Child Care Resource and Referral and Hub

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

January 15, 2021

Executive Summary

The following is the *Final Report* in relation to the budget note included in the Early Learning Division's 2019-21 Legislative Approved Budget:

> The Early Learning Division (ELD) of the Oregon Department of Education will study the feasibility of consolidating Early Learning Hubs and Child Care Resources and Referral (CCR&R) entities to better align its regional entities into one regional body while maintaining the scope, purpose, and legislatively intended function of both. The ELD shall report its findings to the Legislature before February 1, 2020. The report will include, at minimum, findings around fiscal and programmatic efficiencies, effect on organizational capacity, and anticipated effect on abilities to meet Early Learning Council designated outcomes. If the study determines that consolidation is deemed fiscally or programmatically efficient, it will present a plan to implement this consolidation as part of its report.

As the ELD turned to the preparation of this Final Report, the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, and the overarching research question that the ELD began with - "What is the feasibility of consolidating the Hubs and CCR&Rs into one regional body, while maintaining the scope, purpose, and legislatively intended function of both?" - took on unanticipated significance given that each of these entities was playing an essential role in COVID-19 response, in concert with the ELD.

As noted in the *Preliminary Report*, the ELD also carefully considered how consolidation might impact or disrupt the critical support that each of these entities provides in the implementation of the *Student Success Act*. Given these realities, the ELD consulted with early learning system stakeholders, including Early Learning Council members, and directors and staff from Hubs and CCR&Rs, to understand their perspectives about the wisdom of consolidating these two entities at this critical time in our state's history. From these conversations, the ELD determined that, at this time, consolidation was unlikely to meet the budget note's measures of fiscal or programmatic efficient. Instead, the development of this report focused on better defining the roles of each entity, the shared body of work between the entity, and how each entity can individually be improved to meet the needs of children, families, and early childhood educators.

The ELD's inquiry focused on understanding how well each of these entities was meeting its scope, purpose, and legislatively intended function and the nature of the work and relationship between the two entities in service to their regions. It also sought to understand if there were unrealized opportunities for greater partnership and collaboration to increase regional system alignment and coordination, resulting in improved outcomes for children, families, and child care providers in their regions.

The ELD used three approaches to this study:

- **Stakeholder Engagement.** In the fall of 2020, ELD staff and contracted early learning systems experts engaged with hundreds of early learning stakeholders using a variety of engagement strategies, including focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and an online survey. Engagement opportunities were designed thoughtfully and with a desire to glean a diverse set of perspectives from early learning system stakeholders including parents, community members, child care providers, Hub and CCR&R directors, community partner agencies, Early Learning Council members, and philanthropy.

- ***Fiscal Analysis.*** The ELD reviewed the financial practices and documentation related to the work and resources of Hubs and CCR&Rs for the current and last biennium. Documents reviewed included quarterly monitoring reports, annual budgets, and audited financials and other supporting documentation, which are collected on a regular basis, as part of overall monitoring for both entities. Hubs and CCR&Rs were also asked to submit responses to narrative questions to assist the ELD with understanding more about how they were choosing to use their financial resources in support of their regional partnership and collaboration.
- **Co-created, Research-based Theory of Change (TOC) for Early Learning Hubs.** The ELD compared its existing, basic TOC to recognized best practices associated with a robust TOC. The ELD then determined that an updated TOC for the Hubs would have significant value for the early learning system. In order to update the TOC, the ELD used a co-creation approach with Hub directors so their expertise and experience could significantly inform its development.

Findings

While analyzing the results of the study, several themes emerged that were consistent across all stakeholder groups. There was consensus that Hubs are effective in their roles as conveners and holders of the vision for the early learning system and that CCR&Rs are effective in their roles as the providers of professional development support and resources for child care providers. There was also agreement that greater clarity and guidance is needed around the Hub and CCR&R scopes of work and both entities require additional support and training around understanding and addressing inequities within the system.

Recommendations

The ELD identified opportunities for greater partnership and collaboration that would increase regional system alignment and coordination, resulting in improved outcomes for children, families, and child care providers. These recommendations include, but are not limited to:

- **Hubs adopt the Theory of Change** and use it to refine Hub scope of work for the 2021-23 biennium, performance measures, reporting, continuous improvement, and evaluation.
- **Improve state and regional knowledge and understanding** regarding the unique purposes, scopes of work, and legislatively intended functions of both the Hubs and the CCR&Rs.
- **Engage the Hubs and CCR&Rs in defining a shared scope of work** to expand efforts already underway and build child care supply to support regional recovery from COVID-19.
- **Engage the cohort of Hubs and CCR&Rs who share a backbone organization** to better understand the nature of their current relationships, identify opportunities and challenges to increased integration and alignment.
- **Improve inclusion of regional early learning system stakeholder voices,** e.g., families, child care providers, Hubs, and CCR&Rs, in the ELD's regional early learning system planning, co-creation, decision-making, and continuous improvement processes.
- **Identify opportunities for improvement in the administration, management, and technical assistance support** of the Hubs and CCR&Rs,

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Introduction

The following is the *Final Report* in relation to the budget note included in the Early Learning Division's 2019-21 Legislative Approved Budget. This report is also being submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the biennial Hub evaluation report pursuant to ORS 417.829.

Below is the budget note:

The Early Learning Division (ELD) of the Oregon Department of Education (ELD) will study the feasibility of consolidating Early Learning Hubs (Hubs) and Child Care Resources and Referral (CCR&R) entities to better align its regional entities into one regional body while maintaining the scope, purpose, and legislatively intended function of both. The ELD shall report its findings to the Legislature before February 1, 2020. The report will include, at minimum, findings around fiscal and programmatic efficiencies, effect on organizational capacity, and anticipated effect on abilities to meet outcomes designated by the Early Learning Council (ELC). If the study determines that consolidation is deemed fiscally or programmatically efficient, the ELD will present a plan to implement this consolidation as part of its report.

A *Preliminary Report* was submitted to the Legislature on February 1, 2020 and provided the background and purpose of these two regional entities. In the preliminary report, the ELD requested additional time to allow for stakeholder engagement and related state and/or regional planning that would be necessary were the ELD to recommend changes to these regional entities.

As the ELD turned to the preparation of this Final Report, the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, and the overarching research question that the ELD began with - "What is the feasibility of consolidating the Hubs and CCR&Rs into one regional body, while maintaining the scope, purpose, and legislatively intended function of both?" - took on unanticipated significance given that each of these entities was playing an essential role in COVID-19 response, in concert with the ELD.

As noted in the *Preliminary Report*, the ELD also carefully considered how consolidation might impact or disrupt the critical support that each of these entities provides in the implementation of the *Student Success Act*. Given these realities, the ELD consulted with early learning system stakeholders, including Early Learning Council members and directors and staff from Hubs and CCR&Rs, to understand their perspectives about the wisdom of consolidating these two entities at this critical time in our state's history. From these conversations, the ELD determined that, at this time, consolidation was unlikely to meet the budget note's measures of fiscal or programmatic efficient. Instead, the development of this report focused on better defining the roles of each entity, the shared body of work between the entity, and how each entity can individually be improved to meet the needs of children, families, and early childhood educators.

The ELD's inquiry focused on understanding how well each of these entities was meeting its scope, purpose, and legislatively intended function and the nature of the work and relationship between the two entities in service to their regions. It also sought to understand if there were unrealized opportunities for greater partnership and collaboration to increase regional system alignment and coordination, resulting in improved outcomes for children, families, and child care providers in their regions.

As was documented in the *Preliminary Report*, the Hubs and CCR&Rs play distinct yet highly related roles within the early learning system. Hubs are responsible for the coordination, alignment and family-

centeredness of the entirety of their regional early learning system – including the sectors of Health, Human Services, K-12, Early Care and Education, and Housing and Community Supports, as well as the business sector. CCR&Rs are primarily responsible for acting as regional leaders in the Early Care and Education Sector, working to increase the availability of high-quality, affordable early care and education through providing training and technical assistance to the ECE workforce. Additionally, they assist individuals or groups in navigating the process to start a child care business, including support for navigating the child care licensing system.

During the last legislative session, the ELD demonstrated a need to reform the state's professional learning system for the ECE workforce. As many of these reforms, (e.g., building capacity of CCR&Rs, regional alignment of CCR&Rs with Hub regions, adoption of NAEYC early educator competencies, alignment of training with NAEYC competencies, etc.) were based on prior work to understand the effectiveness of the CCR&Rs, ELD approached this report with a focus more on the CCR&R partnership and collaboration with the Hubs.

The ELD undertook three main activities to inform the content of this report: stakeholder engagement activities, a fiscal analysis, and the co-creation of a research-based Theory of Change for the Early Learning Hubs. This report provides an overview of each of these activities, which provides documentation of processes and findings.

Stakeholder Engagement

In the fall of 2020, ELD staff and contracted early learning systems experts engaged with hundreds of early learning stakeholders using a variety of engagement strategies. The ELD prioritized the provision of a variety of engagement opportunities and modalities, with the goal of gaining insights and information from a diverse set of stakeholders. There were also engagement opportunities for Spanish speaking stakeholders.

Each engagement opportunity was designed thoughtfully with a desire to glean a diverse set of perspectives from early learning system stakeholders, including parents, community members, child care providers, Hub and CCR&R directors, community partner agencies, Early Learning Council members, and philanthropy.

Fiscal Analysis

The ELD reviewed the financial practices and documentation related to the work and resources of both Hubs and CCR&Rs for the current and last biennium. Documents reviewed included quarterly monitoring reports, annual budgets, and audited financials and other supporting documentation, which are collected on a regular basis as part of overall monitoring for both entities. Hubs and CCR&Rs were also asked to submit responses to narrative questions to assist the ELD with understanding more about how the Hubs and CCR&Rs were choosing to use their financial resources in support of their regional partnership and collaboration.

Co-created, Research-based Theory of Change for Early Learning Hubs

When the opportunity to create a statewide network of Early Learning Hubs was realized in 2012, a very basic Theory of Change (TOC) was created. This TOC was used in combination with the *Framework for Collective Impact* to inform the development of the Hub RFP and guide the ELD's initial technical

assistance offerings. In the preparation of this report, the ELD compared the original TOC to recognized best practices associated with a robust TOC. In doing so, the ELD determined that an updated TOC for the Hubs would have significant value for the early learning system. To inform the creation of this updated theory of change for the Hubs, the ELD conducted a literature review of prior research on entities similar to Hubs. The literature review provides a strong rationale for why the Hubs are necessary for Oregon to realize its three Early Learning System goals and importantly, how the Hubs might best approach their work to be most effective. The ELD also used the literature review to inform the organization of the findings from early learning stakeholders, regarding their perspectives on the effectiveness of the work of the Hubs. The literature review is included in Appendix D.

Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement Plan

The methods used included one-one-one interviews, focus groups and follow-up interviews, Human-Centered Design interviews, and a web-based survey, which was provided in Spanish and English and distributed via Hub and CCR&R Directors to community members, child care providers, and partner and backbone agencies.

Table 1 provides a synopsis of the stakeholder groups that were engaged in this process. For more detailed information on specific stakeholder engagement approaches, see **Appendix A.**

Table 1. Engagement approaches and stakeholder groups.

Activity/Audience	Hub Director	CCR&R Director	Child Care Provider	Parent/ Family	EL Council Member	Philanthropy	Hub or CCR&R Community Partner	Backbone or board member for Backbone
Human-Centered Design Interview	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Focus Group	✓	✓						
One-on-One Interview			✓	✓	✓	✓		
Online Survey	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓

Engagement Process

<u>Human-Centered Design Interviews</u>

The ELD engaged in a design thinking-based project to explore the state's regional early learning system entities - the CCR&Rs and Hubs - and determine where there might be opportunities for systemic improvements. This process served as the primary way to surface where changes were needed within the regional and state-level early learning system.

The foundation of design thinking is the development of a first-hand understanding of the human behaviors in the system being designed, followed by decision-making that is based in that understanding. It relies heavily on collaboration from a team, participation from potential end users,

and stakeholders, and a willingness to learn the way to the right solution, and a bias toward action over planning.

To launch that process, members of the ELD team analyzed previously generated reports and professional knowledge and developed themes related to the strengths and challenges facing the early learning system specifically CCR&Rs and Hubs. Informed by the themes, the team then mapped the stakeholders in the system, created interview questions, and conducted one-on-one interviews. Interviews were conducted in Spanish as needed.

Focus Groups

The Directors of Hubs and CCR&Rs, as well as representatives of their respective backbone organizations, were invited by to participate in focus groups. Four focus groups were held, two for Hubs and two for CCR&Rs, in order to ensure opportunity for all Directors to participate. The purpose of the focus groups was to hear directly from these regional leaders regarding their regional Hub's progress toward achieving one of the three Early Learning System Goals from Raise *Up Oregon*: The Early Learning System is aligned, coordinated, and Family-Centered.

The focus groups also explored foundational community conditions, which need to be in place to effectively pursue all three of the early learning system goals (e.g., data-driven, equity-focused, adaptive community problem solving and continuous improvement). The research documented in the literature review conducted for this report, demonstrates that these community conditions develop over time and early childhood collaboratives, like the Hubs, range widely in their pursuit of these conditions. Finally, the focus groups sought both Hub and CCR&R perspectives about what the nature of their relationship ought to be with each other.

One-on-One Interviews

The ELD identified several members of the Early Learning Council, local philanthropists, and a national, regional early learning systems expert and requested their participation in a one-on-one interview designed to gain their perspective on the Hubs and CCR&Rs and their work toward achieving the three Early Learning System Goals from *Raise Up Oregon.* A total of seven interviews were conducted.

Online Survey

An online survey, offered in both English and Spanish, was open from mid-December to early January. A link to the survey was sent to all Hub and CCR&R Directors for distribution within their regions. Directors were asked to send the survey to people/organizations who work most closely with their Hub and/or CCR&R, including the governance council members of the Early Learning Hub.

The purpose of the survey was to understand the perspectives of regional leaders regarding how they typically interact with the Hubs and/or CCR&Rs, what they perceive are the most important roles are for these entities, current strengths and areas of growth related to the equity work conducted by these entities, and the benefits and consequences they perceive to the potential consolidation of these entities.

A total of 281 people responded to the survey, representing 14 of 16 Hubs and 12 of 13 CCR&Rs. The largest proportions of respondents were connected to the regional Hubs for Jackson and Josephine counties (22%), Marian and Polk counties (21%), and Marrow, Umatilla, &Union counties (12%). The largest proportions of respondents were connected to the regional CCR&Rs for Marion, Polk, and

Yamhill counties (26%), Jackson and Josephine counties (22%), and at Umatilla Morrow Head Start (UMCHS) (17%). The survey was distributed in English and Spanish. Most respondents (95%) completed the English version of the survey and some respondents (5%) completed the Spanish version of the survey. Of the respondents who responded to the question about racial/ethnic identity, most identified as Other White (36%), Western European (30%) and Hispanic or Latino/a/x Mexican (14%).

The ELD has analyzed and compiled the preliminary data based on this survey and will continue with additional analysis to inform other important work, including the ELD's multi-faceted, organizational equity self-assessment, which is currently underway. The ELD intends to work with the Hubs and CCR&Rs to make sense of the responses shared by early learning partners about the status of the equity work currently being conducted by their Hub and CCR&R.

Findings

Following the multiple stakeholder engagement opportunities, ELD staff synthesized the feedback and identified common themes that emerged. The findings below represent a compilation of the feedback from all stakeholder groups.

The majority of this report focuses on themes that emerged from all stakeholder groups related to how Hubs work to create effective partnerships. The feedback is organized to align with the Elements of Effective Partnerships, as outlined in the literature review for the Theory of Change for Hubs. The literature review can be found in **Appendix D.**

Findings are also outlined specifically related to families, child care providers, and CCR&Rs, which build on the findings of the 2019 Professional Learning Report completed by ELD to inform investments and reforms to the CCR&R System. Data from the professional learning report and the additional input of families, child care providers, and CCR&R staff informed the *Recommendations.*

Finally, we include findings related to the work of the Early Learning Division and how it can better support each entity.

Themes Specific to Hubs

Building a Shared Vision

A shared vision is foundational to drive all regional efforts to improve outcomes for families and children. A shared vision "describes population-level outcomes (e.g., obesity rates, homelessness), community conditions (e.g., access to affordable housing, livable wage jobs, transit, etc.), and related local inequities community members have prioritized for change" (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2018).

Effective shared visioning processes engage stakeholders representing multiple sectors (e.g., health, education, etc.) and roles (e.g., families, direct providers, leaders, etc.) in clearly defining the ultimate population-level impacts they want to bring about for children and families. They help determine which local groups of children and families are experiencing the greatest inequities related to these impacts, and the multiple systemic issues or "root causes" getting in the way of these impacts within the local community (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2018).

Stakeholder Consensus

Across stakeholder groups, there was agreement that the Hubs currently work consistently to build and articulate a shared vision that ensures all early learning sectors are on board and helps to reduce duplication of services. The Hubs are viewed as a focal point, holding a collective vision for how agencies work together toward shared purposes. They are viewed as the holders of the vision for early learning and development within and across their regions, bringing together and engaging around a common purpose, the stakeholders who represent various sectors and roles. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders have found that there is even more collaboration within the system, providing programs a greater opportunity to become familiar with families and community dynamics. Stakeholders generally agreed that Hubs have found success within this role and use their relationships with leaders of various sectors as a means for moving the vision forward.

"Our Hub Director is an outstanding leader who can articulate the vision of the Hub well and that models collaboration in every meeting." - Child Care Provider (Online Survey)

Identified Challenges

While there were many examples provided of Hubs successfully creating a shared vision, several identified challenges were also consistent across stakeholder groups. One challenge is being able to clearly define desired population-level impacts and outcomes when all concerned sectors and roles are not included in the creation of the vision. Stakeholders highlighted the challenges inherent in creating and sustaining a shared vision over time with multiple sectors and perceived and actual competing priorities.

Stakeholders Suggest

Stakeholders identified potential areas for addressing these challenges. For example, Hubs should prioritize intentionally amplifying organizations that are often left out of decision-making and engage and create close connections with representatives from all sectors. Hubs should also prioritize engaging diverse perspectives and creating concrete metrics in partnership with local and state entities when identifying desired outcomes and indicators of success.

Promoting Equity

Children grow and develop within the context of their families, families live and work in communities, and communities are made up of and impacted by larger systems. In order to impact equity for Oregon's children, (i.e., the guarantee that all families and children have access to the opportunities necessary to meet their needs, advance their well-being and achieve their full potential) our work must occur not only at the individual level, but also the system-level. Shared visions are more likely to improve outcomes for all children and families when they explicitly embed equity as a priority (Wolff et al., 2016). Equity therefore must be a core tenant of regional systems, which must be able to directly plan and execute to advance equity for priority populations, i.e., local populations that have been most effected by inequities.

Stakeholder Consensus

There was consensus across stakeholder groups that Hubs desire to respect and honor the diversity of their communities and to embrace different perspectives. Some Hubs have placed a high priority on conversations related to equity and raising the voices of culturally specific and community-based organizations. One identified success is around language access and providing simultaneous translation for meetings, which supports the raising up of voices that do not always have access to the table. Additionally, representatives from one Hub worked together to design an *equity lens* and placed it prominently within the early learning system to identify who is not "at the table" and how to increase engagement of parents and business and housing sectors to continue to address needs and racial equity. CCR&R directors and child care providers shared their focus on providing much-needed access to equitable learning opportunities for children, with hopes of hiring and training more staff representative of the populations they serve.

Identified Challenges

While there are successes noted related to embedding equity as a priority within the work of the Hubs, this is an area many stakeholders identified as a challenge requiring greater focus, intentionality, and support. One challenge identified across stakeholder groups is a lack of diversity and representation in leadership positions and engaged in ongoing discussions related to the vision, priorities, and work of Hubs. There was also agreement that greater support and training is required to help current leaders understand and address the existing barriers to realizing equity and carrying out coordinated and aligned equity work. Stakeholders identified specific groups who require greater levels of access to systems-level conversations and need to be explicitly and intentionally invited to engage and provide their unique and important perspectives. These groups include bilingual, bicultural direct service providers and families representing different sectors and populations experiencing poverty.

Stakeholders Suggest

Some suggestions for immediate work include the need for Hub governance council members and staff to access and participate in training specifically related to identifying systems and processes that are barriers to equity and the work required to revise and improve them. Stakeholders would like to see more consistent and intentional outreach to marginalized populations, with a focus not just on giving them a "seat at the table" but designing and providing platforms that invite diverse perspectives. The intent should be to raise up the voices of those in the community who work within and across early learning and development sectors and who represent children, families, and child care providers.

"*Our region has grown in their desire to be inclusive to people of color, tribal communities, Hispanic community members, Pacific Island community members. We use our equity lens to ask who is not at table, ask if they would like to join in planning meetings, how we can provide bilingual information and events."* - Community partner (Online Survey)

Developing cross-sector and community partnerships

Effective collaborative partnerships provide the necessary supports and conditions to ensure all stakeholders – especially families experiencing targeted inequities – can fully and authentically engage in the change efforts (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2018).

Stakeholder Consensus

The legislative mandate to work across the five sectors is viewed as a powerful statement and provides Hubs with the leverage needed to reach out and undertake efforts to bring people/organizations to the table. The Hubs have the potential to bring coherence and partnership to a fragmented system. As they've grown and evolved, other partners have found that the Hubs are an important initiative to stay engaged with. Stakeholders agree that Hubs have a unique role in bringing together partners who may not know one another and in identifying elements and aspects of the regional early learning system that aren't working. Communities have observed the value in having an initiative focused specifically on young children and their families, including all aspects of their learning and development. The key to success is engaging a wide variety of people/organizations and then actively seeking to understand their diverse perspectives. The Hub coordinates this by working to bring all voices to the table to develop system change strategies designed to result in more cohesive local systems, which connect families with needed supports and opportunities.

