



the
forum
FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT

COLLECTIVE IMPACT FOR POLICYMAKERS

Working Together for Children and Youth



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The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan action tank dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are ready by 21 – ready for college, work and life. www.forumfyi.org

Ready by 21 is a set of innovative strategies developed by the Forum that helps communities and states make a measurable difference in the lives of children and youth. www.readyby21.org

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INTRODUCTION

When it comes to helping young people succeed, there are no shortcuts, no magic bullets.¹ Researchers have found that there is no one single program or factor — even one as traumatic as the death of a parent or as important as going to a great school — that can reliably predict a young person’s success or failure. Instead, researchers have been able to predict children’s outcomes more reliably by counting the number of positive and negative factors in a child’s life. The odds that a young person will succeed worsen as the number of negative influences (“risk factors”) pile up in children’s lives, and the odds improve as the number of positive influences (“protective factors”) increases.² And the better coordinated those positive experiences are, the stronger their effect.³

With so many different types of supports needed to help meet the diverse needs of young people, no one person, institution or organization can singlehandedly provide everything that parents rely upon to help children and youth succeed. Lots of different organizations need to play lots of different roles, and must do so in a coordinated fashion.⁴

In the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* article “Collective Impact,” authors John Kania and Mark Kramer report that in situations like this, which “require many different players to change their behavior in order to solve a complex problem,” it is essential to get “a group of important actors from different sectors” to “abandon their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach.”⁵ While partnerships are plentiful, those that succeed in having a collective impact on outcomes for the target population are not. Kania and Kramer identified five conditions for achieving collective impact on any issue: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and backbone support functions (such as convening partners, conducting needs assessments, developing a shared strategic plan for aligning efforts, selecting success metrics and designing an evaluation).

These conditions were designed to be applicable to partnerships addressing any issue, no matter how broad or narrow the agenda. But when a partnership is focused on child and youth issues, the breadth of the agenda matters a great deal. Partnerships need to have a broad enough scope to drive changes in the wide array of services, supports and opportunities that are needed to change the trajectory of children’s lives.

Furthermore, communities often suffer not from a dearth of child-focused partnerships, but from a glut of them, each focused on a different combination of sub-populations (e.g., young men of color, homeless youth, middle school youth), problems (e.g., drug abuse, school dropout, violence, teen pregnancy) and programs (e.g., afterschool activities, health services, mentoring). Poorly coordinated partnerships aren’t just burdensome to the stakeholders who go to all those meetings; they are often inefficient and ineffective. The sheer number of partnerships limits the ability of any one partnership to achieve collective impact. Leaders in communities with lots of partnerships often experience “collaboration fatigue,” rushing from one collaborative meeting to another, ultimately abandoning all efforts before any achieve success.⁶

Put together, child and youth partnerships need to do three things:

1. Adopt a mission broad enough to address the diverse set of supports, services and opportunities required to help parents change the trajectory of children’s lives.
2. Create the conditions necessary for achieving collective impact.
3. Align and build upon existing partnerships, strategic plans and data systems.

A close-up portrait of a young Black woman with dark skin and long, thin braids. She is wearing a blue headband with a white floral pattern. Her hands are clasped under her chin, and she is looking directly at the camera with a calm, thoughtful expression. The background is softly blurred, showing vertical lines of brown and grey.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT FOR POLICYMAKERS

To be sure, much of what affects children and youth has little to do with government. A partnership can do a great deal to achieve collective impact without changing public policies. Driving change at scale, however, requires shifting resources, and the majority of funds a partnership can tap into are in the public sector, through schools and social service programs. Therefore, partnerships that do not address government at all quickly hit a ceiling. To a large degree, the success or failure of a partnership for children and youth is influenced by public policies and public systems that create the context within which they operate. Consequently, no discussion of how to help communities achieve collective impact can be complete without considering policy reforms.

One would hope that federal, state and local policies would be crafted in ways that make it easy for community partnerships to adopt a broad agenda, create the conditions necessary for achieving collective impact, and align and build upon existing partnerships. Sadly, just the opposite is true. Over the years, policymakers and public system administrators have (with good intent) created numerous categorical program solutions for discrete subpopulation needs, instead of advancing comprehensive solutions. Government policies are far more likely to inhibit, rather than enhance, a partnership's ability to advance the types of comprehensive solutions that children and youth need.

Some policies prevent partnerships from functioning optimally. For example: laws mandating the creation of multiple narrowly focused, overlapping partnerships, none of which has at the table all the people they would need to forge a comprehensive solution.⁷ Others prevent partnerships from implementing their strategic plans. When a community needs assessment identifies key gaps in programs and services, policies often prevent partnerships from reallocating resources to where they are needed most.⁸ During times when no new funding is possible, the inability to reallocate existing funds can render a partnership powerless. This has led to a poorly aligned, inefficient and ineffective patchwork of services that transcends political parties and mayoral, gubernatorial and presidential tenures.

Understanding why so many policies stand in the way of effective partnerships requires looking at the way government is structured.

Siloed governmental structures and processes inhibit the development of comprehensive solutions

Government is organized into departments and agencies, legislative committees and subcommittees. For issues that can be solved through policies made by one specific subcommittee or agency, the system works relatively well. However, this system creates significant barriers to solving issues that require working across multiple committees and agencies.

In these cases, reformers often find that the structures and processes within which policymakers operate lead to loyalties that stubbornly resist change. Policymakers and public system administrators build expertise in, and loyalty to, the issues within their jurisdictions, and most policies are crafted to narrowly fit within their purview. Policymakers often don't want the specific issue they are passionate about to be subsumed inside a broader, more comprehensive approach, especially if they would have less control over the bigger initiative. They fear that the element they care about most will be given less attention and funding than it would have as a stand-alone effort.

