Strengthening Two-Generation Initiatives That Support Child Development and Improve Family Economic Security

Insights from the Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches Project

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Strengthening Two-Generation Initiatives That Support Child Development and Improve Family Economic Security

Insights from the Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches Project

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Acknowledgments

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Expert Panel

We are grateful for the insight and contributions of the following expert panel members. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of these members.

- Dr. Allison Holmes, the Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Dr. Christopher King, Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas at Austin
- Sharon McGroder, SMc Consulting
- Marjorie Sims, Ascend at the Aspen Institute

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Overview

Two-generation initiatives intend to make children's educational and home environments richer and more supportive of child development and overall family well-being by serving caregivers and their children in an intentional, coordinated way (Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014). Based on past studies showing that early two-generation initiatives did not show intended impacts (St. Pierre et al. 1997; Hsueh and Farrell 2012), research theorizes that well-run and potentially effective two-generation initiatives include services that are high quality and intensive for both generations and that those services are intentionally aligned and coordinated (Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014; see literature review in Sama-Miller et al. 2017).

The Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches (NS2G) project was sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to build the evidence base for fully integrated, intentional models for two-generation service delivery with adequate intensity and quality of services for caregivers and their children.

This project is part of a portfolio of research focused on coordinated services to support children and families. Projects within this research portfolio address the intentional coordination of two or more services. These projects span OPRE's program-specific research portfolios, including child care, Head Start, home visiting, child welfare, and welfare and family self-sufficiency. More information about OPRE's Coordinated Services projects can be found on the webpage for the Coordinated Services Research and Evaluation Portfolio.

Purpose

ACF sponsored the NS2G project to further advance understanding of contemporary two-generation initiatives that support child development and family economic security. NS2G had three objectives:

1. To conduct formative research to better understand initiative implementation, strengthen promising initiatives, and prepare them for evaluations of effectiveness

2. To build the capacity of initiatives and researchers to conduct rigorous and meaningful evaluations of two-generation initiatives

3. To address measurement issues to promote learning across evaluations and a better understanding of relevant processes and outcomes of two-generation initiatives

Activities to address these objectives included partnering with four initiatives on formative evaluations, facilitating a learning community of 10 two-generation initiatives (including the four initiatives participating in formative evaluations), and developing a measure of mutually reinforcing two-generation partnerships. This report describes the experiences and activities of two-generation initiatives participating in NS2G and shares findings, lessons, and common themes from their participation in the formative evaluations and learning community. A separate brief, "The Two-Generation Mutual Reinforcement Measurement Tool: Development and Pilot Study Findings" (Conroy et al. 2023) describes the process for developing the measure, findings from the pilot testing, and next steps for continuing to test and refine the measure.

Key findings and highlights

The initiatives participating in the formative evaluations aimed to improve the intentional alignment and coordination of their services. They developed and tested improvement strategies to streamline processes, such as intake and referrals, and to build staff knowledge and capacity, such as by developing training and examining staff members' use of time. The formative evaluation work also promoted communication with partners. Two initiatives' improvement strategies entailed exploring opportunities to strengthen communication with partners, including data sharing.

The initiatives generated insights about how formative evaluation helped strengthen their initiatives:

- Creating a two-generation logic model was a useful foundation for program improvement.
- Carefully documenting the opportunity for change and the improvement strategy helped initiative leaders communicate clearly with staff.
- Two-generation initiatives lengthened iterative improvement cycles to learn more about their improvement strategies or adjusted their planned approach as needed.
- The rapid cycle learning approach was motivating.
- The strategies initiatives tested intentionally integrated supports for staff.
- Regular, structured communication helped service providers coordinate efforts.

The initiatives participating in the learning community reported that they developed logic models and data systems, and they began work to identify and develop program improvement strategies. Four reported working on their two-generation logic models. All reported strengthening their two-generation data systems, with two reporting they adopted a new data system that supported family-level analyses of services and outcomes for primary caregivers and their children. Three reported examining data to assess alignment with the logic model and considering ways to improve the alignment. Initiative staff who participated in the learning community indicated:

- They appreciated the opportunity to come together in a like-minded community.
- They reported that their initiatives' use of formative evaluation tools and activities was limited.
- The experiences of formative evaluation initiatives supported learning among the enrichment sites.

Overall, participants in the learning community expressed high levels of motivation and interest in the topics discussed. Future support would ideally combine opportunities for peer learning with more intensive support to help participating initiatives make more progress.

Methods

NS2G included three primary activities to continue building the evidence base on two-generation service delivery: (1) formative evaluations and technical assistance (TA) with four initiatives; (2) a learning community designed to build the evaluation capacity of those four initiatives and six others; and (3) development of a measure of two-generation initiative functioning, which involved three of the four initiatives that participated in formative evaluations.

For the formative evaluations, the NS2G project used the Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI^2) framework to guide the initiatives. Grounded in implementation science, LI^2 is a framework for program improvement that helps practitioners unpack program challenges, develop evidence-informed solutions, and use

analytic methods to gather data to assess the success of a solution (Derr 2022). The formative evaluation work provided initiative staff with an opportunity (and a requirement) to step back from their day-to-day responsibilities, examine how initiatives' services were coordinated to lead to intended outcomes, and explore challenges and opportunities in strengthening service delivery. During the formative evaluations, a small group of initiative staff—typically two to three people—met for an hour each month with NS2G TA providers.

As noted above, NS2G included a learning community of 10 two-generation initiatives, which included the four initiatives participating in the formative evaluations and six others—called "enrichment sites"— that participated in only the learning community. Participating initiatives met virtually five times between October 2021 and January 2023, with meetings structured to achieve these goals. To assess initiatives' progress during the learning community, the NS2G team reviewed notes from the facilitated discussions and surveyed participants after each meeting and before the fourth meeting, in October 2022. Lessons are drawn from enrichment site staff members' reflections in the final virtual meeting in January 2023 and informed by meeting notes and survey responses.

Recommendations

The activities and experiences of NS2G initiatives suggest additional program and research development is needed to continue building evaluation capacity. Initiatives in the formative evaluations reported obstacles to strengthening services and improving readiness for summative evaluation, including entering and using program data and ongoing staff capacity limitations and turnover. At the end of NS2G TA support, most initiatives still needed to build internal evaluation and program improvement capacity or establish external partnerships to help with this work. Many of the initiatives participating in the NS2G learning community engaged in key developmental activities, such as documenting and refining a logic model and implementing a two-generation data system that could link caregiver and child records. As these systems are implemented and initiatives begin to use data to better understand how their services are working, initiatives indicated they would continue to identify additional ways to improve and expand. Drawing on findings from NS2G, the report suggests opportunities for future research into program development:

- Continue formative evaluation work with two-generation initiatives, including defining and exploring the core components that comprise two-generation services and documenting categories of models of two-generation service delivery.

- Continue measure development to build understanding of key two-generation functions and processes.

Where possible, these activities should take a participatory approach. Practitioners and families should be involved from the outset, shaping research questions, sharing experiences and perceptions of two-generation services, and identifying important outcomes and family processes to explore.

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Executive Summary

Over the past decade, two-generation initiatives have generated increasing levels of interest from policymakers, program administrators, and researchers because of the promise these initiatives show in helping children and their families achieve well-being and economic security. Two-generation services intend to make children's educational and home environments richer and more supportive of child development and overall family well-being.

Past evaluations found that some early two-generation initiatives did not improve participant outcomes (St. Pierre et al. 1997; Hsueh and Farrell 2012). It has been hypothesized that the services provided for children and their caregivers through these early initiatives were of insufficient quality or intensity, or not intentionally coordinated, to improve outcomes.[1] Renewed interest in two-generation initiatives has included a sharpened focus on how to provide both generations with high quality services that are sufficiently intensive and intentionally coordinated (Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014). Although recent research has indicated the promise of new "two-generation 2.0" initiatives (Chase-Lansdale et al. 2017), few of these initiatives have been studied extensively.

This report uses the term "initiatives," a broad term that encompasses the diverse ways an organization (or a group of organizations) may combine programs and services for caregivers and their children. Other terms, such as "approach" and "program" are often used interchangeably in the field.

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) sponsored the Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches (NS2G) project to further advance understanding of contemporary two-generation initiatives that support child development and family economic security. The project had three objectives: (1) conduct formative research to better understand the implementation of promising two-generation initiatives and prepare them for evaluations of effectiveness; (2) build the capacity of initiatives and researchers to conduct rigorous and meaningful evaluations; and (3) address measurement issues to promote learning across evaluations and a better understanding of relevant two-generation processes and outcomes. To address these aims, NS2G involved three main activities designed to move the field closer to evaluation readiness (Figure ES.1).

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[1] In this report, we use "caregivers" to describe the adults in a family unit. Families are diverse and can include children and a range of biological and non-biological caregivers and guardians, such as grandparents, parental relatives, and foster and adoptive parents.

Figure ES.1. Objectives of the NS2G project and activities to achieve them

Objective 1: Conduct formative research to better understand initiative implementation, strengthen promising initiatives, and prepare them for evaluations of effectiveness	**Activity 1:** Use a structured learning process and provide technical assistance to strengthen four initiatives' two-generation services
Objective 2: Build the capacity of initiatives and researchers to conduct rigorous and meaningful evaluations of two-generation initiatives	**Activity 2:** Convene a learning community made up of 10 initiatives to build their evaluation capacity
Objective 3: Address measurement issues to promote learning across evaluations and a better understanding of relevant processes and outcomes of two-generation initiatives	**Activity 3:** Develop and pilot test a draft measure of two-generation initiative functioning

Ten initiatives participated in NS2G (Table ES.1). All ten participated in the learning community; four participated in the formative evaluations and learning community. Three initiatives that participated in the formative evaluations also piloted the measure.

Table ES.1. Two-generation initiatives participating in NS2G

Initiative	Location	Formative evaluation	Learning community	Measure development
Aroostook County Action Program	Presque Isle, Maine		X	
Briya Public Charter School	Washington, DC		X	
Center for Transforming Lives	Fort Worth, Texas		X	
Chicago Commons	Chicago, Illinois		X	
Garrett County Community Action Committee	Oakland, Maryland	X	X	X
Jeremiah Program	Various urban locations[a]		X	
Northern Kentucky Scholar House (operated by Brighton Center)	Newport, Kentucky	X	X	X
San Antonio Dual Gen Initiative (coordinated by the United Way of San Antonio and Bexar Counties)	San Antonio, Texas	X	X	X
Two-Gen Austin (including the United Way for Greater Austin, American YouthWorks, and St. Louise House)	Austin, Texas		X	
Valley Settlement	Glenwood Springs, Colorado	X	X	

[a] Jeremiah Program provides services in Austin, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; Brooklyn, New York; Fargo-Moorhead, North Dakota; Las Vegas, Nevada; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; and Rochester, Minnesota.

This report describes the activities and experiences of two-generation initiatives participating in the formative evaluations and learning community and shares lessons and insights from their participation. A separate brief, "The Two-Generation Mutual Reinforcement Measurement Tool: Development and Pilot Study Findings" (Conroy et al. 2023), describes the process for developing the measure, findings from pilot testing, and next steps for continuing to test and refine the measure.

Activities, insights and lessons across formative evaluations

The NS2G project used the Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI2) framework to guide initiatives in formative evaluation (Figure ES.2). Grounded in implementation science, LI^2 is a framework for program improvement that helps practitioners unpack program challenges, develop evidence-informed solutions, and use analytic methods to gather data to assess the success of a solution (Derr 2022).

Figure ES.2. Application of the LI^2 framework in the NS2G formative evaluations

Goals: Develop a comprehensive understanding of the two-generation initiative, document a logic model, and identify opportunities to strengthen the logic model
Timing: Spring 2021 - Spring 2022
Activities:
- Virtual site visit
- Core components identification
- Logic model development
- Collaborative workshops

Goal: Design improvement strategies to address challenges identified in the Learn phase
Timing: Spring 2022
Activities:
- Collaborative workshop
- Rapid cycle learning planning

Goal: Test and refine improvement strategies using multiple iterative improvement cycles
Timing: Summer 2022 - Winter 2022
Activities:
- Rapid cycle learning with 2 to 3 improvement cycles

The formative evaluation work provided initiative staff with an opportunity (and a requirement) to step back from their day-to-day responsibilities, examine how initiatives' services were coordinated to lead to intended outcomes, and explore challenges and opportunities in strengthening service delivery. During the formative evaluations, a small group of initiative staff—typically two to three people—met for an hour each month with NS2G TA providers. At the end of the Learn phase, a broader group of initiative staff participated in two collaborative workshops to review and refine logic models and identify opportunities to strengthen service delivery. At the beginning of the Innovate phase, that same group participated in a third collaborative workshop to develop and prioritize improvement strategies to address the opportunities they had previously identified. The strategies that initiatives focused on for rapid cycle learning related to intentionally aligning and coordinating their services (Table ES.2).

Table ES.2. Focus for rapid cycle learning

Initiative name	Goal	Strategy and focus initiative staff selected for rapid cycle learning
Garrett County Community Action Committee	Reduce chances that families' identified needs go unaddressed.	Formalize the process for following up on internal referrals by building it into EmpowOR, the initiative's database.
Northern Kentucky Scholar House	Decrease enrollment burden on participants who have to repeatedly tell their story and share the same information with different partners.	Streamline enrollment paperwork and enhance data sharing among partners.
San Antonio Dual Generation Initiative (Dual Gen)	Build staff knowledge and capacity to increase enrollment of new families and referrals between Dual Gen partners.	Train partner staff and require partners to dedicate specific staff time to the initiative.
Valley Settlement	Increase staff knowledge of Valley Settlement offerings to increase internal referrals.	Deliver staff-driven presentations about each Valley Settlement program during biweekly meetings.

The initiatives generated insights about how formative evaluation—and rapid cycle learning, in particular—helped strengthen their initiatives:

- **Creating a two-generation logic model was a useful foundation for program improvement.** The logic modeling activities introduced a comprehensive view of family services and a focus on the services and outcomes for two generations that participating initiatives had not previously explored. Before each initiative held its first collaborative workshop, key initiative staff developed a logic model with NS2G TA providers. They identified important features to include in the logic model to reflect important principles of two-generation services, including mutually reinforcing services; the characteristics of the primary caregiver, child, and family, and their mutual motivation; and the foundational values that inform how the initiative works with families (Aharpour and Baumgartner 2022). In the first workshop, a broader group of staff and partners reviewed the logic model, provided input on what should go in the logic model, and used it as a foundation for brainstorming what was working well—and not as well—in the initiative.

- **Carefully documenting the opportunity for change and the improvement strategy helped initiative leaders communicate clearly with staff.** After the collaborative workshops, key initiative staff completed a program improvement worksheet with NS2G TA providers. The NS2G team developed the worksheet to help initiative staff to get specific about the strategy so that it would be as strong as possible (Fung and Sama-Miller 2022). Completing the worksheet helped initiatives determine whether they had chosen a strategy that could make a difference in participating families' outcomes. Providing granular details about the strategy would support strong implementation, because the worksheet prompted staff to document each staff member's role in the strategy and the supports they would need, potential obstacles and ways to overcome them, and indicators that would help them know whether the strategy had the potential to contribute to improved outcomes. Initiative staff reported that the worksheet also promoted clear communication among their team before launching an improvement cycle.

- **Two-generation initiatives lengthened iterative improvement cycles to learn more about their improvement strategies or adjusted their planned approach as needed.** Two initiatives found the volume of data collected during improvement cycles was not enough to inform changes to their

strategies; they needed more data, collected over a longer period. Staff from the other two initiatives decided to use later improvement cycles to collect additional data and iteratively explore additional questions without adjusting their strategies. When designing improvement cycles, initiatives may need to consider the processes they are trying to influence. Slower or low volume processes might need longer improvement cycles. Initiatives might also need to remain flexible and open to adjusting the length or focus of later improvement cycles based on what they learn in earlier ones.

- **The rapid cycle learning approach was motivating.** Staff from multiple initiatives reported that the rapid cycle learning process empowered them to initiate a change process by helping them envision change of a manageable size. Improvement cycles in NS2G intentionally started with small changes to agency practices and services. Initiative staff reflected that starting small and working iteratively helped make program improvement more manageable and approachable, particularly when the challenges were large or staff didn't know where to start. The compressed time frame for rapid cycle learning boosted staff motivation, although in some cases, it limited data collection. Because rapid cycle learning prompted action, it could be motivating to staff.

- **The strategies initiatives tested intentionally integrated supports for staff.** The initiatives in the formative evaluations prioritized relationships between staff and participants in their approaches to serving caregivers and their children. The strategies that initiatives developed and tested aimed to support staff and give them the time and space to develop these relationships by (1) making sure staff have enough time to dedicated to the initiative; (2) clarifying and reducing staff burden by revising intake paperwork; and (3) reducing the pressure on staff to juggle multiple priorities by automating referral reminders.

- **Regular, structured communication helped service providers coordinate their efforts.** Three initiatives aimed to improve how they communicated and coordinated two-generation services. The strategies that the initiatives tested involved defining and protecting time and space for communication and coordination. Initiative staff found regular, structured communication essential for coordinating services.

Opportunities to continue building evaluation capacity: Findings from the learning community

The learning community had five goals. Participating initiatives, including the four initiatives participating in the formative evaluations and six other "enrichment sites," met virtually five times between October 2021 and January 2023, with meetings structured to achieve these goals:

1. **Give initiative staff an opportunity to talk with a community of staff with shared interests about their progress, challenges, and solutions** to foster supportive connections among participating sites.

2. **Provide a "road test" of the materials developed for the formative evaluation initiatives**, as enrichment sites learn about them, try them out between calls, and provide feedback on them.

3. **Help the enrichment sites refine their two-generation models using a less-intensive TA approach**. For example, this approach might appeal to initiatives that already conduct other initiative development efforts, those that have more local capacity for initiative improvement, or those with less time to devote to such activities.

4. **Empower staff from initiatives participating in the formative evaluations to be leaders in the two-generation field** by equipping them to share their experiences and strategies for data-informed initiative development with leaders of other two-generation initiatives and organizations.

5. **Extend the lessons from formative evaluation activities to the broader two-generation field**, as enrichment sites test and refine the strategies formative evaluation initiatives shared about.

The learning community approach rested on the expectation that participants from enrichment sites would take the ideas discussed in the meetings and implement them on their own between meetings.

In the learning community, four enrichment sites reported making notable, additional progress toward developing specific two-generation logic models that illustrated links between caregiver and child services and outcomes. Three sites shared their two-generation logic models with the learning community and two enrichment sites reported using initiative data to examine whether the assumptions of their logic model about service quality and intensity were borne out in practice. One initiative used its logic model to guide the choice of measures and data to collect to better understand how the initiative was working. The other initiative reported examining data to understand whether recent staff training on a coaching model led to greater caregiver engagement in workshops.

Although enrichment sites built some data capacity, using data for initiative improvement stood out as the biggest challenge for the initiatives in the learning community. Two enrichment sites implemented new data systems that include family identifiers to join caregiver and child data, and two already had a two-generation data system with this capability. The other two enrichment sites made some progress on a two-generation logic model and data systems. Additional research and evaluation capacity—internally or through partnerships—could help initiatives make more progress.

Overall, the learning community approach was successful in building a virtual community. Initiative staff appreciated the opportunity to come together in a like-minded community, and participants expressed high levels of motivation and interest in the topics discussed. Enrichment sites made some progress toward evaluation readiness, continuing work that began before the learning community started, but there was still room for growth. Future support would ideally combine opportunities for peer learning with more intensive support to help participating initiatives make more progress.

Next steps to build the two-generation field

The activities and experiences of NS2G initiatives suggest additional program and research development is needed to continue building evaluation capacity. Initiatives participating in NS2G engaged in key developmental activities, such as documenting and refining a logic model and implementing a two-generation data system that could link caregiver and child records. As these systems are implemented and initiatives begin to use data to better understand how their services are working, initiatives indicated they would continue to identify additional ways to improve and expand.

Drawing on findings from the formative evaluations and learning community, we identified opportunities for future research into program development:

1. **Continue strengthening existing two-generation initiatives.** Future program development work can focus on helping initiatives improve their quality, intensity, and intentionality. This work might include developing research and training for initiatives, along with individualized support. Individualized support might take the shape of technical assistance or formative evaluation to help initiatives use the tools and implement promising practices to strengthen their services.

2. **Define and explore the core components that comprise two-generation services, collaboratively.** Through the NS2G formative evaluations, initiatives highlighted several types of core components. These include processes that helped them integrate services for caregivers and children, such as use of

an integrated data system as a platform for communication between service providers; services that helped them reach intended outcomes, such as a single coach or navigator to help connect families to services; and the principles that guide how they provide intentional two-generation services, such as tailoring services based on families' individual, self-described needs and goals. The formative evaluations showed that participating initiatives centered the voices of families in the design and delivery of services. Research to define core components of two-generation initiatives should take a participatory approach, seeking to engage a range of interested parties.

3. **Document categories of models of two-generation service delivery.** Research could identify and categorize models of two-generation service delivery, incorporating active engagement with initiatives and networks and identifying what data sharing or integrated data systems are in place. It could assess how two-generation models vary in how they engage families in services and over what time period, the data available to assess services received and outcomes, and the core services provided to families. It could also identify promising models for future study or evaluation.

4. **Continue measure development to build understanding of key two-generation functions and processes.** The NS2G team developed a definition for and draft measure of *mutually reinforcing* services, thought to be a key dimension of how service providers work together to serve caregivers and children in an intentional, integrated way (see Conroy et al. 2023). Future research can continue to refine and test the draft measure of mutually reinforcing services, adapt it to incorporate family perspectives, and improve accessibility and cultural relevance. Future measure development could focus on another construct thought to be important for providing and evaluating two-generation services: *mutual motivation*, which describes how one family member's actions and behaviors influence another's. Additional research can explore family processes to build understanding of how to define and measure key family outcomes that two-generation initiatives might affect, and their relationship with later outcomes for caregivers and their children.

Future designs for a summative evaluation of two-generation initiatives should consider issues related to size, variability, and the need for long-term follow-up.

•   **The small size of many two-generation initiatives.** Because many two-generation initiatives are small, designing an experimental study in a single site with enough power to detect impacts could be challenging or impossible. It might also be difficult for two-generation initiatives in small geographic areas to stimulate the excess demand that would be necessary to generate a control group. Two-generation initiatives that cannot engage in a random assignment evaluation could be evaluated using a quasi-experimental design, such as one that compares families participating in a two-generation initiative to families participating in a similar early childhood education program (but not similar caregiver services) in other communities.

•   **The variability of two-generation service delivery models.** The design of many two-generation initiatives is heavily influenced by the population they serve, the services and partners available, and other features of the local environment. Different two-generation approaches might bundle different adult workforce development services based on local industries and educational partners or provide culturally appropriate family and child services. Two-generation initiatives are iteratively refining their approaches, so there is also variability within an initiative over time. A multisite summative evaluation could include initiatives that share core components, such as thresholds for quality and intensity of adult and child services. Accompanying implementation research could examine the ways that participating initiatives address the core components and how their service offerings, populations, or policy contexts compare. This implementation research should also document the services received

by families participating in the evaluation, including their quality and intensity, and how the initiative intentionally serves whole families to inform an understanding of the impacts and for potential replication. It would also be important for implementation research to document how initiatives tailored services to be culturally relevant to the populations they served.

