



Business Ambassadors: Promising Practices in New Hampshire's Regional Early Childhood Initiatives

INTRODUCTION

What Will You Find In this Guide?

This guide describes promising practices being used in one or more regions of New Hampshire to engage the business community in supporting young children and their families. The practices described do not yet meet the rigorous threshold as “evidence-based practices.” However, we have enough initial data and documentation to believe that they are having a positive impact. We share the practices with a sense of humility because we are still learning about what does and does not work and we welcome the opportunity to learn from you too!

How Is The Guide Structured?

This guide responds to ten questions about the promising practice:

1. What Is It and Why Does It Matter?
2. What Is The Problem Our Regional Initiatives Are Trying to Solve?
3. What Do We Hope to Accomplish?
4. What Did We Do?
5. What Difference Did It Make and How Do We Know?
6. What Does It Cost and How Is The Work Funded?
7. What Lessons Did We Learn Along The Way?
8. What Challenges Have We Not Yet Solved?
9. Where Should You Begin?
10. Where Can You Find Out More?

Are There Other Promising Practice Guides?

Yes! As of this writing, we have created guides for four promising practices being used by one or more of our regional initiatives: A Regional Approach to Developmental Screening; the Family Center Model, Business Ambassadors and ACERT, a partnership with police departments that connects families who have experienced violence with the supports they need to mitigate the impact of trauma. As we continue to learn in our communities, we hope to be able to share additional approaches to working with young children and their families. For more information and copies of the other promising practices go to our website: <http://sparknh.com/> or email us at: info@sparknh.org

Who Created This Guide?

The Guide was created by the members of the Spark NH Regional Early Childhood Initiatives. Communities across the state of New Hampshire are working to ensure that young children have the strong foundation and support they need to thrive and succeed. Some of the most innovative work is being led by regional early childhood initiatives. While each of our regions has its own flavor and approach, we all share a vision of communities where every child has the positive learning experiences, good health, and strong family support they need as they grow to become tomorrow’s parents, workers, and citizens.

BUSINESS AMBASSADORS



What Is the Business Ambassador Model and Why Does It Matter?

What Is It?

Business Ambassadors are local business leaders who are working together to create child- and family-friendly policies and practices in the workplace.

Why Does It Matter?

- **One of the best ways to ensure the well-being of young children is to invest in their parent's economic well-being.¹**
- **Strong, healthy children and families are good for business.** They make it possible for businesses to recruit and retain a skilled, productive workforce.
- **Family-friendly businesses are good for parents, good for children and good for the economy.**

What Is The Problem Our Initiative Is Trying to Solve?

- **Employers are struggling to find and retain a high-quality workforce.**
- **Families are finding it hard to balance work and family.**
- **Parenting/caregiving can be compromised by stress and other challenges caused by employment.**

What Do We Hope to Accomplish?

- **Help businesses attract and retain employees**
- **Increase employee engagement, worker productivity and workplace morale**
- **Enhance the brand of participating businesses**
- **Develop a healthy, capable future workforce**
- **Improve community climate for families**

What Did We Do?¹

- **Convened.** Hosted an event for business leaders in our community at which we used Bedrock Messaging to make the “case” for investing in early childhood.
- **Engaged a core group of business leaders to lead the work.** Identified a core group of business leaders who agreed to lead the work and serve as Business Ambassadors.
- **Supported and educated.** Provided the Business Ambassadors with information on child- and family-friendly policies and supported them as they set their own priorities, reached out to other business leaders and built a local network.
- **Provided technical support.** Partnered with families to provide technical support for businesses as they designed and implemented new family-friendly policies and practices.

What Difference Did It Make and How Do We Know?

Outcomes

Here are a few of the results we have seen in our communities:

- Participating businesses are implementing family-friendly policies and practices.
- Businesses are contracting with Early Childhood staff to provide expertise and guidance.
- Businesses are connecting with each other and advocating for family-friendly workplace practices as a way to support workforce development and retention.

Indicators of Success – We are now in the process of collecting specific impact data on:

- New policies at workplaces
- Number of employees affected
- Employee satisfaction percentages
- Impact of business peer coaching
- Changes in businesses’ approach to supporting early care/education initiatives in the region

¹ Note that our regions are at different stages of development in their screening work and all of the work continues to be a “work in progress.”

What Does It Cost and How Is The Work Funded?

Expenses

Expenses vary from region to region but some of the types of expenses you may incur include:

- **Project Facilitator/Coordinator** – you will need someone to convene, coordinate and support the development of a Business Ambassadors group.

Technical Assistance - In some cases you may also need staff time to provide technical assistance to businesses as they design and implement new policies and practices. However, in some cases the Business Ambassadors provide technical assistance to one another. In other cases, businesses pay us to provide technical support.

