

# Chapter 4: Communication

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**Vision:** *All state and local program stakeholders will have current and relevant information to maximize their effectiveness.*

## **I. Introduction**

A successful statewide communications strategy should ensure two-way communication with sites, public officials, partners, funders, and legislators. Communication vehicles range from state or local meetings to newsletters and emails, with a range of valuable opportunities for both internal dialogue and open forums. Communication is especially critical in times of fiscal and political stress. Comprehensive, rapid, and dependable communication structures allow the state system to respond quickly and effectively to any situation that arises.

## **II. Guidelines for Communication**

**1. Establish effective strategies to facilitate communication among and between members of the Healthy Families America network in the state.** Consider using a listserv or a website to share information and provide a forum for dialogue. Listservs and websites can be developed for several different levels of targeted or open use, while newsletters and email bulletins provide the opportunity to share program information or convey a call to action to a broad audience. Regular and ad hoc meetings, phone conferences, and forums also provide crucial opportunities for more personal interaction and relationship building.

**2. Create opportunities for people to come together and share information.** In addition to regular forums through which ideas and concerns can be expressed, provide additional communication opportunities as initiatives and challenges arise. Include opportunities for staff and other program representatives to problem solve and share successes. Keep transportation and time costs in mind, regionalize meetings and teleconference and provide print and electronic media, such as websites and newsletters.

**3. Recognize and celebrate the success of efforts.** Help site and system staff remember how valuable the program and their contributions are by recognizing individual and group accomplishments through awards at the site, regional, state, and national level. These awards can be highlighted at meetings, in print media, and on state websites, in order to communicate strengths to funders and provide inspiration to staff.

## **III. Examples from the states**

Twenty-two Healthy Families America states have a statewide coordinator. In Illinois, the Department of Human Services houses a state official that coordinates all Healthy Families Illinois information sharing with program staff, administrators and planners. Healthy Families Indiana's website is accessible only to sites and administrators and provides updates on program news and opportunities.

Florida's strategic communications plan provides communication strategies, messages, timelines, and resources for HFF on a statewide basis. The plan served as a broad-brush approach with the potential for local specialization. The plan clearly articulates goals, reviews market conditions, identifies strengths and challenges, outlines roles and responsibilities, identifies target audiences, aligns messages and local strategies and is shared across the state.

Arizona holds a statewide conference that includes a ceremony dedicated to celebrating the successes of individual paraprofessional and sites. The website lists county and site level awards, workers nominated for and receiving national and state awards, and awards related to professional growth and promotions.

#### **IV. Communication Resources**

##### ***Funders Supportive of Communications Technology, Benton Foundation:***

<http://www.benton.org/publibrary/toolkits/stratcommtool.html>

The **Healthy Families America** national website, [www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org), offers a variety of resources, information about the program and tools to help in advocacy and funding sustainability efforts.

The **Healthy Families Florida** website communications section contains brochures, sample speeches, new articles, etc: <http://www.healthyfamiliesfla.org/news.html#top>

##### ***Peer2Peer Learning, experiences in creating and implementing a successful communications strategy.*** Benton Foundation.

[www.benton.org/Practice/Toolkit/discuss.html](http://www.benton.org/Practice/Toolkit/discuss.html)

##### ***Techsoup, Technology Page for Non-Profits.***

<http://www.techsoup.org/index.cfm?cg=linking&sg=idealist&CFID=4497917&CFTOKEN=64390016>