Capital Region Early Childhood Collaboratives Network

Year 1 Progress Report Presentation
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
March 14, 2019

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Agenda

1. Goals; ECN Theory of Change

2. Evaluation Questions

3. Data Collection Methods

4. Results to Date

5. Key Areas of Consideration Moving Forward

6. Next Steps

Goals,
ECN Theory of Change

1. **Develop the Network:** The Foundation will develop a regional early childhood network to share information, resources and support and to engage in joint actions.

2. **Strengthen Regional Voice:** The Early Childhood Network will have a stronger regional voice (with legislators and with the public) strengthening the capital region's role across the state for early childhood, and laying the foundation for a more cohesive and efficient regional early childhood system.

Goals,
ECN Theory of Change

3. **Strengthen the Collaboratives:** Strengthen the operations and sustainability of each of the local early childhood collaboratives to help them to a) improve the school readiness and school success work they do in their communities to help local families and b) contribute to the regional network's efforts to improve the regional early childhood system.

Evaluation Questions

Network:

1. Does the network strengthen over the duration of the initiative?
    a. What aspects or activities of the network help strengthen it?
    b. What else can be done to strengthen it further?

2. Does the network achieve the network goals for the two year grant period:
    a. Share information, resources and support
    b. Engage in joint action
    c. Leadership emerges
    d. Strengthen regional voice

Evaluation Questions

Collaboratives

1. Does being a part of the regional network benefit the local work of each collaborative?

2. Do the collaboratives learn from the network - about collaborative functioning; about early childhood practices?

3. Do the collaboratives reach, or make progress towards, the anticipated outcomes of their individual grants during the two year periods?

4. Do the collaboratives strengthen in other ways as a result of being a part of this network?

Data Collection Methods

- Review of relevant network materials and collaborative materials

- Review of network meeting notes and SharePoint discussion

- Interviews with each collaborative to report on network development (measuring against goals in the TOC) and to report on collaborative progress (measuring against goals in the collaborative TOC) (August '18, November '18, January '19)

- Interviews with the HFPG program staff (August '18, January '19)

- Interviews with two partners in each of the five collaboratives (Jan-Feb '19)

- Focus groups with collaborative Leads (Feb '19)

- Interviews with network consultant (August '18, February '19)

- Network development survey (First administration, October '18)

RESULTS TO DATE (YEAR 1)

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Has the Network Grown Stronger?

- Yes, it has grown stronger since it started.

  - Sites feel a deeper connection to each other and to the network as a collective

  - Sites indicated that they are more comfortable turning to each other for information, resources and support and are more apt to do so now than at the start

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

What aspects or activities of the network help strengthen it?

- Giving ownership to the sites from the start; guiding but not directing. Letting everyone have a role in offering ideas, and leading

- Being flexible and letting it be a little more free-flowing and organic in first yr.

- Making it clear from the start that it was ok to share challenges, questions – that it was a "safe" space

- Intimacy - small #s participating

- Informal time to allow "chit-chat" before and after, and during lunch – "breaking bread together"

- Providing the "backbone structure" and admin and financial support, including regularly scheduled meetings that are scheduled out for the year

- SharePoint: reported as a strengthening tool, however a few respondents indicated it is not utilized to its potential yet but has promise; several indicated that although they don't contribute to the discussions, they find it very valuable to read and to have the resource library

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK; What Aspects Help Strengthen it?

"It is not competitive but there is candor"

"We are able to have deeper connections because we are smaller"

"I appreciate how they all engage us in discussion – talking with us rather than talking at us"

"They value our input"

"I love having lunch with everyone…there is something to be said for breaking bread together."

"It is not do this, do that… it allows for sometimes we are like wait a minute, what are we supposed to be doing but I appreciate that because it allows us to sit whatever that is for a moment and say wait what does that mean for our collaborative and for the network"

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Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network achieve the network goals for the two year grant period?

a. Share information, resources and support

a. Engage in joint action

b. Leadership emerges

c. Strengthen regional voice

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Share information, resources and support?*

- Yes, all in agreement and many examples cited.

