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# An Authentic Family Engagement Framework for Policy Advocacy Organizations

**The National Center  
for Family and Parent Leadership**

Powered by The Early Childhood Investment Corporation

 **Alliance for  
Early Success**  
*Every Child. Every State.*



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**Families with young children are essential to informing policy solutions and strategies to achieve them, and, as such, are important partners to state advocacy organizations.**

Advocacy organizations may engage families directly or through partnerships with organizations that have established relationships with families. Family engagement happens across entire organizations or coalitions, for targeted policy campaigns, or for specific funded initiatives. How organizations engage with families in policy advocacy efforts varies widely due to a range of factors, including capacity and resources. Across the continuum, effective family engagement in advocacy is rooted in trusting relationships between organizations and families themselves.





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**This family engagement framework is intended to support advocates with exploring how they engage and partner with families to advance their policy advocacy efforts across the continuum of listening to families, integrating families as advisors, and sharing power with families.**

The framework invites organizations to reflect on their current practices for family engagement and how their practices enable or enhance their capacity to engage families as informants, advisors, and partners. While the framework is written in a linear way, there is no single or straight path for organizations across the continuum, and organizations may see themselves in more than one place at once.

# AT-A-GLANCE

<b>DIMENSION</b>		<b>Indicators</b>
<b>Partnership</b>	How are relationships built and maintained?	Connections, retention, feedback, authenticity
<b>Reach</b>	Who participates?	Equity, diversity, access
<b>Voice</b>	Who shapes the narrative, messages, and stories?	Engagement with policymakers, storytelling, message development
<b>Power</b>	Who decides?	Policy agenda, advocacy strategy, policy development and implementation
<b>Sustainability</b>	What sustains engagement?	Organizational commitment, structures, compensation, family training, resources



## DIMENSION: Partnership

How are relationships built and maintained?

### INDICATORS

**Connections**

**Retention**

**Feedback**

**Authenticity**



## DIMENSION: Partnership

### How are relationships built and maintained?

INDICATOR	Listening to Families	Integrating Families as Advisors	Sharing Power With Families
<b>Connections</b>	Contact with families is occasional, one-directional, or transactional; trust and mutual understanding are minimal. Interactions primarily serve organizational needs.	Families and staff engage regularly, with ongoing dialogue, visible follow-through, and growing trust. Relationship-building is recognized as part of staff roles, and families begin to feel a sense of belonging.	Families and staff build sustained, trusting relationships that support learning and leadership. Families collaborate with staff as partners, not participants.
<b>Retention</b>	Families participate in one-time or inconsistent activities; no clear retention strategy.	A core group of families is consistently engaged (e.g. monthly) over time.	Families help to sustain engagement and recruit or mentor new families.
<b>Feedback</b>	The organization begins collecting feedback on involvement from families.	Some family suggestions have been incorporated into organizational work.	Family input is consistently incorporated, and feedback loops in place with families.
<b>Authenticity</b>	Only legislative policy outcomes are shared with families.	Families receive capacity building that includes understanding policy processes and timelines.	Families are treated as informed thought partners, collaborating on policy solutions and advocacy strategy.



# DIMENSION: **Reach**

## **Who participates?**

### INDICATORS

**Equity**

**Diversity**

**Access**



## DIMENSION: **Reach**

### **Who participates?**

<b>INDICATOR</b>	<b>Listening to Families</b>	<b>Integrating Families as Advisors</b>	<b>Sharing Power With Families</b>
<b>Equity</b>	Currently engaging accessible families.	Beginning outreach to underrepresented groups.	Actively recruiting marginalized families.
<b>Diversity</b>	Families are primarily English-speaking from similar backgrounds or relies on limited language access supports.	Families engaged reflect some of the state's diversity, including in language, communities/regions, and early childhood programs.	Families reflect the state's full diversity in language, culture, geography, economy, and connections to public services.
<b>Access</b>	Meetings at the organization's convenience/location with limited support for families.	Supports for participation are provided such as food, child care, and interpretation.	Families help design various participation options, including necessary supports, with meetings held in their chosen community spaces.



