

Technical Assistance Briefs: A Three-Part Series

Practice-Level Strategies to Create Systems-Level Change: Resources

Regional Partnership Grants act as a catalyst for systems change. This three-part series covers key elements of sustaining change: relationships, resources, and results. **Relationships** formed across systems are crucial to securing the required **resources** to achieve better **results**. Achieving and sustaining change that improves outcomes for families requires a combination of these three elements and an understanding of how they intersect.

Systems change is a permanent shift in doing business that relies on **relationships** across systems—and within the community—to secure needed **resources** to achieve better **results** for all children, parents, family members, and the family as a whole.

This brief:

- ▶ Examines the importance of identifying, developing, and maintaining resources across substance use and mental health disorder treatment, child welfare, the courts, and other service systems. The goal is to support collaborative, family-centered practices and policies to help families at risk of, or affected by, parental substance use disorders (SUDs) and involvement in child welfare services.
- ▶ Highlights the essential elements of successful resource development while offering considerations for sustainability—such as human resource development, community building, funding mechanisms, and institutionalization necessary to sustain these resources for long-term change.
- ▶ Provides RPG lessons and strategies on how cross-systems collaborative capacity building can lead to increased family-centered treatment and resources to serve families more effectively.



Relationships

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Resources

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Results

Introduction and Overview

The term “resources,” as it relates to systems change, has a broad definition that is important to fully understand. While many view resources as exclusively related to money or funding, it is essential to consider community investment and human resources as critical to sustaining systems-level change. A community’s commitment to ensuring an array of services in support of family well-being contributes to the longevity of any systems-level change. The ongoing dedication of human resources for leadership and direct service provision is key to integrating system innovations and long-term maintenance of systems change. Finally, financial resources such as staff salaries, ongoing cross-system training, data collection, and evaluation are necessary to consistently cover the hard cost of system innovation.

Collaborative teams benefit from considering the connection between **relationships**, **resources**, and **results**. All the resource types—community, human, and financial—rely on the quality and variety of relationships. ‘Strong, consistent, community-level

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relationships, based on a shared vision and supported by a collaborative governance structure built for longevity, ensure that the will of champions and the larger community can support long-term systems change.¹ A strong community relationship built on mutual trust and vision leads partners to share their available resources, seek new ones, and work together to maintain the changes needed to accomplish positive results for families. Achieving success based on innovations developed at the will of the community—and implemented by service providers—creates an environment committed to the human and financial resources necessary for institutionalization of the innovation and long-term systems change.²

Elements of Systems Change: Resources

Community investment of human and financial resources, combined with strong relationships and clear results, can ensure that innovations and effective practices will support families as long-term systems change. Certain steps can help communities and collaborative teams develop and maintain the resources needed for systems-level change. Staff can review, implement, and revisit each step often to achieve the most robust results.

Assessing Need and Capacity

The first steps are to assess current systems (i.e., identifying any systems change strategies underway) and analyze gaps in current approaches. Collaborative teams can examine each system's capacity to meet the needs of the specific population and achieve the desired changes.

Community mapping identifies existing services and supports needed by children, parents, family members, and families as a unit, while identifying any gaps that exist. The most effective strategy relies on a network of partners in the community coming together regularly, in person or virtually, to identify the full breadth and depth of services aimed at, or available to, the clients they serve, and continue to identify and resolve gaps that may exist. For RPG innovations, the identified populations of focus across sites are quite diverse, but all serve children, parents, and families at risk of, or affected by, parental substance use disorders (SUD) and involvement in child welfare services.

Identifying comprehensive and responsive services for the population of focus requires a broad understanding of the “client” using a family-centered approach, and a wide range of community partners that know the services well. A variety of tools and templates exists to support community mapping efforts. Though many communities conduct this process informally through discussions, these tools can help teams consider a wide range of potential partners as collaborative team members—improving engagement of partners who remain committed to common outcomes and possess the resources to support a comprehensive service array and long-term sustainability of systems change efforts.³



¹ To learn more about how to develop and structure these relationships in support of long-term systems change, please view [Practice-Level Strategies to Create Systems-Level Change: Relationships](#).

² To learn more about how to create and use results to support long-term systems change, please view [Practice-Level Strategies to Create Systems-Level Change: Results](#).

