

Colorado's Early Childhood Systems Building Inventory



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Introduction

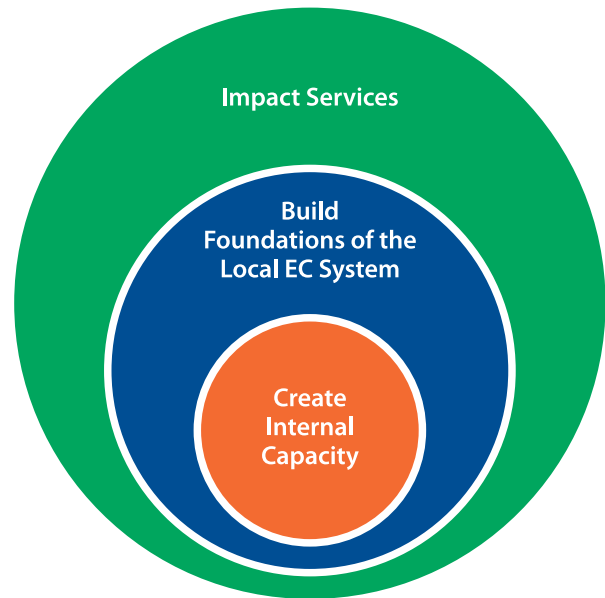
Colorado’s Early Childhood Systems Building Inventory includes recommendations and best practices, compiled, gleaned, or otherwise distilled from the early childhood (EC) systems work that has been in progress in Colorado for the last 12 years; much of it residing in Colorado’s Early Childhood Councils (EC Councils). The work and practices of these EC Council communities are synthesized in ways that are hopefully understandable. This is not a cookbook for local communities seeking to create an EC system; rather it details the individual components that comprise functioning, locally based, EC systems—based on Colorado’s experience. Considerations, suggestions, strategies and activities, indeed, all of the information contained in the following pages are tendered as recommendations rather than expectations; observations rather than cold, hard fact. The reality is that many of the goals and objectives associated with EC systems building can be achieved via a variety of methods. This inventory is therefore meant to show a comprehensive view of the road to be traveled rather than a prescription of how to arrive at the destination.

More specifically, the inventory’s contents will be used to inform:

- The development of technical assistance and evaluation tools and activities for EC Councils;
- EC Council strategic, communication, resource, and professional development plans; and,
- The creation of local leadership and organizational capacity necessary for EC Council growth.

The challenge lies in accurately describing the developmental continuum that communities must travel when crafting an effective EC system. Beyond this description, actual creation and implementation of an EC system is punctuated frequently by starts and stops—related mostly to resource and capacity deficiencies. Colorado’s Early Childhood Systems Building Inventory creates a container for those practices identified as effective, and/or desired, in moving communities along the developmental continuum towards an increasingly advanced early childhood system.

This document is the first step in fully describing the components of an EC system. It consists of three sections that are organized along a developmental



continuum. The first section, “Create Internal Capacity”, is about helping communities identify and tackle the steps necessary to build functioning EC Councils. The second section, “Build Foundations of a Local System”, concerns those activities that an EC Council might undertake to frame the imminent EC system. The final section, “Impact Services”, addresses the effect of the EC Council on early childhood programs, services, activities, and outcomes within its community.

This inventory was built over the course of the last four years using various methods to determine both developmental categories and relevant content. State staff created an outline and provided some content initially. A series of intensive work sessions involving numerous local and state-level stakeholders followed; yielding significant additions and revisions. Subsequent work with a team of national systems evaluators, including an intensive, facilitated two-day retreat, further refined the content and provided thoughtful guidance on the potential utility of the inventory. Finally, the inventory was radically revised to align with the newly introduced Early Childhood Colorado Framework; a process that included the creation of new categories and an extensive cross-walk, and some modification, of the inventory’s content.

Subsequent versions of this document and planned complementary pieces will continue to flesh out the content of the developmental continuum components. We will also start documenting how communities successfully move along that continuum within particular categories.

Create Internal Capacity

Governance

Topic Definition: Structure and procedures used to lead and oversee the creation and implementation of an early childhood system.

Definition of Community

Starting Point

- Community represented by EC Council meets minimum requirements of funding source.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council actively encourages and works to involve community stakeholder participation.

High Performing

- Defined community is refined as needed; for example, expansion to unserved areas or counties.
- Work brings community together around common themes and needs while simultaneously allowing flexibility to address specific needs that may not apply to the entire community.
- Community stakeholders actively contribute to the work of the EC Council.
- The EC Council serves the interests of the community's stakeholders.

Management and Operations

Topic Definition: EC Council structures and processes that manage the effective and efficient operations of both EC Councils and their staff.

Starting Point

- Fiscal sponsor/agent understands and meets legal obligations.
- Capacity for providing coordination for at least 10 hours per week.
- Staffing provided on an ad hoc basis.

Intermediate Development

- Fiscal agent/sponsors make organizational resources available.
- Applicable insurance.
- Access to legal expertise.
- Ability to manage funds for grants.
- Staffing is at least 40 hours per week of coordination.

High Performing

- Organization has a formalized structure.
- Full compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- Established Human Resource capacity.

Oversight

Starting Point

- Stakeholders meet for a particular reason or cause.
- Management and oversight responsibilities are tasked to individual partners rather than the group.

Intermediate Development

- Stakeholders work together under a formal agreement to coordinate and/or collaborate.
- By laws/operating principles exist that establish decision-making procedures.
- Agreements are used to support the efficient and effective functioning and oversight of the early childhood council activities such as:
 - Communication with council members and external stakeholders;
 - Prioritization of council tasks;
 - Structure for organizing the work of the council aligns to the strategic plan;
 - Identification of needed resources;
 - Implementation of the strategic plan; and,
 - EC Council members have some authority to make decisions for their organization.

