Sustaining New Approaches in Child Welfare

A Framework for Sustainability for Research-Based Infant-Toddler Court Teams

Quality Improvement Center *for* **Research-Based Infant-Toddler Court Teams**

Introduction

The Quality Improvement Center for Research-Based Infant-Toddler Court Teams (QIC-CT)[1] is building and disseminating knowledge of effective, collaborative court team interventions that seek to transform child welfare systems for infants and toddlers and their families. The QIC-CT supports work in 11 sites[2,3], working to implement and institutionalize an innovative approach—based on the ZERO TO THREE Safe Babies Court Team (SBCT) approach—for improving child, family, and system outcomes. This issue brief is the first in a series prepared by the QIC-CT on sustainability of the approach. It provides a framework for understanding the key elements necessary for sustainability—**collaboration, resources, data, financing, policy and legislation, and a common vision**—and lays the foundation for additional briefs that will each discuss in more detail the strategies for sustaining the core components of the approach.

Sustainability Starts on Day One

Deciding when to start planning for sustaining the core components of the SBCT approach—or any new approach—must happen simultaneously with the work to launch the site operations, implement the approach, collect data, garner ownership from partners, and demonstrate impact and results.

The QIC-CT sites are working to implement, perfect, and then institutionalize a court team model in daily practice by changing policies, adopting new practices, and integrating services and resources that will sustain new and more effective ways of serving families with infants and toddlers. The collaborative court team intervention is a complex, multi-system approach that requires investment by a broad network of partners who bring knowledge, commitment, and

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1   The QIC-CT, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, is providing intensive training and technical assistance to fully develop and expand research-based infant-toddler court teams approach.

2   The eleven demonstration sites are located in: Connecticut, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (located in North Carolina), Florida, Mississippi, Hawai'i, and Iowa.

3   Throughout this brief, "site" refers to the systems and jurisdictions working to sustain change.

financial and in-kind resources to support both individual families and system change. Developing and building on these relationships is critical for implementation and the achievement of sustainability down the road. Particularly when there is preliminary evidence that supports the approach, the importance of beginning sustainability planning on day one is further strengthened. (See sidebar on Documented Impact of the SBCT approach.)

Although there are myriad challenges associated with institutionalizing a new approach—especially an approach involving multiple partners who have come together to change system practice—considering how to sustain the work from the outset is essential. *Sustainability planning cannot wait until results are in; any initial financial investments start running out or key leaders of the approach transition out.* Beginning the conversation about sustainability early increases the opportunity to engage diverse partners in the work and to plan for success from the start. It also opens the door for sharing ownership, information, and investment in sustainability. Further, sustainability planning is not a separate activity. The critical elements of effective implementation are the same as those for sustainability planning: engaging partners, garnering resources, and tracking impact to ensure positive outcomes are being achieved.

Planning for Sustainability

In order for the QIC-CT sites to ensure that core components last beyond the demonstration period, it is essential to have a roadmap to achieve sustainability. Most often, when those implementing innovations think about sustainability, they focus on *financial sustainability*—how to cover costs associated with a pilot or demonstration effort. However, sustainability involves more than just finances. Sustainability includes the collection of **data** and leveraging of **collaborations, resources,** and **policy** and **legislation** that support shared goals and a common vision.

The remainder of this brief lays out a framework for sustainability and the key elements necessary to understand and leverage in order to sustain—and institutionalize—this new approach, practice, and/or delivery model. While each site faces unique opportunities and challenges that impact their strategies for sustaining the work, the guiding questions below are intended to help frame local thinking and sustainability planning.

Documented Impact of the SBCT Approach:

- 97% of the identified service needs of infants and toddlers served by the SBCT had either been fully met or were in the process of being met.

- 99.05% of infants and toddlers served were protected from further maltreatment.

