



ACS Today

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ACS staff Scarlett Boudier and Rebecca Cohen traveled to Phoenix, AZ during the summer to help train the staff of First Things First in the art of facilitation. Through eight training days, ACS helped 25 FTF's regional directors prepare to facilitate stakeholder discussions in their regions. In addition, ACS conducted one-on-one technical assistance with participants to help them anticipate challenging scenarios that could arise in their regions and devise plans for responding to them. Every training participant left with a binder of templates, checklists, tips, common facilitation exercises and other tools that will help them prepare for and facilitate successful stakeholder gatherings across the state, building their capacity for whatever comes next. The end result? FTF has the capacity to help communities throughout Arizona reach consensus about the best approaches for supporting young children and their families.

[See more recent appearances on page 2](#)

Continuing the celebration of our 10 year anniversary, ACS is pleased to unveil our refreshed website, which highlights [new tools and resources](http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/tools-resources/) (<http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/tools-resources/>) to help you better engage in media relations, facilitation, messaging, and advocacy and a new client based series called "[Voices from the Field](http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/clients/testimonials/)" (<http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/clients/testimonials/>) which showcases the successes of our work around the country from our client's perspective. Both sections will be refreshed on a regular basis in order for you to have access to client stories and top-notch tools and resources. Stay tuned!

The Art of Multi-Stakeholder Facilitation

First Things First (FTF) in Arizona had an ambitious goal: lower the number of children entering kindergarten with unnoticed, untreated developmental delays, vision or hearing issues. However, when the organization began to look at how children 0–5 are screened to identify potential delays, they found fragmented services, restrictive eligibility criteria and barriers for families throughout the state. Stakeholders and providers were not communicating with each other on a regular basis, and families were often unclear about when and where to access screenings. These issues led to major gaps in services and a high number of children with unmet needs.

FTF has begun to address the problem with a federal Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant for planning and improvement across the state. But figuring out how to engage the wide range of state partners and stakeholders to create meaningful change remains a challenge. At the same time, FTF's Phoenix South Regional Partnership Council committed to a community process to engage local partners to better coordinate screenings and services for young children.

Enter ACS. "For the past 18 months, we've been convening partners and stakeholders to talk about how to improve the screening process," says Dr. Karen Peifer, Senior Director of Children's Health at First Things First. "We knew that having external facilitation services would be helpful in this process, so we hired ACS."

At the same time, ACS has helped FTF's team in the Phoenix South region launch a demonstration project and convene a learning collaborative, led by Senior Director Jennifer Johnson. "Screening and referral services for children ages zero to three has always been a big part of our plan, but in Phoenix South, the council realized we have a need to coordinate and share information between the multiple service agencies. We needed to create a community of practice to streamline and be more efficient with the work, rather than creating more programs. ACS is helping us move that conversation forward by convening identified stakeholders, synthesizing information to create meaning, and helping people articulate their perspectives and ideas."

The ACS team has facilitated several meetings at both the state and regional level for FTF, and conducted and shared research findings on screening systems, tools and

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Recent Appearances:

Lori, Scarlett and Rebecca also traveled across the country during the summer and early fall, working with Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Forward Promise grantees to help them identify strategies to improve life outcomes for young boys and men of color. Our team visited organizations in [Chicago](#), [Minneapolis](#), [New Orleans](#) and [Little Rock](#) who are leading community partners around [Collective Impact](#) (http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact) initiatives in their communities. The Collective Impact framework is particularly useful to take on social challenges that require more than one organization to move the needle on community change. It takes planning strategy from a single organization that runs a program, and allows multiple stakeholders to work together on a shared agenda in a community.

- In Chicago ACS met with community non-profits who are implementing school-based restorative justice practices and policies and built a workplan that will help them build community partnership and implement practices to accomplish their objectives.
- ACS facilitated a meeting with 20+ community organizations who are leading targeted action in North Minneapolis to help young boys and men of color achieve academic and lifetime success.
- In Little Rock our team provided best practice research that provides ideas and models for reducing gun violence and promoting academic success for young black boys. ACS met with the Chief of Police, City Manager, and Director of Community Programs to coordinate city-wide action that supports young black boys.
- In New Orleans ACS facilitated meetings with local government agencies and community organizations to help them identify sustainable governance and decision-making structures for their effort, and build a short-term workplan to build community partnership and sustain their work.

This is all part of our work to help Forward Promise grantees develop the infrastructure, community relationships, and strategic workplans to elevate their work and move it forward to ensure school and life success for young boys and men of color.

