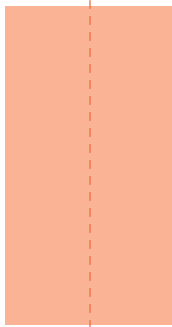
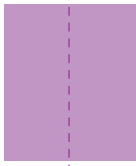




# Early Learning Community **Action Guide and Assessment Tool**



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## About CSSP

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) works to achieve a racially, economically, and socially just society in which all children, youth, and families thrive. We translate ideas into action, promote public policies grounded in equity, and support strong and inclusive communities. We advocate with and for all children, youth, and families marginalized by public policies and institutional practices. Learn more at [www.CSSP.org](https://www.CSSP.org).

## About the Early Learning Nation Collective

Early Learning Nation (ELN) Collective is a national effort to shift power to local leaders to ensure all young children—prenatal through age 8—and their families can thrive.

The ELN Collective fosters and supports local decision-making toward solutions for the health, school readiness, and well-being of children prenatal through age 8. Local leaders are at the forefront, guiding the national partners who work alongside them. Together, they listen to community needs and align ongoing efforts, helping to develop solutions tailored to benefit the children and families in each community.

## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood—the period that begins before birth and continues through 8 years old—is a vitally important stage of development. The science of brain development and studies about the effects of early relationships and experiences tell a compelling story about how important early childhood is for lifelong health and well-being. We also know that the early years of raising a child can be some of the most stressful for parents as they navigate logistical, financial, social, and emotional challenges—and that these challenges are amplified for families who are living in poverty and those who face discrimination based on their race, ethnicity, immigration status, ability level, and sexual and gender identity and orientation. It follows that investments in supporting children and families in the early years can make a significant difference for children’s development and parents’ well-being—and that those investments also have long-term benefits for the communities in which they live. Supporting and investing in early childhood is an investment in a thriving community, now and into the future.

With this growing understanding of the importance of early childhood, leaders in many communities are looking for concrete ideas about how to improve the lives of young children and their families in their communities. They are looking for information and guidance about where to put their resources and energy, how to implement effective programs and services, how to reshape systems to get to more equitable outcomes, and what policy changes will make a difference in families’ lives and support early learning. We call communities that are engaged in this work Early Learning Communities.

This *Early Learning Community (ELC) Action Guide and Assessment Tool* is designed to support local leaders—from mayors and executive directors to parents and service providers—through a process of assessing how well their community is currently supporting early learning and healthy development, and developing an action plan to make improvements in one or more areas. When parents and early childhood leaders from early care and education, health care, and family support services come together to identify actions they can take at the program, neighborhood, or system level to strengthen their communities and support healthy child development, they can make their community a place where all children thrive.

Early learning happens in the context of relationships and across all of the settings where infants, toddlers, and young children spend their time—at home, on the playground, in child care and school, at the doctor’s office, at the library, and at the grocery store. Early development includes physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development, and is driven by the foundational relationships and experiences that promote early relational health. In this guide, “early learning” refers to all of these critical aspects of development in the early years.

**Key Term – Parents and caregivers:** Throughout this guide, we use the word “parent” or the phrase “parents and caregivers” to include any adult in a primary caregiving role for a child, including birth and adoptive parents, grandparents and other kin raising children, step-parents, foster and resource parents, chosen family, and others who play that critical role for children.



## EARLY LEARNING COMMUNITIES: BUILDING BLOCKS FOR SUCCESS

An Early Learning Community (ELC) is a city, town, village, or county that promotes learning and development prenatally through the early years of elementary school so that all children can thrive. While communities vary greatly by history, culture, demographics, and geography, all Early Learning Communities stand on four key “building blocks”—that is, community characteristics and actions that promote healthy development and well-being for all young children:

- Community leadership, commitment, and public will to make early childhood a priority;
- Quality services that work for all young children and their families;
- Neighborhoods where families can thrive; and
- Policies that support and are responsive to families.

In an Early Learning Community, these building blocks are aligned, bolstered, and assembled in a way that builds on the strengths of the community and the families that live there. This includes recognizing the challenges families face and identifying and addressing the ways that systems are perpetuating disparities across racial, ethnic, sociodemographic, and/or geographic lines in the community. Putting these pieces together requires an early childhood infrastructure that includes effective leadership, sustainable financial backing, support for service providers, and the use of data to drive change. The voices of parents, service providers, and grassroots community leaders are critical in this work—along with the more formalized leadership and funding power that comes from municipal or county government, the school district, or a community-based non-profit entity.



In partnership with municipal leaders, parent leaders, local early childhood advocates, and national partners, the Center for the Study of Social Policy and the National League of Cities developed the original *ELC Action Guide* to help stakeholders come together and transform their communities into Early Learning Communities. Local leaders—which we define to include elected officials and municipal staff, early childhood system leaders, service providers, parents, and grassroots community leaders—informed the initial definition of the building blocks of an Early Learning Community in 2016; more local leaders piloted versions of what was then called the Progress Rating Tool, implemented action plans, and gave feedback on the experience between 2017–2022. The latest revisions, made in 2023–2024, and the development of this format with an integrated Assessment Tool, reflect lessons learned from those early implementers as well as new feedback from parent leaders and national partners. This latest revision also reflects examples of actions that elementary school and other early childhood providers can take to serve and support children through age 8. The voices of local leaders have shaped the *ELC Action Guide and Assessment Tool* to reflect a wide range of diverse perspectives and to make it as useful as possible for other communities to put their commitment to early childhood into action and achieve better outcomes for young children and their families.

**Key Term – Early childhood systems:** Throughout this guide, we use the term “early childhood system” to refer to the network of services and entities that reach children from prenatal development through age 8 and their families. The early childhood system includes interdependent policies, programs, services, and infrastructure including all child- and family-serving systems—such as early learning, health, housing, economic development, and transportation—and the connections of each of these elements to each other. In some communities, the early childhood system is very inter-connected and organized, while in other communities it is less organized and may be experienced more like independent programs and services. Becoming an Early Learning Community includes formalizing and organizing the early childhood system with a commitment to equity, parent voice, and accountability.





## ENSURING THAT ALL CHILDREN THRIVE: THE GUIDING VISION FOR EARLY LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The vision of an Early Learning Community is one where all young children get a great start, setting the foundation for lifelong success and well-being. This means that children are healthy and can learn and thrive in strong families and in safe, equitable communities. For *all children* to thrive, targeted and intentional efforts are needed to lift up and better serve families and communities that have been neglected or harmed by historical and current systems.

Early learning occurs across multiple domains (physical, cognitive, social, and emotional) in the context of young children’s relationships with their parents and other caregivers in their communities, and in schools as children enter that system. Early Learning Communities align their efforts toward three broad sets of outcomes for young children and their families related to early development:

- All new and expectant parents and young children are healthy.
- All children are ready to thrive in school.
- All children live in strong, positive, and nurturing families and communities.

These are universal goals—the kind of results that all parents and caregivers want for their children. While many families may feel able to ensure these outcomes for their own children, the United States is far from reaching them universally. A community that invests in achieving these outcomes for *all* children and families will see improvements in child and family well-being throughout the community, as well as longer-term benefits such as increased academic achievement, a healthier and more prepared workforce, and savings across many public systems. Achieving these outcomes at a universal or population level will require targeted investments and actions taken in partnership with families and in communities to address and overcome harm done by current policies, systems, and approaches that have maintained and perpetuated disparities based on race, ethnicity, immigration status, ability level, and sexual and gender identity and orientation. Identifying and implementing needed changes to help all children and families achieve these outcomes is the pathway to the “Guiding Vision” of ensuring that all children thrive.



## GUIDING VALUES OF AN EARLY LEARNING COMMUNITY

The outcomes described above guide leaders as they work to transform their communities into Early Learning Communities. This work can only be effective when it is guided by core values which will inform how leaders understand the needs in the community, prioritize the actions they want to take, and provide resources to accomplish the goals. The *ELC Action Guide and Assessment Tool* emphasizes three core values that inform this work; local leaders may come together to identify additional values that guide the work in a given community. The guiding values highlighted here are:

- **Equity.** Are we taking steps that will transform our systems to promote thriving and eliminate disparities in outcomes related to health, school readiness, and well-being?
- **Parent Voice.** Are parents and caregivers at the table, helping to shape the agenda, supported as leaders and partners, and being heard about what will work best for their families and communities throughout the entire process?
- **Accountability.** Are we tracking our efforts and impact in meaningful ways, and adjusting our work based on what we learn to ensure that we are making a difference?

### Guiding Value: Equity—Ensuring All Means All

Achieving well-being outcomes for **all** young children requires intentional effort focused on equity. That means understanding the current and historical conditions in the community that contribute to disparities among different populations, and how those conditions affect families.

Inequitable access to opportunity persists in communities across America, including in the form of uneven investments in public infrastructure, school systems, and services, as well as reduced private investment. The racial segregation that characterizes most communities in America means that Black, Latiné, and Indigenous children are more likely to live in neighborhoods with high rates of concentrated poverty, exposure to air and water pollution, and vulnerability to climate change and natural disaster—all of which pose risks to healthy development. Policies and systems disadvantage individuals, families, and groups based on race and ethnicity as well as immigration status, ability level, sexual and gender identity and orientation, language spoken, and socioeconomic status—meaning that individuals face different barriers to resources, services, power, and ultimately to health and well-being, depending on their intersectional identities.

Becoming an Early Learning Community requires that elected officials, business and civic leaders, and advocates understand and reckon with the disparate ways that social determinants of health affect children and families in their community. Before making the systems changes needed to address those disparities, communities must first examine existing data to pinpoint who is thriving and who is being left behind. It also requires an examination of historical practices that have denied certain groups equitable access to resources and services. Furthermore, addressing those disparities and achieving better outcomes for the population as a whole requires shifting power to community members who have historically been shut out of the decision-making process and those who face the most barriers to accessing services. Actions toward becoming an Early Learning Community should include changes that are necessary to better meet the needs of families who have been socially and economically marginalized in the community—informed and led by members of those families. Depending on a community’s history and context, this may mean increasing access to established services for particular neighborhoods or cultural or language groups that are not being equitably reached or implementing a new program that meets the expressed needs of a group whose needs have not been met before.

### **Guiding Value: Parent Voice—Parents Leading the Way to Success**

In an Early Learning Community, parents and caregivers—particularly those from marginalized and underserved communities—are respected and supported as partners, leaders, and advocates, ensuring that all children, families, and communities have equitable opportunities to achieve the three broad outcomes of an Early Learning Community. Increasing the level of parent involvement in an Early Learning Community initiative can take many forms. Through inclusion and collaboration with parents, communities can be transformed by the families who have a nuanced understanding of the opportunities for change in their own neighborhoods and the systems they’ve experienced firsthand. Early Learning Communities recognize parents’ expertise, as parents have key insight and know what is best for their families and communities.

Through inclusion and collaboration with parents, communities can be transformed by the families who have a nuanced understanding of the opportunities for change in their own neighborhoods and the systems they’ve experienced firsthand.

Some communities have a strong track record with parent leadership—in the school system, in community organizing on other issues, or in early childhood—and can leverage that to ensure that parents have a strong voice in developing and implementing an Early Learning Community Action Plan. In many communities, though, parents are not currently organized, supported, or recognized as leaders. In those communities, the work to become an Early Learning Community will require creating new avenues for collaboration and feedback, building a welcoming context for parent leaders to join, and supporting families to take leadership and advocacy roles. This will be most effective when it begins with program providers and decision makers engaging families in ways that are culturally and linguistically relevant, building strong relationships, and finding out what support parents need to make their voices heard.

It is important to note that parent leadership and equity are closely intertwined: it is not possible to achieve equity goals without strong parent leadership from communities that are affected by racism and other forms of discrimination; and it is not possible to effectively engage diverse and representative parent leaders without attention to equity issues. The ***Manifesto for Race Equity and Parent Leadership in Early Childhood Systems*** is a helpful guide to approaching these issues jointly for the greatest impact.

## Guiding Value: Accountability—Keeping a Focus on Results

Becoming an Early Learning Community requires continuous attention to whether efforts are achieving the desired results and moving the community closer to achieving the Guiding Vision. That means clearly defining the community's goals from the beginning and identifying and gathering different types of data that will show where you started and whether progress is being made toward those goals. Early childhood systems function best when representative data are consistently used to drive change—to keep stakeholders focused on the outcomes of their efforts, improve progress toward those desired outcomes for all children and families, and increase effectiveness of various programs and of the system itself.

When appropriate, formal evaluations of programs or initiatives focused on specific outcomes may be conducted. However, a results focus is broader than program evaluation. Accountability demands that leaders pay attention to what, if anything, has changed as a result of their efforts and investments, as well as being responsive to families and community members and adjusting strategies and investments as needed. This might be gleaned through some combination of listening sessions, surveys, interviews, observations, and tracking quantitative data.

### Tracking Progress toward the Guiding Vision

Tracking progress toward the outcomes above will look different in every community. This guide provides an assessment and action planning process for local leaders to identify changes they want to make in their communities. It will also be necessary to gather or monitor other data to track how well children and families are currently doing relative to this vision that all children will thrive, and to identify and assess where improvements are made over time.

Local leaders can start by considering data that are currently collected by the school system, the public health department, other state and local entities, or the Census and American Community Survey. It is important to be alert to the potential for data to reflect bias (due to the questions asked, methods used to collect it, or other flaws) and to consider what data are necessary to better understand children's and families' experiences and outcomes. Families should be consulted about what indicators they see as showing success in health, school readiness, and family and community well-being. Some communities will be able to identify trustworthy "hard data" metrics that are related to the outcomes that they can track over time (such as low birth weight rates, or kindergarten readiness scores), find ways to share their data, and maintain a public dashboard showing progress. Other communities may not be ready for that level of data sharing and reporting, but can still identify some key metrics and informally share progress on those metrics, among partners.

Most communities will find that not everything they want to track is currently measured or collected. Qualitative data can be critical in telling a more complete story. Local leaders—particularly those who already have trusting relationships in the community—can collect data through interviews or focus groups with community members to help document what is happening in the community. All communities can use tools like the Early Learning Community Assessment Tool in this guide to gauge how well stakeholders think the community is doing, and track changes over time. In addition, communities may also use CSSP's **Early Childhood Systems Performance Assessment Toolkit** to look more closely at how their early childhood system is functioning, and identify ways to improve.

Whichever indicators a community chooses to focus on, it should track them for the entire population of the city or county, disaggregating the data (by race, ethnicity, home language, gender, zip code, or other relevant demographics) to see which population groups are thriving and which could be better served by the systems in place. Leaders should work to understand the reasons for those results and develop a plan for how to improve them. It is also important that leaders report progress regularly to the broader community to help them understand the numbers and the story behind the numbers—and what it all combines to say about the community's progress toward the Guiding Vision.



## BECOMING AN EARLY LEARNING COMMUNITY

Becoming an Early Learning Community is an ongoing process, where there are always opportunities to make progress. In the infographic, the steps a community can take are illustrated as a community coming together to build a playground. There are common elements in Early Learning Communities, but, like playgrounds, these elements can be assembled in many different ways. Some communities may choose to make minor renovations or additions to an established playground, while others are breaking ground for the first time. Wherever a community is in the process, some elements are critical to success.



**Commitment.** Making a commitment to value and support early learning and development for all young children in a community—and particularly those who lack equitable access to opportunities for success—is a critical first step. It is crucial this commitment is made by decision-makers in local government, leaders and providers that serve children and families, and by representative stakeholders (most often parents) and people outside of the early childhood system who are leaders in their communities. The commitment to these efforts should value children and families and put their needs at the center of these efforts—and should be backed up with resources to bring the vision to reality.



**Leadership.** Becoming an Early Learning Community will not happen without dedicated leadership, coming together with agreed-on values, timeline, and desired results. It is critical to create or identify a diverse, inclusive leadership group with cross-field experience in areas such as early care and education, health and dental care, public health, and family support, as well as parents and community residents who will be most impacted by the decisions of this group. It will also be important to designate an organization to serve as the “backbone” for your efforts—an office or agency with a designated staff person to coordinate and monitor the cross-sector work, identify opportunities for collective action, and guide the community narrative about its commitment to early childhood and the potential for all children to succeed.



**Assessment.** Once that commitment has been made—by a mayor or city council, a county executive or county board, or a non-profit organization like a United Way or early childhood commission, in partnership with many other stakeholders—the next steps depend on the unique characteristics of the community. This guide and assessment tool—with a scoring sheet in **Appendix B** and a digital version available at [eln-collective.org](http://eln-collective.org)—are designed to gather many people’s perspectives on what the community is already doing well and where there is a need for new or different efforts. Parents, caregivers, and service providers, beyond those involved in leading these efforts, should be asked to give their perspectives, through the formal assessment tool or through focus groups and less formal conversations. In addition, looking at available data on child and family well-being will help leaders identify where changes and improvements are needed, and determine how to measure change over time.



**Action Planning.** With the commitments made, the right stakeholders at the table, and data in hand, the next steps are up to each community. Completing the guide and assessment tool will generate ideas that can be incorporated into an ELC Action Guide, which will look different in every community. (Communities can use the template for an ELC Action Plan in **Appendix C**—or use another format that stakeholders are already familiar with.) Some communities will choose to focus on one or two building blocks, while others will take on all four building blocks at once. Some will choose to enhance areas where there is already a strong foundation, while others will focus on a building block where very little has been done so far. For example, communities can build on existing policies, programs, and initiatives within or across the sectors that affect young children and their families, and in some cases create new policies, programs, and initiatives. Each community will also have to take into account how state and federal programs are currently implemented and what opportunities could be leveraged to make better use of those funds.



**Implementation.** Putting a plan into action won’t happen overnight. Coalitions may benefit from including some immediate, relatively easy actions to solve some problems quickly, which also helps to build momentum and a sense of camaraderie among stakeholders. Other steps in the ELC Action Plan may take months or years of planning, fundraising, advocacy, or relationship building before they can be implemented. In any case, implementation should take place in partnership with parent leaders in the community and with input from as many residents as possible about how the plan will be carried out—the when, where, and how—in order to be most effective.

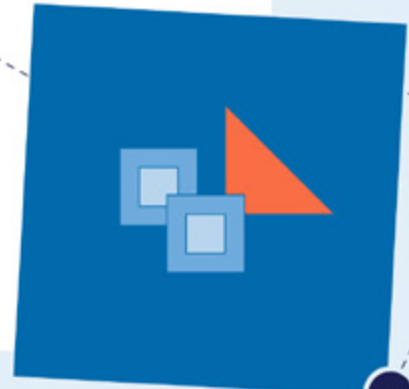


**Reflection and Recommitment.** The ELC Action Plan should be a living document. At regular intervals, the leadership group should review what has been done, how effective it has been, what is coming up next, and what might need to change in the Action Plan going forward. Less frequently, this might include going back and re-doing assessments, celebrating progress, and setting new goals—or revisiting partners’ commitment to the work after changes in leadership or priorities.

# Building Your Early Learning Community

## Commitment

- What is your community's commitment to young children?
- What resources are going to be invested in becoming an Early Learning Community?



## Leadership

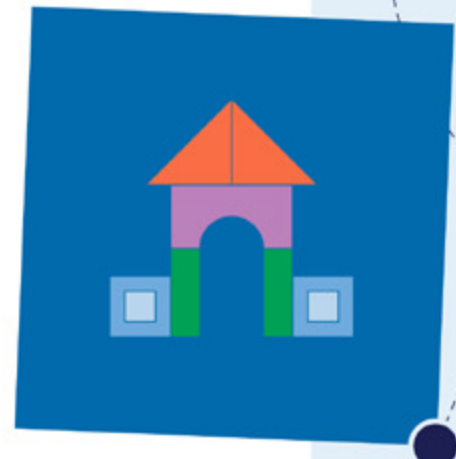
- Who will lead the work, and what will they do to convene and organize early childhood stakeholders?
- Who else needs to be at the table to represent the families, neighborhoods, and groups that will be most affected?



## Assessment

- What is already going well to support young children in your community, and where is there a need for something new or different?
- Where do stakeholders differ in their impressions of how the community is doing?

**Use the ELC Assessment Tool**



## Action Planning

- Based on your assessment process, where do stakeholders want to focus their time and energy on making improvements?
- Will you focus on one or two building blocks, or spread your efforts across all four? Will you build on work that's already going on, or do something new?

[Use the Action Planning Template](#)



## Implementation

- What is needed to put your plan into action?
- How will you gather input from families about the “when, where, and how” of your action steps to be most effective?



## Reflection and Recommitment

- What have you accomplished, and what have you learned along the way?
- Has your community gotten stronger in one or more building blocks?
- What's next on your journey to becoming an Early Learning Community?





# Structure of the Early Learning Community Action Guide and Assessment Tool

## Building Blocks

The *Early Learning Community Action Guide and Assessment Tool* is built around the four building blocks that make up an Early Learning Community. These are four broad areas that communities can focus on in order to improve how families with young children are supported to promote early learning and healthy development. Identified by local leaders working to transform their own communities, the building blocks are:

- Community leadership, commitment, and public will to make early childhood a priority;
- Quality services that work for all young children and their families;
- Neighborhoods where families can thrive; and
- Policies that support and are responsive to families.

## Goals

Each building block is divided into three to six goals, describing the ideal conditions when that building block is established in a community. These goals are aspirational and, taken together, describe an almost utopian community for young children and their families. Most communities in the United States will find that they have a long way to go toward reaching these goals, but this guide offers a variety of suggestions for how to get closer to them. An ELC is a community that is working and making progress toward these goals, not just one that has reached them.

