

# ADVANCING EQUITABLE OUTCOMES IN CHILD WELFARE

## A Toolkit for Sustainability

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## THE FAMILY STABILIZATION INITIATIVE

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## Rethinking Racial Equity: The Innovative Approach of Lutheran Services in America's Family Stabilization Initiative

When decision makers discuss reducing racial disproportionality in the child welfare system, they frequently focus on the actions providers should take to change the way services are delivered, the types of services that are provided, and how the system and its resources should change to reduce structural inequities. But what if decision makers also centered issues of race in how services are implemented and sustained? This is the approach of Lutheran Services in America's Family Stabilization Initiative, an innovative learning collaborative that is part of its Results Innovation Lab (RIL). The RIL was built to reach the goal of achieving equitable outcomes for children and their families.

## INTRODUCTION

Lutheran Services in America represents networking at its best—it’s their mission, they have a long-standing collaborative culture to support it, and it serves as their catalyst for change.

Formed in 1997, the Lutheran Services in America (LSA) national network model accelerates transformational change. One key decade-long movement has been LSA’s implementation of learning collaboratives that target systemic changes in the welfare of all, from children to older adults. This results-based work is grounded in equity and community.

One groundbreaking outcome of LSA’s learning lab work was the Results Innovation Lab (RIL), which began in 2016. The RIL aims to lead change in the child welfare system, where LSA’s impact decreased the disproportionate number of children of color separated from their families, reduced youth of color’s length of stay in foster care, and improved outcomes for children transitioning out of the child welfare system (Oftelie, 2022). In fact, the RIL has been so successful that LSA already met their Moonshot Goal ahead of schedule—dramatically improving the trajectory of 20,000 children and youth *significantly ahead of their 2024 target* so they can grow up to be healthy, productive adults. The Results Innovation Lab includes the Results Network of equity-focused leadership-building learning collaboratives, and the Family Stabilization Initiative, the focus of this Toolkit.

The Family Stabilization Initiative (FSI) is LSA’s effort to engage a range of stakeholders to work in a broader

ecosystem to achieve equitable outcomes for children and families and drive systemic change (Oftelie, 2022). Aligned with the direction of the federal government (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023), LSA is accelerating the shift in child welfare from intervention to prevention (Oftelie, 2022). The FSI is a unique opportunity because it provides resources to expand and implement evidence-based programs while, at the same time, building organizational capacity and peer learning (Young, 2021). This Toolkit includes a review of LSA’s implementation of the C.A.R.E.S. and WISe models, which recognizes family strengths and ensures flexibility in responding to and advocating for families and is embedded in local and culturally specific contexts by prioritizing large and diverse community partnerships. The C.A.R.E.S. model is one of only two evidence-based practices for wraparound services with high child welfare relevance (CEBC, 2023).

The unique value of the Family Stabilization Initiative not only stems from LSA’s strong history of community networking and results-based work but also from its ability to address racial disparities. The FSI began in 2021 as a 3-year learning collaborative among organizations in 4 states with high rates of racial disproportionality among families involved with child welfare. The cohort of organizations in the Family Stabilization Initiative, on whom this Toolkit is in part based, are ensuring that evidence-based programs such as C.A.R.E.S. and WISe are implemented with an approach that addresses racial disparities. The cohort is collecting disaggregated data by race, analyzing data with a racial lens, and developing strategies and program implementation with families and partners who are most impacted by child welfare. This results-based peer community—where teams and states share learning, troubleshooting, and best practices—stands out in its emphasis on eliminating racial disparities, scaling evidence-based programs with this target in mind, and, through all the long-established LSA foundations, increasing the likelihood of more effective and equitable sustainability plans (lutheranservices.org).



# Overview: The Sustainability Toolkit





## METHODOLOGY

The Family Stabilization Initiative Sustainability Toolkit was developed by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago in partnership with Lutheran Services in America. Chapin Hall designed and implemented a multifaceted approach to gain comprehensive understanding of the FSI and its core sustainability components. Chapin Hall first reviewed the FSI and participating affiliates' existing documents, including meeting notes, sustainability tools, and evaluation reports. Next, Chapin Hall engaged LSA leadership, the FSI team, and participants in a series of discussions about sustainability successes, sustainability challenges, and experiences being part of the learning collaborative.<sup>1</sup>

The Sustainability Toolkit is intended for any organization interested in applying race equity and sustainability best practice principles to their implementation of evidence-based or evidence-informed programming. At its foundation, the FSI values peer networks and family strengthening programming. Leaders are coached to think about program sustainability beyond funding and deepen their organization and community's strategy to advance racially equitable outcomes.

## UTILIZATION

### Who is this Toolkit for?

The Toolkit's Equity-Centered Sustainability Key Components are geared toward decision-making staff in human service organizations. The Toolkit provides grounding in the key components and values of the FSI. The FSI is designed to be used in tandem with implementing and sustaining evidence-based practices, using peer learning that expedites innovation, and race equity goals. The Toolkit is most directly suitable to:

- Senior leadership
- Development directors
- Program managers
- Program model developers

The Toolkit can also be helpful to practitioners, caseworkers, and other clinical staff who see a need and want to engage in or enhance race equity programming in their organization or community.

## Ways to Use this Toolkit

There are several ways human service organizations can use this Toolkit:

- Consider forming a learning collaborative in your community to strategize about equity-centered sustainability approaches
- Share the Toolkit with your organization's leadership team to spark conversation around structural issues of race equity
- Share the Toolkit with your staff to help them reflect about individual work and understanding race equity practices
- Print the Six Facets of Race Equity to display in your office or common area
- Choose one barrier to addressing race equity that you can take one step towards changing in 1 week

<sup>1</sup> Discussions included a World Café activity; interviews; and discussion groups held in person and remotely. Site participants included program leadership, program directors, supervisors, and Chief Executive Officers.



# Foundations of the Family Stabilization Initiative







# 1. Build a Learning Collaborative

The learning collaborative is the cornerstone of LSA's 3-year Family Stabilization Initiative (FSI), where four on-the-ground service agencies in the LSA network collaborate with each other and with nearly 80 local partners to support the initiative's transformative goal: to reach 580 families in crisis in underserved communities.

The FSI began in 2021 with the cohort of four organizations in Alaska, Montana, South Dakota, and Washington implementing high-fidelity wraparound services to promote child abuse prevention and family preservation (National Center for Innovation and Excellence, n.d.; Washington State Wraparound with Intensive Services, 2022). Together, the cohort embarked on a learning journey aimed at reducing the disproportionate number of children of color who are separated from their families due to child welfare system involvement. Collaborative members convene routinely during the FSI to foster strong relationships among participants and promote sharing best practices and lessons learned.

FSI began as a implementation tool to high-fidelity wraparound services however the objectives are much broader. FSI works to engage leaders who will be champions of race equity in their organization's approach to program sustainability, regardless of the program model being implemented. To achieve this objective, the FSI brought together organizations' teams to create a peer culture that would learn and plan for sustainability using race equity principles. Simply stated, the FSI is a complementary approach for human service organizations to use to implement and sustain programs using race equity and sustainability best practice principles.

