



## **Essential Functions, Core Components and Quality Indicators of Strong & Effective Children's Trust and Prevention Funds**

### **Introduction**

Soon after the Kansas legislature acted to establish the first Children's Trust Fund (CTF) in 1980, legislatures across the nation took action to pass laws creating their own state trust fund, charging them with leading statewide efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect. Because of this official sanction and mandate, CTFs are uniquely positioned to serve as catalysts, connectors, conveners, facilitators, funders, strategists, communicators, capacity-builders, evaluators – in other words, accountable and clearly identifiable state leads for driving innovation and promoting proven strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Given their leadership role in and responsibilities for helping achieve broadly held public policy goals, the capacity of a trust fund to function at the highest possible level of performance is critical not only to advancing its mission, but also to ensuring continuing public confidence.

This document describes the essential functions, core components and quality indicators of an effective trust fund. It was created collaboratively by the National Alliance of Children's Trust & Prevention Funds and its member trust funds, and reflects both the research on organizational best practices and the specific expertise developed by CTFs over the years. Its purpose is to inform and provide guidance to state trust funds in their continuing drive towards peak performance in service of the important mission and position of public trust they hold.

## Essential Functions

### Children's Trust Funds:

- Focus extensively on strengthening families to prevent child abuse and neglect before it occurs.
- Catalyze child maltreatment prevention efforts at the individual, family, community and societal levels.
- Seek to embed prevention in multiple agendas by working in partnership with and across multiple domains and systems.
- Advance the use of data, research and evaluation in strategy development and program and practice improvement.
- Work to ensure that proven effective and research-based innovative programs and strategies are broadly available to families and children by providing funding, technical assistance and training, linkage to other resources, and other capacity-building supports.
- Educate policy makers and the public through knowledge building and public awareness activities.
- Articulate and advocate for strategies that reduce risks and promote the protective factors shown by research to prevent child maltreatment and promote optimal child development.
- Reach out to and work in partnership with parents.
- Convene and support family strengthening and child abuse prevention networks with diverse membership.
- Affiliate with and contribute to national networks that provide opportunities for knowledge and leadership development.

# **Core Components and Quality Indicators of Strong & Effective Children's Trust and Prevention Funds**

## **Enabling Legislation**

Ideally, the Children's Trust Fund (CTF) is incorporated into state statutes, and includes a clearly articulated mandate that focuses its purpose on the prevention of child abuse and neglect before it occurs. The experience of trust funds over the years makes clear that such enabling legislation has been and remains critical to their success and sustainability. For this reason, the presence of enabling legislation providing this mandate is considered critical criteria for the establishment of any new CTFs.

### Quality Indicator:

- CTF has statutory authority (enabling legislation)

## **Organizational Structure**

The structure of a trust fund should support its ability to perform its critical functions. Due to the variability across states, no one specific structure fits all.

Essential to the CTF structure is that it must be solid enough to sustain and support its forward momentum, and flexible enough to adapt and respond to changes in the operating environment. As with other organizations, the key structural components that contribute to success include:

- An engaged governing body that represents multiple perspectives, and which focuses on the functions appropriate to its role. These functions include setting the organizational vision, mission and core strategies; ensuring accountability and resource sufficiency; and serving as connectors to and ambassadors for the trust fund to the constituencies and organizations they represent. The governing board should operate in accordance with regularly updated by laws.
- Qualified and adequately compensated staff who are provided with access to the ongoing training and development opportunities to fulfill the responsibilities of their position.
- Access to sustainable funding and other resources adequate to creating a positive work environment and to support continuous quality improvement in advancing progress towards goals.

### Quality Indicator:

- CTF structure supports effective governance qualified staff and access to sustainable funding and other resources.

## Strategic Planning

The purpose of a CTF's strategic planning process and its result – typically but not always a written strategic plan -- is to lay out where it is going, how it is going to get there with what resources, and how it will support continuous quality improvement and assess progress.

The particular approach a CTF takes to the creation of its strategic plan and the format of the plan itself are not as important as the plan's ability to serve as an aspirational yet realistic and reliable guide for action in the short, intermediate and long term. Typically such processes/plans start with a focus on the CTF's mission (and vision and/or values) and include goals to advance achievement of the mission, strategies to achieve the goals, and action plans that include resource requirements, steps, a timeline and measurable objectives.