High Performing

- Agreements for how the council coordinates, collaborates and makes decisions are known and transparent to community stakeholders.
- Stakeholders begin to align internal organizational goals and processes with system goals.
- EC Council members shift to decision making on behalf of the whole community rather than on behalf of their organization and/or constituency.
- EC Council meetings are actively structured using the mission, vision and strategic plan as the basis for making decisions and determining specific activities.

- Reflective evaluation by the group informs future decision-making process changes.
- Formalized work plan reviewed regularly by the EC Council.

Policies and Procedures

Starting Point

- EC Council has assessed organizational needs and defined its capacity to deliver and support assessed EC systems building needs.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council has policies that define how EC system building activities will be created, prioritized, and implemented.
- EC Council consistently implements policies.
- EC Council has some capacity to monitor and make policy/program adjustments based on practice.
- Policies, procedures, and expectations based thereon, are defined, written, and formalized.
- Policies exist to guide membership; for example, conflict of interest.

High Performing

- All Intermediate Development items plus the following:
 - EC Council has developed and implemented a formalized, regular, and consistent monitoring process that provides key data, policies, strategies and/or activities to inform future policy and service direction.
 - Grievance procedure is instituted.
 - EC Council begins to create sequencing that identifies procedures/processes that are most developmentally appropriate and productive for improving program quality and availability.
 - Procedures for reconciling impasse when in a shared governance situation are established.

Accountability

Starting Point

- Communicate goals and vision to community stakeholders.
- Capacity to meet state and other funder accountability measure(s).

Intermediate Development

- Written agreements, as appropriate, to document accountability and responsibility for work.
- Timely and accurate reporting to funders about expenditures and achievements.

High Performing

- System wide report documenting successes and challenges including fiscal resources.
- Use the success of the work as an opportunity to engage funders and the broader public in order to build ownership.
- Shared accountability measures across system include outcomes and identified indicators.
- Data informs future planning and decisions.

Leadership: Shared Visioning

Starting Point

- Strategic Planning.
- Mission and Vision (MV) statement.
- MV statement is aligned with Early Childhood Colorado Framework.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council members can articulate the MV statement.
- Alignment between vision and goals/strategic plan.
- Understanding the relationship between EC Council MV and member organizations' individual MV.

High Performing

- EC Council demonstrates commitment to outcomes.
- MV used to assess opportunities, create priorities, and make decisions.
- Member organizations demonstrate application/alignment/integration of EC Council MV within individual member organizations.
- EC Council work focuses on challenges, successes and lessons learned.

Communication Mechanisms

Topic Definition: How the EC Council provides information to and between various stakeholders and to facilitate communication between system partners.

Starting Point

- Keeps members informed about EC Council business and issues between meetings via basic communication mechanisms; e.g., listserv, website, forum at meetings.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council has an established system to:
 - 1) Coordinate issue-specific communications pertaining to EC Council work between partners at the local level; and,
 - 2) Coordinate the distribution of information from (and to) state and national stakeholders.

High Performing

- The EC Council communication system is viewed by partners as the means of staying informed of, and participating in, systems building work.
- Use of technology to support further expansion of the communications system.

Assessment

Topic Definition: The process of identifying, quantifying and/or qualifying both needs and available resources.

Data Tools, Collection, Tracking, and Analysis

Starting Point

- Identifies strengths and challenges in EC Council's capacity to evaluate various aspects of its systems building efforts, programs, and/or services.
- Identifies outputs linked to desired results that can be tracked.
- Creates a mechanism for collecting and counting data.
- Creates a Data Action Plan.

Intermediate Development

- Identified outputs/outcomes linked to strategic plan priorities.
- Process for tracking outputs is developed and implemented.
- Quarterly review of progress in tracking outputs; includes revisions, as needed.
- Outputs are linked or otherwise correlated with indicators that align with the framework and local council strategic plan.
- Output data is analyzed and used to monitor progress in implementing strategies.
- Begin to track systems data longitudinally.
- A process for tracking evaluative tasks is established.
- EC Council has established information to be reported by staff to EC Council members.
- Timelines for reporting are established.
- EC Councils can demonstrate they understand the need/rationale for data collection and analysis.

High Performing

- A Data Action Plan exists that definitively connects strategic plan priorities with outcomes.
- Regular, formalized evaluation of both process (formative) and outcomes (summative) of work is implemented and continuously reviewed, adjusted, and analyzed to show systems impacts over time.
 - Outputs are linked with measurable outcomes.
 - Results are used to inform revisions in, and communicate with stakeholders about, systems building work.
 - Information is exchanged with other organizations about common goals, objectives.
 - Creation of a database that compares the applied systems strategies with program quality measures and child outcomes; example, professional development activities.

Community Assessment

Starting Point

- Community has completed a community profile that includes:
 - Demographics;
 - Child health and well-being;
 - School readiness;
 - Economic and workforce; and,
 - Geographic and other relevant attributes.
- Some examples of information:
 - % of children under 6 living in poverty;
 - % of children under 6 w/all parents in the labor force;
 - % of high risk factor births;
 - # of licensed child care providers; and,
 - # of licensed child care slots.

Intermediate Development

- Community assessment is complete and includes:
 - Community Profile
 - Status of children and families
 - System Assessment
 - A List of Considerations and Observations from assessment
 - Existing assessments from communities are utilized (for example, Head Start, United Way, etc.).
 - Analyze assessment data for trends/themes and to inform the selection of data points.
 - EC Council has identified strengths, needs, and gaps in data that are used to prioritize goals and work activities.
 - EC Council has approved the community assessment.
- Community assessment data provides the rationale for selecting EC Council priorities.

