

Ready by 21 State Policy Survey: Child and Youth Policy Coordinating Bodies in the U.S.

This is the first comprehensive biennial survey of state child and youth policy coordinating bodies. These entities work across agency lines to coordinate services and foster the well-being of children and youth. The survey assesses coordinating bodies along criteria derived from the Ready by 21[®] Leadership Capacity Standards, which are organized into the four Building Blocks for Effective Change: broader partnerships, bigger goals, better data and bolder actions.

Prevalence:

State coordinating bodies are so common that some states have more than one

The Forum identified 110 state coordinating bodies and invited them to take the survey; 55 coordinating bodies completed it. The respondents represent 29 states, plus the District of Columbia, American Samoa and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Early Childhood Councils were the most prevalent respondents: 23 completed the surveys. Governors' Children's Cabinets and Interagency Commissions, which typically address child and youth issues from birth to adulthood, collectively completed 20 surveys. P-16 and P-20 Councils completed seven surveys.

Several states reported having multiple child and youth coordinating bodies. Ten percent of responding states indicated that three or more coordinating bodies were in place, and 22 percent of states reported two coordinating bodies. The Forum for Youth Investment believes that there is value in aligning the work of multiple coordinating bodies in a given state.



When coordinating bodies work in tandem, rather than in silos, they can maximize their impact along the continuum from cradle to career.



Structure:

Fifty-seven percent of the coordinating bodies indicated that they were established in statute. Another 30 percent indicated that they were created through executive order. Coordinating bodies established in statute have clear advantages over ones that are not. The survey found that coordinating bodies established in statute have more full-time employees (FTEs), more frequent communication with the public about their work, and are more likely to expand the use of evidence-based or promising practices.

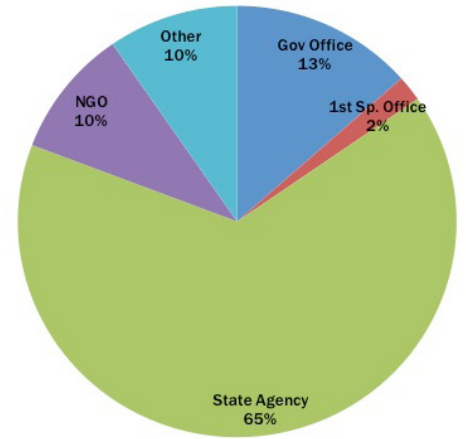
Most coordinating bodies (63 percent) have one or more FTEs, including 19 percent that have five to six FTEs. Thirty-seven percent have less than one FTE.

The Forum believes that the most effective coordinating bodies are housed in an entity with significant overall decision-making power, such as a governor's office, that is not limited to a single issue.



When a coordinating body is housed in an individual agency, it might be more difficult to engage other state agencies in the coordinating body's work. The survey found that the majority of coordinating bodies (62 percent) are housed in individual agencies. Thirteen percent are housed in a governor's office, with an additional two percent housed in a first spouse's office. Another nine percent reported being housed in a non-governmental organization, and another nine percent are housed in "other" entities.

Where are they Housed?



Partnerships:

Most coordinating bodies include a range of members

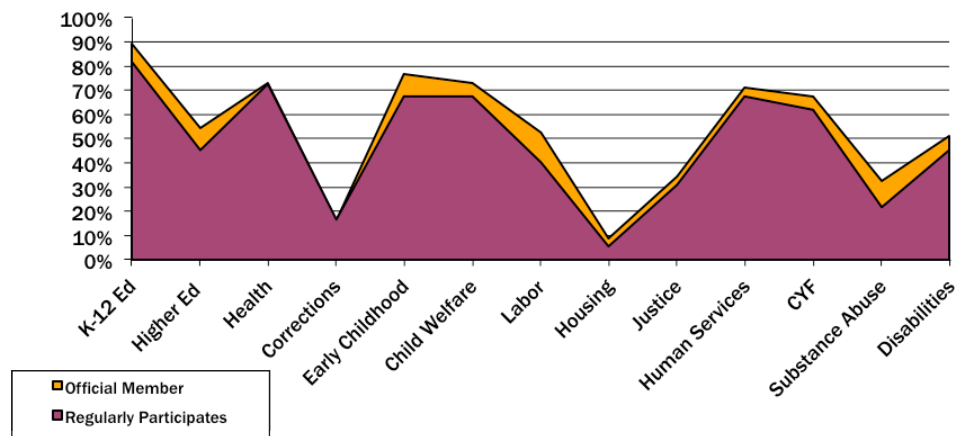
While coordinating bodies generally include a large number of government agencies as official members (87 percent include at least six; 37 percent include more than 10), more research is needed to determine the degree to which they are all fully engaged in the collaborative effort.

