Building Effective Early Childhood Coalitions:

A Literature Review by Altarum Institute for the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation

Chapter 1 | Introduction

A. Importance of Early Childhood Initiatives

The 2000 research review *From Neurons to Neighborhoods* has been instrumental in helping researchers to answer the question, "Why the concern with early childhood development?" That review was conducted by the Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, a joint effort of the Board on Children, Youth, and Families of the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000). The Committee was charged with (1) updating scientific knowledge about the nature of early development and the role of early experiences; (2) disentangling such knowledge from erroneous popular beliefs or misunderstandings; and (3) discussing the implications of this knowledge base for early childhood policy, practice, professional development, and research. The committee's conclusions and recommendations were derived from an extensive knowledge base that confirmed that all children are born "wired for feelings" and ready to learn, that early environments matter, and that nurturing relationships are essential. The review concluded that what happens during the first months and years of life is of great importance, not because this period of development provides an indelible blueprint for adult well-being, but because it actually sets a sturdy or fragile stage for life.

Promoting the health, development, and well-being of young children and their families requires the active involvement of an array of disciplines and organizations from both the public and private sectors.

Efforts have continued to build on the work that was summarized in *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*. For example, the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child highlighted recent research on neurobiology that showed that early experience literally shapes the architecture of the brain. Toxic stress in early childhood resulting from negative early experiences and being raised in deprived circumstances can have long-lasting effects on children. Similarly, health, social, and educational programs that provide a supportive environment and rich experiences can have a positive effect on brain architecture with long-term positive impacts (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007).

Young children need a nurturing family, quality health care, sound nutrition, adequate housing, and appropriate recreation in order to thrive. Their parents or caretakers may need a variety of enabling and supportive services to allow them to provide for and nurture their children. Therefore, promoting the health, development, and well-being of young children and their families requires the active involvement of an array of disciplines and organizations from both the public and private sectors.

B. The Smart Beginnings Initiative

The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation's (VECF) Smart Beginnings Initiative mobilizes and supports community coalitions to strengthen their local early childhood systems. The theory underpinning this Initiative posits that by building community capacity, localities can enhance and integrate early care, education, health, and family support services for children under age 5 in ways tailored to the community's unique set of needs. Because the process of building local capacity can take years of sustained work, VECF grants are structured to allow for incremental development (Smart Beginnings Grants Manual, 2010). Table 1 displays the grant type and the tasks associated with each grant.

Table 1. VECF Grants

Grant Type	Grant	Grant Tasks and Purpose
Planning	15-18 months ($50,000)	Forming leadership, governance, community assessment, strategic planning and public engagement
Getting Ready I	24 months (approximate $75,000-$125,000)	Implement plans developed during planning grant and activities in one system based on assessment and strategic plan.
Getting Ready II	24 months (approximate $75,000-$125,000)	Implement collaborative activities in two systems based on community assessment and strategic plan.
Partnership (up to 2 Partnership Grants)	24 -48 months up to $400,000 total for 1 or split between 2 Partnership phases	Fully operational leadership and governance with implementation and evaluation of collaborative activities in three systems based on community assessment and strategic plan.
Sustaining	24 months (up to $100,000)	Sustain work implemented under Partnership Grant
Sustaining Partners	Small award based on restricted expenses incurred as Partners	Grantees who have successfully completed the grant continuum and join the Foundation as a full partner in Smart Beginnings

Source: Smart Beginnings Grants Manual, 2010

By strengthening and integrating local early childhood systems, local coalitions can give young children and their families improved access to the care and support necessary (e.g., quality child care, social services) to ensure health and developmental readiness for kindergarten. Importantly, these local coalitions are tied together into a "statewide network that shares resources, 'best practices,' and outcomes" (Smart Beginnings Grants Manual, 2009). State-level coordination helps to ensure that the local coalitions are not operating in isolation but are working together to support their individual successes and to advance the state's efforts to provide all its children with the best possible start to school and life.

C. Purpose and Approach of the Literature Review

This document presents the findings of a review of the literature on early childhood coalition building. The intent of this literature review was to provide an overview of the characteristics of effective coalitions and collaborative groups, frameworks for understanding community coalitions, and current research on systems change. The literature review will also support the second phase of the evaluation, the development of an evaluation plan.

Specifically, the literature review investigated the following questions:

- How are central concepts, such as capacity building and systems change, defined in the literature?
- What are examples of initiatives that have funded community coalitions to build local infrastructure? Are there examples specific to early childhood coalitions?
- What are the characteristics of an effective coalition? What are the important elements to sustaining coalitions? Examples include leadership, governance structure, partnerships, and assessment and planning.
- What resources do coalitions need to make an impact on local systems? Are there differences in the needs between urban and rural coalitions?
- What are the best means for providing TA to coalitions? In what ways can funders make a difference in coalition development and what are the limitations of a funding organization?

The literature review is arranged as follows:

Chapter 2 | A Systems Approach to Early Childhood

Historically, health and human service agencies have not taken a comprehensive approach to promoting healthy child development. Instead, they have tended to respond to specific needs and individual crises with a variety of programs developed and implemented independently. Although a categorical approach allows policy-makers to focus on discrete issues, it also creates barriers to access and appropriate utilization of the full range of services that young children and their families need. Individual programs have been developed with separate eligibility criteria, benefit structures, and administrative procedures; multiple entry points; and segmented service providers. Such a patchwork of services can be confusing for parents and discouraging for provider participation (Hughes, Halfon, Brindis, & Newacheck, 1996).

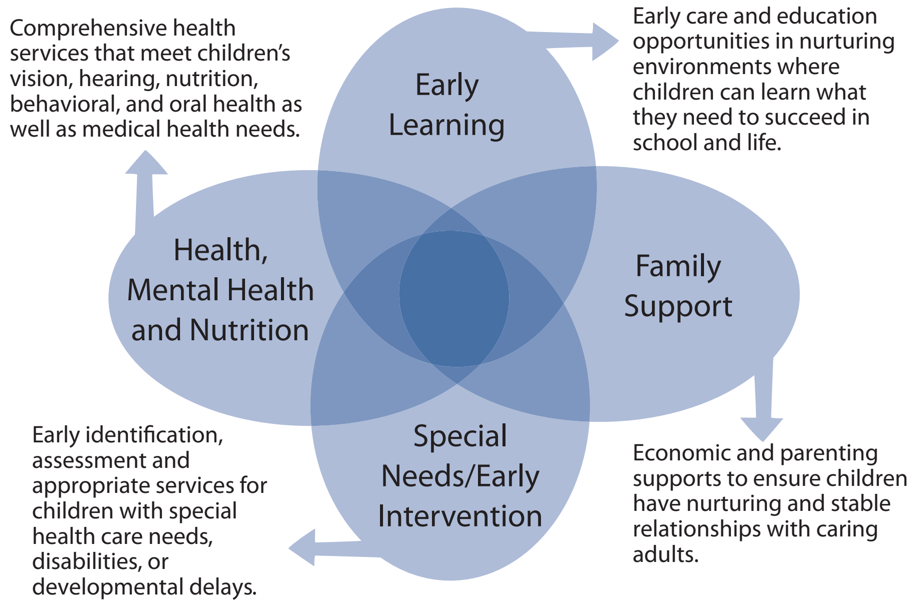
A. Characteristics of a Comprehensive Early Childhood System

The health, development, and well-being of young children and their families depends upon an array of disciplines and organizations from both the public and private sectors. The early childhood system is a complex system consisting of multiple subsystems delivering services such as health care, early care and education, child protective services, and services for children with special health care needs. Foster-Fishman and colleagues refer to a system as "the set of actors, activities, and settings that are directly or indirectly perceived to have influence in or be affected by a given problem situation" (p. 198). Systems theorists have concluded that systems are composed of a complex web of interdependent parts, each requiring attention in order to foster lasting change (Behrens & Foster-Fishman, 2007; Christens, Hanlin, & Speer, 2007; Foster-Fishman & Behrens, 2007; Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang, 2007; Parsons, 2007).

The Early Childhood Systems Working Group[1] has developed a depiction of the overlapping early childhood system components, which includes early learning; family support; special needs and early intervention; and health, mental health, and nutrition (Figure 1). It should be noted that the broad components are composed of overlapping subsystems; for example, within the early learning component, there is a Head Start system, a subsidized child care system, a regulated care system, and an unregulated care system.

1 The Early Childhood Systems Working Group is a group of 12 national organizations examining early childhood systems issues.

Figure 1. State Early Childhood Development System

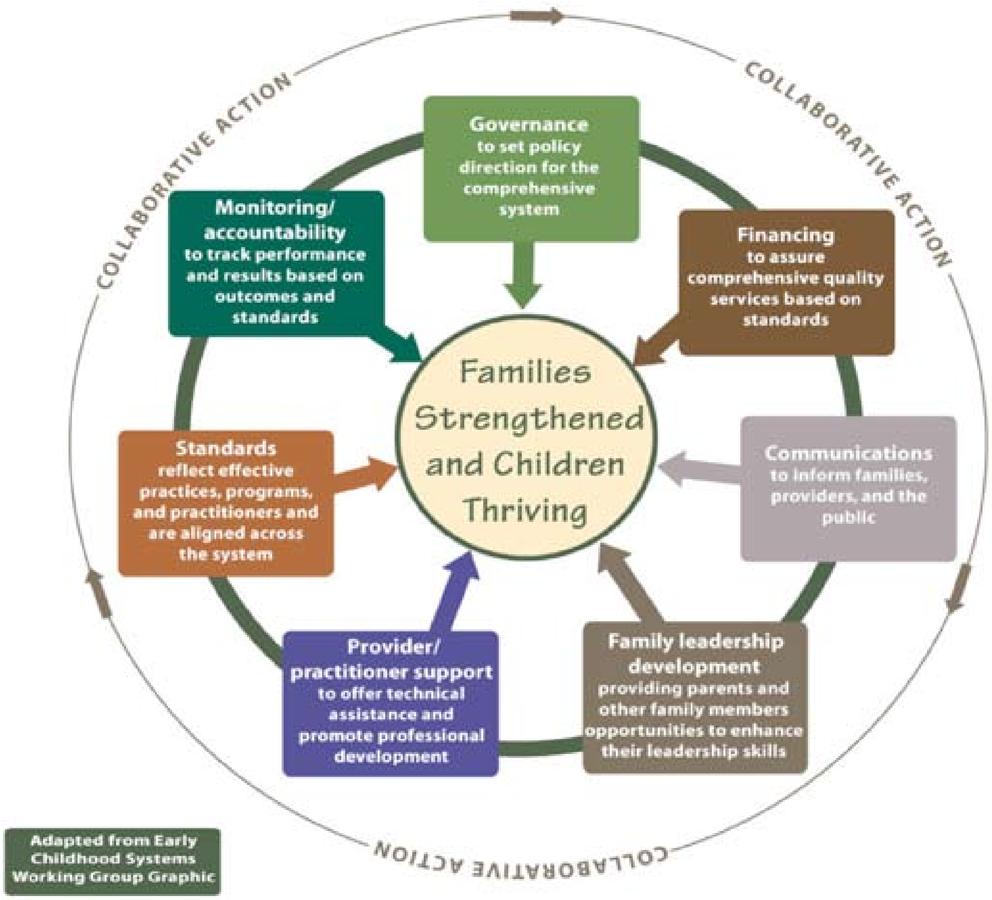


Source: Early Childhood Systems Working Group

The interaction among these overlapping systems can be understood in several ways. The early childhood system has been referred to as a loosely coupled system, because the parts are not well-integrated: Actions in one component may or may not affect another component (Coffman, 2007). Loose coupling can make systems difficult to navigate. Children who need help from multiple systems may find that their care is not coordinated and that they must deal with a myriad of rules and regulations that impinge on both the quality of care and the quality of life. However, loosely coupled systems offer some advantages: Innovations may be easier to accomplish in parts of the system, because the autonomy of the individual parts enables systems builders to move forward without limitations from the other parts of the system. In addition, failures in some of the component parts may have more limited effects than they would in a tightly coupled system (Coffman, 2007).

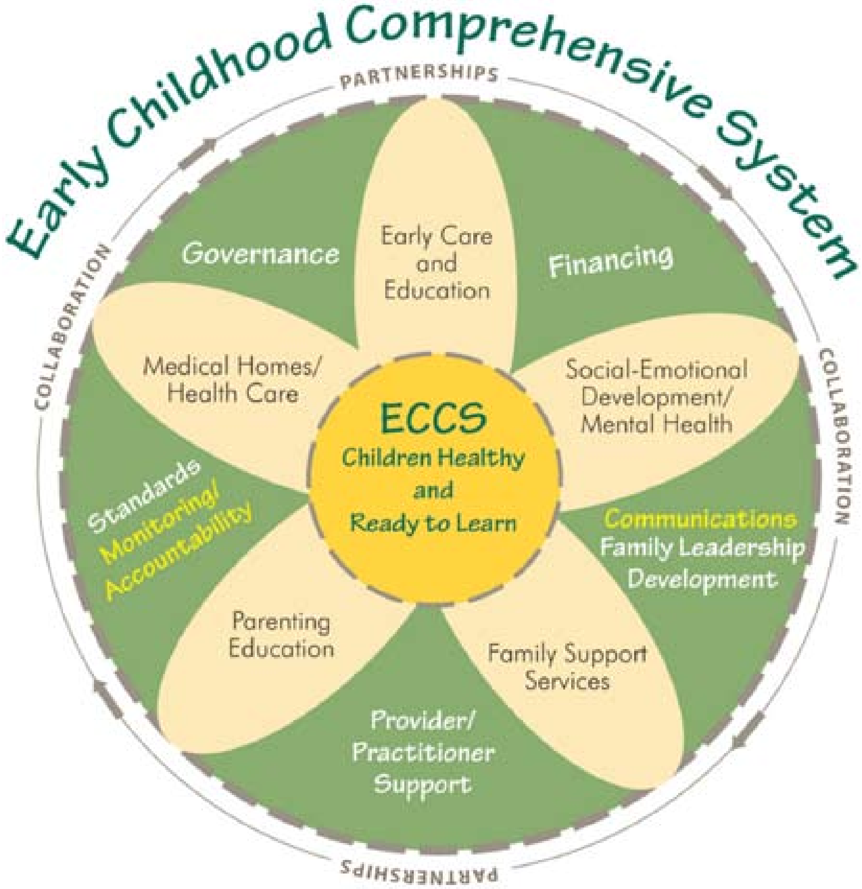
The Early Childhood Systems Working Group developed an additional model rooted in research on system building and the experience of the participants regarding what types of activities take place when a group is engaged in system building. The group initially developed a list of seven core elements of early childhood system development. This model was used by the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) initiative which is funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau to provide the framework for a national partnership meeting involving multiple Federal and state partners from different components of the early childhood system. In the course of using the elements at meetings and through discussions with system-building partners, the version adopted by the ECCS initiative dropped one of the original core elements (research and development) and added a new element, family leadership development, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2.
Key Elements that Need to be Addressed in Comprehensive System Building



ECCS grantees were understandably interested in how they could integrate the new framework with the focus on the five key components of early childhood systems which are similar in content but different in labeling to the components of the state early childhood development system identified by the Systems Working group. The components had been central to ECCS since the beginning of the initiative and continued to be a key part of the work. The ECCS Coordinator from South Carolina shared a graphic combining the elements and the components and asked the Altarum Institute, which was then serving as the ECCS Technical Assistance contractor, to assist in refining the graphic. After discussions with MCHB it was decided that the graphic would be used by the initiative as a whole to show multiple audiences what ECCS was focused on. This graphic shown in Figure 3 illustrates that early childhood system building involves working in the different systems that help make up the overall comprehensive system while addressing key elements that are essential to creating systems change.

Figure 3. Early Childhood Comprehensive System



Adding to the complexity of the early childhood system is the fact that its numerous, interrelated components are significantly affected by the community structure and context in which they exist. Consequently, to make meaningful improvements to the system, we need a team of individuals whose diversity of experience and expertise mirrors the diversity of the early childhood system and who are intimately familiar with the community and its context. The coordination of the work of the various agencies and organizations that are involved in early childhood can prevent duplication of effort and groups working at cross-purposes.

B. A Model of Early Childhood Systems Building

Virginia's Smart Beginnings coalitions could be described as a network of local initiatives working together to improve early childhood systems. This model, in which regions or localities strengthen early childhood systems at the local level while coordinating their efforts at the state level, has received increased attention and support from federal agencies and foundations that are focused on system building. For example, ECCS funds states to improve the integration and coordination of early childhood services. Of the 54 ECCS grantees, 38 have connections to networks of local coalitions to improve the early childhood system at the community level, which Project Thrive calls a "grassroots and grasstops approach" (Johnson & Theberge, 2007). The following section presents a summary of several state-coordinated networks of community coalitions (Bruner, Coffman, & Wright, 2006).

Funding. Various mechanisms are used to fund these networks of coalitions: some coalitions are supported through state-administered training and TA but do not receive grant money; other states set aside funding for local coalitions, ranging from a few thousand dollars in some regions to a few million dollars in others, such as some of the North Carolina Smart Start coalitions and Arizona First Things First coalitions (FTF). Many coalitions receive their funding from the state-level organization or agency, while others have secured 501c3 status, which allows them to secure independent funding. For example, some of Oklahoma's Smart Start coalitions are 501c3 organizations, as are North Carolina's Smart Start coalitions. Some state-level funding is typically used to pay community coordinators, who are employed on a part- or full-time basis. While paying the community coordinators is associated with coalition success, their pay ranges from a small stipend of $5,000 per year for Minnesota's Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) to a full-time salary in Arizona, Michigan, and Vermont (Coffman, Wright, & Bruner, 2006).[2]

Establishment. State-organized networks of local coalitions have frequently been established through legislation, although many are not. For example, Minnesota's ECI and Connecticut's Discovery Initiative are run through foundations, Arizona FTF is a product of a voter referendum, and Vermont's Building Bright Futures (BBF) was established by executive order. Coalitions typically have a mechanism for communicating local-level feedback, experiences, and perspectives to the state-level organization and sometimes to other state-level agencies that address early childhood issues. Ongoing communication from the communities to the state level is important for letting state leaders know what works on the local level and what does not. This information then can help the state develop more effective policies and procedures that accomplish the goal of supporting families and children.

Accountability. Virtually all local coalitions are required to report to the state on their progress, typically by tracking process and/or outcome indicators that may be decided upon locally or dictated by the state. For example, Michigan's Great Start coalitions and Vermont's BBF coalitions operate within a Results Accountability (RA) framework (see Strategic Planning Models section of this literature review). RA assesses, on an ongoing basis, how well an initiative is being implemented and its level of effectiveness. RA focuses on the link between system changes and population indicators of health and well-being. Michigan uses such data to compile and disseminate community report cards, which summarize community status on early childhood indicators. North Carolina's Smart Start coalitions use a performance-based incentive system to monitor local coalition progress. High-performing Smart Start coalitions are rewarded with increased spending flexibility, while low-performing coalitions receive less flexibility.

Training and TA. North Carolina Smart Start coalitions that are persistently low performing are put on a performance improvement plan, which provides intensive support. The performance improvement plan is only one component of North Carolina's extensive system of TA provided to the Smart Start coalitions. Each coalition director participates in orientation training, and Smart Start field staff and program specialists work together to provide targeted, comprehensive, and hands-on support to local coalitions. Peer-to-peer collaboration is another common mode of TA. Oklahoma's Smart Start coalitions provide TA to each other directly through phone calls and indirectly by sharing ideas through community newsletters. Similarly, the foundation that sponsors Minnesota's ECI provides a "Promising Strategies Resource Directory for Early Childhood

2 The regional directors in Vermont's Building Bright Futures (BBF) initiative lost their funding and were laid off in 2009.

Initiative Projects," which describes replicable projects that have been implemented across the state. Iowa's Community Empowerment Initiative provides each of its coalitions with a toolkit to help with coalition development and strategic planning. The toolkit also includes a survey to measure collaborative functioning, which is similar to Smart Beginnings' use of the Wilder Inventory among local coalition members.

Evaluating success. Generally, these coalitions have been successful in engaging in statewide advocacy coalitions, expanding their membership base and partners, and raising awareness about the importance of early childhood issues. Colorado's Community Consolidated Child Care Pilots[3] have been particularly successful in implementing flexible funding mechanisms on a local level. Flexible funding has remained an elusive goal for most coalitions; Colorado credits its success to the implementation of a waiver system in which local coalitions apply to be excused from certain state laws that they believe create barriers to early childhood systems-building efforts. These waivers include raising the child care assistance eligibility threshold and streamlining the application process for various social services (Bruner, Coffman, & Wright, 2006). Despite the existence of a large number of state networks of local early childhood initiatives, few have completed a third-party evaluation. However, the results from a recent evaluation of Vermont's BBF Initiative are highlighted here.

3 These coalitions have subsequently been renamed Early Childhood Councils.

BUILDING BRIGHT FUTURES (BBF) WAS ESTABLISHED by executive order in 2006 and is composed of a state council and 12 regional councils, one for each of the 12 human service administrative districts in Vermont. This discussion focuses on the regional efforts. The regional evaluation consisted of a survey of 204 regional council members and in-depth interviews with each of the 12 regional directors.

In general, most coalition members felt that the early childhood system improved as a result of the initiative. Survey respondents felt that the most successful aspect of BBF was in increasing the number and breadth of stakeholder participation and collaboration among stakeholders. Regional councils successfully set up their own governance structures, including, in many cases, the establishment of subcommittees. In addition, BBF coalitions reported establishing a shared vision, developing a mechanism to track progress, and increasing coordination among early childhood partners. Many of the coalition members credit their success to the dedication and impartiality of their regional directors.

Despite these achievements, BBF encountered significant challenges. The evaluation found that little if any progress was achieved either in services delivered or in greater coordination of them. However, this result may reflect that BBF was evaluated after only 3 years; indeed, new coalitions may take years to develop and additional years to affect outcomes. Another challenge appeared to be related to the coalition's history. Coalitions established prior to BBF reported difficulty realigning themselves with the structure imposed by BBF. On the other hand, regional coalitions with no history of early childhood collaboration reported difficulty starting up. A middle ground was found to be best—one in which there was a history of informal collaboration on early childhood issues in the region.

The evaluation concluded that overall, BBF was a promising initiative with some initial successes in terms of coalition development, function, and planning. However, in 2009, the regional directors were laid off due to state funding cuts. Given this recent development, coalition members were unsure whether they would be able to continue their efforts.

Detailed descriptions of a subset of these initiatives are available in Appendix C. The following chapter describes the rationale behind using community-based approaches to create systems changes and what is known about how these approaches should be organized in order to be most successful.


SWEET

Chapter 3 | Community Coalitions as a Vehicle for Change

Community-based solutions to public health challenges have received increased attention in the past 20–30 years, as federal and state governments and philanthropic organizations have shifted their focus from promoting "one-size-fits-all" national and statewide approaches to funding local community groups to creating and implementing interventions tailored to their particular community (Schorr, 1997; Wandersman, Goodman, & Butterfoss, 1997; Huxham, 1996). A review of the published literature reveals that the use of community collaboratives and coalitions has accelerated in the past few decades and is often now a requirement of funding. Because there is no established definition for a coalition, this section includes information not only on coalitions but on a range of coalition-like groups: collaboratives, partnerships, and collaborative partnerships—terms that are often used interchangeably in the literature (Berkowitz, 2001; Weiss, Anderson, & Lasker, 2002).

A. Rationale of a Community-Based Approach

The shift to a community-based approach is based on both a practice-based rationale and philosophy. The practice-based rationale draws from the ecological model, which posits that the community affects the health and well-being of its residents. This model provides the basis for two major arguments in favor of a community-based approach: first, that only individuals who are part of their community are able to identify intervention strategies that are feasible and most appropriate within the community context; and second, that complex issues, such as early childhood well-being, touch all aspects of the community and thus necessitate a broad-based collection of stakeholders working together to address them. Researchers have learned that ignoring community input can affect the quality and effectiveness of a promising intervention (Kreuter, Lezin, & Young, 2000).

A community-based approach recognizes that a wealth and diversity of skills and potential exist within any community.

The importance of a community-based approach is also supported by the philosophical rationale that individuals should have a voice and a mechanism for influencing decisions that affect them (Box, 1998; King & Stivers, 1998; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). When this democratic ideal is extended to health, education, and social service initiatives, it is called a ground-up approach, meaning that interventions and initiatives should not be dictated to a community but rather should come from within the community itself.

Because a community-based approach is thought to increase community capacity and foster community ownership, it may increase the likelihood that the initiative will be sustained (Okubo & Weidman, 2000; Clark, Baker, Chawla, & Maru, 1993; Dearing, Larson, Randall, & Pope, 1998). While the link between community ownership and sustainability is relatively straightforward, the pathway from a community-based approach to capacity to sustainability is slightly more complex. A community-based approach recognizes that a wealth and diversity of skills and potential exist within any community (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1997; Minkler & Wallerstein, 1997; Rissel & Bracht, 1999; Sharpe, Greaney, Lee, & Royce, 2000; Kramer et al., 2005). By utilizing these existing abilities, community capacity increases; this increased capacity may in turn increase the likelihood that positive community changes are implemented and sustained (Merzel & D'Afflitti, 2003; Minkler & Wallerstein, 1997; Mittelmark, 1999).

While much of the literature points to the importance of community-driven approaches, it also describes the common challenge of engaging partners and community members in a meaningful way. Community coalitions with broad stakeholder involvement and community engagement have been identified as a vehicle for implementing community-driven solutions and have been used to address a range of community issues such as substance use, chronic disease, teen pregnancy, immunization, and violence prevention. While the use of community coalitions is considered a promising approach for achieving community change, the empirical data supporting this approach are still somewhat limited. This is partly the result of the methodological challenge of linking the work of coalitions with positive outcomes for individuals in a community (Butterfoss, Morrow, Webster, & Crews, 2003; Cheadle et al., 2003; Cramer, Atwood, & Stoner, 2006; Granner & Sharpe, 2004; Kreuter, Lezin, & Young, 2000).

The existing body of research suggests that a number of factors influence a coalition's ability to facilitate systems change, including coalition membership and developmental stage, environmental factors (e.g., political), ability to sustain activities, and access to TA (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993; Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, & Allen, 2001). Because of the multifaceted nature of systems change, this review presents research on effective coalitions, coalition development, sustainability, TA, and systems theory. The following section highlights the characteristics of effective coalitions in terms of the capacity of members and leaders, the organization, and the community.

B. Characteristics of Effective Coalitions

This section discusses what is known about the characteristics of high-functioning, effective coalitions in terms of the levels of capacity that appear to promote effective collaboration—member and leadership capacity, organizational capacity, and community capacity. This section draws on the model developed by Foster-Fishman et al. (2001), which identifies several areas of collaborative capacity that are critical to the success of a coalition. While these levels of capacity are presented here as distinct, it is important to note that these capacities are dynamic and interactive, and therefore are constantly evolving and responding to internal and external conditions. A thriving coalition can mobilize resources and create a positive dynamic that engages additional partners and resources to accomplish its goals. However, a negative dynamic in which the coalition is seen as ineffective and unable to mobilize resources to make progress can develop. In this case, effective, targeted TA can enhance positive dynamics and minimize the impact of negative ones (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001).

Key Definition

Member and leadership capacity includes having effective leadership and core skills, knowledge, and attitudes among members that are critical to collaborative activities and provide the motivation to collaborate.

1. Member and Leadership Capacity

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Of the coalition characteristics that have been shown to affect coalition effectiveness, leadership has been identified as the greatest predictor of success (Pluye, Potvin, & Denis, 2004a; Scheirer, 2005). Leaders who have strong communication, conflict resolution, resource development, and administrative skills will be able to effectively manage a diverse membership body and guide the coalition toward its stated objectives (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Butterfoss et al., 1993; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). This leadership is particularly critical in the early stages of development, because the way in which leaders manage startup dynamics affects how well the coalition works toward its ultimate goals (Shultz, 2002).

Research indicates that the level of commitment among those in leadership positions, as well as their specific skills, are critical in helping coalitions coalesce around an important issue, develop a planned approach, and progress toward its goals (Goodman & Steckler, 1989; Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). The ability to build relationships and galvanize support among coalition members and external partners contributes to coalition capacity (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Not surprisingly, the credibility of coalition leaders within the community affects the ability of coalitions to mobilize community members, develop partnerships, and implement activities (Weiss, Coffman, & Bohan-Baker, 2002; Mancini & Marek, 2004). Leadership is so important that practitioners recommend that emerging leaders be continually identified and developed within the coalition membership (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000).

In addition to its leaders, a coalition's most important asset may be its membership. Members who are committed not only to the issue but to the coalition are important to its success (Shultz, 2002). Wynn et al. (2006) discussed the process of drawing up memoranda of understanding and formal agreements among member organizations as a way to solidify member commitment and ensure that members are appropriately compensated as necessary.

Member and Leadership Capacity Characteristics

Attitudes

Holds positive attitudes about collaboration

- Committed to collaboration as an idea
- Views current systems/efforts as inadequate
- Believes collaboration will be productive, worthwhile, achieve goals
- Believes collaborations with serve own interests
- Believes benefits of collaboration will offset costs

Committed to target issues or target program

Holds positive attitudes about other stakeholders

- Views other as legitimate, capable and experienced
- Respects different perspectives
- Appreciates interdependencies
- Trusts other stakeholders

Holds positive attitude about self

- Views self as a legitimate and capable member
- Recognizes innate expertise and knowledge bases

Skills and Knowledge

Ability to work collaboratively with others

- Skilled in conflict resolution
- Effective communication
- Knowledge about norms and perspectives of other members
- Broad understanding of problem domain

Ability to create and build effective programs

- Understands targeted problem or intervention
- Understands target community
- Knowledgeable and skilled in policy, politics and community change
- Grant writing and program planning, design, implementation, and evaluation skills

Ability to build an effective coalition infrastructure

- Skilled in coalition/group development
- Knowledgeable about coalition member roles/responsibilities, committee work

A highly functioning coalition leadership will achieve optimal membership composition by developing inclusion criterion for its members (Knitzer & Adely, 2001; Wynn et al., 2006). For example, inclusion criteria could be developed, members could be recommended, and leaders could vote to accept or reject individuals or organizations. Rosenthal (1997) presents an "inclusivity checklist" composed of a series of questions that a coalition may ask itself to determine its level of willingness to welcome a range of community groups for membership. Factors such as age, ethnicity, and cultural background are important factors to consider and can impact a coalition's ability to affect community outcomes. For instance, a coalition focused on reaching youth should involve youth from the beginning and share coalition ownership with them, rather than involving only youth development professionals who decide what youth need and implement their plans accordingly (Wolff, 2001). In such cases, the coalition may find it has developed failed outreach plans and communication tools, primarily because it did not have active participation from the group being targeted.

Additional factors that should be considered in identifying coalition members include

- Representation of multiple community sectors
- Commitment to community issues
- Active local citizen and professional participation
- Bottom-up planning and decision making
- Attention to membership tenure and depth of involvement
- Concern for diversity and social justice (Berkowitz, 2001; Valente, 2007)

Member characteristics, such as skills and attitude, influence their level of contribution. Their self-perception as legitimate contributors to the collaborative effort will increase perceived competence and increase the likelihood of active participation (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Based on a review of the coalition literature, Foster-Fishman et al. identified the following skills as essential to collaboration:

- Skills and abilities that allow for collaboration, including being respectful of others, being able to resolve conflict, valuing diversity of opinions, and having effective communication skills;
- The "skills and knowledge to create and build effective programs," such as management, program design, and analytic and evaluation skills; and
- The skills and knowledge to "build an effective coalition infrastructure" by supporting the development of coalition processes and defining member roles and responsibilities.

Several researchers emphasize the importance of membership diversity as an element critical to successful coalition development (Berkowitz, 2001; Wolff, 2001; Cramer, Mueller, & Harrop, 2003; Valente, 2007; Yates, 2007; Downey, Ireson, Slavova, & McKee, 2008). By bringing together individuals representing a diversity of organizations and perspectives, coalitions can capitalize on valuable resources (Schultz, 2002). Berkowitz recommends that coalition leaders focus on having representation from a broad range of community sectors, with attention given to how existing community issues will affect membership diversity (Berkowitz, 2001).

Beyond promoting diversity among its members, coalitions must create a culture that is inclusive and makes members feel that the decision-making process considers input from all members (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). While member diversity has been identified as important to coalition functioning, Shultz (2002) cautions that members with extremely divergent beliefs and who are uncompromising in their tactics can be difficult to manage. For instance, members who are committed to using radical means to accomplish the coalition's objectives may deter potentially critical community partners from joining.

2. Organizational Capacity

Organizational capacity includes the creation of a positive working environment and implementing a coalition structure that is task oriented, promotes continuous improvement and supports effective communication and the establishment of strong relationships among its members.

Key Definition

Organizational capacity includes the creation of a positive working environment and implementing a coalition structure that supports effective communication, strong relationships among members, and continuous improvement; ensures sufficient resources; and is task oriented.

An organization's capacity hinges on the availability of human and financial resources that facilitate the operational costs associated with coalition activities (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Coalitions that are able to maintain membership and seek out resources are better positioned for long-term sustainability (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001).

Developing a vision and/or mission statement is an important milestone in coalition development (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Wynn et al. 2006) recommend that a mission statement include information on the coalition's values, norms, and operating structure and be developed in initial meetings with coalition founders and leadership. Allowing members time to invest

Organizational Capacity Characteristics

Organizational or group processes

- Conflict resolution
- Decision making
- Clear mission
- Quality of action plan
- Formalized roles and procedures
- Technical assistance
- Resources available

Develops a positive working climate

- Cohesive
- Cooperative
- Trusting
- Open and Honest
- Effectively handles conflict

Develops a shared vision

- Common understanding of problems
- Shared solutions

Promotes power sharing

- Participatory decision-making processes and shared power
- Minimizes member status differences

Task oriented work environment

- Clear staff and member roles, responsibilities
- Well-developed internal operating procedures and guidelines
- Detailed, focused work plan
- Work group/committee structure

Effective communication

- Effective internal communication system

Continuous improvement orientation

- Seeks input, external information/expertise
- Develops monitoring system and adapts to evaluation information
- Responds to feedback and shifting conditions

in relationships in the infancy of a coalition may reap long-term payoffs (Knitzer & Adely, 2001). Wolff suggests that members use "visioning exercises" to articulate their unstated hopes and wishes, a process that may uncover a greater sense of agreement on common goals than was previously understood (Cramer et al., 2003). Reinforcing the development of a shared vision and reexamining coalition activities based on subsequent shifts in that vision will keep members focused on the coalition's objectives and responsive to evolving community needs (Wolff, 2001).

An important determinant of an effective coalition is whether leaders can create a work environment that is productive and task-oriented with the operational structures in place to support the undertaking of such tasks (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Organizational behavior research suggests that formal coalitions with structures that support governance, management, and communications are more effective in meeting objectives. Coalition members must understand the operating structure of the coalition and be clear about their roles and responsibilities and their expected contribution to the work of the coalition (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Kaye and Wolff (1995) describe the "6 R's of Participation: Involving & Mobilizing Coalition Members"—recognition, respect, role, relationship, reward, and results—as a guide to building and maintaining strong collaborative relationships. Kaye's inclusion of "role" is of note, because without defined places or substantive responsibilities within a coalition, members may feel unneeded and abandon their commitment.

Having operational structures in place not only helps clarify member roles but is useful in organizing and focusing the coalition's work toward its goals (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Early development activities may include the creation of bylaws, committees, and working groups that will assume distinct responsibilities within the coalition (Cheadle et al., 2005; Wynn et al., 2006). Introductory meetings may be used to outline a proposed structure and elect committee chairs; however, some coalitions may decide that it is more appropriate for members to serve equally across all levels instead of dividing the coalition into advisory and subordinate roles (Wynn et al., 2006).

Although research supports the decision for coalitions to have such formalized procedures, the structure should not be so complicated that it becomes overly burdensome to manage. For example, as coalitions increase in size, the time spent on governance and communication also increases, which can create barriers to success (Green, Daniel, & Novick, 2001). Each step toward the creation of formal structures adds another layer of issues to manage. Added structure and formality may be unnecessary, complicating the coalition processes and diverting attention from its important work (Shultz, 2002). The complexity of the structure also is shaped in part by the resources available to the coalition. For example, many of the Smart Start coalitions received funding of more than $1 million required a highly formalized structure to ensure accountability. Early childhood coalitions that have much more limited funding and focus more on coordination and collaboration among agencies may be equally effective with a less complicated structure.

Establishing processes for decision making and conflict resolution can create a predictable coalition structure that is better able to manage work and conflict (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Mechanisms for communication that promote regular, open sharing of information are essential to developing cohesion and trust among members (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Frequent interaction among coalition members underscores benefits such as learning new skills, gaining personal recognition or respect from others, increasing cooperation with members or among other agencies, and experiencing increased satisfaction by contributing to an important community project (Chinman, Anderson, Imm, Wandersman, & Goodman, 1996; Kegler, Steckler, Malek, & McLeroy, 1998). The challenge for coalitions is to balance fostering close-knit and productive relationships with minimizing unnecessary and superfluous contact among members (Cramer et al., 2003; Downey et al., 2008; Foster-Fishman & Behrens, 2007; Kaye & Wolff, 1995; Shultz, 2002; Wynn et al., 2006).

Chinman et al. (1996) explored the costs and benefits associated with member participation and concluded that members who met regularly or who fell into a "high" attendance group perceived significantly more benefits than costs to coalition membership than did those who participated and communicated less frequently. While coalition members must give up some autonomy and yield personal goals to the advancement of the coalition, too many personal costs limit participation (Cramer et al., 2003). For example, losing autonomy in decision making, having unfavorable images of partners or other coalition members, perceiving a lack of leadership or perceived direction, feeling unappreciated for skills or commitment, and feeling pressure for additional commitments are all factors that add to member burden and weaken the stability of the coalition (Berkowitz, 2001).

A positive organizational climate employs effective methods of communication, promotes collaboration and trust among members, and can serve to create a learning organization. A coalition that facilitates learning among its members is critical in the development of members' skills and knowledge, which ensures meaningful coalition participation (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Cramer et al., 2006). Members who are more engaged and satisfied foster collaborative environments that are more active and vibrant (Pluye, Potvin, & Denis, 2004a, 2004b; Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). A nascent organization that solicits feedback and expertise, responds to data and changes in the environment, and engages its members in addressing a problem will be more successful (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001).

3. Community Capacity

Community capacity includes the extent to which the coalition addresses community needs, involves outside organizations and community members in supporting coalition activities, and improves the capacity of these external partners.

A coalition that considers community needs, strengths, and resources will be more likely to enjoy community support and involvement than one that does not (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Research indicates the importance of involving community members and organizations in planning and implementation to ensure that activities meet community needs and are culturally competent (Merzel & d'Afflitti, 2003). According to Downey et al. (2008), "breadth and depth of community partners appear to be the leavening agent that pushes a forming coalition into a coalition that is implementing programs." Successful coalitions will establish relationships with important external partners which can serve key roles throughout the lifespan of a coalition (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001).

Key Definition

Community capacity includes the extent to which the coalition addresses community needs, involves outside organizations and community members in supporting coalition activities, and improves the capacity of these external partners.

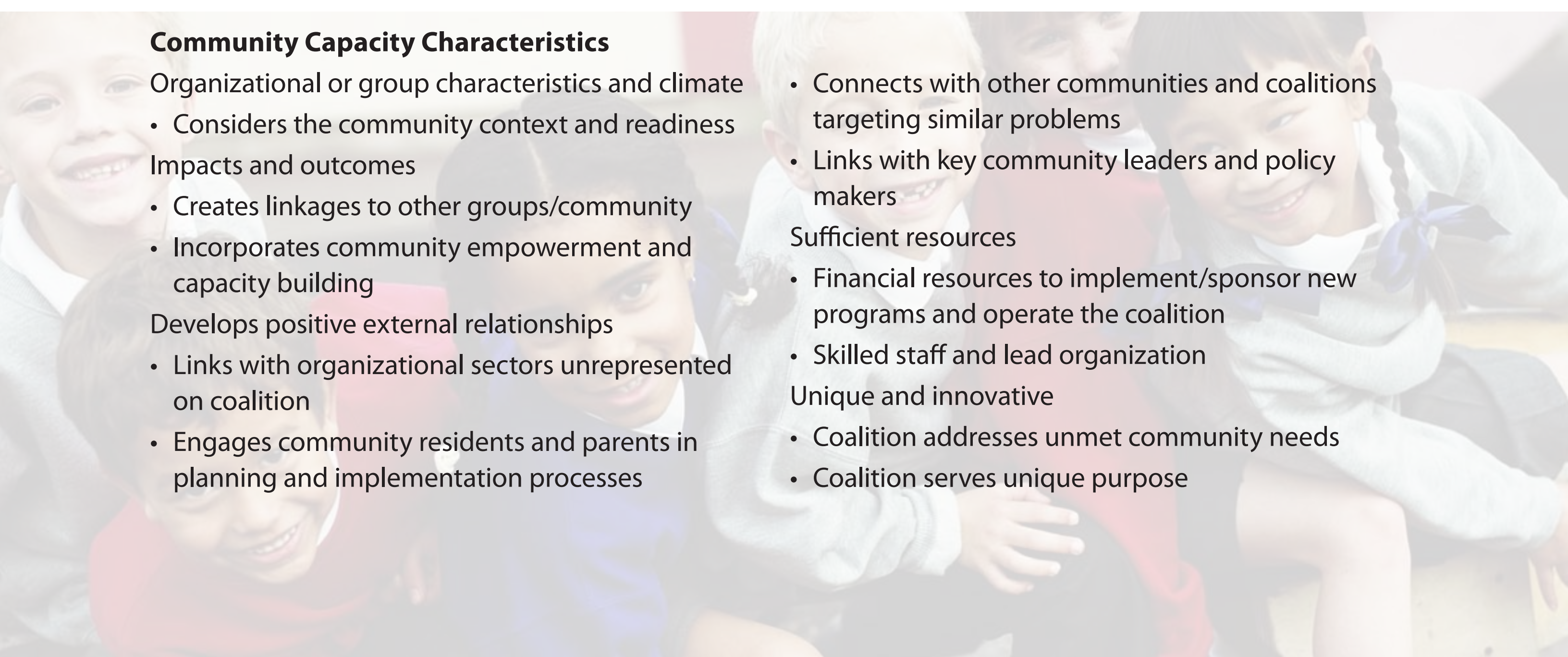
If community relationships are not already established, then coalitions should invest the time necessary to do so. Many public health programs have cited the limited time alloted in grant cyles as an obstacle to engaging multiple stakeholders (Merzel & d'Afflitti, 2003). Approaching key leaders is useful in engaging community members. Powerful figures in a community, including policymakers or advocates, are community change agents who can serve as catalysts for environmental and and policy changes (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Hill et al., 2007). To be successful, a coalition should not underestimate the role of its community partners and their history of community collaboration (Green, Daniel, & Novick, 2001).

More recent community initiatives are focused on engaging multiple sectors (e.g., workplaces, faith-based and community institutions, health care organizations, schools) in supporting coalition work to increase visibility, leverage available resources, and expand the reach of proposed activities (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Merzel & d'Afflitti, 2003; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Every coalition should include in its network the following types of partners:

- Multisectoral organizations,
- Community residents,
- Key community leaders and policymakers, and
- Other communities.

Reaching out to other communities, perhaps those addressing similar issues or implementing similar approaches, can be very useful in identifying "new innovations and best practice solutions" (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001, p. 253).

Research suggests that in order to make meaningful changes within a community, coalitions need to do more than simply develop relationships; they must also develop the capacity and leadership of community members and organizations to mobilize around the coalition's priorities (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). To this end, most programs to improve the health and well-being of children develop an egalitarian planning structure that gives voice not only to agencies and academic leaders but to communities and parents (Evans et al., 2001). This approach is aligned with the family-centered or family-focused philosophy, which is based on the assumption that



Community Capacity Characteristics

Organizational or group characteristics and climate

- Considers the community context and readiness

Impacts and outcomes

- Creates linkages to other groups/community
- Incorporates community empowerment and capacity building

Develops positive external relationships

- Links with organizational sectors unrepresented on coalition
- Engages community residents and parents in planning and implementation processes
- Connects with other communities and coalitions targeting similar problems
- Links with key community leaders and policy makers

Sufficient resources

- Financial resources to implement/sponsor new programs and operate the coalition
- Skilled staff and lead organization

Unique and innovative

- Coalition addresses unmet community needs
- Coalition serves unique purpose

families are the experts when it comes to their children's needs (Thies & McAllister, 2001; Anderson, McIntyre, Rotto, & Robertson, 2002). Thies & McAllister describe the appeal of this approach, noting that it creates a system that fits the needs of families, rather than one that molds families and their needs into an established system. By involving families in program development, early childhood program advocates expect that coalitions will address real community and family needs, increasing the likelihood that the community and stakeholders will sustain the activity. Ouellette, Lazear, & Chambers (1999) as well as Evans et al. (2001) maintain that this approach is the only way to inspire real change in child services. Parental involvement must be supported through personal engagement, the provision of funding for travel, and the provision of the necessary training or background materials, so that parents feel that they can fully contribute to discussions (Sadao & Robinson, 2002).

While there have been few empirical studies evaluating the impact of parental participation on coalitions, early childhood coalitons have reported benefits from such an approach. North Carolina Smart Start and the Michigan Great Start Initiative have seen the benefits of mobilizing parent leaders to support funding requests to the state legislature. Briggs, Briggs, & Leary (2006) found that statewide family networks focused on mental health issues resulted in new and restored funding, changes in policy and practices, and new legislation.

C. Developing Coalition Capacity

Given the prior section, which outlined the types of capacities that promote effective collaboration, this section presents information on the approaches that have been used to build these capacities in coalitions. While the literature suggests that coalitions continue to struggle with the challenges and the level of effort involved in bringing about large-scale community change, there has been relatively little published on best practices associated with organizations or funders who have successfully sponsored and supported coalitions (Butterfoss et al., 2003).

Studies have shown that it is harder to sustain newly created coalitions because of the level of financial, technical, and material support that is required from a funder. Assisting coalitions in developing capacity is particularly critical because of its connection to sustainability. An evaluation of a 7-year Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) initiative found that the coalitions that were formed in response to the funding opportunity were more likely than preexisting coalitions to dissolve at the end of the funding period. Researchers found that coalitions were unable to sustain the involvement from community members without financial support or other incentives (Kramer et al., 2005).

1. TA Frameworks and Models

A number of federal agencies have invested in training or TA to build and improve coalition capacity, although they have also struggled with the best structure to meet these needs (Butterfoss, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2002). Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence to explain how TA can be most effective in building the capacity of coalitions or other community groups. Though there is no definitive conceptual model, researchers do support the use of a systematic approach to providing TA (Cramer et al., 2003; Mitchell et al., 2002). Building on coalition development research, Florin et al. suggest that using a developmental framework is useful in assessing strengths and weaknesses of local coalitions and then developing TA to address areas of greatest weakness (Mitchell et al., 2002).

After years of work as a TA provider, Butterfoss (2004) developed the Coalition TA and Training Framework (CTAT), building on the stages of development outlined in the Community Coalition Action Theory (Butterfoss, 2004; Kegler, 2002). The CTAT uses an approach to empowerment that "helps coalition staff and members help themselves to be more effective and efficient" by providing the necessary resources and support to facilitate that development. The CTAT uses a 6-step process (see Figure 4 below) that takes 6–12 months.

Figure 4. Coalition TA and Training Framework

Step 1: Assessment

Complete written self-assessments (coalition staff and/or leaders):

- Coalition Needs Assessment (CNA)
- Coalition Effectiveness Inventory (CEI)

Step 2: Site Visit

Consult with staff

Review CNA, CEI, and historical documents

Attend and evaluate meetings

- Meeting Effectiveness Inventory (MEI)

Out-process with staff

Step 3: Written Recommendations

Send site report with recommendations for action to staff

Step 4: Telephone Consultation

Consult by telephone with staff to explain or clarify recommendations

Step 5: Coalition Training

Provide training on issues related to building or sustaining coalition

Step 6: Evaluation

Evaluate success of actions taken (staff and consultant)

Identify new recommendations for action (repeat Steps 4 through 6)

Source: Butterfoss (2004)

The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC) was charged to "develop, implement, and evaluate an approach to TA that would result in sustainable systems change in state early intervention and preschool special education program." The NECTAC provided TA to states to assist with the development and implementation of state plans to achieve systems change. Their TA model was structured around the following steps:

1. Market and introduce the NECTAC TA model.
2. Select the topic or issue.
3. Clarify the issue and gain an in-depth understanding of the needs and resources.
4. Plan the development process (i.e., determine participants, schedule, process strategies, and agenda).
5. Provide TA to help develop the state plan.

6. Develop and refine the state plan.
7. Conduct a quality review based on established criteria.
8. Plan the implementation of state plan activities.
9. Track and promote state plan implementation.
10. Review and verify evaluation data.
11. Revise the state plan to modify planned activities or add new ones.
12. Provide TA in state work plan content or issue areas.

The NECTAC TA team also worked with other TA organizations, state contacts, and research centers for additional expertise to provide context for state-specific priorities, and to maximize the coordination of resources (Kahn et al., 2009).

Logic models can also be very useful planning tools to help TA providers and coalitions think through the TA process at each step, such as when determining the type, amount, duration, and source of TA. The process of developing a logic model can also be an important communication tool and strengthen the TA provider-recipient relationship by defining expectations and identifying potential barriers to the achievement of desired outcomes (Mitchell et al., 2002).

2. TA Methods and Format

A range of structures and formats have been used to provide TA to community coalitions. A challenge for TA providers is deciding the best format to use—whether information should be provided by phone, electronically, on-site, or through a Web-based option (e.g., Webinars). These decisions are influenced by both the feasibility (e.g., cost, time) of a format and the appropriateness of the format for a particular audience and activity.

Workshops, designed as short but intensive sessions, are often used for training purposes. A benefit of this format is that it concentrates TA activities in a short time span, typically a few days; training sessions can accommodate a large group of participants, which is more cost-effective than conducting individual trainings. An example of this approach is the Coalition Training Institute, which was developed to prepare coalitions to improve immunization rates in their communities. The Institute provided a 3-day training session to coalition participants and covered the following topics:

- Developing and maintaining coalitions;
- Developing coalition mission statements, goals, work groups, job descriptions, and bylaws;
- Conducting rapid needs assessment; and
- Planning and coordinating services and programs (Butterfoss et al., 2003).

In this example, participants reported that the training curriculum was useful and applicable to their work, but they also reported a need for additional training through on-site TA or distance learning options. The conclusion was that a single training session was not sufficient to meet the level of TA needs (Butterfoss et al., 2003). Even in sessions that are considered high quality, researchers question the effectiveness of this format in relation to long-term capacity building and knowledge transfer (Butterfoss, 2004).

Some TA models rely on coalition members to facilitate learning among their peers. This sometimes involves creating opportunities for information sharing and networking (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). The Pacific Diabetes Today Resource Center used this approach to community building and empowerment, holding trainings in each Pacific jurisdiction, providing opportunities for community members to learn from each other by working in small groups, and sharing stories and information (Braun et al., 2003). Other initiatives have used a “train-the-trainer” model to build skills among coalition members. Butterfoss, who found that the successful use of this approach was contingent on the ability of coalition members to replicate training (1993), advises coalitions to explore methods of delivering training based upon member capabilities and level of receptivity (2003).

Roussos and Fawcett (2000) identified several barriers to the effectiveness of TA. These included offering communities either inappropriate or insufficient support, partnerships lacking an understanding of their needs and requesting inappropriate TA, and not providing TA throughout the life span of the initiative. Additional research, including evaluations of coalition-driven initiatives, is needed to learn more about how TA can be used to improve the effectiveness of coalitions and partnerships (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000).

3. Capacity-Building TA

Researchers have noted that providing training to a coalition, especially during its early stages of formation, is critical to develop members’ core skills and knowledge (Braun et al., 2003; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). When knowledge and skills are consistent across members, collaboration within a coalition is optimized and meaningful participation among its members ensured (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Cramer et al., 2003). Providing training is particularly important to coalition members who have little experience working in a collaborative group.

TA provided to coalitions has most frequently focused on improving the capacity of individual coalition members by increasing knowledge in relevant content areas (e.g., best practices) and through skills-building activities. Coalition functioning can be improved by developing practical skills, such as in negotiation and decision making, that help to manage internal conflict (Butterfoss et al., 2003; Butterfoss & Dunn, 2001). Foster-Fishman et al. (2001) identified the following skills as being important for coalition members:

- Skills and abilities to allow for collaboration, including being respectful of others, being able to resolve conflict, valuing diversity of opinions, and having effective communication skills;
- “Skills and knowledge to create and build effective programs,” such as management, program design, and analytic and evaluation skills; and
- Skills and knowledge to “build an effective coalition infrastructure” by supporting the development of coalition processes and defining member roles and responsibilities.

Available research indicates that members with these skill sets will feel more competent and thus be more effective (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001).

The work of Butterfoss et al. (2003, 2004) also supports these conclusions. They found that many coalitions need basic training in the process of developing and maintaining coalitions, activities that support the organizational capacity—for example, how to identify appropriate members and how to structure effective coalition meetings. The need for ongoing TA and training has been well documented in a range of activities that are commonly included in grant requirements, such as conducting assessments, developing action plans, and conducting evaluations. This is particularly true when coalitions must carry out data analysis and evaluation activities (Mitchell et al., 2002; Butterfoss et al., 2003; Kegeles, Rebchook, & Tebbetts, 2005). Butterfoss (2003) found that coalitions were not accustomed to using data in planning and had basic questions concerning its collection, analysis, and use. TA providers assisted these groups with evaluation design, development of evaluation instruments, and data management. In cases with the greatest gaps in capacity, TA providers assisted groups with the analysis and interpretation of data and evaluation of activities (Kegeles et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 2002).

