INVESTING
in
INNOVATION

**reflections on the family economic success–
early childhood education pilots**

CHILDREN GROW UP in the context of their families and communities. Yet services for children in low-income families often overlook the financial, emotional and practical struggles of their parents — factors that directly affect children's well-being.

Like a growing number of funders over the past decade, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has been investing in approaches that create opportunities for whole families together, build knowledge about how to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and inform thinking about an investment strategy focused on rapid learning and prototyping. As part of this effort, the Foundation set out to test a hypothesis: Children would grow up with brighter futures in more stable families with integrated services that help parents increase earnings and manage finances while providing high-quality learning for their young children — helping parents reduce stress and become advocates for their needs.

To test this concept of integrated two-generation services, the Foundation invested in four pilots known as Family Economic Success — Early Childhood Education (FES-ECE). At the same time, the Foundation invested in a developmental evaluation.

The Foundation began this work in 2009, building on research and the past experiences of early two-generation approaches. Research on early childhood development, family economics and family well-being informed the Foundation's approach to FES-ECE. The framework was purposely flexible to see how community-based organizations would put the three pillars of family economic success, parent engagement and capacity building and high-quality

early childhood care and education into practice. Funding supported time for learning, framing the approach, site selection, implementation, evaluation and capacity building in the field. Program funding began in 2013 and the evaluation examined the experience of the sites from 2014–16. The sites continue their work in the two-generation field today.

The FES-ECE investment yielded promising early results and strengthened sites that continue to influence practice and policy. But the Foundation learned it had underestimated what it would take for sites to be ready to integrate services in terms of culture, data, staffing and other key aspects of their work, and that entering

with such a flexible framework ultimately kept the Foundation from being able to measure consistent family outcomes across sites during the period of the FES-ECE investment.

This brief, therefore, wrestles with a central tension that it cannot completely resolve. In many ways, FES-ECE is providing an enduring contribution about technical assistance, data infrastructure and lessons about staffing and culture that continues to pay dividends for the programs involved and the larger field. On the other hand, the flexible approach that led to those insights made it difficult not only to document lasting change for families, but also to discern even in hindsight exactly what length of time, amount of money and type of initiative design would have produced that change.

FES-ECE has strengthened Casey's belief in the promise of two-generation approaches to build a brighter future for children and their families, and the Foundation continues to invest in two-generation programs, research and policy and data development on a broad scale. In that spirit, this brief shares reflections from the FES-ECE journey in the hope that other funders will build on the lessons the Foundation learned in its early work. While investing in two populations for holistic gains carries special complications and risks, the potential rewards are great and worth deliberate pursuit.

Lessons From the FES-ECE Pilots
ARE DOCUMENTED IN A VARIETY OF PRODUCTS, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

An Evaluation of Family Economic Success — Early Childhood Education: Findings from a Two-Generation Approach Demonstration. *James Bell Associates (Brief to be published in 2018 at www.aecf.org.)*

Advancing Two-Generation Approaches: Funding to Help Families Succeed. *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Advancing Two-Generation Approaches: Developing an Infrastructure to Address Parent and Child Needs Together. *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Advancing Two-Generation Approaches: Integrating Data to Support Families. *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Strengthening the Foundation: Strategic Evidence Building for Two-Generation Approaches. *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Engaging Parents, Developing Leaders: A Self-Assessment and Planning Tool for Nonprofits and Schools. *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

For more information on Casey's two-generation investments and evaluation, contact Rosa Maria Castaneda or T'Pring Westbrook at webmail@aecf.org.

THE APPEAL

and

CHALLENGES

of a two-generation approach

One-third to one-half of children whose families live in poverty for a substantial part of their childhood will experience poverty as adults.[1] Research has found that a few thousand dollars in additional family income during a child's early years can make a difference in academic achievement over the course of a child's life.[2] Parental educational attainment and peer support also have been identified as factors that help move families beyond poverty.[3] Likewise, investment in early education has been found to move children toward better economic outcomes as adults.[4] Two-generation approaches build on these findings with the goal of interrupting the cycle of poverty by investing in the development of children and their parents in an integrated way.

The Foundation's two-generation approach is grounded in research on families, intergenerational poverty, early childhood development and family economics. Approaches implemented and evaluated in the 1980s and 1990s shaped Casey's thinking about two-generation work.[5] This body of evidence indicated the importance of strong implementation, high-quality early childhood education programs and well-integrated, seamless services that address the needs of children and parents simultaneously.[6]

Casey's FES-ECE approach was based on three pillars: (1) family economic success strategies; (2) parent capacity building to help parents build parenting skills and manage stress in their daily lives; and (3) early care and education, as illustrated in Exhibit 1. Specifically, the Foundation's two-generation theory was: *When families have access to high-quality early education and resources for children, assistance to strengthen parents' caregiving skills and tools to improve their economic standing, the outcomes for families and children will improve.* Furthermore, Casey wanted the two-generation approach to address issues that contributed to intergenerational poverty, such as toxic stress and racial inequity. The Foundation outlined a vision that would connect families to one another, support caregiver well-being, interact with systems that were responsive to family needs and serve both children and their parents in an intentionally coordinated and simultaneous way. While research theories supported this idea, the Foundation knew from past evaluations and work in service integration that it would be difficult to operationalize.

A major challenge of developing the Foundation's vision for FES-ECE was that it involved changes at multiple levels, from families to systems. Casey started with the belief that a two-generation approach to service delivery should meet families where they are and respond to their individual needs. This involves a "no wrong door" policy (where families engage in services through a variety of existing community-based programs) and having families define their own goals, which can vary widely from one family to the next. In general, shifting to a family-centered service delivery structure is a significant cultural change for organizations and their partners, and also a challenge for evaluators. For example, data systems typically track adult or child progress, but they rarely capture family-level outcomes or link parents and children. Organizations engaging in this type of two-generation work need an integrated and seamless service delivery system for families. This requires capacity at the organizational level, strong community partners and a funding and policy environment that supports family-level reporting, tracking and service delivery.