## DESIGN

The learning collaborative functions as an innovative blend of direct program delivery and collective learning. It provides cohort members with technical assistance, coaching, and curriculum. To further supplement the learning of cohort members, the FSI engages the National Center for Innovation and Excellence (NCFIE) to support the partner sites in their individual implementation of wraparound service delivery models, including developing specific plans for hiring and training staff and for gathering data and outcomes for program evaluation and fidelity monitoring. Together, these resources empower service providers to design innovative solutions and interventions specific to the communities they serve.

## WRAPAROUND SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS

Implementation learning was specifically focused on wraparound service delivery, such as the C.A.R.E.S. and WISe models. The learning collaborative helped illuminate the usefulness of strengths-based, culturally competent care coordination models to stabilize families and children who find themselves in crises. Through experiential learning, cohort members learned best practices to leverage community assets to support whole families, adhering to ten core principles of the Wraparound process, monitoring fidelity, and gathering whole-family outcomes data. These models also address all five protective factors related to child welfare: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children (Harper Browne, 2016).

## CAPACITY BUILDING

The learning collaborative also focuses on developing the capacity of nonprofit community leaders to ensure sustainability of offering preventive services beyond the life of the grant. This involves building leadership skills, fostering continuous improvement, and managing change effectively. With these skills, service providers are better positioned to develop a framework for long-term funding that supports innovative whole-family approaches at the state and federal levels. Potential funding sources include the Family First Prevention Services Act Title IV-E funding, CAPTA Title II Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CB-CAP) funding, Medicaid reimbursement, and other sources.

Table 1 shows the variety of benefits that can come from participating in the learning collaborative. Service providers highlighted each of these benefits in the informational interviews conducted by Chapin Hall. Their comments are synthesized in the table.

**Table 1. Benefits of the FSI Learning Collaborative**

Benefit	Summary of service provider comments
Social support	Learning with others provides a support system that can help learners overcome challenges and stay motivated. Cohort members can provide encouragement, share their experiences, and help each other through difficult parts of the curriculum.
Diversity of perspectives	Different learners bring unique experiences and perspectives to the group. This diversity can lead to deeper understanding and richer discussions, helping everyone to learn more effectively.
Peer learning	Cohort members can learn from each other in addition to learning from instructors or course materials. This peer-to-peer learning can be especially valuable when cohort members have different levels of expertise or background knowledge.
Accountability	Being part of a cohort can help participants commit to their learnings and be accountable for their progress. Knowing that others are also working through the material can provide a sense of accountability and help participants stay engaged.
Networking	Learning cohorts often bring together individuals with shared interests. This can be a great opportunity to make connections that could be beneficial for future collaborations and professional partnerships.
Improved outcomes	Literature shows that learning in cohorts can lead to better outcomes compared to individual learning. The combined effects of social support, diversity of perspectives, peer learning, and accountability can contribute to deeper understanding and higher retention of knowledge obtained. (Thies et al., 2020)
Enhanced emotional experience	The camaraderie that often develops within a cohort can make the learning experience more enjoyable. This can enhance motivation and make the process feel less lonely or isolating.

## CONCLUSION

The learning collaborative approach provides an innovative and effective model for reducing racial disparities in child welfare, stabilizing families, and achieving long-term program sustainability. By fostering collaboration, sharing best practices, and using data-driven decision making, LSA and its on-the-ground service providers have made significant strides toward improving the lives of children and families in the target communities.

## 2. Address Race Equity

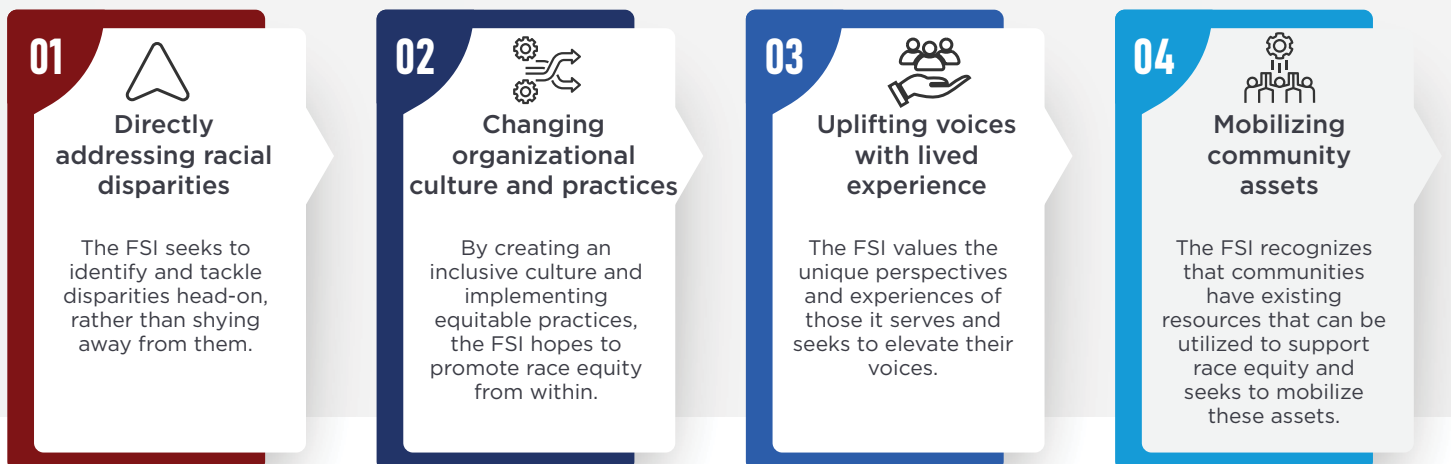
Race equity is central to the mission and vision of the FSI and is intended to support each sustainability component. In its broadest sense, race equity refers to the fair and just treatment of all individuals, regardless of their race. It seeks to identify and eliminate race-based disparities in opportunities and outcomes. Race equity goes beyond the concept of equality, where everyone gets the same resources or opportunities, to focus on ensuring that everyone has access to what they need to thrive, fully considering their unique circumstances and barriers they may face due to systemic and historical racial discrimination.

By integrating race equity principles into the foundation of the FSI's mission and embedding them throughout the different sustainability components, the goal is to create an environment that actively recognizes and addresses systemic racial inequities. Moreover, intentionally weaving race equity principles ensures that efforts are geared towards building culturally responsive and equitable approaches to programming and service delivery. The FSI prioritizes race equity to create a sustainable and impactful model that is not only responsive to the needs of marginalized communities but is also designed to uplift and empower them for the long term. Race equity is a goal that requires continuous effort and a commitment to addressing the root causes of racial inequities. One FSI leader explained:

In the context of the FSI, we aim to ensure that race equity is not treated as an afterthought or a token inclusion but is instead a fundamental and integral part of the process.

Figure 1. FSI's Four Guiding Principles for Advancing Race Equity

### FSI'S FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ADVANCING RACE EQUITY



Race equity is a complex concept that can be defined and understood in various ways, depending on the context and the perspectives of those involved. However, at its base, orienting to include race equity as part of organizational goals includes developing shared understanding of the multiple dimensions of race equity. Table 2 shows six different facets of race equity, which highlight how on-the-ground service providers can move to action.