The NECTAC provided TA in all of these areas and spent the most TA hours providing TA in content areas and developing the state plan (Kahn et al., 2009). Given that coalitions need technical support in such broad areas, an experienced and knowledgeable team of TA providers is necessary. The NECTAC assembled a group of TA providers that collectively demonstrated:

- **Context knowledge—**an understanding of the state context, including political climate, economic realities, past and current initiatives, key players, and relationships in the state;
- **Planning expertise—**the ability to guide the state systems change process to develop a logical, sound plan that adequately and efficiently addressed the state's needs, including monitoring implementation and attainment of desired outcomes;
- **Process expertise—**the ability to plan, coordinate, conduct, and facilitate stakeholder meetings and conference calls and to employ technology appropriately;
- **Topical expertise—**knowledge of relevant content; the ability to interpret the state's issues to provide information or TA to support plan activities; and the ability to use information about research, resources, effective practices, projects, and initiatives pertinent to the identified issue (Kahn et al., 2009).

Implications for Practice

Because early childhood systems touch a range of issues, improving these systems requires the involvement of a broad base of stakeholders. Using a community-based approach is thought to foster community ownership and increase the likelihood that the initiative will be sustained. The existing body of research suggests that specific types of capacity appear to promote effective collaboration—member and leadership capacity, organizational capacity, and community capacity. The leadership and membership characteristics, such as level of commitment as well as specific skills and knowledge, have been identified as the greatest predictor of success. A coalition that facilitates learning among its members is critical in the development of members' skills and knowledge, which ensures meaningful coalition participation. A positive working environment and coalition structure that supports effective communication, strong relationships among members, and continuous improvement, ensures sufficient resources, and is task oriented. Organizational behavior research suggests that formal coalitions with these structures in place are more effective in meeting objectives. The ability to build relationships and galvanize support among coalition members and external partners contributes to coalition capacity. Research suggests that in order to make meaningful changes within a community, coalitions need to do more than simply develop relationships; they must also develop the capacity and leadership of community organizations, community members and parents to mobilize around the coalition's priorities. TA provided to coalitions has most frequently focused on improving the capacity of individual members by increasing knowledge in relevant content areas and through skills building activities. Though there is limited evidence around what TA is most effective, researchers do support a mixed methods approach—workshops, training sessions, peer support, and individual TA, as well as the use of a systematic approach to providing TA. The need for ongoing TA and training has been well documented in a range of activities. Given that coalitions have broad technical needs, it is recommended that a team of TA providers have knowledge of the community context and expertise in planning, processes, and the topics at hand.

The following chapter presents specific frameworks of coalition development and how it can influence the effectiveness of the collaborative.

Chapter 4 | Coalition Development Frameworks

As coalitions develop and evolve, they progress through several stages, which can be associated with important milestones and achievements. This chapter presents several frameworks describing coalition development. Because these frameworks emphasize planning stages, the chapter also includes a selection of planning models that community coalitions have used. Understanding these frameworks can provide planners with insight into the trajectory of coalition building and help them to identify opportunities for support and TA.

A. Developmental Frameworks

In addition to the literature describing characteristics of an effective coalition, researchers have developed several frameworks to describe the process through which a coalition achieves success. These frameworks are predicated on the assumption that coalitions move through a variety of stages of development. While these models present discrete developmental stages, development is not necessarily a linear process. Coalitions evolve and can return to previously "completed" developmental stages as circumstances change. Many of the authors who have developed these frameworks note that they are designed to complement one another and emphasize the general consistency among the various models (Butterfoss et al, 1993; Downey et al., 2008).

1. Stages of Development

The Stages of Development model, developed by Butterfoss and Kegler (2002) identified three developmental stages:

- **Formation—**the initiation of the coalition, recruitment of participants, and development of rules and procedures that govern its work;
- **Maintenance—**assessing, planning, selecting, and implementing strategies; and
- **Institutionalization—**when coalition strategies become part of the way that the community routinely addresses problems. This stage may or may not involve the coalition itself becoming a permanent fixture. The strategies may be adopted by a new body that replaces the coalition or by groups of partners who continue to work together informally or in other groups that existed prior to the coalition or that developed as a result of the coalition's work.

The authors note that as they expand, are renewed, or begin to address new issues, coalitions will cycle through the stages again.

2. Florin Model

Florin, Mitchell, & Stevenson (2000) describe coalition development as the accomplishment of a series of developmental tasks:

- Initial mobilization involving recruiting participants and engaging key constituencies and sectors;

- Establishment of an organizational structure, including the establishment of roles and procedures;
- Building capacity for action—both the capacity of members and organizational capacity through the establishment of linkages with other organizations in the community;
- Planning for action, including a needs assessment, selection of strategies, and the development of an action plan;
- Implementation—carrying out the action plan;
- Refinement of strategies through the analysis of data and the uncovering of additional gaps; and
- Institutionalization, in which processes are developed to ensure the continued functioning of the group as membership changes or as the group's functions are incorporated into existing organizations or institutions.

The commonalities of both frameworks are reflected in the graphic below (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Comparing Butterfoss and Kegler's Stages of Development with Florin Model

Butterfoss and Kegler	**Formation**	**Maintenance**	**Institutionalization**
Florin et al.	• Initial mobilization • Organizational Structure • Building capacity of the collaborative	• Needs assessment and action planning • Implementation • Refinement of Strategies	• Development of processes to ensure continued function-ing of coalition • Incorporation of coalition functions into existing entities

3. Downey Model

A recent article integrates the developmental approach with key milestones that coalitions should achieve as they move through developmental stages. Downey et al. (2008) based this model on research conducted with rural coalitions to assess what they needed to accomplish to be successful. The authors identified a list of 12 key components with corresponding outcomes, which were classified by the developmental stages of formation, implementation, and maintenance. These are displayed in Figure 6. The model raises the issue of whether a coalition can be expected to progress at the same rate, across all core components as depicted by the model. It seems likely that coalitions will be at different stages for different components.

Figure 6. Key Components with Corresponding Outcomes

Core Component	Phase I Formation	Phase II Implementation	Phase III Maintenance	Phase IV Outcomes
Funding	Collaborate to obtain funding	Maintain funding		Achieve financial sustainability
Data	Define what data are or are not available	Retrieve, collect and analyze data	Guide coalition efforts with data	Continue to guide coalition efforts with data
Coalition Structure	Define coalition structure	Formalize coalition structure		Attain goals by adhering to coalition structure
Membership	Recruit members	Empower current members and continue to recruit new ones	Continue to seek new members as work expands	Coalition is representative of community
Leadership	Inform community about the development of the coalition	Network with other groups with similar interests	Ensure effective delegation of tasks	Core leadership group developed (not dependent on one leader)
Partnerships	Identify potential partners with similar interests	Identify additional partners	Continue expanding collaboration efforts	All needed partners are at the table
Coalition Enhancement	Structure and facilitate meetings appropriately	Ensure active members have a significant role in the coalition	Determine future endeavors of the coalition	Coalition is sustainable through active members and extended support
Community Support	Notify community leaders and businesses about the forming coalition	Seek community support for projects	Maintain these relationships by keeping the coalition's agenda at the forefront of supporters' minds	Community recognizes group's mission and importance
Education	Identify what education is needed in the community	Channel messages through the most effective venues	Expand to new channels as the opportunity arises	Awareness of topic has increased
Outreach	Members and partners get coalition's message out	Identify additional venues for outreach	Identify future opportunities for the coalition to disseminate messages	Outreach efforts are reaching the targeted groups
Publicity	Build relationships with a variety of media outlets	Keep coalition's efforts or related topics in media	Communicate the coalition's agenda in the media	Media messages are effective in getting coalition's message out
Evaluation	Develop a coalition evaluation plan	Evaluate coalition's process, structure and outcomes	Improve the coalition as needed based on evaluation's findings	Evaluation is used to define and refine coalition efforts

Source: Downey et al. (2008)

The distinction between some of the core components that are identified here is not always clear, and the notion that the outcomes stage is a separate developmental phase from continued maintenance is questionable. However, the idea that coalitions carry out work across multiple areas while progressing through the stages of development is compelling. Use of this framework suggests that efforts should be made to move coalitions forward within the individual component areas critical to success.

B. Planning Models

Each developmental framework includes the planning process as a core component. To this end, a number of strategic planning models have been developed to assist community coalitions through this process. Though these planning models may vary in structure, they typically involve key steps, including engaging relevant partners, conducting an assessment and identifying needs, developing priorities and a plan to address those needs, implementing the plan, and monitoring and evaluating the coalition's work.

Understanding the community is essential in defining the issues to be addressed. This process involves gathering information about the target population, identifying the priority issues, and learning about the communities in which they occur (Meister & Guernsey de Zapien, 2005). A valid approach will be informed by community needs and will build on community strengths and resources (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Planning decisions should also rely on data to inform decisions. Coalitions are more likely to be effective when they are clear about what they are trying to achieve (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Florin et al., 1993; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Kegler et al., 1998).

Table 2 provides an overview of a variety of models, three of which are described in more detail in the following section.

Table 2. Strategic Planning Models for Community Coalitions

Model Name	Settings in Which Applied	Summary	Source
PRECEDE-PROCEED	Public health but also community coalitions in general	PRECEDE-PROCEED is a community-based, multilevel model with nine phases. It starts with the idea that the focus must be on the intervention's desired outcome and works backward from that outcome to construct an intervention. In this portion of the model, the community's needs are identified and contributing factors researched. An intervention and its strategies are then planned, and attention is paid to environmental supports that will aid in implementation. The intervention is then implemented and evaluated using process, outcome, and impact evaluations. The PROCEED portion of the model was added later to reflect an ecologic approach to public health interventions.	Gielen, A., & McDonald, E. (1997). The PRECEDE-PROCEED planning model. In K. Glanz, F.M. Lewis, & B.K. Rimer (Eds.), Health behavior and health education: Theory, research, and practice. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Results Accountability	Services for children	This model emphasizes plain language and using evidence to assess whether the coalition effected change. Using the model, the coalition defines success and develops measureable indicators and performance measures. Friedman emphasizes that partner recruitment is "a process, not an endpoint." Partners collectively identify and prioritize intervention ideas, create an action plan, and follow up with the creation of a budget. The coalition can then begin to implement its intervention, track progress by monitoring indicators, and evaluate the intervention.	Friedman, M. (2005). Trying hard is not good enough. Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing.
Right Track Decision Accelerator (DA)	A multisite health care provider and a community coalition operating within its service area	This is a decision-making framework for use with both external and internal stakeholders present. Participants generate a horizon plan, which is a strategic planning effort in which key milestones are identified to achieve the desired outcome. The framework includes the creation of indicators against which progress can be measured.	Emery, F., & Trist, E. (1965). The causal texture of organizational environments. Human Relations, 515(18), 21–32.
Assessment Protocol for Excellence in Public Health	Local health departments in partnership with their communities	Part I of the model, the Organizational Capacity Assessment, focuses on improving the performance of the health department. The product of this portion of the model is an organizational action plan created by the local health department. The capacity assessment should be an ongoing process. Part II of the model, the Community Process, works to build a coalition composed of the local health department and the community members. This coalition then assesses community needs, creates goals, and sets measurable objectives that are aligned with Healthy People objectives. Part III, Completing the Cycle, is the evaluation portion of the model.	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1991, March 1). Assessment Protocol for Excellence in Public Health (APEXPH). Retrieved October 23, 2009, from CDC Web site: http://wonder.cdc.gov/wonder/prevguid/p0000089/p0000089.asp.
Community Health Action Model	Rural health issues	This model focuses on community ownership. Community members are responsible for and direct the entire process, including all intervention activities and outcomes. They participate in participatory action research, which means that they work together to build capacity, assess needs, implement an intervention, and engage in political action. Besides improving health, this model depicts the community growing in terms of capacity, resiliency, collaboration, and cohesion.	Racher, F.E., & Annis, R.C. (2008). Community health action model: Health promotion by the community. Research and Theory for Nursing Practice, 22(3), 182–191.

1. PRECEDE-PROCEED

PRECEDE-PROCEED is a strategic planning model that has been used to plan health interventions since the 1970s. This model embraces a community-based approach, involving community members in needs assessment activities, intervention design, implementation, and evaluation. With the addition of the PROCEED portion of the model in 1991, the model incorporated an ecological approach to strategic planning, recognizing that health behavior and outcomes are influenced by multiple environmental levels, including Policy, Regulatory, and Organizational constructs (the "PRO" in "PROCEED").

The first two phases of PRECEDE identify the needs of the community and then identify measurable goals of the intervention to meet these needs. Needs are identified by both listening to the community members (Phase 1: Social Diagnosis) and looking at the community health data by target group (Phase 2: Epidemiological Diagnosis). In all subsequent phases of the intervention, the perspectives of community members and community epidemiologic data are used in conjunction with health behavior theory. In Phase 3: Behavioral and Environmental Diagnosis, modifiable risk factors for the health problems identified in Phases 1 and 2 are identified and rated in terms of importance and changeability. Based on the ratings, the coalition chooses the targets of the intervention which can include individual behaviors as well as social and environmental targets, such as policy or changes to the built environment. Measurable objectives are created for each intervention target (Gielen & McDonald, 1997).

PRECEDE-PROCEED has formed the foundation for community coalition strategic planning.

Upon choosing the intervention targets, the team examines the Predisposing, Reinforcing, and Enabling (the "PRE" in "PRECEDE") factors surrounding these targets to best understand how behavior change can be initiated and sustained. These factors are also assessed in terms of their importance to the intervention target and changeability, and then measurable objectives are created. This constitutes Phase 4: Educational and Organizational Diagnosis (Gielen & McDonald, 1997).

Based on the analyses conducted in Phases 3 and 4 of the model, the coalition finalizes its intervention strategies (Phase 5: Administrative and Policy Diagnosis). In doing this, it pays attention to how environmental and contextual factors could affect the intervention. In addition, community change leaders are identified and recruited to aid in intervention dissemination (Gielen & McDonald, 1997).

In Phases 6–9 of the model, the coalition implements and evaluates the intervention based upon the measurable objectives that were written in Phases 2–4, making use of process and outcome evaluations. Evaluation operates as a feedback loop, informing in-process improvements to and the evolution of the intervention (Gielen & McDonald, 1997).

PRECEDE-PROCEED has formed the foundation for community coalition strategic planning. Indeed, many community coalition strategic planning frameworks draw on the model's participatory approach and process of conducting a comprehensive needs assessment, followed by setting measurable goals and objectives and monitoring progress through evaluation. However, more recent strategic planning models for community coalitions have been developed in response to criticism that PRECEDE-PROCEED is clunky and burdensome. For example, the model was used in CDC's PATCH programs in the 1990s, and communities found the planning process slow; it also required significant training and TA. This is likely due to (1) the model's extensive reliance on data to inform each phase of the process and (2) the need for knowledgeable staff to conduct the epidemiologic diagnosis and evaluation.

2. Results Accountability (RA)

The RA model is a widely used approach that stresses the use of plain language and action-oriented strategic planning. Friedman emphasized that strategic planning was something that could and should be done by the coalition itself, and strategic plans could be developed and meaningful actions could be implemented quickly. Like PRECEDE-PROCEED, RA asks the coalition to start by identifying and working backwards from its desired outcomes. As in PRECEDE-PROCEED, RA relies on data to measure progress. However, it does not lean as heavily on data and research, so the intervention may move forward in the absence of data. In contrast to PRECEDE-PROCEED, although RA advocates for the continued recruitment and involvement of a wide range of partners, it does not specifically promote a community-based, participatory approach to strategic planning (Friedman, 2005).

The first step in the RA model is to have the coalition identify its end goals and the target population to whom those goals apply. In this model, the desired results must be described in plain language and can reference neither a program nor data. For example, Smart Beginnings' vision of children entering kindergarten ready to learn and succeed is an example of a desired result phrased in the RA style. The RA model urges the coalition members to think not only about how to name the desired results but to consider how those results will manifest themselves.

The next step in this strategic planning process is to identify three to five indicators to measure each result; these are used to track progress during and after the implementation process. To support tracking via indicators, coalition members must identify and prioritize their data needs. If data do not exist or are of poor quality, team members should work to improve data quality or develop new, common-sense data collection methods.

Once each indicator has been identified, its baseline must be established. This process consists of two measurements: one to establish the current indicator level and a historic measurement to establish the trajectory. If indicator measurements after the intervention show a different trajectory, then that suggests that the intervention had an effect. However, the RA approach recognizes that trends in many indicators are driven by multiple factors, including many that do not respond to direct intervention. Along with establishing the baseline for each indicator, coalition members should discuss possible reasons underlying the baseline trajectory. Each partner may have a different and important interpretation of the root causes of an issue. To supplement the perspectives of the coalition members, additional information and research, such as a needs assessment, should be used to identify the potential determinants of the baseline data.

Once the coalition has defined success, developed measureable indicators, and examined potential root causes for behaviors, the RA model prompts members to recruit a wide variety of relevant partners. Friedman (2005) emphasizes that partner recruitment is "a process, not an endpoint," and encourages coalitions to be continuously recruiting new, appropriate partners who could help advance each phase of the intervention.

Finally, partners collectively identify intervention ideas, drawing heavily from past experience and research on best or promising practices, and including no- or low-cost options. The coalition then establishes criteria by which each idea will be assessed; Friedman recommends the following: 1) specific enough to implement, 2) potential impact, 3) consistent with community values, and 4) feasible/ affordable. After prioritizing intervention ideas, members create an action plan and a budget. The coalition can then begin to implement its intervention, track progress by monitoring indicators, and evaluate the intervention by answering the questions: "'How much did we do?', 'How well did we do it?', and 'Is anyone better off?'" (Friedman, 2005)

3. Right Track Decision Accelerator (DA)
DA is a strategic planning tool based on Open Systems Theory (Emery & Trist, 1965), which stipulates that internal and external stakeholders must be present throughout the strategic planning process. Ensuring the presence of members of the target population is necessary (though insufficient) to ensure that the community perspective is heard and that the intervention is ultimately relevant and appropriate within the community context. Activate Omaha Kids, a community coalition in Omaha, Nebraska, used DA to guide its members through a successful strategic planning process. The coalition is working to prevent childhood obesity through structural interventions (e.g., vis-à-vis the built environment, policy, and programs) that support healthy eating and active lifestyles.

Coalition leaders first identified and convened the appropriate internal and external stakeholders for the executive committee, ensuring that there was representation across the levels of the Ecological Model, that the individuals had the "reach and authority to create political will," and that there was representation across the focus areas enumerated in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Active Living By Design 5 P model (preparation, promotion, programs, policy, and physical projects). After Activate Omaha Kids coalition members had been recruited, the newly formed coalition used DA to identify key areas upon which to focus its efforts and formed a planning committee dedicated to each. Members of these planning committees were purposefully recruited using the same strategies used to recruit the executive committee.

Activate Omaha Kids, a community coalition in Omaha, Nebraska, used DA to guide its members through a successful strategic planning process.

Each planning committee then used DA to develop its own strategic plan through a process called horizon mapping. In horizon mapping, future goals are identified, and then the "horizon" is divided into phases of implementation—in this case, the first year, Years 2–3, and Years 3–5. Milestones and strategies for achieving the future goals are identified by first generating a list of potential activities and prioritizing activities by their evidence base, feasibility within the desired timeline, likelihood of success, and appropriateness in the community. From a finalized list of intervention activities, measureable objectives and indicators for assessing progress are identified. Activate Omaha Kids developed indicators that were both committee specific and community-wide.

Each committee's strategic plan was then integrated into an overall horizon map. The executive committee members were careful to craft a plan that was (1) achievable; (2) timely; and (3) addressed all ecological levels, all 5 P focus areas, and all coalition-identified focus areas. Upon finalization of the strategic plan, committees created 1-month, 3-month, and 6-month action plans to begin implementation.

An important component of DA is monitoring the measurable indicators identified in the horizon map to assess progress and inform in-process improvements to the intervention. Monitoring implementation is a common pillar in the strategic planning models cited, including PRECEDE-PROCEED and RA. Activate Omaha Kids also used a tracking tool to assist in monitoring its identified indicators and is conducting a process and outcome evaluation.[4]

The strategic planning process used by Activate Omaha Kids is instructive in that it utilizes common components of established strategic planning models, such as meaningful participation of community members, engagement of a broad representation of stakeholders, identification of a vision, and development of a phased plan with measurable objectives and strategies. Also important was the use of monitoring to assess progress. Activate Omaha Kids' process was successful in at least two areas. First, the coalition was able to maintain high participation throughout the planning process; indeed, each committee meeting was attended by 9–22 members. Second, the coalition was able to complete the strategic planning process and begin implementation in just 9 months, which is less time than most coalitions report. However, as with other coalition experiences with strategic planning, Activate Omaha Kids struggled with a lack of available data with which to track progress. This required coalition members work to design and implement the necessary data collection tools.

Implications for Practice

A single, highly specific model may not always meet the needs of a diverse group of coalitions. Strategic planning models need to be flexible enough to meet the needs of coalitions with differing levels of capacity. Developmental frameworks can provide insight into the trajectory of coalition building and suggest that successful coalition development is a result of progressing in a number of different areas, achieving key milestones, and planning for action. Based on the commonalities between the various models reviewed, there are some features that all models should include:

- An effort to identify and engage community partners;
- An inclusive focus that seeks to collect input from a wide range of stakeholders and potential partners;
- A community assessment that is intended to directly inform the strategic plan;
- A collective effort to analyze the data collected so the coalition's understanding of the community is enhanced and so that participants will be more likely to make the connection between the data and their plan;
- The development of a strategic plan that specifies desired goals and outcomes as well as the strategies and activities that will be used to achieve them; and
- Monitoring of the plan including the outcomes so progress can be assessed and shared or corrective action taken if problems arise.

4 Activate Omaha Kids has already completed evaluation activities for the baseline year.

Chapter 5 | Sustainability Models

Sustainability is a critical issue for all community coalitions. If a coalition is to have an impact over time, it must be able to sustain itself long enough to implement key components of its strategic plan and to build the community's capacity to be able to address current and future challenges. Although funders often stress the importance of sustainability, they have struggled to provide meaningful guidance on what needs to be done to achieve it (Altarum Institute, 2009). This challenge is not surprising given the lack of consensus on definitions and conceptualizations of sustainability (Altarum Institute, 2009; Scheirer, 2005). In an influential article, Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998) examined different definitions and conceptual frameworks related to sustainability and classified them into three categories depending on their focus. These categories are

Key Definition: Levels of Sustainability

Individual-level—maintaining the benefits of the initiative for targeted individuals

Organizational-level—continuing activities within an organizational structure and ensuring that program goals, objectives, and approaches adapt to changing needs over time

Community-level—building the capacity of the community to develop and deliver program activities

This chapter addresses the question of sustainability and what is known about how coalitions can achieve it.

A. Empirical Studies of Sustainability

A limited number of empirical studies of sustainability exist. There is also a challenge associated with applying the sustainability literature to the work of community coalitions, because the research has frequently focused on the work of programs rather than coalitions. Although this research can inform our understanding of sustaining coalitions, the process of achieving sustainability may be different for specific programs and broader coalitions.

In a comprehensive literature review of empirical studies of program sustainability, Scheirer (2005) found six studies that looked at the sustainability of health-related programs involving community coalitions or similar entities. The time since funding had ended ranged from 1 year to as many as 6 years. In five of the studies, at least 60% of the coalitions continued to operate. This suggests that coalitions are often able to continue past funding. One caveat is that there was very little information in these studies about whether these entities were contributing to increased community capacity and thus fulfilling a key function of community coalition work.

Scheirer (2005) indicated that as a group, the studies of sustainability, both coalition and individual program studies, had extensive methodological limitations and seldom used a clear framework or clear operational definitions of key concepts. Keeping those limitations in mind, there were five factors for which there was reasonable convergence regarding sustainability. A program or initiative is more likely to be sustained if it meets one or more of the following criteria:

- It can be modified over time.
- It has a champion (though the definition used makes it unclear whether the champion matters because of his or her influence or because of the way in which leadership is exercised).
- There is a good fit with the lead organization's mission and procedures.
- Staff members and/or clients readily perceive benefits.
- Other stakeholders in the community support the effort.

Three additional studies are worth noting because of their use of the frameworks identified above.

Marek et al. (2003) studied an initiative designed to develop community-based programs for at-risk children, youth, and families for 6 years after the programs and funding ended. Of the 92 programs studied, 60 (65%) were still active. It is important to note that 60% of these initiatives were located in rural areas or small towns. Researchers found that the programs had strong leadership, diverse and involved collaborators, supportive community members, and qualified staffs. Most programs reported having evaluation plans in place that were used to measure program outcomes and promote the program to key stakeholders. Forty-four percent of the sites reported beginning to plan for sustainability at an early stage (by the end of the second year of a 5-year funding cycle), and an additional 44% did so between the third and fifth years of the funding cycle.

Although the programs in Marek's study had some funding and some were even able to expand, they lacked the level of stable funding that would have allowed them to have sufficient staff to meet the needs of the program and to recruit and train volunteers. Programs struggled to piece together different pots of funding in order to continue to function. A crucial factor that enabled many to survive despite this challenge was their connection with the state Cooperative Extension office, which receives funding through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Cooperative Extension office provides resources such as TA, resources, and program steering (e.g., involvement in coalitions and advisory boards). This role is somewhat similar to the one played by state early childhood entities that support community coalitions and suggests that state organizations have the potential to play a key role in helping sustain community-level entities.

A year after funding ended, almost all of the accomplishments achieved during the funding period remained in place.

Beery et al. (2005) used their Conceptual Model for Evaluating Community Health Initiatives, to evaluate the California Wellness Foundation's Health Improvement Initiative (HII). HII grantees included nine community coalition sites charged with planning and implementing health improvements by building a formal health partnership, providing direct preventive care, improving systems of care, and measuring population health. A year after funding ended, almost all of the accomplishments achieved during the funding period (i.e., coalition-building; systems changes, such as greater integration of services and adoption of new health promotion policies; provision of direct health services; and improvements in population health measurement) remained in place. Two-thirds of the programs had activities in place that were either comparable to or exceeded the level obtained during the funding period. Beery concluded that although no universal characteristics emerged to explain sustainability, a number of distinct factors appeared to have affected sustainability, including the extents to which

- Partnerships implementing the initiative effectively prepared in advance for the period when initial funding would end
- Partners firmly established a commitment to the initiative's goals
- Coalitions aggressively pursued grant writing or leveraging of other funding
- Partners or other organizations were willing to assimilate programs

Another recent empirical study of Pennsylvania coalitions developed through the Communities That Care initiative found that 90% of coalitions operated 1 year after funding and 3–5% of coalitions ceased operation in the second and third years, with a jump to 8% ceasing to function after 4 years. Because of staggered funding, the study did not have data on all the coalitions but estimated that slightly fewer than two thirds would still be in existence 6 years after the end of funding. The study examined factors associated with sustainability and found that how well the coalition was functioning, as rated by coalition members and a TA provider, was positively associated with sustainability, as were the level of funding from other sources, the use of evidence-based practices, and the level of engagement in sustainability planning. Community features, such as population size, poverty, and school dropout rate, were not associated with sustainability (Feinberg, Bontempo, & Greenberg, 2008).

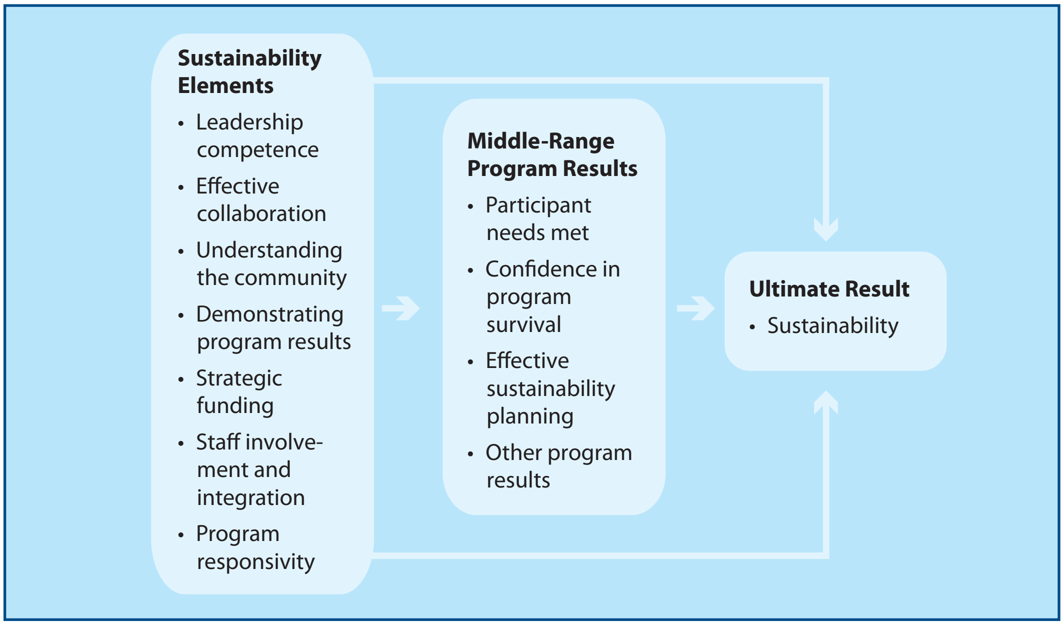
B. Sustainability Models

There are many models of sustainability; this literature review describes two that are most relevant to community coalitions.

1. Community-Based Program Sustainability Model

Mancini & Marek (2004) developed a model (Figure 7) to outline the sustainability process for community-based programs. This model identifies seven major elements of sustainability, which the authors define as the ability to provide "continued benefits, regardless of particular activities delivered or the format" (p. 339).

Figure 7. Model of Community-Based Program Sustainability



(Mancini & Marek, 2004)

The Community-Based Program Sustainability Model features seven elements that appear to be associated with sustainability:

- **Leadership competence—**the ability of leaders to clearly articulate a program's vision and objectives, perform regular needs assessments, engage in ongoing program planning and adaptation, conduct evaluations, secure and manage funding, support and supervise staff, and provide staff training;
- **Effective collaboration—**the identification of and engagement with relevant stakeholders who actively support program goals and who have clearly identified responsibilities;
- **Understanding the community—**having knowledge of community needs and resources, respecting community members, and involving key community members in programs;
- **Demonstrating program results—**evaluating program process and outcomes using rigorous research methods and informing stakeholders of evaluation results;

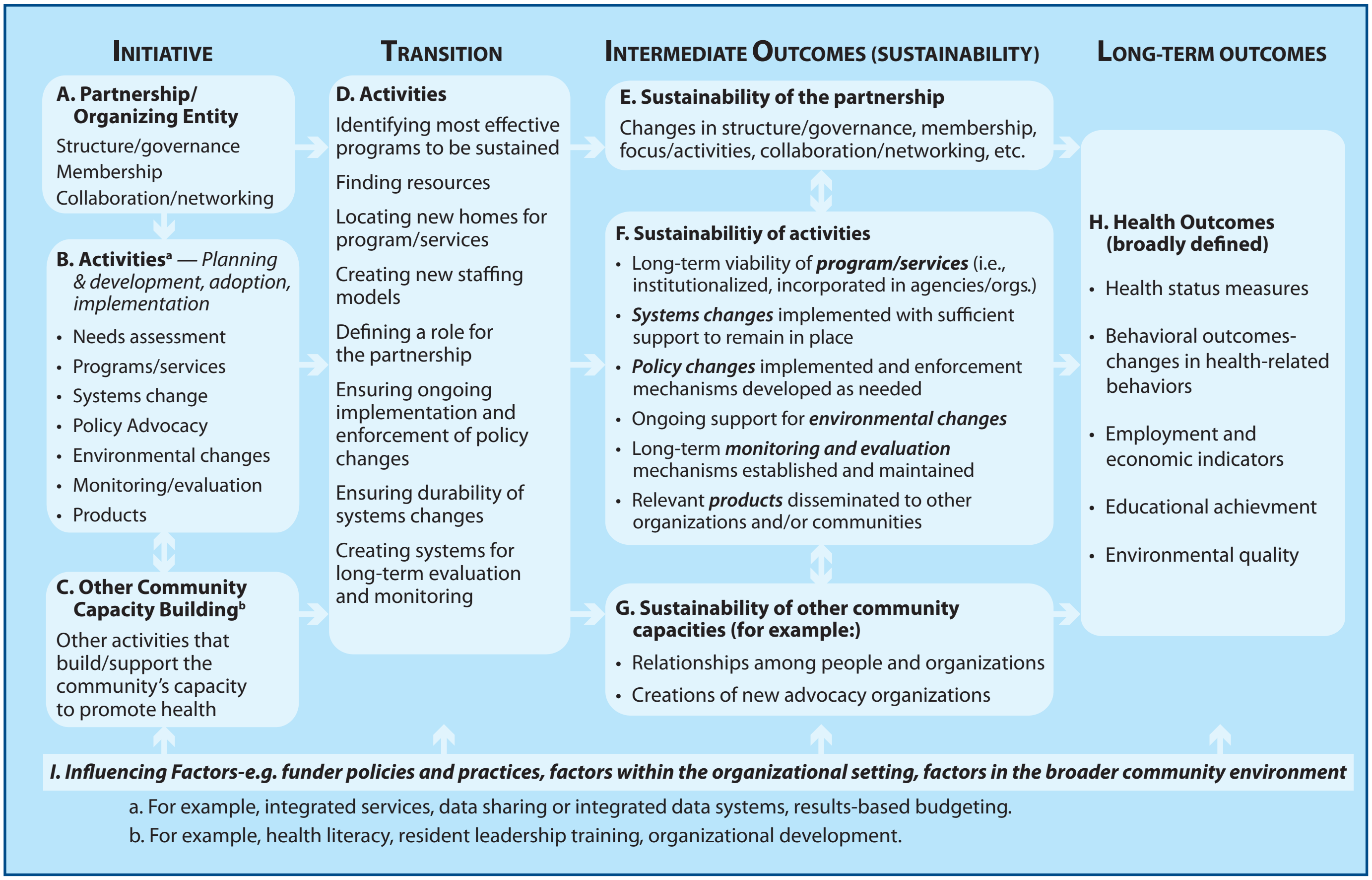
- **Strategic funding—**having plans and resources in place to support current and prospective program requirements;
- **Staff integration—**the inclusion of committed, qualified staff in program design, implementation, evaluation, and decision making; and
- **Program responsivity—**the ability of a project to adapt to programming to meet changes in community needs (Mancini & Marek, 2004).

The second component of the model is middle-range program results, which are intermediate points along the causal pathway leading to the end point of sustainability. The figure included here shows a short list of middle-range program results, including meeting the needs of clients, engaging in effective planning for sustainability, and having confidence in project survival. The authors indicate that other intermediate results are closely related to ultimate sustainability, such as the degree to which the organization perceives an initiative as permanent and the number of years that funding is in place to support the effort. The authors stress that the more important indicator of sustainability is whether the program is maintaining benefits to clients and communities, rather than the maintenance of specific program activities (Mancini & Marek, 2004).

2. Conceptual Model for Evaluating Sustainability of Community Health Initiatives

Beery et al. (2005) created a sustainability model targeted specifically to broad community health initiatives (Figure 8). The model defines sustainability as the "continuation of health or quality-of-life benefits over time" (p. 151). The logic model delineates the key steps an organization or partnership undergoes when a community health initiative achieves sustainability. Beery et al. intended for this model to serve as a tool for evaluating sustainability following the end of initial funding. The authors subsequently used this model in evaluating the California Wellness Foundation's 5-year HII.

Figure 8. Conceptual Model for Evaluating Sustainability



Source: Beery et al. (2005)

The key components of this model follow:

- **Initiative.** The community initiative comprises a partnership or other type of entity responsible for carrying out activities associated with planning, adopting, and implementing the initiative. Nearly all of these activities help build the community's capacity to promote health through activities such as promoting systems changes, developing stronger relationships, and increasing skills.
- **Transition.** Early on, the partnership also engages in a number of different activities to sustain its efforts. Activities include identifying programs to be sustained, finding resources, creating new models of staffing, defining a role for the partnership, and devising ways of ensuring continuation of policy and systems changes.

- **Intermediate Outcomes (Sustainability).** Over time, a set of elements from the initiative will be sustained, including the partnership, major activities, and community capacities. Each of these elements can be sustained in whole or in part and with either the same or a modified structure.
- **Health Outcomes.** The continuation of key elements from the initiative is expected to improve an array of health outcomes, from individual-level measures such as health status to community-level measures such as employment and economic indicators.
- **Influencing Factors.** The final component of the model accounts for the fact that throughout an initiative's lifecycle, many contextual factors within the community can impact the process of achieving sustainability, such as the availability of resources, the local and national economy and changes to funders' practices.

Beery's model views sustainability as an intermediary and necessary condition for an initiative's long-term impact on community outcomes. It recognizes the lag time between system changes and the realization of positive outcomes. Sustaining an initiative during this lag time will ensure that efforts reach a point at which improvements in community health status and the well-being of individuals are measurable and recognized by stakeholders.

Ultimately, sustainability is not only about survival; it is about the ability of a coalition to sustain itself while continuing to improve the capacity of the community to address issues and to have an impact on health outcomes. Both of these models are limited by the way in which they conceive of sustainability as a linear process. If it is to remain relevant and functioning, a coalition will have to continue to adjust its form and function to changes in political and social context. This suggests that Beery's intermediate outcomes stage will continue as long as a coalition remains in existence and that some of the activities that are listed under "Transition" will also need to reoccur over time. Smart Start in North Carolina represents one example of this. It has evolved over time as it has weathered multiple transitions in government, the development of other early childhood initiatives that address similar issues, and economic ups and downs.

Implications for Practice

Although methodological limitations make it challenging to draw conclusive findings from the sustainability literature, many of the factors discussed in the published research as important to sustainability are also factors associated with effective coalitions. This suggests that sustainability requires enough funding and time to succeed, high quality leadership and membership, deliberate and long-term planning, a focus on financing, being able to show results of coalition work, and the establishing of strong community partnerships. If community coalitions are viewed as long-term tools for addressing specific issues, then sustainability is not just a matter of surviving changes in funding sources but of adapting to changes in the political environment, transitions in leadership, and changes in the economic and demographic environment. In this case, sustainability is not an end state but an ongoing process which requires a dynamic reproduction of the coalition so it continues to be successful in an evolving context.

Chapter 6 | Facilitating Systems Change

A number of experts have concluded that systems change is "complex and nonlinear and involves strategizing across multiple dimensions," and takes years of sustained effort to implement, and is often achieved incrementally (Kahn et al., 2009). Emshoff et al. (2007) define systems changes as the effects of the collaborative activities of the system's interdependent entities on the greater system of care. Foster-Fishman et al. (2007) offer that "systems change" refers to the "intentional process designed to alter the status quo by shifting and realigning the form and function of a targeted system" (p. 197). The goal of systems building is to create an environment in which collaboration, innovation, evaluation, learning, and reflection are possible. The California Wellness Foundation HII project defined systems change to include collaborative activities in four areas:

Key Definition

Foster-Fishman et al. (2007) offer that **"systems change"** refers to the "intentional process designed to alter the status quo by shifting and realigning the form and function of a targeted system" (p. 197).

- **Service integration—**providing comprehensive services that are responsive to the needs of the community;
- **Policy development—**developing and implementing new policies that promote population health;
- **Finance and budget reform—**changing the process by which local funding decisions are made to more closely link budgets to outcomes; and
- **Data integration—**increasing the extent to which data are organized and shared across agencies (Cheadle et al., 2003).

In such an environment, there is willingness and capacity to change course and make corrections based on feedback mechanisms, as well as openness to further innovation (Chapman, 2004).

A. The Process of Systems Change

Foster-Fishman et al. (2007) developed the following framework to illustrate the key steps in systems change (see Figure 9 below). The process begins with bounding the system and defining it in terms of its environment and then continues with understanding the root causes of the problem at hand and identifying the system components that are linked.

Figure 9. Essential Components of Transformative Systems Change

Bounding the System	Understanding Fundamental System Parts as Potential Root Causes	Assessing System Interactions	Identifying Levers for Change
• Problem definition • Identification of the levels, niches, organizations, and actors relevant to the problem	• System norms • System resources • System regulations • System operations	• Reinforcing and balancing interdependencies • System feedback and self-regulation Interaction delays	Identifying Parts to Leverage for Change • Exerts or could exert cross-level influences • Directs system behavior • Feasible to change Identifying Interaction and Patterns to Leverage for Change • System differences that create niches compatible with systems change goals • Long standing patterns that support or hinder change goal • Gaps in system feedback mechanisms • Cross-level/sector connections that are needed

Source: Foster-fishman et al. (2007)

The next step involves understanding the patterns of interaction among system components. By understanding the system parts and interactions, one can identify its leverage points. Identifying levers for change is both an analytic and opportunistic process. Leverage points could be the result of systematic analysis but can also be created or present themselves as the result of new funding or an emerging community priority (Behrens & Foster-Fishman, 2007). The intent is that the underlying structures and supports within a system will be impacted; this can involve a change in policies, practices, relationships, resources, and values (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007).

The following questions are useful in this critical examination.

Questions for Understanding Fundamental Systems Parts

System Characteristics	Guiding Questions
Identifying System Norms	• What current assumptions explain why things are done as they are? What current assumptions support the systems change effort? Which ones might impede its success? • What are the "theories in use" that stakeholders use to explain why the targeted problem exists? • What are the values guiding current programs, policies, and practices within the system? What are the values guiding the proposed change? To what extent are these two congruent or compatible with each other?
System Resources	*Human Resources:* • How will setting members be expected to behave if the systems change effort is successful? Do system members have these skills and knowledge sets now? • Are there local champions for the change? Do they know how to leverage change within the system? Do they understand how the system operates? What is needed to help system members develop this understanding *Social Resources:* • To what extent are relationships among stakeholders a contributing factor to the targeted issue? In what ways? • What formal and informal relationships in the system explain "the way things are done around here"? • How will relationships need to shift in order for the proposed initiative to be successful? Who will need to interact with whom and what will be the nature of that interaction (i.e., information sharing, collective action)? • What aspects of the system might support or hinder relationship development? Are policies/procedures put into place to guide, support and encourage collaborative relationships, shared work, and service coordination? *Economic Resources & Opportunities:* • Whose needs are prioritized in the ways that current resources are allocated and opportunities distributed? Whose needs are ignored? • What new resources or opportunities are needed to support the desired change? How does the system need to use its resources differently to support the goals of the initiative? Who might perceive this reallocation as a loss?
Identifying System Regulations	• What policies, practices and procedures exacerbate the problem you want to address? • Which ones have made it difficult to fully resolve this problem in the past? • What current policies, practices and procedures are incompatible with the new or planned change? Which ones might get in the way of the systems change effort succeeding? • Is there a gap between the stated policy and implemented practices? If so, why? • What policies are not in place but are needed to fully support the goals and philosophies of new change? • What practices are not in place but are needed to fully support the goals and philosophies of new change? • What practices or procedures exacerbate the problem you want to address? Which ones have made it difficult to fully resolve this problem in the past? • What daily routines will support and encourage the desired changes? Which ones might get in the way of this change being fully enacted?

System Characteristics	Guiding Questions
System Operations: Power and Decision-Making	• What types of decisions are most critical to the functioning of the system and where does authority over these decisions rest? • What types of information and resources are most important to the system and who controls access to these resources? • Who are the social "movers and shakers" of the system? Do these individuals support the systems change effort? • How does the systems change effort challenge the existing power and decision-making structures? What new power bases or decision-making structures will need to be developed to support the goals of the initiatives? What else within the system will need to be altered to support this new power structure?
System Interactions	• How do deep and apparent structures (e.g. policies, attitudes, relationships) currently interact with each other? What do these interactions mean for the desired systemic change goal? • Where among the interdependencies seems to be the weakest link? Where is the longest delay moving from one part of the system to the other? What do these characteristics mean for your systems change effort? • Will strengthening an existing interdependency or adding/deleting a link accelerate the achievement of the desired change? • How can interdependencies within the system be leveraged strategically to promote sustainability of the desired change over time? What needs to be in place for the system to continue to "feed" and support this change? • What interdependencies between system parts could undermine sustainability of the change effort? • How do current feedback mechanisms support or impede system change goals? What additional feedback mechanisms could be added to facilitate systems change?
Levers for Change	• Which system parts are currently inconsistent with the systems change goal? Which parts support the systems change goal? This includes parts that are (a) problematic in that they cause disruptions in system functioning; (b) have characteristics that are misaligned with the overall purpose of the change effort; and (c) are aligned with the systems change goals. • Which parts are most likely to trigger system wide change (e.g. norms, regulations)? • Which of the above desired levers for change can actually be altered or strengthened given current resources and understandings? What do change agents have the ability to influence? Which parts are malleable within the system? • What impact will the shift in the targeted system parts have on other system parts, interactions and the problem situation?

The framework presented here supports a systematic approach to systems change and a useful process for defining the system norms, resources, regulations, and operations that need to be addressed in order to identify levers for change.

B. Systems Change Strategies

In a review of the research, Behrens & Foster-Fishman (2007) concluded that systems efforts are generally undertaken to do one of the following:

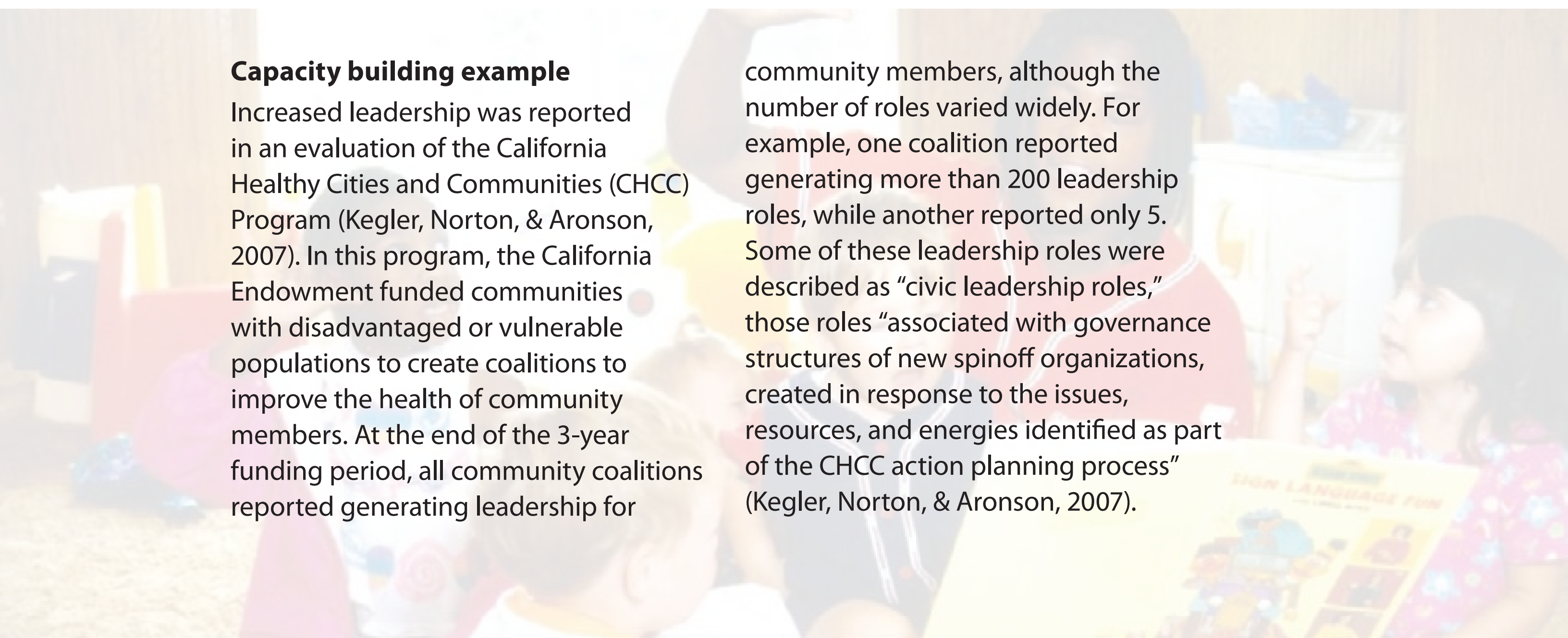
- Achieve better and more sustainable programmatic outcomes,
- Achieve organizational or community-level outcomes, or
- Allocate resources more equitably to change outcomes for specific groups (p. 411).

Based on the literature reviewed, it is clear that the process of systems change requires a significant investment of time and resources. Integrating findings from multiple disciplines leads us to conclude that bringing about meaningful community change requires that coalitions undertake a broad approach, undertake and implement a wide range of activities, including capacity building, community mobilization and advocacy, and public awareness campaigns. As such, the following are strategies for achieving systems change.

1. Facilitate agreement of vision. The coalition should create a shared understanding of the problem or issue at hand, and a shared vision for the coalition. This will create ownership and minimize some of the disorganized nature of social systems. Considering that social systems can be uncertain, the coalition should capitalize on opportunities to create a state of high agreement among its membership.

> *Key Definition*
>
> **Chaskin defines community capacity** as "the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community"

2. Prioritize capacity building. Capacity building among coalition members as well as the community is an essential component of how coalitions can effect systems change. Chaskin defines community capacity as "the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community" (Chaskin, 2001). This can include increasing leadership and expanding the network of coalition partners, such as parents, that are mobilized around priority issues (Kegler, Norton, & Aronson, 2007). This can increase the likelihood that the community will sustain coalition activities.



Capacity building example

Increased leadership was reported in an evaluation of the California Healthy Cities and Communities (CHCC) Program (Kegler, Norton, & Aronson, 2007). In this program, the California Endowment funded communities with disadvantaged or vulnerable populations to create coalitions to improve the health of community members. At the end of the 3-year funding period, all community coalitions reported generating leadership for community members, although the number of roles varied widely. For example, one coalition reported generating more than 200 leadership roles, while another reported only 5. Some of these leadership roles were described as "civic leadership roles," those roles "associated with governance structures of new spinoff organizations, created in response to the issues, resources, and energies identified as part of the CHCC action planning process" (Kegler, Norton, & Aronson, 2007).

Increased community coalition capacity can operate as a feedback loop as coalitions increase the size of their partner networks (Salem, Hooberman, & Ramirez, 2005). Similarly, increased capacity often leads to increased community organizing, an increased ability to leverage community resources, and additional avenues for information dissemination (Salem, Hooberman, & Ramirez, 2005). When combined, these capabilities increase the coalition's ability to effect change, which then further increases the coalition's credibility, confidence, and capacity, perpetuating the cycle.

3. Incorporate planned and emerging approaches. Systems change efforts should include planned and unplanned approaches. Coalitions should follow a systematic process that involves assessment and development of plans to target predetermined outcomes, but should not just limit their approach only to planned activities. To identify potential emerging opportunities, continual monitoring of coalition activities and changes in environment is needed (Parsons, 2007). Coalitions should be encouraged to be creative and open organizations that can easily adapt strategies that appear to be successful and discard those that are failing to produce results.

4. Engage multisectoral and multidisciplinary involvement. Meaningful improvements in a system require the work of a coalition of strong partners who are intimately familiar with the community and its context and whose diversity of experience and expertise reflects the diversity of the early childhood system. Evidence increasingly indicates that child development and well-being can be optimized by approaches that involve multisectoral and multidisciplinary systems that also include the family and community perspectives (Halfon, Uyeda, Inkelas, & Rice, 2004). Elements associated with successful community interventions include targeting multiple sectors such as workplaces, faith-based and community institutions, schools, and businesses (Merzel & d'Afflitti, 2003). Within these sectors, it is important for the coalition to identify individuals that can serve in multiple roles as the coalition evolves, which can include actively participating in coalition activities or serving as a community champion and advocate.

Example of multilevel approach

The NECTAC systems change model is based on the ecological model and targets activities at five levels of service systems, based on the assumption that state and local infrastructure, personnel systems, and service provider practices can interact to either support or hinder the services provided to children and families. The levels of service systems are defined as

1. State infrastructure—administrative structures, policies, procedures and guidance, funding, and interagency collaboration at the state level
2. Personnel development—higher education and a state's capacity for training and TA across the state
3. Community and local infrastructure—administrative structures between state and practice levels, policies, procedures and guidance, funding, and supervision and collaboration at the community and local agency levels
4. Service provider and practice—providers' values, knowledge, skills, and practices
5. Children and families—what children and families value, know, feel, and are able to do as a result of the change (Kahn et al., 2009)

5. Implement multilevel approaches. Coalition activities should target multiple levels, including efforts to alter the social, policy, and physical environments; community-level efforts to change social norms and behaviors (e.g., social marketing campaigns); and individual-level efforts such as education and advocacy(Merzel & d'Afflitti, 2003).

6. Incorporate community engagement. Research suggests that members of the targeted community should be meaningfully involved, as they possess a deep understanding of the community's priority issues and their surrounding complexities and nuances. Such community-generated understanding helps to ensure that proposed solutions are culturally appropriate and can be implemented within the community's structure and context (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Wandersman, Goodman, & Butterfoss, 2004; Lasker & Weiss, 2003). Engaged community members can also advocate for continued support for systems change efforts from policy makers.

7. Provide appropriate technical assistance. The research on coalition development, effective coalitions, and sustainability suggest that successful coalition success is a result of progressing in a number of different areas, achieving key milestones, and planning for action. Technical assistance should be modeled to support achievement of these key milestones, with the most intensive TA typically needed during coalition formation. Because coalitions do have broad TA needs, the most effective TA provider will be one who understands the community context in the community and within the state and also has expertise in facilitating a planning process as well as the relevant content areas (e.g. best practices).

Implications for Practice

Community coalitions are being used as an agent of systems change. The social science literature provides the strongest evidence that broad community-level changes can be brought about by implementing key activities such as coalition building, community mobilization, advocacy, and public awareness campaigns. To effect such changes, community coalitions must first increase member awareness of community needs and agree on the rationale for priority issues. They must work to increase awareness in the larger community and particularly among policy makers and community leaders. Awareness-raising coupled with coalition capacity-building activities establish both the desire and ability to initiate and continue systems change. Funders should maintain flexibility, recognizing that success and progress are not likely to follow a clear pattern or to result from coalitions moving through a set of specific stages. A number of experts have concluded that systems change is complex and nonlinear, and takes years of sustained effort to implement.

Appendix A | Citations

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Appendix B | Methods

The search focused on articles and publications presenting research findings and recommendations related to early childhood coalitions, from funding to evaluation to sustainability. A search of the peer-reviewed public health literature was conducted using electronic journal databases that included MEDLINE, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, and PubMed. Table 3 below shows the search phrases used for the literature review and the number of sources consulted. We then used a snowballing technique in which reports and articles cited in documents that were found during the initial search were reviewed for inclusion and used to identify other relevant literature. Most of the articles and reports reviewed were published within the past 10 years.

