

Building a Prenatal-to-Three Leadership Team

One of the first steps in advancing programs and policies that support infants, toddlers, and families in your community is to create a cross-sector leadership team that will work together on each action step as you prepare, build your plan, and execute the work.

When building your leadership team, focus on identifying team members who are leaders in their sectors and have the authority to make meaningful impact to move your work forward. Be sure to focus on the people who have experience with the systems you're working to build or change, but also consider including representation across sectors and from varying levels of staff including direct service, mid-management, and senior leadership.

When building your team, select the members who will be most essential to inform your work and help reach your goals. Ensure that the team is large enough to include expertise on the systems and populations that you are working to impact, but small enough to allow reasonable consensus building and action.

Essential members of a leadership team focused on infants, toddlers, and families may include:

- [Elected officials and policymakers](#)
- [Early care and education professionals](#)
- [K-12 leaders and special education teachers](#)
- [Parent and family representatives](#)
- [Public health officials and health care providers](#)
- [Child welfare advocates](#)
- [Community-based organizations focused on prenatal-to-three](#)
- [Research, evaluation, and measurement experts](#)
- [Business community members](#)
- [Philanthropic organizations](#)

Over time, consider adding the following members to your team:

- [Planning and zoning professionals](#)
- [Public housing and housing developers](#)
- [Faith leaders](#)
- [College or university representatives](#)
- [Workforce development board members](#)



WHY IS A DIVERSE LEADERSHIP TEAM IMPORTANT?

Learn about the unique perspectives and expertise each member can provide:

Elected Officials and Policymakers

Elected officials and policymakers have the authority and influence to effect positive change in policies, programs, and systems that relate to the health and well-being of infants, toddlers, and their families. Government officials also have access to critical data that can be used to inform your efforts.

Who to include:

- Depending on your location and the structure of your local government, consider including mayors, council members, commissioners, and other executives in your team. Government officials can chair a commission to review available community data, identify needs, and make recommendations on needed actions to improve outcomes for infants, toddlers, and their families.
- If the chief elected officer in your community is unable to attend meetings on a regular basis, ask them to appoint a representative, but continue to meet with the chief elected officer frequently to share progress and gain buy-in for the work. You may also ask government officials to appoint a commission or formal structure within the city or county government to support infants, toddlers, and families.

Early Care and Education Professionals

Early care and education (ECE) professionals work with young children during their most formative years—often from birth until age eight. They may also provide programming for parents of young children to help them support their child’s development and improve parent-child relationships. By participating in the leadership team, ECE leaders can learn more about how other ECE programs work, identify opportunities to work collaboratively, improve their own service delivery, reduce costs, and avoid duplication of services.

For instance, a child care program representative may learn about pooling and sharing resources with other ECE programs in a “shared service alliance” to improve child outcomes and their programs’ financial stability. ECE providers could learn about professional development opportunities being offered in home visiting programs that could benefit their teachers. A pre-K program representative might benefit from learning about how local home visiting models can benefit the children in the pre-K classroom and help families in need get enrolled.

Having different types of ECE representation on your team also helps you understand how eligibility requirements and rules vary across ECE programs and the challenges this variation presents for families trying to access care for their children. Community teams can work in partnership to eliminate silos, duplication, and undue hardships for both families and ECE programs to create a seamless prenatal-to-three service delivery system.



Who to include:

- Representation from different types of Early Care and Education (ECE) programs such as:
 - Home visiting programs
 - Head Start and Early Head Start
 - Pre-K
 - Center-based child care
- It may also be helpful to ask those who regulate these entities, oversee funding, or manage quality assessment programs to participate. If your area has a 'Shared Services' model, be sure to ask them to participate.

K-12 Leaders and Special Education Teachers

Because kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade education overlap with the ECE sector, coordination and collaboration between the two are essential to help children transition to new learning environments. Coordination also helps programs to streamline their learning environments across age groups, align on learning goals for children at various stages of development, coordinate supports for the whole child across all domains of development in both ECE and K-12, and help children maintain or enhance the social and emotional gains from ECE in the K-12 setting to avoid educational losses.

