



COLORADO LOCAL EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS EVALUATION REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, the Center for Research Strategies (CRS) has evaluated the progress of Colorado's Early Childhood (EC) Councils in building EC Systems, their challenges and the extent to which the State's assistance has helped their capacity building efforts.

As part of this effort, CRS reviewed existing EC Council reports and analyzed electronic surveys from 31 EC Council Coordinators and 286 EC Council members, staff and other community stakeholders. CRS also conducted three focus groups with 25 EC Council Coordinators and interviewed eight EC Council Board Chairs.

All 30 Councils in Colorado, including the newer Councils that have only been in existence a few years, reported engaging in systems building efforts to grow and sustain their Councils. The majority (85%) have conducted needs assessments. All the Councils are engaged in ongoing strategic planning and are targeting their efforts towards the three systems building strategies recommended by the Colorado Department of Human Services Division of Child Care and the Colorado Department of Education: 1) strengthening internal capacity 2) building foundations of a local EC system and 3) impacting services.¹

Based on the information collected, CRS identified five leverage points for change that EC Councils can employ to strengthen their capacity to create effective and sustainable EC Systems on a local level as well as statewide:

- 1) Coordinate and enhance marketing efforts related to the work of the EC Councils
- 2) Promote greater collaboration and partnerships both at the State and local levels
- 3) Promote improved utilization of data and evaluation tools
- 4) Provide tools to strengthen internal governance and EC Council mission statements and
- 5) Increase and strengthen funding to build the capacity of the EC Councils

To assist them in these efforts, EC Coordinators, Council Members and Board Chairs requested training and technical assistance from the State in a variety of areas, including systems building implementation strategies, the creation of a systems-oriented evaluation framework and evaluation tools. They would also value assistance in the areas of strategic planning, grant writing, policy development, and data collection related to systems building efforts.

These evaluation results demonstrate the progress that has been made by the EC Councils to create responsive and effective early childhood systems at the local levels. Opportunities for further capacity building have been identified that will enable the Councils to continue to develop their capacity, with the ultimate goal of building a strong and sustainable EC System for the State of Colorado.

¹ http://earlychildhoodcolorado.org/systems_building/

THE COLORADO EARLY CHILDHOOD FRAMEWORK AND SYSTEM

Colorado’s Early Childhood (EC) Councils were established in 2007 through State legislation (HB07-1062) as a network of community-based collaboratives that can help to build a “comprehensive system of early childhood councils to increase and sustain the availability, accessibility, capacity, and quality of early childhood services throughout the state.”²

Research has demonstrated the value of high quality early childhood care and education in preparing children for success in school and throughout their future lives. Successful programs are those that address the whole child and their families by providing early learning, health, mental health, family support and parent education.³ Using these core components, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor’s EC staff developed the Early Childhood Colorado Framework in 2008 with four domains (early care and education, family support, mental health and health) that serve as the basis for building a comprehensive EC system for Colorado. The Division of Child Care and the Colorado Department of Education later expanded this Framework into a three-tiered, 15-component model that details the role of the EC Councils in building locally based EC systems. Figure 1 details the role of the EC Councils in achieving these goals.

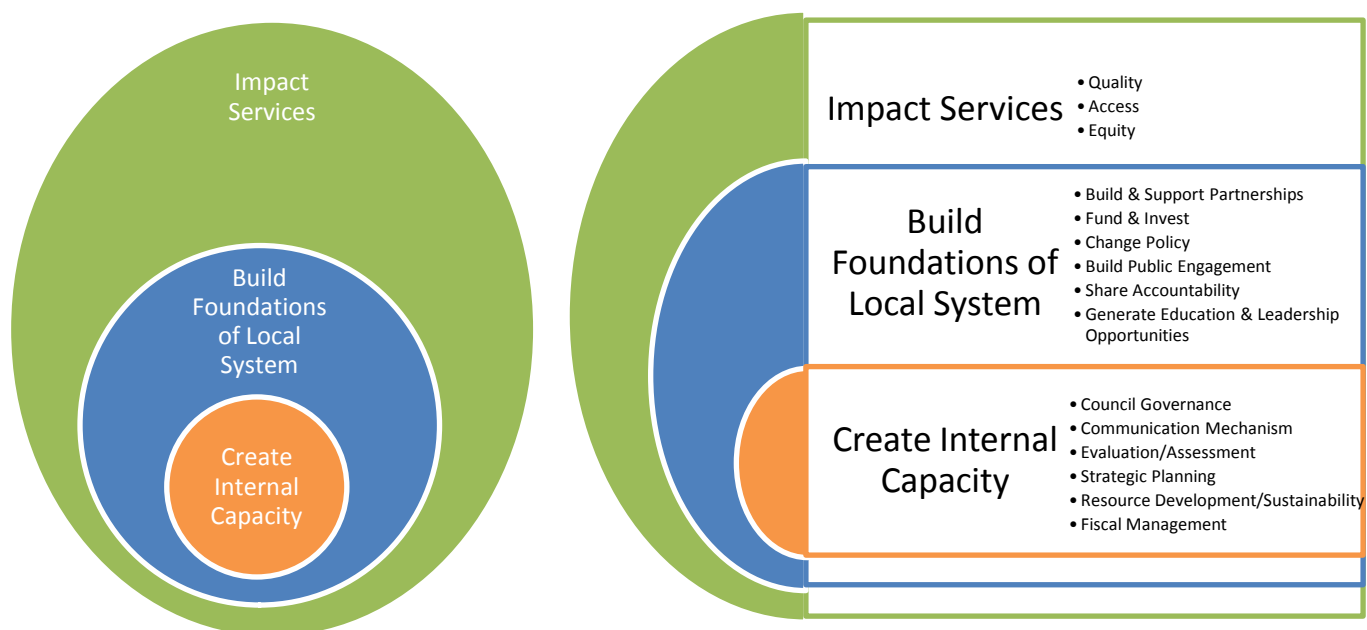


Figure 1: Role of the EC Councils
EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS EVALUATION

² Colorado Revised Statutes 26-6-5-101 (7) http://www.state.co.us/gov_dir/leg_dir/olls/sl2007a/sl_378.pdf

³ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Published report. (2000).

To evaluate the effectiveness of the 30 EC Councils across the State in developing and implementing early childhood systems, the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) Division of Child Care (DCC) contracted with the Center for Research Strategies (CRS). CRS conducted the evaluation summarized in this report over a six-month period from January through June 2010. The report is divided into four sections as detailed below.

Section 1 details characteristics of the Councils: the regions of Colorado they serve, their size, and the types of partners included in their Councils. **Section 2** describes some of the tools the Councils are using as part of their systems building efforts, namely needs assessments and strategic planning. **Section 3** describes the current state of systems building capacity within the Councils and leverage points for change to enable the Councils to advance their efforts to establish coordinated local and statewide EC systems. **Section 4** provides a description of the role and responsiveness of the State in providing technical assistance and training to assist the Councils in developing their EC systems.

