

2.5 Capacity Building

Level at which the system supports professional development and organizational capacity building

Purpose

A strong early childhood system encompasses a variety of high-quality, interconnected child- and family-serving programs and agencies, staffed by skilled professionals. The early childhood system can support the quality and breadth of services available in the community and enhance the ability of those services to meet families' needs by supporting professional development within and across sectors and by supporting organizational capacity-building.

Definition

Communities conduct a self-assessment of how well the early childhood system as a whole supports professional development and organizational capacity building, rating the system's performance on several topics in these two broad areas, defined as:

Professional Development: Activities, including but not limited to training, mentoring, and supervision, that develop workers' skills, knowledge, expertise, and other characteristics that assist individuals to do their jobs well and advance in their careers. In an early childhood system, professional development also offers opportunities to help workers build relationships and knowledge of each other's programs and services in order to better serve children and families.

Organizational Capacity Building: Activities that support organizations within the early childhood system to improve their organizational functioning, reach, effectiveness, and sustainability, such as facilitating strategic planning and board development or improving organizations' ability to gather and use data. This can include pooling resources and sharing opportunities across organizations and sectors to enhance the capacity of the system as a whole.

Communities can use the preliminary model tool provided below to gather information and stakeholder opinion about this measure. Taking into account the ratings for each of the questions in the survey, communities then assign themselves an overall rating of Level 1 (little or no coordinated professional development or capacity building) through Level 4 (extensive cross-sector professional development and prioritization of capacity building). Assigning a level provides a baseline for ongoing assessments of system coordination, facilitates system-wide target setting, and offers an easily understood way to convey the status of the system on this performance measure to funders or policymakers. The detailed results of the survey can help systems identify specific areas of weakness and objectives to address those weaknesses, which will lead to overall improvement in the level over time.

Implementation

Tool or Survey

The tool at the end of this section is preliminary; communities will want to consider the elements within this model and innovate or customize. Communities may want to start with just professional development or just capacity building.

Summary of Steps

- 1. Set intention:** Determine what the community's goals are around using professional development and capacity building. Define the level at which you are conducting this assessment—initiative-based, sector-based, or system-wide.
- 2. Determine stakeholders:** Define the stakeholder group to participate in self-assessment process. See Stakeholder section below.
- 3. Context-setting:** Set the context with stakeholder group so they understand the purpose of the tool, the implementation process, and how the results will be used. Have a clear, shared vision for your goals in using this tool.
- 4. Share tool:** Share the self-assessment tool and have everyone complete in advance of meeting(s).
- 5. Meet:** Meet with stakeholder groups either as a full group or in a series of meetings with discrete components/sub-systems of the early childhood system.
- 6. Rate:** Assign numeric scores aligned with the level definitions for each component of professional development and organizational capacity in the self-assessment tool.
- 7. Interpret:** Communities should interpret results using question prompts provided in the Interpreting Results section.
- 8. Plan:** Determine what action should be taken as a result of the analysis, and record in action planning guide. Use this assessment as an entrée to a larger conversation to support system building efforts.

Stakeholders

Target Sectors

An early childhood system can benefit from improved professional development and capacity building across all sectors, but communities may want to think about reaching out to specific sectors that would benefit most from robust and coordinated professional development and capacity building.

Roles For Different Groups of Stakeholders

In general, communities will need to identify the following:

Lead agency: We expect that most often the lead will be a staff member in an organization that coordinates the early childhood system, which has some convening power and strong partnerships with other stakeholders.

Stakeholder group: A stakeholder group to participate in the process should include both leaders and front-line service providers within individual sectors and programs.

Parents: The key participants for implementing this measure are system leaders and front-line staff, but communities may seek parent input on perceptions of provider skills, knowledge, cultural competence, and other aspects of high-quality professional service delivery. For this measure, parents would be most effectively engaged through targeted focus groups or a survey. These instruments would need to be developed.

Data Sources

This measure collects data through a self-assessment tool and does not require gathering and analyzing other secondary data sources. However, communities may draw from existing data sources such as professional development systems and registries, career development systems, and quality rating improvement systems as inputs into your self-assessment process.

