

1. What are the 2 or 3 most important things (data, answers to questions, etc.) you think the panel needs so that we can recommend evaluation strategies for FTF? (I'm attaching the list we came up with at the end of the meeting indicating the items FTF is already working on for us.)?

- Logic model, which includes:
 - o Goals, intended outcomes
 - o Clarity on all that FTF is
 - o Most important aspects of implementation process (components of FTF activities)
 - o Costs of components
 - o Copy of FTF's strategic plan outlining in specific terms what the organization intends to accomplish in the next 3-5 years.

- Knowing who gets what services/programs ("strategy density")
- Expectations for the evaluation and its intended use: by the public, statutes/legal/legislature, ADE, AZ Early Childhood Development & health Board, regional council members, service providers, tribes
- Details on consortium studies: Why were products unsatisfactory? What are the lessons learned? What challenges did they face (and meet or not)?
- What data grantees are collecting
- Rationale for currently planned evaluation efforts [jml: I presume this means internal]; including how has the evaluation/research literature been used? What data are linked to what at the child level?
- Mapping of FTF strategies to reports of state and regional needs
- Anything FTF has in mind to be measured that's not already being measured
- Which regional councils are most ready to have their efforts evaluated, i.e., most fully "up and running"?
- What other states are doing to address questions similar to those FTF has; Illinois and Florida were mentioned.
- How flexible can FTF be in service delivery?
- Can outcome data be obtained on children who are not receiving services?

Most basic question: What is it that we want to know and how can we know it?

2. *What do you see as the major opportunities that an evaluation (or set of evaluation studies) could offer to the FTF leadership?*

- Obtaining a thorough understanding of how and how well the system of strategies etc. is being implemented in regional councils and across the state
 - o learn not only about impacts on children's readiness but about the FTF process (formative); increase efficiency of ECE system as well as its effectiveness.
 - o learn what services kids get, by age, and over time (tracking service receipt); how well services are matched to needs;
 - o learn about Quality First and what relationships are between QF ratings and change in children's performance over time.
 - o To learn about program costs (unit costs) and why they are what they are.
 - o Learn who are unserved.

- Learning how the system benefits children and families.
 - o Learn about the K readiness of AZ children irrespective of FTF participation
 - o Learn about both short- and long-term processes and effects.

- Testing the FTF theory of change.

- Build public will regarding need for FTF services; buy-in by stakeholders; perhaps leading to empowerment of regional councils.
 - o Having the results help FTF leadership change investments, policy/practice in the infrastructure or its scale.

- Influence overall program improvement
 - o To inform state-level perceptions and policies.
 - o Establishing learning communities whereby regional councils learn about best practices within Arizona.
 - o Learn what resources are needed to ensure adequate implementation

- To learn how much FTF "backfills" cuts in state programs.
- Use feedback quickly and frequently to allow for greater adaptation of efforts.
- Use the QIRS and TEACH to track children, teachers, achievement
- See if staff is working smart as well as working hard.

3a. What do you see as the most critical challenges to designing such an evaluation (or evaluations)?

- Fully understanding FTF's programs/strategies/etc.;
 - o Starting with a thoughtful theory of change
 - o The complexity of FTF's systems
 - o Deciding which parts of FTF's system should be held accountable for the child and family impacts

- While I am a big fan of formal, rigorous evaluations, I think that FTF does not offer lots of scope for such an evaluation, and would probably not actually benefit much from it. Another panel member didn't think we should attempt to look at statewide impacts on children overall. A third said we should avoid premature summative evaluation.
- Having valid measures of children's school readiness that K teachers can administer and include both objective assessments and teacher ratings
- Figuring out what can be done within FTF's budget
- Documenting the counterfactuals
- Being clear about intended audience and intended use of the evaluation results

