Strengthening State and Territory Infant/Toddler Child Care System Policies and Practices

Users' Guide

This users' guide accompanies *Strengthening State and Territory Infant/Toddler Child Care System Policies and Practices: A Tool for Advancing Infant/Toddler Child Care Quality*[1] (herein referred to as "the policy tool"). This guide is based on feedback from the policy tool's developers and initial users; it offers a variety of tips and strategies for maximum success using part I of the tool.

This users' guide includes the following sections:

1. Background and Purpose of the Policy Tool
2. Overview of the Policy Tool
3. Who uses the policy tool?
4. Where to Start
5. Who Should Facilitate?
6. Using the Policy Tool
7. Additional Support

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[1] Child Care State Capacity Building Center. (2017). *Strengthening state and territory infant/toddler child care system policies and practices: A tool for advancing infant/toddler child care quality*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Child Care. Retrieved from https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/itrg/StrengtheningInfantToddlerChildCarePolicy_170421.pdf

Background and Purpose of the Policy Tool

Connecting policy to practice helps with successful implementation of evidence-based practices across early childhood programs and systems. Early childhood practitioners often experience barriers to service delivery that can be solved only at the policy level (Metz, Naoom, Halle, & Bartley, 2015).

Child care system stakeholders and policymakers can implement and sustain systems that ensure that infant/toddler child care practices and experiences are communicated back to policymakers to inform decisionmaking and continuous improvement. Policy-practice feedback loops serve as continuous quality improvement cycles that are critical to maintaining effective child care policy and practices.

The policy tool is designed to support state child care leaders and infant/toddler stakeholders as they assess, prioritize, plan, implement, and evaluate state policies to strengthen the quality of child care services infants, toddlers, and their families receive. The tool also aims to assist infant/toddler child care leaders as they put in place policies, protocols, and systems that do the following:

♦ Identify relationship-based care as essential to quality infant/toddler child care

♦ Engage, inform, and connect with families of infants and toddlers

♦ Strengthen the quality and conditions of the infant/toddler workforce to help meet the unique needs of infants and toddlers in child care settings

♦ Increase the supply, health and safety, sustainability, and quality of infant/toddler child care settings

♦ Coordinate and integrate cross-sector systems that serve infants, toddlers, and their families

At a minimum, the policy tool can help users start answering a key question: "How is my State or Territory's child care system increasing access to and quality of child care for infants, toddlers, and their families through policy and practice?"

Overview of the Policy Tool

The tool is organized into three parts: parts I and II are included in the original document, part III will be published later in 2017. States and Territories can complete the policy tool as is in its entirety or choose to complete only certain sections.

Part I. Inventory of Infant/Toddler Child Care System Policies and Practices
(Overview of part I is on page 6 of the policy tool.)

This first part of the policy tool requires stakeholder engagement and data collection to complete a scan of current infant/toddler child care policy and practices. Thus, part I requires the most time and coordination to complete. To tailor the use of the tool, a State or Territory may choose to focus on one or more of the goal areas at a time.

The policy tool is organized by five goal areas:

Goal 1. Infants and toddlers are supported (page 8 of policy tool)

Goal 2. Families are supported (page 19 of the policy tool)

Goal 3. Infant/toddler workforce is supported (page 26 of the policy tool)

Goal 4. Quality infant/toddler care settings (page 32 of the policy tool)

Goal 5. Infant/toddler-focused and aligned cross-sector systems (page 39 of the policy tool)

Each goal area has subcategories and indicators as detailed in the policy tool.

Part II. Infant/Toddler Child Care System Policies Action Planning Form
(Overview of part II is on page 44 of the policy tool.)

This part of the policy tool helps users organize the results of part I and identify the following:

♦ Infant/toddler child care policy implementation priorities and goals

♦ Next steps for infant/toddler child care policy implementation across child care system stakeholders

♦ Policy implementation resources to strengthen state or territory infant/toddler child care policies and practices

Figure 1. Action Planning Form (page 44 of the policy tool)

Part II. Infant/Toddler Child Care System Policies Action Planning Form

This action plan form is a tool that is intended to help you assess next steps in planning for infant/toddler child care policy development and implementation. Below is a sample of a framework that could be utilized as an action plan.

Policy Goal and Indicators	Priority Level (From Part I)	Child Care System Partners	Implementation Stage (From Part I)	Potential Action Steps	Comple-tion Date	Team Member Responsible	Resources for Policy Implementation	Comments
Indicator	☐Low ☐Medium ☐High	☐Licensing ☐PDS ☐Subsidy ☐Quality framework or QRIS	☐Not started ☐In review ☐Implementing ☐Fully implementing	[Planning team enters data here.]	[Planning team enters data here.]	[Planning team enters data here.]	These could include related policy indicators, examples of other States' related policies and practices, child care licensing profiles, early childhood system profile data, rationale papers, OCC policy statements and information memorandums.]	[Planning team enters data here.]

