The Opportunity

Through **Community Systems Mapping,** Start Early Consulting supports community leaders working to understand their early childhood system's landscape of programs, data, and funding to improve system equity and effectiveness. **The systems mapping process culminates in the presentation of a customized, visual data dashboard grounded in the experiences of families and providers.** The dashboard highlights strengths and opportunities and provides comprehensive data on:

- Community populations
- Healthy beginnings: perinatal and child health
- Strong, supported families: economic indicators, mental health, and supports
- Quality early childhood programs: WIC, home visiting, early intervention, child care, Early/Head Start, public pre-K, and early childhood special education

The Benefits & Impact

Systems maps support communities to gain a comprehensive and digestible picture of their early childhood system. The system mapping process engages families and early childhood professionals to understand their experiences and perspectives and includes facilitated sense-making sessions with community government leaders, advocates, and program leaders to help communities build a shared understanding of their system. Systems maps provide actionable insights and can fuel quality decisions, policy changes, strategic plans, and other collaborative planning to improve early childhood policies and programs for young children. System mapping is tailored to unique local contexts and may help communities answer questions such as:

❖ What are family experiences, priorities and needs in finding and accessing early care and education for their children in our community?

❖ How many 3- to 5-year-old children are served across publicly funded early childhood programs? Do children have equitable access? What are the gaps?

❖ We want to increase access to home visiting, but need to know: How many programs serve our community, what's their capacity, who is eligible and served?

The Process & Deliverables

Systems mapping is a collaborative, 6-month process that partners community teams with Start Early consultants to generate a systems map. The process includes:

- Planning and preparation with the community to ensure the map meets local needs
- Communications and outreach to community partners
- Engagement with families and providers through a survey, focus groups, and interviews
- Data collection, aggregation and visualization
- Analysis of the data to generate insights
- Sense-making meetings with community teams and partners to build shared vision
- Production of the community systems map

The community systems map includes data visuals, simple and compelling analysis, and quotes and insights from parents and providers. The map is available in multiple formats so communities can share it widely in ways that best meet the needs of local partners, families, providers, elected officials, or other key audiences. The map can be viewed through an online dashboard, shared electronically as a pdf, or printed for in-person distribution. This data belongs to the community; as such, community teams will also have access to all of the data files, documentation, and analysis needed to update their map or verify information in the future.

The Partnership

It takes a partnership to make the systems map as accurate and useful as possible! Communities will:

- **Ongoing Collaboration**: Participate in a kick-off meeting, periodic check-ins to ensure the process is on track and meeting community needs, and a final sense-making session to reflect on the data and plan for next steps.
- **Community Connections**: Partner with consultants to plan and communicate about the project; engage local partners, families and providers.
- **Access to Data**: Identify local data sources and facilitate connections to key contacts for data requests across early childhood sectors, agencies, and programs.
- **Point of Contact:** Provide one or more contacts for ongoing questions and clarifications during the data collection and community engagement processes.

About Start Early Consulting

Start Early Consulting is a mission-driven team of early childhood experts that shares system leaders' commitment to positive, long-term outcomes for children and families. Our consulting is dedicated to ensuring the right policies, programs, funding, and supports are in place to prepare young children and their families for lifelong success. Learn more at StartEarly.org/Consulting.