

Evaluation of the North Carolina Partnership for Children Leaders Collaborative

Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant
Final Report 2012-2015



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STRATEGY GROUP

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Smart Start Leaders Collaborative (Leaders Collaborative) strengthens local leadership capacity by improving learning outcomes for young children in North Carolina communities. The Leaders Collaborative, created by the North Carolina Partnership for Young Children (NCPC), specifically works to ensure that the most vulnerable children have the experiences needed to enter kindergarten ready to succeed by focusing on results-based accountability, reducing disparities between groups of children, and more effectively engaging diverse community partners in collaborative leadership to develop solutions that address challenges faced by young children and their families.

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation sponsored a preliminary cohort of the Leaders Collaborative, which was revamped based on lessons learned. The revised Leaders Collaborative was then funded by a four-year federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant. NCPC coordinated annual cohorts of executive directors from local Smart Start partnerships and up to four NCPC staff members. This report summarizes the results from the four cohorts funded between 2012-2015.

Each year, up to sixteen participants came together on a regular basis over the course of nine months. Participants learned tools for engaging new and existing community partners and worked in their local communities to create shared agreements to address disparities among children, build data capacity, and develop mechanisms for quantifying and sharing progress. In between sessions, participants implemented new tools for leadership and collaboration directly into their community work. The Leaders Collaborative significantly focused on racial equity by providing training and practice for participants to address situations where structural and institutional realities led to disparate outcomes between groups of children. In addition to concentrating on this area throughout all the sessions, one of the eight Leaders Collaborative sessions focused solely on this topic and 21 local communities implemented a local Leading for Equity retreat with community partners.

The Leaders Collaborative was designed to fortify the Smart Start model to improve early childhood outcomes, which can only happen through collective action and coordinated efforts. Through the development of skills to engage diverse community partners and align contributions, the executive directors of local partnerships were better equipped to reduce disparities between groups of children by creating effective partnerships and collectively strengthening early childhood systems and programs.

The Leaders Collaborative has shown an increase in the quality and quantity of partnerships and collaborations focused on addressing disparities among young children across the state and issues related to equity.

All four cohorts reported measurable gains in knowledge of their leadership style and skills, learned new tools for building community partnerships, developed and used these new skills in ways that had a measurable impact in their communities, and built new relationships to further the vision and mission of Smart Start locally and statewide. Leaders Collaborative participants report a positive difference in both the ways in which they facilitated local meetings and the ways in which statewide meetings took place. Participants across all cohorts reported that as a result of their experience they developed significant assets that contributed to the overall Smart Start network. They built a strong statewide network of colleagues among the executive directors of local partnerships and with NCPC: cultivated a shared language and tools for hosting conversations, adopted a mindset, focused on proactively seeking positive solutions; and developed the ability to use data to inform decision-making and measure impact.

The Leaders Collaborative participants consistently identified the following specific distinctions and tools as ones they used in their daily work:

- The appreciative leadership approach
- Serving as a convener and facilitator of community processes rather than the person who needed to have all of the answers (known as the “host not hero” distinction)
- Engaging more partners generally as well as engaging more strategic partners to support the local work
- Learning to use data more effectively to drive community decision-making
- Gaining a much deeper understanding of issues related to equity and how to effectively address disparities between groups of children
- Using protocols to facilitate community conversations and processes
- More effective meeting planning and implementation

- More confidence in planning and convening community partners, particularly around challenging problems for which there were not immediate solutions
- Improved communication skills

In each cohort at least two (and as many as six) **participants stated that the Leaders Collaborative had such a profound impact that it had dramatically altered their work.** In more than one case this happened to the point that long-planned retirements or professional transitions were cancelled because the leaders were so rejuvenated.

Collectively, this demonstrates that the focus of the Leaders Collaborative, which presents new topics and then requires the participants to apply this new knowledge in their local communities, has effectively supported application of knowledge into practice consistently across all four cohorts.



In addition to getting feedback from the participants through surveys and focus groups, surveys of local community partners assessed the impact of the Leaders Collaborative on the way Smart Start work took place. **Across all four years community partners confirmed that the skills executive directors learned in the Leaders Collaborative had a direct impact on local work happening on behalf of young children.** The community partners consistently identified the following as changes they had experienced and observed: more effective meetings, more extensive community engagement, and greater focus on addressing disparities between groups of children.

Among the 21 communities that planned and implemented local Leading for Equity retreats with community partners, **significant capacity and momentum was built to address disparities in communities.** Community partners who participated in local equity retreats were particularly complementary of that experience and the positive impact it had on addressing disparities between groups of children. Community partners reported general improvements in the amount and quality of local conversations about early childhood issues and on specific equity issues; improvements were also noted in the number of actions taken to address these disparities. Some community partners also noted that they were making changes within the organizations they operated to bring a more focused equity lens to their work.

Another goal of the Leaders Collaborative was to create stronger relationships among the participants to strengthen the Smart Start Network. All four cohorts reported positive impact on this goal, although Cohort III faced unique challenges with group cohesion due to early turnover in group membership.

Participants in all four cohorts reported hesitation at the onset of the program about making the time commitment to participate in the Leaders Collaborative. By the end of the experience, however, **100% of participants said they would recommend the experience to their peers.**

Over the course of the four years NCPC adapted the Leaders Collaborative to reflect lessons learned from the evaluation to better meet the goals of the project. Of these many positive changes, perhaps most notable was the creation of leadership development assessments and a competency-focused peer coaching program provided to all participants to allow greater opportunities for skill building.

The Leaders Collaborative achieved its goals and has been a very positive experience for the participants, community members and the overall Smart Start network. **The intensive leadership development experience significantly advanced the knowledge and skills of the partnership executive directors and rejuvenated their commitment to their work, both locally and statewide. The experience has had a strong positive impact on local communities' ability to meet the needs of young children and to reduce disparities between groups of children with new and more diverse partners getting involved and helping to make a positive difference at the local level.** The overall Smart Start network has grown stronger as a result of the Leaders Collaborative, as it has provided shared language and new approaches for leaders committed to helping each child reach his or her potential to prepare them to succeed in a global community.





BACKGROUND

The Smart Start Leaders Collaborative is a performance-driven leadership program for executive directors of local Smart Start partnerships and selected staff from the North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC). Over the course of the nine-month program participants explored best practices in leadership, community development, meeting planning and facilitation, partner engagement, and the effective use of data to mobilize community work. Smart Start Partnership Executive Directors worked in their local communities to collaboratively develop agreements focused on closing disparities between groups of children, engaging diverse partners to address this community priority, building data capacity, and developing mechanisms for quantifying and sharing progress.

The Leaders Collaborative was designed to systematically increase the knowledge and skills of Smart Start Executive Directors so they had the leadership skills needed to galvanize their communities to better meet the needs of the most vulnerable children. The Leaders Collaborative focused on: results-based accountability, closing the gap on disparities, and building collaborative leadership.

Each cohort convened eight times over the course of one year. The meetings occurred over the course of one evening, a full day, and a half-day. Each session provided training and coaching by subject-matter experts. In between sessions, leaders implemented the new tools in their community work and participated in an online learning community, which was designed to enable participants to share resources and provide support and feedback in a shared online space.

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation sponsored a preliminary cohort of the Leaders Collaborative. Based on lessons learned from this cohort, the Leaders Collaborative program was revamped. The four subsequent cohorts and a total of 59 professionals were supported by federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant funding between 2012-2015; this included 44 executive directors of local partnerships and 15 staff from NCPC. This report summarizes the results of all four years of the Leaders Collaborative cohort funded by RTT-ELC grant.

EVALUATION SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This evaluation was designed to evaluate, over a four-year period, the impact of the Leaders Collaborative on building the leadership capacity of local Smart Start Executive Directors, strengthening the Smart Start network to more effectively meet the needs of young children and families in local communities, and reducing disparities between children with high needs and their peers. This report summarizes the results from the four years, documenting the impact of the Leaders Collaborative on more immediate outcomes designed to contribute to the longer-term goal. The evaluation summarized three levels of impact:

- **Community Development:** impact of the Leaders Collaborative and the Leading for Equity retreats on work to engage community partners to address disparities between groups of children and the effectiveness of the executive director at rallying community partners and resources to make a measurable impact on children's outcomes.
- **Individual Development:** impact of the Leaders Collaborative on the individual awareness, knowledge and skills of the Leaders Collaborative participants.
- **Group Development:** impact of the Leaders Collaborative on the development of the group of participants as a cohort of colleagues.

Cohort I was asked questions only after their participation in the Leaders Collaborative due to the timing of the start of the evaluation. Data was gathered from Cohorts II-IV before and after participation to measure impact over the course of the Leaders Collaborative. Participants from each cohort are also contacted annually to measure additional progress on local plans to achieve the results and outcomes from their specific project and measure the impact of the Leaders Collaborative one to three years after participation. The full scope of the expected results, expected outcomes and evaluation questions is provided in Appendix A.

This report provides cumulative results from the four RTT-ELC cohorts and is organized around the three larger themes of development: community, individual and group. Given the extensive qualitative feedback gathered from the interviews and surveys, direct quotes are provided in italics throughout the report to demonstrate the impact of the Leaders Collaborative on participants and community members. The comments were made at the end of each cohort, unless otherwise noted.



TECHNICAL APPROACH

Overview

This report summarizes results from the evaluation completed over four years, with comparisons provided by cohort or aggregate results reported. This report consists of results gathered through:

- **Qualitative results from individual interviews** from participants at the end of the Leaders Collaborative experience. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each (see Appendix B for a copy of the interview questions). Quotes from interviews from the four cohorts are throughout the report.
- **Quantitative and qualitative results from a baseline and post-participation survey** of the executive directors. Over the course of the Leaders Collaborative project 38 executive directors (Cohorts II-IV) completed the baseline survey (see Appendix C) before the start of the Leaders Collaborative. A total of 42 executive directors (Cohorts I-IV) completed the post-participation survey (see Appendix D) after the completion of the Leaders Collaborative. The annual results from each cohort are outlined in this report.
- **Quantitative results from previous cohort participants** A total of fifteen executive directors from Cohorts I-II (2014) and eight executive directors from Cohorts I, II and III (2015) completed the survey that reflected on how their experiences in the Leaders Collaborative continue to impact their work more than a year after participation.
- **Quantitative and qualitative results from a survey of Community Partners** who work with the Leaders Collaborative participants in their local communities (see Appendix E for a copy of the survey). The survey was completed following participation for all four cohorts.



Analysis

Mixed methods were used to collect and analyze the data for each of the four years of the evaluation to ensure richer data and to capture information from a variety of perspectives. Quantitative data were gathered through Survey Monkey and entered and analyzed in SPSS. The findings were summarized with descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies and means), comparisons of pre- and post-tests or retrospective post evaluations (e.g., paired t-tests and general linear model repeated measures) and group comparisons (e.g., cross-tabulations).

Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and entered into NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software program, which was used to organize and code the interview transcripts. Each transcript was initially coded into categories based on the semi-structured questions used in guiding the interviews. A constant comparative method of data analysis was used to separate and categorize the data into discrete concepts. This grounded approach included open coding and theoretical memoing. Axial coding was used to reduce the data and identify parent and grandparent codes that led to the causal links and themes. The coded data were integrated and emergent themes were identified.

To identify any research validity threats, the evaluation team applied a critical lens to preliminary findings from the data analysis by discussing them among the team members. This critical review was employed to ensure that the data were sufficiently rich and that qualitative findings were congruent with the quantitative results (Maxwell, 1996). The findings were also triangulated between the responses from the executive directors and those of the Community Partners. Alignment and consistency of the semi-structured questions used in each of the interviews strengthened the validity and reliability of the study (Creswell, 2007). Any threats to validity were addressed by using multiple data sources, a mixed methods design, continuous checks among the research team during data analysis, and review of the preliminary findings for congruency and consistent methodology.

Because this was a four-year project, data was gathered annually through each of the four RTT-ELC-funded cohorts both immediately following participation as well as annually one to three years after participation. This enabled assessment of how the Leaders Collaborative experience impacted participants and ongoing work in local communities over time. Deeper interviews were also completed with a small number of executive directors who made particular strides in their communities.



OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS ON EXPECTED RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

The full evaluation scope is provided in Appendix A and consists of expected results, expected outcomes, and evaluation questions. Table 1 summarizes each of the expected results and outcomes and the status of each of the items after four years of the Leaders Collaborative. **As noted in the table, most objectives were achieved or exceeded stated goals; a couple did not meet the targeted number of participants.**

Table I summarizes the long-term goals of Leaders Collaborative through the end of 2015 and progress toward meeting these goals after all four RTT-ELC cohorts (2012-2015).

Table 1: Progress on Leaders Collaborative Expected Outcomes and Results: Cohorts I-IV: 2012-2015

EXPECTED RESULTS	RESULTS FROM RTT-ELC COHORTS I, II, III AND IV
By the end of 2015, up to 50 local leaders and 14 NCPC leaders will participate in the Leaders Collaborative project	
Target date for completion	End of 2015
Number of partnerships as of December 2015	44 local partnership executive directors and 15 NCPC staff participated in RTT-ELC cohorts I-IV*
Status compared to target date	The targeted number of NCPC Staff participated and fewer than estimated Local Partnership Executive Directors
	<i>* Cohorts I and II each had 12 executive directors and 4 NCPC staff; Cohort III had 9 executive directors and 3 NCPC staff; Cohort IV had 11 executive directors and 4 NCPC staff</i>
By the end of 2015, 20 Equity Retreats will be held across the state	
Target date for completion	End of 2015
Percent of local partnerships meeting objective as of December 2014	21 Equity Retreats held
Status compared to target date	Exceeded Expected Target
By the end of 2015, 50 local partnerships will develop shared agreements with their Community Partners; the shared agreements will define the disparity the community-based group has agreed to work on, the specific role or activity each partner agrees to understand to address the disparity, how they will measure their success, and how the Community Partners will work together.	
Target date for completion	End of 2015
Percent of local partnerships meeting objective as of December 2015	44 local partnerships completed shared agreements with their Community Partners (100%)
Status compared to target date	100% completion rate among participants; Slightly behind target due to total number of graduates

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

RESULTS FROM RTT-ELC COHORTS I, II, III, IV

85% of Leaders Collaborative participants will increase their understanding of their leadership style, leadership strengths, and leadership weaknesses.

