

NH ALLIANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD COALITIONS

Handbook for Starting a Local Early Childhood Coalition



Promising Practices for Creating and Nurturing a Local Early Childhood Coalition

As of April 2026



Introduction

PURPOSE

This document describes the process of forming and supporting a local early childhood coalition. In particular, this handbook focuses on the role of the coordinator and the backbone organization in creating, building and sustaining coalitions. We share these 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!

STRUCTURE

The handbook responds to the following questions about Early Childhood Coalitions:

1. What is an Early Childhood Coalition and why does it matter?
2. What is the problem Early Childhood Coalitions are trying to solve?
3. What do we hope to accomplish?
4. What did we do?
5. What difference have we made?
6. Where should you begin?
7. What does it cost and how is the work funded?
8. Where can you find out more?

There is also a supporting document that includes templates and resources that may be helpful. Throughout the document there will be clickable links that will direct you to an outside link or somewhere else in the document.

Introduction

ABOUT

The Handbook was created by the NH Alliance of Early Childhood Coalitions, further referred to as the Alliance. The Alliance includes representatives from early childhood coalitions from across the state of New Hampshire. Each coalition is working to ensure that young children have a strong foundation and the support they need to thrive and succeed. While each coalition has its own flavor and approach, we all share a vision that all NH families and children have equitable access to a comprehensive, adequately resourced, and sustainable early childhood system that fosters healthy childhood development and ensures families are thriving.

To see a list of all current early childhood coalitions, please visit the NH Alliance website at <https://www.nhaecc.org/members>

We are stronger together!



Table of Contents

- Developing an Early Childhood Coalition 1**

- Phase One: Bring People Together 6**

- Phase Two: Commit to Action 9**

- Phase Three: Organize the Work 13**

- Work Plan Example 17**

- Engage Your Community 18**

- Coalition Funding 20**

- More Information 25**

Developing an Early Childhood Coalition

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

Early Childhood Coalitions are cross-sector efforts that focus on health, early learning and family support in particular geographic regions. In some cases, a coalition's geography is defined as a town or city and its surrounding communities. In other cases, it refers to a broader geographic area. Regardless of how the region is defined, coalitions are focused on bringing together the combined resources of the area for the benefit of young children and their families.

Example Mission and Vision Statement:

Mission: To support children and families from birth through early childhood by strengthening coordinated, high-quality systems that promote healthy development, school readiness, and lifelong success.

Vision: All children and families are healthy, supported, and thriving in a coordinated community that helps every child grow, learn, and belong.

CHALLENGES FACING COALITIONS

Across the state, passionate and committed individuals are doing vital work to support young children and their families. The opportunity ahead is to better connect and align these efforts to increase their reach and impact. Many initiatives currently operate independently, which can limit coordination, reduce public awareness, and prevent resources from being used as effectively as possible. A more unified approach would allow these efforts to build on one another, address critical gaps, and move communities toward a shared vision for early childhood success.

Early childhood coalitions also face ongoing funding uncertainty, which can make it difficult to sustain programs and maintain consistent leadership. Because coalitions are grounded in strong relationships, leadership changes can disrupt progress and slow momentum. With stable investment, shared planning, and intentional collaboration, these coalitions have the potential to strengthen continuity, amplify their collective voice, and build lasting systems that better serve children and families across the state.



COALITION GOALS

The goal of coalitions is to galvanize, coordinate and align the resources of a community to ensure that every child has a strong foundation and the support they need to thrive and succeed.

We hope that by working together:



The people who live, work and employ others in the region will:

- Understand the value of ensuring that every child has what they need to thrive
- Know that when we invest in the youngest members of our community, the community, as a whole, is stronger
- Work together to create family-friendly work environments



Families with young children will:

- Have the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to support their children's development
- Receive social, emotional and developmental screening and referrals if needed
- Have access to high-quality early education, supports and services that are aligned and connected with one another



Early Childhood Professionals will:

- Have the skills, supports, and resources they need to provide high-quality care
- Connect families with resources
- Ensure smooth transitions from one resource to another.



Public policymakers will:

- Have the awareness, data, and information they need to develop policies that help families with young children and their communities thrive.

COALITION ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Below is a partial list of activities coalitions are using to ensure that every child has what they need to thrive. Note that every coalition is different and chooses which activities they employ based on the needs of their communities, the stage of development of their coalition, and the passions and resources of coalition members.



