

Promise Community Handbook

“None of us can truly tap the potential that is out there until we become involved with the people of our communities in promoting the well-being of everyone's children”
~ Con Hogan

Promise Communities Handbook

Helping Vermont to Fulfill the Promise of Every Child

July 10, 2015

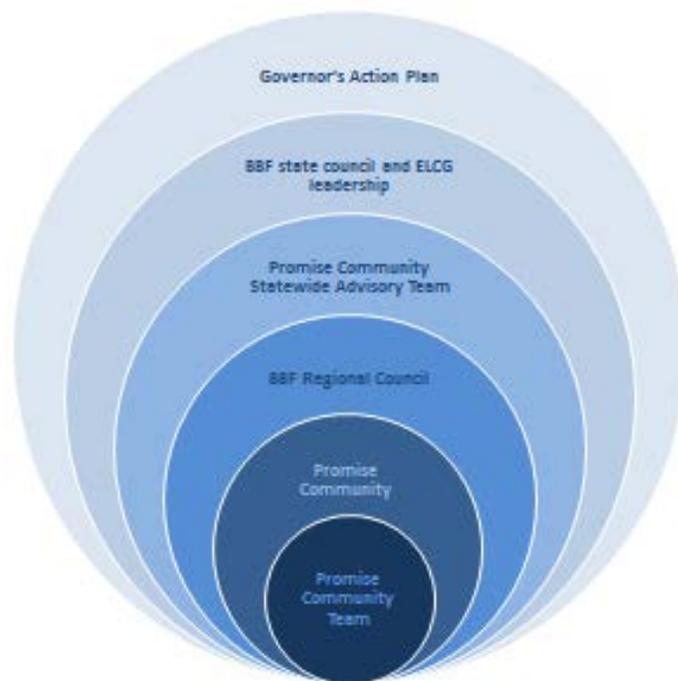
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Promise Communities Overview

The Promise Communities initiative is one of 24 projects in the Early Learning Challenge - Race To The Top Grant awarded to the State of Vermont by the federal Departments of Education and Health and Human Services.

Promise Communities is a place based initiative working in specific, identified geographical areas. In a Promise Community, people and organizations form a partnership and commit to doing whatever it takes to help turn the curve for good outcomes for young children and families in that community. Outcomes include increasing school readiness and closing the achievement gap by 3rd grade for children with high needs.

The Promise Community initiative provides supports such as, Promise Community coaches for each community, financial supports, and information to help local communities work together across sectors – health, education, human services and community planning. With Early Learning Challenge - Race To The Top funding, we hope to reach 18-23 communities in Vermont over the next three years. Planning is family centered, research based, and reflective: communities use Results Based Accountability as a method to develop strategies and indicators. The Strengthening Families Framework and other related activities are employed to engage and support families.



A Project Director oversees program implementation with a statewide advisory team of representatives from diverse stakeholder groups, see appendix A for listing of stakeholders. At the local level, Promise Community coaches provide support to do a community needs assessment and develop and implement a community action plan.

A Promise Community is about the community coming together to support the children and families that live there. Service providers in communities can offer one perspective on the people who live there, yet the neighbors are the ones who can make the biggest impact. A Promise Community wants to engage neighbors to improve the outcomes of young children.

Vermont's Early Learning Challenge Grant

Vermont's Early Learning Challenge - Race To The Top Grant (ELC) is a \$36.9 million federally funded, four year grant to help build a high-quality and accessible early childhood system so that all young children in Vermont will be ready to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. The grant rapidly advances Vermont's larger reform agenda by serving as a "jumpstart" to Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan. Grant implementation is led by the Governor's Office in partnership with the VT Agency of Education, the VT Department for Children and Families, the VT Department of Health, and Building Bright Futures.

Building Bright Futures (BBF) serves a dual role as both the Vermont Early Childhood Advisory Council and a 501(c)(3) statewide network, aligning local solutions of 12 Regional Councils with policy at the state level in order to make improvements in access, quality, and affordability of early care, health, and education for families and young children 0-8. BBF acts as a regional link between the smaller Promise Communities and regional efforts to turn the curve for early childhood.

