

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

2013 Survey Report

Jenny Bonilla Moreno, Elizabeth Gaines, Danielle Evennou





\\ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This survey captures the decisions and experiences of more than 40 children’s cabinets and councils. Many thanks to all state contacts for responding to the survey and their enthusiasm for sharing and learning.

This project is both richer and more useful because of the support of the National Governors Association and the American Public Human Services Association, as well as their members.

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\\ ABOUT US

The *Ready by 21 State¹ Policy Survey* was created by the [Forum for Youth Investment](#). The Forum 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. Informed by rigorous research and practical experience, the Forum forges innovative ideas, strategies and partnerships to strengthen solutions for young people and those who care about them. For over a decade the Forum has worked with innovative policymakers, including governors’ children’s cabinets and other coordinating bodies.

Ready by 21 is a set of strategies developed by the Forum for Youth Investment that help communities improve the odds that all children and youth will be ready for college, work and life. Ready by 21 provides clear standards to achieve collective impact, tools and solutions to help leaders make progress, and ways to measure and track success along the way. www.readyby21.org

The [Children’s Cabinet Network](#), managed by the Forum, is the only national network of state policy coordinating bodies for children and youth (children’s cabinets, P-20 councils and early childhood advisory councils). Members of the network share best practices and learn more about tools that focus on bringing efficiency and effectiveness to state efforts that improve outcomes for young people. The Children’s Cabinet Network offers:

- peer-to-peer conference calls and webinars on topics identified by network members
- regular updates on federal funding opportunities
- publications on topics of interest to children’s cabinets
- convenings, such as roundtable discussions, trainings and meetings with federal policymakers

In addition, the Forum provides technical assistance to children’s cabinets and related state policy coordinating bodies on a range of issues. The Forum’s areas of expertise include helping states to: create a children’s cabinet, develop common goals and shared data, generate a statewide plan for all children and youth, and map fiscal resources for young people.

¹ The “State” survey includes U.S. territories and the District of Columbia as well as the 50 states.

INTRODUCTION

Improving the coordination, collaboration and efficiency of youth services has been on the “to do” lists of state and local governments for years. And for good reason: Services are fragmented. Policies are often redundant and contradictory. Policymakers are overwhelmed. The public is confused or complacent, having resigned to the fiction that nothing in government works.

This frustration has fueled a consensus that government needs to systematically change the way it operates for children and youth. To help make that change happen, more and more leaders are calling for the creation of youth-focused coordinating bodies to align policies and practices.

States are increasingly heeding that call. Across the country, state leaders are creating permanent cross-agency coordinating bodies – often called children’s cabinets, councils or commissions – to make services for youth more efficient and effective.

These coordinating bodies are generally established through legislation or executive order and vary in structure. Their members are usually heads of government agencies with child and youth-serving programs. Members meet regularly to coordinate services, develop a common set of outcomes to achieve, and create and implement plans to foster the well-being of young people.

This report is intended to help governors, legislators, department secretaries and advocates looking for information on ways to strengthen the structure and function of their existing cabinets or to create a new one.

Key Findings

- Fewer states reported multiple coordinating bodies. The average was 1.27 coordinating bodies per state.
- More coordinating bodies developed a strategic plan, action agenda or work plan.
- Coordinating bodies continue to address a range of ages and developmental outcomes.
- More coordinating bodies report having youth as official members.
- More coordinating bodies are aligning the work of member agencies.

“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 partnerships with the nonprofit and private sectors.”

– A Governor’s Guide to Children’s Cabinets, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2004.

Ready by 21 State Policy Survey: Child and Youth Policy Coordinating Bodies in the U.S. is the nation’s only survey of state child and youth policy coordinating bodies. The biennial survey assesses coordinating bodies’ progress under the Ready by 21® [Building Blocks for Effective Change](#). Ready by 21 is a set of strategies to help state and local government leaders get all young people ready for college, work and life. Those strategies are built on these four building blocks: broader partnerships, bigger goals, better data and bolder actions.

This biennial survey was conducted first in 2011 and again in 2013. The Forum for Youth Investment hopes that the decisions, lessons and experiences documented here can serve as tools for coordinating bodies at all stages of development.

\\ SURVEY PARTICIPANTS



Number of Participating Coordinating Bodies

In 2013, the survey was completed by 30 states, as well as Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This is a slight increase over the 29 states that participated in 2011. Overall, states reported fewer coordinating bodies. Among those that reported having at least one, the average was 1.27 coordinating bodies per state, down from 1.7 in 2011. Forty-three coordinating bodies were reported in the 2013 survey, compared with 55 in 2011. Survey participants in 2013 included both new coordinating bodies and returning participants from the previous survey. Eighteen coordinating bodies that participated in 2013 also completed the 2011 survey. Three of the participating coordinating bodies in 2013 were derived from entities that participated in 2011.

