

Planning Collaboratives: Learnings to Support Integrated Planning and Consideration for Municipalities

**Excerpts of the report highlighting the
Children and Youth Planning Table**



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In the spring of 2017, the Children and Youth Planning Table was asked to participate in a research project with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs to better understand effective collaborative processes. This was in response to the 27 recommendations outlined in the *Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan*. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs was “tasked with addressing the recommendation that call on the Province to support local integrated planning (IP) efforts” (p. 3). In partnership with regional staff, “deep dive” research was completed with 5 planning collaboratives across the province. Common learnings around success factors and barriers were grouped into five main themes:

1. [Backbone Support](#)
2. [Strategy](#)
3. [Partnerships](#)
4. [Readiness and Capacity](#)
5. [Parameters](#)

The following contains excerpts from the report that specifically highlight the Children and Youth Planning Table in this deep dive research (identified in the original report as The Planning Table). Local learnings are based on focus groups with highly, as well as peripherally, engaged Children and Youth Planning Table participants, key informant interviews, and meeting observation.

Theme 1: Backbone Support

Dedicated coordination function is vital to the success of collaborative operations, as well as governance, strategy, partnership building, and service planning efforts (p.13).

1.1-1.2: Backbone support is essential; Dedicated coordination is critical

Permanent backbone support is essential to the success and sustainability of IP efforts. Collaboratives having access to fulltime – and sustainably funded – coordination are able to focus on more activities tied directly to their mandates. Those not having access to this type of support appear to struggle with overall coordination and administrative efforts, and planning efforts become challenging and unguided. “Effective and sustainable coordination is difficult to achieve on a part-time or temporary basis” (p.13). This is especially true for regional collaboratives that service a large number of partners and navigate multiple jurisdictions and relationships (p.13). Where backbone support is threatened or limited, planning becomes disconnected, coordination dwindles and relationship-building suffers (p.13).

Children and Youth Planning Table: The report highlighted the Children and Youth Planning Table as an example of success due to backbone supports. Funding, provided through a combination of public foundation funding and municipality in-kind supports, has removed the need for any further direct financial support (p.12). The full-time manager and dedicated Social Planning associate “play a pivotal role in strategic coordination, analysis and fostering of relationships and connection necessary to IP” (p.16). They are “instrumental in providing a broad systems-level perspective and ensuring the Table is strategically moving towards system level integration” (p. 16). With this dedicated coordination, “planning efforts have greater success and the collaborative is more sustainable and able to work in a more integrative manner” (p. 13). The report also highlighted the role of data collection and analysis, and The Table’s partnerships with data analysis coordinators to access and analyse data related to family support services and Early Years transformation.

Theme 2: Strategy

2.1: Shared vision and mutual goals

Clearly defined priorities, direction, outcomes and decision-making processes take time to develop but are vital to successful IP (p.17). “All participants agreed that establishing a shared understanding of the collaborative vision, mandate, goals and outcomes were important for effective cooperation among and between their respective members and partners, for sustained planning impact” (p.17). Establishing a common vision, mission

and goals helps prioritize work and define project ownership, roles, and communication channels throughout all planning stages (p.17).

Children and Youth Planning Table: The report highlighted the Children and Youth Planning Table's efforts to develop common goals, and encouraging members to see the alignment between individual organization goals and the Shared Goals of the Children and Youth Planning Table. The report spoke to the Children and Youth Planning Table's use of a collective impact framework to develop a Theory of Change model which has provided clarity on the direction, role and mandate of the Table. This has "helped [members] clearly identify their purpose and the role they play in impacting the developmental health of children" (p.18).

2.3: Deliberate governance

The presence of a formal and deliberate governance model was a criterion for participation in this research. Governance is a key ingredient to adding structure, accountability and transparency to planning activities (p.20).

Children and Youth Planning Table: The report noted the Children and Youth Planning Table's robust governance model including elements around voting members, working groups, steering committee, backbone support and affiliated groups. These processes have worked to keep the Children and Youth Planning Table on track through the decision-making processes and ensure common goals are carried out.

