

## 9. Use data to show value

Sharing data, reporting, and evaluation information can punctuate important points while making the case with the public and policymakers. Celebrating successes contributes to attracting new investments and sustaining existing ones. Use different kinds of data, in different ways, with different kinds of audiences. Fiscal accountability is a part of this. The other part is showing the positive impact at the client-level which, in combination with fiscal accountability, can be used to make the case for what is being bought (i.e., positive outcomes, efficiency in program delivery, reaching children who otherwise would not be reached, etc.).

## 10. Be a good sales person

When making the case for maintaining an existing investment or building support for a new investment, speak to the audience at hand and capitalize on opportunities to show success. In particular, key informants spoke to the importance of this when speaking with legislators and business leaders. Know what the primary objectives are of the buyer, how the investment or proposal meets the needs of the buyer, have a clear ask, and close the deal. Use additional outreach on new points and/or alternative options as rebuttal to the buyer's hesitancy to act. All along the way, proactively seek opportunities to share successes.

## 11. Never stop campaigning for your cause

Acquiring and sustaining gains requires a commitment to constant and long-term work on building new constituencies and deepening a sense of buy-in from existing constituencies. For early childhood champions in public office, the practice of promoting certain investments or raising awareness about key issues with legislators and the public should occur throughout their tenure in office. This highlights the importance of getting early childhood issues on the public platforms of candidates for key offices during campaign seasons. For the early childhood community as a whole long-term campaigning involves constant attention to relationship mapping, steady work on public awareness, and ensuring the right messages are delivered to the targeted audiences by the best messengers.

## 12. Use opposition to rally your troops

Opposition from individuals or groups on early childhood issues is an opportunity for the wider early childhood community to exercise unity. Presenting a unified voice can offer policymakers and the public confidence that the early childhood field has, and stands behind, reasonable answers to the problems raised by opponents. Additionally, opposition should not be underestimated. It is important to really understand what the opposition is about in order to address it properly and appropriately.



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The BUILD Initiative helps states create comprehensive early childhood systems – coordinated, effective policies that address children's health, mental health and nutrition, early care and education, family support, and early intervention. BUILD's vision is at the center of an emerging and vibrant state-based policy movement in the early childhood development field. We work with those who set policies, provide services and advocate for our youngest children to make sure that they are safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed in school.

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# Sustaining Early Childhood Systems Development

## Interviews with Key Informants Outside Pennsylvania: Key Findings in Brief<sup>1</sup>

Prepared by Kristin Wiggins • September 2009 Draft

### Introduction • • •

The BUILD Initiative is leading a research project about early childhood systems development progress, sustainability of systems-building efforts, and managing leadership change. While the research project is Pennsylvania-focused it draws from the experience of other states and will provide valuable lessons and insights for many states.

States are increasing their investments of effort and resources in establishing comprehensive early childhood systems that transcend multiple programs, funding streams, and lines of authority. Sustaining such efforts and systems-building gains involves building infrastructure in a manner that aims at optimizing system integrity and longevity. For instance, embedding programs, services, and systems across agencies as a technique to reduce likelihood an effort can be dismantled. Sustainability also encompasses how to keep focus on and momentum for forward early childhood systems-building work, as well as managing adaptations and developments to the systems-building cause through leadership change. This yin-and-yang dynamic between maintaining gains with accepting and managing change that the future inevitably holds is an overarching theme explored throughout the key findings sections of this report.

In Pennsylvania, there have been milestones achieved for children in the past six years under Governor Rendell's administration including the establishment of the cross-agency Office of Child Development and Early Learning. Pennsylvania's state investments in birth through five early childhood programs have increased dramatically. In addition, huge advances have been made on improving quality in child care settings with a strong focus on standards.

With Pennsylvania facing the election of a new governor in 2010, The Heinz Endowments is supporting a review of Pennsylvania's systems building efforts to inform strategies that will sustain programs and the early childhood policy agenda and prepare for a transition in leadership. As part of this work, the BUILD Initiative has contracted with the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning and the Child and Family Policy Center to conduct interviews with key informants to understand the strategies employed in Pennsylvania.

<sup>1</sup> This document is a draft, shortened version of a document that will be produced later in 2009.

Key informants from Pennsylvania were interviewed to discuss their assessment of early childhood gains, their thoughts on the challenges and opportunities ahead related to pending leadership changes in the executive branch, and what planning efforts are underway for sustaining the early childhood gains. Because sustainability planning is a valuable component of any state's early childhood work and much can be learned from other states who have experience with managing political transitions and maintaining momentum for systemic change, a second interview process was conducted simultaneously with leaders from outside Pennsylvania.