"Hubs do a great job at [elevating family voice]. They always make sure that the family voice doesn't fall away from the conversation." - CCR&R Director (HCD Interview)

Identified Challenges

The places where Hubs have experienced success in engaging stakeholders are the same expressed as challenges. Some Hubs find it difficult to bring families together with partners to have conversations about how to better support families and children. In other places, partners are working toward the same goals but in silos. This makes engagement and coordination more challenging. Stakeholders also identified the challenge of engaging K-12 leaders in the early childhood system work.

Stakeholder Suggestions

Suggestions ranged from Hubs focusing on bringing more voices to the table, to requiring other state-funded organizations to collaborate with the Hubs. This is an area where stakeholders were unsure as to what might help in terms of engaging stakeholder groups that they currently do not have relationships with.

Focusing on Systems and Problem-Solving

Effective collaborative partnerships use systems thinking to: 1) understand how the characteristics of their local early childhood system are serving as barriers to alignment, coordination, and family-centered approaches; 2) design strategies to address these barriers; and 3) guide effective implementation (Coffman, 2007; Foster-Fishman et al., 2007, 2012; Stroh, 2015). These partnerships gather and use qualitative and quantitative data from diverse perspectives and sources to help understand and address system barriers and guide implementation (Early Childhood System Workgroup, 2013; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017).

Gathering and Using Data

Stakeholder Consensus

The Hubs clearly have different levels of capacity when it comes to effectively gathering and using data. Some stakeholders mentioned having little to no reliable data and struggling with tracking data and measuring outcomes. Others mentioned data use as a strength, such as sharing data for early care and education sector planning. It helped them to align data from Hubs and CCR&Rs to see where their early care and education gaps are and where to apply for funds.

Identified Challenges

The challenges were consistent. Programs struggle with gathering reliable data, which makes analysis and reporting difficult, if not impossible. As one Hub Director said, "*Trying to analyze bad data makes it hard to drive change*." A lack of a standardized data system, which all partners can contribute to and extrapolate from, creates a challenge in truly measuring and understanding children's growth and development toward identified goals. In addition, there is a consensus that people are very busy and have a lot of competing priorities, making it difficult to be thoughtful and reflective and to make decisions based on data.

Stakeholders Suggest

Stakeholders would like to see a data dashboard with a filter for different communities and strategies so they can identify when different communities need specific resources. A need was also expressed for shared data systems that talk to each other, so everyone knows what's going on. These two suggestions would require a significant investment, but the consensus is that without strong data systems, it is very challenging to track and communicate progress and outcomes and to coordinate and reduce duplication of efforts.

Effective Convening

Effective collaborative partnerships are supported by convener staff who take on coordination, administration, communication, and facilitation roles to promote partnership relationships and work. These roles are clearly defined to ensure conveners remain neutral and focused on "*building* community leadership as opposed to *being* the leadership" (Wolff et al., 2016). These partnerships put processes in place to ensure timely, ongoing, and culturally responsive communication about decisions, activities, and progress to stakeholders in and out of the partnership (Early Childhood System Workgroup, 2013; Kegler et al., 2007). This communication allows stakeholders to have the information they need to be informed and active members of the systems building efforts (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Effective collaborative partnerships also have comprehensive financing structures that align local, county, state, and national funding to support the partnership functions listed above and their systems building strategies.

Neutral Conveners

Stakeholder Consensus

There was unanimous consent among all stakeholder groups that the Hubs act effectively as neutral conveners. They are viewed as neutral because they do not provide direct services or compete for funding or families. This perceived neutrality allows Hubs to successfully bring people together to work toward a common purpose. They do this by developing relationships with partners, across sectors, who view the Hubs as the place to find everything related to early childhood systems and as the connector to multiple communities and service providers.

As neutral conveners, the Hubs are well-connected and bring organizations and people together to create momentum. They have been successful in engaging and bringing significant decision makers to the table who share knowledge and resources that benefit local efforts. Their convening role highlights the importance of engaging all sectors in understanding and caring for children and families, with a focus on preparing children for success in kindergarten and in life.

"They are conveners, and as a CCR&R that's super important to me. We would be here, but not with the level of partnerships that the Hub has brought." - CCR&R Director (HCD Interview)

Identified Challenges

One challenge that was mentioned consistently was that Hubs lack the leverage they need or are unable to identify incentives that encourage attendance and engagement in their governance councils. While

they are viewed by many as being neutral, this status may put them at a disadvantage in terms of being able to effectively bring needed voices and representation to the table.

Stakeholders Suggest

There was agreement that Hubs should become better at building parent leadership, engaging parent voice, and including it at the decision-making level, as well as facilitating the same for all regional partners. The hope is that as a regional convening table, state-level system partners could see their regional offices benefit by connections to the Hub.

Clearly Defined Roles

Stakeholders Consensus

In terms of the roles of Hubs and CCR&Rs, there were two themes that surfaced across stakeholder engagement. The first is that each is perceived by stakeholders as being very good at the jobs that they do. The second is that not everyone is clear on which of these entities should be doing what jobs. All participants agreed that a clearer definition of roles and responsibilities is essential for greater regional impact moving forward; and that will lead to a more clear and shared understanding by regional early learning partners.

There is agreement among stakeholders that Hubs are recognized as the early childhood experts in the region, the entity that works to bridge the gaps with key partners that serve the community. They are the umbrella – the ones that actively seek to "see the whole system" and support communication and collaboration across sectors. The Hubs have created community processes that are more inclusive and are bringing more insight into the underlying reasons for these problems. CCR&Rs, on the other hand, are focused on child care providers and their businesses and providing training and technical assistance.

Stakeholders also agreed that there is strength brought to the region by the Hubs and CCR&Rs having different roles, as it allows them to each focus their efforts in a more specific and effective way. The CCR&Rs have close relationships with early educators and child care and the explicit responsibility to provide training, coaching, and technical assistance in a deep and meaningful way. Hubs connect with early learning partners such as school districts and can develop close relationships with families.

"Para mi y mi programa el apoyo del HUB y CCR and R son cruciales, importantes y muy necesarios. Si cada oficina se enfoca en una area en especafico. Por ejemplo una oficina que proporcione toda la informacion y herramientas para la inscripcion de las familias. Y la otra oficina especa-ficamente que preste apoyo a las proveedoras en las necesidades en general se cada programa."

- Child care provider (Online Survey)

Translation: "For me and my program, the support of the Hub and the CCR&R is crucial, important and much needed. If each office focuses on a specific area. For example, an office that provides all the information and tools for the registration of families. And the other office specifically that provides support to the providers in the general needs of each program."

Identified Challenges

Despite deep appreciation for the work that the Hubs and CCR&Rs do, there was a consistent message across stakeholder groups that there is still a need for more clarification of roles for each of them. In some places, there is confusion as to what each entity represents or the work they do. In others, there's uncertainty related to which entity is responsible for which goals or outcomes. Members of the community are often confused as to which entity is responsible for which work, and when the Hub and/or the CCR&R are confused about their roles, this sometimes leads to perceptions that each is not staying in "their lane."

"*Part of the struggle I think is that we all know that there needs to be greater integration and collaboration, but we don't have clear understanding of what the integration and collaboration should look like." - CCR&R Director (Focus Group)*

Stakeholders Suggest

There were several suggestions as to how Hubs and CCR&Rs might better clarify their roles. These suggestions included clarifying the ELD scopes of work for each of these entities, as well as formally defining the body of work they are expected to accomplish together, and building more of a shared vision across the community of what the role of the Hubs is. In many cases, stakeholders felt clearer about the role of the CCR&Rs than the role of the Hubs, and they suggested it would be helpful to come together more often and have conversations about who is doing what in their regions. Increased strategic communication between Hubs and CCR&Rs was identified as a potential solution to this current lack of clarity related to roles.

<u>Clearly Defined Relationships</u>

Stakeholder Consensus

Like the perceptions of Hub and CCR&R roles, there was agreement among stakeholders that a clearly defined relationship was essential as well. Where Hub and CCR&R Directors expressed they had a close relationship with one another and strong communication, there was less confusion over roles and responsibilities. There was an emphasis on being "close but separate," where both entities saw the value in working closely together but maintaining separate roles and responsibilities.

Identified Challenges

The challenge here, as in any solid relationship, is clear communication and an intentional focus on building and maintaining the relationship between the Hub and its CCR&R. The challenges expressed were that there was a lack of communication between the entities and that they do not completely understand or appreciate what the different roles and responsibilities are, leading to misunderstanding and a breakdown of communication.

Stakeholders Suggest

The suggestions included that CCR&Rs be viewed by Hubs as strong partners and regularly invited to engage in the Hub's planning efforts to improve and expand early learning programs. There was also hope expressed that relationship building is included as part of their scopes of work so there is a clear understanding that developing a close, working relationship is seen as part of the successful fulfillment of their roles and responsibilities.

Flexible & Sustained Funding Mechanisms

Stakeholder Consensus

Stakeholders agreed that for Hubs to be successful at the work they've been tasked with, they require access to a more robust set of resources, broadly defined. There was a consensus that consistent and predictable funding streams would help Hubs in regional planning, the engagement of stakeholders, and in designing and using much more robust systems change strategies.

Identified Challenges

The challenges identified by stakeholders included instability in state provided funding, leaving Hubs feeling unsure of sustainability of their regional investments. There were also concerns expressed about the capacity of Hubs to be able to do their work effectively without sufficient and reliable resources behind them.

Stakeholders Suggest

Suggestions for this challenge include providing more funding for Hubs to do their work and to provide more resources overall that would result in Hubs being able to accomplish their scope of tasks. Several stakeholders mentioned that Hubs have been successful at meeting goals even without expanded funding, so the suggestion is that perhaps it is not just funding that is required, but a more robust support system. This might include for example, ELD sponsored training and technical assistance, and guidance related to engaging business leaders and legislators.

Themes Specific to Child Care Providers, Families & CCR&Rs

The purpose of the stakeholder engagement was to provide a wide range of opportunities to gain a diverse set of perspectives from early learning system stakeholders including parents, community members, child care providers, Hub and CCR&R directors, community partner agencies, Early Learning Council members, and philanthropists. The themes above are focused on the Hubs and where they've had success and faced challenges. This section is focused on the feedback related specifically to families, child care providers, and CCR&R about the work of their CCR&Rs, as well as some themes that point to needs between connections between CCR&Rs and Hubs.

Families Identify Strengths and Challenges

Families were engaged in the Human-Centered Design interviews and asked about their experiences finding child care, whether their current child care met their family's needs, and how they experienced interactions with their Hub and CCR&R. The sample size was small, so the feedback here represents the group that was engaged and may not reflect the experiences of all families. A small percentage of respondents to the online survey identified as being parents, and when their feedback reflected the experience of being a parent in the Hub, their feedback is included here.

Families Identify Strengths

Families agreed it is important to be involved in the community and to learn from others in the community. They mentioned that they learned from friends or community members how to navigate the system to get the resources they need. Several parents mentioned they feel they can rely on their CCR&Rs to answer questions or concerns and look to their Hub for encouragement and support. An

example raised by many of a successful approach to supporting families was Pollywog, which helps families access their regional early learning system in a streamlined, simplified way.

Families Identify Challenges

While some families reported that community members helped them navigate the system, the challenge identified was the complexity of the system and navigating it independently. Learning to find child care was identified as a "big issue." An additional challenge related to finding child care was that families with children with identified disabilities or suspected delays struggle to find child care programs that will enroll them. The Hubs identified this as a challenge they need support with to ensure families are a part of the decisions made and are not left with limited options for care.

Child Care Providers Identify Strengths and Challenges

Child care providers were engaged through the Human-Centered Design interviews and were asked about their training experiences and relationship and interaction with CCR&Rs. They also represented 23% of respondents to the online survey and 12 out of 13 CCR&Rs. Relevant responses are included here.

Child Care Providers Identify Strengths

Child care providers agreed that they found their CCR&Rs to be reliable and helped ECE programs navigate rules and regulations related to licensing. One provider described the CCR&Rs as a "practical, reliable, accessible resource." They also appreciated CCR&Rs providing access to high-quality, relevant training opportunities.

"CCR&R, me a dado la oportunidad de crecer educativa mente y me a incluido en todo momento en mandar informaciÃ³n con entrenamientos."
- Child Care Provider (Online Survey)

Translation: "The CCR&R has given me the opportunity to grow educationally and has included me at all times in sending information with training."

Child Care Providers Identify Challenges

Child care providers expressed challenges related to accessing culturally relevant networks and trainings. They also identified challenges with preschool enrollment, suggesting that it would be helpful if programs could manage their own enrollment, while still having support from a central, coordinating system of enrollment for eligible families in the region.

CCR&R Directors Identify Strengths and Challenges

CCR&R Directors had multiple opportunities to participate in the stakeholder engagement opportunities. CCR&Rs are primarily responsible for the Early Care and Education (ECE) sector and – by virtue of the way ECE programs are delivered – have a role within the K-12 system as well. This includes a role around supporting families to understand the system, but is primarily focused on training and technical assistance to the ECE workforce in family child care, child care, and other programs, as well as support to assist individuals or groups in navigating the process to start a child care business. This includes

support to navigate the child care licensing system, among other duties. Their responses related specifically to their roles and their views on child care provider strengths and challenges are included here.

CCR&R Directors Identify Strengths

Directors view their role as helping providers navigate complex regulations and to help them understand decisions made that impact their work. They recognized that providers come to them frequently for support because they understand child care. Because they are connected to Hubs, when CCR&R directors are engaged in opportunities to make decisions, they do their best to get provider input. They feel this role is important because sometimes providers share feedback that is unexpected and important for decision-makers to hear and understand.

CCR&R Directors Identify Challenges

There were many challenges identified by CCR&R directors. One consistent theme was that directors feel their role is to speak for providers, but what they really want is to elevate child care providers presence and voice at decision-making tables. Rather than just helping providers understand decisions, they believe providers should be involved in making the decisions. A barrier to providers accessing decision-making tables is language. Providers who speak a language other than English are not easily able to communicate their needs to CCR&Rs and may experience challenges access meetings or trainings that would support their capacity to engage and provide their diverse perspectives.

"*It takes time to recruit people to the table and teach people how to advocate for themselves—this can't be something you do on the side."* - CCR&R Director (Focus Group)

Directors believe the provider voice needs to be included in decisions that are made that impact their work, specifically unlicensed providers who are not connected to the system in any way. They also expressed that surveys are not the best way to ensure provider voices are heard. With many competing priorities, providers do not always have the time to complete surveys.

"*[Providers feel] like even though they have a voice, they don't. If you can actually talk to them, you can identify what their voice is and share what they really need. The human-to-human contact is important.*" - CCR&R Director (Focus Group)

In terms of supporting programs in expansion efforts, directors noted that county and city regulations are often a barrier to programs opening in new locations, due to required permits and waivers. COVID-19 has added additional complications.

Themes Specific to the ELD

During the preparation of this report early learning stakeholders also shared their perspectives about the ELD role in supporting effective regional early learning systems. The following are themes that were consistent across stakeholder groups:

More opportunities are needed for:

- The inclusion of regional early learning system stakeholder voices, e.g., families, child care providers, Hubs, and CCR&Rs, in planning and decision-making.

- Co-creating initiatives/mandates with ELD to create shared understanding and buy-in from the beginning.

"Sometimes we collectively don't sit down and put our heads together and understand each other. We need to come together to look at the issue and work on it together and be on the same page with a collective approach. - Hub Director (HCD Interviews)

- Visible expressions of understanding and appreciation of the contributions of the Hubs to the early learning system.
- Co-creating a shared culture of continuous learning and improvement among ELD, Hubs and CCR&Rs.
- Shared professional learning opportunities designed to build shared systems understanding and capacity among Hubs, CCR&Rs and the ELD.
- Hub technical assistance and training designed to build capacity for: how to embed anti-racism and equity, how to break down equity barriers, building and supporting family leadership and voice, moving families to be co-equal system architects and facilitating inclusive decision-making processes for Hub governance councils.

"Facilitation involves not only in-meeting facilitation of dialogue, but the ability to design and manage truly inclusive decision-making processes. This is often more difficult than it sounds, and therefore additional TA support from the ELD may be helpful or necessary to truly achieve this." - Hub Director (ToC Feedback Session)

More state-level coordination and alignment is needed regarding:

- Other state agencies not requiring and supporting effective regional/local agency engagement with the Hubs, particularly as governance council members
- Professional learning funding between the ELD and the Educator Advancement Council, specifically related to RENs
- State workforce requirements for ECE teachers and school-based preschool teachers

Adjustments are needed to:

- Timelines and expectations in Hub and CCR&R scopes of work so there is more time to convene stakeholders, build a solid understanding, be thoughtful, reflect, and assess progress.

"When time is crunched, it makes it hard to get people at the table and be really thoughtful—and we miss things when we have to rush." Gathering perspectives takes time, and the voices of providers and parents are often left out." - CCRR Director (Focus Group)

- The amount of time and resources Hubs and CCR&Rs need to respond to ELD requests and adapt "in real time" to new requirements in their scopes of work.

"Whiplash is the word. When we are constantly having to change... funding, purpose, metrics, roles...coordination is challenging." - Hub Director (Focus Group)

- Grant agreements so they allow Hubs and CCR&Rs to respond more nimbly to the emerging and changing needs of their region.

- The overall breadth of expectations currently in place for Hubs so their regional system change efforts have more impact.

"The state's portfolio for the Hubs is so broad that the effects look very diffused. We may only focus on one area for periods of time, in order to affect change in that area, and then move focus to another. And the expectations were to do it all. We have to let things go because we can't do everything. Lots of spinning plates." - Hub Director (Focus Group)

- Reporting requirements to assure they are producing valuable and useful information for Hubs and CCR&Rs and the ELD.
- Communication processes so they are clear, expedient and assure Hubs and CCR&Rs receive the same, timely information.

More financial resources are needed to assure:

- Hubs have sufficient internal capacity to effectively operate and achieve their intended regional outcomes.

"When we have money, we can bring everyone to the table. When dollars go away, all the hard work goes away. Funding is not stable, and that affects bringing partners to the table."
-Hub Director (Focus Group)

- Hubs can financially support families to be full and equal members of Hub governance councils.
- Regional learning systems have access to timely, reliable data and sufficient data infrastructure and capacity.

"Is there someone troubleshooting to make sure there is better data connectivity between data systems? Especially connecting early learning programs to K-12 outcomes. There has to be a way we are able to connect individual child level data to be able to show the effectiveness of the interventions and services we are investing in. Until we get that, it is just speculative. You're taking 3rd grade reading scores and trying to extrapolate whether your K transition program worked and there is no way to make that one-on-one comparison. And looking at population level data is futile because it's too big - it takes too much time."
- Hub Director (Focus Group)

More clarity is needed about:

- The connection between what state is doing with *Raise Up Oregon* and what Hubs are responsible for.

"This requires working together to develop a clearer plan on how we will work together to make Raise Up Oregon a reality, with much more clarity and specificity. Then moving forward implementing the plan, monitoring it and adopting reflective practice along the way to learn and adjust as necessary."
- Hub Director (HCD Interview)

- How the state is using the early care and education sector plans developed by the Hubs and CCR&Rs to inform its planning and decision-making.

Additional access is needed to:

- Translation of required trainings and training materials for child care providers and translation needs to expand outside of the five core languages.
- Training and resources to support inclusion, with a goal of assuring a foundational set of inclusive practices is built and being used consistently in ECE programs.

"When trainings aren't translated, we have to figure out how to do that, which feels rushed and non-authentic. There is a lot of equity work to be done there."
- CCR&R Director (HCD Interview)

Fiscal Analysis

Overview

The ELD reviewed the financial practices and documentation related to the work and resources of both Hubs and CCCRs for the current and last biennium. Documents reviewed included quarterly reports, budgets, audited financials and other supporting documentation that is collected on a regular basis and as part of overall monitoring for both entities.

Both Hubs and CCRR's are required to submit quarterly reporting and have back-up documentation for all dollars that they receive from the ELD. Both organizations also participate in biennial monitoring processes that include a review of fiscal documentation including budgets, invoices, sub-contracts and audited financials. These documents are submitted to the ELD as part of these processes.

The backbone entities of Hubs and CCRRs vary across the state and include Educational Service Districts (ESDs) Community Colleges, Head Start, a Community Care Organization, a County, Community Action Agencies, United Ways, and other not for profits. In almost all cases, the backbone receives a negotiated indirect rate from the CCRR or Hub under its umbrella. These vary from three percent up to 15 percent. Only a couple of backbones charge little to no overhead and some provide additional resources for staffing, shared services or in-kind office space. Examples include providing administrative support staff, data staff, technology and communications support, use of vehicles, facilities, human resources and financial services, fundraising and professional development.

The Hubs and CCRRs were also asked to submit responses to the following narrative questions:

- Has your (Hub/CCRR) allocated resources to your regional (Hub/CCRR)? Please be specific on what you are funding and how much or what you have funded in the last 3 years.
- Do you and your (Hub/CCRR) co-fund any strategies, activities or programming in your region? Please be specific and provide actual budget information.
- How have you leveraged funding for joint work that supports children, families and programs in your region? Please be specific and provide actual budget numbers, if applicable.
- What type of resource support is your organization receiving from your backbone entity? Please be specific as possible and provide actual budget information, if applicable. If no support is being provided, and you are giving an indirect rate please indicate this as well.

Findings

In their narrative responses Hubs and CCR&Rs provided many examples of joint strategies and activities, including both co-funding and shared leveraging of funding in their regions.