Part III. Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) in Infant/Toddler Child Care Policies
(Overview of part III is on page 45 of the policy tool.)

This part of the policy tool is currently under development. It will address continuous quality improvement. When available, it is expected to help state leaders do the following:

♦ Assess the status of new policy implementation

♦ Measure the success of scaling up of existing infant/toddler child care policies, and

♦ Strengthen the use of data-informed decision making for infant/toddler child care policy continuous quality improvement

Who Uses the Policy Tool?

The policy tool is designed to be completed collaboratively by child care system partners who work on behalf of infants and toddlers through their service in child care.

Where to Start

To determine whether the policy tool is a good resource for your State or Territory, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

♦ Does this resource align with work your State or Territory is already committed to strengthening?

♦ Is there an established infant/toddler stakeholder group willing to commit to action planning informed by the policy tool results?

- Does your State or Territory's Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan include goals related to infant/toddler child care quality?

- Are there certain child care system goals (for example, workforce, systems) that your State or Territory is focusing on more than others right now?

- Does your State or Territory need to collect data on its infant/toddler child care system practices?

- Does your State or Territory want to learn about how it can strengthen its infant/toddler child care system?

- Has your State or Territory identified strengthening its infant/toddler child care system as a priority in its early childhood systems planning?

If you answered "yes" to a majority of these questions and there is commitment from stakeholders to participate in the process, your State or Territory is most likely ready to proceed with using the policy tool. If you answered "no" to most of the questions, you might consider talking with your regional State Capacity Building Center Infant/Toddler Specialist about possible next steps and other ways to support the building of strong infant/toddler child care system policies in your State or Territory.[2]

If your State or Territory is ready to proceed with the policy tool, the next step is to assign a facilitator to guide the use of the tool.

Who Should Facilitate?

The ideal facilitator is familiar with the State or Territory's infant/toddler child care system as well as its stakeholders. A facilitator could be any of the following:

- Regional or national infant/toddler specialist

- Early childhood technical assistance specialist

- State infant/toddler lead

- Other professional in the State or Territory's early childhood community

The State Capacity Building Center Infant/Toddler Specialists can help facilitate the use of the policy tool as well.

Using the Policy Tool

Consider the following list of key people and resources needed to support successful use of the policy tool.

- Facilitator(s).

- Time: if you are using the tool to assess all goal areas, part I could take up to 20 hours to complete (4 hours per goal area). The process can be broken into four or more time periods.

- Data resources that will inform your responses to questions about existing child care system policies, practices, and initiatives (for example, subsidy and licensing policies).

- A way to record responses to part I. The inventory could be completed on a paper copy and then transferred to Excel or a Word table, or a facilitator (or other person) could use a computer during the meetings to track.

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[2] Find your regional Infant/Toddler Specialist using the map on this page: https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/infant-toddler-resource-guide.

- A team of dedicated infant/toddler stakeholders. To gain the most comprehensive assessment of your State or Territory's infant/toddler child care system landscape in completing the inventory, include at least one representative from each of the following:

  - Child care licensing

  - Professional development system

  - Quality frameworks or quality rating and improvement system (QRIS)

  - Child care subsidy stakeholders

Depending on the landscape of your State or Territory's child care system, additional key stakeholders may include parents and community member as well as representatives of the following:

- Early Head Start

- Early Head Start–Child Care Partnerships

- State Early Learning Advisory Councils

- Early childhood state agencies

- Home visiting programs

- Institutions of higher education

- Early Intervention (Part C) and other relevant early childhood policy and professional community organizations

Consider the following questions when selecting participants:

- Who has access to the information needed to evaluate the indicators?

- Who has decisionmaking power regarding priorities?

- Whose voices are needed to share valid and reliable data regarding current CCDF-funded programs and services that help infants, toddlers, and their families?

- Who are the professionals implementing programs or activities in support of high-quality infant/toddler care?

Figure 2. Completing Part I: Relevant Child Care System Partners, Priority Level, and Implementation Stage

Below is a sample protocol and guiding questions to help your group reach consensus on each indicator represented in the inventory in part I. The implementation stage is a good place to start, as the discussion required to get consensus on it will help generate ideas for relevant partners and priority level.

Consensus Building: Identifying Implementation Stage

The inventory (part I) helps leaders identify the implementation status of each indicator using the terms "not started," "in review," implementing," "fully implementing," and "unsure." These terms are defined as follows:

1. "Not started" means the child care system has not yet begun to prioritize or think about implementing this indicator.