Status as of December 2015

Percent of Leaders Collaborative participants who have increased their understanding of their leadership style 97.2%

Percent of Leaders Collaborative participants who have increased their understanding of their leadership strengths 100%

Percent of Leaders Collaborative participants who have increased their understanding of their leadership weaknesses 100%

Status compared to expected outcome Exceeded Expected Outcome

100% of Leaders Collaborative participants will share data on early childhood disparities with local Community Partners

Status as of December 2015 100%

Status compared to expected outcome Met Expected Outcome

75% of Leaders Collaborative participants will work with local partnership to develop a plan to address disparities for young children (this should include all of those partnerships hosting Leading for Equity retreats as well as a portion of those not hosting retreats).

Status as of December 2015 100%

Status compared to expected outcome Exceeded Expected Outcome

50% of communities with action plans will begin implementation within three months after the last meeting of the Leaders Collaborative

Status as of December 2015 100%

Status compared to expected outcome Dramatically Exceeded Expected Outcome

75% of Community partners will report an increase in collaboration focused on addressing disparities in children's learning.

Status as of December 2015 100%

Status compared to expected outcome Exceeded Expected Outcome

Program Improvements

The annual evaluation of the Leaders Collaborative provided important feedback, which was instrumental in shaping the initiative over time and ensuring it best met participant needs and accomplished project goals. NCPC carefully reviewed results of each of the annual evaluations and had extensive conversations with the evaluator to learn more about the feedback to effectively integrate improvements into the Leaders Collaborative experience.

NCPC made the following changes to the Leaders Collaborative as a result of the evaluation:

- **Session content and connection between facilitators:** The program was revised over time to provide clear roadmaps to participants about the purpose of the overall initiative and how each specific element of the content built upon previous learning to help achieve the initiative's goals. Some content was rearranged in terms of when and how it was presented and facilitators began to intentionally check-in with each other between sessions to share emerging themes and relevant insights about content and dynamics to improve subsequent sessions. These changes created a smoother flow of content and more intentional implementation.
- **Leadership development:** In Cohort IV NCPC developed and implemented self-assessments for use by the cohort to increase the focus on leadership competencies. Participants individually assessed and tracked their leadership growth at key points throughout the process as they applied new theories and tools. By the final session, participants had a clear sense of their strengths and growth as individual, organizational and community partners.
- **Cultivating new leaders:** Cohorts I-III only included experienced Smart Start executive directors. By Cohort IV the target audience was expanded to include not just seasoned executive directors but also directors new to an executive role. The goal of this change was to build a stronger, more sustainable Smart Start network fueled by both experienced wisdom and new perspectives and energy.
- **Sustained focus on Leading for Equity:** Over the four cohorts the focus on Leading for Equity – a deep focus on how to achieve equitable results for all children – increased. By Cohort IV the title of the Leaders Collaborative was changed to be Leaders Collaborative/Leading for Equity and sustained emphasis was placed on the importance of this work throughout the leadership development process, not just in the Leading for Equity workshop and during the local Leading for Equity retreats. All applicants addressed equity questions in their application and all had the chance to apply for funding for local Leading for Equity retreats. Additionally, in year four previous cohorts were provided the opportunity to apply for two additional leading for equity retreats.
- **Increased focus on outcomes:** By the fourth cohort there was a strong focus on cultivating community buy-in at the beginning of the process. To increase understanding of and commitment to addressing local disparities, the executive directors collaborated with their local stakeholders earlier in the process to identify the most pressing disparities in the community and this focus was sustained throughout the experience. When participants gathered in November all participants shared the outcomes achieved in their communities and described the actions taken to continue to propel this community change forward.
- **Additional session:** An additional session was added that emphasized the role of each participant as individual, organizational and system-wide leaders. This session was intended to integrate all the Leaders Collaborative/Leading for Equity theories and practice so participants were able to “connect the dots” of their learning by connecting how the theories, skills, and practice all fit together.
- **Coaching:** Mid-session in Cohort IV, small peer coaching groups were formed from the larger group and sustained through the end of the program. Peer coaching in small groups was provided to help participants increase awareness and application of their own leadership skills as they worked with

their communities to collaboratively address disparities. The peer coaching was facilitated by the four key Leaders Collaborative/ Leading for Equity instructors.

- **New Online Learning Community:** While participants appreciated the conceptual model of an online learning community the initial iteration in Cohort I was challenging. Participants found it overwhelming to go to yet another system to do work; there were also some functionality issues that made using the system frustrating, particularly for participants in rural communities with limited Internet access. By year four the online learning community was revamped and integrated into Fabrik, NCPC’s suite of online tools, with the design informed by lessons learned from the Leaders Collaborative. This integrated, revamped system enabled executive directors to access a more streamlined online learning community more efficiently and effectively.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Leaders Collaborative sought to build the skills of Smart Start partnership executive directors to reduce disparities between groups of children, build more effective and strategic community partnerships, and improve overall effectiveness in having positive, measurable impacts on children's outcomes. Leading for Equity Retreats (Equity Retreats) were implemented in a total of 21 communities over the four years to engage local community partners in deeper work related to addressing racial inequities and disparities among groups of children.

The Leaders Collaborative was designed to build community development in multiple ways, which were assessed as part of the evaluation:

- Collaboration with community partners
- Development of shared community agreements to support work in communities
- Increasing the focus on disparities between groups of children
- Implementing local Equity Retreats

A summary of results in each of these categories is provided, followed by a summary of the implications of the collective results on community development. Results from all four cohorts are provided.

Collaboration with Community Partners

As a result of the Leaders Collaborative, executive directors in Cohorts II-IV reported that collaboration with all partner types increased; pre and post data to measure growth over time was not gathered for RTT-ELC Cohort I since the evaluation did not start until after they were half-way through the Leaders Collaborative experience. Participants were asked to rate their degree of collaboration with each type of community partner before their participation in the Leaders Collaborative on the initial survey, and then were asked to rate their degree of collaboration with these same types of partners on the post-participation survey. A total of 38 participants completed the pre-survey across the three cohorts and 30 participants completed the post-survey. To evaluate growth over time, only the results of the respondents who completed both surveys each year were analyzed.



Table 2: Collaboration with Community Partners Before and After the Leaders Collaborative

	COHORT II			COHORT III			COHORT IV		
	COLLABORATION BEFORE AND AFTER THE LEADERS COLLABORATIVE (AFTER NUMBERS NOTED IN ITALICS)			COLLABORATION BEFORE AND AFTER THE LEADERS COLLABORATIVE (AFTER NUMBERS NOTED IN ITALICS)			COLLABORATION BEFORE AND AFTER THE LEADERS COLLABORATIVE (AFTER NUMBERS NOTED IN ITALICS)		
	N=10			N=8			N=12		
	None	Some	Extensive	None	Some	Extensive	None	Some	Extensive
DSS	11.1% <i>0%</i>	44.46% <i>58.33%</i>	44.44% <i>41.67%</i>	12.5% <i>0%</i>	37.5% <i>75%</i>	50% <i>25%</i>	13% <i>18%</i>	27% <i>55%</i>	60% <i>27%</i>
Health Department	0% <i>0%</i>	70% <i>83.33%</i>	30% <i>16.67%</i>	0% <i>0%</i>	37.5% <i>12.5%</i>	62.5% <i>87.5%</i>	7% <i>18%</i>	33% <i>27%</i>	60% <i>55%</i>
LICC	10% <i>8.33%</i>	60% <i>58.34%</i>	30% <i>33.33%</i>	25% <i>25%</i>	37.5% <i>25%</i>	37.5% <i>50%</i>	31% <i>18%</i>	46% <i>64%</i>	23% <i>18%</i>
CCR&R	0% <i>8.33%</i>	40% <i>16.67%</i>	60% <i>75%</i>	12.5% <i>12.5%</i>	37.5% <i>25%</i>	50% <i>62.5%</i>	0% <i>9%</i>	53% <i>27%</i>	47% <i>64%</i>
Child Care Centers	0% <i>0%</i>	30% <i>41.67%</i>	70% <i>58.33%</i>	0% <i>25%</i>	50% <i>25%</i>	50% <i>50%</i>	13% <i>9%</i>	34% <i>46%</i>	53% <i>45%</i>
Family Child Care Homes	0% <i>9.09%</i>	50% <i>63.64%</i>	50% <i>27.27%</i>	12.5% <i>25%</i>	62.5% <i>37.5%</i>	25% <i>37.5%</i>	20% <i>9%</i>	40% <i>55%</i>	40% <i>36%</i>
Local School Districts(s)	0% <i>0%</i>	30% <i>66.67%</i>	70% <i>33.33%</i>	12.5% <i>0%</i>	50% <i>50%</i>	37.5% <i>50%</i>	20% <i>27%</i>	40% <i>46%</i>	40% <i>27%</i>
County Managers	0% <i>0%</i>	40% <i>75%</i>	10% <i>16.67%</i>	25% <i>25%</i>	50% <i>62.5%</i>	25% <i>12.5%</i>	50% <i>36%</i>	50% <i>55%</i>	0% <i>9%</i>
Mayor's Offices	50% <i>8.33%</i>	30% <i>75%</i>	10% <i>16.67%</i>	62.5% <i>62.5%</i>	37.5% <i>37.5%</i>	0% <i>0%</i>	50% <i>45%</i>	50% <i>55%</i>	0% <i>0%</i>
Other Elected Officials	10% <i>0%</i>	80% <i>91.67%</i>	10% <i>8.33%</i>	25% <i>12.5%</i>	62.5% <i>75%</i>	12.5% <i>12.5%</i>	40% <i>27%</i>	60% <i>73%</i>	0% <i>0%</i>
Chambers of Commerce	0% <i>0%</i>	80% <i>81.82%</i>	20% <i>18.18%</i>	0% <i>12.5%</i>	75% <i>87.5%</i>	25% <i>0%</i>	33% <i>36%</i>	47% <i>46%</i>	20% <i>18%</i>
Businesses	20% <i>8.33%</i>	70% <i>75%</i>	10% <i>16.67%</i>	37.5% <i>50%</i>	62.5% <i>37.5%</i>	0% <i>12.5%</i>	40% <i>27%</i>	60% <i>64%</i>	0% <i>9%</i>
NAACP	80% <i>36.36%</i>	20% <i>54.55%</i>	0% <i>9.09%</i>	100% <i>75%</i>	0% <i>12.5%</i>	0% <i>12.5%</i>	93% <i>63%</i>	7% <i>37%</i>	0% <i>0%</i>
Other Civil Rights Groups	0% <i>0%</i>	10% <i>36.37%</i>	10% <i>18.18%</i>	62.5% <i>75%</i>	37.5% <i>25%</i>	0% <i>0%</i>	92% <i>45%</i>	8% <i>55%</i>	0% <i>0%</i>
Community-Based Non-Profit Organizations	Question not asked in initial survey			Question not asked in initial survey			Question not asked in initial survey		
	<i>0%</i>	<i>58.33%</i>	<i>41.67%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>75%</i>	<i>9%</i>	<i>46%</i>	<i>45%</i>

Data from survey of local partnership executive directors.

The bolded percentages denote which partner types reported a statistically significant improvement in their level of collaboration. Across the three years, the following groups had significant improvements in collaboration across all three years: Department of Social Services, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R), family child care homes, county managers, mayor’s offices, other elected officials, other businesses (not Chambers of Commerce), NAACP. The following groups had significant improvements in collaboration across two years: Health Departments, Local Interagency Coordinating Council (LICC), and civil rights groups; the following groups had significant improvements in collaboration during one year: child care centers, school districts, and Chambers of Commerce.

Respondents reported that collaboration with some partner types actually decreased over the course of the Leaders Collaborative. Through probing this in the interviews this may be because executive directors overestimated their level of collaboration before the Leaders Collaborative and, through the experience, realized that there was more room for improvement to deepen this collaboration. A number of participants reported that their post-results were a more accurate reflection of their actual level of collaboration and that they now had skills to more effectively cultivate deeper and more authentic collaboration.

Local community partners also noted a measurable difference in the quality and extent of collaboration as a result of the Leaders Collaborative. Community partners completed a survey asking for their perspective on a variety of areas of work. Participation by cohort included:

- Cohort 1: 54 respondents from eleven of the twelve participating communities
- Cohort II: 57 respondents from nine of the eleven participating communities
- Cohort III: 21 respondents from four of the thirteen participating communities
- Cohort 4: 78 respondents from nine of the eleven participating communities

The community partners were asked how the work of their local Smart Start partnership

changed over the last year, specifically related to the activities outlined in Table 3. Across all four years, the most dramatic changes were related to engaging other community members (80%), identifying community needs (72%), bringing the right people together to address specific needs (71%), and creating community partnerships (66%). These results were relatively consistent across the four years. While the placement of the top five items shifted slightly among cohort years these changes were consistently the top five across all cohort years. Across all four years the three changes that scored the lowest were helping the early childhood system in the community work together more effectively (57%), running efficient and effective meetings (47%), and raising funding (42%). The placement of these three items was consistent across all four years of the evaluation.

Table 3: Changes in Local Partnership Work From Perspective of Community Partners

	%	n=199
Engaging other community members	80%	159
Identifying community needs	72%	143
Bringing right people together to address specific needs	71%	141
Creating community partnerships	66%	132
Creating community momentum on specific issues	58%	115
Helping the early childhood system in our community work together more effectively	57%	93
Running efficient and effective meetings	47%	159
Raising funding	42%	141

Data from survey of local community partners.

Additionally, across the four years:

- 76% of community partners stated they had worked with their Smart Start local partnership to address a specific disparity (or differences between groups of children) that needs improvement.
- 59% of community partners stated that their organization had developed new strategic partnerships with other local organizations on issues related to early childhood in the last year.
- 51% of community partners stated that they had developed a new or improved relationship with their local partnership in the last year.

Across the four cohorts, participating executive directors identified the following outcomes of the Leaders Collaborative:

- Deepened existing partnership (71%)
- Developed new ways of working together on community priorities (68%)
- Created new momentum on challenging issues (63%)
- Learned new skills for handling challenging community dynamics (61%)

One of the goals – and challenges – of the work of local Smart Start partnerships is to engage diverse community partners to collectively improve early childhood outcomes in local communities by maximizing and aligning local resources. These results indicate that the Leaders Collaborative is effectively increasing community engagement and collaboration among a broad array of stakeholders to address children’s needs.

