



Managing Up and Down: Supporting Home Visiting Supervisors

**Strengthening Leadership, Communication,
and Collaboration Across All Levels**

BRIEF | April 2026

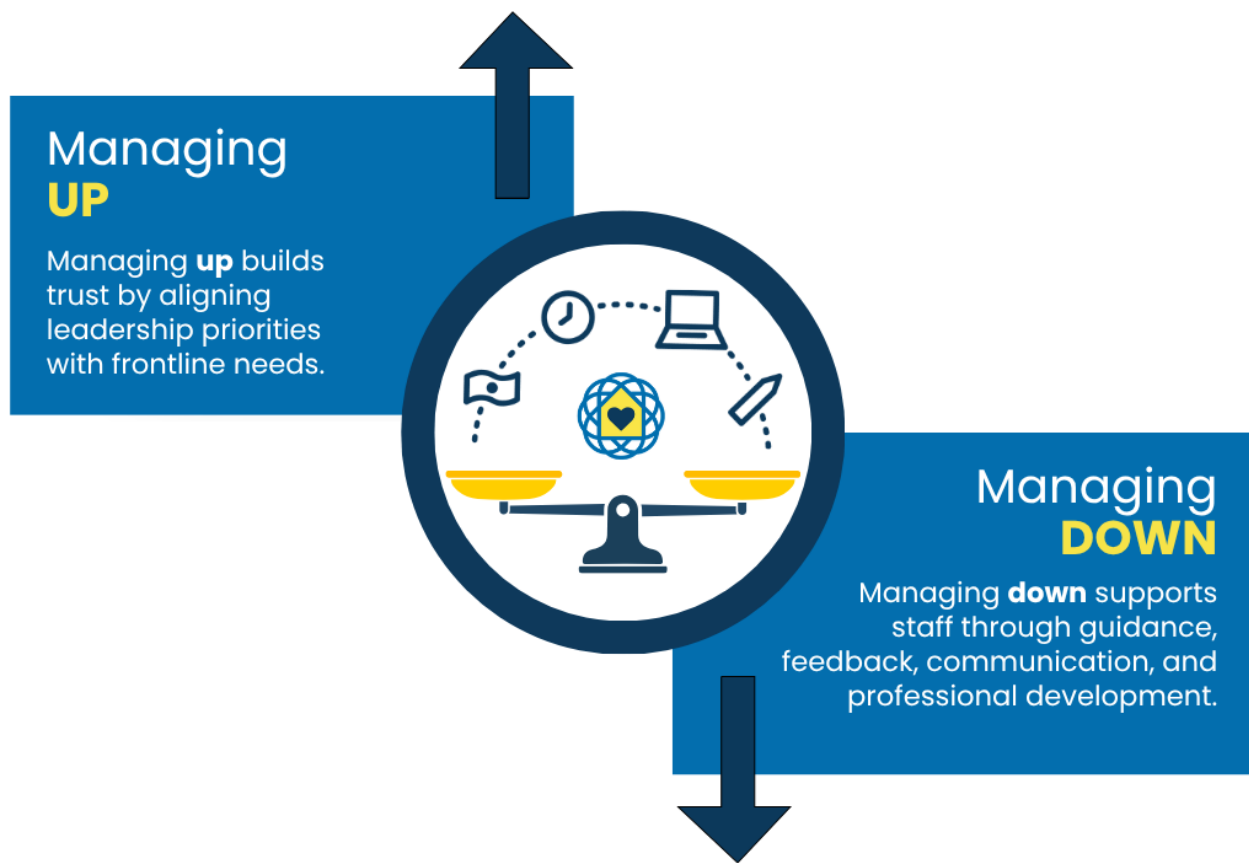
Introduction

Supervisors play a critical role in supporting home visitors and ensuring high-quality service delivery to families. Effective supervisors skillfully navigate relationships in two directions. They manage up—communicating needs, insights, and challenges to agency leadership; and manage down—providing guidance, feedback, and support to staff. By skillfully managing relationships in both directions, supervisors serve as a critical link between direct service staff and organizational leadership—translating organizational vision into practice while ensuring that frontline experiences and insights shape organizational decision-making.