Below are the themes the ELD determined from this fiscal analysis:

Hubs and CCR&R work collaboratively and leverage joint resources in many different ways in their regions. Professional Development is an area that has been a particularly rich area of collaboration with multiple examples of joint efforts between CCR&Rs and Hubs to support the creation of equitable and accessible professional development opportunities for child care providers in their regions. Hubs and CCR&Rs have jointly funded trainings, conferences, provider participation incentives, translation services and Focused Child Care networks in English and Spanish.

Almost all regions hold joint conferences and trainings for providers. Below are some illustrative examples:

- *Central Oregon Partners in Practice* supports child care provider certificate and degree completion, with emphasis on providers in the work force, with lived experience and providers from diverse and historically underserved populations.
- In Southern Oregon the Hub provides scholarships for providers for conferences and professional development opportunities supported by the CCR&R.
- In Washington County, the Hub and CCR&R put on an annual child care provider summit and co-fund provider incentives. The Washington County Hub supports translation services as well.
- In Marion and Polk counties, disaster preparation training is delivered by the CCR&R with emergency supplies provided by the Hub. Marion and Polk counties also worked to meet the needs of providers by working with Clackamas Community college to create early care and education classes in Spanish for providers who may not have had access to home language professional development previously.
- In the South Central Region, an early care and education conference and conference for KPI are supported by the Hub and CCR&R.
- In Eastern Oregon, the Malheur ESD provides Hub funded professional development to all interested educators across the region.

The implementation of shared strategies, shared leveraging of resources and co-funding of activities is also prevalent amongst CCR&Rs and Hubs in many regions. The development of a regional child care task force is a joint CCR&R and Hub strategy that is being replicated across the state, in order to increase the supply of high quality early care and education. Below are some illustrative examples:

- In Central Oregon, the Hub, CCR&R, Chamber of Commerce, and other partners developed a child care task force and pulled funding together for a Child Care Accelerator position to leverage business partnerships and investments in childcare, coordinate the regional chamber's focus on childcare, and cultivate owner/broker support for childcare facility siting.
- In Linn, Benton and Lincoln, a similar strategy is taking place. The new child care accelerator position funded in part by the Oregon Community Foundation is designed to jumpstart new childcare facilities by addressing barriers to new and expanded quality childcare facilities. The child care accelerator position will act as catalyst between the private and public sectors in identifying opportunities to increase quality childcare through aligning employer participation, capital, land and public private partnerships.
- On the South Coast, the Hub and CCR&R are working closely with the Southwestern Oregon Workforce Investment Board to start a child care apprenticeship program. This would be funded with private foundation funds and a workforce grant through state or federal sources.

CCR&Rs and Hubs are also co-funding the preparation and dissemination of: STEM kits and STEM trainings, literacy kits, lending backpacks, lending library materials and story-time activities, for families and child care providers. At the Blue Mountain Hub, the CCR&R and Hub co-resource professional learning teams, conscious discipline trainings, and several other joint activities.

Although not all Hubs and CCR&R have the financial resources to co-invest in specific shared strategies, most noted that they endeavor to work closely together and seek opportunities to aligning their work with each other. In the Four Rivers region, it was noted that between the Hub and the CCR&R there is "mutual respect and alignment of diverse but coordinated strategies." Other Hubs and CCR&Rs noted

that the sharing of in-kind resources like staff time, and the free use of meeting or training spaces as their usual way of working together.

Hub governance is another area where Hubs and CCR&Rs are working closely together. Many CCR&R directors or their staff are members of their respective Hub governance councils helping to provide strategic direction and investment decision making. In Yamhill County, the CCR&R director serves as the co-chair of the Hub governance council.

Finally, in 2019 all Hubs and CCR&Rs completed an early care and education sector plan for their regions. Hubs generally coordinated their regional Stewardship Committee meetings and compiled regional data on historically underserved populations, while CCR&Rs provided the regional Stewardship Committee with up-to-date data on early care and education program availability (slots) in the region and helped identify strengths and challenges for the region's early care and education expansion. Hubs and CCR&Rs are jointly using their early care and education sector plans to hone their focus on priority populations and to advocate and plan for the expansion of ECE services in their regions.

Co-Created Theory of Change

Regional Early Childhood Systems Theory of Change

The following describes the draft TOC the ELD proposes to guide regional early childhood systems building efforts in Oregon. A TOC is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It is focused particularly on mapping out what a change initiative like the Hubs does, and how its strategies and activities lead to the desired goals being achieved. It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goals. This TOC begins with the early learning system goal, "Children Arrive Ready for Kindergarten" and then works back from this system goal to identify all the preconditions (outcomes) that must be in place for this goal to be realized.

Through this approach, the precise link between the strategies and activities of the Hubs, and the achievement of the long-term goals are more fully understood. This leads to more effective implementation. It drives how the Hub conducts its work, crafts and ultimately selects its strategies and activities, and can be informed by and linked to a research-based understanding of how systemic change actually happens. It also leads to better evaluation, as it is possible to measure progress towards the achievement of longer-term goals that go beyond the identification of program outputs. The ELD is hopeful that this updated TOC will also be useful in addresses the concerns shared about many stakeholders, including Hubs, for needed clarity in Hub vision, role, and work focus.

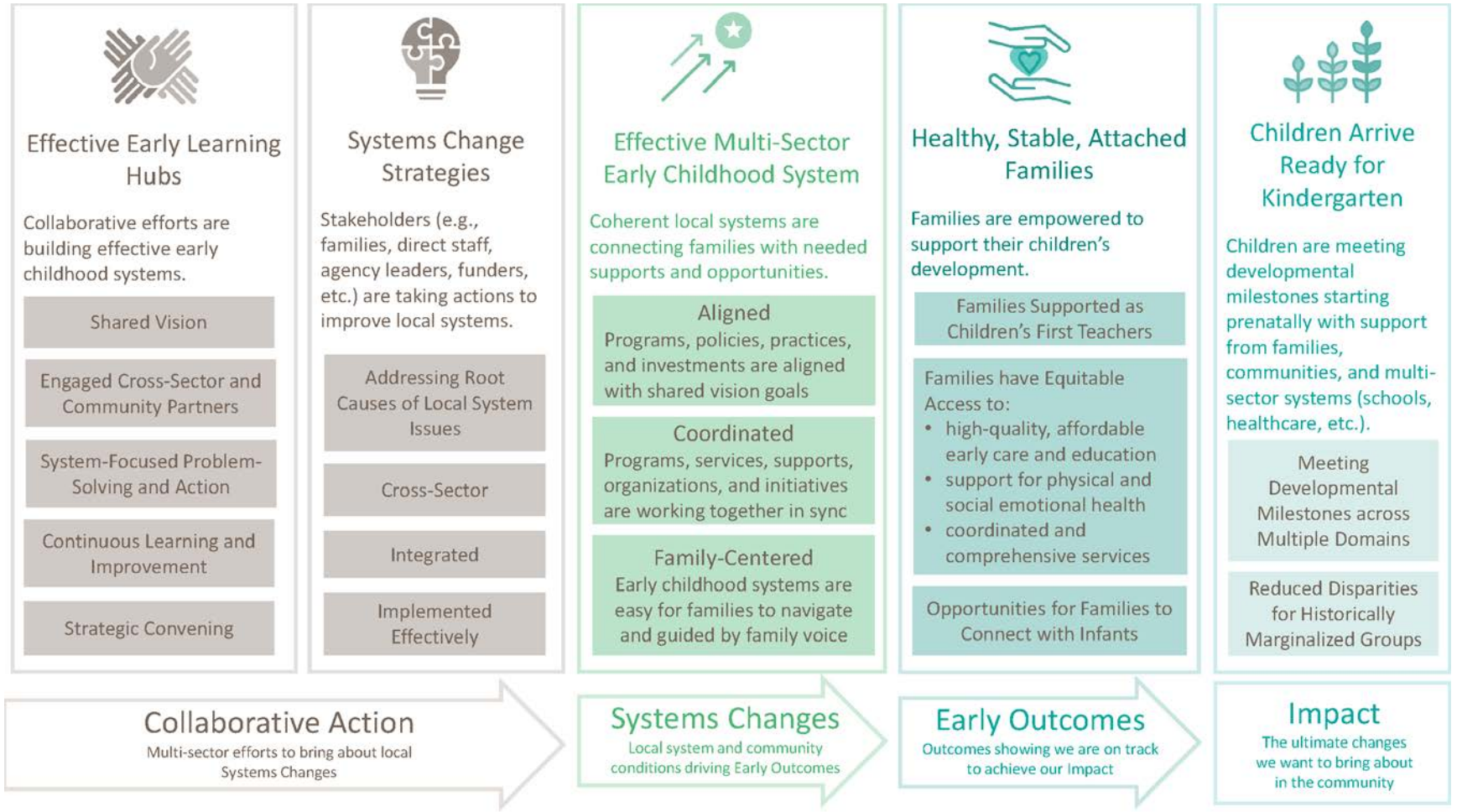
Each section of the draft TOC shown below is described in detail in **Appendix B.**

Theory of Change Development

In order to update the Theory of Change (TOC) used to inform regional early learning systems, the ELD used a co-creation approach with Hub Directors so their expertise and experience could significantly inform its development. ELD offered two opportunities for Hub directors to provide their input and expertise regarding how a highly effective Hub would operate and what it would look like. In the TOC engagement sessions, Hub directors considered questions such as: Who is engaged by a highly effective early learning Hub? What roles do they play? How do these partners stay focused on shared goals? How do they effectively problem-solve local system issues? A themed summary of Hub responses was created and provided to Hub directors for their review and any additional input.

A draft TOC was then created (see below), which integrates the input and expertise shared by Hub directors, with the early learning system goals, objectives and strategies from *Raise Up Oregon,* and the literature review. The presentation used for the TOC engagement sessions can be found in **Appendix C.**

Oregon Early Childhood Systems Theory of Change



Recommendations

This report documents how well the Hubs and CCR&Rs are meeting their scope, purpose, and legislatively intended function, and the nature of the work and relationship between the two entities in service to their regions. After the Human-Centered Design interviews, ELD staff analyzed feedback and formulated questions that would inspire and guide the development of recommendations. These questions were designed to provoke critical thinking and planning.

For example:

- How might we . . .
    - help stakeholders visualize an equitable early learning system?
    - support Hubs to continue building cross-sector relationships?
    - create more clarity in roles and mandates with the CCR&Rs and Hubs?
    - support a culture of continuous learning and improvement in the regional systems?
    - elevate the voices of families and empower families to influence the system?

The ELD has identified opportunities for greater partnership and collaboration that would increase regional system alignment and coordination, resulting in improved outcomes for children, families, and child care providers. Recommendations are as follows.

Early Learning Hubs

- **Adopt the Theory of Change for Hubs** and use it to refine Hub scope of work for the 2021-23 biennium, performance measures, reporting, continuous improvement, and evaluation.
- **Refine Hub scope of work to assure:**
    - alignment with the Theory of Change.
    - sufficient time and resources to build leadership with, engage, and convene stakeholders, particularly families of young children.
    - ongoing assessment of progress toward early learning system goals and outcomes, and continuous improvement is conducted with families and other early learning system stakeholders.
    - more consistent and intentional outreach to marginalized populations, with a focus beyond giving them a “seat at the table” but designing and providing platforms that build leadership and raise up the voices of culturally specific, community-based organizations.
    - capacity to respond more quickly and effectively to the emerging and changing needs of the region and the early learning system as a whole.
    - Hub and CCR&R relationship building is defined as a key aspect of the successful fulfillment of their respective roles and responsibilities.
    - CCR&R Directors are required members of the Hub governance councils.
- **Refine Hub funding approach to assure sufficient internal capacity** to effectively operate and financially support families to be full and equal members of Hub governance councils.

Child Care Resource and Referral Entities

- **Refine CCR&R scope of work to assure:**
    - sufficient time and resources to build leadership with, engage, and convene stakeholders, child care providers, culturally specific organizations, and other key

partners from the early care and education sector in the region, as members of an Advisory Council for the CCR&R.
    - capacity to respond more quickly and effectively to the emerging and changing needs of the region and the early learning system as a whole.
    - ongoing assessment of progress toward early learning system goals and outcomes, and continuous improvement is conducted with child care providers.
    - Hub and CCR&R relationship building is defined as a key aspect of the successful fulfillment of their respective roles and responsibilities.
- **Focus on ensuring resources from the Student Success Act Professional Learning Plan effectively increase the capacity of CCR&Rs to:**
    - increase the number and racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of staff available to support all early childhood educators.
    - expand high-quality training and technical assistance opportunities for all child care programs.
    - employ coaches to support Preschool Promise Providers and other preschool providers with job-embedded support.
- **Increase the visibility and examine the branding or CCR&Rs within communities** to ensure that all early care and education programs are aware of the supports available to them and that communities see the CCR&R as the leader in knowledge of early care and education best practice.
- **Continue to examine the need for additional funding for CCR&Rs** to ensure the effective implementation of a professional learning system for the ECE workforce during the COVID-19 recovery.

Hubs and Child Care Resource and Referral Entities

- **Improve state and regional knowledge and understanding** regarding the unique purposes, scopes of work, and legislatively intended functions of both the Hubs and the CCR&Rs.
- **Engage the Hubs and CCR&Rs in defining a shared scope of work** to expand efforts already underway and build child care supply to support regional recovery from COVID-19.
- **Engage the cohort of Hubs and CCR&Rs who share a backbone organization** to better understand the nature of their current relationships, identify opportunities and challenges to increased integration and alignment.

Early Learning Division

- **Improve inclusion of regional early learning system stakeholder voices,** e.g., families, child care providers, Hubs, and CCR&Rs, in the ELD's regional early learning system planning, co-creation, decision-making, and continuous improvement processes.
- **Identify opportunities for improvement in the administration, management, and technical assistance support** of the Hubs and CCR&Rs, including but not limited to:
    - aligning Request for Application (RFA) cycles.
    - defining outcomes for the regional early learning system that are aligned with the Hub Theory of Change (TOC) and CCR&R scope of work.
    - improving the utility of quarterly progress reports for the ELD, early learning system stakeholders, and the CCR&Rs and the Hubs respectively.

    - improving communication processes among the ELD, the Hubs, and the CCR&Rs so communication is clear and expedient, and assure Hubs and CCR&Rs receive the same, timely information.
    - integrating the technical assistance and training provided to support the achievement of the scopes of work for the Hubs and CCR&Rs.
    - increasing access to ongoing, high value professional learning opportunities to develop and build knowledge, understanding, skills, and capacities of staff and governance council members. Focus on: how to effectively use the TOC, how to embed anti-racism and equity, how to break down equity barriers, how to build and support family leadership and voice, how to move families to be co-equal system architects and facilitate inclusive decision-making processes for Hub governance councils.
- **Develop a more in-depth understanding of the optimal backbone organization(s)** necessary to support and realize effective Hubs, as defined in the TOC, and effective CCR&Rs.
- **Increase access** to required trainings, Focused Child Care Networks, technical assistance, coaching, and resources for child care providers who speak languages other than English, and—where needed and feasible—provide opportunities in more than the five core languages (English, Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, and Chinese).
- **Adapt current approach to supporting inclusion in child care** with a goal of assuring a foundational set of inclusive practices is built and being used consistently in ECE programs.

Early Learning Council and Legislature

- **Improve Hub access to connected, timely, and accurate data** to help make informed decisions and to evaluate their impact. ELD and the cross-agency partners of the Early Learning Council–the Oregon Department of Human Services, the Oregon Department of Education, the Oregon Health Authority, and the Oregon Housing and Community Services–must have the resources necessary to address the challenges the Hubs encounter with reliable and accessible data, and a comprehensive and connected early learning data system.

Early Learning Council

- **Share and work to address the cross-agency issues identified in this report** with the Early Learning Council (ELC) and the Raise Up Oregon Interagency Implementation Committee convened by the ELD which includes: the Oregon Department of Human Services, the Oregon Department of Education, the Oregon Health Authority, and the Oregon Housing and Community Services. This work would include more specific direction regarding how regional counterparts are expected to participate, share and dedicate resources, and take action as members of Hub governance councils.

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Appendix A

Stakeholder Engagement Protocols

Human Centered Design Interviews

Overview

In the fall of 2020, a Design Team from the Early Learning Division was engaged in a Design Thinking-based project to explore the Early Learning system (specifically the CCR&Rs and Hubs) and where there might be systemic improvements. The team consisted of the following members: Joan Blough, Sara Mickelson, Valeria Atanacio, Kimberly Moua, Carmen Ellis, Leslee Barnes, Remy Watts and Katie Schergen.

Design Thinking, a recognized approach for creating thoughtful experiences and systems, is a core practice of some of the most innovative companies and institutions in the world. Design Thinking has been utilized to create consumer products, healthcare systems, retail spaces, fundraising events, curricula and much more.

Design Thinking methodologies have gained increasing traction in the K12 education space in recent years. From educators using the process as a pedagogical framework for real world, project-based learning to school leaders leveraging the process as a driver of innovation, progressive leaders of education reform have taken up Design Thinking as a mechanism for positive change. As we build awareness that school systems are complex human-centered environments that are actively designed, we continue to see the desire to equip school leaders with tools that are more traditionally leveraged by designers in the corporate and social sectors.

The foundation of Design Thinking is a first-hand understanding of the human behaviors in the system being designed, followed by decision-making that is based in that understanding. It relies heavily on collaboration from a team, participation from potential end users and stakeholders, a willingness to learn the way to the right solution, and a bias toward action over planning.

To launch that process, members of the Design Team analyzed previously generated reports and professional knowledge and developed themes related to the strengths and challenges facing the system.

Interviews

Informed by the themes, the Design Team mapped the stakeholders in the system and conducted interviews using the following Interview Guide.

In terms of determining the sample size of this qualitative study, we followed these guidelines: “The sample size used in qualitative research methods is often smaller than that used in quantitative research methods. This is because qualitative research methods are often concerned with garnering an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or are focused on *meaning* (and *heterogeneities in meaning*)—which are often centered on the *how* and *why* of a particular issue, process, situation, subculture, scene or set of social interactions. In-depth interview work is not as concerned with making generalizations to a larger population of interest and does not tend to rely on hypothesis testing but rather is more inductive and emergent in its process. As such, the aim of grounded theory and in-depth interviews is to create

"categories from the data and then to analyze relationships between categories" while attending to how the "lived experience" of research participants can be understood (Charmaz, 1990, p. 1162).

There are several debates concerning what sample size is the right size for such endeavors. Most scholars argue that the concept of saturation is the most important factor to think about when mulling over sample size decisions in qualitative research (Mason, 2010). Saturation is defined by many as the point at which the data collection process no longer offers any new or relevant data. Another way to state this is that conceptual categories in a research project can be considered saturated "when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113)."

After completing their interviews, the Design Team synthesized the qualitative data they gathered into observations and inferences about why those observations were important.

Needs Statements
Based on the qualitative research gathered through interviews, the Design Team synthesized the data into "Needs Statements" that describe what the constituent groups need regarding the Early Learning system. Information from the "Needs Statements" was incorporated into the *Findings* section of the report.

How Might We Questions
These opportunities are then used to create How Might We questions. How Might We questions use a variety of creative approaches to develop generative, energizing questions used to drive a brainstorming process. For example, "How might we help visualize the system for all stakeholders?" These questions informed the *Recommendations* section of the report.

HCD Interview Guide
Use the tools included to select your top six questions from the suggested questions below. Start with the questions that will help your team build rapport. Then, select questions your team thinks are the most important. If you have additional time, feel free to ask additional questions as well. Always save time to ask the wrap question.

Also, use the tools to take notes about what you are hearing.

CCR&R

Build Rapport

- What is your personal goal for your work? What difference are you personally trying to make? What gets you up in the morning?
- What keeps you up at night about this work?
- What did you wish you had that you need to be effective? Why?

Content Questions

- If you could make one change to Hubs, what would it be?
- If you could make one change to CCR&Rs, what would it be?
- If you could make one change in your regional early learning system, what would it be?
- If you could make one change to how CCR&Rs and Hubs work together, what would it be?
- Tell me about a time when you felt that your organization made a difference in the community.
- Tell me about your most successful partnership. What's an example of why it is so successful?

- Tell me about a time when your organization came together with a Hub to make a real impact.
- Where do you see efficiency in the existence of both entities?
- Where do you see redundancy between what your organization does and what Hubs do?
- If Hubs went away (not proposing they do -- this is just a reflection question) would might improve for your work?
- If Hubs went away (not proposing they do -- this is just a reflection question) what would be lost?
- If CCR&Rs went away (not proposing they do -- this is just a reflection question) what would be lost?
- Is it important that CCR&Rs and Hubs remain distinct entities? Why or why not?
- How do you define your work and the Hub's work? What was that process like?
- Tell me about a time that you had a conflict with the Hub.
- What problem or concern would you most like to see your organization take on? How would you want the Hub to be a part of solving the problems?
- What problem or concern would you most like to see your Hub take on? How would you want to be a part of helping the Hub solve problems?

Lower Priority

- How do you see your organization's collaboration with Hubs contributing to further the system goals of the ELD?
- How do you see your organization contributing to further the system goals of the ELD?
- How do you see Hubs contributing to further the system goals of the ELD?
- What guidance/resources do you wish the ELD would provide?
- If you could make one change to how you interface with the ELD, what would it be?
- Tell me about a time that your engagement with ELD supported your work.
- Tell me about a time when your engagement with ELD hindered your work.

Last Question

- Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

<u>Hubs</u>

Build Rapport

- What is your personal goal for your work? What difference are you personally trying to make? What gets you up in the morning?
- What keeps you up at night about this work?
- What did you wish you had that you need to be effective? Why?