“The Leaders Collaborative was a transformative experience that expanded my capacity as a leader. Personal barriers were removed that would have prevented me from taking on some of the community challenges and findings ways to address them.”
Cohort I

“Some of the very practical facilitation skills that I learned in the LC have proven to be very valuable. I am often surprised at how seemingly basic things can make such a positive impact. I have a much deeper “tool kit” to draw from now than I did before the LC. This was evidenced at a board retreat we held just last week, in which the board is taking on their own growth and engagement for the sake of young children! Also, while I am growing in my leadership strength and I would not say I have reached my pinnacle yet, I am a more confident leader. I take my role more seriously, and I take the role of the partnership more seriously in terms of what kind of leadership we need to offer in the community. Finally, I value convening and facilitating more now than I did before the LC.” Cohort II

Development of Shared Community Agreements to Support Work in Communities

A central goal of the Leaders Collaborative is to improve the outcomes of vulnerable children and to close disparities between groups of children. Leaders Collaborative participants engaged in concerted efforts to review local data to identify disparities between groups of children and to identify topics on which the community was experiencing the greatest challenges. These topics included, but were not limited to:

- Kindergarten readiness
- Childhood obesity
- Third grade reading scores
- Quality of early learning programs
- Immunization rates
- Participation in well child check-ups
- Bringing attention to the needs of young children through the First 2000 Days campaign.

The topic of focus for the shared agreements was developed through a collaborative process that involved diverse stakeholders in each community reviewing data, identifying priorities based on the greatest need and community resources and momentum, and development of a shared agreement around what topic would be addressed

and how the community partners would work together to close disparities between groups of children.

Participating local partnerships received detailed data from the North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC) that informed the planning around how to decrease local disparities. Most interviewees found this data extremely helpful, though a small number of participants shared that the data did not show obvious disparities, particularly by race, and their community agreement work was informed by knowledge of the community and issues on which there was already community momentum.



- *“When confronted with hard data any excuse of hand-waving is reduced to a trifle.” Cohort I*
- *“Better data (such as comparing DIAL scores of beginning kindergarteners with previous preschool vs. those without) makes a clearer picture of our situation what needs to be done to address the issue.” Cohort I*
- *“I loved the data reports. It put the data in terms that I was able to understand and brought it to my county level. Our birth to five population is really small and it is hard to get data that is usable. The data report helped*

me present data in new ways.” Cohort II

- *“The data reports were so helpful to our community. It was really helpful to see complex data presented in new ways. Combined with the tools I learned in the Leaders Collaborative, the data report helped create new momentum on important issues for children in our community.” Cohort III*
- *“I have done a lot of work with data for many years and didn’t think I had much to learn about our community. Boy was I wrong! The data report really helped me and others in our community understand the needs of children in important new ways.” Cohort III*
- *“The Leaders Collaborative provided more resources discovering data so I could provide a more complete picture of my community. I also learned how to present and use data more effectively. I was able to present data in a way that was compelling and engaging and bridge from this presentation into effective action.” Cohort IV*

Participants from diverse sectors within each community used the data reports to work together to develop a set of Shared Community Agreements (previously called shared agreements). Across all four years some of these agreements were highly detailed and defined the disparity and how the community partners would work together and measure success as they worked together. Others were more general and stated broad issues and a vision to which all partners were committed to fulfilling. Across all four years the agreements also varied in scope, with some focusing on a specific event or activity and others focused on much broader goals that would take many years and focused attention to address. By December of 2015 all of the executive directors across all four cohorts had completed their shared community agreements.

Of the 189 community partners who responded to the community agreement question on the survey, 71% had or were currently participating in the development of shared community agreements.

Community partners indicated a strong potential for follow-through on their commitments. Among community partners involved in fulfilling the community agreement:

- 15% had already completed their commitment to the community agreement
- 85% said they were somewhat or highly likely to complete their commitment
- 0% said they were not very likely or not at all likely to complete their commitment.

When asked to share their estimations of how many community partners would fulfill their commitment:

- 32% of respondents stated that they thought all participants would complete their commitment
- 51% thought most would likely follow through
- 17% thought that some would likely follow through
- 0% of respondents thought that none would follow through.

Community partners had the following comments on the impact of the development of the shared community agreements:

- *“We have seen incredible growth in our collaboration with the school system, most notably in a project to share data and create a system that will link data from the Pre-K years to the early elementary years. This is for the purpose of creating a business case for large public/private investment in a universal Pre-K model for our county. We have more work happening between meetings by sub-group, and we are working more intentionally toward a shared goal. Also, other people who can move the project forward have come to the table. I have learned that using another leader’s strengths and influence rather than muddling along trying to do it myself out of a feeling of obligation has been a key to success.” Cohort I*
- *“Our agreement is still a living document and we are continuing to work on the goals we articulated as a group.” Cohort I*
- *“We continue to have a very active committee that continues to work on the shared agreement.” Cohort II*

- *“Our shared agreement related to increasing quality child care and engaging child care centers and the community around the First 2000 Days message. We continue to build upon the work that first began with our shared agreement.” Cohort II*
- *“The discussion among different organizations of how resources can be used to create collective impact have increased. The work feels more focused and coordinated now.” Cohort II*
- *“The collaboration has increased among community partners. We are engaging diverse leaders in new ways that hold a lot of promise. There is a lot of momentum.” Cohort II*
- *“More and more individuals and agencies are coming to the table to work together to help our families and their children.” Cohort III*
- *“More agencies have taken an active role to help address disparities. More committed partnerships and deeper collaboration is taking place.” Cohort III*
- *“Community organizations are really starting to understand and get on board to help with this cause. People from schools, government, economic development, child care, etc. are coming together in new ways to focus on our children and their future.” Cohort IV*
- *“The meetings planned by the Executive Director have started the conversation and brought many of the key players to the table. We now have more intentional programs and action teams working on goals.” Cohort IV*

The focus and scope of the shared community agreements varied widely and therefore the progress from each community was also very different. Comments from participants at the end of the Leaders Collaborative on the community shared agreement work included:

- *“We are really pleased with the shared agreement, which includes the action steps. People feel like they’re going to do something – very active. The “we know” statements will be publicized. The ultimate work plan ended up being really awesome.” Cohort I*



- *“The most exciting thing: people focused on what needed to be done and not on just the budget and how much money was needed.” Cohort I*
- *“We think that coming up with four areas was pretty bold. People were not scared of this and they feel like the children in their community deserve excellent services. They are seeing the product and are really proud of this work. They think it will really live on.” Cohort I*
- *“We have engaged our local newspaper in writing a series of articles on early childhood development. We are utilizing existing resources such as the First 2000 Days presentations from Smart Start. We are coordinating with existing programs such as Cooperative Extension and Child Care Technical Assistance to reach parents, community partners and child care providers. Develop child care information and checklist to be shared with families by home visitors who work in Even Start, Nurse Family Partnership and other home visitation programs. Distribute information to families via public school system and PTOs.” Cohort II*
- *“I loved the community agreement work. I see people really coming together more now. They are realizing that if they all work together they can problem solve and make a much larger impact.” Cohort III*
- *“By having the conversations and putting the information out there we are helping people realize that so many children are entering school not ready. Leaders in our community are engaged in a whole new way now.” Cohort III*

- *“I am seeing a much better alignment of resources. Principals have already starting planning events to do outreach in communities to inform families of our resources. They are even planning events with child care providers! Leaders in general are getting more on board and excited about working together to have better outcomes for kids. For the first time we are not in competition but working together.” Cohort III*
- *“Developing our agreement was a great process. We really used the data to inform our direction and then really went deep to make sure we are focusing our energies on substantive issues so our work would make a difference. We get very focused on both services for underserved populations and teacher professional development. Everyone is very engaged and excited about the work. I have never seen such energy and it is because of the skills I learned in the Leaders Collaborative that it has been so successful, particularly around how to engage people from an appreciative leadership perspective, align their contributions and serve as the host. It has been really powerful for all of us.” Cohort IV*
- *“We engaged in a very deliberate effort. We needed to educate people, show them the data, and then move beyond the data to spur people to action. There has been a lot of momentum past the shared agreement. I am certain we will keep people engaged and make a meaningful difference.” Cohort IV*

These comments indicate that the shared community agreement work has been a galvanizing tool to engage new partners around a shared priority, accomplish focused work on topics meaningful to young children in individual communities, and create community change over the long term.

“It is very rare for an organization to allow this much time for growth. It is not normal for an operation to allow for this type of work. It is the best I have ever experienced.” Cohort II

Increasing the Focus on Disparities Between Groups of Children

One of the priorities of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant is to reduce disparities among groups of children. Early improvements were seen in local work related to disparities. Among community partners across all four cohorts:

- 71% of respondents stated that their understanding of disparities in their community had increased and 23% stated that their understanding of disparities in their community had stayed the same.
- 73% of respondents stated that the amount of conversations in their community about disparities had increased and 23% stated they had stayed the same.
- 61% of respondents stated that activities in the community related to disparities had increased and 35% stated they had remained the same.
- 76% of respondents stated that the quality of collaboration related to disparities had improved and 21% stated it had remained the same.

When community partners were asked to identify the impact of the Leaders Collaborative (as related to reducing disparities) on their own work they identified the following:

- Created new relationships with community partners (63%)
- Gave me new understanding of my community overall (63%)
- Increased my commitment to early childhood issues in my community (62%)
- Gave me new understanding of early childhood issues in my community (61%).

These results were consistent across all four cohorts. A full summary of community partner feedback related to how the work on reducing disparities impacted local work is provided in Table 4; this feedback is from community partners in all communities, not just those that held a Leading for Equity retreat.

Table 4: Benefits of Work on Disparities According to Local Community Partners

	%	n=183
Created new relationships with community partners	63%	116
Gave me new understanding of early childhood issues in my community	63%	115
Increased my commitment to early childhood issues in my community	62%	113
Gave me new understanding of my community overall	61%	112
Created new partnerships between my organization and another organization	45%	82
I am now creating changes in my organization to address disparities	15%	27
I am now creating changes in partners my organization works with to address disparities	9%	17
Had little impact on me or my work	4%	8
Strained relationships between me and other community partners	1%	2
Decreased my commitment to early childhood issues in my community	0%	0

Data from survey of community partners.

- *“We are a predominantly white community. It is really easy to marginalize issues of minorities. Through our local session some of the local dynamics that community had not understood became clearer. We have made some real progress because of our retreat and the subsequent partnerships. We can better hear and understand more voices now.” Cohort II*

Implementing Equity Retreats in Communities

All of the Leaders Collaborative participants completed an equity session as part of the overall experience. A total of 21 executive directors applied for and received additional funding to convene equity retreats in their local communities. These executive directors planned the racial equity event, invited key partners, and coordinated with outside trainers who facilitated the two-day local retreats.

Led by skilled facilitators with specific expertise on equity, these intensive local equity retreats examined the impact of structural racism on individuals, communities and the larger system. Participants examined issues related to historical, structural, and institutional bias and reflected on their personal experiences. The participants also explored, personally and professionally, how they could make a difference on equity issues in their communities.

Executive directors described the local equity retreats in their communities as follows:

- *“The racial equity retreat has changed the conversation and engaged powerful leaders in a new and more constructive way than ever before.” Cohort I*
- *“It was a different kind of conversation – some participants have had many years of ongoing community conversation [on this topic]. They said it was different from anything they have ever done. People felt it was very concrete and they came out with small changes they can make real progress on.” Cohort I*
- *“Our equity retreat was fantastic. I was filled with trepidation as it could go wrong in so many ways. OpenSource Leadership Strategies provided excellent support and their facilitators were really strong. It was so good that people who said they could not come the second day rearranged their schedules to keep participating.” Cohort III*
- *“Our group came ready to tackle the issues and worked really hard. It really helped that we brought together a diverse group of people who have never come together before. We are really focused on some pressing issues*

“The Leaders Collaborative had an extremely powerful impact on both professional and personal awareness and skill building.” Cohort III

in our community and the combination of faith and government and school system and housing and business leaders coming together gives me hope that we will be able to move more progress than we could with less diverse leadership at the table. I am really excited about what this work is doing in our community.” Cohort III

- *“I now have the ability to interrupt and correct inappropriate comments around racial disparities with diplomacy and tact rather than from an aggressive place or just remaining silent. I have so many tools to present factual information effectively which has helped me to build more effective coalitions and finally take action on this issue in my community.” Cohort IV*

Among the 206 community partners who responded to the survey, 35% participated in an equity retreat in their community:

- Cohort I: 21 of 52 community partner respondents participated in a racial equity retreat
- Cohort II: 19 of 57 community partner respondents participated in a racial equity retreat
- Cohort III: 19 of 20 community partner respondents participated in a racial equity retreat
- Cohort IV: 14 of 77 respondents participated in a racial equity retreat

Nearly all respondents provided feedback on how the equity retreat impacted them and their work. The results of the feedback were extremely positive, as outlined in Table 5. The benefits were primarily related to increased awareness and deepened commitment.

Community partners from Cohort III and IV reported that participation in the equity retreat caused them to create changes in their organization to address disparities (21.1% of respondents in Cohort III and 36% of respondents in Cohort IV). This feedback indicates a greater immediate community impact for Cohorts III and IV from the equity retreats; in Cohorts I and II zero community partners reported immediate changes in organizational behavior.

Table 5 summarizes the feedback from community partners about the impact of the equity retreat on their work within their organization and in the community.

Table 5: Impact of Equity Retreat on Local Partner Work

	%	n=73
Gave me new understanding of the historical impact of structural and institutional issues in my community	89%	65
Gave me new understanding of my community overall	70%	51
Created new relationships with community partners	53%	39
Increased my commitment to early childhood issues in my community	52%	38
Gave me new understanding of early childhood issues in my community	47%	34
Created new partnerships between my organization and another organization	37%	27
I am more aware of issues of privilege	58%	42
I am now creating changes in partnerships my organization work with to address disparities	27%	20
I am now creating changes in my organization to address disparities	18%	13
Decreased my commitment to early childhood issues in my community	1%	1
Had little impact on me or my work	4%	3
Strained relationships between me and other community partners	0%	0

Data from survey of community partners.



A number of the community partners provided feedback on their experience in the equity retreat.

