



GEORGIA
family connection
PARTNERSHIP

GAFCP Key Stakeholder Interviews, Fall 2023

Report of Key Findings

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Introduction

In the fall of 2023, Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) asked researchers from its statewide outcomes team to conduct individual interviews with key stakeholders, namely Board Members, state partners, and Georgia legislators. A total of 15 key stakeholder interviews¹ were conducted. This process of getting stakeholder feedback has been implemented periodically throughout the history of GaFCP.

The primary purpose of these interviews was to obtain the opinions of these key stakeholders concerning the value added by the state-level functions of GaFCP, particularly the salient ways that GaFCP facilitates access and serves as a conduit to local Collaboratives for stakeholders, anchors multi- or cross-county work, and provides data needed for effective decision-making and supports the use of data. Stakeholders could discuss these 'value adds' of GaFCP from the lens of their state-level position and of the Family Connection local Collaboratives.

Depending on the respondent, the interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes, and all interviews followed the same semi-structured interview protocol. Respondents were assured that specific comments would not be attributed to individuals – and that data would be aggregated for analyses. Interview questions asked about the informant's relationship, history, and benefits from its affiliation with the GAFCP, the influence of the Partnership on Georgia and its communities, and GaFCP programs and initiatives, including its data work. Toward the interview's conclusion, respondents were also asked what GaFCP did well, what could improve, and their thoughts on the agency's future direction.

Findings

This report summarizes the interview findings organized by the protocol's main topics. Although this report identifies organizational names (Appendix 1), specific comments are not attributed to

¹ One state partner interview was conducted with two individuals.

individual respondents². The report reflects substantial themes, including special emphasis on comments made by multiple participants.

Respondents' History with the GaFCP

Almost all respondents (n=14) had a long history with GaFCP (usually ten years or longer), including some in multiple capacities related to the well-being of children and families, such as in current or prior professional positions at the Department of Public Health, Department of Education and the Division of Family and Children Services. The nature of these professional relationships included working with GaFCP on statewide coalitions and initiatives, working on securing legislative funding for GaFCP, serving as a local Collaborative chair or board member, supporting funding GaFCP, grant writing, and serving on the GaFCP board.

“Having [GaFCP] as a partner helps us connect to grassroots efforts in counties, know what resources might exist in counties, and understand how we can help.”

State Partner Representative

Benefits to the Respondents' Organizations from Affiliation with GaFCP

Respondents (n=11) mostly described GaFCP as a supportive partner facilitating access to Georgia's local communities statewide and providing “local intimate knowledge,” considered critical support to their agency's initiatives. For example, one state partner commented, “Family Connection Partnership has a statewide reach with their local community Collaboratives, so they're often a partner that our agency looks at when we need to think about local initiatives and work that needs to be done at that community level.” Another partner echoed, “Through the years, we've done different partnerships with GaFCP. It's that relationship that they have at the local level that allows us to use that knowledge and experience to support initiatives we might have.” Still, other respondents depicted GaFCP as a valuable research partner, citing their work managing Georgia's KIDS COUNT data (n=5) and assisting with local resource deployment (n=2). Concerning resource deployment, one respondent mentioned that when it is time for their state agency to launch initiatives in local communities (e.g., Covid relief funds), they call upon GaFCP to identify which communities have the interest, capacity,

“We feel that GAFCP is so critical to Georgia's child and family well-being infrastructure that it is one organization where we provide annual funding.”

State Partner Representative

² The 15 respondents included four Board members, nine state-level partners, and two state legislators.

and readiness to receive these resources. Some examples of respondents' comments include:

- "We operate at the state level. We don't have boots on the ground when we need to unroll an initiative locally. Family Connection provides the knowledge and understanding of local communities that helps us figure out how to fit in."
- "Family Connection is a conduit – it provides access and coordination for us."
- "[GaFCP] has the pulse of what's happening."

In addition, one state partner stated that GaFCP helps them develop state-level policies. At the same time, another respondent uses the local Collaboratives as a broker to provide local training.

