

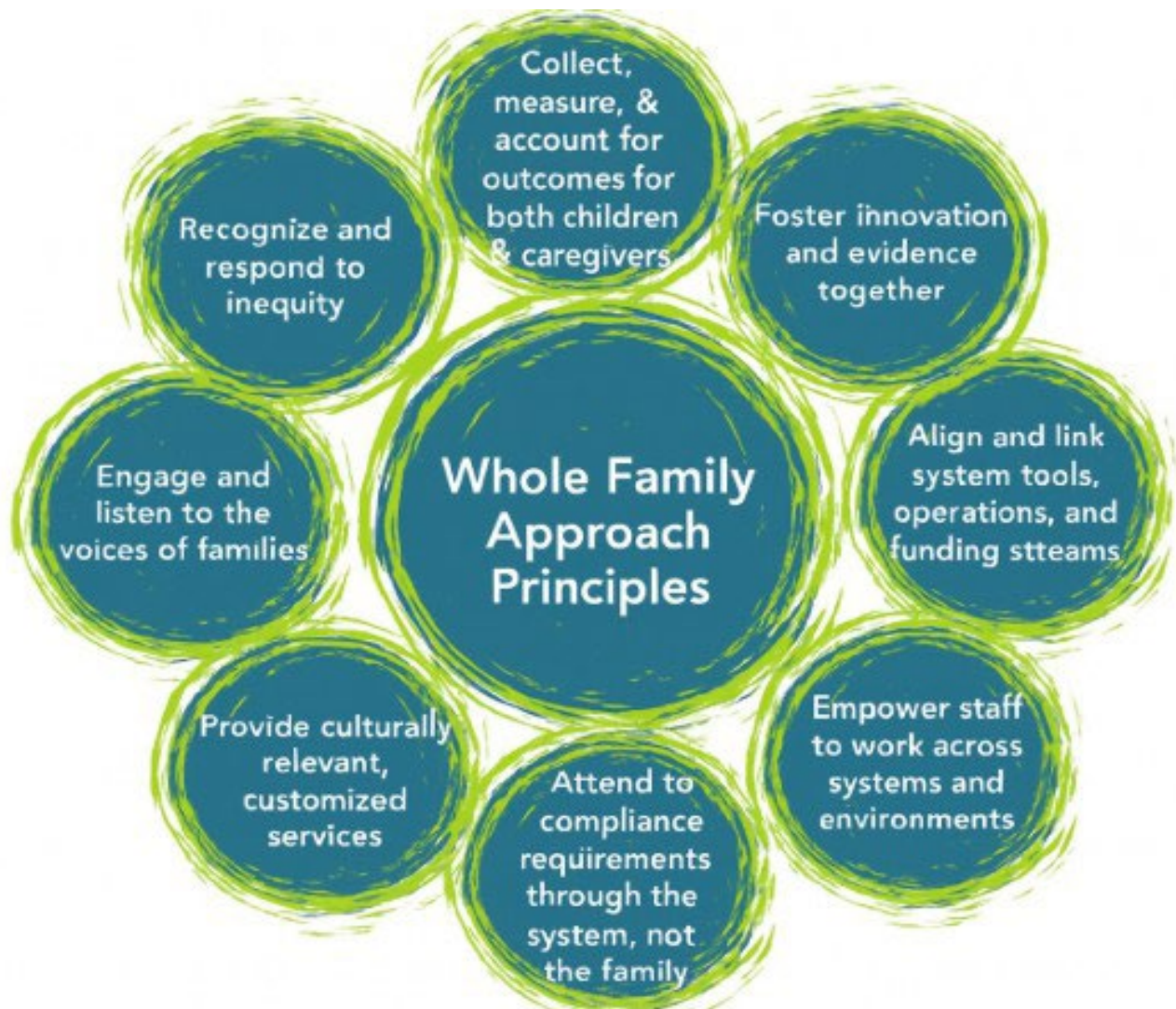
Whole Family Approach Principles to Practice

Empowering Minnesota agency staff and leaders to turn the Whole Family Approach into everyday practice — building systems where all families can thrive.



Whole Family Approach Principles to Practice

This tool works to help you spot what's working well and where there's room to grow as you bring the principles into everyday practice. It's meant for anyone who shapes policy or runs programs that affect families. The principles all connect and build on one another—what you do in one area often depends on what's happening in another. They're listed in no particular order, because each one matters equally in creating real change for families.