- Children served by the SBCT exited the foster care system approximately 1 year earlier than children in a matched comparison group; they are more likely to reach permanency with a member of their biological family.
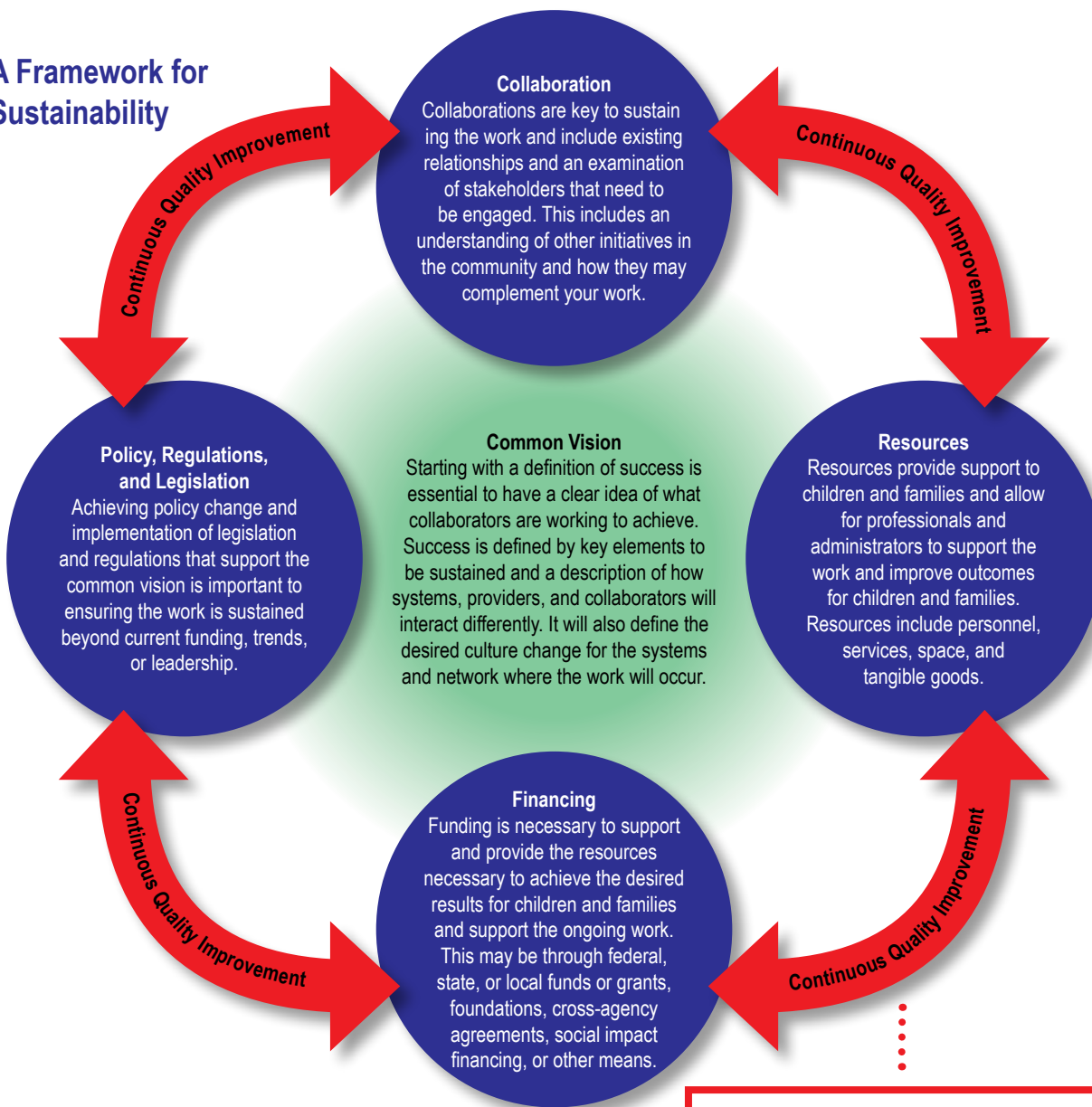
Hafford, C., McDonnell, C., Kass, L., DeSantis, J., & Dong, T. (2009). *Evaluation of the Court Teams for maltreated infants and toddlers: Final report.* Submitted to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice by James Bell Associates, Arlington, VA.

McCombs-Thornton, K. L. (2012). The effect of the ZERO TO THREE Court Teams initiative on types of exits from the foster care system—A competing risks analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review 34,* 169–178.

A Framework for Sustainability

The Framework for Sustainability[4] diagram is a visual currently used by the QIC-CT sites. The diagram highlights how the key elements—**collaborations, resources, financing, policy** and **legislation,** and data—fit together to support the **common vision** and sustain culture, behavior, policy, and practice changes.

A Framework for Sustainability

Collaboration
Collaborations are key to sustaining the work and include existing relationships and an examination of stakeholders that need to be engaged. This includes an understanding of other initiatives in the community and how they may complement your work.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Common Vision
Starting with a definition of success is essential to have a clear idea of what collaborators are working to achieve. Success is defined by key elements to be sustained and a description of how systems, providers, and collaborators will interact differently. It will also define the desired culture change for the systems and network where the work will occur.