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The graphic above illustrates this dynamic balance, highlighting key strategies for building strong relationships, communicating with clarity and intention, advancing team needs, and creating feedback loops that strengthen alignment across all levels. Together, these practices help supervisors lead effectively, promote staff growth and well-being, and ensure that families receive responsive, high-quality services.

This resource offers practical strategies, real-world scenarios, reflection questions, and actionable tools to help home visiting supervisors strengthen their leadership practice and navigate the processes of managing up, managing down, and leading across levels with clarity and confidence.



Understanding “Managing Up” and “Managing Down”

The “managing up/down” approach is one of many well-established frameworks designed to guide effective management and reflective supervision practice. Drawing from leadership research and supervision frameworks such as those from Harvard Business Review and the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, this dual approach strengthens communication, promotes alignment, and ensures that both staff and leadership are supported in advancing high-quality home visiting services. The following summary highlights core leadership and supervision concepts to support home visiting supervisors in strengthening their understanding and application of managing up and down within their teams.

By managing both up *and* down, supervisors can fulfill the important role of connector, bridging field-level experiences with organizational decision-making.



Managing up involves effectively communicating with and influencing one’s supervisor or agency leadership. It involves understanding leadership priorities, anticipating needs, sharing insights from the field, and advocating for resources or changes that support staff and families. The purpose of managing up is to build trust, secure necessary support, and align goals and priorities across the organization. When supervisors manage up successfully, leadership is better prepared to make decisions grounded in frontline realities.

Managing down involves leading and supporting one’s direct reports—home visitors, coordinators, and/or other frontline staff. It involves providing clear expectations, reflective space, constructive feedback, professional development opportunities, and consistent communication. The purpose of managing down is to ensure team effectiveness, morale, and high-quality service delivery. When supervisors manage down successfully, staff feel supported, valued, and equipped to do their work well.



Guided Reflection:

Applying Managing Up and Down in Real Scenarios

Supervisors are often called upon to lead in two directions at once—supporting staff while communicating effectively with organizational leadership. The following scenarios reflect common, real-world challenges that require balancing these complementary responsibilities.

As you read each scenario, consider how you would respond by reflecting on the following questions:

- What does my team need from me right now?
- What does leadership need to understand?
- How can I align both perspectives to support quality services and staff well-being?

After reflecting on your own approach, review the sample approaches for additional strategies and ideas.



Scenario 1:

Home Visitor Burnout Due to High Caseloads.

Home visitors are showing signs of stress, fatigue, or disengagement related to workload demands.

Reflect:

- What patterns am I noticing across staff?
- How am I creating space to process stress and workload concerns?
- What information or data might help leadership understand the impact?

Possible Approaches:

Managing Up:

Share patterns related to caseload strain, advocate for realistic caseload guidelines or temporary coverage, and offer possible solutions aligned with agency capacity.



Managing Down:

Provide reflective space to process challenges, revisit boundaries and prioritization, and identify short-term workload adjustments or peer supports.



Scenario 2:

New Documentation Requirements from Leadership.

Leadership introduces additional documentation expectations. Staff express concern about increased administrative burden.

Reflect:

- How can I help staff adapt while acknowledging the impact of the new requirements?
- What questions might leadership have about implementation of the new requirements?
- How can I frame feedback constructively?

Possible Approaches:

Managing Up:

Communicate the cumulative impact of documentation changes, share concrete examples of time burden, and propose strategies for minimizing burden (e.g., streamlining reporting, phased implementation).



Managing Down:

Clarify expectations, support workflow adjustments, offer training or peer learning, and acknowledge staff concerns openly.



Scenario 3:

Rising Safety Concerns in Certain Neighborhoods.

Home visitors report feeling unsafe entering particular neighborhoods or homes.

Reflect:

- How am I ensuring that staff feel heard and supported?
- What immediate steps can I take at the team level to protect their safety?
- What additional support might require leadership involvement?

Possible Approaches:

Managing Up:

Request additional support, such as safety training, travel pairing options, or agency-funded safety equipment. Share staff feedback to inform your recommendations.



Managing Down:

Review safety protocols with your team, co-create individualized safety plans, and reinforce open communication about risk.



Practice Prompt.

