

Early Education Funders Collaborative Case Study

March 2018



Executive summary

EEFC Mission

The mission of the Early Education Funders Collaborative is to support the development of a high-quality early learning system that prepares children living in poverty, especially children of color, for success in kindergarten and beyond.

The Kansas City Early Education Funders Collaborative (EEFC) comprises representatives of 12 philanthropic organizations who together administer the Early Education Grant Fund. The Collaborative promotes kindergarten readiness in the region by supporting initiatives that increase access to and/or the quality of early education for children living in poverty, especially children of color. This case study describes EEFC activities from 2014 to 2017 and presents members' perspectives on the Collaborative's impacts, challenges, and future directions.

According to EEFC members, collaborative grantmaking benefited

the Kansas City early education community, applicants and grantees, and members themselves.

In its first two years of funding, the EEFC made large investments in the region's **early education community**, principally to organizations serving many young children in high-need communities. In interviews, EEFC members reported that **applicants and grantees** benefited from an efficient application process and through exposure to many funders. Participation gave **EEFC members** opportunities to influence large investment decisions, build their knowledge, and use resources not available through their own organizations.

EEFC Reported Benefits



The Early Education Community

- More than **\$9.6M** in grants to **29 organizations** serving young children and families in **2 years**
- **Increased access** to high-quality early education through EEFC-funded program expansions
- **Improved program quality** through EEFC-sponsored workforce development and parent support programs
- Support for **systems change efforts** such as policy advocacy



Applicants and Grantees

- **Streamlined, efficient application process** freed up time and resources for delivering services
- Opportunity to receive **larger than typical awards** to support projects with wider impact
- **Guidance on grant-writing** from representatives of diverse funding organizations
- Built **new connections and relationships** with funders



Collaborative Members

- **Input** into decisions about larger investments in the early learning community
- **Enhanced knowledge** of early learning and of the region's needs and resources through other Collaborative members and local stakeholders
- **Collective technical and topical expertise and resources** exceeded those of single foundations

Case Study Overview

This study of the Early Education Funders Collaborative was conducted by SRI International at the request of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. Data came from interviews of 12 EEFC members in fall 2017 and from reviews of internal and public documents.

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EEFC members reported that an inclusive atmosphere, knowledge sharing, and strong logistical support facilitated the EEFC's early success.

Members said that the EEFC's open-door policy resulted in an atmosphere that was conducive to effective collaboration and that allocating meeting time to sharing knowledge and resources helped keep the group engaged and informed. They also reported that having dedicated members oversee the logistical work of the Collaborative made the work efficient and productive.

EEFC members discussed challenges in reaching the target population, measuring impact, and ensuring sustainability.

Some members expressed concerns that the current grantmaking approach did not reach the full target population because some providers may not meet the criteria for EEFC funding. Some members also reported a lack of data to track their progress, and some expressed

concern about the sustainability of the work they support, as well as the long-term commitment of EEFC member foundations.

EEFC members reported that with a more focused and strategic approach, collaborative grantmaking can promote sustained, region-wide improvements in early learning.

Members reported that EEFC grants had facilitated some positive outcomes for individual organizations but that they wanted to ensure that all children in the target population are ready for kindergarten. They reported that making lasting improvements in kindergarten readiness could be possible with a more strategic approach, including taking risks beyond supporting individual providers. Accordingly, EEFC members decided in spring 2017 to launch a formal strategic planning process. Each interviewed member viewed this decision as a positive step toward realizing the EEFC's full potential.

Challenges Reported by EEFC Members



The Early Education Community

- Grantmaking approach may not be focused and strategic enough to reach a large proportion of the region's young children living in poverty, especially children of color
- Current eligibility and scoring criteria may disadvantage some organizations that serve many of the children in the target population



Applicants and Grantees

- Large, short-term EEFC grants may create dependencies in grantees rather than supporting them to build capacity to sustain programming



Collaborative Members

- A lack of data on children's kindergarten readiness outcomes hindered the Collaborative's ability to measure its own impact
- The requirement that member foundations make only a yearlong funding commitment to the EEFC may make it difficult for the Collaborative to achieve longer-term goals

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Current EEFC Membership

George K. Baum Family Foundation
The H&R Block Foundation
Stanley H. Durwood Foundation
Francis Family Foundation
Greater Kansas City Community Foundation
Hall Family Foundation
Hispanic Development Fund
Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
William G. McGowan Charitable Fund
Sherman Family Foundation
Shumaker Family Foundation
United Way of Greater Kansas City



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Background

EEFC Mission

The mission of the Early Education Funders Collaborative is to support the development of a high-quality early learning system that prepares children living in poverty, especially children of color, for success in kindergarten and beyond.

