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A STRATEGIC PLANNING GUIDE FOR STATE-LEVEL EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS- BUILDING INITIATIVES: From Resources to Results for Young Children and Their Families

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This series of reports is designed to support the planning and implementation of the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (SECCS) Initiative. The series was edited by Neal Halfon, Thomas Rice, and Moira Inkelas. The reports were written by a team of experts to provide guidance on state policy development within the SECCS Initiative. Policy reports on crosscutting themes include strategic planning, communications strategies, financing, results-based accountability, cultural proficiency, and data analysis and use. Policy reports on programmatic topics include medical home, parenting education, family support, infant mental health, and dental health.

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Background

The State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (SECCS) Initiative represents a unique opportunity to improve the quality of life for young children and their families, and support them in reaching their full potential. Funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), the SECCS Initiative provides state Maternal and Child Health (MCH) agencies with planning and implementation grants to help them improve the integration, availability and quality of services for young children and their families. The SECCS Initiative engages states in a comprehensive and collaborative long-term change process that encourages innovation and stimulates new ways of thinking beyond “business as usual.” Rather than dedicating resources solely to funding existing or additional programs and services, SECCS planning and implementation is intended to make better use of existing assets and build the capacity to support an integrated statewide early childhood plan and system. Dedicated planning is geared to facilitate both coordination among the myriad programs and services that the system funds or otherwise supports, as well as create state-level flexibility to enable innovation at the local level.

According to MCHB specifications, state SECCS planning efforts should include, but are not limited to, the following five components of a comprehensive early childhood system:

1. Access to health insurance and a medical home
2. Mental health and socioemotional development
3. Early care and education/child care
4. Parenting education
5. Family support

Under the SECCS Initiative, state MCH agencies are being asked to apply MCH experience and expertise to a process of:

- Strengthening or creating partnerships with key early childhood stakeholders including those involved in existing early childhood initiatives;
- Collaborating with those stakeholders to implement a state early childhood strategic plan; and
- Supporting the development of integrated community-based platforms for promoting optimal early childhood development.

This process will include a variety of state and local agencies that serve and have an impact on the lives of young children and their families. It should also include community-level stakeholders, such as advocacy groups, and must result in either the development of a new statewide plan for early childhood systems-building, or the enhancement of an existing plan where applicable.

In order to accomplish the ambitious goals of the SECCS Initiative, it will be necessary for states to use planning funds to:

- Forge connections between relevant existing state and local agencies, organizations and initiatives;
- Leverage and maximize available resources including both funding and effort; and
- Develop monitoring and evaluation activities that ensure accountability to short- and long-term results.

This tool is designed to assist state MCH agencies with this exciting yet challenging work, regardless of where they currently stand along the continuum of early childhood systems building. Some states might see themselves starting from an array of disconnected early childhood services and programs, while others may have well integrated service delivery platforms in place linking state, county and community-based providers. Each state will enter the process at a slightly different level, yet all have the ability to improve the quality, coordination and comprehensiveness of services and care delivered to young children and their families.

How to Use Resources to Results

Resources to Results is designed to assist state MCH agencies and their partners in the SECCS strategic planning process. It can also be used to help MCH contribute and participate in other early childhood strategic planning processes if they are already underway in the state. Specifically, it can be used as a:

- Road Map – Where do we start? What types of things should we be looking at?
- Checklist – Have we addressed a specific element of the process? Do we want to address or expand on it?
- Educational Tool – Do participants in the planning process need help understanding the different components of a comprehensive strategic plan for young children and families?
- Stalemate Buster – Are planners unable to come to consensus on a particular issue, and in need of some guidance to get the process moving again?
- Link to Helpful Resources – What are some of the existing tools and approaches that have been beneficial to others engaged in similar processes?

How Resources to Results is Organized

Resources to Results is organized around seven components that constitute a framework for a comprehensive strategic planning process and plan:

1. Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles
2. Inclusion, Public Input and Communication
3. Strengths and Needs Assessment
4. Results Accountability Framework

5. Identification of Strategies
6. Allocation of Resources
7. Evaluation and Quality Improvement Process

Each component begins with a set of questions to consider that are designed to assist planners in deciding whether, as they develop or revise their strategic plan, they would like to do more work in a particular area. For users who are unable to answer all of the questions to consider to their satisfaction, each component next presents several levels that are designed to accommodate both users who need to start by working on the basics, as well as users who are ready to proceed with developing a more comprehensive strategic plan. Because each level builds upon the previous one, users will want to complete all activities in Level I prior to starting work on Level II. In moving from one level to the next, users are in essence moving from shorter-term goals and activities to longer-term goals and activities. How far states will want to go within each component will depend on the resources available to them and the work that has already been done to date. Ideally, however, all state plans will address the issues raised in all levels presented in this tool. Please note that *within* any one level, the items are presented somewhat randomly - the ordering of items is not meant to indicate that items appearing first are more important than or should be undertaken prior to the items presented later.

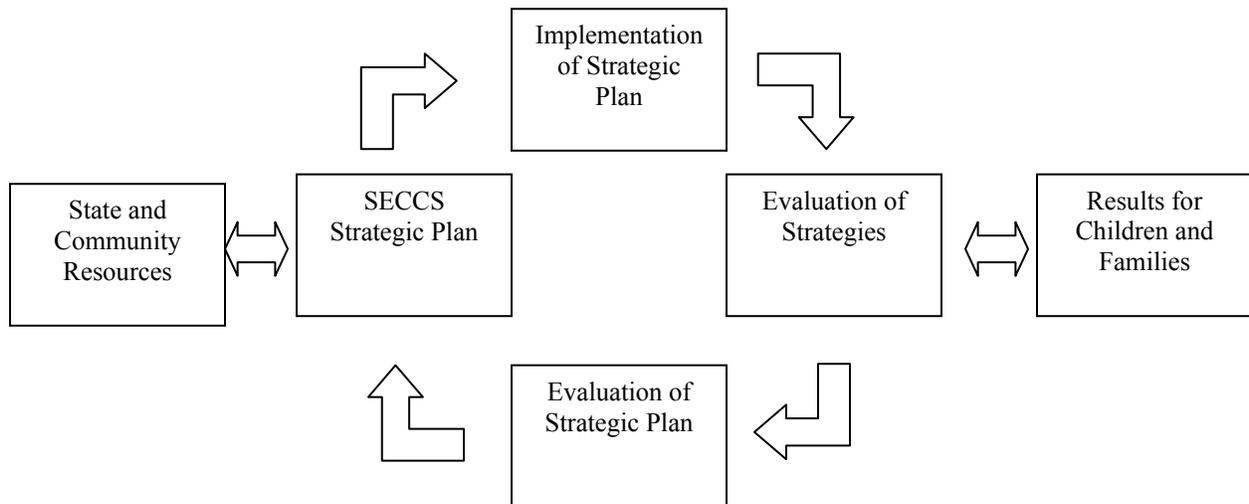
Some of the items presented in the tool include criteria for prioritizing results, strategies and projects. These are intended as suggestions only; states may, of course, come up with their own criteria based on their local values and needs. Finally, each section of the tool provides information about existing tools and approaches that have been used by others engaged in work similar to what states will be doing under the SECCS Initiative.

The seven strategic planning components are presented sequentially with each component logically following from and building upon the previous one. However, not all states will engage in the planning process in a linear fashion, and, in fact, the various components tend to inter-relate. Also, a strategic planning process should be iterative. Thus, each component also stands on its own so that states may enter and use the guide wherever they are and in whatever order best matches their unique circumstances.