Bringing People Together

- Cross-sector coalitions
- Family Networks
- Parent education and community resource guide workgroups



Public Awareness Campaigns

- Billboards, PSAs, parent support materials
- Educate policymakers and leaders on importance of early childhood
- Educate professionals, school, board members and others on trauma-informed practices



Professional Development

- Professional development and technical assistance on evidence-based practices
- Advise businesses on how to become more family-friendly
- Align curricula and tools across child care centers



Developmental Screening

- Add new developmental screening sites within child care centers, community mental health centers, home visiting programs, primary care, and WIC clinics
- Standardize developmental screening tools



Transition Planning

- Focus groups for educators to improve transitions from early learning to kindergarten
- Community Health Workers identify families who are struggling and connect with resources



Data

- Key indicators and data on interventions to inform practices and track progress
- Data visualization tools to track impact and wellbeing of children and families



Share Learnings

- Promising Practices Guides
- Participate Community of Practice meetings
- Hosting local conferences and events



Education and Support

- Neighborhood-based Family Centers that link families to supports and services
- Playgroup model to support parenting
- Police department partnership
- Child care for students with young children
- Connect parents with parenting skills via Vroom

COALITION IMPACT

Each early childhood coalition looks a little different. Some have been around for a decade, while others are brand new. Each evolved a little differently depending on the needs and interests of the community, the readiness of leaders, and the amount of funding and resources they had available. They are also at different stages of development in tracking outcomes. A key factor to coalition success is ensuring coalition leaders are supported by their backbone organizations and have the ability to move ideas and plans into action. Below are a few examples of the remarkable impact coalitions have had:

- More children are **receiving developmental screening** and being **connected sooner** to the supports they need.
- More families are getting **parenting support services**.
- Early learning teachers are using **high-quality curricula** and **evidence-based practices** for responding to the behavioral needs of children.
- Police officers are partnering with early childhood professionals to ensure that children who **witness traumatic events are immediately connected** with supports and services.
- Pre-school teachers and kindergarten teachers are working together to ensure a **smooth transition into kindergarten**.
- New family centers have been started in neighborhoods that are **accessible to families** even when transportation is limited.
- Professionals are coming together to learn about such topics as **trauma-informed practice**.
- Health centers, mental health providers, child care centers and others are working together in new ways to ensure that **no one gets “lost between the cracks”**.
- Business leaders are implementing **family-friendly work practices**.
- Community health workers are **connecting families with health care** and support services.
- Towns are creating **interactive public installations** for parents and their children that are both fun and educational.
- Home visitors are working together to **coordinate and improve their services**.



It is great to be part of this. It is inspiring and helpful and I do not feel alone. I have role models for what to do.

Patrice Baker, HATCh Coalition

WHERE TO BEGIN

There is no one right way to launch an early childhood coalition. Each coalition has taken a different approach but many took a path that looked something like the three phases of work described in the next few sections.

PHASE ONE: BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER



INITIATING
GROUP



READY
LEADERS



CROSS-SECTOR
GROUP OF
STAKEHOLDERS



NEEDS
ASSESSMENT



PRIORITIES

PHASE TWO: COMMIT TO ACTION



LEADERSHIP
TEAM



ROADMAP

PHASE THREE: ORGANIZE THE WORK



ANCHOR
ORGANIZATION



WORK
GROUPS



TRUST



ACTION
PLAN

Phase One: Bring People Together



INITIATING
GROUP



READY
LEADERS



CROSS-SECTOR
GROUP OF
STAKEHOLDERS



NEEDS
ASSESSMENT



PRIORITIES

STEPS IN THE PROCESS



Someone takes a chance and leads the way. An Initiating Group starts the ball rolling. In some cases, this may be a funder that is interested in improving outcomes through a collective impact approach.¹ In other cases, it is a practitioner or educator with a vision for finding a better way.



Engage the folks who are most receptive and “ready” to help. The Initiating Group often begins with simple one-on-one conversations with people who are likely to be receptive and who have influence with others in their field and/or the broader community. These “Ready Leaders” begin to identify what the community most needs and who the key stakeholders are who can help move the work forward.



Convene a cross-sector group of stakeholders and assess the community's needs. The Initiating Group, with help from the Ready Leaders, convenes a broader group of people for a conversation or series of conversations.



Assess the community's needs. Together, this cross-sector group of stakeholders begins to assess the needs and strengths of the community. They may initiate or build on an existing formal needs assessment or they may assess the needs informally by tapping into the knowledge and experience of those at the table.



Set some initial priorities. As the group assesses the needs, themes and gaps emerge. They also begin to discover what people are passionate about. Together they decide on a set of shared goals and priorities.

¹ <https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/what-collective-impact>

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Identify a Lead Team. There need to be individuals responsible for the tasks of identifying “Ready Leaders,” convening stakeholders, facilitating discussions, capturing themes, collecting data, and assisting the group in setting priorities. This role can be fulfilled by a single person or a small team.

Bring the voices of families to everything you do. Listen to and engage families at every stage of your work. Ideally, engage families from the start as members of your coalition. If you don't yet have families ready to serve on the coalition, reach out to them in other ways. Use focus groups to find out what matters the most to them. Ask direct service providers to listen deeply to families and share what they learn with you.