Certain goals within building blocks 1 and 2 are marked with a bridge icon to indicate that they make up the “critical infrastructure” of an Early Learning Community. Special attention should be paid to these goals, particularly if you are having trouble advancing your early learning efforts or if you are ready to formalize your work for greater effectiveness.



## Levels

Within each goal are three levels that describe how close a community is to reaching the goal:

- ▶ **Level 1** describes the starting point and is the first thing a community will want to establish on their path to reaching that goal. In many cases, the first level involves assessing the current situation in order to identify strengths and areas of need.
- ▶ **Level 2** describes a community that is taking initiative and making some progress toward the goal. This may include communities where progress has been made for some pockets of the population, but those efforts are not benefiting the whole community yet.
- ▶ Finally, **Level 3** indicates that a community has invested time, energy, and resources toward reaching this goal and is integrating their efforts across the early childhood system and/or with other sectors.

Communities will likely be at different levels for different goals. The levels are meant to be hierarchical so that a community can build on its progress. However, even a community that has been working for many years to improve early childhood systems may find ideas for actions in levels 1 and 2 that haven't been done before—or haven't been done in a long time—and could be used to strengthen or revitalize their efforts. Communities should evaluate what early learning and family-informed efforts have taken place in the past. Previous efforts can provide insights on lessons learned, challenges, and new opportunities. If parents and members of marginalized communities did not have a chance to inform previous efforts, that could be a place to start. And if previous efforts did not focus on identifying and addressing disparities in the community, that can be the hallmark of a renewed effort.

Some communities may find that this assessment process is the first time they have even considered some of the goals in this guide. In that case, the “not started” rating may be appropriate for one or more goals. Those goals may offer clear action steps to include in the ELC Action Plan, to move to level 1. Some communities may not be ready to get started in some areas, but know it's an area for future growth and development.

## Actions

The actions described within each level are examples of steps a community might take—things that have been done in other communities as they worked to build or enhance their early childhood systems. These are suggested actions but they are not an exhaustive list of requirements for meeting the levels. The particular actions a community chooses will differ depending on its social, political, financial, and historical context. One community may decide to implement a number of actions just as described in this guide, while another community may take inspiration from the listed actions and ask stakeholders to design their own actions that will help them get closer to that goal. Throughout this assessment tool, stakeholders can note actions that have already been taken that are similar to those on the provided list; select actions to include in the ELC Action Plan; or write in other actions that would move the community closer to that goal. Whatever actions are included in the ELC Action Plan should be grounded in the needs and desires of families in the community who should inform the plan at every step of the way.

## How to Use this Action Guide and Assessment Tool

Wherever you are in the process of becoming an Early Learning Community, elements of this Action Guide and related materials available at <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/early-learning-nation> may be useful:

- The “Building Your Early Learning Community” infographic can help to guide the process and identify the next steps in your journey toward becoming an Early Learning Community. Slides and a handout version of the infographic are also available.
- The detailed description of the building blocks, goals, and action steps communities can take to reach each goal may be best shared with the people most closely involved with each building block or those who will focus on an action plan for a given building block.
- Not all stakeholders need to engage with the written details of every building block or goal. A discussion guide is available for gathering input about the community's current status and ideas for improvements with stakeholders who have less time to spend on this process; who have lower literacy; or who speak languages other than English and Spanish, as it can be translated more easily than the full *ELC Action Guide and Assessment Tool*.
- In the At-a-Glance overview in **Appendix A**, you can quickly track where your community stands on each of the goals of an Early Learning Community and identify areas to take action. This overview document includes the level of detail that may be most helpful for some stakeholder groups or meetings.

- The Assessment Tool throughout this guide can be used to rate your community's current status and identify action steps you think your community should take. You can track your ratings in **Appendix B** or in the online Assessment Tool. The results from the Assessment Tool may be a good messaging tool to use with elected officials, local foundations, and the public.
- The assessment process is designed to help you create an ELC Action Plan, selecting areas where you will focus your efforts in the next six months or year. **Appendix C** provides a template for your ELC Action Plan; your community may prefer to add these actions to an existing plan, or to use some other format.
- The Glossary, in **Appendix D**, will be particularly useful in establishing shared terms for the steps for becoming an Early Learning Community, and will provide grounding vocabulary for this guide.

Depending on where you are starting from, here are some special considerations:

- **Just Getting Started.** If you are bringing together stakeholders for the first time or launching a new effort toward becoming an Early Learning Community, the steps in this *ELC Action Guide* should be very straightforward. A critical early step is identifying a leadership body or organization that has the credibility to convene people and resources to lead this effort. This might be a public office (city, county, or school district), a non-profit, or a higher education institution. Be sure to assess the quality and accessibility of services currently available and engage the leaders of any previous or current initiatives focused on quality improvement or cross-systems partnerships. To successfully launch these efforts, it might be helpful to identify prior initiatives or offices (such as a children's cabinet or local government committee) and what their progress has been.
- **Building on Progress.** If your community already has a track record of partners working together with a focus on early childhood issues, the *ELC Action Guide and Assessment Tool* can help you to identify your next steps—whether you choose to deepen your work in a particular area, expand your reach to new areas, or bring a new focus on equity and ensuring that all families with young children throughout the community are benefiting from the early childhood system in place. For you, becoming an Early Learning Community may mean bringing in new partners and new perspectives and broadening your scope, or infusing your work with new energy and focus.
- **Already Doing Well.** If your community already has a strong early childhood system, the *ELC Action Guide and Assessment Tool* may serve as a way to validate your current efforts and identify some areas to focus new energy. For example, if you find that your community is already at a level 2 or 3 and close to reaching many of the goals related to community leadership and quality services, you might choose to focus on neighborhood issues or on policies that would better support families in raising children. If your community has an existing early childhood plan, you may pull some language or concepts in from the *ELC Action Guide* for ideas or actions that aren't currently addressed in your plan.



**EARLY  
LEARNING  
COMMUNITY  
ASSESSMENT TOOL**



## Building Block #1

### **Community Leadership, Commitment and Public Will to Make Early Childhood a Priority**

At the heart of an Early Learning Community is a common understanding that children and families are a priority—a community commitment to valuing and supporting families, and public will to maintain that commitment with funding, volunteerism, and neighborliness. This commitment is necessary to drive change in all of the other building blocks (services, neighborhoods, and policies) and transform a community into one where children and families are valued, supported, and thriving.

## Embodying the Guiding Values in Building Block 1

To strengthen and guide a community's work on Building Block 1, keep the following in mind related to each of the guiding values:

### Equity

- Key components of equitable engagement include building strong and sustainable relationships and partnerships through collaboration with community liaisons, including grassroots organizations and local service providers, that have long-standing relationships with historically underrepresented communities. Creating trusting relationships, increasing accessibility to facilities and services, and providing a range of opportunities to become involved are key actions that reflect a commitment to equitable engagement.
- Equity in engagement and community advocacy must place specific emphasis on those who will be most impacted by the project and those who are most often marginalized in decision-making. Community engagement work cannot be separated from the larger cultural, political, and socioeconomic context in a community, and the most effective forms of civic engagement must remain responsive to conditions of inequity and injustice. Leaders have to make a commitment to identify disparities impacting communities, and collaborate with community members to develop plans to improve conditions, experiences, and family outcomes. Engagement and community advocacy efforts should include individuals, families, and groups marginalized due to race and ethnicity as well as gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status, disability status, language spoken, and socioeconomic status.
- Consider identifying one or more reputable accessibility and inclusion experts who are familiar with different populations within the community, to inform and promote accessibility throughout all efforts and to aid in identifying caregivers and children impacted by disabilities and/or chronic conditions.

### Parent Voice

- Leadership groups should collaborate with families and community members representing communities that have been marginalized and underserved to shape, improve, and inform the ELC Action Plan and other efforts. This is also an opportunity to connect families to community resources, supportive services, and their elected officials serving in the leadership group.
- Including parents and caregivers in leadership groups is essential. Seek out parents and caregivers who have existing relationships with partnering organizations, include more than one parent to represent parent voice, and be prepared to offer supports such as check-ins before and after meetings, training and leadership development opportunities, and stipends for anyone who is joining the group outside of a paid role. Through referrals, it is also possible to identify parents who are engaged in their communities but may not have existing relationships with partner organizations, and who will bring fresh eyes to the challenges the community is facing.
- When planning events, listening sessions, or focus groups, include venues in neighborhoods outside the city center and where families already frequent such as laundromats, parks, child care centers, places of worship, libraries, and other cultural institutions. Think of other ways to eliminate barriers for parent attendance to events, including meeting in an accessible space (handrails, access to elevators, etc.), providing child care so that parents can attend with their children, scheduling meetings to accommodate working parents, and considering the language and communication needs of all individuals.

### Accountability

- Funding is one of the most visible and effective markers of commitment. Track the community's investment of funds into early childhood programs and services and community-level efforts—and how the community provides resources for families with young children directly—to see whether it grows over time. Alongside tracking funding, measure outcomes of interest, evaluate provider performance, and gather feedback from community members on whether services and programs funded have been responsive to their needs.
- It can be powerful to record the membership of the early childhood leadership group, including which sectors, neighborhoods, and demographic groups are represented, attendance at meetings, and other measures of engagement in the work to see how it changes over time.

### Local leaders work together across systems with a focus on early childhood

Building and strengthening the infrastructure for an Early Learning Community requires committed local leadership, a trusted convening entity, one or more champions, and a broader group of engaged stakeholders. This leadership can come from elected officials, city or county staff, non-profit leaders, service providers and active family and community members.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

- ▶ **Level 1** – A group of stakeholders committed to early childhood and with community ties meets regularly to identify collective priorities to better support families and young children, to guide the effort to act on established priorities, and to identify areas of overlap and possible areas of future collaboration.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Hold multiple listening sessions across the city or county, using community liaisons to recruit broad participation, to learn what community members want for children and what their aspirations are for their community. Foster a culture of trust, respect, and inclusion to ensure you receive authentic feedback. Listening sessions and outreach need to be accessible to all members of the community, and should take into account language, transportation, and other access barriers. Account for and deliberately reduce barriers so that all community members feel free to share their own opinions, experiences, and ideas.
- Activate an existing group of stakeholders or host a community-wide early childhood summit to identify partners who would be willing to participate. The local United Way may be able to help identify potential partners, and neighborhood associations, civic clubs, faith groups, or PTA groups can be great sources of community voice. Parents of young children and early care and education providers from the community should be represented in this group.
- Consider who is *not* at the table, to ensure that representation is equitable and inclusive.
- Establish frequent and open lines of communication between a core group of stakeholders and top community leaders, such as the mayor, county executive, or superintendent of schools.
- Have each provider and community organization involved identify how they influence families' lives and how they embody the guiding values of an Early Learning Community, and identify overlaps and gaps in their services. This "service mapping" should include partners' reach as well as other services available, who and where in the community the services are reaching, and what is missing.

- ▶ **Level 2** – A group of community members and representatives from a wide variety of organizations and institutions are jointly working toward a shared vision and common goals.

Some ways communities can keep working toward this goal include:

- After extensive outreach and multiple conversations with a diverse set of community members, develop a shared vision and shared goals among a core group of stakeholders committed to moving the work forward.
- Identify a few distinct areas to focus joint action. Create working groups or subcommittees dedicated to action plans around these areas.
- Ensure that the partnership is diverse and representative of the community. It should include regular and routine input from families and core early childhood partners (i.e., early care and education, health, home visiting, and family support). Representation should be equitable and inclusive of community members from different backgrounds, neighborhoods, socioeconomic statuses, races, and ethnicities.

- Establish regular and open lines of communication between a core group of stakeholders and top community leaders, such as the mayor, county executive, or superintendent of schools.
- Evaluate how different partners' organizational and programmatic strategies and goals intersect. Consider aligning priorities and action plans across the community to work on shared goals and highlighted themes. For example, align the city plan with the school district's plan or the community development plan.

▶ **Level 3** – A well-established early childhood group with dedicated leadership and broad community input works collaboratively to promote the healthy development of young children.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Formalize the administration of this group of stakeholders with a coordinator at an existing non-profit— or create an office of early learning or young children at the city or county level. Identify funding for the sustainability of this position or office.
- Develop protocols for meetings and participation in the early childhood coordinating group, including guidelines for facilitating stakeholder relationships, managing disagreements about priorities, and identifying gaps in representation.
- Expand the representation in the group to include sectors beyond early childhood that impact families, such as transportation, the business community, and faith-based organizations.
- Sign commitment letters or memoranda of understanding to formalize the partnership and articulate the commitments each organization or individual is making to the work.
- Develop an ELC Action Plan and share it with the community, with formal and public endorsements and commitment to implementation of the plan from multiple stakeholders.

#### **Effective Leadership:** External Resources

- **Community Toolbox** – University of Kansas Center for Community Health and Development (Updated 2023)
- **Field Catalyst Origin Stories: Lessons for Systems-Change Leaders** – The Bridgespan Group (2023)
- **Making Network-Based Strategy Work: A Field Guide** – Community Wealth Partners (2016)
- **Toolkit for Collaboration** – FRIENDS Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (Updated 2023)



#### **Communities in Action—GOAL 1.1 | Reimagining child care in Palm Beach County, FL**

In 2023, **Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County** (CSC) began to **reimagine** their investments in early care and education. By engaging families and child care providers in a collaborative decision-making process, CSC hopes to redistribute more than \$7 million in funding across early care and education programs and initiatives by 2024. From May to September 2023, CSC hosted a series of focus groups and individual interviews where residents—child care professionals, caregivers, community providers, and system partners—shared their priorities, goals, and hopes for quality child care in Palm Beach County. These engagement opportunities identified **four themes**: Child Care Accessibility, Child Development and Wellness, Parent-Teacher Relationship and Mutual Support, and Recruitment and Retention of Staff. Informed by these themes, CSC's new Residential Advisory Committee of families, child care providers, teachers, and staff will meet bi-monthly to use the data gathered from the community to decide how CSC can best support children and families in Palm Beach County.







## Communities in Action—GOAL 1.1 | Cross-sector leaders and representatives collaborate in Boston, MA

Convened by the Boston Opportunity Agenda, the **Birth to Eight Collaborative** includes parents and more than 200 representatives from early education centers, family childcare, non-profit organizations, schools, public health, philanthropy and medical institutions. The Boston Opportunity Agenda is a public/private partnership that works to strategically transform the Boston education landscape and create an equitable education system. The work of the Birth to Eight Collaborative is guided by a cross-sectional group of leaders from throughout Greater Boston, supported by a number of committees. The Birth to Eight Collaborative released **a report in 2023** and continues its work with a focus on five strategies: expand access to high-quality early education and care, screen every child, family engagement, maximizing health, kindergarten readiness, and developmental screening.

## GOAL 1.2 Critical Infrastructure

### The community invests in young children and families

The difference between an Early Learning Community and any other community may come down to a sustained, visible, and broadly supported investment in the early learning and healthy development of young children and their families—a commitment that shows up in actions by elected officials, civic leaders, neighborhood activists, and voters. Communities’ investment of funding, time, and other resources towards the Early Learning Community outcomes is an investment in a future in which all families and their children thrive, and in the long-term the community thrives.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

▶ **Level 1** – The community uses its available resources, including existing funding streams, to effectively support families and promote healthy child development.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Gather information from partners about current investments in early childhood work to understand what is already being spent, where there is flexibility in how those funds are spent, and where there are gaps or room to grow that investment.
- Survey or interview providers—early educators, home visitors, community health workers, health care providers, and others—about the resources they have, challenges they face, and the supports they could use as they work to improve quality of services. This could also be an opportunity to connect providers to community resources, supportive services, and their elected officials.
- Survey or interview families of young children in the community about the resources they have, the challenges they face, the knowledge they have about available services and public resources, and the supports that would most improve their quality of life and promote outcomes in alignment with the Guiding Vision.
- Partner with school districts to assess how public education funds are and can be used to support early childhood programming within schools and other programs in the community.
- Engage city or local government departments that are funding programs for healthy and safe communities and strengthening families, such as crime prevention, health or nutrition education, family literacy, or mentoring for school-age children and youth.

- Provide space at publicly owned buildings, such as recreation centers, libraries or school buildings, for providers and local organizations to deliver services, host family gatherings, and address other community needs.
- Use public media, like the local open access channel, and other public assets to promote early childhood development and parent education, family and social services available, and early learning initiatives in the community.
- Place developmental resources and tips for how parents can engage children in accessible and frequented forums in the community; inside utility bills, on the sides of buses and trash trucks, in public transportation stations and depots, and/or on other city owned vehicles and buildings.
- Renew stakeholders' and the group's ongoing commitment and investment to early childhood at least annually to celebrate successes and re-evaluate areas of further growth.

▶ **Level 2** - Community and early childhood partners work together to identify points of intersection to use existing funds and resources creatively as well as to find new funding sources.

Some ways communities can keep working toward reaching this goal include:

- Consider what assets each partner has (financial and otherwise) and how they might be employed to further common goals. For example, when the school district is hosting trainings or conferences for pre-k teachers, community-based pre-k providers could be invited to attend. Parent leadership groups can be powerful allies to increase parent and family engagement in city or county level planning and initiatives.
- Learn from service providers about how they "blend and braid" funding to meet family needs, and explore whether there are ways to formalize those strategies or support other programs in making similar innovations.
- Use business development resources and tax incentives to help early care and education providers better manage the business side of their centers and improve quality of services.
- Consider the current needs of the early childhood system and develop an improvement or strategic plan to meet set benchmarks or target goals.
- Engage the philanthropic and business community through public and/or private partnerships to collaborate on specific issues, focus neighborhoods, or to fund programs, evaluation efforts, or parts of the Early Learning Community efforts.
- Provide technical assistance in a variety of areas, including organizing bulk buying groups and participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program to provide subsidized meals to children in early care and education centers.
- Encourage providers to use a shared services model to reduce or share costs through joint purchasing, staff sharing, or centralized administration to ease administrative burden. Consider how local government could help administer this model.
- Encourage agencies and providers to write proposals and apply for grants collaboratively. Use the opportunity to showcase what combined strengths and resources can accomplish.

- ▶ **Level 3** – The community’s commitment to early childhood is formalized, and support for the families who need it most is prioritized.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Identify consistent, dedicated funds for early childhood services, care, and education. For example, funds could be directed to creating more early care and education slots, raising wages of early childhood educators, or expanding legal aid services for families with young children.
- Ensure that residents’ priorities drive how funding is directed and how services are provided. Engage a broad range of community leaders—some who are directly connected to early childhood services and some who are not—to be champions and advocate for additional investment in early childhood.
- Reduce the administrative burden on providers and families by developing coordinated or universal applications for services (such as applying for early care and education or home visiting programs) and/or reporting requirements for local programs or grants received from the city, county, or local funders.
- Create a dedicated source of revenue through a local sales or property tax, or earmark a portion of existing taxes, for early learning programs.
- Establish a developer impact or linkage fee to fund new early care and education centers or seats within existing centers to meet demand created by new residential development.

#### **Investing in Early Childhood:** External Resources

- **Braiding, Blending, and Layering Funding Sources to Increase Access to Quality Preschool** – Preschool Development Grants Technical Assistance Team (Accessed 2024)
- **Helping the Early Childhood Field Achieve Financial Sustainability and Strong Child Outcomes through Shared Services** – Opportunities Exchange (2023)
- **Community Systems Building** – Build Initiative (Accessed 2024)
- **Coalition: A Model of Supporting Child Development** – McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership
- **Financing High-Quality Center-Based Infant-Toddler Care: Options and Opportunities** – Early Educator Central (2015)
- **Financing Strategies and Collaborative Funding for Inclusive Programs** – Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (Accessed 2024)
- **Local Funding for Early Learning: A Community Toolkit** – North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation (Accessed 2024)
- **Systems Building Resource Guide 7: Financing Strategically** – Child Care State Capacity Building Center (2019)



#### **Communities in Action—GOAL 1.2 | Voters choose to invest in children’s services in Kent County, MI**

When voters in 2018 approved the **Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage**, Kent County, MI became the first county in Michigan to have dedicated public funding towards early childhood services. The millage was approved with bipartisan support by 56.7% of voters and is estimated to raise approximately \$37 million over six years. Administered by First Steps Kent, Ready by Five funds support programs improving health, school readiness, and well-being for children under the age of five. In 2022, Ready by Five supported over 12,400 children and families, including through services providing families with resources and information, developmental screenings, and connections to early childhood programs, behavioral health care, and social needs support. The Ready by Five millage will be up for another six year renewal by voters in **August 2024**.

### GOAL 1.3

#### **Community members support and understand the importance of early childhood health, learning, and well-being**

Public will is built in part through efforts to share knowledge about the science of early childhood with parents and other members of the community in a way that is relevant to their lives, and to help people see why supporting early childhood development is important for the future of their children, their community, and their own well-being. Special campaigns may focus on promoting early literacy development, building early relational health, or understanding the importance of early childhood as a critical period for brain development.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

▶ **Level 1** – Information about developmental science, early health and learning, and parenting is disseminated to the community with messages that are accessible and relevant to members of different cultural groups.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Post information about child development and available services in all city- and county-owned buildings and vehicles, and disseminate culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate materials to cultural centers and community gathering spaces.
- Ensure that elected officials and other high-level city and county staff understand and talk about the importance of early childhood at speaking engagements both with community members and with other stakeholders such as business leaders and agency heads.
- Partner with parents to start a petition for local governments to take action to demonstrate their commitment to improved early childhood outcomes.
- Host story times in libraries and recreation centers in languages spoken in the community for different age groups with developmentally appropriate books and activities.
- Provide community centers and other public spaces with free resources for families to promote young children’s development, including free books, activity pamphlets, and/or enrichment toys, as well as information about early childhood resources and programs.
- Align messaging across agencies and groups so families get similar information across multiple sources, to reduce confusion and conflicting messages.
- Assess how families are acquiring and viewing information about early childhood, available services and programs, and other community’s resources. Make information accessible to families free of charge, in a variety of languages with writing that is concise and clear, and available both in print and digitally. Optimize online materials for viewing on smartphones, as well as for screen readers and other accessibility technologies.