While *Resources to Results* supports strategic planning, it is based on the notion that the strategic plan is embedded in a larger process which builds on existing state and local resources to achieve desired results. As shown in the diagram below, the existence of resources such as leadership, planning staff, skills, existing agencies and services, community based organizations, families, available funds, and informal social networks influences the strategic planning process. In turn, the planning process is part of a long-term and iterative implementation and evaluation process by which selected strategies and resource allocation decisions, along with the strategic plan as a whole, are regularly evaluated and revised to ensure that desired results are being achieved. The bi-directional arrows indicate that the level of existing resources within the state will determine the capacity for planning, implementation and evaluation, which in turn will affect results

achieved. At the same time, the results of the planning, implementation and evaluation processes could improve the capacities and resources within the state.

Figure 1: Imputes to the Strategic Planning Process



Underlying Assumptions

In designing *Resources to Results*, we began with the following assumptions about both the intention of the SECCS Initiative and about the strategic planning process itself:

1. The SECCS strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation process is by its nature a *long-term, iterative process of continuous quality improvement*. Depending on the existing resources and infrastructure within a state, some of the suggestions in this guide will be accomplished in the near term while others will take years to implement. For example, in the short term a state without any kind of early childhood systems-building plan or initiative could identify the potential linkages among relevant state agencies and work to develop partnerships. In the longer term, these agencies could work together to create a collaborative strategic plan that reflects their shared goals. States that already have a fairly well-developed early childhood system-building plan or initiative might focus in the short-term on working with the agencies who developed the plan to ensure that all five SECCS components are adequately represented in that plan, and that the plan is consistent with the concepts and principles behind the SECCS Initiative. Long-term goals for these states might include moving to full implementation of the plan, such as creating or supporting the development of integrated service delivery platforms such as family resource centers at hospitals and schools.
2. It is important to *work across the five required components* - not simply within

them - to ensure that the planning and implementation process is both efficient and effective and that the resulting service system is not only comprehensive but integrated. For example, to promote children's health, it may be necessary to create pathways by which child care providers are able to recognize developmental delays and connect parents with qualified children's health care professionals. Similarly, children's health care providers interested in the full continuum of health care and promotion might need enhanced linkages to networks of mental health, family support, parenting and early childhood educators to support the growth and development of a child in their care.

3. *A focus on the integration and quality improvement of existing services – not simply the provision of additional services – is critical to providing seamless support to families and reducing duplication of effort among service providers. Efforts in this area will help to ensure that families experience a single system of care, and that client and service information is integrated and shared in a respectful and confidential manner. They will also help to promote services that are geographically accessible, linguistically and culturally appropriate, and accessible to families with special needs.*
4. *Because SECCS is about creating *comprehensive systems of care that will improve the lives of all children*, not just children at risk, it is important to be clear about the population being represented in the strengths and needs assessment. Needs assessments, and resulting strategies, which focus solely on children and families receiving services, rather than the population as a whole, will not be representative of and responsive to the broader range of needs in the community. Nor will they succeed in promoting optimal child development for all children. For example, the concept of a medical home often entails service coordination for children with special health care needs. While this is certainly a worthy target population, the medical home strategy and platform of care can actually benefit all children and families. For a more universal and comprehensive system of early childhood care, planners will need to consider methods of capturing the assets and needs of the population that reflect these desired results. This point is particularly important for state MCH to consider given their history of focusing much of their early childhood efforts on children with special needs.*
5. *The SECCS planning process should not be about the provision of more direct services. Instead, planners need to assess current funding availability and work with other local, state and perhaps even federal agencies to ensure that currently available funds are being maximized, leveraged and coordinated. The longer-term effects of the planning and implementation monies associated with the SECCS Initiative should really result in more integrated and efficient delivery systems. This might be through new linkages and shared programming, administrative efficiencies and creation of strategies to leverage maximum federal dollars. Building the capacity of the system to sustain itself will be the legacy of the SECCS Initiative long after the relatively small planning and implementation grants have passed.*

6. It is important to *set priorities at each stage of the planning process* to help avoid:
 - 1) spreading resources across many targets and potentially diluting the impact; and
 - 2) missing leveraging opportunities for drawing down more resources aimed at a given target. Prioritizing needs will be necessary given the myriad needs of today's young children and families, the complexity of developing a statewide strategic plan for early childhood systems building, and the fiscal constraints many state governments are currently facing. Thus, even beginning with the vision and mission statements, planners can ask themselves, "Which aspects of the mission will we focus on in the short-term?" Prioritizing does not mean that in the long-term the plan does not have to be sufficiently comprehensive to address all five required SECCS components. Rather, prioritization means identifying the short term goals that are prerequisite and/or most helpful for achieving the long term goals.

7. *Data are useful for monitoring priorities, but should not be used to set them.* The decision to allocate resources should not default solely to what can be measured now. Investments may need to be made in priority areas where good data is lacking and where resources will likely need to be allocated to develop data capacity. With a dedication to results for children and families, as well as a systems-building focus, part of the SECCS Initiative may be to develop systems where data can continue to drive innovation, improvement and good outcomes.

Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles

What Do We Mean By "Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles"?

A *vision* is a broad, general statement of the desired future for young children and their families. A *mission* is a specific statement of the purpose of the state's SECCS Initiative in terms of how it will contribute to your stated vision. *Guiding Principles* are the values and beliefs that provide guidance and inspiration to the state MCH agency and others involved in the SECCS planning and implementation process.

Table 1 provides an example of a vision, mission and guiding principles that could characterize the SECCS Initiative as a whole. While these may be appropriate for the overall initiative, each state initiative will need to create its own vision, mission and guiding principles and should respond to the *Questions to Consider* asked below.

Why Is This Important?

Because SECCS is about building systems for children through new collaborative relationships, people with different assumptions and values will be around the same table. Thus, clarification of values is both a challenging and an important element of the planning process. Values clarification is particularly important where data is limited or where there is a shortage of reliable evidence as, under these conditions, values will play a significant

role in determining where the emphasis of the plan should lie. The process of developing a vision, mission and set of guiding principles provides the participants in the SECCS planning process with an opportunity to examine their values and come to a consensus about what they hope to achieve for children and families.

Table 1: Example of a Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles for a State SECCS Initiative

Vision: Planning, funding and service provision are integrated at the state, local and community levels resulting in the availability of culturally appropriate services at integrated service platforms or through integrated networks of service providers.	
Mission: To encourage integrated service planning, funding and provision at the state level to facilitate local and community service provision platforms and networks in the five component service sectors by convening existing state and local initiatives, state and local agencies, public and private sector leaders, and communicating the need for optimal child development to stakeholders and the public.	
Guiding Principles	
Health and development can and should be optimized for <i>all</i> children.	Families are a central focus of young children’s health and development.
All families can benefit from guidance and support.	Child development requires an explicit recognition as a public responsibility.
“Developmentally informed” public policy and related investments must be maintained.	Strong and innovative leadership is needed.
Systems should be held accountable for outcomes.	A complex and changing society will require diverse approaches to service delivery.

Adapted from Halfon, N et al. *Building Bridges in an Early Childhood Service System*, National Center for Infant and Early Childhood Health Policy, 2004.

Questions to Consider:

Have you developed a vision and a mission that are consistent with the goals of the SECCS Initiative?

Does this vision and mission also reflect your state’s underlying values? Is it consistent with the shared goals of the agencies and organizations involved in your state’s SECCS Initiative (e.g., the planning body)?

