

5. EMERGING STATE STRUCTURES: ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROMOTE COLLABORATION

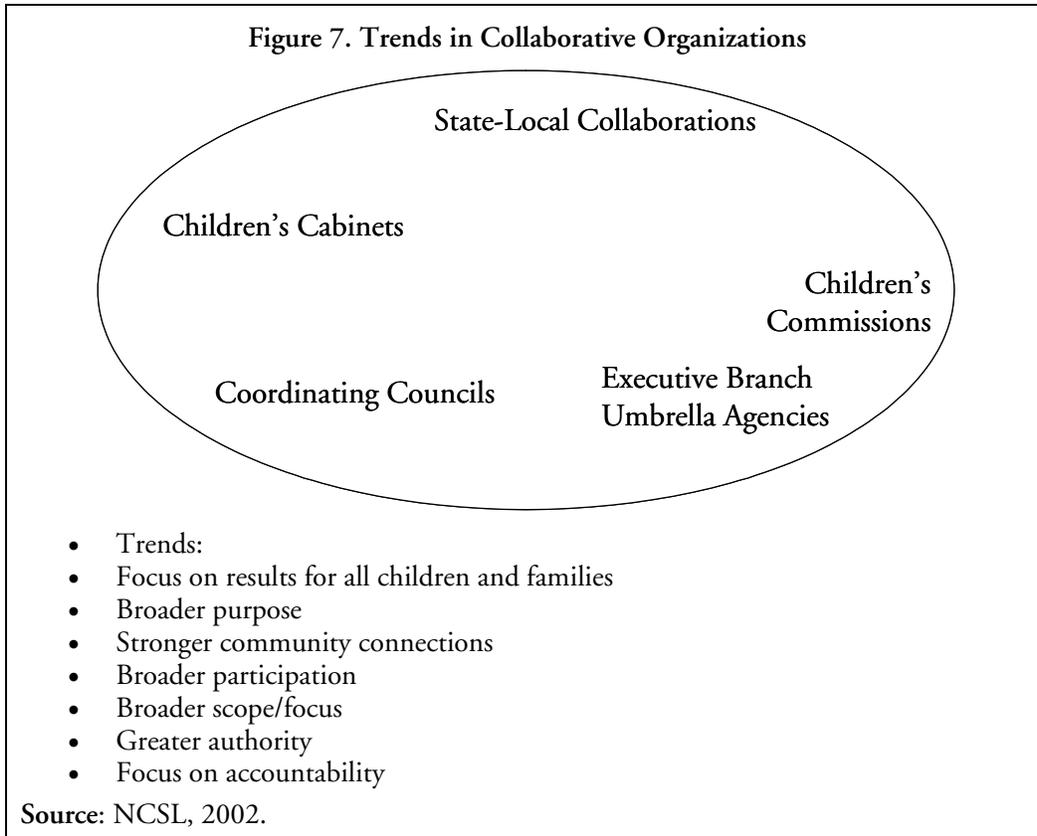
Introduction

In many states, legislators and executive branch leaders are developing collaborative structures aimed at improving the lives of children and families. These organizations connect agencies, programs, interest groups and citizens to identify shared goals and build cross-cutting strategies. All are intended to improve coordination of planning and service delivery and to build the state's capacity for achieving results for residents. At the same time, each is a unique entity that reflects a distinct organizational, policy and political environment. As a result, they vary in many respects.

Appendix B contains a chart with detailed descriptions of state organizations that are intended to promote collaboration, including the participants, origin, mission and responsibilities.

Trends in Collaboration

Collaborative structures began as groups of state agency leaders or managers that were convened to address a social problem, an underserved group of children and families, or a service delivery concern. Over the years, they have evolved into a highly diverse group of organizations that continue to change as they respond to experiences, research and lessons learned. Although highly targeted councils of agency executives have useful purposes, collaborative organizations as a whole have become broader in mission and membership. Figure 7 illustrates trends in state collaborative organizational.



Community Empowerment in Iowa: A New Take on Democracy?

Legislators have come together across Iowa’s political spectrum to support Community Empowerment. It grew out of a public-private task force created by the General Assembly in 1997 to restructure the state’s human services. The plan they developed and the legislature authorized is what Iowa Representative Ro Foege calls “democracy at the most basic level.” Citizen-dominated state and local collaborative boards are charged with working to achieve certain clearly articulated results for young children and their families.

The effort has definitely been a learning process. An inclusive circle of participants debates and decides issues, ranging from the state’s role in setting service standards to equitable distribution of funds. The initiative has led to the empowerment of a grassroots political force for children and families. Communities identify their strengths and needs and make decisions about how to use resources to improve child development and school readiness. The authorizing statute expresses the intent of legislative champions to expand community empowerment over time to embrace all children and families. In the meantime, it has been an evolving process of getting people to learn together.

Elements for Success

Rigorous research of state collaborative organizations is lacking. However, the following components appear critical to the design of each collaborative. These elements synthesize recent research findings, including a study of the effectiveness of community decision making for children and families conducted by the Center for the Study of Social Policy and information collected for the National Conference of State Legislatures. The elements reflect characteristics that people in key positions within state and community collaborative organizations identify as critical to success, that are associated with communities and states showing improvement in statistical measures of child and family well-being, and that state legislators who are champions of human service reform report are critical from their perspective. Figure 8 illustrates elements to consider in state collaborative organizations.

Figure 8. State Collaborative Organizations: Elements to Consider	
<p>I. Purposes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve results for the state's children and families. • Build state-local partnerships that promote strong communities. • Improve the performance of human services systems. • Broker negotiated agreements among stakeholders. • Review and improve financing strategies. • Conduct research and development. • Promote public dialogue, education and information. • Recommend policy changes. 	<p>II. Composition/Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State agency participants. • Cross-system • Frontline representation • Residents. • Service consumers. • Youth. • Business leaders. • Faith community representatives. • Advocates, professionals, other interest groups. • Strong leadership.
<p>III. Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure progress toward results. • Monitor program and system performance. • Improve information management. • Investigate and review individual cases. • Oversight of the collaborative itself. 	<p>IV. Authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to make planning and implementation decisions. • Authority to allocate resources. • Authority to redirect existing resources. • Ability to influence decisions.
<p>V. Scope and Scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted or broad focus. • Expanding over time. • Duration. 	<p>VI. Organizational Home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of the governor's office. • A unit within an existing state agency. • A freestanding state agency within the executive branch or the legislature. • A nonprofit corporation. • An informal, ad hoc group.

The Legislative Role

The organizations depend on strong legislative champions to rally support for change and to keep stakeholders focused on better results for the state's children and families. Legislators help convey the credibility, legitimacy and authority that collaboratives need in addition to organizational resources and capacity that help achieve results. Almost all state collaborative organizations that last longer than a single gubernatorial administration have legislative authorization. Specific legislative action may be necessary to accomplish the intended purposes, such as redirecting government activities and resources, for example, to compile children's budgets, pool funds from multiple agency budgets, or redeploy program staff to accomplish new strategies.

When creating or reviewing collaborative structures for children and families, the legislature can set the course by considering key characteristics and choosing options that best fit their state and their goals. The purposes—especially bottom-line improvements in child and family conditions—are the primary consideration and should determine the composition, authority, activities and auspices of the organization.

Most legislatures create cabinets, commissions and other collaboratives to connect programs, agencies and interests that otherwise operate separately and lack coordination. The organization provides a broad umbrella for people and organizations to work together toward the same outcomes. One challenge for legislators is to ensure that the desired results for citizens drive the organization, and to guard against the structure becoming a force of its own.

As state and local collaborative organizations continue to develop, the legislative role likewise is evolving. Legislators serve as creators of these groups, members, advisors, information recipients, monitors and supporters. Ongoing legislative involvement often makes the difference between success and lack of results. Perhaps the critical role for the legislature is as a collaborative partner.

Purposes: What Do We Want to Accomplish?

The desired results of the collaborative—its mission and purpose—are the foremost consideration. It is the foundation that determines other organizational components and strategies. Clear purpose sets the organization on track and helps to keep it focused.

Often, a state collaborative encompasses a number of purposes. This section outlines nine of the most common goals that guide current state collaboratives. Although all are worthy pursuits, the overarching consideration for many states is better lives for the state's children and families. Other goals support an emerging focus on results for the entire human services system, state government, and other partners working together.

For policymakers, it is critical to ensure that the organization's goals are clearly defined, understood by all stakeholders, and measurable in a way that allows everyone to tell if the collaborative is making a difference. Often, a shared understanding of the purposes is

assumed. When specific planning begins, however, it becomes obvious that stakeholders have different interpretations and individual interests. The process of developing a common understanding is one of the fundamental challenges of collaborative organizations. Sooner or later, it must be accomplished. Working upfront to develop clear purpose is a better use of resources.

Focusing on the Bottom Line: Measurably Better Lives for Children, Youth and Families

In recent years, many policymakers have created new state collaboratives or have redirected existing ones to coordinate efforts to improve the lives of the state's children and families and the conditions of their communities. Policymakers and stakeholders have identified a set of core results to achieve for all children and families. For example, the Georgia Family Connection Partnership helps community partnerships throughout the state achieve five results:

- Healthy children
- Children ready for school
- Children succeeding in school
- Strong families
- Self-sufficient families

This focus differs from the past goals of collaborative organizations in several important ways.

- **It is data-driven.** The results are based on statistical information for the entire state that can be measured, tracked over time, compared and analyzed. Desired results are defined by population-level indicators—measures of the conditions of the state's residents. For example, the state may agree that its children are safe when the percentage of children who experience injury requiring hospital care reaches an acceptably low level, no children experience repeat incidents of abuse or neglect, and no children injured in automobile accidents are without seatbelts.
- **It requires broader efforts than any single program, agency or sector can accomplish.** To achieve results such as safe children, healthy children, and children entering school ready to learn, a state must develop strategies that include a broad array of partners, programs, and resources.
- **It is based on the well-being of all** the state's children and families, residents of particular communities or regions, populations who experience certain problems or conditions, and other subgroups. This focus is broader than any specific population of individuals or families or any particular issue, although it allows the state to study the effects of strategies on individual groups and on the state as a whole.

