

Supporting & Strengthening Our Nation's Families: A Blueprint for the Development of Strong Networks of Family Resource Centers



2022



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Overview

Families represent the foundation of, and most fundamental unit within a society. When families are healthy and strong, communities thrive.

A Family Resource Center¹ (FRC) is a community or school-based welcoming hub of support, services, social connections, and opportunities for families that enhances their ability to be strong, healthy, and successful. FRCs work with an approach that is multi-generational, strengths-based, and family-centered. The services and programs they provide reflect and are responsive to community needs and interests, are designed for all families, and are provided at no or low cost for participants. FRCs intentionally help connect parents/caregivers to each other, developing their peer support network and sense of community.

Local and statewide Networks comprised of two or more FRCs have emerged organically across the United States from a desire to coordinate quality support for families. Much like the individual FRCs that make up these organizations, FRC Networks have a variety of organizational structures and focus areas, and are at different developmental stages – emerging, evolving, and established. They are funded in a variety of ways and some are wholly volunteer efforts.

Despite these differences, all FRC Networks serve as the backbone entity to leverage and coordinate the collective impact of their members. There is also remarkable commonality across their most common functions²:

- Increasing connectedness, coordination, cooperation, and collaboration amongst members
- Disseminating information and resources across organizations, service providers, and families
- Providing training and technical assistance
- Working on advocacy, policy, and legislation
- Providing and maintaining a shared data-tracking system

In order to promote the development and sustainability of a well-organized system of support for families in every state, the NFSN has identified four areas of focus with strategic actions for itself, federal, state, and local governments, philanthropy, and Networks to:

- **Strengthen existing FRC Networks**
- **Establish new FRC Networks**
- **Strengthen the FRC workforce**
- **Connect and leverage FRC Networks with other initiatives**

¹ Family Resource Centers are known by different names across the country, including Family Centers, Family Success Centers, Family Support Centers, and Parent Child Centers.

² OMNI Institute. (2016). Advancing the Family Support & Strengthening Field Project Survey Results.

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I. Strengthen Existing FRC Networks

Strong FRC Networks tend to have formal structures with dedicated staff and resources to support Network-level efforts¹. These Networks have greater capacity to ensure that families are effectively supported. Yet insufficient resources to support Network-level coordination and administrative activities are common across many Networks. Some Networks rely on a single funding source and some Networks do not have any administrative budget. FRC staff often take on the roles of nonexistent Network staff on top of their full-time jobs working at FRCs, which is not sustainable. Networks may struggle to keep members active and engaged in the context of limited resources.

Even Networks with staffing could benefit from additional resources to further strengthen their efforts. For example, some Networks have secured resources to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives across their membership and to develop effective evaluation systems. Others lack the funding to do so. Focused attention on adequately resourcing all Networks will yield a strong and equitable system of support for families across the country.

Bright Spot: Utah

For years, the Executive Directors of the individual Family Support Centers in Utah tried as a group to secure funding that would support the 11 Centers and 17 crisis/respite nurseries throughout the state. As a volunteer group, they realized they did not have the time to devote to this effort given their responsibilities to their Centers. They recognized they needed someone who would focus on building a strong infrastructure that would serve the statewide network of Family Support Centers.

In 2019, funds to support the position of a statewide Executive Director were awarded through a Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) grant. The new Executive Director has led the transformation of the statewide network to a more mature organization with greater capacity. Several successes include:

- Expanding the Board of Directors membership to include influential community members who promote and fortify the collaborative relationships across the state.
- Developing a long-term strategic plan that will sustain the Network.
- Securing \$2.9M in TANF funding and \$900K in COVID Relief Funds for FRCs in 2021, and \$3.4M in new, ongoing funding from the state legislature in 2022.
- Implementing an Outreach Plan that communicates the breadth and depth of services provided by Family Support Centers of Utah and the individual Family Support Centers.

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³. OMNI Institute. (2016). Advancing the Family Support & Strengthening Field Project Survey Results.

I. Strengthen Existing FRC Networks (Continued)

Objective: Increase the capacity of existing FRC Networks

A. Systems Change Actions

1. Support efforts at the federal level to increase funding that can be leveraged for FRC Networks, such as Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP), Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families, the Full-Service Community Schools program, Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5), and Title IV-B, including Promoting Safe and Stable Families.
2. Support efforts at the state and county levels to leverage federal, state, and local funding for FRC Networks, such as re-prioritizing child welfare funding to focus upstream on family strengthening and child abuse prevention, Family First Prevention Services Act implementation, Community Schools implementation, early learning, education, maternal-child health, and workforce development.
3. Encourage funders to allocate resources to FRC Networks to increase their capacity and sustainability, including for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion and utilizing effective data collection and evaluation systems and processes.

B. NFSN Internal Actions

1. Advance policy discussions related to ensuring adequate resources for FRC Networks, providing impact data and an analysis of how FRC Networks are currently funded.
2. Develop and provide budget advocacy tools for Member Networks.
3. Provide training and information for Member Networks about how states have successfully secured ongoing resources.
4. Connect Member Networks through convenings, meetings, cohorts, and newsletter to facilitate peer sharing of best and promising practices to enhance their effectiveness, including on diversity, equity, and inclusion and evaluation.
5. Support Member Networks to develop Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening & Support Trainers and implementation plans to increase their capacity and enhance the work of their FRCs.



II. Establish New Networks

Supporting the creation of new FRC Networks will bring this valuable work to scale, to ensure that more families have access to FRCs. These Networks will provide support for FRCs working with families to do so most effectively and leverage their collective efforts to be most impactful.