- Sharing information on membership recruitment strategies, staffing approaches, equity work, and service utilization by residents from neighboring areas, among other topics

- Exchanging referrals, sample materials and resources including consultant referrals, sample budget for 2Gen, and sample outcomes reporting document

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Share information, resources and support?*

- Supporting each other:
  - Thinking of each other's community when an issue comes up relative to another community;
  - Inviting each other to meetings and events in each other's communities, and
  - The "validation" that comes from hearing other communities grappling with the same issue and knowing "are we on the right track" -- knowing that they are not alone

- Members spoke of the "sacred space", "trust" and "candor" in the network meetings

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Engage in joint action ?*

- No; all of the collaboratives indicated that the sites are not yet engaging in joint action

- Consensus among the 5 sites that there is value to be added by joint action, once timing is right

- All 5 responded "agree" with the statement "*I am likely to participate with others in this network on joint action to advance early childhood work, as part of the network"* on the October Network Survey; and 4 agreed with the statement *"I am likely to engage in joint activities or partnerships with others in this network outside of formal network activities." (the fifth was neutral/no opinion)*

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Engage in joint action ?*

- The relationships need to come first as the foundation for projects to be build upon

  "If you have the relationships, then collaboration will naturally evolve – opportunities may come up"(Network member)

- Projects can help sustain the connections, if individuals change positions (not person based)

- Joint projects can give momentum when conversations have been in place a long time; so that the individuals don't lose interest/patience

  "We often are in groups where we say the conversation is great but what's next – people only have so much time; having a shared project and shared work – really helps keep that momentum to move the work forward" (Network member)

- A focus or win can help expedite network growth; and leadership by members

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Engage in joint action ?*

- What does Joint Action Mean for the Collaboratives?
  - Common Messaging – how to explain what a collaborative does
  - Planning a joint conference or event together
  - 2Gen – *"We can join together in our awareness raising and messaging - both outside of and within our communities" (Network member)*
  - Advocacy – *"We can ultimately have a stronger influence on the outcomes in our region if we do this as a region" (Network member)*

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Engage in joint action ?*

- What does joint action in 2Gen mean?
  - Distinction between *"working under the rubric of the same topic and joint learning about the topic vs. collective work…collective works takes time" (Network Consultant)*
  - Sharing a "boots on the ground" person for 2Gen; or consultations re; 2Gen planning; or identification of common 2Gen issues – all of this is sharing resources, information, support but what would joint action look like?
    - Could come later following identification of common issues

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Question of <u>balancing time to focus on 2Gen while still allowing for organic network growth</u> given limited mtg time?

- Overall response was we already have the solid relationships in place now to take on an issue like 2Gen; <u>comfort and trust in place</u> to address a burning issue if someone came in with a burning issue

- 2Gen is *"threaded through all of our work… so the focus on 2Gen and having <u>shared project and shared purpose, can bring us together more"</u>(Network member)*

- *"It is almost like the <u>second stage of work</u> – first stage is the relationship and the second stage is taking on a project together – it seems natural"* *(Network member and all others nodding in agreement)*

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Demonstrate emerging leadership?*

- Sites are stepping up to help shape the network's discussions and topic direction, and at least one example has emerged of a taking on more responsibility where appropriate, such as shaping and leading the communications meeting

- This aligns to a reasonable expectation of what "leadership" should look like at this stage of the network, given the sites' limited capacity and the Foundation's role as the backbone support

- This type of leadership (the communications meeting example) is often referred to as "peer led" or "self organizing" - someone in the group willing to not just offer the topic to discuss but to take the lead and organize the discussion

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Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Demonstrate emerging leadership?*

- Varying perceptions among sites of what constitutes leadership; A couple sites said yes, leadership is emerging citing members suggesting agenda topics, helping inform what the network discusses, posting articles and raising topics on SharePoint; others don't see this as leadership

- All affirmed that they don't see the Foundation as expecting more at this point; Foundation said they have not made any expectation regarding leadership or meeting planning explicit;

- Strong support expressed for the "ownership" that the Foundation gives to the sites in network discussions; letting the sites often drive discussion, and valuing site input

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Demonstrate emerging leadership?*

