

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE



FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION

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Harvard Family Research Project



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a follow-up evaluation of the Early Care and Education Collaborative, a multiyear strategic communications training led by the Communications Consortium Media Center for a cohort of eight state-based child advocacy organizations (the first evaluation was in 2001). The evaluation examined how participants in four states—Colorado, Illinois, Missouri, and New Jersey—have sustained and built on their strategic communications activity since 2002, and how this activity has translated into results.

The evaluation was organized around a four-level framework for evaluating training programs. The framework traces a sequence of potential outcomes, beginning with participants’ reactions to the training itself and ending with the training’s impact on their organizations. The table below organizes the evaluation’s findings around the four levels. Findings focus on what participants felt made the Collaborative experience unique compared to other trainings. Examples from the four focus states illustrate the findings in the text.

	Question	Findings on the Collaborative’s Unique Value Added
Level One REACTION	What about the Collaborative did participants find of most value?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on partners’ agendas; not a pre-determined and collective agenda • Targeting executive directors • Providing multiple learning formats, especially peer-to-peer
Level Two LEARNING	What did participants learn that was particularly useful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to <i>think</i> about communications (a paradigm shift) • Ways of challenging conventional advocacy practice • How to implement new communications techniques
Level Three TRANSFER	What have participants applied from their learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications prioritization within their organizations • Proactive communications strategies (in contrast to reactive) • How to adapt to changing political and economic contexts • Transfer of communications learning to other advocacy issues
Level Four RESULTS	How has applying what was learned produced a return on investment for participants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less partisan positioning • Effective relationships with other advocates • Increases in advocacy constituent bases • Policy outcomes in challenging environments

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2001, Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) conducted an evaluation of the Early Care and Education Collaborative (the Collaborative). The evaluation found that in the two years since the Collaborative's inception, child advocate participants had developed comprehensive communications strategies and greater communications capacity. They were using communications to expand their reach and to increase collaboration and inform policy, and had found value in Collaborative idea, skill, and resource sharing.

In 2005, HFRP conducted a follow-up evaluation of the Collaborative to examine whether and how advocates in four participating states—Colorado, Illinois, Missouri, and New Jersey—had sustained and built on their strategic communications activity since 2002, and how this activity translated into results for their organizations and for their overall advocacy goals. This report presents findings from the follow-up evaluation. Findings also offer broader lessons about developing strategic communications capacity among advocates and other nonprofits based on the Collaborative experience.

A. About the Early Care and Education Collaborative

The Collaborative was formed on the premise that **strategic communications** can play an important role in helping to bridge the gap between public concern for the nation's youngest children and the state policies and investments needed to ensure their overall well-being and school readiness. Led by the Communications Consortium Media Center (CCMC), over the last five years the Collaborative has supported state-based child advocates in their development of communications strategies to support the expansion and quality of early care and education resources.

Collaborative members included child advocacy organizations in eight states (Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania).¹ Participants received expert-led communications training and technical assistance and participated in peer-to-peer information sharing and networking. In addition, CCMC shared lessons learned from these partners with the larger early care and education community.

The Collaborative's short-term objectives were that participants learn to:

- Integrate their communications goals with their overall missions and build the communications capacity of their organizations
- Design and execute communications strategies tailored to the specific needs of their organizations and budgets
- Make informed choices about communications tools such as public relations, polling, research, and advertising.

Longer-term, its objectives were, through the implementation of communications strategies, to improve early care and education programs and policies by increasing

¹ Florida is no longer an active Collaborative participant.

state public and private investments, advocacy constituent bases, and public awareness and will.

B. Evaluation Methodology

The follow-up evaluation used a **success-case method** approach.² The success case method uses a blend of storytelling and evaluation inquiry and documentation. It uses the stories of an initiative's participants to investigate and understand the roots of their successes. This approach is based on the premise that small successes can yield greater ones, and studying and documenting success can provide instructive information for other organizations or future initiatives.