▶ **Level 2** – Families have opportunities to engage with each other and with community leaders about the importance of early childhood well-being and what families need and want to succeed.

Some ways communities can keep working toward reaching this goal include:

- Host co-created community events, such as a parent night at public housing complexes, faith centers, or a public recreation center, with a focus on child and family well-being. Consider including a “parents and caregivers only” portion where they might learn about taking advantage of tax credits or other public benefits or learn about child brain development. Working with families to co-create these events will make them more successful.
- Promote attendance at events by providing food, child care, transportation, door prizes, gift cards, and/or stipends for family members’ time and participation.

- Host “film nights” with documentaries and films related to early childhood to spark conversation; provide a discussion guide and time for people to reflect on the film.
- Host ongoing trainings for providers from a variety of fields to help them learn about child development, new strategies for encouraging healthy development, and how to engage with parents and families, including recognizing parents’ expertise about their own children, families, and communities.
- Invite faith-based communities and local organizations to consider what they can do to support families in promoting healthy child development, including hosting the types of events described here, in ways that are culturally relevant and relatable to their communities.
- Facilitate opportunities for parents to share their strengths and utilize their cultural and lived expertise, with one another, with program providers and educators, and with decision-makers.

▶ **Level 3** - Throughout the community, families receive culturally relevant messages about early childhood health, learning, and well-being.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Promote brain-building moments throughout the community with multi-platform tools such as **Vroom** (a text messaging service and app) and **Talk Read Sing** (a newsletter and resource hub), both of which have community messaging opportunities (like billboards and posters) available. Promote these tools in community spaces, like libraries, and offer information on their use.
- Identify community partners to disseminate your messages about early childhood investment and initiatives (such as local public radio and television stations). Consider where there is already contact with local families with young children (through mailed utility bills, or public bulletins in spaces like libraries, public housing, and medical clinics) and the effectiveness of current messaging.
- Encourage businesses to think about how they can post materials to reach employees and customers. For instance, grocery stores can post brain development information or activities on their shopping carts and sale brochures.
- Partner with parent leaders to develop an advocacy campaign that shows the importance of investing in early childhood and how the investment benefits everyone in the community.
- Reach out to people or groups who haven’t been working on early childhood issues but have influence in the community, such as seniors, the business community, or civic organizations.
- Use a “Children in All Policies” or “Children First” approach to promote awareness of how all policies affect children and to endorse the commitment the community has made to children and their well-being.



### **Communities in Action—GOAL 1.3 | Raising awareness and building public will in Southeastern Idaho**

Residents of American Falls and Pocatello-Chubbuck, Idaho have **come together** to improve kindergarten readiness through “**Read Talk Play**,” an initiative aiming to motivate caregivers to read, talk, and play with their children every day. Along with providing 40% of preschool attendees with scholarships, **United Way of Southeastern Idaho** also provides resources and activities through the program that help parents support their children’s development and school readiness; these include free “kits” available at local libraries and schools around the county. After years of advocacy, the community has come together around the initiative’s slogan, with “Read Talk Play” billboards, posters, and banners decorating the towns. **Every Wednesday**, residents of American Falls are encouraged to wear their “Read Talk Play” shirts as a reminder of the importance of early learning.

## GOAL 1.4

### Families feel a strong sense of community and receive informal supports from their social networks

Early Learning Communities encourage and facilitate informal supports for all families that build a sense of community. All families need support to varying degrees at different points in their lives. Families who feel a strong sense of community receive a lot of that support through their social networks, extended families, faith community, and/or neighbors, who may watch their children when they need a break, bring a meal at the birth of a child, or lend money when finances are tight. Families who aren't engaged in the give-and-take of these informal community supports may not feel a strong sense of connection to their community. Residents may build mutual aid networks in order to promote and encourage the giving and receiving of goods, services, and support. More formally, communities can encourage these informal supports and build a sense of community by ensuring access to safe public spaces where families can meet and build relationships and strengthen their personal networks, including facilities such as public libraries, museums, and playgrounds. In some neighborhoods where many families are isolated, as is often the case in high-poverty and rural areas, intensive efforts may be needed to weave a stronger social fabric. Similarly, communities may need to tailor supports and outreach to families that are marginalized due to disabilities, language barriers, or immigration status.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

▶ **Level 1** – Community leaders understand who does and who does not have access to informal supports and what the barriers are to building those informal support networks in the community.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Conduct a needs assessment and landscape analysis at the neighborhood and district level, asking residents whether they feel supported by their community and have informal supports to help meet their needs.
- Ask community and cultural organizations with strong ties to the community for their insight into opportunities, gaps, and barriers for families to build strong social connections.
- Invite parents and caregivers to give their input on needs and opportunities to reduce social isolation through surveys, focus groups, or going door to door asking residents what is standing in the way of them getting support from (and giving support to) others in their community.
- Create a community map of safe places where families can and do gather.
- If there are places where families could gather but don't—such as an unused playground in a neighborhood park or rarely used spaces at the local library—engage residents to find out what is keeping them from utilizing them, and what could be done to promote gathering in those spaces.

▶ **Level 2** – Families have many opportunities to make connections.

Some ways communities can keep working toward reaching this goal include:

- Ask residents what kind of opportunities they would like to see to build social connections, and engage them in co-creating those opportunities.
- Find out specifically what the barriers are to informal supports and how to overcome them for families with low incomes and those living in areas of concentrated poverty, families of color, pregnant and parenting youth, families with child welfare involvement, immigrant and refugee families, and families that include children or adults with disabilities, chronic conditions, and LGBTQ identities.

- Co-develop a meeting space for residents to gather, learn about, and discuss opportunities to address community needs. Community meeting spaces can be at parks, community gardens or buildings, or other available spaces welcoming to community members.
- Use a “snowball” approach where each parent who participates agrees to bring at least one more parent to the next meeting or event.
- Provide community “mini-grants” for neighborhood groups or community-based organizations to carry out community-building and engagement efforts.
- Facilitate connections and information sharing by organizing local groups on social media platforms, online tools, or group-messaging programs.

▶ **Level 3** - Mechanisms are in place for all parents and families, especially families who are often more isolated, to make connections with each other. Every neighborhood has safe places for people to make connections in person and/or digitally.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Create groups for parents of infants and toddlers to come together for support.
- Establish dad groups to engage fathers in the early development of their children and form connections with other dads in their community.
- Convene parent advisory groups made up of a variety of parents and caregivers from different neighborhoods, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and different lived experiences. These are the groups that should determine what activities are carried out in their neighborhoods to best engage more isolated parents.
- Provide funding to community groups to facilitate mutual aid networks within neighborhoods or across the whole community. While these groups are informal by definition, funding can help them to, for example, staff their efforts, do more outreach, or translate requests and offers into other languages.
- Support community-based groups to host a series of Parent Cafes or Community Cafes, with residents facilitating the conversation. Parents engaged in planning and facilitating cafes are the best ambassadors to recruit isolated families to join in.
- Establish Family Resource Centers to provide opportunities for parents and caregivers to come together. Consider co-locating such centers with other services including early care and education.



### **Communities in Action—GOAL 1.4 | Parents build connections in Washington, D.C.**

The **Early Childhood Innovation Network (ECIN)** partnered with **Be Strong Families** in Spring 2021 to provide parents and caregivers in Washington, D.C. with parent-led spaces for connection and peer support. In regular **Parent Cafés**—a model for guided conversations about the protective factors that keep families strong, which grew out of CSSP’s Strengthening Families initiative—parents and caregivers come together for conversation, peer-to-peer support, and reflection. Parents have the opportunity through free Parent Cafés to build social connections, strengthen their parenting and leadership skills, and receive follow-up referrals to community resources, for those in need of concrete support.

## GOAL 1.5

### Community resources for children and families are well known, accessible, and easy to use

Communities can also invest in ensuring that families and other community members are aware of the services and resources available in the community, and able to access them when needed. When this is working well, a family needing support will know where to turn—or their neighbor will know and give them a number to call. For example, up-to-date referral resource centers can help connect families to culturally relevant and updated services, and warmlines and hotlines can provide immediate support for families under stress.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

▶ **Level 1** – An up-to-date directory is available and accessible for all families to find services and for service providers to refer families to additional services and appropriate resources.

Include services in the directory such as early care and education, food distribution services, domestic violence shelters, substance use and mental health services, food and clothing banks, health and dental care providers, insurance programs, maternal health resources, crisis intervention services, community meals and food distribution, transportation services, disability services, housing and utility supports, summer camps and recreation programs, after school programs, family resource centers, mentoring and tutoring programs, and training and continued education programs.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Create online and hard copy versions of the directory and disseminate them widely. Some communities may have this already in the form of a Help Me Grow or Family Connects.
- Ensure that the directory is updated at least once a year by giving listed organizations and providers the opportunity to easily edit their contact information and services offered. This task should be included in someone's job description to ensure it gets done.
- Visit early care and education centers to show providers and families how to access and utilize the directory.
- Encourage local information and referral providers to invest in developing a shared digital service directory or local resource guide, ideally with an easy-to-use mobile interface to access it.
- Encourage early childhood service providers and community partners to remain knowledgeable of the local directory and promote its use as an updated, local resource to families.



- ▶ **Level 2** – Non-traditional partners are aware of and use the directory to make referrals. Barriers that prevent families from accessing care are addressed.

Some ways communities can keep working toward reaching this goal include:

- Host trainings for partners such as health care providers, clergy members, and business owners on how to use the directory and make referrals.
- Address practices and policies that stigmatize families who seek support. Ask families about sources of stigma and their experiences with different service providers. Incorporate a way for parents and caregivers to rate and/or review the services and resources listed in the directory, including the directory itself.
- Hold listening sessions to identify root causes of the barriers to accessing needed services.
- Assess language needs among families in the community. Make language services available to families whose primary language is not English, and translate marketing and application materials.

- ▶ **Level 3** – A “no wrong door” approach is used by public service and community organization staff to connect families with appropriate services even if the service isn’t available directly through their agency or organization.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Promote implementation of this approach by training support staff who interact with families, such as bus drivers and front desk staff, to appropriately direct families to community resources.
- When possible, streamline application processes for services, using just one application for the different services a family might need.
- Encourage parents and other family members to become ambassadors in spreading the word about these services, compensating them for their time and expertise.
- Enhance mandated reporter training, so that mandated reporters learn about ways to connect struggling families with community resources and supports when they have concerns that don’t warrant a report to child protective services.
- Consider co-locating several social services into one location where families can access the resources they need to be successful. This one-stop shop can promote efficiency, leverage resources and support families.



### **Communities in Action—GOAL 1.5 | Connecting parents to resources and events in Pittsburgh, PA**

**Kidsburgh** is an online resource that serves as a calendar of family-friendly events and a place for advocacy aimed at making Pittsburgh a more child-friendly place to live—or, as the community leaders, child advocates, and educators who launched the effort put it, to make the Pittsburgh region “the best place on earth to raise a kid.” Kidsburgh partners with the local public television network and the local tourism promotion agency to publish timely content. It is sponsored by two foundations and has an advisory board representing a variety of organizations serving children, youth and families. They are also in the process of launching an online directory of child-serving organizations.

## Building Block #1: External Resources

- **A Divided Electorate is United on Early Childhood Education** – First Five Years Fund (2016)
- **Birth to Eight Collaborative** – Boston Opportunity Agenda (Accessed 2024)
  - **(Re)Building Boston’s Early Education and Care Sector: Supply, Affordability and Quality Needed** – Report from the Boston Opportunity Agenda and the Birth to Eight Collaborative (2023)
- **Building Our Future: Supporting Community-Based Early Childhood Initiatives** – Child Trends (2017)
- **The COFI Way** – Community Organizing and Family Issues (Accessed 2024)
- **Developing a Plan for Communications**—from the **Community Toolbox** – Workgroup for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas (Accessed 2024)
- **Five Steps for State and Community Leaders to Increase Equitable Access to Early Care and Education** – Child Trends (2023)
- **Local Leaders Set the P.A.C.E. for Infants, Toddlers, and Families** – National League of Cities (2021)
- **Strengthening the Foundation: A Profile of Early Childhood Educators in Boston and Beyond** – The Boston Foundation (2024)
- **Using Café Conversations to Build Protective Factors and Parent Leadership** – Center for the Study of Social Policy (2015)
  - **Parent Café** – Be Strong Families (Accessed 2024)
  - **Community Café** – National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds (Accessed 2024)

# Early Learning Community Assessment Tool



## Building Block #2

### Quality Services that Work for All Young Children and their Families

Families living in an Early Learning Community have access to high-quality and family-centered services for their children and themselves, aligned in a way that makes them easy to use to meet their needs. Some combination of these services and supports are available in all communities. Progress toward better life-course outcomes for the population as a whole comes about when communities coordinate services; activate formal and informal social networks; ensure that all children and families who need services are able to get them; focus on improving quality and increasing community accessibility; and assess from a system level where there are gaps or unnecessary duplication. Communities can then use current services as a springboard for innovation and customization of services and supports to meet families' needs.

## Embodying the Guiding Values in Building Block 2

To strengthen and guide a community's work on Building Block 2, keep the following in mind related to each of the guiding values.

### Equity

- When assessing the availability of quality services, think about what it currently takes for the most vulnerable and under-resourced members of the community to access them (for example, what is necessary for a parent with low income who does not have paid time off or a car to get their child to the services they need). Actions taken with that parent in mind will benefit the whole community. Addressing accessibility to quality services within a community requires an intentional look at the personal barriers the target population is experiencing. Also assess whether services are culturally relevant and delivered by providers who reflect the racial, ethnic, and linguistic makeup of the community.
- “Quality services” will not look the same for every family. Services should be flexible enough to be adapted to meet each child’s and family’s unique needs, and a range of service options should be available to accommodate family schedules, cultural preferences, and special needs of family members.

### Parent Voice

- Every interaction between a parent and early childhood service provider is an opportunity for engagement and relationship building. Valuing parents’ voice and partnership in day-to-day interactions sets the foundation for parents’ voices to be heard in shaping services and changing systems.
- English language requirements and educational prerequisites can make it challenging for adult learners to enroll in job preparation courses, career planning, and continuing education. Providing opportunities for career and educational pathways for parents and community members that acknowledges the specific needs of their population is a way of investing in communities.

### Accountability

- Data about child and family well-being is not very useful unless it is disaggregated by relevant demographic variables (such as race, ethnicity, immigration status, disability status, socioeconomic status, zip code, or gender) to uncover disparities, identify gaps in services, and motivate actions to better meet those needs. Examine local data in connection with social determinants of health to understand specific conditions impacting children and families.
- Coordinated effort across multiple agencies facilitates cross-system data sharing and collaboration. Data sharing can inform a public health and child first approach by effectively aligning the efforts of multiple agencies. Utilizing data from across systems—such as vital records, health care, housing, public benefits, education, and the courts—can help communities better understand areas of strength and need, informing community-based approaches to increase positive outcomes.
- Policymakers and funders are often concerned about “duplication of services” within a community. However, it’s important to consider whether similar programs or agencies are meeting different needs within the community, reaching different community members, and how they can each be supported to do what they are best at, with the people they best support. There may also be an opportunity to combine service meetings and engage in coordinated efforts.

## GOAL 2.1

### **Families have access to high-quality, basic services that proactively promote healthy development, early learning, family strengths, and early relational health**

Residents of an Early Learning Community have access to high-quality, strengths-based services that support healthy development across health, early care and education, and family support services. These are universal services that all children and families need, focused on promoting well-being, understanding and addressing concerns, and preventing negative outcomes. These basic services include a high-performing medical home for all children; strong prenatal, perinatal, and postnatal support services; quality early care and education and the transition to elementary school; and family support services like prenatal and early childhood home visiting and playgroups. Universal supports also include outreach materials and information shared with all new parents, which might be delivered through birthing hospitals or universal home visits. All of these services must be culturally relevant to the population being served.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

- ▶ **Level 1** – City or county leadership have a comprehensive overview of the range and quality of services available throughout the community and whose needs are not being met.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Survey or conduct listening sessions with parents of young children to learn about their needs, how they currently access services or get help for their child, what needs remain unmet, and what would make accessing services easier for them. Take care to hear from parents in underserved neighborhoods and those who are marginalized. Ensure that parents who can't attend a scheduled event have other opportunities to join the conversation such as through Facebook Live or social media chats and online surveys.
- Map the availability of core services (pediatric and family practice clinics, early care and education programs, elementary schools, and family support programs such as home visiting providers, and family resource centers) in neighborhoods throughout the city, numbers of young children in each neighborhood, and public transportation options linking neighborhoods to those where more services are available. Include demographic data, like income, race, and ethnicity to help identify disparities in enrollment and usage and gaps in access.
- Identify tools that service providers and government staff can use to assess the level of quality appropriate to a variety of settings to stimulate conversations about quality improvement. Consider elements such as curriculum, professional development, planning time, pay, and developmentally appropriate practices.
- Come to an agreement on shared language and common goals for children and families on which all providers can agree. Explore potential frameworks, like the Strengthening Families protective factors, to capture goals that all relevant systems can embrace and connect their work to, and adopt the language of that framework across systems.
- Leverage assessments and surveys already conducted within or around your community. For example, many Head Start grantees and hospitals already do community assessments. Check with these entities to see if they have recent results.
- Conduct listening sessions with early care and education providers to determine their needs for additional support for themselves or for the families they serve. As with parents, offer multiple avenues for providers to engage in these conversations.

- ▶ **Level 2** – Leaders, residents and service providers work together to increase access to high-quality services for underserved families.

Some ways communities can keep working toward reaching this goal include:

- Establish incentives for service providers (e.g., early care and education, mental health providers or anything else identified in gap analyses) to locate in areas of greater need or to better reach marginalized families, including supporting existing service providers to expand into additional neighborhoods or expand hours of operation to meet families' needs.
- Establish a cross-sector collaboration of providers in early care and education, health, social services, legal aid, and basic services in areas of most need, so providers may determine standards of quality and align services. Provide incentives or support for deeper collaboration, including cross-referral (with tracking of successful service delivery), data sharing, and tracking of shared output and outcome measures.
- Utilize a child-first approach to prioritize policies and programs that fund important services for children and families to thrive. Establish incentives for participatory grantmaking and participatory budget processes.
- Reach out to informal (family, friend, and neighbor) child care providers to find out what support they need to provide the highest quality care, and help interested providers move toward licensing.
- Promote the importance of medical homes for young children, both by educating parents about the benefits of finding a consistent provider for their children, and by supporting health care providers to provide comprehensive services for the children and families they serve, including connecting families to behavioral health care, legal services, and family support.
- Implement a unified application and/or waitlist for early care and education programs so that parents only have to complete one application and get the first available spot that meets their needs.
- Support early care and education providers in providing professional development to staff. Host citywide trainings for teachers and joint trainings for pre-k and kindergarten teachers. Consider how trainings can be accessible to in-home providers and centers without staff to cover classrooms during the day. Include trainings on culturally and linguistically responsive approaches that support staff in providing services to diverse families and communities.
- Implement high-quality preschool in a way that reaches underserved families and addresses gaps in school readiness.

- ▶ **Level 3** – Quality services are available throughout the community and easily accessible to residents of historically underserved neighborhoods.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Invest in the development of an easily accessible service hub, anchored around a public entity such as a library with low-cost rental space available for other services such as a health clinic, child care center, legal aid office, or family resource center.
- Develop transportation solutions to help community residents access services located outside of their own neighborhoods. For example, consider using online messaging programs to help small cohorts of families develop plans for ridesharing to early learning centers or libraries.
- Continue to garner commitment and investment from local representatives, service providers, and funders to support incentives and programs designed to increase families' access to high-quality services.
- Encourage co-location of programs and services to expand the range of services available in underserved neighborhoods.

- Implement full service community schools in underserved neighborhoods, including family support and early childhood services.
- Measure parent and caregiver satisfaction with various programs or agencies. Improving “customer satisfaction” is an important step toward assessing and improving both access and quality.
- Identify trusted community organizations that interact directly with community members from immigrant and multilingual households, and coordinate tailored outreach and enrollment efforts for public services and local resources. At every step of ELC advocacy, fund concurrent efforts that mitigate barriers, provide education, and address immigrant families’ concerns, such as improving language access, ensuring confidentiality of immigration status during the application process, and advocating for policies that either extend eligibility or remove structural barriers to enrollment for families.



### **Communities in Action—GOAL 2.1 | Improving access to health care and preventive health services in the South and Central Bronx, NY**

**Project CHEERS** is a cross-section collaboration aimed at addressing health disparities, improving access to health care, and offering preventive health services for infants, children, youth, and families. The project is led by BronxCare, the largest voluntary, not-for-profit health and teaching hospital system serving the South and Central Bronx neighborhoods. BronxCare worked with project and community partners, including New Settlement Apartments, BronxWorks, Lehman College, daycare centers, Include NYC, Health First, and representatives of the Community Advisory Board to launch the project. To reach its goals, Project CHEERS: 1) Screens patients and families in BronxCare Pediatric clinic sites pertaining to the SDH and ACE; 2) Trains community partners and works towards more efficient mechanisms for mutual referrals, resource and tool sharing, and follow-up; 3) Creates a referral network of medical facilities, social services agencies, and other community organizations; 4) Has added the SDH and ACE to the BronxCare pediatric residency training curriculum, including screening tools in the EMR. The project is supported by an **HRSA maternal and child health workforce and leadership grant**.



