

## **Individualizing Economic Mobility Services with Families**

Manica Ramos: Welcome to this presentation on Individualizing Economic Mobility Services with Families. We're so excited to share some of our insights as well as learn from the group's expertise. We see this as an opportunity to put our heads and our hearts together to find ways to better serve families. While all families have many strengths and the ability to reach their goals, some families can also face unique and significant barriers to accessing the services they need. This session will share strategies for tailoring economic mobility services for culturally diverse and historically underserved families.

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Before we get started, I'd like to take a second to introduce ourselves. My name is Manica Ramos. I'm a senior research scientist II in the early childhood development program area. My area of focus is understanding how families decide to be engaged, as well as the support providers and teachers can offer to maximize engagement, particularly among brown or Black families.

Maria Ramos-Olazagasti is a senior research scientist in the reproductive health and family formation area at Child Trends. Her work focuses on risk and protective factors for Hispanic children's mental health and overall well-being.

During this session, we will discuss why it is important to individualize economic mobility services with families. We will share lessons from the field about specific circumstances that may make accessing economic mobility services challenging for families and discuss strategies for partnering with culturally diverse and historically underserved families to improve economic mobility access.

We will begin with the why. Why is it important to tailor economic services with families? I'll begin the discussion by sharing three whys is it important to individualize economic mobility

services with families, and then I'll bring the conversation back to our larger why. That why is why we do our work, and we'll hear directly from a parent.

Before I share these reasons, I want to point out one key word that makes a world of a difference in this work. During the discussion today, we're talking about individualizing services with rather than for families. What we mean by "individualizing services with families" is that families should be a part of this process at every phase through positive, goal-oriented, open communication.

Now, the first reason to individualize services is that economic well-being is at the foundation of child and family well-being. As you see in the image, which has been reframed to highlight the positives of child outcomes instead of only the negatives, children need their most basic needs met first, at the bottom, to reach the highest levels of outcomes, such as well-being.

Access to food, shelter, and stable income are at the base of this pyramid because they are essential for nurturing children and providing them a safe, secure, and stimulating environment in which caregivers have the capacity to be responsive to their child's needs and supportive of their development – as seen in the next level up. This, in turn, promotes children's physical, mental, and relational health and skill development, which is seen at the blue level. That supports children's school readiness and learning, which is at the green level and one of the Head Start central goals.

This fulfills [Inaudible] potential is, of course, an investment in children's broader and longer-term well-being, seen in purple at the top. This is not at all to mean the families that struggle economically are not nurturing or that their children can't lead meaningful lives – only that their paths to well-being may be harder.

I also want to note that, in the base of this pyramid, there is an acknowledgment that external conditions, including structural factors and policies, play a role in shaping the economic environment to support child health, development, and well-being. This is exactly why teaching [Inaudible] programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start is so important.

Now, I'll take a moment to pause and review the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement model. I think most of us are familiar with this framework, which identifies the program foundations and impact areas. Those are the two columns on the left that are important to support family engagement and leads to the desired family and child outcomes, which are the two columns on the right. Above these foundations, you will see both positive goal-oriented relationships, which are key to family engagement, as well as equity, inclusiveness, and linguistic responsiveness, which are important to weave throughout all family engagement efforts.

The second reason that it is important to tailor or individualize economic mobility services with families is to support equity. The populations that we serve are diverse and so are their needs. A one-size-fits-all approach will not allow us to lift up all families equally. If we don't pause to listen to someone's story, to understand their unique circumstances, and tailor our response to their specific needs, there is a potential for many families to be missed by the systems designed to serve them.

Advancing equity is directly tied to the historical mission and purpose of Head Start and will frame all that we discuss here today. We will hear in a bit from a Head Start parent, Gabriela, who talks about how circumstances outside of her control upended her family when the pandemic hit. Helping parents like her overcome structural barriers to accessing immediate resources in challenging times helps to stabilize and support the foundation that her children and others need to thrive.

