

**Early Connections System of Care
Stipend/Family Reimbursement Policy for
Parents/Caregivers and Youth
Alameda County, California
*Funded by SAMHSA***

Early Connections is a systems change effort to better meet the needs of families with children 0-5 who may feel their children are experiencing serious social, emotional, behavioral and related developmental concerns in Alameda County. *Early Connections* highly values and encourages family and youth participation with the goals of ensuring a family-driven system of care, in which families are involved in all aspects of decision-making, planning, implementation and evaluation and quality improvement. Our goal is to have 51% Family Member/Youth representation of all Early Connections Action Teams, the Full Partnership and Coordinating Council. The purpose is to make sure family members have equal voice in all decisions that are made with regards to Early Connections. To that end, we would like to establish and adhere to a policy and set of protocols to ensure family members and youth are compensated for their participation and related expenses. Along with this document, please also see the **Community Recruitment and Engagement Policy**.

Purpose of Policy

The overall purpose of this policy is to pay parents/caregivers and youth to participate in the system-of-care, for the broader goal of ensuring their voice is represented in all phases of Early Connections. The policy will help to ensure that value is placed on parents/caregivers and youth for their time spent by defraying some of the costs of actively participating in the various meetings and committees. This policy must be adhered to by all members of Early Connections hereafter. **Please note that stipends will be paid based on the fiscal budget, or as funds are available.**

Definition of Stipend/Family Reimbursement

A stipend is a set amount of money that will be paid for active participation at any Early Connections Governing Body meeting. The Governance meeting could include the following:

- Action Teams
- Full Partnership
- Other Early Connections -related activities

The purpose of the stipend is to:

1. Defray the costs of child care and transportation to enable family members to participate in Early Connections meetings.
2. The stipend can also compensate a family member/youth for time spent in Early Connections activities that are not related to the Governance meetings, if indicated.

Guiding Principles for Stipend/Family Reimbursement Allocation

In order to successfully recruit and retain parents and youth as true partners in the Early Connections Governing Body, stipends must be provided *quickly* and *flexibly* to meet recipient needs. Because parent/caregiver and youth involvement are critical to our community, the following six guiding principles established in conjunction with United Advocates for Children and Families, Early Connections Management Team and the Family Leadership Team are as follows:

1. An adequate family involvement budget shall be established to support parent/caregiver and youth voice on all Early Connections Governing Body meetings.
2. Funding to support parent/caregiver and youth involvement can be used for participant stipends, cost associated with meetings, transportation, childcare and/or other cost-effective and useful supports as identified by the participants. The intent of the support is that parents/caregivers and youth directly receive the support that enables them to participate as requested.
3. Use of funding must follow Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). Please see 4a below.
4. For maximum flexibility, highest speed in reimbursement and maximum use of parent/caregiver and youth input, stipends for Action Teams and other meetings will be administered by United Advocates for Children and Families (UACF).
 - a. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) define stipend as a fixed sum of money paid periodically for services or to defray expenses. For the purpose of this policy, a stipend is given to defray the costs of childcare and/or transportation as it relates to participating in Early Connections Governing Body meetings.
 - b. When a gift card is issued, it is understood that the amount of the gift card will offset the cost of childcare and transportation.
5. Use of funding must follow policies and procedures set forth by the Early Connections Grant Administrators and UACF.
6. Early Connections Grant Administrators can interpret and resolve issues as they are identified and report back to the Family Leadership Team (FLT) at the next scheduled meeting.

Why do we need Stipends?

Action Teams have been established as part of governance to help inform, and make decisions and recommendations for the SOC. Alameda County is one of the most ethnically diverse counties in the nation; therefore, all teams and groups should represent that diversity. Equal representation of family members and providers is critical to all action teams. In order to achieve this representation, stipends/ reimbursements are provided for child care and transportation costs incurred by parents/caregivers and youth who choose to participate in these Action Teams. (On occasion, childcare will be provided on site for the convenience of family members participating in a meeting.) The stipends also serve to value the participation and experiences of parents/caregivers and youth in the effort of transforming the overall Early Childhood System of Care. This document explains the policies regarding stipends.

What is Expected of Family Members in Stipend Positions?

In order to receive a stipend, the following should take place:

1. All interested parties should attend an Early Connections orientation meeting to learn more about how to become specifically involved in the various Action Teams and other Governing bodies.
 - a. Participants can decide, at that time, which group they would like to join and become an active member.
2. Stipends will be issued from this point forward.
3. Please see Community Recruitment and Engagement Policy for more details.

Who Qualifies for a Stipend Position?

- Parents/caregivers and youth who have completed an Early Connections orientation class and agree to adhere to the Community Recruitment and Engagement Policy.

The definition of Parent/Caregiver is as follows: a primary caregiver of a child or youth with social, emotional, behavioral, and related developmental concerns or at risk of these concerns.

The definition of Youth is as follows: a youth with social, emotional, behavioral, and related developmental concerns. Or a primary caregiver of a child with these concerns.

Who is Excluded from Receiving a Stipend?

Early Connections highly values parent/caregiver and youth participation and welcomes their attendance in as many meetings as they would like. However, due to the diversity of our families as well as budget limitations, the following guidelines are intended to assure broad representation of family and youth voice in EC activities.

