

# 2025 Field Assessment Report (FASST)

## New Hampshire's Early Childhood Field Assessment Report

Behavioral Health Improvement Institute  
Keene State College

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# Executive summary

## Assessing NH's Early Childhood field

In 2015, the Endowment for Health (the Endowment) asked the Behavioral Health Improvement Institute (BHII) to develop an assessment to inform the strategic allocation of resources in the Endowment's priority areas (i.e., "fields"). The resulting Field Assessment Tool (FASST)<sup>1</sup> estimates field development across eight domains and 39 items based on key informant interviews. The FASST was first used to assess the conditions of NH's Early Childhood (EC) field in 2018.<sup>2</sup> The assessment was repeated in 2021 and 2025; the latter constitutes the focus of this report.

## Progress amid gaps

Across the early childhood field, dedicated individuals and regional partnerships continue to drive progress. Local efforts often reflect strong collaboration and promising practices. Program quality and reach remain inconsistent, with some communities offering comprehensive, well-linked services and others facing limited options, particularly in rural areas or for children with disabilities. Leadership is marked by committed, knowledgeable individuals, but diversity at the leadership level lags behind that of the broader workforce.

Access to data has improved in some areas, offering early momentum toward more informed decision-making, though significant gaps remain. State-level infrastructure and inter-agency collaboration are underdeveloped, and equity efforts are nascent. Advocacy is constrained by limited resources and competing priorities. Funding remains unstable and inadequate, limiting the field's ability to plan long-term or sustain infrastructure.

## Recommendations for EC field development

The early childhood system depends on a skilled, stable workforce, but high turnover and burnout continue to limit progress. The Endowment can support efforts that increase job stability, elevate the voices of early educators, and promote the value of their work.

The Endowment's investments in BIPOC- and parent-led organizations have elevated new leadership and expanded the field's capacity to act equitably. Continuing to fund this work will ensure those most impacted are centered in solutions. Supporting organizations that build bridges between communities and systems is especially critical to ensuring policies reflect lived experience.

As a member of the NH Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, the Endowment is well-positioned to strengthen coordination among funders. We recommend playing a leadership role in aligning expectations around equity outcomes, data use, and capacity-building supports for grantees. This can help reduce duplicative efforts, signal clear priorities to the field, and increase the collective impact of philanthropic investment across New Hampshire.

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<sup>1</sup> Fauth, J., Phillips, M, & Nordstrom, A. (June, 2016). Field Assessment Tool (FASST) Manual. Unpublished report, commissioned by New Hampshire Endowment for Health.

<sup>2</sup> Fauth, J., Boucher, B., Kenefick, H.W. (September 2018). Baseline Assessment of the New Hampshire Early Childhood Field. Unpublished Report, commissioned by New Hampshire Endowment for Health.

# NH's Early Childhood Field

## Endowment for Health's field building activities

The Endowment for Health (the Endowment) is a statewide, private, nonprofit foundation dedicated to improving the health of New Hampshire's people, especially those who are vulnerable and underserved. The Endowment engages in "field building" by providing resources to develop systems-change capacity within its priority areas ("fields"). Howard and Wu<sup>3</sup> define a field as "a community of actors who engage in a common set of core practices with a common goal for their work." The Endowment's field building involves creating strong coalitions and networks, enhancing the NH knowledge base, growing leadership and advocacy capacity, developing shared measures and data-based decision making, and supporting other systems change capacities. It currently supports six fields: children's behavioral health, early childhood, health equity, healthy aging, health policy, and health care workforce ("Forward Fund").

## New Hampshire's Early Childhood field: 2007-2025

In 2007, federal law required all states to create early childhood advisory councils to strengthen coordination among federal, state, and local EC programs. In response, Governor Lynch issued an executive order in 2011 establishing Spark NH as New Hampshire's early childhood advisory council.

The Endowment identified Early Childhood as a targeted initiative in 2014 and began partnering with EC leaders to expand and deepen their work. Key outcomes of this partnership included Spark NH's community of practice, the formation of 11 regional EC coalitions in 2016, and successful advocacy for statewide full-day kindergarten in 2017.

In 2020, New Hampshire released its Strategic Plan for Early Childhood. That same year, Spark NH staff submitted a proposal on behalf of the state for Preschool Development Grant (PDG) funds to support a comprehensive early childhood system. Later, Governor Sununu issued an executive order replacing Spark NH with the NH Council for Thriving Children, and the state was awarded \$26.8 million through the PDG. In 2021, New Hampshire received an additional \$29.7 million in child care development funds through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

Momentum continued through the SFY24-25 budget, which supported expanded child care scholarship eligibility, reduced family cost share contributions, and increased reimbursement rates for providers. In 2024, eligibility was further extended to early childhood educators working 25+ hours per week in licensed or exempt programs that accept scholarships.

The timeline on the next page highlights milestone events in the recent history of New Hampshire's early childhood field.

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<sup>3</sup> Howard, D. & Wu, P. (2009). Assessing California's multiple pathway field: Preparing youth for success in college and career. Retrieved from The James Irvine Foundation website: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED506581.pdf>

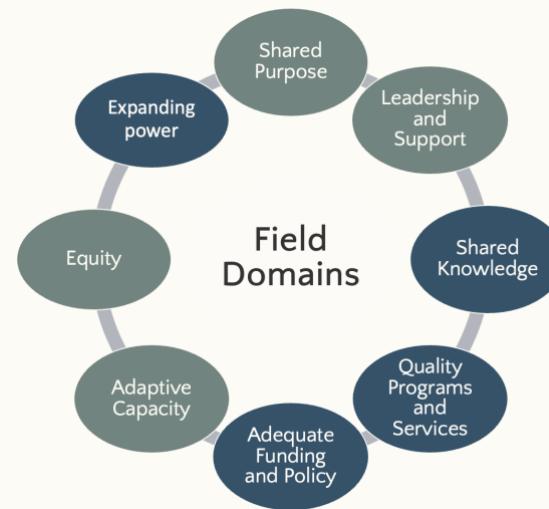
## Milestone events in NH's Early Childhood field

2007	Federal law requires all states to create Early Childhood advisory councils.
2011	Gov. John Lynch enacts Spark NH by Executive Order to "provide leadership that promotes a comprehensive, coordinated, sustainable early childhood system . . ." The Endowment serves as philanthropic representative to the Council.
2014	The Endowment launches EC as new targeted initiative.
2016	The Endowment supports the creation of Spark NH's community of practice to share, align, and support 11 regional EC coalitions throughout NH. Spark NH co-hosts the first Gubernatorial Forum on Early Childhood.
2017	HNH Foundation, NH Charitable Foundation, and the Endowment join forces with New Futures to invest in enhanced advocacy capacity, ultimately securing funding for full-day kindergarten, \$10M for child care assistance, and other policy wins.
2020	NH Council for Thriving Children established by executive order of Gov. Chris Sununu – replaces Spark NH as EC advisory council, releases NH Strategic Plan for Early Childhood. NH secures 3-year, \$26.8M Preschool Development Grant to build a comprehensive EC Care and Education system.
2021	NH DHHS awarded \$29.7M in discretionary funding via the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), directed mainly toward the child care sector
2024	Child care scholarship eligibility expanded for families and EC workers, family cost share contributions toward child care tuition reduced, and reimbursement rates for providers accepting scholarships increased

# Field Assessment Tool (FASST) domains and items

In 2015, EH commissioned the Behavioral Health Improvement Institute (BHII) at Keene State College to develop a field assessment tool to assess the status and progress of their key investment fields and guide strategic decision making. The resulting Field Assessment Tool (FASST) assesses eight domains as visualized in the graphic to the right. The colors depict whether the domain is Core (green) or Special Interest (blue). Core domain items are those that most informants, regardless of their role or position in the field, can speak to. Special Interest domains require niche knowledge possessed by only a subset of interviewees. During FASST planning, the Endowment and BHII match key informants to the most appropriate Special Interest Domains, maintaining balanced domain coverage.

For more information about the domains, items, and their definitions, see the tables on pp. 5-6.