Now, the third reason it is important to individualize services is that tailoring services to families' specific needs is also a key ingredient in developing positive and goal-oriented relationships with families. Tailoring services often involves active listening and authentic interactions that are meaningful to all participants and the affirmed families' cultures and languages. These approaches help to build relationships with families that are based on mutual respect and trust. Positive goal-oriented relationships, in turn, improve wellness by reducing isolation and stress for both families and for staff.

Of course, Head Start families are the heart of the why we do what we do, so let's hear directly from one parent, a parent who has the lived experience of having been unable to access the resources her family needed so badly during the pandemic. Gabriela, which is not her real name, is a Head Start parent. She has four children under the age of 5. Prior to COVID, her husband had a steady job working 50 hours a week, and she was happily a stay-at-home mom who was very involved in her children's Head Start program. She says that before COVID, they were pretty stable financially and generally able to put some money away every now and then. Let's hear what happened when the pandemic hit.

[Video begins]

Gabriela: Once the pandemic hit, I will say that everything just changed overnight. That stay-at-home order ... I don't think many of us saw it coming. Husband went to work and was told, "Hey, we're just here for three hours, and in those three hours we have to clear out all the merchandise." He works at a flower market, so it was all getting rid of all the flowers because they were going to shut off everything in the market – freezers and stuff. Then, when I pick up my kids that Friday afternoon, we get this letter, saying, "Hey, until further notice, we'll be closed."

It was a lot of uncertainty because, again, never been in a similar situation with a pandemic, we didn't know what to expect, whether it was going to be for a week, for two weeks, three weeks. Definitely very nerve wracking. Husband obviously unemployed but due to his illegal status, we're going through his immigration process. Unfortunately, he doesn't get to collect unemployment. On top of not being able to collect unemployment due to his status and us going through immigration process, we were afraid to ask for any type of government assistance at the time. That was very scary as well because we weren't really sure where to turn for help that wouldn't hinder anything in his case.

On top of that, when you have a family that big, with that many kids, people are always going to be quick to judge and say, "You opted to have that many kids. You should be able to provide for them." We always have that guilt trip on us. How do you even start sharing with people that you're going to struggle financially without being looked at in a negative light? Definitely a scary

time for us. [Inaudible] was one of the first people that I was able to turn to when I found out that, on top of all of those things I couldn't ask for, my family also didn't qualify for a stimulus check.

It was hopeful for two weeks, checking my status, and I never got a deposit – never received a check – and I was upset to find out that because I was a mixed-status family, filing taxes jointly with an i10 holder, I would not be entitled to that money, or my US citizen kids. When I reached out to Abriendo Puertas, they were just as shocked as I was but were every quick to offer referrals and assistance on their end to help us make some bill payments and even food delivery for our family.

[Video ends]

Manica: Sorry about that. We all know we've been working with families throughout the pandemic. We would love to hear about your experiences. What resonated with you about Gabriela's story? What else have you heard from families about their needs and challenges during this time? Please type your comments into the chat.

All right, I don't think you can all see each other's comments, so I'll read a few out loud: "When she talked about how people were quick to judge her guilt. When they didn't qualify for a stimulus check even though she and her kids were US citizens. The importance of referrals." All right, these are all such great points. "In this unexpected time, the typical supports weren't available. That she is one of many families experiencing this situation." All right, that was powerful.

Before we continue to the next segment of our presentation, we would like to highlight a key takeaway, namely that the mere existence of a program or resource does not make it accessible. As Gabriela's story made clear, just because the federal government expanded unemployment insurance and passed the bill to send stimulus checks to millions of families does not mean that everyone who needed unemployment insurance or income support during this time was able to access the supports.

