

# Building Connections State Assessment

For use on Day Two, June 28, during State Team Time from 1:00-2:30 p.m.

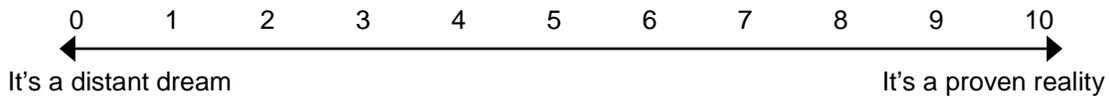
## Instructions and Tips

This assessment identifies 11 critical components of a state-local early childhood system-building effort.

**Respond to this question** after reading the brief description that goes with each component:

**To what extent do your state-local early childhood system-building efforts feature the following components?**

**Rate your state on the 10-point continuum** that follows each component description.



**Use the comments section** to qualify your responses or make notes about why you gave the rating you did. Also include ideas for follow-up that emerge during the discussion.

**Use one of two approaches** to complete the assessment:

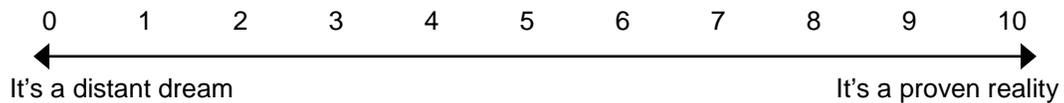
- 1) Start by having each person on your team complete the assessment independently. Then for each item, discuss as a group the rating you gave and why. Finally, pick the number for each item that best represents your collective viewpoint.
- 2) Complete the assessment as a group, picking together the rating you want to give as a group and why.

**Assign a recorder** to create one team packet that can be handed in at the end of the activity.

**Move quickly enough** through the list to make sure you cover all elements.

**1. A focus on early childhood system building, not just funding programs.**

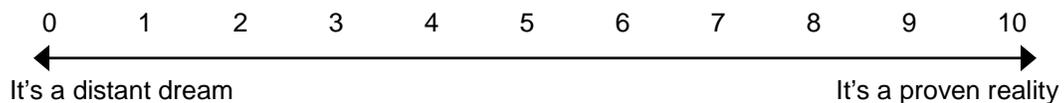
Efforts should tackle system issues and not just receive “seed funding” to develop demonstration projects and programs. While systems ultimately are made up of programs, and communities engaged in system efforts can fill gaps with new or improved programs, efforts should not lose sight of essential systems issues such as how those programs are coordinated, integrated, or aligned. This applies at both a state and local level. For example, even if the state successfully consolidates funding or better integrates services, there are likely an array of programs and services at the local level with overlapping responsibilities that deal with some of the same families. Communities need to consider how programs can work efficiently and effectively together, and this often involves making decisions about primary responsibility and referral and follow-up on a family-by-family basis. On a practice level, and even on a local system level, this work cannot be done through state policy or regulation but requires a community problem-solving component and nexus.



**Comments:** (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

**2. Clear state/local roles and responsibilities that go beyond parallel play.**

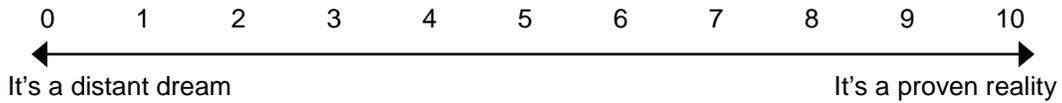
State and local entities focused on system building efforts should have clear and distinct responsibilities that ensure they are more than parallel efforts that do not intersect and support one another. Responsibilities for decision making about oversight, planning, funding, spending, technical assistance, communication, collaboration, and reporting should be understood and coordinated, and not duplicative.