Policy, Regulations, and Legislation
Achieving policy change and implementation of legislation and regulations that support the common vision is important to ensuring the work is sustained beyond current funding, trends, or leadership.

Resources
Resources provide support to children and families and allow for professionals and administrators to support the work and improve outcomes for children and families. Resources include personnel, services, space, and tangible goods.

Financing
Funding is necessary to support and provide the resources necessary to achieve the desired results for children and families and support the ongoing work. This may be through federal, state, or local funds or grants, foundations, cross-agency agreements, social impact financing, or other means.

Continuous Quality Improvement: Data and Learning
Continuously tracking outcomes being achieved will inform how the approach is modified and adapted in order to maximize impact

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4   The Framework for Sustainability was created by the Center for the Study of Social Policy for the QIC for Research-Based Infant-Toddler Court Teams.

Common Vision: The Starting Point for Sustainability

The common vision drives system efforts and includes sustaining culture, behavior, policy, and practice changes in order to better meet the needs of infants, toddlers, and families. Each site's common vision of how practice will change in order to achieve system reform and better outcomes for children and families is unique. Each site's collaborators need to create and share a site-specific vision, although it will reflect the core components of the SBCT approach and the QIC-CT's commitment to a shared set of demonstrated outcomes.

Critical questions to address and understand while developing a common vision include:

- What results are you trying to achieve? What will success look like at the end of this project?
- How will systems, providers, and partners work and act differently? What is the anticipated culture change in how systems, providers, and partners operate?
- What are the core components of the approach that will be necessary at the start and over the long-term to achieve success?

A Closer Look: A Common Vision from Iowa and EBCI

Iowa's vision: Build a statewide collaboration that supports services to families with infants and toddlers. We will know we are succeeding when we have identified the essential elements and have infused them into everyday practice. Families will see this approach as helpful to them.

Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' (EBCI) vision: To expand Safe Babies within the tribe. Educate and train staff, service providers and court personnel on both qualitative and quantitative outcomes around early childhood trauma with infants/toddlers.

Developed at QIC-CT Meeting, "From Kickoff to Completion"
April 2015

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Collaboration and Cultivating Champions

Collaboration may be the most fundamental ingredient to sustaining the work. Existing relationships need to be nurtured and new stakeholders need to be engaged. This requires an understanding of other initiatives in the community and how they may complement the work. A goal of collaboration is to identify and cultivate **champions**—key partners operating in different circles who believe in and are invested in the approach.

Critical questions to address and understand while identifying partners include:

- Who are the key partners with whom you have current working relationships? Who is already engaged in the work and at what level? How do you intend to strengthen those existing collaborations?

- What current programs, initiatives, and projects in the community complement your work? How?

- Which new partners would you like to build relationships with and engage as stakeholders? Who do you need to engage in the work for this to be a success? What are the challenges in engaging these partners (conflicting missions, administrative policies, etc.) and how can they be overcome?

- How can you leverage the natural leadership positions of certain individuals (Court Improvement Program Directors, judges, child welfare directors, advocacy organization representatives, etc.)?

Circles of Champions

Child Welfare Agency
Administrators, supervisors, workers

Public Partners
Public agencies, legislators, administrators

Champions
Community Coordinator

Court
Judges, Court Improvement Program Directors, child attorneys and Guardians ad Litem, parent attorneys

Community
Family and child serving community-based organizations, families

A Closer Look: Collaboration in Mississippi and Connecticut

Mississippi has developed a strong network of partners and collaborations. Within these collaborations, Mississippi has cultivated **champions** in multiple arenas—court, child welfare, and community—who are deeply invested and are able to both leverage resources and engage their colleagues in sustaining the work. Having champions in multiple circles increases the likelihood of sustainability when a key member of the team transitions out of the work. The Mississippi QIC-CT team is cultivating a strong relationship with Excel by 5—a statewide initiative with a complementary mission to support young children and emphasize the important roles parents and early childhood educators play in the lives of young children. Each local program is led by a group of stakeholders similar to those that support the infant-toddler court team, including the judicial leader in Hattiesburg who also serves on the Excel by 5 statewide advisory committee. Through this collaboration, the court team and Excel by 5 are engaging in mutually reinforcing strategies to support young children.

The QIC-CT team in **Connecticut** is collaborating with leaders of federal initiatives—including a Project LAUNCH grant from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration—to understand how they can coordinate efforts to support young children and families.