- Identifying appropriate level of methodological rigor
- Having a strong definition of "school readiness" with key stakeholder buy-in.
- Reaching consensus on design as a panel
- Having clear evaluation questions and setting boundaries (don't try to do too much)
- Deciding whether, and if so how, to evaluate quality of care (I presume this person meant Quality First, but not sure)
- High-quality survey data can be very expensive to obtain, but consider designing a statewide integrated data system that includes data already collected; would be expensive, but would also pay huge dividends over time.
- Obtaining record-based information on outcomes of interest, starting before FTF began and extend beyond age 5, with geographic tracking to allow knowing if child was in an area exposed to FTF.
- Challenge for planned variation studies: determining optimal/desirable service package implemented in a known way; avoiding sample/population confounds that can't be statistically controlled reasonably and would wreck the internal validity.
- Some qualitative work, case studies, etc., would also be desirable, but I suspect cost would be prohibitive, except on a very small scale. Might not be worth the expense if you can't do enough cases.

3b. What do you see as the most critical challenges to conducting the evaluation (or evaluations)?

- Finding the right sample for each evaluation component, or each study in a set of interrelated studies
- Doing what is needed within FTF's budget
- Ensuring that the plan recommended by the panel can actually be conducted
- Gaining the confidence of the evaluatees that the goal is continuous quality improvement and not punishment or deletion
- Finding outcome measures that are sufficiently convincing to outsiders but not massively complicated to collect.
- Agreeing on threshold of implementation/service delivery quality/intensity/etc. before beginning a formal evaluation
- Finding a good contractor to do the work
- Ensuring FTF has capacity to monitor the evaluation
- Creating process for using results to improve programs and services
- Effectively disseminating findings so that policy, investment, and practice all move in the intended direction; maximizing the utility of findings
- Having the necessary data available from other public agencies
- Tracking changes in children longitudinally
- Getting meaningful stakeholder involvement
- Getting the right data
- The large, diverse state with many cultures, large counties, i.e., great geographic and demographic diversity
- Ensuring what's typical for any study: reliability, validity, and completeness of data; logistics of data collection; appropriate analysis.
- A big question is whether self-report data (which they seem to rely on a great deal) are usable for evaluation purposes.

4a. What do you think the goals of the FTF evaluation (or evaluations) should be in the short term?

- Begin with developmental, formative work
- Focus on school readiness outcomes
- Quickly collect baseline data for both short- and long-term outcomes
- Determining whether the programs and services to be evaluated are in place and performing as intended, efficiently and effectively
 - o Learn whether program's strategies are aligned to state and regional needs
 - o identifying the sites/grantees/practices that are working well and those that need more support
 - o Examination and documentation of service delivery, fidelity of implementation; what services are children and families actually getting; how valid, reliable, and complete the data are that centers and service providers provide FTF.
 - o What services are children/families now receiving at the state level and by region.
- Providing FTF with information that can assist them in decision making, presumably decisions about the allocation of resources. And for Board to learn from the eval.
- Move beyond measuring the indicators (which are mostly process measures) to measuring outcomes and impacts
- Incorporate both formative and summative aspects
- Build credibility for the program

4b. What do you think the goals of the FTF evaluation (or evaluations) should be in the long run?

- Obtain through the evaluation(s) a thorough understanding of how and how well the system of strategies/programs/etc. is being implemented within regional councils and across regions, and how the system benefits children and families
 - o Know how the program is progressing against outcomes and impacts.
 - o Provide information on the efficacy and effectiveness of what FTF is doing.
 - o Conduct a Perry Preschool type study
 - o What effects are programs (strategies or "suites" of strategies) having on child/family outcomes along a range of dimensions.
- Create special situations that make it easier to test the program's theories about how it is supposed to produce effects on children even if the evaluation only tests the first several links or each link separately (e.g., in Quality First).
- Use evaluation findings (especially persuasive, longitudinal child-outcome data) to improve the political context that surrounds FTF, so it can produce the policy and funding changes needed to create, sustain, and grow the early childhood system.
- Use findings to demonstrate extent to which FTF played a role in creating strong, effective linkages across system components that further improve results for children and families.
- Create model data system that enables efficient tracking of implementation and outcome indicators, be source for portraits of how services to children and families can be integrated and aligned for optimum benefit, and be a basis for calculating cost-benefit ratios for optimizing quantity, intensity, and types of services.