Types of Coordinating Bodies Participating

While Early Childhood Councils continue to make up the majority of survey respondents, the number of these respondents decreased significantly (from 23 in 2011 to 15 in 2013). Similarly, the number of participating P-20/P-16 Councils decreased from seven in 2011 to only one in 2013. Though a similar outreach strategy was used, the survey might not have reached the appropriate contacts in the education sector that run P-20/P-16 Councils. In contrast, governors' children's cabinets and commissions collectively made up 23 responses, an increase of three.

Reduction in Coordinating Bodies

Fewer states reported that they had multiple coordinating bodies. In 2011, 32 percent of states reported that they had more than one coordinating body. This dropped to 10 percent in 2013.

A winding down of federal funds to support Early Childhood Councils might explain the reduction in coordinating bodies. Additionally, some states reported that their coordinating body was undergoing a restructuring phase. These transition periods offer critical opportunities for states to better align the efforts of their various coordinating bodies to increase their impact on children and youth. In fact, it might be a positive sign that states are reducing the number of coordinating bodies and focusing on making one coordinating body successful.

“New legislation in [Colorado] mandates the development of a statewide youth development plan, which has implications for the priorities addressed by the new state interagency coordinating council on youth services.”

– José Esquibel, Director
Interagency Prevention Systems
for Children and Youth
Colorado Department of
Human Services

STRUCTURE OF COORDINATING BODIES

A majority of coordinating bodies (57 percent) are established in statute, which is the strongest policy approach to creating such entities at the state level. Twenty-eight percent of coordinating bodies are formalized through a governor's executive order.² This data is consistent with the results of the 2011 survey.

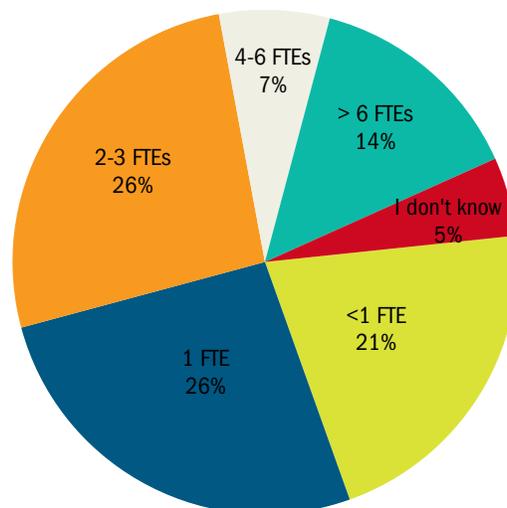
The responding coordinating bodies report more fulltime employees (FTEs) in 2013 than in 2011. The percentage of coordinating bodies that reported having less than one FTE decreased by 16 points, while the percentage of coordinating bodies reporting two to three FTEs grew by 13 points.

It is possible that those coordinating bodies with one or more staff members in 2011 were more likely to have remained active and to have completed the 2013 survey. Additionally, it is possible the survey did not capture the work of coordinating bodies without FTEs because such bodies may have lacked the capacity to report on their work.

Individual state agencies continue to run the majority of coordinating bodies (65 percent). Governor's offices housed 16 percent, while 10 percent were run by non-governmental groups. This data is consistent with the 2011 findings. The Forum for Youth Investment believes the most effective coordinating bodies are housed in a neutral office with the capacity to sufficiently staff and support the work.

A new survey question was added to gain a better understanding of the relationship between statewide coordinating bodies and coordinating structures at the local and regional levels. More than half of all participating coordinating bodies voluntarily connected to local and regional structures. Eight coordinating bodies were required to connect to local structures and four were required to connect to regional structures. As communities across the country quickly take on "collective impact" initiatives, aligning state and local policies is becoming ever more critical.