- **The need for long-term follow-up.** Two-generation services often aim to influence long-term and intergenerational outcomes that are not easily measured in an 18- or 24- month follow-up. A follow-up period of this length might lead to conclusions that are different from the longer-term picture, as children and their caregivers continue to mature.

Future research should take a participatory approach, seeking to engage a range of interested parties. Practitioners and participants, in particular, could each provide insight into what motivated families to seek out services, how two-generation services have affected families, how long families participate in services and what keeps them engaged (as well as what they consider overly burdensome), and what they think high quality services look like. Looking across input from practitioners and families, initiatives and researchers could also examine the factors that lead to successful relationships between staff and families.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, two-generation initiatives have generated increasing levels of interest from policymakers, program administrators, and researchers because of the promise these initiatives show in helping children and their families achieve well-being and economic security. Providing coordinated services for multiple family members is not a new idea. Comprehensive family services, for example, have been a core component of Head Start since its creation in 1965 (Zigler and Styfco 2010). However, past evaluations found that some early two-generation initiatives did not improve participant outcomes (St. Pierre et al. 1997; Hsueh and Farrell 2012). It has been hypothesized that the services provided for children and their caregivers through these early initiatives were of insufficient quality or intensity, or not intentionally coordinated, to improve outcomes.[2] Renewed interest in two-generation initiatives has included a sharpened focus on how to provide both generations with high quality services that are sufficiently intensive and intentionally coordinated (Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014). Although recent research has indicated the promise of newer "two-generation 2.0" initiatives (Chase-Lansdale et al. 2017), few of these initiatives have been studied extensively.

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) sponsored the Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches

> **Box 1.1. The Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches project**
>
> The Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches (NS2G) project was sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families to build the evidence base for fully integrated, intentional models for two-generation service delivery with adequate intensity and quality of services for caregivers and their children. Activities included partnering with four initiatives on formative evaluations, facilitating a learning community of 10 two-generation initiatives (including the four formative evaluation initiatives), and developing a measure of mutually reinforcing two-generation partnerships. The initiatives participating in NS2G formative evaluations included:
>
> - Garrett County Community Action Committee, Garrett County, Maryland
> - Northern Kentucky Scholar House at Brighton Center, Newport, Kentucky
> - San Antonio Dual Generation, San Antonio, Texas
> - Valley Settlement, Roaring Fork Valley, Colorado
>
> For more information about NS2G, please visit https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/next-steps-rigorous-research-two-generation-approaches-ns2g-2019-2023-0.

(NS2G) project to further advance understanding of contemporary two-generation initiatives that support child development and family economic security (Box 1.1). In this report, we use the term "initiatives," a broad term that encompasses the diverse ways that an organization (or a group of organizations) may combine programs and services for caregivers and their children. Other terms, such as "approach" and "program" are often used interchangeably with "initiative" in the field.

The NS2G project is part of an investment the ACF Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) is making in research related to services coordination and is aligned with ACF's overall mission

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[2] In this report, we use "caregivers" to describe the adults in a family unit. Families are diverse and can include children and a range of biological and non-biological caregivers and guardians, such as grandparents, parental relatives, and foster and adoptive parents.

(Box 1.2). NS2G built on an earlier ACF-sponsored study, Integrated Approaches to Supporting Child Development and Improving Family Economic Security (Sama-Miller et al. 2017). Key conclusions from the Integrated Approaches project included the following:

- Most identified two-generation initiatives were in early stages of development.

- Contemporary two-generation initiatives, and the field more broadly, would benefit from additional research to develop and strengthen their program models and build capacity for future evaluations of effectiveness.

- More work was required to define and measure dimensions and concepts central to a two-generation theory of change, such as how services for caregivers and their children are intentionally coordinated.

These findings informed three objectives for the NS2G project. To address these objectives, NS2G included

> **Box 1.2. OPRE's Portfolio on Coordinated Services**
>
> This project is part of a portfolio of research focused on coordination of services to support children and families. Projects within this research portfolio address the intentional coordination of two or more services. These projects span OPRE's research portfolios, including child care, Head Start, home visiting, child welfare, and welfare and family self-sufficiency. More information on OPRE's Coordinated Services projects can be found on the OPRE website.

three key activities (Figure 1.1). This report describes lessons and insights generated from the first two activities: providing technical assistance to four two-generation initiatives to conduct formative evaluations, and convening a learning community. A companion brief describes the measurement tool developed as a part of the third activity (Conroy et al. 2023).

Figure 1.1. Objectives of the NS2G project and activities to achieve them

Objective 1: Conduct formative research to better understand initiative implementation, strengthen promising initiatives, and prepare them for evaluations of effectiveness	**Activity 1:** Use a structured learning process and provide technical assistance to strengthen four initiatives' two-generation services
Objective 2: Build the capacity of initiatives and researchers to conduct rigorous and meaningful evaluations of two-generation initiatives	**Activity 2:** Convene a learning community made up of 10 initiatives to build their evaluation capacity
Objective 3: Address measurement issues to promote learning across evaluations and a better understanding of relevant processes and outcomes of two-generation initiatives	**Activity 3:** Develop and pilot test a draft measure of two-generation initiative functioning

The promise of two-generation initiatives

Two-generation initiatives intend to make children's educational and home environments richer and more supportive of child development and overall family well-being (Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014).

Single-generation initiatives, in contrast, might focus on a child's early care and education or a caregiver's employment, training, or working conditions without attending to other factors that influence the success of each family member, nor to the family collectively. The design of modern two-generation initiatives is informed by two constructs theorized to change trajectories for families experiencing disadvantages: mutual reinforcement and mutual motivation (Box 1.3; Sommer et al. 2018; Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014).

Box 1.3. The theorized role of mutual reinforcement and mutual motivation in changing trajectories for families experiencing disadvantages

Services and outcomes reinforce each other. When services for children, caregivers, and families are aligned and build on one another, they work in a complementary way to achieve more together than they could achieve separately. For example, training caregivers to be early childhood teaching assistants can be mutually reinforcing, because it provides opportunities for caregivers and children to learn new skills together. Mutually reinforcing services might also reduce barriers to service participation, such as transportation or scheduling issues. In turn, they may make it more likely that children will achieve the developmental outcomes an initiative intends for them, and caregivers might be more likely to achieve their workforce goals, such as attaining credentials and employment. Participation in mutually reinforcing services might also bolster family outcomes. For example, a child's participation in reliable, high quality early care and education can promote their healthy development and support job retention for their caregivers. These factors could improve housing stability and reduce family stress levels, reinforcing positive parenting behaviors and promoting a better home environment.

Caregivers' and children's achievement may be enhanced by mutual motivation. One family member might be motivated by seeing the efforts of another. For instance, a child who observes the positive example of their caregiver studying for a credentialing exam or working on a job application might be more persistent in their own learning activities. A caregiver who sees their child excel in school might be motivated to pursue employment opportunities that offer more income to support their child's future educational expenses.

To provide mutually reinforcing services that address multiple factors affecting families' well-being and economic security *and* to encourage families' mutual motivation, initiatives must treat the family unit holistically, rather than focusing services on only caregivers or children. Based on past studies showing that early two-generation initiatives failed to show impacts due to low quality, intensity, or intentionality of services, research theorizes that well-run and potentially effective two-generation initiatives that prioritize serving whole families have intentionality, and include services that are high quality and intensive for both generations (Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014; see literature review in Sama-Miller et al. 2017).

- **Intentionality** involves purposefully and deliberatively linking services with the needs of both caregivers and their children while keeping the family's shared goals in mind (Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014; King et al. 2011). Often, intentionality requires coordination between multiple service providers in an initiative. Rarely does a single organization possess the expertise and capacity to serve caregivers and their children together (Anderson-Butcher and Ashton 2004). Intentional partnerships can have dimensions that promote mutually reinforcing service delivery, such as a high level of engagement, shared missions, and strategically combined resources (Keast et al. 2007; Austin and Seitanidi 2012). There is little evidence showing how organizations intentionally work together to serve multiple generations of a family (Sama-Miller et al. 2017).

- **High quality** services for each generation should include features and characteristics associated with appropriate implementation and improved outcomes for the populations they serve. For example, high quality early childhood education services might be highly rated on a state's Quality Ratings and Improvement System (QRIS) (Mitchell 2005). High quality services for adults might be designed using adult learning principles (Merriam and Bierema 2014) or combine several evidence-based employment and training strategies (Shiferaw and Thal 2022).

- **Intensive** programs are longer in duration and provide a higher amount, or dosage, of a service than typical programs; these characteristics are thought to be important for contributing to a program's intended outcomes (Zaslow et al. 2010; Rangarajan 2001; Hamilton 2002). High intensity initiatives might also provide a broader range of services to help participants meet their needs and encourage engagement in services, such as providing home visits and early childhood education for children or case management and employment training for adults (King et al. 2011).

A conceptual framework developed for the Integrated Approaches project (Figure 1.2) depicts the theoretical links between two-generation services and outcomes for caregivers and their children (Sommer et al. 2018). In the conceptual framework, the needs and motivations of primary caregivers and their children are interrelated. As a result, intentionally reinforced, aligned, and coordinated services for both generations might help caregivers and their children achieve outcomes that support and enhance one another, a relationship depicted by the crossed arrows between the services and outcomes boxes. The services in the blue boxes are assumed to be intensive and high quality. A separate conceptual framework, also developed by Sommer and colleagues (2018) for the Integrated Approaches project, proposes key dimensions of coordination among service providers in a two-generation initiative.

Figure 1.2. Integrated Approaches conceptual framework for two-generation initiatives to support child development and improve family economic security
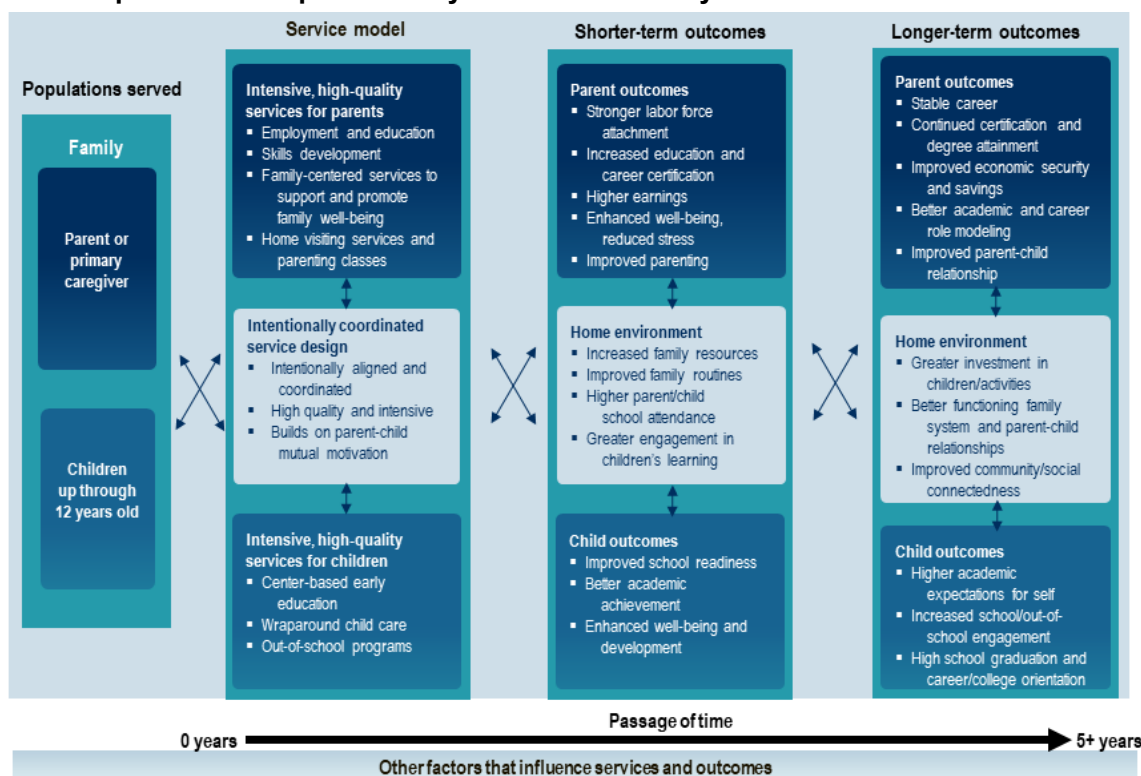
The NS2G project

Ten two-generation initiatives participated in NS2G (Table 1.1). NS2G included three primary activities to continue building the evidence base on two-generation service delivery (Figure 1.1): (1) formative evaluations and technical assistance (TA) with four initiatives; (2) a learning community designed to build the evaluation capacity of the 10 participating initiatives; and (3) development of a measure of two-generation initiative functioning, which involved three of the four initiatives that participated in formative evaluations. Site selection for the formative evaluations and learning community is described in Appendix A. This report focuses on how the Mathematica researchers and TA providers conducting NS2G (referred to collectively as the NS2G team) worked in collaboration with two-generation initiatives in the formative evaluations and learning community, and lessons and insights that emerged from this work.

Table 1.1. Two-generation initiatives participating in NS2G

Initiative	Location	Formative evaluation	Learning community	Measure development
Aroostook County Action Program	Presque Isle, Maine		X	
Briya Public Charter School	Washington, DC		X	
Center for Transforming Lives	Fort Worth, Texas		X	
Chicago Commons	Chicago, Illinois		X	
Garrett County Community Action Committee	Oakland, Maryland	X	X	X
Jeremiah Program	Various urban locations[a]		X	
Northern Kentucky Scholar House (operated by Brighton Center)	Newport, Kentucky	X	X	X
San Antonio Dual Gen Initiative (coordinated by the United Way of San Antonio and Bexar Counties)	San Antonio, Texas	X	X	X
Two-Gen Austin (including the United Way for Greater Austin, American YouthWorks, and St. Louise House)	Austin, Texas		X	
Valley Settlement	Glenwood Springs, Colorado	X	X	

[a] Jeremiah Program provides services in Austin, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; Brooklyn, New York; Fargo-Moorhead, North Dakota; Las Vegas, Nevada; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; and Rochester, Minnesota.

Formative evaluations

The overarching goal of the formative evaluations in NS2G was to strengthen two-generation initiatives for future evaluations of effectiveness. A team of Mathematica researchers (called NS2G TA providers) worked collaboratively with four two-generation initiatives on activities designed to help initiatives identify and document the aspects of their initiative that helped them intentionally combine intensive, high quality services for caregivers and their children, design strategies to strengthen key aspects of their two-generation service delivery models, and iteratively test and refine those strategies. The NS2G project used the Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI^2) framework to guide the formative evaluations. Grounded in implementation science, LI^2 is a framework for program improvement that helps practitioners unpack program challenges, develop evidence-informed solutions, and use analytic methods to gather data to assess the success of a solution (Derr 2022).

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Formative evaluation *(also called process or implementation evaluation) is intended to strengthen the implementation of an intervention. It is important for understanding what services an initiative offers, clients' participation in and satisfaction with services, challenges to participating, and ideas for improving the initiative.*

This type of evaluation enables practitioners to define the core components of their initiative, develop a logic model, understand participants' satisfaction with services, identify barriers to participation in services and areas for improvement, and test whether selected strategies strengthen the model.

—Rossi et al. 2003; Smith 2009

Learning community

NS2G included a learning community of 10 two-generation initiatives, which included the four initiatives participating in the formative evaluations and six others—called "enrichment sites"—that participated in only the learning community (Table 1.1). The initial plans for the learning community included five goals:

1. **Give initiative staff an opportunity to talk with a community of staff with shared interests about their progress, challenges, and solutions** to foster supportive connections among participating sites.
2. **Provide a "road test" of the materials developed for the formative evaluation initiatives**, as enrichment sites learn about them, try them out between calls, and provide feedback on them.
3. **Help the enrichment sites refine their two-generation models using a less-intensive TA approach**. For example, this approach might appeal to initiatives that already conduct other initiative development efforts, those that have more local capacity for initiative improvement, or those with less time to devote to such activities.
4. **Empower staff from initiatives participating in the formative evaluations to be leaders in the two-generation field** by equipping them to share their experiences and strategies for data-informed initiative development with leaders of other two-generation initiatives and organizations.
5. **Extend the lessons from formative evaluation activities to the broader two-generation field**, as enrichment sites test and refine the strategies formative evaluation initiatives shared about.

Participating initiatives met virtually five times between October 2021 and January 2023, with meetings structured to achieve these goals.

Measure development

The NS2G team developed a draft measure of mutual reinforcement to promote learning across evaluations and a better understanding of relevant processes and outcomes for two-generation initiatives. As part of the measure development process, three initiatives participating in the formative evaluations pilot tested early versions of the measure and a scoring tool. The goals of the pilot were to determine the feasibility of use, the comprehension of the items, and the usefulness of the measure and tool. The brief "The Two-Generation Mutual Reinforcement Measurement Tool: Development and Pilot Study Findings" (Conroy et al. 2023) describes the process for developing the measure, findings from the pilot testing, and next steps for continuing to test and refine the measure. With the brief, ACF is releasing the

draft measure and scoring tool so that initiatives can use it to begin to assess the mutual reinforcement of their services, identify opportunities for improvement, and facilitate conversations within and across partner organizations about progress and challenges in implementing mutually reinforcing services.

Roadmap to the report

This report describes the experiences of two-generation initiatives participating in NS2G and shares findings, lessons, and common themes from their participation in the formative evaluations and learning community. Chapter 2 describes the activities that initiatives completed during the formative evaluations and how they map to phases of the LI^2 framework. Chapter 3 provides a description of the initiatives in the formative evaluations, including their core components, how they intentionally integrated services for caregivers and their children, successes in service delivery, and opportunities to strengthen their two-generation models. Chapter 4 describes the program improvement opportunities that participating initiatives identified and the strategies they used to address them. Chapter 5 summarizes insights and lessons from the formative evaluations. Chapter 6

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For more information on using the Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI^2) framework in the Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches project

A series of three briefs focuses on each phase of formative evaluation activities:

- Learn: Defining a Two-Generation Logic Model (Aharpour and Baumgartner 2022)

- Innovate: Using a Structured Learning Process to Strengthen Two-Generation Service Delivery (Fung and Sama-Miller 2022)

- Improve: Using Rapid Cycle Learning to Build Momentum for Change in Two-Generation Service Delivery (Bauer et al. 2023)

All publications from the NS2G project can be found on the project's OPRE webpage.

describes the activities of the learning community and its participating two-generation initiatives, and shares lessons about a light-touch approach to building evaluation capacity for two-generation initiatives. The final chapter draws on lessons from the formative evaluations and learning community to discuss needs and opportunities to continue to strengthen two-generation initiatives and move them closer to readiness for future evaluation.

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2. Conducting Formative Evaluations with Two-Generation Initiatives

This chapter describes the activities that two-generation initiatives completed in each phase of the NS2G formative evaluations. These activities aligned with the three phases of the LI^2 framework. As its name suggests, LI^2 has three phases (Figure 2.1), which the NS2G team implemented as follows:

- **Learn.** The goals of the Learn phase in NS2G were (1) to develop a comprehensive understanding of each initiative's community context, vision and goals, service delivery, staffing, and data management practices; (2) to document a logic model illustrating how two-generation services are linked to intended outcomes; and (3) to identify opportunities to strengthen the logic model. In the Learn phase, NS2G TA providers conducted virtual site visits with two-generation initiatives that included interviews with staff and focus groups with initiative participants. Then, NS2G TA providers worked collaboratively with initiative staff and participants through a series of meetings and collaborative workshops to identify the core components of the initiative, populate a logic model, and prioritize opportunities to strengthen service delivery.

- **Innovate.** The goal of the Innovate phase was to design improvement strategies to address the opportunities identified during the Learn phase. In the Innovate phase, NS2G TA providers led a collaborative workshop with a broad group of initiative staff to develop an improvement strategy to address the challenge prioritized during the Learn phase. Following the workshop, NS2G TA providers and initiative staff worked together to develop a plan to iteratively test and refine the strategy using rapid cycle learning.

- **Improve.** In the Improve phase, initiatives iteratively tested and refined program improvement strategies by implementing them on a small scale, collecting implementation data, identifying opportunities to refine strategies, and testing those refined strategies. By testing and refining over time, initiatives strengthened implementation and built capacity to use data when monitoring and improving their own services.

Participating initiatives completed activities with support from a team of two NS2G TA providers. Staff from participating initiatives dedicated several hours per month to the formative evaluation activities. During the formative evaluations, a small group of initiative staff—typically two to three people—met for about one hour each month with NS2G TA providers. Initiative staff also completed work in between monthly meetings, such as adding details about initiative services for the core components activity and filling in a logic model template. Initiative staff also helped the NS2G team coordinate the virtual site visits, including scheduling interviews and identifying caregivers to participate in focus groups. As needed, initiative staff identified and engaged their colleagues in the formative evaluations. For example, the collaborative workshops involved six or more staff from multiple levels of the initiative, from direct service providers to directors. Staff throughout the initiatives also participated in rapid cycle learning by implementing improvement strategies, collecting data, and providing feedback.

The NS2G formative evaluations took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, the NS2G team planned to conduct in-person site visits, which would have included the interviews and collaborative meetings that were a part of the Learn and Innovate phases. As a result of the public health emergency, however, NS2G TA providers and initiative staff completed all activities virtually. The sections that follow describe the activities involved in the formative evaluations and a final meeting that the NS2G team hosted to wrap up the formative evaluations.

Figure 2.1. Application of the LI² framework in the NS2G formative evaluations

Goals: Develop a comprehensive understanding of the two-generation initiative, document a logic model, and identify opportunities to strengthen the logic model
Timing: Spring 2021 - Spring 2022
Activities:
- Virtual site visit
- Core components identification
- Logic model development
- Collaborative workshops

Goal: Design improvement strategies to address challenges identified in the Learn phase
Timing: Spring 2022
Activities:
- Collaborative workshop
- Rapid cycle learning planning

Goal: Test and refine improvement strategies using multiple iterative improvement cycles
Timing: Summer 2022 - Winter 2022
Activities:
- Rapid cycle learning with 2 to 3 improvement cycles

Holding a virtual site visit (Learn)

In the middle of 2021, NS2G TA providers conducted a virtual site visit with each initiative participating in formative evaluations. The goal of the virtual site visit was to begin building a mutual understanding of initiative services and operations, including strengths of and challenges with each initiative's service delivery model. Documenting strengths and challenges helped NS2G TA providers and initiative staff to identify a focus for program improvement activities and rapid cycle learning in the formative evaluations. Strengths included program features that the initiatives could build on, whereas challenges included opportunities for improvement (as well as circumstances outside the initiatives' control).

Staff interviews. The site visits included a series of interviews with initiative staff, including staff who worked directly with families, supervisors, managers, and leaders. The NS2G TA providers also conducted interviews with key partners. Initiative staff helped NS2G TA providers identify interview participants and schedule the interviews. The interviews covered a range of topics related to two-generation service delivery and initiative operations (Table 2.1).