A distinctive characteristic of a strong and effective CTF's strategic plan is incorporation of multiple viewpoints, including those of parents and community partners. As so much of the work of a trust fund involves embedding of prevention into multiple domains of effort and on partnerships, ensuring these viewpoints are considered and reflected in the plan is critical.

Organizing strategic efforts under a unifying, research-based framework is key to being able to conceptualize how specific strategies (both the CTF's and those of its partners) support goal achievement. The Strengthening Families<sup>1</sup> Protective Factors represent one such framework that many trust funds have found particularly useful and important to their work. The Strengthening Families Protective Factor framework also underlies and informs much of the Alliance's early childhood work and is increasingly being referenced in federal initiatives and policies.

Various platforms are available to support the strategic planning process and ensure that the results can be used to guide actions and monitor performance. One is creation of a "theory of change" that lays out in visual form how the CTF's work contributes to the big picture (long term outcomes across multiple domains). Often the product of a broad based work group, a theory of change is also helpful in bringing a focus to the role of partners, and as a framing device to help communicate how the trust fund's work aligns with and supports widely held goals.

Another is the creation of an organizational and/or program logic model. Logic models illustrate a sequence of cause-and-effect relationships — a systems approach to communicate the path toward a desired result. It describes logical linkages among organizational resources, activities, outputs, audiences, and short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes related to a specific problem or situation.

---

<sup>1</sup> See [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net) for more information, including the research review.

Creation of a 'balanced score card' is another way to approach strategic planning that is intended to result in a tool to support performance management. Performance 'dashboards' are easily derived from a well-constructed strategic plan, logic model or balanced scorecard, and provide ready platforms for the CTF's staff leadership and governing body to monitor results and make course corrections when needed.

Quality Indicator:

- A strong and effective CTF engages in strategic planning processes incorporating multiple perspectives and a systems approach. As a result, it is able to clearly articulate the strategies it will use to achieve aspirational yet realistic short, intermediate and long term goals, along with the metrics needed to ensure accountability and support continuous quality improvement.

## **Financing**

A sufficient funding base is critical to effective CTFs, but just as important is whether its funding is sustainable. Being able to develop and/or rely on multiple funding streams has proven critical to many trust funds, most of which periodically find themselves vulnerable to efforts to divert their funding base to support other, non-prevention purposes.

A strong financing strategy for trust funds often includes more than one of the following:

- An allocation made from the state general fund/operating budget. These allocations are sometimes made to support the functions established in the trust fund's enabling legislation, and sometimes are tied to specific program efforts. Designation by its state's governor as the lead for the child abuse prevention-specific funding stream, the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) grant program, part of the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA).
- Revenue generating mechanisms incorporated in state statutes. Common examples include check off boxes that enable taxpayers to divert a portion of their payments to the trust fund, dedication of some or all of the revenue of sales from products such as specialty license plates or birth certificates. Similarly, some states dedicate a portion of the fees they collect to support the trust fund, such as for marriage licenses, divorces, or the provision of duplicate birth certificates. How such income can be used may be articulated in enabling legislation.
- Endowments and interest income. Some trust funds were provided with an endowment made up of public funds when they were created in statute; others

have received financial support allowing them to establish such as endowment. The rules and requirements about how such endowments may be used are varied. However, many CTFs have the ability to, at a minimum, to benefit from the interest income from any funds held outside of the state's general operating budget.

- CTFs are often well positioned to and able to access federal grant funds, either by their successful independent efforts to compete for federal grant awards, or by participating in collaborations aimed at securing federal funding to be distributed to multiple partners.
- Publicly-sponsored workplace giving campaigns often will include a CTF as an allowable beneficiary.

Quality Indicator:

- The CTF financing strategy maximizes opportunities to leverage resources from multiple sources.