Resources

Resources provide direct support to children and families; they also allow for professionals and administrators to carry out the work to improve outcomes for children and families. Resources include personnel, services, space, and tangible goods. The ability to access resources is very much dependent on the collaborations developed and maintained in a community.

Critical questions to address and understand while identifying resources that are available and those that are needed include:

- What current services are available in the community to support the approach? What do partners bring to the table?

- What training resources are available for the development of new practitioners/providers and expansion of services?

- What are the specific resource gaps that need to be filled?

A Closer Look: Services and Supports in EBCI and Mississippi

The **EBCI**, located in North Carolina, is a tribe rich in resources. In their community, EBCI has pediatric care, infant mental health providers, substance abuse services, and mental health services for parents. However, EBCI continues to anticipate needed resources and is working to add additional infant mental health specialists in the budget. Through upfront planning, EBCI can decrease the chances of future gaps in available services.

Through a focus on cultivating champions, **Mississippi** has built strong relationships which they have been able to leverage in order to increase access to necessary, community-based resources. The relationship with Excel by 5 supports the court team in identifying new partners, which increases access to available resources in the community to support child health, parent training, and well-being.

Data Driven Decisions

Data are critical to understanding areas of strength and identifying opportunities to further support children and families. Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is central to this project. Using data will enable the tracking of identified outcomes across all sites and ensure that each site is on track to achieve positive outcomes. CQI will provide real-time information about the impact of practice changes and whether the outcomes that are expected are being achieved. It will also inform how the approach is modified and adapted along the way to maximize impact. Further, sharing data and providing evidence of impact is an effective strategy for creating new champions; garnering additional resources; and ensuring sustainability with current funders, administrators, policymakers, and collaborators.

Critical questions to address and understand for collecting and sharing data include:

- What data do you need to collect in order to demonstrate the impact of the court team approach with children and families, the community, and the collaborating systems?
- What information do you need to collect and use on a continuous basis in order to adjust implementation to maximize impact?
- What data do you need to understand gaps in services for children and families in your jurisdiction?
- What is your current thinking about how best to communicate your results with key stakeholders at the local and state levels?

A Closer Look: Data-Informed Decision-Making in Hawaii

Hawai'i identified a gap in services: young children were not consistently receiving the early intervention services they needed. In order to understand where the gap was occurring, the Hawai'i site leadership turned to the data. Key questions included: were children not receiving Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) screenings; were services not available in the community; and was payment for services a problem?

By analyzing the data, the team was able to understand that children were receiving required EPSDT screening, but either referrals for the recommended early intervention services were not occurring or there was no follow-up on the enrollment in services to ensure receipt of services. The team is currently analyzing additional data to better understand the needs of young children based on the referrals made through EPSDT screenings, as well as the availability and accessibility of early intervention services in the community.

Financing Change

Fiscal strategies must support and provide access to the resources necessary to support the ongoing work and to achieve the desired results for children and families. Fiscal strategies are likely to include efforts to garner resources through federal, state, or local government funds; foundation and corporate grants; cross-agency agreements; reallocation of current funds; social impact financing; or other means.

Critical questions to address and understand when identifying and exploring fiscal strategies include:

- How is the project currently being financed? What components of the work will need new funding in order to be sustained?

- What relationships exist or can be developed with state and local public agencies to increase their commitment and funding for this work?

- What current positions and resources can be reallocated or restructured to maintain the key positions that support the initiative?

- What other existing federal grants or funding streams in your jurisdiction could be used/developed in new ways to support aspects of this work?

- What private partners (foundations, universities, etc.) are providing or could be engaged to provide financial support?

A Closer Look: Fiscal Strategies in Florida and Connecticut

Florida has a statewide model for implementing their Early Childhood Court initiative and employs a state-level community coordinator as well as local community coordinators. Florida's Court Improvement Program and Department of Children and Families partnered to leverage **Title IV-E** funding—both waiver and non-waiver dollars—to support training to court staff on the approach and other trainings as needed. Florida is also using **Court Improvement Program** funds to support the implementation of the Early Childhood Court initiative through financial investments and is planning to support the statewide community coordinator position, which is currently being supported by the QIC-CT, after the QIC-CT demonstration is complete.

Connecticut's Department of Children and Families (DCF) is leading the effort to implement and sustain the infant-toddler court team. Through redefining existing roles within DCF—supervisors and workers in intake and permanency—to work with young children and families, the team is institutionalizing the practice change necessary for better results for young children and families. This strategy of redefining responsibilities of existing funded positions allows for Connecticut to maximize current fiscal allocations already included in the budget.

