PARENT ENGAGEMENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT: A GUIDE FOR LITERACY PRACTITIONERS

A practical toolkit to support literacy practitioners in promoting positive parent and caregiver engagement in children’s learning.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONTRIBUTORS

This guide was spearheaded by members of the Project Literacy Community of Practice. It was developed through a practitioner-driven, multi-stage process, which included contributions from many individuals and organizations.

During initial stages, consultations with the following individuals helped shape the direction

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The following terms are used throughout the guide. These definitions are by no means prescriptive but are outlined for the sake of mutual understanding and to avoid confusion.

**Literacy**: The ability to read and write.

**Literacy development**: A series of skills that culminate in a deep understanding of text (the ability to read), beginning with the ability to understand spoken words and decode written words.

**Stakeholder**: Any person, group, or organization who may influence or be influenced by a program or service.

**Home learning environment**: Conditions in and around the home, as well as interactions a child has at home with different family members and caregivers.

**Native language (L1)**: Language that a person has been exposed to from birth. Also known as an individual’s first language or mother tongue. In some countries, native language refers to the language of one’s ethnic group rather than one’s first language.

**Scale-up**: Process of expanding or replicating an innovative project to reach more people and/or broaden the effectiveness of an intervention.

**Social network**: An individual’s network of social interactions and personal relationships.

**Course-correct**: To correct something as the process is happening. After realizing improvements are needed, you make improvements during the process without restarting from the beginning.

**Theory of change**: An approach for planning and evaluation that is used to promote social change. The method defines long-term goals and then maps backward to identify necessary preconditions. It is the thinking behind how a particular intervention will bring about lasting change. **For more information**: https://usaidlearninglab.org/lab-notes/what-thing-called-theory-change.

**Human-centered design**: A process that starts with the people you are designing for and ends with solutions tailored to their needs. **To learn more**: http://www.designkit.org/human-centered-design.

**Strengths-based approach**: An approach that focused on strengths of individuals and families, rather than weaknesses, to promote positive partnerships. **To learn more**: https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/developing-relationships-families/strength-based-attitudes.

**Policy advocacy**: A range of activities an organization can use to influence decision-makers on a particular policy or program that affects the lives of the people served by the organization. For example, educating government officials on the need for more government-funded literacy programs.

**Political will**: Commitment or lack of commitment by decision-makers on a particular issue, solution, or policy.

**Educational assessment**: A systematic process of documenting and analyzing data on students’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs to refine programs and improve student learning. Educational assessments can be used to compare student outcomes across different schools, regions, and even countries.

**Target population**: A group of individuals that a program is designed to serve.

**Citizen-led assessments**: Local volunteers are trained to administer literacy assessments in households. The process can act as a force of bottom-up accountability and action to improve education quality and learning. **For more information**: http://www.r4d.org/wp-content/uploads/Bringing-Learning-to-Light_English.pdf

**Technological literacy**: The ability to use and understand technology.
INTRODUCTION

Today, 1 in 10 people globally are unable to read and write — more than the entire population of Europe (UNESCO, 2017). People who struggle with literacy are more likely to live in poverty, lack education, have difficulty finding a job, and miss out on opportunities to participate fully in society (Ibid). Greater parent engagement in education is needed to tackle this global challenge. Research in both developed and developing countries shows that positive parent engagement at home and in school can lead to improved literacy outcomes (National Institute for Literacy, 2006). Yet, we continue to see an overreliance on teachers and only a small minority of parents actively involved in their children’s learning. Literacy practitioners cite a number of barriers to more productive parent engagement, including:

- Parents are unaware or confused about their roles and responsibilities related to children’s learning
- Parents lack confidence in their ability to fulfill these responsibilities
- Parents may have other commitments that interfere with their ability to actively participate at home or in their child’s school
- Poor communication or distrust between parents and teachers/administrators at school (National Center for Education Statistics)

Parent-child engagement can lead to improved literacy outcomes.

Literacy practitioners possess the tools to promote greater parent engagement in children’s literacy development; however, efforts often fall short as they struggle to fully empower parents, recognize their constraints, take advantage of existing networks, or overcome a general lack of parental enthusiasm or willingness to engage. There is a need for practitioners to create and deliver programs that are engaging and relevant to the needs of parents (Baker, 2015). Progress towards increasing parent engagement at home and in school will require local ownership and customized strategies for specific contexts. This guide aims to support literacy practitioners in achieving this goal.

What is parent engagement?

Parents can support their children’s literacy development from an early age and in a variety of ways. Parent engagement activities are commonly classified into two broad categories: family-school partnerships and family-led or home-based learning (National Institute for Literacy, 2006).

