GEORGIA
family connection
PARTNERSHIP

GaFCP Cohort Coordinator Interviews
Key Findings
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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the results of the qualitative interviews conducted with a sample of GaFCP's Strategy Cohorts. The interviews examined perceptions of progress toward the identification of how the GaFCP Cohort process has affected collaborative functioning and strategy development and implementation. Data were used to assess the following:

- Coordinator's perception of the Cohort Process
- Strategy development and implementation
- Challenges, opportunities, and changes in the community

INTERVIEW DATA

A random sample of 12 participants from GaFCP Strategy Cohorts were asked to participate in semi-structured interviews including, 6 Community Partnerships for Supporting Youth Cohort (CPSY) coordinators, 3 Family Support Cohort coordinators, and 3 Promoting Women's Health Cohort coordinators.

APPROACH

Interview questions were developed in partnership with the GaFCP's Outcome Team evaluation strategy. A Reflexive Thematic Analysis was utilized for data analysis. Qualitative methodology was chosen to provide context and depth of understanding to the Cohort process.

RESULTS

How has being part of a GaFCP Cohort impacted collaboratives challenges and opportunities?

- Most participants identified the expansion of programs, incentives, and being able to identify new partnerships within their counties as the main opportunities afforded to the collaboratives by being a part of the Cohort.
- The main challenges identified by participants included COVID-19 delays and adaptations, concerns about sustainability post-Cohort funding, and how time-consuming it can be when there is burn-out and turn over within partnerships.

In what ways has the GaFCP Cohort participation facilitated the exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices among counties within the Cohort?

- Coordinators frequently reported one of the best things about being in the Cohort is the exchange of ideas and resources between other collaboratives. Namely the support and collaborative brainstorming that is facilitated through the Cohort process.

How have Collaborative strategies contributed to positive changes in the community?

- Overall, participants had a difficult time identifying specific strategies that were contributing to changes in the community, rather identifying **programming support and**

partnership building as the main contributing factors that contributed to positive changes.
- Additionally, participants had difficulty identifying **specific** changes that have resulted because of their participation in the Cohort.

What role has the GaFCP Cohort participation played in enhancing collaboratives ability to identify and address systemic barriers that impact the outcomes for children and families in their counties?
- Participants mainly reported that Cohort participation has highlighted systemic barriers that they were already aware of, namely helping them understand how these barriers affect other community issues related to their work and new ideas on how to address these issues.

How has data utilization and evaluation been used to drive decision-making and strategy implementation within Collaboratives?
- Every participant named ways in which data utilization guided decision-making, specifically CPSY coordinators were able to name different data sources that contributed to changes in priorities, such as graduation rates. Other participants said data utilization informed their annual plans and logic model development.

How has coordinator knowledge and skill evolved or expanded through involvement in the GaFCP Cohort?
- Most coordinators said that Cohort participation allowed them to grow both personally and professionally, particularly when it comes to the importance of data utilization, the nuances of their Cohort's issue in their community, and gaining skills in community collaboration across sectors.
- Conference participation and technical assistance were both identified as contributing to this growth.

How has the Cohort experience influenced the long-term commitment to addressing the identified challenges and maintaining a focus on the population of interest?
- Participants reported that being a part of the Cohort has allowed the collaborative to focus their efforts and identify actionable steps to affect change with the identified challenges and build partnerships to increase the long-term commitment to affect change. Namely through capacity building and the additional bandwidth that additional funding allows.

Has participation in the Cohort directly contributed to developing, implementing, and evaluating comprehensive strategies?

- Most participants had difficulty identifying ways in which the Cohort directly contributed to developing, implementing, and evaluating strategies, rather citing that they've focused more on the strategies that were already in place.

How has the additional funding impacted collaboratives/collaborative's strategy?

- Participants all agreed that the additional funding has impacted their collaborative's functioning and impact positively mainly in the following ways:
  - Ability to expand resources and services
  - Enhanced participation engagement
  - Strengthened community support and partnerships
  - Improved program efficacy and outcomes
  - Strengthened collaborative foundations and relationships

Does GaFCPs Cohort process drive positive change and improvements for children and families in Georgia?