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

CRS completed four evaluation tasks to answer six evaluation questions required by the State including:

- An online survey of EC Council Local Coordinators and members to document the progress of the EC Councils in building local EC systems within their communities.
- A literature/website search and a review of EC Council materials (e.g. needs assessments and quarterly reports)
- Three focus groups and a short 8-question paper and pencil survey with EC Coordinators and
- Eight interviews with EC Council Board Chairs.

These data collection tasks focused on gathering information about the challenges EC Councils face in conducting their work and the support they would like from the Colorado Department of Human Services' (CDHS) Division of Child Care (DCC) to enable them to develop coordinated local and statewide EC systems.

SECTION 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EC COUNCILS

CRS administered an online survey to EC Council Coordinators and Council Members in April 2010. Included in the survey were questions related to different characteristics the Councils, including their geographic location, years in existence, size and membership of the Council.

LOCATION, YEARS IN EXISTENCE AND SIZE

EC Council Coordinators and Council Members who responded to the survey represent the following locations depicted in Table 1:

Table 1. Representation of EC Council Coordinators & Council Member Respondents by Region

| <u>Region</u> | <u>Coordinators</u> | <u>Council Members</u> |
|---|---------------------|------------------------|
| Mountains (NCCCF, Gunnison, San Luis Valley, Montelores, Fremont, Park/Teller, Chaffee) | 22.6% (7) | 17.6% (49) |
| Rural/Resort (Rural Resort West, Rural Resort NE, Routt, Bright Futures, La Plata) | 16.1% (5) | 15.8% (44) |
| High Plains (OBC, Morgan, Logan/Phillips/Sedgwick, Washington/Yuma/Kit Carson, Elbert, HULA) | 25.8% (8) | 11.8% (33) |
| Urban: Non-Metro (Pueblo, El Paso, Larimer, Mesa, Boulder, Weld) | 19.4% (6) | 36.6% (102) |
| Metro Denver (Triad, Arapahoe, Adams, Denver, Broomfield, Douglas) | 16.1% (5) | 18.3% (51) |
| Total | 31 | 279 |

Forty-three percent of the EC Council Coordinators stated their Councils had been in operation for three or fewer years while another 43% stated that their Councils had been in existence for 10 or more years. The remaining 14% stated their Councils had been operating for 4-9 years.

Twenty-nine of Coordinators indicated that just over a third of the Councils (37.9%) employ one or fewer full-time staff and another 37.9% employ 1-2 full time staff members. The remaining 21.4% employ more than two full time staff members. Since the inception of their EC Councils, more than a third (37.9%) have employed two coordinators, another quarter (24.1%) have employed one coordinator, and the remaining 37.8% have employed three or more coordinators.

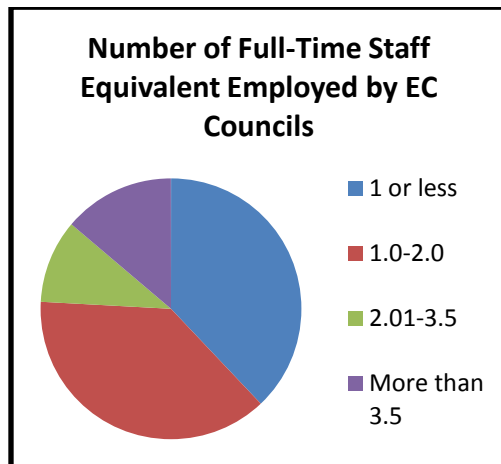


Figure 1. EC Council Staffing

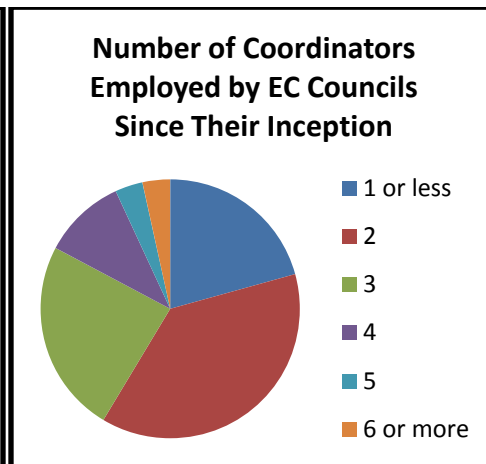


Figure 2. EC Council Coordinators

EC COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

The majority of EC Council Coordinators (82.8%) reported that their Councils include small child care service providers as members. Throughout the regions, the following percents of Councils reported that small providers are represented: Mountains - 80%, Rural/Resort – 80%, High Plains – 88%, Urban Non-Metro – 100% and Metro Denver – 60%.

In terms of their roles within the EC Councils, both EC Coordinators and EC Council Members rated small child care service providers as being “somewhat” to “adequately” represented as indicated in Table 2.

**Table 2. Representation of Small Child Care Service Providers
Across EC Council Functions**

| Function | Mean | Mtns | Rural/ Resort | High Plains | Urban Non- Metro | Metro Denver |
|--|----------------|------|------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Coordinator Survey (n) | 29 | 5 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 5 |
| Council Member Survey (n) | 238 | 47 | 41 | 29 | 79 | 42 |
| | Ratings | | | | | |
| EC Council Activities | 3.03 | 3.20 | 3.00 | 3.25 | 3.17 | 2.40 |
| | 2.84 | 2.87 | 2.97 | 2.95 | 2.82 | 2.67 |
| Governance | 2.46 | 2.60 | 2.00 | 3.29 | 2.00 | 2.00 |
| | 2.56 | 2.49 | 2.72 | 2.77 | 2.58 | 2.53 |
| Decision-making functions | 2.61 | 2.80 | 2.20 | 3.29 | 2.00 | 2.60 |
| | 2.61 | 2.80 | 2.20 | 3.29 | 2.00 | 2.60 |
| Rating Scale | | | | | | |
| 4=Very adequately; 3= Adequately; 2=Somewhat adequately; 1=not represented | | | | | | |

Coordinators and Council members would like to recruit representatives from faith-based organizations, local businesses, local government, and higher education for Council membership. Council members would like to increase participation from parents. Council members from all regions agreed that representation could be increased from both the business community and faith-based organizations. See Table 3 below.

Table 3. Group Representation in Council Desired by EC Coordinators and Council Members

| Groups to Include in Council Membership | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| | Faith-Based Organizations | Local Businesses | Local Government | Higher Education | Parents | All Groups Included |
| Coordinators | 65.5% (19) | 48.3% (14) | 31% (9) | 20.7% (6) | 13.8% (4) | 10.3% (3) |
| Members | 38.1% (83) | 39% (85) | 25.7% (56) | 17.4% (38) | 23.9% (52) | 27.5% (60) |
| Variation by Region | | | | | | |
| | Response Totals | Mtns | Rural/Resort | High Plains | Urban Non-Metro | Metro Denver |
| Coordinators | | | | | | |
| Local business | 48.3% (14) | 60% (3) | 40% (2) | 37.5% (3) | 50% (3) | 60% (3) |
| Faith-based | 65.5% (19) | 60% (3) | 80% (4) | 62.5% (5) | 50% (3) | 80% (4) |
| Members | | | | | | |
| Local business | 38.5% (82) | 38.6% (17) | 37.8% (14) | 48.3% (14) | 37.7% (26) | 32.4% (11) |
| Faith-based | 38% (81) | 52.3% (23) | 27% (10) | 31% (9) | 33.3% (23) | 47.1% (16) |

EC Council Coordinators were asked why they thought some groups were underrepresented in their Councils. Across all the regions, the most often cited reasons were that the groups had been identified but the Council had not had the time or resources to involve them (55% of responses) or that groups had not been identified (41% of responses).

