

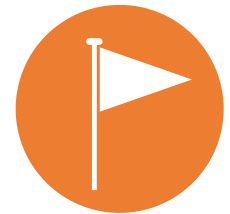
Activating Leaders to Advance Early Learning

LOCAL LEADERSHIP CADRE

Made possible by Indiana's Preschool Development Grant
Powered by Early Learning Indiana



THE NEED FOR LOCAL LEADERSHIP TO ADVANCE THE STATE OF EARLY EDUCATION IN INDIANA



High-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs are vital to a thriving state, its economic development and its residents' prosperity. Despite the growing importance of the early learning sector, ECE initiatives remain fragmented and individual providers often operate in isolation, lacking the community of public policy advocates, professional service providers and other supports that surround K-12 education, health care and other industries that have similar influence on a state's broader aims. States that have developed an effective early learning ecosystem are marked by diverse stakeholders instigating and driving progress at the program, local and state levels.

Indiana saw the fruits of this type of multi-layered collaboration firsthand with the successful All IN 4 Pre-K campaign in 2016. In this campaign, a cross section of early childhood experts, parents, business leaders and community stakeholders advocated in support of expanded access to high-quality pre-kindergarten services, particularly for those children most in need. In response, the Indiana General Assembly approved an expansion of the a five-county pilot of the state's On My Way Pre-K program.

With continued engagement by the All IN 4 Pre-K coalition, ultimately, services were made available statewide during the 2019 legislative session. Beyond this important pre-kindergarten initiative, as the strategic planning process for Indiana's 2019 Birth to Five Preschool Development Grant (Indiana Birth-5 Strategic Plan 2020-2022) made clear, there is more work to be done to ensure that state and local stakeholders are informed about and engaged in issues impacting the success of early learning efforts. Local business, community and public sector leaders are uniquely positioned to drive accessibility and quality of ECE services in their backyard.

INDIANA'S PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT



In order to optimize the gains envisioned by the Indiana Birth-5 Strategic Plan 2020-2022, the state needs ECE leaders to help establish key policy initiatives, advocate for policy changes and help implement those changes in communities throughout Indiana. Currently, local ECE leaders have few opportunities to collaborate outside of their own communities and, as a result, minimal chances to learn best practices or the leadership skills that will help them communicate and collaborate with others who have solved related challenges in other parts of the state.

To address this issue, Indiana's Family and Social Services Administration (the State) engaged Early Learning Indiana (ELI) to develop a cohort of local leaders ready to engage in ECE and advocate for policy change in their local communities and across the state. To do so, ELI:

1. Identified and evaluated promising early childhood leadership models happening across the nation.
2. Leveraging elements of those promising programs, created a new model for Indiana with program goals and evaluation criteria.
3. Piloted this new model along with an existing offering, the Strosacker Early Learning Fellows (SELF), which is further described below. Together, these two initiatives became the Local Leadership Cadre program.
4. Recruited and engaged at least 50 individuals to be ECE leaders across three cohorts statewide.
5. Evaluated the newly created portion of the Local Leadership Cadre program that was targeted to those in the early care and education field to determine its efficacy and updated the model as needed.
6. Created recommendations for the State, including results, findings and recommendations for scaling and replicating the Local Leadership Cadre.

THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE



Nationally, there are 78 institutions of higher education offering 84 different early childhood leadership programs at all degree levels. Nearly half of the leadership programs offered by higher education institutions award a bachelor's degree, a post-bachelor's or master's certificate, or a master's or doctoral degree. Many, if not most, of these programs are focused on operational leadership of early childhood programs, and as such, may provide only ancillary treatment of related policy issues, to the extent that these issues are covered at all. [1]

To supplement those degree program, organizations across the nation have developed models to help drive change in the early learning field. As of 2017, there were 32 early childhood leadership development academies or programs in the U.S., excluding those which are part of degree programs. [2]

In the process of developing a model for Indiana, ELI identified, researched and evaluated four successful leadership models: ABLe Change, Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning Policy Fellowship, McCormick Foundation Executive Fellows, and Learn Lead Excel.