- Participants identified several ways in which the Cohort process drives positive changes including:
  - Improved educational outcomes
  - Increased intentionality and accountability
  - Enhanced service delivery and resource allocation
  - Community engagement and partnership
  - Expansion of reach and effectiveness
  - Strengthened community collaboration
  - Increased community awareness and involvement

Key Takeaways:

1. **Opportunities and Engagement**: The GaFCP Cohort process has enabled the expansion of programs and partnerships, leading to enhanced community engagement and support despite challenges like COVID-19 and sustainability concerns.
2. **Data-Driven Impact and Strategy Development**: Participation has fostered data-driven decision-making and professional growth among coordinators, contributing to improved educational outcomes and community services, though direct links to new strategy development are less clear.
3. **Long-term Community Change:** The process and additional funding have strengthened collaborative foundations, increased community awareness, and facilitated a focus on long-term commitment to address systemic barriers and community needs.

Detailed Findings

Italicized quotes indicate participant responses during interviews that support the findings

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Cohort Impact on Challenges and Opportunities

1. **Challenges Addressed:**
   - **Logistical Issues and COVID-19 and Limited Resources:** Collaboratives faced logistical hurdles and the need for adaptation due to COVID-19, affecting initiatives like parenting classes and educational programs. Additionally, collaboratives expressed that limited resources within communities made their efforts challenging. However, the Cohort experience provided a platform for learning and adapting to these challenges effectively.

"I think that being a part of the Cohort definitely made us work in the community together more and start realizing that we can pull our resources together and have a larger impact. That helped us overcome some challenges of just resources in general, whether that be funding or just people to get the work done, pulling volunteers, things of that nature together."

   - **Sustainability and Burnout**: Concerns regarding sustainability post-Cohort funding and burnout due to high turnover were common. Despite these issues, the Cohort framework has enabled collaboratives to share solutions and mitigate some of these challenges.

2. **Opportunities Gained:**
   - **Partnership and Community Engagement:** The Cohort process has significantly facilitated new partnerships and bolstered community engagement. Ben Hill and Butts County, for instance, highlighted the incorporation of new partners and the strengthening of community relationships, enhancing the effectiveness of their initiatives. For example, one coordinator said:

"It's [the Cohort] *actually broaden the scope of what people are doing within the community. What I found as far as some of the work that we're doing with the CPSY Cohort we've actually been able to partner and connect some of the dots for our community partners. So I would say that that was impactful. Sometimes we have some of these pockets of organizations that are best kept secrets. So having this particular strategy team and Cohort meet we've connected some of those partners and persons together to foster some relationships and build upon their work."*

- **Sharing of Ideas and Resources:** Across multiple counties, a recurring benefit was the ability to share and brainstorm ideas. This collective problem-solving approach led to innovative solutions, such as Butts County's shift to one-on-one meetings and Lamar's community-wide events, which have enhanced service delivery and engagement. For example, one coordinator noted:

"Hearing what works for other counties and even counties who are already part of the Cohort. Hearing them share and bounce ideas off of each other it gives you new ideas even if you're not taking that exact one, just hearing it and hearing how other counties have been successful, it's like, oh, you know, we could do something like that!"

- **Expansion of Services:** The Cohorts have enabled a broadening of services and outreach, as seen in Macon and Lumpkin Counties, with initiatives like mobile refrigerated vans and grant acquisition, responding to community needs. This was mainly attributable skill development and expanded capacity as a result of being in a Cohort.

Cohort Facilitation in the Exchange of Ideas, Resources, and Best Practices?

1. **Facilitated Exchange of Ideas and Resources:** Members across counties, such as those from Ben Hill and Butts County, have highlighted the Cohort's role in enabling an exchange of ideas and resources. Notable quotes from participants illustrate this:
"But it's definitely exchanged, a lot of resources idea wise..." and *"I think that's probably been the biggest impact as we learn from each other..."*
These exchanges have occurred both in-person and virtually, allowing for broader participation and continuity despite logistical challenges.