Content Questions

- How do you see your organization's collaboration with CCR&Rs contributing to further the system goals of the ELD?
- How do you see your organization contributing to further the system goals of the ELD?
- If you could make one change to how CCR&Rs and Hubs work together, what would it be?
- If you could make one change to Hubs, what would it be?
- If you could make one change in this system, what would it be?
- If you could make one change to CCR&Rs, what would it be?
- Tell me about a time when you felt that your organization made a difference in the community.
- Tell me about your most successful partnership. What's an example of why it is so successful?

- Tell me about a time when your organization came together with a CCR&R to make a real impact.
- Where do you see efficiency in the existence of both entities?
- Where do you see redundancy between what your organization does and what CCR&Rs do?
- How is your work recognized by ELD? By the community? What is the most under-recognized contribution the Hub makes?
- If Hubs went away (not proposing they do -- this is just a reflection question) what would be lost?
- If CCR&Rs went away (not proposing they do -- this is just a reflection question) what would be lost?
- If CCR&Rs went away (not proposing they do -- this is just a reflection question) would might improve for your work?
- Is it important that CCR&Rs and Hubs remain distinct entities? Why or why not?
- Tell me about a time that you had a conflict with the CCR&R.
- How do you define your work and the CCR&R's work? What was that process like?
- What problem or concern would you most like to see your organization take on?
    - How would you want the CCR&R to be a part of solving the problems?
- What problem or concern would you most like to see your CCR&R take on?
    - How would you want to be a part of helping the CCR&R solve problems?
- Tell me about your relationship with your backbone organization.
- Tell me about a time when your relationship with your backbone organization hindered your work.
- Tell me about a time when your relationship with your backbone organization furthered your work.

Lower Priority

- How do you see CCR&Rs contributing to further the system goals of the ELD?
- If you could make one change to how you interface with the ELD, what would it be?
- Tell me about a time that your engagement with ELD supported your work.
- Tell me about a time when your engagement with ELD hindered your work.

Last Question

- Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

<u>Child Care Providers</u>

Build Rapport

- Tell me about the best training you have ever been to or professional learning you have ever had?

Content Questions

- Tell me about what you know about CCR&Rs?
- Tell me about how you interact with CCR&Rs?
- How do you feel your vision for what young children and their families need is aligned or not aligned with the CCR&R?
- Tell me about a time when you felt your voice was heard by the staff at the CCR&R about your needs around early learning?

- If they have had an experience with the CCRR...Tell me about the best experience you have had with a CCR&R?
- Tell me about a time when you felt your voice was NOT heard by the staff at the CCR&R about your needs around early learning?
- Tell me about a time with your interaction with your CCR&R really made a difference.
- What is your biggest frustration with your CCR&R
- Tell me what you know about Hubs?
- Tell me about how you interact with your Hub?
- How do you feel your vision for what young children and their families need is aligned or not aligned with the hub?
- If they have had an experience with the Hub...Tell me about the best experience you have had with a Hub
- Tell me about a time when you felt your voice was heard by the staff at the Hub about your needs around early learning
- Tell me about a time when you felt your voice was NOT heard by the staff at the Hub about your needs around early learning.
- Tell me about a time with your interaction with your Hub really made a difference.
- What is your biggest frustration with your Hub?
- If Hubs went away (not proposing they do -- this is just a reflection question) what would be lost?
- If CCR&Rs went away (not proposing they do -- this is just a reflection question) what would be lost?

Last Question

- Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

<u>Families</u>

Build Rapport

- Tell me about your experience finding child care (and/or preschool for your child/children).
- What assistance (if any) did you receive?
- Does your family have access to the other resources you need to meet your basic needs (affordable housing, health care, healthy food)?
    - What do you wish were different about accessing these resources?
    - If you could get support in one of those areas, which would be most important? Why?

Content Questions

- Does the child care(preschool) you currently have meet your family's needs?
    - Why or why?
    - What do you wish were different about your child care options?
- What additional support do you wish you had around the development of your child, in helping them be ready for Kindergarten?
- Tell me about what you know about the Child Care Resource and Referral entity in your region (insert the name used in the Region)?
- Tell me about what you know about the Hub in your region (insert the name used in the Region)?
- Tell me about a time when you felt your voice was heard by the staff at the CCR&R about your needs around early learning

- Tell me about a time when you felt your voice was heard by the staff at the Hub about your needs around early learning
- Tell me about a time when you felt your voice was NOT heard by the staff at the CCR&R about your needs around early learning
- Tell me about a time when you felt your voice was NOT heard by the staff at the Hub about your needs around early learning
- Tell me about a time with your interaction with your Hub really made a difference.
- What is your biggest frustration with your Hub?
- If Hubs went away (not proposing they do -- this is just a reflection question) what would be lost?
- If CCR&Rs went away (not proposing they do -- this is just a reflection question) what would be lost?

Lower Priority

- Tell me about a time with your interaction with your childcare provider really made a difference.
- What resources do you wish your childcare had access to that they don't currently?
- What do your wish your childcare provider did differently?
- What is your biggest frustration with your childcare provider?

Last Question

- Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

References

Charmaz, K. (1990). 'Discovering' chronic illness: Using grounded theory. *Social Science and Medicine, 30*, 1161–1172.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage Publications.

Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 11*(3) [Article No. 8].

Focus Group Interviews

Interview Guide

Below is the process flow

- Thank you for joining us today for this listening session.
- And thank you for all the work you are doing! [perhaps take a moment to celebrate 2 or 3 examples of recent work, like the planning process, or helping with COVID] We acknowledge that the work you do is challenging -- that there are many things that get in the way of you achieving your organization's goals. You are the experts about building an early learning system in your regions. You are uniquely positioned to share systems-level insights into what's going on in your regions.
- Show the Slide for the Legislative Report
- Show the Slide for the Purpose
    - We know that the pandemic has created many challenges, so barriers related to the pandemic may be at the forefront of your mind. We're not asking you to set those concerns aside. That said, what we're most interested to hear about is your organization's cumulative efforts, over the tenure of your time in this position.

- Show the Slide for the Consent for Audio Recording

I want to check and make sure that everyone is ok with us recording the conversation today. We will only use the recording to make sure we have an accurate record of our conversation. However, if anyone is not comfortable with us recording the session, we will go ahead with written notes. [Note to facilitator/notetaker: be prepared for this possibility.] Is everyone comfortable with us recording today? Feel free to privately chat to me if you'd rather not say out loud.

- Show the slide for Facilitator and Note-taker Roles

Focus Group Questions CCR&R

Warm-up.

1. In your region, what is working well related to families having access to high-quality (culturally responsive, inclusive, developmentally appropriate) affordable early care and education that meets their needs? What is not working? Why?

Aligned Coordinated Family-Centered System

Next, we want to understand more about your organization's experiences with supporting an aligned, coordinated, and family-centered early learning system for your region. We will discuss each component of this system goal.

Aligned – means all people/organizations are pursuing shared goals of getting children ready for school and promoting equity. Everyone is heading in the same direction. For example: All members of the Hub Governance body actively pursue shared goals of getting children ready for school, supporting families, and promoting equity.

2. From your perspective, how aligned are the goals and work of the CCRR with your region's early learning system? What is working well? What is getting in the way of system alignment? Why?

a. Has the alignment of your region's early learning system changed over time? Has it gotten easier? Harder? How so?

Coordinated – means we are all not only heading in the same direction, but everyone is conducting their parts of the work in sync with other people/orgs. For example: early care and education providers are engaging in sharing professional development across organizations, and using shared processes and practices for assessment.

3. What is working well in your efforts contribute to the *coordination* of your region's early learning system? What is getting in the way of system coordination? Why?
    a. How have your efforts to bring about coordination changed over time? Has it gotten easier? Harder? How so?

The last question on these goals is about efforts to center family need and voice and in the case of CCRRs provider need and voice.

Family Centered – means we have the people most affected by the problems at the table helping to determine what problems should be solved and helping to make decisions. For example, child care providers would be engaged in guiding the way the work is done by the CCRR.

4. How is provider voice driving decision-making and guiding the way you do your work? What is working (approaches, strategies, techniques)? Not working? Why?
    a. How have your efforts to incorporate provider voice changed over time? Has it gotten easier? Harder? How so? (Pre-Covid? During Covid? Looking ahead to Post-Covid?)

Next, we understand that equity is at the core of this system goal.

Equitable – means each and every child (and their family) receives the necessary resources they need individually to thrive, regardless of national origin, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, first language, differently abled or other distinguishing characteristics.

For this system goal, *equity could mean having alignment & coordination towards achieving equity goals, hearing the voices of child care providers who serve your region's priority populations, or prioritizing investments that support equitable outcomes for children and families, as examples.*

5. What is going well in efforts to build an equitable early learning system in your region? What is getting in the way? Why?
    a. How have your efforts toward building an equitable early learning system changed over time? Has it gotten easier? Harder? How so?

Foundational Community Conditions
Next, we want to talk about what needs to be in place to effectively pursue these system changes. There are three foundational conditions that many communities have found to be important for their success:

- Data-driven, equity-focused, adaptive community problem solving and continuous improvement.
- Engaged Diverse Perspectives
- Effective Convening

We know from research that these conditions develop over time and early childhood collaboratives range widely in their pursuit of these conditions.

For this next section, we would like you to think about your CCR&Rs interactions with your partner Early Learning Hub.

Let's start with the work the EL Hubs are doing to engage diverse perspectives: Part of Hubs' role is to bring community partners and families to the decision-making table. We're particularly interested to hear from you about who you think is NOT yet at that table but should be.

6. Whose voices are missing from that table that you think most need to be included in Hub decision-making? What is getting in the way of their engagement? What would it take to engage them?

7. What do you think the CCRR's relationship should be with the Early Learning Hub in its region? How have your efforts to work with your EL Hub changed over time? Has it gotten easier? Harder? How so?

Now let's talk about the Hub's problem-solving efforts

8. How does your region's EL Hub engage your CCR&R in problem solving? What is working well? What is not working well? What could be improved? Why?

Lastly, let's talk about effective convening.

Part of the Hubs' role is to be a neutral and trusted convener. There are many ways to accomplish this. Providing leadership, creating an inclusive environment, facilitating gatherings, and communicating with community partners and families all contribute to the Hub's role as a neutral and trusted convener.

9. What about your Hub's efforts to convene is working well? What's not working? What could be improved? Why?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Thank you again for your time. Please let me know if you have any follow up questions about this work (are share who they can direct follow up questions to).

One-on-One Interview

Interview Guide

Tell me what you know about Hubs.

Tell me how you typically interact or have interacted with Hubs.

Oregon has 3 early learning system goals (share the goals) – How do you see Hubs contributing to furthering the system goals?

Based on your experiences, if you could make one change to Hubs, what would it be? Why?

Tell me what you know about CCRRs.

Tell me about how you typically interact or have interacted with CCRRs.

How do you see CCRRs contributing to furthering OR's early learning system goals?

Based on your experiences, if you could make one change to CCRRs, what would it be? Why?

What do you think a Hub's relationship should be with the CCRR in their region? Why?

What do you see as the benefit of the existence of Hubs and CCRRs?

What problem or concern would you most like to see Hubs take on? CCRRs? Hubs and CCRRs together? (probe for why)

Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Input Survey on Hubs and CCR&Rs

Data Collection

The survey was open from December 17, 2020 – January 8, 2021

Survey creation

- Questions were created by Joan B., Jenny M., & Jaiya C., with input from CST, the ELD Research Team, and Sara M.
- Translated into Spanish by a translation service, with light editing by Josefina H., Aaron R., & Christina C.

Survey distribution

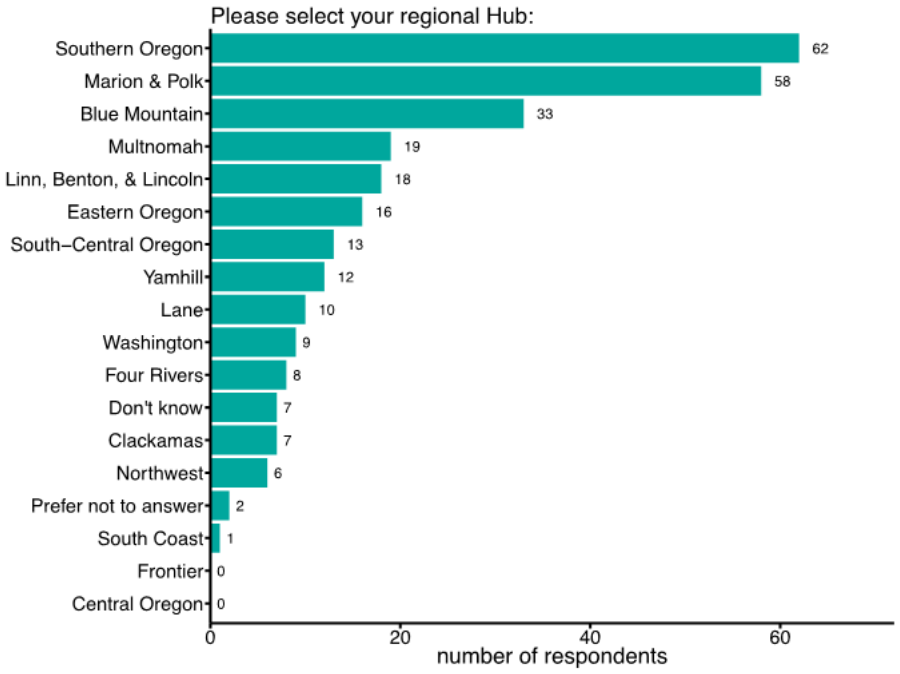
- Survey was sent by ELD to Hub & CCR&R directors
- Directors were asked to send it to people who work closely with their Hub/CCR&R

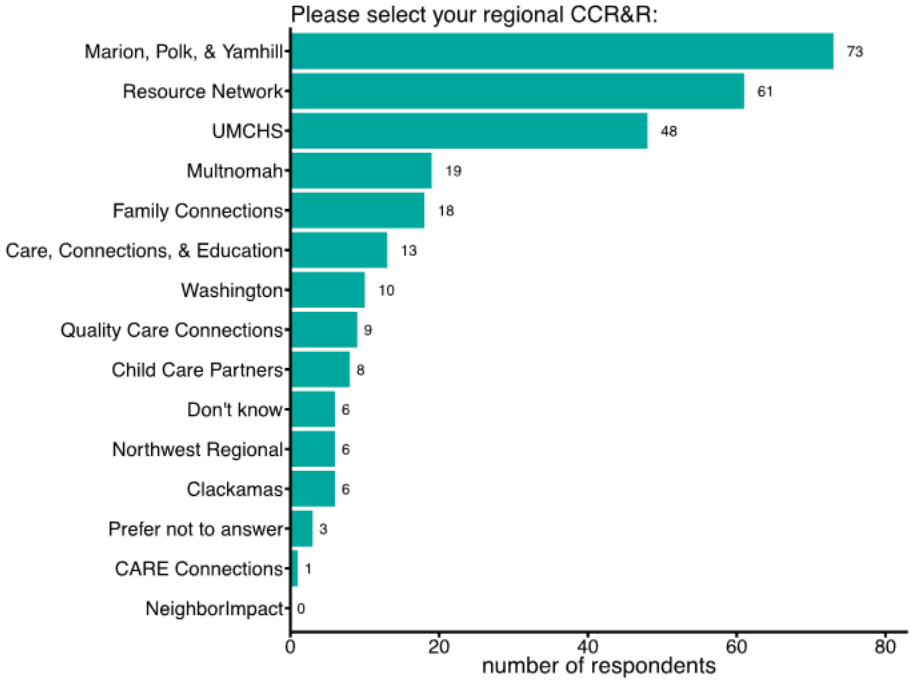
The survey was distributed in English & Spanish. Most respondents (95%) completed the English version of the survey and some respondents (5%) completed the Spanish version of the survey.

Survey Language	Number Respondents	% of Total Respondents
English	268	95%
Spanish	13	5%

Findings

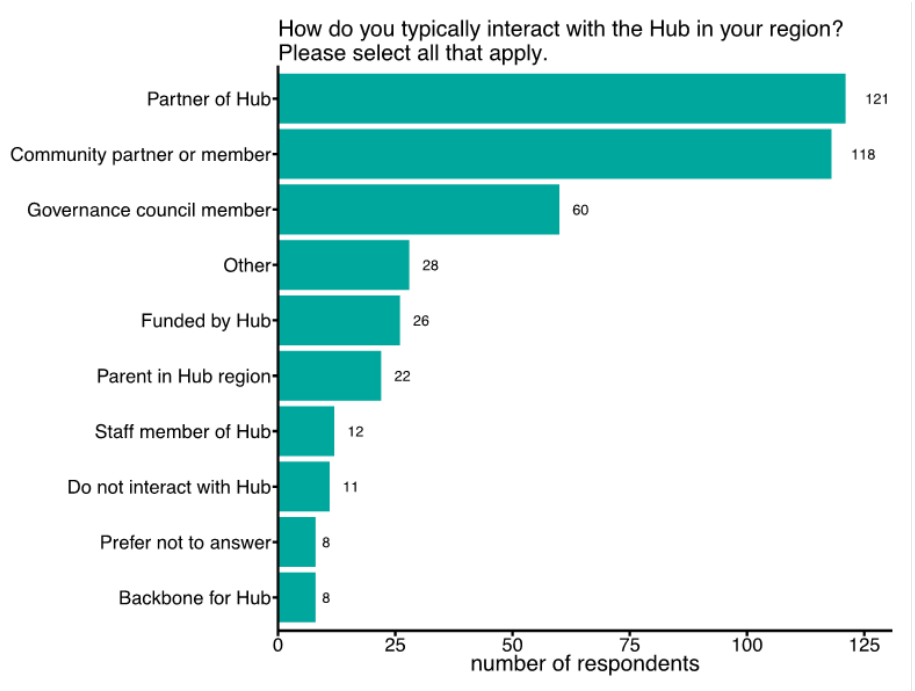
Regionally, respondents represented 14 of 16 (88%) Hubs and 12 of 13 (92%) CCR&Rs. The largest proportions of respondents were connected to the regional Hubs for Jackson & Josephine counties (22%), Marian & Polk counties (21%), and Marrow, Umatilla, &Union counties (12%). The largest proportions of respondents were connected to the regional CCR&Rs for Marion, Polk, & Yamhill counties (26%), Jackson & Josephine counties (22%), and at UMCHS (17%).

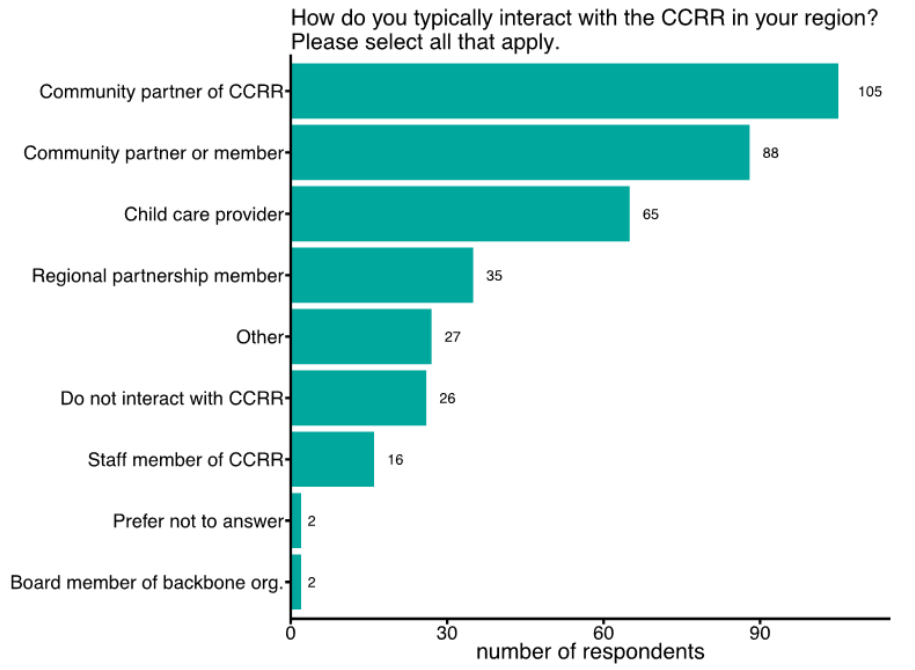




How Respondents Interact with Hubs and CCR&Rs

The largest proportions of respondents reported that they typically interact with their regional Hub as partners of the Hub (43%), community partners or community members (42%), or Governance Council members (21%). They also reported that they typically interact with their regional CCR&R as partners of the CCR&R (37%), community partners or community members (31%), or child care providers (23%).



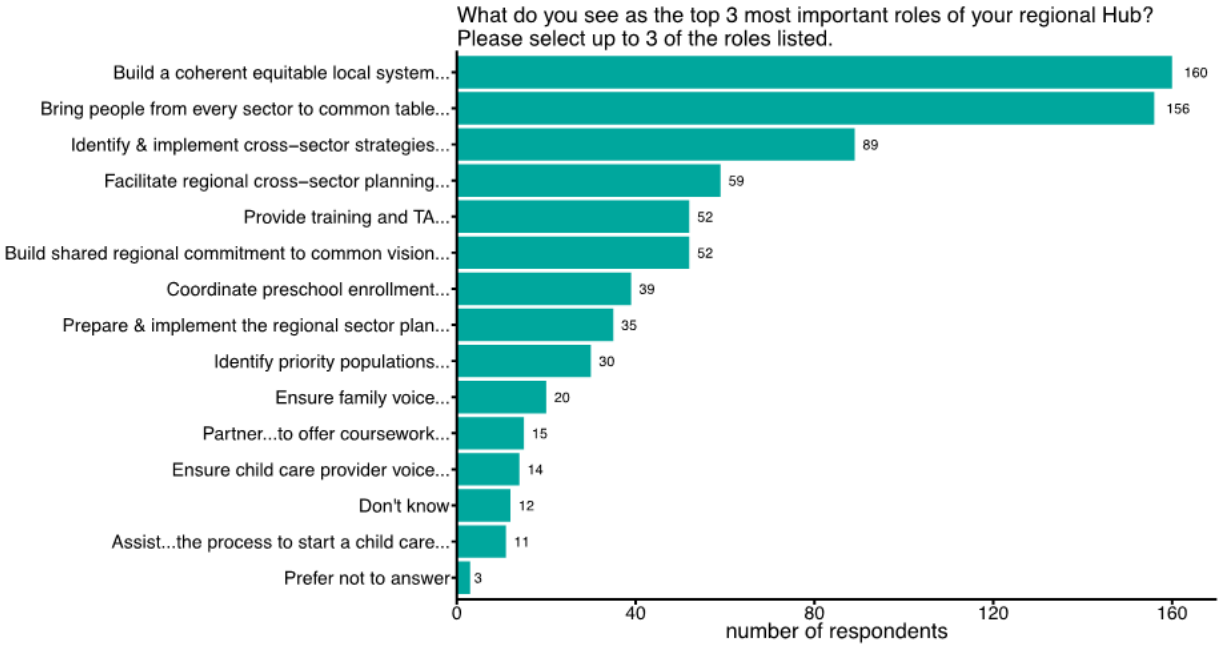


Top Roles of Hubs

Respondents were asked to identify the top 3 most important roles of Hubs and separately of CCR&Rs. Respondents identified two different sets of roles.