Often, collaborative organizations fill a void that no individual state agency can perform. They are well-positioned to facilitate this results focus:

- To collect and analyze data from multiple sources;
- To mobilize public and private, state and community partners;

- To develop consensus regarding the desired results for the state's residents;
- To negotiate agreement regarding strategies that reach beyond individual programs, agencies, levels of government, or sectors; and
- To monitor the progress of the state as a whole and to analyze changes for individual groups or communities.

Better results for young children and their families. One recent trend among state collaboratives is a focus on achieving better results for young children and their families. Organizations with this focus respond to the growing body of knowledge regarding the importance of the early years on brain development, safe and nurturing environments, and the costs of high-quality child care. They also strive to build bridges among previously separate efforts, programs and agencies such as child care, education, health care, social services, welfare to work, and workforce development.

Collaboratives created to improve results for young children and their families include the California Children and Families First Commission and county commissions, the Florida Partnership for School Readiness Board and local coalitions, and the North Carolina Partnership and local partnerships. In Maryland, the General Assembly directed the Subcabinet for Children, Youth and Families—a longstanding organization with an original mission of developing home and community-based options for children in out-of-state and out-of-home placement—to broaden its mission to improve school readiness of young children. The Iowa Community Empowerment State Board and community boards initially were created to focus on young children and their families; however, the authorizing legislation clearly states the legislature's intent to expand the initiative over time to results for other populations.

Better results for children who experience severe emotional or behavioral problems. As a group that often has fallen through the cracks of existing state systems, children with emotional disturbance are another popular focus for state collaboratives. The Minnesota Children's Cabinet and the Mississippi Interagency Coordinating Council for Children and Youth target these youngsters.

Legislative Strategies and Considerations

Caution: The Challenges of Measurable Results

Both community and state collaboratives report that they focus on results and that they systematically measure their progress toward results. However, recent research reveals that, despite their best intentions, many organizations fall short in collecting and monitoring information that measures results. Legislators can focus collaboratives on results and can enable them to measure progress.

Population measures often are not used. For example, a desired result of healthy youth might be measured by indicators such as teenage pregnancy rates; adolescent suicide rates; or percentage of youth who abstain from use of tobacco, alcohol and other substances. Instead,

much of the information that collaboratives collect measures program operations and service provision. For example, they are likely to measure the number of youth participating in substance abuse prevention classes, the number of calls to a teen crisis hotline, or the percentage of teenage parents receiving prenatal care. Although this may be very important information about extremely useful services, it does not measure the health of the community or of the state's youth.

Why Use “Results Measures”?

Only by monitoring information about the conditions of residents' lives can we answer certain important questions.

How are we as a state or community doing? Taxpayers, public officials, service participants and others want to know whether citizens' lives are improving. This is the main concern. They need information that, when monitored in a systematic and sustained way, will tell them how lives are changing. Results indicators measure conditions of all residents, not just of those who participate in a particular program or service.

How do we compare to other states and communities? Population measures allow policymakers, citizens and others to compare the conditions of children and families in their own community and state with others. Not all communities have or need the same programs, but they all want to know how residents are faring.

Are we headed in the right direction or should we shift course? Over time, using the same measures allows stakeholders to tell whether the overall strategies being used are working. If improvements in child health, family stability and other desired results are not taking place, they can examine those conditions and strategies in greater depth and make adjustments in their plans.

Why Is It So Difficult?

Unfair use of accountability. Collaborative organizations often object to measuring population-level results indicators for fear that they will be held responsible for achieving outcomes that are beyond their control. No single organization can accomplish broad results such as children entering school ready to learn. It takes an array of partners, working together, to develop and implement a range of strategies.

Lack of timely, reliable information. Another reason collaboratives cite for measuring program and service performance rather than outcomes for children and families is the availability of data. They monitor what they have or realistically can obtain. Often, information about how children and families are doing is outdated by the time it is generally available, and its usefulness is limited. Information management systems are often as fragmented as human service agencies and programs. Statistics gathered from multiple sources—such as information about family economic well-being, child safety and other results—are incompatible. On the other hand, program-level information often is required by funders and is readily available.

What Does It Take?

Cooperation among data sources. The agencies and other sources that measure results indicators must work together to collect and analyze data in meaningful ways. Multiple organizations often must work together to ensure that data are compatible, collected in congruent ways, and analyzed in coordination.

Skill and other resources. Every state needs capacity to pull together information, analyze its meaning and disseminate it. Policymakers and other decision makers rely on cross-sector information. Some states use universities, legislative research agencies, or collaborative organizations to systematically and routinely collect and distribute results information.

Asking the right questions. By asking questions about results, legislators can make indicator data a priority for collaboratives and their partners. Letting agencies and stakeholders know that they expect reliable information, routinely asking for—even insisting on—the information, and using it to make decisions are ways that legislators can improve the quality of information available.

(For more information, see *Improving Children’s Lives, A Results Toolkit for Legislators*.¹⁰⁵)

Building State-Local Partnerships

A primary purpose of a growing number of collaborative bodies is promoting reform that is both top-down and bottom-up. For many states, collaborative organizations represent a step toward a new type of partnership between state government and communities. Instead of directly providing services at the local level through a range of discrete programs or supervising and enforcing local provision of state-determined services, the goal is to develop a new type of relationship. Communities and state governments are viewed as partners that must find ways to work together to improve human services and the lives of children and families.

State-local collaboratives are becoming a primary vehicle for accomplishing the kinds of organizational change described in section three of this report. Their role is complex and evolving. Many policymakers view these organizations as laboratories for fostering and testing new state-local approaches to service planning and delivery. Others view them as a voice for communities within the established state decision making process.

State-local collaboratives encourage communities to take a stronger role in decision making for children and families, often including planning, financing and delivering services. State-level collaboratives often serve as a bridge and convener for state-level stakeholders and community-level groups. They aid in negotiating the balance of decision making and help both the state and communities develop new capacity for making and implementing plans.

How Can the Collaborative Foster State-Local Partnerships?

State leaders have a key role in removing bureaucratic barriers and providing flexibility for local decision making. Many federal resources flow through and are supplemented by state

government before they reach communities and individual residents. Collaborative state efforts can relieve burdensome requirements that come with these resources. Instead of administering narrowly defined programs and highly prescriptive policies, state collaborative organizations are well-positioned to serve as a resource to help community members develop strategies that make sense to them.

Building Community Capacity

State collaboratives are increasingly reaching out to become equal partners with communities. As the balance shifts toward greater community and citizen involvement, collaborative organizations often help identify and eliminate state-level barriers to achieving local results. Many state-local collaboratives foster the development of community capacity by:

- Providing information, consultation and technical assistance to help communities gain the skills and other capacity they need to help residents thrive;
- Working to remove unnecessary barriers that make public resources difficult to obtain or use, including regulations, procedures, financing and budget strategies;
- Developing guidelines or standards for local efforts and providing oversight to ensure the safety of individuals and to monitor local progress toward results; and
- That serve as a voice for community collaboratives within the state policy arena.

Building State Capacity to Partner with Communities

These groups not only can assist community efforts, but they also can help the state provide critical support for communities that are working to nurture children and their families. For many state human services agencies, the emphasis has been on individual clients and programs. Staff often lack the skills and experience to identify and increase community strengths. Collaborative organizations are well-positioned to develop cross-cutting capacity to support strong communities and to help state agency staff switch from the role of regulatory enforcer to community facilitator.

Many policymakers want the collaborative to help the state:

- Build understanding, skills and capacity among staff of state-level agencies to support strong communities;
- Eliminate policy, regulatory and financing barriers to achieving local results;
- Develop appropriate accountability systems for community-based services, including data collection, results monitoring, and continuous improvement;
- Model positive collaborative decision making for state-level agencies to use among themselves and with communities.

State collaboratives from coast to coast foster state-local partnerships. Two long-established examples are listed here, and more are described in appendix B.

- The **Georgia Family Connection Partnership** is the catalyst for the nation's largest network of community collaboratives for children and families; it consists of more than

150 organizations working toward a set of core results for children and families. Fostering the capacity of these local groups is its primary purpose. It provides technical assistance and consultation, opportunities for networking among communities, research about promising practices, and other services for local partnerships.

- The **Oregon Commission on Children and Families** was created in 1992 as a state-local collaborative. Its mission is to establish statewide policies for services to children and families, support local Commissions on Children and Families in each county as they develop plans to enable families and communities to help children reach their full potential, ensure accountability, help evaluate counties' progress, and build the framework for local commissions' work.

Improving the Performance of Human Service Systems

Another key purpose of state collaboratives is to coordinate efforts of the many human services organizations and interests within the state. A number of human services experts believe that a strong focus on improving results for state residents and using population-level information to monitor changes is sufficient policy guidance for change. The theory is that, if the desired results for children and families are the clear focus for a collaborative effort, the partners will determine the best organizational, planning, service delivery, financing and other strategies to accomplish those results. At present, however, almost every state collaborative organization is directly charged with making particular improvements in services for children and families. Commonly stated goals include:

- Better coordination of planning, budgeting and service delivery among multiple agencies and programs;
- More efficient administration through streamlining, eliminating unnecessarily duplicative functions, and reducing procedural barriers and requirements; and
- Better use of existing resources and leverage of new assets.

Legislative Strategies and Considerations

To be effective brokers of change, state organizations may need specific statutory authority to develop and implement strategies that encompass budgetary, policy and practice changes. Although a goal of all state collaboratives is improvement of human services, it often is the primary charge of cabinets and coordinating councils for children and families.

- The **Louisiana Children's Cabinet** has authority to redirect programs to ensure effectiveness and to reduce duplication and waste.
- The **Maine Children's Cabinet** is charged with sharing resources, removing barriers, supporting collaborative initiatives and coordinating service delivery.
- The **Montana Interagency Coordinating Council on State Prevention Programs** was created to develop a comprehensive and coordinated prevention delivery system to strengthen Montana's children, families, communities and individuals.

At the same time, there is no limit to the steps that do not require special authority. For example, the informal **North Carolina State Collaborative for Children and Families**

compiled the first list of assessments that the state agencies conduct of children. With the commitment of state and county stakeholders, this may serve as a first step toward coordination of assessments across agencies and elimination of unnecessary intrusion and procedures for children and families.