2. **Implementation and Adaptation of Successful Programs:** Counties have benefited from learning about successful initiatives implemented by others within the Cohort. Examples include life skills programs, parenting meetings, and community engagement strategies, which have been adapted and implemented based on the shared experiences from different counties.
"And I get a lot of questions and emails about X program and folks that were wanting to give that a shot..."

3. **Enhanced Community Specific Solutions:** Discussions within the Cohort have led to the identification and adaptation of community-specific solutions that cater to unique challenges faced by different counties. This has enabled counties to implement targeted interventions effectively.

4. **Promotion of Resource Sharing and Community Involvement:** A shift towards a more collaborative and community-focused approach has been observed, with counties moving from a 'this is ours' mentality to a 'this is the community's' perspective, facilitating better resource sharing and involvement.

"This is not our money. This is Webster County's money..." and *"We really like the Cohort part of it that we can share resources..."*

Collaborative Strategies Contribution to Positive Changes in the Community

1. **Challenges in Identifying Specific Contributory Strategies:**
   - Many participants expressed difficulty pinpointing distinct strategies that directly led to community changes, instead highlighting overarching initiatives like life skills programs or school engagement efforts. For example,

"I guess it is not really a strategy per se, but to see it be so effective... to get those kids involved..."
   - When asked "Can you provide specific instances where participation in the Cohort directly contributed to positive changes in the community?" others said sentiments such as, *"No, I can't. I don't think so. No."*
   - This suggests a broader challenge within the Cohorts in clearly delineating and measuring the direct impacts of specific strategies on the community.

2. **Lack of Clarity on Specific Community Changes:** Participants indicated difficulties in articulating the specific changes resulting from their participation in the Cohort. This reflects a broader issue in connecting collaborative strategies to tangible community outcomes.
   - Participants from Crawford and Lamar Counties noted the introduction of new ideas and energy into the collaborative but struggled to link these directly to concrete community changes.
   - This points to a potential gap in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of collaborative strategies in driving discernible improvements.

3. **Recognition of Programming Support and Partnership Building:** Despite challenges in identifying specific strategies, participants stated a belief in the effectiveness of programming support and partnership building as key contributors to positive community changes.

"I think that we have a really strong collaborative to begin with. I think that the funding has just opened the doors. For us to be able to just strengthen some of those relationships that were already there. But now we're able to provide something for their programs. And that has kind of improved [participation] and I feel like they feel more a part of the collaborative just because

there is more of a relationship there now.'' and *"...our strategy contributes positive changes to our community every chance we get..."*

4. **Innovative Adaptations and Community Outreach:** Despite the noted challenges, some counties like Lanier and Lumpkin have developed unique initiatives such as kinship support groups and educational programs targeting systemic barriers, hinting at the potential for collaborative strategies to yield positive community impacts.

"We developed the kinship support group... it's really taken us a while to really get it going." (Lanier County).

5. **Data and Feedback-Driven Revisions:** Some counties, such as Meriwether and Webster, have made strategic adjustments based on community feedback and data analysis, leading to the refinement of existing programs and the introduction of new initiatives.

"...we had a huge, strategy team meeting... that set my board on fire." and *"...we tweaked our plan and added some different programs..."*

Cohort Role in Identifying and Addressing Systemic Barriers

1. **Highlighting Pre-existing Systemic Barriers:** Participants across several counties reported that Cohort participation has primarily helped in highlighting systemic barriers they were already aware of, providing a broader perspective on these issues.

"I think it [Cohort participation] *has highlighted and it's allowed me to see who wasn't at the table."*

2. **Enhanced Understanding and New Approaches:** The Cohort has fostered a better understanding of how systemic barriers interlink with other community issues and has spurred new ideas on tackling these barriers effectively.

"We've been so focused on XYZ that we haven't even attempted to look at this [systemic barriers]. *Now we are taking a step back to look at it with a broader lens..."*

"Addressing them [systemic barriers] *in the best way that we can... being a part of the Cohort gives you new and unique ways to do that and new ideas."*

3. **Challenges in Direct Identification and Addressing of Barriers:** While the Cohort has aided in highlighting issues, participants like those from Lamar and Dekalb County expressed difficulties in directly linking Cohort participation to the identification and resolution of new systemic barriers.

