



American Humane's 2010 Conference on
Family Group Decision Making
and Other Family Engagement Approaches
Fostering All the Connections

Conference Announcement and Call for Presentations

Tuesday, June 22, to Friday, June 25, 2010
Sheraton Burlington Hotel and Conference Center
Burlington, Vermont



AMERICAN HUMANE



Family Group Decision Making

Conference Announcement and Call for Presentations

The American Humane Association is pleased to announce the 2010 Conference on Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) and Other Family Engagement Approaches, June 22-25, in Burlington, Vt.

The conference organizers are seeking sessions on FGDM and other family engagement approaches from child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, domestic violence, judicial, adult services, education and other systems and practice settings from the United States and other countries. With this conference, and into the future, we will plan for the opportunity to learn across various systems working with children and families. Come join the more than 500 attendees from the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, New Zealand, Australia and Europe who gather each year to share their ideas and vision about advancing FGDM and other family engagement approaches. They bring with them extraordinary knowledge, enthusiasm, and new challenges and solutions.

International surveys indicate that various approaches to engage families in decision making are being implemented in more than 35 states and 22 countries, across multiple systems. In the U.S., a number of factors have resulted in more systems implementing FGDM and family engagement strategies. These include: (1) the Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs) and state Program Improvement Plans (PIPs), many which have documented family meetings as a strategy for child welfare improvement; (2) the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (PL 110-351), which funded Family Connection Grants to support FGDM and other programs; and (3) a growing body of knowledge worldwide about the effectiveness, benefits and outcomes of engaging family groups in decision making.

Over the past decade, agencies and community-based organizations have been implementing numerous family engagement and decision-making models as a way to provide inclusive and culturally respectful processes when decisions need to be made about children. Family group conferences, family team meetings, team decision meetings, family team conferences, child permanency mediation, child and family teams, family decision meetings, family safety planning meetings, wraparound services and family team decision making are some other commonly used family engagement approaches in child welfare and other child and family-serving systems that will be highlighted at this conference.

Please consider submitting a proposal that reflects your knowledge of FGDM and other family engagement approaches, highlights your community's experiences, broadens your colleagues' perspectives and advances this body of knowledge.

American Humane's National Center on FGDM released a seminal paper titled *Family Group Decision Making in Child Welfare: Purpose, Values and Processes* (2008). This document, developed in partnership with FGDM leaders worldwide, provides a clear definition of FGDM, enabling the accurate classification of family-involvement approaches as being FGDM, for the purposes of funding application, research and evaluation, and for training and education. FGDM processes are carefully managed and crafted to ensure fidelity to FGDM values and to ensure that those values drive practice. The following five items are critical to supporting exemplary practice in FGDM:

1. An independent (i.e., non-case carrying) coordinator is responsible for convening the family group meeting with agency personnel.
2. The child protection agency personnel recognize the family group as their key decision-making partner, and time and resources are available to convene this group.
3. Family groups have the opportunity to meet on their own, without the statutory authorities and other non-family members present, to work through the information they have been given and to formulate their responses and plans.
4. When agency concerns are adequately addressed, preference is given to a family group's plan over any other possible plan.
5. Referring agencies support family groups by providing the services and resources necessary to implement the agreed-upon plans.

Formats for Conference Sessions

Intensive seminars and skills-building institutes will serve as the pre-conference activities on Tuesday, June 22, 2010. The conference, beginning Wednesday, June 23, will include a combination of plenary sessions, formal workshop presentations and discussion groups.

Through this Call for Presentations, we are seeking applications for the formal workshops and discussion groups. By offering diverse formats, the conference accommodates different learning and participatory styles. Formal workshops and discussion groups last approximately 90 minutes. A formal workshop presentation is predominately a didactic presentation with sufficient time for questions and answers. A discussion group is a format in which a facilitator presents a limited amount of information, poses questions and moderates a dialogue on the topic. Because of the session time frames, the program committee strongly encourages you to narrowly define your proposed workshop and discussion group sessions. Past attendees have requested that sessions provide depth on the proposed issues. If accepted, presenters are strongly encouraged to follow their proposed format to meet attendees' learning expectations.