High Performing

- Community assessments are performed regularly and consistently in an effort to identify resource/system needs across multiple domains.
- Assessment data is used to prioritize activities across multiple organizations; e.g., strengths, needs, and gaps.
- Data points must be tied to specific goals to function as indicators.
- Assessments are used to support engagement of unusual suspects in early childhood system building.

Technical Assistance

Starting Point

- Ability to identify and request technical assistance to address a specific systems building need or gap.

Intermediate Development

- Specific technical assistance needs/gaps begin to be included in strategic planning process for the community.

High Performing

- Resource development plans, strategic plans, and communication plans identify technical assistance needs/gaps.
- EC Council has capacity to provide technical assistance to other EC Councils in specific systems building areas.

Strategic Planning

Topic Definition: A formalized process for council staff and members to determine and articulate an EC Council's course of action for a given period of time—typically 3–5 years. This document divides the process and growth of strategic planning into three areas that focus on: the group process “Collaboration and Partnership”, the structure of the plan “Vision, Goals, Strategic Plan”, and the ongoing use of the plan “Institutionalizing”.

Collaboration and Partnership

Starting Point

- EC Council is convened.
- Shared decision making process exists.

Intermediate Development

- Intentional process for completing plan (task identification, assignment, etc.)
- Planning process is understood and easily communicated to external stakeholders and potential stakeholders.

High Performing

- Vetting of plan is a formalized process. Feedback is actively solicited.
- Link the planning process to other stakeholders groups' planning processes.

Vision, Goals, Strategic Plan

Starting Point

- Community has a defined vision, mission statement, and community assessment.

Intermediate Development

- Acknowledgement of one domain and two goals.
- Plan goals are aligned with state framework.
- Placeholders for other domains/goals are listed in the plan.

- Strategic Plan contains the following elements:

- Mission;
- Guiding principles;
- Goal/Objectives;
- Rationale;
- Strategy; and,
- Annual Work Plan.

- EC Council has approved Strategic Plan.

High Performing

- Multi-year plan addresses four domains, four goals, and the three areas of the developmental continuum; prioritized by needs identified by a community assessment.
- Includes all Intermediate Development components and also the following:
 - Outcome indicators exist for each activity;
 - Baseline;
 - Success; and,
 - Means for measuring indicators exists or is being developed.
- Stakeholders begin to demonstrably align internal organizational goals and objectives with the goals/objectives of the EC Council.
- Annually review and revise Strategic Plan; with a full update at least once every three years.
- Evaluation of strategies is conducted and includes, at a minimum, the following elements:
 - An analysis of impact; and
 - Possible changes in Strategic Plan elements as a result of the analysis.

Institutionalizing

Starting Point

- Form follows function.
- Use the strategic plan as a living document.

Intermediate Development

- Regularly reviewed.
- Provides context for the development of EC Council agendas.
- Aligning structure to effectively implement plan.

High Performing

- Quarterly tune up of the plan.
- Continuous quality improvement cycle, e.g., ongoing use of outputs, monitoring, review and revise opportunities, is a part of EC Council operations.

Resource Development

Topic Definition: Activities intended to increase the types and amount of support available to achieve the EC Council's goals and objectives. Resource Development addresses how to identify and access resources for the EC System. Fund and Invest (which addresses, in part, a specific mechanism for developing resources; i.e. investing) is covered later in the document.

Identifying Needed and Available Resources

Starting Point

- Some resource needs have been identified through a coordinated process.

Intermediate Development

- Collaborative process for assessing current resource level and what is needed—where are the gaps?
- Some analysis of effectiveness of existing resources.

High Performing

- An environmental resource assessment is a regular, budgeted part of the organizational planning process.
- Includes collaboration and a process for receiving and vetting resource information to all stakeholders.

Planning for, and Acquiring, Resources

Starting Point

- Resource opportunities are identified on an ad hoc basis.

Intermediate Development

- There is a collaborative process and identified mechanisms for identifying, assessing, and responding to resource opportunities that support EC system building work.

High Performing

- The organization has a formal plan, containing both short and long term strategies, for accessing new and diverse sources of funding and sustaining existing funding.
- The organization accesses new and diverse sources of funding and sustains existing funding (a minimum of two domains).
- Stakeholder roles are clearly defined in the development and acquisition of resources.

Sustainability

Topic Definition: The degree to which plans and resources developed by a council can be used to support activities that enable the EC Council to maintain its functionality. **Note:** Please also refer to Fund and Invest in Building Foundations of Local Systems.

Starting Point

- Community has identified barriers to sustaining gains made by the EC Council.
- Lessons learned from existing programs and services are documented.
- Demonstrated ability to continuously reflect on the process.
- Capacity to respond to grant opportunities.
- EC Council expects that members actively participate.
- EC Council has operating principles and practices that enable members to actively participate.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council has an established infrastructure to support EC system building work.
- EC Council has begun to develop a formal process for developing resources. This might include:
 - Assess and document resources needed to sustain gains in one domain;
 - Complete research and review of models to increase and sustain gains;
 - Resource development models for sustaining gains are selected/developed and implemented;
 - Identify potential sources of funding for EC system building work; e.g., public and private organizations; and,
 - Understand funding processes and mechanisms—both public and private.
- Resource development models are evaluated for impact and effectiveness and adjusted, as needed.
- EC Council members are informed and knowledgeable of EC Council work and processes.
- A formal orientation for new EC Council members exists.
- An orientation for new staff exists.