- **Event Costs** - space, food, marketing, and educational materials
- **Stipends** - for family leaders to participate in the events and trainings

Current Funding

- **Thrive Laconia received funding from:**
 - Spark NH Family Leadership funds
 - Fees-For-Service to Develop Practices for Businesses
- **Impact Monadnock received funding from:**
 - Monadnock United Way
 - Participating Business Ambassadors

What Lessons Did We Learn Along The Way?

- **Business executives/leaders work differently than many leaders in the nonprofit sector.** It is important to:
 - Be clear, direct and efficient
 - Strongly promote the benefits of participation
 - Give space to business leaders? network, learn and be creative
 - Inspire business leaders to take ownership – and they will!
 - Don't lose sight of the mission
- **Engage leaders with decision-making authority.** It's important to identify local business leaders who understand the need for child-family-friendly policies and practices in the workplace AND who have the authority needed within their companies to implement them.

What Challenges Have We Not Yet Solved?

- **Impact Measurement** - We are still learning how to measure the impact of policy/practice changes
- **Managing Attrition** – Business leaders and human resource managers change over time. This can slow momentum and create leadership gaps.
- **Engaging Business Ambassadors with other Early Childhood work** - We would like to expand business engagement beyond workplace policies and practices. For example, are there ways to engage business leaders in advocating for changes in local and state policies? How might we interest them in supporting the work of local child care centers?

Where Should You Begin?

- **Learn what’s already happening in your community.** Are there local businesses that are offering family-friendly benefits? Take an inventory of family-friendly workplace activity to inform your approach.
- **Reach out to individuals.** If applicable, meet one-on-one with business leaders who are already implementing family-friendly policies in their workplace. Then meet with other business leaders who understand the importance of early childhood and work together to invite other leaders to an initial convening.
- **Make the “case” for investing in early childhood.** Host a Bedrock Messaging event for business leaders and use the event to identify a core of business leaders who will form and lead the work of the Business Ambassadors.

Where Can You Find Out More?

Resources

- **Sample policies and practices**
 - <http://www.impactmonadnock.org/what-you-can-do/business-leaders/policies/>
 - www.impactmonadnock.org/resources/family-friendly-workplaces
 - www.strongnation.org/readynation
- **Sample brochure**
 - <http://www.impactmonadnock.org/wp-content/uploads/IMBA-Brochure-Updated-11-10-17.pdf>

Regional Initiatives Active In This Area

- **Thrive Laconia:** www.facebook.com/thrivelaconia
- **Impact Monadnock:** www.impactmonadnock.org

Related Work and Policies

Campaign for a Family Friendly Economy: <http://www.familyfriendlyeconomy.org/>

Families and Work Institute: <http://www.familiesandwork.org/>

The Custom Fit Workplace: <http://www.customfitworkplace.org/>

Parenting in the Workplace Institute: <https://www.babiesatwork.org>

Stories from Two Communities

Impact Monadnock

In October 2015, Impact Monadnock, in partnership with the Greater Keene Chamber of Commerce, presented a regional business summit, "Workforce Development: Investing in the Future Workforce," at Keene State College's Alumni Center in Keene. Nearly 160 business people, policymakers, educators, and community members attended the summit.

Following the summit, business leaders formed a group, developed a formal membership program, set up a committee structure and created a schedule of meetings and events. Today their membership includes 20 businesses representing approximately 2,500 regional employees.

As a result of their work:

- Four businesses are now offering a "Babies at Work" program. The program enables parents of babies 3-6 months old to bring their babies to work and have organizational support to do so. The four businesses collectively employ 250 people.

Thrive Laconia

In the spring of 2016 Thrive Laconia welcomed business leaders, HR department heads, and major funders to hear about why the early years are important to the future of the local economy and the way of life in the Lakes Region, what the research says, and what are some concrete steps businesses can take to support their employees and support children's optimal development. That summer Thrive Laconia offered a four-day - Mind in the Making training. This fall the Thrive Family Leadership Team offered a two-day Strengthening Families training. Businesses were invited to participate in the trainings. HR departments, in particular, benefited because they could use what they learned to better support employees.

After the initial meeting, participants established a business ambassadors group to help local businesses compete in today's marketplace, build a foundation for lasting economic security, and help children get on track to succeed in school and life.

Today, businesses can contract with Thrive Laconia for technical assistance in developing Family Friendly Workplace Practices and Family Support Workshops.

Thrive Laconia is an unfunded initiative. Lead partners include: The Family Resource Center of Central NH and Lakes Region Child Care Services. The leadership team includes area agencies. Direction for current initiatives comes from the Parent Leadership and Business Ambassador Groups. Thrive Laconia is supported in part by Early Learning NH. Events have been sponsored by Grappone Automotive and Spark NH.

¹ Kieschnick, PI, Milliken, L. (2015). A Framework for Action for New Hampshire's Young Children, Concord, NH: Spark NH Early Childhood Advisory Council. For more information see: <http://sparknh.org>