

**ORGANIZING
PARENT NETWORKS**

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THEME

The previous workshops have focused on how individual parents can assist to improve the education of their children. This workshop addresses the need to organize parent networks so that parents can support each other in improving the education of their children.

FACILITATOR PREPARATION

Prior to conducting this workshop, the facilitator should:

- ✓ Read:
 - Facilitator's Manual
 - Reading Materials provided for this workshop

- ✓ Gather:
 - Flipchart
 - Magic markers
 - Chairs
 - Map of local neighborhood

- ✓ Do:
 - Set chairs in a circle

WORKSHOP TIMELINE

ACTIVITY A:	Introductions	10 minutes
ACTIVITY B:	Icebreaker: Parents are Buried Treasure	20 minutes
ACTIVITY C:	Role-playing: Getting Parents to Join a Parent Group	45 minutes
ACTIVITY D:	Wrap-up	<u>15 minutes</u>
	Total Time	90 minutes (1 hour, 30 minutes)

ACTIVITY A INTRODUCTIONS

TIME LIMIT  10 minutes

- OBJECTIVES**
- To welcome the group back and introduce new members to the group
 - To answer any questions not answered during the last workshop
 - To provide an overview of the workshop and how it will be conducted
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FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS

1. Welcome everyone back who attended the last workshop. Welcome any new members to the group and have them say something about themselves if they feel comfortable doing so. Then, have group members briefly introduce themselves to the new parents.
2. Announce that new group members should get in touch with a person who attended the previous workshops in order to get the reading materials.
3. Answer any questions which were not answered at the last workshop.
4. Provide an overview of the workshop and how it will be conducted. Your overview may contain the following:


"What happens at home is one of the biggest influences on how well a child does in school. We've learned how to better communicate with our children; that there are many ways to get involved in the education of our children; and the many rights we have, as parents, to be involved in school. We know, however, that it may be very difficult for one parent to act alone in bringing about change within the school for the benefit of our children.


The purpose of today's workshop is to give parents ideas on how to recruit and organize other parents to collectively advocate for a better education for their children. To help us examine these ideas we will be doing two exercises--an 'icebreaker exercise' and a 'role-playing exercise'."

ACTIVITY B ICEBREAKER EXERCISE: PARENTS ARE BURIED TREASURE

TIME LIMIT  20 minutes

OBJECTIVE ■ To identify sites where parents can meet other parents

PREPARATION  Make sufficient copies of the attached local map to hand out to each small group

 Have sufficient magic markers for each small group

FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS

1. Advise the group that this will be an **icebreaker exercise**. Have a group member explain what an **icebreaker exercise** is meant to do. Once the person is finished, you may want to fill in anything that was left out.
2. Break the group up into smaller groups. Provide each group with a magic marker and a copy of the map of a local neighborhood.
3. Ask each group to mark down places on the map where parents might be found. Advise everyone that they have five minutes. To facilitate their search, ask the group to also think about where they live, and then think of walking down the street--what kinds of places are they passing? They can add these places to the map.
4. Once everyone is done, have one person from each group say where and what kind of places they came up with, and make a list on your flipchart.
5. Suggest these places to them if they haven't thought of them:

· *In their building*


· *Among their neighbors on the street*

- *At informal gatherings of parents (picking up kids after school) in schools generally*
 - *At the "bodega" or local market*
 - *Community agencies*
 - *Churches*
 - *After-school programs*
 - *Programs teaching English as a second language*
 - *Job training programs*
 - *Youth groups*
 - *Youth recreation programs*
 - *Sports clubs*
6. After the exercise, reinforce that there are a lot of places where parents can be found, aside from school. Since people are already going there, some of them are likely places to have parent meetings as well.
 7. Explain to the group that finding people for group meetings is like looking for buried treasure--you may need a map. Once you find out where they are, however, you can then convince them to get involved. That is what the next activity is about.

ACTIVITY C ROLE-PLAYING: GETTING PARENTS TO JOIN A PARENT GROUP

TIME LIMIT  45 minutes

- OBJECTIVES**
- To identify some of the concerns group members have about getting involved in a parent group.
 - To discuss how some of those concerns may be alleviated so that parents may participate in meetings.

PREPARATION  Make sufficient copies of the Reading Material for this workshop entitled "**Organizing Parent Networks**" to hand out to the group at the end of the workshop

FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS

1. Advise the group that this will be a **role-playing exercise**. Have a group member explain what a **role-playing exercise** is meant to do. Once the person is finished, you may want to fill in anything that was left out.
2. Explain to the group that knowing where to find parents is just the first step in organizing a successful parent group. The next step, which is sometimes the hardest step, is to talk to parents and convince them to come to the meeting.
3. Ask group members to volunteer to play two roles:
 - *One volunteer will play a parent who recruits other parents to form a new active group about education. This person will try to convince the other to attend a meeting.*
 - *The second volunteer will play a non-active parent who is not sure that he/she wants to be active.*

Each person involved should perhaps imitate someone they know--they have to be completely convincing. Encourage them to have fun while they are doing this. The role play should last 3-5 minutes.

