

Engaging Families

A Coalition Toolkit



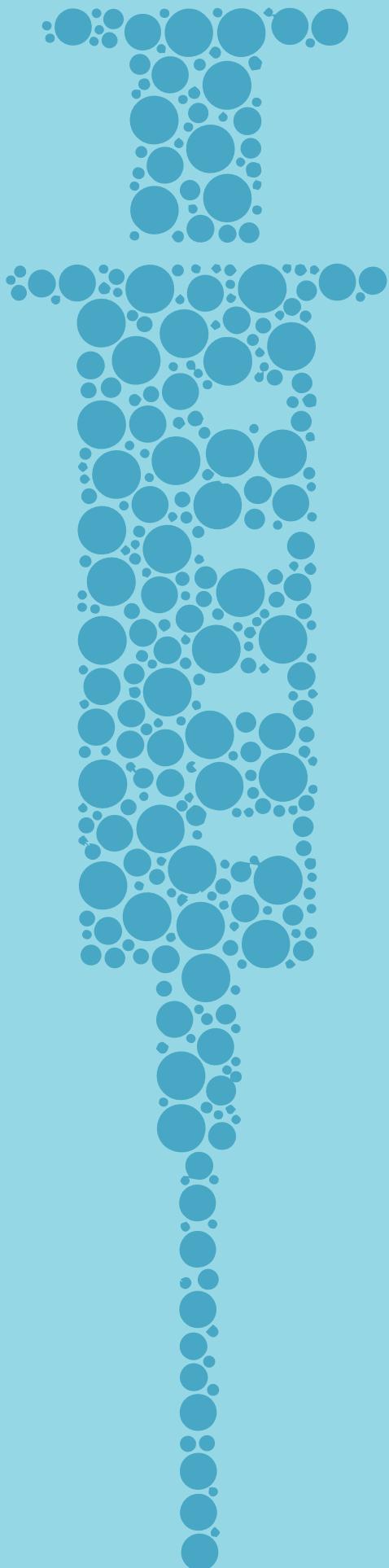


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Introduction: Why you make a difference

Coalitions do amazing work supporting vaccination rates in their states. Each coalition is unique in what it prioritizes, how it works, and who it works with, but based on 2021 research by Voices for Vaccines, they all have some important commonalities in mission and focus. Most coalitions center their work around:

- Improving immunization rates
- Providing education opportunities for healthcare providers
- Reducing health disparities / improving access to vaccination
- Community education, particularly to fight misinformation
- Legislator education

What's not on that list? **Families.**

That's ok, we get it! Immunization programs need to consistently weigh where to allocate limited staff and resources. So for coalitions that overwhelmingly see themselves as "professional" organizations, engaging families can be a bit of a challenge. Many coalitions have a strong desire to better engage with families but don't have a model to do so – and most definitely don't have the budget and staffing for high-touch efforts.

This toolkit provides a path for stronger family engagement. It's evidence-based and practical. We understand the enormous value that our state and local coalitions bring to the table. We want to support their efforts and help them leverage and engage families more...and more effectively.



5 facts about the state of family engagement



Coalitions often see themselves as “professional organizations”: Most coalitions are not structured to easily incorporate family members. As such, family engagement varies greatly from coalition to coalition.



Coalitions see the family role primarily in legislator education: Most coalitions see family partnership primarily as providing “first-person” stories for legislator education.



Coalitions would like to do more family education: Most coalitions identify families as “consumers” of their work and wish they were more active in family education but have staff and budget limitations.



Combating misinformation, particularly online, is a priority. Coalitions identify false information as a significant problem but struggle to get ahead of it.



Families believe the value they could add to coalitions is sidelined: Families have clear ideas of what and how they would like to contribute to coalitions but find engaging with coalitions challenging.



Coalition Family Engagement: The down low

How coalitions currently engage with families

Based on the findings from the VFV Coalition Family Engagement research, coalitions fall broadly into three categories of family engagement.

Tier I Coalitions: Are strictly professional organizations with no direct family outreach – by design. They use their partners to reach families directly. Coalitions in this tier need a “passive” and low-touch approach to family engagement.

Tier II Coalitions: Are coalitions that have limited engagement or have expressed an interest in growing family engagement. These coalitions are looking to develop relationships with motivated families to support legislator and public education efforts.

Tier III Coalitions: These coalitions have integrated families in their work, either as part of the coalition or through a family coalition partner. Tier III coalitions need strategies that provide benefits for families to encourage engagement.

A good way to think about family engagement is diversity–inclusion–equity workplace model.

- Ensure a diverse representation of stakeholders
- Provide opportunities for all members to be included
- Create an environment of equality



Why coalitions should engage with families

Regardless of where a coalition falls in the engagement tiers, the most important thing to keep in mind is the end game.