## Core domains, items, and definitions

Core domains	Item	Definition
Shared purpose	Shared goals	Agreement on a set of clearly articulated shared goals, with a process for collaborative, ongoing revision
	Shared values	Common values that guide the public face and private actions of field members
	Strategy alignment	A portfolio of coordinated, complementary, and purposive strategies to achieve shared goals
	Network connectivity	A network of highly engaged interactive actors who seek to leverage collective resources and capacities
	Trust	The extent to which actors feel that others in the field with whom they interact are reliable, support field goals/actions, and are open to discussion
	Governance structure & process	The level of intentional hierarchy and centralization of leadership, and formality of process, within the network that helps to facilitate and sustain communication, cooperation, and decision-making
Leadership & community support	Knowledgeable, ready, supportive leaders	Identifiable leaders/exemplary organizations that are knowledgeable, actively supportive, and ready for collective action
	Diverse, representative, knowledgeable actors	A representative, knowledgeable, and culturally competent set of field actors
	Empowered beneficiaries	The group(s) whose needs the field is intended to address are engaged and empowered to self-advocate at all levels of the field
Adaptive capacity	Aware, supportive & engaged communities	A receptive community atmosphere/context that supports effective field action; communities that are aware of field issues/needs and supportive of field efforts
	Monitoring	Ability to monitor and assess external environments to identify needed shifts relevant to field strategies, tactics, and needs
	Adaptation	Ability to alter strategies and tactics in response to new information in a timely manner
Equity	Flexibility of resources	Degree to which resources are reallocated, shared, leveraged among higher- and lower-resourced actors to successfully cope with changing conditions
	Equity lens	An equity perspective, including recognizing root causes of disparities, is infused throughout the field's vision, values, goals, and strategies
	Equity related data	Disaggregated data about vulnerable populations in the field, and shared measures, that are available and used by field actors to understand ingrained and emergent issues facing communities of color and to guide strategy and action
	Informed policymakers	Leaders and decision-makers understand the importance of cultural competence, social determinants of health, and health equity to the field
	Inclusive participation	A growing quantity and variety of partnerships with representatives from vulnerable populations, in particular communities of color, are fostered / valued in the field
	Culturally and linguistically competent programs	Culturally and linguistically appropriate programs that are accessible to vulnerable populations in the field

## Special interest domains, items, and definitions

# FASST method

domain		
Shared knowledge	Applied knowledge	The extent to which scholarly theory and research, and/or local, credible information is leveraged to support efforts in the field
	Knowledge sharing	Effective sharing of relevant knowledge among field actors and to external audiences
	Professional standards	Presence and use of standards of practice in the field, such as practice guidelines, credentialing processes, and reporting standards and platforms
Quality programs & services	Reach	The percentage of the relevant population of the field's potential beneficiaries who are reached by evidence-based and promising practices
	Implementation	The extent to which drivers of high-fidelity, high-quality implementation of program and services are in place in the field, such as training, coaching, and evaluation/performance monitoring
	Comprehensiveness	The extent to which the array of programs and services in the field is sufficient to meet the needs of potential beneficiaries
	Linkages	Presence of linking mechanisms that allow beneficiaries to successfully transition from one related program to another
Adequate funding & support for policy	Shared measurement	Existence and utilization by field actors of shared measures and a common data sharing platform, to monitor progress and inform decision making
	Funding	The availability and security of the resources and funding to support effective collective action in the field
	Technology	Existence and utilization of needed technologies to support effective action in the field
	Policy environment	Presence of an enabling policy environment to support effective action in the field
	Policy knowledge	Field actors have the knowledge necessary to inform and shape an enabling policy environment
Expanding power	Policy advocacy	Presence of a sustainable advocacy infrastructure to support effective action in the field
	Backbone structures	The degree to which people with lived experience included in the field's structures that convene and coordinate field members
	Elevating lived experience with data	The degree to which contextualized data are used to elevate the perspectives of people with lived experience
	Sharing best practices for advancing equity	An infrastructure that supports field members as they learn and implement approaches to advancing equity
	Funding for grassroots organizing	Financial support that enables local residents to influence policies and decisions that affect their communities
	Sharing best practices for advancing equity	An infrastructure that supports field members as they learn and implement approaches to advancing equity
	Community member engagement	The inclusion of local community members in decision-making, leadership, and advocacy efforts
Community engagement	Infrastructure for community input	The processes for local providers and policy makers to receive input from community members
	Community advisory groups	Structured efforts to ensure programs and services reflect cultural competence

## Key informant interviews

The Endowment partnered with BHII to identify 26 key informants: ten

advocates, eight technical assistance (TA) providers, five community-based providers, two government representatives, and one funder (see chart below). Each informant participated in a one-hour, semi-structured Zoom interview with one of two BHII evaluators between December 2024 and February 2025. All interviews were recorded.

### Quantitative scoring

FASST uses anchored rating scales to assess each item based on interview responses. The first seven interviews were scored by two raters to establish interrater reliability.

### Qualitative themes

Alongside scoring, evaluators used thematic analysis to identify qualitative themes for each FASST item. These themes supplement the quantitative ratings, providing context and serving as the foundation for interpreting findings.

### Understanding the findings

FASST scores are reported at the item level by averaging ratings across relevant informants. Domain scores reflect the average of item scores within that domain. To support interpretation, scores are categorized into three stages of field development: preparation (field properties are absent, fragmented, or undefined), action (field properties are emerging but not yet comprehensive or stable), or maintenance (field properties are mature, sustainable, and widely adopted).

# Overview of all domain scores

The chart below displays the average domain scores across all items. Overall, the early childhood field is in the action stage of development. Lagging behind in the preparation stage are Equity and Expanding Power. Expanding Power is approaching the action threshold, suggesting opportunity for future growth.

The pages that follow explore each domain's trajectory and item-level scores in more detail, following the order depicted in the chart.

## 2025 scores by domain



# Shared purpose

Shared purpose is the extent to which the field unites around a common vision and works in a coordinated, collaborative, and results-driven manner. It is characterized by goal alignment, shared values, network connectivity, trust, and governance structure and process. Its average score (3.0) is aligned with previous administrations. It is in the action stage of development.

**Shared values** is the extent to which a set of common, agreed-upon values guide the public face and private actions of field members. The score for this item (3.4) has decreased since the last administration. It is in the action stage of development. Regardless of role, field members generally share a commitment to supporting families to provide a safe, nurturing start for children. Frequently named values included co-creating services with families, centering family voice, and maintaining empathy and respect. Equitable access and the professional value of early childhood workers are also widely shared, though often not reflected in policy or pay.

**Trust** is the extent to which actors perceive others within the field are reliable, support field goals/actions, and are open to discussion. The score for this item (3.2) is similar to previous administrations. It is in the action stage of development. Informants shared that trust is built most easily at the local level, where priorities align and relationships are longstanding. Trust tends to be lower across regions or between differently sized organizations, where priorities diverge. Competition for limited funding, overlapping services, and stretched capacity fosters a scarcity mindset and weakens trust between organizations.

**Shared goals** is the extent to which field actors agree on a set of clearly articulated, collaboratively defined, and regularly reviewed shared goals. The score for this item (3.1) is on par with previous administrations. It is in the action stage of development. The field's goals are to increase access to affordable, high-quality child care; support healthy development of young children and families;

and build a robust, well-compensated workforce. While broadly shared, actors from different sectors prioritize these goals differently.

For example, while caregivers and statewide policymakers prioritize efforts to increase child care seats, child care providers believe that increased staffing and pay should take precedent. Some informants noted that early childhood is increasingly viewed as synonymous with child care, obscuring other potentially important goals.

**Network connectivity** is the extent to which a network of highly engaged and interactive actors leverage resources and capacities for the collective good. The score for this item (3.0) is consistent with previous administrations. It is in the action stage of development. Connections continue to be shaped more by personal collegial ties than by intentional structure or inclusive strategy. This limits access to collaboration and leadership opportunities for those outside established social circles. Statewide communication suffered following the loss of Spark NH and has not fully recovered according to respondents, likely contributing to the slight decline in score from 2021 (3.3). Structures like the early childhood regions and efforts by the Council for Thriving Children and Early Learning NH strive to bolster relationships beyond individual communities, but their success has been limited. Locally, coordination is stronger. The Souhegan Valley's collective impact model, supported by PDG and Charitable Trust funding, stands out as a leading example. There, organizations engage in collaborative coalitions to align on vision and priorities and participate in one-on-one monthly meetings between organizations to share information and coordinate strategy.