### **Communities in Action—GOAL 2.1 | Patient-Centered Medical Homes for Kids (PCMH-Kids) in Rhode Island**

**PCMH Kids** convened in 2013 with the mission to engage stakeholders in developing high-quality, family, and patient-centered medical homes and in 2016, launched a pediatric-relevant care transformation project through multiple cohorts. The mission of PCMH-Kids was to **engage providers**, payers, patients, parents, purchasers, and policymakers to develop high quality family and patient-centered medical homes for children and youth through various programs and initiatives across the state. For example, in 2022, PCMH and the Care Transformation Collaborative of Rhode Island (CTC-RI) launched their third Maternal Psychiatry Resource Network (MomsPRN) Cohort to help practices increase and strengthen behavioral health early intervention, treatment, and resources. Since its 2013 launch, PCMH Kids **has engaged 36 practices covering 105,000 residents and representing more than 80% of the state’s pediatric Medicaid population**.

## GOAL 2.2

### All children receive routine screening, identification, referral, and linkage for risks and needs

One of the markers of an Early Learning Community is the development of a trusted and coordinated (if not centralized) approach to monitoring, screening, early identification, and referral for developmental concerns of young children, such as hearing problems, autism spectrum disorders, and challenging behaviors; family challenges such as caregiver depression or substance abuse; and progress toward educational readiness at entry to kindergarten. These screenings should take place in the context of the universal services described in target 2.1, such as hospitals and clinics, early care and education programs and schools, and family resource centers, in order to reach the greatest number of children and families. In a well-integrated early childhood system, there are clear pathways for referral and following up on any concerns and needs identified, with further assessment, referrals, and family-centered, strengths-based services. This works best when providers have access to a centralized point of intake for referrals when they identify a need for more rigorous assessment or specialized services.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

- ▶ **Level 1** – Providers are trained in administering screenings and know where to refer families when concerns and specific needs are identified. Populations that aren't receiving screenings are identified and efforts are made to reach them more effectively.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Survey providers to find out how many, how regularly, where, and which developmental screenings are being conducted to determine which children in the community are less likely to be screened.
- Ensure that health care professionals, child care providers, and home visitors have access to screening tools and are trained on how to administer them and communicate the results to parents and caregivers in a strengths-based, culturally responsive manner.
- Provide a directory of community resources, accessible to anyone who is administering screenings, to help guide referrals when needed.
- Assess the ways in which stigma is a barrier for some families to accept or seek out screening, and work to reduce that stigma by communicating that screening is for everyone, that screening results will only be used to refer a child or family for additional support and that early intervention can reduce the need for other services later on.

- ▶ **Level 2** – Residents have access to screening and referral services throughout the community.

Some ways communities can keep moving toward reaching this goal include:

- Hire and train community liaisons to bring screenings to families who do not participate in formal child care or home visiting programs. Community liaisons should be locally identified and familiar with community practices.
- Make a variety of culturally responsive screening tools available, in multiple languages, for parents and informal care providers (family, friend, and neighbor care providers) to check out from the library along with instructions for use and a directory of community resources for following up on identified concerns.
- Educate parents about the importance of developmental screenings (and their availability for children covered by Medicaid) and encourage them to seek it out through their pediatrician or other provider.



- ▶ **Level 3** – A centralized point of intake is available for referrals and follow-up.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Implement a citywide, countywide, or regional phone number or website for referrals for use by providers, parents, or anyone administering developmental screenings.
- Track the number and types of referrals coming from different population groups and neighborhoods within the community, and use that data to focus services and/or outreach on populations identified as underserved. Track the proportion of referrals completed and the length of time to completion.
- Have a cross-sector early childhood collaborative group monitor results for quality improvement of services and review of community needs.

 **Communities in Action—GOAL 2.2 | Developmental screenings in early care and education settings in Rochester, NY**

In 2014, the City of Rochester contributed funding to a developmental screening initiative that reaches children in places where they already spend their time, **Get Ready to GROW Rochester**. The initiative trains local early care and education providers to conduct developmental screenings with accuracy and consistency. In addition, the training includes *Tips for Talking with Families*, with sample scripts and suggestions on what makes for successful reciprocal conversations, such as starting with the child’s strengths, offering information on developmental milestones, discussing why developmental screening is important and having an open format that allows for ongoing questions and support when additional assessments or services are necessary. Since its inception, GROW has screened over 10,000 children. Navigators provide support and follow-up assistance to families, caretakers, and programs to access further evaluation, resources, and services as needed. In 2019, GROW Rochester adopted the Help Me Grow model to enhance its cross-sector partnerships and community impact. In 2022, the program expanded into Get Ready to GROW Finger Lakes.

**GOAL 2.3**

**Children and families have timely access to the continuum of more intensive and specific services when needed**

More intensive preventive services and an array of early intervention services can help families to overcome or manage identified challenges and needs. In many cases, responding to concerns early can keep children and families from progressing to need more intensive and expensive services later. Whatever a child or family’s needs are, intervening as early as possible is critical, whether in health care, mental health, developmental or special education services, or family support. All of these supports must be relational, family-centered, and strengths-based. The coordination of these services in an Early Learning Community can be particularly beneficial for families facing multiple challenges, who often struggle trying to navigate several systems. For families who are facing potential or current involvement with child protective services, an Early Learning Community should seek to minimize that contact and keep children in their families or with kin whenever possible. Leaders should keep in mind that child neglect substantiations are most often associated with poverty, so services and concrete supports to alleviate poverty can help families to keep their children safe while avoiding contact with the child welfare system.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3



- ▶ **Level 1** – Early intervention and prevention services are available in multiple settings throughout the community.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Assess the extent to which families are currently able to access early intervention services. Are those services available to everyone who needs them? Are families charged for these services, and if so, what options are available for families who cannot afford to pay out-of-pocket? Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C early intervention agencies should have access to these types of data.
- Are families of color and non-English-speaking families able to equitably access services that are culturally competent and responsive? Are services provided in a way that meets families' needs? Are efforts underway to reduce the stigma of accessing services? Are efforts underway to increase education and cultural connection points to better serve families?
- Encourage collaboration between early intervention providers and child care providers so that children of working parents can receive therapeutic interventions and other needed services in the setting where they spend their days, when appropriate.
- Invest in early childhood mental health consultation so that early care and education providers can bring in a specialist to coach them in managing challenging behaviors, preventing expulsions, and identifying when a child is in need of further services and supports.
- Hold listening sessions or meet one-on-one with system-involved families, or those identified as in need of services, to find out what they want for their families and what supports they need to achieve their goals. Identify accessibility issues that could prevent reliable access to available services (such transportation, financial, cultural, or language barriers).
- Identify and begin mapping solutions to accessibility and affordability barriers preventing children and families from utilizing early intervention and prevention services to meet their needs.

- ▶ **Level 2** – Support is available for families to advocate for themselves as they navigate through systems.

Some ways communities can keep moving toward reaching this goal include:

- Ensure that community navigators (or *promotoras*) are available to conduct outreach, organize activities in select communities and assist families in accessing needed services—in paid positions.
- Hire parent mentors who have past involvement with the child welfare system to help parents with open cases navigate the system, access resources, and understand what they can do to free themselves from child protection oversight and keep their children safe and their families together.
- Translate communication materials into all languages spoken in the community and have interpreters available during events.
- Support multilingual and non-English-speaking families in combating misinformation about multilingualism in early childhood and defending their right to speak with their children in their home languages.
- Use digital outreach—social media, websites, and apps—to raise awareness about available resources and find families who could benefit from navigation supports.
- Braid funding streams and services together to meet identified needs of the whole family, not just the child. For example, make it possible for a family support specialist at a family resource center to serve as a resource and referral specialist to help families find quality child care rather than handing them off to another entity for that support.

- ▶ **Level 3** – Families experience a seamless system of supports in response to identified needs.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Ensure financial and language barriers are actively being addressed by public and private investments. Develop a cross-sector action plan and comprehensive timeline to specifically address barriers keeping the community’s most vulnerable families from accessing necessary services in a timely manner.
- Fund providers to use Family Team Meetings or other family-centric approaches bringing family members, service providers, and other key support people in the family’s life together to work and plan how best to meet a family’s needs.
- Empower caseworkers and care coordinators from any system to serve as an advocate and central point of contact for families, including accessing services from other systems and/or for other family members once a relationship is established.
- Establish a protocol for warm handoffs from one system to another, for example from a caseworker to a home visitor, so that a trusted provider helps a family access additional services or transition to the next appropriate service when a case is closed.
- Work with Child Find and early intervention agencies to assess current services and provide outreach to families. This is especially important for families where children are nearing the age of 3 and may transition from early intervention to special education services.



### **Communities in Action—GOAL 2.3 | Expanding mental health consultation across Maine**

The **Maine Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP)** is a free infant and early childhood mental health consultation program that addresses the social-emotional needs of children, birth to age 8, by offering support, education, and consultation to the adults who provide care for them. ECCP consultants provide strategies, support, and training to improve the capacity of early childhood education and childcare. **ECCP** is the result of Maine legislators and early childhood experts coming together to expand mental health consultation across the state including the highly successful Early Childhood Consultation and Outreach (ECCO) program developed by the Community Caring Collaborative. The initial pilot began in 2021 in eight counties in Maine, and was expanded statewide in 2023.

## **GOAL 2.4**

### **Families and parents are actively engaged as partners and valued experts on their children, families, and communities**

Service providers in an Early Learning Community make partnerships with families a high priority. They welcome parents as partners and as experts on the strengths and needs of themselves, their children, and their communities. Whether at their child’s six-month check-up, preschool drop-off, or a parent-teacher conference, parents experience respect and a feeling of partnership from the professionals they encounter. As a critical part of this, providers value, respect, and remain curious about the cultural practices of the families they serve; they also take a “no wrong door” approach to connecting families to the services they need, regardless of what part of the early childhood system they first contact.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

- ▶ **Level 1** – All child and family service providers receive training and support to help them approach parents as partners.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Give service providers from multiple systems access to training on empathy, effective family engagement methods, and/or parent leadership, including content on implicit bias, ableism, cultural bias, and other potential barriers to family engagement.
- Ensure that school district approaches to parents in the early grades are grounded in partnership and leadership, not just “engagement,” which is often one-directional.
- Employ the providers in your community who specialize in working with parents—such as parenting educators—to train and coach child-oriented providers.
- When providing training on parent and family engagement, invite parents as co-trainers to model effective partnership, share their personal stories, and demonstrate why approaching parents as partners makes a difference.

- ▶ **Level 2** – Parent leadership is integrated into every sector of the early childhood system.

Some ways communities can keep moving toward reaching this goal include:

- Partner with existing parent leadership groups in your community, either to provide consultation on your processes or to recruit participants for a new advisory group. Check whether there are active parent groups connected to mutual support programs such as Circle of Parents or Parents Anonymous, affiliated with Head Start, schools, or places of worship, or formed around particular issues such as children with special health care needs.
- Work with community-based organizations to host Parent Café or Community Café series to engage parents in meaningful conversations about their strengths and needs, and the needs and assets of their community.
- Convene child- and family-serving professionals and leaders across sectors to discuss parent engagement strategies and learn from each other and enhance their organizational readiness to include parents at decision-making tables.
- Provide coaching for leadership skill development and opportunities for parents to take action in their own lives and in partnership with other community members. Consider parent engagement initiatives like Parent Academies which meet year-round and focus on involving parents as full partners in their children’s education.

- ▶ **Level 3** – Parent leadership and resident engagement are the established norm throughout the community, including for government and government-funded activities.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Create seats for parents and residents on city or county committees on issues related to early childhood, health care, etc.
- Require parent representation on decision-making bodies funded through city or county offices, such as the boards of family-serving non-profits and school district committees.
- Bring parents together with leaders of neighborhood associations, non-profits, and the school system to identify challenges and then take on local projects to help improve the community.



## Communities in Action—GOAL 2.4 | Family leadership in early care and education programs in Boston, MA

The **Boston Family Engagement Network** (BFEN) is a citywide coalition of nine agencies focused on raising awareness about the importance of family engagement in the life of a young child and emphasizing parents’ role as their child’s first teacher. A **citywide peer-to-peer Parent Leadership model** is the backbone of the Boston Family Engagement Network. BFEN is made up of parents, caregivers, community partners, early educators, and family support workers who are invested in ensuring that beginning at birth, all young children have access to a quality educational experience—at home, in school, or in child care—that supports all areas of their development. BFEN’s Neighborhood Agents are available five days a week to get you connected to programs like Welcome Baby, Parent-Child Playgroups, parenting education classes, Family Cafés, and child development screenings.

### GOAL 2.5 Critical Infrastructure

#### Supports are in place for the well-being of the early childhood workforce

In an Early Learning Community, attention is paid to the early childhood workforce serving children and families in a variety of settings. Efforts to strengthen and support the wellbeing of the early childhood workforce are critical for improving the quality of services, the relational and supportive experiences of families, and the engagement of families in helpful services. Continuing education, coaching, consultation, and reflective supervision can help service providers stay informed of advances in our understanding of the science of early childhood and maintain their relational capacities and mindset to best nurture family well-being and relational health. To support families’ access to culturally responsive services, communities can also take action to increase the diversity of the child- and family-serving workforce and leadership, by creating pathways to careers for parents and other community residents, providing mentoring, reflective practices, and career development support, and/or taking life experience into account in hiring decisions.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

▶ **Level 1** – Professional development and workforce supports are provided across sectors to improve quality and reduce turnover.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Identify trainings that are relevant to providers in multiple fields (e.g., training on fostering parent leadership, empathy, trauma-informed care, early relational health, or mandatory reporting for child abuse and neglect), and use those trainings to build and strengthen relationships among providers at the neighborhood or community level.
- Host gatherings or trainings for early childhood educators in community and school-based programs to align teaching practices, get to know each other, and exchange information on curricula, education approaches, community relationship-building, and more.
- Disseminate information to providers about career pathways and opportunities to increase their qualifications, including helping more diverse providers move up into leadership roles. Be creative about reaching informal care providers who may not be aware of pathways to becoming licensed, or who could benefit from professional development and networking opportunities even if they choose not to pursue licensing.
- Host trainings for directors and supervisors in child- and family-serving programs that focus on issues such as leadership training, adult learning theory, and business skills.
- Host listening sessions with providers in your community to identify key challenges and connect early childhood providers to community supports, services, and local elected officials.

- Gather information from the early childhood workforce on the challenges staff and families face in your community. Identify challenges and opportunities by inquiring about prevailing wage rates, staffing, turnover, professional development, and opportunities to grow in their careers.
- Use a collaborative approach to develop a strategy for supporting the early childhood workforce. Connect early childhood providers to information about scholarship and tuition assistance opportunities to help pay for increased educational attainment.

- ▶ **Level 2** – A variety of opportunities are available for providers to get support to improve their practice, meet quality standards, and advance their careers.

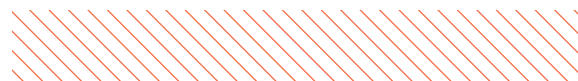
Some ways communities can keep working toward reaching this goal include:

- Provide targeted training, coaching, and supports for current and potential providers in neighborhoods or population groups lacking access to high-quality care. Equip providers to meet quality standards or state licensing requirements, and deliver family-centered and culturally responsive care.
- Make arrangements for professionals in child- and family-serving fields to get continuing education credits for trainings that improve their ability to compassionately and respectfully serve families. For example, workforce registries can facilitate this for early care and education providers.
- Host site visits for elementary school principals in early care and education centers and pre-k classrooms, and schedule learning and networking sessions with school PTO/PTA groups to connect with preschool parents, to build relationships and ease transitions into school.
- Make infant mental health consultation available to all early care and education providers in the community, so that providers have access to on-site coaching and support to manage challenging behaviors, work with parents and keep children in their classrooms.
- Develop a coaching or mentoring program to support providers as they implement effective practices in their classrooms.
- Increase the community's capacity to serve families in their home languages, both by finding and supporting interested speakers of needed languages to become providers, and by supporting English-speaking providers to learn a needed language in their community.

- ▶ **Level 3** – Critical issues are being addressed related to the early childhood workforce, including diversity, fair compensation, and career pathways.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Develop pathways for parents and caregivers, community residents, and program participants to get necessary education and certifications to become professional providers to serve their communities.
- Work with child- and family-serving programs and system leaders to develop strategies to increase wages and benefits for providers, such as wage supplements or tax credits.
- Advocate for formal recognition and payment (e.g. through Medicaid or state children's health insurance programs) for community health workers, doulas, family support specialists, and others who provide culturally relevant support in their home communities.
- Host a roundtable with providers and post-secondary institutions focused on what competencies are needed and the barriers to credentialing.
- Work with community colleges and universities to develop and enhance early care and education programs and to ensure that degree programs are accessible to providers already in the workforce.



- Build the diversity of leadership in the early childhood field through mentoring and targeted professional development to help interested providers from diverse backgrounds advance into program and system leadership roles.
- Create an articulated career pathway knitting together public and private educational opportunities for caregivers.

#### **Supports for Service Providers:** External Resources

- **Building A Relational Health Workforce for Young Children: A Framework for Improving Child Well-Being** – InCK Marks Initiative (2021)
- **Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: Policies and Practices to Foster the Social-Emotional Development of Young Children** – ZERO TO THREE (2017)
- **Examples of State and Local Early Childhood Workforce Strategies** – Office of Early Childhood Development (2023)
- **Early Relational Health: A Review of Research, Principles and Perspectives** – Nurture Connection (2023)
- **Learn the Signs. Act Early** – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023)
- **Making Headway: Principles & Policy Recommendations to Improve Early Childhood Jobs** – Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (2020)
- **Resources on shared services** – Opportunities Exchange (2023)
- **Six Policies to Support the Early Childhood Workforce** – Center for American Progress (2017)
- **Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Framework** – Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council (2015)



#### **Communities in Action—GOAL 2.5 | Play & Learn groups promote strong network for informal care providers in Washington State**

**Kaleidoscope Play & Learn** groups (KPL) are free, weekly 90+ minute drop-in play groups led by community facilitators that engage children and their caregivers in culturally and developmentally appropriate play activities. The groups meet once a week, and promote peer to peer learning, hands-on active, child development education, and community-building for mutual support. Kaleidoscope Play & Learn was designated as a Promising Practice by the University of Washington’s Evidence-Based Practice Institute in 2013. The model was created by Child Care Resources, a non-profit serving King and Pierce Counties, and stems from **their work to provide support and information to FFN caregivers**. The model was created with community guidance representing community-based organizations, ethnic/cultural communities, public libraries, schools, public health, and funders. In 2018, Best Starts partnered with community-based organizations and Child Care Resources to add 31 additional weekly KPL play groups. Kaleidoscope Play & Learn groups are held in a variety of neighborhood locations, such as libraries, community centers, schools, apartment buildings and shopping centers.



#### **Communities in Action—GOAL 2.5 | Promoting mental health and well-being for ECE workforce in Nebraska**

Initially developed in 2017, Nebraska Extension’s **Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators** (CHIME) program for early childhood educators provides staff with a series of 1.5-hour sessions led by a trained guiding teacher who facilitates well-being and mindfulness activities. A pilot randomized controlled trial of the program showed that participation in CHIME reduced stress and difficulties in emotional regulation and increased self-compassion, mental well-being, feeling general healthiness, and caregiver efficacy. Beginning in 2019, CHIME expanded to deliver sessions to educators throughout Nebraska.

### Leaders use data to drive change

Early childhood systems function best when aligned and longitudinal data is consistently used to drive change—to keep stakeholders focused on the outcomes of their efforts, improve progress toward those desired outcomes for all children and families, and increase the quality and effectiveness of various programs and of the system itself. In an Early Learning Community, diverse stakeholders serving children have shared data and outcome metrics, which may feed into a process of continuous quality improvement.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

- ▶ **Level 1** – Leaders within and across child- and family-serving systems have agreed on shared language and committed to common outcomes for children and families.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Explore potential frameworks to capture the outcomes all relevant systems can embrace and connect their work to—such as Strengthening Families, Developmental Assets, or the Healthy and Ready to Learn measure—and adopt the language of that framework across systems.
- Engage parents and other community residents in the process of arriving at shared language and common outcomes, and enlist their help in determining how to communicate that information to the community.
- Identify what data is available, whether it is of high quality (including whether it is disaggregated by race, income, and other relevant demographic characteristics), and what major gaps in data exist.
- Develop a data development agenda outlining the data you would like to have and who you would need to work with to obtain it.
- Determine what data can be used to track progress and evaluate community needs, including data from non-early childhood focused sources, such as the US Census, the health system, or criminal justice.

- ▶ **Level 2** – Agencies and programs share data with each other to advance their work toward shared outcomes.

Some ways communities can keep working toward reaching this goal include:

- Develop Memoranda of Understanding to articulate data sharing agreements among agencies and across systems.
- Compile data from across systems and programs to identify disparate outcomes experienced by particular neighborhoods, racial groups, income levels, or other population groups, and adjust strategies accordingly.
- Formalize the adoption of a shared outcomes framework by having programs and agencies publicly sign on to it and identify how their work helps children and families meet the identified goals.
- Consider adopting a universal intake form for child- and family-serving programs and services to facilitate cross-referral, sharing of data, and tracking of shared outcomes along with outputs.
- Share outcomes and data with the community in an accessible, easy-to-understand format.



