EVALUATION SNAPSHOT

From county collaboration to community vitality

Structured for Success

Connecting Collaborative Development with Leveraged Dollars

A Collaborative's ability to clarify its structure, involve influential local leaders in its work, and develop and implement a comprehensive plan can benefit the entire community. These abilities, combined with what happens inside a Collaborative—its effectiveness, influence, and sustainability—define collaborative development, which is linked to a higher level of leveraged dollars.

T his Evaluation Snapshot is the second of a three-part series that examines the aspects of local Collaboratives that are related to leveraging funds beyond the dollars the state appropriates annually. This report evaluates the relationship between collaborative development and financial resources. Part one,

"Structured for Success: Connecting Leadership Continuity with Leveraged Dollars," examines how strong, continuous leadership is critical to the success of a Collaborative.

Collaborative Development Linked to Local Funding

Collaboratives across the state have been created in a variety of ways to address the needs of children and

families in each of their communities. The Family Connection concept of collaborative development includes 58 characteristics of how a Collaborative is structured and how it functions.

In the annual Self-Assessment, Collaborative leaders report which of these features are in place or occurred during the year. The 58 attributes fall into five overarching categories.

Governance attributes include Collaboratives that:

- define member roles and responsibilities,
- schedule regular meetings,
- develop and use by-laws,
- establish committees (finance or strategy team), and
- ensure that community groups are well represented in decision-making.

Budget and Finance attributes include Collaboratives that:

- develop a resource map,
- implement a sustainability plan,
- raise funds together with partners,
- share financial reports with partners, and
- conduct a cost analysis of strategies in the plan.

Communication and Publicity attributes include Collaboratives that:

- maintain a current resource guide,
- keep websites up to date,
- offer member trainings,
- follow a process for internal collaborative communication, and
- inform the community about conditions for children and families using multimedia platforms.

Planning and Evaluation attributes include Collaboratives that:

- encourage broad participation in annual and strategic planning,
- implement best practices,
- conduct strategy-level evaluation,
- have collaborative partners who collect data, and
- present evaluation reports at collaborative meetings.

Administration and Leadership attributes include Boards that:

- ensure that policies are implemented,
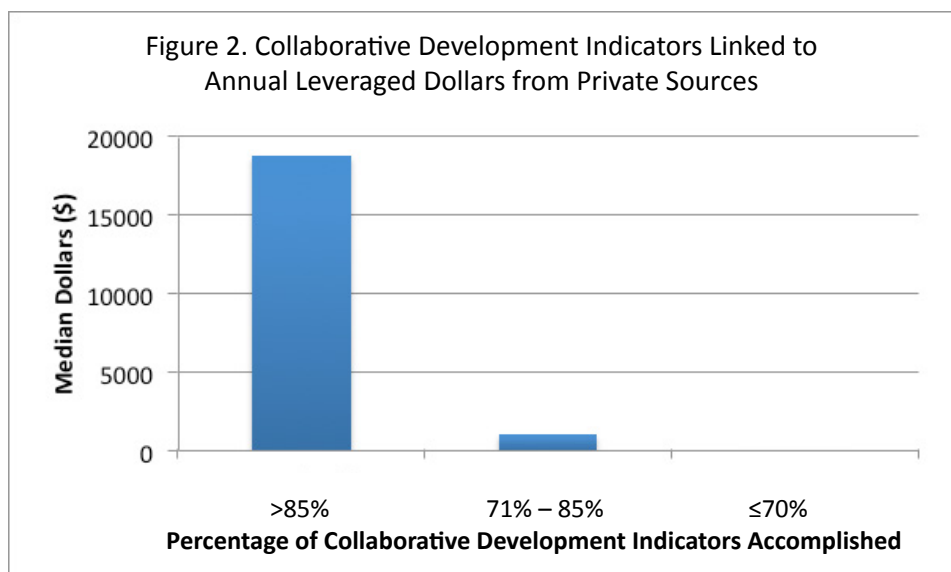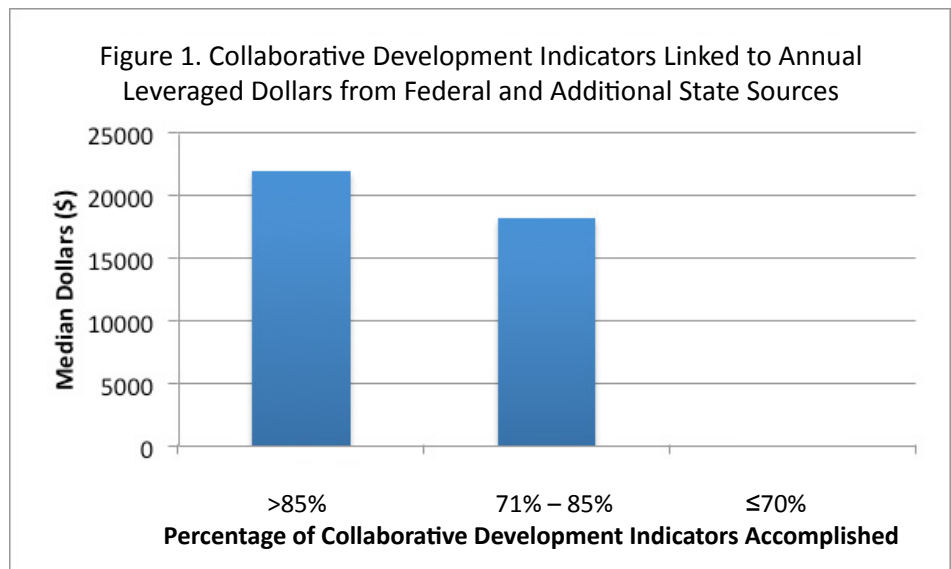- supervise the coordinator or executive director,