Encouraging Innovation

Collaboratives are a natural structure for studying and evaluating new approaches. The organizations can promote innovation by identifying and working to remove regulatory barriers and by supporting interagency and community efforts to incubate new approaches.

- The **Washington Family Policy Council** is charged with taking local recommendations for decategorization of funds to the governor and legislature. The Legislature accepted recommendations from Pierce County and put a proviso into legislation to allow flexible use of juvenile justice and court funds.
- The **West Virginia Governor's Cabinet for Children and Families** has authority to waive state rules and regulations that impede coordinated service delivery.
- The **Ohio Families and Children First Council** has authority to reduce state rules and waive state regulations for county councils.

Facilitating Joint Problem-Solving

A state collaborative organization can serve as a facilitator for developing agreements among stakeholders: state government, communities, the private sector, advocates, service providers and residents. To make difficult decisions often requires a credible, neutral broker who can help everyone who has a stake in the outcomes for children and families reach consensus about the desired results, strategies for achieving those results, or solutions for service system problems. Specific negotiations may focus on clarifying the roles and responsibilities of agencies, addressing recurring issues or concerns, or problem-solving individual cases.

State collaboratives may have authority to negotiate shared policies that member organizations then incorporate, to help organizations resolve conflicts that hinder their joint effectiveness, or to advocate on behalf of individual citizens for interagency responses that will improve their lives. For example, members of a governor's cabinet or other interagency collaborative may develop binding agreements about policies and practices of human services agencies and programs. Member organizations also may agree to pool funding, share staff for common purposes, and redirect resources (such as staff time, funding, facilities or training) to achieve results.

- As an independent entity, the **New York Council on Children and Families** helps negotiate both case-level and system-level solutions. It facilitates agreements among state agencies for responding to children who need services from multiple agencies, who are difficult to serve, and who are aging out of the children's service system. It also provides a forum for identifying and ameliorating systemic barriers to better results for children and families.

- The five state agency commissioners who are members of the **Maine Children's Cabinet** jointly developed pooled, flexible funding; an automated client eligibility system; collaborative case management; an on-line electronic resource director; local case review committees; and restorative justice programs.
- The **North Carolina State Collaborative for Children and Families** is an informal forum for negotiation that has no legal authority and is not part of any agency. Instead, it provides a mechanism for helping child-serve agencies and families make well-informed, collaborative decisions. Families; advocates; local or state groups that assist parents; the courts; and county or state agency representatives or others may bring issues to the attention of the collaborative. The group then makes recommendations to the various departments represented about strategies for coordinating and funding services, training staff, and otherwise improving the service system.

Reviewing and Improving Financing Strategies

Collaboratives are well-positioned to compile multiple agency budgets, to review state investments for children and families, and to negotiate strategies for redirecting spending to maximize results. They also have potential for helping states maximize monetary and other resources for children and families across programs, agencies and levels of government.

Coordinating and Integrating Budgets and Funds

Through legislative authorization or negotiated interagency agreements, state collaboratives may be able to pool federal and state funding streams to achieve better results.

- Legislation authorizes the **Alabama Department of Children's Affairs** to review state agencies' budget requests for children's services other than K-12 education programs. The recently expired **Maryland Subcabinet for Children, Youth and Families** had authority to analyze departmental budget requests and review federal, state, local and private funds available to the state.
- Children's cabinets in **Louisiana, Minnesota and Rhode Island** have been charged with developing comprehensive children's budgets.

Redirecting Resources

A number of state collaboratives have authority to redirect resources through flexible use of funding and innovative use of assets. For example, the **West Virginia Governor's Cabinet on Children and Families** has legal authority to transfer funds within and between state agency budgets.

State-local collaboratives may redirect existing resources to the community level. As a liaison between government agencies and communities, many distribute pooled or targeted funds to local collaboratives. They also encourage communities to use existing resources more effectively, to develop local assets, and to generate private and other funding.

Maximizing Resources

Collaborative organizations are well-positioned to help state agencies, communities and the private sector work together to most effectively use resources. Many opportunities are being developed and many more have yet to be explored.

State interagency organizations may help coordinate strategies of multiple agencies to ensure that government is making the most efficient use of funding, staff, facilities and other resources. Public-private collaboratives can encourage the private sector to contribute space, time and other assets to joint efforts. State-local collaboratives can help communities identify underutilized assets, put them to work, and leverage additional funds and nonmonetary resources.

A major thrust of resource maximization efforts is better claiming and utilization of federal funding. The multitude of categorical funding streams challenges any single agency or community to make the best use of federal resources. Interagency and state-local groups can boost use of federal resources.

- The **Minnesota Children's Cabinet** has statutory authority to oversee all funding requests for children's services, to leverage funds for comprehensive program planning at local levels, and to direct cross-agency efforts to maximize federal funds. In 1993, as part of its responsibility to identify and maximize funding for children, the cabinet developed an integrated children's budget within the governor's budget request to the Legislature.
- The **Mississippi Interagency Coordinating Council for Children and Youth** is charged with increasing funding levels by matching pooled funds with federal Medicaid funds to increase the resources available for community-based services.

State-local collaboratives are especially well-situated for helping communities boost a state's access to federal funds through local claiming activities. Communities may be able to improve eligibility rates, identify reimbursable services that the state has overlooked, or provide a local match or maintenance of efforts for federal funds by using in-kind contributions or other resources in new ways. In addition, financing strategies that reach across agencies at the local level may maximize federal funding opportunities. For example, schools in Polk County (Des Moines) Iowa are working with health and human services agencies to provide Medicaid-eligible services and claim reimbursement.

Research and Innovation

It is a goal of many state collaborative organizations to study and develop promising strategies for improving child and family well-being. They are making valuable contributions to decisions regarding policies, service strategies and state-local partnerships. Collaboratives often encourage community innovations, evaluate their effectiveness, and incorporate keys to success in the guidelines for local work. Other entities consider statewide policies, practices and issues and promote effective options.

- Research is a primary purpose of the **Connecticut Commission on Children**, a legislative entity. Its mandate includes conducting research on issues that affect children

in response to recommendations of the executive, judicial or legislative branches of government; and identifying and promoting positive public policy and coordinated efforts.

- The **Georgia Family Connection Partnership**, a member of a national Promising Practices Network, promotes “what works,” using proven research and evaluation practices and showcasing community successes.

Promoting Public Dialogue, Education and Information

Many state collaboratives work on public engagement and mobilization of citizens to improve child and family well-being. They conduct public information campaigns regarding key issues and distribute information to the public concerning the conditions of the state’s children, families, other residents and communities. Still other information dissemination focuses on publicizing services and resources available to those who need assistance.

- The **Connecticut Commission** enlists the support of businesses, the education community, state and local governments, and the media to improve policies, service delivery and the state budget process. Likewise, the **Georgia Family Connection Partnership** works to build necessary public support for statewide change by enhancing public awareness, understanding, communication and commitment to improve results for children and families.
- The **California Children and Families First Act** directs the state commission to distribute information and educational materials about early childhood development to the public and professionals. As part of its work with county commissions, it reviews and holds public hearings on local annual reports and audits.

Recommending Policy Changes

Some policymakers create state collaboratives in part to gain credible information about the concerns of children, families, communities and service providers; system problems; and promising strategies for improvement. As neutral organizations with interests that surpass any single system, they may be appropriate vehicles for formulating policy recommendations.

- The statute that created the **Iowa Community Empowerment State Board** directs the group to make recommendations to the governor and legislature for increasing coordination, eliminating duplication, consolidating, and integrating functions to achieve improved results.
- The **Oregon Commission of Children and Families** is charged with communicating information, policy advice, current research and proven practices, and community progress to local commissions, the governor, the Legislative Assembly, state agencies and the public. In addition, the commission reviews waiver requests from local commissions and recommends action to policymakers.

Purposes of Collaborative Organizations: Legislative Strategies and Key Considerations

Clear purpose sets the organization on track and helps to keep it focused. Individuals and organizations that have a stake in human services must reach broad agreement about the results they want to achieve. The legislature also has a critical role in convening stakeholders and encouraging them to reach broad agreement about the results they want to achieve. Identifying results and performance goals that can be measured allows policymakers and other participants to determine if they are making progress. Legislative authorization or intent language that clearly states the desired results in ways that allow them to be measured can help ensure that purposes are accomplished.

Questions to Consider

- What results do we want to accomplish for state residents?
- What are service system improvements we want the organization to accomplish?
- Are the purposes of the organization clearly articulated and understood by key stakeholders?
- Is a collaborative structure the best organization for these purposes?
- Are our expectations both realistic and ambitious?
- How will we tell if the organization is accomplishing its purposes?

Composition/ Participation: Who Are the Partners That Can Achieve Results?

The active participation of the right people is key to any collaborative's success. The organization's purposes determine who the right individuals and group representatives are.

Broadening the Partnership for Children, Youth and Families

According to a former longtime legislator and state human services commissioner, "It's a partnership...If you're serious about trying to systematically improve results for kids, the state agency can't be the only one at the table."

Collaboration among executive branch administrators is valuable for coordinating planning among state agencies, removing barriers to assistance, and increasing the attention given to particular issues or to groups of people who are experiencing poor results. The commitment of people who have authority to make decisions about the use of public resources is essential. However, when executive branch leaders collaborate on their own, there may be few incentives to challenge each other or the system as a whole and many disincentives for holding each other accountable. In addition, to achieve results for the state's residents as a whole requires the collective efforts of a broader range of stakeholders and resources.

Engagement in collaborative partnerships has steadily expanded until a common goal is **representation of everyone who has a stake in the desired results and something to contribute**. Legislators who have been champions of state-local partnerships rate grassroots citizen participation as an essential ingredient for success. Not only does broad participation ensure a variety of perspectives and ideas, it also can enrich the available resources and the strategies developed. Active constituent involvement helps to engage legislators and other public officials. Experienced lawmakers judge highly participative collaboratives as more politically credible and more genuinely representative of stakeholders' interests. Broad collaboratives are unlikely to be controlled by one or more state agencies, a particularly strong region, or any other single interest.