EXHIBIT 1 / Casey's Approach to the FES-ECE Two-Generation Pilots

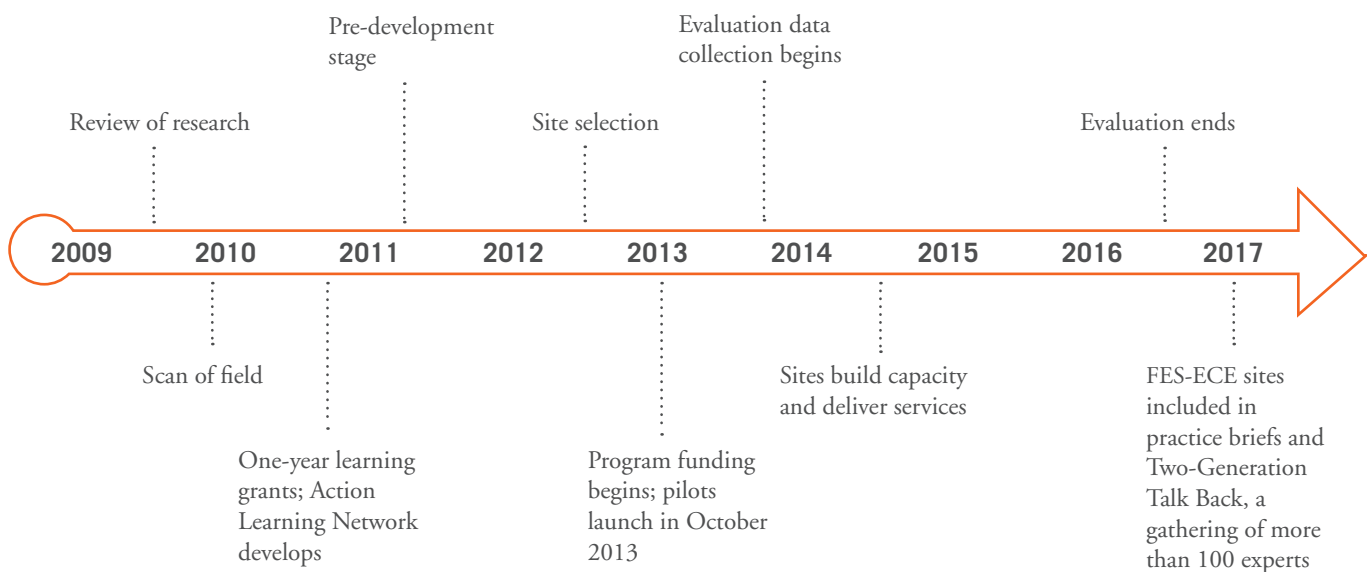| FAMILY ECONOMIC SUCCESS STRATEGIES	CAPACITY BUILDING FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS	EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION AND EARLY GRADES
• Workforce and career development • Access to income and work support benefits • Financial coaching and education; access to financial products	• Strengthening parents' executive function skills • Building confidence and increasing their power • Comprehensive resources for families	• High-quality early education programs (center based or home based) • Successful transition to elementary school • Quality elementary school experiences • Effective teaching • Trusting relationships with parents

the foundation's

INVESTMENT

The Foundation made a substantial commitment to advance the state of the two-generation field with FES-ECE — about $5 million total over the life of the investment in direct support for the sites, technical assistance, support of the peer network, evaluation and data support and infrastructure. FES-ECE began on the heels of the Great Recession, when family needs were significant, and many service providers were trying to do more with less. Casey staff spent time learning from and understanding the research and lessons of past and current two-generation programs, funded by the Foundation and a variety of other sources, including Ascend at the Aspen Institute, the

W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Casey colleagues with expertise in early child development. The Foundation convened a seven-member evaluation advisory group to help shape the approach and consider what research questions could be answered in a three-year project. The advisory group contributed expertise in early childhood development, family income, adult employment and education, poverty and evaluation to the project.

FES-ECE was ambitious — overly ambitious, in hindsight. Casey strove to frame a two-generation approach, support innovation at the site level and build the evidence for a two-generation approach

in a short period of time (see Exhibit 2). Its investment included programmatic funding, technical assistance, peer-to-peer exchanges and site visits and an independent evaluation. Casey took a significant risk investing in the development of an approach and supporting four diverse sites as they learned and innovated.

EXHIBIT 2 / FES-ECE Timeline

IMPLEMENTING

and

EVALUATING

a two-generation approach

This section provides an overview of the components of the Foundation's investment in FES-ECE.

Site Selection

Staff and consultants visited numerous programs and consulted with two-generation program[7] experts to identify potential sites. Casey engaged in a diligent, nine-month site selection process and considered eight potential sites for participation in FES-ECE. The team examined numerous aspects of each organization, including their existing networks and ability to leverage public funding. Key site selection criteria included:

• Ability to serve at least 100 families within the time period.

• Services for both children and parents. All programs served children directly through their Early Head Start or Head Start program and were working with parents. However, the adult services varied by site and the level of integration.

• A comprehensive and intensive service delivery approach. Each site had a comprehensive service approach, but these approaches were at varying levels of maturity and sites had different two-generation goals.

• Partnerships or networks that would support a site's ability to expand. All sites relied on community partners (often focused on employment or higher education) to deliver their two-generation program and their Head Start program provided a platform for expansion.

• Experience with data tracking and data systems. The sites tracked case management and individual program performance, yet data were not tracked in a way that was necessary to measure how well whole families were doing.

Four organizations were ultimately selected as FES-ECE sites in 2013 (see Exhibit 3). All the FES-ECE sites had experience working in their community, a strong Head Start or Early Head Start program and a desire to incorporate a two-generation approach into their business model. They were also distinctly different from each other. The sites differed in how they approached community partners, the scope of their two-generation work and the depth of their family economic success strategies. Exhibit 3 and the sidebars in this document provide a brief overview of each site.