Example: Nashua Smart Start Coalition gained momentum with its family outreach efforts when they hired a family engagement coordinator who focused on building relationships with families in the places families came together. Through these efforts, the Coalition provided the kindling for the Nashua Family Network to stand up itself as a self-directed entity with a diverse representation of Nashua families.

Ground your work in data. Even if you have people at the table with great expertise on young children, take a look at the data available on how children are doing. What data do you have? What data is missing? What does this tell you about what's working and what's missing? Understanding where you are beginning can help you determine where you need to go next.

Example: Coos Coalition has hosted both a child care tactical team and a behavioral health summit. At these events, participants reviewed the data, discussed their observations and identified priority areas that people felt they could advance together.

Define success. As you set goals and priorities, make sure that you are clear on what success would look like. Start having a conversation about how you will monitor your progress and measure success. The more concrete you can be, the easier it will be to stay focused. Selecting a few data points to monitor and measure will help you make sure that what you are doing is working. It will also help you make the case for the value and impact of your work.

Embed the work of the Coalition in the partner organizations. Make sure that each partner in the Coalition has at least one of the goals/priorities as a goal or priority in their own organization. Having goals that match a partner organization brings buy-in to the coalition and helps a partner see they can have a bigger impact beyond their work.

PRACTICAL TIPS

Provide a meeting space and note-takers

Sometimes it's the simple things that make the difference. Providing meeting space, a note-taker, and someone to send out meeting reminders doesn't take a lot of effort, but it can make a big difference in getting the work off the ground. This is where partners can be helpful at varying levels. Ask partners if they have a great meeting space. Ask them to commit the use of that space for coalition building meetings.

Funding Structure

Building a sustainable funding structure begins with understanding the coalition's core financial needs and the true costs of the work, from staffing and operations to programming. This means thinking carefully about what resources are required and what structures need to be in place to steward funds responsibly. Thinking through these topics early, before committing to any specific funding path, will position the coalition to make strategic decisions that align resources with long-term mission. Refer to the Funding section for more information.

Do a Needs Assessment that makes sense for your region and resources

Community Needs Assessments vary drastically. Some are formal, in-depth analyses done by outside consultants. Others consist of knowledgeable people sitting around a table talking about what they see every day in their work. If your community already has a solid needs assessment (many hospitals, Public Health Networks, and United Ways have these), use them! If not, think about what you most need to know, and determine the dollars available to you to dig deeper. Then start with what you can. There are several reports about return on investment in early childhood have been done in NH and could help in your work. Check out the [Rand article](#) and [Granite United Way's Need Assessment](#).

Research data platforms

Check out different data platforms to explore how young children and families in our state are faring. Some sites you might want to consider are:

- [New Hampshire Child Well-Being Hub](#)
- [NH Children's Health Foundation](#)
- [Early Care and Education Research Consortium](#)
- [New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute](#)
- [DHHS Data Portal](#)
- [New Futures/Kids Count](#)

Phase Two: Commit to Action



LEADERSHIP
TEAM



ROADMAP

STEPS IN THE PROCESS



Form a cross-sector Leadership Team. Once the broad group of stakeholders has identified priorities and agreed on an overall direction, form a Leadership Team comprised of people who are passionate about moving the work forward and willing to serve as an on-going group to guide the process. Ideally, the Leadership Team should include key influencers from each of the sectors you seek to engage. Typically, this means early learning, health, behavioral health, public schools, family support, and the business community. Whenever possible, ensure that families are also a part of your Leadership Team. Their voices will keep you grounded and motivated for the work ahead.



Create a plan. The Leadership Team should begin to map out how the coalition will move forward to advance the priorities identified in Phase One. This plan should include specific actions, timelines, and measurable goals to ensure steady progress. Additionally, it's crucial to incorporate strategies that will allow for ongoing family involvement in the process. This could include regular feedback loops or community forums to ensure families remain actively engaged, their voices are heard, and their needs are continuously addressed as the plan unfolds. The plan should be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances while staying focused on the shared goals.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Bring the right people to the table. They need to be excited about the work and have the decision-making authority needed within their organizations to commit their organization to help move the Leadership Team priorities forward. They must also be able to commit time, energy and resources to the coalition outside of coalition meetings. Having this kind of dedicated human and financial support can make or break an initiative.

Follow the passion. Listen to what the team members are excited about working on together and start there. Starting with projects that generate passion and motivation will create momentum and lead to small wins, helping to build confidence and drive for the larger goals ahead.

Build leadership from the start. Notice what people are willing to do and engage them in a leadership role in doing, leading and creating the sustainability of the leadership from day one. View your role in leading the coalition as though you might leave at any moment. This will help to make sure that the local leadership is empowered to lead. No coalition is successful with just one leader. It's about setting the stage for community leaders to rise and that the first idea thinker/stakeholder does not always remain as the lead always.

