

0 Foundations

Partners from multiple sectors in the community are building an aligned early childhood system to improve child and family well-being.

SYSTEM PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR FOUNDATIONS

Measurement	Resources needed	System stakeholder engagement	Data collection requirements	Timeframe
				Level of Effort
Extent to which the three core early childhood sectors are jointly engaged in building an early childhood system	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lead convener• Participation of EC system leaders• Facilitator (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agencies across the system (leaders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online survey• Stakeholder convening	1-4 months Medium effort
Extent to which the key foundational elements for building an early childhood system are in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lead convener• Participation of EC system leaders• Facilitator (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agencies across the system (leaders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online survey• Stakeholder convening	1-2 months Medium effort

0.1 Core Sector Engagement

Level at which key sectors have come together to build an early childhood system

Purpose

An early childhood system, by definition, attempts to connect and integrate the core services used by young children and their families, including healthcare, early learning and development, and family support. This measure allows systems to take stock of how much progress they have made in developing these connections and provides information to support decisions about priorities moving forward. It is likely to be most valuable in the earlier stages of building an early childhood system. More developed systems may want to use measure 3.2, Leadership Engagement, which examines a much wider range of connections, for example, to local businesses, faith-based institutions, and elected officials.

Systems using this measure may also consider a companion measure also designed for use by systems in the early years of developing an early childhood system. Measure 0.2, Infrastructure for System-Building, examines other essential elements of a solid foundation for an early childhood system: a trusted and effective backbone organization; a vision and strategy shared by all of the partners; and an agreed-upon set of aligned activities aimed at achieving that vision.

Definition

This measure provides a tool for a team of system leaders to self-assess the extent to which the three core sectors have come together to form an early childhood system in a given community. These sectors include the following types of services and supports:

- ▶ **Early Learning and Development:** Head Start/Early Head Start, center-based and family-based care, child care subsidy assistance, and early intervention services.
- ▶ **Health:** pediatric and maternal physical and behavioral health services, with particular attention to the clinic- and hospital-based or affiliated practices that serve the largest numbers of families with low incomes.
- ▶ **Family Support:** home visiting and other family support services, family resource centers, parent education and playgroups, housing support (subsidies and homelessness prevention and intervention), and income supports (TANF, WIC, etc.).

Implementation

Tool or Survey

The rating tool at the end of this section presents a series of statements to be evaluated with regard to each of the three core sectors. Some of the questions ask about the extent to which the sector is engaged with other parts of the early childhood system, and others ask about the extent of progress in specified areas.

The tool provides several examples of engagement to help participants contextualize what this might mean. These examples are not necessarily required conditions of engagement, nor are they exhaustive; communities may have other examples that come

to mind when thinking about their engagement within and across sectors.

The usual unit of analysis for this tool is an early childhood system in a city or county. Stakeholders should come to a shared understanding of the geographical area being assessed through this process. When it is used with regard to an entire state, users should be aware that some items may not apply, or they may need to be modified.

After the tool is completed, individual responses should be aggregated to support a conversation among stakeholders. Please see the Interpreting Results section of the Toolkit, which provides a detailed example of how to summarize results using this measure as the demonstration case.

Summary of Steps

1. **Set intention:** Decide your community's goals with respect to measuring core early childhood sector engagement. It may be as simple as, "We aspire to have a high-quality, coordinated early childhood system in our region; this assessment will provide a baseline for understanding our progress toward that goal (or will provide an update to our previously determined baseline)." This may require discussion about how the early childhood system and the "community" are defined so that everyone is assessing the same thing.
2. **Stakeholder engagement:** Identify early childhood system leaders or representatives to participate in the assessment process. With the stakeholder group, affirm or revise intentions and consider reviewing the tool together, before fielding, so that questions can be surfaced and discussed beforehand.
3. **Complete tool individually:** If the group is large, it will be more efficient to distribute the tool in advance and have people complete and return it, so the data can be aggregated as shown above before the stakeholder discussion. Doing so has the additional advantage of allowing a larger number of people, including some who may not be able to participate in a meeting, to contribute. In a smaller group, you may be able to aggregate data as you go, and simply set aside the first 15 minutes or so of a meeting for individuals to complete the tool. An online version of the tool using Google Forms is available here; communities using this will need to save the tool in their own Google account, and customize as needed, before distributing.
4. **Aggregate the data:** Have a designated person or entity receive all of the individual responses and aggregate and display the data. Or, if participants are completing the tool at the start of a meeting, set aside time to aggregate the data before continuing with discussion.
5. **Discuss:** Review and discuss the aggregated data, with particular attention to variation in responses. Why did those who gave the highest and lowest rating to each item make those choices?