Site-Level Staffing

Each FES-ECE site had designated two-generation coordinators

EXHIBIT 3 / A Snapshot of the FES-ECE Sites

SITE NAME/LOCATION	COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS	OVERVIEW OF APPROACH
Atlanta partnership, Atlanta, Georgia	A predominantly African-American community.	This partnership between Educare Atlanta and the Center for Working Families Inc. supported family success by emphasizing workforce development, asset building, high-quality early child care and learning and family engagement for families with a child in Head Start or Early Head Start and living in the Neighborhood Planning Unit-V (NPU-V).
Garrett County Community Action Committee, Maryland	A rural community with primarily white families. This program had more married participants than other programs.	All families with a child in Early Head Start or Head Start could participate in integrated services that promoted economic self-sufficiency, parenting and supporting children's early education goals.
Educational Alliance, New York City	Immigrant and nonnative English speaking families (primarily Asian and Hispanic) living in lower Manhattan. This program had more nonnative English speakers than other programs.	The College Access and Success Program is offered to parents of children enrolled in Early Head Start and Head Start to advance parents' education and ultimately improve the family's financial stability.
Community Action Project of Tulsa County (CAP Tulsa), Oklahoma	A mix of African-American, white and Latino families.	The Career Advance program pairs early childhood education for children with a career pathway training in health care for parents. CAP Tulsa strives to help families work toward a secure future while providing support to prepare young children for success in school.

and staff, with differing titles. For example, in Atlanta, staff were called support specialist + pathway coaches; in New York, they were family advocates; and in Garrett County, they were family support coordinators. These titles evolved to reflect the family-oriented role of two-generation staff. Changing the titles and staff responsibilities was an important step in breaking down service delivery silos and orienting staff to work with whole families, not just children or parents. FES-ECE sites provided training to manage staff expectations and gain buy-in for a two-generation approach.

Labor was the most significant expense for all the FES-ECE sites,

and Foundation funds were often used to support two-generation staff positions and training. Over the course of the investment, it became clear that three distinct roles were important to the implementation of FES-ECE:

1 | a two-generation project coordinator tasked with building and strengthening local partnerships, overseeing the integration of services and overall two-generation program implementation;

2 | a grant coordinator responsible for monitoring measurable targets and benchmarks and reporting to the Foundation; and

3 | a data coordinator who oversees data sharing (between partners and with the Foundation), understands how data are used to monitor program

performance and is a key point of contact for the evaluation team.

Staff turnover was an issue for the FES-ECE sites. Some turnover is inevitable (when staff move or pursue other opportunities) and some is positive, as when staff are promoted or if they feel "lack of fit" with the two-generation program. However, changes in staff can slow services for families and continuity for key processes.

FES-ECE Two-Generation Services, Families and Partners

Since FES-ECE encouraged innovation, each site established different goals for its two-generation approach. The family economic success pillar, for example, included a range of services such as financial literacy and coaching, job readiness and placement, adult education and higher education services for

parents. The parent engagement pillar included parent training, home visiting and parent leadership efforts, and the final pillar sought to deliver high-quality early childhood education. Each site had different expectations about how to engage families, particularly parents, in these activities. For example, one of Educational Alliance's goals was that 50 percent of parents will use one family economic success service, while the Atlanta partnership wanted 95 percent of parents to use at least two family economic success services. Garrett County staff strove for a 20-percent increase in the number of parents accessing college or GED courses (from 2014–15).

Other two-generation program goals focused on how the organization worked with families. Atlanta wanted to engage 85 percent of parents in "bundled

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EXHIBIT 4 / Overview of Characteristics of Staff and Families Served by FES-ECE Sites[8]

The race, ethnicity and gender of the staff typically reflected that of the families being served.

All families had at least one child in Early Head Start or Head Start.

Most parents were mothers, although some fathers and couples participated. The parents' age, employment status, educational attainment and marital status varied by site.

ATLANTA, GA

Two longstanding service providers (Educare, a Head Start provider, and the Center for Working Families Inc., an adult employment service provider) partnered to offer Head Start/Early Head Start, parent engagement activities, coaching by staff from both agencies bundled together, career coaching, supports for parents of children transitioning from Head Start to kindergarten, financial classes, job readiness and referrals to technical schools and colleges. Support from the Foundation facilitated this partnership, which engaged in a two-generation approach from its inception. The first two years of the Foundation's investment focused on establishing and cultivating the partnership. One of the first coordinated activities was to establish "bundled meetings" where families met with staff from both agencies to assess needs and set goals. The partners also worked to offer services for parents at a time and location that fit with their child care arrangements and implemented a new, shared data system to provide information on families to staff at each agency as part of their grant-funded work.

meetings," which included staff from both the parent- and child-serving agencies meeting together with the family. CAP Tulsa, the most experienced two-generation site, was working to see 50 percent of families demonstrate both child and parent progress.

Exhibits 4 and 6 provide an overview of the demographics of the families who engaged in services at the FES-ECE sites.

Partnerships were another critical element of FES-ECE, and each site engaged partners in a different way. FES-ECE provided an opportunity for sites to strengthen or establish partnerships. For example, Atlanta's partnership between Educare Atlanta and the Center for Working Families Inc. was established in response to FES-ECE, while Educational Alliance in New York City began working with the City University of New York's Borough of Manhattan Community College two years before FES-ECE was funded. CAP Tulsa also partnered with a local community college to offer health care training classes. The site scheduled the classes to coincide with the children's Head Start schedule. The level of integration between partners is

best described along a continuum (see Exhibit 5). Although most sites were working toward a coordinated community response to intergenerational poverty, they began FES-ECE at various places on the continuum. For example, even though the organizations in the Atlanta partnership had communicated prior to FES-ECE, they more actively coordinated and collaborated during FES-ECE. Even within a site, relationships with partners may have been at different places along the continuum.

Training and Technical Assistance

Training and technical assistance (TA) were essential to building site capacity. For example, the Foundation provided proactive, group capacity-building activities to all the FES-ECE sites. TA addressed data systems, linking child and adult data sets; establishing and measuring family outcomes; developing partnerships; delivering career counseling, mental health assessments and resources and financial coaching to families; and building social capital. Additional customized TA was delivered one on one, based on site-specific needs. TA was delivered virtually (through webinars, video

sessions and toolkits) and in person.