At the federal level, the Congressional Research Service found that:

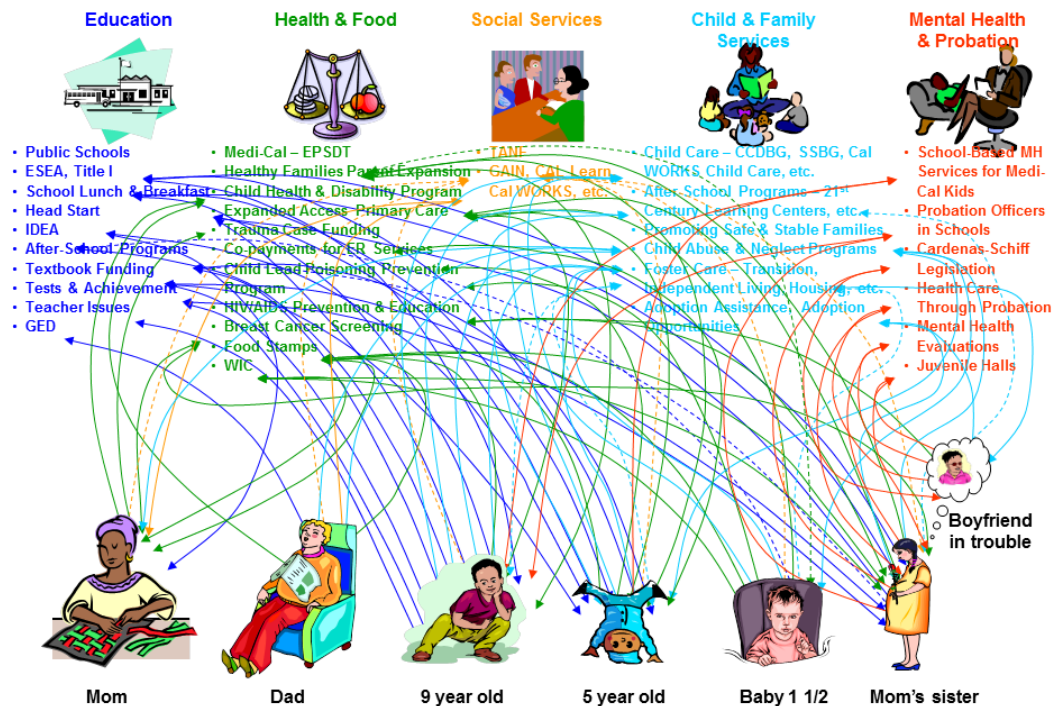
“Government has not adopted a single overarching federal policy or legislative vehicle that addresses the challenges vulnerable youth experience in adolescence or while making the transition to adulthood. Rather, federal youth policy today has evolved from myriad programs established in the early 20th century and expanded in the years following the 1964 announcement of the War on Poverty. ... Despite the range of federal services and activities to assist disadvantaged youth, many of these programs have not developed into a coherent system of support. This is due in part to the administration of programs within several agencies and the lack of mechanisms to coordinate their activities.”⁹

The numbers speak for themselves: The last time an official count was made, there were 339 federal programs serving disadvantaged youth scattered across 12 departments.¹⁰

At the state and local levels, the reality is much the same. A survey of state legislators found that “building a coherent message on children's policy is challenging

... because there is no clearly discernible legislative agenda for children and families; rather, a multitude of individuals and organizations with different agendas are sending mixed messages about what is best for children.”¹¹ As one state official put it, “the legislature gets overwhelmed hearing from advocates and departments what the priorities are, so we are left with scrambled eggs.”¹² An inventory of Los Angeles County’s policies for children, youth and families (right) found a tangled mess. A similar picture could be drawn for most — if not all — cities, counties and states in the nation, as well as for the country as a whole.

UNDERSTANDING LA SYSTEMS THAT AFFECT FAMILIES



Dunkle, M. (2002) Understanding LA Systems that Affect Families. Los Angeles, CA: George Washington University and the LA County Children's Planning Council

Risk-averse culture coupled with unclear policies creates powerful de-facto barriers to collaboration

For partnerships to succeed, agencies need to work across systems and sectors in ways that are very different from how government generally operates. Government accountants and audit officials – whose careers are intentionally built around mitigating risk – have little incentive for pushing the boundaries of what types of interagency collaborations are allowed. Little has changed since the Institute for Educational Leadership reported in 2000 that:

“schools, school districts, and state education agencies see more risks than benefits in doing business differently. They fear that auditors will look askance at non-traditional uses of federal funds, making a sensible innovation look like a scandal that will make headlines in local papers. Their concern about unforeseen consequences creates a culture of timidity that constrains educators at all levels from doing things differently.”¹³

Even when government officials want to allow collaboration, it is a huge undertaking just to figure out what collaborative activities are and are not allowed by local, state and federal government. When you combine a risk-averse culture with scarcity of information, it comes as little surprise that most communities conduct only those interagency activities that they are *explicitly* told they are allowed to. As a study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found, “with incomplete information, district officials may make only conservative and narrow interpretations of federal requirements, believing they have less flexibility than they actually do.”¹⁴

While the government context is challenging, there are reasons to be optimistic. Across the country, the growing collective impact movement has shined a spotlight on the importance of partnerships and the conditions for their success. This paper presents a framework for assessing the degree to which a policy inhibits or enhances the ability of partnerships to achieve collective impact, and provides concrete, common-sense solutions that policymakers can put into practice right away.



POLICY FRAGMENTATION TRANSCENDS POLITICAL PARTIES AND ADMINISTRATIONS

Clinton Administration

"Many Federal programs exist to support community-based efforts to prevent youth crime and violence; however obtaining help from the program best suited to a particular need can be confusing and frustrating. ... When communities come together to plan their crime prevention efforts, it is often in response to crises. ... The immediate impulse is to do something, anything, to attack the problem or defuse the situation. The challenge faced by many communities is to plan and implement a comprehensive, coordinated and sustained crime prevention effort."

President's Crime Prevention Council: 50 Programs That Help Communities Help Their Youth

George W. Bush Administration

"The complexity of the problems faced by disadvantaged youth is matched only by the complexity of the traditional Federal response to those problems. Both are confusing, complicated, and costly."

White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth: Final Report

Obama Administration

"Communities often have multiple, fragmented efforts to address complex issues, each governed by a separate federal policy that makes it difficult to align services into a coherent strategy. ... These individual efforts are critical to the lives and well-being of the people they serve and are important examples of success to demonstrate that progress is possible. But overall, these approaches are not resulting in significant change at a community-wide level, which is frustrating to all: taxpayers, funders, policymakers, service providers, and the beneficiaries themselves."