A MAJORITY HAVE AT LEAST ONE FULL-TIME STAFF

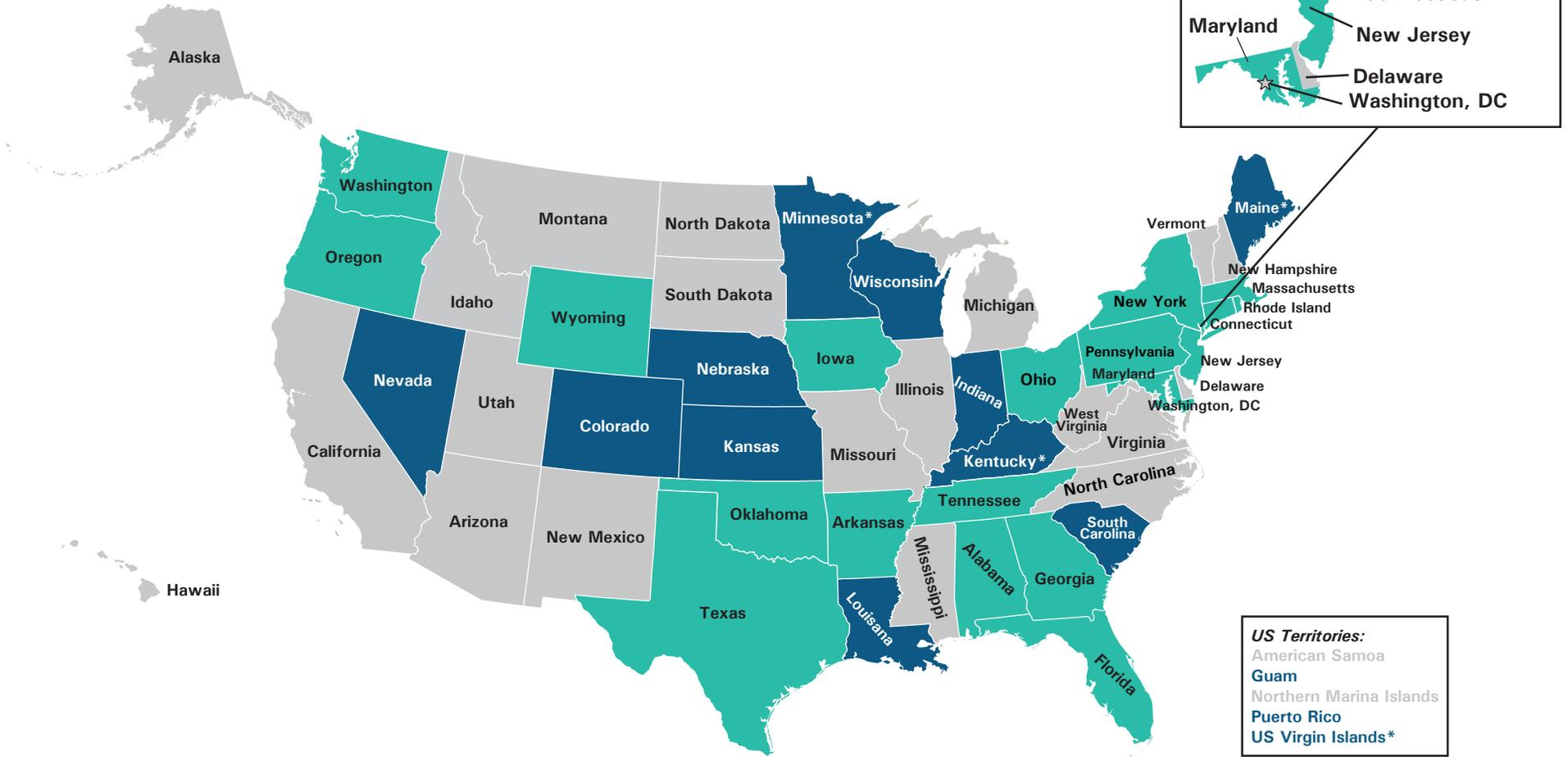


² Some coordinating bodies are formalized in both statute and executive order.

RESPONDENTS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

- 2011 and 2013 Participant (same coordinating body)
- 2013 Participant
- Did Not Participate in 2013

* Indicates state participated in 2011 and 2013, but respondent was different coordinating body each year.



PARTICIPATING COORDINATING BODIES

Alabama

- [Alabama Department of Children's Affairs](#) † (2011, 2013)

Arkansas

- [Arkansas Early Childhood Commission](#) (2011, 2013)

Colorado

- [Colorado 9 to 25](#) (2013)
- [Colorado Children's Caucus](#) (2013)
- [Colorado Prevention Leadership Council](#) (2013)
- [Colorado Early Childhood Leadership Commission](#) (2013)

Connecticut

- [Connecticut Interagency Birth to Three Coordination Council](#) (2013)
- [Connecticut Commission on Children](#) (2011, 2013)
- [Connecticut Early Childhood Cabinet](#) (2011, 2013)
- [P-20 Council](#) (2011, 2013)

Florida

- [Florida Children and Youth Cabinet](#) (2011, 2013)

Georgia

- [Georgia Children's Cabinet](#) (2011, 2013)

Iowa

- [Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development Council](#) (2011, 2013)

Kansas

- [Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund](#) (2013)

Kentucky

- [State Interagency Council for Services to Children with Emotional Disabilities](#) (2013)

Louisiana

- [Louisiana Children's Cabinet](#) (2013)

Maine

- [Maine Children's Growth Council](#) (2013)

Maryland

- [Maryland Children's Cabinet](#) (2011, 2013)

Massachusetts

- [Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet](#) (2011, 2013)

Minnesota

- [Minnesota Children's Cabinet](#) (2013)
- [Minnesota Early Learning Council](#) (2013)

Nebraska

- [Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council](#) (2013)

Nevada

- [Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council](#) (2013)

New Jersey

- [New Jersey Council for Young Children](#) (2011, 2013)

New York

- [New York State Council on Children and Families](#) (2011, 2013)

Ohio

- [Ohio Family and Children First](#) (2011, 2013)

Oklahoma

- [Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth](#) (2011, 2013)

Oregon

- [Oregon Youth Development Council](#)† (2011, 2013)

Pennsylvania

- [Pennsylvania System of Care Partnership - State Leadership Team](#)† (2011, 2013)

Rhode Island

- [Rhode Island Early Learning Council](#) (2011, 2013)

South Carolina

- [Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children](#) (2013)