Be concrete. As you create the road map, spell out what you are going to do in practical terms. The road map should go beyond philosophy and theory and hone in on action.

Look at the data. Throughout the process, pay attention to the data. Identify the data that will give you meaningful feedback and that is easily available. You can use this data to inform what you do and how you do it. The data may be formal or informal, but know what it is, and use it to make a difference.

PRACTICAL TIPS

“Right-Sizing” Your Leadership Team is an Art Not a Science

There is no magic number for the size of your leadership team. The team needs to be broad enough to have credibility and move the community forward, but small enough to get the work done. Finding your “sweet spot” is part of the art of effective coalition building. The next page provides potential partners you may want to engage.

Consider Forming a Steering Committee

If your Leadership Team is large, you may also want to create a small “kitchen cabinet” or Steering Committee of three to five people to help plan meetings and keep the work of the Leadership Committee moving forward.

Develop a Memorandum of Agreement

Create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Leadership Team that reflects the commitment that participating organizations are making to the work.

Build Capacity to Engage Parents as Participants and Leaders

Engaging parents in the work has to go beyond tokenism and lip service. There are great resources in the state on how to engage parents in meaningful ways and how to build their confidence and skills as leaders. Talk with some existing early childhood coalitions about what they have learned and reach out to resources such as the Parent Information Center for resources and expertise.²

2 <https://picnh.org>

EARLY CHILDHOOD COALITIONS: POTENTIAL COALITION PARTNERS

Family Voice and Support

- Family Resource Centers
- Home Visiting
- Early Intervention
- Parents/Caregivers

Education

- Early Learning / Child Care
- Head Start / Early Head Start
- K-12
- Higher Education
- Training/ Technical Assistance Provider

Health

- Health Care
- Mental Health / Substance Use
- Public Health Network
- Perinatal Coalition
- Prevention Coalition

Community

- Libraries
- Police/First Responders
- Municipalities / Town
- Recreation
- Businesses
- Non-Profits
- United Way
- Advocacy Organizations

Human Services

- Community Action Programs
- WIC (Women, Infants, and Children)
- DHHS / DCYF
- Domestic Violence Prevention or Services
- Other education or human service organization

“The New Hampshire Alliance of Early Childhood Coalitions has played a vital role in the growth and development of Somersworth Ready Together. Through the dissemination of timely information and the intentional fostering of connections among local coalitions, the Alliance has strengthened collaboration and shared learning across communities. These coordinated efforts have been instrumental in advancing aligned, comprehensive early childhood services throughout the state, ensuring that families and young children have greater access to integrated supports.

Kerry Martinelli, Somersworth Ready Together

Phase Three: Organize the Work



STEPS IN THE PROCESS



Identify Funding Backbone Organization or Fiscal Sponsor. At this stage, a coalition will likely need to identify a nonprofit organization willing to serve as a fiscal sponsor, a tax-exempt entity that can receive grants and donations on behalf of the coalition and provide the necessary documentation for fiscal reporting. It is important to identify an organization that has the capacity, expertise, and willingness to take this responsibility on. The organization may guide strategy, support aligned activities, and advance policy, but in some regions, these tasks fall to the coalition itself. It's crucial to clearly define expectations for the backbone organization's role. Over time, the coalition may also consider whether a more formal structure is needed. One that provides dedicated staffing, coordination, and infrastructure to align partners and manage resources, or whether incorporating as an independent nonprofit entity is the right long-term path.

Name a Coordinator. Now is the time to officially define the role of the point person and begin referring to them as the coordinator. They are responsible for bringing people together, fostering relationships, aligning efforts, reporting progress to funders, nurturing new partnerships, and ensuring effective communication. Usually, the coordinator is a paid position with the backbone organization serving as the "employer of record" who takes responsibility for issuing paychecks, handling payroll, taxes, etc.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS



Form Workgroups. Bring together stakeholders from various sectors to collaborate on initiatives that support the well-being and development of young children and their families. These workgroups focus on specific aspects of early childhood, such as education, health, or family support, to address challenges, share resources, and implement strategies that improve outcomes for children. Some examples include:

- **Providers:** Representatives from various organizations (e.g., schools, behavioral health centers) working together to advance the initiative.
- **Businesses:** Business Ambassador Groups that engage the business community and support family-centered initiatives.
- **Special Initiatives:** Short-term groups focused on specific projects, like "Thinkscapes" that inspire further long-term efforts.