Participant focus groups. In addition to interviews with initiative staff, NS2G TA providers conducted focus groups with caregivers whose families had participated in two-generation services. The focus groups allowed TA providers to learn about the services that families received and their experiences in different aspects of the initiative, including what has been challenging about participating and what has made it easier to participate. The NS2G TA providers used feedback from the caregiver focus groups to inform the identification of challenges and opportunities for improvement in the formative evaluation activities that followed.

Table 2.1. NS2G site visit staff interview topics

Main interview topics	Example sub-topics
Vision and goals	• Vision for the initiative over the next several years • How participation in two-generation services helps families achieve their goals
Partners	• Information sharing and communication between partners • Co-design of two-generation services
Intake	• Eligibility requirements • How families are identified and recruited into the initiative
Service delivery and case flow	• Types and characteristics of services offered for caregivers, children, and families • Intentional alignment and coordination of services • Case flow • Common challenges that families experience in accessing and receiving services
Staffing	• Skills and qualifications necessary for direct services staff • How staff allocate time to administrative tasks and working directly with families • Average caseload of staff • Supervision and assessment of staff performance
Data use	• Use of integrated data systems to track families' goals, service receipt, and progress in program services for caregivers, families, and children • Monitoring of completeness and accuracy of data • Challenges and benefits associated with collecting and using data
Program improvement and monitoring	• Use of data for program improvement • Additional data that would be useful to collect and analyze • Suggested changes or improvements to the initiative

Identifying core components (Learn)

Identifying core components can help a complex initiative deconstruct its services and identify the most important ingredients that help it address the needs of caregivers and their children in an intentionally coordinated way.

Initiative staff participated in a series of three activities, led by NS2G TA providers, to identify the core components of their initiatives.

Core components are the "essential functions and principles that define the program and are judged as being necessary to produce outcomes in a typical service setting."

—Holzwart et al. 2021

1. **Services components matrix.** First, NS2G TA providers used information gathered during site visit interviews and focus groups to populate a matrix detailing all of the services initiatives and their partners delivered to families, key participant needs, and short- and long-term intended outcomes. The NS2G TA providers and initiative staff reviewed the matrix and mapped individual services to participants' needs and the short- and long-term outcomes.

2. **Staff supports components matrix.** Initiative staff described successful staff performance, the challenges they faced in doing their work, supports they provided to staff, and other resources the initiative needed to be successful, such as regular communication between partners. NS2G TA providers populated a matrix of staff-level supports based on site visit interviews and asked initiative

staff to review it and add details. This process helped the initiatives identify staff supports essential to delivering high quality services and areas where staff needed additional supports to be successful.

3. **Prioritizing service and staff support components.** Third, initiative staff reviewed the matrices of services and staff supports. They then prioritized the most important long-term intended outcomes for adults, families, and children; the services they believed contributed most directly to achieving them (including mutually reinforcing services for adults, children, and families); and the essential supports that staff needed to provide these services successfully. The services and supports that initiative staff prioritized in the third activity were considered the initiative's core components.

The core components activity helped each initiative identify gaps in their models: (1) participants' needs that were going unaddressed; (2) intended outcomes that the initiative had no mechanism for achieving; and (3) places where initiatives could strengthen staff supports. Documenting these gaps helped staff begin to identify opportunities for improvement during the later collaborative workshops.

Developing a logic model (Learn)

Developing a comprehensive understanding of an initiative's services and desired outcomes and documenting them in a logic model is the foundation for data-informed program improvement (Ross et al. 2018). Mapping out services for primary caregivers, children, and families in a logic model can help two-generation initiatives show how the services are intentionally combined and integrated to achieve intended outcomes. Once initiative staff identified their initiative's core components, they and NS2G TA providers placed the components into a logic model template (Figure 2.2). This tool was based on the Integrated Approaches conceptual framework (Figure 1.1). Although participating initiatives all had

Logic models are diagrams that help program leaders: (1) articulate their plans for services, including service intensity (frequency and duration), quality, and in the case of two-generation initiatives, how services are intentionally combined for whole families; (2) ensure that the plans line up with the expected outcomes for caregivers and children; and (3) identify expected outcomes and the associated measures for the outcomes.

—Ross et al. 2018

existing logic models that documented the services they offered, the logic models they developed for NS2G prompted the initiatives to think even more deeply about, and specify how, services for caregivers and their children were intentionally aligned and integrated. As NS2G TA providers and initiative staff worked together on the logic model, initiative staff provided input on the structure and components of the logic model template, informed by their practice experience. The NS2G TA providers then refined the template to develop a final version that all initiatives used. A blank template of the final version is available in the brief "Defining a Two-Generation Logic Model" (Aharpour and Baumgartner 2022) for other two-generation initiatives to use.

A two-generation logic model depicts the unique factors that make it possible for two-generation initiatives to achieve mutually reinforcing outcomes for caregivers and their children (Table 2.2). It describes the characteristics of the families served, the core services offered to each generation to support family economic security and child development, and how these services are intentionally coordinated and mutually reinforcing. In a two-generation logic model, service providers' efforts align and build on each other to achieve a shared vision and common or compatible goals for serving families. As with most logic models, the two-generation logic model template also includes a space for inputs and contextual factors.

Figure 2.2. Two-generation logic model
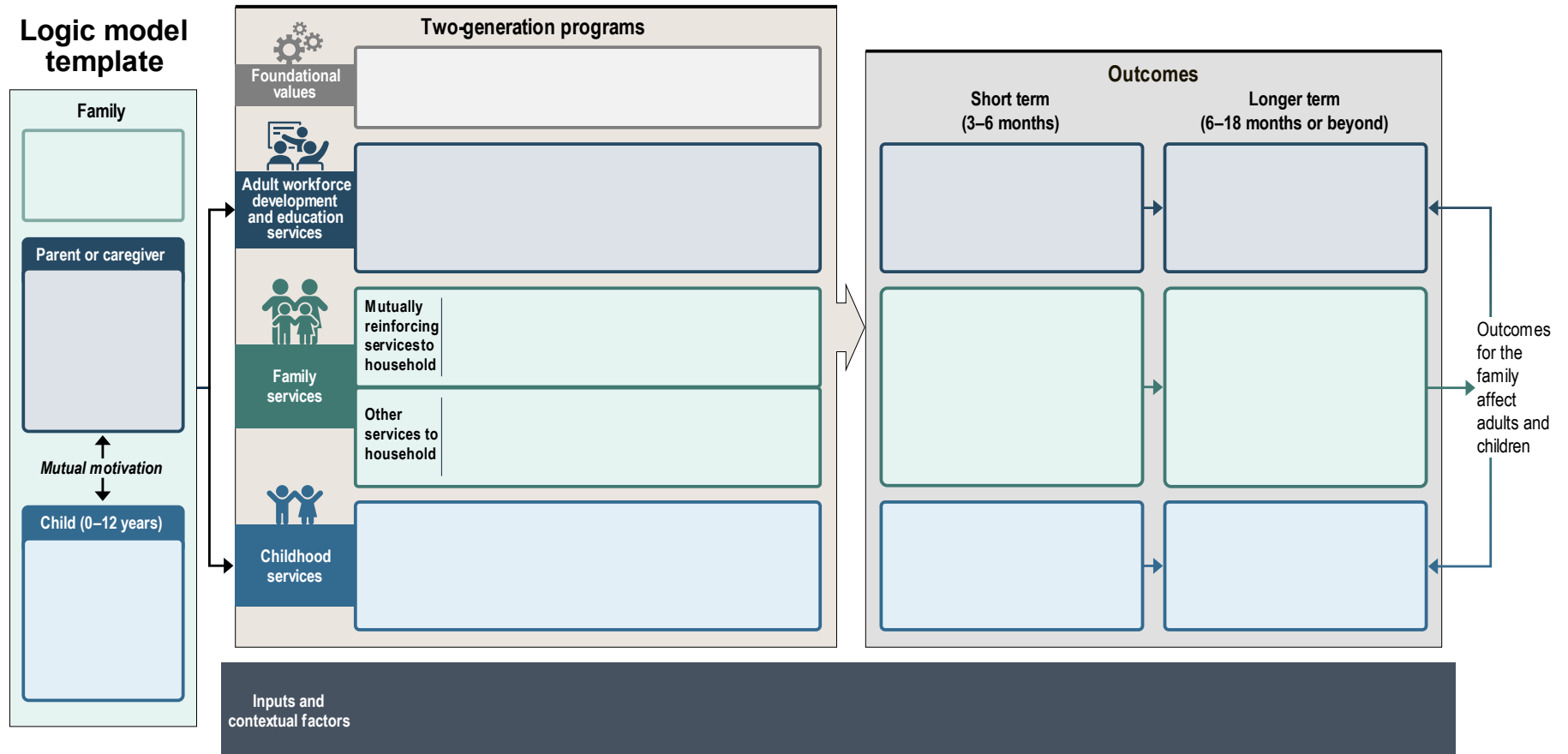
Table 2.2. Unique features in the two-generation logic model template

Unique feature	Why feature is essential for two-generation initiatives
One box to represent the characteristics of the primary caregiver, the child, and the family's mutual motivation	Successfully integrating services requires two-generation initiatives to consider the needs of each generation and build on each generation's mutual motivation, which describes how each generation will be motivated to participate in services when it recognizes and values the other generation's activities and progress. This differs from a typical logic model, which depicts participants without considering how the people in their lives and the circumstances of those people might influence the participants.
Separate boxes for adult, child, and family services	Two-generation initiatives aim to provide each generation with high quality and intensive services that meet its needs. In contrast to a typical logic model, this template depicts how an initiative might touch the lives of several people in the same family.
A box distinguishing mutually reinforcing services from other services to the household	Two-generation service providers intentionally coordinate services and set services up to be mutually reinforcing. This makes it possible for each generation to work toward achieving interconnected goals. This recognition that services to one member of a family might influence other family members is unique to a two-generation logic model.
Customizable arrows linking activities to outcomes	The arrows in the template link two-generation services to family outcomes. For example, these arrows illustrate the potential for mutual motivation—intergenerational and familial links between activities and outcomes. Activities can affect outcomes, and vice versa, across generations. Adult, child, and family outcomes can reinforce one another. These arrows serve the same function as the crisscrossed arrows in the conceptual framework for two-generation approaches (Figure 1.1). Depicting the richness of the relationship among family members and their outcomes is a key feature unique to two-generation logic models.

The logic model also includes contextual influences and moderators, as well as foundational values. Although these factors are not specific to two-generation initiatives and their logic models, initiative leaders and staff highlighted their importance. They believed that deeply embedded community and policy factors, such as geographic location, client experiences, and decisions about infrastructure planning and development, affected service delivery and operations. Many staff at two-generation initiatives participating in NS2G also stressed the importance of including foundational values, indicating that *why* they provide services and *how* they engage with their families is as integral to their two-generation identity as *what* services they provide.

As initiative staff added to their logic models, NS2G TA providers prompted them to consider a series of guiding questions (Table 2.3). Identifying core components first helped initiative staff narrow in on responses to some of the questions, such as the primary adult, family, and childhood services of the initiative and short- and longer-term intended outcomes for families. The brief "Defining a Two-Generation Logic Model" (Aharpour and Baumgartner 2022) provides additional detail on the development of the logic model template.

Table 2.3. Guiding questions to help two-generation initiatives populate a logic model

Section of the logic model template	Guiding questions
Family	• What are the characteristics of caregivers that participate in the initiative? • What are the characteristics of children that participate in the initiative? • What are the characteristics of families that participate in the initiative?
Two-generation initiative	• What are the foundational values of the initiative? • What are the primary adult, family, and childhood services of the initiative? • How do you intentionally coordinate each service for primary caregivers and their children?
Short- and longer-term outcomes	• What are the most important needs of and challenges experienced by primary caregivers, children, and families? • What are the short- and longer-term outcomes you hope families will achieve by participating in each service?
Inputs and contextual factors	• What factors external to the initiative affect the initiative's ability to be successful? • What factors within the initiative influence whether services are delivered in a high quality way that aligns with the intended model?

Prioritizing opportunities for improvement and developing improvement strategies through collaborative workshops (Learn and Innovate)

To wrap up the Learn phase and begin the Innovate phase, the initiatives participated in a series of three collaborative workshops in early 2022 (Figure 2.3). The earlier activities in the Learn phase (site visits, identification of core components, and development of the logic model) set the foundation for the formative evaluation by helping initiative staff and NS2G TA providers establish a shared understanding of initiative services, operations, and intended outcomes. Through these three earlier activities, initiative staff and NS2G TA providers also began to identify opportunities to strengthen the initiatives. The collaborative workshops then provided an opportunity for staff to reflect on the earlier activities and decide what to do next.

To include as many voices as possible, the collaborative workshops typically included five or more initiative staff, including administrators, supervisors, direct services staff, and key partners. A key principle of LI[2] is to involve staff at all levels of an organization in identifying service delivery challenges and potential solutions. Table 2.4 describes the goals and examples of activities in each of the three collaborative workshops.

In the first workshop, initiative staff reviewed and commented on the two-generation logic model and then brainstormed challenges in delivering two-generation services. NS2G TA providers also prompted initiative staff to discuss challenges and opportunities for improvement that had come up in the site visit and core components activities. In the second workshop, initiative staff presented a logic model they had revised based on the conversations from the first workshop. Then, they reviewed the challenges they brainstormed in the first meeting, prioritized one or two challenges to focus on, and then explored the drivers and consequences of the challenges. In the third workshop, initiative staff moved from Learn phase activities to Innovate phase activities. NS2G TA providers guided participants to reframe their challenges as opportunities for change. The primary activity for initiative staff in the third workshop was to brainstorm strategies to strengthen their initiatives. At the end of the third meeting, initiative staff

prioritized their most promising or most needed strategies. The brief "Using a Structured Learning Process to Strengthen Two-Generation Service Delivery" (Fung and Sama-Miller 2022) describes the specific activities initiative staff completed in these meetings.

Figure 2.3. Timeline of NS2G collaborative workshops, planning for rapid cycle learning, and improvement cycles
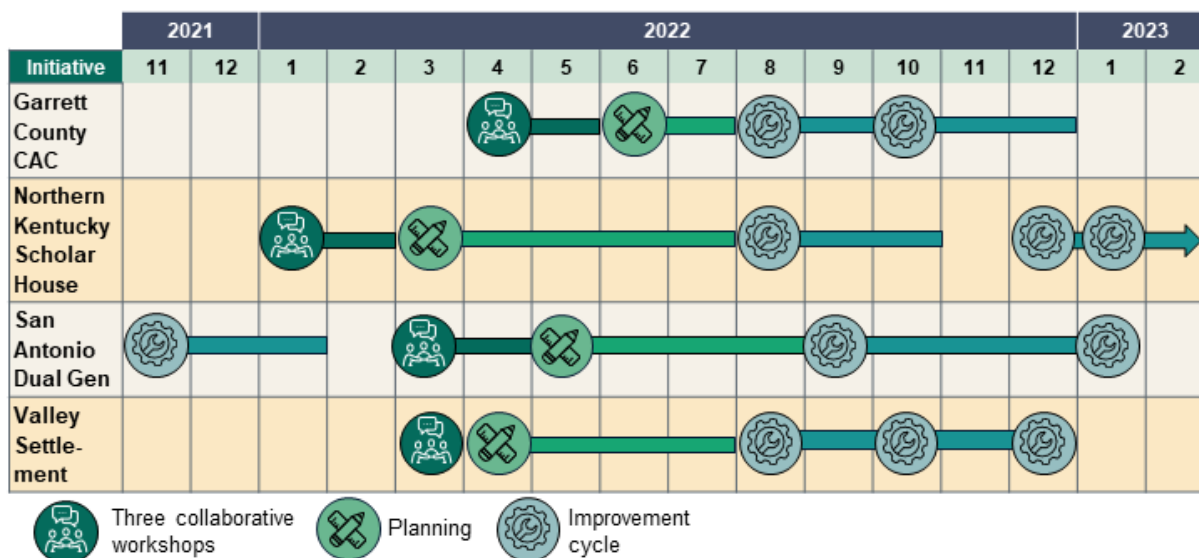
Table 2.4. NS2G collaborative workshops

Meeting	Goals	Examples of activities
Meeting 1 (Learn phase)	• Gather staff and partner input on logic models collaboratively developed by initiative staff and NS2G TA providers. • Identify initiatives' strengths and challenges with providing two-generation services.	• Individually brainstorm and then discuss what is going well and what is challenging related to topics such as enrollment and intake, participation and retention, service integration, and staffing.
Meeting 2 (Learn phase)	• Prioritize an implementation challenge identified in Workshop 1. • Explore the drivers and consequences of the implementation challenge.	• Complete a Problem Tree exercise to individually brainstorm and discuss the "roots" (drivers) and "branches" (consequences) of a "trunk" (central implementation challenge). • Group challenges and consequences into categories and vote on the categories workshop participants feel are most important to address.
Meeting 3 (Innovate phase)	• Brainstorm and prioritize improvement strategies to address the priority implementation challenge and its drivers.	• Consider how to apply solution categories, such as technology, partnerships, and processes and procedures, to an implementation challenge (for example, answering the question, "How could we update processes and procedures to address an implementation challenge?"). • Prioritize brainstormed strategies into high, medium, and lower priority solution categories.

Planning for rapid cycle learning (Innovate)

By the end of the collaborative workshops, initiatives had identified basic strategies to improve their service delivery models. Before rapid cycle learning, initiative staff needed to build out the details of their strategies, including specifying roles and responsibilities for all staff involved in implementing the strategy and identifying the supports that the initiative would put in place for implementation. During monthly check-in meetings, NS2G TA providers and initiative staff completed a worksheet to develop detailed plans to pilot test their improvement strategies.

The worksheet included two sides with prompts for initial staff to fill:

1. **Your challenge.** The front side of the worksheet asked initiative staff to specify the challenge that their improvement strategy was designed to address, what would change if the challenge was addressed, and how they would know in the short-term if their strategy had promise for leading to changes in participating families' outcomes. The worksheet also prompted initiative staff to write down any obstacles that could hinder the implementation of the strategy or their intended changes.

2. **Your change strategy.** The back side of the worksheet included prompts to help initiative staff build out the details of their strategy. First, it asked initiative staff to re-frame the challenge from the first side of the worksheet as an opportunity—similar to the activity that they completed at the beginning of the third collaborative workshop. Then, the worksheet prompted initiative staff to describe the components of the strategy, including the theories or beliefs behind it, the roles and responsibilities of all staff involved in implementing it, and the resources needed for implementation (such as trainings or revised staff guidance). Next, the worksheet asked initiative staff to detail how they would support staff implementing the strategy in three ways: (1) generating motivation and buy-in; (2) building staff knowledge, skills, and habits; and (3) removing barriers or providing support to make it easier for staff to execute the strategy.

The NS2G team developed the worksheet for the formative evaluation based on tools included in the LI[2] framework (Derr 2022). The brief ["Using a Structured Learning Process to Strengthen Two-Generation Service Delivery"](#) (Fung and Sama-Miller 2022) provides instructions on how initiatives can use the worksheet on their own to plan their own service delivery improvements. A copy of the worksheet is in Appendix B.

Pilot testing an improvement strategy using rapid cycle learning (Improve)

Next, in the Improve phase, initiative staff used rapid cycle learning to iteratively test and refine the strategies they began developing in the collaborative workshops. During successive improvement cycles, initiative staff tried out their strategies and collected data on strategy implementation, including data from their data systems and feedback from staff. NS2G TA providers met regularly (approximately monthly) with initiative staff to check on progress and troubleshoot issues as they emerged, and assisted initiative staff with data collection. At the end of each improvement cycle, initiative staff reviewed data with the NS2G TA providers and determined adjustments to the strategy before beginning another round of pilot testing with a revised strategy.

Rapid cycle learning is a method for quickly and iteratively testing strategies to strengthen their design and implementation. It often involves "improvement cycles"—successive cycles to pilot strategies, collect feedback from staff and participants on how these strategies are working, and gather available data to demonstrate whether the strategies are supporting improvement.

Each initiative conducted rapid cycle learning on its own timeline (Figure 2.3). The length, number, and timing of improvement cycles depended on each initiative's strategy and its programmatic calendar. Rapid cycle learning occurred from late 2021 through early 2023. The San Antonio Dual Gen Initiative (Dual Gen) conducted an improvement cycle in late 2021, before its collaborative workshops, because of needs related to its expansion to San Antonio's West Side neighborhood (see Chapter 3). Three of the four formative evaluation initiatives completed three improvement cycles each, while the fourth initiative completed two cycles.

Wrapping up the formative evaluations with a final virtual meeting

The NS2G team designed the formative evaluations to be collaborative and to build evaluation capacity in the participating initiatives. In January 2023, after the initiatives had completed their improvement cycles, the NS2G team hosted a final virtual meeting that offered an opportunity for staff from the formative evaluation initiatives to (1) reflect on their experience in NS2G, and (2) plan for next steps. The meeting took place over two half-days. The enrichment sites (the other six initiatives in the learning community described in Chapter 1) also attended the first half-day session.

Day 1: Reflecting on the formative evaluations: The goal of the first day of the meeting was for initiatives to reflect on their participation in NS2G. In addition to staff representatives from the 10 initiatives that participated in NS2G, participants in the Day 1 virtual meeting included NS2G team members, federal staff, and most NS2G expert panel members. Prior to that first day, initiative staff from the four formative evaluation initiatives and NS2G TA providers developed posters. The posters aimed to share their logic models, describe the strategies they tested and the structure of their improvement cycles, and offer lessons learned. In the meeting, initiative staff presented the posters to other attendees and fielded questions and feedback. They also participated in a roundtable discussion to reflect on how participating in the formative evaluations had helped strengthen their initiatives and build capacity. In addition to activities centered on the formative evaluations, the first day of the meeting included opportunities for staff from all ten initiatives to reflect on the learning community and a demonstration of the measure of mutual reinforcement that the NS2G team developed.

Day 2: Planning next steps: The goal of the second day of the meeting was to set up initiatives in the formative evaluation to make continued progress towards evaluation readiness after the end of NS2G, and it focused on participants from the four formative evaluation initiatives. Attendees in the second day of the meeting included the broader group of formative evaluation initiative staff who had attended the collaborative workshops, NS2G team members, and federal staff. On that day, initiative staff met with their NS2G TA providers to identify emerging opportunities to continue improving their service delivery models and begin developing an action plan to address the opportunities. In this meeting, initiative staff completed many of the same activities they had completed during the earlier collaborative workshops while shifting their focus to different opportunities than the ones they tested earlier. NS2G TA providers guided staff through the activities and showed them how they could use them on their own to continue building capacity for future, more independent formative evaluation. At the end of the day, staff from all of the initiatives presented their action plans to one another. Following Day 2, NS2G TA providers and initiative staff continued to meet about once per month to check in on initiatives' implementation of the action plans they developed.

The remainder of this report describes the insights and lessons learned that emerged from these formative evaluation activities and from the learning community more broadly.