How to use this tool

STEP ONE: Select a specific policy or program for which you have responsibility or authority. Gather resources that are easily available to you: statutes, rules, policy manuals, staff expertise and knowledge, previous research, etc.

STEP TWO: Using this tool, take a snapshot of your current context. Think about what currently exists; make note of what could exist in the future as you go along.




STEP THREE: With each principle, consider how you might be able to improve current practice. Consider what issues might benefit from deeper assessment or would require partners or additional authority, and document that information. Make note of what you can do: there may be small decisions and larger commitments or conversations that you need to start. Lead from where you sit.

STEP FOUR: Connect with other agencies and find partners to support the implementation of new practices. Assess the impact of the new approaches, both intended and unintended.

STEP FIVE: Repeat. This is a snapshot-in-time assessment and is not an exhaustive list of how to implement a Whole Family Approach and Set an intention to revisit this on a semi-annual basis.

Practice Rating Scale: Emerging > Developing > Established

Use this rating scale to reflect on the current stage of implementation for each practice. The seedling icons offer a simple, human-centered way to communicate growth over time.

Icon	Stage	Description
	Emerging	The practice is new or not yet consistently in place. Actions may be informal, limited in scope, or dependent on individual effort.
	Developing	The practice is in place in some areas or with some consistency. Structures and routines are forming, but there's still room for alignment and growth.
	Established	The practice is fully integrated and consistently applied. It's supported by clear systems, shared understanding, and ongoing reflection or improvement.

Where on the Whole Family continuum is the emphasis of the policy or program? (Mark with an X)



Which "gear" is the emphasis of the policy or program? (Mark with an X)



Principle: Engage and listen to the voices of families

In human-serving systems, it is important for those who design policy and programs to understand the perspectives of those we seek to serve.

Practices

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



Mark with "x"

We center the voice of racially, culturally, and geographically diverse families in program, practice and policy decisions.			
We regularly seek and document the input of families on the design and implementation of our program and policies.			
When we engage with families, we value their time (monetarily) and provide for child care, transportation, and meals so they can easily participate.			
In our grants and contracts, we partner with trusted community organizations that are deeply connected to the families they serve and deliver meaningful, measurable results.			
We prioritize feedback loops, sharing back with community what we did with their input, and ask: "Did we get it right?" and "How do we keep doing better?"			

Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:

Principle: Empower staff to work across systems and environments

Minnesota has a long history of innovation in policy and programs built on strong cross-sector relationships. That legacy is a powerful asset as state agencies, counties, Tribes, and local nonprofits work toward a shared vision: a system that places families at the center. Strengthening these connections—and ensuring staff know and trust one another—makes it easier to align goals, coordinate efforts, and deliver more effective Whole Family Approach program responses.

Practices

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



Mark with “x”

<p>We provide staff with dedicated time and support to participate in cross-agency learning sessions, community roundtables, and collaborative workshops that strengthen relationships, deepen understanding of community needs, and build shared problem-solving capacity.</p>			
<p>We strengthen collaboration through cross-program workgroups, shared governance models, and clear processes for sharing information across teams and partners to ensure alignment, build trust, and support coordinated action.</p>			
<p>We have shared reporting and accountability systems that measure collective impact across programs.</p>			

Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:

Principle: Foster innovation and evidence together

Responding to families’ evolving needs requires new and innovative ways of working—approaches that are grounded in evidence and continuous learning. By building a strong foundation of evaluation and feedback, we can ensure these new ways of operating are effective for families and lead to better outcomes for both caregivers and children.

Practices

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



Mark with “x”

We regularly bring staff and partners together to assess what’s working, surface challenges, and co-create new and more effective approaches.			
To inform the shape of our work, we consult evidence-based clearinghouses and research to understand effectiveness of similar models			
When we are developing new, innovative approaches, we develop the evaluation of this work at the same time.			
We innovate while staying grounded in compliance. We collect data on how new strategies deliver better outcomes for families.			

Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:

Principle: Align and link system tools, operations, and funding streams

Whole Family Approaches require us to move beyond traditional silos. To make this possible, we must align and connect funding streams, operational practices, eligibility rules and criteria, and system tools—creating the conditions for more coordinated, holistic services for families.