What will ELC do?

Improve Quality and Access

- ❖ Increase participation in the VT STARS quality rating program so that families will be able to access high quality programs in every VT community.
- ❖ Develop and implement a Pre-K monitoring system to ensure high quality Pre-Kindergarten education programs.
- ❖ Improve high-quality home visiting services to pregnant women and young children and support parents as their children's first teachers.
- ❖ Ensure all children with high needs have access to quality early care and education through the Specialized Child Care Program.

Invest in People

- ❖ Award \$900,000 in scholarships through the VAEYC T.E.A.C.H. program for Early Care professionals wishing to pursue a license or a degree.

- ❖ Expand the VT Child Care Apprenticeship program to provide free college courses and formal on-the-job mentoring.
- ❖ Offer training and coaching in the revised VT Early Learning Standards to better support the learning and development of children with high needs.

Empower Communities

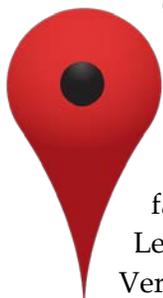
- ❖ Identify Promise Communities in rural areas to support improved outcomes for children with high needs.
- ❖ Improve the power of communities to impact child and family well-being by strengthening the statewide Building Bright Futures network and its 12 Regional Councils.
- ❖ Host Help Me Grow through VT 2-1-1 to provide information, support, community resources and referrals related to early childhood and childhood development, including developmental screening resources.

Ensure We Are Making a Difference

- ❖ Revise VT's Kindergarten Readiness Survey to make sure we have valid and reliable assessment data to measure children's learning and development.
- ❖ Expand vermontinsights.org as an online toolbox that helps Vermonters leverage meaningful data to guide policies that improve the well-being of children, families and communities.
- ❖ Connect early childhood data to Vermont's K-12 State Longitudinal Data System in the Agency of Education.

The Early Learning Challenge Grant strengthens a system to support early learning, and the healthy physical, social, and emotional development of children with high needs to lay the foundation for future success of all Vermont's children. Grant supported initiatives narrow the opportunity gap between high needs children and their peers before it occurs, so that all children are able to thrive and grow up to contribute to a vibrant economic future for our state.

History of Place Based Initiatives



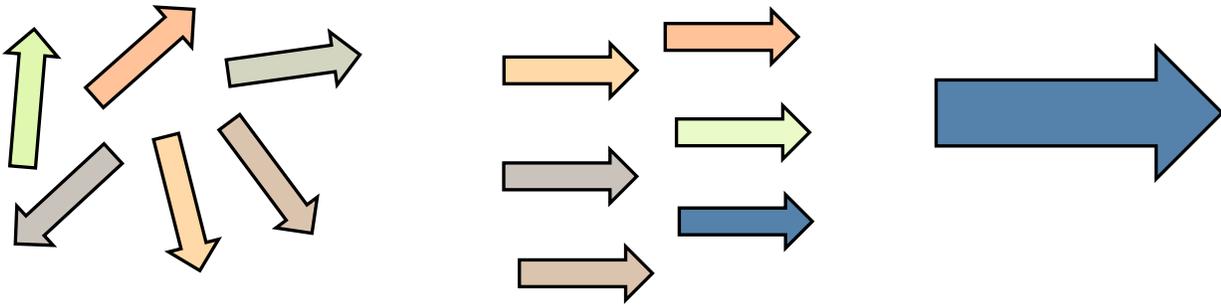
Communities are embracing place based initiatives all across the country. One of the leading efforts comes from the Harlem Children's Zone, which began in the 1990's with a one block pilot project. It has grown to serve children and families in 97 city blocks of New York. Building on the success of the program, efforts have been made to duplicate the model and reach out into other cities to support children and families in poverty to help children succeed in school and beyond. Through the Early Learning Challenge federal grant several states have developed place based initiatives. Vermont is on the forefront to address the nature of rural poverty and develop a community initiative in this way. Some other state programs are called Promise Neighborhoods and Transformation Zones. How they operate to support families varies from program specific initiatives to more open community level planning and ranging in ages from early childhood to young adults in families.