White House Council for Community Solutions: Final Report



**COLLECTIVE IMPACT
POLICY FRAMEWORK**

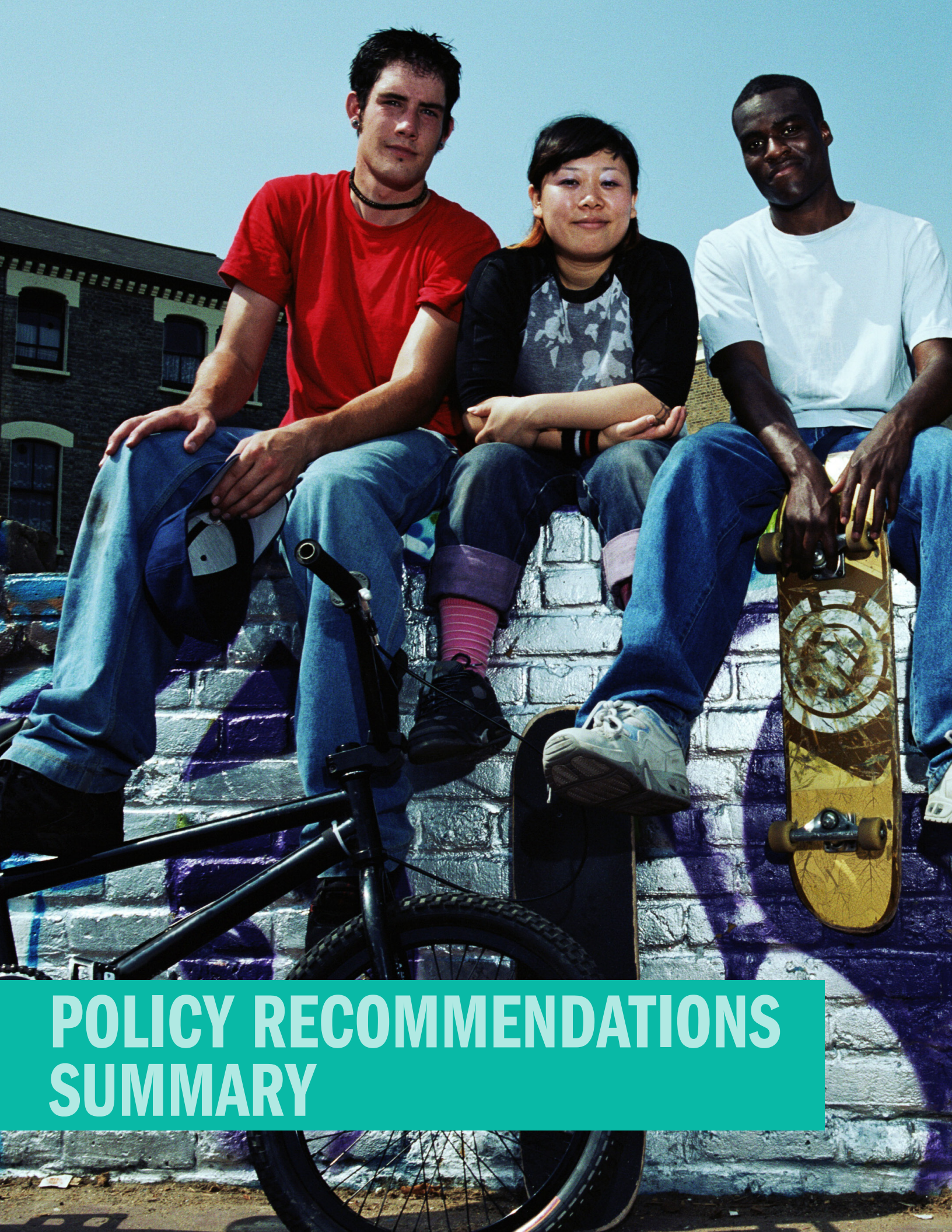
All policies — even those that don’t use words like partnership, collaborate or collective impact — affect the ability of partnerships to succeed. The illustration below shows how government policies can inhibit or enhance the ability of partnerships to achieve collective impact.

It is not enough for a policy to be silent on the issue of collaboration. That silence creates an assumption that such activities are not allowed. This de facto barrier to collaboration can be almost as strong as a legal barrier. If a policy is meant to allow collaborative actions, it must say so explicitly.

Collective Impact Policy Framework

CONTINUUM OF POLICIES THAT INHIBIT OR ENHANCE COLLECTIVE ACTION

<p>PROHIBITING partnerships from taking actions necessary to achieve collective impact.</p> <p><i>Example</i> The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act prohibits education data from being shared with most other agencies.</p>	<p>NOT PROHIBITING partnerships from taking actions necessary to achieve collective impact.</p> <p><i>Example</i> The Drug Free Communities Support Program does not prohibit substance abuse coalitions from covering other issues, but most do not, believing it would be frowned upon.</p>	<p>EXPLICITLY ALLOWING partnerships to take actions necessary to achieve collective impact.</p> <p><i>Example</i> Performance Partnership Pilots give partnerships flexibility to use federal resources to achieve the partnership’s goals.</p>	<p>INCENTIVIZING partnerships to take actions necessary to achieve collective impact.</p> <p><i>Example</i> Promise Neighborhoods provide funding to help communities develop a neighborhood plan creating partnerships” to provide a “continuum of solutions”</p>
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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

1 Create interagency policy coordinating bodies. Federal, state and local governments should create interagency policy coordinating bodies — such as children’s cabinets, task forces, councils and commissions — charged with crafting and implementing an overarching plan for serving children and youth.

2 Reserve 1 percent of funds to enhance the capacity of coordinating bodies at all levels to achieve collective impact across multiple government programs. This set-aside in all federal, state and local funding streams would provide direct support, networking, training and technical assistance to improve partnership management capacity (sometimes referred to as “backbone functions”).

3 Reserve 1 percent of funds to arm coordinating bodies with the data and evaluation systems they need to manage effectively. This set-aside in all federal, state and local funding streams would provide direct support and training and technical assistance to improve the quality of the data that policy coordinating bodies use to guide their work.