High Performing

- Successful practices are institutionalized via policy and organizational changes.
- EC Council has a fully developed, formalized process for resource development, including:
 - Long-term fund raising strategies;
 - Diversified funding;
 - Capacity to identify and describe concrete needs and solutions to potential funders resulting in additional funding;
 - Documentation of what resources are needed to impact and sustain gains is created for multiple domains;
 - Assess resources needed to sustain gains made in multiple domains;
 - Complete research and review of models to increase and sustain gains made in multiple domains;
 - Model(s) is selected, implemented in 2–4 domains;
 - Resource development models are evaluated for impact and effectiveness and adjusted; and,
 - Demonstrated continuity of council work.
- Written succession plans for council members and staff.
- Demonstrated ability to influence policy makers, state, and local budget makers.
- Strategies for effectively addressing council membership participation are used.
- EC Council uses self-assessment of EC Council processes, opportunities for participation, perceived EC Council effectiveness.

Fiscal Management

Topic Definition: The processes and procedures utilized to maintain effective oversight of funds received and controlled by the EC Council.

Budget and Accounting Systems: Internal Resource Accountability

Starting Point

- Fiscal agent accounting system meets Generally Acceptable Accounting Practices (GAAP) including effective internal controls.
- Budget is linked to goals and strategies listed in strategic plan, approved and monitored by both council and the fiscal agent.
- Written agreement with fiscal agent includes expectations that fiscal management uses GAAP and identifies shared responsibilities between the council and fiscal agent.

Intermediate Development

- Budgets are established annually and follow a formal approval process as do any budget amendments and revisions.
- Budgets are tracked using a computerized accounting system.
- Budget reports are presented to EC Council and governing groups monthly for approval.
- Training is provided to governance groups and council members on how to interpreting financial reports.
- Written fiscal policies.

High Performing

- Fiscal management system has the capacity to track multiple revenue sources and integrated project expenditures.
- No findings in the audit management letter.
- Historical fiscal information is used to inform future budget planning.
- Reserve account is established.
- Diverse revenue sources.
- Fiscal planning supports the creation and growth of an EC system.
- Periodic review of staffing structure and resource efficiency.

**Legal Responsibility:
Initiate and Manage Contracts**

Starting Point

- No formal system or process for awarding or managing sub grants or contracts.
- Written agreement in place for contractors.
- Ability to process and pay invoices.
- Conflict of interest policy is in place and followed.

Intermediate Development

- Access to legal review of legal documents.
- Able to document the impact of the contracted service and/or products.
- Written policy and procedures for managing contracts exist.
- Written policy and procedures for fiscal management exist.

High Performing

- Legal agreements are formalized and standardized;
- Ability to manage multiple legal agreements concurrently;
- Procedure that guides what happens when a contract is not met;
- Formalized signature authority;
- Monitoring process is in place that holds contractors accountable for documenting activities; e.g., receipts for purchases, site visits, record keeping (who, what, when);
- Results of monitoring process are shared with oversight groups and used to inform planning;
- Results are evaluated and inform future work.



Build Foundations of the Local EC System

Build and Support Partnerships

Stakeholders

Topic Definition: Individuals and/or organizations that have an abiding interest in early childhood issues.

Starting Point

- Community has a group of stakeholders meeting on EC systems.
- Collaboration between two or more stakeholders addressing some aspect of EC system building.
- Stakeholders attend EC Council meetings based on personal interest.
- Stakeholders may not have authority to make decisions within their organization.
- Stakeholders attend inconsistently.
- Representation from four domains but does not yet meet 50% threshold of required partners.

Intermediate Development

- Formalized agreements between two or more stakeholders on one or more aspect of EC system development expectations/definitions/standards:
 - Some stakeholders have investment from organization, others do not;
 - Some stakeholders can make decisions for organization, some cannot make those decisions; and,
 - Stakeholders attend 50% of meetings (council, steering committee, work group).
- Representation from four domains and 50% of required partners.
- Development of processes/work plans that demonstrate collaboration.
- Development and implementation of tools to assist in program integration AND improve program quality/availability.
- Stakeholders are willing to align resources towards a common goal while maintaining separate control.

High Performing

- High level of trust and transparency exists.
- Shared pool of resources.
- Shared goals and outcomes.
- Shared data for decision making and program implementation.
- Documented savings in funds and/or other resources.
- Demonstrated alignment of stakeholder organizations' operations or services with agreed-upon collaboration plan.
- Implementation of plans, processes, and tools are used by multiple stakeholder organizations' operations and services.
- Stakeholders exhibit willingness to share fiscal information and through this sharing make changes to more efficiently coordinate and use resources.
- Resources are integrated and used to support activities and goals of the strategic plan.
- Diverse representation.

Shared Ownership

Topic Definition: EC Council members jointly assume responsibility for all aspects of EC Council work.

Starting Point

- Agencies are focused solely on their own outcomes/projects.
- EC Council works collaboratively on behalf of all children and families within the community.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council works on behalf of children and families within specific projects.
- Identification and understanding of individual stakeholders' roles, interests, expertise, and accountability.
- EC Council stakeholders demonstrate active collaboration on resource development.
- Change in projects and activities that are directly influenced and informed by the MV.

High Performing

- Integration of multiple resources and/or goals of EC Council and its stakeholder organizations are directly influenced, informed, and directed by strategic implementation of the EC Council's MV.
- Agreement and use of common language across domains.
- Credit for the work is jointly shared and recognized.
- Alignment of system, program or child/outcome indicators across organizations or domains.

Shared Knowledge

Topic Definition: EC Council members use and contribute to a common set of terms, practices, services, etc., for building the EC system.

Starting Point

- EC Council has identified a set of common working definitions, as necessary, in one domain.
- EC Council and community stakeholders begin identifying EC systems terms and/or processes that need to be defined by the EC Council.
- Framework for sharing information is developed and implemented; for example, operating principles.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council has identified a set of common working definitions in multiple domains.
- Community has identified the current universe of EC programs and services available locally within one domain.

