

Family Youth Advisory Councils

*This workbook is offered as a guide to starting a
Family Youth Advisory Council for organizations
serving Families, Youth and Children*

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Introduction

Family and Youth Advisory Council Meetings are formal structures, facilitated by youth and/or family partners, to routinely gather information from consumers about the agency's services. These councils are an important quality assurance and improvement strategy. Through council meetings agencies receive commentary and recommendations about how their services are being received by youth and family members, and how they can be improved.

During Council meetings, youth and family members will have the opportunity to identify aspects of the services and supports, which they have received, and that have been helpful and are associated with achievement of their goals. In addition, they will have the opportunity to share their concerns about access to or the quality of care, along with their recommendations for improvements.

Information from these meetings can, and should, in turn be used to inform programmatic adjustments, to build upon areas of success and address areas of concern, and to improve the overall quality of care and effectiveness of the agency's services.

Dynamic Council meetings will also result in significant benefits for consumers and family members including:

- Serving as a forum to receive information, respond to questions, and clarify rumors or misunderstandings.*
- An opportunity to build peer-to-peer support.*
- Gain tools and confidence to be more effective partners in their own care (in the case of youth) and the care of their child (in the case of parents).*
- Engage parents/youth who may have been reluctant to attend meetings and other traditional activities.*

Preparing to Establish a Council

The value of Council meetings is enhanced by the breadth and diversity of the youth and family members that participate, the skill and ease with which the facilitators lead the meeting, and the extent to which information from the meetings is seriously reviewed and attended to by the sponsoring agency. As a consequence, establishing highly successful Council meetings requires attention to the following areas:

- Breadth of participation by current consumers (youth and family members).*
- Selection, training and support of meeting facilitators.*
- Involvement of an agency administrator that actively supports “champions” the convening of Council meetings on the one hand, and the diligent review and use of meeting comments/recommendations to inform programmatic adjustments, on the other hand.*

The following are important considerations when establishing and supporting Council meetings:

- Identify an agency administrator who will actively “champion” and support the process of establishing Council meetings, including recruiting, training and supporting youth and family member facilitators, and providing resources necessary for inviting participants and hosting meetings.*
- Survey key individuals from throughout the agency (line staff, supervisors, managers, administrators, board of directors) about what they would like to learn from Council meetings, or what information from youth and family members about the services they receive would be of most value to them. Results from such a survey can help the administrator “champion” when crafting the mission and goals for the Council, and increase the relevance of meeting comments and recommendations for agency staff.*
- Consider other ways in which information from the Council meetings can be magnified by including opportunities for family and/or youth, who cannot attend meetings, to share their perspectives. For example, consider establishing blogs, online chats, surveys, and so forth.*

- *Create an agency Family and Youth Advisory Council policy and procedure that articulates the mission, goals and procedures for how meetings will be conducted and meeting reports used to inform quality improvement activities.*
- *Create an action plan with assignments and timelines. See Appendix A for a sample Council meeting timeline.*
- *Publicize your Council meetings, sharing the meeting’s mission and goals, with both staff and consumers. For example, information about the Council meetings could be shared with staff through a memo and/or agency newsletter, and with youth and family members through posters, brochures, and/or notices.*

Additionally, consider posting information about the Council meetings in your lobby next to the FYRT poster, informing family/youth about how they can get involved including contact information for the facilitators and the lead agency administrator, and details on the date and location of Council meetings.

Agency Advisory Council Checklist

- ✓ *Agency’s plan for engagement*
- ✓ *Identify Sr. management point of contact*
- ✓ *Agency’s or Programs Vision for Advisory Council*
- ✓ *Plan for Council Structure*
- ✓ *Choosing a facilitator*
- ✓ *Agency’s plan for dissemination to staff*
- ✓ *Plan for reporting to Council*
- ✓ *Plan for receiving Council feedback*
- ✓ *Plan for disseminating Council feedback/activities*
- ✓ *Plan for Quality Improvement needs*

Facilitators

Strong and well-supported facilitators are central to the success of your Council meetings. Facilitators need to lead candid and constructive dialogue that results in meaningful and actionable comments and recommendations that will have programmatic value for the sponsoring agency.