Tennessee

- [Tennessee Children's Cabinet](#) (2013)
- [Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth](#) (2011, 2013)
- [Tennessee Young Child Wellness Council](#) (2013)

Texas

- [Texas Council on Children and Families](#) (2011, 2013)
- [Texas Early Learning Council](#) (2013)

Washington

- [Graduation: A Team Effort – Statewide Steering Committee](#) (2011, 2013)

Wisconsin

- [Department of Children and Families – Secretary's Advisory Council on Child Welfare](#) (2013)

Wyoming

- [Wyoming Early Childhood State Advisory Council](#) (2011, 2013)

U.S. Territories

Guam

- [Guam Early Learning Council](#) (2013)

Puerto Rico

- [State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care](#) (2013)

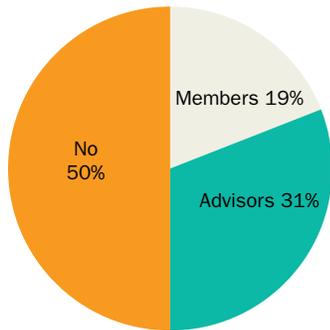
U.S. Virgin Islands

- [Governor's Children and Families Council](#) (2013)

† Indicates derivative entity participated in 2011 survey.

MEMBERSHIP IN COORDINATING BODIES

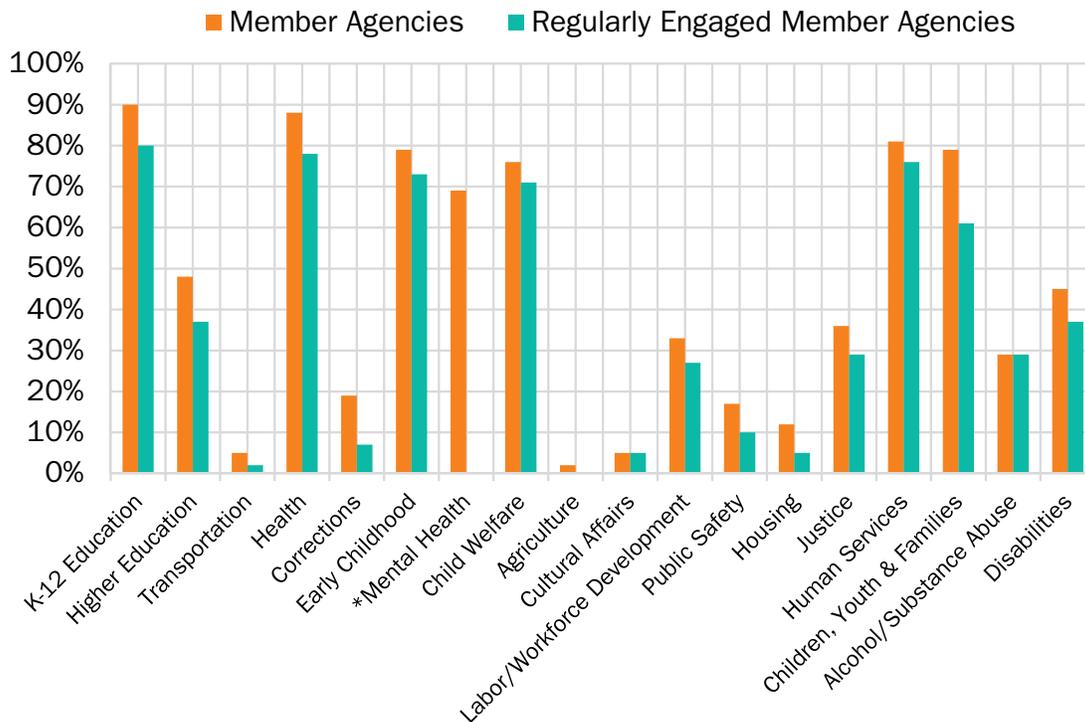
MORE COORDINATING BODIES HAVE YOUTH AS OFFICIAL MEMBERS



More coordinating bodies are engaging youth. The percentage with youth engaged overall, either as members or advisors, increased from 42 percent in 2011 to 50 percent in 2013. In 2011 only 9 percent of coordinating bodies included youth as official members. This jumped to 19 percent in 2013. Conversely, the number of youth in advisory roles decreased from 33 percent in 2011 to 31 percent in 2013. This might indicate that coordinating bodies are converting youth advisory roles into official member positions.

While coordinating bodies typically include a range of members, 56 percent report that the majority of their membership consists of the heads of state agencies. Such state agencies include departments of education, health, early childhood, mental health, child welfare and human services, and of children, youth and families. Consistent with 2011, half of all coordinating bodies have from six to 10 state agencies in their membership. Roughly one-third (36 percent) have 11 or more agencies represented.