EC Coordinators recognize that broadening representation on their Councils can build leadership capacity while strengthening their fund raising and public awareness building efforts. Faith-based groups can solicit support for the Councils among their church constituents and commit to supporting specific Council programs. Business support, in turn, can strengthen community involvement and commitment to the Councils’ work. Some EC Coordinators have had success in recruiting business support by working through local Chambers of Commerce. More broadly, the Councils seek local champions who are committed to the community level goals within the EC framework and its four domains.

SECTION 2: TOOLS FOR SYSTEMS BUILDING

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

EC Council Coordinators were asked in the online survey about their needs assessment efforts. As depicted in Table 4, the majority of the Coordinators (85%) across all the regions report that their Councils have conducted needs assessments within the last few years to understand the specific needs and gaps related to early childhood care and education in their regions.

- With the exception of the High Plains Councils, 60-100% of the Councils have shared their assessment results with local community and key constituents. One quarter of the High Plains Council have done so.

- All of the Mountains, Rural/Resort and Metro Denver Councils use their needs assessments to set their priorities. Two-thirds (67%) of the Urban Non-Metro Councils and over a third of the High Plains Councils (38%) have used their needs assessment for this purpose.
- The majority of all the Councils (63-100%) utilized local data to develop their strategic plans, to make funding decisions, and to engage the public and stakeholders in collaborative efforts to improve services.

In a follow-up survey, the EC Coordinators recognized the critical importance of the needs assessment in detailing the work of the Councils, the current status of EC efforts and those service gaps that the community should address. Given the importance of the needs assessment in garnering community support, EC Coordinators reported that they work to ensure that the needs assessment results are accurate and can be appropriately presented to key community constituents. Many EC Coordinators also link the needs assessment results to their strategic planning efforts and system building goals.

Table 4. Regional Needs Reported by EC Coordinators

| Needs | Response Totals | Mtns | Rural/Resort | High Plains | Urban Non-Metro | Metro Denver |
|---|-----------------|----------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Conducted a needs assessment | 85.2% (23) | 100% (5) | 50% (2) | 87.5% (7) | 83.3% (5) | 100% (4) |
| Shared assessment results with local community and key constituents | 59.3% (16) | 60% (3) | 75% (3) | 25% (2) | 66.7% (4) | 100% (4) |
| Set priorities with assessment data | 74.1% (20) | 100% (5) | 100% (4) | 37.5% (3) | 66.7% (4) | 100% (4) |
| Utilized local data to develop strategic plan | 77.8% (21) | 80% (4) | 75% (3) | 62.5% (5) | 83.3% (5) | 100% (4) |
| Used local data to make funding decisions | 81.5% (22) | 80% (4) | 75% (3) | 62.5% (5) | 100% (6) | 100% (4) |
| Engaged public and stakeholders to improve services | 81.5% (22) | 80% (4) | 100% (4) | 62.5% (5) | 83.3% (5) | 100% (4) |

EC Council Coordinators recognize the value of data in establishing Council priorities, determining local needs and setting directions for future programs, In the words of one Coordinator, *“data make our strengths clear and our needs apparent.”*

They reported that surveys were the most utilized method for collecting data directly from parents, employers, providers or others (83%).

- The use of interviews and focus groups varied, with between 33 to 75 percent of all of the Councils throughout all the regions employing these tools.
- At least 75% of all the Councils utilized secondary data acquired from State sources; the use of local and national secondary sources was more variable.
- The variety of secondary sources utilized included: Kids Count, public health and social service databases, Census data, COHID, Results Matter (CDE), ASPIRE (OMNI), CCR&R, Children’s Trust Fund and school district needs assessments.

EC Council Coordinators reported that they used the data on an annual basis for: strategic planning (76%), setting priorities (58%), sustainability planning (52%), planning purposes (44%), making decisions to distribute funds (42%), and identifying potential stakeholders (39%).

- Coordinators reported differences in how often they used their data to obtain community feedback. Councils from the Urban Non-Metro (UNM) areas tended to provide feedback to the community on a monthly basis (40% of the UNM Councils did this). The other regions provided feedback on a quarterly basis, with the exception of Rural/Resort. Each of the four respondents from Councils representing Rural/Resort varied from monthly to annual feedback.
- The majority of the Councils from all regions but High Plains reported utilizing data for evaluation on a quarterly basis. Half of the High Plains Councils did so on an annual basis.
- A few individual EC Council Coordinators reported that they utilized needs assessment data originally to guide development of their action plans, but that the action plans are updated on an annual basis based on community priorities rather than assessment data.
- EC Council Members reported variation in terms of how often they utilized data for different purposes. Across all regions Council members reported using data on an annual basis for strategic planning for sustainability planning and evaluation. Data were more frequently used for planning making decisions to distribute funds, identifying potential stakeholders and, setting priorities.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The online survey asked both EC Council Coordinators and Council Members to describe the level of strategic planning conducted by their Councils. Across all regions, EC Council Coordinators reported that their Councils are engaging in various strategic planning functions as detailed below in Table 5. Consistently, the percentage of Councils including all of the listed strategic planning functions was high, with the exception of making joint funding and investment decisions, and improving policies related to the four domains. Only a third of the Coordinators reported that their Councils have included these two functions.

**Table 5. EC Council Strategic Planning Functions Addressed
According to EC Council Coordinators**

| Function | % and Number of Coordinators | | | | |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| | Doing, in plan | Doing, not in plan | Not doing, in plan | Not doing, will be in plan in future | Not doing, not in plan |
| Improving availability, accessibility, and quality of services | 96.3% (26) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 3.7% (1) | 0% (0) |
| Building & supporting partnerships | 85.2% (23) | 7.4% (2) | 3.7% (1) | 3.7% (1) | 0% (0) |
| Engaging the public and stakeholders in efforts to improve services | 81.5% (22) | 7.4% (2) | 3.7% (1) | 7.4% (2) | 0% (0) |
| Collaborative communication | 77.8% (21) | 14.8% (4) | 0% (0) | 3.7% (1) | 3.7% (1) |
| Building local leadership within the system across the four domains | 57.7% (15) | 26.9% (7) | 0% (0) | 11.5% (3) | 3.8% (1) |
| A structure for self-governance | 56% (14) | 28% (7) | 4% (1) | 8% (2) | 4% (1) |
| Developing resources (financial, staffing) | 55.6% (15) | 18.5% (5) | 11.1% (3) | 11.1% (3) | 3.7% (1) |
| Evaluation of Council activities | 42.3% (11) | 23.1% (6) | 15.4% (4) | 11.5% (3) | 7.7% (2) |
| Sharing responsibility for the effectiveness of joint decisions | 34.6% (9) | 34.6% (9) | 7.7% (2) | 19.2% (5) | 3.8% (1) |
| Making joint funding and investment decisions | 33.3% (9) | 25.9% (7) | 18.5% (5) | 14.8% (4) | 7.4% (2) |
| Improving policies related to the four domains | 33.3% (9) | 18.5% (5) | 11.1% (3) | 29.6% (8) | 7.4% (2) |

Percentage of Strategic Plan Implementation

According to survey responses from both the EC Council Coordinators and Council Members combined, slightly more than half (or 53%) indicated that greater than 60% of their Strategic Plans could be implemented within this year’s current budget.