Build Trust. Nothing happens without some degree of trust and trust takes time. It takes time for workgroup members to get to know one another; understand what each other's organizations do; and build the trust and respect needed to work together effectively. Trust helps to foster an environment where diverse stakeholders can collaborate effectively without fear of miscommunication or competition. It also enables a more coordinated approach, where everyone is aligned on priorities and committed to the goal. Additionally, trust encourages accountability and resilience, ensuring that the coalition can navigate challenges and sustain long-term efforts to improve outcomes for children and families.



Create Action Plans. Workgroups must actively engage by creating and implementing action plans that turn the broad ideas from Phase One priorities into practical steps that make a tangible impact on people's lives. It's essential to establish regular meeting times for the workgroups to review progress, share updates, and refine strategies. Use data to inform your work and align your actions with the desired outcomes.

As you do this consider:

- What data will give you meaningful feedback on how young children are doing and whether or not your interventions are making a difference?
- Is any of this data already being collected and if so, is it being collected in a standardized way across organizations?
- What kinds of supports will organizations need to collect and enter data? Do they have staff who have the time to enter the data? Do staff need training in order to enter the data consistently? How will you use the data to inform your work?
- How will you use data to inform the community about your work and the importance of early childhood?

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Workgroups require active leadership. Workgroups need guidance, especially when newly formed, and require active leadership to thrive. The Coordinator should attend all meetings initially to ensure strong communication, build capacity, and identify any challenges. This also helps maintain continuity across workgroups and avoid duplication of efforts. While the goal is to have a strong leader for each workgroup, it may take time to reach that point.

Communicate, communicate, communicate. Make sure that you have formal and informal ways to keep everyone informed both within and across the workgroups.

Create some “Early Wins”. When selecting initial priorities, include tasks that can lead to early wins, or short-term, tangible, and visible results. While much of the work will take time, these early successes help maintain momentum, demonstrate that progress is achievable, and energize the team. Early wins strengthen relationships, boost morale, and attract new partners to the initiative.

Don't hesitate to change direction. If a workgroup struggles to define its goals or lacks leadership, it may not be ready or necessary at this time. In such cases, disband the group early and redirect efforts elsewhere. Stay flexible, follow the group's energy, and remain agile—there's too much at stake to waste time.

PRACTICAL TIPS

Plan for Fundraising From the Start

This work requires funding, so it's crucial to start developing fundraising strategies early to ensure its continuation and growth. Starting early ensures that the necessary funds are in place to sustain and expand the initiative over time. In addition, involving funders and businesses as partners from the outset is key. See page 20 for more information.

Articulate Roles and Responsibilities

This is a good time to spell out the roles and responsibilities of the leadership team, the workgroups, the workgroup leaders, and the Regional Coordinator. It's also important to outline the roles and responsibilities of the backbone organization including any time or financial commitments they are prepared to make. Additionally, clarify the extent to which the backbone organization will be involved in advising and interacting with the coalition.

Don't Reinvent the Wheel

You don't have to write MOUs, job descriptions, roles and responsibilities documents from scratch. The NH Alliance website has a supporting document with templates and examples.

PRACTICAL TIPS

Create a Work Plan Template

Provide each work group with a written template they can use to lay out their plans. Workplans should include what the group plans to do; when they will do it; who will take the lead, and the likely timeline. The work plan should also include space for notes where groups can record their progress, questions and lessons learned. Keep the work plans simple and make sure they are regularly updated. See page 17 for an example work plan layout.

Ensure the Work Plan Fits the Group's Needs

The work plan should be practical. It needs to be used! If you find that a workgroup is not using the work plan, it may be time to try a Plan B. The group needs to know what they have done/not done and what's next so that you can keep it all together – but the tool that helps them do this may vary from one region to another.

Create Organized and Updated Email Lists

If you don't already have a system for tracking everyone involved in the work, now is the perfect time to set one up. It doesn't need to be complex, but having well-maintained email lists will save time and frustration when keeping stakeholders informed and updated on progress. Some examples of how to track and organize emails effectively are to create categories or groups (like Workgroup Members, Funders, Partners), use email management tools (MailChimp or Constant Contact), or use a spreadsheet (Google Sheets).

Assess Missing Stakeholders

Periodically, have the group take a look at who is actively engaged in the work. Use this opportunity to consider what leaders and/or sectors are missing and who you need to engage next.

Take Time to Celebrate!

The work your coalition is doing is not quick and it is not easy – which makes it all that more important to take the time to celebrate your accomplishments along the way. The accomplishments do not have to be momentous and the celebrations do not have to be elaborate. But do note your progress, recognize people's contributions, and have a little fun together!

Create Feedback Loops

It's important to revisit and assess the work using data, outcomes, and qualitative feedback to ensure progress is consistently reviewed and discussed.