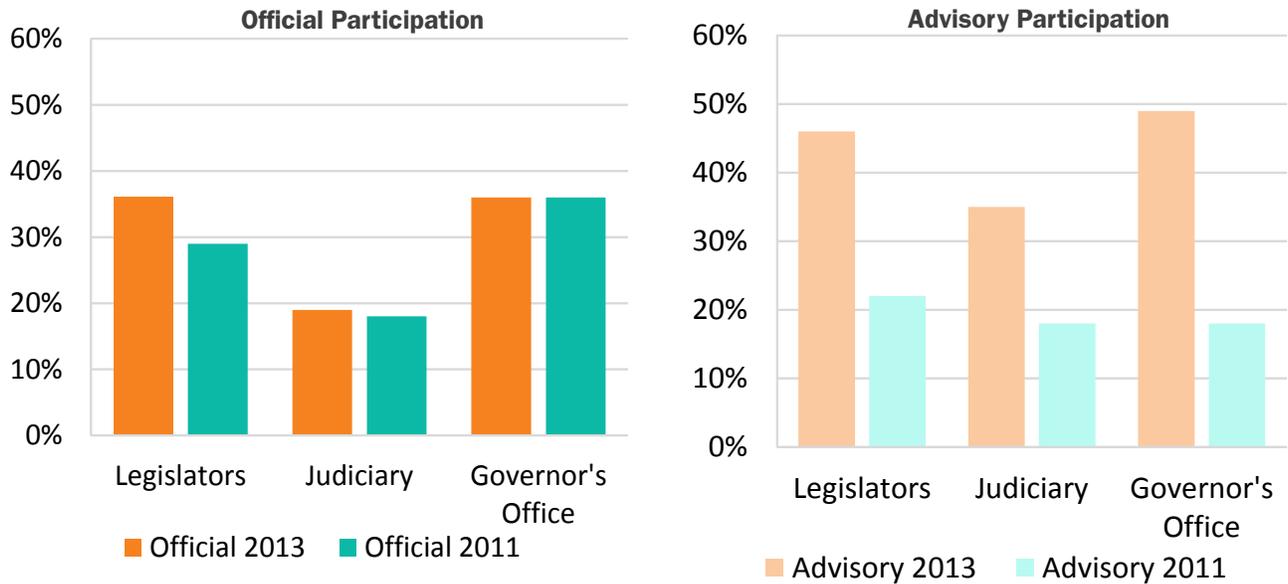
MOST MEMBER AGENCIES ARE REGULARLY ENGAGED



*Note: We were not able to fully capture the engagement of mental health agencies.

Average overall participation by the legislative, judicial and executive branches of state government, whether official or advisory, increased between 2011 and 2013. Average official participation by these branches increased by a margin of approximately 3 percentage points, while average advisory participation increased by 24 percentage points. In 2013, legislators, governors’ offices and members of the judiciary were more likely to play an advisory role as opposed to serving as an official member. This differs from 2011, when representatives from these groups were more often cited as official members. Legislators were most likely to participate in coordinating bodies that have an early childhood focus.

PARTICIPATION BY BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT



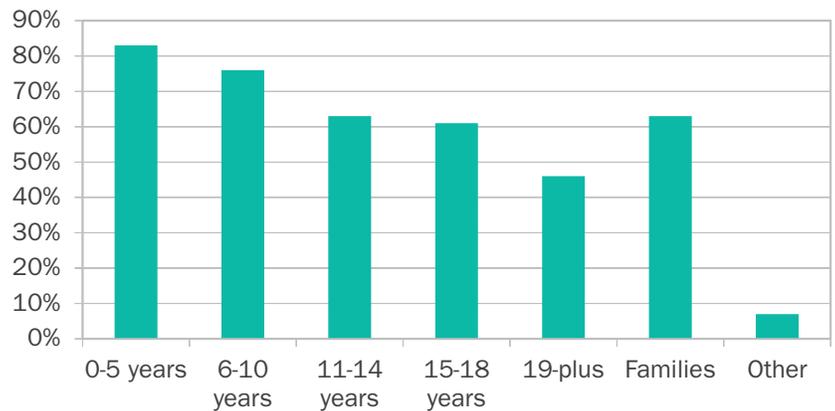
In addition to youth and government stakeholders, coordinating bodies identified other groups that serve in advisory roles and as official members. Parents, community based organizations, and private sector service providers were included as official members by more than 40 percent of respondents.

Survey participants identified several advantages to engaging a wide range of stakeholders. These benefits include a better understanding of issues to inform policy recommendations and funding decisions, as well as an increased commitment to policy implementation.

GOALS OF COORDINATING BODIES

In the 2013 survey, more coordinating bodies reported focusing on young children than on older youth. Eighty-three percent of coordinating bodies reported that they focus on children ages 0 to 5, while 46 percent reported that they concentrate on youth ages 19 and above. The number of coordinating bodies focusing on families increased from 40 percent in 2011 to 63 percent in 2013.

CRADLE TO CAREER



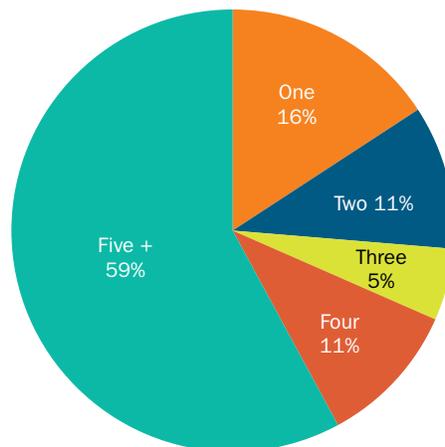
“The [Georgia Children’s] Cabinet partnerships provide a platform for Georgia to be able to accomplish our goal of increasing access to high quality services.”

