![RPG Regional Partnership Grants]

Technical Assistance Briefs: A Three-Part Series

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

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 how using cross-systems data to create shared goals and outcomes can inspire meaningful change for families at a program level, and how those **results** can bring about long-term practice and systems-level changes

▶ Stresses the need for a collaborative approach to:

– Map and collect the available data across systems

– Facilitate practice improvement within a continuous quality improvement framework, and with a focus on identifying and resolving barriers

– Use data to decide where to direct resources

▶ Provides RPG lessons of successes and challenges in using results to sustain systems change

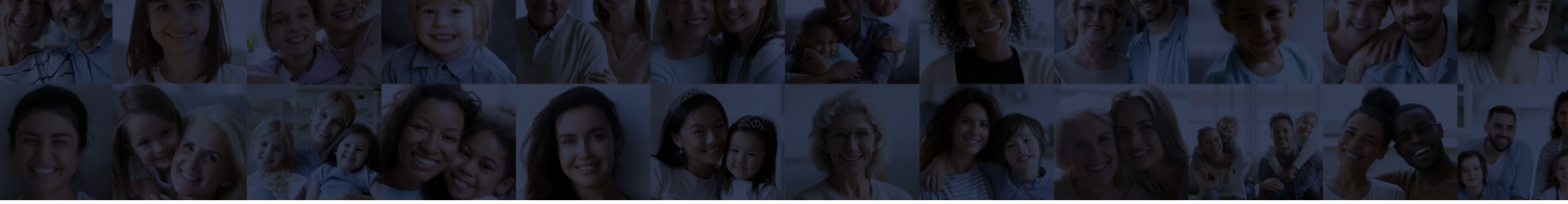Relationships

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Resources

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Results

Introduction and Overview

Agencies achieve their greatest success by working together to serve the complex needs of children, parents, family members, and families as a whole. Systems traditionally have distinct missions and populations of focus; as a result, families must interact with various agencies individually to meet their needs. These systems—working together through **data sharing, relationship building, cross-training, and resource pooling**—can positively affect outcomes for families. When siloed, agencies miss the opportunity to provide a cohesive, evidence-based response to the multifaceted challenges families face.

Over 13 years of Regional Partnership Grant (RPG) lessons have shown that long-term sustainability successes depend largely on programs' work to establish collaborative goals, outcomes, and indicators. RPG recipients identify the value of analyzing data at a cross-systems level to determine effectiveness of the interventions implemented. Partners who work together across systems to identify shared goals and outcomes have the greatest opportunity to successfully sustain some or all of their RPG program.

Collaborative Approach to Results-Driven Systems Change

Working Together Across Systems

Collaboration and relationship building are critical to successful outcomes for all children, parents, and family members. When representatives from each system come together, there is an opportunity to understand successful practices (as well as barriers) that contribute to positive outcomes for all families. Regional partnerships and other similar collaboratives can establish practices and protocols that embrace the value of data to effectively track families' involvement across systems and monitor the partnership's progress in meeting the needs of all families.

Lessons from the Field

Rounds 2-6 Regional Partnership Grantees participated in a national cross-site evaluation. The process includes acquiring administrative data about the safety and permanency of children and the substance use disorder treatment of adults, in addition to the use of databases for data reporting and administration of standardized instruments to measure child well-being, family functioning, and recovery. The cross-site evaluation is important to demonstrate the effectiveness of the overall RPG program.

The cross-system partners must also work to develop a consensus on the values that underlie their collaboration as a basis for agreeing on critical issues. Multidisciplinary teams, using a tool like the Collaborative Values Inventory (CVI), have an opportunity to discuss areas of dissonance and commonalities. A collaborative mission statement based on shared values and principles helps specify the goals of the partnership and establish joint accountability. A clear mission emphasizes the ultimate client-specific outcomes of the collaborative approach as well as the systems changes necessary to sustain them. In addition, a statement of agreed upon principles ensures the collaborative family outcomes are more important than any one agency's activities, and the partners will monitor outcomes to assess whether the lives of children, parents, and families have improved.