³ To learn more about community mapping, please view [Practice-Level Strategies to Create Systems-Level Change: Results](#).

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Direct service providers have the information needed to complete a thorough community mapping and gap analysis with a deep understanding of availability, access, and quality of services. Additionally, their buy-in is essential for any systems-change effort, since they will implement the innovations.

Once staff have completed the initial review of the service array, partners can assess for quality, capacity for growth or expansion, current innovations and change efforts, leadership, and expertise. They can then start to identify gaps in the current service array and create opportunities to develop, enhance, expand, or sustain innovations for systems change. It is crucial to incorporate data and results in the assessment of services, including information about variations in service provision in the community, responsive service availability, and differences in outcomes. By doing so, collaborative teams can ensure a comprehensive evaluation that supports improvements in service delivery.

This gap analysis process, supported by tools such as a drop-off analysis, systems walkthrough, and data dashboards, can ensure consideration of both the presence of services in the community as well as the quality and accessibility of those services across all families. These tools enable partners to identify gaps in services as well as practice and process challenges that might not otherwise come to light by community mapping alone.

This assessment sets the stage for service improvement and innovation while creating goals for development, redirection, or blending of resources to support system change. These changes can range from collaborative development and streamlining services to developing new programming and enacting policy. Regardless of goals needed for improvement or development, it is important to “start with the end in mind,” ensuring that staff consider sustainability early in any systems-change effort.

Establishing Partnerships

By establishing meaningful partnerships with service providers, decision makers, and the community, a complete picture of resource needs, current capacity, and opportunities to secure additional resources emerges. These collaborative relationships ensure a commitment to develop new resources, facilitate efficient resource blending, and institutionalize practices and policies necessary for systems change. Assessment and shared goal development provide opportunities for partners to share their own motivations while beginning to understand alternate perspectives about participating in collaborative systems change.

Community partners have important insights into the service array from a resource and financial perspective. Commitment to collaborative goals—focused on resource development and established by community partners—provides unique flexibility and connection to resources that some partners cannot access on their own. These include grant funding, human resources in a variety of agencies, and connections to a wide range of community champions and political partners. By leveraging these resources, collaboratives can enhance the effectiveness and reach of their initiatives.

Establishing commitment to shared goals and finding champions within family service systems and agency leaders enable those in positions of power to make decisions about resource allocation. By sharing the positive results of systems innovations both in terms of data and family “stories,” collaborative teams can garner support. Engagement in planning, implementation, and ongoing feedback about progress allows partners to solidify and sustain their commitment.





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Strategies and Considerations

1. Securing Resources

Communities can identify and pursue the resources necessary to achieve their shared systems-change vision through clear and comprehensive needs assessment and partnership development. Strategies used to access these resources will vary based on the type of systems change undertaken.

Strategies to increase access to human resources:

- ▶ Implement cross-system training and education to establish shared best practices across systems, enhance quality of service implementation, improve knowledge sharing across agencies and community partners, and improve referral pathways.
- ▶ Direct service coordination, joint case planning, or co-location of staff to eliminate duplication of services across multiple organizations and enhance access for families.
- ▶ Bring multiple, similar projects or programs under a common leadership and governance structure to decrease overhead costs, align similar goals, benefit from “economies of scale” by sharing administrative costs, and implement joint case planning to avoid parallel processes.

Strategies to increase access to community resources:

- ▶ Expand access to, and capacity of, currently available services through enhanced information sharing and collaborative communication among community providers.
- ▶ Offer multidisciplinary training for service providers on the unique needs of these families; integrate best practices for family services to support longstanding and sustainable community resources to effectively serve this population.
- ▶ Enhance community support by engaging partners to identify community needs; teach partners about effective practices and positive outcomes including cost savings of systems change efforts.
- ▶ Strongly evaluate implemented strategies to illustrate the benefits of support to these families. Doing so can decrease stigma about this population and encourage systems-level change that enhances their well-being. This leads to well-informed partners who can become champions for these efforts.

Financial resources for sustainable systems fall into two main areas: new funding sources and reorganization/redirection of existing sources.