4. After the role-playing exercise, ask the group how many reasons they can come up with--serious and not so serious--for why parents can't always come to meetings, and write them down on a flipchart. They can start with the ones they saw in the role play, then add. A fairly complete list might include:

- *It's too far to get to the school where the meetings are held.*
- *I have two jobs, and don't have the time.*
- *I don't know anything about school issues or processes.*
- *The school teachers and administrators don't care what we think so why bother?*
- *It's a waste of time*
- *I don't fit in with that group*
- *I have to watch my favorite television show that night.*
- *It's scheduled when I'm cooking dinner.*
- *I'm not interested.*

5. People organizing community meetings have got to have serious answers for whatever reasons are used, so you should ask the people who are there how they would answer or otherwise try to solve these objections. Record their answers on another page of your flipchart. Here are some examples of possible answers that can be added to the list if they weren't brought up:

- **Meetings could be held closer to parents' homes rather than at the school, or in the parents' homes themselves**
- **Meetings could be set up at times when working parents are free with child care provided**
- **No one knows very much about school issues and processes, but to help your child do well in school, it's necessary to know something--we can learn together**
- **Some teachers and administrators don't do enough for us or our children, which is why it's important to get together in a group, to be strong enough to force them to listen to us.**
- **The purpose of the group is not just to be critical--but to learn about schools and our rights so our children will do well**

6. More than anything, you should encourage the group to stress the positive aspects of joining a group--how children whose parents are actively involved in education do better in school. Ask the group to give suggestions as to the advantages they see in getting together in groups of parents and list them on the flipchart.

ACTIVITY D WRAP-UP

TIME LIMIT  15 minutes

- OBJECTIVES**
- To summarize lessons learned
 - To invite group members to participate in the next workshop
 - To announce/schedule the next workshop
 - To obtain feedback

FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS

1. Have a group member explain what a "wrap-up" is meant to accomplish. Once the group member is finished, you may want to fill in anything that was left out.
2. Summarize accomplishments of the workshop. Ask the group what they learned. Be sure to include:
 - *Places to find parents for meetings*
 - *Ways to alleviate parents' concerns so that they attend parent meetings*
3. Invite the group to participate in all workshops. Announce that the next workshop will focus on "Group Dynamics."
4. Announce (or collectively schedule) the next workshop date, time and place. Be sure to advise group members of the method by which everyone will be contacted to confirm their attendance.
5. Provide members with copies of the Reading Material for this workshop entitled "Organizing Parent Networks."

READING MATERIAL FOR WORKSHOP EIGHT

Organizing Parent Networks

Getting Started

It takes special effort to encourage people to come to their first meeting. Involving themselves in complicated discussions on the schools and education is not very familiar to everyone.

When Latino parents take their children to school, they often believe the system will assign the children to schools, and educate them, without the need for any parental involvement. That was often their experience in Latin America. And in fact, the school system here also almost never asks parents for their opinions about their children's educations, except for when they get in trouble.

If parents are asked, many times they do not know or understand enough about what is being taught. Therefore, they cannot be sure if their children are being taught properly.

Visiting a school doesn't always help. Many Hispanic parents tell us that this is an experience in being burdened and intimidated.

Many barriers exist to parents' getting involved in meetings about school issues. When you begin organizing meetings, you should discuss these barriers with the parents at an early stage--perhaps by asking them the three most pressing issues that kept them from getting involved. **Examples of issues that can inhibit parent involvement are listed in EXHIBIT #2.**

EXHIBIT #2: THINGS THAT CAN INHIBIT PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- long distance to and from school
- different levels of education
- need to work one job and possibly two
- unfamiliarity with school issues, processes
- lack of trust in system
- disinterest in parent and student problems by school system and teachers
- intimidation of parents by system
- language barrier
- differing cultural attitudes and experiences of parents

Can you think of some others?

WORKING WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Overcoming these barriers to parent involvement can be quite hard. Parents might not want, or find it convenient to go to the schools for meetings.

In organizing meetings, you may want to work with institutions that can offer meeting sites. Community agencies, churches, and other institutions serving Latinos are examples of groups that might be helpful, and from which your first recruitment efforts can be carried out.

A list of institutions and other places useful for meeting and recruiting parents is included as EXHIBIT #3.

