

## **Getting the Most Out of Parent Engagement**

Parent engagement is now institutionalized in many national and state policymaking bodies and organizations. As a consequence, agencies and organizations are finding they must develop new ways of doing business. Here are some recommendations for those in non-parent roles:

**Share leadership:** Don't hesitate to ask parents to take on difficult tasks. Work with parents to create opportunities for increased responsibility.

**Encourage parent input:** Constantly ask parents for their suggestions. Ask questions respectfully until you understand their input, and reiterate their comments to others.

**Avoid tokenism:** Work with a variety of parents, not just "the usual suspects."

**Stay in touch with all parents:** Keep in touch with parents and follow up with any parents who suddenly stop participating in meetings.

**Communicate roles and procedures:** Communicate to parents what is expected of them in different roles and negotiate together exactly how the work will get done. Make sure parents understand the purpose of the group and why their participation is important.

**Use multiple communication mechanisms:** Be respectful of the different ways people work and communicate (for example, not all parents want to use, or have access to, e-mail). Use fax, phone, and regular mail.

**Conduct staff training:** Train organizational staff in strategies to share leadership and decision making with parents.

**Be responsive:** Be prepared for parents coming from all walks of life and be prepared to respond to a variety of cultural and economic differences.

**Establish a buddy system:** When parents join a team, connect them with other parents who are on the team to help facilitate their transition.

### **Offer parent training and orientation**

Adapted from *Putting Parent Engagement into Action: A Practical Guide*, (2002) Family Support America, Chicago, IL.

For more information:

Family Support America – [www.familysupportamerica.org](http://www.familysupportamerica.org)

Friends National Resource Center for CBFRS programs – [www.friendsnrc.org](http://www.friendsnrc.org)