Can your mission and vision serve as effective tools for increasing awareness and understanding of the SECCS Initiative among state and local stakeholders, particularly those individuals and organizations on whom your success depends?

Do you know on which elements of the mission you will focus in the short term if you are unable to address them all immediately?

Level I

- Develop a vision and mission that are derived from and/or validated through input from a range of agencies, service providers, community-based organizations, state and local leaders, and other key stakeholders.
- Check that your mission and vision are concise yet relate to a range of early childhood goals and objectives so that the wide range of stakeholders see that their particular interests are included.
- Consider using a bridging concept such as *school readiness* to describe the ultimate outcome of your efforts. This will help to create an inclusive vision and mission that a variety of stakeholders will be able to relate to their own goals and objectives, understanding that participation in and support of the SECCS Initiative will make their job easier, not harder.
- Develop a Statement of Values or Guiding Principles that reflects the values and beliefs that guide and inspire the members of the planning body.

Level II

- Develop a process for reassessing the vision and mission over time to ensure that it continues to reflect the planning body's purpose and the overall purpose of the SECCS Initiative.
- Assess how your vision, mission and guiding principles are framed and communicated. How messages are framed directly affects how receptive an audience may be to the message—the wrong frame may actually turn your audience off to your message when the right frame would win them over.

Existing Tools and Approaches

Halfon N, Uyeda K, Inkelas M, Kumar V, Tullis E, Rice T. *Building Bridges: A Comprehensive System for Healthy Development and School Readiness*. In: Halfon N, Rice T, and Inkelas M, eds. *Building State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Series, No. 1*. National Center for Infant and Early Childhood Health Policy;2004.

This report orients state MCH directors to the State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grants (SECCS). As leaders in outreach and program planning efforts regarding maternal and child health, this report presents challenges and opportunities pertinent to state MCH agencies in integration of child and family services. Opportunities for systems building within and across five component areas of the SECCS Initiative are addressed. A ten step strategic engagement plan that includes process-oriented, service-related, and infrastructure-related strategies are discussed to guide state-level planning and implementation. This report introduces the challenges and opportunities for state MCH directors in planning and implementation efforts of the SECCS Initiative as well as frames the Building Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Series of the National Center.¹

¹ Available at <http://www.healthychild.ucla.edu>

Gilliam Jr. F, Bales S. *Framing Early Childhood Development: Strategic Communications and Public Preferences*. In: Halfon N, Rice T, and Inkelas M, eds. *Building State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Series, No. 7*. National Center for Infant and Early Childhood Health Policy;2004.

Designed to support state MCH agencies build long-term public support, partnerships with other state and local agencies and organizations, and buy-in from state and local leaders needed to successfully plan and implement the SECCS Initiative, this report presents an overview of strategic communications and framing that can be used for systems building. The report focuses on communications strategies initiated during the planning process and the role that effective communication efforts and messages can play in achieving initiative goals. In addition, the report discusses strategies to gather particular audiences and constituencies and to facilitate collaboration among the various state and local agencies. Specific, practical recommendations to guide the development and implementation of strategic communications activities are provided. Web sites and other informational resources are also listed. Featuring strategies to build support for this specific initiative and create demand for early childhood comprehensive systems in general, this report is available as part of the National Center's Building Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Series.²

Collaborative Values Inventory

This tool was developed by Children and Family Futures in Irvine, CA provides a helpful starting point for a group discussion about values relating to young children and their families. A series of questions about alcohol and other drugs, services for children and families, and dependency courts asks members of the planning body to state their feelings and beliefs relating to these issues for the purpose of making both points of agreement and potential points of conflict explicit. The tool could easily be expanded and/or adapted so that the questions relate more specifically to the SECCS Initiative. For a copy of the tool, visit <http://www.cffutures.com/> and click on Collaborative Values Inventory Survey.

Inclusion, Public Input, and Communication

What Do We Mean By “Inclusion, Public Input, and Communication”?

Inclusion is the process by which diverse sectors are valued as partners and encouraged to participate in all aspects of decision-making. It is not an isolated component, but a process and value that is integral to every step of the planning, implementation and evaluation process.

Public input is the process by which diverse sectors are invited to participate in and provide feedback about the development of the strategic plan.

Communication is a key strategy for increasing both inclusion and public input. An effective communication strategy for the SECCS Initiative will create and disseminate key

² Available at <http://www.healthychild.ucla.edu>

messages that increase understanding and buy-in with regards to shared goals and objectives. Such a communication strategy will assist relevant agencies and organizations in understanding the value of investing and assisting in early childhood systems change. Strategic communication messages may be tailored to different audiences, stemming from an understanding of the different values, history and current environments of potential partners. Furthermore, a well thought out communications strategy helps keep messages consistent and allows for the development of a shared vision and mission. It is important to recognize that how messages are framed directly affects how receptive an audience may be to the message—the wrong frame may actually turn your audience off to your message when the right frame would win them over.

Why Is This Important?

Involving representatives from a range of early childhood-related state and local agencies – as well as organizations such as advocacy groups and community-based organizations that may be traditionally excluded from state-level planning – is consistent with the intent of the SECCS Initiative: to support system building through broad participation in strategic planning. Moreover, the strategic planning process for any effort rarely starts with a blank slate; there are likely numerous collaboratives and strategic planning efforts already underway at the state level or in particular communities within a state. The more time spent on coordinating SECCS with other related efforts that are already underway, the less resources need to be expended in the initial phases of planning and more time can be dedicated to enhancing existing processes.

Finally, efforts to include a variety of participants in the planning process will help make the SECCS effort accountable to the communities and populations that will be affected, and are a good way of encouraging buy-in and support from a variety of stakeholders. This includes using communication strategies that help these agencies and organizations understand the importance of their active participation in the SECCS Initiative not only by engaging in the strategic planning process but by serving as leaders who promote a shared vision represented by SECCS.

Questions to Consider:

Do you have a clear sense of what partners, local agencies and communities say they want and need with regards to the health and well-being of children and families?

Has the planning approach encouraged ownership of the process by relevant state and local agencies, and community-based organizations?

Do you have a strategic communication plan that engages key partners and effectively captures the issues relevant to a broad base of organizations, agencies and communities?

Are all relevant stakeholders either actively participating in or otherwise supportive of the SECCS effort?

Level I

- Identify the diverse stakeholders and traditionally underrepresented groups in the state.
- Identify current service providers and determine how their traditional service roles might change as a result of SECCS planning and implementation.
- Identify the available demographic indicators of current recipients of services, especially those living in underserved geographic regions.
- Identify the current array of private sector entities (e.g. businesses, faith-based organizations and foundations) and what these organizations currently provide as support to children and families. This is the first step in determining and facilitating a role for these entities in SECCS planning and implementation.
- Review existing programs operating in the state that seek to link, coordinate and integrate activities and develop a comprehensive picture of the range of services for children and families in the state.
- Develop an inventory of parallel planning processes targeted to young children and their families.
- Develop a communication strategy that is designed to maximize participation and/or support from relevant individuals, agencies and organizations.

