



Structured for Success

*Connecting
Leadership Continuity with
Leveraged Dollars*

Leveraging resources is critical to the work of both Georgia Family Connection Partnership and the statewide network. Statistical analyses reveal links between certain Collaborative characteristics and the amount of cash leveraged—beyond the critical state allocation—from other sources such as local governments, private foundations, and additional state and federal grants.

This Evaluation Snapshot is the first 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 continuity of leadership and financial resources.

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.

The Georgia legislature allocates dollars to support the statewide Georgia Family Connection network each year. However, most county Collaboratives seek—and receive—funding beyond the state's annual contribution to expand their services and execute strategies for addressing priority child and family needs in

their communities. Collaboratives' efforts to boost public commitment result in expanded and maximized resources to improve conditions for families across the state.

Local Funding Accompanies Lasting Leadership

Strong, continuous leadership is critical to the success of any organization, and county Collaboratives are no different. Two

key Family Connection leadership roles, the executive director and the Board chair, are the backbone of each Collaborative. The individual dedication and collaboration between these key individuals is a hallmark of the Georgia Family Connection approach to helping children and families become self-sufficient, contributing citizens.

The coordinator or executive director, in the salaried leadership role, works closely with the Board chair to ensure that the Collaborative meets its planned goals and effectively implements strategies and programs.

The Board chair, serving in a voluntary leadership role, negotiates complex relationships among partners and ensures forward momentum—both essential elements in Collaborative success.

Analyses of all 157 county Collaboratives reveal a relationship between length of tenure of an organization's top leaders and the amount of dollars leveraged beyond state funds allocated to Family Connection. These findings point to a need for Collaboratives to find ways to recruit and retain highly engaged leaders.

The average tenure of a Family Connection executive director is five years. The length of tenure is directly related to the amount of dollars leveraged from local sources. As shown in Figure 1, the median leveraged dollars from local sources by a Collaborative where the executive director had less than five years of tenure is \$3,000. The median for a Collaborative where the executive director had five or more years of tenure is \$4,600.

By comparison, the average tenure of a Family Connection Board chair is

Figure 1. Executive Director Tenure Linked to Leveraged Dollar Amount from Local Sources

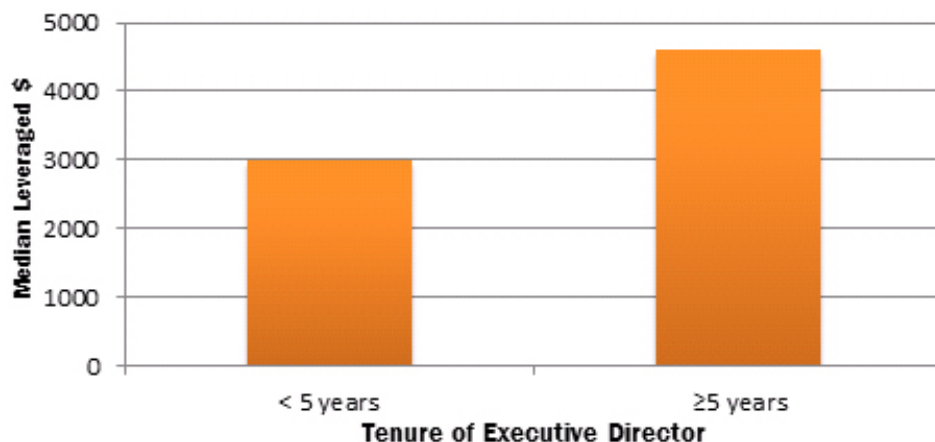
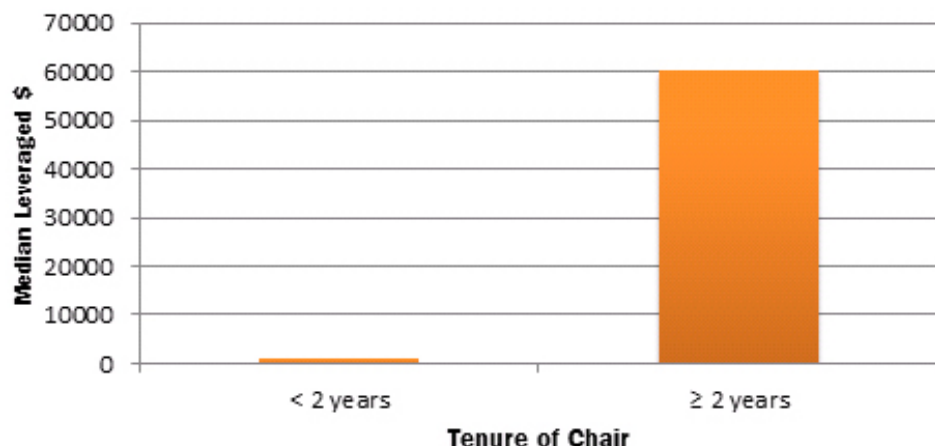


Figure 2. Chair Tenure Linked to Leveraged Dollar Amount from Federal and Additional State Sources



two years. And while executive directors are linked to local funds, analyses reveal that a Board chair's length of tenure is directly related to dollars leveraged from combined state and federal resources. Figure 2 shows that the median leveraged dollars from state and federal sources by a Collaborative where the chair had less than two years of tenure is \$1,000. The median for a Collaborative where the chair had two or more years of tenure exceeds \$60,000.