1. Family-school partnerships are activities that encourage parent-teacher communication and engagement in the school community, such as parents attending school events, volunteering in the classroom, communicating with teachers about children’s academic progress, or participating in school governance.

2. Family-led learning activities happen when parents actively engage with children’s learning at home, including bringing home learning materials such as books or education videos, talking, playing, or joint reading with a child at home, or reviewing a child’s homework.

According to UNICEF, parent engagement programs are defined as interventions or services aimed at providing information, education, skills, and support on child development to parents and caregivers (UNICEF, 2015). The guide uses this definition when referring to parent engagement programs, focusing specifically on those that support parents in engaging with literacy-related activities.
PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The guide helps you gather information to make more informed decisions.

We recognize that literacy practitioners work in complex environments including engagement with different types of parents and caregivers, settings, and services. The purpose of the guide is to support this work by providing easy-to-use guidance on determining the realities, beliefs, needs, and resources of your community, building local ownership and customized strategies in the process.

With an ultimate goal of promoting greater parent engagement in children’s learning, the intended result is for users of the guide to analyze the information they collect and use it to develop and implement tailored parent engagement programs that parents will actually use and benefit from.

Remember: In certain situations, a child’s primary caregiver may not be his or her biological parent. The guide will use the terms parent and caregiver interchangeably, referring to all caregivers regardless of their age, gender, or family relation to the child.
WHO WILL FIND THIS GUIDE USEFUL?

This guide was developed by literacy practitioners just like you. It is intended for literacy advocates and those who design, implement, and evaluate parent engagement programs, particularly those who engage low or non-literate populations. The information is applicable to all country contexts.

Is this tool right for me?

If you identify with one (or more) of these statements, the guide can benefit your work.

- I work directly with parents and caregivers on children’s literacy or education issues.
- I want to understand the biggest literacy challenges facing my community
- I am a decision-maker who advocates for policies that impact parents and families
- I currently implement a program or service that engages parents and caregivers in children’s education
- I am interested in designing and/or implementing a program or service that engages parents and caregivers in children’s education
- I evaluate the effectiveness or impact of literacy and/or parent engagement programs

What this tool is NOT

- A comprehensive guide on how to design a parent engagement program
- A comprehensive guide on how to evaluate the impact of a parent engagement program
- A tool for assessing the literacy of parents and caregivers
  - The tool is intended to increase parental engagement in children’s literacy development, not necessarily improve the literacy skills of parents and caregivers.

You may feel like you already know the answers to the questions in this guide; nevertheless, it is still valuable to intentionally collect information on different aspects of the literacy context and caregiver experience. The process can help identify biases or assumptions you hold that could impact the success of your program or service.
The guide contains two main sections. The introduction section outlines a set of guiding principles on how to engage and empower parents and caregivers in support of their children’s literacy development. The framework section of the tool then provides a series of one-pagers with guiding questions to help you assess the broader literacy context, a household’s home learning environment, and the caregiver experience.

One-pagers in the framework section can be read in sequential order or individually. Select only the topics and guiding questions you feel you need. Each begins with a summary of key points. Some are more technical, due to their subject matter, than others, but they all mean to convey practical information to readers who do not have specific technical expertise. Suggestions on data collection methods and key reflections from literacy practitioners are included to guide you in conducting the assessment. Many of the one-pagers recommend other resources that offer more in-depth information.

The following icons are used in the tool to symbolize recommended data collection tools:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Data Collection Tools</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>A systematic way to observe people in their natural environments. Observe people’s routines and interactions in households, community and religious centers, schools (when parents are most likely to be present), health centers, and /or public meeting areas.</td>
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<td>Key informant inter-views</td>
<td>Interviews allow you to collect information from a wide-range of people, including those who have first-hand knowledge of the community. Conduct interviews with political, religious, or community leaders, education officials, teachers, and parents/caregivers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus group discussions (FGD)</td>
<td>FGDs can be helpful to collect specific in-depth thoughts and opinions on a topic from a group of people who share something in common. Conduct FGDs with parents and caregivers, grandparents or other extended family members, teachers, and children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey or questionnaire</td>
<td>A survey or questionnaire is an effective way to systematically gather information on a specific set of questions, which you can then analyze and draw conclusions from. For more information on what to consider when designing a survey, see Harvard University’s Questionnaire Tip Sheet.</td>
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<td>Desk review/secondary research</td>
<td>A desk review can help you understand existing research on a topic. Examples of secondary research include analyzing data collected by a third-party, reading reports issues by research institutions or implementing organizations, or scanning news articles. It is not recommended you rely solely on this information to make decisions. Relevant facts and perceptions can change over time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public meeting</td>
<td>Community meetings do not provide as in-depth information as a FGD or interview but can still be useful to gather thoughts from a larger group. Presenting at public meetings is also a great way to build visibility around your programming.</td>
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### TOPICS AND MAIN QUESTIONS