- a. **Interpret:** Reflect on the results and identify strengths, weaknesses, and patterns in core sector engagement. Discussion should be aimed both at trying to achieve a consensus rating and at identifying opportunities for improvement.
- b. **Rate:** Arrive at a consensus 1-4 rating for each statement, sector, and for the system as a whole. Use the consensus ratings to arrive at a single rating for your system.
- c. **Plan:** Identify those aspects of core sector engagement which the group will prioritize for improvement, and what the goal will be for each. Communities can use the action plan template in this toolkit to help plan next steps.

Stakeholders

A diverse group of leaders within the early childhood system should be involved in this assessment process. In this context, “leaders” means people who know the field well, are aware of the system-building efforts, and have credibility with their peers. If the early childhood system has begun to engage parents in leadership roles, their participation would be especially valuable.

Ideally the process of distributing the survey, collecting data, and leading the conversation would be done 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 arrive at a consensus rating for each statement for each sector, and for this measure overall. 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 or actors within 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 current engagement, desired engagement, resources, priorities, and how early childhood systems are conceptualized.

0.1 Core Sector Engagement: Rating Tool

- 1—Little or no evidence so far of engagement or progress
2—A few strong early examples, not yet widespread engagement or progress
3—Significant engagement or progress, with some gaps remaining
4—Engagement is strong and widespread, or progress approaching complete implementation
DK—Don't know/not enough information to answer

For each sector, statements 1 (about building connections within the sector) and 2 (about building connections with other sectors) are followed by one or more examples of ways in which some early childhood systems have addressed these needs. As stated above, the examples are meant as illustrations only. If your system has made progress on these issues in other ways, feel free to assign a high rating even if none of the examples apply. The open-ended questions should be presented as optional but encouraged.

EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Leaders in this sector are...

<p>1. Building a foundation for improvement and connection among the different parts of this sector. Examples to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ If there is a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), it includes effective mechanisms to help providers with lower ratings improve.▶ There are routes for professional advancement in Early Care and Education (ECE), e.g., ways for Family, Friend and Neighbor care FFN) providers to become licensed, for parents to become employed in ECE, for ECE providers to become credentialed and advance their careers.▶ There are effective mechanisms to connect FFN providers to one another and to resources, training, and supports.	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>2. Building connections with other early childhood sectors. Examples to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ The child care resource and referral provider is able to help families connect to a wide variety of services and supports, not limited to ECE only.▶ Similar assistance is available at child care subsidy intake.▶ Information on community-based resources is disseminated to providers to share with families.	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>3. Advocating for policy changes to benefit young children and their families.</p>	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>4. Working to increase the reach of their services across the community.</p>	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>5. Working to achieve equitable outcomes for all children.</p>	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>6. Engaging parents as partners and working to make services and supports more responsive to parents' needs.</p>	1 2 3 4 DK
What examples came to mind as you considered your ratings, particularly in relation to statements 1 and 2?	

HEALTH

Leaders in this sector are...

<p>1. Building a foundation for improvement and connection among the different parts of this sector. Examples to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Health care providers conduct universal developmental screening.▶ Providers assess for social determinants of health.▶ Providers use team-based care to identify and attend to a wide range of family needs.	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>2. Building connections with other early childhood sectors. Examples to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Help Me Grow, or a similar local program, is in place and is used by pediatric practices to help families connect with the services and supports they need.▶ There is universal outreach to new parents with the capacity to provide support to parents who want it.	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>3. Advocating for policy changes to benefit young children and their families.</p>	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>4. Working to increase the reach of their services across the community.</p>	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>5. Working to achieve equitable outcomes for all children.</p>	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>6. Engaging parents as partners and working to make services and supports more responsive to parents' needs.</p>	1 2 3 4 DK

What examples came to mind as you considered your ratings, particularly in relation to statements 1 and 2?

FAMILY SUPPORT

Leaders in this sector are...

<p>1. Building a foundation for improvement and connection among the different parts of this sector. Examples to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Providers of home visiting, family resource centers, playgroups, parenting support groups, and similar family supports network with one another and are aware of the full range of supports available to parents.▶ Providers have effective mechanisms to help parents learn about and connect with other family support services as children's needs change.	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>2. Building connections with other early childhood sectors. Examples to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Family support providers have effective linkages with providers in health care and early care and development to help parents connect with the services they need.	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>3. Advocating for policy changes to benefit young children and their families.</p>	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>4. Working to increase the reach of their services across the community.</p>	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>5. Working to achieve equitable outcomes for all children.</p>	1 2 3 4 DK
<p>6. Engaging parents as partners and working to make services and supports more responsive to parents' needs.</p>	1 2 3 4 DK

What examples came to mind as you considered your ratings, particularly in relation to statements 1 and 2?

EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

Next, thinking about the ratings you have assigned to the statements within each sector, turn your attention to the early childhood system as a whole. Assign an overall rating for each statement, using the same 1-4 scale.

1. Building a foundation for improvement and connection among the different parts of the sector in which they work.	1	2	3	4	DK
2. Building connections with other sectors.	1	2	3	4	DK
3. Advocating for policy changes to benefit young children and their families.	1	2	3	4	DK
4. Working to increase the reach of their services across the community.	1	2	3	4	DK
5. Working to achieve equitable outcomes for all children.	1	2	3	4	DK
6. Engaging parents as partners and working to make services and supports more responsive to parents' needs.	1	2	3	4	DK

What examples came to mind as you considered your ratings, particularly in relation to statements 1 and 2?

0.2 Infrastructure for System-Building

Level at which the early childhood system has the foundational elements needed to achieve impact

Purpose

This measure is meant to help early childhood system-builders evaluate their early efforts to build a strong foundation for future success. It examines the system's progress in four areas.

The first of these is the emergence of a trusted “backbone organization” that convenes the partners and guides the development of a common agenda, supported by common data. This role has been played by different types of organizations, including local foundations, planning bodies such as the First 5 organizations throughout California, and local government units. The second and third areas relate to early signs of effective work by the backbone organization: guiding the development of a common vision and strategy, and supporting aligned activities. The final area is building the foundation needed to work effectively towards equity. In each of these areas, the measure highlights actions that can be taken relatively early in the work of developing an early childhood system.

We encourage communities in the early stages of system-building efforts to use this measure together with a companion measure 0.1 Core Sector Engagement. A strong overall score (3 or 4) on this measure may be an indication that a community is ready to move on to other parts of the toolkit, to gauge progress associated with more advanced stages of development. These include, for example:

- ▶ Shared measurement (*2.4 Using Data*)
- ▶ Public will, policy, and funding (the Commitment measures, *3.1 – 3.3*); and
- ▶ More advanced efforts to promote parent leadership and advance equity (*4.1 Parent Engagement* and *4.2 Advancing Equity*)

Definition

This measure provides a tool for early childhood system leaders to examine their progress in laying a foundation for a well-functioning early childhood system, including having a trusted and effective backbone organization, a common vision and strategy, aligned activities, and foundations for advancing equity.

Implementation

Tool or Survey

Using the measure requires conducting a survey of partner organizations followed by aggregation of data and one or more conversations among partners to analyze results, come to consensus on overall system performance, and identify actions aimed at improvement. Communities are invited to use the rating tool provided at the end of this section. Because the measure covers aspects of the backbone organization’s performance, you may want to have a partner organization or neutral facilitator send out the survey and aggregate the data, rather than asking the

backbone organization to do that work itself. The Summary of Steps section below provides more detail on the recommended sequence of activities.

Summary of Steps

1. **Set intention:** Decide your community’s goals with respect to evaluating how you are constructing the infrastructure for system-building
2. **Stakeholder engagement:** Identify early childhood system leaders or representatives to participate in the assessment process. Decide which organization will manage the work of distributing the survey, collecting responses, and aggregating the data. With the stakeholders, affirm or revise intentions and consider reviewing the tool together, before fielding, so that questions can be surfaced and discussed beforehand.
3. **Complete tool individually (recommended):** The early childhood system representatives participating in the assessment may complete the tool individually before meeting and discussing as a group. An online version of the tool using [Google Forms is available here](#); communities using this will need to save the tool in their own Google account, and customize as needed, before distributing.
4. **Convene stakeholders:** Convene the group to review and explore the data. Questions might include:
 - a. Across items, which stand out as having high average ratings, and which have lower ratings?
 - b. Are there items for which perspectives varied widely among respondents—for example, several very low scores and several very high scores? Discussion of these items, aimed at eliciting both points of view rather than trying to resolve the differences immediately, may be especially helpful.
 - c. Which areas are most ripe for improvement, in terms of both importance and capacity? What improvements would participants propose—or, for complex issues, what process would participants propose to decide upon an improvement plan?
5. **Rate:** Come to a consensus on the level that best describes where the system as a whole falls at this time. This overall rating sets a baseline for future assessments of progress.
6. **Plan:** Determine how to proceed. Communities can use the action plan template in this toolkit to help plan next steps for building your system’s capacity for collective impact.

⁴ The idea of a backbone organization, along with a considerable body of work about the functions of such organizations, has been developed by the consulting firm FSG as part of their broader ideas about collective impact.

Stakeholders

Early childhood system leaders, from both the backbone organization and all of the sectors that are meaningfully involved in the early childhood system, should participate. If the early childhood system has begun to engage parent leaders, their participation would be especially helpful.

