



CHAPTER 12

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

As you go through the process of establishing an early childhood program, you will have a chance to develop management, team-building, and decision-making skills. Managing a program and working with staff is not always easy. When things get tough, it can help to remember that your program management skills will develop over time.

This chapter covers some of the basic elements in program management: accountability, transparency, leadership and monitoring.

Some program management principles are:

1. **Accountability** -- Are you doing what you said you would do?
2. **Transparency** – Do people see and understand how the program is run?
3. **Managing finances responsibly** – Can you live within your budget? Are your expenditures appropriate for the goods and services you purchase? This includes establishing a system of checks and balances and shopping around for best prices on supplies and equipment.
4. **Developing management structures** – Are there structures in place for getting the job done?
5. **Leadership** – Is there someone to inspire and motivate others?
6. **Professional development & positive staff morale** – Are staff encouraged to develop new skills? Is there open communication among staff? Are wages fair?
7. **Strategic Planning** – Do you have goals for 1, 2, and 3 years down the road?
8. **Negotiation** – Can you help people understand others' viewpoints? Are you willing to work towards a common ground?
9. **Program evaluation** – Is your program doing what it aimed to do?
10. **Monitoring** – Does the program meet licensing requirements? Does the program offer quality, culturally relevant, developmentally appropriate services?

Accountability

As a community service, your program is accountable to the community. You are responsible to them for doing what you said you would do. Community members will expect that you are doing the best job that you possibly can.

It is a good idea to develop a communication system so community members and funding bodies know what's going on in your program. Your parent advisory committee, parent circle, or Elders committee will be important sources of information for the community.

Annual report

One strategy for demonstrating accountability is to distribute an annual report to parents, community members and funders. An annual report describes your activities and accomplishments over the past year. Did you acquire any new toys or equipment? Did any local high school students volunteer in the program?

Audited financial statements

You are also accountable for the money that your program receives from funders and community fundraisers. How did you spend the money raised at the book auction? What professional development courses did staff attend?

To show that you spent the funds responsibly, it is a good idea to have your financial statements audited annually. Regular audits ensure that you have receipts for all expenditures and may help you improve your financial management practices.

Transparency

It is important that staff of your program feel they are being treated fairly and consistently. Parents will also want to know that they and their children are subject to the same rules and policies as everyone else. Clearly written policies and procedures will ensure that staff, parents, and community members know how and why you make certain decisions. The parent handbook, parent agreement, and personnel handbook are all components of a transparent management system.

Leadership

Recent research about quality in Canadian child care programs shows that staff satisfaction is a primary factor in quality child care programs. The *You Bet I Care!* study by the Centre for Families, Work, and Well-Being at the University of Guelph identified several factors associated with higher quality care, including:

1. Better than average staff wages and benefits.
2. ECE - trained staff (with two years or more of training).
3. Good staff to child ratios.
4. The program being not-for-profit.
5. The program receiving subsidized rent or utilities (room for higher wages).
6. Staff feeling supported by their co-workers.

The study also found that high quality care was associated with staff:

1. Education and training.
2. Networking with other organizations involved in child care.
3. Wages.
4. Satisfaction at work.

Professional development

Professional development happens when staff have opportunities to further their training and education. This could be through professional development (pro d) days, conferences, and/or workshops. It is an integral part of any quality early childhood program. Professional development allows employees the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills that they may not have developed in their initial training programs. Your staff may want to learn more about parenting programs or how to communicate in your local language.

Because professional development is required for certified early childhood educators in BC, it is important that you set aside funds in your operating budget. To figure out how much to set aside, find out about the costs of programs and conferences that staff may have interest in and multiply by the number of staff you will have. Also, talk to coordinators of other programs to find out what they typically spend.

Many early childhood programs also cover the costs of renewing staff certifications. For example, you may want to pay for renewing First Aid certificates. Stress management and conflict resolution courses may also be considered professional development.

Your investment in professional development will pay off in quality care!