#### Phase I: Assessment of the Literacy Context

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<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 1</strong></td>
<td>Map stakeholders</td>
<td>What questions do I need to ask to identify and prioritize stakeholders? Why is stakeholder mapping and analysis important to me? How do I conduct a stakeholder mapping exercise?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 2</strong></td>
<td>Understand government interests and resources</td>
<td>How do I assess what government resources are available to me? What do I need to consider before using government resources?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 3</strong></td>
<td>Gather and analyze relevant statistics</td>
<td>What statistics and relevant benchmarks are valuable for me to know? Why are these indicators important to me? Where can I find this data?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 4</strong></td>
<td>Consider cultural and social factors</td>
<td>Why is it important to understand the cultural and social context I work in? What questions can I ask to understand this context better? What factors (e.g. gender, age, values) should I consider?</td>
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#### Phase II: Assessment of the Home Environment and Caregiver Experience

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<th>STEP</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 1</strong></td>
<td>Determine the economic status, daily routine, and lifestyle patterns of households</td>
<td>What questions can I ask to understand a household’s constraints better? Why are they important to assess? How can I use the information I gather to design or improve my program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 2</strong></td>
<td>Understand the home learning environment</td>
<td>What is the “home learning environment” and why is it important? What questions can I ask to assess the “home learning environment?” How can this information inform the design of my program?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 3</strong></td>
<td>Assess a household’s media consumption</td>
<td>What information is important to know when thinking about developing an intervention that involves technology? What are best practices for incorporating a technology component into a parent engagement program?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 4</strong></td>
<td>Understand parent and caregivers’ current attitudes and beliefs on their role as a parent or caregiver</td>
<td>Why is understanding a parent/caregiver’s attitude and belief system important? What questions can I ask to assess this? How can I use this information to inform program design? What real-world examples can I reference?</td>
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<td><strong>STEP 5</strong></td>
<td>Analyze social networks of parents and caregivers</td>
<td>Why should I understand the social networks of parents and caregivers? How can I use this information in program design or improvement? What considerations do I need to take into account when using this information in program design?</td>
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Engaging parents and caregivers requires a foundation of trust and mutual respect between program implementers and those they are trying to reach. Observing a set of guiding principles can help build this foundation and ensure that programming is high-quality and effective. The authors of this tool propose the 7 guiding principles listed below as a foundation for engagement, planning, implementation, and evaluation of parent and caregiver engagement programs. They should be regularly revisited at each phase of the process.

Guiding Principles for Parent Engagement Programs

- Keep the parent or caregiver at the center of the literacy process. Their participation is essential.
- Empower parents and caregivers to support the literacy development process of their children, even if they are not literate themselves. Meet parents where they are. Consider their constraints and do not immediately assume they are simply not interested in engaging with their children’s learning.
- Take a human-centered design approach. Parents and caregivers are the experts on their needs. Directly involve them in the needs assessment and program design process.
- Allow communities to own programs and determine what is included and how they are run. This can be done by involving parents and caregivers in both the initial design and final evaluation of programs.
- Value and respect the communities you serve. Base programs on a community's way of life, history, and values. Validate and incorporate multiple methods of language and literacy development, such as oral tradition like storytelling, folktales, and narration. Build a program that parents and caregivers can identify with.
- Measure progress in a way that is meaningful to parents and caregivers. Avoid simply evaluating a program against international benchmarks. Consult with parents and caregivers to learn how the program is impacting them. Work with caregivers to co-design measurement tools that capture impact in a relevant way.
Phase I: Assessment of the Literacy Context
High-impact parent engagement programs are ones grounded in the local context. The following four sections will help you understand the broader literacy context by guiding you through an assessment of:

- Stakeholders and their priorities
- Government interests, resources, and networks
- Available data on literacy-related outcomes
- Cultural and social factors impacting parent engagement

**Data collection tools you can use to complete the assessment**

**Observation**

**Key informant interviews**

**Focus group discussions**

**Public Meeting**

**Desk review/secondary research**

**When is this information useful to know?**

- Introduction of a new program or service, specifically for:
  - Selecting a target population to serve
  - Identifying partners
  - Mobilizing resources
  - Understanding political will
  - Developing a monitoring and evaluation plan
  - Ensuring content of program is valid for the local context
- Scale-up of an existing program or service
- Evaluating whether a theory of change holds or not
- Policy advocacy
- Communication with donors or other stakeholders
- Evaluating impact of a program or service
- Course-correcting a program or service
- Measuring behavior change after a program or service