In 2014, several foundations in the Kansas City metropolitan area were investing in early education, primarily through operating support that enabled providers to serve more children. However, there was little dialogue or systematic collaboration about the work among funders. Four colleagues, representing one nonprofit and three philanthropic organizations, began meeting monthly to exchange knowledge and ideas. These initial discussions reflected a shared desire to support the region's young children through high-quality programs that prepared them for kindergarten.

Over time, the informal meetings attracted philanthropists from other local foundations. The group welcomed all local funders to the conversation, establishing an open-door policy that continues today. The original goal of the Early Education Funders Collaborative (EEFC)² mirrored the intentions of the participating

foundations – to improve access to and the quality of early childhood programs that prepare the region's children for kindergarten. From its inception, the EEFC had sought to support young children living in poverty, and later it articulated a specific emphasis on children of color living in poverty. The Collaborative commissioned two landscape studies, completed in 2015 and 2016, to better understand the region's communities, early education program characteristics, and the policy implications for early learning.³

“I wanted to see if collaboration would work. How could we more effectively deploy resources and set the bar higher, both for giving and for asking?”⁴

² Throughout this document, “EEFC” and “the Collaborative” refer to the Early Education Funders Collaborative.

³ The EEFC serves six counties in the Kansas City metro area: Johnson and Wyandotte counties in Kansas and Cass, Clay, Jackson, and Platte counties in Missouri. Landscape study reports, which present data on Jackson, Johnson, and Wyandotte counties, are available at <https://www.growyourgiving.org/early-ed-report>

⁴ All quotations in this case study report are from interviews of current EEFC members.



As the EEFC membership grew, the discussion evolved to how interested funders could leverage their financial assets as well as their knowledge to promote accessible, high-quality early education programming. The result was the Early Education Grant Fund, launched in 2016. The Collaborative established criteria for awarding grants to local early education programs and initiatives and also documented its guiding principles, including its vision, mission, core values, and strategic goals. All foundations participating in the EEFC had the option to invest in the Early Education Grant Fund; those that did had a required annual investment of at least \$50,000. Currently all 12 foundations participating in the EEFC contribute to the fund, and overseeing grantmaking is a primary focus of the Collaborative's work. The EEFC

completed two funding cycles in 2016 and two in 2017.

Members reported that in spring 2017, after three funding cycles, the Collaborative agreed that EEFC grants had facilitated some positive outcomes for individual programs. Yet members wanted to have a larger, region-wide impact on kindergarten readiness. They acknowledged a need to better articulate the EEFC's goals and to focus its strategies. The EEFC accordingly launched a formal strategic planning process, hiring Bellwether Education Partners to oversee the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for the future work of the Collaborative.⁵

⁵ At the time of writing, the strategic planning process was ongoing, and it is not included in this case study.



Benefits of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative

In four cycles of grantmaking over two years, the EEFC has influenced a wide range of early education stakeholders in the Kansas City metro area. In interviews, EEFC members described what they believed were benefits to the region’s overall early learning community, EEFC applicants and grantees, and Collaborative members themselves.

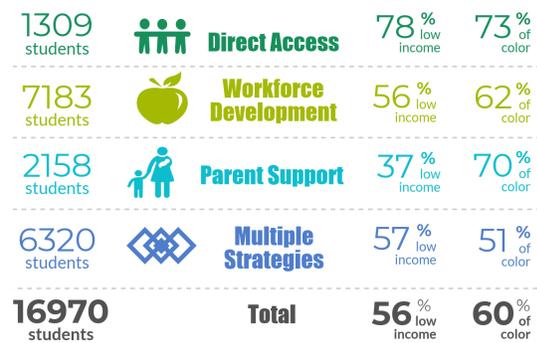
The EEFC made significant investments to address critical regional needs in early education.

Demand for local early care and education services in the Kansas City metro area greatly exceeds supply.⁶ The region’s 56,000 spaces in licensed home- and center-based care programs can serve less than half the 126,000 children under age 5. More than 1 in 5 of these children live in poverty, and 1 in 3 are children of color. Across four funding cycles in 2016 and 2017, the EEFC awarded **\$9.6 million in 37 grants to 29 organizations**. The grants ranged from \$32,000 to \$500,000 and supported greater direct access to preschool and early childcare (e.g., by expanding or creating new childcare centers), early childhood education workforce development, parent support

programs, and systems change efforts such as policy advocacy. By their most recent reporting period, grantees had leveraged EEFC funds to benefit almost 17,000 children, most of whom resided in high-need communities. All grantees reported that they had made progress on their target outcomes, which included

- improving classroom quality and increasing enrollment rates,
- changing policies or program-level practices,
- addressing program sustainability,
- improving child and family well-being through developmental screenings, and
- educating parents on positive parent-child interactions.

