



Frequently Asked Questions for Community Providers

Developed in collaboration between the National Council for Behavioral Health and the National Building Bridges Initiative

What is the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) all about?

Across the United States, services and supports for youth with behavioral health challenges and their families are delivered in a variety of environments that include both residential and community-based settings. Children and families often move between different services and supports as their needs change, and yet, in some communities, transitions between residential interventions and community services and supports are not well coordinated among human service professionals, educators and other youth and family-serving providers. There may also be inconsistencies with how youth and families are involved in their treatment and in the transition process.

The Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) promotes full partnerships between all who are involved with youth and families who receive residential interventions and community services and supports. BBI also supports the use of promising, best, and evidence-based and -informed practices to achieve sustained positive outcomes for youth and families touched by residential and community programs. This FAQ is designed to provide information about BBI for community behavioral health organizations as a way to demonstrate the benefits of participating in BBI in their local communities.

Originally founded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) is a national partnership of residential and community service providers, youth and families, advocates, and national organizations and associations, that have come together to create better outcomes for children and youth with behavioral and/or emotional challenges, and their families. With emphasis on youth and families touched by both residential and community services, BBI seeks to build strong partnerships to support youth and families when they are in most need of support. According to the BBI Mission Statement:

The mission of the Building Bridges Initiative is to identify and promote practice and policy initiatives that will create strong and closely coordinated partnerships and collaborations between families, youth, community- and residentially-based treatment and service providers, advocates and policymakers to ensure that comprehensive services and supports are family-driven, youth-guided, strength-based, culturally and linguistically competent, individualized, evidence and practice-informed, and consistent with the research on sustained positive outcomes.

BBI currently has over 100 partners, who have endorsed the “Joint Resolution,” which is a statement about principles and best practices. These partners are actively working to implement the BBI framework in their communities. Detailed information about BBI, along with products, services and resources can be found at www.buildingbridges4youth.org.

What does it mean to be a Partner of BBI?

To become a partner of BBI, organizations must endorse the [Building Bridges Joint Resolution](#), demonstrating commitment to the shared principles, including the need to create a comprehensive array of family-driven and youth-guided services that are culturally and linguistically competent and focused on clinical excellence. Partners strive to implement these principles in their day-to-day practice. For a current list of BBI partners, click [here](#).

Benefits of becoming a BBI partner include:

- Becoming part of a national network dedicated to improving outcomes for children, youth and families that have had contact with residential and community service systems;
- Receiving periodic updates from the SAMHSA Child, Adolescent & Family Branch Chief, Dr. Gary Blau;
- Obtaining advance copies of new resources designed to help implement the Building Bridges framework;
- Receiving preferential invitations to BBI summits and forums;
- Opportunities to collaborate with peer organizations, as well as national partners;
- Having the opportunity to participate in a national learning community, which includes work groups on topics ranging from cultural competency to clinical best practices to financing strategies;
- Developing strategies to enhance partnerships with other providers, policy-makers, youth and families; and
- Gaining an enhanced knowledge base, and ultimately, improved outcomes.

How will participating in BBI improve the experiences for youth and families at my organization?

Partners in BBI have achieved a variety of positive outcomes, including, but not limited to:

- **Improved family and youth experiences and long-term outcomes through family-driven and youth-guided approaches.** The BBI approach means that youth and families are part of decision making about their care, feel supported throughout their care, and are partners in the implementation of their plan of care. By ensuring that families and youth are part of the process, partners are able to make specialized improvements to their services.
- **Successful transitions between levels of care through improved partnerships.** The Joint Resolution outlines key principles and activities to improve partnerships and collaboration among organizations across the full spectrum of care for youth. These partnerships enable creative means of supporting families and youth, better sharing of information among all of the professionals involved in a family and youth's care, and fewer children "falling through the cracks," all of which support better long-term outcomes and maintaining youth and families together at home successfully. When done properly, BBI promotes the development of child and family teams, engages providers and non-traditional supports, finds strengths, and manages risk across all partners.
- **Increased focus on the importance of cultural and linguistic competency.** BBI's Cultural and Linguistic Competence Guidelines offer providers a range of strategies to support organizations in improving their cultural and linguistic competence (e.g., important elements to use in the staff selection process; successfully recruiting and engagement of diverse board members; specific recommendations for ongoing training programs; using data to inform needed improvements) (<http://www.buildingbridges4youth.org/workgroups/cultural-linguistic-competence/products>).

What resources does BBI provide to partners, other providers, youth and families?

BBI produces publicly available resources to help providers, youth and families implement the principles outlined in the Joint Resolution. These resources can be found at <http://www.buildingbridges4youth.org/products>, and include:

- Tip sheets for families and youth to help them make informed choices about residential care (available in Spanish and English);
- A handbook to support organizations in hiring and supporting youth peer advocates;
- Guides for successfully engaging families and youth in their own care;
- Tools for evaluating your current practice across BBI system principles (i.e. BBI Self-Assessment Tools) (available in Spanish and English);
- A Tip Sheet for developing and sustaining successful Youth Advisory Councils;
- A variety of Webinars on topic areas relevant to residential and community providers; and
- Guidelines for cultural and linguistic competence in residential programs.

BBI can also help you to identify and secure specialized training and support for providers, policy makers, families and youth, including groups of community partners at your expense. Many organizations have used a variety of BBI resources (e.g., Successfully Engaging Family Guide) as training tools for their staff.

Does becoming a BBI partner cost anything?

No – becoming a partner of BBI is free. You are only required to endorse the [Joint Resolution](#).

How can my organization fund the efforts we undertake as part of BBI?

Organizations can take large or small steps towards implementing changes that support the BBI principles. Most agencies find that the smaller steps do not cost anything, except for time and the commitment of their leadership to focus on best practices. Other agencies identify funds for specific improvements (e.g., hiring family and youth advocates), and then work with their funders over time to identify a permanent funding stream.

BBI has created a white paper identifying fiscal, licensing, regulatory and practice barriers, and proposes recommendations to overcome them. The white paper, [Fiscal Strategies that Support the Building Bridges Principles](#), outlines specific examples of how Medicaid, performance-based contracting, reallocation of existing funds, private funding, and reinvestment strategies can be used to fund BBI initiatives in your community.

How does BBI fit with System of Care activities in our community?

The principles and activities are closely aligned and are both promoted by SAMHSA. BBI promotes values that cut across systems and providers, involve families and youth, and enhance partnerships between community and residential programs, and all organizations and individuals that are involved with families and youth.

How does BBI fit with my organization's work to implement evidence-based practices?

BBI creates a learning environment for collaboration and dialogue across constituent groups, sharing of best practices, and promotion of innovative solutions. During BBI webinars and at BBI events, attendees learn about new strategies and proven practices that have been successful in other communities. The BBI mission focuses on sustained long-term outcomes for youth and families touched by residential interventions and community programs; to support this focus, BBI shares information on specific evidence-based and -informed, best and promising practices in the clinical arena as well as organizational practices that support positive outcomes.

Where can I go to learn more about BBI or get involved?

To get involved and endorse the Joint Resolution, visit our website at www.buildingbridges4youth.org, or contact the Director of the national Building Bridges Initiative – Mark Nickell at marknickell.bbi@gmail.com. Periodic updates on BBI events are also posted in the National Council's B Hive newsletter; sign up at www.thenationalcouncil.org.