OK. Now we're going to take a deeper dive into the sorts of barriers that families can face when trying to access services. Let's start by defining what we mean by barriers. Barriers are all the things that can make it hard for families like Gabriela's to access services. Learning about a program, filling out paperwork, navigating online systems, figuring out the logistics of getting to the program, waiting in line – these are not just nuances. They take time, effort, money, knowledge, and emotional energy, all of which are already in short supply for families that have limited resources.

There are a lot of different types of barriers, so what often helps me to think about them, as falling into three broad categories or buckets. The first is barriers to accessing information or learning about a program. The second is barriers to enrollment. These are the sort of things that we typically think about as administrative red tape. The third bucket is focused on psychological barriers. For example, some of the things Gabriela mentioned when she talked about feeling scared, about potential consequences for applying for government programs, and concerns about others' perceptions of them. Now, we will talk about each of these in turn.

Let's discuss the first group of barriers: challenges to accessing information or learning about the program in the first place. This quote from a national reporter for The Atlantic magazine shows how surprisingly common it can be to experience these sort of barriers. As she says here, "In the past few days, I've talked to a bunch of folks who are eligible for monthly child care allowance.

Despite the nonstop news coverage on these benefits, none of the people I talked to had any idea the money was coming." Sometimes it's hard to remember that not everyone has access to the same sources of information that we do. Or, in some cases, it's not always clear whether the information is relevant to their own specific circumstance.

These are the sort of things that fall into the first bucket: the challenges to learning about a program's existence and understanding how it applies to you and benefits you. In her full interview, Gabriela talked about how much time and energy she spent trying to figure out the types of programs or services out there that could help her and her family.

Knowing what you should be looking for, finding reliable information, understanding how it's relevant to you is hard, and it can be even harder when there's little or no information about a program in your home language or you do not have access to formal or informal networks that information about these programs are commonly shared. For example, think about how much easier it is to learn about and understand something when you have co-workers or friends or family who are already familiar with systems and can help answer your questions.

Another important thing to keep in mind when thinking about barriers to understanding benefits is misinformation. My colleague, Maria, found that some families who are eligible for benefits did not apply for them because they were misinformed about the consequences for using benefits. For example, some thought that they will have to pay back to the government any money they had received.

Other barriers to accessing information include challenges to understanding and determining eligibility as well as learning how to apply. Complex eligibility rules can be particularly hard for mixed-status families like Gabriela's, who include both US citizens like Gabriela and all her children as well as undocumented family members – in this case, Gabriela's husband.

For some programs, eligibility [Inaudible] depends on the status of the person receiving the benefits. For example, Gabriela and her children are eligible for SNAP, but other programs – like the Earned Income Tax Credit, EIT, and Child Tax Credits, CTC – require that all family members have valid social security numbers. Similarly, some programs use family income to determine eligibility, while others use total income of all persons living in the same household. Still others use income of a defined subset of a household.

Let's take Kim for example. She's a 20-year-old single parent with a 1-year-old daughter who lives with her parents and both of her parents work. She's eligible for TNAF, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, based on her own low income, but she's not eligible for SNAP because SNAP considers her as part of her parents' household till she's 22. Once she turns 22, she can be considered her own SNAP household, but only if she purchases and prepares most foods separately from her parents.

These are the sorts of rules that can vary from one program to another. Because of their complexity, there can be a lot of confusion and misinformation about eligibility. Some families may assume that because they were ineligible for one program, they're ineligible for others, but this is not always true. It's not just eligibility rules that can be complex. Understanding how to apply and navigating the websites and application systems can be difficult too, especially when these systems are unfamiliar and are not in the family's home language.

OK. We talked about the challenges to learning about a program, but even once you know about a program's existence and think you are eligible, there can also be challenges related to actually enrolling in the program. I saw this post on Twitter that really captures how the process required to enroll in programs are not accessible to all.

As Pam Herd points out, almost all of the enrollment processes associated with these sort of programs assume that people have access to a computer, email, and the internet. Maria Burnett points out her client's frustration with being told that the forms he needed are online when he doesn't understand how to navigate the Internet to access these forms, even if he had access to a computer and the internet.