3. Understanding Two-Generation Initiatives: Findings from Learn Activities

Chapter 2 described the formative evaluation activities NS2G TA providers conducted in partnership with four two-generation initiatives as part of the NS2G project. The activities in the "Learn" phase of the LI^2 approach included virtual site visits, identifying core components, developing and refining logic models, and beginning to identify opportunities to strengthen their service delivery models. Chapter 3 describes the two-generation initiatives that participated in formative evaluations and TA under the NS2G project, including findings from Learn phase activities they completed.

The following chapter sections are short descriptions of each initiative, based on background information and insights from activities conducted in the Learn phase. For each initiative, we describe the core components and activities of the initiative and how services were integrated for both generations, successes and challenges delivering two-generation services, and adaptations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each description closes with the logic model that the initiative developed with NS2G TA providers. The descriptions below reflect services offered and internal processes present at the time of Learn phase activities conducted from spring 2021 through spring 2022, and may not be an accurate reflection at the time of reading.

Garrett County Community Action Committee

Garrett County Community Action Committee (CAC) has provided programming and services to adults, children, and families in Garrett County, Maryland, since 1965. Garrett County is a small, rural, working-class community in the western panhandle of Maryland. It is geographically and politically isolated: mountains and state parks break up the residential communities within the county, and adjoining counties are in separate states. As a community action agency, one of Garrett County CAC's main roles is to administer the Community Services Block Grant program from ACF's Office of Community Services.

Garrett County CAC established its two-generation initiative, called 2G, to address the needs of Garrett County residents by providing services such as adult education and training, job skill and career development, financial literacy workshops, stabilization and emergency services, transportation services, legal aid, and Head Start/Early Head Start. Garrett County CAC's partners include the Garrett County Health Department, three Garrett County public school districts, Garrett College, and the local branch of the Maryland Department of Human Services, which administers Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, medical assistance, child support, and child protective services. Garrett County CAC referred families to these partner agencies, and the partner agencies referred eligible participants to Garrett County CAC.

Box 3.1. Garrett County CAC's foundational values

Garrett County CAC's 2G initiative was based on several foundational values embedded into various aspects of programming:

1. The 2G initiative is a mindset, not a program, and Garrett Country CAC prioritizes individuals' and families' well-being.

2. Caregivers are lifelong learners and inspired their children to learn; caregiver learning is better supported when a family was economically secure.

3. Strong partnerships with families and within the community are essential.

Core components and activities of the initiative

Garrett County CAC's approach to 2G service delivery was guided by three foundational values (Box 3.1). These values informed the initiative's core components and activities, which included family service coordinators (FSCs) who helped integrate and coordinate services for families. At the core of the Garrett County CAC's service delivery was the trusting and responsive relationship that FSCs built with families that enrolled in any of Garrett County CAC's services.

Box 3.2. Garrett County Community Action Committee 2G initiative

- **Location and history:** Private, nonprofit organization serving Garrett County, Maryland (a small, rural county located in the panhandle of western Maryland) since 1965

- **Families served:** Families living in Garrett County, Maryland, that had a low income and a child aged 12 or younger. Family structures varied within the community and included two-parent households, single caregivers, and grandparents serving as primary caregivers.

- **Key services for caregivers:** Adult education and training; stabilization and emergency services; transportation services; legal aid; job skill and career development; financial literacy workshops; opportunities to strengthen social networks

- **Key services for children:** Head Start; Early Head Start

- **Key services for families:** Wraparound child care; medical services; home visitation; housing supports (for example, energy and weatherization assistance, assistance finding housing)

- **Intentional coordination of services**: Holistic and integrated case management and service delivery approach through a universal intake, service bundling, and a centralized database that shared data across generations within a household, for viewing by staff and initiative partners

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We learned that FSCs began developing relationships with families during the intake process, guided by two main tools:

1. **Life Scale assessment.** Garrett County CAC developed the Life Scale to help families identify their needs and to inform the referrals that FSCs provide.

2. **Pathway Plan.** FSCs co-developed a Pathway Plan with families. The Pathway Plan was intended to help families identify and prioritize their goals and define actions they would take to progress toward those goals.

FSCs entered the information gathered through these tools into EmpowOR (a centralized database that Garrett County CAC used). All initiative staff and partners working with a family reviewed, updated, and referenced information in EmpowOR.

FSCs then worked with other initiative staff to bundle services appropriately and coordinate internal and external referrals and services for each family. Examples of services provided to families included adult education and training, legal aid and support, and job skill and career development. FSCs also helped coordinate enrollment in Head Start, Early Head Start, and local child care providers for children. FSCs also referred children to the Judy Center, an early childhood center for children younger than 5 that was funded by the Maryland State Department of Education. In addition to caregiver and child-specific services, Garrett County CAC also provided family-focused services including medical services, home visitation, energy and weatherization assistance, and help finding housing.

How services were integrated for both generations

The initiative had a no wrong door approach to delivering programing to families. Adults, caregivers, and families that enrolled in any Garrett County CAC service were connected to an FSC and participated in a universal intake process that included completing a Life Scale assessment and a Pathway Plan in response to it.

Initiative leaders and staff described EmpowOR as a powerful tool for documenting and coordinating services internally and externally with local partners. Once the FSC loaded the Life Scale and Pathway Plan into EmpowOR, the system automatically determined participants' eligibility for internal and external services, and initiative staff made internal and external referrals within the database. EmpowOR enabled initiative staff to link caregivers and children from the same family. It also allowed all Garrett County CAC staff and external partners to access case notes, follow up on referrals, and view other services a family is already receiving. Staff also highlighted how the case notes within EmpowOR were essential for internal communication and service coordination.

Garrett County CAC considered FSCs integral to coordinating services for families. FSCs worked with each family to assess progress toward or reassess their goals. Families retook the Life Scale assessment at least every six months. FSCs used EmpowOR continuously to document and coordinate services for caregivers and children, by sending and tracking referrals. FSCs were supported by a family enrichment coach, who met with FSCs regularly to support service delivery for the families on an FSC's caseload, ensure services for families are coordinated, and troubleshoot potential challenges for initiative staff or families.

Successes delivering two-generation services

Garrett County CAC staff identified their approach to holistic, integrated service delivery, universal intake and Pathway Plan process, bundling of services, and the integration of EmpowOR as their key successes. Staff and partners described the initiative as a leader for coordinated service delivery within Garrett County and Maryland. Initiative leaders and staff described

> *"2G is not a budget item, it's how you do business."*
>
> —Garrett County CAC staff member

Garrett County CAC's two-generation approach as a mindset that helped the initiative deliver services and provide internal and external referrals to adults, children, and families in Garrett County.

Opportunity areas for improving the delivery of two-generation services

Initiative leaders and staff identified internal improvement areas, such as staff development and processes related to participant engagement, and external obstacles, such as eligibility for funding due to the initiative's location. Staff also noted that it had been hard to deliver online services and coordinate services during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Within the organization

Initiative staff identified internal improvement areas with ongoing professional development and staff onboarding. Initiative staff highlighted that ongoing professional development and staff onboarding could be refreshed to reinforce the organization's and initiative's culture. Staff highlighted that inadequate professional development and onboarding had contributed to communication breakdowns and a lack of

coordination across departments, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when staff were challenged to communicate and provide services virtually.

Initiative staff also described challenges related to family engagement—for example, how outdated contact information made it difficult to follow up with families. In addition, initiative staff explained that because Garrett County was a small community and residents tended to know each other, some participants were concerned about being seen receiving services. Staff worked to reduce the stigma of service receipt and create a supportive and inviting environment.

Staff also explained it could be difficult to monitor the status of referrals in EmpowOR and ensure they were completed promptly. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, initiative staff submitting an internal referral often checked in informally in the office with the provider of the referred service to ensure the referral request was received and would be addressed. However, the pandemic transformed staff communication and staff realized how much they relied on their informal processes to complete internal referrals promptly. Staff noted that revisiting the internal referral process to ensure it supported monitoring and prompt response times was a top priority.

Policy and local context

Initiative staff and participants identified a variety of obstacles related to Garrett County CAC's policy and local context, such as limited education and employment opportunities, and eligibility for services or funding. According to staff, people living in Garrett County had limited options for education or work in the county, which resulted in many young families leaving the county, rapid growth of the county's aging population, and a steady decline in its school-age population.

Initiative staff and families also explained that many families in the county did not qualify for some forms of federal assistance. Because Maryland's minimum wage was higher than federal minimum wage, families employed at the state's minimum wage level could exceed the income limits for some federally funded services, including Head Start. Despite earning more than those who qualified for federal services, these families could still experience economic insecurity.

The geography of Garrett County also made transportation difficult, because state parks and forests covered a large portion of the county, and much of the remaining area was covered by rural roads. Families participating in the initiative explained in focus groups with the NS2G TA providers that transportation challenges limited their ability to take part in activities and pursue education and employment opportunities.

Responding to challenges related to the COVID-19 public health emergency

Garrett County was a small, tight-knit community where services were typically delivered in person. Online service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic was difficult for initiative staff and participants, as the public health emergency led to office closures and made it challenging to access services such as child care. The county's rural location presented limited access to consistent or reliable internet service. Many households lacked reliable broadband access and internet-enabled devices. For instance, if classes were scheduled for the same time, some families had to choose between virtual school for a child in the household or virtual community college coursework for a caregiver. For staff, virtual private network accessibility was limited, making it hard to deliver services online and work remotely. Remote work also affected staff development and organizational culture, and staff were challenged to find creative ways to communicate and build camaraderie virtually.

Figure 3.1. Garrett County Community Action Committee Logic Model
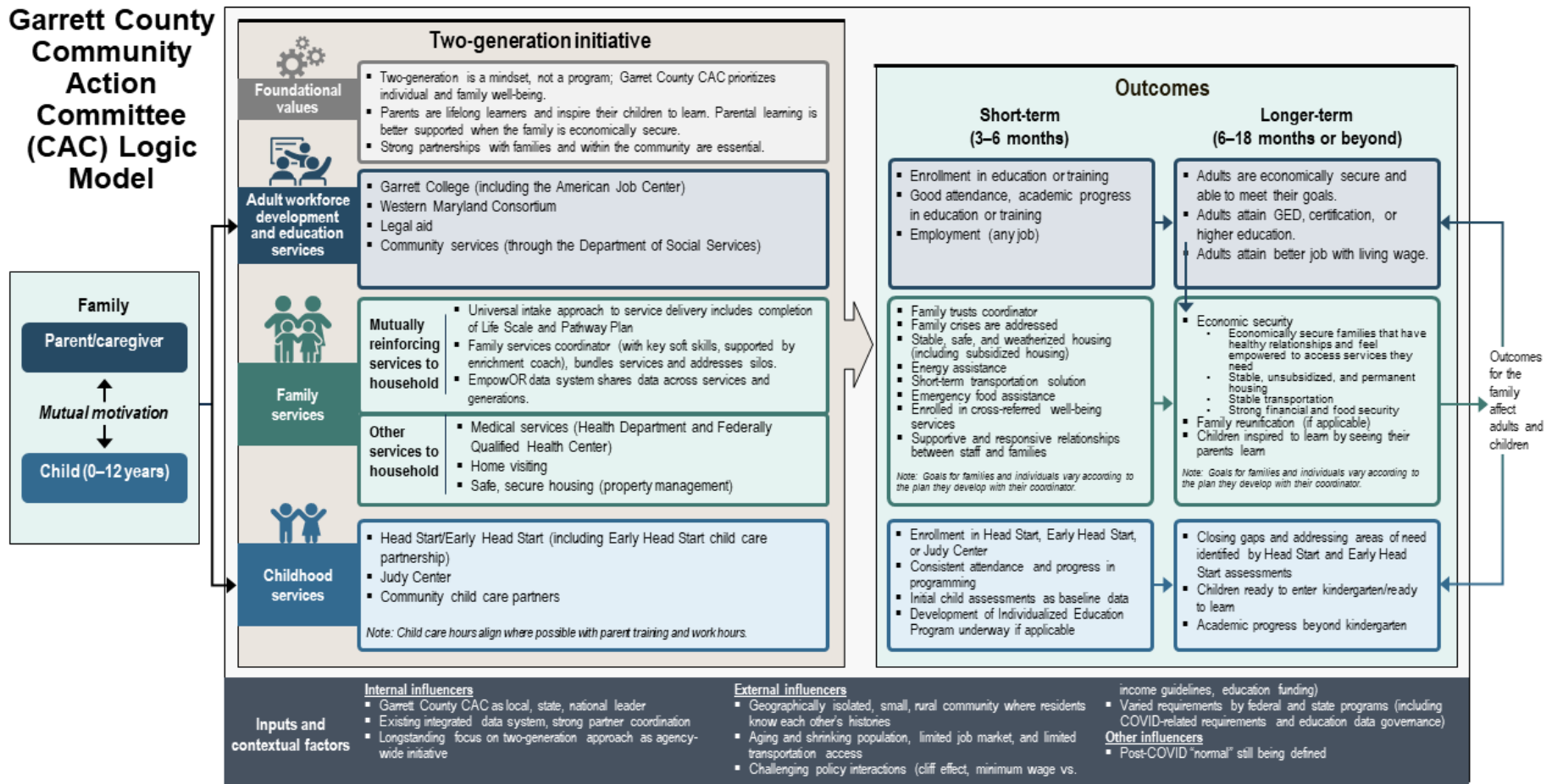
Northern Kentucky Scholar House at Brighton Center

Northern Kentucky Scholar House (NKSH) is a part of Brighton Center, a nonprofit that implemented more than 40 programs providing employment and workforce services, housing, early childhood education and youth services, financial education, and other support. NKSH served about 50 families at a time. NKSH partnered with the local and state housing authorities, Neighborhood Foundations and the Kentucky Housing Corporation. The Kentucky Housing Corporation created the Scholar House model, which co-located housing and child care, to help single-caregiver families obtain housing, child care, and supportive services while they earn a college degree (Kentucky Housing Corporation n.d.). NKSH was the 10th Scholar House project in Kentucky.

Box 3.3. Northern Kentucky Scholar House

- **Location and history:** Operated by Brighton Center since 2015 in Newport, Kentucky, a suburb in the Cincinnati, Ohio, metropolitan area, which includes cities and towns in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana

- **Families served:** Single mothers with low incomes who were enrolled in postsecondary education, and their children. Northern Kentucky Scholar House prioritized families with children younger than 5 years old.

- **Key services for caregivers:** Postsecondary education and related wraparound supports; employment and training; behavioral health services

- **Key services for children:** High quality early childhood education through an on-site child development center

- **Key services for families:** Comprehensive case management; housing; community events

- **Intentional coordination of services:** Housing, early childhood education, therapy, and case management are co-located. Case management addressed needs of caregivers and children.

Core components and activities of the initiative

A set of foundational values informed how Brighton Center operated NKSH and its other services (Box 3.4). Brighton Center—and by extension, NKSH—was driven by the belief that diversity, equity, inclusion, and racial equity were imperative to the strength of its organization and its community. Brighton Center used a no wrong door approach to connect families to the services that they needed, regardless of how these families entered the organization. Staff were trained to take the perspective that families knew their own situations best. Therefore, Brighton Center bundled services based on individual families' needs, hopes, and dreams, and directed all eligible and interested families to NKSH. Brighton Center and NKSH practiced a partnership approach when working with families.

Box 3.4. NKSH's foundational values

Brighton Center operated according to a set of foundational values that informed NKSH and all services that the organization offered:

1. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and racial equity are imperative to the strength of the organization and its community.

2. No wrong door: no matter what service families seek initially, the initiative helps them access the services that would address their needs and goals.

3. Families know their own situations best.

NKSH families received services from Brighton Center and its partners. NKSH case managers coordinated with the local colleges where caregivers were enrolled to provide wraparound support and monitor family uptake and progress. Caregivers could receive employment supports and financial education through Brighton Center's Center for Employment Training and therapy on site through Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health Services. For children younger than five, programming at Early Scholars Child Development Center used a developmentally appropriate, research-based curriculum aligned with Kentucky's Early Childhood Standards. It had a rating of four out of five possible stars in the Kentucky Division of Child Care's QRIS system. In addition, Early Scholars staff administered ongoing developmental assessments and provided follow-up support based on assessment results, including referrals for early intervention services. NKSH offered households a range of other services, including safe and affordable housing, community events on topics such as parenting, and after-school care and tutoring for school-age children.

How services were integrated for both generations

NKSH integrated services for caregivers and children primarily through intensive, family-centered case management. Case management included the following:

- Monthly meetings between caregivers and their case managers.

- Completion of the Self-Sufficiency Matrix, a self-assessment tool that Brighton Center developed. NKSH used the Self-Sufficiency Matrix to assess families' self-sufficiency within several domains, help caregivers set goals for their own families, and identify additional supports that Brighton Center can provide to help families meet their goals. Families completed the assessment at program intake and updated their progress and goals several times per year during monthly meetings with their case manager.

- Referrals to services provided by Brighton Center and its partners.

- An approach that centered on working with families, instead of dictating the services families should receive. All supports provided by partners and staff were in service of what families wanted to do.

- Regular meetings between NKSH and their postsecondary partners to discuss caregivers' academic progress and attendance. Meetings were monthly or quarterly, depending on the postsecondary partner.

Prior to participating in NS2G, Brighton Center invested in the BrightonForce database, which enabled staff to link data across generations so case managers could take a holistic view of family progress along the Self-Sufficiency Matrix. NKSH case managers could also view outcomes across all the Brighton Center services a family was engaged with. Use of BrightonForce enabled NKSH to better understand families' needs, experiences, and outcomes. During NKSH's participation in NS2G, Brighton Center was still uncovering the potential of its data system, and staff hoped to eventually use this system to understand long-term outcomes for families that participated in NKSH. Service integration for both generations relied on staff support and co-location of services.

"The service that has been most helpful is Early Scholars. Being connected to the housing [makes] it really easy to take my child to day care, go to school, go to work. It's all in one place."

—NKSH focus group participant

Successes delivering two-generation services

NKSH identified successes related to co-location of staff, a safe and supportive community, and an improved data system. Housing, the Early Scholars Center, and the main office where caregivers met with their case manager were all located on the same campus, making it easy and convenient for caregivers to access support from their case manager and Brighton Center more broadly. Co-locating some staff, including the case manager, housing manager, and early education center staff, promoted communication among (primarily internal) partners, helping staff connect families to services quickly and efficiently. Caregivers who participated in focus groups also reported NKSH was a safe place to live with a supportive community that helped them and their children achieve their goals. Finally, the investment in BrightonForce enabled NKSH (and other Brighton Center services) to move away from legacy data management processes (primarily Excel spreadsheets) and organize its data to better understand families' experiences and outcomes.

> *"When we moved here, [my daughter] got involved in an accelerated school program… Seeing these young ladies do what they're doing has been motivating for my daughter."*
>
> —NKSH Focus group participant

Opportunities for improving the delivery of two-generation services

NKSH staff identified opportunities for improvement related to staff workloads, partner communication and vision, and maintaining benefits.

Within the organization

Despite the investment in a robust internal data system, many NKSH staff found it challenging to make time for data entry while balancing their other job responsibilities, especially when they were short-staffed. This was especially prevalent at the Early Scholars Center, which experienced regular turnover of teaching staff, despite the center offering some of the highest wages for early childhood teachers in the area (see the section on challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic).

Working with partners

Staff found that although coordinating with partners created more opportunities for families, data sharing and regular communication was often a struggle. One example was the administrative burden placed on families during the lengthy NKSH enrollment process, which required a significant time commitment from applicants and staffs. This burden was driven in part by the detailed paperwork each partner required and the lack of formalized sharing of information gathered from families at intake. Staff also said it could be hard to collaborate with partners who did not share their vision for working in partnership with families (as in the case of the Section 8 policy challenge discussed later in this section).

Policy and local context

Caregivers often faced the "cliff effect," meaning they lost access to income supports when they worked part-time. The NKSH case manager coordinated with staff at program offices in the county to reinstate benefits for caregivers whenever possible. In addition, because the local housing authority was a NKSH partner, the center was subject to the restrictions and requirements of Section 8. For example, some Section 8 housing regulations included zero tolerance policies that conflicted with organizational core values. These policies included expelling families that violated overnight guest policies. For example, if a

caregiver wanted to live with their partner, their family might be asked to leave the initiative before the caregiver completed school. The Kentucky Housing Corporation also set additional policies related to the Scholar House model, such as a requirement that the caregiver maintain a 2.0 grade point average.

Responding to challenges related to the COVID-19 public health emergency

The COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges for the NKSH program and its participants. The pandemic reduced the amount of contact staff had with families and led to frequent closures of the Early Scholars Center. These closures sometimes made it difficult for caregivers to attend classes or other services because they had to stay home with their children. Before the pandemic, caregivers' interactions with Early Scholars Center staff were a key avenue for identifying family needs and beginning the process of connecting them with critical resources. The inability to hold community events was especially challenging for families that were new to the program and felt isolated without the opportunity to meet other NKSH families. Lastly, staffing shortages created or exacerbated by disruptions related to COVID-19 strained existing staff and limited the number of children who could enroll in Early Scholars Center.

Figure 3.2. Northern Kentucky Scholar House at Brighton Center Logic Model

Northern Kentucky Scholar House at Brighton Center Logic Model

Family

Parent/caregiver
- Single parents
- Qualify for Section 8 housing
- Most are already pursuing postsecondary education at intake

Mutual motivation

Child (0–12 years)
- Priority given to families with at least one child younger than 5

Two-generation initiative

Foundational values
- Diversity, inclusion, and racial equity are imperative to the strength of our organization and our community.
- Families know their situations best.
- We bundle services based on the individualized needs of those we serve and their hopes and dreams for the future.
- Our dedicated staff practice a "no wrong door" and partnership approach.

Adult workforce development and education services
- Postsecondary education through local partners (primarily Gateway Community Technical College and Northern Kentucky University)
- Coordination with postsecondary partners to provide wraparound support (including Ready to Work) and monitor family uptake and progress
- Employment services and financial education through the Center for Employment Training (an on-site one-stop center)

Family services

Mutually reinforcing services to household
- Family-centered case management using the Self-Sufficiency Matrix and progress toward family-identified goals
- BrightonForce data system to link data across generations

Other services to household
- Safe, secure, affordable housing (Neighborhood Foundations)
- Co-location of housing and early care and education center
- Identification of needs and referrals to services internal and external to Brighton Center (for example, food assistance, clothing, early education intervention, Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health services)
- Community events; life skills and parenting workshops

Childhood services
- Individualized classroom instruction at Early Scholars Center
- Developmentally appropriate, research-based curriculum aligned with Kentucky's Early Childhood Standards
- Ongoing developmental assessments (Creative Curriculum, Teaching Strategies GOLD, BRIGANCE, Devereux, Ages and Stages) and follow-up support based on assessment results
- After-school care and tutoring for older students

Outcomes

Short-term (3–6 months)
- Parents are enrolled in college or training full-time.
- Parents find balance between caregiving, education, and any work responsibilities.
- Parents can meet and maintain minimum grade point average and attendance.

Longer-term (6–18 months or beyond)
- Parents complete degree or credential needed for employment.
- Parents maintain employment with income sufficient for asset building (at least 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level).

