Family Resource Center Landscape Review







THE EarlyLearningLab

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What did we set out to do?

A Reflection of Family Resource Centers

Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are overwhelmingly viewed as incubators for innovation because of their willingness to respond to family and community needs. This ability enables FRCs to be uniquely positioned to work with diverse families as well as partners who reflect local priorities.

In 2015, the California Family Support Network reported that there were 1,000 FRCs and 30 FRC Networks serving nearly 300,000 young children and 568,000 parents annually across California. FRCs not only serve as a valuable community resource, but the extent of their reach is also significant.

While several statewide efforts and organizations have been developed over the years to support and strengthen the family support field, navigating the landscape of FRCs remains complex. This leaves the field fragmented and without a unified advocacy voice, stable funding source(s), common evaluation framework, statewide data system, or comprehensive professional development system. Despite these complexities at a systems level, there is considerable interest to address these challenges and generate greater awareness and highlight family resource centers' impact on children and their families.

Primary Goals of this Project

In the fall of 2017, with funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, consultant Laurel Kloomok and the Early Learning Lab conducted a landscape review of California's FRCs and the state's existing FRC networks, associations, and regional partnerships. Guiding the work were two primary goals:

1. Build off the recommendations from *Vehicles for Change*[1] and explore the current landscape of statewide FRC networks and systems to better assess the field's appetite for change; and

2. Engage key FRC stakeholders in collective inquiry and creative problem solving to ascertain concrete options for further action.

The following summary provides an overview of lessons learned through the landscape review process as well as next steps that have the potential to continue to advance the field of Family Resource Centers.

1. S.H. Cowell Foundation and the Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) recently commissioned a report to tell the continuing story of FRCs in California. The resulting monograph Vehicles for Change Volume II concluded with a call for "a unified statewide body that provides leadership, advocacy, networking opportunities and common measures for success for FRCs and their local networks". A coordinating body would help galvanize the field, support best practices and seek policies that would create sustainable funding sources to better serve families and caregivers.

Data Collection Methods

To achieve these goals, we engaged in a set of qualitative data collection methods intended to solicit stakeholder experiences and perspectives on opportunities as well as identify potential next steps for further exploration. A summary of the data collection methods is noted below:

22 Key Informant Interviews:

- Statewide Agencies ad Organizations
- County First 5 Organizations
- Family Resource Centers
- FRC Networks
- Funders
- Other Key Informants

1 Stakeholder Focus Group:

- 8 participants representing a diverse set of perspectives. Including statewide associations, networks, funders, and practitioners.

What did we learn?

Common FRC Experience

Through the data collection, a unified a set of experiences emerged across stakeholder groups. While each entity brings a unique perspective, they shared several common practices influencing the work on the ground. These shared experiences include:

- Being grounded in the principles of family support and use the Strengthening Families/Protective Factors Framework
- Engaging in a targeted universal approach
- Holding shared values of integrity, respect, partnership, social justice, and community voice
- Providing a set of core services including family navigation, parent education and support, and playgroups
- Implementing various evidence-based and evidence-informed practices
- Accessing multiple funding streams for sustainability
- Facing challenges with creating and identifying a single definition to describe their work

There is debate around the definition and core focus of Family Resource Centers: Child Abuse Prevention, Strengthening Families, Health and Wellness, Strong Families/Strong communities or all of the above. This results in some confusion about what defines FRCs.

-Key Stakeholder

Lessons Learned

In addition to a set of shared experiences, stakeholders' perspectives coalesced around six specific themes affecting the current state of FRC systems:

1. **Funding and Sustainability**
   - FRCs are under-resourced but there are opportunities at the state and county levels
2. **Advocacy and Communication**
   - There is not a common definition or message around the role FRCs play
   - Advocacy campaigns have not gained traction
3. **Data and Evaluation**
   - Outcome data are hard to collect
   - There is a need for an FRC-centric evaluation framework

FRCs need a stable, flexible, and dedicated government funding stream in order to achieve sustainability.

FRCs need to mobilize and be part of the state and local budgeting process.

FRCs need to advocate for prevention. There should be prevention plans in every county.

