

Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health
FAMILY LEADERSHIP IN SYSTEMS EVALUATION
TIP SHEET
LANGUAGE QUALIFYING FAMILY PREFERENCE IN HIRING

Challenge:

Some System of Care communities are being challenged by hiring practices that do not encourage or qualify family members for employment related to work on their local or national evaluations. **Hiring preferences** have been used to qualify U.S. Veterans, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, family members of Foreign Service personnel, and many others populations of people in certain circumstances. If System of Care communities are committed to

- Being family-driven
- Having evaluation activities, methods, instruments, findings, etc. truly informed by the voices of those whose very lives are to be impacted by those evaluations

Then, it stands to reason they should qualify the

- Experience of being a family member raising a child with mental, behavioral, or emotional problems and
- Experience with the mental health system

As critical **core competencies** for at least some members of their evaluation team.

Historical Context:

Application guidelines for the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children, Youth and their Families Program about family involvement in evaluation is clear.

RFA No. SM-03-009, issued in 2003, page 21 instructs that the Evaluation Plan “*explain how family members and youth will be incorporated into evaluation activities. These activities may include providing feedback on the design and objectives of the evaluation, conducting interviews, analyzing data, and interpreting and reporting results.*” On pages 55-56, the same document says that Key Evaluation Staff’s responsibilities will include “*incorporating youth and family members in multiple activities of the evaluation.*”

Most recently, the CFDA No. 93.104, issued in 2005, asked applicants to “*describe how family partnerships will occur and be demonstrated in planning, implementing, and evaluating the project.*” (page 40) Further, it instructs to “*explain how family members and youth will be incorporated into evaluation activities. These activities may include providing feedback on the design and objectives of the evaluation, conducting interviews, analyzing data, and interpreting and reporting results.*” (page 44) In Appendix G, Requirements of the National Evaluation, “*Family representative on evaluation or case review team*” is listed as one of the persons to be interviewed during the System-of-Care Assessment site visits.

The national Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health expects that families and youth should be fairly compensated for these types of activities requiring their specialized expertise

To assist System of Care communities in developing hiring criteria supportive of these goals, job descriptions and ads from 7 communities were reviewed. They included job announcement, communications, and descriptions of job openings that appeared in 2003. The following are direct quotes from those materials.



Sample Qualifications:

(Note: Educational requirements ranged from high school graduate to masters level degree)

- Family member (Parent or Adult sibling) of a child with Serious Emotional Disorder, who has experience with state agencies through their child's mental health problems.
- Individual who is interested in sharing opinions and perspectives to help researchers understand the family perspective and what families want to be evaluated.
- Must be a current or prior caregiver (parent, other family member, foster parent) of a child who's struggled with emotional issues
- Experience with a child or a relative with serious emotional disturbance and experience with child-serving system is highly desired.
- Must have ... knowledge of severe mental illness in children, formal or experiential.
- Must have ... working knowledge of wraparound process, family driven care, severe emotional disturbance in children, and accessing community resources

Sample Responsibilities:

- Provide a family perspective for data interpretation
- Review all evaluation materials from a family perspective
- Review and revise the Family Handbook on evaluation as needed
- Helping researchers understand the perspective of families and what families need and want to know.
- Meeting with families as they enter the children's mental health system of care to collect demographic and descriptive information
- Documenting the service planning information generated at the Community Planning Team meetings
- Obtaining consent from youth and families to participate in outcome evaluation
- Facilitating the assignment of outcome evaluation interviews
- Maintaining up-to-date contact information for the families involved in the outcome evaluation
- Maintaining supplies of all evaluation materials

Sample Alternative to including language in job description:

"Instead we made a pitch for a family member in our newspaper ads and in email and other communications. The HR department requires Exempt positions to have a recruitment plan that includes outreach to the minority community, and they approve the plan, the ads, etc. Consequently, we were able to include our wording about seeking family members and get a clear approval of the language. Our interview process included family representation ... we sought a blend of professional and personal experience."

Communications included some of the following:

- We are interested in applicants who are family members, particularly parents of children with server emotional disabilities.
- In keeping with the family driven and family supported model, the ... seeks interviewers who are experienced family members, who have experienced challenges within their own families, and who have experience seeking and receiving services for their children and family.
- The ... will train all interviewers, regardless of prior level of training and experience.

In Conclusion:

New learnings continue to emerge from System of Care communities dedicated to family-driven evaluation. Strategies for the engagement and support of families and youth to apply their specialized expertise are growing. In addition, training and technical assistance to help families and youth gain necessary evaluation skills are available through the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. Please contact Elaine Slaton with comments on this TIP SHEET or to learn more about available training and technical assistance. Eslaton@FFCMH.org