Selecting examples of success, verifying them, and documenting them are at the core of the success case method. Five steps are involved:

1) Focusing and planning—The first step clarifies what the study needs to accomplish.

The follow-up evaluation's main objective was to review the extent to which advocates are using communications differently as a result of their Collaborative participation. Specifically, the evaluation examined:

- How participants' organizations and advocacy are different as a result of any changes in how they think about communications.
- How new contextual challenges (e.g., political, financial, organizational) in the past few years have challenged advocates, and how communications work has adapted as a result.
- How advocates know their communications work is making a difference, and how they are learning from their work over time.
- The Collaborative's and CCMC's roles in contributing to progress on strategic communications.

2) Creating an impact model that defines what success should look like—The second step projects what success should look like, creating an impact model to demonstrate intended outcomes.

The Collaborative's impact model is based on a four-level framework for evaluating training programs that was developed more than 40 years ago by Donald Kirkpatrick.³ This model has stood the test of time, and today is the most widely used framework for evaluating training programs in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. Because the Collaborative at its core was designed to train advocates on what strategic communications is and how to use it, this framework provides a useful tool for examining Collaborative results.

² Brinkerhoff, R. O. (2003). *The success case method: Find out quickly what's working and what's not*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

³ Kirkpatrick, D. (1998). Evaluating training programs: The four levels. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler; Maxson, B. (1999, March/April). 40-year-old evaluation model still the strongest base. *Training Today*.

The table below summarizes the four levels for evaluating training, and identifies what success should look like at each level for Collaborative participants. The levels trace a sequence of outcomes that starts with participants' reactions to the training itself, then moves to what they learned, followed by what they applied from their learning, and finally how the application of their learning impacted their organizations. For the follow-up evaluation, levels three and four are of particular interest.

Impact Model of Collaborative Success

	Focus	Success
Level One REACTION	<i>Did participants like the training experience?</i> Customer satisfaction or participants' reactions to training, such as their satisfaction or perception of its value.	Partners respond positively to the Collaborative experience itself—skills training, information sharing, peer-to-peer networking, technical assistance
Level Two LEARNING	<i>What did participants learn?</i> What participants learned during the training, such as their knowledge or skills.	Partners understand the value of strategic communications Partners learn what it means to think strategically about communications Partners gain tangible communications skills—e.g., radio actualities, polling, etc.
Level Three TRANSFER	<i>Did participants use what they learned?</i> The skills participants actually use, usually after some time has passed.	Partners dedicate resources to communications Partners transfer communications skills throughout their organizations Partners use communications tools and skills in their advocacy work Partners are able to adapt communications strategies over time to changing conditions
Level Four RESULTS	<i>Did the application of what was learned produce a return on investment?</i> The impact of the training related to participants' overall organization-level goals, again usually after some time has passed.	Implementation of communications strategies result in increased or sustained early care and education investments

3) Searching for best cases—The third step identifies the success cases for the study's focus.

Based on CCMC's recommendation, the follow-up evaluation focused on 4 of the 8 Collaborative participants—Colorado Children's Campaign, Voices for Illinois Children, Association for Children of New Jersey, and Citizens for Missouri's Children.

- 4) **Interviewing and documenting success cases**—The fourth step captures and documents the particular and personal ways in which an initiative has been used to achieve success or results, as well as what did or did not contribute to that success.

Data collection included the following methods:

Document and website review—Review of hard copy and electronic documents, including state partner publications and briefs, Collaborative memos and meeting minutes, and data from polling, focus groups, and survey research.

Collaborative participant interviews—Semi-structured telephone interviews with state partners, and periodic informal communication (i.e., phone, email).

Policy and media tracking—Policy and media tracking to gather information on state contexts and to place communications activity in a policy context.

- 5) **Communicating findings, conclusions, and recommendations**—The final step communicates results to interested stakeholders. This report chronicles follow-up evaluation findings and lessons for the Communications Consortium Media Center, Collaborative funders, and participants.