Frameworks

The Vermont Promise Community Initiative designs and delivers our work within evidence based frameworks:

Collective Impact

Collective Impact is a framework for social change that uses the following five conditions to maximize the impact of coalitions: **Common Agenda, Shared Measurement, Mutual Reinforcing Activities, Continuous Communication, and Backbone Support**. Doing complex work across agencies, organizations, and stakeholder groups can be difficult and complicated but ultimately provides us with deeper and wider reaching wins. By utilizing the evidence based framework on Collective Impact we can achieve maximum synergy and impact while hopefully minimizing some of the pitfalls.



Strengthening Families



Promise Communities aim to strengthen the ties that bind communities—making families more resilient regardless of income or need. Promise Community coaches will approach the relationship between communities and families from the perspective of a protective factors framework. This evidence based framework promoted by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)

(<http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies>) is being disseminated throughout Vermont in a variety of efforts. The

framework provides the community with a coherent vision of how communities support families and in turn promote healthy outcomes for all children. CSSP describes five identified protective factors that support families and children: **Parent Resilience, Social Connections, Concrete Support in times of Need, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, Social and Emotional competencies in children**. The Promise Community Initiative integrates these five factors into goal setting, needs assessment design, and planning processes to ensure families stay in the forefront in our work.

Results Based Accountability

In 2014 the Vermont legislature enacted legislation requiring the use of Results Based Accountability (RBA) for the monitoring and planning of any state government programs. This is a framework from the work of Mark Friedman as a disciplined manner of thinking about

results. RBA asks three key questions to understand if anyone is better off as a result of the work – How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off? Promise Community coaches begin asking these questions in the planning phase to ensure that communities are measuring the right things to demonstrate success – the work has made children and families in the communities “better off”. RBA is especially relevant to coalition/ Collective Impact work as it clearly explains the connection between what changes happened for everyone and the difference a particular effect makes. All of the coaches are trained in RBA and look forward to integrating RBA concepts into our planning work at the community level. Each community offers its own unique assets. These qualities will be incorporated into the work of the Promise Communities as each community will discover their own solutions.

Promise Community Selection Process

This was the process used for selecting the first cohort of Promise Communities:

1. Governor Shumlin announced the request for applications in a press conference for the first cohort.
2. A Request for Applications was posted on the Child Development Website and distributed through email lists including Building Bright Futures, schools and partner stakeholders. Application details were posted on the Child Development Division website: http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/promise_communities
3. Webinar informational sessions about the application process and expectations were offered one week after information was shared.
4. Applications were received approximately thirty days from posting.
5. Applications were reviewed by a selection committee using a scoring rubric, also found on the website: http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/promise_communities. Selection committee represented individuals from the governor’s office, Early Learning Challenge Grant, human services, health, education and other state community partners.
6. Communities were announced in April of 2015.

Promise Community Coaches

The Promise Community coach spends two years in each community; facilitating a needs assessment and then supporting the creation and early implementation of a “road map”. During this time they will facilitate conversations to include community neighbors and engage the voices of families, support work groups, and move plans forward. They serve as coach of the communities they are working in, helping to do “whatever it takes” to turn the curve for children and families. The coaches:

- **Serve as the primary point of contact between the Local Promise Community and the Statewide Promise Community Initiative.** The coaches will share information

regarding program standards and practices to their communities, including developing specific materials for communications.