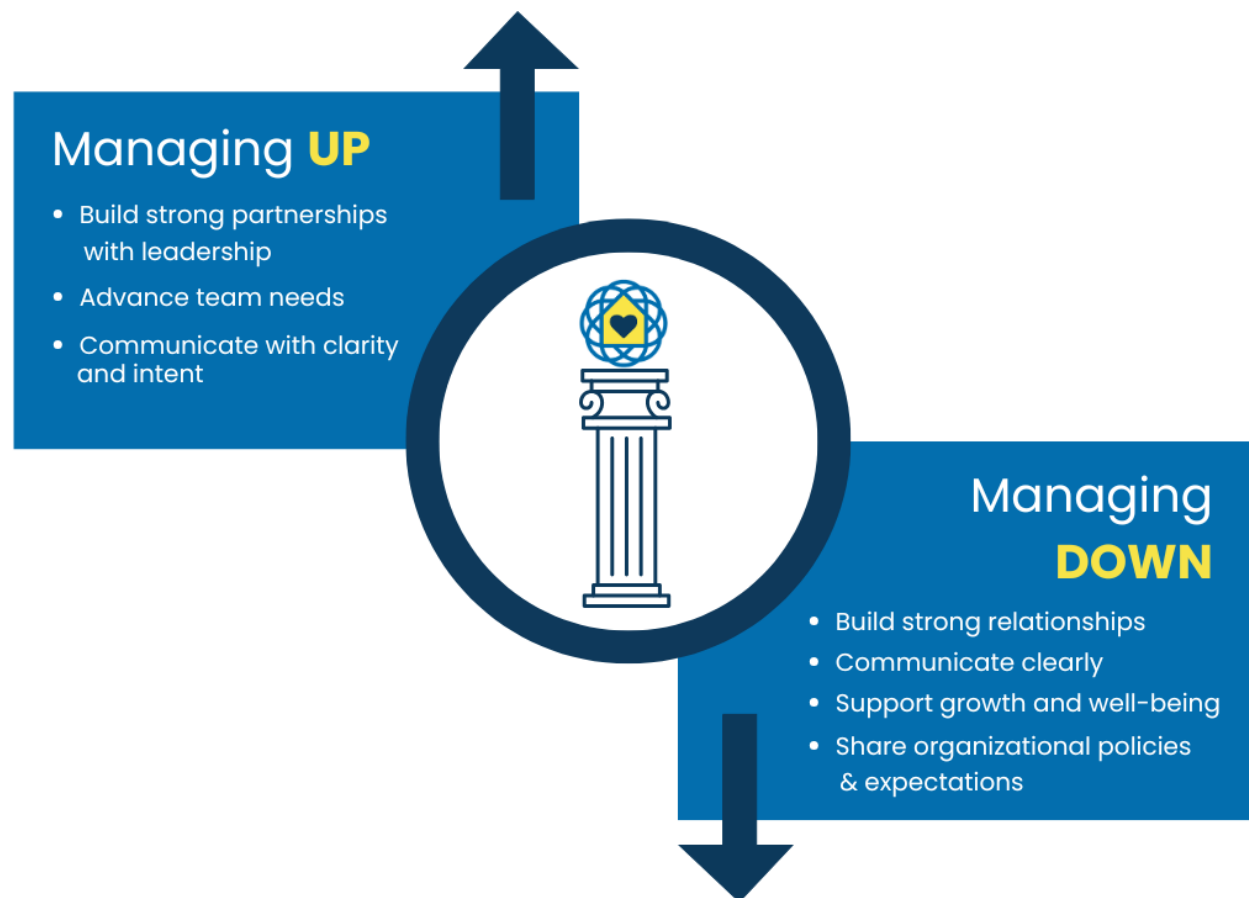
Think of a situation you are currently navigating.

- What does managing up require?
- What does managing down look like at this moment?
- Where might there be tension between the two?
- How can you balance the two, rather than feeling pulled in opposite directions?



Leadership Practice Pillars

The following pillars highlight core supervisory behaviors that strengthen alignment, trust, and effectiveness. By translating theory into action, these pillars equip supervisors with practical strategies to both support their teams and build strong partnerships with leadership. Together, they serve as guideposts for intentional, balanced supervision that benefits staff, leadership, and families alike.