- participate in the Peer-to-Peer Network,
- observe relevant policies of the fiscal agent, and
- ensure that annual and strategic plans are implemented.

Findings from the analyses indicate that when a Collaborative reports a greater number of characteristics, they are more likely to secure money from private, federal, and state sources. (See Figures 1 and 2.) Ultimately, we might conclude that the presence of these qualities indicates to a funder that a Collaborative is mature, energetic, and equipped to manage resources. Therefore, a funder is more likely to award dollars.

Data for these analyses are from the Self-Assessment, a self-report of activity that all 157 Georgia Family Connection Collaboratives submit at the end of each fiscal year.

Interpret these results with care, since the relations described here could work in either direction. That is, a higher amount of leveraged dollars could result in greater resources to achieve certain development activities, not the other way around. Based on the findings, however, Collaboratives should still consider ways to cultivate effective collaborative development.

Figure 1. Collaborative Development Indicators Linked to Annual Leveraged Dollars from Federal and Additional State Sources

Figure 2. Collaborative Development Indicators Linked to Annual Leveraged Dollars from Private Sources

Leveraging Dollars Essential for Children and Families in Rural Georgia

Tucked in rural southwest Georgia with a population of only 11,000, Early County may seem an unlikely recipient for hundreds of thousands of grant dollars. But for this small community on the Alabama border, hard work, collaboration, and keeping funders informed have paid off for its most vulnerable citizens.

"I've found that if you do your job well, prove that you're trustworthy, establish solid relationships—and you're a pleasure to work with—then funders will want to continue to invest in your mission," said Gwen Houston, Early County Family Connection FACES (Families And Children Early Success) coordinator.

Beyond the state appropriation, five funding streams support the Collaborative's work. Houston attributes this fiscal success to being bold and building new skills. She advises coordinators to willingly take on tough tasks to get the job done, even if it means treading into unfamiliar waters. This didn't come easy to Houston at first, since, before taking on the role of Early County coordinator ten years ago, she had never written a grant application.

"I was worried about applying for our first grant, because I had no idea what I was doing," she said. "But I did know that to meet our community's needs, we had to secure additional funding. We haven't received every grant we've applied for, but over the years I've become increasingly educated about leveraging dollars."

One way Houston hones her grant-writing skills is by reviewing other grant applications. "Being on the other side of the process, I learn what grantors like, and I learn from what other applicants do right and wrong," said Houston, who also stressed the benefits of establishing trusting relationships with funders.