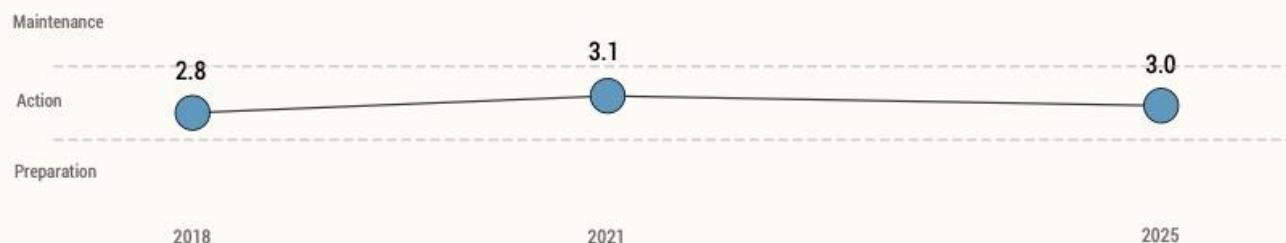
**Strategy alignment** is the degree to which the field has an agreed upon portfolio of coordinated, complementary, and purposive strategies to achieve shared goals. The score for this item (2.8) is aligned with previous administrations. It is in the action stage of development. While local strategies often reflect shared values and adapt well to community needs, limited statewide coordination prevents cross-community learning and resource sharing. Promising efforts such as

shared human resource services and utilities have seen sporadic uptake, often hindered by limited capacity and staff workloads. Local alignment is stronger than at the state level, which is undermined by siloed efforts, short-term funding, and turnover.

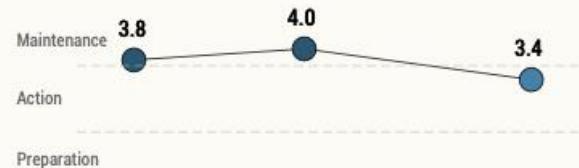
**Governance structure and process** is the degree to which there is a centralized leadership that helps to sustain communication, cooperation, and decision-making. The score for this item (2.3) remains in preparation stage despite the clear improvement trend across the three administrations. A unified state structure is widely recognized as essential, yet governance remains diffuse. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Education (DOE)

share oversight of the early childhood field but operate with limited coordination. In the absence of strong state leadership, organizations such as Early Learning NH, the Council for Thriving Children, and the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative have stepped in to fill some gaps. Their efforts, combined with increasing collaboration within early childhood regions, have likely contributed to the steady rise in this item's score. However, progress has not advanced to the action stage, as these entities are constrained by limited scope, informal status, and lack of decision-making authority. While subsector and local structures exist, the absence of a unified statewide framework continues to weaken alignment.

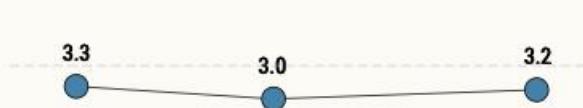
## Shared purpose (n=26)



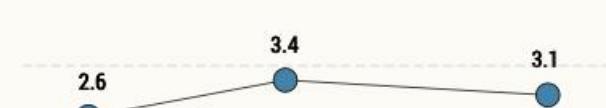
## Shared values



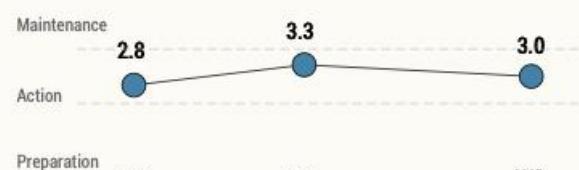
## Trust



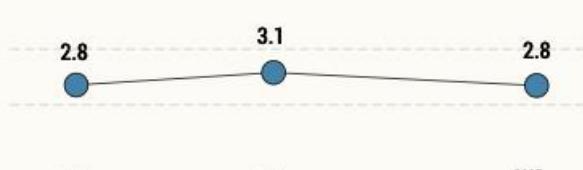
## Shared goals



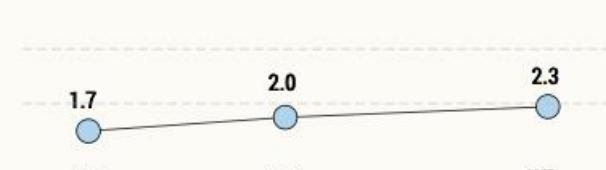
## Network connectivity



## Strategy alignment



## Governance structure & process



# Shared knowledge

Shared knowledge is the degree to which the field uses and shares information, research, and data to guide action and shape professional standards. It includes applied knowledge, professional standards, and knowledge sharing. The domain score (2.8) is aligned with previous administrations. It is in the action stage of development.

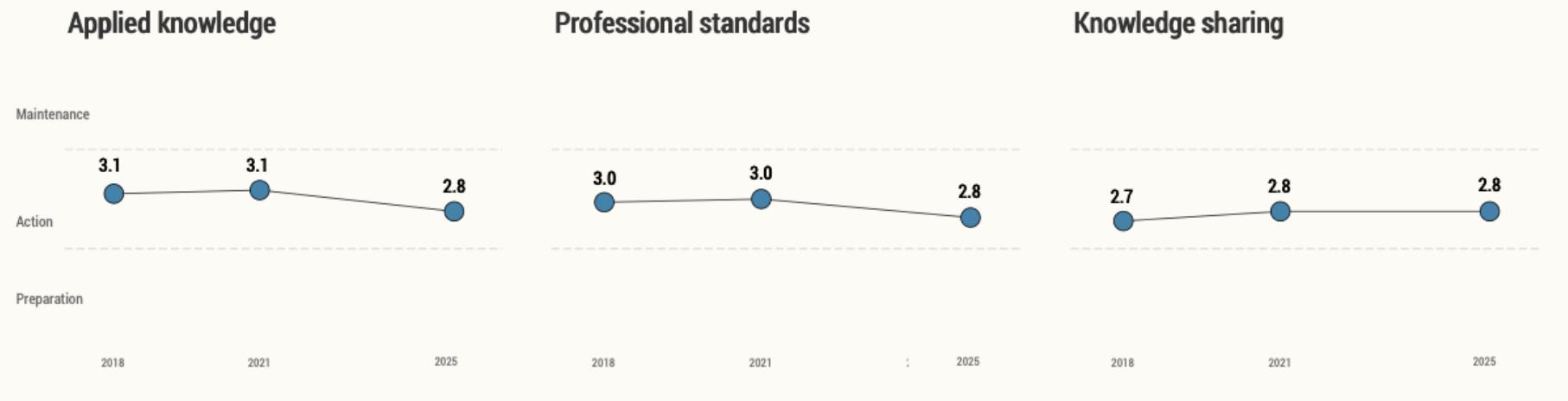
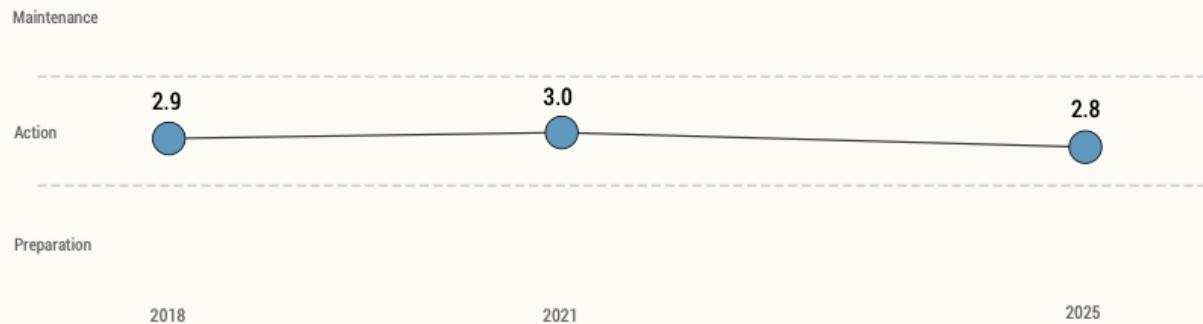
**Applied knowledge** refers to the extent to which scholarly theory and research, and/or local, credible information is leveraged to support efforts in the field. The score for this item (2.8) is similar to previous administrations. It is in the action stage of development. Research-informed practices such as home visiting and parent education curricula are widespread throughout the field. Legislative decisions are less consistently grounded in research, reflecting skepticism toward academic models.