Level II

- Conduct a planning process that reflects an understanding of the state's family and child composition, and that encourages and heeds public input.
- Choose a variety of modalities to seek public input, including, but not limited to, focus groups of key target populations, community forums with service providers at times and in locations convenient to them, statistically valid telephone surveys, and opportunity surveys by social and health organizations among existing clients.
- Use your communication strategy to encourage participation and leadership from experts (including but not limited to MCH representatives) in the areas of childcare, child development, child health, maternal health, mental health, family support, parenting education, and others in the planning process.
- Use your communication strategy to encourage participation and leadership from staff from model programs that already coordinate, link and integrate their activities and resources.
- Use your communication strategy to encourage participation and leadership from service providers whose roles and practices may change as a result of SECCS-related program and system changes.
- Use your communication strategy to encourage participation and leadership from representatives of private sector institutions including businesses, faith-based organizations and foundations, since these entities may have access to substantial resources and have traditionally played a powerful role in guiding the development of policies that affect children and families.

- Link with existing state and local planning bodies as appropriate.

Level III

- Commit to and document a process for ongoing public input about what is working, what is not, and how needs are changing over time as SECCS moves from planning to implementation.
- Utilize input from experts (e.g., both practitioners and researchers) in the areas of childcare, child development, child health, maternal health, mental health, family support, and parenting education to select specific results and strategies.
- Utilize input from the staff of model programs to select specific results and strategies.
- Utilize input from service providers whose roles may change as a result of SECCS to select specific results and strategies.
- Utilize input from private sector representatives to select specific results and strategies.
- Develop a process for ongoing coordination with related planning efforts, including sharing data, setting priorities and joint implementation activities.
- Identify and include key individuals that can serve as leaders and champion the SECCS vision of collaborative system-change as an effective strategy for achieving shared goals and objectives. Key individuals may come from the corporate sector whose interest and wherewithal can be valuable to garnering public and political attention, as well as community members and leaders from underrepresented groups who have similar power to get and hold public and political attention.

Existing Tools and Approaches

Inclusive Governance and Accountability Tools:

This set of tools promoting inclusive governance and accountability were developed by the Foundation Consortium in Sacramento, CA for use by First 5 county commissions wishing to implement maximally inclusive strategic planning and evaluation efforts. Although the focus is on inclusiveness with respect to community-level stakeholders such as parents of young children and other members of the target population, the principles and concepts presented in these tools can also be helpful when seeking input and participation from a variety of individuals and organizations. For copies of the tools, visit <http://www.foundationconsortium.org/what/earlychildhood/rcitools/rcitools.html>

Gilliam Jr. F , Bales S. *Framing Early Childhood Development: Strategic Communications and Public Preferences*. In: Halfon N, Rice T, and Inkelas M, eds. *Building State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Series, No. 7*. National Center for Infant and Early Childhood Health Policy;2004.

Designed to support state MCH agencies build long-term public support, partnerships with other state and local agencies and organizations, and buy-in from state and local leaders needed to successfully plan and implement the SECCS Initiative, this report presents an overview of strategic communications and framing that can be used for systems building.

The report focuses on communications strategies initiated during the planning process and the role that effective communication efforts and messages can play in achieving initiative goals. In addition, the report discusses strategies to gather particular audiences and constituencies and to facilitate collaboration among the various state and local agencies. Specific, practical recommendations to guide the development and implementation of strategic communications activities are provided. Web sites and other informational resources are also listed. Featuring strategies to build support for this specific initiative and create demand for early childhood comprehensive systems in general, this report is available as part of the National Center's Building Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Series.³

Strengths and Needs Assessments

What Do We Mean By "Strengths and Needs Assessment"?

A *strengths and needs assessment* is an analysis of both the needs in a state or community and the available resources and capacities to meet those needs. A strengths and needs assessment is geared toward determining gaps and gap-filling strategies and resources. The type of strengths and needs to be examined in this process should include not only the availability, quality and effectiveness of existing systems and services, but also the extent to which they meet other important systems-building criteria: integration, comprehensiveness, and cultural proficiency. Given the SECCS focus on service integration, it will be particularly important to review some of the comprehensive service delivery platforms such as family resource centers, medical homes, and school readiness programs to determine their existence (or appropriateness) within the state and local communities.

A strengths and needs assessment should include a socio-demographic profile of state residents and an inventory and assessment of the state's capacities, resources and assets, including community organizations, agencies and systems serving all or some of the children and families in the state. A strengths and needs assessment should also utilize and build upon data from prior assessments that have been completed in the state (e.g., those by state and local agencies and institutions, community-based organizations, children's planning councils or collaboratives, not-for-profits, universities, etc.). Some of the innovative ways that communities and states have approached this process has included the development of asset maps of existing programs, services and resources which overlay measured community needs to determine the specific geographic areas where there are significant gaps. This helps in targeting appropriate interventions, as well as helping to develop the infrastructure to cover whole communities (or a state) using a comprehensive and universal systems-building approach.

Another way of assessing the strengths and needs of a state, community, or system of services is to map out the critical pathways that lead back from a desired outcome to the conditions needed to achieve that outcome. For instance, a desired outcome might be that all children are ready to learn when they reach school. A precondition to this outcome is

³ Available at <http://www.healthychild.ucla.edu>

that all children are raised in nurturing and learning environments. On this map are also placed the strategies that support the outcome and its “preconditions,” as well as measures of both preconditions and strategies. For example, one strategy could be “health plans offer parenting classes to expectant parents” and a measure “the number and percent of parents who participated in classes and read to their child on a daily basis.”

This process is typically informed by research and evidence of what has been effective in achieving certain outcomes. Having identified the pathways to achieve an outcome, planners can overlay existing strategies and measures to identify:

- where there are gaps along the pathway,
- what steps in the pathway are successful, and
- where the pathway is broken.

The outcomes, preconditions, strategies and measures of a pathway can show how well a community is meeting the needs of parents and their young children. Key processes that can be measured through this approach include access to outreach, surveillance, assessment, identification, diagnosis, treatment, counseling and intervention, coordination, rehabilitation, and prevention and health promotion.

Why Is This Important?

A strengths and needs assessment can be used to guide priority setting, selection of strategies and resource allocation. Given the limited resources SECCS provides to states, it is important for the planning body to have a thorough understanding of existing resources, as well as the gaps in the communities being targeted or served. Such an understanding allows planners to take advantage of opportunities to address needs by building upon strengths without duplicating what’s already being done and/or contributing to further fragmentation among programs and services. Traditionally, assessments have focused predominantly on identifying needs. However, an overemphasis on needs and deficits may overlook both the potential for prevention strategies and the importance of assets that individuals, families, communities and existing efforts have to contribute to the SECCS Initiative.

Questions to Consider:

Have you conducted a strength and needs assessment focusing on both challenges and resources in the state for all young children and their families?

Do you have a clear understanding of how the current service delivery system functions and what gaps and inefficiencies remain to prevent children and families from accessing needed services?

Of the gaps you identify (both the identified needs of children and families and the inefficiencies and gaps in the existing service delivery system) which will you seek to close first?

Level I

- Identify existing strengths and needs assessments that have been completed by other organizations and entities within the state.

Level II

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment (including a review of data from existing strengths and needs assessments) that includes a socio-demographic profile, with a focus on underrepresented groups such as ethnic/cultural minorities, immigrants and special needs children but inclusive of all children.
- Conduct a comprehensive assessment (including a review of data from existing strengths and needs assessments) that includes an analysis of the adequacy, integration, comprehensiveness and cultural proficiency of the existing service delivery system within the state.
- Identify the state's capacities and assets, including public and private agencies (e.g., state and local governmental agencies, businesses, schools, parks, hospitals, libraries, colleges, police departments, community-based entities, etc.); citizen associations (e.g., churches, synagogues, block clubs, sports groups, parent groups and networks, other formal and informal networks); and the gifts, skills and capacities of members of both the planning body and the target population that SECCS can take advantage of and build upon.
- Identify and quantify gaps through geographically-specific asset and needs maps that indicate how well available resources correlate with needs.
- Develop an inventory of parallel planning processes targeted to young children and their families.
- Identify what monies are already being spent for children and families in the state by creating or reviewing a children's budget.
- Review existing data and literature in the areas of childcare, child development, brain research, child health, maternal health, mental health, family support, parenting education and other areas of interest. (Primary data collection is almost certainly not necessary given the array of literature reviews and other documents that have been prepared by research and policy organizations.)
- Identify major data gaps in your and existing strengths and needs assessments.