Characteristics of students benefited, by grant focus⁷



⁶ Sources for the data presented in this section are as reported in KC EEFC Strategic Planning by Bellwether Education Partners (August 4, 2017), as follows: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (2015); Missouri Comprehensive Data System (2016); Greater Kansas City Early Care and Education Landscape Summary Report (2017); Mid-America Head Start Community Assessment (2017–2018); Missouri Accreditation webpage (n.d.); Office of Head Start Grantee Snapshot (2015–16); Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2016–17); and the Kansas Department of Education (2016–17).

⁷ These numbers and percentages reflect the actual numbers of children who benefited from 2016 grants (reported by 11 grantees) and the projected numbers of children who benefited from 2017 grants (reported by 16 grantees), as available at the time of writing. Data from two funded programs are included in the counts of children who benefited but not in the percentages, because the grantees did not provide data on low-income children or children of color. Funded programs that do not serve children directly were excluded from the calculations.

The EEFC leveraged expertise in early education to increase community awareness of the importance of high-quality early learning opportunities for children.

Collectively, EEFC members possessed a range of expertise in early education and deep knowledge of the area's organizations and services. Some members had relationships with community stakeholders, and the EEFC hosted discussions with guest speakers from education and policy organizations, drawing attention to the region's unique issues and needs. Some Collaborative members noted that community stakeholders are excited about having a group of funders working together in support of early learning, with one member suggesting that the mere existence of a funding collaborative dedicated

to the sector sends the message that early childhood education is important. Another member suggested that the EEFC could do more to leverage its influence: "(There are) heavy hitters in terms of foundations and individuals at the table; that power hasn't been leveraged yet. We could do more advocacy around issues."

Data compiled by the Collaborative show that after the first two EEFC funding cycles in 2016, overall investments in Kansas City's early education community had increased by 79 percent since 2015. Some Collaborative members emphasized that the EEFC itself had not caused other funders to invest in early learning, but it may have played a role in bringing attention to the sector, with one member explaining, "I don't think we've catalyzed more spending outside [the Collaborative]. But we're adding to the conversation."

Grantees typically received larger awards from the EEFC than individual foundations could provide.

Some members reported that the grants EEFC funded (ranging from \$32,000 to \$500,000) were significantly larger than most individual foundations could have provided alone. These members reported that large grants permitted programs to increase the number of children and families they served or direct more resources to improve program quality. Larger awards for program operations also freed up funds for some grantees to pursue new projects. For example, a



Collaborative member reported that significant EEFC funding for general operations enabled one center based program to pursue new work in behavioral health and to expand professional development for teachers.

The Collaborative supported prospective grantees by offering a streamlined application process and guidance on writing high-quality proposals.

Some EEFC members reported that writing just one grant proposal for a substantial award (rather than applying to multiple foundations for smaller grants) reduced burden on applicants. This meant that programs serving young children and their families could spend fewer resources on fundraising. Two Collaborative members reported that some EEFC member foundations accepted the EEFC grant application for their individual grantmaking.

Some members reported that applicants benefited from having guidance from Collaborative members during the application process. Two Collaborative members reported that the quality of EEFC applications was generally high and had improved over the course of the four funding cycles, with one member attributing this improvement to the individualized support that EEFC members provided prospective grantees.

Findings from a 2016 survey of applicants conducted by the Collaborative suggested that applicants found the support from EEFC members useful. The majority of the 20 responding applicants, most of whom did not receive EEFC awards, indicated that they found the application process helpful and intended to apply for an EEFC grant again.



“Dedicated time for learning is something I don’t have time for in my own organization.”

“Grantees can leverage more money with less effort.”

Applicants gained exposure to multiple funders. Some members used introductions through the EEFC to form new connections with early childhood organizations that might appeal to their individual foundations. Some members further reported that they took applications that were not funded by the EEFC to their parent foundations for funding consideration.

The Collaborative members had access to data that enabled them to better understand community characteristics and investments in early education and to share this information with their foundations’ boards. As mentioned, EEFC members commissioned two landscape studies to better understand the context and needs of the local early education community, an activity that some members said they could not have undertaken through their own

organizations. As a result of the EEFC’s emphasis on data informed decision-making, some Collaborative members reported being able to provide more precise and compelling information to their respective boards. One member reported using EEFC-produced reports in presentations to colleagues at her parent foundation.

