

## **Appendix H-4. Creating a Statewide Advisory Board**

### **Brenda Myers, South Carolina State Coordinator**

I became the state coordinator shortly after the last reauthorization of ESEA in 2002, so I inherited an approved state plan. One of the items proposed in the state plan was the creation of a statewide advisory board. Since I wasn't in the role when the plan was written, I'm not sure where the idea for the board originated. One of the first steps we took was to develop a comprehensive list of all the agency heads that might need to be included. An invitation was sent to the agency heads as an official request from our state superintendent which gave it more clout than just coming from me. People accepted, declined, or provided an alternate person to participate. We had about 22 agencies involved with 30-34 people at the table. We had representation from the University of South Carolina, Department of Health and Environmental Control, South Carolina Housing Authority, the United Way, faith-based organizations, the Red Cross, Department of Juvenile Justice, HUD Continuum of Care, Veterans Administration, Department of Mental Health, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Social Services, early childhood and Head Start, Hispanics Connections, Pupil Transportation, Title I, Special Education and School Nutrition. Later, we added law enforcement. I also had six homeless liaisons – two with subgrants and four without grants. Since I worked more closely with my subgrantees, I had a pretty good idea about what they would say. I wanted more nongrantees to add a voice I didn't know as well.

I never had less than 25 people at a meeting. We met quarterly, and our meetings were a full day with lunch provided. We met at a building that had no food, so I could justify providing a nice lunch, not just a box lunch. At the first meeting, I provided an overview of McKinney-Vento and set the purpose of the board. We identified the big needs at that time which were immediate enrollment, school selection, Title I, transportation, and development of our dispute resolution. (Now the foci would be different; it would probably be unaccompanied homeless youth, Title I, transportation, and early childhood.) We divided into subcommittees for each of the initiatives, and I included a liaison on each. I facilitated the meetings but I didn't chair any of the subcommittees. There was a chair and vice chair for each, and they took

ownership for their charge. We would start each meeting as a whole group and update everyone, and then we would break out into the committees to do the actual work.

It really was not hard to start this initiative. It did save time because it brought all the players to me. Before having the board, I always had to invite myself to the table. After starting the board, things changed. There was more awareness, the Coalition president and our HUD staff knows who I am and they know I'll come, so they recommend me to be at other tables. Some great relationships came from this. For example, the Department of Juvenile Justice recognized that one of their problems was figuring out what to do when a youth was ready to leave but couldn't go home. I was able to help them connect with the shelters and group homes, so they got their needs met, too.

One of the hardest parts was deciding which agencies to include and how to involve key folks without having such a large group that it wouldn't work. Another major challenge was getting agency folks who had such a strong policy focus to see CHILDREN FIRST and keep the human focus. That was necessary to break down barriers and look outside the box for solutions.

We developed a state manual that offered guidance to our school districts and drafted forms that could be used across the state. When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit, we put the board on hold. By the time we were ready to reconvene, reauthorization was already being discussed. We've decided to wait for reauthorization to bring everyone back together.

Yes, it was worth it. I enjoyed listening to outside groups and how they saw the issue of homelessness. I was opening eyes!