**Professional standards** reflects the presence and use of standards of practice in the field, such as practice guidelines, credentialing processes, and reporting standards and platforms. The score for this item (2.8) is on par with previous administrations.

It is in the action stage of development. Most engage in training only when required for credentialing or employment. Larger organizations, such as Waypoint and Community Bridges NH, are recognized for supporting the professional development of their staff. Smaller organizations often lack the infrastructure to do so. Credentialing structures are established for health and child care providers but are absent in other parts of the field.

**Knowledge sharing** is the extent to which the field has systems in place to exchange local insights, innovations, and effective practices. The score for this item (2.8) is consistent with previous administrations. It is in the action stage of development. Information on ongoing initiatives and program activities is regularly shared through trainings and presentations led by local and regional organizations such as family resource centers, the Alliance for Regional Early Childhood Coalitions' newsletter, and Milford Thrives. These dissemination efforts primarily highlight what is being done, with less emphasis on research about the effectiveness of those efforts. Until recently, the state lacked a centralized hub for such research; the NH ECE Research Consortium represents a step toward filling this gap.

## Shared knowledge (n=6)



# Quality programs & services

Quality programs and services reflect the extent to which supports are effective, comprehensive, and coordinated. It is characterized by the linkages, implementation, reach, and comprehensiveness of services. Its average score (2.8) is in the action stage, continuing the improvement trend over the past three administrations.

**Linkages** refer to formal mechanisms that help beneficiaries transition or progress successfully between related programs or systems. The score for this item (3.2), an increase since the last administration (2.3). It is in the action stage of development. This increase likely reflects DHHS's focused efforts to connect participants across programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the childcare scholarship fund. Cross-agency coordination remains uneven, with some programs having formal linking mechanisms and while others do not. Strong examples include Family Resource Centers (FRCs) and Child Care Aware, which model effective intra- and interagency practices such as warm handoffs. Gaps remain in transitions between Head Start and public school, and between preschool and special education. One informant emphasized that a shared data system and single point of entry could strengthen linkages. NH EZ was created to address this need, but its poor user experience has limited its impact.

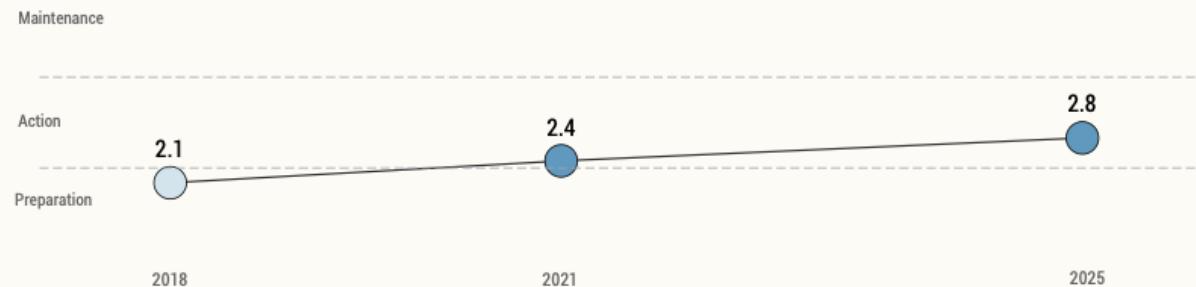
**Implementation** is the extent to which drivers of high-quality programming such as training, coaching, and evaluation are in place. The score for this item (3.0), continuing an upward trend over the past three administrations. It is in the action stage of development. High-quality programming is currently recognized through optional designations for FRCs (Family Resource Centers of Quality) and child care providers (Granite Steps for Quality). These designations are not required for operation or consistently tied to funding, and some view them as overly rigid or burdensome, limiting their reach. Within organizations, frameworks like the Protective Factors Framework are often used to guide high-quality program implementation.

Training and resources are widely available, including through quality improvement initiatives such as Child Care Aware and the Granite Steps for Quality (GSQ).

**Reach** reflects the percentage of potential beneficiaries reached by evidence-based and promising practices and policies. The score for this item (2.5), an increase since the last administration (1.8). It is in the action stage of development. This is likely due to recent policy efforts to expand child care capacity statewide. Despite this progress, informants noted that assessing reach remains difficult without more regular and robust data from DHHS. Most child care classrooms are seen as safe and nurturing, but only a small percentage have a high-quality designation. This is partly due to the voluntary and resource-intensive nature of the GSQ process, which can limit participation to well-resourced providers. Another not-yet-fully-realized goal of GSQ is to provide caregivers with actionable information about program quality to drive enrollment choices.

**Comprehensiveness** is the extent to which the array of programs and services in the field is sufficient to meet the full array of needs of potential beneficiaries. The score for this item (2.4), a decrease since the last administration. It is in the action stage of development. Many view the current array of programs and services as insufficient, especially for families in rural areas or raising children with disabilities. As a result, caregivers often choose programs based on cost or availability rather than preference or perceived quality. Workforce shortages caused by low wages and burnout, and limited awareness of resources like FRCs, emerged as key barriers.

## Quality programs & services (n=5)

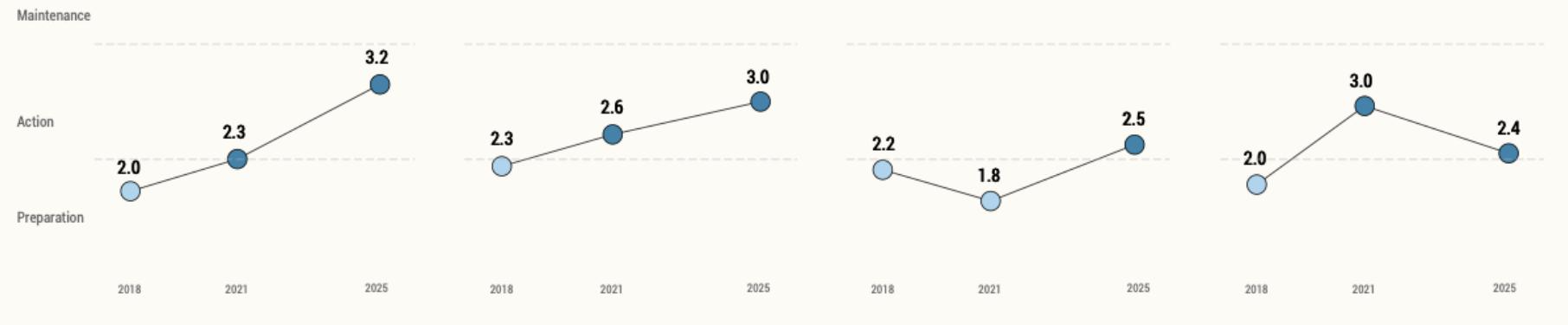


### Linkages

### Implementation

### Reach

### Comprehensiveness



# Leadership & community support

Leadership and community support reflects the degree to which formal and informal leaders actively support the field and include representation from grassroots and racially and ethnically diverse actors. It includes knowledgeable, ready, supportive leaders; aware, supportive, engaged communities; empowered beneficiaries; and diverse, representative actors. The domain score (2.7), holding relatively steady across administrations.

**Knowledgeable, ready, supportive leaders** is the extent to which leaders are knowledgeable; actively support effective strategies, policies, and practices; and contribute to collective action. The score for this item (3.1), aligned with previous administrations. It is in the action stage of development. The domain and is marked by a deep bench of knowledgeable, passionate, and action-oriented individuals. Many have long histories in the field and have driven progress in areas like behavioral health and kindergarten funding. Young leaders are also emerging, signaling field-level health and a generational shift that brings new energy and perspectives. Key informants noted that frontline staff are more diverse, while leadership roles are held mostly by white women. Even when included at the decision-making table, frontline staff don't feel that their input is respected. High turnover and limited capacity further challenge leadership stability. Leadership positions within state government agencies, with several key positions unfilled and longstanding tension between the field members and state agencies limiting coordination.

