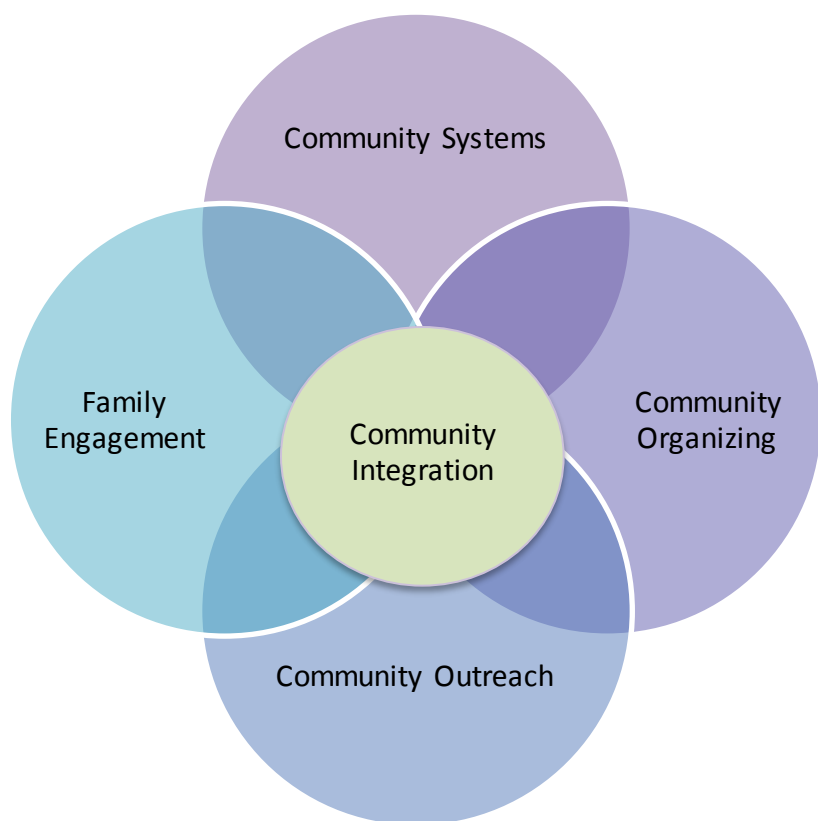


## Guidance for Community Engagement Strategies for Early Childhood Programs<sup>1</sup>

Effective community engagement helps early childhood programs stay up-to-date on policies and resources that may improve their programs and connect families to resources they may need. Early childhood programs, with strong family engagement strategies, can build upon family engagement<sup>2</sup> practices by developing community engagement strategies that help families stay connected to their local community, build family voice, and encourage collaboration with others to improve early childhood services and community issues. When family engagement is combined with community engagement, programs achieve effective community integration which welcomes the experiences and resources that families and community members bring to the program to co-create opportunities for the community as a whole.

The guidance is for **early childhood providers, specifically center-based programs** that want to deepen their community engagement efforts locally. The general framework and definition of community engagement is adapted from the domestic violence field and comprises of three strategies (see below): **Community Engagement is “bringing together the talents, resources, and skills of people in the community in order to increase their collective power and work for social change.”<sup>3</sup>**



Strategy	Definition	Examples
<b>Community Systems</b>	Actively participates in local early childhood collaborations to raise issues and ideas that could improve state early childhood services and systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Participate in local early childhood collaboration tables</li><li>Participate in state-level advisory committees or policy conversations<sup>4</sup></li></ul>
<b>Community Organizing</b>	Advocates for changes to programs or social issues by working with families and program staff to build their skills and voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Partner with organizations to advocate on early childhood policies and community issues</li><li>Develop advocacy/leadership skills of families to be advocates</li></ul>
<b>Community Outreach</b>	Brings in resources from the community for the benefit of families and children in their programs and raises awareness of the importance of early childhood programs in local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Educate community members about early childhood services</li><li>Build relationships with other programs to bring more resources that serve families and community members at large</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> The Principle and Practices Committee reviewed tools, resources, and research on community engagement in early childhood programs and focus group findings from previous research about the Awards of Excellence for Family and Community Engagement to inform this guidance.

<sup>2</sup> ExceleRate Illinois. Awards of Excellence Family and Community Engagement. <http://www.exceletrateillinoisproviders.com/overview2/awards-of-excellence/family-and-community-engagement>

<sup>3</sup> The community engagement definition is adapted from a report by Mimi Kim: Community Engagement Continuum: Outreach, Mobilization, Organizing and Accountability to Address Violence against Women in Asian and Pacific Islander Communities. The continuum offers four strategies often used to engage the community. <http://www.apildv.org/files/CommunityEngagementContinuum-Report-2005%28Rev.2010%29.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Visit the Partner Plan Act website to learn more about community systems opportunities in Illinois and how to get involved: [www.partnerplanact.org](http://www.partnerplanact.org)