



# Structured for Success

*Connecting  
Systems Change  
with Leveraged Dollars*

Systems change when we reform how business is conducted, how decisions are made, how finances are handled, and how families are supported. And when Georgia Family Connection Collaboratives focus on changing systems, they are more likely to leverage dollars.

**T**his Evaluation Snapshot is the third installment of a three-part series, called “Structured for Success,” which 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 systems change and financial resources.

Part one, “[Connecting Leadership Continuity with Leveraged Dollars](#),” examines how strong, continuous leadership is critical to the success of a Collaborative. Part two, “[Connecting Collaborative Development with Leveraged Dollars](#),” addresses the relationship between a Collaborative’s ability to achieve certain features to improve its influence and effectiveness—like clarifying its structure, involving

local leaders, and developing and implementing a strategic plan—and its ability to garner additional funds.

### **Systems Changes Linked to Local Funding**

There are countless ways that service systems are organized to address the needs of children and families in their communities. Georgia Family Connection’s measure of

Collaborative impact includes assessing 16 indicators of whether a Collaborative has introduced innovative changes into traditional service systems. In the annual Self-Assessment, Collaborative leaders report which of the 16 indicators are in place or occurred during the year. The 16 indicators can be divided into three overarching categories:

**Changes in the way decisions are made**, for example:

- forming a multi-agency task force, or
- developing a computer network linking multiple organizations.

**Changes in the strategy mix and how services are delivered**, for example:

- re-deploying staff or services to non-traditional locations, or
- creating a medium for multiple agencies to jointly manage cases.

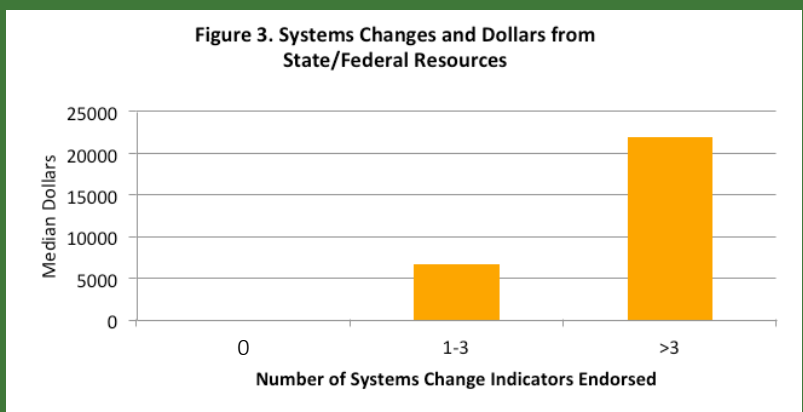
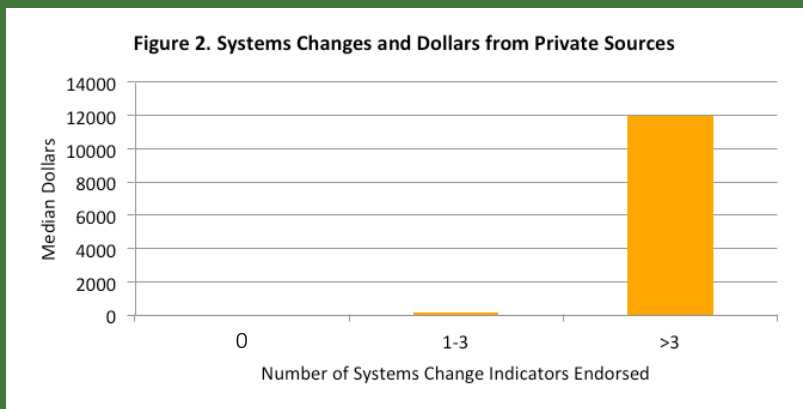
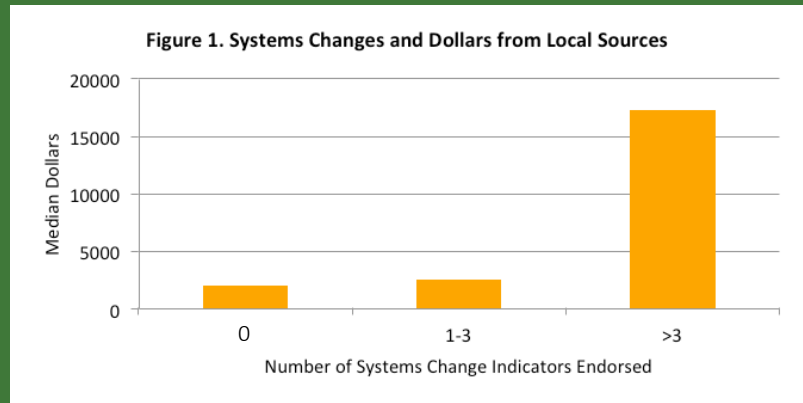
**Changes in financing and budgeting**, for example:

- redirecting funds to non-traditional services, or
- organizing multiple agencies to write grants together.

Analyses indicate that the more systems change indicators a Collaborative reports as occurring within the community, the more likely it is that the Collaborative will secure new money from local, private, and federal and state grants—in addition to the state’s annual appropriation (figures 1, 2, and 3). One might conclude that the presence

of these systems changes is a sign of Collaborative partners’ new energy focusing on fundraising. These activities also may signal to funders

that community service providers are strategic and effective, and that those providers will therefore be good stewards of additional investment.



Data for these analyses are from the Self-Assessment, a self-report of activity that collaborative organizations in all 159 counties 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 systems change activities, not the other way around. Based on the findings, however, Collaboratives should still consider ways to cultivate effective collaborative development.

# Changing Systems to Achieve Mighty Results

“Mighty oaks from tiny acorns grow” is a familiar adage that has surfaced in stories and cultures for generations. If one individual’s small effort has the potential to produce mighty results, imagine what an entire community can achieve by leveraging the talents and resources of its people and organizations.

The leadership, staff, and partners of the Augusta-Richmond County Community Partnership for Children (APC) are cultivating mighty results through multiple coordinated efforts to improve systems that serve families and children there.

One impressive change resulting from those efforts is occurring within the juvenile justice system. While recent statewide efforts to overhaul Georgia’s juvenile justice code were underway, partners in Augusta-Richmond were already applying techniques to identify youth at the beginning of what evidence indicates could become a lifelong series of encounters with the justice and corrections systems.

The Collaborative joined forces with community lawyers, judges, the Dept. of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), and others to secure funding for a System of Care program from the Governor’s office aimed at breaking the cycle of delinquency for juvenile offenders.

“We identify kids who are just starting to get into trouble—kids who are having problems with truancy or fighting,” said Dr. Robetta McKenzie, executive director of APC. “The school refers a child to DJJ, and a juvenile court judge determines whether or not that child is placed in the program.”

The program provides an individualized plan of success for each child, and—depending on a family’s circumstances—involves the parents as active participants. Plans include anything from after-school programs, to individual or group counseling, to sex education programs.

“We’re changing the way children are managed inside the justice system,” said McKenzie. “We examine the aspects of children’s lives or personalities that seem to contribute to their delinquency, then adjust to those contributing circumstances or behaviors based on what we learn. This approach prevents



*Augusta-Richmond County Community Partnership for Children and the entire community gather to celebrate Children’s Week.*

future incidents of delinquency much more than if we incarcerate or prescribe punishment without the context of a child’s unique situation.”

While the System of Care grant is significant, changing a system of this magnitude requires more than cash.

“Partners have rallied to support this program—and not just by writing checks,” said McKenzie. “Organizations and agencies, including the Boys and Girls Club, 100 Black Men, and the County Health Dept., have contributed more than \$100,000 worth of in-kind services.”

According to McKenzie, implementing evidence-based programs is essential to receiving funds. “While a handful will fund original ideas, most funders like to invest in efforts that are proven to make a difference,” she said.