High Performing

- EC Council has developed indicators and measures of success for demonstrating the impact of sharing knowledge on the development of the local EC system, programs, and/or services.
- EC Council works to inform activities of external stakeholders; state-level partners, for example.
- Demonstrate improved outcomes (linked to strategic plan goals) as a result of program, and/or process, integration.

Fund and Invest

Topic Definition: Activities aimed at building the community's effectiveness in increasing resources for the EC System. Fund and Invest focuses on effective management and growth of resources under the control of the EC Council. Please note that investing is a specific mechanism for developing resources.

Resource Identification and Analysis

Starting Point

- Capacity to identify resources that are directly supporting some portion of an EC Council's work.

Intermediate Development

- Current resources and anticipated expenses have been mapped in one domain.
- Collaborative process has been established to analyze data in an effort to identify gaps in financing.
- Use resource data to support planning.
- Steps for addressing specific gaps are prioritized.
- Strategies to address the gap(s) are identified using resource mapping and cost projection information.
- Reasons to engage in resource mapping are well articulated.

High Performing

- Capacity to identify resources that support multiple components.
- Systems planning is informed by information gained from resource mapping.
- Data is used to compare existing resources with desired resources.
- Community has mapped current and future resources across multiple domains.
- Mapping and cost projection include integration and linkages between components and domains.
- Information is used to drive funding and investing in the system.

Investment and Sustainability

Topic Definition: Establishing and growing EC Council via resources acquired through investing.

Starting Point

- Some funding has been secured and is utilized under informal EC Council influence, relationships or networks.
- Some coordination of training resources.

Intermediate Development

- A committee exists to coordinate resources.
- Some mini-grants and/or scholarships are provided.
- Decisions about resources are made informally.
- Commitments are verbal or informal in nature for participation in council investment activities such as scholarships, quality improvement grants, etc.
- Begin to establish policies related to one domain.

High Performing

- Policies and procedures align with goals of the strategic plan.
- Budgeting addresses investment activities and coordination needs.

Cost Projection

Topic Definition: Formalized process for estimating future expenses.

Starting Point

- Collaborative group has identified and agreed on cost projection elements.

Intermediate Development

- Capacity to collect baseline financial data on at least one of the cost projection elements.
- Capacity to use the data to build a more accurate cost projection model.
- Collaborators agree to provide data and expertise.

High Performing

- Capacity to collect data on the majority of identified cost projection elements.
- In the absence of good data, capacity to estimate costs of programs using a set of realistic assumptions and logic.

- Data, realistic assumptions, and logic are used to create formulas for estimating future costs.
- Collaborative group is involved in final decisions on what and how much to project costs for, then review those results and adjust, as needed.
- Cost projection is used as tool to inform decision making and planning.
- Cost projection is used to understand implications for other parts of the system.

Integrated Resources and Braided Funding

Topic Definition: Describes the continuum of practice an EC Council would engage in to better leverage and/or commingle funds to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

Starting Point

- Community identifies a specific need and agrees to respond.
- Multiple partners contribute resources for a specific project, service, or activity related to young children and their families.

Intermediate Development

- Clarity on identified needs exists among EC Council members.
- EC Council creates a plan to address identified need(s); includes specific goals associated with the planned activities, programs, or services.
- Written agreement exists that defines roles and responsibilities of the partners in achieving the intended goals.
- Identification of existing resources has been established between partners to address needs.
- EC Council develops messaging for the community's EC stakeholders about the intended goals.
- EC Council creates an evaluation plan for the activities, programs, or services.

High Performing

- EC Council members begin to commingle resources via the EC Council to support achievement of EC Council goals.
 - Written plan includes commitments of personnel from existing agencies and identification of new resources with an approach to addressing the need.

- Identify and procure additional resources.
- Implement an evaluation plan that addresses, at a minimum, benefits to one or more of the following:
 - System;
 - Community;
 - Providers; and,
 - Children and families.

Change Policy

Topic Definition: Focuses on creating new, or identifying and changing existing, local or state-level policy to support a more effective and efficient early childhood system.

Policy

Starting Point

- Local EC Councils have identified state and local policy makers.
- Training provided to EC Council stakeholders on various aspects of the policy process; e.g. legislative process, interacting with policy maker, local/state policy decision processes.

Intermediate Development

- Understand the policy process at the local, state and federal level.
- EC Council stakeholders widely support EC Council policy positions.
- Council provides education on EC issues to inform:
 - State and local policy makers; and,
 - State and local budgeting process;
- EC Council has a process for determining level of EC Council support for a given policy.

High Performing

- EC Council begins to develop specific EC policies.
- EC Council demonstrates ongoing leadership in EC policy development and advocacy.

Build Public Engagement

Topic Definition: Activities intended to first inform stakeholders (and/or the general public) about early childhood and second to involve them in addressing early childhood issues, priorities, challenges, etc.

Public Awareness/Public Engagement

Starting Point

- EC Council begins to identify potential audiences.
- EC Council begins developing messaging on the importance of early childhood.

Intermediate Development

- Public Awareness:
 - Educational materials are developed and used to increase the awareness of EC needs and issues within the community;
 - Champions are identified and nurtured within the community;
 - Public awareness activities are linked to the priority areas as established by the strategic plan; and,
 - EC Council has established brand, logo, and marketing materials and elevator speech to support communication of the EC Council's goals and role within the community.

High Performing

- Public Engagement:
 - Specific public engagement campaign is established that identifies the desired change, target audience, messaging and what the target audience is being asked to do;
 - Campaign implementation is monitored and adjusted to ensure effectiveness;
 - Campaign results are captured and reported back to the stakeholders; and,
 - Data from campaign is used to inform future campaigns.