- ABLe Change, developed by Michigan State University, is a program framework that emphasizes building system-level thinking within early childhood leaders. Training focuses on system change approaches to identify a targeted community problem, define the targeted program and understand the local system. ABLe Change uses cohort-style training days that consist of monthly meetings with follow-up technical assistance and evaluation; online cohort training sessions are also available. The program requires a long-term commitment of in-person cohort engagement and training to work through its theory of systems change model.

[1] <https://mccormickcenter.nl.edu/library/early-childhood-leadership-degree-programs-an-emergent-academic-discipline/> Accessed 11/26/19.

[2] Goffin, S. G., & Daga, E. May 2017. "Early childhood education leadership development compendium: A view of the current landscape, 3rd edition." Washington, DC: Goffin Strategy Group.

- The Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning Policy Fellowship is driven by the need to enhance career pathways for early learning providers and professionals. It aims to grow the candidacy pool of future leaders in Pennsylvania's early childhood system and ultimately, to strengthen the quality of the early learning system to better serve children, families and providers. The model focuses on mentor/fellow pairings as an effective means for developing less experienced teachers. Integral components include monthly cohort meetings, individualized placement sites and an online learning community. However, this model requires a commitment of 10 months of engagement in the learning cohort. To implement a similar program, Indiana first would need to develop a pool of potential fellows.
- The McCormick Foundation Executive Fellows is a program of the Erikson Institute's Early Childhood Leadership Academy. It is designed to provide highly influential leaders from multiple sectors with a credible, up-to-date and research-based understanding of child development. The approach entails cohort-style presentations that are delivered face to face and online that address early childhood systems building, recruiting and retaining high-quality staff, and return on investments in the early years. It emphasizes networking opportunities and visiting key early childhood sites. However, the program focuses on educating people about child development, a topic very familiar to ELI's potential participants.
- Lead Learn Excel is a professional learning program that helps ECE leaders develop skills to fuel the everyday learning and continuous improvement of teachers. Developed by the Ounce of Prevention Fund, Lead Learn Excel uses an approach that combines training, coaching, peer learning communities and access to practical tools and resources to drive classroom instructional excellence. The model is an intensive 9- or 16-month engagement. Time is required to participate in the program, as well as to implement the model in local environments.
- Strosacker Early Learning Fellows (SELF) is a program of Purdue Northwest that engages a small group of local leaders from fields outside of early care and education to equip them with the knowledge, tools and strategies to help and empower them to advocate for children and families in an effort to promote economic development, strengthen the future work force, and improve the quality of life in Northwest Indiana. The program has been adapted from a model successfully implemented in New Orleans at Tulane University.

A MODEL FOR INDIANA



After reviewing the model leadership programs, comparing and contrasting their strengths, speaking with the programs, and reflecting on Indiana's needs, ELI identified five essential attributes of an Indiana model:

1. Designed to emphasize practical advocacy skill development with tangible, actionable resulting steps;
2. Grounded in an understanding of the science of early learning and the multiple benefits (economic, educational, health, etc.) of early childhood investments;
3. Built around a professional learning community, leveraging a cohort model of participants with varied experiences and understanding of early learning fundamentals to learn together and maximize influence;
4. Flexible and locally-driven, with cohort participants prioritizing areas of interest based on the unique needs of each locality; and
5. Accelerated in pace, consistent with the requirements of the underlying funding source and a general urgency to spur participants to quick action.

While each of the evaluated programs met many of these criteria with notable success, none met all five. As noted above, several included somewhat different learning objectives, some were a better fit for a narrower audience, and many could not meet the required pace. As a result, ELI developed a hybrid model for Indiana with supporting program goals and evaluation criteria.