Search engines such as Google were also used in searching for relevant reports and publications and for reviewing the websites of other early childhood community coalition initiatives. We were especially interested in initiatives that have been evaluated or that have otherwise published information on best or promising coalition building practices. Other initiatives reviewed include Smart Start North Carolina, the Build Initiative, Great Start Michigan, Smart Start Oklahoma, Vermont Building Bright Futures, All Our Kids Early Childhood Networks Illinois, and the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative, among others.

During the literature review, we noted and followed up on promising tools or toolkits to include in this review. We also received information on potential tools from VECF and incorporated tools used or discussed in past coalition building work that Altarum has undertaken. All potential tools were gathered into a database and reviewed for inclusion into this project.

Table 3. Literature search phrases

Search Phrase	Sources Found	Sources Excluded or not available	Sources in Multiple Searches	Sources Reviewed
capacity building AND early childhood	7	6		1
systems change AND early childhood	8	4		4
systems change AND rural	36	34		2
capacity building AND rural AND community development	50	49		1
leadership AND planning AND coalition	75	64		11
governance AND planning AND coalition	51	48		3
coalition AND community AND effectiveness	93	83	2	8
sustainability AND coalition	85	77	3	5
community assessment AND planning	94	88		6
sustainability AND planning AND coalition	22	17	4	1
system building AND health	18	17		1
early childhood AND coalition	4	2		2
coalition AND leadership	576	561	7	8
“partnership development”	148	140		8
“early childhood” AND comprehensive AND system	60	55	1	4
“systems integration” AND evaluation AND health	205	202		3
“integrated systems” AND evaluation AND health	54	46		8
“strategic planning model”	27	23		4
“results-based accountability”	8			8
Sources previously consulted	-	-	-	128
	Total sources reviewed:			**216**

Appendix C | Examples of Comprehensive Community Efforts

Structure			Coalition Type			System Outcomes				Evaluation Effort	
Title	Funding Type	Funding Level	Local Structures	Bottom-Up	Pre-Existing	Service Integration	Policy Development	Finance	Data Integration	Population Indicators	Formal Evaluation
Smart Start North Carolina	State appropriations	$205.5 million (SFY2007-8)	100 community partnerships	x				x		x	x
Palau Interagency Model	Federal grant	-	n/a		x	x			x	x	x
Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and their Families Program	Federal grant	$1 billion for more than 100 grants	22 sites			x		x		x	x
Starting Points States and Communities Partnership for Young Children Initiative	Foundation grant	$7 million	4 city sites and seven states				x				x
The Build Initiative	Foundation		7 sites				x				x
Project Great Start Michigan	Foundation	-	55 collaboratives	x	x	x	x	x		x	
Smart Start Oklahoma	State appropriations	$2 million per year (as of 2006)	18 communities	x	x		x	x		x	
First Things First Arizona	State appropriations	Approx $150 million/year	31 Regional Partnership Councils	x		x		x		x	
Vermont Building Bright Futures	State appropriations	-	12 Regional Councils		x	x		x		x	
Bridgeport Safe Start Initiative	Federall grant	-	n/a			x					x
Free to Grow	Foundation and federal grant	Avg. $140,000/year	15 demonstration sites	x		x	x			x	x
All Our Kids (AOK) Early Childhood Networks (Illinois)	State and local appropriations, foundation	Approx $1.1 million for 11 networks in SFY2008	13 community networks	x		x					
Iowa Community Empowerment	State appropriations	$22.5 million in SFY2005	58 community empowerment areas	x		x		x		x	
Minnesota Early Childhood	Foundation	$3.2 million for three years	80 local coalitions				x				
Colorado Consolidated Child Care Pilots	State appropriations	$4.7 million in SFY2008; each ECC recieves $30-100,000	31 Early Childhood Councils			x		x			

Descriptions

Title: Smart Start North Carolina
Description: Statewide early childhood initiative in which funds are distributed to community partnerships that develop plans to meet the unique needs of the respective communities and to improve services for children and families. Community partnerships must spend at least 70 percent of the funds on early care and education, either through direct child care subsidies to low-income families or through child care quality improvement activities such as on-site technical assistance, license upgrades, or teacher education scholarships. Remaining funds can be used at the discretion of the community partnerships to improve other early care and education services (Bryant et al., 2002).

Intended Outcomes: Helping children enter school healthy and ready to succeed by improving the quality of child care and early care and education (Bryant et al., 2003).

Level of Funding: Smart Start is state funded and began with an initial state investment of $68 million in 1993 (Bryant et al., 2003). In SFY2007-8, Smart Start received $205.5 million in state appropriations. Additionally, Smart Start raises at least 10% of the appropriation amount in private cash and in-kind donations.[5]

Provision of TA: Smart Start community partnerships provide TA to early care and education sites including on-site technical assistance, quality improvement and facility

5 http://www.smartstart-nc.org/about/faqs.htm

grants, teacher education scholarships, license upgrades, teacher salary supplements, and subsidies to improve care and teacher education (Bryant et al., 2003).

Evaluation efforts: Research staff gathered data in three ways:

- Between 1994 and 1999, data related to child care quality, participation in Smart Start-funded activities, and the skills of preschool children were collected from a sample of 110 child care centers in 12 community partnerships receiving funds in 1993 and 8 receiving funds in later rounds in 1996 or 1997. These data were compared to data collected in 2002.
- Research staff also conducted site visits at one randomly selected preschool classroom in each of the 110 centers during early 2002 to collect observational data on the quality of classroom practices and conduct interviews with center directors and teachers.
- Between April and June of 2002, research staff revisited each classroom to assess children's knowledge and socio-emotional skills (Bryant et al., 2003).

The evaluation found that the quality of child care steadily and significantly increased at participating sites, that participation in Smart Start-funded activities was significantly associated with child care quality, and that classroom quality was a significant positive predictor for five of nine child outcomes of interest (Bryant et al., 2003).

Title: Palau Interagency Model
Description: This model, implemented in 199, targets the Palau Parent Network, public and private service providers, and the general public. It is intended to develop collaborative, family-centered, multiagency, island-wide systems to provide comprehensive services for children with disabilities and their families (Sadao & Robinson, 2002).

Intended Outcomes: To increase public awareness, create joint data tracking and standards, create an interagency team on each island to increase communication among agencies, and produce and implement action plans to create cross-agency systems of care (Sadao and Robinson, 2002).

Level of Funding:

Provision of TA: TA is delivered through annual Pacific Basin Interagency Leadership Conferences and is intended to increase the capacity and team development skills of interagency staff (Sadao & Robinson, 2002).

Evaluation efforts: Research staff conducted a two-part evaluation:

- Key informant interviews were conducted with leaders of interagency teams in each of six Pacific Islands regarding the process of interagency development.
- A quantitative and qualitative survey tool was developed from the results of the key informant interviews. The survey was administered to participants representing the three major categories of stakeholders—health, education, and families—at 1996 and 1997 Pacific Basin Interagency Leadership Conferences.

The evaluation found that the interagency team model produced a number of key benefits, including improved interagency infrastructure development, an increase in awareness of the needs of children with special needs, an increase in members' understanding of team work values, expanded representation on interagency teams and communication across agencies, increased numbers of families contacted and served, and increased numbers of families requesting services (Sadao & Robinson, 2002).

Title: Starting Points States and Communities Partnership for Young Children Initiative (Carnegie Corporation)

Description: This initiative began in 1996 and lasted for 4 ½ years. Grantees were required to establish and meet measurable, concrete outcomes based on strategic plans emphasizing program and policy development (Knitzer & Adely, 2001).

Intended Outcomes: Development of short- and long-term early child systems change through program improvement, policy development, and public engagement and awareness (Knitzer and Adely, 2001).

Level of Funding: $7 million to four city sites and seven states (Knitzer & Adely, 2001)

Provision of TA:

Evaluation efforts: Data collection for the assessment involved a review of grantee documents and interviews with key informants. It was intended to find variations in leadership structure, in demographic, policy, economic and political contexts, the most common positive and negative mediating factors, and lessons learned for future initiatives. The evaluation found that grantee communities achieved gains in many areas, including policy, public and private resources, advocacy, expanded networks of service and new service models, new partnerships, family support, and leadership capabilities (Knitzer & Adely, 2001).

Title: Project Great Start (Michigan) (The Early Childhood Investment Corporation)

Description: This initiative grew out of the Michigan Ready to Succeed Partnership. In 2005 the Early Childhood Investment Corporation was funded to act as the focal point for Michigan's early childhood system. The project is intended to improve access, quality and capacity of the early childhood programs in Michigan across five focus areas: pediatric and family health, social and emotional health, child care and early education, parenting leadership, and family support. The purpose of Project Great Start is to assure a coordinated system of community resources and supports to assist all Michigan families in providing a great start for their children from birth through age five. Michigan has fifty-five Great Start Collaboratives that serve as the local infrastructure and include parents, educators, local public agencies, law enforcement, philanthropic organizations, and other local stakeholders.[6]

Intended Outcomes: Project Great Start is intended to create a comprehensive system for children, incorporating family support, parenting leadership, child care and early education, and physical, emotional, and mental health. The initiative supports local parent coalitions intended to influence policy and build support for early childhood systems change and funding, and a funding and investment arm, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, that is intended to secure permanent and adequate funding for sustainability of the program.[7]

6 http://www.greatstartforkids.org
7 http://www.greatstartforkids.org

Level of Funding: Unsure

Provision of TA: The program provides funding and TA for the local Great Start Collaboratives through quarterly regional meetings, on-site consultation, and presentations by the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC). The ECIC has a TA director who provides TA for assistance calls and outcomes management, and offers an annual state-wide meeting on Parent and Professional Leadership and Effective System Building. Additionally, ECIC has an intranet site to facilitate communications and peer-to-peer linking.

Evaluation efforts: In April 2007 a workgroup submitted a paper to ECIC recommending the adoption of a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to monitor child care and education quality.[8]

Title: Smart Start Oklahoma (Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness)
Description: Smart Start Oklahoma was founded in 2003 to coordinate early childhood system building, which had previously been locality-by-locality. Sites form local partnership boards and by-laws and manage their own day-to-day operations. At the state level, the initiative is managed by the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness and the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Foundation. Board members include 13 state agency directors and 16 private sector individuals (Bruner et al., 2006)

Intended Outcomes: The initiative seeks to facilitate collaboration among local service providers to more effectively serve families with young children by creating new local partnerships or aiding already existing partnerships. Goals include ensuring that families nurture their young children, have access to health care and high-quality child care, and that children enter school prepared to learn and succeed (Bruner et al., 2006).

Level of Funding: Communities must provide a 10% match, either in case or in-kind. Funding is provided by the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness, which has established $2 million in funding for Smart Start Oklahoma (Bruner et al., 2006).

Provision of TA: Local site coordinators participate in quarterly meetings and bimonthly conference calls and receive materials on best practices for community mobilization, collaboration, early childhood, funding and research. TA is provided one-on-one to local sites and during these quarterly meetings. There is also informal peer-to-peer networking (Bruner et al., 2006).

Evaluation efforts: None at this time.

Title: First Things First Arizona
Description: In 2003 a governor-appointed School Readiness Board created a long-term school readiness plan; ECCS funding added momentum to implementation. The initiative is overseen by a state board and implemented by 31 Regional Partnership Councils. The Regional Partnership Councils are responsible for collecting information on local needs, prioritizing and creating a plant to address those needs, choosing collaborative partners, and identifying the funding necessary.[9]

8 Early Childhood Investment Corporation (2007). "A Great Start for Kids: Michigan Quality Rating and Improvement System." Retrieved 11/2/2009 from http://www.greatstartforkids.org/documents/QRS_051707.pdf

9 http://www.azftf.gov

Intended Outcomes: First Things First is intended to increase access to quality early care and education, early health and screenings, and parent and family information and support. It is focused on creating a coordinated system of early childhood programs and services and informing the public about the importance of early childhood care and education.[10]

Level of Funding: First Things First is funded by a tax on tobacco products approved by voters and receives about $150 million per year.[11]

Provision of TA: The state Board includes experienced statewide and regional staff who hare available to provide TA to the Regional Partnership Councils. They provide support to regions as they develop funding plans, implementation programs, and outcomes. The state Board monitors the implementation of programs. The Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center also provides TA to the Board and to Councils.

Evaluation efforts: None at this time.

Title: Vermont Building Bright Futures (Vermont Department for Children and Families)

Description: The Vermont Early Childhood Work Group was founded in 1992 to coordinate Vermont's early childhood care and education system. In 2002 the state received a grant from the North Carolina Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center to create the public-private partnership, Building Bright Futures; in 2004 the Governor established the Building Bright Futures Transitional Board to sustain the effort (Bruner et al., 2006). There are currently 12 Building Bright Futures Regional Councils.

Intended Outcomes: To create an integrated system of services for children under six at the state level. At the regional level, councils "coordinate regional programs, collect outcome data, communicate local gaps in services to the State Council and develop regional plans for service delivery."[12] Goals of the program include the integration of services, school readiness, and family support.

Level of Funding: Funds are drawn from the Vermont Department for Children and Families, from state appropriations, and from early childhood system grants such as the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant (Bruner et al., 2006).

Provision of TA: The State Council provides technical assistance to Regional Councils to ensure they are able to create and coordinate service delivery (Bruner et al., 2006).

Evaluation efforts: Regions are to collect indicator outcome data, analyze the data, and report it to the State Council Data and Evaluation Committee, which will addresses issues related to data collection, analysis, reporting, and use of evaluation and planning. (State Plan)

Title: Bridgeport Safe Start Initiative (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention)

Description: Bridgeport, CT, was chosen in 1999 as a site for the Safe Start Initiative. A collaborative agreement was created between the city, a local domestic violence service and education agency, and an existing coalition of organizations committed to

10 http://www.azftf.gov
11 http://www.azftf.gov/WhoWeAre/HowWeWork/Pages/Funding.aspx
12 http://www.buildingbrightfutures.org

education, advocacy, community planning and research for the well-being of Bridgeport's children (Friedman 2007).

Intended Outcomes: To create a coordinated service system to "improve the access, delivery, and quality of services for young children at risk of exposure or who have been exposed to violence" (Friedman et al., 2007, p. 295). Reduction in the fragmentation of services and integrated service delivery were the main goals of the initiative.

Level of Funding: n/a

Provision of TA: n/a

Evaluation efforts: In 2007 key stakeholders were surveyed using the Interagency Collaboration Scale. Network analyses were performed and the evaluation found increases in linkages between agencies and providers. In addition, providers, parents and policymakers participated in three focus groups at 18-month intervals to determine their impressions of the system of care for children exposed to violence. The focus groups reported improvement in communication and collaboration between agencies (Friedman et al., 2007).

Title: Free to Grow (National Head Start Bureau, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention)

Description: Free to Grow was a research and demonstration program that ran from 2001 to 2005 and tested community-based approaches to preventing substance abuse and child abuse. There were 15 demonstration sites whose community coalitions included law enforcement, schools, substance abuse treatment programs, prevention coalitions, other human services programs, and community residents (Floyd, 2004). The initiative emphasized community-strengthening activities and the development of local leadership, school-linked community advocacy, and policy change on the local level as well as improvements in the continuum of care for families vulnerable to substance abuse.[13]

Intended Outcomes: Reducing the vulnerability of young children to substance abuse and high risk behaviors through family impacts such as family management practices, reduced substance abuse, parent/child bonding, and advocacy skills. Community outcomes included neighborhood safety and reductions in substance abuse.[14]

Level of Funding: Total program grant awards (including local matching funds) average $140,000 annually.[15]

Provision of TA: TA was provided by the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and included training in core competencies, communication skills and sustainability planning. A web site with resources was also developed for grantees.[16]

Evaluation efforts: An initial process evaluation was conducted by Mathematica in 2000. The initiative was found to be promising and funding was extended to new sites.[17] The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation undertook a more comprehensive

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13 http://www.rwjf.org/reports/npreports/freetogrow.htm
14 http://www.freetogrow.org
15 http://www.freetogrow.org
16 http://www.rwjf.org/reports/npreports/freetogrow.htm
17 http://www.freetogrow.org

process and outcome evaluation that included a quantitative evaluation of family and community risk and protective factors, which were compared between initiative sites and matched control sites. Researchers compared neighborhood measures, family measures, and family substance use measures through surveys of caregivers of children. The indicator data were gathered three times via telephone survey. The evaluation found that the initiative enhanced the capacity of some Head Start sites to identify and assist vulnerable families, increased opportunities for family/parent leadership, and that coalitions were enhanced, but found little evidence for direct outcomes on neighborhood or family measures.[18]

Title: All Our Kids (AOK) Early Childhood Networks (Illinois) (Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois State Board of Education, local health departments, Ounce of Prevention Fund, other local agencies)

Description: The AOK Early Childhood Networks are local entities made up of service providers, parents, and community members and supported by state and local health and education departments. Currently 13 community networks undertake independent projects for the health of their communities; for instance, one network worked to ensure that all children under the age of three receive health screenings at school, community fairs, or social service and health agencies, and another has published the annual Family Yellow Pages, a resource guide providing information on crisis support, education, housing, social services, and recreational opportunities for families.[19]

Intended Outcomes: AOK Networks has four goals: that babies are born healthy, that children have and maintain physical and emotional health, that children enter school ready to learn, and that families are knowledgeable about and connected to appropriate services.[20]

Level of Funding: In SFY2008, the Illinois Department of Human Services provided $1,116,200 in funding to 11 of the 13 regional AOK networks.[21] Funding levels from other supporting organizations were not available.

Provision of TA: The Illinois Department of Health provides TA for grantees under the AOK Network;[22] however, the form of this TA is not specified. Other partners, such as the Ounce of Prevention Fund, may also provide some form of TA.

Evaluation efforts: In 2008 AOK administered surveys for parents and providers to determine how services are accessed, satisfaction with services, gaps, referral patterns, collaborative efforts, and needed resources or trainings.[23] Results from these surveys do not appear to have been released at this time. The Illinois Department of Human Services in 2008 wrote that the AOK Networks have conducted community assessments to identify resources and needs in their communities, facilitated communication between parents and providers, distributed over 102,000 directories of community services for families, increased the number of development screenings available to

18 http://www.rwjf.org/reports/npreports/freetogrow.htm
19 Illinois Department of Human Services. (2007). "AOK Statewide Brochure in English." Retrieved 11/2/2009 from http://www.aoknetworks.org/pdf/aokbrochureenglish.pdf
20 Illinois Department of Human Services. (2007). "AOK Statewide Brochure in English." Retrieved 11/2/2009 from http://www.aoknetworks.org/pdf/aokbrochureenglish.pdf
21 Illinois Department of Human Services. (2008). "All Our Kids (AOK) Fact Sheet." Retrieved 11/2/2009 from http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=32796.
22 http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=41494
23 http://www.aoknetworks.org/surveys.html

young children and families, and improved the timeliness and appropriateness of the referral system.[24]

Title: Iowa Community Empowerment Initiative (Iowa Department of Management)

Description: The Iowa Empowerment Board was created by the State legislature in 1998 and is made up of State department directors from a variety of agencies including Human Services, Public Health, Education, and Economic Development, along with legislators and citizens (Bruner 2006). The goal of the Board is to improve the quality of life for children ages 0 to 5 by developing an integrated system of care and advocating for policy development in support of early childhood and early learning. The Board oversees 58 geographically self-defined areas that represent all 99 counties. These areas implement their own community plans and have local community empowerment boards made up of citizens representing business, faith, education, and health as well as local elected officials. Additionally, a State Advisory Council made up of citizens from all areas of the State provides a link between the community empowerment areas and the Empowerment Board by making recommendations and providing feedback.[25]

Intended Outcomes: The Community Empowerment Initiative is intended to improve outcomes in five areas: healthy children, children ready to succeed in school, safe and supportive communities, secure and nurturing families, and secure and nurturing child care environments.[26]

Level of Funding: The six State-level departments provide staff time in kind to the Empowerment Board. Monetary support comes from School Ready Children Grants, which provided $15.3 million in SFY2005, and Early Childhood Grants, which provided $7.2 million in SFY2005.[27]

Provision of TA: The Empowerment Board provides TA to local communities, including information, promotion of community capacity and leadership, guidance on system building, and connections to additional assistance.[28]

Evaluation efforts: The Empowerment Board has tracked agreed-upon outcomes in its five focus areas since 2004. Indicators include birth weight, immunization rate, school readiness, juvenile arrests, serious crime, poverty level, employment rate, incidence of child abuse, teen birth rate, child abuse in a child care setting, and availability of child care.[29] The State's 2008 Annual Report found a decrease in the percentages of low birth rate, a slight increase in the percentage of children entering kindergarten with appropriate reading skills, and a decline in child abuse numbers.[30]

24 Illinois Department of Human Services. (2008). "All Our Kids (AOK) Fact Sheet." Retrieved 11/2/2009 from http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=32796.

25 Iowa Office of Empowerment. (?) "Empowerment 101. Community Empowerment: Achieving Results." Iowa Department of Management. Retrieved 11/5/2009 from http://www.empowerment.state.ia.us/files/empower_101.pdf.

26 Iowa Office of Empowerment. (?)

27 Iowa Office of Empowerment. (?)

28 Iowa Office of Empowerment. (?)

29 Iowa Department of Empowerment. (?); http://www.empowerment.state.ia.us/achieving_results/performance_measures.html

30 Iowa Department of Empowerment. (2008). "2008 Annual Report." Retrieved 11/5/2009 from http://www.empowerment.state.ia.us/annual_reports/2008.html

Title: Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative
Description: The MECI started as a collaborative venture in 2003 between the McKnight Foundation, Ready 4 K, and six independent foundations representing the six regions outside of Minneapolis/St. Paul, the Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs). These MIFs are the governing bodies for MECI and oversee a total of 80[31] local coalitions. These coalitions are responsible for organizing themselves, gathering community input, creating an action plan and resource inventory, and identifying system gaps. Projects undertaken by the coalitions and funded by the MIFs include creating new services such as literacy programs, bolstering existing programs such as health screenings, supporting service integration, and providing professional development and public awareness campaigns (Bruner et al., 2006).

Intended Outcomes: The MECI's purposes are to educate parents about the importance of early learning and care, help form community coalitions with action plans to improve early learning and care, provide training, support, and referrals to improve services to young children, and to advance early learning and care in policy at the local, state and national level.[32]

Level of Funding: Initial funding from the McKnight Foundation was $3.2 million for three years, which has been renewed for a second three-year grant (Bruner et al., 2006).

Provision of TA: MIFs provide technical assistance to help the coalitions through the initial coalition creation process. Additionally, MIFs facilitate regional meetings, a Statewide Early Childhood Coordinators' Network, and a Promising Strategies Resource Directory for Early Childhood Initiative Projects to provide opportunities for network, public advocacy, policy development, education and training (Bruner et al., 2006).

Evaluation efforts: None at this time at the foundation level; unsure if local coalitions carry out their own evaluations.

Title: Colorado Early Childhood Councils (ECC) (Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Department of Human Services Division of Child Care)
Description: Established by legislation in 1997 and originally named Consolidated Child Care Pilots, there are now 31 Councils active in 26 of Colorado's 64 counties.[33] The Councils were established to build an early childhood system with a place for local voices and to create a "seamless delivery system of early care and education services."[34] The councils are made up of community service providers and leaders, identify community needs and make decisions about how to spend the grant funding (Bruner et al., 2006).

Intended Outcomes: The ECCs are intended to facilitate change in eight areas: quality and standards, service availability, parent and family engagement, workforce development, public engagement, systems oversight, accountability, and financing.

Level of Funding: Funding for each ECC ranges from $25,0000 to $176,000 annually. Additional money is leveraged locally or through other grants and foundations (Bruner et al., 2006). Funding is administered through the Colorado Departments of Human Service and Education and comes mainly from the federal Child Care Development

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31 http://www.ifound.org/children_c_coalitions.phps
32 http://www.ifound.org/children_childhood.php
33 Colorado Department of Education (2008). "Colorado's Early Childhood Councils." Retrieved 11/6/2009 from http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/download/pdf/ec_councils_one_pager.pdf
34 http://www.smartstartcolorado.org/Testing/about/consolidated_pilots.html

Block Grant with some additional state funds provided.[35] In SFY2008 $4.7 million in funding was available.[36]

Provision of TA: TA is provided in quarterly and monthly meetings of ECC coordinators and state-level leaders, both peer-to-peer and from the State to the ECCs. TA topics include finance, professional development, and data collection and evaluation. The Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center based in North Carolina has also provided TA to the ECCs (Bruner et al., 2006).

Evaluation efforts: None at this time.

35 http://www.smartstartcolorado.org/Testing/about/consolidated_pilots.html
36 Colorado Department of Education (2008)

Supporting Community-Level Early Childhood System Building:

Findings from Interviews with Community and State Leaders

July 2010

By Altarum Institute for the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation

Introduction

Virginia's Smart Beginnings coalition is one of many efforts around the country aimed at developing a community-level, comprehensive approach to early childhood issues through State-level support for development of local and regional coalitions focused on early childhood system change. The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) provides funding and support for these community and regional Smart Beginnings coalitions. VECF recognized the need to assess and strengthen the support they provide so both the Foundation and the local coalitions could better accomplish the goals of Smart Beginnings This report highlights interviews with 18 Smart Beginnings' leaders as well as with leaders from six other States engaged in similar coalitions. The first section describes findings from these interviews, the second section reports on the national interviews, and the final section discusses implications of both sets of findings for VECF and Smart Beginnings. VECF was already aware of many of the concerns and issues identified by grantees prior to this report and that awareness led to the decision to undertake this process to analyze and address issues related to building effective coalitions. This report is part of a larger process undertaken by VECF with support from Altarum Institute (Altarum) to strengthen the guidance and support the Foundation provides to the local coalitions.

A. Findings From Interviews With VECF Coalitions

In fall 2009, Altarum researchers interviewed leaders from 18 Smart Beginnings coalitions; these leaders represented all of the currently funded local coalitions but did not include those that had just received funding in the fall of 2009. The newest coalitions were excluded, because they did not have enough experience with Smart Beginnings to discuss the issues covered in the interview. Interviews were conducted with six Planning Grantees, four Getting Ready Grantees, three Partnership Grantees, two Sustaining Grantees, and three Sustaining Partners.

Table 1. VECF Grants

Grant Type	Grant	Grant Tasks and Purpose
Planning	15-18 months ($50,000)	Forming leadership, governance, community assessment, strategic planning and public engagement
Getting Ready I	24 months (approximate $75,000-$125,000)	Implement plans developed during planning grant and activities in one system based on assessment and strategic plan.
Getting Ready II	24 months (approximate $75,000-$125,000)	Implement collaborative activities in two systems based on community assessment and strategic plan.
Partnership (up to 2 Partnership Grants)	24 -48 months up to $400,000 total for 1 or split between 2 Partnership phases	Fully operational leadership and governance with implementation and evaluation of collaborative activities in three systems based on community assessment and strategic plan.
Sustaining	24 months (up to $100,000)	Sustain work implemented under Partnership Grant
Sustaining Partners	Small award based on restricted expenses incurred as Partners	Grantees who have successfully completed the grant continuum and join the Foundation as a full partner in Smart Beginnings

Source: Smart Beginnings Grants Manual, 2010

Community Readiness for Early Childhood Collaboration and Systems-Building Work

Smart Beginnings offers communities in Virginia an opportunity to improve their early childhood services and systems by building local and regional coalitions. A key factor in whether such coalition-building will succeed is whether the groundwork has been laid to take advantage of the opportunities presented. In fact, a great deal of work has been done around cross-sector early childhood systems building at the national and State levels. Based on interviews with local Smart Beginnings leaders, the following conclusions can be drawn about community readiness in Virginia:

- **The Smart Beginnings approach resonates with local communities in Virginia.** Many local communities were well-positioned to respond to the opportunities that Smart Beginnings offers.
  - Most interviewees reported that their communities view Smart Beginnings as a great opportunity that can be used to build on efforts they had begun previously.
  - The most commonly cited existing effort was Success by Six, which four respondents mentioned.

- Three respondents noted that they had received State Early Childhood Partnership grants, the precursor to the Smart Beginnings grants, from the Department of Social Services. These grants built on previous efforts within communities to develop collaborative approaches to early childhood.

- Other respondents mentioned various other efforts at collaboration, including collaboration around Early Learning Opportunity grants, a United Way early education coalition, and an unsuccessful application for funding to support a Nurse Family Partnership grant.

- One respondent noted that although there was a great deal of interest in early childhood issues and various efforts to discuss strategies, there were no means to pursue a sustained collaborative effort until Smart Beginnings funding became available.

- A few grantees explicitly mentioned that the community was interested in pursuing a systems approach, but most spoke in more general terms about early childhood, school readiness, and collaboration.

■ **A subset of grantees has already amassed significant achievements in early childhood systems-building work.** Richmond has developed a system for coordinating home visiting programs that increases access to the service and the fit between the program and the recipient. This process is a State and national model for the coordination of a service that has a strong evidence base and which is likely to see increased Federal funding in the next few years. Both Richmond and South Hampton Roads have done very effective outreach to their local business and civic communities. The Fairfax coalition represents an excellent example of places in which the public sector is willing and able to play a lead role in school readiness work. Fairfax's neighborhood school readiness coalitions are an innovative effort to address school transition issues at the level that parents most directly experience them.

■ **Smart Beginnings will increasingly face the challenge of working in communities where there has been limited collaboration around and emphasis on early childhood issues.** Many of the early Smart Beginnings grantees were selected because they had engaged in collaborative activities around early childhood. Among the Planning Grantees interviewed, however, three of six did not describe a history of local collaboration in explaining why their organization had applied for a Smart Beginnings grant. These respondents indicated that their applications were motivated more by the availability of the funding than by an existing focus on early childhood issues. The absence of a history of collaboration around early childhood is reflected in and amplified by the presence of coordinators who lack experience in this area. Two of the other three planning grants described levels of collaboration that were generally much more limited than most of the grantees that had received funding in previous years. As Smart Beginnings continues to expand, it is likely to encounter future grantees that are more similar to these Planning Grantees than to other types. This will mean that future grantees are likely to need more support as they attempt to advance their work.

Grantees Vary in Their Level of Understanding of What Is Expected of Them by Smart Beginnings

Local coalition coordinators were asked about their expectations regarding Smart Beginnings and how these have changed over time. While Smart Beginnings has a group of grantees that have a very advanced understanding of what the coalition is trying to achieve, most grantees, especially more recent ones, have a very general understanding. This is especially true in terms of understanding the importance of infrastructure and systems development. Although most Planning Grantees understand the need to complete an assessment and create a plan focused on school readiness issues, they do not necessarily have a bigger-picture view of how this will help strengthen their communities' overall approach to early childhood. Some grantees do not appear to understand what is meant by systems building and systems development. This is not entirely unexpected and is consistent with the experience of other States where this type of work is being done. The general issue speaks to the need for VECF to develop a consistent message, strong materials, and an effective monitoring system that will promote success for grantees and the coalition. Given that the newer grantees face challenges related to community capacity, this focus will be especially important as the coalition develops over the next few years.

Technical Assistance (TA) and Other Resources and Support

Local coalition coordinators were asked to assess the TA that they had received and to describe their future needs for it. The key findings in this area are as follows:

- **Current TA and support are generally viewed positively.** Overall, most grantees have positive things to say about the TA that VECF has provided. VECF staff is seen as responsive and open to communication. Several grantees reported that they found the development of templates that can be tailored to particular communities to be extremely helpful. They very much appreciate the creation of brochures to which they can add their own contact information. They are interested in additional materials such as PowerPoint presentations, materials tailored to the business community, and templates for newsletters that they can use or adapt for their own purposes.
- **Peer learning and sharing are important sources of TA.** Grantees report that some of the best resources and support come from each other. Much of this exchange has been informal; grantees mentioned that they made connections or shared information because they happened to be sitting next to another grantee at a meeting. Although VECF has sometimes helped make these connections, grantees think that it should make more formal efforts to do so. Nine grantees specifically suggested devoting more time during meetings for grantees to share experiences and best practices. Four grantees specifically suggested a listserv that would allow grantees to ask one another questions and share materials; one suggested that Facebook be used for this purpose. Four grantees suggested that there should be a clearinghouse or a place on the VECF Web site to which grantees can post and share materials. Four grantees mentioned receiving materials or support from the South Hampton Roads grantee and noted that this was very helpful.

- **More advanced grantees feel that TA is not always developmentally appropriate.** Four of the more advanced grantees raised concerns about how well group TA is structured for grantees at different developmental stages. These grantees felt that they were sometimes being required to participate in TA activities that were not useful to them. Two mentioned that they tended to need help on more technical issues and sought support from outside consultants; they would like additional support from VECF. Advanced grantees represent an important resource for newer grantees but also have specific needs that may require tailored responses.

Strengths and Challenges of Smart Beginnings Coalitions

Self-assessment of strengths and challenges is a useful tool for understanding the experiences of Smart Beginnings grantees. Smart Beginnings communities provided varied responses to a question about what has been working well in their communities.

- **Specialized workgroups can be a useful tool.** Four respondents mentioned their coalition structure as being a success. Two Getting Ready Grantees and one Sustainability Grantee described functional workgroups focused on specific issues with ties to a leadership council that oversees the coalition. The use of workgroups enabled the communities to bring people into the overall effort who otherwise might not get involved with addressing the general topic of school readiness and early childhood systems. One coalition that mentioned coalition structure as a strength was in the Sustaining stage and described a structure that separated business and civic leadership from early childhood program leadership because they found it more useful to achieving their overall goals. Business leaders operate in a different culture than do early childhood program leaders, and they found that meetings were more productive if done separately.

The strengths and challenges that grantees mention vary, but obtaining business involvement is a major challenge for many communities.

- **Some communities have successfully generated business involvement.** Four communities mentioned business engagement as something that was working well. Three of these four had reached the Sustaining stage, and one was a Planning Grantee.
- **United Way involvement was important for two communities.**
- **A small number of communities saw their involvement in State-level early childhood activities as important to their success.** Two coalitions indicated that they have been extensively involved with State early childhood efforts that go beyond their role as Smart Beginnings grantees and that this had helped to shape their community-level work.
- **A focus on professional development was a source of strength for some communities.** Two communities indicated that their focus on professional development was a critical part of their success.
- **Involved and willing partners represented a strength in multiple communities.** Many coalitions mentioned general issues related to building partnerships and the willingness of community members to work together.

Grantees tended to agree more on issues surrounding what is not working well and the challenges that they face in overcoming barriers.

- **Obtaining business involvement was the most common challenge.** Nine respondents indicated that obtaining business involvement in Smart Beginnings was a major challenge. This included three Getting Ready Grantees, five Planning Grantees, and one Sustaining Grantee. Two grantees felt that they could ultimately obtain business involvement, but not in the way that it is required under the grant (i.e., active involvement in the Leadership Council).
- **Capacity posed a challenge in some communities.** Four grantees mentioned the limited capacity of the entity responsible for leading the coalition. A few indicated that although great ideas were being put forth, there was a real challenge in providing the support needed to carry them out or in determining where to focus resources. Among those making these comments were one community in the Planning stage; one in the Getting Ready stage; and two in the Sustaining stage, in which the communities had embraced the effort and were moving forward on implementation in multiple areas. In a related issue, two respondents mentioned the challenge of getting collaborative participants to play an active role beyond attending meetings.
- **Multiple communities mentioned a variety of other challenges:**
  - Three communities each mentioned the challenge of moving forward on a regional effort that involved multiple communities and government jurisdictions, the economy, and the limited availability of indicator data that measures the key areas on which the coalition wants to focus.
  - Two communities each mentioned turf issues within the community, challenges involving schools, and challenges involving private daycare providers.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Smart Beginnings coordinators were asked about any monitoring and evaluation activities that they were undertaking. Key findings include the following:

- **Most evaluation activities were undertaken for monitoring purposes and not focused on long-term outcomes.** Grantees reported monitoring implementation of work plans to ensure that implementation of activities and completion of deliverables were on schedule. A few have also used such data to keep stakeholders engaged, to get community buy-in, and to recruit new coalition members.

  For those grantees that are going beyond monitoring, most are capturing short-term outcomes related to their activities, such as

  - Level of satisfaction (e.g., administering satisfaction surveys),
  - Changes in knowledge (e.g., using pre-and post-tests), and
  - Program reach (e.g., the number of children identified for a service, the number of referrals generated, the number of hits on the Web site).

Some Smart Beginnings coalitions have administered surveys after training and educational sessions with parents and daycare workers. These surveys are used to assess changes in knowledge based on the educational presentation and level of satisfaction; this information is then used to improve the quality of the information provided. One program has tracked referral rates.

Evaluating long-term outcomes and impact of activities has been less of a focus. For example, one grantee is tracking the number of parenting resources that have been distributed but is not evaluating the usefulness of these resources. For those thinking about impact, most are relying on data sources related to school performance. A few have mentioned using PALS-K data that can be used to track changes in school performance over time.

- **Most Smart Beginnings coalitions are not integrating the Getting Ready Indicators into their planning and evaluation activities.**

A few grantees thought that the Getting Ready Indicators provide a useful framework to help structure coalition activities and provide common outcomes for Smart Beginnings coalitions and others working on early childhood. One grantee reported actively using the Getting Ready Indicators as a framework and developing its coalition strategies with these outcomes in mind. Another Planning Grantee is working on incorporating these indicators into the strategic plan.

Most grantees were uncertain about the usefulness of the Getting Ready Indicators. Some chose to proceed without using them in their strategic plan or other data collection efforts. One grantee that had completed the assessment process chose not to use the indicators, choosing instead to structure its data collection around content areas. A few grantees have formed committees or workgroups focused on data or evaluation and have tasked these with addressing data use. Other grantees have used the indicators because they felt that they were required to do so, and others were uncertain as to the usefulness of the indicators. Grantees that used the indicators did not know what value they added or how to incorporate them. A few coordinators commented that the Getting Ready Indicators are too broad, questioned the link between these indicators and school readiness, and suggested a need for indicators that are more closely linked to school performance. One grantee views the Getting Ready Indicators as supplementing other assessment data that seem more directly relevant to their activities.

Aside from the challenge of how to incorporate the indicators, grantees reported that collecting the data was also challenging. The Getting Ready Indicator data are not standardized and are either unavailable or incomplete. For those coalitions that cover multiple counties, this makes comparisons across communities fairly difficult. Some coordinators also expect that ongoing data collection for monitoring their progress will also prove difficult.

- **Smart Beginnings coalitions have minimal capacity to address evaluation, which is typically not considered until the later phases of Partnership and Sustainability.**

Smart Beginnings coalitions in early grant stages are focused on completing their assessment and planning for short-term activities but are not thinking about the long term. Only a few coordinators felt that they had the internal capacity to conduct all evaluation activities and were confident that they could lead evaluation work based on previous experiences and skills. These were largely the grantees that had a more indepth understanding of early childhood systems building and coalition work. Beyond the coordinator, several coalitions have formed an evaluation workgroup or committee to coordinate data and evaluation tasks.

At least one-third of grantees contract out for evaluation support, mostly focused on program evaluation. For example, one grantee has hired a consultant to evaluate the effect of its early childhood intervention because it does not have the knowledge and expertise required to conduct such an evaluation. A few have chosen to partner with local colleges and universities to assist them in developing logic models and evaluation plans, including measures to track each key activity.

Some coalitions, especially those with limited capacity, requested additional support from VECF related to evaluation. Coordinators suggested that VECF could provide the following:

- Information on evaluation resources,
- Guidance on using the Getting Ready Indicators,
- Improvement of data indicators and what should be monitored, and
- Leadership on improving the data infrastructure.

Some coordinators would like more guidance from VECF on the relevance of the indicators in their day-to-day work and how to incorporate the indicators into their long-term planning. Others felt that VECF could select or develop indicators that are better measures of school readiness and socio-emotional development. Those coordinators needing evaluation support would appreciate receiving more evaluation resources or a list of potential evaluators whom they could hire. Several coordinators would like VECF to play a leadership role in developing the data infrastructure across the State and in advocating for standard data collection procedures or the collection of minimum data elements statewide. Some coordinators felt that they are not in a position to undertake the level of effort that would be required to make this type of systems change in a community and that VECF is better positioned to do so.

Sustainability Represents a Major Challenge for Smart Beginnings Coalitions

The Smart Beginnings model is designed to provide several years of support to grantees with the intent that they will be able to build up a record of accomplishments and relationships that allow the grantees to sustain themselves. Evidence cited in the literature review indicates that coalitions can sustain themselves over time without funding. However, the literature does not address how the loss of funding impacts their effectiveness. In addition, the literature does not speak to a larger point about whether communities can maintain a network of coalitions that are supported by State-level leadership without State-level funding. The interviews with Smart Beginnings coalitions raise questions about the long-term viability of VECF's strategy of a defined and limited funding period.

- Two of the three Partnership Grantees expressed concern about their ability to sustain their efforts and to obtain the match that they will need to become a Sustaining Grantee. The third Partnership Grantee focused on strategies for obtaining funding but is clearly not in a position to know where their match is coming from. Given that two coalitions have already failed to obtain the match needed to advance to the next level of funding, this finding suggests that the matching requirements may present an obstacle to grantees completing the full cycle of funding available through VECF.
- While most of the Sustaining Grantees and Partners have obtained support that will enable them to move forward with coalition work, one of them has lost its coordinator's position because of lack of funding. This grantee is, in many ways, most similar to the newer cohorts of grantees.
- Three of the five Sustaining Grantees and Partners raised questions about the nature of their relationship with VECF as funding ends. While these coalitions will continue to function, the extent to which they participate in the network of Smart Beginnings coalitions and the level of influence that VECF will have with them is questionable.
- Most Planning and Getting Ready Grantees discussed sustainability in very general terms; it is clearly not one of their main concerns, given where they are in the funding cycle. However, two of the Planning Grantees indicated that they were skeptical about sustaining the coalition using community resources.

Community Suggestions for Strengthening the Smart Beginnings Model

Grantees were asked what changes they would make to the VECF model or approach.

- **The most common change suggested was focused on lengthening the time for particular grant types.** Nine of the 13 Planning, Getting Ready, and Partnership Grantees suggested that there should be more time for planning. Sustaining coalitions did not mention requests for longer planning grants; this is not surprising given that they did not participate in these stages under VECF. This finding may also reflect the fact that they were in a better position to create a plan because of their history of collaboration on early childhood issues. Three grantees mentioned a need for longer Partnership Grants and two suggested longer Getting Ready Grants. One grantee suggested that the focus should be on whether a coalition is making progress and not on a specific deadline to complete a grant stage.
- **Funding during the planning period was also a concern for a few grantees.** A Partnership Grantee indicated that it needs more funding to afford a coordinator with the rights skills and experience. Two Getting Ready Grantees indicated that there needed to be more funding during the planning phase so that a full-time coordinator could be hired at that time. Another Getting Ready Grantee suggested that the amount of funding would have been problematic if they had gotten started on time, but because they were delayed, they had lower costs for salaries and expenses.
- **Suggestions related to the match requirement were the second most common change requested by grantees.** Five grantees at various stages of the process

suggested that the match requirements were too high or should be more flexible in terms of counting inkind contributions. A few of these grantees mentioned that the match is particularly difficult in the current economy or in places such as rural areas that have fewer resources. Three of the communities in the Sustaining stage raised concerns about the end of the funding cycle and expressed doubts that they would be able to continue their participation in the Smart Beginnings network without financial support.

- **A variety of other suggestions were made by smaller numbers of respondents.** Two grantees questioned the requirements for active business participation within the leadership council and the coalition. They suggested that it is fine to require business involvement in the work, but communities should determine how to do so most effectively in their local context. Two grantees raised concerns that Smart Beginnings is too "Richmond focused" and suggested that it would be useful to hold meetings in other regions so that VECF staff and Smart Beginnings coalitions can get a better sense of community efforts and context. Two of the communities in the Sustaining phase raised concern that there was a lack of clarity over the outcomes that Smart Beginnings is trying to achieve and that this might threaten the survivability of the coalition. Two Planning Grantees felt that there needed to be more of an emphasis on branding and that all communities should use the same logo.

B. Support From State-Level Organizations for Early Childhood Coalitions: Experiences in Other States

Interviews were conducted with leaders with knowledge of six other States' coalitions in which State-level organizations provide support to community coalitions for planning and implementation of comprehensive approaches to early childhood. For all but one of these interviews, the leaders were current staff; in one case, they were leaders who had been involved with a coalition for many years and were thought to have the historical perspective that would provide the most relevant information for this review. The State coalitions participating in these interviews included

- Arizona's First Things First,
- Connecticut's Discovery coalition,
- Michigan's Great Start coalition,
- Minnesota's KIDS PLUS Early Childhood coalition,
- North Carolina Smart Start, and
- Oklahoma Smart Start.

Each of these coalitions is somewhat unique in how it approaches community coalition building, but all share a focus on supporting community-level coalitions through funding and TA provided by a State-level entity. Almost all of the coalitions have some connection to State government, although the extent of the relationship varies. Arizona's First Things

First has the closest connection, with coalition staff functioning as State employees; Minnesota's KIDS PLUS coalition has the most distant relationship, since it is administered by an independent foundation that does not receive direct support from the State budget. There is wide variation in how these coalitions function and how much support they provide to local coalitions. The table below highlights some of the features of these coalitions.

State	Lead Agency or Organization	Funding (Minimum/ Maximum)	Coalition Assessment
Arizona First Things First	State agency	$100,000/$10 million (State hires and provides separate support for the coalition staff person)	Not yet planned or developed
Connecticut Discovery Coalition	Regional foundation (State matching for some of their activities)	$10,000/$50,000 up until this year; $7,500/$50,000 going forward	Tailored Community Self-Assessment Tool
Michigan Great Start	Non-profit public corporation	$120,000/$400,000	Required but not specified (most used Wilder); in the process of developing a tailored tool
Minnesota KidsPLUS	Regional foundation	$4,000 for coordinator stipend; $4,000 for activities*	There is a community visioning process that includes an assessment
North Carolina Smart Start	Non-profit with extensive state support	$169,000/$17.6 million ($104,000/$5.5 million excluding childcare subsidy funds)	Developed a Smart Start Governance Self-Study Tool in 2008
Oklahoma Smart Start	Public-private partnership	$40,000/$120,000	Used Wilder, but coalitions have requested a change because of the burden involved

** The Foundation staff conducts the community assessment and facilitates meetings.*

Funding Approaches

Coalition Funding Levels. As is shown in the table, funding levels differ dramatically across coalitions. Oklahoma and Michigan are most similar to Smart Beginnings in terms of the amount of funding provided. The difference is that in both cases, the funding amount is partially determined by the size and demographic characteristics of the community. Arizona and North Carolina also base funding on community size and characteristics. In the past, Oklahoma has provided smaller amounts of funding for grantees that are in the initial convening stage, in which the coalition has agreed to form but is not quite ready to conduct an assessment or planning. Connecticut funds grantees differently depending on their category: Implementation Grantees receive up to $50,000, Planning Grantees receive up to $20,000, and continuing grantees that have not been able to develop a fully functioning coalition that meets the foundation's criteria receive $7,500 (until this year, it had been $10,000). Michigan is in the process of revisiting its funding amounts and is seeking to lower base funding to create a larger pool of funds that can be used to support implementation of plan activities. They are also considering reducing funding for communities that are unable to meet performance standards with that money also being used to fund the implementation pool.

Matching Requirements. Michigan had a pool of funds for implementation last year but it required a dollar-for-dollar match, which was difficult for many communities, particularly smaller ones, to achieve. They have decided that any future match will be small and done on a sliding scale so that smaller communities will have to meet a smaller percentage match. This is similar to Oklahoma's approach, which requires a match for all stages except the convening stage. The match is set at 20% for their four urban grantees and 10% for all others and can be an in-kind match. Connecticut is in the process of implementing a match for its implementation grantees and is looking to develop a process in which the match increases over time as foundation funding declines.

Frameworks and Overall Focus

Funders have a broad range of expectations regarding coalition organization and focus.

- Minnesota KIDS PLUS has the least structured requirements in terms of expected outcomes. This is combined with a structured approach for planning and assessment. The coalitions are given tremendous flexibility in the issues on which they choose to focus, which have included safety, literacy, school readiness, home visiting programs, and parenting education. Its funder, Northland Foundation, views a key goal of the coalition to be raising awareness of early childhood issues. The foundation emphasizes leadership development among all participants, rather than focusing exclusively or even more on high-level leadership, because such leaders often do not have the time to sustain activities. Although high-level leaders should be included, they usually can participate only in key events.

  The grant period corresponds roughly to three phases:

  - Community visioning (6–12 months),
  - Project implementation (12 months), and
  - Sustainable operation (ongoing).

  The foundation guides the coalition using a community-organizing model consisting of the following steps:

  - **Community Assessment.** The Northland staff spends a few days to conduct 30–50 interviews with community members who are identified through a variety of methods, including recommendations from community members and newspaper ads. Based on this information, they prepare a document.
  - **Community Discussion.** The Northland staff organizes a community meeting to review these findings and get feedback. During the meeting, staff members focus

on questions such as the following: Is this accurate? Is there additional information we need to gather? Are there surprises? What are the strengths and gaps?

- **Speak-Out.** Northland staff create a panel with representation from all major sectors, including public officials, Head Start providers, early childhood providers, and the business community. The panel members make presentations and community members are welcomed to comment. This step is important for public engagement.

- **Visioning Session.** Northland facilitates a visioning session in which the community identifies broad goals (roadmap for action). They then conduct action planning over two sessions. They identify both short-term "easy" actions as well as long-term actions that will require more time and resources. This process is useful because it includes the "easy wins" that appeal to some people, with larger goals that will appeal to others. Some communities use a task force structure to implement activities; several task forces usually operate simultaneously.

■ **Connecticut's Discovery Coalition** has become increasingly structured as time goes by but is still less structured than most of the other coalitions interviewed. They began with a flexible approach that recognized the vast differences in the communities in which they worked. These communities ranged from a few thousand people to 150,000 and had vastly different infrastructures and resources. Connecticut has focused on parent engagement and has provided special funds for parent leadership training opportunities. Its grant application requires signatures of a chief elected official, the superintendent, a collaborative agent (nonprofit), the chair of a school readiness council (another community coalition, with a different funding source, focused on young children), the chair of the Discovery collaborative (if there is one; some communities have combined the school readiness council and Discovery collaborative), and a parent or leader of a parent advocacy group. Based on experience, Connecticut has tried to become more structured, particularly in its expectations. The program has found that it needs to be clearer about expectations to explain the link between the capacity building that it is trying to promote and its ultimate outcomes. It has increasingly tried to articulate in detailed and observable ways what it considers to be success. Although it has conducted training in results-based accountability, Connecticut does not appear to have required coalitions to use it in creating plans or determining their own success.

■ **North Carolina Smart Start** laid the groundwork for many of the early childhood coalitions that have developed since and has had considerable influence, particularly on the group that will be described in the rest of this section. Nevertheless, it is an outlier in terms of the amount of funding that communities receive. While it has always included strategies related to family support, it has tended toward a great emphasis on the early care and education sector compared to many of the comprehensive coalitions that followed it. The amount of funding and the requirements for the creation of formal nonprofits entities at the community-level means that Smart Start is considerably more structured than either of the other two coalitions discussed so far. The community entities are overseen and supported by the North Carolina Partnership for Children. The community-level nonprofit organizations that oversee Smart Start have very specific requirements for board membership. The advantage of requiring the creation of nonprofits not tied to other organizations was that they were independent entities not tied to the interests and rules of a specific organization. The challenge was that this required a great deal of attention and investment in organizing and structuring these entities. Smart Start has always put a strong focus on business involvement and public engagement. The regional councils, with State support, are actively involved in mobilizing parents to inform and educate legislators about early childhood programs and coalitions.

- **Oklahoma Smart Start** is similar to Smart Beginnings in having rolled out its coalition over a number of years in a growing set of communities. It began in 2003 with six communities that received funding under United Way's Success by Six and has expanded to 18. It hopes to expand further to cover the entire State as its budget permits. Like Smart Beginnings, funding is provided to a community-level entity that plays the role of fiscal agent. Oklahoma Smart Start is overseen by the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness, a legislatively mandated entity with a mix of public and private members. In 2008, the partnership's Board was designated as the State's Early Childhood Advisory Council.

  Communities are encouraged to draw from a broad base and to bring together a diverse group including parents, service contractor, business representatives, the faith community, the nonprofit community, the government, schools, and the media. It requires a leadership committee but does not have requirements for a specific composition. There are four stages through which grantees pass: convening; assessing, planning, and developing; implementing; and going to scale. Currently, it is not making use of the convening stage. There are no specific periods for advancing through the stages, and the distinction between the implementation and going-to-scale phases is not entirely clear. Coalitions are required to work on building a comprehensive system that encompasses health and nutrition; early care and education; family involvement and support; early intervention; and informal community supports such as recreational activities, churches, and community groups. All coalitions are expected to focus on public engagement and public policy issues related to early childhood. The annual reports from the communities show a variable focus on systems work, with much of the reporting covering project- or program-related activities.

- **Michigan's Great Start** coalition began with a relatively small set of communities but quickly grew to a statewide coalition as a result of strong political support and extensive investment from the private foundation community. The coalition is overseen and supported by the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC), which includes a mix of public and private members appointed by the governor and the State's intermediate school districts, which are the entities that receive the community-level support funding. The intermediate school districts are responsible for hiring a coordinator for the community coalitions, though about one-quarter of them contracted out responsibility for this work. The grantees proceed through three stages: a 6-month startup phase in which a coordinator is hired and a coalition is developed; a 1-year planning phase; and 2 implementation years with slightly different expectations for each of the years. At this point, it is expected that once these initial stages have been completed, grantees will be funded in 3-year cycles with continued monitoring and with full-scale plan revisions due every 3 years.

  Great Start has a comprehensive focus with five substantive component areas identified: pediatric and family health, social and emotional health, childcare and early education, parenting leadership, and family support and basic needs. Of all the coalitions that are covered in this report, Great Start has put the greatest emphasis on system development. Michigan has identified nine infrastructure elements around which grantees are expected to make different levels of progress at each stage. The infrastructure elements are

- Collaborative governance,
- Accountability, results, and standards,
- Data and information systems,
- Professional development and TA,
- Parent and community engagement,
- Public will building and strategic communication,
- Public policy education,
- Service system integration, and
- Financing and fund development.