2. "In review" means the child care system is reviewing or compiling current policies, opportunities, and activities, or it may involve first steps toward implementation.

3. "Implementing" means that the child care system has a policy, required activity, or offers supports; however, whatever is in place does not apply to or is not available to all infant/toddler child care settings or is in some way limited in its implementation.

4. "Fully implementing" means that the child care system has polices, practices, required activities, or supports in place that are evidence-based, demonstrate best practices, and are available across all sectors and settings.

5. "Unsure" means that you don't know where your State or Territory is in relation to any stage of policy implementation

The facilitator could read the indicator aloud or have group members take turns reading the indicators and then ask participants what stage they feel they are in for each indicator. A possible way to frame this question is to say, "Where are we with this indicator?"

The richness is in the discussion, not just the ranking: different child care system partners may indicate varying implementation stages depending on their priorities and fiscal and human resources, as well as the current focus of your State or Territory's CCDF leadership. It is normal to receive varied responses from partners based on their focus and the current child care system climate. Getting a sense of the overall climate of readiness is more

important than landing on one stage or another. This tool is used to measure the implementation of these indicators in the State or Territory *as a whole.* After honoring the conversation, the goal is to have the team reach consensus on the implementation stage.

Facilitators might need to remind the team of the stage definitions and encourage input from all members. You may print out the stages and their corresponding descriptions and place somewhere in the room that is visible to the group at all times (see page 6 of the policy tool).

Additional questions you might ask to support this work on consensus regarding implementation stage include the following:

♦ Have we begun to think about implementing this indicator in any part of our child care system?

♦ Do we have any evidence showing we've begun to think about or plan for this indicator?

♦ Which child care partners are involved in practices or approaches related to this indicator?

Important conversations will happen during this time, so notetaking is critical.

Identifying Relevant Partners

This column will likely be completed in tandem with the implementation stage column. However, you may want to ask the following questions to gain group clarity and consensus if it hasn't already been achieved through discussion of implementation stage.

♦ Which child care or broader early care and education system partners have a stake in this indicator?

♦ What child care system partners have an impact on the adoption, development, or integration of this indicator?

♦ Who would be a primary decisionmaker in implementing this practice, policy, or strategy?

♦ Are there cross-sector partners (for example, Part C, health) integral to successful implementation? Identify them.

♦ What is the role of families in this indicator?

♦ Who are we forgetting?

Identifying Priority Level

Below are some sample questions to help come to consensus on priority level:

♦ Is this indicator something we have already been working on for some time?

♦ Do we want to focus on this indicator in the near future?

♦ Is this indicator an early win for our State? Can we achieve this in a short amount of time?

♦ Are we at a tipping point with this indicator?

♦ Does this indicator rely on the implementation of any other policy indicator?

♦ What resources do we need to support making this indicator a priority?

♦ What is our return on investment for making this happen now? In the future?

Additional Notes and Reminders for Facilitator

♦ The inventory can be completed in part or in full (that is, you may complete it for only selected goal areas, or for all goal areas).

♦ Tag indicators that your State or Territory wants to dig into more deeply for action planning.

♦ If you have a one-day in-person meeting, get through one goal area. Establish a pattern for coming to consensus.

  ▪ Protocol for consensus:

    • Set the arena for open conversations. How will your group come to consensus? Have you addressed this in your ground rules? Has your group maintained this process for determination?

    • When unsure, determine the following: (1) Who can help us figure this out? (2) What is the likely source of these data? (3) Who will be the point person for finding this information?

How Do States and Territories Use the Inventory Data?

States and Territories will want to consider how they can use the data obtained from the inventory process to create an action plan based on priorities and readiness to implement.

There are several ways you can help bring the inventory data to life for the team:

♦ Create a visual to show the State's baseline implementation stages

♦ Update the inventory to show progress toward use of strong infant and toddler child care polices

♦ Highlight progress and celebrate milestones with the team and other interested stakeholders

♦ Develop an action plan with state team members that outlines goals, priorities, partners, action steps, completion dates, team members, responsible parties, and resources (see part II; page 44 of the policy tool)

By keeping track of implementation stage data and action planning progress, States and Territories can chart their progress over time and develop strong visuals to illustrate progress made toward implementation of promising practices for strong infant and toddler child care policy.

Additional Support

For additional support in using this resource please contact your regional Infant/Toddler Specialist: https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/infant-toddler-resource-guide.

Reference

Metz, A., Naoom, S. F., Halle, T., & Bartley, L. (2015). An integrated stage-based framework for implementation of early childhood programs and systems (OPRE Research Brief 2015-48). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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