Broad partnerships help ensure that all stakeholders, not just agency leaders, embrace a "big picture" vision for all children and youth. Survey respondents reported that their broad range of partners helped them to prioritize next steps for the coordinating body, get state agencies to re-commit to issues, and advocate for policy change.

Forty-two percent of coordinating bodies report having parents as official members. Youth play an advisory role in 33 percent of coordinating bodies, and only 9 percent of coordinating bodies include youth as official members.

The Forum believes that strong partnerships are essential for coordinating bodies to be effective. Survey respondents report that broad partnerships provide state agencies with additional insight and resources and with an increased awareness of the perspectives of youth and families, and help agencies to be more grounded in the "reality" of local communities.

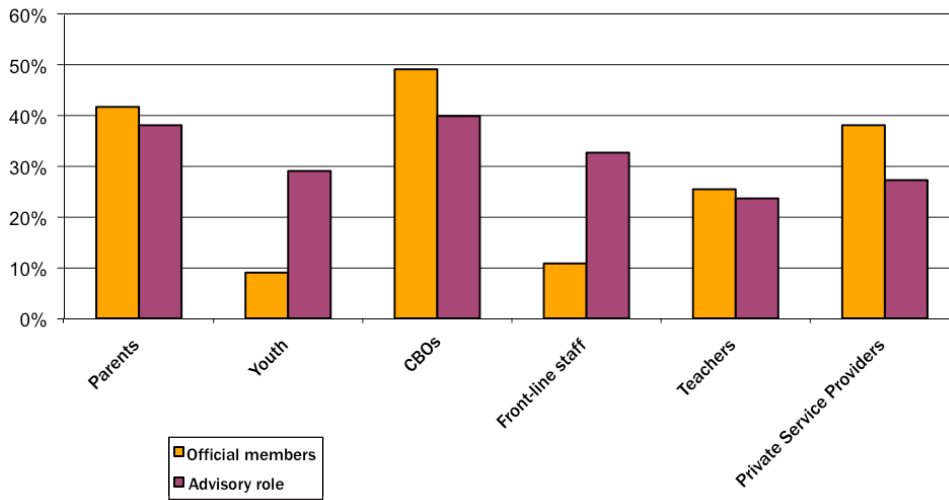
Membership and Participation of Government Agencies



Note: We were not able to fully capture the engagement of housing agencies.

Engagement of non-governmental partners is uneven, with less than half including parents or community-based organizations as official members. The majority of coordinating bodies did not report that they engaged youth as either members or advisors.

Non-Governmental Members and Advisors



Goals:

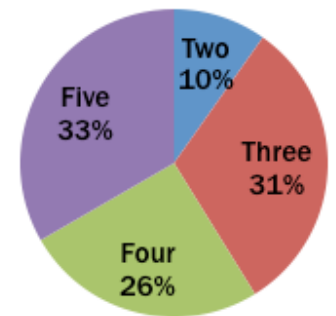
Most coordinating bodies address children and youth holistically

More than half of coordinating bodies address at least four of the following areas of child and youth development: academic, social/emotional, physical, vocational and civic. And more than half address at least four of the following age ranges: 0-5, 5-10, 11-15, 16-20 and 21+.

Although coordinating bodies focus on a range of issues, academic, social/emotional and physical issues are most common. Ninety-one percent focus on academic outcomes, 84 percent on social/emotional, and 78 percent on physical issues.

More coordinating bodies work on issues related to young children ages 0-5 than on older youth. Only 16 of the coordinating bodies surveyed reported a focus on young people of all ages and families. This is not simply because Early Childhood Councils make up the majority of the coordinating bodies that participated in the survey. A significant number of “other” coordinating bodies indicated that they address issues that primarily impact children ages 0-5.