Great Start's summary of the expectations with regard to each of the infrastructure elements is included in Appendix A. Great Start requires a comprehensive community assessment that includes an analysis of indicator data, a strategic review of the component areas, and an early childhood infrastructure review examining each of the infrastructure elements.

- **Arizona's First Things First** is the newest of the coalitions. It is also the only one with a dedicated tax that provides support. The coalition was created as a result of a 2006 voter referendum designating a portion of the tobacco tax to promoting school readiness. At the time of their interviews, the communities were developing the application for the second year of funding. They are working through 31 regional councils—which vary dramatically in geographic size—that are charged with mobilizing key stakeholders and designing early childhood systems within their community. For example, while Phoenix is covered by three councils, other councils in more rural areas cover huge geographic regions. Regional coordinators, who are hired by the State office, lead the development of regional partnership councils covering a wide range of stakeholders. Funding is based on a formula that includes the population and the percentage of at-risk children. Of all the coalitions described in this report, Arizona's is the most fully embedded within the State government. State and regional staff are State employees. This structure, combined with the large amount of funding, makes it similar to North Carolina's Smart Start in having the most formal set of rules for how regional entities operate. The regional boards are made up of 11 members—who must reside or work in the region—and must include at least

    - One parent of a child aged 5 or younger at the time of their appointment to the council;
    - One childcare provider;

- One health services provider;
- One public school administrator;
- One early childhood educator;
- One member of the business community;
- One representative of the faith community;
- One representative of a philanthropic organization; and
- If an Indian tribe is located in the region, one public official or employee or a tribal government.

First Things First has always intended to focus on systems and infrastructure development. However, it has had to spend its first few years focused on developing procedures, getting councils up and running, and getting plans in place. It has now begun to better define its systems focus and has identified six results to be pursued:

- All children have access to high-quality early care and education (Quality and Access).
- All children have access to high-quality preventive and continuous health care (Health).
- All early childhood development and health professionals are well prepared and highly skilled (Professional Development).
- All families actively engage in children's success (Family Support).
- The early childhood system is coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive (Coordination).
- Arizonans substantially support early childhood efforts both financially and politically (Communication).

Approaches to TA

Developing an effective approach to providing TA to local communities is a significant challenge for State entities focused on early childhood system development. States take a variety of approaches to TA. North Carolina, with the longest history of doing this work, has reorganized its TA system four times. It has gone back and forth between assigning TA providers to certain counties and assigning TA providers to specific TA requests based on their expertise in particular topics. Key informants suggested that an approach that combines these two strategies may be ideal. The Minnesota foundation conducts strategic planning sessions for its grantees. This level of support may be particularly useful when grants are as small as those offered in Minnesota. In Arizona, the coalition coordinators are State staff, but they are still supported by a TA system made up of regional coordinators and topic specialists. Connecticut's TA is very broad and consists of a variety of different training sessions and seminars and a Web site that includes a diverse set of tools that grantees may use. Although this approach may reach the needs of all grantees eventually, it is not particularly focused or targeted. Michigan attempts to provide more focused TA.

It has just developed enough capacity to hire multiple TA staff members, including those who focus on particular regions and one who focuses on parent leadership development. Participation in TA is a requirement of the grant. Michigan structures its annual meetings so that groups of similar grantees have time to discuss experiences and issues and develop their own solutions. Michigan's TA focuses on helping grantees meet the grant's specific expectations.

Approaches to Evaluation and Monitoring

Evaluation and monitoring are challenging areas for early childhood coalition building efforts focused on systems change. States are taking two key approaches: conducting statewide evaluations and, to various degrees, monitoring community progress.

Statewide Evaluation Efforts. Three State coalitions (Arizona, Connecticut, and Michigan) are in the process of conducting large-scale evaluations, which are still in the early phases. Both Connecticut and Michigan have developed a theory of change and adopted a framework that will guide their processes. Arizona is conducting a large scale State-level evaluation. It would also like to focus on the systems work but is unsure how to evaluate this. North Carolina has invested significant funds in a variety of evaluation activities designed to estimate the effect that Smart Start is having at the State level. These kinds of evaluation efforts have often included statewide surveys and data collection from administrative systems such as those administered by childcare agencies. Issues related to sample sizes, regional boundaries, and the limited quality of much administrative data make it difficult to conduct evaluations that can assess the effect of coalition building at the community level.

Assessment and Monitoring of Local Coalitions. Statewide entities recognize the need to collect data on local coalition performance both for monitoring purposes and for maintaining or enhancing support for the coalition among policymakers and other stakeholders. Many key informants mentioned that demonstrating the "real impact" of statewide coalitions has been a challenge. They point to anecdotal evidence that their efforts and funding of local activities have made a difference in communities, but other types of evidence are harder to come by. State key informants reported that local coalitions are conducting minimal evaluation. The funded coalitions are expected to conduct planning, which often involves identifying goals, objectives, and measures. One key informant mentioned that the local coalitions may track reach, but conducting evaluation beyond this basic outcome is not a priority and is not often undertaken. Arizona's key informant mentioned that the State is struggling to decide what direction it will take to evaluate the performance of each local coalition and how to use the data collected for monitoring purposes.

States have used a variety of tools to monitor the effectiveness of their coalitions:

- Oklahoma and North Carolina have created tailored self-assessment tools that coalitions can use to monitor governance, communication, and effectiveness. The Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness has been using the Wilder tool since it began. The tool is paired with a TA strategy designed to address any issues that are uncovered through the use of the tool. The TA strategy was implemented after the tool had been administered a few times, making the tool much more of a resource for community improvement. While the State continues to find the tool useful, the local coalitions have asked it to explore alternatives, because coordinators and partners view the tool as burdensome. The partnership is looking for an alternative tool but will continue to administer Wilder until it finds one.

- Michigan's monitoring system is closely linked to assessing progress on the seven infrastructure elements. As noted above, communities receive expectations for progress in each of the areas and are expected to report on that progress. The State tracks how well the communities are doing through regular contact with them. TA is designed to help communities progress on the infrastructure elements. Michigan also required each coalition to use a self-assessment tool, such as Wilder or something similar to it. Although most used Wilder, Michigan feels that it does not emphasize systems work and would like to create a tool that does. The ECIC has contracted with Pennie Foster-Fishman, who has published extensively in the systems change area, to develop a self-assessment tool that focuses on systems change.

- North Carolina has the greatest experience monitoring and assessing the effect of community partnership work. North Carolina's key informants acknowledged the challenge of obtaining stakeholder buy-in for coalitions that have a strong focus on developing infrastructure and improving systems. It found the development of a performance-based incentive system to be a helpful strategy. The goal was to develop measures that showed that communities were developing systems that were reaching more children and families or that were more responsive to children and families. They cautioned that Smart Start had more resources behind it than many other State efforts and that it is important that other States match the measures that they use in evaluating and assessing coalitions to what can be reasonably expected given the amount of investment the coalition offers.

Successes and Challenges

This section highlights successes and challenges reported by State entities that support early childhood systems-building community coalitions.

Successes

- **Early childhood policy advocacy and implementation.** Community coalitions can play an important role in providing a local perspective that can shape support for early childhood investment and the implementation of child and family policies that support school readiness. The Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness helps local Smart Start coalitions communicate with State agencies and State policymakers regarding policy development and implementation. The local coalitions also conduct outreach within their communities that emphasizes the importance of the early childhood period and the need to invest resources to support school readiness. The community coalitions in North Carolina and Michigan play an important role in communicating with policymakers and legislators about early childhood issues. In both cases, the State entity plays a key role in supporting these communication efforts. As the newest of the group interviewed, Arizona has only begun this work recently but it is following in the model of other States' programs.

- **Parent leadership development.** Parent involvement has played a key role in the success of a number of coalitions. Connecticut has emphasized parent leadership development as a key component in developing community capacity. It provides parent leadership training opportunities as part of its TA and requires the signature of a parent or parent organization representative on the grant applications from the community coalitions. North Carolina has long emphasized the important role that parents play and has encouraged coalitions to mobilize parents to communicate with their legislators in their home districts and on special advocacy days at the State capitol. Michigan has made parent and community engagement one of the infrastructure elements that must be addressed by all coalitions. The coalitions are required to hire, retain, and support a parent coordinator who works at least 60 hours a month. The community coalition must be at least 20% parents, and there must be a parent coalition that develops an annual plan that is supported by the community coalition. In addition, the ECIC has a TA provider who focuses on parent leadership development. Arizona has indicated that it recognizes the importance of parent leadership and requires parent membership on the community boards; it is moving to define better what it means by promoting parent leadership as part of its increasing focus on system issues. Key informants in multiple States mentioned that being able to mobilize parents who can tell how the work of community coalitions helped or supported them can have a tremendous effect on building support for the coalition activities.

- **Business support.** A few of the State coalitions have sought to mobilize business support for early childhood issues. The coalition with the greatest record of success is North Carolina. From the beginning, Smart Start in North Carolina emphasized attracting business support at the State and community levels. Business involvement has been a key to the overall success of Smart Start. The key informant in North Carolina, who led one of the most successful local coalitions, indicated that she developed a separate business council that worked on implementing specific activities, including an annual luncheon to pay tribute to family-friendly employers and an effort to mobilize volunteers to train child care providers in business skills. Oklahoma indicated that many of its community coalitions have good relationships with business though coalitions have generally found that it is not effective to involve business in community coalitions. Instead, Oklahoma's coalitions tend to keep their business contacts informed about their work and then involve them in specific activities to which they can make a concrete contribution. Remaining States did not mention business as playing an active role in their coalition work, although Arizona and Minnesota both require business representation.

Challenges

- **Responding to a difficult budget climate.** Budget situations have presented a tremendous challenge for both Arizona and Michigan. In Arizona, there have been discussions about developing a new referendum that will require that the money allocated to First Things First be redirected to basic services. At the regional level, both Michigan and Arizona have had to address the issue of whether the goal of building infrastructure and focusing on coordination is legitimate in the face of extensive cuts in key services. Leadership for both coalitions is working hard to make the case that investing in infrastructure is critical to the long-term success of early childhood policies. Oklahoma has also struggled with a tight budget climate. It has a long-term plan to expand its coalitions to cover the entire State but has had to proceed slowly due to limited budget allocations. Oklahoma's grants are relatively small; the State is trying to protect them by having the partnership's office bear the burden of their most recent budget cuts.

- **Implementing a focus on systems and infrastructure.** There is a general consensus that it is often challenging to convey the goals and importance of systems work to both coalitions and State and community stakeholders. Many of the Regional Councils in Arizona developed plans with a focus on services; now that it has completed the initial development of the First Things First structure, the State office is going back and trying to encourage more of a systems and infrastructure focus. Although Oklahoma emphasizes systems development, it is clear from the reports from its local communities that they often have a focus on program development and outreach events. The North Carolina key informants noted that systems and infrastructure work does not have the immediate appeal that comes from direct service efforts. They suggested two strategies: one, the use of performance measurements and performance based funding incentives that was described in the previous section; and two, working to implement quality rating systems and quality standards which appeal to policymakers. There is a respectable amount of evidence on what constitutes quality services and the importance of quality in determining the effectiveness of programs. Efforts to increase quality followed by evaluations designed to measure whether quality has increased are very useful.

- **Working in rural communities.** All States reported challenges in working in rural communities, especially in terms of capacity. Rural communities have fewer people to draw on and often struggle to find the leadership that is essential to building successful coalitions.Rural communities also are less likely to have the types of businesses that are able to invest substantial time, effort, and resources in coalition work focused on young children. States have tried to partially address these issues by being flexible in their requirements, providing lower match requirements for rural communities, and providing focused TA for rural communities. Minnesota indicated that the flexibility of its model and its focus on working directly with individual communities to determine their needs works very well with rural communities. Minnesota even felt that rural communities feel well served by the small amounts of money provided, because they recognize that they do not have the resources to sustain larger temporary investments. North Carolina reported that the key to an effective relationship with rural communities begins with setting clear expectations about the uses of funding and what the community needs to do to meet funding requirements. This expectation needs to be followed up by close monitoring and a willingness to intervene when local communities are not meeting expectation or have hired the wrong coordinator. Michigan is providing focused TA to rural communities and including break-out sessions at State conferences where rural communities can work together and learn from one another.

C. Implications of Findings

This final section of the report is based on Altarum's analysis of the findings from the interviews with the Smart Beginnings coordinators and national key-informant interviews and is informed by the literature review that was previously submitted. It is important to note that VECF recognized many of these issues prior to the completion of the report and has begun to take action to implement some of the suggestions included here and to provide additional support to help grantees address barriers identified in the report. Implications are organized by topic.

Funding Structure

The interviews with community Smart Beginnings coordinators and other State organizations around the country provide information that can help shape future discussions about how VECF funds the Smart Beginnings coalitions. Three key areas would benefit from discussion and review.

- **Planning a collaborative community approach to early childhood takes times and resources.** Some grantees raised concerns that sufficient time and resources are not allocated for planning in the early stage of the grants. Grantees are expected to produce a plan in a relatively short period, and the amount of funding is relatively limited. VECF has been flexible in how it handles these requirements, but that has meant that the Planning and Getting Ready stages may be more similar than suggested by their labels and requirements. A number of strategies could be used to provide the time and resources that may be necessary to implement a successful plan. One would be to lengthen the planning process. Another would be to add a pre-planning stage in which a coordinator would be hired and the process of forming a coalition would begin. Finally, it might be useful to review the amount of funding provided for the planning stage since it may represent a challenge in regard to hiring a coordinator and developing a fully functioning coalition.
- **The funding structure for the Smart Beginnings grants has strengths and weaknesses.** Smart Beginnings is unique among the State coalitions examined here in providing a highly variable amount of funding depending on the grantees' stage. The advantage of the funding structure is that VECF makes a substantial investment during the Partnership phase, which has the potential to pay dividends in terms of the effect and the reputation of the Smart Beginnings coalitions. Both Michigan and Oklahoma have struggled with the issue of how to provide enough funding to support staffing of coalition efforts and the implementation of infrastructure or program activities. As noted above, Michigan is seeking to reallocate some of its funding to create an implementation pool. Virginia provides the resources that enable the coalitions to potentially create a significant effect during the Partnership phase. Although this substantial investment has advantages, grantees raised concerns about other phases in the model and whether the level of investment is appropriate. As noted above, a few grantees raised concerns that the planning funds are too limited to cover the staffing and activities required to successfully complete a plan. Another pressing issue is that once grantees have completed the funding cycle, there is a continued need to draw

on their skills and their participation in a statewide network focused on improving systems for children and families. However, it is not clear that they will continue to be active participants in Smart Beginnings once funding ends.

- **Virginia's matching requirements are high compared to other States and are likely going to be difficult for many communities to meet.** VECF matching requirements are high in comparison to other States and may represent a barrier for Virginia communities to successfully complete the planning cycle. Most other States require no match or a very limited match for coalitions. Two States that have used matches have determined that it is necessary to vary the match by the size or resource capacity of the community. Michigan hired a consultant to conduct a study of how to finance community work; they concluded that smaller communities do not have access to much private funding and that it is unrealistic to expect them to obtain a significant funding match. Some prior Virginia grantees have failed to meet the matching requirements that would have enabled them to move on to the next stage of the grant process; current Partnership Grantees doubt their ability to obtain the required match for the Sustaining Grant. Given that literature on coalition building suggests that sustained support is important in building successful coalitions, this finding represents a major barrier to achieving the goals of community coalitions within the Smart Beginnings framework.

In the absence of substantial increases in funding, VECF will need to weigh the tradeoff between (1) continuing to make such a substantial investment in implementation with concerns regarding support for and the length of the planning period and (2) the need to sustain the active participation of all Smart Beginnings coalitions. The matching requirements must be revisited, because they present a thorny challenge for the rural communities and smaller towns that comprise many of Smart Beginnings more recent grantees.

VECF, Virginia's Early Childhood Agenda, and the Smart Beginnings Network

The community coalitions recognize the important role that VECF plays in supporting their work. There is also a sense that even more could come from the joint activities of VECF and the communities in support of a statewide agenda for early childhood. Other States have tried and sometimes succeeded in using the interaction between strong State leadership and community-level work to support efforts to strengthen early childhood policy. This section discusses these points further and describes some of the ways that the full potential of Smart Beginnings can be realized.

- **VECF plays a vital role in helping community coalitions achieve their full potential.** The connection between the communities and a State entity provides a pipeline through which community experiences can influence State policy and procedures. Like programs in Oklahoma and Arizona, VECF can help communities convey concerns over policy and practices to State leaders. VECF can also play a critical role in implementing State policies or guidelines for early childhood. Because it has a direct connection with community coalitions, VECF can play a critical role in helping ensure that innovative policy is enacted in a way that is effective and efficient. For example, VECF can play a critical role in building an effective quality rating and improvement system in which communities learn from each other about how to best promote improvements in quality childcare. The Smart Beginnings coalitions have the potential to play a tremendous role in implementing the core competencies for the early childhood workforce identified through the Virginia Early Childhood Development Alignment Project. In order to realize VECF's potential as a leader in State early childhood policy, it is critical that grantees be taught about the State's various early childhood coalitions and the role of the local coalitions and VECF in helping to support the State's overall goals for children and families. By serving as a conduit of evidence-based practices with strong links to communities, VECF will continue to establish itself as a vital part of the overall early childhood system.

- **Statewide networks of coalitions have tremendous potential.** Smart Start in North Carolina developed tremendous influence as a result of its presence in communities across the State. That influence was cultivated through relationships with influential leaders in the business sector but also came from the North Carolina Partnership for Children's ability to mobilize parents around the State to talk to political leaders about the challenges that families with young children faced and how Smart Start helped to address those challenges. These efforts have been critical to allowing Smart Start to survive changes in administration and to protect its funding in difficult budget years. Michigan represents a more recently established example in which a statewide network was essential in mobilizing support for early childhood investment. The State faced a profoundly difficult budget situation. The ECIC's ability to help mobilize coalition members, particularly parent leaders, in every legislative district in the State was critical in helping reduce the cuts that the early childhood system absorbed. The ECIC sees the maintenance of a statewide network as essential in enabling it to sustain support for the goals of Great Start.

The critical role of statewide networks goes beyond funding. They play an important role in the fostering and sharing of innovative approaches to early childhood. Neither State nor national leaders have the grounding in local experience that enables them to understand every challenge or develop strategies for implementation that fit the needs of every community. Statewide networks allow for the sharing of experiences across similar communities. As more rural communities come to participate in Smart Beginnings, it will be important to work with the communities to share their experiences with each other and within the network and for VECF to support efforts to share this information more broadly so that other States facing similar challenges can benefit from Virginia's experience.

Smart Beginnings: Structure and Key Partners

As Smart Beginnings moves forward, it is important to assess the overall structure of the coalition and how key partners are incorporated into the effort. The following issues emerged from an analysis of the interviews:

- **It is important to maintain flexibility within a well-defined structure.** As VECF clearly recognizes, the capacity of local communities to develop and carry out early childhood plans varies tremendously; many of the communities that are receiving Smart Beginnings grants have dramatically different challenges than previously funded communities. Based on this fact and the experience of other States, VECF clearly needs to maintain flexibility in terms of requirements and expectations. However, this flexibility appears to operate most effectively within a well-defined structure that clearly identifies the goals and means of the overall early childhood coalition. Both Oklahoma and Connecticut respondents indicated that they began with more flexible approaches but became more structured over time as it became clear that this was necessary to help coalitions succeed and to show policymakers and other stakeholders that the coalition was having a positive effect. VECF has begun to take steps to develop a more defined structure for its planning and assessment process. As it does so, VECF must be sure that the structure meets the needs of the multiple communities that are participating. Depending on how VECF stays involved, it may be necessary to grant more flexibility to some of the communities that received funding earlier in order to accommodate the structures they developed when the coalition was taking a more flexible approach.

- **The question of how to involve business and other high-level leadership in coalition work is challenging and may require rethinking.** Requirements to involve the business community are important and need to be maintained and monitored. But there is a great deal of uncertainty over how and when to involve business leaders in coalition work. A few grantees raised questions about whether involving businesses too soon risks alienating them; businesses may become weary of efforts related to building the capacity of the coalition as opposed to addressing early childhood issues. Virginia has some successful examples of business involvement, but these tend to be in communities with higher capacity. There are also successful examples at the national level, with Smart Start North Carolina being the most prominent, but Smart Start involves a larger amount of funding and a more distinct program focus than does Smart Beginnings. Arizona requires business involvement on its boards, but again, many of their coalitions are receiving large funding amounts. Most other States require efforts to involve business without specifying how they should be involved. The issue extends to high-level leaders in general, with some States suggesting that such leaders should be pulled in to help accomplish particular goals or tasks and not be expected to participate in coalition governance activities. Minnesota has emphasized leadership development among all coalition participants, because the foundation's leadership feels that high-level officials and business leaders do not always have the time to devote to coalition activities. VECF grantees clearly need additional support with this issue, including examples that work for different types of communities with different levels of capacity. Any loosening of this requirement would require careful monitoring to ensure that coalitions are continuing to reach out and educate high-level leadership on the importance of early childhood and to seek and obtain buy-in and participation from these leaders in relevant ways.

- **Parent leadership is a critical resource in building an influential network.** The importance of parent leadership has been apparent since the early stages of the development of North Carolina Smart Start. Parents provide vital support for the outreach efforts to coalitions and can have a key effect when reaching out to legislators and other political leaders. Michigan Great Start's recent success in maintaining investment in early childhood despite a disastrous budget situation was attributed to its ability to mobilize its coalitions, particularly its parent leaders, throughout the State. Parent leadership also can help ensure that parent perspectives inform outreach efforts directed at them and can provide an energized volunteer workforce that helps implement key parts of the coalition's agenda. North Carolina, Michigan, Arizona, and Connecticut are emphasizing developing parent leadership; Michigan even requires a parent liaison in each community. VECF may want to discuss how parents can best contribute to Virginia's efforts and what needs to be done to strengthen efforts to promote parent leadership within Smart Beginnings.

Smart Beginnings: Monitoring and Support

The issues of monitoring and support are presented together here because one of the main goals of a monitoring system needs to be to identify areas where communities need support. This area ties into the issue of the overall structure of the coalition, since clear but flexible expectations are a prerequisite to conducting effective monitoring and support. The following issues related to monitoring and support emerged from the interviews:

- **Grantees would benefit from a clearer understanding of the VECF systems- and infrastructure-building goals.** State entities that support early childhood coalition building at the community level struggle with how best to convey the importance of systems building to the community coalitions with which they work. Systems building is a challenging concept and is not something that is intuitive to many of the people involved in coalition work. The challenge is compounded by the experience of having the information presented in multiple, sometimes seemingly contradictory ways. While it is impossible to impose a single framework on the extensive discussions about systems that occur in the early childhood field, it is important for VECF to convey clear expectations for Smart Beginnings grantees regarding what they should be doing in the area of systems building. Michigan Great Start has gone the farthest of the States examined here in this regard. While Smart Beginnings may not need or want to impose the same level of detail on its grantees, a clear, consistent message about expectations regarding systems building would help strengthen grantee efforts and allow VECF to more effectively explain to its stakeholders how and why systems work is important to the overall mission of supporting school readiness.
- **Grantees need support in conducting community needs assessments.** Most VECF grantees struggled with collecting and analyzing indicator data. They often found it difficult to obtain these and other data they needed, particularly from the school system. They did not always appear to have a good grasp of what should be in the community assessments and how they should be used to develop and support their plans. This problem is compounded in communities that must complete assessments covering multiple counties. This is a difficult task and one of the issues that suggests that some of the grantees are being asked to cover areas that are too large in scope to enable effective community planning. VECF clearly recognizes the need for more guidance on community assessments and has taken steps to provide more guidance and structure.
- **Grantees would benefit from more opportunities to share experiences and materials.** A large number of VECF grantees expressed an interest in increased opportunities for sharing their experiences and materials with each other. Among the suggestions for ways to share information were the creation of a listserv, the use of the VECF or Smart Beginnings Web site, and increased opportunities during in-person

meetings. National interviews validated the importance of sharing between communities. Key informants from various States stressed the important role that sharing among communities plays in building stronger, more innovative coalitions and enhancing the leadership of coordinators.

- VECF needs to continue to refine its monitoring system and link it closely to its TA process. VECF program officers do a solid job of communicating and working with local coordinators. They are seen as a resource and a welcome provider of information. However, it is also clear that the communities are still working to understand the overall purpose of the Smart Beginnings coalition, VECF's role in the overall State early childhood efforts, and expectations regarding what should be in their plans and how they should implement them. This has become more challenging as VECF has begun to work with communities that are not as well versed in the direction of early childhood policy and practice. It will become increasingly important for VECF to clearly define the goals and expectations for grantees and to organize the support it provides around those goals and expectations.

Appendix

Great Start Collaboratives: Required Activities Years Orientation through Implementation Year 2

Presented to ECIC Executive Committee on 5/23/07

Background

This document is intended to quantify both the current work that Great Start Collaboratives are currently undertaking, as well as the work that they may potentially undertake in subsequent years.

The bold headers are the infrastructure components of the Great System. These components were determined through a literature review that was conducted during the initial strategic planning for the Great Start system which took place during 2002-2004.

The mission of each Great Start Collaborative is to oversee the planning, implementation and ongoing improvement of the infrastructure of the local, comprehensive early childhood system.

In the Planning Year column, the required tasks of each current Great Start Collaborative, per their contract with the ECIC, are detailed under each heading. The Implementation Year 1 and 2 columns, contain future proposed tasks for each Great Start Collaborative.

The Orientation/Start Up Phase column details the current thinking of the ECIC regarding its initial work with communities funded after 9/30/07.

Orientation/Start Up Phase – 6 months	Planning Year – 12 months	Implementation Year 1 – 12 months	Implementation Year 2 – 12 months
Collaborative Governance	Collaborative Governance	Collaborative Governance	Collaborative Governance
• Establish Great Start Collaborative • Determine & begin implementation of effective, collaborative governance structure • Begin building active and engaged membership • Hire & orient highly qualified GSC Coordinator	• Sustain Great Start Collaborative • Implement effective, collaborative governance structure • Continue development of active and engaged membership • Retain highly qualified GSC Coordinator • Demonstrate commitment to establish and maintain local comprehensive early childhood system	• Sustain Great Start Collaborative • Maintain effective collaborative governance structure • Recruit, orient and support GSC members (as needed) • Retain highly qualified GSC Coordinator • Oversee & participate in implementation of Year 1 Early Childhood Action Agenda • Evaluate progress on Year 1 Action Agenda • Determine priorities for Year 2 Action Agenda	• Sustain Great Start Collaborative • Maintain effective collaborative governance structure • Recruit, orient and support GSC members (as needed) • Retain highly qualified GSC Coordinator • Oversee & participate in implementation of Year 2 Early Childhood Action Agenda • Evaluate progress on Year 2 Action Agenda • Determine Priorities for Year 3 Action Agenda
Not Applicable	Accountability, Results & Standards	Accountability, Results & Standards	Accountability, Results & Standards
	• Complete ECIC provided "Local Early Childhood System Assessment" • Prepare 3-5 Year Strategic Plan • Prepare Year 1 Action Agenda • Prepare ECIC required reports	• Review progress on Year 1 Action Agenda • Determine priorities for Year 2 Action Agenda • Submit required ECIC reports	• Collect and compile data for Great Start results • Update Strategic Plan • Prepare Year 3 Action Agenda • Submit required ECIC reports
Not Applicable	Data & Information Systems	Data & Information Systems	Data & Information Systems
	• Review existing data and information systems via infrastructure review portion of "Local Early Childhood System Assessment • Prepare recommendations for strategic plan • Determine priorities for Year 1 Action Agenda	• Implement Year 1 Action Agenda for local Great Start data and information system • Review progress on Year 1 Action Agenda • Determine priorities for Year 2 Action Agenda	• Implement Year 2 Action Agenda • Review progress on Year 2 • Determine priorities for Year 3 Action Agenda

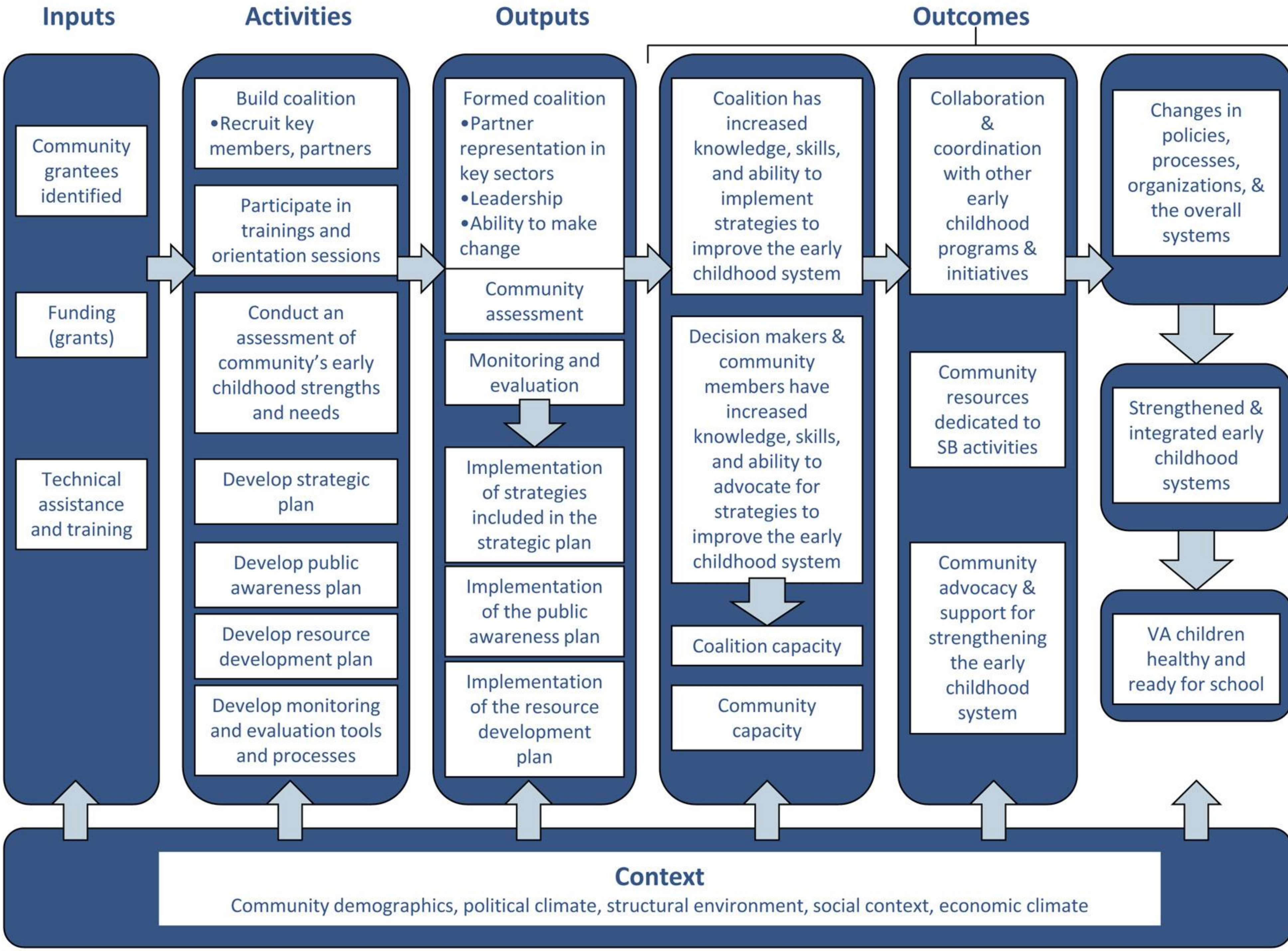
ECIC Technical Assistance	Professional Development & Technical Assistance	Professional Development & Technical Assistance	Professional Development & Technical Assistance
• Participate in orientation & start up TA provided through the auspices of ECIC	• Review existing professional development and technical assistance via infrastructure review portion of "Local Early Childhood System Assessment" • Prepare recommendations for strategic plan • Determine priorities for Year 1 Action Agenda • Participate in ECIC provided Technical Assistance.	• Implement Year 1 Action Agenda recommendations for professional development & technical assistance • Participate & assist w/ provision of ECIC Technical Assistance • Review progress on Year 1 Action Agenda • Determine priorities for Year 2 Action Agenda	• Implement Year 2 Action Agenda • Review progress on Year 2 Action Agenda • Determine priorities for Year 3 Action Agenda

Parent & Community Engagement	**Parent & Community Engagement**	**Parent & Community Engagement**	**Parent & Community Engagement**
• Recruit & begin engagement of parent members for GSC • Develop financial procedures for parent reimbursement and supports • Provide financial & other supports for parent members of GSC • Hire Parent Coordinator(s) for local Great Start Parent Coalition & orient • Participate in ECIC provided TA for parents • Begin formation of local Great Start Parent Coalition, representative of the diversity of the parents in the community	• Continue recruitment & engagement of parent members for GSC • Provide financial & other supports for parent members of GSC • Retain & support Parent Coordinator(s) for local Great Start Parent Coalition • Participate in ECIC provided TA for parents • Support local Great Start Parent Coalition activities	• Recruit, orient, support and engage parent members for GSC • Provide financial & other supports for parent members of GSC • Retain Parent Coordinator of local Great Start Parent Coalition • Prepare & implement annual plan for local Great Start Parent Coalition activities • Support local Great Start Parent Coalition Activities • Participate & assist w/ planning for ECIC TA for parents	• Recruit, orient, support and engage parent members for GSC • Provide financial & other supports for parent members of GSC • Retain Parent Coordinator of local Great Start Parent Coalition • Prepare & implement annual plan for local Great Start Parent Coalition activities • Support local Great Start Parent Coalition Activities • Participate & assist w/ planning for ECIC TA for parents

Public Will Building & Strategic Communication	**Public Will Building & Strategic Communication**	**Public Will Building & Strategic Communication**	**Public Will Building & Strategic Communication**
• Develop communications plan • Develop one or more communication venues (website, etc.)	• Implement communications plan • Develop one or more communication venues (website, etc.) • Provide annual progress report to community • Seek & incorporate feed-back on communications strategies.	• Develop & implement communications plan, based on feed-back solicited from the community • Sustain one or more communications venues, e.g. website • Provide annual progress report to the community	• Develop & implement communications plan, based on feed-back solicited from the community • Sustain one or more communications venues, e.g. website • Provide annual progress report to the community
Public Policy Education	Public Policy Education	Public Policy Education	Public Policy Education
• Attend Star Power Day at the Capital	• Attend Star Power Day at the Capital	• Attend Star Power Day at the Capital • Organize and host two legislative education sessions	• Attend Star Power Day at the Capital • Organize and host two legislative education sessions
Not Applicable	Service System Integration	Service System Integration	Service System Integration
	• Develop pertinent formal written agreements among GSC early childhood service providing partners re: communication, service access, service interface, services coordination and early childhood service delivery. • Develop policies and procedures for the local Great Start system that facilitate service access, interface, coordination, and inclusion of children with disabilities into all early childhood settings.	• Implement written agreements. • Review implementation of written agreements, assess progress, determine needed changes and amend agreements as necessary. • Implement policies and procedures for local Great Start System. • Complete a review of policy and procedure implementation, assess progress, determine needed changed and amend as necessary.	• Review implementation of written agreements, assess progress, determine needed changes and amend as necessary. • Review implementation of policies and procedures for local Great Start System, assess progress, determine needed changes and amend as necessary

Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Local Great Start System Bldg.	Local Great Start System Bldg.
		• Oversee disbursement and use of Great Start infrastructure investment fund.	• Oversee disbursement and use of Great Start infrastructure investment fund.
Not Applicable	Financing & Fund Development	Financing & Fund Development	Financing & Fund Development
	• Review current financing and fund development strategies as required in infrastructure review; • Prepare recommendations for strategic plan. • Determine priorities for Year 1 Action Agenda	• Implement Year 1 Action Agenda • Review progress on Year 1 Action Agenda • Determine priorities for Year 2 Action Agenda.	• Implement Year 2 Action Agenda • Review progress of Year 2 Action Agenda • Determine priorities for Year 3 Action Agenda.

Smart Beginnings Logic Model



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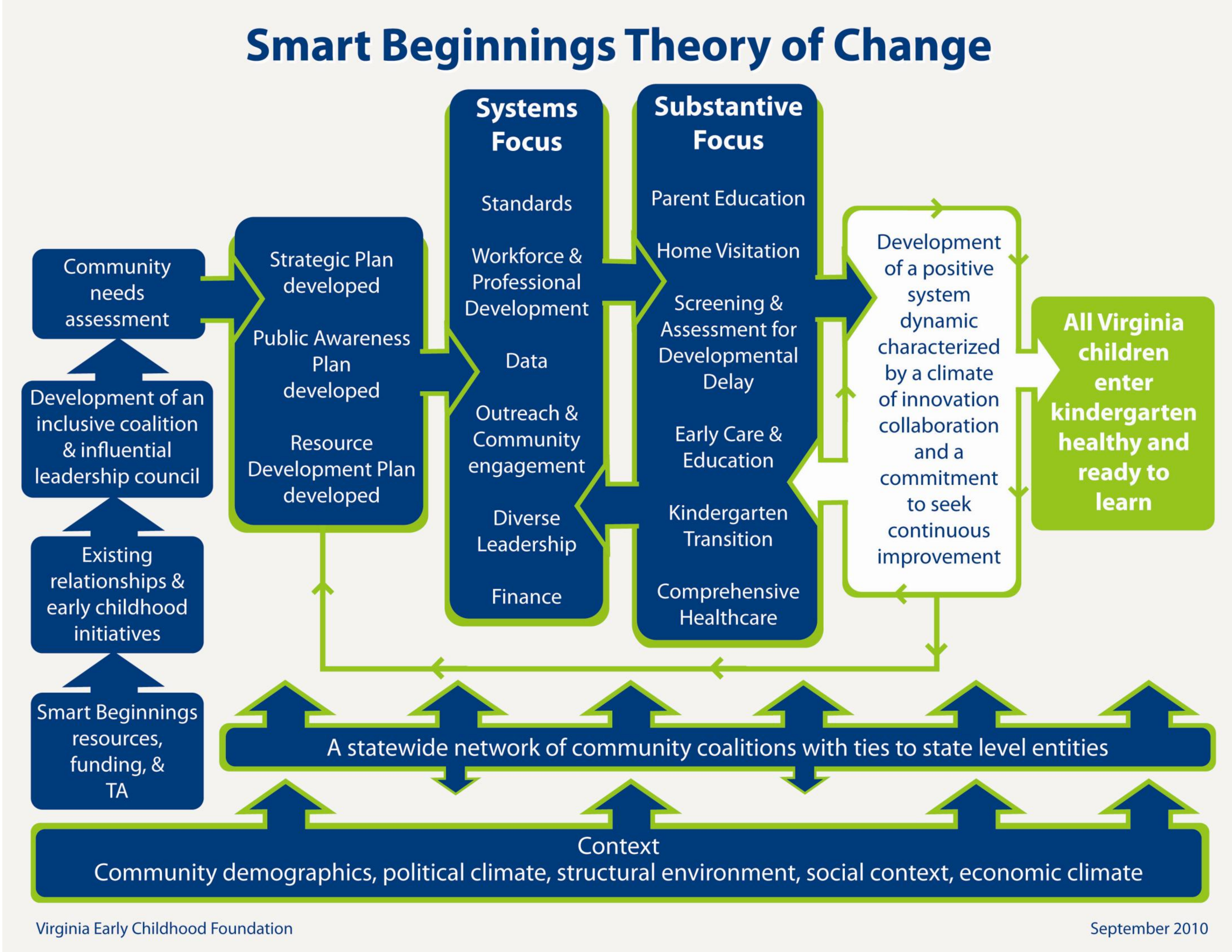
September 2010


Smart Beginnings Theory of Change
Community needs assessment
Development of an inclusive coalition & influential leadership council
Existing relationships & early childhood initiatives
Smart Beginnings resources, funding, & TA
Strategic Plan developed
Public Awareness Plan developed
Resource Development Plan developed
Systems Focus
Standards
Workforce & Professional Development
Data
Outreach & Community engagement
Diverse Leadership
Finance
Substantive Focus
Parent Education
Home Visitation
Screening & Assessment for Developmental Delay
Early Care & Education
Kindergarten Transition
Comprehensive Healthcare
Development of a positive system dynamic characterized by a climate of innovation collaboration and a commitment to seek continuous improvement
All Virginia children enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn
A statewide network of community coalitions with ties to state level entities
Context
Community demographics, political climate, structural environment, social context, economic climate
Virginia Early Childhood Foundation
September 2010

Toolkit Introduction

The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation's (VECF) provides grants, training, and technical assistance to local and regional Smart Beginnings Initiatives to strengthen local early childhood systems throughout Virginia. By strengthening and integrating local early childhood systems, local coalitions can give young children and their families improved access to the care and support necessary (e.g., quality child care, social services) to ensure that children are healthy and developmentally ready for kindergarten. These local coalitions are linked via a statewide network that shares resources, best practices, and outcomes. State-level coordination helps to ensure that the local coalitions are not operating in isolation but are working together to support their individual successes and to advance the state's efforts to provide all its children with the best possible start to school and life.

As part of their technical assistance to local Smart Beginnings Coalitions, VECF asked the Altarum Institute to develop a toolkit that could help coalitions be more successful. This toolkit draws on the literature about what makes effective coalitions. Research supports the theory that successful coalitions, like young children, evolve through developmental stages that are associated with important milestones and share specific characteristics. Like children, coalitions vary greatly in how they develop; following evidence-based and promising practices increases the likelihood that the coalition will succeed.

The toolkit is organized around six components that are essential to high functioning and successful coalitions. Although presented here as distinct components, these elements overlap, interact, and influence one another. Coalitions that develop each of these components will be able to create a positive dynamic that engages coalition members and mobilizes the resources and partners necessary to accomplish its goals.

TOOLKIT CORE COMPONENTS

1 **Leadership.** Ensure that strong leadership is established early in the grant period and sufficiently nurtured.

2 **Membership.** Ensure that the "right mix" of organizations are recruited and prepared for coalition work.

3 **Coalition Structure and Governance.** Create a positive work environment and coalition structure that supports common purpose and productivity.

4 **Assessment and Planning.** Undertake assessment and planning process that will identify community needs, assets, and priority areas, and develop a plan for implementation.

5 **Public Engagement and Stakeholder Involvement.** Engage stakeholders whose involvement or support is critical to plan implementation.

6 **Sustainability and Finance.** Develop a plan to sustain coalition and coalition priorities.

This toolkit will support development in each of these areas. The table of contents on page 2 lists all the tools that are available. The subsequent sections provide some additional information on each of these components and explain why they are so critical to coalition success.

Toolkit Contents

Toolkit **1**
Leadership

Ensure that strong leadership is established early in the grant period and sufficiently nurtured

AVAILABLE TOOLS

TOOL 1
Self Assessment:
Leadership Trait Questionnaire

TOOL 2
Assessing Leadership within the Leadership Council

TOOL 3
Self Assessment:
Developing Coalition Members

TOOL 4
Developing Leadership Goals

Strong leadership is one of the greatest predictors of success and coalition effectiveness. As a Smart Beginnings (SB) coordinator, you play an important role in establishing healthy and successful dynamics, processes, and interactions for your SB coalition. Because **strong leadership is particularly crucial during coalition formation**, you can take steps early to establish leadership. In addition to influencing the coalition activities, leadership is helpful to develop partnerships and mobilize community members.

Coalitions need to ensure that emerging leaders are continually identified and developed within the coalition membership (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, & Allen, 2001; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Developing emerging leaders serves three goals: first, developing the leadership capacity of community members and organizations helps strengthen the community's ability to make meaningful changes and is also an incentive for ongoing coalition participation (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). A coalition that facilitates learning among its members is critical in the development of members' skills and knowledge, which ensures meaningful coalition participation (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993; Cramer, Atwood, & Stoner, 2006). Members who are **more engaged** and **satisfied** foster collaborative environments that are more active and vibrant (Pluye, Potvin, & Denis, 2004a; Pluye, Potvin, Denis, & Pelletier, 2004b; Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). Second, providing leadership opportunities to parents, grassroots partners, and other community members moves them beyond being simply supporters into being leaders who can bring community-level buy-in to the coalition's goals (Ouellete, Lazear, & Chambers, 1999; Evans et al., 2001). Finally, because leadership tenure is often short and leadership is so critical to success, a leadership base must be developed (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001).

Beyond the individual coalition members, Smart Beginnings coalitions need to **establish themselves as legitimate leaders in early childhood;** the community must perceive the coalition as being reliable and competent and able to accomplish its goals. Leaders must be able to reach out to community members and potential partners during the formative stages of a coalition and look for opportunities to publicize coalition work and achievements. Leaders need to seek out and take advantage of opportunities to network with groups that share similar interests. In addition to improving coalition visibility within a community, networking with groups whose primary goals and priorities complement the coalition's mission can lead to the discovery of "new innovations and best practices solutions" (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001, p. 253). The ability of leaders to build relationships and galvanize support among coalition members and external partners contributes to coalition capacity (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). A leader must be able to seek and nurture community connections.

Toolkit 2

Membership

Ensure that the "right mix" of organizations are recruited and prepared for coalition work

AVAILABLE TOOLS

TOOL 1
Inclusion Criteria Checklist

TOOL 2
Assessing Inclusiveness of the Leadership Council and Coalition

TOOL 3
Member Skills and Assets Matrix

TOOL 4
Self Assessment: Membership Engagement

TOOL 5
Promoting Membership Engagement

TOOL 6
Developing Membership Guidelines

TOOL 7
Sample Membership Memorandum of Understanding

An important element of coalition success is membership, which entails **recruiting the "right mix" of organizations and individuals** and **preparing them for coalition work**. Having an impact on a community's approach to early childhood requires a diverse coalition of stakeholders who are able to bring different resources to the table (Kreuter, Lezin, & Young, 2000; Schultz, 2002). Recruiting involves drawing from a **broad range of community sectors and potential stakeholders** (Berkowitz, 2001). Several studies have found that coalition diversity is an important factor in coalition development (Berkowitz, 2001; Wolff, 2001; Cramer, Mueller, & Harrop, 2003; Valente, Chou, & Pentz, 2007; Yates, 2007; Downey, Ireson, Slavova, & McKee, 2008). Inclusion criteria should be developed to achieve the best membership composition to accomplish the coalition's goals (Knitzer & Adely, 2001; Wynn et al., 2006). Criteria could include age, ethnicity, and cultural background, especially if the intervention is targeted at a particular group (Rosenthal, 1997).

Members' skills and attitudes influence how much they can contribute to a coalition; coalition leaders should be equipped to assess skills, areas of expertise, and other assets that members bring to the coalition. Based on a review of the coalition literature, Foster-Fishman et al. (2001) identified the following skills as essential to collaboration: **collaborative skills** such as being respectful, conflict resolution, valuing diversity of opinions, and communication skills; **programmatic skills**, such as program design and analytic and evaluation skills; and **coalition skills** that support the development of coalition processes and defining member roles and responsibilities. Skills assessment allows leaders to appropriately delegate coalition tasks to the members best equipped to carry them out and to identify skill and knowledge gaps that could be remedied by training.

Recruiting involves **identifying members who are both able and willing to join.** Potential members must be committed to both the issue and the coalition (Shultz, 2002). Developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and other formal agreements can solidify member commitments and outline processes and expectations (Wynn et al., 2006). This helps ensure that members understand their role. Finally, to ensure ongoing success, leaders must be able to **create an environment that promotes relationship-building among coalition members.** Coalitions should create a culture that is inclusive and presents an open and accessible decision-making process to all members (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). An open decision-making process is important to the satisfaction and participation of coalition members; members who feel that they are legitimate contributors are more effective members (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Team building, networking activities that facilitate trust and understanding, and the ability to identify and discuss potential conflicts are important elements of a supportive and productive coalition environment.

Toolkit 3

Coalition Structure and Governance

Create a positive work environment and coalition structure that supports common purpose and productivity

AVAILABLE TOOLS

TOOL 1
Vision and Mission Worksheet

TOOL 2
Operational Structure Checklist

TOOL 3
Bylaw Development

TOOL 4
Meeting Agenda and Reporting

Coalition leaders and members must create a positive **work environment and coalition structure that supports common purpose and productivity.** This involves developing organizational capacity with effective communication, strong member relations, the ability to secure sufficient resources, and a culture that is goal- and task-oriented. Creating this environment means clearly defining member roles, as well as creating organizational structures that focus and direct the coalition's work (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Toolkit 3 aims to help coalitions develop and reinforce a vision or mission statement, create an organization structure that members support and understand, ensure that members are clear about their responsibilities, structure efficient and productive meetings, and create an environment that promotes learning and solicits input from members.

First, a coalition needs to **develop and reinforce a vision or mission statement,** a milestone in coalition development (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). This statement should include information on the coalition's values and norms and should be developed with input from members to facilitate buy-in and ownership (Wynn et al., 2006; Knitzer & Adely, 2001). Developing a shared vision and revisiting that shared vision when necessary will keep members focused on the coalition's objectives (Wolff, 2001; Cramer et al., 2003).

To operate effectively, coalitions must create an **operational structure that members support and understand.** The creation of a productive and task-oriented work environment is an important determinant of coalition effectiveness. Organizational processes, such as those for decision-making and conflict resolution, can better manage work and conflict (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Developing appropriate communication mechanisms can help members share skills, gain recognition, increase cooperation, and contribute to shared goals (Chinman, Anderson, Imm, Wandersman, & Goodman, 1996; Kegler, Steckler, Malek, & McLeroy, 1998). Although structure can be useful, it should not be so burdensome that it limits coalition effectiveness. Balancing the coalition's size and goals with the appropriate level of formalized governance procedures is a delicate but necessary process (Green, Daniel, & Novick, 2001). An operational structure includes elements such as bylaws, committees, and workgroups to assume distinct responsibilities, decision-making and conflict resolution processes, and internal mechanisms for formal and informal communication.

TOOLKIT 3
continued

Coalition members need to understand their roles and responsibilities, in part so that they feel essential to the coalition's work and maintain their commitment to it (Kaye & Wolff, 1995). Formal coalitions with structures that support governance, management, and communication are more effective in meeting objectives, but these structures and expectations for roles and responsibilities must be clearly communicated to coalition members (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Coalitions should outline specific responsibilities and associated timelines for coalition members with action plans, meeting agendas, and other tools.

Coalition leaders must also respect the time of their members and **structure meetings to be efficient and productive**. Coalitions must have enough communication among members to ensure that productive relationships are developed, but not require superfluous contact (Cramer et al., 2003; Downey et al., 2008; Foster-Fishman & Behrens, 2007; Kaye & Wolff, 1995; Shultz, 2002; Wynn et al., 2006). Creating a structure that minimizes burden on coalition members and maximizes their ability to contribute in a meaningful way is important to coalition effectiveness (Berkowitz, 2001). Steps such as the identification of meeting objectives, the creation of agendas that are distributed in advance, and the identification of next steps are tools that can help create efficient meetings.

Finally, a well-planned and implemented organizational structure can help **create an environment that promotes continuous improvement and solicits input from coalition members**. Coalitions must create an inclusive culture that presents an open and accessible decision-making process to all members (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Creating a learning environment that facilitates learning among its members and develops members' skills and knowledge can help ensure meaningful coalition participation and member satisfaction (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Cramer et al., 2006; Pluye et al., 2004a; Pluye et al., 2004b; Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). A learning organization can solicit feedback from the larger community, its funders, and technical assistance providers as well as from its members, allowing it to grow and respond to problems as it works toward its goals (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). To promote a learning environment, coalition leaders can facilitate discussions on prior collaborative experiences and identify what helped or hindered success, and regularly assess costs, benefits, and member satisfaction with participation.

Toolkit 4

Assessment and Planning

Undertake assessment and planning process that will identify community needs, assets, and priority areas, and develop a plan for implementation

AVAILABLE TOOLS

TOOL 1
Community Assessment Template

TOOL 2
Data Collection

TOOL 3
Community Assessment Checklist

TOOL 4
Stoplight Decision Making

TOOL 5
Strategic Planning Template

Assessment and planning is the process of **identifying community needs, assets, and priority areas** to inform the development of a strategic plan. A coalition should conduct an environmental scan to identify existing community priorities and social and political factors that can support or limit coalition work. The coalition should not underestimate the role of its community partners and their history of collaboration (Green et al., 2001); existing social and political harmonies or tensions can help or hinder program implementation.

Understanding the community is essential in defining the issues to be addressed. A community assessment will identify needs and resources. This process involves gathering information about the target population, identifying the priority issues, and learning about the communities in which the coalition operates (Meister & Guernsey de Zapien, 2005). Collecting and analyzing indicator data, defining data that could help the coalition reach its goals, and finding ways to get community input are important parts of this process. A valid project will be informed by community needs and will build on strengths and resources already present (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Collecting and understanding data is particularly important, as planners should rely on data for decisions and use it to guide coalition efforts (Downey et al., 2008).

Finally, the coalition **should undertake a strategic planning process** using data to inform coalition efforts; this planning process should take into consideration the level of impact, political climate, potential for sustainability, and available resources uncovered during the environmental scan and community assessment. Although the literature includes multiple strategic planning models, little empirical evidence exists demonstrating higher rates of success with one model over another. However, many of the components emphasized are consistent with other studies of the development of successful coalitions and include identifying supports in the community environment to help implement interventions, planning ahead for evaluation by selecting and monitoring indicators, using data as a "feedback loop" to continuously inform the work of the coalition, identifying key milestones to measure progress and inform decision-making, and developing community support at multiple levels (Gielen & McDonald, 1997; Friedman, 2005; Emery & Trist, 1965; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1991; Racher & Annis, 2008; Florin, Mitchell, & Stevenson, 2000; Kahn et al., 2009).

Toolkit 5

Public Engagement and Stakeholder Involvement

Engage stakeholders whose involvement or support is critical to plan implementation

AVAILABLE TOOLS

TOOL 1
Developing Communication Strategies

TOOL 2
New Partners Tracking Tool

TOOL 3
SB Initiative Integration with the Community

For community systems change to be successful, coalitions must **engage stakeholders whose involvement or support is critical to the initiative's implementation**. The role of community partners should not be underestimated (Green et al., 2001) and recent community initiatives have focused on engaging stakeholders in multiple sectors, including workplaces, schools, health care organizations, community residents, and other communities who are addressing similar issues (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Merzel & D'Afflitti, 2003; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Effective collaboration with stakeholders and the involvement of key community members are important elements of sustainability (Mancini & Marek, 2004).