- ▶ **Level 3** – Data is used to inform quality improvement efforts across sectors to meet identified needs and reach shared goals.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Implement a unique identifier, assigned to each child and used across systems, to facilitate data sharing and tracking between early care and education, home visiting, and health care. In this process, be sensitive to parents' concerns about confidentiality and develop opt-out and/or data shielding strategies to address those concerns.
- Plan and carry out quality improvement efforts across systems with a focus on a particular outcome or indicator, including a focus on closing disparities among demographic groups.
- Develop a shared database for child and family service providers to contribute to and access, facilitating better cross-system coordination when families are involved with multiple systems.
- Engage community residents in analyzing and interpreting data and developing strategies to reach shared goals.

#### **Use of Data to Drive Change:** External Resources

- **Collective Impact** – FSG (2011)
- **Early Childhood System Performance Assessment Toolkit** – Center for the Study of Social Policy (2021)
- **Essentials for Childhood: Creating Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships and Environments for all Children** – National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2019)
- **How can data sharing across child- and family-serving systems be implemented effectively?** – Casey Family Programs (2022)
- **Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework** – Center for the Study of Social Policy (Accessed 2024)
- **The 10 Fundamentals of Coordinated State Data Systems** – The Early Childhood Data Collaborative (2017)



#### **Communities in Action—GOAL 2.6 | Common outcomes across funded programs in Onondaga County, NY**

The **Early Childhood Alliance** (ECA) is a multi-sector community collaborative launched in 2015 at the recommendation of the Onondaga Citizens League (OCL), following a study revealing a key challenge to the county: the lack of a strategic, systemic approach to early childhood issues. It also revealed that a lack of coordination and collaborative goal setting limited the potential impact on young children and families. ECA has advanced several programs to strengthen the early childhood system, including the development of the **Onondaga County Data Dashboard** to “tell the data story of how children and families are doing.” According to the Alliance, “a key strategy in achieving a more equitable early childhood system is utilizing data to help inform the discussion about distribution and reach of programs.”

## Building Block #2: External Resources

- **Advancing a Family-Centered Community Health System: A Community Agenda Focused on Child Health Care, Foundational Relationships, and Equity** – Center for the Study of Social Policy (2020)
- **Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! A Compendium of Screening Measures for Young Children** – Department of Health and Human Services (2020)
- **Chapter 24: Developing and Improving Community Services** – Community Tool Box (Accessed 2024)
- **Defining and Measuring Access to High-Quality Early Care and Education: A Guidebook for Policymakers and Researchers** – Department of Health and Human Services (2018)
- **Developing Culturally Responsive Approaches to Serving Diverse Populations: a Resource Guide for Community-Based Organizations** – National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families (2017)
- **How Cities Embrace Their Infants and Toddlers** – Early Childhood Action Collective (2017)
- **Healthy Families: From ACEs to Trauma Informed Care to Resilience and Wellbeing: Examples of Policies and Activities** – International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership (2016)
- Manifesto for Race Equity and Parent Leadership in Early Childhood Systems (**English / Spanish**) – Center for the Study of Social Policy and the Parent Leader Network (2019)
- **National Parent Leadership Institute** – (Accessed 2024)
- **Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships** – Department of Education (2013)
- **A Roadmap for Advancing Family-Engaged Developmental Monitoring** – Help Me Grow National Center (2023)
- **Ripples of Transformation: Families Leading Change in Early Childhood Systems** – Center for the Study of Social Policy (2017)
- **What are Linguistically Responsive Practices and Why are they an essential ingredient of high-quality early childhood education?** – UnidosUS (2020)
- **Working Systemically in Action: Engaging Family and Community** – SEDL, American Institutes for Research (2010)



## Building Block #3

### Neighborhoods Where Families Can Thrive

Children’s development and well-being are affected by all aspects of the neighborhoods where they live—from whether they have access to healthy food and green spaces, to how safe their communities are, whether there is safe and affordable housing, and whether residents have a sense of hope for their futures. While these issues are beyond what we typically think of under the heading of “early childhood,” these community determinants of health are critical. Early Learning Communities are increasingly turning their attention to neighborhood living conditions, ensuring that all young children grow up in neighborhoods where they and their families can live safe, healthy lives. Neighborhoods that are safe and healthy foster the sense of belonging and networks of informal supports that are so critical for families to thrive.

## How do neighborhoods impact early learning and development?

A growing body of research provides evidence that the places where children live, learn, and play have significant impact on their health and development. For example, a number of neighborhood factors can undermine healthy early childhood development, like exposure to high rates of violence, exposure to environmental hazards, unsafe housing, inadequate access to grocery stores, and a lack of economic opportunity for parents and caregivers. On the other hand, positive neighborhood factors—like safe public places to play, safe and affordable housing, accessible public transportation, and good employment opportunities—can have a positive impact on early childhood development, setting children up for success in learning and in life.

### Embodying the Guiding Values in Building Block 3

To strengthen and guide a community's work on Building Block 3, keep the following in mind related to each of the guiding values.

#### Equity

- Redlining and unfair lending practices have hindered many Black, Latiné, Asian, and Indigenous families from building generational wealth, and living in and creating thriving neighborhoods. These discriminatory practices have disadvantaged whole neighborhoods, typically ones with significant numbers of racial and ethnic minorities, and residents with low incomes. Neighborhood improvement efforts, supported with public and private funding, must be led by residents, not developers and outside investors who are not committed to the neighborhood.
- Transportation justice encompasses the equitable distribution of transportation infrastructure, services, and benefits, regardless of socioeconomic status, disability status, race, or ethnicity. It acknowledges that historically marginalized communities often bear a disproportionate burden of transportation-related pollution and divestment in public transportation services, which exacerbates issues of safety, sanitation, and accessibility options. Investments in public transit equity, clean and sustainable mobility options, and safe, walkable infrastructure are a critical equity issue.

#### Parent Voice

- Engaging parents in improving their neighborhoods is a great way to build connections and see hope grow. Parents know what kind of neighborhood they would like to live in—and with resources and support from local government or non-profit organizations, they can make changes happen.
- Prioritize parent voice in determining community planning and investments. In practice, this might mean including and centering parents' voices in identifying solutions to local issues. It could also mean prioritizing affected community members and constituencies through participatory grant-making to determine community investments.

#### Accountability

- Many communities will not have the ability to track population-level data differences from one neighborhood (such as a zip code or census tract) to another. This may call for less formal methods of data collection and comparison, such as surveys of parents, teachers, or service providers.
- Residents who have taken time to give input or attend meetings should also be informed about the results of their involvement, whether that be through email updates, opportunities for follow-up input on implementation in their area, or neighborhood meetings to share data reports and action plans.

## GOAL 3.1

### The built environment promotes safety and healthy development

Families thrive in neighborhoods with safe and affordable housing, ample green space, access to nutritious and affordable food, and safe, walkable routes between the places they spend their time. Neighborhoods should be free from violence and from environmental hazards such as lead, other water contaminants, and air pollution that cause and aggravate health conditions—and which are more often found in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. In Early Learning Communities, leaders work alongside residents to ensure that every neighborhood promotes health and safety, for families with young children as well as all other residents.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

- ▶ **Level 1** – Plans are in place to tackle neighborhood issues, including green space, adequate housing, and safety concerns identified by families.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Hold community listening sessions to learn about families' needs in a variety of neighborhoods in your community, including concerns they may have about the safety of parks, accessible sidewalks, availability of affordable housing, or other components of the built environment. When organizing these listening sessions, ensure the physical space is accessible to all community members, including individuals with disabilities. Ensure there are multiple means of communicating and accessing information.
- Use community asset mapping to identify neighborhoods where families may have a harder time meeting their basic needs because their neighborhood is underserved by public services (like issues with transportation and infrastructure, affordable housing, or access to outdoor spaces) and/or disproportionately exposed to hazards (like water and air pollution, lead contamination, violence, or traffic that endangers pedestrians and discourages walkability).
- Promote collaboration across sectors (including health and dental care, housing, business community, public safety, violence prevention, transit, community organizations, and schools) to identify hazards to children and families, and to understand potential linkages to better meet families' needs.
- Work with farmers markets and vendors to bring fresh, culturally appropriate foods to communities that lack grocery stores and/or to ensure that Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) benefits are accepted at markets.

- ▶ **Level 2** – Neighborhood improvement strategies are designed with a focus on residents' priorities and desired outcomes.

Some ways communities can keep moving toward reaching this goal include:

- Implement coordinated, cross-sector solutions (including sectors like housing, health care, and education) to make sure the communities where children learn and grow are safe and healthy.
- Use public-private partnerships to expand access to the Internet in public spaces through broadband services or citywide Wi-Fi, or through public institutions like libraries and community centers.
- Assist service providers in implementing trauma-informed and healing-centered policies and practices to improve the accessibility of services and well-being.

- Work to increase tree density, access to green space, and shaded play areas for children.
- Strengthen building code enforcement and housing inspection efforts to proactively address health issues rather than relying on tenant complaints for reporting. Leverage existing city inspection processes by including lead paint hazard inspections or consider how to engage health care providers to help identify when patients may be living in unsafe housing conditions.
- Consider communities' access to public "third spaces" that allow for safe convening, community building, and opportunities for residents to access resources and social support.

▶ **Level 3** – Regardless of neighborhood, residents are regularly consulted by policymakers about how their neighborhoods can better promote safety and healthy development.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Align policies and strategic plans across sectors to promote safe, healthy environments for children and families, particularly those who are currently underserved by public services and facilities, possibly by using a "health in all policies" approach.
- Require that public services be trauma-informed and healing-centered and ensure that public spaces are inviting and accessible for all children and families.
- Engage city, county, school, and system leaders in an exercise to assess what a family living in an underserved area would need to do in order to obtain health and dental care, buy healthy food, get their child to quality early care and education or get themselves to school for an evening event, or travel to work in various parts of the city. Try to understand the burden that families and individuals face just by virtue of where they live.
- Map and analyze how resources flow into neighborhoods. If there are disparities, try to ascertain the root causes.
- Ensure that service providers are consistently trained on how to best serve communities facing multiple barriers to opportunity, including immigrant and refugee families, families that include LGBTQ individuals, non-English speakers, families involved in the child welfare system, and those with disabilities.
- Formalize the authentic engagement of parents and caregivers who are representative of the community in planning and zoning decisions, in the design and planning of public services like transportation, and in community health strategies.

### **Communities in Action—GOAL 3.1 | Promoting use and investment of green spaces in Philadelphia, PA**

**Prescribe Outside**, Philadelphia's nature prescription program, is a partnership between Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), Awbury Arboretum, Let's Go Outdoors, and the USDA Forest Service, and Temple University Center for Sustainable Communities. Launched in 2023, the goal of the program is to provide physicians and families with tools to improve the health and wellness of Philadelphia children by helping them locate and use safe, accessible, and convenient public green space and discover the benefits of time spent in nature. The program's mission is supported by a growing body of literature that points to the positive effects of green space. **Studies** indicate that access to safe, natural areas improves health across a wide variety of outcomes. The program also hosts drop-in activities at varying times and locations throughout the city, which are open to the public.



### Communities in Action—GOAL 3.1 | Tidal channel restoration and community rehabilitation in San Juan, PR

The **Proyecto ENLACE del Caño Martín Peña** (the ENLACE Project) pursues the environmental and community rehabilitation of the Caño Martín Peña, a highly polluted tidal channel, and the comprehensive and equitable development of the eight communities along its margins. **The project** is recognized as a public entity created in 2004 by Law 489 to implement a comprehensive development and land use plan for the district, and participatory process for community empowerment, where residents have a voice and a vote, is written into the policy. Legislation has been instrumental in the development and protection of the ENLACE Project, and grassroots community-led efforts have been key to its sustainability.

The Project promotes financial opportunities for residents and most of the staff are residents of one of the eight impacted communities. The project utilizes an equitable and community-driven model for bringing together community leaders from the eight communities surrounding the channel to ensure a participatory process throughout the implementation of the plan. The project resulted in a Community Land Trust (CLT), an organization created to manage the land and an innovative model for collective land ownership. The project promotes housing initiatives, civic engagement, gender and social inclusivity, youth mentoring and positive education outcomes, leadership development for residents, and programs for economic, health, and environmental justice.

### GOAL 3.2

#### Families can access services as well as economic and employment opportunities

Children are more likely to thrive when their parents have access to a diversity of economic and employment opportunities where they live, as well as early childhood services that support healthy development. Whether in the neighborhood or easily accessible by public transportation, families need to be able to reach quality early care and education, schools, clinics, and family support programs, while parents also need access to jobs that pay a living wage and offer family and medical leave and paid sick leave, education, and job training services. In addition, in family-friendly neighborhoods, banks and credit unions are available to meet families' financial needs and give them opportunities to build credit—rather than institutions that drain resources from the community and harm families through financial practices such as predatory lending. Other types of infrastructure, including opportunities to connect to the Internet, are also critical for families to be full participants in their communities and to access educational and employment opportunities.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

▶ **Level 1** - There is an understanding of how public and private investments are currently allocated and where services are available across the community.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Use community asset mapping to identify neighborhoods where economic investment is needed and areas of concentrated disadvantage (i.e., areas of concentrated unemployment, food insecurity, with high levels of unbanked households, areas with reduced access to affordable high-quality early care and education).
- Assess the availability and quality of workforce development resources, and analyze how workforce development policies and programs can be adapted to better suit the local job market and better prepare residents (particularly parents and caregivers) to succeed and earn a livable wage.
- Collect and analyze data on participation in income support programs within neighborhoods, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, and explore local options to increase participation.

- ▶ **Level 2** – Investments in service expansion, job training, and education are targeted to underserved areas.

Some ways communities can keep moving toward reaching this goal include:

- Direct public investment toward underinvested neighborhoods to improve access to education and job training, and improve availability of stable jobs with livable wages for local families.
- Work directly with residents to determine what barriers they face to employment and economic mobility, and design solutions accordingly.
- Reduce barriers to employment for parents and caregivers by improving access to high-quality, affordable child care and strengthening public transportation systems.
- Partner with workforce development agencies, businesses and education, and training institutions to develop career pathways for high needs jobs in the region, including retraining for people who are currently unemployed and underemployed.
- Hire a consultant with experience working within the community, to map identified systemic barriers and how they are intertwined with ongoing disparities (across race, disability status, zip code, and more). Ensure the consultants findings' are intentionally integrated in and used to identify solutions that are responsive to families' experiences and present disparities.

- ▶ **Level 3** – Residents have access to quality services, opportunities for economic mobility and stability, and reliable public transportation, regardless of neighborhood.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Apply a two-generation approach to workforce development programs by aligning workforce development policies with policies governing child care subsidies to remove barriers for caregivers seeking further education or training.
- Adopt a living wage that allows families to provide for their children, and index it to inflation to reduce income inequality.
- Incentivize private investment in underinvested communities through tax incentives and subsidies to businesses that will provide needed services, stable employment and critical benefits like paid family, medical, and sick leave to local families.
- Collaborate with residents to prioritize investments in public transit equity and identify current issues, including access to reliable transportation, clean and sustainable mobility options, and safe, walkable infrastructure.



### **Communities in Action—GOAL 3.2 | Connecting families in isolated neighborhoods to jobs, child care, and transit in Atlantic County, NJ**

Through the **South Jersey Strengthening Families Initiative**, the **Pascale Sykes Foundation** has dedicated resources to building up public transit options in the largely rural counties they serve. The foundation partnered with the County of Atlantic, the South Jersey Transportation Authority, the Family Service Association, NJ TRANSIT, and the Cross County Connection Transportation Management Association to start the English Creek-Tilton Road Community Shuttle, based on community meetings where parents identified transportation as one of their greatest needs. Launched in 2012, the community shuttle runs regularly 14 hours a day, six days a week to connect a number of apartment complexes, shopping centers, medical centers, office locations, and a local shopping mall. Of passengers **surveyed** after the shuttle services were in operation for two years, 53% said they used the shuttle to get to and from work, with 71% reporting that the shuttle made it easy to reach their destination, and 73% reporting that, due to the shuttle, they no longer considered transportation a problem.





### Communities in Action—GOAL 3.2 | Children’s savings account (CSA) initiatives in Oakland, CA and Boston, MA

The **Brilliant Baby College Savings Account** program is led by Oakland Promise and operates with the goal to serve all families in need in Oakland within the next decade. Launched in 2016, Brilliant Baby is a two-generational approach spearheaded by former Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf. Babies born into poverty in Oakland will have a 529 college savings opened in their names with \$500, which will grow over time. New parents can also receive parenting support, financial coaching, and the opportunity to earn financial awards as they take steps to promote their children’s well-being. In Boston, starting in K2 Kindergarten, **Boston Saves** provides each student with a savings account with \$50 in seed funding for their future post-secondary education or career training. The program is managed by the Mayor’s Office of Financial Empowerment, and has allocated funding to over 15,000 Boston Public School students and provides opportunities for families to earn additional Boston Saves Dollars for their child’s account and financial education resources that make saving easier. A one-year evaluation indicated that participation in Boston Saves was linked to statistically significant and positive effects on students’ social-emotional development, reading frequency, parental life satisfaction, and parental educational expectations.

### GOAL 3.3

#### Residents feel a sense of belonging and hope within their neighborhoods and connection to the broader community

Ideally, families will feel a sense of belonging and ownership of their neighborhoods, a sense of kinship with their neighbors, and a connection to the surrounding city or county. In neighborhoods where families can thrive, residents tell a story of hope about their neighborhood and feel they have power to shape their community. They feel that their neighborhood is connected to the broader community and that city or county leadership cares about them—that they matter in the eyes of elected leaders and fellow residents. Community leaders can contribute to these intangible aspects of a neighborhood, both in words and actions, by focusing on and investing in a neighborhood’s assets, and by listening and responding when residents organize and speak up to effect change in their neighborhoods.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

► **Level 1** – Community members are supported to make changes in their own neighborhoods to address identified needs and build a sense of community.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Offer parent listening sessions or summits at a variety of accessible public spaces frequented by families, including libraries, schools, and health centers, to engage families with each other and the community around topics of interest, while also informing providers and policymakers about families’ needs and concerns.
- Develop strong relationships with community groups that can help connect residents to local elected leaders and community-building resources.
- Openly share information that will allow residents to be more engaged in the decision-making process, including data on how children are faring in the community and information on upcoming funding and policy proposals.
- Connect with city departments, local historical groups, and informal community historians to learn about the history of neighborhoods and then provide opportunities to advocate for positive change.
- Offer “mini-grants” for neighborhood groups to make improvements in their communities.



► **Level 2** – Leadership incorporates and is responsive to voices of community residents.

Some ways communities can keep moving toward reaching this goal include:

- Create compensated decision-making roles for residents (and particularly parents and caregivers) and offer peer-mentoring opportunities to cultivate community leadership and encourage under-represented groups to participate in governance.
- Partner with local community groups, community colleges, and others who can provide training, peer support, and tools to support and build the skills of parent leaders and activists within the community.
- Ensure that the voices and feedback of parent and community leaders are incorporated from the earliest stages of decision-making processes, allowing residents to collectively take action to improve their neighborhood with the support of city leadership.
- Support parent and community leaders to attend and testify at public budget hearings at the City/County level.

► **Level 3** – Leaders and policymakers provide support for community-led organizing, prioritizing resident-led change.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Provide funding and support for neighborhood councils that allow residents to meet regularly, discuss concerns, propose solutions, and take action.
- Implement participatory budget processes that are resident-led, and allow community members' priorities to drive the allocation of discretionary funds in a city's budget.
- Formalize parent and resident participation in decision-making by requiring city departments to have strategies in place to incorporate parent and caregiver voice on issues impacting children and other areas of concern.



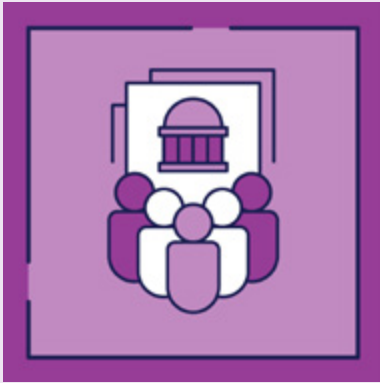
**Communities in Action—GOAL 3.3 | Community building through an Early Childhood Hub in the Castlemont Corridor in Oakland, CA and through Family Success Centers in Washington, D.C.**

In 2013, a group of community organizations, including First 5 Alameda, worked together to create an **Early Childhood Hub called Room to Bloom**. Through the hub, families with young children have access to a variety of parent and child activities, services and/or programs there at various times throughout the week. Families are also connected to leadership opportunities and additional community resources, including Play & Learn groups, parenting education, Parent Cafés and referrals to community resources such as entitlement programs, mental health and public health services and economic self-sufficiency programs. The services of the Early Childhood Hub are guided by CSSP's Strengthening Families framework of family protective factors.

In 2020, **Families First DC initiative** (FFDC) launched 10 **Family Success Centers** in Wards 7 and 8 of Washington, D.C. The Centers are funded through 10 grants to community-based non-profits working with the families and communities where the centers are located. The Families First DC network works with families to increase family well-being and provide community-driven supportive services and resources. With the assistance of an outside consultant, the District's Child and Family Services Agency analyzed data to map community needs, the availability of resources, and family and wellness services. Once the neighborhoods with significant needs were identified, community voice was a key strategy and priority was given to hiring program staff who live in the neighborhoods where the FSCs are located.