Ultimately, these results should be interpreted with care since the relations described here could work in either direction. That is, a higher amount of leveraged dollars could result in increased personal investment by the chair or executive director and a desire to continue serving, not the other way around. Based on the findings, however, Collaboratives should still consider ways to cultivate tenured leadership.

Cultivating Trusting Relationships to Improve Conditions for Children and Families in Athens-Clarke County

Athens-Clarke County has the highest poverty rate of any metro county in the nation at nearly 37 percent. Children from low-income families enrolled in Athens-Clarke County public schools are not alone, since 79 percent of the system's students fall into that category.

The need for a long-term strategy that helps low-income families become self-sufficient in this community is dire, and leading the charge is Tim Johnson, executive director for Family Connection-Communities in Schools of Athens. Johnson has dedicated more than 20 years to serving children and families in Athens-Clarke County, and he's helped raise millions of dollars to help support his Collaborative's efforts.

"My tenure provides me with several advantages in helping leverage additional funds for our local organization," said Johnson. "As is usually the case, experience has given me the opportunity to make a lot of mistakes—often the best way to learn—and to learn from others in our community and elsewhere to hone those skills that help generate financial support. Among those skills, I have come to understand the structure and goals of partner organizations and to facilitate linkages across systems, which is really at the core of what Family Connection is all about. I often know ahead of time when funding opportunities will become available and consequently can be well-prepared to seize those opportunities."

Several years ago, the University of Georgia wanted to engage the community to address the issue of poverty. They requested involvement by the Mayor, the Chamber of Commerce, and the School District. When Johnson heard about the issue, he was able to set meetings with each of the individuals and persuade them to come to the table and commit to engage in the process.

"I was able to do this because they knew and trusted me, were comfortable expressing to me their concern about the issue of poverty, and accepted my



personal commitment that their concerns would be addressed," said Johnson.

Out of this came Partners for a Prosperous Athens, now OneAthens, the largest anti-poverty initiative ever undertaken there. Millions of dollars of funding followed for new projects like the Athens Community Career Academy, the J.J. Harris Charter Elementary School, expanded teen pregnancy prevention services, and more, each of which is improving outcomes for local children and youth.

Under Johnson's leadership, the well-being of children Athens-Clarke County also has improved tremendously during the past nine years. Low-income students reading at or above grade level jumped from 57 to 90 percent, while the teen pregnancy rate among African-Americans fell 72 percent from 2002-2010.

"Ultimately, my longevity in this role has allowed me to build trusting relationships with many individuals and organizations as they have seen increased success through collaboration that we facilitate," said Johnson. "As a result, potential funders understand and respect our commitment to improving results for children, and the organizations themselves reach out to me to connect them with others."

Achieving Lasting Leadership

Here are some recommendations—based on successful community models—that will have a positive impact on leadership continuity and ultimately strengthen local Collaboratives' ability to improve outcomes for children and families.

For Boards

Provide clear direction to the executive director regarding organizational priorities and how to align resources. A clear strategic plan that maps out goals, as well as how to reach those goals, and clearly outlines the executive director's roles in the process is necessary for the executive director and staff to maximize their efforts.

Provide adequate and fair compensation to your executive director. Competitive compensation is essential in successfully recruiting and retaining good executives. Support your executive director. An inactive Board that does not commit to helping the organization reach its goals frustrates an executive director's ability and determination to do the job well.

Plan for transition. Transition can provide the Collaborative with a chance to revisit its mission, harness new energy and skills, and improve staff and Board relationships and functionality.

Support activities that improve and enhance an organization's ability to become stronger, more

sustainable, and better able to serve the community. Funded activities can include leadership and Board development and executive transition.

For Executive Directors

Be open with your Board about the stressors of your job. Burnout is a by-product of your work, so explore organizational benefits that allow you to effectively balance career and personal responsibilities.

Take advantage of technical assistance and training. Professional development opportunities help you better understand and perform your duties, which include supervising employees and managing volunteers, working with the Board to ensure that the collaborative is functioning according to its mission and reaching its goals, and working with financial officers to ensure that the Collaborative is operating within its budget.

Participate in peer support networks. Peer support networks provide you with a venue where you can share ideas, brainstorm solutions, review and learn from the successes and challenges of others, and step back from your day-to-day work to reflect

and consider all the options and data before you make decisions.

For Technical Assistance and Training Providers

Be a sounding board. Executive directors often feel isolated in their position and need someone who is available to listen and offer feedback. Boards also need a safe place that supports the constructive exchange of ideas.

Provide training. First-time executive directors need development training. Seasoned executive directors risk stagnation, and also need opportunities for personal growth and development. Boards are constantly changing, so regular orientations and ongoing training in team building, communication skills, fundraising, meeting management, messaging, outreach, and other areas are necessary.

Offer succession planning. Leadership succession planning is vital for the organization's long-term sustainability. One of the best ways to develop qualified Board members for promotion to the chair position is by establishing a straightforward system of succession.

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. 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 159 county collaborative organizations committed to improving the quality of life for children and families.

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