The model called for programs that had two distinct target audiences (early childhood professionals and non-early childhood leaders) and consisted of three cohorts: two Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts with approximately 40 early childhood professionals total and an existing Strosacker Early Learning Fellows (SELF) cohort in Northwest Indiana with approximately 17 participants from fields outside of education. The cohorts would focus on topics such as how Indiana's early childhood system works, how to improve capacity for communicating and how to engage their networks for a cause. By the end of the cohorts' completion, at least 50 individuals throughout Indiana would be ready to be local ECE leaders.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP CADRE

	Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts	SELF cohort in Northwest Indiana
Participants	40 in total, from Indiana's early childhood system; application to participate	17
Goals	Address the most significant challenges and needs in engaging ECE policy work and communication strategies specific to Indiana and the participants' communities	Develop a cadre of advocates in Northwest Indiana who will influence the region's practices to promote high-quality ECE as a critical factor for community and economic development.
Structure	Two group webinars. One 1.5-day professional development session. One individualized virtual coaching session	Kick off reception with current and past fellows followed by a series of four facilitated discussion sessions over the course of 2.5 months
Facilitator	Advocacy and Communication Solutions, LLC (ACS), a national communication, advocacy and strategy development consulting firm	Strosacker Early Learning Fellows (SELF) Invited guest speakers based on session topic
Evaluation Methods	Pre-event and post-event surveys and interviews	Conducted by SELF; ELI will interview the program director upon conclusion
Intended Result	Deploy at least 40 individuals to support local leadership in early childhood education	Fellows commit to an action plan when the program concludes

PROGRAM EVALUATION

ELI will deploy several methods to evaluate the customized Indiana Early Learning Leadership cohorts, including:

- pre-assessment surveys of participants' existing knowledge
- post-event activity surveys
- formal or informal feedback opportunities during cadre activities or planned focus groups
- semi-structured interviews at the conclusion of the cadre with 5-10 participants
- post-cohort surveys of all participants and facilitators

Evaluation questions will address the following:

- Did the leadership cohort accomplish its goals?
- Who participated in the leadership cohort?
- Are cohort participants gaining new skills they were lacking or expressed interest in obtaining?
- Was the model implemented as designed?
- How effective are the facilitators with each type of activity?
- How can the model be adapted to better meet the needs of the participants?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of this model?
- Should this model be replicated or sustained, and, if so, how?
- What are the recommendations to the state for future leadership efforts?

Summative evaluation will assess the extent to which the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts met the following goals:

- 95% of leadership cohort participants report an increase in their understanding of the early childhood system by December 2019
- 95% of leadership cohort participants report an increase in their knowledge of the PDG Strategic Plan by December 2019
- 95% of leadership cohort participants report an increase in their understanding of or their capacity to engage in one of the program areas
- 80% of leadership cohort participants commit to taking action in support of the Preschool Development Grant Strategic Plan by December 2019





THE MODELS PILOTED

Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts

Armed with the program requirements, ELI partnered with Advocacy and Communications Solutions, LLC (ACS), a national communication, advocacy and strategy development consulting firm that helps nonprofits, for profits, government agencies and philanthropic organizations successfully share their messages about target issues with key audiences and advocate for policy changes. ACS is experienced in working with early childhood issues, having worked with clients around the country, including with the First Things First initiative in Arizona, to advance policy goals in this area.

ELI worked to recruit and engage individuals to participate in the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts. Working under time constraints, ELI identified “ready” communities to build the cohorts. ELI staff involved with the previous All IN 4 Pre-K campaign offered feedback on active local coalitions that might have the interest and capacity to help recruit and facilitate a local cadre. ELI then contacted the recommended cadres to discuss the project and gauge their interest in participating. Coalitions that agreed received a sub-grant to cover their efforts of recruiting participants and securing venues in their communities.

ELI selected the Early Childhood Coalition for Wayne County and the Bartholomew County Early Learning Coalition to help recruit participants. Each participating coalition invited individuals with a demonstrated interest and acumen to participate.

In total, 53 professionals (28 from Wayne County and 25 from Bartholomew County) agreed to participate. Years of experience in early learning ranged from one year to 30 years. There were a range of roles, as well — 37% were administrators, 37% were teachers, 8% were program owners, and 25% occupied another role.

Drawing from ACS' experience working with early learning and other policy matters, ELI and ACS created a model customized to the existing foundational knowledge, specific needs and interests of cohort participants. ACS surveyed participants to determine their preexisting knowledge as well as their comfort levels in engaging policy makers and communicating their message to others. ACS also asked what skills participants hoped to gain.