FES-ECE site leaders also participated in peer learning to share concrete approaches and strategies. They were members of the Action Learning Network (ALN), sponsored by Casey and offered through the Aspen Institute's Community Strategies Group. ALN included regular convenings of teams from every FES-ECE site to focus on challenges and opportunities in the sites' two-generation efforts, emerging two-generation innovations and trends and data tracking and measurement. The ALN included action planning and goal setting used to assess progress. The network shared information through peer-to-peer exchanges, such as site visits, peer-advising webinars and virtual exchanges, as well as an online platform. Sites
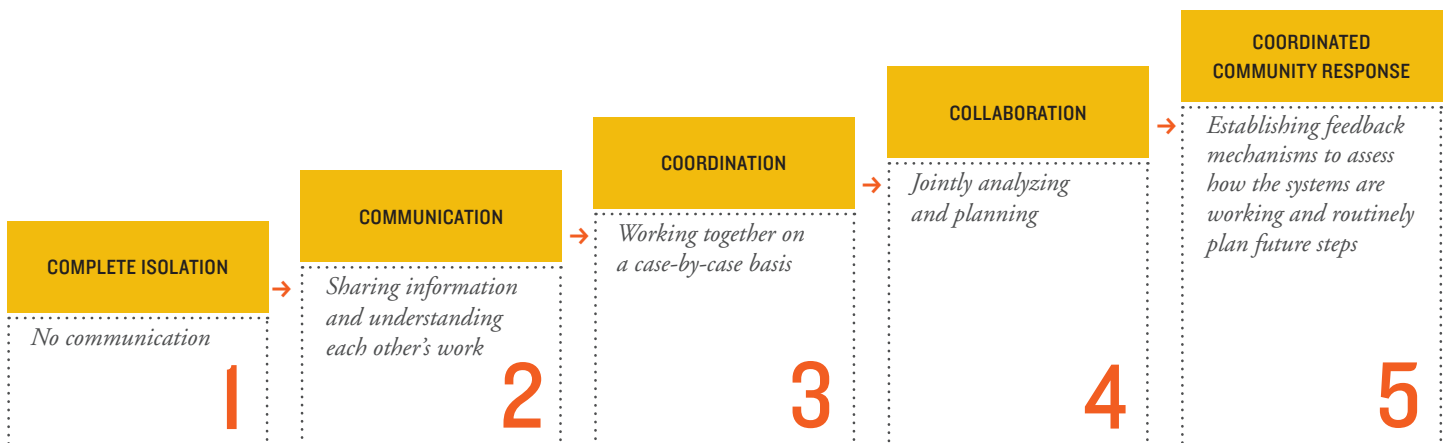
reported finding the peer-to-peer exchanges particularly valuable for sharing ideas and support.

The FES-ECE Evaluation

Casey funded a process study and descriptive outcome study to answer the Foundation's questions about what it takes to do two-generation work and to see how families involved in family-focused services at FES-ECE sites participated in services and changed over time. Specifically, the process evaluation looked at operational issues such as management structure, interagency relationships, costs, staffing, training and data capacity. The outcome evaluation examined how participant outcomes changed over time and how those changes correlated with their participation. An overview of the key findings is

GARRETT COUNTY, MD

In 2008, GCCAC (also referred to as Garrett County), engaged in a five-year, comprehensive strategic planning process to integrate services and help families become self-sufficient. This plan was the foundation of Garrett County's two-generation approach and involved structural changes at the organizational level, such as a new management information system, revised job descriptions, restructuring and changes in how families were assessed and served. Garrett County is a rural community with few social service providers. The two-generation approach included partnerships with five agencies to offer Early Head Start/Head Start, coaching to help families establish and achieve their goals, financial education workshops, budgeting sessions, one-on-one financial coaching, child care (including early care and summer programming), parent meetings, teacher home visits and social and parent support activities. Throughout the funding period, the agency worked to formally strengthen its partnerships through memorandums of understanding (MOUs) that allowed data sharing across agencies. A goal of the MOUs was to decrease redundancy for families and give two-generation staff access to more complete information about the family. Foundation funding supported essential two-generation staff positions and parent engagement in adult education.

EXHIBIT 5 / Integration Continuum[9]

1 COMPLETE ISOLATION	2 COMMUNICATION	3 COORDINATION	4 COLLABORATION	5 COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE
No communication	*Sharing information and understanding each other's work*	*Working together on a case-by-case basis*	*Jointly analyzing and planning*	*Establishing feedback mechanisms to assess how the systems are working and routinely plan future steps*

TULSA, OK

CAP Tulsa launched its two-generation approach, CareerAdvance, in 2009. The program offered health care career training, college coursework and trainings, career coaching, incentives to reduce the financial burden of entering school, early care and education and Head Start. The Foundation provided programmatic support for CareerAdvance which was incorporated into the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG), administered by the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 2010. As part of HPOG, CAP Tulsa is part of a study to determine how these training opportunities help participants to improve their skills and find better jobs. CareerAdvance has federal funding to continue through 2020.

presented in Exhibit 6; for more detail, please see the independent evaluation report.[10]

The Foundation faced the challenge of simultaneously supporting innovation and conducting an evaluation in a complex operating environment. Casey was particularly interested in learning whether two-generation programs can deliver a coordinated, seamless strategy for whole families, or whether they are simply "two-track" programs (separate sets of child and adult services) offered in the same setting. Another complication was the innovative nature of the approach, which involved making tweaks and modifications to service delivery as insights were gained.