Community mapping of current agencies, organizations, and initiatives involved with families helps staff understand the current landscape while inviting partner agencies to join the collaborative effort, thereby expanding shared accountability across the community. Community mapping at this macro level builds an understanding among partners about existing and potential services, resources, and support while reducing fragmentation and duplication.[1]

Considerations for Building a Collaborative Team

▶ Include cross-agency representation to ensure a systems approach.

▶ Ensure systems-level administrators participate. They often work across departments and budgets—with the ability to devote staff time, resources, and capacity to make policy changes.

▶ Involve on-the-ground staff who will work closely with families and implement interventions.

▶ Include community members representative of the families being served, and with personal experience of the systems. (Preferably with a stipend for their work, if possible.)

▶ Explore the use of a communication protocol to establish clearly defined practice standards.

[1] To learn more about how to create and use results to support long-term systems change, please view Practice Level Strategies to Create System Level Change: Resources.
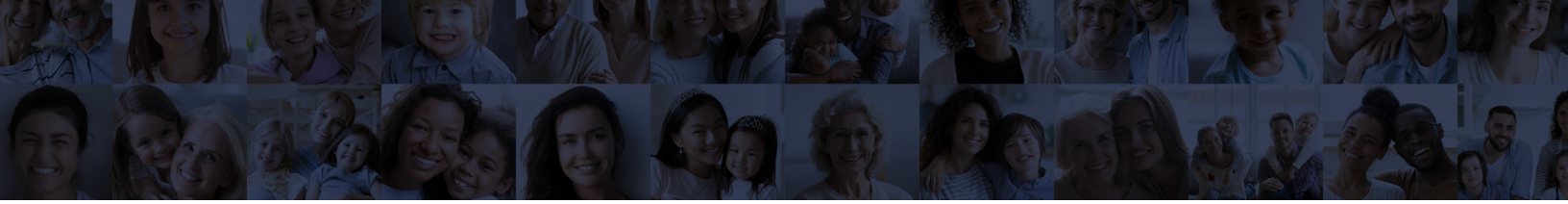
A systems walkthrough provides a way to understand the experience of families receiving services across the various agencies. It can identify how practices in one agency might affect services in another, and how that can either support or hinder a family's progress. Once a community has developed a shared understanding of current practices across the network of systems serving families, they can begin to see how collaborative attention to goals, processes, and outcomes can ultimately improve results.

Defining Shared Outcomes and Determining How to Measure

Understanding what data each agency captures is an important part of creating a baseline on how families are faring across multiple domains and where improvements are needed. Each agency collects data in different ways, at different points, and categorizes it based on their own systems and considerations. Interpreting data from each system is a multifaceted task requiring an understanding from each agency about (1) which specific data relate to family needs, characteristics, and other indicators; (2) how each agency codes these data; and (3) any limitations that may affect the data's validity. Cross-systems data collection is complex and takes time. Bringing together the right personnel for these conversations is key to developing written processes and protocols that become institutionalized.

Lessons from the Field

Many RPG recipients analyzed how families were faring in multiple ways, including (1) accessibility of substance use disorder (SUD) treatment and recovery services; (2) ability for children to remain at home with their families; and (3) positive effects on child and family well-being measures, including safety and permanency. Using data from SUD treatment partners and child welfare, RPG recipients collaboratively determined problem areas and proposed strategies in response. They next determined key indicators for measuring outcomes of their intervention and analyzing how those outcomes affected the problem areas (as demonstrated by the initial data). Ongoing collaboration throughout implementation is key since the proposed intervention strives to improve family outcomes across systems.

Who needs to be at the table?

▶ Representation from all systems that serve and support children, parents, family members, and the family as a whole

▶ Involvement across systems of personnel responsible for the actual collection, analysis, and reporting of their data

▶ Partners and community leaders who can assist in data interpretation and dissemination

▶ Policymakers who can help establish permissions and pathways to sharing the information

Formalizing what data elements are being sought, by which agency, and for what purposes, through the establishment of Data Sharing Agreements is an important aspect to the collaborative approach—often done through formalized Memoranda of Agreement or Understanding (MOA, MOU). Collaborative teams often find time spent establishing a data-sharing agreement beneficial to the ongoing relationships beyond the life of a grant—both in cases of staff turnover and in collaborating on additional projects.