“It’s a rare thing to sit with a group and base decisions on objective data.”

Collaborative members created a learning community that deepened their knowledge, provided new resources, and helped them build new relationships. Most EEFC members reported that learning from other Collaborative members and from community leaders about the region’s unique early childhood challenges and opportunities kept them engaged in the work and supported thoughtful decision-making. In addition to dedicating Collaborative meeting time to in-depth, substantive discussion, EEFC members shared relevant documents and connected with each other through emails, informal conversations, and community work outside the EEFC. Members mentioned that various individuals in the group contributed specific knowledge and resources on topics such as issues in early childhood education and subpopulations of young children (e.g., children of color), specific organizations and initiatives in the region, data analysis and program evaluation, administrative support, marketing, and strategic planning.



Factors that Facilitated Success

In interviews, EEFC members reported factors that they believed drove the Collaborative's early achievements.

The EEFC's inclusive philosophy contributed to a collegial atmosphere. The EEFC maintains an informal, open-door policy for interested funders. In interviews, most members said that this inclusiveness resulted in a welcoming atmosphere that was conducive to knowledge sharing. One member asserted that the diversity across participating foundations, both in terms of assets and work cultures, helped to build awareness of the diversity across early learning organizations in the Kansas City metro area.

The EEFC's decision-making policies also reflected a spirit of inclusion. Regardless of the amount of the investment in the Early Education

Grant Fund, each contributing foundation could cast one vote on each application, with awards decided by a simple majority. As one member described, this meant that knowledgeable philanthropists with smaller budgets could have a voice in large investments, and those with larger budgets could make significant funding decisions with the benefit of broad input from multiple perspectives.

Two members said that building consensus in a large group with no formal membership criteria can slow decision making because of divergent experiences and priorities. Some acknowledged that a collaborative necessarily has a slower process but reported that having many voices at the table results in better decisions. Overall, most members reported that the process of awarding grants, like

“The dynamic of the conversation and due diligence process and planning process have been far more rich than what a single funding organization can achieve.”



“Who is at the table matters a lot. . . . The knowledge people bring to the table, not just of the staff, but of their boards, has been tremendous.”

“It’s a group that works well together; it’s a group that learns well together.”

the sharing of their knowledge with each other, was respectful and gave all participants an opportunity to contribute.

Having the right people at the table – who were knowledgeable and committed – supported effective collaboration. Some members commented that their colleagues had essential skills, experience, and knowledge, often using the words “committed” and “passionate” to describe fellow members. Some reported that the EEFC’s initial outreach ensured that the key players in the region were aware of the Collaborative, including some smaller foundations and organizations that

were new to funding early education. Members said that some funders chose not to participate but that the current membership offers the needed experience and a strong commitment to improving early education across the region.

Strong logistical support kept members engaged. Although the EEFC does not have an official leadership structure, all interviewees reported that the dedicated members who oversee the logistical and administrative work of the Collaborative played a big role in its success. They indicated that good organization, frequent and clear communication, and timely follow-up facilitated their work.

Challenges to Collaborative Grantmaking

EEFC members reflected on challenges that they have encountered as they transitioned from being a learning community to also being a funding organization.

Members suggested that their efforts had not yet resulted in a region-wide impact on early learning and suggested a need to reassess the way they allocate funds. There was broad consensus that a collaborative funding approach holds the promise of creating sustained, region-wide improvement in children’s kindergarten readiness but that the Collaborative

had not yet achieved this. Some members reported that transformative improvement in kindergarten readiness would be possible only by identifying and implementing a more focused and strategic approach, including a willingness to take risks beyond supporting individual providers. Two members discussed some initial efforts to support work that could serve many more children than an individual provider can, including an EEFC grant to an organization working to prevent the defunding of early education initiatives in Kansas

and another to promote the use of a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) in Missouri.⁸ However, these represented a small percentage of EEFC investments; the Collaborative has committed 10 percent of its 2018 budget to activities to improve early learning systems, such as policy advocacy.

Some members expressed concern that the EEFC funded high-quality organizations that serve some children in the target population but did not support organizations that have fewer resources but serve many more children in the target population. These members stated that EEFC investments, although substantial and awarded to high-quality programs, primarily supported the “usual suspects” –large, center-based programs that had long-standing support from several individual funders. One member commented that the EEFC’s eligibility criteria for school- and center-based programs prohibited investments in small organizations that were not licensed and that lacked capacity to measure children’s readiness for kindergarten.