II. FINDINGS: WHAT WORKED

Evaluation findings are organized by the four levels in the impact model. Headings within each level identify what participants said worked and had direct value from their Collaborative experience. Examples from the four success cases (Colorado, Illinois, Missouri, and New Jersey) illustrate findings—particularly for levels three and four. Because three years have passed since the last evaluation and organizations have had the opportunity to transfer and apply lessons, these “higher-order” levels are of particular interest now.

A. Level One: REACTION

The impact model’s first level focuses on how participants reacted to the Collaborative training experience itself. All four participants’ reactions to their Collaborative experience were overwhelmingly positive. Below are findings that respond to the question: **What about the Collaborative did participants find of most value?**

Note that over the past five years, several foundations have sponsored initiatives focused on communications and child advocacy. In fact, most Collaborative participants were involved in more than one of these efforts. It is not possible to isolate precisely the Collaborative’s communications-related value compared to these other efforts. However, these findings identify what participants noted as the unique value-added of the Collaborative model.

Focusing on partners’ agendas; not a pre-determined and collective agenda

The Collaborative did not begin with a specific substantive early care and education agenda that it attempted to hand down and implement through state advocate

participants (e.g., advancing universal preschool or state fiscal policies). Rather, it focused on helping participants advance their own agendas by giving them communications knowledge and skills that they could take back to their organizations and apply in ways that best fit their structures, missions, and resources. This approach was different from several other communications efforts happening simultaneously that brought advocates together around a pre-determined advocacy agenda and strategy. While this latter approach can also have value, one Collaborative participant noted that it does not provide as “clear a chapter in one’s advocacy playbook.” In contrast, the Collaborative fostered learning that advocates could use across time, issues, and contexts. It emphasized skill building, and used substantive issues or agendas as the context or background for demonstrating how skills could be used. This approach promoted ownership of communications-related learning among Collaborative participants and increased the likelihood that they would apply and sustain it.

Targeting executive directors

The Collaborative involved the executive directors of advocacy organizations rather than communications or other mid-level staff. This approach is based on the rationale that executive directors are the primary change agents in their organizations. Creating organizational culture and capacity for using communications strategically requires executive director buy-in and support. In addition, the Collaborative engaged visible leaders in the child advocacy arena—individuals likely to spend their careers in child advocacy and to be recognized thought leaders in their respective fields. This focus increased the chance that what Collaborative participants learned would get transferred to their own organizations and to other child advocates who look to them for examples of best practice.

Providing multiple learning formats, especially peer-to-peer

The Collaborative offered strategic communications training in a variety of learning formats, including peer-to-peer, expert advice and technical assistance, skills training, and role playing. All participants noted the value of having this mix of formats, which allowed for both learning and the application of that learning within the context of participants’ own experiences and organizations.

In particular, participants noted the value of peer-to-peer learning. While similarities exist across all child advocacy organizations, important differences are also present in terms of positioning, issue focus, and structure. Each participating organization came to the Collaborative table with its own communications successes and challenges. The Collaborative capitalized on participants’ similarities and differences by offering the opportunity to share individual experiences and then engaging in collective problem solving or identifying transferable lessons. This allowed sharing to become less presentation-focused, and more about what could be learned across different experiences. CCMC also optimized peer-to-peer learning by keeping the number of participants manageable. As a result, participants became a learning cohort, and were able to understand one another in enough depth that they could benefit from learning and developing their skills together over time. They also became resources for one another outside of Collaborative meetings.

The benefits of the peer-to-peer learning are clear. For example, **Voices for Illinois Children** took from the **Colorado Children’s Campaign** the idea of training local spokespersons on early childhood issues. Illinois now has a cadre of local spokespersons across the state that includes the messengers research shows are most

effective on early care and education issues—members of the police, pediatricians, and Kindergarten teachers. When Voices released its Kids Count report this year, they had 11 simultaneous press releases across the state featuring local spokesperson voices. All were successful in generating local press. The **Association for Children of New Jersey** also learned from this approach and developed new messengers among parents and children.