The developmental evaluation sought to answer questions about the feasibility of an integrated two-generation approach to service delivery and how this approach might improve family financial stability and children meeting developmental milestones. A central goal was to examine programmatic challenges, lessons learned and promising practices developed in diverse communities. The evaluation was part of a broader effort by Casey to invest in building evidence around

two-generation approaches, which ultimately might provide data and information that would support or refute the validity of the approach.[11] Originally, the Foundation included all four sites in its evaluation, but soon afterward, CAP Tulsa was selected for a federal impact evaluation, and all parties agreed it was best for Tulsa not to be included in the more formative Casey evaluation. (See evaluation findings for CAP Tulsa on page 15.)

The evaluators conducted in-person interviews, focus groups and annual site visits from 2013 to 2016 to gather information for the case studies, and they made follow-up phone calls to directors and senior staff to clarify information gathered through site visits. The descriptive outcomes evaluation used data collected through the sites' data systems between June 2014 and June 2016. The evaluation was descriptive since there was no control group to which the program participants could be compared. The Foundation provided evaluation and data systems technical assistance, and many of the sites ultimately used the Foundation's grant funds for data systems development or enhancement.

EXHIBIT 6 / FES-ECE Evaluation Findings

About the families

- Each FES-ECE site engaged 100 to 250 families in two-generation services between 2014 and 2016.

- Thirteen to 20 percent of participating families in Atlanta, New York and Garrett County had more than one child enrolled in Early Head Start or Head Start.

- FES-ECE engaged a diverse group of parents.

  – Parents in Garrett County tended to be younger and were more likely to be married than those in other sites.

  – More than 90 percent of the families in Atlanta were single-parent families.

  – The majority of parents in Atlanta (60 percent) and Garrett County (58 percent) were employed.

  – In New York, 39 percent of parents spoke English as their primary language and one-third did not have a high school degree or equivalency, which was significantly higher than the rate in Atlanta or Garrett County.

- Families identified a variety of different needs, and different common needs surfaced in each site: building assets in Garrett County, amassing savings in Atlanta and increasing parent earnings in New York City.

About their participation

- Having at least one parent employed predicted overall service receipt in New York and Atlanta, although the opposite was true in Garrett County.

- Parents participated in a variety of services, and the most frequently attended services varied by site.

  – Parents typically attended two to three coaching sessions, which could address employment, education, financial or other issues.

  – Eighty-eight percent of parents participated in parent support services in Atlanta.

  – Sixty-eight percent of parents participated in financial services in New York City, and 91 percent of parents participated in coaching sessions in Garrett County.

About their progress

- Most children (86 percent in Garrett County, 71 percent in Atlanta and 57 percent in New York) scored at or above all domains in the child assessment in the fall of 2015, indicating they were achieving appropriate educational and developmental milestones.

- In Garrett County and Atlanta, where data were available at two points in time, families demonstrated improvement across most family well-being measures.

  – In Garrett County (using the Crisis to Thrive Assessment), families' scores improved in nine of the 14 areas measured.

  – In Atlanta (using the Family Bridge Assessment), families showed improvement in all 10 areas that were measured. Given the nature of the study, however, these improvements cannot be solely attributed to participation in two-generation services.

- Families in each site reported gains in areas identified as important to each two-generation program:

  – Atlanta families reported decreased debts and increased savings.

  – Nearly half of the New York City families in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes gained a level in ESOL.

  – Garrett County families saw greater access to transportation.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Foundation learned eight key lessons from its FES-ECE experience that can help inform future two-generation investments:

1 | While a loose framework can produce lessons and innovation, achieving measurable child and family outcomes across a two-generation project requires a well-developed theory of change to address how the combination of family economic resources, parent capacity building and early childhood education services can decrease intergenerational poverty and improve outcomes for children over time.

2 | Funders must calibrate their expectations with the time and resources invested in a two-generation approach to serving families, recognizing that organizational capacity must be built before benefits to families can be measured.

3 | The Foundation invested time conducting site visits and selected some of the strongest two-generation programs operating at that time to be part of FES-ECE. As two-generation programs evolve, however, funders need to continuously assess an organization's readiness to implement and evaluate various phases of a two-generation approach.

4 | Funders should not embark on a two-generation approach without listening to the families who will be served and understanding how they identify their own needs in the places and contexts where they live. Funders should plan on incorporating what they learn into initiative design and measurement. They should continue such listening throughout their investments and use the feedback, along with feedback gathered from sites and other stakeholders, to refine their approaches.

5 | A formal, systematic, team-based peer-learning community among pilot sites is particularly instrumental to drive innovation in two-generation strategies. The approach used in FES-ECE accelerated and strengthened simultaneous changes in process, structure and culture.

6 | Two-generation work requires changes to systems and policies, along with organizational changes needed to serve parents and children in a coordinated way.

7 | Program operators must have the capacity to collect and use integrated family data for program improvement. An additional investment was necessary to build site-level capacity and install or enhance data systems.

8 | Evaluators should engage two-generation sites as partners in a developmental evaluation to gain buy-in and maximize learning.

These lessons emerged from the experience of Casey Foundation programmatic and evaluation staff and consultants involved in FES-ECE.

Lesson 1: Ensure Clarity on Indicators and Performance Measures

Casey's overarching hypothesis was that *when families have access to high-quality early education and resources for children, assistance to engage and strengthen parents' caregiving skills and tools to improve their economic standing, the outcomes for families and children will improve.* This hypothesis was translated into three pillars that guided the Foundation's two-generation approach (see Exhibit 1). Although these pillars provided a useful framework, they did not constitute a detailed theory of change. The Foundation's reliance on a broad framework was intentional and promoted learning about development of a robust theory of change by testing the assumptions in the two-generation hypothesis and three pillars. But narrowing the variables within that framework would have helped the Foundation

more precisely determine what it could learn during the investment. A much more detailed theory of change would have been required to achieve and measure child outcomes across the project within its desired timeframe.

A theory of change offers a picture of the destination and what to look for on the journey to ensure innovative programs are on the right path.[12] While the ultimate destination was clear (improving outcomes for families and children), FES-ECE did not sufficiently map out the short-term outcomes that could be expected along the way. The project should have better supported clarity and alignment on parent and child indicators and performance measures linked to improved outcomes. Moreover, more attention could have been paid to consistently strengthen and test each site's theory of change over the course of the investment to avoid tension between short- and long-term goals. For example, increasing household income in the short term may be at odds with helping parents build skills (e.g., by returning to school) that will ultimately increase their earnings over time.