- *“Talk is cheap – these conversations have generated action, which is more significant than conversations.” Cohort I*
- *“Many non-traditional partnerships were developed as a result of the Equity Retreat our partnership hosted.” Cohort I*
- *“There are so many more families at risk than I realized. There are so many more risk factors that affect a child’s performance and ability to learn than just socioeconomic status!” Cohort I*
- *“It’s been helpful to see the bigger scheme of things. There are so many more families at risk than I realized. There are so many more risk factors that affect a child’s performance and ability to learn than just socioeconomic status!” Cohort I*
- *“My experience as a member of this community group truly opened my eyes to the reality of the needs of our county and I am most grateful to have been a member of the group. I now realize all the different organizations who are available to meet the needs of our children.” Cohort II*
- *“I will be making plans to affect change in my organization. I feel like I now have an open place to express my sadness, anger and frustrations.” Cohort III*
- *“The facilitators were awesome and made everyone feel comfortable leading discussion on what could be a difficult subject. We are waiting to receive our typed charts and the history sheets so that we may move forward on planning another meeting.” Cohort III*
- *“Our local initiative... is a committed group of people with effective, enthusiastic leadership from our Partnership director.” Cohort III*
- *“I am grateful for the two day forum opportunity. The presenters were unbelievably effective. I want to bring them into my organization for some exposure and education.” Cohort III*
- *“I was already pretty aware of the issues and history. The workshop helped me to look at myself and my possible role(s) in what we*

might do from here.” Cohort IV

Some community partners expressed concerns that the Equity Retreat was only the first step and that significant time and energy would be needed to make a real, sustainable difference. Cohort III community partners summed it up this way:

- *“It is a heavy lift. We have the right people and organizations involved but it will take time.”*
- *“Until we actually start focus groups with more agencies and families, the work will only be conversation. I hope we have the commitment of time and resources to really do the deep work.”*
- *“It is a huge problem and we have just started, with no funding to really impact change.”*
- *“I hope it will make a difference. I guess I am afraid it will go by the wayside. Bigotry and the good ‘ole boy thinking are difficult to penetrate.”*

These comments speak to the need for resources so executive directors can provide sustained leadership to continue the work and maintain the momentum to make a meaningful difference on equity issues. Participants in all four cohorts reported the shared sense of the critical importance of the work related to equity and the challenges finding the time to provide the level of focused leadership required to facilitate the structural and institutional changes needed to reduce disparities among groups of children in the long term.

Promising Implications

The Leaders Collaborative was designed to build the skills of executive directors to engage local partners and align their contributions and work toward shared priorities – specifically toward reducing the disparities between groups of children. Across all four cohorts the feedback shows promising progress on this front. The equity session during the Leaders Collaborative and the local equity retreats were particularly helpful experiences for both the local partnerships

and the community partners across all cohorts. While difficult content, the process was valuable for most participants and for many participants it was transformative for the way they think about and now address meeting the needs of young children in their communities.

Participants expressed concern that given the entrenchment of inequity within structures and institutions that real change would require sustained focused and leadership, a requirement that many were concerned was not possible if reducing disparities was not more fully integrated into their goals. To maintain this momentum and make a meaningful difference reducing disparities between groups of children over time, local partnerships will need to carefully plan, continue to engage key partners, and provide sustained leadership. Participants in all cohorts suggested that NCPD could help sustain this focus in a variety of ways. Suggestions included: requiring data to

be gathered and analyzed through an equity lens (e.g., by disaggregating outcome data by race); providing ongoing support to communities to implement Equity Retreats and support to sustain the dialogue and work following these retreats; creating communities of practice focused on equity for local partnerships to share successes and support each other through challenges; and sharing lessons learned and connecting similar partnerships to provide peer support. The commitment to focusing on equity work is high among many local partnerships. It was seen as integral to accomplishing the larger goals of Smart Start and very necessary work. While respecting this work, executive directors also shared concerns that the demands of their job responsibilities may limit their ability to provide ongoing leadership in the area of equity, with the possibility of easily losing momentum without sustained focus.





COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



Cabarrus Partnership
for children

Ann Benfield is the executive director of the Cabarrus Partnership for Children. Cabarrus County is located in south central North Carolina just east of Charlotte and is 364 square miles. Cabarrus County, according to the 2014 U.S. Census estimate, is home to approximately 192,000 people, which are 77.4% White, 17.1% Black or African American, 2.8% Asian, 2% two or more races; 10% of the population are Hispanic or Latino.

Ann completed the Leaders Collaborative in the first RTT-ELC cohort in 2012. When she signed up she was not sure she would learn anything she had not learned in the many other leadership workshops she had taken over the last 25-30 years. However, the Leaders Collaborative turned out to be a totally different leadership development experience: "It was just the thoughtfulness and the way it had been put together... that totally changed my life and how I worked with

the community and saw myself as a leader in the community."

She credits the skills learned through appreciative inquiry as instrumental in changing the way she led the partnership, how people perceive the partnership, and how the staff and board frame their role and their work to improve the lives of young children. Specifically, she said, "Appreciative inquiry helped me ask the right questions and bring the right people to the table. Before Smart Start was perceived as the people with all of the answers and the ones that needed to provide all of the programs. But when funding started to decrease we had to change our role if we were going to continue to make a difference for young children."

At first the decreases in funding meant that the board had to focus on the difficult work of cutting funding for valuable programs, which was challenging for everyone. The

Leaders Collaborative provided Ann with new tools, which she used to plan and support a process of changing the role of the partnership and the board. She created a process to develop a new vision, mission, and a substantive strategic plan designed to move the board and the organization forward over the next three to ten years. This required the creation of a new structure to create a smaller board. It also required significant changes to role of the organization from primarily fulfilling a funding allocation function to serving as host who facilitated conversations that addressed community challenges. With the tools developed in the Leaders Collaborative, Ann actively engaged in the process that led to jointly created outcomes in which they were fully invested in achieving. She also invited community leaders who brought a range of involvement with the partnership to share their perceptions about the work of the local partnership and to

identify areas of community concern in which the local partnership could take a new direction. As a result, the local partnership has a new mission and vision as well as a smaller, more diverse board that represents many community sectors. The board meetings are more engaging and have higher levels of participation because of the way they are planned and facilitated. These were not easy changes, and Ann credits the tools she learned from the Leaders Collaborative with equipping her with the vision and skills needed to maneuver through challenging change dynamics while effectively engaging the support and investment of board and community members in making the needed changes.

Through the foundational work and deepened trust that emerged from this process, Ann frames the work she now does as much differently today from how it was four years ago. While the local partnership continues to serve as the fiscal agent for programs – including traditional Smart Start programs, NC Pre-K, and the Head Start grantee for the county – these programs are now overseen by community partners to maximize program and funding synergy, thus allowing Ann maintain a smaller staff. She now sees herself primarily as a convener who is responsible for asking the right questions and connecting the right people with the goal of getting the important work done on behalf of young children and their families. New community partnerships have emerged as Ann has applied the knowledge and skills gained from the Leaders Collaborative. Her own growth has not strengthened the implementation of these programs, but has also inspired new work in the community on critical issues affecting the health and well-being of young children.

A specific outcome resulting from Ann's evolved leadership style was the creation of a single point of entry for families seeking low cost child care. There were numerous funding sources in the community - NC Pre-K, Smart Start subsidies, regular child care subsidies, and Pre-K and Head Start provided through the school system - that employed their own intake staff and maintained independent waiting lists. This shared approach was not only inefficient but difficult for families to figure out which funding source would best meet their needs. Ann developed the idea of a single point of intake with a colleague at a Rotary

meeting and then met with the leadership for each funding source to explore ideas for what would be possible if they created a single portal for families that needed child care in the county. After getting all of the partners on board and jointly designing an information, the challenge posed by the lack of funding to create the network linkages was clear. She and community partners determined that the county was the most logical "owner" of the system since the county both had a significant IT system and qualified people for many other public services. After nearly a year spent engaging county commissioners and numerous commission meetings, the county is developing, funding and will soon release an app for families to easily access services. The availability of this app will be advertised at no cost via county radio, television and other places. All partners agree that it will be a tremendous asset to families and the community in significantly improving the process families complete to find the most appropriate early learning assistance. "It is all about asking the right questions, bringing the right people to the table, and watching it unfold."

Ann is very clear about the impact of the Leaders Collaborative on every aspect of her work. "If I had not had the experiences in Leaders Collaborative, I would not have seen the possibilities. It has been a total mind shift for me. I realize the partnership cannot own everything and shouldn't. There are many others well situated to lead work for young children and this expands the ownership and leadership in ways that have exceeded my wildest expectations. I found in community collaboration that things need to belong to others to be successful. In self-reflection I see that my new role is to connect people and purpose to improve child well-being. I cannot tell you how much this experience meant to me. Truly it was one of the greatest experiences of my life."

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

Another goal of the evaluation is to measure the impact of the Leaders Collaborative on the individual awareness, knowledge and skills of the Leaders Collaborative participants. Results across all four cohorts are provided.

The Leaders Collaborative helped build individual leadership development skills on multiple fronts:

- Expanded personal leadership capacity
- Developed individual skills to facilitate effective local partnerships
- Developed knowledge and skills to address issues of equity and disparities
- Developed skills to support work with local partnership board and staff

Results in each of these categories are provided, followed by a summary of the implications of the collective results on individual development.

This went far beyond the theory to practical application and information I wish I had known 20 years ago. I have always thought it was my job to anticipate problems and address them when they pop up. Now I know that I am not the fixer of all problems. It is my role to host people coming together for us to create solutions together. Cohort II



Impact of Leaders Collaborative on Personal Leadership Capacity

Across the four cohorts the reasons for participating in the Leaders Collaborative were highly consistent. Respondents, asked to identify their three most common reasons for participation before the Leaders Collaborative, cited: Wanting to enhance my leadership skills (80%), I am always eager for new information (59%), and I had heard good things about the experience (51%). Table 6 summarizes the full list of the reasons identified by participants in all four cohorts.

Table 6: Reasons for Participation

	n=41
I want to enhance my leadership skills	80%
I am always eager for new information	59%
I had heard good things about the experience	51%
I was encouraged to participate by my peers	49%
I was curious	24%
I was encouraged to participate by NCPC	15%
I was struggling with some specific challenges and I hoped the Leaders Collaborative can help with these issues	15%
I was curious	0%

Data from survey of local partnership executive directors.

Among participants it was notable that while more than 50% of members of Cohort III cited the availability of the grant money as a significant motivator for participation, less than 20% of participants in other cohorts cited grant money as a motivator. Among the four cohorts Cohort III faced the most pronounced challenges with the experience overall and group cohesion; the grant

money as a more pronounced motivator to apply, rather than participating to develop new skills or strengthen the statewide network, may have had an impact on perceptions of the experience.

Participants across all cohorts expressed levels of hesitation, with both Cohorts II and III expressing more hesitation than Cohorts I and IV. However, even with these initial concerns, 100% of participants across Cohorts I-IV reported that they would recommend the experience to others. Participants summed up their feelings in different ways:

- *“I went into this with a great deal of uncertainty and hesitation. I was discouraged by lack of board support and ready to resign as executive director. However, I have emerged with new insight into my own desires and personality along with confidence and renewed energy to continue the work on behalf of young children and families.” Cohort II*
- *“It was an interesting experience. I went into it begrudgingly. I am a seasoned professional and did not think that there was much I could learn. It was a somewhat rewarding experience – definitely better than I thought. It gave me insights into my own leadership style and I am now more open, more willing to listen, and more receptive to other ideas.” Cohort III*
- *“If you had called me a month into this I would have told you I had lost my mind – it was such a huge time commitment. But then I realized that I came away from the first session with really practical tools. And it only got better. I was surprised when I caught myself using something I learned in the Leaders Collaborative in everyday conversation. It just kept showing up! I can tell that without question it makes a real difference. My skill set is stronger and I am much more confident as a result of participating.” Cohort IV*

“I was skeptical of learning anything from the Leaders Collaborative after 25+ years of administrative experience. I’m glad to say that my fears were unfounded. I’ve learned much about own leadership abilities and style, as well as my Smart Start colleagues.” Cohort III

The Leaders Collaborative sought to intentionally build the personal leadership capacity of the participants. Prior to attending the first session cohort participants identified their hopes for how the Leaders Collaborative would specifically impact their leadership skills. Following the conclusion of the Leaders Collaborative members of each cohort identified the concrete ways that their leadership skills had changed as a result of their participation.

Across all four cohorts, participants reported greater benefits than anticipated in the following areas: building new relationships with other executive directors, learning new tools to build community partnerships, building new relationships with NCPD staff, and increasing understanding of leadership strengths. Participants reported achieving less benefits than expected in the following areas: improving skills leading initiatives, developing new opportunities to work to improve outcomes of children in the community, learning new tools to sustain and engage community partnerships, increasing understanding of leadership weaknesses, improving communication skills, and learning new strategies to most effectively invest Smart Start resources.

Full results are summarized in Table 7. The percentage of respondents across all four cohorts who selected each answer is noted in the column next to the answer. Survey respondents were asked to identify their top three answers each time; the top three answers each time are noted in bold.

