



Lead Family Coordinators: *Roles, Responsibilities, and Opportunities*

The Lead Family Coordinator (LFC) is a required role in the System of Care (SOC) Expansion and Sustainability Grants (also known as the Children’s Mental Health Initiative) funded through SAMHSA. Filling this position demonstrates a commitment to the value of a family-driven system for children, youth, and young adults with mental health, substance use, and multi-system challenges. Hiring the right person to fill this role is both important and takes time. A relationship with a family-run organization (FRO) can help you be successful in your search.

WHAT IS A FAMILY-RUN ORGANIZATION?

FROs are family-led, 501 (C)(3) non-profit organizations dedicated to supporting families who are caring for children, youth, and young adults with mental health, substance use, or multi-systems challenges – and the agencies that serve them.¹ The organization is governed and guided by the lived experience of families. FROs encompass the collective experiences of families in their states, commonwealths, and communities, and advocate for change based on those experiences. They are specialty providers, each as unique as the families they serve. FROs connect with lots of families with diverse experiences and various skills. If you need help finding or connecting with a FRO near you, let us know at info@fredla.org.

The LFC is a core member of the management team for the grant and site. In addition to participating in management activities, LFCs serve a number of functions in the operation of the grant. They are liaisons to families and partners with family-run organizations (FROs). They help other system partners identify opportunities for engaging families throughout all aspects of care. They engage families to inform policy and practice recommendations that will lead to positive outcomes (such as access to services). The LFC collaborates with community groups that reflect cultural and ethnic diversity and supports their involvement in the SOC. The LFC budget can support the development of family leadership, training, and participation on task forces, committees, or governance boards. LFCs advance family roles and functions throughout the system and advance parent-peer support services in the community. In summary, the LFC role is essential to the success of the system of care.

Embracing the Lead Family Coordinator within the SOC Infrastructure

The Project Director and LFC are a unique team – both advance the overarching goals of the SOC while navigating the healthy tensions that accompany their roles and responsibilities. The exceptional experience of LFCs is as unparalleled as that of other leadership positions (such as a clinical director or DEI specialist) warranting their place on the senior management team. Embracing the LFC in a management role helps your system of care make informed decisions about services, processes, and policy-making that reflect the experiences of families.

Hiring a Lead Family Coordinator

Qualifications of LFC

The foremost qualification for this position is “lived experience” as the primary caregiver for a child, youth, or young adult with behavioral health needs *and* in navigating one or more systems for their child. In addition, the LFC must have other qualities and skills, such as self-awareness, strong communication, experience in advocating and coalition building, and a willingness to collaborate. This document describes additional skills and characteristics for this role. It is important to note and

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understand that the LFC should not be viewed as THE voice of families, but rather as a conduit to engage families throughout the system, and, when necessary, to reflect their collective voice and shared vision.

There are three main models for engaging a Lead Family Coordinator in a system of care community; hiring in an organizational structure outside a family-run organization, contracting for the position within a family-run organization, or contracting with a known family leader to assume the responsibility until the LFC is hired.

Models external to a Family Run Organization: One successful model includes the SOC setting aside money from the program to support the growth and development of a family organization when one does not exist. This provides financial support, greater visibility, and sustainability for the family movement and establishes an expectation of family involvement beyond the funded grant period. Another model permits SOC sites to directly hire a LFC as an employee of the state or local government agency. The advantages to this arrangement are that the LFC has close access to the SOC project director and other key staff, particularly when they are members of the management team. It is important to recognize that numerous procedural obstacles in local or state government can impede or prolong the hiring process for an LFC. Family members hired under this arrangement may feel isolated, or become viewed by other family members in the community as no longer having authentic family experience. The LFC needs to access family support for their own needs, engage in peer-related opportunities, and receive supervision from a peer so they are clear about their role and know how to handle task-related challenges they may face.

Contracting with a Family-Run Organization: Many SOCs have contracted directly with an FRO to designate a current senior staff member to function as the LFC, or to hire a new staff member for the position. There are multiple advantages to this arrangement. The FRO may have participated in planning the proposal and would be knowledgeable about the structure and goals of the award. An FRO is uniquely organized to hire, train, and support the LFC role as their policies and procedures are designed for the lived experience workforce. This eliminates some of the barriers encountered when hiring someone with lived experience in governmental or county structures. Additionally, the FRO may have an experienced staff person who fits the criteria for LFC and is aware of the selected family member's ability to assume a leadership role in the award. FROs have established networks of families, resources and training for family engagement and leadership, and connections to systems that are all valuable to the work of the system of care and to implementation of the grant.

Contracting with a family leader: In the third approach, the SOC contracts with a family leader to assume the duties of the LFC. This strategy should be temporary, and only be used while the SOC seeks to overcome obstacles it has met in hiring a LFC, or if the grant goals include developing a family-run organization because one does not exist. In this case, the grantee can play a critical role in "incubating" the family-run organization by employing or contracting with a lead family member while the forming family-run organization completes the necessary procedures required by state and federal law to operate.