Participants indicated that they found policy makers to be the most difficult audience with which to communicate. They said they wanted to build skills in planning for and engaging in difficult conversations, developing succinct messages to effectively communicate their work and why it is valuable, communicating a shared vision with stakeholders to catalyze action, and using data strategically. Participants also wanted to learn about communicating with policymakers, building a public policy agenda and knowing the rules for working on policy issues. With this information, ACS developed curriculum content.

In September of 2019, the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts launched with separate introductory webinars that described the core objectives of the leadership cohort, outlined the broader goals of the PDG, and set expectations for the remainder of the cohort.

In October, each cadre had a 1.5-day training session. The agenda focused on the following topics, supported by the identified tools and skill-building activities:

- Best practices for messaging, coalition building and engagement and outreach:
 - Message Creation Checklist
 - Give Jargon the Boot Tool
 - Network Mapping Exercise
 - 6 Components of a Strong and Effective Coalition
- Policy review on the state of early childhood:
 - Data Walk
 - Overview of PDG
- Public policy planning:
 - Dos and Don'ts of Nonprofit Lobbying
 - 5 Steps to Effective Policymaker Engagement
 - Creating a Public Policy Plan
- Network mapping and messaging to external stakeholders
- Outreach to families and key audiences:
 - Putting Coalition Building into Practice

Participants were also offered one hour of individualized coaching with ACS, which allowed them to ask for and receive support related to the goals or issues they were targeting.

In November, participants joined a webinar to receive additional information about the Indiana Birth-5 Strategic Plan 2020-2022 and a deeper dive into best practices surrounding messaging, which they had identified as an area requiring additional support.



Outcomes

Upon completion of the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts, ELI conducted interviews and surveyed the participants. These post-cadre evaluations found that by December 2019:

- 93% of leadership cohort participants reported an increase in their understanding of the early childhood system.
- 89% of leadership cohort participants reported an increase in their knowledge of The Indiana Birth-5 Strategic Plan 2020-2022.
- 100% of leadership cohort participants reported an increase in their understanding of or their capacity to engage in one of the program areas.
- 98% of leadership cohort participants had taken action or had committed to taking action in support of the Indiana Birth-5 Strategic Plan 2020-2022.

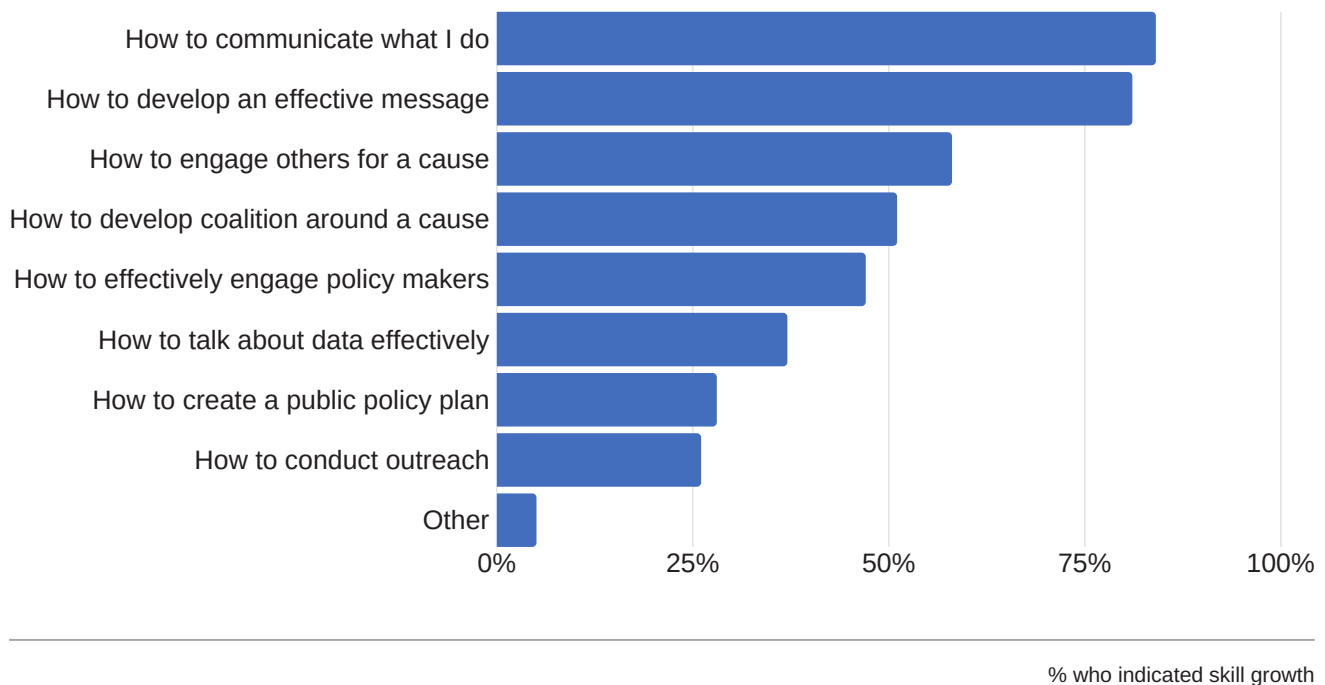
While the percentage of participants who reported an increase in their understanding of the early childhood system and who reported an increase in their knowledge of the Indiana Birth-5 Strategic Plan 2020-2022 fell just short of ELI's projected goals, the cohorts proved overwhelmingly successful at improving participants' skills and interest in taking action to support early learning.