**Table 2. Six Facets of Race Equity**

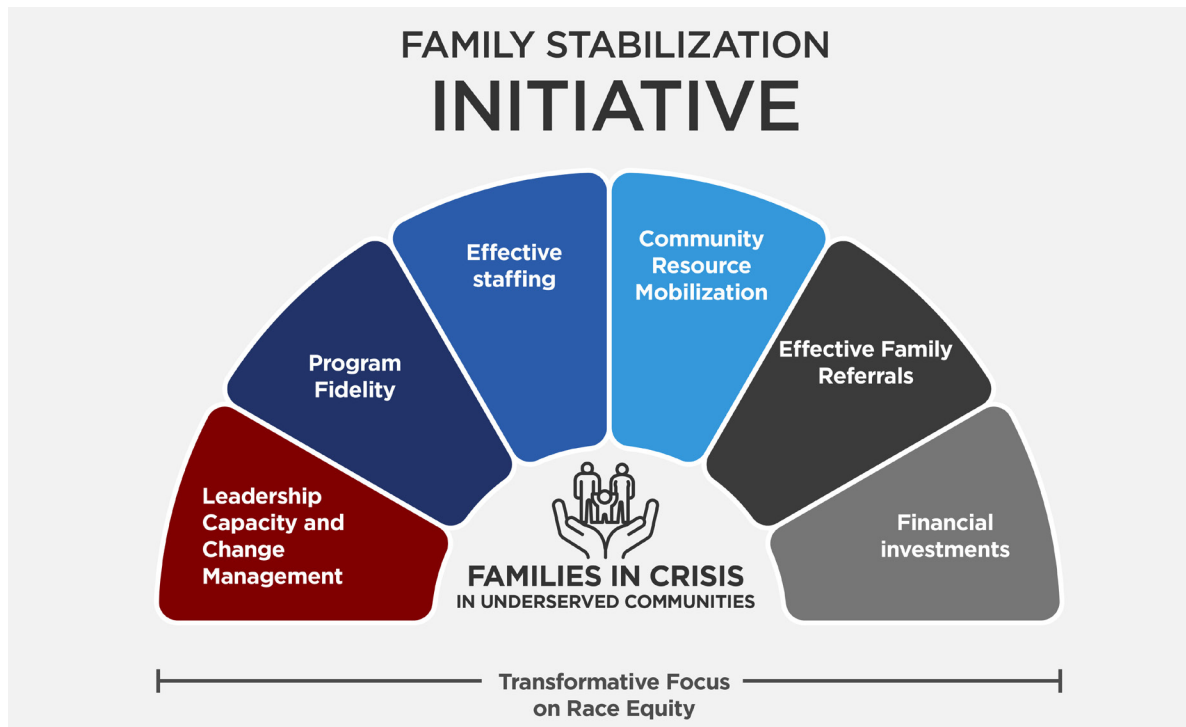
Facet	Description of Facet
Equal opportunity	The equal opportunity for individuals of all races to access resources, benefits, and opportunities. This definition acknowledges the historical and systemic barriers that have prevented certain racial groups from accessing opportunities and seeks to remove those barriers.
Fair treatment	Emphasizes the need to address systemic biases and discrimination that result in disparate treatment of individuals based on their race.
Equal outcomes	Recognizes that historical and systemic inequities have created outcome disparities in health, education, social, and economic outcomes for different racial groups. Race equity, in this definition, seeks to address and rectify those disparities.
Systemic change	Emphasizes the need to address underlying systems, structures, and policies that perpetuate racial inequities. Race equity, in this definition, involves transforming those systems to create a more just and equitable society.
Empowerment & representation	Emphasizes the importance of giving individuals from those groups a voice in decision-making processes and the power to shape their own futures.
Redistribution of resources	Acknowledges that historical and systemic inequities have resulted in unequal distribution of resources (such as wealth, education, and health care) among different racial groups. Race equity, in this definition, involves redistributing resources to address those disparities.

Note: These definitions are not mutually exclusive, and different organizations and individuals may emphasize different aspects of race equity based on their goals and priorities.

### 3. Incorporate Equity-Centered Sustainability Key Components

The learning collaborative and race equity-centered principles form the foundation of the FSI; the pillars are its six key sustainability components. The FSI blends its equity principles into these components and facilitates understanding and action through the learning collaborative.

Figure 2. The Results Innovation Lab and Family Stabilization Initiative's Transformative Focus on Race Equity



**Building Leadership Capacity and Change Management.** LSA supports results-based work for their leadership that builds core competencies, uses data to assess progress, and brings groups together to move from stated intentions to effective action (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017).

**Community Engagement.** The FSI builds on and expands LSA's collaborative culture, engaging a range of stakeholders to work in a broader ecosystem to achieve equitable outcomes.

**Effective Family Referrals.** Effective referrals are targeted through cross-program connections, education, and outreach, promoting integration with both internal and external partners.

**Effective Staffing Models.** Effective staffing includes hiring from the community to better connect with and serve families, additional implementation support for staff, and learning from and incorporating staff's practical experience and real-world consequences to enhance change.

**Fidelity to the Program Model.** This component not only focuses on fidelity to any service being implemented, but also on fidelity to the approach of The Family Stabilization Initiative.

**Financial Investments.** Financing is addressed from the beginning, taking into consideration the complex braiding of funding that is necessary to support both innovation and sustainability.



# Shifting Mindsets and Paradigms





## IMPLEMENTING A TRANSFORMATIVE FOCUS ON RACE EQUITY

There are two steps to achieving social change, changing narratives and changing behaviors. (Passon, 2019).

LSA leaders realized that pursuing the envisioned degree of change in disproportionality would require supporting its organizations to shift mindsets and deviate from worn paths that weren't working. It would also require sustained commitment from LSA to help organizations establish the foundation for change in the context of being within states with deep racial disproportionality within their child welfare systems. A member of the LSA leadership team said:

The RIL really began because most children are removed from their families because of [factors such as] neglect, poverty, not abuse. We had to ask ourselves, "What do we need to change within our organizations and communities to change that?"

Leaders of FSI recognized that sustainability was often thought of as the ability to ensure program funding throughout ebbs and flows in different sources of revenue. The FSI recognized the learning opportunity to build sustainability infrastructure by broadening the view of sustainability, and to build equity infrastructure at the same time, hand in hand. One site participant said,

That sustainability was more than just money, that was something that we hadn't heard of before.

Employing a learning collaborative is what LSA's culture is for. Creating the FSI to infuse equity into leadership for program sustainability was a natural fit, not just to fuel ideas, but to celebrate each other's successes. In turn, participants stressed that sharing successes reinforces commitment to the work. One participant said:

Hearing and seeing client success gives you a bubble and gives you a boost for conviction and the purpose of why you continue to work in community mental health I really think cannot be understated.