Specific barriers to enrollment include needing to provide documentation that you are eligible, you meet the eligibility requirements, which involves not just pulling the documentation together, but also confirming their authenticity and often having to wait in long lines to present them in person at an agency office. This often means taking time off from work, which can be difficult if you don't have a flexible schedule. It also requires access to transportation and access to child care, both of which can be particularly challenging in rural areas.

Remember, too, that providing documentation of one's eligibility requires sharing personal information, and it's not always clear how that information is used and to the extent to which this information is shared across different federal agencies. Even though Gabriela's kids are US citizens and are eligible for SNAP, Gabriela still has to provide information about all household members on the application, and she's worried about whether this information can be shared with other government agencies.

This barrier to enrollment bucket also includes challenges with filling out forms and to being able to comply with the rules for remaining in a program. As we already noted, filling out forms often requires access to a computer, email, the internet, and some level of digital literacy. It can also be extremely challenging to fill out forms and fill them out correctly when the instructions and the forms are not in the family's home language. In addition, remember that in many cases, these benefits come with strings attached.

Remaining in the program requires complying with certain rules. For example, documenting ongoing work activities, showing up for in-person interviews, and proving that you can continue to meet eligibility requirements by the reenrollment date. Nearly one quarter of all child Medicare recipients get kicked out of the program for short periods of time due to rigid and automatic systems that enforce eligibility rules. For example, some kids get kicked out because their family's income fluctuates due to seasonal or irregular work.

OK. Now we turn to the third category of barriers. We've talked about the challenges to learning about a program in the first place. We talked about the challenges to enrolling and

remaining in a program. Now we're going to talk about psychological barriers and structures that can accompany the entire process. I threw up another set of Twitter posts up here that have done a nice job of highlighting how psychologically exhausting it can be.

Don Moynihan puts it, "To fight for support you are entitled to." He's commenting on David Perry's powerful story and the nation about all the times he's cried because social service systems require him to document again and again his disabled son's deficiency in order for him to get the supports he needs. It can be dehumanizing and disempowering, and it's just as true for the process that governs social safety network programs as well.

Now, we've already talked a little bit about some of the barriers that fall into this third bucket. The fear, the stress, the frustration, and the mental load required to navigate all these different systems. The logistics, deadlines, and requirements. But here I want us to pause a bit longer and put ourselves in Gabriela's shoes.

Your world has just been turned upside down by the pandemic. Your family lost their sole income. You have little by way of savings. You're scrambling to figure out what to do, but your kids are also in need of attention 24/7 because daycares and schools have been shut down. You're looking for work, but scared of getting sick with the virus that can be fatal. No one knows how long this will last or what will happen next.

On top of all of that, you're scared – deeply scared – to access services for which you are eligible to and which you are entitled to because of confusion and concerns about changing immigration policies and whether recipients of any sort of public benefit could hurt your husband's application for legal status. This is a fear that affects many families that includes someone who is foreign born. Even when all family members have legal status or are naturalized US citizens, many immigrants have internalized a message that being a public charge or relying on the public for any period of time is not OK.

In addition, as I previously noted, many of the administrative processes are complex and onerous. They're designed with the administration of the program, not the families they serve, in mind. They do not take into account the burden these processes put on families who already face significant constraints on their time, on their energy, on their resources. Any one of these, not to mention all of them together, can be overwhelming, using up all of our cognitive and emotional bandwidth, leaving little reserves to accomplish even our regular day-to-day tasks.

Further, psychological barriers can also include concerns about loss of autonomy and stigma. As David Perry's Twitter post highlighted, the overly complex and onerous process that characterizes social support services prioritize administrative efficiency over human dignity. Some of these processes can also feel paternalistic and disempowering, leaving potential recipients to feel that they have less control over the direction of their own lives. Similarly, cultural perception about receipt of government assistance as well as the stigma and trauma experienced due to the perpetuation of false narratives about benefits recipients can also make an eligible family hesitant to access services.

