


## BRIGHT BEGINNINGS FINAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bright Beginnings (formerly Early Childhood Development Initiative), in partnership with Spark Policy Institute, conducted an evaluation of its collective impact efforts for the 2015-2016 grant year based on the initiative's Theory of Action. Data sources include a survey with 29 initiative stakeholders as well as a secondary data review of initiative documents, such as initiative notes and progress tracking forms. This executive summary describes and summarizes evaluation findings, including key accomplishments and insights for improving the initiative's efforts in the upcoming grant year<sup>1</sup>.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVERVIEW

Bright Beginnings made progress in designing infrastructure for the initiative, engaging partners in planning processes, and increasing awareness around early childhood. The following examples highlight specific accomplishments aligned with the Theory of Action and across the five elements of collective impact. It is important to note that some of these actions were initiated in response to feedback received from initiative members through evaluation activities and convenings, indicating progress in establishing a learning culture within the initiative.

#### Mutually Reinforcing Activities

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- (Community Action Teams) CATs held strategic planning sessions, including asset mapping;
  - Held strategy meetings with other initiatives to align activities and approaches;
  - Provided training to align county level outcomes, indicators and activities; and
  - CATs strategized on engaging parents and residents in action planning.

#### Common Vision

- Formed CATs in 6 regions;
- Developed a Theory of Action;
- Hired facilitators and provided additional support to CATs;
- Built partnerships through media campaign; and
- Co-developed talking points to articulate alignment with Bright Futures.



<sup>1</sup> A mid-year report is available for additional evaluation findings and recommendations.





### Continuous Communication

- Strategized media campaign and developed talking points;
- Conducted informational presentations to groups across the County;
- Developed file-sharing documents to improve communication between CATs;
- Hired a communications consultant to develop an internal and external communications plan and create tools and trainings for the initiative and partners.

### Shared Measurement

- Coordinated with other initiatives and organizations in Monterey County to explore data systems that will provide continuity within the county.



### Backbone Support

- Released Engagement Opportunity Requests to identify CATs;
- Formed the Policy Advocacy Network to guide public policy and systems change; and
- Created materials and processes to unite and support the initiative.

## INITIATIVE PROGRESS IN THE FIELD

Bright Beginnings has demonstrated progress in developing and strengthening many of the key components identified in its Theory of Action, which is based on successful Collective Impact practices. Evaluation results indicate a readiness for the initiative to transition from a focus on planning into prioritizing action and identify six key areas as actionable opportunities to facilitate this growth. These key areas, described below, include: Engaging Partners and Expanding the Network; Communication; Policy Development; Sustainability and Resource Development; Data and Evaluation Strategies; and Collective Impact Capacity and Backbone Support.

## ENGAGING PARTNERS AND EXPANDING THE NETWORK

**Evaluation Findings:** Throughout the evaluation, Bright Beginnings members identified challenges with stakeholder recruitment and retention within their work. The importance of diverse community collaboration is reported as valued and prioritized. However, the initiative continues to be driven primarily by the education and non-profit sectors. Additionally, there is some ambiguity within the initiative about how various stakeholders are engaged, as well as a discrepancy between leadership and CAT members on perspectives about the extent to which sectors are currently engaged and should be engaged in the future.



**Insights:** Within collective impact work, active engagement of partners across diverse sectors helps to ensure prioritized solutions address root causes from multiple perspectives to create sustainable community change. Strategic dialogue that leads to understanding and action for addressing who is involved, who to include moving forward, and how to recruit those voices can help the initiative be better prepared to effectively lead system-wide change.

## COMMUNICATION

**Evaluation Findings:** Building and promoting communication infrastructure has been a priority this year for Bright Beginnings, with a focus on improving internal communication channels and feedback loops, as well as external communication platforms. However, those involved in the initiative report limited knowledge of the work happening internally across initiative stakeholders. For every stakeholder group within the initiative, the majority of survey respondents reported being “not at all” to “moderately” knowledgeable about the activities of that group<sup>2</sup>. The least amount of knowledge was reported for the activities of the Backbone and the Policy Advocacy Network.

**Insights:** Supporting internal communication, from the top down and the bottom up, to regularly and in real-time identify successes and opportunities for support can bolster initiative cohesion. Additionally, improved internal communication can promote partnership opportunities across stakeholders. This includes network building and resource sharing to encourage systemic approaches to addressing early childhood development challenges.

