



Ready by 21 Change Maker Updates

Changing the Odds for Youth by Changing the Way They Do Business

State-Level Children's Cabinets and Commissions Come Into Their Own

It is always interesting to watch what happens when public and political leaders recognize the potential power embedded in dormant or neglected structures or laws. Sometimes, the recognition results in quick and quiet efforts to dismantle. Other times, it results in systematic efforts to empower. Children's cabinets and commissions are increasingly falling into the second category. Frequently created as quasi-formal or temporary structures to oversee particular initiatives that required interagency coordination or were receiving special gubernatorial attention, these bodies, state by state, are being fortified to become structures that have real vision, clout and real staying power.

The second annual Children's Cabinet Roundtable was held in New Mexico in March 2005. Directors from eight of the country's 15 existing children's cabinets met to discuss their progress in coordinating resources, collaborating on strategies, and convening key players in improving outcomes for children and youth as well as learn about the exciting work going on in New Mexico. The New Mexico Children's Cabinet co-hosted the event with National Governors Association and the Forum for Youth Investment.

It was clear from the opening introductions that Children's Cabinets are not static organizations. Aside from the obvious challenges that come with changes in administrations, directors discussed changes in legislative status, in roles and responsibilities, in their relationship with the Governor and in their relationship with localities. Each story reinforced the need for Children's Cabinet directors to be both flexible and visionary and underscored the importance of having a peer group to share with and learn from.

By the end of the opening session, one director who was not only new to the group but new to her job stated that she felt like she had "come home." Within a matter of hours, she had gained a framework, a sense of history, and a peer group.

"[the meeting provided] an opportunity for me to see the big picture rather than being thrown into the detail. I feel now like I have the support for what I have been thinking but it is backed up by a clear way to implement the big picture work."

By the end of the meeting, all those who attended were convinced that they and their states could benefit not only from an annual meeting of directors, but from a staffed Children's Cabinet Network that would facilitate directors efforts to document progress and success stories, generate awareness, archive and share tools and lessons, identify and coordinate training and facilitation assistance, and create opportunities for convening not only the directors, but executive branch leaders including Governors, Lieutenant Governors and First Spouses.

The Forum for Youth Investment and the National Governors Association are actively seeking ways to support these state leaders in their work for children and youth. Read more about the Roundtables, the Children's Cabinets, and the recent technical assistance projects:

- Getting to Results: Three Ways that Children's Cabinets can Increase Accountability for Change (March 2006 Roundtable)
- Increasing Change Horsepower: Cabinet Directors Share Strategies for Increasing Stakeholder Engagement, Collaboration and Youth Involvement. (March 2006 Roundtable)
- Spotlight on New Mexico: Creating Real Momentum for Change
- On the Road: Reports from Three Children's Cabinet Retreats

Getting to Results: Three Ways that Children's Cabinets Increase Accountability for Change

The March 2006 Children's Cabinet Roundtable was kicked off by presentations from three organizations that spend a significant amount of time working with states to identify ways to increase their capacity for measuring, managing and funding improvements in children and youth services by creating actionable "Big Picture visions" that provide a frame for a) selecting indicators and performance measures for improving specific results and b) collecting and analyzing data that shows resources are allocated against result areas and key services.

[The Ready by 21 Framework](#)

Karen Pittman, the Forum for Youth Investment

The Ready by 21 framework is designed to help change makers committed to connecting the dots between policies, programs and initiatives increase their "horsepower for change" by taking five steps: 1) creating coordinating structures charged with Big Picture planning, 2) articulating a shared Big Picture Vision of youth outcomes *and* community supports, 3) creating Big Tent Partnerships that engage all stakeholders to accept shared accountability, 4) implementing effective strategies not only for improving services, but also for increasing demand, engaging youth and families, and aligning policies and resources needed to improve services, and 5) identify the indicators that are linked to Big Impact Results. In presenting the framework, Pittman, spent extra time presenting strategies for creating an actionable Big Picture Vision, starting with the need to have a measurable, overarching goal that galvanizes stakeholders. The Ready by 21 framework uses Gambone and Connell's research that suggests that 2 in 10 young people doing poorly and only 4 in 10 doing well as young adults, and ties these poor outcomes to gaps in specific supports. Cabinet directors were very interested in knowing how they could take the Gambone research and do special runs by state, and thought that a concise representation of how well states' youth are doing could have great communications power. They were also intrigued with the idea that "dashboards" could be used to map and communicate the range of supports available for children and youth.