- **Facilitate coalition building activities.** The coach can provide support to the team by building collaborative agendas, support partner recruitment, develop written materials, set up meeting spaces, disseminate meeting minutes, organize training workshops, and provide on-site technical assistance and consultation.
- **Lead Participatory Needs Assessment.** Conducts conversations, gatherings, studies, special surveys, interviews, focus groups, and community forums to determine priorities for communities.
- **Link Promise Communities.** Coaches support communication at the community level to help break down silos. Coaches will also facilitate coordination of Promise Community efforts with other departmental, agency and community programs.
- **Apply RBA frameworks, set objectives with communities and evaluation partners to design the Roadmap.** Develops and participates in collaboration with evaluation team in the establishment and operation of quality assurance procedures, including the monitoring of results.
- **Provide technical assistance.** This includes researching best and promising practices for community empowerment and bringing relevant information back to their communities.

Promise Community Team Building

The Promise Community team is the core of the Promise Communities planning process. It is important to strike a balance between openness to new ideas and members while maintaining a core set of norms and work flow. At initial launch meetings Promise Communities coaches will lead the group to set the following parameters for themselves:

- Develop group norms of behavior
- Support rotating group roles
- Develop strategies to invite others to join
- Guide the preliminary definition of community
- Support a shared mission for moving forward
- Expand how Strengthening Families effects the Promise Communities
- Establish a shared decision making processes



Steps for Promise Community Needs Assessment

Each community has assets that create the place in which people live. Promise Community teams will review the assets to help inform the process of identifying the community and its needs. This will take place in the first four to eight months of the initiative.

1. Promise Communities will gather data and review of existing information. The following is a list of data points to be considered in the asset/ needs assessment:
 - a. Demographics- data such as: population, age, educational level, income range, race/ethnicity, poverty levels, gender, single parents, immigration levels
 - b. Work life- data such as: primary employer, skill level (do the community's skills match available jobs?), unemployment, full and part time opportunities
 - c. Schools- data such as: attendance, test scores, Kindergarten readiness scores, and mobility numbers-how many kids leave the district or join the district mid-year?
 - d. Parent's engagement with schools- data such as: what is available both structurally and programmatically?
 - e. Housing- data such as: tax rates, home ownership and grand list, rental pricing and availability, homelessness and marginally housed, resource availability for cohousing, subsidized housing, neighborhood associations, perceptions of tax rates and housing opportunities
 - f. Internet availability
 - g. Child Safety- data such as: number referred for Department for Children and Family services or intervention; Safety with peers- school environment survey
 - h. Early Care, Education and Intervention- data such as: Access to CIS and EEE services, and CIS/EEE those students receiving a One Plan or IEP? Available, affordable, high quality early care and education opportunities. Availability and use of home-visiting programs or parent child centers
 - i. Health- data such as: Medical Homes, immunization rates, drug/alcohol rehabilitation services, dental coverage, mental health services available and utilized, health disparities, teen pregnancy rates
 - j. Nutrition- data such as: grocery stores (what are the closest stores and what are their sales), food shelf usage and access, Three Squares VT (food voucher), Child and Adult Care Food Program, summer food program, WIC enrollment
 - k. Community infrastructure- data such as: transportation, recreation opportunities, community events, town plans, churches, informal initiatives
 - l. Libraries- data such as: usage, programming
 - m. Public Safety- data such as: local police/state police, incarceration levels, major issues

- n. Town History- data such as: town plans, town budget
 - o. Existing needs assessments- What else do we know?
 - p. Community culture- qualitative data such as: how does the community view the importance of early childhood? Level of understanding of early childhood brain development? Responsibility of all community members is raising healthy, successful children.
2. Develop indicators for measuring improvement
 3. Community conversations on data
 - a. Review information gathered to reflect, find community meaning and tell a story behind the data gathered
 4. Finding Strengths and Gaps: Using our RBA toolkit the coach will facilitate a conversation working from the communities desired population level outcomes and working backwards to answer the following questions:
 - a. What are we doing well?
 - b. Where do we overlap?
 - c. What areas could use some more attention?

