



OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Communities often feel slighted and further marginalized when systems make decisions about practice or system changes that will affect their communities without being included from the beginning. Because CFPM partnerships are necessary for collaboratively building implementation readiness and capacity within the agency and community to go to scale, child welfare agencies are encouraged not to make a decision on their own to implement the Practice Model before establishing community partnerships and considering this decision together. In taking this lesson to heart, one implementing jurisdiction delayed practice model implementation so it could more fully explore with its community partners whether the CFPM was a good fit for addressing practice- and system-level barriers for locally-served children and their families. The jurisdiction conveyed to project partners that it was prepared to pull out as a participant in the federal grant project if the local community was not on board. This position demonstrated a genuine willingness to partner and a commitment to proceed only in ways that both agency and community partners felt would benefit local children and families being served. The partnership was strengthened significantly as a result, and community partners have since been actively involved in all aspects of practice model implementation.

The active involvement of community partners includes identifying and engaging community and system partners, as well as key agency staff and leadership, who can help address the particular disproportionate representation and disparate outcomes that emerge in data analysis. To explore this, implementing jurisdictions and their leadership teams asked the following questions:

- Who can help us better understand the lived experiences and needs of this group of children and their families?
- Who does or could play a significant role in supporting this group of children and their families in culturally responsive ways within the community?
- Who brings valuable system knowledge, perspectives and resources to solving the problem?

Two worksheets on the following pages are designed to assist replicating jurisdictions in identifying the cultural and community leaders and system partners who are priorities for initial outreach and engagement, as well as the most appropriate person, position, or level of the organization or community to which to direct the outreach. These worksheets are followed by additional information and tips for successful engagement that respects the community's culture and honors its organizing framework, leadership, and governance structures.

While there will be a tendency to be broad and inclusive, implementing jurisdictions have found it important to focus initially on identifying internal and external partners who bring critical cultural, community, and system influence and expertise to address the specific issues the child welfare agency is trying to solve. As outreach proceeds and agency and community partners come together, the group can then consider together “Who is missing?” and “How do we engage them?”

AICP: Identifying Key Community Partners

Target Population(s) of Children: _____

- Who are respected and recognized as having important knowledge and wisdom about:**
- (1) The culture, lived experience, and needs of the target population(s)**
 - (2) Improving child welfare practice, systems, and outcomes for the target population(s)**

Note: Consider community and Tribal leaders and elders; councils or task forces; Indian Health, Social Service and TANF; cultural and faith-based groups; experienced staff; trusted providers; leaders among caregiver groups; leaders in parent partner, cultural broker, and foster youth alumni programs; and others with experience in system improvement and meeting child/family needs.

Recognized and Respected Leaders	Organization/Person to Whom to Direct the Outreach

AICP: Identifying Key System Partners

Target Population(s) of Children: _____

What system partners are critical to improving child welfare services, supports, and outcomes for the target population(s)?

Consider: union reps; courts; mental health and substance abuse treatment providers; probation; education, etc.

Agency or Department Representative	System Partners to Whom to Direct the Outreach

The child welfare agency and its leadership often know the best way to outreach to system partners, as they are likely to engage with these partners frequently. Outreach to community partners and establishing a child welfare agency culture of active involved community partnerships can be much more challenging. Implementing jurisdictions found that when community partner outreach and engagement was considered a function of leadership it was most successful. High-level child welfare agency leadership is uniquely positioned to create and sustain support for community partner voices in practice model implementation and system change. Outreach should proceed as soon as possible after analyzing data and identifying potential partners. Communities that are engaged early on feel valued in the process of co-creation and take ownership in successes and set-backs.

The child welfare director leads outreach and engagement. When high-level child welfare agency leaders reach out to engage communities and Tribes, they show respect for leaders and elders in the community and for the sovereignty of Tribes. While the agency should ensure there is capacity to conduct the outreach and to support partnership efforts continuously, it should not delay outreach in order to “get our child welfare house in order.” Community and Tribal partners bring valuable perspectives for practice and system changes being considered by the child welfare agency and will help the agency move forward in positive ways on behalf of the children and families that are being served.

Outreach by agency leadership to community partners sets the tone for all other engagement and partnership activities. The outreach will take many different forms and look different in every community. A tailored approach needs to be developed that is sensitive to the worldview and values of the community or Tribe being engaged and its unique organization and structure. This means refraining from “business as usual” and *not* developing the outreach method according to what is “convenient” to the agency (e.g., sending an e-mail invite to engage a community with a relational worldview and a long history of verbal traditions). A persistent and layered approach, including written and verbal outreach, usually followed by in-person engagement, will generally be needed, especially with communities and Tribes who have long experienced the system’s lack of follow-through and authentic partnership.