Practices

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



Mark with “x”

<p>We know what other programs and services our families are most likely to engage with. We take that into account when administering this program.</p>			
<p>Our operational practices include tracking our grantee's portfolio of state funding and coordinating reporting, monitoring and other activities across program areas.</p>			
<p>We have worked to analyze and structure funding so it can be used more flexibly to support cross-sector, whole family strategies and other innovative approaches.</p>			
<p>We structure eligibility criteria based on a definition of family that aligns with the diversity of family structures in Minnesota.</p>			

Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:

Principle: Attend to compliance requirements through the system, not the family

A Whole Family Approach focuses on building families' social capital by making every interaction with systems meaningful and generative, rather than compliance-driven. This often requires shifting system requirements onto agencies and staff so families can spend their time accessing support, not navigating bureaucracy.

Practices

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



Mark with "x"

<p>We use data sharing with other programs or agencies to assist applicants in gathering required verifications or documentation.</p>			
<p>We are able to gather information needed for eligibility through existing system data or have streamlined intake forms and recertification processes.</p>			
<p>We examine current and new policies and programs to identify ways to reduce administrative burden and simplify the family experience.</p>			
<p>Our policies and programs are designed to allow staff to minimize compliance-focused interactions with families and maximize generative interactions with families.</p>			

Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:

Principle: Collect, measure, and account for outcomes for both children and caregivers

It is important to do what we can to ‘see’ the whole family in our administrative system. The way we assemble and analyze data is an important dimension of moving forwards a more holistic family orientation throughout the system.

Practices

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



Mark with “x”

When developing a policy or rule, we use data to evaluate the effects of the policy on both caregivers and child.			
Our system allows for the linking of data for caregivers and child.			
We regularly analyze and use data we collect about the caregivers, children, and families to improve our work and understand outcomes.			
We work with communities to identify strengths- based, culturally specific measures.			

Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:

Principle: Provide opportunity for culturally relevant and customized services

Families in Minnesota are diverse, and a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work - especially for those with complex histories. To achieve meaningful and positive outcomes, we must adapt our practices and programs so they reflect and respect the unique values, identities, and experiences of each family and community.

Practices

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



Mark with "x"

We acknowledge and attend to the impact of historical trauma, institutional racism, and adverse childhood experiences on communities we serve. This means we have trained our staff and modified our practices to be more trauma informed.			
We are explicit in utilizing flexibility in our engagements with families to ensure cultural relevance.			
Our staff and leadership look like the communities we serve.			
We develop our staff's ability to operate interculturally.			
We intentionally seek out, learn from, and support culturally specific and emerging best practices.			

Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:

Principle: Recognize and respond to inequity

Systems intended to serve families don't work well for every family. Inequitable outcomes can be seen across race, ethnicity, and cultural identities; signs that systems designed to help families are recreating and/or perpetuating inequity. Reform of a program, policy, or system must examine disparate outcomes and systematic inequity to effectively foster equitable outcomes going forward.

Practices

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



Mark with "x"

<p>We examine outcomes of our policies across a range of characteristics including race, ethnicity, language, geography, gender, disability status, and family structure and have a targeted approach to address any inequitable outcomes.</p>			
<p>We use tools and resources available to us to shape our thinking and program development with race and equity in mind, such as: racial equity tool kits and racial equity action plans.</p>			
<p>When we have inequitable outcomes in our policies or programs, we develop a targeted approach to address them.</p>			

Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:

Next Steps

STEP THREE: Consider what issues might benefit from deeper assessment or would require partners or additional authority, and document that information. There may be small decisions and larger commitments or conversations that you need to start. Lead from where you sit.

List the resources that you will explore further.

What issues arose that you want to assess further and require more information than what you currently have available to you?

What might be barriers to implement changes? How will you work around those?

STEP FOUR: Connect with other agencies and find partners to support the implementation of new practices. Assess the impact of the new approaches, both intended and unintended.

List potential partners who could support the implementation of new practices in your policy/program area.

How will you assess the impact of these new approaches?

STEP FIVE: Repeat. This is a snapshot-in-time assessment. Set an intention to revisit this on a semi-annual basis.

Add a reminder to your calendar 6 months from now to take another snapshot.