Short-term
- Family decompresses and transitions from "survival mode" to a feeling of stability.
- Both generations are connected to the medical, health, and basic supports they need.
- Family feels safe in and supported by their community.
- Risk for abuse and neglect is reduced.

Longer-term
- Family exits to safe, stable, unsubsidized housing with the resources required to locate, secure, move to, furnish, and maintain their new home.
- Family members nurture healthy relationships with each other and their community.
- Family members are insured and maintain physical and mental health.

Short-term
- Children are engaged in safe, quality early childhood education and care.
- Children show progress in developmental skills.

Longer-term
- Children are prepared to attend school or early education, reach developmental milestones, and advance in education (including entering kindergarten).
- Older children enroll in postsecondary education or training.

Outcomes for the family affect adults and children

Influencers

Individual: Security and safety concerns; lack of social support; unique needs of first-generation learners

Organizational: Lack of resources for more intensive services (for example, tutoring for adults) and case management (for example, data entry, analysis, and long-term follow-up with graduates)

Community: Affordable housing shortages and gentrification; generational poverty and systemic inequality; racism and bias; fragmented, uncoordinated services elsewhere in community

Policy: Statewide Scholar House model; Section 8 requirements; quality standards for child care and licensing; lack of adequate reimbursement for quality early care and education; required employment hours for select benefits (for example, Ready to Work for recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families); cliff effect of benefits

San Antonio Dual Generation Initiative

The San Antonio Dual Generation Initiative (Dual Gen), which started as a Promise Neighborhood[3] in 2011, is one of several initiatives led by United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County. It aimed to serve caregivers and children directly and in a coordinated manner to help caregivers obtain employment and to support childhood development.

Box 3.5. San Antonio Dual Gen Initiative

- **Location and history:** Dual Gen launched in 2011. It historically operated in the East Side neighborhood of San Antonio, Texas, and in 2022, it expanded to include the city's West Side neighborhood. Dual Gen was a collaborative, place-based service model. United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County served as the backbone organization, supporting and coordinating services across nine partner organizations.

- **Families served:** Families (typically single mothers) that had low incomes and a child who was 10 or younger, and resided in certain zip codes within San Antonio

- **Key services for caregivers:** Workforce training and education supported by individualized employment and financial coaching

- **Key services for children:** Subsidized child care and support obtaining placement in high quality child care; developmental screenings; mentorship, coaching, and training for child care providers

- **Key services for families:** Access to partner organizations and services; parenting engagement and education services; opportunities to strengthen social networks; community and family engagement events

- **Intentional coordination of services:** Individualized coaching and case management

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At the outset of NS2G, Dual Gen operated in the East Side neighborhood in San Antonio. During NS2G (but not directly because of the project), Dual Gen expanded operations to the West Side neighborhood. Most of the city's Black and Latino residents lived in the East Side and West Side neighborhoods. According to Dual Gen staff, historically, these communities had suffered from a lack of local capital investment to promote safety, family economic security, and business development.

Before expanding to the West Side, Dual Gen typically served 70 to 100 families at a time. This number was lower during the pandemic, but expansion to communities on the west side of San Antonio offered an opportunity to increase enrollment (described later). United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County served as the backbone organization for this collaborative initiative, which included nine other partners throughout the city. As the backbone organization, United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County provided training, quality assurance, and overall program management and oversight for the initiative by contracting directly with other local organizations to act as service providers, but did not itself provide direct services. This made partnerships and coordination essential to the initiative.

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[3] Promise Neighborhoods are an initiative led by the U.S. Department of Education to provide children and youth growing up in designated communities with access to great schools and strong systems of family and community support. The initiative aims to prepare participants to receive an excellent education and then transition successfully to college and a career. Promise Neighborhoods seek to improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth. For more information, see https://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov.

Core components and activities of the initiative

Three foundational values guided the services Dual Gen offered and how staff worked with families (Box 3.6). Families could enroll in the initiative through any partner in the network. This no wrong door approach provided participating families access to a wide array of services, as they could be referred to any partner organization through Dual Gen. Case managers provided each family with intensive and individualized case management. They helped each family develop goals, including goals for employment and education. Families led their own goal setting and achievement process. Case managers helped families set goals and identify specific needs through an assessment process, but case managers did not dictate the goals. Case managers helped families work toward their goals, meeting with them at least monthly and referring them to relevant services, such as education and training opportunities, both within case managers' organizations (if available) or at another partner organization in Dual Gen.

> **Box 3.6. Dual Gen foundational values**
>
> Dual Gen was based on several foundational values embedded into various aspects of its programming:
>
> 1. A long-term and stable relationship with a case manager is essential for a family's success.
> 2. Families are the experts in setting and achieving their goals.
> 3. Families can engage with Dual Gen through any partner organization (a no wrong door policy).

> *"[A Dual Gen staff member] enrolled me in a class [that] covers aspects of achieving a goal, a short-term goal. We started with a goal in the beginning, and they helped us figure out what we needed to prepare, what information do we need, what will help us achieve that goal."*
>
> —Dual Gen focus group participant

Each partner organization in Dual Gen offered a variety of training and educational options related to furthering adult participants' careers, and some offered parenting classes. Each family participated in Financial Empowerment coaching through one of the partner organizations. In this service, participants learned about managing their personal finances. Dual Gen also offered services to support childhood development by connecting families to home visiting services and developmental screenings. In the past, families participating in Dual Gen were provided a full-day, full-year child care slot (if needed) during their participation in programming and for as many as 60 days after they completed their training program. As of 2021, case managers helped families apply for child care subsidies and connected them with child care providers who had available subsidy slots. The Dual Gen backbone organization worked to make high quality child care options available in the area by providing ongoing TA through mentorship, coaching, and training of staff at local child care providers, to equip providers to serve Dual Gen families. Children could also receive additional services, such as developmental screenings, through Dual Gen partners.

The Dual Gen backbone organization developed an integrated database for Dual Gen called Signify and required all partners to use Signify to coordinate service delivery. Case managers were responsible for updating Signify for each family they worked with and could use the system to refer families to both partner organizations within Dual Gen and outside organizations connected to Signify. The Dual Gen backbone organization used Signify to track participation and other relevant metrics at the provider level, for both caregivers and children from the same family.

How services were integrated for both generations

Services were coordinated and integrated for both generations in three key ways:

1. **Monthly communication between families and case managers.** Case managers had individual in-person or virtual monthly meetings with caregivers in each family to discuss their progress toward their goals, including updates on education and training programs. During these meetings, case managers also checked on each family as a whole, discussing whether children were attending child care, changes in the household, and any additional needs they had. For example, if a family was interested in home visits, the case manager would connect that family to a partner that provided those services.

2. **Updates in Signify.** Case managers used Signify to refer families to partner organizations participating in Dual Gen. Partner staff then provided updates in Signify after each touchpoint with a family, so the case managers stayed informed about the services families participated in to help them reach their goals.

3. **Monthly partner and practitioner meetings.** United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County hosted and led monthly meetings with frontline staff and leaders from all Dual Gen partners. During these meetings, partners discussed changes to services provided through the initiative, upcoming events, and updates to the eligibility guidelines; problem solved around challenges; and reported progress toward monthly targets and metrics using data. Dual Gen also used practitioner meetings to discuss individual families and their cases as needed. The Dual Gen backbone organization trained partner organization staff so case managers across these partners could work with families in a consistent manner.

> *"Our mission is to truly change a family's life and lead them towards success and sustainability, [and] to continue to inform the community, city leaders, and [national leaders], how successful and needed the two-generation approach is."*
>
> —Dual Gen leader

Successes delivering two-generation services

In 2022, Dual Gen expanded to meet the needs of families living in the West Side neighborhood of San Antonio. With this expansion, Dual Gen increased the number of families it could reach and service options available to help families reach their goals. San Antonio of San Antonio and Bexar County staff saw the growth and evolution of the number of partners as a success. The Dual Gen backbone organization also viewed the development of Signify as a success. Staff envisioned Signify as a unified system that social services agencies across San Antonio—including those in Dual Gen and outside the initiative—could use to identify services for their participants.

Opportunities for improving the delivery of two-generation services

Although Dual Gen saw expansion as a marker of its success, the initiative also experienced growing pains in its progression to serving the West Side neighborhoods.

Within the initiative

The growth and evolution of partner organizations was both a success and a challenge for Dual Gen. Many of the initiative's original partner organizations dropped out or reduced their involvement in the initiative in the past two years, including the initiative's largest partner. Staff at most of the partner

organizations did not spend all of their time working with Dual Gen families. Instead, Dual Gen was one of several programs and initiatives that partner organizations offered or were a part of. The Dual Gen backbone organization and partner organizations identified this as a challenge in serving Dual Gen families as it resulted in a lack of overall capacity to recruit, enroll, and serve Dual Gen families.

From a programmatic and process perspective, Dual Gen identified several additional areas for improvement. The number of partners made it difficult to coordinate and communicate across organizations, leading to delays in referrals and follow-up for families. In addition, having numerous partners led to duplicative paperwork for families, as they would need to complete each partner organization's intake paperwork, as well as the Dual Gen-specific paperwork. Although the Dual Gen backbone organization viewed the development and implementation of Signify as a success overall, some partner staff reported that they had to enter the same data into Signify and their agency's internal database, which could be time-consuming.

Policy and local context

According to staff involved in Dual Gen, the communities they served have lacked high quality job opportunities and child care options. The area has also experienced a history of government disinvestment and continues to feel the impacts of systemic racism. Adoption and use of Signify outside of Dual Gen was also an area for improvement for the Dual Gen backbone organization.

Responding to challenges related to the COVID-19 public health emergency

The COVID-19 pandemic tested Dual Gen's ability to serve families. Case managers were unable to hold in-person meetings with families, families were unable to attend in-person events, and children were often home from child care, making it difficult for adults to participate in their education and training programs. For example, at the time of the site visit in early 2021, Dual Gen was serving about half the number of families that the initiative typically worked with. Throughout the pandemic, Dual Gen provided virtual services, hosted outside events for families, and continued providing families with supports.

Figure 3.3. San Antonio Dual Gen Initiative Logic Model
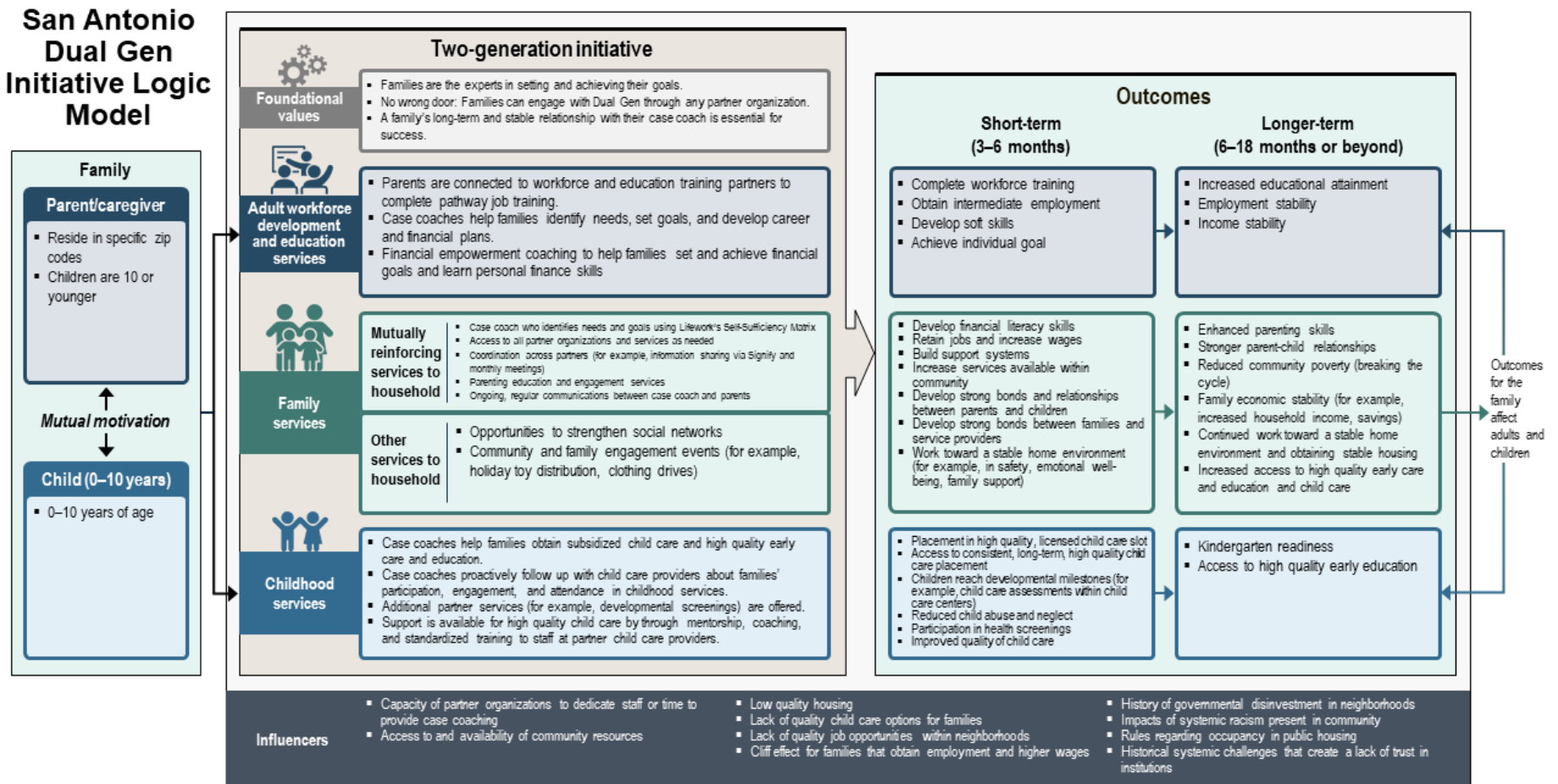
Valley Settlement

Valley Settlement provides programming and services to the fast-growing, primarily Latino/a immigrant community in the Roaring Fork Valley, located in western Colorado between two resort destinations, Aspen and Glenwood Springs. Members of this community typically earned low wages. Most families participating in Valley Settlement worked in construction or the resort and hospitality industry. Valley Settlement provided adult education and training, early childhood education, coaching, and other supportive services. As the initiative primarily served families that spoke at least some Spanish at home, Valley Settlement provided all its programs and services in Spanish.

Box 3.7. Valley Settlement

- **Location and history:** Valley Settlement started in 2011 as a response to the needs of the fast-growing and primarily Latino immigrant community in the Roaring Fork Valley, located in western Colorado between two resort destinations, Aspen and Glenwood Springs. The resorts in the area were major employers for the community Valley Settlement served. Many community members experienced low incomes.

- **Families served:** Latino families and children who lived in the Roaring Fork Valley. The initiative primarily served families that spoke Spanish or both English and Spanish at home. Family structures varied within the community and included single and two-caregiver households, blended families, or multiple generations under one roof.

- **Key services for caregivers:** Adult education and training; peer support; opportunities to strengthen social networks

- **Key services for children:** High quality early childhood education through a mobile preschool

- **Key services for families:** Wraparound supports; home visiting; coaching for home-based child care providers; education on child development and parenting

- **Intentional coordination of services:** Comprehensive, holistic case management

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Core components and activities of the initiative

A set of five foundational values guided Valley Settlement's services (Box 3.8). Valley Settlement staff created each of its six programs in response to the needs of the community. Valley Settlement accepted funding only from organizations that aligned with its foundational values. For example, because Valley Settlement served some community members that did not have lawful documentation or proof of citizenship, it did not accept funding from sources that required participants to provide this documentation. As of 2022, Valley Settlement offered six programs:

1. **Lifelong Learning:** a free adult education program that offered classes on topics such as English, Spanish literacy, computer skills, and mathematics

2. **Family Support Team:** an individualized support and resource navigation program

3. **Learning with Love:** a program that integrated group classes and home visiting, using the Parents as Teachers curriculum

4. **Parent Mentor:** a school-based volunteer program designed to help caregivers feel more comfortable advocating for themselves and their families in school settings

5. **Alma:** a peer support and mentoring program that was available to pregnant women and new mothers

6. **El Busesito:** a mobile preschool that served children ages 3 through 5

Valley Settlement staff believed its core components were embedded in multiple programs. Valley Settlement provided caregivers with the support they needed to advocate for themselves and their children through Parent Mentor, Learning with Love, and Alma. Lifelong Learning provided free adult education to encourage adults to pursue a GED, higher education, or certifications to support professional advancement and economic security. The Family Support Team used family navigators to refer families to resources.

To help children meet developmental milestones, build their confidence and agency, and prepare them for kindergarten, Valley Settlement operated El Busesito, a mobile preschool for children ages 3 through 5. As a mobile program, El Busesito eliminated transportation barriers and provided free preschool to families that needed it most. It incorporated Colorado's state prekindergarten standards and learning objectives from Teaching Strategies GOLD, a widely used early learning assessment system, to track children's development during enrollment. Learning with Love was an additional program that aimed to reinforce child development at home.

> **Box 3.8. Valley Settlement's foundational values**
>
> Valley Settlement was based on several foundational values and embedded these values into aspects of its programming:
>
> 1. The initiative focused its programming and service delivery on the needs of Latino families living in Roaring Fork Valley, Colorado.
> 2. Initiative staff engaged in a continuous listening process to fully understand families' goals, aspirations, and barriers.
> 3. The initiative worked in the community to integrate programming into the rhythm of each family's life.
> 4. Initiative staff were intentional about helping participants strengthen social bonds, cultivate leadership, and build networks of support in each program.
> 5. The initiative accepted funding only from organizations that align with its values.

How services were integrated for both generations

The initiative offered wraparound services to all participants through the Family Support Team. Family navigators worked with caregivers to identify each family's goals and needs during intake. Family navigators met with families in their homes, assisted families in times of crisis, and connected families to community resources, including referrals to local community organizations. When a family navigator referred a family to a service in the community, they helped that family navigate the referral to its destination. For example, families were sometimes unable to access a community resource because registration forms were not available in Spanish, or because they did not have a device or internet access to complete electronic forms. Their family navigator helped those families access, translate, and complete the forms. Family navigators also helped connect families to early education or child care. As a family wrapped up its time with the Family Support Team, it could participate in other Valley Settlement programs.

While participating in NS2G, Valley Settlement began implementing an initiative-wide case management and data system called TRAX that enabled it to link caregivers and children from the same family. Prior to acquiring TRAX, Valley Settlement did not have a centralized data system to help it integrate services for caregivers and their children.

Successes delivering two-generation services

Valley Settlement staff identified their relationships with participants and connections to communities in the Roaring Fork Valley as successes. Every program offered through the initiative was developed to meet the needs of families in the community. Valley Settlement conducted regular listening tours of the community as part of its strategic planning process. In addition to the listening tours, initiative staff had an open dialogue with participating families to identify additional service needs or priorities. Participants learned about programming through word of mouth, and initiative staff regularly knocked on doors in neighborhoods with high concentrations of Latino families to share information about programming and to build relationships with new families. Initiative staff noted that some past participants had joined the initiative as staff or program managers.

"Someone from the program explained it to me, and the program sounded great. The program teaches a lot about child development, and it's a program that has taught me a lot about how children think, what to expect at different ages, how to understand children, and the way they express themselves at different stages. I've learned a lot about that and how be a good parent and interact with them through a lot of different activities."

—Valley Settlement focus group participant

Opportunities for improving the delivery of two-generation services

Valley Settlement found opportunities for improvement in its referral processes, collecting and using data across the programs, and preventing program staff from feeling isolated in the initiative. The organization also experienced challenges engaging partners and obtaining preschool licensing.

Within the organization

According to initiative leaders, families typically enrolled in multiple Valley Settlement programs concurrently. However, staff reported that the internal referral process could be more streamlined. Although Valley Settlement aimed to assign a family navigator from the Family Support Team to each family, doing so was not always possible. Because of the multiple steps involved in internal referrals, which involved the supervisors of direct services staff, some referrals could be missed. For example, if a family with a child in El Busesito was interested in joining Learning with Love, the El Busesito teacher had to share information about the family with the El Busesito supervisor. The El Busesito supervisor then had to share information about the family with the Learning with Love supervisor, who would then connect with a Learning with Love staff member responsible for engaging the family.

Before the implementation of TRAX, data collection varied by program. This made it difficult for staff to use data to assess how programs were helping families and the number of families participating in programming. Valley Settlement collected data about the families participating in individual programs using surveys. Families sometimes completed the surveys using different names or variations of the same name, making it difficult for Valley Settlement to determine the total number of families participating in the initiative, without duplicates. Valley Settlement acquired TRAX to address data challenges and track participant outcomes, and as of 2022, implementation was ongoing.

Valley Settlement staff also described feeling isolated in their programs. Although they sometimes referred families to other programs, some staff shared that they often did not interact with staff from other programs. As a result, staff expressed concerns about not having a current understanding of the programming available to families or what to keep in mind when referring families to one program over another. Staff acknowledged that this isolation sometimes made it difficult to ensure staff provided families with the same level of engagement regardless of which program they participated in.

Policy and local context

Because mobile preschools were not eligible for preschool licenses in Colorado, El Busesito was not a licensed preschool. A license would allow the initiative to pursue additional funding and, as a result, expand its services to serve more children. Although El Busesito was not licensed, Valley Settlement received a state waiver that allowed it to deliver programming to preschool-age children.

Responding to challenges related to the COVID-19 public health emergency

The COVID-19 pandemic was particularly difficult for many of the families that participated in Valley Settlement services. Although Valley Settlement shifted services to a remote model, staff said the format made it difficult to build relationships with families. In 2022, Valley Settlement resumed in-person services.

"The programs are more than an organization. They really care about the families. What I realized about Learning with Love is that if someone has a need or concern, there is someone there to listen to the situation. If there is information that you need, they will get it for you."