Members further articulated a perceived disconnect between the Collaborative’s target population and the organizations it has supported. Some members stated that the EEFC’s eligibility criteria and scoring rubric may disadvantage many providers, especially home-based providers

and smaller organizations that serve many of the region’s young children living in poverty, especially children of color. Some members stated that the group needs to discuss how to balance the Collaborative’s high standards for grantee accountability and quality against the need to identify and support more providers who serve children in the target population. This could mean making riskier investments or directing funds to strengthen provider organizations before funding the improvement and expansion of direct services – a costly strategy that some members reported would be prohibitive for their individual foundations to fund. Some members said that the group was open to considering proposals that their individual foundations would not consider, such as applications perceived as being relatively low in quality but high in potential. Despite the members’ willingness to discuss potentially risky investments, however, the Collaborative typically has not funded these types of projects.

One member remarked that the Collaborative needs to more explicitly articulate population-specific strategies for reaching the children

“The biggest (challenge) has been to figure out how we can make a difference and do more than throw money at good programs. How can we change the landscape of early childhood education and make it available throughout the region?”

⁸ A QRIS is a state-supported strategy to rate, monitor, and improve the quality of early education programs. Kansas and Missouri do not currently use a QRIS or other approach to assess program effectiveness.

“Rather than worrying about the number of kids we serve, we need to build capacity to sustain funding [for programs].”

of interest: “We give preference to... organizations that already have curricula and assessments in place. Organizations that see [the EEFC] as an opportunity to improve practice are disadvantaged.... We have an opportunity to think through how we can impact these quality deserts.”

The EEFC’s large short-term grants may create dependencies among grantees. Some members expressed concern that EEFC grants were too large and questioned grantees’ ability to sustain the work beyond the year or two of funding. For example, some providers used EEFC funds to hire staff, despite having no guarantee

that the money would be available in future years. One member described concerns about dependencies among grantees this way: “Several of us have had conversations about the long-term impact of very large grants to large organizations. Does that set them up for failure? Does it decrease their development capabilities? In creating an ease of application, we want to make sure we do no harm.” Some members suggested that rather than investing funds for organizations to serve more children, the Collaborative could help build organizational capacity to sustain existing programming.

The Collaborative did not yet have a focused overarching plan with clear strategies for achieving broad impact on kindergarten readiness.

Most members concurred that the EEFC’s mission in pursuit of kindergarten readiness has remained constant. According to some respondents, current EEFC members maintain the EEFC’s original intention to fund projects that individual foundations could not take on. One member stated that over time the Collaborative had developed some strategies and tactics to guide the work, particularly when it decided to begin grantmaking. Some members reported, however, that the EEFC had not yet done enough to operationalize specific strategies for supporting



innovative work that could “move the needle” on the kindergarten readiness of children in the Kansas City metro area. As a result, some members reported, the EEFC has primarily funded the kinds of activities that participating foundations already supported independently. As one member said, “We’re still trying to figure out the benefit of collaboration when we could give to those organizations individually.”

The EEFC did not have a way to measure its impact on children and families. The Collaborative provided members with data on the early learning landscape to inform decisions about grant awards, but some members reported that the EEFC lacked data on outcomes that would enable it to evaluate its own progress. Indeed, one member stated that the Collaborative’s greatest challenge is figuring out how to measure its impact. Although the EEFC reviews the effectiveness of individual grantees in meeting expected outcomes, no common metric currently exists that would enable the EEFC to aggregate outcomes at a portfolio level or at a community level. One member noted that a QRIS or other measurement system could provide standardized data to assess changes in the quality of early care and education programs across the region, but Kansas and Missouri currently do not use a QRIS or similar approach.

Allowing participating foundations to make short-term funding commitments could jeopardize the Collaborative’s ability to achieve long-term goals. The amount of funds available to the Collaborative varies by year. Each year, participating foundations have the opportunity to stop investing in the Early Education Grant Fund or to change the amount of their investment. Some members suggested that to have the widespread and sustained impact the Collaborative members seek, the EEFC may need to implement a longer term strategy (e.g., a 10-year goal). One member also questioned whether the relatively modest minimum investment requirement could enable foundations to try out the EEFC without real buy-in or serious, long-term commitment.

“We’ve had a consistent focus but not a defined strategy for doing the work.”

“We don’t have a clear sense of how to measure our own success.”



Members' Perspectives on the Future of the EEFC

“How do we help [organizations that have achieved good outcomes for children] share that knowledge and spread it to the other agencies in town providing the same services? The intention of the Collaborative is to move those best practices beyond a single agency. That’s our next challenge.”