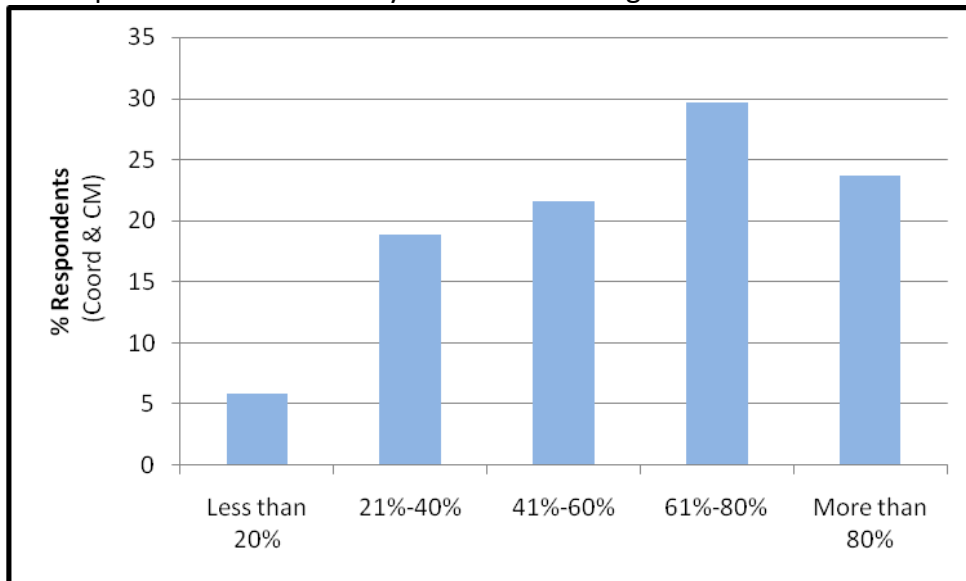


Figure 3. Estimated % Strategic Plan Implemented with Current Budget

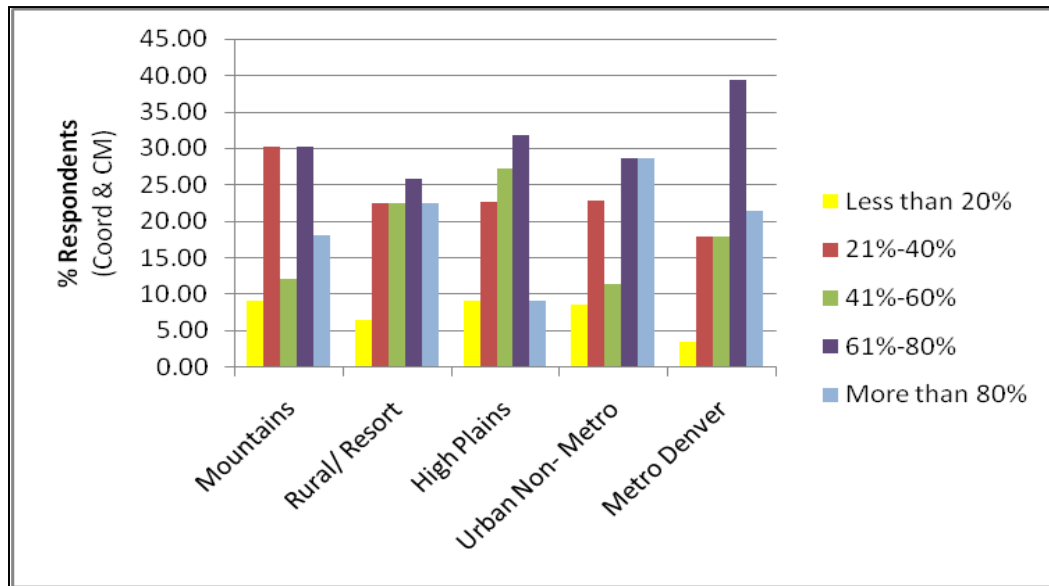


Figure 4. Estimated % Strategic Plan Implemented with Current Budget by Region

In terms of future years, slightly over three-quarters of the Coordinators and Council Members (combined) indicated that they would be able to implement greater than 60% of their Strategic Plan in the next three to five years.