FSI participants were clear that stories increase motivation. They also improve the ability to rapidly learn from others, including from those whose story may be different. Others' insights can improve confidence in trying new approaches. Site participants indicated they benefited from having the support and wisdom of peers experiencing the same process as part of the learning collaborative:

I just think just knowing that there's somebody you could maybe ask, and they may not have the answer, but they have an understanding of what you're going through. Yeah, and some of the people in this collaborative have been doing this work for a really long time, which is invaluable because they've been through the ups and the downs.

It's like institutional knowledge but across organizations and different areas of the country.

FSI facilitators were intentional in designing the learning collaborative to create an accountability network. Sites are accountable to each other, their organizations, communities, and FSI coaches. A member of FSI leadership said:

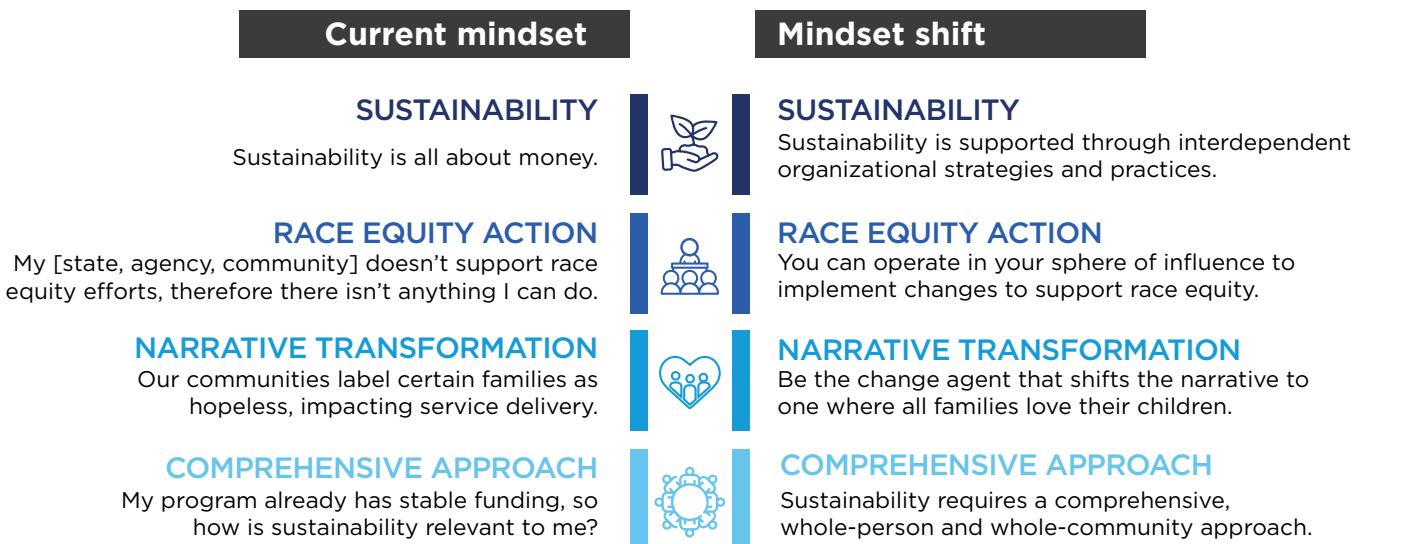
We make sure there is a DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] component to each check in. We talked about equitable hiring practices and staffing practices, so it's using that infused in each team that we meet with or every conversation we were having. . . we emphasize, we're not aiming for a point, it's throughout all of the work. It's a part of the work. It's not extra work.

The learning collaborative brings together three team members with different roles and varying levels of experience and seniority promoting a career ladder steeped with sustainability and race equity best practices. Participants reported that the FSI helps build the next generation of leaders. One site participant said:

Bringing [new staff] in under the FSI has given them that professional development opportunity, that exposure to peers, that exposure to the broader LSA network. . . I've seen time and time again how impactful those relationships can become.

To begin this journey with FSI's program leaders, LSA articulated themes that had been keeping their on-the-ground partners stuck, despite being committed to alleviating racial disproportionality in their communities. The FSI integrated and reinforced these mindset shifts (see Figure 3), and FSI participants have been clear that there have been "light bulb moments," which, when taking place as part of a peer group, are even more impactful.

Figure 3. Four Mindset Shifts of the FSI







# Sustainability Key Components



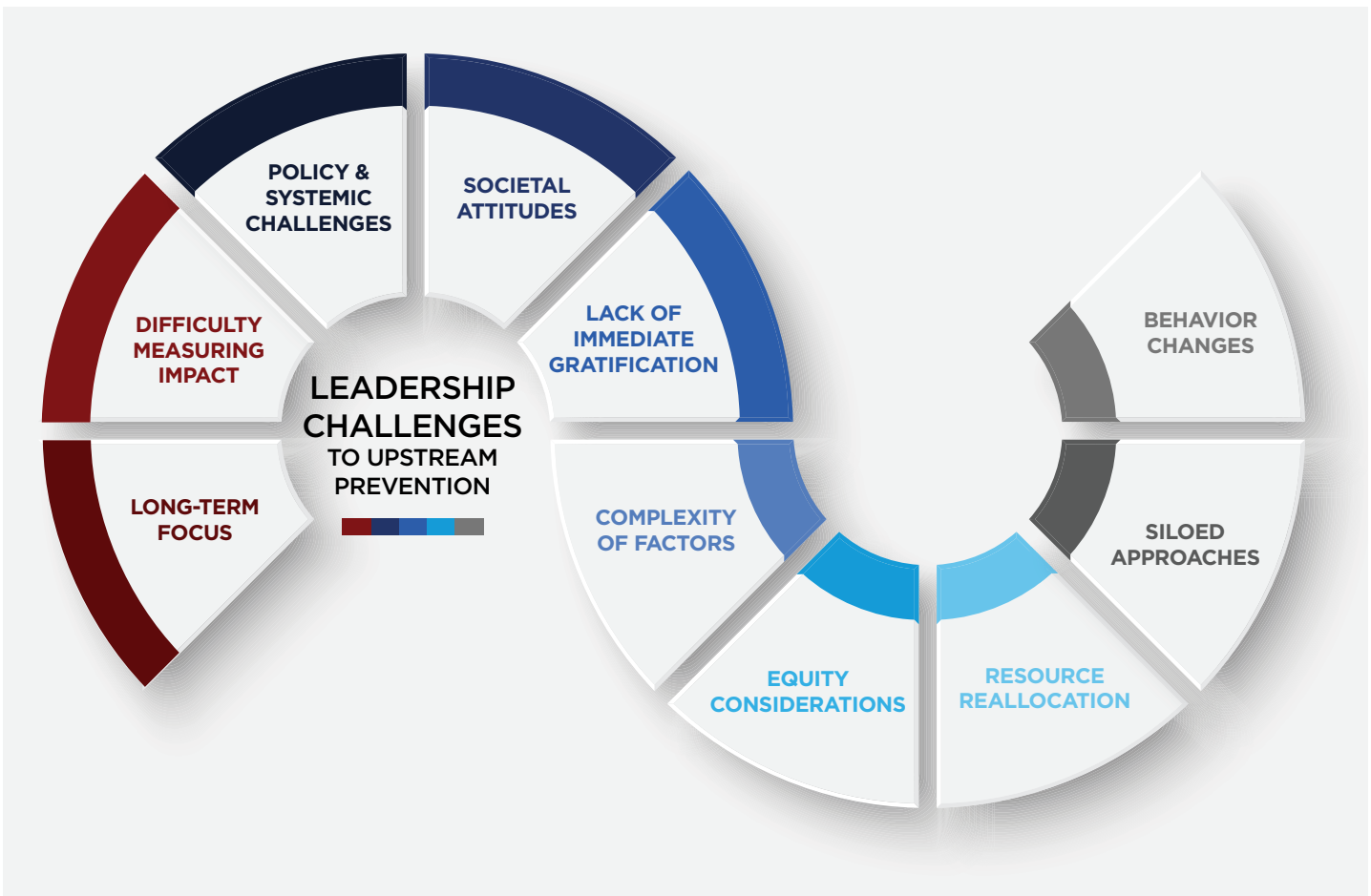
There has long been a focus on implementing scientifically informed practices (Blase & Fixsen, 2013), yet passive dissemination through publications and trainings is insufficient for both assuring fidelity, reach, and sustainability (Tinkle et al., 2013). Fixsen and colleagues were among the first, if not the first, to call out the importance of third-party agencies, such as intermediary organizations, that assist with the implementation process across multiple functions to disseminate and implement the service with fidelity. This can range from training and coaching to building organizational and system capacity (Fixsen et al., 2005; Fixsen et al., 2005; Franks, 2010). The Results Innovation Lab’s strategies, including the Results Network & the Family Stabilization Initiative, have been informed by implementation science, and have several key components.