4 Allow funding to be used flexibly, and to be blended and braided when coupled with accountability for results. Whenever possible, authorization committees, appropriation committees and executive branch agencies should explicitly allow coordinating bodies to use and allocate funding flexibly. This includes blending and braiding funds with other related funding streams that provide a range of related services, address a range of related outcomes and target similar overlapping populations — on the condition that they be held accountable for achieving specific results.

5 Develop research and evaluation methodologies appropriate for partnerships. Government-affiliated research institutions, such as the National Science Foundation and the Institute of Education Sciences, should fund research to determine what factors underlie the success of child and youth policy coordinating bodies and to design evaluation methodologies for their unique needs.

6 Reform auditing and accounting practices to allow partnerships and policy coordinating bodies to be held collectively accountable for results achieved, rather than for services provided. The key regulations within the compliance, accounting and auditing infrastructure developed by the White House Office of Management and Budget and the Government Accountability Office, along with their state and local counterparts, should provide mechanisms for holding partnerships and coordinating bodies accountable for achieving specific results, instead of for undertaking specifically prescribed activities. In so doing, a portion of the \$88 billion spent every year to audit the accounting records of public and private organizations that receive federal funds, and to attest to compliance with generally accepted accounting practices, could be redirected to measuring the results of collaborative activities to achieve collective impact.

7 Explicitly allow new coordinating bodies, strategic plans and data systems to use and build upon existing ones. All policies that call for the creation of a partnership, strategic plan or data system should explicitly allow grant recipients to use and build upon existing ones (if they have been effective and if they are willing to tackle the specific issue the policy seeks to address). This could be done either universally for all grantees or selectively through waivers.

8 Create “Folk Law” waiver programs. The White House, governors and mayors should put in place waiver programs, even when there is no new legislative waiver authority. Doing so sets in motion a series of actions that, in and of themselves, will spur collaborative actions that people think they are not legally allowed to undertake, when in fact they are. History suggests that this approach could address such perceived barriers, whimsically nicknamed “folk laws,” that could account for as much as one-third of the barriers that prevent partnerships from taking collective action.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS DETAILS



Create interagency policy coordinating bodies.

Federal, state and local governments should create interagency policy coordinating bodies — such as children’s cabinets, task forces, councils and commissions — charged with crafting and implementing an overarching plan for serving children and youth.

Rationale

Since one of the root causes of policy fragmentation is the siloed structure of government, an obvious solution is to create interagency coordinating structures that cut across the predominant silos.

The National Governors Association reports that “a strong and effective Children’s Cabinet can improve coordination and efficiency across state departments and local levels of government; mobilize resources around the governor’s priorities for children; facilitate a holistic approach to serving children; and strengthen coordinating bodies with the nonprofit and private sectors.”¹⁵ The Forum for Youth Investment’s Children’s Cabinet Network convenes interagency coordinating bodies formed at the state level; the Forum’s most recent survey found that at least 10 percent of states have such an entity.¹⁶

Likewise, at the local level, the National League of Cities reports that “young people and their families frequently interface with numerous local agencies within and outside of city government. Many cities have created a mayor’s office or department that provides strategic direction and coordination for the range of services available through the city or its partners. ... Cities are increasingly developing the ‘infrastructure’ needed to make lasting improvements in child and family well-being. Key strategies for building this capacity include establishing commissions, departments and coordinating entities that can sustain multi-sector collaborations. ... These offices play important convening roles, analyze progress in improving outcomes for children and families; expand awareness of and access to services; strengthen service providers’ capacity; develop family-friendly policies; and leverage private, state and federal funding.”¹⁷

At the federal level, interagency coordinating structures (such as the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, the Interagency Forum on Disconnected Youth, and the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention) have been less robust. Yet there is ample evidence that such coordinating structures can

be effective at the national level as well. Indeed, countries spanning the alphabet from Australia to Zambia have created interagency government structures and instituted policy development processes designed to create, oversee and sustain a comprehensive strategy to achieve collective impact for children and youth.¹⁸ They are supported in these efforts by international organizations, such as the Commonwealth Youth Ministers¹⁹, the European Youth Forum²⁰ and the United Nations²¹, which have called on countries to create comprehensive interagency child and youth policies and action plans to coordinate efforts across departments and sectors.²²



Reserve 1 percent of funds to enhance the capacity of coordinating bodies at all levels to achieve collective impact across multiple government programs.

This set-aside in all federal, state and local funding streams would provide direct support, networking, training and technical assistance to improve partnership management capacity (sometimes referred to as “backbone functions”).

Rationale

Policymakers might hope that communities will transform the various federal, state and local funding streams into an aligned, coherent plan for serving children and youth. But alignment does not happen on its own. It requires policy coordinating bodies to create the conditions necessary to achieve collective impact.

As Kania and Kramer write, “Creating and managing collective impact requires ... staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. Coordination takes time, and none of the participating organizations has any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.”²³ The backbone functions necessary for a partnership to achieve collective impact are incredibly complex. These functions include fostering the development of a common agenda, translating disparate funding streams into a cohesive set of services and drawing attention to needed changes over time.

Further, there is no university degree program for people to learn how to play these backbone functions. Instead, they have to reinvent the wheel as they try to figure out the best way to achieve their goals. A little technical assistance and networking support can go a long way.