Benefits GaFCP Creates for Georgia and its Communities

Interview respondents explained the numerous benefits of GaFCP for Georgia and its communities. Many (n=11) described GaFCP as a state-level "anchor partner" and the "go-to if you need to collaborate." The state-level GaFCP is where "local communities go to figure out how to get things done." One respondent commented, "The local Collaboratives usually only have one paid staff – the state has a whole staff ready to help them." GaFCP provides data tools and strategic planning that help Collaboratives move forward with their initiatives.

For example, one state partner commented, "If they were to disappear, that would leave a major hole in our system. They are an asset in Georgia that many other states don't have. I'm not sure there's any other state with Collaboratives that work in every county, which makes Georgia much stronger for having that." Some also believed that GaFCP supports the breakdown of state

"Not only have they been helpful in me doing my work, but they've been helpful in this state in shining a light on all of the things that bring together strong communities."

State Partner Representative

agency silos and helps implement or support statewide programs and initiatives (n=5), with one interviewee noting, "They are good at leading the charge and ensuring that we're not duplicating services." One additional respondent thought the GaFCP work helps move the needle on Georgia KIDS COUNT indicators (n=2). Another mentioned that the state level GaFCP "enlightens local policymakers and

stakeholders."

At the same time, most respondents also discussed the benefits of GaFCP at the county level. Specifically, according to ten respondents, the Partnership provides a local structure for a cross-agency focus on issues related to children and families (n=10). Similarly, some respondents noted that GaFCP provides "real-time, real-life, local context and information" (n=7). They do so

by serving as local resource hubs (n=4). One interviewee stated, "The Family Connection Collaboratives are where the work happens. They serve as a gap filler and a hub to connect people with resources, get assistance, or meet their needs." "Whenever a community needs to address an issue, someone has to be the convener. In Georgia, Family Connection fills that role." One respondent also added that local Collaboratives help to maximize local resources and avoid duplication of effort.

The Value-Add of the GaFCP

When asked about the value added to Georgia and its communities because of the work of the GaFCP, respondents noted the following key contributions:

- Assisting with brokering partner relationships (n=9) – "They are a great connector."
- Having the pulse on and helping to address the needs of local communities (n=8).
- Raising the visibility of important issues, such as the Civic Health Index, grade-level reading, early learning and childcare, and accurate Census-taking (n=6) – "They worked to activate local Collaboratives to be a part of the Census and ensure that communities were accurately counted and engaged, which made a difference."
- Having a presence in every county, relatedly, ensuring every county has a voice, not just the largest or most highly resourced (n=6).
- Initiating "innovative" partnerships with other agencies, such as the Georgia Municipal Association, on state initiatives related to children, youth, and families (n=6).
- Providing data to help local communities plan and measure progress (n=4).
- Reducing the number of silos by increasing the number of partnerships (n=4).
- Serving as a trusted, "non-governmental" voice (n=3) – "They take issues happening locally and lift those to the state level."
- Ensuring the sustainability of local programs and other valuable community-level work (n=2).
- Influencing the improvement of Georgia's KIDS COUNT indicator data (n=2).

"They organized all this work for us around community partnerships because that wasn't in my wheelhouse. I don't think I could do this work if I didn't have a partnership with GaFCP."

State Partner Representative

People or Organizational Connections Resulting from GaFCP

Respondents discussed the connections between people or organizations facilitated by GaFCP, describing them as the catalyst that creates connections and "the only state agency that brings together all communities." "In every community, people have the time and inclination to help.

Family Connection gives them a place to apply their talents." While there was overall agreement that there were "so many" examples of this occurring, when pressed for specific examples, respondents cited a diverse set of assisted connections, including:

"I think I could probably come up with an example for every sector where GaFCP has helped [with relationships]."