Now, I want to pause for a moment to acknowledge that I spent the last 15 minutes really focused on challenges. While it may feel heavy, it's really important to be aware of the often unnoticed factors that can get in the way of families accessing the services they need. But I do

want to also note that not all programs are the same in terms of the number and types of barrier families experience when trying to access them.

Many of the benefits included in the American Rescue Plan, like the expanded Child Tax Credits, are administered through the tax system and are seen not as public assistance programs but as tax refunds for which families meeting requirements are entitled. This is thus very little, if any, stigma associated with these particular programs.

I also want to acknowledge that the barriers we just discussed are generally not distributed equally. This graph shows the churn or a percent of Medicaid beneficiaries who get kicked off of Medicaid for short periods usually due to some of the challenges that we've discussed related to the processes for remaining in a program once enrolled. The top set of bars is for children.

As you see, the experience of being kicked off of much-needed services are not distributed equally. Hispanic children are more likely to get kicked off than non-Hispanic children. And "Other" and Black children are more likely than White children to experience these challenges and have their services temporarily terminated.

This is true not just of Medicaid. Across many types of services, some populations will face greater barriers to access than others. For example, a large proportion of Hispanic families, Asian-Americans, and Pacific Islander families, and families that include immigrants can face challenges, a number of which we've discussed all the way throughout this presentation, such as lack of information available in their home language, immigration-related concerns, and unfamiliar systems and application procedures.

Others, including many Black families, have these additional challenges stemming from rules and regulations, for example, work environments, family caps, and drug-testing, that are rooted in the history of racial discrimination, as well from the ongoing perpetuation of false narratives about benefit recipients, that myth of the welfare queen. Still others, such as American-Indians and Alaskan native families, face unique challenges that stem from the particular experience of historical trauma that has fostered mistrust of state and federal agencies. These differences in access have real consequences for child outcomes.

OK. Now, that was a lot of information. Feel free to take a moment to stretch, wherever you are, but also, as I mentioned, the community here today has a lot to learn from about your own experiences working with families. Please also take a moment to type in the chat. What are the most common barriers, experiences by the families you work with?

"Not even knowing where to start to look for help. Stigma. Transportation. A lack of information in Spanish. Not being able to understand all the complex rules. All the time it requires to figure this stuff out. Misinformation. Figuring out what is true and what is misinformation." Yes, these are all really important to keep in mind as we continue to work with families.

OK. We're going to finish off this part of the session with a few more takeaways. As a reminder, our first takeaway was that the mere existence of a program or resource does not make it accessible.



Our second key takeaway is that, when we talk about barriers to access, we're not just talking about families who do not meet eligibility requirements. Yes, when ... As we listened to Gabriela's story, eligibility was one of the barriers she faced, but there was also many more. They were afraid to ask for government assistance. They were not sure where to turn to for help. They were worried about being seen in a negative light. These are all barriers to access.

Our third takeaway is that access is not equal, and lack of access exacerbates inequalities. The families that face challenges in accessing services are the same families that tend to be more likely to be barely making ends meet in the first place, more likely to be working in service industries that shut down during the pandemic, and more likely to be negatively impacted by structural and systemic discrimination. In sum, the families that are among the most in need of support are also the families most likely to experience challenges to accessing the support they desperately need.

This returns us to where I initially started: that tailoring economic mobility services with families is important for supporting equity. With that, I'll hand it off to Maria.

Maria: Thank you, Manica. We've talked about many of the things that may make it difficult for families to access services that can promote their economic mobility. Fortunately, all the work that Head Start staff put into getting to know families and building relationships with them can be leveraged toward working with families to identify the services that respond to their needs and circumstances.

We have a number of recommendations that we're going to share with you, but first, we're going to hear again from Gabriela, as she has some thoughts that how staff could work with families to tailor services to their needs.