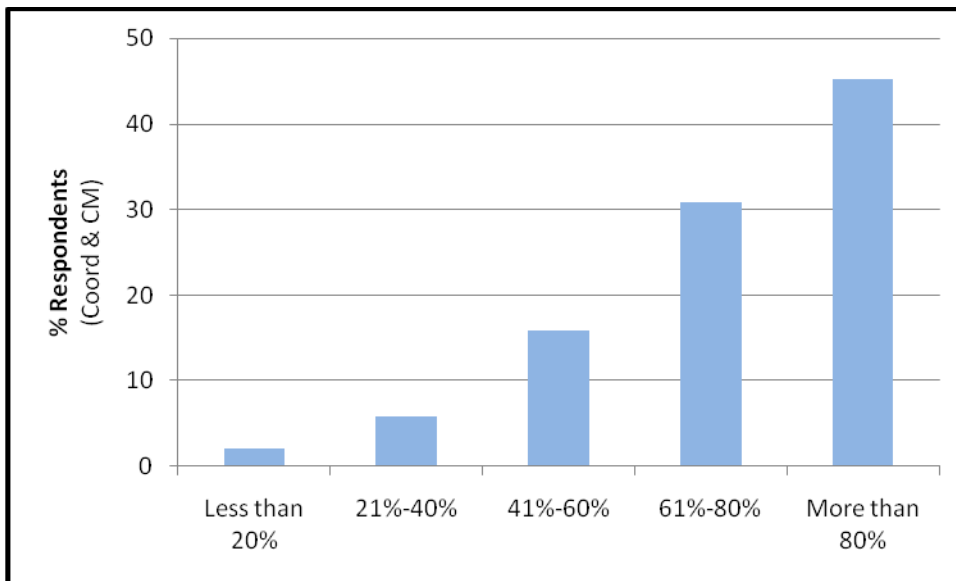


Figure 5. Estimated % of Strategic Plan Implemented In Next 3-5 Years

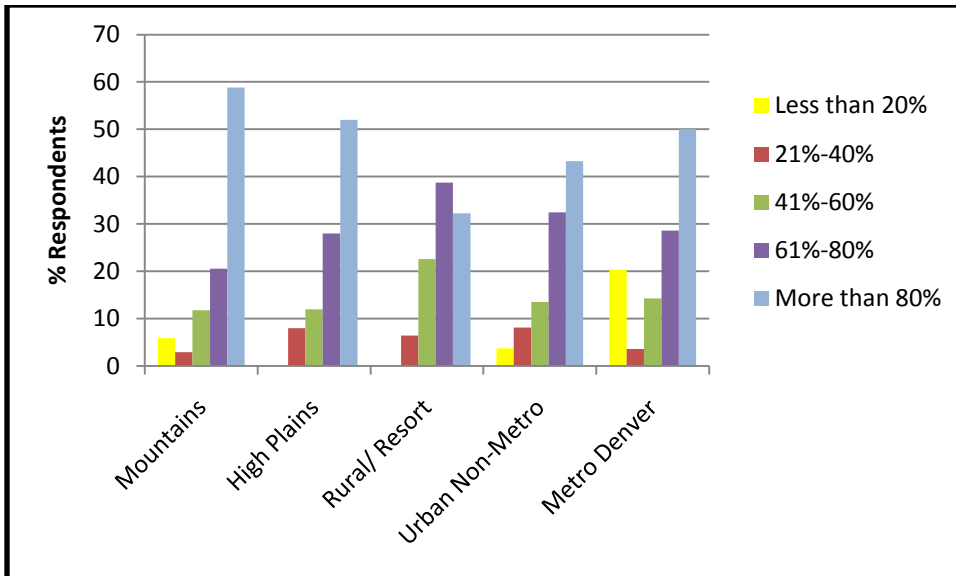


Figure 6. Estimated % of Strategic Plan Implemented In Next 3-5 Years by Region

Barriers That Impact Strategic Goal Attainment

The EC Council Coordinators work to create a balance between what they can reasonably accomplish with current funding while also identifying longer term goals. Priorities become those areas where the Council impacts can be achieved given current program capacity.

Limited public awareness, unfunded mandates and competing systems/silos of service delivery were rated the highest by both EC Council Coordinators and EC Council Members as barriers that impact the achievement of their EC Strategic Plan goals. The mean ratings of 3.71, 3.52 and 3.34 for these three barriers, respectively, indicate that respondents thought the barriers were only somewhat concerning. (Refer to Table 6 for a detailing of the ratings across barriers and regions.)

Limited public awareness creates challenges for the EC Councils because the public remains unaware of the role of the Councils, the manner in which they work and the types of impacts they can have. As a result, Councils find it difficult to engage the community and to raise funding support for the Councils' work, particularly as it relates to systems building.

Recommendations for increasing awareness include having a statewide public relations and branding campaign, hosting more community events and public meetings and using multiple forms of media to promote the contribution of the Councils to improving outcomes for infants, toddlers and preschool children.

EC Coordinators elaborated on the issue of unfunded mandates. Requirements viewed as being "unfunded" include:

- Requirements that are part of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program
- Implementation of the Early Childhood Framework and Pyramid guidelines and
- Activities associated with the Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance.

Other barriers to the attainment of strategic plan goals that were moderately rated by both EC Council Coordinators and EC Council Members included insufficient training of early childhood workers, lack of membership participation in EC Council activities and State rules or regulations that limit EC Council activities.

- As a group, EC Councils in the Mountain region rated the impact of barriers to strategic goal attainment lower than did EC Councils in other regions.
- Other barriers listed by EC Council Coordinators included:
 - Geographic barriers, lack of staff capacity and small economies (Mountain & Rural/Resort Regions)
 - Turnover in leadership (High Plains Communities) and
 - Lack of money and time (Urban Non-Metro Cities).

Almost all EC Council Members who cited barriers stated that limited resources and funding were impacting their ability to attain their Strategic Plan goals.

Table 6. Perceived Barriers That Impact the Achievement of EC Strategic Plan Goals

| Barrier | Mean | Mtns | Rural/ Resort | High Plains | Urban Non- Metro | Metro Denver |
|---|------|------|------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Limited public awareness | 3.71 | 3.15 | 3.84 | 3.45 | 3.88 | 4.34 |
| Unfunded mandates | 3.52 | 2.75 | 3.50 | 3.41 | 3.79 | 3.98 |
| Competing systems or silos of service delivery | 3.34 | 2.70 | 3.31 | 3.61 | 3.44 | 3.57 |
| Insufficient training of early childhood workers | 2.75 | 1.94 | 2.36 | 2.56 | 3.42 | 3.23 |
| Lack of EC Council membership participation in Council activities | 2.62 | 1.94 | 3.03 | 3.03 | 2.30 | 3.03 |
| State rules or regulations that limit EC Council activities | 2.44 | 1.99 | 2.26 | 2.64 | 2.73 | 2.39 |
| Other barriers | 3.94 | 4.09 | 4.50 | 3.62 | 3.88 | 3.97 |
| Rating Scale | | | | | | |
| 5= Greatly; 4=Somewhat; 3=Unsure; 2=A little; 1= Not at all | | | | | | |

Table 7. Other Barriers to Achievement of Strategic Plan Goals

| Region | Coordinator & Council Member Responses |
|------------------------|--|
| Mountains | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic barriers on the rural western slope, limited funding streams. • The need is simply greater than we can satisfy right now. The strategic plan is ambitious, and has the support of every Council member, but finding ways to care for children - especially children whose parents cannot afford child care - is our greatest challenge. • Staff capacity to carry out the work; Insufficient funding and staff (2) • Economies of scale: We are small and some things just aren't justifiable on this scale. • Limited understanding of important and appropriate stakeholders in what the EC Council role could be in system • Limited resources. We have to scale our goals not based on need but on anticipated funding. • Unfunded Needs. |
| Rural/Resort | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel across an extremely large region with different priorities often leads to confusion of the Council's function vs. the function of each county within the region mandated to also have a CPP Council. This also makes it hard for the Coordinator to be a presence across the entire region. • Insufficient funding and resources to support work in all 4 domains; lack of adequate funding; financial resources; full funding from a dedicated and sustainable source. • Lack of funding not connected to mandates. • There is a high need to start including stakeholders to include more daycare providers and business areas such as banks, local community college, DHS, which are currently not being utilized. • Some of these issues affect all early childhood efforts, and do not apply as much to just the Council work. • Community apathy, parts of community not educated in importance of early child care. |
| High Plains | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The turn-over in Leadership. The community partners placing high demands (or their agendas) on the EC Council and forgetting we work with 4 domains with little staff and limited funding. |
| Urban Non-Metro | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding and lack of Staff; additional Council staff are needed to perform systems work. • Communication barriers and role specifications/expectations within Council Staff Leadership! • General sustained funding; limited grants/funding; consistent, reliable, adequate public funding for early childhood programs; high demand for service, public not aware of benefit of services. • Our Council provides no direct services but engages in capacity building and infrastructure development. • Lack of local resources and support from city, county governance members. |
| Metro Denver | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money and time; each of us on the Council have programs to run that take a lot of time...and, we are very committed to our Council. Wouldn't do it without each other! • Hidden agendas, unwillingness to bring new voices to the Council. |

SECTION 3: SYSTEMS BUILDING CAPACITY

CURRENT STATUS

As part of the online survey, both EC Council Coordinators and EC Council Members rated the effectiveness of different functions in assisting their Councils to build an EC system. Across all the regions, Coordinators and Council Members reported that most of the functions listed in Table 8 were somewhat to very effective in assisting their Councils. Completing a resource development plan and actively informing and including small or underrepresented early childhood service providers were rated as being less effective in building a system than the other functions.