Ideally, facilitators are youth and family partners, well-trained and supported to succeed. Facilitators will need to possess both relevant life experiences and skills sets specific to this role. Importantly, facilitators will need to maintain an objective and neutral stance and be able to support and enhance partnership between professional partners and families/youth.

Identifying, training and fully supporting facilitators is critical to the success of your Council meetings. Consider the following when recruiting facilitators:

- 1) Engage direct service workers to assist in identifying and recruiting family and/or youth for facilitator roles.
- 2) *In choosing facilitators, consider whether they have the experiences and abilities to successfully lead Council meetings.*

See appendix A for a sample facilitator’s guide to hosting meetings.

Facilitator Skills Set

- *Lived experience as a youth consumer or family member*
- *Organized and responsible*
- *Self-motivated and confident*
- *Comfortable with public speaking*
- *Clear communicator*
- *Active listener*
- *Able to maintain the meeting focus, politely manage digressions or interruptions*
- *Able to maintain an objective or neutral point of view as a facilitator*
- *Able to summarize participant comments into thoughtful meeting summaries*
- *CORE demonstration to the principal of partnership and PFYPP*

Meeting Design

Based on input from staff and consumers, design your Council meetings, including attention to the structure, facilitation, and goals of the meetings.

Be clear about how information and recommendations from the meetings will be used by the agency to make programmatic adjustments.

Attend to meeting logistics, including location, scheduling, materials and refreshments.

Develop meeting invitations and strategies for outreaching and engaging youth and family members.

Consider the following items when designing your Council meetings:

- Is there a lead administrator “champion” that is overseeing and supporting the design of your Council meetings?*
- Is the mission and goals of the Council meetings clear?*
- Is there a plan for how to (1) summarize meeting comments and recommendations, (2) prepare and share meeting reports with consumers, staff and managers, and (3) use the meeting reports to inform programmatic improvements?*
- Are meeting logistics conducive to robust participation by youth and families?*
- Do you have strong, trained and well-supported facilitators?*

Appendices B, and C are also available to help guide development of your council’s meeting structure.

A few things families should hear and feel.

Just because your child has challenges.—

- You are not a bad parent; your child is not a bad child
- You are not alone
- You are the expert about what your child needs
- Your voice and experience are meaningful to us.

Evaluation

Evaluation activities, associated with your Council meetings, can occur at two levels. First, the comments and recommendations made by participants are an appraisal of the agency's programs and services. When summarized in a clear and constructive manner, they are a valuable source of information about consumer and family member perception of service quality and effectiveness, and very useful as part of a continuous quality improvement process. See Appendix D for a sample sector report that can be used for summarizing meeting comments and recommendations. This form may also be used to amplify your council voice into the boarder Children's System of Care family youth sector's report.

The value of Council meetings is enhanced when they occur on a regular basis, use a standard agenda and format focusing on important aspects of the agency's programs and services, and involve participation by diverse youth and family members. As the meetings occur over time, comments and recommendations that are repeated or converge will have growing relevance.

The overall utility of the Council meetings is, to a large degree, reliant on the design and structure of the meetings, and the strength of the facilitation. The second level of evaluation would focus on these issues, notably the degree to which (1) the meeting design and structure supports the meetings' mission and goals; and (2) the facilitators lead and manage the meeting in a clear, positive and constructive manner.

Evaluation of the meetings' content and facilitation can be achieved through post-meeting surveys completed by participants. In addition, the strength of attendance over time will be a good indication of the value of the meetings to youth and family members.