Overall, the results indicate that the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts were successful at increasing knowledge and awareness, developing or improving participant's skills, and motivating them to take action in support of early learning.

Graph 1 shows the percentage of respondents who indicated they improved a specific skill as a result of the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts training they received.

SKILL IMPROVEMENT

Graph 1.

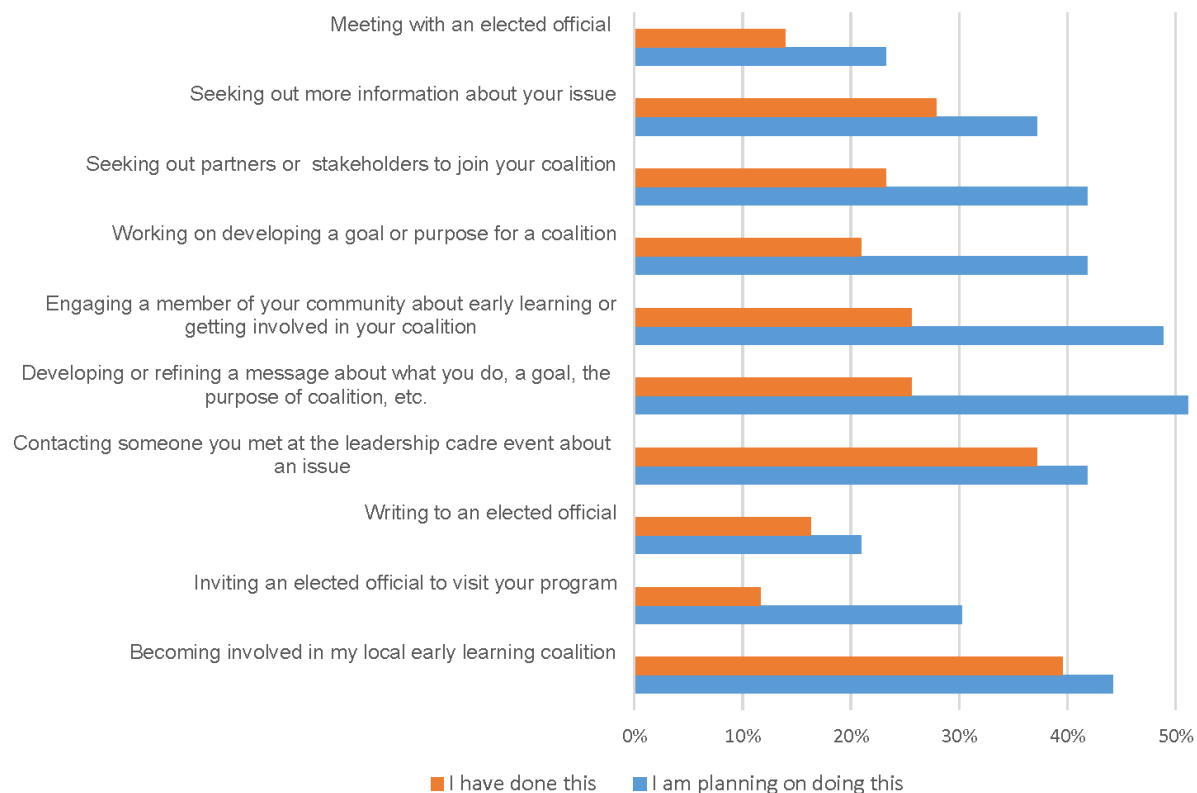


These results indicate that a large majority of the respondents feel that they are better able to communicate about what they do and how to develop an effective message.

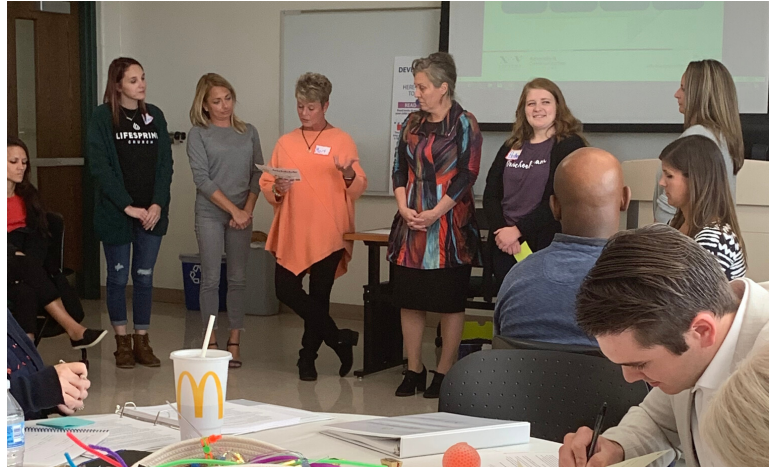
Graph 2 shows the percentage of respondents who planned to take or had taken action as a result of participating in the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts.

ACTIONS AS A RESULT OF CADRE PARTICIPATION

Graph 2.



The largest percentage of respondents who have already taken action have become involved in their local early learning coalition. The largest percentage of respondents plan to develop or refine key messages about what they do, a goal, or the purpose of a coalition whether it is an existing early learning coalition or a newly formed coalition around a specific public policy issue related to early learning.



Strosacker Early Learning Fellows (SELF)

In addition to designing the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts, ELI identified an existing program in one Indiana region that met a majority of the essential criteria it was seeking through this effort — the Strosacker Early Learning Fellows, which is an initiative of Purdue University Northwest's Center for Early Learning. Given the SELF model's focus on individuals who were relative novices to early learning issues, ELI invested in this initiative as an alternative to the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohort model, which was best suited for participants with a foundational awareness of early learning issues.