Theme 3: Partnerships

Developing and fostering meaningful, trustworthy relationships amongst planning partners is essential to IP success. It is important to include partnerships with key sectors well-versed in integrated service delivery planning, including education, health care, police departments, non-traditional groups, and private sector (p.23).

3.1-3.3: Outreach; Rules of engagement; Core partners

Partnership-building is framed as a continuous effort to stay current with changing community needs and manage relationships and expectations. Early, meaningful and strategic outreach is crucial for cultivating sustainable and trustworthy relationships (p.21). Successful outreach and engagement is often reliant on strong backbone support.

Children and Youth Planning Table: The report noted the Children and Youth Planning Table's presence at important conferences, planning events, or relates tables/groups in the community as an opportunity for active engagement in planning discussions, but also for networking, knowledge exchange, and potential partnerships. Additionally, frequent outreach activities were considered

an essential component to the success of the work, due to the breadth and depth of our catchment area and service providers operating within the system.

Theme 4: Readiness and Capacity

IP endeavors take time, as a result of the complexity of the overall process and the work in general.

4.1 Readiness

Communities need to reach a level of awareness with respect to local issues and challenges, provincially-driven mandates, and the ability of the collaborative to collectively resolve them (p.25).

Children and Youth Planning Table: Members engaged in mapping exercises of multi-partner initiatives or collaboratives to ensure resources are allocated effectively and overlap amongst initiative is minimal (p.26). The “Mapping Moving Trains” workshop also served to increase awareness for members and the broader community, of coalitions and networks doing the work in the area. It also helped to identify real and potential service duplication and a critical assessment on the need for further planning (p.26).

4.2 Capacity (access to data, leaders and volunteers)

A key component to successful IP is the expertise or capacity in planning and leadership of collaborative stakeholders, members and partners (p.26). Organizations of individuals associated with planning efforts need to have an understanding of IP, the various models, the benefits and challenges, the (potential) outcomes, and time commitment (p.26). Direct influences on capacity include access to data (data sharing across services), local leadership, and volunteers (internal and/or external).

Children and Youth Planning Table: Reiteration of the common goals at all meetings, and during presentations has reinforced “priorities while linking and integrating specific topics into the broader work” of the Children and Youth Planning Table (p.27). Purposeful attribution during working sessions, and engaging and interactive sessions have ensured the wider membership is involved in the critical work of moving goals and plans forward (p.27). The use of mixed seating has encouraged networking, knowledge exchange, and collaboration opportunities beyond members’ own organizations (p.28).

Opening up the organization’s in-house training calendar to the Children and Youth Planning Table members has promoted capacity building, transparency, and encouraged trust while facilitating knowledge and data exchange. Additionally, the structure of Working Groups (staffed and chaired by individuals in middle management positions) empowers and builds leadership and other

management competencies, while ensuring a degree of succession planning (p.28).

Theme 5: Parameters

Approaches to IP differ across communities in part due to parameters around service boundaries and catchment areas. Planning should be driven by localized issues and energies must be put into fostering partnerships and finding synergies as membership increases (p.31-32). Some participation beyond municipal boundaries is beneficial when tackling 'big policy issues' to avoid "planning silos and gain more of a holistic perspective of the service planning and delivery landscape" (p.30).

5.3: Planning is systematic

Large-scale collaboratives tend to focus their strategic planning efforts on supporting local service providers on the ground, and planning activities undertaken tend to be further removed from direct client contact and geared towards higher-level coordination and networking (p.35). "Planning efforts appear to serve more of a systemic role/function across a much broader pool of service[s]" (p.34).

Children and Youth Planning Table: Issues being addressed are often the same priorities as provincial interests. With an open membership, there are approximately 450 Children and Youth Planning Table stakeholders of which 120-150 are highly engaged, spanning a large geographic area of rural, urban and diverse community groups. The development of a new joint virtual access point (a.k.a. Family Compass) will offer service providers one-site access to information, while reducing the client burden of navigating numerous websites (p.35). "The service provider connectivity demonstrated through this project is imperative to IP and can lead to the systematic improvement of client-focused family services while addressing client needs" (p.35).