### Building Block #3: External Resources

- **Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience: A Framework for Addressing and Preventing Community Trauma** – Prevention Institute (2016)
- **All-In Cities: Building an Equitable Economy from the Ground Up** – All-In Cities, PolicyLink (2017)
- **The Asthma Improvement Collaborative at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital** – Center for the Study of Social Policy (2016)
- **Boost Your Competitive Edge: Actions for a Healthy, Productive Workforce** – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016)
- **Build Healthy Places Network** – (Accessed 2024)
- **Community Engagement Toolkit** – Collective Impact Forum (2017)
- **Disrupting Food Insecurity** and **Tackling Food Insecurity by Bringing Data to Communities** – Urban Institute (2019)
- **Efficient, Effective Services: Career Pathways and Lasting Economic Stability for Families** – ASCEND, The Aspen Institute (2017)
- **Food Environments: An Introduction for Public Health Practice** – National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health (2015)
- **Food Systems: Policy Solutions** – ChangeLab Solutions (2021)
- **Health in All Policies: A Guide for State and Local Government** – Public Health Institute (Accessed 2024)
- **The necessity of urban green space for children’s optimal development** – UNICEF (2021)
- **Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement: A Transformative Guide** – The Kirwan Institute (2016)



## Building Block #4

### **Policies that Support and Are Responsive to Families**

The conditions in which young children and their families live—the building blocks already described—are all influenced by policy at the local, state, and federal levels. In early learning communities, attention is paid to how policies can support children and families, from policies that affect families' economic well-being and ability to meet their needs, to the policies that directly govern child and family services, to broader community-level policies that shape the contexts in which families live. While some of these policies are made at the federal or state level, local leaders have some agency in how those programs are implemented and resources are used. Local entities can also develop policy solutions at the local level through city or county ordinances, resolutions, rules, and regulations. Other actions can be taken by employers, with or without support or incentivization from the government.

## Embodying the Guiding Values in Building Block 4

To strengthen and guide a community's work on Building Block 4, keep the following in mind related to each of the guiding values.

### Equity

- No policy is race-neutral. Policies must intentionally address the effects of segregation and racism that have shaped our communities over generations, or they will only reinforce them.
- The burden of environmental hazards falls disproportionately on people of color, indigenous people, people living in poverty, and people who have been disadvantaged or marginalized, only adding to the other challenges they face. These communities are more exposed to environmental threats that drive health disparities, and more vulnerable to the effects of climate change and natural disaster. Investments to address environmental justice concerns must center communities' access to clean energy and energy efficiency, clean transit, affordable housing, workforce development, remediation and reduction of legacy pollution, and access to nutritious, local foods, updated clean water and wastewater systems, and access to safe and well-maintained community infrastructure.

### Parent Voice

- In their ideal form, town hall meetings allow lawmakers to describe their work, and to listen to the concerns of their constituents. Open and vigorous dialogue benefits policymakers and the public. Promoting community dialogue—through town halls, advisory boards, listening sessions, or well-moderated forums on social media—is an engagement strategy to ensure policies are informed by and responsive to community needs.
- Long-term community investment in policy-making can be cultivated by engaging parents in grassroots policy efforts and collaborating with them at every step of the process, including the drafting of policy solutions to specific community issues, advocacy to pass the policy, and implementation once the policy is passed.

### Accountability

- Policy advocacy can be a slow process and “big wins” may be few and far-between. Tracking the steps toward those policy changes can help stakeholders to see that progress is happening. For example, a bill may not have passed in this legislative session, but it passed out of a committee and will be better positioned next year; the city may not have adopted a paid family leave program, but more private employers began offering it.
- Stories about how a policy, or the lack of a needed policy, is affecting individual children and families can be critical tools in making the case for policy change. Combining these stories with hard data—demonstrating child and family well-being in the community, or disparities in key outcomes—will help appeal to different decision-makers and stakeholders.

## GOAL 4.1

### Government and workplace policies support families in raising children

Many policies directly influence families' lives, particularly regarding their financial well-being and stress, whether those policies are implemented by the government to affect all families, or by employers providing supports to their employees. Policymakers in Early Learning Communities enact and promote policies that make it easier for families to raise children. For example, local ordinances can provide, promote, require, or incentivize family and medical leave, paid sick leave, flexible work schedules, and other family-friendly employment policies and practices. Local policies can also determine how many families are eligible for various programs or benefits such as health care or food and cash assistance; how well families are connected to the services they need; and how easily families can navigate those systems. While these policies are often aimed at the entire workforce, all health care consumers, or all employees of a business, for example, parents of young children are an important subset of these groups and the impact on them as parents should be taken into consideration.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

- ▶ **Level 1** – Local leaders are aware of what public and private supports are currently available to families in the community, who is benefiting from them, and who is not.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Gather information about how many families in the community currently benefit from SNAP, public health insurance, local or state paid family leave programs, universal basic income pilot programs, or mandated paid sick leave—and who is not eligible or not benefiting from those programs.
- Assess which employers in the community currently offer family-friendly employment policies (including paid family and medical leave, affordable and inclusive insurance options, fair scheduling practices, and access to lactation facilities), and which of their employees are benefiting from them. Leadership and incentives may be particularly necessary to get these benefits extended to workers in low-wage jobs, where the market may not push employers to provide them but where workers need them the most.
- Highlight the successes of businesses in the community that have family-friendly workplace policies and those that are partnering with early care and education providers to ensure that their employees have child care.
- Widely disseminate information about tenants' and workers' rights and legal protections throughout the community, in workplaces, and in public spaces.
- Ensure working families have access to legal support and advice to understand their existing rights and legal protections, and address any infringements upon their rights.

- ▶ **Level 2** – More and more families are benefiting from policies that are designed to improve economic mobility, support caregiving, promote family-friendly workplaces, and ensure that they are able to meet their basic needs.

Some ways communities can keep working toward reaching this goal include:

- Make sure municipal and county governing bodies serve as a positive example by adhering to best practices in workplace policies, including by offering paid family and medical leave, child care benefits, and comprehensive, affordable insurance options to all employees.
- Increase the supply of affordable housing units that are large enough for families.

- Work with the business community to implement family-friendly workplace policies that improve workplace environments for all workers, particularly those who are least likely to have access to paid leave or other protections.
- Advocate for, pass, and implement fair scheduling or fair workweek laws at the local or state level. Predictability of work hours is particularly critical for parents of young children who need to schedule care for the hours they work.
- Extend health insurance to immigrant families that are excluded from state public health insurance programs.
- Prioritize family-friendly employers when awarding local contracts, rewarding employers that have policies and procedures in place to support their employees' family-related needs.

► **Level 3** - Policies are in place to ensure that families receive tangible support to meet their needs and reduce the stress of raising young children.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Implement paid family leave for all workers.
- Guarantee child care for all children in the community, partnering with providers to ensure care is available that meets all families' needs, including care in families' home languages, second and third shift care, and before- and after-school care for elementary school students. This may require workforce investments, partnerships with the school district, and tax breaks and/or subsidies for providers.
- Invest in "baby bonds" or child savings accounts established at birth with an initial deposit from the city or county.
- Implement local ordinances, tax breaks, and/or subsidies that support family-friendly policies such as fair scheduling practices, paid family and medical leave, comprehensive health insurance coverage, and living wages.
- Incentivize employers to report on how many families ultimately use family-friendly policies and benefits in order to identify any obstacles to utilizing these policies and benefits by race, ethnicity, gender, income, or other characteristics.
- Implement a guaranteed income program that benefits families with young children to give parents more freedom in choosing how to care for their children in the early years.



### Communities in Action—GOAL 4.1 | Paid family and medical leave in Louisiana

Louisiana's Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) Coalition is made up of partnering organizations across the state, **and in recent years** has successfully secured state funding for an actuarial study on the cost analysis of a statewide PFML program, advocated for an inclusive, comprehensive PFML bill during the 2023 legislative session, and helped secure paid parental leave for Louisiana state employees. **The policy came into effect January 1, 2024 and covers 70,000 state government employees.** The coalition and its various stakeholders call for improvement, as the current policy is limited to 6 weeks of paid leave, imposes a 12-week window for utilizing the benefit, and does not extend protection to private sector employees.



## Communities in Action—GOAL 4.1 | Guaranteed income pilot and economic opportunity programs in San Diego, CA

From March 2022 through February 2024, the **San Diego for Every Child (SDEC) Guaranteed Income Project** will pilot the region’s first guaranteed income program. Fiscally sponsored by Jewish Family Service of San Diego (JFS), the pilot was innovatively designed to efficiently address one root cause of poverty: economic disparity. Eligible families with a child who is 12 years old or younger, will receive \$500 a month for 24 months. JFS has also launched a new department, the **Economic Mobility and Opportunity Department**, and implemented three additional programs in collaboration with community-based organizations. The other programs, also designed to address economic opportunity and mobility are the Black Women’s Resilience Project (BWRP), the Family Income for Empowerment Program (FIEP), and the Recovery Action Fund for Tomorrow (RAFT). Though each program serves varying populations, they all share the provision of “no strings attached” cash-aid in a dignified approach to provide support for families within our community.

### GOAL 4.2

#### Policies that govern child and family services are equitable and responsive to families

Federal, state, and local policies affect the quality, effectiveness, and availability of the continuum of services described in the previous building blocks. Many of these policies are set at the state or federal level, but local administration of those policies can determine how they affect families’ experiences, children’s outcomes, and disparities between groups in the community. For example, child care subsidies are critical to ensuring access to quality care for the lowest-income families, and the amount of funding and basic parameters of those subsidies are often determined at the state level. But local entities may have flexibility in how those subsidies are administered—including eligibility rules, where and how families can apply for services, how the intake process takes place, and reporting requirements—and these details can have positive or negative effects on accessibility, continuity of care, and family stress. An Early Learning Community can develop its own policies or take advantage of flexibility in the implementation of existing policies related to early care and education, early intervention services, child protective services, health care, and more. By creating new programs, making existing programs more generous or responsive to families’ needs, and improving access and reducing administrative barriers for families and providers, communities can ensure that families with young children can meet their needs.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

▶ **Level 1** - Local leaders take families’ needs and experiences into account in their administration of federal and state programs and policies.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Use tools like surveys and community listening sessions to learn about families’ needs in your community and their experiences accessing child and family services, including child care supports, food and housing assistance, and other programs that help families meet basic needs. Multiple formats to gather feedback and information should be used to reach a diversity of families. Ensure listening sessions are held in physically accessible spaces and that translation services are available.
- Fully integrate parents and caregivers and child-serving providers into all relevant committees, task forces, and workgroups where policy strategies that impact young children and their families are considered. Include stakeholders from different racial and ethnic groups—especially those most likely to be affected or those you are most interested in reaching—in the development of new policies and programs. Determine who is missing and how they can be engaged.



- Explore how the community can use local discretion in the administration of state and federal resources to best meet the needs of young children and their families, including through the use of waivers and in the alignment of programs that serve overlapping populations.
- Continuously train child care subsidy intake workers, family service workers, eligibility and case workers in public benefit granting agencies, and other staff who work directly with families on cultural and linguistic responsiveness, implicit bias, trauma-informed and healing centered engagement, strengths-based family goal-setting, and on how to work across service systems to meet families' full spectrum of needs.
- Track and examine data on access and quality of services by race, ethnicity, income level, home language, and other demographic characteristics to inform equitable policies and resource use.

▶ **Level 2** – Administrative and policy innovations are implemented across sectors to ensure that the needs of all children and families are met.

Some ways communities can keep working toward reaching this goal include:

- Implement policy and administrative innovations that improve or increase the availability of family supports. For example, communities may be able to use local funds to supplement SNAP benefits for purchases at farmers markets, extend public health insurance to cover immigrant families, or cover lapses in child care subsidy eligibility to promote stability for children, working parents, and child care providers.
- Take steps to reduce the administrative burden for families applying for government programs (such as SNAP, public health insurance, child care subsidy, or free/reduced price school lunch) by streamlining application forms, implementing categorical eligibility, or reducing response times in local offices. Making programs universal—such as free lunch for all students—is another innovation that reduces the administrative burden on both families and systems, and ensures that needs do not go unmet.
- Implement continuous improvement and feedback loops that include families and workers to determine what is and isn't working well for children and families to access programs and services.
- Examine local zoning policies to ensure that family child care providers are able to operate in neighborhoods where there is a lot of demand for infant and toddler care; determine what support would be needed for a provider to meet licensing standards, such as installing a fire sprinkler system in an apartment building.
- Establish a linkage and referral system that seamlessly connects families to existing services in the community at the appropriate time. Memoranda of Understanding can be used between agencies and organizations to ensure services are provided seamlessly with a “no wrong door” approach.
- Facilitate cross-sector convenings (including health, education, housing, etc.) to address data sharing issues and promote cross-sector solutions to the challenges families face, particularly families who are involved in multiple systems due to the needs of various family members.
- Examine data, current outcomes, and challenges through intersecting social categories (e.g., gender, race, geography, ability) and interlocking systems of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, ableism) to understand barriers to better outcomes. Consider intersectionality and how systemic inequalities can heavily impact certain demographic groups across sectors, and work with communities to promote cross-sector solutions.

- ▶ **Level 3** – Policies are aligned across systems and are responsive to the diverse and changing needs of families.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Create a municipal-level office that is charged with promoting the well-being of families with young children, such as an Office of Early Childhood or a Children’s Cabinet.
- Coordinate business processes and data collection strategies across service systems to facilitate data sharing.
- Streamline application and eligibility processes through common applications, care coordination, and data sharing. When possible, families should be notified about their eligibility for services such as child care subsidies based on cross-system data-sharing, rather than requiring eligible families to navigate complicated application processes to determine their eligibility.
- Use cross-sector data analysis to identify areas of need, design policy strategies to address those needs, and evaluate outcomes in a system that is aligned and responsive to families.
- Use a racial equity toolkit to assess policies, initiatives, and programs. It should help you answer the following questions: “How will this increase or decrease disparities between groups? What are the potential unintended consequences? What benefits may result? Do children, families, early educators, and providers of color have access, and if not, why?”



#### **Communities in Action—GOAL 4.2 | “Gateway to Pre-K” agenda supporting children’s services in Massachusetts**

In 2024, Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey announced the **Gateway to Pre-K** agenda to improve affordability and access to early education and child care. “Gateway to Pre-K” will expand early education and care programs in Massachusetts’ **26 Gateway Cities** and across the state. The agenda’s four key components include; Delivering universal, high-quality preschool access for four-year-olds in all Gateway Cities by the end of 2026; Increasing Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) eligibility from 50% of the state median income (SMI) to 85% SMI; Continuing Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) grants in FY25; and an executive order requesting a whole-of-government approach to ensure affordable, high-quality child care.



#### **Communities in Action—GOAL 4.2 | Cradle to K Cabinet in Minneapolis, MN and new department at the state level**

The City of Minneapolis’ former Mayor Betsy Hodges formed the Cradle to K Cabinet, explicitly focused on eliminating race- and place-based disparities in children’s early experiences, stable housing, and quality early care and education. After a series of meetings and community forums, the Cabinet published the **Cradle to K Cabinet Plan to Address Early Childhood Disparities**. In 2015, Mayor Hodges and the Cradle to K Cabinet released the final Cradle to K report outlining policy, legislative and collaborative recommendations for 2015 and beyond.

**During the 2023 state legislative session**, multiple supports for young children and their families passed (including some recommendations from the 2015 Minneapolis report). Some of the legislation passed include state-funded programs to increase child care worker compensation and expand child care access, increased funding for free school meals, and a new cabinet-level agency, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, to elevate child, youth, and family policy and funding needs.

### GOAL 4.3

#### Land use and community development policies are designed with consideration for how they affect young children and families

In an Early Learning Community, attention is paid to how a wide range of decisions will affect families. Similar to the “Health in All Policies” movement, Early Learning Communities pay attention to the effect of all policies on young children and their families. For example, many aspects of community design, such as housing regulations and public transportation systems, can encourage or hinder healthy child development and family well-being. These decisions should not be made without considering the impact on families with young children. In addition, young children are the group most affected by air pollution, unsafe drinking water, extreme weather, and other environmental factors. Their well-being, as well as their future, should be taken into consideration in decisions that can either increase or counteract climate change. As mentioned above, family-friendly local administration of state and federal policy can also be a marker of an Early Learning Community.

? **Which level describes your community currently?**  Not Started  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3

► **Level 1** - There is an understanding that land use and development affect children and families, including a recognition that such policies have resulted in underinvestment in some neighborhoods.

Some ways communities can get started include:

- Examine how public investments in community development projects are currently allocated across the community, whether residents’ priorities are addressed by those investments, and how land use policies impact different neighborhoods.
- Use surveys, listening sessions at public spaces frequented by families, and other tools to learn about families’ needs and desires for the community and obstacles they face to accessing safe, affordable housing, public transportation, nutritious and affordable foods, health and dental care, and other community resources. Ensure listening sessions are physically accessible to all members of the community. Allow for multiple methods of communication and information sharing for both surveys and listening sessions.
- Use community asset mapping to better understand how access to community resources, community safety, and environmental conditions—like affordable housing, public transportation, food, affordable high-quality early care and education, safe pedestrian corridors, safe and accessible public spaces and health care—vary among neighborhoods leading to conditions where some children and families are disconnected from resources and opportunities that are available to those in other neighborhoods.
- Consider how changes to zoning and building codes can encourage developers to consider the well-being of children and families.

► **Level 2** - Cross-sector efforts ensure the needs of young children and their families are met in every aspect of community design, including housing, transportation, food, health and dental care, and other important systems that serve families.

Some ways communities can keep working toward reaching this goal include:

- Create multi-sector coalitions that include families that can help inform more effective and equitable policy development and implementation.
- Create a Policy Council, similar to the Head Start model, made up of parents and caregivers and other stakeholders to be trained in policy advocacy.
- Consider how public spaces and buildings can be used to co-locate services from different systems that serve overlapping populations, and identify existing policies and regulations that pose barriers to co-located services.

- Designate city or county staff with early childhood expertise to advise decision-makers in public and private systems about how their decisions will impact young children and their families.
- Gauge the success of efforts to make policies more supportive and responsive to families by tracking community listening sessions, monitoring the number of proposals that were driven by resident-identified needs or asking residents to assess the degree to which residents' and parents' voices are actively and authentically integrated into policy development and implementation.

▶ **Level 3** - A formalized process is in place to take into account the impact on children and families of all land use and community development policies.

Some ways communities can make a deeper commitment to reaching this goal include:

- Formalize the consistent use of child or family impact statements in all land use and community development policies.
- Ensure that child impact statements and other formal tools also consider disparate outcomes based on race, ethnicity, immigration status, income, and other demographic characteristics. For example, if high-quality affordable child care facilities are concentrated in one area of the city, who is disproportionately harmed?
- Require review of land use and community development plans by city or county staff with early childhood expertise, and include the voice of families in the planning process.



### **Communities in Action—GOAL 4.3 | UNICEF’s Child Friendly Cities Initiative in Houston, TX and Minneapolis, MN**

In collaboration with **UNICEF USA**, the City of Houston officially became the first **Child Friendly City** in the United States in **August 2023**. Minneapolis became the second city in **February 2024**. Drawing on the strength of existing local efforts to improve child well-being, the initiative brings UNICEF together with community stakeholders to ensure children’s needs and concerns are front and center in city planning and policy-making. The initiative supports municipal governments in realizing the rights of children at the local level by using the framework of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** to build a roadmap for establishing safer, more just, equitable, inclusive, and child-responsive cities and communities. The City of Minneapolis’s CFCI local action plan highlights four top priorities: emergency management and preparedness planning, youth voice in decision-making spaces, community safety, and child rights education. The City of Houston’s plan highlights three priority issues: children’s participation, access to mental health services, and child-responsive emergency planning.



### **Communities in Action—GOAL 4.3 | City leaders, partners, and community voice re-imagine park equity in Lexington, KY**

In November 2023, Lexington, KY adopted the Imagine **Lexington 2045 Comprehensive Plan**. Imagine Lexington 2045 was created after two years of study and public input—“designed for Lexington by the people of Lexington.” The plan emphasizes park equity and includes the goal of “increasing the population served within a 10-minute walk of a neighborhood park through development of existing parkland, new parks in growing areas (including developer contributions), and improved access to existing parks.” This plan and the city’s “Rethink Open Space” initiative are intended to reshape zoning policy to ensure future development supports equitable access for all neighborhoods.

#### **Building Block #4:** External Resources

- **Creating Change through Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development: A Policy and Practice Primer** – PolicyLink (2017)
- **Equitable Development as a Tool to Advance Racial Equity** – The Government Alliance on Race & Equity (2016)
- **Family Friendly Workplace Policies Toolkit** – Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment through Essentials for Childhood in partnership with Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC) (Accessed 2023)
- **Family Impact Institute: Using Research to Build Better Public Policy for Families** – Purdue University (Accessed 2023)
- **Five Steps for State and Community Leaders to Increase Equitable Access to Early Care and Education** – Child Trends (2023)
- **Key Park Equity Policies: Toward A 10-Minute Walk Park Equity Policy Framework** – Trust for Public Land (2023)
- **GROUNDING JUSTICE: Toward Reparative Spatial Futures in Land and Housing** – PolicyLink (2024)
- **One Fairfax Resolution** – A formal declaration of commitment to racial and social equity by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and the Fairfax County School Board (2016)

## Appendix A

### At-A-Glance

This four-page summary of the *ELC Action Guide and Assessment Tool* is an easy way to share the building blocks, goals, and levels with current or potential partners, to inform your strategic planning, or to remind people of the big picture. It can also be a handy way for you and other stakeholders to visually track your current status and areas of focus.