B. Level Two: LEARNING

The second level assesses whether learning occurred during the training in the form of new knowledge or skills.⁴ Findings below respond to the question: **What did participants learn that was particularly useful?**

How to *think* about communications (a paradigm shift)

When asked to identify what they learned from the Collaborative, foremost among participant responses was their learning of how to *think* differently and strategically about communications. All four state participants said they had little to no knowledge of communications prior to their participation. Based on their Collaborative experience, they now view the meaning of strategic communications as:

- Being purposive and proactive about communications rather than reactive.
- Defining communications broadly, beyond media, as a way of thinking and a function that should be *integrated* throughout an organization's overall strategy and culture and used every day, rather than as a separate function used sporadically. Almost everything an advocacy organization does is linked to communications.
- For every activity—including product development and dissemination, coalition building, service delivery, etc.—always asking a set of strategic communications questions: Who is the audience? What is the goal? What are the messages? And who are the messengers?

Ways of challenging conventional advocacy practice

Introducing strategic communications into advocacy practice challenges convention in many ways. Participants noted the following lessons as learning that had a major impact on their work:

- The quality of media coverage counts, not the quantity.
- Getting your own name in print is much less important than placing your message.
- Before messaging, it is critical to recognize the way the media or an audience frames the issue. Messaging should then either attempt to counter those frames or work with them (e.g., the media frames social problems as the responsibility of individuals, rather than as the collective responsibility of society).

⁴ It is important to measure learning because it can take place without actual behavior change. Many things may prevent behavior change, such as organizational culture and climate or the availability of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for performing the behavior.

- While developing messages is important, *how* they get communicated—when and by whom—is equally important.
- Alerting your existing constituencies about new information and the need for action is important, but broader impact can be achieved by using the power of the mass media to reach beyond the “already converted.”
- Messaging needs to take into account your audience’s values, not your own.

How to implement new communications techniques

The Collaborative offered exposure to communications techniques participants had not previously used. As a result, participants developed their capacity to implement very practical techniques such as telephone press conferencing, e-advocacy, and radio actualities.

C. Level Three: TRANSFER

The third level examines how new knowledge, attitudes, and skills were *transferred or applied* to participants’ advocacy work. Findings below respond to the question: **What have participants applied from their learning?** (specifically since 2002)

Communications prioritization within their organizations

As reported in the first Collaborative evaluation, as a result of their participation, Collaborative participants made substantial changes to their staffing by hiring communications staff with specialized knowledge and experience. For the four states examined here, this commitment has sustained and will likely sustain permanently. While they recognize the importance of building communications knowledge and capacity across all staff, they also see the importance of having at least one individual on staff with a sole focus on communications.

The **Association for Children of New Jersey** now has two staff focusing on communications, and reports that ideas on communications are now coming from everyone within the organization.

The role of the communications staff person at **Colorado Children’s Campaign (CCC)** has evolved greatly in recent years. The communications director is now a member of the management team and runs CCC’s policy team. This move demonstrates the recognition that communications is integral, is a priority, and is a part of everything CCC does. As CCC said, “You can have a smart policy team, but that does no good unless you can talk to policymakers and the public effectively.” Now positioned hand-in-hand with policy, CCC poses communications questions about messaging, audience, and messengers every time they develop or advocate on policy issues.

Proactive communications strategies

All four Collaborative partners noted that their shift toward *strategic* communications thinking has made a big difference in their ability to get out ahead on advocacy issues. For example, all four participants mentioned the lack of a prior media relations strategy. In the past they responded when the media called, but did not seek out reporters or develop relationships with them or with editorial boards. They no longer wait for the

media to call, but have established relationships that position them as credible sources on many child-related issues and allow them to reach out when they have new messages.