Theme: Fostering All the Connections

The conference's theme is based on an assumption that we are all interconnected in society. Engaging family groups in decision making about their children and young people results in the opportunity for a plethora of connections to be formed and/or strengthened to support achieving better outcomes for children and families. For example:

- Connections within family groups: Creating space for family members to connect and reconnect with one another, to recognize and tap into the strengths and protective capacities of family group members within the decision-making forum, and to collectively plan for their children.
- Connections in communities: Working to build the broader community and village — those formal resources and informal supports — to support and partner with family groups.
- Connections between families and service providers: Fostering respectful and transparent communication between families and service providers and listening to the needs of families, to meet their needs.
- Connections between children and youths and their family group: Recognizing that children belong to their extended family system whose responsibility it is to plan for them, and modeling their care and concern for children by participating in the decision-making forum.
- Connections among and between service providers: Working collaboratively, in a coordinated way, to serve families.
- Legislative connections: Leveraging the legislative connections of the Fostering Connections federal act and state and provincial statutes and policies.
- Connections between conference participants: To collectively build best practices and system changes for children and their families, and to enter into self- and system-reflective dialogues.



Conference Tracks

In developing your submission for a formal workshop or discussion group, please use the following track system, as well as the criteria for selection listed in the Criteria for Abstract Selection section of this announcement and on the application forms. The tracks have been broadly defined to give presenters flexibility to develop creative, stimulating sessions that fit within the context of their community and to include the larger themes of the conference. The bulleted items under each track's description should be used to stimulate, but not limit, the applicant's thinking, as they do not represent an exhaustive list of session possibilities.

Track 1: Emerging Connections: Practice Developments

This track broadly concerns the advancement of FGDM and other family engagement approaches as a way of reorganizing our work with families throughout multiple systems. Proposed sessions should be geared toward issues that affect family members, children, youths, coordinators, facilitators and others who are involved in the day-to-day practice of these approaches. The underlying values and principles of the espoused practices should be highlighted in the submission.

Abstracts could address a range of issues, including:

- The engagement of children and youths in these processes
- Involving fathers and paternal kin as core partners in decision making
- Concrete skills for coordination and preparation, and rapid engagement of family groups, children and youths, and community supporters
- Maximizing referral processes
- The relationship between the referring worker and the coordinator, the family or the supervisor
- The role of the referring worker in garnering internal and external support for this approach
- Effective supervision practices in implementing family engagement approaches
- Connection between family engagement and Signs of Safety
- Innovative designs from the newly released Family Connections federal grants

Track 2: Never-Ending Connections to Create Organization and Systems Change

This track focuses on FGDM and other family engagement approaches as a catalyst for systems change and coalition-building. Proposed sessions could discuss:

- Ways to genuinely involve families', youths' and children's voices in development, implementation and sustainability of FGDM and other family engagement approaches
- Connecting families with community resources and services that meet the needs they identify as essential
- Strategies to spread FGDM and other family engagement approaches throughout organizations and systems
- Maintaining model fidelity
- Developing internal and external coalitions to create an agenda for reform
- Leadership and/or involvement of faith-based and culturally diverse organizations in implementation
- Tactical strategies to create community collaborations to support this way of working with families
- Using FGDM approaches to address issues of disproportionality and racial disparities which are prevalent in child welfare, juvenile justice and criminal justice systems
- Public and private partnerships in the implementation of family engagement approaches
- Training and professional development strategies to promote practice growth
- Creating organizational and community culture shifts to manage and sustain change
- Sustaining FGDM and other family engagement approaches as a community-owned process through leadership and vision
- The connection between differential response and family engagement approaches

Track 3: A Necessary Connection: Legal Systems

Various legal issues emerge with the implementation of FGDM and other family engagement approaches. Partnerships between courts and other public systems to support this direction are essential. Abstracts could focus on:

- Implementation of the Fostering Connections for Success Act
- The role of the courts
- Partnerships between the courts and other child- and family-serving systems
- The role of judges, magistrates, attorneys, CASAs and guardians ad litem in these processes
- The connection between laws, policies and practices
- Issues of mandatory or permissive legislation

Track 4: Connecting the Dots: Research and Evaluation

This track focuses on research and evaluation in FGDM and other family engagement approaches. Proposed sessions could describe:

- The evaluation designs from the newly funded Fostering Connections federal grants
- Existing studies, including issues of design, analysis and data interpretation
- How evaluative activities can be supported and/or integrated into broader system change and other program improvement initiatives
- How the integration of outcomes and evaluation with broader community outcomes leads to practical and seamless cross-system changes

Track 5: Connections Across Systems

FGDM and other family engagement approaches are being implemented in many child- and family-serving systems, including dual systems, such as dependency and delinquency, domestic violence, education, juvenile justice, adult services, criminal justice and adult probation, mental health, and economic self-sufficiency. In addition, restorative justice approaches are increasingly embraced as a way to repair harm and promote accountability when crimes are committed. These systems employ a variety of approaches to serve vulnerable populations. While there are some distinct differences between the everyday practices, many of the values are consistent.