Table 7: Hopes for and Impact of Leaders Collaborative on Leadership Capacity

HOPE FOR HOW PERSONAL LEADERSHIP CAPACITY WILL GROW AS A RESULT OF PARTICIPATING IN THE LEADERS COLLABORATIVE		WAYS PERSONAL LEADERSHIP CAPACITY GREW AS A RESULT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE LEADERS COLLABORATIVE	
BEFORE PARTICIPATING IN LEADERS COLLABORATIVE		BENEFITS AFTER PARTICIPATING IN THE LEADERS COLLABORATIVE	
Build new relationships with other executive directors	21%	Built new relationships with other executive directors	76%
Learn new tools to build community partnerships	30%	Learned new tools to build community partnerships	54%
Improve skills leading initiatives	58%	Improved skills leading initiatives	46%
Gain greater understanding of leadership strengths	33%	Gained greater understanding of leadership strengths	37%
Learn new tools to sustain and engage community partnerships	61%	Learned new tools to sustain and engage community partnerships	37%
Develop new opportunities to work to improve outcomes of children in my community	55%	Developed new opportunities to work to improve outcomes of children in my community	32%
Build new relationships with NCPC staff	6%	Built new relationships with NCPC staff	27%
Gain greater understanding of leadership weaknesses	30%	Gained greater understanding of leadership weaknesses	20%
Improve communication skills	18%	Improved communication skills	12%
Learn new strategies to most effectively invest Smart Start resources	24%	Learned new strategies to most effectively invest Smart Start resources	0

Data from annual surveys of local partnership executive directors before and after participation

Participants shared that the Leaders Collaborative positively influenced their individual leadership development:

- *“I feel more confident in my ability to make a difference and be a strong leader. I now have new tools to use in different situations that are not just personality or style drive, but informed by evidence-based practices.” Cohort II*
- *“This has been as much a personal journey as a professional journey. It is really changed my reactions and the way I relate to others.” Cohort II*
- *“It has helped me to develop leadership skills I have even further. You don’t realize how much it has changed you until the end.” Cohort III*

- *“I see impact on my leadership style and work in big and small ways. I am leading a large project totally differently as a result of the Leaders Collaborative. And I interact differently with my board and staff and community partners in subtly different but much more positive and productive ways. I feel so much more confident with my leadership skills as a result of participating.” Cohort III*
- *“The Leaders Collaborative was really life changing. I am much more centered and aware of my thought processes. I feel like my mind was transformed over the course of the year and I now have much better skills to help engage others to achieve goals and to be an effective leader. I cannot express how meaningful this was.” Cohort IV*

- *“This was a great, great experience. It taught me a lot about myself as a leader. This experience gave me a lot confidence to engage partners more effectively. Things have been different in my community and there is so much more engagement now because of the skills I learned from the Leaders Collaborative. It has helped me take good work and make it excellent.” Cohort IV*

Before and after the Leaders Collaborative, participants were asked to rate their knowledge of their leadership style, leadership strengths, and leadership weaknesses on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being not at all knowledgeable and 4 being extremely knowledgeable. Participants were also asked to rate themselves as a leader, with 1 being not at all effective and 4 being extremely strong and effective. Improvements were seen in all four areas as a result of participation in the Leaders Collaborative in Cohorts II-IV (baseline data was not available for Cohort I).

Table 8: Impact of Leaders Collaborative on Knowledge of Leadership Style, Leadership Strengths, Leadership Weaknesses, and Rating of Self as Leader: All Four Cohorts

Average Ratings Pre and Post-Leaders Collaborative				
	Average Rating Cohort I	Average Rating Cohort II	Average Rating Cohort III	Average Rating Cohort IV
Knowledge of Leadership Style	Pre: n/a	Pre: 2.78	Pre: 3.17	Pre: 2.94
	Post: 3.50	Post: 3.58*	Post: 3.71*	Post: 3.09
Knowledge of Leadership Strengths	Pre: n/a	Pre: 3.00	Pre: 2.75	Pre: 2.81
	Post: 3.38	Post: 3.50*	Post: 3.29*	Post: 3.09*
Knowledge of Leadership Weaknesses	Pre: n/a	Pre: 2.89	Pre: 2.83	Pre: 2.56
	Post: 3.50	Post: 3.50*	Post: 3.29*	Post: 3.18*
Rating of Self as Leader	Pre: n/a	Pre: 3.00	Pre: 2.75	Pre: 2.69
	Post: 3.13	Post: 3.33	Post: 3.00	Post: 2.91*

* p<.05

Data from annual surveys of local partnership executive directors before and after participation in the Leaders Collaborative

Statistically significant improvements were measured on ratings of knowledge of leadership style, knowledge of leadership strengths, knowledge of leadership weaknesses, and rating of self as leader.

Improving knowledge of leadership strengths, weaknesses, and self- assessment as a leader were key elements of the Leaders Collaborative. Through self-reflection and strategic skill development, the participants actively developed both self-awareness as well as specific skills to address weaknesses and further develop strengths. Multiple participants noted that their

“This is not a training that is left behind when it is completed – it changed how I think about addressing issues and provide tools that can help in finding solutions. Very valuable!” Cohort II

confidence approaching challenging situations, their ability to approach and engage new partners, and their skills planning and facilitating successful strategies and meetings all significantly increased as a result of their participation in the Leaders Collaborative.

Development of Individual Skills to Facilitate Effective Local Partnerships

In the interviews, participants were asked to identify which new skills and tools they learned from the Leaders Collaborative. The most commonly cited skills and tools across the four cohorts included:

- Being a host not a hero
- Appreciative leadership and bringing an appreciative inquiry lens to the work
- Facilitation skills and protocols
- Theory of Aligned Contributions and more effectively planning both partner engagement and meeting goals to better align the contributions of key players
- Strategies to plan more effective and efficient meetings
- Strategies to engage different partners and

share responsibility for moving forward work related to young children in the community

- Using data to start new conversations and measure success over time
- Radical responsibility

Additional benefits cited included:

- Increased confidence and courage
- Improved listening skills
- More patience
- More effective partner engagement
- Better meeting planning

Through the surveys, participants were asked how the Leaders Collaborative impacted their work with community partners. The executive directors noted that the Leaders Collaborative supported their work with community partners because it:

- Developed new ways of working together on community priorities (62%)
- Created new momentum on challenging issues (62%)

Table 9: Summary of Impact of Leaders Collaborative on Work with Local Smart Start Partnership Boards

	n=39
Developed new ways of working together on community priorities	62%
Created new momentum on challenging issues	62%
Deepened existing partnerships	56%
Created new partnerships	51%
Learned new skills for handling challenging community dynamics	36%
Helped other organizations take the lead on community change	13%

Data from survey of local partnership executive directors

- Deepened existing partnerships (56%)
- Created new partnerships (51%).

A full summary of the impact the Leaders Collaborative had on participants' work with community partners is outlined in Table 9.

When asked how the Leaders Collaborative influenced their work, participants identified changes in how they planned for meetings and supported community decision-making.

- *"I spend more time clarifying my goals and intentions of the meeting, both as leader and as participant. I have also considered who might be in the room and who might be missing (aligned contributions). I listen more attentively for underlying assumptions (the equity lens). I have had one extreme example of using an appreciative question in a group meeting to shift the direction entirely and move the group to a much more specific outcome. I drew specifically from the LC context to do this, and I would not have done it without the LC training."* Cohort I
- *[I keep the] "focus on 'What is possible?' Now I lead meetings differently."* Cohort I
- *"More thought goes into development of an agenda that will prompt participation and discussion at the meeting. Meeting agendas are developed with questions that require some pre-meeting thoughts and preparation. More background info and/or data are shared prior to meetings. Meetings are held when there is an issue to explore or resolve, not just because it is time to have a meeting. Meetings are open to having different interested individuals join."* Cohort II
- *"I work to clearly communicate goals (articulated on our meeting agendas) and remember the Host Not Hero role that we play!"* Cohort II
- *"The greatest "take away" has been the concept of "Leader as Host." Planning for meetings now means more pulling information and data together -- not trying to determine the "answers" before hand." This allows meeting participants to become more involved in the discussion and decision-making."* Cohort III

- *"Use the skills I have learned to open up conversations and get everyone's input on topics of discussion. I realize I don't have to have all of the answers but need to ask the right questions."* Cohort III
- *"I go into meetings with the idea of Leader as Host more now. I try to apply Appreciative Leadership strategies, such as 'holding people capable' and 'creating conditions for success.' I try and utilize some of the Community of Practice protocols, when appropriate, such as text rendering and the feedback principles."* Cohort III
- *"Using the protocols has really helped with facilitating meetings. I now intentionally draw information out of each person at the table and let them know their voice is helpful to the process."* Cohort IV
- *"As a result of the Leaders Collaborative I am really rethinking and have had a total shift in mindset about how to pull together what*



I need for a meeting. I have new and much more effective ways of looking at agendas and handouts and data and new ways of using protocols and using processes to get people involved.” Cohort IV

Quality of Relationship of Community Partners with Local Partnership Executive Director

Community partners were asked to rate the quality of their relationship with the local partnership executive director at the end of the Leaders Collaborative and one year prior to

Table 10: Quality of Relationships with Executive Directors

	Average Rating			
	Cohort I	Cohort II	Cohort III	Cohort IV
Rating of quality of relationship with local partnership executive director 1 year ago	4.39	4.13	4.05	4.10
Rating of quality of relationship with local partnership executive director today	4.63*	4.47*	4.55*	4.48*

*p<.05

Data from survey of local partnership executive directors

measure how the relationship changed over the course of the Leaders Collaborative experience. Community partners rated the relationship on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not at all good (poor) to 5 being very good (excellent). The results for each of the four cohorts are provided in Table 10.

Development of Knowledge and Skills to Address Issues of Equity and Disparities

All participants completed equity training during one of the sessions of the Leaders Collaborative. This session was designed to build the individual knowledge and awareness of the participants about issues related to equity so they could better address issues related to disparities in their local communities. Among participants in Cohorts I, II and IV, feedback about the statewide equity training was mixed; some participants really enjoyed the content and other struggled and were uncomfortable. All Cohort III participants viewed the equity content positively.

- *“I was hoping that I would learn ways to do things differently, but all it did was build tensions that did not exist before the retreat.” Cohort I*
- *“I was so glad we did this session. Some people in our cohort did not understand it at all – they could not get past their own privilege. It was hard to see it so clearly but other than this I really learned a lot and am so glad we did this work. I went back to my community with a different lens and new energy to really tackle these entrenched problems.” Cohort I*
- *“It was a great event for us. It was tough and emotionally draining. We had a lot of participation and this will give us a foundation for a long time for good work.” Cohort II*
- *“I really thought the equity content was fantastic.” Cohort III*
- *“The equity content opened my eyes for a lot of challenges.” Cohort III*
- *“The equity session was the most challenging for me. It was difficult and a little discouraging. I left feeling kind of beaten down because I am a white female. I just shut down and did not say anything.” Cohort IV*

- *“This was a tough session for our group. The first night they let their guard down a little bit but it was really tough to identify white privilege initially. It was disturbing to some degree to see some of the reactions and the fear. But by the end of the sessions it was really worthwhile. I am really glad that I struggled and that our group struggled because the benefits were greater as a result.” Cohort IV*

Of the 44 local partnership executive directors, 21 also led a local equity retreat. These local equity retreats were designed to engage and build the knowledge and capacity of local community partners to focus on equity issues.

Local Equity Retreats

Comments from executive directors about the local equity retreats and the impact on their individual development as leaders on equity issues included:

- *“Wow. Wow. Wow. Wow. The training - that whole session – personally was really moving. It is hard to put into words something that was so experiential. It was spiritual. By the middle of the full day, people were saying that others needed to be there and wanted to do another one.” Cohort I*
- *“The racial equity retreat was really challenging in our community. Everyone remarked on how brave I was to host it. It was a great event to have. When we encounter issues that we need to tackle I now have a common bond with community members to reach out to them.” Cohort II*
- *“The racial equity retreat has changed the conversation and engaged powerful leaders in a new and more constructive way than ever before.” Cohort I*
- *“It was a great event for us. It was tough and emotionally draining. We had a lot of participation and this will give us a foundation for a long time for good work.” Cohort II*
- *“The racial equity retreat was really*

challenging in our community. Everyone remarked on how brave I was to host it. It was a great event to have. When we encounter issues that we need to tackle I now have a common bond with community members to reach out to them.” Cohort II

- *“We had two good days brainstorming and discussing the issues. As a result of the retreat, we are focusing on increasing school readiness and literacy. We are developing a common language on what it means to be successful in kindergarten. We are really focusing on families and providing them with tools to support their children’s literacy development, as well as their own if needed.” Cohort III*
- *“We planned for our retreat very intentionally. We were pleasantly surprised how many people signed up including board members, community partners we had barely worked with, and partners we had worked with for years. We had a really intense and incredibly rewarding experience and there is such a tight bond between the people who participated. We are carefully deciding how to build on this momentum because people do not want to stop talking about and working on these issues.” Cohort IV*
- *“After participating in the session during the Leaders Collaborative I knew I needed to host a local equity retreat. Through a lot of hard work and careful planning we had a great experience in our community. People came, really participated, and are eager to keep this work going.” Cohort IV*

Community partners noted the impact of the local equity retreats. Related to the individual development of the participating executive directors, a common theme among these partners related to how the racial equity retreats were particularly effective as a vehicle for executive directors to effectively engage new community partners and lead new dialogue related to disparities and equity issues:

- *“It helped to provide healing to some of the folks in our group. From a historical perspective, we have much to overcome and*

this facilitated a greater awareness of past treatment and its impact on the present and future. The retreat brought clarity to my own paradigm of how my privilege impacts my thoughts and actions and assumptions.”
Cohort I

- *“We now have more awareness and are taking action as a partnership to seek out underrepresented populations in our community and provide meaningful services.”*
Cohort I
- *“I am really excited to see our executive director and Partnership working to participate and foster these kinds of events. It helps make everyone more aware of our community and its needs, how to help and advocate and provide opportunities/strategies to “jump off” from and make change! Thank you for providing these types of professional development experiences to the Smart Start executive directors. [It] is a very important and effective type of training for executive directors that can become “real” for the communities and partners with whom they work. This really helps support Smart Start’s role as a convener. Thank you!”*
Cohort II
- *“My experience as a member of this community group truly opened my eyes to the reality of the needs of our county and I am most grateful to have been a member of the group. I now realize all the different organizations who are available to help meet needs of our children.”*
Cohort II
- *“I am really excited to see our executive director and Partnership working to foster and participate in these types of events. It helps make everyone more aware of our community and its needs, how to help and advocate and provides opportunities/strategies to “jump off” from and make change! Thank you for providing these types of PD experiences to the Smart Start executive directors. [It] is a very important and effective type of training for executive directors that can become “real” for the communities and partners with whom they work. This really helps support Smart Start’s role as a convener. Thank you!”*
Cohort II
- *“I will be making plan to affect change in*

my organization. I feel like I now have an open place to express my sadness, anger and frustrations.”
Cohort III

- *“Our local initiative... is a committed group of people with effective, enthusiastic leadership from our Partnership director.”*
Cohort III

Among members of Cohorts I, II and III, the focus on disparities in their ongoing work was mixed after the completed the Leaders Collaborative. Among the respondents who answered the survey more than one year after participation, some had integrated a focus on equity into their overall focus and others were actively working on specific disparities as part of their ongoing work on their community agreement. Approximately 40% of participants, however, reported that there was no focus on disparities as part of their ongoing work. Comments included: “We are not actively doing a lot regarding disparities at the present time.” “There has been no follow up.” “In the midst of everything else we need to do I realize this has been lost. Without regular reminders and a focus on this it hasn’t gotten the attention it deserves.”

