



Using the State-Local Structure to Reveal Community Strengths and Needs

A leadership team including funding stream administrators will need to communicate the mixed delivery vision, present relevant data, and engage communities to explore solutions. All of the work rests on an understanding that (a) state government is taking the initiative to weave the funding streams into a unified, responsive system, and (b) government cannot do that without active engagement and insight from communities.

Braiding and Coordinating Funds for Strategic Impact

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- ➔ Reaches communities and groups that have previously been left out or poorly served

The following steps help identify current strengths and needs *in relation to that vision*. Funding stream administrators will ask which families or communities lack access and which children lack adequate learning opportunities. Then they will ask about the landscape of community services and other assets that should be included in a strategy to address the needs.

STEP

2

Collect and Display Data

EXAMINE DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL ECEC FUNDING.

Currently, each funding stream collects data on children and families served, programs funded, and funding amounts. To support a mixed delivery vision, these data silos must be integrated to give an overall picture of community need and service levels.

Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS) are essential tools for this purpose. For example, [the dashboard for the Chicago Early Childhood Integrated Data System \(CECIDS\)](#) displays unduplicated counts of children and the percentage of the population served by all or by selected ECEC funding streams in each Chicago Community Area.¹ Users may filter by child age, household income, labor force participation, provider type, and funding stream. This data supports planning for change or expansion at the individual program, community, and City levels.

Funding Equity Maps are another tool to identify geographic areas and priority populations that have been overlooked. For example, [CELFE and Afton Partners have developed maps](#) for Illinois revealing that public funding per low-income child varies widely across communities, and that funding levels do not consistently reflect the state's priority of investing in communities with the highest concentration of low-income families.²

EXAMINE DATA ON FAMILY ACCESS.

Family needs change as the workforce and demographic make-up of a community change. A funding strategy should support program models that respond to family needs. Useful data might include:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| + Family work schedules | + Language barriers
& availability of dual
language programs | + Family preferences |
| + Family income | | + Number and type of
existing programs |
| + Transportation needs | | |

Data systems in North Carolina, Oregon, and other states provide some of this information for use in regional or county-level planning. [North Carolina's Smart Start Community Indicators Dashboard](#) provides a wide range of data.³ To answer targeted questions, state data systems might generate specialized reports. Oregon provided data and guidance for its regional Hubs to develop [Early Care and Education Sector Plans](#) focused on Priority Populations.⁴

1 See <https://cecids.org> (go to Services tab)

2 See <https://celfe.org/resources/il-ecce-funding-equity-map/>

3 See <https://www.smartstart.org/smart-solutions-effective-birth-to-five-investments/>

4 A regional example can be found at: <https://www.oregon.gov/delc/programs/Hub%20Documents/delc-elhco-ecce-plan-final.pdf>

EXAMINE DATA ON QUALITY.

The mixed delivery vision calls for all program models to support child development and learning. Moving from the current patchwork to a unified system will require a common set of standards for high quality. States might choose to adopt the [National Institute of Early Education Research \(NIEER\) benchmarks](https://nieer.org/research-library/download-nieers-benchmarks-high-quality-pre-k) for high-quality PreK⁵ or use standards from Head Start or their State PreK systems.

Many states have already looked across funding streams in developing their Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS).⁶ However, states may have designed QRIS standards—even at the highest tier—to be achievable using current child care program revenue. Unfortunately, that revenue is usually inadequate to support the cost of stable, well-qualified staffing and other essential quality components for early learning programs. QRIS standards can be an ideal tool for defining high-quality preschool for mixed delivery, but only if they have been designed for that purpose.

Once a working definition of high-quality ECEC is established, states can estimate the overall number of preschool age children in each community and the number served in high-quality programs.



STEP

3

Structure Questions for Community Dialogue

Data provides an important starting point for understanding needs, but it can paint an incomplete picture. A state-local governance model supports dialogue with communities to add essential information. That dialogue will be most effective if administrators develop a presentation that explains the mixed delivery vision and structure a few questions directly related to the vision, such as:

- ? Does the data appear to be accurate?
- ? What has it missed?
- ? What are the community's priorities for improvement or expansion?
- ? What community strengths and resources could help meet the goals?

⁵ See <https://nieer.org/research-library/download-nieers-benchmarks-high-quality-pre-k>

⁶ Other names include Quality Recognition and Improvement Systems or simply Quality Improvement Systems (QIS).

STEP

4

Engage in Dialogue

Steps 1 through 3 prepare administrators for focused and productive dialogue with communities. Once they have articulated their mixed delivery vision, collected relevant data, and structured a set of questions, administrators are ready to engage the community systems within their state-local structure. They can begin to construct a culture of collaboration by planning a discovery process and timeline with community or regional system leaders. An effective process will include feedback mechanisms like listening sessions, working advisory groups, surveys, and general discussion. Target dates can be established for periodic reports that answer the administrators' structured questions and suggest community priorities.

Spotlight 4 discusses how states can respond to data and community feedback through a strategic funding plan that considers all funding streams in addressing the needs for improved program models or for expansion of high priority services.



NEXT UP

Spotlight 4
Braiding and Coordinating Funds for Strategic Impact

LEARN MORE

For further guidance or to share your experience on building a mixed delivery system, email info@celfe.org.

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*Third in Strategy Spotlight Series,
published May 2025*