EXHIBIT #3: PLACES WHERE YOU CAN RECRUIT PARENTS

- community agencies
- churches
- after-school programs
- informal gatherings of parents (picking up kids after school)
generally near schools
- programs teaching English as a Second Language

One way to attract parents is to get them involved in issues that matter the most to them right away. It should be something that will spark interest, or get them concerned enough to become more involved. **(Remember, parents are concerned about their children first and foremost.)**

One possibility is for you, the group facilitator, to become involved in school advisory councils, and to encourage parents to join you at those meetings, where they can begin to see what is and what is not being done. A working relationship should be established with the schools. This will make it easier to give information to the parents. **A list of some other possibilities is included as EXHIBIT #4.**

EXHIBIT #4: PARENT GROUPS CAN TAKE MANY FORMS

- **parent-teacher organizations and associations**--groups of parents and teachers working with the school administration on projects that support the current work of the school
- **school advisory councils and school councils**--groups of parents, teachers, and administrators set up by the school (They may give advice to the school officials on specific programs, or they may have the power to make decisions about running the school.)
- **school foundations**--groups of parents who raise money for the school, especially for new equipment or building maintenance
- **school boards**--each school or school district has an elected board that makes decisions (If you feel your community is not represented on the board, a group of parents working together may be able to help one or more of their members get elected.)
- **parent advocacy groups**--groups of parents organizing to change certain policies of the schools or improve the school overall (Advocacy groups do not have to have the approval of the school to operate.)

Hopefully your efforts with different community organizations and institutions will quickly result in a group of interested parents. A list of institutions which might offer you places where you can have your meetings is included in EXHIBIT #5.

EXHIBIT #5: PLACES TO HAVE MEETINGS

- community agencies
- after-school programs
- churches
- schools
- any place with large meeting rooms
- non-institutional settings, such as private homes, apartments, etc. (if the group is not too large)

Once people start to volunteer, you should get their names, addresses and phone numbers. But if you have the time, you should get more information from them, including finding the best time and date they can go to meetings. A sample form showing what information might be best to gather is attached as **WORKSHEET #1: PARENT INVOLVEMENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT**.

With luck and hard work, you will develop a core group of parents. You will be able to begin to work with them to solve serious problems in your community.

WORKSHEET #1: PARENT INVOLVEMENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Estimado Padre/Encargado:
Dear Parent/Guardian:

Por favor responda a las siguientes preguntas. Sus respuestas nos ayudarán a prestar un mejor servicio a usted y a sus niños en edad escolar.

Please fill out this short questionnaire. The answers you provide will help us to better serve you and your child.

Gracias.
Thank you.

Eduardo Sanchez

Nombre: _____ Escuela: _____
Name: _____ School: _____

Dirección: _____ Nombre(s) de niño(s)/niña(s)
Address: _____ Child's name: _____

de teléfono: _____
Phone #: _____

Programa: _____
Program: _____

Marque los temas sobre los cuales le gustaría recibir información en otra reunión:
Check topics you would like to hear more about at a meeting:

- ___ 1. School District Policies and Procedures (*Reglamentos del Distrito Escolar*)
Standardized/Adapted Curriculum (*El currículo estandarizado, ¿qué es?*)
CSET/IEP Procedures (*Procedimientos para niños en educación especial*)
- ___ 2. Making good use of community agencies: Who are they? What do they do?
(*Como aprovechar la ayuda que ofrecen las agencias de la comunidad: ¿Cuáles agencias? ¿Qué hacen?*)

- ___ 3. Meeting your child's needs at home
(Como ayudar a sus hijos en el hogar)
 Behavior Management (*Comportamiento*)
 Home/School Cooperation (*Cooperación entre el hogar y la escuela*)
 Homework Supervision (*Supervisión de tareas escolares*)

- ___ 4. Parent/Child Advocacy
(Derechos de los padres y los estudiantes)

- ___ 5. Parent Training for in-school participation
(Preparándose para participar en la escuela de sus hijos)

- ___ 6. Promotion Policy/Report Cards
(Promoción académica del estudiante/Notas escolares)

- ___ 7. Other/Otro: _____

Check the time that is best for you to attend a meeting:

Indique el día y la hora que resulte más conveniente para usted para asistir a reuniones:

Lunes _____ Martes _____ Miércoles _____ Jueves _____ Viernes _____
 Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday

___ Morning: before noon (*en la mañana: antes de las doce*)

___ Afternoon: after noon (*en la tarde: después de las doce*)

___ Evening: after six (*en la noche: después de las seis*)

In which language would you prefer to receive information?:

¿En qué idioma prefiere usted recibir información?

Español: _____ English: _____