Promise Community Roadmap

The Promise Communities Roadmap serves as the primary planning document and funding/grant application for each community. Drafting of the plan is an inclusive process, with all community members and stakeholders invited to participate to be completed by the end of year one. Continuing the RBA process, coach and communities answer the following questions:

1. From the information gathered in the needs assessment, asset mapping, and analysis. What is the community going to do to make an impact on Kindergarten readiness?
2. Who is the customer?
3. How will we know if someone is better off?
4. What works to support children and families better?
5. Who will do what, including the recommendation of a fiscal agent or agents?
6. Review plan with Promise Community director, Julianne Nickerson. And present to Statewide Stakeholder group.

Evaluation

The Child Development Division has contracted with Flint Springs Associates (FSA) to lead all Promise Community evaluation activities. The evaluation will be iterative and participatory so that communities can make informed decisions about their ongoing work. What FSA is responsible for:

Facilitate a participatory process to create an evaluation plan. FSA staff will structure and facilitate discussions intended to identify and gain agreement on:

- Concrete measures for evaluating services and supports (program performance efforts) that will be implemented as a result of the community needs assessment
- Concrete measures for evaluating client outcomes resulting from those efforts (better offs)
- Concrete indicators of community change

FSA will provide each local team with a draft evaluation plan that identifies:

- Population and program performance measures
- Specific data needed for each of these measures
- Quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (e.g., interviews, survey, accessing existing data)
- Data collection tools (e.g., Structured Interview, Strengthening Families Survey, Collaboration Survey)
- Data collection responsibilities including who will collect data
- Data collection and reporting timelines

Local Promise Communities will use existing tools when appropriate for data collection around certain measures. FSA will develop tools that are needed to conduct structured interviews and satisfaction surveys as well as create simple data reporting methods (e.g., use of Survey Monkey for entering and organizing data).

FSA will provide training and a range of technical assistance to Promise Community team members. FSA will determine on a site-by-site basis whether to provide group or individual trainings to designated collectors. Written guidelines and instructions for using data collection tools will be embedded in each tool, making the collector's job as clear as possible.

Implementation

1. Promise Communities will use the Roadmap to guide implementation, making it a “living document” – leading community work and open for revision.
2. Financial support of *up to* \$200,000 will be available to the community for specific implementation activities.
3. Coaches will continue to support and serve communities – ensuring the communities remain on track to meet the roadmap and evaluation goals.

4. Throughout the implementation process continuous improvement and planning processes with data tracking and feedback from evaluators and coaches will occur.
5. Clear ongoing community commitment and leadership to continue work as the coach transitions out of the community.

Partners

As a collective impact – place based initiative, the Promise Community effort welcomes the involvement of any and all potential partners and stakeholders. At the state level, Promise Communities works with our stakeholder group and the Building Bright Futures council. At the community level we welcome participation from anyone (either neighbor or professional) to have an opportunity to influence the lives of children.



Building Bright Futures

The Building Bright Futures regional council is a close partner that aligns with the overall goals of Promise Communities working on a regional level many of the same challenges. yet works at a larger level than the Promise Communities.

The role of BBF regional coordinators shifts throughout a community's timeline in the following way;

Application Process:

- Help to distribute the Promise Community Application to stakeholders and other regional partners- such as sending emails through the BBF network, making space at BBF meetings for Promise Communities presentations when appropriate, offering contacts or introductions to Promise Communities coach.
- Connect community stakeholders if they are applying from similar communities. For example, if they hear of two groups that will apply for Promise Communities and they are from the same specific geographic area- encourage these two groups to work together as one community.
- Be aware of which communities in the region are applying for Promise Communities.
- BBF Coordinators are welcome, but not expected, to be part of the application process. This will depend on the specific relationship with the community which is applying and if they see a place for the coordinator, and if the coordinator sees a place for themselves in that stakeholder circle.
- Sign and sponsor the Promise Community Application, showing awareness of the application from a particular community.