Several jurisdictions implementing the Practice Model developed numerous tips and strategies. They learned that communities and Tribes whose culture and identity is tied to their lands and region, whose location is rural and a significant distant from the child welfare agency, and for whom assimilation in mainstream society is not a value or goal, are more likely to be engaged when child welfare agency leadership travels to meet with them in person, and there is continued outreach and in-person engagement by agency leadership to nurture, support, and sustain the partnership. The strategies used to address these challenges and other outreach and engagement tips are included in the 2-page printout resource that follows.

Active Involved Community Partnership: Outreach Tips and Strategies

Seek out guidance from staff, local groups focused on similar issues, and others with a relationship with the community or Tribal leaders you are trying to engage. What kind of outreach and follow-through do they suggest?

A trusted liaison may be available (*familiar to the child welfare agency and trusted by the community or Tribe*) who is willing to connect with the community or Tribal leader and bring back important information on boundaries to respect and how best to engage them.

Send an introductory letter with a statement of intent from the child welfare director (*for Tribes, address to the Tribal Chair or Tribal Council to respect the government-to-government relationship*). Express agency commitment to ongoing trust-building and to working together to improve outcomes.

Follow up with phone outreach to set up an in-person meeting.

Meet in person, and find out from the leader what partnership with their community might look like in order to work together to improve outcomes for children and their families.

Listen and receive feedback graciously. Be willing to hear, “No,” or “Yes, but I need to give you a piece of my mind first.” Be willing to try various approaches, and keep at it.

Most systems stop when they hit barriers. If you want better outcomes and deeper engagement with communities, keep going!

Travel to them no matter how far it is; **appreciate** the beauty of the land to which they are tied; find out **what is sacred** to these leaders, and honor that; ask about the **best ways of learning** about the experiences of their children, families, community, or Tribe and carry their suggestions forward.

Inquire into community **events and activities** that might take people away from partnership meetings. For example, summer time is busy with traditional ceremony activities in many Tribal communities. Listen for that, and **do not schedule conflicts** with those times.

Note: The trusted liaison may come back and say, “They do not want anything to do with you...they do not trust you.”

This does not mean to take them off your radar. It may mean you need to build some social capital with leaders from other respected communities or Tribes before they will believe the outreach and interest in engagement is genuine.

With bad history and big tensions in the relationship, the approach may involve jointly exploring the possibility of starting down a new and improved path.



Venue Considerations for Partnership Meetings and Events

- Make sure that you are aware of and verbally recognize the meeting's location or proximity to landmarks which are meaningful or historic for the community or Tribe, such as where communities or their ancestors have experienced trauma.
- Hold meetings in spaces that either appeal esthetically to community or where spaces have been remodeled with community to increase appeal.
- Hold meetings in community spaces or in partner organizations that are accessible and welcoming to community.
- Ensure that meeting times prioritize availability of community over convenience for system staff. If during work hours, attention to child care, transportation, parking, and other logistical considerations may be needed.
- Offer snacks, refreshments, or food for participants whenever possible. At the very least, offer beverages.

The sample letter below sets a great tone and includes helpful messages to give to partners during early outreach and engagement. Be respectful of the time and commitment of partners being invited to attend meetings to assist the agency with its work. Offer a stipend, travel reimbursement, and/or child care for those who do not have an organization willing to cover their time and travel.

Greetings:

We know you all are very busy, and we wanted to share our sincere appreciation for those who joined us at the December 8th Partnership Advisory Committee meeting. We learned much about how to move forward, focus our work, and relationship build together. Community and Tribal involvement and guidance are critical to improving the lives of children and families involved in child welfare.

_____ [insert jurisdiction or agency name] is committed to engaging and learning and appreciates that real change is only possible if we work together and build on the strengths of community and Tribes. We are learning as we go, evolving and improving. As hard as we try, we don't always get it right and want to keep doing better. Your contributions at the meeting on December 8th have helped to develop the draft agenda that is included in this letter, identify others who should be invited to the table, and led to providing you all the materials included with this letter.

Your passion and commitment to this work is appreciated. We are working hard to listen with appreciation and use the guidance and input we are receiving to inform the work.

Please join us for our next meeting:

[Insert date, time and community location of meeting]

[If lunch will be provided or served include that information as well.]

We hope that you will be able to participate in this next meeting on January 6th. Please RSVP to _____ [Insert name, phone number and e-mail address of agency contact]. If you need child care services during the meeting, please RSVP with ages and number of children that will need care. For information on stipend availability for attending this meeting, please contact _____ [Insert name and phone number of agency contact].

Sincerely,

[Signed by Child Welfare or Agency Director]