Communication Plan

Starting Point

- Some regular communication occurs between the EC Council and member organizations about the development and/or implementation of an EC system.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council begins work on developing a communication plan around some aspect of EC Council work.
 - EC Council develops common message(s) about EC Council and EC system building.
 - EC Council uses messages in advocacy work.
- Member organizations begin to adopt some EC Council messages.
- Identify and begin to target potential stakeholder groups for EC Council messaging.

High Performing

- Communication plan that addresses strategic priorities has been developed.
- Member organizations adopt communications plan and begin to implement.
- Communication work informs advocacy for both the EC Council and for some percentage of member organizations.
- Intentional, regular planning by member organizations across four domains on messaging and communications.
- Engage professional consultants in the development of communications plan, etc.
- Implementation of communications plan.
- Annual review and revision of communication plan by EC Council.
- Formal evaluation of communication plan's effectiveness.

Advocacy

Note: Government funds may not be used to fund advocacy efforts. Funds may be used to provide information about early childhood systems building, programs, and services.

Starting Point

- EC Council is aware of the responsibility and benefits of being an advocate.
- Current advocacy efforts are identified.

- Advocacy is driven by a specific need or is reactive.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council establishes a core set of values (beliefs or guiding principles) on building an EC system.
- EC Council accesses training and support on advocacy work.
- Advocacy efforts are using data to drive organizational and/or partner policy changes.

High Performing

- Data has been gathered, analyzed, shared/disseminated to:
 - educate others;
 - be a champion for the work; and,
 - inform policy.
- Lessons learned from data gathered influences policy planning.
- Advocacy efforts demonstrably inform policy development and/or changes.

Champions

Starting Point

- Recognize that champions are needed to move the work forward.
- Regular communication with potential champions is established.

Intermediate Development

- Gradually increasing efforts to engage champions is part of the EC Council's strategic plan.
- Strategic identification and recruitment of champions who can effectively assist the EC Council in achieving its goals.
- Champions are celebrated by public recognition that acknowledges the champion and benefits the EC Council.

High Performing

- The pool of EC champions represents all four domains.
- Champions recognize that their partnership with the EC Council is mutually beneficial.
- Champion believes in the relationship with the EC Council.
- EC Council members recognize and embrace their individual responsibilities as champions and in nurturing champions.

Share Accountability

Topic Definition: Responsibility for supports and services for young children and families is shared by stakeholders. This includes sharing responsibility for the outcomes of those services.

Starting Point

- Members formally agree to work together and build an EC system.

Intermediate Development

- Integrated database that tracks participation in, and outputs of, EC Council activities; specific to creating internal capacity, building foundations of the local system and, finally, impacting services.
- Analysis of data generated by EC Council activities.
- EC quality improvement activities begin to occur in more than one early childhood domain.
- Analysis of gaps identifies other areas, programs or services where quality improvement is needed.
- EC Council has some capacity for evaluating the effectiveness and/or desirability of the quality improvement activities.
- Forum exists for discussion of systems building goals, strategies, activities, etc.

High Performing

- Structure in place to assess necessary sequencing of EC system development activities; i.e., what next steps are developmentally appropriate for a given community.
- Information is used to establish linkages between various system components.
- Evaluate the strength of the integration against outcomes.
- Capacity is evaluated in context of the strategic plan goals and community resources which is used to set priorities for systems work.
- Use information to guide strategic decision making.
- Systems building strategies and activities are demonstrably linked and build upon each other effectively.
- Local system elements begin to be aligned with state and national systems and policies across multiple domains.

- Demonstrable shift in community-wide policies and procedures that actively inform and support quality early childhood practices and services.

Establish Education and Leadership Opportunities

Topic Definition: Programs and activities designed to educate council staff, stakeholders, community members, and champions about the importance of early childhood; also, to support the development of leadership and other skills required to effectively build an early childhood system. Note: This is specific to council members, stakeholders.

Leadership: Capacity Building

Starting Point

- EC Councils provide some training to staff and/or members on some aspect of EC systems building.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council members receive orientation to EC system work.
- EC Councils actively seek training and capacity building to support its mission, staff, and members.
- Training and education become key elements of an EC Council's EC systems building efforts.
- EC Council allocates specific resources to expand member/staff capacity to lead work.
- Leaders come together while still representing content expertise or organizational agendas.

High Performing

- EC Council expects and empowers its members to be both mentors/coaches and students of EC systems work—nurturing leadership.
- A defined training plan that provides opportunities for staff and EC Council member development.
- EC Council members and staff have specific expertise to dynamically identify and address the needs of the EC Council and systems building—both formally and informally.
- EC Councils provide leadership in the creation of an EC system—putting the larger good of the community ahead of individual organizational or content focused agendas.

Advocacy: Identifying Barriers and Providing Training

Note: Government funds may not be used to fund advocacy efforts. Funds may be used to provide information about early childhood systems building, programs, and services.

Starting Point

- Community is aware that barriers to building an effective EC system exist.
- Acknowledgment that training may be necessary for some advocacy activities.

Intermediate Development

- Documented evidence of barriers in the development of leadership and advocacy opportunities.
- Various assessment data is reviewed for information on barriers.
- EC Council identifies possible strategies to address barriers.
- EC Council begins to develop an action plan for advocacy.
- At least one advocate receives training.

High Performing

- An intentional plan/agenda is created and implemented for advocacy efforts around multiple domains to address identified barriers.

- Review and adjustments are made to efforts to address barriers.
- Advocacy training is offered to broad group of community stakeholders.
- Many individuals and organizations utilize the skills and knowledge to be effective advocates.

Advocacy: Implementation and Impact

Starting Point

- Individuals are advocating with internal stakeholders or “usual suspects”.
- An individual or group of EC stakeholders develops passion around a particular issue.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council leaders have begun to advocate or implement some advocacy strategies from the plan or agenda.
- Champions are engaged for a particular issue.