For FGDM and other family engagement and restorative justice strategies to become known as “the way decisions are made,” multiple systems need to operate under a similar philosophical paradigm and structure. Presentations in this track could focus on:

- The implementation of these approaches in systems other than child welfare or in a combination of systems
- Practice nuances
- Strategies to build community support
- Developing and sustaining interagency and multi-system relationships to implement these approaches
- Necessary policy adaptations
- Other cross-system lessons

Track 6: Culture, Privilege, Bias and Power and the Impact on Connections

True family engagement and involvement in decision making can only occur when a strong awareness and understanding of families' cultural needs is achieved. Additionally, it is vital to consider how privilege, bias and power uniquely impact the dynamics of engagement and decision making between family members and service providers. Proposed sessions could focus on:

- Alternative families, such as (but not limited to) kin care, gay and lesbian parents, gay and lesbian youth, deaf families, and families with religious diversity

- Looking through the families' lenses — how they perceive the service provider(s) and what service providers can do about it
- Effective engagement approaches for working with families whose cultures are different from your own
- The role of oppression in a family's relationship with any public system
- Disproportionality and disparity and how these phenomena are being addressed through family engagement and decision making
- Privilege and bias determining how families are engaged and included
- How to increase one's awareness of his/her privilege, biases and power
- Power through decision making: helping families harness their power

Track 7: Personal Growth and Leadership Development

FGDM and family engagement approaches benefit when leaders are developed across systems and at various levels, and when opportunities are created for service providers to reflect and grow their practice with families. Proposed sessions could include:

- The impact of family engagement approaches on individual workers' practices and beliefs
- Ways to promote family and youth leadership
- Growing and sustaining organizational and community leadership
- Coordinator/facilitator self-evaluation
- Practice exposure as opportunity for growth
- Implementing FGDM process in making organizational and community decisions
- Group supervision of staff

Audience

In your submission, please identify a target audience for your formal workshop or discussion group. This categorization helps participants identify the sessions that will best meet their learning needs. When selecting your target audience, please evaluate the content of your presentation materials and not your own level of expertise. The categories are:

- Foundational:** Less than one year of experience with family engagement approaches
- Intermediate:** Between one and three years of experience
- Advanced:** Four or more years of experience

Criteria for Abstract Selection

All abstracts will be reviewed by staff from American Humane and the conference program committee. Acceptance for presentation will be based on the extent to which the abstract meets the following selection criteria:

- Congruence and responsiveness of abstract with one of the tracks
- Clarity of the submission (Is the abstract communicated concisely?)
- Originality of the proposed session (Do the content and format reflect new perspectives or themes in the field?)
- The extent to which the proposed session generates new thinking or knowledge
- Diversity of methods to engage participants

Guidelines for Submission

Follow these steps to submit an application:

1. Visit American Humane's FGDM webpage at www.fgdm.org.
2. Select either the Formal Workshop or Discussion Group form (MS Word documents), and save it on your own computer or network. If you are unable to access these forms, please contact Candy Larue at candyl@americanhumane.org. Complete the Formal Workshop or Discussion Group form and the 500-word abstract, and attach a resume for each presenter/facilitator. All these items are required by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to qualify the presentation for continuing education certification. Please note that the program committee strongly suggests a maximum of three presenters per discussion group or formal presentation.
3. After completing the form and other materials, either email them as an attachment or print and mail them to the address below. All applications must reach American Humane by Nov. 16, 2009, and must be fully completed to be considered. Applications sent by fax will not be considered. There is no limit to the number of applications that may be submitted by a particular individual or agency.

Email: candyl@americanhumane.org

Standard Mail:

American Humane Association
2010 Conference on FGDM and Other Family Engagement Approaches
Attn: Candy Larue
63 Inverness Drive East
Englewood, CO 80112-5117

Questions

For additional information about American Humane or FGDM, please visit www.americanhumane.org. If you are having difficulty sending your submission, please contact Candy Larue at (303) 925-9440 or candyl@americanhumane.org. If you have questions about a potential submission, please contact either Lisa Merkel-Holguin at (303) 925-9421 or lisa@americanhumane.org or Anita Horner at (303) 925-9449 or anitah@americanhumane.org.

Presenter Agreement

By submitting a proposal, selected presenters and co-presenters are responsible for:

- Completing a registration form, even if only presenting and not attending sessions (no registration fee). If attending other conference sessions or events, the registration fee must be paid.
- Paying all costs related to transportation, room and board.
- Bringing their own laptop, projectors and speakers, if needed for the presentation.
- Providing handouts in sufficient quantity for workshop sessions and facilitated groups.
- Providing handouts and/or PowerPoint presentations by June 7, 2010, to American Humane for distribution to all conference participants.
- Lead presenters are responsible for communicating all conference information and instructions to their co-presenters.