Collaborative members report the following benefits of broad participation.

- **More people and groups own the problems and the solutions.** To achieve results requires the investment of the people who have a stake in those results and who have something to gain and something to lose. They have an investment in making conditions better. Stakeholders are more likely to make changes if they have a voice in shaping the strategies. The ultimate goal is to engage the public in dialogue and decision making about improving the lives of children and families throughout the state.
- **Participants bring a broad range of perspectives, skills, and resources to the table.** Exchanging ideas and negotiating strategies with people who have different perspectives enriches all participants and results in strategies that are more likely to produce results. It broadens understanding of the conditions of the state's children, families and communities, the human services system, and the effects of policies and practices. Individual and organizational representatives expand the monetary and nonmonetary resources available to achieve results including skills, leadership, experience, facilities and staff.
- **Accountability improves.** Partners help hold each other accountable. They develop a sense of responsibility to other members of the team. Broad membership also provides checks and balances. The voice of any single interest group is balanced by others.
- **Broad representation increases political credibility.** State agency leaders and policymakers are likely to take organizations seriously if a broad range of stakeholders are included and the groups have adequate decision making authority or influence.

Increasingly, state collaborative organizations include legislators, judicial representatives, advocates, experts, university and community college representatives, local service providers, community representatives, frontline staff, and people who receive services. Inclusive membership also promotes public-private partnership by boosting the involvement of business leaders, private service providers, the philanthropic community, and faith-based organizations. Increasingly, these groups represent the demographic and geographic diversity of the state. Urban, suburban and rural members; ethnic and cultural diversity; and inclusion of youth members are becoming common.

For participation to build and strengthen partnerships for achieving results, it must be active and genuine. Leaders and others who fail to attend meetings or consistently send

subordinates give a strong message about their commitment to developing new partnerships and working toward desired results. Service consumers, community representatives, citizen participants and others who are inexperienced in the workings of government must be assured more than token participation.

State Agency Participation

Cross-System

Interagency structures introduce horizontal, cross-cutting activities and strategies into a system that typically consists of separate, hierarchical silos. They can provide a forum for resolving interagency conflicts and negotiating agreements. Cross-agency partnerships can cultivate a shared focus across agencies, coordinate policies and practices, and forge strategies for achieving results.

To promote cross-system collaboration that will improve citizens' lives, states look beyond the traditional social services agencies to include leaders of executive branch agencies who are responsible for education, juvenile justice, health care, mental health care, economic development, workforce development, health care financing, government administration and management, public safety, and others. Including the courts through the state administrative office of the courts, juvenile or family court judges association, and other judicial representatives can be critical to connections with the legal system.

The **New Mexico Children's Cabinet** includes leaders of the following departments: Children, Youth and Families; Corrections; Human Services; Labor; Health; Finance and Administration; Economic Development; Public Safety; Aging; and Education.

The **Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board** has 13 public sector representatives—the leader or designee of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Department of Commerce, Department of Libraries, Department of Human Services, Health Care Authority, Commission on Children and Youth, Department of Rehabilitation, Educational Television Authority, Department of Career and Technology Education, Regents for Higher Education, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Commissioner of Health, and Cabinet Secretary for Education Agencies.

Top-Down and Bottom-Up Participation

Membership in state collaboratives is concentrated in state agency executives. Only agency executives can make many key decisions. Their active participation signals public staff, legislators and interest groups that collaboration is taken seriously and that it has leadership endorsement. On the other hand, their lack of participation, failure to follow through with commitments, or unwillingness to share resources and responsibilities signals the opposite and has led legislators in some states to look for alternatives to agency-only groups.

Coordinating councils, task forces, work groups, and other groups that focus on coordinating and improving administrative and management functions are likely to feature mid-level managers. Depending on the specific mission and issues, state agency leaders often designate the appropriate staff representatives.

The **Team Florida Partnership** includes representatives from seven state agencies as well as the Governor's Office.

Frontline staff make an enormous contribution to outcomes for children and families, and ensuring their input or direct participation is important.

- They know firsthand the day-to-day challenges and successes of the system. They can identify key issues that administrators may overlook or minimize.
- Frontline workers often have a strong understanding of what works and what does not. They have valuable ideas and can help develop strategies that will achieve results.
- The success of new strategies depends on support of frontline staff. They will be responsible for implementing changes and will be the face the public sees. Without their support, new service delivery strategies and many other changes are doomed to failure.

Residents, Youth and Service Consumers

Ultimately, vulnerable individuals, residents and taxpayers may have the most to gain and to lose in state human services. Many states are making a point to include individuals who do not have a fiduciary interest in human services—those who are not paid staff or contract agency representatives—as members of the state collaborative.

- Legislation requires that membership of the **West Virginia Governor's Cabinet on Children and Families** consists of one-third citizen participants.
- **Iowa's State Community Empowerment Board**, as well as community-level empowerment boards, are required by statute to have a majority citizen membership.
- The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth has a youth advisory group.

Not only can the state collaborative benefit from the experiences and observations of citizens and service recipients, these individuals can gain enormous understanding of the service system and how it works. If they are opinion-leaders or have positions of influence within their communities and the individuals they represent, this knowledge can reap larger benefits.

To encourage citizen participation requires special effort. Outreach efforts may include people who are not paid for the time involved, parents who have child care responsibilities, people with disabilities, young people, and representatives of grassroots organizations that may not have resources to spare. Covering transportation and other costs, meeting in accessible locations, providing information in language and media that everyone understands, and ensuring that their concerns are heard and taken into account are all measures that states use.

Business Leaders

Business leaders bring both influence and resources to the table. They also are likely to offer skills and practices that can benefit the collaborative and its partners. The business world's focus on the bottom line, use of strategic planning, and understanding of sound financial and personnel practices can enrich human services.

However, engaging business leaders is a challenge for several reasons. They may not immediately appreciate the stake they have in human services or better results for children and families. Outreach efforts may need to include both carefully targeted research and personal engagement. Many business leaders lack time or patience for meeting-intensive efforts and may be frustrated by lack of clear focus on measurable outcomes. Adopting businesslike practices—such as focusing on clear results, measuring progress toward results, conducting efficient meetings, and providing concise background materials—can help respond to these concerns.

Business leaders were critical to the creation and mission of the **Missouri Family and Community Trust**, a state-local collaborative created by executive order to reform the systems through which communities and state agencies work to improve the lives and well-being of children and families.

Authorizing legislation for the Alabama Family Policy Council, the Florida Partnership for School Readiness Board, the Hawaii Interdepartmental Council on Children and Families, the Illinois Early Learning Council, requires representatives of business and industry.

The Faith Community

In most states, faith-based organizations have long been major actors in human services. In the public system, they may operate large private agencies that provide child placement, adoption and other services. At the local level, faith groups provide food, clothing, shelter and informal resources for vulnerable individuals and families. Leaders of faith groups often are influential members of their communities.

Because policymakers are rethinking the role of faith-based groups in publicly funded services, it may be appropriate to consider their participation in state collaborative organizations. One state agency executive and former legislator sees the state-local collaborative as an ideal forum for shaping new partnerships with faith communities. For state and community collaboratives that embrace many partners, the influence of any single faith group can be balanced by a comprehensive range of viewpoints and representatives.

The **North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc.** is a legislatively authorized nonprofit organization that provides statewide leadership, oversight and technical assistance for the Smart Start initiative. The 38 members include representatives of religious organizations.

Legislative Members

Legislative participation in collaborative governing bodies is increasing. State lawmakers may serve as full members or as non-voting participants.

The **Alabama Children's Policy Council** includes two state senators and two state representatives. Legislative committee chairs sit on the **Connecticut Commission on Children**. The **Louisiana Children's Cabinet** includes two legislators, one from each chamber, and the **Maine Council on Children and Families** includes seven. The **Washington Family Policy Council** features a legislator from each caucus of both the House and the Senate.

Legislative staff are members of the **Team Florida Partnership**.

Six legislators are ex officio members of the **Iowa Community Empowerment Board**, and two lawmakers serve as non-voting members of the **Oregon Commission on Children and Families**.

Legislative leaders appoint collaborative participants to the California First Five Commission, the Illinois Early Learning Council, the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Families.

Other Key Stakeholders

Legislators can help ensure that other stakeholders' interests are considered. In some states, urban and rural areas often see their issues as quite different and view themselves as competing for resources. Identifying common results—the outcomes that people in all areas of the state want for their children and families—and providing flexibility for achieving results can help to bridge differences between these and other interest groups. Ensuring places at the table is an essential first step.

The **Alabama Family Policy Council** is chaired by the Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court. Presidents of the juvenile and family court judges association, district attorneys association and juvenile probation officers association are members along with the chief administrator of the courts.

- The Florida Partnership for School Readiness Board, Oregon Commission for Children and Families and the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, all legislatively created bodies, require equitable geographic representation.
- Voting members of **California's Children and Families First Commission** are selected in consultation with public and private sector associations, organizations, and professional conferences.
- The **Illinois Early Learning Council** includes a representative of federal children's programs appointed by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regional office.

Legislative Strategies and Considerations

Legislation often specifies the composition of the governing board, establishes procedures for appointing participants, and provides guidelines and criteria for selection. In some states, legislators serve on the body and, in a larger group of states, lawmakers make some of the appointments. In all states, legislators have the potential to influence the group's composition and individual appointments.

Leadership

Surveys of state and community collaboratives reveal that strong leadership is critical to the organization's success—not only when it is initially developed, but to sustain its progress toward results.¹⁰⁶ The individuals with responsibility for managing and leading state and community collaboratives are forging new territory in human services.

Participants are the collaborative's voice within the groups they represent. Although many collaboratives are embracing people whose voices previously have not been heard, including individuals who can control or influence resources also is important. Citizens who are community opinion leaders can engage new levels of grassroots participation, skills and other assets. Leaders of businesses, private foundations and service organizations represent a wealth of expertise and resources beyond taxpayer funds. To influence public policies and improve the use of public resources, legislators, judicial leaders and executive branch decision makers often are included. Legislators can boost the visibility and effectiveness by their active and ongoing participation in collaborative partnerships. They also can use their influence to engage other leaders and to maintain the body's prestige. Ongoing legislative oversight helps to sustain the organization's stature and effectiveness.