## Building Block #1: Community Leadership, Commitment and Public Will to Make Early Childhood a Priority

### Goal 1.1: Local leaders work together across systems with a focus on early childhood



**Level 1** - A group of stakeholders committed to early childhood and with community ties meets regularly to identify collective priorities to better support families and young children, to guide the effort to act on established priorities, and to identify areas of overlap and possible areas of future collaboration.

**Level 2** - A group of community members and representatives from a wide variety of organizations and institutions are jointly working toward a shared vision and common goals.

**Level 3** - A well-established early childhood group with dedicated leadership and broad community input works collaboratively to promote the healthy development of young children.

### Goal 1.2: The community invests in young children and families



**Level 1** - The community uses its available resources, including existing funding streams, to effectively support families and promote healthy child development.

**Level 2** - Community and early childhood partners work together to identify points of intersection to use existing funds and resources creatively as well as to find new funding sources.

**Level 3** - The community's commitment to early childhood is formalized, and support for the families who need it most is prioritized.

### Goal 1.3: Community members support and understand the importance of early childhood health, learning, and well-being

**Level 1** - Information about developmental science, early health and learning, and parenting is disseminated to the community with messages that are accessible and relevant to members of different cultural groups.

**Level 2** - Families have opportunities to engage with each other and with community leaders about the importance of early childhood well-being and what families need and want to succeed.

**Level 3** - Throughout the community, families receive culturally relevant messages about early childhood health, learning, and well-being.

### Goal 1.4: Families feel a strong sense of community and receive informal supports from their social networks

**Level 1** - Community leaders understand who does and who does not have access to informal supports and what the barriers are to building those informal support networks in the community.

**Level 2** - Families have many opportunities to make connections.

**Level 3** - Mechanisms are in place for all parents and families, especially families who are often more isolated, to make connections with each other. Every neighborhood has safe places for people to make connections in person and/or digitally.

### Goal 1.5: Community resources for children and families are well known, accessible, and easy to use

**Level 1** - An up-to-date directory is available and accessible for all families to find services and for service providers to refer families to additional services and appropriate resources.

**Level 2** - Non-traditional partners are aware of and use the directory to make referrals. Barriers that prevent families from accessing care are addressed.

**Level 3** - A "no wrong door" approach is used by public service and community organization staff to connect families with appropriate services even if the service isn't available directly through their agency or organization.

## Building Block #2: Quality Services that Work for All Young Children and their Families

### Goal 2.1: Families have access to high-quality, basic services that proactively promote healthy development, early learning, family strengths, and early relational health

**Level 1** – City or county leadership have a comprehensive overview of the range and quality of services available throughout the community and whose needs are not being met.

**Level 2** – Leaders, residents and service providers work together to increase access to high-quality services for underserved families.

**Level 3** – Quality services are available throughout the community and easily accessible to residents of historically underserved neighborhoods.

### Goal 2.2: All children receive routine screening, identification, referral, and linkage for risks and needs

**Level 1** – Providers are trained in administering screenings and know where to refer families when concerns and specific needs are identified. Populations that aren't receiving screenings are identified and efforts are made to reach them more effectively.

**Level 2** – Residents have access to screening and referral services throughout the community.

**Level 3** – A centralized point of intake is available for referrals and follow-up.

### Goal 2.3: Children and families have timely access to the continuum of more intensive and specific services when needed

**Level 1** – Early intervention and prevention services are available in multiple settings throughout the community.

**Level 2** – Support is available for families to advocate for themselves as they navigate through systems.

**Level 3** – Families experience a seamless system of supports in response to identified needs.

### Goal 2.4: Families and parents are actively engaged as partners and valued experts on their children, families, and communities

**Level 1** – All child and family service providers receive training and support to help them approach parents as partners.

**Level 2** – Parent leadership is integrated into every sector of the early childhood system.

**Level 3** – Parent leadership and resident engagement are the established norm throughout the community, including for government and government-funded activities.

### Goal 2.5: Supports are in place for the wellbeing of the early childhood workforce



Critical Infrastructure

**Level 1** – Professional development and workforce supports are provided across sectors to improve quality and reduce turnover.

**Level 2** – A variety of opportunities are available for providers to get support to improve their practice, meet quality standards, and advance their careers.

**Level 3** – Critical issues are being addressed related to the early childhood workforce, including diversity, fair compensation, and career pathways.

### Goal 2.6: Leaders use data to drive change



Critical Infrastructure

**Level 1** – Leaders within and across child- and family-serving systems have agreed on shared language and committed to common outcomes for children and families.

**Level 2** – Agencies and programs share data with each other to advance their work toward shared outcomes.

**Level 3** – Data is used to inform quality improvement efforts across sectors to meet identified needs and reach shared goals.



## Building Block #3: Neighborhoods Where Families Can Thrive

### Goal 3.1: The built environment promotes safety and healthy development

**Level 1** – Plans are in place to tackle neighborhood issues, including green space, adequate housing, and safety concerns identified by families.

**Level 2** – Neighborhood improvement strategies are designed with a focus on residents' priorities and desired outcomes.

**Level 3** – Regardless of neighborhood, residents are regularly consulted by policymakers about how their neighborhoods can better promote safety and healthy development.

### Goal 3.2: Families can access services as well as economic and employment opportunities

**Level 1** – There is an understanding of how public and private investments are currently allocated and where services are available across the community.

**Level 2** – Investments in service expansion, job training, and education are targeted to underserved areas.

**Level 3** – Residents have access to quality services, opportunities for economic mobility and stability, and reliable public transportation, regardless of neighborhood.

### Goal 3.3: Residents feel a sense of belonging and hope within their neighborhoods and connection to the broader community

**Level 1** – Community members are supported to make changes in their own neighborhoods to address identified needs and build a sense of community.

**Level 2** – Leadership incorporates and is responsive to voices of community residents.

**Level 3** – Leaders and policymakers provide support for community-led organizing, prioritizing resident-led change.

## Building Block #4: Policies that Support and Are Responsive to Families

### Goal 4.1: Government and workplace policies support families in raising children

**Level 1** – Local leaders are aware of what public and private supports are currently available to families in the community, who is benefiting from them, and who is not.

**Level 2** – More and more families are benefiting from policies that are designed to improve economic mobility, support caregiving, promote family-friendly workplaces, and ensure that they are able to meet their basic needs.

**Level 3** – Policies are in place to ensure that families receive tangible support to meet their needs and reduce the stress of raising young children.

### Goal 4.2: Policies that govern child and family services are equitable and responsive to families

**Level 1** – Local leaders take families' needs and experiences into account in their administration of federal and state programs and policies.

**Level 2** – Administrative and policy innovations are implemented across sectors to ensure that the needs of all children and families are met.

**Level 3** – Policies are aligned across systems and are responsive to the diverse and changing needs of families.

### Goal 4.3: Land use and community development policies are designed with consideration for how they affect young children and families

**Level 1** – There is an understanding that land use and development affect children and families, including a recognition that such policies have resulted in underinvestment in some neighborhoods.

**Level 2** – Cross-sector efforts ensure the needs of young children and their families are met in every aspect of community design, including housing, transportation, food, health and dental care, and other important systems that serve families.

**Level 3** – A formalized process is in place to take into account the impact on children and families of all land use and community development policies.

## Appendix B

### Assessment Tool Scoring Sheet

Use the Assessment Tool Scoring Sheet to record your ratings of where your community is on its journey to becoming an Early Learning Community and reaching each Goal. You can complete this sheet as you go through the *ELC Action Guide*, or fill it in after you've reviewed the entire guide and made your ratings for each Goal. This is also where you can compile ideas for action steps your community might take to advance to the next level in one or more Goals. Your "suggested action steps" may come from the list of examples given in the *ELC Action Guide* for each level, or it may be something else specific to your community that would help you get closer to that Goal.

Each building block is divided into three to six goals, describing the ideal conditions when that building block is established in a community. These goals are aspirational and, taken together, describe the aspirations of an Early Learning Community. Communities will likely be at different levels for different goals. The levels are meant to be hierarchical so that a community can build on its progress. Utilize the "Notes and Suggested Action Steps" section to go into more detail on your community's current status and what Actions might strengthen your community's effort for that Goal. Use the notes to inform action steps in the Action Plan in **Appendix C**.

**Building Block #1: Community Leadership, Commitment and Public Will to Make Early Childhood a Priority**

**Goal 1.1: Local leaders work together across systems with a focus on early childhood**

 Critical Infrastructure

Not Started

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

**Goal 1.2: The community invests in young children and families**

 Critical Infrastructure

Not Started

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

**Goal 1.3: Community members support and understand the importance of early childhood health, learning, and well-being**

Not Started

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

**Goal 1.4: Families feel a strong sense of community and receive informal supports from their social networks**

Not Started

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

**Goal 1.5: Community resources for children and families are well known, accessible, and easy to use**

Not Started

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

**Notes and Suggested Action Steps:**

**Building Block #2: Quality Services that Work for All Young Children and their Families**

**Goal 2.1: Families have access to high-quality, basic services that proactively promote healthy development, early learning, family strengths, and early relational health**

Not Started       Level 1       Level 2       Level 3

**Goal 2.2: All children receive routine screening, identification, referral, and linkage for risks and needs**

Not Started       Level 1       Level 2       Level 3

**Goal 2.3: Children and families have timely access to the continuum of more intensive and specific services when needed**

Not Started       Level 1       Level 2       Level 3

**Goal 2.4: Families and parents are actively engaged as partners and valued experts on their children, families, and communities**

Not Started       Level 1       Level 2       Level 3

**Goal 2.5: Supports are in place for the wellbeing of the early childhood workforce**  Critical Infrastructure

Not Started       Level 1       Level 2       Level 3

**Goal 2.6: Leaders use data to drive change**  Critical Infrastructure

Not Started       Level 1       Level 2       Level 3

**Notes and Suggested Action Steps:**

**Building Block #3: Neighborhoods Where Families Can Thrive**

**Goal 3.1: The built environment promotes safety and healthy development**

Not Started  | Level 1  | Level 2  | Level 3

**Goal 3.2: Families can access services as well as economic and employment opportunities**

Not Started  | Level 1  | Level 2  | Level 3

**Goal 3.3: Residents feel a sense of belonging and hope within their neighborhoods and connection to the broader community**

Not Started  | Level 1  | Level 2  | Level 3

**Notes and Suggested Action Steps:**

**Building Block #4: Policies that Support and Are Responsive to Families**

**Goal 4.1: Government and workplace policies support families in raising children**

Not Started

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

**Goal 4.2: Policies that govern child and family services are equitable and responsive to families**

Not Started

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

**Goal 4.3: Land use and community development policies are designed with consideration for how they affect young children and families**

Not Started

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

**Notes and Suggested Action Steps:**

## Appendix C

### Action Planning Template

This action planning template is designed to help local early childhood stakeholders move from completing the *Early Learning Community Assessment Tool* to making changes in their community. Keeping the guiding vision and guiding values in mind, stakeholders should come together to select action steps to be taken in the next 6-12 months—informed by the community context, what has already been done, where there is the greatest need, where there is the most support or momentum, what resources are available, and other local considerations.

Everyone involved in the action planning process should have a shared understanding of the vision for the community, the current reality, and the reasons for coming together to do this work. It is also important for stakeholders to think about the commitment they are willing to make toward achieving the vision, and understand the commitments others are willing to make.

**1. As a group, consider whether to adopt or modify the guiding vision, core outcomes, and guiding values from the *Early Learning Community Action Guide*. This may include switching to language that has already been adopted and used in the community, or adding concepts that are not represented in the ELC Action Guide.**

From the <i>ELC Action Guide</i>	Local additions or edits
<p><b>Guiding Vision</b></p> <p>The vision of an Early Learning Community is one where all young children get a great start, setting the foundation for lifelong success and well-being.</p>	
<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All new and expectant parents and young children are healthy.</li> <li>• All children are ready to thrive in school.</li> <li>• All children live in strong, positive, and nurturing families and communities.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Guiding Values</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equity</li> <li>• Parent Voice</li> <li>• Accountability</li> </ul>	

**2. Consider other important baseline questions:**

How are you defining the community that is working on becoming an Early Learning Community?

Who is involved in implementing this action plan?

What is the timeline for this action plan, and when will it be re-visited?

How will you ensure that this action plan is implemented in a way that promotes thriving for all young children and reduces disparities between groups in the community?

What resources are available (funding, staff time, venues, etc.) to support the implementation of this action plan?



3. **Develop your action plan. This template prompts stakeholders to think through details that will make those action steps real: timeline, responsible party, resources needed, milestones, and markers of success.**

<b>Early Learning Community Action Plan</b>			
<b>Building Block(s) / Goal(s)</b>	<b>Action</b> (Broken into smaller steps if needed)	<b>Resources Needed</b>	<b>Lead Person / Organization</b>

**Early Learning Community Action Plan (continued)**

<b>Timeline</b> (Start and end dates)	<b>Milestones</b>	<b>Markers of Success</b>

**Early Learning Community Action Plan: EXAMPLE**

<b>Building Block(s) / Goal(s)</b>	<b>Action</b> (Broken into smaller steps if needed)	<b>Resources Needed</b>	<b>Lead Person / Organization</b>
2.1, 3.2	<p>Support new and informal care providers in ABC neighborhood to become licensed</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Translate outreach and licensing materials into Spanish and Vietnamese</li> <li>2. Pay community liaisons to do outreach at playgrounds, library, housing development</li> </ol>	<p>\$1,500 (\$1,000 from city + \$500 still to be raised)</p> <p>Community liaisons (Spanish speaking and Vietnamese)</p> <p>CCR&amp;R staff to support new providers</p>	<p>Child care resource &amp; referral</p>

**Early Learning Community Action Plan: EXAMPLE (continued)**

<b>Timeline</b> (Start and end dates)	<b>Milestones</b>	<b>Markers of Success</b>
Jan-June 2025	Materials translated by Feb. 1  Community liaisons engaged by March 1	At least 5 new providers and 5 current informal providers in ABC neighborhood begin work toward licensing

## Appendix D

### Glossary and Resources

Welcome to the glossary and resources appendix. This appendix provides definitions and resources for highlighted key terms used throughout the *ELC Action Guide and Assessment Tool*. This glossary is designed to enhance the reader's understanding of each term and their context within the *ELC Action Guide and Assessment Tool* and how suggestions can be implemented in different communities. Most terms include references that can provide further reading on the key term.

### Blend and Braid Funding:

Blended and braided funding both involve combining two or more sources (or “streams”) of funding to support a service. Braided funding pools multiple funding streams toward one purpose while separately tracking and reporting on each source of funding. Blended funding combines, or “comingles,” multiple funding streams for one purpose without continuing to differentiate or track individual sources.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Blended and Braided Funding.” Urban Institute, Accessed at: January 2024. <https://workforce.urban.org/node/57.html#:~:text=Braided%20funding%20pools%20multiple%20funding,differentiate%20or%20track%20individual%20sources>

### Built Environment:

The human-made structures and surroundings where people live, work and play and how they travel. The built environment touches all aspects of our lives, encompassing the buildings we live in, the distribution systems that provide us with water and electricity, and the roads, bridges, and transportation systems we use to get from place to place. In addition, other components of the built environment which affect human health: air quality, ambient noise (noise pollution), land use and development patterns, public spaces, and access to green spaces.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. “Basic Information about the Built Environment.” United States Environmental Protection Agency, February 2023. Available at: <https://www.epa.gov/smm/basic-information-about-built-environment>
2. Gelormino E, Melis G, Marietta C, Costa G. From built environment to health inequalities: An explanatory framework based on evidence. *Prev Med Rep.* 2015 Sep 4; p. 737–745. Available at: [doi: 10.1016/j.pmedr.2015.08.019](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2015.08.019)

### Caregiver:

For the purposes of this Action Guide, a caregiver is a person who regularly looks after another person who cannot care fully for themselves independently. A caregiver might provide care to a child, or a person with impairments related to old age, temporary or long term disability, a disease, or other condition. Caregivers provide instrumental, tangible, and emotional care and support activities of daily living and functions necessary for promoting health and well-being. Caregivers who are members of a care recipient’s family or social network, and who may have no specific professional training, are often described as informal caregivers. Please note, a caregiver is different from a **care provider**, an individual or organization that has training and is often paid to provide health care services.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. “Caregiver Law and Legal Definition.” USLegal, Accessed in March 2024. Available at: <https://definitions.uslegal.com/c/caregiver>
2. “Parents and Caregivers.” Better Care Network, Accessed in January 2024. Available at: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/practitioner-library/human-resources/parents-and-caregivers#:~:text=A%20caregiver%20is%20a%20broader,a%20grandparent%20or%20older%20sibling>

### Care Provider:

Care providers are trained, and often licensed, health care professionals whose responsibility is to diagnose and provide treatments to patients. Care providers can be organizations or people that provide healthcare services such as doctors of medicine, dentists, nurse practitioners, doulas, midwives, and more.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. “45 CFR § 160.103 – Definitions.” Legal Information Institute – Cornell Law School, Accessed in January 2024. Available at: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/45/160.103>
2. “Summary of the HIPAA Privacy Rule.” Health and Human Services, October 2022. Available at: <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/laws-regulations/index.html>

### **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP):**

A federally-funded program administered by the state that provides assistance to child and adult care entities to provide nutritious foods.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Child and Adult Care Food Program.” United States Department of Agriculture, July 2023. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp>

### **Child Care Subsidies:**

A federally funded program that provides assistance to low-income families to pay for child care needs. Eligibility and size of subsidy vary by state.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Child Care Financial Assistance Options.” ChildCare, Accessed in January 2024. Available at: <https://childcare.gov/consumer-education/get-help-paying-for-child-care>

### **Child/Family Impact Statement:**

A tool to determine the impact of a policy on children and families at the policy development stage. The goal is to protect children’s interests in policy making and identify any effects early.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Fact Sheet: Child Impact Statements.” First Focus on Children, September 2021. <https://firstfocus.org/resources/fact-sheet/fact-sheet-child-impact-statements>

### **Child Find:**

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Child Find is the legal requirement that schools find all children who may have a disability and follow the proper referral and evaluation procedures. School districts must have a process to identify and evaluate children who may need early intervention or special education services.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“What is Child Find?” Understood, Accessed in January 2024. Available at: <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/child-find-what-it-is-and-how-it-works>

### **Children in All Policies/Children First:**

An approach to decision making that considers how any one policy or practice change will affect the community’s children.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

Dalglish, Sarah L.; Costello, Anthony; Clark, H.; Coll-Seck, A. (2021). “Children in All Policies 2030: a new initiative to implement the recommendations of the WHO–UNICEF–Lancet Commission”, The Lancet, 2021. Accessible at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)00718-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)00718-2/fulltext)

### **Circle of Parents:**

A parent support group model where anyone in a parenting role can share ideas, resources, successes and challenges.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“About Circle of Parents: Overview.” Circle of Parents, Accessed in January 2024. Available at: <http://circleofparents.org>

## Community:

In this guide, community is used in the formal sense—a city, town, village, county, or other geographic and politically defined area. In this sense, community is the physical and geographical spaces in which children and families live. It determines the availability, access, and use of formal services and informal resources that families have. This term is also used to refer to relational communities, within and beyond an immediate geographical and living environment, which consist of a group with shared interests, practices, or identifications that foster a sense of community.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. “Community connections for children: family, friends, neighbours and local organisations.” Raising Children, December 2022. Available at: <https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/connecting-communicating/connecting/helping-your-child-connect-with-others>
2. “Section 2. Understanding and Describing the Community.” Community Toolbox, Accessed in January 2024. Available at: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/describe-the-community/main>

## Community Asset Mapping:

A strength-based approach to community development. The goal of asset mapping is to document a community’s existing resources, incorporating these strengths into community development work. It can help identify where disparities exist, and begin a conversation about how resources can be used, leveraged and/or built upon to address community needs.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Participatory Asset Mapping: A Community Research Lab Toolkit.” Healthy City, April 2012. Accessed in March 2024. Available at: <https://communityscience.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AssetMappingToolkit.pdf>

## Community Navigators/Promotoras:

A community member trained to help individuals navigate the human services and health systems to get the services they need.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Community Navigators.” National Partnership for New Americans, Accessed in January 2024. Available at: <https://partnershipfornewamericans.org/community-navigators>

## Community Member(s):

Throughout the guide, community members refer to all who live, learn, work, play, and pray in a community, and extends to include members of relational communities that make up families’ networks. Children and families belong to relational communities that consist of a variety of community members, whether it is friends at childcare, parent peers on the sports fields or online, multi-generational connections in churches, extended families, or wider communities built around shared language, or racial, religious, national, LGBTQ+ identities, and more. Relationships with community members contribute to a sense of belonging and affirming the social and cultural identities of adults and children.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. “Community connections for children: family, friends, neighbours and local organisations.” Raising Children, December 2022. Available at: <https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/connecting-communicating/connecting/helping-your-child-connect-with-others>
2. “Community Members.” County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, Accessed in January 2024. Available at: <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/take-action-to-improve-health/partner-center/community-members#:~:text=They%20include%20all%20who%20live,person%20who%20gets%20things%20done>



### **Developmental Screening:**

A way to monitor a child’s developmental milestones and assess whether a child may need services to support their development. A number of tools are available for parents, physicians, or other care providers to assess a child’s development, such as the Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ).