Making staff feel comfortable

It may help to approach this issue in a round-about way. Think about the worst job you ever had. Why was it so bad? Were you expected to stand all day? Did you get few breaks? Were the facilities too cold, too hot or too loud? Was your supervisor always in a bad mood? You can make your facility comfortable for staff by addressing these issues. For example:

1. Provide a staff room where staff can take a quiet break, have a snack, use the telephone, and store their personal belongings.

2. At minimum, follow the employment standards that apply to your program. Staff should have time for breaks and lunch, and should be fairly compensated for overtime work.
3. Treat staff with the respect they deserve. If there is a problem, follow your program's conflict resolution procedures.

Teamwork

Teamwork is essential to the success of your program. You will need to:

1. Create an atmosphere of trust, acceptance, understanding, and fair play.
2. Make sure that all staff feel they are important to the program.
3. Involve staff in decision making when it relates to the program or staff.
4. Encourage staff as they apply new skills; and celebrate their accomplishments.
5. Hold regular staff meetings. Staff can write notes in a communication book to address issues between staff meetings.

Conflict resolution and resolving performance issues

One way to prevent conflict in your program is to start with a set of clearly formulated policies that outline the rights and responsibilities of staff. Staff should also understand the consequences of taking actions contrary to your policies.

Some common sources of conflict are power struggles, lack of trust, miscommunication, unspoken assumptions, differing philosophies, and disagreements about goals and processes. Many of these can be resolved through open and honest communication. If communication is a problem, invite a mediator to participate. Having Elders present in meetings can help you establish an atmosphere of calm and respect.

You will need to have some procedures in place for dealing with serious problems. It is important that the director/coordinator/supervisor of the program or, if necessary, the program committee, address serious problems right away. A serious problem that is not addressed will get worse. At the first sign of a serious problem, implement the first step of your resolution procedure. Resolution procedures typically include:

1. Telling the staff member about the problem.
2. Talking with the staff member to work out steps to resolve the problem.
3. Setting a time frame within which the problem can be resolved.

Remember to have a staff member sign all records of action taken regarding the issue. The staff member may note on the record that she doesn't agree with the actions taken.

Decision-making

A well planned decision making process will help everyone work through conflicts that arise among coordinators, staff, and children. Many decisions will directly affect the health and well-being of the children in your care, so it is important to deal with questions and problems as they arise. Try these steps:

1. Identify the problem.
2. List some possible solutions to the problem.
3. List some outcomes of each of the possible solutions.
4. Identify the importance of the situation to the person(s) with the problem.
5. Make a decision.
6. Think about the results of the decision. Did it work?

Monitoring

Monitoring is the part of program management that reviews how a program carries out its planned activities. The purpose of monitoring is threefold:

1. To ensure that a program complies with licensing regulations. Your local licensing officer is responsible for this aspect of monitoring.
2. To ensure that a program complies with funding regulations. The program funder is responsible for this aspect of monitoring.

3. To support a program in its operations. At least two parties are responsible for this role: The licensing officer and the program funder.

Licensing officers and program funders will monitor your program through letters, telephone calls and on-site visits.

Assisting in the monitoring process

There are a number of ways that the governance committee and program coordinator can assist in the monitoring process:

1. Recognize that the purpose of program monitoring is help the program operate in the best way possible.
2. Ensure that program policies, procedures and activities comply with relevant laws and regulations (e.g. required salary deductions, staff:child ratios, appropriate staff qualifications).
3. Keep children's files up to date with enrollment information, health information, signed consent forms and attendance records.
4. Keep personnel files up to date with certifications, immunization records and time sheets.
5. Keep all written program policies and procedures together in a file, handbook, or binder.
6. Maintain up-to-date financial records. This includes the program budget, quarterly reports, annual reports, audited financial statements, and receipts for all expenditures.
7. Maintain separate financial records for different projects and funders.
8. Involve monitors in program evaluations.
9. Provide monitors with a copy of the annual report and other activity reports.

There may be other ways that the governance committee and program coordinator can assist in the monitoring process. Ask your local licensing officer and program funder what you can do.

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