You can learn more about ACS' work with the Forward Promise initiative and collective impact in our [Summer 2014 newsletter](#). http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/wp-content/themes/acs/docs/newsletters/June2014/ACS_newsletter_summer_2014.pdf

Client Spotlight: Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition

Joan Englund knows a thing or two about the importance of responding to policy developments. As Executive Director of the newly formed (2013) statewide Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition (MHAC), she monitors Ohio's legislative sessions each year. But a challenge arose last year, when the need to quickly create a policy position in response to Governor Kasich's Mid-Year Budget Review (MBR). The related provisions in the MBR came up against the reality of a board that was spread across the state and unable to provide approval or authorization for a new policy within a short timeframe.

"How do you create a policy position within a week's time when you only meet once a quarter?" Englund asked. She realized that MHAC would face this issue many times as its reach and reputation grew, and would need a plan to address it.

"ACS immediately came to mind, because I knew they would have experience in this area," Englund says. "Plus, I was pleased with the work they'd done to help us take our organization from a regional organization to statewide last year."

Lori, Scarlett, and policy associate Cassie Gaffney worked with MHAC to explore options for overcoming this internal communications infrastructure challenge. "They did their own research, including interviews with our board members to get their perspective and feedback," says Englund. "Then they provided us with a recommendation for creating a streamlined decision-making process for advocacy, and facilitated our board's discussion and adoption of the new plan. They also helped us create a method for overcoming potential conflicts when MHAC's organization policy position might differ from that of an individual member and the needs of their organization."

As a result, MHAC is now poised to respond to new policy opportunities or challenges when they arise. "Timeliness will always be an issue," says Englund. "Learning to address it was part of our organizational development work. Now we have a defined process for time-sensitive decision making and are well prepared to respond to whatever may arise." ▲

ACS Spotlight: Scarlett Boudier Triples Government Funding for Dress for Success Columbus

Any fashionista knows that the most versatile, long-wearing looks come from combining separates. The same is true for fundraising, where the key to organizational strength and sustainability comes not from a single donor, but by weaving a fabric of multiple contributors. Dress for Success Columbus was looking to diversify their public sector fund development strategy. ACS Vice President Scarlett Boudier joined the board of this organization in 2011 and went to work expanding options.

“Dress for Success promotes the economic independence of disadvantaged women by providing professional attire, a network of support and the career development tools to help women thrive in work and in life,” says Boudier. “That’s a strong economic development mission, and I was able to leverage my network of government relations contacts to make that connection and to help Dress for Success meet their goal of diversifying their public funding options.”

Now, Dress for Success Columbus has broadened its funding sources from one to three public contracts worth a total of \$70,000, up from \$20,000 in 2011.

“I’m proud to have played a small role in helping Dress for Success Columbus advance their mission” says Boudier. “They are an organization that does amazing work to empower the women of the region.”

The Art of Multi-Stakeholder Facilitation

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processes. Now, ACS is helping both the state and regional teams create plans for advancing best practices into a broader community network.

Any effort that brings together multiple stakeholders requires sensitivity in facilitation and the ability to think quickly to steer conversations away from turf issues and toward the common goal. “ACS serves as a neutral party with an objective perspective to de-politicize issues and provide support from a system-building perspective,” says Johnson. “Locally, people are sometimes influenced by their own knowledge base, their own interests or piece of the work, and their own experiences. ACS helps us all move forward with a broader view.”

“At the state level, differences can be amplified,” adds Peifer. “Everyone may have the same goal in mind, but they define and communicate about that differently. Even the way in which our stakeholders might define an ‘early intervention system’ is different. ACS helps us to create a common language for the work we each are doing and to define our individual efforts within the larger system. That’s allowed us to move the collaborative work forward.”

The key, says ACS Senior Director Rebecca Cohen, is knowing the field, the players and the issues before stepping into the room, then listening with an open mind. “You have to always listen first. We may be experts in facilitation and communication, but all of the stakeholders in the room are experts in their own right. Our goal is always to draw out their best thinking and use that to create a plan of action that feels authentic and actionable.”

“I have great trust in ACS,” says Johnson. “I know they will listen and interpret the group well, and they’ll foster open, honest dialog.”

“Even when we don’t all agree, we have meaningful dialog on how to move forward,” Peifer agrees. “ACS helps us resolve differences and maintain respect and appreciation for one another.” ▲

Be Empowered

Want to learn how communication, strategy development or advocacy can move your organization forward? Need an expert for training sessions or conference presentations? Contact one of our team members below, call toll-free at 1-877-372-0166 or check out our website at www.advocacyandcommunication.org

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