



National
Infant & Toddler
Child Care
Initiative
@
ZERO TO THREE

KEY STEPS FOR CREATING AN INFANT/TODDLER SPECIALIST NETWORK

A number of States have created infant/toddler specialist networks to support the infant/toddler caregiver workforce, and improve the quality and availability of infant/toddler child care. This is an emerging strategy for providing leadership and a vision for meeting the unique needs of babies and toddlers. Creating an infant/toddler specialist network can be challenging; fortunately, lessons learned from several States help to identify key steps for success.

The National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative synthesized the information gathered from many conversations and interviews with infant/toddler specialist network representatives. It was from this process of inquiry that the following series of steps were outlined. Links to examples that illustrate the step are included when available.

Many of the steps include specific tasks that the States have successfully undertaken. Others steps were identified in hindsight – States felt these would have been helpful additional actions to take as part of the planning and implementation process. While some of the steps may take place simultaneously and/or may not take place in this order, all of the steps should be considered during the development process.

Step 1. Assess System Needs and Readiness to Support a Network

- Collect information about the existing systems' current abilities to meet the needs of infants and toddlers
- Identify the gaps in the services available in the existing systems (e.g. number of working mothers vs. availability of infant care)
- Determine whether an infant/toddler specialist network is the appropriate vehicle to fill the gaps in existing systems to improve the quality and availability of infant/toddler care
- Analyze the readiness of existing systems to support infant/toddler specialists

A supply and demand report is one example of a data source that can be used to assess system needs. A sample report from the Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Agency is available at http://www.occrra.org/reports_occrra.htm

Step 2. Determine the Scope and Focus of the Network

- Identify and invite key stakeholders and partners
- Develop a vision, mission, and goals for the network
- Develop strategies to meet the identified goals
- Identify what funding resources are needed to meet the goals
- Develop an action plan for implementing the strategies
- Develop a logic model to illustrate how the strategies will support the goals and fulfill the vision of the network



Defining the scope and focus of the network can be captured in many ways. The annual report of The Iowa Program for Infant & Toddler Caregivers outlines much of the framework for their network and is available at

http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/dhs2005/dhs_homepage/docs/iowapitannualreportpub04.pdf

The goals and vision of the Infant/Toddler Specialist Network of the Kansas Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies is located on their website. The link to this information is at

http://www.kaccrra.org/show_expanded_pages.php3?sid=69e392&member_id=0&chapter_id=12

The Bush Foundation has highlighted the scope and focus of their work through a document called Lessons Learned: This publication outlines the work of the past ten years of the work they fund in MN, ND and SD, including Infant/Toddler Specialist Networks. The link to this newsletter is found at <http://www.bushfoundation.org/publications/reports.asp>.

Step 3. Identify and Secure Funding

- Develop a budget
- Explore funding sources
- Secure commitment from funding sources

The main source of funding for the Infant/Toddler Specialist Networks has been the Child Care Development Fund, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/1stateadm/nbook01.htm> and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, <http://mchb.hrsa.gov>. Other sources have included private foundations and local government. A number of states have been able to utilize the different funding streams to address all age groups and developmental stages. Illinois has an example of an inventory of funded programs that include numerous supports for babies, toddlers and their families. The link to this inventory is

<http://www.illinois.gov/gov/elc/programs.cfm>

Step 4. Find a Home for the Network

- Determine criteria for selecting where the network will be housed
- Use criteria to consider existing systems
- Select a home (determine whether sole source or an RFP process)
- Draft agreement or contract

Step 5. Create an Administrative Structure

- Determine line of authority/communication flow (state/contractor/coordinator/specialists)
- Determine roles and responsibilities for network personnel

Iowa lists the roles and responsibilities of the State Infant/Toddler Specialist and the Regional Infant/Toddler Specialists at the following link.

http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/dhs2005/dhs_homepage/docs/iowapitannualreportpub04.pdf

Step 6. Design an Evaluation

- Determine the criteria for the evaluation design
- Use the logic model to help design an evaluation
- Explore and secure funding sources (if there is no funding for evaluation in the budget)
- Draft an RFP for evaluation services
- Choose an evaluator

Evaluation reports can be used to describe the work being completed as well as the success of the program. The following reports from the Kansas Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and Healthy Child Care Washington, demonstrate how evaluation has been conducted in two different systems –

http://www.kaccrra.org/show_expanded_pages.php3?sid=69e392&member_id=0&chapter_id=12
<http://www.healthychildcare-wa.org> .

Ohio has prepared a logic model as a basis for their evaluation and design. A copy of the logic model can be found at <http://www.occrra.org/firststeps.htm> .

The National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative also developed an At-A-Glance document on evaluation and infant/toddler child care located at http://www.nccic.org/itcc/wordDocs/B2Three_AAGEvaluation.doc.

Step 7. Support the Network

- Provide orientation and pre-service training for new network personnel
- Assess and address the ongoing professional needs of network personnel development
- Provide opportunities for networking among all infant/toddler specialists
- Encourage and enable collaboration with other systems that serve infants, toddlers, their families, and their caregiver.