State Partner Representative

- Program developers of new statewide initiatives
- State-level committees, such as the Behavioral Health Commission, Get Georgia Reading Campaign, and the Get Georgia Reading Summit
- School systems and early childhood education
- Human services such as daycare, food supplies, and housing campaigns
- Local healthcare providers, such as pediatricians, emergency departments, and hospitals
- Local community organizations, such as the Rotary Clubs, libraries, and Recreation and Parks Departments
- Local businesses engaged with health and educational issues
- Local elected officials
- State agencies or representatives, such as the Department of Public Health, the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), the Department of Education (GaDOE), and Department of Justice (DJJ), the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS)
- State-level advocacy groups, such as Voices for Georgia's Children

Several respondents offered specific examples of organizational connections that have been made resulting from GaFCP. They described how GaFCP accomplished the following:

- Connected Prevent Child Abuse Georgia and DFCS
- Integrated Prevent Child Abuse Georgia into local communities
- Helped connect Voices for Georgia's Children with relevant state agencies, such as DECAL, DJJ, and GaDOE
- Assisted DECAL with access to school systems to ensure good food in schools
- Facilitated Atlanta housing folks working with rural communities to share lessons learned on affordable housing

Respondents also provided local examples of these connections. In one community, there was a federal grant aiding childcare. When that grant was over, the local Family Connection Collaborative coordinator knew how to connect various partners so that the work could continue – otherwise, it would have ended. Another community connected child abuse prevention, foster care, and health care systems to support their county's goals.

Examples of Funds Leveraged or Generated by GaFCP

Interview respondents were somewhat less conversant about how GaFCP uses its position to leverage or generate funding in the state.

“There have been instances where an organization’s been hesitant to invest in a state agency, but their partnership with the GaFCP made the difference.”

State Partner Representative

- Helping state partners or local entities identify funding sources to support their initiatives (n=2)
- Serving as the fiscal agent for partner funding (n=1)
- Serving as a trusted steward for potential funders (n=1)
- State-level GaFCP helps with identifying grant sources and proposal preparation – and then how to implement grants (e.g., 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant (n=3)
- At the local level, Collaboratives using GaFCP funding as grant-required match dollars or to leverage additional private dollars (n=2)
- Leveraging funds at four to five times the investment (n=1)
- Local Collaboratives can serve as the fiscal agent for grants to a community (n=1)

GaFCP Influence on the State and Local Agency Work

According to interview respondents, GaFCP influences the work of state and local agencies in different ways, including:

- Modeling, facilitating, or organizing community partnerships (n=8) - they set the example for how to do it
- Providing a county-level go-to person for state agencies (n=4)
- Highlighting prevalent issues at the county level (n=4)
- Effective lobbying, including providing communities the information they need to lobby their legislators (n=2)
- Have effectively promoted a focus on collective impact
- State agencies are better coordinated when working on overlapping issues
- State and local agencies better informed on legislative issues and how to effectively lobby
- State agencies can use state-level GaFCP as a broker between them and the local communities to get resources, training, and services delivered

- “All partner organizations can hear from each other, think together, plan together, implement together.”
- State and local agencies are both more data-oriented (for planning and evaluation) as a result of GaFCP data (primarily Kids Count)

Programs, Services, and Policies Created or Facilitated by GaFCP

When asked about the programs, services, and policies GaFCP has created or facilitated, most respondents (n=9) described their work managing the Georgia KIDS COUNT data as “informing practice and policy at the state level.” Still, other respondents mentioned the following:

- Serving as a key partner for the Get Georgia Reading initiative (n=7)
- Partnering with Communities in Schools of Georgia and various school systems on a dropout prevention initiative (n=1)
- Increasing the number of Prevent Child Abuse Georgia local chapters (n=1)
- Leading the campaign to promote accurate Census-counting in Georgia’s counties (n=1)
- Maintaining a strong focus on data collection and evaluation, touted as having “strengthened the field overall, particularly at the local and state levels.” (n=3)
- Initiating “transparent” work on racial equity and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), “building the capacity of not just their state office but within the local Collaboratives” (n=1)
- Leading Georgia’s work on civic health (n=2)
- Advocating for statewide policy (n=1)
- Driving the quality care movement within early childhood education (n=1)
- GaFCP’s lobbying affects all state policies (n=1)
- Community Partnership for Supporting Youth (n=1)
- Helping improve parenting skills (n=1)