"After a few years of receiving grants from the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)—and consistently reaching our goals and making them aware of the vital work we were accomplishing—the Agency notified us that we qualified for a large contract to help stem prescription drug

Gwen Houston, Early County Family Connection FACES coordinator (bottom left), has some fun with Collaborative members, a rap group, and dancers at an Early Choices rally targeting alcohol abuse prevention. The tagline for the campaign is "I made my choice. Have you?"

abuse in the community," she said. "Ultimately, we were awarded those dollars, and I believe our positive track record with them gave us a leg up in the process."

Grant dollars have allowed the Collaborative to address evolving needs in the community by implementing strategies around childhood literacy, underage drinking, sexual abstinence, smoke-free schools, and GED and work readiness. But Houston also recognizes the significance of allocating resources to promote the Collaborative's work to help the community and funders understand the organization and its services.

"One of our strategies is making sure our community knows who we are and what we do," said Houston. "We invest time and resources in educating others about our services and our mission, and social media plays a large role in that effort. That investment of time and resources has been tremendously helpful in expanding our reach."

Early County demonstrates that being intentional about collaborative development increases funds and yields positive outcomes for kids and families.

"The size of your community is irrelevent," Houston said, "when you know your job is to improve the lives of your neighbors, and you structure your organization to achieve that result, you can and will be successful."

Achieving Quality Collaborative Development

The research resulting in this Snapshot highlights the importance of developing a competent collaborative infrastructure. The following recommendations have a positive impact on Collaborative growth and development and, when implemented, may also increase financial resources.

For Boards

Ensure a broad-based, inclusive Collaborative by seeking partners who reflect diverse perspectives, experiences, cultures, and levels of authority.

Establish an effective governance structure. There is no ideal size or design of an effective collaborative governance structure. However, a two-tiered approach to governance has proven to work effectively in communities. For instance, a small management group that can quickly respond to immediate concerns makes day-to-day decisions, while a larger oversight group meets periodically to consider long-term issues and ensure diverse representation.

Secure a formal commitment to collaboration. Ask partner organizations to designate representatives' names and responsibilities in writing. This increases the likelihood that the same people will participate in the collaborative process and will help ensure that representatives are authorized to make decisions.

For Coordinators

Ensure that the Collaborative plans for action by:

- establishing guidelines for partner relationships (e.g., bylaws and operating procedures);

- supporting shared decision-making that includes partners and families;

- creating trust and a shared vision, which allow collaborative members to explore perspectives, find common ground, and set the tone and direction for comprehensive strategies; and

- defining the target community, because multiple stakeholders within a collaborative often work with several communities based on geographical location, service boundaries, and funding constraints. Outlining a scope of work will eliminate barriers that prevent children and families from benefiting from a seamless service delivery system.

Broker opportunities for the governing Board to understand and embrace the difference between governance and management. The governing Board is legally responsible for overseeing the overall policymaking agenda of the organization. The executive director is responsible for implementing the organization's policies and providing day-to-day management. A governing Board functions best when it focuses on higher level, future-oriented policy and strategy implications. Higher functioning Boards are better able to communicate the organizational mission and vision to collaborate with members in a way that motivates them to action.

Celebrate success. Partners are often so focused on the goal that they forget to celebrate successes along the way. Yet, improving community conditions demands that all stakeholders recognize that each small accomplishment contributes to the overall success of collaboration. Celebrating an early success in collaboration helps motivate the team to action and lasting commitment.

For Technical Assistance and Training Providers

Facilitate opportunities for collaborative members to learn about each other and their community. People learn in different ways. Honor different learning styles by providing materials in a variety of forms and using small group activities to stimulate discussion.

Promote cultural competency within the collaborative. "Culture" refers to a group or community that shares common experiences that shape the way its members understand the world. Culture influences our views, values, hopes, and loyalties. A culturally competent organization understands how different behaviors, attitudes, and policies work effectively in cross-cultural settings to produce better outcomes.

Provide ongoing assistance and feedback to collaborative members so they can assess their progress and effectively implement their work plan.