**What are ways to engage the community in collecting this information?**

- Build a team of community members to review your data collection tools to identify relevant issues that may be missing from your original research questions.
- Engage and train parents/caregivers from the community to help collect data and facilitate discussions with other caregivers.
- Conduct interviews in an informal setting to help encourage participation of parents/caregivers and community members who may not regularly participate.
- Facilitate small group discussions where information can be collected and used to design or course-correct programs with community input.
Step 1: Map Stakeholders

To effectively implement a parent engagement program, it is important to understand who your stakeholders are and the impact they may have on your program or service. The questions below aim to generate knowledge on stakeholders’ interests, influences, resources, and the overall role they play in engaging parents. This information will help you recruit individuals or organizations as part of your effort.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

♦ Who are the relevant stakeholders?
  ♦ Government bodies
  ♦ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
  ♦ Foundations
  ♦ Businesses
  ♦ Schools and early childhood development programs
  ♦ Community centers
  ♦ Individual families

♦ What is the relationship between stakeholders?
  ♦ How do they influence each other?
  ♦ Do alliances exist between stakeholders?
  ♦ Which alliances are most threatening or supportive to your primary objective?

♦ What are relevant stakeholders’ priorities?
  ♦ What is their interest in promoting parent engagement in education or literacy-related activities?
  ♦ What is each stakeholders’ influence or power in relation to their interest?
  ♦ What is the best way to communicate with these stakeholders?

♦ What similar programs or services already exist?
  ♦ What populations do they serve?
  ♦ What is their scope? (number of families, number of centers, capacity of community workers, etc.)

♦ Where can your program fit in to the existing landscape?
  ♦ What gaps exist?
  ♦ What physical and human resources are available?
  ♦ Which parent engagement activities require active participation of which stakeholders to be successful?

HOW TO GATHER INFORMATION

♦ Develop a list of all possible stakeholders, including everyone who has an interest in your current or future objectives. Consider non-literacy specific stakeholders as they could still provide access to target populations and additional resources.

♦ Refine a list of priority stakeholders who have a direct interest in or influence over parent engagement practices in education.

♦ Interview priority stakeholders to understand what their interests, influence, and resources are.

♦ Understand there is no magic list of stakeholders. Who you decide to engage will depend on your program, the impact you hope to make, and your current engagement objectives.

♦ The list will likely change as the environment around you evolves and as stakeholders themselves make decisions or change their objectives. Allow this list to be flexible and something you revisit often.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on stakeholder mapping and analysis.

♦ Stakeholder Analysis: A Basic Introduction
♦ BSR Stakeholder Mapping
♦ Engaging Stakeholders: Sustaining Reading First
♦ Stakeholder Analysis
Step 2: Understand Government Interests and Resources

Government stakeholders often have existing budgets to support large-scale interventions. To take advantage of these resources and networks, it is important to both understand a government’s policy priorities and assess where your intervention could fit in. The questions below will help you identify government interests related to parent engagement practices, the political will behind them, current programs you could align with, and remaining gaps that your intervention could fill.

**GUIDING QUESTIONS**

♦ At a government level, what do education/child services policy documents mention about parent engagement?

♦ What trends do we see in government policy?
  ♦ Has there been an increased focus on literacy or parent engagement in education?
  ♦ If so, who or what is driving it?

♦ What larger-scale government programs already target parent engagement?
  ♦ What percentage of the total budget is allocated to these programs?
  ♦ What is their scope?
  ♦ What gaps exist?
  ♦ Are allocated resources actually being received by intended beneficiaries?

♦ What larger-scale government programs aim to address literacy challenges specifically?

♦ Is government funding available to organizations that run literacy and parent engagement programs?
  ♦ Is this funding sustainable?
  ♦ What conditions must be satisfied to receive consistent funding?

**HOW TO GATHER INFORMATION**

♦ Read government documents. These materials can often be obtained from Ministry or Department of Education offices and/or websites.

♦ Interview key community influencers, government officials, and community members to assess if policies and programs are actually being implemented.

♦ Interview individuals and organizations who receive government funding to run programs. You want to understand the reality of using government funding before you engage.
**Step 3: Gather and Analyze Relevant Statistics**

Statistics help us quantify the broader literacy context. They provide reliable comparisons, reveal variation in outcomes within different geographies or populations, and allow us to analyze meaningful trends or changes. The questions below will guide you in identifying relevant statistics and where to find them. The information in this data can help you better understand why parents are not engaging, what populations are most in need of support, and how to measure the impact of your programming.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What statistics are useful to know?
  - Overall literacy rates (youth and adult)
  - How do literacy rates compare across different genders, ages, races, socioeconomic status, etc.?
  - What are overall trends in literacy rates?
  - If literacy rates are low, why?
- Results of educational assessments (EGRA, PISA, etc.)
  - How far behind are certain children?
  - What do these outcomes tell us about the importance of parent engagement?
- What citizen-led assessments are available?
  - What do they tell us about the needs of certain populations?
- What is missing from this data?