GOOD BUT NOT GREAT: INTERAGENCY COORDINATION THAT FALLS SHORT OF THE IDEAL

Over the years, across federal, state and local levels, the Forum has observed a number of well-intentioned alternative efforts to address fragmentation. While some coordination is always better than no coordination, in isolation these kinds of efforts are ultimately insufficient. These include:

- **Single-Topic Coordination:** This is perhaps the most prevalent form of coordination, which is not surprising because the logic that drives this response is so compelling. It does not take long for a political leader who is passionate about an issue to realize that fully addressing that one issue will require a coordinated interagency response. It is common, therefore, to find several different coordinating bodies related to child and youth issues at any given time, in any administration, at any level (local, state or national). This approach falls short in two areas. First, a similar set of staff often find themselves rushing between multiple coordinating bodies addressing similar populations from different vantage points, leading to the ironic need to coordinate the coordinating bodies. Second, single-topic coordination by definition not only fails to address the fragmentation in all the other areas of child and youth policy, but perpetuates it.
- **Time-Limited Coordination:** Sometimes a coordinating body is set up for a fixed amount of time (to complete a report, for example). In such instances, we have often seen the coordinating body issue a powerful set of recommendations but then dissolve, leaving no clear entity in place to complete the child and youth strategy, oversee governmental efforts to implement the strategy and continue the stakeholder engagement. Knowing what needs to be done but not having a standing body tasked with taking action is as frustrating as it is fruitless.
- **Personal Network Coordination:** Interagency coordination is often undertaken by a few key high-ranking officials with close working relationships. “Of course I believe in coordination. I talk to Sally and Tom all the time” is the type of refrain common in such coordination. Indeed, a tremendous amount of effective coordination comes from just these types of personal connections. They are particularly useful in institutions that have slim bureaucracies. (One should never underestimate, for example, how much coordination can be achieved by strong personal ties between chiefs of staff of several key legislative committees.)

However, the bigger the bureaucracy, the harder it is to coordinate through personal relationships alone. For example, the sheer scale of federal executive branch institutions limits the ability of even the most competent of political appointees to scratch the surface of what could and should be coordinated. Personal network coordination tends to be an effective way to coordinate a few signature initiatives but cannot by itself align the hundreds of federal programs serving children and youth. Furthermore, coordination based on personal networks is very difficult to sustain. As soon as a key political appointee steps down or changes roles, the coordination gains that he or she achieved are quickly lost.

- **Ad Hoc Coordination:** When specific interagency problems surface, they are handled on a one-off basis. “We are happy to coordinate – tell me specific places where agencies are stepping on each other’s toes and we’ll fix it” is a common refrain in this type of coordination. As with the other types of coordination, this type is also well-intentioned and valuable, especially for putting out individual fires that flare up between agencies. But although it fixes isolated problems, the coordination does not fully achieve what is possible. Effective coordination aligns efforts toward common goals articulated in a national strategy, making the best possible use of scarce resources. Ad hoc coordination addresses isolated areas of dysfunction but does not create a national vision or path to move efforts toward optimal functionality.

Adapted from *What’s the Plan?* Gaines, E. and Ferber, T. (2010) in *Big Ideas: Game-Changers for Children*, Washington, DC: First Focus.

In addition to aligning efforts across agency lines (“horizontal alignment”), this funding should also be used to align efforts across levels of government (“vertical alignment”). Alignment needs to happen at all levels, including schools (e.g., community schools); neighborhoods (such as the Harlem Children’s Zones and Promise Neighborhoods); school districts (such as those participating in Race to the Top District Challenge); cities, counties and states (such as children’s cabinets); as well as at the federal level. Each has to be invested in the implementation of a collective approach, and ideally all levels would be aligned with each other.

It is also important that funding set aside to support infrastructure at all levels of government is *not* used to create a new programmatic funding stream. Doing so could cause the coordinating body to lose its credibility as a neutral convener (because it would now represent its own siloed programmatic governmental funding stream above those of other agencies) and could take attention away from the key interagency coordination role that should be its core mission.

3 Reserve 1 percent of funds to arm coordinating bodies with the data and evaluation systems they need to manage effectively.

This set-aside in all federal, state and local funding streams would provide direct support, along with training and technical assistance, to improve the quality of the data that policy coordinating bodies use to guide their work.

Rationale

As Kania and Kramer note, data plays a critical role in effective partnerships: “Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.”²⁴ Yet, as the Aspen Roundtable on Community Change found, in most communities “there is no systematic infrastructure for developing and making available the kinds of data that policymakers and practitioners need to guide decisions about how to improve outcomes for children and families in poor communities.”²⁵

Data is needed to track change at three levels: how effective the partnership itself is performing, how the availability and quality of school and community supports are changing, and the extent to which child outcomes are improving. Gathering and analyzing this data is complicated by the fact that government investments in data systems are themselves fragmented, with funding to create separate data systems to track early childhood outcomes, homeless youth, youth in transition from foster care, youth in workforce training programs, youth health outcomes, and more.²⁶ As the Forum has previously written, these data systems “are being implemented largely in isolation from each other, even though in many cases they are designed to collect information about the same children. Instead of pooling resources to develop one effective, interconnected, interagency set of data systems, many states and localities are developing parallel data systems — one for each federal, state, local and foundation-funded grant. These parallel data systems make for redundant

Data systems “are being implemented largely in isolation from each other, even though in many cases they are designed to collect information about the same children.”

WHY NOT BLOCK GRANTS?

One approach to ensuring that government funding can be used flexibly is to combine multiple categorical grant programs into a single block grant. As defined by the Congressional Research Service (CRS), “block grants are a form of grant-in-aid that the federal government uses to provide state and local governments a specified amount of funding to assist them in addressing broad purposes, such as community development, social services, public health, or law enforcement. Although legislation generally details the program’s parameters, state and local governments are typically provided greater flexibility in the use of the funds and are required to meet fewer administrative conditions than under categorical grants.”²⁷

However, block grants come with significant tradeoffs. The flexibility in a block grant is not coupled with accountability for results. As the CRS report explains, the “decentralized nature of block grants makes it difficult to measure block grant performance and to hold state and local government officials accountable for their decisions.”²⁸

Perhaps more problematically, pooling separate funding streams does not pool popular and political support. In fact, it erodes it. In this case, the sum is not greater than its parts: People who passionately support a particular government program are less likely to be as passionate about a broader block grant.

As the CRS report explains, “some block grant critics oppose the consolidation of existing categorical grants into block grants because they believe that funding for the programs is likely to diminish over time, as it is thought to be more difficult to generate political support for broad-purpose, state-administered programs than for categorical programs targeted at specific purposes. ... From their perspective, block grants critics view block grants as a ‘backdoor’ means to reduce government spending on domestic issues.”²⁹

In our democratic system, policy changes will need to have popular and political support in order to be sustained. Proposals for policy flexibility can hit the sweet spot for bipartisan support when they are framed not as promoting more government or less government, but as promoting better government. Since block grants often lead to a decrease in funds, efforts to advance policy flexibility through the creation of new block grants might not have the bipartisan support they need to be enacted.