## **Budget**

A strong and effective CTF has a budget that clearly shows sources of support and how funding will be used during the applicable funding period. The budget should link to and support the achievement of the objectives and performance measures articulated in the strategic plan and/or logic model. The budget need be only as complex as is required by funding sources and others in the trust fund's operating environment; however, it must be as detailed as necessary to promote real time fiscal monitoring and accountability. In addition to the financing strategies, the resource allocation decisions codified in the budget represent strategic decisions for a CTF, a topic which is further explored below.

Quality Indicator:

- The CTF budget supports accountability by clearly communicating how available funding will be used.

## **Data Systems**

Because a strong and effective trust fund recognizes the power of data to guide its decision-making and to support accountability, at a minimum, its strategic plan should include goals related to strengthening its access to available data systems. At the most basic level, the trust fund should have access to: 1) data to inform its needs assessment and strategic planning processes, and 2) a data system sufficient to easily and accurately account for its established performance measures. The ability to access

and use the information available in highly sophisticated data systems typical of large public agencies (child welfare, health, education) can be a major benefit to a trust fund. Regardless of the scope or complexity of the data system or expertise available to it, trust funds should routinely collect data on its key activities, and ensure that it is used to promote continuous quality improvement and performance measurement.

Quality Indicator:

- The CTF has access to data and data systems that adequately support planning and performance measurement.

## **Partnership and Collaboration**

No matter how strong a trust fund is, its fundamental effectiveness is often largely dependent on the strength of its partnerships and collaborations. No CTF has sufficient resources to be able to 'do everything' that is required to reach every child, family or community with effective prevention strategies. Even if it had such resources, a strong CTF recognizes that embedding prevention into multiple domains – across systems and into all dimensions of the socio-ecological model – is a more far reaching, impactful and sustainable model. And no CTF can hope to achieve its mission without strong collaborative relationships reflective of the diverse constituencies and communities they serve.

Of critical importance to all CTFs are partnerships that reflect and support cultural and racial diversity, as well as a broad array of other factors, such as age, life experience, expertise, organizational affiliation, etc. A strong and effective CTF recognizes that embracing diversity as it is expressed across multiple domains greatly enriches its efforts and opportunities to achieve its mission and goals.

The specific partnerships a CTF prioritizes reflect its unique situation and the specific opportunities available to it that best leverage its progress towards goal achievement. Some of the key types of partnerships typical of strong and effective trust funds are those it establishes with parents, other state agencies or departments within state agencies, community-based organizations and coalitions, and with the private sector, including formal public-private partnerships.

Key ways that CTFs advance strategic partnerships include:

- Ensuring that partnership development and partnership leveraging opportunities are reflected in their strategic plans.
- Identifying and developing relationships with potential new partners, seeking out opportunities to participate in developing or existing collaborations.
- Actively participating in existing inter- and intra-agency partnerships. Serving as conveners or co-conveners of efforts to broaden partnerships or establish collaborations.

- Funding, staffing and/or providing other resources to develop or sustain partnerships and support their effectiveness and accountability.

Quality Indicator:

- The CTF is engaged in partnerships and collaborations that maximize opportunities to leverage impact and reflect the diversity of the constituents and communities they serve.

## Parent Partnerships

'Parent partnerships' refers to the broad, multi-level efforts CTFs undertake to engage parents – those who speak from their point of view *as parents*, not as representatives of a particular organization or ideology -- in the planning, design and implementation of child abuse and neglect prevention efforts. Strong and effective CTFs value and support going well beyond 'engaging parents' to developing true partnerships with parents, understanding that these are a key means of improving practices, programs and policies.

CTFs are engaged in diverse strategies for partnering with parents, including:

- Supporting an organizational culture that consistently demonstrates its respect for parents.
- Building relationships with parent leaders and organizations that represent parents.
- Supporting parent leadership development either directly by funding specific programs or indirectly by increasing parents' access to resources and supports.
- Providing capacity building supports to funded programs on parent leadership development and partnering with parents.
- Including requirements related to increasing parent partnership in grant criteria, and monitoring performance on this element in program reviews.
- Creating and supporting meaningful roles for parents in all aspects of their own operations, i.e. CTF program, strategy and message development, grant making processes, evaluation design, policy discussions, and governance and accountability structures, etc.
- Advocating for the inclusion of parent voices in broad-based initiatives, system change effort, etc.

