

Cultural Brokers and Community Liaisons

Definitions:

Community Liaison

While there are many definitions for community liaisons, for the purposes of this booklet, Family Voices defines community liaisons as “trusted individuals who may or may not live in a certain community, yet have knowledge of a community’s strengths, preferences and needs.” Community liaisons can act as relationship brokers, providing information and linkages between individuals, families and communities and the organizations and systems that seek to provide services and supports.¹

Cultural Broker

Cultural brokers function much like community liaisons but also have knowledge of the values, beliefs and practices of a cultural group or community and specific organizations and systems with which they have learned to navigate effectively, either for themselves, their families and/or their communities. Cultural brokers can play a key role in informing family leaders and organizations about the most culturally appropriate ways of joining with families and communities from different backgrounds.¹

“The keys to engagement for most communities and the families that live in them are based on relationship building, establishment of trust, the presence of welcoming attitudes and behaviors, and effective communication.”

Identifying Liaisons and Brokers:

- Families: moms, dads, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents
- Communities: community leaders, home-based and center-based child care providers, babysitters
- Schools: educators/teachers, school nurses, safety/officers/crossing guards, librarians, family resource staff
- Disability-specific organizations: United Cerebral Palsy, The Arc*, developmental disability staff
- Faith-based organizations: clergy, first wives, deacons, secretaries, parishioners
- Universities: university program staff, college students, sororities, fraternities

- Social service organizations: social workers, case managers, case workers
- Health and related services: nurses, receptionists, pediatricians, therapists, speech & language pathologists; program administrators and staff within
- Departments of Health, Public Health, Behavioral and Oral Health programs, community clinics
- Government Programs: staff within programs such as Early Intervention, Head Start and Early Head Start, Title V, and Medicaid programs; community guides in Aging and Disability Services Administration
- Local government: community leaders, firemen, City Parks and Recreation department staff, community-based program family advocates, juvenile justice staff, pow-wow planners
- Non-profit Agencies: staff within YMCAs, Children’s Rehabilitation Services, refugee resettlement programs, Women’s Alliance, regional resource centers, Kids Care Coalition, American Red Cross, small business associations, Childcare Resource Services
- Other Service Providers: translators and interpreters

Linking with Brokers and Liaisons

Working effectively with a community liaison or cultural broker requires developing an effective collaborative partnership. There are a number of models that describe how relationships among potential partners develop in to effective collaborations. Himmelman⁹ presents a framework that suggests a series of steps that individuals, groups and organizations go through in the process of arriving at collaboration.

Finding and Forming Collaborations with Community Liaisons or Cultural Brokers

Examples from the Field:

- Having discussions with other projects that work with community liaisons/cultural brokers about ways to work together
- Attending local community events to introduce yourself or your organization to the community
- Collaborating with other groups on community events such as health fairs, Special Olympics, Child Find, Pow Wows
- Actively recruiting and hiring individuals from within a community who have interests and skills to be community liaisons or cultural brokers
- Working with staff who are known and trusted in the community to train bilingual and monolingual family volunteers



Maintaining and Strengthening Relationships with Community Liaisons and Cultural Brokers

Examples from the Field:

- Paying a competitive wage with benefits for community liaison/cultural broker services
- Offering benefits such as in-service training continuing education, conference opportunities
- Providing peer support, exchanging ideas, celebrating successes
- Recognizing contributions through certificates and appreciation events
- Helping liaisons to prepare for additional roles such as becoming members of boards, committees, task forces

Linking families, professionals and communities helps develop and promote a system of services that is community-based, accessible, comprehensive, coordinated and culturally and linguistically competent.

Develop an action plan to help you or your organization to implement your ideas for:

Targeting specific communities or cultural groups for community engagement activities,

- Working with cultural brokers or community partners to identify existing community or culturally-based services and supports,
- Identifying community or culturally-based preferences, strengths and areas of growth related to services and supports you or your organization provide,
- Determining language preference and English ability for cultural groups that you seek to reach or serve,
- Planning for interpretation and translation services (costs, methods [telephonic, on-site, simultaneous, sequential]), and service providers,
- Developing short- and long-term goals for community engagement and outreach to new groups or communities,
- Identifying timelines for achievement of short- and long-term goals,
- Enlisting staff to implement the outreach and engagement activities, and
- Enlisting additional community partners or allies to enhance efforts (perhaps those identified in a community asset mapping process).

References

1. Family Voices, Inc. (2005). Building Community Using Community Liaisons/Brokers. Albuquerque, NM: Family Voices, Inc.

Adapted from Jones, W., and Thomas, T. (2009). Growing Your Capacity to Engage Diverse Communities by Working with Community Liaisons and Cultural Brokers. National Center for Family Professional Partnerships, Family Voices, Inc., Albuquerque, NM.