Level III

- Use the data and information you have gathered to create a critical pathway for young children and their families that address the key outcomes identified in your planning. Overlay the types of services available (and those that should be available) in the current system of care. Review these pathways and identify major gaps and inefficiencies that the SECCS effort could focus on and address.
- Identify the implications of the socio-demographic profile for implementing the strategic plan.

- Identify how the strengths and gaps in the state’s service delivery system may affect SECCS planning, implementation and/or attainment of results.
- Develop criteria for prioritizing gaps; select priorities for action. Potential criteria for prioritizing identified gaps include:
 - Size and severity of the gap
 - Trend of the gap (is it getting bigger or smaller?)
 - Potential cost of not closing the gap
 - Potential to leverage or draw down additional funding to help close the gap
 - Potential for mobilizing wide public and volunteer support to help close the gap
 - Potential for long-term benefit if the gap is closed
- Identify the implications of current funding levels for SECCS planning.
- Develop strategies for filling data gaps in your and existing strengths and needs assessments over time.

Existing Tools and Approaches

Halfon N, Uyeda K, Inkelas M, Kumar V, Tullis E, Rice T. *Planning for the State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative (SECCS): An Environmental Scan of Opportunities and Readiness for Building Systems*. In: Halfon N, Rice T, and Inkelas M, eds. *Building State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Series, No. 3*. National Center for Infant and Early Childhood Health Policy;2004.

To illuminate the policy and programmatic landscape for grantees, this scan of national and statewide programs presents an overview of efforts across the country. Included are findings from a survey of state MCH directors that report on statewide early childhood development systems and their views on the opportunities and challenges for states. A review of initiative characteristics including population demographics, service components, partnerships, financial support, and MCH involvement are described. Findings are followed by a discussion of strategies, resources, and best practices that address the challenges and opportunities presented in the survey. As a tool for state MCH directors, this environmental scan takes a broad look at the current national, state, and local systems-building efforts and provides resources and tools for states. This environmental scan is made available as part of this report series to introduce the challenges and opportunities for state MCH directors in planning and implementation efforts of the SECCS Initiative.

Results Accountability Framework

What Do We Mean By “Results Accountability Framework”?

A *results accountability framework* requires that planners are guided by identified desired *results* (e.g., all children enter school healthy and ready to learn, all early childhood programs and services are integrated and of high quality). These results are monitored and measured by *indicators* (e.g., percent of children with access to a medical home, percent of early childhood program and services that cross-refer and exchange information about their shared clients). And from these indicators flow the design and strategies to achieve those desired results (e.g., enrolling all eligible children in existing public health insurance programs, collaborating with other agencies to develop a shared data/case management system). Thus, results accountability shifts the focus from the more traditional services provided (“What activities should be carried out? What should be done?”) to “Ultimately, what results, what impact, what changes in children, families and systems do we expect to see from the activities performed?” Once the focus has shifted to results, it becomes easier to engage multiple stakeholders representing different service sectors, and easier to identify the services that need to be involved.

In order to evaluate progress towards the desired results – namely, the creation of an integrated and highly functional early childhood system – participants in the SECCS planning process also need a carefully crafted set of performance measures. *Performance measures* assess the changes in those sub-populations targeted by specific services and projects and provide shorter-term indicators of progress to meeting the initiative’s goals. Performance measures must be reasonably linked to indicators (e.g., number of trainings in cross-referral methods for providers [performance measure] could logically lead to increases in the % of early childhood programs that cross-refer [indicator]).

Why Is This important?

SECCS asks states to develop specific goals and objectives with time-frames for completion, and to develop early childhood indicators to track results and drive program and policy changes. Developing these goals (results), indicators, strategies, and performance measures will help to ensure that the focus of state efforts is on achieving the ultimate desired result of building early childhood systems constituted by high-quality, integrated programs and services. It will also help SECCS planners, implementers and evaluators create and sustain a continuous quality improvement process that ensures the ongoing relevance and effectiveness of the SECCS strategic plan and SECCS implementation activities. Thus, developing a results accountability framework enables SECCS planners to clarify precisely what it is they want to change, to determine the extent to which resources have been allocated in a way that actually achieves those changes, and to therefore maintain accountability for their desired results and to the communities they serve.

Questions to Consider:

What results, what changes in the conditions of children and families, do you expect to see from the activities performed?

How will you prioritize the results you wish to achieve given the resources available in your state? Which results will you focus on in the short term? Which results will be longer-term goals?

Have you decided on indicators and performance measures that will track results by using valid and reliable measures of progress?

Have you clearly distinguished between desired results of the planning process (such as getting buy-in from a range of early childhood stakeholders) and desired results of implementation of the plan (such as the development of integrated community-based platforms for service delivery which leads to better child and family outcomes)?

Within the category of child and family outcomes to be achieved by SECCS delivery systems, have you clearly distinguished between desired results for the whole population and desired results for targeted populations of specific programs, services or projects that SECCS supports or creates?⁴

Level I

- Identify both short- and long-term results that are reasonable given the resources available for SECCS.
- Distinguish between results that relate to the whole population and results that relate to specific sub-populations targeted by SECCS programs, services and projects.
- Determine how results will be measured at a single point in time.
- Identify national and state-level data that tracks indicators in programs and systems for young children and families.
- Commit to periodically reviewing, revising and updating your desired results.

Level II

- Identify criteria for selecting specific results of the planning process, system-level results of the plan implementation, and whole population and program-level results. Possible criteria for prioritizing results include:
 - Gaps identified and prioritized by the strengths and needs assessment
 - The values expressed during the public input process

⁴ Although the SECCS Initiative is comprehensive and universal in scope, service delivery changes may only impact a subset of children and families (e.g., where there may have been gaps). For this reason, it will be important for accountability purposes to examine not only statewide indicators encompassing a whole population, but also measures relating specifically to the results achieved for the sub-population most affected by the initiative.

- Importance to improving the health and development of all young children and supporting their families
 - Importance to the public and policymakers
 - Relevance to the goals of SECCS
 - Mutability/sensitivity to change
 - Immediacy and extent of potential impact
- Prioritize selected results according to the criteria agreed upon by the planning body.
 - Identify specific indicators and performance measures (where applicable) for the whole population.
 - Develop performance measures for programs, services and projects that are consistent with measures of progress for the whole population.
 - Develop current baseline or trend information, comparisons and benchmarks for key measures.
 - Identify data sources for the prioritized measures.
 - Specify who will track indicators and performance measures.

Level III

- Identify data gaps and allocate resources for upgrading information systems and developing data capacity.
- Implement formal agreements (Memoranda of Understanding) for data exchange and/or develop an integrated data system in collaboration with existing agencies and organizations.
- Set a date and develop a detailed process for a regular review, revision and updating of desired results, indicators and performance measures.
- Develop baselines, trends, comparisons and benchmarks for all measures.