For Hubs, the most commonly selected roles were:

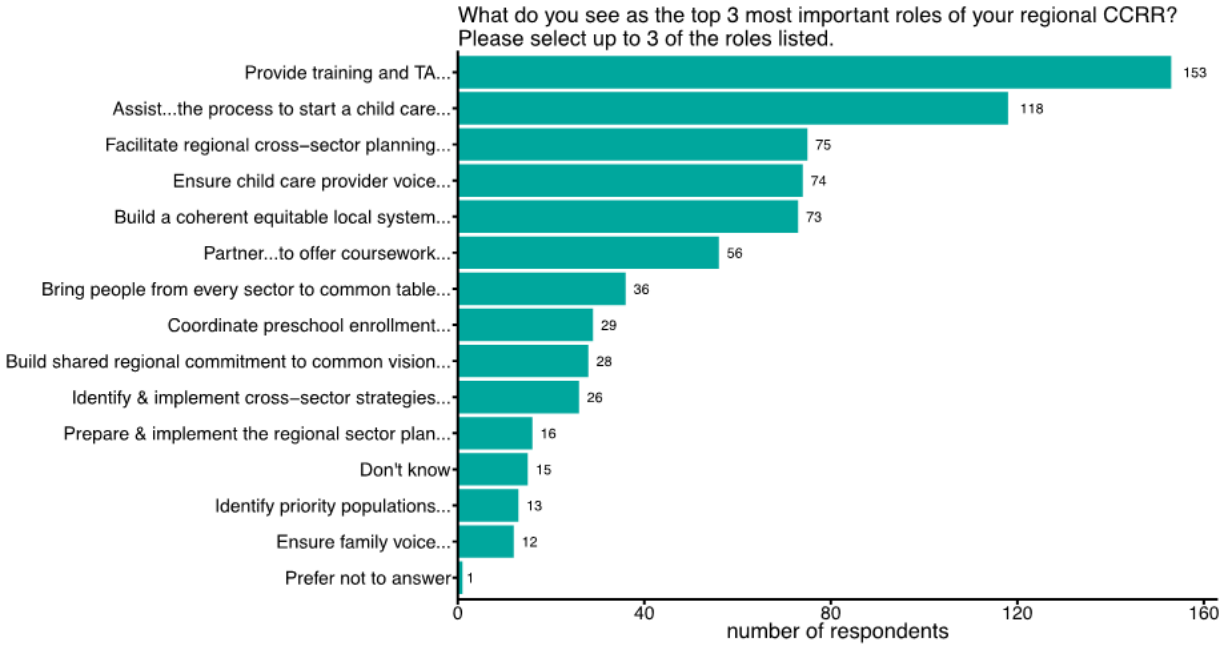
- Building a coherent, equitable local system through which families with young children can easily connect with needed services and supports (60%)
- Bringing people from every sector (i.e., early care and education, health, human services, K-12, housing, and the business community) to a common table to support greater coordination and more comprehensive solutions (56%)
- Identifying and implementing cross-sector strategies and activities to support children arriving ready for kindergarten and living in healthy, stable and attached families (32%)



Top Roles of CCR&Rs

For CCR&Rs, the most commonly selected roles were:

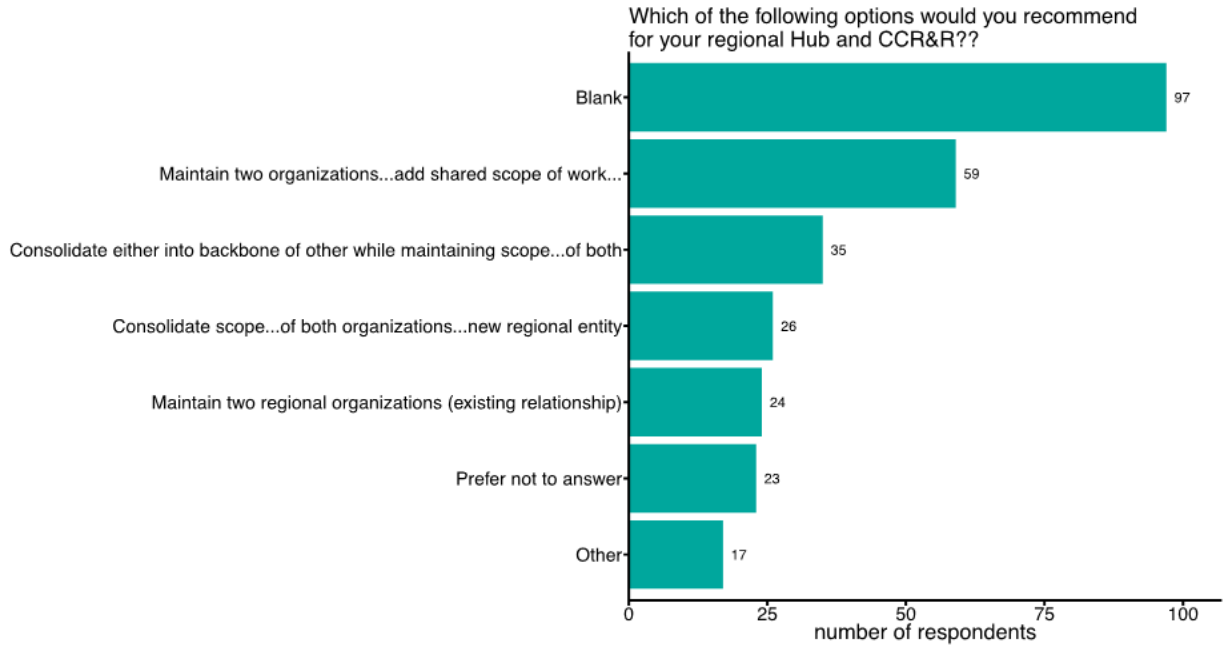
- Providing training and technical assistance to the early care and education workforce in the region (54%)
- Assisting individuals or groups in navigating the process to start a child care business, including child care licensing (42%)
- Ensuring child care provider voice in early care and education sector planning and implementation (27%)



Respondents' Recommendations

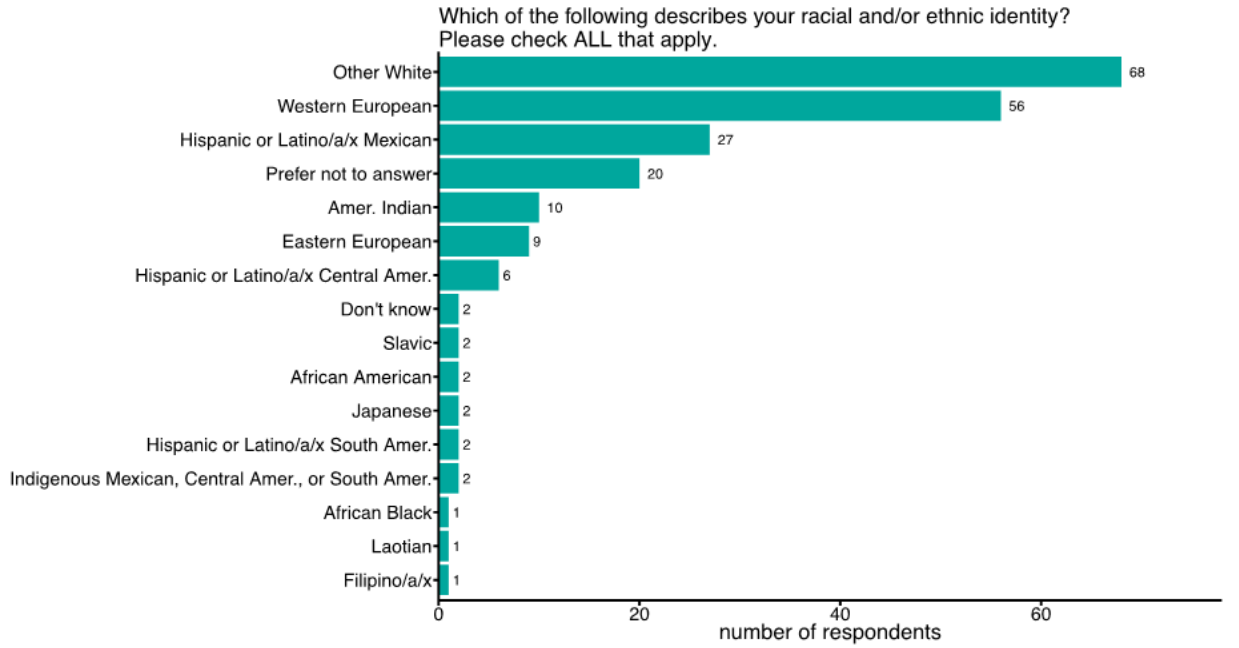
Respondents were provided with several possibilities for how Hubs and CCR&Rs could potentially consolidate or not. Over one third of respondents (35%) left this question blank.

Of those who responded (n=184), most recommended (32%) that the Oregon Legislature maintain two regional organizations, each with own scope, purpose, and legislatively intended function and add a shared scope of work that both organizations are responsible for working on collectively to benefit the region.



Racial/Ethnic Identities of the Respondents

Over two thirds of respondents (67%) provided their racial/ethnic identity. Of these respondents, most identified as Other White (36%), Western European (30%), and/or Hispanic or Latino/a/x Mexican (14%).

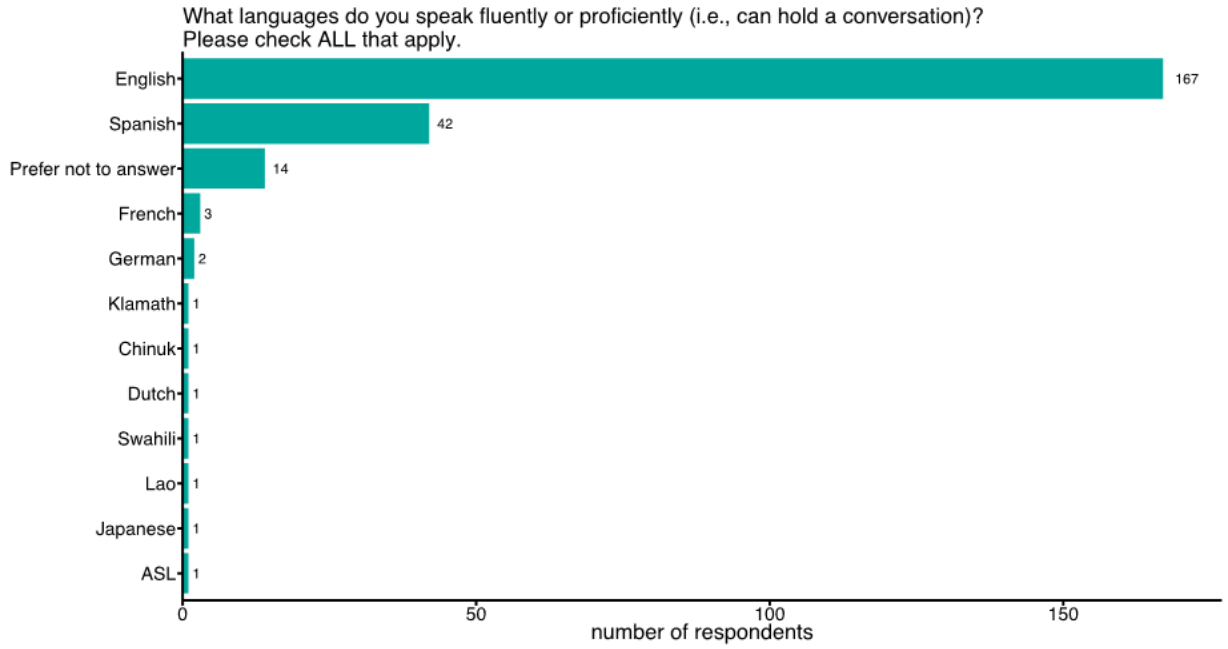


Notes:

- Race/ethnicity options selected by zero respondents are not included above
- 92 respondents left race completely blank

Languages of the Respondents

Over two thirds of respondents (69%) provided the language(s) they speak fluently or proficiently (i.e., can hold a conversation). Of these respondents, most selected English (86%) and/or Spanish (22%).



Notes:

- Language options selected by zero respondents are not included above
- 87 respondents left language q completely blank

Input Survey Questions

1. Please select your regional Hub

2. Please select your regional CCR&R

3. How do you typically interact with the Hub in your region?
Please select all that apply.

- I (my organization) am a Governance Council Member
- My organization is funded by the Hub
- My organization is a partner of the Hub
- My organization serves as the backbone for the Hub
- I (my organization) am a community partner/community
- member
- I am a parent in the Hub's region
- I am a staff member of the Hub
- I typically do not interact with the Hub in my region
- I prefer not to answer
- Other (please explain)

4. How do you typically interact with the CCR&R in your region? Please select all that apply.

- I (my organization) am a community partner of the CCR&R
- I (my organization) am a member of the Regional partnership group
- (e.g., Early Learning System Coalition, Advisory Board,
- Cradle to Career group)
- I am a child care provider who participates in training and assistance offered by the CCR&R
- I am a Board Member of the CCR&R's backbone organization
- I (my organization) am a community partner/community member
- I am a staff member of the CCR&R
- I typically do not interact with the CCR&R in my region
- I prefer not to answer
- Other (please explain)

5. How do you typically interact with the CCR&R in your region? Please select all that apply.

- Building a coherent, equitable local system through which families with young children can easily connect with needed services and supports.
- Building shared regional commitment to a common vision for young children and families.
- Bringing people from every sector (i.e., early care and education, health, human services, K-12, housing, and the business community) to a common table to support greater coordination and more comprehensive solutions.
- Identifying priority populations for services.
- Facilitating regional cross-sector planning to build the supply of high-quality, affordable child care that meets the needs of the region's families.
- Preparing and implementing the region's early care and education sector plan.
- Identifying and implementing cross-sector strategies and activities to support children arriving ready for kindergarten and living in healthy, stable and attached families.

- Assisting individuals or groups in navigating the process to start a child care business, including child care licensing.
- Providing training and technical assistance to the early care and education workforce in the region.
- Partnering with community colleges and universities to offer coursework for the early care and education workforce.
- Coordinating preschool enrollment for eligible families within the region.
- Ensuring family voice in regional system design and implementation.
- Ensuring child care provider voice in early care and education sector planning and implementation.
- I do not know.
- I prefer not to answer.

6. What do you see as the top 3 most important roles of your regional CCR&R? Please select up to 3 of the roles listed.

- Building a coherent, equitable local system through which families with young children can easily connect with needed services and supports.
- Building shared regional commitment to a common vision for young children and families.
- Bringing people from every sector (i.e., early care and education, health, human services, K-12, housing, and the business community) to a common table to support greater coordination and more comprehensive solutions.
- Identifying priority populations for services.
- Facilitating regional cross-sector planning to build the supply of high-quality, affordable child care that meets the needs of the region's families.
- Preparing and implementing the region's early care and education sector plan.
- Identifying and implementing cross-sector strategies and activities to support children arriving ready for kindergarten and living in healthy, stable and attached families.
- Assisting individuals or groups in navigating the process to start a child care business, including child care licensing.
- Providing training and technical assistance to the early care and education workforce in the region.
- Partnering with community colleges and universities to offer coursework for the early care and education workforce.
- Coordinating preschool enrollment for eligible families within the region.
- Ensuring family voice in regional system design and implementation.
- Ensuring child care provider voice in early care and education sector planning and implementation.
- I do not know.
- I prefer not to answer.

7. Imagine you could make a change to how your region's Hub and CCR&R work to carry out ONE of the roles or functions above. Which role would you choose to change?

- Building a coherent, equitable local system through which families with young children can easily connect with needed services and supports.
- Building shared regional commitment to a common vision for young children and families.

- Bringing people from every sector (i.e., early care and education, health, human services, K-12, housing, and the business community) to a common table to support greater coordination and more comprehensive solutions.
- Identifying priority populations for services.
- Facilitating regional cross-sector planning to build the supply of high-quality, affordable child care that meets the needs of the region's families.
- Preparing and implementing the region's early care and education sector plan.
- Identifying and implementing cross-sector strategies and activities to support children arriving ready for kindergarten and living in healthy, stable and attached families.
- Assisting individuals or groups in navigating the process to start a child care business, including child care licensing.
- Providing training and technical assistance to the early care and education workforce in the region.
- Partnering with community colleges and universities to offer coursework for the early care and education workforce.
- Coordinating preschool enrollment for eligible families within the region.
- Ensuring family voice in regional system design and implementation.
- Ensuring child care provider voice in early care and education sector planning and implementation.
- I do not know.
- I prefer not to answer.

8. Please briefly describe the change you would make:

9. Briefly describe what you see as strengths of your regional Hub's equity work, especially related to racial equity.

10. Briefly describe what you see as areas for growth in your regional Hub's equity work, especially related to racial equity.

11. Briefly describe what you see as strengths of your regional CCR&R's equity work, especially related to racial equity.

12. Briefly describe what you see as areas for growth in your regional CCR&R's equity work, especially related to racial equity.

13. What do you see as potential benefits to consolidating your region's Hub and CCR&R into one entity?

14. What do you see as potential negative consequences of consolidating your region's Hub and CCR&R into one entity?

15. Which of the following options would you recommend for your region's Hub and CCR&R?
    - Maintain two regional organizations, each with own scope, purpose, and legislatively intended function (existing relationship)

- Maintain two regional organizations, each with own scope, purpose, and legislatively intended function and add a shared scope of work that both organizations are responsible for working on collectively to benefit the region
- Consolidate either entity into the backbone of the other while maintaining the scope, purpose, and legislatively intended function of both
- Consolidate the scope, purpose, and legislatively intended function of both organizations to found a new regional entity
- I prefer not to answer

16. Please briefly explain why you recommend the option you selected in the previous question.

17. Is there anything else you would like to tell us regarding the roles and functions of the Hub and CCR&R in your regional early learning system?

18. If you are employed at an organization that partners with your regional Hub or your regional CCR&R, then please enter the name of your organization and your position within the organization (e.g., Early Learning Division, Administrative Specialist):

19. Which of the following describes your racial and/or ethnic identity? Please check ALL that apply.

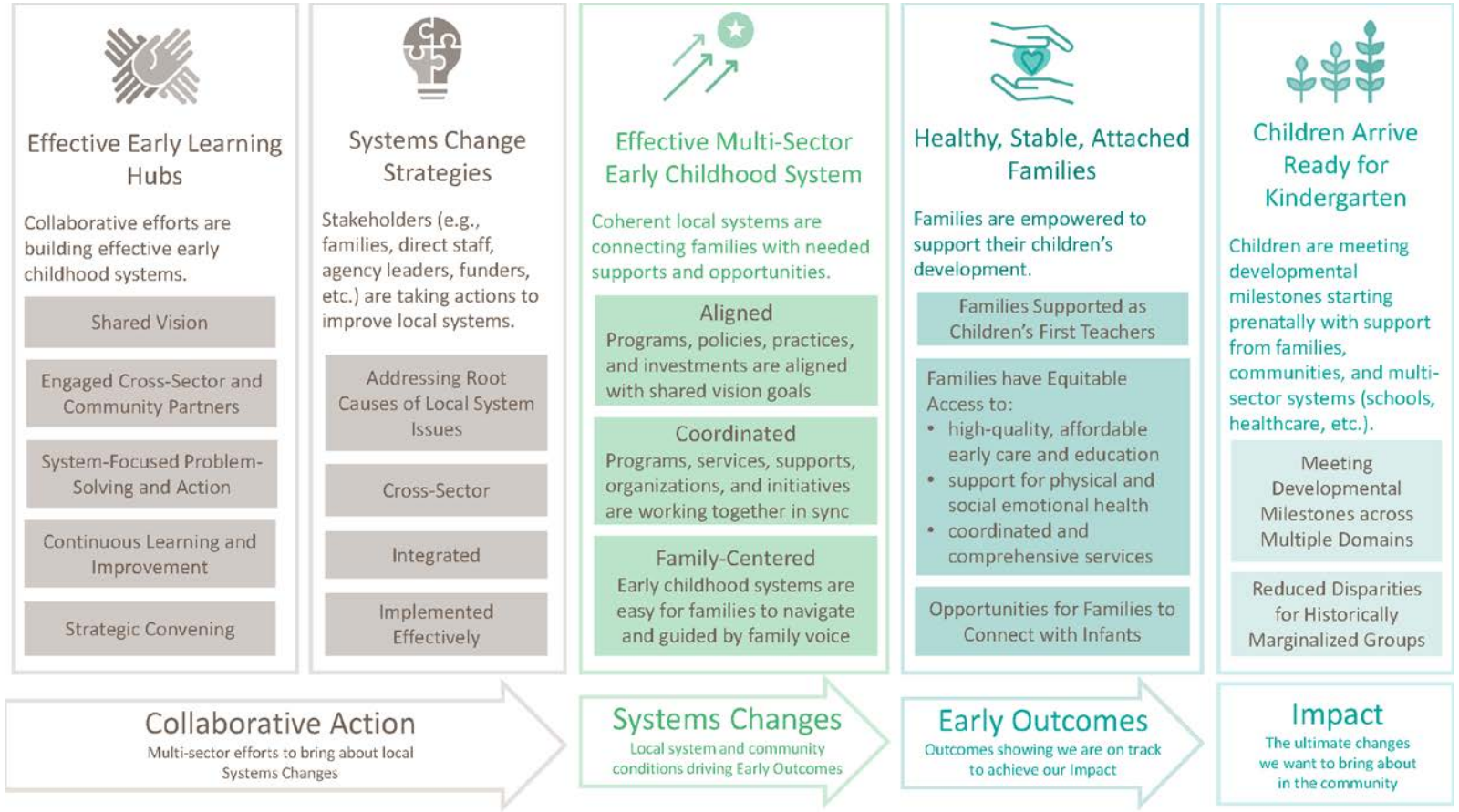
20. What languages do you speak fluently or proficiently (i.e., can hold a conversation)? Please check ALL that apply.