### QUESTION FOR CONSIDERATION

How can you measure local progress in a way that is meaningful to the population you are serving? (e.g. not only evaluating a program against international benchmarks)

### HOW TO GATHER INFORMATION

The following sources provide a variety of locally and internationally comparable statistics related to education. This is not an exhaustive list. You are encouraged to seek out additional sources of data relevant to your specific context.

- **Ministries or Departments of Education**
  - National, provincial, state, district, county, local education offices
- **UNESCO Institute for Statistics**
  - Most comprehensive source of internationally-comparable education statistics for more than 200 countries and territories
  - Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML)
- **World Bank EdStats**
- **Global Partnership for Education Data & Results**
- **INEE Data & Statistics**
  - Focused on education in emergency or conflict settings
- **National Center for Education Statistics** (United States specific)
- **OECD Education Data**
Step 4: Consider Cultural and Social Factors

Parents and caregivers should not be made to feel they are being bombarded by a foreign way of life, a foreign culture, or foreign values. The questions below will help you to gain an in-depth understanding of cultural and social factors that may influence how and when caregivers engage with their children learning. This information can (and should) be used to design and implement interventions that value the life experience and culture of beneficiaries.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are common family structures?
  - What are common living arrangements?
  - What are common caregiver arrangements?

There are many ways someone could support a child’s education. You want to identify the people who can do that.

- What gender norms impact parent engagement in education?
  - Do parents/caregivers engage in children’s education differently depending on their gender? On their age?
  - What barriers may exist for individuals based on their gender? Or age?

- What other cultural or societal norms may impact parent engagement in education?

For example, parents may perceive education to be the responsibility of teachers, or that engaging with a child’s education will result in the child disrespecting the parent. Your program will likely need to address these norms.

- What is your target population’s perception on the value of education?
  - If certain populations do not see value in education, what are similar concepts that a society holds? (cultural learning through word of mouth, folktales etc.)

Spotlight on We Love Reading

We Love Reading (WLR) is a Jordanian non-profit organization dedicated to fostering the love of reading among children in the Middle East. WLR focuses on training and encouraging parents to read aloud to their children and understands first-hand the importance of valuing cultural and social norms when working with parents and caregivers.

Recently, WLR was approached by a university professor who wanted to study the impact of WLR’s approach on parent-child relationships. The professor’s study involved surveying parents and children about parent-child interactions in the household. After reviewing the initial survey, the WLR team immediately realized that the assumptions of the survey were based on western notions of how parents should interact with and parent their children. The survey did not accurately reflect the caregiver experience in Jordan. For example, one survey question asked whether the father sits on the floor to play with his child. WLR knew most parents would answer “no” to this question. In Jordan, a father is not likely to sit on the floor and play with his child; however, this does not mean the father does not care about his child. He simply shows his love in a different way.

Through a collaborative and iterative process, WLR adapted the survey to be more culturally relevant. This helped ensure that the findings were accurate, but also helped facilitate buy-in from parents and caregivers to WLR’s approach. Parents were able to identify for themselves how they could engage with children’s learning in a way that was considerate of the cultural and social environment they were familiar with. WLR now has a valid tool to assess the impact of their programming.

“We are able to understand the community because we are the community,” quotes Rana Dajani, founder of We Love Reading. It is essential to include local perspectives before, during, and after the needs assessment process.

To learn more: www.welovereading.org

HOW TO GATHER INFORMATION

Individuals may not be consciously aware of cultural and social norms impacting the way parents/caregivers engage with their children’s literacy development. If you receive vague responses, try rephrasing questions by having individuals think about their own families. For example:

- Who lives in your household?
- Have you enrolled your child in school (primary or pre-primary)? Why or why not?
- Do you read with your child? Why or why not?
- How do other members of your household interact with the child?
- Do you think these people interact with your child differently because of their gender or age? Why or why not?
Phase II: Assessment of the Home Environment and Caregiver Experience
High-impact parent engagement programs are ones parents can identify with. The following five sections will help you align your program with parents’ real-life needs and values by guiding you through an assessment of:

- A household’s economic status, daily routine, and lifestyle patterns
- The home learning environment
- A household’s media consumption
- A parent or caregiver’s current attitude and belief on their role
- Social networks of parents and caregivers

Data collection tools you can use to complete the assessment

- Observation
- Key informant interviews
- Focus group discussions
- Survey or questionnaire
- Desk review/secondary research

When is the information from this assessment valuable to know?