Leadership Practice Pillars: Managing Up

Managing up involves intentional partnership with leadership to ensure alignment, advocacy, and shared problem-solving. These practices help supervisors strengthen influence and organizational

Build partnerships with leadership. Understand leadership priorities, pressures, and communication styles.

- Learn what matters most to leadership and how success is measured.
- Proactively share updates rather than waiting to be asked.
- Anticipate questions and prepare thoughtful responses.

Advance team needs strategically. Translate frontline realities into actionable insights.

- Frame staff concerns as opportunities for program improvement.
- Translate needs into specific requests (e.g., training, staffing, resources).
- Offer potential solutions alongside identified challenges.

Communicate with clarity and intent. Strategic communication strengthens trust and alignment.

- Be concise, solution-oriented, and aligned with agency goals.
- Use both data and stories to illustrate impact and challenges.
- Follow up on discussions and share outcomes with your team to close the feedback loop.



Leadership Practice Pillars: Managing Down

Managing down is about creating the conditions where home visitors feel supported, clear about expectations, and able to grow. These leadership practices help strengthen team effectiveness, morale, and service quality.

Build strong relationships.

Trust is the foundation of effective supervision. Strong relationships are built through consistency, presence, and authentic engagement.

- Hold regular one-to-one meetings with staff to check in on workload, challenges, and successes.
- Show appreciation by recognizing both individual and team achievements.
- Practice reflective supervision by creating space to process emotions and problem-solve collaboratively.

Communicate with clarity.

Clear communication reduces confusion and stress while increasing accountability and confidence.

- Provide transparent updates about program expectations, changes, and priorities.
- Offer constructive feedback regularly—not just during annual reviews.
- Clarify priorities to help staff focus their time and energy.

Support growth and well-being.

Supervisors play a key role in sustaining staff resilience and professional development.

- Encourage professional development aligned with staff goals and strengths.
- Foster psychological safety so staff feel comfortable sharing concerns, questions, or mistakes.
- Promote self-care and reflective practice to help prevent burnout.



Share organizational policies and expectations.

To ensure that practice remains consistent, compliant, and aligned with quality standards, staff must be aware of and understand organizational policies, procedures, and performance expectations.

- Communicate policies, procedures, and expectations clearly.
- Explain what is required and why it matters.
- Translate directives into practical, day-to-day guidance.
- Create space for questions while reinforcing accountability.

