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National Network of Children's Advocacy Centers

Information Paper:

Organizational Development

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ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CACs can take years to develop. Communities begin with a vision of how to improve services to children and their families. In time this vision takes root, grows and matures; buildings are built or renovated; collaborative procedures are developed around investigations and interviewing; information is shared; cases are reviewed and tracked; coordinated services are made available.

To facilitate the process of starting a CAC, participants -- especially the leadership -- should understand what is happening in the context of organizational development. This awareness will enhance all stages of development from the work of the task force to building a team, from developing a communications network to evaluating specific programs. Completing the goals of each phase helps provide a solid foundation for a well-run organization with strong community support.

The Start-Up Phase is where a task force conceives the purpose and mission of a future CAC, and a team begins to lay out a public relations campaign. The goal is to establish operating norms, to identify the people and financial resources needed to begin the task and to push toward the development of a mission. The challenge at this point is survival. In this phase, there will be a high degree of uncertainty. The informal structure of this stage is characterized by emotion and ambiguity. People are filled with enthusiasm and hope, as well as fear regarding their roles and responsibilities. They look for reassurance that their contribution will be useful, and that the goals of the group connect to their own sense of self. Committee members need to be oriented to the task and will experiment with methods of working together. Various concerns are consciously and unconsciously expressed during this phase. People want to know what is expected of them. They are also concerned about possible hidden agendas.

Flexible leadership is required at this stage. It should be a person(s) who is perceived as a neutral party, who has the ability to manage and facilitate the various power centers and who can support members through the ambiguity of developing a group identity. If it is a task force coming together to start a CAC, the group needs to spend time gaining insight into the culture of each agency and how each agency defines the problems in the system. They need to talk to each other about the legal and bureaucratic limitations under which they operate. The facilitator must set the tone of a listening and learning environment to allow for full disclosure and for building trust. A discussion about confidentiality requirements and information sharing is important at this stage. Structural issues that will give the group some form also have to be discussed and implemented: record keeping; distribution of minutes; meeting schedules; evaluating the progress of the task; accessing the necessary resources to do their work; and, finally, as this phase comes to closure, the writing of a vision and

mission statement. If this phase is done well and the critical tasks are performed, a group identity should begin to emerge. The task force can move with confidence to the Structuring Phase.

The Structuring Phase is characterized by short-term decision-making, confronting conflict, and long-term planning. It is oriented toward the future implementation of the vision and mission of a particular program, project or organization. Gathering written information and videos from other CACs and visiting different models is helpful at this stage. It gives the group a picture of operational CACs and provides a backdrop for clarifying specific problem areas and prioritizing where the committee or task force should best spend their decision-making and planning energy.

The activities of the task force/committee during this phase are focused on developing a structure where the impact of adopting a particular CAC model, starting a specific program in the CAC or publicizing certain activities can be thoroughly examined. It is the phase where committee members must reach agreement on the decision-making process and where there is enough trust in the process to confront conflicting philosophical and legal viewpoints. It is a time when subcommittees develop a long-term programmatic concept and choose the mechanics for circulating drafts of their work and where everyone understands the difference between consensus building and decision-making.

Visionary leadership is necessary at this stage. The chair or facilitator must have the capacity to synthesize and articulate a clear picture of how the various agencies can work together under the umbrella of a CAC. Leadership must also articulate possible strategies for achieving this goal and yet support the discomfort some task force members will feel as the decision making and planning process becomes more concrete. If a work group or team accomplishes the tasks of this phase, there should be common agreements about how to move forward. The committee is maturing and moving into the Cooperation Phase.

In the Cooperation Phase of development the pace quickens; the work of the task force/committee is in full gear. It is characterized by more interaction among the various players and agencies and requires more attention to the details of communication, coordination, collaboration, negotiation, and networking. In communities beginning a CAC, people inside and outside the system will have access to appropriate information and become part of the process. This will minimize some of the new barriers that tend to arise at this stage of development by people who were not involved in the initial planning process or whose positions might be affected by anticipated changes.

The task during this phase is to develop an internal coordination and communication network, so misinformation is kept to a minimum. In addition, the group must concentrate on sorting out their priorities so that human and financial resources are apportioned in the right direction. This is just as important to the work of committees or teams as it is to a large task force. Regular meetings among key players not on a committee, written communication of key decisions to each member or agency, and periodic interagency information meetings are some methods of keeping the communications lines open and accurate. It is important to build on the group's enthusiasm for the project by increased networking with the wider community. Representatives from each agency can be involved in this process through a speakers' bureau, school forums and participation in community events. Groups should consider hosting a fun social event during this stage of development.

In this phase leaders must be creative, have good listening skills, be communicative, enjoy coordinating diverse groups of people and know how to build a cooperative and harmonious climate. They must possess excellent problem-solving skills and a clear sense of priorities. They need to be able to negotiate agreements with individuals, team members, agency heads and community leaders. These qualities need not be embodied in one person. Several people on a task force or a committee can fulfill the necessary leadership functions during this phase. Successful completion of this phase is reflected by ongoing communications and collaboration, increased ability to problem solve, appreciation for the skills members bring to the group, a growing sense of trust and concrete plans on how programs or ideas will be implemented.

The Productive Phase will move more slowly than the previous one. It is characterized by a more rhythmic pace. The primary task can be as large as implementing the general CAC plan, to getting a volunteer program, to adding a specific program component, to integrating an information data collection system. It is oriented in the present and focuses on giving everyone as much as they need to work together delivering good services. Deadlines are required to accomplish the limitless amount of work. For CACs that are just getting started, the details of building and staffing a facility to the designing of forms and finalizing operational procedures and protocols require disciplined execution. This will require training and a support system, so people learn how to pace themselves to avoid undue stress.

Leadership during this phase is managerial and administrative. It is a quieter style. Unlike the previous phase, individuals who take leadership roles at this time need to be practical, reliable and detail oriented. They must focus on getting a smooth running operation. They need to give recognition to team members and build in a process where everyone feels a sense of satisfaction about the tedious tasks they accomplish. These are usually people who have a storehouse of knowledge and experience to work with problems and who know how to get and give group support.

Effective completion of this phase will insure a smooth running center, well-integrated programs and movement toward positive interaction between individuals, groups, teams and agencies.

The Completion Phase focuses on evaluating the implemented goals of the previous phases. It is the slowest phase and is characterized by precision. The focus can be examining the quality and value of a particular program, interagency cooperation, board, or the whole organizational operation of a center. It is a time to reflect on how well the organization or program fulfilled the initial vision and mission. It involves an ongoing conversation about the values of a CAC and can inspire people to work toward high performance standards. It is oriented toward the past with a view toward future possibilities. It validates programs that work and the people who implemented them and provides a method of eliminating what is not valuable. Methods of evaluation vary. There are CACs that employ an evaluator to monitor their program from the beginning. Some programs build in informal data collection systems and analyze the data as a team. Others are required to undergo an independent evaluation as part of their funding contract.

Leadership in this phase is evaluative. It requires a person or persons who are precise, analytic and incisive. They are concerned with the greater good and ask questions such as, "Are we doing this well? Should we continue or eliminate it?" By measuring for quality, this phase will lead toward improving, changing and possibly expanding programs. It closes this five phase cycle and provides the information to move toward a new level of development that will, based on the Completion Phase, focus on different issues and problems. If done well, the organization or team will feel validated for their work, and ineffective programs will be eliminated or changed. The completed task in this phase is the basis for renewed personal and group resources to begin a new cycle.