For example, last November Colorado voters passed a tobacco tax initiative that raised cigarette taxes by 64 cents. The tax was projected to raise \$175 million a year, earmarked for tobacco-prevention efforts, health coverage for children, and preventive-health screenings for low-income adults. Soon after, the Governor quickly announced a press conference to lay out his plan for what to do with the extra tax revenue. **Colorado Children's Campaign** initially thought they would wait to learn what the Governor proposed, and then react to it. Instead, they took a proactive stance to shape the news as it was happening. CCC called its media contacts and told them they would be at the capitol press conference and would respond on the spot. At the conference, CCC was able to respond to the governor's plan, which they felt was not in line with the ballot initiative's intent. CCC used a clear message in their response—keep faith with the voters—and that message became the media's frame in its coverage of the Governor's plan.

Voices for Illinois Children also took a proactive stance in responding to its public audience. Recognizing the importance of checking in periodically with its audience to understand how best to shape messages, Voices engaged a group of students from the Northwestern School of Business to conduct audience research. Voices learned that 1) its messages focused too much on the advocacy process and not enough on outcomes, 2) the organization was perceived as already well-funded, and 3) the audience is not being engaged enough. This has prompted changes in Voices messaging and on its website, and reinforced the strategic principle of continuously assessing audience perceptions and needs.

Citizens for Missouri's Children was proactive and strategic as they developed a new public engagement campaign to generate public support for early childhood, out-of-school time, and health investments. They conducted research and focus groups to identify best practices in message development and delivery. The campaign's messengers will not be the usual advocate suspects; they will come from communities.

How to adapt to changing political and economic contexts

In the last three years, as Collaborative participants became more experienced with strategic communications, they became better able to predict and adapt to the constantly changing environments in which they work. This includes responding to crises and unexpected events. In particular, the last three years have presented difficult state budget circumstances for all states, and in many cases, challenging political environments (e.g., New Jersey will have three governors over the course of one year).

The **Association for Children of New Jersey** (ACNJ) has developed its ability to respond effectively to unexpected crises and negative press. ACNJ has been a long-time leader in promoting quality preschool and expansion in the state, starting in the late 1990s with the State Supreme Court *Abbott v. Burke* decision that mandated high-quality preschool for all three- and four-year-olds in the state's 30 lowest income school districts. As preschool in these districts has been implemented, ACNJ and the statewide Early Care and Education Coalition it leads has carefully monitored the program's implementation and raised important issues that affect preschool access and quality. This past year, however, ACNJ found itself in a different position. Several *Abbott*

districts received a great deal of negative press following an audit showing they fraudulently used preschool funds. Fearing a backlash toward all *Abbott* programs, ACNJ carefully crafted messages in response. They acknowledged that fraudulent use of funds was criminal activity, but emphasized that this took place in only a minority of *Abbott* districts. ACNJ feels their efforts have helped manage and mitigate the potential backlash.

Transfer of communications learning to other advocacy issues

One test of whether strategic communications learning from the Collaborative has truly been transferred is if participants apply it to issue areas beyond early care and education. In fact, all four organizations reported applying it to other issues, demonstrating a built-in capacity that is integrated throughout the organization and is sustainable.

Colorado Children's Campaign has been applying its learning to tax, fiscal, and budget policy issues. These have become priority issue areas and communications has played a significant role in crafting an advocacy strategy around them. Chief among their work in this arena are two ballot measures for November 2005—Referenda C & D which center on the state's Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR). TABOR was put into effect through a constitutional amendment when Colorado was financially stable in the early 1990s. TABOR limits the revenue the government can keep from one year to the next, making the amount equal to the revenue generated from the previous year, plus small allowances for inflation and population growth. In times of surpluses, anything greater than the TABOR limit is refunded back to the taxpayers. In times of recession when revenues drop, the TABOR limit lowers. When the state starts to generate revenue again, however, because there is a lower bottom line from the previous year, the state is not allowed to keep surplus money. This is having serious implications for spending on all social programs and education. Because this is a crosscutting issue with implications for all of the issues CCC works on, they are emphasizing advocacy and strategic communications on the November measures. For example, they were the only organization in the state to release a study on the impact of referenda C&D on kids.