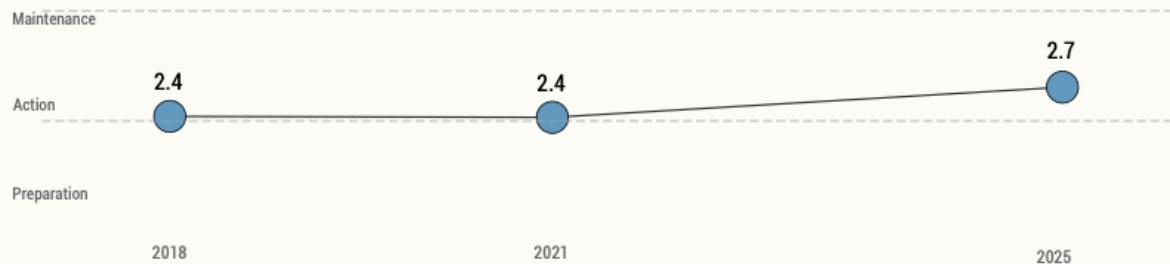
**Aware, supportive, engaged communities** refers to receptive communities that are aware of field issues/needs and supportive of efforts. The score for this item (2.9), similar to previous administrations. It is in the action stage of development. While awareness of issues such as child care access and affordability has grown, understanding does not always lead to action. Some community leaders view these issues as public concerns requiring collective action while others continue to

frame them as private family matters, placing responsibility on individual households. Engagement relies on local leadership and resources, with communities like Keene and Lebanon cited as exemplars in this area. Business and civic leaders increasingly acknowledge the impact of child care gaps but often lack clarity on how to respond.

**Empowered beneficiaries** reflects the degree to which potential beneficiaries are engaged and empowered to self-advocate at all levels of the field. The score for this item (2.6) has reached the action stage for the first time, an improvement over the previous two administrations (2.2 and 2.1, respectively). The increase likely stems from stronger efforts to elevate caregiver voice. Engagement is strongest among caregivers of children with disabilities, who tend to be better informed and more connected to formal supports. Elsewhere, engagement varies by geography and topical issues, often depending on whether local leaders raise awareness and create pathways for participation. Promising efforts like the B8 Family-Community Advisory Council and advocacy organizations like MomsRising and Save the Children have helped bring caregiver perspectives forward. Still, many caregivers face barriers to participation such as time constraints, and opportunities to elevate child voice are still limited.

**Diverse, representative actors** is the degree to which the field includes a representative, knowledgeable, and culturally competent set of field members. The score for this item (2.4), continuing a steep improvement trend over time. It is in the action stage of development. Diversity in the field has grown, especially in cities such as Manchester and Nashua, with efforts to diversify varying in scope and coordination across the state. Leadership roles have not diversified at the same pace, with the most diverse positions often receiving the lowest pay. Larger organizations, such as Head Start, are more likely to require cultural and linguistic training for their staff. There is concern that recent funding cuts may slow or reverse gains.

## Leadership & community support (n=26)

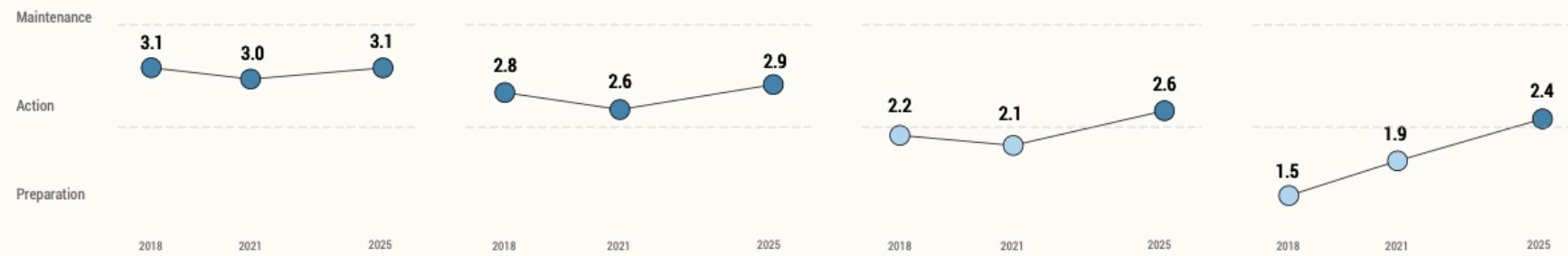


**Knowledgeable, ready,  
supportive leaders**

**Aware, supportive, engaged  
community**

**Empowered  
beneficiaries**

**Diverse, representative  
actors**



# Adaptive capacity

Adaptive capacity is the degree to which field members monitor and adapt to barriers and seize new opportunities in an ever-shifting environment. It is characterized by adaptation, monitoring, and resource flexibility. Its average score (2.7) is on par with previous administrations. It is in the action stage of development.

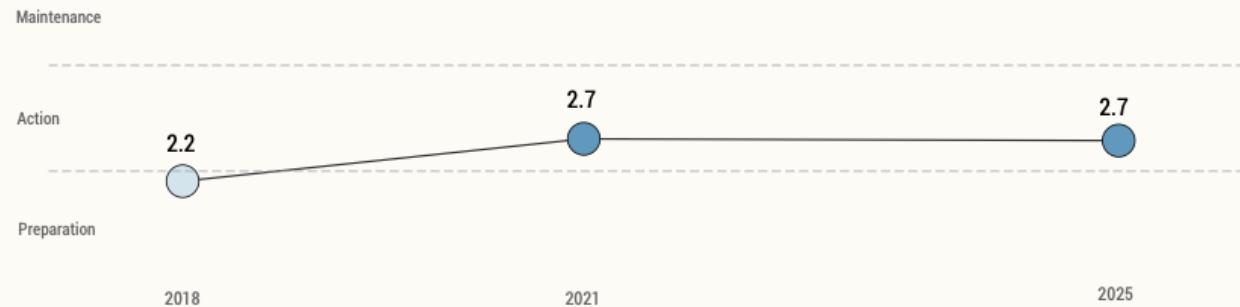
**Adaptation** reflects how quickly the field can alter its strategy in response to new information. The score for this item (2.9) is in the action stage and is consistent with last administration (3.0), when providers rapidly adapted during COVID-19 based on caregiver feedback and urgent needs. Today, the field's adaptive efforts remain reactive in that they are driven by immediate issues such as staffing shortages rather than strategic shifts. Limited resources and competing demands constrain proactive change.

**Monitoring** is the extent to which the field monitors and assesses external environments to identify necessary shifts in strategy. The score for this item (2.8), continuing its upward trend across administrations.

It is in the action stage of development. Some actors, especially policy advocates, monitor external environments through strong networks and sustained communication with state agencies. Many providers operate in survival mode, with little time or infrastructure to track external trends. Systems-level mechanisms to monitor the environment remain limited, and many shifts are triggered by new policies or funding rather than ongoing assessment.

**Flexibility of resources** is the degree to which resources are reallocated, shared, and/or leveraged among higher- and lower-resourced actors to successfully cope with changing conditions. The score for this item (2.4), which is aligned with the previous administration (2.5). It is in the action stage of development. While some field members share data or collaborate on discrete initiatives, often through intermediaries like State Early Learning Alliance of New Hampshire (SELA) or the NH Center for Justice and Equity, resource reallocation is rare. Most collaboration remains limited to information exchange rather than distribution of tangible resources.