Facilitating Practice Improvements Within a Continuous Quality Improvement Framework

Once an intervention or new multi-system approach to service delivery begins, meeting regularly as a cross-system team for the purpose of monitoring and analyzing data is key to understanding who is benefiting, in what ways, and to what extent. Practice and policy changes are justified by their positive effect on **all** families, which means coming together to explore which families are
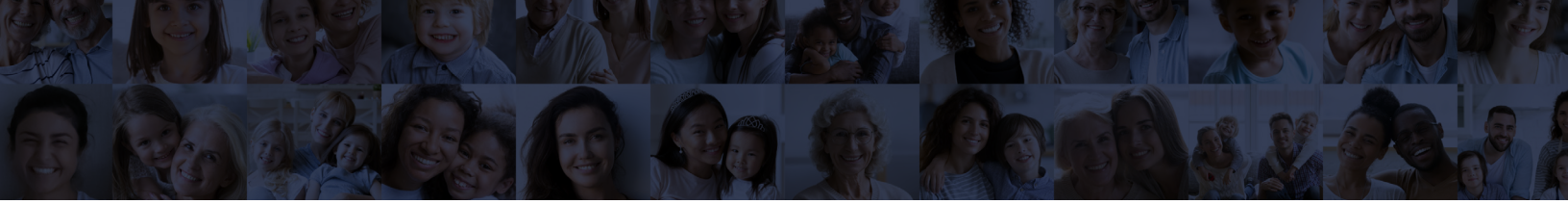
not as well served by the intervention or approach, and refining practices to ensure effective engagement, access to services, and positive outcomes. Regularly sharing data across systems is a chance to see how changes in one system can affect another, while also understanding the results of changed practices within and across each system over time. This approach to continuous quality improvement requires consistent attendance at team meetings, and adequate staff time and financial resources to support the team's efforts.

Data Utility and Value

▶ Building a collaborative system that embraces the value of data

▶ Ownership of data among team members

▶ Routine sharing and discussion of data with all levels of staff, community, state, and other key partners

▶ Governing committees and leadership that use data to inform decision making and show improvement over baselines

▶ Solidifies regular performance monitoring and evaluation as standard operating best practices as opposed to time-limited grant requirements

Data snapshots and dashboards help clarify goals, progress, and performance measures or outcomes as staff implement changes. Data snapshots focus team discussions on the progress and challenges.
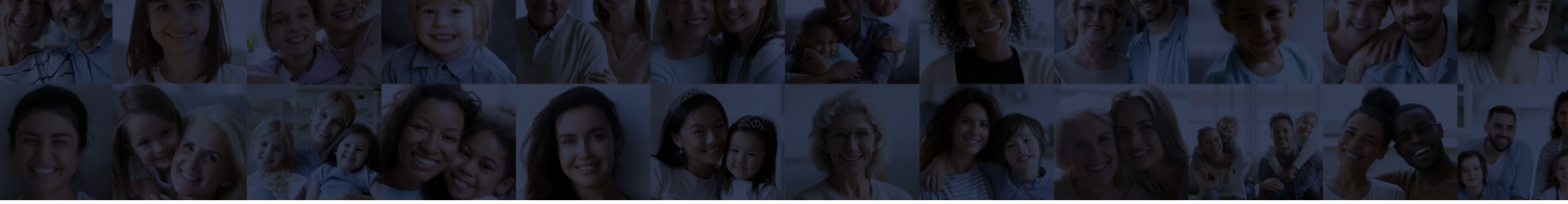
By reviewing data that includes overall and across family characteristics, partners can identify:

▶ Barriers in recruitment and retention

▶ Improvements in recruitment and retention when new strategies are implemented

▶ Specific drop-off points in engagement

▶ Effectiveness of evidence-based and evidence-informed practices with certain populations

▶ Opportunities for improved cross-systems collaboration

▶ Opportunities to identify and eliminate service access barriers

Strategies and interventions used by RPG recipients to identify and resolve system-level barriers for families and improve outcomes:

▶ Implement universal substance use and mental health disorder screening at time of initial child welfare involvement to ensure early and identification of families who could benefit from services

▶ Co-locate SUD treatment staff and child welfare workers to streamline coordination of services and cross-train on relevant issues

▶ Enhance case management to focus on in-home services and partnering with therapeutic supports, allowing families to safely remain together

Systems-Level Infusion and Sustainability

Ideally, staff institutionalize the collection and use of cross-systems data rather than relying on occasional or ad hoc data collection. This allows for compiling knowledge over time related to how the agencies are changing and how those changes affect families. Results drive resources and funding allocation.