Skills, Competencies, and Duties of the LFC

The following lists provide examples of skills, competencies and duties of the Lead Family Coordinator. There may be others to add based on the specific populations served by the SOC or other factors.

EXAMPLES OF SKILLS:

- Written and verbal communication
- Computer literacy (basic and common applications such as Word, PowerPoint, Zoom, etc.)

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- Understanding and a demonstrated application of the SOC values and principles
- Effective advocacy skills
- Public speaking skills
- Experience in delivering training across a variety of audiences (families, practitioners, etc.)
- Ability to maintain professional boundaries and behaviors
- Ability to work with diverse groups to foster partnerships and collaborations among systems, families, and youth.
- Ability to translate lived experience to policy or practice solutions

EXAMPLES OF COMPETENCIES:

- Comfortable with, and appropriate in, sharing their own lived experiences with others
- Awareness that lived experience (positive and negative) fosters personal growth
- Ability to recognize and understand multiple points of view (engage in perspective-taking)
- Capacity to think beyond their own family needs to understand the perspective and needs of other families, as well as the needs of agencies or systems
- Employs a non-judgmental and unbiased approach to others, as well as practices cultural humility in interactions and tasks
- Recognizes and values diverse opinions
- Team player who works for the benefit of the whole rather than self

EXAMPLES OF DUTIES:

- Participate as a full member of the SOC management team for the SOC initiative to accomplish their goals and objectives.
- Promote the mission and vision of the SOC values and principles of families as partners throughout all aspects of care within the SOC team and externally with communities and systems.
- Support and facilitate families to be engaged in all aspects of the SOC, including oversight of a family engagement budget, advancing the parent peer support role, engaging in family leadership development, etc.
- Work in a supportive partnership with an existing family-run organization or guide the development of one if none exists.
- Inform the SOC about barriers families are experiencing in the system or its services and contribute to solutions and strategies.
- Work with the lead evaluator to ensure evaluation activities include youth and families, and reflect their prioritized outcomes of youth and families.
- Work in partnership with the youth coordinator, if one exists, to ensure that family and youth activities of the SOC initiative take place in a coordinated and complimentary way.

Supporting the Lead Family Coordinator

The most important responsibility of the LFC is to engage a diverse complement of families and ensure they are prepared to be involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the SOC efforts. To accomplish their job, the LFC requires resources, (i.e. current information, tools, and a budget to support their work). The SOC budget must include resources for engaging families, providing training, and supporting their participation. The LFC also requires support to strategize around any challenges or barriers they encounter in their position or assigned duties. Helping the LFC understand the boundaries and ethics of their role early on will help them be successful as champions in their role.

Supervising Lead Family Coordinators

Supervision is a key component in the success and retention of a Lead Family Coordinator (LFC). This role can be a difficult one as the LFC is often initially the only or the main family voice on the management team and within the grant. Supervisors must understand the role and functions of the LFC across settings and efforts, implement policies that value the LFC as both professional and parent, and be a champion for family-driven care internally and with external partners and systems. One of the keys to effective supervision is recognition that the LFC not only has lived experience but may be currently living their experience as well. Supervisors should employ a developmental approach that promotes the unique lived experience of the LFC and supports the inclusion of the LFC in the management structure of the system of care grant and work. This includes creating an environment that values lived experience and embraces parents as partners. It also calls for having clear and appropriate job descriptions for all staff and how they are integrated into the work of the agency or grant; facilitating a workplace culture that is inclusive and strengths-based, and: infusing youth and family voice in meaningful ways into the operations of the organization. Additionally, supervisors should facilitate opportunities for growth and advancement for their lived experience staff, including a schedule of ongoing training appropriate to the role, a professional development budget for conferences and classes, and developing a career ladder specific to the lived experience workforce. While many sites have the Project Director as the programmatic supervisor for the LFC, individuals in this role also benefit from peer supervision (a supervisor who has lived experience and has used that experience in a professional role for several years). This supervision can occur within a family-run organization. Suppose the SOC requires a mental health professional in the supervisor role. In that case, the FRO or mental health agency can hire a Master's level person who also has lived experience as the primary caregiver of a child/youth with mental health challenges. When supervision occurs outside a family-run organization, supervisors can benefit from consultation or coaching from the organization for strategies that support the lived experience workforce.

Effective supervision calls for maximizing productivity, and communicating with and motivating staff. Supervising in a SOC requires talent that supports a multi-generational and diverse workforce in a fast-paced environment. Supervisors also need training and ongoing professional development to support their team members. Supervising the Lead Family Coordinator is an exciting opportunity for the professional growth of both the LFC and the supervisor!

¹ The foundation of family-run organizations consists of four essential elements: 1) Its mission is dedicated to supporting families caring for a child or youth described in this section; 2) The organization is governed by a minimum of 50% family members with lived experience; 3) The Executive Director or CEO and the majority of staff members providing support are family members with lived experience, and; 4) the organization promotes and advances family voice