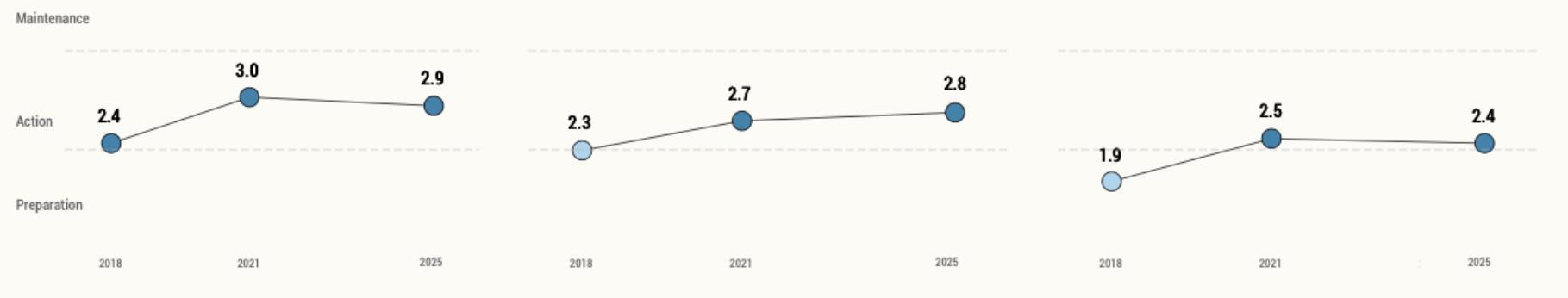
## Adaptive capacity (n=26)



### Adaptation

### Monitoring

### Resource flexibility



# Adequate funding & support for policy

Adequate funding and support for policy reflects the degree to which the resource and policy environment supports the goals and aims of the field, including policy advocacy, policy environment, policy knowledge, shared measurement, funding, and technology. The domain score (2.6) is similar to previous administrations. It is in the action stage of development.

**Policy advocacy** refers to the strength and sustainability of the field's advocacy infrastructure. The score for this item (3.0) has decreased since last administration (3.9). It is in the action stage of development. The field benefits from experienced organizations and growing engagement from caregivers and providers. The infrastructure expanded and matured in recent years through efforts from key players like New Futures, MomsRising, and Save the Children. Concerns remain about long-term sustainability, especially when funding or priorities shift. These concerns were not raised in the previous administration, contributing to the lower score.

**Policy environment** is the degree to which the policy environment supports effective action in the field. The score for this item (3.0) is on par with last administration (3.3). It is in the action stage of development. The early childhood policy environment is seen as generally enabling, bolstered by recent legislative gains in child care access and maternal and child health. Unstable and insufficient funding limits the impact of these advances.

**Policy knowledge** is the degree to which field actors have the knowledge necessary to inform and shape an enabling policy environment. The score for this item (2.9) has decreased since last administration (3.7). It is in the action stage of development. Training from Early Learning NH and New Futures has improved understanding of policy across the field. They increasingly apply tools like root cause analysis to guide advocacy.

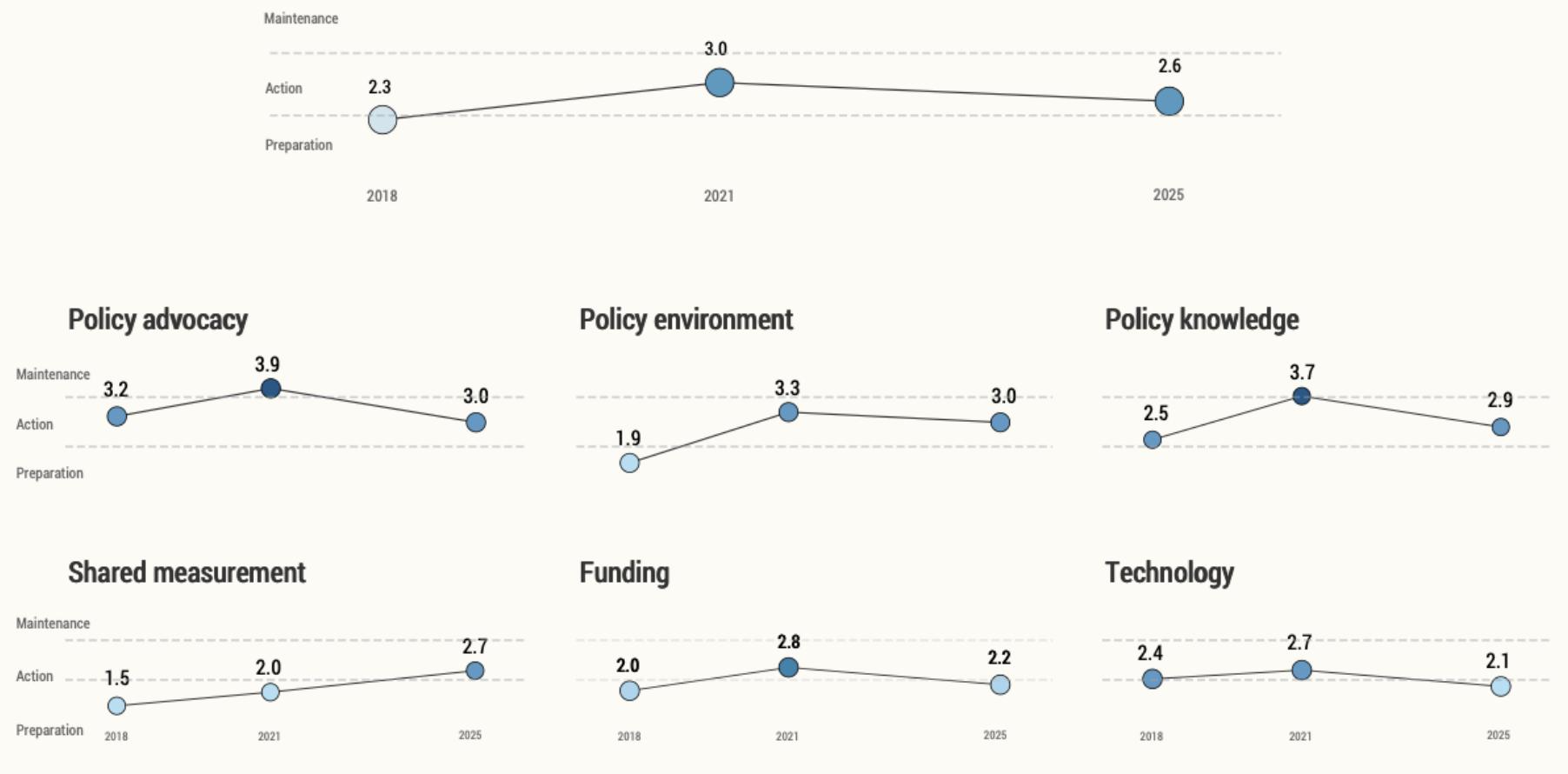
**Shared measurement** is the systematic collection and use of common measures and shared data sharing platforms, to monitor progress and inform decision making. The score for this item (2.7) has markedly increased over the past three administrations. It is in the action stage of development. Interest in shared measurement has expanded, with organizations like Kids Count, the Council for Thriving Children, and the Endowment for Health curating and sharing public data through online dashboards. One informant noted that while these sources offer useful starting points, they often lack the depth or nuance needed to fully assess progress. Other organizations such as the Carsey School and the University of New Hampshire and the NH Fiscal Policy Institute contribute through original research and regular publication. DHHS collects valuable state-level data on licensing, workforce credentials, and child care scholarships but rarely shares it publicly. Organizations like the FRCs have historically shared aggregated trends to support advocacy and communication.

**Funding** reflects the availability and security of the resources and funding necessary to support effective collective action in the field. The score for this item (2.2) has decreased since the last administration (2.8). It is in the preparation stage of development. Funding across the field is widely seen as inadequate and unreliable. Tight state budgets and competition from sectors such as education and aging limit public investment. Year-to-year variability hinders infrastructure development, long term planning, and basic advocacy. One notable exception is the New Hampshire Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, which offers responsive and strategic support. Still, many programs operate with minimal, short-term funding. Few have sustainability plans, and many face uncertain futures as COVID-era federal funds expire. This instability continues to stall progress toward shared goals.

**Technology** refers to the existence and utilization of needed technologies to support effective action in the field. The score for this item (2.1) has decreased since the last administration (2.7). It is in the preparation stage of development. Although enabling technologies are available, their use and impact remain limited. Virtual meetings and online learning platforms have improved access and flexibility.

Efforts like NH Connections Information System, a DHHS database that facilitates provider and caregiver access to child care resources and referrals, demonstrate promise but are still developing. Technology could be better leveraged for data sharing, state-field communication, and operational efficiency. Key barriers include limited time, capacity, and technical skills.

## Adequate funding & support for policy (n=10)



# Expanding power

Expanding power is the degree to which historically excluded individuals and communities can shape decisions, influence systems, and drive change. It consists of community member engagement, elevating lived experience with data, community advisory groups, backbone structures, sharing best practices for advancing equity, funding for grassroots organizing, and infrastructure for community input. This is the first time this domain was included in the administration of the early childhood FASST. The average score (2.3) is in the action stage of development.