Power resides in the community. We need to offer tools to help organize advocacy efforts.

We cannot achieve sustainability without data: person/child level, program level, system level, and community level.

-Key Stakeholders

Lessons Learned

4. **Professional Development**

   - Emerging leaders at the local, regional, and state levels need support
   - Professional development needs to be more formalized and universal, yet flexible for community context and practitioner expertise
   - Technology can and should play a role in the delivery of professional development

5. **Statewide Organizations**

   - There is a strong desire to have a state organization that can support leadership development, advocacy, and communication that is informed by practitioners and families at the community level.

6. **First 5's Role**

   - Largest funder of FRCs in the state
   - First 5's are working to create a systems approach to funding
   - There is a potential opportunity to advance family support programming through cannabis tax

There is little coherent connection between Early Childhood Education and Family Resource Centers. We need to align professional development to improve services and a birth to five continuum of care.

We need to focus on leadership development and have a system to codify and measure leadership.

There needs to be stronger statewide presence and a comprehensive statewide communication plan.

We couldn't support our FRCs without First 5 funding and are worried about First 5's declining revenue stream.

-Key Stakeholders

What are the opportunities?

The key themes offer valuable insights into potential opportunities to support FRC systems across the state. As part of the landscape review process, we engaged stakeholders in a focus group to pressure test the potential next steps to determine if they resonated with stakeholders, and if so, to discuss how to best prioritize and sequence these opportunities. The bullets below highlight the opportunities informed by stakeholders.

- Adopt a Set of FRC Standards and Implement a Certification Process
- Develop a Statewide Policy and Advocacy Platform
- Build Organizational Capacity & Leadership Development

Standards and Certification

Adopt a set of FRC Standards and Implement a Certification Process at a Statewide Level

- Certification and unified standards strengthen the field of FRCs. If certification is offered and a set of standards are adopted, it would give more creditability to the field and offer pathways to quality improvement and excellence.

- There is interest in elevating the field of FRCs and an opportunity to bring people together to review, modify, design, redesign, and adopt a version of Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support that best suit California.

- Adoption of an agreed upon version of the Standards of Quality or an alternate framework can serve as one strategy to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of FRCs and the field.

Policy and Advocacy

Develop a Statewide Policy and Advocacy Platform

- There is an existing statewide organization to support and strengthen. The California Family Resource Association (CFRA) is dedicated to advancing policy and advocacy for FRCs — by leveraging this existing organization and offering targeted support, CFRA can begin to enhance its policy advocacy capacity.

- There is strong interest in developing a unified message(s), definition, and brand/language that can support and advance advocacy efforts.

- There is an opportunity to bring early childhood advocacy organizations together, with CFRA, to align policies and advocacy efforts that support families and young children.

Capacity and Leadership

Build Organizational Capacity and Leadership Development

- There is an interest and opportunity to bring FRC leaders and capacity building organizations together to align local, regional, and statewide capacity building and leadership development efforts.

- There is an opportunity to align and access other state and county department training, capacity building, and leadership efforts including Early Care and Education, K-8, Public Health, Mental Health, etc.