"I would say that, if we have identified them, it was of course helpful... but I can't say that we would not have not identified those had we not been a part of the Cohort."

4. **Strategic Focus and Community Outreach:** Some collaboratives have leveraged Cohort insights to focus on significant areas such as socio-economic inequality, health access, and educational challenges related to their primary strategies.

"It's been more of a focus on education... dispelling a lot of myths and misperceptions of people living in poverty." and

"Well, our systemic barriers, first of all, transportation is a huge barrier... we continue to push for that..."

Data Utilization and Evaluation in Decision-Making and Strategy Implementation

1. **Guidance in Decision-Making:** All participants highlighted the significant role of data in informing their decision-making processes. For instance, Ben Hill emphasized the use of student performance and local data to inform life skills education and community interventions. Butts County detailed how demographic shifts influence their community outreach strategies, demonstrating the dynamic nature of data-driven decision-making.

2. **Influence on Strategic Priorities:** Specifically, CPSY coordinators noted how different data sources, such as graduation rates, have led to adjustments in their strategic priorities. This shift is evident in Crawford County's focus on increasing graduation rates and Lamar's emphasis on addressing low birth weight and WIC participation. Such data-driven insights have been pivotal in realigning collaborative efforts towards pressing community needs.

3. **Annual Plans and Logic Model Development:** Collaboratives like those in Lanier and Lumpkin Counties mentioned how data analysis has been crucial in developing their annual plans and logic models. Lanier County, for example, used data to identify populations requiring urgent attention, while Lumpkin County's community assessment has been guiding their upstream intervention strategies.

4. **Challenges and Successes in Data Implementation:** While the utilization of data has evidently been beneficial, challenges remain. Dekalb County reported partial use of data, indicating potential areas for more comprehensive application. Nevertheless, successes are notable as well, with Macon County using data to celebrate improvements in graduation rates, showcasing the positive impact of data-informed strategies.

5. **Identification of Systemic Barriers:** Data utilization has also enhanced collaboratives' abilities to identify and address systemic barriers. Meriwether County's efforts to tackle transportation and healthcare accessibility issues highlight how data can uncover and quantify systemic challenges, guiding targeted interventions.

6. **Community-Specific Adjustments:** Tailoring strategies to community-specific data has led to the development of more relevant and effective programs. Webster County's integration of early childhood programs in response to daycare shortages and Worth County's focus on workforce development underscore the customized approach enabled by data analysis.

Coordinator Knowledge and Skill Development

1. **Professional and Personal Development:**
   Coordinators experienced growth both professionally and personally. One coordinator reflected, *"I feel like everything is so much more personal now...being a part of the Cohort has really opened my eyes."*

2. **Training and Conference Contributions:**
   Specific opportunities that coordinators indicated as the most impactful included conferences. A coordinator highlighted, *"I will never forget the healthy mother healthy babies conference...it really stuck with me."* Additionally, coordinators mentioned to Cohort meet ups and technical assistance were instrumental in expanding coordinators' knowledge bases.

3. **Broadened Understanding of Local Issues and Application of Learned Strategies:**
   Engagement with the Cohort led to a richer comprehension of systemic issues within communities. Additionally, learning from the coordinators encouraged the practical application of new ideas, as seen in: *"hearing other people talk about their ideas...makes you want to bring those back to your county."*

Cohort Influence on the Long-Term Commitment to Addressing the Identified Challenges

1. **Vision Reinforcement:** Participation in the Cohort program has reinforced the strategic vision of the collaboratives, aiding in clearer planning and goal-setting. As one coordinator expressed,
"It helped strengthen that vision and that resolve...definitely kind of rekindles [our commitment]."

2. **Resource Optimization for Sustainability:**
   Collaboratives have learned to maximize their funding and resources, ensuring the sustainability of their programs beyond the life of the Cohort. A representative remarked,

"I think it's helped us...stretch our dollars and our resources...so that even once the Cohort or the dollars go away, we are still able to hopefully continue our work."