Number of Developmental Areas Addressed

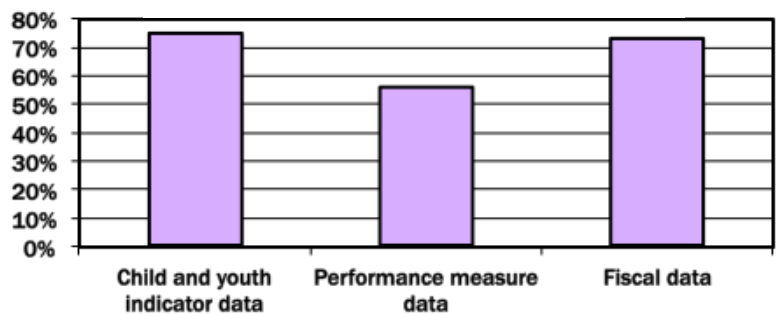


Data:

Coordinating bodies collect significant amounts of interagency data

Close to 75 percent of coordinating bodies collect child and youth indicators (sometimes publishing a statewide “children’s report card”) and fiscal data (sometimes publishing a statewide “children’s budget”). More than 50 percent collect performance measure data. Twenty-six coordinating bodies reported collecting all three types of data.

Data Collected by Coordinating Bodes

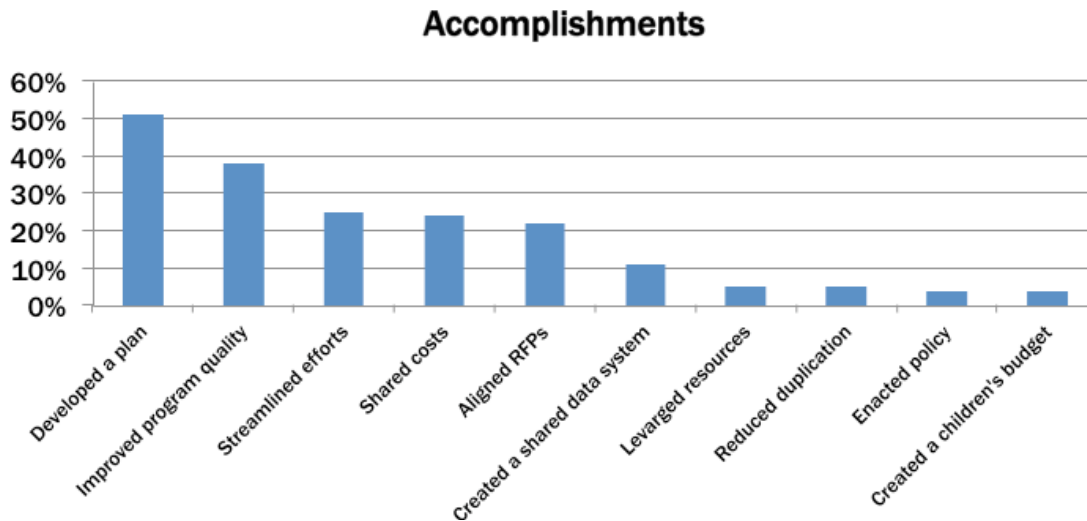


More research is needed to better understand the extent to which this data is used to drive decision making. The majority of coordinating bodies, 75 percent, use data to identifying problems. In comparison, just 35 percent reported using data to track performance, and 25 percent to make decisions about funds.

Actions:

Coordinating bodies report success in interagency planning and program improvement, but less success in leveraging resources, reducing duplication and enacting policy

More than half reported success in developing strategic plans, and more than a third reported success in improving program quality. Yet less than 10 percent reported success in important areas such as leveraging resources, reducing duplication and enacting policy.



The Forum believes that coordinating bodies are uniquely positioned to align initiatives across agencies and work toward common goals. However, these tasks were among the top challenges identified by survey respondents. Visibility was also a challenge. Twenty percent of respondents indicated that their coordinating body lacks political support, and 18 percent cited low meeting attendance as a problem.

- Lack of initiative alignment (31 percent)
- No success using best practices (24 percent)
- No common goals across agencies (22 percent)
- Insufficient political support (20 percent)
- Low meeting attendance (18 percent)

About Us

The Ready by 21 State Policy Survey was created by the Forum for Youth Investment in partnership with the RAND Corporation. The Forum is a nonprofit, nonpartisan action tank dedicated to helping communities make sure all young people are ready for college, work and life. For the past decade, the Forum has worked with innovative policymakers, including governors' children's cabinets and other coordinating bodies. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that helps improve policy and decision-making through research and analysis. Over the past four decades, RAND has developed a broad research agenda to address child well-being, across divisions in health, education, safety and justice, and labor and population.