



Family Engagement Communication and Record Keeping

This information will help you develop your family engagement communication and recording keeping plan. The best practices presented here came from a review of reliable sources. For more information, visit the websites of U.S. Department of Education: Family and Community Engagement (<https://www.ed.gov/parent-and-family-engagement>), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Head Start's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement>), and Edutopia's Family Engagement blogs (<https://www.edutopia.org/blogs/tags/family-engagement>). You might incorporate all or parts of this information into your policy guidebook.

The Importance of Channels of Communication and Record Keeping

Establishing and maintaining reliable channels of communication has great value for 21st CCLC programs that want to communicate effectively with families. You will want to support communication by keeping accurate records and maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of the families in the program. Here are some best practices necessary to achieving these goals.

Family Liaisons

Family liaisons are an important part of communicating with families, especially when they are trusted members of the community and when they speak the home language of families. It is, however, important for the 21st CCLC program director to have direct contact with family liaisons and to establish an understanding of what the position entails.

Program directors should work with liaisons to determine their responsibilities. Be sure to establish a schedule of the liaison's availability and adhered to it. Also, establish a list of policies or procedures for the liaison to follow. Family liaisons should understand that they are an extension of the 21st CCLC program and its staff and should behave with the same standard of professionalism.

Here are some policies to consider for 21st CCLC program staff and family liaisons:

- Rather than sharing personal information like your cell phone number and home address with family members, share the program's main number and the email address that you use for 21st CCLC activities.
- You are not required to meet with family members outside the program site and program hours. However, if you decide to do so, make sure you meet with family members in public areas where both parties are comfortable.
- If family members ask for advice or guarantees that you are not sure about, let them know that you will refer to the 21st CCLC program director and get back to them as soon as possible.
- Keep all information about families private or confidential, including their contact information, issues they may be dealing with and their stance on controversial matters.
- Keep records, including family contact information and notes from discussions with family members, in a safe place where only you have access. Notes on a computer should be kept in a password-protected file, and paper notes should be kept in a locked cabinet.

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Print Media

Print media will include program flyers and newsletters. All print media must be approved by the 21st CCLC program director and may also need to be approved by school-day administrators, especially when they will be posted on school grounds. Check all print media for accuracy before distribution. This includes grammar and spelling checks as well as correctness of information.

Print media should adhere to language considerations and federal guidance. Translating print media into the languages 21st CCLC families prefer is important to ensure that important information reaches its target audience. Make sure that translations are checked for grammar issues and that the meaning has accurately transferred from one language to the other. Translating word-for-word does not always work, and online translation tools are not always accurate. The best way to ensure appropriate translations is to have multiple bilingual readers verify their accuracy.

Federal guidance calls for certain precautions when distributing print media. Make sure that no information negatively targets any family group across racial, ethnic or socioeconomic lines. Print media should also remain within the confines of federal and state law. Any information that speaks to services or guarantees contradictory to the law must not be distributed. When in doubt, speak to legal teams and attorneys at local school districts and social service agencies, or call your local law enforcement department for additional guidance on who to speak with. In addition, make sure that print materials adhere to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Remember that photographs and information that identify students may not be published without written consent from parents or guardians, or students themselves if they are of age.

Social Media

Social media can be a great way to keep families informed and engaged, especially if they work during program hours or cannot attend program activities and events due to conflicting schedules. With social media, family members can catch up on all the exciting things happening at the 21st CCLC program right on their phones or other devices.

However, the considerations related to print media also apply to social media. The information you share should be socially, morally and legally responsible. Make sure your groups are set to be private; confirm all members' identities before you allow them to join the group; and have the program director, 21st CCLC staff and family member volunteers consistently monitor the content that is shared. Offensive posts or posts that are contradictory to the mission and vision of your program should be removed immediately. This includes content in languages other than English.