3. **Formation and Maintenance of Strategic Teams:**
   The Cohort experience has led to the development of focused teams aimed at tackling specific issues within the community, as noted by another coordinator:

"The Cohort has...opened eyes to being more focused on those things that we're really having issues with."

4. **Evolution of Collaborative Efforts and Integration with Broader Community Goals:**
   - The experience has transformed the approach of collaboratives from unfocused activities to targeted strategic efforts. One coordinator observed significant growth, stating,

"It has really helped us move forward in all the work we're doing...we're getting more people joining and wanting to be a part."

   - Collaboratives have integrated their efforts with broader community initiatives, such as workforce development, enhancing the long-term impact. *"By combining it with our Chamber of Commerce...it brings it all together,"* explained a coordinator, highlighting a community-wide approach.

Developing, Implementing, and Evaluating Comprehensive Strategies

1. **Challenges in Directly Attributing Contributions:** The majority of participants expressed challenges in directly attributing the Cohort's contribution to the development, implementation, and evaluation of new strategies. Instead, they highlighted an emphasis on enhancing existing strategies rather than creating new ones. For instance, one coordinator mentioned, *"No, I can't [provide specific instances]... I don't think so."*

2. **Existing Strategy Enhancement and Focus on Pre-existing Initiatives:** While new strategy development was not prominently noted, participants acknowledged the Cohort's role in enhancing existing strategies, particularly through sharing ideas and best practices. For example, a coordinator observed the benefits of integrating Cohort experiences into ongoing projects, suggesting an indirect influence rather than a direct contribution. The focus tended to remain on pre-existing initiatives, with Cohort experiences serving more to reinforce or expand upon these rather than initiating new, comprehensive strategies. As one participant noted, *"We've focused more on the strategies that were already in place."*

3. **Limited Identification of Comprehensive Strategies:** Participants generally had difficulty identifying specific, comprehensive strategies that resulted directly from Cohort

participation. This suggests a need for clearer frameworks or guidance from the Cohort to support strategic development processes.

Impact of Additional Funding on Collaboratives' Strategies and Effectiveness

The findings related to this research question echo many of the previously stated findings, with every coordinator stating the importance and impact that the additional funding has had within their collaborative, but not specifically identifying how strategies related to the Cohort impacted changes.

1. **Expansion of Programs and Services:** Participants consistently reported that additional funding significantly broadened the scope of their programs and services. For instance, coordinators from various counties highlighted how funding allowed for the execution of multiple initiatives simultaneously, such as educational workshops and support services. One coordinator noted, *"Well, it would definitely limit what we were able to do... it helps us to cast a wider net."* when asked how their collaborative would change without funding.

2. **Enhanced Community Outreach and Engagement**: Additional funding was crucial in enhancing community outreach and engagement efforts. Coordinators described increased abilities to conduct marketing, set up booths at community events, and directly engage with business owners and community members. *"We would not be able to reach as many parents... it has expanded our ability to get out there and be present and be known,"* mentioned one participant when asked how their collaborative would change without funding.

3. **Increased Resource Allocation for Incentives and Support:** The funding was pivotal in providing incentives and support to encourage participation in collaborative programs. This approach helped in attracting more community members to educational and resource-sharing events. *"We're able to give a little something to try to get more people there so that we can educate them,"* shared a participant.

4. **Sustainability and Capacity Building:** The influx of funds contributed to the sustainability and capacity building of the collaboratives. Coordinators expressed that without additional funding, crucial programs would face limitations or discontinuation. The financial support not only maintained but also expanded the reach and effectiveness of their initiatives. A participant reflected, *"The additional funding has been great because we were actually able to hire someone to help us..."*
   - However, at the same time participants all agreed that sustainability may not be long-term if funding is cut for the Cohorts, remarking that things such as partnerships would continue but impact would likely suffer.

5. **Support During Critical Times:** Specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic, the additional funding was described as a lifeline that allowed collaboratives to continue essential services when resources were scarce. The ability to provide emergency assistance and maintain food supply was particularly highlighted. *"It really truly meant continuing to be able to be that lifeline and give families hope,"* remarked a coordinator.