Appendix B

Theory of Change

Oregon Early Childhood Systems Theory of Change

The following describes a draft theory of change to guide early childhood systems building efforts in Oregon. Each section of the theory of change shown below is described on the proceeding pages.



Children Arrive Ready for Kindergarten

Ensuring children arrive ready for kindergarten can be considered the ultimate impact we are trying to bring about in local communities. To achieve readiness, children must reach a series of developmental milestones, some of which begin when children are still in utero (Burns, 2020). Children are supported in reaching these milestones by families, communities, and multi-sector systems (schools, healthcare, etc.).

Readiness	Details
Developmental Milestones across Multiple Domains	Kindergarten readiness includes multiple interrelated domains such as emotional and social development, health and physical development, language and communication, cognitive development, and approaches to play and learning (North Carolina Foundations Task Force, 2013).
Reduced Disparities for Historically Marginalized Groups	Achieving impact involves reducing disparities affecting children and families from historically marginalized groups (e.g., across the intersections of racial/ethnicity, income, language, geography, etc.).

Healthy, Stable, Attached Families Supporting Children's Development

A child's development is supported and enhanced when they are raised in healthy, stable, attached, and empowered families who can engage them in high quality early learning experiences and access opportunities and supports to help the family thrive (e.g., comprehensive health services, affordable housing, livable wage employment, safe communities, healthy environments, etc.; Early Childhood Systems Workgroup, 2013). Empowering healthy, stable, and attached families who can support children's development represents an early outcome along the pathway of ensuring all children arrive ready for kindergarten. The following table summarizes relevant Raise Up Oregon objectives.

Initial Successes	Raise Up Oregon Elements
Families are Supported as Children's First Teachers	OBJECTIVE 1: Families are supported and engaged as their child's first teachers.
Families Have Equitable Access to Services and Opportunities	OBJECTIVE 2: Families have access to high-quality (culturally responsive, inclusive, developmentally appropriate) affordable early care and education that meets their needs. OBJECTIVE 7: Parents and caregivers have equitable access to support for their physical and social emotional health. OBJECTIVE 9: Families with young children who are experiencing adversity have access to coordinated and comprehensive services.

Opportunities for Families to Connect with Infants	OBJECTIVE 8: All families with infants have opportunities for connection.

Effective Multi-Sector Early Childhood System

Most communities have evolved a complex and disorganized array of early childhood programs and supports that are difficult for families to navigate and use (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). In response, there has been a growing movement to build early childhood *systems* to provide more aligned, coordinated, and family-centered services, supports, and opportunities for children and their families. Effective early childhood systems integrate a diverse array of accessible, high-quality services and supports across multiple sectors and domains (e.g., early learning and development, health and mental health, family leadership and support) and ensure policies and practices are aligned with goals for equitable early childhood development (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012; Schumacher, 2011). These systems changes are needed to bring about early family outcomes and the ultimate impact of children being ready for kindergarten.

The following table summarizes objectives and strategies from the Raise Up Oregon report that are relevant to aligned, coordinated, and family-centered systems.

Systems Changes	Raise Up Oregon Elements
Aligned Systems Programs, policies, practices, and investments are aligned with shared vision goals	OBJECTIVE 1: Families are supported and engaged as their child's first teachers. Strategy 1.1 Expand parenting education and family supports. Strategy 1.2 Scale culturally responsive home visiting. OBJECTIVE 2: Families have access to high-quality (culturally responsive, inclusive, developmentally appropriate) affordable early care and education that meets their needs. Strategy 2.1 Expand access to, and build the supply of, high-quality (culturally responsive, inclusive, developmentally appropriate) affordable infant-toddler early care and education that meets the needs of families. Strategy 2.2 Expand access to, and build the supply of, high-quality (culturally responsive, inclusive, developmentally appropriate) affordable preschool that meets the needs of families. Strategy 2.3 Strengthen child care assistance programs. Strategy 2.4 Build the state's capacity to ensure children are healthy and safe in child care. Strategy 2.5 Improve the essential infrastructure for high-quality early care and education. OBJECTIVE 3: The early care and education workforce is diverse, culturally responsive, high quality and well compensated.

	Strategy 3.1 Improve professional learning opportunities for the full diversity of the early care and education workforce. Strategy 3.2 Build pathways to credentials and degrees that recruit and retain a diverse early care and education workforce. Strategy 3.3 Compensate and recognize early childhood educators as professionals. Strategy 3.4 Improve state policy to ensure early care and education work environments guarantee professional supports. OBJECTIVE 4: Early childhood physical and social emotional health promotion and prevention is increased. Strategy 4.1 Ensure prenatal-to-age-five health care services are comprehensive, accessible, high quality, and culturally and linguistically responsive. Strategy 4.2 Increase capacity to provide culturally responsive social-emotional supports for young children and their families. Strategy 4.3 Increase and improve equitable access to early childhood oral health. OBJECTIVE 5: Young children with social-emotional, developmental, and health care needs are identified early and supported to reach their full potential. Strategy 5.1 Ensure adequate funding of and access to a range of regional and community based services, including Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education services. Strategy 5.2 Continue to prioritize screening through the health system and build pathways from screening to a range of community-based services and supports for children and families. Strategy 5.3 Prevent expulsion and suspension by strengthening state policies and supports to early care and education programs. OBJECTIVE 7: Parents and caregivers have equitable access to support for their physical and social emotional health. Strategy 7.1 Increase equitable access to reproductive, maternal, and prenatal health services. Strategy 7.2 Improve access to culturally and linguistically responsive, multi-generational approaches to physical and social-emotional health. OBJECTIVE 8: All families with infants have opportunities for connection. Strategy 8.2 Provide paid family leave. OBJECTIVE 9: Families with young children who are experiencing adversity have access to coordinated and comprehensive services Strategy 9.1 Expand and focus access to housing assistance and supports for families with young children. Strategy 9.2 Provide preventive parenting support services to reduce participation in the child welfare system. Strategy 9.3 Improve the nutritional security of pregnant women and young children, particularly infants and toddlers.

	OBJECTIVE 10: State-community connections and regional systems are strengthened. Strategy 10.3 Further develop the local Early Learning Hub system. OBJECTIVE 11: Investments are prioritized in support of equitable outcomes for children and families. Strategy 11.1 Ensure resources are used to reduce disparities in access and outcomes. Strategy 11.2 Align and expand funding opportunities for culturally specific organizations. OBJECTIVE 12: The alignment and capacity of the cross-sector early learning workforce is supported. Strategy 12.1 Support consistent, high-quality practice among all professionals in the family- and child-serving early learning workforce. Strategy 12.2 Improve cross-sector recruitment, retention, and compensation. OBJECTIVE 13: The business and philanthropic communities champion the early learning system. Strategy 13.1 Educate business leaders on the economic value of early care and education to the Oregon economy. Strategy 13.2 Introduce business leaders to the science of early childhood development and the impact of public investment. OBJECTIVE 14: The data infrastructure is developed to enhance service delivery, systems building, and outcome reporting. Strategy 14.1 Strengthen data-driven community planning. Strategy 14.2 Integrate early learning data into the Statewide Longitudinal Data System. Strategy 14.3 Develop and implement a population survey to track the well-being of children and families across Oregon. Strategy 14.4 Create and use an early learning system dashboard to create shared cross-sector accountability for outcomes for young children and their families.
Coordinated Systems Programs, services, supports, organizations, and initiatives are working together in sync.	OBJECTIVE 4: Early childhood physical and social emotional health promotion and prevention is increased. Strategy 4.4 Strengthen coordination among early care and education, health, and housing to promote health and safety for young children. OBJECTIVE 5: Young children with social-emotional, developmental, and health care needs are identified early and supported to reach their full potential. Strategy 5.2 Continue to prioritize screening through the health system and build pathways from screening to a range of community-based services and supports for children and families.

	OBJECTIVE 6: Children and families experience supportive transitions and continuity of services across early care and education and K-12 settings. Strategy 6.1 Establish shared professional culture and practice between early care and education and K-3 that supports all domains, including social-emotional learning. Strategy 6.2 Improve the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment to better support decision-making between early learning and K-12 stakeholders. OBJECTIVE 8: All families with infants have opportunities for connection. Strategy 8.1 Create a universal connection point for home visiting for families with newborns. OBJECTIVE 9: Families with young children who are experiencing adversity have access to coordinated and comprehensive services Strategy 9.4 Link high-quality early care and education, self-sufficiency, and housing assistance programs.
Family-Centered Early childhood systems are easy for families to navigate and guided by family voice.	OBJECTIVE 10: State-community connections and regional systems are strengthened. Strategy 10.1 Ensure family voice in system design and implementation. Strategy 10.2 Ensure family-friendly referrals.

Systems Change Strategies

To bring about aligned, coordinated, and family-centered early childhood systems, stakeholders representing diverse roles (e.g., families, direct staff, agency leaders, community members, state-level funders, etc.) can pursue multiple systems change strategies (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012). The early childhood field has identified numerous strategies to improve alignment, coordination, and family-centered approaches (see Raise Up Oregon report for examples). The community change literature has also identified the following general elements of effective systems change strategies.

Strategy Elements	Details
Addressing Root Causes of Local System Issues	Effective systems building efforts engage diverse stakeholders (e.g., families, service providers, leaders, etc.) in selecting, adapting, and/or co-designing strategies to address multiple, interrelated root causes affecting the alignment, coordination, and family centering of local early childhood

	systems. These root causes are identified by local stakeholders and data sources (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017; Hodges, Ferreira, Israel, 2012).
Cross-Sector	Effective strategies address root causes across multiple sectors such as education, health, social services, housing, and economic development (Early Childhood Systems Workgroup, 2013).
Integrated	Effective strategies are coordinated and aligned across stakeholders, organizations, and initiatives spanning multiple ecological levels (e.g., community, county, state, nation/tribal, etc.) to promote synergy and avoid duplication or interference (Burns, 2007).
Implemented Effectively	System building efforts engage diverse stakeholders in effectively planning and implementing strategies within the local community context (Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; Foster-Fishman, Wattenberg, You, Collins, McAlindon, 2012).

Effective Early Learning Hubs

One common systems building/change approach is the creation of collaborative partnerships (Cheadle, et al., 2008). A large number of collaborative partnerships have formed over the years to address an array of social issues, including equity in kindergarten readiness (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). Collaborative partnerships include people and organizations across multiple sectors working together to achieve their shared goals. These partnerships can engage in multiple activities such as needs assessments, strategic planning, community organizing, policy advocacy, and developing and launching a range of systems change strategies (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Collaborative partnerships range greatly in their effectiveness, and even seasoned partnerships often experience significant barriers to their success (Siegel et al., 2018). Fortunately, the literature has identified several elements that enable collaborative partnerships to more effectively pursue systems building. These elements are described below.

Elements of Effective Partnerships	Details
Shared Vision	**Clearly defined shared goals.** Effective shared visioning processes engage stakeholders representing multiple sectors (e.g., health, education, etc.) and roles (e.g., families, direct providers, leaders, etc.) in clearly defining the ultimate population-level impacts they want to bring about for children and families, which local groups of children and families are experiencing the greatest inequities related to these impacts, and the multiple systemic issues or "root causes" getting in the way of these impacts within the local community (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2018).

	Explicit focus on equity. Shared visions are more likely to improve outcomes for all children and families when they explicitly embed equity as a priority (Wolff et al., 2016). **Shared measurement.** Effective shared visions engage diverse stakeholders – including families and members of the local community - in defining a comprehensive set of outcomes and indicators around prioritized child and family impacts and targeted local systems changes (Early Childhood System Workgroup, 2013). **Empowered champions.** Effective early childhood collaborative partnerships identify and empower local leaders to champion their shared vision with organizations, community members, and elected officials (Scott, 2013; Washington, 2011).
Engaged Cross-Sector and Community Partners	**Engagement of stakeholders representing diverse perspectives.** Effective collaborative partnerships engage stakeholders from the following groups: families with children experiencing inequities in early childhood outcomes; cross-sector direct services providers working on issues affecting priority children and families; cross-sector, high-level leaders in position to make decisions on changes and the allocation of resources; people from local neighborhood settings where priority families live (e.g., faith-based leaders, neighborhood organizations, businesses; Early Childhood Systems Working Group, 2013; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017; Scott, 2015; Siegel et al., 2018). **Engagement in all phases of the work.** Effective collaborative partnerships engage stakeholders representing diverse perspectives (e.g., families, direct service providers, community members, leaders, etc.) in all phases of the work – including understanding barriers to system goals, designing and implementing strategies, and learning for continuous improvement (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017; Checkland & Scholes 1990; EquityXDesign, 2016) **Distributed leadership and decision-making.** Effective collaborative partnerships promote shared and distributed leadership by sharing the power to set goals, shape agendas, and make decisions (e.g., about policies, strategies, and next steps) with stakeholders representing diverse sectors and roles – including families experiencing targeted inequities (Hargreaves, 2017; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). **Enabling Collaborative Infrastructure.** Effective collaborative partnerships create enabling group infrastructures that: 1) provide safe spaces for stakeholders to talk honestly about local system problems and develop creative solutions; 2) legitimize the perspectives and decision-making power of all stakeholders; and 3) self-organize and evolve in response to current needs and opportunities (e.g., action team created to address a targeted problem and then removed when problem is resolved; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017). **Supported Engagement.** Effective collaborative partnerships provide the necessary supports and conditions to ensure all stakeholders – especially families experiencing targeted inequities – can fully and authentically engage in the change efforts (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2018).

Systems-Focused Problem Solving and Action	**Use of Systems Thinking.** Effective collaborative partnerships use systems thinking to: 1) understand how the characteristics of their local early childhood system – including cross-sector goals, decision-making processes, policies, practices, connections, resources, program components, mindsets, and the interactions between these elements – are serving as barriers to alignment, coordination, and family-centered approaches; and 2) design strategies to address these barriers; and 3) guide effective implementation (Coffman, 2007; Foster-Fishman et al., 2007, 2012; Stroh, 2015). **Use of Qualitative and Quantitative Data.** Effective collaborative partnerships gather and use qualitative and quantitative data from diverse perspectives and sources to help understand and address system barriers and guide implementation (Early Childhood System Workgroup, 2013; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017). **Aligned Action Planning.** Effective collaborative partnerships help stakeholders across ecological layers (e.g., community, county, state/tribal, national, etc.) identify actions they can take to pursue systems change strategies (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017). Effective partnerships help to clarify, align, and support these actions (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). In many communities, local partnerships also provide "guidance back to the state on how the state can effectively manage resources and ensure quality" (Coffman et al., 2006, p. 4).
Continuous Learning and Improvement	**Short Cycle Feedback Loops.** Effective collaborative partnerships continuously gather short cycle feedback on their efforts to identify emerging implementation barriers and assess to what extent strategies are starting to make a difference in targeted systems changes and ultimately child and family outcomes (Bowie & Inkelas, 2014; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017). **Aligned Learning and Continuous Improvement.** Effective collaborative partnerships use rapid feedback to learn about their progress and inform decision-making, including how to address implementation barriers, redesign strategies to better meet local conditions, and scale successful changes (Eoyang & Holladay, 2013; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017). These learning and continuous improvement processes are more likely to promote aligned action when they engage stakeholders across ecological levels (e.g., community, county, state/tribal, national, etc.).
Strategic Convening	**Neutral Role.** Effective collaborative partnerships are supported by convener staff who take on coordination, administration, communication, and facilitation roles to promote the partnership functions listed above. These roles are clearly defined to ensure conveners remain neutral and focused on "*building* community leadership as opposed to *being* the leadership" (Wolff et al., 2016). **Systems Change Competencies.** Effective collaborative partnerships are supported by convener staff who are skilled in systems thinking, meeting facilitation, community engagement, planning, communication, organizational and financial management, data management, diplomacy and negotiations, conflict management, and change management (Clifford, 2013; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Siegel et al., 2018).

	Continuous Communication Processes. Effective collaborative partnerships put processes in place to ensure timely, ongoing, and culturally responsive communication about decisions, activities, and progress to stakeholders in and out of the partnership (Early Childhood System Workgroup, 2013; Kegler et al., 2007). This communication allows stakeholders to have the information they need to be informed and active members of the systems building efforts (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). **Flexible, Sustainable Funding Mechanisms.** Effective collaborative partnerships have comprehensive financing structures that align local, county, state, and national funding to support the partnership functions listed above and their systems building strategies. Examples include leveraging shared savings agreements (e.g., reinvestment of savings resulting from system building efforts into the partnership), cross-sector blended/braided funding approaches, health plan and/or hospital community benefit investments, line items in existing public agency budgets, in-kind support, sliding scale membership fees, and corporate/business resources (Preskill, 2014; Community Toolbox, 2020).

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Appendix C

Theory of Change Engagement

Developing an Early Learning System Theory of Change

Erin Watson, Ph.D.

11/23/20

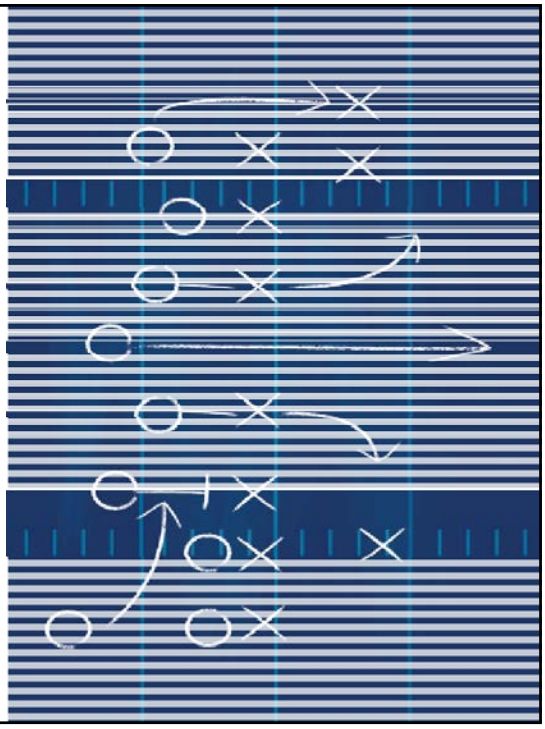
What is a

Theory of Change?

What **impacts** do we want to see for children and families?

What **changes** are needed to bring about this impact?

What **will we do** to create these changes?



Why develop a

Theory of Change?

Direction

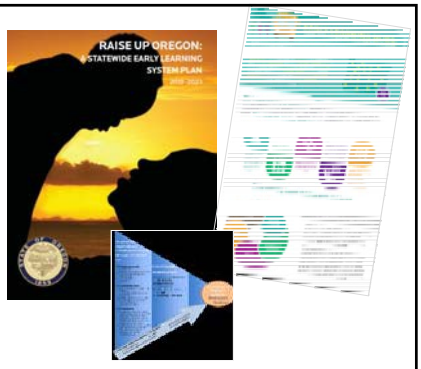
Inspiration

Alignment

How do you develop a

Theory of Change?

Existing plans and documents



Stakeholder Input

Research

Children Ready for Kindergarten

Healthy, Stable Families Supporting Children's Development

Aligned, Coordinated, Family Centered System

Integrated, Cross-Sector Systems Change Strategies

Effective Cross-Sector Community Collaboration

Impact we want to see

Changes needed to bring

What we will do

Children Ready for Kindergarten

Healthy, Stable Families Supporting Children's Development

Aligned, Coordinated, Family Centered System

Integrated, Cross-Sector Systems Change Strategies

Effective Cross-Sector Community Collaboration

Example:

Children meeting developmental milestones with reduced inequities across groups

Emotional and Social

Health and Physical

Language and Communication

Children Ready for Kindergarten

Healthy, Stable Families Supporting Children's Development

Aligned, Coordinated, Family Centered System

Integrated, Cross-Sector Systems Change Strategies

Effective Cross-Sector Community Collaboration

Examples:

OBJECTIVE 1: Families are **supported** and **engaged** as their child's first teachers.

OBJECTIVE 7: Parents and caregivers have **equitable access to support** for their physical and social emotional health.