Work Plan Example

<p>Objective 1 - Community Awareness: The community understands the importance of early childhood and is actively engaged in promoting kindergarten readiness for all the children within the coalition catchment area.</p>		
<p>Strategy 1.1: Distribute and share information about the Coalition's work to promote school readiness and the importance of early childhood development and high-quality early learning services and supports.</p>		
ACTVIITY DESCRIPTION	STATUS	TARGET DEADLINE
<p>Activity: Develop marketing materials to distribute to local and state-wide stakeholders</p>	<p>Ongoing: A one-pager has been developed</p>	September 2025
<p>Activity: Present the "Bedrock" presentation key community groups and stakeholders</p>	<p>Not Started: Need to define and attract audience</p>	November 2025
<p>Activity: Develop an online presence for the Coalition</p>	<p>Ongoing: A website has been developed</p>	January 2026
<p>Strategy 1.2: Engage organizations and individuals throughout our region in activities that support early learning and development and the goals of the Coalition.</p>		
<p>Activity: Partner with local family serving businesses to post signage that promotes learning</p>	<p>Behind: Materials are ready; need a distribution plan</p>	October 2025
<p>Activity: Recruit community and business champions</p>	<p>Ongoing: Recruited one community member</p>	December 2025
<p>Activity: Champions use mainstream and social media to spread information</p>	<p>Starting: Reaching out to local contact</p>	February 2026
<p>Activity: Champions use personal and business network to identify donors (financial and in-kind)</p>	<p>Ongoing: Community member solicited partnerships and funding</p>	April 2026

Engaging the Community



HOW TO ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY

Building communities in which children can thrive depends on engaging everyone in the community. It is not enough to engage schools, health centers, and social service agencies. It's not even enough to engage employers. Real success depends on creating communities where everyone is engaged. Some of our coalitions have focused on public awareness from the very beginning. Others have focused first on professionals and leaders and added public awareness later as their initiatives have matured and resources have increased.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

- **Identify your target audience.** Define what you mean by your community, then determine who you want to reach first.
- **Start by thinking about what your community cares about.** Ask them what is important for young children and families in the community: what's important to them, what they are concerned about, what they get excited about.
- **Develop a communications strategy.** This may begin with informal one-on-one conversations, or it may begin with a large group convening/event.
- **Keep communicating.** Listening and communicating is an on-going process. It may help to create a communications plan that helps you keep track of who you want to communicate with, in what manner, and how often.
- **Engage.** Offer suggestions on how your community members can engage in the work. Listen to their ideas. Then work together to identify concrete ways they can become a part of supporting young children and their families.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Identify champions. What you say matters, but it also matters who says it! If you want to engage businesses, find an employer who is excited about the work and willing to reach out to other employers. If you want to engage public schools, find the teacher, principal or superintendent who is passionate about this work and willing to help engage others. If you want to reach parents and caregivers, develop a partnership with a small group who can take the lead in reaching out to others.

Use consistent messaging. Whether you are hosting an event, writing an article, or creating a billboard, develop a set of core messages that you can use over and over again. See page 28 for Talking Points that may be helpful in describing your coalition's work.

Make a specific “ask.” Once someone is excited about getting involved, the first thing they will ask is “what do you want me to do.” Be ready to respond with concrete actions they can take right away.

Tailor your communications, events and “asks” to the audience. One size does not fit all. Know your audience and understand how they prefer to access information; where they gather; how they learn. Then communicate in ways that work for them.

PRACTICAL TIPS

Brand your work

Create a coalition logo and a standard way to recognize key partners in public-facing materials, brochures, and promotions.

Take advantage of public awareness resources

There are many organizations that have developed research-based messaging around why early childhood matters and the value of investing in young children. Take time to explore resources from organizations such as Save the Children and New Futures as these can provide a strong foundation for your own coalition's communications and advocacy efforts.

Engage Your Business Community

Work with local business leaders to develop a Business Ambassador initiative. Business Ambassadors groups in the Monadnock and Laconia regions have done great work in helping local employers develop more family-friendly workplaces.

Engage Families

Make sure parents and caregivers have a seat at the table to make sure educational and social services are aligned with the unique needs of each family.

Funding

Budget size varies drastically across the state. Some coalitions are supported almost entirely by volunteers, some have funding but operate on a shoestring and some have had significant and consistent funding over a period of years. Below are the types of expenses a coalition may incur in order to support its core functions:

CORE INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENSES

Staffing: These funds cover the various full time, part time, or contracted services (e.g., Coalition Coordinator's salary). Also covers fiscal sponsor fee if applicable.

Leadership Team Stipends: These funds compensate leadership team members for the time and expertise they contribute. Stipends help ensure diverse community partners can participate fully in leadership and decision-making roles.

Food and Supplies: These funds cover refreshments and materials needed to host coalition meetings, trainings, and community events. Providing these helps create welcoming, accessible environments that support relationship-building and participation.

Training/Conferences: These funds support the coalition in hosting events and allow members to attend relevant conferences and learning opportunities to bring best practices back to their communities.