[Video begins]

Gabriella: I would really like to invite administrators and staff that are going to be working with these families to be very – connect with your families. Please, please, please find resources, but find resources that are going to work for them. Don't give them a page of 20 resources that, if lucky, they might be able to get one or two based on qualifications.

Yes, it might take a little longer, but please have your staff really look into the resources. That is one of the biggest things, as the chairperson for Saint Anne's and an advocate at [Inaudible], I have really pushed for. Getting resources for these families. They are not all capable of finding resources on their own, whether it be due to challenge with technology, whether it be because sometimes they don't really even speak a language like English or Spanish. We do have dialect families, as well. That's something that can be a big obstacle for them. Definitely work with your families. Know who you're serving so that those resources are adequate and valid for them. Don't give them something that's going to require a social security number to qualify if you know that that family doesn't have that.

Just, lastly, the sensitivity portion of it, I think is going to be a huge, huge number when we start getting back into these classrooms. These kids and families have gone through a lot of trauma during this past year. Some of them lost their jobs. Some of them had to give up their jobs because they had to stay home and do distance learning with their child.

There are some that may be ... both the parents are at home, and you would think that is a good thing. But unfortunately, there's other issues that can arise when you're in a stressful situation. Some unfortunately go into drugs, alcoholism. Some become abusive to their family members so etc., etc. Open that door for families to feel comfortable to come and disclose what their true needs are without being afraid of being reported. I've run into that a lot.

A lot of families are scared to let their staff know their current situation because they're afraid that they're going to have child services knocking on their door because their child doesn't have an adequate space to sleep in, or things like that – things that, in normal times, we maybe couldn't get away with, but due to this pandemic, families had two, three families living in one home. Definitely, the key is going to be open communication and just great support for these families.

[Video ends]

Maria: OK. Gabriela provided some very concrete examples about how staff can work with families to identify their specific needs and linked them to those services. We're going to go over the specific recommendations, which, by the way, she was spot on. They're also backed by research and practice.

First, she says, "Connect with your families." This seems pretty obvious and basic, but it's really important, and you're already spending a lot of time doing this. But this is why it's so important to recognize that the time you spend getting to know your families can really make a difference in terms of tailoring economic mobility services to families' needs. The more you get to know your families, the better able you are to identify their needs and work with them to identify the appropriate services for them.

Connecting with individual families is also important because the communities that you serve are likely very heterogeneous. The fears, challenges, and eligibility issues that one family faces are likely different from that of another family.

Connecting with family involves actively listening to what they're saying. We just heard about the fear about the consequence of using services that can serve as a barrier to using the services. Believe me, this fear is very real, and we see it in the numbers, and we see how many immigrants who are eligible for certain services actually use them. The number is actually much lower than one would expect, considering the needs and the eligibility for certain services.

Most of what's driving this lack of uptake is the fear about the potential consequences of using those services. When you talk to families, really listen to their concerns. Ask questions, debunk myths, and help alleviate some of these concerns.

When possible, personalize your communication with families. Ask about their communication preferences. Do they prefer to talk to you in person, in private, with another family member, via text, WhatsApp? Whatever it might be, learn about their communication preferences and tailor your communication style to those preferences.

Again, this is obvious but also very important, communicate with your families in their preferred language, and we understand that not everyone speaks every language that your families might speak, but find an interpreter if you're not able to speak their language.

Finally, following up with families regularly is really critical. This is not a one-time conversation that you're going to have with families. This is important for two reasons. One, multiple barriers might show up along the way that you want to be aware of and help families navigate. If you refer a family to a particular program, ask them how that went or were they able to apply successfully, have they received the services, how has that changed their situation? That's one reason why it's important to follow up with families.