EEFC members had several ideas for building on the strengths of the Collaborative and addressing its challenges.

The EEFC could advocate for transformative changes in early education throughout the Kansas City metro area through financial investments and through its influence in the region. To date,

a relatively small portion of the Collaborative’s investments have gone to informing policies that could benefit children region-wide. Some members emphasized that these are the types of activities that can have impact beyond just a few providers. Moreover, some members reported that many individual foundations do not support these kinds of critical projects, putting the Collaborative in a unique position to direct funds toward initiatives that could reach children served by many providers in the region.

Many members also discussed the collective influence of the Collaborative members in the Kansas City metro area and the potential for the EEFC. They suggested that their combined stature could help focus policymakers’ and other stakeholders’ attention in a way that representatives of independent foundations could not. One member described the relatively small Kansas City metro area as a place where people working to improve the community all know each other and

interact frequently. Another member said that individual Collaborative members were well respected and influential in the region and wondered if one of them could identify a champion for early education from the corporate world.

The EEFC could facilitate sharing of best practices and resources across the region’s early education providers. Some members suggested that the Collaborative could leverage its relationships with well-established, high-quality providers to support less established organizations that have fewer resources. For example, they discussed the possibility of supporting grantees in sharing best practices with other providers, particularly those serving hard-to-reach children from the Collaborative’s target population. Two members further suggested that the Collaborative could fund initiatives specifically to facilitate collaboration and resource sharing among the region’s early education providers.

The EEFC could solicit more perspectives and guidance from the region’s broader early education community. Some members discussed the need for the Collaborative to reach out to more community members, particularly grantees and other providers, to fully understand their issues. One EEFC member suggested collecting more formal grantee feedback and said that

Collaborative members were working on this. Two members mentioned the possibility of including teachers and administrators of early childhood programs in discussions about the region's needs.

All interviewed members mentioned that strategic planning holds promise for addressing many of the identified challenges of the EEFC.

Each EEFC member interviewed for this study expressed positive perceptions about the decision to launch a strategic planning process. Members had recognized a need to better articulate and evaluate their work, just as they expect their grantees

to do. As one member asked, "What does 'access' mean? New providers? More seats for existing providers? Access across age groups? There was never a deep definition of access. And defining quality is even harder." Some members also reported that the boards of their parent organizations were seeking more information about the EEFC's impact. They agreed that an outside facilitator would help them focus their intentions and develop a more strategic and targeted approach for moving forward. Consequently, in spring 2017, the EEFC launched a formal strategic planning process.

Conclusion

In just a few years, the EEFC has become a cohesive, dedicated learning community and a generous funder of early education programs and initiatives across the Kansas City metro area. The Collaborative has supported high-quality programs and initiatives in expanding or creating new childcare centers, enhancing the skills of early childhood teachers, and supporting parents of young children. Some EEFC members stated that their investments overall had achieved positive outcomes for the children

and families grantees served, but they expressed a need to direct their investments in ways that would reach more children living in poverty, especially children of color. Members perceived the decision to launch a formal strategic planning process as a critical next step toward focusing the Collaborative's efforts to give underserved children high-quality early learning opportunities that prepare them for success in kindergarten and beyond.

Appendix A: Study Design and Methodology

This qualitative case study was conducted between November 2017 and February 2018.

Selecting case study respondents

All EEFC members were asked to participate in an in-person or phone interview about what has worked well for the Collaborative and what challenges it has encountered. The potential pool of interviewees was 18 individual members representing the 12 foundations.

The final sample comprised 12 respondents representing 10 foundations. Six foundations had two representatives in the Collaborative. Two of those foundations opted to have both members interviewed together, one chose to have both representatives interviewed separately,

and one chose a single representative to give an interview. Members from two foundations were unavailable to participate.

Data collection

Data for the case study came from interviews and document reviews.⁹

Interviews. To guide the interviews, the study team developed a semistructured interview protocol that aligned with the research questions (Appendix B). The protocol included questions about members' experience with the

⁹ Study team members attended two EEFC meetings on site on October 6 and November 3, 2017. Both meetings occurred after the time frame covered by this case study (i.e., after the strategic planning process had begun). Therefore, the content of these meetings is not reflected in the case study.



EEFC and its mission and priorities, perceptions of what collaborative funding can achieve, and successes and challenges of the EEFC.

Interviews took place between November 2 and December 1, 2017. Six interviews were held in person on November 2–3, and six were phone interviews conducted over the next four weeks. Most interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, but two lasted about 60 minutes. (These were interviews of an original Collaborative member and a member who oversees the logistical operations of the EEFC.) The interviews were audio-recorded with consent from the respondent.