Although innovation must leave room for uncertainty and chance, there is a balance to strike — especially for evaluation purposes. The development of a detailed theory of change would have refined the Foundation's

thinking about what could be accomplished in the timeframe and would have provided sites with a more consistent road map. It is necessary for funders to discuss and specify expected outcomes at the beginning and to invest at the scale necessary to realize those outcomes.

Lesson 2: Match Expectations to the Time Horizon

FES-ECE included an intentionally modest programmatic investment — with the goal of leveraging existing funding sources (such as Head Start) so the approach could be sustained or replicated — as well as a developmental evaluation. The Foundation had hoped this comprehensive investment in implementation and evaluation would demonstrate how families and children would benefit from receiving seamless, simultaneous services. Three years, however, was not enough time to see significant changes in earned income across families, for example, and the developmental nature of the evaluation focused more on process than family outcomes. FES-ECE did generate valuable information on the feasibility of the framework, indicating sites need a lot of capacity (in staff and data systems) to engage in this complex work.

The Foundation underestimated the complexity of what sites would need to implement a fully integrated two-generation approach to serving families and

overestimated their initial capacity. Sites had to build the capacity of their staff, embrace organizational change and figure out how to infuse Casey's three pillars into their daily operations. Although the sites had strong early childhood services and experience delivering services to parents, some had to integrate services or develop new program components to meet the needs of families (such as classes on financial goal setting, employment supports, mental health services and parent engagement). A better appreciation of what it would take to meet those needs could have helped the Foundation develop more realistic expectations for what it could measure and the overall time horizon or make different decisions about how long the project might take.

Lesson 3: Check Site Readiness Not Just at the Start, but Along the Way

Starting in 2009, Casey staff focused first on gathering the best available research to prepare for FES-ECE. The Foundation assessed organizational readiness and, in 2012 and 2013, carefully selected sites that were early adopters of a two-generation approach. Nevertheless, the Foundation learned that because of the significant culture change associated with doing two-generation work, readiness must be assessed from multiple perspectives and over time. While

the Foundation's selection criteria made sense, more emphasis should have been placed on the maturity of the comprehensive and intensive service delivery approach, the sites' experience with data systems and a continuous improvement process.

Casey learned that FES-ECE sites had to continually assess and build their capacity, (re)evaluate partnerships and consider how they collected, managed and used data to truly be "ready" to fully engage and sustain work in the three pillars. Although willingness and experience with parallel parent and child services were important criteria for beginning the pilots, true readiness required greater integration. Staff turnover also affected ongoing readiness to progress with implementation and evaluation. Ultimately, sites are continually working to create and sustain community partnerships, collect and analyze two-generation data in a sophisticated way and adjust staffing arrangements in response to the challenges of the work.

Lesson 4: Listen to Families and Use What You Hear

The Foundation's readiness assessment and design of FES-ECE was largely missing a critical perspective: that of the families either involved or likely to become involved with the local programs. While the sites knew their local constituents well, Casey missed an important opportunity to listen directly to families describe their own strengths, needs and barriers and to use that information to design not only FES-ECE and its outcome and indicator targets, but broader two-generation investment approaches. Although a few sites had elements of parent engagement, more intentional mechanisms such as holding parent panels in each location to surface parents' voices and establishing feedback loops with families would have strengthened both the pilots and the evaluation. The pilots also would have benefited from stronger feedback loops with site staff and other stakeholders. Understanding the family landscape also would have helped the Foundation refine its planning for how long the investment might take and the resources it needed to achieve clearly defined results.

Lesson 5: Invest in a Formal, Team-Based Learning Approach

The peer-learning approach used in FES-ECE is consistently described as one of the most valuable aspects of the initiative experience by sites and continues to have lasting influence for the sites and for the field. The Action Learning Network methodology developed by a grantee, Aspen Community Strategies Group, incorporated in-person and virtual progress check-ins, structured peer advising on special topics, six-month action planning with built-in accountability, an annual conference and site visits. Sites could also apply for modest funds to acquire special expertise or external capacity relevant to their goals. The process made the best use of peers as resources for learning and problem-solving in an environment that necessitated continuous redesign, whether it was engaging a new community partner to expand adult education and workforce offerings, installing procedures to assess and address parent mental health needs or revising the organization's intake and case management processes.

Each site brought between three and eight staff representing different levels of the organization to convenings. Their participation facilitated within-site team building along with cross-site exchange on the practical aspects of doing things in a new way — and made this way of working systemic and institutional. The investment would have benefited from more peer learning on data development, including opportunities for data experts to interact and collaborate with program staff and with the FES-ECE data consulting team. Elements of the peer-learning approach, with adaptations, have been replicated with several other two-generation pilot cohorts, including the federal Rural IMPACT initiative, the Kellogg

EXHIBIT 7 / Layers of Complexity

Foundation's STEPS project and the Educare Acceleration Grants project funded by the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, among others.

Lesson 6: Consider the Role of Systems and Policies

Implementing and evaluating two-generation work requires consideration of many layers in addition to the diverse needs of families (see Exhibit 7). The Foundation learned important lessons about the various layers of complexity that influenced FES-ECE, especially those at the system and policy levels.

A two-generation family approach to services does not fit well when policies and related funding streams are designated solely for parents or children. At one site, for example, identifying funding for two-generation leadership positions was challenging because existing grants did not allow for that cost. Policies and funding restrictions also complicated payments for parents to participate in vocational programs. In some cases, FES-ECE staff members leveraged relationships with government offices to secure additional funding, and in other cases, the Foundation connected sites with additional resources to help overcome policy and funding silos. Making meaningful changes at the policy level is a large-scale effort that extends beyond site-specific initiatives and requires a longer time horizon.

