

3.2 Leadership Engagement

Level at which community leadership is engaged in supporting children and families

Purpose

One of the markers of a well-functioning early childhood system is that leaders throughout the community understand the importance of early childhood and are engaged in efforts to make the community more supportive of young children and their families. This tool is designed to help early childhood system leaders: set intentions for the leadership engagement they are seeking; assess how engaged those leaders are in their community's early childhood efforts; identify strengths and areas for growth; and articulate goals and next steps. The tool is designed to be completed by an individual or small group in a leadership or convening role for the early childhood system. When desired, this tool can be used to guide a conversation to gather input from key partners and spur action planning for how to engage new stakeholders in early childhood work or to deepen the engagement of existing partners.

Definition

This tool assesses engagement in early childhood issues by sector. Since communities differ, each must define which sectors and groups should be included in the assessment. The assessment includes the level of actual sector leadership engagement in early childhood issues; the level of desired engagement or engagement goals; sector champions; who still needs to be engaged; and next steps. Possible sectors for assessment inclusion are:

- ▶ Business (e.g., the Chamber of Commerce, large employers in your area, associations of business owners)
- ▶ Non-profit sector (e.g., private human services providers, advocacy groups, intermediary organizations like the United Way)
- ▶ Higher education (e.g., public or private universities, community colleges)
- ▶ Health care (e.g., hospitals, clinics, a local chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, managed care organizations)
- ▶ Faith-based / clergy (e.g., individual clergy members, congregations, interfaith alliances)
- ▶ Elected officials (e.g., mayor, county executive, city council, county board, state and federal representatives)
- ▶ Government agencies (e.g. department of health and human services, department of education)
- ▶ Local philanthropy (e.g., local community foundations, family foundations, major donors, United Way)
- ▶ Service organizations (e.g., Rotary, Junior League, Optimists)
- ▶ Housing (e.g., public housing, private housing developers and owners, shelters, homelessness service providers, affordable housing advocates)

(Note that a different set of questions apply for assessing how well parents are engaged in your community's early childhood system. That assessment is contained in system performance measure 4.1 *Parent Engagement*.)

The tool describes ways that leaders within the sector may demonstrate engagement and commitment, and includes a rating scale for each of those dimensions of engagement, as well as an overall assessment of the sector's engagement. The dimensions of engagement are defined as:

- ▶ *Well represented in early childhood group(s):* Leaders from this sector are members or leaders of one or more groups focused on early childhood and/or convened by early childhood leaders and advocates. This may include sitting on the boards of early-childhood-focused organizations.
- ▶ *Demonstrates commitment to early childhood issues in own work:* Organizations, individual leaders, and/or collaborative groups within the sector have made early childhood a priority; this may include employers that have implemented family-friendly workplace policies.
- ▶ *Devotes resources to early childhood issues:* Organizations, individual leaders, and/or collaborative groups within the sector invest time, space, money, or other resources in work related to early childhood. For example, this might include charitable donations earmarked for early childhood efforts, sponsorship of events, or dedicated staff time.
- ▶ *Efforts are aligned with others:* Whether formally participating in collaborative groups or not, organizations, individual leaders, and/or collaborative groups within the sector are aligning their early childhood efforts with others in the community, an example being signing on to a community-wide effort. The absence of alignment could mean that a sector is investing resources into efforts that do not seem to connect to any other early childhood work in the community, such as a business that provides on-site child care for its employees but is not engaged in community-wide efforts.
- ▶ *Invites participation from the early childhood sector in its own collaboratives and initiatives:* Early childhood leaders and advocates, including parents, are included as members of work groups, invited to speak at events, and/or consulted about decisions in this sector.
- ▶ *Advocates for policy changes:* Organizations, individual leaders, and/or collaborative groups within the sector take a stand on policy issues related to early childhood. This may include signing on to letters or petitions, writing op-eds, speaking out publicly, or lobbying for specific policy changes that benefit young children and their families. All levels of advocacy—whether local, state, or national—are considered.
- ▶ *Overall assessment for this sector's engagement:* Given your rating on each of the dimensions, what is your overall sense of how engaged this sector is in early childhood work?

Participants rate each sector on all seven dimensions of engagement according to a four-level scale from 1 (little or no engagement) to 4 (strong and widespread engagement). If giving a rating of 1 or 2, communities should consider the extent to which this reflects a lack of outreach from the early childhood sector, a lack of response from the other, or a combination of the two.

After considering each sector individually, assess how well your engagement efforts are going across sectors and how well that engagement has led to concrete action to accomplish your early childhood agenda.

Implementation

Tool or Survey

Communities are invited to use the template on the following page for each sector they wish to evaluate, and then to discuss the “overall” questions at the end of the tool.

Summary of Steps

- 1. Set intention:** Decide your community’s goals with respect to measuring leadership engagement.
- 2. Stakeholder engagement:** Identify early childhood system leaders or representatives to participate in the assessment process. With the stakeholder group, affirm or revise intentions. Collectively decide: What does successful engagement look like in our community? What type of engagement would have the greatest impact? Who do we most need to engage?
- 3. Select sectors:** Collectively identify the sectors for assessment. Make a copy of the rating tool on page 47 for each of the sectors to be assessed.
- 4. Complete tool individually (optional):** The early childhood system representatives participating in the assessment may complete the tool individually before meeting and discussing as a group.
- 5. Convene stakeholders:** Convene the group to review individual assessments (if completed in advance), determine consensus assessment, reflect on the results, and determine what to do next with the information/analysis. Identify sectors where early childhood system leaders would like to increase engagement, which may be sectors where engagement is currently low or where it is uneven.

- 6. Plan:** Determine who will reach out to the selected sector(s) and what steps will be taken to initiate or deepen the engagement. Communities can use the action plan template in this toolkit to help plan next steps.

Stakeholders

Leaders of the early childhood system should be involved in this assessment process. Ideally this would be led by someone in a convening or coordinating role for the system, along with close partners.

Data Sources

This performance measure uses a self-assessment tool, which may be completed by individuals in advance of meeting as a group. At the group meeting, participants would arrive at a consensus rating for each dimension for each sector. No additional data sources are needed to complete this assessment.

Limitations

The value of the tool for local communities lies primarily in clarifying the sectors to prioritize for strengthening engagement and the type(s) of additional engagement desired. It is not intended for cross-community comparison since the landscapes differ in terms of sectors, current engagement, desired engagement, resources, priorities, and how early childhood systems are conceptualized.

Opportunities

Additional opportunities include the following:

- ▶ An individual sector score may not represent the range of engagement within a sector. Additional thinking about how to accommodate varied engagement within sectors may help the tool evolve.

3.2 Leadership Engagement: Rating Tool

Make a copy of this page for each of the sectors you are assessing. First, complete questions 1 through 6 for each identified sector in your community using this rating scale:

- 1—Little or no evidence of engagement
- 2—A few strong early examples, not yet widespread
- 3—A significant number of leaders/organizations in this sector demonstrate engagement
- 4—Engagement strong and widespread

Sector: _____

1. Who represents this sector in your community?				
2. Assessment of engagement:				
Well represented in early childhood group(s)	1	2	3	4
Demonstrates commitment to early childhood issues in own work	1	2	3	4
Devotes resources to early childhood issues	1	2	3	4
Invites participation from the early childhood sector in its own collaboratives and initiatives	1	2	3	4
Advocates for policy changes	1	2	3	4
Overall assessment for this sector's engagement	1	2	3	4
3. What do you most want to accomplish in terms of engagement from this sector?				
4. Who are the champions?				
5. Who still needs to be brought along?				
6. What will you do next, and who will do it?				

