



TIPS & TRICKS FOR MAINTAINING COHESION IN YOUR MULTI-COUNTY PROGRAM

FROM TEXAS CASA

1 RECOGNIZE THAT ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES CAN BRING BOTH HARDSHIPS & HOPE

- Give credence to staff's feelings of anxiety or skepticism of change.
- Offer "the why" a change is occurring early in the process. Elicit ideas for "the how" where there is room for negotiation and/or creativity.
- Safeguard your positive culture and acknowledge what is going well.
- Develop collective goals and identify indicators of goal achievements.

2 OVER-COMMUNICATE

- **Greet each other first thing in the morning**
Check-in on satellite team members at the start of each day. Something as simple as "Good morning! How are things going today? What can I help you with?" is a great place to start. This can be done electronically, but hearing another's voice periodically has great benefits for co-worker relationships and mental health.
- **Morning status updates**
If working remotely or in a satellite office is new to your staff, it could be helpful to have frequent morning updates over video conferencing to help keep your team connected and in the know.
- **Frequent check-ins**
 - Check-in frequency depends on your team's needs and desires.
 - Check-in with satellite team members as often as possible.
 - Share all updates, announcements and/or changes in operations with the entire team – satellite/remote workers get left out of hallway announcements.
- **Start a "water cooler" channel in Slack, Teams or another messaging platform**
When you can't just swing by someone's desk, a quick chat is the next best thing. Chatting gets quicker responses and keeps team members more engaged than emailing back and forth. Ask how your teammates' days are going, offer some relevant news or fun facts, or ask a question everyone can answer.

3 DEVELOP A CULTURE THAT RESISTS ISOLATIONIST TENDENCIES

- When a staff member is working in an office or remotely alone, it is easy to unintentionally develop a silo mentality. This may lead to reduction in collaboration, effective communication and feeling of cohesion.
- Be on the look-out for staff who are feeling disconnected by checking-in with each person regularly. A culture of an open-door policy, even if virtual, can help to maintain relationships and feelings of inclusion.

4 PUT TOGETHER A WEEKLY STAFF LETTER

Hearing from leadership on a regular basis can keep morale high, and your words of encouragement will be welcomed. Keep it fun, fresh and focused on the work that you are doing and expect from your team. Canva is a free site that has easy-to-customize templates.

5

HOLD FRIENDLY COMPETITIONS

There's nothing like a friendly competition to spark imagination and action among staff, regardless of where the staff works.

Example: One program hosts trivia on a Slack channel. Around 4:45 or 5 p.m., a trivia emcee will pose one question to the group, and team members submit guesses in a Slack thread until someone responds with the correct answer. The emcee continues this way for four more questions, and the competition can get fierce.

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TAKE TURNS HOLDING STAFF MEETINGS IN DIFFERENT OFFICES

Don't have a big satellite office? Why not meet at the local diner, coffee shop or another popular place in that county?

7

BE CONSISTENT WITH POLICIES

Attendance, time off requests, holidays and other HR policies need to apply at each location in a uniform way.

8

KEEP DECISION-MAKING INCLUSIVE

It's one thing to give orders from afar, and it's another to seek input on important decisions that affect every area the program serves. Including key team members in larger decisions is good for morale and encourages cohesiveness over distance. It also ensures you don't overlook any important differences between the main office and a satellite location.

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CREATE TRADITIONS

Create traditions to form a sense of unity and team. It could be something as simple as organizing a "Snow Cone Friday" and a video call to just catch up and talk with each other while enjoying a treat. Host a CASA blood drive in each county you serve, host a holiday party, or organize a team lunch or movie outing.

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HAVE PROGRAM-WIDE CELEBRATIONS

- When you have a reason to celebrate, big or small, make sure all staff in each county get to participate and that the way you celebrate at the main office is the same in the other counties.
- Start a Slack or Teams channel (or recurring email) for milestones in team members' lives, like work anniversaries, engagements, weddings, babies and accomplishments. Everyone loves a good "congrats!" GIF here and there.