At the same time, sites discovered substantial flexibility and the ability to innovate within and across policy silos. In some cases, rules were assumed that turned out to be mere status quo, surprising both the sites and regional and state policy leaders. Sites pooled, blended and braided program resources in exemplary ways, many of which have proved both instructive and sustainable.

The Foundation's initial thinking about two-generation work assumed that site operations and funding would be somewhat static, but this proved not to be true. A different approach, starting small and focusing on family priorities, may have been a better starting place from which to build instead of embracing all the layers described in Exhibit 7 at once.

Lesson 7: Build Data Capacity to Support Program Operations

Data systems were an important structural piece of the FES-ECE initiative. To support a two-generation approach, data systems (and the processes they support) had to be integrated to measure family-level outcomes. The Foundation learned that sites had difficulty collecting whole-family data, which includes parent measures (such as educational attainment or participation in parenting classes), child measures (such as cognitive development or school readiness) and family measures (financial security or well-being). The Foundation learned that these data were often siloed between programs or organizations, making it difficult to connect parents, children and siblings within existing systems.

Data systems must be user friendly and provide information that is useful to the program. Frontline staff operating in a two-generation environment must have data on both children and parents when they meet to discuss how families are doing. Staff who work with adults, therefore, must have access to data on their children to ensure that the program is addressing the needs of the family as a whole. The Foundation overestimated the capacity of the sites to capture and provide good data for program management. Casey funds were invested in data systems and to

provide training and technical assistance to help staff improve the quality of their data.

Lesson 8: Engage Sites as Evaluation Partners

FES-ECE set out to build knowledge about implementing a two-generation approach and the families served by two-generation programming with a developmental evaluation. While much was learned through the evaluation, the process was challenged by many of the issues addressed in this section, including the timeline, readiness of the sites to implement a two-generation approach and the sites' capacity to collect quality data. In hindsight, the evaluation would have benefited from deeper, continuous engagement of sites in the evaluation process.

The Foundation learned many things about the importance of the relationship between evaluators and sites:

• Evaluators need to invest time working with sites to make the purpose of the evaluation clear and explain what they are measuring and why. Some data may be used to help program operators manage the program (performance data) and other data may be deemed necessary to answer research questions (evaluation data). This process can help align the site's expectations with what questions the evaluation can answer.

• The purpose of the data being collected must be clearly explained to the sites to build their support and buy-in. When staff buy in to the evaluation, they are more likely to deliver higher-quality data, which will benefit the evaluation over time.

• In a developmental evaluation, data and findings need to be continuously shared to help sites engage in the evaluation process. The evaluator may need to translate evaluation findings for practice so programs can use short-term outcome data to adapt, modify and translate their approach.

• Evaluators should create clear mechanisms and expectations for collecting and using data.

• The Foundation should establish points when key decisions and midcourse corrections can be made. When the site reaches one of these points, the funder can review the available data, discuss what is working (or not) and determine whether to continue or make changes. It is important for funders to take the time to reflect on the data, talk with sites and consider how best to respond to the complex operating environment in which two-generation programs exist.

RECOMMENDATIONS

for future investments

Invest in a Longer Timeline

Foundation staff and consultants involved in FES-ECE recommend a six- to eight-year investment for a project of this scale and complexity. This type of two-generation approach involves organizational change, including changing job titles and descriptions, rethinking organizational structure, considering policy and funding silos and redesigning how success is measured. The approach needs to be integrated into the organization's mission and the way they work with families and community partners. These are significant organizational changes that take time.

Two-generation programs involve innovation, which takes time to develop and needs to be staged. A structured implementation strategy could be a good model to move a site through planning and early implementation phases with clear check-in points and indicators to guide program development. Like FES-ECE, future two-generation projects should start with a planning phase. The duration of this phase will depend on the site's experience and capacity and could last up to two years. It is recommended that the program start small and demonstrate success before moving on to early implementation. A key component of this phase is to agree on a theory of change to guide the work.

Once the pilot begins, the funder and the site would look for indicators that things are moving in the right direction and use data to make program improvements. Site leadership and the funder should designate points when they can stop and assess progress against key indicators. If things are progressing as expected, the site would advance into an early implementation phase. This would demonstrate the integration of services and ability of a site to generate and gather quality data and include a formative evaluation. The evaluation also needs time to ensure data collection processes are working, generate findings and inform program improvements. Finally, with continued, demonstrated progress that aligns with the theory of change, the site would advance into full implementation and a more rigorous evaluation. Ongoing investment is needed to continue to test and evaluate innovative two-generation programs.

Establish a Data-Driven Mindset

To appropriately evolve and advance two-generation approaches, funders and sites need to embrace the idea of using data to make decisions. For this to be effective, the data must be of high quality and of value to the organization. Program operators and funders can use quality data to monitor program operations and periodically reflect on the theory of change. If indicators are not moving in the expected direction, funders may have to help the site redirect their efforts.

Sharing data across agencies or relying on continuous feedback cycles to make program decisions may be new for program operators. Funders need to support sites as they develop and implement data systems that track family-level indicators and provide ongoing training, coaching and technical assistance to help sites measure their progress. Funders also need to work with sites and evaluators to identify metrics that can be collected for performance management. The program has to value the data being collected and understand how the measures fit with its theory of change.

Invest in Assessing Readiness

Funders and program operators need to invest time and resources to assess organizational readiness for implementation and evaluation before and throughout the two-generation program. Representatives knowledgeable about family economic security, early childhood programming and evaluation should jointly assess organizational readiness not only as part of the site selection process, but also at identified points during the planning and implementation phases as sites prepare to evolve their services into a two-generation approach. Two-generation programs can also use organizational readiness self-assessment tools to guide this process.

The challenge of evaluating a site's readiness is to make a clear and realistic assessment. Some organizations may be very eager to engage in two-generation work, but without the strong, integrated,

critical components — providing services to both children and parents, a comprehensive and intensive service delivery approach, partnerships and experience with data tracking and data systems — a lot of capacity will have to be built at the site level prior to piloting the program. Future funders may want to invest in more programs, continually assess their readiness to evolve their two-generation program and then fund a portion of those sites for implementation and evaluation.