The **Association for Children of New Jersey** has applied strategic communications learning to its work on child welfare. Reform for the state's child welfare agency was sparked after a series of highly publicized and tragic child deaths from child abuse and neglect in 2003. The Governor responded by ordering a large panel of child welfare stakeholders to create a broad-reaching reform plan. In mid-2004 the plan was released and called for a fundamental restructuring of the entire child welfare system. ACNJ played a role in crafting that plan, and has also crafted an advocacy and communications strategy around it. For example, they conducted a survey on the child welfare system. In the past, they would have focused only on the substantive findings from that survey. As a result of new strategic communications capacity, they were able to develop a strategy for identifying when and how to present it for maximum effect. ACNJ also has applied its learning to their work on early care and education systems building, and is developing a public communications campaign to promote this work (facing the formidable challenge of developing public messages on complex systems issues).

D. Level Four: RESULTS

Perhaps most important, the fourth level examines whether training translated into tangible benefits or outcomes for the organizations. In the corporate sector, evaluation often tries to quantify training results using “bottom line” indicators such as sales figures, turnover, profits, or a numerical estimate of the return on investment (ROI). In the nonprofit sector results are harder to quantify, but may mean outcomes connected to the organization’s communications strategy, such as success of outreach to new funders or new constituents, and policy advocacy success.

Findings below address the question: **How has applying what was learned produced a return on investment for participants?**

Less partisan positioning

Collaborative participants’ development of communications strategies in recent years has emphasized the importance of how they are perceived by their audiences. While all are advocates, they have paid more attention to positioning themselves as less partisan and more as experts on child-related issues. This positioning gives them more leverage in the policy arena because it adds visibility and credibility. To accomplish this repositioning, as has been emphasized throughout this report, their messaging focuses more on the research and data on which their positions are based, and they take great care in who delivers their messages (relying less on themselves as messengers and more on other credible messengers). Several partners reported that their efforts are paying off.

The **Colorado Children’s Campaign** reports that its image has moved substantially in recent years from advocate to expert. For example, the editorial board from *The Denver Post* now calls them on a regular basis for their views on issues. In addition, because they have positioned around a broader fiscal agenda, they have become the “go to” organization in the state for opinions on a broad range of child-related issues.

The **Association for Children of New Jersey** also reported moving toward a more expert position in the state. ACNJ has always had a powerful substantive background in child-related issues and policy. But with the addition of more effective strategic communications, they have been able to ensure their messages and how they convey them clearly portray the evidence-base on which they are founded. In addition, because they lead various collaborative efforts in the state, and are careful to “share the spotlight,” they are viewed as representing a broad range of constituent interests, and have been recognized publicly for this by the State Supreme Court, the media, and state policymakers.

Citizens for Missouri’s Children is in the process of trying to position itself as less partisan, though acknowledges there have been mixed results to date. With changes in the state’s leadership, the organization found they were being labeled as “liberals” and that policymakers were not receptive to their messaging even when based on clear and credible evidence. They have responded with more value-based messaging that is resonating more with this audience, and are gaining some ground as a result.

Effective relationships with other advocates

As statewide advocates, all four partners often take a leadership role in the early care and education arena, and work to coalesce groups of stakeholders around coordinated

advocacy efforts. This requires careful positioning so that all groups involved feel like they have a voice. It also requires careful negotiation among groups that sometimes have competing interests and viewpoints. Strategic communications has helped the partners in their approach to this work. Their work on messaging and with different messengers helps them to frame, develop, and deliver advocacy messages that are “bumped up” to a level at which varied interests can feel comfortable signing on.

Voices for Illinois Children is one of three main statewide advocacy organizations in Illinois. Positioning with each of these organizations is a continuous challenge, but one that strategic communications is helping them to address. Their communications often walk a fine line between distinguishing their unique value in the advocacy arena and purposefully being in the background to allow shared credit and responsibility.

Citizens for Missouri’s Children has been effective at pulling groups together to deliver consistent messages on issues. They have worked hard on this as a result of their strategic communications knowledge, and report that the consistency of message delivery has improved greatly in recent years as a result.