Existing Tools and Approaches

Friedman M. *Results Accountability for State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems: A Planning Guide for Improving the Well-Being of Young Children and Their Families*. In: Halfon N, Rice T, and Inkelas M, eds. *Building State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Series, No. 4*. National Center for Infant and Early Childhood Health Policy;2004.

This paper sets forth a disciplined thinking process designed to help identify actions that will measurably improve the lives of children, families and communities. First it begins with discipline about language and the use of words to label ideas. Second, it posits a sharp distinction between accountability for the well-being of whole populations and accountability for the performance of programs, agencies and service systems. And third it offers a common sense progression of work that produces effective actions. This framework guides policymakers, program managers, and service providers to select the best indicators during the planning process. By measuring targeted outcomes and evaluating results, those involved with the SECCS Initiative can apply these principles to focus on improving program design and service delivery of early childhood systems. This

report is available as part of the National Center's Building State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Series.⁵

Results Accountability Website:

In addition to the above report, Mark Friedman also developed a website intended for use by individuals and organizations wishing to develop results accountability plans. The website provides a wealth of information about what results accountability means and a step-by-step guide for developing a plan. Visit <http://www.raguide.org>

Identification of Strategies

What Do We Mean By "Strategy"?

A *strategy* is a course of action taken to achieve your desired results. In addition to simply identifying the strategies you will use to achieve your desired results, SECCS plans should explain why and how the programs, services and projects you provide, sponsor or facilitate will achieve your stated goals and objectives; who will be involved in developing and implementing particular strategies; how and where they should go about it; and the timeframe within which each strategy will be completed.

Strategies to be included in the SECCS Initiative must include efforts to integrate and improve the quality of the five required programmatic components of the initiative, but should also go beyond that to include strategies such as:

- Communication, leadership development, and partnership building strategies that promote inclusion and public input in SECCS planning and implementation.
- Tool development strategies that build and make available a variety of effective tools and approaches needed at both the state and local level.
- Training and professional development strategies that ensure that a sufficient number of individuals with appropriate skills and perspectives are available to participate in the types of bridging and integration activities to be implemented in the SECCS Initiative.
- Policy development strategies that promote alignment at the state level for the purpose of enabling more innovation and collaboration at local levels.

The results accountability framework described above is naturally inclined to assist with the identification of strategies.

Why Is This Important?

SECCS planners have some tough choices to make since prioritizing one set of strategies means that other potential strategies cannot get the same level of support. These choices should be based on both available evidence as to what pathways need to be in place to achieve a given outcome, and the values of the state in which you work and the members of

⁵ Available at <http://www.healthychild.ucla.edu>

the planning body. Identifying all the possible strategies you could choose allows and how each contributes to an outcome, helps you to see the tradeoffs that will have to be made given limited resources, and to select only those strategies that are most likely to have a significant and measurable impact.

Questions to Consider:

Have you specified the strategies to be implemented in order to achieve your desired results (both the results of the planning process and the results of implementing the plan)?

Have you described why and how the programs, services and projects that will be provided, sponsored or facilitated will achieve your goals and objectives, and address the gaps and inefficiencies you identified through your strengths and needs assessment?

Are you clear on who needs to be involved in an effective effort to develop and implement the strategies you have chosen?

Which strategies will you begin to implement now to reach the results you have decided to focus on in the short term?

How will these short-term strategies support the implementation of your longer-term strategies?

Level I

- Focus on strategies that create linkages and improve coordination between existing programs and services.
- Describe how the strategies you have selected will help you achieve your desired results.
- Identify the evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of your chosen strategies, and specify where more evidence is needed.
- Identify gaps in the availability of qualified personnel to implement your strategies.

Level II

- Clarify the criteria, values and assumptions that justify the selection of your strategies. Wherever possible, justify the plan based on a cost effectiveness analysis of strategies, or other evidence about what works. Possible criteria for prioritizing strategies include:
 - Based on a review of evidence, this strategy works.
 - It creates linkages between programs.
 - It creates or builds on existing delivery platforms and/or other community assets.
 - It creates or strengthens a foundation to support other strategies.
 - Federal, state, local or private funds are available to match SECCS funds.

- Funds are not available for this strategy from any other source.
 - This strategy allows for the coordination or blending of funding.
 - It addresses the needs of multiple clients or multi-generations of clients.
 - It represents a reengineering of services that addresses known needs and problems with the current delivery system.
- Include strategies for ongoing monitoring of staffing needs and training of new personnel, including cross-disciplinary training.
 - Include strategies to create or support appropriate service delivery platforms for programs and services, such as:
 - Family resource centers
 - Early education and care outreach and service linkage programs
 - Health-based care coordination programs (e.g., medical homes)
 - Schools-based resource centers
 - Outline a plan for overcoming barriers to the target population's access to existing programs and services.
 - Select strategies that will build the capacity of families and encourage self-help, informal support networks, sustained independent efforts, etc.
 - Enlist families, businesses, educational institutions, community-based organizations, and state and local government in supporting and implementing your strategies.

Existing Tools and Approaches

Theory of Change:

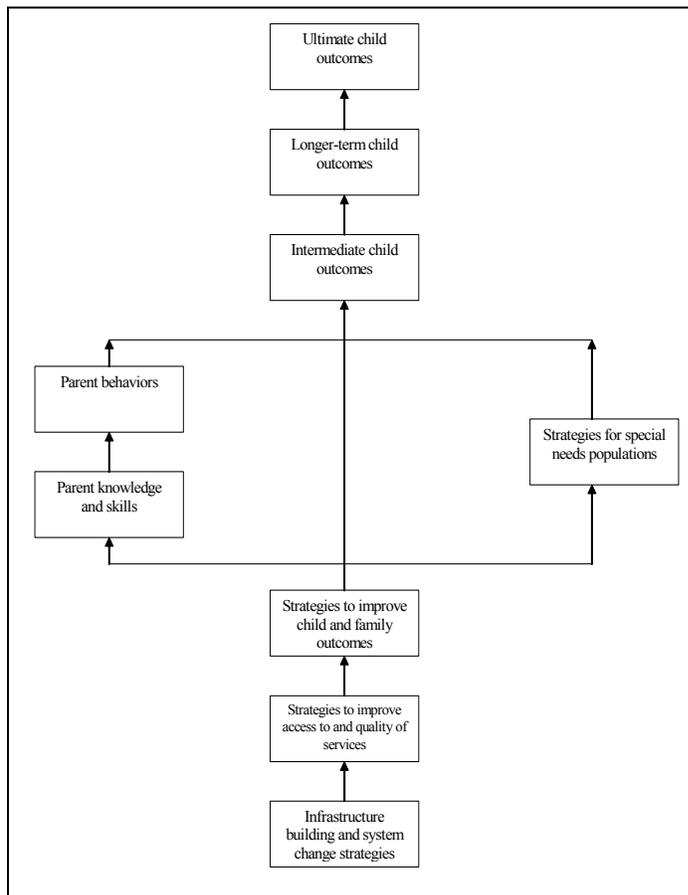
The Aspen Institute on Comprehensive Community Initiatives and Act Knowledge collaborated to develop this user-friendly approach to creating logical, evidence-based models for achieving outcomes. For more information about the Theory of Change and the training and technical assistance that is available, visit <http://www.theoryofchange.org/>

Critical Pathways: An Early Childhood Framework. An Application of the Theory of Change.

Based on a review of early childhood literature and the Theory of Change, a set of critical pathways can be developed for use in planning and implementation of an early childhood systems-building initiative. The pathways can be a useful tool to identify ultimate outcomes of the initiative.