Quality Indicator:

- The CTF is engaged in substantive and meaningful activities aimed at strengthening its partnership with parents in all the domains of effort articulated in its strategic plan.

## Communications (Public Engagement and Education)

An effective Children's Trust Fund is actively engaged in ongoing strategic communications aimed at broadening and deepening the engagement of multiple constituencies in child abuse and neglect prevention efforts. Ideally, these communications are guided by a plan aligned with the CTF's strategic plan (and logic model(s), theory of change, etc.). The communications plan should:

- Integrate all the trust fund's key activities (i.e. programs, public awareness and education, grassroots organizing, marketing, fundraising, etc.) and
- Address the CTF's communications infrastructure, goals, targets/target audiences, framing, messages, spokespeople, channels/outlets, and activities.

As with its other domains of effort, it is important that a CTF's communications reflect reliance on research, the use of data, and evaluation. Knowledge of and consistency with research findings on effective framing of child abuse and neglect prevention messages is particularly critical.<sup>2</sup>

Many CTFs are engaged in broad communications efforts intended to increase public understanding of and engagement in child abuse and neglect prevention, such as efforts that culminate in heightened activity during April (historically, 'child abuse prevention month'). By linking to national efforts that offer unified messages and campaign resources, CTFs are often able to leverage benefits that strengthen their ongoing work and increase impact. These benefits typically include new partnerships, increased media attention, and an expanded network of supporters. However, primarily due to limited resources, CTFs are rarely able to convincingly demonstrate the impacts of such effort. Therefore, building the campaign on research and data, and having clear objectives with associated performance measures, are critical to evaluating their contribution to the CTF's strategic goals.

CTF public education strategies also focus on specific issues, in addition to the more general efforts related to advancing public understanding of child abuse and neglect or broad-based campaigns aimed at promoting positive parenting practices. Typical issue-specific campaigns include those related to child abuse reporting, shaken baby/abusive head trauma prevention, infant safe sleep, prevention of child sexual abuse, post-partum depression, and specific topics related to child health and development such as developmental milestones, immunization schedules, etc.

Whatever specific public education strategies a trust fund undertakes, in addition to being factually accurate, CTF communications should also strive to be culturally

---

<sup>2</sup>. For more information, see materials available from the Frameworks Institute at [www.frameworksinstitute.org](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org)

relevant and appropriate, and broadly accessible (i.e. available in multiple languages and formats, at a reading level appropriate for the audience).

Quality Indicator:

- The CTF supports public engagement and education through ongoing research-based communications with multiple audiences guided by an integrated strategic communications plan.

## **Public Policy**

A strong and effective CTF takes an active role in shaping and advancing policies that strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. While the particular form that this role takes must reflect any specific requirements or constraints associated with its enabling legislation and structure, a CTF's responsibility for influencing public policy is a part of its core function of catalyzing societal change.

Key CTF activities related to influencing public policy include:

- Assessing family and community needs
- Collecting, analyzing and synthesizing data from various sources
- Monitoring state and federal policy and funding initiatives
- Regularly communicating advancements in research and knowledge of best practices to key audiences
- Connecting to, convening and/or supporting community-based stakeholder networks
- Participating in and providing opportunities for stakeholders, including parents, to engage in policy processes
- Identifying and promoting specific policy changes

A CTF's public policy efforts should support and recognize the essential role of government in strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect.

Quality Indicator:

- The CTF is actively engaged in shaping public policies through processes appropriate to its role and structure.

## **Resource Allocation & Distribution**

While CTFs have many roles as child abuse and neglect prevention leaders, a common one is as a key source of funding and other resources for child abuse and neglect prevention programs and initiatives. Whether serving as a direct funder of local programs or as a catalyst for broad-based prevention initiatives, a strong and effective CTF makes fund and resource allocation decisions based on a powerful and well-

thought out funding/resource-allocation strategy. These strategies often reflect the reality that CTFs are often the state's primary provider of resources reliably aimed at preventing abuse and neglect before it occurs, and that prevention resources are often the first to be cut when budgets shrink.