6. **Enhanced Data Collection and Program Evaluation**: Some coordinators noted that additional funding contributed to better data collection and evaluation practices, allowing them to tailor their strategies more effectively to meet community needs.

GaFCP Feedback

1. **Need for Inclusive Participation:** Coordinators expressed a need for broader inclusion in the Cohort activities. There's a perceived disconnect where coordinators feel a greater variety of community members, especially those directly working within school systems like social workers or school coordinators, should be involved to enhance the direct impact on students and families. For example, one coordinator suggested, *"There needs to be other people involved in the Cohort other than the executive director coordinators"* highlighting the necessity for diverse perspectives to enrich the Cohort's effectiveness.

2. **Extension and Expansion of Program:** There's a desire among participants for the extension of the Cohort program beyond its current duration. One suggested, *"Look at a way to extend the program by 3 additional years,"* indicating a need for long-term planning and sustained support to ensure the continuous impact of their initiatives, especially in the school systems.

3. **Increased Training and Conference Participation:**
   Coordinators highlighted the value of attending conferences and receiving training. They suggested that more opportunities for such educational engagements could significantly benefit the collaborators, particularly if these opportunities are extended to other partners within the community and school systems. As one coordinator noted,

"This conference really would have impacted many of my partners that are in the school system versus me being indirectly out of the school system."

4. **Acknowledgement of Impact and Improvement Needs:** Feedback indicated that while the Cohort process has aided growth and strength within collaboratives, there's an ongoing need for improved support structures and funding mechanisms. A coordinator

reflected, *"It's helped our collaborative grow and become stronger... But we need more results to justify more funding."*

5. **Clarification and Utilization of Grant Funds:** There was some confusion regarding the grant application process and the strategic use of the funds. Coordinators appreciate the funding but expressed a desire for clearer guidelines and the ability to apply funds more flexibly to address broader community needs. This sentiment was captured as, *"We were just a little confused on the actual grant itself... So we're coming back around to all of our other community things."*

6. **Financial and Operational Challenges:** Coordinators discussed the financial and operational challenges of running their programs, emphasizing disparities in funding allocation and the impact on their capacity to deliver services effectively. One pointed out, *"A lot of the coordinators, all their money goes to their salary and benefits. I don't see how they can get anything done,"* highlighting the need for better financial management and resource allocation to ensure the effectiveness of community initiatives.

These findings suggest a need for GaFCP to consider broader engagement, extend program duration, offer more training opportunities, clarify funding applications, and address financial challenges to enhance the Cohort's impact on community collaborators and the families they serve.

Conclusion

The GaFCP Cohort process has provided significant opportunities for collaborative growth and learning, despite facing challenges such as COVID-19 and concerns about sustainability and burnout.

- While participants have benefited from the exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices, they have experienced difficulties in identifying specific strategies that directly resulted from Cohort participation.
- Additional funding through the Cohort has significantly impacted collaborative strategies, allowing for the expansion of programs, enhanced community outreach, and increased resource allocation.
- The Cohort experience has led to personal and professional growth among coordinators, although there is a desire for broader inclusion of community members and more direct support for implementing and evaluating strategies.

Key Takeaways:

1. **Enhanced Collaboration and Community Engagement:** The GaFCP Cohort process has enabled collaboratives to expand their programs, form new partnerships, and engage

more deeply with their communities. This collaborative environment fosters a space for sharing and learning, which, in turn, contributes to community-wide improvements and the belief in positive community change.

2. **Data-Driven Approach and Professional Growth:** Participation in the Cohort has emphasized the importance of data utilization in guiding decision-making and strategy development. Additionally, coordinators have reported significant growth in their knowledge and skills, particularly regarding community collaboration and understanding systemic issues. However, there is an expressed need for greater inclusion of diverse community members in Cohort activities and decision-making processes.

3. **Funding and Sustainability Concerns:** While additional funding has allowed for considerable progress and expansion of services, concerns remain regarding the long-term sustainability of initiatives post-Cohort. Participants appreciate the financial support but emphasize the need for continued funding, clearer guidelines for fund usage, and strategies for maintaining momentum and impact without constant financial aid.