Fortunately, there are promising alternative approaches to providing flexibility coupled with accountability for results.

PROMISING ALTERNATIVES

Pay for Success

Private investors pay for services to be delivered, in return for a guaranteed payment from government if and only if the services achieve agreed-upon outcomes.

Performance Partnerships

Federal, state and local governments sign agreements with a partnership, allowing it to use government funding flexibly as long as the partnership produces specific, agreed-upon results.

Partnership Zones

Communities propose a set of partnership activities within a geographical area. The government entity gives them a competitive preference for new government funding along with flexibility.



technological expenditures and often overlapping sets of information, and are built in ways that inhibit the flow and transfer of data among them. As a result, despite new resources devoted to data systems, most state and local policymakers and practitioners still do not have the information they need to be effective.”³⁰

4 Allow funding to be used flexibly, and to be blended and braided when coupled with accountability for results.

Whenever possible, authorization committees, appropriation committees and executive branch agencies should explicitly allow coordinating bodies to use and allocate funding flexibly. This includes blending and braiding funds with other related funding streams that provide a range of related services, address a range of related outcomes and target similar overlapping populations — on the condition that they be held accountable for achieving specific results.

The chairs of federal, state and local legislative authorization committees should instruct committee members to include such provisions in legislation they introduce. The chairs of appropriations committees should instruct their members to provide for such flexibility when the authorizers do not. The White House’s Domestic Policy Council and Office of Management and Budget, along with their state and local counterparts, should instruct executive branch agencies to do the same.

Rationale

Policy coordinating bodies that have strong strategic plans and data systems are likely to be better equipped than legislative appropriators and individual executive branch agencies to allocate resources where they are needed most. Accordingly, they should be afforded the greatest possible flexibility to use funding where it can do the most good. At times, doing so requires allowing policy coordinating bodies to braid funds (using funds from more than one source to pay for a common set of services, with careful accounting of how each dollar from each source is used), or blend funds (co-mingling funds from more than one source to pay for a common set of services, accounting for how the total amount is spent but not for which dollars from each funding source are used to pay for each expense).

Providing such flexibility does not mean that government should abdicate its oversight responsibility to ensure taxpayer dollars are used wisely. Instead, government

should shift from holding partnerships accountable for providing a prescribed set of actions to holding them collectively accountable for results.

As former White House Office of Management and Budget Chief Economist Jeffrey Liebman put it:

“Most government programs fund specific providers who serve a set number of people who meet particular eligibility requirements. Typically, the providers recruit clients, and clients often receive multiple types of services. Most government social service funding today is dedicated to purchasing slots in programs. Programs are managed to deliver a defined set of services to a fixed number of people rather than to achieve any particular outcome. Multiple government programs often provide ‘stove-piped’ assistance or services to a given individual, with none of them accountable for getting the individual to achieve success. ... Rather than managing programs based on the quantity of services provided, government agencies need to track outcomes for specific target populations and manage their programs to achieve outcome goals. Successful population-focused efforts will generally require extensive collaboration with many non-governmental community partners, including businesses, non-profit service providers, and philanthropies.”³¹

Convincing policymakers to provide such flexibility and allow braiding and blending of their funding requires overcoming the natural tendency for policymakers and system administrators to champion the specific slices of what is needed that are within their bailiwicks — which is an almost inevitable result of siloed governmental structures and processes. Another challenge can arise from legislative counsels, who draft legislation, and general counsels, who approve policy language in the executive branch. These lawyers sometimes point out that it is impossible to list everything that is *not* prohibited in a policy, and hence they shy away from explicitly listing any such items. While this reasoning is logical, in practice it creates de facto barriers.

Overcoming this resistance will take firm encouragement from people positioned to be loyal to the totality rather than to parts. These positions are few enough to name:

- Chairs of the legislative committees focused on children and youth (both authorizations and appropriations committees).
- The secretaries of each related government

department, along with the directors of their policy offices (to align efforts within a department).

- The directors of the policymaking offices of the president, governors and mayors (the Domestic Policy Council and its state and local equivalents) and the directors of their budget offices (White House Office of Management and Budget and its state and local equivalents) to align efforts across departments.

These individuals wield considerable power. They could dramatically curb the creation of new policy barriers by issuing instructions to the members of the committee/ executive branch agencies to allow for funding to be aligned, braided and blended whenever possible. For example, the sponsors of any new child and youth policy could be asked to answer the question: “Might it be more efficient and effective for the services specified in this policy to be delivered by people and programs that also provide a range of other related services, addressing a range of other related outcomes, for similar overlapping populations?” If yes, the policy should explicitly state that it is permissible to blend and braid these funds with those from other related government funding streams for these purposes — either universally for all grantees or selectively through waivers to specific grantees.



Develop research and evaluation methodologies appropriate for partnerships.

Government-affiliated research institutions, such as the National Science Foundation and the Institute of Education Sciences, should fund research to determine what factors underlie the success of child and youth policy coordinating bodies and to design evaluation methodologies for their unique needs.

Rationale

Evaluating partnerships requires confronting difficult questions such as: Can changes in population-level outcomes be attributed to the activities of policy coordinating bodies, when so many external factors are also constantly changing? How should coalitions be held accountable for the multi-year period before efforts mature enough to effect changes on the ground?

As the Aspen Roundtable on Community Change found, “A particular challenge is defining and developing indicators of intermediate outcomes around building capacity for lasting change, such as resident engagement,

organizational or institutional capacity, civic capacity, influence, and the ability to partner and network. Funders, practitioners, and researchers view these as critical aspects of community change efforts but continue to have difficulty defining their components, tracking progress, measuring increases in capacity, and conveying their value to policy makers. This also makes it difficult to assess the performance of intermediary organizations.” The roundtable endorsed the idea of “advancing work on interim indicators of community capacity by developing a taxonomy of how place-based change efforts are defining civic capacity, its dimensions and outcomes, and what tools and protocols they are using to measure it or to track increased capacity.”³²

Fortunately, there is a body of science to draw upon from the fields of community psychology and public health. Since 1990, the Work Group for Community Health and Development* at the University of Kansas (along with partners that include the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization and major national funders) has been studying “the process, intermediate outcomes, and more distant population-level outcomes of community efforts to promote health and development.” This includes research conducted on more than 1,500 community partnerships supported by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy’s Drug Free Communities program.³³ Using this data set, researchers in the University of Kansas Work Group distilled the characteristics of coalitions that correlate with their success in effecting community and system changes, and in turn the types of community and system changes that correlate with improvement in population-level outcomes over time.³⁴

While promising, this body of work is still relatively nascent. The level of national attention that collective impact is receiving has far outpaced research on effective collaborations. This gap needs to be narrowed to ensure that efforts are directed toward where they can do the most good.