Table 8. Effectiveness of Different Functions in Assisting to Build an EC System

| Function | EC Council Coordinators and Council Members |
|---|---|
| Create a functioning Council | 4.76 |
| Communicate regularly with statewide system partners | 4.56 |
| Develop and/or implement a strategic plan | 4.54 |
| Establish collaboration and partnerships in your community | 4.44 |
| Build local leadership capacity | 4.34 |
| Fundraise and write grant proposals | 4.30 |
| Conduct a community assessment | 4.24 |
| Measure progress of the EC Council against its goals | 4.17 |
| Collect and analyze data | 4.11 |
| Write effective reports | 4.11 |
| Complete a resource development plan | 3.98 |
| Actively inform and include small or under-represented early childhood service providers | 3.75 |
| Rating Scale | |
| 5= Very effective; 4=Somewhat effective; 3=Unsure; 2=Not very effective; 1=Not effective at all | |

EC Council Coordinators and EC Council Members also reported the extent to which their Councils are currently working to include all 15 components of the three-tiered EC Council roles model described at the beginning of this report in their Council efforts to build an EC system. As detailed in Table 9 below, Coordinator and Council Members across all the regions reported they were working toward the inclusion of all 15 components in their Council functioning. Little variation occurred across the regions. Councils are focusing more on strategic planning, building and supporting partnerships, fiscal management, quality, access and equity of services than on the other components, although at least two-thirds of the respondents reported their Councils were working on all of the other components.

Table 9. % EC Councils with EC Systems Components in Place (< 1 yr to 3+ yrs)

| Early Childhood System Components | Combined | EC Council Coordinators | EC Council Members |
|---|----------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Impact Services | | | |
| Quality, access & equity | 88.9% | 85.2% | 89.6% |
| Build Foundations of a Local System | | | |
| Build & support partnerships | 92.0% | 92.6% | 91.9% |
| Generate education & leadership opportunities | 83.3% | 88.9% | 82.2% |
| Fund & invest | 79.6% | 74.1% | 80.7% |
| Build public engagement | 77.2% | 81.5% | 76.3% |
| Share accountability | 69.8% | 55.6% | 72.6% |
| Change policy | 65.4% | 51.9% | 68.2% |
| Create Internal Capacity | | | |
| Strategic planning | 95.7% | 92.6% | 96.3% |
| Fiscal management | 91.4% | 92.6% | 91.1% |
| Council governance | 86.4% | 85.2% | 86.7% |
| Communication mechanism | 85.8% | 88.9% | 85.2% |
| Evaluation/assessment | 80.3% | 59.3% | 84.4% |
| Resource development/sustainability | 75.3% | 74.1% | 75.6% |

LEVERAGE POINTS FOR CHANGE

After analysis of the online survey results, CRS conducted further investigation of the EC Councils’ efforts to develop and implement components of systems building. A series of three focus groups with EC Council Coordinators and eight interviews with EC Council Board Chairs were conducted to ask Coordinators and Board Chairs in-depth questions about areas of systems building that posed ongoing challenges for their Councils. Responses from the Coordinators and Chairs reinforced the importance of the following five leverage points for change that can help EC Councils to continue to create effective and sustainable EC Systems on a local level as well for the State as a whole.

Coordinate and Enhance Marketing Efforts related to the Work of the EC Councils

EC Councils recognize that State and local level marketing efforts can help community stakeholders understand the important role they play in developing and sustaining early childhood systems. The EC Council Coordinators and Board Chairs stressed the importance of public engagement and “getting the word out” about the valuable role of EC Councils within their communities. Creating public will is viewed as critical to systems building work and should target community residents as well as key stakeholders, such as child care providers, health care providers, schools, legislators or City Council members. Complementary statewide marketing efforts can expand and reinforce this type of messaging by emphasizing the importance of addressing the needs of the “whole child,” including consideration of the full continuum of health, mental health, education and childcare requirements.

Specific marketing ideas viewed as promoting EC Council system building include:

- *Conduct a statewide marketing campaign to promote Early Childhood issues and the importance of building an EC system inclusive of the four domains*
- *Conduct legislative coffees with regional representatives*
- *Enable members of local Councils to develop a statewide voice with strong lobbying capacity*
- *Design marketing materials that incorporate branding and logo development, websites, bi/multi-lingual brochures and other educational materials, radio PSAs, Facebook page, YouTube videos, newspaper and internet articles*
- *Hire a State level marketing director and/or grant writer to serve all 30 EC Councils*
- *Bring State staff to Council meetings so that the community better understands the importance of EC efforts*
- *Have one unified Council Coordinator job description for all Councils to implement and*
- *Develop more EC leaders/champions who can be vocal at the State level.*

Promote Greater Collaboration and Partnerships both at the State and Local Levels

EC Council Coordinators and Board Chairs overwhelmingly agreed that building and supporting partnerships are critical to the success and sustainability of EC Council operations locally and statewide. Collaborative partnerships promote the sharing of limited resources, help to coordinate services, build public will and spread the message that early childhood issues are important for the well-being of a community. Partnerships help to forge a common understanding of the value of EC Councils and serve to define those common strategies that strengthen accountability for EC Council operations as well as for tracking EC Council outcomes. EC Council Board Chairs and Coordinators recommended that more collaboration at the State level occur (i.e., reducing silos) to model the types of collaboration expected by the EC Councils. They believe that increased coordination and more streamlined communication at the State level will in turn enhance local level partnerships.

Specific ideas for promoting greater collaboration and partnership included:

- *Coordinate grants and share data resources; share more information and planning*
- *Generate monthly reports that can be presented at Council meetings*
- *Invite all interested parties to Council meetings, regardless of whether or not they are Council members*
- *Share staff and responsibilities*
- *Rotate Council meetings between partnering agency sites*
- *Conduct community meetings and personalized meetings to keep involvement strong*
- *Funnel State funding through the EC Councils to enforce accountability and collaboration*
- *Collaborate among partners to conduct needs assessments*
- *Create standard reporting requirements*
- *Institute State-level requirements for partners to participate in EC Councils (State Mental Health, Human Services, Head Start, school districts, Public Health and Childcare agencies) and*
- *Develop legislative task forces to address policy issues.*

Promote Improved Utilization of Data and Evaluation Tools

EC Council system building requires methods by which EC Councils can share participant level outcomes and track the types of community level changes that are resulting from their efforts. EC Council Coordinators and Board Chairs recognized the importance of data tracking to develop the “business case” for EC Councils and to obtain future funding. At the same time, they are aware of the difficulty of both measuring and achieving systems level change given the limited staffing and resources of their Councils. By contrast, measures of the direct services provided to children and families are more easily obtained.