5. Is there anything else you'd like to suggest that we (FTF leadership and your chair) should consider in planning our March meeting?

Background

- Present a clear logic model
- Present key questions FTF (and key stakeholders) want the evaluation(s) to answer
 - o Prioritize the questions
 - o Group questions into categories (e.g., context, process, outcomes,...)
- Be sure panel understands FTF's needs and expectations for the evaluation(s)
- Consider whether examples of what other states have done would be helpful; suggestions include California, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, North Carolina, Illinois, Florida
 - o Could some panel members offer some examples?

Process

- Discuss/create a process for moving toward a set of potential recommended designs
- Discuss what format the panel and FTF would like to have the report of our recommendations look like. How should we frame the recommendations?
- Allow ample time for panel discussion; limit presentations.
- Have a longer mid-day break

Outcomes

- Set of draft recommendations that we can contemplate and come back to for debate on April 30-May 1
- List of any additional information needed from FTF

Summary

(John's opinion about the most important points in the panel's input from questions 1-4)

What panel most needs:

1. Logic model indicating what the evaluation needs to learn about
2. Data on who is getting which services and how much/many, and at what cost
3. Information on any particularly strong needs of key stakeholders and the public—
i.e., what do folks most want from the evaluation?

What our major opportunities are:

1. Obtaining a thorough understanding of who gets what in FTF
2. Learning how the system benefits children's kindergarten readiness
3. Influence program improvement
4. Building public will for early childhood programs

Our most critical challenges:

1. Fully understanding FTF's programs, strategies, etc.
2. Deciding what strategies are most important, and feasible, to study
3. Ensuring that the activities to be evaluated are really in place and of sufficient quality and intensity/density
4. Coming up with evaluation strategies that are rigorous, sufficiently comprehensive, and affordable
5. Designing study(ies) of any part of the system that will allow causal attribution to the outcomes
6. Having large enough samples to be able to draw conclusions about subgroups, whether demographic groups (whites, Hispanics, Native Americans) or programmatic groups (home visiting participants, Quality firsts participants, individual regional councils)

Our most important goals:

1. Focus on school readiness outcomes
2. Get good, comprehensive baseline data as soon as possible
3. Provide FTF with information to assist in decision making
4. Obtain thorough understanding of how well the FTF elements are being implemented, whom is being served, and what difference that all makes for children and families

(6) Possible evaluation strategies emerging from this feedback and the first meeting's discussion (i.e., preliminary ideas to move us toward recommendations)

1. Begin with formative evaluation; don't do summative prematurely, before FTF programs and strategies are ready.
2. Unplanned variation study: Conduct a series of implementation studies in strategically selected RPCs, tracking their services, participants (users), and children's outcomes, then compare across RPCs or grantees.
Yield: carefully documented portraits of more- and less-well-functioning sites or undertakings.
3. Planned variation studies: Compare alternative models, improvements, service densities, etc. in terms of their effects on child and family outcomes.
4. Statewide evaluation:
 - Conduct series of systematic implementation studies, documenting how some strategically selected subset of the partnership councils or grantees are doing their work and tracking the associated outcomes at the child, family, and/or classroom level.
 - Tracking the outcomes longitudinally, and comparing the trajectories of similar outcomes across sites/programs that have similar goals, would constitute an unplanned variation study
5. Case studies or other qualitative studies would be desirable, but cost could be prohibitive, except on a very small scale.
 - a. Conduct carefully documented portraits of more or less well-functioning sites or undertakings, supplied with the kind of outcome data that could be provided as evidence to stakeholders for claims like (a) children are developing desired skills, (b) children are staying healthy, (c) parents acknowledge the contributions of FTF to their well-being, (d) child providers acknowledge the contributions of FTF to the quality of the care and education they provide, (e) health care providers incorporate more attention to child language/cognition and parent-child interaction into their protocols, and (f) other such patently desirable outcomes.
 - b. Might not be worth the expense if you can't do enough cases.