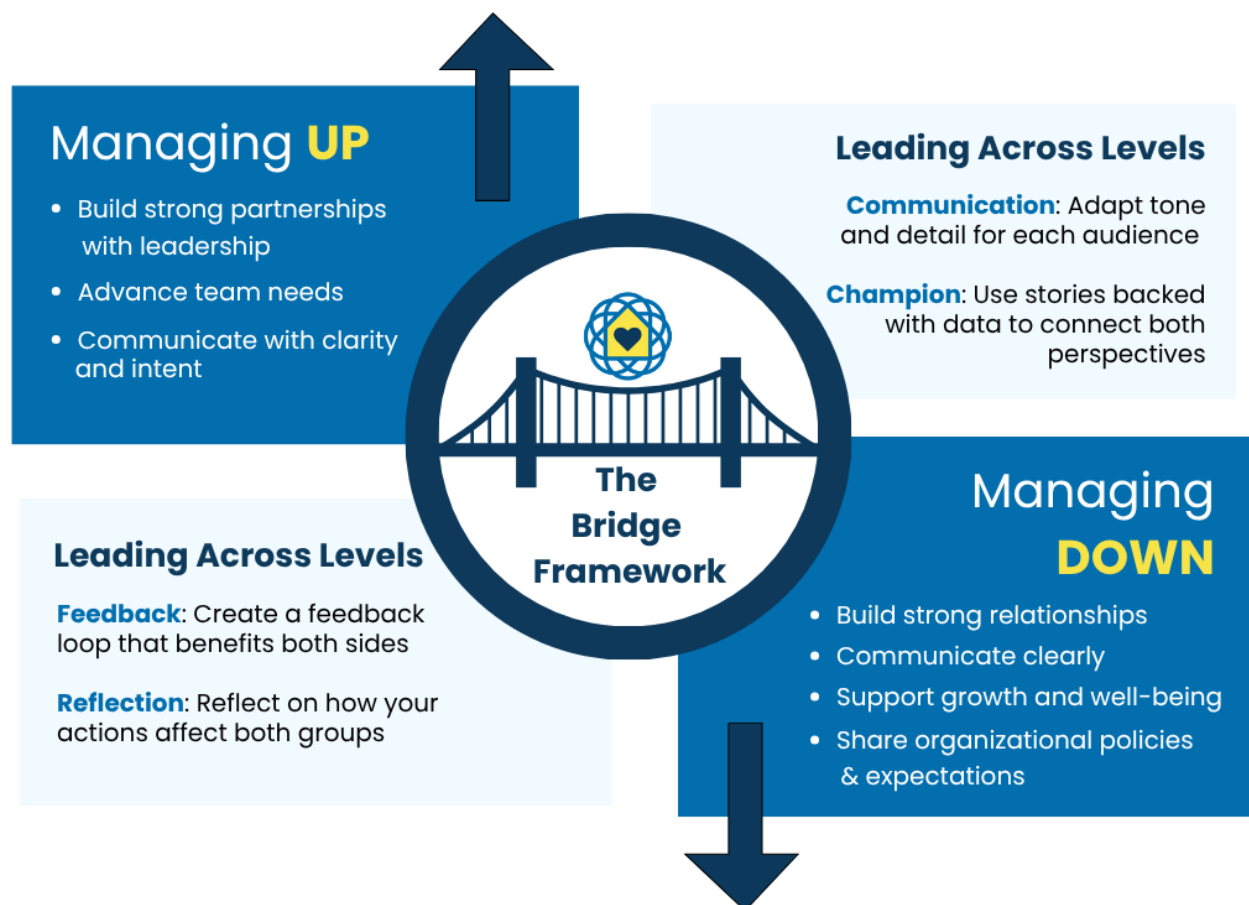


Managing Across: The Bridge Framework

Supervisors don't simply switch between managing up and managing down—they operate in the space between. **Managing across** means intentionally *bridging* communication, priorities, and relationships so that information flows clearly and trust is strengthened at all levels. It is not an additional responsibility, but the intentional integration of managing up and managing down into a coherent leadership practice that aligns people, priorities, and organizational goals.

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The practices below highlight how this intentional bridging of communication, priorities, and relationships happens in real time.



Communication:

Adapting for Audience and Alignment

Managing across requires clarity in both direction and tone. With staff, supervisors provide context, reassurance, and space for questions. With leadership, they communicate concisely, strategically, and using language that aligns with organizational priorities.

Effective supervisors adjust the level of detail and framing depending on their audience while ensuring that core message remains consistent. They translate decisions downward with empathy and translate frontline realities upward with clarity.

Champion:

Representing People and Systems

Supervisors champion staff needs while also elevating systemic barriers that may require organizational attention. Specifically, this means:

- Representing staff experiences accurately and respectfully.
- Connecting those experiences to broader program goals.
- Using stories supported by data to bridge emotional insight and organizational decision-making.

Supervisors avoid positioning one group against another. Instead, they align perspectives around shared outcomes—quality services and family well-being.

Feedback:

Creating a Two-Way Loop

Supervisors who manage across ensure that feedback travels in two directions:

- Staff receive growth-oriented, actionable feedback.
- Leadership provides clear expectations and strategic direction.
- Information shared upward results in visible follow-through.

When supervisors close the feedback loop; sharing outcomes, decisions, and next steps, they build trust and reduce frustration on both sides.



Reflection:

Modeling Accountability and Self-Awareness

Managing across requires supervisors to reflect on how their words, tone, and decisions affect both staff and leadership. Strong supervisors ask themselves:

- How might this message land with my team?
- How might leadership interpret this information?
- Am I framing concerns in a way that invites shared problem-solving?

By modeling accountability and reflective practice, supervisors demonstrate the same leadership maturity they seek to cultivate in others.

Leading Across Levels in Practice

When supervisors focus on alignment, transparency, and empathy in both directions, they reduce tension and prevent misunderstandings. They become trusted connectors rather than intermediaries caught in the middle.

Managing across is not an additional task; it is the integration of managing up and managing down into a coherent, intentional leadership approach.