For more ongoing, leadership independent of the Foundation, the network needs more time for the structure to evolve and for the determination of what that structure will look like vis-à-vis the foundation and the formation of a statewide network

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Strengthen its regional voice?*

Network members are beginning to talk about their work to others, particularly with 2Gen, as being part of a regional effort

- Speaking about their 2Gen work on behalf of the network at meetings of the early childhood and family resources alliances

- When going before the Town Council and the Board of Ed to provide an update on the collaborative's work, one community said that they will present their 2Gen work as part of the broader regional work

- One collaborative said that they planned to speak with their Adult and Continuing Ed head about the 2Gen work as part of the network *"before how we talked about this work was just our collaborative but now when we meet with her, we will frame (it) as part of the network."*

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Strengthen its regional voice?*

Network members see the potential to message and advocate jointly on a regional level with 2Gen and see the value to be gained by doing so

"2Gen looks different in each community, and then advocacy is joint across" (Network member)

"We are incentivized to rise to joint action and messaging, as we are working locally at the town level to strengthen our message and then going regionally" (Network member)

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Strengthen its regional voice?*

The network seems to be on the right track to evolve from speaking about the network and presenting 2Gen as part of a regional effort to move to joint advocacy on specific issues

"When they first began the work – everything was very town specific and as things have emerged, they do see town to town discourse and exchange – that gives them an idea -- an opening of some economies of scale for some of the work that they are doing – with some potential benefit to the work that they are doing…" (*Network Consultant*)

"I do see the advocacy work as a natural step in what we are doing – I think in a well planned action that would be more down the road." (*Network member*)

Goal 1: DEVELOP THE NETWORK

Does the network: *Strengthen its regional voice?*

Having the relationships and structure in place, positions the network to activate when the right opportunity arises

"That conversation moves faster if something happens legislatively where there is an opportunity to move together." (HFPG Early Childhood Team Member)

"Should there be more regional networks in the State and over some period of time, have those networks get together?...would be great to have some sort of live communication vehicle so that people could access it; from an advocacy perspective when you need to rally the troops, you have that ready and available." (Network member)

Goal 2: Strengthen the Collaboratives?

1. Does being a part of the regional network benefit the local work of each collaborative?

2. Do the collaboratives learn from the network - about collaborative functioning; about early childhood practices?

3. Do the collaboratives reach, or make progress towards, the anticipated outcomes of their individual grants during the two year periods?

4. Do the collaboratives strengthen in other ways as a result of being a part of this network?

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Goal 2: Strengthen the Collaboratives?

Does being a part of the regional network benefit the local work of each collaborative?

All five sites reported value that their local collaborative has derived from participation in the regional network:

- Hearing about strategies other towns have used and "tweaking it" for use in their community

- Validation; support from other communities – that they are not alone; that they are on the right track, etc.

- Sharing information from other towns with their larger partnerships; "evidence" of approaches that have worked

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Goal 2: Strengthen the Collaboratives?

Does being a part of the regional network benefit the local work of each collaborative?

Value reported….

- A different lens and perspective with which to see the work

- Bouncing ideas off each other; feedback from others with a shared experience

- Sacred time to think about the issues, new energy and excitement

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Goal 2: Strengthen the Collaboratives?

Do the collaboratives learn more about collaborative functioning from the network?

- Three of the five sites* said that they have learned more about how a collaborative functions from the larger network and have applied some of these lessons to their work with their collaborative.

- Examples cited include:
  - ➢ Coordinating with other partners to do the work rather than have the collaborative run everything directly,
  - ➢ Building trust and relationships with partners in the community to lay the foundation before doing the work, and
  - ➢ Strategies to recruit new members

Note: 4 of 5 agreed with the statement that they have learned something new about how a collaborative functions that they are likely to apply to their local collaborative work on the October network survey.

Goal 2: Strengthen the Collaboratives?

Do the collaboratives learn more about early childhood practices?

- Just two sites* responded affirmatively when asked if they have increased their knowledge of early childhood practices from the larger network.
  - Both cited learning from the network's conversations about developmental screenings and each has discussed applying some changes based on learning what other communities do with their collaborative
  - One also cited learning from one of the other communities more about how to offer free playgroups

* Note: 4 of 5 sites agreed with the statement that they have learned something new about an early childhood practice, service or intervention that they are likely to apply to their local collaborative work on the October network survey.