[Results Based Accountability](#)

Mark Friedman, Fiscal Policy Studies Institute

More than half the states represented at the meeting had previously been introduced to Friedman's powerful system for "turning the curve" toward achieving important results for children, youth and families. Friedman used this opportunity to provide a refresher course to cabinet directors, focusing on the role of both population results and indicators and system performance measures in driving informed change. He emphasized clarity in language, gauging success by looking at trends and planning based on those trends and forecasts. Friedman noted that the Forum's Ready by 21 Framework is one that is specifically applicable for a children's cabinet and the results based accountability work that Friedman takes people through is applicable to any data and assessment situation within government. The two frameworks combine nicely to make a clear path forward for those working to improve child and youth policy by providing a big picture vision, tools for assessment and guidance on informed decision-making. An important takeaway from his presentation was that children's cabinets are often about fixing service systems, but that is not a sufficient goal. He suggested that cabinets have the power and the potential to change systems and change outcomes for children and youth.

[Creating a Children's Budget](#)

Margaret Flynn, the Finance Project

The Finance Project is known for the innovative work they do with states and localities to help determine sustainable funding solutions for important priorities. They are also known for their deft analyses of complex funding streams. The Finance Project and the Forum for Youth Investment joined forces to create a guide to creating child and youth centered children's budgets that report resource goals and realities against results rather than by department. Flynn walked participants through the key sections of *Adding it Up: A Guide to Creating a Children Youth and Families Budget*, discussing the rationale, the

practical considerations and tools that are necessary considerations in making effective use of public dollars for children and youth. Flynn highlighted the importance of strategic financing based on a clear vision. To do that requires a backwards glance at historic funding patterns and trends that then inform the budget recommendations and priorities for the coming years.

Spotlight on New Mexico: Creating Real Momentum for Change

Among the many stories shared at this convening was that of the New Mexico Children's Cabinet, one of the newer coordinating bodies of its kind, which has made tremendous progress in establishing itself over the past two years. With strong support from the New Mexico Community Foundation and a modicum of technical assistance from the Forum and the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute (Mark Friedman's shop), their achievements include communicating a set of public goals, creating cross-departmental legislative priorities, establishing a statewide Youth Alliance whose members work directly with the Children's Cabinet secretaries, and developing an online reporting system for creating a true child- and youth-centered children's budget — one that reports on expenditures not just by department, but looks at cross-departmental expenditures by population group (e.g., early childhood), by child and youth outcome (e.g., health), and by the type of supports and services provided (e.g., counseling).

Lieutenant Governor Diane Denish took time out of her busy schedule to meet with the March Children's Cabinet Roundtable participants. She shared her list of what she considers to be the Children's Cabinets biggest successes:

- **Joint funding of the Directors Position.** Each state department now contributes a part of their budget to fund the CC director position, which is housed in the Lt. Gov office. The Lt. Governor believes that this is desirable for a number of reasons, including the neutrality that comes with all depts. having a stake in the position's success. It makes it easier to demonstrate the leveraging of funds from other sources.
- **Solid buy-in from Agency Directors.** The Children's Cabinet has become a source of pride and a common part of the vernacular of all of the state agencies. This was tangibly represented by the great turnout of secretaries at the Roundtable to share their successes. Lieutenant Governor Denish's examples of buy-in included: getting agencies to work together towards a common plan;
- **Broad Stakeholder Engagement.** The Children's Cabinet has been successful in bringing in philanthropy, youth serving organizations, and the business community; educating people about children's policy, children's needs and why it is important to be a part of the NM Youth Initiative.
- **Increased Legislative Success.** The Lt. Governor cited the cross-agency cooperation fostered by the Children's Cabinet as one reason for recent legislative accomplishments such as universal pre-K, school based health centers, home visiting programs, Medicaid eligibility, and the Next Generation Fund.

She candidly expressed some concern about completing the institutionalization of the children's cabinet before a new administration takes office down the road, reinforcing the overall sense among the group that the changing context within which these structures exist requires constant vigilance and planning.

Children's Cabinet Director Claire Dudley and her colleagues shared their recent work to create an electronic database that allows programs across departments to be categorized by primary goal/result (e.g. health), services, and eligible population and provides an online framework for reporting budgets. The structured format ensures that information can be easily submitted by departments and ties budget dollars to the results and outcomes that the children's cabinet seeks. The New Mexico Children's Cabinet, is statutorily required to produce a children's budget. They used this mandate as an opportunity to connect the dots between the results, services and dollars.

Cabinet Secretaries and Youth Alliance members joined the roundtable at the end of the day to discuss the Youth Alliance, New Mexico's statewide structure for involving young people in state policy.

For more information about the New Mexico Children's Cabinet, click [here](#) to read a case study of the New Mexico Cabinet's progress. Director Claire Dudley provided an excellent summary on a June Audio Conference co-sponsored by Grantmakers for Children, Youth and Families and the Forum or visit the Children's Cabinet's Web site: www.ltgovernor.state.nm.us/childrencabinet.html.

Increasing Stakeholder Engagement, Collaboration and Youth Involvement.