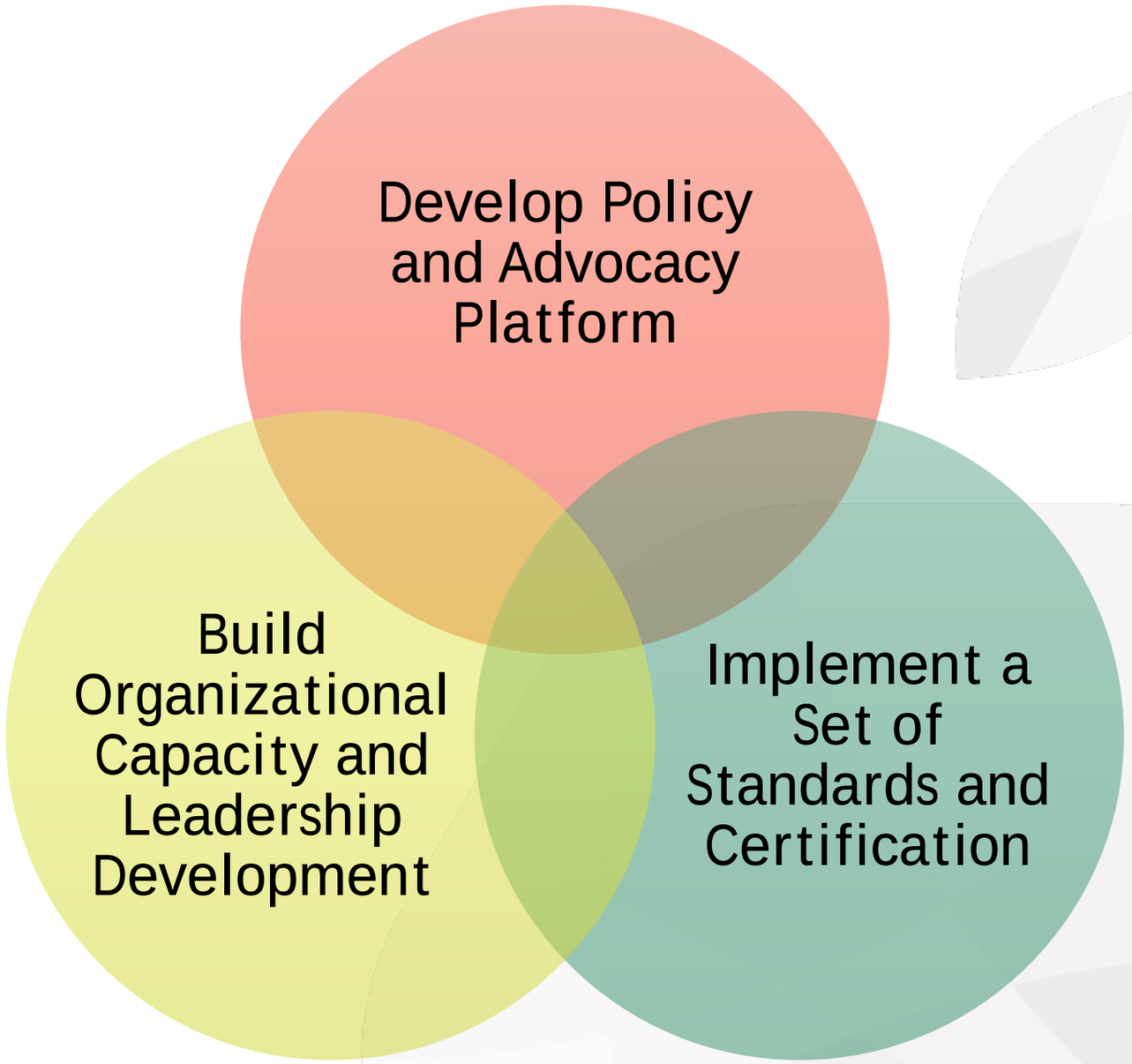
- There is a body of research and best practices to build on. In addition, several bright and promising FRCs and FRC Networks can serve as demonstration sites that are piloting promising practices, standards, data collection and evaluation, and outcome metrics. Lessons from these sites can offer valuable guidance, inform statewide FRC efforts, and strengthen the field.

Where do we go from here?

Coordinated Next Steps

During a reflection with stakeholders in the focus group, participants realized that while each of these opportunities holds significant value independently, they should not be completed in isolation. Rather, to gain traction and advance the field, it will be critical to engage in a collective approach that applies each concurrently but at different levels across the state (i.e., local, regional, and statewide).

In order for a policy/advocacy play to be effective there needs to be an agreed upon definition, accurate data and metrics, coherence around impact measures, and a policy agenda informed by implementation of standards of practice and leadership development.



Helpful Resources

- California Family Resource Association (CFRA)
  http://californiafamilyresource.org/

- California Network of Family Strengthening Networks (CNFSN):
  http://www.cnfsn.org/

- California Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP)
  http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/OCAP

- Strategies 2.0
  http://strategiesca.org/

- Family Resource Centers Network for California (FRCNCA)
  http://www.frcnca.org/

- Vehicles for Change, Volume II: “The Evolving Field”
  https://bit.ly/2JSKBRj

Thank You.

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