Goal 2: Strengthen the Collaboratives?

Do the collaboratives reach, or make progress towards, the anticipated outcomes of their individual grants during the two year periods?

- All of the sites have made some progress on their specific grant outcomes and seem to be on track to complete their outcomes by the end of the grant period.

Goal 2: Strengthen the Collaboratives?

Do the collaboratives reach, or make progress towards, the anticipated outcomes of their individual grants during the two year periods?

Partner Perspectives*:

- Most of the partners could speak to specific outcome areas that they were directly involved with or on a committee that had a role giving input to, or overseeing the specific area. In these cases, the progress that the partners spoke of, aligned to the progress described by the collaborative leads

*Two partners were interviewed in each site; partners included representatives from the town social services agency, including the director in one of the towns, school board administrators, and persons with a role in providing services for the collaborative's programming or related to the work of the collaborative such as preschool providers and social service providers. Most of the partners have been involved in the collaborative a long time and several were former chairs.

Goal 2: Strengthen the Collaboratives?

Do the collaboratives reach, or make progress towards, the anticipated outcomes - 2Gen?

- All five collaboratives are in the early stages of the 2Gen work and are gearing up, lining up stakeholders to join steering committees, researching the state of 2Gen locally, and hiring consultants, to plan more strategically once they complete the assessment.

- All of the partners were at least minimally familiar with the concept of 2Gen and familiar with the fact that their collaborative was taking on 2Gen as an area of work as part of the HFPG network.
  - All of those familiar with the work spoke favorably of the introduction of the concept and the area of work to their collaborative, and several specifically spoke of the importance of this work for early childhood.

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Goal 2: Strengthen the Collaboratives?

Do the collaboratives strengthen in other ways as a result of being a part of this network?

- All five sites reported improved functioning over the past year; 3 said was potentially more of a coincidence of timing with other factors that helped to strengthen their collaborative over the past year, such as increased staffing capacity and new leadership – however they talked about how this was furthered by the influence of the network

Goal 2: Strengthen the Collaboratives?

Ways in which the collaboratives report strengthening:

- Increased focus and renewed energy, deeper planning,

- Having a renewed sense of purpose through restructured workgroups,

- More strategic outreach and networking,

- Thinking on a larger scale, challenging them to think in a new way (e.g., looking more at the connections between strands of their work)

Goal 2: Strengthen the Collaboratives?

<u>Partner Perspectives:</u> When asked if their collaborative had strengthened since being a part of the network, the partners' responses were mixed.

- A few said that the collaborative was already strong and that they had not seen any improved functioning attributable to being a part of the network. In a couple of these cases, they did note that the collaborative had brought back ideas and questions from the network that sparked good conversation in the collaborative meetings.

- When partners did indicate improved functioning, it was in the following ways: a) more structure, b) greater focus in specific areas, and c) increased relationships and participation

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Goal 2: Strengthen the Collaboratives?

Partner Perspectives:

- Common strengths of the collaboratives as cited by partners: staff dedication and quality; structure of the meetings, subcommittees and the work, and efforts to engage diverse members.

- Common weaknesses cited: parent engagement, funding/sustainability and use of data.

Key Areas of Consideration Moving Forward for

The Early Childhood Network

What else can be done to strengthen the network?

- Consensus among sites largely – "working well as is"; biggest challenge is time; everyone is stretched

- To strengthen further, as much as possible build in more time for informal conversation or conversation that allows sites to jointly problem solve or confer on an issue a site may be grappling with

  - Can do this with 2Gen lens as they assess and start to plan; leave open for other issues as well

What else can be done to strengthen the network?

- Continue to provide space and flexibility for site input and leadership

- Foster opportunities for joint action, advocacy over time including possibly
  - Common messaging, esp. around 2Gen
  - Joint advocacy – Foundation staff could help identify right opportunity and facilitate approaching jointly
  - Planning a joint event or conference (2Gen possibly)
  - Collective action in 2Gen where there may be economies of scale by collaborating on a service or activity (e.g., joint training of staff in agencies shifting to more 2Gen focus)

What else can be done to strengthen the collaboratives?

