

NGA ROUNDTABLE ON CHILDREN'S CABINETS

Hall of the States, Washington, DC

A MEETING REPORT

By Elizabeth Gaines



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OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE:

There are currently 16 states that have convened Children's Cabinets, or cross-agency coordinating bodies to address the complex needs of children, youth and families. Of those states, 11 attended the NGA Roundtable on Children's Cabinets on March 21, 2005 to share their stories, ideas and challenges. Many states are convening these bodies in light of the fact that state government, like federal government, is becoming more and more fragmented and the issues that effect children, youth and families are not always properly addressed for that reason.

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) has an ongoing interest in the success of Children's Cabinets across the states and recently released the Governor's Guide to Children's Cabinets. This Roundtable was a result of interest in the field and the NGA Center's desire to build on this work and provide the necessary support to make it successful. The meeting was a chance for NGA and the Forum for Youth Investment to learn from the Children's Cabinet directors in the states — some who have been heading these bodies for years and some only beginning recently. It is the NGA Center's hope that there will be funding to hold a larger meeting in the coming year at which time information could be gathered on structure, leadership and challenges. NGA and the Forum for Youth Investment would then provide technical assistance and support in tackling challenging issues and charting a way forward for these coordinating bodies.

The Forum for Youth Investment (The Forum) is interested in the various ways states are coordinating across departments. The Forum recently released a report on State Youth Policy, in many cases working to gather the information with the help of Children's Cabinets. The Forum has been gathering information and thinking through child and youth policy coordination for many years and is committed to learning by listening. The Forum has collaborated with NGA to assist states around the Families and

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Youth Service Bureau and the National Crime Prevention Council grants. The Forum is also working with other national partners including the National Conference of State Legislatures to move the dialogue on youth policy.

NGA and the Forum would like to help sustain the relationships that developed in the Roundtable and build a peer learning network of Children's Cabinet leaders. The Roundtable was funded by the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs.

ATTENDEES:

Children's Cabinets:

Claire Dudley, New Mexico
Conchi Morales, Idaho
Lauren Sterling, Maine
Suzy Sonnier, Louisiana
Denise Sulzbach, Maryland
Lisa Glow, Arizona
Steven Heasley, West Virginia
Mickey Lansing, Oregon
Terry Maloney, Pennsylvania
Cheryl Quinio-Blodgett, New Jersey
Jim Redmon, Kansas

Consultant:

Jacqui Romer-Sensky, Ohio

Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs:

Meg Booth

The Forum for Youth Investment:

Thaddeus Ferber
Shanetta Martin
Karen Pittman
Elizabeth Gaines

National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices:

Steve Crawford
Susan Golonka
Anna Lovejoy
Kathleen Nolan
Jenn O'Connor

IMPETUS FOR CHILDREN'S CABINETS

The reason for the formation of a Children's Cabinet in a given state is as varied as the structure, makeup and goals of each Cabinet. Of the participating states some began as far back as 20 years ago and some began only in the past year for the following reasons:

- New Jersey Governor James McGreevey announced widespread child welfare reform and created the Children's Cabinet to keep watch and develop a response after a tragedy occurred in the state in 2003.
- Maryland formed a structure some 20 years ago that went through incarnations until this year when the legislature failed to reauthorize its existence. The future of a Children's Cabinet in Maryland remains uncertain.
- Idaho Governor Dirk Kempthorne created the Coordinating Council on Families and Children by Executive Order in 2000 to improve coordination of services and decisions across the large, rural state.
- Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano convened a task force on child protective services in 2003 and established a Children's Cabinet by Executive Order to review the findings.
- The West Virginia Children's Cabinet was established by the legislature in 1990 during a special session on education reform.
- Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell made a campaign commitment to children and signed the Executive Order creating the Cabinet and a citizen commission in 2004.
- The Oregon Speaker of the House had a negative personal experience accessing services in 1993 that inspired him to form the Children's Care Team, which studied for 14 months and then recommended a Commission on Children and Families.
- The Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund was legislatively mandated in 1999 as a way to provide oversight and administration to the tobacco settlement dollars allocated to children's programs.
- New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson created the Children's Cabinet by Executive Order in 2003 to meet a campaign promise. The Lieutenant Governor plays a strong role.
- Louisiana Governor Mike Foster and the state legislature partnered to pass legislation establishing a Children's Cabinet in 1998 to reduce the duplication or overlap in programs, prevent inefficiencies and waste, and to develop programs where none existed to help children most in need of assistance.
- Maine Governor John E. Baldacci took four competing mandates from the federal government and created one system to affect children and families outside of it.