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Developmental Monitoring and Screening.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2023. Available at: [https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/screening.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fncbddd%2Fchilddevelopment%2Fscreening.html](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/screening.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fncbddd%2Fchilddevelopment%2Fscreening.html)

### **Early Care and Education (Early Childhood Education):**

The formal and informal education programs that guide the growth and development of children from birth to age 5. The purpose of early childhood education is to provide children with a foundation that helps them develop the emotional, social, and cognitive skills needed to become lifelong learners throughout preschool years and as children transition to kindergarten.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“What is early childhood education and why is it so important? Understanding its impact.” University of Massachusetts Global. Accessed in January 2024. Available at: <https://www.umassglobal.edu/news-and-events/blog/what-is-purpose-of-early-childhood-education>

### **Early Childhood:**

Early childhood is a pivotal period of child development that begins before birth and goes through age 8. This is a period of rapid and key brain and body development. Healthy development and support during this period provides the building blocks for educational achievement, economic productivity, responsible citizenship, lifelong health, strong communities, and successful parenting of the next generation. In this guide, we refer to an investment in early childhood as investment in funding and resources towards early childhood systems and improving outcomes for young children and their families. For a definition of early childhood systems, refer to its glossary entry.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Early Childhood.” American Academy of Pediatrics, Accessed in March 2024. Available at: <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/early-childhood>

### **Early Childhood Health:**

Health is a foundational aspect of an individual’s ability to develop, learn, and thrive, and early childhood health lays the foundation for future healthy development. Early childhood health is the extent to which individual children are able or enabled to (a) develop and realize their developmental potential, (b) have their needs met and learn to meet their needs, and (c) develop the capacities that allow them to interact successfully with their biological, physical, and socio-emotional environments. Children’s health and well-being is influenced by a variety of factors, including family characteristics, community dynamics, and other social determinants of health. All aspects of health and development work together to inform a child’s overall well-being. Healthy children live in families, environments, and communities that provide the opportunity to reach their fullest developmental potential. It is important to note that health is not merely the absence of disease and infirmity.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. “Child Health – Definition.” First Things First, October 2007. Available at: [Child Health Definition \(aztf.gov\)](#)
2. “Children’s Health, The Nation’s Wealth: Assessing and Improving Child Health.” National Research Council (US); Institute of Medicine (US), 2004. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK92198>
3. “Overview of Early Childhood Health Promotion.” Rural Health Information Hub, February 2021. Available at: [Overview of Early Childhood Health Promotion – RHInfo Toolkit \(ruralhealthinfo.org\)](#)

### **Early Childhood System:**

The network of services and entities that reach children from prenatal development to age 8 and their families in a given community or state, including early care and education; health and mental health; and family supports. An early childhood system contains: (1) interdependent policies, programs, services, and infrastructure; (2) all child- and family-serving systems—such as early learning, health, housing, economic development, and transportation; (3) connections of each of these elements to each other.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. “Early Childhood System Performance Toolkit.” Center for Study of Social Policy, 2021. Available at: <https://cssp.org/resource/early-childhood-system-performance-assessment-toolkit>.
2. “What is an Early Childhood System?” Build Initiative. Available at: <https://buildinitiative.org/approach/early-childhood-system>.

### **Early Intervention:**

The system of services that support young children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“What is “Early Intervention”?” Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/parents/states.html>

### **Early Learning Community (ELC):**

An Early Learning Community (ELC) is a city, town, village, or county that promotes learning and development prenatally through the early years of elementary school so that all children can thrive. While communities vary greatly by history, culture, demographics, and geography, all Early Learning Communities stand on four key “building blocks”—that is, community characteristics and actions that promote healthy child development and family well-being: (1) Community leadership, commitment, and public will to make early childhood a priority, (2) Quality services that work for all young children and their families, (3) Neighborhoods where families can thrive, and (4) Policies that support and are responsive to families.

### **Early Relational Health:**

Early Relational Health is the state of emotional well-being that grows from emotional connection between babies and toddlers and their parents and caregivers when they experience strong, positive, and nurturing relationships with each other. Early Relational Health is foundational to children’s healthy growth and development and their parents’ and caregivers’ sense of competence, connection, and overall well-being. These strong and enduring relationships also help to protect the family from the harmful effects of stress.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Early Relational Health Explained.” Nurture Connection, Accessed in March 2024. Available at: <https://nurtureconnection.org/early-relational-health/early-relational-health-explained>

### **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC):**

A federal tax benefit for low to moderate-income working people. EITC reduces the amount of tax owed.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).” Internal Revenue Service, 2023. Available at: <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/earned-income-tax-credit-eitc>

### **Equity in Early Childhood Systems:**

Every child receives what they need to be developmentally on track and prepare for kindergarten and life. Historically, access to high-quality care, education and other services has been lower in low-income neighborhoods. Equity would ensure that all children, regardless of race, socio-economic level, and ability, have access to and knowledge of high-quality providers.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement.” National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2019. Available at: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity>

## Family:

A unit with a kinship bond made up of a group of two or more people bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, legal and/or biological ties. Families can have a variety of structures, and be biologically tied, or “family of choice” (chosen family) bound together by ongoing social support. Families play a significant role in individual’s lives and assume key responsibilities and primary functions for their family.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. Definition of Family. The Vanier Institute of the Family. Accessed in March 2024: <https://vanierinstitute.ca/definition-of-family>
2. “Family of choice.” Accessed in March 2024: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family\\_of\\_choice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_of_choice)
3. Sharma, Rahul. “The Family and Family Structure Classification Redefined for the Current Times.” Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care, 2013. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4649868>

## Family Resource Centers:

A neighborhood-based facility where families can access formal and informal support, such as parenting education programs, job training, health and mental health services, child care, literacy and other city or county services.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Do place-based programs, such as Family Resource Centers, reduce risk of child maltreatment and entry into foster care?” Casey Family Programs, 2019. Available at: <https://www.casey.org/family-resource-centers>

## Family Team Meetings:

Planning and decision-making meetings with trained facilitators to determine goals, identify strengths and areas for improvement, and find solutions to keep children safe and promote their well-being within a supportive family. Participants in Family Team Meetings may include parents, service providers and members of the family’s informal support network, depending on the specific model being used.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“2007 Quick Reference Guide: Family Team Meetings.” Child and Family Services Agency, 2007. Available at: <https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/QRG%20-%20Family%20Team%20Meetings%28H%29.pdf>

## Health in All Policies:

An approach to decision making that considers how any one policy or practice change will affect the overall health of people in a community.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Health in All Policies.” Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/policy/hiap/index.html>

### High Quality Services:

Definitions of quality may vary depending on the type of service being provided (e.g., a high-quality early care and education program vs. a high-performing medical home), and families may prioritize different aspects of quality depending on their own preferences and frame of reference. Broadly speaking, high-quality services in early childhood are those that “go beyond basic health and safety requirements to provide warm, responsive relationships..., stimulating and developmentally appropriate curricula [or guidance], and ongoing training for educators [and other providers]”; a high-performing medical home “provide[s] care coordination capable of responding to both bio-medical and social risks and conditions.”

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. Johnson, Kay and Charles Bruner. “A Sourcebook on Medicaid’s Role in Early Childhood: Advancing High Performing Medical Homes and Improving Lifelong Health.” Child and Policy Family Policy Center, October 2018. Available at: [https://www.inckmarks.org/docs/pdfs\\_for\\_Medicaid\\_and\\_EPSDT\\_page/SourcebookMEDICAIDYOUNGCHILDRENALL.pdf](https://www.inckmarks.org/docs/pdfs_for_Medicaid_and_EPSDT_page/SourcebookMEDICAIDYOUNGCHILDRENALL.pdf)
2. Schoch, Annie D., et al. “Children’s Learning and Development Benefits from High-Quality Early Care and Education: A Summary of the Evidence.” Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, November 8, 2023. Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/childrens-learning-and-development-benefits-high-quality-early-care-and-education>
3. Workman, Simon and Rebecca Ullrich. “Quality 101: Identifying the Core Components of a High-Quality Early Childhood Program.” Center for American Progress, February 13, 2017. Available at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/quality-101-identifying-the-core-components-of-a-high-quality-early-childhood-program>

### Home Visiting Program:

Programs that bring trained home visitors to support expectant parents and parents of children 0-5 in their own homes. Services can include providing information on child development, health and well-being as well as supporting and building the capacity of parents. A home visitor may also connect parents to other services and resources available in the community. Program structure varies widely depending on the implementing entity and the program model.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

Lewy, Daniela and Armelle Casau. “Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Maternal and Child Health Through Home Visiting Programs.” Center for Healthcare Strategies, October 2021. Available at: <https://www.chcs.org/resource/addressing-racial-and-ethnic-disparities-in-maternal-and-child-health-through-home-visiting-programs>

### Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C:

A federal grant program, part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to assist states in implementing statewide early intervention services for infants and toddlers, ages birth through 3, with disabilities and their families.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“IDEA Part C: Early Learning and Early Childhood.” U.S. Department of Education, December 13, 2023. Available at: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/early-learning-early-childhood>

### Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:

A consultation by a trained mental health professional with an early childhood teacher/provider focused on an individual child or on entire classroom environments to “infuse activities and interactions that promote healthy social and emotional development, and to prevent, identify, or reduce mental health challenges.”

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: A Briefing Paper.” ZERO TO THREE, August 2, 2017. Available at: <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/infant-and-early-childhood-mental-health-consultation-a-briefing-paper>

### **Local (Community) Leaders:**

Local leaders and decision makers play an important role in addressing community needs and setting priorities, providing overarching policy direction, and bringing stakeholders. Elected officials, school superintendents/ administrators and teachers, business and civic leaders can be local leaders, but the term is not limited to any professional roles. Local leaders are individuals invested in local community development, who use leadership strategies to reach other community members and navigate local challenges, community needs and concerns, and opportunities for innovation and improvement.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Building Community Resilience by Integrating Hazard Mitigation: The Role of Local Leadership.” FEMA, 2020. Available at: <https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/building-community-resilience-local-leadership.pdf>

### **Marginalized:**

Marginalization occurs when members of a dominant group relegate members of a particular group to the edge of society, excluding them based on a perceived difference from the dominant group and not allowing them an active and equal voice, role, identity, or place within the shared society. Marginalization is discrimination, and includes treating a person or group differently, whether it’s through dismissal, isolation, and/or disempowerment.

Marginalization is a result of inequitable distribution of social, economic, cultural, or political opportunities and resources. Marginalized groups have been historically distanced from access to power and resources. For example, in 1935, the U.S. passed the Social Security Act, which included welfare benefits of unemployment and social security. The act excluded individuals who worked on farms or as domestic help, jobs disproportionately held by African Americans and other people of color at the time. This marginalization of specific laborers deprived them of equal access to social security resources, and reinforced a longstanding legacy of racial and economic discrimination in the US.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. “The Impact of Institutional Racism on Maternal and Child Health.” National Institute for Children’s Health Equity. Available at: <https://nichq.org/insight/impact-institutional-racism-maternal-and-child-health>
2. National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. “Glossary of essential health equity terms.” National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health, St. Francis Xavier University, 2022. Available at: <https://nccdh.ca/learn/glossary>
3. “What Does Marginalized Mean and Why Does it Matter?” CultureAlly. Available at: <https://www.cultureally.com/blog/what-does-marginalized-mean-and-why-does-it-matter>

### **Mutual Aid:**

A voluntary exchange of services and resources between members of society for mutual benefit. In this way, people are able to build new social relationships, give what they can and receive what they need.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

Wex Definitions Team. “mutual aid.” Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School, April 2022. Available at: [https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/mutual\\_aid](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/mutual_aid)

### **No Wrong Door Approach:**

A holistic model to provide services that allows a family to approach any agency and receive the programs or services they need. Every entry point is a universal “door” to community services and government programs.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

The Governing Institute. “No Wrong Door: A Holistic Approach to Human Services.” The Governing Institute, 2016. Available at: <https://papers.governing.com/No-Wrong-Door-A-Holistic-Approach-to-Human-Services-73108.html>

### Parent:

For the purposes of this Action Guide, we would like to emphasize that parents come in many forms and we hope to use the broadest possible interpretation: a caring adult entrusted with caregiving and raising a child. Parenting involves child rearing and supporting the physical, emotional, social, cultural, and cognitive development of a child. Parenting includes the intricacies of raising a child and is not exclusively tied to a biological relationship with the child. A parent can have different relational ties to a child, and can include family kin, legal guardians, close family friends or chosen family, caregivers, child care providers, and/or role models with close ties to the family and community. In short, a “parent” is a caring adult entrusted with the raising of a child and primary care of that child, and can be family members or formal and informal caregivers.

#### SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. Brooks, Jane. *The Process of Parenting: Ninth Edition*. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2012.
2. Suskind, Dana. *Parent Nation: Unlocking Every Child's Potential, Fulfilling Society's Promise*. New York: Dutton, 2022.

### Parent Cafes/Community Cafes:

A series of structured small group conversations that bring parents together to discuss issues important to them. The goal is to directly engage parents in building protective factors needed to prevent maltreatment and promote healthy outcomes for children.

#### SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Insider’s Guide To Strengthening Families Through Protective Factors.” Be Strong Families. Available at: <https://info.bestrongfamilies.org/strengthening-families-through-protective-factors>

### Parents Anonymous:

A family strengthening organization focused on parent leadership and mutual support where parents and caregivers come together to create positive change, improve family functioning and provide emotional support to each other in a safe and caring environment.

#### SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. “About Us.” Parents Anonymous. Available at: <https://parentsanonymous.org/about-us>
2. Burnson, Cynthia, et al. “The Impact of Parents Anonymous on Child Safety and Permanency.” *Children and Youth Services Review*, 124, May 2021. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740921000529>

### Participatory Budget Process:

A process of democratic decision-making in which residents decide how to allocate a portion of the public budget in a city allowing them to identify public spending projects and giving them power to direct how the money is spent.

#### SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. “Participatory Budgeting: Next Generation Democracy.” Participatory Budgeting Project, August 2016. Available at: [https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/PBP\\_whitepaper\\_2016.9.20.pdf](https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/PBP_whitepaper_2016.9.20.pdf)
2. Yancy, Curtis. “Community Fund: A Participatory Grantmaking Case Study.” Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, January 23, 2023. Available at: <https://participatorygrantmaking.issuehub.org/resource/community-fund-a-participatory-grantmaking-case-study.html>

### **Participatory Grantmaking:**

A collaborative funding approach that shifts power from funders to impacted communities through the grantmaking process. By engaging directly impacted community members in funding decision-making, from defining grant criteria to awarding funds, participatory grantmaking prioritizes community voice and builds trust.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. Gibson, Cynthia. "Deciding Together: Shifting Power And Resources Through Participatory Grantmaking." Foundation Center, 2018. Available at: [https://learningforfunders.candid.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/12/DecidingTogether\\_Final\\_20181002.pdf](https://learningforfunders.candid.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/12/DecidingTogether_Final_20181002.pdf)
2. Gibson, Cynthia. "Participatory Grantmaking: Has Its Time Come?" Ford Foundation, October 2017. Available at: [https://www.fordfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/participatory\\_grantmaking-lmv7.pdf](https://www.fordfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/participatory_grantmaking-lmv7.pdf)
3. Kabia, John. "Fund 101: Intro To Participatory Grant-Making." Fund for Global Human Rights, February 25, 2021. Available at: <https://globalhumanrights.org/commentary/fund-101-intro-to-participatory-grant-making>

### **Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS):**

A system to rate the quality of early care and education providers to educate the public about the relative quality and adherence to safety and program standards by the provider. The ratings are also used to encourage providers to undertake continuous quality improvement of their programs, which can include professional development, trainings and financial incentives to achieve higher levels of quality.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

"QRIS Resource Guide Section 1: About QRIS." National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, December 2018. Available at: [https://ecquality.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/1812\\_Section\\_1\\_About\\_QRIS\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ecquality.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/1812_Section_1_About_QRIS_FINAL.pdf)

### **Results:**

In this guide, results refers to the outlined, three broad sets of desired outcomes for early learning communities to strive for and collaboratively build towards achieving. The combined results describe the "Guiding Vision" goal of ensuring that all children thrive, and are defined as universal goals that all early learning communities need to work towards as a benchmark of equitable outcomes for young children and their families. When these results are focused on and investment is made to sustain these efforts, communities benefit as a whole.

### **Shared Services:**

Shared services models in the early childhood field are a way for early care and education (ECE) providers to share some of the business functions of an ECE operation, including joint purchasing, staff sharing, centralized administration or coordinating program or capacity building including professional development, sharing tools and systems or continuous improvement processes.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

Early Learning Challenge Technical Assistance (ELC TA) Program "Shared Services as a Strategy to Support Child Care Providers." AEM Corporation, 2016. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED583847.pdf>

### **Talk Read Sing:**

An early literacy campaign with tools and resources to encourage parents and families to talk, read and sing to babies and young children every day.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

"Talk, Read, and Sing Together Every Day!" Administration for Children & Families, May 8, 2017. Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/talk-read-and-sing-together-every-day>

### **Thrive:**

Children and young people thrive “when they are developmentally supported across all sectors of the community—school, youth serving agencies, faith organizations, community governance, business... and more.” We extend our definition of thrive to include support and learning across multiple domains of development—physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and language.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

Whitlock, Janis. “Understanding Youth Development Principles and Practices.” ACT for Youth Upstate Center of Excellence, September 2004, p. 1. Available at: [https://actforyouth.net/resources/rf/rf\\_understandyd\\_0904.pdf](https://actforyouth.net/resources/rf/rf_understandyd_0904.pdf)

### **Trauma-informed Policies and Practices:**

An approach to care and services that takes into consideration the wide impact trauma can have on children and families in their care and supports them in their path to recovery. Providers who follow trauma-informed practices work to integrate appropriate responses into their interactions to promote recovery and resilience among communities impacted by trauma. Trauma can stem from chronic conditions (such as living in poverty or consistently experiencing racism) as well as from one-time experiences (such as losing a loved one to violence or being the victim of a crime). Many members of a community can also experience trauma as a result of community conditions or shared experiences.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Fact Sheet: Health Disparities and Stress.” American Psychological Association, 2012. Available at: <https://www.apa.org/topics/racism-bias-discrimination/health-disparities-stress>

### **Two-generation Strategies:**

An approach to providing services that addresses needs of both the child and caregiver. It can include a range of services including family-centered services, child-centered services, and adult-centered services. They often work to build the capacity of adults to care for children; provide ways to improve their education, work and economic opportunities; and build the strengths and resilience of families.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“Two-Generation Approaches.” U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, 2016. Available at: <https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/kindergarten2genratnappro.pdf>

### **Underserved and Under-resourced:**

These terms refer to groups and communities who share a particular characteristic—demographic, geographic, or other factor—that results in them being systematically denied full access to a resource (for example, an area that lacks clean water and/or a specific school system that is reliability under-funded). The term(s) also refer to when groups of people or communities are not equitably served by specific programs, initiatives, infrastructure, or systems.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. “Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication—Key Principles.” Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed in January 2024. Available at: [https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Health\\_Equity.html](https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Health_Equity.html)
2. “Key Concepts in Health Equity.” Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Accessed in October 2023. Available at: <https://www.cms.gov/priorities/innovation/key-concept/health-equity>

### **Vroom:**

A set of tools and resources to provide families with messages and tips to use everyday moments to improve cognitive, social, and emotional development of young children.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

“About.” Vroom, Accessed in March 2024. Available at: <https://www.vroom.org/about>



### Warm Handoff:

A referral during which one provider introduces the client to another provider in person and in real time. The client can hear the information exchanged between providers. It engages the client in the process, improves communication among all parties, and may encourage follow through by all parties.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

"Warm Handoff: Intervention." Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2023. Available at: <https://www.ahrq.gov/patient-safety/reports/engage/interventions/warmhandoff.html>

### Well-being:

With reference to a person or community, well-being refers to the state of being healthy, happy, or prosperous; physical, psychological, or moral welfare. Well-being can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives and wellness as a whole.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. Michaelson, Juliet; Mahony, Sorch; Schifferes, Jonathan. "Measuring Well-being: A guide for practitioners." New Economics Foundation, 2012. Available at: <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/measuring-wellbeing.pdf>
2. "Well-being." Oxford English Dictionary, Accessed in March 2024. Available at: [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/well-being\\_n?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/well-being_n?tab=meaning_and_use)

### Workforce Registries:

State-based systems that are intended to record the educational and training data of early care and education workers, including teachers, administrators, directors, owners, trainers, and coaches. They also provide information on available trainings and professional development opportunities for the ECE workforce and offer a way for providers and teachers to keep track of their qualifications and credentials.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

"Evolution of the Child Care Workforce Registry." The National Workforce Registry Alliance, 2021. Available at: <https://www.registryalliance.org/evolution-of-childcare-workforce-registry>

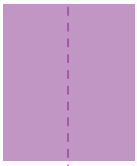
### Young Children:

Children in the period of early childhood development, defined by the American Academy of Pediatrics as a pivotal period of growth beginning before birth through approximately age 8. Although developmental periods do not rigidly correspond to chronological age, early childhood is a critical stage for young children to acquire the building blocks for later growth in various developmental domains. The main domains of development include physical, cognitive, language, and social-emotional.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE:

1. "Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) Position Statement." National Association for the Education of Young Children, Accessed in January 2024. Available at: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/dap/glossary>
2. "Early Childhood Health and Development." American Academy of Pediatrics. Accessed in January 2024. Available at: <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/early-childhood/early-childhood-health-and-development>

**Notes**





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