Children Ready for Kindergarten

Healthy, Stable Families Supporting Children's Development

Aligned, Coordinated, Family Centered System

Integrated, Cross-Sector Systems Change Strategies

Effective Cross-Sector Community Collaboration

Examples:

OBJECTIVE 3: The **early care and education workforce** is diverse, culturally responsive, high quality, and well compensated

OBJECTIVE 5: Young children with social-emotional, developmental, and health care needs are **identified early and referred** to needed community based services and supports

OBJECTIVE 10: **Family voice** is used in decision-making to guide the design and implementation of policies and programming (adapted from strategy 10.1)

Children Ready for Kindergarten

Healthy, Stable Families Supporting Children's Development

Aligned, Coordinated, Family Centered System

Integrated, Cross-Sector Systems Change Strategies

Effective Cross-Sector Community Collaboration

OBJECTIVE 5: Young children with social-emotional, developmental, and health care needs are **identified early and referred** to needed community based services and supports

?

Why are some of the ROOT CAUSES for why this condition is not yet happening in your community/region?

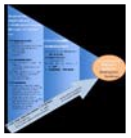
Children Ready for Kindergarten

Healthy, Stable Families Supporting Children's Development

Aligned, Coordinated, Family Centered System

Integrated, Cross-Sector Systems Change Strategies

Effective Cross-Sector Community Collaboration

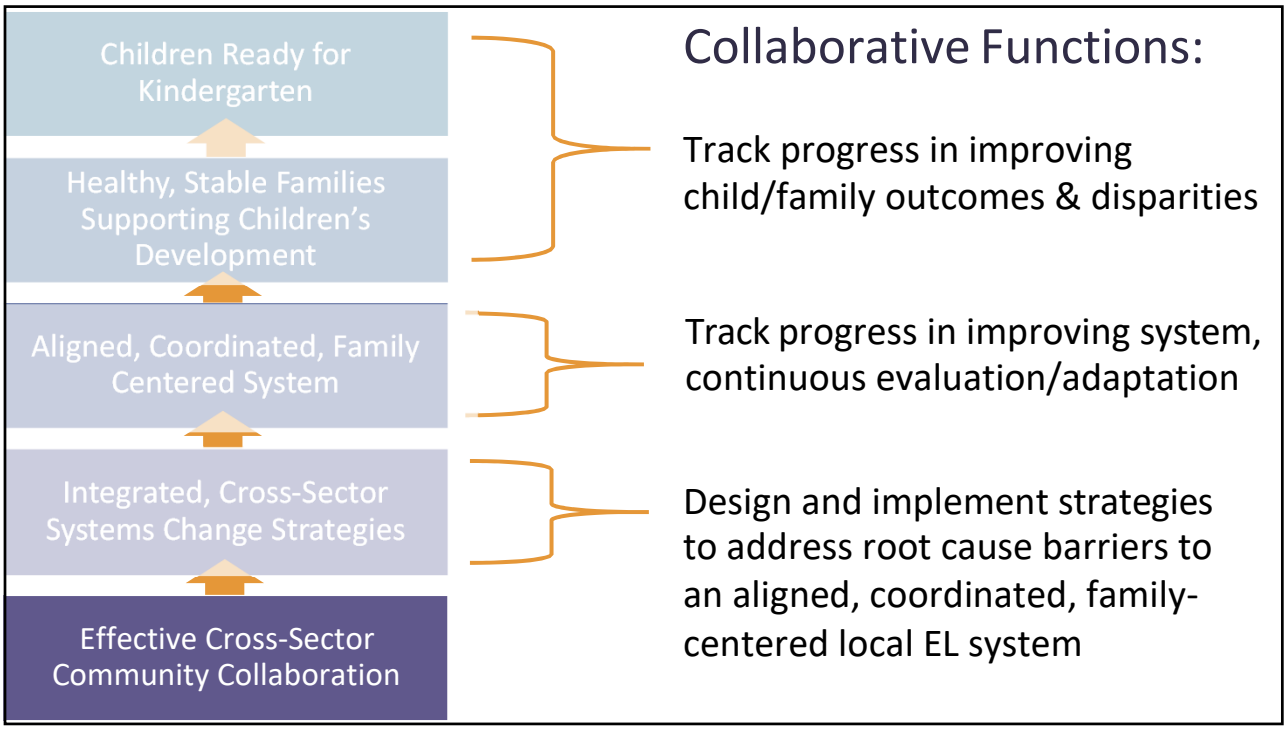


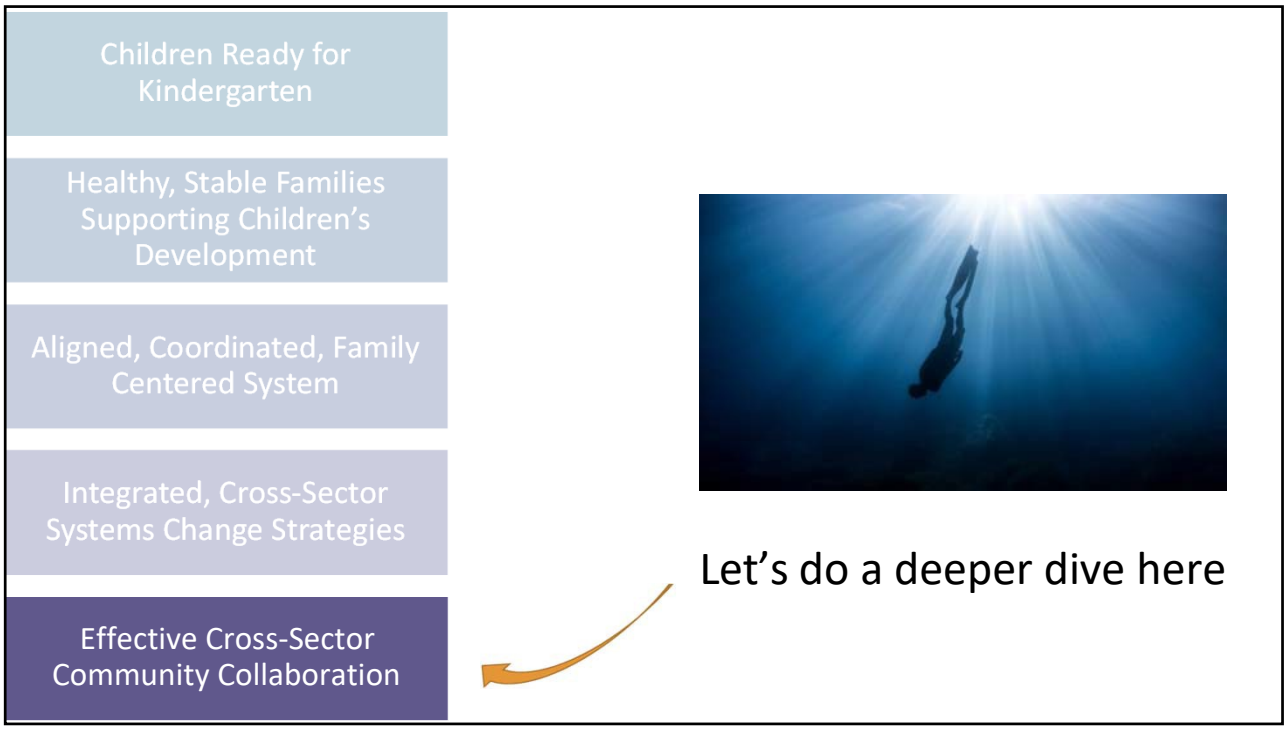
Powerful Strategies:

Address Root Causes

Promote Equity

Are Cross-Sector


Children Ready for Kindergarten
Healthy, Stable Families Supporting Children's Development
Aligned, Coordinated, Family Centered System
Integrated, Cross-Sector Systems Change Strategies
Effective Cross-Sector Community Collaboration
Collaborative Functions:
Track progress in improving child/family outcomes & disparities
Track progress in improving system, continuous evaluation/adaptation
Design and implement strategies to address root cause barriers to an aligned, coordinated, family-centered local EL system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Integrated, Cross-Sector Systems Change Strategies
Effective Cross-Sector Community Collaboration
Let's do a deeper dive here

Children Ready for Kindergarten

Healthy, Stable Families Supporting Children's Development

Aligned, Coordinated, Family Centered System

Integrated, Cross-Sector Systems Change Strategies

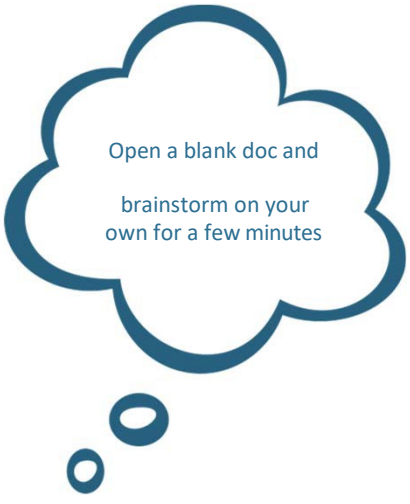
Effective Cross-Sector Community Collaboration

Imagine it's **10 years from now**.

Your **Hub** has been recognized as the **most effective EL collaborative in the country**.

You have built an aligned, coordinated, family centered system and improved equitable outcomes for children and families.

What does the Hub look like?



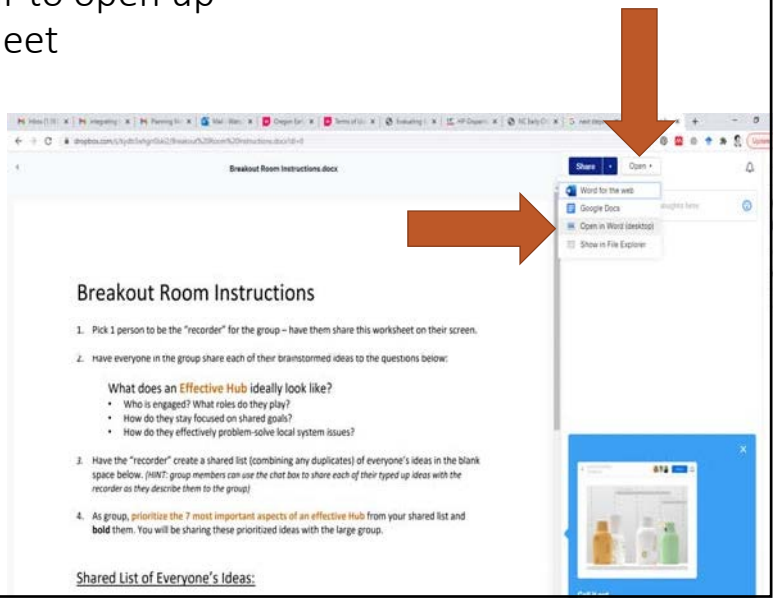
What does an Effective Hub ideally look like?

- How do they effectively problem-solve local system issues?
- Who is engaged? What roles do they play?
- How do these partners stay focused on shared goals?

Click the link in the chat bar to open up the breakout room worksheet

Click the “open” button in the right corner

Then click “Open in Word (desktop)” from the dropdown



Breakout Room Instructions

- Pick 1 person to be the recorder – have that person share the worksheet on their screen
- Have each person share their brainstormed ideas, recorder creates a shared list *(HINT: you can use chat box to share text)*
- As a group, prioritize the 7 most important aspects of an effective Hub from your shared list

Let’s see what everyone said!

Recorder….

Look at your prioritized list

Pick one idea that the group

- was really excited about
- Thought would be difficult to create
- Would be most fun to do

Paste it into the chat box.

Next Steps

- We will ask other Hubs same questions and incorporate their ideas
- We will identify additional ideas from the literature
- You will have opportunity to provide feedback on draft theory of change

Appendix D

Theory of Change Literature Review

THE NEED FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM BUILDING

Experts define kindergarten readiness with several interrelated domains including emotional and social development, health and physical development, language and communication, cognitive development, and approaches to learning (North Carolina Foundations Task Force, 2013). To build kindergarten readiness, children must reach a series of developmental milestones across these domain, some of which begin when children are still in utero (Burns, 2020). A child's development along this path is supported by families, communities, and multi-sector systems that can provide them access to high quality early learning experiences and opportunities and supports needed to help their families thrive (e.g., comprehensive health services, affordable housing, livable wage employment, safe communities, healthy environments, etc.; Early Childhood Systems Workgroup, 2013).

Numerous investments, programs, and supports have been created over the years to support children in reaching developmental milestones towards kindergarten readiness, often with little alignment or coordination. As a result, most communities have evolved a complex and disorganized array of early childhood programs and supports that are difficult for families to navigate and use (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). Many of these programs and supports are also not available or accessible to the most disadvantaged children and families in a community, exacerbating local inequities (Fixen et al., 2013; Feagin and Bennefield, 2014). This situation is exacerbated by the fragmentation of funding and accountability for programs and supports across vertical and horizontal ecological layers (e.g., the federal government is responsible for Head Start, state governments usually fund child care subsidies, and counties often coordinate childcare resources and referrals; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). In addition to the fragmented service array, many of the policies and practices within local cross-sector organizations and institutions (e.g., parental leave policies, screening and referral practices, etc.) are not aligned with promoting equitable early childhood development.

In response to these issues, there has been a growing movement to build early childhood *systems* to provide more aligned, coordinated, and family-centered services, supports, and opportunities for children and their families (Oregon Early Learning Council, 2019). Effective early childhood systems provide a sustainable yet flexible infrastructure that integrates a diverse array of accessible, high-quality, cross-sector services, supports, and opportunities (e.g., early learning and development, health and mental health, family leadership and support) to equitably meet the needs of children and families (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012; Schumacher, 2011). Effective early childhood systems also ensure policies and practices are aligned with promoting equitable early childhood development (Scott, 2012).

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS AS A WAY TO BUILD EARLY LEARNING SYSTEMS

One common system building/change approach is the creation of collaborative partnerships (Cheadle, et al., 2008; Emshoff et al., 2007; Javdani & Allen, 2011; Nowell 2009). A large number of collaborative partnerships have formed over the years to address an array of social issues, including equity in

kindergarten readiness (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). These entities are typically funded by governmental and philanthropic entities (Stebbins, 2012; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000) and have formed a "new organizational layer" across the country (Erickson et al., 2017).

Collaborative partnerships include people and organizations across multiple sectors working together to achieve their shared vision (Himmelman, 1992). In particular, early childhood collaborative partnerships are often focused on improving outcomes for children birth to age 8 and their families (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). Collaborative partnerships can engage in multiple activities such as needs assessments, strategic planning, community organizing, policy advocacy, and developing and launching a range of systems change strategies (Roussos & Fawcett 2000). At a more fundamental level, collaborative partnerships also engage their members in identifying opportunities for collaboration, negotiating agendas, mediating different interests, and promoting synergy (World Health Organization, 2014). Collaborative partnerships range greatly in their effectiveness, and even seasoned partnerships often experience significant barriers to their success (Siegel et al., 2018). Fortunately, the literature has identified several key elements that distinguish more effective collaborative partnerships. These elements are described below.

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The literature describes five elements that enable collaborative partnerships to more effectively pursue the complex task of systems building. These elements include:

1. Shared Vision of Equity in Child and Family Wellbeing
2. Engaged Multiple Stakeholders Representing Diverse Perspectives
3. Systems-Focused Problem-Solving and Action
4. Continuous Learning and Improvement
5. Strategic Convening

The following sections describe each of these elements in more detail.

Element 1: A Shared Vision of Equity in Child and Family Wellbeing

Effective early childhood collaborative partnerships develop and pursue a shared vision that is compelling and motivating to local cross-sector organizations and community members (Scott 2015; Early Childhood System Workgroup, 2013). A Shared Vision supports early childhood system building by helping local stakeholders clarify what changes they we want to see in the community and how those changes will come about. This in turn provides direction for local efforts, motivates individuals to get engaged in the change process, and aligns the energies of diverse individuals and organizations around shared goals (Corbin et al., 2016; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Martin et al., 2014; Walden, 2014). Shared visions can also build public will for targeted changes within the community (ORS Impact & Spark Policy Institute, 2018)

Effective shared visioning includes the following features:

- **Clearly defined shared goals.** Effective shared visioning processes engage stakeholders representing multiple sectors and roles (see Element 2 for more details) in clearly defining the ultimate population-level impacts they want to bring about for children and families, which local groups of children and families are experiencing the greatest inequities related to these impacts, and the multiple systemic issues or "root causes" getting in the way of these impacts within the local community (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2018; Wolff et al., 2016). Through this process,

stakeholders often build their critical consciousness of the multi-dimensional issues contributing to local early childhood outcomes and as a result become more motivated to pursue change (Fear et al., 2006).

Example Shared Visioning Questions for Kindergarten Readiness
(adapted from Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2018)

What does it look like for children to be ready for kindergarten?
What does it look like for children to be meeting developmental milestones along the way?

In what ways are children not ready for kindergarten in our community?
Which children are the least ready?

Why are these children the least ready for school?
How is the early childhood system contributing to these inequities?

Unfortunately, many collaborative partnerships limit their shared visions to broad goal statements without enough detail to guide action, leaving stakeholders confused about what exactly they are trying to change and how (Dearing, 2008). Without this clarity, stakeholders can also end up pursuing misaligned actions (e.g., pre-k programs and kindergarten classrooms may adopt misaligned curriculums or assessment processes based on their different definitions of kindergarten readiness), and this misalignment can hinder the success of the system building efforts (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2018).

- **Explicit focus on equity.** Shared visions are more likely to improve outcomes for all children and families when they explicitly embed equity as a priority (Wolff et al., 2016). This includes using disaggregated data to identify which groups are experiencing the worst outcomes compared to other groups over time (PolicyLink, 2018), and using qualitative and quantitative data on the system to understand the structural root causes for why those inequities are happening (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017). Making equity an explicit focus of the shared vision can also encourage local settings and organizations to align their own internal policies, practices, and resources to promote equity (Rudolph et al., 2013; Lounsbury & Mitchell, 2009; Preskill et al., 2014).

  In practice, many collaborative partnerships do not make equity an explicit focus of their shared visions (Wolff et al., 2016). This is in part because many stakeholders lack a deep understanding about equity, including the definitions of key terms (e.g., equity vs. equality) and a recognition of how local inequities are primarily caused by community and system conditions rather than individual-level behaviors (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). Even some popular collaborative models frequently endorsed by funders (i.e., Collective Impact) do not include an explicit focus on equity.

- **Shared measurement.** Effective collaborative partnerships engage stakeholders representing diverse roles – including families and members of the local community (see Element 2 below) - in defining a shared measurement approach for the shared vision (Preskill et al., 2014). The act

of clearly defining what success will look like is important because it can build collective accountability for the work (Latham, 2014) and support learning and continuous improvement processes (see Element 4 below). A shared measurement approach includes a comprehensive set of short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes around prioritized child and family impacts *and* local systems changes, relevant metrics and data collection tools that are culturally and linguistically responsive to the local community, and a commitment to track progress in targeted outcomes over time (Early Childhood System Workgroup, 2013; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Wolff et al., 2016). Effective shared measurement also provides outcome data that is disaggregated by key demographic categories (e.g., race/ethnicity, income, gender, geographic location, immigration status, etc.) to track shifts in local disparities over time (PolicyLink, 2018).

In practice, many collaborative partnerships do not develop effective shared measurement approaches. For example, many partnerships engage only top leaders in defining targeted outcomes which can hinder community support for the system building efforts and lead to strategies that are not responsive to the needs of local children and families (LeChasseur, 2014; Wolff et al., 2016). Many partnerships also fail to define short and intermediate population *and* community/system-level outcomes, instead focusing mostly on long-term population-level outcomes which can take years to change; without defining and tracking these additional types of outcomes, many partnerships find it difficult to communicate intermediate markers of their success to funders and the community (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Finally, many efforts do not disaggregate outcome data by key demographic categories which makes it more difficult to understand and address the systemic root causes driving local disparities (Bensimon, 2005; PolicyLink, 2018).

- **Empowered champions.** Effective early childhood collaborative partnerships identify and empower local leaders to champion their shared vision with local organizations, community members, and elected officials (Scott, 2012; Washington & Lipstein, 2011). This includes not only describing the shared vision goals but also helping people understand how they can support those goals individually and in their work (e.g., by having their organization include some of the shared vision goals into their mission or strategic plans; Community Toolbox, 2018[a]).

  In practice, stakeholders in the position to champion the shared vision struggle to clearly define the value of the system building efforts and the shared goals (Stebbins, 2012). In addition, many partnerships do not have the communication processes or plans in place to empower and support leaders to champion the vision in the community (Dudley et al., 2018).

Element 2: Engaged Multiple Stakeholders Representing Diverse Perspectives

Early childhood outcomes are influenced by many interacting issues across vertical and horizontal ecological layers of the community (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). It is impossible for any individual perspective to see and understand all of these issues (Ulrich & Reynolds, 2010). In response, effective community partnerships engage a diverse range of stakeholders to guide their efforts (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017). This engagement ensures early childhood system building efforts are informed by and responsive to the needs and interests of diverse stakeholders (Early Childhood Systems Working Group, 2013). Effective collaborative partnerships also identify indicators (and benchmarks) to track stakeholder engagement (particularly of families experiencing targeted inequities) in decision making

within the collaborative partnership and across the early childhood system (Early Childhood System Workgroup, 2013).

Effective stakeholder engagement includes the following features:

- **Engagement of stakeholders representing diverse perspectives.** Effective collaborative partnerships actively engage a broad range of stakeholders representing multiple roles and the demographic diversity of the community to guide their efforts (Calancie, 2017; Wolff et al., 2016). Experts recommend collaborative partnerships engage stakeholders from the following groups given their unique roles and perspectives in the system (Early Childhood Systems Working Group, 2013; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017; Scott, 2012; Siegel et al., 2018):
    - families with children experiencing inequities in early childhood outcomes
    - cross-sector direct service providers working on issues affecting priority children and families (e.g., childcare providers, home visiting nurses, CCRR staff, etc.)
    - cross-sector, high-level leaders (e.g., directors, funders, policy makers, etc.) in the position to make decisions on changes and the allocation of resources
    - people from local neighborhood settings where priority families live (e.g., faith-based leaders, neighborhood organizations, businesses)

  By actively engaging a broad range of stakeholders in the collaborative partnership, the initiative as a whole is better able to tap into their diverse perspectives, skills, resources, and networks (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001).