Invest in Training

Training is essential to building the capacity of sites to do two-generation work. Because of staff turnover, dynamic funding and policy changes and the evolving nature of two-generation programs, training must be initial and ongoing. Staff was the most significant portion of each site's budget in FES-ECE. When sites invest most of their funds in their staff, they need to hire well, train well and manage turnover. Turnover can happen at all levels of an organization and should be expected. Ongoing training, cross-training and good documentation of key project-level decisions are especially important because of the complexity of two-generation efforts.

Encourage Evaluators to Engage Two-Generation Site Leadership and Staff

Evaluators need to engage with two-generation programs to build the site's capacity to use data for program management and to gain buy-in for the evaluation. Funders can encourage evaluators to get to know the local context and culture at an organization through site visits and trainings. In a developmental evaluation,[13] evaluators need to work with site staff to help them better understand the data they are collecting and how it can be used. For example, sites need to understand the different types of data being collected as part of the two-generation initiative and how different revenue streams influence the type of data.

Funders should require sites to have a data coordinator and provide resources for that position if it does not already exist. This individual can support the organization's use of data. Continuous training and work with the evaluator will continue to build the capacity of the data coordinator. The data coordinator can also benefit the funder by answering questions, running reports and keeping the funder informed of operational achievements.

Support Sustainability

Funders need to work with sites to sustain the two-generation initiative beyond the funding period. This may involve seeking changes in funding or policy, helping sites use data to make their case to other funders and working to change systems to support a two-generation approach. Documentation of the program, key decision points, staffing and services are important so that sites can explain what the program did and why.

Due to the complexity of two-generation programs, sustainability must be considered at the system level, in addition to the site level. No single organization can implement a two-generation program alone; it is necessary to gain the buy-in of other community partners and demonstrate the value of the investment. To manage systems change, funders need to support partner organizations as they move along the integration continuum and establish user-friendly child and adult data systems that talk to one another.

An innovation can result in a scalable model, but it is very difficult to innovate and scale up at the same time. The FES-ECE experience taught the field that more work needs to be done to evaluate and sustain two-generation programs, prior to scaling up. Casey's investment built the capacity of four two-generation programs and added to the knowledge base. With ongoing implementation and formative evaluation, it may be possible to evaluate the connection between the integration of services and family-level outcomes. But to achieve that goal, sites need to continue to innovate, test and refine their approach.

conclusion

THE FOUNDATION SEES PROMISE in efforts to create
opportunities for parents and children together, even as it reflects on and learns from
the experience of the FES-ECE pilots.

The FES-ECE experience illuminated the complexity and potential of two-generation work. Creating an integrated, seamless, two-generation program requires considerable site-level buy-in and culture change, along with changes in staffing, partnership and data collection. It also often necessitates community-level support for broader-scale systems change to facilitate that work and make it sustainable.

Casey's limited investment in FES-ECE ended with substantial progress but without clear demonstration of changes in child outcomes across the three sites evaluated. There are, however, indicators that families are making progress toward

their goals. Because of those indicators, all of the sites involved have continued to advance two-generation approaches in important ways beyond Casey's investment and have emerged as leaders in this still-growing field. The insights on what it takes to serve parents and children together have proved valuable and spread broadly beyond FES-ECE. Site representatives often guide and support other programs exploring the delivery of a two-generation approach, and some sites are also participating in additional evaluations to continue to build the evidence base for two-generation work. CAP Tulsa is being evaluated through a federal Health Profession Opportunity Grant, and the Atlanta partnership has an ongoing relationship with

the University of Georgia to continue the learning journey started by the Foundation.

Educational Alliance is being evaluated by New York University. Although findings are correlational, Educational Alliance has observed statistically significant associations between participation in the College Access and Success Program (CASP), its two-generation program, and positive indicators of change. Specifically, families participating in at least one CASP service between September 2014 and August 2016 were slightly more likely than families not participating to have more stable housing, higher savings and higher school attendance. The positive findings are primarily driven by parents with limited English

proficiency who participate in college-level language and literacy courses and whose children are enrolled in Head Start. Sites also are using the knowledge generated by their FES-ECE experience to work for a more supportive policy environment.

The experience with FES-ECE has also influenced a next generation of work at the Foundation, which continues to invest in building two-generation practice and policy across numerous initiatives. Family-Centered Community Change sites in Buffalo, N.Y.; Columbus, Ohio; and San Antonio, Texas, are creating partnerships among schools, early learning centers, job-training programs and housing authorities to build evidence for a place-based, two-generation approach. The Foundation's Parents and Children Thriving Together (PACTT): Two-Generation State Policy Network supports five states

— Colorado, Georgia, Minnesota, New Jersey and Oregon — toward policy and system reforms that align parent and child programs as a core way to reduce poverty and increase family opportunity.

The value of FES-ECE cross-site peer learning informed the launch of 2GenACT, a set of peer-learning activities and components intended to advance the substance and depth of practitioner knowledge and action in the two-generation field. The lessons on data capacity and the importance of helping sites create a well-developed theory of change early on are being incorporated into Whole Family Approaches to Economic Mobility From Poverty, a new community of practice engaging community action agencies with peer learning and technical assistance for integrated services and whole-family approaches. The Foundation also is investing in a next generation of work focused

on advancing opportunity for young parent families, which aims to tailor and adapt best practices and advance policy solutions for this critically important demographic. Casey continues to invest in research, data and practice knowledge for the two-generation field, contributing expertise to[14] and investing in practice briefs, webinars, studies and other products. Finally, we continue to address racial and ethnic systemic and structural barriers through our two-generation work, including for immigrant and refugee families.

The challenges of serving parents and children together and accurately measuring the effects of the approach are many. But the potential these approaches hold to serve families better makes it worth the effort. A family is an interdependent unit central to the success of children. We must strive for our systems of support to more effectively align with that reality.

Endnotes

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701 ST. PAUL STREET   BALTIMORE, MD 21202   410.547.6600   WWW.AECF.ORG