*The KU Work Group on Community Health and Development was designated as an official World Health Organization Collaborating Center for another four years in 2013. WHO originally selected the KU Work Group in 2004, adding it to a small group of centers with similar missions in the Americas, including those at the University of Toronto, University of Sao Paulo and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

6

Reform auditing and accounting practices to allow partnerships and policy coordinating bodies to be held collectively accountable for results achieved, rather than for services provided.

The key regulations within the compliance, accounting and auditing infrastructure developed by the White House Office of Management and Budget and the Government Accountability Office, along with their state and local counterparts, should provide mechanisms for holding partnerships and coordinating bodies accountable for achieving specific results, instead of for undertaking specifically prescribed activities. In so doing, a portion of the \$88 billion spent every year to audit the accounting records of public and private organizations that receive federal funds, and to attest to compliance with generally accepted accounting practices, could be redirected to measuring the results of collaborative activities to achieve collective impact.

This includes the White House Office of Management and Budget's *Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards* and its circular on *Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non-Profit Organizations*; the Government Accountability Office's *Government Auditing Standards*; and their state and local equivalents.

Rationale

Fear of an audit is one of the primary reasons that many partnerships and policy coordinating bodies are reluctant to attempt blending and braiding funds. So reforms are needed on that front as well. Eighty-eight billion dollars are spent every year on compliance and auditing infrastructure for ensuring financial accountability.³⁵ Barely any dollars are spent on ensuring accountability for results. In general, efforts to ensure accountability for results are based on no common, industry-wide standards; rely on data of unequal quality; are not validated by a third party; and are not widely reported.

Governments should look for opportunities to relax the need for non-productive, duplicative audit and compliance activities, and repurpose the related funds to build an infrastructure for tracking results achieved. Such an approach — focusing accountability on what outcomes the grantee achieved, rather than on whether the grantee checked all the boxes on a form to ensure it complied with the specific actions mandated by the policy — can be an almost revolutionary concept in the public sector. Making the shift requires not only a strong signal from leadership, but also changes to the key documents that define the rules for the compliance, accounting and auditing industry.

At the federal level, there has been some recent progress. The Office of Management and Budget's *Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards* (released in 2013) states that efforts should “rely more on performance than compliance requirements to ensure accountability, and allow Federal agencies some additional flexibility to waive some requirements (in addition to the longstanding option to apply to OMB to waive requirements) that impede their capacity to achieve better outcomes through Federal awards.” It also includes a new provision specifically related to blended funding that allows non-Federal entities to submit performance plans that incorporate funds from multiple

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ALLOWING COMMUNITIES TO BUILD UPON EXISTING, BROAD PARTNERSHIPS RATHER THAN CREATING NEW, NARROWLY FOCUSED ONES

Policy Language that Helps

- Language allowing existing collaboratives to receive grants for new coordination tasks, rather than forcing a new entity to be created.
- Language ensuring an existing collaborative has the structure and capacity to satisfy the intent of the new legislation before funds are awarded.

2007 Head Start Act

B) The Governor may designate an **existing entity** in the State to serve as the State Advisory Council, and shall appoint representatives to the State Advisory Council at the Governor's discretion. In designating an existing entity, the Governor shall **take steps to ensure that its membership includes**, to the extent possible, representatives consistent with subparagraph (C).

Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA)

(ii) DESIGNATION OF EXISTING ENTITIES — A State may designate as panels for purposes of this subsection one or more **existing entities** established under State or Federal law, such as child fatality panels or foster care review panels, if such entities **have the capacity to satisfy the requirements** of paragraph (4) and the State ensures that such entities will satisfy such requirements.

Reengaging Americans in Serious Education by Uniting Programs Act (H.R. 3982/S. 1608)

Existing Partnership — An **existing workforce, education, or youth development partnership, coalition, or organization** may serve as the eligible entity for the purposes of grants under this section **if the partnership, coalition, or organization includes, or modifies the members of the partnership, coalition, or organization to include, the individuals required to be included in the eligible entity under section 3(2).**

2) ELIGIBLE ENTITY — The term 'eligible entity' means a partnership consisting of partners **qualified to represent the community assisted, or proposed to be assisted, by the partnership pursuant to this Act.**

Policy Language that Doesn't Help

- Language requiring the creation of a new interagency collaborative even if a good one already exists.

Act 114 of 2006 (Pennsylvania)

Section 1422.2. Interagency Coordinating Council for Child Health, Nutrition and Physical Education — (a) The Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Health and the Secretary of Agriculture shall establish an interagency coordinating council which shall annually review, revise and publish a Pennsylvania Child Wellness Plan to promote child health, nutrition and physical education. The council shall be composed of employees of the Department of Education, the Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture. The Secretary of Education shall appoint the chairman of the council. (b) **The Secretary of Education shall establish an advisory committee to offer recommendations to the council.** The secretary shall appoint no fewer than eight members to the advisory committee, who may include experts from the fields of health, education, research, community development and business.

Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 (IDEA)

Sec. 641 STATE INTERAGENCY COORDINATING COUNCIL.