Coalitions need to work to develop strong relationships with stakeholders by identifying key partners and documenting their needs and priorities. Coalitions should consider how best to reach and involve important stakeholders, how to create mutually beneficial opportunities, and how to recognize stakeholder involvement and contributions. Identifying potential champions is an important step; the limited timelines in grant programs can be a barrier to community involvement, so coalitions must approach powerful community figures who can serve as catalysts for change (Merzel & D'Afflitti, 2003; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Hill et al., 2007). A model focused on rural coalitions identifies a cycle of recruitment, member empowerment, and collaborative efforts that continues until the coalition is representative of the community and all needed partners are at the table (Downey et al., 2008).

Coalitions must **establish an external communication process for key stakeholders**, including a plan that delineates key messages, targeted audiences, communication channels, alliances with media groups, and media and advocacy strategies. In the Results Accountability strategic planning model, Friedman (2005) emphasizes that partner recruitment is a process and encourages coalitions to continuously recruit new, appropriate partners who can help advance each phase of the project. Downey et al. (2008) emphasize outreach steps, including getting the coalition message out, continuously identifying venues for outreach and opportunities for the coalition to disseminate messages, building relationships with media outlets, and keeping the coalition's efforts in the media.

Part of this public engagement is **keeping stakeholders informed of coalition progress;** coalitions should identify activities and accomplishments to share with the broader community and look for ways to connect with existing community priorities or events. Publicizing the coalition's agenda helps ensure that the community recognizes the mission and importance of the coalition and project (Downey et al., 2008). Additionally, coalitions should **identify and pursue needed outreach and education efforts**. Based on needs assessment and asset mapping activities, a coalition should develop a plan for increasing community awareness, conducting community education, and capitalizing on opportunities to connect with established community partners. Coalitions should work to increase awareness in the larger community to establish momentum to continue systems change over time and engage new partners at all levels of the community.

Toolkit 6

Sustainability and Finance

Develop a plan to sustain coalition and coalition priorities

AVAILABLE TOOLS

TOOL 1
Sustaining Impact

TOOL 2
Tracking and Planning for Opportunities

Even at the early stages of a coalition's work it is important to **develop a plan to sustain the coalition and its priorities**. Among the factors associated with sustainability is the development of a sustainability plan early in an initiative (Marek & Mancini, 2003). Beery et al. (2005) concluded that while no factor could fully explain sustainability, a number of factors appear to affect it, including being prepared for the end of the initial funding, having partners committed to the initiative's goals, aggressively pursuing other grants or leveraging other funds, and encouraging partners or other organizations to assimilate programs or aspects of the initiative. Other factors that influence sustainability include the ability of a program to be modified, the presence of a champion, a good fit between the program and the lead organization's mission, tangible benefits to clients and staff, and supportive community stakeholders (Scheirer, 2005). As a part of community outreach, coalitions can **work with champions to find ways to promote the coalition's priorities.** Key leaders and powerful community figures can serve as catalysts for change, helping promote coalition activities and goals (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Hill et al., 2007). A coalition will not be sustained if its members are unhappy, so coalitions should find ways to improve member satisfaction and commitment. Coalitions that can maintain membership are better positioned for long-term sustainability (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). High coalition functioning is associated with sustainability after the initial funding ceases (Feinberg, Bontempo, & Greenberg, 2008).

Developing community ownership over coalition activities has also been associated with sustainability. Increasing community capacity and fostering community ownership are thought to increase the likelihood that the initiative will be implemented and sustained (Okubo & Weidman, 2000; Dearing, Larson, Randall, & Pope, 1998; Merzel & D'Afflitti, 2003; Minkler & Wallerstein, 1997; Mittelmark, 1999). Community capacity and leadership can be developed by providing training to community members, community institutions, and parents; capacity development helps to win the support of community stakeholders and increases the community's ability to implement change (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Involving families in program development helps ensure that the coalition's activities address real community and family needs, increasing the likelihood that the community and stakeholders will sustain the activity (Evans et al, 2001; Thies & McAllister, 2001; Anderson, McIntyre, Rotto, & Robertson, 2002; Ouellette et al., 1991).

Finally, a sustainable coalition is one that can **be flexible and adapt to changes in community needs or environment.** An organization that solicits feedback, responds to data and changes in its environment, and engages its members in addressing problems will be more successful (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). It is likely that the community and environment around a coalition will change with time, and it is important to keep abreast of social and political changes and look for ways to change outdated methods and capitalize on opportunities and new initiatives. Mancini and Marek (2004) describe this as "program responsivity," or the ability to adapt programming to meet changes in community needs.

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SMART BEGINNINGS

Leadership Toolkit

Ensure that strong leadership is established early in the grant period and sufficiently nurtured

Purpose of the Tools

This set of tools will help you assess and think about the development of your leadership abilities as well as the abilities of the leadership council. The tools focus on key areas, skills, and practices that are associated with effective leadership. They will help you identify strengths and gaps in your leadership practices and in the leadership council and can assist you in being more intentional about developing leadership qualities. The tools incorporate information from the coalition literature and are adapted from materials developed by the Turning Point National Program Office, the Virginia Cooperative Extension, the Community Tool Box, and Coalitions Work.

The Leadership Tools

How to Use These Tools

Regardless of your grant type, the tools here may be useful to you as you develop leadership capacity for the coalition. These tools examine leadership, beginning with you as the SB coordinator and then looking outward to the leadership around you. The self-assessment questions in **tools 1 and 3** are a good resource if you are a new SB coordinator; they give you an opportunity to reflect on your own leadership abilities. You can also share these tools with members of the leadership council to help them assess their leadership abilities to strengthen their leadership both within the SB coalition and within the larger community. **Tools 2 and 4** will familiarize you with leadership roles and responsibilities that will benefit the coalition and help you develop leadership goals.

It may be helpful to use the tools annually as you progress through the grant process. For help identifying leadership gaps within the SB coalition and establishing leadership goals to work on throughout the year, you may want to share the self-assessment results with your program officer. In addition to working with your program officer, you may consider working with a mentor. The mentor should be someone whose leadership style you admire and who has time to meet with you regularly. This individual could work more closely with you and assist you with the self-assessment process, developing your leadership goals and providing feedback on your development. You can also access additional leadership training opportunities through local or state organizations such as the Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Leadership Tool 1

Self Assessment: Leadership Trait Questionnaire

This tool allows you to rate yourself on traits shared by strong leaders. As you complete this tool, you may also find it helpful to seek input from family, friends, or members of the leadership council to see how they view you as a leader.

INSTRUCTIONS

For each trait described below, indicate the degree to which this describes you as a leader.

Leadership Traits and Attitudes

	Trait	Description	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	***Collaborative***	Committed to and believes in the benefits of collaboration	1	2	3	4	5
2	***Committed***	High level of commitment to the goal of improving school readiness and to the coalition's mission	1	2	3	4	5
3	***Trusting***	Views other stakeholders positively and trusts their position	1	2	3	4	5
4	***Respectful***	Respects and appreciates differing perspectives	1	2	3	4	5
5	***Articulate***	Communicates effectively with others	1	2	3	4	5
6	***Perceptive***	Discerning and insightful	1	2	3	4	5
7	***Self-Confident***	Believes in oneself and one's ability	1	2	3	4	5
8	***Self-Assured***	Secure with self and free of doubts	1	2	3	4	5
9	***Flexible***	Able to adjust to different situations	1	2	3	4	5
10	***Persistent***	Stays fixed on the goal(s) despite interference	1	2	3	4	5
11	***Determined***	Takes a firm stand, acts with certainty	1	2	3	4	5
12	***Trustworthy***	Acts believable, inspires confidence	1	2	3	4	5
13	***Dependable***	Consistent and reliable	1	2	3	4	5
14	***Friendly***	Shows kindness and warmth	1	2	3	4	5
15	***High Energy***	Has drive, enthusiasm, and a tolerance for stress	1	2	3	4	5

1. What are my *strongest* leadership traits and attitudes that are an asset to the coalition?

2. What are my *weakest* leadership traits and attitudes that I can improve?

Leadership Tool 2

Assessing Leadership within the Leadership Council

INSTRUCTIONS

For each item below, select the rating that best reflects the extent to which you are comfortable acting in each of these roles.

As an SB coordinator, you must be able to manage the internal coalition processes while also serving as a bridge to advance your goals among the broader community. This level of management, which requires you to play several roles, requires a range of abilities and skills. This assessment tool covers key leadership roles and responsibilities that are important to an organization.

	Leadership Roles and Responsibilities		Not Able				Very Able
1	***Visionary***	Maintains a big-picture vision for the coalition; members look to you for inspiration and to keep the coalition moving forward during setbacks.	1	2	3	4	5
2	***Spokesperson***	Feels comfortable acting as the public face of the coalition and feels comfortable speaking publicly to promote the coalition's work.	1	2	3	4	5
3	***Broker***	Continually looks for opportunities to locate resources, approach potential partners, and secure their commitment.	1	2	3	4	5
4	***Negotiator***	Negotiates, solves problems, and resolves conflicts that may arise among members.	1	2	3	4	5
5	***Content Expert***	Provides leadership and expertise in early childhood issues in your community.	1	2	3	4	5
6	***Strategist***	Has good strategic skills—knows what to do, when to do it, and who to involve—that can help coalition members translate their ideas into a good strategic plan and detailed work plan to set the stage for successful implementation.	1	2	3	4	5
7	***Facilitator***	Promotes open dialogue among SB coalition members and creates an environment that is respectful of divergent viewpoints. Observes coalition dynamics and knows when and how to encourage changes to the group and how to develop individual members.	1	2	3	4	5
8	***Coordinator***	Manages the day-to-day work of the coalition, and ensures that activities are moving forward by tracking them, managing deadlines, and remaining accountable to VECF.	1	2	3	4	5

After assessing your leadership strengths and weaknesses—and recognizing that the coalition has varied leadership needs—you should think about ways to distribute leadership roles among members of the leadership council and the broader coalition. The distribution of leadership will allow others to assume important roles and feel greater ownership of the coalition's work. This model of shared leadership will also lessen the chance that any one member will become overburdened and improve the likelihood that you will have a consistent level of participation. **Ongoing development of leadership** is crucial for the coalition's success and sustainability. The next tool will walk you through some exercises to help you think about the concept of shared leadership.

Worksheet for Developing a Shared Leadership Model

After completing the prior assessment, take some time to review the scores and think through the following questions:

1. Which leadership roles do I enjoy?

2. Which leadership roles do I prefer to avoid?

3. Which leadership attributes can I develop in myself?

4. Which leadership roles are better served by other members of the leadership council?

Next, think about the leadership strengths for each leadership council member, and use the following worksheet to match each strength for each member.

	Potential Leadership Roles							
Name of Leadership Council Member	Visionary	Spokesperson	Broker	Negotiator	Content Expert	Strategist	Facilitator	Coordinator

Leadership Tool 3

Self Assessment: Developing Coalition Members

INSTRUCTIONS

For each statement below, indicate how often you exhibit this behavior with coalition members.

A collaborative leader shares power and builds broad-based involvement. There are practices and behaviors that are associated with leaders who actively develop those around them and allow others any opportunity to exercise power and influence. This tool allows you to assess the extent to which you engage in these practices and behaviors.

		Seldom		Sometimes		Almost Always
1	I offer coalition members an active role in decisionmaking	1	2	3	4	5
2	I am open to learning from others	1	2	3	4	5
3	I express confidence in the capabilities of leadership council members	1	2	3	4	5
4	I invest time in developing others	1	2	3	4	5
5	I help others take advantage of opportunities for new experiences	1	2	3	4	5
6	I create opportunities for others to develop their leadership skills	1	2	3	4	5
7	I discuss leadership development with members of my coalition	1	2	3	4	5
8	I work with coalition members to help them develop leadership goals	1	2	3	4	5
9	I reach out to members whose engagement is uncertain	1	2	3	4	5

1. What are my strengths in regard to creating a climate in which others can develop their leadership skills?

2. What can I do to be more effective at creating a climate in which others can develop their leadership skills?

Leadership Tool 4

Developing Leadership Goals

INSTRUCTIONS

Review the results of the assessment completed in tool 2. Areas that scored 4-5 should be considered strengths and areas that scored 1-2 should be considered needs. This information will inform step 1 of this tool. Once you've decided on the coalition needs, steps 2 and 3 will help you develop leadership goals and identify some strategies for leadership development.

Successful coalitions should seek to expand and develop leadership among their members. Because leadership is so important—and the needs for leadership are constantly evolving—emerging leaders should be continually identified and developed within the coalition membership. If you have used the prior tools, then you have some useful information about yourself and other coalition members, as well as a sense of strengths and areas that could be improved. This information can serve as the basis for conversations, either with the leadership council at-large or with other individuals. This tool can help you identify leadership development goals for yourself and members of the leadership council.

Step 1: Identify Coalition Strengths and Needs

Which of the following are coalition strengths and which are coalition needs?

	Coalition Roles and Responsibilities	Coalition Strength	Coalition Need
Visionary	Maintains the big-picture vision for the coalition; inspires and keeps the coalition moving forward during setbacks.		
Spokesperson	Comfortable acting as the public face of the coalition, speaking publicly to promote the coalition's work.		
Broker	Continually looks for opportunities to leverage resources, approach potential partners, and secure their commitment.		
Negotiator	Able to negotiate, problem-solve, and resolve conflicts that may arise among members.		
Content Expert	Feels prepared to provide leadership and expertise in early childhood issues in the community.		
Strategist	Has good strategic skills—knows what to do, when to do it, and who to involve that can help SB coalition members translate their ideas into a good strategic plan and detailed work plan to set the stage for successful implementation.		
Facilitator	Promotes open dialogue among SB coalition members and creates an environment that respects divergent viewpoints. Observes coalition dynamics and knows when and how to encourage changes to the group and how to develop individual members.		
Coordinator	Manages the day-to-day work of the coalition, and ensures that activities are moving forward by tracking activities, managing deadlines, and remaining accountable to VECF.		

Step 2: Select Leadership Goals and Priorities

You may have identified a number of leadership needs but may not be able to develop all of these at one time. Identify those you feel are most important based on your current work. For each priority area, list the individual who may fill that leadership role and identify opportunities for leadership development. Remember to include yourself as well. A few examples are included below.

Coalition Role That Is Needed	Can this role be met with current members?	What coalition member will be developed to serve in this role?	What specific opportunities or trainings can develop this individual?
Content Expert	*Yes*	*Fill in coalition member name*	*Have member participate in all VECF trainings on early childhood* *Ensure that member becomes familiar with the best practices document prepared by VECF* *Have member pursue other training opportunities that may be offered in the community* *Have the member act as the content expert when other coalition members pose questions*
Spokesperson	*Yes*	*Fill in coalition member name*	*Look for training on public speaking and presentations* *Practice by making presentations to the VECF coalition* *Look for opportunities to promote SB at public meetings and conferences*

NOTE: You may need to identify outside individuals who can be recruited to join the leadership council for those roles that cannot be met by current members. Bring this up during a coalition meeting and ask for suggestions. Adding new people over time will help vitalize the coalition and may introduce new ideas to the group.

Step 3: Incorporate Other Leadership Development Opportunities

In addition to the specific development opportunities identified in step 2, you can do many activities on an ongoing basis. The following are some activities that you can plan to do in the next year:

- **Member Orientation.** Conducting orientations with new coalition members is very important for getting them involved quickly. Make sure to include the following when conducting an orientation:
  - Background on SB and coalition history
  - Overview of the mission, vision, policies, and procedures for the coalition
  - Coalition goals and activities based on grant type
  - Description of specific roles, responsibilities, and expectations of members

Opportunities to meet other coalition members on an informal basis are important also.

- **Workshops and Trainings.** Some sessions may be one-time trainings or could be annual conferences and events. These can help the coalition develop concrete skills or learn new information. You can even have a few members attend a workshop and then lead a mini-training session with other coalition members.
- **Leadership Retreats.** You or the leadership council may decide that more intensive and specialized leadership training is needed. You may find it helpful to set aside a few hours or a day to bring in your VECF program officer, an outside consultant, or a coalition member to facilitate discussions and walk you through exercises focused on developing leadership skills. Spending focused time with each other can also strengthen relationships among the coalition members. Consider holding the retreat in a new space; it can be helpful to change your routine. Remember to get the commitment of all members, get their input in planning the retreat, and plan well in advance to ensure that most or all members can attend.

SMART BEGINNINGS

Membership Toolkit

Ensure that the "right mix" of organizations are recruited and prepared for coalition work

Purpose of the Tools

This set of tools provides guidance on recruiting coalition members and keeping them engaged. Successful coalitions are able to draw from a base of capable and willing members who have useful skills and expertise. As an SB coordinator, these tools can help you in the selection of appropriate coalition members and then assist you in cataloguing the sectors, skills, and expertise they represent. Once you have successfully recruited individuals to join the SB coalition, you'll find that keeping members active can be a challenge. It is important for leaders to assign members to suitable tasks based on their skills and experience. There are several tools that provide a snapshot of how well you are doing and also provide concrete strategies to help you be more proactive and prevent significant member attrition from year to year.

The Membership Tools

How to Use These Tools

These tools will be most useful for *planning grantees* as you are forming leadership, establishing membership guidelines, and developing memoranda of understanding (MOU) with coalition members. In addition to the sample MOU that is provided here, your VECF program officer may have other samples that can be shared. Don't forget to complete tool 3 for each new member you recruit. **Tools 4 and 5 can be particularly helpful to grantees who are further along in their coalition development and have had issues with inactive members. Completing tools 4 and 5 annually** can be a useful reminder to check in with coalition members, to make sure that members are participating in activities that are meaningful, and to incorporate strategies that will promote continued participation. Discuss the results with your VECF program officer who can be useful in finding approaches that are most appropriate for the coalition.

Membership Tool 1

Inclusion Criteria Checklist

INSTRUCTIONS

This tool may be helpful in deciding whether to invite someone to join your coalition. Go through this set of questions for each person you are considering for recruitment.

A coalition will achieve optimal membership composition by developing criteria for inclusion that could help coalition leaders decide whether to recruit a potential member. Consider the following questions when deciding who to recruit as a new coalition member.

- Does this individual hold positive attitudes about collaboration?
- Does this individual seem open to differing perspectives and value diversity?
- Is this individual committed to improving the community?
- Is this individual well respected and trusted in the community?
- Is this individual available and have sufficient time to commit to the SB initiative?
- Does this individual have something to contribute in the area of early childhood and school readiness?
- Does this individual represent a priority sector?
- Does this individual have skills and expertise that would benefit the SB coalition?
- Does this individual add to the diversity of the coalition members, in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity, or cultural background?

Keep in mind that this list can be adapted. Your coalition may identify other criteria that are important to include.

Potential Member:	(Name/Title/Organization)
Address:	
Phone/Email:	
City/State/Zip:	

	Inclusion Criteria	**yes**	**no**
1	Does this individual hold positive attitudes about collaboration?		
2	Does this individual seem open to differing perspectives and value diversity?		
3	Is this individual committed to improving the community?		
4	Is this individual well respected and trusted in the community?		
5	Is this individual available and have sufficient time to commit to the SB initiative?		
6	Does this individual have something to contribute in the area of early childhood and school readiness?		
7	Does this individual represent a priority sector?		
8	Does this individual have skills and expertise that would benefit our SB coalition?		
9	Does this individual add to the diversity of the coalition members, in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity, or cultural background?		
10	(Additional criteria)		
11	(Additional criteria)		
12	(Additional criteria)		

Comments:

Membership Tool 2

Assessing Inclusiveness of the Leadership Council and Coalition

INSTRUCTIONS

Check the appropriate boxes for each coalition member, whether they are participating in your leadership council, coalition, or workgroup or are involved in some other capacity. You can check multiple boxes if they are involved in multiple ways. You can include the individual's name, title, and the city or county(ies) he/she serves.

A successful coalition reflects a cross-section of the community. This tool is designed to help determine if the leadership council and coalition include at least some of the recommended participants and cover the full range of early childhood systems and services that are present in communities. You want to periodically update this form to determine whether key participants are involved with the SB initiative. Your **program officer may use this form to review the inclusiveness of your coalition**. If you have gaps, you may want to raise the issue to the leadership council or coalition and discuss how you could recruit members from the missing groups (you may want to use the *New Partners Tracking Tool* (in toolkit 5) to assist with and document this process). You are expected to have diverse representation from multiple sectors but are not required to have representation from each category. For example, a coalition dominated by representatives from the early care and education sector or the social services sector should be seeking to recruit partners from other categories listed here.

Position or Category		Name/Title/Organization City/County(ies) Served	Type of Participation: Leadership Council	Coalition	Work-group	Other
			place an [x] for all that apply			
Section 1: Suggested Leadership Council Members						
1	School Board Member or Superintendent of Schools					
2	Executive Director of Department of Social Services					
3	Executive Director of Health Department					
4	Director of Community Services Board					
5	Director of Infant Intervention Program					
6	Hospital CEO					
7	Leader in the Faith Community					
8	Workforce: Chamber Chair, Workforce Board/Employment Commission Director					
9	Business Owner/CEO					

10	College or University President or Dean					
11	County or City Government Mayor/ Administrator/Councilman					
12	Director of major non-profit agency with diverse programs					
13	Director of Planning District or Community Action Agency					
Section 2: Representation from Various Early Childhood and Community Sectors						
1	Early Care (child care)					
2	Head Start					
3	Private Preschools					
4	School System					
5	Home Visiting					
6	Parent Education Providers					
7	Early Intervention/Infant Toddler Connection (community service boards)					
8	Preschool Special Education (school system)					
9	Child Protection/ Child Welfare					

10	Child Support					
11	FAMIS/FAMIS Plus Enrollment					
12	Food Stamps/TANF					
13	Health Department					
14	WIC					
15	Cooperative Extension					
16	Health Care Providers, Including Hospitals					
17	Economic Development Program Staff					
18	Teen Pregnancy Programs					
19	Parents					
20	Business Sector					
21	Public Officials					
22	Faith-Based Sector					

Membership Tool 3

Member Skills and Assets Matrix

INSTRUCTIONS

This tool will help you catalogue the skills and expertise that are internal coalition resources. For each coalition member, identify his/her assets and skills and then think about the potential role or contribution this individual can make to the coalition's efforts. The most accurate information will be gathered directly from coalition members. For example, you can choose to gather this information by having an individual conversation or by sending out a quick survey.

Because of the range of tasks that will be undertaken by the SB coalition over several years, it is in the coalition's best interest to recruit members who have the skills and knowledge that will benefit the coalition. Use this information to have members working in suitable tasks based on their strengths. The following is a list of the types of knowledge, experience, skills, and resources that will prove useful to you at different points in the coalition's development. Keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list.

Knowledge

- Knowledgeable about policy, politics, and community
- Content knowledge of early childhood or school readiness
- Knowledge of evidence-based practices

Experience

- Prior coalition experience
- Experience working with local policymakers
- Experience implementing and replicating evidence-based practices
- Communication/media background and public speaking experience
- Development experience

Technical Skills

- Analytic—assessment and evaluation skills
- Technical writing and grant writing abilities
- Planning skills—strategic planning, program planning design, financial planning
- Management skills

Other Resources

- Financial
- In-kind contribution

Member Skills and Assets Matrix					
Name of Coalition Member	**Knowledge**	**Experience**	**Technical Skills**	**Other Resources**	**Potential Role**

Membership Tool **4**

Self Assessment: Membership Engagement

INSTRUCTIONS

Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of these statements.

One aspect of a highly effective coalition is a membership that is engaged and satisfied. This brief self-assessment will provide you with a snapshot of the level of coalition engagement.

	Indicators of Member Engagement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Your Response
1	Members share the coalition's mission	1	2	3	4	5	
2	Members offer a variety of resources and skills	1	2	3	4	5	
3	Members clearly understand their roles	1	2	3	4	5	
4	Members actively plan, implement, and evaluate activities	1	2	3	4	5	
5	Members assume responsibility for tasks	1	2	3	4	5	
6	Members share the workload	1	2	3	4	5	
7	Members regularly participate in meetings and activities	1	2	3	4	5	
8	Members communicate well with each other	1	2	3	4	5	
9	Members feel a sense of accomplishment	1	2	3	4	5	
10	Members seek out education and training opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	

Membership Tool 5

Promoting Membership Engagement

INSTRUCTIONS

Use the scales to rate how well your coalition is doing on engagement strategies.

As an SB coordinator, you can help members feel more involved and connected to the work you are doing. Based on some of the research on coalitions, Kaye and Resnick (1994) identified six factors that are important to continued participation in collaborations.

The six Rs: recognition, respect, role, relationships, rewards, results

Recognition

People wish to be recognized for their contributions to communities and collaborations. At first they wish to be recognized by the members of their own groups, but then, increasingly, by the members of other groups. Collaboration members wish to be recognized for their efforts and contributions to build a better quality of life for the community and for their special contributions to the workings of the collaboration.

	Does the coalition…	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Your Response
1	Regularly praise members or individuals for work they have done, including small tasks, by recognizing them in meetings and on occasions when others are present?	1	2	3	4	5	
2	Regularly praise members or individuals for work they have done through awards, dinners, or other public events?	1	2	3	4	5	
3	Contact members or individuals after they have completed a task or contributed to an event or program and to privately thank them?	1	2	3	4	5	
4	Use a newsletter or other written communication tool to praise and recognize member or individual contributions?	1	2	3	4	5	
						Recognition Total Score	

Respect

Everyone wants respect. By participating in community activities, we often seek the respect of our peers. Respect involves an appreciation for people's values, culture, and traditions, and there may not be many settings in a community that can provide that respect for community members. By joining collaborations and other community organizations, people are seeking not only recognition, but also respect for themselves.

	Does the coalition…	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Your Response
1	Thoughtfully delegate tasks, making sure that members' and individuals' skills and strengths are being used?	1	2	3	4	5	
2	Provide translators or translated materials for members or individuals who do not speak English as their first language?	1	2	3	4	5	
3	Include celebrations and traditions that reflect the diversity of its membership and community?	1	2	3	4	5	
4	Reflect the diversity of its membership and community through the foods and refreshments shared at meetings and other events?	1	2	3	4	5	
5	Provide child care at meetings or dinner at evening meetings so that people with families and children can participate equally?	1	2	3	4	5	
6	Hold meetings at times other than during the 9-5 workday so that people who work or go to school during those hours can attend?	1	2	3	4	5	
7	Listen to and acknowledge the contributions of all members?	1	2	3	4	5	
						Respect Total Score	

Role

We all have the need to feel needed. People want to belong to a group that gives them a meaningful role and in which their unique contributions can be appreciated. Not everyone is seeking the same role, not everyone wants to be the leader, but everyone wants to feel useful. Collaborations that can provide useful roles to members are more successful in maintaining membership.

	Does the coalition…	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Your Response
1	Provide the same kinds of roles for professionals and nonprofessionals with the same responsibility and power?	1	2	3	4	5	
2	Delegate tasks to grassroots members and individuals that involve contacts with important stakeholders and others with power?	1	2	3	4	5	
3	Ask members and individuals what kind of roles they would like to play in the organization/collaboration?	1	2	3	4	5	
4	Dedicate some portion of time to working with grassroots members and individuals to develop their skills to accomplish these tasks and play these roles?	1	2	3	4	5	
						Role Total Score	

Relationships

Relationships are the heart of the collaboration's work. It is often a personal invitation that convinces members to join. People join for many reasons, among them: to meet new people, to make new links, and to broaden their base of support and influence. Collaborations draw community members into a wider context of community relationships which encourage accountability, mutual support, and responsibility.

	Does the coalition…	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Your Response
1	Regularly provide opportunities for socializing before and after meetings?	1	2	3	4	5	
2	Provide opportunities for members and individuals to formally network with each other around common interests?	1	2	3	4	5	
3	Provide opportunities for grassroots members and individuals to meet with powerful stakeholders who have access to and who may or may not be part of your organization?	1	2	3	4	5	
4	Provide opportunities for individuals to work together as partners on projects and tasks?	1	2	3	4	5	
						Relationship Total Score	

Rewards

Coalitions attract and maintain members when the rewards of membership outweigh the costs. Not everyone is looking for the same rewards. Coalitions need to identify what members' self-interests are, what they are seeking, and how to go about meeting their needs.

	Does the coalition…	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Your Response
1	Work to identify the public and private rewards that respond to the self-interests of members and individuals? In other words, does it try to understand what people want out of their involvement and try to meet their self-interests within the parameters of vision and mission of coalition?	1	2	3	4	5	
2	Provide the same information and access to funding opportunities to all members and individuals who are involved with the coalition?	1	2	3	4	5	
3	Provide other resources or referrals to members and individuals involved with the collaboration?	1	2	3	4	5	
4	Create opportunities for members to share information and other resources amongst themselves in special interest committees or some other way?	1	2	3	4	5	
						Reward Total Score	

Results

Nothing works like results. An organization that cannot deliver the goods will not continue to attract people and resources. All coalition members come into a meeting with a cost-benefit scale in their heads. They ask, "Is it worth it on a Thursday afternoon at 5:00 to sit for an hour and a half with this group of folks and try to make a change in our community?" The ultimate measure is whether anything gets done. Grassroots community leaders are even tougher on this issue than agency people who are being paid to sit in the room. They are giving up their precious personal time, and they want to know if this is going to make their community better.

	Does the coalition…	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Your Response
1	Have short-term goals and projects that show immediate results on issues that matter to members and individuals?	1	2	3	4	5	
2	Have long-term goals and projects that will create meaningful change?	1	2	3	4	5	
3	Welcome members and individuals who have specific concerns that may not fit directly into its long-term agenda but may fit indirectly and have the support of others in the community?	1	2	3	4	5	
4	Use short-term victories as a way to build its base of membership or involvement in the community?	1	2	3	4	5	
						Results Total Score	

Tally your score for each of the six sections and use the following guidelines to score your results.

	Enter your Score and compare
Recognition	
Respect	
Role	
Relationships	
Rewards	
Results	

If you scored	Need to Improve
4-9	Take a hard look at what you are doing or not doing to satisfy people's need for recognition. Can you provide more opportunities for praising members or individuals and their contributions? Pay greater attention to recognizing members and other individuals?
7-15	
4-9	
5-9	
4-9	
4-9	

If you scored	Almost There
10-15	You're on your way but not there yet. You're still at risk for discouraging participation. Keep trying to think of new ideas and make recognizing people a regular part of your dialogue and contact with members and others.
16-24	
10-15	
10-15	
10-15	
10-15	

If you scored	Good Job
16-20	You understand the value and importance of recognizing folks for their contributions and are succeeding in making this an active part of how your coalition works.
25-35	
16-20	
16-25	
16-20	
16-20	

If you scored in the higher numbers, you should feel positive about the effort you are putting into making your initiative a welcoming place for individuals to be active partners. If you scored in the middle or low numbers, don't just assume you're doing all you can and move on. Try to improve your work in these areas and turn to your program officer for additional guidance.

After you have tabulated your scores…

1. Where do you want to prioritize improvement efforts?

2. What do you currently have the capacity to do?

Membership Tool 6

Developing Member Guidelines

INSTRUCTIONS

Answering the questions here will help you develop membership guidelines.

As the SB coordinator, you need to communicate expectations when recruiting new coalition members. Developing coalition membership guidelines should be included in any MOU that you develop. Having these in place can

- be useful in recruiting new members,
- clarify roles,
- create consistency in member participation levels, and
- provide a basis for member accountability.

Step 1: Decide on the Process You Will Use to Develop Membership Guidelines

The following questions will guide you to make decisions that will determine this process. These questions touch upon what should be considered and can even serve as a team-building exercise for coalition members who have already been recruited.

1. **Who should be involved in creating the membership guidelines?**

2. **What is the process for creating the membership guidelines?**

3. **How often should the coalition revisit membership guidelines to keep them up to date?**

4. **How are changes to the membership guidelines adopted?**

5. How will we ensure that all members are aware of guidelines and agree to them?

6. How will members be held accountable for following the established membership guidelines?

7. What will happen if guidelines are not followed?

Step 2: Establish Member Benefits and Expectations

Now that you've decided on the process for establishing membership guidelines, it's time to discuss the items that you want to include. Guidelines should include specific benefits and expectations for members of the SB coalition. The following section features some information that could be included in membership guidelines and questions to help you think this through.

Member Benefits

1. In what ways do members really benefit from participating in the SB coalition?

-
-
-

Potential Member Benefits

- Contributing to an important issue and making a positive impact in the community
- Opportunity to be part of a shared effort
- Recognition as a community leader

Member Expectations

1. What do you really expect from members of the SB coalition? Do you have different expectations for members of the leadership council than for the broader coalition?

-
-
-

Areas and Questions to Consider

- Commitment to coalition vision and mission
- How will you expect members to contribute to or promote the vision and mission of the SB initiative?
- Roles and responsibilities
- What are the key activities that coalition members will participate in (e.g., will contribute to community needs assessment)?
- Be realistic when describing the level of effort involved in specific activities and, if possible, the structure that will be used. For example, if you plan to form several workgroups and expect coalition members to participate in at least one workgroup, then include that in the guidelines.

Time Commitment

- What type of time commitment do you expect from members?
- It is helpful to be as specific as possible regarding the level of effort that is expected from coalition members. Try to include the expected hourly/monthly commitment (e.g., monthly 2-hour coalition meetings) as well as the long-term commitment to the coalition. For example, some coalitions require a minimum 2-year commitment.

Available Resources

- What resources (e.g., financial, in-kind support) are available to the SB initiative?

Describe the resources that are available to the coalition. Include whatever supports your work, including the VECF grant amount, your time commitment as the SB coordinator, and access to a physical space to house the SB coalition. If you expect coalition members to contribute new resources in time, then include that as well.

Membership Tool 7

Sample Membership Memorandum of Understanding

Resource

Coalition Member Participation Agreement

By signing this agreement, I acknowledge that I understand the following expectations for a *Smart Beginnings* local coalition member and agree to fulfill my obligations to the best of my ability.

- Learn about the coalition and its initiatives
  - Know and support the coalition's vision, mission, goals, objectives, policies, and programs
  - Seek information on research, best practices, and emerging developments in early childhood development
- Actively participate in coalition meetings
  - Regularly attend scheduled coalition meetings
  - Read written materials in preparation for coalition meetings
  - Share my particular area of expertise with the coalition
- Maintain a focus on community needs as opposed to any particular program's needs, and actively support the coalition in the community
  - Disclose any conflict of interest or perceived conflict of interest when decisions affect any program in which I have a direct interest
  - Be an advocate for the coalition and its work and promote its efforts
  - Assist in identifying and recruiting qualified coalition members
  - Help educate policymakers, business leaders, and others in the community about the importance of early childhood experiences
- Participate in decisionmaking
  - approve focus areas, goals, objectives, action plans, and timelines for local initiatives
  - approve indicators and monitor data collection
- Ensure financial development of coalition and fiduciary oversight
  - Review the organization's financial statements
  - Help the coalition and fiscal agent fulfill fiduciary responsibilities
  - Assist in resource and fund development and the implementation of fund-raising strategies
  - Give an annual gift according to my personal means

I understand that I will be asked to attend a mandatory meeting of local coalition members sponsored by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation prior to a grant being awarded to my local coalition, and I agree to participate in this meeting as requested.

Signature: ______________________________________ Date: __________________________

Name: ____

Title: ____

Organization: ____

Spring 2010

SMART BEGINNINGS

Structure and Governance

Create a positive work environment and coalition structure that supports common purpose and productivity

Purpose of the Tools:

This set of tools is intended to support the creation of a positive work environment and coalition structure that supports common purpose and productivity. This involves developing the capacity of the SB Coalition by putting in place the kind of organizational structures, including governance and communication, that will support implementation of the coalition's strategic plan. The information and worksheets presented in this tool were adapted for Smart Beginnings coalitions from the following sources: Virginia Cooperative Extension. Innovative Leadership: The Vision & Goals; the Finance Project, Sustainability Planning Workbook Module II: Developing a Vision and Results Orientation; and the Community Toolbox: http://ctb.ku.edu.

The Structure and Governance Tools

How to Use These Tools:

The worksheets in **Tool 1** are designed to lead you through a collaborative process with members of the SB Coalition to define the vision and mission of the SB initiative. The vision and mission planning worksheets should be completed after you have established the coalition and are in the beginning stages of the community assessment and strategic planning process. This information can then be utilized in the strategic planning process to articulate specifically the activities and actions the coalition will take to meet its goals and work towards accomplishing its vision for the community. You may want to revisit the coalition's vision and mission statements periodically to ascertain whether they need revision to fully encompass the goals and strategies that are coalition priorities. The Operational Structure Checklist in **Tool 2** is useful in helping you assess the elements of organizational structure that support effective communication and productivity. This tool can help you identify weaknesses in the coalition structure. **Tool 3** includes worksheets to help you develop by-laws, which can formalize the coalition structure and ensure that it is understood by all coalition members. Considering that much of your work will be accomplished through meetings and conferences calls, **Tool 4** supports meetings that are task-oriented and productive.

Structure and Governance

Tool 1

Vision and Mission Worksheets

How to Use Vision and Mission Statements

Vision and mission statements are intended to be used by the coalition for communicating to partners, the public, decision makers and others about what you are trying to achieve. Think of ways to promote your initiative with these statements, and where it might be relevant to include them, such as in the strategic plan, on the coalition's website, and in other reports.

Developing a vision and mission statement for the SB initiative is an important step in coalition development and defining the activities it will undertake. The following worksheets will help you to think about what it is the initiative really seeks to achieve, and how the coalition will work towards accomplishing those goals.

The process that you go through to define these statements will help the coalition begin to analyze strengths and weaknesses in the community, your coalition's goals, and what you hope to achieve through collaborative action. This information can then be utilized in the strategic planning process to articulate specifically the activities and actions the coalition will take to meet its goals and work towards accomplishing its vision for the community.

The development of the vision and mission statements should be a collaborative and participatory process. Once you have a coalition and group meeting together, complete the worksheets on the following pages before you embark on the assessment process. You may want to revisit the vision and mission statements later on during the strategic planning to ascertain whether they need revision to fully encompass the goals and strategies that the coalition selects during that process.

Vision Statement Development Worksheet

INSTRUCTIONS:

Complete the worksheet with the Leadership Council or members of the broader coalition, posing the questions below and recording the ideas and thoughts. Build consensus around the coalition's dream for early childhood in the community and articulate the coalition's vision statement below. If your group is large you may want to brainstorm ideas within the group and then have a smaller committee review what was discussed and develop a draft vision for discussion at a follow-up meeting (the same process may also be useful in developing a mission statement).

A vision statement is the coalition's view of the future, what your community would look like if all of the coalition's goals were accomplished. It is an ambitious statement, and one that describes how your community will look in the future if you achieve the coalition's goals.

Key Questions	Coalition Responses
1. What should be the results of our efforts?	
2. What is the ideal situation for our community related to early childhood?	
3. If the community were perfect with respect to early childhood, what would it look like?	

Examples of vision statements developed by Smart Beginnings coalitions:

Our vision is that all children in South Hampton Roads arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed in school, and in life.

-Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads

Our vision is a diverse community where every family is supported and has access to quality programs and resources for their young child.

-Smart Beginnings Shenandoah Valley

To ensure that every child in Greater Roanoke enters kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed in school and in life.

-Smart Beginnings Greater Roanoke

Vision Statement:

Vision statements should have the following characteristics:

- Defines the ideal conditions for early childhood in your community.
- Uses short phrases and sentences to convey your community's hopes for its future.
- Clarifies the beliefs and governing principles of the coalition.
- Understood and shared by members of the coalition.
- Broad enough to cover a diverse variety of perspectives.
- Inspirational to those involved in the SB initiative.
- Compelling to decision makers and the general public.
- Easy to communicate.

Mission Statement Development Worksheet

INSTRUCTIONS:

Use this worksheet to help define what the coalition needs to accomplish in order to reach its vision. Once again you want to give everyone involved a chance to contribute but it may be helpful to have smaller groups develop a proposed draft statement.

A mission statement articulates the coalition's reason for existence and communicates the values, purpose and hopes of the coalition. It should articulate the *what* and *why*-what your group is going to do and why they are doing it. The mission statement is similar to the vision statement, but more concrete and action-oriented. As such, it should be developed after the vision statement.

Key Questions	Coalition Responses
1. What is it that we want for children and families in our community?	
2. What are the key things we need to achieve in order to reach our vision?	
3. How are we going to go about reaching our vision?	

Examples of mission statements developed by Smart Beginnings coalitions:

To provide support and information to parents and family members raising children, improve the quality of early childhood programs in the area, and ensure young children have access to all health supports and services.

-Smart Beginnings Greater Roanoke

Our role is to maximize the potential of every child in our region and ensure that every child has access to high-quality early care and education by:

- *Raising awareness about the importance of the early years;*
- *Advocating for greater public-private investment in our youngest citizens;*
- *Encouraging regional collaboration to improve our early care and education systems; and*
- *Working with South Hampton Roads cities to garner the resources and support necessary to improve their current systems.*

-Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads

Our mission is to help all children enter school healthy and prepared to succeed.

-Smart Beginnings Shenandoah Valley

Smart Beginnings Western Tidewater is committed to our mission that "All Children in Western Tidewater enter school healthy and ready to learn."

-Smart Beginnings Western Tidewater

The purpose of Smart Beginnings Alexandria/Arlington is to ensure that all children, prenatal to eight years, in Arlington and Alexandria, and their families have access to the resources they need to achieve success in school and in life.

-Smart Beginnings Alexandria/Arlington

Mission Statement:

Mission statements should generally encompass the following characteristics:

- Concise and not too long.
- Outcomes oriented, explaining what the coalition is working to achieve.
- Inclusive of the goals and membership of the coalition.

Structure and Governance Tool 2

Operational Structure Checklist

INSTRUCTIONS

Use this checklist to determine the present operational structure of the coalition, and the extent to which these items are in place. This checklist will be meaningful in the Planning phase and as a check and balance through the evolution and expansion of the coalition. Use this checklist during initial coalition meetings to discuss with members what structures are needed to ensure the coalition functions efficiently and effectively. Revisit the checklist after the conclusion of the Getting Ready phase to assess the coalition's current structures, and identify needs for future structure as the coalition begins implementation. Use the comments column to capture notes about present or needed structures, whether an existing structure is working or not, file names associated with the items to help you find documents, or anything else that will help you stay organized around this topic.

Having operational structures in place not only helps clarify member roles but is useful in organizing and focusing the coalition as it works toward its goals. This checklist was adapted from the work of Dr. Frances Dunn Butterfoss of Coalitions Work and is designed to assist Smart Beginnings coalitions in developing a more formal organizational structure. The checklist addresses both characteristics and processes that coalitions may want to establish as they work towards creation of a close-knit and productive coalition. Early development activities may include the creation of bylaws, committees, and work groups that will assume distinct responsibilities within the coalition. As the coalition evolves, having formal or semi-formal processes in place to address decision-making, conflict resolution and sustainability will become increasingly important. Mechanisms for communication that promote regular, open sharing of information will also become increasingly pertinent as membership grows. These processes can create a predictable coalition structure that is better able to manage work and conflict.

Coalition Operational Structure Checklist		Formal structure in place	Informal structure in place	No structure in place	**Comments**
Coalition Characteristics					
1	Bylaws	☐	☐	☐	
2	Mission statement	☐	☐	☐	
3	Vision statement	☐	☐	☐	
4	Goals and objectives	☐	☐	☐	
5	Communication or public advocacy plan	☐	☐	☐	
6	Organizational chart	☐	☐	☐	
7	Written descriptions for jobs and volunteers	☐	☐	☐	
8	Leadership Council	☐	☐	☐	
9	Subcommittees or workgroups	☐	☐	☐	
10	MOU in place for coalition members	☐	☐	☐	
11	Membership recruitment strategy	☐	☐	☐	
Coalition Processes					
1	Elicits member feedback annually (e.g. through Coalition Feedback Tool)	☐	☐	☐	
2	Mechanisms in place for internal communication	☐	☐	☐	
3	Mechanism in place to make decisions	☐	☐	☐	
4	Mechanism in place to solve problems and resolve conflicts (e.g. through Stoplight Decision Making tool)	☐	☐	☐	
5	Employs process and outcome evaluation strategies	☐	☐	☐	
6	Conducts annual action planning session	☐	☐	☐	
7	Explicit distribution of work	☐	☐	☐	
8	Assures members complete assignments in a timely manner	☐	☐	☐	
9	Regularly records actions completed (e.g. through Action Planning and Reporting Form)	☐	☐	☐	
10	Sustainability plan	☐	☐	☐	
11	Plan for orienting new members	☐	☐	☐	
12	Regularly trains new and existing members	☐	☐	☐	
13	Recruits new members to fill gaps (e.g. such as those identified in the Member Skills Matrix)	☐	☐	☐	

Structure and Governance

Tool 3

Bylaw Development Tool

INSTRUCTIONS

These tools are designed to help you develop bylaws to govern the work of the Smart Beginnings coalition. We suggest working with a group to complete this tool. You may want to think about having your program officer work with you during this process and maybe facilitate a discussion during a Leadership Council meeting. The first section walks you through the 7 steps involved in creating bylaws. The following section includes a template that you can fill in and you can also adapt and add additional sections. The last section includes a checklist to make sure you've addressed all the major points.

Bylaws are the written rules that control the internal affairs of a coalition.

Bylaws govern the way the group must function as well as the roles and responsibilities of its leaders. They can help map out the coalition's purpose and the practical day-to-day details of how it will go about its business. Research shows that coalitions are more likely to be successful if they develop some formal rules and structures and bylaws are a frequently cited example of the types of rules that are helpful. It is also helpful to have these rules documented for new members or in case there is change in leadership. The information and tools included here are adapted from information and materials available on bylaws that are available on the Community Toolbox website (http://ctb.ku.edu/en/).

Steps in Creating Bylaws

Step 1. Gather examples of the bylaws of similar groups for reference.

Seeing how other groups like yours have written their bylaws will be immensely helpful. Getting examples from several different groups will let you see a good range of styles and ideas. You should not just copy another group's bylaws and then stick the coalition's name in here and there, but other groups' bylaws can make a good rough guide.

- If there are other coalitions in your community that have been successful you may want to contact them and, assuming they have bylaws, and obtain a copy.
- Ask your Program Officer for examples from other SB Coalitions.

Step 2. Decide by whom and how the bylaws will be written and approved.

Before you start, know how you are going to develop the bylaws.

- Decide on one or two people who are going to be in charge of writing up the first draft and making additional changes.
- You also need to decide who will be involved in the approval process. Will it be the Leadership Council, a committee on bylaws, or some combination of these groups?

Step 3. Write a first draft of the bylaws.

- The group that will approve the bylaws should meet at least once to discuss what they want to include in the bylaws. This is not the time to get into lengthy discussions about the particulars of the bylaws; instead, you should put together enough generally agreed-upon information for the writer to compose a first draft, and leave the specifics for later discussion.
- When writing the first draft, you may find that filling in a general bylaws template (such as the Sample Bylaws included in this section) is much easier than writing it from scratch. You can leave blanks on specific things you're not sure about; those can easily be filled in when you meet again as a group.
- After you have completed the draft of the bylaws, make copies for all the people who will be involved in the process of approving them.

Step 4. Meet as a group to discuss the proposed bylaws.

- Get copies of the proposed bylaws out to the group that's going to edit or review them well in advance of the meeting so they'll have time to reflect and can have their questions, issues, prospective changes, or concerns ready. This will not only save time, but it will also make it much more likely that errors or ill-considered bylaws will be caught, and that the final version will mirror what everyone really wants.

- Get together and go over the bylaws together. You may find this really calls for one person taking charge and reading off the bylaws for approval, or if you have a smaller or more casual group you may take turns reading the articles and sections aloud. Go over each article and section individually for approval, and do so carefully. It may seem tedious, but the bylaws are very important and should be handled with attention to detail.
- This is also the time you should consider whether the bylaws are fair and democratic. Take note and discuss any changes and vote when necessary.
    - Do they distribute the power in the organization in a fair way?
    - Do they allow members enough of a voice in how the organization is run?
- This may take more than one meeting depending on how long and how complicated the bylaws are. When you've worked through and made all the changes, adjourn to have the final draft made.

Step 5. Complete and approve the final draft.

- Again, make sure that people get copies ahead of time. If the whole membership of the coalition is expected to vote on the bylaws, you need to figure out how that's going to happen, especially if the membership is large.
    - You may find it easiest to send them out a letter explaining the history of the bylaws (who wrote them, what the process was, etc.) and an approve /disapprove form to send back. If you do it this way, there should be a last date to receive the votes, and tallies will be made based on either the whole membership or the number of votes received.
- Make all the agreed-upon changes to the bylaws and meet again to go over the final draft. The date that the final draft was approved should appear at the bottom of the bylaws in all future copies.

Step 6. Use the bylaws!

So now the new bylaws are in effect - that's wonderful! But they're not worth much if you don't actually use them.

- The first step is making sure everyone who needs them has a copy. One of the tasks of the coordinator will be to make sure that meetings are run smoothly and according to the bylaws. If there are other participants who are skilled at applying bylaws they should be encouraged to play a lead role in reminding the group if something is being done contrary to its bylaws.
- Be sure that a copy of the bylaws is handy any time that official organization business is being conducted. If there is ever any question about how exactly you should proceed, don't hesitate to consult the bylaws. And if you come upon a situation you didn't think of when writing the bylaws, consider dealing with that in the final step of the bylaw process, which we'll talk about next.

Step 7. Review and amend the bylaws periodically.

Getting together as a group from time to time to go over the bylaws and, if necessary, amend them will insure that everyone remains familiar with the bylaws.

- Reviewing the bylaws periodically will allow you to gauge whether the bylaws accurately reflect the direction of the coalition, whether changes need to be made in light of events since the bylaws were written, or if any clarifications need to be made.
- Bylaw amendments can be suggested at any time by anyone, if that's the way you prefer it, or by a group of people (if you use this method, be sure to specify how many people must propose the change), or by any board member whatever specifications work best for the coalition. No matter what, there should be room for those kinds of suggestions whenever there's an issue.

To sum it up

Bylaws can be easy to write and even easier to change if you are well-organized and have a good plan in place for how to go about it. By following a simple outline, just about anyone can write bylaws for a new or existing coalition and having bylaws in place will help eliminate confusion and encourage consistency in the ways the coalition is supposed to go about the things it has to do to reach its goals.

Sample Bylaws

This is a "fill-in-the-blank" set of bylaws. You may wish to use this as a general template for your own bylaws. You may decide to alter this somewhat for the coalition's own purposes, so keep in mind that the bylaws don't necessarily have to be arranged in this order or include all of these components, and you may decide to add components of your own.

Bylaws of [______________________________]

Article I: Name and Purpose.

Section 1: Smart Beginnings of [fill in location] is organized for the purpose of [fill in purpose/vision/mission]

Article II. Membership.

Section 1: In order to become a member of [name of coalition], potential members must meet the following requirements:

Section 2: Members of [name of coalition] have the following rights and responsibilities:

Article III. Officers and decision-making.

Section 1: The governing structure of [name of coalition] is as follows:

Section 2: Officers' titles and main duties are as follows:

a. Chair/Duties

b. Title/Duties

c. Title/Duties

d. Title/Duties

e. Title/Duties

f. Title/Duties

Section 3: Procedures for filling and vacating offices. An officer shall be dropped for excess absences from his or her office if he or she has [fill in how many] unexcused absences from meetings in a year. An officer may also be removed under the following circumstances:

Section 4: Committees or Workgroups: ____

Section 5: Decisions

a. Decisions are to be made as follows: ______________________________________

b. At least [fill in]% of the total membership must be present in order to have a quorum.

c. Amendments to the bylaws must be made as follows:

Article IV. General, special, and annual meetings.

Section 1: Regular meetings are to be held as follows: ______________________________

Meetings may be called by the following people: ______________________________

For meetings, notice [fill in] (in writing, via phone, via email) of at least [fill in days/weeks/months] must be given to members.

Section 2: Special meetings may be called by [fill in who has authority to call them] under the following circumstances:

Section 3: Annual meeting: The date of the annual meeting shall be set by [fill in] and notice [fill in] (in writing, via phone, via email) of at least [fill in days/weeks/months] will be given to members for the annual meeting.

Article V. Leadership Council

Section 1: Leadership Council size and role. The council shall have up to [how many] and not fewer than [how many] members. The board is responsible for [fill in] [fill in] [fill in]

Section 2: Council meetings. The council shall meet at least [frequency] at an agreed upon time and place.

Section 3: Quorum. At least [fill in]% of the council members must be present before council business may be conducted.

Section 4: Resignations and Termination. Resignations from the council must be in writing

and must be given to [whom]. A council member shall be dropped for excess absences from the board if he or she has [how many] unexcused absences from council meetings in a year. A council member may also be removed under the following circumstances:

[fill in]

These bylaws were approved at a meeting of the [fill in] (board of directors, officers, general membership)on [Month/Day/Year].

Checklist

Here, you'll find a checklist which summarizes the major points contained in the text.

Before preparing the bylaws draft:

[ ] You have gathered examples of the bylaws of similar coalitions or organizations for reference

While writing the bylaws draft:

[ ] You have named and decided on the purpose of the coalition

[ ] The stated requirements for the coalition's membership have been established

[ ] The draft explains:

[ ] Governing Structure

[ ] Officers

[ ] Procedures

[ ] Committees

[ ] Decisions

[ ] Amendments

[ ] You have decided how often meetings will be held

[ ] You described the role of the Leadership Council if it is not already covered under the Governing Structure

After completion of bylaws draft:

[ ] You have given copies to the people involved in the approval process

[ ] You have met as a group to discuss the proposed bylaws

Upon completion and approval of final draft:

[ ] You've sent copies of the bylaws to anyone who needs them

[ ] You have put the bylaws into effect

[ ] You have made plans to review and amend the bylaws

Structure and Governance

Tool 4

Meeting and Agenda Reporting Tool

INSTRUCTIONS

Complete this template for meetings of Leadership Councils or working groups or committees. The reporting tool includes key information that should be on any meeting agenda including: the name of the group; the location (including the address); the meeting objectives; and agenda items including a brief description of the items (i.e. issues that need to be addressed). After the meeting, add in information related to attendees, the outcome of the discussion, next steps, next meeting date, and follow-up items. And then be sure to distribute to meeting attendees, to make sure that everyone is clear about next steps.