Another reason is that new situations might arise. As Gabriela mentioned, they used to have a stable employment – her husband did – and finally with COVID, he lost it. Also, she mentioned how COVID brought about new situations at home – for example, substance abuse and family violence, that you want to be aware of so that you can support families in finding the types of services that might help them with those particular situations.

Building on the recommendation to connect with families, Gabriela also highlights the importance of getting to know the families you're serving and making sure that the resources we provide families are aligned to their specific needs. This involves familiarizing yourselves with the eligibility requirements of programs and working with families to determine which programs are available to them and could help them specifically. Again, the reason why this is so important is because figuring out eligibilities is quite complicated, as we've mentioned before, and this also might vary by state, county, and city.

Some states, for example, have eligibility requirements that make it easier or harder for certain groups to access services. For example, some states allow both [Inaudible] and English as a second language classes to count towards program eligibility, but others don't. Some states have minimum work-per-hour requirements, and others don't. This minimum work requirement might be particularly detrimental for groups who work informal or seasonal jobs, as is often the case for Hispanic and immigrant populations, for example.

It also involves making sure that the materials that you share with families are culturally appropriate, in families' preferred language, and at a reading level that's appropriate for the community you serve. Also being alert to families' transportation, childcare, work schedule constraints, and their level of familiarity with technology.

Finally, knowing the families you're serving involves really personalizing how you refer them to services. Like Gabriela mentioned, a long list of resources is not going to go very far in terms of linking families to services that are specifically useful for them, but rather personally telling them about specific resources that are relevant for their circumstances, that might be in line with their eligibility criteria, helping them make initial appointments can really make a difference.

Don't get me wrong, the long list of potential resources that families might use is helpful for you, and I do encourage you to have one. You have cheat sheet and maybe different colleagues can contribute to it so that you have that in the back of your mind. But handing that to families is not going to be so helpful as it is working with them to identify their specific needs and which programs they might be eligible for.

Another key point that Gabriela brought up is the importance of being sensitive to families' circumstances. This is quite critical, especially when it comes to tailoring services to families

who are either immigrants or mixed status, or who are experiencing difficulties at home that may make them particularly vulnerable, as it is the case, for example, for those experiencing domestic violence.

The process of applying for services can be very scary and intimidating, whether it's because of your or your families' immigration status or the challenges that you're facing that are very personal. The bottom line is that sharing sensitive information with a person that you don't know at a provider's office is very uncomfortable. But you can capitalize on the relationships that you've built with families to create a safe environment in which families are comfortable sharing personal information, because, again, the more that they share, the better positioned we are to refer them to the right resources.

Being sensitive also involves realizing that, for some families, immigration status might be a concern when sharing personal information in the process of signing up for programs. But you should clarify to families which information is actually required to submit in the application process and which one isn't, even if the applications ask for it.

Many applications do have a line, for example, for social security number, when this information is actually not required to apply for the program. But they don't always clarify that this information is optional. But if you do tell families that that's optional, that might help alleviate many of the concerns that they have about applying for programs. It also involves avoiding collecting personal information that's not required for the application purposes.

Many families, once trust has been built, will probably volunteer their immigration status and any concerns around them. But if they haven't, I wouldn't necessarily encourage you to ask families to volunteer this information. Rather, I would encourage you to talk about it in terms of eligibility for a different program. I would say, "This program is for families who are either born in the United States or who are US citizens," for example.

Lastly, while Gabriela did not say this in the segments of the interview that we shared, she ultimately did get connected to some community resources that provided critical support in the form of food donations to her family during this time. Let's remember that there are often a lot of resources available in the community that can provide support, particularly for those families who may not be eligible for government services, or who are too afraid to ask.

We can capitalize on those resources by partnering with well-respected community leaders to link families with resources in the community, using social media channels preferred by the community to disseminate information more broadly. [Inaudible] communities, for example, religious institutions offer a safe haven for resources that help support families in times of need. Encourage those partnerships to disseminate resources available in your community.