Because leadership is critical and transitions are difficult to weather, key members and staff should be chosen carefully and given the support they need to achieve the organization's purposes. To help ensure the required leadership skills and to share expertise among themselves, board or membership development activities can be valuable. Existing resources within state government, universities or the private sector are available to assist in many states.

How Much Participation Is Too Much?

As state collaborative organizations engage a broader array of partners, they risk becoming unmanageable, overly complex or bureaucratic. Organizing and managing the collaborative can consume resources that otherwise would be used more directly to benefit constituents. Membership must be carefully weighed to contain the organization's size and to ensure that participation is meaningful. Active advisory boards that have a true voice in the organization are one way that states expand representation without making the governing body unwieldy in size.

Participation in Iowa Empowerment

Iowa's community empowerment legislation specifies that the majority membership of both the state empowerment board and community boards must be citizens. Legislators wanted to ensure that the boards were not dominated by people and organizations with financial interests to protect. Resident participation is considered a major factor in increasing community ownership of and responsibility for results for young children and their families. New executive branch leaders have been added to the state board to represent economic development programs along with health, education and human services, but statutory language ensures that citizens dominate the group. Legislators participate as nonvoting members with representatives from both chambers and both political parties.

After the state board was created, an advisory council was formed to “bubble up” the concerns, experiences and ideas of communities to the state board. The council is another organizational strategy that helps ensure community voices are heard.

Questions to Consider

- Who are the partners we need to improve results—the conditions of children and families' lives?
- Does the group represent the people whose interests are at stake—in professional and citizen representation, gender, race, cultural background, and life experiences?
- If not, is there an advisory committee or other means to represent broad interests?
- Do participants include people with the capacity to make or influence decisions that will help accomplish the desired results?
- Does the organization's composition help to ensure that the group will have credibility with the people whose interests it represents and with key decision-makers?
- How can legislators help to ensure that the composition and leaders of the organization are effective?

Accountability: How Can Collaboratives Help?

Many state legislators are frustrated by what seems to be a lack of accountability within human services. They are searching for ways to provide oversight without micromanaging. Although state collaboratives are not a panacea for solving accountability woes, in many states they help to improve oversight and responsibility. As collaboratives grow beyond interagency membership, policymakers are giving them authority to hold the system accountable for achieving results and for responding appropriately to vulnerable citizens.

Because they are relatively independent, state collaborative organizations may be well-positioned to assess the effectiveness of individual programs or state systems overall. Review, monitoring and evaluation are included in the mission of some. State-local collaboratives

usually oversee community initiatives and facilitate their development. Oversight responsibilities range from conducting specific evaluations requested by policymakers to ongoing system monitoring to reviewing individual cases. Many collaboratives coordinate information from multiple state agencies in order to monitor services or conditions of children, families and individuals.

“Bear Hug Partnerships”

Accountability does not necessarily take place through sanctions and punishment. In fact, collaboratives that exercise punitive authority are unlikely to gain the trust and confidence of state agencies. Instead, it is a partnership of mutual accountability. A former longtime legislator who became the executive of his state’s human services agency described the relationship of the agency, the state collaborative, and communities as a “...bear hug partnership. We hold each other accountable.”

State collaboratives with strong stakeholders and leaders can encourage agencies and decision makers to make needed changes and provide forums for negotiation. The organizations can encourage—and, when necessary, confront—decision makers through informal pressure, independent research, reports to policymakers and the public, and media campaigns. These partnerships have the potential to become cornerstones of state accountability systems.

Measuring Progress Toward Results

One of the most powerful steps a state can take to improve accountability is to monitor progress toward desired results for citizens in an ongoing, systematic, and public way. This requires some entity with capacity, authority and responsibility for measuring progress. A number of states have designated a collaborative organization as one of these entities. As cross-sector, interagency, and often state-local groups, they are well-positioned to identify appropriate indicators of population well-being and collect data from numerous sources. Groups that are viewed as neutral and credible are well-situated to monitor state progress and use the information as a foundation for partners to develop and refine strategies for improvement.

Some collaboratives collect data regarding targeted results, while others more broadly monitor child and family well-being.

- The **Ohio Families and Children First Council** tracks indicators of child well-being with emphasis on prenatal and child health care, early learning and supporting families.
- The **Maryland Partnership for Children and Families** and **Georgia’s Family Connection Partnership** monitor indicators and report state and local data on the Internet.
- **New York’s Council on Children and Families** and **Tennessee’s Commission on Children and Youth** are “Kids Count” contacts for their states. They systematically collect indicator data to measure child and family well-being as part of the Annie E. Casey’s national Kids Count initiative.

Monitoring Program and System Performance

Still other collaboratives monitor performance measures that help policymakers and the public tell how well individual programs and agencies are performing. This type of oversight measures:

- Access to health care, child care, family support and other services;
- Number of children and families receiving particular services or benefits;
- Quality of services or programs available and consumer satisfaction;
- Family and citizen participation in decision making; and
- Use of private and other resources.

The **Oregon Commission on Children and Families** evaluates local initiatives by monitoring outcome measures and community performance measures such as resource allocations, participation in local activities, local strengths, barriers and service gaps.

Information Management

Monitoring results for the state's residents and responses to individual children and families requires a data management system that is capable of collecting information beyond a single program or agency. A few state collaboratives have been granted authority to coordinate multiple state agency information systems.

- Legislation directs the **Maine Council on Children and Families** to promote a plan for the informal exchange of information that respects the confidentiality of information and the privacy interests of children and their families.
- The **Rhode Island Children's Cabinet** (2001 R.I. Pub. Laws, H 5912) is charged with developing a strategic plan for a single, secure, universal student identifier system that will foster interagency communication and increase service delivery efficiency, while protecting children's rights to privacy.

Investigation and Review of Individual Cases

In addition to monitoring the well-being of the state population, collaborative organizations may be appropriate structures for ensuring the protection and appropriate treatment of individuals who receive human services. Policymakers who are considering consolidation of facility inspections and licensing often look to collaboratives.

- The **Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth** serves a number of oversight functions. It is responsible for evaluating services for children in state custody. As part of this mission, the commission uses an intensive case review process called CPORT. As the state Kids Count organization, it collects and reports on data to monitor well-being of all the state's children and families.
- Similarly, the **Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth** oversees and inspects state facilities, private residential facilities and county detention facilities. It also conducts investigations of service complaints.

Oversight responsibilities can include the investigation and review of individual cases. For example, the **Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth** serves as the state ombudsman for children in state custody, and in this capacity, investigates individual cases.

To ensure that multiple agencies and organizations serve children effectively, some collaboratives conduct reviews of individual cases and convene service providers to respond to problems. Such bodies often are the only state organization with authority to routinely conduct cross-system case reviews and may be especially important for ensuring that children who need services from multiple programs do not fall through the cracks.

- The **New York Council on Children and Families** resolves placement issues and services for individual children with multiple disabilities and service needs. It also facilitates placement of hard-to-place children and the transition of older youth to adult programs.
- The **Maine Children's Cabinet** assesses resource capacity and allocations and, like many over state collaboratives, reviews specific case examples to improve policies and programs.

Advocacy/Public Education

Efforts to make public decision making accessible to the public are arguably another way to improve accountability. From coordinating councils that focus on a particular issue such as substance abuse prevention to independent commissions that work to improve the well-being of all children and families, advocacy and education are primary purposes of state collaboratives. The organizations strive to inform and influence state and local policymakers, public agencies, private service providers, community organizations, the business community, citizens and parents. Mechanisms for disseminating information include media strategies, public outreach campaigns and informal connections. Increasingly, the Internet is providing a useful medium. State collaboratives make state and local indicator data available in user-friendly formats. They also use results indicators to inform policymakers and the public, rally support for better results, and develop strategies that will improve progress.

Legislative Strategies and Considerations

What Is the Added Value of the Collaborative?

State collaborative organizations have a variety of roles for improving accountability. For each, responsibilities for monitoring data, public organizations and resources, and individual children and families depend on a number of factors. Policymakers will want to consider the existing strengths and weaknesses within the state. Other organizations may have the capacity, political standing and leadership necessary for oversight. For example, a university or state administrative agency may have existing capacity or the ability to develop resources for collecting, tracking and reporting cross-system indicator data regarding children, families and communities. An existing ombudsman may be a more sensible agency for investigating

and responding to individual complaints and critical incidents. A legislative oversight office may have capacity and credibility for monitoring cross-agency use of resources.

How Will the Collaborative Be Held Accountable?

Regardless of its oversight responsibilities, the collaborative itself must be held accountable for its own actions, achievement of performance measures, and use of public resources. Because most collaborative organizations are freestanding structures, their oversight often requires special consideration beyond their own governing boards or members. The legislature may have a strong role in reviewing the collaborative's budget, conducting periodic performance evaluations, and monitoring stakeholders' satisfaction. Just as legislative leadership often is key to the organization's creation, capacity and credibility, it likewise is critical to its accountability.

Questions to Consider

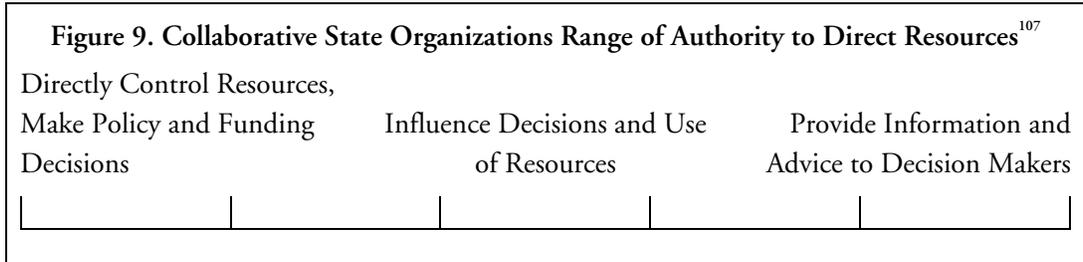
- How can the collaborative help to improve accountability?
- What oversight and monitoring responsibilities are appropriate?
- What oversight and accountability challenges must the collaborative overcome?
- What capacity and resources will the collaborative need or need to develop in order to improve accountability?
- What authority and support will the collaborative need?
- What oversight will be provided to the collaborative itself?