Purpose of the Tool. This tool provides a template that can be used when developing meeting agendas and reporting on the outcomes of meetings. We spend far too much time in meetings that are not productive. You want to make sure each meeting you have is designed to accomplish clear goals. This template is designed to help with the following:

- Develop an agenda that describes the objectives of the meeting and lists what is going to be discussed
- Describe the issues that need to be addressed under the individual agenda items
- Summarize the results of meetings by including the outcome of the discussion and the next steps on the form itself once a meeting has been completed
- Set a date for the next meeting and identify issues that will be addressed

For additional tips on running an effective meeting, go to the on-line Community Toolbox at: http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1153.htm.

Planning for an effective meeting

One of the most common pitfalls in meeting planning is to use meetings as forums for updates. The following are ways to make sure that meetings are action oriented and attendees feel that meetings are productive.

- A strong agenda is a critical first step in having an effective meeting. Meeting objectives should be summary statements about what the meeting is intended to accomplish, they should not be a verbatim repeating of agenda items. Sample meeting objectives can include:
    - Review community assessment findings
    - Plan for next steps for the assessment
    - Review challenges that have arisen in implementing our strategic plan
    - Develop a plan for corrective action
- It is helpful to prepare the group ahead of time by providing the agenda, written updates or materials that can help them better provide inputs and suggestions.
- While meetings can be a useful forum for providing updates, they should not be the entire focus and when updates are given it should be done with a purpose. The person providing the update should be encouraged to request things from the group such as asking for support with a task, suggestions for dealing with a challenging situation, or input on next steps.
- Meetings are opportunities to obtain commitments from members of coalitions and councils to contribute their time, talent, and contacts to the work of the Smart Beginnings initiative. You should make sure you take advantage of these opportunities by asking for support and making specific requests for contributions to the work of the initiative. It is also a time to think about whether there are others in the community who might be able to help you accomplish specific goals and to obtain suggestions for who might be of assistance and who is best positioned to contact them (the New Partner Tracking Tool is a resource that can help you with this task).
- If you are having a meeting in which you are trying to attract new participants, members of the public, or key political leaders you may want to develop a public agenda that includes some of the same elements but which is more visually appealing.

After the meeting

You want to have a summary of what occurred at each meeting. This is important as a tool for you to keep track of what was said and what requires follow-up. Meeting minutes are also an important tool for your Program Officer in assessing the coalition's progress and helping them determine how they can best provide support to you and the coalition.

- This form can help you summarize what occurred at the meeting. In order to be most effective you want to complete it as soon as possible after the meeting.
- You can send it to attendees along with a thank you for participating and a request to suggest any changes or additional information that should be included.
- Before the next meeting, send out a reminder about the date and time as well as any follow-up items that were assigned to specific individuals, workgroups, or committees. This will set up the expectation of accountability to the entire coalition.

If you do this regularly you will find that it makes planning the next meeting much easier and contributes to active participation of group members in your Smart Beginnings efforts.

Meeting Agenda Reporting Tool

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Smart Beginnings [Insert name of county/region] [Insert name of group that is meeting]</td></tr>
<tr><td>Location:</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Date and Time:</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Attendees:</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Meeting Objectives</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Agenda Item</td><td>Issues that Need to Be Addressed</td><td>Outcome</td><td>Next Steps</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Items for follow-up at next meeting:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Next meeting date:</td></tr>
</table>

Virginia Early Childhood Foundation

A Smart Beginnings Community Assessment and Strategic Planning Toolkit

Overview

December 2011

ALTARUM INSTITUTE
SYSTEMS RESEARCH FOR BETTER HEALTH

Prepared by Altarum Institute

A Smart Beginnings Community Assessment and Strategic Planning Toolkit: Overview

This toolkit was created for SB grantees by Altarum Institute at the request of the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation. It is designed to help grantees complete community assessments and strategic plans that will guide their work for years to come.

The toolkit is based on the following principles:

- **The case for investing in children to better prepare them for school and for life is strong and has appeal to a wide range of people in the community.** All communities are different and will use somewhat different approaches to SB, but all communities can benefit from a focus on building a comprehensive early childhood system that better prepares children for school and life.
- **Community assessment and strategic planning is more productive and results in a better product if it is done through an inclusive and participatory process.** When conducting the community assessment and strategic planning process, SB coalitions should seek input from a wide variety of community members, including community leaders, service providers, and parents. It is important to hear from representatives of all the different types of services that make up a comprehensive system. While it is useful to have smaller groups responsible for putting together the final pieces, you want to make sure you have heard from the wider community. An assessment and plan that was created with the input of the community will have community buy-in and is far more likely to succeed than one that is not.
- **Community assessments are undertaken to shape and support a strategic plan and should not be seen as just another grant requirement.** The data you collect for your community assessment is essential to the plan you create. There should be a direct link between the findings and the plan. In addition, the community assessment can serve as a resource for others in the community. There are data that you will include in your community assessment that various agencies and organizations can use when they are applying for funding or when they need to think about how they might reshape their programs to make them more effective. By creating a resource that is useful, you help to build connections and the reputation of SB in your community.
- **Strategic plans are not meant to sit on shelves, they are meant to guide coalitions and organizations and serve as a tool that helps them achieve the goals they want to reach.** The strategic plan the coalition creates will serve as the document that guides your SB work. As you move forward with your plan, you will have successes and encounter roadblocks. New opportunities may develop due to changes in legislation or policy or because your efforts attract new champions. Your plan is a starting point that you should use and be prepared to revise as things change.

- **A comprehensive systems approach to early childhood requires changing the way things have been typically done.** Community leaders, including the SB coordinator and leadership council and others willing to step to the forefront, should be prepared to challenge the status quo, take chances, and come together to develop and implement plans.

The following materials are included as part of this toolkit:

- An **overview** of what it means to build a comprehensive early childhood system at the community level and strategies that can be used
- **Community Assessment Tools**
  - A guide to developing a community assessment covering the types of data that need to be collected, how to find help in completing your assessment, and how to interpret data
  - An indicator grid that allows you to capture the most recent SB indicator data and compare them with state level data
  - Sample data collection tools including surveys, discussion guides for focus groups, and key informant interview guides for use with individuals who play a key role in early childhood work in your community
  - A template for organizing your final community assessment report
  - A checklist that enables you and your project officer to determine the progress you have made in meeting the requirements and expectations for a community assessment
- **Strategic Planning Tools**
  - A guide to developing a strategic plan that provides tips for working with your leadership council, your coalition, and your community to develop a successful SB strategic plan
  - An action planning form (activities and outcomes form for planning and reporting) to help you capture your goals, the strategies you will use to try and reach the goals, and the action steps that will need to be taken to carry out those strategies as well as the outcomes you are trying to achieve
  - A stoplight tool for use in a modified consensus decisionmaking process
  - A template for organizing your final strategic plan
  - A strategic planning checklist that enables you and your project officer to determine the progress you have made in meeting the requirements and expectations for a SB strategic plan

A Guide to Completing a Smart Beginnings Community Assessment

December 2011

Prepared by Altarum Institute

Table of Contents

List of Appendices

A Guide to Completing a Smart Beginnings Community Assessment

Overview

All Smart Beginnings (SB) coalitions are required to complete a community assessment. The assessment is an opportunity for the coalition to examine the key issues in early childhood in your community, and to determine what is working well, where challenges exist, and where the most promising opportunities are for improvement. The assessment will play a critical role in helping you develop your strategic plan. VECF has outlined the requirements for the assessment. As part of this toolkit we have developed a **community assessment checklist** (appendix A) that you can use to determine whether your assessment is fulfilling the requirements.

How Conducting a Community Assessment Will Benefit Your Coalition

Through the community assessment you will:

- Identify areas of strength and challenges
- Identify opportunities for improving the well-being of children and families and addressing the challenges your community faces
- Engage the community to think about what needs to be done to help children better prepare for school and for life
- Publicize the work of the coalition and the needs of the community regarding early childhood issues

A well-written community assessment will both meet the requirements of your SB grant and serve as a resource for coalition participants. You not only will be able to use the assessment when applying for SB funds, but also organizations throughout the community will be able to use the community assessment when seeking support or funding. Conducting a community assessment should not be seen as a hurdle you need to get over to continue your SB work but an opportunity to take an important step in addressing the needs of children and families in your community. Since you want the community assessment to inform your strategic planning process, you want to develop a draft to inform this process. As you move forward with strategic planning, however, you may want to go back and revise parts of your community assessment to find out more about the areas that you have decided to make a priority based on your initial assessment and planning process.

Finding Help to Complete Your Community Assessment

SB coalition and leadership council members can play an important role in helping you carry out your community assessment. While your entire leadership council needs to be involved in reviewing your assessment and your whole coalition should discuss the findings, you may want to create a community assessment subcommittee responsible for carrying out some of the key tasks that will need to be completed. This could include people who are not part of your leadership council. Regardless of whether or not, you create a subcommittee you do want to ask the question, who are some of the people or groups who might be able to help with the community assessment?

- Subcommittee members or other coalition members could be asked to complete brief key informant interviews with key contacts in the early childhood community.
- If you have contacts at a community college or university, they may be able to participate. They may also be able to identify classes, programs, or departments where students are being trained in research or assessment techniques. These students may be able to carry out particular tasks. For example, members of a class may be assigned different indicators to collect and be asked to write a little about what they mean. More advanced students may be able to help with interviews or surveys.
- Public health professionals such as those who are often hired by local health departments often have formal training in carrying out assessments. You may want to reach out to your health department and see if they can help.
- Parent groups may have leaders who have strong facilitation skills and who can serve as moderators for a parent discussion group, or they may be able to publicize surveys using social networking sites such as Facebook or listservs or newsletters.
- While not required, you may have coalition members who have skills in making graphs or putting pictures or graphics in documents, and they might be able to make your final document look more exciting. You may have someone who is a particularly strong editor or proofreader and, if asked, would agree to review the document.

There may be people in your community who can help who have yet to participate in the coalition. If so, now would be a good time to recruit them. The coalition can use the new partners tracking tool and membership tools to help accomplish this. SB is about sharing work and sharing resources. It is important to ask for support and to set clear deadlines so that the final product is as strong as it can be and gets done in time for your deadlines.

Some of you may feel that you do not have the resources to carry out a community assessment on your own and choose to contract out the work. If you do so, you can work with your program officer on finding a consultant and developing a work plan. You should also remain very involved in monitoring your consultant's progress and approach. You and the people who make up your coalition are the best judge of whether an assessment is going to be useful, and the best way to guarantee that the final product is useful is for you to provide input throughout the process, not just when a product is delivered.

Key Questions that Need to Be Addressed in Your Community Assessment

One of the main things you need to do when you decide how to conduct your community assessment is to take a close look at the questions you are trying to answer and then figure out what you need to do to answer them. Some questions may be difficult to find the answer to and you will need to revisit them once you move forward on your planning process. Everyone recognizes that this is challenging work, the goal is to get the best possible picture you can of your community or communities as a starting point.

The sections below talk about different ways of collecting data, but first you have to decide what data you want to collect based on the questions you are trying to answer. There are some key questions about how the early childhood system works in your community that you are ultimately trying to answer. Here are some of those questions:

How are services and resources paid for (financing)? Are there funding opportunities that are missed because matching funds are not available or because a decision was made not to take advantage of them? Are there groups, for example businesses or a community foundation that might be interested in helping support an effort focused on young children?

What is being done to address quality of services (standards and professional development)? Are there efforts being undertaken to try to improve the quality of child care centers? Are there efforts being undertaken to figure out what people who work with young children need to know? Where do the people who work with young children in your community get their education and training? Who is offering continuing training and how is it determined what will be offered? Are programs or people who work with young children interested in receiving particular kinds of training?

How is information about young children shared (communication and data)? How are parents and families being informed about available services and resources? Are there any efforts to educate the broad community about the importance of the early childhood period? Are there communication efforts around particular issues such as child abuse prevention, school readiness, healthy eating, physical activity, reading to children, or enrollment in FAMIS or FAMIS Plus? Are there parent education classes or groups? Has anyone targeted the business community to help educate them in the role they might be able to play in supporting families with young children? Is anyone regularly sharing data and information about young children?

Who are the leaders in addressing the needs of young children (leadership)? Have groups already been getting together to address issues related to young children? Are there groups focused on particular issues such as teen parents, child care, family violence, or transition to kindergarten? Are parents playing a lead role in this area? Are parents of children in Head Start active? What about parents of children with special needs?

What is happening in key service areas? What is the situation regarding the availability of child care and preschool? What is known about quality? Is infant care available? How effective is Head Start at reaching the population eligible for the program? What is the status of the Virginia Preschool Initiative in the community? What home visiting programs exist in the community? Are there any efforts to increase the use of developmental screening and to make sure screened children are referred to the appropriate programs? Has any effort been made to address the transition to kindergarten and getting children and families ready for that transition? Who is doing parent education in the community? Are the different groups who do parent education talking to each other, and what kind of feedback are they getting from parents?

You should also look at the community assessment template since it describes some of the things you might ultimately want to include in your community assessment report and this can help you decide what data you need to collect.

What Kind of Data Needs to Be Included in Your Community Assessment?

You have been asked by VECF to collect the following three kinds of data:

Demographic data

- Demographic data including data on population, family characteristics, and income

+

Indicator data

- Common School Readiness indicators data and substantive focus area indicators

+

Environmental scan data

- Environmental scan data covering local resources and services

=

Community Assessment

Your community assessment report will bring all these data together in a single place and will provide information that will help the reader and the community interpret what these data mean. This section provides information on compiling and collecting data and organizing and interpreting it.

Compiling and Collecting Data

Some of the data collection you need to do is pretty straightforward, and it involves collecting existing data off the Internet or from schools or other organizations. Collecting environmental scan data is more challenging and you have more options for what to collect and how to collect it.

- ***Demographic Data.*** VECF lists a variety of demographic data for you to collect. These data along with the other community assessment indicators are included in the **indicator grid** (appendix B). Some of the most important data include population levels by race and income. It is helpful to show the racial and ethnic make-up of the total population of your various jurisdictions and of your early childhood population since these sometimes differ considerably. In order to understand demographic data, it is sometimes useful to look at and include data from previous years. For example, if your community has a growing Hispanic population you might want to show how the population of Hispanics has grown over the past decade or so.
- ***Common School Readiness and Substantive Focus Area Indicators.*** VECF has become more selective about the indicator data you are being asked to collect. The most recent indicators are listed in appendix B along with state level data for the indicators. If you like, you can use this form to report the indicator data you collected. As we note multiple times in this document, it is useful to include data going back a few years as well as comparisons to the state as a whole. Some of you might find it useful to include comparisons to counties or cities that are similar to yours. The goal of having these additional data is to help make it easier to understand what the data mean.

- ***Environmental Scan Data.*** The environmental scan is where you attempt to compile and collect data to understand the early childhood system in your community. That is a big task and it is important to develop a strategy and set priorities. While you should try to be as thorough as possible, you probably won't get everything right the first time. You should be prepared to revise the information in your community assessment as new information comes in and as your planning process moves forward.

Members of your leadership council or coalition likely have information about some of the questions you are trying to address. If they don't have the answers, they will often be able to provide names of people who might and then you can call those people up and try and get more information. You may want to conduct formal interviews with the contacts they identify (described below) or you may just want to do an introductory phone call that includes an effort to find out what they know about particular topics. You might use a simple script like the one below.

> Hi, my name is [YOUR NAME]. I am the coordinator for the [NAME OF COMMUNITY] Smart Beginnings initiative. We have received funding from the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation to develop a community plan to address the needs of young children ages 0 to 5 and their families. We have put together a leadership council and coalition and some of our participants suggested you might have information on [TOPIC OF INTEREST]. Is that correct? Can you tell me what is going on in that area?

This may also be an opportunity to give them information about SB and to ask whether they want to be more involved, possibly through being part of the leadership council or the coalition. You may decide you want to set up a more detailed interview later to get more information. They may also recommend other people who have more information or who might be interested in SB.

These informal discussions can be useful and it is very important to make sure you take clear and detailed notes. However, you probably also want to use some of the more structured data collection techniques described in the next section for collecting these kind of data.

There are a number of different questions you want to ask when you decide what types of data collection you want to do.

What questions are you trying to answer?	See the information above and the **community assessment template** (appendix C) while thinking about this. When you are considering a data collection method, ask yourself what questions will it answer for which you don't currently have the answer?
Does the indicator data raise questions that it would be helpful to try and answer through the environmental scan?	For example, if you have a large percentage of mothers who have less than a high school education, you may want to check what is being done to try and help teen mothers complete their high school degrees. If your PALS scores have improved dramatically or have declined, you may want to conduct surveys or focus groups with kindergarten teachers to better understand the trend.

What do we need to do to make sure we are hearing from a variety of perspectives?

A strong community assessment needs to draw on information from a wide range of community stakeholders. For example, if someone has recently completed an extensive community assessment on child care in the community and you are using it in the SB assessment, then you may want to spend more time making sure you hear from family support and health care programs to make sure their perspective is represented. You can capture the perspective of parents through focus groups, surveys, or interviews with parent leaders. Head Start programs have a long history of promoting parent involvement and may be able to help with this.

Can we do it?

It is always important to ask whether you have the resources you need to do something. There are a lot of things that are potentially useful but which you may not have the staff or partners or funds to pull off. If it is something that you think is really important, check in with your subcommittee, leadership council, or coalition members to see if they can help or have ideas. Also find out what your program officer thinks.

The next section highlights some of the ways you can collect data for the environmental scan portion of your community assessment. The Data Collection Options Table summarizes what makes particular kinds of data collection useful and poses questions you need to ask when considering whether or not you want to use a particular technique.

Data Collection Option Table

Method of Data Collection	What makes it useful?	What questions need to be asked before using it?
1 Existing needs assessments or reports	• May contain answers to key questions • Saves time and resources	• How old are the data? If 2 years old or older, consider not using it or take its age into account when interpreting it. • Was an inclusive process used that involved getting information from the various groups involved with the issue? • Did the group doing the community assessment have an agenda? You may still use it but note this when describing the data or collect additional information they may have left out.
2 Surveys	• Good way to ask a lot of people the same questions • Allows you to hear from a lot of people from different groups	• Who should we survey? • Can we get enough respondents to make it worthwhile? • Who can help us find respondents? • Will our respondents represent the different types of individuals who make up this group in our community? • Are we going to conduct an online or paper survey? • If it is a paper survey, who is going to enter the data? • Who is going to tabulate or analyze the data?
3 Focus groups	• Allows you to reach a sizable group of people in one meeting • Allows you to hear details about people's experiences	• Who do we want to conduct focus groups with? Focus groups can be more effective if participants are from similar groups. • Who can serve as moderator? • How will we find the people we need? Who will do that? • What can we do to make sure they come? A good location and meals or child care can help. • How will we record their responses? Will we use a tape recorder or take notes by hand? • What will we do with the information we collect?
4 Key informant interviews	• A good way to get detailed information from people who know a lot about how the system works • Helps build connections that might be useful later	• Who will we interview? • Who will conduct the interviews? • How will we record their responses? Will we use a tape recorder or take notes by hand? • What will we do with the information we collect?

Method 1: Previous Needs Assessments or Studies

You may be able to draw from other studies or needs assessments that have been done in your community. Head Start and other programs or funded initiatives often require needs assessments. There may be key findings or data that you want to highlight from these reports. However, because they were done for other purposes, it is unlikely that such reports will have all the data you need. Also, think about whether the information is outdated. If a needs assessment or study is more than 2 years old, it is possible that things have changed and you might not want to use it, or you may want to use it and note that things may have changed.

Method 2: Surveys

You may decide that you would like to collect information through brief surveys of one or more groups in your community (e.g., parents, staff members from child care and preschool programs, staff members from other early childhood programs, kindergarten teachers, and doctors). We have included **sample surveys** (appendix D) in the toolkit. Because conducting a survey and figuring out what all the data means can be a challenge and time consuming, you need to think carefully about who you want to survey and why. You may have other ways of gathering data about some of these groups. For example, if there has been a recent survey of child care providers in your community and you know what it found, you may not want to conduct a survey with them. You may decide that you don't have enough contacts with doctors to conduct a survey with them. You are not required to conduct surveys; you are required to find out the answers to a lot of questions, and surveys are one way that might help accomplish that.

- ***Finding Survey Participants.*** If you are going to conduct a survey, you want to make sure you are trying to get participants from all different sectors of the community. You should ask your leadership council and coalition members to suggest ways in which you can notify people about the survey or distribute it if you are using paper copies. For parent surveys, you may want to put information about them in school newsletters or child care centers or give them to home visitors and infant and toddler connection staff members to distribute. One SB initiative was able to get the school system to ask parents to complete surveys when they brought a child in for kindergarten registration. Conducting a paper survey can be a real challenge in terms of getting the forms to the right people, getting them back, and tabulating the results from the surveys. Before you undertake a survey, you should think about how you are going to use the information and complete all the tasks. If you have help or experience doing this, it will be easier.
- ***Online Surveys.*** If most of the population you are surveying has access to the Internet, you may want to use an online survey tool to conduct your survey. This approach will work better in some areas than others and may not be possible in rural areas with more limited access to high-speed Internet connections. However, if it is a feasible strategy, online survey sites such as Survey Monkey (http://www.surveymonkey.com) or Zoomerang (http://www.zoomerang.com) can help make data collection easy. Both sites allow you to conduct simple surveys for free or you can pay for more advanced features and technical support. Both sites are popular and different people have different opinions as to which works best. If you are using the free version, Zoomerang allows you to ask more questions (30

compared to 10 for Survey Monkey). Both sites limit you to 100 responses per survey so if you are expecting more from, for example, a parent survey, you may need to purchase the enhanced service. If you decide it would be helpful to pay for the service to get advance features, Survey Monkey bills monthly while Zoomerang offers an annual fee, so if you only wanted to use the service for a few months it would be cheaper to go with Survey Monkey. Zoomerang does offer a discount to nonprofits and educational organizations.[1] It may even be that you can split the cost with other projects within your organization that also would like to conduct surveys. Program officers may be able to get you in touch with other communities who have used these sites so you can have a better sense of whether they can work for you.

- ***Paper Surveys.*** If you are going to use paper surveys, you need a plan for entering the data you collect. There are various ways to enter and analyze data. You can do it in Excel or, if you have access, special programs such as SPSS or SAS, which are designed for statistical analysis of data. Unless you have a very small number of surveys, it is very difficult to analyze survey data without some sort of computer program or tool. You should have a plan for how you will handle the data before you send out the survey.

Method 3: Focus Groups

Sometimes you want more details than you can get in a survey, or you want to hear what people talk about when they get together to discuss the main needs of children in the community and what could be done to improve things for children and families. Focus groups made up of community members can be a useful way to collect this kind of detailed data. These are small group discussions led by a moderator who asks questions and makes sure the conversation stays on track. The ideal focus group size is 8-10 people who are from a particular group or from similar groups. While you can have open groups involving people from diverse backgrounds, the discussion may be less focused.

- ***Recruiting Focus Group Participants.*** One of the biggest challenges that must be addressed in conducting focus groups is recruiting participants.
    - You want to make sure you have participants. Just hanging up a sign or putting an ad in a newspaper isn't likely to be enough to attract people. You want to use your contacts to see if someone can help put together a group.
    - Give people a good reason to come. Sometimes money is offered or gift cards, but if you can't afford that then you may want to offer a meal or child care or something that entices people to come.
    - Make sure you have the right kind of participants. If you want to attract parents of young children, take steps to make sure parents of high school age children do not appear.
    - Try and have participants who reflect the different individuals who make up a single group. For example, while it may be easier to have a focus group with all Head Start parents, it may be that there are other parents (even low income parents) whose children aren't in Head Start and whose experience is very different than those who have children in the program. So you may want to try and get a mix or do two groups if you have the time and resources.

[1] Survey tool features and prices are subject to change, so you will want to confirm these details on the websites before making a decision.

- ***Focus Group Questions.*** The toolkit includes a **discussion guide** (appendix E) with a sample set of questions. There is one guide for parents and one guide for people who work with young children. These focus group questions would take between 90 minutes and 2 hours to get through. You are not required to conduct focus groups as part of your needs assessment or to use these exact sets of questions. You may want to choose some of them and add some of your own. When you write focus group questions, you should:
  - Avoid yes/no questions because people will give very short answers and you want details. For example, you don't want to ask: Are you satisfied with the information you receive from your child's doctor? Instead, you might want to ask: What information has your child's doctor given you to help you understand what you can do to give your child a good start in life? How useful has that information been?
  - Avoid leading question in which you assume you know how people will answer. For example, you don't want to ask: Why do you think there are so few good child care choices around here? You might want to ask: What do you think about the choices you have for child care and preschool in this area?
- ***Recording the Focus Group.*** It is best if there is someone other than the moderator who can take notes during focus groups since the moderator should be focused exclusively on the discussion. Whether or not you have a note taker, it might be useful to record the session using a digital recorder. There are relatively cheap (around $50) but effective digital recorders available. You can copy the files onto computers and listen to them (caution, the files are very big). If you are going to use a recorder for any of your data collection, you should always ask for permission to record. People are unlikely to object if you let them know that they won't be quoted directly in any report and that you are just recording the session so you will be able to better remember what was said.

Method 4: Key Informant Interviews

There may be some individuals in the community who you want to talk with separately because they have special knowledge about services and supports for young children in your community. You could bring them together as part of a group but maybe they don't have time to participate, or maybe you could get more information out of them if you talked to them one on one. Some of these people may be on your leadership council or coalition. While they will certainly be able to make comments during meetings, sometimes it is helpful to sit down and ask them specific questions about their experiences. Among the people you might want to conduct key informant interviews with are:

- Directors of social services,
- School superintendents,
- Lead kindergarten teachers,
- Head Start directors,
- Child care and preschool directors,
- Health department directors,
- Lead for your local WIC program,
- Home visiting program directors,

- Infant and Toddler Connection leads for your communities and whoever else works with children who have been identified as having developmental delays, including the person in the school system responsible for preschool special education,
- Parent education program coordinators, and
- Someone from doctors' offices or clinics that see a large number of families with children who are covered under FAMIS.

While the list includes mostly directors and administrators it may be that other people in an agency or organization know more about families with young children. When you call someone up to schedule an interview you may want to let them know that you are hoping to talk with the person in their agency or organization who knows the most about services and resources for families with young children. That way the person could suggest someone besides himself or herself. He or she may suggest multiple people. In some cases it may make sense for you to interview these people together since it may save time and result in better information.

Key informant interviews can be conducted over the phone in order to save travel costs and time. However, there may be reasons you want to do some or all of them in person. For example, with the goal of getting them more involved in SB work, you may want to get to know the key informants you are talking with better.

The community assessment toolkit includes **a discussion guide for interviews with individuals from organizations that provide services or resources to young children.** You are not required to conduct interviews or ask this specific set of questions. You may add or subtract some of the questions. If you add any, the focus group question rules apply: avoid questions that can be answered with a yes or a no, and avoid leading questions that assume you already know someone's views. We estimate that the current interview questions take from 45 minutes to 1 hour to get through. Regardless of what questions you use, you want to make sure there is enough time to get through the interview. As for focus groups, it is helpful to have someone else help with notes or to record the interview. Remember, if you want to record it, you should ask for permission first.

How Do We Begin to Organize and Interpret the Assessment Data?

Organizing Data

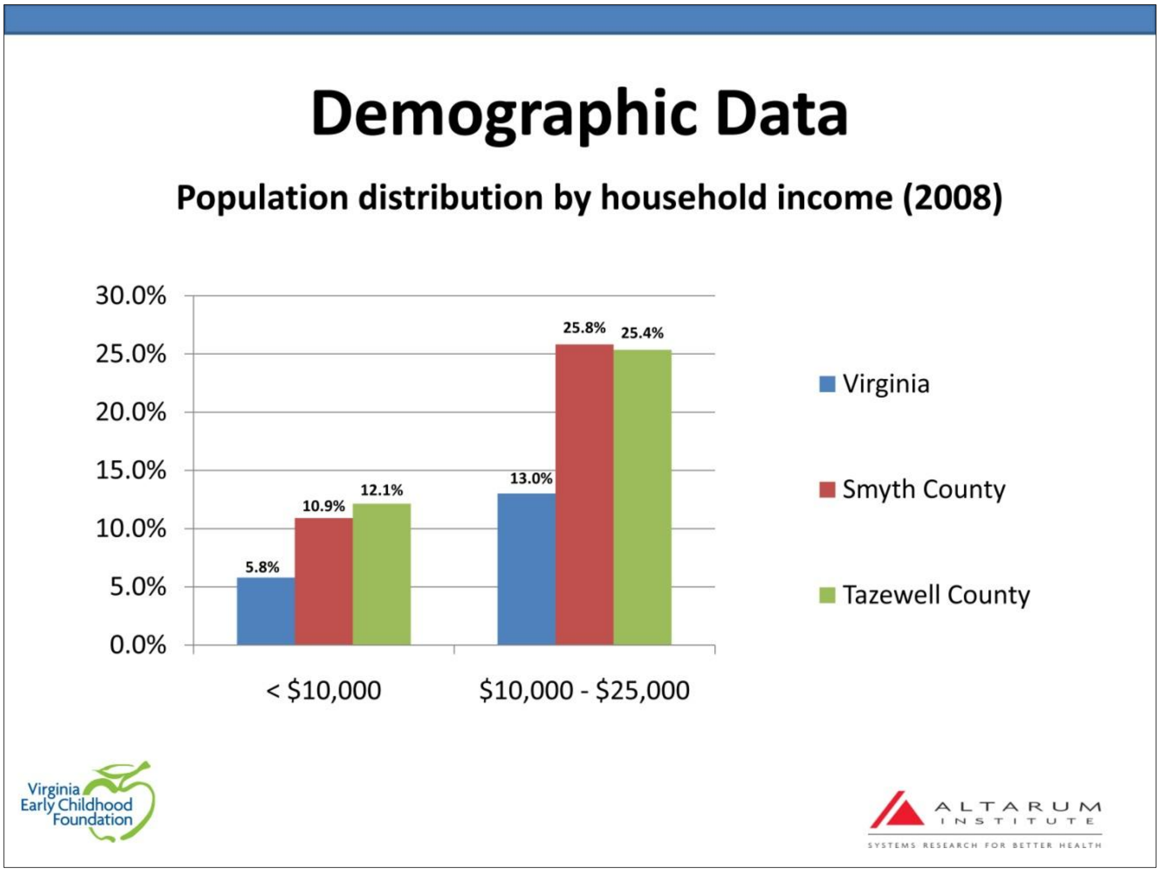
The hardest part of any assessment is usually not collecting data but trying to understand what it means and how you can use it to accomplish your overall goals. How you do that depends on the kinds of data you are dealing with. This section describes some of the steps you would go through when organizing and interpreting data. One way that has proven useful for doing this is holding a meeting with your coalition to go over the results and to use that meeting as a springboard for the next steps in your strategic planning process. If, for some reason, that strategy is not feasible, then you could do it with a smaller group such as a community assessment subcommittee or others from your coalition or leadership council who are helping with the needs assessment.

Step 1: Examine the Indicator Data.

You have been asked to collect a good deal of data. When using it to describe your communities, you won't be able to highlight all of it in your community assessment report (though you do want to include it all in a table or at least an appendix). You want to go through the data and look at what stands out and what you want to cover in more detail. Some of the types of questions you want to ask when you do this follow:

- Are there indicators that your community is struggling with? Is there an indicator where you are well below the state average? Is there an indicator which has been going in the wrong direction for the past few years?
- Are there indicators that your community is doing well on? Community assessments can highlight positive as well as negative findings. If your community is above the state average on some indicators or doing better than other communities like yours, maybe you want to highlight that indicator and discuss what might be behind this positive finding.
- Are there differences between the counties that are covered by your coalition that you should highlight? You may or may not have an explanation for them, but sometimes it is important to note differences between the communities that your strategic plan will be addressing.
- Do you want to highlight the presence of particular racial or ethnic groups so you can make sure your coalition reflects your community population or to ensure that the goals and strategies you choose reach all the groups? Have there been changes in the makeup of the community over the past few years that it is important to highlight?
- What about the different income groups in your communities? Are there things to highlight regarding how your community looks compared to the rest of Virginia? Do these data suggest that there are target groups you want to make sure you are reaching?
- Are there indicators that have been the subject of a great deal of discussion in your community? Maybe there has been a good deal of discussion about or efforts related to teen births or prenatal care. If so you may want to highlight that indicator and mention the discussion or actions that have been taken.

After you have gone through this process and selected a group of indicators that might be of interest, it is useful to present them at a coalition or leadership council meeting. This is a great way to get your partners talking and thinking about data. They may have some great insights into why an indicator is a serious concern, or they may suggest that the data does not tell the full story. Constructing charts in PowerPoint is pretty easy to get the hang of, but if you do not have experience doing it there is almost certainly someone on the coalition or who works in your organization that can help you do this. Examples of some charts that were used in SB coalition meetings are included here so you can get a general idea of some ways to present data.


Demographic Data
Population distribution by household income (2008)
30.0%
25.0%
20.0%
15.0%
10.0%
5.0%
0.0%
5.8%
10.9%
12.1%
13.0%
25.8%
25.4%
< $10,000
$10,000 - $25,000
Virginia
Smyth County
Tazewell County
Virginia Early Childhood Foundation
ALTARUM INSTITUTE
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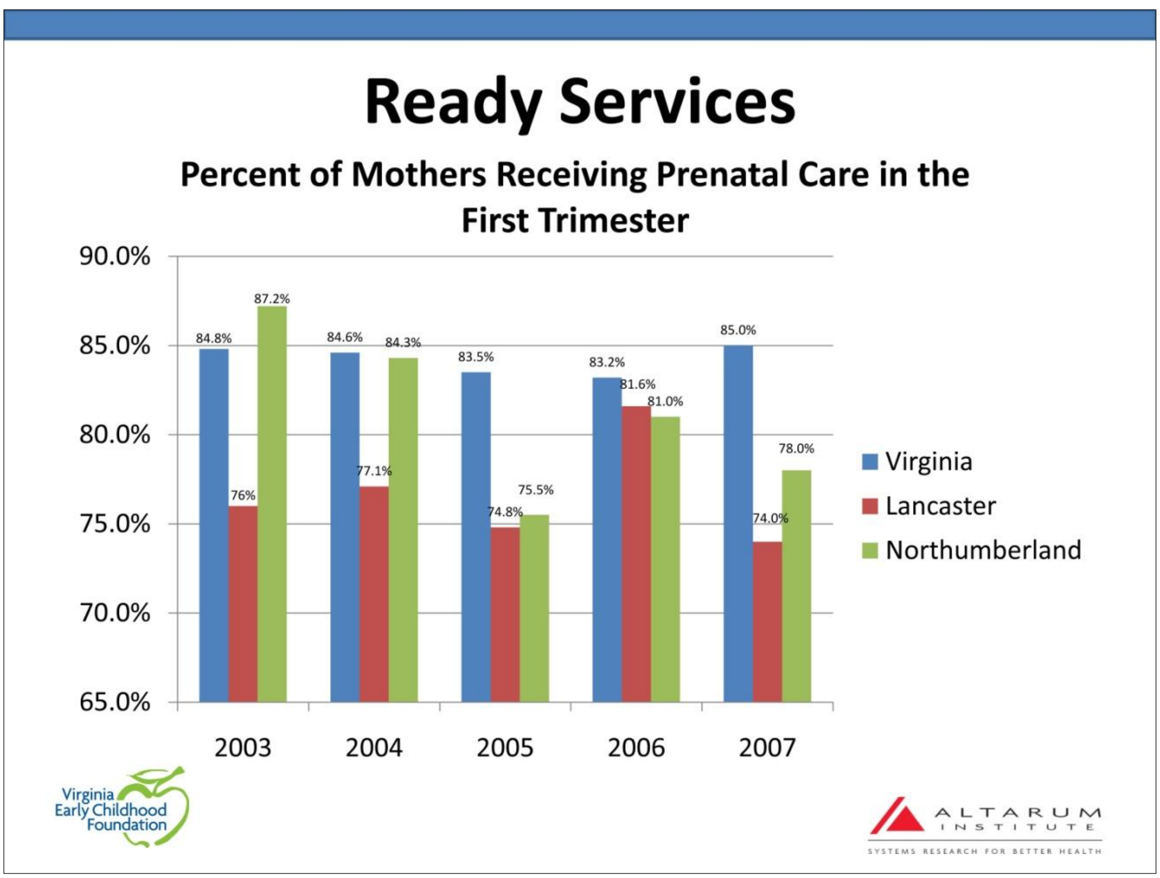
Ready Services
Percent of Mothers Receiving Prenatal Care in the First Trimester
90.0%
85.0%
80.0%
75.0%
70.0%
65.0%
84.8%
76%
87.2%
84.6%
77.1%
84.3%
83.5%
74.8%
75.5%
83.2%
81.6%
81.0%
85.0%
74.0%
78.0%
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
Virginia
Lancaster
Northumberland
Virginia Early Childhood Foundation
ALTARUM INSTITUTE
SYSTEMS RESEARCH FOR BETTER HEALTH

After showing one of these charts you will want to ask the group some questions, such as:

- What do these data seem to show?
- What is behind what they show? What factors are influencing the data?
- Is this something our coalition should address?
- Is this something our coalition can address?

This type of discussion reinforces a very important message, which is that the strategies your coalition chooses to pursue need to be tied to the data you are collecting through the community assessment. This is something that should be reinforced over and over again by the coalition coordinator or any facilitator who is helping guide the assessment and planning process.

Step 2: Use the Indicator Data to Shape Your Environmental Scan Data Collection Strategies.

Once you have taken an initial look at your indicator data, you may want to use it to shape some of your decisions about what data collection methods and strategies you will be using for your environmental scan. If an indicator stands out, you may want to do some interviews to understand more about why it is improving or getting worse or very different from the state average. You may want to conduct interviews, convene a focus group, or conduct a survey that helps you find out what is being done to address the condition measured by the indicator.

Step 3: Use the Indicator Data to Shape Your Next Strategic Planning Steps.

During the meeting you hold to discuss your indicators, you have an opportunity to identify specific areas that seem to be the subject of particular concern in your community. One thing that has proven helpful for Smart Beginnings communities that have gone through this process is to identify areas of concern and then to form workgroups to find out more about the focus area and how it might be addressed in the strategic plan. Twin County Smart Beginnings did this and a form they used to support the process is included in appendix F. The form lists the areas they identified during the initial stages of the community assessment. After the meeting to discuss the findings from the indicator data collection, they formed workgroups around these issues. The results of the workgroup meeting were summarized in the form shown in appendix F. The workgroups then reported these findings during the strategic planning meeting which is described in the strategic planning guide.

Step 4: Choose Key Demographic Data Points and Indicators to Highlight in Your Community Assessment Report.

The work you did in step 1 should have helped you identify some demographic data and indicators that would be useful to highlight in your community assessment report.

Once you have chosen indicators to highlight, it might be useful to include answers to the following questions in your report.

Why is this indicator important? The rationale that VECF provides in the list of indicators in the appendix of your grant manual can serve as a starting point for this. You may want to add some other information that helps illustrate why the indicator is important for your community.

How are we doing? This is where you show the data and explain what it means. In order to determine how your community is doing you need some standard of comparison. You can compare yourself to how you were doing a few years ago, how Virginia as a whole is doing, how counties that have similar characteristics to yours are doing. You may even want to include two different comparisons.

What can be done to improve this indicator? This can be a little more challenging, but if possible it is great to include some strategies that might lead to improvements on the indicator. You may draw this from the information on evidence-based practices that VECF presents or other resources that you or your coalition members are familiar with. You may want to do a little work on this in your draft needs assessment and then go back and revise it after your strategic planning process has determined what your priorities are.

Challenges in Interpreting Data

Interpreting the meaning of indicator data can be challenging work. There are a number of issues that may come up.

- ***It is not always easy to interpret what is a good or bad finding for a particular indicator.*** Sometimes it isn't clear what is a positive result or positive trend for a particular indicator. For example, an increase in the percent of children receiving early intervention or special education services may reflect an increase in the percentage of children with developmental delays in the community or it may mean that efforts have been made to increase outreach and identify children who need services earlier. Changes in the number of cases in which a substantiated case of child abuse and neglect has been found may result from more effective outreach or a change in standards. Thus it would be wrong to say the cause was that parents were more or less abusive or neglectful. The best way to address this issue is to note that it is not entirely clear what the meaning of the indicator is, you may also want to try to use environmental scan data collection such as key informant interviews to help you understand what the data mean.
- ***Data are not always up-to-date.*** One of the big challenges with data on topics such as poverty is they often times are not up-to-date. So the data you have is unlikely to reflect the impact of current economic conditions. It may be useful to note this kind of information when presenting the data.
- ***What happens if some of our communities are doing well and some are not doing so well on a particular indicator?*** You may have some counties that are doing much better than others on a particular indicator. There are a lot of reasons this might happen. If one of your counties or cities is considerably wealthier than the others, then you may consistently see more positive outcomes in the wealthier county. If the counties are similar or a county or city with more challenges is showing better results, then you may want to take a closer look and see if there are things that the county with better results is doing that might be helpful to apply in the other counties in your area.

Step 5: Analyze the Data You Collected for Your Environmental Scan.

You will need to take a look at your environmental scan data and pull out the key findings from the work you did.

- If you are using previously completed community assessments, you will want to review them and pull out the findings that are most relevant for your SB work. You should make sure you can explain where these findings came from and how they were arrived at.
- If you conducted surveys, you will need to develop tables showing the results. When interpreting your survey findings, you probably want to pay attention to the characteristics of who responded to your survey. Do you have any way of knowing whether they are similar to other parents or providers in the community? If so, you might want to describe how similar or different the respondents are when you describe the data in your community assessment report. You may find that some of your questions may not have worked as well as you hoped because people did not understand them or many respondents didn't answer the question. You may decide not to report the answer to questions such as that.
- If you collected focus group or interview data, read the notes and try and figure out if there are common themes. Are there areas where there are disagreements? Are the disagreements between people in different groups or are they more random? You probably want to have some rules in deciding whether something is important or not. If large numbers of people raise a particular issue, then it is likely worth saying something about it in your report. If only one person brings up a particular issue, then you probably do not want to include it. If you can, it is useful to give people at least a rough idea of how many of your respondents were concerned about particular things and whether those people had something in common. If your coalition covers multiple cities or counties you certainly want to talk about differences between the different communities.

Step 6: Putting it All Together

Once you have taken a look at all the data, you want to bring it all together in your community assessment report. You are covering a lot of ground so there may not be a single story to tell, but you should think about this task as trying to tell an overall story about your community and its early childhood system. The community assessment template provides details on what you should report. While the full community assessment report is an important product, you will also want to pull out some highlights and possibly develop a shorter summary document or presentation slides that you can use with various audiences.

Sharing the Results of Your Community Assessment

After you have completed a draft community assessment, you will want to share the results with a variety of groups. This will provide an opportunity for you to get feedback and input from important groups and individuals. You may find that some people disagree with your interpretations and conclusions. This may lead you to revisit some of them and think about whether changes need to be made. Just because someone objects doesn't mean that a change should be made, but it is good to be open to making changes based on new evidence. These meetings can also provide opportunities to discuss how you will use this information to develop a strategic plan. This is discussed more in the

Guide to Completing a Smart Beginnings Strategic Plan. Here are some of the groups you may want to share your findings with:

- ***Discussing the Findings with the Community Assessment Subcommittee.*** If you have a community assessment subcommittee, you should be having regular discussions about the data you are collecting and what seem to be the most important findings. These discussions can help you decide what other data you need to collect and to think about some of what you want to highlight in follow-up meetings and in presentations to other groups.
- ***Sharing Your Assessment Findings with Your Leadership Council.*** You should share your assessment findings with your leadership council. If they are meeting regularly during the assessment, you want to include an update on the assessment at each meeting covering the progress that has been made and any challenges that are coming up. This is a good opportunity to ask for help, if it is needed. You should also highlight a few preliminary findings, if possible, while letting them know that these are subject to change as more information comes in.
- ***Sharing Your Assessment Findings with Your Coalition and Other Stakeholders.*** It is a good idea to share your assessment findings with your broad coalition and other stakeholders. You can do this in a meeting using PowerPoint slides or by sending out a brief summary of key findings. You could email this summary or provide paper copies. The purpose is to inform these groups and get feedback on the findings. In any presentation or email you should acknowledge that it is challenging to get information covering all the issues related to early childhood in a community and that you may have missed something or misinterpreted something. You should encourage feedback and suggestions for improving the assessment. One of the goals here is to make sure that people are given the opportunity to respond and review the findings so that you can deal with any concerns as soon as possible and so, if concerns arise later, people will recognize that you did everything you could to give key stakeholders the chance to have input on the findings.
- ***Sharing Your Assessment Findings with Key Target Audiences.*** You may want to arrange a time to share the findings with groups you are targeting for involvement in SB. For example, if many business leaders belong to the same club, you may want to think about whether it would be useful to see if you can get on the club's agenda and highlight some of the findings. Other possibilities include gatherings of faith-based leaders, parent advisory groups for Head Start or other parent groups, and your community's local legislators or their staffs. Depending on the group, you may want to tailor your materials. For example, you might want to approach a summary for business leaders differently than you would a group of parents. When you do these presentations, it is important to highlight next steps and to let them know that there may be ways that they can help address some of the issues you have identified.
- ***Sharing Your Assessment Findings with the Media.*** You may want to send your findings to local newspapers, radio, or television stations. You want to make sure you cover all the key media outlets in the different communities you are working in so the information can be publicized across the entire area you serve. If you send the information to the media, you need to be prepared to answer questions about it. If the agency you are based in has communications or public relations specialists, you may want to enlist their help in reaching the media and preparing your responses to questions. If there are members of your coalition

or leadership council who have experience in this kind of work, they might serve as resources for publicizing the findings of your assessment.

- ***Sharing Your Assessment Findings in an Open Meeting.*** You may want to have an open meeting to share the findings with anyone in the community who is interested. Open meetings can be a challenge because you don't know who will show up or what issues they will want to bring to the table. However, they can also be a way of getting publicity for your effort and getting useful input.

What Should the Final Community Assessment Look Like?

This toolkit includes a **template for an SB community assessment** (appendix C). The final assessment should tell a story about the key issues involving young children and their families in your community and the opportunities that exist to improve school readiness and enhance child and family well-being. Your plan for doing that will be a separate document, but the assessment will help you develop that plan and can help community members understand the current status of children, families, and the early childhood system in your community.

Appendix A

Community Assessment Checklist

Appendix A

Community Assessment Checklist

The community assessment checklist is designed to assist you in completing the community assessment process. The purpose of the checklist is to serve as both a self-monitoring tool and a tool to be shared with your VECF program officer to assess your progress. While you are completing tasks, add notes about your activities, progress, and barriers encountered in the far right column. When tasks are completed, check the box in the middle column as complete by double-clicking on the box and selecting "checked" for the default value. By completing this checklist electronically, you will be able to continually work on completing the items and noting progress, as well as share your progress easily with VECF by sending this form via email.

Community Assessment Preparation

	Task	Check Completed	Status (note activities conducted toward task completion, barriers encountered, etc.)
1	Community assessment guide and template reviewed and planned approach for the assessment discussed with VECF program officer	☐	
2	Established a SB leadership council	☐	
3	Identified individuals to assist with the community assessment process	☐	
4	Consider forming a community assessment workgroup	☐	

Data Collection Process

The following tasks are related to the collection of data and information for the community assessment process. You should begin development of the coalition as a first step prior to data collection and continue to add members throughout the data collection period as needed.

	Task	Check Completed	Status (note activities conducted toward task completion, barriers encountered, etc.)
1	Meet with partners who are helping to conduct the community assessment and develop a preliminary plan for carrying out the assessment, including roles, assignments, and timelines	☐	
Inclusiveness of the Assessment Check the boxes below to indicate representatives from key sectors have been included in the assessment. Check the boxes in the middle column that correspond to the level of involvement of the representatives and include any notes about their participation.			
2	Representatives from early care sector are involved in the assessment process	☐	Check all that apply: ☐ Helped conduct the assessment ☐ Data were collected from them ☐ Helped review the findings Notes:
3	Representatives from early education sector are involved in the assessment process	☐	Check all that apply: ☐ Helped conduct the assessment ☐ Data were collected from them ☐ Helped review the findings Notes:
4	Representatives from health sector are involved in the assessment process	☐	Check all that apply: ☐ Helped conduct the assessment ☐ Data were collected from them ☐ Helped review the findings Notes:
5	Representatives who address issues related to young children's behavioral problems and/or mental health and social emotional development are involved in the assessment process	☐	Check all that apply: ☐ Helped conduct the assessment ☐ Data were collected from them ☐ Helped review the findings Notes:

Task		Check Completed	Status (note activities conducted toward task completion, barriers encountered, etc.)
6	Representatives from family support sector are involved in the assessment process	☐	Check all that apply: ☐ Helped conduct the assessment ☐ Data were collected from them ☐ Helped review the findings Notes:
7	Representatives from both the public and private sector have been involved in the assessment	☐	Check all that apply: ☐ Helped conduct the assessment ☐ Data were collected from them ☐ Helped review the findings Notes:
8	Parents are involved in the assessment process	☐	Check all that apply: ☐ Helped conduct the assessment ☐ Data were collected from them ☐ Helped review the findings Notes:
Data Collection			
9	Demographic data were collected	☐	
10	Indicator data were collected	☐	
11	A plan was developed for collecting environmental scan data	☐	
12	Found out whether existing needs assessments have been conducted for other programs or initiatives in the community	☐	
13	Determined what information from existing needs assessments is useful for the SB community assessment	☐	
14	Reviewed the possibility of conducting surveys	☐	
15	Reviewed the possibility of conducting focus groups	☐	
16	Reviewed the possibility of conducting key informant interviews	☐	
17	Environmental scan completed	☐	

Analysis of Results

After collecting data and information during the assessment phase, analyze the data by completing the following tasks:

	Task	Check Completed	Status (note activities conducted toward task completion, barriers encountered, etc.)
1	Review indicators • Which indicators is the community doing poorly on (i.e., less than state average or a negative trend over time)? • How is your current system addressing the indicators you are doing poorly on? • Which indicators show positive results? • Have there been specific initiatives that help explain the positive outcomes in the indicators you are doing well on? • How are the different counties and cities covered by your initiative doing on the various indicators?	☐	
2	Select indicators to highlight in your community assessment report	☐	
3	Discuss indicator results and analysis with your leadership council and make revisions to the analysis based on their input	☐	
4	Analyze the environmental scan data you collected	☐	
5	Share your analysis of the environmental scan data with your coalition and make revisions to your analysis based on their input	☐	

Sharing Preliminary Community Assessment Results

As your community assessment proceeds, you will want to share your results with a variety of audiences. This could include presentations or the development of brief summaries highlighting some of the key findings. The purpose is to obtain feedback and to incorporate it as necessary while also publicizing what your SB coalition is doing.

	Task	Check Completed	Status (note activities conducted toward task completion, barriers encountered, etc.)
1	Preliminary community assessment results have been shared with the leadership council	☐	
2	Preliminary community assessment results have been shared with the coalition	☐	
3	Preliminary community assessment results have been shared with other community members	☐	
4	Community assessment results have been reviewed and changes have been made based on feedback from the different audiences it has been shared with	☐	
5	Opportunities for sharing the final results have been identified	☐	

Community Assessment Report

This is a final checklist for submitting and using the results from the assessment. Ensure all items listed below are included or completed in your submission of the community assessment.

	Task	Check Completed	Status (note activities conducted toward task completion, barriers encountered, etc.)
1	Demographic data are discussed	☐	
2	Key indicators are highlighted	☐	
3	Data from all the common school readiness and substantive focus area indicators that were available are included	☐	
4	Key issues facing the community are discussed	☐	
5	Key strengths of your community are highlighted	☐	
6	Issues related to the community's early care and education system are discussed	☐	
7	The community's home visiting programs are described and discussed	☐	
8	Issues related to parent education are discussed	☐	
9	Issues related to developmental screening are discussed	☐	
10	Issues related to transition to kindergarten are discussed	☐	
11	Issues related to health and health care are discussed	☐	
12	Issues related to mental health and social and emotional development are discussed	☐	
13	Issues related to access to benefits are discussed	☐	
14	Issues related to professional development of individuals who work with young children in the community are discussed	☐	

Task		Check Completed	Status (note activities conducted toward task completion, barriers encountered, etc.)
15	Issues related to parent leadership efforts are discussed	☐	
16	Issues related to efforts to inform the larger community about early childhood issues are discussed	☐	
17	Issues related to efforts to inform parents about child development topics are discussed	☐	
18	How well agencies and organizations are working together around early childhood issues in the community are discussed	☐	
19	Possible sources of support for your SB initiative are discussed	☐	
20	The report provides a brief overview of next steps for your SB initiative	☐	
21	A brief written summary or summaries have been developed for sharing with audiences who may not have the time or interest in reviewing the whole report	☐	
22	A presentation has been developed for sharing community assessment findings with stakeholders and key audiences whose support or attention you are seeking	☐	

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

Coalition Name:				
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA/ CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY				
MEASURE[1]	**VIRGINIA**	**COUNTIES**[2]		
		1	**2**	**3**
Population distribution by age Source: http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-qr_name=ACS_2008_3YR_G00_DP3YR5&-geo_id=04000US51&-ds_name=&-_lang=en Census data may not be available for all counties.	Under 5 years: 515,420 (6.7%) 5 to 9 years: 484,751 (6.3%) 10 to 14 years: 504,233 (6.5%) 15 to 19 years: 549,139 (7.1%) 20 to 54 years: 3,878,431 (50.4%) 55 to 85+ years: 1,766,764 (23%)			
# of births for each locality – (note the most recent year) http://www.vdh.state.va.us/healthstats/documents/2010/pdfs/BirthsByRace09.pdf	2009: 103,061			
Population distribution by race Source: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/51000.html Census data may not be available for all counties.	White: 7,698,738 (67%) Black: 5,442,609 (19.9%) Latino: 506,843 (6%) American Indian: 21,390 (.4%) Asian/Pacific Islander: 373,565 (5%) Persons reporting two or more races: 154,987 (1.7%)			

[1] Links active as of 9/13/2010.
[2] Insert or delete columns as necessary.