Bright Spot: Hawai'i

In Hawai'i in 2020, a grassroots effort to establish a Family Resource Center network began with the founding of four virtual school-based Family Resource Centers (FRCs) and the formation of a statewide steering committee that included representatives from public and private sectors. Made up of the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Department of Human Services, Neighborhood Places – which are community-based FRCs, and 5 other non-profit family support and strengthening organizations, the steering committee organized to form the Hawai'i 'Ohana Support Network (HOSN). In just under a year, Hawai'i became a member of the National Family Support Network and grew to over 20 members statewide.

In 2021, several HOSN members joined together with the Hawai'i National Governors Association Cohort for Child and Family Well Being and were awarded technical assistance to move the work of FRCs. This opportunity resulted in the drafting, introduction, and passage of Senate Bill 3111 to fund a statewide FRC office. In addition, \$235K in federal Governor's Emergency Education Relief funding was awarded to stand up the four school-based FRCs physically. In April of 2022, the HOSN received support from Casey Family Programs to continue building its capacity.

Objective: Support the creation of new Networks

A. Systems Change Actions

1. Support efforts at the federal level to increase funding that can be leveraged for FRC Networks, such as Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP), Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families, Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5), and Title IV-B, including Promoting Safe and Stable Families.
2. Support efforts at the state and county levels to leverage federal, state, and local funding for FRC Networks, such as re-prioritizing child welfare funding to focus upstream on family strengthening and child abuse prevention, Family First Prevention Services Act implementation, Community Schools implementation, early learning, education, maternal-child health, and workforce development.
3. Encourage funders to allocate resources to seed and develop new FRC Networks.



II. Establish New Networks (Continued)

B. NFSN Internal Actions

1. Conduct outreach to key stakeholders in states without Networks, such as state human services departments, philanthropy, Children's Trust Funds, and existing FRCs to promote the concept of developing FRC Networks.
2. Continue to provide tools such as sample funding templates and documents, and technical assistance to support the development of emerging FRC Networks.
3. Connect emerging FRC Networks to the NFSN and facilitate peer sharing of best and promising practice to enhance their effectiveness through convenings, webinars, and newsletters.



III. Strengthen the Family Resource Center Workforce

The Family Support field as a whole has not focused on compensation issues for staff. In most FRCs, staff are hired from the community served, sharing the same backgrounds and experiences and speaking the same languages as the families with whom they are working. Employing staff from the community builds trust with families who identify with and feel comfortable with them. At the same time, these staff are typically not well-compensated for their efforts. Without adequate wages, working at a FRC is unlikely to be a desired career.

There is a natural role for FRC Networks to play in calling attention to and promoting consistent approaches to staff compensation and retention.

Objective: Advance understanding of the value of the FRC workforce

A. Systems Change Action

Encourage systems to recognize that FRC work is valuable and needs to be adequately resourced.

B. NFSN Internal Actions

1. Learn from fields that have successfully increased the profile and wages of their workforce, such as Early Care and Education.
2. Develop a framework and tools to support Member Networks to conduct wages and benefits surveys and analysis in their states.
3. Develop and provide budget advocacy tools for Member Networks.
4. Encourage Member Networks to build relationships with colleges in their area to connect students with learning about FRCs, such as tours and internships.
5. Encourage Member Networks to connect with AmeriCorps to introduce volunteers to working at FRCs.



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IV. Connect and Leverage FRC Networks with Other Initiatives

FRC Networks have natural connections with many current initiatives promoted by the federal government, state governments, local governments, the education field, philanthropy, and other stakeholders, including family engagement, early care and education, school readiness, home visiting, child abuse prevention, health and well-being, vaccine education, reducing early chronic absenteeism, male and father engagement, 2-generation strategies, healthy marital and couples relationships, and family economic success. These Networks are poised to be effective partners with and platforms for these efforts.

Bright Spot: Colorado

When a local nonprofit organization that was housing Colorado's Fatherhood Practitioners Network (CFN) decided it was no longer able to host the program, the Family Resource Center Association (FRCA) was approached by the group's leadership members and funders about taking it on, which it agreed to do in 2022. FRCA's role in housing the CFN is to provide Network coordination, technical support, funding, and sustainability planning to support the longevity and success of the Network and father inclusion in Family Support Programs across Colorado.

Also in 2022, FRCA was chosen by the state to be the Intermediary Organization for Colorado Community Response (CCR). In that role, FRCA supports leveraging FRCs, and other human service non-profits, in partnering with local child welfare agencies to provide comprehensive, community-based services for families at risk of child neglect through Colorado's Differential Response. Core responsibilities of the CCR Intermediary role include provision of training, technical assistance, and implementation support to existing CCR sites, further developing the CCR model fidelity and data monitoring statewide. CCR sites utilize the Colorado Family Support Assessment 2.0, FRCA's reliable family-level index of family functioning.



IV. Connect and Leverage FRC Networks with Other Initiatives (Continued)

Objective: Increase and highlight connections of FRC Networks with other initiatives

A. Systems Change Actions

1. Facilitate connections between FRC Networks and current and proposed initiatives.
2. Include FRC Networks in initiatives, funding opportunities, policy papers, and statements related to areas where they can affect impact.

B. NFSN Internal Actions

1. Raise the visibility of the value of FRC Networks as potential partners in key initiatives.
2. Connect Member Networks to initiatives and opportunities related to areas where they can affect impact.



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Founded in 2011, the National Family Support Network (NFSN) is a membership-based organization comprised of state networks that focus on strengthening and supporting families. Its mission is to promote positive outcomes for all children, families, and communities by leveraging the collective impact of state networks and championing quality family support and strengthening practices and policies.

www.nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org