Specific recommendations for data collection and evaluation included:

- *Hire experts (e.g., statistician) to help with what and how to collect data*
- *Collect data through surveys that are relatively easy to conduct (e.g., add questions to county-wide surveys already being conducted)*
- *Develop a system of common child identifiers that crosses service categories*
- *Develop a mechanism for drilling down within the data to be able to utilize it to develop the need for systems change and*
- *Streamline reporting mechanisms to enable EC Councils to track and monitor policies and resulting impacts.*

Other suggestions offered as part of the EC Council Coordinator survey were:

- *Create common data criteria that all Councils statewide could use*
- *Provide continuing education and technical assistance regarding data*
- *Support the costs of data collection and*
- *Standardize tracking mechanisms.*

Provide Tools to Strengthen Internal Governance and EC Council Mission Statements

The EC Coordinators and Board Chairs described efforts underway to improve their Council governance structures. This was especially true for those EC Councils that have been in existence for a shorter period of time (three years or less) who are more focused on internal governance policies, by-laws and procedures. Activities underway include:

- *Recruit Board members, establish Board positions and fill the positions*
- *Establish the legal status as an EC Council as part of an effort to apply for 501c3 status*
- *Broaden the Council mission to ensure a holistic approach to school readiness; i.e., that includes the four domains; health, mental health, early care and education, and family support.*
- *Review and update the Council’s strategic plan as needed to assure the Council is doing planned activities or revise as needed according to changes in community need*
- *Share Council strategic plans among each other to learn from other Councils*
- *Develop Council infrastructure such that adequate staffing exists (i.e., sufficient leaders and workers in place to do the work)*
- *Have the State provide clear expectations and duties for the Councils*

- *Have the State become more involved in the day-to-day development of a new Council and*
- *Provide incentives to replicate best practices at the local level related to governance and services*

Increase and Strengthen Funding to build Capacity of the EC Councils

EC Councils face an ongoing challenge of having sufficient funding to sustain and expand their efforts. The expectation and State legislation exists to demand the development of local and statewide EC Systems, but general sustained funding from federal, State or private sources is limited for EC development and systems building. Although some EC Councils leverage funds more effectively than others, EC Coordinators and Board Chairs agreed that insufficient resources exist to support the staffing levels needed at the local level for the Councils to be able to effectively work to develop and sustain efforts in all four domains of EC Systems Building work (early learning, health, mental health, family support and parent education). Current and future plans and recommendations to increase Council funding included the following:

- *Hire a consultant to help identify funding sources*
- *Approach funders who don't typically fund program operations*
- *Seek and sustain funds for affordable early care and education slots*
- *Propose a mill levy*
- *Promote sound fiscal management within the Council*
- *Avoid having significant portions of monies inflexibly specified for program delivery and*
- *Engage foundations in Colorado to provide funding for EC initiatives*
- *Provide funding at the federal level for policies to support families and communities in this work and*
- *Re-authorize the Child Care Development Block Grant Child Care Development Fund, with increased funding and re-design the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program so that funding follows the programs*

SECTION 4: STATE STAFF⁴ ROLES AND RESPONSIVENESS

EC Council Coordinators, Council Member and Council Board Chair survey respondents and focus group and interview participants were asked about the roles of State staff in building an EC System and the responsiveness of the State in meeting their needs and requests for assistance. They reported their level of satisfaction with State staff and made additional requests for assistance.

IMPORTANCE OF STATE ROLES

Both EC Council Coordinators and Council Members in the online survey rated as very to extremely important the various roles the State plays in building an EC system. All of the following State roles were rated above a 3.0 on a 4.0 scale (1=not important; 4=extremely important) as follows:

- Leadership on early childhood issues (3.56)
- Resource development (3.54)
- Evaluation (3.39)
- Grant management (3.40)
- Individualized technical assistance (3.30)
- Group training (3.16)
- Other: cultural competence, providing consistent reliable funding, recognize local accomplishments, working in partnership with the State

STATE RESPONSIVENESS AND CAPACITY TO MEET EC COUNCIL NEEDS

EC Council Coordinator survey respondents rated the responsiveness and capacity of State staff to meet the needs of their EC Councils. They rated State staff highly in terms of meeting the needs of the EC Councils (mean 4.11) and their capacity to do so (mean 3.81).

⁴ State staff refers to staff from the Colorado Department of Human Services, Colorado Department of Education, and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, , who together comprise the Early Childhood Councils Management Team.

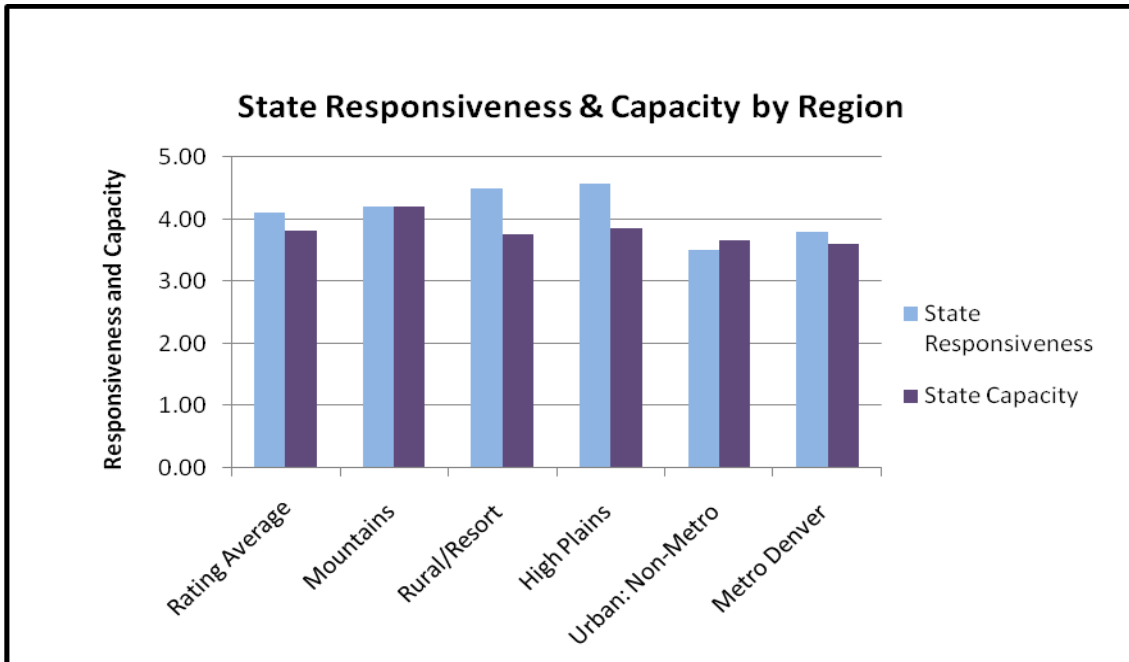


Figure 7. Responsiveness & Capacity of State Staff to Meet EC Council Needs
 (Responsiveness: 1= very unresponsive to 5=very responsive)
 (Capacity: 1=limited to 5=excellent)

Typical comments about responding to the needs of EC Councils included:

“State has responded quickly to all requests for assistance by providing technical assistance and guidance.”

“We always get a quick response and have found the State staff to be very helpful and understanding.”

“Any time I need something all I need is to email, or call and I have an answer right away.”

“When we have a question, you answer it. And do it in a timely manner.”

“[The State staff] supports, guides. Reminds me as a Director what is important and why my job is vital to the community and State.”