One of the most valuable functions of the Children's Cabinet Roundtables is that they provide real opportunities for peer to peer sharing. The Forum and NGA take this need very seriously. Directors were asked to identify topics before hand and were given time at the end of the Roundtable to surface new challenges that warranted further discussion. Four themes dominated the conversations:

Engaging Key Stakeholders

- *There are multiple ways that stakeholders can/should connect to the children's cabinet.* Some stakeholder groups are aligned with the interests of the children's cabinet, in other cases they may be outside advocates that challenge the work of the children's cabinet, in others there are formal local structures in place with a clear communication path to the children's cabinet and even regularly scheduled meetings where they share concerns from the local level. In some cases it is an established role of the Children's Cabinet to build the capacity of new stakeholder groups or just to engage with already existing ones. In all cases the challenge is balancing stakeholders' needs for inclusion with cabinet members needs for a protected space for decision-making and compromise. The directors cautioned that, in a highly political climate, it can be difficult to develop a sense of connectedness among the secretaries and other cabinet members if there are outsiders at the table or if all meetings are required to be open to the public by statute.
- *There is a need to connect the various state task forces and commissions to see how they fit with the children's cabinet.* Children's cabinets may have the broadest vision and membership, but they are often not the only game in town. It is not infrequent that issue/system or population -specific task forces and commissions are created even after the children's cabinet has been created. What should the role of the Children's Cabinet be vis a vis these entities that are often given the same charges (e.g. coordinate across departments)? Participants agreed that the cabinet should make every effort to convene these groups and show them how they fit into the "Big Picture" hopefully with the Children's Cabinet serving as the coordinator/clearinghouse that can craft common communications messages that place initiatives within a coherent vision. Directors also acknowledged, however, the value of having roles and responsibilities outlined up front as new commissions are being created.
- *Engaging the private sector.* All directors expressed a desire and need for stronger connections to the business and philanthropic communities. Directors shared success stories. In one case the Children's Cabinet director is also the state's foundation liaison. In another the Children's Cabinet convenes private funders in an annual meeting with the Children's Cabinet.
- *Creating opportunities for advice-giving.* Several directors discussed strategies (e.g. road tours, town meetings, advisory councils, dedicated cabinet sessions) for ensuring that stakeholders feel that they have real opportunities to offer information, recommendations and feedback to the cabinet.

Increasing State to Local Collaboration

- *Adding value to local commissions.* The Oregon Commission on Children, Youth and Families was formally created in tandem with local commissions. In Oregon the system is intentionally bottom up with the local commissions feeding information to the state commission. They have regional support staff that takes the coordination and alignment work being done at the local level and makes sure that it adds up at the state level. The local staff receives training around outcomes and performance measures. The information that comes to the state is then similarly formatted and can be easily retooled and

packaged for the legislature as they go into funding discussions. They also work with the local commissions to create a six year plan. A goal this year is to bring more structure and common language to the plan in an effort to demonstrate that the priorities selected by each local commission are variations on several Big Picture themes.

- *Encouraging community planning.* Maine has taken a more informal approach. Communities for Children and Youth is a statewide initiative of the Maine Children's Cabinet designed to create a partnership between state government and local communities to promote positive child and youth development. Staff support at the local level is provided by a team of Americorps VISTA volunteers.

Increasing Youth Involvement

- *Create a state-wide youth alliance.* While most children's cabinets have not found an effective way of formalizing a role for youth in decision making, it is safe to say that they are interested in doing so. The New Mexico Cabinet Director brought members of the NM Youth Alliance to share their reflections on their involvement in policy decision-making thus far. The New Mexico Youth Alliance is a youth advisory council made up of young people 14 to 19 years old from all 112 legislative districts. They identify an adult mentor, mobilize a local youth peer group, meet regionally with other members, meet 4 times a year as a state council to present solutions to state policymakers and they issue an annual report. The Youth Alliance has only been in place for 3 years and already has seen great accomplishments in both legislation and youth involvement overall.
- *Capitalize on existing structures.* While the idea of legislating the creation of a youth alliance linked to the children's cabinet had some appeal, several directors acknowledged that there were already existing groups (e.g. Youth Legislative Councils, non-profit state and local youth leadership groups) that could be engaged more formally.