Development of Skills to Support Work with Partnership Board and Staff

“I often think about the experiences and knowledge) from the Leaders Collaborative in building my own communication strategies. I think about how to be more effective in presentation, how to be more engaging of others in a group, how to be more welcoming to others. I am currently president of my local civic club and feel that the take-aways from LC are very helpful in this diverse group, especially the varied professions represented.”
Cohort III

The purpose of the Leaders Collaborative was to increase the skills of the local partnership executive directors to work with their local communities generally, and to specifically increase their skills to address disparities between groups of children.

Some of the research questions for this evaluation

related to whether the development of these skills had any additional carry-over benefit in the way the executive directors interacted with their boards and staff. The results across the four cohorts were that the Leaders Collaborative was most effective at helping participants: engage board more effectively (51%), practice using data driven decision making (51%), presenting new information to the board to make the work more effective (41%). Full results are outlined in Table 11 below.

Table 11: Summary of Impact of Leaders Collaborative on Work with Boards

	n=39
Engaged boards more effectively	51%
Have practiced data driven decisions making with the board	51%
Learned new information that can be presented to the board to make their work more effective	41%
Helped boards shift direction to address additional challenges	38%
Empowered boards to address challenging decisions	31%
Engaged specific board members more effectively	31%
Learned new skills to manage challenging board members	5%

Data from survey of local partnership executive directors

The executive directors were also asked to identify how the Leaders Collaborative impacted their work with staff. The greatest impacts were on empowering staff to fulfill their roles more successfully (64%), helping staff take on new leadership roles (54%), improved management (51%) and improved communication skills (46%). These results are consistent across all four cohorts. Full results are outlined on Table 12.

Table 12: Summary of Impact of Leaders Collaborative on Work with Staff

	n=39
Empowered staff to fulfill their roles more successfully	64%
Helped staff take on new leadership roles	54%
Improved management skills	51%
Improved communication with staff	46%
Developed new skills for working with challenging personalities on staff	41%

Reflecting on the experience overall, participants shared:

- *“I felt that the Leaders Collaborative was an excellent opportunity to grow as a leader and to bond with my fellow executive directors. This time also allowed me the opportunity to study my county data in detail and reflect on ways to address those issues, thereby allowing me the present it to the regional partners in a manner that encouraged immediate action on the issues.” Cohort I*
- *“It was a great experience, learning from each other, having access to professional methods of communication, authors, and individuals individual in community collaboration and access to various helpful tools and resources. I appreciated the notebook, copies of resources, time away from the office to concentrate on this professional development opportunity, and most of all the in-depth conversations, practical experiences, and feedback at regular intervals. It was great to have a diverse group of small and large partnerships and to have NCPC staff participating in the cohort. A very well done series of events.” Cohort II*
- *“The Leaders Collaborative was a wonderful experience for me. I really wish there was a “graduate” level of the Leaders Collaborative for those of us who have already experienced it and want another advanced learning opportunity.” Cohort III*

- *“This was a great experience. I was very skeptical at first because of the time commitment but I am so clear now clear now that I really got something out of it. It was so valuable to spend time with others who were not judgmental so I could be honest about my challenges and develop new skills to address them. The whole cohort and the facilitators were very supportive and accepting of one another and we built strong relationships with each other. The skills I learned and the relationships I developed will serve be well for a long time.” Cohort IV*

Implications

The Leaders Collaborative had a positive impact on the individual leadership development of executive directors. This was clear in many ways in the daily work of the executive directors, from what the executive directors did to how they approached situations as a result of their participation. The participants consistently identified having specific new tools that changed everything from the way they planned for meetings and developed agendas to how they identified and approached new community partners to assist with addressing community challenges for young children and their families.

The shift in perspective also had a profound impact on the way that they did their daily work. Having an appreciative inquiry stance, shifting their role from host not hero, engaging people to align their contributions more effectively, and bringing an equity stance to community work all dramatically changed how the participants approached their work as leaders in their community. Participants reported both relief about not feeling solely responsible for movement for young children as well as deeply empowered to take on bigger challenges in more effective partnership with others. Their ability to be effective conveners, a key role of Smart Start partnerships, increased in all four cohorts; this was reported by not only the executive directors themselves but confirmed consistently by the community partners that provided feedback.

The inconsistent focus on disparities following participation shows an area for potential integration into the overall focus of Smart Start. Without sustained leadership and having an equity focus integrated into the requirements of the work some local partnerships struggled to maintain early momentum.





COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



FRANKLIN GRANVILLE VANCE PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN

Carolyn Paylor is the executive director of the Franklin/Granville/Vance Partnership for Children, three contiguous counties located north and east of Raleigh. According to the 2015 Census estimate the three counties have a total population of approximately 165,000 people. Franklin County is 69.8% White and 26.8% Black/African American and 1.8% of the population is Hispanic; Granville County is 64.7% White and 32.1% Black/African American and 7.6% of the population is Hispanic; Vance County is 46.4% White, 50.9% Black/African American and 7.2% of the population is Hispanic.

Carolyn completed the second cohort of the Leaders Collaborative in 2013 during her 18th year as Executive Director. The Leaders Collaborative changed Carolyn's leadership perspective by helping her frame challenges in terms of possibilities, increasing her awareness of how to meet community needs and inspiring her to engage diverse partners to effectively address community challenges. For example, Carolyn said "In the past when we did strategic plans I just took it upon myself and the staff to write it up for others to respond to. This time we were really inclusive of community leaders and other partners. First, we as staff spent several days working and brainstorming, then we looked at the data and hired facilitators to assist. We did an all-day workshop and worked with the community members to review and process the information.

We got everyone involved and created a strategic plan that benefitted from the input of the board and diverse partners throughout the community. The feedback was fantastic. Everyone was very satisfied and we have an active working document now. I have a much stronger sense of what the community wants because they gave their input. The skills I learned from the Leaders Collaborative totally changed how I tackled this work. There was so much excitement in the planning because it was really engaging and people were definitely on board." Through engaging the community as part of the strategic plan, Carolyn also realized how little community members knew about the diverse range of work the local partnership led and supported. As a result of their successful strategic planning process, the partnership has mounted more strategic communications and outreach efforts to broaden community awareness about the work of the local partnership.

Carolyn also shared that the Leaders Collaborative helped her bring greater focus to the issue of equity and disparities between groups of people. "We have spent more time on the topic of equity now. Staff talks more about this, our board has carefully reviewed the data and we are working on become more data-driven and looking specifically at the disparities. We are more cognizant of the disparities that exist and more intentional about addressing what needs to be done to reduce them."

Becoming more thoughtful about examining data has also helped to bring a deeper focus to issues related to the quality of infant and toddler care. "In some of our planning we have looked at star ratings and the star ratings looked good. But when we drilled down, we realized that the data was skewed by the four year olds and there was a real need to work with infants and toddlers. The overall numbers looked good, but they were much worse for babies and toddlers. We have learned to drill down and look beyond the surface." As a result the local partnership is now developing more infant and toddler-focused training and working with the community college and developing courses focused on infants and toddlers.

Like many partnerships Franklin/Granville/Vance has sustained dramatic cuts, which are challenging to manage, particularly when the cuts have continued multiple years. Through the Leaders Collaborative, Carolyn developed Appreciative Leadership strategies that helped her reframe these challenges as she developed more creative and productive solutions. As a

result of the Leaders Collaborative, Carolyn has deepened her collaborations in ways that have helped her to effectively address community challenges. She now collaborates strongly with nearly every agency in the three counties that impact young children and their families. "There are so many needs and the demands can cause a high burnout rate among executive directors. The Leaders Collaborative provided invaluable reframing and gave us real tools to keep the work and the approaches fresh and pull the community together to tackle new areas of work with great energy behind it. The experience was really good. I learned so many applicable skills. I am able to bring things back to the community and adapt it. In talking with people from different cohorts everyone came out feeling like they emerged as a changed person. We each grew, got really close to the people in our group even those we had already known for many years. We got to know each other in a much deeper way. These relationships are carrying on and will impact the way the whole Smart Start network works for years to come."



GROUP DEVELOPMENT

The final element of the evaluation was the measure of the impact of the Leaders Collaborative on the development of the group of participants as a cohort of colleagues.

The Leaders Collaborative helped build group development in different ways:

- Impact of the Leaders Collaborative on the development of the group of participants as a cohort of colleagues
- Benefits of NCPC staff participation on group development
- Online Learning Community website as a tool for group development

A summary of results in each of these categories is provided, followed by a summary of the implications of the collective results on group development.

Impact of the Leaders Collaborative on the development of the group of participants as a cohort of colleagues

The group development varied by the different cohorts. In Cohorts I, II and IV the creation of a network of colleagues was cited as one of the greatest benefits of the Leaders Collaborative. Cohort III struggled with this more than Cohorts I, II and IV; during the first 3-4 months of Cohort III three participants left the cohort because of career transitions; a fourth member left the cohort later. The changes in cohort membership over the first few months of this cohort had a unique impact and lessened the group cohesion and relationship development. Participants in the other cohorts reported a greater sense of connection with other cohort members both during and between the sessions. In the case of Cohort III, only one of the interviewees reported being in contact with other participants between sessions by email or phone.

Participants across all four cohorts felt strongly that the overall Smart Start network was strengthened by the Leaders Collaborative, with a particular emphasis on the impact of having NCPC staff participate in each cohort.

- *“The Leaders Collaborative helped us see and understand by working together the things we have in common [while] celebrating the fact that things might work in small counties don’t work in big counties and vice versa.” Cohort I*
- *“Now I am more comfortable reaching out and getting information and resources from others. I’m less likely to reinvent the wheel.” Cohort I*
- *“The Leaders Collaborative was long overdue in Smart Start. Not only did it help to build our skills as leaders but it gave us a common language, approach and strategies. Very valuable.” Cohort II*
- *“It made such an impact to have the NCPC staff participate with our cohort. It provides a lot of understanding on both ends of what we each do daily. To get to know people on a closer level helps us each gain a better understanding of each other’s work.” Cohort II*
- *“I loved having time with the NCPC staff. It was really powerful to have time together and work on shared projects.” Cohort II*
- *“I already see how the Leaders Collaborative is changing how we work together as a statewide network. We are able to hold each other to a higher standard and take on challenges more constructively.” Cohort III*
- *“The Leaders Collaborative has strengthened relationships with other executive directors and with NCPC. It has made our whole network stronger and more effective.” Cohort III*
- *“Having shared language and a shared frame of reference has given us new tools for working together and developing new solutions. It is inspiring to see such a large and complex organization be strengthened from the inside.” Cohort III*

- *“We now have a much greater common understanding, common language, and common skills. We have a greater awareness of each other’s challenges and pressures so we can understand where things are coming from and develop solutions that work for both rather than talking past each other or getting frustrated. Now we have new ways of working towards efforts together in a more productive and collaborative way.” Cohort IV*
- *After many years with Smart Start I can say that the Leaders Collaborative created different types of experiences with EDs and NCPC than we have ever had before, without question. I know them differently now and better appreciate their challenges. I am really happy that NCPC was there.” Cohort IV*

All four cohorts shared that they strongly appreciated the positive impact of the Leaders Collaborative on the implementation of statewide meetings and actions. It was their shared perception that issues were framed more effectively and the dialogue was more positive and productive, on the part of both NCPC and the participants, as a result of the Leaders Collaborative tools.

Online Learning Community as a Tool for Group Development

One of the tools provided through the Leaders Collaborative was the Online Learning Community website. Over the course of the Leaders Collaborative the methods used to stay connected through an online learning community changed. In Cohorts I and II a new online learning community tool was used. This tool had mixed feedback, primarily negative, that it was one more place to go, it was challenging to access for people who lived in rural communities and had internet limitations, and that it could be confusing to look for and find different documents and tools on the learning community websites.

Consistent across all cohorts, multiple respondents hoped that there would be one unified way to communicate, as it was too challenging to simultaneously keep up with email, DropBox, the Online Learning Community, Fabrik and SmartNet (which are used for other Smart

Start business). One participant stated *“There are just too many sites to check. If you would integrate them all into Fabrik that would be so much easier for us.”*

This changed during Cohort IV in response to this feedback and online learning community functionality was added into the Fabrik suite of existing NCPC online tools. The online community of practice in this suite, fabrikONE, provided the Leaders Collaborative participants with an online conversation tool where they posted and responded to ideas and insights, as well as posted programs resources such as agendas, shared agreements and other deliverables.

While fabrikONE got better reviews than the previous online learning community the primary complaint remained that participants had to enter the system through a separate URL. During the initial launch of this tool with Cohort IV there was a partition to separate fabrikONE from the remainder of the tools until fabrikONE was launched to the broader state audience; because of this partition, Leaders Collaborative participants entered the fabrikONE tool through a different url than they do to enter Fabrik. This concern will be addressed when fabrikONE is integrated seamlessly into Fabrik, providing users with a single place to do all Smart Start online business.



Implications

Across all cohorts, including Cohort III which experienced extenuating circumstances, the participants noted stronger closer connections with their peers as one of the important benefits of participation. These relationships provided the executive directors with important new contacts with whom to brainstorm and develop innovative solutions to challenging problems, share resources, request feedback, and experience support. At statewide meetings participants report feeling a strong sense of camaraderie, connection to each other and their shared mission, and greater feelings of support. This translated into a greater commitment to the statewide work of Smart Start and greater energy and excitement about the local work of the partnerships.

NCPC staff participation in the Leaders Collaborative was significantly positive and important to participants. Consistent across all cohorts, the local executive directors consistently stated that sharing the training with the NCPC staff was highly beneficial. Through the shared experience of local partnership executive directors and NCPC staff learning together over an extended period they created a much stronger sense of a shared mission and deepened relationships.

The possibilities of the online learning community to deepen connections among the group of participants were not fully realized during the Leaders Collaborative. Developing efficient and effective online tools to create ongoing connection among the executive directors of the local Smart Start Partnerships remains a challenge.