Document review. The Collaborative provided the study team with internal documents, including materials developed for the strategic planning process by Bellwether Education Partners. Through web searches, the case study team gathered publicly available information about the Collaborative and early learning in region. The following documents informed the case study:

- Landscape studies commissioned by the EEFC
- Summary of 2016 EEFC applicant feedback survey
- Grantee progress reports and outcomes
- Early Education Fund Decision Making Guidelines

- EEFC Guiding Principles
- EEFC scoring rubrics
- EEFC funding summary
- Landscape data and information about the EEFC compiled by Bellwether Education Partners
- Notes from interviews of EEFC members and community stakeholders conducted by Bellwether Education Partners.

Data analysis

Interviews. The study team debriefed after interviews, reviewing the interview notes and audio-recordings as needed for clarification. The team identified key themes that emerged. Interview data were entered into a template organized by the research questions and additional themes that emerged during



the interviews. Using the template, the study team recorded supporting evidence for each of the themes and determined the degree of consensus across respondents.

Document review. The study team first gathered and reviewed all available documentation to understand the Collaborative and its context. Information from this initial review was used in the development of the interview protocol. After the interviews, the study team referred to documents to identify information that could provide additional context for or clarification of interview responses.

Study limitations

This is a descriptive study based primarily on self-reported interview data from a purposefully selected sample. The findings are not representative or generalizable to groups beyond the EEFC.

The case study covers a time period ending before the EEFC's strategic planning process began, but all interviews took place during or after the strategic planning process. It is possible that interview responses reflected developments or changes that had occurred after the case study time frame or changes in respondents' perspectives as a result of the strategic planning process. Furthermore, four interview respondents reported that they had joined the EEFC after the strategic planning process began in fall 2017, so they lacked personal experience with the Collaborative during the case study time frame. These respondents' foundations all had served on the EEFC for at least two years, and two of these respondents were interviewed with colleagues from their foundation who had longer tenure on the Collaborative.



Appendix B: Research Questions and Data Sources

EEFC Evaluation Component 1: Case Study Research Questions and Associated Data Sources

Research Questions	Interviews		Document Review
	Kauffman Foundation	EEFC Members	
1.1. Original mission of the EEFC	✓		✓
1.2. Decision to pursue a collaborative funding approach to making investments in early education	✓		
1.3. Original priority or focus areas	✓		✓
1.4. Original Collaborative members	✓		✓
1.5. Evolution of the mission and priority areas since the EEFC's inception	✓	✓	
1.6. Decision to engage in a strategic planning process	✓	✓	✓
1.7. Number of members and types of organizations represented			✓
1.8. Level of financial contributions of participating organizations	✓		
1.9. Criteria for membership (e.g., type of agency, level of financial investment)	✓		
1.10. EEFC governance, leadership structure	✓		
1.11. Roles of different members (e.g., committees, chairperson, administrative duties) and how roles are assigned	✓		
1.12. Member perceptions of the combination of participants (e.g., Are the right voices at the table? Are there too few members? Too many?)	✓	✓	

Research Questions	Interviews		Document Review
	Kauffman Foundation	EEFC Members	
<p>1.13. Collaborative achievements that are not possible for an individual funder</p> <p><i>Probes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Draw the attention of a wider audience to the needs of the early childhood sector in the region?</i> • <i>Inspire new funders to invest in the sector?</i> • <i>Fund programs or initiatives that are larger in scale than what individual organizations could fund?</i> • <i>Fund activities that assume a higher risk than those funded by individual entities (e.g., controversial projects, initiatives with a limited evidence base)?</i> • <i>Scale up promising programs or initiatives that individual organizations have supported?</i> • <i>By example, improve the quality of grantmaking by individual funders?</i> • <i>Serve as a learning community or community of practice for members to share ideas and resources about early education?</i> 	✓	✓	
1.14. Communication about administrative details (e.g., meeting logistics and topics)	✓		
1.15. Communication during meetings; meeting format	✓		
1.16. Incorporating differing opinions into decision-making process	✓	✓	
1.17. Strategies for resolving conflicts of opinion	✓	✓	