In addition, special education provides individualized education for children with special needs, including children with developmental delays and disabilities. It's critical to have representatives from both a preschool special education program and an early intervention program for infants and toddlers on your leadership team because:

- Community efforts can help influence the state's plan to serve children with disabilities. The Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that a state defines its role in implementing a quality early childhood system that serves young children with disabilities. A community's on-the-ground perspective can help advise or shape this plan and implementation.
- Specialists in special education and Early Intervention can help create more inclusive opportunities for children with disabilities in early care and education settings, provide recommendations on creating appropriate learning environments, and advise on the best strategies to involve parents.
- Preschool special education and Early Intervention staff are already aware of the additional supports the early childhood workforce needs to support young children with disabilities or developmental delays. These representatives can help your state or community strengthen the required core competencies of educators working with this group of children through professional development and other opportunities.



Who to include:

- School district superintendent(s), their direct reporting staff, and/or a school board member with high interest in early childhood
- Early Intervention/Part C leadership
- Preschool and K-12 special education professionals

Note, “early intervention program for infants and toddlers” refers to Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which serves children with developmental delays and disabilities from birth through age two. “Preschool special education” refers to Part B, Section 619 of IDEA, which serves children with disabilities 3-21 years of age.

Parent and Family Representatives

Parents and families are the central providers of care and education for children from birth to three, and they directly influence the health and development outcomes of their children. As their child’s first teacher, they are uniquely positioned to help children thrive and reach their optimal development. It is essential to include parent representatives on your leadership team to ensure that the services you are planning to improve or develop align with parents’ needs.

Find parent representative(s) through parent advocacy groups that already exist in your state or community. For help finding local parent advocacy groups, contact your local chapter of United Parent Leaders Action Network (UPLAN).

Who to include:

- Parents, particularly parents of young children, and parent advocates.

Public Health Officials and Healthcare Providers

Health professionals on your leadership team can provide valuable expertise and insights as you work to coordinate and enhance health services for pregnant women, infants, and toddlers in your community.

Public health professionals are likely familiar with the range of health services and programs available to young children and their families; they understand how and where health care is delivered to pregnant women and young children in their jurisdictions, how children and families can obtain health coverage, and the prevalence of public health risks (such as exposure to lead or second-hand smoke) that can affect the health and development of pregnant women, infants, and toddlers.

Pediatric health care providers see young children and their parents regularly—often before infants and toddlers interact with other services in an early childhood system. Mental health providers help with targeted interventions for moms battling conditions such as postpartum depression, and they identify and support children experiencing behavioral or emotional challenges. Both pediatricians and mental health providers can provide valuable information to your leadership team about where gaps in health care and mental health care delivery exist. Health care providers can also be strong data sharing partners; they can



provide information on trends in the health and development of infants and toddlers in your area.

Who to include:

- Public health officials
- Hospital administrators
- Directors of federally qualified health centers
- Pediatricians
- Mental health care providers who specialize in young children and parents of young children

Child Welfare Advocates

The disproportionate number of young children who come into and remain involved in the child welfare system necessitates an individual with child welfare expertise on your leadership team. Young children make up a growing proportion of the children in foster care and the child welfare system. A 2017 study by Zero to Three found that approximately 32% of the children who entered foster care in 2015 were younger than three years old, and every year approximately 200,000 children younger than three have contact with the child welfare system because of abuse or neglect.

A child welfare advocate can provide valuable information about programs to prevent child maltreatment, eliminate multiple foster care placements, and ensure that infants and toddlers have the supports they need to remain safely in their homes and be cared for by their families. They may also promote prevention supports, like home visiting services, and provide insight on how to create policies, programs, and systems that prevent young children from entering the welfare system.

Who to include:

- Child welfare caseworkers
- Child welfare leadership/administration staff
- Family court judges
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (also known as CASAs)
- Guardian Ad Litem (also known as GALs)

Community-Based Organizations Focused on Prenatal-to-Three

Many community-based organizations, often nonprofits, work to support infants, toddlers, and families by providing services and comprehensive supports. In many cases, these organizations have strong ties to the communities they serve and can help build political and public support for better outcomes for infants and toddlers. These organizations may also have data that can help you assess your state or community and understand the scope of issues facing infants, toddlers, and families. In addition, your leadership team can bring diverse organizations together to better coordinate services and ensure efforts are not duplicative.