Once Promise Communities have been identified in the region:

- Meet with Promise Community coach to provide any information about the community: key partners, local community knowledge or history
- Allow time on regional meeting agenda for Promise Community work progress, updates or announcements
- Promise Community local team will have a representative sit on both local Promise Community team and at the BBF regional council
- Share information about the BBF regional plan with the Promise Community team
- Promise Communities will share Community Roadmap with BBF regional council
- Collaborate as seen fit, (e.g. Asset Mapping work)
- Reciprocal data sharing
- Sustain and support the Promise Community effort over time

The larger ELC grant is a partnership between the Agency of Education, the Agency of Human Services, and others; Promise Communities supports this collaboration and asks that these local partners sign community applications and participate at the local level.

School

Each Promise Community contains at least one elementary school. While the exact role of each school depends on the needs and dynamics of their community, across the state they will share the following role;

During the Application Process:

- Help to distribute the Promise Community Application
- School personnel are encouraged to participate in the application process.
- Principals and School Superintendents are asked to sign the Promise Community Application, showing awareness of the application from a particular community.

Once Promise Communities have been identified in the region:

- Meet with Promise Community coach to provide any information about the community: key partners, local community knowledge or history
- Participate on local Promise Community team
- Data sharing with both evaluation team and local Promise Communities team.

Community Partners

Others are invited to be participants in the Promise Community as they wish. We encourage the community to provide signatures of support in the application process and if identified as a Promise Community, to then be an active member of the local team.

- Commit to doing “Whatever it takes” to turn the curve to serve young children and families of the community

- Attend regular meetings of the Promise Community collaborators to develop the Promise Community roadmap (weekly to monthly)
- Support the implementation of the plan
- Collaborate with an evaluation team to develop and collect short term data; and develop a longitudinal data plan to track the progress of the work, beyond the time of the coach participation
- Collaborate with the various partners to allow for sustainability of the Promise Community roadmap
- Support equity of planning and participation throughout the Promise Communities.

Contact Information

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Appendix A- Stakeholder Members

Organization	Representative	Contact Information
Race To The Top- Early Learning Challenge	Julie Cadwallader- Staub Carolyn Wesley	julie.cadwallader-staub@vermont.gov carolyn.wesley@vermont.gov
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AHS Commissioner office	April Allen Karen Vastine	april.allen@vermont.gov karen.vastine@vermont.gov
Head Start Association		
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Home-visiting	Laura Bernard	laura.bernard@vermont.gov
Integrated Family Services	Carol Maloney	carol.maloney@vermont.gov
Department of Mental Health	Bill McMains	william.mcmains@partner.vermont.gov
AHS Secretary's Office- homelessness	Angus Chaney	angus.chaney@vermont.gov
American Academy of Pediatrics/VT Association of Family Practitioners	Stephanie Winters	swinters@vtmd.org
Oral Health Coalition		
Agency Of Education	Kate Rogers	kate.rogers@vermont.gov
Community Action	Steve Geller	sgeller@sevca.org
Public School Principal	William Anton	wanton@doverschool.net
School Superintendents		
School Board Association		
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VT Business Round Table- VT Business for Social Responsibility	Andrea Cohen	
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VT Interfaith Action	Debbie Ingram	debbie@viavt.org
VT Association for the Education of Young Children		

Parent Child Center Network	Jan Rossier	janleerossier@hotmail.com
Prevent Child Abuse VT	Linda E. Johnson Cindy Wells Patricia Hendee Suzan Marshall	ljohnson@pcavt.org cwells@pcavt.org phendee@pcavt.org smarshall@pcavt.org
Vermont Family Network	Pam McCarthy	pam.mccarthy@vtfn.org
4H- University of Vermont Extension	Sarah Kleinman	sarah.kleinman@uvm.edu
Vermont Foodbank	John Sayles Jen Messier	jsayles@vtfoodbank.org jmessier@vtfoodbank.org
Vermont Birth to Three	Barbara Postman	barbara.postman@gmail.com
Children's Trust Fund	Linda Allen/or Fagan	linda@vtchildrenstrust.org
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Permanent Fund	Mark Sustic / Rick Davis	mark.sustic@gmail.com
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Promise Communities	Shannon Hottinger	shannon.hottinger@vermont.gov

Appendix B- Promise Communities Bibliography

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