

Strength in Families: Fostering Family Engagement in the Community

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Today's children are significantly shaped by families and the communities in which they live. It has been observed that nutrition, health care, safe learning spaces and enrichment can all affect children's learning outcomes. Children, who find the least support in their home, peer, and community experiences face the most severe challenges in school. Community organizations including libraries offer important opportunities for growth and development in informal settings. For this reason, libraries must be part of a collaborative approach to assist families to thrive. According to a recent IMLS study, 36% of children having the lowest socioeconomic status visited libraries in their kindergarten year, compared to 66% in the highest. Unfortunately, too many children and families designated "high risk" are disconnected or unaware of library programs and services.

According to the recently released Public Library Association [IDEABOOK: Libraries for Families](#), libraries have increasingly become the educational, technological and social hub of the community. Family engagement which is about building relationships with families is a critical component of this evolution. [IDEABOOK](#) offers libraries a way to move beyond thinking of family engagement as random, individual activities or programs, but rather as part of a system where library leadership, resources and events are linked to goals. The framework represents a theory of change that builds a pathway for meaningful family engagement beginning in the early childhood years and extending through young adulthood.

Based on the principles outlined in [IDEABOOK](#), the **Strength in Families** grant would encourage libraries to create or build on existing partnerships with community organizations that share a similar mission. This includes schools (private, public, academic), local museums, early learning systems as well as community agencies that provide family support: e.g. health and nutrition; mental health, special needs and early intervention. A key element in this effort would be to elevate the family voice in designing services to those previously underserved in their communities. This would include groups with one or more risk factors such as:

Households without English speakers
Low-level parental education
Transitional residential mobility
Unmarried parents

Teen parent
Unemployed parents
Incarcerated parent
Housing and food insecurity

Using the [IDEABOOK](#) as a framework, the library will provide leadership that includes cultural competency as part of staff capacity development; work with identified community partners to engage and provide guidance by creating welcoming spaces and technology access.

1. To create programs and offer services that create family engagement both within the library and outside including non-traditional locations such as health centers, playgrounds, parks, farmers' markets, and other local gathering spaces.
2. To promote libraries as a resource for families to find information and services in education, job and housing searches, health and well-being and social networking.
3. To create intentional partnerships with parents who will work with neighborhood associations and civic and community support organizations in support of high-needs children and families

Based on a community self-assessment, this effort would address the development of programs and services that might effectively reach a previously underserved audience. By fostering an expansion of knowledge, skills, and self-awareness it will identify institutional barriers that have previously affected family participation and begin to implement changes during the grant year.

ELIGIBILITY

Public libraries that meet standard eligibility requirements for Direct Grant programs may apply. This project can be either a one or two -year grant from \$ 7,500- \$10,000 based on project needs.

INTERESTED?

Applicants must submit a Letter of Intent form with the "Strength in Families" option checked off. If you need more information about this program, please call Shelley Quezada at the MBLC at 1-800-952-7403 ext. 235 or email shelley.quezada@state.ma.us