Want to increase vaccination rates? Parents and caregivers are the vaccination decision-makers for childhood vaccines so it makes sense to include them in the conversation.

Those of us in the vaccination arena often have a lot of conversations about vaccination with each other without recognizing that the chief decision-makers aren't at the table. It's a lot like creating a rad skate park without ever talking with a skateboarder.

Without that first-person input, we might be missing really obvious things. For instance, did you know that when VFV talked with healthcare providers and parents about what caregivers most needed to know to feel comfortable vaccinating, parents cited the science and HCPs felt the science wasn't really that important? There was clearly a bit of a disconnect. Without talking directly with families, we'd never know the need for and value of this information.

Regardless of your coalition's current model, we hope you will be open to incorporating the family voice in your work both as a contributor informing efforts and as a student being educated by it.

DIVERSITY IS BEING INVITED TO THE PARTY.

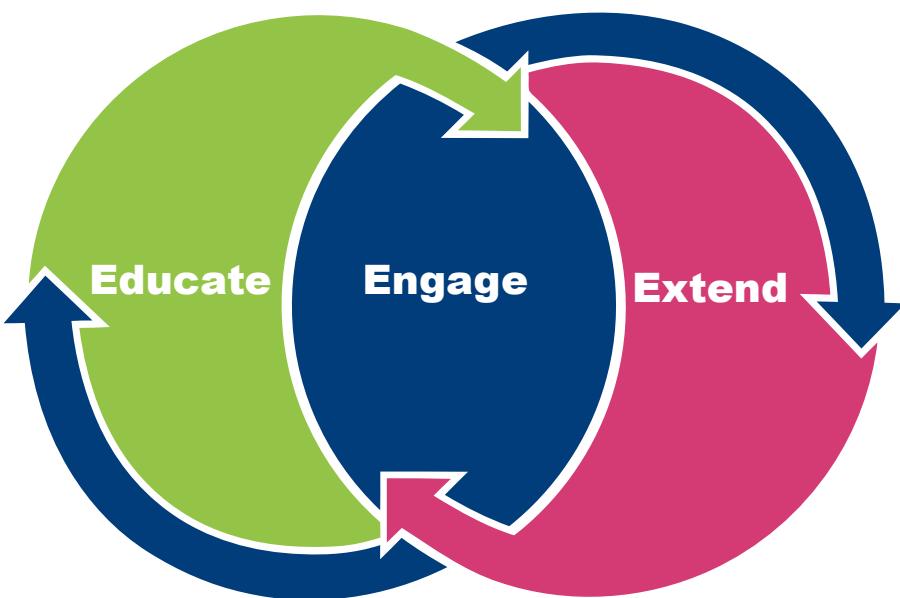
INCLUSION IS BEING ASKED TO DANCE.

EQUALITY IS BEING ON THE PARTY PLANNING COMMITTEE.



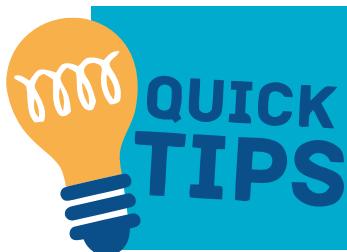
How coalitions can increase family engagement

Increasing family engagement can be easy, regardless of the type of coalition you are. Based on our research, VFV has come up with a framework to help: Educate, Engage, Extend.



- **Educate:** Provide credible, understandable information for families to boost vaccine confidence.
- **Engage:** Provide opportunities for coalitions to involve families in vaccine advocacy and community awareness.
- **Extend:** Provide strategies to use families to increase reach and influence.

Coalitions can apply this framework to whatever tier they occupy and tailor it to the level of effort that is most practical for them.



Baby steps are a perfectly good strategy. Most coalitions have a lot more work than time or resources. Start with building on what you are already doing and go from there.



So here's the magic playbook:

	Educate	Engage	Extend
	Credible, understandable information for families to boost vaccine confidence	Family involvement in vaccine advocacy community awareness	Strategies to use families to increase reach and influence
Tier I: No direct engagement	Be an amplifier. Share educational materials and resources with partners.	Leverage existing efforts. Take a look at Vaccinate Your Family for easy ideas!	Find ways to integrate families into some of your meetings.
Tier II: Limited engagement	Maximize your online presence. Be active on social media, record webinars, and make sure your website is chock full of good information	Find and involve families in your work!	Have a family board member. Think about training members on family engagement.
Tier III: Greater engagement	Invest, invest, invest. We're not talking money but effort. Create campaigns and train advocates.	Train your families to be compelling storytellers!	Provide family media training and guidance on editorial efforts.

The following pages have all the details to educate, engage, and extend for each tier.