CONCLUSION

The Leaders Collaborative/Leading for Equity has done a remarkable job of achieving its goals. NCPC and the facilitators of the Leaders Collaborative/Leading for Equity have a great deal to be proud of based on the results of the four cohorts. As a result of the sustained leadership development effort, individual executive directors have expanded their leadership skills and practices while developing new tools for engaging partners and implementing more effective community work. Community partners are more engaged and doing substantive work with their local partnerships to reduce disparities among groups of children, and the overall Smart Start network has been fortified with closer relationships among executive directors and between local partnership and NCPC staff.



Appendix A

EVALUATION SCOPE

Expected Results

The Leaders Collaborative is a four-year project. By the end of the fourth year of the RTT-ELC grant in 2015, NCPC anticipates that:

- 50 local leaders and 15 NCPC leaders will participate in the Leaders Collaborative project;
- 20 Equity Retreats will be held across the state; and
- 50 partnerships will develop shared agreements with their Community Partners; the shared agreements will define the disparity the community-based group has agreed to work on, the specific role or activity each partner agrees to undertake to address the disparity, how they will measure their success, and how the Community Partners will work together.

Expected Outcomes

In addition, the Leaders Collaborative is designed to achieve the following outcomes:

- 85% of Leaders Collaborative participants will increase their understanding of their leadership style, leadership strengths, and leadership weaknesses;
- 100% of Leaders Collaborative participants will share data on early childhood disparities with local Community Partners;
- 75% of Leaders Collaborative participants will work with local partners to develop a plan to address disparities for young children (this should include all of those partnerships hosting Leading for Equity retreats as well as a portion of those not hosting retreats);
- 50% of communities with action plans will begin implementation within three months after the last meeting of the Leaders Collaborative; and
- 75% of Community Partners will report an increase in collaboration focused on addressing disparities in children's learning.

Evaluation Questions

The key evaluation questions included questions about Individual Development, Group Development, Community Development, and – for those communities that completed a Leading for Equity Retreat – specific questions about the impact of that experience. Specifically, the evaluation questions included:

1. To what degree is the Leaders Collaborative achieving each of the anticipated outputs and outcomes? (See Expected Results above)

2. Leaders Collaborative - Individual Development

- In what ways have individual participants developed or increased their personal capacity to lead?
- What kinds of changes have participants experienced in how they work with others?

3. Leaders Collaborative - Group Development

- Do individuals have an understanding of a shared mission and vision for Smart Start?
- How have the Leaders Collaborative members within a cohort worked together and collaborated within the Leaders Collaborative gatherings? Outside the Leaders Collaborative gatherings? After the cohort sessions ended?
- What tools and skills introduced in the Leaders Collaborative sessions have they used as a group outside of the sessions?
- How have the Leaders Collaborative members worked together and collaborated across the Leaders Collaborative cohorts?
- How has collaboration among Leaders Collaborative participants changed over time? To what degree is any change due to participation in the Leaders Collaborative?
- What implications does this have for the Smart Start statewide community?

4. Leaders Collaborative - Community Development

- How have the Leaders Collaborative members applied skills and tools they learned through the Leaders Collaborative in their own communities?
- How has applying these skills and/or tools impacted early childhood system structures in the local community? Impacted how local organizations work together?
- How has this work in the community affected early childhood outcomes? Are there tangible improvements in policies or services for young children with high needs?

5. Leading for Equity – Local Communities

- How were local leaders invited/engaged to participate in the Leading for Equity retreat? What sectors (geography, generational, demographics, economic status, etc.) of the community were represented?
- Did retreat participants gain broader knowledge of issues of equity?
- What types of racial disparities did each community group choose to focus on? What types of data were reviewed?
- What are the next steps each community agreed to at the end of the retreat?
- What actions have taken place following the Leading for Equity retreat to 1) develop the action plan and shared agreements? 2) engage additional partners? 3) implement the shared agreements/action plan? 4) measure progress, and 5) support the long-term sustainability and commitment to community change identified during the Leading for Equity retreat?

Appendix B

LEADERS COLLABORATIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Please reflect on this experience –information you have learned, your application of the information, and your enthusiasm for this approach to leadership development. Please also compare your previous and current status as a leader. Finally, we would like your recommendations for this initiative.

LEARN1	Please describe the leaders collaborative for you.					
LEARN601	On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being no change and 4 being a dramatic change, how would you rate your understanding of your leadership style as a result of participating in the Leaders Collaborative?					
	No change	1	2	3	4	dramatic change
LEARN701	On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being no change and 4 being a dramatic change, how would you rate your understanding of your leadership strengths as a result of participating in the Leaders Collaborative?					
	No change	1	2	3	4	dramatic change
LEARN801	On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being no change and 4 being a dramatic change, how would you rate your understanding of your leadership weaknesses as a result of participating in the Leaders Collaborative?					
	No change	1	2	3	4	dramatic change
ID101	Please identify three concrete ways that your personal capacity to lead has changed as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative.					
ID202	Please identify three concrete ways that your work with others has changed as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative.					
ID4	On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being not very applicable and 4 being very applicable, how would you rate the degree to which you will be able to apply the information you gained from the Leaders Collaborative?					
	not very applicable	1	2	3	4	very applicable

GD102	In what ways have you collaborated with other participants within the Leaders Collaborative sessions?
GD202	In what ways have you collaborated with other leaders participating in the Leaders Collaborative outside of the formal sessions?
GD301	In what ways do you see the work of the Leaders Collaborative supporting the statewide work of Smart Start?
GD403	Have you used new skills as a result of participating in the Leaders Collaborative?
GD503	If yes to GD403, Please identify three new skills introduced in the Leaders Collaborative sessions that you have used outside of the sessions?

SHARED AGREEMENTS

Think about the process of developing the shared agreements. We would like to learn more about how you accomplished this with community members, the outcomes achieved to date, and the outcomes (or results) you anticipate achieving in the next 6 to 12 months.

MOU01	What was the content of your shared agreement? What disparity does it address?						
PLAN203	Please describe the process of developing your local plan to address specific disparities for young children in your community.						
PLAN303	What role did the leaders collaborative play in helping you develop your local process?						
PLAN403	Please describe how you involved local partners in developing your local plan.						
PLAN504	Who were your key partners in this plan development (please identify roles, not specific names)						
MOU12	On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being not very much potential and 4 being a lot of potential, how would you rate the opportunity to strengthen your local work as a result of the shared agreement?						
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Not very much potential</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>A lot of potential</td> </tr> </table>	Not very much potential	1	2	3	4	A lot of potential
Not very much potential	1	2	3	4	A lot of potential		
MOUM1	How will you measure the results achieved in reducing disparities in your community?						
PLAN703	About what are you most proud related to the disparities you are collaborating with community members to reduce/eliminate?						

PLAN803	What outcomes do you hope to see within 6 months from your local plan?
PLAN804	What measurable accomplishments do you hope to see in 12 months as a result of the shared agreement?

DS1	Please share your experience with the Data Report and Data Coach you received for your community.
DS502	Have you shared the results of your data with local community partners?
DS602	If yes to D502, please describe how you have shared the results in your community.
DS702	Have you used the results of your data with local community partners in other ways?
DS802	If yes to D702, please describe how you have used the results in your community in other ways.

LE1	Thinking back to the sessions you completed as part of the Leaders Collaborative, please share your impressions of the Racial Equity session.
LE2	Did you complete a Racial Equity Retreat in your community?
	NO YES
If yes to LE2 please complete questions LE3--LE18; If No, please skip to WEB1.	
LE3	Please describe this experience.
LE401	How were local leaders invited/engaged to participate in the Leading for Equity retreat?
LE501	What sectors (geography, generational, demographics, economic status, etc.) of the community were represented?
LE602	Did retreat participants gain broader knowledge of issues of equity?
LE702	If yes to LE602, please identify up to three ways participants gained broader knowledge of issues of equity.
LE803	What types of racial disparities did each community group choose to focus on?

LE903	What types of data were reviewed and applied?
LE1204	What are the next steps each community agreed to at the end of the retreat?
LE1406	What actions have taken place following the Leading for Equity retreat to engage additional partners?
LE1506	What actions have taken place following the Leading for Equity retreat implement the MOU/action plan?
LE17	What was positive about the Racial Equity Retreat?
LE18	What challenges did you encounter in this experience?

WEB--BASED RESOURCES

Please reflect on the web--based resources made available to you.

WEB1	How would you describe the Learning Community website?						
WEB2	On a scale of 1--4, with 1 being not very useful and 4 being very useful, how would you rate the Learning Community website						
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Not very useful</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>very useful</td> </tr> </table>	Not very useful	1	2	3	4	very useful
Not very useful	1	2	3	4	very useful		
WEB6	What changes to the site would you recommend?						
WEB7	On a scale of 1--4, with 1 being not very likely to and 4 being very likely, how likely are you to continue using the Learning Community website to further your learning after the formal sessions?						
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Not very likely</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>very likely</td> </tr> </table>	Not very likely	1	2	3	4	very likely
Not very likely	1	2	3	4	very likely		

FINAL REFLECTIONS

These final questions ask you to reflect on changes that have happened – or that you foresee happening – as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative.

COLLO5	Using a scale of 1-4, with 1 being none and 4 being a great deal, how would you rate your community's level of collaboration focused on addressing disparities in the topic you are working on locally?							
	Before the First Session:	none	1	2	3	4	A great deal	
	Now:	none	1	2	3	4	A great deal	
CD202	I know it is early, but I have four impact questions to ask you. These are designed to take where you are now and project into the future. How do you see how applying the skills and/or tools from the Leaders Collaborative will impact early childhood system structures in the local community?							
CD403	What new, tangible improvements in policies or services for young children with high needs do you envision as a result of your Leaders Collaborative experience?							
CD503	How do you see that this new work in the community will affect early childhood outcomes?							
CD603	What effect can the Leaders Collaborative have on how NCPC and the local partnerships learn and work together?							
REC1	Would you recommend the Leaders Collaborative to others?							
	NO YES							
REC2	What are the primary reasons for your answer?							
REC5	What do you feel should NOT be changed about the Leaders Collaborative for future cohorts?							
REC6	Based on your experience, do you have any changes you would recommend for future cohorts to best serve your peers?							
REC8	Is there anything else you would like for us to know that we have not discussed?							

Appendix C

LEADERS COLLABORATIVE INITIAL SURVEY

RTT COHORT III

WELCOME! We are excited that you are participating in the next cohort of the Leaders Collaborative. This initial survey is designed to learn more about why you are participating in the Leaders Collaborative and what you hope to gain from this experience. The survey will take 10-15 minutes to complete.

This survey is part of the broader, multi-year evaluation of the Leaders Collaborative that is being completed by the Thorman Strategy Group. You will also complete a short survey at the end of the Leaders Collaborative and be interviewed by the research team. All of your responses are completely confidential. Your feedback will be used to report on the impact of the Leaders Collaborative to the funder of this project and be used to inform improvements to future Leaders Collaborative cohorts. Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey.

1. Why did you apply to participate in the Leaders Collaborative? (Please select up to THREE answers only)

- I want to enhance my leadership skills
- I was curious
- I was encouraged to participate by my peers
- I was encouraged to participate by NCPC
- I had heard good things about the experience
- I am struggling with some specific challenges and I hope the Leaders Collaborative can help me with these issues
- I am feeling burned out and need to be recharged
- I am always eager to learn new information

Other (please specify)

2. Please identify three ways that you hope your personal capacity as a leader grows as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative. (Please select your top THREE answers only)

- Gain a greater personal understanding of leadership strengths
- Gain a greater personal understanding of leadership weaknesses
- Improve skills leading initiatives
- Improve communication skills
- Learn new tools to build community partnerships
- Learn new tools to sustain and expand community partnerships
- Learn new strategies to most effectively invest Smart Start resources
- Build new relationships with other executive directors
- Build new relationships with NCPC
- New opportunity to work to improve outcomes for children in my community

Other (please specify)

3. Please identify three ways that you hope your work with other community partners improves as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative. (Please select your top THREE answers only).

- Create new partnerships
- Deepen existing partnerships
- Develop new ways of working together on community priorities
- Learn new skills for handling challenging community dynamics
- Help other organizations take the lead on community change
- Create new momentum on challenging issues

Other (please specify)

4. Please rate the degree to which you have collaborated with the following organizations in the past year

	No collaboration	Some collaboration	Extensive collaboration
DSS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health Department	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LICC	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CCR&R	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child care centers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family child care homes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local school district(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
County managers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mayor's offices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other elected officials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chamber(s) of Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other business groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
NAACP	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other civil right organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify)

5. Please identify up to three ways that you hope work with staff improves as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative.

- Help staff take on new leadership roles
- To empower staff to fulfill their roles more successfully
- Improve communication with staff
- Improve management skills
- Develop new skills for working with challenging personalities on staff

Other (please specify)

6. Please identify three ways that you hope work with the local partnership Board improves as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative.

- Engage board overall more effectively
- Engage specific board members more effectively
- Learn new skills to manage challenging board members
- Help board shift direction to address additional challenges
- Empower board to address challenging decisions
- Learn new information that can be presented to the board to make their work more effective
- To practice data driven decision making with the board

Other (please specify)

7. Please briefly describe the way you currently prepare for community meetings.

8. On a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being not very knowledgeable and 4 being extremely knowledgeable), how would you rate your understanding of your own leadership style?

Not very knowledgeable ○ ○ ○ ○ Extremely knowledgeable

9. On a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being not very knowledgeable and 4 being extremely knowledgeable), how would you rate your understanding of your own leadership strengths?

Not very knowledgeable ○ ○ ○ ○ Extremely knowledgeable

10. On a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being not very knowledgeable and 4 being extremely knowledgeable), how would you rate your understanding of your own leadership weaknesses?

Not very knowledgeable ○ ○ ○ ○ Extremely knowledgeable

11. On a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being not at all strong or effective and 4 being extremely strong and effective), how would you rate yourself as a leader?

Not at all strong or effective ○ ○ ○ ○ Extremely strong and effective

12. What would you identify as the single most pressing early childhood challenge in your community?

13. How do you hope the Leaders Collaborative helps you address this challenge?

14. Which partnership do you work for? (This is for the purposes of coding only for the researchers)

Thank you so much for taking the time to complete this survey! If there are any questions please email Dr. Abby Thorman at abby_thorman@yahoo.com

Appendix D

LEADERS COLLABORATIVE AFTER PARTICIPATION SURVEY 2014 RTT COHORT III

WELCOME! We are excited that you have participated in the most recent cohort of the Leaders Collaborative. This follow up survey, along with the interview, is designed to learn more about your experience. The survey will take 10-15 minutes to complete. Please complete no later than November 19.