Uses of GaFCP Data

According to key stakeholders, the KIDS COUNT data work is highly valued, and different entities use the GaFCP data. “Everyone who works with children and families uses KIDS COUNT...for setting goals, establishing needs, preparing grant applications, planning, evaluation, and determining where agencies should put their resources.” Mostly cited were state agencies (e.g., the State PACES Action/Department of Health, Governor’s Office of Student

“I think that the state government uses [KIDS COUNT data], and the Collaboratives use it to partner with others in the community. I suspect employers use it when looking at where they want to relocate or what healthcare looks like in a county. I’m sure hospitals and the Department of Health also use the KIDS COUNT data. I think that data gets used a great deal.”

GaFCP Board Member

Achievement, and Department of Health, Department of Childhood Education and Learning, Division of Public Health) (n=8) and the local Family Connection Collaboratives (n=8). Others named the local Division of Family and Children’s Services offices (n=2), school districts (n=3), GaFCP Board Members (n=1), child welfare nonprofits (n=2), local employers (n=1), funding agencies (n=1), city officials (n=1), local youth councils (n=1), advocacy agencies (n=1), legislators (n=1), chambers of commerce (n=1), and local court systems (n=1).

Described by one respondent as “a treasure trove of information,” how these entities use the KIDS COUNT data are many, including:

- Showcasing community needs, such as in competitive grant applications or for identifying deficits (n=4)
- Measuring progress on circumstances related to children and families, including establishing baseline conditions and determining changes over time (n=2)
- Influencing or supporting state policy (n=2)
- Lobbying for children and family issues or GaFCP funding – showing its progress/effectiveness (n=2)
- Comparing and contrasting county-level data (n=1)
- Comparing Georgia to other states over time (n=1)
- Developing additional statewide metrics, such as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (n=1)

“Gaye is all about metrics, and we talk about metrics at every board meeting. If you’re going to count metrics, the real measure is what’s happening with the KIDS COUNT. It’s what’s happening on the ground with improving measurements, which I think has something to do with GaFCP.”

GaFCP Board Member

GaFCP Strengths, Improvement Areas, and Future Directions

Interview respondents noted many GaFCP strengths, often focused on making connections, convening partners, and developing partnerships (n=7). For example, one informant commented, “They create opportunities for people to get together and make decisions. They facilitate these opportunities as an outside entity coming into a community.” “They serve as the centerpiece and connect others through their efforts, data, and being in every county.”

Other strengths described include the following:

- Measuring outcomes and conducting research (n=4)
- Supporting strong local Collaboratives (n=3) – “You have to give credit to the state that they are that strong because of the technical assistance, the training they provide, and the help with the data collection. That’s a real credit to the GaFCP state office.”
- Coordinating resources (n=1)

- Identifying needs (n=1) - "Elected officials don't want to hear about gaps, but GaFCP keeps people aware of what we need – making the data available and pushing it out so that people can't ignore it."
- Focusing on collective impact (n=1)
- Focusing on race, equity, and inclusion (n=1)
- Keeping state agencies aware of local issues (n=1)
- Supporting the Get Georgia Reading initiative (n=1)
- Bridging between policy and advocacy (n=1)
- Articulating the needs of the state, including understanding the needs of rural Georgia (n=1)
- Staffing their organization with quality individuals – "I adore everybody I work with at GaFCP. They are wonderful. I don't think I go two days without talking to a Family Connection person." (n=1)

When asked what GaFCP could do better, most respondents said that what GaFCP is already doing is great. Still, they offered many suggestions for GaFCP to consider doing differently or stronger. The most frequently mentioned was implementing better publicity of their work (n=8). GaFCP should clarify to other state agencies and policymakers what resources they have and how they could be helpful. Relatedly, another respondent stated that not everyone knows what services, data, and resources they have to offer – at the state and local levels. Another stated that GaFCP needs to tell more stories about the success of local Collaboratives and connect its work to state priorities. In general, GaFCP must do a better job of marketing its success. One respondent said, "I'm a key stakeholder, and I don't know everything they do."