On engaging and leveraging the resources of APC’s more than 120 members, McKenzie says it’s critical to listen to each of them and make clear that collaboration doesn’t mean a partner’s individual work will become obsolete.

“Building trust is a big part of it,” she said. “If you say you’re going to do something, you better do it. Then you’re in a position to hold partners accountable for what they agree to do. Ultimately, the community must value the work and continue to invest so that we do our best on behalf of our children and families.”

# Achieving Quality Systems Changes

Findings from this Evaluation Snapshot highlight the importance of applying positive changes to the systems that support children, families, and communities. These recommendations have been shown to have a positive impact on how a community makes decisions about policies, programs, and allocating resources.

## For Boards

**Nurture community and cultivate networks.** Lasting change requires relationship building within a community. In the push to make decisions that produce quick results, it's often more expedient to bypass partners. More often than not, though, these are the same partners who will be tasked with implementing those decisions. To achieve lasting systems change, leaders must cross boundaries and be intentional in inviting to the collaborative table partners who can shed new light on a particular issue.

**Acknowledge that change is going to take time.** There are no quick fixes. For most organizations, meaningful change is at least a three-to five-year process. Changing the systems that support children, families, and communities is painstaking and involves a lasting commitment. Partners need time to understand each other's concerns, to learn to trust each other's motives, and to acquire the education and training required to change attitudes and adopt new practices.

**Seize breakthrough opportunities.** Making a lasting positive change to systems can be difficult. However, sometimes an opportunity uncovers an area where a system is encountering a challenge or crisis. This change in circumstances can be either a disruption in the system or a

breakthrough to new possibilities. Collaboratives must see these openings as breakthrough opportunities to aid systems in giving up old structures, behaviors, and beliefs that fail to benefit children, families, and communities.

## For Coordinators

**Provide opportunities for all stakeholders to acquire the same knowledge.** Collaboratives consist of a diverse range of stakeholders with disparate levels of knowledge and understanding. If partners are to advocate for systems change, they must be prepared participants in a deliberate process where issues are explained and discussed, proposals are evaluated, and consensus is reached. Be intentional in building a knowledge base for your Collaborative members through trainings, meetings, conferences, special project work, websites, and printed materials.

**Help construct a community-wide, unified fiscal strategy.** How money is spent can have a tremendous impact on the quality and quantity of supports provided in a community. Collaboratives need to coordinate services by shifting their focus from individual programs to the larger issues those programs are addressing. By looking collectively at all the funding streams and other resources already devoted to an issue, communities can redirect funding in a way that uses

limited dollars more efficiently and identifies new resources to fill gaps and expand services and supports.

## Collect data that help prove the effectiveness of systems change.

Change advocates need concrete evidence that new and different approaches can improve the lives of children and families—and are cost effective. Establish a data collection process in the initial stages of formulating strategies for change. Data can be your best ally in fostering positive systems change.

## For Technical Assistance and Training Providers

**Facilitate systems change by disturbing the system.** According to two well-known philosophers, “You can never direct a living system. You can only disturb it.” Disturb the systems in which you work by introducing information that encourages people to think differently. Demonstrate to people that things they think they can't do have already been accomplished somewhere else, invite new people into the conversation, present issues from different perspectives, and create conditions that maximize the Collaborative's capacity to generate new solutions.

**Provide ongoing assistance and feedback** to Collaboratives so that they can assess their progress and effectively implement needed systems change.

*Evaluation Snapshot* examines how Georgia Family Connection county collaboration affects indicators of child, family, and community well-being in communities across the state. This series is based on reports from the GaFCP Theory of Change Workgroup, a team of researchers from EMSTAR Research, Metis Associates, and Georgia State University, and GaFCP. GaFCP is a public-private nonprofit created and funded by the state of Georgia and investors from the private sector. We support Georgia Family Connection, a statewide network of collaborative organizations in all 159 counties committed to improving the quality of life for children and families.

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