– Katie Jo Ballard,
Executive Director
Governor’s Office for
Children and Families

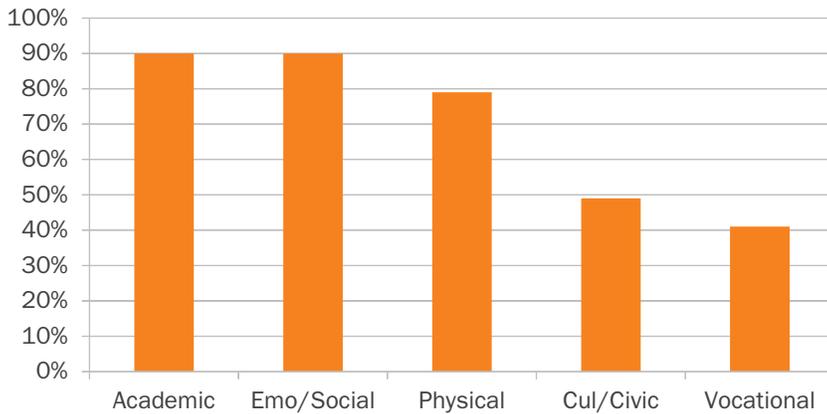
While slightly more coordinating bodies are focusing on youth ages 15-18 (58 percent in 2011, rising to 61 percent in 2013), the number of coordinating bodies focused on youth ages 19 and older decreased from 51 percent in 2011 to 46 percent in 2013. However, among coordinating bodies that participated in both the 2011 and 2013 surveys, 57 percent reported focusing on youth ages 19 and older and 76 percent reported focusing on ages 15-18. This could indicate that coordinating bodies that have been active longer, and are arguably more experienced, are more likely to address the needs of older youth.

Coordinating bodies continue to address multiple developmental areas and ages. A majority of respondents (59 percent) focus on all five of the following age ranges: 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-14 years, 15-18 years and 19-plus. This marks a 19 percentage point increase since 2011. Another 16 percent focus on three or more of these age categories.

A MAJORITY FOCUS ON MULTIPLE AGE GROUPS



BODIES ADDRESS MULTIPLE DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS



Most coordinating bodies (89 percent) address at least three of the following developmental areas: academic, social/emotional, physical, cultural/civic, and vocational. The number of coordinating bodies that reported covering five developmental areas decreased by seven percentage points since 2011, while the number of coordinating bodies covering three developmental areas increased by 14 percentage points. A strong majority (79 percent and higher) address academic, emotional/social, and physical outcomes for children and youth. The number of coordinating bodies that reported focusing

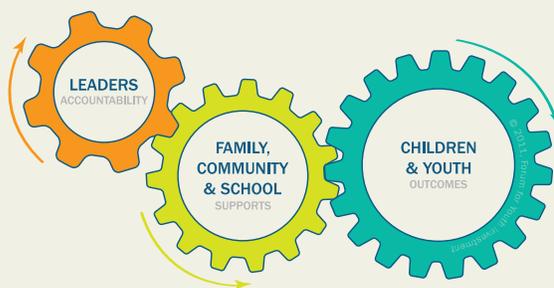
on vocational goals decreased from 53 percent in 2011 to 41 percent in 2013, while the number of bodies focusing on cultural and civic development remained unchanged.

READY BY 21 THEORY OF CHANGE

When coordinating bodies were asked to name their goals, they identified a range of items that align with the Ready by 21® theory of change. Several identified outcomes for children and youth, such as “babies born healthy,” “school success,” and “safety.” Others remarked on their efforts to increase access to high-quality programs and family supports, while some focused on things that policymakers themselves can do, such as create an office focused on youth services and develop a strategic plan.

Theory of Change

The Ready by 21 Theory of Change



Ready by 21 uses interconnected gears to illustrate its theory of change for improving youth outcomes at a large scale.

To change the odds for children and youth, we must help our communities improve the quality and quantity of the supports available for young people from their families, schools and communities.

To change the landscape of communities and the supports they provide, we must first change the way we, as leaders, do business.

To help us be more successful as leaders, we must build broader partnerships, set bigger goals, use better data and decision-making, and take bolder actions.