Travel: These funds support mileage for travel within the region and state. This ensures equitable participation and engagement, particularly for members traveling from rural or underserved areas.

Marketing/Public Awareness Materials: These funds support outreach materials, printing, digital communications, and public awareness efforts to connect families and partners to resources and coalition initiatives. Strong communications help increase visibility, engagement, and access to early childhood supports.

Technology: These funds support website maintenance, software subscriptions, virtual meeting platforms, and tools needed for communication, coordination, and data collection. Reliable technology infrastructure ensures efficient coalition operations and effective collaboration.

It is estimated that it costs approximately \$200,000 annually to sustain a mature, high-functioning coalition. This level of funding supports leadership, coordination, infrastructure, and capacity-building needed to create lasting impact for children and families.

ESTIMATED EXPENSES FOR MATURE COALITIONS

Salaries	128,000	1.0 FTE Director & 1.0 FTE EC Project Assistant
Fringe Benefits	33,290	22.5% of salaries
Comsultants	5,000	
Supplies/Printing	2,000	
Travel	5,000	Local travel
Marketing	5,000	
IT/Phone	1,200	Cellphone \$50/month x 12 months x 2 staff
Education	1,000	Conference registration
Insurance	1,000	
Occupancy	2,000	
Meeting Costs	2,000	
Subtotal	185,490	
Indirect Costs	18,549	10% indirect cost; will change to a federally negotiated
Total Expense	204,039	Rate TBD

REVENUE STREAMS

To date, early childhood coalitions have been funded through a mix of volunteer and in-kind contributions, support from local United Ways, grants from private and community foundations, and large federal grants such as those that supported the work of Project LAUNCH, the Preschool Development Grant and the Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative (funded by SAMSHA).

Fiscal Sponsorship

Some coalitions utilize fiscal sponsors for funding purposes, as the 501(c)(3) application process is time-intensive. NH Alliance offers support in helping you assess which fiscal sponsor agency is the best fit for your coalition.

Low-Cost Strategies

In addition, coalitions can implement various low-cost strategies for hosting family and community events, including securing in-kind donations, obtaining local community sponsorships, and engaging volunteers. These non-financial supports, such as donated time and resources from local organizations, play a vital role in advancing the work of the coalitions while keeping operational costs low.

Fundraising Examples











- Partner with a local restaurant to donate 10-15% of the bill or sales for a certain time period
- Reach out to local businesses and have their logos at events or sponsor their services

Sponsorship

When asking businesses and individual donors to sponsor an event or initiative, make sure you are providing them with some kind of incentive. A sponsorship package is a great way to provide them with options that works best for them. After the event, make sure to follow up with donors about the impact your event had on the children and families. See the next two pages for examples.

Sample Sponsorship Package

Join us as a sponsor and amplify your brand while supporting [coalition's name]. Our sponsorship packages offer meaningful visibility and engagement opportunities that connect your company with the community. We've designed three flexible sponsorship tiers to meet various partnership goals and budgets:

	Bronze Level \$500 - \$2000	Silver Level \$2000 - \$5000	Gold Level Over \$5000
Logo on Website			
Social Media Shoutout			
Logo Printed on Materials			
Branded Promotional Items at Events			
Certificate of Appreciation			

Sample Impact Report



IMPACT REPORT

FY2024 July 2023 - June 2024

#Working Together so that Milford Kids Thrive

3265

Parent, caregiver & young child engagements @Milford Kids Thrive (MKT) events

2300

monthly reach MKT Facebook & website

774

Subscribers MKT parenting E-Newsletter

127

Infants welcomed by MKT Welcome Baby program

305

sleeves of diapers provided



Thank you Milford Kids Thrive for welcoming us to the community! And for connecting us with diapers, baby clothes, and community partner support when we really needed it.

-- E.B.

www.MilfordKidsThrive.org



Thank you for giving us an opportunity to connect with other parents and toddlers. I've learned so much about how to support my child's healthy development.

--Ashley D.



23

Community agencies partnering with Milford Kids Thrive & MKT Early Childhood Collaborative

strong early childhood foundations so they can be ready for school and thrive.



Milford Thrives

52 Nashua St, Ste 3, Milford, NH 03055 603/836-4356

Click [here](#) to view the full report

More Information

PROMISING PRACTICES

As of this writing, we have created five companion documents that includes detailed information on promising practices being used by one or more of our coalitions: A Regional Approach to Developmental Screening; the Family Center Model, Business Engagement, Parent and Caregiver Depression Screening, 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.

PRACTICE PROFILE

Consider how you'll continuously evaluate the coalition's effectiveness and responsiveness to community needs. It's best to establish these monitoring practices during the coalition's formation so they become embedded from the start. Use brief check-in sessions with members and the community to ask: What's working? Where can we improve? What are your ideas for moving forward?