The SELF initiative engaged a select group of 17 leaders from a variety of businesses, government and nonprofit organizations in northwest Indiana to equip them with knowledge and resources of current early childhood research and connect them to a network of community leaders. The goal was to develop a cadre of advocates who will influence the region's practices to promote high-quality early education as a critical factor for community and economic development.

The 2019 class of SELF participants represented a wide variety of industries from Porter, LaPorte and Lake counties, including government, health care, financial services, the non-profit sector and economic development corporations. The SELF initiative brought together these leaders with the purpose of informing them about the critical nature of the development that occurs in the first five years of life and how that foundation has a lasting impact for not only the child, but for communities, businesses and the future workforce.

SELF participants received extensive materials about the state of the ECE field — both nationally as well as in Indiana — along with case studies prior to the fellowship to provide context and the necessary background knowledge to understand the larger picture. These materials ensured that everyone had certain shared understandings coming into the fellowship program.

The fellowship program kicked off with a presentation by Geoffrey Nagle, Ph.D., president and CEO of the Erikson Institute. Dr. Nagle's presentation highlighted the importance of ECE for children birth through age five and provided data that indicated that no school district in the country has been successful at bringing all children to grade level by 3rd grade if they began kindergarten below grade level. Dr. Nagle explained it is simply too late to wait until kindergarten to focus on education.