That's the Ready by 21 theory of change: **Moving the small gear – focusing on leaders – makes a big difference.**

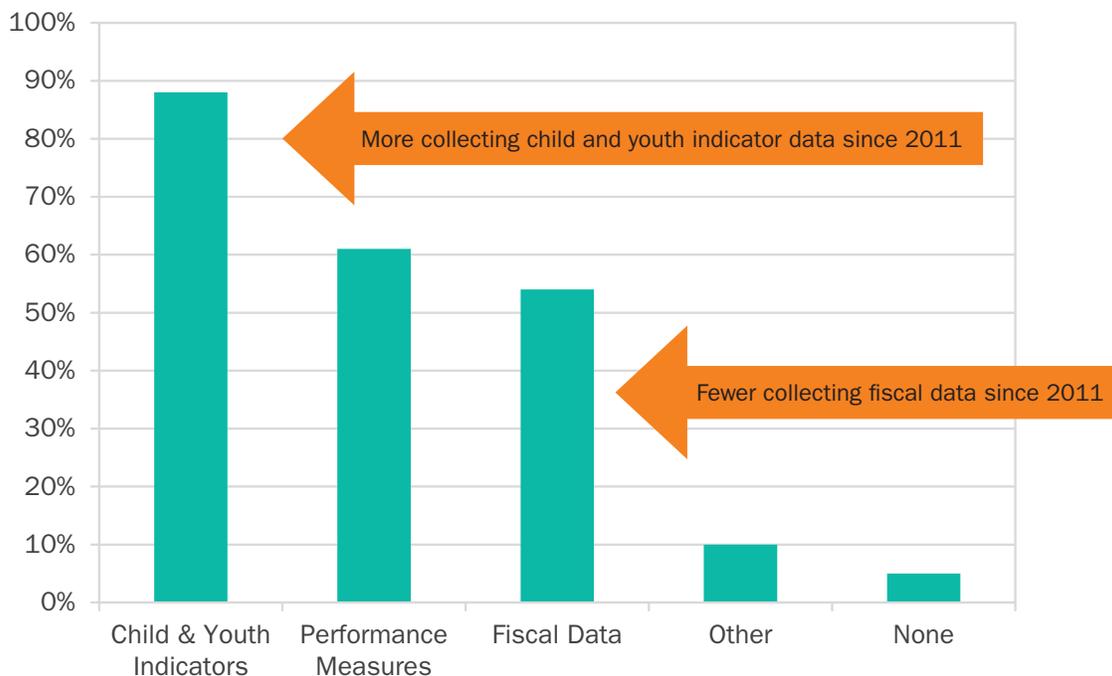
DATA COLLECTED BY COORDINATING BODIES

Over half of coordinating bodies are collecting at least one of the following:

- **Child and youth indicator data** - a population-level measure that helps quantify the achievement of a result (e.g., *rate of low-birth weight babies, rate of high school graduation, youth crime rate, youth unemployment rate*)
- **Performance measures** - a measure of how well a program, agency or service system is working (e.g., *caseload of social workers, teacher quality*)
- **Fiscal data** - measures that relate to budget, funding and/or resources, including in-kind (e.g., *amount spent on prevention, dollars per student in a given school district*)

Child and youth indicator data continues to be the most common type of data collected by coordinating bodies. In 2011, 75 percent of coordinating bodies reported collecting youth indicator data. That rose to 88 percent in 2013. More than half of coordinating bodies continue to collect performance measure data, which reflects the progress of programs and systems. Fewer coordinating bodies collect fiscal data. Often referred to as a “children’s budget analysis” or “fiscal map,” this data helps show where dollars for kids are being spent in a given state or locality. In 2011, 73 percent of coordinating bodies reported collecting fiscal data, but in 2013 this fell to 54 percent.

MOST ARE COLLECTING ONE OR MORE KINDS OF DATA



Data are only valuable if they are actually used to drive decision-making. In both 2011 and 2013, respondents reported that they most often used data to identify problem areas and share data across agencies. Two positive trends emerged in 2013. The percentage of coordinating bodies using data to track performance increased from 35 percent in 2011 to 45 percent in 2013. In addition, the percentage of coordinating bodies using data to make decisions about funds increased from 25 percent in 2011 to 38 percent in 2013.

ACTIONS BY COORDINATING BODIES³

Developing a strategic plan, action agenda or work plan remained first on the list of reported accomplishments, with 62 percent of respondents reporting this activity, compared with 51 percent in 2011. The second most common accomplishment was passing new legislation, with 31 percent of respondents reporting this activity. Between 20 and 30 percent of respondents also reported the following accomplishments: streamlining duplicative efforts, aligning requests for proposals, implementing program quality initiatives and sharing costs across programs. In contrast, eight percent of coordinating bodies reported eliminating ineffective programs and only three percent reported creating a children's budget.

Top Three Challenges for Coordinating Bodies

- Sharing data between agencies (53%)
- Insufficient decision-making authority (28%)
- Turnover in leadership positions (23%)

“The New Jersey Council for Young Children was actively involved in the development of the New Jersey Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) application. The planning team responded to the RFP with the role of the council as paramount in the continued alignment of New Jersey's early childhood systems and services. It's an exciting time and New Jersey is very pleased to be a recipient of an RTT-ELC grant.”

– Gambi White-Tennant,
Executive Director
New Jersey Council for
Young Children

More coordinating bodies are aligning their work. The percentage of coordinating bodies reporting a “lack of alignment between child and youth initiatives” as a challenge dropped by more than half, from 31 percent in 2011 to 15 percent in 2013.