While there is no “gold standard” for Early Childhood Coalitions, members of the Alliance developed this [Practice Profile](#) for coalitions to reflect on their development.

More Information

EARLY CHILDHOOD COALITIONS: THEORY OF CHANGE

IF WE...



THEN...

Family - Friendly Communities	Raise community awareness of the importance of early childhood	Communities will be family-friendly and invest in young children and their families
	Engage the business community in creating family-friendly workplaces	
	Foster the adoption of public policies that support young children and their families	
Strong Parenting Skills	Engage families as active partners in our work	Families will have the strong parenting skills they need to support children's healthy development
	Provide families with the knowledge, skills and tools they need to support their children's development	
Early Screening	Make developmental and maternal depression screening more available	Children and families in need of supports and services will get early screening
	Ensure that all providers in the community are using the same validated, reliable screening tools	
Quality Supports and Services	Increase the availability of high-quality home visiting, behavioral health supports and trauma-informed practice	Children and families will connect with high quality supports and services
	Make it easy for families to connect with primary care, behavioral health care and trauma-informed supports and services	
Quality Early Learning	Increase the availability of affordable, high quality early learning centers and programs	Children will have the high-quality early learning experiences they need to thrive in school
	Increase alignment across all early learning programs and between early learning programs and public schools	
Better Place	Put into place strong cross-sector EC initiatives	Communities will be better places for young children and families

**AS A RESULT, ALL YOUNG CHILDREN
WILL THRIVE!**

More Information

EARLY CHILDHOOD COALITIONS: MENU OF ACTIVITIES

Below are a few of the activities Coalitions are using to achieve the objectives listed in the Theory of Change.



Family-Friendly Communities

- Partner with Libraries to offered shared programming
- Public Awareness Campaigns (billboard, PSA, events, Facebook Groups)
- Business Ambassador Groups
- HOPE Framework
- Presentations to School Boards on EC Trauma
- Identification of Community Champions
- Community Baby Showers
- Thinkscape Installations to Promote Positive Parent-Child Interactions



Strong Parenting Skills

- Parent Cafes
- VROOM
- Neighborhood-Based Family Centers
- Family Leadership Training
- Fun Events for Families
- Playgroups
- Early Literacy Events



Developmental and/or Depression Screening

- New Screening Sites
- Standardized Screening Tools
- Support for Data Entry



High-Quality Supports and Services

- Professional Development on Evidence-Based Practices
- Cross-Disciplinary Work Groups
- Community Health Workers
- Partnerships with Police Departments to Link Children Experiencing Trauma with Supports (ACERT)
- Use of Data to Inform Practice



High-Quality Early Learning

- Curriculum Alignment
- Transition Planning
- Pyramid Model Training

More Information

TALKING POINTS

Provide purpose. Example: Talking points help explain a coalition's purpose clearly and consistently by breaking down complex ideas into focused, accessible messages. They boost confidence, support advocacy, and ensure that everyone—from community members to policymakers—understands the coalition's goals and impact.

Target Audience: General Stakeholders

State the Vision	Explain the Problems	Explain ECCs Solution	Describe Achievements
<p>We all want to ensure that every child has the strong foundation they need to thrive. <i>Our vision is to create a coordinated, inclusive early childhood system where families are empowered, communities are engaged, and services are aligned—so that every child, regardless of their circumstances, has access to the support, opportunities, and nurturing environments they need to reach their full potential.</i></p>	<p><i>The lack of coordination among child and family programs—due to separate funding streams, regulations, and data systems—results in isolated services and decisions made without local or family input. This leads to inefficiencies, duplicated efforts, limited outcome tracking, and makes it harder for families to access the comprehensive support they need.</i></p>	<p><i>ECCs address the lack of coordination and family voice by bringing together families, professionals, and leaders to set priorities, align resources, and resolve service gaps. They also promote family-friendly workplaces and raise community awareness about the importance of supporting young children and families.</i></p>	<p><i>The Early Childhood Coalition's achievements have led to earlier identification and support for children's developmental needs, smoother educational transitions, and stronger community collaboration—empowering families, enhancing child well-being, and fostering family-friendly environments.</i></p>

Investing in early childhood is investing in our future. When we work together to support young children, we strengthen families, improve education outcomes, and build healthier, more prosperous communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the dedication and collective effort of the many individuals and organizations who believe deeply in the power of early childhood as a foundation for lifelong success. We are grateful to the community partners, advocates, families, and leaders who contributed their time, expertise, and lived experience to shaping this resource.

The Alliance is also deeply grateful to Allie Wexler, who poured her time, creativity, and care into the design and vision for this revised handbook.

Please visit the NH Alliance of Early Childhood Coalitions website for more information or to reach out with questions.

<https://www.nhaecc.org>