Also encourage parent leadership and social support networks. For example, provide opportunities for parents to discuss and share resources and to provide informal support to one another. Parents can share success stories and lessons learned with other parents about navigating support systems and also provide support helping with childcare, for example, so that parents can attend appointments that need to be in person.

Also, solicit and be responsive to suggestions from the community. For example, we've learned a lot today from what Gabriela had to say. I would encourage you to ask families that you serve [Inaudible] accessing services and to work with them to find solutions. It's also worth exploring existing programs and reaching out to discuss ways to partner and share resources.

For example, I have a colleague who worked at a pediatrician's office and the pediatrician ... This was in a community clinic, and the pediatrician was interested in helping link families to economic mobility services while they waited for the appointments. She talked to volunteers who helped people file taxes and also some employees from the state who were able to come to the office and work with families while they waited, and enrolled them for these services. This is just one way in which you can partner with other programs to support the communities that you serve.

We've shared a lot of information, but now I'd love to hear from you one more time. Think of a family that you have worked with that has faced institutional or structural barriers like those that we've discussed today. I'm asking you to please share how you navigated those challenges with them in a way that was culturally and/or linguistically responsive. And if you can please type it in chat, I can share it with the group.

OK. I hear that one person was working with a family who spoke a dialect that she wasn't familiar with, so she reached out to another family that was from the same region and spoke that same language, and asked her if she could help facilitate conversations. I see another person who personally helped a family sign up for a program and fill out a form that they had had for a long time but didn't know how to complete and was too afraid to ask. Also, working with colleagues and getting input from colleagues on how to get the right information from families so that you were able to personalize services for them. These are all great experiences. Thank you for sharing those.

Another question that I have for the group is, are there some recommendations that we shared today that you're excited to put into practice with your families? If you can please include them in the chat.

I hear, "I had to work with a family that needed health insurance for her citizen children but was scared because she was undocumented." I think that was related to a previous question. Somebody's sharing that they liked the idea of having people from one program come to help enroll people, peer to peer. Report groups. Asking families for ideas on how programs can best support them. Great, so we hope that you find some of these recommendations helpful and that you can implement them with their families.

I want to close this session with some key takeaways. First, we have a responsibility to elevate every family's potential by tackling factors that limit access to services for certain families. Engaging in active listening and focusing on families' strengths can go a long way toward building positive relationships with families based on trust and respect. Lastly, knowing the barriers that tend to affect some families can help us become better partners with families.

I want to share some resources with the group. Most of these recommendations come from resources that aren't listed here, so if you want more information, please take a look at these, which are available on ECLKC. I want to particularly highlight the "Economic Mobility Toolkit,"

which contains information about how to integrate economic mobility work into your program. The one listed at the end, “Partnering with Families to Build Economic Security During Emergencies,” which is particularly relevant today with the pandemic.

To complete this session and download your certification of attendance, please follow these steps. Go to the engagement tools at the bottom of your console. Click on the blue Certificate of Attendance icon. A pop-up message will appear on your screen. If you have met the full credit criteria, a certificate icon will appear in the tool window, allowing you to download your certificate. If you click on the icon, this will open the certificate as a PDF in a new browser tab. You can either save it on your computer or print it. We do recommend that you save it on your computer.

If you attended this session with several of your colleagues and all of you have met the full credit criteria, the group leader can add other viewers by opening the Group Viewer Form.

Don't forget to download the resources in the Resources and Helpful Links section of your console. The resources are also available on the Engagement Hub.

Your feedback is really important to us, so please go to a survey link that's posted on the Engagement Hub, and please remember to complete this event survey at the end of the institute.

We know how eager you all are to resume full in-person services for children and families in your programs. The great news is that the Biden Administration has prioritized teachers, early educators, and child care staff to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. To learn more about the vaccine, we have information available in the Engagement Hub to help you become confident in making the right decisions for yourself. Now, please join us in the Engagement Hub for a self-care break, and get ready for your next session. Thank you.