- Introduction of a new program or service
- Selecting a target population to serve
- Applying human-centered design principles
- Brainstorming ways to reach parents and caregivers with programming
- Scale-up of an existing program or service
- Evaluating whether a theory of change holds or not
- Policy advocacy
- Communication with donors or other stakeholders
- Measuring knowledge obtained and retained before and after a program or service
- Course-correcting a program or service
- Measuring behavior change after a program or service

What are ways to engage the community in compiling this information?

- Build a team of community members to review your data collection tools to identify relevant issues that may be missing from your original research questions.
- Engage and train parents/caregivers from the community to help collect data and facilitate discussions with other caregivers.
- Conduct interviews in an informal setting to help encourage participation of parents/caregivers and community members who may not regularly participate.
- Facilitate small group discussions where information can be collected and used to design or course-correct programs with community input. Collectively brainstorm solutions with community members, parents, and caregivers.
Step 1: Determine the economic status, daily routine, and lifestyle patterns of households

Financial constraints and conflicting responsibilities can affect how and when parents are able to engage with their children’s learning. The questions below will generate knowledge on a caregiver’s constraints and commitments apart from parenting. This information can help you ensure your program or service is mindful of these constraints, increasing the likelihood that caregivers will utilize and benefit from your intervention.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How many adults (ages 16+) live in the household? How many children?
- Where do parents or primary caregiver(s) work? What are their hours?
- Where do other adults in the household work? What are their hours?
- What is the average income of the household?
- What does the household usually spend money on?
  - What is the biggest expense?
  - What is the smallest expense?
- What does a parent/caregiver’s usual day with a child look like?
  - What are their activities?
  - Who do they spend time with?
  - Where do they go?
- What other responsibilities do parents/caregiver(s) have outside parenting and formal employment?
  - Domestic chores?
  - Community involvement?
- What is the distribution of parenting responsibilities among adults in the household?

Spotlight on Child Dream Centre
Tamale, Ghana

Tamale Children’s Hub is a program run by Child Dream Centre that provides holistic educational services and after-school programs to children and adolescents in northern Ghana. The Hub was established because a handful of committed literacy practitioners took the time to understand how economic constraints can impact parent engagement in a child’s learning.

Growing up in northern Ghana, Simeon Martey, the founder of Child Dream Centre, noticed a concerning pattern in his community. Children were progressing through upper grade levels in school; however, many were not developing fundamental literacy skills. Simeon and two friends began to investigate why this was happening. They went door-to-door speaking to parents and caregivers about daily household routines. What does a parent’s usual day with a child look like? What were children doing when they came home from school? When and how were parent’s engaging with their children’s learning?

What did Simeon and friends learn? In rural areas in northern Ghana, public schools close in the early afternoon. Because parents and caregivers often need to work in the afternoon to support their families, children come home to an empty house. Parents possess a strong desire for their children to be engaged in learning after school, but financial constraints prevent parents from actively participating in this learning. Instead of completing homework or reading, a child goes to play with friends and is asleep by the time a parent arrives home.

What did Simeon and friends do? Recognizing that children needed more structured engagement after school, Child Dream Centre formed Tamale Children’s Hub. When children finish school, they go to the Hub where local staff engage children in educational activities. The Hub uses Jolly phonics digital programs and African children’s storybooks to build literacy skills. Tamale Children’s Hub recognizes that parents have financial and time constraints that prevent them from engaging after school. The Hub allows parents to concentrate on their work by providing an alternative outlet for children to stay engaged. In the future, Child Dream Centre hopes to include parents in Tamale Children’s Hub activities and provide home learning resources for parents to use on the weekends.

Learn more: www.childdreamcentre.com

HOW TO GATHER INFORMATION

- If your program is already running, directly ask parents and caregivers whether program offerings (location, time of service, etc.) are ideal for them. What would they change?
- Some individuals may be sensitive to disclosing personal finances. It is not recommended you kick off an interview or focus group with this question. For honest responses, clearly explain your reasoning behind this line of questioning.
- When assessing work responsibilities of parents, caregivers, and household members, consider both formal and informal employment.
Step 2: Understand the Home Learning Environment

A child’s learning experiences and early literacy development are shaped by everyday activities within the home. The questions below aim to generate information on aspects of the home environment that either promote or inhibit positive parent engagement in learning. **You can use this information to identify the real-life challenges caregivers face, as well as what tools may be useful in overcoming these barriers to more engagement at home.**

**GUIDING QUESTIONS**

- Is the parent/caregiver literate? If so, what is their literacy level?
  - How and when did the parent/caregiver learn to read and write?
- What is the literacy level of the child?
- Are other children or adults in the household literate?
- What language is spoken at home?
  - What is the native language (L1) of the child and his/her parents/caregiver(s)?
  - What is the language of instruction in school?
  - What additional language(s) is the child regularly exposed to?
- What activities does the parent/caregiver currently do with the child to promote language and literacy development?
- What kind of print material does the child have access to?
- Is reading material available in the home? In places outside the home?
- Does the parent/caregiver read with their child?
  - How often?
  - Where?
  - What types of reading material?
- What barriers does the parent/caregiver face in reading to their child?