Intermediate outcomes, service strategies, access and quality improvement strategies, and system change strategies can be linked causally to the ultimate outcomes (**Figure 2**). This framework represents relationships between outcomes and strategies, and can be used in strategic planning to identify funding priorities, strategies, and performance measures. The framework shown may be used to create more detailed critical pathways for statewide early childhood initiatives.

Figure 2: Critical pathways Early Childhood Framework



While pathways are based on evidence of what works to affect certain outcomes, other considerations include community input, needs assessment, political realities, and available funding. For evaluation, data capacity among service providers is an important factor in the selection of indicators in addition to the casual relationships implied in the pathways.

Allocation of Resources

What Do We Mean By “Allocation of Resources”?

For SECCS, the *allocation of resources* involves thinking strategically about how to spend limited systems-building resources in the most effective and efficient way possible in order to achieve desired results. Since the SECCS monies are limited in time, amount and intent, there should be considerable thought given to what states already have, as well as what they are potentially missing in terms of federal or untapped funding streams (public or private). Ultimately, for SECCS planning and implementation to promote integration and innovation at local levels, a basic SECCS funding strategy must include aligning fiscal policies at the state level to create maximally flexible funding streams. Thus, SECCS

funds should principally be considered as: 1) glue to help the initiative maintain a comprehensive scope, and a focus on the harder-to-fund integration issues; 2) a catalyst to facilitate the creative and most efficient use of existing funds; and 3) seed capital to test new models that would eventually be sustained using other funding mechanisms.

An important role for SECCS planners is to assess what funding is already available to address priority needs, determine whether or not that funding is being used efficiently and effectively, and determine how better to utilize these funds. As these decisions are difficult during the best of fiscal times, the appropriate individuals need to be involved in the planning: agency representatives with the authority to make changes in policy and resource allocation. If SECCS planners represent the authority necessary to make change, they can then work with county, state and federal agencies to ensure that currently available funds are being maximized and leveraged before allocating limited SECCS funds.

Why Is This Important?

A strategic allocation of resources is critical to ensuring that states get the most for their money, time and effort, and that the programs, services and projects supported by SECCS are sustainable even after SECCS funds are no longer available. Funding allocation will rely heavily on the previously described components of strategic planning: strengths and needs assessment, results accountability framework and strategies—particularly the prioritization of the strategies.

Many of the services young children need already have existing funding streams. And while some are woefully underfunded, there may still be some areas where greater efficiencies and innovation can be employed to improve effectiveness. Analyzing these existing resources and determining how they can be leveraged and utilized to create an integrated system of services should be one of the first steps SECCS planners take. Planners also need to look at other states for examples of how to change the policies and regulations that sometimes work against integrated and effective systems. Key investments in specific areas that fill gaps can be catalysts to demonstrate effectiveness of an integrated service delivery platform and could go a long way towards changing regulations and institutionalizing a new and effective method or model. SECCS planners will need to determine the most strategic use of limited funding, approaching the task with ample information and understanding of existing needs, resources, gaps and policies.

Questions to Consider:

Is there sufficient alignment, support and flexibility at the state level for innovative funding mechanisms that promote collaboration and integration across the five programmatic components of the SECCS Initiative?

How will you fund the strategies you have selected?

What criteria will you use for selecting funding mechanisms?

Are resources allocated in a way that will support the achievement of desired results?

Level I

- Identify existing sources of funding and revenue for early childhood programs, services and systems of care.
- Work with appropriate individuals and agencies at the state level to understand the existing flexibility in funding streams and promote policies that enhance local ability to integrate systems.
- Involve local and national foundations in your planning as early as possible. Do not wait to apply to them for funds once you have a completed plan. Rather, utilize their skills, resources, and political knowledge to your advantage by making them an initial member of your planning body and building their commitment to your cause.
- Create a budget that allocates funds to specific results and strategies.
- Use SECCS funds to integrate and/or improve, not fund, existing programs and services.
- Use SECCS dollars to fund promising approaches that have specific gaps that prevent full achievement of desired results.
- Identify and utilize low-cost and no-cost options; use your planning process to generate as many of these ideas and options as possible.

Level II

- Leverage other local, state or federal funds and resources to maximize revenue streams for a specific strategy.
- Consider opportunities to apply to private funders for gifts, grants, donations or contributions of money, property, facilities or services, particularly as this may fill specific niche needs within a program or system.
- Allocate funds and other resources to prioritized strategies in sufficient dosage so that they are likely to have a significant impact.
- Maximize the use of low-cost and no-cost options; many of these options will have higher-than-expected impacts and a cascade effect enhancing the initial impact.

Level III

- Design, propose and implement a strategy for creating more flexible funding mechanisms, such as master contracts between states and local entities for multiple integrated services or pooled funding at a state or county level.
- Identify funding sources that could be redirected toward particular strategies if they are proven effective, and specify how these funds could be used to replicate and expand such programs.
- Consider long-range financial planning based on the expectation that SECCS funds are only available for a few years. Develop other funding sources and innovative fiscal strategies to sustain the SECCS mission.

- Keep searching for low-cost and no-cost options, or strategies that build off existing infrastructure. The more integrated a system the more these opportunities will arise.

Existing Tools and Approaches

Hayes CD, Flynn M, Stebbins H. *Strategic Financing: Making the Most of the State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative*. In: Halfon N, Rice T, and Inkelas M, eds. *Building State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Series, No. 5*. The Finance Project; 2004. Prepared for the National Center for Infant and Early Childhood Health Policy.

The report reviews basic challenges that policy makers, community leaders, and program developers struggle with as they finance early childhood initiatives. General principles are highlighted to guide decisions concerning the allocation and management of early childhood funds. An array of relevant strategies for financing comprehensive community early childhood initiatives such as SECCS are presented. A summary of keys strategies to developing and implementing successful financing plans are described. For reference, appendices provide information on federal funding streams, list federal funding sources by functional activity, and highlight a number of other published materials and electronic information sources that are relevant and can supplement the information presented in this paper. This report is available as part of the National Center’s Building State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Series.⁶

Langford B, Flynn M. *Sustainability Planning Workbook*. Washington, DC: The Finance Project; 2003.

This workbook presents guidelines for writing a business plan for school-based collaboratives. Providing steps and a framework for creating a sustainability plan, the workbook also clearly shows applicable examples that illustrate the steps of sustainability planning. Specifically, the Sustainability Planning Workbook assists the user in defining goals, assessing assets and resources, and planning and implementing strategies. While designed for school-based collaboratives, the workbook can be adapted for use in early childhood systems building. For more information on The Finance Project, visit: <http://www.financeproject.org>.

Evaluation and Quality Improvement Process

What Do We Mean By “Evaluation and Quality Improvement Process”?

Evaluation is the part of the strategic planning process that puts the results accountability framework into action by collecting and analyzing data on an ongoing basis, and reflecting on progress as it relates to established goals and objectives. Evaluation is most beneficial when it is incorporated into every phase of the strategic planning and implementation process, from selection of strategies to project development, through start-up, implementation, expansion and/or replication.

⁶ Available at <http://www.healthychild.ucla.edu>

Planners have come to appreciate evaluation as a tool that is not simply used to determine outcomes at the end of a phase of a project, but as a mechanism to provide ongoing information that can guide the implementation of an initiative and contribute to its optimal effectiveness and *quality improvement* along the way.