## DIMENSION: **Voice**

**Who shapes the narrative, messages, and stories?**

### INDICATORS

**Engagement with Policymakers**

**Storytelling**

**Message Development**



## DIMENSION: **Voice**

### Who shapes the narrative, messages, and stories?

INDICATOR	Listening to Families	Integrating Families as Advisors	Sharing Power With Families
<b>Engagement with Policymakers</b>	Staff share family anecdotes with policymakers.	Families are occasionally invited to policymaker engagements e.g., the annual Capitol Day.	Families are equal participants with organizational partners in policymaker engagements.
<b>Storytelling</b>	The organization uses a few family stories as needed, without ongoing family involvement.	The organization supports families in telling their stories effectively.	Organizations and families collaborate on story development and storytelling strategy for advocacy efforts.
<b>Message Development</b>	Organization creates all messaging independently.	Families review and advise on messaging.	Families co-create messaging.



## DIMENSION: **Power**

### **Who decides?**

#### INDICATORS

**Policy Agenda**

**Advocacy Strategy**

**Policy Developement & Implementation**



## DIMENSION: **Power**

### Who decides?

INDICATOR	Listening to Families	Integrating Families as Advisors	Sharing Power With Families
<b>Policy Agenda</b>	Staff set policy priorities internally, with families educated about them and consulted only occasionally.	Families provide ongoing input and advise on policy priorities.	Families and staff collaboratively set policy priorities together, creating space for dialogue and different viewpoints; advance only with family approval.
<b>Advocacy Strategy</b>	Families are informed of or mobilized for advocacy activities.	Families advise on advocacy strategies and tactics.	Families and organizations co-develop advocacy strategies and tactics together.
<b>Policy Development &amp; Implementation</b>	Families are educated on policy solutions and implementation issues, and their input is considered.	Families advise organizations on policy solutions and on implementation challenges or successes.	Families and organizations discuss and co-create policy solutions and identify opportunities to strengthen implementation.



## DIMENSION: **Sustainability**

### **What sustains engagement?**

#### INDICATORS

**Organizational Commitment**

**Structures**

**Compensation**

**Family Training**

**Resources**



## DIMENSION: Sustainability

### What sustains engagement?

INDICATOR	Listening to Families	Integrating Families as Advisors	Sharing Power With Families
<b>Organizational Commitment</b>	Individual staff champion leads family engagement.	Family engagement is recognized by organizational leadership and embedded in strategic plans.	Family engagement is championed by all levels of the organization, including leadership, and is written and clearly operationalized through mission, vision, theory of change, and budget.
<b>Structures</b>	Families have limited or symbolic representation on committees or councils, with little support for meaningful participation.	Families participate in committees or councils with limited shared authority or participate in a separate advisory council without decision-making authority.	Committees and councils include meaningful representation of family leaders who also serve as leads or co-leads with organizational partners, and possess shared decision-making authority.
<b>Compensation</b>	Volunteer-based participation.	Stipends are provided for specific activities.	Consistent payment policy for family participation and consultation.
<b>Family Training</b>	No family leadership development planned; families are educated on early childhood systems and/or trained on advocacy on an as-needed basis.	Occasional family trainings on specific topics to support their role as advocates.	Regular capacity-building opportunities for family leaders.
<b>Resources</b>	Funding for family engagement is inconsistent or tied to a specific grant requirement rather than a strategic priority; family engagement is incorporated into existing staff roles without a dedicated budget.	Funding for family engagement is included in organization's budget as a sustained investment; staff time, family engagement activities, and compensation for families are funded intentionally.	Resource allocation for family engagement efforts is a budget priority for the organization. Families participate in decision-making about how funds are spent for family engagement efforts.



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