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Non-literate and low-literate caregivers are still able to support their child’s literacy development. For ideas on how to involve these caregivers, see the resources below for reference:

- CEI’s Early Learning Toolkit
- The Communication Trust’s resources for practitioners and parents
- Improving the Home Learning Environment, National Literacy Trust

**HOW TO GATHER INFORMATION**

- Include children’s perspectives. You can ask them questions such as:
  - What do you do with your parents (or sister, grandma, aunt, etc.) at home?
  - Who plays with you? Does anyone read to you? Does anyone help you with your schoolwork?
- Think about how families and caregivers could generate their own literacy materials as a more cost-effective option of accessing reading materials at home.
- The language of instruction in a child’s school can often be different than the language he/she speaks at home. For more information on programs for bilingual or multi-lingual families, please see listed references at the end of this guide.
Step 3: Assess a household’s media consumption

Media and technology can be used in a variety of ways to support caregivers in engaging with their child’s literacy development. Technological literacy is also an increasingly important skill for children and adults to learn in many societies. The questions below will guide you in assessing a household’s current use of technology and access to media sources. This information will help you think through if, how, when, and in what capacity you want to incorporate technology into your programming.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

♦ Does the parent/caregiver have access to the Internet? Does the child?

♦ What devices (i.e. mobile phones, tablets, computers, television, etc.) are used by the parent/caregiver and the child(ren)?

♦ What is media or technology used for in the home? What type of content is browsed?

♦ What is the frequency and nature of technology use in the household?

♦ What is the cost of data usage and electricity for the household?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For best practices on incorporating technology or media into parent engagement programs, please find the following resources for reference:

♦ 10 Critical Design Elements for Parent Engagement Technologies
♦ Webinar: Tapping the Potential of NextGen Technology
♦ Empowering Parents through Technology
♦ Best Apps for Parent Engagement
Step 4: Understand a Parent/Caregiver’s Current Attitude and Belief on their Role as a Parent/Caregiver

Parents and caregivers are one of the most influential factors in a child’s life; their attitudes, beliefs and practices can either foster or hinder a child’s learning and development process. Understanding how parent interpret the learning process, and the role they play in it, is key to designing and implementing targeted, impactful interventions. The questions below will help you identify core attitudes and practices that may be associated with negative or positive child outcomes, understand diverse contextual factors that influence these attitudes and practices, as well as identify gaps in knowledge that need to be addressed.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How would the parent/caregiver describe their role in a child’s language and literacy development?
  - What does the parent/caregiver think a child should learn at school vs. at home?
- What concerns does the parent/caregiver have about engaging with their child’s education?
- What types of educational activities would the parent/caregiver like to do with their child, but feel they are unable to?
  - What prevents them from engaging in these activities?
- What do they feel they are best at?
- What parts of educational engagement does the parent/caregiver most enjoy?
  - What does the parent/caregiver think a child should learn at school vs. at home?
- What parts do they find challenging?
  - What does the parent/caregiver believe they can most improve upon?
- Why types of educational activities would the parent/caregiver like to do with their child, but feel they are unable to?
- What tools or programs does the parent/caregiver think would help them engage more with their child’s literacy development?
- Has the parent/caregiver participated in a program focused on early childhood development or literacy before?
  - Why or why not?
- What existing programs is the parent/caregiver aware of?

Spotlight on Queen Rania Foundation

Amman, Jordan

Queen Rania Foundation (QRF) is well-known for developing innovative solutions to a wide range of education challenges in Jordan, including parent engagement. QRF’s most recent intervention is a two-month program that aims to engage parents in early childhood education activities and practices. Two delivery approaches will be explored to deliver engaging content to parents. One is a blended model in which parents participate in face-to-face training sessions, alongside a longer running virtual component. The second approach is to deliver content entirely online. Two separate needs assessments helped to shape this program.