Also, consider not admitting 21st CCLC students as group members. Bringing adults and minors together over social media can be problematic, and some discussion topics may not be suitable for online discussion with minors. These topics may include information on drug and alcohol abuse, community gang activity, and school safety measures regarding concerns like school shootings, bomb threats and youth suicide.



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Family Information Nights

Family information nights can be an important way to keep families informed, and provide a great opportunity to confirm contact information and preferred contact methods with families. These gatherings create opportunities for conversations that provide insights on the most pressing issues and interests that families share. And, formal information gathering through surveys may also be conducted, adding to your understanding of families' needs and wants.

To help family information nights succeed, be sure to share information with families in a clear and professional manner. You want families to get a feel for the positive culture in your 21st CCLC program through various information sources, including mailings, newsletters and website postings. Let families know what they can expect from their 21st CCLC program moving forward.

Check the accuracy of all information gathered during the family information night. If you collected phone numbers or email addresses, reach out to the families the next day to thank them for their attendance. This will show families that you appreciate their involvement and will help you verify the contact information. Be sure to update master contact lists using confirmed email addresses and phone numbers.

Family Contact List

A master family contact list should be securely stored by the 21st CCLC program director in a password-protected, digital format. Staff members and other stakeholders who are part of decision making and planning efforts may have their own lists as well. For example, teaching staff may have a contact list for the families of the students they instruct. However, all staff with family contact information should follow the same practice of updating their lists often and keeping them secure under lock and key or password protection. Stakeholders can also verify contact information with each other in case they are unable to reach a family member. It is good practice to update the master contact list every time an error or update has been identified.

Running Records, Including the Use of Technology for Record Keeping

It is best practice for programs to have one master contact list stored digitally on a cloud-based system. This list should be password protected, with all stakeholders who require access to the list sharing that password. As a security measure, any changes made to the list are kept in the list's history on the cloud. Those making changes are identified in the history, making each stakeholder accountable for the access they have. When one person updates information on the list, it becomes readily available to all who have access. Programs should make sure they have the hardware needed to implement this best practice.



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Communicate to Engage Families

Programs communicate their beliefs and values through visuals within program space; verbal interactions among and between staff, students and families; body language; and type and frequency of written communications. With all communication, the goal is to increase family engagement.

Consider the following items when assessing your program's current communication style and strategies.

- How are families represented in the space?
 - Families should be invited in as participants, and also as leaders or experts. Respecting varying skill sets and perspectives sets the tone for a welcoming environment.
 - Encourage volunteering, which may or may not take place during site hours. Present meaningful opportunities for families to give back. Family member volunteers are another way to honor their importance to the program.
 - Prominently display student work. Ask an artistic parent, staff member or student to design an interesting layout. Perhaps you might even include photos. The additional effort demonstrates your commitment to celebrating student success.
- Is there adequate and easy-to-use signage?
 - Helping everyone navigate the space sends the message that families are welcome. Clearly label important locations, such as the school office, the afterschool program office, sign-in and sign-out area.
- What type and at what frequency does communication occur?
 - Clearly establish what information will be communicated, by whom and how often. If your organization does not already provide one, work with your stakeholders craft a communications policy. The goal is to create efficient communication patterns that engage families and monitor student progress.
 - When you make families aware of upcoming events, consider including notices in a weekly or monthly newsletter. Or, you might use program-to-home folders. Be sure to consistently send information home on the same day of the week or month so families know when to expect it.
 - Establish a welcome procedure for new families. This can include anything from a family guidebook to a student-led tour to a program family welcome group. Refer to the Creating a Family Guidebook tool for more assistance with this best practice.
 - Extend beyond one-way communication, where you inform family members. Develop systems for families to provide information to staff. Sharing information is a key ingredient to providing responsive, supportive programming. Your program could implement strategies such as:
 - Informal surveys
 - Formal surveys
 - Staff emails
 - Connect forms in the program-to-home folder
 - Refer to the Family Activity Guide and Understanding Program Families tools for more assistance.