



GEORGIA
family connection
PARTNERSHIP

GaFCP Supports Strong Partnerships and Enhances County Strategies

Synopsis of GaFCP Stakeholder Interviews, Fall 2023, and GaFCP Cohort Interviews Key Findings, October – November 2023

Introduction

One of GaFCP's three strategies is focused on expanding state, regional, and local partnerships to improve the lives of all children and families in the state. During FY24 and FY25, the GaFCP Outcomes Team conducted a series of interviews with state stakeholders and GaFCP Board members to hear their opinions about the state-level functions of GaFCP. In particular, the interviews focused on salient ways that GaFCP (a) facilitates access and serves as a conduit to local Collaboratives for stakeholders, (b) anchors multi- or cross-county work, (c) provides data needed for effective decision-making, and (d) supports the use of data. In addition to the interviews with key state stakeholders, the Outcomes Team conducted additional interviews with a random sample of coordinators from GaFCP Cohorts to hear their perceptions of how the GaFCP Cohort process affects Collaborative functioning, strategy development and strategy implementation.

A total of 15 key stakeholders were interviewed, including GaFCP Board Members, state partners, and Georgia legislators. The primary purpose of these interviews was to obtain the opinions of these key stakeholders concerning the value added by GaFCP. Interview questions also included their opinion about what GaFCP did well, what could improve, and their thoughts on the organization's future direction. 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 responses from key stakeholders centered on two broad themes: (1) GaFCP Supports the work of state agencies and (2) GaFCP creates benefits for (local?) communities.

Twelve coordinators from GaFCP's Cohorts were asked about their perceptions of how the GaFCP Cohort process affected Collaborative functioning, strategy development and implementation. All coordinators had been involved in a GaFCP Strategy Cohort for more than one year and were asked to reflect on the effects for their Collaborative and local strategies due to their involvement

in a Cohort. Cohorts are groups of counties who are identified to receive additional funding to address specific population indicators. Responses from coordinators detailed ways that **strategy cohorts provide opportunities, build local capacity, and influence system and population changes.**

“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.”

State Partner Representative

GaFCP Supports the Work of State Agencies

Key stakeholders 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. 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.”

“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

In addition to state agency support, GaFCP connects with other nonprofits and organizations at the state and local level. Examples include Voices for Georgia’s Children, Get Georgia Reading Campaign, and Positive Childhood Alliance Georgia. Respondents depicted GaFCP as a valuable research partner, citing their work managing Georgia’s KIDS COUNT data and assisting with local resource deployment. Many state agencies and organizations use KIDS COUNT data to help establish needs, set goals, measure progress, and influence state policy. 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, and readiness to receive these resources.

GaFCP Creates Benefits for Communities

Many 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 strategic planning, data tools, and evaluation support that help Collaboratives move forward with their initiatives. One state partner commented, Others believed that GaFCP supports breaking down state agency silos in communities and helps implement or support statewide programs and initiatives. For example, one interviewee noted, “They are good at leading the charge and ensuring that we’re not duplicating services.” Respondents discussed the connections between people or organizations and described GaFCP as the catalyst that creates connections and “the only state agency that brings together all communities.” Similarly, another respondent stated, “In every community, people have the time and inclination to help. Family Connection gives them a place to apply their talents.”

“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.”

State Partner Representative

GaFCP Cohorts Provide Opportunities, Build Local Capacity, and Influence System and Population Changes

One method by which GaFCP supports Collaboratives is through convening Cohorts of counties to work on a focal outcome of concern for children and families. Five Cohorts have been convened since 2016, including a focus on Early Childhood Health and Education,

Family Support, and Community Partnerships for Supporting Youth. Coordinators involved in Cohorts receive additional funding, specialized technical assistance, and opportunities to engage with and learn from other coordinators and strategy teams from counties focused on the same outcome of interest.

Interview participants identified the expansion of programs 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. They frequently reported that one of the best things about being in the Cohort is the exchange of ideas and resources among

other involved Collaboratives. “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!” This support and

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

State Partner Representative

Collaborative brainstorming and problem-solving is facilitated through the GaFCP technical assistance providers as a key part of the Cohort process. Participants also shared that Cohort participation has highlighted community system barriers and helped them understand how these barriers affect other community issues related to their work and develop new ideas on how to address these issues. "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."

In addition to affecting Collaborative functioning and strategy implementation, coordinators shared that Cohort participation allows them to grow both personally and professionally, particularly regarding 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 made possible by Cohort funding and specialized technical assistance were both identified as contributing to this growth. "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."

Cohort interview participants all agreed that the additional funding has impacted their Collaborative's functioning and strategy implementation mainly in the following ways:

- Strengthened ability to expand resources and services
- Enhanced participation engagement
- Expanded community support and partnerships
- Improved program efficacy and outcomes
- Reinforced Collaborative relationships

Further, participants identified several ways in which the Cohort process drives positive community changes including:

- Improved educational outcomes
- Increased intentionality and accountability
- Enhanced service delivery and resource allocation
- Facilitated community engagement and partnership
- Expanded population reach and strategy effectiveness
- Strengthened community collaboration
- Increased community awareness and involvement

The stakeholder and Cohort identified the critical role of GaFCP in providing partnership opportunities, expanding programs and initiatives, engaging communities, identifying and

developing methods to address system barriers, supporting data-driven decision-making, and achieving long-term positive community and population change.

Lumpkin County was engaged in the Family Support Cohort in 2018 and has continued to have a strong Family Support Strategy. The coordinator shared, “Our Family Support Strategy has truly transformed the way we work together in Lumpkin County. Through the Family Support Cohort, our community partners began working together more methodically and intentionally, which helped us develop a habit of thinking Collaboratively on every project moving forward. This shift has genuinely changed the culture of our partnerships—collaboration is now automatic.

The partnerships forged through the Cohort and our shared strategic focus led to the development of a successful Student Outreach Center that continues to grow and thrive. Because of the careful planning and evaluation processes established through the Cohort, we were able to track positive outcomes and see a significant drop in Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) rates. Beyond that, we now regularly share resources, co-host events, and even share a handicapped-accessible bus—decorated with all our partners’ logos—that we use to take resources out into the community or bring families to services. All of these successes are direct results of the relationships and coordinated approach built through the Family Support Cohort. Further, our child abuse and neglect rate dropped from almost twice the state average in 2015 to well below the state average in 2022. I contribute that to our DFCS Director being amazing and to our Family Support Strategy work!”

How Collaboratives Can Influence Community Work

- Reach out to your Regional Manager to help you engage a wide range of partners, especially those most critical to your strategy implementation.
- Work with your ERA Regional TA Provider to disaggregate your local data and help identify geographic pockets of need in your community.
- Utilize the Communications Toolkit to better communicate your Collaborative work.
- Engage your Regional Manager to help ensure that your Collaborative table is fully representative of your community population.
- Use data from your Collaborative’s Partner Engagement Matrix to add intentionality to partner outreach efforts.
- Get to know your local legislators and ensure that they are familiar with your Collaborative. Contact the Communications Team to help develop a plan of action.
- Explore funding opportunities to support your Collaborative strategies and help ensure effectiveness. “Connected to Fund Development” and partner organizations’ emails and newsletters are a great place to find possible funding sources.