Strategies for new funding:

- ▶ Research and identify how to access common state and federal grant funding including entitlement programs, formula (block) grants, discretionary grants, and direct payments.
- ▶ Access grant funding from community philanthropic organizations that can provide seed (pilot) funding or ongoing support through regular grants or commitment of endowments to certain projects.

Lessons from the Field

Several RPG recipients have implemented family treatment court interventions in which partner agencies give staff time to case plan and attend case staffing and court progress hearings, supporting a collaborative approach to systems change through coordinated responses.

By educating partners on effective practices and sharing information on positive RPG outcomes, one grantee improved community perceptions and decreased stigma related to pregnant women with SUDs while developing political and fiscal support for sustainability of their innovative project.

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- ▶ Garner support through evaluation, outcomes, education, and partnership to include systems changes aimed at these families as a new line item in local, state, and federal funding streams. This effort could include development of a new funding stream during annual budgeting for local, county, or state funding organizations.
- ▶ Consult with states that have successfully identified new funding strategies.

Strategies for reorganization or redirection of existing funding sources:

- ▶ Review funding in the child welfare system, treatment systems, courts, and supportive services such as childcare, health care, and aftercare services to identify how current funding across partners may be blended or braided to fund collaborative system change.
- ▶ Commit in-kind support in the form of administration, supervision, direct service staff, office space, training, and/or other concrete resources and staff to support a collaborative approach to systems change and coordinated responses.
- ▶ Contract for service provision, concrete resources, staffing, or administration to redirect resources from a specific agency to a web of partners with expertise in services and innovations already proven effective for families affected by parental substance use and mental health disorders and child welfare involvement. This funding mechanism allows for the contracted partner to add their expertise while allowing for support, fiscal oversight, shared accountability, and ongoing commitment to success from the contractor organization.

Collaboration with a wide variety of partners can provide access to funding aimed at certain system partners or service elements. Additionally, a shared commitment to meeting the requirements of funding secured collaboratively can enhance buy-in from partners, creating ongoing commitment and sustainability of funded system changes.

A funding matrix tool can help collaborative teams identify what resources staff need to sustain innovations and support ongoing systems change, while identifying what avenues they have available, or would like to pursue, for financial, human, and community resources.

2. Maintaining Systems-Level Changes

When a system has changed practices to better meet the needs of the community, and available resources support these changes, institutionalization is necessary to ensure the changes last. Documentation of changes (e.g., written practice guidance, rules, statutes, legislation) and shared responsibility for resources, often linked to shared outcomes, are critical for long-term systems-level change.

Documentation of practice changes codified in agency policy and procedure—along with written and signed memoranda of understanding and/or enacted rule, statute, or legislation—are critical to maintaining systems change over time and across resource changes. Those changes may include staff turnover, shifts in the political landscape, and resource allocation modifications. These concrete systems change integrations can take time to implement and often require the will of a group of dedicated partners.

Lessons from the Field

One coordinating agency provided case coordination services, thereby eliminating redundant coordinator positions. The agency then used the extra funding to pay for peer support staff members who have provided greater support to families.





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A strong governance structure is an important strategy to garner the ongoing support needed for sustaining systems change. To learn more about developing and maintaining partnerships for systems change, please review Brief 1 in the [Practice-Level Strategies to Create Systems-Level Change](#) series. Development and implementation of a robust dissemination strategy based on sharing strong evaluation and data with local, county, and state leaders has proven to be a successful strategy to ensure an ongoing commitment to maintaining systems changes.

3. Ensuring Sustainability of Resources for Systems Change

Planning for Systems Change

A sustainability assessment (or sustainability planning template) can help the team develop a strategy that includes partnerships, resource opportunities, and viability of maintaining innovations and practice changes based on community conditions. Reviewing the sustainability plan regularly enables partnerships to share data and information on agreed-upon outcomes for ongoing assessment of fidelity, service drift, quality of service, changing service needs, and identifying changes in community or state conditions that may affect the sustainability of systems change.

Strategies to Overcome Barriers

Common Barrier: Partners fail to thoroughly assess services and gaps in their community or state by not involving key partners in leadership and direct services, potentially resulting in an incomplete sustainability plan.