Lastly, fewer coordinating bodies report challenges with implementing policies based on best practices. Between 2011 and 2013, the percentage of coordinating bodies that reported an inability to implement policies based on best practices dropped by more than half, from 24 percent in 2011 to 10 percent in 2013.

Coordinating bodies that participated in both the 2011 and 2013 surveys reported fewer challenges related to political support, structure and participation in 2013. This could signify that these are startup challenges, meaning that they are common to coordinating bodies in their infancy but resolve themselves as coordinating bodies mature and become more established. In addition, coordinating bodies that participated in both 2011 and 2013 were more likely to report that their greatest challenges in 2013 were policy-related. This could indicate that they have resolved their startup challenges and are now able to focus more deeply on the policy issues they were created to tackle.

³ In 2011, many survey respondents submitted open-ended responses regarding their biggest successes and challenges. In response, the Forum for Youth Investment and the RAND Corporation retooled answer choices in the survey about accomplishments and challenges. Each of the top three challenges identified by coordinating bodies were offered as answers for the first time in 2013.

\\ SUSTAINABILITY



Sixty-eight percent of coordinating bodies reported that they are making specific plans to sustain their work over time. Coordinating bodies identified a number of strategies for doing so, such as:

- A cross-agency funding plan for basic operating costs
- Institutionalizing the council through legislation
- Using the council strategically to solve difficult issues
- Continuing high-quality work
- Hiring a backbone organization to identify sustainable funds
- Embedding the work of the coordinating body within communities across the state
- Maintaining solid working relationships with legislators, the judiciary, service providers, interested citizens and the media

“In addition to the obvious harm and stress for individuals caused by the potential or actual loss of services, it makes it harder to talk about new initiatives when current programs that are already underfunded (e.g. Head Start) are being cut further. Sequestration, and now the shutdown, are likely to further challenge program implementation and draw resources, and may draw attention, from quality improvement efforts as well.”

– Marcie Jefferys, Director
Minnesota Children’s Cabinet

Since the 2011 survey, “sequestration” has entered the nation’s lexicon. “Sequestration” is shorthand for a series of automatic federal spending cuts that took effect in March 2013 to reduce the nation’s deficit. Because sequestration impacts states, an additional question was added to the survey to assess its impact on state coordinating bodies for children and youth. An overwhelming majority of coordinating bodies reported that they are not directly impacted by sequestration. However, several coordinating bodies stated that sequestration has affected individual agencies and programs, causing a shift in budgets and priorities.

\\ CONCLUSION

The Forum for Youth Investment continues to be interested in the progress of these coordinating bodies for a number of reasons. Without them, and without something similar at the federal level, the work on the ground in communities to improve outcomes for kids will eventually be stalled. The lion’s share of resources for children, youth and families in the United States come from state sources, and then from federal agency sources. The coordinated, efficient and visionary application of those resources at the state level can have a huge impact. Developing best practices in state child and youth policy coordination requires attention to the building blocks for effective change. If the partnerships are not broad enough, the goals not big enough, the data not better and the actions not bold, there is little chance of significant, lasting change.

We are constantly learning what makes for success, and through this survey we can track progress across the country. To that end, the Forum regularly provides technical assistance to states. There is no need to reinvent the wheel; many of the tools and strategies that the Forum uses have been gleaned from experience in other states. That work has been supported by a generous grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

\\ ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **[2011 Ready by 21 State Policy Survey: Child and Youth Policy Coordinating Bodies in the U.S.](#)**

In 2011 the Forum for Youth Investment conducted the first comprehensive biennial survey of state child and youth policy coordinating bodies, conducted with assistance from the RAND Corporation. The study identified coordinating bodies and reported initial findings on the breadth of their partnerships and goals, how well they use data, and their effectiveness in using innovative strategies to support children and youth.

- **[Don't Stop Collaborating – Just Stop Creating New Collaboratives](#)**

Many states and communities have multiple task forces, partnerships and councils working on overlapping youth issues, from bullying to pregnancy to dropouts. This policy brief calls attention to the problem of collaboration overload, and suggests ways to tackle it. Check out these tips for working collaboratively without creating redundancy. Learn how states and communities, from Texas to Petaluma, Calif., are taking steps to align their collaboratives.

- **State Children's Cabinets and Councils Series**

- **[State Children's Cabinets and Councils: Getting Results for Children and Youth](#)** provides the rationale behind the Forum's assertion that children's cabinets and councils should be taken seriously, and spells out how state children's cabinets and councils are operating in ways that are consistent with the Forum's Ready by 21 theory of change.
- The **[2008 Directory of State Children's Cabinets and Councils](#)** provides at-a-glance responses to basic but important questions, through summaries of interviews done with children's cabinet and council directors in 2008.
- **[Elements of Success 1: Structural Options](#)** outlines the range of current children's cabinet and council structures, and offers tips and warnings for putting the most effective structure in place. This issue brief builds on interviews conducted by the Forum and on the detailed documentation work done for the National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Governors Association Center on Best Practices.

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