Evaluation occurs on three levels: at the population level (including measures of the status of children and families), the program level (including measures of quality and quantity of services provided), and at the system level (including measures of system integration, coordination of services and capacity building). The SECCS Initiative is an exciting opportunity to integrate evaluation efforts across multiple sectors and all three levels to create a shared, useful assessment of how well services are integrated, performing, and impacting child and family outcomes. The MCH community has a considerable amount of expertise to share in this regard with its mandated and existing expertise in data collection at the population and program levels. These mechanisms, as well as the infrastructure of partnering agencies, can be used to expand data collection and evaluation efforts.

While SECCS efforts may primarily focus on the system level having data on individual outcomes and the effectiveness of specific programs will also be necessary and appropriate. The SECCS evaluation will also need to include measures and procedures for determining the effectiveness of the planning process itself. At all levels, the evaluation process can include individual interviews, written surveys, focus groups, observation, and analysis of data and administrative information.

Data collection efforts can take advantage of the considerable resources that already exist. For instance, national assessments of early childhood exist (e.g., the National Survey of Early Childhood Health) that can be adapted to the state, local, health plan, or program level. Having comparable measures of child and family well-being allows planners to compare across levels and between places.

Why Is This Important?

Evaluation is a critical component of strategic planning and implementation. A good evaluation process provides SECCS planners, and the community as a whole, with regular feedback about how well they are achieving their desired results (including system integration and coordination and the assurance of high-quality early childhood programs and services) through their chosen strategies. Where evaluation is built into the planning and implementation process, there is the opportunity for continuous data and information feedback to planners and administrators. This feedback allows for a certain amount of reflection on the process and enough information to support adjustments that can improve the quality of the program or initiative. Improved quality helps the initiative reach its goals and desired results. Continuous feedback on the process also provides the basis for a review of allocation decisions to ensure that SECCS money is being used efficiently and effectively.

Questions to Consider:

Which evaluation methodologies will you employ to check your progress toward reaching your desired results at the population level, systems level, and program level (if relevant)?

What investments in data collection, information analysis and staff training will be needed to effectively carry out an evaluation of SECCS and the integrated service system it promotes?

How will you report the results of your evaluation to yourself, to the public and to relevant agencies and organizations? How will this fit into your communications strategy?

Have you established a method of collecting data on an ongoing basis, and providing feedback to relevant stakeholders to promote continuous quality improvement and mid-course corrections as needed?

Level I

- Develop a plan for ongoing collection and analysis of relevant data at applicable levels:
 - population level (including specific measures of young children and families)
 - program level (including measures of both quality and quantity of service provided)
 - system integration level (including coordination of services and capacity building)
- Develop an evaluation process that includes multiple data collection techniques such as interviews, surveys, focus groups, observation, and analysis of existing administrative or population data.
- Specify how and by whom data will be collected, analyzed and reported.

Level II

- Specify how data and information will be fed back into the design and implementation of SECCS-related programs, services and projects to enhance their effectiveness.
- Specify how data and information will be fed back into the decision making process for the strategic plan regarding strategies and resource allocations.

Level III

- Include plans for collecting and analyzing data on specific sub-populations of the state, particularly ethnic and geographic areas with a history of under-representation and/or disproportionately negative outcomes/results.
- Develop plans for collecting key data where data is not currently available.
- Provide for periodic revision of the strategic plan based on the results of your evaluation, ongoing public input, and updated needs assessments by setting a date for an annual plan review.

Existing Tools and Approaches

National Initiative on Children's Healthcare Quality (NICHQ)'s Breakthrough Series

NICHQ's Breakthrough Series involves the use of structured learning collaboratives to improve outcomes for children, families, and communities. This model brings together organizations and agencies sharing a commitment to a specific issue and that want to make major, rapid changes, producing breakthrough results. Each agency and organization puts together a "team" to make changes and implement new systems over the course of nine to 12 months. By using a combination of local learning and scientific methods to produce change in the quality of health care for a given population, learning collaboratives tackle the common barriers to systems and practice improvement. The learning collaborative model incorporates a rapid cycle process of continuous quality improvement. In a Breakthrough Series, organizations are asked to address the following questions:

- What are we trying to change?
- How will we know if these changes lead to improvement?
- What are the measures that will enable us to tell whether we are making progress?

A formulation of change concepts and pathways to navigate the change process emerges and permits the creation of tools tailored to support change. The hope is that through repeated cycles of testing, organizations will learn how their practice works so they can mold new ideas to fit this environment. The Breakthrough Series is a very efficient way of structuring collaboration across multiple organizations to facilitate rapid systems change and achieve measurable improvements in care. It also results in a set of principles and tools that permit greater diffusion of innovation.

FACCT's Promoting Healthy Development (PHD)

The Promoting Healthy Development (PHD) Survey was developed by the Foundation for Accountability (FACCT) and has also been adopted by the National Committee for Quality Assurance as part of patient satisfaction measures. These measures are used to define and profile how well health plans are providing essential early childhood services designed to promote health development. The PHD instrument surveys parents to examine the content of anticipatory guidance received from their health care provider in the previous year and the health information provided, follow-up for children identified as at-risk, family well-

being, and safety. The PHD has been fielded in several states to measure performance of health plans and improve the delivery of Medicaid-funded early childhood services, and will be used by NICHQ in their work to improve practice performance of developmental services.

National Survey of Early Childhood Health (NSECH)

In 2000, the NSECH was utilized across the United States to examine current perceptions of health care among families with young children. The survey instrument was developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics and UCLA and fielded by the National Center for Health Statistics. Additional funding came from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and The Gerber Foundation. The national sample of 2,000 families with children ages four to 35 months also included an over-sampling of minority populations in order to give precise estimates of Black and Hispanic children nationally. The content of the survey includes items adapted from the PHD, as well items from the Commonwealth Survey of Families with Young Children. Parents were queried about health supervision and content; parental preferences of care and what they would like to receive; factors of quality care; child and parent demographics, child risk and protective factors; and how parenting practices such as reading and discipline styles relate to content of care.

Conclusion

The elements to the strategic planning process described and outlined in this report are meant to assist states in crafting a comprehensive, viable and effective early childhood system building plan. A well devised plan incorporating good evidence and baseline assessments, with enough buy-in and leadership, has a much greater chance of successful implementation. Each of the seven steps can be a large endeavor in and of itself. Therefore, states are encouraged to enter the strategic planning process utilizing different components and starting at appropriate levels of activities, depending on their individual state circumstance. There are also several other tools and approaches listed in each component section to guide further work in each area.

The dedicated resources and time for planning built into the SECCS Initiative are important for several reasons. The complex nature of multiple service systems working together takes forethought and significant groundwork. Fortunately, systems of care, such as education, health and social services have actually been on a converging trend with regards to early childhood. These service sectors have jointly recognized the significant investments needed during the critical period of early childhood. They have also demonstrated multi-disciplinary and multi-generational approaches to service delivery. The converging nature of the dominant thoughts and trends in these fields makes coordinated and strategic planning very timely.

Another important reason for dedicated planning is the stark economic reality currently faced by many service sectors. Although young children and their families have been a priority in many states, shrinking state budgets and a sluggish economy have led to a

reduced amount of investments in these populations. Furthermore, innovation and collaboration are not normally embraced in difficult economic times. The components of the strategic planning process outlined in this document are geared to maximize collaborative opportunities to create higher functioning systems of care. These should result in less duplication, streamlined administration, maximal leveraging and overall efficiencies that help, rather than hinder, the state and local agency function. In the end, the planning process helps ensure that the desired outcomes and results we hold for young children, families and communities are realized.