**Community member engagement** refers to the inclusion of local community members in decision-making, leadership, and advocacy efforts. The score for this item (2.6) is in the action stage of development. Participation often occurs through local leadership roles, school boards, grassroots organizing, and advocacy with lawmakers. These efforts tend to be ad hoc and depend heavily on individual trust and initiative. Some community members mobilize others by sharing resources and opportunities, while others take direct action like pooling funds to keep centers open or launching home-based care. These efforts are rarely part of a coordinated or sustained strategy, and opportunities for engagement vary widely by organization or leader.

**Elevating lived experience with data** is the degree to which data are contextualized (e.g., through the use of disaggregated or qualitative data) to elevate the perspectives of people with lived experience. The score for this item (2.5) is in the action stage of development. Stories are commonly used to humanize issues and advocate for change.

**Community advisory groups** are structured efforts to ensure programs and services are provided in a culturally responsive manner. The score for this item (2.5) is in the action stage of development. Key informants cited the Granite State Organizing Project, the Early Childhood Equity Movement, MomsRising, and initiatives led by the Endowment for Health and the Manchester Community Action Coalition.

They noted that many mainstream advisory groups lack voices from the communities they aim to represent and warned that scaling grassroots efforts can sideline founding members.

**Backbone structure** is the degree to which people with lived experience are actively involved in the field's convening and coordination structures. The score for this item (2.2) is in the preparation stage of development. The field lacks consistent, intentional structures to ensure that family voices inform planning, funding, and advocacy. People with lived experience are often not directly engaged in decision-making spaces. Instead, advocacy groups like MomsRising are invited to speak on their behalf. When families are invited to participate, systemic barriers like scheduling and lack of compensation often make it difficult to sustain their involvement.

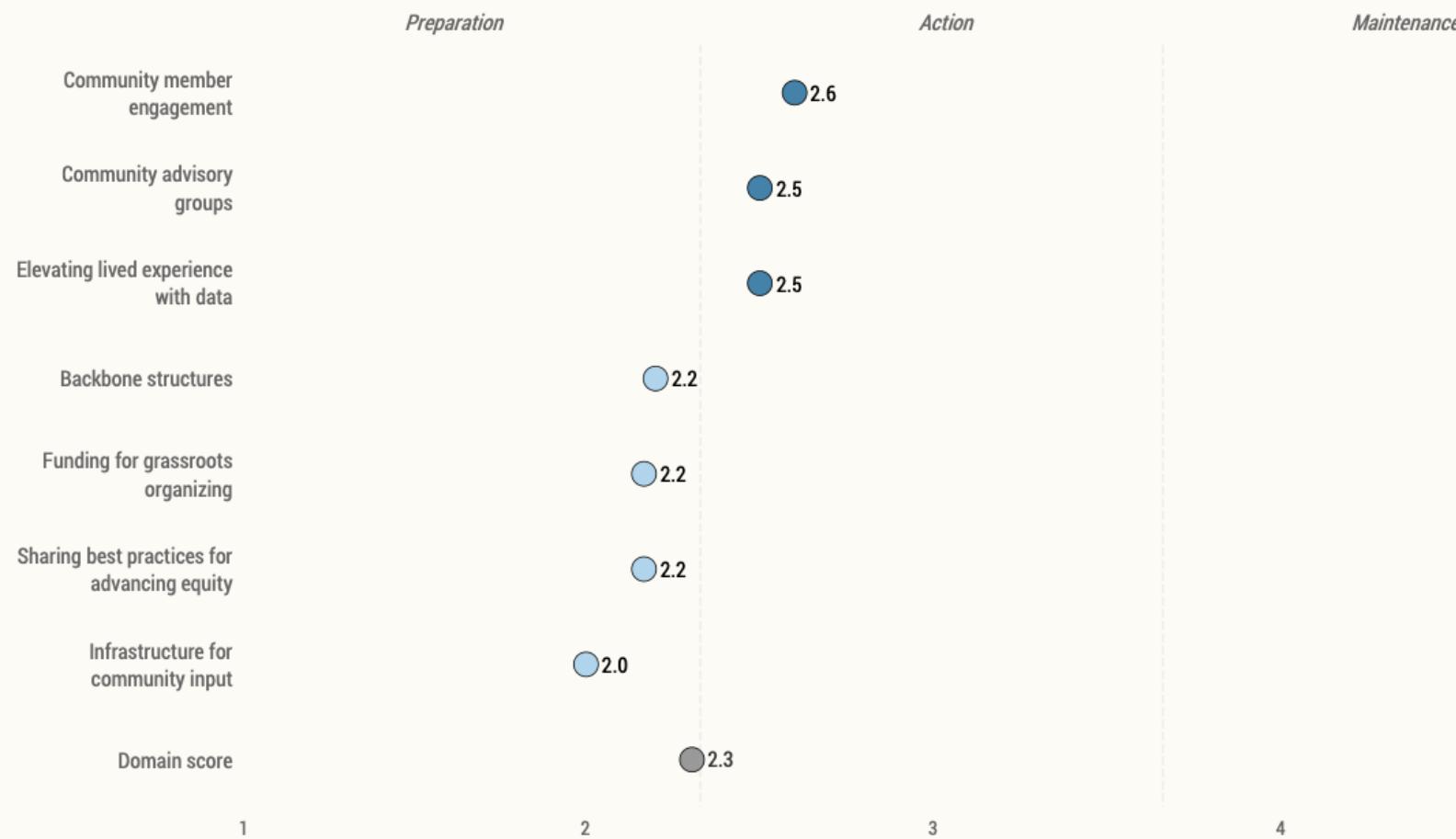
**Sharing best practices for advancing equity** is the degree to which field members exchange approaches to advancing equity. The score for this item (2.2) is in the preparation stage of development. Some professional development opportunities are available, including from a grassroots group in Manchester, though implementation varies. Some organizations are adopting more intentional practices, like New Futures offering stipends to participate in their fellowship programs. Most learning, however, remains informal and disconnected to daily work.

**Funding for grassroots organizing** refers to financial support that enables residents to influence policies and decisions that affect their communities. The score for this item (2.2) is in the preparation stage of development. This type of funding is available but can be difficult for local community leaders to access. Some funders, such as the Endowment for Health, set aside dollars for local initiatives and reduce barriers to access. Many others, however, continue to grant funding to larger, white-led organizations outside the communities they serve. As a result, smaller grassroots organizations struggle to secure support.

**Infrastructure for community input** reflects the processes for local providers and policy makers to receive input from community members. The score for this item (2.0) is in the preparation stage of development. Few formal structures such as office hours or accessible forums that enable parents to connect with policymakers exist. Communication is often one-directional, and the field lacks mechanisms for sustained, inclusive dialogue. Some providers collect parent feedback through surveys or direct interaction, but it's unclear how consistently this input is valued or used. Informants emphasized the need to build systems that make space for full, honest participation without fear of judgment or dismissal.

When asked about promising directions, three distinct ideas emerged. First, the child care field should clearly articulate a shared goal of equity, to continue momentum and guard against counterforces. Second, equity should be embedded across systems, from scholarship access to strategic planning, rather than treated as a siloed initiative. And third, for funders to continue intentional investment in community-led efforts. Doing so could shift organizational behavior, as funding often drives institutional priorities.

## Expanding power (n=6)



# Equity

Equity is the degree to which the field recognizes and addresses the sources of disparities. It assesses the level of equity in the other domains by examining equity lens (shared purpose), equity-related data (shared knowledge), informed policymakers (adequate funding and support for policy), inclusive participation (leadership and community support), and culturally and linguistically competent programs (quality of programs and services). Its average score (1.9) is in the preparation stage of development.

**Informed policymakers** is the extent to which leaders and decision-makers understand the importance of cultural competence, social determinants of health, and health equity to the field. The score for this item (2.1) has markedly decreased since last administration (3.1). It is in the preparation stage of development. This is likely due to an increasing number of policies that are hostile to DEI. While some policymakers recognize the importance of equity, it is not broadly embraced or embedded in policy.