High Performing

- Widespread advocacy of a unified message that is based on the plan/agenda.
- Demonstrable impact of advocacy efforts on the behalf of the EC system.



Impact Services

Topic Definition: Activities intended to improve programs and services available to families and young children across all four domains. These topics are not focused solely on EC Councils but rather on what might be effective for both local and state partners; the section on technical assistance, for example.

Quality

Assessment

Starting Point

- EC Council has identified the strengths and challenges associated with building the quality of existing programs and/or services within its community.
- EC Council has identified the strengths and challenges in building the capacity of the system in order to increase the quality of identified system elements, programs, or services.
- An assessment tool or process is used to generate information for the EC Council's strategic plan.

Intermediate Development

- Assessment tool continues to evolve—delivering more precise data on the EC Council community, programs, and services.
- EC Council intentionally integrates the assessment process with its system building work.

High Performing

- Assessment tool(s) and process are fully integrated into EC Council system work.
- EC Council can demonstrate the connection between assessment and improved quality of programs, services, and/or improved child outcomes.

Provider Needs Assessment

Topic Definition: A Provider is defined as any provider of service within the four early childhood domains. See also “Community Assessment” on page 7.

Starting Point

- EC Council has completed an informal assessment of provider needs, challenges, and/or barriers in an identified domain and/or discipline.

Intermediate Development

- Work group with evaluation expertise has been established to create, or access, an intentional systems-based assessment of providers.
- Work group review of existing assessment tools.
- Appropriate assessment tool(s) is chosen (or designed).
- The assessment tool is evaluated for effectiveness by work group and an evaluation expert.
- EC Council implements the assessment tool to determine provider needs, challenges, and/or barriers in an identified domain and/or discipline.

High Performing

- Uniform system-based assessment is created and utilized in ongoing planning, development and implementation of programs and services to address provider needs.
- Assessment process applicable to different groups of providers.
- Assessment includes respondents from multiple domains.

Establish Education Opportunities

Note: This section concerns the implementation and evaluation of professional development activities for providers

Starting Point

- Professional development addressed within the strategic plan.
- The EC Council implements specific professional development activities for providers per strategic plan.
- Output data from professional development activities are tracked and aggregated.

Intermediate Development

- EC Councils have a formal process for making allocation decisions for professional development funds controlled by the EC Council.
- Member organizations also begin to fund and implement professional development activities that are aligned with the EC Council's strategic plan.

- EC Council creates and implements a limited evaluation studying the impacts on the quality of programs and/or child outcomes associated with implemented professional development activities.
- Community stakeholders begin to adhere to professional development standards endorsed by the EC Council.

High Performing

- Stakeholders make resources directly available to the council to support the implementation and evaluation of the EC Council’s professional development activities.
- EC Council is able to demonstrate that a majority of providers adhere to professional development standards endorsed by the EC Council.
- Evaluation of professional development activities sponsored by EC Council is an integral, ongoing component of EC Council planning and implementation processes.
- EC Council demonstrates a direct, quantifiable connection between sponsored professional development activities and program and/or child outcomes.

Technical Assistance (TA)

Topic Definition: Resources and/or services that help service providers develop and institute quality practices.

Starting Point

- EC Council identifies one or more areas on which to focus TA that directly supports the implementation of quality improvement activities.

Intermediate Development

- EC Councils use local expertise to develop and/or establish TA activities that impact the quality of services available within the system.
- EC Council begins to document and catalogue challenges and best practices in building and sustaining quality improvement.
- EC Council creates and implements a limited evaluation studying the effect of TA on the quality of programs and/or services.

High Performing

- EC Council develops the expertise of staff in providing TA to improve the quality of programs and/or services in one or more areas.

- EC Council establishes a network of TA providers and resources available to providers to support quality improvement.
- TA is linked /aligned to statewide efforts to maximize effectiveness and impact.
- Evaluation of TA activities sponsored by EC Council is an integral, ongoing component of EC Council planning and implementation processes.
- EC Council demonstrates a direct, quantifiable connection between sponsored TA activities and the improvement of quality in programs and services affected by the TA.

Standards

Topic Definition: Desired practices, norms, or expectations recognized as either a required minimum, an ideal, or both.

Starting Point

- Applicable state rules and regulations are identified to inform council work in a specific issue or priority area.
- Education and awareness activities on standards for program providers and other relevant stakeholders.

Intermediate Development

- Nationally recognized standards and best practices are identified by EC Council.
- EC Council supports meeting nationally recognized standards where appropriate and practical.
- Strategic decisions of what standards the community agrees and embraces for best practice and what is desired for young children and domains—as appropriate.

High Performing

- System standards are integrated across disciplines.
- Wide community acceptance and use of these agreed upon, integrated standards.
- EC Council demonstrates a direct, quantifiable connection between the adoption of specific EC Council-endorsed standards and the improvement of quality in programs and services affected by the TA.

Build and Support Partnerships

Starting Point

- Stakeholders share in decision-making about EC systems work.

Intermediate Development

- Identification of systems development decision makers and their roles.
- Data is used to improve the connection between various systems elements.
- EC Council begins to establish a connection between the achievement of quality improvement objectives and increased engagement and partnership among EC Council members and stakeholders.

High Performing

- EC Council effectively demonstrates the connection between the achievement of quality improvement objectives and the creation of effective partnerships that integrate activities and resources for programs and across domains.

Demonstrating Accountability via Increased Efficiency or Effectiveness in Improving Quality

Starting Point

- EC Council quality improvement activities are provided with some coordination and are guided by a strategic plan developed by an EC Council.
- EC Council implements at least one activity designed to specifically improve the quality of a given program or service.
- EC Council controls some resources that are targeted to support quality improvement activities.
- EC Council identifies and tracks specific outputs related to an EC Council funded quality improvement activity.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council formalizes data collection that tracks participation in, and outputs of, EC Council quality improvement activities.
- Analysis of data generated by quality improvement activities.
- EC quality improvement activities begin to occur in more than one early childhood domain.
- Analysis of gaps identifies other areas, programs or services where quality improvement is needed.