## BUILDING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

### Leading for Prevention

Upstream prevention refers to interventions or strategies that aim to prevent health or social problems from occurring in the first place, rather than addressing their consequences once they’ve already occurred (which is known as downstream prevention). While upstream prevention can be highly effective and ultimately save resources (Monahan et al., 2023), leadership in the context of shifting narratives and business to invest more heavily in prevention poses several challenges. Figure 2 shows these challenges.

Figure 4. Leadership Challenges related to Upstream Prevention (see Toolkit Resource D, p. 30)



The FSI's approach to building leadership capacity and change management recognizes that prevention can only be accomplished with dedication, patience, and long-term strategies. The issues at hand are complex and deeply rooted in long-persistent systemic and structural problems. Thus, achieving meaningful change is not a quick process. Wraparound is a strengths-based, collaborative process that can target such things as preventing out-of-home placement. It is a comprehensive approach to intervention that brings together multiple stakeholders and resources to create an individualized plan for each family in need. This requires coordinating efforts across various sectors, including health, education, and social services, to address interconnected challenges. With these layers of complexity, it is no surprise that success might take time. But by being patient, upstream prevention can ultimately create sustainable change and address the root causes of health and social problems. Endurance is key, as the solutions to systemic issues can't be achieved overnight and require consistent and concerted effort over time.

The mantra "change is continuous" encapsulates the ongoing nature of shaping and adapting strategy, leadership capabilities, and organizational design. These three key elements are interdependent, and each impacts the others' effectiveness. The FSI's rigorous learning collaborative approach emphasizes commitment, flexibility, and a shared vision for cultivating leadership skills, fostering continuous improvement, and managing change effectively. The shared experiences of the peer-led collaborative highlight a substantial need for focus on strategic planning, resource allocation, learning and evaluation, and iteration, all of which are prerequisites to becoming a strong leader and managing change effectively (see Appendix, Tool D).

### **Helpful hint: The approach is the change that you want to make**

This is less about which model is better, and more about how to lead this change in your community. – FSI Leader

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: PARTNERSHIPS AND MOBILIZATION**

Community engagement is foundational in the learning collaborative approach—it acts as the glue binding together various elements in a cohesive whole. A learning collaborative is not just the exchange of information and ideas, but also the creation of a dynamic, shared space where service providers and their organizations can engage, learn, and grow together with the larger community. These connections become the conduits for shared learning, exchange of best practices, and tackling challenges. A well-engaged community serves as both a sounding board and a motivational force, enriching the collaborative with diverse perspectives and resources. In this context, community engagement isn't just a "nice-to-have" element but a critical ingredient in achieving sustainability.

A truly effective community ecosystem thrives on diversity, not just in terms of individual demographics and identities, but also in the types of assets and partnerships it nurtures (see Toolbox Resource C, p. 22). A diverse ecosystem is potent because it offers a multidimensional, holistic approach to problem solving, thereby increasing the chances of creating sustainable solutions. Diverse community partnerships offer more comprehensive solutions, resource optimization, and increased cultural understanding and competence.

### **Helpful hint: Be patient**

We know we are successful when we engage a larger set of partners. We need to recognize that this is a continual process. Social change needs sustained commitment around collective action.

– FSI Leader

## MAXIMIZING FAMILY REFERRALS THROUGH EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Maintaining a system of timely referrals to families and identifying and addressing structural barriers in the service pathway with community partners effectively serves families. These steps also establish the agency's dependability and value within the service community. Moreover, equitable referrals are key. Equity in family referrals requires multiple organizational levels, from leadership to program delivery, to collect, review, and respond to data on family referrals. It requires organizations to be transparent about their data and raise their equity goals related to internal and external family referrals.

Key drivers for receiving sufficient referrals include cross-program connections, education, and outreach, be it internal or external. Just by the nature of the FSI, siloes are being disrupted. The sites have integrated with partners, helped the FSI members reframe their approach to be more focused on engaging and strengthening their community partners, and tried to center the messaging in the community around advocacy for families. The referral approach should be about how the organization can help to strengthen families and this has informed LSA's strategic vision.

### Helpful hint: Use your connections

Use the connections that you have to provide broad supports for families. This especially applies to providers who have more of a one-on-one relationship with families and don't have as much community connection.

## BUILDING STAFF AND USING THEIR INPUT FOR CHANGE

Effective staffing pertains to the "right people, at the right time, for the right purpose." To plan effectively for sustainability while centering racial equity principles, leaders need to proactively assess their program hiring and staffing goals. They should work collaboratively with human resources to adapt procedures regarding recruitment, training, professional development, and turnover.

It is important to understand the providers' unique perspective and their key role in systems change. FSI hires staff with lived experience, allowing them to better connect with and serve families. That experience has informed teams' perspective and their ability to interact with clients. FSI leadership also recognize that staff need additional support to implement a new approach; leadership has been learning from staff about how the approach is being implemented and how it looks on the ground. The results framework and equity focus are being integrated into specific programmatic work as well as throughout each agency and their leadership team. Peer connections and further integration of concepts and frameworks into specific work at a programmatic level has been most valuable for the staff.

## FIDELITY TO THE INITIATIVE AND SERVICES IMPLEMENTED

At the core of program fidelity is the ability to reproduce positive outcomes by following a defined set of strategies or activities. Anyone can "pick up" the model and be certain that intended outcomes will be realized if the formula is followed. Program fidelity is important to program sustainability—programs that achieve their objectives, such as reducing child maltreatment, are more likely to be supported by organizations, decision makers, system partners, and funders. Achieving program outcomes also makes it more likely community partners will make referrals to the program. Evidence-based models implemented with fidelity should produce equitable outcomes regardless of individual characteristics, although this is inconsistent across program models.