This kickoff set the stage for four 3.5-hour sessions that comprised the SELF program. The four sessions focused on the following topics:

- The brain science of early learning
- The business case for early learning
- The infrastructure for workforce development
- A call to action for Northwest Indiana — advancing early learning as a key factor for economic and community development

Nine fellows completed the program. Throughout the sessions, participants received content from experts in the field and reviewed associated data specific to each county represented. Participants were given ample opportunities to collaborate with others in the cohort, to benefit from the breadth of experience that each brought to the discussion. The final session consisted of fellows crafting and producing an elevator speech highlighting the importance of early learning and designed to motivate others to become engaged around the issue. [A final report is available here.](#)

LESSONS LEARNED

Based on the number of participants in both early learning cadres and the relatively short recruitment window, it is evident that there is a desire among those working in all settings within the early learning field and beyond to better understand how to advocate on behalf of early childhood policies and practices, whether formally or informally.

Despite busy schedules, individuals participating in the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts, including teachers, each childhood program leaders and community partners, were willing to devote a day and a half to improving their skills related to communication, engaging with community members, and building coalitions around policy issues.

Although it is impossible to know how the leadership cohort participants would have responded to the other leadership programs that were considered during the planning process, participants were overwhelmingly satisfied with the facilitators from ACS.

I would highly recommend this to anyone in the early learning or educational field. It was extremely well organized, presented, and full of great and relevant content.

— Wayne County participant

It was a very good training! It helps there is now a core of early childhood educators who can work together with common terms and process to develop our message.

— Bartholomew County participant

The material and presenters were among the best I have worked with on issues related to advocacy.

— Wayne County participant

In addition to recognizing that there is a clear demand for leadership development for those within the field, the SELF program at Purdue Northwest demonstrates that there is value and need to train those who hold leadership positions in fields outside of education and early learning on the importance of early childhood development. Providing opportunities for these professionals to learn about the importance of early development and its effect on not only their industry, but their community and society at large, increases the base of support for programs and initiatives that serve young children and their families, thereby contributing to the improved well-being of all children in Indiana.

After the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts concluded, ELI evaluated the efficacy of the model. The two cadres chose to focus on skill development around coalition building and crafting clear and effective communication. To complement this skill building, future efforts might include more elements of foundational public policy.



Based on feedback from the participants, cadre participants could benefit from a public policy academy that fills in the foundational pieces and introduces them to data. It could include professional development on communication strategies and coaching over the course of the cadre, and involve participants meeting with legislators at the statehouse.

A participant from Bartholomew County stated, “For people new to the experience of the government picture, a more basic development may be needed. Not everyone understands the process from the very beginning.”

Many things worked well and are replicable to scale the program. Participants responded well to the customized curriculum and were pleased with the ACS team. They thought having the opportunity to role play and practice the skills they were learning was helpful. The cadres gave the participants the time, space and opportunity to think about what they do so they can better communicate the importance of early learning to others. Participants also said networking was very beneficial.

If given more time, ELI would have identified an optimal cohort using an application process. Due to the time frame allowed, many participants engaged in the cadres because they were asked to do so by a supervisor; some did not know the objective of the cadre and had little interest in issues outside of their classrooms. In many cases, there were multiple participants from the same facility. While it was beneficial in some cases to have participants who were used to working side by side, this also limited the diversity of ideas and perspectives and did not expose participants to as many new connections and contacts.

The SELF model fills an important need in Indiana. It was much different than the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cadres, as it targets business leaders to educate them on child development and the importance of early care and education. Ideally, SELF-type models would exist throughout the state. Two different populations both advocating on behalf of young children from their unique perspectives have a better chance of truly moving the needle.

RECOMMENDATIONS



The Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohort evaluation results indicate that participants were very satisfied with the cadres and that the cadres were successful in increasing participants' knowledge of the early childhood system and the Indiana Birth-5 Strategic Plan 2020-2022. Every participant indicated that they improved their communication or engagement skills, and 98% of participants indicated that they planned to take or had taken action to support early learning or an issue related to early learning as a result of participating in the leadership cadre.