From Concept to Commitment

Supervision in home visiting is both a leadership role and a relationship practice. Supervisors operate at the intersection of frontline work and organizational decision-making, translating needs, expectations, and insights in both directions. When supervisors intentionally manage up and manage down, they strengthen alignment, build trust, and create the conditions for high-quality services.

Managing up and down is not about control or hierarchy; it is about clarity, communication, and connection. It requires supervisors to balance championing with accountability, empathy with strategy, and reflection with action. At times, this role can feel complex. Yet it is precisely this bridging function that positions supervisors as key leaders within their organizations.

The most effective supervisors return regularly to reflection:

- What does my team need from me right now?
- What does leadership need to understand?
- How can I align both perspectives in service of families?

The Self-Assessment checklist that follows is designed to support this ongoing reflection. Rather than a one-time exercise, it should serve as a leadership habit, helping supervisors stay proactive, intentional, and balanced. By revisiting these questions regularly, supervisors can strengthen their influence, sustain staff well-being, and contribute to organizational effectiveness.



Self-Assessment Checklist

This checklist is not intended as a measure of perfection, but as a reflective tool to strengthen intentional leadership. Managing up and managing down are ongoing practices that evolve as team needs, organizational priorities, and external demands shift. Regular self-assessment helps supervisors stay aligned, proactive, and balanced in both directions.

Managing Up

Use the questions below to reflect on how you are partnering with leadership and advocating for your team.

Building Partnership with Leadership

Do I understand my supervisor's priorities, pressures, and communication style?

Have I proactively shared updates about my team's successes and challenges?

Do I anticipate leadership questions and prepare accordingly?

Am I building trust through consistency and follow-through?

Advancing Team Needs Strategically

When concerns arise, do I frame them as opportunities for improvement?

Have I translated staff needs into clear, actionable requests?

Do I offer potential solutions alongside identified challenges?

Am I using both data and stories to illustrate impact?

Communicating with Clarity and Intent

Are my messages to leadership concise and aligned with agency goals?

Do I follow up on discussions and share outcomes with my team?

Have I closed the feedback loop when issues are raised?

Am I balancing advocacy for staff with accountability to organizational priorities?



Managing Down

Use the questions below to reflect on how you are currently supporting your team. Consider revisiting this checklist monthly or quarterly to monitor your growth and identify areas for adjustment.

Building Strong Relationships

- Am I holding regular one-to-one meetings with each team member?
- Have I recognized individual or team contributions recently?
- Do I intentionally create space for reflection—not just task updates?
- Do my staff feel comfortable sharing with me their concerns or mistakes?

Communicating with Clarity

- Have I clearly communicated recent changes, expectations, or priorities?
- Do I provide feedback regularly, rather than waiting for formal reviews?
- When new demands arise, do I help staff prioritize effectively?
- Have I checked for understanding rather than assuming clarity?

Supporting Growth and Well-Being

- Have I discussed professional development goals with each staff member?
- Am I attentive to signs of stress, burnout, or disengagement?
- Do I model healthy boundaries and reflective practice?
- Have I encouraged self-care and sustainable workload practices?

Sharing Organizational Policies & Expectations

- Have I clearly communicated organizational policies and procedures in ways that connect to daily home visiting practices?
- Do my staff understand both what is expected and why these expectations matter for compliance, quality, and family outcomes?
- When policies or expectations change, have I shared updates promptly and ensured understanding?
- Am I reinforcing expectations consistently while balancing accountability with support?



Resources for Further Learning

Training

- **[Home Visiting Supervisor Training Modules](#)**

Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professionals

Includes practical reflections, guidance, decision-making tools, templates, and questionnaires to help supervisors effectively oversee the delivery of virtual home visiting services.

Articles and Tools

- **[Managing Your Boss](#)**

Harvard Business Review

Offers practical guidance on how employees can proactively build more effective, mutually respectful working relationships with their supervisors by understanding their boss's goals, pressures, and work style, and their own strengths and communication preferences.

- **[Reflective Supervision Toolkit](#)**

University of Minnesota, Center for Early Education and Development

Provides an overview of the reflective supervision/consultation model, including its principles, benefits for frontline professionals, and insights from nationwide research on how it supports emotional resilience, professional growth, and effective practice in early childhood and related fields.