The **Colorado Children’s Campaign** has applied strategic communications learning to their work with other groups on mental health for young children. They have catalyzed a paradigm shift in collective thinking by framing the issue around social and emotional health. In addition, they have provided leadership in applying a social marketing approach to the issue, helping groups involved to think beyond parents as the audience and to think at a systems level.

Increases in advocacy constituent bases

Collaborative partners are continuously trying to recruit new advocates and constituents to their work. An expected result of more effective strategic communications practice is a concomitant increase in their constituent base.

Throughout the life of the Collaborative, the **Colorado Children’s Campaign** has been developing the *It’s About Kids* network. This grassroots advocacy network brings local communities together to develop a legislative agenda for kids and to increase the voice of those communities in the legislative process. Membership in this network continues to grow, and as a result of media trainings with “unusual messenger suspects,” the network now provides the face of advocacy campaigns on all children’s issues.

The **Association for Children of New Jersey** reports that it has increased greatly the number of people who connect with them through their new e-advocacy and communications system. They are “taking [their] work to a new level in new communities.”

Policy outcomes in challenging environments

All four Collaborative partners credit significant policy outcomes in the last several years, at least in part to more effective strategic communications. Despite the challenges of budget crises, all four have achieved some expansion and increased investments in the early care and education arena.

In spite of a very challenging fiscal and political climate, **Citizens for Missouri’s Children** has had success in adding dollars to child care during a time of extreme cuts. They credit learning how to better message to policymakers based on values as a key

reason for this outcome. Their messaging has focused on the values that child care enables parents to work and it supports families.

Also challenged with state budget crises, for the past three years **Voices for Illinois Children** has achieved yearly gains of \$30 million for early childhood education. Voices' credits their Early Learning Illinois public awareness and will building campaign for at least part of this success, as public polling showed significant pre-post campaign increases in public awareness and demand for early learning.

As an outcome linked to the work of the **Association for Children of New Jersey** and the Early Care and Education Coalition it leads, preschool expansion received a considerable leap forward in 2004 with the Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI), which increased preschool access for four-year-olds. The Governor committed to providing preschool for all 4-year-olds by 2010, and dedicated \$15 million in 2004 toward that end.

III. LESSONS FOR FUTURE EFFORTS

As the above findings clearly illustrate, the four participants included in the follow-up evaluation had overwhelmingly positive reactions to their Collaborative experience. They easily articulated ways in which their participation affected their advocacy approach. Foremost among these was a change in thinking about what communications is and how it is an integral part of advocacy strategy. As a result, unlike many capacity-building efforts that lose steam when they end or are scaled back, five years after the Collaborative began, its effects are still multiplying.

When prompted, Collaborative participants offered some suggestions for how their experience might have been enhanced or could be enhanced in the future.

While expertise increased, there is more room for growth. Collaborative partners felt there were areas in which they still had room to grow in terms of their knowledge and skills. Specifically they mentioned framing as one area, especially as they apply strategic communications to new substantive areas and expand their communications to cover broader issues (e.g., systems building and tax issues). In addition, they mentioned the need to cover techniques that are low-cost and can be done with little to no funding.

A commitment to participate may be needed. Because in a small peer group consistent attendance and participation is important, some partners felt that participants should be required to make a minimum level of commitment to participate in meetings or apply learning outside the meeting. They felt this kind of accountability may help to enhance participation, and consequently learning.

The composition of the peer cohort is important. All partners liked the peer-to-peer learning and felt there was much value in having a peer cohort. There were mixed reactions to changes in the cohort's composition, however, as new participants were added in later years. Some felt the level of experience among the peers grew uneven, and there was a need to review issues for new members that had already been covered earlier. Others felt the addition of new members gave the group additional breadth and experience that added to the learning.

The agenda should be balanced between structure and flexibility. All partners liked the mix of learning formats, and appreciated built-in flexibility to allow for new or emerging issues. At times, however, some partners felt the agenda was too loose and would have liked a more structured or focused agenda.