

Using Policy to Initiate Change in Systems of Care Communities Webinar Questions/Answers September 15, 2011

Presenters:

- Gary De Carolis, Senior Consultant, National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care
- Matthew Shuman, MSW, ICF International

Question 1:

Completely agree with the steps you are outlining based on my experience. 1) Did the development of these resources include implementation science as a framework? 2) The way through which federal mandates and federal grants are often structured do not allow for the time needed for this level of relationship building and planning. What is the federal TA doing to help align federal policy with what we know works best for policy development?

Answer (Gary De Carolis):

Great question! We incorporated reference to the Implementation Science work in our materials throughout the Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center. The Improving Child Welfare Outcomes through Systems of Care grant program funded by the federal Children's Bureau had two great benefits that allowed for policy development and implementation. First, the grants incorporated a planning year upfront. This allowed all grantees to do a robust strategic planning process including the potential development of policies to sustain the work of the grant. Secondly, the grants were for 5 years. This amount of time allowed for relationship building and continued planning and implementation of the work being done.

Question 2:

To elaborate, what training or strategies have been used to reinforce the practice as outlined in the policy with workers who are tasked with implementing the policy?

Answer (Gary De Carolis)

It is important to use a variety of strategies to help all stakeholders involved truly embrace the spirit and intent of the new policy. First of all, it is important to make sure everyone has a copy of the new policy. Liberal dissemination of the policy is important so people can read it and ask questions they may relate to the new policy. Secondly, it is important to provide many training opportunities around the new policy. It is important to make sure that there is a large amount of time set aside to answer any questions people may have related to the new policy. Finally, make use of electronic media and use this vehicle to pose frequently asked questions and the answers to further broaden people's understanding of the new policy. These are a few of the tools we used to help our grantees successfully implement new policies. By the way, these kinds of trainings and dissemination strategies need to be repeated over and over because of new people being hired and the constantly changing workforce

Question 3:

What are some of the strategies that have been used to bring policies to the ground level once a policy has been implemented?

Answer (Gary De Carolis):

See answer above. The only other addition to the above question would be the use of state or local conferences to disseminate the new policy and to offer workshops and questions and answer time at those workshops. Usually at conferences you have a large group of stakeholders assembled which allows for maximum distribution of the new policy and the relevant information to the line staff.

Question 4:

How have you acquired personnel and other resources to do an evaluation component to your project/ policy building? Finding affordable ways to do so has been tough for us.

Answer (Gary De Carolis):

I understand your concern. Fortunately, in our case we had a federal grant that helped support the hiring of evaluation personnel. My one suggestion is that evaluators are very resourceful people. If they see the benefit of them being involved in your policy work they may be able to identify potential funding sources to help support their involvement. Beyond the support of your work, involving evaluators may have significant benefit to the world of policy evaluation that the evaluators could leverage to seek funding. For example, they may be able to publish the findings of their work with you.

Question 5:

Can you talk about successful ways agencies have engaged children and families so they are soliciting their input.

Answer (Gary De Carolis):

Great question. In the grant program child welfare agencies identified many families by looking at how particular families were doing a year after their cases were closed. Most successful families in the system of care work had been far enough away from their child welfare involvement that they had processed all that went on and were now ready to give back to the child welfare field. Asking various caseworkers who they knew were doing well was one great source of finding families to be involved.

Question 6:

Does each of the guides have similar sections - say for Internal policy is there a next steps section?

Answer (Matt Shuman):

The Action Plan Forms for each of the five approaches are similar in structure. They all have sections about understanding the context, identifying partners and leaders, developing the policy, planning outreach strategies, and identifying resources. There are also sections for obtaining input and building support, planning implementation strategies, and assessing the results in four of the five forms (not proclamations). The content for each section has some similarities across the approaches, but we tried to tailor them as much as possible to the specific approaches. The section headings may vary slightly from approach to approach, too. Each form has the same Next Steps Template at the end.