- **[Building a Culture of Support: Supervisor Toolkit](#)** (Resource Hub, search Supervisor Toolkit)

Home Visiting Applied Research Collaborative

The Home Visitor Research Training is a free, four-module video series designed to build home visitors' knowledge, confidence, and skills in partnering on research and quality improvement projects. Developed with funding from PCORI and input from home visitors, managers, model developers, and researchers, the training helps ensure research is more relevant and useful to home visiting programs and families. The short, on-demand modules can be used for professional development or to prepare home visitors participating in research projects.



- **How to Build a Continuous Feedback Loop in the Workplace**

Emily Helen Arnold

Describes how a continuous feedback loop in performance management shifts organizations from infrequent annual reviews to regular, real-time observation, feedback, and follow-up conversations. This practice help managers and employees align goals and quickly correct courses when needed. It also supports ongoing **development within everyday workflows.**

- **Leadership Feedback Loops in Internal Communication**

Defines leadership feedback loops: Structured systems within internal communication designed to collect, process, and act on employee-directed feedback to enhance transparency, strengthen decision-making, and build trust between organizational leadership and staff.



Resources

[Prioritizing Home Visitor Safety: Strategies to Support the Home Visiting Workforce.](#)

This research-to-practice brief is designed for local program leaders, supervisors, state and network leaders, and model developers who want to take meaningful action to protect and retain their staff.

[Continuous Quality Improvement Toolkit: A Resource for Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program Awardees \(Poes M, Clark M, Leis J, Miller K & Till L, 2017\)](#): This CQI Toolkit is designed to help programs build CQI skills through nine modules that can be delivered individually or in a multiday training.

[Improving Home Visitor Professional Well-Being: A Resource for State and Tribal Home Visiting Programs, Model Representatives, and Local Programs](#) (Sparr, M, Johnson H, & Quigley Clark M, 2022): This resource draws on the newly developed Conceptual Model of Professional Well-Being, together with CQI principles, to provide guidance on using data to improve home visitor well-being.

[IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work](#) (Perlo J, Balik B, Swensen S, Kabcenell A, Landsman J & Feeley D, 2017): This resource provides four steps leaders can take to improve joy in work and workforce well-being, including using quality improvement to test approaches to improving joy in work in an organization.



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MANAGING UP & DOWN

SUPERVISOR QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE



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MANAGING UP

Partner with leadership.



BUILD STRONG PARTNERSHIPS WITH LEADERSHIP

- Understand priorities and how success is measured.
- Communicate proactively and build trust.



ADVANCE TEAM NEEDS STRATEGICALLY

- Advocate for resources and changes that support staff and families.
- Bring solutions and recommendations.



COMMUNICATE WITH CLARITY AND INTENT

- Share data and stories, not just problems.
- Connect requests to organizational goals.

You are the BRIDGE

You connect leadership and your team so that information, trust and solutions flow both ways.



Supervisors bridge the gap between direct service staff and organizational leadership, translating vision into practice while elevating frontline experiences to inform decision-making.



MANAGING DOWN

Lead, support and develop your team.



BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

- Create trust, listen deeply and show genuine care.
- Get to know your staff and their strengths.



COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND CONSISTENTLY

- Provide clear expectations and ongoing two-way communication.
- Clarify priorities to help staff focus their time and energy effectively.



SUPPORT GROWTH AND WELL-BEING

- Encourage development and provide feedback.
- Foster psychological safety.
- Promote self-care and resilience.



SHARE ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

- Explain why it is required and why it matters.
- Create space for questions and reinforce accountability.

Strengthen leadership, communication and collaboration across all levels.

Managing Across: Bridge communication and build alignment

COMMUNICATION

Adapt tone and detail for each audience.

CHAMPION

Use stories backed with data to connect both perspectives.

FEEDBACK

Share updates with both directions.

REFLECTION

Reflect on how your actions affect both groups.

QUICK-ACCESS REFLECTION

MANAGING DOWN (WITH STAFF)

- What feels most challenging right now?
- What's working well?
- What support would be most helpful?

MANAGING UP (WITH LEADERSHIP)

- What does leadership need to understand?
- What patterns am I seeing?
- What resources are needed?

MANAGING ACROSS (CONNECTING BOTH)

- Am I representing both perspectives fairly?
- Have I closed the feedback loop?
- Does everyone understand the "Why"?