Strategies:

- ▶ Engage a team that can recognize shifting agency and community priorities, identify and resolve gaps as they appear, revisit their shared vision regularly, and reaffirm their commitment to serving families.
- ▶ Embed sustainability planning, both financial and relationship-based support, in any initiative from the beginning, and ensure staff frequently and regularly review. Sustainability starts at the first meeting, always with the idea that the systems change must demonstrate that it improves the well-being of families.

Common Barrier: Partners avoid values talk and fail to develop shared outcomes and shared accountability. Staff report data on monthly activities or agency-specific outcomes rather than collaborative results, creating an inability to demonstrate effectiveness and a lack of partner buy-in necessary for long-term systems change.

Strategies:

- ▶ Select partners committed to working together to develop shared goals; develop agreements on how to measure progress—and with whom you can share resources to achieve those goals.
- ▶ Select early outcome and resource goals to ensure a common vision; make priorities clear and identify and resolve any conflicting goals based on differing perspectives or priorities among various partners.
- ▶ Adopt clear systems change goals early in a project; this works to create buy-in among partners by ensuring they have a stake and a role in the larger effort as opposed to their distinct project/program/agency.

Lessons from the Field

An RPG recipient collaborated with one of its state's primary Medicaid managed care organizations (MCO) to integrate physical and related health care plans in the grantee's three RPG counties. The recipient and MCO identified shared goals and combined resources for staff trainings. The way in which providers in the three counties have collaborated to engage and retain hard-to-reach families has positively influenced managed care planning in the larger region.

One family-centered program sustained their innovations past the initial project period by redirecting and developing new funding from partners. Sources included the local county's general budget, the state's substance use prevention and treatment agency funds, and early childhood funding that the state administered through the county health department. To supplement that funding, this program developed a model replication manual and provides fee-based training on their approach across the state.

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Common Barrier: Collaboratives emphasize grant funding rather than developing a funding plan based on existing institutionalized funding.

Strategy:

- ▶ Recognize that grant funding is not a sustainability plan; however, demonstration grants are a great way to test out a promising practice. The grant can include a partnership plan to identify existing, institutionalized, ongoing funding as positive outcomes appear. Once the grant begins, maintain communication with state and local leaders to improve relationship-based resource development (i.e., true collaboration) and leveraging of grant funding already in the community.

Lessons from the Field

RPG recipients have identified Medicaid-eligible evidence-based practices in their state to ensure that insurance reimbursements can sustain innovations at clinical sites after validating their effectiveness during an initial demonstration period.

Resources

The NCSACW [website](#) provides practice and policy publications, webinars, videos, trainings, state examples, and additional resources on topics related to serving systems.

The following resources provide information on common funding sources and finance strategies that states and communities across the country use:

[Implementing a Family-Centered Approach—Module 3: Collaboration to Support Family-Centered Practices at the County and State Level](#): This module highlights the state- and local-level leadership and collaboration required to successfully implement the family-centered practice lessons presented in Module 2. This module describes collaborative efforts and policy-level activities such as priority setting, data collection and evaluation, tapping existing and new funding streams, and other collaborative strategies to ensure the implementation and sustainability of a family-centered approach.

[Sustainability Planning Toolkit](#): The Sustainability Planning Toolkit provides collaboratives, organizations, and programs with the tools needed for planning and implementing a sustainability approach for innovative projects.



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Tools

RPGs have used these tools to support and strengthen resource development:

- ▶ Community Mapping*: a method to promote cross-systems collaboration and align initiatives, while identifying and securing partnerships with existing local programs, service providers, and stakeholders
- ▶ Program and [Systems Walkthrough](#): a structured process designed to identify effective practices as well as barriers that contribute to achieving desired outcomes for children, parents, and families across the various helping systems
- ▶ Funding Inventory Template* and Example: This template and example can be used as a starting point to track and inventory all funding available for a specific project. It includes the lead agency, annual cost, current funding sources, potential funding, and unfunded balance.
- ▶ Sustainability Discussion Guide*: This document briefly sets forth the elements needed for a sustainability plan.
- ▶ RPG Sustainability Matrix*: This table can be used by planners to walk through the steps of sustainability planning.

*These tools can be found in the [Sustainability Planning Toolkit](#).



For more information about these tools and resources, visit [National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare](#).



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