Facilitators, and the agency champion who supports these meetings, will want to consider questions like:

- What is working well – and what is not?*
- What meeting goals are being achieved – and what are not?*
- What surprises were not anticipated?*
- What can be done improve meeting attendance and participation?*
- What can be done to improve meeting clarity and facilitation?*

See Appendix E for a sample meeting agency review form, and Appendix F for a sample post-meeting evaluation survey.

Additionally, it is ideal to periodically review, rate and provide supportive guidance to facilitators in regards to their meeting leadership and management skills. See Appendix G for a sample Facilitator Review form.

Appendix A - Facilitator Planning Guide

Facilitating Council meetings is both challenging and rewarding. The success of your meeting will be enhanced with some advanced preparation and attention to the following items:

- ✓ *Have meetings led by co-facilitators. Having two facilitators will increase your ability to manage the meeting, take accurate notes, and be responsive to your participants.*
- ✓ *The suggested length of time for a meeting is 2 hours. This provides ample time for participants to gather and visit, then attend to the meeting content, and conclude with refreshments and networking.*
- ✓ *Schedule the meeting at a time and a place that is convenient for family members to attend.*
- ✓ *Broadly publicize the meeting.*
- ✓ *Serve refreshments.*
- ✓ *Bring meeting materials, which might include:*
 - *Flip chart or easel paper*
 - *Markers*
 - *Masking tape*
 - *Watch or clock*
 - *Sign-in sheet or list of participants*
 - *Agenda*
 - *Handouts*
 - *Meeting evaluations*
- ✓ *Arrive early to set up the room. U-shaped or O-shaped seating provides an opportunity for participants to more fully engage with each other.*
- ✓ *Greet and welcome participants as they arrive.*
- ✓ *Start and end the meeting on time.*
- ✓ *Facilitators will want to set a positive tone by modeling Family Youth Professional Partnership, and striving for a meeting in which participants feel positive and hopeful about their involvement.*
- ✓ *Review ground rules at the outset of the meeting.*
- ✓ *Clearly communicate the meeting goals, and how information from participants will be used.*
- ✓ *Facilitators will want to ensure that each participant has an opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions, and that all are treated with respect.*
- ✓ *Facilitators will want to keep the meeting focused on the agenda and meeting goals, and politely manage any digressions or interruptions.*
- ✓ *Facilitators will want to encourage full responses; the “what” and the “why,” For example, instead of “we need respite care”, a participant might be encouraged to explain why “we need respite care in order to keep our kids, out of placement”.*

Appendix B - Meeting Planning

Preparing to convene a successful council meeting requires sufficient time to invite participants, organize the venue, and develop materials. A successful meeting depends on your participants, and participants appreciate advanced notice so that they can arrange their schedules. As a consequence, it is ideal for planning to start at least 5 weeks prior to the meeting. This will give you ample time to put all in order. The following is a suggested planning timeline.

1.	<i>Prepare a list of individuals to invite to the Council meeting.</i>	<i>5 weeks prior to meeting date</i>
2.	<i>Prepare a contact list with names, phone numbers, email addresses, and mailing addresses.</i>	<i>5 weeks prior to meeting date</i>
5.	<i>Arrange and reserve the meeting/venue site.</i>	<i>5 weeks prior to meeting date</i>
6.	<i>Prepare and send invitations to participants.</i>	<i>4 weeks prior to meeting date</i>
7.	<i>Follow-up invitations with phone calls.</i>	<i>3 weeks prior to meeting date</i>
8.	<i>Prepare agendas and other presentation or meeting materials.</i>	<i>3 weeks prior to meeting date</i>
9.	<i>Make arrangements for seating, equipment, and refreshments.</i>	<i>3 week prior to meeting date</i>
10.	<i>Place a reminder call to participants.</i>	<i>1 week prior to meeting date</i>
11.	<i>Conduct the Council Meeting.</i>	<i>Meeting date</i>
12.	<i>Review evaluations and develop a report that summarizes key issues and any action items, and that identifies strengths of the meeting process and any areas for improvement.</i>	<i>1 day post meeting date</i>
13.	<i>Send a thank-you letter/other items to participants.</i>	<i>2 days post meeting date</i>
14.	<i>Send your Meeting Report to your staff.</i>	<i>1 week post meeting date</i>
15.	<i>Amplify your voice send your sector meeting notes to FYRT</i>	<i>1 week post meeting date</i>