- Continue to provide space for sites to gain validation, support from each other in the convening time

- Continue to foster exchange of information and resources; preserving time to enable sharing of a challenge and joint problem solving/idea exchange
  - Consider facilitating joint strategizing around common areas of weakness identified by sites and collaborative partners: parent engagement, funding/sustainability and use of data

What else can be done to strengthen the collaboratives?

- Potentially make more explicit the exchange of information about early childhood practices and information about collaborative functioning

  - Could do this on SharePoint –more categorization of stored resources or even discussion topics (stored as resources when more content focused) for ready accessibility and more explicit recognition when used

Key Areas of Consideration Moving Forward for

Networks Supported by HFPG

Early Lessons on Network Development

- Ownership = buy-in; the sites spoke repeatedly of the value they derive in connection to their ability to give input and help drive the network

- Emphasis on Peer Learning – Peer exchange of information rather than outside speakers/"experts" – learning to turn to each other to problem solve, serve as a source of information

  - People spend 1/3 of their time looking for information and are 5 times more likely to turn to a colleague for information than a written source. (Tacit Knowledge, Kimiz Dalkir)

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Early Lessons on Network Development

ECN = A Community of Practice:

- Three characteristics of a Community of Practice: 1) Domain - identity defined by a shared domain of interest; 2) Community – members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other and share information – interact; and 3) Practice - they are practitioners and they develop a shared repertoire of resources (experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems)

- Activities common to a community of practice include: problem solving, requests for information, seeking experience, reusing assets, growing confidence, discussing development, building an argument, mapping knowledge and identifying gaps, and coordinating strategy

"Introduction to Communities of Practice, a Brief Overview of the Concept and Its Uses", Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, 2015

Early Lessons on Network Development

- Expectations re: results/outcomes for the Foundation for a network, learning community?
  - Is shared learning, information exchange in and of itself a worthwhile return on investment for the foundation? When does it have to lead to joint action?

- Question of what it takes to build and sustain relationships so that over time, they are there to build upon and activate should the right opportunity arise for either a) joint work, programming, funding opp; or b) advocacy

Early Lessons on Network Development

To Build Relationships:

- Duration needed – need to build in time for relationship formation first, before other expectations can be realized. How long is needed to build the relationships (e.g., approx. one year in this case)?

- Dosage needed – a regular frequency of meeting is likely to further support relationship building (e.g., monthly)

- Informal/flexible, organic, to allow for "chit-chat" and "breaking bread together"

- Smaller #s = intimacy

Early Lessons on Network Development

"Richard, Karen and Elena have this great working balance – they really lead by example"

"The Harford Foundation was mindful to give us the time and space to create the trusting connections to everyone in this group – really important to laying the foundation – got to know everyone by name and the make-up and dynamic of everyone in their community – lots of informal discussion before the meetings – some work related and some commonalities as people – and I think those relationships are sustainable."

"Playing off each other's experiences… and also gives us sacred time to dedicate to thinking about these issues – and I go out with new energy and new excitement – there is something about the time allotted for this."

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Next Steps: Timeline For Evaluation

March 2019	Progress Report Presentation to HFPG
June 2019	Network Development Survey (Round 2)
June 2019	Phone Interviews with Local Sites
July 2019	Discuss Progress with HFPG (reporting and data collection)
November 2019	Network Development Survey (round 3)
December 2019	Site Phone Interviews (Round 3)
December 2019	Interviews with Partners in Each Site (round 2)

Next Steps: Timeline For Evaluation

December 2019/Jan 2020	Phone Interview with Network Consultant
January 2020	Focus Group of Site Leads
January 2020	Discuss Progress with HFPG Staff
April 2020	Interviews with each Site (Round 4)
April 2020	Interview with HFPG Staff
June 2020	Final Report and Presentation to HFPG

*Note: *The grant period ends December 2019. However, the evaluation will continue until June 2020, to allow for assessment of post completion results.*