**Building a Caregiver Coalition**

**Background:** National Family Caregiver Support Program policy requires that, “*the aging unit shall convene or be a member of a local family-caregiver coalition or coordinating committee with other local providers who currently provide support services to family caregivers, (providing) an opportunity to advocate with other provider agencies about expanding and enhancing existing services in order to better meet the needs of family caregivers.”*

**What is a Caregiving Coalition?** A caregiving coalition is a community of representatives that has come together to address the needs of family caregivers across the lifespan with information and referral services, educational outreach and advocacy. A caregiving coalition presents a united voice working to meet the complex social, medical, physical, financial, spiritual, and emotional needs of family caregivers.

**How to get started?**

1. **Create basic structures**

* Invite partners: *see list of suggested coalition partners*
* Define expectations of participation: *define minimal level of participation (meeting attendance, financial or in-kind contribution, help with projects, etc.)*
* Leadership: *One leader? Rotating leaders? Agenda creation?*
* Communication: *Notes taken at meetings? Who? Create email list.*
* Logistics: *Frequency of meetings, time and location. Fixed or rotating schedule?*

1. **Create a vision statement** *(see examples of vision/mission statements)*

* A vision statement is a big picture dream of the way things should be. It gives a clear understanding of why the coalition exists.

1. **Create a mission statement**

* The mission statement is the coalition’s declaration of purpose; what the coalition is going to do to accomplish the coalition’s vision. A clear mission statement lets outside people know what general activities the coalition will undertake.

*\*\*The mission statement must be committed to and shared by all the partners.*

1. **Write goals and objectives**

* Goals define and prioritize actions the coalition will take in order to fulfill the mission and vision. Goals are more general statements of intent while objectives define the steps to reaching the goals. The obectives are essentially projects you will work on.
* Examples of goals:
  1. Encourage family caregivers to self-identify
  2. Promote and provide educational and training opportunities
* Examples of objectives:
  1. Develop an outreach program to help family caregivers self-identify
  2. Provide caregiver educational programs and resource information to health care providers, employers and the community at large

1. **Choose a project**

* Use your goals and objectives to come up with a project to work on. This is the core of why the coalition exists!
* It is important to have a project or activity to keep members interested and involved. While meetings are important, there needs to be a project or activity that the group can work on together in a collaborative way.
* Choose a project that is achievable and consistent with the coalition’s vision and mission. Focus on one piece of your vision so you don’t feel overwhelmed.
* Consider starting with something small enough to achieve in the short-term, or break down larger projects into several steps. A small, achievable step that leads to visible, concrete results will give your group a sense of progress and momentum while you build confidence, skills, and support.
* Utilize sub-committees as needed for efficiency. Seek new partners to fill in areas of deficiency if necessary.

1. **Create an action plan**
   * Each project should have an action plan that lays out the steps necessary to ensure efficiency, accountability and success. The action plan should include:
     1. Goals/objectives
     2. Actions/tasks
     3. Responsibility
     4. Timeline
     5. Needed resources
     6. Plan for communication
2. **Evaluate**
   * Evaluate the success of your project. Gain insight from coalition members and also those who were served by the project.
   * Evaluate your coalition. Review your goals and objectives and make adjustments as necessary.
   * Think about what will take place over time in order to sustain membership and interest in the work of the coalition.