

This presentation will provide you with an understanding of the best practices occurring in early childhood partnerships and collaborations in the state of Ohio. The content of this presentation was derived as a result of a two-phased project.

Ohio's head start collaboration office commissioned a 2017 needs assessment the results suggested a need for an increase in understanding early childhood collaborations. Phase two of this project was devoted to compiling best practices being successfully implemented by local agencies in the state of Ohio.

Several early childhood agency leaders in Ohio were identified as collaboration exemplars. They engaged in an interview to understand the nature of their successful collaborations. A few things to note about these individuals, they lead organizations that serve a broad population.

For example, some serve children from birth to three years, medically fragile infants, and preschoolers and so on. They primarily serve urban and rural families. On average the participating agency leaders have 25 years of early childhood experience and they share an average of 11 years engaging partners.

This presentation is a culmination of work over the past two years in this area and will serve as the foundation for future professional development offerings. Collaborations are not magic nor are they as complicated as they sometimes appear to be. Partnerships occur when you network coordinate and cooperate with a partner. Collaboration occurs when you blend those actions to produce increased capacity.

To state it plainly, networking is exchanging information for mutually beneficial reasons, while coordinating is altering of activities to reach a common purpose, and cooperating is the sharing of actual resources to achieve a shared purpose.

These actions culminate into collaborating, which is layering all of these activities with a keen focus on increasing each partner's capacity. While all these actions can benefit children and their families, collaborations are the most intense form of partnerships where intentional learning and enhancement of capacity occurs.

Our findings indicate that collaboration doesn't always happen even after seemingly positive interactions. There are barriers on the pathway from partnership to collaboration.

First, there is a perception that collaborations take too much time, and it is no secret that some collaborations that involve early childcare agencies can turn into turf wars. Collaborations do not occur as a result of mistrust. While other collaborations are not initiated because there is a perception that they are not needed. Collaborations can be stifled due to concerns regarding confidentiality issues and data sharing regulations. Lastly, potential collaborative partners are not approached as a result of untested perceptions that they are not collaborative.

Ohio's exemplary agency leaders suggested that in their experience there are three key elements to successful collaborations: understanding how successful collaborations are formed, understanding the

wide array of issues and needs the collaborations can address, and understanding the actions needed to sustain effective collaborations.

Forming a collaboration does take time, but engaging in everyday activities with the intention of meeting needs does not require additional actions. Some collaborations were formed after routine inspection of data where agency needs were uncovered, while others were simply a result of providing a service or resource for free.

Collaborating secures your place at the table to be part of important conversations and provides visibility in the community. Many agency leaders suggested that partnerships and collaborations were brought to their attention as a result of someone in the community championing their work.

Stay in constant communication with your partner to nurture your collaborations and make them stronger. Strong collaborations are also likely to make you more competitive when attempting to secure grant funds.

Collaborations can address a host of issues that childhood agencies seek to resolve, such as gaining star ratings, securing preventative medical care, and acquiring kinship services for families. These are just a few examples, please take time to review the rest of the list on the next slide.

Formed collaborations failed for many reasons. For example, low trust and transparency were noted to be some of the greatest barriers to sustaining collaborations. When collaborators were able to take time to be patient and allow for small decisions to lead to bigger impacts, there was an increase in successful outcomes.

Some agencies sustain their collaborations by devoting all or a portion of an agency's position to maintaining and nurturing important partnerships. Additionally, while agency leaders and partners were intimately involved in the details of their collaborations, some were unsustainable due to agency staff who were not aware of the potential impact of their actions and interactions.

Barriers to sustaining collaborations were alleviated by transparent interactions with staff and partners and being okay with saying no to collaborations that did not fit the agency's mission or needs. You and your agencies can't do all the work required to sustain partnerships and collaborations, so work with your partners and devote staff within your agency to maintain and sustain the relationships.

Finally, collaboration is a team effort. This is not an us versus them situation, so allow for a free flow of ideas and suggestions by using open and honest communication. While this list is not exhaustive, it illustrates examples of agencies that have engaged in successful partnerships and collaborations with some of Ohio's early childhood leaders and their agencies.

Collaborations can be formed and sustained to address issues that impact children and their families. Many of them are strengthened from the outset when goals, activities, and responsibilities are clearly and formally outlined.

Memorandums of understanding are written agreements that have been used to outline roles and responsibilities. They are often referred to as MOU's. Ohio's early childhood leaders suggest that they routinely use MOU's with their partners.

Good collaborations do not last forever, and there are ways to detect when it is time to discontinue a partnership or collaboration. An annual review of the collaboration's goals and achievements can help determine if there is no longer a need to be met. This should be done with your partner. A collaboration is not viable if the effort and resources required outweigh the benefits that it yields unless it is intentionally benevolent.

Honest and open communication with a partner can facilitate determination that a collaboration needs to be retooled is no longer needed or is not viable. Discontinuing collaborations is sometimes appropriate and at times necessary. Just remember that the way you end a collaboration can have an impact on the success of future collaborations.

Are you ready to enhance your collaborations? Consider engaging in some of these activities. Understanding your agency's needs and the needs of potential partners can serve to jumpstart your effort. Evaluate your current partners and determine if there are needs that they can be meeting, or if you can contribute to the needs of other agencies.

Look for new mutually, beneficial collaborations and start new collaborations with transparent expectations and intentions. When you've done the work to seek out a partner and you're ready to begin collaborating, here are a few things you can do in order to move the partnership forward. Formal and transparent agreements in the form of an MOU can elevate the probability of success.

Continue to evaluate the partnership to discuss what is working, what needs to be improved, and make adjustments when necessary. As we've discussed, successful collaborations have many benefits not only for your agency, but also for those your agency serves.

How will you use your new knowledge? We encourage you to read the full report of findings to gain more insights about the exemplary practices summarized in this presentation. You can access the report from the link provided here.

If you have questions about Ohio's head start program, please contact Anita Armstrong at the Ohio department of education. For questions about the findings summarized in this presentation and the report, please contact Kenyona Walker at the Ohio State University.