- EC Council has some capacity for evaluating the effectiveness and/or desirability of the quality improvement activities.

High Performing

- Structure in place to assess necessary sequencing of EC system development activities based, in part, on data generated by quality improvement activities.
- Success of quality improvement activities is demonstrably linked to systems building strategies and activities.
- Evaluation of quality improvement activities is used to demonstrate the growth of the EC Council and the development and capacity of the local EC system.
- EC Council demonstrates that an increase in resources is connected, in part, with an associated improvement in the quality of participating programs/services, greater professionalism in the field, or both.
- Data generated by quality improvement activities is integrated with systems development data to demonstrably leverage additional resources.
- Data generated by quality improvement activities is integrated with systems development data to demonstrably build stakeholder engagement and commitment.

Access

Topic Definition: Activities designed to increase families' ability to secure early childhood services across all four domains.

Resource and Referral

Topic Definition: Establishing and strengthening the mechanisms by which professionals and families with young children are able to identify what services and supports are available to them across domains.

Starting Point

- Sources of information on what supports and services exist within the community are identified.
- EC Council provides a forum in which professionals can update and share information about services and supports available in the community.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council provides a forum to develop a coordinated approach that ensures the families and providers have access to current information about available services and supports when it is needed.
- Entry points into the systems and opportunities to strengthen, streamline and better coordinate information access are identified and/or developed

High Performing

- Systems changes may include:
 - Reconfiguration and/or linking of resources to address gaps and barriers in information management
 - Unusual suspects that might bring resources to the table
 - Reconfiguring resource and referral activities so that the burden of coordination falls upon the organizations that offer services
 - Creating access to information through places that families frequent in the community
 - Cross-domain connections that facilitate families' obtaining accurate information regardless of what domain, service, or support they initially access.

Reconfiguration of Program Delivery

Topic Definition: Improving the connections between programs, reconfiguration of program delivery—the interaction between program and support services; e.g., alignment of application processes, review of eligibility criteria, expansion of services and resources to address gaps.

Starting Point

- A variety of services and supports exist within the community.
- Entry points to services tend to be specific to the individual programs or organizations.

Intermediate Development

- Co-location of programs and activities is established to provide greater access to supports for families with young children.
- Entry points begin to provide access to multiple programs, services, or organizations.

High Performing

- Procedures and policies that guide application and access to services are coordinated and integrated where feasible.
- Application processes are streamlined and support efficient eligibility determination and access for families to multiple programs.
- Integration of services is established when greater access for families can be achieved via efficiencies in both program services delivery (shared services is one example) or in reaching greater numbers of potentially eligible families (ABCD project, for example).

Building Capacity Within Projects

Topic Definition: Expanding the community's capacity to provide supports and services that increase access.

Starting Point

- Access needs/gaps are identified in community assessment.
- Identification of areas where additional capacity is needed to address needs/gaps.

Intermediate Development

- Identification of potential resources to increase capacity.
- Focus on increasing capacity in one domain or service area. May be using a more programmatic approach to address capacity needs initially.

High Performing

- Review of collaborations and resources that partners bring to the table.
- Establish plan for increasing capacity specific to existing services and expertise.
- Leverage partnerships to develop new capacity to existing community strengths.
- Partnerships are evaluated and information is used for continuous improvement, sustainability planning, and identification of policy change that may be needed to increase capacity over time.

Equity

Topic Definition: Strategies and activities that ensure that all families and young children have equal opportunity to participate in responsive, culturally appropriate services.

From a systems perspective, EC Councils begin to address equity in the following ways:

- Financial supports to allow access to services; and,
- Diversity in options and supports that reflect the culture, needs, and desires of community stakeholders.

Fiscal Supports

Topic Definition: Ensuring resources are distributed in an impartial and fair manner that positively impacts service delivery to families and children.

Starting Point

- Community assessment data is used to determine if programs and services are distributed/provided equitably to diverse groups.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council demonstrates increased equity in the provision of services via an increase in resources to address equity gaps.

High Performing

- EC Council connects increases in equity in the provision of services to both the adoption of EC Council program standards and resulting quality improvement of programs/services.
- Policy that guides existing subsidy and scholarship programs is reviewed and analyzed.
- Changes are targeted that will support affordability for providers and families to access the supports needed.
- Additional review of needs and policy identifies areas where underlying causal factors that create the situation of inequity can be addressed by community partners such as wages, access to education, disparities etc.

Diversity

Topic Definition: EC Councils understand the full spectrum of diversity within its community and how that impacts both the kinds of services offered and access to those services.

Starting Point

- Community profile exists that identifies the various groups and stakeholders within the community. Strengths, needs and characteristics are known.
- EC Council representation reflects the diversity of the community.

Intermediate Development

- EC Council planning and implementation activities demonstrably include diversity considerations.
- EC Council sponsored programs and activities provide choices that address some of the diversity needs identified in the community.

High Performing

- Activities designed to impact services are individualized to meet the needs of all community members.
- Activities are developed and implemented in consideration of, at a minimum, the cultural, socioeconomic, ethnic, and geographic disparities of its community.

System of Supports

Topic Definition: Ensuring that diversity considerations are formally recognized and integrated into every aspect of EC Council work.

Starting Point

- Identification of needs within the community includes addressing meeting cultural and individual needs of families and young children.

Intermediate Development

- Families are included in the identification of needs and design of services and inform the work to ensure greater access to system supports.

High Performing

- The burden of coordination of services falls upon the system rather than the family.
- Family choice is honored.

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