

Early Childhood Systems Infrastructure Analysis Protocol

Portfolio Assignment

What and Why. The assignment is to list and analyze the existing cross-systems structures at the state level that include early childhood and family issues from the prenatal period to age five. The goal is to get a lay of the land and conduct an analysis to help the state team determine if there is a structure best positioned to advance and institutionalize the cross-systems strategic action needed over time to address the equity challenge being explored through the HOPE Leadership Institute.

Definition of a Cross-Systems Structure. A prenatal-to-age-five cross-systems structure is a group in which more than one system is represented, e.g., health and mental health, early care and education, child welfare, human services, family support, or housing. Examples of such structures can include, but are not limited to: Children's Cabinets, Early Childhood Advisory Councils or Boards, and ongoing committees and workgroups.

Step 1: Create a Chart of Existing Cross-Systems Structures

To create your state's scan and analysis of the existing early childhood structures, BUILD has provided a template and recommends these activities:

1. **Identify structures.** Identify all structures that include early childhood and family issues from the prenatal period to age five. If your team has selected an equity challenge, identify structures

Leadership Institute Goal of the Infrastructure Analysis

Build and advance capacity for shared action within the early childhood system to advance positive outcomes for children and families in each state.

whose mission or purpose includes the challenge, and ensure the list of structures comes from multiple systems' points of view.

2. **Provide information for each structure.** For each structure listed in the template, provide the following information:

Convener – The organization(s) or leader(s) who hosts the meetings, establishes agendas, facilitates the meeting, and monitors next steps.

Purpose – The structure's goals, why the structure exists, and what the child and family outcomes are that drive the structure's shared work and action.

Structure Membership – The specific systems or sectors, stakeholders, and populations that the structure's membership represents.

Systems-Building Functions – Select from the eight early childhood systems-building functions the ones that the structure undertakes in order to

PROJECT HOPE

(a) make progress towards its specific child and family outcomes, (b) contribute to the infrastructure that undergirds or contributes to the building of a coherent, comprehensive equitable state early childhood system.

Definitions of the Eight Systems-Building Functions

The following provides definitions for the early childhood eight systems-building functions. Your team can use these definitions when determining which functions each structure advances:

Define & Coordinate Leadership. Structures addressing this function are working together under a shared understanding of common goals. They are establishing processes for ongoing communication, coordination, and decision-making among and across governance structures and systems as they relate to achieving shared goals for young children and their families.

Enhance and Align Standards. Structures addressing this function are revising and cross-walking existing standards across multiple systems' programs and practitioners to identify gaps, establish clear expectations, and improve alignment so that all services and professionals are reaching common and complementary goals.

Support Continuous Quality Improvement. Structures addressing this function are aligning quality improvement activities within and across service sectors, ensuring that ongoing improvement efforts are supporting progress toward achieving common goals.

Foster Professional Development. Structures addressing this function are identifying, coordinating, and/or collaborating on professional development that advances the core knowledge and skills that programs and providers need in order to support progress toward achieving common goals for young children and families.

Recruit and Engage Family and Community Stakeholders.

Structures addressing this function are making decisions that are informed by and responsive to the needs and interests of a broad array of stakeholders – creating two-way feedback loops. Stakeholders include families, administrators, providers, and policymakers. The structure especially seeks the voices of the target population families to learn about if and how they access and benefit from the services, programs, or investments.

Seamless Linkages, Referrals, and Transitions. Structures addressing this function are identifying how programs and providers in each system know about available opportunities and services, and develop a way to make linkages between services, make referrals to new services, and support transitions between services that support young children and families.

Finance Strategically. Structures addressing this function are working together to leverage and maximize all available resources and improve access to additional financial support to achieve common goals for children and families.

Ensure Accountability. Structures addressing this function are establishing and tracking comprehensive indicators of child and family well-being across funding streams, particularly for high-needs populations, to focus governance and management systems on common goals.

Step 2: Analyze the List of Existing Cross-Systems Structures

Once you have populated the template with your state's cross-systems structures, consider the following questions to assist your analysis of the structures. Your team may have additional or different questions for the analysis.

1. Which structures have cross-system representation?

PROJECT HOPE

2. Which structures have diverse representation across race and ethnicity, the state's geography, key public and private stakeholders, etc.?
3. Which structures engage with communities and families on a regular basis, through membership or other processes? Do they seek to create a feedback loop with beneficiaries?
4. Out of the eight systems-building functions, consider if there are functions more important for addressing your equity challenge and determine which structures are engaging in those functions.
5. Which structures have a purpose, strategic plan, or mission that is related to your equity challenge?
6. Which structures have the authority to make decisions about the strategic actions different systems will take toward a shared outcome? Strategic actions could include, but are not limited to, shifts in policy, practices, delivery of programs and services, and/or the repositioning of resources and investments.

Summative Reflections for the Portfolio

Your reflections on the following questions are not required but may be included in the final portfolio. Please keep them in mind as you participate in the Leadership Institute that the experiences are designed to build upon each other; when you complete an activity, keep your reflections in mind as you engage in further activities.

1. What understanding have you gained about the cross-systems structures that exist in your state?
2. What did you learn about who has authority, e.g., who makes decisions about which programs, services, or initiatives are offered and how they are delivered? What is the process or infrastructure for making systemic changes?
3. Did you gain insights into the possible role of a cross-systems team to address your equity challenge?