—Valley Settlement Focus group participant

Figure 3.4. Valley Settlement Logic Model
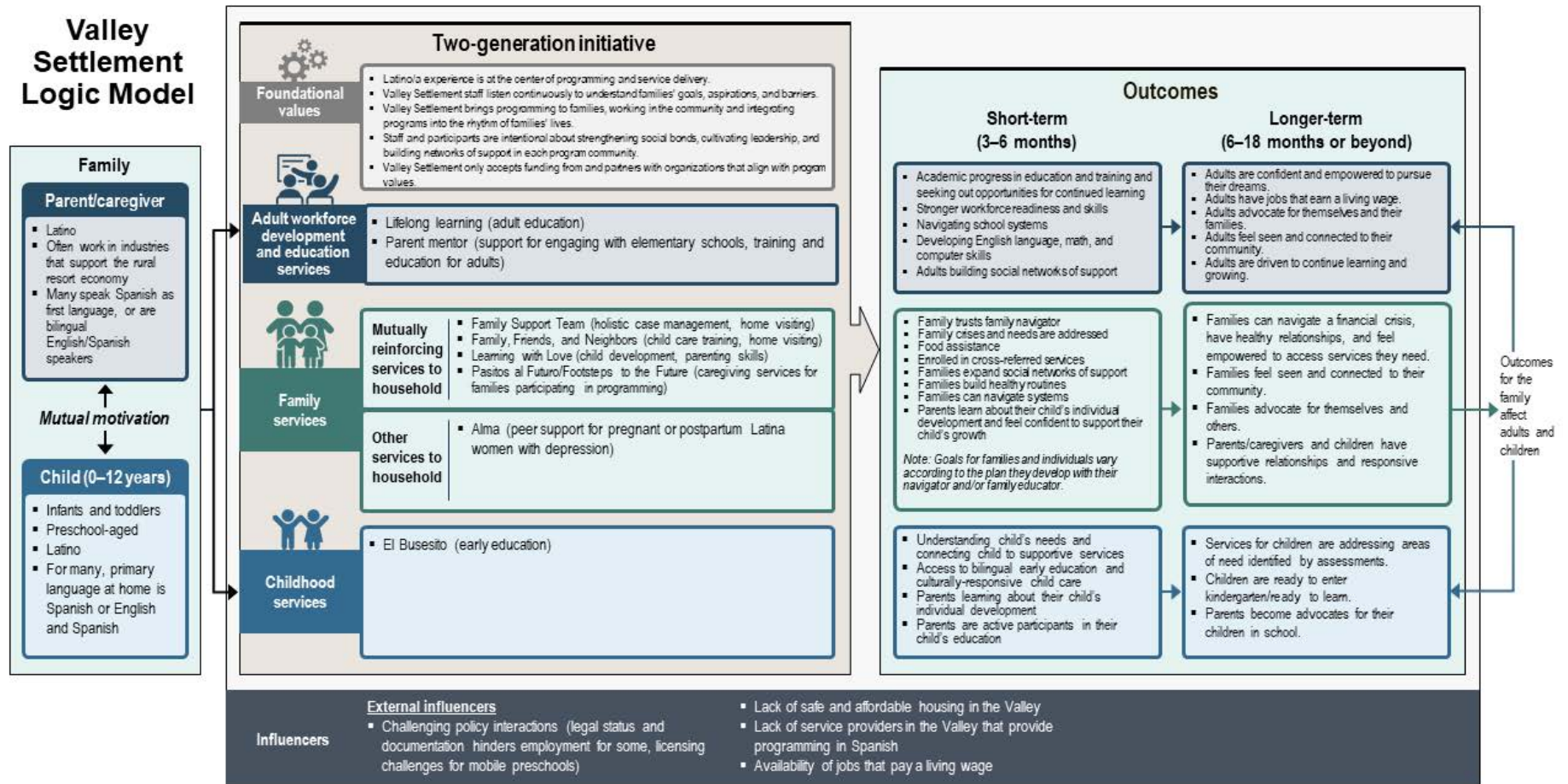
Themes in two-generation service delivery

In the Learn phase, initiatives participated in a site visit that included staff interviews and participant focus groups, activities to identify core components and develop a logic model, and two collaborative meetings to identify challenges and opportunities to strengthen their service delivery models. Taken together, these activities helped initiatives and NS2G TA providers build a common understanding of initiatives' goals and services and identify opportunities for improvement during the Innovate and Improve phases of TA service provision. Themes from across the initiatives emerged from Learn activities:

- The services that each initiative provided were highly tailored to the cultural backgrounds and needs of the communities they served.

- Initiatives all used a no wrong door approach to enrollment, so a family could begin receiving services through any component service—or partner—in the initiative.

- Foundational values prioritized relationship-building between staff and families and delivering services aligned with families' individual goals.

- Three initiatives used integrated data systems as platforms for initiative staff to communicate and share referrals with one another; the fourth began implementing such a data system during NS2G.

- Three initiatives defined specific staff roles to connect families to different services within the initiatives.

- Initiatives tended to serve small numbers of families because they operated in sparsely populated or narrowly defined geographic areas or because they had an intensive service delivery model.

4. Strengthening Two-Generation Initiatives: Findings from Innovate and Improve Formative Evaluation Activities

The second and third phases of formative evaluation work with NS2G TA providers were called Innovate and Improve. In these respective phases, initiative staff developed strategies to address challenges they identified, then piloted the strategies using rapid cycle learning. In this chapter, we describe the focus of initiatives' work in the Innovate and Improve phases and the insights they generated.

Two-generation initiative implementation challenges and opportunities for change

The topics that initiatives focused on for rapid cycle learning related to intentionally aligning and coordinating their services (Table 4.1). Dual Gen and NKSH addressed topics related to coordination with partners. Valley Settlement and Garrett County CAC, initiatives that did not rely as much on external partners to provide services, focused rapid cycle learning on intentional coordination between internal departments.

Table 4.1. Focus for rapid cycle learning

Initiative name	Goal	Strategy and focus initiative staff selected for rapid cycle learning	Why the strategy could lead to improvements in participant outcomes, according to initiative staff
Garrett County Community Action Committee	Reduce chances that families' identified needs go unaddressed.	Formalize the process for following up on internal referrals by building it into EmpowOR, the initiative's database.	Having email reminders and accountability measures built into EmpowOR would help staff provide timely referrals and enable them to focus on supporting families instead of figuring out the status of a referral. Timely referrals would reduce families' frustration.
Northern Kentucky Scholar House	Decrease enrollment burden on participants who have to repeatedly tell their story and share the same information with different partners.	Streamline enrollment paperwork and enhance data sharing among partners.	Reducing the burden of sharing family challenges is a principle of trauma-informed practice. Reducing the enrollment burden would enable families to become engaged with services and staff more quickly.
San Antonio Dual Generation Initiative	Build staff knowledge and capacity to increase enrollment of new families and referrals between Dual Gen partners.	Train partner staff and require partners to dedicate specific staff time to the initiative.	Staff who are fully dedicated to the initiative would shift their mindsets from working on behalf of their employer to working as a part of Dual Gen.
Valley Settlement	Increase staff knowledge of Valley Settlement offerings to increase internal referrals.	Deliver staff-driven presentations about each Valley Settlement program during biweekly meetings.	Staff who are more aware of the initiative's offerings would be better able to identify the services that might meet a family's needs.

To address these topics, initiative staff developed and tested small changes to streamline processes and build staff knowledge and capacity. Dual Gen and Valley Settlement developed trainings for staff. Garrett

County CAC and NKSH revised key processes for referrals and intake, respectively. Some initiatives addressed multiple aims in rapid cycle learning. Dual Gen, for example, also sought to identify the best way to allocate staff time to the initiative. NKSH sought to simplify the intake process for families and identify opportunities to share data with partners. These activities represented small steps toward more intentional alignment and coordination of services. Because these steps were small, they fit within the time frame of the formative

> *"This project led us to create [more] intentionality around that coordination piece and that communication piece, as a nonprofit, and with all the programs we have."*
>
> —Valley Settlement staff member

evaluations and the initiatives' bandwidth. The formative evaluations started with simple strategies to make change more manageable. When replicated over time, the process of identifying a challenge, developing and implementing a solution, and then implementing and assessing how the solution worked could build towards substantial improvements in the intentional alignment and coordination of services to two generations, and normalize change as a part of serving clients.

Garrett County CAC

The opportunity for change

Staff used the initiative's EmpowOR database to refer families to services from different departments. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, staff often followed up on these referrals through regular in-person interactions with people in other departments. This same type of informal follow-up was often not possible when staff were working remotely during the pandemic. Initiative staff believed that creating a formal process for follow-up on referrals would reduce the chances that referrals "fell through the cracks" and would improve to families' access to the services they needed.

The strategy

Garrett County CAC developed a formal referral process that used EmpowOR to help staff track pending referrals. The new process included (1) formalizing the expectation that staff would respond to incoming referrals within two business days; (2) updating an EmpowOR dashboard so that staff and supervisors could see the status of all pending referrals they sent or had assigned to them; (3) having EmpowOR send automated reminders for overdue pending referrals; and (4) developing a report in EmpowOR to track referral response time.

> *"With this more rigorous follow-up on referrals, we hope to see more families receiving services and receiving them quicker, which will in turn lead to outcomes —not just that they're receiving energy assistance or asset building, but [that] it leads potentially to owning a home, or that child entering kindergarten ready to learn.*
>
> —Garrett County CAC staff member

Garrett County CAC conducted two improvement cycles. In the first cycle, Garrett County CAC staff planned to send manual email reminders for overdue pending referrals. This manual approach was a necessary first step, because any changes to the automated reminders had to be programmed by the EmpowOR developer, an external contractor. Garrett County CAC planned to involve the developer in making changes for later improvement cycles. To assess whether the revised referral process was working, Garrett County CAC staff planned to (1) review data on

how long it took for staff to follow up on referrals and (2) conduct a focus group with staff about the revised process. Ultimately, because of delays in the EmpowOR updates, Garrett County CAC elected to continue with a manual reminder process for its second improvement cycle. In the focus group, initiative staff reported that the updated referral process was easier, more direct, and faster, but made only two referrals during the first cycle. As a result, Garrett County CAC staff determined that they did not have enough information to make any changes, and so they kept the process the same for the second improvement cycle. In the second cycle, Garrett County CAC conducted additional focus groups with staff to gather their input on the revised referral process and inform future changes. From the focus groups, Garrett County CAC leaders learned that the revised referral process was helpful for staff, but the expectation of follow-up within two business days was not always achievable. Leaders planned to have follow-up conversations with staff to understand their concerns better and get their input on what a reasonable turnaround expectation would be.

Northern Kentucky Scholar House

The opportunity for change

Staff, partners, and participants shared that it was challenging for families to communicate with and fulfill the requirements of different service providers—in particular, its housing partner. This was especially apparent during the enrollment process, which involved a lengthy packet of forms for NKSH's postsecondary and housing providers and the Early Scholars Center. NKSH staff believed that this paperwork overburdened potential participants because it was complex and required them to tell their story repeatedly.

The strategy

NKSH used three improvement cycles to iteratively streamline the information that it required families to provide at intake to improve the enrollment experience for staff and participants. In the first improvement cycle, NKSH staff developed a flow diagram of the enrollment process and gathered feedback on its existing enrollment packet. Staff volunteers from the NKSH parent organization, Early Scholars, and a postsecondary partner completed the packet, recorded the time it took them to complete it, and gave feedback on readability, accessibility, and items they thought were redundant. Using that feedback, NKSH decided on forms and data elements to streamline, eliminate, or move to an enrollment interview.

"A few of our outcomes are around parent satisfaction with their experiences. Our families come to us in crisis, and when you're in crisis, it's so hard to focus. So, [we wanted to take] some of that burden away and spend less time collecting information so they'll have more free time to dedicate to school [and] their children.

—NKSH staff member

In the second improvement cycle, NKSH staff asked current families to complete the revised process and collected additional feedback from them using a short survey they developed. The survey asked the applicant to reflect on whether they had to provide the same information on different forms, the ease of completing the packet, the accessibility of the language in the forms, and specific suggestions for improving the enrollment process. NKSH staff also met with the housing partner to discuss what parts of the packet they could streamline while still complying with federal housing regulations. Because the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations required many items, NKSH refined

the packet again to reduce the number of non-HUD items, such as those that the NKSH parent organization asked for, and decided to offer individualized support to people completing the packet. After this second revision, NKSH staff planned to pilot the revised application packet and procedures with new applicant families and ask for them to complete the survey in a third improvement cycle. As of early 2023, this testing was ongoing.

San Antonio Dual Gen

The opportunity for change

After expanding its service area, Dual Gen found new partners providing workforce development services and case coaching were having difficulty understanding and describing the core values of the initiative's two-generation approach. Partner staff also split their time between Dual Gen and other organizational initiatives. Dual Gen backbone organization staff found that two metrics it tracked were lower than anticipated: (1) enrollment of new families and (2) volume of referrals between partners.

The strategy

Dual Gen developed a two-pronged strategy to address challenges related to staff knowledge and capacity. In its first improvement cycle, Dual Gen backbone organization staff prepared and delivered a training for partner staff about case coaching—the model for how case managers should work with families to set goals, provide referrals to services in the initiative, and follow up with families regularly on their progress. After the training, the Dual Gen backbone organization administered a staff survey and learned that partner staff understood their roles but didn't have enough time to meet with Dual Gen families.

"Our work with the NS2G team really begins a conversation with our initiative partners regarding the amount of time needed to work alongside our Dual Gen families…. That dedicated staff will not only meet with a family on a monthly basis, but will collect information and place it in our data system, and maintain a relationship with the family during their time in the initiative."

—San Antonio Dual Gen staff member

For the improvement cycles that followed, Dual Gen backbone organization staff reviewed the staffing configurations of partners to determine which configuration appeared to help case managers focus on enrolling and serving families in the initiative. One partner dedicated a staff member to work on Dual Gen full-time, and another partner organization required several staff members to dedicate one to two days per week to the initiative. In a second improvement cycle, Dual Gen backbone organization staff used its data system to see which partner had higher numbers of new enrollments, active children and adults, and referrals. Staff learned that the organization that fully dedicated a staff member to the initiative had more enrollments, but the data on referrals and active participants was inconclusive due to the characteristics of the organizations. For example, the partner that had staff members dedicate one to two days per week provided more referrals, but it also provided fewer services in-house than the partner with fully dedicated staff. In interviews, case managers using the second staffing configuration believed that splitting their time between multiple programs reduced the quality of their work. Based on the information, Dual Gen backbone organization staff determined that full-time case managers would probably be the best approach to staffing the initiative, but decided to collect additional data in its third improvement cycle before recommending a specific staffing configuration to partners.

In its third improvement cycle, Dual Gen backbone organization staff used its data system to review the frequency of scheduled meetings between case managers and families to try to understand whether full-time dedicated case managers were able to spend more time meeting with families. Dual Gen backbone organization staff also found these data to be incomplete, and as a result, it was hard for the organization to draw any conclusions. In a follow-up time use survey, Dual Gen backbone organization staff found that case managers spent almost as much time on data entry as they did meeting with families. Going forward, it identified a need to retrain staff on entering complete data, and identify ways to simplify data entry.

Valley Settlement

The opportunity for change

Valley Settlement staff reported feeling that they did not have a strong grasp of all of the initiative's offerings. They believed that this lack of staff awareness might keep families from accessing all of the services that could help the families achieve their goals. Initiative leaders described a mindset among staff that they had to "be all things to all people"—in other words, that they were solely responsible for addressing all of a family's needs. Staff thought sharing more information with each other about services would help them provide more and better referrals to meet families' needs.

The strategy

Valley Settlement decided to integrate staff-led presentations about each Valley Settlement program into standing all-staff meetings. Initiative staff wanted these presentations to be informal and interactive. Integrating them into existing meetings and recording them made the presentations accessible to staff who often worked off-site.

Valley Settlement operated six programs, so each of three improvement cycles focused on presentations from two programs. Valley Settlement staff used data from a strategic planning session to identify the order in which programs would present, prioritizing the programs that staff knew the least about. After each improvement cycle, Valley Settlement gathered feedback from staff about their understanding of services and eligibility criteria for each program. Initially, Valley Settlement intended to use these data to adjust the format of the presentations between each improvement cycle. After the first improvement cycle, staff determined instead to keep the presentation formats the same and review all data at the end of all the presentations. Valley Settlement leaders were also interested in looking at whether the volume of cross-program referrals increased after the presentations, but the initiative's data system was in the middle of an upgrade during rapid cycle learning. As a result, the data system could not support such an analysis. Through surveys, staff indicated they found the presentations helpful and felt more confident about providing referrals. Valley Settlement planned to incorporate presentations into new staff onboarding processes and develop handouts for staff describing the features of Valley Settlement programs.

> *"Because we're hoping to have a higher cross-program referral, as we understand each family's needs and how they could benefit from another program in our organization… that also comes with really equipping our staff and having staff fully understand what every other program does."*
>
> —Valley Settlement staff member

Insights from improvement cycles and challenges with rapid cycle learning

The small number of staff in the initiatives posed challenges to formative evaluation and improvement efforts. Key staff from each initiative departed their respective organizations during the formative evaluations, increasing burdens on initiative staff and creating delays in formative evaluation activities. For example, Valley Settlement, Garrett County CAC, and Dual Gen experienced turnover in the leadership and data and research staff. NKSH dealt with turnover among the staff who worked directly with participants. Staff from the initiatives participating in the formative evaluations valued the speed and intensity of rapid cycle learning, noting it was motivating to develop a strategy and move quickly into implementing it. However, limited capacity contributed to some delays in the formative evaluations.

In their formative evaluations, initiatives encountered obstacles that they could not address. In Dual Gen, the backbone organization coordinated partners but they had no direct oversight of case managers who worked directly with participants and could not require them to work in a certain way. As a result, Dual Gen leaders decided to use improvement cycles to observe how partners allocated staff to the initiative. To update EmpowOR, Garrett County CAC staff had to put in a request with the contracted firm that builds and tailors that system. The request was not fulfilled during the initiative's two improvement cycles. NKSH learned through its second improvement cycle that several items and forms in its enrollment packet were required by federal housing regulations and could not be changed.

Despite these challenges, staff at two-generation initiatives found the strategies they tested improved their practices:

- Although **Garrett County CAC** was not able to update EmpowOR by publication time, staff were positive about the new referral process and suggested changes to the process that Garrett County CAC could make on its own, such as extending the two business day window for responding to a referral.

- As of publication time, **NKSH** staff were continuing to enroll participants using the revised application materials. Leaders reported that the revised process had created more opportunities for relationship building between NKSH staff and participants. Although some parts of the enrollment packet could not change because of policy constraints, NKSH staff identified other parts of the packet with duplicate questions that they could streamline or eliminate to improve the intake process for families.

- **Dual Gen** backbone organization staff reported that insights from the improvement cycles affirmed their commitment to requesting partners dedicate staff to the initiative instead of mixing Dual Gen responsibilities into their other job responsibilities. They also identified areas to retrain partner staff.

- **Valley Settlement** staff reported that the presentations about the initiative's programs were informative. Surveys suggested that staff knowledge of programs and eligibility criteria grew after attending the presentations.

Opportunities for formative evaluation initiatives to continue improvement activities

The two-generation initiatives participating in NS2G completed rapid cycle learning by early 2023. In January 2023, staff from the four formative evaluation initiatives participated in a two-day virtual meeting to reflect on their NS2G experiences and plan how they would continue their improvement work. The opportunities that initiative staff identified addressed four areas:

1. **Improving program data.** Staff from two initiatives, NKSH and Valley Settlement, planned to work on this area in the future. NKSH used BrightonForce, the Salesforce-based database of Brighton

Center, its parent organization. Initiative staff were interested in comparing the items in BrightonForce with the intended outcomes documented in the logic model that NKSH staff developed with support from NS2G. After taking this step, staff would be able to identify opportunities to assess outcomes for NKSH and needs for additional data collection. During NS2G, Valley Settlement adopted a new integrated data system. Valley Settlement staff expressed interest in increasing staff use of the data system so it could be used to report program outcomes and improve services. As a first step, Valley Settlement staff identified a need to understand the obstacles that staff had to using the system and how staff believed the data system could be useful for their day-to-day work.

2. **Building and maintaining staff capacity.** Garrett County CAC worked on integrating services by developing an internal referral process during its work with NS2G. To build on this work, County CAC staff expressed interest in creating a staff position focused on encouraging integration of different departments within the agency, such as by leading conversations between staff, coordinating cross-department meetings and coordinating training of Garrett County CAC staff so that they developed and maintained a common understanding of the agency's two-generation approach.

3. **Supporting partner agencies.** Dual Gen's work in NS2G focused on building the capacity of case managers, who are employed by partner agencies to provide case management and coaching to participants. The case managers in partner agencies are also responsible for enrolling participants into the Dual Gen Initiative. Dual Gen backbone organization staff wanted to build on their work in NS2G by providing additional support to partner agencies to identify and enroll eligible families. The backbone organization staff identified the first step of having a conversation with the largest partner agency to clarify eligibility criteria for the initiative and the single-generation services in which eligible families might already participate. After that initial conversation, Dual Gen staff could discuss approaches to reaching out to families to assess their interest in Dual Gen.

4. **Increasing uptake of referrals for mental health services.** In addition to improving the use of data, NKSH staff expressed interest in building on efforts to minimize burden on families and ensuring its enrollment process used a trauma-informed approach. The NKSH case manager shared that many NKSH caregivers struggle with their mental well-being because of past trauma. When needed, NKSH refers families to two mental health care providers in the community. According to the case manager, many caregivers hesitate to accept these referrals because there is a stigma around receiving this type of care. To decrease this stigma and increase the acceptance of referrals, NKSH leaders wanted to explore training for staff on the unique needs of the populations they most often support (mainly single mothers), continue holding trainings in mental health first aid, and explore caregiver-led "cafes" as potential avenues to discuss topics related to mental health. NKSH said it plans to explore various trauma-informed approaches, so all caregivers can "show up for themselves and their children" and change their community's culture regarding mental health.

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5. Insights and Lessons Across Formative Evaluations

The formative evaluation work provided initiative staff with an opportunity (and a requirement) to step back from their day-to-day responsibilities, examine how initiatives' services were coordinated to lead to intended outcomes, and explore challenges and opportunities in strengthening service delivery. Rapid cycle learning, a component of the formative evaluations, offered initiatives a framework for systematically and iteratively pilot testing and adjusting strategies to improve coordination between services and partners, reduce staff burden, and enhance the experiences of families. In the final virtual meeting described in Chapter 2, the four initiatives generated insights about how formative evaluation helped strengthen their initiatives.

Creating a two-generation logic model was a useful foundation for program improvement

Although the four initiatives had mapped their services to outcomes before participating in NS2G, the initiatives reported that the logic modeling activities that were part of the formative evaluations built on earlier work and helped them identify new opportunities for improvement. By taking a two-generational perspective, the logic modeling activities introduced a comprehensive view of family services and a focus on the services and outcomes for two generations that they had not previously explored. Valley Settlement, for example, had developed theories of change for each of its programs but had not investigated how those theories fit together. The NKSH parent organization had a logic model to describe all of its services, but had not specifically examined NKSH.

> *"[The logic model] really set the foundation for everything else we did, really fleshing out… how we're going to present the work that we do and the flow [to] the outcomes that we hope to get from it."*
>
> —San Antonio Dual Gen staff member

NKSH. Garrett County CAC had neither updated its logic model recently nor invited a range of staff to contribute to it. Dual Gen backbone organization staff reported that developing a logic model with NS2G TA providers helped the initiative think through how to talk to partners about its goals and how its services contributed to intended outcomes. In this way, developing the logic model set the stage for the opportunity for change that Dual Gen focused on: coordinating and communicating with partner agencies.

Before each initiative held its first collaborative workshop, key initiative staff developed a logic model with NS2G TA providers. They identified important features to include in the logic model to reflect important principles of two-generation services, including mutually reinforcing services; the characteristics of the primary caregiver, child, and family, and their mutual motivation; and the foundational values that inform how the initiative works with families (Aharpour and Baumgartner 2022). In the first workshop, a broader group of staff and partners reviewed the logic model. They provided input on what should go in the logic model and used it as a foundation for brainstorming what was working well—and not as well—in the initiative.