**Comments:** (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

**3. Flexibility that allows communities to address their own priorities.**

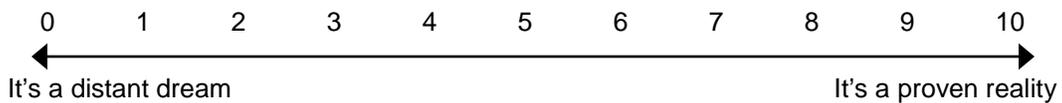
Communities are diverse and have different needs and strengths. As a result, they typically are in the best position to determine their own priorities. System-building efforts should avoid concentrating all decision making authority at either the state or local levels; instead, they should emphasize local flexibility. Frequently, local decision-making is needed to contour services to unique local strengths and resources. Decisions regarding how to organize services and who to award specific contracts and grant funds to can be highly political, but people at the local level generally are in the best position to know which organizations and services will most effectively respond to community needs.



**Comments:** (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

**4. Mechanisms for local input into state-level system decisions.**

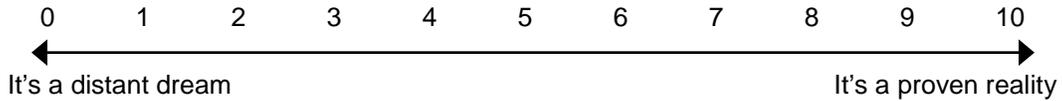
The state regularly sets policies and parameters around funding that gets administered at the local level. Some policies work well and others have unintended consequences. Communities see those consequences firsthand and are in the best position to provide feedback to the state, particularly regarding the interplay of requirements across different agencies and funding streams. Regular and intentional two-way communication through meetings, forums, or workshops involving both state and community representatives is essential to ensuring that communities are able to help identify areas where state rules and procedures can be modified to better achieve results.



**Comments:** (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

**5. Representative and meaningful cross-sector engagement.**

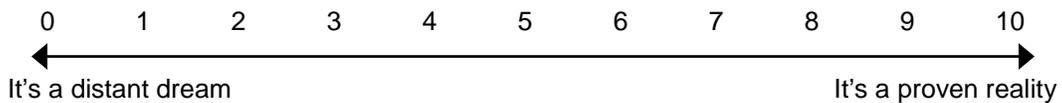
At both the state and local levels, system building should be a cross-sector and collaborative endeavor that engages stakeholders from multiple parts of the early childhood system. While each system-building effort can define for itself the kinds of individuals that should be at the table, representation should be diverse and from all relevant sectors of the early childhood system. In addition, efforts should engage voluntary support networks where possible, and provide meaningful roles for parents.



**Comments:** (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

**6. Sufficient investments in local-level leadership.**

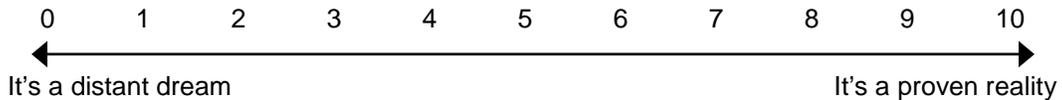
Leadership for system-building at the local level should not be a volunteer effort. Infrastructure is needed to make collaboration and system-building efforts successful and sustainable. This includes funding for community-level staffing, along with technical assistance and training. In addition, local leaders should have local system knowledge and credibility combined with the energy, inclination, and ability to work with others.



**Comments:** (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

**7. Opportunities for connecting local efforts to statewide advocacy.**

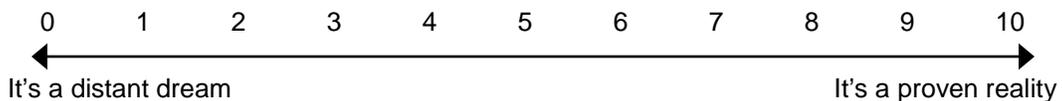
The most effective advocacy happens at the local level. Local entities and individuals are most aware of early childhood system needs and can be the most compelling spokespersons for system issues such as infrastructure, services, and quality. As a result, they should be part of the statewide advocacy base on early childhood issues (either organized locally or by other organizations such as statewide child advocates) that educates policymakers or parents and other segments of the general public. Advocacy training should be available locally, along with opportunities to engage and educate diverse and powerful constituencies at the grassroots, grassstops, and state levels.