Maintaining momentum

- *Shift from focusing on projects to focusing on systems change.* Participants agreed that it is easier, at times, to engage the Secretaries and their departments around specific projects (e.g. Universal Pre-K) than around the long term goals of systems change and improved youth outcomes. They agreed, however, that children's cabinets are well poised to bring people in decision making positions together to really do business differently. The directors, however, have to see themselves in the position of change manager and have to work hard to connect the disparate, well intentioned efforts that are abound in states. They reinforced the value of creating and using Big Picture visions as a way to make the work concrete and "actionable." They suggested that, done correctly, having this kind of overarching framework can help agency directors develop joint plans that use their and their staff's time more effectively.
- *Demonstrating added value.* What happens when the children's cabinet is no longer the hot issue in the state? Directors discussed the ebb and flow of their work and their close connections to the Governor. Most felt that these shifts were inevitable and that the most important way to demonstrate added value is to be extremely clear about what roles the cabinet plays and then report on those roles regularly. New Mexico shared their strategy of releasing the youth-outcome focused report card with the annual children's cabinet report on accomplishments since both were written using the same results frame. Maine shared their success at adding up the dollars leveraged through their Cabinet's work.
- *Focus on communications.* The need for better communications and marketing was a near constant theme. Participants discussed their desire to have the children's cabinet established as the "go to" organization on kids issues in the state and, as noted above, discussed strategies for getting credit for what they do, noting that collaboration and coordination are difficult accomplishments to quantify.
- *Maintaining the work.* One strategy for keeping secretaries engaged in the meetings is to ensure that work happens between the meetings. Workgroups, sub-committees and ad hoc groups are effective

ways to ensure that this happens. They also provide opportunities for mid-level staff and non-departmental stakeholders to be involved in the work.

On the Road: Reports from Three Children's Cabinet Retreats

Children's cabinets are definitely coming into their own. Summer has brought a round of efforts by children's cabinets to gather at retreats to push deeper with their missions. The Forum has had the opportunity to facilitate a few of these meetings over the past month beginning in Maine where First Lady Karen Baldacci and the commissioners of the Maine Children's Cabinet came together to plan for the coming year. Next, it was to the Governor's mansion in Georgia for First Lady Perdue's Children's Cabinet retreat where we worked with Mark Friedman of the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute to clarify a leading result that the Cabinet would collectively work toward. Finally the Forum was in Oklahoma facilitating the annual meeting of the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth, whose members include the secretaries of the major child and youth serving departments plus commissioners appointed by the Governor, the legislature and the Supreme Court. The Commission, which includes agency heads and appointed members, was created by executive order in 1982, has a mandate to develop and improve services for children and youth which includes monitoring authority for state plans and facilities. The directors of each of these cabinets attended the March 2006 Children's Cabinet Roundtable co-sponsored by the Forum for Youth Investment, the National Governors Association and the New Mexico Children's Cabinet.

About the Children's Cabinet Roundtables

In 2002, the Forum for Youth Investment released a report on strategies for coordinating state youth policy that profiled the work of 11 state coordinating bodies that had received funding support from one of three initiatives sponsored by NGA, the National Crime Prevention Council and the HHS Family and Youth Services Bureau. The Forum maintained communication with the staff of these and other coordinating bodies through loose network and a listserv.

In September 2004, the National Governors Association recognized this fast growing trend in cabinet level coordination with the release of *A Governors Guide to Children's Cabinets* which offered governors and their staffs a roadmap for designing effective children's cabinets based on the lessons learned by existing cabinets. Staffing rose to the top of the list of the common denominators.

In March 2005, NGA joined forces with the Forum for Youth Investment to convene children's cabinet directors from across the country at the NGA national headquarters in Washington, D.C. That meeting was such a success that NGA and the Forum committed to making it an annual event.

March 2006 Attendees:

Irene Jacobs, Arizona
Eva Lester, Arizona
Elaine DeCostanzo, Georgia
Jim Redmon, Kansas
Rayanne Darensbourg, Louisiana
Lauren Sterling, Maine
Claire Dudley, New Mexico
Anne Roberts, Oklahoma
Mickey Lansing, Oregon
Carol Wire, Oregon

Speakers:

Margaret Flynn, the Finance Project
Mark Friedman, the Fiscal Policy Studies
Institute

Forum for Youth Investment:

Elizabeth Gaines
Shanetta Martin
Karen Pittman

National Governors Association:

Susan Golonka

Guest:

Katie Thurstin, NCSL

March 2005 Attendees:

Claire Dudley, New Mexico
Conchi Morales, Idaho
Lauren Sterling, Maine
Suzy Sonnier, Louisiana
Denise Sulzbach, Maryland
Lisa Glow, Arizona
Steven Heasley, West Virginia
Mickey Lansing, Oregon
Terry Maloney, Pennsylvania
Cheryl Quinio-Blodgett, New Jersey
Jim Redmon, Kansas

Consultant:

Jacqui Romer-Sensky, Ohio

Association of Maternal and Child Health

Programs:

Meg Booth

The Forum for Youth Investment:

Thaddeus Ferber
Shanetta Martin
Karen Pittman
Elizabeth Gaines

National Governor's Association Center for

Best Practices:

Steve Crawford
Susan Golonka
Anna Lovejoy
Kathleen Nolan
Jenn O'Connor