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

Coalition Name:				
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA/ CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY				
MEASURE[1]	**VIRGINIA**	**COUNTIES**[2]		
		1	**2**	**3**
Race/ethnicity of children ages 0–17 in 2007* Source: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/chooseindicator.aspx?state=VA *Counts for Hispanics already included in race categories.	White: 1,280,894 (70.3%) Black: 433,985 (23.8%) Asian: 100,459 (5.5%) Native American: 6,614 (.4%) Hispanic: 179,711 (9.9%)			
Population distribution by household income (%) Source: http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US51&-qr_name=ACS_2008_3YR_G00_DP3YR3&-ds_name=ACS_2008_3YR_G00_&-_lang=en&-_sse=on Census data may not be available for all counties.	Less than $10,000: 5.8% $10,000 to $14,999: 4.4% $15,000 to $24,999: 8.6% $25,000 to $34,999: 9% $35,000 to $49,999: 13.3% $50,000 to $74,999: 18.7% $75,000 to $99,999: 13.3% $100,000 to $149,999: 14.7% $150,000 to $199,999: 6.2% $200,000 or more: 6.1%			
Family structure and households with one or more persons under 18 years Source: http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US51&-qr_name=ACS_2008_3YR_G00_DP3YR2&-ds_name=ACS_2008_3YR_G00_&-_lang=en&-redoLog=false&-_sse=on Census data may not be available for all counties.	Married couple family: 637,689 (70.6%) Female householder, no husband present, family: 207,034 (22.9%) Male householder, no wife present, family: 58,369 (6.5%)			

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

Coalition Name:				
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA/ CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY				
MEASURE[1]	**VIRGINIA**	**COUNTIES**[2]		
		1	**2**	**3**
Poverty status of children by family group and age Source: http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-qr_name=ACS_2008_3YR_G00_DP3YR3&-geo_id=04000US51&-ds_name=&-_lang=en&-redoLog=false Census data may not be available for all counties.	Families below FPL Total: 10.8% of all families with children <18 years old. These families fall in these groups: Married couple families: 4% Single-mother families: 29.1%			

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

Coalition Name:				
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA/ CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY				
MEASURE[1]	**VIRGINIA**	**COUNTIES**[2]		
		1	**2**	**3**
Young children in poverty	Percentage of children under age 6 living in families with income below the federal poverty level Source: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Map.aspx?state=VA&ind=3262 For more recent estimates for children <5, see: http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPGeoSearchByListServlet?ds_name=ACS_2008_3YR_G00_&_lang=en&_ts=284995108031 Select "County" under "geographic type." Select "Virginia," then your county name. Select "Show result." Under "Survey: American Community Survey," select "Economic." Scroll down to the appropriate statistic ("Percentage of Families and People Whose Income in the Past 12 Months Is Below the Poverty Level").	2000: 13% 2008: 12%		

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

Coalition Name:				
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA/ CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY				
MEASURE[1]	**VIRGINIA**	**COUNTIES**[2]		
		1	**2**	**3**
Children in TANF-UP and VIEW-UP Cases Source: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=VA&loct=5&by=a&order=a&ind=3247&dtm=10586&tf=38	2009: 62,511 2008: 38,615 2007: 34,208 2006: 41,302 2005: 43,803			
Average monthly participation of persons in the food stamp program (SNAP) Source: (Average for all months per given year) http://www.dss.virginia.gov/geninfo/reports/financial_assistance/fs.cgi	2009 average: 691,175 2008 average: 560,871 2007 average: 519,530			
Poverty status of children ages 0–17 (%) Source: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=VA&ind=3259	2008: 14% 2007: 13% 2006: 12% 2005: 13% 2004: 12%			
Infant mortality rate (5-year average) Source: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=VA&ind=3243	7.4 per 1,000 (some counties not available)			
Number of persons living in public housing Source: must select years separately) http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/assthsg.html	2008: 43,688 2000: 47,000			

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

Coalition Name:				
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA/ CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY				
MEASURE[1]	**VIRGINIA**	**COUNTIES**[2]		
		1	**2**	**3**
Unemployment rate Source: http://www.vawc.virginia.gov/gsipub/index.asp?docid=427 Retrospective data http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=VA&ind=3241	December 2009: 6.7% 2008: 4% 2007: 3% 2006: 3% 2005: 3.5%			
10 largest employers Source: http://www.vawc.virginia.gov/multisession.asp	1. U.S. Department of Defense 2. Wal-Mart 3. Fairfax County Public Schools 4. Postal Service 5. Newport News Shipbuilding 6. Sentara Healthcare 7. Food Lion 8. County of Fairfax 9. City of Virginia Beach Schools 10. Booz, Allen, and Hamilton			

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

COMMON SCHOOL READINESS INDICATORS				
MEASURE	**VIRGINIA**	**COUNTIES**		
		1	**2**	**3**
PALS Assessment- Source: DOE web link or your VECF PO % of children scoring at or above benchmark on PALS-K at kindergarten entry	Fall- 2010: 2009: 2008: 15% 2007: 16% 2006: 17.1%			
% of children scoring at or above benchmark in spring of 1st grade	Spring- 2010: 2009: 2008: 2007: 2006:			
% of children promoted kindergarten-3rd grade Source: DOE; Kids Count Data Book	2010: 2009: 2008: 2007: 2006:			
Third grade SOL scores- Source: DOE web link or your VECF PO English- % of children with reading proficiency	2010: 2009: 2008: 84% 2007: 80% 2006: 84%			

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

COMMON SCHOOL READINESS INDICATORS				
MEASURE	**VIRGINIA**	**COUNTIES**		
		1	**2**	**3**
History- % of children with history proficiency	2010: 2009: 2008: 2007: 2006:			
Science- % of children with science proficiency	2010: 2009: 2008: 2007: 2006:			
Mathematics- % of children with math proficiency	2010: 2009: 2008: 2007: 2006:			

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

SUBSTANTIVE FOCUS AREA INDICATORS

DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT					
INDICATOR	**MEASURE**	**VIRGINIA AVERAGE**	**COUNTIES**		
			1	**2**	**3**
Developmental screening	Percentage of children receiving health and developmental screening by health care providers through well child visits Data not currently available: Percentage of children served in early intervention programs Source: http://www.infantva.org/sup-PublicRepStateLocalMon.htm "Summary of State and Local Results"	Ages 0–1 .67% Ages 0–3 1.99%			
	Students receiving special education services. Source: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=VA&ind=3248	2008: 13.5% 2007: 14% 2006: 14.1% 2005: 14.4%			

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

PARENT EDUCATION AND SUPPORT					
INDICATOR	**MEASURE**	**VIRGINIA AVERAGE**	**COUNTIES**		
			1	**2**	**3**
Mother's education level	Percentage of births to mothers with less than a 12th grade education Source: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=VA&ind=3257&dtm=6718	2007: 15% 2006: 15% 2005: 15% 2004: 15% 2003: 15%			
Births to teens	Number of births to teens ages 15–17 per 1,000 girls Source: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=VA&ind=3235&dtm=6674	2007: 17 2006: 17 2005: 16 2004: 18 2003: 17			
Child abuse and neglect	Rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect among children ages 0–5 Source: VDSS, 2008 (number, not percentage) Contact Rebecca Hjelm, Policy Analyst at DSS, 804-726-7553 or email Rebecca.hjelm@dss.virginia.gov for data 0–5 years. Rate for children birth to 17 available on Kids Count http://www.kidscount.org/cgi-bin/cliks.cgi?action=rawdata_results&subset=VA	3,857 (total for children)			

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

PARENT EDUCATION AND SUPPORT					
INDICATOR	**MEASURE**	**VIRGINIA AVERAGE**	**COUNTIES**		
			1	**2**	**3**
Substance exposed newborns	Number of newborns exposed to alcohol, improperly used prescription medication, and illicit substances in utero. Source: http://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/about/reports/children/cps/all_other/2008/cps_substance_abuse_newborn_count_fy00--fy08.pdf	2008: 864 2007: 834 2006: 690 2005: 681 2004: 561			
Parent Education	Number or percentage of families with infants or toddlers who enroll in parent education classes each year. Contact local parent education services				

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

PARENT EDUCATION AND SUPPORT					
INDICATOR	**MEASURE**	**VIRGINIA AVERAGE**	**COUNTIES**		
			1	**2**	**3**
Nutrition	Percent of children approved for free and reduced lunches Source: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=VA&ind=3239	2009: 37% 2008: 34% 2007: 33% 2006: 33% 2005: 33%			

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

HOME VISITATION					
INDICATOR	**MEASURE**	**VIRGINIA AVERAGE**	**COUNTIES**		
			1	**2**	**3**
Supports for families with infants and toddlers	Number or percentage of families with infants and toddlers who are enrolled in home visiting services Contact local home visiting services, (i.e., Healthy Families, Resource Mothers, CHIP of Virginia, Healthy Start, Early Head Start)				

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

COMPREHENSIVE HEALTHCARE					
INDICATOR	**MEASURE**	**VIRGINIA AVERAGE**	**COUNTIES**		
			1	**2**	**3**
Health insurance	Percentage of children without health insurance Source: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=VA&ind=4654	200,737 (number, not percentage)			
Low birth weight infants	Percentage of infants born weighing under 2,500 grams (5.8 pounds) Source: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=VA&ind=3252&dtm=6708 For more information, see also: http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/healthstats/stats.htm	2008: 8.4% 2007: 8.6% 2006: 8.3% 2005: 8.2% 2004: 8.4%			
Access to prenatal care	Percentage of mothers receiving prenatal care in the first trimester Source: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=VA&ind=3234	2008: 85% 2007: 83.2% 2006: 83.5% 2005: 84.6% 2004: 84.8%			
Immunizations	Percentage of children ages 19–35 months who have been fully immunized Source: VDH Local data available by contacting Immunization Action Plan (IAP) coordinator with the local health departments; contact list available from VECF *Health department only has rates for the children who receive immunizations at the local health department immunization clinic; no local rate is available to capture rates for all children*	79.6%			

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

COMPREHENSIVE HEALTHCARE					
INDICATOR	**MEASURE**	**VIRGINIA AVERAGE**	**COUNTIES**		
			1	**2**	**3**
Physical well-being	Children under 5 identified as children with special health care needs. Source: http://mchb.hrsa.gov/cshcn05/SD/virginia.htm Data are not available at the county and community level.	24,291 (8.4% of all CSHCN)			

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

<table>
<tr><th colspan="6">EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION</th></tr>
<tr><th rowspan="2">INDICATOR</th><th rowspan="2">MEASURE</th><th rowspan="2">VIRGINIA AVERAGE</th><th colspan="3">COUNTIES</th></tr>
<tr><th>1</th><th>2</th><th>3</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Children enrolled in an early education program</td><td>Number of 4-year-olds enrolled in Virginia Preschool Initiative
Source: (number, not percentage) http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings.aspx?state=VA&ind=3258</td><td>2009: 14,934 (some counties n/a)
2008: 14,569
2007: 12,224
2006: 11,237
2005: 10,318</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Number of children in Head Start

County-level data not publicly available. Contact local Head Start.</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Licensed Providers</td><td># of licensed child care centers
Most recent year

Source: http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/search/cc.cgi</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Quality rated programs</td><td>Number of programs participating in Virginia Star Quality Initiative(VSQI)
Source: http://epm.virginiainteractive.org/qris/?template=sb.master</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Accredited child care centers</td><td>Number of child care centers accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
Source: NAEYC, 2009, http://www.naeyc.org/accreditation/search</td><td>132 accredited providers in VA</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Smart Beginnings Community Assessment Indicator Grid

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION					
INDICATOR	**MEASURE**	**VIRGINIA AVERAGE**	**COUNTIES**		
			1	**2**	**3**
Class size	Average teacher-to-child ratio in K–1 classrooms Source: National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008. For K–7 county data, see link below. For K–1 county-level data, contact local school district. http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/supts_annual_report/2008_09/index.shtml	1:21.9 (kindergarten) 1:21.6 (Grades 1–8)			

Appendix C

Community Assessment Template

Community Assessment Template

This template provides a suggested outline for your community assessment. You can use an alternative outline, but be sure to cover the information included in this template.

SECTION A: Introduction

Provide a brief introduction describing SB. The following is an example of some of what you might want to say:

> This community assessment was conducted to support the work of the [INSERT YOUR COALITION'S NAME] Smart Beginnings coalition. Under Smart Beginnings, the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation provides support to local partnerships working to coordinate, improve, and expand the delivery of high-quality early childhood programs and services. Our coalition is one of 24 local or regional initiatives[1] across Virginia. The findings of this assessment will be used to inform the development of a strategic plan that will guide the work of the Smart Beginnings coalition and other stakeholders interested in improving services and resources for children ages 0–5 and their families in our community. The goal of this plan will be to allow more children to enter kindergarten ready for school and ready for life.

Provide a very brief summary of the methods you used to complete the community assessment and how you have shared the findings so far. You could note that you gathered indicator data along with how many focus groups and interviews you conducted. The goal of this section is to show that you sought information and shared your findings with a broad range of community stakeholders. Detailed information about the community assessment can be included in an appendix and will be important for documenting what you did in the community assessment for your program officer and other interested community members.

SECTION B: Children and Families in Our Community[2]

In this section, you want to highlight the demographic data showing the population of children, racial and ethnic makeup, poverty, and unemployment. The goal here is to provide an overview of the child and family population in your community. You may want to highlight a few key points such as whether there have been any changes in the population or how the local poverty rate compares with the state as a whole. If some of the data are out of date and you have reason to believe that things might have changed, you might want to note that.

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[1] Check with your program officer to confirm the current number before finalizing your document.
[2] You could use "Communities" if you think that is more appropriate.

SECTION C: Common School Readiness and Substantive Focus Area Indicators

A community assessment should include all the indicator data you collected. However, there are so many indicators that you cannot discuss them all. You will definitely want to include a table with all your results. You may put that table in the main body of the report or you may put it in an appendix in the back of the document. You want to select some of the indicators and discuss them in more detail. This could be as few as three or four or more if you think it would be useful. These indicators should be selected with the input of your leadership council and coalition. Things you want to cover include:

- **Why is this indicator important?** The rationale that VECF provides in the list of indicators in the appendix of your grant manual can serve as a starting point for this. You may want to add some other information that helps illustrate why the indicator is important for your community.
- **How are we doing?** This is where you show the data. To determine how your community is doing, you need some standard of comparison. You can compare yourself to how you were doing a few years ago, how Virginia as a whole is doing, or how counties that have similar characteristics to yours are doing. You may even want to include two different comparisons.
- **What can be done to improve this indicator?** This can be a little more challenging but, if possible, it is great to include some strategies that might lead to improvements on the indicator. You may draw this from the information on evidence-based practices that VECF provides or from other resources that you or your coalition members are familiar with. You may be less specific for now and provide the details in your action plan or work plan when you apply for further funding. Some examples include:
    - If your PALS scores show that a lot of children are behind on language development, you can say that we need to make sure that more children in our community have access to high quality child care;
    - If there are quite a few low birth weight babies, you can say that, given that such children are more likely to have developmental delays, we need to make sure that we are doing routine developmental screenings so we can catch problems early; or
    - If there are a lot of children without health insurance, you can say we need to make sure we are doing everything we can to let all eligible children and families know about FAMIS or FAMIS Plus.

SECTION D: Findings from Our Environmental Scan

This section will vary based on what types of data you collected, but there are some key items you should cover if possible. Is it likely that you will know all the details about all of these things? Probably not but, to the extent that your community assessment has found information on them, you should report them. While all the questions below are important, we have emphasized some in bold text because these questions can be very useful as you develop a plan.

- **What do your sources see as the key issues facing families with children in your communities?**
- **What do your sources see as the key strengths in your community?**
- Report on what is known about the early care and education system in your community covering topics such as infant care, child care, Head Start, preschool, and the Virginia Preschool Initiative. What efforts are being made to increase quality in this area?
- **Report on what is known about the availability and delivery of home visiting services in your community? Are there programs? Are there waiting list? What are the characteristics of the people receiving these services?**
- Report on what is known about parenting education in your community. What programs are out there? Is there any information on how well they are working? Is there any information on what parents want or need in this area?
- **Report on what is known about what is going on regarding developmental screening. Is it being done at doctor's offices or other places such as health departments? Where does your infant-toddler initiative program and preschool special education program get most of its referrals?**
- Report on what is known about what is going on regarding transition to kindergarten. Are there special efforts being made to make this a smooth transition?
- What efforts are being made to conduct outreach so that people sign up for benefits for which they are eligible? How are parents being told about FAMIS, FAMIS Plus, WIC, and food stamps? Are these programs reaching eligible individuals?
- **What do you know about what is going on with staff members who work with young children? What kind of training do they get? Who does the training? Are there attempts to match that training with the standards that have been identified in the Virginia Alignment project? What issues or concerns would these staff members like help addressing?**
- **Are there parent leaders in your community or parent-led groups who are addressing early childhood issues? Which issues? What do you know about what parents think and what they see as key needs?**
- **What is being done to inform the community about the importance of the early childhood period and how investing in children when they are young can have long-term payoffs? What is being done to help parents understand the importance of these early years and how they can best give their child a great start?**

- **How well are the different agencies that work with young children working together in your community? What could be done so they could work better together?**
- **Who out there might be able to support your efforts to improve things for children and families in terms of providing funding or other resources such as expertise or equipment or materials?**

SECTION E: Summary of Key Findings

This section is intended to bring together the key findings from the review of the demographic data, indicators, and environmental scan. You may want to highlight a few of the key issues that have been identified in the report. For example, if health insurance coverage, behavioral problems, poverty, or lack of quality child care have been identified as issues, you can highlight them here. You don't have to repeat the details which are covered above. One useful way of organizing this section is to include a few bullet points highlighting the key findings and apparent key issues in your community. It will be very important as you move into strategic planning to try to develop strategies that address these issues.

SECTION F: Next Steps

This section can be very brief. You can say that you are using the community assessment findings to develop a strategic plan that will guide your coalition's work. You will seek additional support from VECF and other sources to start making progress on some of the goals in the strategic plan. You will also be looking for other resources and support to help achieve the important goal of giving all children and families in the community the best possible chance to succeed.

Appendix D

Sample Surveys:

Parent Survey

Provider Survey

Smart Beginnings Sample Parent Survey

This survey is being conducted as part of the SB community assessment. We are asking parents about your experiences so we can find out information that can inform a community-wide effort to address the needs of families with young children. We are not asking you to provide your name, and any information you provide will be kept private.

SECTION 1: Some Questions About You and Your Children

1. **Where do you live?**
Insert a list of towns, cities, or counties. You may want to put a category for "other" and ask them to fill that in if they don't think they fit in any of the places you list.

2. **How many children do you have age 5 or under?**
☐ 0 children ☐ 4 children
☐ 1 child ☐ 5 children
☐ 2 children ☐ More than 5
☐ 3 children

3. **How old are they?** *(check all that apply)*
☐ Less than one year ☐ 3 years old
☐ 1 year old ☐ 4 years old
☐ 2 years old ☐ 5 years old

SECTION 2: Health

1. **Do your children who are 5 or under have any kind of health care coverage, including health insurance, prepaid plans such as HMOs, or government plans such as Medicaid or FAMIS?**
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ At least one child does and one child does not

2. *A personal doctor or nurse is a health professional who knows your child well and is familiar with your child's health history. This can be a general doctor, a pediatrician, a specialist doctor, a nurse practitioner, or a physician's assistant.*
Do you have one or more persons you think of as the personal doctor or nurse for your children age 5 or under?
☐ Yes, one person ☐ Yes, more than one person ☐ No

3. *Sometimes, people have difficulty getting health care when they need it. By health care, we mean medical care as well as other kinds of care like dental care and mental health services.*
During the past 12 months was there any time when any of your children age 5 or younger needed health care but the care was delayed or not received?
☐ Yes ☐ No

4. *Sometimes, a child's doctor or other health care provider will ask a parent to fill out a questionnaire at home or during their child's visit.*
During the past 12 months, did a doctor or other health care provider have you fill out a questionnaire about specific concerns or observations you may have about your child's development, communication, or social behaviors?

   ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

5. **Which of the following statements best fits your child or children age 5 or under?**

   ☐ My child definitely gets enough exercise or physical activity.
   ☐ My child probably gets enough exercise or physical activity.
   ☐ My child needs more exercise or physical activity.

6. **Are any of your children ages 5 or under overweight?**

   ☐ Yes, definitely ☐ Maybe ☐ Definitely not

SECTION 3: Things You and Your Children Do

1. **During the past week, how many days did you or other family members read to your children under age 5?**

   ☐ 0 days ☐ 4 days
   ☐ 1 day ☐ 5 days
   ☐ 2 days ☐ 6 days
   ☐ 3 days ☐ 7 days

2. **On an average weekday, about how much time does your child age 5 or under usually watch TV or videos?**

   ☐ 0
   ☐ Less than 1 hour
   ☐ Between 1 and 2 hours
   ☐ 2-3 hours
   ☐ 3-4 hours
   ☐ More than 4 hours

SECTION 4: Parenting

1. **In general, how well do you feel you are coping with the day-to-day demands of raising children?**

   Very well ☐ Somewhat well ☐ Not very well ☐ Not very well at all ☐

2. **Is there someone who you can turn to for day-to-day emotional help with raising children?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. **How sure are you that you can tell whether your child is able to physically do the things that he or she should be doing at his or her age?**

   Totally sure ☐ Very sure ☐ Somewhat sure ☐ Not at all sure ☐

4. **How sure are you that you can tell whether your child is able to get along with others the way he or she should be doing at his or her age?**

   Totally sure ☐ Very sure ☐ Somewhat sure ☐ Not at all sure ☐

5. **How sure are you that you can tell whether your child's feelings and emotions are healthy and about right for his or her age?**

   Totally sure ☐ Very sure ☐ Somewhat sure ☐ Not at all sure ☐

6. **How sure are you that you know what should be done to best help prepare your child for kindergarten?**

   Totally sure ☐ Very sure ☐ Somewhat sure ☐ Not at all sure ☐

7. **How easy is it to find places in your community where you can find out more about children's growth and development?**

   Very easy ☐ Somewhat easy ☐ Not very easy ☐ Don't know ☐

8. **Would you like to have more information about what you could do to best help your child grow and learn?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

9. **Thinking about people in your community, which of the following are good ways to get parents information about how to help children grow and learn?**

   ☐ Putting it on the Internet
   ☐ Putting it in newspapers
   ☐ Putting it in child care centers
   ☐ Putting it in doctor's offices
   ☐ Putting it in the library
   ☐ Sending it in the mail
   ☐ Sharing it during meetings or classes
   ☐ Other *(please describe)*: ______________________________

SECTION 5: Child Care

1. What type of child care are you currently using or have you used in the past year?

- ☐ Family/friend caretaker
- ☐ Private center in someone's home
- ☐ Private center outside of someone's home
- ☐ Public center such as Head Start or in a school
- ☐ I haven't used child care [SKIP TO THE NEXT SECTION]

2. How much do you agree with the statement, the place where my child or children get child care provides high quality care?

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐

3. If you could afford it, would you find a different place for your child to get child care?

Definitely	Probably	Probably not	Definitely not
☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION 6: A Few More Questions About You

1. What is the race/ethnicity of your child or children age 5 and under?

- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ White
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ American Indian
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Two or more races

2. Are you Hispanic or Latino?

☐ Yes ☐ No

3. What was your total household income last year before taxes *(include any cash benefits you received from a government agency such as unemployment, TANF, or disability payments)***?**

- ☐ Under $10,000
- ☐ $10,000-$14,999
- ☐ $15,000-$24,999
- ☐ $25,000-$34,999
- ☐ $35,000-$49,999
- ☐ $50,000-$74,999
- ☐ $75,000-$99,999
- ☐ $100,000 and above

Thank You!

Smart Beginnings Sample Child Care Provider Survey

This survey is being conducted as part of the SB community assessment. We are asking child care providers about your experiences so we can find out information that can inform a community-wide effort to address the needs of families with young children. We are not asking you to provide your name, and any information you provide will be kept private.

SECTION 1: Some Questions About Your Services and Staff

1. **Where is your child care facility located?**
   Insert a list of towns, cities, or counties. You may want to put a category for other and ask them to fill that in if they don't think they fit in any of the places you list.

2. **How many children age 5 and under do you serve?** _________

3. **Do you provide care for infants** *(children under 1 year of age)***?**
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. **In a typical month, what percent of children in your facility receive child care subsidies from the state?**
   ☐ None ☐ 41–60%
   ☐ 1–10% ☐ 61–80%
   ☐ 11–20% ☐ 81–99%
   ☐ 21–30% ☐ 100%
   ☐ 31–40%

5. *[IF YOU SERVE CHILDREN WHO RECEIVE SUBSIDIES]*

How satisfied are you with the way the child care subsidy program is administered?

Very satisfied	Mostly satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Mostly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. **How many staff members work directly with children in your facility?** *(Don't forget to count yourself if you work directly with children.)* _________

7. **How many of your staff members who work directly with young children have the following education credentials?**
   _____ High school diploma
   _____ Certificate in child care
   _____ Associate's degree
   _____ Bachelor's degree
   _____ Master's or other graduate degree

SECTION 2: Challenges

1. Please indicate how much of a problem each of the following issues are for your facility?

	Major problem	Minor problem	Not a problem
Turnover of staff	☐	☐	☐
Turnover among children at your facility	☐	☐	☐
Parents having difficulty affording child care	☐	☐	☐
Problem behavior among children enrolled in the center	☐	☐	☐
Lack of training among staff	☐	☐	☐

2. **In the past year how many children have been asked to leave your facility because their parents were unable to pay the bill? _______________**

3. **In the past year how many children were asked to leave your facility because the child was exhibiting behavior problems? ________________**

SECTION 3: Other Programs That Serve Young Children

1. **How familiar are you with the Infant Toddler Connection Program in Virginia?**

   ☐ Very familiar ☐ Somewhat familiar ☐ Not at all familiar

2. **Have you ever referred a family to the Infant Toddler Connection Program?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

3. **Do you provide families who are enrolled in your center with information about the FAMIS or FAMIS Plus (children's Medicaid) program?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. **How familiar are you with the Virginia Star Quality Initiative also known as VSQI?**

   ☐ Very familiar ☐ Somewhat familiar ☐ Not at all familiar

5. **Has anyone ever asked if you would be interested in learning more or participating in VSQI?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

SECTION 4: Professional Development Opportunities

1. If workshops or training opportunities were available in the following areas, how interested in each would your staff members who work directly with children be?

	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not at all interested
Addressing problem behavior among children	☐	☐	☐
Improving nutrition among children	☐	☐	☐
Connecting families to other community resources	☐	☐	☐
Creating opportunities for increased physical activity in child care settings	☐	☐	☐
Understanding developmental delays in early childhood	☐	☐	☐
Supporting children's social and emotional development	☐	☐	☐
Implementing activities in child care settings that help prepare young children for kindergarten	☐	☐	☐

SECTION 5: Quality Ratings

1. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I would be interested in having the quality of my child care facility assessed as part of a community effort to improve the quality of child care.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would participate in a quality rating effort if there was a financial incentive to do so.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would participate in a quality rating effort if training and technical assistance opportunities covering how to improve quality were offered in return for taking part in the rating system.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Most parents are able to distinguish high quality child care facilities from poor quality facilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Thank You

Appendix E

Interview and Focus Group Discussion Guide

Tips for Conducting Interviews and Focus Groups

Don't be afraid of a little silence. The primary role of an interview or a focus group moderator is to be a good listener and to ask the right questions. Avoid the temptation to talk too much. Sometimes silence just means people are thinking. After a question, you should pause and look at your audience with a look that conveys that you are eager to hear what they have to say in response to the question.

Follow up on questions that might have more than one answer. Many of the questions you ask may have more than one answer. For example, many questions are in the form of what works well about what you are doing or what works better or what unmet needs exist. Usually a person will mention something and then describe the issue. After they are done, you usually want to ask something like, "Is there anything else?" or "Are there other unmet needs?"

Use probes if respondents are only partially answering the question. Sometimes you ask a question about early childhood services in general and people focus only on child care. If one person does this, other people may follow their lead. Probes are designed to be used when you want to make sure some issues are addressed. You don't always use them, only when those issues haven't been addressed.

Ask people to elaborate. When respondents say things that are interesting or that partially answer the questions you are trying to address in the community assessment, ask them for more details so you have more information to work with. Probing questions such as, "Can you tell me more about that?" or "How does that work?" are very useful.

Ask people to explain things. Sometimes we feel like we should know everything. That is impossible, especially when we are working in a broad area like early childhood. If somebody says something that you don't understand or don't fully understand, you should ask them for more detail. For example, you can say, "Can you explain that?" If they use an acronym and you don't know what it means you can ask them what it is. For example, "What is ASQ?" If you do this once or twice, your respondent will be more likely to start making his or her answers easier to understand.

Don't express strong opinions or get into debates. Everyone has strong opinions on topics, but an interview or focus group is not a good place to bring them up. You want people to feel free to share their experiences and what they are thinking, and if they think you are going to judge them or you have already made up your mind on something, they might be reluctant to do that.

If they ask you what you found so far, you might not want to tell them too much. People are interested in finding out what you are hearing from others and you probably wouldn't mind sharing. You may, however, want to limit what you share because you really want to spend your time finding out about their experiences, and the coalition's assessment findings will change as you collect more information, think about it, and discuss it among coalition members. It is probably best to limit what you say and be somewhat noncommittal by noting that people are saying different things and you and the coalition and leadership council are going to need some time to figure out what it all means.

Say thank you and follow up. It is always important to thank people for the information they provide. If they are someone who you want to get further involved in SB, saying thank you and then following up with an email or phone call can be very useful. If someone asks for something like a summary of SB or a contact number for someone you know, try and get it to them as soon as possible.

Focus Group Discussion Guide for Program Directors or Staff Members Who Work with Young Children

Welcome to our group discussion. Thank you for participating. This group discussion is being held to help inform the community needs assessment that is being conducted as part of our community's Smart Beginnings initiative. Smart Beginnings is intended to bring together a diverse group of representatives in our community to explore what can be done to help families raise healthy children who are ready to be successful in school once they get to kindergarten. The goal of this community assessment is to understand our community's successes and challenges in this area so we can create a plan to improve things.

Today's group is designed to get input from people who work with young children or on issues related to young children. Before we begin, I want to go over a few ground rules and provide a little information about the group.

- There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask. We want to hear about your thoughts and experiences, whether positive or negative.
- It is okay to disagree with one another, but please do so respectfully.
- Only one person should talk at a time. Otherwise, it will be hard to follow what everyone is saying.
- We would like everyone to participate. You don't have to answer every question, but I do want to hear from a lot of different people and may call on you to find out what you think about a particular issue.
- We have a lot to talk about so I may have to interrupt sometimes. It is not because I am rude but because there may come a time when we need to move on to a new subject.
- We will be using first names only during the discussion. Nothing anybody says will be tied to a particular person in any report, document, or presentation.
- [IF YOU ARE RECORDING THE SESSION] In order to be able to get an accurate account of what was said during our group I would like to record the discussion. Does anybody object to that?

Introduction: Let's get started. I'd like to begin by going around the table and having each of you tell us a little about yourself.

Start with the participant to your right. Have them respond in round robin fashion.

Please tell me your first name, the agency or organization you work for, the services your organization provides to families with children ages 0 to 5, and your specific role in providing those services?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

How Families Find Out About Services and Resources 20 minutes

Now, I would like to ask you about how families find out about services and resources for young children in your community.

1. When families need a service or resource for children ages 0–5, how do they usually find out about it?

   PROBES: What about health care services?
   What about child care information?
   Information on how to be a good parent?
   Financial support or help with needs such as food?
   Counseling?

2. What works well about the way information is provided to families?
3. What could be better?
4. Based on your experience, what is the most effective way to share information with families in this community?

   PROBES: Does written material such as brochures or pamphlets work well?
   What about telephone help lines?
   Group gatherings?
   One-on-one meetings?

Referrals and Collaboration 25 minutes

I want to talk about your experiences providing services to families and children.

1. When a family asks for or clearly needs something that your organization cannot provide, what do you usually do?
2. Is what you do in these cases effective?

   PROBES: What is effective about it?
   What could be better?

3. Overall, how aware are people like you, who work with families of young children, about the various resources and services available to families outside their own agency?

   PROBES: Are there some services they are more likely to be aware of? Some that they are less likely to be aware of?
   What is done to make them aware?
   Is there anything more that could be done or that could be done better?

4. How could the different agencies and organizations that provide services for families of young children in this community work better together?

   PROBE: What needs to be done in order to make that happen?

5. What about among those of you who provide the direct services, are there ways you could work better together?

   PROBE: What needs to be done in order to make that happen?

Unmet Needs 15 minutes

1. What services or resources do the families you work with need that are difficult to get?
2. What is difficult about getting them?

   PROBES: Are they not available?
   Is there a waiting list?
   Do they have to leave the county?

3. Other than increased funding, are there any steps that could be taken that could improve access to these services or resources?

Input From Providers 10 minutes

I want to ask you about whether you are given opportunities to provide feedback on how services and information are provided to families with young children.

1. What opportunities are there for people like you, who provide direct services to families with children, to provide feedback on how well things are working and what needs to be changed?

   PROBES: At your agency?
   To those at the community or county level who are responsible for making policies and decisions?
   To those at the state level who are responsible for making policies and decisions?

2. What could be done to provide effective opportunities for you to provide feedback on what is working and what needs to be changed?

Priority Change 28 minutes

We would like you to take some time to think about a couple questions. You have paper and pencil in front of you so you can write down your answers before we discuss them. That way you will be able to think about it without thinking about what people have already said.

Here are the questions:

1. If you could make one change regarding how information or services are provided to families of children ages 0 to 5 in this community, what would that change be?
2. If you could make one change regarding how the different agencies and organizations in this community who serve children ages 0-5 work together, what would that change be?

[Give them a few minutes, and ask round robin for their responses to the questions one by one.]

3. How did you answer the question?
4. What led you to select this answer?

Sum up the responses or ask the co-moderator to do it.

5. How do you think it would be best to accomplish the things you listed?

   PROBES: Who should do them?
   How should they be done?

Closing 2 minutes

Thank you very much for coming today. We enjoyed the discussion and have learned a lot about what you think about the services and resources available for families in your community.

Before we stop is there anything I haven't asked about or that you would like to add that is important for us to know regarding services for children in your community?

Focus Group Discussion Guide for Parents of Young Children

Welcome to our group discussion. Thank you for participating. This group discussion is being held to help inform the community needs assessment that is being conducted as part of our communities Smart Beginnings initiative. Smart Beginnings is intended to bring together a diverse group of representatives in our community to explore what can be done to help families raise healthy children who are ready to be successful in school once they get to kindergarten. The goal of this community assessment is to understand our community's successes and challenges in this area so we can create a plan to improve things.

Today's group is designed to get input from parents of young children. Before we begin, I want to go over a few ground rules and provide a little information about the group.

- There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask. We want to hear about your thoughts and experiences, whether positive or negative.
- It is okay to disagree with one another, but please do so respectfully.
- Only one person should talk at a time. Otherwise, it will be hard to follow what everyone is saying.
- We would like everyone to participate. You don't have to answer every question, but I do want to hear from a lot of different people and may call on you to find out what you think about a particular issue.
- We have a lot to talk about so I may have to interrupt sometimes. It is not because I am rude but because there may come a time when we need to move on to a new subject.
- We will be using first names only during the discussion. Nothing anybody says will be tied to a particular person in any report, document, or presentation.
- [IF YOU ARE RECORDING THE SESSION] In order to be able to get an accurate account of what was said during our group I would like to record the discussion. Does anybody object to that?

Focus Group Questions

Let's get started. I know some of you may have older children, but please remember that the focus of this group discussion is young children from birth to 5 years old, so please try and limit your comments to your experiences with that age group.

Joys and Concerns Families Have About their Children Age Birth to 5 Years 15 minutes

I would like to begin our discussion with some general questions about children age 5 or younger.

1. What is the best part of being a parent to children under age 5?
2. What worries you about caring for and raising young children?

   PROBES: "When you're lying awake at night what do you worry about?"
   Who do you turn to for help with things that worry you?

Service Areas

Now I would like to focus in more detail on some particular areas, including some we have already talked about a little.

Let's start with health and wellness issues for your young children. 15 minutes

1. Do you have health insurance for your child? What kind? What is good and what is bad about your insurance?
2. During regular check-up visits, what does the doctor or nurse talk with you about?

   PROBES: Child development (age you can expect your child to accomplish a particular task)
   Child rearing (eating, sleeping, play, temper tantrums)
   Family concerns (stress on parent, sibling rivalry)
   Does the doctor suggest or refer you to other resources or services?

3. What kinds of things would you like to discuss with your child's health care provider that you do not currently discuss?

Now let's go on and talk about parenting. 15 minutes

Babies and young children do not come with instruction manuals. Let's talk about how and where you learn to be a parent, starting with:

1. Where do you go for answers about your parenting questions or concerns?

   PROBES: What information or advice they were seeking
   How useful was the information or advice
   What made it useful?

2. What are the child rearing areas and issues where you think parents and families need the most information and guidance?
3. What services in your community currently help parents get the guidance they need?

   PROBE: What do services look like?

4. What services are needed that aren't currently available?

   PROBES: What should the services look like?
   What are some things that could be done to help parents strengthen their parenting skills?

Let's talk now about child care or day care for your young children. 15 minutes

1. What have been your experiences in finding and using child care?

   PROBE: Where did you find out about the child care providers you considered using?

2. What do you look for in choosing someone to care for your child?
3. In your opinion what makes a great child care setting?
4. What do you think are the needs in your community related to child care?

When children get older and enter the preschool and kindergarten years, families begin to use other types of education and care settings such as preschool, Head Start, and kindergarten. 10 minutes

1. What have been your experiences with these programs?

   PROBES: What was good about the experience for you and your child?
   What could have been better?

2. How did you come in contact with them?

Caring for little ones, managing a home, and supporting a family can be a handful and sometimes parents need some help. 15 minutes

1. What kinds of supports are currently available to families in your community?
2. How could these supports and services be improved?
3. What would be the best way to let people know about family support issues and services available in the community?

Summary Issues 15 minutes

Thinking about all the areas and services we have discussed, what would make it easier for you and your family to:

1. Do a good job raising your children?
2. Find services or information you need?
3. Use the services?

If there was one thing you could change about the services or resources available in your community to parents of very young children, what would it be?

Closing 5 minutes

Thank you very much for coming. We enjoyed the discussion and have learned a lot from your comments and suggestions.

Is there anything I haven't asked about that you would like to tell me related to the topics we have discussed?

Key Informant Interviews for Agencies or Organizations That Serve Families With Young Children

Introduction: I am conducting an interview for our community's Smart Beginnings coalition as part of our community assessment. Smart Beginnings is intended to bring together a diverse group of representatives in our community to explore what can be done to help families raise healthy children who are ready to be successful in school once they get to kindergarten. The goal of this community assessment is to understand our community's successes and challenges in this area so we can create a plan to improve things.

One way we are doing that is by talking to you. We are collecting a lot of information and will put it in a report. We won't be quoting anyone directly but instead will be describing what we found from all our activities. Do you have any questions before I begin?

Interview Questions

Overview of Organization and Its Services

1. Can you describe your organization and your role in providing resources and services to children ages 0–5?
2. What are the biggest challenges you face in serving families with young children?
3. What do you do to try to address those challenges?

What do you think works well about the services you provide to young children?

1. What do you think could work better?

Overall Strengths and Challenges of Early Childhood System

1. In general, what is working well about how our community addresses the needs of families with young children ages 0–5?
2. In general, what are the biggest challenges that you think families with young children face in this community?
3. What are some ways you think those challenges can be overcome?
4. What services or resources are needed for families with young children that are hard to find in this community?

Accessing Resources and Services

1. When families need a resource or service for children ages 0–5 in this community, how do they usually find out about it?
2. What works well about the way information is provided to families?
3. What could work better?
4. Based on your experience, what is the best way to share information with families in this community?

Staff Training

1. What types of training or support are needed for practitioners and providers who work directly with young children?
2. What would be the best ways to provide the training or support?

Relationships Between Organizations

1. How well do the different organizations that work with families of children ages 0–5 work together in the community?
2. Which types of providers of services work particularly well together?
3. In what ways could the relationships between different organizations be strengthened?

Suggestions for Smart Beginnings Coalitions

As I said at the beginning, as part of our Smart Beginnings work we are bringing together different agencies, organizations, and people in the community who work with families with young children or who are interested in improving things for them. What suggestions do you have for ways this group could address the needs of families with young children in our community?

Appendix F

Focus Area Discussion Form Example

1117 E. Stuart Drive, Box 9
Galax, VA 24333
Cell: (276) 233-3730
Office: (276) 236-0391
Fax: (276) 236-0485

smartbeginningstc@gmail.com
www.smartbeginnings.org

Focus Area Discussion Form

Member Name:____

Select One Focus Area

_____ Parent Education and Support	_____ Early Care and Education
_____ Home Visitation	_____ Kindergarten Transition
_____ Comprehensive Health Care	_____ Developmental Screening

1. What is already being done to affect the issue?
2. Who is now working on this issue?
3. Who should we bring into the discussion (other stakeholders)?
4. What should we be doing to better address the issue?
5. Are there resources available to support work on this issue?

Other notes:

Virginia Early Childhood Foundation

A Guide to Completing a Smart Beginnings Strategic Plan

December 2011

Prepared by Altarum Institute

ALTARUM INSTITUTE
SYSTEMS RESEARCH FOR BETTER HEALTH

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A Guide to Completing a Smart Beginnings Strategic Plan

Overview

All SB coalitions are required to complete a strategic plan. The strategic plan should be based on the findings from your community assessment. The plan will guide the work you do with the funding you receive from VECF, but it should also serve a larger purpose in identifying key areas related to early childhood where work needs to be done in your community. Some of that work will require resources other than those provided by VECF.

VECF has outlined the requirements for a SB strategic plan. As part of this toolkit, a **strategic planning checklist** (appendix A) that you can use to determine whether your strategic plan and strategic planning process are meeting the requirements has been developed. In the same way that your community assessment should be inclusive and participatory, so should be your strategic planning. You want to obtain input from people in different positions in the early childhood system in your community. While the leadership council should play a key role in developing your strategic plan, you want to hear from a lot of different individuals and groups before making any decisions. An inclusive and participatory process involving people working in different sectors, parent leaders, direct service workers, and administrators will help you produce a stronger strategic plan because

- A plan needs community buy-in if it is going to be successful;
- People in high positions do not have a monopoly on good ideas and leadership skills;
- You want to hear from the people whose day-to-day experience involves being with or working with children; they will have a different perspective than administrators and high-level community leaders, and it is a critical perspective; and
- It is the right thing to do—people should have input on decisions that affect their lives and work.

Things to Include in a Plan for Completing Your Strategic Plan

- How you will obtain input from your community
- Who will be responsible for
  - Choosing goals for the plan
  - Choosing strategies
  - Defining the outcomes your goals and strategies are intended to achieve
  - Choosing action steps
  - Approving the plan
  - Writing the strategic plan using the template
  - Facilitating meetings
- A timeline for the activities required to complete the plan

Moving from Information Seeking to Planning

Your first step in completing a strategic plan should be to create a plan for completing your strategic plan with clear timelines and responsibilities. It is useful to develop an initial timeline early during your planning grant. You can always revisit the timeline and make adjustments, but having a good sense of how the assessment and planning process is going to play out will help a great deal in planning and coordinating people's time. It is helpful to discuss this plan with your program officer since he or she may have ideas and suggestions.

Once you have completed a draft community assessment, you need to begin to make the transition from seeking information to planning for the future. This should not be a sudden process nor should it be a complete shift. You will still want to seek out new information even as you begin to plan. Your completed community assessment is the foundation for your plan and the findings from it need to be a key part of the discussions that are held in your strategic planning meetings.

You may decide that it is helpful to hire someone to help you complete a strategic plan by helping design and facilitate meetings. Your program officer will be able to provide with you some guidance on finding a consultant. The most important thing is that you sit down with the consultant and make sure whatever process he or she is suggesting helps you achieve your goal of completing a strategic plan that meets the requirements for SB and that is focused on goals, strategies, and action steps that are designed to lead to improvements in the early childhood system.

The Ultimate Result of Your Planning Process

As you design your strategic planning process, it is important to keep the end goal in mind. The coalition needs to emerge with a completed strategic plan that includes the actions and activities for moving forward. The strategic plan should cover your community's approach to early childhood over the next 3–5 years. You do not have to be confined to the work that is being supported by your SB grant. If there are other efforts underway that support the work the coalition is doing to develop a comprehensive early childhood system, then by all means they should be included as part of the overall strategic plan. If there are goals that the community feels are important but that may not be able to be completed with resources from your SB grant, they can be included, too, with the hope that the work the coalition is doing will help you find and obtain such resources.

A **strategic planning template** (appendix B) is included as part of your toolkit. Part of that plan is an action plan which includes the elements from the Activities and Outcome Form for Planning and Reporting (appendix C). One important thing to note is that, while you ultimately want to be able to complete the Activities and Outcomes Form, it is not something you want to necessarily introduce to the whole coalition in the early stages since members may become overly concerned with definitions rather than focus on the task of plan development. That said, the form includes the following elements:

- **Goals** are general statements about what needs to be accomplished to address the major issues facing the community. Examples of goals include:
  - Children with developmental delays will be identified as early as possible

- Parents and people who work with young children will be better informed about how best to meet the needs of young children so they arrive in school healthy and ready to learn
- The availability of high-quality child care will increase

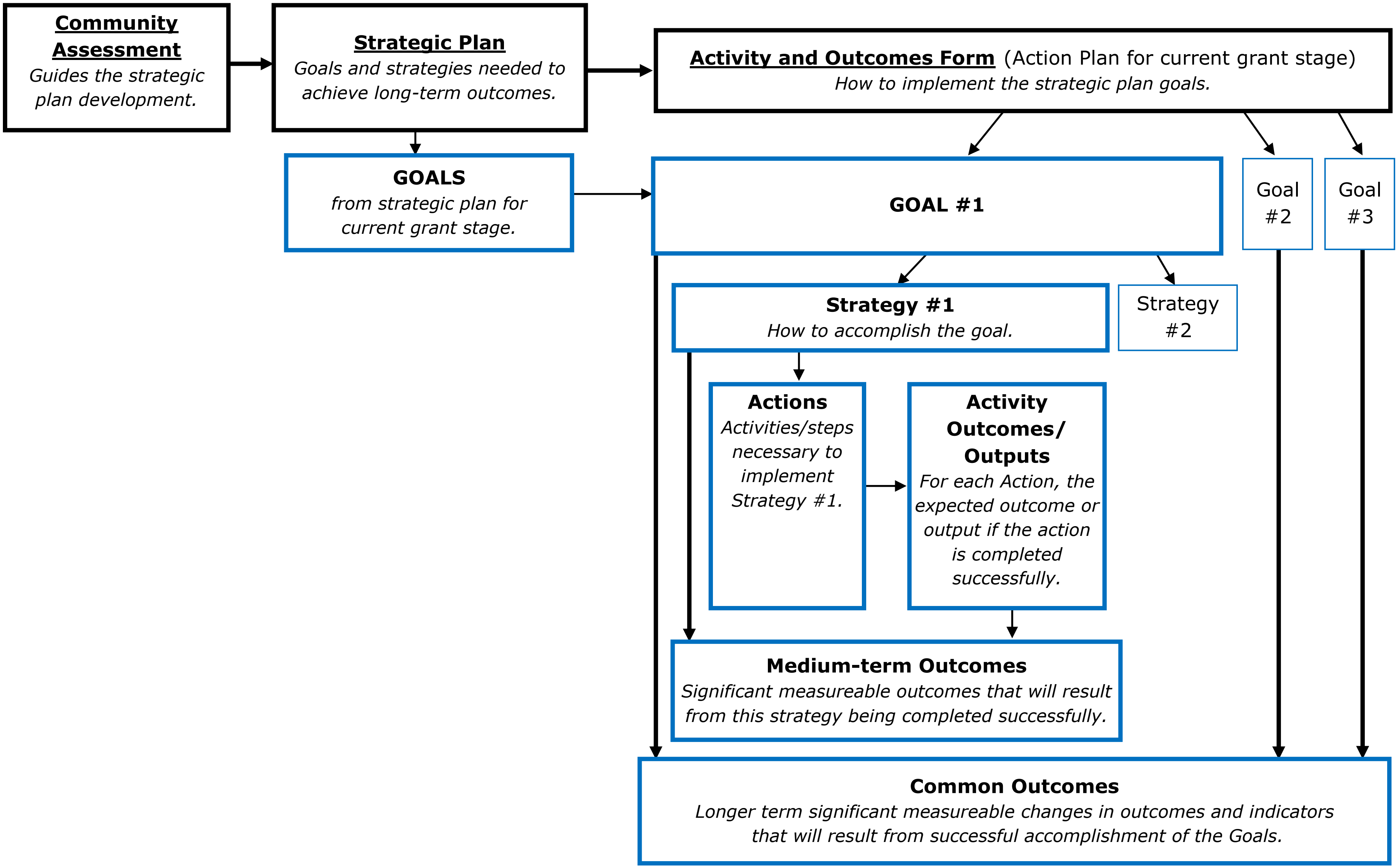
- **Strategies** are the broad, overarching efforts that will be undertaken to achieve the goals. Examples of strategies include:
  - Parent education and home visiting programs will increase their use of materials that are designed to convey evidence-based information
  - The local community child development curriculum and agency training programs will be examined and reformed to better reflect the core competencies outlined by the Virginia Alignment Project
  - A community-wide initiative to improve the quality of child care will be developed
  - A review will be undertaken to determine how effectively the system for assigning parents to appropriate home visiting programs is working
- The **outcomes** you are trying to achieve relate to the improvements you are trying to make in the early childhood system. Outcomes should be something you can measure. The outcomes for strategies will likely occur in the medium term if you are successful so they are labeled medium term outcomes. Examples of outcomes include:
  - Changes in policies or procedures
  - Participation of a certain number of child care centers or family child care providers in a quality improvement initiative
  - A reduction in the number of children who are registered for kindergarten on the first day of school because they and their parents missed orientation
- **Action steps** are what need to be done to implement each strategy. Examples of action steps include:
  - Research evidence-based materials or practices
  - Conduct trainings
  - Assess the availability of funding sources to finance the delivery of materials to parents

  The **activity outcome/output measures** are the ways you measure whether the activity has been successful. Sometimes it will just be that you completed the action and shared the result, but it may also include things like surveys or assessments completed after a training to show that the participants learned the materials covered in the training session.
- **Resources** are the people, organizations, and potential funding sources that will support the implementation of your strategies and actions. These do not have to be confined to people or organizations that are already committed to working with your coalition. If it would benefit to have others involved, then you might want to indicate that without implying that you already have a commitment.

- The **timeline** does not have to be extremely detailed or specific in your strategic plan. Later on during your work with SB you will be asked to be more specific, especially regarding activities funded by SB. The **activities and outcomes form for planning and reporting** (appendix C) can be used to capture this level of detail. For now, if you do know what year or month something will occur it is worth including in your plan. Another option is to define whether things will occur in the short-term, medium-term, or long-term. A useful way to define these categories is to define short-term as starting within the next year, medium-term as starting within 2–3 years, and long-term as something that will begin more than 3 years from now. Most of your focus should be on short and medium-term goals and strategies though if there are particularly long-term strategies that are embraced by the community you may want to include them. At some point, you will be encouraged to revisit your strategic plan and revise it based on your successes, changes in focus, and new opportunities.

The graph below shows how the various pieces fit together, moving from the community assessment to the intended outcomes.

The Smart Beginnings Path from Community Needs to Successful Outcomes



The Strategic Planning Process

The exact way that you organize your process will vary based on a number of factors. These include your knowledge and experience of what works in your community, logistical challenges such as travel distance, and the strategic planning experiences of your leadership council, coalition, and partners.

Agenda Items for Strategic Planning Sessions

However you structure your strategic planning, you do want to make sure it is an inclusive process and that participants have a good understanding of what you are trying to achieve. The following is a list of agenda items that need to be covered in strategic planning sessions in order to enable meaningful participation. Within these items are the key tasks that need to be accomplished which are to select goals, develop strategies, and define action steps.

AGENDA ITEM 1: Review the Purpose of the Smart Beginnings Initiative

Regardless of who is taking part in a strategic planning session, you want to take some time to review the purpose of the SB initiative. This may be very brief if the audience has heard the information before, or it may take a little longer if you are working with a group that has limited information about SB. The information provided should include the following:

- Why focusing on early childhood is important
- SB brings people together across all the sectors serving young children, including child care, preschool, health, family support, and parent education, to help them create a plan for improving services and resources for young children and their families
- The goal is not to create a new program but to improve systems so that existing services and resources work better and so that more people in the community understand the importance of investing in young children
- We are one of over 20 SB coalitions working together with our state partners to improve systems for young children throughout Virginia.

Providing this type of information will help participants better understand what they are being asked to plan for.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Highlight Key Findings from the Community Assessment

A strategic planning session should highlight the key findings from the community assessment you conducted. The purpose is to make the connection between the assessment and the planning activities. Participants should understand that the plans they are making should be connected with identified community needs. The purpose here is to highlight the key findings, not to cover everything you looked at or found. It is worth doing this even if the group you are working with has seen these results before because it will serve as a reminder that the plan needs to be linked to the assessment findings. The things you most want to highlight are

- The key indicators you identified through the community assessment
- The major findings from the environmental scan portion of the assessment

- The reports from any focus area workgroups that were formed as a result of the discussions about indicators.

Participants in the process should be asked to think about what opportunities exist to address the challenges identified through the community assessment. These opportunities can be used to develop the goals and strategies that make up your plan.