Appendix C - Meeting Structure Guide

Group or Council's Name:

Agency's Contact:

Who is the focal point for your council, gives support, answers questions/concerns

Purpose:

What does your agency/program see as the mission of your Advisory Council

Goals:

Do you have goals you would like the Council to achieve

Decision making process:

Describe to your council members and staff how decisions that need to be made based on council recommendations, concerns, and question of staff/policies and/or needs will be made

Report out method:

See Appendix D for sample of report for incorporation into CMHS CSOC Sector report. Who at the agency/program is responsible for amplifying your council's voice via the sector report? Will you use the same format to report to council members/families receiving services, and staff. How will you incorporate other methods; such as blogs, surveys, telephone message line, for voice you offer family/youth into the reports

Team Membership:

Describe who your members are:

Meeting frequency:

length / time/ place

Ground Rules:

Establish some simple ground rules:

Examples:

- *Only speak for your point of view never against someone else's*
- *Open door, any family/youth receiving services may attend meeting*

Appendix D - Sector Report

Advisory Council Sector Report

Date:

Agency/Program Name

Key Issues Discussed

Successes or Accomplishments

Challenges or Concerns

Upcoming Activities/Events

**Send Report: attention: Sector Report by fax: 619-546-6251
or email to: peer2peer@fyrt.org**

Appendix E - Meeting Review Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

Top 3 Significant Successes

Council Meetings Success	Factors That Supported Success

Other Notable Council Meetings Successes

Council Meetings Success	Factors That Supported Success

Shortcomings and Solutions

Council Meetings Shortcoming	Recommended Solutions

Appendix F - Meeting Evaluation

Date: _____ **Facilitator:** _____

Thank you for participating in today's _____ Meeting

In order to ensure that it met your needs and to determine how we might improve on future events, we would like to get your feedback as well as suggestions.

Please place your response next to each category listed below based on these ratings:
1: Poor; 2: Mediocre; 3: Average; 4: Good; 5: Excellent;

In addition, there is space at the end of this form for you to include additional comments. Please note that all information is confidential. We need to hear from you. This is your council

Presentations	Rating
Overall meeting format and structure	
Overall quality of session	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was the program/agency information shared meaningful to you 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was the facilitator engaging 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you feel your feedback to the agency/program is heard and valued 	
Comments:	
Is there a topic you would like us to discuss at future meetings?	
Comments:	
How can we improve our future meetings?	
Comments:	
Other Comments:	

THANK YOU

With YOU, We make a difference

Appendix G –Review of Facilitator

Name of Facilitator: _____ **Date:** _____

<i>Was Facilitator Engaging</i>	
<i>Did Facilitator bridge partnerships</i>	
<i>Did Facilitator stay neutral</i>	
<i>Did Facilitator create discussion ground rules?</i>	
<i>Did Facilitator help group follow stay on topic</i>	
<i>Was Facilitator clear and articulate</i>	
<i>Did Facilitator give purpose of the council</i>	
<i>List Strengths Facilitator has in hosting Council Meetings</i>	
<i>List Area of needs for Facilitator to improve skills</i>	
<i>Name of Reviewer:</i>	

<i>Date Reviewed with facilitator:</i>
<i>Improvement Plan:</i>
<i>Next Review Date:</i>
<i>Has Facilitator improved? list areas of improve still needed and Final Review date:</i>
<i>Does Facilitator require more coaching what is the coach areas and coaching plan</i>
<i>Reviewers final Recommendation</i>