Tips for Successful Implementation

- ▶ This assessment is designed to be done with a system-level perspective. That is, the question is not whether a particular entity (such as the early childhood coordinating council or its equivalent) *provides* all of this capacity-building support, but whether these supports are available to the programs, services, and sectors that make up the early childhood system.
- ▶ There may be significant differences between organizations or between sectors within the early childhood system in terms

of how well either professional development or organizational capacity-building are supported. Note the strengths, and try to apply lessons and resources from the areas that are strong to raise the capacity in other organizations or sectors to benefit the system as a whole.

Limitations

Assessment results identify areas of strength (assets) and areas of opportunity in a community/early childhood system. Some aspects of the tool may be more relevant than others to the system, subsystems, and specific stakeholders.

Resources

- ▶ [Aligning professional development across HV and ECE will contribute to a more cohesive early childhood workforce](#), Lloyd CM, Goldberg J. *Child Trends*, 2018
- ▶ [What is Capacity Building?](#), National Council of Non-Profits

2.5 Capacity Building: Rating Tool

For each topic 1-8 below, we suggest that communities identify:

- ▶ A significant strength and/or recent accomplishment that they can build upon (this could include highlighting one sector that is doing very well that others could join with or replicate);
- ▶ A significant challenge they need to address in order to make further progress;
- ▶ A tentative rating on a four-point scale, as follows:
 - 1—Little or no progress to date
 - 2—Some progress, with commitments from key players to move forward and initial evidence of needed infrastructure being put in place
 - 3—Some accomplishments, involving some, but not all sectors of the early childhood system, with some coordination across sectors and training providers
 - 4—Substantial accomplishments, involving most or all of the sectors of the early childhood system

Topics 1-5: Professional Development

<p>1. Clear career pathways and supports for providers to advance along them, such as scholarships, accessible coursework for working adults, recognition of life experience as a substitute for formal education, and concerted efforts to increase the diversity of the workforce. This may also include efforts to improve compensation and benefits for service providers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge: 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>2. Professional development offerings for service providers, specific to their field of work, type of organization, or population served. These offerings are strongest when they provide CEUs or other credits that support licensing and formal recognition, as well as supports to overcome barriers to participation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge: 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>3. Supervision and coaching for providers to improve quality and support their individual development, such as mentoring, reflective supervision, classroom observation, and other support for implementing new practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge: 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>4. Opportunities for cross-sector professional development on topics that are of interest across multiple fields, such as trauma-informed care, mandated reporting of child abuse and neglect, brain science, or protective factors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge: 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>5. Formal and informal opportunities for service providers to connect with each other, learn about each other's work, and connect with other parts of the early childhood system, in order to better meet the needs of children and families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge: 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>

2.5 Capacity Building: Rating Tool (Continued)

The self-assessment will produce a numerical rating and a set of recommendations for further progress. The numerical rating for the professional development portion of the tool uses the following levels:

Level 1—No coordinated efforts; no sector is thriving in the area of professional development.

Level 2—Some coordination of professional development efforts; isolated sector(s) are doing professional development well.

Level 3—Professional development is supported within multiple sectors of the early childhood system, and there is some coordination of these efforts across multiple sectors.

Level 4—Cross-sector supports are in place for professional development.

Topics 6-8: Organizational Capacity Building

<p>6. Capacity-building grants for organizations, such as for: expanding services, opening new locations, or adding staff to meet identified community needs; developing and implementing new interventions to address gaps; accessing technology; or obtaining provider certification.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge: 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>7. Support for other organizational capacity building efforts needed in the community, such as leadership coaching, board development, investments to improve equity and inclusion, or organizational self-assessment processes (such as readiness for evaluation or readiness for racial equity work).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge: 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>8. Intentional efforts to bridge sectors, agencies, and programs in order to increase the ability of the early childhood system to meet children's and families' needs and to ensure that children and families are not slipping through the cracks, such as navigation supports and collective impact efforts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strength: ▶ Challenge: 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>

The self-assessment will produce a numerical rating and a set of recommendations for further progress. The numerical rating for the capacity building portion of the tool uses the following levels:

Level 1—Very little support is available for organizational capacity building in the community.

Level 2—Some support is available for organizational capacity building, but it is only available to organizations in 1-2 sectors of the early childhood system.

Level 3—Organizational capacity-building opportunities are available for organizations from multiple sectors.

Level 4—Organizational capacity-building is prioritized and opportunities and supports are available for organizations from multiple sectors.