CHALLENGES

Creating and running a Children's Cabinet is a challenging task and one that for a long time did not come with a guide book or best practices to follow. The Children's Cabinet directors candidly shared the daily challenges that they face in their work. Common themes were: maintaining unified goals among often compartmentalized state agencies; rallying support from the necessary stakeholders; addressing funding and budgetary issues; and institutionalizing the Cabinet beyond the founding administration and the politics of the office.

Some specific challenges that states expressed were:

- Securing attendance at meetings
- Engaging the Governor's support for the work and finding the capacity, resources and technical ability to move forward on priorities even with strong gubernatorial support.
- Creating a legacy within the state structure and moving away from attachment to one personality and/or one issue or system.
- Struggling with budget concerns and disillusionment by the Legislature, and facing a sunset of the Cabinet in a highly politicized climate
- Experiencing tension between a new Governor who is trying to dismantle the Cabinet and move authority into a single department and a legislature that is opposed to these changes.
- Overcoming politics and reaching institutional maturity to meet intended charge of the Cabinet effectively.
- Managing competing perspectives on what the Children's Cabinet priority actions should be.
- Keeping consistent staff of the Children's Cabinet.
- Developing long term support on behalf of the Legislature and setting legislative priorities

EXPECTATIONS OF THE ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

The reason for gathering these very busy state officials was to provide an opportunity for them to meet with their peers and share ideas, receive assistance from those with the time to research and investigate solutions, and in some cases, help them get started. The state leaders identified what they hoped to takeaway from the Roundtable, including options for Cabinet structures, sustainability and creative financing strategies, managing multiple interests and building a culture of collaboration among state agency directors, setting an agenda, where to house a Cabinet, how to track outcomes and focus on results, and how to overcome (or work within) the politics of the office.

Additional topics raised include:

- How to broaden the scope of a narrowly focused Cabinet?
- How to sustain the Children's Cabinet beyond the current administration's life span?
- How to create an agenda through a process that gets the state agencies invested.
- What models exist to create a parent's bill of rights that would help parents navigate the systems that they need?
- What are the pros and cons of being in the Governor's office, or are there other ways to sustain the work?
- What are the pros and cons of having middle managers vs. appointed agency heads participating?
- How are other states restructuring how government functions for children and youth? How to avoid the Cabinet becoming another agency running programs?
- How to track measurable outcomes and better involve the public.

LEADERSHIP

Consultant Jacqui Romer-Sensky gave a presentation titled, *Linkage Leadership* that emphasized the importance of strong leadership and communication (power point was in the packet). She said that engaging and exciting state stakeholders about the work of the Children's Cabinet can be powerful. She also said that being able to make the critical linkages between the work and to articulate a vision are also important skills. She cautioned against too much time spent on programs and not enough on thinking about the future and where the state is going. The job of a Children's Cabinet should be to guide the state's future. One wise bit of advice was that "if you've seen one collaboration, you've seen only one." Each of the states' Children's Cabinets will necessarily look different because of each state's varying needs.

EXAMPLES FROM THE STATES

Two Children's Cabinet Directors presented: Lauren Sterling, of the Maine Governor's Children's Cabinet and Suzy Sonnier, of Louisiana Children's Cabinet and the Juvenile Justice Implementation Commission. (Their Powerpoint presentations were included in the packets.)