(a) Establishment.—

(1) In general. — A State that desires to receive financial assistance under this part shall **establish a State interagency coordinating council.**

federal awards and account for their combined use based on performance-oriented metrics:

“For Federal awards of similar purpose activity or instances of approved blended funding, a non-Federal entity may submit performance plans that incorporate funds from multiple Federal awards and account for their combined use based on performance-oriented metrics, provided that such plans are approved in advance by all involved Federal awarding agencies. In these instances, the non-Federal entity must submit a request for waiver of the requirements based on documentation that describes the method of charging costs, relates the charging of costs to the specific activity that is applicable to all fund sources, and is based on quantifiable measures of the activity in relation to time charged.”³⁶

While challenging to develop, new outcome-based accountability mechanisms — once properly tested and proven effective — could allow policy coordinating bodies the flexibility they need to achieve collective impact while ensuring proper oversight of taxpayer dollars.

7 Explicitly allow new coordinating bodies, strategic plans and data systems to use and build upon existing ones.

All policies that call for the creation of a partnership, strategic plan or data system should explicitly allow grant recipients to use and build upon existing ones (if they have been effective and if they are willing to tackle the specific issue the policy seeks to address). This could be done either universally for all grantees or selectively through waivers.

The chairs of federal, state and local legislative authorization committees should instruct committee members to include such provisions in legislation they introduce. Chairs of appropriations committees should instruct committee members to provide for such flexibility when the authorizers do not. The White House’s Domestic Policy Council and Office of Management and Budget, along with their state and local counterparts, should instruct executive branch agencies to do the same.

Rationale

Perhaps the greatest irony in governmental efforts to help communities achieve collective impact is that these efforts to promote collaboration are themselves fragmented. Each is mandated to focus on one narrow slice of a young

person’s life.³⁷ The result is that communities often end up with lots of policy coordinating bodies, none of which has a scope broad enough to reliably change the trajectory of children’s lives. This is not a new problem. When the President’s Crime Prevention Council under the Clinton administration began its work to align government efforts, it started by creating an inventory of existing federal efforts to promote collaboration, and found that most of them were implemented in isolation from each other.³⁸

The same is true for the core functions that policy coordinating bodies must undertake in order to achieve collective impact, such as conducting needs assessments and strategic plans, and putting in place data systems. Communities end up with multiple needs assessments and strategic plans, and multiple disconnected data systems. Success, therefore, often requires aligning — and sometimes consolidating — existing policy coordinating bodies, strategic plans and data systems, rather than creating new ones.

8 Create “Folk Law” waiver programs.

The White House, governors and mayors should put in place waiver programs, even when there is no new legislative waiver authority. Doing so sets in motion a series of actions that, in and of themselves, will spur collaborative actions that people think they are not legally allowed to undertake, when in fact they are. History suggests that this approach could address such perceived barriers, whimsically nicknamed “folk laws,” that could account for as much as one-third of the barriers that prevent partnerships from taking collective action.

Rationale

Waiver programs contain several components: (1) new legislative or administrative authority to waive existing policy requirements; (2) an outreach effort to solicit waiver requests; (3) internal governmental staff and processes to evaluate and respond to waiver requests; and (4) communication to share the results of the waiver requests with the broader public. While an ideal waiver program has all four components, simply doing the outreach, setting up the internal processes to respond to requests, and communicating the results has significant value even in the absence of new waiver authority.

Why? Because history has shown that when a waiver program is in place, up to one-third of waiver requests are for items for which there is already ample flexibility. For example, during the Clinton administration, the

It is easy for policymakers to seize on such perceived ‘folk laws’ as evidence that change is not needed. The opposite is true: It is evidence of an underlying dysfunction in the policymaking process that must be addressed head-on.

U.S. Department of Education received 617 requests for waivers under the “Ed-Flex” program. Nearly one-third of the requests were for actions that the requesters were already allowed to do without a waiver.³⁹ This suggests that, had the waiver process been run years before, long before there was new legislated waiver authority, more than 200 requests for flexibility could have been approved on the spot.

It is easy for policymakers to seize on such perceived “folk laws” as evidence that change is not needed. The opposite is true: It is evidence of an underlying dysfunction in the policymaking process that must be addressed head-on. In this case, perception is reality. Whether a barrier is created by statute or myth, it undermines efforts to achieve collective impact just the same.

In addition to identifying and debunking “folk laws,” such an approach would likely yield requests that could be approved through existing waiver programs that have been established under different auspices. Once the perceived barriers have been addressed, along with those which could be handled through existing waiver programs, there will still be a substantial list of barriers that need to be changed through legislative or administrative action. While there will be little that government can do to provide immediate relief, this work still has tangible value. This list could be prioritized based on the level of demand and used to advance legislation that would allow such flexibility in the future.

CONCLUSION

While swimming against the tide is never easy, in this case it is essential. It has long been known that changing the trajectory of a young person’s life is “difficult, if not impossible, to achieve within the bounds of a single intervention unless that intervention is, in reality, not a single program — even a comprehensive one — but a reasonably complex strategy to change young people’s environments and opportunity structures.”⁴⁰ If such comprehensive strategies could have been put in place using traditional governmental mechanisms, they would have been implemented by now. And as Kania and Kramer conclude, “Until funders are willing to embrace this new approach and invest sufficient resources in the necessary facilitation, coordination, and measurement that enable organizations to work in concert, the requisite infrastructure will not evolve.”⁴¹ The status quo is no longer an option. We have a moral and economic imperative to change policies to enhance the ability for partnerships to achieve collective impact on child and youth outcomes.

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- ¹³ Institute for Educational Leadership & Center on Education Policy. (2000). *Understanding Flexibility in Federal Education Programs*. Washington, DC: Author.
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- ¹⁶ Evennou, D., Bonilla Moreno, J. and Gaines, E. (2014). *Ready by 21 state policy survey: Child and youth policy coordinating bodies in the U.S.* Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment.
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- ¹⁸ Gaines, E. and Ferber, T. (2010). What's the plan? In First Focus (Eds.), *Big ideas: Game-changers for children* (pp. 24-37). Washington, DC: Author.
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- ²¹ The United Nations' Third World Youth Forum committed to “ensuring that national youth policy formulation, implementation and follow-up processes are, at appropriate level, accorded commitment from the highest political level, including the provision of adequate levels of resources,” and recommended “the formulation in all states of youth policies by the year 2005, which are cross-sectoral, comprehensive and formulated with long-term vision coupled with Action Plans. United Nations Third World Youth Forum. (1998). *Proceedings from World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth*. Lisbon, Spain: United Nations.
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