Empowerment: What Authority Does It Take to Achieve Results?

Each state collaborative needs some level of authority to accomplish its purposes. Existing groups include agencies with statutory authority to directly control resources, develop policy, and formulate strategies that other agencies must implement. At the other end of the range are advisory bodies that provide information and recommendations to state agencies, the legislature, the governor, and/or the public. The type of authority that a collaborative needs depends upon a number of factors: the desired results, whether it is highly targeted or broad in scope, the members and their capacity to make or influence decisions, its role and relationships with other entities, its oversight responsibilities, and its connection with communities.

Many collaboratives report that their success depends upon the leadership of their members, their ability to mobilize political will and their capacity to influence key decision makers. Although lack of legal authority can present obvious challenges, direct authority may be less important than elimination of existing barriers to working together for results. Very real impediments to collaboration may have been constructed to protect the interests of a particular group or agency. Working as partners, individuals and organizations often can dismantle barriers and find more effective ways of protecting both their mutual interests and

the well-being of children and families. Figure 9 illustrates the decision making authority of collaborative state organizations.



Control of Resources

Through the participation of government leaders, children’s cabinets and other collaboratives represent the authority to make many decisions regarding the allocation and use of public agency funding, staff and other resources. Instead of being conferred directly upon the collaborative, this authority derives from its members.

In addition, state collaboratives often have their own dedicated funding to accomplish intended goals. This may be a combination of federal administrative funds, state appropriations and private money. A number of collaboratives obtain federal and other grants to administer juvenile delinquency prevention programs, child care development, innovative demonstration projects, and other efforts. Most funding comes from state coffers, often through discrete line items or funds reallocated from multiple agencies’ budgets.

State-level organizations use their funding to convene people and organizations, hire staff, conduct research, collect data, distribute reports, conduct outreach and other activities that help accomplish their purposes. Some provide funding to other organizations, such as community collaboratives or service provider agencies. The requirements they pass on to the entities they fund may be carefully crafted standards or very flexible. State-local collaboratives (such as the Georgia Family Connection Partnership, Iowa Community Empowerment Board, former Maryland Subcabinet, Oregon Commission for Children and Families, and Washington Family Policy Council) distribute funding to communities for planning, services or other strategies.

Authority to Redirect Resources and Decision Making

A number of state collaboratives are authorized to redirect decision making through flexible use of funds, freedom from regulation, and flexibility to develop innovative strategies. For example, the **Idaho Council on Children’s Mental Health** is part of a court-approved plan for resolving a long-standing action against the state. To improve services to children with serious emotional disturbances and their families, the council has authority to establish local councils to develop community partnerships and review individual cases.

Ability to Influence Decisions

The membership of the collaborative organization is critical to its ability to influence decisions regarding allocation of public resources and policies. Including key leaders of stakeholder groups can ensure that decision makers and those who influence them are engaged. Legislators report that active, grassroots citizen participation helps to ensure the attention of state and local elected officials. Especially when partnerships are mirrored within communities throughout the state, their influence is a significant factor in achieving better outcomes for children and families.¹⁰⁸

Legislative Strategies and Considerations

Sources of Authority: Do We Need Legislation?

Whether a collaborative needs specific legislative authorization to conduct its activities is likely to vary, depending on the organization's purpose and scope, the existing legal framework, and established state policies and organizational mandates. Collaborative organizations are likely to need statutory authority to:

- Directly control the use of public resources or to develop cross-cutting policies;
- Coordinate or integrate budgets, policies, programs and information management systems; or
- Conduct oversight activities, such as reviewing individual cases and monitoring individual outcomes.

Even if a collaborative does not require legal authority to conduct its activities, legislation may have other benefits. It can be used to articulate the desired results and design of the collaborative. Although true collaboration cannot be forced, legislation can let agencies and other stakeholders know policymakers' expectations, create forums for working together, provide incentives for partnerships, and take other steps to promote joint efforts. In addition, legislative authorization helps to sustain collaborative organizations through changes in executive branch and organizational leadership.

Is Executive Branch Authorization Adequate?

The authorization of the governor or agency executives can go far toward promoting collaboration and providing the needed authority for collaborative structures. Much coordination and integration is possible within the executive branch and with its leadership. Funding, staff and other resources often can be pooled without legislative authorization. Indicators and other data that allow stakeholders to monitor results and performance can be shared.

The challenges of relying on executive branch authorization are revealed by the histories of some promising state collaboratives. Changes in state leadership—even of a single strong agency champion—can jeopardize progress. Depending on the strength of the partnership

and its challenge to the status quo, some stakeholders may use these periods to sabotage the change that collaboration poses.

When Authority Is Not Enough

Other challenges arise when a group lacks the will and commitment to work together to make real changes. Their effectiveness often depends on the leadership ability and influence of members and the ability of these individuals to assume additional responsibilities. Partners must be willing to bring their own resources to the table. These challenges have led legislators to authorize collaborative structures to make decisions that involve flexible use of state resources. Often, legal authority is provided after state agencies and others have gained experience and credibility working together.

Should Non-Elected Individuals Control Public Resources?

A few legislators have raised concerns about giving people who are not elected and are not employees of the state the power to make decisions about the use of public resources. Traditions and precedents vary among states. A number of states and local jurisdictions have a long history of citizen commissions, councils and other governance groups that set policy. For others, this is a relatively new direction that may warrant debate.

Questions to Consider

- What authority does the collaborative organization need to achieve the desired results and to eliminate existing barriers?
- How can we encourage a partnership that will redirect existing resources to achieve results?
- How can we encourage a partnership that will coordinate budgets, policies and practices to achieve results and enhance system performance?
- What authority does the collaborative organization need to improve accountability for achieving better results for children and families?
- What oversight authority does it need?

Scope and Scale: How Targeted or Comprehensive Should the Focus Be?

The organization may be targeted or comprehensive in scope. It may be organizationally complex, with large staff and other resources, or a core group of individuals who leverage the resources of other organizations. The collaborative's scope depends in large part on its mission and desired results. Its range also may reflect implementation and strategic concerns. There are numerous considerations for legislators.

The overall question of whether collaboratives should be highly targeted or comprehensive is unsettled. State experiences reveal some common challenges and several critical issues to consider. Using results to determine the scope offers potential for overcoming obstacles.

A Range of Options

Some collaboratives target a particular issue or set of related issues, a program or set of programs, or a group of people. Frequently, coordinating organizations are created to enhance the quality of assistance, access and availability, or the functioning of clients. These performance-focused organizations often focus on a particular set of individuals—usually a group that is underserved—such as people with disabilities or young children and their families.

On the other end of the continuum are collaborative organizations that work to improve the well-being of all the state's children, families or residents. Organizations that focus on results for the entire state population are, of necessity, concerned with a broad set of strategies and people. They require a range of resources—both the public and private sectors—and multiple public agencies.

Coordinating Councils

Coordinating councils often begin as informal bodies that are convened by executive branch leaders with a common goal or at the direction of a governor with special interest or concern about a particular issue or group. The legislature also may create a council or give permanent authority, structure and funding to an existing entity.

- Mississippi's **Interagency Coordinating Council for Children and Youth** has lead responsibility for developing a coordinated system of care for children with severe emotional disturbance.
- The **Georgia Children and Youth Coordinating Council**, a freestanding state agency, targets juvenile delinquency prevention.
- Montana's Interagency Coordinating Council on State Prevention Programs and Utah's Substance Abuse and Anti-Violence Coordinating Committee focus on prevention issues and resources that might otherwise fail to receive adequate attention.

The State of the Art in Comprehensive, Results-Focused Collaboratives

The Georgia Family Connections Partnership has developed sophisticated training, technical assistance and information services for what is likely the nation's largest network of public-private community collaboratives. The state-level organization serves more than 150 county partnerships in 12 regions of the state. The partnership focuses on helping communities and the state as a whole achieve five core results:

- Healthy children,
- Children ready for school,
- Children succeeding in school,
- Strong families, and
- Self-sufficient families.

Highly skilled teams directly provide assistance that is tailored to each community. Periodically, statewide conferences offer opportunities for community activists to learn from

each other and from state or national experts. Quarterly strategy institutes are held at various locations throughout the state to provide assistance in improving the five results the state is targeting for children and families. Community self-help tools that are available online provide guidance for :

- Compiling community profiles,
- Formulating strategic plans,
- Building organizational and decision making capacity,
- Developing a media strategy,
- Learning effective advocacy skills, and
- Evaluating the success of community plans and conditions of children and families.

Other on-line resources, which also are available in traditional formats, include a clearinghouse of community success stories, updates on state and federal policy developments that support communities and families, links to research on promising practices, and a monthly electronic magazine with updates.

Legislative Strategies and Considerations

Focus on Results, Not on Scope

Recent research by the Center for the Study of Social Policy produced an unexpected finding: The scope of community and state collaborative decision-making organizations was not a key factor in their ability to achieve measurable results in the lives of children and families. Collaboratives that concentrated on one or two population-level outcomes were no more likely to accomplish measurable changes than were groups that focused on an entire set of results and indicators.

Proliferation of Narrowly Focused Groups

As highly targeted state coordinating councils and other collaborative planning groups proliferate, they sometimes become burdensome to administer and coordinate. Ironically, their limited scope can contribute to the fragmentation of the service system, even as their members try to promote coordination. In some states, many interagency groups—often with similar agency and individual staff members—focus on a range of specific children and family issues. Rallying individuals' support and maintaining their commitment can be obstacles, especially when participants already have a full complement of ongoing responsibilities.

For these reasons, a growing number of states have developed more comprehensive collaborative entities. In addition to authorizing consolidated collaborative organizations, legislators help reduce proliferation of state planning groups by directing state agencies and other stakeholders to work together to consolidate multiple, program-focused or narrowly-targeted plans into comprehensive plans for achieving results.

Capacity Requirements of Comprehensive Collaboratives

On the other side of the coin, collaboratives that are broad in scope also face challenges, including:

- The risks of unrealistic expectations;
- Management complexity; and
- The need for staff, money and other resources to achieve broad goals.