Over 80% of the leadership cadre participants said they felt that others within the ECE field could benefit from a program like the one they attended. These conclusions lay the foundation for four targeted recommendations for the future of early childhood leadership work in Indiana.

Recommendation 1: Focus efforts on two distinct audiences who can benefit from leadership development training in Indiana.

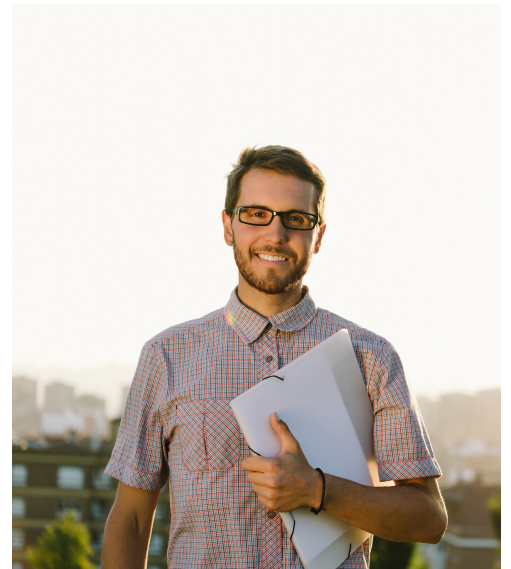
1. Those working in the early care and education field need to learn communication and networking skills that will help them more effectively translate their knowledge and passion about ECE to a broader audience of stakeholders and policy makers.
2. Those who occupy leadership roles in industries outside of ECE benefit from training on the importance of early care and education. This will allow them to better understand its importance and then bring about an increased awareness among their peers.

While the targeted audiences are very different, having two different types of leadership programs serves the early childhood system from two different vantage points and therefore has the potential to make a larger impact than either program could on its own.

Recommendation 2: The small, local cohort model was successful and should be replicated. Both the SELF cohort and the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts utilized small regional cohorts of no more than twenty-five people. The Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohort participants met virtually twice and in-person once over the course of 2.5 months, and the SELF participants met bi-weekly for two months. The cohort model allowed them to form connections and facilitated networking opportunities.

Participants in the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts said they appreciated getting to work with others in their county or region whom they hadn't met previously. Working with others from their region was seen as helpful by participants because they faced similar issues or were interested in working collaboratively on an ongoing basis.

Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohort participants indicated that they wanted additional background information such as the state of the early childhood system in Indiana, how rules and laws get changed, and what role various state agencies play in building and maintaining the system. Including the requested material would broaden the scope of the leadership training and would necessitate the lengthening of the cohort, but it would provide a more comprehensive program for those in the field.



Recommendation 3: The selection of participants should be intentional and selective, more closely resembling the recruitment model of the SELF initiative. SELF initiative leaders meet with prospective participants and outline the expectations in advance so that fellows are aware of what they are committing to and can devote the appropriate amount of time to attend the meetings.

For the pilot project, the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts primarily relied on word of mouth and convenience recruitment. While this allowed the cadres to serve the maximum number of professionals, participants should ideally have an understanding of the purpose of the cadre and a desire to develop their leadership skills. A more selective application process would help ensure this.

Recommendation 4: Future leadership training should continue to be facilitated by external experts who have demonstrated experience working with early learning practitioners to improve their communication practices and coalition-building skills. This training should include a mix of skill-building exercises, practice scenarios and small group activities.

All participants rated the facilitators from ACS as knowledgeable and effective. In addition, each participant indicated that they had increased at least one communication or networking skill as a result of the attending the 1.5 day training. Participants found the tools and activities used by ACS to be very helpful, particularly the “Give Jargon the Boot” tool and the “Coalition Building” activity.

Overall, the Indiana Early Learning Leadership Cohorts and SELF initiative proved to be two successful models that show promise to fill the need for early learning leadership development programs in Indiana. They can help groups of early childhood educators and business leaders develop their leadership skills, expand upon their policy knowledge and ultimately help advocate for and drive ECE change at the local and state levels.