**Comments:** (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

**8. Mechanisms for learning and innovation across communities.**

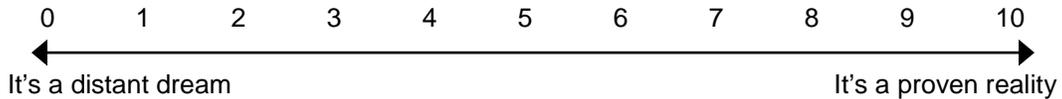
Communities can explore and test new programs and ideas more quickly and cost-effectively than the state, taking advantage of energy that exists at the local level. Where there is energy and expertise, communities can develop new or reformed services that then serve as models for their peers. Mechanisms for learning such as peer-to-peer technical assistance or mentoring should be in place to ensure effective community practices or strategies get shared. Those mechanisms should support the transition from site-specific innovation to scale-up or institutionalization.



**Comments:** (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

**9. Leveraging of local and private resources to support the early learning agenda.**

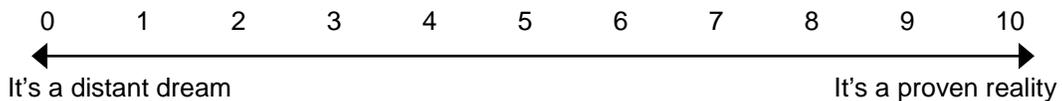
Outside some limited foundation support for particular initiatives, state governments rarely receive gifts or grants from the private sector (individual, corporate, or foundation givers). Most of this giving is local and personal, often related to very tangible and physical things (e.g. buildings and capital campaigns). Communities should pursue opportunities to generate and leverage local funding and resources to support early childhood system-building efforts. At the same time though, if there is a state-level nonprofit leading the initiative, that entity might also consider a fundraising strategy that allows for larger contributions from corporations and other philanthropic sources that could then be disseminated locally as smaller grants.



**Comments:** (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

**10. Mechanisms for cross-community reporting and accountability.**

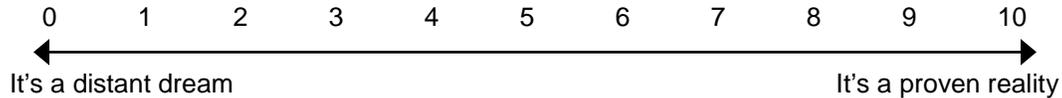
While communities can pursue their own system-building plans and priorities, they should work toward and measure common performance goals or outcomes that are set at the state level and can be measured on a statewide basis. The ability to aggregate data on local communities and track progress statewide is critical to ensuring adequate resources are in place and can be sustained.



**Comments:** (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

**11. Attention to diversity and cultural congruence.**

Communities within a state generally vary greatly in terms of race, culture, and language. Developing culturally-competent and congruent early childhood systems that respond to each community's cultural mix is essential for success. Attention to this issue should exist at both the state and local levels. At the same time, while state actions need to be culturally congruent, there is no "one size fits all" solution and local efforts need to pay particular attention to these issues, as effective early learning systems should be tailored to the children and families they serve.



**Comments:** (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

**12. Considering the ratings you just gave, in what three areas would you most like to receive technical assistance to help your state move forward?**

Check your top three priorities.

- Focusing on early childhood system building, not just funding programs.
- Developing clear state/local roles and responsibilities that go beyond parallel play.
- Achieving flexibility that allows communities to address their own priorities.
- Developing mechanisms for local input into state-level system decisions.
- Building representative and meaningful cross-sector engagement.
- Making sufficient investments in local-level leadership.
- Establishing opportunities to connect local efforts to statewide advocacy.
- Developing mechanisms for learning and innovation across communities.
- Leveraging local and private resources to support the early learning agenda.
- Developing mechanisms for cross-community reporting and accountability.
- Addressing diversity and cultural congruence.