While no one strategy works for every state, the strongest strategies share the following common features. CTF funding and resource allocation decisions:

- Are tied to the mission and objectives identified in the strategic plan.
- Leverage others' funding and resources.
- Are based on criteria that include data on needs and opportunities, and the consideration of research and evidence.
- Advance outcome accountability and quality improvement.
- Contribute to the sustainability of both the fund/resource recipient and the CTF itself.
- Serve as a catalyst for new initiatives and innovation.
- Are made through a fair and open process that engages diverse community stakeholders.
- Are guided by written policies that are routinely reviewed and updated.

#### Quality Indicator:

- The CTF makes resource allocation decisions based on a process informed by research and clear criteria in support of a strategy that maximizes opportunities to leverage impact.

### **Capacity Building**

A focus on capacity building across multiple domains is characteristic of strong and effective CTFs. The programs CTFs typically support focus on capacity building at the individual level, i.e. for parents or caregivers. However, as funders and state leaders, CTFs are clearly well positioned to strengthen the capacities of the organizations they support that provide these services. Beyond providing financial resources, a CTF should seek to support their grantee's/community partner's continuous quality improvement. This can take many forms:

- Providing training or offering resources and incentives to participate in training
- Providing or linking to resources for technical assistance
- Serving as a reliable, accessible resource for knowledge building regarding best practices and research.

Efforts to increase community capacity or achieve broader systemic changes through collaboration are also often a focus for CTFs. Community capacity building also takes varied forms, including:

- Supporting local councils focused on advancing child abuse and neglect prevention and family strengthening in a specific geographic area.

- Providing funding, training, technical assistance or other support for collaborative initiatives and other community capacity-building activities.
- Requiring applicants for funding to demonstrate how their proposed projects build community capacity, and fund recipients to report on these metrics.

In order to serve these functions, trust funds must also attend to their own capacity-building needs. Key components for this include:

- Supporting an organizational culture that encourages shared learning.
- Membership and active engagement in the National Alliance of Children's Trust & Prevention Funds.
- Taking advantage of technical assistance from and networking opportunities available through participation in other national resources such as FRIENDS, Prevent Child Abuse America and others.
- Subscribing and attending to the knowledge building information available through the Children's Bureau, Child Welfare Information Gateway and other key resources.
- Ensuring that learning opportunities are available to all staff and volunteers, including the governing board.

Quality Indicator:

- The CTF engages in activities aimed at building its own capacities and those of its partners, including grantees, and of communities.

**Network Development**

A key role that trust funds play is developing and supporting networks of diverse individuals and organizations that share their interest in strengthening families and preventing abuse and neglect before it occurs. Network development takes many forms, including:

- Serving as a communications and knowledge sharing hub (i.e. using various media to share information about research, activities, funding opportunities, etc.)
- Holding conferences and convening meetings.
- Actively engaging in outreach efforts.
- Linking with and encouraging others to link with associated efforts, as well as non-traditional allies.
- Using message frames that encourage broad engagement.
- Recognizing and celebrating accomplishments of network participants.

Quality Indicator:

- The CTF is engaged in activities aimed at broadening and strengthening the network of those who share its interests.

## Evaluation and Knowledge Building

The prevention of child abuse and neglect is a relatively young field, and the research supporting it is constantly evolving. With a commitment to honoring the public trust and wisely using taxpayer dollars to accomplish their mission, strong and effective trust funds recognize evaluation as a cornerstone of their efforts. A key part of this commitment to evaluation and knowledge building is expressed in organizational efforts to support Continuous Quality Improvement processes, both in its own operations and in those with which it partners.

In addition to supporting an organizational culture that encourages shared learning, strong and effective CTFs recognize and act on their responsibility for contributing to knowledge development by:

- Developing and maintaining relationships with those with evaluation expertise.
- Seeking out and using the best available research on strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect.
- Developing their own knowledge of and capacities to use a range of evaluation approaches and methodologies.
- Consistently and systematically evaluating and sharing the results of its own activities and those it funds and supports.
- Thoughtfully selecting and advocating for evaluation approaches and methodologies that are most to appropriate and relevant to what is being evaluated
- Funding and/or supporting the development of evaluation capacity of their grantees.

### Quality Indicator:

- The CTF demonstrates a focus on evaluation and knowledge development in all aspects of its operations.