A common concern among legislators is that these collaboratives require significant capacity to achieve results. Ensuring the necessary capacity risks building a new layer of bureaucracy that will add additional administration to an already highly complicated system.

Expanding Scope Over Time

A number of states have started a targeted collaborative initiative or organization with the intent later to broaden the desired results, target population or geographic range. Often, they find expansion challenged or stalled. The collaborative may have little credibility or influence within the human service system, face organized resistance from other organizations that perceive expansion as a threat, or lack the capacity it needs to expand.

At the same time, initiatives and organizations with a broad mission and authority may threaten established interests, face large implementation challenges, and require rapid development of resources and expertise. Regardless of its scope, to be successful, the organization purpose must be matched by support from leaders, its authority and access to resources.

To Pilot or Not to Pilot?

Some state-level collaboratives start with a particular pilot community, a handful of interested locations, or a particularly challenged region. Most are intended to encompass the entire state, either from the outset or after testing strategies in a few sites. For many organizations, geographical scope is a matter of phasing in new strategies, gradually implementing collaborative practices, and cultivating new capacity.

The Scope of Empowerment

In 1998, when Iowa legislators created the community empowerment initiative with its local collaboratives and state-level board, they targeted results for children from birth to age 5 and their families. Some lawmakers hoped the community-state partnership would expand to other populations and eventually become the model for all human services.

Since its inception, the initiative has expanded from a handful of communities to statewide participation. Community stakeholders have become a powerful political force and have forged strong models for grassroots collaboration. At the same time, other groups—especially those with similar or overlapping goals, such as local child abuse prevention councils and the state human services agency—have perceived community empowerment as a threat. Some resistance has subsided, perhaps because feared threats have failed to materialize or the staying power of community empowerment has become clear.

In a few communities, strategies developed by local partnerships have been applied to child protection, there is interest in incorporating child mental health results into community empowerment, and some stakeholders want to expand the target population to include 6-year-olds. However, despite its development as a powerful political force and strong model for grassroots collaboration, the scope of community empowerment has not yet expanded.

Duration: Should It Be Permanent or Time-Limited?

Policymakers usually create collaboratives intending to establish permanent structures, if organizational lifespan is considered at all. However, it may be worth considering the issue of duration from the start. There may be reasons for creating a relatively short-term organization that will be dissolved after it accomplishes its purpose, especially if it is highly targeted. Another approach for legislators to consider is setting a sunset date for reviewing the organization's effectiveness and renewing its authorization if justified. Table 14 illustrates the potential advantages and disadvantages of time-limited collaboratives.

Potential Advantages of a Time-Limited Collaborative	Potential Disadvantages of a Time-Limited Collaborative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders may have a greater sense of urgency or immediacy to work together for results. • Participants may focus on accomplishing results rather than sustaining the organization. • Existing agencies and interest groups may not consider it a threat. Partnership may be easier to develop. • Politically, it may be easier to rally support for a time-limited organization. • It will be less likely to contribute to growth of government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless it has adequate resources and capacity from the start, the organization may not be able to develop them. • It may focus exclusively on making short term progress rather than setting the necessary groundwork and building the required capacity to make long-lasting change. • Existing agencies and interest groups may discount the collaborative, simply wait for it to expire, and fail to change. • Politically, the group may be considered inconsequential and without strong support.

The New York Council on Children and Families: Still Evolving After 25 Years

The New York Council on Children and Families, founded in 1977, is acknowledged as the oldest state collaborative body for children. Its members are the directors of 13 agencies of the state's health and human services system. One of the council's primary purposes reflects an objective of many policymakers for these collaborative entities—to help state agencies resolve disputes regarding difficult cases by that serve as a neutral forum for identifying and resolving policy, jurisdictional, and procedural issues. The council's authorizing legislation requires that it resolve placement issues and services for children with multiple disabilities and service needs, facilitate treatment of hard-to-serve youth, and aid the smooth transition of older youth who continue to need services as they reach adulthood. In this capacity, the council works with member agencies to negotiate agreements, develop cross-agency and state-county linkages, and monitor implementation of interagency agreements.¹⁰⁹

In 1994, the Task Force on School Community Collaboration was created to improve child and family well-being by fostering new state and community-level partnerships among schools, county and municipal governments, families, community-based organizations, and other groups. The task force compiled a resource list of possible funding that schools and communities can use to improve outcomes for children both during and outside the school day. For each funding stream, the matrix lists the state agency and staff responsible for supervising the funds, the purpose of the funds, eligibility criteria, how the funds are allocated, the funding time frame, any partnering that funding criteria require or encourage, and a Web site for further information.¹¹⁰

Working with state agency directors, the council developed Touchstones, a shared vision of desired results for children, along with measurable goals and objectives. It monitors and publishes data on child and family well-being statewide and in each county. In 2002, the council posted its database online in a format that allows users to monitor progress of each county on numerous indicators of child and family well-being.¹¹¹

Questions to Consider

- Is the collaborative's scope consistent with our desired results and expectations for performance?
- Are the organization's authority, resources and capacity consistent with its scope?
- How can we ensure that the collaborative reduces fragmentation rather than contributes to it?
- Is the geographic scope, target population or results focus intended to expand over time?
- If so, how can we build capacity for that expansion?
- Should we limit the lifespan of the organization or arrange for periodic review of its effectiveness?

Organizational Home

The organization's standing as part of state government or as an independent entity has a strong connection to purpose and authority. Organizational auspices for cross-cutting work include:

- A unit within the governor's office;
- A unit within an existing state agency;
- A freestanding state agency within the executive branch or the legislature;
- A nonprofit corporation; or
- An informal, ad hoc group without formal structure.

In several states, the collaborative's organizational home has changed over time as it has moved from state government to more independent status. For example, both the Georgia Family Connection and North Carolina Partnership for Children have been moved from the auspices of the state's human services agency to become 501(c)(3) organizations. Others that started as informal workgroups or advocacy efforts have been formalized after gaining momentum.

The auspice of a state collaborative has implications for the organization's ability to achieve its intended results. Factors that are affected include:

- Ability to convene key stakeholders;
- Credibility with various stakeholder groups including residents, service consumers, agency leaders, private providers and policymakers;
- Ability to hold providers, programs, or agencies accountable and, in turn, to be held accountable for its own actions; and
- Authority to enter into legal contracts, receive and expend funds, and negotiate with government or private agencies.

Executive branch umbrella agencies for health and human services are described earlier in this report. When compared to most collaborative entities, they have both similar elements and differences. As with collaboratives, they encompass a range of programs and departments and are intended to improve coordination of their member agencies. However, they are

hierarchical organizations with direct authority over and administrative responsibility for the included agencies, a trait that differs from the collaborative structures described here.

A Unit Within the Governor’s Office

Most cabinets or subcabinets for children and families and some coordinating councils are sited within the governor’s or lieutenant governor’s office. Examples include the Idaho Council on Children’s Mental Health, Louisiana Children’s Cabinet, Maine Children’s Cabinet, Maryland Children’s Cabinet, Michigan Children’s Cabinet, Minnesota Children’s Cabinet, Ohio Families and Children First Council, Rhode Island Children’s Cabinet, and West Virginia Governor’s Cabinet on Children and Families.

These collaboratives often are created by the governor to promote more broadly an agenda for a particular issue or for child and family well-being. Many are eliminated or reduced in authority by successive chief executives who do not share their predecessors’ priorities. Their survival may depend on sustained legislative support and statutory authority. Table 15 illustrates the potential benefits and possible challenges of a unit within the governor’s office.

Table 15. Potential Benefits and Possible Challenges of an Executive Unit	
Potential Benefits	Possible Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on the chief executive’s interest and commitment, it may have the visible support of the governor as well as a direct line of communication. State agencies and statewide human services may develop a common guiding vision, especially with the chief executive’s direct leadership and oversight. Its political clout is sufficient to convene state agency leaders and other interest groups. It is well-positioned to leverage significant cross-agency staff and resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successive governors may not have a sense of ownership, continuing vision for the organization, or commitment to it. Staffing is likely determined by the governor or participating agencies. Fluctuating staffing levels and individual appointments may reflect the current governor’s interest or leaders’ understanding. Lack of direct connection to communities may limit change to top-down approaches. Its influence may be limited to the state agencies that are directly involved. Policymakers may view it as an additional layer of bureaucracy. Legislators may not be engaged or committed to its mission.

Part of a State Agency

Some collaboratives are administered by and housed within a state agency. A state human services agency is the most likely organizational home. For example, the Washington Department of Social and Health Services administers the state Family Policy Council. At the same time, human services collaboratives may be within another type of agency. Iowa’s

State Community Empowerment Board is housed in the Department of Management. Regardless of the agency that houses the state collaborative, one of the advantages of direct connection to a state executive branch agency is access to the relatively large staff, funding and other resources of government. Pros and cons for both approaches are outlined in tables Table 16 and Table 17.

Table 16. Within a Human Services Agency	
Potential Benefits	Possible Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State agency leaders and program staff may develop a sense of ownership instead of viewing the collaborative as an external threat. • The parent agency acts as fiscal agent. It has authority to enter into contracts and handle finances on behalf of the collaborative and can perform other administrative functions. • The collaborative may be able to use or leverage agency staff and other resources for its purposes. • It may be possible to integrate collaborative strategies into the human services system. • The organization may be subject to and included in existing, institutional accountability mechanisms. • Other state agencies may view the collaborative as a credible, legitimate entity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other state agencies may view it as part of the parent department and without broader relevance. • Citizens, advocates and community stakeholders are likely to regard it as an extension of the parent agency. Their participation and sense of ownership may be limited. • Stakeholders are unlikely to view the organization as a neutral forum for negotiating collaborative strategies and resolving conflicts. • If threatened, the administering or parent agency may easily thwart its influence and undermine the collaborative's authority and purpose. • The parent agency may not take the organization seriously. Its resources and mission are easily consumed by the larger agency. • The collaborative's ability to hold accountable the parent organization or other government offices may be compromised. • Its agenda and strategies are likely to be top-down, rather than driven by strong grassroots goals and community focus.

