Parent Partnership in the Grant Application Review Process

A Collaboration between the Greater Rochester Health Foundation and the National Parent Leadership Institute, Summer-Fall 2018

GRHF Background: The Greater Rochester Health Foundation (GRHF) recognizes that parents play a crucial role in children’s development, and shares the view of families as “agents of change in their children’s lives, communities and early childhood systems.” Strong partnerships between community organizations and parents are essential for fostering children’s health and achievement.

As part of our Healthy Futures strategy for whole child health and development, GRHF released a Request for Proposals entitled Partnering with Parents and Families for Healthy Futures. These grants were intended to fund projects that incorporate authentic parent partnership, and to identify promising models or approaches that could be replicated in other organizations and settings.

We recognize that parents have unique insight and perspective to offer in assessing the degree to which projects that serve children and families are likely to be engaging, equitable, and successful. Further, we believe that as funders we have a responsibility in our Healthy Futures work not only to support effective parent and family engagement on the part of our grantees, but to involve parents in our grantmaking. To this end, the Health Foundation established a partnership with the National Parent Leadership Institute (NPLI) to engage parents as equal partners in reviewing grant proposals.

This project involved a collaboration between staff and alumni of NPLI and its local initiative, the Greater Rochester Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), along with Health Foundation staff. NPLI facilitated the process of engaging and supporting six (6) parents in the Partnering with Parents and Families grant review process.

NPLI Background: NPLI is a national nonprofit that partners with communities to strengthen parent leadership through the proven Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) model and to develop agencies and systems that are prepared to partner with parents.

From initiating and sustaining parent leadership and partnership in communities, we have seen that parents become active participants on behalf of their child(ren) and their community when they believe they can make a critical difference and feel supported, respected, and acknowledged for their time and efforts. Parents maintain their engagement and leadership when they are acknowledged, next steps are inspired and a space is created where they feel safe, comfortable, and valued.

These efforts are more likely to make lasting change in a community when effective partnership exists between agencies, communities, and parents. Such partnership relies on an inclusive environment, learning and growth opportunities being offered for parents and staff, and ongoing opportunities to partner and engage on substantive issues and work.

Continued on reverse page
NPLI responsibilities in the *Partnering with Parents and Families* grant review process:

- Recruiting parent leaders
- Managing the logistics of the review panel session, including location, meals, child care
- Arranging and facilitating sessions to prepare parents for the review process
- Facilitating the joint parent and professional review panel session
- Providing continuous support to parent reviewers in the form of meetings, phone calls, and emails
- Building knowledge of effective parent engagement strategies among Health Foundation staff

**Diversity brings strength.** NPLI intentionally builds racial and cultural diversity into all levels of its work, and prepares an inclusive space that embraces difference. NPLI and GRHF worked together to:

- Build two teams of reviewers, each with 3 parent leaders and 3 professionals, that was diverse across race, ethnicity, income, and geography
- Reflect the community of participants in our process by ensuring that the facilitation team was diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, income, and geography and utilized facilitation practices that are responsive to different learning and communication styles.

**An equitable review process included:**

- Parent-friendly logistics, including meetings times and locations as well as on-site childcare
- Ground rule process for dialogue and discussion during the review panel
- Template for parent input on grant proposals
- Adjustments to traditional grant-making processes:
  - Added pre-session and additional meetings as needed
  - Developed user-friendly scoring rubric
  - Training and a sample walk-through of review submission process
  - Debrief session with parent reviewers and staff
- An MOU for each parent leader outlining roles and responsibilities of all parties

**“Best practices” for parent and family partnership include:**

- Building trust and mutual respect
- Designing programs and activities that are culturally appropriate for diverse families
- Reducing barriers to families’ participation (time, childcare, transportation etc.).
- Engaging parents in meaningful roles involving program design or delivery
- Building staff skills for working collaboratively with parents and families