Comments about the capacity of State staff to meet the needs of EC Councils included the following examples:

“They seem very busy, but they do a great job of making sure to follow through. I am sure they would like to have more staff to help them with all of the work they do!”

“It seems that with the team in place there is excellent capacity to support the Councils. Unless, I am their favorite or just really need the help!”

Table 10 below provides more specific ratings for specific types of assistance provided to EC Councils by State staff. Coordinators rated State staff as “very” to “extremely responsive” in providing technical assistance related to fostering regionalized effort, providing useful system-building tools, providing individualized support and quarterly check-in calls, promoting leadership and assisting Councils to develop resources to meet the requirements of their grants. The State was not seen quite as responsive in conducting annual site visits and community visits.

**Table 10. State Staff Responsiveness in Meeting Needs of EC Councils
Rated by Coordinators According to Region**

| Type of Assistance | Mean | Mtns | Rural/ Resort | High Plains | Urban Non- Metro | Metro Denver |
|---|------|------|------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Providing Technical Assistance (TA): regionalized effort | 4.40 | 4.75 | 4.00 | 4.57 | 4.33 | 4.20 |
| Providing useful system-building tools | 4.33 | 4.00 | 3.67 | 5.00 | 4.17 | 4.40 |
| Providing Technical Assistance (TA) for individualized support (e.g. one-on-one coaching) | 4.28 | 4.40 | 4.33 | 4.83 | 4.50 | 3.20 |
| Providing TA: quarterly check-in calls | 4.19 | 4.60 | 3.75 | 4.67 | 4.17 | 3.60 |
| Promoting Leadership | 4.08 | 4.25 | 3.67 | 4.57 | 4.33 | 3.20 |
| Assisting your EC Council in developing skills or resources for meeting the requirements in your grant | 4.04 | 4.40 | 3.25 | 4.67 | 4.20 | 3.40 |
| Providing T A: annual site visits | 3.80 | 3.40 | 3.33 | 5.00 | 3.83 | 3.00 |
| Providing TA: community visits | 3.33 | 2.75 | 3.00 | 4.67 | 3.50 | 2.20 |
| Total Number: EC Coordinators | 27 | 5 | 4 | 7 | 6 | 5 |
| Rating Scale | | | | | | |
| 5=Extremely responsive; 4=Very responsive; 3=Responsive; 2=Somewhat responsive; 1=Not at all responsive | | | | | | |

TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

EC Coordinators, Council Members and Board Chairs were asked in the online survey, focus groups and interviews how the State could help them improve their Councils’ ability to effectively build an EC System. All the EC Councils have received training and technical assistance over the past years and have been highly satisfied with what they received and continue to request additional assistance.

A priority request of the majority of EC Coordinators (85%) in the online survey (and confirmed by the focus group and interview participants) was to have State help to create an evaluation framework that reflects a systems approach (e.g., measuring such things as collaboration, joint decision-making, long-range investments in early childhood, and cross-system leadership),

followed by providing evaluation tools and showing how to create benchmarks of performance (70.4%). Figure 8 details the percentages of Coordinator survey respondents requesting help to measure the effectiveness of their Council activities.

One EC Coordinator commented:

“I could use any tool that would enable better evaluation of Council work.”

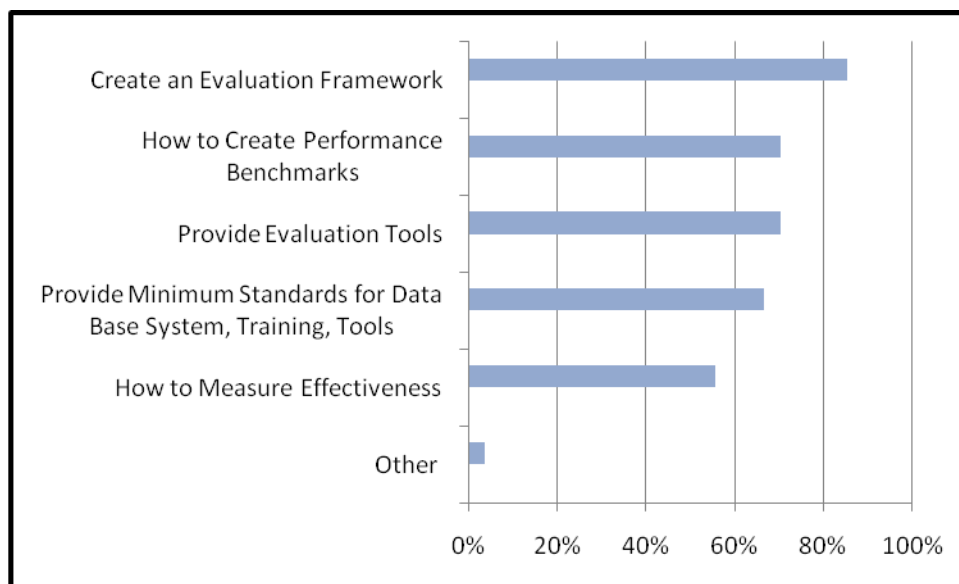


Figure 8. EC Council Coordinators Wanting Assistance from the State to Measure Effectiveness

Other specific requests for State assistance included:

- Professional development training that supports sustained change (e.g. follow-up training related to implementation efforts)
- Designing evaluation tools and showing how to create benchmarks of performance
- Ongoing training related to strategic planning, grant writing and funding sources, research development and sustainability
- Training related to policy: how Councils can develop the authority to create policy, defining the value and cost of Councils to coordinate their work, providing examples for how Councils can influence policy, enabling Councils to write waivers
- Defining a basic cost model to establish core funding requirements (e.g. staffing) for all Councils and
- Providing continuing education and technical assistance related to data collection and evaluation

CONCLUSION

The evaluation results summarized in this report demonstrate that Colorado’s EC Councils are working diligently to develop an effective and sustainable Early Childhood System across the State. Survey findings from 31 EC Coordinators and 286 Council members, staff and community

stakeholders detail the ways in which the EC Councils are successfully implementing efforts to improve early learning, mental and physical health, and family support services in their local regions. From the perspective of the EC Framework and its 15 component areas, the EC Councils are making progress in their efforts to build the foundations of local Early Childhood systems by developing their internal capacity related to staffing, communication mechanisms, strategic planning, assessment and evaluation. They are also working to build public engagement and partnerships around Early Childhood issues and to increase opportunities for new funding and investment in their Councils. According to the EC Coordinators, State partners have been very helpful to Councils by providing training and technical assistance to help them continue to build capacity and develop sustainable efficient systems.

Focus groups and key informant interviews have highlighted several leverage points for change that can assist the Councils with their system building activities, as follows: 1) strengthen marketing efforts to build public will related to Early Childhood issues, 2) continue to build partnerships with organizations and key stakeholders, including parents, that work to support the lives and learning of young children and their families, 3) improve the use of evaluation tools and mechanisms for tracking the efforts of the Councils to build an Early Childhood system, and 4) strengthen internal capacity of the Councils that will enable them to sustain their efforts and their systems in future years.

In combination, these evaluation results demonstrate the progress that has been made at the local and State levels to create a responsive and effective early childhood system. Opportunities for further capacity building have been identified including particular options for technical assistance and training.