The FSI is different from other approaches to fidelity because it implements an evidence-based model through an equity and inclusion lens, with a strong pull to keeping families together. Fidelity is not just

about fidelity to an evidence-based service, but also about fidelity to this initiative and approach. For the initiative, LSA leadership has long been embedded in results-based work (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017) and that helps inform their perspective about and understanding of the evidence-based service as well as the support implementing staff need. This model informs their perspective better than just theoretically learning what results leadership looks like. For the service, fidelity requires full, not partial, implementation of comprehensive services for families with great needs. Service delivery, and racial equity, will occur through the Family Stabilization Initiative.

## POLICY AND FINANCE IMPLICATIONS

Each of the key components helps generate resources to begin and sustain a program. In addition, there are also three specific financial investment levers:

1. start early and re-assess program funding streams often;
2. be visible, active, and influential with local and state decision makers; and
3. clearly define start-up and maintenance program costs at the get-go.

Financing—and sustainability—is complicated. It is more complicated than braided funding. This is not a policy Toolkit, but changing finance does have policy implications. Grant funds do not go on forever, so state contracts are needed to sustain such an intensive service model. Yet, federal and state funding processes are slow, so other nongovernmental funding needs to be sought while waiting to scale to more sites and, ideally, scale statewide. While grants are not as sustainable, they do offer flexibility. This body of work and the funding that came with it has bred creativity in terms of who the sites take referrals from, how they develop partnerships, and how they try to meet the local needs and community. LSA will know they are successful when they can provide resources before children are removed from families.



# Conclusion





All children and families in need should have access to programming in human services that is downstream, “tertiary,” or occurs after a problem is evident. It is a valuable and necessary component to a service continuum. However, the opportunity exists to infuse more resources in a child and family well-being system that defines success in child, family, and community terms. Families of color experience far greater downstream interventions than other families. By pairing evidence-based and evidence-informed models with six equity-centered sustainability components and peer networks, the FSI filled a gap. This will appeal to decision makers in any organization that aims to strengthen services for children, youth, and families.

Effective progress in this work hinges on frequent and consistent intentional conversation and a thorough grounding in the key concepts put forth in this Toolkit. The resources here are not meant to be exclusive to groups that are in formal learning collaboratives. Rather, the Toolkit’s methods aim for broad applicability. In any learning setting, understanding and normalizing these issues is just as crucial as organizing and operationalizing them to take action.

Lutheran Services in America elevated the use of peer networks to bolster their established results-based community network. Their built leadership capacity, emanating from years of work and culminating in the Results Innovation Lab and the Results Network, was a necessary foundation for change. Yet one can see the unique value-add of the Family Stabilization Initiative’s added peer network—which applied those equity-focused leadership skills to an evidence-informed service—to increase the catalyzation of change. Separately, networking or a results-based foundation or using a race equity lens are not unique. Even combined, examples can be found in the field. What stands out about Lutheran Services in America is that they continue to elevate what they created—social welfare approaches that create conditions for all people to thrive and live with dignity and respect (Oftelie, 2022). The role of LSA cannot be emphasized enough, serving as an intermediary supporting the implementation of this initiative, driving the integration of these components through their networking approach as well as providing the resources without which such complex and innovative endeavors cannot take place.

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# Tools & Appendices



# TOOLBOX

## Toolbox Resource A

### Operationalizing Race Equity Resource Guide

The Family Stabilization Initiative upholds a vision to eradicate racial disparities in the community for children and their families. Doing so requires addressing racism at the **individual**, **institutional**, and **structural** level. This resource puts forth a process and set of probing questions to guide service providers on the ground through an exploration in the **development**, **implementation**, and **evaluation** of their **policies**.

#### WHEN DO I USE THIS?

**Early and Ongoing.** To optimize effectiveness and alignment with goals and outcomes, apply the guide early and use it repeatedly throughout different organizational initiatives and decisions that affect policies, initiatives, programs, and budgetary matters.

#### HOW DO I USE THIS?

The results of working through this guide are strongest when people of diverse racial identities are engaged. If demographic makeup of staff does not allow for this type of inclusion, organizational leaders and providers involved in the exercise should strive to include representation from community.

The six outlined steps are meant to be followed from beginning to completion:



**Step 1: Identify outcomes.** What policy, program, practice, or budgetary matters are under consideration? What are the desired results? Program leadership and staff set desired outcomes for racial equity to anchor the rest of the exploration process.

**Step 2: Engage stakeholders & investigate data.** Engage in dialogue with staff, community representatives and stakeholders on how a particular issue or initiative affects the community, regarding racial equity. In what ways will you engage community? Is there an opportunity to expand engagement? What are the (racial) demographics of those most impacted? What do the data and your conversations with stakeholders tell you about the inequities impacting community? What factors and underlying root causes contribute to these racial inequities?

**Step 3: Assess for alignment.** Analyze how the initiative aligns (or does not align) with the identified racial equity outcomes. Will the policy, practice, program, or budgetary matter increase or decrease racial equity? Are there any potential unintended consequences? What are the benefits?

**Step 4: Move forward OR reduce harm.** If alignment exists, move forward to develop strategies that will support the implementation and sustainability of the initiative. If misalignment exists, take a step back to develop strategies and actionable next steps that will minimize the potential unintended harm to community and realign the work. Strategies should address both immediate impact and root causes. What is your plan for engaging partners and community in the long term? Is the implementation plan feasible, adequately funded, and staffed?

**Step 5: Activate continuous quality improvement processes.** Collect data on the impacts to communities of color over time. Sustain ongoing and regular communication with stakeholders and keep track of any unresolved issues. What will be your method for evaluation? What timeline will you adhere to for addressing and reducing the harm? How will you maintain stakeholder engagement and stay accountable to the work? If anything is unresolved, what additional partnerships and resources are needed to progress?

**Step 6: Gather & share insights.** Organize insights learned from each step of the exploration process and document to report out. How will you raise awareness on the issue?

Using racial equity tools, such as this guide, represents a crucial, but foundational, step toward the larger goal of operationalizing racial equity within organizations. These tools offer invaluable frameworks for analyzing existing policies and practices, thereby facilitating data-driven decision making aimed at reducing racial disparities. However, the tool alone is not sufficient for addressing the complex and deeply ingrained systemic issues at play. Advancing racial equity is a multidimensional challenge. First, conversations about race must be normalized. We can't solve problems we don't talk about or don't fully understand. Open dialogues about race, systemic discrimination, and the need for equity must become commonplace in discussions, planning sessions, and decision-making processes. Secondly, we must operationalize new behaviors and policies. This means taking the insights gained from racial equity tools and conversations and turning them into actionable policies. It involves training personnel, changing procedures, reallocating resources, and enacting new practices that reflect racial equity frameworks. Achieving racial equity also requires organizational commitment. This includes engaging with a diverse set of stakeholders, both within government and in the wider community, to bring about real change. By combining influence and resources, organizations can better work in partnership across sectors and with communities to have a far-reaching impact.