In the second interview process leaders from states outside Pennsylvania were interviewed to discuss what leadership changes impacted their early childhood system most, how those changes were handled, and what advice they have for states such as Pennsylvania that are currently facing a leadership change that will have significant impacts on early childhood efforts. This report summarizes the key findings from the interviews conducted with state leaders from outside Pennsylvania.

The BUILD Initiative's consultant team identified 10 key informants from outside Pennsylvania to be interviewed due to their valuable perspective on and experience with sustaining an early childhood system through state leadership transition. Key informants represented diverse perspectives including vantage points from philanthropy, business, non-profits, public private partnerships, and state government. Four key informants were from North Carolina, two from Ohio, and one each from Arizona, Iowa, South Carolina, and West Virginia. All 10 key informants were available for interviews conducted in early-July through early-September 2009.

The goals of the interviews were to: (1) capture lessons from states outside Pennsylvania that have significant early childhood initiatives and have sustained achievements and momentum; and (2) to learn successful strategies for managing

leadership transition and sustaining early childhood system-building progress from state leaders outside Pennsylvania.

Considering these purposes and the responses key informants offered during the interviews, common themes about lessons learned prevailed over the course of conducting the key informant interviews. These themes are explored in the following Key Findings section.

## Key Findings ●●●

Ten key informants from Arizona, Iowa, Ohio, North Carolina, South Carolina, and West Virginia representing perspectives from philanthropy, business, non-profits, public private partnerships, and state government were interviewed over the summer of 2009. The key informants were selected for interviews due to their experience with sustaining an early childhood system through state leadership transition.

The purposes of the interviews were: (1) to capture lessons from states that have significant early childhood initiatives and have sustained achievements and momentum; and (2) to learn successful strategies for managing leadership transition and sustaining early childhood system-building progress.

Based on these purposes, the common themes that prevailed during key informant interviews are described in brief below.

### 1. Formalize and institutionalize key processes

When system-building, formalize interagency collaborative relationships and intertwine various systems in statute before early childhood mavens leave office or political appointees are replaced. When the various pieces impact and have value-add with each other, it becomes hard to eliminate or reduce pieces of the system following the departure of a key champion or during a tough budget year.

### 2. Pick your battles

When planning for a leadership transition, determine the top priorities – the things worth fighting the hardest for – and if necessary, be prepared to compromise on the rest. Work with the executive and legislative branches to sustain those top priorities and ensure the advocacy community is aligned in such efforts. Compromise may involve finding a way to have net gain in early childhood investments while enduring losses to specific programs. Weather a loss position by posing programs to ramp up again and attract a return to funding when the economic forecast is more promising.

### 3. Know when to fly under the radar

After a leadership change, sometimes there are things that can continue to happen in practice without renewal or formalizing. Sometimes more can get achieved, in perhaps more creative and innovative ways, when there is less scrutiny.

### 4. Fill the vacuum wisely

When an early childhood champion leaves their position, be intentional and strategic about filling the gap. If the governor has been a highly visible and strong champion, their departure from office is an opportunity for key legislators to step-up and lead on certain causes for the remainder of their careers.

### 5. Be a key player in transition

When a new governor takes office secure an early position to guide the planning discussions on what early childhood items stay intact and what items get further enhanced. In an open gubernatorial race, strong and meaningful outreach to all viable candidates is politically wise to begin a relationship of trust and to become well-positioned to help with transition once a candidate is elected to office.

### 6. Build diverse leadership in multiple places

All along the way build diverse types of leadership, in different places, at different levels whose actions can shepherd a shared vision. Different kinds of leadership serve different functions. Leadership in different places (inside and outside government, public and private sectors) and at different levels (executive and middle-management, grass tops and grassroots) is needed to build successful systems and is important to the big picture of sustainability.

### 7. Create a partisan-neutral cause

Create a cause that is as partisan-neutral as possible to increase likelihood it will be sustained when the executive office and the majority in the legislative branch change parties. This involves developing relationships with legislative leaders from both political parties. Collaboration with groups and individuals that do advocacy and lobbying can help with political analysis. There are always political considerations when working with elected officials and political appointees on a term schedule. Learning and using political acumen is an important part of sustainability planning.

### 8. Create a collegial push-pull dynamic with policymakers

The heart of this is developing community ownership and support which can enable an initiative to transcend a political administration and avoid a partisan tone. Create a credible, dependable, and responsive feedback loop on early childhood issues between elected officials and their constituencies. This is especially important during legislative session. Enlist individual champions and constituencies, especially local communities, to communicate needs and build salience with policymakers. Help key legislators and/or the governor garner support from their districts and the early childhood community by building or supporting a conduit for timely and relevant information on legislative and budget items.