This survey is part of the broader, multi-year evaluation of the Leaders Collaborative that is being completed by the Thorman Strategy Group. All of your responses are completely confidential. Your feedback will be used to report on the impact of the Leaders Collaborative to the funder of this project and to inform improvements to future Leaders Collaborative cohorts. Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey.

1. Please identify three ways that your personal capacity as a leader has grown as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative. (Please select your top THREE answers only)

- Gained a greater personal understanding of leadership strengths
- Gained a greater personal understanding of leadership weaknesses
- Improved skills leading initiatives
- Improved communication skills
- Learned new tools to build community partnerships
- Learned new tools to sustain and expand community partnerships
- Learned new strategies to most effectively invest Smart Start resources
- Built new relationships with other executive directors
- Built new relationships with NCPC
- Developed new opportunities to work to improve outcomes for children in my community

Other (please specify)

2. Please identify three ways that your work with other community partners has improved as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative. (Please select your top THREE answers only).

- Created new partnerships
- Deepened existing partnerships
- Developed new ways of working together on community priorities
- Learned new skills for handling challenging community dynamics
- Helped other organizations take the lead on community change
- Created new momentum on challenging issues

Other (please specify)

3. Please rate your current degree of collaboration with the following organizations.

	No Collaboration		Some Collaboration		Extensive Collaboration
DSS	<input type="radio"/>				
Health Department	<input type="radio"/>				
LICC	<input type="radio"/>				
CCR&R	<input type="radio"/>				
Child care centers	<input type="radio"/>				
Family child care homes	<input type="radio"/>				
Local school district(s)	<input type="radio"/>				
County manager(s)	<input type="radio"/>				
Mayor's office(s)	<input type="radio"/>				
Other elected officials	<input type="radio"/>				
Chamber(s) of Commerce	<input type="radio"/>				
Other business groups	<input type="radio"/>				
NAACP	<input type="radio"/>				
Other civil rights organizations	<input type="radio"/>				
Community-based non profit organizations	<input type="radio"/>				

Other (please specify)

4. Please identify up to three ways that your work with staff has improved as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative.

- Helped staff take on new leadership roles
- Empowered staff to fulfill their roles more successfully
- Improved communication with staff
- Improved management skills
- Developed new skills for working with challenging personalities on staff

Other (please specify)

5. Please identify up to three ways that your work with the local partnership Board has improved as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative.

- Engaged board overall more effectively
- Engaged specific board members more effectively
- Learned new skills to manage challenging board members
- Helped board shift direction to address additional challenges
- Empowered board to address challenging decisions
- Learned new information that can be presented to the board to make their work more effective
- Have practiced data driven decision making with the board

Other (please specify)

6. Please briefly describe the way you now prepare for community meetings as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative.

7. On a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being not very knowledgeable and 4 being extremely knowledgeable), how would you rate your understanding of your own leadership style?

Not very knowledgeable

Extremely knowledgeable

8. On a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being not very knowledgeable and 4 being extremely knowledgeable), how would you rate your understanding of your own leadership strengths?

Not very knowledgeable

Extremely knowledgeable

9. On a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being not very knowledgeable and 4 being extremely knowledgeable), how would you rate your understanding of your own leadership weaknesses?

Not very knowledgeable

Extremely knowledgeable

10. On a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being not at all strong or effective and 4 being extremely strong and effective), how would you rate yourself as a leader?

Not at all strong or effective

Extremely strong and effective

11. What would you identify as the single most pressing early childhood challenge in your community?

12. How has the Leaders Collaborative helped you address this challenge?

13. Please share any other reflections on the Leaders Collaborative that would be helpful for the evaluators.

14. Which partnership do you work for? (This is for the purposes of coding only for the researchers)

Appendix E

LEADERS COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY PARTNERS FEEDBACK COHORT III

WELCOME! We are excited to reconnect with you after your participation in the Leaders Collaborative. This follow up survey is designed to learn more about how your Leaders Collaborative experience has impacted your work. The survey will take 10-15 minutes to complete.

This survey is part of the broader, multi-year evaluation of the Leaders Collaborative that is being completed by the Thorman Strategy Group. All of your responses are completely confidential. Your feedback will be used to report on the impact of the Leaders Collaborative to the funder of this project and to inform improvements to future Leaders Collaborative cohorts. Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey.

1. What year did you participate in the Leaders Collaborative?

2012

2013

2. Please identify three ways that your personal capacity as a leader has grown as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative. (Please select your top THREE answers only)

- Gained a greater personal understanding of leadership strengths
- Gained a greater personal understanding of leadership weaknesses
- Improved skills leading initiatives
- Improved communication skills
- Learned new tools to build community partnerships
- Learned new tools to sustain and expand community partnerships
- Learned new strategies to most effectively invest Smart Start resources
- Built new relationships with other executive directors
- Built new relationships with NCPC
- Developed new opportunities to work to improve outcomes for children in my community

Other (please specify)

3. Please identify three ways that your work with other community partners has improved as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative. (Please select your top THREE answers only).

- Created new partnerships
- Deepened existing partnerships
- Developed new ways of working together on community priorities
- Learned new skills for handling challenging community dynamics
- Helped other organizations take the lead on community change
- Created new momentum on challenging issues

Other (please specify)

4. Please rate your current degree of collaboration with the following organizations.

	No Collaboration		Some Collaboration		Extensive Collaboration
DSS	<input type="radio"/>				
Health Department	<input type="radio"/>				
LICC	<input type="radio"/>				
CCR&R	<input type="radio"/>				
Child care centers	<input type="radio"/>				
Family child care homes	<input type="radio"/>				
Local school district(s)	<input type="radio"/>				
County manager(s)	<input type="radio"/>				
Mayor's office(s)	<input type="radio"/>				
Other elected officials	<input type="radio"/>				
Chamber(s) of Commerce	<input type="radio"/>				
Other business groups	<input type="radio"/>				
NAACP	<input type="radio"/>				
Other civil rights organizations	<input type="radio"/>				
Community-based non profit organizations	<input type="radio"/>				

Other (please specify)

5. Please identify up to three ways that your work with staff has improved as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative.

- Helped staff take on new leadership roles
- Empowered staff to fulfill their roles more successfully
- Improved communication with staff
- Improved management skills
- Developed new skills for working with challenging personalities on staff

Other (please specify)

6. Please identify up to three ways that your work with the local partnership Board has improved as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative.

- Engaged board overall more effectively
- Engaged specific board members more effectively
- Learned new skills to manage challenging board members
- Helped board shift direction to address additional challenges
- Empowered board to address challenging decisions
- Learned new information that can be presented to the board to make their work more effective
- Have practiced data driven decision making with the board

Other (please specify)

7. Please briefly describe the way you now prepare for community meetings as a result of your participation in the Leaders Collaborative.

8. On a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being not very knowledgeable and 4 being extremely knowledgeable), how would you rate your understanding of your own leadership style now?

Not very knowledgeable Extremely knowledgeable

9. On a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being not very knowledgeable and 4 being extremely knowledgeable), how would you rate your understanding of your own leadership strengths now?

Not very knowledgeable Extremely knowledgeable

10. On a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being not very knowledgeable and 4 being extremely knowledgeable), how would you rate your understanding of your own leadership weaknesses now?

Not very knowledgeable Extremely knowledgeable

11. On a scale of 1-4 (with 1 being not at all strong or effective and 4 being extremely strong and effective), how would you rate yourself as a leader now?

Not at all strong or effective Extremely strong and effective

12. What would you identify as the single most pressing early childhood challenge in your community?

13. How has the Leaders Collaborative helped you address this challenge?

14. Please describe the current work related to your shared agreement.

15. If different from previous question, in what ways has your community worked on issues of disparities since your participation in the Leaders Collaborative?

16. Please share any other reflections on the Leaders Collaborative that would be helpful for the evaluators.

17. Which partnership do you work for? (This is for the purposes of coding only for the researchers)

Thank you so much for taking the time to complete this survey! If there are any questions please email Dr. Abby Thorman at abby_thorman@yahoo.com

Appendix F

COMMUNITY PARTNERS FEEDBACK COHORT III

The executive director of your local Smart Start Partnership recently participated in a nine month long Leaders Collaborative professional development experience. One of the goals of this work was to expand and strengthen community partnerships.

This survey will help us measure the impact of the leadership development experience on activities in your local community. Please complete this survey by May 7. The survey results will assist us in reporting back to the funder on the impact of the Leaders Collaborative on local communities as well as inform strategies to strengthen the experience for future cohorts.

The results of surveys of community leaders will be aggregated for reporting purposes.

If there are any questions, please contact Dr. Abby Thorman at abby_thorman@yahoo.com.

1. What is the name of your local Smart Start Partnership?

- Alamance
- Ashe
- Chowan
- Davie
- Guilford
- Herford, Northampton
- Hoke
- Montgomery
- Perquimans
- Transylvania
- Union
- Wayne
- Yadkin

2. Please identify your role in the community

- a. Nonprofit manager
- b. Government/school administrator
- c. Parent representative
- d. Concerned citizen

Other (please specify)

3. For approximately how long have you have worked with the executive director of your local Smart Start Partnership on early childhood issues?

- 0-11 months (less than 1 year)
- 12-23 months (1 year)
- 24-35 months (2 years)
- 36-47 months (3 years)
- 48-59 months (4 years)
- 60 or more months (5+ years)

4. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not at all good (poor) to 5 being very good (excellent), how would you rate the quality of your relationship with the executive director of your local partnership today?

Poor Excellent

5. On the same scale of 1-5, how would you rate the quality of your relationship 1 year ago?

Poor Excellent

6. Over the last year has your organization developed new strategic partnerships with your local Smart Start partnership?

- Yes - We have developed a new or stronger relationship with our local Smart Start partnership over the past year. (Please describe below)
- No - We already had a strong partnership with our local Smart Start partnership.
- No - We haven't worked closely with our Smart Start local partnership over this past year.

If yes, please describe

7. Over the last year has your organization developed new strategic partnerships with other local organizations on issues related to early childhood?

- Yes - We have developed a new or stronger relationship with other organizations over the past year (please describe below)
- No - We already had a strong partnership with other local organizations.
- No - We haven't worked closely with other local organizations over this past year.

If yes, please describe

8. Over the last year have you worked with your Smart Start local partnership to address a specific disparity that needs improvement? (by "disparity" we are referring to differences between groups of children)

- Yes (please identify the disparity worked on in your community below)
- We are in the middle of this planning right now
- No
- I do not know

If yes, please identify disparity

9. Have you attended meetings on similar topics in the past with your local partnership?

- Yes (if so, select all that apply)
- This meeting was similar in content and structure
- This meeting was better than meetings on similar topics (explain below)
- This meeting was worse than meetings on similar topics (explain below)
- No

Additional explanation for answers

10. Did you participate in the development of a shared agreement around a specific issue?

- Yes (please elaborate below)
- We are in the middle of this planning right now
- No
- I do not know

If yes, please identify the purpose of the shared agreement and what your organization agreed to do in the shared agreement

11. How likely is it that your organization will implement what was agreed to in the shared agreement in the next year?

- My organization has already completed its commitment to the shared agreement
- Highly likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

12. How likely is it that other community organizations will implement what they agreed to in the shared agreement in the next year?

- All will likely follow through
- Most will likely follow through
- Some will likely follow through
- None will likely follow through

13. Over the last year has your understanding of disparities in your community among young children increased, stayed the same or decreased?

- Increased (please describe below)
- Stayed the same
- Decreased (please describe below)

Please describe

14. Over the last year, have the conversations about disparities among young children in your community increased, stayed the same, or decreased?

- Increased (please describe)
- Stayed the same
- Decreased (please describe)

Please describe

15. Over the last year, have activities to address disparities among young children increased, stayed the same, or decreased?

- Increased (please describe below)
- Stayed the same
- Decreased (please describe below)

16. Over the last year, has the quality of collaboration to address disparities among young children increased, stayed the same, or decreased?

- Increased (please describe below)
- Stayed the same
- Decreased (please describe below)

Please describe

17. In what ways has this work affected early childhood outcomes in your community?

- We have made measurable improvements in our area of focus (please describe below)
- It is too early to measure improvements in our area of focus
- Other

Please describe

18. What impact did this work on disparities and the community shared agreement have on you and your work? (Select all that apply)

- Gave me new understanding of my community overall
- Gave me new understanding of early childhood issues in my community
- Had little impact on me and my work
- Increased my commitment to early childhood issues in my community
- Decreased my commitment to early childhood issues in my community
- Created new relationships with community leaders
- Created new partnerships between my organization and another organization
- Strained relationships with me and other community leaders
- I am now creating changes in my organization to address disparities
- I am now creating changes in partnerships my organization works with to address disparities

Other (please specify)

19. How likely do you feel this work on disparities is to make a measurable difference for young children in your community? Feel free to add explanation of your answer below.

- I think we are on the right track based on the work we have done so far
- I am unsure we will make a difference based on the work we have done so far
- I do not think we will make a measurable difference based on the work we have done so far

Please explain

20. Did you participate in a racial equity retreat in your community?

- Yes
- No (Skip to question 22)

21. What impact did the racial equity retreat have on you and your work? (Select all that apply)

- Gave me new understanding of my community overall
- Gave me new understanding of early childhood issues in my community
- Had little impact on me and my work
- Gave me new understanding of the historical impact of structural and institutional issues in my community
- I am more aware of issues of privilege
- Increased my commitment to early childhood issues in my community
- Decreased my commitment to early childhood issues in my community
- Created new relationships with community leaders
- Created new partnerships between my organization and another organization
- Strained relationships with me and other community leaders
- I am now creating changes in my organization to address disparities
- I am now creating changes in partnerships my organization works with to address disparities

Other (please specify)

22. How has the work of your Smart Start local partnership changed over the last year? Which, if any, of the following have you noticed your local partnership making an increased effort in over the past year?

- Engaging other community members
- Creating community partnerships
- Creating community momentum on specific issues
- Identifying community needs
- Bringing the right people together to address specific needs
- Helping the early childhood systems in our community work together more effectively
- Raising funding
- Running efficient and effective meetings

Other (please specify)

23. Is there anything else you would like for us to know?

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is very valuable and will help inform the work of the Leaders Collaborative in the future.