  In practice, most collaborative partnerships do not engage stakeholders representing a diverse array of perspectives and roles. For example, few partnerships consistently engage families experiencing targeted inequities in their work, or engage them in authentic and empowering ways (Wolff et al., 2016). Similarly, most collaborative partnerships do not have working relationships with stakeholders representing a full range of sectors relevant to their shared vision (e.g., economic development, housing, transportation, the built environment, and regional planning), limiting the type and amount of change they are able to create in the community (Roussos & Fawcett, ##; Siegel et al., 2018). Many partnerships also do not engage stakeholders representing the demographics of the community, increasing the risk that solutions exacerbate local inequities (LeChasseur, 2014).

- **Engagement in all phases of the work.** Effective collaborative partnerships engage stakeholders representing the perspective groups listed above in all phases of the work (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017). For example, stakeholders can be engaged in understanding the current system conditions influencing prioritized outcomes and inequities, designing and implementing strategies, and learning for continuous improvement (Checkland & Scholes 1990; EquityXDesign, 2016; Koelen et al., 2008). In particular, engaging families currently experiencing prioritized inequities *from the beginning* of a system building initiative can help to ensure efforts are responsive to families' needs and aspirations (Black & Rahman, 2017; Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Hargreaves et al., 2017; Scott, 2012). Some collaborative partnerships use a portion of their resources to hire a community organizer or coordinate with existing community organizing initiatives (e.g., a parent coalition) to help engage families as equal partners in all phases of the system building work, including advocacy and direct action (Wolff et al., 2016). However, Wolff and colleagues (2016) also emphasize the need to protect the autonomy of these entities to enable bold action:

> *If collaboratives are truly invested in a community organizing approach, then they must seek to provide enough autonomy and funding to the [community organizing] initiative so that it can take bold, independent action, including potentially challenging the coalition or some of the institutions that its members represent* (p. 46).

In practice, many collaborative partnerships do not engage stakeholders representing diverse perspectives in all phases of the work. For example, most collaborative partnerships do not provide roles for families experiencing targeted inequities to actively engage in the system building efforts, often leading to partnership decisions and actions that are not responsive to local needs (LeChasseur, 2014; Wolff et al., 2016). Many collaborative partnership also struggle to consistently engage cross-sector, high-level leaders with decision-making authority in the system building efforts, limiting the institutional influence needed to accomplish the shared vision goals (Siegel et al., 2018).

- **Distributed leadership and decision-making.** Effective collaborative partnerships promote distributed leadership by sharing the power to set goals, shape agendas, and make decisions (e.g., about policies, strategies, and next steps) with stakeholders representing diverse sectors and roles – including families experiencing targeted inequities (Hargreaves et al., 2017; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Some argue that priority families should actually have the ultimate power to determine targeted problems and strategies, with professionals playing more supportive roles (e.g., sharing expertise, access, and resources; Wolff et al., 2016). Distributed leadership is important because it encourages stakeholders to actively engage in the change process, take on leadership roles as they arise, and lead changes within their own organizations or sphere of influence (Smith et al., 2004; Trickett & Beehler, 2017). Distributed leadership also ensures stakeholders – especially marginalized families – have representational justice and influence over decisions affecting their lives (Fraser, 2009). This is essential as organizational leaders in positions of power often make decisions that perpetuate the status quo and unintentionally exacerbate local inequities (Agic, 2019). Collaborative partnerships can enhance distributed leadership by helping stakeholders clearly define and coordinate their roles within the change effort (Koelen et al., 2008; Nelson et al., 2013).

  In practice, many collaborative partnerships do not effectively share power and leadership with local stakeholders, particularly priority families and community members. For example, while families are sometimes engaged in providing input or interpreting information, they are rarely provided opportunities to influence decisions about the system building efforts (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012). In addition, collaborative partnerships that fail to engage families and community leaders as equal partners from the beginning often find it incredibly difficult to later "reengineer" their efforts in ways that will authentically share power with these stakeholders (Wolff et al., 2016). Unfortunately, even the Collective Impact model frequently endorsed by funders promotes a top-down decision-making model that does not include an explicit focus on engaging and sharing power with priority families or other community leaders.

- **Enabling collaborative infrastructure.** Collaborative partnerships can promote stakeholder engagement and support distributed leadership and decision-making by creating enabling collaborative infrastructures. Enabling collaborative infrastructures: 1) create safe spaces for stakeholders to talk honestly about local system problems and develop creative solutions; 2) legitimize the perspectives and decision-making power of all stakeholders; and 3) self-organize

and evolve in response to current needs and opportunities (e.g., action team created to address a targeted problem and then removed when problem is resolved; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017). For example, some collaborative partnerships create a series of separate "affinity groups" that engage stakeholders from the same role (e.g., a group for leaders, a group for direct service providers, a group for families, etc.) in problem solving system issues (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012). This infrastructure creates safe spaces for dialogue and problem solving (e.g., staff are typically more honest about current issues when their leaders are not present, same with families and their service providers) and legitimize the perspectives of all stakeholders (Burns, 2007). The groups all focus on the same shared vision goals, but each uses their unique perspectives and sphere of influence to pursue change; each group is also given equal decision-making power in the change effort (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012). These parallel group processes are then integrated together by convening staff or a centralized facilitating body (Burns, 2007).

In practice, most collaborative partnership infrastructures do not enable the authentic engagement of all stakeholders. For example, many infrastructures combine stakeholders representing multiple roles (e.g., leaders, direct service providers, families) in the same collaborative space, even though these structures have been found to exacerbate existing power dynamics by privileging the perspectives and decision-making influence of institutional leaders while marginalizing those of family representatives (Chavis, 2001). In addition, most infrastructures are rigid and unable to adapt to emerging needs and opportunities, often because they are bound to immutable strategic plans or funding requirements (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017).

- **Supported engagement.** Effective collaborative partnerships provide the necessary supports and conditions to ensure all stakeholders – especially families experiencing targeted inequities – can fully and authentically engage in the change efforts. This includes considerations such as providing transportation to meetings (and the selection of meeting locations that are easily accessible to the community), on-site child-care, meals, translation of information, interpretation supports, and culturally responsive facilitation and meeting processes (Early Childhood Systems Workgroup, 2013; Stark, 2020; Wolff et al., 2016). Engagement support can also include providing capacity-building to help families build their leadership skills and confidence *and* to help other collaborative members understand, value, and effectively use the knowledge, skills, and networks held by families and community members (Watson & Foster-Fishman, 2012).

  In practice, many early childhood collaborative partnerships do not consistently provide the supports needed to ensure the active and authentic engagement of all stakeholders, particularly families experiencing targeted inequities (Stark, 2020). Even when supports are provided, they are sometimes designed or distributed in ways that exacerbate local inequities (e.g., partnerships provide families a stipend in the form of gift cards instead of cash, limiting families' ability to determine how best to utilize those resources to meet their needs; Stark, 2020).

Element 3: Systems-Focused Problem-Solving and Action

Equitable school readiness is a complex problem rooted in layers of systemic issues. As mentioned above, cross-sector early childhood investments, programs, services, and supports are often fragmented, uncoordinated, and difficult for families to navigate. In addition, the conditions and

opportunities needed to help children and their families thrive (e.g., affordable housing, livable wage employment, safe communities, healthy environments, etc.) are often not available and accessible to everyone (Solar & Irwin, 2010). This situation is exacerbated by policies, practices, and structures that are misaligned with promoting early childhood outcomes. Effective change efforts use problem-solving approaches that can understand and address this complexity (Lounsbury & Mitchell, 2009; Patton, 2011) and tackle the underlying system issues contributing to inequitable outcomes for children and families (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012).

Effective systems-focused problem-solving and action includes the following features:

- **Use of systems thinking.** Systems thinking is an approach to help understand how systems function over time (Goodman, 2018) and is recommended by experts as an essential orientation for early childhood system building (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). Systems thinking involves understanding how a given early childhood system's unique characteristics – including cross-sector goals, decision-making processes, policies, practices, connections, resources, program components, mindsets, and the interactions between these elements – are contributing to inequities in local kindergarten readiness outcomes (Coffman, 2007; Foster-Fishman, et al., 2007; Stroh, 2015). This understanding of the system context is then used to design and implement targeted interventions to address identified system issues (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012; Tseng & Seidman, 2007).

  In practice, many early childhood system building initiatives focus more on implementing or expanding programs than problem-solving cross-sector system issues (e.g., related to alignment, access, coordination, and family-centered design) affecting disparities in kindergarten readiness (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). While programs can bring about positive outcomes, at least for the particular families who are able to access them, they are unable to transform the underlying system issues that ultimately reinforce inequitable kindergarten readiness across the community/region (Foster-Fishman et al. 2007; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017; Lornec et al., 2013; Meadows, 2008). In addition, few partnerships intentionally seek to understand and address system issues related to structural racism, as this focus often challenges the community's current power structure (Wolff et al., 2016). Given these disconnects, it is not surprising that few system building efforts have achieved the level of change for which they aspire (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007; Siegel et al., 2018).

- **Use of qualitative and quantitative data.** Effective collaborative partnerships gather and use qualitative and quantitative data to guide their systems-focused problem solving processes (Early Childhood System Workgroup, 2013). This includes using data to help: 1) understand the range of systemic root cause barriers (e.g., policies, practices, decision-making processes, connections, etc.) getting in the way of promoting equity in kindergarten readiness; 2) design or adapt strategies to address these identified barriers; and 3) identify system conditions (e.g., communication processes, stakeholders' skills and knowledge, logistical supports, etc.) needed to effectively implement these strategies within the local community context (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017; Preskill et al., 2014). Effective qualitative data comes from stakeholders representing a diverse range of perspectives (e.g., families, direct service providers, agency leaders, community members, state-level funders, etc.; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017; Ulrich & Reynolds, 2010). Effective quantitative data is current and focused on tracking *system* elements (e.g., local practices, family experiences, and community-system environments) contributing to local disparities in kindergarten readiness (Bowie & Inkelas, 2014). Both types of

data are gathered and analyzed using culturally responsive methods (Early Childhood Systems Workgroup, 2013).

In practice, many collaborative partnerships do not effectively use data to guide their systems-focused problem solving. For example, many efforts gather qualitative data representing a narrow range of perspectives on the system, often excluding families directly experiencing targeted inequities (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017). Many efforts also focus their quantitative data on local organizations' service outputs or client counts instead of the organizational practices, family experiences and interactions within the system, and community environments that contribute to local inequities (Bowie & Inkelas, 2014). Additionally, many efforts do not use data gathering and analysis methods that are culturally responsive and driven by local families (Wolff et al., 2016). As a result, system building efforts often unintentionally exacerbate local inequities because they do not have the information they need tailor strategies to meet the needs of the most marginalized families (LeChasseur, 2014; White et al., 2009).

- **Aligned action planning.** Effective collaborative partnerships help stakeholders representing diverse perspectives (e.g., families, direct service providers, leaders, community members, funders, etc.) across ecological layers (e.g., community, county, state/tribal, national, etc.) to identify and plan out quick actions they can take in their own sphere of influence to pursue systems building strategies (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017). These quick actions, each taking less than 3 months to carry out, create little resistance because they seem feasible yet are significant enough to lay the groundwork for larger systems changes (Weick, 1984; ORS Impact & Spark Institute, 2018). Effective partnerships help stakeholders to: 1) clarify the quick actions needed to move their strategies forward, including who will do what by when; 2) align and coordinate their actions to promote synergy and avoid duplication or interference; and 3) access behind the scenes supports to help them implement their actions (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2018; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Aligned action planning helps partnerships stay focused on shared systems change goals (Gottlieb et al., 1993), expand their membership (Bibeau et al., 1996), and build shared accountability for action (Kegler et al., 1998).

  In practice, many collaborative partnerships struggle to engage in aligned action planning. For example, partnerships often do not break down large-scale strategies into a series of small, feasible action steps that diverse stakeholders (e.g., families, direct service staff, leaders, community members, etc.) can carry out across the community (Holt et al., 2007; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012). This is problematic, as successful system building requires change actions across multiple ecological layers and settings (Schaffer & Ashkenas, 2005; Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2014). Compounding this situation is the fact that partnership stakeholders who are not in leadership positions (e.g., marginalized families, direct service providers) often falsely believe they cannot initiate action given their role in the system (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2018).

Element 4: Continuous Learning and Improvement

Early childhood systems include many actors (e.g., families, service providers, leaders, community members, etc.), settings (e.g., organizations, institutions, neighborhood venues, etc.), and elements (e.g., programs, policies, practices, goals, resources, etc.) that interact with each other across multiple ecological layers (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). These complex systems often respond to change efforts in unpredictable ways, such as when interventions targeting one part of the system frequently create

unanticipated outcomes in other parts of the system (Eoyang & Holladay, 2013; Johnston et al., 2014; Zimmerman et al., 2001). To succeed within this context, effective collaborative partnerships must continuously learn about their progress and, when needed, improve/adapt their efforts to stay on track to reach their shared vision goals (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2010; Jones et al., 2010).

Effective continuous learning and improvement includes the following features:

- **Short cycle feedback loops.** Effective collaborative partnerships have processes in place to gather feedback about their change efforts in frequent cycles on an ongoing basis (Bowie & Inkelas, 2014; Eoyang & Holladay, 2013; Spoth & Greeenberg, 2011). This feedback should come from multiple perspectives (e.g., families, direct service providers, leaders, etc.) and assess the extent to which: 1) the partnership's internal dynamics are promoting effective engagement, problem-solving, and action around the shared vision; 2) initiated strategies and change efforts are starting to make a difference in targeted system root causes and ultimately child and family outcomes; 3) anticipated and unanticipated implementation barriers are emerging; and 4) the larger early childhood system is responding to the change efforts in ways that either support or hinder success (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017; Wolff et al., 2016; Hargreaves et al., 2017; Goodman et al., 1996). Short cycle feedback can be used to improve decision making, document successes, celebrate accomplishments, and increase members' motivation and commitment (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Collaborative partnerships are better able to gather this type of rapid feedback when they have clearly defined immediate/short, mid, and long-term outcomes that capture targeted systems changes (Wolff et al., 2016).

  In practice, many collaborative partnerships are not set up to gather short cycle feedback on their systems building/change efforts. For example, many initiatives primarily gather feedback data on set of predetermined long-term population outcomes - or at best service outputs or client counts - instead of changes in local system functioning (e.g., organizational policies and practices, family experiences and interactions within the system, community environments, etc.; Bowie & Inkelas, 2014). Feedback is often gathered infrequently (Bowie & Inkelas, 2014) and does not authentically represent a diverse range of perspectives (e.g., priority families, direct service providers, etc.) needed to understand the multi-faceted nature of system change (Chavis, 2001; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017). In addition, partnerships often do not gather feedback to identify unanticipated outcomes or system responses resulting from their efforts, even though change within complex systems is rarely linear or predictable (Patton, 2011).

- **Aligned learning and continuous improvement.** Effective collaborative partnerships use the rapid feedback described above to inform their decision-making, including how to address implementation barriers, redesign or evolve strategies to better align with local conditions, and scale successful changes (Eoyang & Holladay, 2013; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). In alignment with "lean impact" approaches (Chang, 2018), this learning and continuous improvement orientation helps initiatives "fail fast" and quickly make needed midcourse corrections to avoid spending significant time and resources on ineffective strategies (Giles, 2018; Wolff et al., 2016). Effective collaborative partnerships also share relevant feedback with applicable stakeholders across vertical (e.g., community, county, state, etc.) and horizontal (e.g., cross-sector, cross-initiative, cross-organizational departments, etc.) ecological layers to improve and align decision making and problem-solving (Early Childhood Systems

Workgroup, 2013; Edwards, et al., 2011). Some effective collaborative partnerships even work to create a culture and expectation for learning and continuous improvement across the community, as this helps to support the overall change efforts (Early Childhood Systems Workgroup, 2013; Foster-Fishman et al., 2007; Lounsbury & Mitchell, 2009).

In practice, many collaborative partnerships are more focused on developing joint projects or implementing strategic plans than using rapid feedback to promote learning and continuous improvement (Granner and Sharpe, 2004). Even when partnerships engage in learning processes, internal power dynamics often hinder the exchange and valuing of insights across stakeholders, particularly those from marginalized groups (e.g., priority families; Chavis, 2001).

Element 5: Strategic Convening

Effective collaborative partnerships are supported by an individual or team who takes on a variety of strategic convening roles to promote the partnership functions listed above. These roles occur both "onstage" and "behind the scenes" and are related to facilitation, coordination, management of data collection and analysis, administration (e.g., record keeping, meeting logistics), internal and external communication, and securing resources and expertise to support implementation and sustainability (Turner et al., 2012; Wolff et al., 2016). Conveners are often the only paid staff affiliated with the partnership (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000) and sometimes form what is referred to as a "backbone organization" (Turner et al., 2012). Strategic convening is one of the most important factors determining whether a partnership successfully brings about systems change (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000).

Strategic convening includes the following features:

- **Neutral role.** Strategic conveners clearly define their neutral role within the partnership (Collective Impact Forum, 2014). This involves setting clear boundaries around their responsibilities to stay focused on "*building* community leadership as opposed to *being* the leadership" (Wolff et al., 2016). As a result, conveners are trusted and respected by stakeholders and are able to promote transparency, openness, and shared decision-making within the partnership (Corbin and Mittelmark, 2008; Zakocs and Guckenburg, 2007; Merrill et al., 2012).

  In practice, many conveners – especially those following the Collective Impact model - do not clearly define their neutral role and instead adopt more of a top-down, hierarchical leadership structure that does not support distributed leadership (Wolff et al., 2016). In addition, many conveners cloud their neutral role and exacerbate local power dynamics by becoming gatekeepers for community funding (Le, 2015).

- **Systems change competencies.** Effective collaborative partnerships are supported by convener staff with a specific array of competencies (e.g., knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc.) needed to pursue systems change (Kania & Kramar, 2011). This includes skills in systems thinking, meeting facilitation, community engagement, planning, communication, organizational and financial management, data management, diplomacy and negotiations, conflict management, and change management (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Siegel et al., 2018). In particular, strategic conveners have the competencies to identify and address internal partnership power dynamics, practices, and process that are marginalizing stakeholders from historically excluded groups, including helping partnership members examine how White privilege and systemic racism are manifesting themselves in the work (Wolff et al., 2016).

In practice, it is common for conveners of systems building initiatives to lack the competencies needed to effectively pursue systems change (Bensberg et al., 2020; Hodges et al. 2007; Trochim et al. 2006). In addition, even conveners in mature collaboratives often prioritize "group harmony" over facilitating difficult yet necessary conversations that expose competing interests across members (e.g., duplication of services) or disrupt the status quo (Siegel et al., 2018).

- **Continuous communication processes.** Strategic conveners help put processes in place to ensure timely, ongoing, and culturally responsive communication about decisions, plans, activities, and progress to stakeholders in and out of the partnership (Early Childhood System Workgroup, 2013; Kegler et al., 2007; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). This communication allows stakeholders to have the information they need to be informed and active members of the systems building efforts and for information and feedback to flow between workgroups, committees, or action teams (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Effective communication processes promote stakeholder engagement, trust, motivation, accountability, and successful implementation (Ostrom, 2010; Kegler et al., 2007). They can also build the initiative's reputation and credibility in the community, which helps to promote local public will and sustainability of the change efforts (Calancie, 2017).

  In practice, many collaborative partnerships do not have effective continuous communication processes in place to support systems change (Dudley et al., 2018; Community Toolbox, 2018[b]). Without these communication processes, efforts to coordinate partnership activities are greatly hindered (Leischow et al., 2010). Communication processes that are in place are often not culturally responsive and as a result frequently exacerbate local injustices (Walton et al., 2019)

- **Flexible, sustainable funding mechanisms.** Strategic conveners help collaborative partnerships build comprehensive financing structures that align local, county, state, and national funding to support the partnership functions listed above and the systems building strategies. Example financing strategies include: shared savings agreements where savings resulting from systems building efforts are reinvested into the partnership; cross-sector blended/braided funding approaches; investments from health plans and/or hospital community benefit funds; line items in existing public agency budgets; tax levies; social impact bonds; in-kind support; sliding scale partnership membership fees; earned income from conveners providing data, facilitation, and communication services; and corporate/business resources (Community Toolbox, 2018[c]; Preskill, 2014; Siegel et al., 2018).

  In practice, many collaborative partnerships struggle to secure sustainable financing for their operations and system building strategies and have little experience with more innovative funding structures (Becker, 2017; Hester et al., 2015). Most early childhood system building partnerships are primarily financed through state funding, which can put them at risk if state revenues decline due to shifting political landscapes (Stebbins, 2012). In addition, few collaborative partnership have long term financial plans, instead relying on a fragmented array of 1-3 year grants to fund specific activities (Siegel et al., 2018). This situation is exacerbated by the fact that many early childhood partnership find it difficult to clearly describe and defend the value of their system building efforts to potential funders (Stebbins, 2012).

SUMMARY

Most communities in the United States have evolved a complex and disorganized array of early childhood programs and supports that are difficult for families to navigate and use (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). In response, there is a growing movement to build early childhood *systems* to provide more aligned, coordinated, and family centered services, supports, and opportunities for children and their families. One common system building/change approach is the creation of collaborative partnerships (Cheadle, et al., 2008; Nowell 2009). The literature describes five elements that enable collaborative partnerships to more effectively pursue systems building/change, including: a shared vision; engaged diverse stakeholders; systems-focused problem-solving and action; continuous learning and improvement; and strategic convening.

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