## POLICY DEVELOPMENT

**Evaluation Findings:** Bright Beginnings members are keen on increasing the policy component of the initiative. Almost one third of survey respondents reported not knowing about any ECD policy changes in their community over the past 12 months and the majority (60%) of those aware of policy change reported seeing little to some change in county policies related to ECD. The Policy Advocacy Network, a component of Bright Beginnings, is connected to the initiative to support policy change. However, roughly half (52%) of survey respondents reported not knowing enough about the PAN’s work to determine if it is a strength of the initiative. Many respondents indicated they would like to see more engagement from and with the PAN, including: increasing policy outreach and coordination in the community, supporting local policy related to ECD, and encouraging internal, collaborative policy engagement across Bright Beginnings stakeholders.

**Insights:** In response to initiative requests for increased engagement around policy issues, consider making policy advocacy a priority for the upcoming year. Given stakeholder feedback, opportunities to support policy work may include: working to set data-driven priorities, incorporating stakeholders into planning and action around policy goals, and ensuring that actions, progress, and opportunities for involvement are clearly and consistently communicated across Bright Beginnings stakeholders.

## SUSTAINABILITY AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

**Evaluation Findings:** Bright Beginnings identified engaging new and diverse funders as a resource development milestone for supporting progress toward early childhood development goals. This includes an intention for CATs to influence alignment of financial and community resources as well as partners to strategically allocate resources toward the shared vision. Grant funding, in-kind donations, and/or volunteer time were noted by about half of survey

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<sup>2</sup> Stakeholder groups include the Steering Committee (Monterey County Children’s Council), Backbone, Community Action Teams (CATs), and the Policy Advocacy Network (PAN).



respondents. Several CATs noted barriers to resource development, including time constraints and needing to prioritize funding for their organizations. Additionally, several respondents from the leadership and grassroots levels noted being unaware or unsure about resource development expectations. CAT respondents noted multiple opportunities for Bright Beginnings leadership to support resource allocation, including letters of support, notifications of new funding opportunities, information on how to approach the business community for financial resources, and logistical support.

**Insights:** For Bright Beginnings members, expectations regarding securing resources to sustainably support the initiative are not well understood. Opportunities for improvement include providing clarification on stakeholders' roles in resource procurement, increasing stakeholder awareness of different types and levels of resource development, and providing direct support to communities to address the barriers they face in securing and aligning resources toward the common goals of Bright Beginnings.

## DATA AND EVALUATION STRATEGIES

**Evaluation Findings:** Movement toward data sharing and using data to inform decision making is beginning to occur for some initiative members, particularly related to school district data. However, CATs report needing a variety of support with data, ranging from basic evaluation design to help with developing data sharing practices. Stakeholders also report a desire to see data become more of a focus area for the initiative, including: resources and capacity building for CAT groups related to understanding data collection, interpretation, and evidence-based decision making; support for developing a shared data system; and help with addressing data management with collaborative partners.

**Insights:** CATs are at different stages of development and therefore require different levels and types of support for transitioning to data-driven practices beyond an understanding of the six common indicators of the initiative. The initiative may benefit from building data and evaluation capacity by further leveraging MCCC and Backbone members' individual expertise, facilitating peer-to-peer learning between CATs, or offering direct training and resources to facilitators and CAT members.

## COLLECTIVE IMPACT CAPACITY AND BACKBONE SUPPORT

**Evaluation Findings:** Direct support for CAT teams is seen as a significant strength as well as a continued requirement for supporting and expanding on the ground work. This support includes funding CAT facilitators and securing Backbone support to drive the common agenda, advocate for the initiative, and coordinate community engagement opportunities. However, communication and engagement between the CAT work teams and the leadership team is limited, leading to a reduced ability for leadership to effectively support community strategies. Transitioning from initiative planning to action was reported to be a top priority, with requests for initiative leadership to identify and promote mutually reinforcing actions, leverage professional network connections, encourage CAT meeting attendance, and provide professional development opportunities. Additionally, greater emphasis on defining metrics, data collection, and reporting results at the initiative level to promote shared understanding of progress by stakeholders and community members is desired by all stakeholder groups.

**Insights:** Providing resources to support capacity for on the ground teams is a critical component for success. Resources that provide direct support to the CAT teams and resources that build overall initiative awareness within communities are valued. Identifying ways to further link leadership team members' skills, resources, and connections with identified CAT needs, represents a significant opportunity to strengthen the capacity of the initiative.



## RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY TABLE

Notes of Interest	Opportunities	Points to Consider
<b>Engaging Partners &amp; Expanding the Network</b>		
<p><i>Clarifying current engagement:</i> Lack of clarity and some discrepancy exists between Bright Beginnings groups on the extent to which stakeholders from various sectors are engaged in the initiative.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leverage communication supports to identify and inform initiative stakeholders on system/sector involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What structures or processes need to be in place for Bright Beginnings to increase engagement across traditional and nontraditional sectors?</li> <li>What additional supports or strategies are needed to facilitate the creation of a cohesive and targeted engagement plan?</li> <li>How can Bright Beginnings leverage successes to motivate participation from diverse sectors?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Diversifying stakeholder engagement:</i> Education and non-profits are the primary sectors involved in BB. Other sectors, including business, and non-traditional partners are desired but not engaged.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support dialogue related to prioritizing diverse partnerships for systems-level change. Encourage shared understanding of the benefits, challenges, opportunities, and strategies for engaging diverse partners.</li> </ul>	
<b>Communication</b>		
<p><i>Internal communication strategies:</i> Bright Beginnings stakeholders have varying degrees of knowledge about the activities of initiative groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address internal communication structures to increase information flow. This can help promote partnership opportunities across stakeholders and encourage systemic approaches to addressing ECD challenges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can Bright Beginnings create internal communication infrastructure that improves information flow without burdening members?</li> <li>What additional supports or strategies are needed to improve information flow within the initiative?</li> </ul>
<b>Policy Development</b>		
<p><i>Leveraging the Policy Advocacy Network (PAN):</i> Bright Beginnings members are keen on increasing the policy component of the initiative.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote Policy Advocacy Network by increasing internal communications and stakeholder dialogues to strengthen Bright Beginnings' role in policy work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can Bright Beginnings leverage current momentum around the PAN, including partnership with the Women's Foundation Policy Institute?</li> <li>What structures or processes need to be in place for Bright Beginnings to increase engagement in policy advocacy among members?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Policy collaboration:</i> There is a need for Bright Beginnings to increase collaboration around ECD policy with stakeholders, organizations and countywide initiatives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for opportunities to include public will building and policy advocacy efforts in planning and communication activities at both the local and county levels.</li> </ul>	



<p><i>Focusing on local policy:</i> There is strong interest in increasing targeted efforts to engage in local ECD policy work that leads to concrete changes in EC systems and services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use assessment of current local level priorities, opportunities, and engagement across stakeholders to determine next steps for the PAN.</li> </ul>	
<h3>Sustainability &amp; Resource Development</h3>		
<p><i>Clarifying expectations and opportunities for securing resources:</i> Bright Beginnings members are unsure of expectations to secure resources for the initiative and note many barriers to resource allocation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clarification on members' roles in resource procurement;</li> <li>• Increase awareness and provide support for securing resources that can contribute to initiative sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What mechanisms can be put in place to ensure Bright Beginnings members understand and have the support they need to contribute to sustaining the work?</li> </ul>
<h3>Data &amp; Evaluation Strategies</h3>		
<p><i>Supporting CATs in their data and evaluation efforts:</i> CATs are at different stages of development and require different levels and types of support to incorporate data-driven practices into their work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build data and evaluation capacity by leveraging MCCC and Backbone expertise, facilitating peer-to-peer learning between CATs, and offering direct training and resources to facilitators and CAT members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What additional knowledge or resources do the MCCC and the Backbone need to further support data and evaluation efforts at the community level</li> <li>• What processes or structures are needed to ensure Bright Beginnings is integrating data-driven decision-making at all levels in a cohesive manner</li> </ul>
<h3>Collective Impact Capacity &amp; Backbone Support</h3>		
<p><i>Transitioning from planning to action:</i> The initiative is transitioning from planning-based to action-based priorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote opportunities for stakeholders to identify, understand, and engage in mutually reinforcing actions linked to goals</li> <li>• Increase backbone efficacy to support action phases of collective impact.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can learning be integrated into the Bright Beginnings infrastructure during this transitional phase?</li> <li>• What additional learning or resources will help the Backbone target their support effectively?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Matching CAT needs with leadership assets:</i> CAT members have requests for leadership and support; requests often match the expertise of Bright Beginnings leadership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify opportunities to communicate CAT needs to leadership and leadership assets to CATs;</li> <li>• Promote infrastructure that encourages use of leader assets to support on the ground efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What additional supports are needed for the Backbone to shift from planning to action?</li> </ul>