**Equity lens** refers to the degree to which an equity perspective is infused throughout the field's vision, values, goals, and strategies. The score for this item (2.1) has decreased since last administration (2.8). It is in the preparation stage of development. Trusted community leaders lead culturally competent work in Nashua, Manchester, and Concord, often backed by foundations and coalitions. Elsewhere, efforts are limited and disconnected. The field increasingly favors narrow interventions, like English classes for New Americans, over broader, community-driven approaches that address root causes. This shift often overlooks community-defined needs like trauma-informed care and culturally aligned childcare.

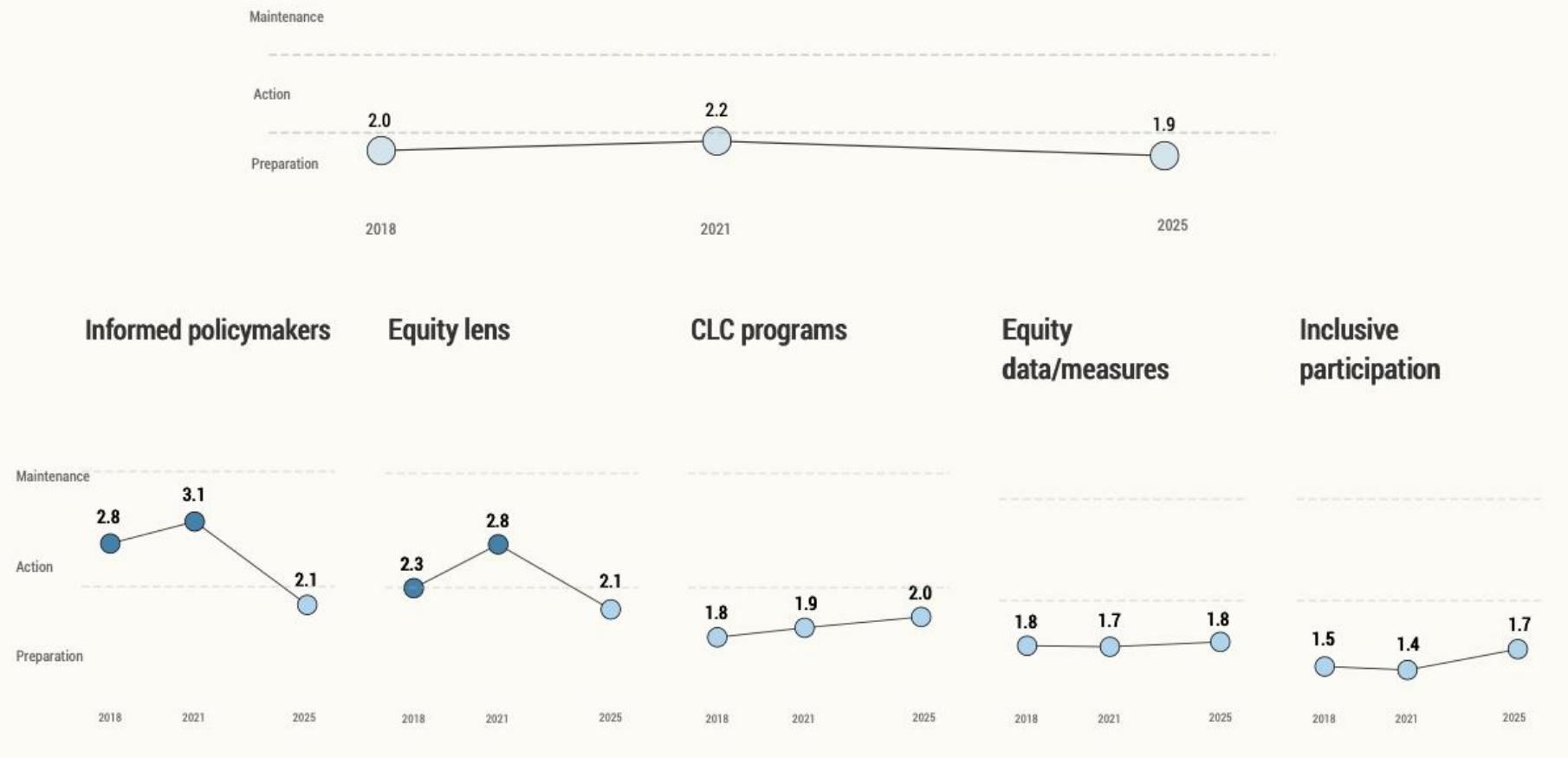
**Culturally and linguistically competent (CLC) programs** is the degree to which culturally and linguistically appropriate programs are accessible to vulnerable populations in the field.

The score for this item (2.0) is consistent with previous administrations. It is in the preparation stage of development. These types of programs are present but unevenly distributed across the state. Training opportunities are available, notably through Child Care Aware. Language access services, such as language banks, are used statewide, while broader CLC practices are more consistently integrated in the southern region of the state.

**Equity-related data** refers to how data about underrepresented communities is used to inform and improve strategy and action. The score for this item (1.8) is aligned with previous administrations. It is in the preparation stage of development. National sources like the Census and American Community Survey (ACS) offer demographic data, but small sample sizes and geographic misalignment reduce their usefulness for regional planning. State-level data are often hard to find or underutilized, though recent efforts by Kids Count, the Council for Thriving Children, and the Endowment for Health aim to make public data more accessible. Some organizations, such as Family Resource Centers, use grant-required data to guide strategy, but equity-focused data collection and application remain the exception rather than the norm.

**Inclusive participation** is the degree to which underrepresented communities are included in the field's decision-making. The score for this item (1.7) is similar to prior administrations. It is in the preparation stage of development. Leadership remains predominantly white and female. While some individuals with other identities are present, system-level inclusion of racially, ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse voices is limited. Their presence appears more frequently in southern regions. Informants stressed that authentic inclusion requires relationship-building, shared knowledge, and support. Some organizations, like the Endowment for Health, create space by convening dedicated tables for underrepresented voices.

## Equity (n=26)



# Lessons learned

Notable progress has been made across several dimensions of New Hampshire's early childhood field since the last assessment. Philanthropic investment has played a critical role in catalyzing change. These investments supported the launch of new initiatives and amplified underrepresented voices. State-level policy reforms such as expanded scholarship eligibility, enrollment-based reimbursements, and \$15 million in workforce funding, marked significant shifts in funding structures and field recognition.

Workforce compensation and stability have received unprecedented attention. Legislative momentum has improved provider pay, supported pilot programs to cover child care costs for workers, and spurred calls for sustainable funding models. Informants noted these gains remain fragile amid staffing shortages, burnout, and inconsistent legislative priorities.

Respondents described several positive trends, including strengthening public awareness, more collaborative governance conversations, and increased attention to prevention and evidence-based practices (e.g., parent cafés, home visiting, ACERT). On the other hand, top-down structures like the early childhood regions were seen as lacking follow-through and transparency. Spark NH's dissolution was named as a major loss in convening and systems-building capacity. Family and community voice have gained visibility, but concerns remain about whose voices are heard and how input is used. Some noted growing advocacy capacity among younger generations and families, though not all perspectives (e.g., families of color and new Americans) are equally represented.

Based on the findings of this report, we offer the following recommendations for how the Endowment for Health can support the early childhood ecosystem in New Hampshire.

## *Strengthen the early childhood workforce*

The early childhood system depends on a skilled, stable workforce, but high turnover and burnout continue to limit progress. The Endowment can support efforts that increase job stability, elevate the voices of early educators, and promote the value of their work such as scholarships, tuition support, wage/benefit pilots, and strategic public relations.

## *Build and link leadership and equity-centered structures*

The Endowment's investments in BIPOC- and parent-led organizations have elevated new leadership and expanded the field's capacity to act equitably. Continuing to fund this work will ensure those most impacted are centered in solutions. Supporting organizations that bridge communities and systems is especially critical to ensuring policies reflect lived experience.

## *Align equity expectations and learning goals among funders*

As a member of the NH Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, the Endowment is well-positioned to strengthen coordination among funders. We recommend playing a leadership role in aligning shared expectations around equity outcomes, data use, and capacity-building supports for grantees. This can help reduce duplicative efforts, signal clear priorities to the field, and increase the collective impact of philanthropic investment across New Hampshire.