Data Sources

This performance measure uses a self-assessment tool. No additional data sources are needed to complete this assessment.

Limitations

The value of the tool for local communities lies primarily in clarifying issues to prioritize for early childhood system-building. 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.

Resources

- ▶ [Early Learning Community Action Guide](#), Center for the Study of Social Policy and National League of Cities, 2019
- ▶ [Getting Started with Collective Impact](#) (webinar series), FSG, Collective Impact Forum, 2017

0.2 Infrastructure for System-Building: Rating Tool

For the statements in each of the four domains, stakeholders should assign a rating on a scale from 1-4 that best captures the extent to which the practices are in place:

1—Not yet in place or just beginning to be developed

2—Partly achieved, perhaps with promising early signs, but not yet having a significant effect on the system as a whole

3—Significantly achieved with at least a few examples of how it has contributed to the effectiveness of the system

4—Fully achieved and largely effective; while occasional problems have to be addressed, this is now an important and generally reliable element of the system

DK—Don't have enough information to rate

FUNCTION 1—BACKBONE ORGANIZATION OR CONVENER					
1. There is a backbone organization that effectively convenes partners and facilitates productive communication among them.					1 2 3 4 DK
2. The backbone organization effectively collects and analyzes data to inform the early childhood system's decisions.					1 2 3 4 DK
3. The backbone organization effectively represents the interests of the early childhood system to legislators, funders, and other key stakeholders.					1 2 3 4 DK
4. The backbone organization has or reasonably expects sufficient funding to continue to play this role.					1 2 3 4 DK
FUNCTION 2—COMMON VISION AND STRATEGIES					
5. The early childhood system has developed a common agenda.					1 2 3 4 DK
6. The common agenda is widely known and acted upon. Asked what the early childhood system is trying to accomplish and how it plans to do that, partners would give similar answers.					1 2 3 4 DK
7. Partner organizations take action in support of common goals.					1 2 3 4 DK
8. Partner organizations believe that other partners are taking action in support of common goals.					1 2 3 4 DK
FUNCTION 3—ALIGNED ACTIVITIES					
9. Partners communicate with one another regularly, both together with and independent of the backbone organization.					1 2 3 4 DK
10. Partners believe that the time they are spending collaboratively is time well spent.					1 2 3 4 DK
11. Partners report that the scope of work they do collaboratively is substantial and/or growing.					1 2 3 4 DK
12. Partners work together effectively to mobilize the funding needed to achieve the goals of the initiative.					1 2 3 4 DK

FUNCTION 4—PROMOTING EQUITY

13. Partners have endorsed an explicit goal of achieving equitable results for all children in the community regardless of race, ethnicity, immigration status, neighborhood, and other demographic characteristics.	1 2 3 4 DK
14. Leadership within the early childhood system is diverse with regard to race and ethnicity.	1 2 3 4 DK
15. Leadership within the early childhood system includes parents of young children, especially parents in under-invested communities.	1 2 3 4 DK
16. The system promotes parent involvement by: compensating parents for their time; addressing needs for transportation, child care, and translation; and ensuring that parents receive the same data as other leaders.	1 2 3 4 DK

After compiling the results of the survey completed by individual partners, communities can convene to collaboratively assess where their system as a whole falls, according to the following levels. While each level has several components and your system may be further ahead or behind on certain components, participants are encouraged to choose the rating that best characterizes their system at this time:

Level 1—Our system is in the very early stages of system-building. We are still identifying the backbone agency, or our backbone agency is working on developing the resources and relationships necessary to bring early childhood partners to the table. We have not yet pursued a common agenda. Aligned activities, if they exist, are sporadic. Our work to promote equity is in the beginning stages.

Level 2—System actors have expressed a commitment to build the system and our backbone agency is in the early stages of formalizing that commitment. Agencies may work towards similar purposes, but this is not yet articulated as a formalized agenda. Agency-to-agency aligned activities exist, but they are not widespread enough to have a significant impact on the system. We have begun to make some efforts to promote equity.

Level 3—Our backbone agency is actively supporting our emerging system-building work and there is a growing level of trust across system actors. Our system has a common vision, which may cover some but not all of the early childhood system's goals. There are many examples of aligned activities and how these are having a positive impact. We are working to embed a commitment to equity within our common vision and there is growing evidence of more diverse representation in system leadership, including work to elevate the voice of parents.

Level 4—Our backbone agency effectively supports system-wide collaboration and is actively promoting the needs of children and families to leaders and key stakeholders. We have a fully articulated early childhood vision and strategy, and we have a high-level of trust that actors within the system are taking action to implement that vision. Partners experience their interactions as effective and aligned. Equity is embedded in our common vision and diverse representation within leadership is widespread, including a strong parent voice.