Institutionalizing Change Through Policy, Regulations, and Legislation

Achieving policy change through legislation and regulations that support the common vision and the core elements of the approach is important to ensuring the work is sustained beyond current funding, trends, or leadership.

Critical questions to address and understand when working to institutionalize practice change include:

- What state or local policies, regulations, and legislation support the common vision or aspects of it? What changes would strengthen or reinforce this work?

- What state policies and programs need to be explored in order to understand how they can be tapped to garner additional resources for this work? Are there existing policies that support the work, but bureaucratic barriers exist in sustaining practice change?

- How do the work and outcomes of the infant-toddler court team address current state or local policy priorities and concerns in your site?

- Are there opportunities (policy windows) that are open or are likely to open in the near future or the upcoming legislative session? How can these opportunities be tapped?

- How does the state-local relationship support or create a barrier to sustaining the approach?

- How can you create legislative champions for this work?

A Closer Look: Institutionalizing Policy Change in Florida, Hawaii, and Iowa

In budgeting for the coming fiscal year, the DCF Secretary in **Florida** has included requests in the budget for funding additional infant mental health therapists and training for child-parent psychotherapy.

The Chief Justice in **Hawai'i** has made the infant-toddler court team a priority and has previously requested funding for the community coordinator position within the court's budget request to the State Legislature.

Iowa has institutionalized pre-removal conferences for families and a relationship with the Parent Partners program, which utilizes the mentorship skills of parents who have experienced the child welfare system to work with families currently involved. These practice changes, support for family team meetings, and value for parent partners are sustained and reinforced through the culture of the agency and agency policy.

Additional Information to Support Sustainability

The following resources provide additional information and tools related to sustainability:

QIC-CT Resources on Sustainability: www.qicct.org/sustainability

A Worksheet: Planning for Sustainability
This worksheet, developed by the QIC-CT and adapted from the Children's Bureau, serves as a tool for sustainability planning for infant-toddler court teams.

A Framework to Design, Test, Spread, and Sustain Effective Practice in Child Welfare
Developed by the Children's Bureau, this is a practical guide for strengthening child welfare systems. It describes a process for exploring problems in child welfare, developing interventions, building evidence about their effectiveness, integrating effective interventions into routine child welfare practice, and continually improving on their delivery. The framework is designed to promote better integration of evaluation with program and policy decision-making and to encourage stronger partnerships between child welfare stakeholders.

Federal, State, and Local Spending to Address Child Abuse and Neglect in SFY 2012.
This report, prepared by Child Trends, presents findings from the most recent iteration of the biennial survey of state child welfare agencies (the 8th), which examined federal, state, and local child welfare expenditures in state fiscal year (SFY) 2012. The findings are also available online at www.childwelfarepolicy.org where stakeholders can access tables or view the survey's national and state-level results in multiple displays.

Building Sustainability in Demonstration Projects for Children, Youth, and Families
This toolkit, prepared by the Institute for Educational Leadership with funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, is designed to provide ideas and links to other resources that will enable demonstration sites to build on their success and sustain effective efforts beyond the life of the grant. It offers case study examples and a variety of tools communities may want to use as they consider plans for sustaining, replicating, or "scaling-up" reform efforts.

Building and Sustaining Child Welfare Partnerships
The National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, established by the Children's Bureau, developed a series of action briefs on key leadership topics for administrators and program managers responsible for systems change initiatives. These action briefs highlight key findings from the leadership study, share lessons learned by Systems of Care grantees, and outline key steps for initiative leaders to advance systems and organizational change.

Maximizing Medicaid Financing for Children in Child Welfare
Developed by First Focus and presented to the QIC-CT infant-toddler court teams' stakeholders at a team meeting in 2015, this presentation provides strategies for maximizing Medicaid financing for families and young children in the child welfare system.

Collaboration for Impact
Collective Impact is a framework to tackle deeply entrenched and complex social problems. It is an innovative and structured approach to make collaboration work across government, business, philanthropy, non-profit organizations, and citizens to achieve significant and lasting social change. It offers guidance to assist communities from the very early stages of considering how to address intractable social issues through achieving sustainability.

Contact Us

The Quality Improvement Center for Research-Based Infant-Toddler Court Teams (QIC-CT) began in 2014 and is funded by the United States Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. The QIC-CT is operated by ZERO TO THREE and its partners, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and RTI International. For inquires on the QIC-CT, please visit our website at www.qicct.org or email: QIC-CT@zerotothree.org.