID-19.**

- National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. (2020). *Preparing for Challenging Conversations with Families.*
  - **This resource provides information on how to identify possibly challenging conversations with families, steps for how to prepare for these conversations, and strategies to use during conversations with families.**

- Angela Watson. (2015). *How to be Pro-Active with Uninvolved (and Overly-Involved) Parents.*
  - **This article, which is also available in a podcast format, addresses how educators should go about engaging with over-involved or uninvolved families.**

Family Engagement Brainstorming Tool

Instructions: On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions. Between each set of questions, have individuals discuss their answers in small groups. At the end of the activity, have each group share what they discussed.

Think about your educational experiences...

- **What adults in your life were active or influential in your life when you were growing up?**
- **What memories do you have about your family's engagement in your education or development?**
- **Can you recall a time where having your family included in your education or development was really meaningful to you? If not, is there a time where you wish your family was included in your education or development?**

Think about your work experiences...

- **Have you had a particularly positive experience interacting with one of your program's families? Is so, describe the experience.**
- **Have you had a particularly negative experience interacting with one of your program's families? Is so, describe the experience.**
- **Where in your work do you find yourself interacting with families the most?**
- **From your interactions with families, describe what you have learned about them. Do families come from particular ethnic or cultural backgrounds? Can you recall if family members mentioned their jobs or professions?**
- **In what ways, if any, have your own experiences shaped the expectations that you hold for the families that you interact with?**

Think about the future...

- **In your experiences with students and youth, where do you think they would benefit from having increased family engagement?**
- **From your past educational and work experiences, what are some ways that your program could increase its' engagement with families?**

Digital Family Engagement Tracker

Digital Family Engagement Tracking Template

Program Name:	Program Director's Name:				
	Site Coordinator's Name:	DATE RANGE:		xx/xx/xxxx-xx/xx/xxxx	

Week 1

Name of Youth	Name of Youth's Family Member	Staff Member Contacted/Handled Interaction	Length of Contact	Reason For Contact/Notes	Follow-Up / Referral
Phone Call/Text Message					
Jane Doe	Jane Doe's Uncle John Doe	Emma Vibber was called on 4/15 by John Doe	We talked on the phone for 30 minutes	Uncle John Doe called Emma because Jane was expressing feelings of sadness and depression and John didn't know who to reach out to or how to start getting Jane support.	Emma explained the services the program offers as well as a list of resources in John's community. She suggested a good starting point would be Jane's Primary Care Physican.
Name	Name				
Name	Name				
Email					
Name	Name				
Social Media (Like, Comment, Follow)					
Name	Name				
Newsletter/Website/Online Inquriry					
Name	Name				
Other					
Name	Name				

To keep track of your organization's digital communication with families, consider using **ACT Now's Digital Family Engagement Tracking Template.** The excel file, which can be downloaded below, can help ensure that staff members are periodically checking in with families and allows staff members to stay up to date on past connections and conversations had between program staff and families.

DOWNLOAD

Sample Family Welcome Letter

Dear Joshua Johnson,

My name is Sara Smith and I am a program staff member at the Deerfield Boys and Girls Club. In my position, I work with a small group of 10-12 year olds every weekday afterschool. Your son, Michael, is in my group for the upcoming school year! Over the next several months, our group be taking field-trips to local parks and museums, working on science experiments and art projects, and learning strong study and homework habits.

While I am excited to get to know Michael, I am also looking forward to getting to know you and your family! Here at the Deerfield Boys and Girls Club, we work to establish collaborative relationships between our program and your home. We have found that receiving support at our program and at home is important to the educational, mental, and physical growth of our youth participants!

To learn more about our program's family community, I invite you to subscribe to our weekly newsletter and to attend some of our upcoming events, which can be found on the calendar attached to this email/letter. If you ever have concerns about Michael, questions about our program, or would just like to talk, I'm always available during pick-up or drop-off or can be reached via email at sarasmith@bgcdeerfield.com.

I am looking forward to getting to know you this year!

Best wishes,
Sara Smith

This is an **example of a Family Welcome Letter**, which can be printed and sent home with youth or can be emailed to families. Welcome letters should introduce your staff and should aim to make a **personal connection between your program and family members.**