## Toolbox Resource B

### Overcoming Barriers to Addressing Race Equity

It is important to recognize that advancing race equity is not without challenges. As a part of larger institutions, transforming systems and even our own organizations can be arduous. One of the most common challenges in this work is capacity, both physical capacity and knowledge management capacity. Effective staffing, training, and mentoring services are going to be critical for reinforcement and growing the overall capacity of organizations and their workforce.

Additional barriers to addressing race equity often include:

1 LACK OF BUY-IN FROM LEADERSHIP	6 RESOURCE RESTRAINTS	11 COMPETING PRIORITIES
2 HAVING TO CONFRONT ONE'S OWN IMPLICIT BIAS	7 CULTURAL BARRIERS	12 TOKENISM OR SUPERFICIAL COMMITMENTS TO DEI
3 NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS	8 LACK OF TRUST FROM COMMUNITY	13 SYSTEM SILOS
4 ADDRESSING COMPLEX, NUANCED ROOT CAUSES	9 UNDERREPRESENTATION	14 SOCIAL STIGMA
5 POLITICAL RESISTANCE	10 INSUFFICIENT DATA TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS	15 SHORT-TERM FOCUS OR FUNDING

By understanding and acknowledging these barriers, system leaders and actors can develop targeted strategies to overcome them, thereby allowing for more effective approaches to advancing racial equity. As one FSI leader said:

[What we do is]. . . help people to understand that there are things you can do right now that you are in control of. You can change. You know what you ask your staff to do. You don't have to wait for a law to be passed, or your CEO to change something. You can lead from your place of influence.

## Toolbox Resource C

# Identifying and Mobilizing Assets in Community Partnerships

**Demographic and Identity Diversity:** Considerations here may include age and generation, education level, ethnic and cultural diversity, gender, sexual orientation, and others.

## DIVERSITY IN ASSET TYPES

- **Skills and talents:** Different community members have unique skills and talents that can be utilized for community betterment.
- **Intellectual resources:** Academics, professionals, and thinkers bring problem-solving capabilities.
- **Material resources:** Land, buildings, and financial assets can all be leveraged in different ways.

## DYNAMIC PARTNERSHIPS

- **Schools:** Educational institutions can offer spaces for meetings, a pipeline for youth engagement, and a wealth of academic resources.
- **Faith-based organizations:** These groups can provide moral guidance, volunteer resources, and a different kind of communal space.
- **Government:** Local and regional governments can provide policy support, funding, and public services.
- **Philanthropy:** Foundations and individual donors can offer financial support, often with more flexibility than government agencies.
- **Courts and Juvenile Justice Systems:** These entities can help address social issues like public safety and rehabilitation from a systemic perspective.

## BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

- **Regular engagement:** Check-ins, open forums, and other feedback loops.
- **Shared objectives:** Because each entity may have its own mission, finding common goals is crucial for effective collaboration and ensuring alignment across needs and aspirations.
- **Transparent communication and governance structures:** Open and clear communication ensures that all partners are aligned and understand their roles.

By consciously weaving this tapestry of diversity into the fabric of the community ecosystem, the collective can ensure that it is not just representative but also effectively resourceful and resilient. This enables on-the-ground service providers to tackle issues from multiple angles, creating more sustainable and inclusive solutions aimed at addressing racial disparities and the underlying root causes that lead to systemic inequities. It also increases opportunities to improve outcomes for children and families.

## Toolbox Resource D

# A Model for Leadership and Change Management

Informed by literature and evidence-based approaches, the learning collaborative engages the following model to ensure the harmonious evolution of the three key elements:

### ADAPTIVE STRATEGY

1. **Real-time data analysis:** Regularly collect and analyze data to provide critical insights that inform strategy updates.
2. **Environmental scanning:** Stay engaged with and constantly evaluate the environment and conditions of the target population, and political climate of the larger system and institutions to keep your strategy relevant and responsive to changing demands.
3. **Scenario planning:** Prepare for various future scenarios so that your plan remains flexible.

### EVOLVING LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES

1. **Continued learning:** Create a culture of continuous learning and development among leadership to increase knowledge, self-awareness, and accountability.
2. **Mentorship & coaching:** Experienced leaders can mentor younger ones, and external coaches offer new perspectives.
3. **Regular assessment:** Leadership skills and effectiveness should be regularly assessed to identify areas for improvement.

### FLEXIBLE ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN

1. **Iterative changes:** Instead of massive organizational overhauls, emphasize smaller and more incremental adjustments that allow for goals to be more specific, measurable, and feasible.
2. **Employee feedback:** Incorporate feedback from all team members to best inform organizational changes.
3. **Cross-functional teaming:** Prioritize the breakdown of silos within the organization to promote adaptability and collaborative.

### ALIGNING THEM TOGETHER

1. **Integrated decision-making:** Strategy, leadership capacity, and organizational design decision are made cohesively.
2. **Alignment workshops:** Regular workshops help to ensure change teams understand how the strategy aligns with leadership and organizational goals.

### MONITORING & ADJUSTMENT

1. **Review and revise:** Regularly review the alignment of the three key elements and adjust as necessary.
2. **Key performance indicators (KPIs):** Keep track of KPIs to ensure the alignment is producing desired outcomes.
3. **Feedback loops:** Establish strong feedback loops to support effective communication throughout quality improvement activities.