Communities invested in systems change use data to ask:

▶ Does what we are learning or doing change how we should invest or spend our money?

▶ Does what we are learning justify sustained or increased resources? (Cost analysis)

▶ Is the intervention or change affecting all families in the same way?

When successful changes happen at the systems level—and those systems represent multiple agencies committed to further improvements—there may be opportunities for blended and braided funding, shifts to funding streams, and increased partnering to share resources. Using results to advocate for additional or sustained resources requires attention to cross-system information gathering, along with collective and effective messaging (and marketing) about evidence the intervention is working. A data dashboard shared regularly with funders powerfully demonstrates the collaboration and prioritization of using data to understand problems, while refining practices, policies, and interventions.

Although many agencies can recite the effect their individual program has had, they often struggle to explain what happens when families no longer participate. A collaborative team focused on data sharing and cross-system results has an opportunity to show how these factors affect family safety, stability, and wellness across the network of systems. For long-term sustainability planning, agencies can document the effectiveness of the innovation as early as possible to illustrate progress and cost savings. While agencies typically invest the resources to capture the initial data and intervention results, follow-up data points rarely receive long-term funding at the program level. This further highlights the need for an institutionalized process for data collection and sharing along the continuum of care and across the agencies serving families.

Cross-System Data-Sharing Considerations

An additional consideration for data sharing is the protections set forth by laws such as 42 CFR Part 2, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), and other agency policies that ensure families' information is treated ethically and safely. Accessing data from each system may require various layers of permission. Time and effort toward creating a comprehensive data-sharing agreement are essential.

Lessons from the Field

One project put several strategies in place to support sustainability, including using staff already employed at their partnering child welfare agency, training staff to deliver the intervention, and involving community agencies in implementation.

Resources

The NCSACW [website](#) provides practice and policy publications, webinars, videos, online trainings, state examples, and additional online resources specific to using results to drive systems change.

[Building Collaborative Capacity Series](#): This series provides states and communities with strategies to create cross-systems collaborative teams, communication protocols, and practice innovations. These strategies aim to improve screening, assessment, and engagement to best serve families affected by substance use disorders (SUDs) and child welfare service involvement.

[Sustainability Planning for Regional Partnerships Technical Assistance Brief](#): This RPG technical assistance (TA) brief presents detailed steps grantees can take to begin sustainability planning of their grant projects. The brief provides a set of questions about mobilizing community resources and conducting early partner engagement.

[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.

Tools

RPGs have used these tools to strengthen their collaborative efforts to achieve improved results:

▶ Drop-off Analysis: a structured analysis using a systems lens to see how handoffs between systems work and identify opportunities for improved family engagement

▶ Data Dashboard: an ongoing update summarizing shared goals, jointly established baselines, and current results

▶ Data Snapshot: a tool used to track clients throughout their time with a program beginning at intake and ending with discharge

▶ [Collaborative Values Inventory (CVI)](#): an anonymous 46-item questionnaire to assess the prevalence of shared ideas and values across groups of professional disciplines

▶ Program and [Systems Walkthrough](#): a structured process designed to identify effective practices as well as barriers that contribute to achieving desired outcomes for infants and their families across the various helping systems

▶ Survey of Policies and Practices: a survey designed to understand how practices within one system, with multiple agencies (e.g., hospitals, child welfare), implement a practice and/or approach a specific need

▶ Community Mapping*: a method to promote cross-systems collaboration and align initiatives, while identifying and securing partnerships with existing local programs, service providers, and other partners

*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](#).