Carefully documenting the opportunity for change and the improvement strategy helped initiative leaders communicate clearly with staff

After the collaborative workshops, key initiative staff completed a program improvement worksheet with NS2G TA providers. The purpose of the worksheet (Appendix B) was for initiative staff to get specific

about the strategy they wanted to test so that it would be as strong as possible (Fung and Sama-Miller 2022). Starting by documenting their improvement opportunity helped initiatives determine whether they had chosen a strategy that could make a difference in participating families' outcomes. Providing granular details about the strategy would support strong implementation, because the worksheet prompted staff to document each staff member's role in the strategy and the supports they would need, potential obstacles and ways to overcome them, and indicators that would help them know whether the strategy had the potential to contribute to improved outcomes for families.

Initiative staff reported that the worksheet also promoted clear communication among their team before launching an improvement cycle. NKSH staff reported that they shared the worksheet with other staff in the initiative and at its parent organization. The worksheet helped all of the initiative staff develop a shared understanding about the goals and process of the strategy. Valley Settlement staff reported that it planned to use the worksheet to pilot a summer camp in 2023.

Two-generation initiatives lengthened iterative improvement cycles to learn more about their improvement strategies or adjusted their planned approach as needed

Two initiatives found the volume of data collected during improvement cycles was not enough to inform changes to their strategies; they needed more data, collected over a longer period. Garrett County CAC staff made only two internal referrals in the initiative's first improvement cycle. As a result, it made no changes to its revised internal referral process for the second improvement cycle, instead using that period to field more referrals and conduct focus groups with staff. In the second improvement cycle, Garrett County CAC leaders learned that staff needed more than two business days to follow up on a referral. NKSH had a low volume of enrollment appointments scheduled in early 2023 when it rolled out a revised enrollment packet in new intake appointments, so staff decided to leave the third improvement cycle open-ended with no firm end date, to collect as much feedback as possible. Limited enrollment was a by-product of the scale and duration of service delivery in NKSH's model because the initiative had a limited number of apartments available and expected participants to remain in the initiative until a caregiver completed her postsecondary degree. Knowing this, initiative staff structured the first two improvement cycles to collect data in creative ways—by asking staff and board members and currently enrolled families to review the enrollment packet and provide feedback as if they were participating in the intake process themselves.

Staff from the other two initiatives decided to use later improvement cycles to collect additional data and iteratively explore additional questions without adjusting their strategies. Valley Settlement reported that staff feedback about the program presentations in the first improvement cycle was inconclusive, so initiative leaders decided to keep the presentation format the same for the last two improvement cycles. In its second improvement cycle, Dual Gen staff observed that the partner with a fully dedicated staff member enrolled more families than the partner with multiple part-time staff. Feedback gathered in interviews with partner staff suggested that full-time staff had more time to recruit families, but Dual Gen staff wanted more data to understand what could be driving differences in enrollment. As a result, they continued to explore differences in staffing in a third improvement cycle by reviewing data on the case management meetings that case managers from different partner organizations logged in the Dual Gen data system.

These examples from the formative evaluations suggest that initiatives using rapid cycle learning consider the processes they are trying to influence when designing improvement cycles. Slower or low volume

processes might need longer improvement cycles. Initiatives might also need to remain flexible and open to adjusting the length or focus of later improvement cycles based on what they learn in earlier ones.

The rapid cycle learning approach was motivating

Reflecting on the formative evaluations, staff from multiple initiatives reported that the rapid cycle learning process empowered them to initiate a change process by helping them envision change of a manageable size. The opportunities for improvement that initiatives identified were large and fundamental to two-generation initiative operations, such as coordination between partners and service providers. Improvement cycles in NS2G intentionally started with small changes to agency practices and services. Initiative staff reflected that starting small and working iteratively helped make program improvement more manageable and approachable, particularly when the challenges were large or staff didn't know where to start.

The time frame for rapid cycle learning boosted staff motivation, although in some cases, it limited data collection. Because rapid cycle learning prompted action, it could be motivating to staff. Initiatives found that one of the biggest assets of the rapid cycle learning approach was moving quickly from developing an idea to testing it. Discussion of rapid cycle learning often emphasizes the speed of iteration—conducting an improvement cycle that lasts as little as two weeks (Derr et al. 2022) or even shorter (AHRQ 2020). As described, NS2G initiatives sometimes encountered difficulty collecting enough information in a short amount of time to inform adjustments to their strategies. One initiative staff member described rapid cycle learning as a "framework for actually getting things done rather than just talking about it and it going nowhere."

> *"[Rapid cycle learning] holds us accountable for our work and forces us to take action."*
>
> —NKSH staff member

The strategies that initiatives tested intentionally integrated supports for staff

The initiatives in the formative evaluations prioritized relationships between staff and participants in their approaches to serving caregivers and their children. The strategies that initiatives developed and tested aimed to support staff and give them the time and space to develop these relationships by taking the following actions:

> *"Something that is very cultural to us, as Latinos, is that you play every role. You are the mom, the therapist, the nurse… you are everything…. So that emotional toll was something that filtered through our initiative. … We were able to say, 'this is our organization. These are all the programs we have, and [this is] how we can work together to support our families.'"*
>
> —Valley Settlement staff member

- **Making sure staff have enough time to dedicate to the initiative.** Dual Gen collected data from case managers to understand how much time they spent enrolling and working with families. The Dual Gen backbone organization planned to use that information to set clearer expectations and work with partner agencies to ensure that those staff had enough time and the necessary supports to do their jobs successfully.

- **Clarifying and reducing staff burden.** NKSH staff thought that revising intake and enrollment paperwork would give staff more opportunities to build relationships with families instead of going through paperwork. Valley Settlement leaders believed that increasing staff knowledge of the other

services in the initiative would help staff understand that they didn't have to meet all of a family's needs themselves, helping reduce the stress staff sometimes felt.

- **Reducing chances for mistakes to happen.** By automating referral reminders, Garrett County CAC leaders hoped to reduce the reliance on individual staff members' organizational skills, memories, and relationships to make sure that they followed up on internal referrals. In turn, the reminders would reduce the pressure on staff to juggle multiple priorities.

Regular, structured communication helped service providers to coordinate their efforts

Three initiatives aimed to improve how they communicated and coordinated two-generation services. Valley Settlement sought to increase knowledge and information sharing between different, isolated programs in its initiative. Garrett County CAC wanted to define a formal internal referral process to reduce the chances that families' identified needs went unaddressed. Dual Gen hoped setting clear expectations and aligning all partner agency staff on their roles would lead

"One of the things we consistently talk about is collective impact… one of the pillars to that is continuous communication. When we first came together with our partners, one of the things we did was… coming up with one common agenda."

—San Antonio Dual Gen staff member

to better enrollment and cross-referrals in the initiative. NKSH's primary goal in streamlining its intake packet was to reduce the burden on families. However, accomplishing this goal would require enhanced communication and data sharing with partner organizations.

"Without the confident communication [between the initiative and the housing partner], we will not be able to serve our families effectively."

—NKSH staff member

The strategies that the initiatives tested involved defining and protecting time and space for communication and coordination. For example, Valley Settlement set aside time during staff meetings to deliver presentations about initiative services. In its first improvement cycle, Dual Gen developed a training for all new Dual Gen case managers and used monthly meetings to discuss expectations for case managers. In later cycles, Dual Gen staff used program data to understand the time commitment necessary to carry out the roles and responsibilities of case managers.

Initiative staff found regular, structured communication essential for coordinating services. Valley Settlement staff said it was hard to serve families effectively if staff members could not communicate with each other. They believed presentations staff gave at team meetings as a part of the strategy Valley Settlement tested helped reduce some of the isolation that had built up around programs. Garrett County CAC articulated clear expectations on time frames for staff giving and receiving referrals. Dual Gen staff said they learned they needed to be more intentional about coordinating with partners. Specifically, they said being situated as representatives of the Dual Gen backbone organization meant it was important to have clear and consistent communication with the partners delivering the Dual Gen services.

6. Opportunities to Continue Building Evaluation Capacity: Findings from the Learning Community

This chapter shares how 10 two-generation initiatives took steps to build their evaluation capacity through the learning community that was a part of NS2G (Box 6.1). The learning community covered topics roughly aligned with formative evaluation activities. Its approach rested on the expectation that participants at enrichment sites would take the ideas discussed in the meetings and implement them on their own between meetings.

Box 6.1. Ten two-generation initiatives participating in the NS2G learning community

1. Aroostook County Action Program, Presque Isle, Maine

2. 2-Gen Coalition (including the United Way of Greater Austin, American YouthWorks, and St. Louise House), Austin, Texas

3. Briya Public Charter School, Washington, DC

4. Center for Transforming Lives, Fort Worth, Texas

5. Chicago Commons, Chicago, Illinois

6. Garrett County Community Action Committee, Oakland, Maryland*

7. Jeremiah Program, Austin, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; Brooklyn, New York; Fargo-Moorhead, North Dakota; Las Vegas, Nevada; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; and Rochester, Minnesota

8. Northern Kentucky Scholar House (operated by Brighton Center), Newport, Kentucky*

9. San Antonio Dual Generation Initiative (coordinated by the United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County), San Antonio, Texas*

10. Valley Settlement, Glenwood Springs, Colorado*

*Participated in both the formative evaluations and the learning community

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Participating initiatives met virtually five times between October 2021 and January 2023 (Box 6.2). Each learning community meeting included introductions, a brief discussion of key points about a particular topic, breakout sessions to discuss the topic, reports from the breakout sessions, and suggestions on how to continue the initiative-strengthening activities following the meeting. Most of the meeting was dedicated to facilitated discussion among staff from participating initiatives. To assess initiatives' progress during the learning community, the NS2G team reviewed notes from the facilitated discussions and surveyed participants after each meeting and before the fourth meeting, in October 2022. Lessons in this chapter are also drawn from enrichment site staff members' reflections shared during the final virtual meeting in January 2023 and informed by meeting notes and survey responses.

Enrichment sites' progress during the learning community

Enrichment sites made some progress toward evaluation readiness, continuing work that began before the learning community started. For example, most initiatives had already designed logic models, though each logic model did not necessarily articulate the initiative's two-generation approach and its expected outcomes. The initiatives also routinely collected data on service use and caregiver and child outcomes to

satisfy funders' reporting requirements. However, two initiatives were working with partners to develop protocols for sharing data to understand services for both generations.

In the learning community, four enrichment sites reported making notable, additional progress toward developing specific two-generation logic models that illustrated links between caregiver and child services and outcomes. Three sites shared their two-generation logic models with the learning community. Two enrichment sites reported using initiative data to examine whether the assumptions of their logic model about service quality and intensity were borne out in practice. One initiative used its logic model to guide the choice of measures and data to collect to better understand how the initiative was working. The other initiative reported examining data to understand whether recent staff training on a coaching model led to greater caregiver engagement in workshops.

Although enrichment sites built some data capacity, using data for initiative improvement stood out as the biggest challenge for the initiatives in the learning community. Two enrichment sites implemented new data systems that include family identifiers to link caregiver and child data, and two already had a two-generation data system with this capability. The other two enrichment sites made some progress on a two-generation logic model and data system. Of the six enrichment sites, three were using or planned to use Salesforce-based systems, two were using or planned to use Apricot-based systems, and one planned to use EmpowOR. Additional research and evaluation capacity—internally or through partnerships—could help initiatives make more progress in using data to strengthen their programs. For example, one enrichment site staff member said they were the first full-time evaluation staff person in the initiative and the organization had worked with consultants in the past.

> **Box 6.2. Topics from the learning community meetings**
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> **Meeting 1 (October 2021):** Developing or refining two-generation logic models
>
> **Meeting 2 (April 2022):** Developing two-generation data systems, linking caregiver and child data, and sharing data with partners
>
> **Meeting 3 (May 2022):** Comparing initiative data with its logic model and identifying opportunities to strengthen service delivery
>
> **Meeting 4 (October 2022):** Implementing a program improvement initiative and conducting rapid cycle learning
>
> **Meeting 5 (January 2023):** Presentations from formative evaluation initiatives; reflections on evaluation capacity building progress during the learning community

Lessons about the learning community approach

Assessed against its initial goals (Box 6.3), the learning community approach was successful addressing the first goal (building a virtual community) and showed promise addressing the other four goals. However, there is room for growth in those areas.

Initiative staff appreciated the opportunity to come together in a like-minded community

Members of the learning community valued the time set aside in meetings to discuss data and programming challenges with one another. The level of engagement in breakout sessions and reports from feedback surveys confirmed these members found breakout sessions to be the most valuable activity of the learning community. Bringing formative evaluation initiatives and enrichment sites together sparked deep conversations that helped the enrichment sites learn more about formative evaluation, rapid cycle learning, and using data to improve service delivery models.

Box 6.3. Goals of the NS2G learning community

The initial plans for the learning community included five goals:

1. **Give initiative staff an opportunity to talk with a community of staff with shared interests about their progress, challenges, and solutions** to foster supportive connections among participating sites.

2. **Provide a "road test" of the materials developed for the formative evaluation initiatives**, as enrichment sites learn about them, try them out between calls, and provide feedback on them.

3. **Help the enrichment sites refine their two-generation models using a less-intensive TA approach**. For example, this approach might appeal to initiatives that already conduct other initiative development efforts, those that have more local capacity for initiative improvement, or those with less time to devote to such activities.

4. **Empower staff from initiatives participating in the formative evaluations to be leaders in the two-generation field** by equipping them to share their experiences and strategies for data-informed initiative development with leaders of other two-generation initiatives and organizations.

5. **Extend the lessons from formative evaluation activities to the broader two-generation field**, as enrichment sites test and refine the strategies formative evaluation initiatives shared about.

In the final meeting, learning community members reported that talking with staff from other initiatives about what they each were working on helped them look critically at their own services. According to one staff member at an enrichment site, the learning community created an environment for research- and data-oriented staff to learn from practitioner perspectives and vice versa. A staff member from another enrichment site reported that the learning community helped them think intentionally about how to implement and measure services as they developed logic models and evaluation plans for their initiative.

Enrichment sites' use of formative evaluation tools and activities was limited

Regarding the second goal of the learning community effort, the learning community made limited use of the formative evaluation tools. We originally planned for the learning community to use templates and information developed for the formative evaluation initiatives. Enrichment sites would use the materials with lighter-touch TA to strengthen their initiatives, reporting back any challenges so that the materials could be made available for other two-generation initiatives in the field to use with less TA support. However, formative evaluation activities and learning community meetings on the same topics took place too close together for materials to be available for the enrichment sites' use. For example, the two-generation logic model template was not available until well after the meeting in which the learning community discussed developing a two-generation logic model, because disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic affected the formative evaluation timeline.[4] No enrichment sites reported using the rapid cycle learning planning worksheet.

The experiences of formative evaluation initiatives supported learning among the enrichment sites

Finally, with respect to the remaining learning community goals, we observed promising growth. Staff from formative evaluation initiatives talked readily about their experiences in learning community meetings. A representative from one or two of these initiatives presented on their initiative's progress,

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[4] For example, we initially intended the site visits and collaborative workshops to be held in person in 2021 for all initiatives. These activities were held virtually in early 2022 for most initiatives. (Valley Settlement's collaborative workshops were in person.)

challenges, and solutions in every meeting, and most contributed to discussions in breakout sessions. In the final meeting, formative evaluation initiative staff and NS2G TA providers presented to the full group about each formative evaluation initiative's activities.

Enrichment sites reported that hearing about the formative evaluations and the "start small" ethos of rapid cycle learning was motivating. A formative evaluation initiative staff member said rapid cycle learning could provide a way to get started on program improvement, even when facing limited data or staff capacity. A staff member at an enrichment site said embedding rapid cycle learning into services could help staff reflect on how initiative services were working and how to define and measure success. One staff member at an enrichment site shared that as a result of its participation in the learning community, their initiative had made small, meaningful changes in its services: its early childhood partner began offering meetings with caregivers during school hours and on campus to make it easier for caregivers to attend and started providing family outings to increase engagement. Another staff member at an enrichment site reported exploring how to use rapid cycle learning to refine the implementation of their initiative's intake process.

Overall, participants in the learning community expressed high levels of motivation and interest in the topics discussed. Although a number of participants reported making progress on program improvement and building evaluation capacity, they also encountered challenges related to research and evaluation capacity and data systems. Future support would ideally combine opportunities for peer learning with more intensive support to help participating initiatives make more progress.

7. Conclusions and Next Steps to Build the Two-Generation Field

The overarching goal of the NS2G project was to build the evidence base for two-generation initiatives that combine services to promote family economic security and children's development and well-being. The project had three objectives, which were to: (1) conduct formative research to better understand the implementation of promising two-generation initiatives and prepare them for evaluations of effectiveness; (2) build the capacity of initiatives and researchers to conduct rigorous and meaningful evaluations; and (3) address measurement issues to promote learning across evaluations and a better understanding of relevant two-generation processes and outcomes. To pursue these objectives, NS2G implemented three main activities designed to move the field closer to evaluation readiness: (1) use a structured learning process to conduct **formative evaluations** and provide intensive technical assistance to strengthen four initiatives' two-generation services; (2) convene **a learning community** of 10 initiatives to provide light-touch support to build their evaluation capacity; and (3) **develop a measure** to help assess the functioning of two-generation initiatives. This chapter shares opportunities and next steps to continue building the evaluation readiness of two-generation initiatives based on insights from the formative evaluations and the learning community. A separate brief (Conroy et al. 2023) focuses on the project's measure development.

Summary of findings from NS2G

Two-generation initiatives are complex and challenging to implement. They aim to integrate services from multiple systems and often require a network of providers and different funding streams to coordinate their missions, services, staffing, and data (Sama-Miller et al. 2017). Two-generation initiatives also look different depending on their local context. For example, Dual Gen, which was located in a service-rich urban area, built a network of workforce development, economic security, and early childhood service providers. Valley Settlement and Garrett County CAC, located in rural areas, each developed a two-generation approach to integrating multiple family and child services within a single organization. NKSH existed as a two-generation initiative within the larger Brighton Center social services organization. It implemented a residential model that other agencies had operated in several other locations throughout Kentucky and southern Ohio.

Initiatives participating in formative evaluations and the learning community reported strengthening their two-generation service delivery:

- The initiatives in the **formative evaluations** aimed to improve the intentional alignment and coordination of their services. They developed and tested improvement strategies to streamline processes, such as intake and referrals, and to build staff knowledge and capacity, such as by developing training and examining staff members' use of time. The formative evaluation work also promoted communication with partners. Two initiatives' improvement strategies entailed exploring opportunities to strengthen communication with partners, including data sharing. All four participated in collaborative workshops with NS2G TA providers and initiative partners.

- The initiatives in the **learning community** reported they had been developing logic models and data systems, and they began work to identify and develop program improvement strategies. Four reported working on their two-generation logic models. All reported strengthening their two-generation data systems, with two reporting they adopted a new data system that supported family-level analyses of services and outcomes for primary caregivers and their children. Three reported examining data to assess alignment with the logic model and considering ways to improve that alignment.

Through the formative evaluations and learning community, the NS2G team developed and refined tools to help implement two-generation services, including a logic model template (Aharpour and Baumgartner 2022) and a program improvement planning worksheet (Fung and Sama-Miller 2022).

Although initiatives in the formative evaluations reported that the support from the NS2G TA providers was critical for program improvement, they also reported obstacles to strengthening services and improving readiness for summative evaluation. These included difficulties with entering and using program data and ongoing staff capacity limitations and turnover. Some initiatives encountered obstacles to improving processes and procedures that they could not address, such as required intake forms that were not user friendly and a lack of direct oversight of partner agency staff. At the end of NS2G TA support, most initiatives still needed to build internal evaluation and program improvement capacity or establish external partnerships to help with this work. Initiatives could use more support assembling and analyzing program data on whole families, communicating findings to initiative leaders and frontline staff, identifying approaches to improving service delivery, and gathering data on how these changes are working.

Individual initiatives made progress, yet the findings from NS2G also point to several challenges to evaluating two-generation initiatives:

- **Size.** Most of the initiatives serve a small number of participants and have limited potential to increase enrollment for a number of reasons, such as their location, the expected intensity and duration of services, or cost.

- **Replication.** Initiatives' service delivery models were highly specified and tailored to their local contexts and service populations, suggesting that replicating a specific two-generation initiative's model might be feasible in only a limited set of locations.

- **Time to measure outcomes.** Many initiatives lack data across a range of targeted outcomes for caregivers and their children because of partners' restrictions on sharing data. Important outcomes, including family economic stability and children's outcomes, can take years to emerge and require data from organizations beyond initiatives' partners (such as state education and employment agencies).

We begin with ideas for formative research that could help two-generation initiatives strengthen implementation, identify core components of the two-generation model, and develop measures that underlie the two-generation approach. We then discuss considerations for designing impact evaluations of two-generation initiatives.

Opportunities for future formative research on two-generation initiatives

Experts in the field have suggested that two-generation initiatives are in an "emerging" state of ongoing refinement, with few stable models that are ready to be replicated and evaluated. For example, most member organizations of the Ascend Network at the Aspen Institute, which is a community of organizations using two-generation approaches, align and coordinate services with partners. However, many of these partners are not yet providing simultaneous services to caregivers and children from the same family and tracking outcomes for both generations. When NS2G began, research suggested newer two-generation 2.0 initiatives were in an early, developmental state (Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014; Chase-Lansdale et al. 2017). These initiatives evolved from earlier two-generation initiatives that had not achieved their intended outcomes because the services for each generation were uneven in quality or intensity and were not closely linked (Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014). Since then, two-

generation initiatives have continued to iterate on the mix of services they provide and how they are intentionally aligned. For example, all three two-generation initiatives that participated in the Family Centered Community Change (F-CCC) project funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation changed and expanded their services significantly after the seven-year demonstration concluded (Anderson et al. 2021). Dual Gen, which participated in F-CCC, expanded services into new neighborhoods and brought on new partners as the focus of its subsequent work in NS2G. Experts observed that the organizations participating in both F-CCC and NS2G seemed to focus on intentional coordination of services for caregivers and their children and staff-caregiver relationships in both projects. However, they brought more organizational knowledge and experience to the work over time. Yet, the fact that program partners, services, and geographic focus change before an initiative can reach full implementation of its two-generation services reflects the complexity of developing an initiative while meeting its day-to-day administrative responsibilities.

The activities and experiences of NS2G initiatives suggest additional program and research development is needed to continue building evaluation capacity. Initiatives participating in NS2G engaged in key developmental activities, such as documenting and refining a logic model and implementing a two-generation data system that could link caregiver and child records. As these systems are implemented and initiatives begin to use data to better understand how their services are working, initiatives indicated they would continue to identify additional ways to improve and expand. Drawing on findings from NS2G, the following section suggests opportunities for future research into program development. The first two opportunities are for initiatives to engage in with appropriate TA. The second two opportunities cut across initiatives and might be the future focus of external researchers.

Continue strengthening existing two-generation initiatives

Future program development work can focus on helping initiatives improve their quality, intensity, and intentionality. For example, future formative evaluation and TA could help two-generation initiatives apply core principles in their services, assess the functioning of their program model, build capacity to measure family outcomes using a two-generation data system, and implement promising or evidence-informed practices—key dimensions of evidence capacity (Mastri et al. 2022). This work might include developing research and training for initiatives, along with individualized support. Tools could include templates, such as the logic models and planning worksheet developed through NS2G, and applications, such as the e2i Coach, that help programs build and use evidence. Individualized support might take the shape of technical assistance or formative evaluation to help initiatives use the tools and implement promising practices to strengthen their service delivery models.