AGENDA ITEM 3: What Can We Do Together to Address the Issues Identified in the SB Community Assessment? Brainstorming Goals

Once you have discussed the community assessment findings, it is time to get into the planning part of this work. Your audience should be reminded that what SB is doing is bringing together different individuals and organizations that work with young children and are interested in supporting families and children. The questions for the group are: What can we all do together to address the issues that were identified in our SB community assessment? What should be the goals of our work? You can provide a few examples, such as those mentioned earlier, and you should encourage the group to build on the work of the focus area workgroups. Participants should be encouraged to use this information and to think creatively about what would work best in the community.

Group members should be asked to think about the outcomes they are trying to achieve through the goal. For every goal, someone should be able to explain what measurable benefit would occur if the goal were achieved.

If you have a large meeting, you might want to break the group up into smaller groups ranging anywhere from 5 to 10 people. You should let them know that, while they should be thinking in terms of realistic goals, they should stretch and focus on what would be best for children and families, even if it might be hard to accomplish. You can note that more consideration will be given later regarding what is actually possible versus what would be ideal.

AGENDA ITEM 4: Prioritizing Goals

Comprehensive system building covers a lot of ground. There will be many things that people want to do in the area of early childhood. While your plan can certainly go beyond your immediately available resources and capacity, you don't want it to go too far beyond. If you have too many goals, it will be hard to monitor them and people will get discouraged when you are not making progress. There is not a set number of goals that you must or should have. We recommend having 3 or 4 goals for your plan, which gives you a lot to work on without being overwhelming. How do you get from all the goals identified in the previous agenda item to 3–4 goals? You need to set priorities, which require choosing a decisionmaking approach. The table on the next page shows some approaches to decisionmaking that you might want to consider.

Approaches to Decisionmaking About Goals

	Type	Description	Things to Consider
1	**Total consensus decisionmaking**	Unanimous agreement on the goals	• Can be time consuming and challenging • Hard with anything other than small groups • Harder with diverse groups from different sectors
2	**Modified consensus decisionmaking**	Goals are presented and group members are given a chance to raise concerns. If the concerns are not resolved a group member may reject a goal.	• Can be time consuming • Ensures everyone supports goals even if they are less enthusiastic about some than others • May not serve to reduce the number of goals enough since participants may be willing to acquiesce even when not enthusiastic • May cause resentment towards the person rejecting a generally accepted goal • May be useful as a second step when combined with a vote or it may be used by the leadership council when reviewing goals prioritized by a larger group
3	**Voting**	Everyone in the group is allowed to vote on what they think should be the priorities for the group	• Everyone has equal input • There is a clear process for reducing the number of goals • The results may depend on the characteristics of the people who attend the meeting or participate in the vote

Total consensus decisionmaking is very challenging among diverse groups and is very difficult once a group gets to be larger than 8–10 people. You probably have a sense whether your coalition is able to function using this method, but there are good reasons to try other methods when choosing something like goals.

Modified consensus decisionmaking allows you to check whether everyone is willing to support a choice even if they are not enthusiastic. You can use the **stoplight tool** (appendix D) or a similar device when using this approach. If your group is relatively small (less than 15 people), you could give participants individual sheets of paper with green, yellow, and red lights or caution and stop signs. The process consists of the following steps:

- A goal is presented.
- If someone has concerns about a goal, he or she can raise a caution flag or yellow light. The participant should then be given the opportunity to explain his or her concern.
- The group can discuss ways to modify the goal to address the issues raised by the concerned participant. If the concerned participant agrees, the goal can be accepted.
- Any participant may raise a red flag, sign, or light and reject a goal. If that happens, the group is required to move on to a new goal.

Voting allows everyone to have a say about an issue. There are various voting techniques.

- Everyone could be given one vote.
- Everyone can be given multiple votes. Three is a common number though you could provide four to more closely match the target for the number of goals the group is trying to select.
- If everyone is given multiple votes, they can be required to use only one per goal or they can be told that they can put multiple votes on a particular goal. That way, if they feel strongly about one goal, they can express that with their votes.
- Participants can also be asked to rank a set of goals, and votes can be given out based on the rankings. For example, participants can be asked to rank their top three goals with the highest ranked getting three votes, second ranked two votes, and third ranked one vote.
- Voting can be done publicly using dots or other markers or it can be done privately.

The most important thing is to establish the rules and stick to them. Because you want to end up with multiple goals and you want people to suggest things that may involve programs outside their sector, it is recommended that you use one of the multiple vote strategies or the ranking strategy.

On a final note, you can also vote through electronic means such as email or by setting up a Zoomerang or Survey Monkey survey (see the SB Community Assessment Guide). This may allow you to reach people who aren't able to come to a meeting or to get feedback from a larger group without holding multiple large meetings.

Once the process is finished and you have decided upon goals, it is very useful to get back to all the people who voted and let them know the results of what has been decided. You do not have to give them specific tallies of votes or explain why some ideas may have been dropped. However, you should convey that people's votes were taken into account and, if at all possible, provide examples of how that was done.

AGENDA ITEM 5: Developing Strategies

Strategies should also be tied to measurable outcomes. While strategies are ultimately designed to achieve the goal they are associated with and the outcome that is tied to that goal, they should also be tied to some short and medium-term outcomes. For example, providing a certain kind of training is designed to produce a short-term outcome of increasing knowledge, a medium-term outcome of changing how a service or resource is delivered, and a long-term outcome of improving parenting practices and the well-being of children and families. One of the advantages of using evidence-based practices is that the link between particular strategies and outcomes is already established. Sometimes participants are unsure whether something is a goal or a strategy or even an activity. You do not necessarily need to worry about whether something is a strategy, activity, or a goal during your planning meeting. As mentioned above it is probably better to not use the activities and outcomes form In fact, it is probably better just to let people brainstorm ideas at first and then maybe group things together at some point in the meeting so you can decide who is going to follow-up with next steps.

AGENDA ITEM 6: Developing Action Steps or Activities

Action steps are more detailed than strategies. They specify the particular steps that need to be taken to carry out a strategy. They can include tasks such as researching, planning, and leading events or activities. More details can be added later, but enough information should be provided to show that there is a clear plan for carrying out the strategy. Having action steps can also serve as a way for you to recruit partners for particular strategies. There may be community members who are not inclined to participate in the coalition but who can contribute to the success of the plan through their contributions to particular action steps. Unless you are having a very long meeting or even a two day meeting chances are you are not going to be able to cover all of the elements of an Action Plan in a single session. Given how challenging it can be to keep people focused for many hours it probably would not be wise to try and do so. At some point you do want to have a group of people sit down and try and outline action steps. This is often something that works better in smaller work groups who have agreed to further develop the goal or strategy.

Ways of Organizing Your Strategic Planning Process

The way you decide who is responsible for the various tasks required for strategic planning will vary. As noted earlier you will need to take into account the characteristics of your community, the size of the area, and your community's experience with similar efforts. This section provides suggestions on organizing your strategic plan.

Bringing Together a Broadly Inclusive Group. One of the best ways to obtain input from a wide range of people in your community is to bring together a broadly inclusive group. You could try to do this through an open meeting where anyone who is interested can come. However, there are disadvantages to that approach since you are not quite sure who will show up, some people who you would like to come may be reluctant to participate in an open forum, and it is much harder to plan a successful meeting when you are unsure who your audience will be. Therefore, you may want to invite a specific set of participants. This could include a wide range of people involved with early childhood issues, including people from a variety of sectors, as well as parent leaders. You might want to ask coalition members, leadership council members, and people you contacted for the community assessment about who they would suggest attend such a meeting.

Examples of Possible Participants in an Inclusive Strategic Planning Meeting

- Select leadership council members
- Coalition members
- Public officials (county, city, and state) who have shown an interest in early childhood or health, education, and human services
- Head Start and child care administrators and staff
- Kindergarten team leaders and teachers
- Infant and Toddler Connection leaders and others who work with children with developmental delays
- Preschool special education staff
- WIC program staff
- Home visiting program staff and administrators
- Health department staff
- Department of social services staff and administrators
- Hospital social workers
- Local cooperative extension staff
- Parent education program staff or administrators
- Staff members from health care facilities that see a lot of children, including community health centers
- Parent leaders from Head Start and other groups (ask for recommendations from programs who work directly with children)

What Should Be Covered in a Meeting Involving a Broadly Inclusive Group? What kind of meetings can you hold with a group like this?

- At a minimum, you should cover agenda items 1–3, though ideally you should also take advantage of the group's presence to offer them an opportunity to prioritize (agenda item 4). A meeting of this type will probably take a minimum of 3 hours. If time is an issue, you could prioritize goals through one of the electronic means mentioned above.
- You could add agenda item 5 and develop draft strategies. This will add at least an hour to the meeting. Often times in the process of developing goals meeting participants will also discuss strategies for implementing the goals. While it is useful to group goals and strategies together, it is more important to generate ideas than to make sure everything is exactly where you ultimately want it to be in your strategic plan. The meeting also could pose an opportunity to ask for volunteers who will participate in workgroups that will be responsible for refining individual strategies and developing action steps for implementing the strategies.
- You could work through all the agenda items and use this group to develop a draft strategic plan that can then be refined by the coalition, leadership council, or work groups. Working through all the items would likely require a minimum of 6 hours. Seven hours may provide more of a cushion and a more relaxed version of the process could easily take a day and a half. However, as noted above there are good reasons to assign this part of the task to work groups. If you are going to try to do this in one day, you will benefit tremendously from having an experienced and skilled facilitator lead the process. It is very hard to keep people engaged for so long. If you want to split the process into two meetings, you may want to get through agenda items 1-4 in the first meeting and cover the rest in a second meeting. You could also use electronic voting between the meetings to prioritize the goals that will be part of the second meeting. One of the challenges with having two meetings is that you may end up with different participants. You will have to recap the first meeting and explain how you arrived at the goals you will be working with in the second meeting. Some people, especially those who missed the first meeting, may want to reopen the discussion around the goals that have been chosen. Ideally, you want to avoid having this happen since it will make it difficult to complete the process. The best way to do this is to clearly and confidently state how the goals were chosen in the last meeting and to define the purpose of the second meeting as fleshing out those goals. If someone has very strong feelings you could suggest that they write down their suggestion and it will be reviewed by the leadership council.

How Do We Get People to Come? You may be concerned that people will be reluctant to come to a large meeting. There are various things you can do to encourage people to come.

- Send a carefully crafted invitation from your leadership council asking people to attend. Be sure to include their names and positions and to stress the importance of hearing from community members as part of developing your plan.
- Have individual coalition or leadership council members with connections to the invited participant follow up with an email or phone call.
- Offer refreshments
- Choose your location carefully
- Hold multiple meetings that cover the different counties you are working in

Refining Your Plan. Once you have input from a broadly inclusive group or groups of community members, you will still need to refine the action plan section of your strategic plan. This toolkit includes a template, the **activities and outcomes form for planning and reporting** (appendix C), which can be used for this purpose. The template allows you to capture your goals, the strategies you will use to try to reach the goals, and the action steps that will need to be taken to carry out those strategies as well as the outcomes you are trying to achieve.

In some communities, the coalition or leadership council can take on the role of refining your plan. However, if these groups have limited availability, are very large, or are struggling to find a way to work effectively and cohesively, you may want to have other groups refine your action plan. One way to do this is to create workgroups organized around the goals you have selected. Prior to developing workgroups, you should prioritize your goals so the workgroup can focus on a limited set of goals. If you have already done this within the inclusive groups, you probably want to review the goals with the leadership council before creating workgroups. If you have not prioritized within an inclusive group, you may want to have the leadership council or a strategic planning subcommittee or workgroup prioritize the goals selected and decide which ones will be included in your strategic plan.

Refining the plan will involve different activities depending on how much work has been done in the inclusive group. The tasks may include:

- Reviewing and refining goals—refining may just mean editing the way they are worded or it may involve some rethinking
- Defining the outcomes the goals are expected to lead to
- Developing or refining strategies
- Defining the outcomes that the strategies are expected to achieve
- Developing or refining action steps
- Developing or refining resources available that support the strategic plan
- Developing the timeline for particular action steps or strategies

Endorsement of Your Plan. You may want to ask your leadership council and coalition to formally endorse your action plan by signing something indicating their support for the plan and their commitment to carry it out. It would be helpful to include some indication of their support on the front page of the strategic planning document. A formal endorsement may be more effective than simply listing the members of the council and coalition.

Alternative Approaches to Strategic Planning. If you are unable to use a broadly inclusive group as part of your first phase of strategic planning, you may try alternate approaches that enable you to obtain broad community input. For example, if your leadership council made an initial pass at drafting a strategic plan, you can still obtain community input by sharing that plan with an inclusive group or groups and asking them for suggestions for goal strategies or for ways to best implement strategies. Such a meeting would still include agenda items 1 and 2, but these would be followed by a presentation of the strategic plan draft. The key to successfully executing this approach is to make sure there is room for meaningful input from the more inclusive groups and a willingness on the part of your leadership council to take into account the comments that are received and to accept changes if warranted.

Using Your Strategic Planning

Once you have completed your strategic plan, you should begin to think about how best to use it. Its main function will be to guide your work, but it is also the document that summarizes what you are doing and thus is a critical communication tool. You may want to develop a one to two page summary of the plan that briefly describes what it is and how it came to be and then focuses on what you are going to try to accomplish. This brief summary might be confined to a discussion of goals and the outcomes to which they are tied. It would be helpful to develop a presentation which describes your plan. This can build on the presentation of your community assessment and show that your coalition is working hard to address the community's needs and would benefit from the support of other community members. Depending on your audience, you may need to tweak parts of the presentation and emphasize different things. The presentation should allow you and coalition members to tell an effective story about what it is you are seeking to accomplish with your SB strategic plan.

Your strategic plan represents a commitment to taking particular actions. VECF will evaluate your coalition based on progress on the implementation of your plan. Both the periodic review of your grant and applications for future SB grant will involve a review of progress in implementing your plan. There may be things that you need to change or that turn out not to work as well as you had hoped. Everyone involved in doing this kind of work recognizes that as a possibility, but if you are unable to make progress on some goals or if you decide you need to change some of your approaches, you will be asked to explain why and how you came to such decisions.

Appendix A

Strategic Planning Checklist

Strategic Planning Checklist

The strategic planning checklist is designed to assist you in completing the strategic planning process. The purpose of the checklist is to serve as both a self-monitoring tool and a tool to be shared with your VECF program officer to assess your progress. While you are completing tasks, add notes about your activities, progress, and barriers encountered in the far right column. When tasks are completed, check the box in the far left column by double-clicking on the box and selecting “checked” for the default value. By completing this checklist electronically, you will be able to continually work on completing the items and noting progress, as well as share your progress easily with VECF by sending this form via email.

Strategic Planning Preparation

Check Completed	Task	Status *(note activities conducted toward task completion, barriers encountered, etc.)*
☐	Developed a plan for completing the strategic plan	
☐	Discussed plan for completing the strategic plan with your program officer	
☐	Discussed plan for completing the strategic plan with your leadership council	
☐	Completed a draft of the community assessment	
☐	Prepared a summary of draft of community assessment	
☐	If using a consultant, had detailed discussions about the support they will provide and how it will enable us to meet the strategic planning requirements and expectations	
☐	Met with partners who are helping to conduct the strategic planning process to discuss roles, assignments, and timelines	

Strategic Planning Process

The following tasks are related to the strategic planning process.

Check Completed	Task	**Status** *(note activities conducted toward task completion, barriers encountered, etc.)*
Inclusiveness of the Strategic Planning Process Check the boxes below to indicate representatives from key sectors who have been included in the planning process.		
☐	Representatives from the early care sector are involved in the strategic planning process.	
☐	Representatives from the early education sector are involved in the strategic planning process.	
☐	Representatives from the health care sector are involved in the strategic planning process.	
☐	Representatives who address issues related to young children's behavioral problems or mental health and social emotional development are involved in the strategic planning process.	
☐	Representatives from the family support sector are involved in the strategic planning process.	
☐	Representatives from both the public and private sectors are involved in the strategic planning.	
☐	Parents are involved in the strategic planning process.	
Tasks		
☐	Possible goals have been identified.	
☐	Goals have been prioritized,	

Check Completed	Task	**Status** *(note activities conducted toward task completion, barriers encountered, etc.)*
☐	Goals have been reviewed to confirm that they include a focus on transforming early childhood systems.	
☐	Outcomes for the goals have been developed.	
☐	Strategies have been developed.	
☐	Strategies have been reviewed to confirm that they include a focus on increasing the use of evidence and research to strengthen early childhood systems and services.	
☐	Outcomes for the strategies have been developed.	
☐	Action steps have been created.	
☐	Needed resources have been identified.	
☐	Timelines for activities have been established.	
☐	The leadership council has approved the action plan.	

Strategic Plan Report and Dissemination

The strategic planning process culminates in the completion of a report that will guide the work of your coalition for years to come. Once it is complete, it is important to share it with the community so you can broaden awareness of what you are trying to accomplish and build support for your work.

Check Completed	Task	**Status** *(note activities conducted toward task completion, barriers encountered, etc.)*
☐	Completed the draft strategic plan report	
☐	Reviewed the draft strategic plan report	
☐	Developed a written summary of the strategic plan	
☐	Developed a presentation describing the strategic plan	
☐	Developed a preliminary public engagement plan that includes a description of how the strategic plan will be shared	

Appendix B

Strategic Planning Template

Smart Beginnings Strategic Planning Template

Your strategic plan should be centered on your action plan, but it is also helpful to include other information so when people pick it up they understand its purpose and how it was developed. The following are sections you may want to include.

SECTION A: Introduction

This section should be very brief and describe why the document was produced and how it will be used. The following is an example of the type of information you want to include in the introduction.

> This strategic plan was developed by the [INSERT YOUR COALITION'S NAME] Smart Beginnings Coalition. Under Smart Beginnings, the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation provides support to local partnerships working to coordinate, improve, and expand the delivery of high-quality early childhood programs and services. Our coalition is one of 24 local or regional initiatives across Virginia. The mission of our Smart Beginnings coalition is [insert mission]. This plan is based on a community assessment that collected key data on young children and obtained input from a wide variety of stakeholders who are involved with issues related to young children ages 0–5. This plan is intended to guide the future work of the Smart Beginnings coalition and to serve as a resource for all of those seeking to make improvements in how our community helps support young children.

SECTION B: Why Focus on Early Childhood?

Not everyone who reads your strategic plan will be aware of the importance of focusing on young children. You want to let them know why this is an important issue. South Hampton Roads Smart Beginnings Action Plan narratives (which can be viewed at: http://smartbeginningsshr.org/index.php?/sub-comm/action_plans/) include extensive detail on the reasons that it is important to focus on very young children. You can certainly provide more detail if you think it will be useful, but at the very least a few well chosen quotes and references can help convince the audience for your community assessment that early childhood is an important topic about which they should be concerned. The key message is that a growing body of evidence shows that investment in very young children pays off for those children and for society as a whole.

Some examples of useful quotes are listed below:

> "It's very unusual for us to be commenting on a social policy issue because we maintain our independence in our nonpartisan institution. On many issues, economic research is not decisive. On some issues though, economic research sends a very clear message. Research shows us that early childhood development sends a return to the individual and to society. We see it as an economic growth strategy…Any one of us would be very happy to have these rates of return on investments that we're making … Some of the return goes directly to the individual … but a substantial share of the return is the broader social benefit, the public benefit."
>
> *Sally Green, First Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond*

"Startling statistics released by the Pentagon show that 75 percent of young people ages 17 to 24 are currently unable to enlist in the United States military. Three of the most common barriers for potential recruits are failure to graduate high school, a criminal record, and physical fitness issues, including obesity. … The most proven investment for kids who need help graduating from high school starts early: high-quality early education. It also helps kids stay away from crime and succeed in life."

Mission: Readiness Military Leaders for Kids. An organization of senior retired military leaders including multiple generals, admirals, lieutenant generals, major generals, rear admirals, and brigadier generals. www.missionreadiness.org

"Early childhood development programs are rarely portrayed as economic development initiatives, and we think that is a mistake. Such programs, if they appear at all, are at the bottom of the economic development lists for state and local governments. They should be at the top. … Studies find that well-focused investments in early childhood development yield high public as well as private returns. … The return on investment from early childhood development is extraordinary, resulting in better working public schools, more educated workers and less crime."

Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis

"Early interventions for disadvantaged children promote schooling, raise the quality of the workforce, enhance the productivity of schools and reduce crime, teenage pregnancy and welfare dependency. They raise earnings and promote social attachment. Focusing solely on earnings gains, returns to dollars invested are as high as 15-17%."

Nobel Prize Winning Economist James Heckman

"Direct evidence has been growing that all children can benefit from high-quality preschool, including the more economically advantaged."

National Institute for Early Education Research

"Research has demonstrated that early detection of developmental disabilities and appropriate intervention can significantly improve functioning and reduce the need for lifelong interventions." "However, less than 50% of these children (meaning those with developmental disabilities) are identified as having a problem before starting school, by which time significant delays may have already occurred and opportunities for treatment have been missed."

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

If you are looking for additional information or want help thinking about ways to convey the importance of early childhood and the work you are doing, refer to *Seven Things Policymakers Need to Know About School Readiness* which was developed by the State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network and is available at: http://finebynine.org/uploaded/file/7%20Things.pdf. It is helpful for thinking about the messages that work best with people who do not work directly with children or in the social services field.

SECTION C: A Summary of Key Community Assessment Findings

You should provide a brief summary of community assessment findings, particularly highlighting those findings that were used in developing the action plan. This might include highlighting a few of the "getting ready" indicators and some of the environmental scan findings. You should note how these findings helped influence the development of your action plan. This does not have to be very long; you can always refer people to the community assessment report for more information. The purpose of this section is to convey to the reader the thinking behind your plan. It is your opportunity to explain to the reader the reasons your coalition has chosen the goals and strategies that follow.

SECTION D: An Action Plan for Moving Forward

The action plan is the heart of your strategic plan. It tells the reader what your coalition is going to do next. You should include both a narrative and a table showing what actions you are planning on taking. The section should include the following:

- **A very brief summary of how the action plan was developed.** This could cover the role of the leadership council and coalition along with any meetings you held to get feedback from other stakeholders.
- **Highlights of the action plan.** You should provide some brief highlights of the action plan. One way to do this is to organize it by the goals you have chosen with a few details regarding the strategies you are suggesting the community pursue.
- **The completed action planning template.** This template, the **activities and outcomes form for planning and reporting** (appendix C), is included as part of your toolkit. The template includes your general goals, the strategies you will use to try to reach the goals, and the action steps that will need to be taken to carry out those strategies as well as the outcomes you are trying to achieve.

SECTION E: Next Steps

This can be a very brief section covering the next steps, including applying for future funding from VECF. You should also talk about the need for community members and key stakeholders to get involved with SB and how they might be able to do that. Either here or somewhere in the document there should be contact information for the coordinator and possibly other leaders.

Appendix C (revised 5.31.11)

Planning and Reporting Instructions for Activities and Outcomes Form

Instructions:

These forms are intended to be used for planning and reporting purposes. Coalitions can use them to show the actions they will be taking as part of their Smart Beginnings Strategic Plan, to track their progress and to show outcomes. *Grantees that have not used these forms will be asked to translate existing Strategic Plans or Work Plans into this format.* These forms are should include activities that are completed, under way, or planned.

In addition, grantees are not being asked to track statewide "Common Outcomes" on the Common Outcomes Reporting Form (separate from this form).

The definitions and examples below help describe what needs to be included in these forms.

- **Goals** are general statements about what needs to be accomplished to address the major issues facing the community. The Goals are taken from your Strategic Plan. Examples of goals include:
  - Children with developmental delays will be identified as early as possible
  - Parents and people who work with young children will be better informed about how best to meet the needs of young children so they arrive in school healthy and ready to learn
  - The availability of high-quality child care will increase

- **Strategies** are the broad, overarching efforts that will be undertaken to achieve the goals. You may have multiple strategies for each goal. Examples of strategies include:
  - Parent education and home visiting programs will increase their use of materials that are designed to convey evidence-based information
  - The local community child development curriculum and agency training programs will be examined and reformed to better reflect the core competencies outlined by the Virginia Alignment Project
  - A community-wide initiative to improve the quality of child care will be developed
  - A review will be undertaken to determine how effectively the system for assigning parents to appropriate home visiting programs is working

- **Outcomes:** The Outcomes you are trying to achieve convey the improvements you are trying to make in the early childhood system. All outcomes should be something you can measure and you should note how they will be measured.

  The Outcomes that are reported annually in the Common Outcomes Reporting Form are:

  1) State-wide outcomes collected from all coalitions. All coalitions complete Outcome #1 and #2. Coalitions involved with VSQI or QRIS complete Outcome #3 and coalitions involved with Developmental Screenings complete Outcome #4.

  2) A coalition's longer-term outcomes, such as Getting Ready Indicators, expected to occur as a result of completion of the Goals.

  Coalitions may collect other **Outcomes or Getting Ready Indicators** for goals (long-term outcomes) that involve direct improvements for children and families. An examples of an outcomes for other goals might be:

  - An increase in the number of c**hild care workers with a certificate** in child development

- The **Medium-term Outcomes** in the Activities and Outcomes Form are significant measurable outcomes that will result from the Strategy being completed successfully. More than one medium-term outcome may be listed and you will report annually on medium-term outcomes. If available, a benchmark or baseline outcome measure is beneficial to include in the report.

  Examples of medium-term outcomes include:

  - Changes in policies or procedures implemented
  - Participation of a certain number of child care centers or family child care providers in a quality improvement initiative
  - A reduction in the number of children who are registered for kindergarten on the first day of school because they and their parents missed orientation

- **Actions** are what need to be done to successfully implement each strategy. Examples of action steps include:

  - Research evidence-based materials or practices
  - Conduct trainings
  - Assess the availability of funding sources to finance the delivery of materials to parents

- **Resources Needed** are the people, organizations, and potential funding sources that will support the implementation of your strategies and actions. These do not have to be confined to people or organizations that are already committed to working with your coalition. If it would benefit to have others involved, then you might want to indicate that without implying that you already have a commitment.

- **Responsible Parties** indicate who is responsible for leading the action and moving it toward success. Try to be somewhat specific; you do not want to just say the Smart Beginnings Coalition for most of your strategies but identify a specific workgroup or committee or organization(s).

- The **timeline** should indicate when you expect to have certain activities completed. If actions are ongoing, provide a time frame.

- **Activity outcome/output measures** are designed to show progress on the actions described. They may include information such as the number of training sessions held, the number of people trained, and how many early childhood workers received a resource directory. These measures are intended to show that an action was carried out in a manner that is likely to result in success for the overall strategy.

- **Progress report** is where you briefly describe the status of the action, including any activity outcome/outputs measures collected.

  For example, if an action is completed you might want to note that with the date when it was completed. If it is partially completed then you may want to provide information on that, for example "two trainings complete, a third one is planned for spring 2011." If there has been a delay or barriers you may want to note why for example, "delayed because of lack of funding for materials." This information will help your coalition and your Program Officer strategize ways to overcome obstacles.

- **Please highlight and note any plan changes** from your previous reporting period. VECF recognizes that plans change due to new opportunities or changes in circumstances. However, in order to best understand the progress of coalitions it is important to keep track of such changes. Grantees will be asked to note future changes in their plans and the reasons they have occurred. If there are areas where progress is not being made discussions will be held about ways to help move particular goals, strategies, or actions forward or ways they could be altered to make them more achievable.

Here are some additional tips to help smooth your use of this form:

- You may want to cut and paste multiple copies of the form before you begin since you are going to need more pages than are provided here.
- Most goals will have multiple strategies and many strategies will have more than three actions needed in order to complete them. In order to keep this all clear you can number the goals and strategies and indicate when a strategy is continuing from a previous page.
- You will be asked to report on progress on your plan throughout your time as a Smart Beginnings Coalition, including outcomes and outputs.

Smart Beginnings

Activities and Outcomes Form for Planning and Reporting

GOAL:	

Strategy 1:

Medium-Term Outcome(s): **1.** **2.** **3.**	**Year 1** *(Annual outcomes reporting)*	**Year 2** *(Annual outcomes reporting)*

Actions *What actions are needed to accomplish this strategy?*	**Resources Needed** *What kind of funding, facilities, expertise is needed to carry out the action?*	**Responsible Parties** *Who on the coalition will take the lead or provide key support?*	**Timeline** *By when should action be completed?*	**Activity Outcome/ Output Measures** *How will you know the action succeeded or is complete?*	**Progress Report** *What is the current status of this activity?*

Appendix D

Stoplight Tool

Stoplight Tool

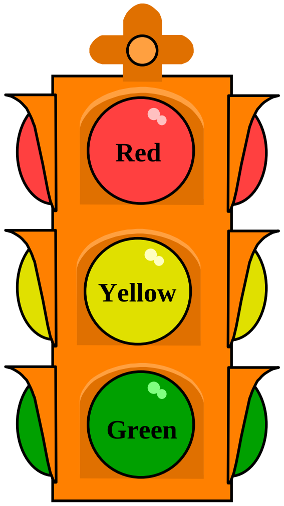
Purpose of the tool. The stoplight tool is designed for use for a modified consensus decisionmaking process. In this process members of groups are asked to review proposals such as proposed strategic planning goals and decide whether they support them (green light), have concerns (yellow light), or cannot support them (red light).

How to use it. The stoplight decisionmaking tool is discussed as a possible tool for reviewing goals for the SB strategic plan in *A Guide to Completing a Smart Beginnings Strategic Plan.* It could also be used for the review and approval of strategies or other proposals. The tool could be used in an in-person meeting or via email. Alternatively, in-person meetings could use flags, colored paper, signs, or something similar.

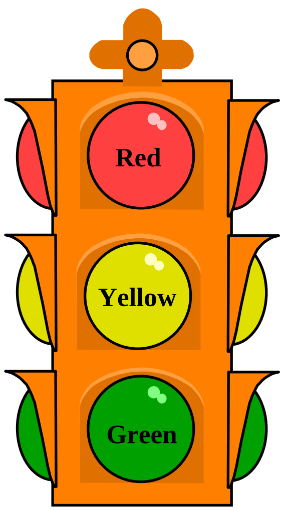
There are various ways to carry out the process and use the tool. Someone who supports a goal can be selected to present a proposed goal prior to the vote, or participants can simply be given materials to review with the goal described on them. Participants are then asked to assess the goal and decide whether they can "green light" it. You may suggest that people refrain from "red lighting" a proposal the first time and instead use yellow lights if they have any concerns. If anyone has concerns, then those concerns are discussed. The outcome of the discussion will likely fall into one of the following categories:

- A modified goal is put forth that the concerned participant can support
- The discussion itself alleviates the concerns without a need for modifying the goal
- The participant agrees to accept the goal despite concerns
- The participant rejects the goal

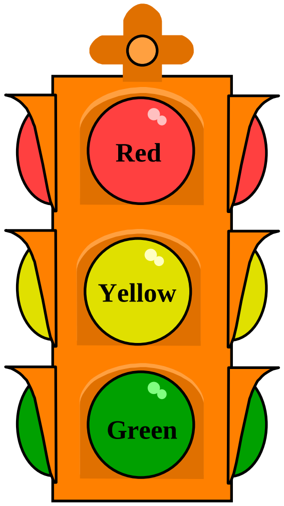
In a pure modified consensus process if any one participant "red lights" or "red flags" a proposal, it is dropped.



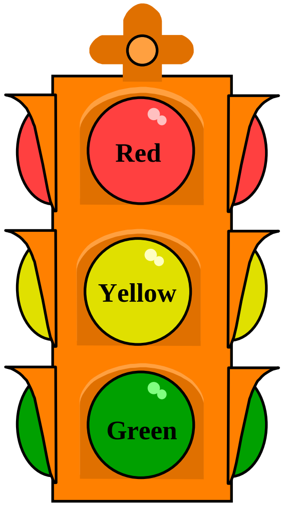
Proposal
Comments



Proposal
Comments



Proposal
Comments



Proposal
Comments

SMART BEGINNINGS

Public Engagement and Stakeholder Involvement Toolkit

Engage stakeholders whose involvement or support is critical to plan implementation

Purpose of the Tools

These tools[1] are designed to assist you in engaging and informing stakeholders, partners, and the public by integrating communication into your planning activities. The tools included here will help you to track partner involvement, develop clear and consistent messages and ensure that you are working with community initiatives as you move from planning to implementation and begin to engage more partners.

The Public Engagement Tools

How to Use These Tools

The worksheets included in **tool 1** should be completed after you have developed your strategic plan and have identified your goals and strategies. Use this time to decide on your communication methods, especially as you approach stakeholders and build awareness about your initiative. Broad involvement of your SB coalition will be an asset in these discussions, as you identify audiences and the most appropriate methods for reaching them. The messages that you define for your SB coalition and initiative are important topics for discussion since they will dictate how you communicate with partners and stakeholders and influence perceptions of your coalition. As you approach and engage organizations throughout the grant cycles, **tool 2** will be useful in tracking your contact with these new partners and making sure that your SB coalition does not miss an opportunity to build new relationships. This tool can be useful beginning in the planning stage as you are reaching out to new partners as well as during later stages when partners are playing a more active role in implementation. **Tool 3** is a short tool to help you assess factors that influence your coalition's credibility and help you think about ways to strengthen connections in your community.

Public engagement activities are important to advancing the coalition's work and will **require a significant commitment of time and energy**. If you have individuals on the coalition with communication expertise, suggest that they play a lead role in communication activities. Always remember that your program officer can offer you guidance and suggestions as well.

[1] The information and templates included here were adapted from materials developed by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation; the Office of Cancer Communications, National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health; and the Human Interaction Research Institute for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Developing a Communication Strategy

INSTRUCTIONS

Using your action plan as the starting point, this tool walks you through a four-step process to help you develop your communication action steps. Have someone facilitate the discussion and someone else take notes for the group. Once you have completed the worksheets, you can either incorporate the action steps into your action plan or maintain them as separate documents. Delegate responsibility for following up on the communication action steps to a coalition member or group of members who have expertise or interest in communication and public engagement. Feel free to modify the templates included here to include additional information, such as the budget amount for each action item.

Working through all four steps for each action plan strategy will most likely need more time than typically allotted for coalition meetings. It is recommended that you set aside a dedicated amount of time—such as holding a half-day or day-long retreat—to really allow the coalition sufficient time to complete all the steps.

Now that the SB coalition has completed the strategic planning process and identified the goals and strategies that will be the focus of its efforts, it will be helpful to be strategic about communication approaches (to whom you communicate, what you communicate, how you communicate). This tool will help you think through strategies and develop some specific communication steps that can support implementation of your action plan.

Please keep in mind that developing communication strategies is hard work that will require a significant commitment on the part of the coalition. The tool has several steps that will require a lot of input from coalition members. Be sure to involve the leadership council and members of the SB coalition in this process; their diverse experiences will be helpful in defining the most appropriate channels and activities for engaging and communicating with key audiences.

After you have reviewed the tool, reach out to your program officer for suggestions about the best way to structure this process. If you have individuals on the coalition with expertise in this field, then involve them in these planning discussions. If you feel this type of experience is lacking among the coalition members, then consider looking to an outside facilitator with expertise to help guide you through the process. Turn to coalition members for suggestions, as many of their organizations may have someone who might be willing to help you at no cost. Also, refer to the VECF communication guidelines when using this tool.

Step 1: Identify and Profile Your Audience

To initiate a successful and effective communication effort, start by reviewing the goals and strategies that resulted from strategic planning. Use the questions below to determine communication goals and the audience for each strategy in action plan. Taking time to look closely at your audiences will provide you with the background information that you need to choose the most effective communication methods. This process will help narrow and sharpen the focus for your coalition's external communication. Complete this worksheet for each strategy you are trying to implement.

Action Plan Strategy	

IDENTIFY the audiences that need to be engaged to implement the strategy.

	Consider these questions.	**BRAINSTORM** Make a list of potential audiences that need to be engaged	**PRIORITIZE** Place numbers (1-3) beside the audiences on which you will focus your efforts.
1	Which stakeholders or groups are most affected by this strategy?	1-	
		2-	
		3-	
2	Whose lives would be most affected by implementation of this strategy?	4-	
		5-	
		6-	
3	Which individuals, organizations, or agencies influence decisions that can affect this strategy?	7-	
		8-	
		9-	
4	Which individuals' or groups' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior must be changed to meet your goal?	10-	
5	Which stakeholders have resources to support implementation of this strategy?	11-	
		12-	

Action Plan Strategy

Discuss these questions for each audience. This information can be used to develop an audience profile.		List one audience in each column below		
		(target audience 1)	(target audience 2)	(target audience 3)
1	Describe what you know about this audience's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that could affect this strategy?			
2	What are other characteristics of this audience that could affect this strategy?			
3	What would make this audience support this strategy?			
4	What prevents this audience from fully supporting this strategy?			
5	What are the benefits if they do? What changes (in attitude or behavior) are we trying to achieve?			

Audience Characteristics/Profile

Review your brainstorm list for this audience and decide which characteristics will be most useful in developing messages. *This information will be used in step 2.*

(target audience 1)	(target audience 2)	(target audience 3)
Characteristics: • •	Characteristics: • •	Characteristics: • •

Factors that Help Determine Acceptance

Clarity—Messages must clearly convey information to assure understanding and to limit the chances for misunderstanding or inappropriate action. Clear messages contain as few technical, scientific, and bureaucratic terms as possible and eliminate information that the audience does not need to make necessary decisions (such as unnecessarily detailed explanations).

Consistency—One of the advantages of creating a communication and public engagement plan as part of a community collaborative is that it increases the chance that multiple organizations and individuals are putting forth the same message. Audiences are much more likely to accept a message if they are hearing it consistently and from multiple sources.

Main Points—The main points should be stressed, repeated, and never hidden within less strategically important information.

Tone and Appeal—A message should be reassuring, alarming, challenging, or straightforward, depending upon the desired effect and the target audience. Messages should be truthful, honest, and as complete as possible.

Credibility—The spokesperson and source of the information should be believable and trustworthy.

Public Need—For a message to break through today's "information clutter," messages should be based on what the target audience perceives as being important to them—what they want to know, and not what is most important or interesting to those who are conveying the message.

Step 2: Develop Messages

Now that you have specific information about your target audiences, the next step is to develop messages that will appeal to these audiences. These key messages can serve as the basis for developing materials, such as talking points, print ads, posters, fact sheets, and letters. Think about the purpose for your communication—to increase awareness, convey new facts, alter attitudes, change behavior, or encourage participation. An effective message will communicate important information and also compel the targeted audience to think, feel, or act.

Messages can:

- Show the importance, urgency, or magnitude of the issue
- Show the relevance of the issue
- Put a "face" on the issue
- Be tied to specific audience values, beliefs, or interests
- Reflect an understanding of what would motivate the audience to think, feel, or act
- Be culturally relevant and sensitive
- Be memorable
- Now you're ready to develop messages for each of your target audiences. Use the characteristics you identified in step 1 to help you draft your messages.

Action Plan Strategy	

Target Audience 1	
Audience Characteristics:	
These are your messages	**Write the three most compelling sentences you could use to motivate the audience?** Base your responses on what you know about what your audience needs to hear in order to think, feel, or act.
	1-
	2-
	3-

Target Audience 2	
Audience Characteristics:	
These are your messages	**Write the three most compelling sentences you could use to motivate the audience?** Base your responses on what you know about what your audience needs to hear in order to think, feel, or act.
	1-
	2-
	3-

Target Audience 3	
Audience Characteristics:	
These are your messages	**Write the three most compelling sentences you could use to motivate the audience?** Base your responses on what you know about what your audience needs to hear in order to think, feel, or act.
	1-
	2-
	3-

Step 3: Select Communication Channels

Communication channels carry the messages to the target audiences. Channels take many forms, giving you an array of possibilities. Answering some key questions will aid you in identifying the most effective channels for reaching your audience.

<table>
<tr><th>Use these questions to identify appropriate channels for your messages</th><th colspan="3">Sample Channels</th></tr>
<tr><td>1. Where or from whom does this audience get its information?
2. Where does this audience spend most of its time?
3. What or who influences audience members?
4. Who do audience members find credible?
5. Where is the audience most likely to give you their attention?
6. What or who could motivate change or action in audience members?</td><td>• Television stations
• Radio stations
• Newspapers
• Websites and social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)
• Community festivals and events</td><td>• Transportation depots/bus stations
• Malls
• Parks, community centers
• Recreation centers (e.g., basketball courts or soccer fields)
• Day care centers and Head Start centers</td><td>• Health care clinics and hospitals
• Schools, colleges, vocational centers
• Public buildings and offices (e.g., city government, libraries)
• Places of worship
• Supermarkets and restaurants</td></tr>
</table>

Action Plan Strategy	

Target Audience 1	
Audience Characteristics:	
These are your channels	Make a complete list of channels your team can use to reach this audience:

Target Audience 2	
Audience Characteristics:	
These are your channels	Make a complete list of channels your team can use to reach this audience:

Target Audience 3	
Audience Characteristics:	
These are your channels	Make a complete list of channels your team can use to reach this audience:

Step 4: Choose Activities and Materials

The last step in the process is deciding if there are materials that you may want to develop for specific audiences, or whether you want to identify specific activities and events you can use to reach your audience through the channels identified in Step 3. In choosing where to focus your efforts, you should consider the following:

- Appropriateness to audience, goal, and message
- Relevance to desired outcomes
- Timing
- Costs/Resources
- Community support or opposition toward the issue/activity
- Cultural appropriateness (including language)
- Environment—geographic considerations
- Whenever possible, messages and materials should be pretested with the target audiences or with channel "gatekeepers" to ensure that the message is understand as intended.

Sample Activities
News conferences
Editorial board meetings at newspapers
Radio talk or call-in shows
A benefit race
Parades
Web events
Conferences
One-on-one meetings
Open houses
Speeches
Hotlines
Listservs
Information fair, county fair or health fair

Materials to Support Activities
News releases
Newsletters
Fact sheets
Fliers and brochures
Opinion editorials (op-eds)
Letters to the editor
Posters
Public service announcements (PSAs)
Bookmarks
Video presentations
Web pages
Buttons, pins, and ribbons
Promotional items and giveaways

Target Audience 1		
Audience Characteristics:		
These are your activities and materials	List the activities your team can use to reach this audience:	List the materials your team can use to support these activities:

Target Audience 2		
Audience Characteristics:		
These are your activities and materials	List the activities your team can use to reach this audience:	List the materials your team can use to support these activities:

Target Audience 3		
Audience Characteristics:		
These are your activities and materials	List the activities your team can use to reach this audience:	List the materials your team can use to support these activities:

Summary of Steps 1-4:

Action Plan Strategy		
Target Audience 1		
Audience Characteristics:		
These are your messages	**Write the three most compelling sentences you could use to motivate this audience.** Base your responses on what you know about what your audience needs to hear in order to think, feel, or act.	
	1-	
	2-	
	3-	
These are your channels	**Make a complete list of channels** your team can use to reach this audience.	
These are your activities and materials	**List the activities** your team can use to reach this audience.	**List the materials** your team can use to support these activities.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Action Plan Strategy</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Target Audience 2</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Audience Characteristics:</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">These are your messages</td><td colspan="3">Write the three most compelling sentences you could use to motivate this audience.
Base your responses on what you know about what your audience needs to hear in order to think, feel, or act.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">1-</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">2-</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">3-</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">These are your channels</td><td colspan="3">Make a complete list of channels your team can use to reach this audience.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">These are your activities and materials</td><td colspan="2">List the activities your team can use to reach this audience.</td><td>List the materials your team can use to support these activities.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Action Plan Strategy		
Target Audience 3		
Audience Characteristics:		
These are your messages	**Write the three most compelling sentences you could use to motivate this audience.** Base your responses on what you know about what your audience needs to hear in order to think, feel, or act.	
	1-	
	2-	
	3-	
These are your channels	**Make a complete list of channels** your team can use to reach this audience.	
These are your activities materials	**List the activities** your team can use to reach this audience:	**List the materials** your team can use to support these activities.

New Partners Tracking Tool

INSTRUCTIONS

Use this template each time a potential partner or resource has been identified. Whatever information is available should be entered. When a name or organization is mentioned at a meeting, try to have someone commit to making the contact, and be sure to note who agreed so you can follow up. Note whether you want that contact to join the leadership council or the coalition. Some people can be good resources even if they are not being asked to join the council or coalition. You may need something specific from someone, such as help getting an announcement in the newspaper or on the radio or help providing space for a meeting. The form can help you keep track of such requests. If you are responsible for the contact, the template provides information you will need to remind you to follow up. Remember to review this tracking tool regularly to ensure that follow-up actions have been completed.

Community coalitions should routinely ask themselves: Are there other people or organizations in our community from whom we should seek support? This tool will be useful beginning with the planning phase as you make initial contact with partners, and it will be critical as you move beyond the planning activities and involve more partners and implement plans and strategies. The purpose of this tool is to record information about suggested partners and the results of contacting them. This tool will help you keep track of who was mentioned as a potential partner, why they were recommended, whether or not someone has contacted them, and the result of that contact. This record will be helpful as a monitoring and tracking device, it also can be tremendously helpful if there is turnover in the coordinator position. It is always helpful to know who has supported SB in the past and who was asked, but declined, to help.

Tracking Form for Recruiting New Partners for Smart Beginnings Coalitions (EXAMPLE)

Potential Partner	Jane Doe	Source	Rotary	Date	10/10/10
Address					
City/State/Zip					
Phone:	260-333-4132	email:	jdoe@goodbusiness.com		

What do we hope they can contribute?	What can we say to encourage them to come?	Who is/are the best person/people to make contact?	What was the result? (Include date that result was reported)	Next steps?
We would like her to serve on the Leadership Council since it will help us with buy-in from the business and volunteer community. Barring that, we would like her to allow us to present our draft assessment and/or strategic plan	Remind her how much hard work the Rotary Club puts into improving our community and how important young people are to the future of our community	Samantha Johnson from Head Start b/c she knows Jane best	Jane said she was not available to participate because of her mother's failing health but she identified Fred Doe as someone who was interested (11/10/10)	Ask Jane if she would be willing to set-up an introductory meeting with Fred to help establish credibility

Tracking Form for Recruiting New Partners for Smart Beginnings Coalitions

Potential Partner		Source		Date	
Address					
City/State/Zip					
Phone		Email			

What do we hope they can contribute?	What can we say to encourage them to come?	Who is/are the best person/people to make contact?	What was the result? (Include date that result was reported)	Next steps?

Tracking Form for Recruiting New Partners for Smart Beginnings Coalitions

Potential Partner		Source		Date	
Address					
City/State/Zip					
Phone		Email			

What do we hope they can contribute?	What can we say to encourage them to come?	Who is/are the best person/people to make contact?	What was the result? (Include date that result was reported)	Next steps?

Public Engagement and Stakeholder Involvement Tool 3

SB Initiative Integration with the Community

INSTRUCTIONS

You may not be able to use this tool until you are well into the planning phase or even the getting ready phase, depending on how familiar you are with existing efforts in your community. It is recommended that you complete this tool annually, so you can track changes over time.

Review each statement and indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement below and then use your responses to complete the questions that follow.

An important aspect of communication is taking steps to ensure that your coalition is well integrated into the community. Having connections and credibility in the community will make it easier to develop partnerships, get community buy-in, secure resources, and sustain your coalition. This tool will help you assess how successful you have been in developing your coalition's credibility and reputation.

		Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree	Your Response
1	Our coalition is building on the work of prior collaborative efforts in our community.	1	2	3	4	5	
2	Our coalition is aware of current organizations or initiatives that can support implementation of our strategic plan.	1	2	3	4	5	
3	Our coalition has influence with policymakers in our community.	1	2	3	4	5	
4	Members of our coalition are well respected and seen as credible leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	
5	Our coalition has ties to influential community leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	
6	Our coalition is viewed as credible and sought out as an expert in our community.	1	2	3	4	5	
7	Our coalition is approached by other agencies or organizations for partnership opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5	
8	Our coalition members are active in other initiatives, workgroups, or committees in our community.	1	2	3	4	5	

		Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree	Your Response
9	Our coalition looks for opportunities to publicize our primary activities and achievements.	1	2	3	4	5	
10	We communicate a consistent message at all community events (e.g., talking points that describe vision).	1	2	3	4	5	
11	Parent groups know about our work and support our efforts.	1	2	3	4	5	

Review your responses to the above items and then respond to the following questions.

1. What are our coalition's strengths with regard to our integration with the community?

2. Do our strengths cut across the different communities we work in and the different population groups (e.g., different racial and ethnic groups, the immigrant community, business leadership) that make up our community or communities? If not, what can we do to make that happen?

3. What weakness do we have with regard to integration into the community and what steps can we take to improve in this area?

SMART BEGINNINGS

Sustainability and Finance Toolkit

Develop a plan to sustain coalition and coalition priorities

Purpose of the Tools

The tools included here will help you think about and work toward sustainability. Sustainability is fundamentally about planning for the future. Sustainability should not be thought of as something separate and distinct from the other work you do as part of your coalition or something you need to think about only when SB funds start to run out.

A key part of **achieving sustainability** involves creating an effective strategic plan and developing a public awareness strategy that describes (a) what you are trying to achieve, (b) your successes so far, and (c) what still needs to be done to create an ideal system for children and families in your community. If you do this well, the need for what you do will be much clearer to potential supporters and they will be more likely to provide you with resources to sustain your efforts.

The Sustainability and Finance Tools

How to Use These Tools

As you go about your work, keep in mind that you really want to sustain two key achievements: first, you want to sustain the improvements your coalition makes in early childhood systems and services in your community; and, second, you want to sustain your coalition as a tool for creating ongoing and effective change.

You should have regular discussions with your leadership council about what you can do to ensure that the changes you are making will be long-lasting ones—**sustaining impact**—and what you need to do to find additional support to create enduring change and to expand your efforts—**sustaining activities**. Use **tool 1** to help guide these discussions and clarify your sustainability strategies. **Tool 2** can be helpful in documenting funding opportunities or in-kind support. You may want to **form a committee to focus on sustainability and resource development** that could be responsible for tracking opportunities and then presenting them to the larger coalition. You may decide to **set aside some time at each meeting to discuss potential opportunities** and ask whether anyone is aware of current or forthcoming funding opportunities for which the coalition can apply. You may want to **hold an annual progress review meeting** in which you review the progress you have made on your strategic plan, adjust it, and discuss issues related to sustainability. You also may want to maintain a full disclosure climate that enables partners to share funding opportunities they are pursuing independently. They should be able to explain why a certain community need falls outside of the coalition's purview or why this source of funds should be pursued by a single agency versus the coalition. Having these open discussions will build trust and lead to unified agreement regarding the goals of the coalition.

Sustainability and Finance Tool 1

Sustaining Impact

For Planning Grantees

INSTRUCTIONS

Use this tool to guide a facilitated discussion with members of the sustainability committee. These questions will help you begin the discussions on sustainability and examine whether the strategies in your strategic plan are ultimately sustainable.

The questions below can be introduced when your coalition is in the process of developing its strategic plan. If you have a committee that is responsible for refining your strategic plan (such as a strategic planning workgroup), they may want to devote some time to discuss these questions and, based on their answers, you may want to modify your strategic plan.

1. Are the strategies in our plan designed to make a long-term impact on early childhood systems and programs?

2. Which aspects of our plan can we strengthen to improve our prospects of making a long-term impact?

You may want to devote part of your annual or semiannual plan review meeting to the questions below. If you do this, you will want to assess your progress on the prior question before re-addressing the questions listed here.

1. How is the way we are implementing our plan maximizing our opportunities to make a long-term impact on issues related to young children and families in our community?

2. What adjustments or changes can we make that would improve our chances of having a long-term impact?

3. Are there ways of extending our efforts to encompass other programs, agencies, or areas of early childhood? If yes, what would we need to do that?

4. What are we going to do during the next grant period to enhance our chances of making long-term improvements in the early childhood system (your progress in this area should be assessed at the next progress review meeting)?

Sustainability and Finance Tool 2

Tracking and Planning for Opportunities

INSTRUCTIONS

This tool contains two parts. Use the tracking form to document funding opportunities or in-kind support that has been identified. You should add to this list as partners share news about opportunities, which may occur via email, at meetings, or in hallway conversations. Use this tool regularly to assess how successful the coalition has been in seeking resources and to share ideas for becoming more successful in the future.

All SB coalitions, no matter which stage they are in, need to focus on obtaining additional support. You should regularly be on the lookout for funding opportunities and encourage partners to share information on opportunities of which they are aware. Seeking funding should be seen as a collective activity. The coalition might realistically pursue, as a group, funding opportunities that would be much harder for individual agency partners to obtain on their own.

Because funding is critical to the survival of community organizations, there are likely to be times when some of the partners in the coalition are competing against each other. Determining how to pursue funding is a strategic process that may lead to conflict. The SB initiative should always be thinking about what needs to be done to enhance the likelihood that the community can benefit from a funding opportunity. It may be in the community's best interest to have one organization assume the lead in pursuing an opportunity, and to recognize that having other organizations apply may be ineffective. However, sometimes members will decide to act in what they perceive to be their organization's self-interest. While not ideal, it is unrealistic to expect participants in a coalition to always pursue the strategy that maximizes the collective gain. The goal is to create an environment in which everyone can be upfront about funding opportunities and be willing to be direct about what their organization is and is not willing to do. If you take advantage of the strength of the coalition, you should be able to enhance funding opportunities for participating organizations and for the group as a whole. Success will increase the likelihood that partners will be willing to work together around funding issues.

Tracking Resource Development Opportunities								
Opportunity for Funding or In-Kind Support (include the amount and when it is due)		**Who can take the lead?**	**What role will the Smart Beginnings coalition play?**	**Does it count as matching funds for Smart Beginnings?**		**Outcome** (Was the resource or funding received?) **and Lessons Learned**		
Opportunity		**Name**	**Describe Role**	**Yes**	**No**	**Received**	**Yes**	**No**
$	**00/00/00**					**Lessons**		
$	00/00/00							
$	00/00/00							
$	00/00/00							
$	00/00/00							
$	00/00/00							
$	00/00/00							

1. What have we been doing well in regard to finding and pursuing opportunities for funding and other resources?

2. What are the obstacles that we have encountered?

3. What do we need to do better in order to be more effective at locating and pursuing funding and other resources to support our SB efforts?

4. What do we plan to do in the next year to make our coalition more effective in locating and pursuing resources?

5. How are we going to carry out the above plan? (Who will be responsible, what will they be doing, how will they be doing it, when will they report on their progress?)