Ms. Sterling emphasized the importance of measuring Cabinet successes and tracking positive indicators and outcomes. Maine's Children's Cabinet produces an annual report, Maine Marks, which measures social indicators of child and family well-being. It also provides a great model of how a Children's Cabinet can annually produce a report card to track state progress over time and in fact make the case for the Cabinet's continued existence. For a summary of the outcomes tracked by Maine Marks and the progress that has been made

in the state visit www.mainemarks.org/intro.htm. More information about the Maine Children's Cabinet can be found at: www.state.me.us/cabinet/homepage.htm

Ms. Sonnier discussed the importance of the makeup of the Louisiana Children's Cabinet. In Louisiana the Cabinet is made up of representatives from the executive office, the legislature, the judiciary and citizens. This diversity has most likely contributed to their long term success. Louisiana also produces a Children's Budget each year, which puts a spotlight on all state funding that is dedicated specifically to children amid all of the other priorities of state government. To read about the Children's Budget visit www.gov.state.la.us/ldbc/childrenscabinet/Childrensbudgetreports.asp. More information on the Louisiana Children's Cabinet can be found at: www.gov.state.la.us/ldbc/childrenscabinet/childrenshome.htm

Karen Pittman, Executive Director, of the Forum for Youth Investment presented a power point titled: *Ready by 21™ An Approach for Children's Cabinets*. The Forum for Youth Investment has developed an approach to youth policy and a way of talking about it that resonates with people. The Ready by 21™ Ready for College, Work and Life strategy outlines how to formulate policy that takes into consideration the range of supports and opportunities that young people need to in fact be Ready by 21. It is a youth development planning framework that enables both state and local policy makers to improve the quantity, quality and coordination of opportunities for youth.

A state's capacity to thrive socially, economically, and politically depends on its ability to ensure that every young person is "Ready by 21: ready for college, work and life." This is the overarching goal. The central challenges are that advocacy and action are fragmented and resources are insufficient. The Ready by 21 Initiative helps states and communities undertake three tasks: taking aim (developing an overarching framework/set of results-based goals for supporting children and youth), taking stock (assessing the needs of children and youth and the current state of public and private resources), and taking action (setting priorities based on need, shifting commitments to balance out investments, tracking progress).

INTERESTING THEMES FROM THE DISCUSSION:

Full transcript is available upon request.

Enactment. The general consensus was that legislation codifying the Children's Cabinet helps to create buy-in from legislators, allows the Cabinet time to maneuver during administration changes, and helps to formalize the Cabinet's existence. Some states passed such legislation up front while others pursued legislation after the Cabinet had been established through Executive Order.

Membership. There was some push and pull about whether middle manager participation or state agency director participation is more valuable. The

middle managers are often the hardest to convince and most deeply entrenched, and so need to be at the table to ensure systemic change.. They also tend to stay on after administrations change. However, the state agency directors have budgetary and decision making power and the ear of the Governor. States are experiencing all of these scenarios and most likely both levels need to be involved at various stages to keep the loop complete.

Location. Where best to house a Children's Cabinet? About half of the states have the Cabinet housed in the Governor's office, close to half are housed in a state agency, one state's Cabinet is housed in neither the state agency nor the Governor's office, and one state's has a floating structure and control is cobbled together. Location in the Governor's office typically ensures dynamic leadership and access along with neutrality and coordinating ability. Housing in a state agency provides greater cover for a Cabinet during a change in administration. It was also noted that there is a difference in a department filling in as a fiscal agent and a department actually running the Cabinet.

Mission. Children's Cabinet Directors are often pulled in many different directions by people with competing ideas about what the goal should be. Roundtable participants advised that Cabinets determine a mission and stick to it. While some directors are struggling with an overly-narrow agenda, others felt that focusing on a select number of winnable issues is more effective than developing a comprehensive agenda.

Financing. Some states were discouraged that there is widely claimed support for Children's Cabinets by decision makers until it is time to pay for them. Directors are always seeking new creative ways to finance the work of their Cabinets. In some cases there are large staffs of many people working on the Cabinet; in others they have been warned not to build a bureaucracy and to get the work completed with limited staff. Some Cabinets are financed by special funds set aside or written into statute; some are public/private partnerships and have worked to bring the private sector (foundations and corporations) into the work of the Cabinet. There was a concern raised about government entities receiving private funds from a foundation or corporation, which should be explored. Some have set up parallel 501(c)(3) organizations to alleviate that problem.