



Project HOPE Celebrating Successes

Five Early Lessons Learned from Project HOPE

Project HOPE has inspired many learnings thus far for Nemours, our states and partners. Our goal is to analyze and share these learnings and channel them into innovations in the project that can intentionally move the needle and spark change to address inequities. Below is a sample of some of the lessons learned we have documented thus far in the implementation of the project.

Lesson Learned: Organizational capacity can be an important determinant of success, but it is challenging to try and measure before an initiative begins.

Any measurement of organizational capacity that took place prior to choosing HOPE grantees would have had limited usefulness because the Cross-sector State Stakeholder Group (CSSSG) has significantly changed or evolved from what was proposed in the state application in three of the four states Nemours is working in. Allowing this level of flexibility in terms of finalizing a CSSSG was critical to enabling states to work towards achieving the HOPE goals. In addition to changes in CSSSG teams, unforeseen circumstances mean capacity may shift significantly due to increased demand on resources. The best illustration of this is Oklahoma's experience with receiving the Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five (PDG). PDG requires grantees to spend a relatively large amount of money, considerably larger than their HOPE grant, in a very short time period. The Oklahoma lead organization for HOPE is also the lead organization for PDG. Being awarded PDG presents great opportunities for Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) as an organization and in terms of amplifying the work being done under HOPE, but it also presents major capacity challenges. PDG provides \$3.1 million in funds that must be at least allocated by the end of the Federal Fiscal Year in September 2019. Any capacity assessment of OPSR prior to being awarded the HOPE grant could not have included this factor since PDG was not part of the picture at the time the grant was being awarded.

Lesson Learned: Flexible system building focused spending, such as that provided by HOPE, can accelerate progress on initiatives that have been identified as beneficial, but which lack a clear Federal or state funding stream and which do not have an obvious agency "home."

System initiatives often struggle to find funding because of a lack of a specified funding stream and because their inter-sector focus often mean they do not have an obvious home-agency. Even though a lack of effective resource and referral mechanisms and developmental assessment processes are often seen as a challenge to providing effective early childhood services, it may be difficult to find a regular funding source or to implement plans to address them. A flexible funding source may help spur action that hopefully ultimately leads to sustainability of effective processes. An example is Washington State's effort to implement the Help Me Grow model for ensuring that young children and their families are



referred to needed and appropriate resources. Statewide leaders and multiple communities in

Washington State identified connecting families to services as an issue and determined that Help Me Grow, a model initially developed in Connecticut that has spread to multiple states, had strong potential to address the issues that had been identified. Both the state and individual communities have faced challenges trying to implement the system because of the factors cited above and the lack of available state financial support. Washington State is using HOPE resources to support a workgroup including representatives from communities that have begun to or plan for the implementation of Help Me Grow, along with state representatives from public and private agencies. State and local engagement are both needed to design a statewide system to benefit all children that works effectively at the community level. HOPE has the potential to accelerate the implementation of a solution to a widely identified problem in a way that can support state-local co-creation of a statewide Help Me Grow system.

Florida's work in Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) is similar in that it is attempting to use the lessons learned around implementing developmental screening in a select set of communities to inform efforts to improve screening statewide. HOPE provides an opportunity to amplify that effort by including a focus on social and emotional well-being, extending the work to another community, and by building on the strengths of the ECCS initiative so far in developing community-based leadership.

Lesson Learned: States are engaging communities in a variety of ways.

In its initial design, the main way that states were seen as engaging communities involved the selection of a single focal community for the HOPE initiative. However, all four states have engaged multiple communities in their HOPE work. Florida's HOPE-funded Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Training involved community-focused representatives from Tallahassee, Escambia County, the Tampa area, Orlando, and two neighborhoods in Miami. Florida is using their HOPE resources to expand their ECCS initiative to Orlando, but some of the activities and lessons will benefit their existing ECCS communities in the Liberty City neighborhood of Miami and in the Town 'n' Country community in Northwest Hillsborough County. As suggested by the turnout at the training by the lead agency for HOPE, The Florida Association of Healthy Start Coalitions, it is also able to use its connections with other organizations across the state to bring in people from a range of communities who can benefit. As noted above, Washington State has brought multiple communities to the table to develop a strategy for implementing Help Me Grow. The communities involved in the Washington HOPE initiative include King County, Pierce County, Whatcom County, and Yakima County. New Jersey's state leadership has expressed an interest in doing work in southern New Jersey counties that receive less attention when it comes to issues of inequities despite having high-levels of poverty and facing a myriad of challenges. Oklahoma is working to select a focal community where Boston Medical Center/Vital Village will provide



support that likely will involve partnerships with tribal organizations, but at the same time it has engaged parents from Oklahoma City to participate in EDI training.

Lesson Learned: States are developing approaches to engaging families.

In addition to, and often as part of, their community-engagement work, states are developing strategies for engaging families in their HOPE work. For example, Oklahoma invited family representatives to their EDI training and they are using HOPE to support a SenseMaker® project, a narrative-based research methodology, to obtain input from families and providers on challenges in accessing services and resources. This showcases Oklahoma's HOPE innovative attempt to obtain parent input and provide lessons learned for other states interested in similar techniques.

Florida is using HOPE resources to send parent leaders who have been involved with the ECCS project and HOPE to leadership training at COFI which stands for Community Organizing and Family Issues. COFI trains parents in Family Focused Organizing which empowers them to make changes in their own lives, families, and communities. The training includes a focus on policy and systems change by training leaders to create a community-based policy agenda that starts with common concerns raised by parents, such as childcare and safety and giving them tools to communicate their ideas and concerns to decision-makers and to build partnerships with professionals to develop programs and policies that work. This training has the potential to have impacts well beyond the scope of HOPE work.

Lesson Learned: States are beginning to strategize about how to build stronger state-community connections and state-community feedback loops which will be both challenging and a potential source for innovative efforts that can be shared with other states.

States have begun to discuss how to build stronger state-community connections and to use information on the lived experience of the people in communities impacted by inequities as shown in the examples below.

Oklahoma is likely to use SenseMaker® as a tool for collecting information on lived experience from communities to inform how it works in communities. SenseMaker® “helps practitioners understand the factors that make up complex problems. Participants in a SenseMaker® survey share an experience in response to a prompting question and answer several questions related to what’s working and what’s not working, how people feel, and who they rely on. SenseMaker® allows researchers to be inclusive of many voices and see reality through community members’ eyes while identifying patterns and emerging trends.” The University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research (CPPR) has submitted a proposal to the Oklahoma CSSSG to do this work. The

state is also discussing options for how best to use it including considering options of conducting this process before selecting a community to inform the selection or after to gather deeper data in the



selected community. Assuming, as is almost certain, Oklahoma uses the tool their experience will help inform states and communities about whether a tool like this can be effective and how the information collected can be used.

New Jersey's CSSSG discussed how they created County Councils for Young Children across the state as a way of getting local input when they were implementing their Race to the Top federal education reform grant plan. One of the New Jersey CSSSG participants indicated there was a need to go further because they had not succeeded in creating a feedback loop in which the state acted on the information the communities were providing. HOPE presents an opportunity to use the lessons learned from Race to the Top to enhance this effort.

Washington and other states where Boston Medical Center/ Vital Village is operating their [Networks of Opportunity for Child Well-being \(NOW\)](#) learning communities provides opportunities to learn how community-centered initiatives can help inform state work while not compromising on being driven by a community-developed agenda.