- Parents/caregivers and youth who attend activities as part of their employment duties cannot receive a stipend.
- In order to have a variety of opinions voiced, no more than two members from one family (e.g. one youth and one parent, two parents, etc.) can receive a stipend for the same meeting.
 - o Parents/caregivers and youth will only be paid for participating regularly in one Action Team and all ancillary meetings related to that action team. They will also be paid for participating in the Full Partnership or the Coordinating Council.
- A parent/caregiver or youth who has not completed an Early Connections orientation.
- Individuals who work under contract with Early Connections as providers of services and supports including parent/caregivers and youth.
- Parents/caregivers and youth who co-convene for an Action Team will not receive a stipend for participating in a different Action Team from the one they co-convene.
- Providers in the Alameda County 0-5 System of Care.

How Does a Family Member Collect a Stipend/Reimbursement for Their Participation?

- Parents/caregivers and youth will have the option of receiving a gift card or check by mail within 30 days of their participation at an Early Connections meeting they signed up to participate in. Participants will be required to sign in at the meeting to verify their attendance. They will also be asked to identify which form of payment they would prefer at the point of meeting selection.

What is the Stipend/Reimbursement Payment Breakdown?

- Parents/caregivers and youth who participate in a meeting where child care is provided at the meeting will receive a \$25 stipend.
- Parents/caregivers and youth who participate in a meeting where child care is not provided at the meeting will receive a \$30 stipend.
- Parents/caregivers and youth who co-convene (co-lead) an action team or other committees will receive \$25 an hour for co-convening the meeting with a maximum of 2 hours of work to prepare for convening the meeting for a maximum of a \$100 stipend per meeting.
- Parents/caregivers and youth who sit on the Early Connections' Management Team meeting will receive \$25 an hour for meeting participation only. This amount will be received in either a check or gift card. Participants will be asked to identify which form of payment they would prefer at the beginning of their service on the Management Team. Payment will not be issued for any preparation time outside of the meeting. Parents/caregivers and youth who serve on the Management Team will do so for a one year term in order to have a variety of voices at the table.

- Parents/caregivers and youth who participate in time-limited Early Connections' sub-committees will receive a one-time stipend determined by the type of work being done and the Management Team.
- Parents/caregivers and youth who participate in presenting an Early Connections' orientation will receive a stipend of \$30 for each presentation.
- Gift cards could include a combination of the following:
 - Safeway cards
 - Walmart cards
 - Target cards
 - **(This list is subject to change based on availability of gift cards.)**
- Parents/caregivers and youth can expect a stipend and/or reimbursement check or gift cards up to 30 days after turning in their stipend and reimbursement forms.

Stipend/Reimbursement for Conferences

Local Travel

- Parents/caregivers and youth who attend an Early Connections approved local conference or training will attend the event at the expense of United Advocates for Children and Families (UACF) funded by SAMHSA Early Connections. Registration and payment will be made by UACF in advance of the event. The cost of transportation to attend the event will be reimbursed upon providing a receipt or reporting mileage to and from event. Reasonable charges for necessary parking or tolls will also be reimbursed with a receipt. Mileage reimbursement is at the standard mileage rate as determined by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). No other stipends will be issued for attending local conferences or trainings.

Out-of-town Travel

- Parents/caregivers and youth who travel overnight for a SAMHSA required event will travel at the expense of United Advocates for Children and Families (UACF) funded by SAMHSA Early Connections.
 - Travel and hotel arrangements will be made by UACF in advance.
 - Meal stipend checks will be disbursed a maximum of one week in advance of expected travel date. Meal stipend checks will be in the amount of the federal per diem rate.
 - Stipends will be issued for child care expenses only for these special events. No other stipends or reimbursements will be issued for attending these special events requiring overnight travel.
 - The stipend for childcare while the family member is out of town will be \$100.00 per day per family for children 12 years old and under or any child in need of specialized care.
- **Reimbursement for travel expenses is based on availability of funds.**

What are the Financial Implications of Accepting a Stipend?

- **In order to receive a check from UACF each parent/caregiver or youth will have to fill out a W-9 form.**
- **Accepting a check from UACF may decrease other public assistance such as SSI Benefits and Food Stamp eligibility. Accepting a check may increase the amount of taxes a parent/caregiver or youth may owe the state and federal government.**
- Each participant receiving \$600 or more will receive a 1099. This income is reported to the IRS and may require the family member/youth to file an income tax return.
- Parents/caregivers and youth who receive stipends/consultation fees are not employees of United Advocates for Children & Families, Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services and First 5 Alameda County.
- A **co-convener** has the option of either accepting a stipend check or gift cards that total to \$25.00 per hour.

Availability of Funds

Early Connections is funded from 2009-2015. Availability of funds for Family Reimbursement will be determined on a yearly basis and maybe subject to change.

Interpretation

UACF is responsible for the official interpretation of this policy in collaboration with Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services and First 5 Alameda County. Questions regarding the application of this policy should be addressed to the Early Connections staff. The stipend policy will be evaluated on a yearly basis.

We thank you for your commitment and participation to improving the *Early Connections System-of-Care and to ensuring healthy, stable and resilient families and children 0-5 with social, emotional, behavioral and related developmental concerns in Alameda County.*