Table 17. Within a Budget or Management Agency	
Potential Benefits	Possible Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The collaborative may have capacity to provide some oversight and accountability of the human services system. • The collaborative may be well-positioned to pool funding streams, coordinate cross-agency claiming of federal funds, and facilitate other collaborative financing and administrative strategies. • Stakeholders may view it as a neutral forum for negotiating collaborative strategies and resolving conflicts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The collaborative may be challenged to influence the human services system. • Administrators and staff may not have adequate understanding of human services issues or the system. • Because it is part of state government, citizens whose voices often are unheard may be reluctant to participate.

A Freestanding State Agency

A commission is the most common type of state collaborative that is freestanding, yet a government agency. The agency has its own budget and appropriation and operates independently of other departments in many respects. Most often, the organization is part of the executive branch. Although this alignment may be primarily for administrative matters, it also serves practical and political purposes. The **Connecticut Commission**, which is part of the legislative branch of government, provides the legislature with information and respond to research requests.

Other freestanding collaboratives within state government include the Alabama Department of Children’s Affairs, the California Children and Families Commission, the New York Council on Children and Families and the Oregon Commission on Children and Families.

Commissions for Children and Families

As freestanding state agencies, commissions have relatively strong independent authority. Historically, many types of commissions were developed to give citizens direct decision making in, and oversight authority of, public agencies. Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas have especially strong traditions of commissions that make policy decisions and provide oversight of individual state agencies. State use, precedence and legal standing of commissions varies enormously.

Rather than governing a particular human service department, commissions for children and families are separate state agencies that conduct advocacy, research, oversight and other functions. Along with the authority of freestanding agencies, commissions have their own staff and administrative capacity. Typical responsibilities include advocacy, data collection and analysis, research, program and service reviews, development of policy recommendations for public officials, provision of technical assistance to state and local organizations, and administration of grant programs.

- The **California Children and Families First Commission** was created in 1998 when ballot Proposition 10 authorized a tax on tobacco products to develop an integrated, comprehensive and collaborative system of information and services to enhance early childhood development. The commission is the state-level body responsible for creating and implementing this system. It is authorized to develop program guidelines and recommend changes in laws, regulations and services.
- The **Connecticut Commission on Children**, a research and advocacy agency, is attached to the legislature. Its members include legislative committee chairs, governor’s appointees, judicial representatives, and advocates appointed by legislative leaders. Its mandates focus on research, oversight and advocacy. Activities include:
 - Assessing and coordinating state programs that affect children;
 - Reviewing responsibilities of the executive and judicial branches and receiving their research recommendations;
 - Enlisting support of business, education, state and local governments and the media to improve policies, service delivery and the state budget process; and
 - That serve as liaison between government and private groups concerned with children.

The **Oregon Commission on Children and Families** includes 12 commissioners whom the governor appoints. The majority must be lay people; represent state regions and interests; and include delegates of social services professions, the business community, local commissions, and the Juvenile Department Director’s Association. The director of the Department of Human Resources and the Superintendent of Public Instruction are ex-officio members. Table 18 illustrates the potential benefits and possible challenges of a freestanding state agency.

Table 18. Freestanding State Agency	
Potential Benefits	Possible Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest groups and other state agencies may view it as a neutral forum for negotiation, collaboration, information and evaluation. • It may be well-positioned to collect and objectively analyze cross-system information concerning progress toward results. • With adequate authority, it may hold state agencies and other organizations accountable. • It may link citizens and communities to state government. • It has authority to seek, receive and expend funds. • It has potential to coordinate interagency financing strategies, including maximizing state claiming and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without adequate resources and authority, it may lack the legitimacy and credibility needed to achieve its purposes. • Without strong champions who understand its purposes and auspices, it may be vulnerable to budget cuts or elimination. • If it provides direct services or controls program funds, other agencies may view it as a threat. • Policymakers may view it as an additional layer of bureaucracy. • A free-standing organization may be more costly to establish and operate. Because its budget is separate, it may appear more expensive than a collaborative housed within another

Table 18. Freestanding State Agency	
Potential Benefits	Possible Challenges
<p>use of federal funds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting as its own fiscal agent, the organization is able to seek, receive and expend funds. It may be well positioned to seek and make use of private funding or resources. 	<p>government agency.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Its separate budget may make it a target in tight fiscal times.

A Nonprofit Corporation

A number of collaboratives that started as part of state government or government-sponsored initiatives have spun off into independent nonprofits organizations. These include the Georgia Family Connection, the Missouri Family and Community Trust, and the North Carolina Partnership for Children. In other cases, informal groups have organized to become nonprofits.

Table 19. Nonprofit Corporations	
Potential Benefits	Possible Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizens, communities and other stakeholders may have a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility because of the organization’s independence from government. It may have more credibility with business leaders, advocates and citizens who often are not engaged in government. Acting as its own fiscal agent, the organization is able to make its own financing and other decisions. It may be well-positioned to seek and make use of private funding or resources. Because it is outside government, it may be able to monitor and hold government accountable. It may be well-positioned to conduct advocacy activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State government may have little sense of ownership and few incentives for investing resources or sharing information with the organization. State agencies may be threatened by its independent status. It may have little influence within the public policy or political arena. It may be more challenging for policymakers to provide strong oversight and accountability. Funding from federal, state or private sources may be more difficult to obtain.

An Informal or Advisory Collaborative

The number and characteristics of informal collaboratives are not known. Obviously, many cross-agency staff and leaders meet and work together informally to accomplish common

purposes. Some of these groups may include state experts, outside consultants, local representatives, advocates, and even business or other private-sector leaders. Table 20 illustrates the potential benefits and possible challenges of an informal or advisory collaborative.

Making State Human Service Organizations More Elastic

Vermont's Policy Clusters were an informal collaboration among multiple state human services departments. Department leaders and staff worked through the clusters to "break down barriers to map out unified, coherent strategies" for addressing their common problems. Clusters promoted cross-silo solutions. Individual clusters focused on:

- Coordinating crises and family stabilization services,
- A coordinated approach to home visits,
- Integrated service delivery across the system,
- Coordinating the caregiver process,
- Strengthening the safety net for high risk citizens,
- Connecting better with communities, and
- Trauma.

Instead of fixed units within the agency, the clusters were expected to change as issues were resolved and new concerns emerged. They were temporary forums for collaboration across departments to solve shared concerns.¹¹²

The North Carolina State Collaborative

The State Collaborative is a forum for discussion of issues regarding ways agencies and families can work together to produce better outcomes for children. It is not part of any agency or even of state government, and it has no legal authority to make decisions. Rather, local or state agency representatives, family members, advocates or others bring issues to the attention of the State Collaborative. Participants make recommendations, which members take to their agencies and programs.

Decisions that involve services, child placement, use of public resources or legal matters are made in the usual way by agencies, the judiciary and elected officials. The collaborative provides a mechanism for better informing those decisions through suggestions from families and other agencies. Recommendations are intended to eliminate duplication, improve agency performance, make the system more consumer friendly, and improve results for citizens. For example, they might involve strategies to coordinate services, funding, training and local reporting requirements.

Participating in the state collaborative does nothing to reduce agency authority or remove the liability of legally defined decision-makers. Recommendations are reviewed by other state and local decision-making bodies. What differs is the role of families and the number of agencies that provide input into recommendations.¹¹³

Table 20. Informal or Advisory Collaborative

Potential Benefits	Possible Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Its credibility and legitimacy depend entirely on its effectiveness and the extent to which it meets needs and goals. • It may be viewed as a truly neutral forum for negotiation, joint problem-solving and collaboration. • It does not its own maintain staff or bureaucracy. Therefore, it has no organizational interests to sustain. • It easily can be refocused or disbanded. It may be easily eliminated when it is no longer needed or successful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has no legal authority to make decisions. • It may have no credibility with government or other interest groups. • It is unlikely to have the capacity to raise funds or hire staff. It depends on donated expertise, time and administrative support. • It is unable to collect or expend funds. • Its purpose can be easily altered. It can be easily eliminated.

Legislative Strategies and Considerations

The question of where to house the collaborative often dominates debate among policymakers, and its auspices can strongly affect organization’s ability to succeed. Factors that contribute to the success of collaboratives, regardless of the organizational home, can help leaders determine the best location.

- Credibility—the location that will enhance the collaborative’s reliability and integrity.
- Legitimacy—where the collaborative will be sanctioned by decision makers and have adequate authority or ability to influence use of resources.
- Neutrality—auspice that has adequate independence and will not be unduly influenced by any particular group’s interests or agenda.
- Leadership—where there are strong leaders who can rally support for collaboration and results and who are respected by a wide range of stakeholders.
- Capacity—adequate resources or ability to develop resources to accomplish its purposes.

Questions to Consider

- Do we need a new organization to accomplish the results we want?
 - Can the desired results be accomplished informally?
 - Can the desired results be accomplished within an existing organization?
- What are the pros and cons of locating the collaborative within state government, within a particular agency, or outside government?
- Does the organization's standing provide adequate autonomy and authority to accomplish desired results, including the decisions of individual state agencies and communities?
- Does the collaborative's standing allow it to hold other organizations accountable for improving results and government performance?
- Does the collaborative's standing promote adequate connections with various interest groups, including public agency leaders, community stakeholders, advocates and people who use services?

Conclusion

Organizational entities that focus multiple agencies, programs, and constituencies on common results have an essential role in human service organization. Whether they are informal workgroups or statutory agencies, collaboratives provide a promising mechanism for joint problem-solving, strategy development, and capacity building.

Collaboratives are an evolving and quickly growing approach to human service organization. Many come and go. Some have immeasurable impact while others are limited to good intentions. They offer great promise for informing, coordinating and improving state agencies and policies. Although states are learning informally from their experiences, intentional study will be required to take full advantage of the potential of state collaboratives.

State collaboratives are at particular risk of elimination during tight budget times. Often, their accomplishments and challenges are not clear to those who are not directly involved. Their value can be especially difficult for legislators to judge. Lawmakers considering the creation or continuation of state level collaboratives will want to consider the key factors outlined here. Policymakers also will benefit from the opinions of constituency groups, service consumers, frontline workers and their supervisors. They will want to consider whether expectations are matched by resources and capacity. At the same time, much can be accomplished without huge expenditures. And legislators are well-positioned to contribute the leadership that is essential for achieving better result