Future program development work can also support initiatives to adopt promising practices that are informed by the research development activities described later in this report, such as core components that appear to be linked to improvements in family outcomes. This program development work could include how to adapt services to be culturally relevant to the population that an initiative serves. Feedback from the NS2G formative evaluations and learning community suggests that initiatives would find program support most beneficial if it combined intensive support with opportunities to talk with and learn from staff at other initiatives.

Define and explore the core components that comprise two-generation services, collaboratively

Through NS2G's formative evaluations, initiatives highlighted several types of core components: the processes that helped them integrate services for caregivers and children, the services that helped them

reach intended outcomes, and the principles that guide how they provide intentional two-generation services. Examples of these processes include the use of integrated data systems as platforms for communication between service providers and families or a no wrong door approach to enrollment. Principles include strong relationships between case managers and families and tailoring services based on families' individual, self-described needs and goals. Examples of services include a single coach or navigator to help connect families to services. These core components echo features of other two-generation initiatives that have participated in formative evaluation (Lehoullier and Murrell 2017).

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Core components *are the "essential functions and principles that define the program and are judged as being necessary to produce outcomes in a typical service setting."*

— Holzwart et al. 2021

The NS2G formative evaluations focused on testing small changes to enhance the intentionality of two-generation services, but did not address the characteristics of quality and intensity. Research defines some characteristics of quality and intensity for single-generation services, but less is known about quality and intensity in a two-generation context or the levels required to generate impacts on caregiver and child outcomes (Sama-Miller et al. 2017). The Integrated Approaches project focused on documenting the services that initiatives provide and how they are coordinated but did not collect much information about service intensity. Future research to document the types, quality, and intensity of two-generation services and their associated outcomes could begin to illuminate the core components of two-generation initiatives, such as recommended thresholds for intensity or the features that define high quality two-generation services.

A "principles-focused evaluation" offers another approach to understanding two-generation initiatives. Principles-focused evaluation would embrace the variability inherent in two-generation models while identifying the core principles that two-generation initiatives share and allow for understanding the set of common outcomes associated with those principles. Principles, typically thought of as a type of core component, could be the initiative elements that support intentional service delivery to whole families and the interactions between staff and caregivers that promote full engagement with services.

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Principles-focused evaluation *is an approach to assessing complex, dynamic systems. The evaluator assesses the success of an initiative by examining: (1) the set of core principles an initiative uses to guide its services; (2) the extent to which the initiative implemented services that align with those core principles; and (3) whether the principles and services are leading to intended outcomes.*

—Quinn Patton 2017

Research to define core components of two-generation initiatives should take a participatory approach, seeking to engage a range of interested parties. Practitioners and participants, in particular, could each provide insight into what motivated families to seek out services, of how two-generation services have affected families, how long families participate in services and what keeps them engaged (as well as what they consider overly burdensome), and what they think high quality services look like. Looking across input from practitioners and families, initiatives and researchers could also examine the factors that lead to successful relationships between staff and families.

Document categories of models of two-generation service delivery

The Integrated Approaches project combined a literature review on *how* two-generation initiatives deliver services with a scan of the field to document *what* the field was delivering as of 2016—including

initiative backgrounds, services, funding sources, and intended service populations (Sama-Miller and Baumgartner 2017). As a follow-up, the Assessing Models of Coordinated Services (AMCS) project, also sponsored by OPRE, reviewed two-generation initiatives and other programs that coordinated early care and education with other services. The AMCS review identified different "models" of coordinated services with similar features and components, including three state-led models and three locally-led models (Cavadel et al. 2022).

New research could update the scan of two-generation initiatives from Integrated Approaches and take the additional step of categorizing models of two-generation service delivery. Integrated Approaches relied on a review of publicly available information. New research could incorporate active engagement with initiatives and networks, identifying what data sharing or integrated data systems are in place. It could assess how two-generation models vary in how they engage families in services and over what time period, the data available to assess services received and outcomes, and the core services provided to families. It could identify promising models for future study or evaluation.

This research could also build on AMCS by exploring differences in how states and localities support two-generation service delivery. It could, for example, identify characteristics of models that use Head Start or Community Action Agencies as a base, employment training or housing services as a base, or public–private partnerships as a base, such as the Parents and Children Thriving Together (PACTT) initiative.[5] It could explore and document emerging county- or state-level two-generation initiatives, not just individual local initiatives, and include information on how funding is combined and allocated, not just what and how services are delivered with that funding. It could also document, where available, how initiatives have adapted practices from other initiatives to work in their own cultural context.

Continue collaborative measure development to build understanding of key two-generation functions and processes

The NS2G team developed a definition for and draft measure of *mutually reinforcing* services, thought to be a key dimension of how service providers work together to serve caregivers and children in an intentional, integrated way (see Conroy et al. 2023). Future research can continue to refine and test the draft measure of mutually reinforcing services, adapt it to incorporate family perspectives and improve accessibility and cultural relevance, and develop an additional measure. Future measure development could focus on another construct thought to be important for providing and evaluating two-generation services: *mutual motivation*, which describes how one family member's actions and behaviors influence another's. Mutual motivation ties to the theory that two-generation services produce outcomes above and beyond the expected outcomes from serving each generation individually. This measurement development work could inform a tool for initiatives to assess the strength of their two-generation services and the extent to which they are high quality, integrated, and sufficiently intensive.

Additional research can explore family processes to build understanding of how to define and measure key family outcomes that two-generation initiatives might affect, and their relationship with later outcomes for caregivers and their children. Past research that examined long-term outcomes related to child development or adult economic success might have missed these important family outcomes, such as a better functioning family system, because validated measures did not exist or were not in widespread use. This type of research could include reviewing literature and measures, developing conceptual

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[5] Through the PACTT initiative, the National Governors Association and Center for Law and Social Policy provided grants and peer learning opportunities to five states to develop two-generation approaches to statewide systems and policy change (Cawthorne Gaines et al. 2019).

frameworks, and developing and testing measures. Measuring, Supporting, and Understanding Child and Caregiver Well-being Through Employment and Self Sufficiency Research (Measuring SUCCESS), a project OPRE is sponsoring that will end after NS2G, aims to begin closing this knowledge gap.

As with research to define core components, a participatory approach is critical. Practitioners and families should be involved from the outset, shaping research questions and identifying important outcomes and family processes to explore. Interviewing families using ethnographic methods, for example, could help researchers develop a detailed understanding of family processes and how two-generation initiatives could, or did, affect those processes.

Considerations for future summative evaluation

Summative evaluation of the impacts of two-generation initiatives could be carried out with specific initiatives that have a strong model of services for caregivers and their children. The research activities described earlier would provide a foundation for planning a multisite evaluation to understand the impacts of two-generation initiatives on caregivers and their children. That foundation includes understanding core components of two-generation initiatives, understanding the types of two-generation initiatives and their associated outcomes for caregivers and children, and further developing initiatives to strengthen their quality, intensity, and intentionality. This information could be used as site selection criteria. In addition, future designs for a summative evaluation of two-generation initiatives should consider issues related to size, variability, and the need for long-term follow-up.

The small size of many two-generation initiatives

Because many two-generation initiatives are small, designing an experimental study in a single site with enough power to detect impacts could be challenging or impossible. It might also be difficult for two-generation initiatives in small geographic areas to stimulate the excess demand that would be necessary to generate a control group. For example, Garrett County CAC operates in a rural part of the Maryland panhandle wedged between state parks and forests, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. The area has a small population, and people living nearby might not be eligible for services of Garrett County CAC because they reside in a different state. Community Action Agencies are a common platform for two-generation initiatives in rural areas such as Garrett County, where they coordinate social services in sparsely populated areas.

Two-generation initiatives that cannot engage in a random assignment evaluation could be evaluated using quasi-experimental designs. For example, families participating in a two-generation initiative could be compared with families participating in a similar early childhood education program (but not similar caregiver services) in other communities. Quasi-experimental designs are not as strong as random assignment, because program and comparison groups could differ in ways that influence outcomes but are not measured and controlled for in the analyses. Nevertheless, careful design of quasi-experimental evaluations can minimize bias.

The small size of many two-generation initiatives can be addressed by using a Bayesian framework for interpreting estimates of impacts on outcomes for each generation (Deke and Finucane 2019; Deke et al. 2022). A Bayesian framework can calculate the probability that an intervention had a meaningful effect, given the impact estimate and prior evidence regarding the effects of similar interventions (Smid et al. 2020). This framework can address policy-relevant questions, such as "What is the probability that the two-generation initiative increased family income by 10 percent on average two years after program enrollment?" In a Bayesian approach, researchers might compare the average change in income for families in a two-generation initiative to a distribution of effect sizes from evaluations of other workforce development programs with similar outcomes to assess the probability that the workforce development component of the two-generation initiative produced effects above and beyond other workforce development programs that intended to achieve similar outcomes.

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__A Bayesian framework for interpreting impact estimates__ is a statistical method that uses evidence from prior studies to help interpret estimates of an intervention's effects. This analysis can provide estimates of the probability that the effect is positive or that it is greater than a specified amount. This contrasts with traditional hypothesis testing, which results in an up-or-down assessment of whether an estimate is statistically different from zero. The Bayesian analysis also guards against the possible misunderstanding that a lack of statistical significance means a low probability that the program had an effect.

—Deke and Finucane 2019; Deke et al. 2022

The variability of two-generation service delivery models

The design of many two-generation initiatives is heavily influenced by the population they serve, the services and partners available, and other features of the local environment. Different two-generation approaches might bundle different adult workforce development services based on local industries and educational partners or provide culturally appropriate family and child services. Valley Settlement's key child services, for example, reflect the needs of the population it serves: a mobile preschool that meets families where they are, and mentoring and support for relative and in-home caregivers. Cultural and local adaptation may be a core component of two-generation initiatives. And, as noted, two-generation initiatives are iteratively refining their approaches, so there is also variability within an initiative over time.

A multisite summative evaluation could include initiatives that share core components identified in earlier studies. These core components might include thresholds for quality and intensity of adult and child services. Implementation research could examine the ways that participating initiatives address the core components and how their service offerings, populations, or policy contexts compare. This implementation research should also document the services received by families participating in the evaluation, including their quality and intensity, and how the initiative intentionally serves whole families to inform an understanding of the impacts and for potential replication. It would also be important for implementation research to document how initiatives tailored services to be culturally relevant to the populations they served.

The need for long-term follow-up

Two-generation services often aim to influence long-term and intergenerational outcomes that are not easily measured in an 18- or 24- month follow-up. A follow-up period of this length might lead to conclusions that are different from the longer-term picture, as children and their caregivers continue to mature. For example, long-term follow-up studies of Project QUEST, a sectoral workforce development program, showed persistent and growing positive effects on earnings nine years after program completion. However, short-term effects were negative, as participants deferred employment to participate in education and training (Roder and Elliott 2019). One might expect similar findings for a two-generation initiative that helped caregivers succeed in postsecondary education, such as NKSH, or access other education and training opportunities, such as Dual Gen.

In addition to funding long-term follow-up, research funders might also be required to provide resources to access administrative records, including wage, employment, and educational system data, and to obtain consent from families at the outset to gather these records over time. Administrative data can also be paired with qualitative data collection with families to build a holistic and well-rounded understanding of the impacts of two-generation initiatives.

Conclusions

Based on initiatives' experiences in NS2G, building the readiness of the field of two-generation initiatives for evaluation can include both research and program development activities. Research could include additional work to document the core components of two-generation initiatives, models and common features of two-generation service delivery, and measure development. Measure development could deepen the field's ability to understand and measure key constructs of two-generation service delivery, such as alignment and coordination, mutual motivation, and family processes likely to be affected by two-generation services. Program development can include opportunities to build internal initiative capacity, such as by supporting two-generation data systems and creating additional opportunities for intensive support and peer learning, and by building a supportive infrastructure to support two-generation initiative development.

Future evaluation should consider the varied and complex models of two-generation initiatives and the need to measure long-term outcomes. To fully understand the impacts of well-implemented two-generation initiatives, longer term follow-up and nuanced measurement might be necessary.

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Appendix A

Site Selection

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This appendix describes the process to select two-generation initiatives to participate in the formative evaluations and learning community for Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches (NS2G).

Formative evaluation

We used a graduated process to select two-generation initiatives for the formative evaluations (Figure A.1). This process was informed by previous research in the coordinated services research portfolio of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), and incorporated input from program office staff of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and NS2G's expert panel.

In the first stage of the process, we identified 10 initiatives from three sources:
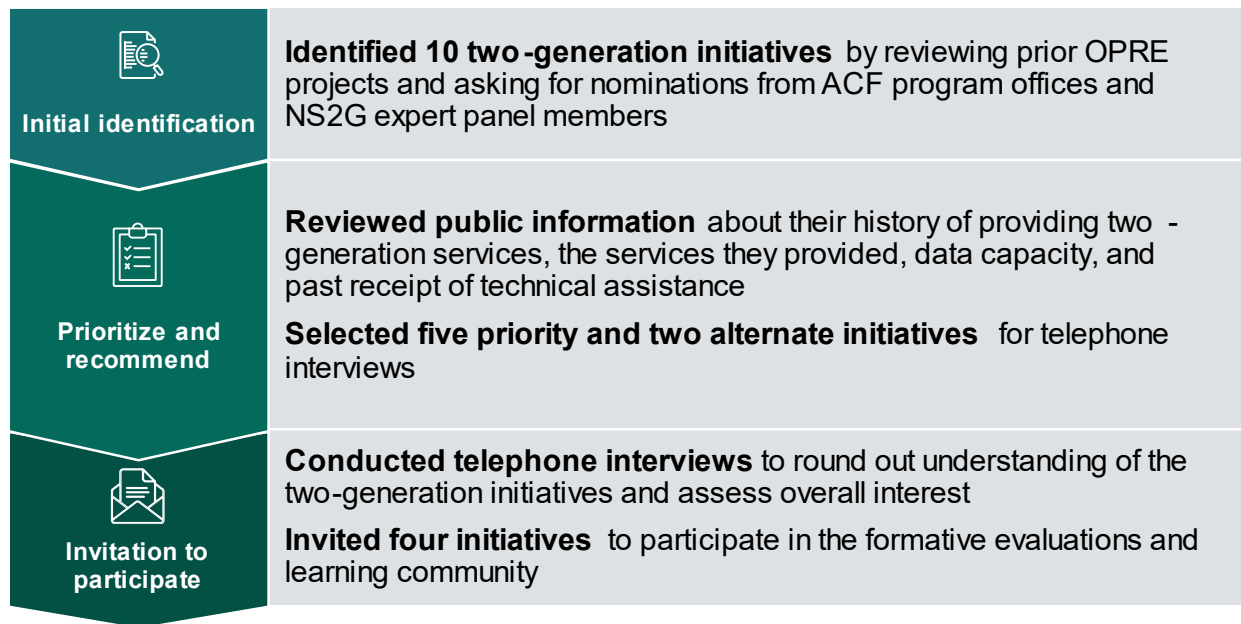
- Initiatives included in environmental scans from two prior OPRE projects, Integrated Approaches to Supporting Child Development and Improving Family Economic Security and Assessing Models of Coordinated Services

- Nominations from ACF program offices

- Recommendations from the NS2G expert panel, which included Dr. Allison Holmes, from the Annie E. Casey Foundation; Marjorie Sims, from Ascend at the Aspen Institute; Dr. Christopher King, from the Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas at Austin; and Sharon McGroder, from SMC Consulting.

In the second stage, we reviewed public information on these 10 initiatives to determine the extent to which initiatives met the following criteria:

- Had a history of implementing two-generation services, rather than just having planned or developed a two-generation approach

- Offered Head Start as a service

- Had services funded by ACF, in addition to Head Start

- Had data capacity in their administrative data system, such as the ability to link caregivers and children from the same families

- Had previously participated in technical assistance to strengthen services

Based on the review in the second stage, we narrowed our list to seven initiatives, including five priority initiatives and two alternates. In the final stage of site selection, we conducted these telephone interviews to confirm and round out our understanding of the seven two-generation initiatives, learn about their program improvement interests, and assess their overall interest in participating in NS2G. At the end of this process, we invited four initiatives to participate in the formative evaluations and learning community.

Figure A.1. NS2G formative evaluation site selection process

Initial identification	**Identified 10 two-generation initiatives** by reviewing prior OPRE projects and asking for nominations from ACF program offices and NS2G expert panel members
Prioritize and recommend	**Reviewed public information** about their history of providing two-generation services, the services they provided, data capacity, and past receipt of technical assistance **Selected five priority and two alternate initiatives** for telephone interviews
Invitation to participate	**Conducted telephone interviews** to round out understanding of the two-generation initiatives and assess overall interest **Invited four initiatives** to participate in the formative evaluations and learning community

Learning community

Initiatives not selected for the formative evaluations were eligible to become learning community participants, called "enrichment sites" (Figure A.2). In addition, we developed a call for nominations that explained the benefits and outcomes of participating and the ideal characteristics of a site. When circulating the call in early 2021, we noted the following criteria regarding the ideal participants:
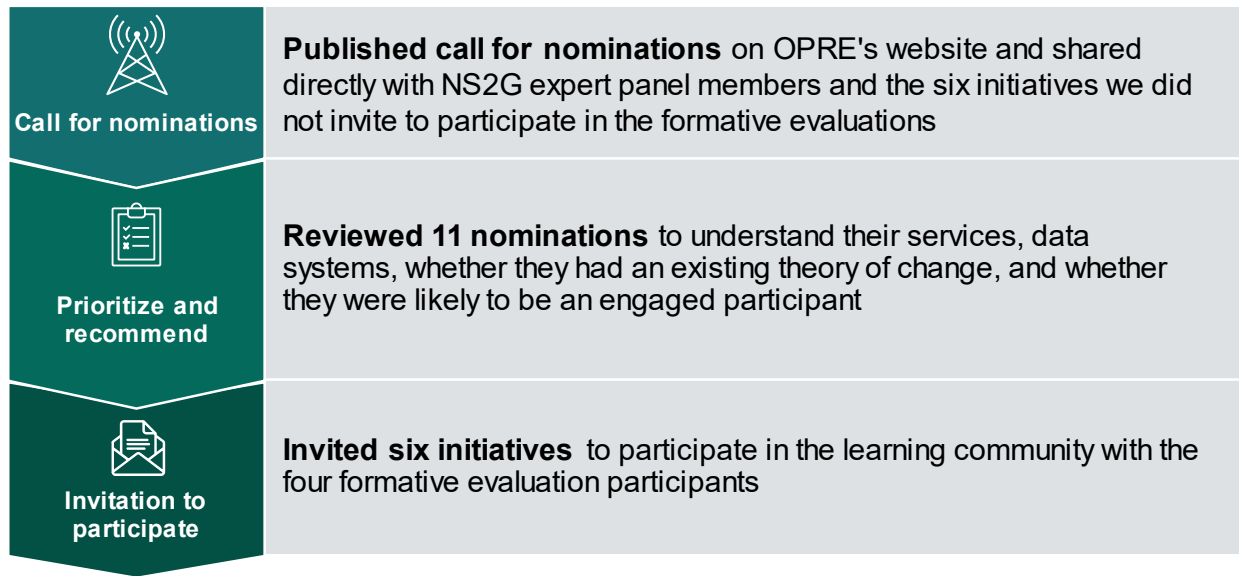
- Initiative offers services to two generations; partnerships are in place to provide child development services to children and to provide employment and education services to caregivers in those children's families.

- Leadership and staff are interested in learning how to strengthen the initiative model and their capacity to engage in the activities with other initiative staff.

- Data systems can measure services received by caregivers and their children.

- A lead contact and as many as two additional staff members are interested and available to engage with the learning community consistently over a two- to three-year period, and they have the authority or stature to bring the information back to the broader initiative and use it to inform initiative development activities.

- Leaders and staff are interested in the expected learning community topics, which include refining the initiative's logic model, examining data on service use, strengthening data systems, and engaging in data-informed initiative improvement.

Eleven initiatives responded to the call. Our review of the responses focused on the criteria of having services for both generations, data systems that could measure outcomes for both generations, and whether the initiatives had existing theories of change. We also considered whether the initiative's narrative suggested it would be an actively engaged participant in the learning community, such as by having leadership support for participating. We selected six initiatives that met these criteria and offered

diverse approaches to two-generation service delivery. The four initiatives participating in formative evaluations also participated in the learning community.

Figure A.2. NS2G learning community site selection process

Call for nominations	**Published call for nominations** on OPRE's website and shared directly with NS2G expert panel members and the six initiatives we did not invite to participate in the formative evaluations
Prioritize and recommend	**Reviewed 11 nominations** to understand their services, data systems, whether they had an existing theory of change, and whether they were likely to be an engaged participant
Invitation to participate	**Invited six initiatives** to participate in the learning community with the four formative evaluation participants

Representatives of each initiative included leaders and data managers to ensure that the discussions about using data for initiative improvement could be implemented by people who work with program data and who could make decisions about implementing changes to operations or activities.

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Appendix B

Program Improvement Worksheet

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Initiatives in the formative evaluations for Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches used a program improvement worksheet to develop plans for conducting improvement cycles. This appendix contains the worksheet template. More information about how initiatives planned to conduct improvement cycles and instructions on how to use the worksheet are contained in the brief [Using a Structured Learning Process to Strengthen Two-Generation Service Delivery](#) (Fung and Sama-Miller 2022).

Your challenge

What is the current challenge? *Describe the problem using data to illustrate or support.*

What do you hope will change? *Write a short narrative to describe what would happen if the challenge were resolved. Specify intermediate and long-term outcomes that would change for parents and children, as well as for other relevant parties (for example, program staff, the community).*

Intermediate outcome(s)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Long-term outcome(s)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

How will you know whether you're on the right track? *What short-term changes (to processes, outputs, or outcomes) do you want to see? These short-term changes are precursors to the intermediate and long-term outcomes you specified. Estimate when you could expect to see each short-term change.*

Short-term changes

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

When do you expect to see results?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What potential obstacles should you account for? *What could hinder the implementation of your strategy or the changes you hope to see?*

Your change strategy

What is the opportunity for change? *Frame your opportunity as a question beginning with the words "How might we…"*

How can you get a better outcome? *List the components of your strategy.*

Principles: What theories or beliefs explain the change?

-
-
-
-

Processes: What activities will you do? Specify who is responsible for each activity.

-
-
-
-

Products: What resources will support the change? Specify who is responsible for procuring or developing each resource.

-
-
-
-

How will it get done? *List the supports you will provide for successful implementation.*

Motivation: How will you encourage, engage, and empower staff making the change? Specify who is responsible for each support.

-
-
-
-

Capacity: How will you support staff knowledge, skills, and habits? Specify who is responsible for each support.

-
-
-
-

Organization: How will you support staff to execute the strategy? Specify who is responsible for each support.

-
-
-
-

What is the timeline for implementing your change strategy? *When will you start, when will you finish, and how will you check progress?*

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