Coalition Family Engagement: Educate

Working with and for families as part of education means finding easy ways to get that great content you produce shared with more people. Amplifying your voice goes a long way to increasing vaccine confidence.

Tier I Coalitions

You don't need to change your professional focus to be effective here. The number one thing you can do is leverage VFV and other partners' family-focused resources.

We've done the heavy lifting, all you need to share with your coalition partners and members. Educational materials, toolkits, fact sheets, podcasts, etc. are just waiting for you to share.

Be the amplifier:

- Have a newsletter or email? include resource links in it
- Have a website? link to resources from it
- Have regular member meetings? Have a standing agenda item to highlight a new or relevant tool.

Be clear that you view your partners' role as being that direct link to families. Make it explicit that you are sharing things with them so that they will share with their patients. We often assume that we don't need to make the direct ask. But you know what they say about assuming – so be clear about your expectations of your members.



Tier II Coalitions

These coalitions currently have limited interaction with families and/or are looking to increase their interaction. Education can be a sweet spot for them, with so many easy-to-do activities to foster family education. These coalitions can do everything from the Tier I list, plus:

- **Leverage the digital space:** It's low touch and high yield. You don't need to do much, just make sure your efforts are targeted and pertinent. For instance, if your state is experiencing a measles outbreak, start educating on social media. If you are not active on social media, share content with partners who are.
- **Record an educational series:** On-demand content is great because you create it and it's available whenever your audience wants it. No fussing with invitations and scheduling. Again, just be sure to share with your partners.
- **Plug into existing efforts:** For example, VFV has a regular podcast. Volunteer to have one of your experts as a guest on it. You don't have to do any heavy lifting beyond hawking the amazingness of your experts!

Sharing is Caring. But Asking is Lasting.

The “if you build it, they will come” model really only works in Iowa cornfields. Anywhere else, we need to build it, share it, and ask others to share it too. That is the way to get lasting results.

So start sharing your (and others') resources with your partners and ask them to share with their patients and members. Research shows us that people are usually very happy to support good work. But they will not “go the extra mile” unless asked. So ask. And ask again. And remind partners. Share with them ways to get information in families' hands. They are busy too so the easier and more explicit you can make it, the more likely they will be to do it.



Tier III Coalitions

These coalitions are more plugged in with the public. They can tailor their approach within their current efforts. Some education ideas include:

- **Have a greater online presence:** Record some webinars. Host a Facebook live event. Just remember to ask your partners to share with families so you get good attendance.
- **Created targeted campaign:** As part of back-to-school preparedness create a “campaign” that increases family education. Partner with school districts to host an educational webinar on required routine vaccinations or host “community classes” that build on tailored educational themes.
- **Invest in Train-the-Trainers (TOTs):** By providing TOTs statewide, your one-time investment builds a team of vaccine educators without increasing your workload.



Coalition Family Engagement: Engage

Engagement is about involving families in vaccine advocacy and community awareness. It's the space that most coalitions feel is a natural fit for families. But it can also be a tricky widget since some coalitions are nervous about advocacy. So let's be clear here: we're talking about advocacy not lobbying. It can be confusing and a bit of a gray area.

For our purposes, we consider advocacy-style engagement to be providing education and awareness of vaccine issues without urging lawmakers and policymakers to take a particular stance on any legislation. While some coalitions can legally be involved in lobbying, many cannot. So we're staying away from anything that comes close to lobbying in this section.

We also want coalitions to expand their idea of engagement beyond state legislatures. Schools boards, businesses, city councils, community boards--all of these places can make policies around vaccination, and families can be involved in educating these bodies in much the same way they may educate a legislator.

On the following pages are some ideas of what coalitions from each tier can do to foster more family engagement.

While all lobbying is advocacy, not all advocacy is lobbying. Advocacy is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. It includes public education, regulatory work, litigation, and work before administrative bodies, lobbying, nonpartisan voter registration, nonpartisan voter education, and more.

Lobbying is communicating with decision-makers (elected officials, staff, and voters) about existing or potential legislation or measures, and urging a vote for or against. All three components of this definition are required: decision-makers, actual legislation, AND asking for a vote.