Research Questions	Interviews		Document Review
	Kauffman Foundation	EEFC Members	
1.18. Sharing of resources or ideas to inform work in parent organizations	✓	✓	
1.19. Frequency and types of communication members have about EEFC with their boards	✓	✓	
1.20. Influence of the EEFC on the work of its funding organizations	✓	✓	
1.21. Frequency, timing of meetings	✓		✓
1.22. Ground rules for participation in meetings (e.g., voting)	✓		
1.23. Documentation practices and responsibilities (e.g., website updates, communication with grantees and prospective grantees)	✓		✓
1.24. Perceptions of the EEFC's decision-making (e.g., for establishing goals and priorities, funding criteria and award decisions, distribution of financial investments)	✓	✓	
1.25. Perceived progress toward achieving EEFC's mission	✓	✓	
1.26. Collaborative successes	✓	✓	✓
1.27. Collaborative challenges and strategies for addressing challenges	✓	✓	
1.28. Lessons learned that could inform other funders seeking to establish or join a collaborative	✓	✓	

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Early Education Funders Collaborative Member Interview Protocol

Introduction and Purpose of Interview

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. My organization, SRI Education, has been hired to develop a plan to evaluate the impacts of future Early Education Funders Collaborative activities. Our first step is to document the work of the Collaborative to date. The purpose of this interview is to get your perspective on a number of topics including what has worked well and what challenges the Collaborative has encountered. We understand that Collaborative members have already participated in interviews with Bellwether Education Partners, and our intention is to minimize overlap with the questions you have already answered. We will keep these discussions to no more than 30–45 minutes. Information about your experiences as a member of the EEFC will be valuable for documenting the work of the Collaborative to date and for learning more in general about the potential of collaborative grantmaking in early education. The final report highlighting the achievements of the

EEFC will be made available to you and your organization in March of 2018.

Your comments in this interview will not be associated with your name or the name of your organization in any reports.

This interview will take approximately 30 minutes. If a question does not apply to you, or you'd prefer not to answer a question, please let me know and we will move on.

Consent Process

If participating by phone, SRI will email a consent form to the respondent before the interview so he or she can read it, sign it, and email it back.

If participating in person, SRI interviewer will have a consent form for the respondent to read and sign before the interview.

The SRI interviewer will ask verbal permission to audio-record the conversation, emphasizing that tapes will be used only to verify written notes and that all interview data will be destroyed at the end of the project.

First, I'd like to ask about your organization's involvement in the EEFC.

1. How long has your organization participated in the Collaborative?
 - a. Are you the original representative from your organization?
 - b. If no, when did you personally join the Collaborative?

Now I have some questions about the overall mission and priorities of the EEFC.

2. What do you see as the overall mission of the EEFC?
 - a. How does the overall mission of the EEFC align with your organization's mission?
 - b. Has participation in the EEFC influenced the work of your organization? If so, how?
3. Do you think that the overall mission of the Collaborative has changed or evolved since you joined the EEFC?
 - a. If yes, how so? Why do you think the mission changed over time?
 - a. *Are there too few Collaborative members, the right number, or too many? Why?*

We are interested in how a collaborative approach to grantmaking may have advantages over conventional investments by an individual funder.

4. What do you think a collaborative can achieve that an individual funding organization cannot achieve?

Allow respondent to answer open-ended question first and then follow up with probes:

What about: *(if yes, ask "In what way?")*

 - a. Drawing the attention of a wider audience to the needs of the early education sector in the region?
 - b. Inspiring new funders to invest in the sector?
 - c. Funding programs or initiatives that are larger in scale than what individual organizations could support?
 - d. Funding activities that assume a higher risk than those funded by individual entities (e.g., controversial projects, initiatives with a limited evidence base)?

- e. Scaling up promising programs or initiatives that individual organizations have supported?
 - f. Helping to improve the quality of grantmaking by individual funders?
 - g. Serving as a learning community for members to share ideas and resources about early education?
5. Has the EEFC achieved results that an individual funder could not achieve? If so, what were those results?

Now I have a few questions about the Collaborative's decision to begin a formal strategic planning process.

6. When did the Collaborative decide to engage in a strategic planning process?
7. What factors led to the decision to engage in this process?
- a. What about the timing of the strategic planning process? Do you think it should have happened earlier than it did? Later?

The next questions are about the successes and challenges that the EEFC has experienced.

8. Please describe the Collaborative's progress toward achieving its goals.
9. What would you say are the EEFC's greatest achievements so far?
Probe: Providing needed financial support, compiling data and expertise on early education in the region, increasing funders' knowledge
- a. How would you describe the impact of this work?
 - b. What factors accounted for its success?
10. What challenges has the Collaborative faced to date?
- a. How has the Collaborative addressed those challenges?
11. What advice would you give to other funders seeking to establish a collaborative?

Thank you for your time and thoughtful responses.