

The National Center for Families Learning's (NCFL) mission is to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. For over 30 years, Family Learning programs have been ideal spaces for community members to activate their collective voices and organize to address community issues. Community Development is the practice of residents, neighbors, and stakeholders coming together to remove barriers to well-being and build on the community's strengths and assets (Center for Community Health and Development, n.d.).

Community Development efforts at NCFL seek to highlight local voices and support families in creating learning systems that foster an equitable and thriving neighborhood. NCFL promotes leadership through participatory democracy, economic opportunity, social justice, and equity. NCFL recognizes five equity domains that impact family well-being and academic achievement. Examples in these domains follow.

- **Economic Opportunity:** business development, entrepreneurial opportunities, fair-wage campaigns.
- **Education:** early childhood funding, family engagement initiatives, college and career readiness programs.
- **Neighborhoods and Infrastructure:** access to natural spaces, street lighting, sidewalks, affordable housing, transportation.
- **Justice and Government:** problems of mass incarceration, voter participation, community representation in government.
- **Public Health:** access to quality and affordable healthcare, health and wellness campaigns, substance abuse and addiction support programs (Institute for State and Local Governance, n.d.).

NCFL's Vision for Community Development

Community Coalitions

Community coalitions are comprised of organizations and local residents who seek to serve as catalysts for systemic change around issues that most impact family well-being. NCFL supports cross-sector collaborative efforts to meet the goal of building comprehensive family learning systems that are embedded at various levels in a community.



Through the establishment of family-centered coalitions, NCFL:

- creates opportunities to work more closely and effectively with partners and families toward reaching shared goals.
- guides partnerships, alliances, and advocacy efforts to increase multigenerational learning.
- offers support that leads to sustainable policy changes that improve systems.

Elements of NCFL supported coalitions:

Community Leadership

A key component of a successful coalition is for those who are most impacted by the issues to be centered as experts in determining the solutions. The participating groups must have residents/parent leaders as key decision-makers in the coalition process.

Addresses Issues of Injustice

Coalitions are committed to following the lead of residents as they identify issues relevant to their community. The initiatives proposed by the community are often determined by extensive root-cause analysis and community investigation tools like interviews and community meetings. The process recognizes how inequities are grounded in policies and practices that have impacted people of color and traditionally underserved communities. Issues that typically rise to the top include social, economic, and racial injustice.

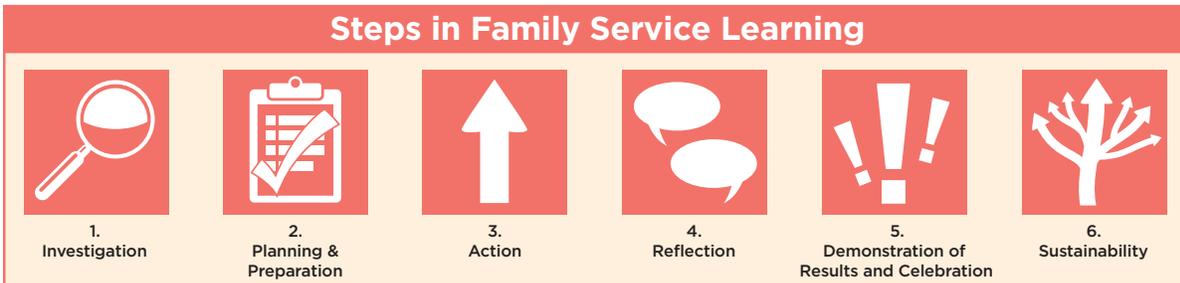
A Focus on Policy, Systems, and Structural Change

Coalitions have the power to create sustainable change by collectively working to remove barriers to family success including but not limited to, laws, policies, regulations, and practices.

(Wolff et. al., 2017)

Family Service Learning

The NCFL Family Service Learning model combines family learning with service learning in an effort to build stronger communities by fostering leadership and advocacy skills for families. Through the NCFL Family Service Learning six-step process, families explore solutions to community issues, conduct root-cause analysis, develop advocacy skills, and solidify and sustain new community partnerships.



(Cramer & Toso, 2015)

Parent Leadership

Parent leadership programs are designed to activate the leadership skills of parenting adults by encouraging them to become engaged advocates for their community and organize to make a powerful, impactful change on education issues.

NCFL Parent Leadership efforts:

- create a pathway for authentic family and community engagement to influence decision makers.
- provide culturally sustaining, accessible, and inclusive programming for families to be fully engaged in their educational journey.
- advocate to fill needs identified by residents, such as social work and health services, for the community.
- guide family leaders in implementing projects and campaigns to better support their children's education.

NCFL envisions communities that are safe, healthy, and thriving—where families are celebrated and valued as visionaries, leaders, and experts. We envision a cycle of interdependence, where families can access the resources to be successful.



References

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Helpful Resources

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