- Council of Nonprofits



Tier I Coalitions

Without direct relationship with families, engagement can seem like a tall order. But it doesn't have to be. Did you know that Vaccinate Your Family already has great tools in place to increase effective engagement at both the state and national levels? Check it out at: <https://vaccinateyourfamily.org/join-us-in-support-of-vaccines/>

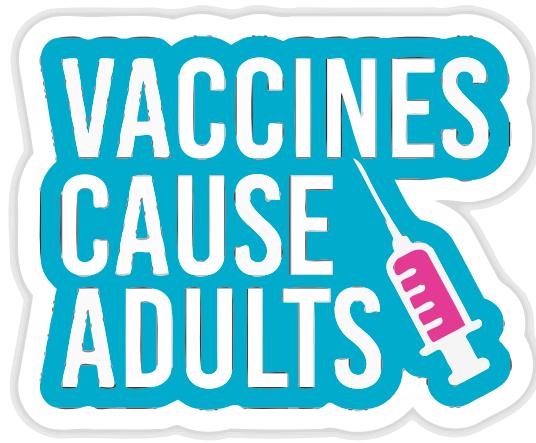
Share with partners and amplify our collective voices!

Tier II Coalitions

If you're already working with some families, train them! Get them up to speed on vaccines, VPDs, and the science of vaccines so they are informed vaccine champions!

If you're not already working with families – put the call out. There are families in every state that have been saved by vaccines or tragically affected by non-vaccination. They want to be heard. Give them a voice! VFV may be able to help find these families for you so let us know if you need some support!

Give your trained families support and a job! Provide them ways to engage with their communities such as talking with school officials. Have tangible asks during NIAM or NIIW. Make them feel valued and valuable!



Tier III Coalitions

Make your families compelling storytellers! Being a storyteller involves both art and science. And we've all seen the difference between a great storyteller and a mediocre presenter. So give your families the tools they need to be true storytellers. Have an involved and committed family? Let VFV know, we may be able to help them beef up their storytelling skills. Look in the resources section for some great storytelling tools and trainings, and resources.

Give them an audience! Once you have a family trained on how to tell a compelling story, make sure you leverage them. Have them share their stories with legislators, record their stories for your website, have them talk with reporters.

Coalition Family Engagement: Extend

The third and final “E” of our strategy is Extend - these are strategies to use families to increase your reach and influence.

Tier I Coalitions

You may be a predominately professional organization, but that doesn't mean there aren't ways to involve families:

- Consider a “family advocate” ad hoc or non-voting member
- Designate one meeting a year to “family voices”
- Agree with your members that you will have one meeting a quarter in the evening so parents and caregivers can attend
- Make room on your agenda to regularly hear input or opinions from families.



Tier II Coalitions

Looking to increase your involvement with families? Extend a voting board seat to a family representative. Provide HCP and other member trainings on how to more effectively engage with families

Tier III Coalitions

Already have a pretty well-established family involvement strategy?

Grow it by:

- Providing media training so you have compelling, credible surrogates you can call on for media engagement
- Host Op-Ed writing sessions that further empower families to show their support for vaccines more visibility



Using Families to Support Social Media

For better or worse, a lot of vaccine conversations are happening on social media, so it's important to get out there on social media and educate folks! A lot of coalitions are reluctant to enter into the social media space because of anti-vaxxers, but family engagement provides ways to make it easier. Consider a group of family volunteers who can support your social media presence. They can post, cross-post, and share as well as act as moderators to keep anti-vaxxers from burying your efforts in negative comments.



Maximize Your Engagement Plan

Have a “value add” approach to vaccination

Families multitask. So they're more likely to see more value in a health fair than a stand-alone vaccination clinic. You do not have to go it alone if you coordinate with other local organizations. For instance, September is preparedness month. A preparedness clinic could include vaccines as well as tips from the fire department and emergency kit planning. A back-to-school theme can extend this type of clinic even more.

We also all love a little “value for our dollar.” So consider some unique partnerships. If families get more than a vaccine, they're more likely to see value in it. Support your local health departments to partner with local businesses to raffle off backpacks full of supplies to families getting all the school-required routine immunizations.



Recognize the pitfalls of family involvement

We live in strange times when something that should be a no-brainer can be fraught with blow back. It's important to be honest about what a vocal and visible family may face when telling their story or supporting vaccines. Don't scare them off, but do prepare them and give them tools to successfully navigate what can sometimes be turbulent waters.

Some helpful hints:

- Suggest they make their personal social media accounts more private before elevating their visibility.
- Teach them how to report any cyber abuse.
- If they own businesses, suggest they disable reviews on social media.
- Touch base with them regularly to ask if they need any support.
- When bringing families to a public hearing, have a private room for them to meet in before and afterward. Be sure to move through and exit public buildings as a group. Make contact with security before any hearings in case escorts are needed.
- Document and film any bad anti-vaccine behavior, whether online or in-person.
- When posting family stories online, give Voices for Vaccines and other partners a heads up so that they can monitor posts for attacks and keep the conversations as positive as possible.
- Remember that anti-vaccine opposition is loud - it can be unnerving but it is almost never physically aggressive. Shield families from the noise whenever possible.





**YOU
MAKE THE
DIFFERENCE**



www.VoicesForVaccines.org