Who to include:

- Representatives from organizations working to support pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and their families.
- Representatives from organizations that provide clothing, food and income supports, transitional housing support (e.g. from domestic violence and family shelters to permanent housing), financial literacy (to help families manage finances and credit and provide education on building wealth), legal services, and advocacy.

Research, Evaluation, and Measurement Experts

Data must be at the core of any plan to improve outcomes for infants, toddlers, and their families. Setting measurable goals can be supported by the NCIT Outcomes Framework, but gathering, cleaning, and comparing data across various sources can be challenging. An expert in data analytics or data science can help your stakeholder group understand and measure progress toward your goals, disaggregate data to discover inequities, and help determine the best way to create visualizations to clearly communicate the data to stakeholders.

Who to include:

- City or county data scientist, data analyst, or other data expert with a similar role. The health department or a college or university may offer expertise in this area.

Business/Private Industry

Programs and policies that support healthy development from birth to three result in better social, economic, and health outcomes and build a more productive workforce that strengthens our economy—now and in the future. Business leaders are recognizing that investments in the health and well-being of young children and their families is a ‘bottom line’ issue, and that issues like access to high-quality child care are important for the success of their employees. Business leaders are, like parents, able to help build political and public support for better outcomes for infants and toddlers. They can also help support innovative financial models and advocate for appropriations to support needed services.

Who to include:

- Chamber of Commerce
- Unions
- Investment firms and banks
- Entrepreneurs interested in early childhood



Philanthropic Organizations

Local community foundations and philanthropies have long supported programs and services for children and families. Like business leaders, funders are increasingly aware of the importance of investing in very young children. Investments in young children can support and complement their grantmaking in many other areas, such as youth services, health care, equity, housing, poverty, job readiness, and education.

Who to include:

- Local foundations that fund programs and services for children and families.

Planning, Zoning, and Economic Development Commissions

Cities and counties have zoning authority over child care facilities, including licensed and non-licensed home-based care and affordable housing. Understanding how these regulations intersect with state zoning laws is an important part of increasing access to safe, affordable, and high-quality early learning environments and understanding affordable housing challenges for young families. City planners and zoning specialists can help identify where and how housing, child care facilities, clinics, and other services used by young families can be located. They may also identify how regulations can be changed, if needed, to increase access to services.

In addition, departments charged with economic development can help influence the placement of child care facilities near jobs centers or on transit lines. Tax credits and other incentives, such as Opportunity Zones, offer benefits to those who build needed services in areas with limited access to employment, health food, affordable housing.

Who to include:

- County or city residential and commercial zoning specialist
- Community development specialist

Public Housing and Housing Developers

Research shows a strong correlation between a safe, stable home and positive health and development outcomes for infants and toddlers. Low- and moderate-income housing developers will be eager to link their investments in quality housing and neighborhood assets to supporting healthy child development.

Who to include:

- Public housing authority leadership
- Affordable housing developers



Faith Leaders

Faith leaders have long played a critical role in shaping positive family environments, strengthening communities, and building family networks. Religious organizations can be a source of family and parent empowerment; they often run child care centers and provide supportive services for low income families, such as parent education and family support networks.

Who to include:

- Given the diversity within communities, an interfaith organization leader can be a great place to start. If there are religious organizations that provide early childhood services and supports, seek their engagement and suggestions.

College or University Representatives

Colleges and universities are a source of research and knowledge about early childhood development, brain science, social work, child welfare, health care, and early education. In addition, some institutions run child care facilities and many have departments dedicated to early childhood development. Professors and other college and university experts can bring the latest research to inform your leadership team and help apply it to your work. They can also help with program and policy design and connect you with grant opportunities.

Who to include:

- Experts from departments relevant to your work, which could include early childhood development, social work, early education, and family and consumer studies.

Workforce Board Members

Workforce Boards are mandated to implement the Workforce Investment Act to direct federal, state, and local funding to workforce development programs as well as research and respond to the needs of their regional economy. Workforce boards can help you understand the current state of the early childhood workforce in your area and provide needed trainings to ensure a strong, high-quality child care and early education workforce is available to meet the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families.

Who to include:

- Leadership from parts of the Workforce Board that oversee workforce training and research.