## Toolbox Resource E

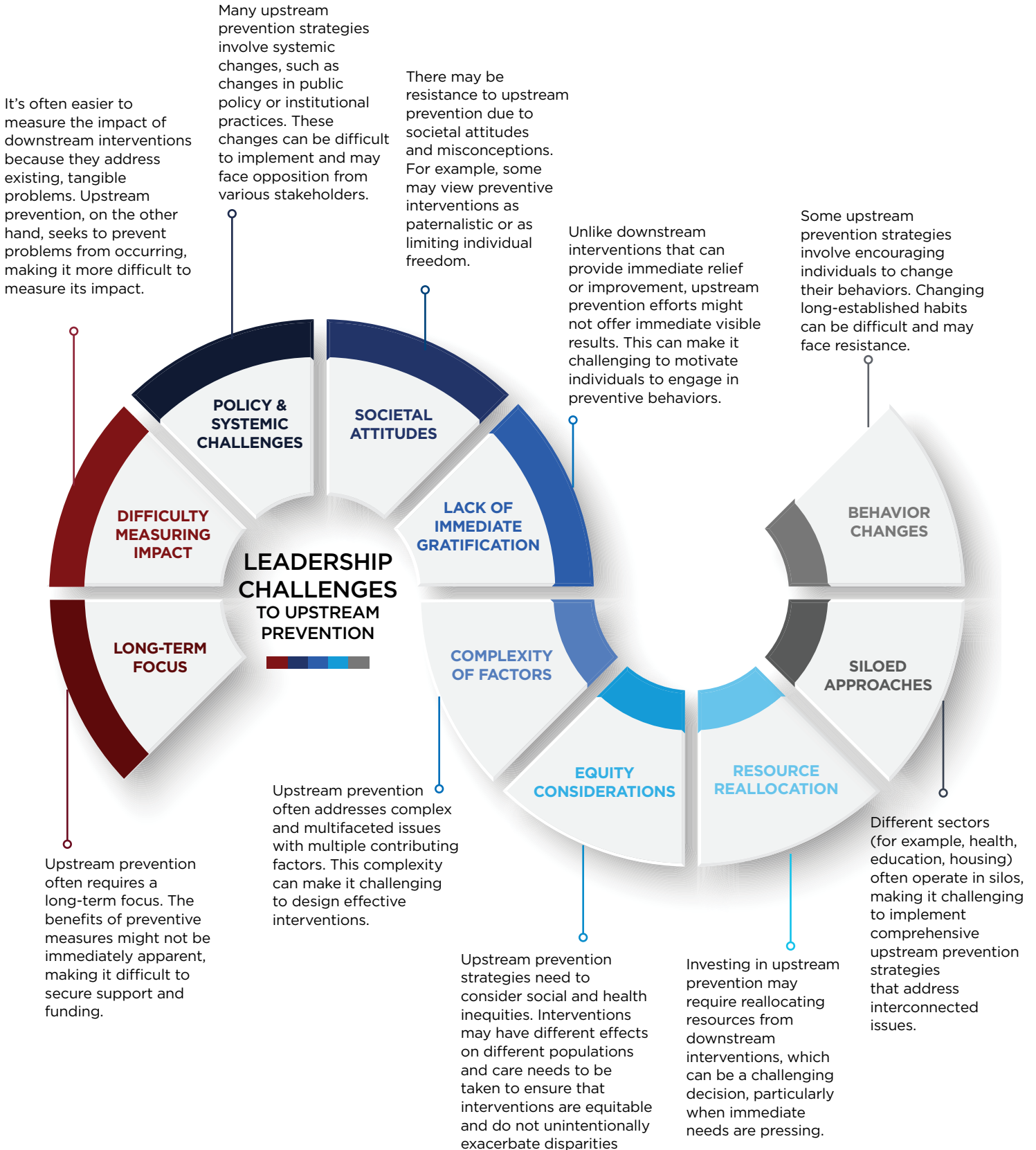
# A Model for Change Leadership and Change Management

What you need to do	How to do it
Manage confidence, not morale	Emphasize long-term viability of the organization and confidence in future success.
Be as transparent as possible	Lack of transparency on “who, what, when, why, and how” will destroy trust and confidence.
Anticipate anxieties and address them	Be clear on what is NOT going to happen as result of change. What are people most worried about? List those worries and develop messages to address them.
Test critical communications on a small group of trusted staff	Learn from their responses and questions and refine your messages. (HR staff are typically engaged for this.)
Provide communication to managers first	Ensure that managers are informed and prepared about what is coming and what reactions to expect. Prepare messages, talking points, and FAQs.
Create a high-touch plan for star performers	These are staff who always have the option to go elsewhere. Arrange for one-on-one discussions with them.
Avoid “cascading” messages	This is when each level of the organization communicates down the next. Much can be lost in translation. With important change communication, it should directly from leadership in numerous forums that allow for interaction.
Message, deliver, repeat	Change requires repeated communication. Messages will not land on first delivery, and people need to hear messages through different channels and from different messengers. Plan for each employee to hear the change message seven times.
Allow for self-guided communication	Provide an integrated online tool (most frequently a staff website) with multiple types of communication: policy letters, webinars, FAQs, video, a way to submit questions and comments.
Follow up as needed	Engage opinion leaders and influencers to get a sense for reactions and responses. Consider conducting surveys to track response to change efforts.
Questions to answer	Responses
Why do we need to change?	Make the case by defining the problem.  Be fact based, business driven, understandable. Emphasize doing the right thing for the future.
What will happen now?	Provide specific details about the solution.  Describe how actions will ensure organizational success.  Avoid ambiguity.
Who will be affected?	Clarify what staff will (and will not) be impacted, in what way and when.
What can I expect in the future?	Eliminate as much uncertainty as possible.
Why should I still want to work here?	Emphasize the future success that change will bring.  Give top performers something to strive for.



# Toolbox Resource F

## Challenges to Prevention Leadership



# APPENDIX

## Participating Organizations in the Family Stabilization Initiative

The Sustainability Toolkit draws from the experiences of the following participant organizations and staff

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### LUTHERAN SERVICES IN AMERICA

“Lutheran Services in America leads a \$23 billion national network of 300 health and human services organizations that cultivates caring communities to advance health and opportunity for all people in the United States. Lutheran Services in America catalyzes innovation through collaborations with its member organizations and partners in philanthropy, academia, healthcare and business to address the most critical challenges in our communities and empower people to lead their best lives.” <https://lutheranservices.org/>

#### Contact information:

Lead: Renada Johnson, Senior Director of Children, Youth and Family Initiatives	Phone: 202-499-5836	Email: rjohnson@ lutheranservices.org
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### AK CHILD & FAMILY (ALASKA)

As a Sanctuary-certified agency, AK Child & Family provides multiple types of trauma-informed treatment options under our Community Programs for youth with emotional and behavioral struggles. Based on the needs of the youth, we offer licensed Therapeutic Treatment Home Services, Home-Based services, as well as AK C.A.R.E.S high-intensity family stabilization and preservation wrap-around services. <https://www.akchild.org/>

#### Contact information:

Lead: Katy Smith, Director of Community Programs	Phone: (907) 792-4148 or (907) 346-2101	Email: ksmith@ akchild.org
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### LUTHERAN COMMUNITY SERVICES NORTHWEST (WASHINGTON STATE)

“When unimaginable crises threaten people’s lives and futures, Lutheran Community Services Northwest offers healing, help and hope. We help vulnerable children, families, refugees and others meet life’s most difficult challenges and thrive in communities that are healthy, just and hopeful.” <https://lcsnw.org/>

#### Contact information:

Lead: Allison Taylor, GPS District Clinical Director	Phone: 206/816-3237	Email: ataylor@lcsnw. org
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## LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF SOUTH DAKOTA

As one of the largest non-profit human services agencies in South Dakota, Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota responds to the changing needs of South Dakota individuals, families, and communities through a whole-person, family-centered approach to care and continuum of services. Individuals, families, and communities have access to the support and resources they need to thrive. Children and families have safe, stable home environments. Our community is a welcoming and inclusive place for people of all ages, faiths, races, and economic statuses. You can be healthy, your family safe, your friends and neighbors accepted, all with LSS. <https://lsssd.org/>

### Contact information:

Lead: Amy Witt, Vice President,  
Children & Youth Services

Phone: 605-444-7530

Email: Amy.Witt@  
LssSD.org

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## ST. JOHN'S UNITED (MONTANA)

“St. John’s United is pleased to be a leader in senior living and a provider of human services across the whole arc of life. From independent to assisted living, outpatient physical therapy to transitional care, family stabilization, pregnancy support to adoption; we offer our community a variety of services to meet their changing needs. At St. John’s, our mission is to provide living opportunities within nurturing environments of hope, dignity and love.” <https://www.stjohnsunited.org/>

### Contact information:

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