The remaining suggestions for what GaFCP could do better include:

- Communicate their own needs outward (n=2)
- Leverage the stories and data of Georgia's organizations to support change (n=2)
- Lobby – or partner with others for lobbying and advocacy (n=2)
- Use lessons learned from convening stakeholders at the local level to convene at the state level (n=1)
- Focus efforts on housing and homelessness (n=1)
- Provide tutorials and workshops to communities concerning fund-raising (n=1)
- Work towards a source of permanent sustained funding for Collaboratives (n=1)
- Increase the number of Family Connection Coordinators in some counties (n=1)
- Train FCP staff to be even more assertive "to get in the door." (n=1)
- Align the GaFCP funding priorities with the interests of the communities (n=1)
- Strengthen partnerships with state-level partners – "Go back and deepen and strengthen the relationships with state agencies and some of the [GaFCP] ecosystem partners. Occasionally, they can be seen as a little territorial at the state level. Just continue to build the relationships is what I see as opportunities that could help Family Connection as they go into the future." (n=1)

Finally, when respondents were asked about future directions for GaFCP, they reiterated that what GaFCP is already doing is great but also provided many ideas for the agency to consider, including:

- Create a visual/infographic of the GaFCP model (e.g., how it does its work) (n=1)
- Develop/disseminate a list of the state's priority areas (n=1)
- Disseminate the model and its success to other states (n=1)
- Work to make sure all state policies and programs have a two-generational approach –parents and children (n=1)
- Engage in thoughtful strategic planning (n=1)
- Focus on children's mental health and developmental health earlier – for example, by ages 4 and 5 (n=1)
- Remain opportunistic, such as the Census work they facilitated (n=1), yet also mission-focused and data-driven (n=1)
- Assist communities with sustainability planning (n=1)
- Train/empower local partners so that they are not fully reliant on the Family Connection Coordinator to move initiatives forward (n=1)
- Publicize their work to ensure they remain visible (n=1)
- Attempt to move the Children's Trust Fund to GaFCP (n=1)
- Work for better integration or collaboration between GaFCP and PCAGA (n=1)

Concluding Remarks and Next Steps

The GaFCP operates somewhat in the shadows of the work of the county Collaboratives, making it sometimes difficult for stakeholders to separate the value adds of the agency without framing them in terms of local Family Connection Collaboratives. Regardless, several key value-adds of the GaFCP emerged from the key stakeholder interview study, including:

1. Modeling, facilitating, or brokering partner relationships and community partnerships
2. Offering a county-level go-to person for state agencies
3. Identifying and helping to address local needs
4. Managing the Georgia KIDS COUNT data
5. Raising the visibility of important issues, such as the Civic Health Index, grade-level reading, early learning and childcare, and accurate Census-taking

Moving forward, it is recommended that GaFCP expand its efforts to publicize its work at the state level to ensure others are more aware of the full gamut of services GaFCP provides.

Similarly, it is also suggested that the agency communicate outward its own needs. This will allow its partners to help GaFCP or advocate for them when appropriate.

Appendix A – List of Interview Respondents

Board members

1. Jamie Loyd
2. Rick Horder
3. Bryan Williams
4. Natalyn Archibong

State partners

1. Susan Adams - DECAL
2. LaMarva Ivory - DFCS
3. Julie Morrill - DOE
4. Deborah Chosewood – former DFCS and current DOE
5. Emily Ann Vall - Resilient GA
6. Katie Landes - VOICES
7. Brian Wallace - GMA
8. Katie Dempsey – State Legislation Representative
9. Blake Tillery – State Legislation Senator
10. David Tanner – CVIOG UGA
11. Lizzie Smith & Dahlia Brown – Woodruff Foundation