The parenting program itself was designed from information obtained through a national early childhood development survey and focus group discussions with parents, conducted in Jordan in 2015. A second needs assessment was carried out (in 2018) to inform the design of targeted messages that would encourage parents and educators to participate in the program. Before launching these messages, QRF partnered with The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) to assess how mothers in Jordan perceive their role in a child’s learning and understand the influence of a home learning environment. Their goal was to identify specific behavioral barriers to increased parental engagement and use this information to develop targeted messages.

QRF and BIT conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with mothers, teachers, and program facilitators, individuals who work with ministries and non-profit organizations to deliver parent engagement programs. A discussion guide for these interviews was finalized through multiple rounds of feedback to ensure the questions were appropriate for the Jordanian context. Interview participants came from across Jordan. Some were interviewed at QRF’s offices in Amman and others were interviewed in their place of work. Here is what QRF and BIT learned:

- Mothers perceive the home as a space for disciplining children, not learning with them. QRF’s program would aim to shift this perspective.
- Mothers feel overwhelmed with chores. This was identified as an opportunity to incorporate children’s learning into daily chores (e.g. cooking with children).
- Mothers rely on and use technology. Mobile phones could be used to deliver programming and messaging to parents.
- Mothers want to engage with their children, but face difficulties planning time to do so. QRF’s program could incorporate planning strategies to increase follow-through.
- Mothers lack support beyond their own mothers and sisters. There is a need to connect mothers to existing networks or build new ones.

QRF and BIT used this information to craft SMS messages that encourage and guide parents and educators through the activities offered by QRF’s parent engagement program. QRF described the needs assessment process as invaluable to the design of these engaging messages. Moving forward, the program will be piloted and rigorously tested in terms of effectiveness of engagement.

Learn more: www.qrf.org
Step 5: Analyze parent and caregiver social networks

A parent’s social network is likely where he/she seeks support and advice on parenting. The questions below will guide you in identifying key support systems or personal relationships in a parent’s life, and the type of support those interactions provide. As a literacy practitioner, think through how to use these networks as a way to reach parents with a program or service.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

♦ Who does the parent rely upon for support and advice?
  ♦ What about advice specific to parenting or engagement in their child’s education?
  ♦ If parents/caregivers lack a supportive network, do they have a desire to be more involved with one?
  ♦ Is a lack of support a barrier to engagement, and a potential area for intervention?

♦ How does the parent communicate with this social network? (In-person, Email, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.)

♦ Who does the parent trust most when it comes to parenting-related advice?

♦ Does the parent communicate with their child’s school?
  ♦ If so, how often and in what capacity?

HOW TO GATHER INFORMATION

♦ Some social networks may be specific to a certain profile of caregiver. The nature of these networks is likely to vary based on a caregiver’s characteristics, such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, rural vs. urban living, access to technology, etc. If your intervention utilizes these networks to reach parents and caregivers, ensure you fully understand both the type of network (i.e. relatives, neighbors, Facebook) and the profile of caregiver who uses it (i.e. older adult, low-literacy level, urban).

Spotlight on Worldreader’s Read to Kids Pilot
Delhi, India

Between 2015-2017, Worldreader partnered with R4D and CKS, a local monitoring and evaluation firm in India, to conduct a needs assessment before piloting a digital reading program that encouraged parents and caregivers to read aloud to their children by providing them access to a free digital library of storybooks for children age 0-8. The goal of their research was to identify which parents to target with the program, how best to reach them, and what local partners to work with. After focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews with around 100 parents and caregivers in Delhi state, Worldreader discovered something unexpected.

In India, Anganwadi workers were the key to reaching parents and caregivers. Anganwadis are government-run preschools serving under-resourced households across the country. Anganwadi workers are community figures who spend half the day interacting with young children at the Anganwadi center, and the other half walking around the community engaging parents on issues related to nutrition and child development. Worldreader realized that these Anganwadi workers were knowledgeable about the communities they served and were able to build trusting relationships with parents and caregivers.

How did Worldreader use this information? They trained Anganwadi workers to promote the importance of reading, as well as nutrition, when visiting parents. They also used the Anganwadi centers to launch the reading app and train parents on how to use it. Many Anganwadi workers even wanted to use the reading app in their own classrooms. By intentionally identifying key support networks in parent and caregivers’ lives, Worldreader was able to leverage those existing networks to deepen the impact of their parent engagement program.

Learn more:
♦ [https://www.worldreader.org/our-solution/programs/pre-reading/read-to-kids/](https://www.worldreader.org/our-solution/programs/pre-reading/read-to-kids/)
♦ [https://www.r4d.org/resources/read-kids-leveraging-mobile-technology-parental-engagement-early-years/](https://www.r4d.org/resources/read-kids-leveraging-mobile-technology-parental-engagement-early-years/)
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